The Roots of Extremism: The English Defence League and the Counter-Jihad Challenge

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Summary points

- While right-wing extremism and populist extremist parties have been the subject of growing attention in Europe and North America, the emergence of 'counter-Jihad' groups has been relatively neglected. Campaigning amid fiscal austerity and ongoing public concerns over immigration, these groups are more confrontational, chaotic and unpredictable than established populist extremist political parties, yet not enough is known about who supports them – and why.

- Widely held assumptions about their supporters – which often stress economic austerity, political protest and Islamophobia as the key drivers – are challenged by new survey data on public attitudes towards the ideas of one leading counter-Jihad group, the English Defence League.

- The data indicate that supporters of such groups are not necessarily young, uneducated, economically insecure or politically apathetic. They are not simply anti-Muslim or overtly racist, but xenophobic and profoundly hostile towards immigration. They are more likely than others in society to expect inter-communal conflict and to believe that violence is justifiable. And their beliefs about the threatening nature of Islam have wider public support.

- Few mainstream voices in Europe are actively challenging counter-Jihad narratives, or the surrounding reservoir of anti-Muslim prejudice among the general public, but this is an essential part of any successful counter-strategy.

Introduction

Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States, policy approaches to extremism were guided by a heavy if not exclusive focus on its religion-based forms. Attempts were made to understand the dynamics of Al-Qaeda and violent Jihadist and Islamist-related groups, and to map individual pathways into these particular forms of extremist mobilization. Recent events in North Africa, Somalia and Yemen confirm the continuing dominance of the security challenge posed by such extremism. But a number of incidents in Europe and the United States have also sparked calls for counter-strategies to be modified or expanded, and for greater resources to be devoted to understanding alternative forms of violent and non-violent extremism, particularly those associated with extreme right-wing or ethnic nationalist ideologies.

Three broad developments have triggered this. First, continuing support for political parties overtly hostile towards immigrants and minorities that emerged in the 1980s has fuelled concern over their impact on broader social cohesion and integration policies, as well as on levels of racially and/or religiously motivated violence (although this relationship is far from clear). While most supporters of such parties reject violence and operate within the bounds of the democratic state, these concerns have been revived, amid the recent financial crisis and ongoing fiscal austerity, by the emergence of the overtly neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece, a strong performance by the National Front in French elections in 2012 and recent data from Germany in particular suggesting that whereas the membership of extremist political parties is shrinking, that of neo-Nazi groups is on the rise (BfV 2012; Goodwin 2011b).

Second, amid these events in the electoral arena, the past six years have also seen a series of actual or attempted acts of violence or terrorism by groups and individuals associated with right-wing extremism. Examples include the murder of two members of a minority group under a swastika flag in Russia in 2007, the arrest and imprisonment in the United Kingdom in the same year of an activist who had stockpiled chemical explosives because of his belief in a forthcoming 'race war', the confiscation of explosive devices from a neo-Nazi group in Germany in 2010, the bombing and shooting attacks in Norway in 2011 that resulted in the deaths of 77 people, the discovery in Germany in the same year of an underground violent neo-Nazi cell linked to a series of murders and attacks, the killing of two Senegalese street traders in Italy in 2011 by a member of an extreme right group, and the killing of seven people in Wisconsin in 2012 by a member of the 'white power' music scene. Estimates derived from analysis of open-source data in the United States suggest that, between 1990 and 2010, at least 348 individuals were killed by 'ideologically-motivated homicides' committed by right-wing extremists.[1]

From Norway to Wisconsin, Berlin to London and Brussels to Stockholm, these events sparked a series of parallel conversations inside policy communities about whether sufficient resources are devoted to understanding and countering forms of violent and non-violent extremism that are not based on religion. In 2009, the London Metropolitan Police and analysts within the US Department of Homeland Security pointed to a growing challenge from right-wing extremists. A subsequent iteration of the United Kingdom's *Prevent Strategy* (HM Government 2011; House of Commons 2012) included an emphasis on right-wing extremism, pointing to 17 recent cases of individuals with links to right-wing extremism being imprisoned for terrorism offences. This reflects a broader discussion in Europe, where the most recent EUROPOL (2012: 6) trend analysis concludes that '[t]he threat of violent right-wing extremism has reached new levels in Europe and should not be underestimated', and predicts that the challenge will manifest itself in lone actors or organized underground groups. Following the attacks in Wisconsin, data presented by US federal agencies and analysts to a Senate subcommittee on domestic extremism drew attention to the challenge from white supremacist and militia extremists, pointing to an upsurge in 'domestic non-Islamic extremist activity',

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1 This total falls to 180 if the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing is excluded. 'Factsheet: Far right violence in the United States, 1990–2010', National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, University of Maryland.

much of which was traced to violent right-wing extremists.[2] While it is important not to overstate the 'threat', it is clear that distinct policy communities have converged on a consensus: that more needs to be known about forms of extremism that are connected to anti-immigrant and anti-minority politics.

However, a third development – the emergence of self-described 'counter-Jihad' groups – has added an important but neglected dimension to these debates in Europe and North America. This represents a significant stage of evolution within the highly diverse constellation of movements that are fundamentally opposed to immigration and ethnic minority communities.

The emergence of counter-Jihad groups

The counter-Jihad scene is comprised of movements that are more confrontational, chaotic and unpredictable than traditional anti-immigrant and ethnic nationalist movements in Western democracies. Within an amorphous network of think-tanks, bloggers and activists, the counter-Jihad scene incorporates the 'defence leagues' in Australia, Denmark, England, Finland, Norway, Poland, Scotland, Serbia and Sweden, groups such as Pro-Cologne and the Citizens' Movement Pax Europa in Germany, Generation Identity in France, the 'Stop the Islamization' networks in Europe and the United States, the American Freedom Defense Initiative and the International Civil Liberties Alliance. Whether formally or informally, such groups often align themselves to an international counter-Jihad network, united by their belief that Islam and Muslims are posing a fundamental threat to the resources, identities and even survival of Western states.[3]

The security significance of counter-Jihad groups is threefold. First, in contrast to older radical right parties, they often shun elections in favour of confrontational and street-based demonstrations that create significant public-order challenges. In 2011, for example, activists from Generation Identity occupied a mosque in Poitiers to draw attention to their demands for a referendum on Muslim immigration. Typical of counter-Jihad groups, they aligned themselves with historical struggles against Islam and presented their campaign as representing a generation of citizens in Europe left with record unemployment, debt, 'multicultural decline' and the 'forced mixing of the races'.[4] Such activities are often small in scope, but they risk sparking counter-mobilization by radical Islamists or left-wing extremists, thereby introducing the potential for a growing interplay between different forms of extremism.

