CREST Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats

Transnational Dynamics in Violent Outcomes for Protest Movements: A Rapid Evidence Assessment

FULL REPORT

AUGUST 2025

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This CREST report was produced from the Radical Contention project. This project looks at whether and how political contention and protest relate to radicalisation and terrorism. You can find all the outputs from this project at: https://crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/radical-contention

ABOUT CREST

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

This report offers a synthesis and critical analysis of research that has considered whether and how transnational dynamics inform the interaction between protest, radicalisation, and terrorism. The analysis draws on research on transnational movements and processes that inform how and why people engage in protests which are or become violent, and which involve violent extremist actors. It explores the influence of transnational intergroup relations.

AIMS

This review seeks to synthesise existing research on transnational mechanisms and processes to provide insights into the factors that shape protest-extremism dynamics to address the following primary research questions:

1. What increases the vulnerability of protest mobilisations to transnational actors (states, violent movements, individuals) promoting violence across borders?

2. What factors constrain the potential for violence, radicalisation, and terrorism in transnational social movements/ mobilisations?

3. Under what conditions do alliances between social movements and international actors lead to an increased potential for violence? What characteristics of both types of actors contribute to this dynamic?

4. What are the mechanisms of influence between transnational and local protest mobilisations?

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a rapid evidence assessment (REA) approach, synthesising knowledge on specific topics in line with the research questions from published journal articles, book chapters, reports, and dissertations, including both academic and "grey" literature (e.g., government and think tank reports). The REA adopted a streamlined methodology using keyword searches of major social science databases, after which identified documents were screened for inclusion based on pre-determined eligibility criteria.

KEY FINDINGS

The literature on both transnational protests and transnational interactions with local movements or protests does not significantly differ from the core findings of the previous two Rapid Evidence Assessments in this series which focused on social movement insights into violent protests (Salman, Marsden, Lewis, 2025) and interdisciplinary research into individual-level processes that shape radicalisation and violence related to protests (Peterscheck, Marsden & Salman, 2025). Earlier findings that remain highly relevant to transnational processes include:

- Movement schism and fragmentation may increase potential for violence.
- Exposure to misinformation influences protest dynamics in ways which can increase the danger of violent escalation.
- The potential for counter-messaging to be counter-productive by producing unintended effects like reinforcing commitment to pre-existing positions, enhancing grievances like perceived discrimination, and reinforcing identities.
- Digital platforms play a role in forging collective identities, including or especially transnational ones.
- Fringe political movements are associated with increased acceptance of political violence.
- Identity fusion, especially in relation to perceived threats against a group, increases the salience of group identity and individual commitment to actions in support or defence of the group, even at cost to the individual.
- Perceptions of existential threats, discrimination, collective angst, and shared grievances can intensify group identity.

The social movement literature has developed a significant body of work on transnational movements. The key insights from the social movement and interdisciplinary literature on violence and protests also help to interpret cross-border influences. Transnational perspectives primarily add another layer of interaction, mutual influence, and opportunities for resource sharing and mobilisation. However, the mediating factors that influence contemporary social movement mobilisations, including new technology and the role of social media and their influence on violence have received less attention. This is particularly the case when violence is informed by local events and dynamics, but is influenced by transnational actors and processes. This suggests a broader gap to be filled by future research on the questions outlined in this report.

Core findings with specific focus on transnational movements include the following:

Transnational protest movements are becoming increasingly diffuse, partly in response to the increased role of social media and online interactions between strangers. Both highly diffuse and segmented identitarian movements have an important role in the radicalisation of individuals and groups across a wide spectrum of movements. These are often "civilisational", religious, or gender-based identities that do not refer to the state and which may organise themselves as "anti-systemic" movements.

The key — and novel — role played by rapidly evolving online platforms in diffusing transnational movements means that local conflicts or protests are increasingly vulnerable to being inflamed by transnational actors: immigration, anti-Muslim and economic themes seem most vulnerable to transnational influence.

The mediating mechanisms that make these interactions possible are evolving rapidly, creating complex new "webs of influence" that are only beginning to be mapped and understood.

Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment are the most resonant issues for far-right groups, and anti-immigrant/anti-Muslim protests have been most frequently violent over the last quarter of a century across Europe.

Strong evidence indicates that some states, and state-aligned movements, play roles in influencing transnational movements: they attempt to mobilise or radicalise local movements, or to accelerate peaceful protest movements toward violent confrontation. The evidence is mixed in the literature on actors like Iran, but stronger on Russia, which has developed a set of policies for liaising with local groups in what Rekawek and Molas call "political warfare" (Rekawek and Molas 2024). Evidence of their success in achieving that influence is mixed, preliminary, and largely anecdotal.

Synthesised evidence from the review partially supports the widely held hypothesis that mis- and disinformation played important roles in some recent episodes of violent protests with a transnational element, although not all. Available evidence supports the role of mis- and disinformation in violent escalation during the Charlottesville mobilisation in 2017 and the Capital Riots in 2021 in the United States, as well as the unrest in Leicester primarily between British Hindus and British Muslims in 2022, and violent mobilisations following the attack by Axel Rudakubana in 2024 in Southport, UK. However, this evidence is preliminary and often falls outside the ordinary scope of the review as it is found in grey literature or in adjacent fields. The review did not find evidence that mis- or disinformation played a catalysing role in violence related to other major protests, such as the Yellow Vest movement in France to antiwar or anti-globalisation protests.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS BY CATEGORY

The research questions and the organisation of the results focuses on four categories: **internal dynamics**, **external influences**, **mechanisms of influence** and **interaction effects**. Each research question cuts across these categories to some extent, but the factors tested against the evidence in the literature are organised around these broad themes.

Key findings identified in this review are summarised in separate tables for each major section, loosely based on the EMMIE framework for evidence relating to crime prevention interventions (Johnson et al., 2015). The EMMIE framework summarises the overall effect, direction, and strength of the evidence; the mechanisms or mediators it activates; relevant moderators or contexts, including unintended effects; implementation considerations; and economic costs/benefits (Johnson et al., 2015). Since the findings of this review are not solely concerned with interventions, the latter two considerations are not summarised here.[1]

Internal dynamics

Internal dynamics inform how and why transnational protests are or become violent and what interrupts these processes. Broader social movement literature does not generally distinguish between transnational and other forms of movements in terms of their predilection for violence. Instead suggesting that the same kinds of factors (ideology, goals, interactions or patterns of escalation of violence, etc) shape transnational movements as they do with other types of mobilisation (della Porta and Diani 2020, 172).

Table 1 summarises the key factors relating to internal dynamics of transnational movements and their influence on violent escalation. Overall, the research indicates that that the scope of movement goals strongly impacts the potential for violence, since some transnational movements embrace revolutionary goals that reject liberal democratic norms; this means their goals cannot likely be achieved through democratic change.

The research indicates that the presence of embedded local networks allied with the transnational movement increases the likelihood of violence. Some evidence suggests that messaging strategies that draw audiences

1 The scope of this Rapid Evidence Assessment does not allow for a formal assessment of the strength of evidence in line with the full EMMIE framework. Here, strength of evidence is based on a qualitative assessment of the scope of evidence linked to a particular factor, and the quality of the methodology used in the research which speaks to each theme.

into increasingly closed and radical platforms can contribute to escalation toward violence and the formation of a radical milieu that supports violence and engages in the dehumanisation of others. Conversely, transnational groups that engage in coalition building, as well as local groups that build transnational coalitions, are less likely to escalate toward violence.

Factor	Effect on violence/ extremism	Mechanisms/Moderators	Strength of evidence
Scope of movement goals	Mixed/bi-directional	Democratic engagement vs. rejection; willingness to act within the current political system vs antagonism toward liberal democratic values; "civilisational" vs national or local goals.	Strong
Movement schism	Increase	Social approval of violence; rejection of institutional routes and political norms; perceived disorder; conspiracism; vigilantism.	Strong
Radical flank	Increase	Social approval of violence; dehumanisation; lack of institutional routes and political norms for change through non-violent engagement.	Strong
"Civilisational" identity	Increase	Dis- and misinformation to construct narratives of existential threat; acceptance or rejection of democratic mechanisms.	Weak/Indirect
Cross-border messaging strategies	Mixed	Variable resonance of many messaging themes; strong when matched to internal political schisms around economic and anti-immigrant messages.	Strong
Platform migration and audience narrowing	Increase	Smaller, self-selected audiences migrate to encrypted platforms with increasingly radical content.	Moderate
Coalition building	Decrease	Increased transnational engagement weakens local networks; engaging with broader public encourages moderation.	Strong
Locally embedded networks	Increase	Smaller groups use acts of violence to capture attention; Locally embedded networks have increased ability to act.	Strong for far-right/indirect for others

Table 1. Summary of factors related to internal dynamics

External influences

Transnational movements and the actors within them are by definition strongly shaped by factors that are external to the local or national context. This ranges from transnational political contestation and inter-state wars like the Israel-Palestine conflict to internal repression that increasingly has transnational effects. Actions in one state, like Uyghur detention and "re-education" camps in China, increase out-migration, affect diasporas across the world, and increasingly become transnational as authoritarian states seek to control diaspora groups and police protesters across state borders.

Table 2 summarises key factors identified in relation to external influences. Overall, the research indicates a strong correlation between contra-context values and escalation to violence – that is, transnational movements whose values and norms strongly contradict those in the local or national political context seem more likely to become violent and often cite failure of local authorities to defend norms as justification for vigilante actions. Transnational "communities of practice" or radical milieus that share tactics, examples and radicalising/dehumanising content, are strongly correlated to acts of violence by both groups and 'lone actors'.

The evidence shows mixed and bidirectional results for transnational repressive escalation, the process by which local and national authorities learn repressive tactics from one another and justify repressive escalation by citing the precedents set by other states. While repressive measures increase the cost of protest action and can lead to de-escalation, they can also backfire by increasing protest group cohesion and dedication and lead to escalation of tactics in response.

Factor	Effect on violence/ extremism	Mechanisms/Moderators	Strength of evidence
Transnational repressive escalation	Mixed/bi-directional	States learn repressive tactics from other states; precedent creates permissive environment; increased repression can backfire and escalate protest engagement; "double precarity": protest movements oppressed abroad and perceiving discrimination in host country may disengage from politics and society.	Strong
Contra-context values	Increase	Norms counter to democratic values lead to revolutionary appeals; appeals to norms that groups claim are not protected by authorities justifies vigilantism; state countermeasures that delegitimise minority cultural norms can backfire.	Strong
Transnational "communities of practice" or radical milieu	Increase	Social approval of violence; dehumanisation; mis- and disinformation; sharing violent tactics and examples; potential to mobilise lone actors.	Strong
Perceived support from national political actors	Increase	Perceived support of one faction by local or national political actors emboldens one while increasing grievances in the other.	Weak

Table 2. External influences

Mechanisms of influence

Table 3 summarises the key findings on the mechanisms which shape the potential for violence. Overall, the research indicates that mis- and disinformation play a significant role as a mechanism for increasing violence by enhancing threat perception and identity fusion among target groups. Mis- and disinformation are simultaneously often used to construct a perceived enemy and to dehumanise perceived enemies.

