



# CREST GUIDE: UNDERSTANDING THE FAR-RIGHT LANDSCAPE

An introduction to the far-right in the UK, including an analysis of some of the groups and networks and the main security threats they present.



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## OVERVIEW

The far-right is a blanket term used for many groups to the right of mainstream politics. The use of the term is often politicised and is used to describe groups ranging from populist political parties to neo-Nazi cells.

The terms radical and extreme are often used to distinguish between groups that work within democratic processes and those that are anti-democratic.

In many cases the amount of information available about groups is limited and contested leading to further unknowns about a group's politics.

There is no universal experience of far-right activism, and trajectories through groups and networks, including violence, may vary radically between activists.

Although ideology is an important component in understanding the far-right, ideological support may

not be a precursor to becoming involved in far-right activities.

Developments in politics and technology have added complexity to far-right organisation; although specific groups of various types exist, the far-right is increasingly characterised by diffuse political networks with multiple actors.

Although the vast majority of far-right activists are non-violent, far-right activism has security implications in the UK and globally.

Risks associated with the far-right include large-scale acts of terrorism, hate crime, and public order issues. Far-right narratives also undermine community cohesion and can support narratives offered by opposing extremist groups.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE FAR-RIGHT

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Following the electoral collapse of the British National Party (BNP) from its 2009 high point, the UK far-right has lost some of its common cause and direction, fragmenting into smaller informal groups. Some groups continue to contest elections. Others have adopted direct action strategies or have taken on the role of pressure groups and talking shops.

The problems of identifying far-right groups and activists, distinguishing between ideological positions, and understanding the potential security threats posed by the far-right are complex. Judgements are often made more difficult by a lack of clear information about groups and activists, politicised reporting and analysis, unclear terminology, and even a lack of understanding among some far-right activists about their own groups and ideologies.

This guide is an aide to navigating this complexity. It is an introduction to the far-right in the UK and is not a comprehensive analysis of it. It provides an overview of right-wing ideologies followed by analysis of some of the groups and networks and the main security threats the far-right presents.



### BEAR IN MIND

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- Groups and activists
- Politicised reporting and analysis
- Unclear terminology
- Lack of understanding among far-right groups on their own ideologies.

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## FAR-RIGHT IDEOLOGY

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Often there is little information available on specific groups or activists. Where groups are formally organised (e.g., as political parties) manifestos and relationships with other parties can make clear policy positions. In some cases, the historical roots of organisations can also be used to draw inferences about their current politics.

Well-documented examples include the transitions attempted by the British National Party and the (French) Front National, from a focus on biological racism to a softer cultural nationalism and populism. In less formally organised groups, this type of information may not be available, which means placing greater emphasis on public statements and the behaviour of activists. In either case, analysis needs to consider the source of material. Material produced by activists and supporters, especially for public consumption, is likely to try and reflect the group in a good light. Material produced by critics

and opponents may attempt to make an audience consider a group less favourably.

Terminology of the far-right is often used loosely to make political points in popular debate. The inherent politicisation of the terminology of the far-right can often make analysis difficult. Analysis also needs to recognise that groups may be ideologically diverse, and contain sub-groups based on specific ideological positions or personal networks. Factions or splinter groups may also develop.

The term, far-right, is a label that can be used to encompass a wide range of ideologies. From many definitions, the scholar of right-wing parties Cas Mudde has identified five core concepts of right-wing extremism: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and a strong state. However, understanding how many of these different concepts are required, and in what strength, adds further

distinctions between positions within the right-wing extremist family. Ideologies cannot be considered mutually exclusive and cross-pollination is likely to be common.

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Within the broad label of far-right there are further terms that have particular meanings. The term ‘extreme’ is generally used to refer to groups that reject parliamentary democracy. This contrasts with the emergence of ‘radical’ right-wing groups that share core ideological concepts associated with the far-right, but which operate within the bounds of parliamentary democracy. This point is highly contingent on accepted understandings of democracy, with many of these groups claiming to be democratic but simultaneously highly illiberal, for example rejecting universal rights and human equality.

There are also concerns that distinguishing between radical and extreme groups serves to gloss over the extreme roots of many of the groups now considered radical, potentially legitimising them. The Front National is a preeminent example of a party with a fascist tradition that encompassed Holocaust denial, which is now electorally competitive and thought of as radical. In the UK, the British National Party’s attempted re-branding as a populist political party was also met with scepticism.

