

The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During 'Hot Periods' Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism: Towards An Assessment Framework

FULL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is growing international recognition of the need to enhance understanding about the dynamics of political violence associated with far right¹ and broader anti-minority² movements. This report focuses specifically on escalation dynamics during waves of intense protest activity – what we refer to as ‘hot periods’ of anti-minority activism – and how these play out in the localities that find themselves at the centre of such ‘hot periods’.

Many anti-minority protests do not result in direct physical violence, or only in low levels of violence (e.g. minor scuffling between anti-minority activists and their opponents). In recent years, however, several countries across Europe and North America have seen protests that have resulted in significant violence. Such events leave a heavy footprint. In addition to the immediate social, political and economic costs associated with the public disorder, such incidents generate fear, particularly among those who perceive themselves to be the targets of such protests; enable anti-minority groups to connect with wider audiences; accelerate social and political polarisation; and can stimulate tactical and ideological radicalisation within anti-minority groups and their opponents.

There is as such a clear and pressing requirement for research that advances our understanding of why some anti-minority protest events result in significant violence, while many others result in only low-level violence or no physical violence at all. This study

responds to this requirement in two ways. Firstly, it addresses three core questions:

1. What are the pathways towards violent escalation during periods of intense anti-minority mobilisation?
2. What inhibits (further) escalation of violence during periods of intense anti-minority mobilisation?
3. How, and under what conditions, do instances of escalation beyond established action repertoires give rise to or inhibit further violence?

Secondly, drawing upon this analysis, it develops a framework that can be deployed by state and civil society actors to generate a more informed understanding about emergent threats of violence relating to anti-minority protest activity. In doing so, the project provides a basis for the development of more informed, effective, and sustainable strategies for responding to and managing anti-minority activism.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH AND METHODS

The report adopts a ‘processual approach’³ to the dynamics of political violence, identifying a series of violence enabling and violence inhibiting mechanisms⁴ within the contexts of hot periods of anti-minority activism. Following advances within the wider literature on the dynamics of political violence, the report locates these mechanisms within five key relational arenas:⁵

- *The within-movement arena*, comprising interactions between activists within the broadly conceived movement.

1 For the purpose of this report, we use this as an umbrella term to encompass both the extreme right-wing and groups that embrace some form of racial nationalism but predominantly pursue their objectives through constitutional means

2 We use ‘anti-minority protest’ and ‘anti-minority activism’ as hypernyms to include all forms of activism explicitly targeting minority groups. We use the term to encompass a broad range of activism, from that which is mobilised around the racial nationalism of conventional extreme right formations, through to groups that eschew such ideological frames, but still mobilise against, often specific, ethnic or religious minority groups e.g. in the form of anti-Muslim or anti-migrant mobilisations.

3 See for an overview: Malthaner (2017).

4 We understand ‘mechanisms’ as the pathways or processes by which a particular effect is produced, following the minimum definition provided by Gerring (2008, p. 178).

5 Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi (2015).

- *The movement – countermovement arena*, comprising interactions between movement and countermovement actors.
- *The movement – political environment arena*, comprising interactions between movement actors and political and cultural elites.
- *The movement – security forces arena*, comprising the interactions between movement actors and the state security forces.
- *The movement – public arena*, comprising the relations between movement actors and different segments of the public.

The analysis is based on four cases studies: Dover (UK), from October 2014 to April 2016; Sunderland (UK), from September 2016 to December 2018; Chemnitz (Germany), from August to December 2018; and Charlottesville (USA), from February to October 2017. The cases were selected because they were assessed to have sufficient similarities to bear comparison: each case comprised a period of significant anti-minority protest activity that captured national and international headlines and clearly had significant potential for violence. All four cases were characterised by different levels of violence and escalation dynamics, however, thereby enabling within- and cross-case comparison conducive to theory building.

The case studies were developed using a combination of documentary evidence, key informant interviews and social media analysis. The documentary evidence comprised public reports, eye-witness reports, news media, publicly available video footage, memoirs, and online publications from anti-minority movements and some of their opponents. Interviews were conducted with a total of 61 key informants across the four case studies, comprising a combination of academics, non-academic expert observers, local authority workers, police officers, anti-minority activists and countermovement activists. For the social media analysis, Crimson Hexagon, a social media monitoring tool, was used to trace the mobilisation timeline for each case study on Twitter and other publicly accessible platforms. Method52, an AI-based natural language

processing tool, was used to extract, clear and analyse public messages from the encrypted messaging application Telegram. In addition, digital ethnographic research was conducted in the relevant social media channels and other online fora.

The data were integrated through detailed case descriptions. These were then examined for sequences of developments that appeared to comprise potential violence escalating or inhibiting mechanisms. Within and cross-case comparison, as well as the wider academic literature, were used to interrogate the emergent analysis of these potential mechanisms and iteratively refine the mechanism definitions. The analysis operated at three levels:

- Micro-situational dynamics – understood as the interactions between different actors during the protest events.
- Event preparation, understood as the actions and interactions of relevant actors as they prepare for a specific event.
- Wider conflict dynamics – understood both as changes in the operating environment and the broader set of actions and interactions through which different actors identify and pursue their goals and adjust to the evolving social and political environment, but that do not comprise preparation for a specific protest event.

Once the descriptions of these mechanisms had been refined, they were re-applied to the case studies to create ‘storyboards’ (see Annex 2) for each case. This provided an opportunity to further refine and critically interrogate the framework, and to begin tracing sequences and clusters of mechanisms germane to the analysis.

FINDINGS: VIOLENCE ENABLING AND VIOLENCE INHIBITING MECHANISMS

For mechanisms to be included in the analysis, they did not need to appear in each case. It was, however,

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required (a) that they were observable at least at some point within more than one case, and (b) that they produced similar outcomes each time they occurred or there was a clear explanation as to why they had produced different outcomes.

In total, the report identifies 21 violence enabling and 17 violence inhibiting mechanisms, organised by the five relational arenas. These mechanisms are summarised in the table below. A more detailed description of these mechanisms and initial observations about how they relate to one another within the cases can be found in Chapter 7.

No assessment has been made at this stage of the relative weight of importance of each mechanism. Each of the mechanisms is conceived of as enabling escalation of violence, but no mechanism is conceived of, in and of itself, as being necessary or sufficient for the escalation of violence.

Within each relational arena, the mechanisms are ordered in terms of whether they are most apparent at greater or lesser proximity to instances of violent escalation, going from more distant mechanisms ('macro') to more proximal ('micro') mechanisms. It should be noted, however, that several of the mechanisms operate across macro, meso, and micro levels.

THE STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FRAMEWORK

There are several challenges with the framework. One of these concerns the fuzziness of the arena boundaries, particularly regarding the *within movement* and *movement – political environment arenas* and the *movement – countermovement* and *movement – public arenas*. Another challenge concerns possible analytical blind spots: in some of the cases, a more effective analysis could have been achieved by adding further relational arenas into the analysis, such as the *within countermovement arena* or the *countermovement – security forces arena*. A further challenge concerns balancing the need for sufficiently detailed mechanism

descriptors to enable analytical precision, with the need to manage the growing complexity of the framework.

These challenges are not insurmountable, however, and are to be expected given the messy and often complex reality of contentious politics. We propose that the first issue can be best addressed by ongoing awareness and discussion of this issue within project teams that deploy the framework. The second of these issues can be addressed through the analysis, where appropriate, of an expanded set of relational arenas – a matrix for which can be found in Chapter 8. We propose that the third of these issues can be addressed through leveraging more effectively the micro, meso, and macro-levels of analysis to structure the framework: a challenge to which the project team intend to turn their attention over the coming months.

The report also argues that the framework has a number of important strengths:

- First, by encompassing the five relational arenas, the framework provides a fuller explanation of the escalation and inhibition of violence than is provided by approaches that focus overwhelmingly on developments within the group(s) in question or the movement – counter-movement dynamic, and offers potentially valuable insight as to how the actions of one actor or group of actors, within any of relational arena, can affect the wider escalation or inhibition dynamic.⁶
- Second, because the framework focuses analytical attention on the evolving relationships between different actors, it provides a more dynamic understanding of escalation and inhibition pathways than analyses that focus attention on so-called root causes. This means that it is well-suited to revealing how opportunities for violence, or for pivoting away from violence, open and close over time.

⁶ Often discussed in terms of 'cumulative extremism' or 'reciprocal radicalisation': see Busher and Macklin (2015); Carter (2019); Eatwell (2006); Ebner (2017); Knott, Lee and Copeland (2018).

Relational arena	Violence enabling mechanisms	Violence inhibiting mechanisms
Within movement arena	A1.1. Intensification of threat narrative	B1.1. Campaign/issue deprioritisation or closure
	A1.2. Foregrounding of revolutionary goals	B1.2. Foregrounding non-revolutionary goals
	A1.3. Declining influence of moderates	B1.3. Persistent or expanding influence of moderates
	A1.4. Valorisation of violence	B1.4. Disassociation from (greater levels/certain forms of) violence and/or identification of violence as counter-productive
	A1.5. Identification of violence as a viable or necessary strategy	B1.5. Rules limiting the use of or opportunities for violence
	A1.6. Fear of missing out	B1.6. Within movement backlash against 'inappropriate' violence
	A1.7. Preparation for violence	
Movement – opposition arena	A2.1. Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment between activists and their opponents	B2.1. Tactical and/or emotional disenfranchisement
	A2.2. Increased mutual expectation of violence	B2.2. Limited expectations of violence
	A2.3. Increased availability of 'legitimate' targets	B2.3. Sustained balance of power within situational contexts
	A2.4. Sudden power imbalance between opposing groups	B2.4. Achievement of dominance without need for (further) violence
Movement – political environment arena	A3.1. Diminishing political opportunities	B3.1. Opportunities to pursue goals through less confrontational means
	A3.2. Growing identification of 'corrupt elites' as 'the enemy'	B3.2. Alliance formation between movement actors and political or cultural elites
	A3.3. Radical flank actors become the focus of political and/or media attention	B3.3. Elite allies withdraw support in response to rising use or threats of violence by movement actors
	A3.4. Endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of political or cultural elites	
	A3.5. Legitimation of violence by members of political or cultural elites	
Movement – security forces arena	A4.1. Communication breakdown between activists and security forces	B4.1. Open channels of communication between security forces and activists
	A4.2. Loss of control by state security actors	B4.2. Security forces maintain control (without breaching societal norms of appropriate policing)
Movement – public arena	A5.1. Decoupling of the movement from the general public	B5.1. Activists emphasise the importance of broad public support
	A5.2. Endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of the public	B5.2. Criticism of 'inappropriate' violence from key constituencies
	A5.3. Legitimation of violence by members of the public	

Table 1: Summary of violence enabling and violence inhibiting mechanisms

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- Third, the integration of both violence enabling and inhibiting mechanisms within the framework helps to ensure a balanced assessment of emergent threats, and provide insight into how and why similar developments sometimes have very different outcomes.
- Fourth, while the framework is rooted in detailed empirical case study analysis, it operates at a sufficient level of abstraction to provide a common analytical language that can work across and facilitate effective comparison of a diverse range of cases.

A TALE OF TWO ESCALATION PATHWAYS

One of the most striking findings is that some of the escalation mechanisms appear to contradict one another (especially A3.1 vs A3.4 and A3.5, and A5.1 vs A5.2). There are several possible explanations for this. The explanation that the report leans towards however is that these apparent contradictions reflect the fact that there are at least two different, although not necessarily mutually exclusive, escalation pathways.

In the *movement marginalised pathway*, anti-minority activists become increasingly decoupled from wider political movements and any form of popular support base. In doing so they become more liable to spiral off towards greater levels of violence, unchecked by strategic concerns about maintaining alliances or public support. In the *movement emboldened pathway*, anti-minority activists become and remain violence-oriented because they believe that they enjoy the support of key political allies and those parts of the public about which they are concerned, even as they engage in violence. This represents an important step forward in understanding the apparently ambiguous effects of some mechanisms.

The report argues that assessing which type of escalation pathway is, or is most likely, to emerge, might provide an important step towards ensuring effective threat assessment and identifying effective response strategies to emergent waves of anti-minority activism.

POTENTIAL USES OF THE FRAMEWORK

The report proposes that the framework has the potential to be used to enhance the timely analysis of emergent threats associated with anti-minority protest activity, both shorter and longer-term, and to support multi-agency planning around management and intervention strategies, both at the level of specific events and broader assessments of the emergent threat posed by different groups or sets of actors.

The framework does not work as and is not intended to be a predictive model. What it can do, however, is structure the analysis and train the attention of analysts and policymakers on aspects of these protest dynamics that the evidence suggests are particularly relevant to escalation and inhibition of violence.

NEXT STEPS

Moving forward, the research team will explore with policy and practitioner communities how this research can most effectively be used to inform policy and practice, with a particular focus on the development of user-friendly analytical tools based on the research that can then be integrated into practice.

The research provides strong support for the idea that adoption of a multi-level approach to understanding emergent threats of violence – one that encompasses analysis of micro-situational dynamics, processes of event preparation and wider conflict dynamics – would likely aid effective utilisation of the framework for analysis and planning at operational and strategic levels. As such, the research team will also examine how to effectively integrate the relational framework with the analysis of macro-, meso-, and micro-level dynamics.

Finally, the research team will also seek opportunities to test the framework in other settings. Here, a particular focus of interest is to assess whether this framework can be used to effectively analyse other forms of confrontational protests beyond far-right and anti-minority protests.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone reading this report is likely to be familiar with images of anti-minority⁷ protest events that erupt in violence. Such events leave a heavy footprint. They can cause intimidation and fear, particularly among those who perceive themselves to be the targets of such protests; intensify concerns that the far right⁸ is gaining ground; enable anti-minority groups to reach wider audiences; accelerate social and political polarisation, and generate substantial financial costs for local businesses, and for local authorities and the police as they seek to manage such events.⁹ In other words, the effects of these events in most cases goes well beyond whatever physical injuries are sustained by those involved.

Public authorities across Europe and North America have struggled with such events in recent years. At the time of writing, for example, such events were causing particular concern in the USA.¹⁰ Instances of such violence are relatively few and far between, however. They tend to be concentrated at particular times in particular towns or cities that find themselves the focal point for such activism.¹¹ Furthermore, even where physical violence does take place, in most cases it remains relatively contained in terms of the scale or intensity of the violence, rarely extending beyond bluster, intimidation and small-scale scuffles without the use of weapons.

So, what explains how and why some anti-minority protest events result in significant escalation of violence, while many others result only in low-level violence or in no physical violence at all?

Answering this question is important not only for researchers, but for anybody with an interest in developing more informed, effective and sustainable strategies for responding to and managing anti-minority activism and the violence with which such activism is sometimes associated. First, a better understanding of how and why violence takes place or escalates can enhance risk assessment capabilities by providing insight about the signs that might indicate escalation beyond the usual parameters of violence is becoming more likely. Second, it can provide insight about how the actions of counter-movements, state actors and the wider public might influence the dynamics of violent escalation and inhibition, thereby helping assorted policymakers, practitioners, anti-racist groups and other interested citizens, to arrive at more informed decisions about how to respond to mobilisations by anti-minority groups.

This report sets out and discusses the findings from a project that sought to respond to this research requirement. It analyses the escalation and inhibition of violence associated with anti-minority protests during four ‘hot periods’ of anti-minority activism, understood as those periods in which anti-minority groups intensify their efforts to influence policy and public opinion and capture media, policy and public attention, usually with a particular town or city providing a geographic focus. Two of the cases are from the UK (Dover, October 2014 – April 2016; and Sunderland, September 2016 – December 2018), one from Germany (Chemnitz, August – December 2018), and one from the USA (Charlottesville, VA, February – October 2017).

7 We use ‘anti-minority protest’ and ‘anti-minority activism’ as hypernyms to include all forms of activism explicitly targeting minority groups. We use the term to encompass a broad range of activism, from that which is mobilised around the racial nationalism of conventional extreme right formations and milieus, through to groups that might eschew such ideological frames, but still mobilise against, often specific, ethnic or religious minority groups e.g. in the form of anti-Muslim or anti-migrant mobilisations.

8 For the purpose of this report, we use this as an umbrella term to encompass both the extreme right-wing and groups that embrace some form of racial nationalism but predominantly pursue their objectives through constitutional means

9 For effects of demonstrations on reaching a wider audience see Davey and Ebner (2017). For economic costs see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23364013> (Accessed on 26/01/21)

10 See <https://graphics.reuters.com/USA-CAPITOL/SECURITY/xegpbxoadpq/> (Accessed 07/05/2021)

11 Busher, Harris and Macklin (2019a); Veugelers (2021).

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The project was designed to address three central research questions:

1. What are the pathways towards violent escalation during hot periods of anti-minority activism?
2. What inhibits (further) escalation of violence during hot periods of anti-minority activism?
3. How, and under what conditions, do instances of escalation beyond established action repertoires give rise to or inhibit further violence?

These are challenging questions about complex processes. Whatever explanation we are able to offer here must therefore come with important caveats: protest is a multi-causal, multi-form and multi-final phenomenon, and there are clear challenges in trying to generalise from a small number of case studies to achieve broader insights. Nonetheless, we argue that the cases that we have used, the data we have assembled and the analytical approach we have adopted, enable us to generate a series of insights that advance current academic and policy understanding of these issues. In doing so, our intention is to enable relevant policy planners and practitioners to better understand, evaluate and respond to emergent threats of violent escalation during and after hot periods of anti-minority activism.

The next chapter provides a brief description of our analytical approach, introduce the four case studies, and discusses the research methods used. In Chapters 3 – 6 we present the four case studies in full. Within each of these chapters, this comprises a detailed description of the case, followed by a discussion of what enables and inhibits violent escalation within the case in question. In Chapter 7, we consolidate and discuss the findings from across the four case studies, and present the framework of violence-enabling and violence-inhibiting mechanisms derived from the case studies. In Chapter 8 we conclude by discussing the overarching findings and reflecting on the potential uses of these findings for policy and practice, both in relation to waves of anti-minority activism, and to other forms of confrontational activism.

2. OUR RESEARCH STRATEGY

2.1. CONCEPTUAL BUILDING BLOCKS: A PROCESSUAL APPROACH TO THE ESCALATION AND INHIBITION OF VIOLENCE

In recent years, there has been a lot of research and policy interest in the so-called ‘root causes’ of violence. When talking about phenomena as complex and multi-faceted as social movements and political violence, however, attempting to decipher what these ‘root causes’ are is not only difficult to achieve, but can arguably lead us towards overly structural and deterministic accounts of how violence does or does not happen. Such approaches are particularly poorly suited to explaining variation across broadly similar cases. As such, rather than trying to identify ‘root causes’, our research strategy was grounded in a processual approach to the study of political violence, meaning that our primary focus was on **tracing the pathways and processes that give rise to particular outcomes – the escalation of violence** – and how these outcomes themselves in turn shape subsequent behaviours and outcomes.¹²

In keeping with this approach, our aim was to use a detailed analysis of four case studies to identify and **describe the ‘mechanisms’ that enable or inhibit the escalation of violence during periods of intense anti-minority mobilisation**: what we refer to as the ‘hot periods’ of anti-minority activism.

We understood ‘**escalation of violence**’ to comprise a shift either to more widespread use of violence, or to the use of a greater degree of violence (e.g. from damage to property, to minor interpersonal violence without the use of weapons, to use of non-bladed weapons etc.). We understood escalation, and by

extension non-/de-escalation, as relative to prior ‘repertoires of action’¹³ within the specific milieu under analysis.

We understood ‘**mechanisms**’ to comprise the pathways or processes by which a particular effect is produced.¹⁴ We adopted the terminology of ‘**violence enabling mechanisms**’ and ‘**violence inhibiting mechanisms**’. We used the term violence inhibiting mechanism to refer both to mechanisms that help to limit the extent of escalation as escalation is unfolding, and that help to curtail rather than prolong escalated violence once it has taken place. As such we use the terminology of ‘violence inhibiting mechanisms’ in relation to processes of both non-escalation and de-escalation of violence.

Such an approach is not without its **challenges**. Given the complexity of conflict dynamics, there are always important questions to ask about how confident we can be that the mechanisms we identify are those that produce the specified effect.¹⁵ It can also be difficult to discern how exactly the identified mechanisms matter – how for example can we distinguish between those mechanisms that enable mobilisation by anti-minority activists and those that actually lead to violence?¹⁶ Furthermore, and as some recent studies have shown, there can be multiple pathways to the same outcome¹⁷ – so how do we accommodate that within our analysis?

13 Charles Tilly (1986, p. 2) defines repertoires of action as a ‘whole set of means that are available for making claims of different types on different individuals’.

14 Our definition is based on the minimum definition provided by Gerring (2008, p. 178). For further discussion about the definition of mechanisms see della Porta (2013, pp. 23-25); Hedstrom and Swedberg (1998); Little (2010).

15 See for example Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi (2015, pp. 30-35) and Blee (2013, pp. 655-681).

16 Ultimately, perhaps the most effective solution is to undertake comparison across a far greater number of cases (see Nassauer 2019).

17 See for example Nassauer (2018).

12 See for an overview: Malthaner (2017).

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We sought to address these issues in a number of ways. First, we used cross- and within-case comparison to develop and critically interrogate our emergent analysis, thereby giving ourselves greater confidence that we were identifying relevant mechanisms, and providing opportunities to identify multiple pathways to similar outcomes.

Second, throughout the analysis we sought to be as specific as possible about the mechanisms, the observed effects and the relationship between them. There is always in practice a trade-off between specificity/complexity vs abstraction/analytical-neatness when seeking to describe complex processes.¹⁸ As a general rule, we erred on the side of the former as we believe it is subsequently easier to move from the former to the latter, than vice-versa.

Third, and more broadly, we also understood these mechanisms as *creating opportunities for*, rather than *directly causing*, escalation or inhibition, thereby in effect softening causal claims in a way that we believe to be appropriate, and helps to leave analytical space for recognising the role of agency in shaping the outcomes described.¹⁹ Put another way, we describe the opening and closing of violence opportunity structures, but within that, whether actors respond to those opportunities remains a question of individual will. We return to these issues in Chapter 7.

We organised our analysis along three main analytical dimensions discussed in more detail below: (1) a relational analysis; (2) analysis of the intersection of macro-, meso- and micro-situational dynamics; and (3) analysis of the intersection of off- and online activities. Each of these, we argue, reflect and build on the current state of the art with regards to the study of political violence.

A RELATIONAL ANALYSIS

Political violence scholars have increasingly adopted a relational lens to analyse and understand the dynamics of violence. Such approaches focus analytical attention on how repertoires of action ‘emerge, and are transformed, in the course of physical and symbolic interactions between social movements ... their opponents, and ... their potential allies,’²⁰ and in particular how these processes ‘promote, inhibit, or channel collective violence.’²¹ In other words, while still acknowledging the role of factors such as ideology, and the strategic interests and visions of activists, such approaches focus our attention on how violence emerges out of series of interactions between relevant actors.

Relational approaches have a number of strengths. They help to capture and foreground the basic fact that conflict is by definition a relational phenomenon, emerging through a chain of actions and reactions.²² Because relational analyses foreground the interactions between different sets of actors, they are well-suited to capturing the dynamic and processual nature of the escalation and inhibition of violence. And where relational analyses encompass a broad range of relevant relationships, they can provide an effective strategy for fostering a holistic understanding of conflict dynamics while still providing a clear and relatively simple framework with which to structure the analysis.²³

Following Eitan Alimi, Lorenzo Bosi and Chares Demetriou,²⁴ we organised our analysis around five relational arenas.

- *The within-movement arena*, comprising interactions between activists within the movement, where ‘movement’ is understood to refer both to more formalised movements

18 Gerring (2008).

19 See Chenoweth and Ulfelder (2017) on the importance of recognising the role of agency within explanations of political violence and its relative absence.

20 Della Porta (2014, p. 165).

21 Della Porta (2014, p. 166) quoting Tilly (2003, p. 20).

22 See Taylor and Horgan (2012); Tilly (2003).

23 Macklin and Busher (2018).

24 Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou (2015).

comprising associated social movement organisations, and looser activist ‘scenes’;

- *The movement-counter movement arena*, comprising interactions between movement and counter movement actors;
- *The movement – political environment arena*, comprising movement actors’ relations with political and cultural elites, including political parties, the media and moral authorities;
- *The movement – security forces arena*, comprising the interactions between movement actors and the state security forces;
- *The movement – public arena*, comprising the relations between movement actors and different segments of the public.

The obvious challenge this raises is around identifying where one relational arena begins and another ends. The distinctions between these categories and their attendant relational arenas are often fuzzier in practice than a ‘model’ might lead us to believe. In the Chemnitz case, for example, whether links between extreme right militants and *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) comprise part of the ‘within movement’ or the ‘movement – political environment’ arena will depend on how one interprets AfD, and also perhaps the particular moment in time under analysis. We return to this issue in Chapter 7.

A MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH TO THE DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE

There are long-running arguments within the academic literature about whether violence is more productively studied at micro-, meso- or macro-levels, with the positions taken often reflecting differences in disciplinary research traditions or the particular forms of violence under investigation. Most scholars agree, however, that a satisfactory explanation of the escalation and inhibition of violence requires at least some degree of attention to be given to micro-, meso-

and macro-level phenomena and how these intersect with, or constitute, one another over time.²⁵

Within this project we therefore adopted a multi-level approach to understanding the escalation and de-escalation of violence. To do this end we developed an analysis based around three focal points:

- At the micro level, we focused on the **micro-situational dynamics**, understood as the interactions between different actors during the protest events;
- At the meso level, we focused on **event preparation**, understood, as the actions and interactions of relevant actors as they prepare for a specific event;
- At the macro level we focused on the **wider conflict dynamics**, understood both as changes in the operating environment (e.g. changing political opportunities, potential catalytic events), and as the much broader set of actions and interactions through which different actors identify and pursue their goals and adjust to the evolving social and political environment, but that do not comprise preparation for a specific event (e.g. processes of group management, production of movement publications, guidelines etc, forming general positions vis-à-vis campaign issues and what comprises more or less appropriate strategies and tactics, etc.).

In practice, of course, these levels of analysis can bleed into one another. For example, preparation for specific events is likely to be deeply infused with the logics of activists’ wider struggles. The point of adopting this approach however was to enable us to examine how different relational mechanisms emerge and operate at greater and lesser ‘proximity’ to actual or potential

²⁵ See for example Della Porta (1995); Malthaner (2017); Waddington, Jones and Critcher (1989). We say ‘most’, as some scholars do not entirely share this broad orientation. For example, Collins (2008) and Nassauer (2019) have argued for approaches with an overwhelming focus specifically on micro-situational dynamics.

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instances of escalation.²⁶ This, we believe, could have both theoretical and practical advantages. Theoretically, we know that micro-situations can acquire their own logics, which are possibly quite distinct from the wider struggles of which they are ostensibly a part.²⁷ This multi-level approach enabled us to accommodate this analytically. Breaking the analysis down to the three levels would also appear to have clear potential to facilitate application of the insights from this research into practice e.g. by helping policymakers and practitioners to focus their attention on the mechanisms most likely to be of relevance depending on the level of proximity to potential instances of violent escalation at which they are working.

Perhaps the major disadvantage of such an approach is that it can make it difficult to identify what comprise the most important causal components. Within such a framework, causality is likely always to be diffuse, and it is likely to be difficult, perhaps even impossible, to effectively or meaningfully weight the mechanisms. We would argue however that this is also a strength – that in effect it does not allow us to slip into a conveniently simple causal story but rather forces us to understand escalation and inhibition as highly contingent processes with multiple possible outcomes. By situating protest events (micro-level) within a wider series of interactions (meso-level) and their attendant conflicts (macro-level), it helps to avoid the production of de-contextualised or ahistorical accounts of the dynamics that unfold during such events. At the same time, emphasising the importance of micro-situational dynamics helps to discourage overly-simplistic or deterministic accounts of violence that downplay individual agency or the basic fact that for most human beings it is actually very difficult to undertake direct physical violence.²⁸

THE INTERSECTIONS OF OFFLINE AND ONLINE ACTIVITIES

Our third main analytic dimension was the intersection between offline and online activities. Most social movement activism today takes place across a combination of offline, online and hybrid spaces. Anti-minority activism is no different, with the adept and strategic use of digital spaces a common feature of this scene.

Anti-minority activists have sought to exploit the opportunities presented by the rapidly evolving online ecosystem, comprising both mainstream and fringe platforms, to recruit and mobilise new and existing sympathisers and supporters.²⁹ They have, for example, skilfully exploited the algorithms of major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, which prioritise content that generates strong emotional responses such as fear, anger and indignation, to increase their visibility and galvanise sympathisers and supporters.³⁰

Since 2016, however, they have also increasingly moved towards and sometimes created their own online safe havens – or ‘alt-tech’ (alternative tech) platforms – at least partly in reaction to take-down policies adopted by mainstream platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and to escape monitoring by the security forces. Some websites, such as 4Chan and Discord, have in effect been ‘hijacked’ by anti-minority groups and networks, turning them into key movement spaces. Other platforms and encrypted apps were specifically created as an ultra-libertarian safe haven for users with radical beliefs, e.g. the alt-right Twitter and YouTube equivalents Gab and Bitchute, or the now-closed crowdsourcing platform Hatreon³¹. Similarly, anti-minority actors have made efforts to create digital communities that facilitate rapid mobilisation and mutual support between disparate groups, such as *Ein Prozent* (One Percent) in Germany, which claims

26 Busher, Holbrook and Macklin (2021) conceive of this in terms of examining process of violent escalation and inhibition at ‘different levels of proximity’ to actual or potential acts of escalation.

27 Malthaner (2017); Nassauer (2019).

28 See Collins (2008); Nassauer (2019).

29 Guhl, Ebner and Rau (2020).

30 Baldauf, Ebner and Guhl (2018); Ekman (2019); Tufekci (2018).

31 Guhl, Ebner and Rau (2020).

‘to provide a professional platform of resistance for German interests’.³²

Most academic studies in this area lend support to the idea that social media and online forums have not only enabled recruitment and mobilisation, but have also at times had a facilitating and accelerating effect on both ideological and tactical radicalisation.³³

As such, within this study we also sought to examine the interplay between offline and online developments and their relationship with processes of escalation and inhibition of violence, and how this varied across the four case studies.

2.2. METHODS

We used a multi case research design, with each case drawing on a combination of documentary evidence, semi-structured key informant interviews and social media analysis.

A MULTI-CASE COMPARATIVE STRATEGY

We developed detailed case studies of ‘hot periods’ of anti-minority activism in four towns or cities:

Dover, UK, October 2014 – April 2016:

A series of five demonstrations characterised by significant escalation of violence. These demonstrations were coordinated by groups and individuals at the most radical ideological and tactical fringes of the UK’s wider anti-minority activist milieu, at a time of heightened movement fragmentation and intensifying confrontations with anti-fascist opponents. The demonstrations resulted in some of the most violent clashes between anti-minority and anti-fascist activists in the UK since the early 1990s, and in a series of arrests that arguably decimated the British

far right street protest scene, at least in the short to medium term.

Sunderland, UK, September 2016 – December 2018:

Two sustained campaigns, organised around claims about sexual crimes committed by men with asylum backgrounds. The campaigns involved a rapidly evolving mixture of established local, national and international anti-minority activists, and individuals and residents with no apparent prior affiliation with such networks. These campaigns generated 18 demonstrations over this period. Despite the moral outrage conveyed in the campaign, and the fact that several local activists had a history of football and protest-related violence, there were only two serious incidents of violence, and there was little tactical escalation across the campaigns. There was however a campaign of intimidation and harassment directed at a local MP and her staff.

Chemnitz, Germany, August – December 2018:

A series of demonstrations that followed the fatal stabbing of a young German-Cuban man in the city. These demonstrations attracted a broad coalition of anti-Muslim street protest groups, extreme right-wing activists, unaffiliated citizens and radical right party supporters, members and officials. The demonstrations gave rise to significant public disorder and targeted violence against left-wing opponents, the police, migrants and journalists, although there are important differences in levels of violence across the protest events.

Charlottesville, USA, February – October 2017:

A series of demonstrations by activists associated with the so-called ‘Alt Right’, the centrepiece of which is the ‘Unite the Right’ rally on 11-12 August. Ostensibly a response to the issue of removing statues and other historical markers associated with the Confederacy, these demonstrations are part of a wider national set

32 See Önnfors (2021).

33 Fielitz and Marcks (2019); Scrivens, Davis and Frank (2020).

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of mobilisations that saw the alt right gain momentum politically and organisationally. The demonstration on 11-12 August was particularly violent, even within the context of this wave of heightened contention, and ended in murder as one of the activists drove their car into counterdemonstrators, killing a young woman and injuring around thirty-five others. Divergent responses to the killing from within the movement would subsequently do much to undermine and fragment it during the months that followed.

These cases exhibit important similarities. Each case saw the town or city thrust into the national or international spotlight, and episodes of tactical escalation beyond the usual repertoires of action of the groups involved; each case is characterised by coalitions of anti-minority actors including, at least at some point, some of the most tactically radical elements of the respective national anti-minority movement scenes; and in each case anti-minority actors used digital media to mobilise, organise and legitimise their claims. As such, such we propose that these cases are similar enough to withstand comparison.

At the same time, however, there is substantial across-case variation in terms of the extent of escalation; the duration of the 'hot period'; the extent to which more ideologically radical actors were prominent; the extent to which these coalitions encompassed actors within or in close proximity to political or cultural elites; and the degree the issue frames deployed by actors resonated with the wider public. There is also significant within case variation in terms of the extent of escalation during confrontational events and the extent to which confrontations stimulated or inhibited further mobilisation. As such, we assessed that these cases provided multiple opportunities for cross- and within-case comparison, which is important for theory development and testing.³⁴

We were mindful nonetheless of the limitations and challenges around multi-case research strategies.

While having more than one case might offer some opportunities for leveraging insight from cross-case comparison, we are still talking about a small number of cases; and where cross-case comparisons are over-leveraged, they can result in decontextualized analyses that are ultimately frustrating and potentially misleading.³⁵ In our case, and as discussed further below, we also did not have easily comparable datasets across the four cases: we had less interview data in Charlottesville than in any of the other cases, less access to anti-minority activists or anti-fascists in Chemnitz and Sunderland than in Dover, and so forth.

We responded to these challenges in a number of ways. First, while we developed and critically interrogated our analysis by drawing across the case studies, we sought to retain the individual case study detail and context by initially developing cases independently of one another, prior to developing an integrated analysis. We also brought the emergent analysis back to the specific case studies (see especially the 'storyboards' in Annex 2) in order to 'sense-check' and further interrogate the cross-case analysis.

Second, we resisted the temptation to reduce the cases to something akin to 'positive' and 'negative' cases studies. Rather, we sought to trace escalation and inhibition of violence within each of the cases. This helped to avoid stereotyping or slipping into narrative smoothing of the cases. We believe this is also a fairer reflection of the cases. While at first glance, Sunderland might seem like the most obvious 'negative' case study (i.e. where escalation did not take off to the degree that might have been expected): there were instances of serious violence there, as well as harassment and intimidation. Conversely, there is little doubt that there could have been considerably more violence in each of the other cases than what actually took place.

Third, and as we reiterate in Chapters 7 and 8, while we argue that the analysis presented in this report offers a basis for claims about the pathways through

which violent escalation during hot periods of anti-minority activism does or does not emerge, we also emphasise the need to map and refine understanding of these pathways across a wider range of case studies, ideally across a greater range of geographic contexts.

With regards to Chemnitz and Charlottesville, the selection of these cases was also supported by the fact that the research team was already in possession of significant datasets relating to relevant social media activity.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence used comprised a combination of public reports, eye-witness reports, news media, publicly available video footage, memoirs, and online publications from anti-minority movements and some of their opponents.

The available documentary evidence varied significantly across the four case studies in terms of type, level of detail and quality. The documentary evidence was strongest for the Charlottesville case, where detailed public reports, court documents, a series of memoirs and extensive media reporting and published books provide extensive, albeit not exhaustive, empirical material.³⁶

While there is a deficit of academic or detailed public reports for Chemnitz, the international interest in the protests produced a large number of news articles, news reports, and extensive video footage (albeit with some notable gaps). Furthermore, there was publicly available commentary on the protests by anti-minority actors, such as on Götz Kubitschek's website, *Secession*.

There was less documentary evidence for the Sunderland and Dover case studies, beyond the news media and reporting by anti-fascist organisations. For each case study, however, there was sufficient documentary evidence to generate a basic timeline

of critical events germane to the study, and for Dover there was still extensive video footage available in the public domain.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Key informant interviews were used in each case study to address limitations in the available documentary and social media evidence, and to enable the research team to capture and explore a range of different perspectives on the events that comprise the focus of the case studies. The interviews were of particular importance for attempting to better understand the internal dynamics of the relevant movements and decision-making processes by the different sets of actors involved in each case.

Across the four case studies, the research team undertook interviews with 61 key informants. As can be seen in Figure 2.1, the interviews were not evenly distributed across the case studies. The key informants break down as follows: Chemnitz, 21 key informants; Dover, 18 key informants; Sunderland, 12 key informants; Charlottesville, 4 key informants. We also had 6 key informants that we have labelled as 'UK' key informants, as their expertise enabled them to provide insight relating to both the UK case studies. The lower number of interviews in Charlottesville reflects the fact that Covid-19 related travel restrictions had a greater impact on our ability to generate interviews for that case, and that during the autumn of 2020 the presidential elections and a series of other ongoing mobilisations and counter-mobilisations meant that many of the people that we were trying to speak with did not have the time to do so. It also reflects the fact that there is far greater documentary evidence available for the Charlottesville case study, so greater interviewing effort was diverted towards other case studies with less documentary evidence.

Across the cases, interviewees comprised a range of respondents from relevant local authorities, law enforcement, anti-minority activists, counter-movement activists, academics, individuals working

³⁶ The Charlottesville case study was completed prior to the conclusion of the *Sines vs. Kessler civil lawsuit case* which concluded on 23 November 2021 with an award of \$25 million in damages against the organisers of the Unite the Right demonstration.

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in a range of civil society organisations that work on issues broadly related to migration, inclusion and discrimination, and other expert observers, including journalists, former activists, and individuals involved in counter-radicalisation work with anti-minority activists.

As can be seen in Figure 2.1, there is not an even spread of interviewees across these different groups. This is a limitation. Across the cases, it proved difficult to arrange interviews with relevant anti-minority activists. We believe that this is to an important extent a product of the limited opportunities that the research team has had to conduct fieldwork on the ground and build rapport with relevant groups: something widely recognised to be important when trying to undertake data collection with difficult-to-access communities. Also notable is the absence of interviews with law enforcement in Chemnitz. Several requests were made to the security forces in Chemnitz who declined to be interviewed for the research. The reasons given were that internal protocol and data protection prevented their participation. Nonetheless, we believe the interview data that has been collected has provided considerable additional insight regarding the case studies, particularly where we have had limited documentary evidence available.

The specific questions asked in interviews were to some extent dependent on the interviewee, with interviews tailored to their particular areas of knowledge and understanding regarding the case in question. Across all the interviews, however, the primary focus was on eliciting a detailed description of how the series of events germane to the interview unfolded from a range of perspectives, rather than on capturing the interviewees' wider theorisations about the events.

SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

Our social media analysis combined quantitative data from natural language processing (NLP) tools with qualitative insights from ethnographic research in extremist online groups. The social media monitoring tool, Crimson Hexagon, was used to trace back the

mobilisation timeline for each case study on Twitter and other publicly accessible platforms. We used both a topic-led approach and a timeframe-led approach to collect and analyse the data. For the topic-led search query lists of relevant keywords and hashtags were drafted that were then refined in an iterative process of manually checking the results. For the time-led approach, we zoomed in on the specific timeframes that were identified as 'hot periods'. The AI-based natural language processing tool Method52 was also used to extract, clear and analyse public messages from the encrypted messaging application Telegram. To complement the quantitative social media analysis, digital ethnographic research was conducted in the relevant social media channels and fora.

One notable limitation in the social media analysis was around access to content that has been removed permanently from the internet. Our NLP tools allowed us to access social media posts dating back to as far as 2012. However, we encountered limitations in some datasets due to the implementation of stricter removal policies for extremist content and the suspension of many extremist accounts by Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms. We tried to fill these gaps by additionally analysing archival material collected at ISD and other social media monitoring institutions as well as public leaks of relevant conversations.

Social media data for the Dover case study

The Dover case study primarily made use of the social media listening tool, Crimson Hexagon. We tracked conversations across Twitter and forums that contained at least one keyword and hashtag mentioning 'Dover' and at least one of following words: 'Support the Calais Truckers' 'migrant' 'Kent National Front Unity Demo' 'east Kent alliance' 'edl' 'English defence league' 'refugees' 'muslims' 'refugees not welcome' '#RefugeesNotWelcome' 'patriots' 'protect our people' '#PieAndMashSquad' '#edl' '#angrywhiteandproud' '#bnp' '#ukip' '#getinthesea', '#SmashCulturalMarxism', '#rapefugee', '5w', 'we go where we want', 'its ok to be white', 'East Kent English

Interviewees	Dover	Sunderland	UK	Chemnitz	Charlottesville	Totals
Local authority	3	3		3		9
Law enforcement	4	4				8
Academics and other researchers	1		3	8		12
Anti-minority activists/ event attendees	1			1	1	3
Counter-movement activists	6	2		1	2	11
NGO workers, working on migration, inclusion and/or discrimination	2	1		6		9
Other expert observers	1	2	3	2	1	9
Totals	18	12	6	21	4	61

Figure 2.1. Breakdown of interviewees by case study and broad role

Patriots’. In an iterative process of manually checking the results, the search query was refined further to exclude irrelevant content, or content posted by news media covering the protests. Between 1 October 2014 and 1 October 2016, we identified a total of 36,333 posts. This data gathering process was complemented with additional ethnographic research on Facebook, which is not captured by Crimson Hexagon. After identifying relevant public pages and groups, we used the tool Crowdtangle to scope the content for the relevant timeframe.

Social media data for the Sunderland case study

For the Sunderland case study, Crimson Hexagon was used to track social media conversations. The data query searched for content that contained at least one keyword and hashtag mentioning ‘Sunderland’ and at least one of following words: ‘Billy Charlton’ ‘#justiceforchelsey’ ‘Chelsey’ ‘rape’ ‘march in sunderland’ ‘migrant attacks’ ‘grooming gangs’ ‘rapefugees’. To avoid false positives from anti-

racist organisations or media outlets, the first rough search was refined manually. A total of 55,119 posts from between 1 January 2016 and 1 April 2020 were analysed. Facebook and YouTube content around the Sunderland mobilisation was collected in a separate digital ethnographic research string.

Social media data for the Chemnitz case study

The AI-based natural language processing tool Method52 was used to extract, clear and analyse 2345 public messages from fourteen separate German far right groups on the encrypted messaging application Telegram. Additionally, the social media monitoring tool Crimson Hexagon was used to trace back the mobilisation timeline on Twitter. The following hashtags were used to analyse of the volume development on Twitter around the Chemnitz protests: #chemnitz #wirsindmehr #prochemnitz. To complement the quantitative social media analysis, digital ethnographic research was conducted in the relevant social media channels and fora.

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Social media data for the Charlottesville case study

The Charlottesville case study used a combination of digital ethnographic research, narrative analysis of archived Discord alt-right messages and Crimson Hexagon data analysis of Twitter posts around the Charlottesville protest. The Crimson Hexagon monitor identified roughly 50,000 relevant Twitter and message board posts in the two weeks run-up to the event. The archival materials of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, as well as those of Unicorn Riot, were used to study channels and posts that were removed from the web in the weeks following the protest.

DATA INTEGRATION AND ANALYSIS

The data were integrated through the development of a timeline that enabled us to trace the basic evolution of the conflict over the course of the relevant hot periods. Each case study was broken down into a series of phases, based around key developments within each case study. These were then written up as detailed case studies, enabling us to describe in progressively greater detail the evolution of each case.

Once we had achieved a detailed description of each case, we examined the sequences of developments in them, relative to processes of escalation and inhibition of violence. We then developed, and assessed the plausibility of, explanations of how these developments could relate to one another, drawing both on cross- and within-case comparison and on the wider academic literature to critically interrogate those explanations. Moving between the analysis, the cases, and the academic literature, we undertook an iterative process to refine our description of what we had identified as the potential violence enabling and violence inhibiting mechanisms.

Using the violence enabling and violence inhibiting mechanisms derived from the analysis, we then re-wrote simplified versions of the timelines of each case study as 'storyboards', which can be found in Annex 3. This had a number of functions and benefits.

Most basically, it gave us an opportunity to critically interrogate the mechanisms and their effectiveness in telling the story of these case studies. It also enabled us to integrate the violence enabling and inhibiting mechanisms, and to trace sequences and/or clusters of mechanisms at various stages of escalation and non-/de-escalation. We would argue that working iteratively from the specific to the abstract and back to the specific again meant that we could achieve analytical clarity without sacrificing processual complexity.

Going forward, we intend to explore how these storyboards can be structured in ways that allow them to function as a useful analytical tool with which policy and practitioner audiences can effectively operationalise the insights from this research, a point to which we return to Chapter 8.

3. DOVER, UK, SEPTEMBER 2014 – APRIL 2016

3.1. SUMMARY

This case study comprises a series of five demonstrations in Dover, a small town in Kent, South East England, between October 2014 and April 2016. The first of these demonstrations was held ostensibly in support of lorry drivers on the Dover-Calais route whose livelihood was, activists claimed, under threat from refugees hiding in their vehicles, but subsequent demonstrations were held around calls to ‘close our borders’ and for ‘patriotic unity’. The events were primarily organised by activists from the South East Alliance (SEA) and the National Front (NF), but drew participants from across the more ideologically and tactically radical fringes of the UK’s anti-minority protest scene, with the North West Infidels (NWI) and other regional Infidels groups among the more prominent supporters.

The first demonstration, on 27 September 2014, attracted scant support, and even less opposition or media attention. Subsequent demonstrations saw an escalation of confrontations, however, as the events came to resemble a series of grudge matches between anti-minority and anti-fascist activists.

The second demonstration, on 25 January 2015, saw small running skirmishes between the opposing groups. The third demonstration, on 12 September 2015, saw substantial confrontations in Dover town centre as opposing groups threw punches and projectiles at one another. The fourth demonstration, on 30 January 2016, was marked by some of the most violent confrontations between anti-minority activists and anti-fascists in the UK since the early 1990s, resulting in 62 convictions and more than 80 years of custodial sentences.

The fifth demonstration, on 2 April 2016, billed as a ‘Unity March’, saw anti-minority activists massively outnumbered by both opposition activists and police. The demonstration resulted in minor confrontations only and marks the decline both of this series of protests and, at least temporarily, this part of the anti-minority protest movement in the UK.

3.2. CONTEXT

At the time of this series of demonstrations, the anti-minority protest scene in Britain was highly fragmented and characterised by processes of ideological radicalisation and increased militancy.³⁷

Throughout the latter part of the 1990s and early 2000s, the street-based anti-minority protest scene in Britain had been significantly diminished, largely as a result of the decision by the British National Party (BNP) to abandon its ‘march and grow’ strategy in favour of a focus on electoral politics.³⁸ This protest scene began to gain momentum again in 2009, however, with the emergence of the English Defence League (EDL).

The EDL sought to differentiate and distance itself from established white nationalist formations such as the BNP and the NF, with the leadership and much of the movement rank-and-file attempting to position themselves as a specifically anti-Muslim but non-racist protest group, and for a short while they largely dominated the anti-minority protest scene.³⁹ This was not to last, however, and by as early as 2011 tensions around an assortment of ideological, tactical,

³⁷ <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2014/01/21/the-state-of-hate-in-2013/> (Accessed on 11/05/2021)

³⁸ Copsey (2008).

³⁹ Busher (2016), Pilkington (2016).

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strategic and personal differences, both within the EDL, and between the EDL and various allies, began to surface, gradually undermining the group and their dominance of this protest sector. The group enjoyed a brief resurgence in the summer of 2013 as activists succeeded in mobilising greater numbers of supporters in the wake of the killing of Lee Rigby, a member of the armed forces killed by two Islamist extremists in May 2013 while off duty. By the autumn of 2013, however, the EDL's leadership had resigned, citing concerns that the group was being infiltrated by right-wing extremists. The EDL's ability to attract support or media interest was dramatically reduced, and there quickly emerged a series of unifying power-struggles within the diminishing EDL itself, and within the wider and increasingly disjointed protest scene.

Activists within groups such as the BNP, NF and other white nationalist formations saw the collapse of the EDL as an opportunity to regain influence, and set about trying to court those who were peeling away from the EDL. The Infidels groups, including but not limited to the North West Infidels (NWI) and North East Infidels (NEI), were among the first EDL splinters to openly embrace overtly racist groups and ideas: this was one of the reasons for the initial rift between NWI and the EDL leadership in the spring of 2011.⁴⁰ Activists associated with SEA, who at that time referred to themselves as the South East Infidels, would soon follow suite. In October 2012 the national EDL leadership removed the leader of that faction, Paul Pitt,⁴¹ from his position as the regional leader for the EDL in Essex, Kent and Sussex, citing his associations with openly racist organisations as one of the motivating factors for the decision.⁴² Over the coming months, Pitt and colleagues would participate in joint events with white nationalist groups, including but not limited to the NF and BNP. Some of these events were characterised by the prominent display of

openly racist symbols, including the flags of explicitly neo-Nazi organisations, the white nationalist 14-word slogan, and straight arm salutes.⁴³

The ability of groups such as the BNP and the NF to profit from the demise of the EDL was, however, severely inhibited by a mixture of rank incompetence, their own internal squabbles, and the fact that they found themselves competing for attention with newer, more media savvy and tactically innovative groups, such as Britain First, itself an offshoot from the BNP, and the later proscribed National Action. The result was a hotchpotch of often fleeting coalitions and alliances, and ongoing attempts by different group or faction leaders to outmanoeuvre one another, often thinly veiled behind calls for 'unity'.⁴⁴ While some events or campaigns did attract support from across the anti-minority protest scene, it was rare for any event to attract more than about 100 participants.⁴⁵ More common were 'no shows', rival demonstrations, sometimes even in the same town on the same day,⁴⁶ and bitter recriminations, all of which was met with the delight and amusement of anti-fascists and other counter-protestors.

Where coalitions of anti-minority activists did succeed in mobilising larger numbers, they were often met by significant counter-protests, some of which resulted in confrontations between opposing groups. For example, a series of St. George's Day parades in 2012–14 in Brighton, about 130 km further west from Dover along Britain's south coast, organised by March for England (MfE) and attended by activists

43 See for example: <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2013/11/11/another-greek-tragedy/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

44 UK 4: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher; UK 5: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher; Hope not Hate (2016).

45 During the latter half of 2013 and early 2014, the EDL continued to muster greater numbers than this for their national demonstrations, reaching as high as around 500 participants for some of their larger events (see Allchorn/Dafnos [2021]), but the fact that these numbers were falling from where they had been recently meant that the group was pervaded with a sense of gradual decline. Around this time the rump of the EDL also comprised a largely distinct entity from the protest scene that cohered around assorted EDL splinter groups, albeit there appears always to have been some overlap in personnel.

46 See for example: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ppmxjb/edl-rotherham-sex-abuse-scandal-simon-childs-jake-lewis-2014-837> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

40 Busher, Harris and Macklin (2019).

41 Paul Pitt's real name is Paul Podromou, which he occasionally made use of while engaging in campaigns in support of the Greek racial nationalist formation, Golden Dawn.

42 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2012/10/27/paul-pitt-sacked/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

from assorted anti-minority groups, including SEA, resulted in progressively more violent skirmishes. These reportedly prompted the formation of the Pie and Mash Squad, essentially an offshoot from Casuals United, who would subsequently be involved in several confrontations with anti-fascists.⁴⁷

Anti-fascism was arguably also going through a period of transition and reorganisation at this time: a result in part of the apparent weakening of UAF following allegations of rape and sexual assault made against a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party in 2013.⁴⁸ Of note for this case study, at least some activists from the more militant Anti-Fascist Network saw themselves as trying to ‘fill’ what one described as the ‘organisational vacuum in British antifascism’ around this time.⁴⁹

The fact that Dover became the site for a series of demonstrations starting in 2014 seems largely to be due to the fact that, in 2014, concerns about ‘mass immigration’ and the supposed threats posed by refugees were both particularly high on the political and media agenda,⁵⁰ and one of the main focal points for organised anti-minority activism.⁵¹ Dover, as one of the country’s primary passenger and freight ports, the closest point on mainland Britain to the rest of Europe and with its iconic castle and white cliffs, has particular symbolic relevance within national debates about migration and borders, and so provided an obvious location for demonstrations around these issues. Indeed, Dover has previously and subsequently been

the focus of media attention and popular mobilisations both opposed to and in support of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees: for example, in the late 1990s around the issue of the arrival of Roma asylum seekers,⁵² and in 2020 around the issue of small boat crossings of the English Channel.

There was ongoing anti-minority mobilisation across Kent during this period, at least some of which was associated with the (unsuccessful) electoral campaigns by the party leaders of Britain First, in Rochester, in 2014, and UKIP, in South Thanet, in 2015. There is, however, no evidence of particularly strong support for anti-minority activism within Dover,⁵³ and none of the organisers of these demonstrations were local to the town. Furthermore, no specific local grievances were cited as a motive for any of these demonstrations, and the local authorities were never identified as a target by the anti-minority activists.⁵⁴

3.3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CASE

Phase 1. September 2014 – January 2015: *Dover becomes a focal point for protests and initial uptick of confrontations between anti-minority activists and anti-fascists*

The series of protests in Dover began on **27 September 2014**. Against a backdrop of significant and growing national media interest in attempts by refugees to cross from Calais to Dover,⁵⁵ activists from SEA, Kent NF, the English Volunteer Force (EVF) and East Kent English Patriots (EKEP) organised an event in Dover Port under the banner ‘Support the Calais Truckers’ (SCT). Their demonstration was ostensibly held in support of British lorry drivers, whose livelihoods they claimed were at risk because they could be fined if

47 See: <https://riversofclaret.wordpress.com/2020/01/18/what-is-pie-n-mash-squad-and-what-does-5w-meanmillwall-westham-chelsea-qpr-charlton-tottenham-arsenal/>. (Accessed on 12/05/2021). By dressing up in clothes similar to the anti-fascist ‘Black Bloc’ – ‘bloccing up’ –, they reduced the ability of police to identify them. Their intention was to force the hand of the police so that they had to stop and identify people wearing similar clothes – i.e. anti-fascists – in order to identify whether they were in fact anti-fascists or members of the Pie and Mash Squad. They claim that this led to anti-fascists desisting from ‘bloccing up’.

48 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jul/29/adiou-comrade-delta-swp-sex-allegations> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

49 <https://libcom.org/news/opposing-far-right-dover-19012016> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

50 Allen (2016).

51 The other main focal point for anti-minority activism around this time were the ongoing revelations about cases of child sexual exploitation involving, in several cases, networks of men of South Asian heritage.

52 www.libcom.org/library/asylum-seekers-dover-part-two-bigotry-uk (Accessed on 12/05/2021); Dover 2: Interview with local authority worker; Dover 3: Interview with local authority worker

53 Recurrent theme across locally based interviewees.

54 Dover 1: Interview with local authority worker

55 See for example <https://web.archive.org/web/20200605164833/https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/18/migrant-arrests-calais> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

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immigrants were found attempting to gain entry to the UK in the backs of their vehicles. It was unequivocally a white nationalist event, however, featuring multiple NF flags and at least one banner bearing the *Wolfsangel*: a symbol used by several Nazi and neo-Nazi organisations past and present.

The event was attended by fewer than 100 people and was a low-key affair. Their aim was to temporarily shut down the M20 motorway leading to the ferry port, and they briefly succeeded in doing this through a short sit-down protest. That aside, the event attracted little public attention, no obvious counter demonstration, and was managed with a minimal police presence. What raised the profile of the event slightly was the brief appearance of Nick Griffin, erstwhile leader of the BNP, seemingly as part of his desperate attempts to remain relevant.⁵⁶

The event made little immediate impact. Throughout the autumn of 2014 the anti-minority protest scene carried on much as it had done. The EDL continued their decline, struggling to stage demonstrations on the scale they had done previously and riven with bitter internal arguments.⁵⁷ Britain First were humiliated twice in nearby Rochester: once when locals, working with anti-fascists, successfully blocked a Britain First march of fewer than 50 people,⁵⁸ and again a few days later when their candidate, Jayda Fransen, achieved only 56 votes in the Rochester & Strood by-election: 0.14% of the vote and just under 100 votes fewer than the Monster Raving Loony Party (151 votes). The NF was split firmly in two, with competing factions organising separate remembrance marches to the Cenotaph in November – usually a time of relative unity within the scene.⁵⁹ Griffin, after being formally expelled from the BNP at the beginning of October,

continued his personal quest for relevance, trying at one point to launch a new party with support from Pitt and other SEA activists,⁶⁰ before unceremoniously dumping them to pursue another venture.⁶¹ Meanwhile, Pitt and colleagues continued to engage with an assortment of groups, mainly on the white nationalist fringe of the anti-minority protest movement, including a quite tiny protest in support of Golden Dawn, the Greek white nationalist formation, outside the Greek embassy in London, attended by individuals associated with NF, BNP, Combat 18 and *Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski* (National Rebirth of Poland [NOP]).⁶²

However, in December and early January, there were, a number of developments that, while at most only tangentially related to one another, all appear to be relevant to the emergent escalation dynamics observed in Dover and across Britain during the months that followed.

In late December, Pitt, in collaboration with other associates, had planned to attend a football match in Southend with the objective of confronting anti-fascists from Clapton FC: part of a longer series of minor confrontations and online antagonism between anti-minority and anti-fascist football groups, including the Pie and Mash Squad.⁶³ A number of those who had offered to accompany Pitt, including members of the Pie and Mash Squad, never made it to the ground, however. Pitt reportedly ended up having to go to hospital.⁶⁴ The extent of his injuries is unclear: he was able to participate in subsequent events in January. Nonetheless, that such a confrontation took

56 See <https://www.vice.com/en/article/yvz97/nick-griffin-english-fascists-dover-281> and <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2014/09/28/griffin-s-comeback-flops/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

57 Dover 13: Interview with an academic.

58 <https://www.artefactmagazine.com/2014/11/18/activists-confront-britain-first-at-rochester-march/> and <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2014/11/02/britain-first-fascists-embarrassed-in-rochester/#more-2358> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

59 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2014/11/09/a-national-disgrace/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

60 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2014/11/21/far-right-round-up-49/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

61 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2014/11/28/griffin-cuts-the-throat-of-british-voice/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

62 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2014/11/30/nazi-conference-round-up/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

63 See <https://exposingon.tumblr.com/post/90111830684/casualties-untied>, <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2015/01/05/kick-off-at-clapton-fc/#more-2504>, and <https://pieandmashsquad.wordpress.com/2014/03/19/too-big-for-their-boots-clapton-fc-ultras-edl-evf/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

64 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2015/01/05/kick-off-at-clapton-fc/#more-2504>; <https://libcom.org/news/fascists-are-trying-shut-down-clapton-ultras-24122014>; <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2014/12/22/idiots-on-the-idiot-box/> and https://www.halsteadgazette.co.uk/news/south_esssex_news/11681378.two-arrested-after-football-brawl/ (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

place provides some indication of the intensification of confrontational dynamics between anti-minority activists and their anti-fascist opponents around this time, or at the very least, that this comprised more than just online posturing. It also seems likely that the confrontation and subsequent goading online and at protest events,⁶⁵ consolidated and intensified personal animosities between Pitt and associates and their anti-fascist opponents. As one SEA supporter declared after the Southend incident:

People should be thinking about payback time, [because] I am. We all need to get together and show these antifa cunts up.⁶⁶

Then in January, a series of events further magnified concerns about migration among anti-minority groups and, for anti-fascists and, arguably, also for wider society and the state, served to intensify concerns about the extent and nature of the possible threat from the extreme right. Shortly after the New Year, information began to circulate about alleged sexual assaults carried out by migrants in Cologne on New Year's Eve. While the events themselves took place in Germany, news about them gained international traction, and was quickly integrated into existing threat narratives by anti-minority groups in Britain and elsewhere, particularly around the so-called 'grooming' of white girls by groups of men from immigrant and minority ethnic backgrounds.⁶⁷ Then, on 7 January, an attack by Islamist extremists at the offices of the French political magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, left 12 people dead. In Germany, Pegida, which had initially been launched in October 2014, saw a dramatic increase in support, with 25,000 people attending their march on 12 January 2015. There was not a similar mass mobilisation response in Britain. Indeed, subsequent attempts to form a PEGIDA UK would end in humiliation for

those involved.⁶⁸ Yet these events were discussed by anti-minority activists in Britain and were used to intensify their threat narratives and feelings of moral indignation.

What also happened in Britain in January 2015 was that Zack Davies, a white supremacist who claimed to be affiliated with National Action, attempted to kill Sarandeve Bhambra, a Sikh man and trainee dentist, in North Wales, with a machete, claiming that his actions were in retaliation for the killing of Lee Rigby in May 2013. While his actions were not directly related to the events in Dover, his actions comprise context to rising concerns within anti-fascist circles about a resurgence of a more militant strand of extreme right activism, and to a growing focus on the extreme right by UK policy makers and the law enforcement community.

Then, just ten days before the next demonstration in Dover, the documentary, *Angry, White and Proud*, aired on Channel 4 television. The programme gave considerable prominence to Paul Pitt, as well as to other activists associated with SEA. The documentary received a mixed response, not least from within the anti-minority protest scene. Critics of Pitt, including Paul Golding, of Britain First, and Jack Renshaw, of the BNP and National Action,⁶⁹ claimed Pitt had disgraced the movement with his antics and made them 'look ridiculous'.⁷⁰ The documentary did however raise Pitt's public profile and showcase an activist scene in which members clearly were prepared to engage in physical confrontation with their opponents.

It is important to note that this did not translate into increased support on the ground, at least initially. In fact, the second Support the Calais Truckers protest, on 25 January 2015, attracted fewer activists than the previous demonstration: around 30 to 60 in total and,

65 Dover 12: Interview with anti-fascist.

66 <https://libcom.org/news/fascists-are-trying-shut-down-clapton-ultras-24122014> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

67 See for example <http://nationalistcorrespondent.blogspot.com/2016/01/the-true-story-of-white-girls-on.html> (Accessed on 12/05/2021). Billy Charlton of North East Infidels referenced these events a year later when he gave his speech in Dover at the 30 January demonstration.

68 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/pegida-holds-first-london-march/60555>; <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/06/pegida-uk-supporters-stage-anti-islam-silent-march-birmingham> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

69 On 17 May 2019, Renshaw would be sentenced to life imprisonment for a plan, in 2017, to kill Rosie Cooper MP and a police officer who was investigating Renshaw for child sex offences. The plan was foiled by a National Action whistleblower.

70 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2015/01/16/gorgeous-fascists/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

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based on photographic evidence, closer to the former than the latter.⁷¹ As before, on display at the march were a range of flags from groups such as Kent NF, SEA, EVF, EKEP and the London Division of the Scottish Defence League.

This time, however, they were met by a similar number of counter-protestors: mainly anti-fascists that had travelled from London. This resulted in a series of small skirmishes. The opposing groups first confronted one another outside the pub that had served as a meeting point for the anti-minority activists. This was mainly a verbal confrontation, with police helping to keep the opposing groups apart, but there was also some occasional pushing and shoving. After the police began to escort the anti-minority activists on their march, the anti-fascists regrouped and intercepted the march again, seeking to block its passage. As the opposing groups came closer together, there was some brief mutual stone-throwing (there is no evidence of serious injuries) and a ‘scuffle’ on the promenade in which one anti-minority activist was knocked to the ground and then given ‘a kicking’ – reportedly including kicks to the head⁷² – until some of his co-activists and the police, with drawn batons, intervened.⁷³

The anti-fascists continued to look for opportunities to disrupt the march but, with a police escort, the anti-minority activists were able to make it to a roundabout next to Dover Port for their photo opportunity in front of the white cliffs, whereupon they were escorted back to a car park in the town centre, where the march ended. However, as the anti-minority activists were leaving Dover, some of them in a van drew the attention of anti-fascists by calling insults as they drove past. The anti-fascists were able to catch up with the van and a small altercation followed. The driver of the van reportedly tried but failed to reverse into the

anti-fascists,⁷⁴ and shortly afterwards one anti-fascist managed to pull the keys from the ignition and toss them into a bramble bush. This led to a great deal of amusement among the anti-fascists, as well three arrests: two of the anti-fascists and the driver of the van.⁷⁵ These were seemingly the only arrests made on the day.⁷⁶

At some point during the day, the anti-fascists managed to steal a SEA banner. Three days later they taunted the SEA by posting pictures of themselves posing with the upside-down banner online.⁷⁷ Reports also circulated among anti-fascists that Pitt had been seen at one point ‘hiding in a ditch’ as the groups confronted one another – a story that would be recycled by anti-fascists on a number of occasions over the coming months, presumably with the intention of humiliating him.⁷⁸

Phase 2. February – September 2015: *Further consolidation of Dover as a focal point for mobilisation around anti-migrant themes, and the intensification of confrontations between anti-minority and anti-fascist activists nationwide*

In the months after the second Dover demonstration, the town continued to provide a backdrop for the heightened public, policy and media interest in issues of migration: interest at least partly fuelled by Europe’s so-called ‘migrant crisis’ and, as the year wore on, growing interest in a refugee and migrant encampment in the vicinity of Calais known informally as the ‘Calais Jungle’. In the social media data, we see a noticeable surge of mentions of Dover in combination with our key words (see Chapter 2) during the summer of 2015, peaking in early August (Figure 3.1).

71 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/police-make-arrest-as-far-right-30720/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

72 <https://www.artefactmagazine.com/2015/01/28/a-sunday-stroll-with-the-far-right/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

73 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/5gk7dd/english-fascists-dover-stc-demonstration-anti-fascists-544> and <https://www.artefactmagazine.com/2015/01/28/a-sunday-stroll-with-the-far-right/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

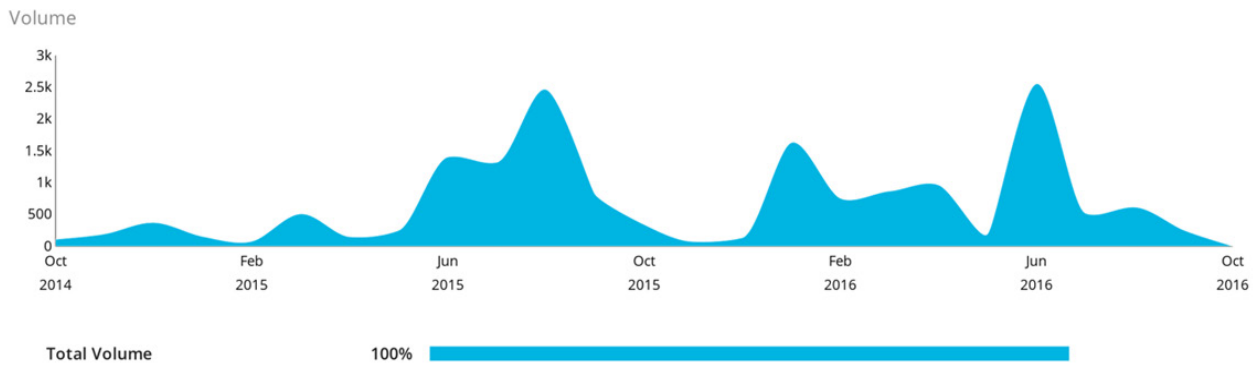
74 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2015/01/26/fascists-blockade-dover-pub-garden/#more-2591> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

75 <https://www.artefactmagazine.com/2015/01/28/a-sunday-stroll-with-the-far-right/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

76 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/police-make-arrest-as-far-right-30720/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

77 <https://aflondon.wordpress.com/2015/01/28/anti-fascist-mobilisation-to-dover/> and <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2015/01/26/fascists-blockade-dover-pub-garden/#more-2591> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

78 <https://libcom.org/news/opposing-far-right-dover-19012016> and <https://novaramedia.com/2016/01/18/interview-opposing-the-far-right-in-dover/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)



Dover CREST Monitor: Content Sources: Twitter
 Date range: Oct 1st, 2014 to Oct 1st, 2016



Figure 3.1. Volume of tweets with combinations of Dover and at least one of the keyword terms used (see Chapter 2)

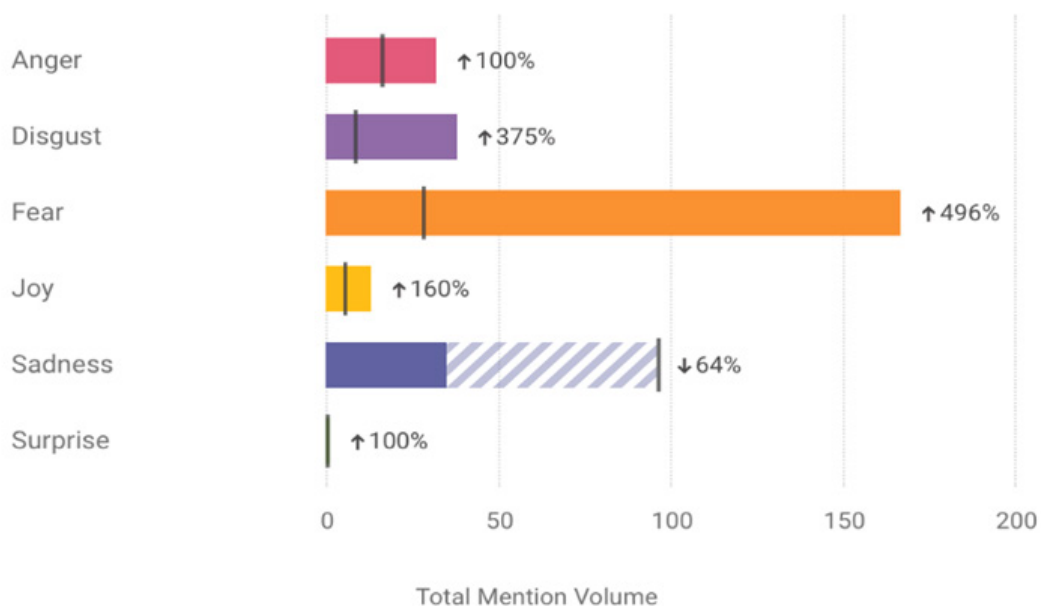


Figure 3.2. Sentiment analysis of Twitter data: June – August 2015, with comparison to prior period

Thematic analysis suggests that much of the discussion on Twitter centred on concerns about the supposed threats to national security from increased migration, about the possibility that the French authorities might become less stringent in their management of the situation, and indignation about claims that Kent County Council and, by extension, ‘the taxpayer’, were paying migrants’ taxi fare of £150 from Dover to London. Sentiment analysis of our Twitter data shows a strong build-up of fear, disgust and anger during the period from June – August 2015 (Figure 3.2).

It is clear that these were not entirely niche concerns. The rise in and emotional intensification of this online activity in the early summer of 2015 was not driven by the actors at the radical fringe of the anti-minority scene that would subsequently mobilise on the streets of Dover. Rather, during June – August 2015, the person with most retweets and mentions on Twitter within our dataset was Nigel Farage, who had just garnered 32.4% of the vote standing as UKIP candidate for South Thanet, northeast Kent, in the May 2015 General Election. Other prominent influencers

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within the Twitter data during this period include Peter Whittle, soon to be a member of the London Assembly for UKIP, and UKIP London mayoral candidate; Tommy Robinson, erstwhile leader of the EDL and at the time self-styled citizen-journalist; and a number of major news outlets, including *The Telegraph*, *Mail Online* and the *Independent*.

Dover, then, was very much in the media spotlight during this period. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that Dover and nearby Folkestone, home to the terminal for the Channel Tunnel, found themselves hosting a number of events and activities organised by various groups both supportive and opposed to migrants and migration. Some of these served to mobilise and further establish local activist networks, particularly within local anti-fascist and anti-racist scenes.⁷⁹ For example, on 1 August 2015, Folkestone United, an anti-racist group based in Folkestone, organised a pro-migrant demonstration at the Channel Tunnel terminal with the aim both of expressing solidarity with migrants and criticising media reporting on, and the UK government's handling of, migration issues. The protest attracted about 30 people, several of whom would attend the subsequent events in Dover. Their protest was met by two counter demonstrations: one, numbering about 10 activists, organised by a local EDL division; the other, organised by Britain First, numbering about 40 activists, including Paul Golding. The demonstrations passed without incident beyond some verbal barbs.⁸⁰

On **5 September 2015**, there was an EDL demonstration in Dover town centre. This was attended by about 50 people, carrying a range of divisional EDL banners, including Millwall, Sheffield, Medway, Bournemouth, Isle of Wight, Fleetwood and the Angels Division.⁸¹ There were no flags from other more ideologically radical groups, however, and there is no indication that this event formed part of

the series of demonstrations that comprise the focus of this case study. Comments in the *Dover Express*, a local newspaper, indicate the march was disruptive and unwelcome, but did not result in public disorder of note, nor did it attract a significant counter-protest. Indeed, it says a lot about the (lack of) impact of this event that none of the respondents in this research referred to it without prompting, and some could not remember it even when prompted. This was in stark contrast to the SEA and NF demonstration that took place in Dover the following week, to which we return below.

Meanwhile, UKIP's decision to stand their party leader and figurehead, Nigel Farage, in South Thanet in May's general election had also stimulated mobilisation by anti-fascists and anti-minority activists in the region: anti-fascists organised a Thanet Stand Up to UKIP campaign, who in turn were subject to a campaign of intimidation, and in some instances physical confrontation from, among others, Britain First and EDL activists.⁸² Some of the activists mobilised through Thanet Stand Up to UKIP would go on to be central to the Kent Anti-Racism Network (KARN) and the counter demonstrations in Dover in September 2015 and January 2016.

As Dover and surrounding towns were becoming consolidated as a focus for protest activity around this time, developments elsewhere in the country were shaping the form that this protest activity would eventually take. In particular, during the first nine months of 2015, protest activity involving the anti-minority and anti-fascist groups central to this case study continued to gather momentum and gain in intensity.

Unlike during the earlier wave of anti-minority activism, centred on the EDL, some of these events were now explicitly framed in racial terms – something

79 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

80 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/folkestone/news/police-on-standby-for-rival-41006/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021) and Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

81 The 'Angels Division' is a women's division of the EDL.

82 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/canterbury/news/britain-first-activist-arrested-on-32734/> and <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/28/nigel-farage-ukip-south-thanet-marina-oloughlin> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

that had long been largely absent from the streets of Britain. On 21 March 2015 a ‘White Man March’ was held in Newcastle by National Action, attracting approximately 100 activists associated with groups including National Action, NF, British Voice, the British Movement, NOP, Misanthropic Division and CasaPound. A week later, in Manchester, on 28 March 2015, a White Pride Worldwide Day event, organised by the NF, drew between 50-100 activists from various groups, including activists from the NWI and NEI, and again from NOP and Misanthropic Division, with some activists carrying Combat 18 and Blood and Honour flags. At both events, white power symbols were on display; anti-minority activists were physically confronted by anti-fascists, despite the efforts of the police to keep opposing groups apart, and activists from both sides went away claiming that ‘they won’ and that their opponents were ‘secretly embarrassed’.⁸³

During the spring and early summer of 2015, there were reports of plans for anti-Jewish marches in London. This eventually resulted in one small and short-lived protest in Clapton about ‘jewification’ that called for ‘equal rights for indigenous whites’,⁸⁴ and a small demonstration in Golders Green organised by stalwart racist and associate of Paul Pitt, Eddie Stampton, which proved a source of considerable acrimony within the protest scene.⁸⁵ While unremarkable in terms of numbers or confrontations, these events provide some indication of how parts of the scene were mobilising around ideological positions more radical, and more obviously in contravention of current societal norms, than those around which the anti-minority protest scene had been mobilising when the EDL was in the ascendancy.⁸⁶

The running confrontation between some anti-minority activists and Clapton FC anti-fascists also continued. At the beginning of August, anti-minority activists chanting, among other things, ‘we hate n*****s’, attacked Clapton FC fans at a Thamesmead Town vs Clapton FC football game in southeast London, causing the game to be cancelled.⁸⁷

Then, as August wore on, anti-fascists enjoyed something of a double victory. On **15 August 2015**, another National Action-led ‘White Man March’, this time in Liverpool, resulted in unmitigated humiliation. National Action organisers gave the event a big build up, writing an open letter to the Liverpool Mayor claiming, among other things, that ‘in years to come your grandchildren will speak of this day’ and that ‘only bullets will stop us’.⁸⁸ However, despite enjoying the support of activists from, among others, NWI, NOP, Redwatch and BNP Youth, the group of approximately 50-100 white nationalists that assembled in Liverpool were prevented from holding their march by a large crowd of anti-fascists – estimated to be as large as 2000, of which approximately 200-300 were possibly members of the Anti-Fascist Network.⁸⁹ Instead, the anti-minority activists were forced to seek refuge in a lost luggage store at Liverpool Lime Street Station while being pelted with milk, eggs, bananas and other objects.