Second, counter-Jihad groups are often characterized by transitory and fluid memberships. This makes it difficult to track their evolution and links to other groups, and to profile their members' backgrounds and concerns – a difficulty compounded by the way in which, unlike established extreme right-wing parties, they often publicly distance themselves from racial supremacism and 'whites-only' groups. Some, such as the English Defence League, have specifically sought to rally support among Jewish, Sikh and Pakistani Christian communities, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual ones, forcing policy-makers to reassess approaches that sought to tackle such groups by focusing on economically deprived sections of the 'white working class'.[5]

Third, rather than attempting to rally mass support by presenting a broad ideological programme, counter-Jihad groups focus heavily on the issue of Islam. Since 2001, academics such as José Zúquete have charted how populist extremist parties in Europe infused their discourse with anti-Muslim prejudice. Their 'opposition to visions of a Muslim takeover' (Zúquete 2008) led them increasingly to stress Christian identity themes and shift towards pro-Jewish and pro-Israel positions. Nonna Mayer (2013) notes how parties like the French National Front, influenced further by the rise and discourse of the radical-right politicians Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders

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2   Statements of the Deputy Assistant Director, Counter-Terrorism Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Daryl Johnson of DT Analytics before the 'domestic terrorism threat' subcommittee on the constitution, civil rights, and human rights committee on the judiciary, 19 September 2012. See Bjelopera (2012).

3   Some of the more prominent blogs include the Gates of Vienna and Brussels Journal.

4   'Generation Identity: Declaration of War', available on YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5sdCgFYN7I.

5   In January 2013, for example, there were over 5,000 subscribers to the EDL's 'Angel' division for women on Facebook, and more than 2,500 subscribers to the movement's Jewish division, although clearly it is difficult to assess the validity of these numbers.

in the Netherlands, came to frame their supporters as 'the defenders of equality, liberty and tolerance against their main enemy, Islam, described as a religion of fanaticism and intolerance, incompatible with democratic values and Western culture' (Mayer 2013: 163). While these parties have supplemented this discourse with other social and economic policies, however, counter-Jihad groups devote little attention to other issues, providing an important source of inspiration to activists (notably Anders Breivik) who would engage in violence in the name of countering this Islamic 'threat'.[6]

Despite all of the above, the emergence of counter-Jihad groups has largely escaped current debates over the challenge from violent and non-violent political extremism. This owes much to the fact that the counter-Jihad scene is embryonic, as well as difficulties in gathering accurate and reliable data on their bases of support. But the emergence of these groups introduces intriguing, unanswered questions. What is driving their support? Who exactly is receptive to their ideas, and why? How sympathetic is the wider public towards their agenda? How valid are claims that they are rooted in the recent financial crisis, political apathy, Islamophobia or racism? And how might counter-strategies adapt and respond to them? In Europe and the United States, attempts to answer these questions have been stalled by a lack of reliable research on the roots of their support.[7] In short, the counter-Jihad challenge is under-researched and poorly understood. And in the absence of evidence, popular stereotypes have flourished.

The following sections draw on new data to close this gap by examining wider public attitudes towards the counter-Jihad agenda, exploring the drivers of its support, and strengthening the evidence base available to policy-makers, as well as challenging current thinking about groups like the defence leagues.

The policy debate over drivers

Extremist right-wing groups and the more recent counter-Jihad movements are often linked to four broad trends in the wider political environment. Mapping these is important, as each identifies a different causal driver and thereby carries implications for policy.

A first approach traces the emergence of extreme political movements to the 'losers' of globalization, the financial crisis and fiscal austerity. In Europe and North America, it is often argued that movements like the defence leagues are anchored in citizens who were first 'left behind' by the shift to a globalized post-industrial economy, and then were the most exposed to the crisis post-2008. These are unemployed and unskilled workers of all ages, who lack qualifications, are financially insecure, depend on social housing or other scarce resources, and resent elites for failing to protect their position.

An alternative approach emphasizes apathy and falling political trust in Europe, contending that extreme movements are by-products of weakening bonds between citizens and established parties, and a more general loss of faith in 'the system'. Advocates might point to the fact that across Europe, and since the onset of the financial crisis, levels of public trust in the European Union have reached their lowest level since records began. The percentage of voters within member states who trusted the EU slumped from 57 per cent in the spring of 2007 to 31 per cent in the autumn of 2012, (at which point only 28 per cent trusted their respective parliament, and 27 per cent trusted their government).[8]

A third approach argues instead that groups like the defence leagues have essentially outflanked mainstream elites, developing successful narratives around a perceived 'threat' that is not being addressed, namely Islam, Muslims and anxieties over their compatibility with Western states. This single-issue perspective is reflected in interviews with those who have enrolled in these groups and who stressed the 'threat' from 'militant Islam' or Islam generally to values and ways of life, as summarized in one study:

> It is in these broader narratives that some activists make use of concepts such as a 'clash of civilizations' between

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6   For one example see L. Collins, 'Anders Breivik and the English Defence League', *New Yorker*, 25 July 2011.

7   What there is relies on interviews, participant observation or social media analysis, which (at least for now) remains limited, for example Busher (2013), Demos (2011) and Richards (2011).

8   These data are taken from the Standard Eurobarometer 78 (Autumn 2012), available at http://ec.europa.eu.

Islam and the West (Huntingdon 1993) or make reference to 'Eurabia' theories (Ye'or 2005) and the ongoing 'Islamification' of Europe through immigration and through higher birth rates among Europe's Muslim populations' (Busher 2013; see also Richards 2011).

A final perspective that also stresses ideological factors but expands the above approach contends that counter-Jihad groups are not distinct from the wider phenomenon of populist extremism but are fuelled by the same drivers. They are seen as rooted predominantly in middle-aged and elderly (male) workers, who have a low level of education and are extremely dissatisfied with elites but who are motivated primarily by a generalized hostility towards all migrants and ethnic minorities or ethnic groups more generally. From this angle, Muslims represent only one of many perceived 'threats' to the native group and nation (see Goodwin 2011a).

Drilling down: the case of the English Defence League

To probe the validity of these approaches, this paper analyses YouGov survey data gathered in October 2012.[9] The survey was based on a random sample of 1,666 respondents in the United Kingdom, drawn from an online panel of 350,000 adults. The panel was weighted to the profile of eligible voters, including those without internet access, and on the basis of age, gender, class, region, party identification and newspaper readership.[10] A later section of this paper examines the attitudes of respondents in the full sample towards issues that are highlighted by counter-Jihad groups, but first the analysis focuses on a smaller group of 298 adults in the UK who had both (i) heard of the EDL and knew what it stood for, and (ii) said they agreed with the values and/or methods of this specific counter-Jihad group.