Fascism is a more specific concept than ‘extreme’ or ‘far-right’. It emerged in early 20th Century Italy and has been the subject of much academic debate. Attempts to establish a consensus view of fascist ideology have suggested the following as possible core concepts: ultra-nationalism; populist claims to

represent the people; opposition to liberal norms; and a sense of re-birth, often in relation to a mythic past.

The terms Nazism and neo-Nazism are generally reserved for groups that seek to imitate the politics of the German National Socialist Party as it existed between 1920 and 1945. These groups are usually characterised by the use of symbols and rhetoric specific to Nazi Germany.

Although ideology is an important component in understanding the far-right, ideological support may not be a precursor to becoming involved in far-right activities. Accounts of far-right groups such as the EDL and National Front have described some of the different sources of ideological learning available to activists after they become involved in an organisation, including specialised literature and the knowledge of fellow activists.

Potential non-ideological benefits to far-right activism may include a sense of solidarity with other activists, protection from other groups, the chance to take part in exciting or violent activities, the maintenance of social relationships, and, in some cases, financial benefits.



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## ORGANISATIONS ON THE FAR-RIGHT

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In addition to being ideologically complex, the far-right is organisationally varied. At the most formal level the far-right organises as political parties that contest elections.

In the UK, the first-past-the-post voting system used in most elections has worked to limit the success of smaller political groups, including those on the far-right. This has not been the case in European elections, which operate on a list-system. Elsewhere, far-right political parties have seen some success in national parliaments, including the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), the Greek Golden Dawn, and the French Front National. Formal political parties with some electoral success have needed to work within democratic systems to win support, and so tend towards radical, rather than extreme, ideologies.

Aside from political parties there are a range of sub-party groupings with far-right sympathies. These can include relatively formal organisations such as think tanks, pressure groups, and organisations dedicated to direct action, as well as more ad-hoc groups, including forums, street organisations, online communities and martial arts clubs. In some cases groups are linked in some way to a formal political party. For example, the UK branch of Pegida, an anti-Muslim movement originating in Germany, is led by Paul Weston, who is also active with the fringe political party Liberty GB.

Although superficially far-right organisations can appear to be disparate and chaotic, they also constitute ideological networks. In some cases networks are composed of many smaller organisational units. The German social scientist Fabian Virchow characterised far-right organisations as a collection of distributed 'groupuscules' supported by physical meetings and existing ties between leaders. This level of organisation allows the far-right to cater to a broad range of ideological tastes and social backgrounds

and adapt quickly to new opportunities and circumstances. Such an approach also protects far-right networks from state action and avoids creating any single entity large enough to ban.

The potential of the world wide web and social media has also been recognised by far-right activists. The web supports the creation of ideological networks, allowing for international cooperation and extending the reach of individual activists. Using low-cost tools activists are now able to publish their ideas and build a following through blogs, videos, and radio shows.

Increasingly, the far-right space is defined by networks rather than formal organisations with individuals maintaining multiple ties and avoiding formal membership. As with other extreme groups, the web also allows for covert activism through spaces less accessible to outside observers, for example, secure messaging applications.

Although larger and coordinated groups exist, the far-right is also composed in large part of individual activists developing followings and promoting their own positions from individual platforms. With relatively little gatekeeping, individual activists can compose their own ideological positions picking from a huge choice of source material.

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## MAJOR FAR-RIGHT GROUPS AND NETWORKS

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What follows is an outline of eleven far-right political groups and networks. They vary from nebulous networks and attendant street movements in the case of the counter jihad and English Defence League, to formalised political parties. This is not a comprehensive list of far-right activity in the UK, but it does include the major players.

### THE ALT-RIGHT

Currently the most infamous movement on the far-right scene, the alt-right is an example of how networked organisational forms have blurred, or even destroyed entirely, ideological and organisational boundaries. The alt-right is a loosely defined collective label and does not refer to any coherent ideology or group.

Ideologically, elements within the alt-right are at times indistinguishable from other fascist, and to some extent neo-Nazi, far-right groups. Richard Spencer of the US-based National Policy Institute (and editor of the journal *Radix*) is identified by many as a central figure in the alt-right. His politics include a strongly racial element and anti-Semitic interpretations. In other spaces connected to the alt-right, influences appear more overtly neo-Nazi, such as the prominent website *therightstuff.biz* which features the podcast *The Daily Shoah*, and the website *dailystormer.com*, run by Andrew Anglin and named after a Nazi newspaper.

Other spokespeople linked to the alt-right, including the UK's Milo Yiannopoulos, have talked up a more conciliatory vision of the alt-right, playing down associations with fascists and neo-Nazi groups. *Breitbart News* at one time claimed to be the platform of the alt-right. More moderate activists claiming the label are viewed with scepticism by more extreme elements; in a video on the subject Richard Spencer used the term 'alt-light' to describe Yiannopoulos and others.