Anti-fascists were quick to celebrate. They set off smoke bombs by the waterfront, and a few days later made a YouTube video of themselves burning flags and notes that they had managed to take from National Action during the attempted march. A spokesperson told *Vice* magazine,

We've seen a surge in neo-Nazi activity and anti-fascists have shown we're more than ready to oppose it. The event has already

83 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/9bzega/white-man-march-photos-193> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

84 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/davehillblog/2015/apr/19/neo-nazis-in-hackney-a-small-sad-and-pitiful-spectacle> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

85 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2015/07/10/far-right-round-up-61/> and <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2015/05/28/antisemitism-set-to-spoil-neo-nazi-rally/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

86 UK 4: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.

87 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/exqpgj/english-fascists-attacked-some-non-league-football-fans-last-night-457> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

88 Macklin (2018).

89 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2015/08/15/liverpool-didn-t-need-bullets-to-shut-up-the-race-haters/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

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been dubbed the 'Battle of Lime Street'. This might be the biggest anti-fascist victory in the UK for 20 or 30 years. It was a total victory over NA, who are completely humiliated. NA came out of the internet and now the internet is ripping the piss out of them on a scale they could never hope to reach.⁹⁰

There was however recognition that future retaliation was likely, and the forthcoming Dover march was identified as a potential site at which anti-minority activists might seek revenge. As the same spokesperson explained,

The struggle against the far right in the UK is far from over. In Dover on September the 12th, racists from all over the UK are coming together to whip up hatred against migrants. Nazis are already talking about getting revenge for Liverpool.⁹¹

The following week, on **22 August 2015**, a 'White, British and Proud' rally was held in nearby Manchester. The event, organised by NWI, featured speakers from NWI, NEI, NF and SEA, and attracted approximately 40 activists carrying an assortment of banners, including those of Combat 18 and Blood and Honour, and one activist dressed in a Ku Klux Klan costume. They were however vastly outnumbered again by anti-fascists – some reports estimate as many as five anti-fascists to every anti-minority activist.⁹² A large police presence – presumably partly a response to the events in Liverpool the previous week – for the most part kept the groups apart, but the anti-fascists were easily able to drown out speeches of those at the 'White, British and Proud' event. Projectiles were exchanged and the police escorted the anti-minority activists away.



Figure 3.3. Word cloud of retweets and mentions during the period June – August 2015

This then was the context in which the third Dover demonstration took place on **12 September 2015**. Anti-minority and anti-fascist activists alike sought to mobilise support in preparation for what many inside these activist scenes believed was likely to be a confrontational event,⁹³ although interviews with local anti-fascists indicate that few anticipated quite how confrontational it would be – as one observed, 'I was nervous but I didn't, I thought, I didn't think it was going to be anything like it was'.⁹⁴

Organised by NF and SEA activists, the event was billed as an 'anti-refugee demonstration', and coincided, intentionally or otherwise, with a national day of action by broadly left-wing groups in support of migrants and refugees that saw multiple solidarity demonstrations organised across the country. Approximately 200 people took part in the anti-minority demonstration.⁹⁵ As with the earlier demonstrations, this was unequivocally a white nationalist event, with NF, SEA, SDL, and NWI banners accompanied by flags with SS Totenkopf symbols, C18 logos and 14-word slogans. The event was addressed by veteran white nationalist, Richard Edmonds.

The anti-minority protesters were met by a slightly smaller number of anti-fascists.⁹⁶ Many of these were

90 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3bjpbj/english-neo-nazis-were-humiliated-in-liverpool-this-weekend-943> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

91 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3bjpbj/english-neo-nazis-were-humiliated-in-liverpool-this-weekend-943> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

92 <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/members-far-right-groups-met-9910607> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

93 <https://radar.squat.net/en/event/london/rabble/2015-09-12/anti-fascist-demo-solidarity-migrants-dover> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

94 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

95 Local anti-fascists estimated that there were 200-300 anti-minority activists (Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists).

96 Local anti-fascists estimated that there were about 150-200 anti-fascists in attendance (Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists). An AFN blog puts the number at 150: <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2015/09/14/what-does-dover-mean-for-anti-fascists/#more-3365>

members of AFN and had travelled from outside Kent, some from as far away as Liverpool. There were also more local anti-fascists, some of whom were already involved with anti-fascist and anti-racist groups such as Folkestone United and Thanet Stand-up to UKIP. It was however the activists that had travelled to Dover from further afield that in effect took the tactical lead on the day because, as one local anti-fascist put it, ‘the AFN comrades ... kind of knew what they were doing: we had no idea what we were doing’.⁹⁷

No arrests were made, and a police spokesperson later stated that, while ‘various items were thrown’, the protest had ‘passed without major incident’.⁹⁸ As one police interviewee⁹⁹ put it, the operation was ‘probably seen as a success’ because, while there was ‘a lot of bricks thrown and there were some cars with broken windcreens, broken windows and that kind of thing in the car park ... there weren’t any significant injuries, no major damage.’

Nonetheless, most observers and participants on both sides framed the events somewhat differently, pointing to the fairly substantial ‘skirmishes’ that took place during the day.¹⁰⁰ Reports also indicate that individuals on both sides were hospitalised.¹⁰¹ Certainly, some local anti-fascists described having felt ‘terrified’ on the day, as they recalled a bombardment of bricks, rubble, and other material, and a distinct impression that the police were very much not in control events:

Out of nowhere, there were bricks, there were, I remember ... there was a rusty chain with a padlock on it, there was full cans of beer, it was a full-on riot and I remember [laughs], because the police

obviously didn’t expect anything to happen because, I remember looking into the eyes of this really young policeman, none of the police had any riot gear on or anything, he was just in uniform and I remember looking at him and he looked absolutely terrified and I thought, ‘Shit, we’re in real trouble here’.¹⁰²

These ‘skirmishes’ began outside the pub that acted as the anti-minority activists’ assembly point. Confronted by anti-fascists, anti-minority activists, including regional NF organiser, Mark Freeman, took refuge inside the pub, the entrance of which was soon blocked by anti-fascists, with the police quickly forming a cordon across the front of the pub to prevent the opposing groups coming into contact with each other.¹⁰³ As more anti-minority activists arrived, coming up one side of the pub, police formed a line to separate the opposing groups, who exchanged projectiles with each other, including bricks, flares and bangers.

As this was happening, anti-minority activists also began to come down a perpendicular street on the other side of the pub, where there was only a minimal police presence.¹⁰⁴ A small number of activists from both sides faced up to one another. Firecrackers were thrown and threats were made. The anti-minority activists advanced on the anti-fascists at walking speed, but the anti-fascists, some of whom were carrying flagpoles and sticks, stood their ground with their improvised weapons held as if ready to strike. As the opposing activists reached one another the police intervened. They first formed a single line between the opposing groups. The verbal exchanges intensified and in video footage of the event there are sounds of firecrackers and other projectiles landing. Additional

(Accessed on 12/05/2021)

97 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

98 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/police-officer-injured-in-dover-43100/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

99 Dover 7: Interview with a police officer

100 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wd7p75/dover-nazi-march-against-refugees-753> (Accessed on 12/05/2021) One local anti-racism activist (Dover 4) stated that they and fellow anti-racism campaigners had been ‘shocked’ by the confrontations and that they were ‘outside of their sphere of experience’.

101 <https://libcom.org/news/neo-nazi-mob-riots-anti-immigration-protest-13092015> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

102 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

103 <https://libcom.org/news/neo-nazi-mob-riots-anti-immigration-protest-13092015>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3a5c0inrjm0&feature=youtu.be>; <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wd7p75/dover-nazi-march-against-refugees-753> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

104 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2015/09/14/what-does-dover-mean-for-anti-fascists/#more-3365> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3a5c0inrjm0&feature=youtu.be> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

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police officers, with riot helmets, but without shields, soon arrived and reinforced the police line between the two groups.

There followed what appears to be a few moments of stasis. Anti-fascists and anti-minority activists faced off on both streets, with double lines of police between them. Chanting and goading from both sides continued. Then a small group of anti-minority activists peeled off the back of the group that had come down the perpendicular street and sought to outflank the police cordon through a car park adjacent to the road in which the activists currently found themselves – accessible by simply stepping over a low railing. The anti-fascists were quick to respond and also stepped over the railing. The insults and volume increased again as opposing activists briefly came into physical contact with one another – likely to be the point at which activists on both sides were able to steal flags or banners from one another.¹⁰⁵

The police cordon also adjusted, limiting direct contact, but projectiles were thrown over the police line. These included glass bottles and masonry. Activists on both sides were struck and injured.¹⁰⁶ As police numbers increased, they were able to strengthen and thicken the cordon, pushing both groups of activists back beyond the range for throwing projectiles.¹⁰⁷

The police sought to contain the anti-fascists and re-route the anti-minority march. The anti-fascists managed to break through a police line, however, and again positioned themselves across the route, making ‘a wall of linked arms, flags and lumps of wood with nails bashed through them’.¹⁰⁸ As the anti-minority activists approached the point where the anti-fascists

were positioned, some sought to break through police lines. They were unsuccessful in doing so, however. This time the police were able to shepherd the anti-minority demonstration past the anti-fascist protestors. Separated only by a line of police vans and police officers, the opposing activists hurled insults and any available objects at one another, including bricks, bottles, beer cans, heavy metal padlocks and hub caps.¹⁰⁹ Police dogs were eventually brought out to enforce separation of the two groups. One police officer was injured, and several vehicles were damaged.¹¹⁰

After the event, both sides claimed some sort of victory online. The anti-fascists, despite being outnumbered, had delayed and disrupted the anti-minority march, but were quick to urge anti-fascists and anti-racists that they needed to redouble efforts to mobilise and oppose what appeared to be a rising tide of ‘open white supremacy’.¹¹¹ For the anti-minority activists, they had still made it to Dover Port despite the opposition, where they had made their speeches and had their photo opportunities with the white cliffs and Dover Castle in the background.

Off the back of the September demonstration, local anti-fascists started to become more organised. The Kent Anti-Racism Network (KARN) was formed, linking up groups of activists from different parts of Kent, who in turn started to be in closer contact with anti-fascist groups nationally.¹¹²

Phase 3. October 2015 – January 2016.

‘The return’ to Dover and the escalation of violence

After the September 2015 confrontations in Dover, the autumn did not produce demonstrations that were particularly notable either for their size or levels

105 There are photographs of an anti-minority activist holding an anti-fascist triangle flag during the exchanges that followed, and anti-fascists holding an upside-down Wirral Infidels flag at the end of the event. <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2015/09/14/what-does-dover-mean-for-anti-fascists/#more-3365> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

106 <https://libcom.org/news/neo-nazi-mob-riots-anti-immigration-protest-13092015> (Accessed on 12/05/2021) and Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

107 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3a5cOinrjm0&feature=youtu.be> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

108 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wd7p75/dover-nazi-march-against-refugees-753> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

109 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wd7p75/dover-nazi-march-against-refugees-753>; <https://libcom.org/news/neo-nazi-mob-riots-anti-immigration-protest-13092015> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

110 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/police-officer-injured-in-dover-43100/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

111 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2015/09/14/what-does-dover-mean-for-anti-fascists/#more-3365> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

112 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists. Also Dover 4: Interview with NGO worker, working on issues of migration, refugees and integration.

of violence. There was however a steady stream of smaller events that resulted in minor confrontations between anti-minority activists and anti-fascists.

On 19 September 2015, in Wigan, north-west England, police dogs were deployed at a small NF organised march in order to control clashes between anti-minority and anti-fascist activists. During the demonstration NF activists gave Nazi salutes and a local NF organiser was arrested and later charged and convicted for a racially aggravated public order offence.¹¹³ The event was attended by several individuals who would later be involved in the confrontations in Dover, including Andy Royston, of Sheffield EDL who, thanks to some graphic images of his bloodied face, would become something of a poster boy of the violence in Dover in January 2016, albeit he was not among those who would face charges, and Nathan Waller, of the Anglesey Infidels, who was given a two year jail term for violent disorder after the January 2016 Dover event.¹¹⁴

On 26 September 2015, in Colchester, there were minor confrontations between approximately 100 EDL activists and 70 anti-fascists at a heavily policed demonstration. While this was an EDL demonstration, there were several activists in attendance that would subsequently take part in events in Dover. And again, Andy Royston was there, along with activists bearing a ‘Taliban Hunting Club’ banner and a 5w flag – the ‘5 words’: ‘we go where we want’, has been used as a tagline by the Pie and Mash Squad and other casual groups.¹¹⁵

On 10 October 2015, in Preston, an anti-refugee protest organised by the NWI attracted around 100 activists and featured speakers from NWI, a group called Right Wing Resistance that quite openly celebrate the life and work of Adolf Hitler,¹¹⁶ Sunderland Defence League,

Scottish Defence League,¹¹⁷ Berkshire Infidels, SEA¹¹⁸ and NF. They were opposed by a considerably larger number of counter-protestors at an event organised by Lancashire Association of Trades Union Councils.¹¹⁹ The police were largely successful in keeping the opposing groups apart, but smoke bombs and firecrackers were thrown.¹²⁰

On the same day, the EDL staged the fourth in a series of demonstrations in Aylesbury, supposedly part of a ‘World Demo Day’ to ‘oppose Islam’.¹²¹ Again, police largely kept opposing groups apart, but just like in previous cases, there were still some minor confrontations, there were individuals in attendance that would later appear in Dover, and on this occasion, there were some minor confrontations between EDL activists and police.¹²²

Meanwhile, even as activists with allegiances to different groups came together for the occasional demonstration, the infighting within and chaotic leadership of the anti-minority scene continued much as before. Competing NF factions again staged rival remembrance marches to the Cenotaph in November, which reportedly resulted in a brawl between the groups.¹²³ The following day Kevin Bryan stepped down as national chairman of the NF, citing health problems.¹²⁴ Dave MacDonald was appointed the new

of violent disorder during the January event in Dover. <https://www.kentlive.news/news/kent-news/dover-peaceful-now-say-residents-1667108> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

117 Thomas Brunton Gideon was one of the speakers from Scottish Defence League. At the time of this research, the banner on his Facebook page read ‘Fighting White Genocide’ <https://www.facebook.com/people/Thomas-Brunton-Gideon/100008157494765> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

118 Paul Pitt, as might be expected.

119 <https://thetab.com/uk/ucan/2015/10/12/edl-splinter-group-demonstrated-anti-refugee-protest-weekend-1279> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

120 https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/10/10/smoke-bombs-thrown-in-preston-refugee-protest_n_8273888.html?guccounter=1 (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

121 <https://www.altcensored.com/watch?v=RTntOQixb34> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

122 <https://www.artefactmagazine.com/2015/10/26/how-the-edl-tried-to-shut-down-aylesbury/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

123 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2015/11/08/national-front-march-begins-and-ends-in-disgrace/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

124 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2015/11/11/nf-no-longer-follow-their-leader/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

113 <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/arrest-made-national-front-rally-10092714> and <https://www.wigantoday.net/news/court-briefs-793796> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

114 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/02/19/will-nf-man-s-conviction-end-months-of-harassment/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

115 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUeclN7FM-A> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

116 Gary Crane, of Right Wing Resistance, was later convicted

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leader, reportedly much to the chagrin of Paul Pitt who had sought the position himself.¹²⁵

In December, Tommy Robinson and colleagues prepared a second launch of Pegida UK. It quickly descended into farce as the group's intended spokesperson gave what was widely considered a 'car crash' interview on a national television news programme and promptly resigned.¹²⁶ Not to be deterred, in January, Robinson announced plans for a silent march in Birmingham at the beginning of February, but it quickly became apparent that on this occasion Robinson was achieving little traction. The event eventually attracted around 200 activists and Pegida UK quickly fizzled out.¹²⁷

On 8 January 2016, the BNP deregistered as a political party, less than six years after they had achieved 563,743 votes in the UK General Election, and less than 7 years after they received 943,598 votes in the European elections. While this event in itself is not obviously or directly related to what happened in Dover later that month, it provides some indication of the quite spectacular collapse of the electoral ambitions of British fascism and the political isolation of activists at the heart of this case study.

From the outset, the Dover demonstration on **30 January 2016** was billed as 'the return' to Dover within anti-minority circles and was heavily promoted within that scene, albeit it is noticeable that the sharp uptick of activity in our Twitter analysis actually took place after rather than in the lead up to the event.¹²⁸

125 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/01/27/the-dover-bound-delinquents/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

126 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-pegida-leader-tim-scott-resigns-following-car-crash-interview-a6761611.html> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

127 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/06/pegida-uk-supporters-stage-anti-islam-silent-march-birmingham> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

128 It seems that the event was promoted mainly in internal Facebook groups and less in public facing campaigns. The spike in Twitter activity on the day of and immediately after the event is, we believe, mostly due to the media reporting that followed the event, which then meant that discussions and campaigns using the pictures and news links about the event and its clashes took off on Twitter. It is also possible however that the removal of some of the initial campaign materials from before the event might have slightly distorted the volume development observed.

The event organiser was Mark Freeman, from Kent NF,¹²⁹ whose publication materials included a poster with the 14 words on it.¹³⁰ SEA and NWI were again involved: Pitt, apparently, was the main liaison point with the police.¹³¹ This time however it appeared the event would draw support from almost all the groups that comprised the most ideologically and/or tactically radical fringes of Britain's anti-minority protest sector, including but not limited to NF, SEA, NWI, East Kent Patriots, EVF, SDL, BNP, Right Wing Resistance, Berkshire Infidels, Bristol United Patriots, Bishop Auckland Against Islam, West Midlands Infidels, NEI, Combat 18, Chelsea Headhunters, Misanthropic Division, National Action,¹³² NOP,¹³³ Pie & Mash Squad and some of the EDL divisions that were by this point increasingly allied with SEA, NF and the Infidels.¹³⁴ This was fuelled by a sense within the movement as a whole that this was an event where 'everybody had to be there'.¹³⁵ Some anti-fascists were

129 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/09/12/national-front-looks-terminal/> (Accessed on 05/12/2021)

130 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/01/27/the-dover-bound-delinquents/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

131 Dover 7: Interview with a police officer

132 National Action were banned from attending the September event due to a falling out with NF. This ban had been lifted for the January event (see <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4wmbkn/nazis-and-anti-fascists-return-to-dover-saturday-142> (Accessed on 12/05/2021), but according to interviewee UK 5 (an anti-fascist researcher), less than half a dozen National Action activists attended as a result of the fallout of then recent allegations about the sexual abuse of a minor by Ryan Fleming, National Action regional organiser.

133 It seems that NOP were not involved in the September 2015 event in Dover as the NF banned them from attending on the grounds essentially that they were Polish <https://libcom.org/news/far-right-plan-surprise-liverpool-return-26022016> (Accessed on 12/05/2021). A police interviewee (Dover 7) reported that somebody from 'a Dutch group' was also arrested on the day, but not subsequently charged.

134 See also: <https://libcom.org/news/opposing-far-right-dover-19012016> (Accessed on 13/05/2021).

Among the key Influencers within the Twitter data that we were able to identify was the BNP Nottingham and)))Aryan Revolution((((Six of the top ten most active authors have had their accounts removed, including @badboyBNP and @AR1488UK. Aryan Revolution and some related accounts made strong use of hashtag pairing, combining multiple hashtags in one tweet. The strategy has been adopted by the alt-right, including in the run-up to elections, to reach a wider audience and generate more engagement with strategic allies and the wider public.

135 Interviewee UK 5 (an anti-fascist researcher) noted: it wasn't 'like a three line whip, like you're out if you don't go, but definitely in terms of the way that they saw it, it would be like not going on your best friends stag do. There's no excuse not to go.' Respondent Dover 11 (an intervention worker with anti-minority activists) also discusses this point, and notes that even at the time of this research, at least some individuals involved with the events in Dover in January 2016 continue to treat their involvement as something of a badge of honour.

anticipating that approximately 250 anti-minority activists would attend.¹³⁶

Preparations for the counter demonstration saw the mobilisation of activists from across a broad swathe of the anti-fascist and anti-racist movements.¹³⁷ Groups operating nationally, such as Unite Against Fascism (UAF), the Socialist Worker, AFN and a number of unions were again involved, and Diane Abbott, a Labour MP, then shadow secretary of state for international development and focus of particular hatred among anti-minority groups,¹³⁸ agreed to speak at a ‘refugees welcome’ demonstration in Dover’s Market Square on the morning of 30 January. This time however there was also greater local coordination. Throughout the autumn, anti-fascists and anti-racists in Kent had been engaging in outreach activities and trying to build support. In October, a coalition of groups, including Folkestone United, KARN, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, the local Labour Party, Kent Refugee Action Network, Kent Refugee Help, the Green Party, and members of Unite had mobilised around 500 people to participate in an ‘Open Dover, Open Europe’ demonstration to express solidarity with migrants – a large number given that the weather on the day was cold and very wet.¹³⁹ Some activists had continued with their mobilising efforts since then. Local anti-fascists reported regular meetings and promotional efforts throughout the autumn and winter, including leafleting campaigns and attending Labour group and union meetings, as well as promoting the event on social media.¹⁴⁰ Some anti-fascists were expecting up to around 500 people to join the counter demonstration on 30 January, and activists

from across the country were organising transport to get them to Dover.¹⁴¹

There were differences of opinion within local anti-fascist and anti-racist groups regarding how to respond to the forthcoming anti-minority demonstration. While anti-fascists involved in groups such as KARN wanted to block the route of the anti-minority march, this was not supported by members of another local group, Dover Stand Up to Racism, whose organisers included members of the local council.¹⁴² They favoured a purely non-confrontational approach and had been quite public in their criticism of KARN and some of its organisers. Yet such differences of opinion are not uncommon within anti-racism, and around this time there had reportedly been a concerted effort on the part of the Anti-Fascist Network to adopt a ‘mixed approach’ to anti-fascist mobilising and collaborate with less militant organisations.¹⁴³ In the end, what emerged in Dover was what one local activist described as a ‘dual strategy’ whereby it was agreed that there would be an anti-racism and pro-refugee rally in Market Square and then,

if people wanted to, they could just stay there, but we were being clear that some of us were going [to go to the train station]: we were not going to allow fascists to march the streets of Dover and we were going to go and block the road.¹⁴⁴

There is no doubt that anti-minority activists and anti-fascists alike saw this as an important event. For anti-minority activists it presented an opportunity to exert their physical dominance against their anti-fascist opponents,¹⁴⁵ exact ‘revenge’ for humiliations

136 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2016/01/03/new-year-same-struggle/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

137 <https://novaramedia.com/2016/01/18/interview-opposing-the-far-right-in-dover/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

138 <https://www.newstatesman.com/2017/09/we-tracked-25688-abusive-tweets-sent-women-mps-half-were-directed-diane-abbott> and <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/12/18/diane-abbott-urges-twitter-tackle-racist-misogynist-abuse/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

139 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/migrant-protest-calls-for-open-44884/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

140 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

141 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4wmbkn/nazis-and-anti-fascists-return-to-dover-saturday-142>; <https://libcom.org/news/opposing-far-right-dover-19012016> and <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2016/01/03/new-year-same-struggle/> (Accessed on 12/05/2021)

142 Dover 4: Interview with NGO worker, working on issues of migration, refugees and integration. Dover Stand Up to Racism was not related to the Thanet Stand Up to UKIP campaign, whose activists were in fact more aligned with KARN.

143 <https://libcom.org/news/opposing-far-right-dover-19012016> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

144 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

145 UK 5: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.

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experienced during the last 18 months,¹⁴⁶ and build on what they perceived as the success of the September 2015 demonstration.¹⁴⁷ It was also an opportunity for Pitt, and others prominent in organising the event, to strengthen their position within the scene. As one local anti-fascist put it,

I think Paul Pitt kind of saw himself as kind of leading a new ... sort of trying to pull in these disparate groups.¹⁴⁸

Anti-fascists and anti-racists also emphasised the importance of the event. Locally and nationally, there were growing concerns about ideological radicalisation within the anti-minority scene. There was a perception that people who had been involved with the EDL were now 'drifting further right', and that this was contributing to a situation of 'neo-Nazi groups flourishing in relative terms'.¹⁴⁹ This was coupled with concerns that far right activists were gaining confidence and that this was likely to result in further attacks on left-wing groups and events.¹⁵⁰ As one anti-fascist explained,

this could be the most significant anti-fascist mobilisation to take place this year and it's probably more important than any of the mobilisations since the peak of the EDL... But the last Dover mobilisation was the first time something he [Paul Pitt] has been involved with has pulled significant numbers and the right think it was a big victory for them. If they get what they think is a victory again in Dover they will potentially be more

unified; the organisational links developed at the last Dover protest will be strengthened, and there's a risk something longer lasting will come out of the coalition.¹⁵¹

There is also little doubt that activists on both sides anticipated violence¹⁵² – as one researcher who was observing these scenes at the time noted, 'you could feel it building...on both sides'.¹⁵³ On the day, police would confiscate weapons including a lock-knife, knuckle duster, poles adapted to cause harm, pieces of wood, glass and hammers¹⁵⁴ and video footage would show at least one anti-minority activist wielding what looks like a baseball bat, leaving little doubt that some activists came prepared for violence.

Among the anti-minority activists, the language building up to the event was incendiary and there is some evidence of organised campaigns of intimidation prior to the march.¹⁵⁵ As well as being billed as a 'return' to Dover, thereby plugging in to the emotional energy of previous demonstrations, flyers for the event clearly portrayed their opponents, both the refugees and 'the left', in dehumanising ways: as, variously, 'the dregs of humanity', terrorists or terrorist sympathisers, rapists and paedophiles – they were an 'army of Orcs [...] ready to invade our shores given the chance'.¹⁵⁶ Within the social media that we were able to access and analyse, the idea that white people need to be saved from an extinction featured heavily, accompanied by references to a forthcoming war. As one flyer warned,

If blood must be spilled, so be it, we will not stand by and allow our homeland to be

146 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists; Interviewee UK 5 (an anti-fascist researcher) talks about the anti-minority activists 'licking their wounds' at this point in time.

147 <https://novaramedia.com/2016/01/18/interview-opposing-the-far-right-in-dover/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

148 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists. This view is supported by interviewees UK 3 and UK 5 and by <https://novaramedia.com/2016/01/18/interview-opposing-the-far-right-in-dover/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

149 <https://libcom.org/news/opposing-far-right-dover-19012016> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

150 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2016/01/03/new-year-same-struggle/> and <https://novaramedia.com/2016/01/18/interview-opposing-the-far-right-in-dover/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

151 <https://libcom.org/news/opposing-far-right-dover-19012016> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

152 UK 5: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher, and <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4wmbkn/nazis-and-anti-fascists-return-to-dover-saturday-142> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

153 UK 4: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.

154 <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/639525/Anti-racism-protesters-Dover-have-swastika-daubed-coach-blood> (Accessed on 13/05/2021). One police interviewee (Dover 9) observed that 'a lot' of the weapons that were found had been taken to Dover by activists on both sides.

155 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4wmbkn/nazis-and-anti-fascists-return-to-dover-saturday-142> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

156 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4wmbkn/nazis-and-anti-fascists-return-to-dover-saturday-142> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

turned into a left-wing sewer of third world mongrels!¹⁵⁷

Even when event organisers seemingly discouraged violence, they nonetheless still hinted at the prospect of and justification for violence. For example, a Facebook post on a SEA page stated:

Remember we are there for a purpose. To highlight certain issues we face. We are not there to have a kick-off with the red scum but we do know they will attack us and we shall defend ourselves without hesitation.¹⁵⁸

For some within this scene, the prospect of violence was undoubtedly a source of excitement: perhaps even one of the principal attractions.¹⁵⁹ Others, however, were apprehensive about the violence. This included members of the NF's national organising committee, who harboured concerns about the possible reputational damage that potentially significant violence at the event could inflict on their organisation. Indeed, shortly prior to the event the NF national organising committee withdrew their official backing for the event, and committee members agreed not to attend, although they did not proscribe other members from attending.¹⁶⁰ On the day, there were several NF flags at the demonstration, and Freeman compered the speeches.

Anti-fascists also anticipated violence, and in keeping with the wider strategy of action of militant anti-fascism, some at least were ready to physically confront the anti-minority activists. At least one activist wore a helmet as a protective measure after their experiences of the September event, and throughout the event there are indications – such as the deployment of call-signs

– that anti-fascists were prepared for confrontation.¹⁶¹ Local anti-fascists were adamant however that their intention was only to block the march, rather than to 'incite' violence: what they described as a form of 'community self-defence'.¹⁶² Indeed, they argued that the logic underpinning their efforts to mobilise a large number of activists was primarily one of preventing violence rather than winning at violence – a subtle but important distinction: the more of them there were, the less chance there would be of violence because the anti-minority activists would not initiate violence if they were heavily outnumbered and the police would likely have to cancel or curtail the march.¹⁶³ Such an interpretation was not shared by the police, however, who saw both groups as broadly equivalent sources of potential public disorder.¹⁶⁴

On **30 January 2016**, the confrontations started even before the activists arrived in Dover.¹⁶⁵ Seemingly by coincidence,¹⁶⁶ at around 10.45am buses carrying anti-minority activists and anti-fascists both found themselves in the Maidstone Services on the M20, about a 45-minute drive from Dover. A confrontation ensued. There are reports of 'running battles'¹⁶⁷ through the service station area as activists wearing Combat 18 and Enoch Powell t-shirts fought with anti-fascists.¹⁶⁸ Several windows were smashed on both anti-minority and anti-fascist coaches, and a swastika

161 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

162 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

163 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

164 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists, reporting on pre-demonstration meetings held with the police. Dover 10: Interview with police officer.

165 It is difficult to gauge exactly how much violence took place on the day. Some observers estimated around 20 people from each side sustaining injuries, with many of those sustaining head wounds as opposing activists exchanged projectiles. There is broad consensus that these were among the most violent confrontations between anti-minority activists and anti-fascists in the UK in many years. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/30/far-right-anti-fascist-protesters-clash-dover> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

166 Although it is possible that one or the other groups deliberately followed the others into the service station. This is suggested by one anti-fascist in an interview with Dazed <https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/29594/1/a-victim-of-fascist-violence-in-dover-tells-us-his-story> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

167 Dover 7: Interview with a police officer

168 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/30/far-right-anti-fascist-protesters-clash-dover> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

157 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4wmbkn/nazis-and-anti-fascists-return-to-dover-saturday-142> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

158 https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/01/30/dover-protest-turns-violent-demonstrator-bloodied_n_9119604.html (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

159 Dover 11: Interview with an intervention worker with anti-minority activists.

160 Dover 14: Interview with a senior anti-minority activist in a nationally prominent organisation.

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was daubed in blood on the side of one of the anti-fascist coaches.¹⁶⁹ As one anti-fascist present reported:

They were running at the anti-fascist demonstrators and there was some argy-bargy, things were chucked back and forth. And then the anti-fascists went back to their coaches and the group of fascists basically tooled up with bits of wood and bins... They attacked one of our coaches and smashed up the windows and one of them came and daubed a swastika in blood on the side of one of the coaches.¹⁷⁰

Two Police Support Units (PSUs) were deployed from Dover to Maidstone Services to deal with the incident. They prevented all of the coaches from travelling any further:¹⁷¹ multiple coaches on both sides, and reportedly as many as 5 anti-fascist coaches.¹⁷² 11 people were arrested on suspicion of violent disorder: all had ‘signs of fighting on them’, such as ‘a cut face’, ‘bleeding knuckles’ or ‘dirty clothing’.¹⁷³

There is broad agreement among interviewees and other eyewitnesses that the events at Maidstone Services had an important impact on the subsequent developments in Dover. First, as news of these events arrived with activists already in or on their way to Dover, it began to ratchet up the tension and create expectations among activists on both sides that their opponents

were prepared for violent confrontation.¹⁷⁴ Second, the number of activists in Dover was quite significantly reduced: one estimate put it at as many as 200 anti-fascists that were prevented from arriving in Dover,¹⁷⁵ including experienced anti-fascists from London and Brighton, thereby potentially influencing the balance of power on the ground. Third, it also spread police resources more thinly than was anticipated. Police respondents agreed that this undoubtedly affected law enforcement capabilities in Dover on the day.¹⁷⁶

In Dover, meanwhile, the Refugees Welcome rally took place in the Market Square around 11am. It was attended by approximately 300 people.¹⁷⁷ As Diane Abbott addressed the crowd, there were banners and placards on display from groups such as KARN, Socialist Worker, UAF and Antifa. At around 12.30 a contingent, many although not all of them ‘blocked up’,¹⁷⁸ then moved from the Market Square towards the station with the intention of preventing the anti-minority activists from being able to undertake their march.¹⁷⁹ It is not clear how many of the approximately 300 people who had gathered in the Market Square did go to physically obstruct the anti-minority march. Certainly, they were not supported by the Dover Stand Up to Racism organisers who, one local anti-fascist recalls, ‘were literally sat in the coffee shop looking down at what we were doing’.¹⁸⁰ Video footage shot from a window above where they gathered on Folkestone Road also suggests it was substantially fewer than 300.¹⁸¹

Police sought to prevent the anti-fascists from reaching Folkestone Road, but the activists easily pushed

169 <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/maidstone-services-closed-nazis-clash-7275043>. (Accessed on 13/05/2021). Having opted to use their own blood, the individual who drew the swastika was later convicted.

170 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/30/far-right-anti-fascist-protesters-clash-dover> (Accessed on 13/05/2021).

171 Interviewee ‘Dover 12’, an anti-fascist present in Dover on the day, reported that one anti-fascist coach containing activists from Clapton FC did in fact manage to get through to Dover, and that when it arrived the police directed the coach straight into an area containing anti-minority activists. They also claimed that the anti-fascists ‘battered’ the anti-minority activists in Maidstone.

172 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

173 Dover 7: Interview with a police officer. The figure of 11 arrests comes from a police briefing that interviewee referred to during the interview. A news report from the time says 6 arrests <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/30/far-right-anti-fascist-protesters-clash-dover>, and a BBC report two weeks later states 10 arrests at Maidstone Services <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-35587165> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

174 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists; Dover 9: Interview with police officer.

175 <https://www.rs21.org.uk/2016/01/30/nazis-smash-and-draw-swastika-in-blood-on-anti-fascist-coaches-on-way-to-dover-demo/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

176 Dover 7: Interview with a police officer; Dover 10, Interview with police officer.

177 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

178 In clothes typical of the ‘black bloc’ style.

179 <https://twitter.com/bbcwhittlesea/status/693416335976615936> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

180 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

181 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJhVKI35AGM> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

through the police line and took up position about 100m from the eastern end of the road, just past a BP Petrol Station and Effingham Street.¹⁸² At this point they were, reportedly, ‘really confident’ that the anti-minority activists were not going to get through and that the police were going to have to ‘stick them back on the train’.¹⁸³ Video footage shows activists chanting and cheering.

The anti-minority activists meanwhile had gathered at The Priory Hotel, a pub next to Dover Priory railway station. Estimates vary, but it seems likely that there were in the region of 200 activists assembled.¹⁸⁴ Alcohol and other drugs were consumed in substantial quantities. Several anti-minority activists can be seen holding drinks in video footage of the beginning of the demonstration, one NF activist later admitted being on cocaine when he threw his St. George’s flag at anti-fascists,¹⁸⁵ and there are anecdotal stories of amphetamine wraps being found in The Priory Hotel later in the afternoon.¹⁸⁶ As one police interviewee observed,

when you look at some of the footage, they look drunk or on drugs. That must have played a part, because they were drinking at a pub before they started ... They were just completely off their faces and wanting to fight.¹⁸⁷

182 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JioSpjCPn6k&has_verified=1 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

183 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

184 Estimates of the numbers of activists present differ substantially. Some media estimates put the numbers around 150-200 (e.g. Huffington Post: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/01/30/dover-protest-turns-violent-demonstrator-bloodied_n_9119604.html), others put the number around 350 anti-minority activists and 400 anti-fascists: <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/unaffiliated-dover-protester-target-of-95971/> (both accessed on 13/05/2021), while one police respondent put the number as high as 500 anti-minority activists (Dover 9).

185 <https://suspended417.rssing.com/chan-53042795/latest-article6.php> (Accessed on 13/05/2021). From the context, it would seem that this admission was part of a plea of mitigating circumstances. He also claimed he had renounced racial nationalism after doing a DNA test and discovering he had some Pakistani heritage.

186 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

187 Dover 7: Interview with a police officer. Although another police interviewee (Dover 9), while acknowledging that the activists had been drinking argued that the ‘level of intoxication didn’t really seem to factor into it’ but rather, ‘it was just kind of the mob mentality that dragged people in’. Interviewee ‘UK 3’ (an intervention worker with anti-minority activists) observes that drug-taking is very widespread within the far right

Shortly before 1pm, when their march was scheduled to start, a group of anti-minority activists pushed through a police line on Priory Station Approach Road, leading onto Folkestone Road. Within this group were organisers from NWI and Andy Royston – visible throughout due to a distinctive cardigan and his decision not to wear any form of face covering or headgear – and several of the activists that would later receive custodial sentences for their actions on the day.¹⁸⁸ Having pushed their way through one police line, they sought to do the same at a second police line, about 100m further down Folkestone Road, about another 100m from where a further police line was containing the now-assembled anti-fascists. While aggressive – some of the anti-minority activists threw objects at the police as they tried to breach the police line,¹⁸⁹ – the activists also appeared excited and in high spirits, with some laughing, chanting and cheering as they shouted at their opponents down the road and jostled with the police. At this stage police were still wearing hats rather than helmets and had not drawn their batons.¹⁹⁰

The police line held. There was a potential flashpoint as one activist received a minor cut to his face during the pushing and shoving. Fellow activists pulled him back from confronting the police however, and one activist, with his back to the police, appeared to encourage him and others to return to the main demonstration. A few seconds later the group started to walk back towards the rest of the anti-minority activists.¹⁹¹ Rather than going back to the main group, however, most peeled off to the northern side of the street, clambering over a low wall into the grounds of Dover College, where

and anti-minority scene, and argues the individuals within the scene that engage in violence are often the same people that engage in drug-taking.¹⁸⁸

Given the ease with which Royston can be identified and his appetite for adopting aggressive postures near to wherever the action is taking place throughout the afternoon, it is extraordinary that he was not among the activists to face charges.

189 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zv7PcIkPR0>. Approx. 00.05.00. (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

190 With the exception of the dog handlers, police did not use shields throughout the afternoon.

191 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zv7PcIkPR0>. Approx. 00.07.30. (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

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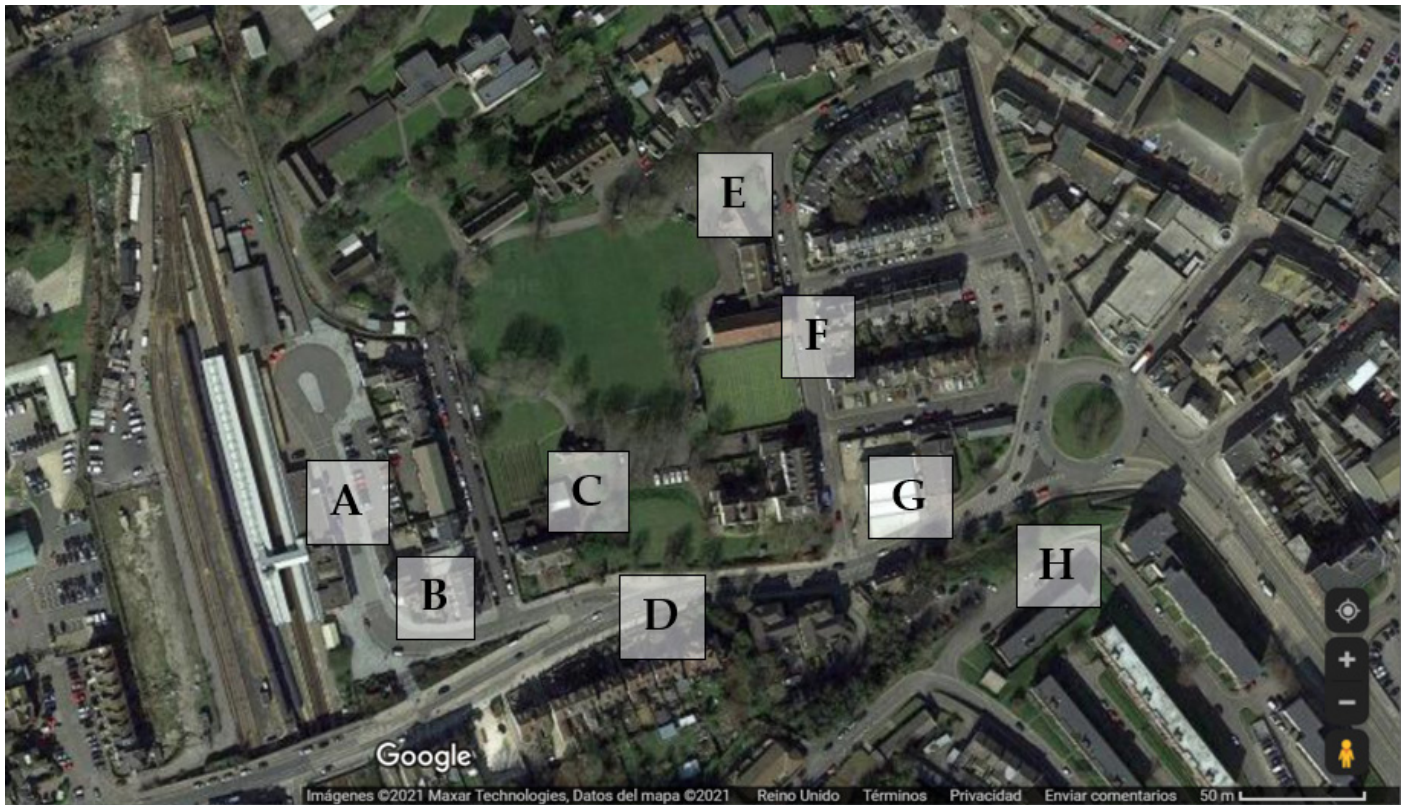


Figure 3.4 Aerial view of the area around Dover Priory Railway Station

Key

A – Dover Priory Station

B – Priory Hotel, rendezvous point for the anti-minority activists

C – Dover College

D – Folkestone Road

E – Gate through which activists gained access from grounds of Dover College to Effingham Street

F – Effingham Street

G – Petrol station

H – Grassy bank where some anti-fascists reassembled

they began to run towards a gate that gave them direct access to Effingham Street.¹⁹²

While this was happening, it seems that another contingent of anti-minority activists had already identified that they could get around the police cordon

by going through Dover College and had ‘overpowered’ Dover College staff that had tried to turn them back.¹⁹³ As anti-minority activists arrived in Effingham Street, there was scant police presence and violence quickly erupted.

We do not have access to video footage of the initial contact between the opposing groups, but anti-fascists present in Dover describe anti-minority activists running up Effingham Street towards them and the

192 Several of the activists that had been in the initial push through police lines on Folkestone Rd can be seen in this video footage arriving through the gate that leads onto Effingham Street, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smgA2-o92x8>. Approx. 00.03.45. About 3.5 minutes later a group of about 20 activists, many carrying British Movement flags, and one carrying a Unite Against Fascism placard can be seen returning from Effingham Street to the main group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zv7PcIkPR0>, approx. 00.10.50. (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

193 Bluer, J. (2016) ‘Fear as jobs turn town into war zone’, *Dover Express*, 4 Feb, pp. 2-3. Not available online.

scene rapidly descending into a chaotic brawl. This is supported by media reports¹⁹⁴ and by video footage shot as the police attempted to separate the opposing groups some minutes later,¹⁹⁵ the ground littered with rubble, flagpoles and placards that had served as improvised weapons.

In the photographs and video footage, activists from both sides can be seen on the floor. Each time an activist falls, opponents rush forward, the person on the floor is kicked, but usually relatively briefly as the focus of the confrontation moves elsewhere and as the co-activists of the fallen individual and the police attempt to intervene.¹⁹⁶ In one video filmed from the anti-minority side, seemingly from a headcam, two anti-minority activists engaged in physical confrontations with anti-fascists are knocked to the ground, and as police try to drag the individuals back to where their co-activists are, anti-fascists land some blows. The photographer rushes forward, shouting and imploring others to join him,¹⁹⁷ he confronts an anti-fascist shouting ‘you fucking Jew cunt’ before a police officer separates them. Another dazed anti-minority activist then stumbles back to his co-activists and is led away by the person making the recording.¹⁹⁸ On the anti-fascist side there are reports of at least one activist being knocked unconscious, and one teenager being found slumped against a petrol pump on the garage forecourt.¹⁹⁹

It was around this time in Effingham Street that one of the most serious assaults of the day took place, as Peter Atkinson attacked photographer Kelvin Williams with a flagpole. As Williams fell to the floor, Atkinson,

sporting a ‘White Pride Worldwide’ t-shirt with ‘14W’ emblazoned on the sleeve, continued to strike him until the flagpole itself broke. Williams’ elbow was shattered, and Atkinson left the scene to continue fighting elsewhere.²⁰⁰ He would in due course be convicted of grievous bodily harm and given a 7-year prison sentence. Anti-minority activists also attempted to assault other journalists and photographers during the afternoon.²⁰¹

As police reinforced the line, the direct physical confrontation gave way to a hail of bricks, bottles and rubble that were flung by some activists on both sides – albeit some anti-fascists implored their co-activists ‘don’t throw back!’,²⁰² not least because the objects were simply being returned by their opponents, and by this point the anti-fascists were essentially contained within a police kettle and, therefore, ‘sitting ducks’ for the anti-minority activists who were more able to move in and out of range as it suited them.²⁰³ It was only at this point that many of the police officers were able to don helmets. Meanwhile many of the anti-fascists sought refuge either up a staircase on the southern side of Folkestone Road, or scrambling up a grassy bank.

As the anti-minority activists were pushed back down Effingham Street by the police, some ‘siege-heiled’ at their opponents.²⁰⁴ Some returned back through Dover College to the main demonstration.²⁰⁵ This included a group of activists carrying British Movement flags.²⁰⁶ Others, however, opted to go east along Saxon Street,

194 For example, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bnkpxw/dover-fascist-anti-fascist-protest-clash> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

195 As an indication of the speed at which this happened, within the initial video footage of this confrontation police are still in soft hats, and only put helmets on after they have formed a line and as the direct physical contact is replaced by bricks and other projectiles being hurled back and forth.

196 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JioSpjCPn6k&has_verified=1 Approx. 00.35 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

197 It is clearly a male voice.

198 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjgUqGQzGQE&has_verified=1 Approx. 02.10 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

199 Bluer, J. (2016) ‘Fear as jobs turn town into war zone’, *Dover Express*, 4 Feb, pp. 2-3. Not available online.

200 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3606480/Far-right-thug-jailed-seven-years-beating-photographer-flagpole-broke-two-anti-immigration-protest.html>; <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/jail-for-protester-who-beat-96319/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

201 Bluer, J. (2016) ‘Fear as jobs turn town into war zone’, *Dover Express*, 4 Feb, pp. 2-3. Not available online.

202 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zv7PcIkPR0> Approx. 00.17.50 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

203 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

204 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JioSpjCPn6k&has_verified=1 Approx. 00.50. This happens throughout the confrontations and could perhaps be considered a form of gaining emotional dominance.

205 One police respondent (Dover 9) observed that ‘Some people joined the back of [the breakaway group through Dover College] and thought, ‘no way’ and went back [...] because they didn’t want to engage in the violence’.

206 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zv7PcIkPR0> Approx. 00.10.50. They return carrying, among other things, a placard from one of the counter-protestors, presumably as some form of trophy.

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giving them access to the roundabout at the bottom of Folkestone Road and again effectively bypassing the main police cordons and giving them access to a relatively open flank of the anti-fascist demonstration.

Once again, violence broke out as opposing activists came into contact. On the northern corner of Folkestone Road, closest to the petrol station, anti-minority activists and anti-fascists briefly came face-to-face. Several of the anti-minority activists involved in the first surge through the police line can be seen. The opposing activists were hemmed in on one side by a police van, there was then a pavement and a raised paved area no more than about 3m wide in front of a closed building, meaning that there was limited opportunity for multiple activists to come into contact simultaneously.

In the video footage,²⁰⁷ two opponents initially face-off, jiggling briefly from side-to-side shouting ‘come on then’. A second anti-minority activist arriving behind throws a stone from almost point-blank range and the first one then throws a clumsy and rather half-hearted punch. Other activists from both sides begin to arrive and push one another with the occasional punch thrown, and some activists on both sides use poles to strike one another as two police officers try to intervene. An anti-fascist is dragged to the floor and two anti-minority activists run in and land punches on the anti-fascists.²⁰⁸ As police separate the opponents, one anti-minority activist clearly has a cut eye.²⁰⁹

As police dogs were brought in to separate opposing activists on the northern corner of the road, on the southern corner projectiles were being flung back and forth. By this point there was a line of police vans across the street, a group of anti-minority activists behind them, on the roundabout, but occasionally rushing forward to throw insults and projectiles at

their opponents, and anti-fascists both in the police kettle and on a steep grassy slope on the south side of Folkestone Rd, where they were also joined by some local residents.²¹⁰

At one point, anti-minority activists surged forward in greater numbers, and as they did so, they came into contact with anti-fascists on the pavement on the southern side of Folkestone Road, which was separated from the road itself by a crash-barrier. Constrained by the crash-barrier, the pavement created both a fairly narrow space in which to fight and provided little opportunity for evasive action. In the video footage two anti-fascists can be seen being knocked to the floor, and as they are, anti-minority activists pile on. One anti-fascist is dragged by anti-minority activists back towards the anti-minority line where he is struck repeatedly.²¹¹ In footage shot from the anti-minority side, the activist can be seen trying to get to his feet with the aid of a police officer. As he does so, an anti-minority activist who is on the road leans over the crash barrier and strikes him again. He slumps to the ground unconscious. Intriguingly, as some anti-minority activists shout ‘leave him’, another puts the fallen anti-fascist in the recovery position.²¹²

The police eventually managed again to separate the opposing activists, but not before several more had been struck by projectiles. Among them was Royston, who began bleeding profusely from his face. Anti-minority activists began to move back onto the roundabout and out of reach of the projectiles raining down from the grassy slope. There is footage of Royston posing for photographs with other anti-minority activists and

207 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBtN0PjG2Yc> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

208 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0fm13e0wTo> Approx. 02.30 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

209 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBtN0PjG2Yc> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

210 There are several reports of young local residents becoming involved in the confrontations, on both sides (Interviews Dover 6, local anti-fascists; and Dover 7, police). The actual number of young people that did become involved is likely to be small, but one at least was eventually charged after they were identified throwing objects in video footage of the events. That individual in fact was involved in throwing objects at both sets of opposing activists (Dover 7: Interview with a police officer) and <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/unaffiliated-dover-protester-target-of-95971/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

211 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2r1GrFT_f0s&has_verified=1 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

212 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjgUqGQzGQE&has_verified=1 Approx. 04.50 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

giving victory signs.²¹³ The anti-minority activists made no attempt to break police lines at this point, but rather allowed the police to regroup them on the northern side of the roundabout, where they looked rather pleased with themselves, taking photographs, laughing and cheering, and occasionally dishing out abuse to passers-by, while those with head-wounds received medical attention.²¹⁴

About 10 minutes later, around 1.45pm, the anti-minority activists that had broken the police lines and been engaged in the violence up to this point, were reunited with the rest of their demonstration. The police had been able to corral the anti-fascists that remained on Folkestone Road to one side of the road and moved the anti-minority activists down the road. Of note, event organisers such as Pitt and Freeman can be seen in the main group that marched down Folkestone Rd, rather than the group that had broken through police lines and engaged in the violence. Having reunited the two groups of anti-minority activists, they were then able to proceed with their march.

There were occasional flash points along the route as small numbers of anti-fascists were able to reach the route, but these confrontations, while ugly, did not see violence of a similar magnitude to that which had taken place on Effingham Street and Folkestone Road. The demonstration arrived at the Eastern Docks, underneath the white cliffs, around 2.15pm, although by that point a significant minority of the activists²¹⁵ had abandoned the march in preference for going ‘walking through town looking for people to beat up that were stragglers that they thought might have been left-wing’,²¹⁶ and there are several reports of violent assaults.²¹⁷

Those that did make it to the Eastern Docks heard Martin Corner (NWI) deliver a speech in which he spoke about ‘race traitors’ and ‘white genocide’ and recited the fourteen words of white racial nationalism, to great applause. Billy Charlton (NEI) then also delivered a speech dripping with invective. They made their way back towards Dover town centre around 2.45pm and were soon engaged once again in confrontations with anti-fascists, this time around Market Square in the town centre. For the most part the police were able to keep the opposing activists separated this time, leaving the opposing activists to trade insults and projectiles across the Market Square. The delicate semi-equilibrium broke down briefly, however, when a group of anti-minority activists gained access to the flank of the anti-fascists through the Discovery Centre – Dover’s library, leading to a brief intensification of the confrontation. Having been effectively separated once again, the dispersal of anti-minority and anti-fascist activists took place around 3.45 – 4pm.

Not surprisingly, the events in Dover garnered significant attention on social media, and it is difficult to analyse with confidence the immediate response to these events within the opposing milieus as so much of what was posted online at this time was subsequently and swiftly taken down, partly in response to the dawning realisation that this time the police were going to actively pursue prosecutions.

We can see, however, that at the time of the demonstration and in the immediate aftermath there is a sharp spike in relevant activity on Twitter (Figure 3.5), and we know anecdotally that in the hours immediately following the demonstration, some activists were keen

213 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zv7PcIkPR0> Approx. 00.36.50 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

214 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zv7PcIkPR0> Approx. 00.45.00 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

215 Estimates and aerial footage of the anti-minority activists gathered for their speeches indicate that only somewhere between 100 and, at the very most, 150 activists made their way along to the Eastern Docks for the speeches.

216 Dover 7: Interview with a police officer.

217 One of the local anti-fascists interviewed for this project (Dover 6), a small middle-aged woman, described themselves and one of the anti-fascist event stewards (male) being attacked by three anti-minority

activists and knocked to the ground. Another anti-fascist told reporters from Dazed about their own experience: after meeting two anti-fascist protestors who’d been attacked and had head wounds, ‘We were walking down the road to try and find them an ambulance when around 100 neo-Nazis just ran at us. We all just scattered, and I ended up running up the steps of a house and they just surrounded me... One punched me in the head, and then I fell to the floor and I don’t remember much more. I remember being kicked and then coming to properly around forty minutes later. I asked my partner what had happened and he was like, “You’ve been beaten up by Nazis”’. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/29594/1/a-victim-of-fascist-violence-in-dover-tells-us-his-story>. (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

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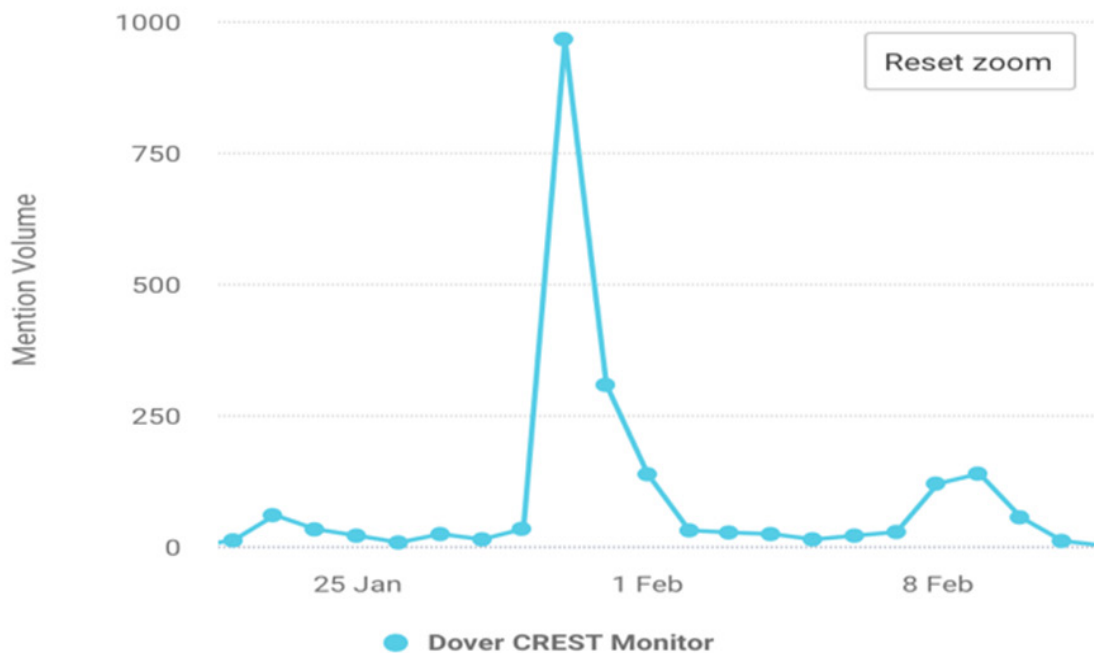


Figure 3.5. Volume of relevant Twitter data around the time of the January 2016 demonstration

to boast of their exploits²¹⁸ – something that several of them doubtless came to regret.

Indeed, within days, and as news of the first arrests began to circulate, anti-minority activists began to encourage their fellow travellers to delete potentially incriminating content.²¹⁹ For many, however, it was too late. As one police interviewee recalled,

[Activists started telling each other,] ‘Destroy the clothes you were wearing, hide everything’. Word went round very quickly that we were arresting. Nobody was surprised when we were on their doorstep at six a.m. Nobody was surprised at all.²²⁰

Phase 4. February – April 2016: *the decline of this wave of protests*

Phase 4 marks the decline of this wave of protests. There seems to be little doubt that at least part of what drove that decline was the growing number of arrests that took place over the following months. After the 17 arrests made on the day, a major police operation was put in place to identify and arrest those involved in the violence. The operation would last several months, but by mid-February 2016 was already putting out public calls for information about individuals of interest.²²¹ In due course, and as the arrests mounted, rumours swirled around the anti-minority protest scene about who might or might not be an informant or be trying to frame other activists for their part in the violence,²²² and relationships within the movement were damaged further as a scandal emerged about the apparent misuse of funds collected under the auspices of a prisoner support fund for those arrested.²²³

218 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/02/12/the-proud-dover-delinquents/>; <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/02/19/will-nf-man-s-conviction-end-months-of-harassment/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

219 For example, an activist associated with the English Democrats posted on Facebook on 17 February warning of arrests in the next 72 hours and calling on all ‘patriots’ to ‘wipe phones’ and ‘delete and posts videos etc off YouTube’.

220 Dover 9: Interview with a police officer.

221 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-35587165> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

222 See Pitt’s comments regarding Stampton: <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/02/17/far-right-round-up-69/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

223 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/213.246.110.234/blog/insider/where-has-the-fascists-money-gone-5156/>; <https://www.hopenothate.org>.

It is important to note, however, that the January 2016 one was not the last demonstration within this wave of protests nationally to see significant public disorder. On 27 February 2016, Liverpool again experienced violence between anti-minority groups and anti-fascists that under normal circumstances would have been considered quite exceptional. The demonstration was called by NWI, and supported by groups including SEA, National Action and NOP²²⁴ – although NF were conspicuous by their absence after tensions emerged between NWI and SEA on the one hand and NF on the other in the lead-up to the event.²²⁵ The event was initially publicised as a demonstration in Manchester, albeit Shane Calvert (NWI) had pledged that they would not be collaborating with the authorities,²²⁶ suggesting a possible further radicalisation of tactics. Shortly before the event, however, they switched to Liverpool, for reasons that remain unclear, although it seems that the intention was to adopt a semi-clandestine mode of organising, with information about the rendezvous point only shared 30 minutes before the event.²²⁷ They only succeeded in mobilising approximately 100 anti-minority activists. Apart from being massively outnumbered by anti-fascists, estimated to have numbered between 500 – 1000,²²⁸ the anti-minority activists also found themselves split in two, with a significant proportion of the activists unable to join the demonstration. About half of the anti-minority activists found themselves kettled on the steps of St. George’s Hall behind a large police cordon, where they daubed swastikas on the walls and engaged in an exchange of projectiles that included cobblestones, fireworks and assorted vegetables.²²⁹

Thirty-four people were arrested, and Paul Pitt would later, in July 2017, be convicted of using threatening and abusive language.²³⁰

NWI held another poorly attended ‘Refugees Not Welcome’ demonstration in Blackpool in March, and then it was the turn of SEA. Pitt and colleagues called another anti-refugee march in Dover for 2 April under the slogan ‘Stop the Fakeugees and Gimmigrants’.²³¹ They again received some support from groups such as NWI, National Front, British Movement and Pie and Mash Squad, but the protest did not attract the kind of attention across the scene that the previous two demonstrations had garnered.

KARN also mobilised again in opposition, but it was a rather different type of opposition this time. While KARN and assorted anti-fascists did plan to block the SEA march, they also organised an event to express solidarity with refugees, albeit while poking some fun at the Pie and Mash Squad: they organised an aid convoy to travel to Calais on the same day as the anti-refugee march, and called it Pies for Calais. That event, which started off in Market Square and then moved down to the docks, was intended in part as a way of rebuilding community relations, which some local anti-fascists acknowledged had been damaged through the violent scenes in January. As one local activist explained, while ‘the fascists were utterly decimated’ by April, particularly as arrests began to mount up, ‘in terms of local support, so were we.’

And so, in a way, and that was like, Pies for Calais in a way was about kind of trying to rebuild that as well, wasn’t it, trying to rebuild some of that.²³²

Subsequent mobilisation efforts would pursue a similar strategy of action, with anti-fascists getting involved

[uk/2017/10/16/sunderlands-billy-liar-accused-plundering-prison-fund/](https://www.sunderlandstar.com/news/2017/10/16/sunderlands-billy-liar-accused-plundering-prison-fund/) (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

224 <https://libcom.org/news/far-right-plan-surprise-liverpool-return-26022016> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

225 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/02/17/far-right-round-up-69/>; <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/02/28/liverpool-does-the-double-2/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

226 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/02/19/will-nf-man-s-conviction-end-months-of-harassment/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

227 <https://libcom.org/news/far-right-plan-surprise-liverpool-return-26022016> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

228 <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/far-right-group-north-west-10960429>; <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/648058/Liverpool-standstill-right-wing-demonstration> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

229 8 (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

230 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2017/07/27/paul-prodromou-found-guilty/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

231 <https://www.dover.uk.com/forums/politics-forum/pie-and-mash-squad> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

232 Dover 6: Interview with local anti-fascists.

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with a multi-cultural festival and, in 2017, a Save Our NHS campaign.

The police were also taking no chances this time. In addition to a far larger operation – reportedly approximately twice the size of the January operation,²³³ and with horses this time – a Section 60 was also put in place, enabling the police to search protestors for weapons and other dangerous instruments.

Despite some pre-march bluster from the anti-minority activists about ‘smashing the reds’ and ‘doing Antifa,’ in the end they only managed to muster in the region of 100 – 120 activists.²³⁴ They were heavily outnumbered by anti-fascists, who managed to mobilise in the region of 400 from across the country, including a large local contingent.²³⁵ Their march was also tightly controlled by the extensive police presence. The anti-minority activists did eventually make it to their planned destination for their speeches, although not before they were made to wait in a static kettle for approximately two hours as police sought to move anti-fascists from the route of the march.²³⁶ During the speeches, Pitt burned an EU flag and encouraged supporters to vote in favour of leaving the EU in the forthcoming advisory referendum on the UK’s EU membership – seemingly a pivot towards a less marginal interest than white supremacy, although he would soon be organising a White Lives Matter march (see below). 13 arrests took place on the day, but most of these took place as police sought to move the anti-fascists off the route of the anti-minority march.

For a while it seemed as though there would be a further event in Dover on 23 April. SEA reportedly intended to hold a St. George’s Day parade in the town and the Pie and Mash Squad also indicated that they

planned to hold a ‘St. George’s Day social’ in Dover on the same day, as well as threatening that there would from this point be unannounced ‘flash’ demonstrations by ‘various groups’ in Dover every month.²³⁷ A small number of anti-fascists prepared to mobilise in response and police were on standby, but in the end no anti-minority activists showed up.²³⁸

In April, Pitt also seemed at one point to be planning to hold a 2-day white power music festival in Dover – ‘Rock Against Immigration’ – supposedly to ‘support regeneration in Dover’.²³⁹ Again, however, nothing was to come of these plans for reasons unknown.

In the months that followed Dover did find itself again a focal point for media narratives with the UK’s EU referendum in June, and this was accompanied by a sharp increase again in Twitter activity focused on the town and themes of migration and refugees. There would, however, not be any further significant anti-minority demonstrations in the town for another four years.

The radical fringe of the anti-minority protest scene largely collapsed over the course of 2016: the result of a combination of the disruption produced by the large numbers of activists arrested and charged as part of ongoing investigations into the violence of January 2016,²⁴⁰ and the increasingly toxic intra-movement recriminations that often accompanied these cases.²⁴¹ National Action was also proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000 in December 2016, thereby potentially further limiting opportunities for these activists to mobilise.

233 <https://www.dover.uk.com/forums/politics-forum/pie-and-mash-squad> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

234 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2016/04/02/dover-solidarity-and-kettled-nazis/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

235 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2016/04/02/dover-solidarity-and-kettled-nazis/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

236 <https://anti-fascistnetwork.org/2016/04/02/dover-solidarity-and-kettled-nazis/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

237 <https://www.dover.uk.com/forums/politics-forum/pie-and-mash-squad> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

238 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/rival-groups-to-rally-on-94616/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

239 <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/04/18/fash-get-over-excited/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

240 For a full list of those charged, see: <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/dover-riots---one-year-119566/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021). Of note, Shane Calvert, one of the leaders of NWI, was given a 30-month sentence in September 2016.

241 Macklin (2018).

Pitt's next noteworthy visit to East Kent was a White Lives Matter march in Margate on **22 October 2016**, where Pitt and fewer than 40 colleagues found themselves ridiculed by a combination of more than 1000 locals and anti-racism campaigners.²⁴² Over the coming months Pitt would continue to attempt, but would fail, to rekindle some kind of support base.²⁴³

3.4. ANALYSIS

What appears to have enabled escalation of violence in the Dover case?

While recognising the challenges of demonstrating causal pathways (see Chapter 2), there are a number of aspects of the case study, both in terms of broader conflict and situational dynamics, that appear to have been particularly important in terms of enabling the escalation of violence.

The first of these, and perhaps the most obvious, is *the increasingly hostile movement – countermovement dynamic* that developed around this time. That the anti-minority activists and anti-fascists disliked and actively opposed one another was of course nothing new. During the course of 2014 – 2016, however, there was an intensification of this hostility, at least in comparison with the years immediately prior to this period, which manifested in more frequent and increasingly violent confrontations.

Throughout this period, the opposing movements sought to gain physical and emotional dominance over one another, with each demonstration, whether in Dover, Liverpool, Manchester or elsewhere, sowing the seeds of resentment, anger and fear that would shape the next demonstration.²⁴⁴ On the anti-

minority side, we can observe an emergent dynamic of repeated humiliation and revenge, as well as attempts to recover lost pride. Throughout this period, anti-fascists inflicted a number of embarrassments on anti-minority activists: being pelted with bananas and milk as they hid in a left-luggage locker in Liverpool Lime Street Station; having their flags stolen and being taunted about it on social media, or failing to get the upper hand at a football brawl that they had instigated and imagined would comprise an easy victory. For a movement whose self-understanding is grounded in tropes of hyper-masculinity and physical dominance over opponents who, within their own movement mythology, are often imagined to be weak and cowardly,²⁴⁵ such incidents demanded a reaction – an attempt to recover their pride and position of (imagined) physical dominance.²⁴⁶

On the anti-fascist side, growing fear and outrage about the expansion and ideological radicalisation of the anti-minority activist scene served both to mobilise support, and to justify calls for adopting a strategy of physically confronting anti-minority activists. While groups such as the EDL had at least sought a veneer of respectability by distancing themselves from racial nationalism and seeking to limit the amount of physical confrontation at their events, the anti-minority scene was increasingly characterised during this period by the open embrace of Nazi slogans and symbols and a celebration of violence and those who carried out violence.

Within this context, expectations of violence began rising on both sides, fuelled by activists' direct or vicarious experience and by social media campaigns on both sides that highlighted and sometimes encouraged or glamourized violence – within the anti-minority scene this was about violence directed both at their anti-fascist opponents and migrants.²⁴⁷ This served

242 Among other things, opponents hijacked the #WLM (White Live Matter) hashtag, turning it into We Love Margate <https://metro.co.uk/2016/10/24/white-lives-matter-protest-doesnt-go-quite-to-plan-6211406/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

243 See for example: <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2017/05/06/pitiful-pitt-pointless-prance/> (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

244 Scholars of political violence have increasingly come to recognise the emergent nature of violence, of how violence often emerges iteratively through series of actions and interactions (see della Porta

[2013], Malthaner [2017]).

245 UK 5: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.

246 Dover 11: Interview with an intervention worker with anti-minority activists.

247 The social media data gathered for this project contains multiple posts that condoned or seemingly encourage violence, with statements such as 'Run over the fuckers!' [referring to migrants] and

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to mobilise those within both milieus that were most open to or enthusiastic about the use of violence.²⁴⁸ It also served to encourage some of those attending the demonstrations to prepare for violence. As such, it is unsurprising that when the opportunity for violence arose, some within both scenes grabbed it with both hands.

A second aspect of the case study that appears to have been relevant in enabling the escalation of the violence is *the chaotic nature of the anti-minority scene* at the time and its apparent *abandonment of any attempt at achieving respectability and broader public support and influence*.

As described above, at the time of this series of demonstrations, the anti-minority scene was particularly chaotic, with multiple groups and individuals seeking to position themselves as leaders. Furthermore, with the collapse first of the BNP and then of the EDL, the moderates of the scene, at least in tactical terms – i.e. those who sought to build a broader base of public support and achieve a degree of respectability –, had lost much of their influence, leaving actors from the radical flank of the movement to spiral away towards more confrontational forms of action and counter-cultural ideological positions.²⁴⁹ It is possible that what drove even more of a wedge between radical flank actors and relative moderates is the fact that several of the key figures within the radical flank had personal grievances with some of the moderates: Pitt was marginalised first by the EDL and then dumped by Griffin; similarly, in early 2016 Calvert and colleagues were aggrieved when Jules Brownlee was expelled from UKIP for supporting the Infidels and EVF since, Calvert claimed, UKIP had previously used NWI to provide security for some of their events in north-west England during the 2015 general election.²⁵⁰

This highly fragmented intra-movement dynamic, and the effective collapse of the moderate flank of the movement favoured both tactical and ideological radicalisation. As prominent figures, such as Nick Griffin and Paul Pitt, sought to retain or achieve relevance, they reached out to groups on the radical fringes of the movement that they had previously eschewed, thereby giving them and their ideas greater prominence. Furthermore, as groups such as National Action appeared on the scene, a form of intra-movement outbidding dynamic appeared, with National Action, the different National Front factions, the SEA, the Infidels and the British Movement all competing for dominance within the radical flank.

The organisers of these groups made strikingly little effort to achieve broader public support and respectability. While their publicity materials and speeches occasionally positioned themselves as champions of ordinary people, and while they mobilised around a few issues of wider public concern, including child sexual exploitation and immigration, this seems to have been more opportunistic than done with a genuine interest in building a broad base of support. Activists made little if any attempt to distance themselves from openly racist language and publicly embraced symbols that they will have known would alienate most of the British public, including the demographic to which they ostensibly sought to appeal. They made no perceptible effort to engage with local communities in Dover,²⁵¹ or to pursue less confrontational modes of protest that might have helped them to build public support; there were scant attempts by organisers to forge alliances with the more ‘respectable’ parts of the ‘radical right’, and their public-facing social media activity is conspicuous by its relative absence.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ ‘When they come out the tunnel shoot [th]em’, often interwoven with apocalyptic comments about looming race wars.

²⁴⁹ Dover 7: Interview with a police officer; Dover 11: Interview with an intervention worker with anti-minority activists; UK 4: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.

²⁴⁹ UK 4: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.

²⁵⁰ <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2016/01/20/ukip-expulsions->

[reveal-infidel-link/](#) (Accessed on 13/05/2021)

²⁵¹ Dover 8: Interview with a police officer..

²⁵² As the respondent UK 4 (an anti-fascist researcher) put it, when discussing the contrast between this faction of the anti-minority protest movement that turned out in Dover and that which became involved in the Sunderland Justice4Chelsey campaign described in the following chapter: ‘when you’re talking about Andy Royston, he’s not interested in changing opinions, but Tommy Robinson and Britain First were.’

Meanwhile, the highly fragmented nature of the movement also undermined opportunities for movement discipline.²⁵³ During demonstrations, the fact that activists were coming together from multiple groups, often with different attitudes towards and appetites for violence, meant there was little if any of the sort of intra-movement control of violence that the leaders of groups such as the EDL had at least sought to impose.²⁵⁴ Sub-groups of activists, sometimes informally assembled in the moment,²⁵⁵ often did their own thing, and there was little if anything that event organisers could do about it.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, the basic logics of supply and demand suggest that as a proliferation of groups competed for the allegiance of a small pool of activists, organisers would have been in a position of relative weakness and wary of alienating supporters through the imposition of disciplinary measures.²⁵⁷

It might be argued that within the anti-fascist movement, there was also at this time an important process of destabilisation and competition as the UAF lost influence and AFN-affiliated groups came to the fore, thereby encouraging an orientation towards a more militant strategy of action. It is important to note, however, that the aim of these militant groups was ultimately to reduce far right violence towards left wing groups and events, rather than violence as an end in itself. Furthermore, while some elements within the anti-fascist movement might have been overwhelmingly focused on confrontation with the anti-minority groups, for a significant proportion of anti-fascist activists, building public support and solidarity continued to be a central pillar of their strategy – causing activists to always have one eye on how their actions might play out with potential supporters beyond the parameters of the immediate movement,

and something that ultimately led to a reorientation away from more confrontational strategies of action.

A third aspect of the case study that appears to have been relevant in enabling the escalation of the violence is the *loss of control by public authorities on the days of the demonstrations* and the consequent *de-structuring of protest events* that produced the kind of ‘*situational breakdown*’²⁵⁸ favourable to violent escalation.

As Collins argues, most people, even those who might indulge in bluster and bravado, will on most occasions attempt to avoid actual direct physical violence, particularly where the outcome is uncertain.²⁵⁹ Effective police lines had come to constitute an integral part of the choreography of protest events involving anti-minority activists and anti-fascists, with many police forces around the country deploying large numbers of police to separate the opposing groups. The resultant police lines allowed activists to engage in a great deal of aggressive posturing – often including a certain amount of jostling of the police lines themselves²⁶⁰ – thereby achieving a certain degree of emotional dominance, without actually having to engage in direct physical violence. Without effective police lines, however, the opportunities for activists to avoid direct physical violence while maintaining that emotional dominance were compromised.

As the standard protest choreography broke down, those who were excited by and sought violence were able to pursue it within the context of a sort of ‘moral holiday’.²⁶¹ Meanwhile, several of those who might have been more reticent about actual participation in violence, even if they were enthusiastic blusterers, were in effect caught up in the action.

253 UK 4: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.
 254 See Busher (2013); and respondent Dover 13 (academic).
 255 Dover 9: Interview with police officer.
 256 UK 5: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.
 257 Dover 9: Interview with police officer. See Macklin (2020) for a discussion of a similar dynamic within the British far right during the 1980s.

258 Nassauer (2019).
 259 Collins (2008).
 260 When watching video footage of these demonstrations, the apparent attempts to break through police lines often bore a resemblance to the classic scenes of street brawlers urging their friends not to hold them back as they ostensibly seek to confront their opponents.
 261 Collins (2008, pp. 243-5).

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As Collins' would anticipate, much of the violence comprised throwing projectiles from a distance, thereby circumventing to a degree some of the situational tension and fear. The most serious direct interpersonal violence was either instigated by those activists who seemed most enthusiastic about violence – those for whom the violence was experienced as a form of fun or entertainment – or took place as individuals or small pockets of activists suddenly found themselves in what Collins describes as 'little local situations of overwhelming advantage'.²⁶² In these situations, we can see forward panic dynamics emerge as the tension and fear of violence is released and activists 'pile on' to those who were in a position of sudden weakness. This can be seen perhaps most clearly in Atkinson's brutal assault on Williams, and in the multiple instances of activists on both sides repeatedly striking and stamping on opponents as they fell to the ground. Given Collins' observations about how the release of tension and fear associated with forward panic dynamics can produce an almost out-of-body experience,²⁶³ it is interesting to note that a number of the activist involved in these incidents reportedly seemed shocked by their own violence when confronted with video footage from the day.²⁶⁴

A number of factors contributed to these losses of control and subsequent situational breakdowns. Part of the explanation is likely to lie in the size of the police operation for both the September and January demonstrations, and the decision not to deploy horses or shields.²⁶⁵ As described above, police resources on

the day were stretched further when two PSUs were drawn away to Maidstone Services to deal with the confrontation taking place there.

Other parts of the explanation for this loss of control are likely to include the intoxication of anti-minority activists and consequent disinhibition, a breakdown of communication between police, event organisers and activists such that those who circumvented police lines were not fully aware of the scale of opposition that was awaiting them further down Folkestone Road,²⁶⁶ the fact that some anti-minority activists at least had travelled to Dover because 'they wanted to have a ruck with the reds, they wanted to fight anti-fascists',²⁶⁷ and even the sheer serendipity of activists identifying that there was a route around the police cordon. It is possible that the decision not to pursue prosecutions after the violence in September 2015 also fostered the kind of loss of control observed in January 2016 by creating a perception among some anti-minority activists that they could essentially 'get away with' engaging in violence,²⁶⁸ a fact that would appear to be supported by what in retrospect appears the surprising absence of effort by a significant number of anti-minority activists to hide their identities even while engaging in serious violence.

