



# Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats

## Exploring ‘Sikh Radicalisation’ in Britain

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### Key research questions

1. **Framing Sikh activism in Britain:** Which incidents have taken place in Britain involving Sikhs including protests and flashpoints and how have these impacted on the discourse around Sikhs in Britain?
2. **Narratives and issues:** Which narratives and issues are relevant in encouraging Sikhs in Britain towards ‘radical action’? Are there specific political and religious narratives and how are these linked to cultural issues?
3. **The transmission of narratives:** How are these narratives transmitted? How do Sikhs learn about these events? How is Sikh activism organised?
4. **Types of Sikh activism:** Are there different types of Sikh activism and what are the key issues of concern?
5. **The impact of Sikh activism in Britain:** What is the impact of Sikh activism on the British public? What possible routes to violence (if any) currently exist?

### Approach

Literature  
Review

Semi-structured  
Interviews

Fieldwork Visits  
to Gurdwaras /  
Sikh Events

Analysis of Historical /  
Contemporary Media (Newspapers  
/ Radio / TV / Online)

### Radicalism or activism?

**Extremism** – ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’

**Radicalisation** – ‘the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.’

Moskalenko and McCauley (2009) define **radicalism** as ‘readiness to engage in illegal and violent political action’ as opposed to **activism** which is a ‘readiness to engage in legal and non-violent political action’.

### What does Sikh activism in Britain look like?

- Sikh activism in Britain fundamentally changed following the storming of the Golden Temple during Operation Bluestar in June 1984 and the anti-Sikh violence that took place in India in November 1984 following the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister by her Sikh bodyguards.
- From a community who supported India and who were focused on campaigning for the right to maintain Sikh symbols in Britain, anger about the events of 1984 led many Sikhs in Britain to protest about the lack of recourse about these incidents from the Indian state.
- The most frequently reported incidents of violence carried out by Sikhs in Britain have taken place against other Sikhs either for political, doctrinal or governance related issues.



‘Sikhs protest in London’ © VimalKanda/Wikimedia Commons (CC-BY-SA-4.0)



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### What are the main narratives and issues?

- The main political narrative relates to the events of 1984 and the perceived lack of justice / recourse for these events from the Indian state.
- The main religious issues relate to disagreements about ideology and religious authority.
- Most of the Sikh on Sikh incidents are a consequence of issues relating to the management of Sikh institutions (gurdwaras).
- Although the concept of ‘martyrdom’ is important in the Sikh tradition it is primarily regarded an act of resistance rather than being viewed as a guarantee of an afterlife in paradise.
- The narrative of Muslim grooming gangs targeting Sikh girls for grooming / conversion and cases not being sufficiently dealt with by the authorities, often feeds on existing historical narratives and contemporary Sikh/Muslim tensions.

### How are relevant narratives transmitted?

- Issues are now most often raised and circulated through Sikh broadcast media and social media. Many Sikhs participate in campaigns without necessarily formally affiliating to Sikh organisations.
- There are few places and spaces within the British education system for Sikhs to examine their heritage and history. This leads Sikhs to undertake such engagement and learning on an ad hoc basis, primarily online.
- There is no one organisation responsible for the transmission of narratives leading to activism although many do support one another on particular initiatives.
- Narratives which lead to activism are transmitted in different ways, through families, organised events, lectures, camps, music, clothing and Sikh media (newspaper, broadcast and online). The recently established British Sikh television channels appear to be playing an increasingly important role.



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### What is the impact of Sikh activism in Britain?

- There is no threat to the British state or to the wider British public from Sikh activism as there is no argument with ‘the West’ or with Britain.
- Sikh activism in Britain is usually focused around campaigns targeting specific issues. These campaigns emerge organically and are most often organised through local networks. Providing food to the needy is an example of Sikh activism where Sikhs born in Britain wish to use concepts from the Sikh tradition in their local societies.
- Instances of Sikh on Sikh violence are most often a consequence of a) the contested nature of religious authority within the Sikh tradition and / or b) local power politics most often as a consequence of personal / familial disputes.
- The main threat to community relations in Britain is the vigilantism resulting from internal Sikh issues or from the exploitation of local tensions most often between Sikhs and Muslims.