

**When Anti-Islamic Protest Comes to Town: Political Responses to the
English Defence League**

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Declaration

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

BNP = British National Party

BUF = British Union of Fascists

CCCPG = Community Cohesion Contingency Planning Group

CONTEST = UK Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy

CSE = Child Sexual Exploitation

DCLG = Department of Communities and Local Government

EDL = English Defence League

HMIC = Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies

LDDC = London Docklands Development Cooperation

MP = Members of Parliament

MEP = Member of European Parliament

NF = National Front

REP = Republikaner Party

SFC = Structured Focused Comparison

Tell MAMA = Tell Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks

UAF = Unite Against Fascism

UPL = United People of Luton

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Abstract

Seven years since its formation, scant academic attention has been paid to how politicians and policymakers have responded to the English Defence League. While a small and fragmented literature has charted some governmental, policing and civil society responses to this form of anti-Islamic protest, little is known about how UK politicians and policymakers have responded to the group where the EDL has demonstrated the most: at the local level. This study aims to address this lacuna. Using semi-structured elite interviews with thirty-four Members of Parliament and local Councillors as well as six behind-the-scenes policy officials, this thesis maps the types of responses issued by local politicians in Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, Luton and Tower Hamlets. Moreover, it generates a new typology for anti-EDL responses – charting a continuum from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ exclusion and on towards more inclusionary measures. Additionally, it provides the first cross-case analysis of the EDL and its protest – positing de-industrialisation, migration as well as prior histories of extremism and disorder as key contextual drivers when the EDL comes to town. What will be found here is significant. Whilst the majority of political responses towards the EDL have been largely static and exclusionary in nature, how these exclusionary responses manifest themselves and what drives such responses varies greatly. Moreover, some responses have exhibited a more inclusionary character - with a minority of responses involved in engagement and interaction work with both communities prone to and affected by EDL protest. This thesis will argue it is only through politicians’ engagement with the politically disaffected and the construction of meaningful forms of interaction between (previously isolated) communities that we can counteract the populist and prejudicial barbs of the EDL and other far-right groups across Europe.

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Chapter One
Introduction and Thesis Structure

Chapter Outline

1.1 Background: Anti-Islamic Activism and the UK Far-right

1.2 Lacuna: EDL Studies and Political Responses

1.3 Thesis' Contribution: Main Empirical and Theoretical Aims

1.4 Thesis Structure and Chapterisation

1.1 Background: Anti-Islamic Activism and the UK Far-right

The role of Islam in the UK and Western societies more generally has become a hot topic over recent decades. Starting with the Salman Rushdie affair in the late 1980's through various measures imposed against Jihadi terrorism and culminating in debates on its public expression, Islam and its adherents have been subject to significant antagonism in Western Europe and the U.S. (Saggar 2008). This antagonism is not at the margins of UK and European politics. One has only to look upon recent debates about alleged introduction of so-called 'Islamism' in UK schools (Wintour 18th July 2014), the salience of Islam in the 2012 French Presidential elections (Alexander 8th April 2012), and the spectre of ISIS-inspired terror attacks in Paris and Brussels during January 2015 and March 2016 to ascertain its mainstream importance.

The perceived 'risky' status of Islam and Muslim communities has been shown most actively amongst anti-Islamic campaigners. Keen to shrug off reputations of anti-Semitism and classical forms of biological racism, one of the most prominent satellite issues that has come to form the focus of radical right-wing populist campaigns since the mid-2000's has been public expressions of Islam. As one key author on the European radical-right suggests, though 'Islamophobia is certainly not an exclusive feature of the populist radical-right', such movements "tend to stand out in both the "quality" and quantity" of their vehemence towards Islam, 'which they describe as an inherently fundamentalist and imperialist religion-cum-ideology' (Mudde 2007: 84).

In the UK context, the main harbinger of this more anti-Islamic form of politics has been the neo-fascist, British National Party (BNP). Keen to modernise its ideology away from ethno-nationalism and towards a more populist (and therefore moderate) form of nationalism (Copsey 2007), it successfully fought local and European elections on a ticket of voluntary repatriation of 'non-indigenous' citizens (BNP 2005: 14) – winning over fifty council seats, two places in the European Parliament and one Greater London Assembly seat in the process. Since the BNP's implosion in 2010, however, the organised UK far-right has experienced a process of fragmentation and re-orientation back towards a more direct action form of politics. As one recent report has noted, Britain's far-right is now more 'isolated and in retreat' than at any point over the

past twenty years - 'becoming more extreme and violent' in the process (*Hope not Hate* 7th February 2016). This has had the effect, not just of moving the far-right onto the UK's streets, but also transitioning the UK far-right into the more pernicious (and criminological space) of online and offline anti-Muslim protests and attacks – accounting for two-fifths of all incidents in the year 2013/14 (Feldman and Littler, July 2014: 3).

1.2 Lacuna: EDL Studies and Political Responses

This thesis examines responses to one of 'the most significant anti-Islam movements in Europe' at the time of this transition (Goodwin et al 2016: 5), the English Defence League (EDL). Formed in June 2009, its emergence came in response to the picketing of a UK army regiment's homecoming parade in the South Bedfordshire town of Luton by a group belonging to a (now proscribed) radical Islamist group, Al-Muhajiroun (Harrison 14th March 2009). Calling itself a 'human rights organisation', the EDL aims to 'protect the inalienable rights of all people to protest against radical Islam's encroachment into the lives of non-Muslims.' (EDL Website 2013) At its emergence, the group mixed a unique blend of ultra-patriotism and anti-Muslim populist politics, with a potent harnessing of social media to recruit supporters and publicise its activities. Its *modus operandi* – and the focus of this thesis - has, however, been its offline activities: organising over 50 sizeable and disruptive protests in towns and cities across the UK in order to demonstrate against what it sees as the 'creeping' effects of 'Islamisation' within UK public life (Goodwin et al 2016: 5).

Such a visceral and disorderly form of anti-Islamic protest has not gone unnoticed. Since 2010, there has been a burgeoning body of academic literature that has debated: whether the origins and drivers of the English Defence League can be seen as far-right, football hooligan or an exclusively working-class phenomenon (Copsey 2010; Garland and Treadwell 2010; Jackson 2011; Alessio and Meredith 2014), and whether the EDL's support base actually coheres with these popular stereotypes (Bartlett and Littler 2011; Goodwin 2013; Goodwin et al 2016; Treadwell and Garland 2011). Moreover, EDL scholarship has tried to uncover the dynamics and extent of the group's commitment to 'anti-Islamism', with some ascribing a deeper, 'Islamophobic' cause to the group's politics (Allen 2011; Busher 2014; Jackson 2011;

Kassimeris and Jackson 2015; Pilkington 2016; Treadwell 2014). Furthermore, there have also been attempts to apply social movement theory to explain the group's specific form of grassroots organisation and its (limited) trajectory (Jackson 2011; Busher 2013; Busher 2015; Pilkington 2016).

As one prominent EDL expert has noted, however, we still know preciously little about the group itself and its 'possible impacts' (Busher 2014: 208). For example, few researchers have explored the effect the EDL has had on community tensions, public-order, racially or religiously motivated hate crime, or the mobilisation of radical Islamist groups (ibid: 1-2). Moreover, few scholars have conducted sustained cross-case analyses of EDL demonstrations – examining the drivers and rationales of the group's main repertoire of action. Taken from a different angle, another prominent area overlooked are how mainstream politicians have responded to the EDL and its main cycle of street protests between 2009 and 2013, described by one set of scholars as 'the most significant threat to community cohesion ... since the heyday of the National Front.' (Treadwell and Garland 2010: 20) Only one chapter of a policy report by far-right expert, Nigel Copsey (2010), has sought to shed light on how the UK Government and national politicians have engaged with this new form of anti-Islamic protest. There has, however, been no thorough-going analysis of how UK Councillors and Members of Parliament have responded to the EDL and its demonstrations where the group has manifested itself the most: at the local-level.

This omission is peculiar for several reasons. Firstly, there has been a plethora of interventions by local authorities and mainstream political elites towards the EDL. Most local authorities - in liaison with the police - help manage protests under the 1986 Public Order Act and have therefore had to devise preparations and come up with informal policy solutions to mitigate the public-order and community cohesion impacts when a group like the EDL comes to town. Moreover, the actions of this new insurgent group have also animated Members of Parliament and local Councillors to offer their own denunciations, diagnoses and policy solutions. In particular, both MPs and Councillors regularly comment on EDL demonstrations in their constituencies and try to enact counter-measures to curb the group – embarking on (sometimes extensive)

local news, Parliamentary and collaborative local campaigns to obstruct the group from protesting within their own particular locale.

Secondly, these interventions speak to a wider and more pertinent philosophical question about how policy-makers 'tolerate the intolerant'. In particular, such a question has plagued the minds of liberal philosophers for centuries, with the likes of John Locke (1689), John Stuart Mill (1869), John Rawls (1971), and Michael Walzer (1997), all grappling with what Karl Popper once called the 'paradox of tolerance' – i.e. that 'unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance.' (Popper 1945: 581) Whether (and why) local politicians have gone too far in censoring or restricting the EDL, therefore, is a weighty philosophical and moral question that can only be answered by looking at how particular local authorities and politicians have dealt with this new form of protest on a case-by-case basis.

Thirdly, a burgeoning academic interest lies in examining – both the nature and effectiveness of - political responses to the contemporary far-right in Europe. Though mainly focused on party-political manifestations, some scholars at the *exclusivist* end of far-right responses suggest that a speedy and coherent 'no-platform' or 'cordon sanitaire' response by politicians helps collapse extreme right mobilisations (Art 2007), while some *inclusivists* suggest that mainstream elites should try to emulate far-right policies on multiculturalism and migration (Bale et al 2010). Furthermore, some advocate less political and more sociologically informed responses - positing that, in order to reduce racial and religious prejudice, politicians should be promoting social interaction between ethnic minorities and other resident populations. Some scholars have advocated this as particularly effective way of dealing with extreme right-wing groups (Goodwin 2011). Such typologies and policy prescriptions are, however, absent from the (albeit small) 'EDL response' literature that largely omits a systematic overview of strategies and tactics available to local and national politicians.

1.3 Thesis' Contribution: Main Empirical and Theoretical Aims

In order to address this lacuna then, this thesis will examine: how UK Members of Parliament and local Councillors have responded to the English Defence

League over the past seven years? This research question will be answered through semi-structured elite interviews with 34 Members of Parliament and local Councillors who have experienced sizeable and/or frequent EDL protests as well as a wide range of behind-the-scenes policy actors. More specifically, we will focus on political responses in Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, Luton and Tower Hamlets – all places with storied histories of far-right mobilisations. These empirical case studies will form the backbone of the thesis and will for the first time provide some answers as to what underlying factors have helped stymie or stimulate successful political interventions towards the EDL. Moreover, they will also provide the basis for the first sustained analysis of EDL protest – illuminating the drivers and determinants of the group’s particular form of anti-Islamic activism.

The main empirical aim of the study will therefore be to map the differing types of political responses to the EDL in locales across the UK - examining approaches, rationales and role perceptions. This will be in order to assess: how UK politicians have dealt with this new form of anti-Islamic protest (beyond the stock response that the ‘EDL is not welcome here’); to uncover the rich variety of policy interventions, campaign initiatives and rhetoric spoken in kind or against the EDL in local arenas across the UK; and to get a sense of what politicians perceive their role to be when the EDL comes to protest. The second empirical objective of this thesis is to contribute to contemporary policy debates about public-order management and community cohesion within a wider context of the Government’s policies on counter-extremism. In the course of this study, we will accrue lessons in what has and what hasn’t worked when dealing with EDL protests in relation to these policy fields. It is important that any such policy mistakes are learnt from and avoided in the future, both at a local and national level. The third empirical aim of the study will be to reach a more fine-grained understanding of contextual drivers for EDL protest – investigating the political, socio-economic and historic patterns that coincide with anti-Islamic activism. An understanding of these variables will gift policymakers with a sharper sense of the local conditions that give rise to such forms of extremism. In addition, factors more germane to the group itself will be discussed in tempering or fuelling activism within a particular area.

Meanwhile, the main theoretical aim of this research will be to construct a specific typology of how (and why) mainstream political elites respond to this particular form of anti-Islamic activism – outlining the pitfalls, challenges, and rationales behind this kind of work. What will be found is that, while the default response of local mainstream political elites has been to exclude the EDL, there have also been limited cases of inclusion – with policymakers sustainably engaging with both communities affected by and communities prone to support EDL activism. It will be argued that a renewed emphasis needs to be placed on this more local-level engagement and interaction in order to responsibly deal with and prevent the threat posed by the EDL and other far-right groups in the years and decades to come. Only by tackling the populist and prejudicial drivers of such groups can we ameliorate their potentially divisive and corrosive impact on UK politics and society.

1.4 Thesis Structure and Chapterisation

Before detailing the thesis' findings and discussing their implications, however, we will spend the next chapter reviewing what we know about the EDL as a group and responses to it. What we will find is that there are three dominant interpretations of the EDL contained in the existing literature on the movement: the EDL as far-right movement, the EDL as a part of UK football hooligan subculture, and the EDL as *sui generis* (or 'of its own kind'). What will be argued here is that a broader shift needs to occur within the EDL scholarship away from causes and characteristics and towards examining the impacts and policy consequences of the group. In order to address this lacuna, then, we first set about fleshing out the possible political counterstrategies that can be made in light of the EDL's own particular form of anti-Islamic activism. This will mainly draw on the comparative European literature on political elites' responses to radical right-wing populism as well as Matthew Goodwin's (March 2013) 'harder-softer' distinction in regard to EDL responses. More importantly, it will allow us to identify, compare, and evaluate political responses to the EDL during the course of the thesis and therefore arrive at a more concrete sense of how elite politicians have responded to the group.

The third chapter will then move on to detail the theses' research methodology and approach. This will usefully explore the realist and liberal normative

underpinnings of the research at hand when examining political responses to the EDL and outline the weighty moral and philosophical reasons for the current mode of study. The chapter will then move on to specify why qualitative over quantitative research methods were used. It will conclude by broadly outlining the research techniques of semi-structured elite interviews and structured focused comparison used in the project as well as the reasons for how and why they were operationalised.

Following the methodology chapter, we will move on to the theses' five main case study chapters. These will look at five UK locations where the EDL has demonstrated the most and in sizeable numbers: Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, Luton and Tower Hamlets. Each chapter deals with a separate case study and will, first, detail the background of each urban location before examining the strategies used by political elites when the EDL have come to town. This is in order to try to identify the historical processes and events that might have been important in informing responses to the group as well as some of the contextual rationale for EDL protest. What will be found in the main bodies of these chapters is that, while a tiny minority of local authorities have been arguably 'ready' to deal with EDL protests, the majority of local authorities have been on sizeable organisational learning processes in order to adapt, address and calibrate their responses to this new form of anti-Islamic protest – with mixed results that have ranged from political schism to significant success in curbing the EDL 'threat'.

The first empirical chapter, Birmingham, will examine EDL protest early on - taking its starting point from the groups' protests during the Summer of 2009. Over the course of the last seven years, what will be found is that – while political responses have moved from a flexible to robust position – West Midlands Police have tracked the opposite arc: moving away from confrontational and high-profile forms of public-order protest management towards a more consensual and low-profile approach. This is largely a symptom of lessons learnt early on – with chaotic scenes in 2009 paving the way for more measured policing response as the group's cycle of protest progressed within the City.

The second empirical chapter will see the thesis move from the West Midlands to West Yorkshire, examining the cases of Bradford and Keighley. In the Bradford case, it will be argued that earlier instances of rioting during the mid-1990's and early 2000's had the effect of mobilising a vigilant and well thought-out response when the EDL came to visit in the Summer of 2010. Lessons were carried forward when the EDL came again in 2013 – seeing the protest site moved away from the main commercial area of the town. Moreover, in the case of Keighley, we can also see that context is important – with an, at times, racialised debate around the criminological issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE) feeding into responses by local politicians in the early summer of 2012.

The third empirical chapter will then see the thesis move away from this major Northern metropolis to a more significant site of multicultural harmony, Leicester. While early chaotic scenes saw significant disorder in the East Midlands City in October 2010, a changeover in Council leadership and lessons learned by Leicestershire Police saw a significant diminution in disorder in February 2012 when the EDL visited Leicester on a second occasion. All was not plain sailing, however. As we shall see, differences of political opinion within the City's Council Chambers over the EDL's presence - in particular passing the City's Central Memorial Clock tower - stoked political acrimony between lay Councillors and the Council's leadership that seems to have outlived the EDL's cycle of protest in the City.

The fourth empirical chapter takes us to where the EDL emerged and started, the South Bedfordshire town of Luton. Still recovering from being where the EDL began, what will be found here is the key rationale behind elite management of subsequent EDL protests in 2011, 2012, and 2014 was reputation management. This gave seed to the adoption of a new town centre policy that tried to effectively exclude the group from the town's main, St. George's Square. In this chapter, key problems with the new town centre policy will be discussed, as well as other innovative measures that have been adopted by local elites in response to anti-Islamic protest.

The fifth and final empirical chapter takes us to the East End London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Though the EDL has only visited the London Borough twice over the past seven years, it will be suggested that sizeable arrest counts in

September 2011 and 2013 point to the problematic role of the group's 'avowed opponents' when trying to manage far-right disorder. What will be found in the Tower Hamlets case, then, is that - while local politicians successfully organised a positive response - the Metropolitan Police was unable to quell counter-protester disorder in the Tower Hamlets case.

Finally, the study will conclude by examining something that has not been touched upon in the main body of the thesis: national political responses towards the EDL. This will look at how senior politicians and policymakers have tried to respond to the EDL at the macro-level and points back to the importance of localised responses. Moreover, we will also discuss again the nature and effectiveness of political responses in light of the findings of the case study chapters. Furthermore, any recommendations that can be made at a broader level about managing far-right protest will be posited in relation to political, policing and anti-fascist responses. While it will be found that inclusivist responses are the exception, it will be argued that a shift from exclusion towards more dynamic forms of inclusion are needed in order to address the EDL and other far-right groups that have become a lightning rod for white working-class disaffection over recent years. Moreover, and specifically in relation to the criminological aspects of managing EDL and anti-Islamic protests, it will be suggested that a more low-key, consensual style of policing and a less confrontational style of anti-fascist activism would help ameliorate the potentially disorderly effects of such demonstrations. Before we come to this, however, we first need to establish what scholars say about the causes and drivers of the English Defence League. This will be in order to suggest political responses to it. It is to this task that the next chapter will now turn.

Chapter Two

Literature Review - Understanding the English Defence League and Responses to it

Chapter Outline

2.1: Introduction

2.2: Interpreting the EDL - Far-right, Football Hooligan or Sui Generis?

2.3: From Causes to Consequences - The EDL 'Response' Literature

2.4: Conclusion

2.1 Introduction

In order to specify possible political responses to the English Defence League, it is first necessary to understand the group itself. Fortunately, this task is made easier by a range of relevant literature devoted to investigating the historical, social and political origins of the EDL, its ideology and politics as well as the support bases of the group. In the first section of this chapter, we will examine what scholars have had to say about the EDL - structured around a discussion of whether the group is far-right, football hooligan or *sui generis*, 'of its own kind'. In the second section, we will then go on to look at an area that has received less attention in EDL scholarship - responses in general and political responses in particular - and move on to construct a typology of political responses to the group. What will be argued is that a shift needs to occur in EDL scholarship from simply looking at the causes and characteristics of the group toward looking at the policy consequences of the EDL's particularly disruptive form of activism, including (but not limited to) responses by politicians, police and other key public-policy actors.