It is possible that wider contextual factors also enabled the observed escalation of violence. In particular, it could be argued that the intensification of the hostile emotions that drove the movement – countermovement dynamic at this time was enabled by *the circulation of wider societal crisis narratives that permeated public, media and political discourse at the time.*

As discussed above, around the time of this series of demonstrations, there was significant public, media and political discussion of the so-called 'migrant crisis'. Within parts of the political right, this was

262 Collins (2008, p. 125).

263 Collins (2008, pp. 83-94).

264 Dover 9: Interview with police officer.

265 There was broad agreement among police respondents (Dover 7, Dover 8, Dover 9 and Dover 10) that the sort of violence that unfolded was not and could not have been anticipated, and that the legal obligations on the police to facilitate peaceful protest mean that any move to curtail protests in advance require clear evidence of a serious threat to public order (Dover 10: Interview with police officer). One police interviewee, however, recalled a conversation with a member of the national police intelligence community on the eve of the event who, on hearing about the planned police operation for the day, warned that things had the potential to 'go really wrong' (Dover 7: Interview with a police officer). This raises broader questions as to why the police did not anticipate significant violence when it seems that most activists on both sides and various observers did seem to anticipate substantial violence, but such questions extend beyond the scope of this project.

266 One police interviewee (Dover 9) who had interviewed many of the activists who faced charges observed that most of the activists that had circumvented police lines had been surprised at the scale of the anti-fascist opposition.

267 UK 5: Interview with an anti-fascist researcher.

268 Dover 7: Interview with a police officer.

woven into and used to fuel narratives about supposed threats to personal and national security and to the British or Western way of life, and about how ‘the left’ was complicit in this. Such narratives were picked up and deployed by groups such as SEA, NWI and the National Front throughout this series of demonstrations, with activists often sharing news stories and other content that fitted this narrative and served to stoke fear, anger and outrage and disgust among their co-activists and supporters (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). This arguably aided their efforts at mobilisation both by giving their demonstrations a certain degree of salience and enabling them to portray the Dover protests as a necessary step to protect the native British population from arriving migrants.



Figure 3.6. News story shared on ‘Support the Dover to calais [sic] truckers’ Facebook page shortly before the demonstration in January 2016



Figure 3.7. Image shared on the ‘Support the Dover to calais [sic] truckers’ Facebook page in July 2015²⁶⁹

As noted above, the anti-fascists also had their crisis narrative – about the rise and radicalisation of the far right. While this narrative was in part the product of intra-movement analyses, it also drew on wider public, media and political narratives that were circulating at the time, about the supposed rise of the far right and associated threats. It seems very likely that this helped the anti-fascists, and in particular militant anti-fascists, to mobilise as extensively as they did at this time, and might also have served to justify for some activists the decision to physically oppose the anti-minority groups.

Yet the causal pathways between such crisis narratives and the eventual escalation of violence are considerably more complex and contingent than those described above. The media frenzy around the ‘Calais Jungle’ provided a good opportunity for anti-minority activists to mobilise, but anti-migrant news stories are hardly new, and anti-minority activism is almost always deeply infused with apocalyptic visions of civilizational collapse, without producing the kind of violence seen in Dover.

What appears to have inhibited (further) escalation of violence in the Dover case?

While the violence in Dover arguably comprises some of the most extensive street violence in Britain involving anti-minority and anti-fascist activists since the early 1990s, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that there were limits to this violence. Nobody was killed,²⁷⁰ there were relatively few cases of lasting physical harm, activists on both sides refrained from the use of firearms or bladed weapons, and even the pile-ons tended to be brief. What might help us to explain this?

strong-looking men, often taken out of context or cherry-picked, that were seemingly used both to augment concerns that many of the migrants were strong and potentially dangerous men, and to work on deserving vs undeserving migrant tropes often used in wider political and media discourse in an attempt to delegitimise refugees.

²⁷⁰ Although interviewee UK 5 (an anti-fascist researcher) noted that activists on both sides were breaking up and throwing paving slabs and that ‘People are aware, you get hit by a paving slab you can get killed.

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First, *while the structure of the protest events broke down on some occasions, generating greater opportunities for violence, these situational breakdowns were usually fairly brief.* Within the video footage from the January 2016 demonstration, there are several episodes in which either the police are conspicuous by their absence, or one can see one or two numerically overwhelmed police officers trying in vain to keep opposing activists apart. Yet these episodes are brief, rarely lasting more than a minute, with the exception of the initial confrontation in Effingham Street.

This in part reflects *the speed with which police responded to the confrontations* that flared up. While the police were arguably outmanoeuvred as the anti-minority activists found a route around their cordons not once but twice, sufficient numbers of police were able to respond on each occasion to limit the extent of the subsequent confrontations and then to separate opposing activists.

It also in part reflects the fact that *those actively engaging in physical violence were in the minority within both groups.* The video footage suggests that while some anti-fascists did indeed confront the anti-minority activists as they surged down Effingham Street, most did not, and a substantial number in fact sought refuge either up some steps on the southern side of Folkestone Road, or scrambling up the grassy bank. Similarly, among the anti-minority activists, the contingent that remained near to the train station and were later escorted down Folkestone Road was clearly larger than the contingent that circumvented the police cordon and was involved in most of the violence, and there is little evidence of violence emanating from the main march.²⁷¹ In effect then, the situational breakdowns associated with escalated violence during these demonstrations were only partial situational breakdowns, with a majority of activists on both sides still upholding their protest rituals.²⁷²

Indeed, there is some evidence of activists in both groups actively seeking, although largely failing, to inhibit the use of violence by their co-activists: the anti-minority activist who intervened to prevent their co-activist engaging in a physical confrontation with the police; the anti-fascist imploring their co-activists not to throw missiles at their opponents because they would likely soon be thrown back at them. There are a number of possible reasons as to why they might have sought to inhibit violence, including pragmatism, strategic considerations or simply fear. What is important, however, is that these actions likely served to limit the extent of the violence.

Second, where situational breakdowns did occur, *the opposing groups of activists were fairly evenly matched, creating few opportunities for the sort of one-sided pile-ons that we would expect to produce the most significant violence.* Even where opposing activists came into contact with one another, video footage and photographic evidence indicates that situational tension and fear continued to inhibit violence to a large extent. There are lots of examples in the January 2016 footage of anti-minority activists throwing a punch or similar before retreating back into their own group or even hiding behind police officers. Even where at first sight certain individuals, such as Andy Royston, appear to be in the thick of the confrontation, closer inspection of the video footage shows that most of the time they are usually hanging 5 metres or so and two or three rows back from the actual physical confrontations. The blooded forehead that he received was from a projectile. As one police interviewee mused,

Interestingly enough what you find is that when you do get that breakaway between the two groups, if they do get together it's almost a bit of a, 'oh we're together now, what shall we do?' So it ends up being a scrap like

271 Dover 9: Interview with police officer.

272 It is possible that the group of British Movement activists seen seemingly returning from Effingham Street to rejoin the main anti-minority

contingent represent something of a hybrid position: being involved in the situational breakdown and associated violence before pulling back into the main demonstration. However, we do not have video footage of the initial confrontation in Effingham Street that would enable us to verify that.

those two men out of Bridget Jones' Diary where it's all legs and fists.²⁷³

Similarly, in September 2015, anti-minority activists and anti-fascists found themselves face-to-face and within easy striking of one another when the anti-minority activists came down the second road perpendicular to the initial confrontation, but rather than striking one another they both simply held their ground for the brief moments until the police cordon was established.

Again, there are a number of possible reasons why they held back from violence, but we would argue that part of the answer lies in the fact that the opposing groups of activists were fairly evenly matched and the potential outcomes of confrontations uncertain, thereby helping to sustain situational tension and fear.

Third, *while activists on both sides undoubtedly expected and were prepared for violence*, particularly for the September 2015 and January 2016 demonstrations, *they were prepared for a particular type of violence with broadly understood, if not explicit, limits*.

As criminologists have observed, violence is often codified, albeit such codes are rarely written or explicit: it is undertaken as part of 'a system of order and honour' that puts 'limitations on situations that warrant violence' and 'constrains the level of violence in a fight.'²⁷⁴ In this case, it seems that activists on both sides prepared for a style and level of violence that achieved emotional and physical dominance over their opponents without necessarily causing lasting physical harm or death – the aim was to dominate, intimidate and humiliate their opponents, but not to annihilate them. Even during the confrontation, amidst the 'fog' of the fighting, there were very few incidents of activists overstepping those parameters. Indeed, there were incidents of restraint and, arguably, kindness, such as when the anti-minority activist

put the unconscious anti-fascist into the recovery position.²⁷⁵

3.5. CONCLUSIONS: DOVER

The violence that took place in Dover, and which peaked in January 2016, was the product both of emergent conflict dynamics and situational dynamics.

In terms of the emergent conflict dynamics, the violence in Dover must partly be understood as the product of an increasingly antagonistic movement – countermovement dynamic and the attendant struggles of the two movements to assert their dominance over one another. At the September 2015 and January 2016 demonstrations in particular, the anti-minority activists were seeking to recover damaged pride and exact revenge for prior humiliations and/or failures to exert their dominance.

The intensity of this movement – countermovement dynamic only diminished as the wave of prosecutions that followed the January 2016 demonstration began to take their toll on the anti-minority movement in particular. Those prosecutions served to remove from circulation, at least temporarily, a significant portion of the most prominent activists within the most radical fringes of the anti-minority protest movement, acted as a warning to many others, and served to stoke intra-movement tensions as rumours circulated about who had provided information about who to the police.²⁷⁶ It is possible that the proscription of National Action later in 2016 further undermined this more tactically radical segment of Britain's anti-minority movement, but by that time the movement was already in crisis.

Dover also provides perhaps the best example of what in Chapter 7 we describe as a 'movement marginalised' pathway to violence. With little if any interest in building a broad-based popular movement or forging

273 Dover 10: Interview with police officer.

274 Copes, Hochstetler, & Forsyth (2003, p. 761)).

275 Similar instances of restraint have been described in confrontations between far right and anti-fascist groups going back at least as far as the Second World War. See Macklin & Busher (2015).

276 Macklin (2018).

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alliances with actors closer to the levers of political power, and with multiple groups and organisers competing for status, recognition and supporters within a fairly small activist pool, there were few if any strategic brakes on violent escalation and plenty of reasons for activists and organisers to either embrace or at least condone violence, provided it did not exceed street brawling, and it seems likely that a similar logic served to foster the ideological radicalisation of the scene – or at least the increasingly open expression of more radical ideological positions – at this time. As these events became more violent, they attracted more individuals with an appetite for violence, thereby making subsequent violence more likely.

Yet the violence that took place in Dover, and the nature and extent of that violence, was also the product of situational dynamics. While there can be little doubt that there were activists on both sides who sought physical confrontation, situational breakdowns were necessary for the violent potential to be realised, in which opposing groups of activists were able to come into contact with one another under conditions favourable to violence. Even then, most of the injuries at both the September 2015 and January 2016 events were caused by people throwing projectiles. The most serious instances of interpersonal violence happened, as Randall Collins would predict, in local situations of overwhelming advantage, or took the form of small numbers of individuals dashing forward and then quickly retreating to their lines.

It is possible that the particular historical juncture of 2014 to early 2016 also favoured this escalation of violence: the ready availability of crisis narratives making it easier for activists on both sides to mobilise. The causal pathway here, however, is considerably more complex and contingent.

As for Dover: the town and its residents might rightly consider themselves unfortunate to have been, essentially, the stage for these demonstrations

and the violence that they entailed.²⁷⁷ Had migration not become one of the focal issues not only for the far right but across much of the political spectrum around this time, it is likely that Dover would have been spared these events. Unfortunately for Dover's residents, not only was that not the case, but concerns about migration continue to dominate a great deal of public and political debate. There is an almost grim inevitability about Dover finding itself the focus of further mobilisations.

It is not just bad luck, however. While hindsight is a wonderful thing, it is difficult not to wonder what would have happened had there been an escalation of the law enforcement and criminal justice response to the violence taking place during these demonstrations after the September 2015 event, rather waiting until after the January 2016 demonstration. Had they done so, however, it is possible that the subsequent prosecutions would have done far less damage to the fabric of the anti-minority scene than they actually did.

277 Dover 1: Interview with local authority worker. Dover 8: Interview with police officer.

4. SUNDERLAND, UK, SEPTEMBER 2016 – DECEMBER 2018

4.1. SUMMARY

The case study comprises two waves of protest that took place in Sunderland, a city in the north-east of England, between September 2016 and October 2017, and between May 2018 and December 2018. Both campaigns were anchored in claims of sexual assaults perpetrated by men with asylum backgrounds.

The first, the Justice4Chelsey campaign, emerged after an alleged sexual assault on a young local mother of three, by six men with asylum backgrounds. The campaign began after the Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) decided that there were insufficient grounds to take further action against the alleged perpetrators. It started in September 2016, initially organised by family and friends of the woman, and local activists, and ran until October 2017. The campaign attracted the attention of nationally prominent anti-minority activists, including Tommy Robinson, Ann Marie Waters, the founder of Sharia Watch and a collaborator of Robinson's, and Britain First. Additionally, it became the focus of international attention with the involvement of Rebel Media, a Canadian neo-Conservative and anti-Muslim online news outlet founded by Ezra Levant. There were thirteen demonstrations over a thirteen-month period, and two serious incidents of violence, albeit one was only indirectly connected with the campaign (see below). Justice4Chelsey disbanded after an appeal to the CPS to reconsider the case was rejected, and a prosecution was launched against one of the campaign organisers for five counts of incitement to racial and religious hatred. The prosecution eventually resulted in his conviction and imprisonment for 21 months.

A second campaign was launched in May 2018 after three sexual assaults within a week in the city, two

of which took place on Roker Avenue, an area with several Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)²⁷⁸ providing asylum accommodation. Two men with asylum backgrounds were later convicted for one of the assaults.²⁷⁹ Residents, led by local women, started a campaign that was originally called Justice for the Women and Children of Sunderland, and later became Justice for Women and Children (JWC). It resulted in three demonstrations in Sunderland, and two in Middlesbrough. Over the course of the campaign, the local MP and some local anti-racist activists suffered serious harassment and intimidation, and there were scuffles between protestors and counter-protestors at the largest demonstration, which was supported by Veterans Against Terrorism (VAT)²⁸⁰ and the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA).²⁸¹ Several of the activists involved went on to take leading roles in the anti-Brexit North East Yellow Vest protests,

²⁷⁸ An HMO is a property rented out by at least three people who are not from one 'household' (for example a family) but share facilities such as the bathroom and kitchen. See <https://www.gov.uk/house-in-multiple-occupation-licence> (Accessed 10/05/2021)

²⁷⁹ See <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/17306118.two-women-jailed-raping-woman-sunderland-flat/> (Accessed on 02/02/21)

²⁸⁰ Veterans Against Terrorism are a group founded by ex-soldier Richard Inman after the 2017 Manchester Arena attack to campaign for better application of counter-terrorism laws and better support for military veterans. Membership is open to ex-military and emergency services personal. In January 2018 they officially backed Gerald Batten's UKIP and in February 2018 they held a march in Newcastle. See <https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/hundreds-armed-flags-march-through-14303402> (Accessed on 22/04/21)

²⁸¹ The DFLA emerged from a split in the Football Lads Alliance (FLA) which like VAT was formed after the Westminster and Manchester Arena terrorist attacks to campaign against extremism. The FLA held two well-attended marches in London in 2017 before splitting in March 2018. Both the FLA and DFLA mounted rival demonstrations in Birmingham in that month. The DFLA has since become the dominant organisation and has held marches in Manchester and London where there were violent clashes between marchers and counter protestors, and had an organising role in the statue defenders rally in London in June 2020. See <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/right-wing-protesters-parliament-square-statues-a4468171.html> (Accessed on 21/04/21). It has also been active in anti-grooming campaigns.

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and anti-sexual grooming protests across the UK. The Facebook page remains active at the time of writing.²⁸²

4.2. CONTEXT

National landscape of anti-minority activism

In the period leading up to the Justice4Chelsey campaign, the UK anti-minority scene was in a state of flux and disorganisation, in no small part as a result of the large number of arrests and convictions following the violence in Dover in January 2016.²⁸³ As had been the case since the demise of the EDL, there was no one dominant group or individual, but rather a range of individuals and groups jostling for position.

Arguably, however, this period saw the most tactically and ideologically radical fringe of the anti-minority movement losing ground. As well as the fallout from Dover described in Chapter 3, two other events had a significant impact on the fortunes of the anti-minority movement in 2016 and its appetite for violent confrontation: the murder of MP Jo Cox in June by neo-Nazi Thomas Mair, and the proscription of National Action in December – the first extreme right-wing organisation to be proscribed by the UK government since the Second World War.²⁸⁴

As the most tactically and ideologically radical fringe of the anti-minority movement lost ground, competition for leadership within the movement again came to centre to a large degree on Britain First and Tommy Robinson. Both had suffered setbacks in recent months. Britain First's attempts to achieve electoral recognition had seen them receive humiliatingly low

shares of the vote²⁸⁵ and laid bare their claims about the extent of their support; and reports that Jo Cox's killer had shouted either 'Britain First' or 'put Britain first' had caused the group's leaders to scramble to disassociate themselves from the attack and the use of violence. Over the course of 2016, Britain First's leaders also found themselves facing growing legal constraints as a result of some of their direct-action campaigns (see below). Robinson, meanwhile, had seen his attempt to (re)launch Pegida UK in early 2016 (and with that his attempt to emulate the success of Pegida in Dresden by attracting respectable 'middle class' supporters to his cause) end in dismal failure, as described in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, by late 2016 and throughout 2017-18, Britain First and Robinson were the anti-minority actors most able to mobilise support and attract attention on social or conventional media, at least in part as a result of the effectiveness with which they capitalised on the terrorist attacks on Westminster Bridge (22 March 2017) and Manchester Arena (22 May 2017) to (re)build their support (see below). For much of the case study period, the two would dog each other's footsteps.²⁸⁶

What also characterises this period was tactical experimentation and innovation, particularly in how anti-minority groups were using digital media. While electoral far right parties, like the BNP, were early innovators online, actors such as Robinson were experimenting with social media to reinvent themselves as influencers/celebrity journalists.²⁸⁷ Robinson and Caolan Robertson, his cameraman, had started 'trolling' marchers on left-wing demonstrations and publicly confronting opponents, filming and

282 See <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community/Justice-for-the-Women-Children-530866033981889/> (Accessed on 20/01/21)

283 See Chapter 3. 64 people were convicted for participation in the riots and received a total of 85 years imprisonment. See <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/dover-riots-case-closed-184605/> (Accessed on 16/12/20)

284 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-action-becomes-first-extreme-right-wing-group-to-be-banned-in-uk> (Accessed on 02/12/20). For a discussion of the effects of these events on the anti-minority scene see Macklin (2018).

285 Their best showing was in the London Mayoral Election, where Paul Goulding received 1.2% of the vote. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2016/london/results> (Accessed 05/05/2021)

286 Illustrating the fluid nature of dynamics between groups, since events in Sunderland, the relationship between Robinson and Goulding of Britain First, which was lukewarm at best, at the time of writing has now become more of an alliance with each supporting each other in their respective court cases. See <https://metro.co.uk/2020/05/20/tommy-robinson-supports-britain-first-leader-court-terror-charge-12732919/> (Accessed on 04/02/21)

287 A trend which has continued to this day. The reframing of activists as 'citizen journalists' who are simply 'telling the truth' enabled by digital media is one that can be seen in the many activists reporting on small boat crossings across the channel and housing of asylum seekers in hotels.

uploading the footage onto Facebook and Twitter. The footage quickly drove up the number of views and followers and demonstrated the potential of social media to expand the reach of anti-minority actors and circumvent mainstream media.²⁸⁸ Aware of his growing social media profile, around the same time Rebel Media employed Robinson as their UK correspondent. Other tactics were adopted such as the filming of South Asian heritage background defendants in sexual grooming trials, which Robinson first tried in Oxford in July 2016. The tactic was a development of longstanding attempts by anti-minority actors to capitalise on public concern over child sexual exploitation trials, notably in Rotherham, but also in Keighley, Rochdale, and Telford.²⁸⁹

Britain First, led by Paul Golding, a former member of the BNP, and Jayda Fransen, also exploited opportunities offered by social media to engage with and mobilise a broader support base. Among the tactics they employed was to film provocative mosque invasions, in which they brandished copies of the Bible, and to stage confrontational Christian patrols in areas with large Muslim populations, as they did in Luton in January 2016.²⁹⁰ This led to a series of legal actions, such as the injunction against Golding and Fransen mentioned above, which banned them from entering any mosque in England and Wales or entering Luton for a year.²⁹¹ Golding was imprisoned in December 2016, for 8 weeks, for breaching the injunction when he drove four other Britain First members to a mosque in Cardiff and helped them to enter the premises.²⁹²

288 By interviewing marchers on left-wing demonstrations such as Remain marches and uploading the footage, Robinson and colleagues were duplicating a tactic long used by the left (for an example, search for 'Muslimic Ray Guns'). Robinson had also started a campaign called Troll Watch when he confronted his critics on camera.

289 For Rotherham see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-34206507>; For Keighley see <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/speeches-by-bnp-leader-led-to-race-hate-charges-1.1003051>; For Telford see <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/2017/02/25/britain-first-in-telford-three-opposition-arrests-during-far-right-protest/> (All accessed on 02/02/21)

290 Davidson and Berezin (2018), Ralph-Marrow (2019).

291 See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/britain-first-high-court-bid-luton-mosque-islamophobia-racism-a7186446.html> (Accessed on 16/12/20)

292 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38326446> (Accessed on 16/12/20)

Sunderland and the local activist scene

Unlike the Dover case study, Sunderland became a focal point of anti-minority activism ostensibly in response to events that took place in the city itself, and involved the mobilisation of local activists and supporters, as well as drawing in activists from the national scene. It also has a history of substantial, if still minority, support for the far right (see below).

Sunderland is a small post-industrial city 10 miles southeast of Newcastle. Once reliant on shipbuilding and coal, it has experienced significant industrial decline since the 70's. Like many post-industrial areas in the UK, the city has significant pockets of deprivation.²⁹³ Unlike the majority of other northern English post-industrial cities, however, it remains largely white British, compared to national and regional averages, with only a small, albeit growing, minority population of 6%. The Bangladeshi community constitutes the largest minority group. The city is also an asylum dispersal area and, due to the low cost of housing in some wards, there is a clustering of HMOs housing asylum seekers awaiting leave to remain decisions.

This has led to the targeting of the area by anti-minority groups. As one respondent described evolving local attitudes to asylum seekers,

with the heavy industries you have communities built for people that worked in them but that created a social fabric. It created social norms. It created cultures around it which were community-based cultures and were healthy. But that has completely unravelled now. And as I say, there's some people it's resentment. But in this type of setting, lives, they haven't had that economic security of their dads,

293 Sunderland is the 33rd most deprived local authority as ranked by the average Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) with 22.7% of its LSOAs (Lower Super Output Areas) in the lowest decile of deprivation. Over 30% of children in Sunderland live in poverty which rises to 50% in Hendon (the 25th highest rate in the country). The unemployment rate is 7.8% compared to 4.7% for the national average.

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granddads which has meant bringing up families has been a lot harder, financially it's been a lot harder, building a home has been a lot harder. It's a classic blame situation.²⁹⁴

It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that the city and the North East England more generally have been the focus of organised far right and anti-minority activity since at least the early 2000's, when the British National Party (BNP) repeatedly attempted to win council seats in the city. In 2004, the BNP fielded 25 candidates, and in 2006, the party contested all 26 wards in the city. In the 2008 Local Election, the BNP won 34% of the vote, finishing second in all the wards they contested, although the party never won a council seat in the city.

More recently, Sunderland and North East England has also been home to a well-established anti-Muslim activist scene, although it has been fractious, with a bitter rivalry developing between the North East Infidels and Sunderland Defence League and their respective leaders, Warren Faulkner and Billy Charlton. Of note, as the EDL split apart, prominent activists in the Sunderland area tended to associate with the more ideologically and tactically radical groups emerging out of the EDL, such as the North West Infidels (NWI) and South East Alliance (SEA), with Billy Charlton speaking on a number of occasions at NWI and SEA events. Both the North East Infidels (NEI) and Sunderland Defence League were involved in demonstrations over the building of a new mosque in a former council depot in Millfield, Sunderland, which resulted in five protests between 2011 and 2014. These events were also attended by members of the BNP, National Front (NF), and the Scottish Defence League. Two of these events involved significant violence, with attacks on counter demonstrators and several arrests for disorder and assault.²⁹⁵ A council worker described confrontation between the protesters and counter protestors,

for example, there was one demo with a counter-protest where there was about three hundred people there, in Millfield, and there was bricks and fireworks thrown. It certainly got, you know, sort of went beyond the half dozen or the dozen activists getting together and having a small demo. So, we did have a couple of quite large ones which did sort of push the public order element of what was going on with some counter-protests.²⁹⁶

There had also been previous attempts to exploit concerns over sexual crime. For example, anti-minority activists had attempted to mobilise over an alleged sexual assault in a pizza shop in Washington, Sunderland, in 2014. Later in August 2015, the NEI and EDL held a protest over a rape in Mowbray Park, Sunderland, which was linked to perpetrators with an asylum background.²⁹⁷ Some local activists had also supported the radical fringe of the UK anti-minority scene by attending the White Man marches in Newcastle (March 2015) and Liverpool (August 2015) organised by National Action.²⁹⁸ Following the latter, two local activists were convicted for affray. Several activists, some of whom were influential in the Sunderland campaigns between 2016 – 2018, also took part in the violence in Dover in 2016 and were later convicted for their actions.

4.3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CASE

Phase 1. September 2016 – April 2017:

The 'catalytic event'²⁹⁹ and first marches

On the morning of **4 September 2016**, Chelsey Wright, a local mother of three children, posted allegations on

294 Sunderland 10: interview with an NGO worker, working on poverty issues

295 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-21627828> (Accessed on 16/12/20)

296 Sunderland 12: interview with a council worker.

297 Mowbray Park next to the Civic Centre had long been the focus of concerns over sexual crime. See <https://www.heart.co.uk/northeast/news/local/teenage-girl-raped-in-sunderland-park/> (Accessed on 04/01/21).

298 See Chapter 3 and <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11830847.neo-nazi-group-notable-openly-racist-agenda-bring-white-man-march-streets-newcastle/> (Accessed on 20/12/20)

299 For discussion of 'catalytic events' see Busher, Harris and Macklin (2019a) and Busher, Harris and Macklin (2019b).

Facebook that she had been sexually assaulted, before reporting the incident to the police. The post stated that she had woken up in a house with a group of men with no memory of how she had got there. The initial post was shared widely on social media, with graphic photos of her injuries. Northumbria Police later arrested six male asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq and Bahrain in an HMO, in Peel Street, Hendon, Sunderland, where the incident allegedly took place. The men were released on bail and moved to a safe house.

The Wright family had known links with the EDL and other anti-minority organisations.³⁰⁰ Through these links and mutual friends, local activist and leader of the Sunderland Defence League, Billy Charlton, picked up on the incident, and started to publicly comment on it on his Facebook page and Twitter account. Charlton is a well-known local activist. He had previously been involved in the mosque protests at Millfield, and the attempted mobilisation around claims of sexual assault in Washington, described above. He had been photographed with activists in Newcastle who were holding a Combat 18 flag and wearing Rudolf Hess t-shirts, and was present, and gave a speech at, the NF/SEA organised protest in Dover in January 2016.³⁰¹ He had also appeared on the front page of *The Sun* newspaper on the day after the European Union referendum, celebrating the result.³⁰² He was, in other words, a relatively high profile, if decidedly controversial, figure locally.

On **10 September**, Charlton called a demonstration. Approximately 100 marchers met at the Ivy Social Club, exceeding the expectations of the police, who initially deployed neighbourhood teams only. Those in attendance marched to Peel Street where the alleged incident occurred – and home to Sunderland’s small Bangladeshi population – diverting from the route

agreed with the police. The march was initially largely led by a group of local women. According to newspaper reports, however, the mood quickly changed as men with scarves tied across their faces pushed to the front of the march.³⁰³

After some highly incendiary speeches, which referred to ‘imported criminals’ and ‘immigrant rapists’, some demonstrators split off from the main rally and ran into backstreets. Soon after, they attacked two men of South Asian heritage who had no connection to the incident. One man was attacked with a hammer. Some local Bangladeshi youth came out onto the streets to confront the attackers and further violence seemed likely, but the police were able to intervene to separate the groups. Six men were arrested for the assaults, and 5 were later convicted on a combination of affray and assault charges. The sexual assault allegation and the demonstration were reported in the local paper, the *Sunderland Echo* and, on 25 September, in the *Daily Mail*, a national newspaper.

Further details of the sexual assault allegations started to circulate more widely online. A former police officer, who ran a website called Police Hour, was instrumental in this process. He posted information, including graphic details of the incident and photographs of bruising. This was in turn reposted on several websites that promoted anti-Muslim sentiment, such as Fahrenheit211, and the blog of Ken Scott, former BNP organiser and electoral candidate for Sunderland. Several members of the NEI commented publicly on the post. The report was shared more 19.5k times.

On the **6 February 2017**, the NEI held a demonstration in Sunderland in Mowbray Park, highlighting crimes committed by migrants. There were approximately 30 demonstrators in attendance, but there was no counter demonstration or arrests.

300 See <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/hospital-patient-posted-shocking-racist-11908690> (Accessed on 03/12/21)

301 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucT8KA3fiCE> (Accessed 29/11/19)

302 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/billy-charlton-sunderland-justice-rape-campaign-tommy-robinson-brexit-a9123376.html> (Accessed 13/11/20)

303 See <https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/billy-charlton-trial-asian-man-attacked-sunderland-after-race-hate-speech-whipped-protesters-jury-told-195315> (Accessed on 06/05/2021)

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The following month, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decided to take no further action against five of the alleged perpetrators of the assault on Wright. On 7 April, the CPS decided not to charge the remaining man. Northumbria Police stated that ‘the evidence did not meet the threshold for a charging decision to the CPS’.³⁰⁴

The first official Justice4Chelsey demonstration was held in Sunderland city centre one week later, on **15 April**. One of the organisers was Billy Charlton, who gave an impassioned speech to a crowd of about 150 people outside Arizona, the nightclub where Wright was allegedly drugged. In his speech he stated that this was ‘not about a few incidents in your hometown’ but one in a series of sexual crimes in Sunderland and across the country. In the speech, he claimed that ‘these immigrants are raping our children’ and that the police were failing to protect the women and children of Sunderland. He stated that he had ‘been fighting this for more than two years’.³⁰⁵

Demonstrators were visibly hostile with tense faces and shouting. Much of the anger was directed at Northumbria Police, with Charlton saying, ‘we’re going to destroy Northumbria Police as they’ve destroyed my town’.³⁰⁶ Particular ire was reserved for the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner, Vera Baird, who had pioneered a Violence against Women and Girls in her tenure as PCC.³⁰⁷ There was no public disorder, however. Neither was there a counter-protest. Indeed, because of the framing of the campaign as a demand for justice for a local woman who had been victim of sexual assault, some young people from the local Bangladeshi community initially

considered offering their support to the demonstration. As an interviewee described,

We certainly had members of the Bangladeshi community, for example, [who] were offering messages of support to Chelsey Wright at one point, [including from] one member [of the community] was who is quite influential with that younger group, and questions as to whether they wanted them to actually go and march in support.³⁰⁸

The demonstration was not reported on local or national media as Wright, who was present, had not at that point waived her right to anonymity under the Sexual Offences Act 2014. Footage of the demonstration was uploaded on YouTube, however, and the Justice4Chelsey Facebook page was set up on 25 April.³⁰⁹ This marked the start of a campaign that saw 13 demonstrations held between April and October 2017.

Phase 2. 29 April 2017 – 29 August 2017:

The Justice4Chelsey campaign grows and professionalises under the influence of national and international actors, and serious violence breaks out in clashes between rival football fans.

A 2nd Justice4Chelsey demonstration was held on **29 April**. It followed a similar format to the previous demonstration. This time Billy Charlton was joined by Charlie Rafferty, a former EDL activist, both making speeches from a bench outside Arizona to a crowd of approximately 200-300 people. Charlton claimed that sexual crime by migrants in the city was part of a pattern, claiming that immigrants were ‘monsters’ and that migrants were targeting ‘our women in our city’. He also argued that the police were failing to do their jobs due to the effects of ‘political correctness’. When it was Rafferty’s turn, he told the crowd explicitly that

304 See <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/15210944.no-action-six-men-arrested-suspicion-peel-street-rape/> (Accessed 11/10/20)

305 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtjrxmODy_A (Accessed on 06/05/2021)

306 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Lj4_mqSiYM (Accessed on 02/02/21)

307 Dame Vera Baird served 2 tenures as PCC for Northumbria between 2012 and until she was appointed Victims Commissioner for England and Wales in 2019. Baird had already been the target of Charlton when he harangued her in a meeting at the time of the alleged sexual assault in Washington in 2014.

308 Sunderland 12: Interview with a council worker.

309 Footage can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Lj4_mqSiYM (Accessed 29/11/20)

rape was justified in the Qur'an. The demonstration was also attended by Tommy Robinson, who had recently been appointed as the UK correspondent for Rebel Media, and his cameraman at the time, Caolan Robertson.³¹⁰ Because of reporting restrictions, there was however no coverage of the event in the local or national media. As in the first demonstration, there was no counter-protest and no arrests.

From this point until July, marches, organised by Charlton, were staged on a regular basis. The demonstrations were held in the city shopping centre, coinciding with Sunderland AFC home games. One interviewee described how for a small group of people the marches became part of the pre-match ritual.³¹¹ Charlton became the point of contact for the demonstrations and, despite the hostility aimed towards the police, he was willing to engage with the police over demonstration conditions. While negotiations could be contentious, the sustained nature of the campaign meant that relationships of trust were built up over time. As a police officer described, the relationship between the police and protest organisers was important in dampening down the potential for violence to emerge,

But I think it did show the key around that protest liaison with the organisers and having that relationship whereby you could go to those key individuals and actually say you need to reign him in or you need to tell him that. And because you have that relationship with protest liaison, and I suppose for us here, because I did them all, you had that consistency, you had that level of actually, I suppose they did a lot of what we asked and I think that's really key.³¹²

Marches were advertised on social media, mostly on the campaign Facebook page and Twitter, and by posters in local shops and pubs. They were also

promoted more widely on the social media pages of Tommy Robinson and Rebel Media. Despite the tone of the speeches – several interviewees spoke of Charlton's skill as a speaker in riling up the crowd – the emotive subject matter, the obvious anger of protestors, and overt hostility to the police, there was no violence. Almost all the interviewees identified the absence of counter protests as part of the explanation for this. One observed, for example,

when you talk about violence, I don't think we had the violence at any of the other protests 'cause we didn't have the counter-protests. And the only reason we got away from that was we, even though we knew that it was actually a right-wing agenda, we were saying to the left-wing groups don't counter because this is supposed to be about sexual offending and about rape. So we didn't want any other group to come along and counter protest.³¹³

There was also a clear concern among the protestors and the protest organisers about the optics of the events, which were carefully constructed to centre attention on Wright, and convey an image of respectable protestors pursuing justice. This went hand in hand with attempts to promote the campaign beyond Sunderland. On 4 May, Robinson shouted out the campaign website in an interview with Andrew Neil on the Daily Politics show.³¹⁴ There were also signs of a certain professionalism and a gradual moderation of presentation and tone. Wright was present at the head of the marches, and in the crowd when speeches were being given, and demonstrators carried banners depicting her injuries. Campaign literature provided clear instructions on the behaviour of protestors: no football colours or banners that were not linked to the Justice4Chelsea campaign were allowed. Charlton was always at pains to emphasise at the end of speeches that protestors should leave peacefully and seemed himself

310 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48942411> (Accessed 16/11/20)

311 Sunderland 4: Interview with a police officer.

312 Sunderland 4: Interview with a police officer.

313 Sunderland 1: Interview with a police officer.

314 See at 10.38 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HIGe0tQYpo> (Accessed on 11/03/21)

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to be trying to foster an image of respectability. As a council worker observed, ‘Billy Charlton, who always had a can of Fosters in his hand at demos, now had a bottle of water after Rebel Media became involved.’³¹⁵

As the size of the protests grew, pressure began to mount within the Bangladeshi community to organise a counter-protest. This this was mitigated by engagement work from the council and police to reassure the community’s growing fears over safety and the increasing size of the demonstrations. A council worker described the process,

there was almost a kind of agreement [with the Bangladeshi community] that there shouldn’t be any counter-protest because this is about the safety of women and children on the streets, which is different to saying, ‘Shut this Mosque down’.³¹⁶

The largest demonstration of the campaign took place on **13 May**. The event was attended by over 1000 people, who presented a petition with 50,000 signatures to the local police station, calling for the CPS to reconsider the decision to take no further action. Chelsey Wright marched at the front of the demonstration. This time, she was joined by Robinson. Attendees were mainly local Sunderland residents, many from Hendon, the area where Wright lived. While several well-known ‘faces’ attended from the local anti-minority scene, they did so ‘as individuals’ rather than representing established anti-minority groups.³¹⁷

On 10 May, three days before the demonstration, Robinson had been given a suspended sentence in Canterbury, Kent, for contempt of court, when he had again attempted to film defendants in a rape trial in Ramsgate.³¹⁸ Incidentally, the following day Golding

and Fransen, not to be outdone, were also arrested for harassment of the defendants (and unrelated people) in the same case.³¹⁹ Yet despite his suspended sentence, Robinson not only attended the Sunderland demonstration, but also gave a speech. Initially, he had planned to attend as a journalist for Rebel Media and was therefore not due to speak. However, the night before the demonstration, Billy Charlton was arrested. The arrest related to an alleged assault on two Asian men, but on social media it was quickly described as police attempt to silence him – he was later acquitted as the men failed to appear in court.³²⁰ Robinson therefore gave a speech in place of Charlton. In his speech, he stressed the peaceful nature of the campaign stating, ‘people have come here for justice, they have chosen to be peaceful’. He also linked events in Sunderland to sexual exploitation in Rochdale and Rotherham and claimed that sexual exploitation was being facilitated by the Labour Party. He promised, ‘I can see this evolving into a huge campaign’.³²¹

As in previous demonstrations, the protestors dispersed peacefully after the event, with no arrests or reports of public disorder. Also, as with previous demonstrations, anti-racist campaigners had decided not to stage a counter protest given the involvement of Wright, and the framing of the campaign as being about sexual violence.

Where there is a difference between this and previous demonstrations is in the extent of social media coverage that the event received. While activists had shared information and sought to mobilise using social media since the outset of the campaign, this event registered a sharp increase in the reach and online engagement.

Robinson’s support, the involvement of Rebel Media and other anti-minority influencers is likely to have been key to amplifying interest in the campaign. At

315 Sunderland 12: Interview with a council worker.

316 Sunderland 12: Interview with a council worker.

317 For evidence of the mixed nature of the marches see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yU2enwA-ZMQ>. In the footage of the march, individuals can be seen drinking outside Joseph’s, a pub frequented by Charlton, wearing Skrewdriver T-shirts. (Accessed on 06/05/2021)

318 For the court judgement see [https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-](https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/coc-yaxley-lennon-20170522.pdf)

[content/uploads/2017/05/coc-yaxley-lennon-20170522.pdf](https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/coc-yaxley-lennon-20170522.pdf) (Accessed 15/11/20)

319 See <https://www.kentlive.news/news/kent-news/britain-firsts-paul-golding-jayda-422470> (Accessed on 03/12/20)

320 Sunderland 3: Interview with a police officer.

321 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9ut4oDghHg> (Accessed on 29/11/20)

the time Robinson had an extensive reach on social media – prior to his de-platforming on 27 March 2018, he had over 1 million followers on Twitter, more than any of the official accounts of the UK’s main political parties.³²² The event was also given extensive coverage by other anti-minority influencers, such as Katie Hopkins and Ann Marie Waters, and after Rebel Media broadcast footage of the march, alongside an emotionally charged interview with Wright in which she describes the ordeal, the campaign attracted international coverage on Breitbart and from Paul Joseph Watson, of Infowars, a US-based conspiracy theory website.

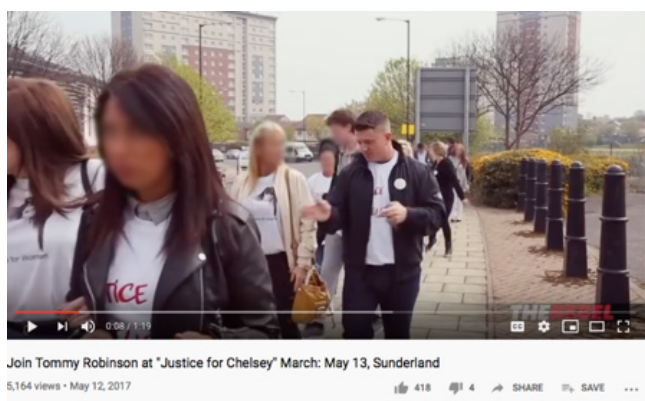


Figure 4.1: Still from YouTube footage of the Justice4Chelsea march on the 13th May (now deleted)

However, the claims of campaigners were being contested across social media by anti-racist activists. On the same day as the march, a Facebook page called Questions for Chelsea launched. It queried aspects of the case and drew violent abuse from campaign supporters. Caolan Robertson also posted a photo on Facebook purportedly showing a leaflet from Antifa that threatened ‘extreme violence’ to ‘racists and extremists’ in Sunderland. Anti-racist activists were at pains to dissociate themselves (Figure 4.2).

The next Justice4Chelsea demonstration was scheduled for **10 June**. Before that demonstration, two further developments served to alter the context. First, on 19

322 See <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/28/tommy-robinson-permanently-banned-twitter-violating-rules-hateful-conduct> (Accessed on 06/02/21)

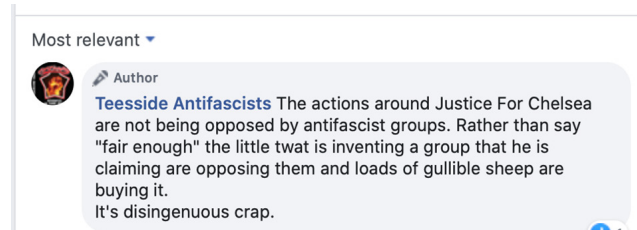


Figure 4.2: comment by Teesside Antifascists.

May, the *Sunderland Echo* issued an initial response to accusations that there had been ‘a media coverup’ around the campaign.³²³ The newspaper’s editors stated they had initially not covered the campaign because Chelsea had not waived her right to anonymity, and therefore coverage of the campaign risked breaching that right. The article quoted Chelsea as saying, ‘I’d like to make this clear that I do not give any permission for any stories to be wrote [sic] about the incident that happened in Peel Street several months back.’ They also stated that the evidence gathered by the CPS undermined the assertions being made by Wright.

Second, on 22 May, in a suicide attack, Salman Abedi placed a bomb at an Ariane Grande concert at Manchester Arena, killing 23 people and injuring 800, including many children. Robinson soon broadcast for Rebel Media from outside Didsbury Mosque, where Salman Abedi was known to have worshipped. One of these broadcasts was viewed 928,845 times.³²⁴ In a similar video, he referred to British Muslim residents living next to the mosque as ‘enemy combatants’.³²⁵ As such, Robinson’s ‘star’ seemed to be rising, and there were reasonable grounds to believe that community tensions around the 10 June demonstration might be particularly acute.

In addition to Robinson, the 10 June demonstration was also attended by Waters and her media manager, Jack Buckby (and formerly of the Youth BNP and Liberty

323 The original article has been taken down but selected quotes from the statement can be found here: <https://barthnotes.com/2017/05/09/northumbria-police-respond-to-social-media-reporting-on-sunderland-rape-allegation/> (Accessed on 29/11/20)

324 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rt4yEoZ88aU> (Accessed on 03/12/20)

325 For video, see <https://order-order.com/2017/06/19/tommy-robinson-called-british-muslims-enemy-combatants/> (Accessed on 20/12/20)

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GB), as well as a host of other Robinson collaborators, such as Lucy Brown,³²⁶ and others eager to emulate his career path as a 'citizen journalist', such as the Anglo-Norwegian, alt-right vlogger Peter Sweden. The demonstrators assembled at The Charltons pub and marched to Market Square, Sunderland's shopping centre, where Charlton, Robinson and Waters gave speeches to a crowd of about 800 people. As with previous marches, there was no formal representation of established anti-minority groups. However, it is clear from some of the video footage and interviews carried out by Peter Sweden that people had travelled to Sunderland from across the country to participate in the demonstration.³²⁷

While the speeches were being given, a very small counter protest – the only one to take place throughout the campaign – was staged. The protest was held by a young local woman who was angry about what she saw as the instrumentalization of sexual violence against women to pursue exclusionary agendas, and the absence of pushback against this. Standing approximately 30 metres from the demonstration, she held a placard saying, 'rape does not have a race'. She was mobbed by a hostile group of mainly male protestors who shouted abuse and chanted 'shame on you' and 'castrate him', although several demonstrators also voiced their agreement at her sentiments. As the crowd surged towards her, several police officers intervened and escorted her away for her own safety.³²⁸

In the weeks that followed, momentum continued to build. The very next day, a 'UK against Hate' march, called by Robinson, was held in Manchester and attended by around 1000 protestors. It was met with

326 Lucy Brown became a camerawoman for Tommy Robinson after being interviewed for Rebel Media as a consequence of her filming at a protest at the London art gallery LD50 showing alt-right art. She collaborated with Robinson until she was sacked after a disagreement over the Freedom of Speech rallies. She then publicly accused him on Twitter of being a narcissist and using drugs. She is currently the editor of metapolitical project, Scum, 'an independent arts and culture magazine that is unafraid to host dissenting views.' See <https://www.lucyfrown.com/about> (Accessed on 21/04/21)

327 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md3rP88Cn6w&t=16s>

(Accessed on 10/02/20)

328 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQK3lyue5GA&t=48s> (Accessed on 03/12/20)



11  [@djgavgreen1980 \(Gavin Green\)](#) @djgavgreen1980 29 May
RT @DogLayer Take care on nights out ladies, more incidents reported in Sunderland. Muslim Rape gangs are organising themselves. <https://t.co/P6Z6CNUOP>

12  [@TRobinsonNewEra \(Tommy Robinson\)](#) @TRobinsonNewEra 29 May
Muslims have been marking their targets with uv pens in the bars in Sunderland where Chelsey was on the night she was raped #datrape <https://t.co/wKESxjZoYQ>

Figures 4.3 and 4.4: Examples of social media posts.

a counter-demonstration with approximately 400 participants. Eight arrests were made after clashes between the marchers and opposition. Charlton was among the speakers.³²⁹

Charlton was also very active on the Justice4Chelsey Facebook page and his numerous Twitter feeds at this time. Here, he seemingly specialised in misreporting about alleged sexual crimes committed by asylum seekers/migrants in Sunderland. He also spread falsehoods about, among other things, attempts by migrants to abduct young boys, and foreign men using UV pens to mark women in nightclubs with the intention of spiking their drinks (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). Northumbria Police issued statements to rebut these rumours, but they still generated and amplified social tensions. As one police officer described,

what we were finding was everybody in Sunderland who ever had any kind of issue with an ethnic minority was reporting that to Charlton who was then kind of sharing it, amplifying it and putting it out. And it almost distorted the true picture because it felt like we had a really big issue with

329 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-40240353> (Accessed on 06/05/21)

asylum seekers committing sex offences against people in the community.³³⁰

On 19 June, within a week of Robinson's 'UK against Hate' demonstration in Manchester, Darren Osborne drove a van into people leaving a mosque in Finsbury Park, London, killing one person and injuring nine. He was later sentenced to life in prison³³¹ and it came out in court that as well as watching *Three Girls*, a BBC documentary about sexual grooming in Rochdale, he had received group emails from Jayda Fransen and Robinson, including one referencing Justice4Chelsey. Immediately after the attack, Robinson condemned the attacks as unjustifiable while tweeting that Finsbury Park Mosque had been a centre for radicalisation.³³²

Rebel Media became increasingly involved in the Justice4Chelsey campaign. On 21 June they paid for a large billboard with a Justice4Chelsey banner on the main road into Sunderland. They also launched an appeal for donations to contribute to Wright's legal fund. On 27 June, Ezra Levant, the Canadian owner and founder of Rebel Media, visited Sunderland and offered to pay for the victim's legal team, hiring Daniel Berke, a high-profile lawyer who had previously defended Nigel Evans MP and Rolf Harris.

Yet here there was a twist, and the first obvious signs of friction within the campaign. It was Robinson who unveiled the billboard with Chelsey and her family. Charlton was not even invited. Charlton shared his anger about the apparent snub on Twitter. There also began to emerge rumours of financial irregularities. Even before the launch of the legal action, local organisers had sought to raise funds for the campaign with a range of t-shirts and wristbands, yet allegations about the misuse of funds appeared on the campaign's Facebook page and soon became a source of growing contention between activists.

Wright, supported by Rebel Media's legal team, did launch an appeal to review the evidence under the victim's right to review, but the Justice4Chelsey campaign itself appears to have begun to lose momentum at this point.

The next march took place on **15 July** but only attracted around 300-400 attendees. Ann Marie Waters, who had announced her UKIP leadership campaign on the 30 June in Rotherham,³³³ was again in attendance, but Robinson was noticeable by his absence. Furthermore, and in contrast to previous marches, he had not advertised it on Twitter or Facebook. Prior to this, his posting on the campaign was prolific, sometimes several times a day. He did not publicly comment on the campaign again until the announcement was made to wind it down. To this day, it is not clear why he dropped the campaign.

The speeches on 15 July were shambolic. Justice4Chelsey was hardly mentioned. Instead, Charlton focused aggressively on the supposed failings of Northumbria Police, saying, 'we're getting sick of peaceful protests, this is not Rotherham or Rochdale', and encouraged the crowd to chant, 'if you're in a yellow jacket, you're a cunt' directed at the police on duty. At one point, Jack Buckley, Anne Marie Water's media manager, had to remind Charlton to give Waters the chance to speak. In her speech, she attempted to turn the focus on to her UKIP leadership campaign, which was noticeably at odds with the mood and interests of the crowd.

Following the march, an announcement was made on the Justice4Chelsey Facebook page to temporarily halt the marches for 2 to 3 months while the legal review was underway. Posts on the campaign's normally prolific Twitter feed also stopped. On the same day, Northumbria Police announced the launch of a new initiative, Operation Kestrel, which would focus on

330 Sunderland 1: interview with a police officer.

331 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42920929> (Accessed on 09/12/20)

332 See <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/19/former-edl-leader-tommy-robinson-condemned-finsbury-park-mosque/> (Behind paywall accessed on 06/02/21)

333 Waters eventually came second to Henry Bolton, who became UKIP leader in September 2017. See <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/sep/29/henry-bolton-elected-new-leader-of-ukip> (Accessed on 04/01/21)

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human trafficking and modern-day slavery involving non-British criminals across North East England.³³⁴

It was, however, as the campaign wound down, or was at least put on pause, that Sunderland saw the most significant outbreak of public disorder during this period. This had little to do with Justice4Chelsey, but a lot to do with Robinson's presence in the city. While Robinson had stopped commenting on the Justice4Chelsey campaign on social media, he had championed another local cause. Fletchers, a newsagent in Hendon (the area where Wright and her family lived), had put up a sign saying, 'This shop does not fund terrorism' in a pointed and inflammatory reference to shops owned by Muslims. The owner was asked by Northumbria Police to take the sign down but refused to do so. At this point Robinson offered to support the owner by doing a book signing of his new book³³⁵ at the shop on the 29 August. He chose to do this on a day when there was a traditional (and usually peaceful) friendly match between Celtic FC and Sunderland AFC. For 2 weeks prior to the event, he had been taunting Celtic fans over the Green Brigade, a group of Celtic FC ultras known for their support for Hamas, Irish nationalism, and left-wing views. On the day of the book signing, on his journey to Sunderland, he livestreamed himself saying that he was 'probably going to get banged out for saying it' but Celtic fans were 'muppets' for supporting Palestine, and ridiculed female Celtic Fans for any sympathy for Hamas, telling them to see what happens if they walk down the street in Palestine wearing low-cut tops.³³⁶ After he arrived at the shop, in a final provocation, he livestreamed himself wearing a Rangers shirt.

Before the match, a group of about 15 Celtic fans walked to the shop, about half an hour walk from the Stadium of Light, the Sunderland stadium. They milled around the doorway shouting for 'Tommy' to come out and threw a firework into the doorway. They retreated a little as about 10 local men started throwing bottles at the Celtic fans. However, the Celtic fans then attacked the shop again, throwing bottles and smashing a window. At this point, several men streamed out of a café opposite the shop. A chaotic scene ensued as fights started between different individuals. One local individual had a baseball bat. Several bystanders were visibly incensed, shouting that there were 'bairns'³³⁷ in the shop'. One Celtic fan was seriously injured. The police arrived two and a half minutes after the violence broke out, at which point the violence outside the shop ceased. Ironically, the injured Celtic fan's head was placed on a Union Jack pillow, much to the derision of onlookers and banter that later played out on social media.³³⁸

At the same time, however, serious public disorder broke out elsewhere in the city. On North Bridge Street, close to the stadium, rival groups of fans clashed, resulting in 21 arrests. A police officer described it as some of the worst violence that they had seen in the city. Among the Celtic fans attending the march, there were people who came with the specific intention of confronting Robinson, and earlier in the day had filmed themselves singing songs celebrating the death of Lee Rigby – presumably a provocation for Robinson. Anecdotally, the violence and Robinson's provocative behaviour did not endear him to Sunderland's residents. There is no public record of him returning to Sunderland.

Phase 3. 29 August to 2 November 2017.
Rebel Media withdraws from the Justice4Chelsey campaign, Britain First enters the fray, and the campaign is wound down.

334 See <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/operation-kestrel-everything-know-police-13343338> (Accessed on 26/01/21)

335 This was his second book, titled Mohammed's Quran: Why Muslims kill for Islam. The book was jointly written by Robinson and Peter McLoughlin who had previously written a book called *Easy Meat: Inside Britain's Sexual Grooming Scandal*, which links CSE with Muslims.

336 For examples of the Twitter feed, see <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/15442675.ex-edl-leader-tommy-robinson-provokes-celtic-fans-ahead-dafabet-cup-clash/> (Accessed at 16/12/21)

337 Colloquial term for children.

338 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-b1yIS3sdAk> (Accessed on 29/11/20). Celtic FC has historically been associated with Irish nationalism.

As promised, no further demonstrations were called as campaigners awaited the outcome of the CPS review. On 12 September, however, the campaign restarted. It was announced on the campaign's Facebook page that a march was to be held on **14 October**, citing as the reason a claim that the CPS 'had failed Wright'. There was however a change in the team supporting the campaign. Specifically, where Robinson and Waters had previously been the high-profile national champions of the campaign, Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen, of Britain First, now began to be involved, promoting the demonstration on their Facebook pages.

A few days later, on 24 September, the CPS officially announced that after reviewing the evidence, they were upholding the original decision to take no further action.³³⁹ A week before the demonstration, Northumbria Police made a statement, questioning the need for the protest considering the CPS decision, and the motives of the protest organisers.³⁴⁰ Golding and Fransen, who had embarked on a European tour of radical right parties in Europe, in breach of bail conditions imposed on them in Canterbury,³⁴¹ were however clearly committed to maximising public attention for the demonstration. On the same day as the Northumbria Police statement, they posted footage on their Facebook page of members of Le Pen's *Front Nationale* chanting 'Justice4Chelsey'. Then, on 8 October, Golding and Fransen cancelled a demonstration they had called in Ramsgate, also for 14 October, citing concerns that they would be arrested as soon as they turned up for breaching bail conditions, and encouraged their supporters to attend the Sunderland demonstration instead.

Golding and Fransen's promotional efforts were not to prove particularly fruitful, however. On 14 October, only around 80-100 people gathered in Sunderland for

the demonstration. Chelsey Wright was still there, but Robinson, again, was notable by his absence, as was Anne Marie Waters, and neither did they comment on the case on social media. Also absent on this occasion was Charlton. His reputation had been tarnished by allegations, made by Charlie Rafferty, a one-time friend of Charlton's, and Andrew Edge, a former EDL activist from Manchester who had joined forces with Britain First, that he was responsible for funds that had gone missing that had been collected for activists imprisoned after the Dover riots.³⁴² Fransen did attend, however, despite, or perhaps because, she expected to be arrested for doing so.

The atmosphere was particularly antagonistic on this occasion and, in contrast with previous demonstrations, it appears that most of the attendees were not from Sunderland. Protestors pushed, although did not push through, police lines.³⁴³ Surprisingly, perhaps, for a demonstration that was ostensibly part of the Justice4Chelsey campaign, there was only one Justice4Chelsey banner. Some commentators on the Sunderland AFC fans forum, Ready-to-Go, described the event as 'a front for Britain First.' In a similar vein, an eyewitness described her impression of the march:

There were very few local people. A lot of the local supporters of her like Billy Charlton, all [of] them, had gone away for whatever reason. And there was Chelsey with a lot of like Britain First and all of that. And the whole atmosphere was, it was just a right-wing demonstration, nothing to do with that.³⁴⁴

Minor scuffles – no more than some pushing and shoving between protestors and the police – broke out when Fransen was, predictably, arrested for breach of bail conditions.³⁴⁵

339 See <https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/no-charges-sunderland-peel-street-13666710> (Accessed on 29/11/20)

340 See <https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/northumbria-police-chief-issues-warning-statement-ahead-sunderland-city-centre-protest-354703> (Accessed on 01/12/20)

341 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/sep/20/two-britain-first-leaders-golding-fransen-charged-with-religiously-aggravated-harassment> (Accessed on 10/05/2021)

342 See <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2017/10/16/sunderlands-billy-liar-accused-plundering-prison-fund/> (Accessed on 04/12/21)

343 Sunderland 3 and Sunderland 4: Interviews with police officers.

344 Sunderland 4: Interview with a police officer.

345 Fransen was later jailed for 36 weeks for 3 counts of racially aggravated harassment, and Golding jailed for 18 weeks for 1 count of

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Although Fransen's arrest did provoke a spike of interest across Twitter, this was to be the last demonstration associated with the Justice4Chelsey campaign. The campaign's Facebook page was taken down, and the campaign itself was wound down following an announcement by Rebel Media on 2 November. In an interview with Daniel Berke, Tommy Robinson said that the CPS had upheld the decision to take no further action as 'the evidence was not there to support prosecution' and that the CPS would not allow a private prosecution. Daniel Berke read out a statement from Wright asking, 'that I be allowed to time to recover and be with my family'. Robinson concluded saying that Rebel Media would disband the campaign 'in respect with the victim's wishes.'³⁴⁶ At the time of writing, the video, which is one of the few Rebel Media videos on Justice4Chelsey still on YouTube, had 65,000 views.

It is noteworthy that on 10 October, Northumbria Police made a public statement on Operation Sanctuary, a long running investigation into sexual exploitation in Newcastle and involving perpetrators from Sunderland. The statement highlighted the commitment of Northumbria Police to prosecute sexual crime and asserted that 'there has been no political correctness here. These are criminals and there has been no hesitation in arresting them and targeting them using all the means at our disposal.'³⁴⁷ We cannot say with certainty what, if any, effect this had on the way that the event on 14 October played out, but respondents suggested that this may have undermined support for the demonstration.

Phase 4. May – Dec 2018. *The Justice for the Women and Children campaign*

A period of relative quiet in Sunderland followed the disbanding of the Justice4Chelsey campaign. This may

or may not have had something to do with the fact that several of the key protagonists from the Justice4Chelsey campaign had either withdrawn from the issue, at least in Sunderland, or were either in prison or facing trial. As mentioned above, Wright had withdrawn from public life and Robinson had distanced himself from the campaign. On 21 January 2018, Charlton was charged with 5 counts of incitement to religious and racial hatred, with a trial date set for 2 December that year. On 20 February, Charlton also appeared in court to answer counts of assault on two Asian men dating back to his arrest in May 2017, although these charges were dropped as the witnesses failed to appear in court. Britain First meanwhile showed some interest in continuing to exploit developments in Sunderland to their own ends. In February they held a group meeting of about 50 people in Joseph's, a pub frequented by local anti-minority activists. Yet otherwise, things remained quiet. This would not last for long, however.

On 23 May 2018, a sexual assault in a HMO housing asylum seekers was reported in Roker Avenue, a street with several other HMOs. Three men were arrested, and one with an asylum background was later charged and convicted.³⁴⁸ Over the following bank holiday weekend, a double sexual assault was reported in Mowbray Park, which had been the location of historic concerns over sexual crime.³⁴⁹ Two white British men were arrested in connection with the assault but reports on social media stated that the perpetrators were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

On Monday 29 May, a second sexual assault was reported, again in Roker Avenue. The victim had run into a betting shop in distress, so the assault quickly became public knowledge. The incidents were picked up in the local press and generated considerable social media traffic. Although Charlton's bail conditions did not allow him to attend or promote demonstrations,

racial harassment. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-43320121> (Accessed 10/05/2021)

³⁴⁶ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE-v_nQgIDk (Accessed on 06/02/21 'Video no longer available at the time of publication)

³⁴⁷ See <https://www.nwgnetwork.org/operation-sanctuary-update-northumbria-police/> (Accessed on 26/01/21)

³⁴⁸ A second man was charged on June 12. Both men were convicted in December 2018. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-46604247> (Accessed on 11/01/21)

³⁴⁹ There had been a sexual assault in Mowbray 2014, for which one man was later convicted, and in February 2018, see: <https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/arrest-made-after-report-rape-sunderlands-mowbray-park-352124> (Accessed on 10/02/21)

he mentioned the incidents on his Twitter feed, highlighting the continuity with Justice4Chelsey.

The following day, on 30 May, a Facebook group was launched calling itself Justice for the Women of Sunderland. The group announced a rally in Mowbray Park for 30 June. The campaign was similar to Justice4Chelsey in several ways. Once again, it was started by local residents, and some of the organisers, but by no means all, had familial links to well-known local anti-minority activists. For example, Natasha Allan, a leading organiser, is the sister of Tommy Allan, who was convicted of violent disorder at the Dover riots. Where it differed was that this campaign was very clearly led by local women. It also appears to have drawn support from a wider range of local activists. Not only did Warren Faulkner, leader of the NEI and rival of Billy Charlton, offer his support as an adviser, but the group was also promoted widely on the Facebook pages of local anti-corruption and anti-Labour groups, such as Sunderland for Transparency, Bin Sunderland's Labour, and the Twitter feed of well-known local anti-corruption campaigner, Len Lowther. It is worth remarking that re-posting tweets on the case on these sites broadened the reach of the campaign but also generated more followers for what were previously niche sites. Indeed, claims by the group that they were 'just normal mothers' who wanted to make the streets safer for children would be central to their efforts to mobilise public and political support, and was articulated by Natasha Allan in a letter she wrote to all the Sunderland councillors and the three local MPs asking them to support the first demonstration on 30 June.

The campaign comprised a series of three demonstrations in Sunderland, from June 2018 to September 2019. Two further demonstrations were held in Middlesbrough, on 8 September and 24 November 2018. The latter were organised by Sharon Binks, a Middlesbrough resident who was previously involved with the Justice4Chelsey campaign and had been sacked from her role as a family support worker for North Yorkshire County Council for religious

discrimination due to her social media posts and attendance on anti-grooming rallies.³⁵⁰

The council and police also found themselves in a different position this time. First, in contrast to the Justice4Chelsey campaign, they were not constrained by restrictions around the investigation of a live case. Second, they were able to draw on their own recent experience and understanding of how issues can escalate. As a result, the council acted swiftly to address concerns over cohesion and the heightened state of community tensions in the city.

On 11 June 2018, the Deputy Leader of Sunderland City Council wrote to the Home Office asking for a temporary moratorium on the procurement of accommodation for asylum seekers in Sunderland, particularly where asylum seekers were known to be facing criminal justice procedures. The request was supported by local MP Julie Elliot, who repeated the request in a second letter to the Home Office. While this approach was perceived as 'pandering to the far right' by some, others defended it.³⁵¹

The local authority's attempts to learn from the previous campaign undoubtedly help to explain why, on the evening of 11 June, the council and police held a community meeting in the local Tesco to engage residents over their concerns around the safety of women. The meeting had to be re-located as over 250 residents attended. Most attendees were local residents, a small proportion of whom were also activists. At the start of the meeting, the first member of the public to speak was a man who asked about the prevalence of 'Muslim grooming gangs' in Sunderland, only to be sharply contradicted by a local woman who said, 'that this was about violence to women, not religion or race'.³⁵² The meeting started a process of engagement with residents and the campaign organisers, daily

350 Sharon Binks is interviewed in the following video by Peter Sweden at the Justice4Chelsey march on the 10 June. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md3rP88Cn6w&t=16s> (Accessed on the 10/02/21)

351 See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/27/uk-asylum-seekers-refused-housing-over-social-cohesion-issues> (Accessed on 04/01/21)

352 Author's own field notes.

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police drop-ins were started on Roker Avenue, and CCTV was installed in the affected area. A council worker stated,

so it was possible for us to engage in discussion and, to be fair, I think they wanted that discussion as well because they were asking the question, ‘What are the Council going to do to make things safer?’³⁵³

This did not stop demonstrations taking place, however. First, on **15 June**, a demonstration not publicly associated with JWC was held on Roker Avenue by Roker Community Group, a local residents’ group. About 150 people took part in what was a peaceful march, with no speeches, arrests or public disorder. The marchers complied with police instructions not to try to march down Roker Avenue due to concerns over the targeting of HMOs on the street. Of note, however, while most attendees were locals, police reported that several members of the DFLA also attended, indicating that the event might have been in some way linked to wider regional and national activist networks.

Then on **30 June**, JWC held its first demonstration, with a march to Keel Square from Mowbray Park. Around 300 people attended that rally. The march was led by local women and children wearing white t-shirts with the slogan ‘No more rapes’. Speeches were given by Natasha Allan and Sharon Binks and broadly focused on the safety of local women, with Binks reading out the personal stories of survivors. A 9-year-old child also read a speech. There was no counter protest. The march passed peacefully and there were no arrests.

Prior to and following the march, activists from the campaign also engaged with the council and Northumbria Police about their concerns.

The second JWC demonstration was held on **4 August**, timed to coincide with Sunderland AFC’s first home game of the football season. It attracted smaller

numbers than the first march, with about 200 people. As in the previous demonstration, women and children led the march, all wearing white t-shirts, and again a child read out a speech. Other speeches were given by Allan, Binks and Toni Bugle of Mothers against Radical Islam and Sharia (from Central Bedfordshire), and formerly associated with the EDL. During her speech, Binks announced the setting up of a National Anti-Grooming Alliance and Helpline (NAGAH) to report abuse.³⁵⁴ An organiser from the DFLA also gave a speech saying how they would be supporting the next demonstration on **15 September**. Again, there was no counter protest. And again, there were no reported incidents of public disorder. While Britain First had visited the city two weeks earlier, and leafleted in the city centre, presumably to exploit the campaign, they did not attend the demonstration.³⁵⁵

Although there was no violence at the demonstrations, an ongoing campaign of harassment started against local MP Julie Elliot and her office staff. The MP had been approached by the campaign group and had publicly pledged her support but declined to speak at the first demonstration.³⁵⁶ As a result, she was denounced by the campaign organisers in a speech at the August demonstration. She was also being targeted by local anti-corruption campaigners who had also thrown their support behind JWC. The harassment which continued beyond the course of the campaign, included online abuse but also attacks on her office which had its windows smashed. In addition, there was also intimidation of a prominent local anti-racist activist, with social media posts making allegations about involvement in child abuse.

354 NAGAH was originally set up in Telford as a response to CSE cases in the town, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/05/far-right-infiltrating-childrens-charities-with-anti-islam-agenda> (Accessed on 10/02/21)

355 It is not known precisely why Britain First were not able to influence the campaign but there is evidence of hostility towards Paul Golding from local activists. See <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2018/09/09/paul-goldings-sneaky-headbutt-sparks-war-north-east-infidels/> (Accessed on 10/02/21)

356 See <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/sunderland-echo/20180704/281565176511470> (Accessed on 14/05/21)

Prior to the 15 September demonstration, the campaign organisers continued to be active. In addition to general dissemination of information about their campaign, organisers also began more actively to engage with other nationally prominent individuals and groups.

These included UKIP in April 2018 once Gerald Batten had been appointed leader and after the resignation of Henry Bolton, who had previously thwarted Waters' candidacy for the UKIP leadership. Batten was well known for his long-standing opposition to Islam and multiculturalism,³⁵⁷ and was seeking to reinvigorate UKIP by giving greater prominence to these issues.

One way in which they did this was to mobilise around issues, such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and sexual violence, that were proving fruitful for the wider anti-minority movement – indeed, on 22 November, Batten appointed Robinson as UKIP's adviser on 'grooming gangs' and prison reform.³⁵⁸ Under Batten, UKIP had also started to cultivate relationships with the DFLA and VAT, who had held two well-attended marches in London in June and October 2017.³⁵⁹ The stronger stance on Islam and sexual grooming attracted leading figures from across the alt-light to join the party, including Mark Meechan (aka Count Dankula),³⁶⁰ Carl Benjamin (aka Sargon of Akard),³⁶¹

Milo Yiannopoulos³⁶² and Peter Joseph Watson of Infowars.³⁶³

On 6 September, following a meeting of the campaign group, JWC posted an open letter to Northumbria Police and Sunderland City Council on Facebook, setting out 21 questions. These questions focused on three themes: the spiking of women's drinks in nightclubs, the sexual assaults in Mowbray Park, and the sexual assaults on Roker Avenue. Eight of the questions referred to ethnicity and migration.³⁶⁴ Then, on 8 September, a small demonstration was held under the banner of JWC in Middlesbrough. The event only attracted around 100 people. There was, however, a small counter protest mounted by Stand Up to Racism. While described in newspaper reports as an 'intimidating' atmosphere, the police were able to prevent escalation by placing themselves between protestors and counter protestors.³⁶⁵ Nonetheless, this appeared to indicate a difference in how anti-racist activists were perceiving and responding to the demonstrations across the region.

The 15 September demonstration was to prove to be the largest of the campaign, with about 1000 demonstrators in attendance, including Batten and Waters. There were also DFLA regional groups from across the country. In some respects, the choreography of the march was similar to previous demonstrations. The demonstrators marched, soberly and without chanting, to the war memorial, where they laid wreaths and made speeches.

357 Batten had previously expressed his admiration for anti-Muslim Dutch politician Geert Wilders and attracted criticism for stating that Islam is a death cult. See https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/gerard-batten-defends-describing-islam-as-a-death-cult_uk_5a8999c2e4b00bc49f45342a (Accessed 10/05/2021)

358 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-46308160>

359 Both the DFLA marches in London that year were attended by over 20,000 marchers, the first without any public promotion. At the October march, Tommy Robinson attempted to join the march but was publicly told to 'jog on' by its organisers.

360 Mark Meechan (aka Count Dankula) became a figurehead for the alt-light after he was arrested and convicted for being grossly offensive under the Communications Act 2003. He had uploaded a video, titled, 'M8 Yer Dugs a Nazi', to YouTube of his girlfriend's dog giving a Nazi salute to the command, Sieg Heil. He later stood as a European Parliament candidate for UKIP.

361 Carl Benjamin is an influential vlogger from the Alt-Light who started his career in Gamergate with anti-feminist positions. He achieved notoriety by tweeting 'I wouldn't even rape her' to Labour MP, Jess Phillips in 2016 in reference to her experiences of abuse in public life. In 2019 he stood as UKIP's MEP for the South West.

362 Milo Yiannopoulos is a UK born alt-light commentator who found success in the United States. As with Carl Benjamin, he started his trajectory with the Gamergate controversy, going on to become the technology editor of Briart. As an openly gay man, he developed a provocative persona delighting in taking on liberal viewpoints and embarking on free speech tours in American universities. His career suffered a dramatic reversal after he was sacked from Briart for appearing to justify paedophilia in a video interview. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/21/milo-yiannopoulos-rise-and-fall-shallow-actor-bad-guy-hate-speech> (Accessed on 21/04/21)

363 Paul Joseph Watson is a British alt-light vlogger who promotes conspiracy theories and anti-feminist and anti-Social Justice Warrior positions on his YouTube channel, PrisonPlanet. He started his career as an editor on Alex Jones' Infowars. Although de-platformed on Facebook and Instagram, at the time of writing he has 1.1 million followers on Twitter and 1.88 million YouTube subscribers.

364 Private email communication with an interviewee.

365 See <https://articulatelive.wordpress.com/2018/09/10/disruption-for-middlesbrough-shoppers-as-justice-for-the-women-and-children-march-in-city-centre/> (Accessed on 04/12/20)

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Unlike previous marches, however, the speeches given this time explicitly linked sexual offences with Islam. Batten, for example, stated in his speech that,

the overwhelming number of people who are responsible for this kind of industrialised gang rape and sexual exploitation have proved to be Muslim.³⁶⁶

What was also different about this demonstration, and the previous demonstrations in Sunderland under the JWC banner or the Justice4Chelsey campaign, was that there was a static counter-protest, in Keel Square, organised by Sunderland Unites and Stand Up to Racism. As an anti-racism campaigner explained, the reason for the change in response from the anti-racism movement was the involvement now of Batten and groups such as DFLA. Even if anti-racist activists perceived in these campaigns a thinly-veiled attempt to stoke up anti-migrant sentiment, counter demonstrations did not seem viable or advisable as long as Justice4Chelsey or JWC were framed simply as campaigns about protecting women and children, and especially when they were led by local women – something one anti-racist activist described as ‘scary’ because they realised ‘we didn’t know how to challenge it.’³⁶⁷ The involvement of the DFLA and Batten changed that. Indeed, as the same activist observed, it ‘was kind of a blessing for us’ when Justice for Women brought the DFLA here because it became ‘so much easier’ to mount a credible counter protest.

The counter protest only comprised approximately 300 people from anti-racist and pro-refugee groups. It would, however, be the focal point for a confrontation. As the JWC demonstration passed through a narrow street close to the counter protest in Keel Square – described by a police officer as ‘a pinch point’³⁶⁸ – 10-15 JWC protestors broke through the steward

and police lines, moving to within 20 metres of the counter-protest. A further 50 or so protestors rushed behind them. Three police vans that had been on standby were driven into the square and parked between the JWC protestors and counter-protestors. Scuffles then broke out between JWC demonstrators and the police, as the police prevented them from getting any further. Some JWC protestors chanted phrases such as, ‘lefty scum’, ‘you’re sick’ and ‘you’re not English anymore’.³⁶⁹ Three mounted police were deployed in an attempt to control the situation, but a protestor hit a mounted officer with a flagpole, albeit to little effect. Opportunities for further violence were inhibited as the police lines were strengthened with vans. Meanwhile in cooperation with the police, JWC stewards were also attempting to keep the main body of demonstrators moving forwards and away from the confrontation. Two protestors attempted to gain access to the counter-protest by sneaking behind, but were soon apprehended by police. Three arrests were made for public order offences.

Shortly after the demonstration, on 23 September, Binks gave a speech at the UKIP party conference, in Birmingham. It was a polished speech, in which she told the story of her activism, starting with the Justice4Chelsey campaign and going on to the JWC campaign. Apart from some pointed remarks about the ethnicity of perpetrators of sexual abuse, she was otherwise at pains to distance herself, and the campaign, from the ‘far right’ and ‘racism’.³⁷⁰

Yet despite Binks’ growing prominence, the momentum of the JWC campaign dissipated after the 15 September march. There are three developments that might help to explain this. First, it seems possible that activists involved in the campaign simply began to focus their attention elsewhere. During the autumn, several of the activists involved in the

366 <https://news.sky.com/story/ukip-leader-gerard-batten-criticised-by-nigel-farage-for-endorsing-anti-muslim-rally-11500884> (Accessed on 10/05/2021)

367 Sunderland 10: Interview with an NGO worker, working on poverty issues

368 Sunderland 4: Interview with a police officer.

369 An erudite chant often heard during EDL demonstrations over the years and sung to the tune of the chorus of the hymn, Guide me O Thou Great Redeemer.

370 Some readers might argue that simply by speaking at a UKIP conference she was in fact actively participating in the ‘far right’ and ‘racism’. Our point is that she distanced herself from what she considered the ‘far right’ and ‘racism’ to comprise.

JWC campaign became increasingly involved in pro-Brexit campaigning and the North East Yellow Vest movement, as well as becoming more involved with the national anti-minority protest movement. On 5 October, for example, several members of JWC were among counter-protestors who heckled Anna Soubry MP (then Conservative) at a People's Vote march in Sunderland. On 13 October, Allan and Binks led a silent DFLA march in London, again using the same protest choreography as in Sunderland. On this occasion, however, the event resulted in fairly substantial public disorder as some protestors tried to breach police lines to reach counter-protestors, and some clashed directly with the police.³⁷¹

Second, the autumn saw an unprecedented level of community engagement through a series of public meetings, attended by as many as 300 or 400 people, called by the police and the local authority. The meetings were held in response to the murder of a local 62-year-old shopkeeper and residents' concerns over the crime, which was briefly linked to a perpetrator with a migration background, but who was in fact British and white. This event and its fallout were not directly connected to the campaign but started a process of intense engagement which undercut claims that public agencies were not listening to public concerns over community safety.³⁷²

Third, it is possible that Billy Charlton's upcoming trial on 5 counts of inciting racial and religious hatred may have served to inhibit not just Charlton himself, but also other activists in and around the anti-minority scene, from engaging in further activism and made them more guarded about what they were prepared to say publicly on social media.