The overall effect of online networks is mixed and bi-directional. Online interaction between transnational groups creates opportunities for solidarity building and coalition building, enabling movements to become broader and more diffuse and less likely to escalate to violence. On the other hand, online networking creates unprecedented opportunities for isolated individuals with extremist tendences to build exclusive networks of solidarity and construct radical milieus that help facilitate violence.

Lastly, the research indicates that these media ecospheres and the identities they create are rapidly evolving: preliminary network mapping and studies on the effect of disinformation released following the 2024 Southport violence suggest that specifically networks that spread mis- and disinformation on anti-immigrant themes are significantly larger and more complex than previous research had captured.

Factor	Effect on violence/ extremism	Mechanisms/Moderators	Strength of evidence
Online networks	Mixed/bi-directional	Diffusion and coalition building moderates movements; platforms create opportunities for those with extreme views to connect with others who share them; mis- and disinformation can weaken shared reality and trust in institutions.	Strong for the formation of radical milieus that increase violence/Moderate for coalition building that decreases violence
Online exclusive engagement prior to protest	Increase	"Social media political participation" associated with illegal protest for those without prior political engagement.	Weak
Accelerationist tactics	Increase	Extremist actors join protests to provoke escalation; state actors drive engagement and escalation to support foreign policy	Weak
Mis- and disinformation	Increase	Social approval of violence; dehumanisation; appeal to vigilante action when authorities "do nothing"; undermine trust in institutions and support for democratic norms.	Strong

Table 3. Mechanisms of influence

Interaction effects

Interactions between local, national and transnational contexts influence actors seeking to create change at and across these levels. This includes the effects of violence in homelands on diaspora groups, experiences of frustration among local-level movements that transnational grievances cannot be resolved through national politics, and considers why individuals or movements on the local level may come to see their transnational (e.g., diaspora or religious identity) as more salient than local identities.

Table 4 summarises the key findings related to interaction effects that lead to violent escalation. Protest movements responding to real-life violence against group members elsewhere seem more likely to escalate to violence or support it. Similarly, the presence of networks dedicated to spreading awareness of that external violence or generating mis- and disinformation that creates the perception of threat increases identity fusion and salience among transnational or diaspora groups influencing their support for violence. External state support for escalation of protest tactics or support for violent groups is supported in the evidence on Russia and its strategy of "political warfare" against perceived enemy states (Rekawek, Renard, and Molas 2024).

Factor	Effect on violence/ extremism	Mechanisms/Moderators	Strength of evidence
Grievances linked to geopolitical change	Mixed	Perceived inability to influence transnational processes by peaceful means; perceived lack of democratic accountability for supra-national institutions; immigrants held responsible for austerity and increased economic competition.	Strong on anti-immigration grievances & inability to influence peacefully Weak on lack of democratic accountability;
Transnational violence	Increase	Violence against members elsewhere increases support for radical and violent action transnationally.	Strong
Sacred values	Increase	Violations of moral values strongly associated with group identity leads to increased identity fusion and willingness to engage in extreme acts of support.	Weak
Ostracism	Increase	Ostracism from a group identity increases willingness to take radical action to preserve belonging	Strong
Networks that create perceptions of threat	Increase	Increase sense of victimisation; heightened threat perception; mis- and disinformation or skewed information to increase identity salience and dehumanise "enemy."	Strong
"Safe haven" or external state support	Increase	State-sponsored or supported training; network development and support for violence seeking to influence more mainstream mobilisations.	Strong on Russia, weak on other state actors

Table 4. Interaction effects

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Prioritise violence prevention efforts toward anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim mobilisations; ensure that public messaging and discourse does not contribute to dehumanisation.

2. Support research and knowledge building with a focus on transnational actors seeking to inflame existing grievances within the UK, especially work that captures multiple platforms and reflects webs-of-influence, including non-English content.

3. Address core grievances exploited by malign actors, including economic inequality, barriers to socioeconomic advancement, and perceived inequalities of access to full citizenship, rights, and belonging.

4. Focus attention on Russian and other hostile state actors' influence operations online and off, both in the UK and beyond.

5. Support social media companies' efforts to identify and remove disinformation, actors promoting violence, and enhance mechanisms to combat misinformation.

6. Enhance protections from transnational repression for protected speech, beliefs, and human rights.

7. Avoid repressive and militarised policing methods that reduce the space for lawful protest, particularly in the context of mobilisations seeking social or political change within existing liberal democratic structures.

8. Increase opportunities for peaceable, democratic engagement with political systems.

9. Carefully consider the most appropriate way of responding to splits and movement fragmentation whilst reducing the potential for violent radical flanks to develop.

10. Consider the implications of state repression overseas, and the potential for this to diffuse across contexts to understand the likelihood of escalatory violence between protesters and state actors.

11. Pay attention to the potential for violence where perceptions of threat and discrimination coincide with real-world violence, including violence perpetrated overseas.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of increasing concerns over interactions between protest movements and extremist actors, this project draws on different areas of research that provide insights into transnational dynamics in group mobilisation and radicalisation, and the processes that inform escalation towards, and de-escalation from violence including literature from social movement studies, social psychology, criminology, sociology and terrorism studies. This is the third and final report in a series that has previously focused on social movement insights into violent protests (Salman, Marsden, Lewis, 2025) and interdisciplinary research into individual-level processes including identity dynamics as they pertain to radicalisation and violence related to protests (Peterscheck, Marsden & Salman, 2025).

The report offers a rapid evidence assessment of literature on transnational dynamics in relation to violent or extremist-adjacent protests and does not cover research on radicalisation that does not relate to protest contexts. What follows first presents a brief background on the project and the rapid evidence assessment approach, followed by details of the research questions and methodology. The core of the report offers a thematic analysis of research uncovered through the review process, dividing evidence on transnational movements and violent protest into four categories: internal dynamics, external influences, mechanisms of influence, and interaction effects.

BACKGROUND

Contemporary mobilisations are increasingly heterogeneous and decentralised, with multiple actors involved in mobilising different constituencies, including those who support political violence (Leach, Ferguson, and Teixeira 2024). This has been accompanied by increasing concern around political violence, backlash, and counter-protest (Leach, Ferguson, and Teixeira 2024). Examining interactions between extremist actors, wider protest mobilisations, and state responses is therefore important to understand the potential for violence, what constrains violence, the effect of state responses, and the implications for civil liberties and the fundamental right to protest (D. della Porta 2018; Leach, Ferguson, and Teixeira 2024).

Protest mobilisations also arise in response to transnational issues, contesting politics that cross state borders, for example in the context of globalisation or migration; in response to geopolitical dynamics reflected in the actions of national governments on the international stage, for example with protest movements responding to war and conflict; or which mobilise around transnational identities such as religious, ethnic, or class identities.

Key concepts covered in the report include transnational radical movements, mobilisation and protest, which we understand broadly as, “political challenges raised by organised collective actors who respond rationally to opportunities and constraints in their environment” (Malthaner 2023, 100). Additionally, radicalisation, violent extremism, terrorism, and political violence will be conceptualised as “when physical force is used in order to produce or resist political change” (D. della Porta 2018, 462).

Transnational movements emerged in the age of globalisation. At times these represented a countermovement to globalisation and its effects, but when considering those that engage in violent repertoires, “the distinction between internal and external security threats is increasingly blurred” (Adamson 2005, 31). This report will operationalise definitions laid out in previous literature (Bouhana, 2019; della Porta, 2018; Malthaner, 2017, 2023; Marsden et al., 2023). Transnational protest movements are those “wherein members in at least two nations

cooperatively engage in efforts to promote or resist change beyond the bounds of their nation," (Gould and Lewis 2018, 1), or as della Porta proposes in relation to more contentious mobilisations: "coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions" (della Porta and Tarrow 2005, 7). When adopting such definitions in the context of social movement and protest, caveats and an awareness of the sensitivities of the sociopolitical and human rights context must be considered (Kundnani and Hayes 2018).

The adoption of the rapid evidence assessment approach (REA) allows the report to accommodate insights from the wider literature on transnational social movements and associated violent mobilisations, and the literature on radicalisation and violent extremism. The aim is to identify and synthesise insights from these different, but increasingly converging fields of research (Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2016; Malthaner 2023).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research questions covered in the report are:

1. What increases the vulnerability of protest mobilisations to transnational actors (states, violent movements, individuals) promoting violence across borders?

2. What factors constrain the potential for violence, radicalisation, and terrorism in transnational social movements/ mobilisations?

3. Under what conditions do alliances between social movements and international actors lead to an increased potential for violence? What characteristics of both types of actors contribute to this dynamic?

4. What are the mechanisms of influence between transnational and local protest mobilisations?

The research questions and the organisation of the results focus on four categories: internal dynamics, external influences, mechanisms of influence and interaction effects. Each research question cuts across these categories to some extent, but the factors tested against the evidence in the literature are organised around these broad conceptual categories.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology, search strategy, screening, and analysis follows the same model as the previous two reports in this series (see: Salman, Marsden, & Lewis, 2025 for full account of the methodology). Much of the literature identified in the first searches for the previous reports that included transnational aspects was set out in the first two reports (Salman, Marsden & Lewis, 2025; Petersheck, Marsden & Salman, 2025).

The initial searches used to identify literature to support the first two reports was therefore expanded to verify initial results and broaden the pool of potentially relevant research to accommodate the specific focus on transnational dynamics. Additional search terms were used to test the pool of initial results by focusing on specific instances or known actors related to transnational violent protest. These were analysed to identify social movement-related interdisciplinary insights that may not have been included in the original search terms, and backward citation searches were used to identity additional candidate studies.

In addition to the 206 documents identified through the original search process, this report and the expanded searches screened an additional roughly 750 related reports and identified 137 additional documents (including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reports) with a more specific focus on transnational movements and case studies for inclusion.

SYNTHESIS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Following the division of the research into internal dynamics, external dynamics, interaction effects between them and mechanisms for influence, the report explores nine distinct areas of research that have transnational aspects. These include:

Internal dynamics	External influences	Interaction effects	Mechanisms
• Scope of movement goals. • Mobilisation styles.	• Transnational contexts.	• Accelerationist efforts by state actors. • Mis- and dis-information.	• Grievances linked to geopolitical change. • Transnational identities. • "Safe haven" or third country support.

These themes were identified based on a review of the core results, and were informed by the research team's existing knowledge of factors understood to be relevant to other forms of transnational violent mobilisation. This included insights from the literature on terrorism and escalation of political violence arising from protests in other contexts, and grey literature around specific violent protest mobilisations. For each of these factors, the presence and strength of evidence was assessed, and a determination made as to whether they met the quality standards for inclusion.

Many of the above themes are not exclusive, instead they overlap and intersect with one another. As highlighted in the first two reports, one of the more important contributions of social movement theory to our understanding of political violence is the emphasis on multi-layered approaches to complex social phenomena that emerge not just out of individuals and groups as they define themselves, but in the interactions between individuals and groups and their contexts.

Important factors identified in the previous reports remain relevant or take on added relevance from the transnational perspective. Movements that have a transnational dimension or interact with larger transnational movements have an extra layer of both potential contestation because of the wider range of motivations at work, and an additional range of human, financial, cultural, and informational resources.

This expanded range of potential resources and allies can become particularly relevant when interpreting what makes movements more vulnerable to radicalisation and violence. For example, becoming more significant in the context of movement schism; when experiencing repression or failure to achieve goals (Winnifred R. Lewis et al, 2022); when perceived injustice within the local political system is a factor; or when responding to a perceived threat toward the group, as these are junctions at which a local or newly fragmented movement might seek new resources, allies, and repertoires for contestation from actors able to provide support across borders.