2.2: Interpreting the EDL - Far-right, Football Hooligan or Sui Generis?

a) Introduction

Understanding the political, social and historical lineage of the EDL has been one of *the* major academic tasks when studying the group. Indeed, it appears that scholars have settled around three major interpretations of the group: the EDL as a *far-right group*, the EDL as an outgrowth of the UK's *Football Hooligan* scene, and the EDL as *Sui Generis* movement (or 'of its own kind'). This multiplicity of interpretations is perhaps unsurprising, however, given informal nature of the EDL's organisation - and has led scholars to note the particularly 'amorphous', 'complex', and ideologically 'unclear' setup of the EDL, like other contemporary populist groups (Bartlett and Littler 2011:3). Moreover, the diversity of classifications has also been further exacerbated by the cross-disciplinary nature of EDL scholarship - with an array of social scientists from differing disciplines interpreting different aspects of the group in different ways. In this brief literature review, we aim to restore some order to the fragmented body of scholarship on the EDL by comparing and critiquing these three major classifications of the group.

Interpretation 1: The EDL as a Far-right Group

The first literary camp in EDL scholarship takes on the popular interpretation that the EDL is a far-right group that has attempted to capitalise on anti-Islamic sentiment over the past decade (Allen 2011; Jackson 2011). This camp asserts that the EDL should be seen as an extension of the electorally successful British National Party (BNP) and that, though they rally to different political tactics, ideologies and support bases, they are both essentially part of wider anti-Islamic hostility that has emerged within the UK's post-9/11 security environment (Allen 2011: 283 and Jackson 2011: 61). Moreover, subscribers to this camp also suggest that groups like the EDL are also part of a broader shift within the European far-right away from biologically racist, anti-Semitic politics toward culturally racist, anti-Muslim campaigns (Jackson 2011).

The first study to assert the 'EDL as far-right' link was Chris Allen's (2011) seminal examination of '...whether the EDL can rightly be described as 'Islamophobic'.' (p.280) Though he explicitly recognises that there is '...little real evidence ... to suggest that the EDL is either a direct product of the BNP' or any other far-right organisation (p. 285), Allen spends considerable time authenticating the EDL's part in continuing the BNP's tactical, ideological and linguistic strategies around anti-Muslim politics. Indeed, Allen asserts that the EDL's emergence can be seen as part of 'very same 'growing wave of public hostility to Islam'' that was fanned by the BNP's former Chairman, Nick Griffin, from the early to late 2000's onwards (p. 283).

An example, which Allen uses to posit this continuity, is the EDL's use of LGBT and ethnic minority groups (p.289). Allen points to the BNP's exploitation of 'intra-Asian tensions' through using Sikh's and Hindu's as opposed to Muslims in their promotional material in the early 2000's (p.288) as similar to the EDL's use of 'special interest divisions' for women, the gay community and Sikhs. Known as 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' tactic, it is an attempt to simultaneously bring to bear other nebulous grievances against Islam around gender and constitutional issues in the Middle East whilst also disavowing accusations from the mainstream that the EDL is a 'Nazi', 'racist' or 'fascist' organisation.

More substantively, Allen asserts that the EDL's ideological differentiation between moderate and radical Islam is in reality 'far less' sophisticated than the group claims (p.292). Using a mixture of his own work (2010) and Clarke's (2003) psychoanalysis of racism, Allen suggests that the EDL's Islamophobia is not purely confined to specific acts but also certain thought processes. This more expansive definition allows Allen to argue that the EDL's ideology is merely the continuation of the BNP's own cultural racism: an intractable psychological 'form of order' that demarcates the Muslim 'Other' as a non-constituent part of English national 'identity' (ibid).

One criticism that can be levelled at Allen's consideration of Islamophobia and the EDL, however, is the highly structural and deterministic definition of Islamophobia he uses. For example, Allen uses an expansive definition of Islamophobia – that 'includes systems of thought and meaning, manifested in signifiers and symbols that influence, impact on and inform the social consensus about the Other.' (p.290) By psychologising Islamophobia and suggesting that it can be found in pre-cognitive patterns of thought, Allen renders a highly structural and deterministic model that suggests that accusations of anti-Muslim sentiment can be levelled at a group or individual even before coherent attitudes and actions that might be considered anti-Islamic exist. This is not to say that his argument of the EDL as group - extending the anti-Muslim environment created by the BNP - is not a valid one, but that this more expansive definition of Islamophobia applied to the EDL deserves a weight of empirical and experimental evidence that is simply not possible within a 15-page journal article. Perhaps a narrower definition of Islamophobia that has more to say about agency would have, therefore, sufficed.

Another study to assert the EDL as far-right link is Julian Richards' (2013) article that '...explores the EDL's own assertion that it is not a part of the far-right at all, but a radical populist movement which has some new things to say to the populace.' (p.178) In it, Richards argues that the EDL 'conforms with many of the characteristics of a group on the political far-right.' (p.191) Two in particular stand out: the first is the EDL's ability to ape a trend among far-right groups in Europe that prey on those who are 'likely to feel the greatest anxiety

over the mismatch of their skills and prospects with the demands of the new information economy', i.e. the white working-classes in economically depressed post-industrial towns (p.184). The second is the EDL's ability to seize on the 'general anxiety over increases in Muslim militancy in some sections of the population coupled with a general dissatisfaction with the way in which the government and political class have tackled these different questions...' (p.190).

The primary text in the EDL-far-right school of thought is, however, Paul Jackson's (2011) report on the EDL. While Allen's conflation of the EDL and BNP is left implicit, Jackson makes a more explicit and expansive case for the 'EDL as far-right' link. From the outset, Jackson argues that the EDL's ideology and 'public facing' rhetoric places the group among the 'New Far Right' (p.5). After analysing the EDL's mission statement, Jackson asserts that the EDL's viewing of Islam as essentially 'anti-modern' and 'barbaric' (p.12), its 'slippage' between Islamic extremism and moderate Muslim communities (ibid), as well as its use of 'us' and 'them' revised in entirely cultural terms (ibid) place it comfortably within the most recent wave of the European far-right.

Crucially, and in contrast to Allen's article, Jackson goes beyond ideological and tactical links to substantiate the link between the EDL and the BNP with reference to shared personnel. Mark Pitchford's contribution, for example, ties EDL former leader Tommy Robinson to the BNP after briefly taking up membership of the party in 2004 (p.48). Moreover, Pitchford goes on to suggest that Robinson's cousin and EDL co-founder Kevin Carroll helped sign a nomination paper for a BNP local election candidate in 2007 (ibid). He also finds extensive BNP membership links amongst EDL supporters (pp.51-54). After analysing this, Pitchford concludes that the group is 'unarguably connected to the BNP and other far-right groups, whether by previous association or by shared interest.' (p.54)

One of Jackson's greatest contributions to the EDL literature is, however, his report's examination of how the structure of the EDL's activism augments the group's claim of being solely against 'radical Islam'. Jackson pushes forward the debate over EDL Islamophobia by drawing a useful distinction between the 'front-stage' rhetoric of the EDL's official website and the more anti-Muslim 'back-stage' discussions that occur between EDL activists on grassroots blog

sites. For example, posts on the news section of the EDL website at least 'attempt to make distinctions between 'moderate Muslims and what is usually termed 'radical Islam'.' (p.36) This is in comparison to English Defence League Extra and Casuals United blogs, where 'anti-Muslim discussions typically characterise the Islamic faith as a whole as inherently violent and threatening' (p.37).

Following on from this front-stage/back-stage distinction is Andrew Brindle's brilliant (2016) article on 'how discourses differ between those produced by the group elite [on the EDL's website]...and those created by individuals' on the EDL's Facebook page (p.2). Like Jackson, Brindle locates the EDL within the contemporary 'populist far-right' through its construction of 'Islam and Muslim immigrants as a cultural threat to the European nations' and as an 'incompatible ontological category' (ibid). Using a sophisticated corpus linguistic and discourse analysis of 340 EDL News articles and 56 threads from the EDL's Facebook page, Brindle also confirms Jackson's findings that, while the 'EDL elite discursively focus...upon opposition to extremism within Islam', group supporters 'have constructed [the whole of] Islam and [all] Muslims as a threat to their position in society and way of life' (p.14). This, Brindle suggests, firmly places the EDL as an 'extreme right-wing movement' that is xenophobic and 'draws heavily on [an] ethno-nationalism based on cultural racism and anti-political establishment' feelings (ibid).

In contradistinction to Jackson and Brindle's 'New Far Right' label, however, one of the other latest studies to authenticate the EDL as far-right link is by Dominic Alessio and Kristen Meredith (2014). They argue that the EDL's ideology and form of organisation fits with something much older. In their article, they argue that the EDL can be seen similar in 'motivation, ideology and membership' to early twentieth century forms of fascistic organisations, such as the post-WWI Italian Squadisti (p.105). Alessio and Meredith argue that the EDL's link with the British Freedom Party (BFP) in 2012 signalled an indelible shift 'away from a single issue anti-Islamist position towards [a] more fully developed ultra-nationalism' or paligenetic nationalism (p.106). The BFP's commitment to 'rebuilding and restoration [of] a strong Britain' and its call for a

'new industrial revolution within the UK' being similar to the idea of national rebirth after a period of decline that is at the centre of fascist ideology (p.114).

More substantively, they conduct an extensive analysis of how '...the actions and practices of [EDL] members, rather than just their words and slogans, lend themselves to a more coherently fascist ideology...' (p.110). They use the example of an attack on a Muslim bookshop in October 2011 to demonstrate 'propensity for violence' (ibid), the open involvement of EDL members in Nazi groups such as the 'Aryan Defence Force' as a sign of its commitment to anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism (p.111), and the charismatic leadership of Tommy Robinson (p.112) in order to demonstrate the EDL's 'fascist pedigree' (p.116).

The central criticism that can be targeted at the literature that interprets the EDL as a far-right movement is the extent to which we can elide the two. As Meleagrou-Hitchens and Brun (2013) usefully point out, while the EDL can be seen as sharing the same xenophobic and authoritarian streak as the BNP, they don't subscribe to Mudde's (2000) third pillar of racial or ethnic nationalism (p.34). Moreover, the EDL's subscription to defending liberal values and liberal democracy means that it is difficult to place the group in the same camp as other right-wing extremist actors in Western Europe who reject 'the fundamental values, procedures, and institutions of the democratic constitutional state' (Carter 2005: 19) and 'principle[s] of fundamental human equality.' (Ibid) Ideologically at least, therefore, the 'EDL as far-right' link is a complex and questionable one, which relies more on conflation and *a priori* assumptions than concrete empirical evidence.

Interpretation 2: The EDL as an outgrowth of the UK's Football Hooligan Scene

The second camp that has emerged within the EDL literature posits that the EDL should be seen as an outgrowth of the UK's football hooligan scene, with its own distinct single-issue agenda (Copsey 2010; Treadwell 2015; Treadwell and Garland 2010, 2011, & 2012). In their eyes, the EDL is not driven by the same 'fascist or neo-fascist ideological end goal' as the traditional far-right (Copsey 2010: 5), but a more protean ideology and a more casual set of organisational principles. Here, the EDL finds its roots in changes to the UK football hooligan scene over the past ten years, where high ticketing prices and public-order interventions have displaced physical confrontation from football

matches and out onto the UK's streets. The EDL is, therefore, seen as drawing 'overwhelming' support from this very same coterie of young, white working-class males (ibid: 29), who would have formerly populated football terraces on match days.

A key protagonist of this camp is academic historian of the UK far-right, Nigel Copsey. In his seminal 2010 report for the counter-extremist organisation, *Faith Matters*, Copsey posits that there are substantive reasons not to couch the EDL as part of a broader far-right phenomenon. In the main, Copsey is keen to stress, that whilst the EDL's profile of support might be 'overwhelming[ly] young, white working-class males' (p.29), the EDL's organisational evolution from football casual subculture (p.9) and its use of the same brand of selective racism against different parts of the British Asian community (p.11) suggest that the EDL is best described as '...a deeply Islamophobic [but not far-right] new social movement.' (p.5)

According to Copsey, the case for disputing the EDL as far-right link is further strengthened with reference to the EDL's 'principal financier, strategist and tactician', Alan Lake (ibid). Lake, a millionaire IT consultant from North London, became an influential figure within the EDL at the end of 2009. His intellectual weight can be seen in the EDL's use of football hooligan networks, which Lake saw as 'more physical groups' that would help 'put bodies on the street' (p. 18). More to the point, Lake was 'entirely unconnected' with the established UK far-right and financed the EDL based on the condition that it distance itself from the BNP (p.15).

The most sustained attention to the EDL's football hooligan link, however, comes in the form of three articles and a book chapter published by criminologists, James Treadwell and Jon Garland. Treadwell and Garland assert that the rise of the EDL has a direct corollary to the neo-liberal policy interventions of New Labour and Thatcherism in the 1980's. More specifically, a common aside in two of their articles is that the inception of domestic football banning orders in 1999 and 'prohibitive ticket pricing' have driven football hooligan firms out of stadia and onto Britain's streets – making them more susceptible to the appeals of far-right protest movements (2010: 20 and 2012: 124).

These assertions are backed up by fieldwork evidence. In their 2011 article, for example, Treadwell and Garland find the 'particular penchant for expensive, exclusive designer clothing' as well as a 'range of football hooligan groups' were on display at EDL's earlier demonstrations. This helps substantiate '...the link between Casuals United [an umbrella organisation for UK football hooligan 'firms'] and the EDL is a strong one...' (p.23) Indeed, their covert ethnographic work with three confirmed EDL supporters further attests to the EDL-Football hooligan link at the individual level. For example, it was found that all participants 'had a history of engaging in ... football hooligan crews.' (2011: 632) This leads them to argue that '... the EDL and Casuals United, while sharing some characteristics with established far-right parties, mark a ... fusing of football hooligan casual culture and extremist politics.' (p.20)

To focus on this particular element of Treadwell and Garland's work is, however, to miss out on one of their key insights. Treadwell and Garland's main concern is more psychological than historical. Using the EDL to examine how white working-class men 'construct a specific form and style of violent masculinity' (2011: 621), they find that the psychosocial lineage of the EDL goes deeper and broader than a mere concern for 'race'. The motivations of the EDL's core supporters are actually an interplay between 'anger, marginalization, alienation and frustration' (p.632) as well as an attempt to 'rediscover the lost historical object of community and solidarity' through the group (Treadwell 2015: 106). These factors pre-date contemporary football hooliganism and can be found in the 'extreme objectless anxiety and cynicism that has afflicted the unemployed from the 1980's onwards.' (2012: 131) Participation in EDL demonstrations gives an outlet for 'externalised hostility, resentment and fury directed at the scapegoat for their [socio-political] ills: the Islamic 'other'' (p.621).

One arguable difficulty of Treadwell and Garland's marginalization thesis, however, derives from the implicitly structuralist underpinnings of the analysis that they bring to bear on the EDL. As Alexander Oaten notes in his (2014) article on EDL collective identity, Treadwell and Garland's suggestion that only disaffected working-class youth will support the EDL 'remains too closely tied to the issues of class' and makes their support 'appear somehow inevitable.' (p.336) Instead, Oaten notes that what is special about the EDL is something

altogether more agency based and surrounds the collective discourse of 'victimhood' amongst EDL activists. For example, in EDL discourse, the English working-class are presented as the 'new second class citizens in our own land' (p.342) whilst the imprisonment of the EDL's leader, Tommy Robinson, in 2012 was seen proof of wider victimisation by the police (p.344). Victimhood embodied by EDL supporters, rather than neoliberalism or markets 'out there', is therefore the 'medium through which Muslims, the government and the establishment are initially filtered within EDL discourse' (p.333) and is how the group arrives at its conclusion of 'Islamisation'.

Moreover, Oaten's critique also unearths another key shortcoming of the football hooligan camp: the way it depicts EDL support. Nigel Copsey (2010), for example, admits that, apart from examining the EDL's Facebook pages and observing EDL rallies, that he was not able to 'conduct any interviews with EDL leading activists or supporters' due to the limited amount of time he had to compile his report (p.7). Moreover, it is unclear how Treadwell and Garland select their research participants. They seem to be satisfied that, due to 'wider author engagement with perpetrators of racist and faith hate', this enables them to assert that their (limited) sample is representative of all young men involved in the group - without any clear, scientific basis to substantiate such claims (p.622).

Interpretation 3: The EDL as a 'Sui Generis' Movement

The latest, and most persuasive, camp to emerge from EDL scholarship contends that we should not consider the EDL as emerging from a particular socio-political or historical context but see the group as 'of its own kind', or *sui generis*. This camp argues that the EDL's innovative use of Facebook, its inclusion of non-traditionally-extreme-right-aligned groups (such as women, Sikhs and gay people), and social movement model of organisation mean a fresh vocabulary and set of methodological tools need to be brought to bear on the study of the EDL. This emerging trend can be found in more recent sociological and think-tank studies, and has placed the EDL literature on a more scientific footing.

One of the first *sui generis* studies of the EDL was conducted by Jamie Bartlett and Mark Littler for the London-based think tank, Demos, and was the 'first ever

large-scale empirical study of the EDL' and its support base (2011: 3). They argued for a revision of '...the received wisdom that the EDL is a street-based movement comprised of young thugs.' (p.5) Bartlett and Littler suggest that, rather than seeing the EDL as far-right or football hooligan, we can assign them the more nuanced label of a 'populist movement that contains some extreme right-wing and sometimes Islamophobic elements.' (p.7)

Contrary to the 'football hooligan camp', Bartlett and Littler found that 28% of supporters are over 30, that 30% are educated to college and University level and that 15% hold professional qualifications. Moreover, they found that, in the main, EDL supporters were 'democrats', with a 'clear majority' agreeing that 'voting does matter' (p.3) and had a high proportion demonstrating a commitment to the 'rule of law' (ibid). There is one stereotype that EDL supporters cannot so easily shrug off, however. Bartlett and Littler still find that the single most important reason for joining the EDL is because of entrenched 'opposition to Islam or Islamism' (p.6). This was followed by 'a love of England' and a 'commitment to preservation of traditional national and cultural values.' (ibid)

Also adding to this new evidence base is Matthew Goodwin's (March 2013) Chatham House paper, 'The Roots of Extremism', and his (2016) co-authored article with Dr David Cutts and Laurence Janta-Lipinski. In both, Goodwin asserts that in order to understand the EDL we should view it as part of a new set of global counter-jihad groups. Such groups are characterised by 'confrontational street-based demonstrations', 'transitory and fluid memberships', and focus 'heavily on the issue of Islam' (2013: 4). They are 'distinct from the wider phenomenon of populist extremism but are fuelled by the same drivers'. (p.5)

More substantively, Goodwin finds that the traditional academic and popular caricature of EDL supporters simply does not stack up. Polling 298 EDL identifiers and sympathisers, Goodwin et al find that they are not simply young males who are politically apathetic, anti-Muslim, and racist, but 'citizens aged between 45-59' (2016: 8) who are 'part of overall low levels of public trust' (2013: 8). More surprisingly, his study (with Cutts and Janta-Lipinski) found that 'Islamisation'- or the encroachment of Islam into the public sphere - wasn't

ranked 'number one' amongst EDL supporter's main concerns. Instead, (related) hostility towards minorities and immigrants followed by the economy were ranked highest (2016: 14). Emerging from these two studies, therefore, is Goodwin's real concern about the 'mainstream' potential for EDL support (2013: 14). Indeed, another, more recent study by Paul Thomas et al (2015) of white working-class communities in West Yorkshire found that 'a number of what might be called EDL themes or concerns [i.e. voices not listened to, preferential treatment of minorities and concerns about changing demographics] did resonate' with the wider public. (p.74) Whilst perhaps not prepared to join or support extremist movements, therefore, these studies worryingly show a cadre of the UK public who are at least sympathetic to the issues and campaigns advocated by the EDL and other right-wing extremist groups.