There was one further small demonstration on 14 November, in Middlesbrough. It attracted around 20 protestors. They were confronted by a considerably

larger counter-protest. There were however no physical confrontations or arrests.³⁷³

The campaign was diminished further after a *Newsnight* exposé, broadcast on 21 December, highlighted the links of some of the leading activists to organised anti-minority groups and some overtly racist posts on the campaign group's Facebook page.³⁷⁴ Over the coming months, the Facebook page continued to operate, but the focus changed. Greater attention was given to national campaigns, and they moved from a focus on sexual assaults to issues such as forced adoption and more general campaigning about what they considered unfair decisions by social services. Several of the campaign's organisers became involved in the nascent Yellow Vest movement, which was particularly strong in the North East, and were involved in national demonstrations in London and, locally, in Newcastle and Gateshead, in the early months of 2019. There were no further demonstrations in Sunderland under the banner of JWC.

4.4. ANALYSIS

What appears to have enabled the escalation of violence?

There were several mechanisms in Sunderland that would appear to favour escalation towards violence. First, the anti-minority activist scene in Sunderland was *characterised by a cohort of influential local activists, associated with the most ideologically and tactically radical fringes of the anti-minority protest scene, and with a track record of violence*. Their capacity for violence and of the potential for confrontation with opponents is clear from past convictions and violence that had occurred at previous demonstrations, locally and nationally.

Second, the initial posting of the allegations on Facebook and social media coverage of the incident

371 See <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/dfla-march-in-london-farright-protest-spills-into-violence-as-police-officers-attacked-a3961276.html> (Accessed on 09/12/20)

372 Sunderland 12: Interview with a council worker.

373 See <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/17254557>.

protestors-take-streets-middlesbrough-town-centre/ (Accessed 30/11/20)

374 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06w7qyq> (Accessed on 09/12/20)

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Fig 4.5 Aerial view of central Sunderland relevant to 15 September 2018 demonstration

Key

A – Peel Street

B – Mowbray Park, site of sexual assaults and rallying point for JWC demonstrations

C – Sunderland Civic Centre

D – War Memorial

E – Crowtree Road, site of JWC 15 September 2018 rally point

F – Keel Square 'pinch point' and site of confrontation with counter demonstrators on 15 September 2018.

created *a sense of moral outrage and indignation among the wider public*. As a police interviewee explained,

because that Facebook post had gone viral. It had been seen by thousands and thousands. And it was really emotive. Like if that was

somebody I knew in my community I would be outraged that that had happened.³⁷⁵

Furthermore, as the post was shared on social media by activists and local residents, it was embellished

with qualities designed to heighten the moral shock, alongside graphic photos of the victim's injuries:

it had gone from the initial post of Chelsey's with three Turkish men having dragged her into a house to six people drugging her, raping her, kidnapping her and it was just lies, it was just out and out lies.³⁷⁶

These rumours helped to sustain a sense of moral outrage and sense of imperilment that was in turn whipped up at the first demonstration when violence did emerge. The fact that Charlton had at least five different Twitter feeds and was posting daily on Facebook – sometimes 10 or 20 times a day³⁷⁷ – indicates that this was a deliberate strategy.

As the campaign developed, activists used social media to amplify false claims about an alleged 'rape jihad' that was sweeping Sunderland, which created an atmosphere of fear and heightened threat. Activists also used social media to link local events to national and international incidents of criminality associated with migrants, particularly those involving women and children. As such, notwithstanding the violence that did take place, it is perhaps surprising that there was not more violence across the course of the two campaigns. This is even more so given the Manchester Arena attack, which on the face of it at least seemed to provide a rich opportunity for violence dressed up as an act of vengeance.

Violence did emerge on three occasions, however. What is noticeable is that on each of these occasions the emergence of violence was shaped by quite specific situational dynamics. At the first demonstration of Justice4Chelsey, emotional tension had been built up on social media and on the day in highly incendiary speeches. The sense of moral outrage may have also been accentuated by holding the demo on the street where the alleged assault took place. Once demonstrators were able to run into back streets

and escape police lines, they were able to go on an *uninhibited rampage of the sort that Collins typifies as a 'moral holiday', and enjoyed an overwhelming situational advantage* when they confronted two men on whom they directed their anger. The ferocity of this is demonstrated by the use of weapons – a hammer no less – something that comprises a very significant outlier within the Justice4Chelsey and JWC campaigns.

Violence at the DFLA/JWC demonstration shared a similar dynamic as emotional tension was released as protestors came in sight of an accessible counterdemonstration and identifiable enemy. The event's structure broke down as marchers were escorted close to the counter-protest and there was a visible rush as protestors pushed forward towards the counter-protest. The 'success' of a small group of activists in breaking through police and steward lines disrupted the choreography of the event and created an opportunity for a larger number of activists to become more confrontational. This time, however, there did not emerge local conditions of overwhelming situational advantage, and the violence was limited to some pushing and shoving. Here it is worth noting a certain irony: there was a continued concern about the optics of the protest here, and the DFLA might reasonably be considered more moderate, both tactically and ideologically, than groups such as NEI and SDL. However, it appears to have been the involvement of the DFLA in particular, and also UKIP, that created an opportunity for a counter-protest by undermining the coherence of the image previously presented by Justice4Chelsey and JWC of organic local campaigns mobilising around concerns about the safety of vulnerable groups.

The third incident was that involving Robinson and Sunderland and Celtic fans. This incident displayed the typical characteristics of a competition for emotional dominance, albeit much of the contest was conducted *through the goading and the taunting of opponents* on social media. The two-week exchange of abuse between opponents made violence increasingly likely.

376 Sunderland 1: Interview with a police officer.

377 Sunderland 3: Interview with a police officer.

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Both protagonists were locked in a cycle of emotional entrainment, typical of how Collins describes the build-up of situational tension, however, in this case tension is built up between opponents at different ends of the country, rather than in face-to-face or physical contact. For either side to back down would have meant a public loss of face. When the opponents come face-to-face, the confrontation is short, brutal, and with no run-up. There are no off-ramps, and no excuses not to participate. It also displayed elements of organisation typical of football violence exacerbated by sectarianism:³⁷⁸ the expectation of violence is high, opponents were prepared and equipped, and some at least were enthusiastic about the prospect of violence.

What appears to have inhibited violence?

Given the seemingly favourable conditions for violence, it is perhaps surprising that there was not more violence across the two campaigns. There are several interconnected factors that help to explain the relative absence of violence:

In some ways the most obvious explanation is that *for most of the demonstrations there was no counter demonstration*. This drastically reduced opportunities for violence and was identified by the majority of interviewees as the most basic explanation. This was in stark contrast to the earlier anti-mosque protests in Sunderland, when there was serious public disorder between protestors and counter-protestors. For local anti-racist activists, the campaign involved an ethical and strategic dilemma: although the links with established anti-minority activists were well-known, the campaign's public face was about justice for a local woman who was the survivor of a sexual assault and was not therefore something that anti-racist campaigners could be seen to oppose. Despite misgivings over who was involved and what their covert

agendas, a consensus was reached 'to stand down'. Similarly, the small local Bangladeshi community did not mobilise, initially because of how the protests were framed, and then later dissuaded by extensive engagement work from neighbourhood police teams and the council. The lack of counter-protests meant that for the most part there were no available targets of violence apart from the police, who were not perceived as legitimate targets for violence.

JWC involved the same dilemma for anti-racist activists, even more so, as the campaign was publicly led by women and children. Consequently, there were no counter-protests until the involvement of Gerald Batten and the DFLA. For local anti-racist activists, public opposition was legitimised by the involvement of national actors who had broader agendas beyond the local safety of women, thereby enabling the emergence of a process of 'entrainment', whereby the two sets of actors become increasingly focused on one another.

The *choreography of most of the events also was not favourable for violence*. The logic of the demonstrations was about conveying victimhood and vulnerability, rather than asserting dominance over any perceived opponents, and demonstrations were consciously crafted with the intention of appealing to a building support among the general public. In the case of Justice4Chelsey, Wright herself attended among other women and young children, and in several cases was at the front of the marches. Such attention to the choreography of the demonstrations reached its peak in the JWC campaign. Video footage of the early JWC marches is striking, with women marching with children in white t-shirts with identical slogans in the dazzling sun, and children giving speeches. As well as deterring counter-protests, this also helped to ensure that any acts of violence by anti-minority activists participating in these campaigns would have appeared inappropriate.

Paradoxically, the success of this strategy in gaining national media attention eventually led to the tarnishing of activists' legitimacy when the BBC Newsnight

³⁷⁸ Sectarianism is an issue which has been a consistent presence in the UK anti-minority scene and particularly problematic for Tommy Robinson who has an Irish Catholic background. It was a factor in splits in the EDL as more radical flanks such as the NWI and NEI were associated with loyalism (Busher, 2016, 136-140).

programme aired in December 2018, contradicting the claims of JWC to be campaigning simply for the safety of women. While not decisive, this indubitably undermined the credibility of the campaign with the wider public.

These explanations themselves point to further factors. First, the absence of counter demonstrations and choreography of the demonstrations were both to some degree a product of *the way the campaigns were framed as* an appeal to address a perceived injustice and a concern with the safety of women and children. Any initial appeal to vigilantism was moderated by the framing of the campaign as a demand to readdress an injustice. For local activists, like Charlton, this gifted them a veneer of respectability and public support that had previously eluded them. As this framing was seen to work, it persisted. Critically here, *the objective of the campaign was to address injustice by operating through established structures of criminal justice.* They were angry about the system not doing what they thought it was supposed to do, but they did not want to change the system per se. As such, at no point did this become a revolutionary campaign or one that entailed challenging or breaking societal taboos. The vast majority of protestors had no interest in an extreme right-wing or revolutionary agenda but found the activists' claims aligned with their concerns over the safety of local women and children: concerns pushed to the foreground through social media and local events. This understanding of their own campaign discouraged the use of more confrontational tactics.

Second, *both local and national actors pursued strategies of mass mobilisation that highlighted the importance of appealing to and not alienating public support.* The participation of seasoned local and national activists, and ordinary residents demonstrated the potential for Justice4Chelsea to gain wider traction but at the same time limited the organisers' strategic options and goals. External actors became involved who had a strategy that centred on building a broad base of public support. Despite attempts to 'rile up' the public and cultivate anger and indignation, especially

through social media, overt calls to violence would have jeopardised activists' claims to respectability and legitimacy.

Their professionalism and the resources that came with external actors translated into attempts to shape the optics of demonstrations with instructions for the behaviour of demonstrators, for example, no chanting, no drinking and, although unsaid, presumably no violence. JWC shared a similar concern with the optics. Arguably, it went further in ensuring women and children led the marches, not men, and was at pains to distance itself from extremism. Men were told they could support but not in an organisational capacity. Again, as the JWC developed, national actors became involved from the relatively moderate flank of the anti-minority landscape, who sought to achieve their aims through elections rather than violence.

While the sophistication and involvement of national actors increased the reach of the campaign, paradoxically it also attracted more outsiders and well-known anti-minority actors that started to chip away at the campaign's legitimacy. It became no longer about local people but the political agendas of outsiders, such as Water's UKIP leadership campaign, the self-promotion of Robinson (especially after the incident with Celtic Fans), or the more radical ideological stance of Britain First.

Third, after violence at the first demonstration, *the police ensured they were sufficiently resourced to respond to any further violence appropriately.* The shadow of the police operation in Dover in securing convictions long after the event had passed may have also affected activist's appetite for violence. Campaign organisers were also willing to engage with the police. Liaison with the organisers meant officers were able to impose conditions on the marches that diminished the potential for violence. *Further, relationships of trust and mutual understanding were built up over time with key activists,* which helped to ensure that activists were willing by and large to collaborate with the police. Officers described how they were able to

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talk to organisers to get them to rein in the behaviour of attendees who were behaving aggressively. Also, while there was undoubtedly some hostility towards the police as an institution for what was seen as their responsibility for failing to protect women and children, this hostility was directed towards the ‘higher echelons’ rather than the officers on the ground.

Fourth, *law enforcement and the local authorities combined to effectively address a number of the concerns that the campaigns were ostensibly intended to address* – through initiatives such as community engagement meetings, policing operations focused on crime by foreign nationals, and signalling through their engagement with the national government that they were taking seriously concerns around the impact of asylum dispersal in the city. This was particularly the case with the JWC campaign, where police and local authorities alike built on substantial learning from the Justice4Chelsey campaign, and where they were not bound by reporting restrictions. While this might not have limited the potential for violence directly, it made it harder for activists to mobilise support, and made it more difficult still for anti-minority activists to justify any use of violence.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS: SUNDERLAND

Sunderland is interesting as many of the factors that we may assume to enable violence were present but the violence that occurred was less severe compared to our other case studies. This is not to be dismissive of violence when it did occur, but it was not as sustained or on the scale of Charlottesville, Chemnitz or Dover. Sunderland is home to a cohort of experienced activists who were capable of and habituated towards violent protest. The city had a backstory of sexual violence against women that was sometimes interpreted through the prism of race and other perceived outsiders. The incident that provided the catalyst for mobilisation was one that provoked a high degree of moral shock,

disgust and outrage which resonated with residents, and was exploited through the strategic use of social media. Among sections of the community, the police were perceived to be failing in their duty to protect citizens, either through alleged incompetence or the dictums of political correctness. However, violence was restricted to three discrete incidents with specific situational dynamics.

Three factors are important in explaining the inhibition of violence. First, no counter-protests were organised during the Justice4Chelsey campaign (except for a single counter-protestor), which diminished opportunities for confrontation with identifiable enemies. Even when a counter-demonstration was organised to oppose one of the JWC marches, the police and event stewards worked to minimise opportunities for confrontation with their opponents. Second, learning from the experience of policing the first demonstration, the police ‘were not prepared to let that happen again’³⁷⁹ and resourced demonstrations sufficiently to tightly control them. Finally, both local and national actors remained orientated towards building public support which engendered a concern with achieving a degree of respectability, and in most cases held firmly to an understanding of themselves as peaceful protestors addressing an injustice, rather than any form of revolutionary movement. An overriding concern for the optics of protest crowded out the potential for violence.

The Sunderland case does however raise important questions about what constitutes violence. While there was not sustained public disorder (except for the Celtic match), there was a persistent environment of harassment and intimidation over the course of both campaigns. Local anti-racism activists were targeted, the local mosque was graffitied and had windows smashed, and the local MP and her staff were threatened. At the highpoint of the campaign, local BAME residents spoke of being scared to go into town on the days of demonstrations. While not generally

escalating into attacks, there was a heightened state of inter-community tensions. As such, while there was little violence during protest events, it would be misleading to say that violence was absent during much of this case study.

Social media played a crucial role in shaping that affective landscape and is a field where the crossover between violent action and incitement to violence, what is below the bar of illegal activity and what is above, and how online behaviour translates into offline behaviour, is unclear. The boundary between what is acceptable speech and incitement to violence is an issue that was unpicked in the prosecution of the organiser of the Justice4Chelsea campaign, Billy Charlton. He was finally convicted of five counts of incitement to racial and religious hatred from his speeches at marches that were uploaded to YouTube and widely viewed, and the judge concluded, 'This is a trial about racial hatred. The jury has found your speeches were intended to, or likely to, stir up racial hatred'.³⁸⁰ and 'that the aim was to incite violence'.

380 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/uk/sunderland-brexit-supporter-jailed-for-inciting-racial-hatred-1.4032940> (Accessed on 10/03/21)

5. CHEMNITZ, GERMANY, AUGUST – DECEMBER 2018

5.1. SUMMARY

This case study focuses on a series of demonstrations in the eastern German city of Chemnitz in Saxony, between 26 August and 31 December 2018. The demonstrations took place in the wake of, and ostensibly in response to, the fatal stabbing of Daniel Hillig, a young German-Cuban man, in the city. The protests were attended by a broad coalition of actors including members of organised anti-minority street movements, extreme right-wing activists,³⁸¹ members and organisers of radical right parties, cultural associations, and many people without affiliations to any of these groups.

Footage of the events, showing ordinary citizens standing ‘shoulder-to-shoulder’³⁸² with neo-Nazi activists and the open display of non-constitutional symbols,³⁸³ provoked a national debate over Germany’s reckoning with historical fascism.

Some of the demonstrations resulted in serious public disorder and targeted violence against left-wing opponents, the police, migrants and journalists. Claims that violence included the organised hunting of migrants, and questions about the extent of the violence, became the focus of intense national debate. These debates involved leading politicians and state officials, and eventually led to the resignation of Hans-

³⁸¹ Throughout the report we use the term ‘anti-minority activists’ as a hypernym to cover a range of different groups (see Chapter 2). In the Chemnitz case study, we use the term extreme right-wing activists to refer to overtly neo-Nazi or National Socialist groups, in line with the definition used by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. We do this in order to be able to describe the convergence and divergence of more and less ideologically radical formations during the course of the case study.

³⁸² Chemnitz 10: Interview with two NGO workers, working on issues of youth and social inclusion. Chemnitz 13: Interview with two council workers.

³⁸³ For a comprehensive overview of German legislation on unconstitutional slogans and symbols, see Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2018).

Georg Maaßen, the head of Germany’s Intelligence Agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

The scale and intensity of the violence attracted activists from extreme right-wing subcultures from all over Germany and made the city the focus of national and international attention. Smaller scale protests continued on a regular basis for several months after the initial events, but none of those resulted in similar levels of public disorder.

5.2. CONTEXT

The events that form the focus of this case study did not come out of the ether. During the months and years prior to the summer of 2018, public expressions of anti-minority sentiment had become something of a feature of the political landscape in Germany, with the south-eastern state of Saxony being one of the focal points for such activities.³⁸⁴

The issue of migration had gained salience during the so-called European ‘migrant crisis’, with Angela Merkel’s decision in 2015 to allow 1.1 million refugees a focus of intense political debate. Since then, Germany has experienced several anti-migrant protests reminiscent of anti-minority mobilisation and riots in Hoyerswerda (in northeast Saxony) and Rostock-Lichtenhagen in the early 1990s.³⁸⁵ A significant difference from earlier waves of anti-minority mobilisation is that recent mobilisations have often

³⁸⁴ See the ‘Sachsen Rechts Unten’ report published by the Kulturbüro Sachsen (Saxony Cultural Office) and the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung: https://kulturbuero-sachsen.de/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Sachsen_rechts_unten_2019_Kulturbuero-Sachsen_web.pdf (Accessed on 24/02/21)

³⁸⁵ For overview of Hoyerswerda riots see Karapin (2002).

sought an air of respectability, even when there was targeted violence against asylum centres. Furthermore, and reflecting wider shifts across the anti-minority landscape in Germany, such mobilisations have also attracted older and more middle-class support than in the early 1990s which often drew on subcultural groups only.³⁸⁶

Throughout this period, opposition to migration has been fuelled by claims that migrants threaten the security and safety of the German public. Concerns about the threat of sexual assault from migrant men has been a particularly potent theme, and become a staple trope in extreme and radical right narratives,³⁸⁷ grounded in incidents such as the widely publicised mass sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Day 2016. Concerns about the threat of sexual violence posed by migrants to German women have sparked several national initiatives from anti-migrant actors including the *Einzelfall* Map,³⁸⁸ set up in 2016, which mapped alleged migrant crime, and the 120 Decibels anti-rape campaign.³⁸⁹ Public indignation at 'migrant crime' has been exacerbated by alternative information sites like Politically Incorrect, which provide rolling coverage of crimes committed by perpetrators from a migrant background. Such incidents also became the catalyst for localised mobilisations. For example, in Kandel in December 2017, protests and counter-protests followed the murder of a 15-year-old girl by her ex-boyfriend, an Afghan national who had moved to Germany as a refugee. An organisation called 'Kandel is Everywhere' was founded on the back of this incident.³⁹⁰ Representatives from the organisation

would subsequently attend the Chemnitz protests. In May 2018 in Wiesbaden, a young woman was murdered by an Iraqi asylum seeker who had his asylum claim turned down but had stayed in Germany using false papers.³⁹¹ Photographs of both victims, among many others of the alleged victims of crime perpetrated by people with migrant backgrounds, were carried on banners during marches in Chemnitz.

Anti-migrant activity has been particularly concentrated in Saxony. Some of this predates the 2015 'migration crisis', including the founding of *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Pegida)³⁹² by Lutz Bachmann, in 2014, in the state capital, Dresden.³⁹³ The anti-Muslim street organisation spawned imitations across Germany, and internationally,³⁹⁴ but by far its most successful branches were in Dresden and in neighbouring Leipzig, with Legida.³⁹⁵ A local branch, Cegida, was set up in Chemnitz at the same time but failed to achieve the same level of success.³⁹⁶ One interviewee indicated that this likely reflected the fact that 'in Chemnitz it simply attracted neo-Nazis',³⁹⁷ rather than the broader mix of people that enabled it to gain momentum and prominence in Dresden. Around 2016-2017, Cegida split into *Heimat und Tradition Chemnitz Erzgebirge* and *Pegida Chemnitz Westsachsen*.

386 See Miller-Idriss and Köhler at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/united-german-extreme-right/> (Accessed on 07/03/21)

387 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35231046> (Accessed 14/12/20)

388 *Einzelfall* translates as 'individual cases', and is used ironically to mock what is seen as liberal acquiescence and silence. For *Einzelfall* Map see <https://www.dw.com/en/the-growing-problem-of-agitation-against-refugees-online/a-37823274> (Accessed on 14/12/20)

389 120 decibels is the frequency of a rape alarm. For 120 decibels see <https://www.mediamatters.org/breitbart-news/far-right-activists-and-alt-right-trolls-are-using-metoo-movement-bolster-their> (Accessed on 14/12/20)

390 For a good discussion of the use of gender in anti-migrant narratives and Kandel is everywhere see Berg (2019). For the organisation see <https://kandel-ist-ueberall.de/> (Accessed on 14/01/2021)

391 The murder of Susanne Feldmann caused a representative of the AfD to hold a minute's silence in the Bundestag and was mentioned in the Interior Minister's public disagreement with Angela Merkel. See <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/28/how-a-teens-death-has-become-a-political-weapon> (Accessed on 21/02/21)

392 Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident

393 Pegida had a precedent in the Lichteläufe campaign in 2013 against asylum accommodation in the small Saxon town of Schneeberg.

394 For a regional breakdown of anti-migrant violence see Benček and Strasheim (2016).

395 At its peak in February 2015, Pegida held rallies attended by 25,000 people, these have continued on a fortnightly basis still attracting regular attendances of 5,000 people in 2019. At the time of writing, monthly Pegida demonstrations continue to be held virtually, albeit on a much smaller scale. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-30777841> and

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/pegida-in-dresden-demonstrieren-tausende-gegen-auslaenderfeindliche-bewegung-a-1292451.html> (Accessed on 03/03/2021)

396 Cegida achieved its peak of support in marches in February 2015 when 400 people attended marches. By 2017, when Cegida split, attendance had fallen to 50 people. Hans-Thomas Tillschnieder from the AfD and Lutz Bachmann and Tajanna Festerling from Pegida were regular guests. See <http://wachsam-in-chemnitz.de/rechte-strukturen-in-chemnitz-asylfeindliche-gruppen/cegidat/> (Accessed on 14/02/21).

397 Chemnitz 6: Interview with an academic.

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In 2015, in Freital, near Dresden, there was a series of protests at a refugee centre that culminated in a sustained bombing campaign by what became known as the Freital Group, whose members were put on trial in 2017.³⁹⁸ Over the summer of 2015, demonstrations were also held against the opening of an asylum reception centre in Einsiedel,³⁹⁹ a Chemnitz suburb. These demonstrations continued into the autumn and winter and included a blockade of the reception centre in January 2016 to stop the arrival of asylum seekers. In January 2016, the ‘alternative district’ of Connewitz in Leipzig was the target of a planned attack by extreme right activists and hooligans after a Legida rally: 211 arrests were made. Several of the activists who were later convicted were from Chemnitz. At Bautzen, a newly set up asylum centre was burnt down in February 2016, and then in August that year extreme right-wing activists fought with asylum seekers in the City Square.⁴⁰⁰ On May Day 2016, the overtly neo-Nazi organisation *Der Dritte Weg*⁴⁰¹ marched in the Saxon town of Plauen and were involved in serious clashes with counter protesters.⁴⁰²

To explain support for the extreme or radical right in the East, several of our interviewees stated that some East Germans feel that they are perceived as second-class citizens and the losers of reunification compared to their compatriots in the West. Others have pushed back against the tendency to stereotype support for the extreme and radical right as a peculiarly East German problem, pointing out the role of political entrepreneurs from the Federal State in establishing extreme right-wing structures by moving to the East, and the existence of similar structures in the West, such as in

Dortmund and Duisburg.⁴⁰³ Nevertheless, in Saxony, it is noteworthy that the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD), an ultranationalist party that attempted to nominate Rudolf Hess for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007, achieved electoral successes in Saxony’s state elections in 2004 and 2009, albeit they did not achieve the threshold for representation in 2014.⁴⁰⁴ The radical right party, *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), has also enjoyed success in Saxony, winning 9.7% of the vote in the 2014 State Election, rising to 27% in 2019, and in the 2017 German Federal Election, the AfD gained 27.5% of the vote in Saxony, the highest share of the vote that they achieved in any state.

Some observers have argued that part of the reason extreme right structures have become embedded in Saxony is the tendency for state political elites to ‘turn a blind eye to the right’⁴⁰⁵ – indeed, in the past prominent public figures in Saxony have challenged the view that extreme right and anti-migrant politics have been problematic in the state.⁴⁰⁶ Another explanation why Saxony seems to be a focus of such activism may lie in its historic and political context.⁴⁰⁷ Several towns and cities in Saxony were instrumental in the protests that started the peaceful revolution contributing to an independence of mind and regional pride among Saxons, characterised by opposition to Federal Government in Berlin, which has often been

403 Dortmund in Dortmund became known as the Nazi-Kiez due to the strength of local extreme right-wing groups. In 2015, a special commission was set up by the police to address extreme right-wing structures. Initiatives by the city to counter extreme right activism appear to have paid off as several activists have now moved to Chemnitz. See [here](#) and [here](#). (Accessed on 19/04/21). On support for radical right in Duisburg, see <https://www.dw.com/en/forgotten-duisburg-voters-turn-to-germanys-far-right-afd/a-40679900> (Accessed on 19/04/21)

404 In the 2004 state elections, the NPD entered Saxony’s state parliament with 9.2% of the vote. This declined to 5.6% in 2009, and 4.2% in 2014.

405 The phrase ‘turning a blind eye to the right’ was widely used by the media to describe police and intelligence failures over the 13-year campaign by the National Socialist Underground. For example see <https://www.dw.com/en/a-blind-eye-turned-to-right-wing-terror/a-15532790> (Accessed on 15/02/21)

406 In 2000, State Premier Kurt Biedenkopf stated that Saxonians were ‘shown themselves to be completely immune against extreme rightist temptations.’ This sentiment was repeated by his predecessor, Stanislaw Tillich, who said in 2011, ‘Saxony does not have a significant problem with right-wing extremism’. See <https://www.zeit.de/feature/sachsen-rechtsextremismus-mpd-pegida-spaltung-einheitsfeier> (Accessed 17/03/21)

407 For discussion of Saxon regional identity and appeasement towards the right, see Virchow (2016) and Weisskircher (2020).

398 See <https://www.dw.com/en/freital-group-members-found-guilty-of-terror-related-crimes/a-42852954> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-39197655> (Accessed on 21/02/21)

399 The Einsiedel reception centre was the only one in Saxony at that time.

400 See <https://www.dw.com/en/more-police-deployed-to-bautzen-after-riots/a-19556044> (Accessed on 14/02/21)

401 For description of *Der Dritte Weg* (The Third Way) see this report: https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/Publikationen/DE/Rechtsextremismus_Rechtsextreme_Kleinparteien.html (Accessed on 17/03/21)

402 See <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/plauen-verletzte-bei-demonstration-von-rechten-und-linken-a-1090267.html> (Accessed on 15/12/20)

worked upon by extreme right formations.⁴⁰⁸ Local anti-migrant activists have exploited this suspicion of the Federal Government by framing the decision to allow asylum seekers into the country in 2015 as yet another unwelcome imposition on by the Federal Government on the sovereignty of a region that prides itself as distinct to or even in opposition to Berlin. Bordering the Czech Republic, indifference to the Federal Government is exacerbated by the tendency of some Saxonians also look as much to the Slavic world as the West, and find common cause in a pan-Slavic nationalism.⁴⁰⁹

In terms of Chemnitz itself, the city is Saxony's third largest city, with a population of 246,334, and is about an hour's drive from Leipzig and Dresden. The city, sited in the Ore mining region, became an industrial centre in the 19th century and became known as the 'Saxon Manchester'. As with Dresden, it suffered extensive bombing in the Second World War. After the war, the city was rebuilt and renamed Karl-Marx Stadt, with a large bust of Marx mounted in the city centre. The Marx monument would become the rallying point for the 2018 anti-migrant demonstrations. While not as badly effected by industrial decline as many East German cities,⁴¹⁰ the city has experienced 20% population decline since reunification, with a significantly ageing population.⁴¹¹ The tendency for young people to leave the city, and consequent lack of youth provision and services was cited by interviewees as one factor in both the attraction of extreme right subcultures to young people in the city and weak civil society organisations to oppose it. The city is also less diverse than many other German cities, with a relatively

small foreign-born population share of just 8%,⁴¹² some of which results from asylum dispersal involving Iraqi, Syrian, East African and Afghan refugees. Despite the city's relatively low ethnic diversity, migration has been linked by residents and anti-migrant activists to concerns over public safety, and in particular concerns over increased crime in the city centre, which was the site of the stabbing of Daniel Hillig.⁴¹³

While Cegida did not achieve similar levels of mobilisation in Chemnitz as Pegida did in Dresden, there is evidence of strong extreme right structures in the city. Indeed, it is possible that the strength of these structures made it difficult for a more 'moderate' organisation, in the style of Pegida, to take root.⁴¹⁴ Most interviewees described dense and interlinked networks of extreme right organisations, neo-Nazi groups, cultural and comradeship groups that dated back to the early 1990s. As one respondent said:

So, we have actually had since the reunification, the 90s, a very active extreme right scene that was never away for all the years and was never inactive. So, we speak here of structures that were present in the 90s, from German variants of Blood and Honour, the right terrorist network, to connections to National Socialist Underground (NSU).⁴¹⁵

408 For a good overview of the Saxon 'character' see <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-to-understand-saxony-look-at-its-history/a-45312184> (Accessed on 15/12/20).

409 It is no accident that Martin Kohlmann, the leader of Pro Chemnitz, founded a cultural club for Russian-Germans to promote friendship between Germany and Russia. See <https://www.swr.de/report/der-fluechtlingsanwalt-und-die-nazis-welche-rolle-spielt-der-drahtzieher-der-chemnitzer-demos/-/id=233454/did=22334330/mid=233454/u3p61h/index.html> (Accessed on 15/12/20)

410 <https://www.chemnitz.de/chemnitz/de/unsere-stadt/stadtportrait/zahlen-und-fakten/bevoelkerung.html> (Accessed on 14/01/21)

411 28.5% of the population in Chemnitz is 65 and over, this the highest reported share in Europe (Ageing Europe, Statistical Books, Eurostat, 2019).

412 The national share of the German population with a migrant background is 26%. See https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2020/07/PE20_279_12511.html (Accessed on 14/01/21)

413 A communal survey from 2018 show that almost every second Chemnitz citizens think that security threats and criminality are among the biggest problems in the city; 43% of the respondents neither feel secure during daylight nor at night: https://www.chemnitz.de/chemnitz/media/aktuell/publikationen/downloads/buergerumfrage_abschlussbericht.pdf. Also, news from 2017 show that the city centre as an alleged focal point for crime has been a hot topic for a while: <https://www.blick.de/chemnitz/innenstadt-ist-kriminalit-tsschwerpunkt-artikel9883471>, <https://www.radiolausitz.de/beitrag/polizeigrosskontrolle-gegen-kriminalitaet-in-der-chemnitzer-innenstadt-447533/> and <https://www.freiepresse.de/kriminalit-t-in-der-stadt-wird-es-wirklich-immer-schlimmer-artikel10324856>. See also: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-riots-in-chemnitz-and-their-aftermath-the-return-of-the-ugly-german-a-1225897.html> (Accessed on 03/03/21)

414 Busher, Harris and Macklin (2019a) make a similar point about the relative failure of local mobilisation beyond a small cohort of activists for the EDL in Blackburn with Darwen.

415 Chemnitz 10: Interview with two NGO workers, working on issues of youth and social inclusion.

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NSU's connections to Chemnitz were cited by interviewees as evidence of just how developed these networks had become by the end of the 1990s. The NSU were originally from Jena, in the neighbouring state of Thuringia, but hid undetected in Chemnitz between January 1998 and June 2000; and then in the neighbouring Saxonian city of Zwickau from 2000 until the 2011 suicides of Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos, and arrest of Beate Zschäpe.⁴¹⁶ As one interviewee observed, it is unlikely that they would have been unable to do so unless they 'had thick structures in Chemnitz'.⁴¹⁷ One of the groups linked to the NSU was *Nationale Sozialisten Chemnitz*, a Neo-Nazi group whose members had participated in organised attacks against migrants, including a revenge attack against a migrant who had been involved in a stabbing, and were proscribed in 2014.⁴¹⁸ The membership of NSC overlapped with football hooligan groups, such as the NS-Boys (see below) and cultural associations. Furthermore, Maik Arnold, a leading activist in the NSC played a prominent role in the Chemnitz demonstrations, including stewarding for Pro Chemnitz.⁴¹⁹

While there is undoubtedly widespread reticence about and opposition to the extreme and radical right in the city, there is also considerable evidence of the embeddedness of the scene in the city. There are a number of clothing stores selling neo-Nazi brands in Chemnitz, and in 2012, Thor Steinar,⁴²⁰ a clothing brand favoured by extreme right activists, opened a shop in Chemnitz called 'Brevik'. They claimed that

this was a reference to a Norwegian town of the same name, but it seems implausible that the similarity to the name, Anders Breivik, the Norwegian mass killer, was accidental. PC records, one of the leading neo-Nazi music labels and distributors, is based in Chemnitz, and its founder is linked to the NSC and NSU. Hooligan groups associated with the local football club, Chemnitzer FC, in the German 3rd division,⁴²¹ are linked to the extreme right scene, including HooNaRa (Hooligans, Nazis and Racists), which was founded by local activist Thomas Haller. Although HooNaRa officially disbanded in 2008, Haller stated at the time that 'technically the group does not exist but could be there in half an hour if necessary'.⁴²² Haller also founded a security firm that provided stewards for White Power music gigs and the city festival at which Daniel Hillig, was stabbed.⁴²³ HooNaRa were succeeded by other football hooligan groups, such as The NS-Boys⁴²⁴ and *Kaotic Chemnitz*, the latter of which made the call to action on Facebook after the fatal stabbing of Daniel Hillig that led to the first outbreak of public disorder (see below). *Kaotic Chemnitz* has close links to other hooligan groups involved in anti-migrant protests and violence elsewhere in Germany, such as *Inferno Cottbus* in the state of Brandenburg,⁴²⁵ and *Die Rechte*, a neo-Nazi group based in Dortmund-Dorstfeld.⁴²⁶

416 The NSU was an extreme right wing terrorist group which committed 10 murders of migrants over as many years. After a bungled police investigation that attributed the murders to organised crime groups, the NSU was finally apprehended in 2011. Two members of the cell, Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt, committed suicide while the 3rd. Beate Zschäpe, was arrested. In 2018, she was sentenced to life imprisonment.

417 Chemnitz 9: Interview with an NGO worker, working on issues of democracy and citizenship.

418 See <http://wachsam-in-chemnitz.de/rechte-strukturen-in-chemnitz/chemnitzer-kameradschaften/die-nationalen-sozialisten-chemnitz/> (Accessed on 12/04/21)

419 Members of NSC and Pro Chemnitz also belonged to a German Folk Dance group celebrating traditional German culture in Chemnitz.

420 See <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/neo-nazi-fashion-thor-steinar-and-the-changing-look-of-the-german-far-right-a-587746.html> (Accessed 15/11/20)

421 The depth of the relationship is shown when the club held a funeral tribute to Thomas Haller on his death in 2019. The team's captain, Daniel Frahn, later had to resign after holding up a T-shirt expressing support for Haller. See <https://www.dw.com/en/daniel-frahn-chemnitzer-fc-and-the-battle-with-their-right-wing-fans/a-50179270> (Accessed on 14/01/2021)

422 See https://www.der-rechte-rand.de/wp-content/uploads/drr_149.pdf (Accessed on 14/01/2021)

423 NS officially stands for New Society, but it is widely believed that this refers to National Socialist. See <https://www.dw.com/en/from-the-stands-to-the-streets-what-does-chemnitz-violence-have-to-do-with-football/a-45258812> (Accessed on 21/02/21)

424 The NS refers to the New Society Boys although locally this is understood to refer to the National Socialist Boys. See <https://www.dw.com/en/from-the-stands-to-the-streets-what-does-chemnitz-violence-have-to-do-with-football/a-45258812> (Accessed on 07/03/21). The NS Boys was under observation by the Office of the Protection of the Constitution in 2012 and disbanded in 2019.

425 The city of Cottbus was also the site of significant anti-migrant protests in Jan/Feb 2018, there were a series of demonstrations organised under the banner of Zukunft Heimat (Future Homeland) after violent clashes between locals and refugees. See <https://www.ft.com/content/b97b0fc2-0753-11e8-9650-9c0ad2d7c5b5> (Accessed on 15/12/20). For information on Inferno Cottbus see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/10/german-police-raid-30-premises-linked-to-far-right-extremists> (Accessed on 15/11/20)

426 Demonstrating the links between Dortmund and Chemnitz, Michael Brück, leading activist of Die Rechte has moved to Chemnitz. For

Members of both groups participated in the Chemnitz protests.

Overlapping with the hooligan scene, local Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) clubs and promoters also form part of extreme right political networks. The Chemnitz MMA club, *Tiwas*,⁴²⁷ is networked to other extreme right fight clubs such as *Der Kampf der Nibelungen* (KdN),⁴²⁸ and Imperium Fight Team (from Leipzig), who organise tournaments in Saxony. These including an annual tournament at the *Schild und Schwert* festival in Ostritz, held on Hitler's birthday.⁴²⁹ Members of both clubs were present at the protests in Chemnitz. An interviewee described the marriage of politics and training for conflict,

In the Chemnitz area there is the Tiwas, it's an extreme right Nazi martial arts event... And, as I said, if you see the development of extreme right violence in football and hooliganism and also Chemnitz, then the ideology is important, but also the training in martial arts in the region Chemnitz.⁴³⁰

These interconnected extreme right, MMA and hooligan networks also reach beyond the extreme right milieu through mainstream businesses, such as demolition, building work, real estate, security and even sponsorship of special needs schools and of team sports. As Robert Claus,⁴³¹ an expert on the relationship between football violence and the extreme right, has commented, the extreme right has sought to

embed and normalise anti-democratic ideologies in 'all domains of life' of a 'modern person'.⁴³²

Extreme and radical right parties have also enjoyed relative success in Chemnitz within the electoral arena. Until the municipal elections in 2019, Chemnitz had 1 NPD councillor, Katrin Köhler. In the 2017 German Federal Election, the AfD gained 24.3% of the vote in the city. Pro Chemnitz, a radical right citizens' association whose banner states 'Freedom, Homeland, Future', had been involved in the campaign against the asylum reception centre in Einsiedel, and had organised 'citizen's patrols' to counter 'migrant crime',⁴³³ had 3 city councillors at the time of the 2018 demonstrations.⁴³⁴ The party is led by Martin Kohlmann, a former member of the Republicans and part of the defence team for the Freital Group (see above). Its Parliamentary Leader, Robert Andres, has been linked to NSC and the MMA club *Tiwas*.⁴³⁵ Pro Chemnitz and Kohlmann would go on to play a formative, if not leading role in the protests in the city.

5.3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CASE

Phase 1. 26 August 2018: *The stabbing of Daniel Hillig and the 'spontaneous' protest*

On Sunday **26 August 2018**, at approximately 3.00am, at the annual city festival in Chemnitz (which had been the site of criminal incidents in previous years, fuelling the narrative of anti-migrant activists that the city centre is 'unsafe'), a young German-Cuban man, Daniel Hillig and one other man, were stabbed following an altercation with a group of men in the city centre. Later in the morning Daniel Hillig died. It was misreported across social media, and repeated by mainstream news outlets *Tag24* and *Bild*, that the

an overview of Die Rechte, see <https://www.dw.com/en/die-rechte-neo-nazis-demand-attention-in-dortmund/a-18673359> (Accessed on 10/03/21).

427 *Tiwas* takes its name from the rune for the Norse God of war, Tyr. *Tiwas* organised an annual tournament in the Ore Mountains in June 2018, 'The Fight of the Free Men'.

428 Translated as the fight of the Nibelungen. Nibelungen is a reference to the German medieval epic poem the *Nibelungenleid* which was reworked by Richard Wagner in his ring cycle.

429 For the involvement of KdN and links to *Tiwas*, see <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2019/10/1/20891729/dangerous-evolution-neo-nazi-fight-club-germany-far-right-mma-politics-feature> (Accessed on 21/02/21)

430 Chemnitz 7: Interview with an independent researcher working on community tensions, discrimination and violence.

431 Online-livestreamed information event organised by *Vollkontakt* in Berlin, 6 October 2020. See also Claus (2020).

432 See also Miller-Idriss (2020).

433 See <https://www.facebook.com/prochemnitz/posts/989708974404759/> (Accessed on 14/01/21)

434 In the 2019 municipal elections this has risen to 5 with 7.9%, the AfD also increased their vote share to 17.9% and 11 seats, only behind the CDU with 20%.

435 See <http://wachsam-in-chemnitz.de/rechte-strukturen-in-chemnitz/rechte-parteien/pro-chemnitz/> (Accessed on 10/03/21)

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victim had been attacked after attempting to defend a young woman from sexual harassment. Other false rumours were spread on extreme right Telegram channels and social media feeds, including that the victim had been stabbed over 25 times and that more people had been injured. Two men with migrant backgrounds were later arrested.

At 8.00am, a call to action was posted on Facebook by the football hooligan group, *Kaotic Chemnitz*, asking all ‘Chemnitz fans and sympathisers’ to gather at the Karl Marx monument at 16.30. The post stated ‘Our City, Our Rules’ and asked for people to ‘show together who has the say in our city’. The post was shared by several Facebook groups including *Heimat und Tradition Chemnitz Erzgebirge*, a spin-off from Cegida.

Over the afternoon of 26 August, the call to action was shared across extreme right Telegram channels by people such as the ex-leader of Blood and Honour Germany, Sven Liebich, who said, ‘the police is neither willing or capable to protect our women and children. In the future we will have to take it into our own hands.’ It was also shared by several other extreme right influencers, such as Chris Arres, the influential extreme right rapper associated with the Identitarians, and on the sites of groups such as *Kandel Kanal*, and *Wir Für Deutschland*.

The social media analysis of Chemnitz related hashtags such as *#chemnitz #wirsindmehr #prochemnitz* shows that there was a steep rise on 26 and 27 August, which underlines the spontaneous nature of the demonstrations in reaction to the killing of the Daniel Hillig.

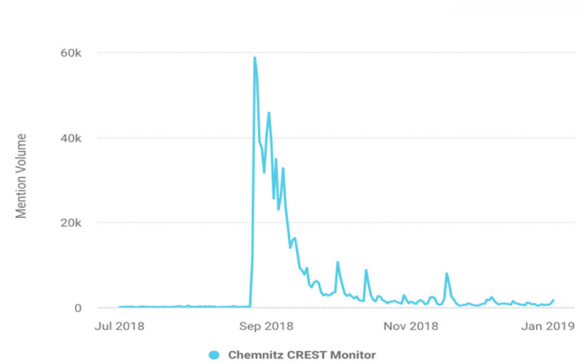


Figure 5.1: Evolution of number of tweets with keywords related to the Chemnitz case

Many users who expressed support alluded to visions of broader societal change, with posts such as ‘The resistance is taking shape’ and linked their response to an assortment of tropes and conspiracy theories central to mobilisation efforts within the extreme right, such as ‘Citizens now take different measures to show their anger. How long will this still go well in #Germanistan? #GreatReplacement #murder #migrants #Islam #Africans #Germany #Merkel #EU.’

As events unfolded, social media, and alternative information sites, such as the widely subscribed Politically Incorrect News,⁴³⁶ were used to reinforce anti-migrant narratives and spread information about the incident, much of it misleading, far more quickly and interactively than the mainstream media.⁴³⁷ As one interviewee observed,

I think one very important part also was that during the first two days the right wing was dominating YouTube in terms of the narrative on Chemnitz. So there was nearly no mainstream media video that nearly got the views right wing videos got, and they

436 Politically Incorrect News is the most influential German language anti-Muslim website. Its initial post on Chemnitz had over 450,000 views within 24 hours. See <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-pi-news/> (Accessed on 10/03/21)

437 For a good, but in parts technical discussion of the role of YouTube in spreading misinformation about Chemnitz see video by Ray Serrato at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFH1uWwerM4> (Accessed on 10/03/21)

actually produced more than 100 videos during the first two or three days.⁴³⁸

At 15.00, the local AfD branch held a small silent vigil at the site of the attack, attended by around 100 people. The vigil was announced on Facebook, accompanied by a photo of a bloodstained pavement.⁴³⁹ According to AfD-politician Carsten Hütter, the AfD event was consciously organised and held earlier so that its attendees do not mix with the ‘hooligans’.⁴⁴⁰ The police report states that the vigil passed without incident and people had dispersed by 16.00.⁴⁴¹

Then at 16.30, 800 to 1000 people gathered by the Karl Marx monument, roughly 50m from the site of the fatal stabbing. In contrast to the vigil, the crowd for this event included contingents of football hooligans, neo-Nazis and mixed martial arts enthusiasts, some wearing clothing with political or hooligan slogans. Some came prepared with quartz sand lined gloves⁴⁴² and fireworks. A witness described the crowd comprising

a huge block of, the way they are kind of called in Germany, sport Nazis: well-trained right-wing activists who try to get behind the police lines and attack counter protestors.⁴⁴³

Initially, there were about 50 police officers on duty. They attempted to prevent the demonstrators leaving the square around the Karl Marx monument,⁴⁴⁴ but their attempts were rebuffed as demonstrators pushed through the sparse police lines. The crowd of protestors moved out of the square into downtown Chemnitz

where, outside the Rewe supermarket, at least one man, who was from Afghanistan, was beaten to the ground and kicked in the face. The march continued to the central bus station with chants of ‘*Wir sind das Volk*’ (We are the people, a pre-reunification slogan) and ‘*Das ist unsere Stadt*’ (This is our city); the chant ‘*Für jeden toten Deutschen einen toten Ausländer*’ (for every dead German, a dead foreigner) was also heard. Video footage shows marauding crowds walking through the city bus station. An interviewee described how a friend had encountered and tried to escape the crowd,

he ran with his family and saw there were refugees inside [the bus] and these... hooligans wanted to overturn the bus. And the police came to stand in front of this bus, and in the bus, everyone was shouting, now they should calm down and hide below the windows, so that nobody sees their face... and it worked.⁴⁴⁵

As demonstrators left the bus station, groups of activists continued periodically to run towards people who they deemed to have the appearance of being ‘foreign-born’. Video footage show protestors abusing people eating at snack bars. An interviewee who was in the city described the atmosphere of the march,

it was no normality anymore, but all these extreme right people running through the city and if there was any citizen who looked like a migrant, they cursed them, mobbed them, partly even actually assaulted them, spat on them, and offended them the worst ways.⁴⁴⁶

At *Johannisplatz*, the police prevented the marchers from returning to the site of the stabbing, using teargas and batons, with one protestor beaten to the ground. Some protestors retaliated by throwing bottles at the police. The protestors then retreated but continued

438 Chemnitz 2: Interview with a journalist and eyewitness

439 See <https://www.facebook.com/AfD.Chemnitz/>

[photos/a.839960939354717/2321674171183379](https://www.facebook.com/photos/a.839960939354717/2321674171183379) (Accessed on 21/02/21)

440 <https://www.zeit.de/2018/36/rechtsextreme-gewalt-chemnitz-regierung-mob-schock/seite-3> (Accessed on 10/02/21)

441 The official police statements on the protests have been deleted from the *Polizei Saschen* website. The research team have archives of the English translations from when they were publicly available. These can be seen on <https://www.zeit.de/2018/36/rechtsextreme-gewalt-chemnitz-regierung-mob-schock/seite-3>

442 These are tactical gloves that are used in military or security applications.

443 Chemnitz 2: Interview with a journalist and eyewitness

444 See <https://www.belltower.news/rassistischer-mob-in-chemnitz-fuer-jeden-toten-deutschen-einen-toten-auslaender-49118/> (Accessed on 21/02/21)

445 Chemnitz 8: Interview with a council worker.

446 Chemnitz 12: interview with an NGO worker, working on political and social education for young people and adults.

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to circle back to the Karl Marx monument using an alternative route. Shortly before coming back on the *Brückenstrasse*, a widely disputed incident described as ‘*Hetzjagd*’ (hunting foreigners) occurred.⁴⁴⁷

Video footage shows three to four men abusing a man, later identified as Afghan, and then chasing him across the road shouting ‘*Kanaken*’⁴⁴⁸ and ‘you are not welcome’. People sympathetic to the protests sought to discredit the authenticity of the footage, arguing that the publisher, ‘*Antifa Zeckenbiss*’, an anti-fascist group, was likely to be biased and had doctored the footage.⁴⁴⁹ By late evening, some demonstrators returned to the Karl Marx monument, then dispersed. Four arrests were made for assault and resisting arrest. There were further scuffles as demonstrators dispersed.

That evening, it is striking that prominent AfD figures not only did not condemn but appeared to legitimise the violence that had taken place, constructing it as at the very least understandable, and a case of self-defence. Markus Frohnmayer, the AfD Member of the *Bundestag* for Baden-Württemberg, tweeted for example that ‘if the state could not protect against ‘lethal knife migration’ then violence was a justifiable response and a case of self-defence’, and Maximilian Krahn, a Dresden-based lawyer for the AfD, tweeted that the killing of Daniel Hillig had been ‘the drop that overflowed the barrel’.

Phase 2. 27 August – 31 August 2018: *Pro Chemnitz demonstration and collaboration between AfD and PEGIDA*

447 While claims about whether some form of ‘hunting’ of migrants actually took place were disputed, references to ‘hunting’ were used between activists on messaging apps before being picked up in the mainstream media.

448 *Kanaken* or *Kanacken* is a racial slur used to describe people with Turkish backgrounds. It can also be used self-referentially by Turkish heritage people.

449 Chemnitz 18: Interview with a senior anti-minority activist in a nationally prominent organisation.

The next day, Pro Chemnitz registered a march for the Monday evening, under the banner ‘Safety for Chemnitz’. The protest was promoted on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube by prominent actors across the alternative digital ecosystem. Some, such as the influential extreme right rapper, Chris Ares, who in a YouTube video on 27 August repeated claims that Daniel Hillig was stabbed while defending women from sexual harassment, enthused about the planned event and linked it to their own revolutionary visions, ‘Germany is waking up – every day a little bit more’. One of his many uploads on YouTube, called ‘Migrant Murder Chemnitz’, was in #1 YouTube trends for fourteen hours on the **27 August** with 490,000 views.⁴⁵⁰

The march eventually attracted approximately 6,000–8,000 demonstrators from across the anti-migrant spectrum, including representatives from the AfD, Pegida, Pro Chemnitz, right wing cultural groups and extreme right activists. The march was opposed by a 1,500 strong coalition of anti-racist activists and civil society organisations brought together by *Die Linke*.⁴⁵¹ The numbers mobilised for the ‘Safety for Chemnitz’ demonstration far exceeded police expectations, which might go some way to explaining why they had only 591 officers on duty.

Counter demonstrators started to rally across the *Brückenstraße* at 15.00, about 30m from the proposed anti-minority protest, with some on an elevated walkway and others on the edge of a park. For the first two hours, they outnumbered the anti-migrant demonstrators. At around 17.00, however, protestors from outside Chemnitz – from Berlin, Brandenburg, Thuringia, Lower Saxony and North Rhine Westphalia⁴⁵² – arrived at the train station and then

450 Testament to the attraction on how events can be manipulated both to spread disinformation and increase the reach of influencers, such as Ares, is the fact that he increased his number of followers on YouTube by 11,000 over four days. This is as many as he previously amassed over 21 months. See <https://www.belltower.news/online-mobilisierung-fuer-chemnitz-bewegtbild-hetze-sorgt-fuer-reichweite-49176/> (Accessed on 19/04/21)

451 https://twitter.com/_C_Nazifrei/status/1034082917272748033 (Accessed on 14/01/21)

452 Police Media information: 421/2018. Responsible: Andrzej Rydzik. As of: 28.08.2018, 12:45

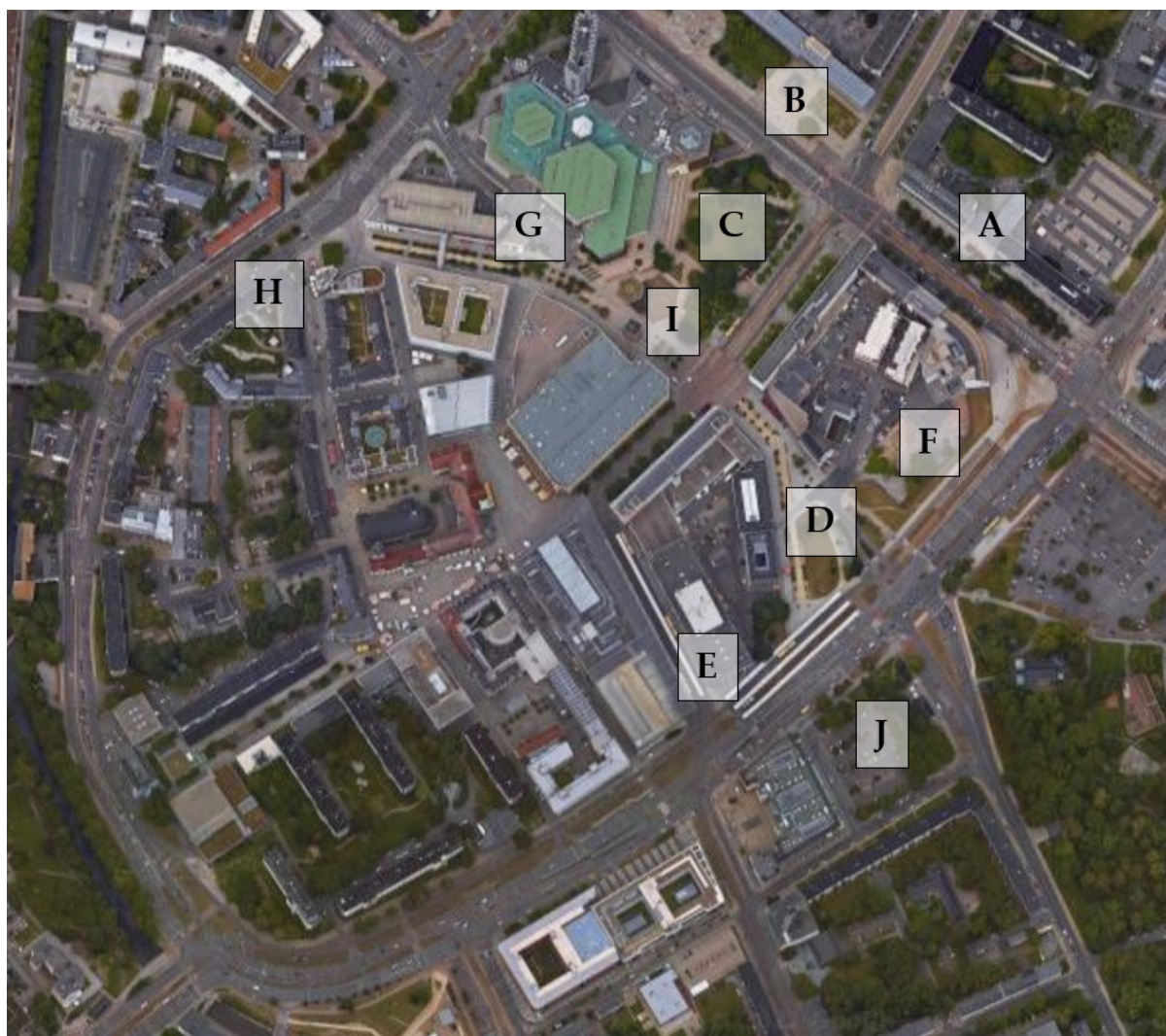


Fig 5.2 Aerial view of Central Chemnitz district

Key

- A – Site of fatal stabbing of Daniel Hillig, now a memorial*
- B – Karl Marx monument, rally point for anti-minority demonstrations*
- C – Stadthallenpark, rally point for counter demonstrations*
- D – Johannisplatz, site of scuffles between anti-minority demonstrators and police on 26 August*
- E – Central Bus Station where anti-minority demonstrators searched for people who looked foreign on 26 August*
- F – Site where video of ‘Hetzjagd’ was filmed on 26 August*
- G – REWE supermarket, outside which an Afghan man was assaulted on 27 August*
- H – AfD regional offices, where the ‘mourning march’ assembled on 1 September*
- I – Red Tower (Roter Turm), site of counter demonstration kettle on 1 September*
- J – Site of anti-fascist blockade on the 1 September.*

walked to the Karl Marx monument where Chemnitz-based demonstrators had started to gather, thereby swelling the numbers of the ‘Safety for Chemnitz’ demonstration well beyond those of the counter demonstration. Counter protestors interviewed for this

project described how their initial relief at the number of counter protestors gradually gave way to concern as the numbers of anti-migrant protestors increased.⁴⁵³

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Such concerns were intensified by the fact that those joining the event would have seen the media coverage of the events the previous day and would therefore be aware of the associations of the demonstration with hooligan and neo-Nazi groups:

even after such a violent Sunday that was also represented in the media, so already to say, ‘something extreme right’ within quotation marks, it was for me absolutely astonishing that there are so many there who say anyway: and now I’m going there on Monday.⁴⁵⁴

It is important to note that in contrast to the previous day, the organisers of the anti-migrant demonstration did try to exert some discipline on protestors. For example, Arthur Osterle from Pro Chemnitz asked protestors, ‘For my sake, tie your right arm, we are here today as a people and not as a political mind’,⁴⁵⁵ referring to the Nazi salute which is illegal in Germany. Stewards from Pro Chemnitz also pushed back some protestors as they turned their attention towards counter protestors, shouting and making beckoning gestures as to encourage physical confrontation.

Several speeches were made, including one by Martin Kohlmann, the leader of Pro Chemnitz, in which he referred to migrants as ‘beasts’ and ‘foxes’ that could not be ‘integrated into a chicken coop’.⁴⁵⁶ Thomas Witte, who is classified as a right-wing extremist by the Saxon Office of the Protection of the Constitution, and a leader of the cultural organisation, *Heimattreue Niederdorf*, also spoke.⁴⁵⁷ As the speeches were made,

counter demonstrators tried to drown them out with chanting and music from the opposite side of the street, with a police line of vans and officers dividing the counter protestor and the protestors.⁴⁵⁸ At 18.15, one of the first flashpoints took place, as a counter demonstrator tore down a banner that had been draped over the Karl Marx monument, presumably by one of the anti-migrant activists, which read, ‘*Deutsch on frei wolln mer sei*’ (We want to be German and free).⁴⁵⁹ The individual was grabbed by anti-migrant protestors and handed over to police.

By 18.30, the atmosphere was described by journalists as ‘escalating’ and becoming more aggressive.⁴⁶⁰ Several hundred protestors, many of whom were drinking alcohol, moved to the fringes of the anti-migrant rally and turned their attention towards the counter protestors. They exchanged verbal abuse, including ‘lying press’, ‘tick pigs’⁴⁶¹, etc. They were joined by members of the neo-Nazi group, *Der Dritte Weg*, who stood facing the counter protest in a row, in uniform and with banners held aloft.

Over the next half hour, the mutual baiting between protestors and counter protestors carried on with an increasingly aggressive atmosphere. Chants of ‘Free, Social and National’ and ‘Foreigners out!’ could be heard. There is also clear video and photographic evidence of the open display of Nazi salutes, to which the police failed to respond. As several anti-minority protestors donned masks, the police tweeted that

Police Sports Club, see <https://www.tag24.de/nachrichten/chemnitz-rechtsextreme-gruppierung-als-sponsor-heimattreue-huepfburg-beim-polizeisportverein-1119596> (Accessed on 10/03/21).

458 They can be seen in this video: https://www.watson.de/videos/!174?utm_medium=social-user&utm_campaign=watson-site-web&utm_source=jwplayer&jwsourc=cl (Accessed on 19/02/2021)

459 The quote is by German folk singer and poet Augustus Gunther (1876-1937) from the Ore mountains. The use of Deutsch instead of Deutsch is a reference to the Bohemian/Alsace/Swiss minority in Germany. Although Gunther never joined the NSDAP, his folk songs have been adopted by Völkisch groups and football fans to indicate a particular Erzgebirge identity. See <https://www.vice.com/de/article/aexgdb/deutsch-un-frei-wolln-mer-seiwas-sollte-diese-choreo-der-aue-fans> (Accessed on 02/03/21)

460 See <https://www.watson.de/deutschland/liveticker/670540491-die-ereignisse-und-reaktionen-von-chemnitz-koennt-ih-er-im-live-ticker-nachverfolgen> (Accessed on 12/04/21)

461 Zeckenschwein (literally: tick pig) is a song by of a 2005 song by the banned neo-Nazi band Nordfront. The lyrics propagates the return of National Socialist order and militarism.

454 Chemnitz 9: Interview with an NGO worker, working on issues of democracy and citizenship.

455 https://www.reddit.com/r/AFD/comments/im1ry6/wie_gut_da%C3%9F_afdfunktion%C3%A4r_arthur_%C3%B6sterle_vor_ort/ (Accessed on 14.01.2021)

456 <https://taz.de/Ausschreitungen-in-Chemnitz/!5529389/> (Accessed on 14.01.2021)

457 Witte is a long-standing activist classified as a right-wing extremist by the Saxon Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Heimattreue Niederdorf is a cultural organisation based in Niederdorf in the Ore mountains, several members were stewards on the Pro Chemnitz marches. See https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2019/08/16/wie-die-cdu-wahlwerbung-mit-einem-rechtsextremisten-machte_28866 (Accessed on 10/03/21). Ironically in June 2019, the organisation found itself in the news for sponsoring and supplying a bouncy castle to Chemnitz

officers would be putting on riot helmets and appealed to protestors to remain peaceful.⁴⁶²

Despite those appeals, at about 19.30, a few hundred anti-migrant protestors became increasingly focused on the counter protest. Some of the men pushing to the front were dressed in black hoodies, sunglasses, and masks.⁴⁶³ Others wore clothes with slogans and symbols associated with neo-Nazi groups. A small group of protestors then forced their way through police lines in order to get to counter protestors, aggressively chanting ‘*Widerstand, Widerstand*’.⁴⁶⁴ Other activists rushed in behind them, shouting, showing upturned middle fingers at the counter protestors and gesturing for the counter protestors to come to meet them. As police officers tried to regain control of the situation, helped in their efforts by the event stewards, there was some scuffling. Fireworks and bottles started to be thrown between anti-migrant protestors and counter protestors, and video footage shows that journalists and police officers were also hit with bottles and manhandled. One eyewitness recalled this as a particular flashpoint,

the mood suddenly changed. From one minute to another, petards started to fly exactly to the spot our children were standing. Suddenly, a young woman shouted: ‘They’ve broken through!’ as she ran towards the middle of the square. The crowd suddenly got in motion, and panic arose ... The situation was very dangerous.⁴⁶⁵

The police managed to regain control of the situation, however. They pushed the anti-migrant protestors back across the street, deploying at least ten police vans and bringing up two water cannons. In some places, there was a double line of police vans separating protestors from counter protestors. Using teargas, the

police were also able to thwart attempts by some anti-migrant protestors to reach the counter protestors on the elevated walkway by coming around behind them through a shopping centre.

At 20.10, while chanting and gesticulating towards counter protestors continued, attempts to break through police lines tailed off as the march began and the large crowd of demonstrators moved off slowly along the demonstration route. This was not an end to the intimidation and violence, however. First, demonstrators milled around a house in the *Theaterstraße* shouting ‘get him out’, after they were abused by a counter demonstrator inside. Then, around 20.30 as it was becoming dark, the atmosphere again became more aggressive as protestors returned to the rallying point, where bottles were thrown, some protestors performed Nazi salutes and chanted ‘We are the fans – Adolf Hitler Hooligans’. Police tweeted that up to a hundred people were seen gathering stones and masking up in the *Stadthallplatz* close to where counter protestors had gathered to hear speeches.⁴⁶⁶ By 21.00, the majority of the anti-migrant demonstrators had returned to the Karl Marx monument where they sang the national anthem.⁴⁶⁷ The demonstration ended at 21.30, and media organisations publicly stated that they would stop reporting on the situation as they could not guarantee the safety of their journalists as they were being threatened, jostled and pushed.⁴⁶⁸

As the crowds dispersed, there are reports of sporadic violence persisting late into the evening. At least one anti-racist activist was beaten up after being ambushed by a group of men waiting in a side street. Police reported that about 200 anti-migrant protestors, armed with sticks and poles, also attacked small groups of

462 See tweet: <https://bit.ly/3FpkQ3L> (Accessed on 26/02/21)

463 The dress code of black hoodies, masks and dark glasses of the Autonomous Nationalists a Strasserite group who mimic the dress code of the anarchist/hard militant black bloc. See <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30608917.pdf> (Accessed on 07/03/21)

464 Resistance which is an allusion to protests in the ‘peaceful revolution’.

465 Chemnitz 13: Interview with two council workers.

466 See tweet: <https://bit.ly/3f6hKH9> (Accessed on 03/03/21)

While the police did not comment on whether it was protestors or counter protestors gathering stones, journalists report that it was anti-minority protestors.

467 The capacity of the police to control the demonstrators was limited, and some had already drifted off the demonstration route.

468 See <https://www.watson.de/deutschland/reportage/219038368-5-szenen-die-zeigen-wie-sich-der-krawall-abend-in-chemnitz-entwickelt-hat> and <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahidi.io/posts/22620> (Accessed on 07/03/21).

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counter-protesters as they left the demonstration.⁴⁶⁹ Later that night, a Jewish restaurant was attacked by a group of 20 masked men, some armed with steel pipes, throwing stones and bottles and injuring the owner with a rock. They shouted ‘Get out of Germany, you Jewish pig’.⁴⁷⁰ Over the course of the day, 43 arrests were made, and 18 people were injured.⁴⁷¹

In the immediate aftermath, prominent extreme right actors showed little sense of backtracking or distancing themselves from the violence. In fact, influencers such as Sven Liebich continued to incite hatred against minorities and his messages appeared to justify the violence that had taken place, alleging that Muslims and migrants wanted to slaughter all Germans. On 29 August he stated in a Telegram post,

They will never integrate themselves. If we always fail to act, they will kill the majority of us. That’s exactly what the Koran recommends to all believing Muslims. The fist fights against unbelievers are only the beginning. Why do you think most of them are carrying a knife with them?

He celebrated ‘The resistance’ as perhaps the one positive outcome of ‘all the blood spilled by refugees’ and accused left-wing actors of conspiring with the ‘lying press’ to ‘cover up migrant crimes’.

The response of mainstream political actors to the protests was mixed. Chancellor Angela Merkel unequivocally condemned the violence saying, ‘We have footage showing that there was targeted harassment, there was rioting, that there was hate on the street and that has no place under the rule of law’. The Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer, with whom she had previously quarrelled over migration policy, gave

a rather different message, however, focusing attention on the stabbing of Daniel Hillig, rather than the rioting and violence that had followed. Merkel’s statement was then directly contradicted by the head of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), Hans-Georg Maaßen, who, when interviewed by the tabloid, *Bild*, said he ‘shared the scepticism towards media reports of right-extremists chasing down foreigners in Chemnitz,’ attributing such claims to disinformation. The State Premier made a similarly ambiguous statement, saying that right wing extremism was the biggest problem facing society but denying that targeted violence had occurred and decrying the media for negative coverage of the city. Media coverage of the protests also came under criticism from the AfD, and the AfD Hochtaunus group⁴⁷² posted an ominous warning on their Facebook page (which they later took down) to journalists stating,

At the beginning of a revolution, state reporters still have the chance to turn away from the system and report the truth! In the case of revolutions known to us, at some point the broadcasting houses and press publishers were stormed and the employees dragged onto the street. The media representatives in this country should think about that, because when the mood finally changes, it will be too late!⁴⁷³

Maaßen’s claims, and similar claims by other observers and public figures, meant the debate about the alleged ‘hunting’ of migrants quickly came to focus on how much violence there was, rather than on the wider legitimacy of the protests.⁴⁷⁴ While some observers argued that the reports of violence were overstated, others wondered whether the police were in fact downplaying the violence in order to ward off accusations that they had significantly underestimated

469 From Saxony Police Press office public statements. These have now been taken down, but the authors have archived English translations, available on request. Also see tweet from journalist Johannes Grunert:

470 See <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nazi-thugs-step-up-antisemitic-violent-attacks-chemnitz-518hr150> (Accessed on 21/04/21).

471 From Saxony Police Press office public statements. These have now been taken down, but the authors have archived English translations, available on request.

472 Hochtaunus is a district in Hesse, Germany.

473 The post was reported in the Frankfurter Rundschau, see <https://www.fr.de/kultur/hochtaunus-facebook-offline-10964723.html> (Accessed on the 09/03/21). It was reportedly deleted the following day.

474 Chemnitz 5: Interview with an academic.

the likely size of the demonstrations and risk of public disorder.⁴⁷⁵

The following day, warrants issued for the 2 suspects in the stabbing incident were leaked online. The documents named the suspects and their personal details, including their migration backgrounds. They were shared widely, without redactions, by members of the AfD, Lutz Bachmann (founder of Pegida) and the WhatsApp group for Pro Chemnitz. An officer at Dresden penitentiary was later arrested for the leak.⁴⁷⁶

Another Pro Chemnitz rally was called on Facebook for 18.00 on **30 August**. This event was scheduled to be held outside the Chemnitz FC stadium where the State Premier, Michael Kretschmer, and the Chemnitz Mayor, Barbara Ludwig, were holding a pre-scheduled ‘Talk of Saxony’ event, where citizens had the opportunity to speak to the politicians. The Facebook post from Pro Chemnitz called for residents to tell the Government ‘that things cannot go on like this, 20,000 foreigners in Chemnitz are too much’.

There were however to be other important differences between this and previous rallies. First, anti-fascist and left-wing groups made a statement on Wednesday evening on Facebook announcing that they would not be opposing this Pro Chemnitz rally because Monday’s events had ‘shown us, that the police are currently not willing or able to guarantee our basic right to the freedom of assembly or physical safety’.⁴⁷⁷ Second, despite the anticipated absence of a counter demonstration, this time there was a far larger police presence, with over 1,200 officers on duty.

On the day, around 900 people gathered to join the protest. Martin Kohlmann again delivered a speech. During that speech he pleaded with protestors not to perform Nazi salutes and to avoid giving the press

‘bad pictures’. He also attributed the photographs of protestors giving Nazi salutes on Monday to ‘provocateurs’ and ‘left-wing agitators’ and accused the press of ‘stage managing events’. The crowd responded with chants of ‘Lügenpresse’.⁴⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the event passed peacefully and was disbanded by 20.15. Inside the stadium, the talk to which 500 guests had been invited was dominated by discussion of the protests. During the event the Mayor and State Premier were both booed, most notably when the latter expressed his support for a proposed anti-racism concert on 3 September.

Meanwhile, politicians at the national level were deliberating on the response to the events in Chemnitz. On 31 August, the next day, Franziska Giffey, the Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, became the first cabinet minister to visit the city after the outbreak of violence. Angela Merkel, however, decided not to visit the city due, she said, to concerns that a visit from her might further polarise residents. The fact that the city did not receive a visit from a more senior minister attracted criticism from the left and right. For the left, the decision to mark the death of a German national was seen as pandering to the right and endorsing narratives of ‘migrant crime’. For the right, the decision to send a relatively junior minister showed a lack of respect for the victim.

Phase 3. 1 September – 23 September 2018: A ‘mourning march’ and the withdrawal of the AfD and Pegida from the protest scene.

Two anti-migrant demonstrations were registered for **1 September**. One was registered by Robert Anders from Pro Chemnitz under the banner of ‘Saxony Stands Up’, and was scheduled to be held at 16.00 at the Karl Marx monument. The build up to that demonstration hinted that further violence was likely. On 30 August, for example, *Wir für Deutschland* (WfD e.V.), an anti-

475 Chemnitz 16: Interview with an academic.

476 See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/29/arrest-warrant-leak-fuels-suspicious-of-far-right-links-with-german-police> (Accessed on 14/12/20)

477 <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/nach-ausschreitungen-am-montag-chemnitzer-buendnis-gegen-rechts-verzichtet-fuer-donnerstag-auf-gegenprotest/22974494.html> (Accessed on 15/01/2021)

478 Lügenpresse translates to lying press. The term was used by the NSDAP before and during the Third Reich to undermine trust in the media. It has been revived by contemporary anti-minority actors such as Pegida and in its Anglo-Saxon form across the alt right. For current use in Germany see <https://www.dw.com/en/lying-press-germanys-misleading-media/a-18816438> (Accessed on 22/04/21)

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migrant group that had demonstrated against Merkel's government many times since 2015,⁴⁷⁹ encouraged supporters to attend the rally, telling them on their social media,

Patriots, join the resistance in Chemnitz or found your own vigilante groups and go out into the streets. The fight for survival has begun. If we don't act now, Germany will die and vanish irreversibly. There have been enough excuses, now it's time to rise together. We'll all meet on Saturday 1 September 2018 at 4pm in Chemnitz at the Karl Marx Monument. And we will take the streets together as patriots, for our tradition, for our families, for Germany.⁴⁸⁰

The other demonstration was jointly organised by the AfD and Pegida and was branded as a 'mourning/funeral march' to begin at 17.00 at the AfD regional offices in the *Theaterstraße*, although on the day both marches would in fact merge. The demonstrations attracted attendees from anti-migrant groups, radical right parties, the 'New Right' and extreme right movements in a rare display of unity between groups that normally keep their distance from each other. A counter protest was also registered to gather at *Johannisplatz* by *Herz statt Hetze* (Heart Against Agitation) at 14.00.

By 15.45, 300 anti-migrant protestors, many belonging to radical and football orientated groups, had gathered at the Karl Marx monument for the Pro Chemnitz rally. Meanwhile, several hundred counter protestors

had arrived at the train station, including a large anti-fascist black bloc contingent. Anti-racist activists then set up a symbolic blockade, standing copies of the German Basic Law⁴⁸¹ on the *Bahnhof* on the route of the AfD/Pegida march, about 12 minutes' walk from the AfD's offices. At 16.20, the blockade became more than symbolic, as counter protestors arrived to make a line about ten people deep across the road. Police asked counter protestors to abandon the blockade three times and threatened to clear it by force, but failed to do so when counter protestors refused to move. As the blockade was strengthened, Pro Chemnitz dissolved their rally and march, citing disagreements with the police over the restrictions on the route. Stewards from Pro Chemnitz asked protestors to join the AfD/Pegida rally at the AfD regional offices in the *Theaterstraße* about an 8-minute walk away.

By 17.30, the AfD/Pegida march was assembling. In contrast to the rowdy appearance of demonstrators⁴⁸² and overt display of unconstitutional symbols in earlier demonstrations, those attending the AfD/Pegida mourning march were asked to wear suits or black. Regional representatives of the AfD stood at the front of the march to form a sombre line of mostly men in black suits, some holding white roses. The line-up included Björn Hocke, the regional leader of AfD Thuringia, and Andreas Kalbitz, former State Chairman of Brandenburg,⁴⁸³ both associated with *Der Flügel*, Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, AfD MP for Saxony-Anhalt.⁴⁸⁴ Lutz Bachmann and Siegfried Däbritz from Pegida stood behind the AfD members. Also, in attendance was Götz Kubitschek, the intellectual grandfather of the *Neue Rechte* in Germany, his associate, Martin Sellner, the Austrian leader of

479 The AfD organised several demonstrations in Berlin drawing support from a wide spectrum of the anti-migrant scene comprising of the remnants of Bargida, neo-Nazi groups, such as the German Brotherhood. They had the most success with a series of 'Merkel must go' demonstrations. The group disbanded in December 2019. See <https://rechtsausen.berlin/2020/01/wir-fuer-deutschland-ist-geschichte/> (Accessed on 03/03/21)

480 German original: „Patrioten, schließt euch dem Widerstand an in Chemnitz oder gründet selbst Bürgerbewegungen in eurer Ortschaft und geht raus auf die Straße. Der Kampf ums Überleben hat begonnen, wenn wir jetzt nicht handeln, stirbt Deutschland und verschwindet unumkehrbar. Ausreden gab es genug, nun ist es an der Zeit gemeinsam aufzustehen. Wir sehen uns alle am Samstag 01.09.2018 in Chemnitz um 16:00 am Karl-Marx-Monument. Und werden als Patrioten gemeinsam auf die Straße gehen, für unsere Tradition, für unsere Familien, für Deutschland“.

481 Basic Law refers to the German constitution that was drafted in 1949. As a response to the Nazi regime and its emphasis on dignity, it has symbolic importance in opposition to fascism. See <https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/constitution/constitutional-issues/constitutional-issues.html> (Accessed on 02/03/21)

482 Demonstrators on Sunday's demonstration were filmed drinking and pulling their trousers down.

483 Andreas Kalbitz was expelled from the AfD on the 15th May 2020 for failing to reveal he had attended a summer camp held by the neo-Nazi group *Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend*.

484 Also in the front line of the leading luminaries of the AfD were Uwe Junge, State Chairman AfD Palatinate, Josef Dorr, State Chairman, AfD, Saarland.