The paper takes the English Defence League (EDL) as a case study to reveal the drivers of support for counter-Jihad groups, which can assist in designing effective and appropriate responses to the counter-Jihad movement. The EDL, which has been described within the counter-Jihad scene as 'the most significant anti-sharia movement in Europe',[11] first emerged in 2009 in the town of Luton in southeast England. Like similar groups in Europe, it framed itself as a human rights organization working 'to protect the inalienable rights of all people to protest against radical Islam's encroachment into the lives of non-Muslims'.[12] It emerged in response to protests by radical Islamists at a homecoming parade for the Royal Anglican Regiment (which was returning from Iraq). Its formation, therefore, is an example of what Roger Eatwell (2006) describes as 'cumulative extremism', whereby the activities of one extremist group trigger the formation of another manifestation, and possibly thereafter a spiral of counter-mobilization or even conflict. Over the next three years the EDL sought to rally public opposition to Islam, framing the religion as a fundamental threat to the national way of life and to Europe generally, and as 'an ideology that … places [non-believers] lower than animals and sees non-Muslim women as targets for grooming and sexual exploitation'.[13]

Reflecting the strategies of counter-Jihad groups, between 2009 and 2012 the EDL organized over 50 street-based demonstrations that often mobilized between 1,000 and 3,000 activists and led to significant policing costs. Over 1,300 officers and 23 police forces were required to manage

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9   YouGov, on 21–22 October 2012. Recent comparisons of opt-in online panels and other techniques have shown that any biases that might be introduced by this online approach are extremely small, and are offset by the larger sample sizes that internet-based methodologies permit; see, for example, Sanders et al. (2007).

10   YouGov draws a sub-sample of the panel that is representative of the U.K. electorate by age, gender, social class, type of newspaper and party identification. Only this sub-sample has access to the questionnaire. Respondents can only answer this questionnaire once. Targets for the weighted data are derived from three sources: the 2001 census; a national readership survey; and YouGov estimates of 2010 party identification. The three sources include 2001 census data; the national readership survey, which is a random probability survey made up from 34,000 random face-to-face interviews conducted annually; and YouGov internal analysis conducted on more than 60,000 responses to YouGov surveys at, and shortly after, the May 2010 general election, when respondents were asked i) whether they generally thought of themselves as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat etc.; ii) which party they would support, or had supported, in the 2010 general election; and iii) election results at the time. From this analysis, along with 2010 election results, YouGov derives its party identification target percentages.

11   'A Brief History of the Transatlantic Counterjihad', available at http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.co.uk (accessed 7 February 2013).

12   'The English Defence League: About Us', available at http://englishdefenceleague.org/about-us (accessed 20 June 2012).

13   'Why we are going to Walsall', available at http://englishdefenceleague.org (accessed 22 January 2013).

Table 1: Social distribution of EDL support

	EDL sympathizers	Full sample		EDL sympathizers	Full sample
Sex			A-Level	13	17
Male	65	49	Other post-16 qualifications	17	17
Female	35	51	Degree/Postgraduate	18	27
Age			**Region**		
18–29	16	20	London	12	13
30–44	23	26	East of England	14	10
45–59	31	26	South (SE and SW)	18	23
60 plus	29	28	North	30	25
Social class			Midlands	17	16
Professional/managerial (AB)	25	28	Scotland	3	9
Routine non-manual (C1)	28	29	Wales	6	5
Skilled manual (C2)	26	21	**Property**		
Semi/unskilled manual (DE)	22	22	Owner/mortgage	69	66
Working status			Local authority rented	7	7
Full-time	50	48	Privately rented/other	18	21
Part-time	12	13	**Read newspapers**		
Unemployed	3	4	No paper	18	25
Retired	26	23	Broadsheet	10	14
Education			Tabloid	65	50
No Qualifications	9	8	Other/local paper	7	12
GCSE/Secondary level	39	27	N	298	1666

Source: YouGov; data are weighted.

one rally and the resulting counter-protest in 2012, at a cost of at least £495,000.[14] These demonstrations had various targets: they expressed opposition to pro-Palestine groups, Islamist extremism, and the establishment of Islamic institutions; claimed that 'Muslim gangs' were coordinating the sexual exploitation of children; expressed support for Geert Wilders; or threatened to stage further demonstrations in areas where local authorities had allegedly refused to use the word 'Christmas'.[15] In only a short period, the EDL established a national media profile and more than 80 local divisions, and attracted over 80,000 Facebook followers.[16] It also cultivated international links, for example joining a 'Stop Islamization of Nations' conference in New York in 2012, attending similar events in Europe and helping form the European Freedom Initiative, which claims to coordinate 18 defence leagues across Europe and North America.[17]

14   Policing EDL demo in Bristol cost force £495,000', *BBC News*, 10 August 2012.

15   'EDL accused of council 'blackmail' in Christmas letter', *BBC News*, 26 November 2010, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-11848225 (accessed 21 January 2013).

16   Facebook data cited by Allen (2011) refer to the EDL Facebook page as of April 2011. Using Google map data (self-reported by the EDL), Allen notes how the movement claimed 89 divisions across the country.

17   In January 2013 the European Freedom Initiative listed affiliated defence leagues in England, the United States, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Australia, Serbia, Greece, Indonesia, Poland, the Philippines, Belgium, Czech Republic, Romania and Luxemburg.

The drivers of counter-Jihad support: key messages

As noted, the survey involved almost 300 UK citizens who had heard of the EDL and said they agreed with its values. Overall, 42 per cent of respondents in the full survey had heard of the group but were unsure what it stood for, 33 per cent had heard of it and knew exactly what it stood for, 19 per cent had never heard of it, and the remainder did not know. Questioned further, 3 per cent said they agreed with the EDL's values *and* methods and 21 per cent with its values *but not* its methods, while 47 per cent did not agree with *either* its values *or* its methods, and 29 per cent said they did not know either way.
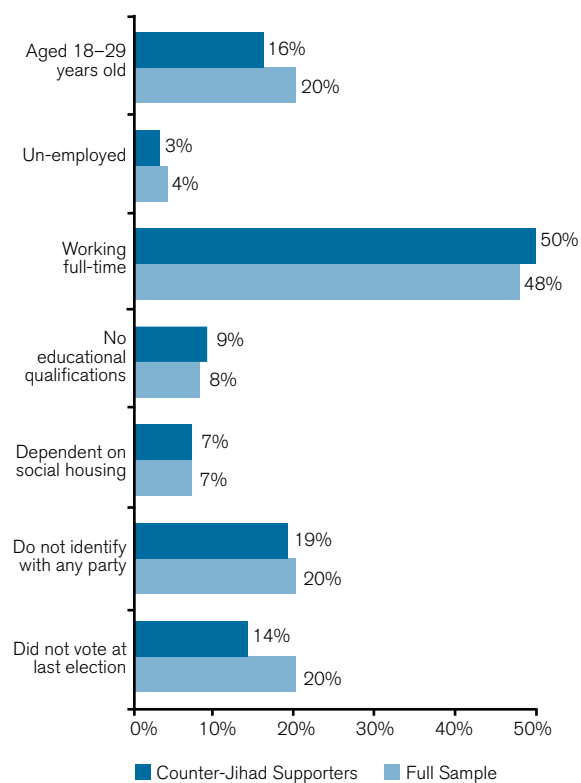
By probing the opinions of those who had heard of the EDL *and* agreed with its values and/or methods, considerable light can be shed on the backgrounds and concerns of those most receptive to counter-Jihad groups. From a policy standpoint, understanding the drivers

of support is a crucial prerequisite to designing more effective counter-strategies. Responses to groups that are rooted in economic insecurity might look remarkably different from those targeting political alienation; while strategies to counter misperceptions about Islam will ultimately be insufficient if support stems from anxieties over immigration and ethnic minorities more generally. The findings of this survey, which are confirmed by a further, separate statistical analysis,[18] challenge basic assumptions about the drivers of counter-Jihad support. They reveal the following key messages.