What must be stressed, at this point, however, is that, while these latest polls of EDL support are perhaps more 'scientific', they are not necessarily more 'democratic'. One problem that undermines these more quantitative studies is still the 'representativeness question' that plagued others, like Treadwell and Garland, and is part of the EDL's informal nature. For example, Bartlett and Littler (2011: 35) admit that there is a major weakness in the sampling method of their study. They only poll the EDL's online presence and therefore can only draw reliable inferences about the EDL's Internet supporters. Moreover, Goodwin's use of polling data is questionable in that it rests on a population of respondents who had 'heard of' the EDL and 'agreed with' its values (2013: 7). This is slightly remedied in his 2016 study when he tests differences in demographics and political attitudes between these aforementioned supporters and members (or individuals who would join the EDL), but it is still an approximation.

Critical of Goodwin's 'counter-jihad' characterisation is a new entrant into the EDL literature: the work of Joel Busher (2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015). In essence, Busher suggests that such a term is too 'nebulous' (2014: 210), as it relates to the broader, global "Counter-Jihad movement". In the UK context, the emergence of the EDL can be better understood as part of a broader form of anti-Muslim populism (ibid: 1) or 'an anti-Muslim protest group' (2015: 20). The EDL, therefore, is seen by Busher as drawing on the same potent themes of

cultural racism and anti-establishmentarianism whilst rhetorically distancing itself from the forbearers of nationalistic populism: the BNP.

Busher's work also signals a shift in academic literature away from merely contextualising the EDL and towards understanding it in its own right. His work draws on almost sixteen months of overt ethnographic research among the EDL grassroots activists in London and the South East, and challenges some key pre-conceptions about the group. In his 2012 work on the role of the EDL in the 2011 London riots, for example, he argues that, whilst politicians and the police were quick to stereotype the EDL as trying to stoke racial tensions, there was 'little evidence' to suggest EDL activist involvement in that Summer's riots (2012: 253). While public discussions were fixated on potential racial strife, EDL activists actively constructed a counter-narrative in which they 'refused to play the role [of] angry, working-class whites teetering on the edge of racism' (p.250).

In his 2013 work on the role of EDL activists in violent disorder, Busher again calls for a fresh perspective by academics and practitioners towards the EDL. In it, Busher stresses that treating the EDL, as a black box is neither useful nor meaningful. For example, while there is a hard core of the EDL who are violent, there are also more moderate activists who wish to carry out peaceful protest (p.78). Moreover, Busher argues that EDL activists use a 'breadth' of narratives that 'enables the EDL to operate as a vehicle through which activists can express an array of grievances' (p.80). These usually extend from activists 'everyday anxieties about how their neighbourhoods are changing...' (ibid) and go beyond typically anti-Muslim chants to more sophisticated 'use of concepts such as 'a clash of civilisations' between Islam and the West, mak[ing] reference to Eurabia theories and [the] 'Islamification of Europe' (p.70).

In another, more ambitious study in the following year, Busher (2014) sought to address concerns surrounding the decline of the EDL, the EDL becoming an electoral force and the evolution of its tactics to more radical forms of protest (ibid: 208). What he found was that: though the EDL's capacity to mobilise large numbers to its demonstrations has been decreasing since mid-2011 (p.213), a shift to more radical tactics would 'alienate a substantial proportion of the group's support base' (p.225). Moreover, Busher asserts that a further foray into electoral politics is 'highly unlikely' (p.224) - given the anti-establishmentarian

sensibilities of EDL supporters. According to Busher, the EDL will therefore continue to operate as it is, seeing 'occasional spikes in support surrounding critical events such as the [terrorist] attacks in Woolwich.' (ibid)

Finally, in Busher's (2015) monograph on EDL grassroots activism, he describes what draws in and sustains EDL activists. Drawing on Deborah Gould's (2009) concept of 'collective world-making', Busher suggests that 'shifting patterns of activists' social interactions', 'activist's development of beliefs about the world around them and their position within it', as well as 'the emotional energies generated through EDL activism' also help perpetuate the 'logic of activism' at the heart of the EDL (2015: 8-9). In particular, Busher repeatedly emphasises the importance of positive and negative emotions in sustaining EDL activism - whether that be pride, dignity, possibility or belonging, tinged with outrage, fear and in some cases righteous anger. In the end, Busher (2015) makes a robust defence of the EDL as *not* simply emerging out of the existing UK far-right scene. Drawing on his extensive fieldwork with the EDL in London and the Southeast, Busher posits that: 'At times, it felt more like a convergence of counter-cultural milieu than a 'new far-right' [movement].' (p.21) He therefore brands the EDL as an 'anti-Muslim protest movement' – due to its 'tighter definition' (p.20), its closer fit with 'the [single-issue] arguments and identities around which the group coalesces' (p.21), and its reflection of the 'emergent culture' of the EDL and its activists who are drawn from 'other political and cultural currents' that are distinct from the UK far-right.

Another recent ethnographic study to emerge within the *sui generis* camp is Hilary Pilkington's (2016) monograph, 'Loud and Proud: Passion and Politics in the English Defence League.' Based on nearly three years of close-up research with the EDL, Pilkington suggests that the adjective of 'anti-Islamism' most accurately describes the group – both because the EDL belongs to the populist radical-right and due to '...the common denominator among EDL activists in the [study being] anti-Islamism.' (p. 4) Demonstrating the sociological focus of the study, Pilkington places an emphasis on the 'activism of *individual* grassroots supporters rather than the EDL as an organisation or movement' (p.8, emphasis added) and how emotions are 'no longer' necessarily opposite to rationality when looking at the drivers of activism (p.9). What Pilkington finds is that

'...there is no one 'type' of person that is attracted to a movement like the EDL; rather decisions to start, continue and draw back from activism are set within a complex web of local environment, familial socialisation and personal psychodynamics.' (p.225) Moreover, rather than ideology, her study finds that 'friendship, loyalty, and a sense of belonging to a 'family'' are the most frequently cited meanings attached to activism.' (p. 229) Other drivers associated with activism are also suggested to relate to the 'politics of silencing' experienced by its supporters and 'a clear distinction between the politics of talk [at the formal political level] and the 'not politics' of action [demonstrated in the EDL].' (p.210)

Continuing this 'ideology-lite' theme is John Meadowcroft and Elizabeth Morrow's (2016) article examining 'why people participate in groups like the EDL.' (p.6) Based on a year's ethnographic fieldwork conducted within the group, Meadowcroft and Morrow argue for how little ideology plays as a factor in driving activism within the EDL. Rather, and using the work of Mancur Olson (1965), they find that 'club goods', such as access to violent conflict, increased self-worth and group solidarity, were 'intuitively grasped' as 'exclusive benefits [needed] to recruit and retain activists' within the movement (p.6) and were used to offset the costs of membership, notably stigma, time, money and unwelcome police attention, incurred during the course of activism (p.2). In this sense, ideology took a secondary role – 'bind[ing] the group together and facilitat[ing] the supply of group solidarity and increased self-worth.' (p.6) All-in-all, however, this had a limiting effect on the trajectory of the group - with the EDL's reputation for violence and drug-taking meaning that the group could not move beyond Olson's first unit of collective action and start to 'grow further and attain mainstream political influence.' (p.15)

One key criticism that can be lodged at the *sui generis* literature, however, is the obvious question of how distinctive or 'new' the EDL actually is? In some senses, this bears the risk of playing into the hands of the group's insistence that it is 'not racist, not violent but no longer silent' and helps the EDL authenticate its disassociation from the UK's traditional far-right – allowing what Roger Eatwell describes as the 'syncretic legitimation' of such groups (Eatwell 1998: 152). Whilst the *sui generis* school provides a good corrective to overly

historical or deterministic accounts of the EDL and its supporters, then, we must also be careful of swinging too far in the opposite direction - extracting such groups entirely from historical context and therefore the wider UK far-right 'scene' itself.

Having said this, we will use the phrase 'anti-Islamic' to describe the EDL's particular form of protest in this study. This is a slightly altered version of Busher's (2015) characterisation of the group and aims at the group's main area grievance: not just radical Islam or 'Islamism', but Islam itself. As a way of caveat, it is also important to point out that 'anti-Islamic' is not meant to denote being – through act or deed – contrary to the particular teachings and theology of Islam as a world religion. Such a phrase was chosen due to its close fit with the core aims of the EDL and to ally the group with a burgeoning trend in the contemporary European far-right towards culturally racist, anti-Islamic politics. We will therefore use the 'anti-Islamic' pre-fix throughout the thesis to refer to the group – both because of its neutrality and also its accuracy in labelling the political phenomena at hand.

b) Conclusion

In summary then, considerable steps have been taken to understand the lineage of the EDL, the extent to which we can call it a far-right organisation, the extent of which its opposition is limited to radical Islam and the nature of its support and activist base. We know now that the relationship between the EDL and far-right is highly complex, that the EDL's rhetoric and discourse can be considered Islamophobic, and that its support base goes beyond and is more nuanced than the popular 'young thug' stereotype. In particular, the recent move away from stressing the EDL's similarities to far-right and football hooligan movements is welcome. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative survey studies, it has finally placed the EDL literature on a more scientific and therefore objective footing.

More, however, still can be said of the English Defence League. Mainly due to the 'speed at which this fairly unstable social movement has evolved' (Busher 2014: 208), one key problem identified in later waves of EDL scholarship is how little first-hand investigations have been conducted on the political and policy impact of the group's particularly disruptive form of protest. This has inhibited

current EDL research from really drilling down into policy questions associated with the group (ibid). Such questions include the EDL's effects on: community tensions, public-order, racially and religiously motivated hate crime, or the mobilisation of radical Islamist groups (ibid). Moreover, it has omitted a sustained analysis of EDL protests – investigating their drivers and determinants. While this has since been partially addressed by a scattering of academic reports and book chapters monitoring these subjects (see, for example, Teesside University's Tell MAMA-sponsored 2014/15 reports or Treadwell's 2014 study on policing the EDL), 'the academic literature on the EDL...has predominantly been based on secondary and survey material.' (Treadwell 2014: 127) This thesis hopes to remedy this by shifting the emphasis away from looking solely looking at the causes and characteristics of the EDL and towards the policy consequences and impacts of the group through examining political responses to the EDL and its demonstrations using first-hand accounts. In light of this aim, the next section of the chapter will look at the existing EDL 'response' literature and will construct a new set of 'ideal types' for political responses to the group.

2.3: From Causes to Consequences - The EDL 'Response' Literature

Compared to academic studies substantively looking at the EDL, there are relatively few academic texts devoted entirely to looking at responses. This is regrettable as the clearly disruptive nature of the EDL and the provocation dynamic that it poses suggests that an examination of responses - particularly by politicians, the police and anti-fascist campaigners - is long overdue. More specifically, the delay in examining the public-order management of EDL protests - and the intersecting policy areas of community cohesion and counter-extremism more broadly - prevents the collation and distribution of lessons and best practice that could be used for other, related forms of anti-Islamic protest that have grown up in recent years; both as a result of the continuing splintering and fragmentation of the BNP and EDL in the UK but also as a result of the growth of broader 'counter-jihad' scene internationally.

a) Identifying the Lacunae: Existing Studies of EDL Responses

This is not to say that there have not been attempts to capture and examine political responses to the EDL. Perhaps the first study to consider responses

substantively was Nigel Copsey's seminal (2010) report on the EDL. Found in a highly comprehensive section towards the end of his study, here Copsey considers both the formal (i.e. Government and police) and informal (anti-fascist and Muslim) responses to the EDL. What he finds is that the 2005-2010 UK Labour Government tried to tackle the EDL under the auspices of 'white working-class dissent', that the police have tried to deal with the EDL through use of the public-order legislation, that anti-fascists from Unite Against Fascism (UAF) have been the EDL's 'principal antagonists' (p.32), and that, while the response of Muslim youth to the EDL's presence in Birmingham in September 2009 was a 'critical factor in the equation' (p.33), 'of particular concern' to policymakers early on in the group's development was the growth of self-styled Muslim Defence Leagues; designed to mobilise young Muslim men in opposition to the group.

Despite its comprehensive nature, however, Copsey's (2010) treatment has several flaws. The first is that, due to the brevity of his responses chapter, he is unable to deal with the phenomena in an in-depth fashion. The major pitfall of this is that Copsey does not have the time or space to expand on each sector of government and civil society that he touches upon. It therefore also excludes a thoroughgoing assessment of the sort of rationales and factors that might feed into responses to the group. Secondly, Copsey omits one key factor when considering responses to the EDL: the role of local politicians and Members of Parliament. Such groups have been campaigning rhetorically and practically when it comes to responding to the EDL and its protests over the past seven years.

The second text to substantively consider responses to the EDL is James Treadwell's (2014) chapter on policing response to the EDL. Based on 'interviews with police officers, active members of the EDL and also extensive research fieldwork' (p.128), Treadwell posits that there has been at least 'two distinct styles of policing' since the EDL's inception. The first was 'a more heavy-handed and largely prohibitive' style that sought to 'robustly contain' EDL protests while the second was a 'much more neutral, non-confrontational approach, premised largely on...a less confrontational public-order maintenance strategy.' (ibid) Treadwell argues that, while there should be a

'middle ground' between confrontation and non-confrontation (p.138), the latter has been proven to be the most effective and has 'seemingly coincided with a fall in the number of arrests' (p.128). While such criminological aspects are not the purview of this thesis, it is significant to suggest that it will be through this 'confrontation' versus 'non-confrontation' heuristic that policing responses will be examined.

The third text to address responses to the EDL is David Renton's (2014) chapter on anti-fascist responses to the group from 2009 to 2012. In it, Renton suggests that the EDL's 'emphasis on marches...swung attention back to UAF' after a period of ascendancy by rival anti-fascist outfit, Hope not Hate, under the neo-fascist British National Party (p.256). Moreover, he states that opposition from left-wing organisations factored in the decline of the EDL from February 2011 onwards – citing that 'a fault line between those who wanted to keep the EDL a single-issue campaign and those who just wanted to attack 'communists'' opened up as a result of repeated physical confrontations with the far-left (ibid: 260). Contrary to Copsey (2010), who largely sheds a negative light on early militant anti-fascist involvement with the EDL, then, Renton evaluates the period of UAF opposition to the EDL as one of 'finally moving in the right direction.' (ibid: 261)

The fourth and final contribution that tries to make sense of EDL responses is Matthew Goodwin's (March 2013) survey of EDL supporters. In the concluding section of his Chatham House report, Goodwin makes a useful and timely distinction between 'harder' and 'softer' responses. 'Harder' responses relate to efforts by Governments to prevent vulnerable individuals from being radicalised and therefore being sucked into extremist groups (p.14), while 'softer' responses relate to efforts to address 'misperceptions and hostility within the wider public towards Islam and the role and perceived compatibility of Muslim communities.' (Ibid). Overall, Goodwin sides with the latter - suggesting that '[u]npacking and calming ... anxieties is a key task.' This, he suggests, is vital in defusing support for 'counter-jihad' groups like the EDL (Ibid).

While these harder and softer descriptors will be used later in this thesis, there are, however, a few criticisms that can be levelled at Goodwin's and others attempts at categorising EDL responses. The first is that the 'harder-softer'

categorisation is too vague – both in its scope and the actors it references. Whilst such a categorisation does come with useful suggestions, there is no systematic typology to outline the universe of tactics that could be usefully pursued by politicians to challenge such groups. Secondly, and related to its vagueness, we are left unsure at what level such responses should be delivered. While we can envisage a role for citizens at the ‘softer’ level and the Government at the ‘harder’ level, Goodwin’s categorisation (perhaps unintentionally) under specifies the type of actors he is referring to. Thirdly, and related to this, the interventions envisaged by Goodwin are more administrative than political. While satisfactory at the level of Government policy and amongst more sociological responses, this would fall short of providing a satisfactory framework for assessing EDL responses at a political level.

b) Moving towards a New Framework: Exclusionary and Inclusionary Responses to the EDL

Before detailing the methodological approach and the type of data-collection used in the main body of the thesis in the next chapter, we will first set out possible strategies in the arsenal of political elites when responding to the EDL. This is mainly due to the absence of such a typology in the EDL research literature, but it will also serve a more utilitarian purpose - aiding our analysis and comparison of local politicians’ responses when it comes to the empirical chapters. Here we will use a combination of the European literature on mainstream political responses to radical right-wing populist parties - as well as Goodwin’s (March 2013) ‘harder-softer’ distinction - as our guide. We will argue that political responses to the EDL can be separated into three distinct ‘ideal’ types: ‘exclusionary’, ‘inclusionary’ and a ‘non-response.’ Moreover, there can be system-level responses, which vary between ‘militant’, ‘defensive’ and ‘immunizing’ forms of democratic defence. In terms of exclusionary responses, this can be further sub-divided into two different degrees of response: ‘hard’ versus ‘soft’. Furthermore, despite being costly in terms of time and resources, it will be argued that interaction - as well as system-level, immunization measures – provide the most sustainable long term treatment of anti-Islamic prejudice that fuel far-right protest groups, like the EDL.

i) Exclusionary Responses toward the EDL

One of the most universally known, short-term strategies adopted by mainstream elites to deal with radical right-wing populist actors, like the EDL, has been to try to exclude such actors. For example, in David Art's (2007) comparative study of recent far-right success and failure in Austria and Germany, Art argues that the reason for the failure of the Republikaner Party (REP) in early 1990's was due to a rapid and co-ordinated response by German mainstream newspapers and politicians to starve it of the 'oxygen of publicity' through the press and erecting a 'cordon sanitaire' around the group through actively isolating the REP within Parliamentary and electoral activities. These effectively muted the group's impact by making sure that it could not gain a 'platform' or participate in democratic debate (Goodwin 2011:23).

Such a policy of exclusion has been broadly applied to the EDL. Many elites either petition for a ban on the group's marches or rhetorically campaign against the group in local media and the press over the course of a protest. While Members of Parliament are not part of the UK public-order protocol, they can bring to bear considerable pressure on police and local authorities to take action and issue a march ban under Section 12 of the 1986 Public Order Act. This can be through: championing petitions, using Parliamentary procedures (such as Early Day Motions or Parliamentary Questions), or through their responses in the media.

Moreover, Councillors can adopt similar strategies; albeit at a more local level, by forwarding motions against groups like the EDL in council chambers, talking to the local press and voting on a Section 12 ban of a demonstration march. Furthermore, for Councillors who directly liaise with the police and protest movements in the run up to EDL demonstrations, it might also include a policy of not speaking to or refusing to negotiate with the EDL. These 'softer' forms of exclusion take a broadly liberal-legal approach that closes down the 'opportunity structure' for a group like the EDL to operate through more indirect means.