Identitäre Bewegung Österreichs (Generation Identity Austria) and his then-fiancée, Brittany Pettibone, an American alt-right vlogger, who had travelled together from Austria.⁴⁸⁵

That these diverse groups came together does not mean that they did not seek to differentiate themselves from one another. In a YouTube video ahead of the march, Sellner attempted to distance the protests from overtly neo-Nazi groups calling them ‘the enemies within’ and criticising them for allowing their ‘Nazi fetish’ to detract from ‘the opportunity whereas many Germans as possible can express their legitimate concerns about what is happening in the country’ while also hoping that Chemnitz would ‘become a turning point’. The AfD issued similar statements about violence and extremists and instructed that the demonstration would comprise a silent march with no banners. Likewise, Kubitschek stated:

Extremists and violent actors are not welcome in our ranks – we are free citizens who want to express their grief peacefully and piously over the dead and victims of illegal migration politics!⁴⁸⁶

Once they had been joined by protestors from the Pro Chemnitz event, there were over 6,000 demonstrators. The merged march eventually set off down the *Theaterstraße* an hour and a half after its scheduled start as additional stewards were needed to cope with the increased numbers. The march was led by about twenty protestors wearing sandwich boards covered with large photos of the alleged victims of ‘migrant crime’, the majority of whom were women, and the line of AfD representatives behind them.

As the march moved off, skirmishes between small groups (10-15 people) of black bloc anti-fascists and anti-migrant activists also broke out in side streets as rival groups threw chairs and bottles at each other.

Further violence was prevented, however, as police drew their batons and chased the rival groups, who promptly scattered.⁴⁸⁷ A larger group of 200 counter protestors attempted to reach the AfD/Pegida march but were prevented by the police who used mounted police to kettle them at the *Red Tower (Roter Turm)* for several hours. Several anti-fascists were injured in the process. As medics attended to those who had been injured, both they and counter protestors were attacked with pepper spray by anti-migrant activists from adjacent rooftops.⁴⁸⁸

At 19.10, as the march returned towards the Karl Marx monument, the police officially disbanded the march under the pretext that it had run over its official time, although anti-fascist activists attributed the decision to their successful blockade.⁴⁸⁹

The AfD representatives left the march at this point and their apparent willingness to co-operate with the police provoked derision among other anti-migrant demonstrators. Indeed, as the AfD departed, they were booed by their fellow demonstrators, many of whom returned to the Karl Marx monument. Over the next half hour, there were at least two attacks on journalists as protestors swarmed around a water cannon, both were pushed and kicked, and one had his camera knocked from his hands.

Again, chants of *Lügenpresse* were common. A group of Leipzig-based members of the Social Democratic Party was attacked on their way to the coach after they left the counter demonstration – one member of the group tweeted ‘all our SPD banners were broken and some of us were physically attacked’, but ‘the police came fast and did a good job’ (Figure 5.3). Later that evening, an Afghan man was attacked and beaten up by several men shouting racist abuse.⁴⁹⁰

487 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wP-vionuiFE> (Accessed on 05/03/21)

488 See <https://unicornriot.ninja/2018/german-far-right-targets-medics-as-left-mobilizes-in-chemnitz/> (Accessed on 03/03/21)

489 For example see <https://enoughisenough14.org/2018/09/03/reportback-from-chemnitz-on-september-1/> (Accessed on 04/03/21)

490 <https://www.morgenpost.de/politik/article215231563/Vermummte-jagen-in-Chemnitz-Fluechtlings-und-pruegeln-ihn.html>

485 Martin Sellner and Brittany have since married in August 2019.

486 <https://sezession.de/59342/chemnitz-zehn-punkte-fuer-die-naechsten-tage> (Accessed on 15/01/2021)

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Figure 5.3: Tweet by Sören Bartol, an SPD politician, claiming that he and his colleagues had been attacked.

The AfD's acceptance of the police decision to disband the march provoked intense debates over strategy within the coalition. Two days later, Kubitschek wrote on his blog, *Secession*, that the AfD should no longer lead demonstrations but leave it to others, as it was caught in a dilemma between needing to present itself as a legitimate political party and as a conservative-revolutionary party to fight the injustice of the liberal state.⁴⁹¹ He called for others to lead the protests, and for AfD members to attend but not as party representatives. Other AfD representatives associated with *Der Flügel*, such as Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, disavowed the timidity of the AfD, and argued that sometimes it is necessary, 'to violate the little order to maintain the great order'.⁴⁹²

The debate also impacted on the relationship between AfD and Pegida. In mid-September, the Federal Executive Board of the AfD made an executive order

that AfD members should only attend rallies that were registered and organised by the AfD, although in practice the overlap of interests and personnel between the AfD, Pegida and other groups on the radical flank of the movement persisted. For example, Arthur Osterle, formerly of Pro Chemnitz started to work for the AfD in 2019.

In response to the protests, Chemnitz-based band, *Kraftklub*, initiated a large free open-air anti-racism concert on **3 September** under the hashtag #wirsindmehr (we are more). About 65,000 people attended the event, with people travelling from all over Germany. There was no public disorder. The concert did generate controversy, however, as one of the bands playing, *Feine Sahne Fischfilet*, appear to have endorsed violence against the police. Furthermore, political support for the concert from the Mayor and State Premier led the AfD to accuse them of double standards: that the political elites condemned violence during the protests but were seemingly willing to condone the violence of the left. The AfD implied that the concert showed a lack of respect to the victim of the stabbing and was instrumentalising his death for political gains.

As the AfD and Pegida formally disengaged from the protests, it opened space for Pro Chemnitz and more radical groups to take over the demonstrations. As might be expected, there followed a decline in the numbers of people attending the protests. Pro Chemnitz held their next rally on 7 September. For the first time since the protests began, the anti-migrant protestors were outnumbered by counter-protestors: about 2,350 to 4,500 respectively. Instructions were again issued by organisers not to perform Nazi salutes, or to drink alcohol or attack the press. Over 1,300 police officers were deployed, equipped with water cannons, horses and helicopters. The march passed without major incidents or disorder. Elsewhere in Germany, on the 8 September, a German national died after a fight with two Afghan men in Köthen about 165km from Chemnitz. Although there was a large spontaneous demonstration of 2,500 people, violence

(Accessed 17/03/2021)

491 <https://sezeption.de/59357/chemnitz-zwickmuehle-und-schlussfolgerung> (Accessed on 15/01/2021)

492 <https://sezeption.de/59356/nicht-nur-der-rechtsstaat-hat-in-chemnitz-kapituliert> (Accessed on 15/01/2021). Hans-Thomas Tillschneider quotes Götz Kubitschek here, who spoke about the "little and big order" in a 2015 interview, related to a previous speech at a Pegida protest. <https://sezeption.de/51755/die-kleine-und-die-grosse-ordnung-kubitschek-ueber-seine-pegida-rede> (Accessed on 21/09/2021)

was avoided, with local police being reinforced by police from across Germany.⁴⁹³

On **14 September**, Pro Chemnitz held a fifth demonstration, attended by 3,500 demonstrators. The march itself passed without incident. That evening, however, 15 men, equipped with quartz sand gloves, broken bottles and a stun gun, were arrested after they hurled xenophobic abuse at and demanded to see the papers of a group of ‘foreign looking people’ who were attending a birthday celebration in a local park. They then surrounded another group, made up of non-German nationals and Germans, throwing glass bottles, and gave an Iranian man a head injury. Six of the men arrested were later charged, along with two others, for being involved in a group calling itself Revolution Chemnitz that was plotting an extreme right wing terrorist attack on politicians, left-wing opponents and German officials on reunification day in Berlin.⁴⁹⁴ The prosecution alleged the September attack was a ‘trial run’ for the disrupted plot.⁴⁹⁵ In group chats the defendants made the claim that Revolution Chemnitz would make ‘the NSU look like a kindergarten group’.⁴⁹⁶

493 As in Chemnitz the protests in Köthen were attended by about 500 neo-Nazis including David Köckert, leader of Thügida who gave a speech, saying ‘This is a war, and you can really say that — a race war against the German people that is happening here, and we have to defend ourselves from it. Do you want to stay like sheep that bleat, or do you want to become wolves that rip things up?’ See <https://www.dw.com/en/death-of-german-fuels-fears-of-far-right-violence-in-k%C3%B6then/a-45434251> (Accessed on 17/03/21)

494 Members of this group have been active in the online space since 2013. There is evidence of Facebook pages with similar names; ‘Revolution Chemnitz ANW’ was created in the same year. On 10 September 2018, a person called Christian K. founded a Telegram channel which became the basis of the 2018 Revolution Chemnitz, organised hierarchically under his leadership. According to Philippsberg (2021, pp. 162-163), there were 8 core members and 6 co-operators who all lived in the same region and were between 21 and 32 years of age. 7 of them were previously convicted, and their education level was relatively low (2 finished no school, 4 secondary school). Other sources also state that three members of the group were part of a neo-Nazi group, Sturm 34, which was banned in 2007, and at least one member of the group had worked as stewards on the Pro Chemnitz demonstrations. The group was disbanded by the authorities and convicted in March 2020 up to 5 and a half years in prison. See also <https://www.foiaresearch.net/organization/revolution-chemnitz>, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/revolution-chemnitz-rechts-extremisten-1.4855988> and <https://www.antifainfoblatt.de/artikel/%E2%80%9Erevolution-chemnitz%E2%80%9C> (Accessed on 04/03/21)

495 See <https://www.dw.com/en/revolution-chemnitz-right-wing-german-terror-group-handed-jail-terms/a-52903660> (Accessed on 04/01/21)

496 See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/24/eight-german-neo-nazis-jailed-over-planned-attacks> (Accessed on 21/04/21).

Pro Chemnitz continued to hold weekly marches of decreasing size. On **23 September**, they held their 6th demonstration, which was attended by 2,500 demonstrators. After the counter-protest organised by *Chemnitz Nazifrei* disbanded, a small group of counter-protestors were attacked by a group of extreme right activists and were forced to take refuge at the *Rothaus*, which housed the offices of *Die Linke*. The door of the building was pelted with eggs and a window was smashed. On the fringes of the protest, a journalist was assaulted.⁴⁹⁷

Phase 4. 24 September 2018 – December 2018: *The long tail*

While support for the marches tailed off, as they became the exclusive preserve of Pro Chemnitz, an atmosphere of tension and harassment towards migrants continued with attacks, racist graffiti and racial abuse. As an interviewee explained,

one has to add that afterwards there were still many racist attacks, so in the weeks after, many people, migrants, were found, also arson attacks in the city, or attacks on shops, also afterwards, and right-wing structures and racist resentments were strengthened in fact through these marches, because they had an emotion of strength that one could show.⁴⁹⁸

The annual report by the Saxon Police Force on extremism⁴⁹⁹ lists an extensive and persistent series of racially motivated attacks and graffiti over this period. This includes a physical attack on the owner of a Persian restaurant, and an arson attack on a Turkish owned restaurant on 22 September and 18 October⁵⁰⁰; persistent attacks and abuse towards a

497 See <https://www.belltower.news/pro-chemnitz-teilnehmer-greifen-journalisten-und-rothaus-an-49430/> (Accessed on 15/01/2021)

498 Chemnitz 9: Interview with an NGO worker, working on issues of democracy and citizenship.

499 From Saxony Police Press office public statements. These have now been taken down, but the authors have archived English translations, available on request.

500 Although subsequent investigations indicate that the latter could be a case of fraud. <https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/>

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Jewish restaurant; the beating of an Arab man on 28 September, who was threatened with a knife and ‘told to go back home from where he came from’; an incident on 22 October where a Persian family was threatened and the windows of their house smashed; the graffitiing of over 100 swastikas on a sports club, and the vandalism of ‘stumbling blocks’ on the anniversary of Kristallnacht.⁵⁰¹

Three months after the start of the protests, on 16 November, Angela Merkel visited Chemnitz – 2 months after she had announced her resignation as leader of the CDU – speaking to residents at the Town Hall. In response to her visit, Pro-Chemnitz organised a demonstration attended by 1,500 protestors who chanted, ‘*Merkel Muss Weg*’ (Merkel has to go) and ‘*Lügenpresse*’. As in previous protests, Kohlmann and Witte gave speeches, this time joined by Klára Samková from the Czech ‘feminist’ and anti-Muslim group *Era Zen*, who described Angela Merkel as ‘Hitler’s successor’.⁵⁰² Sven Liebich was also present. This time however there was no public disorder: likely to a large extent to be the result of the presence of more than one thousand police officers who were able to keep the protestors away from a small counterprotest of the group *Bündnis Chemnitz Nazifrei*. When interviewed, Merkel said about the protestors: ‘I’m ready to talk to them ... but we have some protestors today with whom one can’t talk.’⁵⁰³

Smaller protests continued until December when they finally petered out. Throughout the later events, there were no major incidents of public disorder. Part of the explanation for the relative absence of public disorder is likely to lie in the heavy police presence observed during these later demonstrations,

which persisted even as activist numbers declined. As some of our interviewees observed, that the scale of policing operations remained significant even as the demonstrations themselves shrank is perhaps unsurprising given the criticism they faced over their failure to control previous demonstrations.⁵⁰⁴

There were also some attempts by anti-migrant and extreme right-wing groups to rekindle the protest energy of the summer of 2018 during 2019 but were only partially successful. On **1 June 2019**, the youth wing of the NPD held a ‘Day of the German Future’ march in Chemnitz. This was an annual event that was held in a different location around the country each year. The NPD youth wing of Saxony hosted the march in Chemnitz presumably to capitalise on the successful mobilisations over the past year. The march only attracted approximately 250 protestors and was met with a much larger counter-protest of over 1000 people. The event itself passed without significant incidents of public disorder. That evening, however, a couple were violently assaulted by NPD activists after there were heard making disparaging comments about an NPD poster.

Then in August, Pro Chemnitz called a rally on the anniversary of Daniel Hillig’s death, **26 August 2019**. This again failed to gain the same level of interest from anti-migrant protestors or counter protestors. The rally was attended by approximately 450 protestors, who were opposed by a counter-protest of 200. The event passed peacefully with just a few arrests (for making a Nazi salute, and for abusive chanting).

Yet what is striking about the Chemnitz case study is that the fizzling out of this wave of demonstrations did not represent a wider collapse of the radical or extreme right milieu, or its local support base. Evidence of the persistent influence of extreme right milieu can be seen, for example, in **March 2019** with the official commemoration of the death of Thomas Haller, HooNaRa activist and founder, by

chemnitz-rechter-anschlag-war-scheinbar-betrug-gastwirt-narrte-sogar-merkel_id_13494089.html (Accessed on 21/09/2021)

501 *Stolpersteine* or ‘stumbling blocks/cobble stones’ are small brass cobblestones that commemorate individual victims of the holocaust and are set outside the victims’ former residences.

502 *Era Zen* is a feminist group based in the Czech Republic whose website says ‘that it is standing up for the rights of Czech women’. See <https://www.belltower.news/ueberraschend-wenig-protest-bei-merkelbesuch-in-chemnitz-77079/> (Accessed on 05/03/21)

503 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/16/angela-merkel-greeted-by-far-right-protests-in-chemnitz> (Accessed on 15/01/2021)

504 Chemnitz 11: Interview with a journalist.

Chemnitzer FC, with a minute's silence at the start of a match with Altglienicke. The team's captain later had to resign after holding up a shirt saying, 'Support your local Hooligans' in memory of Haller. A similar commemoration was held at Energie Cottbus, illustrating the relationship between fans of the clubs.⁵⁰⁵

There is also no evidence that the association of political parties, such as the AfD and Pro Chemnitz, with extreme right activists and openly neo-Nazi groups, negatively impacted on their electoral support, at least during 2019. In the municipal elections in Chemnitz in May 2019, the AfD achieved 17.9% of the vote, an increase of 12.3%, and won 11 seats. Pro Chemnitz also increased their vote share to 7.7% from 5.6% and won 5 council seats, 2 more than before. In the September 2019 Saxony State Election, the AfD won 27.5% of the vote share, an increase of 17.7%.⁵⁰⁶

The city continues to be a focal point for extreme right-wing activism. In December 2020, prominent activists from Dortmund such as, Michael Brück of *Die Rechte*, a law student and a former city councillor, moved to Chemnitz and is now employed by the legal offices of Martin Kohlmann. He has been joined by Martin Esterhaus who has strong links with the neo-Nazi fight teams in Chemnitz and Dortmund. Brück revealed his move to a Telegram Channel called *Zusammenrücken* (moving together), an initiative to encourage neo-Nazi activists to move from the West to the East. In explaining his move, he said, that people in the East were more receptive to 'right wing positions'.⁵⁰⁷

5.4. ANALYSIS

505 See <https://www.dw.com/en/why-was-a-neo-nazi-hooligan-mourned-at-a-football-game-in-germany/a-47856332> (Accessed 15/01/2021)

506 An interesting aside to events in Chemnitz in 2018 is that at the time of writing, leading neo-Nazi activists from Dortmund, including Michael Brück, an organiser for *Die Rechte* have recently moved to Chemnitz. Brück is now employed by Pro Chemnitz. See https://twitter.com/_c_nazifrei/status/1339243917909352452?lang=en-gb (Accessed on 05/03/21)

507 See <https://bylinetimes.com/2021/03/19/moving-together-colonisation-of-eastern-germany-by-the-far-right/> (Accessed on 20/04/21)

What appeared to enable escalation towards violence?

The Chemnitz case study brings together what can be conceptualised as at least two different forms of violence, albeit at times they coincide: public disorder associated with protest events, and violence that involved racial/revolutionary targeting often outside the protest arena. For the purpose of this study, our primary focus is on the violence more or less directly associated with protest events.

There are a number of aspects of the Chemnitz case that appear to have enabled the escalation of violence during this hot period of anti-minority activism. First, although by no means foremost, the killing of Daniel Hillig, particularly as it was initially narrated – linking it to themes of violence against women by migrant men – provided an important window of opportunity for mobilisation, thereby acting as a form of '*catalytic event*'⁵⁰⁸ for what was to follow. As well as providing an opportunity to mobilise anti-migrant activists, it also helped to place Chemnitz at the heart of national debates about these issues.

Second, and part of the reason why the killing of Daniel Hillig worked so effectively as a catalytic event, was that there was a *pre-existing extreme right-wing milieu that valorised and was prepared for violence and was able to mobilise at speed*. This enabled the scale and speed of mobilisation following the initial call to action by *Kaotic Chemnitz*, which in turn gave protestors a series of situational advantages that were important in the escalation towards violence: enabling them to outmanoeuvre police and heavily outnumber counter-protestors, particularly during the first two days of action, as we discuss further below.

Furthermore, the interconnected scenes that were mobilised – the hooligan groups, the MMA scene and existing extreme right structures – are all scenes within which violence was valorised and seen as an essential part of group identity and status, meaning that many of

508 Busher, Harris and Macklin (2019a; 2019b).

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the protestors came prepared and equipped for violence. Indeed, it is worth noting that the overt references to vigilantism and calls on Facebook for participants to ‘take control of our city’ and ‘show people who is driving it’, were arguably not exceptional incidents, but rather were aligned with previous initiatives by Pro Chemnitz to set up street patrols to combat ‘migrant crime’.

Third, this *extreme right-wing milieu was not marginal or marginalised to the extent that it was, for example, in the Dover case study*. Rather, it had and sustained multiple links with broader radical right parties and movements and enjoyed a degree of public support. Several interviewees argued that the Pegida street protests and *Chemnitz Erzgebirge* campaigns against migrant reception centres had played a crucial role here, bringing ‘*Wutbürger*’ (ordinary but angry citizens) into contact with extreme right actors.⁵⁰⁹ Interviewees also argued that contact between ordinary citizens and neo-Nazi activists was facilitated by the extent to which extreme right structures permeated into civil society in the economic and social spheres through businesses, clothing shops, cultural organisations and sport. According to some commentators, and several of our interviewees, there has at times been indifference or denial of extreme right activity by some political elites and the police, which, they argued, both enabled extreme right structures to consolidate and permeate more widely into society and hindered civil society efforts to counter extreme right-wing activity. The strength of civil society organisations may have also been tempered by the tendency for state actors to draw equivalences between fascism and anti-fascists. Some interviewees argued that this hindered state support for anti-fascist initiatives.

What also appears to have enabled extreme right-wing actors to achieve and sustain a certain degree of public and political support has been the way that they deployed issue frames that resonated with and capitalised on pre-existing local concerns over public

safety and ‘migrant crime’. These concerns in turn had been shaped by high-profile incidents across the country in the months prior to the events in Chemnitz and the drip-by-drip sharing of disinformation and heavily selective news reporting about these issues across the alternative digital information landscape, thereby in effect preparing the terrain for an incident such as the killing of Daniel Hillig to act as an effective catalyst for mobilisation and violence.⁵¹⁰

Importantly for our purposes, even as the violence in Chemnitz of August 2018 began to garner national and international news headlines, *while some more moderate radical right actors eventually criticised some of the violence, those engaged in or advocating violence were not heavily ostracised*. Rather, the radical flank actors appear, at least initially, to have been successful at taking a number of prominent public figures, as well as a significant minority of the general public, along with them in their legitimisation of violence in terms of self-defence. Even where ostensibly more moderate actors sought to distance themselves from the violence – through, for example, holding separate events or even criticising the use of violence – it was still presented as an understandable consequence of broadly legitimate fears about the impacts of migrants on society, and a lesser problem in comparison with that of ‘migrant crime’,⁵¹¹ which in turn operated as a signifier of the supposedly existential threat posed by migrants.⁵¹² Again, the foundations for this interpretation of events was built over several months and years through the ongoing manipulation of victim-perpetrator roles⁵¹³ and the long-term fostering of moral indignation and outrage.

510 Holger Marcks and Janina Pawelz (2020) describe how feelings of insecurity and existential threat are intertwined online in a potent blend that can facilitate violence.

511 Role reversal between victims and perpetrators was also used to add emotional force to the narrative of existential threat. For how the radical right reverse roles of victim and perpetrator see Volk (2020).

512 On the relationship between violence and existential threat narratives see ISD. ‘The Great Replacement’: The violent consequences of mainstream extremism. See here: <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf> (Accessed on 20/02/21).

513 Volk (2020).

509 See <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/united-german-extreme-right/> (Accessed on 12/04/21)

It is striking that despite the violence on 26 August and the negative media coverage, many ‘ordinary citizens’ or unaffiliated individuals⁵¹⁴ still decided to join a demonstration and march alongside overtly neo-Nazi groups, such as *Der Dritte Weg*. This emboldened those radical flank actors, many of whom doubled down on rather than distancing themselves from the violence. Kohlmann, for example, was quoted as saying in a subsequent interview,

After the recent events in Chemnitz, one of the ministers said that the state must have a monopoly on violence. We will not oppose if they implement this monopoly, but they do not.⁵¹⁵

Fourth, and as with the other cases, at the micro-level we can see how much of the actual violence followed instances of *situational breakdown* and, in particular, a series of situational advantages achieved by the anti-migrant activists. As noted above, the speed and scale of mobilisation by anti-migrant activists on 27 August appears to have surprised the law enforcement agencies. With the police unable to contain the anti-migrant activists, the latter experienced ‘feelings of strength’⁵¹⁶ – several of our interviewees spoke of the crowd ‘being unrestrained’ or ‘without inhibitions’ – and spilled out across the city centre.⁵¹⁷ There, groups of activists found themselves in multiple local situations of overwhelming advantage as they encountered individual or small groups of people who they suspected of being migrants or left-wing activists, creating ideal conditions for the emergence of forward panic dynamics.

Perhaps more surprisingly, similar dynamics were repeated on 28 August, when the police appeared to have been ill-prepared for the numbers of anti-migrant activists that assembled in Chemnitz, despite the fact that the police had been forewarned by the intelligence agency about the potential for violence.⁵¹⁸ Again, anti-migrant activists were emboldened by their massive numerical superiority in comparison with the anti-fascists, and the limited numbers of police on the ground meant that they were unable to act on clear breaches of the law by some anti-migrant activists, such as Nazi salutes, thereby enabling a ‘moral holiday’ among the activists. On this occasion, there were sufficient police to inhibit most of the attempts by anti-migrant activists to confront their opponents during the demonstration. As the demonstrators dispersed, however, there emerge again local situations of overwhelming advantage in favour of the anti-migrant protestors, with large groups of anti-migrant protestors attacking small groups of counter protestors.

What appears to inhibit violence?

There can be little doubt that some anti-migrant activists engaged in serious violence in Chemnitz during the period under analysis. Nonetheless, there were limits to this violence: much of it comprised attacks on individuals, buildings or small groups, rather than major brawls between opposing movements; much of the violence took the form of bottle throwing and fireworks, rather than direct interpersonal violence, and where direct interpersonal violence did take place, it always stopped short of lethal force. Furthermore, protest-related violence tailed off significantly after 28 August, albeit other forms of violence did not, as we discuss below.

It is difficult to assess why violence did not escalate further, especially in light of the numerical advantage enjoyed by anti-minority activists at the first two demonstrations, without having been able to speak

514 By non-affiliated we mean citizens with no known links to anti-minority formal political organisations or movement groups/organisations.

515 See interview in Polish: https://opinie.wp.pl/martin-nie-jest-nazista-martin-jest-zwyklym-niemcem-ktory-chce-wywalic-arabow-z-chemnitz-6292038733493889a?amp=1&__twitter_impression=true (Accessed on 15/12/20)

516 Chemnitz 9: Interview with an NGO worker, working on issues of democracy and citizenship.

517 Chemnitz 12: Interview with an NGO worker, working on political and social education for young people and adults.

518 There is a separation of powers between the intelligence services and the state police: the intelligence service can only offer intelligence. There is no executive function.

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to activists directly involved or without further video footage. Interestingly, unlike Charlottesville and Dover, there is scant video footage of the actual violence but plenty of the abuse and disorder normally associated with large-scale demonstrations. There is evidence that some restraints on violence was exerted by anti-minority protestors within the protest arena, perhaps because protestors were able to achieve emotional dominance over counter protestors without the need to kill or severely injure opponents.

The available data do however suggest a number of factors that likely inhibited the further escalation of violence. The first of these is *movement discipline and, as the series of events progressed, growing attempts by movement moderates to protect their reputation and public support, and re-exert their influence.*

While video footage and some eyewitness accounts suggest that some individuals attended the protests in Chemnitz looking for confrontation and violence, it is also clear that there were ongoing efforts within the movement to maintain movement discipline. On 28 August, for example, event stewards can clearly be seen working with the police as they attempted to manage the protest and limit confrontations with counter-protestors. This is not unexpected. In most movements, particularly those that do, or harbour aspirations to, achieve influence through more formal political channels, it is common for some organisers and activists to favour limiting the use of violence, usually at least partly in order to achieve and maintain a degree of public respectability. Even more radical groups, such as Pro Chemnitz, were at pains to explain violence as the work of left-wing provocateurs.

As the series of events progressed, movement moderates increasingly distanced themselves from violence and those who were most actively engaged in violence. On the 1 September march, for example, demonstrating a clear concern about how the march would be perceived by the wider public, the AfD were at pains to brand their event as ‘a funeral march’ with

explicit instructions to distinguish themselves from hooligan/neo-Nazi elements. For example, instructions were issued to wear black, or to carry a white rose – the symbol of resistance to the Nazi regime – rather than banners. Unconstitutional slogans and symbols were prohibited.

It is interesting to note that the move by AfD to cooperate with the police in the decision to disband the march highlighted intra-movement tension. The alienation of more radical elements undermined any claims of leadership, while the threat of reputational damage as a result of association with radical groups made the national leadership keen to distance themselves from the protests. Following the literature on processes of escalation and de-escalation of political violence, one possibility here would have been that the radical flank actors in effect peeled away from the movement moderates and became involved in an escalation dynamic. Instead, however, the protests slowly fizzled out as the number of participants declined and anti-migrant activists ceased to enjoy the sort of numerical advantages over the counter-protestors that had characterised the earlier events.

This introduces another factor that appears to have inhibited further violence: that *there were not more local situations of overwhelming numerical advantage in favour of the anti-migrant protestors, and that their numerical advantage declined sharply after 28 August.*

As Randall Collins would predict, the most significant interpersonal violence was associated with local situations in which the anti-migrant activists suddenly enjoyed an overwhelming numerical advantage over one, or a small number of, people that they considered to comprise their opponents. While there was an extended period on 27 August during which such local situations of overwhelming advantage occurred frequently, on 28 August there were fewer such situations, and on subsequent events there were fewer such situations still.

After 29 August, demonstrations were sufficiently resourced to largely prevent similar episodes of violence. The police were able to act proactively on the demonstrations, officially disbanding the AfD's march on 1 September when counter protestors blocked the route and having the capacity to kettle counter protestors earlier in the day. While isolated violence occurred, it was not on the scale of previous demonstrations, as police regained control of the situation. It is worth noting that while the mobilisation of greater numbers of counter protestors from the more militant wing of the countermovement could ostensibly have made violence more likely, such violence was not forthcoming. Part of the explanation for this appears to lie in the police decision, and capacity, to disband the march. It is possible that part of the explanation also lies in anti-fascist restraint.⁵¹⁹

Subsequent demonstrations, although attracting smaller numbers, were heavily policed with a re-balancing of the numbers of counter-protestors to protestors: as anti-fascist groups mobilised from across the country in response to the initial protests, and attendance at the protests fell off among anti-migrant protestors.

The decline or displacement of violence?

As the demonstrations slowly lost momentum, and as the scale of policing operations in proportion to the demonstrations increased dramatically, the violence associated with demonstrations declined. Chemnitz differs from the other case studies however both insofar as it continued to experience extreme right violence, and insofar as the actors associated with the demonstrations and their attendant violence appear not to have suffered considerable reputational damage, at least within their own support bases.

As the number of protestors and counter-protestors rebalanced and state agencies were sufficiently

resourced to control violence during demonstrations, there is some evidence to suggest that violence became displaced away from the protest arena. While racially targeted violence and public disorder co-existed during the protests, as in the '*Hetzjagd*' incident when individuals were targeted solely on the basis of 'looking foreign', after the 1 September there is an uptick in the number of racial incidents including attacks on foreign-owned restaurants, and street violence targeted towards migrants. It is not possible to assert whether the refocusing of violence was simply to avoid arrest, or a result of activists feeling emboldened for violence to spill over onto the streets, or an attempt by activists to strategically build on the public disorder to pursue revolutionary goals.

Whether, as is likely, these incidents were politically driven, these went well beyond an ostensible concern with migrant crime and involved an element of pre-planning. Certainly, the fact that several of these incidents were anti-Semitic points to wider political motivation. The adoption of more radical or revolutionary strategies is most apparent in the arrest of the members of Revolution Chemnitz who were seeking to exploit events in Chemnitz to foment societal collapse. It is beyond the scope of the research to speculate on the relationship between protest violence and terrorism, but it is noteworthy that several of the activists arrested had worked as stewards on the demonstrations. Furthermore, extreme right influencers saw the potential of the 'spontaneous' protest in Chemnitz as a 'turning point' to capitalise on. The phrase 'turning point' was one that was repeatedly used by many actors involved in the protests. There remains an open question about how different forms of violence co-exist and how we may differentiate between them, especially in the relative priority given to ideological and political motivation and the situational context in which violence can emerge.

5.5. CONCLUSIONS: CHEMNITZ

⁵¹⁹ As has been discussed elsewhere, where anti-fascists do deploy violence, it is almost always reactive rather than proactive violence (e.g. Copsey and Merrill, 2020).

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The key element of the protests in Chemnitz is the broad coalition that characterised the initial protests where radical right electoral parties and ‘ordinary citizens’ openly stood with overtly neo-Nazi, extreme right groups, football hooligans, cultural associations and MMA enthusiasts. Whereas under other circumstances we might expect the influence of more moderate participants to be a powerful inhibitor to violence, this was not the case in Chemnitz. While not exclusive to Chemnitz (or East Germany), this built on deeply embedded extreme right structures with reach into the civic middle classes.

The potential for violence was heightened by the mobilisation of activists who were well-rehearsed in the performance of violence, and from subcultures within which violence was valorised and seen as an integral part of identity, status and masculinity. This was optimised in the participation of MMA clubs and fight teams that combine a commitment to revolutionary goals and expertise in fighting. The speed that these groups and the extreme right were able to mobilise using social media meant that the police were not able to sufficiently resource the first three protests and were unable to engage or restrain the demonstrators.

After the first demonstration, as more mainstream political actors became involved, there was an increased concern with the optics of protest and how they looked to the outside world. On one hand, while this may have dampened the appetite for violence for appearances sake, this was countered on the other hand by a narrative framing of violence as self-defence in the absence of the state’s exercise of the monopoly of violence and reversal of the roles of victim and perpetrator. In this way, violence could be branded as understandable if not legitimate.

6. CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA, USA, FEBRUARY – OCTOBER 2017

6.1. SUMMARY

The Charlottesville case study⁵²⁰ covers the period from 2015 to 2020. During this period, both before and after the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States, the so-called alt-right began to gain momentum politically and organisationally.⁵²¹ The centrepiece of this case study is the Unite the Right demonstration which was staged in Charlottesville, Virginia, on 11-12 August 2017, ostensibly around the issue of removing statues and other historical markers associated with the Confederacy (the southern slave states that seceded from the Union in 1861, thereby sparking the American Civil War 1861-1865).

Politically, however, the Charlottesville demonstration ‘was intended to show that it was now a real political movement, with real public supporters, and had moved beyond being a group of online trolls and propagandists.’⁵²² It was the first occasion where the fragmented online subcultures of the alt-right movement united to stage actual street protests. The demonstration itself was particularly violent and ended in a lethal incident. One of the extreme right activists, James Fields Jr., who had travelled to Charlottesville from Ohio to attend the event, deliberately drove his car into counter demonstrators killing a thirty-two-year-old local woman, Heather Heyer, and injuring around thirty-five others, several seriously. A police helicopter which had been monitoring these events subsequently crashed, killing the two pilots.

520 The Charlottesville case study was completed prior to the conclusion of the *Sines vs. Kessler civil lawsuit case* which concluded on 23 November 2021 with an award of \$25 million in damages against the organisers of the Unite the Right demonstration.

521 There is a large body of literature on the alt-right. Useful studies include Wendling (2018); Main (2018); Hawley (2019a, 2019b); Stern (2019); Hermansson et al. (2020); Reid and Valasik (2020).

522 Hawley (2019, p. 139).

6.2. CONTEXT

The City of Charlottesville is a city in the Commonwealth of Virginia on the Eastern seaboard of the United States of America with an estimated population in 2017 of around 47,463 inhabitants.⁵²³ It is famous as the home of former US presidents Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809) and Thomas Monroe (1817-1825), respectively the third and fifth incumbents. These statues were, for the majority of their existence, uncomplicated and uncontroversial for the city. It had accepted funds from a private donor to care for them both in 1997, the year the Lee statue was added to the National Register of Historic Places.⁵²⁴ When the restoration was completed two years later, Charlottesville accepted the gift in a rededication ceremony.⁵²⁵ By 2017, however, Charlottesville had become the site of a series of protests by alt-right and white supremacist groups who staged rallies in the city to protest the proposed removal of these monuments to the Confederacy. This long simmering issue became particularly pertinent to the national conversation after Dylann Roof, a young white supremacist, murdered nine African American worshippers at a Bible study group being held at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina on 17 June 2015. Prior to the massacre, Roof had photographed himself draped in the Confederate flag and posted a ‘manifesto’ to his own website.

Roof failed in his desire to create a ‘race war’ but his actions did succeed in accelerating the national

523 United States Census Bureau (2021), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-total-cities-and-towns.html>

524 <https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/97000447>. The Lee statue had been added to the Virginia Landmarks Register the previous year, see <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/104-0264/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021).

525 Heaphy and Hunton & Williams LLP, hereafter Heaphy report (2017, p. 23).

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campaign to remove Confederate statues and memorials from public places, though under President Donald Trump there was a notable ‘white backlash’ against the trend. Efforts to retain these monuments also converged with animosity towards the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, the rise of which coincided broadly with the increasing attention being received by the bid to remove Confederate memorials.

This campaign became particularly acute in Charlottesville with regards to the statues of two prominent Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee (erected in 1924) and Thomas ‘Stonewall’ Jackson (erected in 1921). These were in Lee Park and Jackson Park, respectively. Whilst the statue of ‘Stonewall’ Jackson was virtually opposite the Albermarle County Courthouse, it was the statue of Robert E. Lee, situated on a rising hill in an open public park that was visible from the Downtown Mall, which became the lightning rod for protest and counter-protest. This ‘local’ issue then spiralled to become a ‘national’ issue that was seized upon by the wider alt-right movement.

However, as Charlottesville’s Mayor Mike Signer stated:

It seemed more often than not that we weren’t really talking about anything that would happen with the Lee statue – in part because of the certainty of protracted litigation even if we did move ahead to try and move it. We were shadowboxing instead with what the statue (and one’s position on the statue) meant – what it stood for.⁵²⁶

It was this ‘politics of symbolism’ – as Signer termed it – that made the issue so contentious for both sides and which ensured that it also quickly became more than a ‘local’ issue.

The principal organiser of the Unite the Right rally on 11-12 August was local activist and blogger Jason Kessler, who had been a member of the Proud Boys.

The most prominent national figure associated with the event was, however, alt-right luminary Richard Spencer, chairman of the National Policy Institute (NPI). Having graduated from the University of Virginia in 2001, Spencer had briefly worked for several paleo-conservative publications before launching The Alternative Right – a phrase he had first coined in 2009 – with the backing of the white nationalist VDARE Foundation. Spencer had set himself the task of overhauling the aesthetics of far right. ‘We have to look good,’ he told a reporter, because nobody wanted to join a movement that was ‘crazy of ugly or vicious or just stupid.’⁵²⁷

Propaganda for Unite the Right, disseminated online prior to the rally, advertised that attendees would be addressed by several speakers: Richard Spencer; ‘Mike Enoch’ alias *The Right Stuff* podcaster Michael Peinovich; Jason Kessler; ‘Baked Alaska’ alias white nationalist media personality Anthime ‘Tim’ Gionet; ‘August Invictus’ alias former Libertarian Party candidate Austin Gillespie; Christopher Cantwell (Radical Agenda); Matt Heimbach (Traditionalist Workers Party – TWP); ‘Johnny Monoxide’ alias John Ramondetta from The Right Stuff; Pax Dickinson (former Chief Technology Officer for Business Insider); and Dr Michael Hill (President, League of the South – LOS).

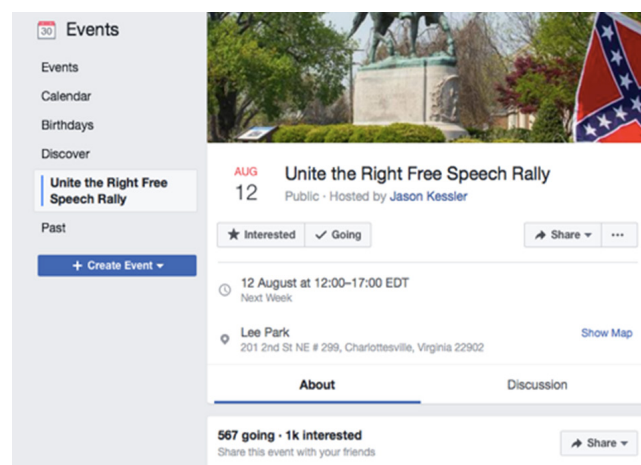


Figure 6.1: Facebook announcement for the Unite the Right Rally.

The Unite the Right rally was a magnet for extreme right groups across the United States. Those attending represented a range of ideological tendencies including, though not limited to, the alt-right, white supremacists, Nazis, racist skinheads, and militia groups. The majority were not only not from Charlottesville, but they were also not from the State of Virginia. In total the ADL, who identified 330 attendees (of an estimated 600), noted that these people were associated with approximately fifty separate groups drawn from thirty-nine of the country's fifty states. This proliferation of groups attending not only highlighted the fragmentation of the far right 'scene' but also the underpinning ethos of the rally itself which aimed to mend these ideological and organisational divisions that plagued the movement in order to 'Unite the Right', at least around the lowest common denominator of shared enemies (minorities, the left, the authorities).

The most notable of these groups were Vanguard America (with which James Fields Jr., was associated); the Traditionalist Workers Party (Matthew Heimbach); the National Socialist Movement (Jeff Schoep); Identity Evropa (Nathan Damigo and 'Eli Mosley' alias Elliot Kline); The Fraternal Order of the Alt-Knights (affiliated to the Proud Boys); Atomwaffen (Marine Corps Lance Corporal Vasillios Pistolis); the Rise Above Movement; various sections of the Ku Klux Klan (Rebel Brigade Klans, Global Crusader Knights, Confederate White Knights; East Coast Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and the Knights Party); several skinhead groups (Hammerskins, Crew 38, and Blood & Honour); a range of 'neo-Confederate' organisations (League of the South, Identity Dixie and the Hiwayman); Christian Identity believers and Odinists from the Asatru Folk Assembly.

These groups were joined by several 'militia' groups, notably the Pennsylvania Light Foot Militia, the New York Light Foot Militia. Leader Christian Yingling said they came at the behest of a local group, the Virginia Minutemen Militia to reinforce their numbers. The militias claimed to be 'neutral,' interested only in upholding First Amendment Rights

rather than attending because they were sympathetic with the aims of the demonstration per se. Members of another militia group, the III%'ers (Three Percenters), were also in attendance,⁵²⁸ however, and C. J. Ross, an organiser with the Virginia Three Percenters, took a more aggressive stance than Yingling. He had sent out a Facebook message prior to the rally stating that its purpose was 'to crush and demoralize Antifa to the point where they don't return to the park'. In a message to another Facebook group, Ross had written 'I can assure you there will be beatings at the August event... That day we finish them all off.'⁵²⁹ Nationally, however, the group appeared to have taken a different stance, issuing a 'stand down order' on 12 August and distancing themselves from 'white supremacist and Nazi groups.'⁵³⁰

Several other leading far right figures were also present. These included former Klansman David Duke; Christopher Cantwell (Radical Agenda); Mike Enoch and 'Johnny Monoxide' (The Right Stuff); Erik Striker, Robert 'Azzmador' Ray, and Gabriel 'Zieger' Sohler-Chaput (Daily Stormer); James Allsup (white nationalist YouTube influencer); Nick Fuentes (Right Side Broadcasting); and Faith Goldy (Rebel Media, Canada). The event also drew an international audience. From Sweden, both Daniel Friberg (proprietor of Arktos Media) and Henrik Palgren (Red Ice TV) attended. Gavin McInnes, leader of the Proud Boys, was invited to attend but declined fearing reputational damage.

Opposition to the rally came from local residents, UVA students, individual anti-fascist and anti-racist activists, and organisations such as the Clergy Collective, Standing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), Black Lives Matter (BLM), the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) to

528 <https://ragingchickenpress.org/2017/08/12/meet-pennsylvania-militia-spotted-deadly-charlottesville-white-supremacist-rally/#mh-comments> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

529 Signer (2020, p. 134).

530 <https://twitter.com/fjmacnab/status/896927138397405185/photo/1> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

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name but a few. Members of the anti-racist militias Redneck Revolt and the Socialist Rifle Club (SRA) also attended. Many of those who turned out to physically oppose the march were estimated to have come from outside of the city, travelling either from nearby Richmond or from anti-racist and ‘antifa’ groups along the Eastern Seaboard.

The City Council had also opposed the rally and sought to stop it going ahead. Other key figures throughout the period in question include Councillor Wes Bellamy and Mayor Mike Signer, as well as the City Manager, Maurice Jones, who whilst helping formulate the City’s response – both before and after the march – were also at times in tension with one another because of the constraints imposed upon them by their roles, or were in conflict with one another as a result of perceptions that they were exceeding the limits of their authority. Beyond the City’s response, another figure involved in the State level response to the Unite the Right protest was Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe.

6.3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CASE

Phase 1: Charlottesville emerges as a focal point for protests (June 2015-October 2016)

The removal of Confederate statues and symbols from public property had become an increasing issue nationally in the United States following Dylann Roof’s terrorist attacks in 2015. This national issue had already been a trigger of heated local discussion from 2012 onwards when it was publicly raised at the Virginia Festival of the Book. Roof’s murderous attack accelerated this national conversation. Several days afterwards Virginia’s governor, Terry McAuliffe, ordered the removal of the Confederate flag from all state-issued car license plates, for instance.

Though it is an ongoing and enduring issue, the status of Confederate statues in Charlottesville became of central importance locally during the spring of 2016.

On **10 March**, Virginia Governor, Terry McAuliffe vetoed House Bill 587 – legislation that would prevent localities in the State from taking down monuments to the Confederacy and other related memorials. The impact of this announcement was quickly felt in Charlottesville itself. Councilman Wes Bellamy, the City’s vice-mayor, held a press conference on **22 March** in Lee Park seeking support for the removal of the statue of Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

Bellamy had been contacted the previous week by a Charlottesville High School student, Zyahna Bryant, who had organised a petition to have the Lee statue removed and whose words spurred him to action.⁵³¹ Seeking to challenge the status quo, Bellamy contacted fellow councillor, Kristin Szakos, who had previously advocated that the City cease to recognise the Lee-Jackson holiday and also publicly speculated that it should one day think about removing the statues, for which she received ‘a ton of backlash’.⁵³² He also met with Charlottesville’s Mayor, Mike Signer, to discuss the prospect of removing the statue, believing that McAuliffe’s action in vetoing House Bill 587 had created a ‘window of opportunity’ which would prohibit the Republican-majority General Assembly from passing a law that would expressly prevent Charlottesville from acting. Whilst sympathetic, Signer cautioned his colleague. ‘I told Bellamy I thought it could be a disaster if done rashly. It could lead to both fury and inaction. He seemed to recognise as much.’⁵³³

On **19 March**, Bellamy was one of several hundred people to attend a talk in the Paramount Theatre given by civil rights activist Bryan Stevenson, famed founder of the Equal Justice Initiative. During the Q&A session Bellamy asked Stevenson whether, in his opinion, the

531 Bellamy (2019, p. 10). ‘I had to write a school paper about something I could change and I had been thinking about public spaces in Charlottesville,’ recalled Bryant. ‘I thought it was important to draw attention to how Confederate imagery is violent and what it represents for people of colour. Eventually I turned my paper into a petition’. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374>. (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

532 Bellamy (2019, p. 12).

533 Signer (2020, p. 37).

statue in Lee Park should remain. Whilst Stevenson agreed, Bellamy's question was really an opportunity to announce that he and Szakos were hosting a press conference 'to announce that we are moving forward with a plan to remove the statue.'⁵³⁴

The following morning, Signer attended a service at the First Baptist Church after which he would attend an informal town hall meeting.. Bellamy was there too and addressed the congregation to inform them about the impending press conference to remove the Lee statue. 'If you want it gone, then let the mayor know.' Bellamy subsequently conceded that:

In my own eagerness to get people to be involved in the process – to engage them, to motivate them, to energize them around what I wanted to do... I stole the show and sucked all of the air out of the room. I thought it as a good strategy, but he saw it as me throwing a grenade at the situation to pressure him into doing what I wanted him to, and he was adamant that nobody, myself included, would force him to do anything. I think it was at that moment that he began to sink his heels into the dirt and the fight was on. It's getting real. Not only am I fighting the confederates, the moderates who thought the statue was art, the people who thought that we never had any racial issues in Charlottesville, but I'm also fighting my colleague on city council, our mayor.⁵³⁵

For his part Signer observed: 'I could sense the dynamic that would come to poison many of the coming months: that if I didn't agree with his approach, I would be attacked, maybe even called a racist.'⁵³⁶

Two days later Bellamy held his press conference, which was picketed by a group of local counter demonstrators. Bellamy recalled being faced with 'a sea

of Confederate flags'. As he entered the park Bellamy was also approached by a man who identified himself as 'Wesley' and told him he was the commander of the regional Sons of the Confederacy. 'I can see how it would make you and people like you offended' but, he explained to Bellamy, his family fought for the Confederacy and 'I love my heritage' though did not hate anyone because of it. 'I was absolutely floored by his comments,' Bellamy recalled. 'It was the kind of thing that let me know that God was present.' They took photos and shook hands before the man re-joined the crowd.⁵³⁷

Whilst Bellamy understood that for the counter demonstrators the idea of removing the statue was 'unfathomable', he also understood that for many of them the issue was less about the monument than it was the issue of race. 'Make no mistake about it, the fact that I was Black, that I was boisterous, and that I wasn't backing down – in the [sic] eyes was extremely problematic.'⁵³⁸ The speeches themselves, including one by the University of Virginia Professor and Charlottesville-Albermarle NAACP chairman M. Rick Turner who stated that the statue deserved to be in a trash can, did little to calm emotions. The crowd was 'more than livid,' remembered Bellamy, which reaffirmed his belief 'that this wasn't about Robert E. Lee at all.'⁵³⁹ Following the press conference, he was inundated with racist threats including lynching.⁵⁴⁰ Signer had not attended the protest leading to an email from the local NAACP stating that 'many people' were 'baffled' he had not attended. 'I explained that I didn't think it was appropriate for the mayor to be advocating against the government he's a part of. A growing mass of grudging and critical comments online began to stalk me like a shadow,' he recalled.⁵⁴¹

534 Bellamy (2019, pp. 23-25).

535 Bellamy (2019, p. 34).

536 Signer (2020, p. 39).

537 Bellamy (2019, p. 42).

538 Bellamy (2019, p. 43).

539 Bellamy (2019, pp. 45-47).

540 Bellamy (2019, p. 53).

541 In his memoir, Signer (2020, p. 49) recalled that 'there was something new here I wasn't sure how to handling. There was an unsettling "you're either with us or against us" tenor that was at war with my deep impulse to resist symbolic victories. If you didn't *signal* that you were on the right side, the argument seemed to go, then you were *already* supporting racism and white supremacy. And that felt awful.'

6. CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA, USA, FEBRUARY – OCTOBER 2017

The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition

The ‘Virginia Flaggers,’ a group founded in 2011 to reassert the visibility of Confederate symbols following the removal of the Confederate battle flag from outside the Confederate Memorial Chapel in Richmond,⁵⁴² staged a counter-protest against removing the statues in Charlottesville’s Lee Park on **18 April**. Many of the attendees were wearing Confederate costume and waving Confederate flags.⁵⁴³ Bellamy’s campaign to have the statues removed, which won both praise and criticism, led to Charlottesville City Council subsequently creating the Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Memorials and Public Spaces to review the issue on **28 May**. It met for the first time on 24 August and held seventeen public hearings. In November, the Commission recommended that both statues ‘remain in place on the condition that their histories are re-told and meaning transformed based on wide ranging historical analysis.’ The City Council itself subsequently deadlocked on whether to move them prior to the Unite the Right demonstration.

On **4 October**, following a public speech by Alicia Garza, one of the founders of Black Lives Matters (BLM) at the Paramount Theatre in the city’s Downtown Mall, a local restaurant owner and adjunct faculty member of the UVA School of Engineering, Douglas Muir, made a Facebook post denouncing BLM as ‘the biggest racist [sic] organisation since the Klan [sic].’⁵⁴⁴ Muir subsequently agreed to take a furlough from UVA. Several days later the UVA School of Law held a free speech panel. Muir’s case was not mentioned by the panellists, but it was raised by local resident and blogger Jason Kessler for whom the debate over the two statues had been a ‘significant factor’ in his personal radicalisation.⁵⁴⁵ Kessler who described himself as a ‘white civil rights’ advocate had previously participated in Occupy Charlottesville, albeit briefly since, it is alleged, he was asked to leave the group for advocating violence against the police

and the use of Molotov cocktails.⁵⁴⁶ Kessler had also supported the election of President Obama though described himself as having been ‘red pillled’ in 2013 following negative reaction to his telling ‘a little race joke’. Thereafter Kessler began railing, on his blog, against ‘white genocide’ and the ‘attack on white history’ that he perceived was taking place.⁵⁴⁷

On **14 October**, the local branch of the NAACP picketed Muir’s restaurant, a protest attended by Councilman Wes Bellamy who had taken to social media to condemn Muir and urge people to boycott his restaurant.⁵⁴⁸ ‘To my recollection, things at the protest were peaceful,’ he stated:

People had signs, slogans were said, and I was about to leave. That was when Kessler decided to make his stance and his position heard. He burst out of the restaurant with a plate of Pasta in hand and a few slogans of his own describing Black Lives Matter as Anti-White, how the NAACP was a fascist organisation, and we were all there denying Doug Muir to his fundamental right to Free speech.⁵⁴⁹

The subsequent ‘chaos’ and the resultant media attention played into Kessler’s hands, Bellamy believed. This was the period in which Kessler ‘found his voice,’ stated Bellamy.⁵⁵⁰ Kessler would later tell the subsequent inquiry that he believed Bellamy had ‘exploited his official position to unfairly malign Muir’ and so began to conduct research on him (see below).⁵⁵¹

Phase 2: The consolidation of Charlottesville as a focal point for far-right mobilisation (November 2016-August 2017)

542 <https://www.thedailybeast.com/for-the-virginia-flaggers-its-hate-not-heritage> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

543 Spencer (2018, pp. 59-60).

544 Bellamy (2019, p. 63).

545 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 23).

546 <https://wina.com/news/064460-jason-kessler-participated-in-occupy-says-another-activist/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

547 <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/jason-kessler> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

548 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 24).

549 Bellamy (2019, p. 65).

550 Bellamy (2019, pp. 65, 61).

551 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 24).

Donald Trump's election as US President on **8 November 2016** electrified the alt-right, whose nominal figurehead, and the man who coined the term, was Richard Spencer, a veteran 'white nationalist' who ran the National Policy Institute (NPI) and a host of other racist initiatives. As Spencer would later remark:

There is no question that Charlottesville wouldn't have occurred without Trump. It really was because of his campaign and this new potential for a nationalist candidate who was resonating with the public in a very intense way. The alt-right found something in Trump. He changed the paradigm and made this kind of public presence of the alt-right possible.⁵⁵²

The synergy the alt-right felt with Trump was readily apparent when Spencer spoke at an event in Washington DC shortly after the President's inauguration. During the course of this meeting, Spencer proclaimed 'Hail Trump, hail our people, hail Victory!' Several audience members greeted Spencer's proclamation with Nazi salutes.⁵⁵³ Whilst Spencer gained nation-wide notoriety because of the speech, the alt-right itself was still a relatively unknown phenomenon. Many Americans (54%) stated they knew 'nothing at all' about it whilst a further 28% had only heard 'a little' about it.⁵⁵⁴ The movement's lack of public profile would change dramatically the following year.

Locally, in Charlottesville on **24 November**, Jason Kessler unearthed a series of racially and sexually offensive tweets that Councillor Wes Bellamy had made in 2011, triggering his resignation from the Board of Education and a teaching position with Albemarle County Public Schools. Kessler used these tweets to attack Bellamy as 'a blatant black supremacist' and to denigrate his campaign to have

the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee as an 'attack [on] white history.'⁵⁵⁵ Kessler became a minor far right celebrity as a result, invited to contribute articles for national conservative and far-right media outlets such as the conservative Daily Caller and VDARE, a nativist, white nationalist publication. His newfound status, which he later conceded 'all came as a consequence of an exposé I did on Wes Bellamy,' led Kessler to begin networking with 'national' figures such as Richard Spencer and far right media personality Antheim 'Tim' Gionet (aka. 'Baked Alaska').⁵⁵⁶

Despite this growing national connectivity, Kessler's focus during this period was his local campaign against Bellamy whom he subsequently publicly denounced at a Charlottesville City Council meeting on **5 December**. When the Mayor Mike Signer told Kessler that 'your time is over,' following his speech Kessler retorted 'And your days are numbered.'⁵⁵⁷ He also organised an (unsuccessful) petition for Bellamy's recall. Whilst gathering signatures for this permission, Kessler became involved in a physical altercation with a shopper whom he attacked. He was later found guilty of misdemeanour assault for which he received a thirty-day suspended sentence and was ordered to perform community service. He was later indicted for felony perjury having lied about the assault to the police.⁵⁵⁸ Bellamy remained in office despite Kessler's campaign, but the incident soured his working relationship with Signer whose support he felt had been less than effusive.⁵⁵⁹

Kessler also began to target the Council more generally, in one instance posting an intimidating video of himself interrupting a Council meeting on YouTube. The video had been edited to include Pepe the Frog memes (an image popular with the alt-right) and

552 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/06/trump-racism-comments/588067/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

553 <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/richard-spencer-speech-npi/508379/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

554 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/12/most-americans-havent-heard-of-the-alt-right/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

555 <http://www.jasonkessler.net/blog/leaked-anti-white-racist-charlottesville-vice-mayor-wes-bellamy-attacks-whites-women-blacks-who-talk-white> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

556 <https://www.counter-currents.com/2018/01/ten-questions-for-jason-kessler/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

557 Spencer (2018, p. 46).

558 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/10/04/jason-kessler-charlottesville-protest-organizer-indicted-for-perjury/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

559 Bellamy (2019, pp. 77-78).

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The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition

‘video-game style targets on councillors, with noises of gunfire in the background’ leading Charlottesville’s mayor to contact the chief of police, who stationed extra officers at the following pre-holiday budget work session.⁵⁶⁰ This ‘trolling’ of Signer and his family as well as online threats against Wes Bellamy, the leaders of the local Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) chapters, amongst others, only increased from May 2017 after the alt-right held their first rally in the city (see below).⁵⁶¹

In **January 2017**, following multiple votes, the Charlottesville City Council was effectively deadlocked on the issue of removing the Lee and Jackson statues, leaving things at an impasse, at least temporarily.⁵⁶² The Council reconsidered the issue again at a meeting on **6 February** at which they voted 3-2 to remove the Lee statue from Lee Park. This generated protest during and after the meeting as various groups, notably the Monument Fund and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, eventually went to court to prevent its removal.⁵⁶³

The inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America on **20 January** further polarised these discussions.⁵⁶⁴ Trump lost little time in announcing his ‘Muslim travel ban’ leading Charlottesville’s Democrat Mayor, Mike Signer, to declare the city a ‘Capitol of Resistance’ to Trump during the course of an unscheduled rally outside City Hall.⁵⁶⁵ Signer’s comments, whilst welcomed by some, also put Charlottesville on the map for the political right. ‘People cheered. That resonated with a lot of

people, but it put a target on our backs,’ recalled Jalane Schmidt, a UVA professor and BLM activist.⁵⁶⁶

The rally was also addressed by local resident Khizr Khan whose son, a US serviceman, had been killed in Iraq. Jason Kessler tried to disrupt the proceedings. ‘He appeared to be filming himself for Facebook Live while Khan was talking,’ noted Signer. ‘He kept shouting out sexually explicit lines from Bellamy’s notorious Twitter feed. He also seemed to be attacking Khan for being a Muslim’. The police did not intervene and as such, for Signer at least, it was a ‘case study in the difficulty the police face in handling disruptive but constitutionally protected speech – even hate speech – at a public event in a public space.’⁵⁶⁷

In **February 2017**, Kessler proclaimed the formation of the ‘Unity and Security for America’ organisation, dedicated to ‘defending Western civilisation’.⁵⁶⁸ He did so at a meeting addressed by Republican politician Corey Stewart, a former Trump campaign manager, who was then campaigning to win the nomination for the Governorship of Virginia. Stewart held two meetings in Charlottesville after the City Council had voted to remove the Lee statue seeking make political capital from the issue.⁵⁶⁹ Kessler addressed the second rally, stating that ‘every generation has a fight, and our fight is this.’⁵⁷⁰ His activism had by this point drawn the attention of the local SURJ chapter who distributed flyers against him and, in one instance in April, became involved in an altercation with him outside a local bar leading to at least one arrest for assault (though the charge was subsequently dropped).⁵⁷¹

Kessler was also on the radar of national actors too. On **8 April** he attended a demonstration in Washington DC, protesting President Trump’s missile strike

560 Signer (2020, pp. 86-87).

561 Blout and Burkart (2021, p. 14). The court document *Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al.*, pp. 46-49 also details a number of threats made to Charlottesville residents involved in Congregate Charlottesville, the local Jewish community and local businesses (some of whom had signed a petition opposing the rally) in the weeks before the Unite the Right rally in August.

562 <https://www.cbs19news.com/content/news/Effort-to-move-Statues-in-Lee-Park-Stalls-411027515.html> (Accessed on 01/06/2021) and Spencer (2018, p. 61).

563 <https://wset.com/news/local/lawsuit-filed-to-keep-lee-statue-in-charlottesville> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

564 Richard Spencer attended the inauguration. An anti-fascist activist punched him in the head whilst he was being interviewed, sparking a viral meme.

565 (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

566 (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

567 Signer (2020, p. 101). Donald Trump would subsequently belittle Khan and his wife after he spoke against him at the Democrat’s National Convention. Trump’s attack on a military family who had lost a son in combat elicited widespread outrage.

568 (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

569 Spencer (2018, p. 47).

570 (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

571 Signer (2020, pp. 133-134).

against Syria which the alt-right viewed as a ‘total betrayal’.⁵⁷² It was at this demonstration that Kessler met Richard Spencer and Eli Mosley, the leader of the white nationalist group Identity Evropa. When Spencer learned that Kessler was from Charlottesville, he informed him of his plans to hold a rally in the city the following month. ‘Specifically, Spencer noted that he was attracted to Charlottesville by the controversy over the statues and the appeal of the issue to his supporters.’ Kessler readily agreed to participate.⁵⁷³

Before this rally took place, however, a judge ruled on the Monument Fund’s motion for an injunction against the City of Charlottesville removing the Lee statue, granting it and requiring the City to continue to preserve it for at least another six months⁵⁷⁴ (though he did, however, allow the City to rename Lee Park and to continue planning for the statue’s potential relocation). Despite this victory, less than two weeks later, on **13 May**, Richard Spencer and approximately 100 white nationalists, many of them from Identity Evropa, the Traditional Workers Party, and American Vanguard, arrived in the city to stage two events providing the first indication that Charlottesville was becoming a lightning rod for the far right at a national level. Both these events took place without advanced warning and neither had a permit (with no action being taken to enforce these regulations).⁵⁷⁵

The first event, which took place at midday, entailed the group marching from McGuffey Park to Jackson Park. Spencer had told those present (who had been chanting ‘We Will Not Be Replaced’, ‘Blood and Soil’ and ‘Russia is our Friend’):

We will not be replaced from this park. We will not be replaced from this world. Whites have a future. We have a future of power, of beauty, of expression.

Spencer also described those present as being the ‘tip of the spear’ (hinting that many of those involved conceived of themselves as a vanguard rather than a conventional pressure group or party) – and concluded by praising General’s Lee and Jackson as ‘gods’. The secretive nature of the march ensured minimal public opposition, though towards the end the alt-right were heckled by several counter-protestors, some drawn from the local SURJ chapter,⁵⁷⁶ chanting ‘Black Lives Matter’ who were quickly encircled by far-right activists shouting ‘anti-white’ at them. There was a small physical altercation after which Spencer’s followers disbursed.⁵⁷⁷

The second event, a short torchlight parade in Jackson Park which began at approximately 9 pm, was a flash demonstration though it too ended in a confrontation with a local resident after which CPD officers ordered Spencer and his followers from the park.⁵⁷⁸ Later that evening, Bellamy recorded that a group of people drove through his neighbourhood (‘one of the last remaining predominantly African American neighbourhoods in the city’) yelling out ‘a few slurs in another method to scare us.’⁵⁷⁹ In the wake of the march, Mayor Signer issued a strongly worded statement condemning Spencer. ‘Without realising it, with that statement I was throwing a match into the alt-right’s tinder,’ he later recalled. This was measured by a number of antisemitic threats that began to roll in thereafter. This included ones from former KKK Grand Dragon, David Duke, who began tweeting at Signer. He responded by mocking the former Klan leader but also noted that in doing so this ‘put me on the radar of an entire universe of anti-Semites. Suddenly, more people were following me, tweeting at me with a whole new level of stereotype – hooked-nosed Protocols of the Elders of Zion stuff.’⁵⁸⁰

572 (Accessed on 01/06/2021)
573 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 25).
574 (Accessed on 01/06/2021)
575 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 25-26).

576 <https://www.c-ville.com/lee-park-scene-white-nationalist-demonstration-counter-protest/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)
577 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 27).
578 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 28).
579 Bellamy (2019, p. 99).
580 Signer (2020, pp. 120-122).

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The alt-right viewed the publicity surrounding the torch-lit march as a ‘significant victory’.⁵⁸¹ The event would subsequently be referred to as ‘Charlottesville 1.0’. Indeed, Kessler records that it was the following day, on **14 May**, that he decided to arrange his own much larger demonstration in Charlottesville. For Kessler, Spencer’s demonstration offered a ‘kernel of an opportunity’ for activists to lay aside personal and factional issues and to unite in a demonstration that ‘would draw attention to our core issues of demographic and cultural replacement’.⁵⁸²

If Spencer’s meeting spurred Kessler to seek wider unity within the far right nationally, at a local level it also fuelled resistance. On the evening of **14 May**, hundreds of people showed up to ‘take back Lee Park’ with a candlelit vigil which had been organised by SURJ, Solidarity Cville and BLM. The statue was draped with a banner reading ‘Black Lives Matter. Fuck White Supremacy’ which Kessler, who turned up towards the end of the protest, tore down resulting in a scuffle with another man who spat on him in response. Kessler was subsequently arrested for refusing to desist from using a megaphone after police had instructed him to do so. The incident served to further raise his profile locally.⁵⁸³

Events of the weekend of **13-14 May** ‘hardened the resolve of both sides [including Charlottesville Council] to continue their ongoing battle over the statues and broader issues of race and history,’ notes the Heaphy Report.⁵⁸⁴ Indeed, the alt-right’s intervention increased local activism and polarised attitudes whilst also heightening ‘pre-existing scepticism about City officials and CPD’.⁵⁸⁵ The intervention of Kessler, Spencer and others appears to have polarised some local attitudes vis-à-vis the issue of the statues. In the wake of these events, Bellamy, for instance, observed

a shift in mood amongst some local residents whom he stated were beginning to ‘wake up’ to the fact that the far right was using the statue of Robert E. Lee ‘as a ploy to push the agenda of White Supremacy.’ He recalled, ‘I was seeing a lot of people say things that they refused to say months earlier [...]. If you thought that the statue needed to stay, then essentially you were on the side of Richard Spencer. Jason Kessler and his minions were not there to defend the statue, they were there to defend their whiteness.’⁵⁸⁶

The growing public salience of Charlottesville’s monuments to the Confederacy also began to draw the attention of other actors from out of the State. On **24 May** the Loyal White Knights of the KKK, an organisation based in North Carolina, filed an application to stage a rally in Charlottesville in July. Six days later, on **30 May**, Kessler followed suit, filing his own application to hold the Unite the Right rally in August. The following week Charlottesville City Council, unable to remove the two Confederate statues for the time being, voted instead to change the names of Lee and Jackson Parks to Emancipation Park and Justice Park, respectively.

On **8 July**, the Loyal White Knights of the KKK held their rally in Charlottesville. During the night, someone daubed the base of the Lee statue in Emancipation Park with red paint and the words ‘Native Land’, though this was removed by council workers before the Klan arrived in the park.⁵⁸⁷ Ironically, the group’s leader, Chris Barker, was unable to attend his own demonstration due to bail restrictions imposed on him and another man following their arrest for the stabbing of another Klansman the previous December.⁵⁸⁸ About 50 activists took part in the rally which ended with 23 arrests. The group’s stated reason for demonstrating in Charlottesville was to protest the proposed removal of the Jackson statue. The protest had been billed as a

581 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 30).

582 <https://www.counter-currents.com/2018/01/ten-questions-for-jason-kessler/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

583 <https://www.c-ville.com/lee-park-scene-white-nationalist-demonstration-counter-protest/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021) and Heaphy Report (2017, p. 30).

584 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 2).

585 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 30).

586 Bellamy (2019, pp. 101-103).

587 <https://www.wsls.com/news/2017/07/08/robert-e-lee-statue-vandalized-ahead-of-kkk-rally-in-charlottesville/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

588 <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-klan-leader-arrest-20161206-story.html> and <https://triad-city-beat.com/felony-dropped-klan-leader-media-spotlight-charlottesville/> (Accessed on 01/06/2021)

‘stop cultural genocide rally at the courthouse’ though it was subsequently moved to Justice Park.⁵⁸⁹

On the day of the demonstration approximately 400 counter-protestors, comprising members of religious groups, SURJ, BLM and ‘antifa’, as well as other local residents, gathered in the park. There were reports that some of the counter-protestors were carrying firearms, knives and swords. CPD were ‘surprised’ by the level of planning by some of the counter-protestors, who had brought with them medical services, used walkie talkies to share information and carried with them protective clothing including gas masks and shields. The Clergy Collective organised a large inter-faith service at the nearby First United Methodist Church, after which one group of worshippers marched to Justice Park to oppose the Klan, taking the total of those who had turned out to oppose them to around 600, though this rose to nearly 2,000 according to some police estimates. The counter demonstrators formed a human chain to block the Klan’s entrance to Justice Park. As CPD sought to clear a path for the Klan, they made numerous arrests, which ‘fired up’ the crowd.⁵⁹⁰

When the sixty Klansmen and -women turned up to speak in their designated zone in Justice Park later that afternoon, the Klansmen would complain that CPD had failed to maintain enough distance between them and their opponents which the Heaphy Report subsequently described as ‘a significant mistake’ in planning and preparing for the event. Indeed the ‘emotional intensity’ was at its ‘most acute’ near to the barricades encircling the Klan. Their rally lasted thirty-five minutes, their speeches mostly drowned out by the counter demonstration. When the Klan exited the park, hundreds of counter-protestors followed them to their departure point (a nearby parking garage). CPD held them inside this structure until an unlawful assembly declaration was made. Police then moved to clear the crowd at which point a portion of those gathered, who refused to disperse, turned on the police. Thereafter there were intermittent clashes with

counter demonstrators leading to a second declaration of unlawful assembly.⁵⁹¹

The fact that these unlawful assembly declarations had to be made at all was, the Heaphy Report remarked, the result of ‘poor planning’ on behalf of the police. ‘It is hard to understate the significance of this mistake,’ the Heaphy report later recorded, ‘give[n] how markedly the unlawful assembly declarations and forced dispersal of the crowd changed the tenor of this event’.⁵⁹² Indeed, shortly afterwards several local anti-racist protestors were tear gassed, seemingly without warning, by a Virginia State Police (VSP) officer, an escalation in police tactics which ‘did not follow the protocol’ since it had not been authorised by the CPD Chief Al Thomas who had already turned down such a request.⁵⁹³

This episode had lingering consequences. It created ‘strong opposition’ across the community which bristled at such heavy-handed policing methods and the ‘militarization’ of the police response in general, whilst the City’s ‘inability or unwillingness’ to engage with citizens on the issue in the aftermath ‘created distrust in law enforcement and City government’.⁵⁹⁴ ‘The narrative of the community versus the police vs the White supremacists was brewing,’ Bellamy recorded in his memoir. Repeatedly he was asked why the police treated the KKK better than the people who lived in Charlottesville. Public criticism of the police by Bellamy and others further meant that figures like Police Chief Thomas felt ‘betrayed’.⁵⁹⁵

Whilst the incident succeeded in further souring relations between protestors and law enforcement prior to the KKK rally, CPD had further polarised local attitudes by conducting ‘aggressive inquiries’ to learn who might oppose the Klan event, knocking on doors in the community in an effort to gain intelligence on

589 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 30).

590 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 50-56).

591 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 55-59, 67).

592 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 67).

593 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 2, 59-61, 67).

594 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 4, 62, 68).

595 Bellamy (2019, pp. 109, 120).

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SURJ and BLM activists.⁵⁹⁶ The City's own attempts to discourage counter-protests had also alienated some members of the community. The Council had run a 'Don't Take the Bait' campaign aimed at dissuading locals from attending as well as holding a 'Unity Day' well away from the rally which, whilst successful in its own right, also backfired since, as Mayor Signer acknowledged, it had probably driven others to confront the KKK, 'in order to signal their resistance to what they felt was a dismissive and paternalistic attitude from the established powers in a progressive city.'⁵⁹⁷

These events also created a deep division within community progressives and faith leaders who also had an 'extremely strong reaction' to the tear gassing of counter demonstrators, which only 'deepened' after the 8 July rally. 'The image of police focussing exclusively on protecting the Klan then acting aggressively toward the counter-protestors angered others in the community.'⁵⁹⁸ The Council's response also angered the police. Despite having been unanimous in his support, the Mayor subsequently issued a Facebook statement stating that the use of tear gas was 'unsettling' and that the police 'owed an explanation' to the people of Charlottesville, which also served to upset Chief Thomas.⁵⁹⁹ No matter how aggressive the counter-protesters were, argued Signer, the police had failed to de-escalate the situation, 'and the stage was set for a cycle of deeper mistrust between police and counter protesters.'⁶⁰⁰ Ultimately, the Klan rally was counterproductive to its stated aims of preserving 'Southern heritage', since the following week the City Manager had the plaque on the Lee Statue, which proclaimed that he was a 'hero of the Confederacy,' removed.⁶⁰¹

The KKK were not a part of the coalition that Kessler was trying to build but he recognised that their event

would negatively impact his own. This being the case, he contacted the organisers and asked them to reconsider stating that 'if you really care about white people, you can't bring this KKK stuff in.' The KKK rebuffed him.⁶⁰² Kessler still attended and live streamed the KKK march on Twitter, however, using it as a means of rallying support for his own event. '#Unite the Right against these shitlibs in Charlottesville on August 12th is going to be so much fun. You've got a month to be there.'⁶⁰³

Planning for the 'Unite the Right' rally

Though Richard Spencer has become synonymous with 'Charlottesville', neither he nor his NPI 'had any role' in planning the event. Rather, the event was 'substantially co-ordinated' by Kessler who was still then a 'new, mostly unknown figure' on the national scene.⁶⁰⁴ Kessler was an inexperienced political organiser. His principal tool for framing the event and organising the various individuals and groups who had agreed to or wanted to participate was through social media. In the months prior to the event, they used sophisticated online communications that were tailored to different target audiences. The earliest traceable rally-related communication took place in Discord channels in early June 2017 when members of the channel 'Charlottesville 2.0' started coordinating the planning and logistics for the protest (Figure 6.2).⁶⁰⁵ The server logs for this platform, which were subsequently leaked online, provided 'irrefutable evidence,' researchers have argued, that the Unite the Right demonstration 'was centrally organized and co-ordinated as a simulacrum of a military campaign.'⁶⁰⁶

In-depth online preparations began at least three months before the rally, with a strong focus on logistics, optics and what was not permissible under local laws –

596 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 34).
597 Signer (2020, p. 161).
598 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 47, 63).
599 Signer (2020, pp. 156-158).
600 Signer (2020, p. 159).
601 Signer (2020, p. 163).

602 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 78).
603 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., p. 22.
604 McLaren (2018, p. 43).
605 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., pp. 26-27 notes that there were at least 43 channels set up on Discord for the purpose of information sharing.
606 Blout and Burkart (2021, p. 7).



Figure 6.2: Screenshot from Discord.

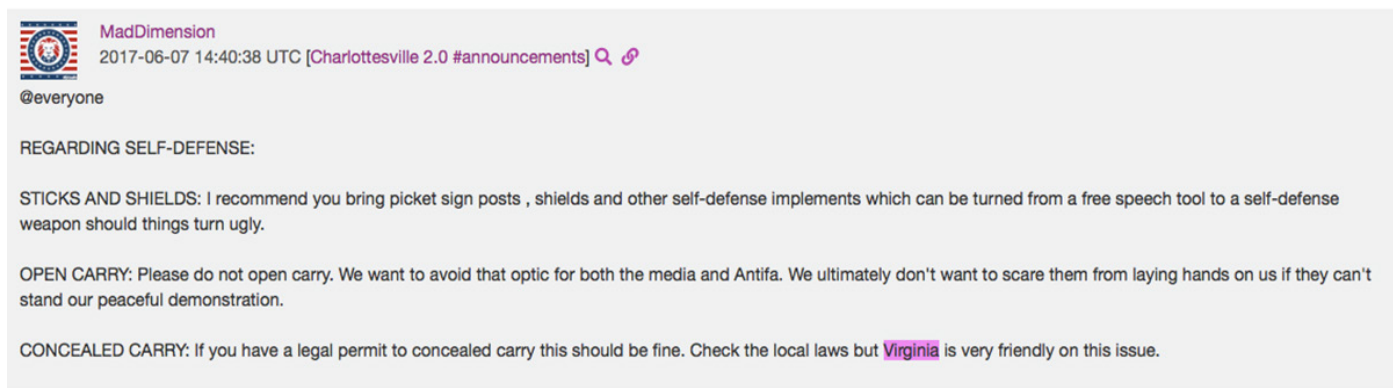
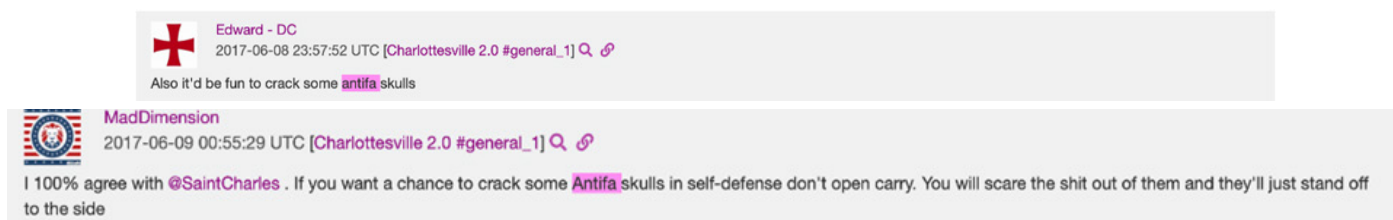


Figure 6.3: Screenshot from Discord.