Not just young, uneducated and economically insecure

Some of the best-known stereotypes about counter-Jihad supporters are wrong (see Figure 1). Although the findings confirm that these groups appeal to less well-educated men from the working class, the picture is far more complex than debates in Europe suggest. For a start, supporters are not simply young: only 16 per cent are aged between 18 and 29 years, while most are over 44 years. Nor does it appear that the defence leagues are pitching to the least educated in society: while supporters often lack A-level qualifications or university education, fewer than one in ten has no qualifications whatsoever. Policy approaches that frame the counter-Jihad challenge as being primarily a phenomenon among deprived working-class communities should also be reassessed. In fact supporters are spread quite evenly across society, with 53 per cent working in routine non-manual, professional or managerial occupations, and the remainder being skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers, or on state benefits. While recent debate in Europe suggests support for groups like the EDL originates in the recent financial crisis, the findings show that economic insecurity is by no means the core driver. Supporters are no more dependent than the average in society on (often scarce) social housing. And they are no more likely than average to be unemployed (see Table 1). These findings carry important implications, especially as policy and think-tank communities have often portrayed these recent street-based groups as an outlet for unemployed and uneducated young men from the working class.

Figure 1: Challenging stereotypes

Category	Counter-Jihad Supporters	Full Sample
Aged 18–29 years old	16%	20%
Un-employed	3%	4%
Working full-time	50%	48%
No educational qualifications	9%	8%
Dependent on social housing	7%	7%
Do not identify with any party	19%	20%
Did not vote at last election	14%	20%

■ Counter-Jihad Supporters   ■ Full Sample

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18   Logistic regression analysis was used and confirmed that support for the EDL is driven most strongly by xenophobic hostility towards minorities, and predictions of group conflict and violence. Full details are available on the project website or via the author.

Not politically apathetic but part of overall low public trust in politics

Counter-strategies that focus more heavily on addressing political apathy and discontent are too narrow and insufficient. Certainly, those in society who are most receptive to the defence leagues are far from satisfied with the political status quo. They are consistently more dissatisfied than the average citizen with politics, more distrustful of institutions and more likely to think that the political system has serious faults that need addressing (see Figures 2–4). Among those who agree openly with the counter-Jihad agenda, 85 per cent distrust political parties and the European Union, 79 per cent distrust their member of parliament, 75 per cent distrust parliament itself, 71 per cent distrust journalists and 69 per cent distrust their local councillors. A clear majority (62 per cent) also feel dissatisfied with the way in which democracy is working more generally, and are significantly more likely than the average citizen to feel this way.[19] But these views should be seen as part of a wider challenge facing political and policy elites: low *overall* levels of public trust in politics. Among the broader population, large majorities are similarly distrustful of key institutions: 79 per cent distrust parties, 75 per cent distrust MPs, 77 per cent distrust journalists, 75 per cent distrust the EU, 67 per cent distrust parliament

and 63 per cent distrust councillors. Thus although those who support extreme groups such as the EDL do express slightly higher levels of dissatisfaction, their views are generally consistent with those of a population that has become profoundly distrustful of its politicians and institutions.

Furthermore, rather than being politically isolated and apathetic, most of those who are sympathetic towards the counter-Jihad scene actively engage in mainstream politics. The assumption that they are giving up on mainstream democracy is undermined by the fact that they are *more* likely than their fellow citizens to identify with the established, main parties, and they were *more* likely than average to have voted at the last election. Only 19 per cent said they identified with 'no party' (compared with 20 per cent in the full sample) and only 14 per cent did not vote at the last election, compared with 18 per cent overall.

On the basis of their party identification and voting behaviour, they engage with the political mainstream and identify with established right-wing parties: 43 per cent align themselves with the centre-right Conservative Party, 25 per cent with the centre-left Labour Party and 9 per cent with the centrist Liberal Democrats. At the most recent UK general election in 2010, they were more likely than average to vote for the Conservatives, and they were four
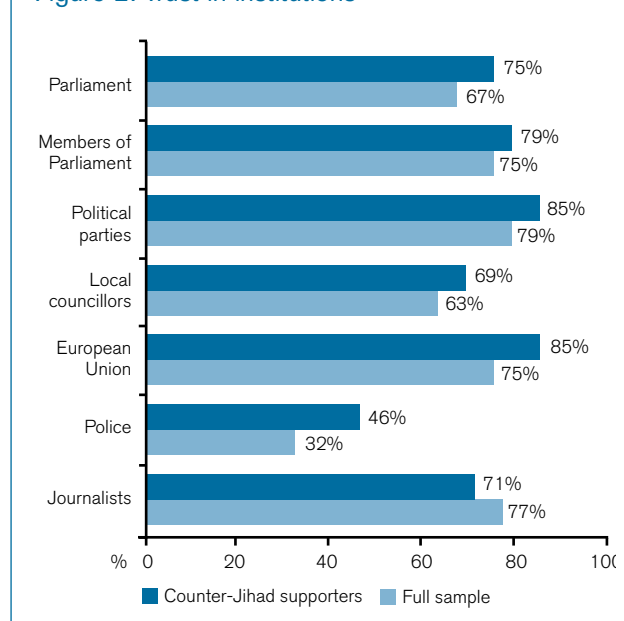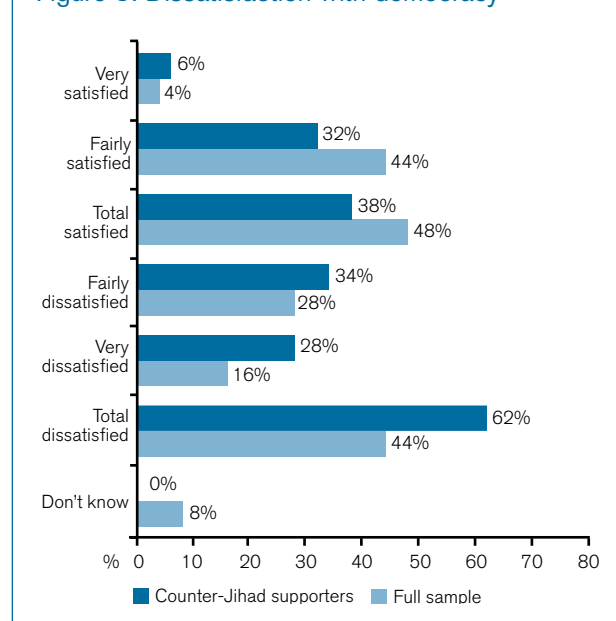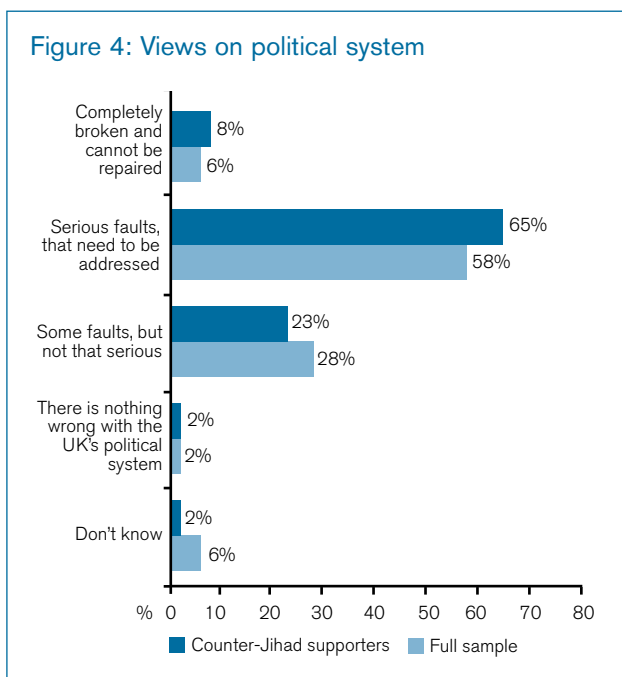
Figure 2: Trust in institutions