In conjunction with these 'soft' exclusionary approaches, there are also 'harder', more extra-Parliamentary forms of anti-EDL response that work outside the existing institutional parameters. This would involve a Member of Parliament or Councillor attending counter demonstrations, petitioning for the EDL to be

proscribed or setting out other restrictions not outlined in the law already. In terms of the latter, this might involve the potential levying of fines against EDL protesters or delimiting areas that a group such as the EDL can protest in. For those who take to the streets, the more direct action side of, what we are going to call, 'hard exclusion' would be based on the principle that groups like the EDL should always be confronted and that they should not be given any platform to protest or express their views, especially in areas with high proportions of the group's 'target' population (i.e. the UK's Muslim community).

The long-term effectiveness of exclusionary strategies on far-right parties can be questioned, however. Opponents of such a strategy argue, for example, that such attempts by mainstream elites to exclude far-right groups can count in the group's favour by reinforcing their outsider status (Goodwin 2011: 23). Moreover, empirical studies show that isolation can breed ideological radicalisation (Van Spanje and Van Der Brug 2007: 1035) and that cooperation can help moderate a group's anti-establishment appeals (Downs 2002: 33). Furthermore, exclusion doesn't tend to engage with the social drivers that fuel right-wing extremist protest more generally, nor does 'hard exclusion' (in the form of counter-protesting) help stop the disruption caused by far-right protest groups. Indeed, as we will see in the chapter on Tower Hamlets, it can make matters worse – with physical confrontation leading to greater public disorder.

ii) Inclusionary Responses toward the EDL

On the other side of the response debate are also short-term inclusionary strategies. In this thesis, 'inclusion' will be taken to mean: politicians' short-term attempts to engage with white working-class communities that may support, or Muslim communities affected by, EDL protests. Furthermore, in the medium- to long-term, it also entails actions by local political elites to address and defuse the underlying causes of extremist politics - by targeting the sources of political alienation and anti-Islamic prejudice within their communities. What we are talking about here, therefore, is *not* the inclusion of the EDL into the UK's political mainstream or even for mainstream politicians to work alongside the EDL but to engage with and foster interaction between those prone to support the EDL (i.e. the white working-class) and those affected by the EDL (i.e. UK Muslims) – restoring trust within both communities who may not feel that the UK

state has their best interests at heart. Whether this more long-term work is being done is a patchy and fragmented picture. What we will find in the course of this study is that the shorter-term work of engagement with Muslim and white working-class communities is being carried out, albeit at a fairly low-scale and piecemeal level.

One of the most controversial tactics proposed by supporters of this ideal type is for mainstream politicians to pander to the prejudices of those that loosely support these groups. Named by Tim Bale et al (2010: 413) as the 'adoption' strategy, this would, for example, involve supporting more restrictive policies on immigration or 'stringent' citizenship tests in order to defuse support for right-wing populist groups. A key example of this was in 1978 when Margaret Thatcher suggested that Britain was 'being swamped by alien cultures'. For example, Herbert Kitschelt, a leading scholar studying the far-right, attributes this as being an important factor in preventing the National Front's breakthrough at the 1979 General Election (Kitschelt 1995: 49). The key demerits of such a tactic for elites are, however, obvious: speak too long on the subject and you might end up giving 'oxygen' to extremists and their diversity-phobic agenda; speak too infrequently and you 'risk looking opportunistic.' (Bale et al 2010: 413)

On a similar note, another possible short-term inclusivist strategy that elites might adopt towards a group like the EDL is to try to 'defuse a new political issue, to decrease its salience or at least its relevance to electoral competition.' (ibid) This involves essentially trying to 'reset the political agenda' and turn it away from toxic debates on immigration and focus on its benefits. (ibid) The main problem with the 'defuse' strategy, however, is its indirect nature. It therefore runs the risk of ignoring the grievances and attitudes that lie behind anti-minority, anti-migrant or anti-Islamic positions. Another similar strategy would be therefore for politicians to hold onto their principles and simply communicate the benefits of their positive immigration policies in a more persuasive and vocal way. Such a tactic is however hard to adopt 'in the face of electorates that are, on the whole, hostile to these trends.' (Goodwin 2011: 26) More sustainable, inclusivist strategies therefore may involve strategies that actually tackle the underlying social issues that give rise to right-wing populist support in the first place, and therefore have a more medium to long-term effect.

A key example of inclusivism involves mainstream parties and politicians simply taking the time to talk directly with voters in the local arena and ‘engage in conversations about difficult issues.’ (ibid: 25) This can be extended to responses when a group like the EDL come to protest – engaging both the group in question (the EDL), the communities affected by the groups presence (Muslims), and those from the local (i.e. white working-class) community prone to be ‘sucked in’ by the EDL. The key merit of engagement is that it counters the ‘elite critique’ at the heart of right-wing populist groups: that they are giving ‘voice to the voiceless’ and represent views that ‘the mainstream wouldn’t dare to engage with’. The key demerit of this strategy is, however, that it takes both time and resources to do it properly - requiring elites to conduct sustained work and create substantial links with groups that they might not normally interact with. Moreover, extremist-prone individuals may not be open to being approached by mainstream politicians, nor receptive to what they have to say.

While engagement may counter one barb of the far-right’s more populist appeals (that political elites are ignoring ‘the people’), a similar and more medium-term strategy can be aimed at tackling support for the more xenophobic and prejudicial aspects of right-wing populist parties policy programmes and messages. Based on the social scientific notion of ‘intergroup contact’ theory (Allport 1954, Savelkoul et al 2011, & Pettigrew and Tropp 2008), an ‘interaction’ strategy aims to break down barriers of estrangement and hostility between communities by bringing them together through informal activities and council-run initiatives. These can take the form of local authority run projects like ‘Luton in Harmony’ that was set up in the wake of the EDL’s initial protests in Luton as well as ‘Be Birmingham’ and ‘One Tower Hamlets’ that came under the ‘community cohesion’ agenda – with similar effects. As we shall see, setting up such projects is largely the realm of council officials and not elected politicians. It will however be argued that a continued emphasis on such longer-term inclusivist strategies is needed in order to combat the more prejudicial aspects that fuel right-wing extremism.

Though interaction is possibly one of the most sustainable counter-strategies within the inclusivist school, it does have a series of demerits or ‘health warnings’ attached to it. Firstly, quite stringent conditions need to be put in

place if such interactions are going to be meaningful and enduring. For example, 'intergroup contact theory' suggests that there are at least four criteria that need to be kept in mind for such meetings to be a success. The first is equal status between participating groups, the second is the sharing of common goals within the mode of interaction, the third is proper cooperation between groups and the final one is that such activities are backed by authorities, the law and customs of the land in which it is taking place (Pettigrew and Tropp 2005: 264-266). Secondly, and as Goodwin (2011: 27) comments, the risks of superficial interaction can outweigh the benefits of this particular activity – especially if they confirm suspicions and therefore fuel tensions (ibid). Finally, fostering cooperation and interaction is again a time and resource intensive activity. It requires substantial 'buy in' from local councils and individuals alike, and even then it is not guaranteed to work.

iii) The Counterfactual: A 'non-response'

Going back to shorter-term responses, the third and final strategy in the arsenal of mainstream elites when dealing with groups like the EDL is to choose to ignore them entirely, or issue a 'non-response'. Obviously, this does not extend to emergency services and those obliged to manage EDL protest but local politicians and elites who are at the liberty of refusing to acknowledge the EDL's presence. Like exclusion, the desired effect of a 'non-response' is to not give far-right groups the 'oxygen of publicity' that they wish, or, in a public-order context, ramping up the 'hype' around such protests and therefore contributing to a 'breach of the peace'. This speaks to the essentially *conservative* logic behind such a strategy - suggesting a significant degree of gradualism and wariness of unintended consequences when implementing such interventions. As we will see later in the conclusion, 'non-responses' have previously been used in combating the British National Party and has been dubbed by some scholars as a 'clean hands' approach toward the far-right and pariah parties (Downs 2012: 32-33).

The major downside of issuing a rhetorical or campaigning 'non-response', however, is that it risks demonstrating a complacency about a group, such as the EDL, and the issues that it touches upon around religious identity, immigration and diversity (ibid: 2012). It therefore should only be used when the

potential for a group to mobilise its supporters and therefore to pose a 'threat' is low as well as a rhetorical strategy of condemnation that minimises the risk of drawing attention to the group. The 'non-response' strategy does, however, serve as an important counterfactual to the current study, and opens up some important philosophical questions such as: Can a non-response be better than poorly administered exclusionary or inclusionary political response? Do politicians need to respond to street movements like the EDL at all? And, what weighty normative judgements lie behind those who feel a need to issue political EDL responses when there's no functional or instrumental imperative to do so?

c) Taking the Long-Term View: System-level Responses to the English Defence League

While we have talked about a number of short and medium term strategies needed to respond to a group like the EDL, it is also important to note that longer term, system-level approaches exist and have been suggested by several academics in order to address the presence of extremist groups in Western democracies. This is based on constitutional lawyer and political scientist, Karl Loewenstein's, inter-war writings on how democratic states could 'withstand fascism's skilful exploitation of democratic rights to subvert democracy from within' (Capoccia 2013: 208). It is through the use of 'special measures' to enable democracies to 'weather the storm' of fascism (ibid). This encompasses the concepts of defensive and militant democracy, and what measures (for example, bans on parties, legislative participation, propaganda and uniforms) are needed to safeguard democracy against anti-system threats.

The most persuasive of these writings is by the Israeli-American Professor, Ami Pedahzur, and his concept of an immunised democracy. In 2001, for example, Ami used the notion of an 'immunised democracy' to describe a nation state, such as the U.S., where a low-level, limited, and well-defined approach to tackling extremist violence exists (p.356). In a later (2004) work, Pedahzur develops this notion of 'immunised democracy' further by suggesting that 'strong civil society' from below and 'high civic educational barriers' from above are needed to counteract the influence of far-right groups in the political sphere. The idea behind this is that low-level, long-term preventative work is better than

last-minute authoritarian interventions when dealing with the ‘illness of extremism’ (p. 116). More practically, Pedahzur suggests that this can be achieved in schools by ‘the inculcation of democratic values and tolerance’ as well as through civil society campaign groups ‘tak[ing] an active role in the political theatre.’ (ibid.) Such a system-level approach will be endorsed by this thesis – suggesting that longer-term appraisal of the preventative work done is needed to sustainably avert the peril of far-right extremism in the UK.

This is in contrast to, and is a gentler version of, the ‘militant democracy’ researched by scholars, like Giovanni Capoccia. This entertains the notion that ‘the use of legal restrictions on political expression and participation’ may be resorted to when a democratic system is facing an existential threat (Capoccia 2013: 207). This more militant mode is the subject of a 2001 article by Capoccia who examines the success of the Czechoslovakia, Finland, and Belgium (versus Italy and the Weimar Republic) in warding off insurgent far-right actors during the inter-war period. In it, he finds the actions of ‘border parties’, or parties who ‘generally face a choice: either they make a common front’ or ‘they put their immediate electoral interests first’ (p.438), and heads of state as crucial in leading repressive action towards such insurgents. While Capoccia points out the merit and necessity of inclusive strategies, he still implicitly supports the stance that ‘tolerating anti-democratic...forces might lead the system to collapse in a time of crisis’ (p. 432) and that, in the short term, at least, civil and political rights open to right-wing extremists should be restricted in order to choke off this particular form of extremism.

One middle ground between immunized and militant forms of democratic safeguards is ‘defensive democracy’, where political and civic rights and freedoms are again limited in order to protect democratic institutions, values and traditions. Two scholars who look at this more defensive mode are Dutch political scientists, Stefan Rummens and Koen Abts. In a 2010 article, they advocate a ‘concentric containment model’ that tracks the relevant concerns of citizens towards extremists and filters out extremist policies that are not compatible with core values of liberty and equality; thus decreasing ‘tolerance towards extremist organisations as they approach the centres of formal decision-making power.’ (p. 663) Again, however, this has potential scarring

effects on the quality of democracy within a particular country and should be thought about carefully by elites before such action is resorted to – particularly if it is implemented in a draconian way. Such dilemmas will become apparent in chapter seven as we consider Luton’s response to the EDL, post-emergence.

d) Summary

In summary then, and with the help of comparative European literature on far-right responses, we have identified three strands of response when talking about the EDL: exclusion, inclusion, and a ‘non-response’. Within this, though, there are a multitude of smaller responses – providing a more comprehensive analytical framework than Goodwin (March 2013) and others when addressing responses to this particular form of political extremism. In the case of exclusion, we suggested that there can be both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ EDL responses, while, in the case of inclusion, there exists ‘engagement’ and ‘interaction’ subtypes. In terms of evaluation, what has been found is that, while exclusionary strategies have mixed results in successfully annulling the threat of radical right-wing populism, inclusionary strategies contain more sustainable routes when aimed at curbing the drivers of such political phenomena. In particular, medium and long-term counterstrategies which promote engagement between politicians and politically marginalised sections of society as well as interaction between majority white and minority ethnic populations have the potential to be the most effective. Furthermore, this needs to be further ensconced in system-level measures to ‘immunize’ UK democracy against the threat of extremism.

2.4: Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has given us an overall summary of the state of the scholarship on the English Defence League so far and how the current mode of study fits into it. While the literature is highly developed, there are still a number of notable lacunae – especially when it comes to charting localised EDL responses and the systematic study of EDL protest. This chapter has made a substantive theoretical contribution to the former – outlining the first typology of political responses to anti-Islamic activism. It will be this exclusionary-inclusionary axis that will be picked up upon in the chapters below and will be used as a way of categorising and evaluating EDL responses. First, however, we will outline the methodology used to collect and structure information

gathered - with a view to responses being categorised, evaluated and incorporated in the empirical case study chapters below.

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Chapter Three

Methodology – How to Study EDL Political Responses and Why?

Chapter Outline

3.1: Introduction

***3.2: Political Responses towards the EDL: The Social-Scientific,
Philosophical and Normative Underpinnings of the Project***

***3.3: Research Methods I - Qualitative versus Quantitative
Approaches***

***3.4: Research Methods II - Research Techniques and Practical
Considerations***

3.5: Conclusion

3.1: Introduction

Before we go on to consider how politicians have responded to the EDL, it is first important to spell out, not just the specific research methods used in this thesis, but also the philosophical commitments that underpin the project and how this informs the methodological approach. As David Marsh and Paul Furlong (2010) put it, questions of ontology, or ‘the claims or assumptions that a particular approach to social inquiry makes about the nature of reality’ (Blaikie 1993:6 quoted in Hay 2002: 62), and epistemology, or the ‘claims or assumptions made about the way in which it is possible to gain knowledge of reality’ (Blaikie 1993:6-7 quoted in Hay 2002: 62), are like ‘a skin and not a sweater’ that have a considerable bearing on the research approach taken and the types of methodology used.

In this chapter, we will first outline the philosophy of social science informing the project. Then, we will move on to consider what kind of approaches and methods are considered appropriate for mapping political responses in the case of the EDL. It will be suggested here that, while quantitative methods have some currency, that qualitative methods are arguably more valuable in deepening our understanding of political responses towards the EDL. Finally, we will go on to outline the exact mode of data-collection and research methods used in this thesis: semi-structured elite interviews and structured focused comparison. We will also justify why these methods were chosen over others when looking at localised elite responses to the EDL.

3.2: *Political Responses towards the EDL: The Social-Scientific, Philosophical and Normative Underpinnings of the Project*

Questions of ontology and epistemology provide the underlying fault lines in political research. What we define as ‘the political’ and valid knowledge is fundamental. Ontology guides our approach and epistemology defines the parameters of ‘meaningful data’. This in turn informs the scope of our methodological and research practice. It is therefore important to be as explicit as possible about where one’s philosophical assumptions lie and the normative considerations that underpin a research project, especially when studying such a sensitive topic as the far-right.

In this section, I will sketch out definitions for ontology and epistemology. I will identify key controversies and positions that flow from each, as well as the ontological and epistemological stances that are taken in this thesis. Finally, I will identify the influences of realism and liberalism in my own research on political responses to the English Defence League. This is less a distinct stance and more an exercise in making explicit some tendencies that inform my research – therefore, setting up the theoretical grounding of the project for further discussion and elaboration later on.

i) Ontology and Epistemology in Political Analysis

Definitions of ontology and epistemology remain relatively uncontested ground in political analysis. Ontology ‘refers to the claims or assumptions that a particular approach to social inquiry makes about the nature of reality – claims about what exists, what it looks like, and how these units interact with one another’ (Blaikie 1993: 6 quoted in Hay 2002: 62). This, Colin Hay (2002: 75) argues, has received ‘little explicit’ attention in political science, with many either settling for a notion of the political that is either institutional or personal. Conversely, epistemology refers ‘to claims or assumptions made about the way in which it is possible to gain knowledge of reality.’ (Blaikie 1993: 6-7 quoted in Hay 2002: 62)

While definitions of these basic concepts remain relatively uncontested, the questions that traditionally flow from these definitions remain highly divisive. In the ontological camp, key questions here are: whether there is a ‘real’, observable world out there and, consequently, what is there to know about it? (Furlong and Marsh 2010: 185). We can identify two schools of thought in answer to these questions. The first is foundationalism. Foundationalism’s key claim is that the political world can be ‘...viewed as composed of discrete objects which possess properties independent of the observer / researcher.’ (Ibid: 190). This holds an essentially naturalistic view that social actors are like atoms or particles, whose behaviours and actions are readily observable. People, like Roy Bhaskar, would contest the extent to which there is parity here between transient, interdependent social structures and enduring, autonomous natural structures. For example, his (1989) work on critical naturalism argues

that there *are* 'clear qualitative differences' between the two and that they should be treated as distinctively separate modes of inquiry.

On the other hand, we have anti-foundationalism, or what is sometimes referred to as 'constructivism'. This position asserts that the political world is not discovered, rather actively constructed by humans through interactions between individuals (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 110 quoted in Furlong and Marsh 2010: 190). Anti-foundationalists acknowledge social and political objects 'out there' (such as an institutions, economies or democracies), but contend that reality does not have any causal power independent of agents, groups or societies (Furlong and Marsh 2010: 191). They are concerned with unobserved units of the social world, such as beliefs, interpretations of events and culture, all of which are said to shape the political and social world around us. Rather than look at 'surface' behaviour, or socio-economic and material variables, therefore, we should look at ideas and forms of meaning behind such phenomena as causally significant factors in understanding the way people act and behave.

Turning to questions of epistemology, key questions here revolve around whether knowledge can be objective (Furlong and Marsh 2010: 185) and therefore whether scientific analysis of the political world is possible (or even desirable). There are three identifiable positions, which again are oriented differently towards these two questions. The first is positivism. Positivists have a foundational ontology. They claim that we can use 'theory to generate hypotheses that can be tested by direct observation.' (ibid: 194) In this way we can make causal, explanatory statements about the political world. Positivists, who are represented by such scholars in political science as the Behaviouralist David Easton or Rational Choice theorist Anthony Downs, would maintain that social science is possible through the use of formal methods adapted from the natural sciences and mathematics. This entails using a deductive approach where you test hypotheses in order to make generalizable laws about a particular realm of political activity. For example, this could be done through statistical models exploring how relative deprivation leads to political violence.