Figures 6.4 and 6.5: Screenshots from Discord.

often in relation to firearms. Discussions took place on a daily basis. Jason Kessler, who used the social media name 'MadDimension', announced rules for the rally regarding 'self-defence' and, on **7 June 2017**, provided members with information regarding Virginia's firearm laws (Figure 6.3). Members of the channel were asked to help create promotional materials and memes for social media and fringe platforms.

As the post in Figure 6.3 indicates, Kessler was keen that attendees would not openly carry firearms so as not create a negative media 'optic' for the event (though other users discussed the use of improvised weapons and posted pictures of themselves with their guns⁶⁰⁷). Whilst he was keen for attendees to bring sticks and shields (many of those who subsequently attended the event did so⁶⁰⁸) in case things got 'ugly' he

also emphasised that he did not want the rally to look too formidable since this might deter anti-racists and anti-facists from attacking the demonstration, which he appears to have wanted so that his political opponents could be portrayed as the aggressors. Kessler appeared to have indicated the same desire whilst sympathising with a Discord user who wanted to 'crack some antifa skulls.' He expressed a wish to do so too (in 'self-defence') but restated that it was important not to openly carry firearms. 'You will scare the shit out of them [antifa] and they'll just stand off to the side' rather than engaging in violence, he wrote on 9 June (Figures 6.4 and 6.5).

To help achieve these goals, Kessler outlined three tactics:

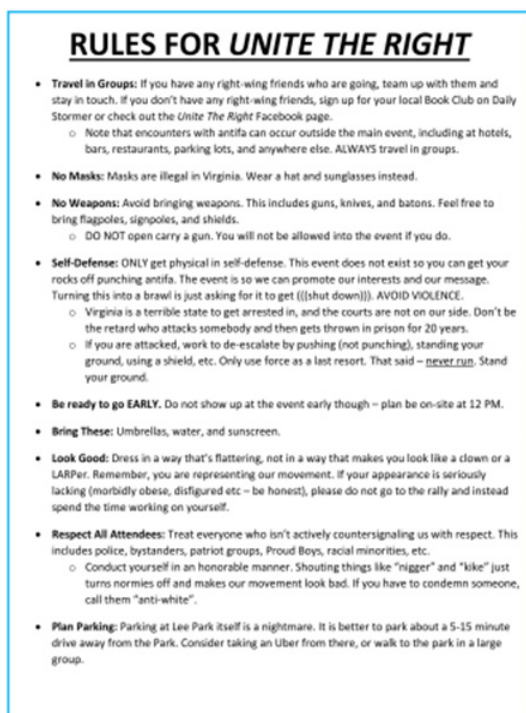
607 Blout and Burkart (2021, p. 8).

608 Blout and Burkart (2021, p. 10) notes that on 7 July, a document entitled 'Shields and Shield Tactics Primer' was uploaded to the

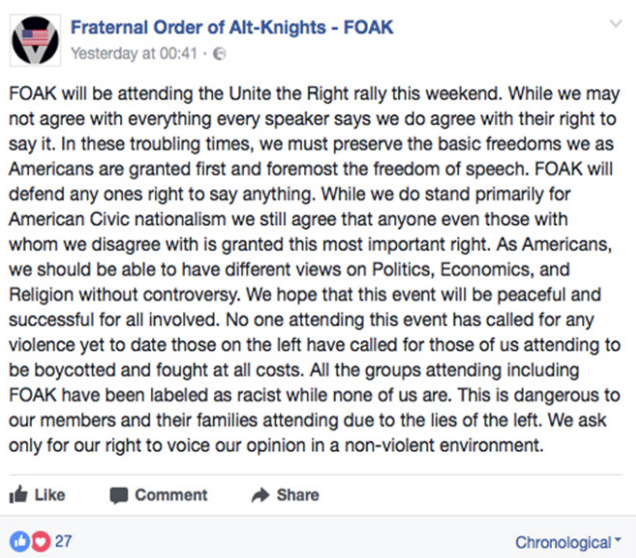
Discord server detailing how such items could be used in a co-ordinated fashion during combat highlighting that their envisaged use was not defensive.

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- Clear rules regarding the use of weapons and branding were communicated (Figure 6.6);
- Common grievances such as freedom of speech and Southern heritage were highlighted (Figure 6.7);
- Neo-Nazi symbols were kept in closed extremist forums and not part of the official communication strategy.



Figures 6.6 and 6.7: Social media spread of the rules for the demonstration.

The organisers and participants planned the event in detail: logistics, optics, weapon laws, etc. Much of this was codified in a document entitled ‘Operation Unite the Right Charlottesville 2.0., General Distribution’ which began to circulate amongst ‘extremely vetted circles’ only from May onwards. The document highlighted that the rally was centrally planned as well as that the group made detailed preparations for three different scenarios, each of which was dependent upon a certain type of interaction with CPD. This included a ‘yellow’ plan for if the police failed or refused ‘to secure the area around Lee Park for us, and may not maintain a buffer between us and antifa’, which is of course what transpired.⁶⁰⁹

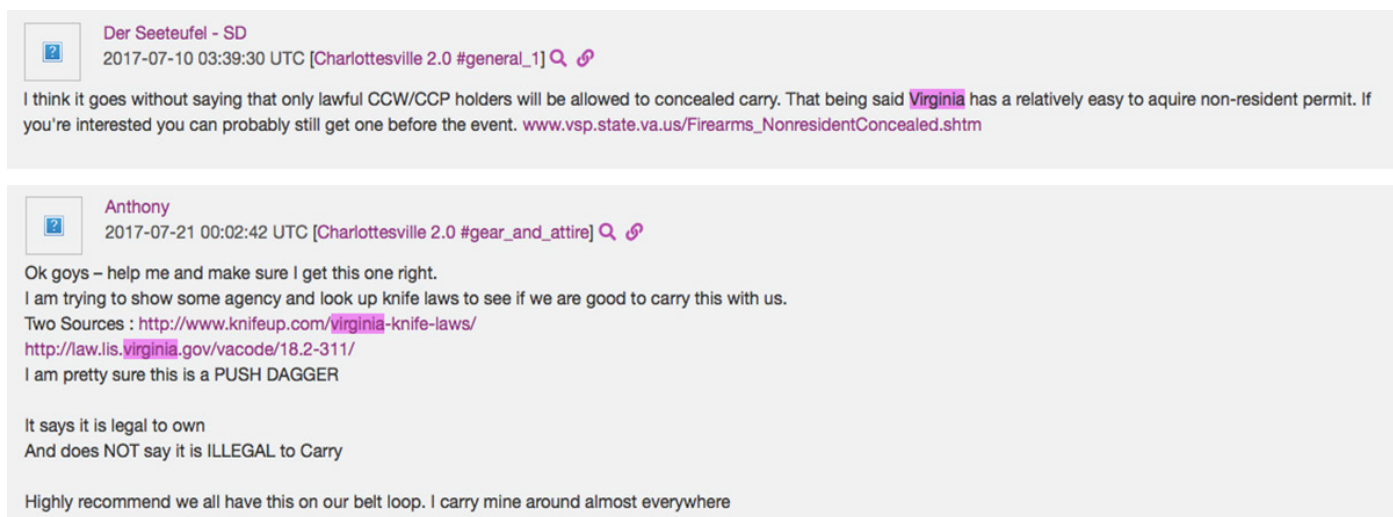
Despite the attention given to the rally’s public image, many attendees had no such interest in ‘optics’ and would attend Charlottesville intent on violence against ‘antifa’ or any other political or racial ‘enemy’. On Discord, the organisers and participants pooled their knowledge, discussing what they had learned about local laws and police forces. Activists even checked with lawyers concerning their legal rights, as non-residents, to carry different types of weapons (guns, batons, knives, etc.) and the permits that might be required (Figures 6.8 and 6.9).⁶¹⁰

Such discussions directly contradicted the ‘rules’ that Kessler had outlined at the beginning concerning ‘defensive shields only, no weapons’. However, as one post on 7 June made by Kessler himself made clear, there was never any division between self-defence and offensive violence: ‘@everyone... I recommend you bring picket sign post, shields and other self-defence implements which can be turned from a free speech tool to a self-defence weapon should things turn ugly.’ Moreover, the Discord server was ‘rife’ with discussions about which weapons to bring and which everyday objects could be used to inflict harm.⁶¹¹

609 https://www.unicornriot.ninja/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/OpOrd3_General.pdf (Accessed on 02/06/2021)

610 The Heaphy Report (2017, p. 70) notes the FBI’s Richmond field office and the Virginia Fusion Center were aware that those attending the rally planned to bring bats, batons, flag sticks, knives and firearms ‘confront their political opponents’ and informed CPD of such.

611 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler



Figures 6.8 and 6.9: Screenshots from Discord.

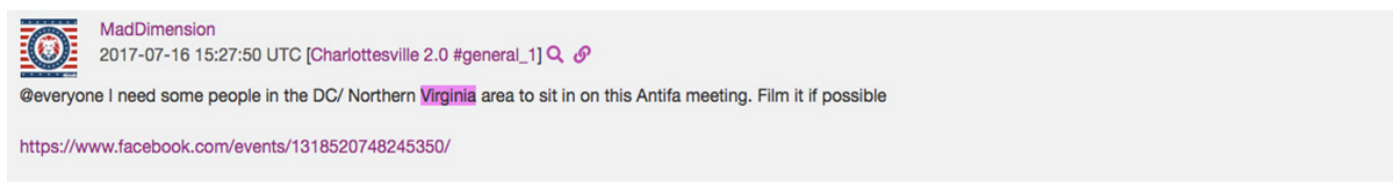


Figure 6.10: Screenshot from Discord.

There were countless exhortations and incitements to violence on the Discord server which was administered by Kessler and Mosley which appeared to transgress the groups own rules.⁶¹² Within our social media data, we also found evidence that those involved researched police officers and police politics to predict how the police would react to different scenarios.

‘Antifa,’ by which the alt-right meant their anti-fascist and anti-racist opposition, were a particular focus of these Discord chats with the City of Charlottesville itself being portrayed as a left-wing stronghold.⁶¹³ This framing was bolstered externally by the Trump administration, which labelled ‘antifa’ as a ‘terrorist organisation,’ a claim that had no merit beyond serving to rile his support base which was undoubtedly the aim. ‘Antifa’ were more than simply a propaganda tool or a rhetorical foil for those engaged with the ‘Charlottesville 2.0’ Discord server, however. On

an open Discord channel called #antifa_watch the organisers also gathered and shared ‘intelligence’ on their presumed adversaries.⁶¹⁴ In this respect, Kessler also sought to recruit people to infiltrate an ‘antifa’ meeting to find out more about potential the counter-protestors’ plans. ‘Film it if possible,’ he wrote (Figure 6.10).

Several activists who were part of so-called ‘anti-antifa’ group called Anticom were also active on the Charlottesville 2.0 server. On 7 August the group’s ‘Head Representative’ used Anticom’s own group’s Discord chat to invite people to attend with ‘as much gear and weaponry as you can within the confines of the law. I am serious... You still have a few days to get some protection from Home Depot and bring any guns you have... This isn’t just Anticom. Spencer, organizers, everyone are behind this.’⁶¹⁵

et al., p. 39.

612 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., pp. 33-34.

613 Blout and Burkart (2021, pp. 14-15).

614 Blout and Burkart (2021, p. 7).

615 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., pp. 28 and 36.

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As well as the practicalities of the Charlottesville rally, which included more mundane logistical issues such as co-ordinating travel arrangements, users in the Discord chatrooms also discussed how the event should be framed, increasingly adopting the idea that the removal of commemoration statues and monuments of Southern heritage would pose an existential threat to Virginia, and by extension the US, whose white population, it was claimed, was being culturally dispossessed.

Kessler was keen that those taking part in the event would present a unified front to preserve the heritage of Southerners and ‘secure the rights of white people.’ The aim was to unite as many people as possible and ‘gain sympathy from whites and the general right wing’ – particularly Republicans – as a means of growing the movement more generally, rather than just mobilising the alt-right base around a single rally.⁶¹⁶ To this end the organisers emphasised that the rally needed to be as ‘open’ and ‘friendly’ as possible, to which end attendees were asked to ‘refrain from roman salutes’ i.e. the Nazi salute.⁶¹⁷ To sell this broader agenda of making the demonstration appealing to whites from outside the alt-right’s own political milieu, the organisers engaged in a three month ‘information and influence campaign’⁶¹⁸ aimed at propagandising key ideological points, intimidating political opponents, and framing their protest as an act of resistance to the so-called ‘Great Replacement’ or ‘white genocide’. Kessler and others then amplified this message through other public platforms such as Twitter.⁶¹⁹

Social media was the central tool through which organisers engaged in narrative development both before, during and after the protest. Discourse analysis of propaganda on webpages ranging from popular, open-access social media platforms to fringe forums and encrypted apps found that the organisers adapted their tone and content to different target audiences. The

official Unite the Right Facebook event page did not feature explicitly anti-Semitic symbols or references but was rather focused on free speech and Southern heritage issues. Its main announcement framed the rally as an event to defend ‘the First Amendment rights of conservatives and right-wing activists’ from a ‘totalitarian communist crackdown’.



Figure 6.11: Anti-Semitic material from the Daily Stormer.

Alt-right websites such as AltRight.com, VDARE and The Right Stuff on the other hand featured more explicitly racist and anti-Semitic announcements and articles. Even more extreme was the propaganda on the neo-Nazi website Daily Stormer (Figure 6.11), which promoted the rally as an event ‘to end Jewish influence in America’. On Stormfront, the Nationalist Socialist Movement and different Ku Klux Klan divisions encouraged participation and coordinated logistics.

On alt-right messaging boards such as 4Chan’s /pol and the /The_Donald subreddit various threats promoted and endorsed the event. The discussions between users tended to highlight common grounds whilst downplaying differences between the different movements. They supported the idea to ‘unite the right’. For instance, one user on /The_Donald who

616 https://www.unicornriot.ninja/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/OpOrd3_General.pdf (Accessed on 02/06/2021)

617 https://www.unicornriot.ninja/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/OpOrd3_General.pdf (Accessed on 02/06/2021)

618 Blout and Burkart (2021, p. 11).

619 Spencer (2018, p. 148).



Figure 6.13: Screenshot from Discord.

claimed to disagree with National Socialism and ethnonationalism encouraged others to take part in the rally.

Our analysis of the Twitter traffic around the #UniteTheRight hashtag in the run-up to the rally suggests that the rally organisers were successful in exploiting a diverse set of grievances to attract individuals from across the ideological spectrum. We collected all supportive tweets used in combination with Charlottesville-related hashtags (in total over 30,000 tweets) to analyse the motivations of protestors and online supporters of the rally.

The following keywords were most often used in combination with the #UniteTheRight hashtag:

Antifa, communist, left, leftists, multiculturalism, sjws, amendment, freedom, free speech, heritage, monument, southern, #whitepeople, anti-white, diversity, identity, immigration, jew, white.

Charlottesville Grievances

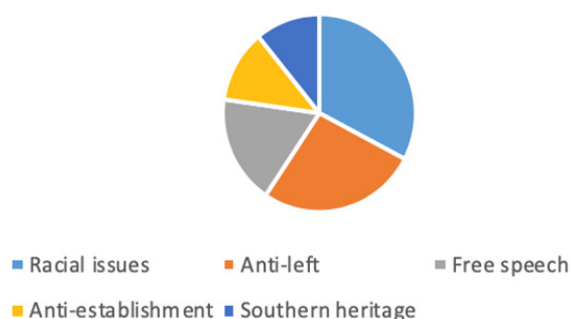


Figure 6.12: dominant grievances within Charlottesville-related tweets.

After filtering and categorising all words that were used in Charlottesville-related posts by participants and sympathisers of the rally, we found a range of dominant grievances (Figure 6.12). 33 percent of expressed grievances were related to racial issues – with keywords such as 'white genocide', 'white people', 'immigration' and 'anti-white' featuring prominently. 27 percent referred to grievances against the left. Posts often explicitly denounced 'antifa' and communists as the enemy. Other revealed grievances were a frustration around freedom of speech (18%), Southern heritage (11%) and the establishment (12%). This shows that the rally organisers were able to mobilise groups and individuals with a wide range of grievances.

The aim of the rally and the 'rules' devised to underpin it, was not just to 'unite' the right but to reach as wide an audience as possible and to recruit more people, particularly young people, to this cause by presenting a strong, united and above all respectable front. The day itself proved to be the complete antithesis of this, however. In order to get the numbers he believed were needed to outnumber Antifa protestors and to have a political impact, Kessler united with a range of groups that would undermine such public-oriented aims. For example, on **14 June**, Kessler suggested that they reach out the Proud Boys – appealing to them on the grounds that 'we're going to be baiting Antifa' (Figure 6.13).

Kessler had in fact joined the Proud Boys, a far-right group founded in 2016 whose recruits cite an oath of loyalty: 'I'm a proud Western chauvinist, I refuse to apologise for creating the modern world.' Further rites of initiation include a would-be member being punched whilst reciting the names of breakfast cereals, getting a tattoo, refraining from masturbation, and getting into

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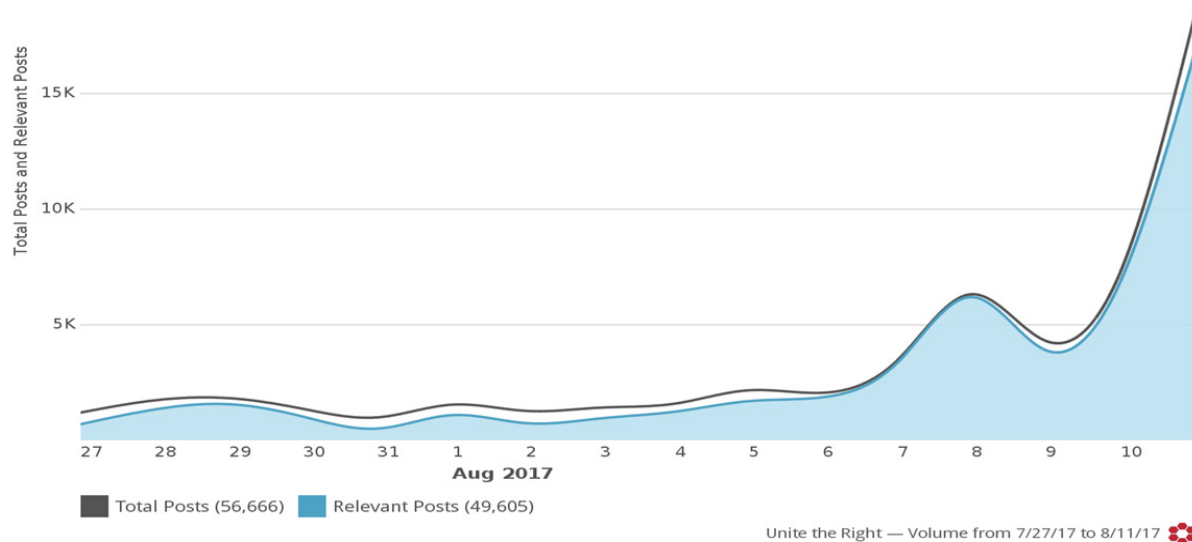


Figure 6.14: Volume of social media posts relating to the Unite the Right rally from 27 July 2017 to 11 August 2017.

a fight ‘for the cause.’⁶²⁰ On **16 June**, Kessler posted on Facebook: ‘We’re going to be introducing the Proud Boys to Charlottesville, Virginia on Saturday. They are going to be visiting here a lot more often as we bring solidarity and UNITE THE RIGHT.’⁶²¹ The group were involved in a minor altercation with Charlottesville shoppers at the Downtown Mall the following day. Despite Kessler’s best efforts, however, the Proud Boys did not commit to join the rally, although leader, Gavin McInnes, did issue a statement stating that though his group would not be participating ‘we wish them nothing but the best’.⁶²²

As the day of the rally drew closer, there was a significant uptick in social media activity on the principal Discord messaging boards used by the alt-right. The Crimson Hexagon monitor (the tool used to collect digital data for this project) identified roughly 50,000 relevant Twitter and message board posts in the

two weeks run-up to the event. The campaign traffic remained steady over a long time before surging in the week prior to the event, as the organisers and speakers stepped up their efforts to spread the word among ‘the normies’. Charlottesville-related tweets and posts then increased exponentially two days before the event and spiked on the day of the rally (see Figure 6.14).

The official alt-right Discord channel passed the 4,000 members mark in the week preceding the rally. A few days prior to the event, over 600 people had clicked on ‘attending’ and over 1,000 others had announced their interest (though ultimately only approximately 600 people did attend).

In these online forums, users presented the rally as a pivotal event. ‘You might think it’s just a rally,’ Spencer wrote, ‘but really, it’s so much more... we are telling the anti-White establishment and it’s [sic] attack dogs that we are not going to give another inch... And now we have come to the tipping point.’⁶²³ Similarly, in an article that appeared on The Daily Stormer on 8 August it was stated that the rally had shifted from being simply ‘in support of the Lee Monument’ to ‘something bigger than that... it is now an historic rally, which will serve as a rallying point and a battle

620 https://www.takimag.com/article/introducing_the_proud_boys_gavin_mcinnes/#axzz4mOj2tsba and <https://www.dailydot.com/layer8/proud-boys/> (Accessed on 02/06/2021)

621 <https://wina.com/news/064460-jason-kessler-proud-boys-take-to-downtown-mall/> (Accessed on 02/06/2021)

622 <http://officialproudboys.com/news/gavin-mcinnes-virginia-unite-the-right-rally-disavowed/> (Accessed on 02/06/2021). McInnes’ statement had concluded: ‘if a chapter or an individual Proud Boy feels compelled to go, we encourage him to do so. Chapter autonomy is a big part of the group as well as personal liberty. Free speech is for everyone. This event isn’t ours, which is why our name is not on the flyer, but we wish them nothing but the best.’

cry for the rising alt-right movement.’⁶²⁴ This shift was apparent on Discord too, where users intoned that the rally was about more than the Monument. ‘If you want to defend the South and Western civilisation from the Jew and his dark-skinned allies, be at Charlottesville on 12 August,’ stated one post. For other users, the rally was simply part of a violent continuum: ‘Next stop: Charlottesville, VA. Final stop: Auschwitz.’⁶²⁵ The threat of violence was also implicit in a statement by one of the organisers, Eli Mosley, who posted: ‘We are [...] going to Charlottesville. Our birthright will be ashes & they’ll have to pry it from our cold hands if they want it. They will not replace us without a fight.’⁶²⁶

According to the 2018 *Charlottesville v. Kessler Complaint*, in the weeks before the rally, Kessler also contacted Christian Yingling of the Pennsylvania Light Foot Militia, as well as C.J. Ross of the Virginia Three Percenters, requesting that they provide a private militia presence on August 12.⁶²⁷ CPD officers subsequently contacted Yingling and another militia commander, George Curbelo, who led the New York Lightfoot Militia, requesting that they ‘stay away’, since their presence and the large amount of weaponry they would bring with them would ‘simply increase tension’, though this injunction was ignored.⁶²⁸

Local citizens also mobilised to prepare for the Unite the Right rally. Congregate Charlottesville, a new faith-based organisation was formed, organising a series of non-violent civil disobedience seminars. The Heaphy Report also states that local anti-racist groups ‘prepared to disrupt the event and hinder law enforcement response to specific threats.’⁶²⁹ More broadly, however, as the date of the demonstration neared, some anti-fascist activists from outside Charlottesville were especially critical that local activists took so long to call a counter demonstration,

which they claim hampered opportunities for a wider counter-mobilisation.⁶³⁰

Amidst strong local opposition to the prospect of the rally, members of Charlottesville City Council sought to find a means of denying Kessler’s permit application or moving his event to a different location. The Heaphy Report was subsequently critical of this move since, in its view, it led to Council members, including the Mayor, ‘injecting themselves into the operational details of the City’s response to this event’ – to its detriment – not least because their involvement created a ‘negative impact on preparations for this challenging event’.⁶³¹ Such actions also appear to have fostered further distrust and anger with the Council and the Mayor since, as a result, many members of the public misunderstood the political and legal constraints placed upon the Mayor,⁶³² and indeed the City’s legal responsibility to actually facilitate the alt-right march because of First Amendment protections and local city ordinances.

On **17 July** at the first Council meeting since the KKK rally, local activist Emily Gorcenski presented the councillors with a packet of evidence highlighting many of the violent missives that had appeared in the Discord chats in an effort to have the rally cancelled. The information was scrutinised by the City’s attorney who concluded that even when considering Charlottesville’s own local ordinances (section 3.4.5 of the city’s regulations stated that a permit could be refused if there was a clear and present danger to public safety) there was nothing that met the Supreme Court’s definition of a ‘credible threat’ test, which required ‘a *specific* statement advocating, or planning, a *specific and imminent* act of violence.’⁶³³ ‘When that

624 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al.

625 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al.

626 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al.

627 <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/icap/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2018/02/lawsuit-charlottesville.pdf> (Accessed on 02/06/2021)

628 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 71).

629 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 4).

630 Charlottesville 4: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.

631 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 4-5).

632 The City of Charlottesville operated according to a ‘weak mayor’ system (as do roughly 50% of other US cities) wherein the mayor has much less formal power than the ‘council-manager’ who, in this instance, was Charlottesville’s City Manager, Maurice Jones. ‘I found the limitation of the council-manager form frustrating,’ states Mike Signer (2020, p. 27). ‘And when there was a crisis, it would be just as frustrating for the public to have a mayor who was no in fact as strong as they thought he was.’

633 Mike Signer (2020, pp. 169-170).

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failed, we knew we were in for a bad day,' Gorcenski recounted.⁶³⁴ Likewise, Jalane Schmidt observed 'The crazy thing is we tried to warn the city. We had infiltrated chat rooms, taken screenshots. We made six dossiers, presented them to police, the city council, anyone who would listen. We said, 'This is not a First Amendment rally. They are literally coming to kill us.'⁶³⁵

Mayor Signer called for a closed session of City Council on **31 July** to receive further legal advice on Kessler's permit, hiring an outside counsel to evaluate the legality of moving the rally. Though City staff and police were reluctant to move the rally to the larger McIntire Park, City councillors voted 4 to 1 to move the event. Kessler remained adamant that the rally would be held in Emancipation Park, refusing to countenance relocating it during a meeting with Council officials on **7 August**.⁶³⁶ With the help of lawyers from the Rutherford Institute and the American Civil Liberties Union, Kessler subsequently sued the City on **10 August**, the day before the rally was due to take place, and was ultimately successful in persuading a federal judge to rule in his favour to keep the event in its original location.⁶³⁷

For their part, CPD sought to gain intelligence on the intentions of those planning to attend, including Kessler and other organisers, who were initially co-operative. In seeking to contact those groups planning to protest against Unite the Right, CPD met 'extreme resistance' since, in the wake of earlier incidents, such attempts were construed as harassment. Whilst SURJ and BLM were distrustful of both the City and the police, some of its members did take part in an initiative to facilitate communication between the two camps. What one of the intermediaries understood from these interactions was that 'law enforcement's focus was on restoring order after it broke down, not preserving order before

conflict began.' This they conveyed to SURJ and BLM who, whilst unsurprised, 'resolved to avoid violence at all costs but record law enforcement conduct.' Other groups such as Solidarity Charlottesville, described as an activist umbrella group that focussed on social media strategies, offered safety advice on how to prepare for the rally as a counter-protestor.⁶³⁸

Given the anti-Semitic tenor of the alt-right demonstration in May, leaders of the Congregation Beth-Israel synagogue had unsurprisingly expressed concern about the August demonstration and hired a private, armed security guard for the duration of the proceedings from 10 to 12 August, after CPD refused to provide an officer to guard worshippers. As a precaution they also temporarily removed the sacred Torah scrolls, a centrepiece of religious life, from the building.⁶³⁹

The impact of recent far right activism weighed heavily on Charlottesville's other faith communities too. In the wake of the 8 July Klan rally there had been a split within Charlottesville's Clergy Collective, a group formed in the aftermath of Dylann Roof's racist killings in Charleston. Two of its leading figures, Seth Wispelwey and Brittany Caine-Conley, who had been appalled by police tactics surrounding the Klan rally, established a new group called Congregate Charlottesville. They criticised the Clergy Collective, led by the Reverend Edwards, for being too close to the City's 'establishment' and its plans. 'It felt to me like a profound test,' Wispelwey later stated. 'But there was no question about where I belonged and what I wanted to do.'⁶⁴⁰

The Clergy Collective planned their own non-violent action training sessions and, though those attending these training sessions were warned about the potential for violence, 'few expected it.' On **31 July** Congregate

634 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374>
(Accessed on 03/06/2021)

635 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374>
(Accessed on 03/06/2021)

636 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 188).

637 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 80-84).

638 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 70-74).

639 https://reformjudaism.org/blog/charlottesville-local-jewish-community-presses?utm_source=Share&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=BlogPost&utm_content=Zimmerman (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

640 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374>
(Accessed on 03/06/2021)

Charlottesville announced that they would be holding an interfaith prayer service on the evening before the Unite the Right rally at St. Paul's Memorial Episcopal Church at which the noted philosopher and political activist Cornell West would speak. The Church was just across the road from the University of Virginia (UVA) and close to its iconic Rotunda and statue of Thomas Jefferson.⁶⁴¹

There appears to have been a clear apprehension that the impending rally was going to be violent. A non-profit organisation called Gov360 held a roundtable in Charlottesville on the eve of the meeting at which Isaac Smith, one of Kessler's former associates was a panellist. 'I know the kind of people who will be there, and it will not be safe,' he states. 'I will not be shocked if there were a dozen hospitalizations.'⁶⁴²

Phase Three: The 'Unite the Right' rally and the violent escalation of far-right protest (11-12 August 2017)

The day before the rally, in an action that in hindsight would indicate that the alt-right had already arrived in the city, flyers began to appear on the windshields of cars in historically black neighbourhoods that read 'Diversity is a Code Word for White Genocide [sic]'.⁶⁴³

The 'first hint' of trouble came on the afternoon of **11 August** when Chris Cantwell, a right-wing podcaster, was involved in a confrontation with demonstrators outside a local Walmart. Police were called after reports that a firearm was involved. Cantwell indicated he had a gun when police questioned him, but had a concealed carry permit and denied brandishing the weapon.⁶⁴⁴ Later that evening, Richard Spencer and numerous alt-right groups held a torch-lit parade on the University of Virginia (UVA) campus on the evening of

the 11 August, which the university authorities became aware of that afternoon (for aerial view of relevant area see Figure 6.15b). Despite having co-operated with CPD over their plans for the Unite the Right rally, Kessler and his colleagues refused to provide details of what they had planned for the night before because they wanted it to be a 'secret' in order to make a statement.⁶⁴⁵ It was only at 5pm that evening that Kessler, after pressure from Cantwell, contacted CPD and then UPD to inform them of his plans, though he made no mention that it would be a torch-lit parade. UPD by this point were already aware that something was afoot after contact with the university authorities, though they failed to appreciate that Kessler's march was likely to result in violent encounters with students since they had little appreciation of the hostility an alt-right march would provoke and treated it as if it were any other march. If the police were largely in the dark about proceedings until early that evening, local anti-racist activists had already infiltrated the Discord server and developed 'significant intelligence' about what the alt-right were planning for that evening.⁶⁴⁶

As Spencer and his security team arrived at Nameless Field, the assembled crowd roared 'Spencer!' For the alt-right group this was a moment of recognition, validation, and personal catharsis. 'For we who had pressed – I for a decade, Spencer for much longer, others for much longer still – to radicalise and direct white consciousness into meaningful dynamic action, this was arrival,' recalled NPI executive director Evan McLaren.⁶⁴⁷ Those assembled marched down McCormick Road towards the statue of Thomas Jefferson at the University Rotunda chanting anti-Semitic epithets such as 'You Will Not Replace Us', 'Jews Will Not Replace Us' and 'Blood and Soil'. There were 'guards' on the outside of the column who, according to the Sines v. Kessler lawsuit, 'were

641 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 72-73).

642 Spencer (2018, p. 79). Smith, who remained a Trump supporter, later stated of his split with Kessler: 'As he got more radical and moved in that direction towards those racial politics, I said, "I can't follow you down this path. That's not what I believe in.'" See <https://dcist.com/story/20/10/14/isaac-smith-ward-8-dc-anc-republican/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

643 Blout and Burkart (2021, p. 19).

644 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 112).

645 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al. highlights efforts to maintain secrecy with attendees being warned to not arrive at their rendezvous point too early to avoid tipping off potential counter-demonstrators (pp. 50-51).

646 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 111).

647 McLaren (2018, p. 46).

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selected for their willingness to get physical” with counter-protestors.’⁶⁴⁸

St. Paul’s Memorial Episcopal Church (located directly across the street from the University) was holding an interfaith service prior to the arrival of the alt-right. Anticipating trouble, two members of Redneck Revolt, a pro-Second Amendment anti-capitalist militia, scouted the perimeter of the Church and also monitored the alt-right’s social media protests. Several possible alt-right adherents were identified as being inside the Church and shortly afterwards police received two calls threatening a mass shooting inside the building. The security detail put the facility on ‘lockdown’ and attendees were prevented from leaving.⁶⁴⁹ When the alt-right actually arrived in the area shortly afterwards, Jalane Schmidt recounted:

The preacher came in to the church and said there were Nazis outside with torches, there were hundreds of them and they were marching on the church. There was a lot of confusion. We thought maybe they were coming to the church to torch it. I heard ‘You will not replace us, Jews will not replace us.’ Seeing them, by the hundreds, the torches bobbing, it was horrifying.⁶⁵⁰

Upon arriving at the Rotunda where students had gathered to protest, the alt-right began to shout, throw things at them and assault them. Pepper spray was used. ‘There was a moment when I saw them marching towards us that I would describe as the worst thing I’ve ever felt in my life. It was absolute terror,’ recalled Gorcenski.⁶⁵¹ Walt Heinecke, a UVA professor ‘waded into the crowd of Nazis with the dean of students and we were assaulted – I got pepper-sprayed, the dean got a torch thrown at him, the students and counter-

protesters were being beaten by these guys.’⁶⁵² Some of the counter-protestors had an unidentified fluid thrown at them and ‘were afraid it was fuel and that they would be burned.’⁶⁵³ Some alt-right activists succeeded in climbing up the Jefferson statue, waving torches whilst yelling ‘Hail Spencer! Hail Victory’ after which Spencer briefly addressed his followers telling them ‘We own these streets! We occupy this ground!’ Those present, he stated, were ‘risking their lives’ for their future.⁶⁵⁴ Within eight minutes UPD had declared the event an unlawful assembly and five minutes after that had succeeded in clearing the area, though ‘small disorders’ continued in the vicinity for a further twenty minutes.⁶⁵⁵ Perhaps the most ominous portent regarding this episode was UPD and CPD’s failure to separate the alt-right from the students who had gathered at the Rotunda.

The main event – the Unite the Right rally – took place the following day (for aerial view of relevant areas see Figure 6.15c). Those in the clique around Spencer woke up ‘energized’ from the torch-lit march the preceding night and no doubt emboldened by the lack of consequences for their violence.⁶⁵⁶ ‘This day belonged to us,’ NPI Executive Director Evan McLaren wrote.⁶⁵⁷

Amongst the first groups to arrive were Christian Yingling’s Pennsylvania Light Foot Militia, who held a ‘pre-op briefing’ before the rally. ‘We were nervous. I could see it in the guys, the way they were gearing up,’ he told the BBC. ‘They knew it wasn’t going to be good. When we first got to the park, about 7.30am, it was tense.’⁶⁵⁸ The militias themselves were heavily

648 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., p. 53.

649 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 115-116).

650 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

651 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

652 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374>

(Accessed on 03/06/2021)

653 Memorandum Opinion – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., p. 10.

654 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., p. 57.

655 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 119-120).

656 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al. (p. 59) highlights Kessler’s use of a photo of the torch-lit parade as a further advertisement for the Unite the Right rally the following day, tweeting it with the caption: ‘Incredible moment for white people who’ve had it up to here & aren’t going to take it anymore. Tomorrow we #UnitetheRight #Charlottesville’.

657 McLaren (2018, pp. 46-47).

658 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374>



Figure 6.15a. General map of Charlottesville area relevant to the Unite the Right march, 11-12 August 2017

Key

A – University of Virginia campus

B – McIntyre Park

C – Downtown

D – Emancipation Park

armed. Each of the thirty-two members of the New York Lightfoot militia for instance ‘were carrying between 60-80lbs of equipment on Saturday, more visible – and heavily armed – than the US military on the scene.’⁶⁵⁹ Indeed, one VSP trooper remarked to a colleague upon seeing the group, ‘What are they, like military? They’re more armed than we are.’⁶⁶⁰

These groups took up position on the southern edge of Emancipation Park to provide ‘security’ around one of the entrances. Whilst the militias argued that they were

there to protect the First Amendment Rights of both sides, this was not how they were perceived locally. Their presence caused confusion (‘you didn’t know who was legitimate security or who was from a militia’) whilst their military fatigues and weaponry ‘added to the sense of hostility.’ Despite their claims to be protecting their First Amendment rights too, counter-protestors denied this claim, arguing that the militias rarely defended black people, liberals, progressives or socialists: ‘It only seems to be in defence of forces in our society that continue to oppress minorities.’⁶⁶¹

(Accessed on 03/06/2021)

659 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/15/charlottesville-militia-security-gear-uniforms> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

660 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 124).

661 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

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Figure 6.15b. Aerial view of location of the University of Virginia torchlight march, 11 August 2017

Key

- A – Nameless Field, where the march began
 - B – Point at which torchlight march entered The Lawn
 - C – Jefferson statue/University Rotunda
 - D – St. Paul's Memorial Church
- For the route of the march, see Heaphy (2017, p.117)

The main alt-right group around Richard Spencer and Jason Kessler assembled at McIntire Park, on the outskirts of Charlottesville, from whence they were chauffeured to areas around downtown Charlottesville by a fleet of passenger vans. The alt-right leadership group elected to 'walk in [to the park] with their audiences,' meaning that there was no police escort from McIntire Park. The decision to forego a police escort does not appear to have been communicated to many of the other speakers. They were not expecting to have to run the gauntlet of counter-protestors to enter the park which is what they had to do. Eli Mosley's Identity Evropa group appear to have been the first

group to enter the park at 9.42am.⁶⁶² The various groups had to enter through the southern edge of the park between the counter-protestors and the militias. 'Everybody came together at the same point in the street out in front of the park,' recalled militia leader Christian Yingling. 'The city of Charlottesville knew who was coming to town, they did their homework, so why would you funnel group after group, right and left, right through each other? It made no sense.'⁶⁶³

662 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 124-125).

663 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374>
(Accessed on 03/06/2021)



Figure 6.15c. Aerial view of the Downtown area pertaining to the Unite the Right march, 12 August 2017

Key

A – McGuffey Park

B – Justice Park, now known as Court Square Park

C – Emancipation Park

D – 2nd Street NE and East Market Street – site of clashes

E – Intersection of Market and Second Street NW – site of clashes

F – Market Street garage – site of attack on DeAndre Harris

G – Water St. and 4th Street SE – site of attack by James Fields.

Market Street began to fill up with protestors, and fighting soon broke out just after 10am as the alt-right and counter demonstrators clashed behind the First United Methodist Church on 2nd Street NE. Police made no attempt to intervene to prevent the violence or arrest the perpetrators as the scuffles continued. When counter demonstrators and the alt-right confronted one another on 2nd Street NE and East Market Street moments later, it was the militia who stepped in to separate the two sides. It was at this point that the subsequent inquiry into the City's handling of the event identified the 'only instance' in which a CPD

officer left their barricade to deescalate a potentially violent situation.⁶⁶⁴ As fighting broke out the police did not actively intervene (see below). 'It was clear there was no effort to separate the two sides - there was almost permission to engage in violence,' noted Claire Gastañaga, of ACLU Virginia, who was observing the demonstration.⁶⁶⁵

664 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 126-129).

665 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374>
(Accessed on 03/06/2021)

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The Clergy Collective, who had held a sunrise service, had also arrived early and tried, unsuccessfully, to block access to Emancipation Park. The group had moved to the southeast staircase entrance. Members of ‘antifa’ who had joined them had just agreed to ‘stand down’ when a group of shield wielding alt-right demonstrators arrived and pushed through them. This group of demonstrators ‘quickly realised’ that they had entered the wrong part of the park, however, and walked back out of the park again, allowing the Clergy to reform their line.⁶⁶⁶

At this juncture (c. 10.45am) hundreds of alt-right activists marched westwards down Market Street towards the southeast entrance of Emancipation. This group consisted of the League of the South (LOS), Matthew Heimbach’s Traditionalist Workers Party (TWP) and Jeff Schoep’s National Socialist Movement (NSM), amongst others. Before surging up Market Street towards the park, this group had gathered at a parking structure several blocks from the where the rally was to be held. Tenold noted that the hundred-strong group, which included LOS, TWP and NSM activists, were all carrying riot shields, flags and clubs. ‘They were the tip of the spear, primed in case Antifa were there,’ he observed.

One of the guys from the LOS was telling the group to use clubs against the abdomen, not the head. The head was assault, the abdomen was not. I wasn’t completely convinced he knew what he was talking about but to be fair, he also said to not strike unless the enemy struck first, which I guess made it more legal.⁶⁶⁷

Counter demonstrators joined the Clergy Collective forming their own picket across Market Street. When the Unite the Right demonstrators arrived shortly

thereafter a ‘brawl’ broke out, with the alt-right attacking counter demonstrators with shields and flagpoles. TWP co-founder Matt Parrott later boasted that it was LOS organiser Michael Tubbs who led the charge through the picket.⁶⁶⁸ Many of the clergy were pushed to the ground. The Reverend Wispelwey was knocked into a bush as an alt-right activist screamed homophobic slurs at him.⁶⁶⁹ With ‘brute force’ and a ‘cloud of pepper spray’, these groups pushed their way through into the park. CPD ‘stood behind the barricades and watched,’ recorded the Heaphy Report.⁶⁷⁰ Once inside Lee Park, LOS, NSM and others affiliated to the Nationalist Front sought to ‘create two shield walls’ to secure the stairwell into the park as well as engaging in violent brawls with opponents, attacking them with rods and flagpoles, though, as Parrott stated, ‘I ended up investing most of my time during the fighting diving into the brawl to extract men who had been disabled by pepper spray to lead them to our several medic teams for treatment’.⁶⁷¹

Recalling the overarching tenor of violence, the Reverend Seth Wispelwey noted:

There were roving groups of men, most in polo shirts, many carrying sticks, bats, all in the street. What was surreal was seeing all the monuments around the city surrounded by hundreds of people intending to cause violence. When we got face to face with these white supremacists, all the slurs were anti-Semitic, homophobic, misogynistic - we didn’t hear anything anti-black or anti-Muslim. It was even more primitive.⁶⁷²

668 Parrott (2017).

669 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., p. 67.

670 Heaphy Report (2017 p. 130). Interviewee Charlottesville 04 (anti-fascist activist) gave a slightly different perspective. ‘I was part of a group that helped... that tried to block League of the South from coming in. There was a small entrance between the police car and the buildings and they just pushed us aside. They forced us inside but there was no striking or very little striking or macing or anything like. They just wailed through. It was very painful, I got pinned against a car but I didn’t get hurt.’ (Interview on 31 October 2020)

671 Parrott (2017).

672 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

666 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 129).

667 Tenold (2018, pp. 289-290). TWP and the NSM had been working with each other prior to Charlottesville, notably attending a rally together in Pikesville, Kentucky in April 2017 through which they built solidarity with one another. See <https://www.kentucky.com/news/state/article147594424.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

Rather than being a constant free-for all, however, the violence itself was episodic. One counter demonstrator recalled that:

The fighting started with people basically stepping forward and squaring off and fighting. You'll even see in the photos of people fighting, people standing ten feet away, just standing there watching like it's almost a playground fight. Fighting didn't happen the whole time. It was really just pockets. I only saw some of the crazy footage later and I was like, 'I didn't witness that at all and I was in the crowd at the front the whole time...' It's never the whole groups fighting each other [...]. It was just bizarre from beginning... people beating the shit out of each other and then just ten feet away drinking a bottle of water.⁶⁷³

Recollections from those inside the park with the alt-right were broadly consonant. One attendee who was standing with the Vanguard America group stated:

[activists] would run out, get into fights, come back in, pour milk in their face if they got maced and so on. So, it was these kinds of fights there that were kind of the important thing and then it was the question like when is it [sic] starting because quite quickly people started to get quite tense, lots of Police, there were rumours that a permit would be retracted and so on.⁶⁷⁴

From within the park, the alt-right began hurling objects over the perimeter into the counter demonstrators.⁶⁷⁵ It was here that the Vanguard America group positioned themselves, along the periphery, armed with shields:

There was one crowd in the middle and in the back, a big one, but then there were also

people standing around the edges and those people were wearing helmets, shields, either like actual weapons but also homemade stuff, you know, they had flags where they had sharpened the end of the flagpole and stuff like that. They were standing along the edges and anti-fascists threw stuff at them and they threw stuff back, but eventually it got heated and it got more and more heated and they started like using their legs trying to kick down these barriers. They wanted there to be an altercation, they wanted to break out of there and fight essentially, they stood quietly next to each other, they were very, you know, shouting kind of little peppy stuff and absolutely there was an anticipation of violence, there was an expectation of violence, they wanted that. I don't think that's a question since rather than looking inwards and staying inside of their area, they really wanted to break out of it and they eventually did as well.⁶⁷⁶

Within Emancipation Park, where attendees were shielded from the violence that was taking place in the surrounding area, Kessler was regarded by some of the demonstrators to be of little consequence. 'I didn't see him around really, to be honest,' noted one man with the alt-right group who felt that proceedings were 'quite quickly taken over' by Spencer and figures like Domingo, whom people gravitated towards. 'This Kessler guy, like people didn't really understand who he was... he's not very respectful or he's not really something anybody had much respect for at this point, he was silly, you know, whereas Richard Spencer, at this point in time, was an incredibly important person of the movement.'⁶⁷⁷

Outside of the park, the intersection of Market Street and Second Street descended into 'chaos'. The Heaphy Report recorded that fighting continued as alt-right activists who had just entered the park came out again

673 Charlottesville 4: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.
674 Charlottesville 3: Interview with a Unite the Right attendee.
675 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 131).

676 Charlottesville 3: Interview with a Unite the Right attendee.
677 Charlottesville 3: Interview with a Unite the Right attendee.

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down its southeast staircase, ‘forming shield walls to push the counter-protestors back. Bottles, balloons filled with unknown substances, and debris flew through the air. The clouds of pepper spray rose every few minutes.’⁶⁷⁸ The CPD response to the escalating violence at this juncture was criticised for being ‘disappointingly passive’ with Police Chief Al Thomas reportedly stating ‘let them fight, it will make it easier to declare an unlawful assembly’ though he disputed this. Regardless, as the report made clear, his ‘slow-footed response to violence put the safety of all at risk and created indelible images of this chaotic event.’⁶⁷⁹

At 11:31am Chief Thomas declared the Unite the Right rally to be an unlawful assembly. Virginia’s Governor, Terry McAuliffe, declared a state of emergency shortly afterwards. The police announcement that the permit for the rally had been cancelled led to a tense standoff with alt-right demonstrators who sought to appeal to law enforcement ‘standing on the barriers and shouting to the Police there, saying like, “We’re doing this for you”, kind of identifying with them as white men essentially and kind of, “How can you take it from us, we have the right to be here?”’, that type of thing.’ They remained there until the police entered the park from the back of the demonstration ‘and started to kind of slowly walk towards the front, pushing people out. That’s probably the most like tense moment.’⁶⁸⁰

Following the announcement, Nathan Domigo, the leader of Identity Evropa, sought to rally those present to resist the police order to disband and leave the park.

He became quite central, so there was a lot of confusion for a while, some people started to leave but he started a little chant, he started shouting with a group of guys next to him, including like Spencer and [Daniel] Friberg and these guys were kind of congregating around there, some of the [Daily] Stormer guys, and they started shouting, ‘We are

going to stay, we are going to stay, we are going to stay’. So, there kind of the crowd split, there were those that wanted to leave and those that wanted to stay and many wanted to stay and of course it was that kind of led to the riot Police starting to enter or it was soon after⁶⁸¹.

Within the Park things became ‘extremely tense’ because those present represented ‘a group of very armed, very angry men in a very small area and it’s hot, it’s incredibly hot, it’s like thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three degrees and people were like running out of water and stuff to drink and people were annoyed.’ There had been no speeches and their demonstration had been cancelled before it had even started. It was then that the idea that they could just refuse ‘got quite a bit of support’ adding to the tension.⁶⁸²

Spencer’s security team were aware, however, that a conviction for carrying a firearm during an event that had been declared to be an unlawful assembly was a Class Five felony carrying a jail term of up to ten years. NPI Executive Director Evan McLaren ordered them to leave as well as anyone else who was carrying a firearm.⁶⁸³ ‘I guess that was kind of a sensible idea actually,’ stated one respondent. ‘So, to that level they were actually thinking quite clearly. They still wanted to stay, a bunch of them wanted to stay, but they did start saying that everybody with a weapon should leave.’⁶⁸⁴

Spencer and his group initially tried to remain in the park. Foreign guests including Daniel Friberg (Arktos Media) and Christoffer Dulny (Nordic alt-right), concerned about their visas, immediately departed. Spencer, ‘enraged at the injustice’, sought to stand his ground but was eventually moved out of the park by police as others also tussled with law enforcement.⁶⁸⁵ There were several arrests. The mood following the

678 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 133).

679 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 133).

680 Charlottesville 3: Interview with a Unite the Right attendee.

681 Charlottesville 3: Interview with a Unite the Right attendee.

682 Charlottesville 3: Interview with a Unite the Right attendee.

683 McLaren (2018, p. 50).

684 Charlottesville 3: Interview with a Unite the Right attendee.

685 McLaren (2018, p. 50).

rally was ugly as the alt-right marched away from the park. The alt-right activists, herded out of the park's southwest entrance by the VSP mobile field force, were forced to run the gauntlet through a 'little corridor' created through the counter demonstrators who threw things at them and maced many of those leaving the event. Once again, police action facilitated rather than inhibited violence. One CPD officer described the dispersal of Emancipation Park as the 'most messed up thing I ever saw.'⁶⁸⁶

It was during this botched dispersal, during which violence broke out in 'all directions,' that counter-demonstrator Corey Long was photographed using a can of spray paint and a lighter to improvise a flamethrower which he pointed at the alt-right. Long later indicated that he used the weapon to defend an elderly man who was with the counter demonstrators.⁶⁸⁷ Minutes later, Maryland Klansman Richard Wilson Preston Jr., fired a pistol at the ground in front of Long. VSP troopers were nearby but 'None appeared to react.'⁶⁸⁸ Preston was, however, subsequently arrested and jailed for four years.⁶⁸⁹ Another man was subsequently jailed for punching a female counter demonstrator in the face as he left the park in full view of the police, who again did not respond.⁶⁹⁰ An attack on an alt-right activist went similarly unpunished.⁶⁹¹

One of those who left the group with a large faction of alt-right attendees recalled that in the aftermath of the failed rally:

... people were angry, disappointed, but there wasn't much happening there in terms of confrontation, the anti-fascists didn't really follow, but the anger there was

palpable, it was probably some of the worst racism I heard during the entire year was during that walk, they were just so incredibly angry.⁶⁹²

Many of these alt-right figures who had been displaced from Emancipation Park, including Spencer, Mosley and David Duke, walked back to McIntire Park where they held an impromptu rally that quickly concluded before counter demonstrators could gather though, according to Sines v. Kessler, there was further violence there too as several of the alt-right activists discussed defying police orders and returning, armed, to Emancipation Park.⁶⁹³

Other rally participants including the TWP and LOS moved eastwards stopping in front of the Market Street garage where, at just after 12pm, violence again broke out. Following an altercation between Harold Crews, chairman of the LOS, and a counter-protestor called DeAndre Harris, other demonstrators joined the fray and the violence moved inside the parking garage. Isolated, Harris either tripped or was pushed to the ground, whereupon six alt-right activists chased and beat him with flagsticks, shields, and pieces of wood leaving him with serious head injuries. There was more fighting shortly thereafter in which an older alt-right demonstrator was also left with a head injury.⁶⁹⁴

Following the dispersal of the crowd from Emancipation Park, many of the counter demonstrators began to move north up 4th Street SE towards Justice Park. At 1:41pm James Fields Jr., who had earlier been demonstrating with the Vanguard America group, drove his car into the crowd injuring dozens of people and killing Heather Heyer, a local paralegal. Police gave chase and Fields surrendered less than five minutes later. The police helicopter, which had monitored these events, and helped track Fields' car as he fled the scene

686 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 135).

687 <https://www.theroot.com/interview-how-corey-long-fought-white-supremacy-with-f-1797831277> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

688 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 136).

689 <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/crime/bs-md-preston-sentencing-20180820-story.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

690 <https://wset.com/news/local/man-pleads-guilty-to-punching-woman-at-charlottesville-rally> and <https://time.com/5009452/charlottesville-white-supremacy-dennis-mothersbaugh/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

691 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 137).

692 Charlottesville 3: Interview with a Unite the Right attendee.

693 Jury Trial Demanded – Elizabeth Sines et al. v. Jason Kessler et al., p. 73.

694 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 137-138).

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subsequently crashed killing both occupants, bringing the death toll from the day to three.

Fields, who lived in Ohio, had only decided to travel to Charlottesville to attend the rally on **8 August**.⁶⁹⁵ As he was preparing to leave on **11 August**, a family member texted him, urging him to be careful. Fields replied: 'We're not the ones who need to be careful.' In the message he had attached an image of Adolf Hitler.⁶⁹⁶ On **12 May** Fields had himself shared the first of two images featuring cars ramming into protestors – just as he would do a few months later. He had commented on the first image: 'When I see protestors blocking.' The second meme, which he posted to Instagram on **16 May**, featured a car ploughing into cyclists with the text 'You have the right to protest but I am late for work.'⁶⁹⁷ Fields subsequently pleaded guilty to twenty-nine Federal crimes to avoid the death penalty and was given two life sentences the following year.⁶⁹⁸

Social media use during the Unite the Right demonstration

Social media continued to play a key role during the protest itself, unsurprisingly given the number of alt-right media figures in attendance who livestreamed the event for a global digital audience using GoPro cameras. This way users who were either in a different location on the rally territory or were not able to attend the protest at all could follow everything in real-time. 'Baked Alaska', one of the influential live streamers, filmed the event until he was pepper-sprayed by a counter-protester, after which someone called 'Millennial Matt' took over his livestream. The livestream itself was saturated with racist language including numerous threats from responding users to kill counter-protesters, Jews and Blacks.

During the course of the day there was also an escalation of calls to violence in the online chatrooms of Discord and the livestream chats. The Unite the Right protest reached its apogee later that day at about 1:45 pm (after the majority of alt-right activists had dispersed) Heather Heyer was killed. Social media platforms were also used by alt-right users to convey images of the carnage to a wide audience. Following Field's terrorist attack, the Discord channels immediately shared the news (Figure 6.16).

4chan users reacted in a similar fashion. The attack happened at 1.45pm local time but a post with the timestamp 20:43 in one 4Chan thread stated: 'car just ran over a bunch of lefties.' A livestream from right after the car hit the pedestrians was posted to 4chan at 19:49. Some users on 4Chan and Discord immediately began glorifying the violence against the left and called for more attacks – which such users would start to do habitually in the wake of mass casualty terrorist attacks committed by right-wing extremists, such as in Christchurch and El Paso, which took place two years later. Many memes and pictures of cars appeared on Discord and 4Chan in the following hours, days and week.

Vanguard America, the group with whom Fields had been photographed, issued a statement denying he had been a member.⁶⁹⁹ Jason Kessler meanwhile denied that those involved in the rally had any responsibility for the killing whatsoever: '[N]o one at "Unite the Right" was responsible for that car accident but James Fields himself.'⁷⁰⁰ Others tried to twist the narrative to victimise the protestors and blame the police and counter-protesters for the violent escalations. For his part Richard Spencer sought to mitigate Field's action arguing that there was 'a distinction that should be made between murder and manslaughter,' before adding Fields, 'could have truly

695 <https://www.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.vawd.111819/gov.uscourts.vawd.111819.1.0.pdf> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

696 <https://www.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.vawd.111819/gov.uscourts.vawd.111819.1.0.pdf> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

697 <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/30/us/charlottesville-james-fields-trial/index.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

698 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/28/us/james-fields-sentencing.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

699 <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/08/white-supremacist-group-disavows-connection-to-driver-who-plowed-into-protesters.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

700 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/06/trump-racism-comments/588067/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

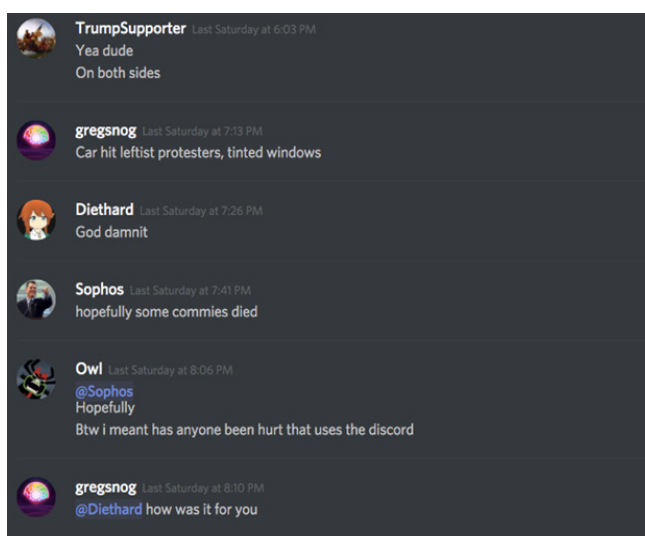


Figure 6.16: Screenshot from Discord.

feared for his life.’ That said, he understood that the violence was ‘counterproductive to the movement.’⁷⁰¹

Other participants did not agree. TWP’s Matt Parrott (Heimbach’s father-in-law) wrote on Facebook that as far as he was concerned James Fields Jr., was an honorary member of the group.⁷⁰² The Loyal Knights of the KKK, the group that had previously demonstrated in Charlottesville in June perhaps went the furthest, however. The group updated their pre-recorded answering machine message to inform new callers: ‘Nothing makes us more proud [sic] of the KKK than when we see white patriots such as James Fields Jr, age 20, taking his car and running over nine communist anti-fascist [sic], killing one [expletive]-lover named Heather Heyer. James Fields, hail victory. It’s men like you that have made the great white race strong and will be strong again.’⁷⁰³

Phase 4: The long decline of the alt-right protest wave (August 2017 to present)

The killing of Heather Heyer was an unmitigated disaster for the alt-right, though some corners of the

online movement revelled in the sudden notoriety occasioned by widespread media coverage.⁷⁰⁴ The Unite the Right rally, which had been meant to showcase the strength of the movement, instead highlighted the fragility of this nascent coalition. Rather than ‘Unite the Right’, Charlottesville fractured it. The coalition fragmented amidst recriminations and many of the groups involved went into freefall as key activists, including Jason Kessler, become mired in legal troubles as a result of the rally. Tellingly of its impact, and fallout for those involved, the ‘movement’ has not tried to mount such a national demonstration since 2017. Footage of marchers chanting ‘Jews will not replace us’ during the torchlight parade, the racist violence the following day, and the images of James Fields’ Dodge Challenger driving into the crowd of demonstrators and killing Heather Heyer were ruinous for the movement. ‘For many these now-fixed impressions are negative to the point of being nightmarish,’ conceded one of Richard Spencer’s close colleagues.⁷⁰⁵

Those involved had a very different perspective in the immediate aftermath of the rally, however. Spencer boasted to the *New York Times* that the event had been ‘a huge moral victory in terms of the show of force.’⁷⁰⁶ The alt-right gained a further fillip three days later from the President of the United States, Donald Trump. Invited to comment on Charlottesville by a reporter during a press conference on **15 August**, astonishingly, Trump refused to issue a blanket condemnation of the alt-right. There was ‘blame on both sides,’ Trump averred. ‘The neo-Nazis started this. They showed up in Charlottesville to protest,’ the reporter stated before Trump interrupted him: ‘Excuse me, excuse me. They didn’t put themselves — and you had some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides.’⁷⁰⁷ ‘Trump, in his own way, was being honest

701 <https://www.businessinsider.com/richard-spencer-says-trump-didnt-condemn-the-alt-right-2017-8?r=US&IR=T> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

702 Tenold (2018, p. 291).

703 <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article167303682.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

704 <http://boards.4chan.org/pol/thread/137223823/to-celebrate-the-success-of-unite-the-right-rally> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

705 McLaren (2018, p. 41).

706 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/far-right-groups-blaze-into-national-view-in-charlottesville.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

707 ‘Remarks by President Trump on Infrastructure,’ White

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and calling it like he saw it. I was proud of him at that moment,' recalled Richard Spencer.⁷⁰⁸

Following Trump's refusal to condemn the alt-right, extreme right-wing social media channels were ecstatic. 'He didn't attack us [...] There was virtually no counter-signaling of us all', wrote Andrew Anglin on the Daily Stormer website which he ran, who later described Trump's Charlottesville-related press conference on 15 August as 'the greatest thing ever'.

Richard Spencer was adamant, however, that although Trump did eventually denounce racists, neo-Nazis, the Klan and white supremacists, this did not mean that he had attacked the alt-right. 'I don't think he condemned it [the alt-right], no,' Spencer said. 'Did he say "white nationalist?" "Racist" means an irrational hatred of people. I don't think he meant any of us.'⁷⁰⁹ Though Trump would make several more speeches which gave succour to the alt-right in the immediate aftermath of the rally, leading figures within his administration also sought to distance themselves from Charlottesville, highlighting both the wider failure of the alt-right's coalitional strategy and its sharp decrease in legitimacy. Steve Bannon, the former Breitbart News CEO who had used this medium as 'the platform for the alt-right'⁷¹⁰ before becoming Trump's Chief Strategist and Senior Counsel, was quick to denigrate the group in a way that Trump had not. 'Ethno-nationalism – it's losers. It's a fringe element,' he stated in an interview shortly after the rally. 'I think the media plays it up too much, and we gotta help crush it, you know, uh, help crush it more. These guys are a collection of clowns.'⁷¹¹ Bannon subsequently branded Spencer a self-promoting 'freak' and a 'goober'⁷¹² and has

continued trying to distance himself from the alt-right label.⁷¹³

If the alt-right were emboldened by Trump's comments in Charlottesville, Kessler found himself under intense pressure. He tried to hold a press conference in front of City Hall on the Downtown Mall the day after Heyer's killing. He was confronted by an angry crowd and was assaulted by a local woman, bringing his event to an abrupt end. CPD snipers and observers stood on rooftops along the mall. Police had to protect him. Those accused of assaulting him were later fined a paltry amount. There appear to have been efforts in the immediate aftermath of the Unite the Right rally to reignite the issue of the statues. On **15 August** a man from North Carolina arrived in Emancipation Park and protested under the statue of Robert E. Lee dressed in Confederate uniform and carrying a Confederate flag. He was also armed with an AR-15. Counter demonstrators demanded he left the park and police eventually escorted him out.⁷¹⁴ The following day UVA students staged a small demonstration retracing the route of the alt-right tiki-torch march but holding candles instead. Photos posted online feature the caption 'We Replaced You.'⁷¹⁵

This period of online enthusiasm and energy generated by Trump's comments was at variance with events offline, however. The 'unity' of the far right that had been touted in the build up to the rally began unravelling almost immediately. This was evident amongst the event organisers themselves. On **18 August** Kessler made a post on social media that read: 'Heather Heyer was a fat, disgusting Communist. Communists have killed 94 million. Looks like it was payback time.'⁷¹⁶ The following day Richard Spencer

House, 15 August 2017. The page (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-infrastructure/>) was subsequently removed from the website.

708 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/06/trump-racism-comments/588067/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

709 <https://www.businessinsider.com/richard-spencer-says-trump-didnt-condemn-the-alt-right-2017-8?r=US&IR=T> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

710 <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/08/stephen-bannon-donald-trump-alt-right-breitbart-news/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

711 <https://prospect.org/power/steve-bannon-unrepentant/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

712 Green (2017, p. 146). Bannon's disavowal of the alt-right

did not save him. Blamed for Trump's public relations disaster, his employment at the White House was terminated on 18 August, see, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/us/politics/steve-bannon-trump-white-house.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

713 <https://thehill.com/media/347266-breitbart-pushes-back-on-alt-right-label> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

714 <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/15/us/charlottesville-lee-park-confrontation/index.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

715 Spencer (2018, p. 31).

716 <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/jason-kessler> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

took to social media to distance himself from Kessler. ‘I will no longer associate with Jason Kessler,’ he tweeted. ‘No one should.’⁷¹⁷

Despite the collapse of Spencer’s relationship with Kessler, he returned to Charlottesville for a third and final protest on **7 October**. There he led a small ‘flash mob’ in a small torch-lit rally in Emancipation Park involving no more than a few dozen activists who left after only ten or fifteen minutes. The purpose of the rally was largely to gain media attention and ‘trigger’ or provoke opponents, though it only served to highlight the movement’s ebbing momentum. Separately, on **27 November**, Kessler filed for a permit to hold a second rally in Charlottesville on the anniversary of the Unite the Right rally in August 2018. The Council refused to grant him permission on the grounds that it represented a danger to public safety. Undeterred, Kessler disrupted a City Council meeting on **3 April 2018**, demanding to know if the assembled councillors would support his Constitutional Rights if a Federal Judge granted him an injunction to hold another rally.

The militia groups who had attended the rally, ostensibly to support First Amendment rights, were also scathing of the alt-right. Christian Yingling who led a contingent of thirty-two members of the Pennsylvania Light Foot Militia to the town subsequently released a video stating that ‘This rally had nothing to do with uniting the right wing [...] They weren’t there to support Southern heritage or protest a statue; they were there to fight.’ Continuing on the offensive, Yingling branded Kessler a ‘piece of (excrement)’ and a ‘dirtbag’ for bringing hate groups spoiling for a fight to the city. Both sides behaved like ‘jackasses’, he stated.⁷¹⁸

The violence at Charlottesville also caused many prominent figures on the alt-lite, with whom the rally had been designed to ‘unite’, to distance themselves

from the alt-right. One such figure, Mike Cernovich, denounced the group as ‘Nazi boys’ and claimed conspiratorially: ‘The alt right is a disinfo group designed to discredit Trump, and to frustrate his agenda, which is why David Duke and all those guys go around saying they’re pro Trump.’⁷¹⁹ Groups like the Proud Boys who had not taken part in Charlottesville were even keener in its aftermath not to be viewed as alt-right.⁷²⁰ Rather than uniting the two disparate milieus, events in Charlottesville pushed them further apart.

Many of those who had either organised the Unite the Right rally or had taken part in it, subsequently found themselves mired in legal difficulties as lawsuits were filed against them. Kessler resolved one lawsuit brought against him by the City and local business after promising not to facilitate organised, armed paramilitary activity at future rallies in Charlottesville. In a separate legal action, the main militia groups (which also included Redneck Revolt and the Socialist Rifle Club who had opposed the alt-right) that had attended the original rally all promised not to return to the city either. Prevented from holding another rally in Charlottesville, Kessler opted instead to organise one in Washington, D.C. This event was sparsely attended by a mere 30 people, who were met by thousands of counter-protestors. Any residual political cachet he had retained as a result of organising the Unite the Right rally evaporated thereafter.

Richard Spencer, whose political star has fallen considerably in the aftermath of the rally, also faced financial ruination as a result of several lawsuits launched against him, not to mention mounting public obloquy. A subsequent speaking tour collapsed. Others, including Jeff Schoep (NSM) and Matthew Heimbach (TWP), both left the movement. Several groups were dissolved more or less as a direct consequence of the

717 <https://twitter.com/RichardBSpencer/status/898766109523951616> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

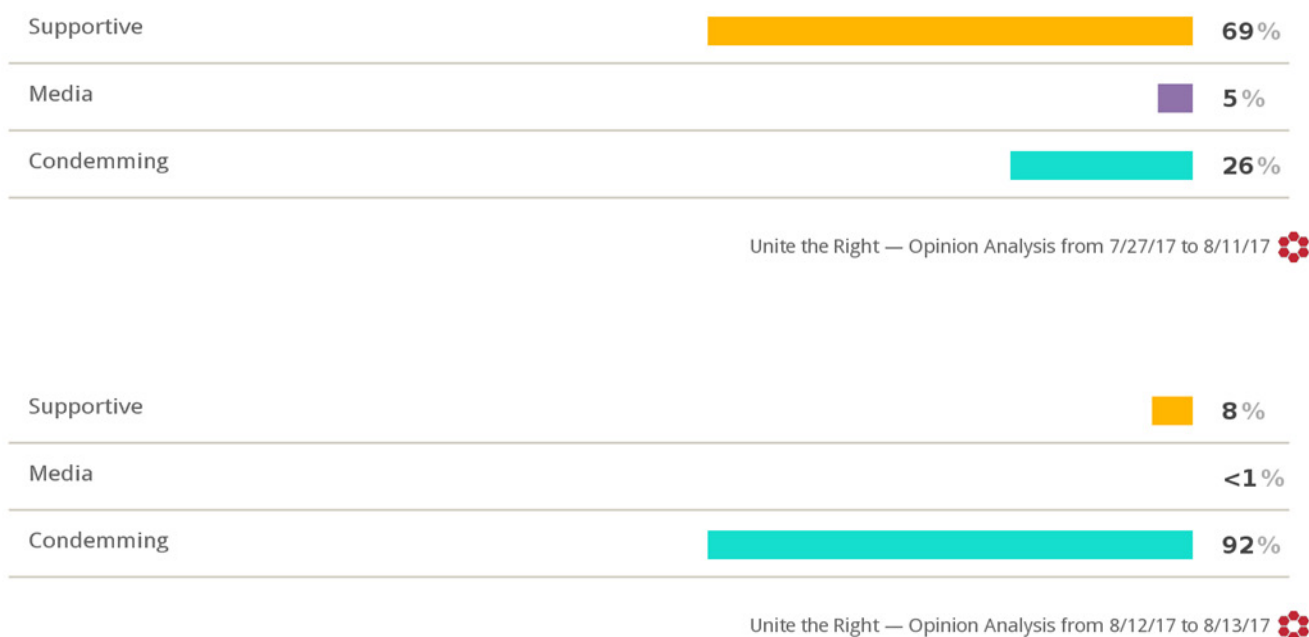
718 <https://archive.triblive.com/local/westmoreland/new-derry-man-who-led-militia-in-charlottesville-clash-condemns-white-supremacists/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

719 https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2017/08/15/mike_cernovich_david_duke_and_richard_spencer_have_to_name-drop_trump_to_get_media_attention.html (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

720 <http://officialproudboys.com/proud-boys/we-are-not-alt-right/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

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Figures 6.17 and 6.18: Attitudes towards *Unite the Right* before and after the event.

stress put upon them in the days, weeks and months following the demonstration.

Several activists were jailed for their actions that day, including four of the six men who physically assaulted DeAndre Harris, and Maryland Klansman Richard W. Preston Jr., who fired a shot near local African American counter-protestor Corey A. Long.⁷²¹ Many more lost their jobs, including several serving US military personnel,⁷²² after their participation in the rally was publicly revealed.

The violence at Charlottesville also had a direct consequence for the alt-right's online presence. Numerous 'white nationalist' groups were digitally 'de-platformed' by an array of tech companies in the weeks and months afterwards, making it difficult for them to operate. The most prominent site to be de-platformed was the Daily Stormer website. Its domain provider, GoDaddy, terminated its services on 13

August after its founder, Andrew Anglin, posted an article disparaging Heather Heyer.⁷²³

Heather Heyer's murder precipitated a major shift in the online mood too. In the two weeks prior to the event, the majority of tweets (69%) using Charlottesville-related keywords or hashtags were supportive (Figure 6.17). This stands in stark contrast with the wave of overwhelmingly negative tweets immediately after the event (Figure 6.18), illustrating the narrative shift that followed the deadly vehicle attack against a crowd of counter-protestors. As the Charlottesville rally gained worldwide media attention in the light of the deadly incident, condemnation mounted to over 90% of all tweets.

The *Unite the Right* rally was a turning point in raising public awareness about the violent potential and dangers associated with the alt-right in the disguise of freedom, speech, southern heritage, or anti-immigration advocacy. After the tragic events, many previously supportive individuals attempted to distance themselves from white

721 <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/crime/bs-md-preston-sentencing-20180820-story.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

722 <https://www.propublica.org/article/vasilios-pistolis-imprisoned-marine-hate-groups> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

723 <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/daily-stormer-godaddy-bans-charlotteville-victim-heather-heyer-victim-fat-slut-defame-uva-neo-nazi-a7891856.html> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

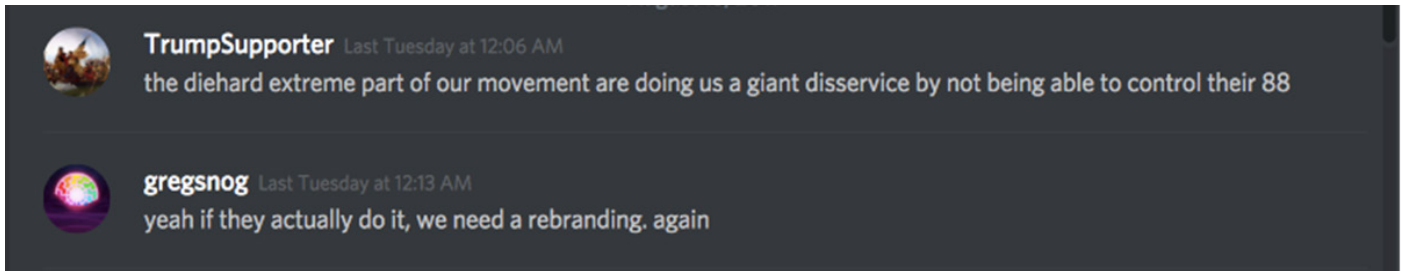


Figure 6.19: Screenshot from Discord.

nationalists. In the light of widespread condemnation, ‘doxing’ of alt-right sympathisers and the closure of white nationalist webpages, contents and accounts, the atmosphere also changed on 4Chan and Discord. Many users expressed their concern about the future of the alt-right and highlighted the need for another rebranding (Figure 6.19).

The rally also led to a political reconfiguration of the City Council which the alt-right doubtless would have frowned upon. Mayor Mike Signer, who did not seek re-election, was succeeded by the City’s first independent candidate for mayor since 1948, Nikuyah Walker. Bellamy also noted that as a result of this realignment, not only was there more public engagement with Council business but ‘There was a new wave of black voices in the community, and it was extremely refreshing.’⁷²⁴

Following the Unite the Right rally the City of Charlottesville continued to grapple with the issue of removing its Confederate monuments. Whilst they were then legally prohibited from removing them, the local council chose to shroud them instead as a mark of respect to Heather Heyer. Bellamy’s family received death threats as a result.⁷²⁵ There were also numerous attempts by protestors to remove the tarpaulins shrouding the two Confederate states, including one on **28 September 2017** which Kessler attended.

Events in Charlottesville on 10-11 August 2017 would also serve to accelerate the national conversation about the place of Confederate monuments in modern America. Perhaps the starkest unintended consequence

of the Unite the Right rally was that instead of preserving Confederate monuments, the far right actually succeeded in accelerating their removal – the exact opposite of what they had intended. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of Charlottesville, twenty such monuments and statues were removed across the United States, according to the *New York Times*.

The pace of removal gained further momentum after four police officers killed another unarmed African American man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis on 23 May 2020. This provided the catalyst for a nationwide wave of unrest which also targeted Confederate monuments. Charlottesville was an important stepping-stone in this regard. This latest wave of unrest and the ongoing campaign for racial justice had consequences for the State of Virginia too. Indeed, following Floyd’s murder, the new Governor of Virginia, Ralph Northam, removed the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, from Richmond. ‘We’ve slayed Goliath,’ stated Wes Bellamy, the former Charlottesville City Councilman. Following years of legal wrangling, in April 2021 Virginia’s Supreme Court ruled that the Charlottesville could remove its own Confederate statues.⁷²⁶

6.4. ANALYSIS

What appears to have enabled the escalation of violence?