Figure 3: Dissatisfaction with democracy

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19 In fact, EDL supporters were almost twice as likely as the average respondent to feel very dissatisfied with the way democracy is working.

Figure 4: Views on political system

Figure 4: Views on political system

Category	Counter-Jihad supporters	Full sample
Completely broken and cannot be repaired	8%	6%
Serious faults, that need to be addressed	65%	58%
Some faults, but not that serious	23%	28%
There is nothing wrong with the UK's political system	2%	2%
Don't know	2%	6%

■ Counter-Jihad supporters ■ Full sample

per cent agreed the system had serious faults that needed to be addressed, while 23 per cent thought that while it had faults they were 'not that serious'. The survey results suggest that though dissatisfied, most supporters remain connected to the mainstream and have not (yet?) given up on representative democracy. This provides a challenging rebuttal to the assertion that successful counter-strategies should focus on political engagement, and points to an opportunity to bring their supporters back into the fold, not least by addressing more actively their core grievances. These supporters have certainly shifted toward the extremes, but they are not yet lost to the currents of anti-democratic sentiment (see Figures 3 and 4).

Not simply anti-Muslim, but anti-immigration

While anti-Muslim prejudice is integral to the appeal of counter-Jihad groups, it is by no means the whole story. Those drawn into the orbit of movements like the EDL are extreme in their views towards Islam and Muslims. These organizations have rallied citizens who appear united by the belief that both the religion and its followers pose a fundamental and pressing threat to their native group and nation: 80 per cent of supporters perceive Islam as a
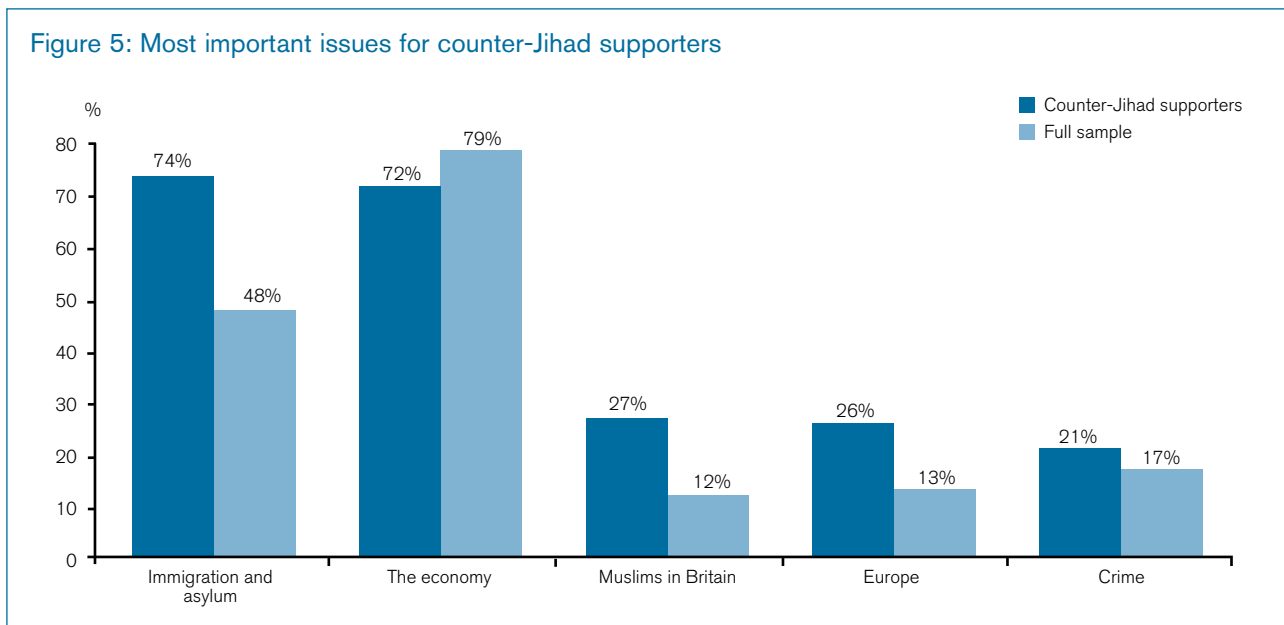
times as likely to support one of the two minor right-wing parties, whether the radical-right UK Independence Party or the extreme right British National Party.[20] Nor have they given up on democracy. When asked for their views towards the political system, fewer than one in ten said it was 'completely broken and beyond repair'. Instead, 65

Figure 5: Most important issues for counter-Jihad supporters

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Issue	Counter-Jihad supporters	Full sample
Immigration and asylum	74%	48%
The economy	72%	79%
Muslims in Britain	27%	12%
Europe	26%	13%
Crime	21%	17%

■ Counter-Jihad supporters ■ Full sample

20 The party identification of EDL supporters broke down as follows: Conservatives (43%, compared with 29% in the full sample), Labour (25 per cent/33%), Liberal Democrat (9%/12%), the UK Independence Party or the British National Party (3%/1%), nationalist/other (1%/2%) or 'no party' (19%/20%). At the 2010 election 46% voted Conservative, 20% voted Labour, 14% did note vote, 11% voted Liberal Democrats, 8% voted UKIP or BNP and 2% voted nationalist or other. They were significantly more likely than the average to vote Conservative (46% versus 31%), and the two fringe right-wing parties (8% versus 2%).

danger to Western civilization and consider the growth of Muslim communities as a threat to their native group. They are consistently more likely to endorse such ideas, and often strikingly so: 76 per cent rejected the notion that Muslims are compatible with the national way of life, compared with 49 per cent in the full sample.