On the other hand, we have interpretivism whose subscribers reject that there is a reality out there that can be objectively observed both from the viewpoint of the researcher and research subject. Interpretivists subscribe to the above anti-

foundational ontology. They claim that the ‘...world is socially and discursively constructed’ (ibid: 199). ‘Social scientists’, interpretivists would contend, operate within their own discourses and traditions (ibid). This means that subjectivity and bias are an inescapable fact of political research. Objective social science, an interpretivist would argue, is unobtainable, since social phenomena cannot be understood independently of our interpretation of them (ibid). At a basic level, therefore, interpretivist approaches entail a large degree of inductive inquiry and suggest that we should seek to form particular understandings and not general explanations of the political and social world. The academic discipline of politics should therefore be defined as ‘political studies’ rather than ‘political science’.

Finally, there is also a realist approach to political studies. Philosophical realism (as opposed to a distinct scholastic or disciplinary strand of realism, such as that by Machiavelli or in International Relations) has the advantage of ‘shar[ing] an ontological position with positivism’ and a similar epistemological outlook to interpretivism (ibid: 204). Realists, for example, have a foundational ontology. They maintain that social structures, such as the capitalist system, and social facts, such as poverty, de-industrialisation, and migration, have causal power. However, they also assert that there are deeper, unobservable structures at work (Furlong and Marsh 2010: 203). This suggests that a dichotomy exists between appearance and reality in political explanations. A good example of this is Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel’s (2004) *Communist Manifesto*, where they assert that a ‘false consciousness’ prevents the proletariat from realising their own interests. Moreover, in Marx’s (1859) *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, he suggests that a ‘superstructure’ of belief systems and ideas play a causal role in shaping economic and social facts, such as the means of production and the relations of production.

Realism is therefore both distinct and goes deeper in its analysis when compared to positivism and interpretivism. It does not make the mistake of suggesting that unobservable phenomena, such as ideas, values and ways of thinking, are unimportant in political analysis but neither does it risk the totalising effect of interpretivism that suggests that everything is either a social or ideational construct. It is an approach grounded in reality and therefore posits that some (if not all) social and political phenomena are amenable to testing,

measuring and verifying. It is this more ‘scientific’ aspect of realism that will be drawn on in this thesis. In order to explain how and why politicians have been responding to EDL protest, for example, it is important to match phenomena ‘out there’ with the more unobservable ideas, strategies and tactics adopted by elites. Realism, then, is what I would argue to be the most versatile epistemological approach to political research as it accommodates both observable and unobservable phenomena in its worldview, as well as opening up the option of the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods research (Furlong and Marsh 2010: 205). On the other hand, interpretivism could have also been used, but – as stated the above - it would have not provided the same balance between ideas on the one hand and reality on the other that I believe is needed in researching individual-level responses to far-right groups.

ii) Ontology and Epistemology of the Current Study

Moving on to my own research (and as hinted at before), the ontological and epistemological positions drawn on in my study of political responses to the English Defence League are a form of philosophical realism mixed with a (limited) normative commitment to liberalism. In terms of the former, the ontology of my research is linked to foundationalism. I believe that there is a world ‘out there’ to be discovered, but that ‘...the real world effect on actions is mediated by ideas.’ (Furlong and Marsh 2010: 190) Moreover, in terms of the epistemological approach I take, my tendency is towards a realist interpretation. In the case of political responses, for example, I see local politicians’ understanding of the EDL, their political belief systems and understanding of their role are crucial in exploring how they respond to the group.

Fig 3.1: Causal Model of Politician’s EDL Responses



Source: Based on the typology used in Goldstein, J. and Keohane, R. (1993) *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*. Ithaca, United States: Cornell University Press. PP. 8-11.

Moreover, and as depicted above in figure 3.1, I would like to suggest that the local political and social context (in particular processes of de-industrialisation and migration, as well as instances of disorder and extremism) as well as their life experiences temper this more ideational field of understanding – placing the study firmly in the realist camp. This contains within it a certain form of rationalism in which it is believed that there is a reason, thought or rationale behind all social or political behaviour, albeit mediated by an individual's reflection on material reality. In addition, I subscribe to a notion of 'the political' in this thesis that is quite expansive. What I consider to be 'political' about politicians' EDL responses is based on political beliefs (as well as the cognitive processes) by which politicians arrive at decisions and courses of actions. Moreover, we can also see political aspects occurring in the 'behind-the-scenes' contestation that goes on at more formal administrative levels when dealing with EDL protest.

Turning to the (limited) normative commitments of the thesis, the ideological position that possibly best illuminates the focus and content of my research is a particular type of liberal theory. In this mode, liberal democracy is seen as an ideal system of government, and principles of basic moral equality, individual liberty and rights, pluralism, toleration and some form of constitutional government are seen as the 'ultimate' concepts that underpin such a system (Buckler 2010: 156). In particular, my research engages with the liberal concept of tolerance and the philosophical quandary of conferring or delimiting rights to intolerant groups. This was famously framed by Karl Popper (1945) as the 'paradox of tolerance' and has vexed liberal philosophers, such as John Locke (1689) and John Stuart Mill (1869), John Rawls (1971) and Michael Walzer (1997), for several centuries. The broader question within my research is, therefore: how we can defend liberal democracy against extreme right groups who deny the legitimacy of its values? Should we impugn ourselves as democrats by responding in illiberal ways to anti-plural forces, such as the EDL, or accommodate them within pre-existing liberal institutions?

The way that liberal philosophers have tried to address this question of 'tolerating the intolerant' is by delimiting the boundaries of tolerance. In John Rawls' seminal essay, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), he suggests that the freedom

of 'intolerant sect[s]' should only be restricted when the 'tolerant sincerely and with reason believe that their own security or the institutions of liberty are in danger' (p.220). Moreover, Michael Walzer (1997), while not talking directly on tolerating intolerance in the political case, suggests that those parties that seek to attain power and call an end to a 'peaceful co-existence' of competing viewpoints should be denied political power; as this would most certainly lead to dictatorship or authoritarian rule (pp.80-82). Looking further back into the past, John Locke's (1689) *A Letter Concerning Toleration* posits a 'principle of restraint' that stipulates that political or civic rights can be limited but not purely to persecute the ideological commitments of a particular group (Mendus 1991: 157). He suggests only where there is a substantial and weighty political or practical reason can any form of repressive action take place, and even then it should be treated with extreme caution (ibid: 156).

As noted in chapter two, the English Defence League is somewhat complex when it comes to examining its classification as an 'intolerant' group. Clearly, it wishes to limit civic rights of Muslims and public expressions of Islam in UK society. This suggests that it impugns the values of moral equality and individual liberty that are at the heart of liberal democracy. However, the group also subscribes to liberal values, such as human rights and rule of law, and is not an anti-system party, as both the organisation and its members subscribe to a democratic form of politics (See EDL Website 2016 and Bartlett and Littler 2011: 5). The EDL may therefore be a case of a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' (using liberal rhetoric to mask more sinister aspects of its belief system), but it is hard to justify limiting the group's rights unless they are a specific threat to community safety or the political system itself, in which case formal banning of a march or the proscription of the group could be considered.

In conclusion, I take a (limited) normative commitment to liberal theory in order to inform my departure from merely a group-centred analysis of the EDL to one that seeks to understand responses to it. While not the total endeavour of my thesis, at least part of my project aims to give tentative answers as to how the UK can address 'tolerating the intolerant' in practice by examining responses to EDL demonstrations. This paradox informs the starting point of my research and acts as a heuristic device (rather than an 'out-and-out' commitment) in

order to shed light what I am studying. I would argue, therefore, that, while foundationalism and philosophical realism guide my methodological approach, what underpins my interest in the topic of EDL responses is this paradox and how we can best combat far-right threats without resorting to methods that might be harmful to UK liberal democracy itself. This is in contrast to the more revolutionary analysis of some EDL scholars (Garland and Treadwell 2012; Treadwell 2015) and anti-fascist civil society groups who see the EDL as part of a 'divide-and-rule' strategy by elites – used to keep working-class communities fighting against each other, instead of overthrowing the economic and political system itself (See Pai 2016: 158). Such groups therefore might suggest that stiffer action needs to take place in order to prevent EDL activities taking place, than those stipulated here.

3.3: Research Methods I - Qualitative versus Quantitative Approaches

In the introduction to this chapter, we suggested that there is a fairly deterministic relationship between one's philosophical approach to social science and the type of methods adopted. In this section, we will revise this suggestion by positing the notion that, while this is partially true, it is not wholly the case. Drawing on Alan Bryman's (1988) work on quantitative versus qualitative research methods, we will suggest that using epistemological assumptions to guide one's selection of research methods only helps so much. Instead, we argue that technical issues, such as the appropriateness for the mode of study and answering research questions, should be an important consideration when deciding whether to use quantitative or qualitative methods. In this section, therefore, we highlight the epistemological and technical differences between qualitative and quantitative modes of political and social inquiry - reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses for the current research project.

The essential epistemological difference between qualitative (e.g. unstructured or semi-structured interviews) and quantitative studies (e.g. surveys, experiments and logistic regressions of large datasets) are 'competing views about ways in which social reality ought to be studied' and are dominated by the 'appropriateness of a natural science model to the social sciences.' (Bryman 1988: 2 & 5) The latter statement alludes to what we have suggested above –

that natural and human objects are to some extent different and therefore require different research methods to be brought to bear on each. For example, while the natural world of particles atoms and molecules might be relatively fixed and constant, the social world is transient and changeable with human beings able to engage in sentient behaviour - reflecting on their behaviour and adjusting their actions accordingly.

In terms of the current study therefore, a quantitative survey of all politicians' responses to the EDL could have been used. This would have targeted elites in all places where there had been an EDL demonstration over the past seven years and could have analysed the general rules about political responses in relation to the local context and the rationales and motivations given within the survey. It would have a balanced sample of all different political parties, and would have taken into account demographic variables, such as gender and age. This could have then been used to draw causal inferences on all relevant independent variables about what, who, where, and why certain responses were issued. Creating descriptive and inferential statistics, this would be able to capture the proportions of responses adopted and derive causal explanations between context and actors actions.

There would, however, have been certain demerits to such an approach. A quantitative survey would have not necessarily uncovered the process by which political elites have constructed policy responses toward EDL demonstrations, nor the 'behind-the-scenes' work done in preparation for such protest events. It also would have not been able to have so richly probed the unobservable and 'deeper structures' - of life experience and understanding of context - influencing EDL responses. Nor would it have been appropriate for the more expansive definition of the political used in this study, which takes into account personal and institutional areas of politics. Only an in-depth look at local context and response rationales would have hinted towards what is at stake when the EDL have come to demonstrate and the sheer diversity and variety of responses. Moreover, a quantitative approach would have not been able to perhaps fully explore the learning processes by which local elites have gone from being fairly inexperienced to adept at handling EDL demonstrations. It would have also been not fitting with the ideographic nature of the project, i.e.

trying to locate ‘findings in [a] particular time period... and locale...’ (ibid: 100). In addition, there is a more substantive, practical reason for why a quantitative or formal approach could not have been taken: the paucity of literature on EDL responses to start with. It would have therefore been hard to use a deductive form of inquiry where we set up testable hypotheses and used formal methods in this instance, and would have been contrary to the more exploratory mode of the project.

It was decided therefore that qualitative research methods would be used in order to more precisely examine *how*, but also the deeper question of *why*, local politicians responded to the EDL. Local historical studies and socio-economic data were used to get a sense of the local factors driving protest and political responses, and to give a rich back drop to the EDL’s particular form of protest within a town. Such a qualitative and inductive mode of inquiry was therefore partially an epistemological but also technical choice - derived from philosophical considerations but also what was technically possible given the phenomena at hand and the existing (and scarce) body of knowledge about it. Though perhaps not as representative or generalizable as a quantitative approach, this gave a deeper understanding of the political phenomena at hand as well as scope for further quantitative inquiry on the subject in the future.

3.4: Research Methods II - Research Techniques and Practical Considerations

i) Semi-Structured Elite Interviews and Question Design

In order to address the ‘response’ gap in the EDL literature and map political responses to the EDL over the past seven years, therefore, thirty-four semi-structured, elite interviews – where the ‘target group’ is elite (Burnham et al 2008: 231) and the questions are ‘of a limited number’ and ‘topic-related’ (Pierce 2008: 118) - were conducted with Members of Parliament and local Councillors from November 2014 to September 2015.¹ Semi-structured elite interviews were chosen due to the expert nature of the interviewee cohort and their usefulness in exploring the thinking and perceptions of elites behind these responses. Turning to the former, elites tend to be busy people (Burnham 2008: 235) and therefore may only be able to give a maximum of 45-60 minutes for an

¹ In addition to this, six interviews were conducted with behind-the-scenes policy actors.

interview (p.237). This renders unstructured interviews non-viable, as they tend to be more fluid and therefore longer. Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, attempt to emulate this more 'organic' style (Lilleker 2003: 210) but use a list of topics from which to structure the interview. This aids time management and rapport with the interviewee by delimiting the subject under discussion - something made all the more important by the sensitive nature of the topic at hand.

Turning to questions of usefulness, and as Burnham et al (2008) suggest in their chapter on the subject, elite interviewing is also about being 'interested in actors perceptions of the world in which they live, the way in which they construct their world and the shared assumptions that shape it...' (p.246). The author wanted to know both *how* and *why* elites had responded to the EDL and the semi-structured nature of this research method allowed the author to do that in an inductive manner – picking up on new themes as he went and being able to probe into the particular rationales behind a response. This is one of the advantages picked up upon in Lewis Anthony Dexter's (1970) original monograph on *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* - suggesting that 'the investigator is willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach him what the problem, the question, and the destination is...' (p.19) On the other hand, and as noted by Fylan (2005: 66), the more structured nature of semi-structured interviews helped when coding transcripts – with questions specifically tailored to elicit responses on key themes, such as the interviewees approach, the rationales behind this approach and the role they took in relation to EDL protest.

Moving away from more direct and practical considerations, as suggested by David Richards (1996), elite interviews '... are a key tool of qualitative analysis for political scientists.' (p. 204) In his seminal article on the subject, he emphasises how elites 'are likely to have had more influence on political outcomes than general members of the public' (p.199). Elite interviewees therefore play a useful part in answering the above *why?* question – assisting the political scientist in 'understanding the theoretical position/s of the interviewee; his/her perceptions, beliefs and ideologies.' (p. 200) The only caveat that Richards gives to elite interviewing is that they '...should, normally, only be regarded as one of a number of research aides' (p.204) – helping the

interviewer ‘to understand the context, set the tone, or establish the atmosphere, of the area [under research].’ (p.200) We have taken on Richards’ advice in this study – supplementing elite interviews with a structured focused case study technique.

Again, and as shown below in figure 3.2, a politically representative sample was also attempted by interviewing public officials across the left-right spectrum. In the end, however, Labour politicians were in the majority (22) with Conservative (5), Liberal Democrat (4), and independent politicians (3) also participating. This was not unexpected given the inner-city nature of wards covered in this study and closely tracked the political composition of the local areas chosen at the time of research (see figure 3.4, opposite). Turning to more practical matters, while just under a third of interviews were conducted face-to-face (8 in total), time and resource constraints meant telephone interviews and one questionnaire were opted for towards the end of the data collection phase of the project (31 in total). It was judged by the interviewer that this did not place quantity over quality, with most elites able to give at least 20-30 minutes of their time. Nor did it affect ‘rapport’ with the interviewees as Burnham et al (2008: 234) suggest, with telephone conversations generally being only slightly shorter than face-to-face encounters. Again, the breakdown of interview types is represented graphically in the second pie chart (see figure 3.3).

Fig 3.2: Political Affiliation of Interviewees

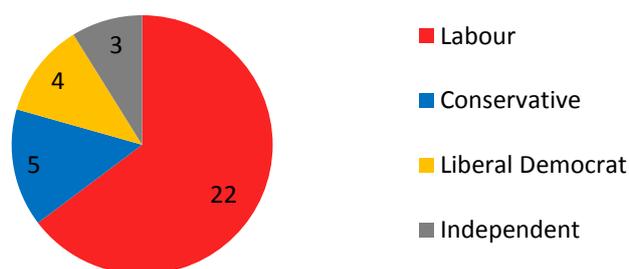


Fig 3.3: Interview Type

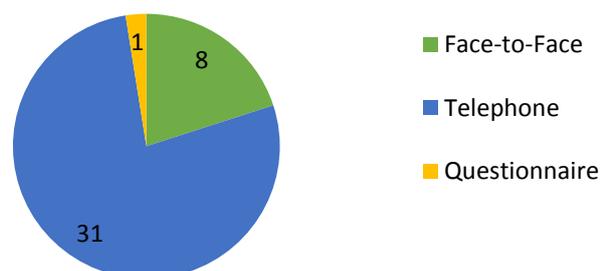
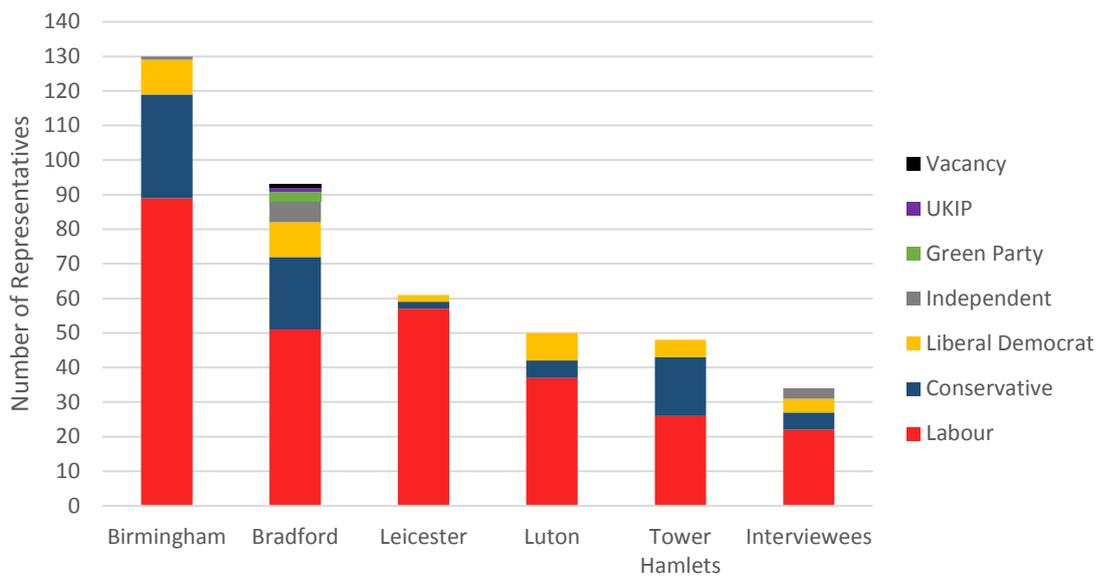


Fig 3.4: Political Composition: Local Areas under Study Vs. Interviewees



Turning to interview questions asked, a schedule of pre-prepared questions was written for each interview with an accompanying briefing document outlining biographical details and press mentions of interventions made by a respondent. This was based on Burnham et al's (2008) advice that 'being prepared' is *the* 'cardinal rule' of interviewing, and other scholars who suggest that the need to do so 'cannot be over-emphasised' (Richards 1996: 202) and can be 'ultra-important' (Lilleker 2003: 210). Each question was worded to correspond with a set of key themes that were deemed important in capturing mainstream politicians responses to the EDL. These included the interviewees approach and/or strategy, the thinking behind their interventions and the role they felt that representatives should occupy when the EDL come to town. Flowing from this, a similar and replicable format was adopted for each interview in order to make comparisons, contrasts and parallels across interviewees and case studies. These were then tailored for each interviewee's professional background, anti-EDL interventions and level of involvement within a particular set of EDL demonstrations. Subsequently, questions were asked based on public remarks and interventions made by an interviewee that had been reported in the press. At the end of each interview, interviewees were then invited to add anything not covered by the questions – giving them space to raise issues or events relevant to the research topic of their own volition.

ii) Structured Focused Comparison, Case Selection and Structure

In conjunction with this first-hand empirical work with political elites from across the country, case studies, or the pursuit of in-depth knowledge of specific examples (Gerring 2007: 3), were also used. This was in order to examine the contextual factors that may be important when sketching out why the EDL had mobilised in a particular area and the rationale behind certain responses and to triangulate and verify elite responses against existing external evidence; therefore, taking Burnham et al's (2008) advice that: 'The key guideline must be not to base any piece of work principally on elite interviewing.' (p.232) Case studies were used in spite of being often referred to negatively in the methodological literature. Their perceived lack of rigour has been well-documented (Yin 2009: 14-15) and flows from claims that the case study method is '...an all-purpose excuse, a licence to do whatever a researcher wishes to do.' (Gerring 2007: 6) This critique is based on earlier case studies that would often be 'descriptive and monographic rather than theory-oriented' (George and Bennett 2005: 69).