724 Bellamy (2019, p. 194).

725 Bellamy (2019, pp. 195-196).

726 <https://dailycaller.com/2021/04/01/virginia-supreme-court-charlottesville-robert-e-lee-stonewall-jackson-statues-come-down/>. The bronze statue of a Confederate soldier which had stood outside the Albermarle County courthouse had been removed the previous year, see <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/charlottesville-removes-confederate-statue-rally-site-72970663> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

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There were a number of factors enabling the escalation of violence at Charlottesville that were the product of multiple interactions across several different relational arenas. *Police planning for the rally itself, which the Heaphy Report described as ‘inadequate and disconnected’ was an important factor in facilitating the escalation of violence on the day itself.* The police response was also complicated by the additional stress of having to plan for two potential scenarios as, right until the last moment, as the City Council sought to have Kessler’s event moved to a different location, highlighting that the local political elites and law enforcement were at odds with one another at certain key junctures. The ‘flawed’ operational plan put in place by CPD, which was criticized for not ensuring an ‘adequate separation’ between the demonstration and counter-demonstrators⁷²⁷ (which was a surprise to many of the counter demonstrators and observers themselves), was also further hampered by the fact that police resources had to be stationed ‘far from areas of potential need’ due to access issues with regards to private property adjacent to Emancipation Park where the rally was actually taking place.⁷²⁸ Such shortcomings in planning and coordination prior to August 12 produced ‘disastrous results’ on the day itself:

Because of their misalignment and lack of accessible protective gear, officers failed to intervene in physical altercations that took place in areas adjacent to Emancipation Park. VSP directed its officers to remain behind barricades rather than risk injury responding to conflicts between protestors and counter-protesters. CPD commanders similarly instructed their officers not to intervene in all but the most serious physical confrontations. Neither agency deployed

available field forces or other units to protect public safety at the locations where violence took place. Instead, command staff prepared to declare an unlawful assembly and disperse the crowd. When violence was most prevalent, CPD commanders pulled officers back to a protected area of the park, where they remained for over an hour as people in the large crowd fought on Market Street.⁷²⁹

It was not simply poor planning that was at fault. *The police response to escalating violence was one of non-intervention which only begat further violence.* The department’s operational plan had advised CPD officers to ‘maintain close observation of the crowd and be mindful of potential open carry and concealed weapons’ as well as to ‘keep close watch of crowd members who are exhibiting behaviors which could become violent.’ Despite guidance on arrests and these written instructions, ‘officers had a very different understanding of the expectations for arrest’, noted the Heaphy Report. Concern for officer safety, due in part to ‘credible threats’ relayed to them by the Virginia Fusion Center that ‘antifa’ were planning to attack CPD officers as well as other rumours, created a situation in which CPD commanders were notably risk averse; instructing officers in their zones that they ‘were not going to go in and break up fights’ or otherwise engage ‘unless it was so serious that someone might get killed.’ Others stated that they were ‘not sending guys out there and getting them hurt.’ A subsequent review of police body camera footage highlighted numerous further instances of ‘uncertainty about potential engagement with the crowd.’⁷³⁰

The upshot of this stance was that much of the violence went unpunished. Commenting on video footage of her own assault by an alt-right activist as the group left Emancipation Park following the declaration of an unlawful assembly, one female counter demonstrator stated:

727 This is despite the fact that CPD officers had previously contacted officials in Pikeville, Kentucky, the scene of a far right rally on 1 May 2017, to discuss how they had managed that event. ‘Those contacts suggested that the alt-right groups were generally cooperative with law enforcement, but also that the opposing groups needed to be physically separated,’ notes the Heaphy Report (2017, p. 87).

728 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 5).

729 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 6).

730 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 97-98, 122).

Particularly alarming is the line of police officers, clearly visible, standing just feet from where I was attacked. I will never forget running to the barricade where they stood and begging for assistance as blood ran down my face. Not one of them moved or responded to my cries for help, except to shift their gaze to the ground. I looked back and forth between the police and my attacker as he walked away.⁷³¹

Police also stood by as the alt-right attacked members of the media. As one reporter covering the event recalled: ‘I saw the first wave of alt-right guys march up, led by Eli Mosley. They said some things to me, called me a nigger. An alt-right guy in a Hitler and swastika T-shirt punched me in the face in front of the police. The police did absolutely nothing.’⁷³² Another counter demonstrator, Nikuyah Walker, who was elected Mayor of Charlottesville in January 2020, recalled people yelling at the police ‘Why didn’t you protect us, why didn’t you help us?’⁷³³ Councilman Bellamy was similarly ‘extremely shocked to see the police watching the fights and not doing anything to stop it. A few officers literally watched people in full blown fist fights and stood idle.’⁷³⁴ CPD strategy therefore became one which did not aim to prevent violence but, by default, to allow it to occur and then use its existence as an excuse to declare the event to be unlawful, bring proceedings to an abrupt end, and then to disperse the crowd. Anger at police tactics continued to resonate and, during the first Council meeting to be held after the rally on **21 August**, members of the public attending were ‘livid’ with how the police had conducted themselves.⁷³⁵

The alt-right was similarly furious, blaming the police for derailing Kessler’s supposedly ‘detailed safety

plans’ by making many of the vans and buses that the group had acquired to transport people from their secondary locations to Emancipation Park stop several blocks from their destination, ‘leaving passengers to make their way on foot through the hostile, violent crowds, entirely without police protection.’⁷³⁶ Though Spencer had an armed security team, he was still maced on route to the Park. Once inside the Park, the alt-right complained of ‘serious problems’ insofar as the area had been ‘barricaded’ into three separate sections one separating the speakers from the public address system and another bisecting their crowd of demonstrators. Despite the presence of a large detail of riot police billeted in a building across the street, McLaren observed that ‘neither these well-equipped officers nor any of the dozens of uniformed local and state police swarming the area were making the slightest effort to protect the demonstrators, arrest their attackers, or maintain separation between the hostile crowds’, which he found ‘perplexing.’⁷³⁷

The police declaration of an unlawful assembly, shortly after the alt-right had been informed that their event would go ahead, generated a great deal of anger and antagonism. Many believed that they had been ‘set up’ and that Charlottesville City Council had never intended to honour the permit despite the court order. In the judgement of one of Spencer’s inner circle:

What the authorities’ actions amounted to was deliberately maximising the potential for tragedy; allowing two hostile armed crowds to gather, and then using a line of armored police to repeatedly push those crowds into each other over the course of several hours.⁷³⁸

Following the declaration of an unlawful assembly, *police action to enforce the order created even more violence and spread this more broadly throughout*

731 <https://time.com/5009452/charlottesville-white-supremacy-dennis-mothersbaugh/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

732 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

733 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44619374> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

734 Bellamy (2019, p. 160).

735 Bellamy (2019, p. 185).

736 McLaren (2018, p. 48).

737 McLaren (2018, p. 48).

738 McLaren (2018, p. 51).

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the city centre. In a bid to clear the park, police drove the alt-right protestors out of Emancipation Park into path of the counter demonstrators. Instead of containing violence within the park or on its periphery, their actions dispersed violent clashes more broadly throughout the downtown area. Small skirmishes broke out thereafter ‘unimpeded by the police’ in numerous localities but notably in the Market Street parking garage (where DeAndre Harris was brutally beaten), Justice Park, the High Street, the Water Street parking area and in the Downtown Mall. By this juncture the police were often too far away and therefore arrived too late to intervene in a meaningful way to prevent the violence. ‘The result was a period of lawlessness and tension that threatened the safety of the entire community,’ remarked the Heaphy Report.⁷³⁹

Many of these problems stemmed from inadequate and flawed police planning ahead of the rally. The Heaphy Report singled out the City’s police chief, Al Thomas, for particular criticism leading to his resignation. Pointedly, the report was scathing that police supervisors ‘devised a poorly conceived plan that under-equipped and misaligned hundreds of officers.’ Both VSP and CPD planners knew that the event would be ‘well-attended’ and ‘potentially violent’ and so ‘could not have been reasonably surprised’ by what occurred. The execution of their ‘poorly conceived plan’ placed officer safety over and above public safety. Offices failed to take a proactive role in preventing the violence and were in fact instructed to only intervene in cases of ‘extreme violence’. This decision represented, the report stated, ‘a tremendous tactical failure that has real and lasting consequences.’⁷⁴⁰

CPD officers were also hampered by a failure to ‘sufficiently coordinate’ with VSP in a unified command on or indeed before the date of the rally which drastically undercut the cohesion and coherence of the law enforcement response. On the day, VSP did not arrive in Emancipation Park until 8.39am ‘much later than CPD expected’

which left ‘little time to meet and review plans.’⁷⁴¹ Another ‘crucial failure’ was that VSP never shared with CPD its own formal planning document for the demonstration which further curtailed coordination. As a result of this failure, CPD were unaware that VSP envisaged distinct limits to their own engagement during the day. There was no joint training or briefings between the two forces and whilst CPD Chief Thomas was the overall incident commander he had no ‘functional control’ over VSP units. Cooperation was further stymied throughout the day itself by the fact that, despite plans to ensure that they were, the respective radio systems of each law enforcement agency were not connected meaning that CPD and VSP officers could not communicate with each other (which the two agencies might have realized had VSP arrived earlier). These failures ‘undercut cohesion and operational effectiveness’ in the police response with both CPD and VSP operating largely independently of each other without a clear chain of command.⁷⁴²

A similar failure in policing had facilitated violence the evening before the rally, during the torch-lit parade at the University of Virginia (UVA). Despite university officials being aware of the event ‘hours’ before it transpired neither the university nor its police department, UPD, took any action to separate the alt-right demonstrators from UVA students thereby imperilling them.⁷⁴³ UPD were also slow to request assistance from CPD once the violence started, despite numerous offers from the latter. ‘The tenor of this event set an ominous tone for the following day,’ lamented the Heaphy Report with the implication that had the march been adequately policed this may have changed the nature of the event the following day.⁷⁴⁴ Elsewhere, the report recorded: ‘We believe that *police passivity on Friday night potentially encouraged violence on Saturday.*’⁷⁴⁵

739 Heaphy Report (2018, p. 6).

740 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 160-166 and 152).

741 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 120).

742 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 5).

743 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 5).

744 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 6).

745 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 158).

CPD also failed to ensure public safety *after* the Unite the Right rally was over, which was when James Fields Jr., drove his car into demonstrators killing Heather Heyer. CPD had placed an officer (a school resource officer) on the intersection of 4th Street NE and Market Street who received no other instruction than that she would be ‘doing traffic’. Fearing for her safety as streams of protestors and counter-protestors streamed out of the area surrounding Emancipation Park towards her, the officer was relieved of her post but CPD commanders did not replace her ‘or make other arrangements to prevent traffic from travelling across the Downtown Mall on 4th Street’ which meant that, aside from a ‘single wooden horse’ there was nothing to impede Fields as he drove his car into counter demonstrators at the intersection of 4th Street SE and Water Street.⁷⁴⁶ This was despite a previous offer from the City’s Director of Public Works to supply ‘water-filled jersey barriers’ along 4th Street prior to the event, or the idea of using dump trucks or school buses, to block roads at the event.⁷⁴⁷

There were also recriminations between the City of Charlottesville and the State of Virginia over who was to blame for the violence, centring upon accusations that those planning the city response had rejected ideas about best practices from state authorities. Virginia’s Governor, Terry McAuliffe, was particularly critical of the City’s response. The After-Action Review (AAR) report commissioned in the wake of Charlottesville equally criticised the role of the Executive Leadership in Charlottesville. It stated:

during planning meetings between VSP and CPD, state officials made recommendations and suggestions to the city on how to best prepare for a protest of this type and scale. State leaders also made recommendations directly to the Mayor of Charlottesville. It is reported that many of the recommendations of the state to the city were rejected. Many

of those recommendations followed industry best practices.⁷⁴⁸

In his memoir, Virginia’s Governor also highlighted the verdict of a report by the International Association of Chiefs of Police that had credited Virginia state authorities with ‘thorough preparation’ ahead of the rally and had provided ‘ample resources’ to the City.⁷⁴⁹ Signer was disappointed that McAuliffe, ‘himself under the gun for the failure of the Virginia State Police, attempted to shift the blame to me and the city.’⁷⁵⁰

Ahead of the rally, *City planners were also mistaken that they could not ban certain items which could be used as weapons*. Whilst Charlottesville could not have banned guns or others restricted attendees from openly carrying firearms, they could, if they had realised it, restricted the possession of sticks, bats, shields, clubs and poles, all of which were used as weapons during the rally. These items increased the ‘quantum and seriousness of the violence’ on 12 August whereas their absence would have guaranteed ‘fewer and less dangerous encounters’.⁷⁵¹

Whilst the combined failure of local law enforcement and the City of Charlottesville both helped facilitate violence *the configuration of the groups and individuals attending the Unite the Right rally also helped to hardwire violence and confrontation into the event*. The organisers of the event had originally believed that the heterodox nature of the groups and individuals involved in the event was a strength rather than a weakness. Indeed, it was believed to be a testament to the success of their coalition building efforts which validated their calls for ‘unity’ on the far right. As NPI Executive Director Evan McLaren observed:

748 Virginia’s Response to the Unite the Right Rally: After-Action Review (2017, p. 20).

749 McAuliffe (2019, p. 142).

750 Signer (2020, pp. 249-251, 279).

751 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 157).

746 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 6, 91).

747 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 90).

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Originally that ideological diversity was meant to extend leftward from the alt-right to the ‘alt-lite’ – to figures like Gavin McInnes and Jack Posobiec, who had clearly enough distinguished their civic outlook from the racial and identitarian mentality of the alt-right, but who were potentially still aligned with it in many ways. This was the unity toward which Kessler was aiming, and as erratic and inexplicable as his behaviour was then and later, this discrete purpose made good sense.⁷⁵²

If the two wings of the movement could work together, it would send a ‘strong signal that the coalition that had elevated Trump to the White House was more than momentary,’ observed McLaren⁷⁵³. However, the coalition that Kessler and others envisaged never materialised. Much of the alt-lite refused to get involved. Gavin McInnes’ Proud Boys, for instance, declined to participate, even though Kessler had joined the group. Their resistance to unity with the alt-right increased in the wake of the rally with McInnes ordering his members: ‘If you know of anyone who is presently a member and who is alt-right, they are cut from the club as of right now,’ McInness said. ‘If you refuse, you are your own separate entity and not affiliated with Proud Boys.’⁷⁵⁴

The wider digital media eco-system deliberately contributed to the growing anticipation amongst attendees that the Unite the Right rally would present an opportunity for violence against their political opponents. Indeed, for several months prior to the rally these digital platforms, both those run directly by the organisers and the broader environment of blogs, podcasts, website and social media platforms run by the wider milieu itself, ratcheted up the belief amongst attendees, framing the Unite the Right rally as a pivotal moment, one which would see them reclaim both

their historic white birthright through a ‘defence’ of the statute of Robert E. Lee, but also one that would more generally allow them to directly challenge the supposed hegemony of a ‘left-wing’ stronghold on its own streets and thereby project its own dominance.

Notably, however, the organisers also failed to build any sort of alliance with local groups, such as the Virginia Flaggers for instance, who supported the ostensible cause around which the Unite the Right rally had been held: the preservation of Southern heritage. *This meant that with a few exceptions most of those attending the alt-right demonstration were from out of town with little stake in what would happen in the city after they left and thus had little incentive to inhibit their own violence.* What this organisation failure meant for the trajectory of the Unite the Right rally ahead of the demonstration was that their efforts to ‘extend leftward’ to the alt-lite had already failed. As a result, ‘unity’ came to take on an ‘alternative meaning,’ observed McLaren:

If the right was not going to be united in Charlottesville along an alt-right/alt-lite axis but still would be united, then this unity would have to extend from the alt-right in the other direction – to groups like the League of the South, the Traditionalist Worker Party, American Vanguard and Patriot Front.⁷⁵⁵

McLaren’s interpretation overlooked the fact that *alt-right ‘unity’ with these more extreme groups, many with a well-documented record of violence, was also particularly fragile since many of these actors did not self-identify with the alt-right or the official aims of the event itself.* As TWP, NSM and LOS formed up on the morning of the demonstration, a LOS activist was heard shouting: ‘We’re not alt-right and we’re not the far right. We’re the hard right!’⁷⁵⁶ For many European far right observers, it was a ‘mistake’ to have allowed such groups to participate in the demonstration in the

752 McLaren (2018, p. 44).

753 McLaren (2018, p. 44).

754 <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/proud-boys-founder-tries-and-fails-to-distance-itself-from-charlottesville-6862fb8b3ae9/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

755 McLaren (2018, p. 45).

756 Tenold (2018, p. 289).

first place, contributing to the fact that the Unite the Right rally was a ‘PR disaster’.⁷⁵⁷

Despite their apparent ‘concern’ about their ‘lack of control’ over the event’s course or the ‘optics’ that might accrue from it, those around Spencer took part in the Charlottesville protest regardless of its ideological shift since ‘we clearly understood that our non-participation in this landmark event would be noted by racially conscious white persons throughout the world.’ The ‘excitement and anticipation’ that was gaining momentum within these circles in the weeks before the event meant that if they did not participate in this ‘singular historic moment’ then ‘we could not have credibly called ourselves leaders on August 13th’.⁷⁵⁸ This drive for status and leadership was reflected in the profusion of speakers and factions present, which also invited the conclusion that Charlottesville ‘wasn’t so much an event for the various groups to come together as it was the place for aspiring leaders on the far right to be seen.’⁷⁵⁹

The involvement of so many extreme actors caused the ‘moderates’ to lose control (insofar as they had any to begin with) since **many of those attending clearly ignored the group’s own operational documents and had little concern with ‘optics’ either.** One such individual was James Fields. Given the fact that the alt-right failed to effectively police their own forums and chat groups, in which the apprehension of and preparation for violence was palpable, the burden of maintaining order fell to law enforcement whose own tactical and operational failure to effectively control escalating street violence was glaring.

The level of violence at the Charlottesville rally entrenched and legitimated ideas within a segment of the extreme right that more violence was the only solution going forward. Whilst many of the actors at Charlottesville distanced themselves from the

violence, for a variety of reasons, there were those who felt that the violence legitimated more militant action. Matthew Heimbach (TWP), for instance, believed there was little point holding further rallies. ‘Charlottesville proved that people are going to call you a Nazi regardless,’ he claimed. ‘There’s no center anymore. There’s no moderation. If you want to be in the movement, you better be prepared to put on the helmet and the armband and get into the streets.’⁷⁶⁰

More broadly, the failure of the Unite the Right rally was also viewed by some actors on the extreme right as signalling that there was no political solution and that terrorism was the only alternative. As the first anniversary of the Unite the Right rally approached, the Council were increasingly worried that there could be another terrorist attack. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam was in communication with the City Council during this period and it was decided to declare a State of Emergency. These measures were deemed necessary, however, since ‘while we were not sure what Kessler was going to do since he withdrew his application for the permit, we still had a city to protect.’⁷⁶¹

Whilst there was no terrorist attack on the first anniversary of the rally, tensions within the extreme right about ‘optics’ and how best to present the alt-right to the public had become a point of fracture in the immediate aftermath of the original events, both between the key organisers and some individuals within the wider movement itself. The issue remains unresolved but reared its head again in the case of Robert Bowers, who murdered 11 Jews the following year at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Prior to committing his atrocity, Bowers had posted ‘screw your optics’ online, highlighting that for some, terrorism had become a viable alternative, though there is of course no telling whether he would have perpetrated his massacre with or without the antecedent of the Unite the Right rally. As the Southern Poverty Law Center highlighted:

757 https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/qvzndx/white-nationalists-in-europe-loved-trumps-charlottesville-response (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

758 McLaren (2018, p. 45).

759 Tenold (2018, p. 292).

760 Tenold (2018, p. 292).

761 Bellamy (2019, p. 218).

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The mention of ‘optics’ references a disagreement that has raged within the white nationalist movement since the Unite the Right rally in 2017 about how best to get their message across to the general public. Some extremists called for continued direct action, while others favoured a retreat back into online spaces. This suggests the suspect was steeped in the debates of the white nationalist alt-right.⁷⁶²

The Unite the Right rally was the culmination of a series of deliberately divisive and provocative events by the extreme right during the course of 2017 each of which contributed to a growing sense of moral outrage and indignation from activists living in Charlottesville and indeed on the east coast more generally. Police action against them rather than the KKK for instance served to further polarise relations in the run up to the Unite the Right rally, meaning that there was little dialogue between sections of the local citizenry and the police or the City Council.

What appears to inhibit violence?

Whilst the alt-right had steeled itself for violence ahead of the rally, the same was not true in relation to how many of the anti-fascists who attended the rally had prepared themselves. Many anti-fascists expected the protest to be ‘massively policed’ and for police to keep the two sides separate, just as they had experienced at countless other protests. That being the case, many of those who attended the rally, particularly those from out of town and indeed out of State, did not come prepared for violence in the same way that the alt-right had, since they perceived that they would be immediately arrested if they did. Furthermore, *a sizeable number of out-of-state activists who might otherwise have attended the rally did not come to Charlottesville*, in part because of charges pending against them – most of which were later dismissed

– following mass arrest of 234 activists who had protested against Trump’s inauguration in Washington DC on 20 January.⁷⁶³

Those who came from outside the state also indicated that the counter-mobilisation was much smaller than anticipated due to local organisers not issuing a call for action sooner. This meant that their demonstration remained largely ‘regional’, i.e. it drew upon activists from Charlottesville, Virginia and the East Coast, but not so much from other areas like the Mid-West or the West Coast. In comparison, the alt-right mobilisation was larger and more geographically diffuse, gaining adherents from as far away as California (the Rise Above Movement) and Europe, who had flown in to witness what was supposed to be a triumphal moment for the movement.

Restraints on violence came to the fore in different ways. For one activist who had travelled from out of state to Charlottesville, the number of counter demonstrators who had gathered initially in Justice Park highlighted that they were *outnumbered physically by their opponents*. ‘I nearly shit my pants when I got there,’ this person recalled. ‘We went to the park at the meeting point and there were like, thirty people there. I was like, “Whoa, we’re fucked!”’⁷⁶⁴ Prior to moving towards Emancipation Park, the size of this particular set of counter demonstrators had grown but not to a sufficient size to make confrontation an attractive proposition. ‘This was like a march of about two-hundred people marching on a crowd of Nazis two or three times the size. Who are you fooling? People are chanting, “Punch a Nazi,” or whatever. They outnumber us.’ In their opinion the ‘only reason’ that *violence did not escalate early on in proceedings was because the alt-right did not initially want to engage with them. They really were restraining themselves because they wanted the rally,*’ this respondent believed.⁷⁶⁵

762 <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/10/27/gunman-opened-fire-synagogue-pittsburgh-killing-least-eleven-people-and-wounding-others> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

763 Charlottesville 4: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.

764 Charlottesville 4: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.

765 Charlottesville 4: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.

Despite angry confrontations and a profusion of weaponry, particularly those carried by the militias, there was *very little resort to firearms during the course of the violence*. Whilst acknowledging the militias to be perhaps the most ‘violent consistency’ within the political landscape, one respondent believed that there was little violence from this quarter during the demonstration because *the militiamen present had a clear sense of purpose about their ‘mission’ at Charlottesville and acted as a moderating force, in part because they maintained a distance from the alt-right and the actual protest itself*. It is when the militias were actually a part of the protest, argued this respondent, that they were more likely to engage in acts of violence. As the respondent explained,

But the rhetoric that the militias were given in Charlottesville was like, ‘Hey, you’re here to keep everyone safe’. And I think it comes from this very performative, like they want to live out some kind of fantasy, where they actually are the guardians of the people. So when they’re given a mission they buy into it. But when they’re part of the protest that’s when they get more violent.⁷⁶⁶

The militias were compliant with orders issued to them by law enforcement, which diminished the possibility for armed confrontation. When Yingling’s group were told by one police officer at the intersection of 2nd Street NW and North West that their presence was a ‘lightening rod’ and asked them to leave the area, they did so. This was evident shortly afterwards as the group was preparing to leave the area more generally. They were followed by a group of counter demonstrators, one of whom threw a rock at the militia, hitting one of their number in the head. In response, the group then took up position alongside the wall nears the Sultan Kebab restaurant on the corner of Garrett and 2nd Street but, not being local, had failed to appreciate that they had stopped directly across the road from a predominantly African American

housing complex and so continued to draw the ire of counter-protestors who presumably suspected they might have some other intent. The police were also unaware at the time that a call had been issued by the demonstrators to colleagues in Justice and McGuffey Parks that the complex was ‘under attack’, leading to a larger mobilisation. More than 100 people made their way to the area to confront the militia who by the time they arrived had, however, left the area. Whilst no violence occurred, the incident highlights that a very different situation could have arisen. When leaving the area one of the militias drove at speed to flee counter-protestors ‘nearly running one of them over’, indicating the further potential for death and injury caused by this incident.⁷⁶⁷

Whilst left-wing militias, such as Redneck Revolt and the Socialist Rifle Club, had also attended the rally armed (in the same way that other militias had), they too had seen their role as ‘defensive’ rather than ‘offensive’. Other individual attendees were also armed but for many, particularly those from out of state, *even though they possessed firearms or had concealed carry permits, chose not to bring them*. Indeed, one respondent talking of their own experience of attending demonstrations more broadly noted that taking firearms to a protest went against the grain with many left-wingers. ‘I can’t imagine a worst idea than bringing a gun to a protest for any reason. It’s just, it’s mind-boggling that someone would do that. But they don’t really, left-wing people generally don’t.’⁷⁶⁸ For those who did bring guns to Charlottesville it was ‘entirely defensive,’ stated another respondent who believed that only a minority of the group ‘on our side’ was openly carrying a weapon. This person also witnessed a friend whom they knew to be carrying a concealed weapon being maced ‘directly in the face’ during the demonstration but at no point did they draw their gun in response, indicating that a *personal set of restraints on violence were in action*. Indeed, despite the large number of firearms present, only one

766 Charlottesville 2: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.

767 Heaphy Report (2017, pp. 141-142).

768 Charlottesville 2: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.

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person discharged a gun during the event. Even then, although it was fired into the ground, the Heaphy Report makes clear: ‘The shot could have hit any number of individuals who were in the immediate vicinity of the man who fired. The shot also could have triggered additional gunshots in the midst of this volatile event.’⁷⁶⁹ The fact that no one was killed was therefore largely a matter of good luck.

It is also a misconception that every interaction between the alt-right and anti-fascists involved violence or that it was thought of as a tool of first resort during any given encounter. Once respondent recalled sitting in a park during the course of the day when two people wearing ‘Daily Stormer’ t-shirts arrived. They were told calmly but firmly that they had to leave and eventually did so when the reality of their situation became apparent. ‘There was a very polite exchange. So, the idea that this was a riot where people just came and it was a big clash and a fully immobilised clash, is wholly not true. Wholly not true,’ recalled the counter-demonstrator.⁷⁷⁰ The same respondent highlighted another misconception, which was that everybody who attended the protest came with the intention of engaging in violence. This was not true. *Many of those protesting the Unite the Right rally simply wanted to do just that, protest the rally and make clear their vocal opposition, but never had any intention of using violence.* Others who might have been inclined to engage in violence were deterred by the fact that there was a ban on wearing masks ‘and people didn’t want to get felonies for masks’, explaining, at least in part, the lack of a visible Black Bloc presence. It was only later on in the event, particularly as people began to use mace upon one another that, in the opinion of this respondent, the use of masks became more widespread.⁷⁷¹

Many of those opposing the Unite the Right demonstration came from out of town, but local activists were also heavily involved in opposing the

protest, too. That said, although this was a racist protest in defence of memorials honouring the ‘heroes’ of the secessionist Confederate slave state, *the overwhelming majority of local residents, including Charlottesville’s African American populace, refused to be drawn into the conflict, avoiding the downtown area altogether on the day of the rally.* ‘Many people of color believed that it wasn’t our fight and that the White Supremacists’ minds were not going to be changed by black people confronting them,’ Bellamy stated. He himself estimated that less than 20% of the counter-protesters were black.⁷⁷²

The scale of the violence at Charlottesville, which culminated in the murder of Heather Heyer, was so visible that the alt-right quickly found itself politically isolated in the wake of the rally, despite Donald Trump’s ‘both sides’ comments. Unite the Right had been intended to legitimate the alt-right in a show of strength that would help the milieu broaden its appeal to the alt-lite, to Republicans and to white Americans in general. The alt-right perhaps believed that it had insulated itself from violence through the construction of a set of ‘rules’ about how activists should conduct themselves at the rally. Some of those present did not go to the rally intent on violence as it was perceived as counter-productive to their wider political agenda. Much of the online discussion, including from some of the organisers, clearly contradicted this advice, however.

The broader reaction to the violence confirms this point. *The deadly outcome of Charlottesville ensured that most of the alt-right’s target audience recoiled from further association with the movement which had been precisely the opposite result to that which the milieu had hoped to achieve with its rally.* Many of the organisations that had characterised themselves as alt-right immediately began to fracture, highlighting the fragility of the coalition that figures like Spencer, Mosley and Kessler had brought together under the Unite the Right banner. Following Kessler’s remarks

769 Heaphy Report (2017, p. 151).

770 Charlottesville 4: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.

771 Charlottesville 4: Interview with an anti-fascist activist.

772 Bellamy (2019, pp. 161-162).

about Heather Heyer in the aftermath of her killing, Spencer disavowed him, reflecting the extent to which association with this event was becoming toxic for the reputations of the leading organisers in the days, weeks, and months, after the event.

The (fragile) political coalition which the organisers had built during the summer of 2017, and with it the *nascent relationships of trust and mutual understanding, imploded amidst accusation and recrimination in the aftermath of the rally which destroyed the ability of the movement to stage further such events*. Key activists were also jailed or dropped out of the movement in the wake of the rally as key organisers also came under sustained legal pressure, further constraining their efforts and deflated the movement's momentum.

Organisational capacity was further diminished by a raft of lawsuits brought against a range of individuals and groups in the wake of the protest, which consumed time, energy, and financial resources. Spencer's association with the violence at Charlottesville ensured that his subsequent efforts to organise a speaking tour at universities ended in failure whilst he himself conceded that rallies were no longer 'fun' and that until they stopped attracting violence 'we are up the creek without a paddle.'⁷⁷³ The financial burden on many of these actors has only increased in the years following Charlottesville as court judgements have meted out a range of financial penalties. In May 2021, for instance, a federal judge awarded one Ohio man who had been injured at Charlottesville four years previously \$2.4million in damages against Spencer's NPI, though it is by no means certain the man will ever see the money.⁷⁷⁴ The lull in violence from the far right was indeed only temporary, however, and whilst

Charlottesville served to hole the public credibility of the alt-right below the water line, other groups – most notably the Proud Boys – soon stepped in to fill the breach, though their activities are beyond the scope of this report.

6.5. CONCLUSIONS: CHARLOTTESVILLE

The sustained and ultimately lethal violence at the Charlottesville Unite the Right rally in August 2017 highlights how, against the backdrop of a protest against the symbols of the Confederacy and slavery and increasing demands for racial justice, a small handful of local activists were able to connect a range of 'national' extreme right actors, emboldened by the election of Donald Trump as President the previous year, who saw themselves as being in the ascendant and wanted an opportunity to show as much. These individuals and groups perceived that by attaching themselves to an emotive local protest they would not only gain publicity but, more generally, could use the image of Charlottesville as a 'left-wing' bastion as a lightning rod for their own 'white backlash' against attempts to remove 'their' heritage and in doing so to increase the breadth and depth of alt-right support.

Even before the rally had begun, however, the failure of the organiser's strategy to 'unite the right' meant that those who did attend were from more militant factions rather than moderate ones. The subsequent configuration of extreme right groups, many of whom had been primed for violence as a result of the months of online chatter about the event both on the Discord servers and through other prominent movement websites, resulted in an expectation of, and preparation, for violence against 'antifa'. Many of those who attended the rally, including killer James Fields Jr., appear to have had very little concern for the so-called 'optics' of the event that the organisers had tried, publicly at least, to convey.

In the months preceding the alt-right rally, there were a number of episodes which served to undermine co-

773 <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/12/alt-right-leader-richard-spencer-says-his-rallies-arent-fun-anymore/416579002/> (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

774 <https://apnews.com/article/think-tanks-b1b19350bca-f0e532db2d5b057f86170>. The same man was awarded \$5,000 in damages from David Duke in 2020 (<https://apnews.com/article/b307e2886jc533bcfa55fd6cc583274e>) and \$10,000 in damages from the Traditionalist Workers Party in January 2021 (<https://apnews.com/article/james-alex-fields-jr-lawsuits-virginia-heather-heyer-charlottesville-7f138997831c05c388aa7277a228d20e>). (Accessed on 03/06/2021)

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operation and indeed hardened boundaries between the police and local anti-racism activists, the police and the City Council, and indeed between local councillors and residents and campaigners. Numerous factors combined to undermine the City's response to the Unite the Right rally, but it appears clear that, regardless of the violent intent of many of the attendees, the police response, or lack thereof, both in terms of planning for the rally and their enactment of that plan on the day itself, was a pivotal factor in enabling violence. The declaration of unlawful assembly and the subsequent attempt to clear Emancipation Park, herding alt-right protestors into the path of counter demonstrators, was a recipe for disaster, serving to facilitate even more violence. Far from losing control of the situation, local law enforcement never really sought control of it in the first place. This served to maximise the opportunities for violence and to nullify the non-violent strategies that others had sought to enact.

7. VIOLENCE ENABLING AND INHIBITING MECHANISMS: A RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK

In Chapters 3-6, we identified a series of violence enabling and violence inhibiting mechanisms within each of the case studies. This chapter synthesises those findings. As discussed in Chapter 2, we use the relational arenas framework to structure this process. Where salient, the micro-, meso- and macro-dimensions and the online-offline interactions are then also discussed.

The descriptions of the mechanisms were generated iteratively. We started by coding up from each of the case studies. We then compared across the case studies to generate a first set of mechanism descriptions, before returning to the case studies to test those descriptions against the case study material and refine them further. We leveraged both across and within-case variation to critically assess and refine our descriptions.

For mechanisms to be included, we did not require them to appear in all of the cases. We did however require (a) that they could be observed at least at some point within more than one case, and (b) that they either produced similar outcomes each time they manifested or there was a clear explanation as to why they had produced different outcomes.

In the first section we present and discuss the violence enabling mechanisms. In the second section we present and discuss the violence inhibiting mechanisms. The reapplication of these back to the case studies can be seen in Annex 3.

In Chapter 8, we provide a discussion of the analytical opportunities and limitations of this framework and offer suggestions about next steps.

7.1. VIOLENCE ENABLING MECHANISMS

After a series of iterations of moving between the case study material, the synthesised descriptions of violence enabling mechanisms and the existing theoretical literature, we were left with 21 violence enabling mechanisms: 7 in the within movement arena; 4 in the movement – opposition arena; 5 in the movement – political environment arena; 2 in the movement – security arena; and 3 in the movement – public arena. These are summarised in Figure 7.1 and described in further detail below.

At this stage, no assessment has been made of the relative weight of importance of each of these mechanisms. Each of the mechanisms are conceived of as enabling escalation of violence, but no mechanism is conceived of in and of itself as being necessary or sufficient for the escalation of violence.

Within each relational arena, the mechanisms are ordered in terms of whether they are most apparent at greater or lesser proximity to actual instances of violent escalation, going from more distant mechanisms (i.e. more ‘macro’ or ‘up-stream’) to more proximal mechanisms. However, it should be noted that, as observed in the descriptions below, some of the mechanisms can be seen operating across macro, meso and micro levels.

Within movement arena

7.1.1. Intensification of threat narrative. While activists in most movements cultivate moral indignation as a means to mobilise activists and supporters,⁷⁷⁵

775 Jasper (2014).

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in this case the ‘Other’ increasingly comes to be seen as an existential threat through processes such as boundary hardening, dehumanisation, the use of zero-sum competition frames, and/or fears about the closing window of opportunity to save the in-group. The intensification of threat narratives might not lead directly to violence, but accentuates fear and hostility. It can also facilitate the justification of violence e.g. through victim-perpetrator reversal⁷⁷⁶ or the construction of self-defence narratives,⁷⁷⁷ and can instil a sense of urgency that is violence-enabling. Across all the cases, the use of digital media was important for the development, circulation and intensification of threat narratives. Within the ‘movement emboldened’ pathway towards violence (see below) this is likely to go hand-in-hand with activists finding alignment between their concerns and those expressed by some members of political and cultural elites (A3.4) and the general public (A5.2). Intensification of threat narrative is often associated with ‘catalytic events’ (see below). (*Prominent in all four cases*)

A1.2. Foregrounding of revolutionary goals. Activists pursue goals that are incompatible with society’s current political, moral and legal frameworks, and increasingly foreground these goals. Such developments are violence-enabling insofar as they make it more difficult for activists to achieve or imagine achieving their goals through constitutional means alone (A3.1), thereby creating opportunities for the promotion of notions such as inevitable war or accelerationist violence, and for the intensification of ideas that corrupt elites are part of ‘the enemy’ (A3.2). Foregrounding revolutionary goals is also conducive to decoupling in the within movement arena (A1.3) or between the movement and potential political allies (-B3.2). (*Observable in Charlottesville, Chemnitz and Dover. In Chemnitz and Charlottesville, violence is deployed to accelerate societal transformation*).

A1.3. Declining influence of moderates. As moderates lose influence, radical actors become more able and

likely to orient towards more confrontational strategies and tactics. This can take different forms. In the ‘movement marginalised’ pathway (see below), it is likely to comprise relative moderates decoupling from the group as splits emerge within the wider movement, thereby leaving the radical flank to spiral towards greater violence (*particularly evident in Dover*). Within the ‘movement emboldened’ pathway, it might also comprise moderates falling increasingly into line with, or become less willing or able to challenge, the more radical elements within the movement, thereby failing to control or even legitimising the radical flank (*particularly evident at points within Chemnitz and Charlottesville*). Declining influence of moderates is particularly likely in contexts of increasing factionalism that can make it harder for organisers to establish internal control. This can happen both at more macro-levels as movements and their internal power structures evolve, or at more micro-situational levels as events unfold on the ground. At the micro level, declining influence of moderates is most likely during fast-moving or unpredictable events, particularly where there is loss of control by state security forces (A4.2) (*as seen for example in Dover*).

A1.4. Valorisation of (escalated) violence. Higher levels of violence are accepted and celebrated within the movement. The performance of or calls to violence are not only accepted but become means to acquiring status within the movement. As well as undermining possible intra-group brakes on violence,⁷⁷⁸ it also skews recruitment/mobilisation towards those activists most disposed towards violence. (*Most observable in Charlottesville, Chemnitz and Dover, although some valorisation of violence also observable in Sunderland*).

A1.5. Identification of violence as a viable or necessary strategy. Even in movements where the performance of violence can be a means to achieve status, activists are often aware that violence has potentially negative consequences, particularly in

776 Volk (2020).

777 See Windisch et al. (2020).

778 See Busher, Holbrook and Macklin (2019).

Relational arena	Mechanism	Mechanism description
Within movement arena	A1.1	Intensification of threat narrative
	A1.2	Foregrounding of revolutionary goals
	A1.3	Declining influence of moderates
	A1.4	Valorisation of violence
	A1.5	Identification of violence as a viable or necessary strategy
	A1.6	Fear of missing out
	A1.7	Preparation for violence
Movement – opposition arena	A2.1	Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment between activists and their opponents
	A2.2	Increased mutual expectation of violence
	A2.3	Increased availability of ‘legitimate’ targets
	A2.4	Sudden power imbalance between opposing groups
Movement – political environment arena	A3.1	Diminishing political opportunities
	A3.2	Growing identification of ‘corrupt elites’ as ‘the enemy’
	A3.3	Radical flank actors become focus of political and/or media attention
	A3.4	Endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of political or cultural elites
	A3.5	Legitimation of violence by members of political or cultural elites
Movement – security forces arena	A4.1	Communication breakdown between activists and security forces
	A4.2	Loss of control by state security actors
Movement – public arena	A5.1	Decoupling of the movement from the general public
	A5.2	Endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of the public
	A5.3	Legitimation of violence by members of the public

Figure 7.1. Violence-enabling mechanisms

terms of escalated state repression and potential loss of public support. In some cases, however violence comes to be seen as a potentially effective part of their strategy of action e.g. if they perceive that there are not possibilities to pursue their objectives

through constitutional means (A3.1) or if they come to believe that through violence they will be able to mobilise support for or ‘accelerate’ the struggle for

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their cause. This loosens the ‘strategic brakes’⁷⁷⁹ on escalation of violence (*Most observable in Chemnitz and Charlottesville*).

A1.6. Fear of missing out. At the meso-level, as movement actors focus on and prepare for a specific event, activists increasingly interpret it as an event of particular importance, and one that will be attended by ‘everyone who is anyone’ within the movement. This does not necessarily lead directly towards escalated violence. It does however favour mobilisation by making it seem almost obligatory to attend, even if one has qualms about possible tactics. Furthermore, by swelling activist numbers it can make managing the demonstration more challenging for security forces (A4.2) or fuel a ‘movement emboldened’ dynamic (see below), especially if this also draws in actual or potential allies from the political environment arena (A3.4, A3.5). In addition, the energy that activists invest in the event in effect raises the stakes, intensifying activist emotions (A2.1), and meaning that frustrated expectations or ambitions become more likely to lead towards significant confrontation and potential hostility or feelings of betrayal directed at state security forces if they curtail the event (A4.1). The emergence of a fear of missing out mechanism in the *within movement arena* is likely to be closely related to increasingly hostile entrainment in the *movement – countermovement arena* (A2.1). (*Clearly observable in Dover and Charlottesville, and also indications that this was relevant in Chemnitz*).

A1.7. Preparation for violence. The individuals or movement factions most willing and able to participate in violence are mobilised, and some activists might prepare weapons and/or wear clothing that enables violence e.g. by concealing their identity. In some cases, activists might undertake training in order to make them more effective at meting out violence. In other cases, usually where training has not taken place, ‘preparation’ might comprise the suppression of tension and fear through drug and alcohol consumption shortly

prior to confrontation with opponents. (*Observable in all four cases. Mobilisation of the ‘right people’ for violence most pronounced in Charlottesville, Chemnitz and Dover, but also in Sunderland for the initial call to action. Prior training for violence is most evident in Charlottesville and Chemnitz. Preparation via intoxication is most observable in Dover*).

Movement – opposition arena

A2.1. Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment.⁷⁸⁰

Opposing movements become increasingly focused on one another and on achieving the emotional domination of their opponent. At the most macro levels, opposing activists increasingly identify each other as existential threats – anti-minority activists often nourish their loathing of their opponents either by dehumanising and humiliating them or, particularly in the case of their white left-wing opponents, labelling them as traitors. At the meso and micro levels, activists can become locked into cycles of humiliation and revenge that augment the emotional energy of the conflict and can drive more violent confrontations. (*This is the dominant dynamic in Dover, but is also evident in Charlottesville and, to a lesser extent or more sporadically, in Chemnitz and Sunderland*)

A2.2. Increased mutual expectation of violence.

Increased expectation of violence encourages activists on both sides to prepare for violence, in terms of recruitment and preparation of weapons and tactics (A1.7). At the micro-situational level, it makes activists more likely to interpret the actions of their opponents as indicators of imminent violence, thereby making them more likely to precipitate violence in response to the perceived threat.⁷⁸¹ It is important to note, however, that increased expectation of violence can also inhibit escalation of violence if one or more parties want to avoid or avert such violence e.g. due to safety fears, belief that such violence would be strategically costly

780 Emotional entrainment is understood as the process whereby a given set or sets of actors develop ‘a mutual focus of attention’ (Collins, 2004) and become affectively attuned with one another (von Scheve et al, 2013). Within this study, we are particularly interested in hostile affective attunement.

781 See Malthaner (2017).

(e.g. B5.1), or anticipation that they would be unlikely to out-violence their opponents (B1.4).⁷⁸² (*Observable in all cases. Increased expectation of violence leading to some actors drawing back apparent in Chemnitz and Sunderland*).

A2.3. Increased availability of ‘legitimate’ targets.

At the more macro-levels, this can occur through a broadened definition of ‘the enemy’, thereby increasing the range of potential targets. At the meso level, target widening may be associated with tactical adaptation, such as in the case of anti-minority activists targeting the media whose footage may be used to dox or convict activists. Increased availability of legitimate targets can also occur at the micro-situational level as the protest event becomes increasingly chaotic or as law enforcement actors either lose control or choose not to intervene (A4.2). The expansion of ‘legitimate’ targets might be based on a number of different types of categories, including ethnic categories, categories based on occupation, or on more or less active involvement in any opposition movement. (*Observable in all cases. Target widening based on ethnic categories is most apparent in Chemnitz and, on occasion, in Sunderland. Targeting of journalists and/or photographers happens in Chemnitz and Dover*)

A2.4. Sudden power imbalance between opposing activists at the micro-situational level.

Confrontational tension and fear built up over a period of hostile entrainment (A2.1) is disrupted by a sudden change in the situational advantage or perceived weakness in opponents, such as when activists suddenly find that they significantly outnumber a group of opponents, or an individual falls to the floor. The disruption of the situational tension and fear can give rise to the sort of ‘hot rush’ and ‘piling on’ that characterise ‘forward panic’ dynamics, whereby tension and fear are released in anger, frenzy and sometimes exhilaration in the performance of violence.⁷⁸³ (*Observable in*

the overwhelming majority of instances of serious interpersonal violence across all four cases)

Movement – political environment arena

A3.1. Diminishing political opportunities. Movement actors find themselves increasingly isolated within the wider political environment and with scant opportunity to achieve their desired goals through constitutional means. This does not necessarily lead to violence but creates opportunities for more radical actors within these groups to argue for the adoption of more radical tactics. It can also foster a decline in the influence of relative moderates, either by encouraging them to disassociate with radical flank actors in an attempt to gain greater access to the political arena, thereby diminishing their influence in the *within movement arena*, or by encouraging them to fall into line with radical flank actors as they seek to retain influence within the increasingly marginalised movement (A1.3). (*Most apparent in the UK cases, and in particular in Dover, where movement actors had little if any support within major political parties or from cultural elites*)

A3.2. Growing identification of ‘corrupt elites’ as ‘the enemy’. While not directly related to violent escalation, and certainly not exclusive to anti-minority movements, the idea that societal elites cannot be trusted and constitute part of ‘the problem’ – reaching their apogee where they are constructed as traitors – enables the justification of calls to take the law into their own hands and creates opportunities for the development and foregrounding of more revolutionary positions (A1.2). We might expect this mechanism to intersect closely with diminishing political opportunities (A3.1). The Charlottesville case illustrates the value in separating A3.1 and A3.2, however. In that case, there was not a discernible diminishing of political opportunities as alt-right actors enjoyed greater accommodation by political elites than at many times in recent history, but simultaneously intensified their narratives about corrupt elites. (*Observable in all four cases*)

782 See also for example Macklin (2020) for a description of such a dynamic in relation to the British far right during the 1990s.

783 Collins (2008, pp. 83-133).

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A3.3. Radical flank actors become focus of political and/or media attention. As radical flank actors become a focus of attention the fame and notoriety that they achieve expands mobilisation opportunities. This does not in itself lead to violence, but enables emergence of other violence-enabling mechanisms. By in effect raising the stakes, it can fuel a fear of missing out dynamic (A1.6) as actors within the movement seek to maintain or strengthen their positions. It can also encourage hostile mutual entrainment (A2.1) and increase mutual expectations of violence (A2.2) in the *movement – countermovement arena*. (Most evident in Charlottesville, but also in Dover and Sunderland. In Chemnitz, however, this mechanism does not foster further escalation because it fosters a significant expansion of the response by state security forces (B4.1, B4.2) and mobilises sufficient counter-movement activists to overturn the situational advantages previously enjoyed by anti-minority actors (B2.3/B2.4)

A3.4. Endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of political or cultural elites. Processes of threat narrative intensification and in-group vs out-group boundary hardening associated with ideological radicalisation in the within-movement arena (A1.1) are believed by activists to be endorsed by members of the political or cultural elite. This can lead movement actors to seek to establish and maintain alliances with those elite actors, which can act as an effective brake on radicalisation (B3.2). However, it can also embolden them to pursue more violent strategies on the assumption that those elite actors will ultimately support them, or at least that they are likely to escape significant political or legal sanction. (Frame endorsement leading to emboldening radical flank actors is most apparent in Charlottesville and Chemnitz, but also to some extent in Dover)

A3.5. Legitimation of violence by members of political or cultural elites. Rarely done directly, due to the potential costs to elite actors, this usually takes one or more of a number of more subtle forms. The most straightforward of these is non-condemnation that falls

just short of condonement. It can also take the form of elite actors proffering justifications for violence, engaging in victim-perpetrator reversal, or articulating equivalences that downplay the violence of anti-minority groups. This does not lead directly to violence but contributes to an environment of permissiveness around the use of violence and can embolden groups or individuals to use, and to continue to use, violence. (Observable in Charlottesville and Chemnitz)

Movement – security forces arena

A4.1. Communication breakdown between activists and state security forces. At the meso and micro levels, activists are less cooperative with state security forces in the preparation and execution of protest activities. In some cases, this takes the form of calls to actively bypass the state apparatus e.g. in the form of vigilantism. Declining cooperation with state actors makes confrontations with opponents more likely, and encourages more clandestine modes of operating, which in turn are more likely to favour escalation of violence.⁷⁸⁴ A particularly intense form of communication breakdown at the situational level arises where activist expectations are frustrated and/or activists feel betrayed by the security forces as a result of a belief among activists that they are essentially ‘on the same side’ or even that their protest somehow supports the security forces, but that this is not appreciated by the security forces. (Observable to some degree in all four cases. Attempts to outmanoeuvre police prior to and during demonstrations most apparent in Dover and Chemnitz. Calls for vigilantism in Chemnitz and Sunderland. Activists feeling betrayed by security forces observable in Chemnitz and Charlottesville)

A4.2. Loss of control by state security actors. State security actors are unable, unprepared or unwilling to respond to emergent escalation of violence. This might be because they do not have the capability to do so, or because their planned or established operating procedures do not lend themselves to such intervention.

This can lead to a ‘moral holiday’ dynamic,⁷⁸⁵ or can favour the emergence of ‘little local situations of overwhelming advantage’⁷⁸⁶ and the consequent forward panic dynamics (A2.4). At the situational level, fast-moving events, such as spontaneous or ‘flash demonstrations’ can limit the capacity of state security actors to prepare for violence, including opportunities for liaison/cooperation (A4.1). At the more macro levels, loss of control by state security actors can take the form of state security actors refraining from or being unable to pursue prosecutions for violence following previous events, thereby emboldening movement actors to push further at the boundaries of legality. *(At the situational level, this is observable at some points in all four cases. The longer-wave loosening of control is evident in Dover following the September 2015 demonstration, and also in Chemnitz in the period prior to the case study)*

Movement – public arena

A5.1. Decoupling of the movement from the general public. Movement actors have little interest in building broad-based public support. This might be because they are a deeply counter-cultural movement that knowingly breaks societal taboos (A1.2); because building broad-based public support is not part of their strategy of action (at this point in their struggle) e.g. in the form of vanguardist movements, or simply because through bitter experience they are seemingly resigned to their position at the political margins (A3.1). This might also be a by-product of a movement becoming consumed by intra-movement competition for dominance that in effect de-prioritises efforts to build broader public support. *(Most apparent in the case of Dover, where most of the anti-minority activists showed almost no interest in appealing to a broader public, but vanguardist strategies also evident in Chemnitz)*

A5.2. Endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of the public. Movement actors believe that

their issue frames are endorsed by a sufficient portion of the public to give them confidence that they will be able to count on their support when it is needed. This lowers the perceived potential strategic costs of violent escalation. In some cases, it can actively encourage violence if such violence is envisaged as a way to mobilise the public and encourage people to take sides in the anticipated forthcoming conflict,⁷⁸⁷ as is the case in accelerationist strategies. As with A3.4, A5.2 could also conceivably favour innovation away from violence, at least in the short term,⁷⁸⁸ but only if the apparent endorsement of the issue frame by members of the public also stimulates efforts towards wider alliance formation (B3.2) and a focus on building and sustaining public support (B5.1). *(Most observable in Chemnitz and Charlottesville)*

A5.3. Legitimation of violence by members of the public. In its strongest form, members of the public that do not obviously pertain to the movement actively encourage or incite violence. This can be seen most obviously in online forums where individuals encourage participants at protest events on the ground to undertake greater violence, especially when events are livestreamed. Offline, and at a micro-situational level, this can also take the form of highly confrontational protest events drawing in small numbers of members from the general public, usually young people, who are attracted and excited by the opportunities for violence. In a weaker, but not necessarily less important form, members of the public appear to tacitly accept the use of violence by continuing to support, either on the street, online or at the ballot box, actors directly involved in or associated with violence. *(Online incitement to greater violence observable in Charlottesville and Chemnitz. Violence being further fuelled by drawing in willing members of the general public observable to a limited extent in Dover. Legitimation of violence through continued support evident in Chemnitz)*

785 Collins (2008, pp. 243-5).

786 Collins (2008, p. 125).

787 For a discussion of this in the context of left-wing movements in Portugal, see Da Silva and Ferreira (2020).

788 For further discussion of differences between short and long term threats of violence, see 7.2.1. Discussion of violence inhibiting mechanisms.

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7.1.1. DISCUSSION OF VIOLENCE ENABLING MECHANISMS

Two different escalation pathways?

One of the most striking points about the escalation mechanisms identified across the four case studies is that some of them appear to contradict one another, particularly in the *movement – political environment arena* and in the *movement – public arena*. In the *movement – political environment arena*, for example, A3.1 (diminishing political opportunities) seems to sit awkwardly with A3.4 (endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of political or cultural elites) and A3.5 (legitimation of violence by members of political or cultural elites). In the *movement – public arena*, A5.1 (decoupling of the movement from the general public) also sits awkwardly with A5.2 (endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of the public).

Part of the explanation for this is likely to be that these arenas hide, or at least contain, important complexity and heterogeneity.⁷⁸⁹ There are likely to be many members of the political and cultural elites that abhor and strongly oppose anti-minority activism even when there are others who might be more willing to accommodate or even endorse some of the arguments that the protestors are putting forward. Similarly, among the general public there will be myriad views running from deep opposition to enthusiastic support for such protests.

We propose however that there is a further possible explanation for these apparent contradictions. This is that the case studies might in fact reveal two somewhat different escalation pathways. One of these pathways – what we refer to as the *‘movement marginalised’ pathway* – is the escalation pathway that emerges as anti-minority groups decouple from the public and become hyper-marginalised within the political arena. This, for example, is the pathway that we observe most clearly in Dover. Here, by the time the anti-minority activists were descending on the town in January

2016, most of those involved had little if any interest in forging support with the general public or political allies – even very fringe right-wing parties such as the NF were seemingly distancing themselves. Instead, the dominant logics of the event were about exacting revenge on their left-wing opponents and jockeying for position within the most ideologically and tactically radical fringes of the anti-minority protest scene.

The other pathway is what we refer to as the *‘movement emboldened’ pathway*. This is the escalation pathway that emerges as actors at the radical flank of anti-minority movements start to believe that they are achieving dominance within that movement; that they have some, if not necessarily widespread or ubiquitous, support among political and cultural elites; and that the portion of the public that matters to them will stand by them if and when the conflict escalates. This pathway, we argue, is most evident in Chemnitz, but also to a substantial degree in Charlottesville.

These different pathways comprise ‘ideal types’. As is always the case, it is rare that such ideal types exist in perfect form in reality. Rather, most cases will comprise something of a combination of the two, as can be seen in the storyboards (Annex 3). What ideal types are useful for however is drawing our attention to and providing insight regarding cross- and within-case variation. They are also of obvious practical use. If, as we propose, there are two somewhat different escalation pathways, one of the first things we should do when trying to assess the risk of escalation is to understand what sort of pathway we might be observing or is more likely to emerge. We return to this point in Chapter 8.

The missing out-bidding dynamic in the movement – security forces arena: some possible explanations

Based on much of the research on social movements and political violence, one of the key escalation mechanisms that we would expect to have encountered would have been an emergent out-bidding dynamic

in the *movement – security forces arena*.⁷⁹⁰ We did not find this, however. The closest thing we found was A4.1, ‘communication breakdown between activists and security forces’, but this lacks the kind of confrontational intensity that comprises most descriptions of outbidding dynamics between movement actors and security forces within the literature. While security forces did, on occasion, become the focus of aggression on the part of anti-minority activists, within our case studies they remained an incidental rather than a primary target of violence for anti-minority activists.

There are number of possible explanations for this. One, of course, is that our four cases are simply idiosyncratic – always a risk with research that uses only a small number of case studies. We believe, however, that there are at least two other explanations that warrant consideration.

The first of these is that the kind of movement – state security forces outbidding dynamics described in much of the literature on political violence tend to emerge and become influential at higher levels of violence and/or violence that is not associated with protest events. While our cases all contain instances of violence that extend well beyond the standard repertoires of action of the groups involved, and while the Charlottesville case does contain one instance of lethal force, the violence deployed within these cases is not of the same order as the drawn out campaigns of violence on which much of the literature is based (and the one instance of lethal force within the Charlottesville case quickly becomes the focus of and catalyst for intra-movement tension). Furthermore, given that all of the case studies are based around public protest events, it might be argued that the level of state repression required to trigger more pronounced movement – state security forces outbidding dynamics has not been reached.

The other possible explanation is that, when compared with the left-wing and/or liberationist movements

on which much of the literature is based, there is something peculiar to escalation dynamics within right-wing movements. While there are cases of revolutionary right-wing and anti-government movements targeting state security services,⁷⁹¹ for most right-wing movements, the security services often form an important part of their vision of what society should look like. Indeed, some anti-minority activists might understand their protests as being broadly supportive of, or even being undertaken on behalf of, the security forces, as observed for example in Chemnitz. As such, even when micro-situational factors might be conducive to confrontation with the security services, such as during attempts to breach police lines, anger towards the security services is often directed to the ‘higher echelons’ rather than the officers on the ground.⁷⁹² Indeed, there are several recorded cases of collusion with and sympathy for the extreme right actors from within state security services.⁷⁹³ Furthermore, while campaigns by far right movements might often be deeply imbued with narratives about corrupt elites, the primary focus of their violence is in most cases not the elites themselves, but anti-racist or anti-fascist movements and people of colour, making it less likely to trigger the kind of significant upscaling of police response that would generate outbidding dynamics.

The role of ‘catalytic events’

While the relational mechanisms described above appear to go a long way towards explaining how violence happened in each of the four cases, in each case, the violence that took place could also at least to some extent be understood as a product of particular events external to, or that do not fit within any one of, the relational arenas. These events stimulated or intensified, more or less directly, the relational dynamics and violence that took place. This is perhaps most obvious in Chemnitz with the stabbing

791 E.g., NSU members killing a police officer, or the Oklahoma bombing targeted against federal agencies.

792 A similar pattern is observed by Busher (2013) in his research with English Defence League activists.

793 German (2020); Flade (2021)

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of Daniel Hillig, and in Sunderland with the various alleged sexual assaults, where these events served to quickly engender a series of actions by anti-minority activists. There are also important contextual events in the Charlottesville and Dover cases, however, albeit they do not lead so quickly or directly to mobilization and violence. Charlottesville becomes a focal point for white supremacists and fellow travellers at least in part as a result of the plans to remove the Robert E Lee statue (catalytic event) and the presence in Charlottesville of Jason Kessler (local activist eager to capitalise on this potential catalytic event). Dover, a perennial candidate to be a focal point for anti-minority activism due to its ferry port, becomes a focal point at that particular time as political and media interest in how migrants are entering the UK intensified, against the wider backdrop of the so-called European ‘migrant crisis’.

We propose thinking of such events as ‘catalytic events’.⁷⁹⁴ These events create opportunities to mobilise or to intensify mobilisation efforts, often by fostering a rapid intensification of the threat narrative (A1.1). In each of the cases we have described, at least part of what makes them effective catalysts is the way they align with and can, with appropriate narration, play upon, the existing structures of moral indignation, outrage and fear around and through which anti-minority activists were mobilising, thereby keying into mechanisms A3.4 and A5.2, endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of political or cultural elites, and the public, respectively.

The more shocking these incidents are or can be made to seem by those seeking to capitalise on them, the more likely they are to comprise effective catalysts, and the more opportunities they offer to some activists to issue calls for and legitimise urgent action that extends beyond the existing tactical repertoire. Yet the effects of these catalytic events are contingent. The extent to which the potential for these events to work as catalysts is realised depends on a range of other

factors, including how effective anti-minority activists are at capitalising on these events, and the response from opponents, public authorities and the general public.⁷⁹⁵

In order not to exclude these catalytic events from our eventual analysis of the case studies, we included them within the ‘storyboard’ timelines.⁷⁹⁶ We believe however that the question of how to integrate catalytic events within a relational analysis framework warrants further attention going forward.

Analytical blind-spots: violence-enabling mechanisms within other relational arenas

What is also apparent from the case studies is that there are developments in other relational arenas not captured within this framework that are relevant to processes of escalation of violence.

In Dover, for example, part of the explanation for the violence that took place relates to the declining influence of movement moderates within the countermovement, and to the breakdown of communication between countermovement actors and state security forces. In Chemnitz, equivalences drawn between right-wing extremism and anti-racism limited dialogue and engagement between anti-racists and political elites in the months and years prior to the summer of 2018. This arguably led to an underdevelopment of the sort of civil society structures that might have been able to respond more effectively and quickly to the events of 2018.

In Charlottesville, there is a hardening of positions and apparent breakdown of dialogue in what we could call the *within political environment arena*, which creates windows of opportunity for both anti-minority activists and their opponents; there are breakdowns of communication between countermovement actors and both security forces and political elites that make

794 Busher, Harris and Macklin (2019a; 2019b).

795 Busher, Harris and Macklin (2019b).

796 See Chapter 2 and Annex 3.

protest management increasingly difficult; and even communication breakdowns between the security forces and political elites that undermined the effective management of the event.

As such, a case could be made for expanding the relational framework to move beyond the current movement-centric approach – where each arena relates to anti-minority protest movement – towards an analysis that encompasses a fuller range of relational arenas. We return to this point in Chapter 8.

7.2. MECHANISMS INHIBITING ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE

Analysis of the mechanisms inhibiting escalation of violence is arguably more challenging: explaining why something does not happen often entails making assumptions that the phenomenon in question was likely to happen in the first place, which can be problematic. In order to mitigate this issue, we sought to leverage within-case comparisons as well as across-case comparisons as we developed our analysis: the advantage of within-case comparisons being that it helps to hold fairly constant the range of actors involved and the wider political environment.

As with the violence enabling mechanisms, we developed our descriptions of these mechanisms by coding up from the case studies. We sought, however, to use broadly similar terminology to that used to describe the violence enabling mechanisms. As such, perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the violence inhibiting mechanisms resemble inverted versions of violence enabling mechanisms.

As with the violence enabling mechanisms, we undertook a series of iterations moving between the case study materials, emergent descriptions of violence inhibiting mechanisms and the existing theoretical literature. This time we were left with 17 mechanisms: 6 in the *within movement arena*; 4 in the *movement – opposition arena*; 3 in the *movement – political environment arena*; 2 in the *movement – security*

forces arena; and 2 in the *movement – public arena*. These are summarised in Figure 7.2 and described in further detail below.

Within movement arena

B1.1. Campaign/issue deprioritisation or closure. As a campaign or issue ceases to be a focus of attention for movement actors, mobilisation becomes more difficult and the likelihood of street-based violence diminishes. In some case this will comprise a campaign being formally closed down (*as happened in Sunderland*), but more often comprises the gradual draining away of support for and interest in the issue or campaign. This can happen for a number of reasons, such as the emergence of a new cause célèbre, the issue being effectively addressed or institutionalised, or the campaign simply running out of steam. (*Observable in all four cases*)

B1.2. Foregrounding non-revolutionary goals. The foregrounding of goals compatible with existing societal norms and extant legal-political systems makes it more likely that activists will be able to build broader public support for their campaign (B5.1) and to foster alliances with actors beyond the narrow parameters of their particular activist milieu (B3.2), thereby orienting the campaign logics towards sustaining such support and alliances. This in turn is likely to entail holding back from the use of violence and might also diminish the appeal of the campaign to activists within the revolutionary right, who are more likely to be open to the use of violence. Foregrounding non-revolutionary goals also creates opportunities for activists to pursue those goals through constitutional means, thereby making a turn to violence less likely and more difficult to justify (B3.1). (*Most apparent in Sunderland, where activists sought to challenge perceived system failures, rather than overthrow of the system*).

B1.3. Persistent or expanding influence of moderates. When movement moderates are able to exert influence in the *within-movement arena*, it is likely that they will seek to orientate fellow activists towards strategies centred on public engagement (B5.1) and wider

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coalition building (B3.2). Their attempts to do so can backfire, however, if their efforts to promote and enforce movement discipline in fact foster movement fragmentation, with radical flank actors splitting away and spiralling towards greater violence (A1.3). At the micro-situational level, persistent influence of moderates is often partially dependent on law enforcement actors maintaining broad control of the event (B4.2) (*Most apparent in Sunderland but also observable at points in Chemnitz and Charlottesville*).

B1.4. Disassociation from (greater levels/certain forms of) violence and/or identification of violence as counter-productive. In its strongest form, this might comprise a normative commitment to non-violence, but might also comprise disassociation just with particular forms of violence, at particular times or in particular places. Disassociation from violence can be context specific: activists who under some circumstances might wilfully participate in violence can in other contexts position themselves or adopt roles that orient them away from or drastically reduce opportunities for violence. The reasons for such disassociation from violence can be varied, and might be rooted in strategic or moral considerations or in how activists conceive of themselves and their struggles.⁷⁹⁷ Disassociation from violence is most likely where activists are concerned about building or sustaining political alliances (B3.2) or public support (B5.1) and assess that these might be put in jeopardy by the use of violence. It might also arise if activists assess that they are unlikely to be able to out-violence their opponents. Disassociation from violence is likely to give rise to within-movement efforts to limit the use of violence (B1.5), and make activists less likely to prepare for violence (A1.7). (*Most apparent and generalised in Sunderland, where disidentification with violence became inscribed in the choreography of protest events. Deliberate forms of situational disassociation from violence are evident in the ‘funeral’ event staged by AfD in Chemnitz, and*

in some militias’ self-allocated peace-keeper roles in Charlottesville)

B1.5. Rules limiting use of, and opportunities for, violence. Activists, usually organisers, issue rules prior to and during the event that are intended to inhibit all or certain forms of violence. This might be about which weapons activists might carry, or proscribing or setting the conditions for violence. Broader rules of comportment might also be issued and enforced by event stewards – e.g. limiting alcohol or drug consumption, chanting, the display of unconstitutional symbols, or dress-codes – all of which can reduce the likelihood of violence by limiting activist disinhibition and potential flashpoints with counter-protestors (B2.1) and/or fostering activist self-understandings that are not conducive to violence (B1.4). While rules can be ignored, they serve to raise the potential cost of ‘inappropriate’ violence for individual activists and for movement cohesion. The extent to which rules are ignored is likely to depend both on the extent of the rule giver’s authority and control, and on emergent situational dynamics. (*Observable in all four cases, but most apparent in Sunderland, Chemnitz and Charlottesville*).

B1.6. Within movement backlash against ‘inappropriate’ violence. While rules might help to inhibit escalation of violence or establish the outer limits of appropriate violence, such rules can fail. When escalation beyond those outer limits of ‘appropriate’ violence does happen, within-movement backlash against those who undertook the violence can help to re-establish those limits and inhibit the repetition of such violence or further escalation. Where there is significant backlash, this can dramatically undermine movement cohesion. (*Most apparent in Charlottesville, following the killing of Heather Heyer, but also evident in Chemnitz where movement moderates criticised and distanced themselves from street violence. It is conspicuous by its absence in Dover*).

⁷⁹⁷ See discussion of internal brakes on violence grounded in the logic of ego-maintenance in Busher, Holbrook and Macklin (2019). See also Simi & Windisch (2020) and Busher (2018).

Relational arena	Mechanism	Mechanism description
Within movement arena	B1.1	Campaign/issue deprioritisation or closure
	B1.2	Foregrounding non-revolutionary goals
	B1.3	Persistent or expanding influence of moderates
	B1.4	Disassociation from (greater levels/certain forms of) violence and/or identification of violence as counter-productive
	B1.5	Rules limiting the use of or opportunities for violence
	B1.6	Within movement backlash against 'inappropriate' violence
Movement – opposition arena	B2.1	Tactical and/or emotional disentrainment
	B2.2	Limited expectations of violence
	B2.3	Sustained balance of power within situational contexts
	B2.4	Achievement of dominance without need for (further) violence
Movement – political environment arena	B3.1	Opportunities to pursue goals through less confrontational means
	B3.2	Alliance formation between movement actors and political or cultural elites
	B3.3	Elite allies withdraw support in response to rising use or threats of violence by movement actors
Movement – security forces arena	B4.1	Open channels of communication between security forces and activists
	B4.2	Security forces maintain control (without breaching societal norms of appropriate policing)
Movement – public arena	B5.1	Activists emphasise the importance of broad public support
	B5.2	Criticism of 'inappropriate' violence from key constituencies

Fig. 7.2. Violence inhibiting mechanisms

Movement – opposition arena

B2.1. Tactical and/or emotional disentrainment.⁷⁹⁸

At the more macro level, movements or counter movements can become focused on broader goals, such as changing public attitudes towards migration,

rather than becoming consumed with achieving dominance over their opponents. At the more meso level, they can also adopt less confrontational tactics for challenging the goals of their opponents, such as commemorations, vigils or celebrations of diversity, rather than direct physical opposition. Such tactical adaptation might happen because activists on one or both sides believe that more confrontational approaches might be counter-productive (*as happened*

⁷⁹⁸ The opposite process to entrainment: the mutual focus of attention between actors declines e.g. one party's interest in the other decreases as they develop other priorities.

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in Sunderland) or due to concerns about personal safety (as happened in Chemnitz). (Also evident in Dover as counter movement activists pivot towards raising public awareness of underlying issues around migration rather than focusing solely on opposing the anti-minority protests).

B2.2. Limited expectations of violence. Limited expectations of violence mean that both groups of activists are less likely to be prepared for violence beyond existing repertoires of action, and are more likely to uphold tacit norms regarding the outer limits of violence. Such expectations are emergent.⁷⁹⁹ Where tacit norms regarding the outer limits of violence are broadly upheld, such expectations will persist. *(Most evident in Sunderland, but also present in the other three case studies. While there are expectations of violence in Chemnitz, Dover and Charlottesville, in each case, activists on both sides prepare for particular styles of violence. This is why it is so shocking to all involved when such expectations are significantly exceeded with, for example, the killing of Heather Heyer).*

B2.3. Sustained balance of power within situational contexts. Sustained balance of power within situational contexts inhibits the emergence of forward panic dynamics by helping to sustain situational tension and fear. *(Apparent at different points within each of the case studies, but some of the best examples are in Dover in September 2015 and in Charlottesville, where opposing activists were face-to-face with one another but either refrained from striking each another or stalled long enough for law enforcement actors to intervene).*

B2.4. Achievement of dominance without need for (further) violence. Activists seek emotional dominance of their opponents. On some occasions they can achieve this without recourse to further or more significant violence e.g. where opponents quickly adopt submissive positions before a forward

panic dynamic arises, or where it is evident that the opponents have been defeated or sufficiently humiliated as to satisfy the activists. This can curtail violence at the situational arena, but can also sow the seeds of subsequent revenge dynamics (A2.1), thereby potentially fuelling more violence in the future. *(Most observable in Dover, but also evident in Chemnitz and Charlottesville)*

Movement – political environment arena

B3.1. Opportunities for activists to pursue goals through less confrontational means. This might take the form of opportunities to pursue their goals through formal electoral arenas, but might also comprise opportunities to have other forms of meaningful engagement with relevant political and cultural elites e.g. through community forums or legal challenges. Where such opportunities open up, it is likely that some movement actors at least will favour less confrontational strategies, thereby acting as a brake on escalation towards violence. The extent to which such opportunities exist is likely to depend to a significant degree on the extent to which the goals being pursued are broadly commensurate with the society's existing legal and political frameworks (A1.2/B1.2). *(Most apparent in Sunderland, where activists pursued their objectives through a legal challenge and a series of meetings with public authorities, but also in Chemnitz and Charlottesville, where some anti-minority activists perceived the opening up of substantial opportunities through alliances with key elite actors).*

B3.2. Alliance formation between movement actors and political or cultural elites. Forming alliances with actors that comprise part of political or cultural elites can place pressure on movement actors to uphold movement discipline and to avoid, minimise or use only carefully coded violence so as to maintain that relationship. As described above, this can have the opposite effect, however, if the elite actors appear to endorse the issue frames (A3.4) and accommodate or justify the violence of the movement actors (A3.5). *(Alliance formation inhibiting violence*

can be observed in Charlottesville, Sunderland and Chemnitz. In Chemnitz and Charlottesville, however, alliance formation between movement actors and political elites can also be seen having the opposite effect and fuelling escalation as part of a ‘movement emboldened’ escalation pathway).

B3.3. Elite allies withdraw support in response to rising use or threats of violence by movement actors.

Elite actors that have previously provided more or less overt support for anti-minority movement actors either seek to distance themselves from or, in the strongest cases, actually criticise the use of violence by movement actors. In cases characterised by ‘movement emboldened’ escalation pathways, this can undermine activists’ expectations of support, and their ability to mobilise significant numbers of supporters, and can also bolster the position of movement moderates (B1.3). It is also possible, however, that this in turn gives rise to the emergence of a ‘movement marginalised’ escalation dynamic. (*Most evident in Charlottesville after the Unite the Right rally; also evident to a degree in Chemnitz, although there the picture is highly ambivalent*)

Movement – security forces arena

B4.1. Open channels of communication between security forces and activists. At the meso level, activists provide information about their plans to security forces and are in turn willing to cooperate with security forces with regards to restrictions put in place, thereby helping to ensure that security forces have reliable intelligence and are better placed to manage the events (B4.2). Clear understanding is achieved about how the event will be policed, thereby helping to reduce the probability of serious communication breakdowns, feelings of betrayal and activist – security forces confrontations on the day (A4.1). At the micro-situational level, sustained communication throughout the event between activists and security forces can inhibit the emergence of perceptions that the event is getting out of control, thereby inhibiting escalation of force by activists or police (B4.2), and helping organisers and/or movement moderates to maintain

influence among the activists (B1.3). (*Most apparent in Sunderland, but evident to some degree at times in each of the four cases*).

B4.2. Security forces maintain control (without breaching societal norms of appropriate policing).

Informed by past experience and accurate forward intelligence (B4.1), security forces have sufficient resources, in terms of officers, equipment and tactics appropriate to the scale of mobilisation and level of expected violence, to maintain control, managing the event and intervening in a timely fashion to escalations of violence. Of particular importance at the micro-situational level is preventing the emergence of local situations of overwhelming advantage for one group of activists over their opponents (A2.4). At the meso level, timely and proportional use of arrests and prosecutions can help to maintain control through a process of deterrence and mitigation of ‘moral holiday’ dynamics. Wider literature on policing protest indicates, however, that where repression by security forces exceeds societal norms of appropriate policing, this can lead towards escalation of violence or displacement of violence to other arenas as movement moderates desert the movement and more radical actors turn towards more clandestine modes of operating.⁸⁰⁰ (*This mechanism is most apparent in Sunderland, but also prominent in the later stages of in Chemnitz and at points in Dover. In Dover, there is a move towards more clandestine modes of organising as the wave of movement – counter-movement confrontations intensify, and in Chemnitz there is a displacement of violence from the protest arena towards targeted attacks, but the extent to which this can be understood as a product of escalated policing is unclear*).

Movement – public arena

B5.1. Activists emphasise the importance of broad public support. When activists place emphasis on building broad public support, the strategic costs of violence rise, since the broader public rarely supports violence, especially outside of contexts of war or

800 Earl (2011).

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revolution. Where any violence does take place, activists will likely attempt to construct it as defensive violence so as not to undermine their claims to legitimacy, which in itself places constraints on what sorts of violence activists can do and when they can do it. This mechanism can fail, or have limited effect, however, if, when instances of escalation do occur, they do not draw sanction from the public. (*Emphasis on broad public support is most apparent in Sunderland. Chemnitz provides the clearest example of the effectiveness of this mechanism being compromised.*)

B5.2. Criticism of ‘inappropriate’ violence from key constituencies. The adoption of tactics that go beyond the societal norms of acceptable protest provoke criticism from credible actors from within the key constituencies that movement actors claim to be speaking for but are not obviously affiliated with the movement. When respected actors within those constituencies criticise instances of, or calls for, tactical escalation, it can serve to undermine the credibility of those who have undertaken or advocated such actions. (*Apparent in Charlottesville and Sunderland.*)

7.2.1. DISCUSSION OF VIOLENCE INHIBITING MECHANISMS

The contingency of violence inhibiting mechanisms

There is considerable contingency around these violence inhibiting mechanisms, as indeed there is with the violence enabling mechanisms. This is in large part about how the different mechanisms interact with one another. For example, opportunities for activists to pursue their goals through less confrontational means might open up, but if movement moderates are unable to exert influence in the movement, those opportunities might not be pursued.

As demonstrated in the identification of the two separate pathways towards violence, some mechanisms can also have ambivalent effects. In the *movement – political environment arena*, alliance formation with some political or cultural elites (B3.2) could

potentially result in a movement emboldened dynamic but can also limit escalation of violence by providing incentives for activists to rein in any violence that might undermine those relationships. Similarly, criticism of inappropriate violence from political elites or from key public constituencies (B5.2) might help to re-establish the parameters of legitimate violence, but may also encourage the emergence of a movement marginalised dynamic, with growing disregard among activists for public support (A5.1) and political alliances encouraging the pursuit of more radical strategies of action.

As such, as with the violence enabling mechanisms, if these mechanisms are to be used to inform decision making, it is important that the focus be on understanding how multiple mechanisms can combine to inhibit violence, rather than focusing on just one specific mechanism.

The role of counter-demonstrations

The research potentially raises some difficult questions about the role of counter demonstrations in escalation dynamics. In all of the cases, violence largely occurs between opposing groups of activists; and in both Dover and Charlottesville, and to some extent also in Chemnitz, intense movement – countermovement entrainment appears to be a prominent driver of the emergence of violence. Conversely, in both Chemnitz and Sunderland, part of what inhibits violence is the decision of counter-movement activists not to stage demonstrations on one or more occasions, thereby depriving the anti-minority activists of ‘legitimate’ targets for violence (A2.3) and the kind of situational flashpoints that can give rise to escalation.

Does this mean that the basic problem is with counter demonstrations and that counter demonstrations should be discouraged? In short, no. There are a number of reasons we would urge caution about reaching for such conclusions. First, and reiterating the point made above, it is arguably not the counter demonstrations themselves, but the micro-situational breakdown of the three-way movement – counter-

movement – law enforcement choreography that gives rise to opportunities for violence. The simple presence of a counter protest is not enough to lead to violence.