These dynamics are captured in several of the themes discussed in the report. Where the evidence supporting them has already been cited and summarised in the previous reports, only additional findings with a specific transnational element are discussed.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS

This section considers the internal dynamics that inform how and why transnational protests are or become violent and what interrupts these processes. Broader social movement literature does not generally distinguish between transnational and other forms of movements in terms of their predilection for violence. Instead suggesting that the same kinds of factors (ideology, goals, interactions or patterns of escalation of violence, etc) shape transnational movements as they do with other types of mobilisation (della Porta and Diani 2020, 172).

Key points

1. Transnational movements whose goals are "anti-systemic" and cannot be accomplished within the existing political system of liberal democratic values (equal civil rights for all citizens, respect for elections etc.) seem more likely to adopt violent repertoires.

2. While schisms or fragmentation are more likely to lead to violence, acts of spectacular violence by one movement, or their radical wings, often lead to further splintering. This can function in different ways: one faction my renounce violence and define itself against it, others may champion the violence and call for more.

3. Although transnational "civilisational" or identitarian movements are highly diffuse, waves of protest that include organised parties with dense networks from within these broad movements can be more predisposed to violence.

4. Far-right actors seem more likely to engage in violence when acting locally than transnationally. That is, while far-right actors engage in transnational movements, training and organisation, they rarely cross borders to carry out violence or engage in violence outside their home states.

5. Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment are the most resonant issues for far-right groups, and anti-immigrant/anti-Muslim protests have been most frequently violent over the last quarter century across Europe.

SCOPE OF MOVEMENT GOALS

The literature offers indirect support for categorising movements according to the scope of their goals and action. Although there are overlaps across types of movement, available evidence suggests that movements in one of four categories are more likely to radicalise members or support violent repertoires of activism: those whose goals are incompatible with the current political system that mobilise transnational identities; and three kinds of movements that seek change within the current political system. These include movements informed by transnational themes or events; transnational identities; or international politics. Importantly, this categorisation is synthesised inductively from the research and has not been tested outside of this review. More work is needed to theorise and empirically examine these relationships.

Movements related to transnational identities including race, religion, and "civilisational" dynamics whose goals are incompatible with the current political system. The evidence strongly suggests movements in this category are most likely to contribute to radicalisation or violence, since their anti-systemic nature means they cannot achieve the desired change in a liberal democracy. This category would include avowed militant or revolutionary groups that openly embrace violence (like ISIS) but also non-violent Islamist organizations like Hizb-ut Tahrir, profiled in REA1 (Salman et al., 2025). "Civilisational" movements include exclusionary far-right and White

Supremacist movements that reject the fundamental democratic value of equal citizenship for all citizens and instead demand legal inequality or exclusion from citizenship based on race, religion, gender or ethnic identity.

Movements devoted to justice around transnational themes or events that seek changes within the existing political system. The preponderance of research and case studies identified in the review belongs to this category, and includes movements responding to globalisation, financial austerity, and transnational economic justice issues. Many of the findings from the earlier reports remain relevant for this category: radical flanks and movement fragmentation are relevant internal factors, while violent suppression/militarised policing and inequality are external factors that seem to increase the likelihood of violence.

Movements related to transnational identities that seek social or political change within the existing political system. These include transnational feminist protests, for example, or protest movements for rights to religious freedom or other civic rights. These appear least likely to become violent, however they are vulnerable to counter-protests and in some political contexts – in particular in authoritarian systems – repression.

Movements related to international politics demanding change within existing systems. These include anti-war protests, which can bring together competing diaspora groups making claims as citizens of their host country. These protests movements, such as those around the Gaza events since October 7 can be "trasnversal" (Sadiki and Saleh 2024) inspiring counterprotests and cutting across many categories that might otherwise divide groups making them more likely to spread or diffuse across previously unrelated social groups. This is particularly the case when the host state is seen as complicit in supporting one side or the other.

MOVEMENT SCHISMS AND FACTIONS

The new movements of the "Global Right" are often described as falling into two categories, distinguished by ideology and scope: a "revolutionary" wing that "seeks to defend European identity from the multiculturalist threat of a 'Great Replacement' through immigration", and "national-conservatives," more concerned "with threats to moral order and the loss of moral bearing due to liberalism's relativism."(Varga and Buzogány 2022, 1089).

The "revolutionary" wing has been described as an 'esoteric, conspirationist and post-truth European New Right' (Varga and Buzogány 2022, 1094), and is highly engaged with conspiracy theories, including the notorious "great replacement" theory, which "foresees the replacement of long-established European populations by Muslim migrants and their offspring" (Sedgwick 2024, 548) or the "white genocide" conspiracy, which holds that this replacement is being facilitated by a secretive political order to deliberately extinguish the white race (Jackson 2015). A recent analysis of these movements in France and Germany found them to favour transnational alignments with Russia (Greene 2023), a question to which we will return in the final category below.

Within the revolutionary wing are other sub-movements and affiliated actors whose scope and goals specifically embrace violence. The counter-jihad movement is related to, and in some cases overlaps with "revolutionary white supremacy," a movement that strives for the total collapse of democratic societies and the establishment of white domination. This differs from other protest movements: its goal is to use explicitly violent actions to accelerate the total collapse of the system (Fürstenberg 2022). For these groups, their scope and goals push members and those they seek to influence toward radicalisation and violence.

In one of the first scholarly responses to the July 2024 riots that followed the Southport murders by Axel Rudakubana, Ince (2025) argues that far-right groups, who position themselves as responding to transnational migration, act according to their own internal logic of order and restoring order when they believe the state has failed to do so. This justifies acts of vigilantism during moments of unrest:

> **"Following the stabbing in Southport, what appeared to some onlookers as a failure of the state to protect white children, combined with misinformation about the identity of the attacker being allegedly a Muslim asylum seeker, meant that participants took the repressive function of state power into their own hands to create an atmosphere of fear and passivity among Muslim, non-white, and migrant groups. This self-appointed policing of public space is part of a longstanding tradition of far-right and fascist activism…." (Ince 2025, 55)**

Following Southport, Venkataramakrishnan argued that mis- and disinformation were mobilised to show that the state was failing to provide security or was part of a conspiracy to deny the "true nature" of the events (Venkataramakrishnan 2025, 11), in the face of a so-called "transnational threat".

In a large-data comparison of clusters of protests across 30 European countries (including the UK) between 2001 and 2021, Oana, Kriesi, and Altiparmakis (2024) found that of three clusters of transnational protests – the Eurozone economic crisis, the refugee crisis, and Covid-19 restrictions – protest mobilisations related to the perceived refugee crisis were more likely to include radical actions, including violence.

While the causal factors that made these protests more likely to become violent were outside the scope of the analysis, this study suggests that the internal character and ideology of the far-right groups involved in these protests helped interpret the increased likelihood of violence. Factors that seemed to contribute to violent escalation, including calls for vigilante action, included their rejection of political norms; perception of an existential threat against their civilisational/racial identity; and claims of disorder or failure of existing authorities to react to the perceived threat (Oana, Kriesi, and Altiparmakis, 2024). In Moskalenko's review of psychological research on radicalisation and violence, she cited other large-data studies in the US context that found a similar prevalence of violence associated with civilisational, right-wing causes:

> **"Since 9/11, 73% of all lethal ideological crimes in the United States have been carried out by right-wing militia groups – not by jihadists who were the primary targets of policing and deradicalizing efforts of the U.S. security apparatus." (Moskalenko 2023, 136).**

The likelihood that a movement embraces violence as a regular part of its repertoire is not static and under some circumstances can be catalysed by violent acts carried out by a self-identified member. The counter-jihad movement, for example, sees itself as a reaction to violence by Islamist militants against non-Muslims. In the past, members have used this to justify violence (Nissen and Lundstedt 2024; Archer 2013). However, following the 2011 attack in Norway by self-identified movement member Anders Breivik, the movement split. Many prominent actors distanced themselves from Breivik. Some, including its most prominent public advocate, Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, re-affirmed their engagement with mainstream politics (changing categories to "demanding change within a system"). Whilst far-right militant protest groups like Generation Identity will engage in protest, provocative action, and direct street violence to intimidate non-white citizens (Ravndal 2020) they reject outright terrorism.

TRANSNATIONAL RADICAL FLANKS

In many cases, diffuse movements have identifiable radical "flanks" that create the context for increased radicalisation. For example, analysis by Mok (2022) indicates that the Hindutva movement includes a radical online flank. This is much like other transnational far-right movements and overlaps with them on some of the same digital ecosystems (Mok 2022). Content within this radical flank is designed to dehumanise non-Hindus and especially Muslims, with the aim of radicalising young men to violence at home and abroad.

For far-right groups that have radical flanks, two studies conducted independently found strong evidence that the scope of political opportunity was negatively related to proclivity to violence: the more opportunities there were for non-violent engagement with the political system, the less likely violence was to occur (della Porta and Wagemann 2012b, 101; Minkenberg 2019)

"CIVILISATIONAL WARFARE"

'Civilisational' movements can be broken into subgroups: those with state sponsors allied with a host state (e.g., Hindutva), and those connected to state sponsors that are antagonistic to the host state (e.g., anti-liberal or far-right protests associated with Russian far-right groups). Those with state allies opposed to host state policies seem to carry a greater capacity for violence. This is both because of opportunities afforded due to their close proximity to potential targets and because they may have less to lose in an already antagonistic relationship; an issue that is discussed in more detail below.

One study drawn from the literature on war and conflict but with insights for mobilisation to violent protest argued that 'civilisational' transnational violent social movements are part of a new form of warfare (Kelshall 2019). As well as producing disinformation, this new kind of contention creates narratives of existential threat to inherently transnational identity groups, such as incels and other identities recently constructed in the digital age. These groupings see themselves as part of a "conflict [that] does not have the preservation of the state as a territorially important factor or reference point, but rather, the preservation and promotion of a cultural identity." (Kelshall 2019, 38). The violence promoted in these highly fragmented and diffuse identitarian movements is primarily associated with lone-actor attacks, including specifically the incel movement (Kelshall 2019).

Some of these "civilisational" movements explicitly claim to accept the limitations of democracy. For example, the international Islamist movement Hizb-ut Tahrir advocates for a radical change in the system of government but rejects violence (McNeil-Willson 2022). Others, including White Supremacist movements, imagine redrawing the geopolitical map and creating a "home state" for their transnational identity group (Perry and Blazak 2010). While a group's nature and goals alone don't clearly predict violence, case studies of violent protests suggest a heightened risk when the group's interactions with international contexts reject current political norms. Although more research is needed, this risk seems to be higher if violence is already occurring in the international context these identities are linked to.

2 This is drawn from the grey literature. It is a study by a qualified academic published and edited by a university-based think tank but not peer reviewed.

MOBILISATION STYLES

Recruitment is key to the growth and expansion of transnational movements, particularly those which are not responding to local events that might "organically" generate protests on the basis of shared local grievances or interpersonal networks. Transnational groups engage in varied mobilisation styles, from external groups that seek to message across borders to create new coalitions, to domestic groups that work to raise solidarity on transnational issues, or increase their own profile on the transnational scene to attract external support.