These anxieties appear deep and intense, but they only partially explain the nature of the counter-Jihad challenge. The findings indicate that the EDL and similar groups in Europe are reaching out to citizens who are actually more likely than their fellow citizens to express a range of socio-political attitudes: they are more authoritarian in their outlook on society, more hostile towards Islam, more dissatisfied with politics, and especially more hostile towards immigrants and ethnic minorities generally.

Among those who agree with the EDL, immigration and asylum are the most important issues facing the United Kingdom, alongside the economy. Yet while they are *less* likely than average to rate the economy as important, they are significantly *more* likely to voice concerns over immigration. And this level of concern contrasts sharply with that over the issue of 'Muslims in the country', which is ranked a distant third.[21] Seen through the eyes of the average supporter, immigration has a profoundly negative impact on the country: more than seven in ten supporters see immigrants as undermining the national culture; seven in ten reject the assertion that the country will benefit from rising ethnic and cultural diversity; and almost the same proportion view immigrants as having a negative effect on the economy. That supporters are also twice as likely to consider 'Europe' an important issue provides further evidence that they are motivated less by economic insecurity or concerns over a single issue than by anxieties about wider 'threats' to the native group and nation, of which immigration, economic decline, Islam and European integration are dominant (see Figure 5). Addressing public concerns over immigration and its effects should be central to any counter-strategies.

Not overtly racist, but xenophobic

These immigration-related concerns should not be dismissed as crude racism. Rather, their nature is more nuanced. Only a minority of those who agree with the platform of the EDL endorse classical or 'biological' racism. Few endorse open expressions of racial supremacism: 58 per cent agreed that non-white citizens who were born in the country are just as 'British' as white citizens, while 56 per cent said there is no difference in intelligence between black and white citizens. Those who agreed with the counter-Jihad platform were almost twice as likely as the average to reject such ideas, and a clear majority distanced themselves from the crude racism of the 'old' extreme right. Some insight into possible responses to this xeno-phobic (rather than overtly racist) hostility can be found by probing views about whom supporters think main-stream elites *are* paying attention to, as opposed to whom they think they *should* pay attention to. Like the wider population, they view mainstream elites as prioritizing large companies, senior civil servants and media elites, but they are more likely than average to see the main parties as looking after senior EU officials and immigrants. Similarly, they are twice as likely as the average citizen to think that mainstream elites *should* be prioritizing 'white men and women who were born in the country'.[22] This provides some evidence that, while also extremely concerned about the wider perceived detrimental impact of migration, they feel that ethnic minorities and immigrants are being prior-itized by elites at the expense of native citizens.

Expecting conflict and prepared for violence

Those who self-affiliate with the counter-Jihad scene are more likely than average both to view violent action as justifiable and to be expecting violent communal

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21   Although it should be noted that supporters were more than twice as likely as the average respondent to consider Muslims in the country as one of the most important issues.

22   Respondents were asked to select up to four groups who 'MPs from the three main political parties generally pay most attention to'. The four most popular answers among EDL supporters were people who run large companies (54%), senior civil servants in Whitehall (42%), owners and editors of newspapers (40%) and immigrants (29%). When asked to select up to four groups who 'MPs should pay most attention to', the four most popular answers among EDL were 'people like you' (69%), 'voters who live in their own constituency' (65%), 'poor families' (41%), 'white men and women born in Britain' (39%).

conflict. Their intense concerns over demographic shifts are wrapped in extreme pessimism. Very few of those who agree with the EDL believe that the country (or even the West more generally) is in transition to a harmonious, integrated and secure future. Most appear united by the belief that a period of group conflict and chaos is imminent. Anchored in older arguments about the 'clash of civilizations' or the 'Eurabia thesis', right-wing extremist and counter-Jihad groups often frame their narratives on immigration in apocalyptic terms. The vision that they offer to supporters is one in which different ethnic, racial and religious groups are embroiled in communal violence, and where violence may be called for (and justified) in order to protect the native group. This is often accompanied by references to birth-rate and demographic data cited as 'evidence' that the native group is confronted with racial and cultural extinction (Goodwin 2011b). Whereas these narratives have been reflected in cases of individuals who have transitioned into violence (see Introduction) they are also reflected in the survey findings: 84 per cent of those who support the EDL expect relations between different groups in society to worsen, as compared with an average of 54 per cent; 79 per cent say there will be a 'clash of civilizations' between Muslims and white British citizens, which is 30 points higher than the average of 49 per cent; and 72 per cent say that violence between different groups is 'largely inevitable', compared with an average of 46 per cent (see Figure 6).

These more extreme beliefs are also intense: the number who feel strongly that relationships between groups in society will soon worsen (38 per cent) is more than twice as high as the average (15 per cent); equally, the number who feel strongly that there will be a clash between Muslims and white British citizens (42 per cent) is more than double the average (17 per cent); and the number who feel strongly that inter-group violence in the country is now largely inevitable (31 per cent) is again more than double the average of 12 per cent. Probing attitudes towards violence is notoriously complex and the findings of any one survey should be treated with caution. But with this in mind it is worth noting that, while most supporters say they would never personally engage in violence (only 5 per cent would), the picture changes when violence is framed as a response to other forms of extremism: 38 per cent agree that 'violence against extremists is justified', a figure significantly higher than the wider average of 21 per cent.

In summary, those who agree with the counter-Jihad message appear united by the expectation that the country will soon descend into communal violence and are more

Figure 6: Attitudes toward violence (% agree)
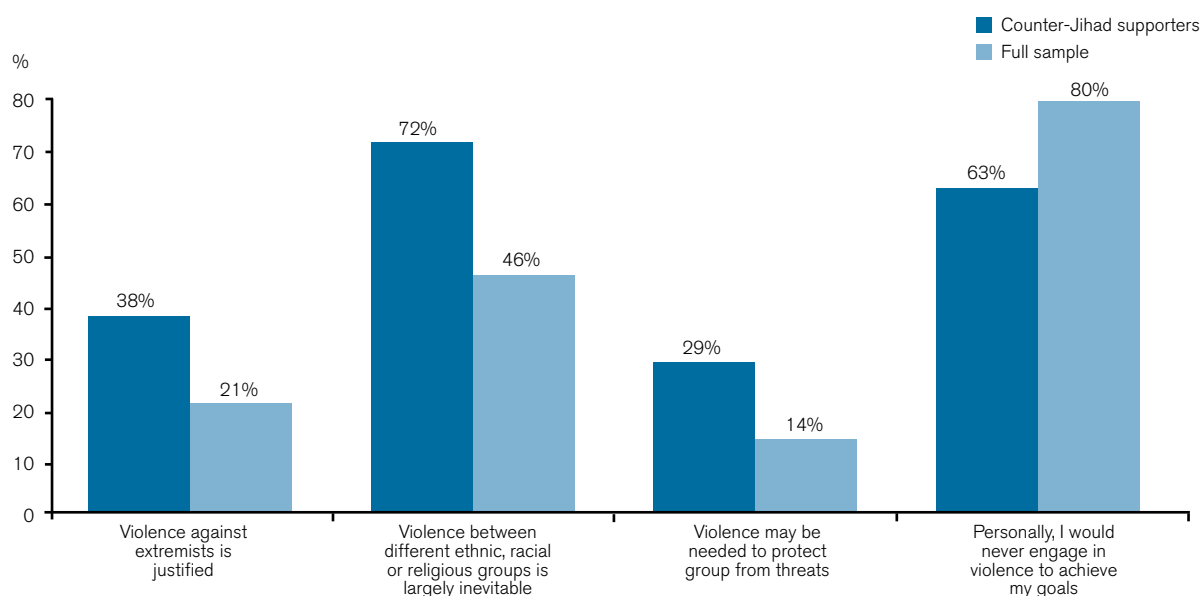
Source: YouGov; data are weighted.