In its self-presentation, elements of the alt-right have specialised in provocation and are noted for its use of the web and social media as an organisational tool and a communication channel. Of particular note has

been the use of 'memes' (often understood in the narrow sense of images juxtaposed with text) in order to propagandise. The alt-right is also characterised by the use of humour, provocation and shock, often coalescing around internet message boards, including parts of 4chan and Reddit. The growth in awareness of the alt-right, and to some extent the number of people claiming to operate under the alt-right label, is likely to have been influenced by the loose affiliation between the alt-right and the Trump campaign in the US.

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### COUNTER JIHAD

The counter jihad is a transnational political network composed of individual activists, pressure groups, think tanks and aligned street movements. Ideologically the network is centred on anti-Muslim prejudice. This is underpinned for many activists by conspiracy beliefs centred on plots to Islamise Europe and the US. These views are not universally held and there is no central dogma, however the book *Eurabia* is a prominent text.

The network is composed in large part of websites that repost news stories intended to support counter jihad narratives, or host original content written by activists. Prominent sites include Gates of Vienna,

Jihad Watch, The Four Freedoms Library, and Pamela Geller's personal site. The network also includes the notable US far-right think tank, the David Horowitz Freedom Center.

In the UK the counter jihad network has been influential on the EDL and less-directly on other anti-Muslim groups including Britain First and the BNP. Given the prominence of Jewish activists in the network, however, it is not compatible with anti-Semitic far-right groups, but there is the potential for unacknowledged ideological cross-fertilisation.

Equally, despite Breitbart's reputation for endorsing the anti-Semitic alt-right, several Jewish counter jihad activists are contributing authors. The counter jihad network was influential on Anders Breivik who included extensive excerpts from the network in his compendium published before the attacks. This included 112,000 words penned by Peder Jensen who is active in the counter jihad network under the name Fjordman.

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The network has also influenced elements within populist political parties, most notably Geert Wilders of the Dutch Freedom Party. In the UK, the fringe party LibertyGB has close ties to the network; party chairman Paul Weston contributes to counter jihad sites and is currently leader of the UK contingent of Pegida, along with Anne-Marie Waters of Sharia Watch and Tommy Robinson of the EDL.

For more information on the counter jihad, read the CREST guide on it [here](#).

## SOVEREIGN CITIZENS/FREEMEN-ON-THE-LAND

Difficult to classify as far-right or a coherent group, Sovereign Citizens and Freemen-on-the-Land are collections of pseudo-legal theories that advocates believe allow them to reject the authority of courts, in particular laws around taxation. Arguments rest on obscure interpretations of common law, claims surrounding the legality of birth names, and the Magna Carta. Although primarily associated with the US and Canada, a 2016 advertising campaign resulted in billboards referring to 'legal name fraud' appearing across the UK.

Although the ideas espoused by these activists are not in themselves violent, refusal to engage with legal procedures and officials have resulted in violent exchanges with police. The sovereign citizen movement in particular has been seen as a serious threat in the US.

## POPULIST POLITICAL PARTIES

Recent successful right-wing political parties in Europe, as well as the Trump campaign in the US, are routinely described as populist, although there is very little consensus on what the term populism means. There is debate over the extent to which populism constitutes a distinct ideology. Some have made the case for abandoning the term altogether, claiming that it serves to legitimate parties with deep historical and ideological connections to fascism.

In the UK, attempts by the BNP to rebrand itself as a populist political party are a good example of a party attempting to circumvent a toxic legacy. The preeminent populist party in the UK, UKIP, does not have a fascist legacy, it emerged out of Alan Sked's anti-federalist league. However, it does share some common far-right ideological components, including nationalism, anti-immigration and anti-elitism. Despite this, UKIP has maintained a commitment to parliamentary democracy, and is not overtly racist, giving rise to the consensus that sees UKIP on the fringes of the far-right. Similar debates exist around other populist political parties including the French Front National and the Dutch Freedom Party.

## NATIONAL ACTION

National Action was the first far-right group in the UK to be legally proscribed (in 2016). National Action was a youth orientated neo-Nazi organisation with a commitment to direct action. Openly critical of legacy far-right groups such as the BNP, National Action deliberately set out to provoke. The group organised extensively online and took part in street protests including a series of marches.

These were often poorly attended, but the group frequently coordinated with other organisations including the North West Infidels and UK supporters of National Rebirth of Poland (*Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski*). In addition to their street demonstrations, National Action also produced propaganda material, including video footage (since deleted) of followers engaging in martial arts training, and distributed leaflets in UK universities.