Within this thesis, we tried to side-step this pitfall by employing Alexander George and Andrew Bennett's (2005) technique of structured focused comparison (SFC). This approach to case study analysis is *structured* in the sense that you approach your case studies with a general set of questions that reflect your research objectives (p.69). For example, in the below case study chapters, we will principally explore how local politicians have responded to EDL protest over the past seven years, but also what ideational and contextual factors fed into elite responses towards the group. Moreover, George and Bennett's technique is *focused* in the sense that you look upon certain aspects of historical cases (ibid). For example, the below chapters overtly pick up upon and explore *politicians'* responses, in contrast to anti-fascist, governmental, communal, or policing responses. Finally, however, one noticeable difference from George and Bennett's (2005) technique and how it is deployed here is the limited use of SFC for theory development. SFC is principally used here to aid a 'strict comparison' and 'orderly cumulation' of empirical data about how UK politicians have responded to the EDL (p.68), rather than the more 'theory-oriented' aspect of SFC advocated by George and Bennett in their (2005) book.

In terms of case selection, Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, Luton and Tower Hamlets were chosen. This was due to each City or town being locations where the EDL has either mobilised frequently (i.e. more than twice) or in sizeable numbers (i.e. 500+ protesters) over the past seven years. The rationale behind selecting places where the EDL had protested most frequently and in greatest numbers was based on the logic that such areas would elicit a proportionately large-scale response. Moreover, the advantage of selecting locations where the EDL has protested frequently is that the development of elite responses can be tracked over time – therefore, adding a sense of reliability to trends or conclusions made. In addition, these areas are also geographically representative of the EDL’s broader protest field, with secondary literature confirming that the North of England, the Midlands, and the East of England are key ‘strongholds’ of EDL support (Goodwin et al 2016: 10).

Finally, and using Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, Luton and Tower Hamlets as focal points, each case study was structured in the following way: first it starts by providing the context of the area, it will then move on to a chronology of EDL protest events and responses, and then finally each case study will conclude by evaluating how successful a particular locale has been in dealing with the group as well as the political completion of responses within a particular locale. The primary rationale behind adopting a familiar format flows from George and Bennett’s (2005) *structured* and *focused* technique – allowing author and reader to draw parallels across case studies. The secondary rationale is that it aided the writer in managing and synthesising numerous pieces of primary and secondary source data into a manageable whole. This is not to say that this was the overriding driver in adopting a similar structure but it did help with the comparative mode of the current research under study by acting as reference points in subsequent chapters.

3.5: Conclusion

In sum, then, this chapter has tried to bring together both the philosophical and technical aspects of research methods chosen in this study. This was in order to be explicit about the ontological, epistemological and ideological assumptions underpinning the research - given their significant bearing on the study itself. As described in the first section, realism was noted as a core approach in this study

as we look at both observable and unobservable social and political facts. When applied to political responses, this suggests that the motives and perceptions of politicians are as important as their responses. Such a concern for responses flowed from the author's (limited) commitment to liberal theory and in particular his interest in the liberal philosophical dilemma of 'tolerating the intolerant'. It was argued that studying political responses to the EDL was important because of the threat that itself, and improperly administered responses, posed to UK liberal democracy.

Turning to the more technical elements of this chapter, it was suggested that qualitative methods (broadly speaking) were more suited to the mode of study at hand. This was both due to a realist-leaning epistemology identified by the author but also due to the nature of trying to *understand* rather than *explain* how political elites arrive at their responses to EDL protest as well as the author's choice to conduct an inductive mode of inquiry that seeks to *discover* rather than *confirm* existing facts and theories. We finished the chapter by asserting that semi-structured interviews and structured focused comparison were the most technically appropriate research methods (versus unstructured interviews and other case study techniques) to answer the main research questions. This was due to their usefulness and reliability. The fruits of which can be found in the case study chapters that now follow.

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Chapter Four

Birmingham – Early Responses to Anti-Islamic Protest

Chapter Outline

4.1: Introduction

4.2: Context

4.3: Birmingham's First EDL Demonstrations (4th July, 8th August and 5th September 2009)

4.4: Birmingham's Second Major EDL Demonstration (17th October 2011)

4.5: Birmingham's Third Major EDL Demonstration (20th July 2013)

4.6: Birmingham's Fourth Major EDL Demonstration (10th October 2014)

4.7: Conclusion

'My initial reaction was that we shouldn't ban it but actually what became apparent was that they had no intention of cooperating with the police and...so by the time we had the second one I can say that my view had changed... I thought to be perfectly honest we had a pretty valid case for calling for a ban.' Steve McCabe (2014), Member of Parliament (MP) for Birmingham Sellyoak, comments on his policy change between the 2009 and 2011 EDL protests.

'Don't draw attention. Don't give them airtime basically. The best thing that Birmingham can do in the face of the EDL coming to town is carry on being Birmingham.' James McKay (2015), Senior Birmingham City Councillor, commenting on the October 2014 EDL demonstration.

4.1: Introduction

Birmingham has the infamous reputation of hosting some of the earliest and most disorderly EDL demonstrations, and is therefore an appropriate place to start our study. In particular, in the summer and autumn of 2009, the West Midlands City experienced pitched battles between police, EDL protesters and young Asian men. In the end, a total 134 arrests were made over the course of three demonstrations as EDL protesters and counter-protesters were caught up in running disorder across the City - placing it amongst one of the most serious instances of public disorder in Birmingham in recent times. The 2009 demonstrations were not, however, the end of EDL mobilisations in the City. The group returned in 2011, 2013 and 2014, with increased numbers and a similar propensity for violent disorder. In 2013, for example, 33 arrests were made as EDL protesters broke through a police cordon in search of anti-fascist protesters. As one local Councillor (Zaffar 2015) commented: 'that was probably the most violent one after 2009, that was the most difficult to police, because [there were] over 1,000 people.'

Unsurprisingly, Birmingham's reputation for EDL disorder in 2009 had a profound effect on local elite responses. Whilst earlier interventions may have underestimated the EDL's potential for disorder, later ones demonstrated a more robust reaction. For example, MP for Sellyoak, Steve McCabe, switched from being against banning the group's demonstrations in 2009 to petitioning for a ban in 2011. Moreover, MP for Perry Barr, Khalid Mahmood, opted in 2013 for more punitive levies to be imposed on demonstrators' where criminal damage

had been involved. In addition, a concerted consultative effort was made to engage with Birmingham's Muslim community, post-2009 and onwards. This was in order to avert one of the major unnamed risks involved when the EDL comes to town: Muslim youth getting caught up in subsequent disorder – as had been the case at the EDL's September 2009 protest.

This chapter maps the arc of Birmingham responses from August 2009 onwards. It tells the story of local politicians' journeys from flexibility to robustness when offering public-order prescriptions towards EDL protest. First, we will examine the local history of Birmingham - looking at the role of de-industrialisation, diversity and previous disorder in prefiguring EDL mobilisations. Secondly, we will look at each of the EDL's 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2014 protests in turn - scrutinising the development of EDL political responses within the West Midlands City. Finally, we will conclude with a review of the Birmingham demonstrations and responses to them. What we will find is that a central paradox exists within the Birmingham case. This is between a robust political response, on the one hand, and a more low-profile policing response on the other. It will be argued that, in respect to successes in dealing with EDL public-order protest, such a 'dual-track' approach does not necessarily end in counterproductive results and can work; as long as one doesn't interfere with the other. Reasons for why this is the case will then be spelt out in the conclusion of the chapter.

4.2: Context

a) Deindustrialisation and Diversity in Birmingham

Birmingham rose to prominence in the 18th Century based on its reputation as a place of intellectual enlightenment. During this period, the West Midlands City developed into a prominent centre for literary, musical, artistic and scientific activity - being commonly referred to as the centre of the 'Midlands Enlightenment' during this period (*BBC News* 22nd April 2014). The City's booming economy attracted many people from outside - such was the scale that Birmingham's population more than doubled, from 23,600 in 1750 to 73,670 in 1801 (Cherry 1994: 33). Moreover, this period of creative activity cascaded down from the laboratory to the shop floor of factories with the blast furnace and engine-powered industry being pioneered in the City. A number of buildings still

stand testament to this period to this day: a primary example being St. Philip's Cathedral, located near Birmingham's New Street train station.

In the nineteenth century, Birmingham was again at the forefront of industry in Britain. Named the 'City of a thousand trades', a variety of small workshops sprang up in Birmingham during this period - making an assortment of specialised goods such as buttons, locks and ornaments as well as cutlery, nails, and screws (Birmingham City Council a). The City's population also blossomed, with the arrival of Irish migrants seeing an almost tenfold increase in population from 73,670 in 1801 to 840,000 in 1901 (ibid). A number of civic buildings still stand testament to nineteenth-century Birmingham to this day. These include Birmingham's Town Hall and Council House, the site of the City's main political functions and cultural events.

Like many of the other Cities and towns included in this thesis, however, the 20th century ushered in the decline of Birmingham's industrial sector and the rise of more service-oriented economy. This is important, as trends of socio-economic transformation are of 'crucial importance' when explaining far-right support (Betz 1994: 26). Largely left out of post-War national industrial strategies, then, the City's manufacturing sector shrank by 10% between 1951 and 1966, as the service sector grew by 24% in the same period (Cherry 1994: 157). Moreover, between 1971 and 1981, 200,000 jobs were lost in the local economy - mostly due to the declining manufacturing industry and the closure of the large British Leyland factory at its Longbridge site (ibid: 161). Once a key hub of industrial innovation, the City's economy therefore became increasingly geared towards finance, public administration, education and health services (NOMIS 'Labour Demand'). A vestige of Birmingham's industrial past, Jaguar-Land Rover's Solihull plant is still one of the largest local employers (Birmingham City Council b).

Such a process of deindustrialisation has hit parts of the Birmingham particularly hard. Inequality is still a big issue in the City. For example, unemployment in Birmingham has been around the highest in the UK - with a rate of 14.4% being double the national average (Savvas 24th October 2013). Moreover, nearly 40% of people in Birmingham live in areas, which are classified as amongst the 10% most deprived in the country (Roger 29th March

2011). In addition, in Aston and Washwood Heath Wards, unemployment is well above the national average – with 30% of those that are of an economically active age being out of work (Savvas 24th October 2013). Meanwhile, infant mortality is 60% below the national average and, in Birmingham's Ladywood constituency, 81% of children are from low income families - the highest proportion in the UK (BBC News 30th September 2008). This contrasts with areas like Edgbaston, Sutton Coldfield, and Solihull where properties can fetch up to £1.2 million and unemployment remains firmly below the City's average (Cannon 27th August 2014).

Like many large cities elsewhere in the UK, Birmingham also has a storied history of migration. Starting in the mid-19th Century, Irish migrants came to the West Midlands City to seek refuge from the 1845-49 potato famine and settled in the Digbeth area of Birmingham. After World War II, many migrants from the Caribbean and Asia joined this first cohort after the passage of the 1948 British Nationality Act. Most migrants from the Indian Sub-continent and from the West Indies came to earn a decent wage - something that was further facilitated by overseas worker schemes conducted during the period (Birmingham City Council c). The final set of travellers to make their home in Birmingham came in the 1980s and 2000's from as far afield as Kosovo and Somalia - with a majority fleeing from either 'ethnic cleansing' or civil war.

Birmingham's storied history of migration has, however, seen it flourish into a multicultural and diverse City. Birmingham's waves of migration mean that the City now comprises of 10 different people groups with 20,000 individuals making up each category respectively (Jivraj and Simpson 2015: 54). 108 languages are spoken in the City's schools (Carter 24th October 2013) and 22% of the City's population hail from outside the City's boundaries (*Birmingham City Council* 18th March 2015). Moreover, the 2011 census found that 26% of Birmingham residents come from Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi or Afro-Caribbean backgrounds - with citizens from minority backgrounds being in the majority in 6 out of 40 wards (ONS Census Date March 2011). In terms of religion, Christianity boasts the most adherents with 46.1% of residents subscribing to the faith (*Birmingham City Council* 18th March 2015). However, Islam is not far behind - with 21.8% of Birmingham's population labelling

themselves as 'Muslim' in 2011. Moreover, this is an increase of 50% on top of the 2001 Census figures.

b) Rioting in Birmingham

Such levels of diversity have not been without their challenges, however. During the 1980's, the 'intense' and 'arbitrary' stop-and-search practices of West Midlands Police created large levels of animosity between the police and ethnic minorities in the City (Waddington 1992: 90). This boiled over in 1981 and 1985 - with two major riots occurring in the Handsworth area of the City. Ironically, the first of these riots came in the summer of 1981 and was sparked when a local police officer tried to quell fears about a National Front demonstration. It came in reaction to earlier riots in the Brixton area of London that had been around the same issue of racial profiling (ibid: 90). In the end, the ensuing disturbances led to 121 arrests and 40 police officers injured - with considerable damage to property coming as a result. Going forward, a second riot was sparked in the same area of Birmingham four years later. Disorder erupted after a young black man became involved in an argument over a parking ticket with a police officer (Connell 10th August 2011). In the end, the ensuing riot saw two men killed and 35 injured - with 45 shops either set alight or looted in the process (*Birmingham Mail* 14th July 2011).

While the disturbances of the 1980s centred on poor police-minority relations, further rioting in the 2000's added a more 'racial' dimension to disorder in Birmingham. In 2005, for example, so-called 'race riots' erupted between residents of British Afro-Caribbean and Asian origin as rumours of an alleged rape circulated in the Lozells and Handsworth areas of the City (Muir and Butt 24th October 2005). As a result of that October's violent disorder, two young men died and 35 individuals were hospitalised that October. Moreover, riots returned to Birmingham seven years later. In 2011, and in 'copycat' incidences to the London riots, violent disorder and looting erupted in the Winson Green area of the City. The disturbances took a negative turn when, in a replay of 2005, three Asian men were hit and killed by a car of looters in what was suspected to be racially-motivated attack (Butt and Wainwright 10th August 2011).

In some sense, the 2005 and 2011 riots shouldn't have happened. These more recent episodes came amidst renewed efforts by the local council to promote more harmonious community relations in the City. In 2001, for example, 'Be Birmingham' was launched to bring together businesses, community and voluntary organisations, faith communities and the public sector to improve quality of life in Birmingham (Be Birmingham 2015a). This strategic partnership brought together representatives from all majority and minority ethnic communities in Birmingham, involving them in dictating future priorities and commitments for the City. For example, the partnerships *2010 compact* provided a commitment to 'advocate on behalf of all sections of [Birmingham's] community.' (Be Birmingham 2015b) In terms of activities, 'Being Birmingham' held regular 'community summits'. Ironically, its most recent one in 2009 was centred on the notion of community cohesion in the City (Be Birmingham 28th January 2015).

Birmingham's history of rioting, as well as its large resident Muslim population, therefore goes some way to explaining the EDL's presence in the West Midlands City in 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2014. The former was certainly in the minds of elites when the group visited the City for the fourth time in October 2014. As Councillor for Lozells and Handsworth ward, Waseem Zaffar (2015), comments: 'Community relations don't just suffer for that day, they suffer for a long time and picking up the pieces and building community relations is not easy.' When the EDL arrived in Birmingham, then, history of rioting played a formative role in the City's response. As Zaffar (2015), a community worker in 2005, adds: '[In Birmingham], we prevent any sort of violence or division at its earliest stage to prevent any long term problems.'(ibid)

c) 'Islamic Extremism' and Right-Wing Extremism in Birmingham

In addition to rioting, Birmingham's recent brushes with Islamic and right-wing extremism might also have had something to do with the EDL's presence. Turning to the former, there have been few instances of so-called 'Islamic extremism' in Birmingham. In January 2008, Parviz Khan, a charity worker from Birmingham who was described as a 'fanatic', was given a life sentence for plotting to behead a British Muslim soldier (*BBC News* 29th January 2009). Moreover, in June 2010, the *Guardian* newspaper reported that anti-terror

surveillance cameras were installed in the Washwood Heath and Sparbrook areas of Birmingham to provide surveillance on 'extremist' Muslim residents (Lewis 4th June 2010). Finally, and in direct provocation to the EDL, in April 2013, five Muslim men from Birmingham pleaded guilty to planning a bomb attack on an EDL rally in Dewsbury during the previous summer (*BBC News* 30th April 2013). Unfortunately for the perpetrators, their plot was foiled, however, when police found the car they were travelling in was uninsured.

Unlike Islamic extremism, prior to the EDL, there have been isolated - but no large-scale - mobilisations by the far-right extremists in Birmingham. In April 1968, for example, the West Midlands City became host to Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech that set the tone for subsequent anti-minority protest in the City and continues to be a source of inspiration for anti-migrant sentiment to this day. Moreover, in 1977, the National Front conducted a particularly violent rally in Birmingham (*BBC News* 13th August 2005). More recently, the British National Party contested a number of local Council and Parliamentary seats in Birmingham during the 2000's. In 2004, for example, the party contested 24 seats and only won one in Birmingham (HC Library Research Paper 04/49). Moreover, in 2006, the BNP contested a further 40 seats without returning a single candidate to the City Council (*Local Elections Archive Project*). Turning to Parliamentary contests, the party never exceeded the National Front's previous by-election best (of 5.73%) since its first electoral contest there in 1997.