likely than their fellow citizens to view violence as a justifiable course of action to counter 'extremists'.

The wider climate: challenge and opportunity

The challenge

Aside from the specific challenge posed by individual counter-Jihad groups such as the EDL, the survey sheds light on a broader challenge facing policy-makers in Europe, namely the extent to which the wider climate of public opinion remains favourable for movements that campaign against immigration and Islam. In recent years a series of studies have shed light on significant and deep public anxieties over these issues, as well as dissatisfaction with the response from mainstream elites (Goodwin 2011b). One comparative study of public opinion across Europe revealed that upwards of 50 per cent of the populations in Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Hungary and the United Kingdom said there were 'too many immigrants' in their country, while the percentages viewing Islam as 'a religion of intolerance' were 48 per cent in the United Kingdom, 53 per cent in Germany, France and Hungary, 60 per cent in Italy and 62 per cent in Portugal and Poland (Zick et al. 2011). A representative survey of public attitudes in France and Germany similarly suggested that more than 40 per cent perceive Muslim communities as a threat to national identity, whereas less than one-quarter view them as a source of cultural enrichment. Broader policy challenges within the areas of integration and cohesion are revealed by the clear and large majorities of 75 per cent in Germany and 68 per cent in France who perceived these Muslims communities as failing to integrate into society.[23]

This wider picture of fertile ground for counter-Jihad movements is reflected in the findings of this survey. Unlike others, its focus was on probing public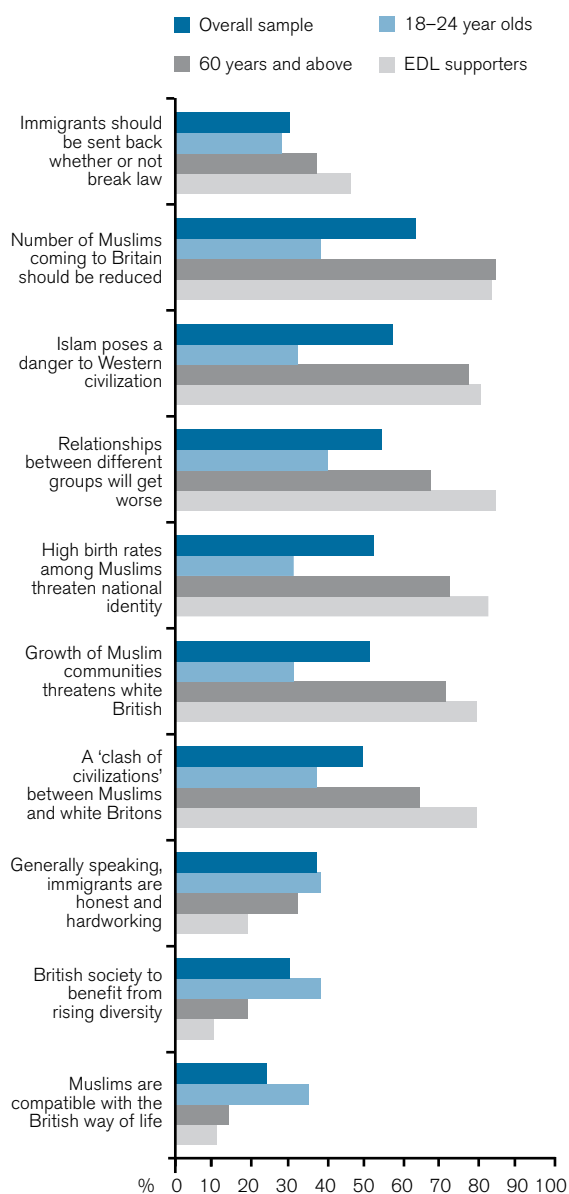 attitudes towards Islam and Muslims – the core target of counter-Jihad campaigns – which are often simply and crudely absorbed into questions about 'immigration', or are the subject of misleading questions.

At first glance the challenge for policy-makers is broad in scope. Large numbers of citizens are yet to be won over by arguments that set out the case for immigration. For respondents in the full sample, immigration was ranked as the second most important issue behind the economy, and few appear convinced that the country is set to benefit over the longer term from continued immigration. In fact, those who reject the suggestion that the country will benefit from it (39 per cent) outnumber those who are in favour (30 per cent). More broadly, large numbers are also deeply pessimistic about the capacity of elites to ensure a harmonious and multicultural future: 46 per cent said that violence between different ethnic, racial or religious groups was largely inevitable. These attitudes and the accompanying pessimism are well documented, and not surprising. But what is striking is the response to questions about Islam and Muslims, and the extent to which they are perceived within the wider population as posing a threat to the native group and national way of life.

In general terms people appear inconsistent in their views towards Islam and its followers. At one level, those who agree that Muslims make important contributions to the country (41 per cent) significantly outnumber those who disagree (23 per cent). Similarly, the number of people who endorse the suggestion that most Muslims are good citizens (62 per cent) dwarf the number who say they are not (12 per cent). But at the same time the survey reveals clear and profound anxieties over the presence, growth and compatibility of Muslim communities in wider society. Unlike in many standard surveys, care was taken not to ask misleading questions. Yet still, when respondents were asked to react to the suggestion that Islam did *not* pose a danger to Western civilization, only 23 per cent agreed, while 57 per cent disagreed. In fact, 32 per cent disagreed *strongly* with the suggestion that Islam was not threatening the West.

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23 The IFOP survey asked: 'Generally speaking, would you say the presence of a Muslim community in France/Germany is … (a) a threat to our country's identity (42% in France/40% in Germany), (b) a factor of cultural enrichment for our country (22% in France/24% in German), (c) Neither one nor the other (36% in France/36% in Germany); available at http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1365-2-study_file.pdf (accessed 18 February 2013).