Significantly, as we will see below, some groups attempt to message to a very broad audience and increase mainstream acceptance of their platforms, while others use their broadest reach to recruit new supporters into closed groups on encrypted channels where they can share materials that might violate the terms of service on mainstream platforms (such as by advocating for violence or sharing graphic content).

Evidence on mobilisation styles is mixed: many of the studies did not find a clear vector or direction of change related to mobilisation style, while others found that change in platform or mobilisation style might decrease overall reach but refine the audience to a more committed core. There is good evidence that for transnational groups seeking to mobilise a cross-border audience, online efforts aren't as effective as might be assumed, but online efforts yield stronger effects when they focus on a "shared threat," such as immigration or Islam (Froio and Ganesh 2019).

Evidence from two studies supports a correlation between radicalisation to violence and a more focused mobilisation style and approach to messaging that sees users migrate across platforms so the audience becomes smaller and self-selecting (Chen, Lukito, and Koo 2023; Mok 2022). Although the research on social movements does not posit this as causal relationship (instead suggesting the link to radicalisation is indirect), this mobilisation style has been previously linked to violence in the terrorism literature for overtly violent groups that begin with sometimes "unbranded" content that might respond to widely held grievances aimed at a broad audience on a popular platform like YouTube or Instagram and then invite users into smaller groups on encrypted messenger platforms like Telegram where far more extreme content, including openly advocating violence, is shared (Tucker 2015). Further study is merited to understand whether comparable dynamics might be at work amongst ostensibly non-violent mobilisations. Finally, among far-right movements, there is evidence to suggest that local actions and smaller groups "inspired" by the transnational milieu are more likely to act violently than transnational groups acting across state borders (della Porta and Wagemann 2012b).

CROSS BORDER MESSAGING

Online engagement is the most common mechanism used to try and access and influence those across borders. However, this is not always effective. For far-right actors, increased opportunities to engage transnationally do not always lead to engagement. In a large-scale 2019 study of transnational Twitter posts from far-right actors in four European countries, including the UK, Froio and Ganesh (2019) found that intra-national engagement was significantly higher than cross-border engagement on most issues they identified, with two exceptions.

There was moderate engagement on economic issues, and one major unifying theme: "Islamophobia seems to be the transnational glue of the far right, bringing together extremely heterogeneous organizations operating in different political systems" (Froio and Ganesh 2019, 531). Economic issues were also most salient when they were framed as "native vs immigrant." This study also found that far-right "influencers" – charismatic individuals with large personal followings – were significantly more successful in generating cross-border engagement than parties or movement accounts. These results were limited to one platform – Twitter – and did not include analysis on other platforms where engagement is now more important.

PLATFORM MIGRATION AND AUDIENCE NARROWING

There is some evidence that transnational social movements seeking to radicalise members or build a narrative that justifies violence follow a similar strategy to that found in the terrorism literature for groups like ISIS. Movement activists work across several layers of media ecology using different platforms that progressively reach a smaller but more dedicated audience. The messages that are shared in these spaces increasingly focus on action frames (Chen, Lukito, and Koo 2023) and calls to violence (Tucker 2015).

In a large-scale study comparing posts contesting the 2020 US election results in the lead-up to the January 6th events, Chen, Lukito, and Koo (2023) analysed messages across Facebook, Twitter, and Parler. They found that the types of messages on each platform differed significantly. Narratives on Parler were much more likely to advocate for violence or seek to create narratives justifying it. While limited to right-wing messaging focusing on politics in the US, Mok (2022) similarly found that messaging from the radical wing of the Hindutva movement focused on radicalising a smaller, already more dedicated audience to provoke violent action. They also segregated their messaging on dedicated forums and encrypted messaging applications like Telegram and WhatsApp and even forums on the DarkWeb (Mok 2022).

The way these groups mobilise – by radicalising existing followers, dehumanising their targets, and making explicit calls for violence that violate mainstream platform rules – demonstrate the limits of only analysing public, unencrypted platforms. Such analyses may fail to detect genuine efforts at radicalisation or violent mobilisation and shifts in mobilisation strategies in the radical fringe that echo approaches adopted by explicitly violent groups.

COALITION BUILDING

Transnational movements seeking to build coalitions and seek engagement with a wider public are negatively associated with violence. However, building transnational coalitions can have mixed results at home. In a robust study of the global justice movement in four country case studies (Italy, Indonesia, the UK and Philippines), Daphi et al. (2022) found that local movements able to successfully build transnational alliances sometimes weakened relationships with local partners (Daphi, Anderl, and Deitelhoff 2022).Both entering coalitions and weakening local engagement networks were found to reduce the likelihood of violence across much of the evidence in their cases.

THINK GLOBALLY, COMMIT VIOLENCE LOCALLY

Della Porta and Wagemann's (2012b) research on extreme-right groups with transnational links revealed several patterns in right-wing violence. They found that smaller groups often used violence to gain attention. Notably, groups operating locally - even if connected to transnational narratives or events - were more violent than those acting internationally (Della Porta and Wagemann 2012b, 93). Additionally, extreme-right groups showed an increased propensity for violence when mobilising around political and migration issues.

Although this evidence is only drawn from a sample of far-right actors and movements and has not been tested against other movement types, evidence from other studies identified in this report suggests this may hold true for other movements independent of ideology (Finnsiö 2024; Dutta 2025).

EXTERNAL: TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS

This section considers the external factors that shape transnational movements and the actors within them. This ranges from transnational political contestation and inter-state wars like the Israel-Palestine conflict to internal repression that increasingly has transnational effects. Actions in one state, like Uyghur detention and "re-education" camps in China, increase out-migration, affect diasporas across the world, and increasingly become transnational as authoritarian states seek to control diaspora groups and police protesters across state borders.

Key points

1. Although complex and contextualised, the scope of mobilisation, communication style and tactics for transnational groups seems to be shaped by the nature of the contestation they are trying to affect. Diaspora groups facing violence in a homeland may be more likely to advocate violent resistance abroad; those facing violence in their host country and in their homeland can be more prone to escalation to violence in both places; and those supporting a clandestine insurgency may be more likely to focus mobilisation on a small, dedicated core rather than swaying public opinion.

2. Just as protest movements diffuse and learn from one another across borders, state governments also learn repressive approaches from one another. When one state escalates in violence in repressive measures, others may be more likely to follow suit. This escalation in repression has the potential to lead to riskier or more radical actions by protestors in response.

3. Closed opportunity structures and norms that counter those of the group are both more likely to lead groups to engage in violence.

4. Increasingly, authoritarian states seek to expand repression of dissent across borders. This has the potential to be more effective against diaspora living in states with high economic interdependence with their home state.

5. Supportive transnational "communities of practice" online can allow diffusion of ideas and tactics across borders and enable what might appear to be lone actor attacks.

6. When transnational protest movements and national political figures successfully collaborate within one country, it can strengthen the movement's activities and resources across borders.

TRANSNATIONAL ACTOR CONTEXTS

Atran's (2021) review of transnational violent movements reveals that the strategies used by these actors are shaped by the specific context they aim to influence. For protest movements, this means their approach to violent conflict and attempts to influence it varies. The context determines if they pursue mass recruitment, can operate legally, opt for clandestine or open recruitment, and where they recruit (Atran 2021).

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSIVE ESCALATION

Governments learn repressive techniques and technologies from one another. As repression of a protest movement escalates in one country, other countries are more likely to follow suite. Conversely, resistance to that repression can also be learned transnationally. Della Porta identified this process of transnational "learning" in her seminal work on protest policing in responses to

Global Justice Movement protests, and strong evidence supports this pattern across a spectrum of transnational movements (della Porta and Reiter 2018).

However, escalation and de-escalation are always complex processes influenced by a range of factors, from individual and affective, to global and even historical (Ayanian et al. 2025). Ayanian and Adra and their co-authors warn that repression and its responses can be difficult to predict and can often backfire by adding to grievances and prompting activists to change tactics. They note that escalating repression "including legal costs (e.g., arrests and detentions), financial costs (e.g., fines or career losses), and physical costs (e.g., injuries or killings)" fuel grievances and "have more often been linked to a higher willingness to engage in high-risk collective action" (Ayanian et al. 2025, 9).

Transnational repression from home states (Moss 2016) against their diaspora or émigré populations has become an increasingly salient feature of transnational protests since the Arab Spring. These efforts can be more salient when economic ties between a host state and a home state are important (Cordell and Medhi 2024). These relationships have the potential to create a heightened sense of threat and vulnerability for a diaspora group that fears their host state will not protect them. This is particularly relevant for Muslim minority or diaspora populations who may have fled authoritarian contexts, such as Uyghur refugees from China. This "double-precarity" – fear of repression in home country and subaltern status in the host country (Lemon and Jardine 2024) – does not lead to violence directly, but may play a role in inhibiting political or protest participation in the host country.

CONTRA-CONTEXT VALUES

Repressive or closed systems that go against the normative values promoted by extreme right social movements may encourage more extreme action (della Porta and Wagemann 2012b). That is, in systems that proscribe the right of neo-Nazi parties to participate in elections or do not support counter-cultural norms such as "racial purity" these groups may be more inclined to patriciate in violence. They also may justify violence by claiming to serve a wider, shared norm or value, like law-and-order, stability, or cleanliness, but interpreting those values in a significantly different way.

> **"Both individuals and organizations at the aggregate level justify their activities within a broader normative system, however deviant from the most commonly accepted one. Very often, they appeal to general norms that they feel have not been implemented, claiming that they act in order to stand in for institutions they perceive as too weak." (della Porta and Wagemann 2012b, 79).**

This framing has particular relevance to transnational protests against migration, especially when combined with mis- or disinformation that falsely creates or inflates the perception of threat from migrants and promotes the idea that the authorities are "doing nothing" in response. In their dataset drawn from far-right protest events in Italy, Germany, and the United States, della Porta and Wagemann found that the most closed political system – the United States – also had significantly more, and more serious violent action associated with far-right protests (2012b, 81).

Conflicts over normative values with diaspora or transnational groups can come into specific tension in relation to state policies and programmes aimed at counterterrorism. Lindekilde offers a typology of "backfire mechanisms" that lays out a theoretical framework for unintended consequences of state interventions that can inadvertently contribute to radicalisation. This covers strategic processes (resulting in unintended diffusion, for example); interaction processes (resulting in things like dehumanisation); and identity processes, backfiring in disenchantment with democratic values or increased commitment to the radical cause (Lindekilde 2014, 58).

TRANSNATIONAL "COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE"

Supportive transnational "communities of practice" around radical ideologies and protest movements form largely online and facilitate the diffusion of ideas and tactics across borders to facilitate or specifically to accelerate violence. These "communities," sometimes referred to in other works as "radical milieu," (Conway 2012) help enable and sometimes inspire what might at first appear to be 'lone actor' attacks.