One supporter of National Action was jailed in 2014 for sending anti-Semitic messages to a British Member of Parliament. In 2015, Zack Davies attacked a Sikh in a supermarket, saying 'this is for Lee Rigby'. Media reports claimed that Davies had links to National Action, but the group denied any connection. The legal proscription of the group came in the wake of the murder of British MP, Joe Cox, and the decision was influenced by the group's apparent endorsement of the murder on Twitter. In early 2017 it was also reported that a pipe bomb had been discovered in the desk drawer of a 17 year-old National Action supporter in Bradford in July 2016. The teenager was found guilty of making the pipe bomb but not guilty of preparing a terrorist act.

## BLOOD AND HONOUR

The combination of a music promotion network and neo-Nazi group has become an international brand, with activists claiming affiliation worldwide. In 2016, under the guise of a private party, Blood and Honour successfully organised a two-day event in Cambridgeshire featuring white power bands, causing a public outcry. Blood and Honour was founded in 1987 by Ian Stuart Donaldson (from



the far-right neo-Nazi band Skrewdriver) and Nicky Crane, now both deceased.

It was intended as an alternative to the White Noise Club, another white power network, seen as dominated by the National Front. White power music is an important source of transnational links for some elements of the far-right, and maintains an internationally-focused website that includes archived radio shows (28 Radio), ideological statements, and coming events. The website also promotes the printed *B&H Magazine*.

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## THE BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY

Formerly the dominant force in far-right politics in the UK, the BNP succeeded in having two MEPs elected in the 2009 European elections as well as winning local council seats. Since 2009, the party has collapsed electorally and much of the current far-right picture in the UK has been shaped by the decline of the BNP.

Electoral and street-based support for the BNP was eroded by more ideologically moderate groups, including the English Defence League (EDL) and UKIP, both of which are free of the BNP's openly fascist history.

## THE ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE

Emerging in 2009, the English Defence League was a social movement with a focus on street protest that notably incorporated football hooligan networks. EDL marches frequently generated public order issues, and often resulted in violent clashes with anti-fascist and other opposing demonstrators. Ideologically, the EDL denied that it was an extreme or racist movement, and claimed to protest only against radical Islam.

To emphasise this, the movement made highly visible efforts to include LGBT, Sikh, and Jewish supporters. The EDL also cultivated transnational links, including in the US and other European countries. A number of European far-right movements have seemingly been inspired by the EDL, including various defence leagues (Dutch, Norwegian), and there are close links between the EDL and the football hooligans super-group, Casuals United. Also of note, the North West and North East Infidels began as extreme break away movements from the EDL.

The passage of time, splits in the movement, and changes to police tactics contributed to a declining physical and media presence of the EDL. Historically, some demonstrations attracted over a thousand EDL supporters. Current rallies draw far fewer: a November 2016 event in Telford reportedly attracted around 100 supporters. The co-founders of the EDL, Tommy Robinson and Kevin Carroll, left the

movement in 2013, citing concerns over extremism. Tommy Robinson has since remained active in the European far-right and helped to re-launch the UK branch of the German anti-Muslim group Pegida.

## BRITAIN FIRST

Britain First promotes a synthesis of Christian fundamentalism, direct-democracy populism, anti-immigration, anti-European and above all anti-Muslim prejudice rooted in theories about a 'leftist' establishment. It has an extremely large presence on Facebook, posting a mixture of content from newspapers, original stories, and videos.

The group also engages in provocative actions, including street demonstrations and filmed Mosque invasions. This last practice resulted in an eight-week prison sentence for leading figure, Paul Golding, after he breached an injunction on him entering a Mosque or calling on others to do so. Early reports of the murder of Jo Cox said that her assailant yelled 'Britain First'.

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This was stridently denied in a video released by Golding, calling the event a 'dark day for our country and our democracy'. This was in stark contrast to the video released by Golding following his release from Pentonville Prison in January 2017 in which he promised a 'day of reckoning' for the 'leftists' responsible for his incarceration.

Britain First is a registered political party and contested the 2014 European Elections in Scotland and Wales, a 2014 by-election, and the 2016 London Mayoral Election, where candidate Paul Golding achieved 1.2% of the vote. Other prominent

members of Britain First include deputy leader Jayda Fransen, and for a time financier Jim Dowson. Dowson, who was previously active with the Orange Order and the BNP, currently runs the pro-Trump Patriot News Agency website.