Second, if opponents were unable to counter protest, it is possible that the more determined opponents would seek to challenge anti-minority activists outside of the context of formal protests, where situational breakdowns, and therefore significant violence, would be more likely.

Third, it is important to remember that counter demonstrations can perform a range of functions that can in the longer run inhibit anti-minority mobilisation and, ultimately, violence. These can include challenging the exclusionary and often dehumanising protest narratives of anti-minority actors; undermining or contradicting their claims to represent particular groups or communities; and helping to foster broad structures of solidarity that transcend ethnic, racial or religious categories that make communities better able to respond effectively to anti-minority activism and in the long run can cast anti-minority activism into the relative social and political wilderness.

Fourth, the basic right to protest is a necessary part of any democratic society – as enshrined in the Human Rights Act 1998 (Article 11: Freedom of Assembly and Association) in the case of the UK – and there is broad evidence that effective democracy reduces various forms of political violence.⁸⁰¹

Analytical blind spots: the role of other relational arenas in inhibiting violence

As with the question of what enables violence, there are again developments within relational arenas not included in this analysis that appear to play an important role in inhibiting the escalation of violence.

In Sunderland, for example, emergent consensus among the local Bangladeshi community, anti-racist activists and state actors on the potential for

counter demonstrations to exacerbate community tensions resulted in members of the local Bangladeshi community and anti-racist activists holding back from organising confrontational counter protests. In Dover countermovement activists' concerns about losing public support led a growing proportion of those activists to focus their energies on community mobilisation events. And in all of the case studies, it is clear that ongoing discussions and debates in the *within countermovement arena* served to inhibit countermovement activists from reaching for greater violence.⁸⁰²

The problem of defining what counts as violence inhibition: Different forms of violence; violence inhibition vs violence displacement and different timeframes

As alluded to at the beginning of this section, one of the challenges with analysing what inhibits violence is that instances of a decline or non-acceleration of violence are often not quite as straightforward as might be analytically convenient.

This research focused on protest related violence occurring during periods of sustained anti-minority mobilisation. However, across the case studies, there are other forms of violence that occurred during protest cycles, including targeted attacks on individuals based on group identity, organised group attacks on people perceived to be 'foreigners', campaigns of harassment and intimidation, and attacks on property. In Sunderland, for example, while there was relatively little protest-related violence, outside of the protest arena there were campaigns of harassment and intimidation towards local political elites and anti-racist activists. In Chemnitz, the violence outside the protest arena extended to planning, and seemingly

802 This does not mean to imply that radical anti-racist or anti-fascist groups do not have some potential for violence. However, even within groups and under circumstances in which violence is considered acceptable, it is usually considered acceptable only insofar as it is reacting to the increased threat of far right violence. Violence for its own sake is not valorised. For a discussion of restraint within the radical flank of anti-fascist activism, see Copsey and Merrill (2020).

801 See for example Rummel (1997).

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practising, for revolutionary violence as the protest violence was already well in decline. This raises a number of important questions about how these different forms of violence do or do not relate to one another. Responding to such questions goes beyond the scope of this project but we hope that future research will examine them.

What is also important to acknowledge is that our empirical focus, and therefore our analysis, has focused on escalation and inhibition of violence within relatively short periods of time. It is possible however that some of the mechanisms that inhibit violence in the short to medium term might in the longer term actually create greater opportunities for or encourage further violence. For example, if the security forces are adequately prepared and resourced to deal with violence (and willing to intervene), then it is likely to inhibit its use, especially in the short term. However, in the long-term, increased state repression may also increase the likelihood of weakening the influence of moderates or the foregrounding of revolutionary goals, as increased state repression pushes actors to adopt other strategies to achieve their goals (movement marginalisation pathway). By way of another example drawn directly from the case studies, the murder of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville provoked criticism of violent overreach from the public and, initially, from within the movement. As time passed however it set a new bar on the use of ‘acceptable’ violence as copycat vehicle ramming attacks on both Black Lives Matters and pro-Trump protests demonstrate.⁸⁰³

We return to several of these discussion points in Chapter 8.

803 See <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/27/917523942/woman-charged-with-attempted-murder-after-driving-into-pro-trump-protesters> and <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/dec/12/arrest-new-york-black-lives-matter-protesters-injured> (Accessed on 24/05/21)

8. CONCLUSIONS

This project set out to develop a framework that can be used to better understand processes of escalation and inhibition of violence during ‘hot periods’ of anti-minority activism. Building on some of the most recent developments in the academic literature on the dynamics of political violence,⁸⁰⁴ we organised this provisional framework around a series of relational arenas and sought to trace violence enabling and inhibiting mechanisms within each of these arenas.

In this chapter, we reflect on that framework and discuss how this research can be taken forward and used to support policy and practice.

8.1. THE STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF THE RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Our experience of using a relational framework to analyse violence enabling and inhibiting mechanisms indicates that such an approach offers a number of analytical advantages. First, the relational framework is **well suited to capturing the dynamic nature of escalation and inhibition**. Tracing developments within the different relational arenas over time helps to reveal not only how the escalation and inhibition of violence is produced through the changing relationships, but also how those relationships themselves evolve as actors reach for more or less violent strategies of action.

Second, use of the five relational arenas helps to strike a **balance between effectively rendering the complexity of violent escalation and inhibition, and providing a manageable framework that can cut through some of that complexity**. By focusing attention on the role of multiple actors in violence escalation and inhibition, it generates a more

holistic understanding of the issue than is achieved by approaches that focus overwhelmingly on the characteristics of the group in question – what is sometimes referred to as an ‘internalist’ perspective.⁸⁰⁵ It also moves us beyond the ‘cumulative extremism’ or ‘reciprocal radicalisation’ frameworks that have been widely discussed in recent years,⁸⁰⁶ by situating movement – counter-movement dynamics within a web of relational arenas, thereby incorporating a wider range of actors and relationships within the analysis. In doing so, it provides a useful device for interrogating **how the actions of one actor or group of actors, within one relational arena, can in turn affect relationships within other relational arenas**, thereby influencing the wider dynamic of escalation and inhibition of violence. Yet the five arena model also provides a relatively simple and intuitive structure around which to organise the analysis

There are, however, a number of challenges with the framework that require consideration if it is to be used effectively. As anticipated in Chapter 2, one of these concerns **the fuzziness of the arena boundaries**. This was particularly apparent with regards to the *within movement* and the *movement – political environment arenas*, especially in cases characterised by what we have described as a ‘movement emboldened’ escalation pathway.⁸⁰⁷ In the Chemnitz case, for example, the breadth and dynamic nature of the anti-migrant coalitions, the high degree of permeability between various groups, and the relative electoral successes of radical right political formations made it difficult to assess whether organisations such as AfD should be considered part of the *within movement* or *movement – political arena*. In a similar vein, we found it difficult to identify where targeted violence against

805 See for example Goodwin’s (2006) critique of heavily ‘internalist’ perspectives.

806 See Busher and Macklin (2015); Carter (2019); Eatwell (2006); Ebner (2017); Knott, Lee and Copeland (2018).

807 See Chapter 7.

804 See Chapter 2.

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people from ethnic minorities would fit within this framework. On the one hand, anti-minority activists identify them ostensibly as opponents (so *movement – countermovement arena*). On the other hand, those targeted by anti-minority activists are often not members of anti-racist or anti-fascists formations as such, but simply members of the public who happen to be from a minority ethnic group (so *movement – public arena*).

There is no simple fix for this issue: such challenges are arguably inevitable when one tries to schematise the complex and often messy reality of contentious politics. It is important to be aware of them, however, and for those who use this framework to be attentive to this issue. This might include, for example, ensuring that within research or analysis teams there is shared understanding about how arena boundaries are being conceptualised and/or making this explicit when presenting findings.

Another issue that arose concerns possible **analytical blind spots**. In keeping with the wider literature in this area, the relational framework used in this project adopts a movement-centric approach: the five relational arenas all pivot around the anti-minority movement in question. Each of our case studies supported the idea,

however, that developments in other relational arenas might also have an important bearing on the emergent conflict dynamics. For example, developments in the '*within countermovement arena*' or the '*countermovement – political environment arena*' might make the countermovement more or less likely to pursue more confrontational tactics, thereby having a bearing on the *movement – countermovement arena*. Similarly, as the Charlottesville and Chemnitz cases show particularly well, it is likely that developments within the '*countermovement – security forces arena*' will also affect and be affected by developments within the *movement – security forces arena*.

The obvious solution to this issue is to include additional arenas within the framework. This potentially adds considerable complexity to the analysis, however. As such, we would recommend undertaking a cost-benefit analysis before expanding the framework in this way. This could comprise a rapid initial appraisal to identify which additional arenas appear *prima facie* to be most important for the case in hand. Figure 8.1 provides a simple schematised way of conceptualising a fuller range of relational arenas.

What this points to, however, is the need to tease out what comprise relevant violence enabling and

Actors	Movement	Countermovement	Political environment	Security forces	Public
Movement	Within movement arena	Movement – countermovement arena	Movement – political environment arena	Movement – security forces arena	Movement – public arena
Counter-movement	-	Within counter-movement arena	Counter-movement – political environment arena	Counter-movement – security forces arena	Counter-movement – public arena
Political environment	-	-	Within political environment arena	Political environment – security forces arena	Political environment – public arena
Security forces	-	-	-	Within security forces arena	Security forces – public arena
Public	-	-	-	-	Within public arena

Figure 8.1. Expanded set of relational arenas

inhibiting mechanisms within these other arenas. That is a task that will require further research.

Finally, as with other analytical processes that centre on the identification of factors or mechanisms, it is important to acknowledge that **the final analysis is always shaped by judgement calls about what comprises the most appropriate level of abstraction** at which to describe the mechanisms. We undoubtedly could whittle the list down further – see for example the discussion of A3.1 and A3.2 – but we assessed that to do so would remove valuable nuance. Similarly, we could have increased the number of mechanisms by breaking some of the mechanisms down further, but we assessed that doing so would add further complexity to what is already a complicated framework. Based on ongoing engagement with other academics and research users, we believe that we have adopted a broadly suitable level of abstraction. We recognise, however, that some research or analysis teams might require greater or lesser levels of abstraction.

8.2. INTEGRATING MACRO-, MESO- AND MICRO-LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

As described in Chapter 2, we sought to examine within this project how the relational arenas described above evolved at different levels of proximity – both in space and time⁸⁰⁸ – to potential acts of escalated violence. We conceived of three levels of analysis in this regard: a micro level of analysis focused on the micro-situational dynamics of specific protest events; a meso level of analysis focused on how different actors prepared for specific events; and a macro level of analysis focused on the wider emergent conflict dynamics.

Based on the cases that we have developed, we argue that such a multi-level approach can provide important analytical depth to efforts to understand escalation

and inhibition of violence during hot periods of anti-minority activism.

In each of the cases, the majority of violence resulted from situational breakdowns: from instances in which the usual choreography of protests and counter-protests is somehow disrupted, giving rise to micro-situations that favour violence. This highlights the importance of micro-situational analysis. Within the cases that we have described, however, both the occurrence of the situational breakdowns and what happened after these situational breakdowns was shaped to an important degree by how the different actors involved had prepared for and interpreted the events, and by the shifting dynamics of the wider struggles in which activists and their various opponents and allies were engaged. A multi-level approach can therefore help to explain both how violence can take place even where all the relevant parties are ostensibly committed to minimising confrontation, and how sometimes violence does not reach the levels that one might have anticipated despite the presence of factors that would ostensibly seem to favour violence.

This sort of multi-level analysis appears to be particularly useful when trying to understand escalation and inhibition of violence over the course of a series of events. Here, such analysis can capture how actors' experiences earlier in the series of events inform emergent strategies, patterns of emotional entrainment, expectations and interpretive frames that shape subsequent actions. While we are cautious about slipping into deterministic accounts of escalation and inhibition – violence was never 'inevitable' in any of these cases – there is little doubt that what happens earlier in these series of events has a significant bearing on what happens during and immediately after those moments in which some actors reach for levels of violence that exceed the relative norm.

In order to fully exploit the insights that such multi-level analysis can offer, it will be necessary, however, to develop a strategy for integrating this multi-level analysis with the type of relational analysis described

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See Busher, Holbrook and Macklin (2021).

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above. This is a task that we intend to investigate going forward.

8.3. THE ROLE OF ONLINE SPACES IN PROCESSES OF ESCALATION AND INHIBITION OF VIOLENCE DURING HOT PERIODS OF ANTI-MINORITY ACTIVISM

As observed in Chapter 2, much of the research to date on the interactions between on- and offline spaces has centred on the question of how online activities influence offline activities. Such studies tend in effect to observe online activities and then trace forwards to see whether there are observable offline effects. This project followed a slightly different logic, starting with observed behaviours in offline spaces and then tracing backwards to see how activities within online spaces contributed to the emergence of those behaviours.

In general, our aim throughout the project was to integrate analysis of online activity into the wider analysis, rather than have it as a standalone component – an approach that we argue is appropriate as the distinctions between on- and offline spaces becomes increasingly fuzzy.⁸⁰⁹ There are, however, a number of ways in which online spaces were particularly important in shaping the observed dynamics, and in which analysis of these spaces provided valuable insight about the emergent relational dynamics.

Perhaps the most obvious of these is how **online spaces expand relational arenas through time and space**, enabling the anti-minority activists and their various opponents, allies and audiences to interact 24 hours a day from almost anywhere. This means that many of the mechanisms described happened across a far more diffuse set of contexts than might have been the case 10 or 20 years earlier. For example, the intensification of movement – countermovement hostilities often happened online well in advance of specific events, as

opposing activists threatened and taunted one another. In all of the cases, digital media provided one of the key spaces in which activists cultivated the moral indignation and outrage that was sometimes used to justify or call for violence.

Similarly, online spaces created opportunities that did not exist before for supporters and members of the public to call for or incite violence, sometimes in real time: just as livestream and live chat functions have been used in recent terror attacks, they can also play an important role in the incitement to violence during protests.⁸¹⁰ As Randall Collins observes,⁸¹¹ being verbally abusive to somebody, either on or offline, is not the same as engaging in the act of physical violence. Nonetheless, as our case studies have helped to highlight, such actions can have a bearing on the subsequent emergence of violence. The exchange of insults and taunts online, or the dehumanisation of one's opponents, can fuel competition dynamics that make it increasingly easy to mobilise those who are prepared for, or might even enjoy, violence, or make it increasingly reputationally costly to step back and disengage.

As has been noted repeatedly in the academic literature,⁸¹² within the cases that we have observed, online communication also **enabled rapid mobilisation and counter-mobilisation, producing fast-moving protest events that were hard to control**. In the *movement-public arena*, the use of alternative information systems by anti-minority actors allowed them to cultivate indignation and heighten moral shock, at speed, through the strategic promotion of disinformation in ways that political and cultural elites and broader professional communities dedicated to countering extremism struggle to respond to or challenge in a timely fashion. This is particularly apt for the movement-emboldened pathway. Encrypted communication via messaging apps like Telegram and

810 Macklin (2019).

811 Collins (2008).

812 See for example Ekman (2018); Anduiza, Cristancho and Sabucedo (2013).

809 Önnersfors (2021).

Discord also allowed protest participants to discuss and coordinate violent acts as well as the use of weapons, as seen in the cases of Chemnitz and Charlottesville.

8.4. INTEGRATING ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE ENABLING AND VIOLENCE INHIBITING MECHANISMS

There is a sizeable literature that explores the dynamics and mechanisms of the escalation of political violence. More recently, there have also been a number of efforts to identify and articulate the mechanisms that inhibit processes of escalation. By and large, however, research is concerned with one or the other, rather than both.

In keeping with the holistic approach taken in this research, within this project we sought to integrate analysis of violence enabling and inhibiting mechanisms. Methodologically, this was done by being attentive simultaneously to how violence has escalated and the emergent limitations on that violence. Even where violence was most acute within each case study, we continued to ask what might explain why it had not gone further. Having developed the sets of mechanisms, we then sought to plot them together within the storyboards (Annex 2), thereby enabling us to observe how they interacted with one another.

We believe this approach has much to offer, particularly in terms of understanding and anticipating the contingencies of escalation and inhibition pathways. This has clear practical application in terms of generating a better understanding of emergent risks and the identification and assessment of suitable intervention strategies. Most broadly, integrating both violence enabling and violence inhibiting mechanisms helps to generate a more balanced threat assessment. More specifically, if we know that there are many violence enabling mechanisms in place but that there are one or two violence inhibiting mechanisms that appear to be holding escalation in check, then ensuring that those inhibiting mechanisms remain in place

should be a priority. Similarly, such analysis might also be used to help policy planners or practitioners identify emergent opportunities to foster relevant violence inhibiting mechanisms.

For this potential to be realised, however, it will be necessary to find a way of enabling policy planners and practitioners to integrate such analysis within their practices and procedures. This is something to which we will be turning our attention over the coming months.

8.5. UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENT ESCALATION PATHWAYS

As outlined in Chapter 7, we believe that potentially one of the most important insights to come out of this project concerns what we have described as the two different escalation pathways: the movement marginalised pathway and the movement emboldened pathway. In the movement marginalised pathway, anti-minority activists become increasingly decoupled from wider political movements and from any form of popular support base, and in doing so become more liable to spiral off towards greater levels of violence, unchecked by strategic concerns about maintaining alliances or public support. In the movement emboldened pathway, anti-minority activists become increasingly violence-oriented because they believe that they enjoy the support of key political allies and those parts of the public about which they are concerned, even as they engage in violence.

As discussed in Chapter 7, these are ideal types. In practice, we would expect most cases to exhibit some elements of both over time. We argue, however, that this distinction offers potentially valuable analytical and practical insight. First, and most basically, it serves to highlight and keep present the simple fact that there is more than one pathway towards violence during hot periods of anti-minority activism.

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Second, it offers a useful heuristic for state and civil society actors with an interest in responding to emergent hot periods of anti-minority activism. Understanding whether the (potential) escalation pathway is a movement marginalised or a movement emboldened pathway can help those actors both to understand how that escalation process might evolve, and what their intervention options might be. Developing a guide that explores this in detail comprises one of the possible future directions for this work.

Third, we argue that it also helps to address important policy questions about the wider threat posed by anti-minority activists during these hot periods. Specifically, although further research is required in order to interrogate this idea, we believe that the movement emboldened pathway is more likely than the movement marginalised pathway to lead both towards more sustained violence, and to have greater societal impacts. We believe this to be the case because strategies of repression are less likely to be effective within the movement emboldened pathway, as the movement actors are likely to be able to challenge such repression by working with their allies in the political arena and by mobilising public support, and are more likely to be able to turn repression to their advantage by, for example, casting such repression as evidence that it is in fact they, the anti-minority activists, who comprise a victimised minority. They are also more likely to be able to sustain a belief over an extended period of time that their violence is preparing the ground for a wider societal change, thereby sustaining their morale and motivation.

Furthermore, as their actions and the reactions to them draw in members of the political and cultural elites, the debates and hostilities generated by their actions are more likely to become politicised and to become embedded as societal fault lines.

8.6. IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH FOR POLICY AND PRACTITIONER COMMUNITIES, AND NEXT STEPS

We believe that this framework can enhance analysis of the emergent threat of protest-related violence associated with anti-minority activism.

The framework is not a predictive model. What it can do however is to **help structure analysis and train the attention of analysts and policymakers on aspects of these protest dynamics that we know to be relevant to the escalation and inhibition of violence.**

Used in this way, the framework could be deployed both to inform understanding of **the threats around specific events or series of events**, and to inform broader assessments of **the evolving threat posed by different anti-minority groups** or networks. Similarly, it could be used both to support analysis of **ongoing waves of protest activity**, and to inform **longer term strategic planning.**

We believe the framework has two main strengths here. First, because it focuses attention on multiple relational arenas and how the actions of multiple actors can impact on the conflict dynamic and threat of violence, the framework encourages the **development of a fairly comprehensive picture of the emergent threat, while providing a fairly simple and intuitive structure around which to organise the analysis.** The fact that it encompasses such a broad range of actors also makes the framework particularly well suited to **informing multi-agency planning and analysis.**

Second, by focusing attention on escalation and inhibition pathways – on ‘routes’ rather than ‘root causes’⁸¹³ – the framework helps to illuminate **how pathways towards and away from (greater) violence can open up or close down at any point during a ‘hot period’ of anti-minority activism**, and by

extension how intervention opportunities evolve, open and close over time.

Going forward, we will seek to work with relevant policy and practitioner communities to identify how the insights from this research can be operationalised, with a particular focus on the **development of user-friendly analytical tools**. This is likely to entail trying to better integrate the relational framework with the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of analysis: something that we believe might enable policymakers and practitioners to cut through some of the complexity in the relational framework.

We will also seek opportunities to interrogate the broader applicability of this framework, including whether **it could effectively be used to inform analysis of and responses to other forms of protests beyond anti-minority activism**.

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ANNEX 1: GLOSSARY

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD): right-wing populist political party in Germany. Since the 2017 elections, it is the largest opposition party of the federal parliament with 94 seats (12.6%)

Alt-light: a loosely connected movement of right-wing activists who attempt to distance themselves from the explicitly white supremacist ideology of the alt-right but who embrace misogyny and anti-migration views and are opposed to “political correctness” and the left

Alt-right: a loose collection of extreme-right and white nationalist groups and online subcultures originating in the USA

Britain First (BF): a British far right organization founded by Jim Dowson, a former fundraiser for the BNP in 2011. It has a focus on Christian identity and campaigns against Islam and migration

British National Party (BNP): a far right fascist political party in the UK founded by John Tyndall in 1982 that sought in the 1990s to make the far right electable by favouring community engagement over a street-based ‘march and grow’ strategy

Combat 18 (C18): a violent neo-Nazi organisation that originated in the UK in the 1990s but has since then created offshoots in other European countries as well as in North America

Daily Stormer: an American neo-Nazi website launched by the white supremacist Andrew Anglin in 2013

Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA): a British street-based movement founded by John Meighan in 2017, which claims to stand up against Islamist extremism but has been associated with far right figures and messages

Der Dritte Weg: in English “The Third Path”, Der Dritte Weg is a national socialist party that overtly embraces racial nationalism

Discord: an online chat application for gamers, which is used by many extreme-right groups

English Defence League (EDL): ostensibly anti-Muslim English street protest movement, that sought to distance itself from, but had links, to the established far right, founded by Stephen Yaxley-Lennon

Extreme right-wing: for the purpose of this report, we use this term to refer to groups and individuals that embrace some form of racial nationalism and that appear willing to pursue their objectives through non-constitutional methods.

Far right: for the purpose of this report we use this as an umbrella term to encompass both the extreme right-wing and groups that embrace some form of racial nationalism but predominantly pursue their objectives through constitutional means.

Fraternal Order of the Alt-Knights: the tactical defence arm of the Proud Boys

Freital Group: The German “Freitaler Gruppe” or Freital Group was an anti-Muslim and anti-migrant terrorist organisation in Germany.

Gab: alternative social media platform established as a ‘free speech’ alternative to Facebook and Twitter, which has attracted far-right users.

Identitarian Movement: a pan-European ethno-nationalist movement, which focuses on the preservation of European ethno-cultural identity and is inspired by the French intellectual right movement the Nouvelle Droite (New Right)

Identity Evropa: an American white supremacist organization founded by Nathan Damigo in 2016

Ku Klux Klan: the oldest and most famous American white supremacist and anti-Semitic hate group that has a long history of violence dating back to the 19th century

Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschland (NPD): Germany's most significant neo-Nazi party to emerge since 1945, founded in 1964 as a successor to the German Reich Party

National Front (NF): a British far right, fascist political party founded in 1967

National Socialist Movement: a US-based neo-Nazi organization that was founded in 1974

Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU): a German neo-Nazi terrorist group responsible for several robberies and murders of people with migration backgrounds

North East Infidels (NEI): a regional splinter group of the EDL that adopted more extreme ideological positions and openly collaborated with far right political formations such as NF. A rival group to the Sunderland Defence League

North West Infidels (NWI): similar to the NEI, but in the North West of England

Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (Pegida): Meaning 'Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident', Pegida is a German anti-Muslim street protest movement that was founded by Lutz Bachmann in Dresden in 2014

Pro Chemnitz: a far right group and municipal political party in the city of Chemnitz

Proud Boys: a male-only extreme-right group known for its anti-Muslim and misogynist rhetoric, founded in 2016 by Gavin McInnes

Rebel Media: a Canadian neo-Conservative online news outlet founded by Ezra Levant

Reddit: Reddit is a news aggregation, web content rating and discussion thread website

Red Ice TV: a Sweden-based white nationalist multimedia news outlet founded in 2002

Rise Above Movement (RAM): A US nationalist straight-edge street fighting group founded by Robert Rundo

South East Alliance (SEA): a regional splinter group of the EDL that adopted more extreme ideological positions and openly collaborated with far right political formations such as NF

Sunderland Defence League: a local splinter group of the EDL that adopted more extreme ideological positions and openly collaborated with far right political formations such as NF, led for a while by Billy Charlton and a rival to the NEI

Telegram: A end-to-end encrypted messaging service funded by VK founder Pavel Durov, which has been widely used by both Islamist and far right extremist groups

The Right Stuff: a neo-Nazi and conspiracy theory website created by Mike Peinovich in 2012 and known for its podcast, The Daily Shoah

Traditionalist Workers Party (TWP): an American neo-Nazi organization founded in 2013, which campaigned for ethno-nationalism and spread anti-Semitic conspiracy theories

United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP): A Eurosceptic party that was founded in 1993 by Alan Sked. UKIP primarily campaigned for the UK to leave the European Union, but after the demise of the BNP also pivoted increasingly towards campaigning around a strongly anti-migrant and anti-Muslim agenda. The party's most prominent leader was Nigel Farage who

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led UKIP from 2006 to 2009 and 2010 to 2016. At the time of writing, UKIP is led by Neil Hamilton

Vanguard America: an American neo-Nazi group that advocates white nationalism and opposes multiculturalism

Veterans Against Terrorism: a movement founded by British military veterans that ostensibly opposes Islamist extremism

White Genocide: a conspiracy theory popularised by white supremacist David Lane, who argued that white populations are being replaced through immigration, integration, abortion and violence against white people

4chan: an imageboard that was originally founded to share anime images, but has become an important gathering point for far right users from the early 2010s onwards, especially on the /pol/ board

8chan: An imageboard that was founded after 4chan had banned discussions of 'Gamergate', during which the harassment of female video-game journalist was coordinated on 4chan, to provide a platform on which such controversial issues could still be discussed

ANNEX 2: STORYBOARDS

Storyboard text is colour-coded to aid interpretation:

- Violence-enabling mechanisms are in red
- Violence-inhibiting mechanisms are in blue

DOVER

Date	Event	Within-movement arena	Movement-counter-movement arena	Movement- political environment arena	Movement-security forces arena	Movement-public arena
The context at the start of the 'hot period'	Decline of EDL and rise to relative prominence of NWI and SEA Major public and media interest in issues such as migration, 'grooming gangs' and ISIS	Intensification of threat narrative (A1.1) amid heightened media focus on issues such migration, 'grooming gangs' and rise to prominence of ISIS Foregrounding of revolutionary goals as anti-minority activists openly embrace white racial nationalism (A1.2) Declining influence of moderates (A1.3)	Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment (A2.1) and increasing mutual expectation of violence (A2.2) as the more radical factions of anti-minority and anti-fascist movements gain in prominence Yet expectations of movement – counter-movement violence still limited outside of 'set piece' events such as the St. George's Day parades/standoffs in Brighton (B2.2)	Limited political opportunities (A3.1) for the far right, a persistent feature of electoral competition in Britain, intensifies with collapse of BNP, further degeneration of NF, and attempts by UKIP to maintain distance from Intensification of narratives that corrupt elites are part of 'the enemy' (A3.2) amid child sexual exploitation scandals Frame endorsement by members of political or cultural elites (A3.4) as concerns about 'mass immigration' becomes a 'mainstream' position and attract major political and media attention	Declining cooperation with the state security forces (A4.1) as actors at radical fringe of the anti-minority scene increasingly look to engage in violence and deploy tactics such as 'flash demonstrations' But by and large still open channels of communication between security forces and activists prior to and during demonstrations (B4.1)	Decoupling of the movement from the general public (A5.1), despite public concerns around issues such as migration and child sexual exploitation, as the anti-minority movement pivots away from frames about 'ordinary English people' to explicitly racial frames Some activists even within radical flank groups, such as Pitt, still harboured illusions about building broad public support among 'ordinary English people' (B5.1)
27 Sep 2014	1 st Support the Calais Truckers demonstration	While white nationalist symbols were on display, the protest was ostensibly organised simply as a solidarity event with truck drivers – prioritising non-revolutionary goals (B1.2) Activists positioned themselves as peaceful protestors (B1.4)	Absence of tactical entrainment, as anti-fascists did not mobilise (B2.1)	While hardly 'political or cultural elite', attempts by Pitt to forge an alliance with Nick Griffin at least in principle oriented activists towards the affecting change through means other than violence and intimidation (B3.2)	Open channels of communication between police and activists (B4.1) and easily able maintain control throughout the event (B4.2)	At least ostensibly sought to appeal to broader public (B5.1), although presence of white nationalist symbols indicate that such ideas were rather fanciful

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Oct - Nov 2014	Griffin expelled from the BNP; competing factions of the NF clash at Armistice Day parade; Pitt and colleagues support pro-Golden Dawn demonstration	Movement fragments and one-time 'moderates' become marginalised (A1.3)		The fact that Pitt was jettisoned even by Griffin indicative of the scarcity of political opportunities for activists involved in this series of demonstrations (A3.1)		
Dec 2014	Confrontation between Pitt and colleagues and anti-fascist Clapton FC football supporters	Valorisation of violence (A1.4) as movement leaders engage in physical confrontation with opponents	Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment (A2.1) and rising mutual expectations of violence (A2.2) as opposing groups clash, fuelling humiliation and revenge dynamics		Declining cooperation with the state security forces (A4.1) as activists deploy clandestine tactics and avoid police control (A4.2)	
1 – 24 Jan 2015	Charlie Hebdo attack and reports of New Year's Eve sexual assaults by migrants in Cologne; White Angry and Proud documentary aired; Zack Davies attacks Sarandev Bhambra;	Intensification of threat narrative (A1.1) as events nationally and internationally seem to support a 'crisis' narrative SEA enjoy growing profile, cut loose from movement moderates (A1.3)	Increased expectation of far right violence among anti-fascists (A2.2) as violent intent of some parts of the anti-minority scene is clearly displayed	Claims that policies advocating increased migration led to sexual assaults further reinforce narratives that corrupt elites are part of 'the problem' (A3.2) Enhanced media profile of SEA helps group gain fame/notoriety (A3.3) Intensification of anti-migrant rhetoric in news media and political arena (A3.4)		
25 Jan 2015	2 nd Support the Calais Truckers demonstration	Idea that they are undertaking a peaceful protest continues to be prominent among activists (B1.4)	Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment (A2.1) and expectations of violence (A2.2) as opposing activists antagonise, threaten and goad one another during and after the demonstration Balance of power broadly even throughout the event (B2.3), except for when one anti-minority activist is knocked to the floor, and anti-fascists pile on (A2.4)		Open channels of communication between security forces and activists (B4.1) as event organisers liaise with police throughout, and police largely able to maintain control (B4.2)	Some aspiration of a desire to foster broader support evident in efforts to maintain movement discipline in face of counter-protest (B5.1)

21 & 28 Mar 2015	White Man March and White Pride Worldwide events in Newcastle and Manchester, respectively	<p>Foregrounding of revolutionary goals (A1.2) as activists mobilised around deeply counter-cultural issue frames</p> <p>Radical flank actors gain prominence and dominate attention (A1.3)</p> <p>Valorisation of violence (A1.4) as activists claimed some kind of victory over their opponents</p> <p>Albeit there is some emphasis placed by organisers on movement discipline (B1.5) as a means to building public support (B5.1)</p>	<p>Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment (A2.1) and rising expectations of violence (A2.2) as opposing groups confront one another and as their radical flanks come to prominence, but appears to be a tacit understanding that violence is limited to some pushing and shoving even where opposing activists do come into contact with one another (B2.2) and balance of power broadly even at micro-situational level (B2.3)</p>		<p>Open channels of communication between security forces and activists (B4.1) as event organisers liaise with police, and police largely able to maintain control (B4.2), but this is limited around the fringes of the events where violence is able to break out (A4.2)</p>	<p>Growing prominence of racial framing further consolidates movement – public decoupling (A5.1)</p> <p>Albeit attempts to sustain movement discipline suggest some interest in building support (B5.1), albeit presumably only among fellow ‘white’ people.</p>
Spring – summer 2015	Dover a focus of widespread media attention around migration and refugee issues	<p>Intensification of threat narrative (A1.1), often feeding off mainstream media interest</p>		<p>Positioning of elites as part of the problem (A3.2) as they are held responsible for failing to close borders</p> <p>Frame endorsement by members of political or cultural elites (A3.4) as prominent political actors, such as Nigel Farage, mobilise around similar calls for the closure of borders</p>		
Aug 2015	Clashes between anti-minority activists and anti-fascist Clapton FC activists; White Man March in Liverpool; White, British and Proud demonstration in Manchester	<p>Foregrounding of revolutionary goals (A1.2) as activists mobilised around deeply counter-cultural issue frames</p> <p>Valorisation of violence (A1.4) as prominent movement organisers engage in or encourage the use of some forms of violence</p> <p>Preparation for violence (A1.7) as anti-minority activists turn attention to forthcoming Dover event</p>	<p>Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment (A2.1) as opposing activists clash across a series of events, and humiliation of anti-minority activists in Liverpool.</p> <p>Increased mutual expectation of violence (A2.2) as each event reiterates activists’ willingness to engage in physical confrontation, and talk of revenge after the Liverpool humiliation, albeit violence continued to be limited to brawling (B2.2)</p>		<p>Declining cooperation with the state security forces (A4.1) among activists at radical fringe of the anti-minority scene, although marches still organised in liaison with police (B4.1) and very large police deployments are able largely to maintain control during events in Liverpool and Manchester (B4.2)</p>	

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12 Sept 2015	3 rd demonstration in Dover	Scant influence of moderates (A1.3) at situational level as event quickly became chaotic	<p>Increased emotional entrainment (A2.1) and expectation of violence (A2.2) as groups confronted, threatened and goaded one another</p> <p>Increased availability of 'legitimate' targets (A2.3) as opposing activists briefly outmanoeuvred the police and as opposing activists found themselves within range to throw projectiles</p> <p>Broadly sustained balance of power within situational contexts helped prevent forward panic dynamics (B2.3)</p>		<p>Liaison between anti-minority activists and police (B4.1), but temporary communication breakdown as activists sought to circumvent police lines (A4.1)</p> <p>Temporary loss of control by police (A4.2) as anti-minority activists twice circumvented police lines, but police able to recover control quite quickly (B4.2)</p>	
Autumn 2015	<p>Reactions to the September 2015 Dover demonstration</p> <p>Rival NF groups again confront each other during Armistice Day parades, and NF leader steps down</p> <p>Re-launch of Pegida UK descends quickly into farce</p>	<p>Valorisation of violence (A1.4) as activists claim victory</p> <p>Declining influence of moderates as core organisations factionalise (A1.3) and as less tactically and ideologically radical alternatives flounder</p>	<p>Hostile emotional entrainment (A2.1) as opposing groups issue claims and counter-claims about who 'won'</p> <p>Expectations of violence heightened by the September demonstration (A2.2)</p>	Opportunities for anti-minority activists to exploit limited political opportunities further constrained through their own ineptitude (A3.1)	Absence of repercussions for violent disorder during September 2015 demonstration potentially undermines control of the situation by security forces (A4.2)	Anti-minority scene thoroughly decoupled from public (A5.1) with movement actors paying no attention to pleas from the public not to return to Dover.

Jan 2016 prior to 30th	Anti-minority and anti-fascist activists prepare for the January 2016 demonstration NF national leadership step back from supporting the event	Intensification of threat narrative and rampant dehumanisation of migrants and opponents as activists seek to mobilise supporters (A1.1) Scant influence of moderates collapses further as national NF leadership steps back from the event (A1.3) Promotional materials heavily infused with justifications of and sometimes encouragement to engage in violence (A1.4) Excitement within the movement builds, and fear of missing out dynamic emerges (A1.6), at least within radical flank. Some activists equip themselves for violence (A1.7)	Intense hostile emotional entrainment as activists amplify one another's supposed threat (A2.1) and high expectations of violence (A2.2) encourage preparation for violence, albeit activists do not appear to have prepared for violence beyond street brawling (B2.2)		Activists in both movements engage with police during build up to the event (B4.1), but members of both movements also withhold plans (A4.1)	Little if any attempt apparent to mobilise broader public or local communities (A5.1)
30 Jan 2016 11.00 approx.	Confrontation between anti- minority and anti-fascist activists at Maidstone services	Largely celebratory response to news of the incident within anti-minority activist community, further valorising violence (A1.4)	Increased availability of 'legitimate' targets (A2.3) as opposing activists find themselves face-to-face with one another Further intensification of expectation of violence as news of the confrontation spreads (A2.4)		State security actors unable to respond to emergent violence (A4.2) as the incident happens away from controlled area. Deployment of PSUs to Maidstone Services further diminishes law enforcement capabilities in Dover	
30 Jan 2016 12.00 approx.	Muster outside Dover Priory station	Intoxication further diminishes influence of moderates (A1.3) and prepares some activists for violence by inhibiting tension and fear (A1.7)				

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<p>30 Jan 2016</p> <p>12.45 – 14.00 approx.</p>	<p>Anti-minority activists circumvent police line on two occasions; opposing groups of activists come face-to-face and violence ensues</p>	<p>Moderates lose control of a portion of the march as some of the activists break away from the main demonstration (A1.3)</p> <p>Albeit the organisers appear to maintain control of the majority of the anti-minority activists, who remain within the main demonstration (B1.3)</p>	<p>Hostile emotional entrainment as opposing activists hurl insults at one another (A2.1)</p> <p>Violence becomes seemingly inevitable as police lose control and activists find themselves face-to-face (A2.2).</p> <p>Situational breakdown results in wide availability of ‘legitimate’ targets (A2.3). This includes multiple instances of sudden power imbalance between activists and opponents as individuals or small groups of activists found themselves isolated or on the ground (A2.4), albeit these moments of overwhelming advantage are in most cases short-lived (B2.3), and with one notable exception, once activist achieve emotional dominance or humiliate their opponents their focus of attention moves to another target (B2.4)</p>		<p>Major breakdown of communication between activists and police as (A4.1) as activists seek to circumvent police lines, leading to loss of control (A4.2) as police are temporarily outmanoeuvred by the anti-minority activists, albeit police recovery control fairly quickly on most occasions during the afternoon (B4.2)</p>	<p>A small number of local residents join in the fighting (A5.3)</p>
<p>30 Jan 2016</p> <p>14.00 onwards</p>	<p>Some anti-minority activists break off from main demonstration in search of opponents; speeches under the white cliffs and renewed confrontations in the town centre</p>	<p>Threat narrative rearticulated during speeches (A1.1)</p> <p>Scant influence of moderates persists as groups of anti-minority activists roam around looking for confrontations (A1.3)</p>	<p>Hostile emotional entrainment sustained as opposing activists continue to confront one another (A2.1)</p> <p>Events earlier in the afternoon mean that activists on both sides anticipate further violence (A2.2)</p> <p>Availability of ‘legitimate’ targets for violence (A2.3) and occasional brief and overwhelming situational advantages as groups of anti-minority activists are able to find ‘stragglers’ to attack (A2.4)</p>		<p>Police unable to exert control as groups break off and roam the city centre, and lose control again as anti-minority activists burst through the Discovery Centre (A4.2), but are able to maintain control at other time during the afternoon (B4.2)</p>	

Feb – Mar 2016	Initial celebrations of the violence by anti-minority activists Violent confrontations between anti-minority activists and anti-fascists in Liverpool Initial arrests	Valorisation of violence as anti-minority activists made claims about having beaten the anti-fascists (A1.4)	Hostile emotional entrainment (A2.1) and expectations of violence (A2.2) remain high, fuelled in part by the violence in Dover Availability of ‘legitimate’ targets for violence as opposing activists oppose one another in Liverpool (A2.3)		Adoption of more clandestine modes of organising by NWI (A4.1) as they seek to outmanoeuvre opponents and the police. Law enforcement and criminal justice system begin to exert control via arrests (B4.2)	
2 April 2016 and end of this wave of protests	Far Right Unity March in Dover is poorly attended, massively outnumbered by counter-demonstrators and heavily policed; SEA sink further into obscurity	Apparent attempt to pivot away from more revolutionary goals by emphasising anti-EU position and support for leaving the EU in forthcoming referendum (B1.2)	Anti-fascists increasingly turn towards strategies focused on (re)building broader public support, resulting in a degree of tactical disenfranchisement (B2.1)	With referendum on UK’s membership looming, and political discourse focused heavily on reducing migration, SEA have little to no issue dominance (B3.1), drifting ever further into obscurity and eventually pivot again to niche interest of claiming ‘white lives matter’.	Liaison between activists and police (B4.1) and massive police presence ensures control is largely maintained throughout the 2 April demonstration (B4.2). Control also a product of growing number of prosecutions for involvement in violence in January 2016.	Apparent effort to appeal to broader public by talking about forthcoming referendum on EU membership (B5.1), although their efforts are unsuccessful

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SUNDERLAND

Date	Event	Within-movement arena	Movement-counter movement arena	Movement- political environment arena	Movement- security forces arena	Movement-public arena
Context prior to Justice4Chelsey campaign	Anti-minority campaigns using racialised narratives of sexual violence locally and across the UK Dover riots and subsequent arrests	Valorisation of violence among local activists (A1.4) Intensification of threat narrative focused on sexual crime and migration at the local and national level (A1.1)	Period of hostile and emotional entrainment between movement-counter movement (A2.2)	Widespread distrust of state elites (A3.2)	Security forces willing and able to respond to escalation of violence (B4.2)	Frame alignment with concerns of broad segment of the general public (A5.2)
4 Sept 2016	Facebook post by Chelsey Wright after alleged sexual assault provides catalytic event	Accusation made of sexual crime linked to migration & asylum (A1)				Generates public support for campaigns around this topic (A5.2)
10 Sept 2016	Demonstration held at site of alleged incident	Intensification of threat narrative as allegations are made of 'migrant crime' in Sunderland (A1.1) Some evidence of preparation (A1.7) and willingness to use violence (A1.4)	Asymmetrical targeting as 2 Asian heritage men are attacked at the demonstration (A2.3)	Distrust of elites & sense that corrupt elites are part of the problem. As elites are blamed for lack of action and double standards on migration & crime (A3.2)	State actors initially unprepared to respond to emergent violence at demonstration (A4.1) but can exert control as demonstration proceeds (B4.2)	
8 Jan 2017	Picked up by digital platform Police Hour and disseminated across social media	Threat narrative intensified by posting on social media and alternative media sites (A1.1)		Distrust of elites & sense that corrupt elites are part of the problem (A3.2)		Endorsement of polarising issue frame by members of public as campaign gains local community support (A5.2)
7 April 2017	Decision to take no further action by CPS	Intensification of threat narrative continues as rumours spread on social media (A1.1)		Decision deepens distrust of state elites (A3.2)		Community dissatisfaction with CPS decision (A5.2)

10 April 2017	Justice4Chelsea campaign launched and first demonstration	<p>Intensification of threat narrative amplified on social media (A1.1)</p> <p>Rules issued by organisers on conduct of marchers on display of colours, chanting, drinking, etc (B1.5)</p> <p>Formation of goals compatible with social norms with a demand for justice within societal norms(B1.2)</p>	<p>Limited opportunities for violence as there are no counter protests (B2.3)</p> <p>Tactical and emotional disentrainment as counter protestors stay away (B2.1). The police not judged a legitimate target within issue frame employed by campaign</p>	<p>State elites and security forces blamed for incidents in Sunderland (A3.2)</p>	<p>Security forces adequately prepared to police protests with increase in police overtime (B4.2)</p> <p>Open channels of communication between campaign organisers and security forces (B4.1)</p>	<p>Frame endorsement as some ordinary residents support the campaign (A5.2)</p> <p>Emphasis on importance of broad public support (B5.1)</p>
29 April 2017	<p>Demonstration attended by Tommy Robinson</p> <p>Campaign attracts increasing traction</p>	<p>Intensification of threat narrative with constant posting on social media of reports of crime involving migrants (A1.1)</p> <p>Increasing involvement of moderates and more professional actors who issued guidance and rules on optics of protest (B1.3, B1.5)</p> <p>Actors pursue goals compatible with social norms (B1.2)</p>	<p>Limited opportunities for violence as demonstrations continue without counter protests (B2.2)</p> <p>Tactical and emotional disentrainment as counter protestors stay away (B2.1)</p>	<p>Framing remains on hostility towards state elites for allowing migration (A3.2) and double standards.</p>	<p>Open channels of communication between organisers and security forces with protest liaison (B4.1)</p> <p>Security forces able to respond to any escalation of violence (B4.2)</p>	<p>Increased frame endorsement by public, campaign posters put up in shop windows (A5.2)</p> <p>Emphasis on importance of broad public support in public facing campaign (B5.1)</p> <p>Some sections of public start to question the campaign (B5.2)</p>
13 May 2017	<p>Largest demo held in Sunderland attended by Tommy Robinson and Anne Marie Waters</p> <p>Interview filmed with Chelsey Wright and broadcast on Rebel Media</p>	<p>Pursuit of goals compatible with social norms (B1.2)</p> <p>Increasing involvement of moderates and professionals as Rebel Media become more involved (B1.3)</p> <p>Rules issued by organisers on behaviour and optics of protest (B1.5)</p>	<p>Tactical and emotional disentrainment as counter protestors stay away (B2.1)</p> <p>A sole counter protestor has to be escorted away.</p>	<p>Anger directed at state elites in speeches, particularly at Police and Crime Commissioner (A3.2)</p>	<p>Open channels of communication and liaison between organisers and security forces (B4.1)</p> <p>Security forces able to respond to escalation of violence with all police leave cancelled (B4.2)</p>	<p>Increased frame endorsement by public, campaign posters put up in shop windows (A5.2)</p> <p>Emphasis on importance of broad public support in public facing campaign (B5.1)</p>

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14 June 2017 21 June 2017	Rebel Media launch legal appeal Rebel Media unveil Justice4Chelsea billboard	Pursuit of goals compatible with social norms as legal review is launched and funding campaign (B1.2) Increasing involvement of moderates and professionals (B1.3) Rules issued by organisers (B1.5)	Tactical disentrainment as counter protestors stay away from demonstrations (B2.1) albeit some hostile entrainment in online space (A2.1)	Opportunities to pursue goals through legal review (B3.1)	Liaison with organisers continues & actors involved in legal process (B4.1)	Emphasis on importance of broad public support with production of glossy videos and public appeals for donations (B5.1)
19 June 2017	Decision taken to halt demonstrations while legal review is ongoing	Pursuit of goals compatible with social norms as demos are halted while awaiting the outcome of the appeal (B1.2) Increasing involvement of moderates and professionals (B1.3) Rules issued by organisers (B1.5)		Opportunities to pursue goals through constitutional means (B3.1)		Emphasis on importance of broad public support as legal review proceeds (B5.1)
29 July 2017	Violent attack on Fletchers Newsagent by Celtic fans and public disorder between rival football fans breaks out across the city	Within movement backlash against violence as incident detracts from campaign (B1.6) Some preparation for violence (A1.7)	Increased hostile entrainment with 'banter' between Robinson and Celtic fans (A2.1) Expectation of violence between antagonists (A2.2) Accessibility of available targets in the shape of rival football fans (A2.3)		Security forces not present at initial incident. They arrive quickly to defuse situation (B4.2), but frequently lose control as violence breaks out throughout day around the stadium between a minority of fans (A4.2)	De-coupling of movement from general public (A5.1) Criticism of activist's tactical overreach in events at Fletchers (B5.1) albeit some incitement to violence within sections of the public (A5.1)
24 Sept 2017	Decision to uphold decision on Wright's case by CPS	De-coupling of moderates as Robinson remains silent on the campaign (A1.3)		Increasing distrust of state elites as legal review did not bring about desired outcome (A3.2)	Declining cooperation with security forces as organisers disappointed by outcome of legal review (A4.1)	
14 Oct 2017	Britain First demonstration, Jayda Fransen is arrested	Declining influence of moderates as Rebel media withdraw and BF step in (A1.3)			Declining cooperation with security forces as Jayda Fransen stage manages her arrest (A4.1)	Public criticism of BF's involvement (B5.1) De-coupling of the movement from general public (A5.1)

2 Nov 2017	Justice4Chelsea disbanded	Lessening of threat narrative as campaign is wound down (B1.1)		State actors challenge claims of inaction on foreign criminals (B3.1)		
22 Jan 2018	Trial of Billy Charlton for incitement to racial and religious hatred				Disincentive to violence as security forces pursue prosecution of leading organiser (B4.2)	De-coupling from the public as some of the organisers reputations are sullied (A5.1)
23 May- 30 May 2018	Two sexual assaults occurred on Roker Avenue and one more in Mowbray Park	Intensification of threat narrative as series of sexual assaults take place over bank holiday weekend and rumours spread on social media (A1.1)			Communication between security forces and activists (B4.1)	Frame endorsement by members of public concerned with safety of women in Sunderland (A5.2)
11 June 2018	Community meeting held at Salvation Army Hall to addresses resident's concerns organised by council and police	Intensification of threat narratives increase (A1.1)		Opportunities to pursue goals through constitutional channels in community meeting and meetings with council workers and police (B3.1)	Engagement between police and campaign organisers (B4.1)	Public concern over sexual crime and anti-social behaviour linked to HMO continues (A5.2)
30 May 2018	Justice for Women launched, and first demo is held at Mowbray Park	Intensification of threat narrative continues (A1.1) Pursuit of goals that are framed in terms of public safety (B1.2) Campaign launched with clearly defined self-image that precludes violence (B1.4) Rules on conduct of protestors (B1.5)	Tactical and emotional disentrainment as counter protestors stay away (B2.1)	Opportunities to pursue goals through engagement with the council (B3.1)	Open channels of communication with security forces (B4.1) Security forces able to respond to escalation of violence (B4.2)	Emphasis on importance of broad public support with great care taken on how the marches were branded (B5.1)

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11 June 2018	Letter to Home Office from council asking for a halt on the procurement of asylum accommodation			<p>Frame endorsement by state elites as letter is written to HO (A3.4)</p> <p>Letter indicates that council is taking action on this issue, and that action can be achieved without recourse to violence (B3.1)</p>		
15 Sept 2018	DFLA demo	Protestors abide by rules as stewards keep them moving away from counter protestors (B1.5)	<p>Increased hostile and emotional entrainment as protest & counter protest with involvement of national actors (A2.1)</p> <p>Increased availability of available targets as demonstration has counter protest (A2.3)</p> <p>Sudden power imbalance as protestors surge towards counter protest (A2.4)</p>	<p>Rising distrust of elites and intensification that corrupt elites are part of the problem (A3.2)</p> <p>Endorsement of polarising issue frame as UKIP support the demonstration (A3.4)</p>	<p>Open communication with security forces and activists (B4.1)</p> <p>Police tactics defuse the potential for violence (B4.2)</p>	<p>Emphasis on importance of broad public support in public facing campaign (B5.1)</p>
23 Sep 2018	UKIP conference where Sharon Binks one of the leading organisers gives a speech.			<p>Opportunity to pursue goals compatible within social norms and in line with standard political practice (B3.2)</p>		
21 Dec 2018	BBC Newsnight expose on Justice for Women and Children Demonstrations cease but Facebook page continues					<p>Criticism of tactical overreach (B5.2)</p>

CHEMNITZ

Date	Event	Within movement arena	Movement-opposition arena	Movement- political environment arena	Movement- security forces arena	Movement-public arena
The wider context in the build-up to the hot period	<p>Murder of young German girl in Wiesbaden by her Afghan ex-boyfriend</p> <p>Third Way march in Chemnitz</p> <p>Fighting breaks out in Cottbus between local residents and asylum seekers</p> <p>Trial of NSU terrorist Beate Zschäpe concludes.</p> <p>Route of Rudolf Hess commemoration march halted by counter protestors</p>	<p>Intensification of threat narrative as concerns grow over crime in the city centre compounded by series of national incidents (A1.1)</p> <p>Foregrounding of revolutionary goals among XRW political structures within Chemnitz (A1.2)</p> <p>XRW structures have links with football hooligans and MMA clubs which valorise and are prepared to use violence (A1.4)</p>	History of hostile and emotional entrainment between movement and anti-fascist activists both national and regional (attack on Connewitz in Leipzig) (A2.1)	<p>Frame endorsement by members of political elites as AfD uses frames associated with anti-Muslim and XRW groups combined with hostility directed towards elites (A3.2, A3.4)</p> <p>Downplaying of XRW presence at State level and equivalences made between left and right-wing extremism seemingly downplay violence (A3.5)</p>		Frame endorsement by members of public as high level of concern with migration crisis mix with anti-migrant sentiment (A5.2)
26 Aug 2018	Stabbing of Daniel Hillig at Chemnitz city festival early on Sunday morning provides catalytic event	Intensification of threat narrative as actors instrumentalise death of Daniel Hillig (A1.1)		Endorsement of polarising frame by members of political/cultural elites as incident is picked up on digital platforms (A3.4)		Frame endorsement by members of public as public indignation grows and is encouraged (A5.2)
26 Aug 2018 10.00	Facebook post by Kaotic Chemnitz calling on people to gather at Karl Marx statue	<p>Intensification of threat narrative across digital media (A1.1)</p> <p>Call to action and inflammatory rhetoric valorise violence (A1.4)</p> <p>Preparation for violence as football hooligans/MMA enthusiasts respond to call to action (A1.7)</p>		Frame endorsement by parts of the political and cultural elite continues (A3.4)		Legitimation of violence by some members of public (A5.3)

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26 Aug 2018 Throughout day	Spreading of false claims online and in mainstream media	Intensification of threat narrative amid calls for action in absence of state action on 'migrant crime' and harassment of German women (A1.1)	Hostile emotional entrainment with asymmetrical opponents ('foreigners') and those held responsible for migration (A2.1)	Frame endorsement by members of political/cultural elites as AfD support (A3.4) Social media posts legitimise violence as self-defence (A3.5)		Frame endorsement by members of public (A5.2) Some legitimisation of violence by public (A5.3)
26 Aug 2018 12.00	AfD vigil held at site of incident	Persistent influence of moderates as AfD organise candle-lit vigil with about 100 attendees (B1.3) Assertions that violence is not an effective strategy (B1.4) Rules on behaviour at vigil including use of violence (B1.5)		Frame endorsement by some members of political/cultural elites continues with public statements online and offline (A3.4) Rising distrust of elites as elites blamed for migration crisis (A3.2)		
26 Aug 2018 18.00 – 22.00	Spontaneous demonstration and reporting of Hetzjagd (attacks on people who look foreign)	Threat narrative sustained activists seek out 'foreign looking' people to attack (A1.1) Foregrounding of revolutionary goals by XRW groups (A1.2) Recruitment of 'sports' Nazis and preparation of violence (A1.7)	Increased availability of legitimate targets with heavily outnumbered counter protesters. Police also become targets, as do media (A2.3) Sudden power imbalance as anti-minority activists attack counter-demonstrators as they disperse (A2.4)	Frame endorsement by members of political/cultural elites attributing crime to migration (A3.4) Legitimation of violence by political elites on social media (A3.5)	No communication with security forces as demonstrators refuse to engage (A4.1) Security forces unable to respond to emergent violence as unprepared for scale of demonstration (A4.2)	Frame endorsement by members of public as residents join march with overtly XRW elements (A5.2) Incitement to violence by members of public made on social media including encouragement as events are livestreamed (A5.3)

<p>27 Aug 2018</p>	<p>Safety for Chemnitz protest registered by Pro Chemnitz</p>	<p>Intensification of threat narrative continues on digital platforms as XRW promote narratives conveyed in speeches at demonstrations (A1.1)</p> <p>Foregrounding of revolutionary goals and understanding of demonstrations ‘as a turning point’ for the German People (A1.2)</p> <p>Valorisation and preparation of violence (A1.4, A1.7)</p> <p>Fear of missing out as activists travel to Chemnitz from further afield (A1.6)</p> <p>Some attempts to exert internal discipline by event organisers e.g. by stewards (B1.5)</p>	<p>Increased hostile entrainment as abuse is exchanged with counter demonstrators (A2.1)</p> <p>Increased availability of legitimate targets with large but outnumbered counter protest (A2.3)</p> <p>Sudden power imbalance in ratio of demonstrators to counters and when counter demonstrators disperse (A2.4)</p> <p>While there are violent incidents, violence is also restrained given the numerical superiority of demonstrators to counter protestors as emotional dominance is achieved (B2.4)</p>	<p>Continuing distrust of political elites (A3.2)</p>	<p>Declining cooperation with security forces (A4.1)</p> <p>Security forces unable and unprepared to respond to emergent violence due to scale of mobilisation (A4.2)</p>	<p>Frame endorsement by members of public and legitimisation by members of public as they are willing to stand next to overtly neo-Nazi groups (A5.2, A5.3)</p>
	<p>Condemnation of violence by Angela Merkel contradicted by Interior Minister</p>			<p>Frame endorsement by members of political/cultural elites who highlight concerns over migration including interior minister (A3.4)</p> <p>Legitimation of violence by political elites continues with comments on violence as self-defence (A3.5)</p>		

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30 Aug 2018	Talk to Saxony event by State and City politicians		Tactical/emotional disentrainment as opposition movement opts not to hold a counter protest (B2.1) Emotional dominance achieved in absence of a counter protest (B2.4)	Opportunities to pursue goals compatible with social norms as residents voice concerns at event (B3.1)		
1 Sep 2018	AfD/Pegida demonstration	Intensification of threat narrative continues with display of photos of alleged victims of migrant crime at protest(A1.1) Persistent influence of moderates as AfD and Pegida organise mourning march (B1.3) Overt rules limiting behaviour of marchers including dress and display of unconstitutional symbols (B1.5) Decoupling of moderates from movement as splits emerge between moderates and radicals over cooperation with police decision to disband march (A1.3) Fear of missing out as AfD march attracts prominent anti-minority actors (A1.6)	Increased hostile entrainment with counter protestors as they block the route of the march (A2.1) 'Black bloc' become involved in counter protests and adopt more confrontational tactics, raising expectations of violence (A2.1, A2.2) Sustained balance of power within situational context as numbers of protesters to counter protestors becomes more balanced (B2.3) But sudden power imbalances as protestors disperse, resulting in violence (A2.4)	Legitimisation of violence as self-defence by political elites as equivalences are made between the extreme left and extreme right (A3.5)	Open channels of communication between security forces and AfD and cooperation as AfD agree to disband march when asked to do so (B4.1), but also decreasing cooperation amidst discontent among radicals about the actions of the moderates (A4.1) Security forces generally able to respond to emergent violence (B4.2), but some loss of control as activists disperse (A4.2)	Frame endorsement by members of public (A5.2) As moderates become involved, increased concern with how public perceive the march (B5.1)
3 Sep 2018	#Wirsindmehr concert		Limited opportunities for confrontation as there are no right-wing protests (B2.2)			

6 Sep 2018	Questioning of claims of Hetzjagd by Henrik Georg-Maßen and state elites			Legitimisation of violence by political elites as scepticism expressed to claims of Hetzjagd (A3.5). Debate around authenticity further promote distrust of elites and media (A3.2)		Denial of violence resonates with some members of the public and reinforces polarising issue frame (A5.2)
8 Sep 2018 and 13 Sep 2018	Pro Chemnitz demonstrations	Threat narrative sustained as Pro Chemnitz continue demonstrations under their organisation (A1.1) De-coupling of moderates as splits emerge between moderates and radicals within AfD (A1.3)	Sustained balance of power within situational context as balance of protests to counter protests becomes more equal (B2.3)		Security forces sufficiently resourced to largely prevent protest violence (B4.2)	De-coupling of public from movement as demonstrations are associated with Pro Chemnitz and more radical groups (A5.1)
13 Sep 2018	Revolution Chemnitz attack	Revolutionary goals inform attacks on 'foreigners' on Castle Green (A1.2), and attacks intended as a pre-cursor for revolutionary violence (A1.5)				De-coupling of public from movement continues (A5.1)
16 Sep 2018	AfD rejects call to join forces with Pegida and prohibit AfD from attending demonstrations not organised by the AfD	Declining influence of moderates as AfD officially withdraws support... (A1.3)		...but tacit endorsement of the polarising issue frame persists as AfD withdrawal is clearly a tactical decision (A3.4)		
23 Sep 2018	Pro Chemnitz demonstration & attack on Rothaus offices		Sustained balance of power within situational context with less opportunity to attack counter protests (B2.3) Increased availability of targets (A2.3) as counter demonstrators as they disperse (A2.4).		Security forces sufficiently resourced to largely prevent protest violence (B4.2)	

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	Series of attacks on ethnic/Jewish restaurants and street violence	Legitimation of violence (A1.4) and identification of violence as an effective strategy of intimidation (A1.5)	Expansion of targeting beyond left-wing opponents to ethnic or racial 'opponents' increases availability of 'legitimate' targets (A2.3)			Indicative of further de-coupling from public (A5.1)
16 Nov 2018	Visit by Angela Merkel & protest by Pro Chemnitz		Sustained balance of power within situational context as counter protestors outnumber demonstrators and do not pursue proactive violence (B2.3)	Merkel's visit helps to institutionalise issues (B3.1)	Security forces sufficiently resourced to largely prevent protest violence (B4.2)	

CHARLOTTESVILLE

Date	Event	Within-movement arena	Movement -countermovement arena	Movement - political environment arena	Movement - security forces arena	Movement - public arena
22 March 2016	Local councillor Wes Bellamy holds a press conference seeking support for the removal of Confederate statues in Charlottesville parks.	Many of the groups demonstrating in support of the statues both on the day and in the proceeding months do not foreground violent or revolutionary goals (B1.2)	Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment takes place because of the issues symbolised by the “statues” coming to the fore in local politics (A2.1).	Bellamy’s strategy to gain support for his campaign creates tension with the Mayor and helps to polarise attitudes towards the statues both within the wider public and for local activists opposing the move (A3.4)	Despite loud counter-demonstration from those seeking to keep the statues in situ, law enforcement maintained control (B4.2).	Both sides emphasised the importance of using the issue of the statues to build a broader public constituency in support of their goals (B5.1).
28 May 2016	Creation of Blue Ribbon Commission on Race, Memorials and Public Spaces.			Council creates a public commission to review the role of such public memorials which can arguably be viewed an attempt to institutionalise the issue (B3.1)		
14 October 2016	Facebook post from local restaurant owner in response to the speech accusing BLM of being racist leads to picket outside his premises.	Intensification of threat narrative as this incident becomes “significant factor” in radicalisation of local activist Jason Kessler (A1.1).	Wes Bellamy was also at the counter-protest and Kessler increasingly focusses his ire upon him (A2.1).	Media surrounding the event opens up political opportunities for Kessler (A3.3).		
8 November 2016	Election of Donald Trump as US President	Emboldened, alt-right actors increase their threat narrative as a means of mobilising further support (A1.1)		The alt-right perceives that Trump’s election opens up represents endorsement of and opportunity for the advancement of their positions (A3.4)		

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14 November 2016	Kessler unearths politically explosive tweets from Bellamy and uses them to undermine him and attack the Council	Intensification of the threat narrative as Kessler tries to paint Bellamy as a “black supremacist” trying to erase “white history” (A1.1). Kessler increasingly comes to the fore of the movement at the expense of other more potentially moderate groups (A1.3).	Local anti-racism campaigners are increasingly subject to threats during this period from actors not obviously part of the local movement (A2.1).	Kessler becomes increasingly hostile to the Council itself in an exchange of words at a subsequent public session on 5 December, and the Mayor and other councillors increasingly subject to threats. (A3.2)		Going forward, decoupling between Kessler’s campaign and that of other potential allies who had campaigned for the statues to remain in place and for the preservation of Confederate monuments more generally (A5.1).
31 January 2017	Mayor of Charlottesville declares the city a “Capitol of Resistance” after Trump’s inauguration		Local anti-racism activists welcome the statement but recognise that it makes them a magnet for hostility from the right, both mainstream and otherwise (A2.1, A2.3).	Signer’s declaration also viewed as politically polarising (A3.4).		
13 May 2017	First alt-right demonstration	Richard Spencer refers to those present as being the “tip of the spear” emphasising that they are a revolutionary vanguard (A1.2) There are no “moderate” voices involved in this campaign (A1.3) which lauds the Confederate generals as “gods”. Torch-lit parade highlights an intensification of threat narrative (‘replacement’ theme), the foregrounding of revolutionary goals and a valorisation of violence that consciously echoes the parades of the interwar era (A1.1, A1.2 and A1.4)	This event hardens both the hostile entrainment and the resolve of both sides (A2.1)	This increasingly hostile entrainment also extends to local council leaders too (A3.2), and the event increases the “pre-existing scepticism” felt by anti-racist groups for both the police and the council.	Law enforcement maintain relatively tight control over the event, despite small scuffles (B4.2).	Local attitudes are also polarised as to the issues at stake with regards to whether or not to keep the statues in situ (A5.2)
8 July 2017	KKK demonstration	Intensification of threat narrative (A1.1) with ‘white genocide’ narrative central to the Klan rally.			Militarised police tactics to clear a path for the KKK rally “fire up” the crowd. Tear gassing of counter-demonstrators, an escalation in police tactics, after “unlawful assembly” is declared (A4.1)	

<p>Summer 2017</p>	<p>Online planning for “Charlottesville 2.0” rally</p>	<p>Publicly, organisers also foreground non-violent/ non-revolutionary goals and emphasise the aim of preserving Southern heritage (B1.2, B1.4).</p> <p>Organisers also express concern about “optics” of violence (B1.4) and issue a set of “rules” intended to limit violence and prospect of negative optics (B1.5)</p> <p>Yet there is online intensification of threat narrative in the three months prior to the rally actually taking place which includes de-humanisation of opponents, zero-sum competition frames and a sense of urgency/ existential threat that time is running out to save the “white race” (A1.1, A1.2).</p> <p>There are few “moderates” in this online space (A1.3).</p> <p>The event itself is presented as a “pivotal” and “historic” moment. Activists and groups feel compelled to attend to attend to highlight relevancy and importance to wider movement (A1.6).</p> <p>Despite the rules noted above, there are extensive discussions online concerning preparation for violence (A1.7).</p>	<p>Many alt-right militants appear to be increasingly entrained upon confronting and fighting “antifa” and other racial enemies (A2.1).</p> <p>Anti-racist activists prepare to counter the event though many of these groups such as Congregate Charlottesville are focussed upon non-violent acts of civil disobedience rather than direct confrontation with the far right (B2.1)</p>	<p>Intensification of narratives that the political elites are part of the “problem” (A3.2).</p>	<p>The police have clear lines of communication with the alt-right organisers. Police also contact the militia groups and seek to persuade them not to attend the rally (B4.1).</p>	<p>Organisers attempt to build wider public support (B5.1) by framing the rally as being about the preservation of Southern heritage.</p> <p>But scant engagement with the general public locally indicative of decoupling (A5.1).</p>
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<p>11 August 2017</p>	<p>Torch-light protest at UVA Rotunda</p>	<p>Intensification of the threat narrative with chants of “Jews will not Replace Us” – clear invocation of existential threat (A1.1)</p> <p>Activists had come prepared for violence (A1.7). In the aftermath the violence was celebrated and used to advertise the rally the following day (A1.4, A1.6).</p>	<p>This event causes an increasingly hostile entrainment between activists and their opponents though this is often asymmetrical (A2.1). The availability of “targets” for the alt-right e.g. students to confront and attack is also an important factor (A2.3).</p>		<p>Breakdown of communication between police and alt-right activists who only inform police of their rally at the last moment because they had wanted to make a statement (A4.1).</p> <p>Law enforcement do not keep the two sides separate affording alt-right activists the opportunity to attack UVA students and staff who had gathered at the Rotunda (A4.2). The violence emboldens the alt-right ahead of the main rally the following day.</p>	
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<p>12 August 2017</p>	<p>“Unite the Right”</p>	<p>The alt-right strategy to build links with the wider “Alt-Lite” and Republican movement fails even before UtR. This results in a range of extreme right factions attending whose goals are at odds with the “optics” which the organisers had tried to construct for the rally. The configuration of such groups help to hardwire violence and confrontation into the event. The organisers themselves as part of their strategy to “unite the right” had little control over the myriad factions that attended the rally (A1.3).</p> <p>Many of the groups who are expecting and have prepared for violence (A1.7) regard themselves as a revolutionary vanguard (A1.2, A1.4). Throughout the day these activists are egged on by the online far right eco-system (A1.4).</p> <p>The militias, though heavily armed, have a clear perception of themselves as being at the rally to protect constitutional rights and so do not engage in violence (B1.4).</p>	<p>Tactical disenfranchisement as many counter-demonstrators, encouraged by appeals for non-violence by key public voices, do not prepare for violence in the same way that the alt-right do and groups like the Clergy Collective pursue non-violent opposition to the alt-right, highlighting tactical disenfranchisement (B2.1).</p> <p>Many counter-demonstrators (perhaps especially those from out of town/state) do not necessarily perceive that the rally will be any different from others they have attended i.e. law enforcement will keep the two sides separate which precludes detailed preparations for violence (B2.2).</p> <p>While militias have a clear sense of their role and do not seek to physically engage with counter-protestors, for some counter-protestors the presence of heavily armed militias increases the sense of hostility and threat of violence (A2.1, A2.2).</p> <p>Police failures increase the availability of 'targets' for those attending the demonstration to attack (A2.3). This increases instances of sudden power imbalances between opposing activists at the micro-level (A2.4).</p>		<p>The alt-right appear to co-operate with law enforcement, agreeing a common plan for the rally, points of entry, egress etc. (B4.1).</p> <p>At the micro-situational level, this might account for CPD believing that it had control of the situation, thereby inhibiting escalation (B4.2).</p> <p>On the day itself, however, these plans break down. Partly because of alt-right subterfuge (A4.1) but also because law enforcement lose control of situation (A4.2). The police (CPD and VSP) fail to effectively co-ordinate a combined response to between themselves which has ramifications for policing the event effectively. The police approach is risk averse and prioritizes officer safety over and above the safety of Charlottesville’s residents meaning that those not to intervene to stop the violence.</p>	<p>The alt-right strategy to build links with the wider “Alt-Lite” and Republican movement fails even before UtR as movement decouples from public support (A5.1).</p>
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The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition

	<p>Declaration of unlawful assembly; police clear the park</p>	<p>When the police declare the event to be an unlawful assembly, key organisers recognise that resistance is likely to be counter-productive (B1.4) and advise those at the rally with guns to leave the area, not least because of the increased legal penalties attached to possessing a firearm after such a declaration (B1.5). The militias also begin to exit the area.</p> <p>Whilst it is a sudden imbalance in power that leads to some of the worst incidents of violence (A2.4 – see below) it is a perception of this that leads many activists not to engage in violence in the first place since they believe themselves to be outnumbered, and therefore expect that aggression would be counter-productive (B1.4)</p>	<p>Police tactics to clear the park pushes the alt-right and counter-demonstrators together greatly increasing the opportunity for violence (A2.3).</p> <p>Police failure to keep the alt-right separate from those demonstrating against their rally presents various alt-right groups and individuals who had arrived at the demonstration anticipating a fight (A2.2) with an increased availability of targets to attack (A2.3).</p> <p>Some of the worst violence occurs because of a sudden imbalance of power between the alt-right and individual anti-racist activists and others who are opposing them. Typically, this involved anti-racists suddenly becoming isolated from the crowd and then being attacked by a larger group of alt-right activists (A2.4).</p>		<p>The declaration of “unlawful assembly” increases anger and alienation between alt-right and the police (A4.1).</p> <p>Police passivity increases the perceived license for violence (A4.2).</p> <p>Police arrest several activists who resist orders to disburse from the park (B4.2).</p>	
	<p>James Fields terrorist attack</p>	<p>At the end of the rally James Fields Jr. uses his car to ram into demonstrators, killing Heather Heyer and injuring dozens more. He had previously valorised violence, sharing memes of cars ramming into protestors (A1.4).</p>	<p>Fields ability to use his car to attack counter-demonstrators stemmed in part because of a sudden increase in the number of “targets” available to him following the dispersal of the “Unite the Right” rally (A2.3)</p>		<p>Fields ability to use his car to ram into counter-demonstrators occurred, in part, because police had lost control of the event (A4.2).</p>	

<p>Aftermath</p>	<p>The fragile alt-right coalition splinters amidst mutual recrimination in the wake of the violence.</p>	<p>The most prominent activists distance themselves from Jason Kessler and his comments regarding Fields’ attack (B1.6). There is also a broader backlash against the violence, perceived by some as counter-productive to their goals (B1.4). Other activists believe that Charlottesville shows that there was no political solution and see violence as not only the only option but also a necessary one (for instance the case of Robert Bowers) (A1.1, A1.5).</p>		<p>In the immediate aftermath of the rally, Donald Trump gives three speeches that appear to legitimate the Alt Right and their actions (“good people on both sides”) (A3.4, A3.5), albeit other voices within the political elite, including those previously well-disposed to the alt-right, distance themselves from the alt-right, however (B3.3) Those campaigning for the removal of Confederate statues dominate the issue and their removal accelerates in the aftermath of the rally in part because of the backlash against the alt-right’s use of the issue (B3.1)</p>	<p>Law enforcement and criminal justice system begin to exert control via arrests and prosecutions after the rally. They also seek to reassert their dominance in the aftermath of the rally on other attempts by the alt-right to organise (B4.2).</p>	<p>Widespread public condemnation of the violence (B5.2)</p>
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ANNEX 3: LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA DATASETS

INTERVIEWS

Interview code	Description of interviewees	Date of interview
UK 1	Intervention worker with anti-minority activists	17 April 2020
UK 2	Intervention worker with anti-minority activists	8 April 2020
UK 3	Intervention worker with anti-minority activists	4 April 2020
UK 4	Anti-fascist researcher	29 April 2020
UK 5	Anti-fascist researcher	9 April 2020
UK 6	Academic	14 April 2020
Dover 1	Council worker	14 January 2020
Dover 2	Council worker	14 January 2020
Dover 3	Council worker	15 January 2020
Dover 4	NGO worker, working on issues of migration, refugees and integration	17 January 2020
Dover 5	NGO worker, working on issues of youth and social inclusion	17 January 2020
Dover 6	Group interview with 5 local anti-fascist activists	18 January 2020
Dover 7	Police officer	5 March 2020
Dover 8	Police officer	24 April 2020
Dover 9	Police officer	21 April 2020
Dover 10	Police officer	30 June 2020
Dover 11	Intervention worker with anti-minority activists	17 November 2020
Dover 12	Anti-fascist activist not based locally	6 October 2020
Dover 13	Academic	15 April 2020
Dover 14	Senior anti-minority activist in a nationally prominent organisation	21 April 2020
Sunderland 1	Police officer	18 February 2020
Sunderland 2	Police officer	19 February 2020
Sunderland 3	Police officer	25 February 2020
Sunderland 4	Police officer	25 February 2020
Sunderland 5	NGO worker, working on issues of refugees and integration	26 February 2020
Sunderland 6	Anti-racist activist	26 February 2020
Sunderland 7	Anti-racist activist	17 March 2020
Sunderland 8	Local councillor	18 March 2020

Sunderland 9	Local political adviser	18 March 2020
Sunderland 10	NGO worker, working on poverty issues	19 March 2020
Sunderland 11	Local councillor	19 March 2020
Sunderland 12	Council worker	23 March 2020
Chemnitz 1	Academic	13 January 2020
Chemnitz 2	Journalist and eyewitness	3 March 2020
Chemnitz 3	Academic	22 April 2020
Chemnitz 4	Academic	23 April 2020
Chemnitz 5	Academic	23 April 2020
Chemnitz 6	Academic	30 April 2020
Chemnitz 7	Independent researcher working on community tensions, discrimination and violence	26 March 2020
Chemnitz 8	Council worker	8 April 2020
Chemnitz 9	NGO worker, working on issues of democracy and citizenship	22 April 2020
Chemnitz 10	2x NGO workers, working on issues of youth and social inclusion	7 May 2020
Chemnitz 11	Journalist and eyewitness	12 May 2020
Chemnitz 12	NGO worker, working on political and social education for young people and adults	14 May 2020
Chemnitz 13	2x council workers	4 June 2020
Chemnitz 14	Academic	4 June 2020
Chemnitz 15	2x NGO workers, working on education and international development	9 June 2020
Chemnitz 16	Academic	11 June 2020
Chemnitz 17	Peace activist	27 October 2020
Chemnitz 18	Senior anti-minority activist in a nationally prominent organisation	26 August 2020
Charlottesville 1	Member of The University of Virginia student council	13 November 2019
Charlottesville 2	Anti-fascist activist	8 October 2020
Charlottesville 3	Unite the Right attendee	27 October 2020
Charlottesville 4	Anti-fascist activist	31 October 2020

ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA DATASETS

Due to the sensitivity of the content in the digital datasets, as well as concerns for the privacy of users, we have not published the metadata or raw data used for our analysis. However, the datasets and screenshot evidence can be made available on demand from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue to researchers who can prove their affiliation with an academic institution and have a specific request that serves their research purposes. Enquiries should be directed to info@isdglobal.org.

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