The concept of "communities of practices" appears in a study by Furstenburg on collective learning among right-wing extremists in Germany and is echoed primarily in studies of far-right or White Supremacist groups, but close parallels emerge in two studies of Hindutva radical elements online (Mok 2022; Dutta 2025) as well as a variety of online, highly diffuse identity movements like incels (Kelshall 2019). In his study of a series of recent acts of antisemitic violence in Germany, Furstenburg argues:

> **"while right-wing terrorism is certainly not a new phenomenon, these attacks largely follow a new pattern: they were committed by extremists with no previous criminal record and without connections to organized groups who acted alone but were participants in far-right online communities. The common term 'lone wolf' to describe these kinds of terrorists is in that sense a misnomer, because it overlooks the fact that they are usually embedded in what could be called 'digital wolf packs'. (Fürstenberg 2022).**

Box 1: Case study
Communities of "Anti-Practice"

Transnational communities of practice are bidirectional. While they can support radicalisation and violence dissemination, they can also limit the opportunities available to transnational movements. McNeil-Willson's (2022) interviews with former activists indicate that UK-based civil society organisations, which opposed Hizb-ut Tahrir and its aims (even "emulating" counter-terrorism or Prevent goals), significantly hindered the movement's growth and public engagement. This effect was compounded by a "community of anti-practice" made up of former members.

Synthesised evidence from across the literature underpinning McNeil-Willson's study suggests that these communities of "anti-practice" may backfire, closing public and system engagement, creating new grievances (or reinforcing old ones), increasing perceptions of marginalisation, and producing civil rights concerns.

For conflicts rooted in "sacred values," especially those occurring within or between diaspora groups, the research on transnational dynamics strongly suggests that states and political actors must consistently demonstrate their commitment to democratic rules, norms, and the principle of equal rights (and responsibilities) under the law for every citizen. Perceptions of unfairness, or that one diaspora receives favoured treatment over another because of economic ties or political connections, are consistently cited as factors that can catalyse escalation to violence.

PERCEIVED SUPPORT FROM NATIONAL POLITICAL ACTORS

When a transnational movement becomes involved in local politics or protests and is perceived by local actors to be sponsored or supported by a foreign government in favour of its diaspora, this external support can exacerbate fears within the community of unfair treatment or increased permission to engage in extreme behaviours. This dynamic is particularly salient when the external state linked to one diaspora is a close ally of the host country and rival diaspora home states are not.

The report Hindutva in Britain released by the Community Policy Forum in 2023 cites both of these factors as exacerbating tensions that led to violence between Hindu and Muslim diaspora communities in Leicester in 2022 (Community Policy Forum, 2023). While this evidence is largely qualitative/anecdotal and preliminary for this specific context, it is linked to stronger evidence that perceptions of discrimination and threat are linked to increased in-group identification and the potential for violence.

INTERACTION AFFECTS: MECHANISMS OF MOBILISATION

This section focuses on the interaction dynamics between actors in the local and transnational contexts and the mechanisms by which external actors seek to exert influence on protest movements. It highlights recent research on the opportunities for interaction; solidarity building and cooperation created by social media; narratives used to create that solidarity and call to action (including mis- and disinformation); and the ways in which these media ecospheres and the identities they create are rapidly evolving.

Key points:

1. Social media is a powerful tool for building transnational solidary between actors and groups who would not otherwise interact. This is particularly relevant for fringe and extremist movements that are substantially less likely to meet like-minded individuals in person.

2. Social media allows disparate groups to share – or discover – common grievances and build alliances. Eyewitness video is a powerful form of alternative information that helps build those solidarities.

3. "Alternative narratives" shared by transnational activists online that contradict mainstream media reporting or commonly held understandings, enhance the attraction and sense of urgency of these narratives, but are also subject to manipulation (and falsification).

4. A vast and stable network of radical influence exists across multiple platforms online that make rapid escalation to anti-migrant violence like the Southport events in 2024 possible. While current research has mapped this newly evolved network around anti-immigrant themes, the evolution of social media platforms and evolving responses by extremist groups suggest rapid escalations to violence around other issues are increasingly possible.

5. A study of violent protests in the US found that when online activity is the primary form of political engagement, violence and illegal protest are more likely.

ONLINE NETWORKS

Social media in particular plays a key role in building transnational solidarity in movements that otherwise would not be aware of having a common cause. Online networks are especially important to transnational movements that have fewer opportunities to connect in person. In their network analysis study of far-right extremist websites and influencers, even before the social media age, della Porta and Wagemann found "there is strong consensus that online activities substantially improve the capacity of such extremist groups to raise funds, attract new followers, and reach a mass audience." (della Porta and Wagemann 2012a, 56).

Social media has accelerated that trend significantly and increased the ability of disparate movements to build connections and solidarities across national boundaries and issues. In a study exploring cross-movement relationship building between Black Lives Matter protestors in the Midwestern United States and Gaza, Lusk and Badran describe that "[s]ocial media helps disparate movements build connections, mobilize participants and tangible resources, foster coalition building, and amplify alternative narrative... In essence, social media allows like-minded activists to connect with each other." (Badran and Lusk 2024).

This dynamic is particularly evident when sharing videos that purport to be eyewitness and unmediated evidence of oppression suffered by one group at the hands of another (Badran and Lusk 2024, 10–12). Whilst the "alternative narratives" that may contradict mainstream media reporting or commonly held understandings enhance the attraction and sense of urgency (Badran and Lusk, 2024).

This kind of firsthand media is also subject to manipulation from both state actors and loosely organised movements. Among state actors (discussed in detail in the next section), Russia has created a substantial apparatus that attempts to build its own "alternative" narratives using highly organised and deliberate disinformation operations (Sanovich 2018). The effects of these efforts are not limited to creating specific narratives; they also work to undermine other sources of information that help create a shared sense of reality in democratic publics, including mainstream media and government messages (Pomerantsev 2015).

New technologies, including generative AI, are increasingly contributing to these efforts. Not so much to create credible disinformation, as to undermine faith in other sources. Strong evidence, for example, from one of the early large-scale studies of responses to both real and suspected "deep fake" videos in social media messages about the Russia-Ukraine war on Twitter/X in 2022 indicates that suspicion of AI-generated content undermines trust in real and credible information and fuels conspiracy theories more often than successful fakes spread disinformation (Twomey et al. 2023). Evidence suggests misinformation efforts by non-state actors in loosely organised movements like Hindutva (Dutta 2025; Mok 2022), anti-migrant influencers (Verma et al. 2025), or other transnational protest movements claiming oppression, play a key role in justifying their own calls for violence or the violence of their members.

While these mobilisation styles do not themselves make a movement more likely to engage in violence, working backwards from violent events to analyse mobilisation styles provides insights into the dynamics at work, as well as pointing at avenues for future research.

Box 2
Mapping the Transnational "Webs of Influence" That Helped Drive Southport Violence

The 2024 anti-immigrant riots that erupted following the murder of three young dance students by a lone attacker in Southport were fuelled by the spread of misinformation falsely claiming the attacker was an immigrant and a terrorist.

Building on the initial finding from the Office of Communications (OfCom) that "there was a clear and direct connection between the 2024 UK riots and activity on social media and messaging apps", research by Verma and a team at the Dynamic Online Networks Laboratory, George Washington University sought to understand how "the riots manage[d] to mobilize thousands of people in otherwise unconnected cities across the UK virtually simultaneously." (1).

They note that while initially it appeared plausible that many disparate individuals could have reacted independently to the same misinformation alleging that a Muslim asylum seeker had perpetrated the Southport murders, "this fails to explain the effectively simultaneous onsets of the disparate riots and the similar speed of their escalations" (1).

Drawing on early initial reporting and investigations that found evidence of interconnected, transnational networks of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim influence online, involving "remnants of" the English Defence League (EDL), Patriotic Alternative, and Britain First, the study created a large dataset drawing on 30 platforms. This process identified billions of accounts and mapped networks of roughly 3 million nodes comprised of around 50 million individual accounts that were identified as hate movements and allied influencers during the period leading up to the riots.

The research found:

- A huge, cross-platform web-of-influence focused on anti-immigrant messaging existed well before the riots, involving local, national and global online hate and extremism communities.
- This web-of-influence fed misinformation to would-be rioters in each city mainly through video platforms.
- Because of its feedback across scales and across topics such as immigration, this web-of-influence is persistent and resilient, and continues to be a significant local, national, and international threat as "its use of multiple lesser-known platforms that put it beyond any single government or platform's reach." (Verma et al. 2025) .

It should be noted, however, that these preliminary studies, including Venkataramakrishnan (2025) described above, analyse and measure the media ecosphere engaging in the themes that justified or encouraged violence, but do not look at forensic evidence from any of the specific cases and can't link generalised conclusions to specific suspects charged with crimes.

CROSS-CHANNEL COMMUNICATION, LOOSE SHARED INTERESTS

A smaller, qualitative analysis by Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan (2025) of anti-immigrant movement messaging on Telegram and X following the Southport events found a similarly amorphous and irregular structure in the cluster of groups and channels, especially on Telegram, that became involved in spreading disinformation. In contrast to past violent protests which had identifiable instigators or organisation, here, a wide range of online communities shared misinformation linked to the violence, from health and climate change conspiracy channels to football hooligans and "manosphere" influencers (Venkataramakrishnan 2025). In this structure, "individuals can join or leave multiple groups and there is no singular membership... these groups typically lack a clear leadership figure. The affordances of Telegram allow users to rapidly forward content from other channels..." (Venkataramakrishnan 2025, 9).

As discussed below, in work on cross-national diffusion of protest movements, Della Porta et al. (2024) found that new waves of transnational protest actions have become more diffuse and less organised, with actors only tenuously connected to one another through shared interests and identities online. None of the reviewed research argues that these changes have a causal relationship to violence. However, it does raise the concern that outbursts of violence like those following Southport may be harder to predict, prevent, and explain using earlier approaches to social movement mobilisation, and suggests that older research on recruitment and mobilisation patterns may be becoming less relevant.

FORM OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT SHAPES LIKELIHOOD OF ILLEGAL PROTEST

Research on waves of protest in the US drawing on survey data from 2019 found a positive link between social media engagement and illegal protest. Specifically, individuals whose main political activity was online, rather than traditional methods like voting, were more likely to participate in illegal demonstrations (Inguanzo, Carty, and Gil de Zúñiga 2024). Although the study did not distinguish between explicitly violent protest and illegal but non-violent civil disobedience, it included transnational issues like racial identity and far-right and far-left movements.

The authors conclude that "social media political participation" that involves creating or seeking out social media groups specifically dedicated to political causes is positively associated with illegal protest. They theorise four different mechanisms that help shape online political participation in this direction: radicalisation fostered by these contexts online; misinformation; normalisation of dissatisfaction with current institutions (creating the sense that community opinion no longer views current institutions as legitimate) and "specifically, normalization of illegal acts" (Inguanzo, Carty, and Gil de Zúñiga 2024).

MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Overall, the research indicates that the use of social media as a mechanism of mobilisation offers opportunities for disaffected or disengaged citizens to encounter transnational calls for radical action and to be exposed to misinformation that appears to support extra-parliamentary tactics. Case-study based research which draws on evidence from beyond the social movement literature suggests that transnational social media mechanisms merit further research.

It should be noted, however, that several studies stressed the role that traditional media continue to play in shaping the context in which radical actions take place and may inadvertently participate in cycles of escalation. This includes in the context of contention between protestors and authorities (Rosie and Gorringe 2009); the transnational spread of radical tactics (Nissen and Lundstedt 2024); grievances including perceived unfair treatment of one diaspora group in favour of another (Dutta 2025); and broadly shared concern that political rhetoric within the mainstream system and traditional media may contribute to marginalising groups that may be targeted for violence, including specifically immigrants.