## LONDON/YORKSHIRE/SOUTH WEST/WELSH FORUM

These groups organise speaking events in different parts of the UK under the auspices of former soldier and National Front member, Jeremy Bedford-Turner (Jez Turner). Content and speakers are diverse, but lean towards fascism and extremism, and have included Alex Davies of National Action, Kai Murros, author of *Revolution - And How to do it in a Modern Society*, Mark Devlin, a DJ who believes there to be a far-reaching conspiracy evident in the music industry, and Andrew Brons, former member of the British National Party and MEP, and now involved in the British Democratic Party/British Democrats.

## FAR-RIGHT RELIGION

In addition to political beliefs, far-right supporters also draw on influences from a variety of religious doctrines. In some networks this may be based on often conservative but still mainstream religious views from Christianity and/or Judaism.

There is also evidence of more esoteric beliefs in some networks. Racial paganism, sometimes described as Odinism or Wotanism, is based on

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resurrecting pagan gods. Racial paganism offers far-right activists to reject the egalitarianism of Christianity, seen as a product of Jewish influences, in favour of religion that emphasises racial ancestry and folk communities.

A dominant voice in this movement was the incarcerated US-based domestic terrorist David Lane. Also in the US, the Christian Identity Movement has been described as heavily influential for some networks and activists.

Emerging from British Israelism in the 19th Century, the Christian Identity Movement argues that the White race is God's true chosen people and that the Jews were imposters aligned with Satan. Non-Whites are presented as sub-human, akin to farm animals. Ideologically, this religious doctrine has been effective in interpreting world events through an apocalyptic millenarian narrative, with each new conspiracy a component in the grand conspiracy orchestrated by Satan and his Jewish agents.

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## THE FAR-RIGHT AND SECURITY

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Although the vast majority of far-right activists are non-violent, far-right activism has security implications in the UK and globally.

Far-right ideology has been a factor in motivating some large scale terrorist attacks, including the 1980 bombing of Central Station, Bologna by Nuclei Armati Revoluzionari which killed 85 and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing carried out by Timothy McVeigh which killed 168. Former member of the BNP and National Socialist Movement, David Copeland, undertook a bombing campaign in 1999 targeting ethnic minorities and the LGBT community in London, killing 3 and injuring more than 100. The attacks by Anders Breivik in Oslo and Utoya Island killed 77 in 2011.

In addition, far-right ideology has been a factor in a range of smaller scale terrorist incidents and plots. Most recently Thomas Mair was convicted of the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox in 2016. Mair was reportedly on the fringes of several far-right groups and accessed far-right ideological material. Zack Davies, who, in 2015, attempted to kill Dr Sarandev Bhambra in a supermarket in Mold in revenge for the murder of the British soldier, Lee Rigby, had a collection of neo-Nazi material and claimed membership of National Action. In 2009 Ian Davidson and son Nicky, from County Durham, were jailed for a planned terror attack under the banner of the Aryan Strike Force; they had been constructing bombs and had created a small amount of the poison ricin (from castor beans).

Far-right groups can also be the targets of violence. Most notably in the UK, a failed attempt to attack an EDL rally was uncovered in 2012, when a car was stopped and a homemade bomb later discovered by police. In 2015, two attackers were killed while attempting to attack a counter jihad network 'Draw Mohammed' contest in

Garland, Texas. Both of these attacks, as well as spontaneous violence during demonstrations, can be seen as examples of reciprocal radicalisation.

Hate crime is a complex phenomenon in which motivations are often obscured and reporting can be inconsistent. There is some evidence that supports an ideological connection between far-right ideology and hate crime, including that far-right activism can provide justifications for violence and other crimes against minorities. The Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 557 anti-Semitic incidents in the first six months of 2016. Of these, the CST, recorded 135 incidents as being politically motivated; 98 of these incidents were recorded as showing evidence of far-right motivation. The figures for political motivation were not broken down by type of incident e.g., abuse, violence, damage, or venue e.g., in person or online. Reporting of anti-Muslim hate crime has also included the role of the far-right, though this has not been separately analysed.

A further consideration is the cost of far-right activity to public order and community cohesion. Far-right activities, most notably demonstrations, often require costly policing and result in public order issues. In May 2016, an event in Dover organised under the banner of Blood and Honour, and opposed by anti-fascists, required more than 700 additional police officers to be drafted in.

In addition to public order issues, far-right activism also has broader strategic implications for the UK security picture. Both Islamist and far-right groups have a mutual interest in exploiting group polarisation as a source of rhetorical support and as a recruiting tool. Far-right activities directed against Muslims have the potential to drive support for Islamist extremism by contributing to cycles of reciprocal radicalisation.

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