4.3: Birmingham's First EDL Demonstrations (4th July, 8th August and 5th September 2009)

With only a few major brushes with Islamic or right-wing extremism, it was a surprise to local residents and elites when the EDL came to Birmingham in the summer and autumn of 2009. Part of the EDL's 'branching out' period, the group's early protests in the town formed the focus of national media attention due to the highly disorderly and disruptive nature of the protests. In the EDL's 4th July demonstration, for example, riot police held 100 EDL supporters back as they confronted local Asian youths while in an 8th August demonstration violent clashes broke out between the UAF and EDL. Finally, in the EDL's 5th September 2009 demonstration, 200 EDL supporters were caught up in

disorder and the day again descended into running battles between protesters and police - this time in the Cathedral area of the City. For the first time, this initial and intensive wave of EDL protest therefore cemented in local (and national) elite's minds the public-order and community cohesion challenge that the group could pose to the City.

a) Wider Preparations and Political Responses

In the case of the 2009 demonstrations, the responses of Birmingham political elites were neatly divided between those in favour of banning the EDL and those against banning the group from marching. This was perhaps a sign of the confusion of how to deal with the group. With little precedence to go on apart from rioting in Handsworth and Lozells four years earlier, local politicians were scrambling for places to draw lessons from in order to construct a considered response to the EDL. In any event, the 2009 demonstrations played a key mental marker for political and policing elites alike as something to avoid when dealing with future EDL mobilisations. As MP for Birmingham Sellyoak, Steve McCabe (2014), recalls: 'they had no intention of having a peaceful protest. Their complete unwillingness to cooperate with the police [was] a major factor in that.'

The first politician to campaign in favour of a ban in 2009 was Khalid Mahmood, MP for Birmingham's Perrybarr constituency. After the EDL's first demonstration in July 2009, he urged the police to block the EDL's forthcoming August event. In a comment to the *Birmingham Mail*, Mahmood suggested that the EDL only had 'sinister intentions' for Birmingham - they wished nothing more than 'to promote violence on [Birmingham's] streets' (*Sunday Mercury* 19th July 2009). He also suggested that the cost to business and public safety was too great to let another EDL demonstration go ahead (Mahmood 2015). Moreover, and after the August 2009 protest, Mahmood suggested that there should be a serious look going forward at interventions that could be used to reduce tensions between the EDL and UAF. In an interview with the *Guardian*, he commented that: 'I think the groups ought to know better and certainly if there was going to be rallies by both these groups at the same time it would always lead to this sort of confrontation.' (Booth and Travis 9th August 2009)

Mahmood was not alone in his efforts to get the EDL's marches banned from Birmingham. After the July 2009 demonstration, he, along with other local Respect and Labour politicians, called on the West Midlands Police to prohibit the EDL from marching at the final September 2009 demonstration. This was based on the violence experienced at the EDL's 8th August protest (Birmingham Respect 23rd August 2009). This time they applied successfully; the then Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, ordering a ban on demonstrations inside the Bull Ring area of the City. In particular, Mahmood also advocated moving EDL demonstrations outside of the City Centre completely - suggesting that this would eliminate the public-order and public safety cost of the EDL's presence (ibid). He was also highly critical of the treatment of local residents at the time of the 2009 protests - suggesting that the rights of demonstrators (who he names as 'perpetrators') were put above the rights of local residents (who he names as 'victims') (Mahmood 2015).

Another strident anti-EDL campaigner at the time of the 2009 Birmingham demonstrations was Salma Yaqoob, Councillor for Sparbrook ward and national leader of Respect. In the run up to the EDL's September 2009 demonstration, Yaqoob too called on the EDL to be banned and complained at the police's reticence on the issue (*Birmingham Mail* 22nd August 2009). Moreover, on the day of the 5th September demonstration, Yaqoob attended and spoke at the UAF counter rally in the City (Unite Against Fascism 8th October 2009). Yaqoob's interventions weren't without personal cost, however. As a result of her campaigning, she started to receive death threats and a man was later charged in August of that year (*Birmingham Mail* 16th August 2009).

Retracing our steps, it wasn't, however, until after the EDL's August 2009 demonstration that another Birmingham Member of Parliament decided to respond to the EDL's presence. In contrast to Khalid Mahmood and other local politicians, MP for Sellyoak, Steve McCabe, publically opposed banning the EDL's August 2009 demonstration in the City. Concerned at approaching the group from a dogmatic angle, McCabe reasoned that 'we can't go around banning things because we don't like them or because of the threat of a reaction.' (*Birmingham Mail* 26th August 2009) Moreover, he had concerns at the security risks and potential infringement of protester rights that a ban may

have affected. For example, he was worried that a ban would have risked 'driving [the EDL] underground and making them more dangerous' as well as infringing the group's freedom of speech (McCabe 2014). In an interview with the author, he suggests that his opinion was not uncommon at the time - with 'a broad spectrum' of his colleagues leaning (at least privately) the same way (ibid).

Moving down from the Parliamentary to the local authority level, local Councillors also displayed divisions between 'pro' and 'anti' ban camps; this time when the EDL came on its final visit in September 2009. Clashes came at the very top of the City Council when Alan Rudge, then Cabinet Member for Equalities and Community Cohesion, disagreed with Deputy Council Leader, Paul Tilsley, over how to best deal with the EDL's presence. Rudge wished to hold off banning the group's demonstration whilst Tilsley wanted the EDL's march to be stopped by the police due to the 'inflammatory' nature of the group's presence as well as its impact on commerce, community relations and Council budgets (*Birmingham Post* 28th August 2009). In a bizarre turn of events, this political conflict wasn't resolved and both made their separate consultations with West Midlands Police over what actions to take next – frustrating and complicating efforts by the local constabulary to police the protest.

It was no surprise then when, on September 5th, the EDL's last 2009 demonstration in Birmingham turned out to be one of the most riotous that year. Against the advice of Senior Birmingham police officers and politicians, Dr Muhammed Naseem, the head of Birmingham's Central Mosque, urged the City's Muslim community to confront the EDL (*Daily Mail* 7th September 2009). In the end, 90 demonstrators were arrested as the EDL, anti-fascist counter-protesters and Muslim youth confronted each other on the streets around Birmingham New Street train station (ibid). This was despite an order by the Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, to ban protesters from the Bull Ring shopping precinct of the City (Booth 6th September 2009). It also came amidst claims of a 'lack of engagement' with Muslim youth before the demonstration (*Birmingham Mail* 22nd August 2009).

In the aftermath of the final, September 2009 EDL protest, Birmingham City Council praised the police operation (planned four weeks in advance) for 'successfully' managing the event. Not all were, however, happy with attempts by West Midlands Police to quell disorder in 2009. Khalid Mahmood MP, for example, suggested that the (September) demonstration and its management was a 'complete mess' – complaining that insufficient preparations had been undertaken by the police for the EDL's return (Booth 6th September 2009). Such pointed criticisms and the spectre of 2009 stimulated a Birmingham-led rethink about how the police should respond to the EDL nationally. For example, a week after the September protest, West Midlands Police convened a summit with other Senior Police Officers from the Greater Manchester, Bedfordshire and Metropolitan police to 'discuss the actions of the EDL' and 'how best to deal with the politics of division' generated by the group (Wilson 17th September 2009).

Moreover, Assistant Chief Constable, Sharon Rowe, was asked to chair a cross-constabulary group to collect intelligence about EDL activists (*BBC Newsnight* 12th October 2009a) – with officers assigned as 'spotters' at a subsequent Manchester demonstration to record and monitor EDL activists (*BBC Newsnight* 12th October 2009b). Furthermore, one of the difficulties identified by police coming out of the Birmingham summit of policing the EDL's demonstrations was that 'much of the planning was carried out over social networking sites.' (*BBC News* 17th September 2009) One of the innovations that the West Midlands Police took on board then was to use Twitter and Facebook in policing EDL protest – involving 'scotch[ing] wild rumours or shar[ing] updates on how they were keeping the peace', this was then rolled out and became a key feature of policing EDL protest across the country (*Birmingham Mail* 3rd November 2011).

b) Conclusion

In summary, then, the 2009 EDL protests in Birmingham came as a shock to both political and policing elites. It firmly divided local politicians with some advocating a ban on the group demonstrating while others suggesting that a ban wasn't an appropriate way of dealing with the group. In terms of policing, confrontation between the EDL and local youths as well as the EDL and local

police officers seemed to provide a key catalyst for disorder on all three occasions. Another contributory factor was that the police had very little experience of the EDL and the chaos that they could generate at this time. As the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, Chris Sims, commented: the EDL were 'a new national phenomenon' that they had not had to deal with before (Wilson 17th September 2009).

Lessons about political unity and the potential for disorder were therefore brought forward after 2009 – with a more consensual policing approach the result. The 2009 conflagrations also acted as a key mental marker for local politicians and police when responding to the EDL – with a number of local MPs (Steve McCabe and Khalid Mahmood) and Councillors (Waseem Zaffar and Josh Jones) referring to the events unprompted when interviewed as something they were keen to avoid. Moreover, the September 2009 protest also provided the impetus for better engagement with Birmingham's Muslim communities at subsequent EDL demonstrations - something that was fostered by the Council and local politicians as part of a more serious community engagement strategy going forward.

4.4: Birmingham's Second Major EDL Demonstration (17th October 2011)

Possibly encouraged by their previous ability to provoke disorder, the EDL returned to Birmingham in October 2011. The motive for the EDL's return this time was, however, far more sinister. According to intelligence gathered by West Midlands Police, the group wished to 'attack' Birmingham's Muslim Community (West Midlands Police, September 2011). In the end, however, the EDL's wishes were not realised; about 500 EDL protesters turned out for a rain-soaked demonstration in which only 5 arrests were made (*Sunday Mercury* 30th October 2011). In a distinct change to two years previous, there were no public-order incidences related to the local Asian community. In an effort to avoid previous conflagrations, police agreed to move the EDL from the Victoria Square to the less prominent Centenary Square - based on the belief held by some Councillors that 'we shouldn't be accommodating them' (*BBC News* 26th October 2011). Crucially, police also tried to strike a more consultative relationship with protesters in 2011 – engaging in a 'great deal' of discussion with event organisers (*Sunday Mercury* 30th October 2011). Mainly as a result of

the change in police tactics and partially to do with the poor weather, then, the 2011 protest event came in stark contrast to the three previous demonstrations in 2009 – with a largely peaceful atmosphere on the day of the protest. As EDL expert Joel Busher notes, the event was largely looked upon within the EDL as being a ‘resounding failure’ (Busher 2015: 124).

a) Wider Preparations

Building on the 2009 experience, the October 2011 protest saw a dramatic change in how the police and local Council prepared for the EDL demonstrating in Birmingham. First, and marking a broader shift in national policing approaches, instead of allowing protesters and counter protesters to interact with each other, they were kept separate – with the UAF located at the Council House and the EDL at the end of Broad Street around Centenary Square. As Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council, Paul Tilsley, comments: ‘[in 2011] we stood a chance because of the road system and access [allowed us] to keep them apart... I think that was reasonably successful in separating them and I don’t think there was a resultant conflagration as there was in the earlier demonstration[s].’ (Tilsley 2015)

Secondly, West Midlands Police engaged in wider dialogue with the protest groups themselves. For example, after talking with the EDL and the UAF, it was decided that employing stewards for the groups was needed in order to curtail the amount of disorder and to act as a link between the protest groups and police. Thirdly, police tried to ‘normalise’ the day’s protest event. For example, West Midlands Police allowed a number of community events to go ahead in and around the City Centre and encouraged ‘people to go about their normal business’ (Tyler 29th October 2011). In a letter to the Guardian, Assistant Chief Constable, Marcus Beale, commented that ‘the [2011] event was ultimately successful’ – with only a couple of road closures and the deferral of a Poppy Appeal being the few signs of disruption on the day (Beale 8th November 2011).

In addition, and crucially, there was also a concerted effort by the Council’s Equalities, Community Safety and Cohesion department to stop young Muslim men getting caught up in disorder. This took its learning directly from the September 2009 experience. For example, and as one Birmingham City Council official recounts, ‘trusted community contacts’, such as Imams, community

leaders and community elders, sent out a robust message prior to the protest; they told young people to 'stay away' from the City Centre (Birmingham 5 2015). This was not however prescriptive advice and was balanced with 'not completely avoiding the city centre if it is part of their day to day travel and shopping.' (ibid) Moreover, this pro-avoidance message was part of a broader rethink (post-2009) of 'how we work with our young people, how we work with our Mosques, how we work with our wider faith groups, how we maintain calm in the city.' (ibid) Crucially, in 2011, scenes of Asian youths brawling with the EDL was not repeated - a major success for community relations and community activists in Birmingham.

b) Political Responses

Similarly, the 2011 demonstration saw a step change in the robustness of anti-EDL interventions by local elites. MP for Sellyoak, Steve McCabe, previously a prominent advocate of not banning the EDL, reversed his position on the issue. In the run up to the October 2011 demonstration, McCabe came out in support of Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Polices' bid for a ban – describing the EDL as a 'a rag bag of extremism looking to cause trouble.' (*Birmingham Mail* 21st October 2011) When questioned about this volte face, McCabe stated that there were two important considerations behind this. The first was evidence from previous demonstrations that the EDL had 'no intention of having a peaceful protest' or cooperating with police (McCabe 2014). The second was due to the cost to police budgets and local commerce of the City. As McCabe suggests: 'I was more concerned by the likely impact on Birmingham on traders lost trade [and the] cost to the retail sector.' (ibid) Labour Councillor for Lozells and East Handsworth, Waseem Zaffar, also called upon the Home Secretary to ban the march (*Birmingham Mail* 21st October 2011), whilst he also later called for a ban to be placed on the group itself (*Birmingham Mail* 11th November 2011). This was not because Zaffar was against freedom of speech in principle but, like McCabe, was due to the violent activity of the group. As Waseem (2015) notes: 'Standing on top of bus shelters throwing missiles at police officers is not freedom of speech.'

The 2011 demonstration also saw a step change in the volume of responses to the EDL's presence. This was mainly because of the high profile nature of the

disorder that happened two years previous that had stoked awareness of the issue. For example, John Hemming, MP for Birmingham Yardley, had mounted frequent Parliamentary protests against the EDL in the intervening period and in the lead up to the 2011 demonstration. He had either co-sponsored or signed three Parliamentary Early Day Motions that suggested that the EDL should have been banned from demonstrating in Leicester, Middlesbrough and nearby Dudley (HC EDM 2182, 758 & 1920).

Moreover, as early as February 2011, Khalid Mahmood again called for a march ban on an EDL protest and petitioned for extra resources if a ban was not secured – with cuts in police budgets and policing provision for his local community provided as key reasons for his stance (Tyler 8th February 2011). In addition, Waseem Zaffar wrote to the Home Secretary, City Council and West Midlands Police in advance of 2011 in order to petition for a ban and to get the protest site on the 2011 demonstration changed from Victoria square – citing the violence of 2009 as a key concern in such a popularly used and central location of Birmingham (Zaffar 10th October 2011).

c) Conclusion

In summary, then, the 2011 EDL demonstration in Birmingham came in distinct contrast to the group's 2009 mobilisations – posing wider lessons about how to deal with EDL protest. This time police adopted a more consultative approach to the group's presence. The result was a more consensual style of policing, which de-escalated the confrontational dynamic that the EDL was likely to engage in. Moreover, the Council also became more innovative in 2011 – taking a more proactive approach to its liaisons with the Muslim community before the day of the October protest. This involved persuading key religious leaders and community elders to help stop the re-occurrence of scenes at the September 2009 protests. Whether it is acceptable for the Council to suggest that a certain minority population 'stay away' from the City centre is for another time but it certainly reduced potential for conflagration in 2011. In contrast to the policing response, political elites *actually* increased the robustness and the exclusionary tone of their interventions in 2011. This would set a trend for the future demonstrations, with political robustness being matched by policing consultation going forward.

4.5: Birmingham's Third Major EDL Demonstration (20th July 2013)

With a more robust stance towards the EDL and lessons learnt from 2009, Birmingham had a strong basis from which to go forward when the EDL announced its intention to demonstrate a fifth time in July 2013. This time the EDL came to the West Midlands City to protest at the dismantling of anti-terror surveillance cameras in two (predominantly Muslim) areas of Birmingham (*BBC News* 20th July 2013). Unfortunately, the EDL's 2013 protest also saw the return of violent disorder to Birmingham's streets. 33 out of the EDL's 1,000 protesters were arrested after serious clashes between the group and police at the main protest site (Lloyd 20th July 2013). One police officer had to be treated for concussion and a number of protester's sustained head injuries as smoke bombs, cobblestones and bottles rained down during the protest (*ibid*).

The immediate context was, however, particularly instructive in terms of disorder: it was the first Birmingham demonstration after five local men were convicted of planning the bombing of an EDL march in Dewsbury the previous year. Moreover, it was also scheduled amid heightened community tensions – arriving in the immediate aftermath of attacks on three Birmingham Mosques and the murder of an elderly Muslim man (*BBC News* 25th October 2013), as well as during a wider peak in anti-Muslim sentiment sparked by the Woolwich terror attacks (Feldman and Littler July 2014). Despite elite learning then, prior events seemed to have set the tone and atmosphere for the EDL's 20th July protest – providing some explanation for the potential disorder on the day of the protest.

a) Wider Preparations

Disorder in the case of 2013 was still odd, however. Even set against such a formidable backdrop, a 'great deal of time, effort and thought' had been dedicated to the EDL's July 2013 protest (Lloyd 20th July 2013). In an interview before the day's events, Assistant Chief Constable, Sharon Rowe, commented that the West Midlands police operation was the biggest the force had ever put in place – with up to 1,000 officers drafted in for the day's events (*BBC News* 25th October 2013). In addition, it even showed broad continuity with the 2011 approach – as police officers patrolled key communities within the City to reassure residents and head off any disorder that might have headed towards

the main protest site. In the end, Rowe even considered the police's operation as 'successful' – with most people being able to 'go about their daily business' and the day 'largely' passing off without serious incident (Lloyd 20th July 2013).

One explanation for the wider conflagration on the day of the 2013 demonstration could, however, have been a repeat instance of senior police officers being distracted by political elites before the event. A lot of time was taken up in 2013 by the (arguably) tangential debate of policing costs for successive EDL protests during a time of austerity and police cuts. For example, the day before the protest, Police and Crime Commissioner for West Midlands police, Bob Jones, publically expressed 'considerable concern' about the 'significant cost and strain on our already stretched budgets' (Talwar 18th July 2013). Moreover, MP for Perrybarr, Khalid Mahmood also weighed in on the conversation - suggesting that significant fines should be imposed on those involved in crime during these demonstrations (ibid). This cannot however fully explain the violent disorder on the day of the protest, and therefore may be down to both the (previously noted) 'hyped up' atmosphere around the 2013 demonstration and the heightened police presence decided on by Sharon Rowe and her colleagues.