Figure 7: Wider (British) public attitudes towards immigration and Islam (% agreeing)

Legend:
- Overall sample
- 18–24 year olds
- 60 years and above
- EDL supporters

Categories (top to bottom):
- Immigrants should be sent back whether or not break law
- Number of Muslims coming to Britain should be reduced
- Islam poses a danger to Western civilization
- Relationships between different groups will get worse
- High birth rates among Muslims threaten national identity
- Growth of Muslim communities threatens white British
- A 'clash of civilizations' between Muslims and white Britons
- Generally speaking, immigrants are honest and hardworking
- British society to benefit from rising diversity
- Muslims are compatible with the British way of life

x-axis: % 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Source: YouGov; Data are weighted; see Chatham House website for full data.

religious group.[24] More than half (51 per cent) disagreed with the suggestion that this was *not* threatening the survival of the native group, while 28 per cent said they were broadly at ease with this growth. Such anxieties appear closely linked to ongoing concerns over the compatibility of Muslims, including British Muslims, with the national way of life. When asked to reflect on the suggestion that they *were* compatible with the national way of life, 24 per cent agreed, while 48 per cent disagreed. In fact only 5 per cent of the full sample agreed strongly.

This inconsistency in attitudes toward Islam and Muslims is revealed in other questions: whereas most respondents saw Muslims as good citizens, they were simultaneously ambivalent about whether Muslims shared the culture and values of the white British majority group in society: while 36 per cent said they did, 31 per cent said they did not (the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed). Whereas a significant portion saw Muslims as making important contributions, 52 per cent saw high birth rates within Muslim communities as a threat to national identity. There was also clear support for one of the core claims made by counter-Jihad groups, namely that there would be an apocalyptic-style 'clash of civilizations' between Muslims and the native group: 49 per cent agreed with the 'clash thesis' while 26 per cent disagreed. Respondents were also significantly more likely to associate this possible inter-group conflict with Muslims rather than other minority groups.[25]

Nor should these attitudes simply be dismissed as having no demonstrable impact on wider society. In recent years a series of studies have shown how anti-Muslim prejudice has become a key driver of support for extremist political movements, with members of these organizations and also electoral supporters tending to concentrate in areas that are in close proximity to large Muslim communities (a relationship that does not hold for other minority groups).[26]

In a similar fashion, large numbers of respondents expressed clear anxieties over the growth of Muslim communities, which in several European countries (including the United Kingdom) are the fastest-growing

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24 The most recent UK census (2011), for example, revealed that the proportion of Muslims had risen from 3% in 2001 to 4.8%.

25 To be robust we explored the extent to which this applies to different minority groups, whether people agree or disagree that there will be a clash of civilizations between native white Britons and Muslims, Hindus, Black British and Sikhs. Overall, 50% endorsed the suggestion of a clash of civilizations with Muslims (26% disagreed) compared with 13% for Hindus, 20% for Black British and 12% for Sikhs.

26 See Ford and Goodwin (2010) and Biggs and Knauss (2011). For similar evidence beyond the UK see Coffé et al. (2007).

The opportunity

Alongside the challenge posed by these attitudes lies an opportunity. There is a sharp generational divide in attitudes towards Islam and Muslims (and immigration generally). Whereas 84 per cent of respondents from older generations (i.e. 60 years and above) supported the idea of reducing the number of Muslims in the country, this fell to 38 per cent among a more recent generation (i.e. those aged 18–24). Whereas 77 per cent of the oldest respondents saw Islam as a danger to the West, this fell to 32 per cent among the youngest respondents. Whereas 64 per cent of the oldest endorsed the 'clash of civilizations' thesis, this support fell to 37 per cent among the youngest.

These figures suggest a process of generational change that policy-makers should seek to protect and enhance. Embracing this opportunity will be a long-term task, given that it appears distinctly unlikely that wider concerns among counter-Jihad supporters will evaporate soon. As the growth of Muslim communities continues and even accelerates, the types of anxieties documented above may sharpen. This appears especially likely if stagnant economic conditions and disproportionately high rates of deprivation within Muslim communities remain, and if sections of the mainstream media that have been criticized for framing Muslims as problematic and threatening continue to cover these trends irresponsibly (Leveson Inquiry 2012).

Conclusions

While policy communities have converged on a consensus that the evidence base on non-religion-based forms of extremism should be strengthened, the emergence of counter-Jihad groups has added an important but neglected dimension to this discussion. There remains a lack of reliable and objective research on these groups and their wider networks, with the result that incorrect assumptions about them often hold sway. The findings of this paper suggest that some of the most commonly held wisdom offers inadequate foundations for policy-making. In the light of these results, current approaches to counter-Jihad groups need to be reassessed.

Contrary to the assumptions that the emergence of these groups at this moment in European politics reflects fallout from the financial crisis, fiscal austerity or political disengagement, the survey finds that their wells of support are not filled with the unemployed, uneducated, unskilled and apathetic. The fact that groups like the EDL are appealing to citizens who are *more* likely than average to be employed and spread quite evenly across occupations challenges the notion that counter-strategies should target unemployed and deprived working-class men. Nor does it appear that they should target a street army of apathetic and marginalized youths cut adrift from mainstream politics. While counter-Jihad supporters are more dissatisfied than most with politics, they are politically engaged with politics and have not completely lost faith in the broader system.

But there are some real concerns. The seeds of support for counter-Jihad groups such as the defence leagues lie among citizens profoundly concerned over immigration, ethnic minorities and their impact on the native group and nation. They feel intensely anxious about these issues and about the future direction of society, and are profoundly pessimistic. Their concerns are deep and well entrenched. They are more likely than their fellow citizens to expect conflict between different racial, ethnic and religious groups, and are more likely to view violence as a justifiable response to these threats. While they are not single-issue in nature, these threats are associated strongly by counter-Jihad supporters with Islam and Muslim communities, which are the target of extreme levels of hostility. Importantly for policy-makers, such views sit within a wider circle of public sympathy for a counter-Jihad narrative that is actively framing Islam and Muslims as a fundamental and urgent threat.

Few mainstream voices in Europe appear to be actively challenging these claims, but doing so will be an integral component of any successful counter-strategy. This underscores the need for these strategies to simultaneously explore ways of addressing, at one level, 'harder' responses to disrupt the actual pathways into these groups and, at another, 'softer' responses aimed at addressing misperceptions and hostility within the wider public towards Islam and the role and perceived compatibility of Muslim communities. Unpacking and calming these anxieties is a key task.

What of the future? Given wider public opinion trends and ongoing attempts by extremist groups to exploit them, significant challenges will remain in the coming years. The

scale of these challenges is reflected in the survey results presented here, which reveal a wide reservoir of public sympathy for claims that Islam and the growth of settled, Muslim communities pose a fundamental threat to the native group and nation. The message is clear: there is and will remain plenty of potential support for counter-Jihad groups or similar movements. Whether this is mobilized will depend to a significant extent on the response from policy-makers and opinion-formers.

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