ACCELERATIONIST EFFORTS BY STATE ACTORS

Accelerationist social movements are archetypically associated with the White Supremacist and Identitarian far-right within the United States which developed that tactic as part of their violent repertoire in the 1980s (Belew 2018). Accelerationism has spread to diffuse anti-systemic movements that have flexible ideologies but whose members share a commitment to undermining the existing order through violence. This includes movements connected to the transnational far-right such as the US-based Boogaloo Bois (Kriner and Lewis 2021). By interacting with mainstream protest movements as diverse as Black Lives Matter, they seek to push them into violent confrontation with authorities to precipitate broader confrontation with the system.

While no evidence that these groups are active in Europe was identified in the research for this report, allied groups including the Proud Boys have built in-person networks and exchanges with UK movements implicated in recent violence following the Southport events (Dutta 2025, 33), suggesting that the potential for links and shared tactics in the "community of practice" merits further investigation.

There is evidence that state actors, notably Russia, have adopted this tactic across multiple country contexts in the Europe (Rekawek 2024). State actors support protests, faux grassroots groups, and vigilante groups in Europe and the US, to promote violence and inflame violent protest on the basis of shared interests or as part of an effort to undermine rivals (Rekawek, 2024).

Russian efforts to develop a counter-civil society that could help mobilise counter-protests have included the UK (Cooley, Heathershaw, and Oliveira 2024). Although findings for this review did not support this as a mechanism for violence, grey literature suggests that some of these actors, particularly those sponsored by Russia, may seek to escalate protest to violence with a goal of undermining stability in European states (Butt and Byman 2020; Polyakova et al. 2016; Rekawek and Molas 2024).

MIS- AND DISINFORMATION

The evidence indicates that mis- and disinformation are strongly correlated to the potential for violence in the context of transnational mobilisations. Misinformation can be inadvertent and sharing it does not inherently mean an actor or group is advocating or attempting to stoke violence. But both malicious misinformation and disinformation can be harnessed in efforts to drive a wedge between identity groups (Dutta 2025); strengthen identity fusion against a perceived (or constructed) threat (Bonnin and Lane 2022); and desensitise viewers to violence.

As discussed in other sections, Russia and Russian-allied movements and actors are primary agents in the disinformation and "re-information" space (Rekawek 2024). Russian state-funded media, foundations and pseudo-think tanks produce deliberate disinformation in multiple European languages, focusing on "alternative" messages that inflame grievances within democratic societies, and offer a platform to fringe movements, including many prominent figures on the far-right.

Rekawek (2024) uses "re-information" to signal that Russian operations are aimed at countering institutions that help create democratic consensus around liberal democratic values and support for foreign policy positions, in particular opposition to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and occupation of its territory. Open disinformation operations linked to Russia include false versions of what appear to be reporting from major mainstream outlets, including the BBC.

THE REAL EFFECTS OF FAKE NEWS

A particular piece of disinformation came to play a widely covered role in the Southport events when Elon Musk, the owner of X (formerly Twitter) reshared a fake Daily Telegraph news story portraying an announcement that Prime Minister Kier Starmer was considering sending those arrested during the anti-migrant unrest to "detention camps" in the Falkland Islands (Vaccari et al. 2025).

To test the effect of credibility of false messages attributed to reputable outlets, Vaccari et al (2025) conducted a robust (n=2580) survey experiment on WhatsApp asking respondents to rate the credibility of both true and false stories attributed to BBC news and true and false stories without specific attribution. They found that BBC attribution significantly increased credibility, but more importantly that false stories attributed to BBC were "statistically indistinguishable" from true/real ones (Vaccari et al. 2025).

According to preliminary assessments from the grey literature, mis- and disinformation played a meaningful role in inflaming interethnic clashes between local Hindu and Muslim communities in Leicester in August and September 2022 (Community Policy Forum, 2023). This included media produced abroad which overlapped with far-right influencers and disinformation, as well as Hindutva outlets, which found common cause in Islamophobic content often fuelled by disinformation:

> **"Ultimately, social media disinformation and activity, as a whole, perpetuated tensions in Leicester by proliferating false or otherwise unhelpful narratives… It is evident, however, that there was a concerted campaign of disinformation from Hindutva online accounts in relation to the Leicester disturbances, whereas Muslim activity on social media was individual-based and not nearly as coordinated or widespread (41)."**

Box 3
Entanglements of resistance and repression in the UK's 'far-right riots' of 2024

Although scholarship from the social movement literature remains very preliminary, Ince published an early research review of available sources relevant to interpreting the violence following the Southport attack. This argued that the misinformation-fuelled response was a form of repression that interacted with years of systemic and political "otherisation" of migrants and non-citizens by a wide array of actors. This included the state, whose perceived failure to adequately repress the "migrant threat" was presented as justification for vigilante response. Although the online element of the mobilisation was important, the webs-of-influence were embodied in very real actors offline.

> **"Amidst public grief and shock, rumours circulated online about the identity of the attacker, falsely claiming that they were a Muslim asylum seeker. This misinformation was distributed across social media, with global far-right and 'manosphere' influencers such as Tommy Robinson (real name: Stephen Yaxley-Lennon), Andrew Tate, and Elon Musk amplifying the message to their followers" (Ince 2025, 53).**

Ince notes that although some violence was seemingly random or opportunistic "the targeting of specific buildings and individuals" should be seen as a pattern typical of "far-right vigilantism." Following the stabbing in Southport, "what appeared to some onlookers as a failure of the state to protect white children, combined with misinformation about the identity of the attacker... meant that participants took the repressive function of state power into their own hands.'" This study argues that the purpose of this vigilantism was to "create an atmosphere of fear and passivity among Muslim, non-white, and migrant groups," noting that this "self-appointed policing" of public spaces is a longstanding tradition in far-right activism (55).

As della Porta and Wagemann found in their study of far-right movements in Italy, German, and the US (della Porta and Wagemann 2012b) , Ince argues that the anti-migrant movement in the UK seized on misinformation to claim they were serving a higher cause and their vigilante actions were made necessary by failure of existing authorities to keep public space in order by putting "them" – the migrant, alient, other – in their "proper place." But, he stresses:

> **"This was… not a state-like organised strategy of repression, but an often-impulsive assemblage of individual and collective actions – some planned, some undertaken in the moment – that included strongly repressive intentions and effects, and that revelled in their temporary control of public space" (55).**

Across the literature, there is strong support that both dis- and misinformation are currently key tools in the communication strategies and narrative structuring that helps to build group identity, enhance cohesion, and inspire action, in particular for those groups in the transnational anti-systemic "civilisational" or identitarian subgrouping (Singam 2025).

In many cases, mis- or disinformation is produced or spread within broad movements, such as the global far-right, but at times it is financed and produced by identifiable actors with deliberate intent to have a radicalising effect. These include, for example, actors like ISIS who pioneered the technique of harnessing unaffiliated "sympathisers" to spread their own messages to a wider public (Veilleux-Lepage 2016). This includes messages that amplify grievances experienced by Muslims and immigrants in the United States seeking to motivate "inspired" acts of violence without ever engaging the group.

MOVEMENT-CONTEXT INTERACTIONS

This section examines ways in which interactions between local, national and transnational contexts shape actors seeking to create change on any of these levels. It includes the effects of far-off violence in homelands on diaspora groups at home, the sense of frustration among local level movements that transnational grievances cannot be resolved through national politics, and considers why individuals or movements on the local level may come to see their transnational (e.g., diaspora or religious identity) as more salient than local identities.

Key points

1. Geopolitical change and supranational processes often give rise to grievances that cannot be resolved through national politics, leading individuals and local-level movements to seek new mechanisms and repertoires for contestation.

2. Local and transnational movements interact not only with one another, but are also shaped by and interact with national political actors and contexts. Political elites can create or inflame grievances and create permissive structures that expand the space for action for transnational groups.

3. Transnational identities can become more salient than local identities in ways that lead to violence in the same ways other identity groups can, in particular, in response to perceived threat and discrimination.

4. The sense of transnational perceived threat and discrimination is strongest and most likely to lead to violence when it is connected to real-world violence, even if that violence is occurring far away.

5. Violence against other people is not the only form that can lead to radicalisation and violent action. Violence against group symbols or "sacred values" are also correlated with willingness of "devoted actors" to fight or die on behalf of a transnational "value" group.

6. Transnational networks can play a crucial role in connecting – or constructing – the link between far-off violence or threats and local contexts, sometimes using disinformation.

7. Ostracism is a powerful trigger of both identity fusion and willingness to take extreme actions to prove devotion to a group.

8. State support for radical transnational movements, including offering safe haven for training, resources and information, can help push local movements into violent actions.

GRIEVANCES LINKED TO GEOPOLITICAL CHANGE

Strong dissatisfaction with geopolitics and perceived inability to influence these transnational processes by peaceful means have emerged in the literature as a factor explaining public support for violence by non-state actors (W.R. Louis 2009). Broad ranging concerns over globalisation, for example, have the potential to unite a variety of actors in ways which can shape the conditions for violence on the basis of a broadly shared set of grievances (Della Porta 2007). This includes perceived lack of democratic legitimacy in supranational processes and international government organisations that are not accountable to specific populations. This is a grievance that cuts across the ideological spectrum, except for those anti-systemic fringe groups that reject democracy entirely (Della Porta 2007).

Although grievances are primarily associated in the social movement literature with left-wing protests that emerged in the first wave of contentious transnational protests, the literature on right-wing movements also cites a link between waves of austerity and ethno-nationalist transnational movements. Crowley (2020) finds a strong statistical correlation in both the US and the UK that supports his hypothesis:

> **"districts that experienced more severe fiscal austerity saw a corresponding rise in anti-immigrant and ethnic nationalist attitudes… [P]opulist political entrepreneurs created, materially and ideologically, a zero-sum politics of scarcity that cast an ethno-national community of deserving left-outs in competition with an extractive, foreign Other." (Crowley 2020).**

A link between these mechanisms and the turn of far-right protests to violence in July 2024, for example, is suggested in Ince's preliminary review of the evidence in Box 3 (Ince 2025).

TRANSNATIONAL AND LOCAL IDENTITIES

Findings from the first two reports in this series remain highly relevant to this question, especially the focus on the role of identity-related factors in mobilisation to violence (Peterscheck et al., 2025). Each individual is connected to multiple layers of collective identities that can become more or less salient in different contexts. This section will briefly reprise insights from the previous reports that lend evidence to why the transnational layer can at times become more salient than local identity, and then explore findings from the expanded survey results and materials from the core findings that speak specifically to this issue.

Identity factors, especially perceived threats and discrimination are highly relevant. These perceptions of threat may not be accurate – they can be created by misinformation or deliberately constructed with disinformation – but strong evidence shows a correlation between the salience of transnational identity and real-life violence happening elsewhere, in particular for diaspora groups responding to conflict, violent repression or pogroms in their homelands.

Perceived threats and discrimination are relevant to all collective group identities; strong evidence indicates that both enhance identification with the group. This is true not just in the present or the prospective, but also in shaping nostalgia and collective memory in response to angst about a perceived threat (Wohl, Stefaniak, and Smeekes 2020). This is particularly relevant to transnational identities where actors evoke an "imagined past" when the local "we" group was not "contaminated" or threatened by an alien "invader."

Some evidence indicates that concerns over a threat to a collective identity is also mediated by the perceived continuity of that group/identity (Jaśkiewicz, Besta, and Borchet 2022). This suggests that more stable transnational identities like gender, race, ethnicity or religion may become more salient when local connections are seen as less durable or more tenuous. While this theme would require more research, it suggests that lower levels of perceived inclusion and belonging to a local identity that is changeable – for example, community, city, citizenship – may increase the salience of more "stable" identities – like an imagined homeland or home community, a process which is especially relevant when that community is perceived as under threat.

As already noted in the second report in this series (Peterscheck et al., 2025), Wohl and colleagues (Wohl, King, and Taylor 2014) found in their work on group identity and support for (violent) protest among Somali and Tamil diaspora in Canada, that perceptions of threat against ethnic and religious collective groups both enhanced identity salience and willingness to act violently. Experience of discrimination against a transnational group identity also enhanced group identification and willingness to participate in collective action, but was not found to be linked alone to violence (Schmuck and Tribastone 2020).

Closely networked diaspora movements can respond to transnational events and protest extreme violence without becoming violent in their host countries (Chao 2024). This can be the case even in the face of repression from local and national authorities or criminalisation (Browne, Weizman, and Matchain 2025), in fact this lack of escalation to violence in protests involving diaspora groups is the norm rather than the exception in the assessment results. This leaves important questions about why protests related to diaspora identities can become violent in those exceptions, such as the Leicester violence in 2022.

As suggested in some of the studies described above, perceived threat or discrimination become most relevant to transnational identities when they are linked to real-world violence involving the group. Koinova's 2013 comparative study of Albanian diaspora activism during the Kosovo independence movement found that protest actions were most likely to become radical or violent when they were linked to real-world violence in the Balkan war and violent repression against movement (Koinova 2013).

SACRED VALUES

Scott Atran and his collaborators have developed a framework with the potential to interpret why transnational identities are perceived as under threat and/ or why violence against symbols can be perceived as the same as violence against the group. This perspective argues that "will to fight" (Atran, Sheikh, and Sheikh 2015), and in particular to engage in dangerous activities that may result in self-sacrifice, can be better understood not via identities, but though a focus on sacred values (Atran 2014). Sacred values are defined in contrast to material or instrumental motivations because they uniquely "incorporate moral beliefs that drive action in ways that seem dissociated from prospects for success. Across the world, people believe that devotion to essential or core values — such as the welfare of their family and country, or their commitment to religion, honor, and justice — are, or ought to be, absolute and inviolable" (Atran and Axelrod 2008, 222)

Atran argues that approaches to understanding the success of transnational movements in mobilising violence and enhancing the salience of transnational identities – both religious and ethnic/racial – cannot be fully understood without reference to sacred values. Using experimental evidence to gauge willingness to support violence in defence of sacred values within both Islam and democracy (Sheikh, Gómez, and Atran 2016), Atran and his colleagues found evidence that identity fusion serves a mediating role. Where a group is organised around sacred values, more highly-fused ("kin-like") ties predicted support for violence in defence against a threat. This study is limited to hypothetical experimental conditions, and Atran acknowledges the complexity of the issues and the necessity of multi-layered, multi-factorial approaches (Atran 2021).

Using another novel approach, Nafees Hamid and colleagues tested responses to sacred values scenarios with identified al-Qaida supporters in Spain (Hamid et al. 2019). Results were consistent with the hypothesis that "'devoted actors' motivated by an extreme commitment towards sacred values rely on distinctive neurocognitive processes that can be identified" (Hamid et al. 2019, 2), and suggested a neurocognitive pathway by which violations of sacred values can assume immediate salience over other identities and mediating factors.

Perceived violations of sacred values do not automatically lead to violence, however. In the case of the Lady of Heaven protest movement in 2022, for example, several of the same factors overlap with the Leicester riots later that same year – including violation or perceived threat against sacred values and connection to a broader (in this case, Sunni-Shia) conflict that has frequently resulted in violence elsewhere – but these events did not escalate. Similarly, the literature surveyed contained several examples of Quran burnings as a transnational accelerationist strategy used by counter-jihad or far-right activists to provoke violence by deliberately transgressing sacred values that failed to provoke escalation (Nissen and Lundstedt 2024)

OSTRACISM AND IDENTITY FUSION

Ostracism from the ingroup or outgroup can increase the likelihood that those with identities 'fused' to the group will engage in extreme actions to prove their loyalty to the group. In this way, identify fusion plays a key role in someone's willingness to take extreme actions in response to their experience of being ostracised. "Past analyses have suggested that ostracism is vexing because it frustrates four distinct needs: belongingness, control, meaningful existence/recognition, and self-enhancement" (Gómez et al. 2011, 1584). This research notes that individuals may be more open to take extreme actions to prove membership in the group regardless of the source of or rationale for the rejection. That is, they will respond in a similar way regardless of whether the threat to identity comes from inside or outside the group, and the type of response is most directly mediated by the degree of identity fusion.

NETWORKS THAT CREATE PERCEPTIONS OF THREAT

Threats to identity or sacred values that raise the salience of a transnational identity are not always direct or immediate. Perceptions of transnational threat, especially in relation to events happening elsewhere in the world, are mediated not only by mechanisms of communication, but also at times by networks that deliberately construct the notion of threat in order to mobilise collective action. They can also develop in interaction between actors with a stake in the contention.

Somewhat in contrast to Atran's "sacred values/devoted actor' model, a simpler model from social psychology suggests that particularly during confrontational protests, participants can develop a "radicalized self-concept" that forms in interaction with an opposing group (Drury and Reicher 2000). During repeated iterations of confrontation, this helps explain how identity fusion may accelerate: "[r]esearch on identity fusion and self-sacrifice suggests that heightened autonomic arousal can amplify willingness to engage in extreme pro-group behaviours, particularly when there is already a strong sense of belonging to the group" (Peterscheck et al 2025, p. 28).

Evidence indicates that elements within wider movements like Hindutva have used strategic communication and mis- or disinformation to create a "global flow of Hindutva across geographically dispersed contexts, connecting the diaspora with India, creating an uninterrupted communication infrastructure around the frame of the "Hindu in danger" (Dutta 2025, 20). The perception of immediate, existential threat in the form of an identified "other" can be nurtured across national lines, in this case seeking to mobilise people around one diaspora identity against another. Converting a majoritarian identity in the homeland to an aggrieved or victim minority abroad in this way is a process that several scholars argue came into clear view during the Leicester events (Dutta 2025; Ranjan and Banerjee 2024a).

Material within this review suggests that in the UK context, some of the more extreme elements of Hindutva networks overlap with White Supremacist and/ or far-right networks and narratives, and that this milieu can borrow anti-Islamic rhetoric and materials from adjacent diffuse far-right movements (Mok 2022; Leidig 2020; Dutta 2025). Some work on far-right movements, however, notes that contemporary far-right rhetoric has evolved from a primary focus on anti-Muslim narratives in the early 2000s to broader anti-immigrant rhetoric that tends to reject alliances with non-white populations (Dutta 2025). Although, materials online may be instrumentalised to fit the goals of the moment regardless of origin, which is often unknown (Dutta 2025).

The communications scholar Mohan Dutta calls this online mediated process, "the interplay of the performance of victimhood and the simultaneous deployment of hate in the Indian diaspora" (Dutta 2025, 21). However, other scholars note that while Hindutva activism is better organised and supported

by significant resources, Muslim activists responding to escalating street actions in Leicester also promoted misinformation and false claims that inflamed tensions (Ranjan and Banerjee 2024a). Early grey literature analysis notes that external Muslim extremist activists attempted to promote inflammatory narratives (Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2022). Activists on both sides sought to persuade their audiences that political or cultural institutions in the UK were biased against them, forming narratives that promoted grievances about unjust treatment in the system in which both ethnic and religious groups have equal rights and protections (ISD 2022).

It should be noted, however, that this review did not explore Hindutva as a topic in and of itself, and has not included the broader literature on Hindutva as a movement, only that which referred to it in relation to violence. However, while the research on the events in Leicester are scant and preliminary for an event so recent, the available studies broadly agree that a history of unresolved local tension, misinformation, dissemination by established extremist actors with a much wider following and – most of all – perceived connections to a long and far deadlier history of violence in South Asia all played roles in elevating the salience of transnational diaspora identities and escalation of conflict in this case.

"SAFE HAVEN" OR EXTERNAL STATE SUPPORT

While support afforded by state actors is more directly relevant to armed conflict, research has considered the role of international actors in supporting the practical mobilisation of resources, which has implications for interpreting when and why violence occurs. Such resources may include training, network development and support for violence seeking to influence more mainstream mobilisations (Enstad 2015).

The primary relevant actor in the literature within the scope of this report is Russia, and its multifaceted support for what Rekawek and Molas call "political warfare", in which Russia "encourages, funds, inspires, and rallies a string of radical and extremist actors who explicitly may not even be pro-Moscow, but act as political disruptors in their respective countries" (Rekawek and Molas 2024, 1).

Russia and its aligned domestic actors play a direct and observable role in helping to organise and support sundry illiberal or anti-liberal movements and actors, inviting religious or ethnic supremacist movement members from the US and Europe to travel to Moscow for conferences and networking opportunities (Riccardi-Swartz 2021). Strong evidence shows links between some of those actors and protests that have escalated into violence, such as in Charlottesville in 2017 (Byman and Butt 2020). The range of tactics are broad, from hosting and producing sources of mis- and disinformation to offering training to influencers and journalists, platforms for local far-right and anti-systemic influencers.

Training camps operated by far-right militant groups including the Russian Imperial Movement have played a role in training and equipping members of the Nordic Resistance Movement in Sweden to expand their repertoire of violent action from protests and threats to bombs targeting migrants (Finnsiö 2024). Neither the Russian Imperial Movement nor the Nordic Resistance Movement appear to have sanctioned the escalation. According to Finnsio (2024) and evidence presented at trial, the interaction between individuals and their new setting – in addition to the new skills and capabilities they acquired as a result – furthered their radicalisation and inspired them to act violently on their own in violation of instructions from their group (Finnsiö 2024, 275).

This case study and others like it highlights the importance of a multi-layered approach. This makes it possible to interpret how transnational interactions can have effects on some individuals that differ from their peers, and create outcomes that higher-level actors, be that a national or international group, or state that sanctioned the activity, did not necessarily predict or intend.

Box 4: Russia's "Political Warfare"

Russian and the Far-Right: Insights from Ten European Countries

Rekawek K, Renard T, Molas B .The Hague, ICCT Press, (2024)

Russia emerges as an important transnational actor across multiple categories, from mis- and dis-information to accelerationist efforts and as a source of financing, resources, and organisation for fringe and extremist movements. Rekawek, Renard and Molas offer both strong evidence and theorisation about what unifies the Russian state's disparate actions under Putin and the strategy they are designed to serve:

> **"Russia has an established record of waging political warfare on its competitors on the world stage or practising "an ongoing subversion campaign in Europe and the United States, using tactics short of war." Effectively, such an approach equals "the employment of military, intelligence, diplomatic, financial, and other means – short of conventional war – to achieve national objectives." As was demonstrated by the likes of Anton Shekhovtsov, this approach also involves liaising with and supporting anti-systemic far-right parties intent on redrawing the political map of different Western countries. By 2024, it should not be a surprise that Russia encourages, funds, inspires, and rallies a string of radical and extremist actors who explicitly may not even be pro-Moscow, but act as political disruptors in their respective countries."**
>
> **(Rekawek and Molas 2024, 1)**

> **"[This work] considers Russia's harmful influence upon the European threat landscape as a two-way street in which actors on both sides play an equally active role in shaping power relations. All for one common goal: destroy democratic debate at home and abroad."**
>
> **(Rekawek and Molas 2024, 6)**

CONCLUSIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In a similar way to the first two reports in this series, the literature does not support a single-factor explanation for escalation to violence related to transnational identities. The existence of a movement connected to strong political and economic patronage; diffuse mobilisation; disinformation; online connectivity and the construction of a perceived threat against a group or its sacred values; enhanced identity fusion and perceived ostracism or contrary values and norms to the host community all combine – inter alia – to contribute to violent outcomes.

Moderating factors or mechanisms that limit escalation to violence are also largely the same as for other forms of protest. These include mechanisms for grievances to be addressed within the system, and coalition building between movements and a wider public. Policing or restricting protest, civil society involvement, and exclusion from public space are all cited across different parts of the research as potentially moderating factors, but all can also backfire and become counterproductive. Policing of social media and enforcement of terms of service rules by platforms are cited in several studies as both a recommendation and a process that continues to evolve. However the research is relatively under-developed and no studies in the review presented evidence that these approaches are successful in reducing violence or the capacity for violence.

Perhaps contrary to popular perceptions, the evidence does not lend support for the idea to disinformation or misinformation are causal mechanisms for violence. Instead, they are perhaps more usefully seen as catalysts that can inflame existing grievances, perceptions of threat, and perceived discrimination. The available evidence suggests that potential for future violence such as that seen in Leicester and following Southport should see misinformation, and the role of social and alternative media as one potential influence, and one that should be understood in relation to the specific mobilisation context and its configuration of perceived grievances and threats.

The research suggests that actors seeking to inspire or catalyse violence and radicalisation are more likely to be successful when they can leverage existing grievances, perceived injustice, perceived discrimination and, often, narratives carried in mainstream media and political discourse. Preventing escalation by transnational actors will benefit from taking into account local conditions and existing grievances, and the way these interact with transnational-level actors, resources, and information.

Overall, the research suggests that future research and attention should be on movements whose scope and goals make them more vulnerable to violent escalation. This includes groups that seek to act outside or overthrow the existing political system and are organised around transnational identities that challenge the existing political order. These include race or “civilisation” based movements that contest the basic terms of the existing order, such as far-right White identity movements.

Several case studies reviewed within the evidence and one large-data study of waves of protest across Europe (Oana, Kriesi, and Altiparmakis 2024) suggest that violence may be more likely to emerge in the convergence of diffuse, transnational online “communities of practice” that promote violence as a tactic with smaller in-person networks that can mobilise and coordinate locally. Evidence of the scale and cross-platform reach of networks on the far-right that support violence against immigrants, and the broad resonance of these themes, suggest more specific work is needed on these movements. It also indicates that technological

change is likely driving a similar evolution in digital ecosystems that support other kinds of anti-systemic violence, from the misogyny of the "manosophere" and incel networks, to diaspora groups with radical elements and post-ISIS Islamism.

More research is needed to understand why violence escalates in specific moments of protest and not others. The literature reviewed here suggests one key to understanding this question lies in the specifics of local and national politics rather than the nature of the transnational movement. A perceived permissive environment or a "state of emergency" can arise in the local context in which a transnational movement can seek to mobilise popular support, or a local movement can seek transnational allies. This may help explain why a movement that does not consistently engage in violence might escalate.

Where the UK increases its public support and military assistance for Ukraine, Russian attempts to interfere in local political and social movements are likely to increase, with implications for the potential for violence. Evidence from other countries, including Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary suggests that local grievances against migrants are an issue that can frequently escalate or inflame into violent action. More research is needed to explore these networks of influence and to identify local issues and actors targeted for mobilisation by Russian "political warfare" assets.

LIMITATIONS

Research on social movements increasingly engages with transnational movements, in no small part because all social movements are increasingly transnational in the age of globalisation. However, the issues they respond to and especially the mechanisms they use to mobilise are changing very rapidly. The research available has important limitations, including:

- **Researcher access/bias.** Much of the research on transnational movements focuses on issues on which researchers themselves have strong opinions and may have participated in activism around (either for or against the movements they study). The movements to which they are sympathetic make up the majority of the sample – such as transnational protests for human rights and religious freedom or against economic inequality – but reveal less about why protestors might escalate to violence because they are overwhelmingly non-violent protest movements. Research into movements that become violent or promote violence is much less well represented in the movement literature and researchers themselves have less access to these networks.
- **Pace of technological change.** As several of the sections in this report illustrate, the specific nature of online platforms (open vs closed, encrypted vs unencrypted, anonymous vs verified accounts) shapes the way that transnational movements use them; the kinds of messages they can share; and the types of coalitions they can build. Much of the research from the first decade of social media platforms focused on Twitter and Facebook, while newer research indicates these platforms are much less relevant. This raises questions about whether the research findings still apply on other platforms, or how cross-platform webs-of-influence have changed the ecosystem.
- **Scale of messaging and online ecosystems supportive of violence.** As suggested especially by the Dynamic Online Networks Laboratory study of webs-of-influence that supported rapid spread of violence following the Southport events (Verma et al. 2025), the mechanisms of transnational mobilisation have become extremely complex and cross both topics and platforms, and now involve billions of individual accounts. While small, dedicated networks and "communities of practice" remain important and relevant, the activities of these groups across many platforms have become extremely difficult to track. It has also evolved significantly from earlier research that typically focused on networks of websites or single platforms like Twitter. The ecosystems that sustain

transnational movements, or the webs that create or share Russian-supported disinformation for example, have become extraordinarily complex in ways that were not technologically possible when much of the literature captured in the survey was published.

- **Language barriers.** While earlier transnational movements such as those focused on responses to globalisation frequently messaged in English as a shared lingua-franca to organise across borders, transnational movements that mobilise around other identities message in many different languages that are less accessible to many English-speaking researchers and much less well suited in some cases to technical analysis using automated tools or language analysis.

IMPLICATION FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Pay particular attention to the potential for violence in the context of mobilisations motivated by Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment as these are often at greater risk of becoming violent. The evidence base indicates that these themes are the most successful focus of far-right agitation across Europe and have most often led to violence (Oana, Kriesi, and Altiparmakis 2024). They are also subjects of dis- and misinformation campaigns structured by webs-of-influence (Verma et al. 2025) across platforms that preliminary research indicates helped drive both the Southport events (Venkataramakrishnan 2025) and the Leicester violence (Dutta 2025) and continue to thrive online. Moreover, recent episodes of related violence indicate that local conditions – grievances, perceived support from some mainstream or political actors, and the mainstream media environment – have created conducive conditions for these messages to inspire offline violence.

Consider means of understanding and tracing the influence of actors operating across multiple platforms and their efforts to promote the need for violence in response to unfolding events, but don't neglect the potential influence of mainstream media. Webs-of-influence are difficult to measure or track using standard resources: the sheer scale and cross-platform nature (Verma et al. 2025) that may involve billions of individual accounts and activist clusters involving a subset of millions require significant computational resources and access to substantial datasets to analyse. On the other hand, qualitative analysis of smaller and more local webs-of-influence and radical milieus remain valuable and important, especially in non-English languages, on encrypted platforms with closed channels, or on the darkweb (Mok 2022). At the same time, traditional media remains an important vector for escalating confrontations between authorities and protestors (Rosie and Gorringe 2009), in some cases, amplifying Islamophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes (Nissen and Lundstedt 2024) that help create a permissive environment for extremist groups or justification for vigilante actions, or inflame grievances including perceived unfair treatment of one diaspora group in favour of another (Dutta 2025);

Ensure actual and perceived fairness and commitment to liberal democratic values in state responses. Connecting to the perception of unfair treatment described above, the belief that a perceived threat cannot be addressed within the current system through democratic means, or that the host state will not act to protect a community and its rights under the law can contribute to disengagement from politics. It also has the potential to lead to the formation of radical flanks, and emboldens vigilante actions by other groups intent on using violence to change the social and political order (Ince 2025).

Focus efforts on understanding the influence of hostile state across borders, to assess the potential for, and likely impact of external state support for violence. Recent events have highlighted Russian efforts to interfere with and commit violence against its own diaspora residing in the UK. Evidence from other contexts indicates the use of a wide range of other tactics seeking to influence civil society (Cooley, Heathershaw, and Oliveira 2024), or escalate protests into violence and support extremist groups (Rekawek, Renard, and Molas 2024). In addition, state actors seeking to repress dissent across

borders (Lemon and Jardine 2024), or extend their internal policies against diaspora populations (Ranjan and Banerjee 2024b) should be a priority.

Support the development and implementation of tech company responses to mis- and disinformation. The research indicates that mis- and disinformation have the potential to catalyse violence across a broad spectrum of movements, and undermine trust in mainstream media and institutions. In the face of substantial online ecosystems that sustain hate speech and misinformation (Verma et al. 2025) and which have helped fuel violence in the US, UK and elsewhere, identifying additional ways that tech companies can deter actors seeking to promote or justify violence will remain an important and ongoing challenge.

Avoid repressive and militarised policing methods that reduce the space for lawful protest, particularly in the context of mobilisations concerned with bringing about social or political change within existing liberal democratic systems. As captured in the review of evidence in all three reports in this series (Salman, Marsden, and Lewis 2024; Peterscheck, Marsden, and Salman 2025), strong evidence indicates that violence from authorities in response to protests and escalation of repressive measures are frequently counterproductive. Whether in the local or transnational context, these responses can lead to escalation. Multiple mechanisms are implicated in this process, from sparking fragmentation and movement schism to inspiring radical flanks on the group level, to enhancing perception of threat, increasing identity fusion and sense of ostracisation on the individual level.

Carefully consider the most appropriate way of responding to splits and movement fragmentation whilst reducing the potential for violent radical flanks to develop. Where movement fragmentation does occur, ensuring equal access to peaceable democratic engagement and avoiding perceptions of discrimination against one faction or another are important principles with the potential to mitigate the risks of radical flanks developing.

Increase opportunities for peaceable, democratic engagement with political systems. Transnational issues, in particular, inspire protest movements in response to perceived injustice and inequalities that exist beyond the political mechanisms available to address them. Support for violence in response to those circumstances is often directly related to the perception that they cannot be resolved by peaceful means (W.R. Louis 2009). The corollary to this is democratic engagement, creating mechanisms for change and representation that extend to the whole community.

Pay particular attention to the potential for violence where perceptions of threat and discrimination coincide with real-world violence, including violence perpetrated overseas. Ample evidence indicates that violent escalation in protest tactics becomes more likely in response to real-world violence, whether it is in response to war (Koinova 2013), violent repression of protests elsewhere (Cordell and Medhi 2024; Moss 2016), ethnic pogroms (Dutta 2025) or systematic discrimination (Lemon and Jardine 2024). Care should be taken to avoid unnecessarily securitising victims of violence elsewhere or contributing to additional discrimination, and to recognise that violent escalation may be more likely to come from counter-protests or transnational repression.

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