Turning to other preparations, as far as Birmingham City Council were concerned, there was heightened engagement with Birmingham's Asian community. This was a continuation of the good work established in 2011. In 2013, for example, local officials engaged in the City's Prevent programme used work from their 'Outstanding Neighbourhoods' project and a reference group of community contacts to prepare two weeks in advance of the demonstration. Like in 2011, the aim of this was to circulate the message that people from these communities should not be in the City Centre when the demonstration was taking place (Zaffar 2015). In the end, the council official responsible in 2013 was pleased with the overall level of community engagement in 2013 – suggesting that 'having an early conversation with communities help[ed].' (Birmingham 1: 2015)

In the reality, however, things weren't so smooth sailing. On the day of the 2013 demonstration, there was a major incident between Asian youths and officers from nearby Warwickshire Police that almost ended in a disturbance of the

peace. Young men reacted adversely to the mass police presence and to being filmed as part of the police's surveillance. As Councillor Waseem Zaffar, who witnessed the events and raised it at the official policing debrief, commented: 'that was totally mismanaged and in the end the police apologised because you know it was just ethnic profiling. If you were of ethnic minority origin you were being pictured before you could leave ... that was creating more tension.' (Zaffar 2015) This was picked up and taken forward by West Midlands Police – mobilising a less high-profile response when the EDL returned in 2014. It does, however, show how rowing back on previous successful adaptations to EDL protest can see a resurgence of disorder.

b) Political Responses

As had now come to be expected, local politicians mounted robust and exclusionary campaigns towards the EDL's presence in 2013. In a letter to the *Birmingham Mail* three days before the 20th July protest, leaders at the City Council as well as key religious organisations stated that the EDL's presence would not 'create divisions and you will not destroy our unity.' (Hallam 17th July 2013) Moreover, Birmingham's Labour party also issued a similarly exclusionary statement ahead of the EDL's return in July 2013 – stating that they 'strongly oppose[d]' the EDL's forthcoming demonstration, and that: 'There is no place in our city for messages of hate. There is no place for intolerance and there is no place for violence or extremism of any kind.' (*Unite Against Fascism* 17th July 2013) This came in contrast to the Council's public statements around the EDL's 2013 protest. In particular, Councillor John Cotton, Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion and Equalities, took a more neutral line – asking individuals to 'go about their normal business' and 'not allow the protest to undermine... tolerance, peace and understanding' in the West Midlands City (Hallam 17th July 2013).

In addition to these more robust public statements, 2013 also spelt the start of publically recorded incidents of Birmingham Councillors taking to the streets *en masse*. Labour Councillor's Josh Jones and Miriam Khan joined the anti-fascist collective, Unite Against Fascism's, 'Unity' event in Chamberlain Square along with five other Councillors. When asked about their presence at the protest, Khan – a Councillor for the Washwood Heath ward - stated that: 'it was

important to have a demonstration against the EDL to show that people in Birmingham don't tolerate hate.' (Ensor 23rd July 2013) Moreover, Jones insisted that it was imperative to oppose the EDL – stating that 'if we don't stop fascists they'll attack everyone.' (ibid) He saw it as his 'duty' as a Councillor 'to stand shoulder to shoulder with the people in [his] community that [were] being victimised and persecuted' by the EDL (Jones 2015). In a separate statement to the press, Councillor for Lozells and Handsworth ward, Waseem Zaffar – who also attended the counter demonstration – stated that:

'We are obviously disappointed that the EDL chose Birmingham to host this demonstration. Birmingham doesn't really need this sort of attention... My message to the EDL would be to stay away from Birmingham - your message of hate divides communities and is not welcome.' (*Huffington Post* 20th July 2013)

Another sign of more robust interventions in 2013 were proposals on policing costs. This was as a result of the demonstration being one of the most expensive policing operations in the history of West Midlands Police. As one might expect, this provoked robust reactions from a number of local elites - angry at the cost to the public purse. For example, Waseem Zaffar asked police whether they would approach the EDL for a contribution towards funds (as had been the case at other large public-order events); this notion was however rejected. Moreover, MP for Perrybarr, Khalid Mahmood, condemned the £1 million spent on the protest – suggesting that it would have been 'better spent on the community on crime-fighting initiatives.' (Tyler 2nd August 2013) In addition, Mahmood suggested that those found responsible for criminal damage to the City and businesses should be fined. When quizzed about the democratic impact of fining demonstrators, Mahmood (2015) suggests that it wouldn't infringe on people's freedom of speech and assembly but would merely 'make [demonstrators] directly responsible for their actions.' He envisaged such proposals in the context of redressing the balance from giving 'licence' to groups like to EDL to freely demonstrate and restore the emphasis on 'the vast majority of victims in this [i.e. residents in Birmingham]' (ibid).

c) Conclusion

In sum, then, the EDL's 2013 protest saw the return of wide-scale disorder to Birmingham's streets. This came as slightly peculiar for a City that had: a) been increasingly robust in its dealings with the EDL and b) had made great inroads into improving its policing of EDL demonstrations. The mass disorder on the day of the 2013 EDL demonstration then came as a shock to local politicians and police, as the local Council had all but eliminated the risk associated with members of the Muslim community being provoked by the EDL's presence. This disorder may have not been totally surprising, however. For example, the return of a more high-profile policing presence in 2013 was shown to have had a considerable influence on members of the Asian community at the day's event. Moreover, the heightening of tensions posed by the Woolwich terror attacks and a failed anti-EDL bomb plot would have added reasons for the EDL to be involved in potential disorder. Such major incidents were, however, built upon and retrenched when the EDL came over a year later. However, it goes to prove how adopting and consistently building on lessons from previous EDL protest is, especially when it comes to policing tactics, highly important when addressing this criminological issue.

4.6: Birmingham's Fourth Major EDL Demonstration (10th October 2014)

Shaken by its experiences in 2013, Birmingham politicians retrenched their robust stance towards the EDL when the group returned in the autumn of 2014. Now a leaderless organisation, the EDL was arguably a smaller public-order 'threat' in 2014 - not able to draw on nearly as many activists as compared to the years previous. For example, only an estimated 500 demonstrators turned out at the protest. The group, however, should have arguably been able to mobilise more - given the fortuitous context surrounding the demonstration. In 2014, for example, the so-called 'Trojan Horse' incidents of 'radical Islam' in Birmingham schools made national headlines; this should have been more than enough to spark sizeable protest and disorder (Lloyd & Buckley 11th October 2014). In the end, however, the protest was neither sizeable, nor massive, with a contingent of only 10 EDL demonstrators being arrested on the day of the demonstration. These came as a result of EDL protesters surging towards anti-fascists and trying to storm the UAF's stage in Chamberlain Square (ibid).

Fortunately, the scenes of the late 2009 and July 2013 were not, however, repeated at the EDL's October 2014 Birmingham protest.

a) Wider Preparations

Learning from the confrontational approach adopted in 2013 and the diminished threat posed by the EDL, police took a more low-key and consultative approach toward the protest in 2014. In the weeks leading up to the demonstration, officers used meetings with organisers, Councillors, business leaders, community representatives and other local stakeholders to shape their operations (ibid). As one Councillor comments: there was 'better communication with everyone involved' and 'better coordination' between demonstrators, police and the local community in 2014 (Birmingham 2: 2015). Moreover, on the day of the demonstration itself, police brought forward lessons from the 2013 'Warwickshire Police incident' and were able to strategically consign officers to discreet places around the City, only appearing as disorder arose (*ITV News* 11th October 2014). In addition, a unit of Police Liaison officers were also dispatched; this was to avoid misunderstandings within the local community as well as to provide a point of contact between demonstrators and senior police officers (ibid).

In proportion to the threat posed by the (now leaderless) EDL, engagement with the local Muslim community was also fairly low-key in 2014. As one key council official at the time suggests: 'We didn't have to utilise as much our community groups. I think now that if people were to see the EDL if they were come to Birmingham, they would see it pointless in terms of coming into the City.' (Birmingham 1: 2015) Moreover, in 2014, the same person believed that the EDL 'as a focal point' had simply lost traction and interest amongst Birmingham's Muslim community; they simply no longer saw the group as a 'threat' and chose to ignore the EDL's presence on the day of the 2014 demonstration (ibid). This was a contrast to dramatic scenes in 2009 and was a deliberate learning from 2013 which found that a 'large police presence may actually lead to more trouble and concern' (ibid).

b) Political Responses

While the policing and community engagement measures in 2014 were fairly low-key, the nature of the political reaction to the EDL's return was even more

robust in 2014 than it was in 2013. About ten days before the 2014 demonstration, Council leaders, the police and local religious leaders again signed a statement in which they made clear that the EDL was 'not welcome in Birmingham.' (Birmingham City Council 10th October 2014) Paul Tilsley, Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council, posits that he signed the 2014 statement for much more practical reasons, however - suggesting that the successive presence of the EDL had been 'negat[ing] years and years of marketing [the] City' and was a continuing threat to public safety in the City centre (Tilsley 2015).

The rationale behind the statement was clear: to use 'much more direct language' and a 'stronger line' against the EDL (McKay 2015). This was a conscious move as previously the Council had been criticised by lay members for not coming out more immediately against the group in 2013 (ibid). As Councillor James McKay, who had taken over from John Cotton as the Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion and Equalities, suggests: the 'feedback from 2013 was that the City...was nowhere near strong enough on its messaging of the EDL protest and it was summed up in people saying: "you never said that the EDL are not welcome".' (ibid) In 2014, then, the Council were at pains to adopt a more robust and exclusionary public relations strategy when talking about the EDL's presence in the City. A distinct shift from the more neutral stance adopted by his predecessor, James McKay (still Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion, Equalities and Community Safety in 2014) took to the press to reinforce this robust exclusionary rhetoric - telling reporters that public safety was a top priority for the Council and suggesting that 'we would prefer [the EDL] to stay away from Birmingham.' (*Walsall Advertiser* 11th October 2014)

Apart from these interventions, other political responses to the EDL's October 2014 demonstration were fairly minimal. Between 2013 and 2014, John Hemming, MP for Yardley, kept up his previous practice of signing Early Day Motions against the EDL – signing one against the presence of the EDL in Tower Hamlets in September 2013 (HC EDM 491). Moreover, a number of Birmingham MP's and Councillors signed a statement commissioned by UAF – stating that as signatories they 'reject[ed] the attempt by the EDL to whip up racism and division in [the] City by trying to turn communities against each

other.’ (Gable 10th October 2014) A sign of the low-profile nature of the demonstration, no Members of Parliament, including Khalid Mahmood (who was in hospital at the time), took it up as a major campaigning issue – perhaps preferring to let the demonstration to run its course and to make as little an impact as possible.

Despite the diminution of public-facing statements in some quarters, however, there was still significant involvement by local politicians in the counter campaigns and rallies of 2014. For example, a number of Birmingham Councillors signed a statement by the UAF-organised anti-fascist collective, ‘We Are Birmingham’, the day before the demonstration, which condemned the EDL’s decision to demonstrate, rejecting ‘the attempt by the EDL to whip up racism and division’ as well as the group’s ability to ‘turn communities against each other’ (ibid). Moreover, on the day, Labour Councillors, Claire Spencer, Josh Jones, Miriam Khan, Sharon Thompson, and Waseem Zaffar, all attended the Unite Against Fascism counter demonstration in Chamberlain Square - with Zaffar, Khan, Jones, and Thompson giving speeches telling Birmingham residents to ignore the EDL, signalling their disgust at the group’s presence, and pleading for community cohesion to be maintained (ibid).

c) Conclusion

In summary, then, the EDL’s most recent demonstration in Birmingham displayed again a contrast between a low-key policing response and a heightened (exclusionary) political response. An exemplar of this was the petition circulated by Council officials that took on far more explicit exclusionary language than in years previous – a deliberate learning from the more neutral Council-sponsored response to the 2013 EDL protest. In terms of events on the day itself, however, these came as a marked contrast to scenes of five years earlier with only 10 arrests coming to pass as a result of minor public disorder. Partially to do with the diminution of the EDL, partially to do with the local authority’s now well-rehearsed policing response to the group, the 2014 demonstration appeared as a ‘non-event’– with the City’s Muslim community and MP’s not responding to the group’s presence. In the end, then, the EDL’s 2014 demonstration was a rather inauspicious exit for a group that had caused such havoc when they had originally come five years previous. Perhaps a sign

of the times, the EDL barely made the local news headlines on the day of the protest.

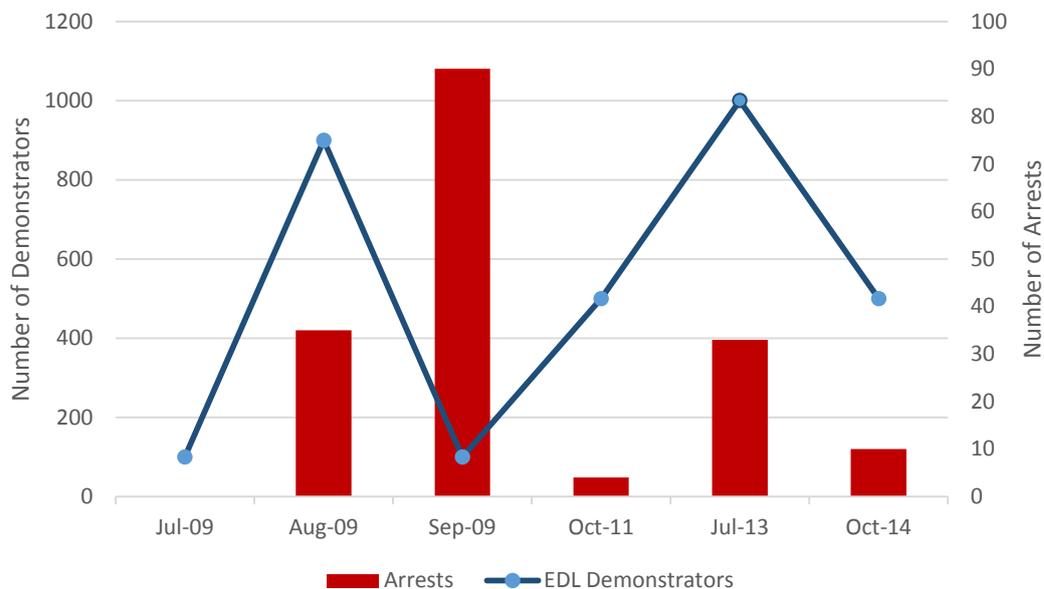
4.7: Conclusion

The advent of EDL protest in Birmingham in 2009 demonstrates the fairly steep learning curve local elites have been on when the EDL first visits a particular locale. The site of some of the groups earliest and most disorderly demonstrations, politicians within the City responded to the 2009 protests with a mixture of confusion and surprise. After this initial period of confusion, however, most political elites became increasingly robust and hard-headed in their stance and their public-order prescriptions towards the group. An example of this was Steve McCabe, Birmingham MP for Sellyoak, who switched from being anti-ban to pro-ban in less than two years. This was part of a broader shift by local politicians towards a consensus around banning the group and much stronger public statements against the EDL at subsequent demonstrations. Moreover, in July 2013, Khalid Mahmood switched from merely being pro-ban to openly advocating levying costs on EDL demonstrators who caused criminal damage. By 2014, political elites had therefore acknowledged that they needed to be on the 'front foot' in challenging the EDL when the protest movement came to demonstrate in the City – something that was perhaps lacking when the group first appeared in 2009.

Responses by local politicians were not however all overt acts of robust exclusion. For example, officials at Birmingham's City Council took a more consultative and inclusivist approach - engaging with Muslim community groups in the lead up to and on the day of EDL demonstrations. Initially picked up upon at the 2009 demonstrations and an unstated but important issue elsewhere, there was real concern about the involvement by Asian youths in violent disorder and the impact this was having on the City's sizeable Muslim population. Therefore, over the course of the 2011, 2013 and 2014 demonstrations, officials at the local Council worked closely with key community figures to make sure that young people were being warned to 'stay away' from the EDL protests and that the Asian community were reassured about protections put in place when the EDL came to protest. This was broadly successful with only one major incident occurring in 2013. Fortunately, there

were no repeats of 2009 where Asian youths engaged in running battles with the EDL – suggesting that proper engagement and successful integration of the approach into the local public-order apparatus had taken place.

Fig 4.1: Birmingham’s Total EDL Demonstrators and Arrest Count, July 2009-October 2014



The robust nature of political (and Council-led) responses has however evolved in contrast to the policing response in Birmingham, and presents the central paradox at the heart of the ‘Birmingham case’. Following three peaks of disorder in August/September 2009 and 2013 (shown above in figure 4.1), West Midlands Police moved from a more confrontational style of public-order policing in 2009 toward a less confrontational, more consultative and lower-level policing response at subsequent EDL demonstrations. This was based on a realisation that by providing the EDL with confrontation, the police effectively entered the group’s dynamic of provocation and therefore less confrontation and better dialogue between protesters and the police was needed to improve public-order management of the EDL in Birmingham. Examples of this came in 2011 and 2014, when the police consulted more closely with the EDL and when the police deliberately struck a less high-profile presence to reduce the ‘hype’ around the day’s protests. This, combined with a much-diminished EDL ‘threat’, aided both protest events to pass off peacefully in 2011 and 2014 - with only a minor level of disorder occurring on each occasion.

A note of caution, however, has to be sounded here about the causality between responses and its bearing on successful protest outcomes (low disorder, zero arrests). In particular, this chapter has shown that in some instances intra-group dynamics of a protest group can work independently of responses to determine how 'difficult' or 'easy' such groups are to police. For example, in the case of the 2013 demonstration, police forces went up against an aggrieved EDL, which resulted in a spike in disorder. In contrast, the poor weather experienced at the time of the 2011 protest made it (literally) a damp squib. This is not to say that responses are unimportant but that the success such responses are channelled, tempered, and moulded through situations and factors within a protest movement that might be outside the reach of police and politicians. Moreover, 2013 was the first instance in our study of how rowing back on previous successful adaptations to EDL protest can see a resurgence of disorder.

In summary then, what lies at the heart of Birmingham's adaptation to EDL protest is a paradox: while politicians have been increasingly robust in their treatment of the EDL, the police have become more light-footed. This was not due to a lack of communication between the two, with local politicians being increasingly consulted on the location and operational decisions around EDL demonstrations. It is merely a symptom of external stimuli – with an appearance of robustness missing in the political case and lesson-learning around confrontation happening in the policing case. What this will mean for future public-order management in the City is hard to say. It does however point to the potential for two competing strategies to co-exist at the heart of a successful response to EDL protests – bearing out the argument that a unified strategy between police and politicians is sufficient but not always the case. As shown in the next chapter, however, a unified outlook does help – knitting together responses from different sectors into a coherent whole. It is to the case of Bradford that we will now turn.

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Chapter Five

Bradford and Keighley – Responses to Anti-Islamic Protest in West Yorkshire²

Chapter Outline

5.1: Introduction

5.2: Bradford – A ‘Post-Riots’ Response

a) Context

b) Bradford’s First EDL Demonstration (28th August 2010)

c) Bradford’s Second EDL Demonstration (12th October 2013)

5.3: Keighley – Balancing Tensions, Regaining Trust

a) Introduction

b) Context

c) Keighley EDL Demonstration (4th August 2012)

5.4: Conclusion

² An edited version of this chapter will be published as a journal article. See: Allchorn, W. ‘Public-order Management in Bradford ‘post-riots’: The case of the English Defence League.’ *Journal of Political Criminology*. Volume 1, Number 2, July 2016.

‘What we were worried about was [sic] the headlines on the press the next day being ‘riot in Bradford’ and that’s what the main thing we wanted to avoid.’ A former Bradfordian MP (Bradford 1: 2014), commenting on the EDL’s August 2010 demonstration.

‘What we needed to do was to expunge the memory of Bradford as a place where all you had to do was to shout at a few people and the place would burn. We had to create a situation so that the message after the event was important as before and that is that the people of Bradford acted well.’ One former Senior Councillor (Bradford 2: 2015), commenting on the EDL’s first demonstration in August 2010.

5.1: Introduction

Bradford presents an important marker for studying the English Defence League. The EDL has visited the area on two major occasions in the past seven years: on 8th August 2010 as part of its Northern expansion strategy (Taylor 28th May 2010) and on 12th October 2013 for a ‘national rally’. In the interim, a more ideologically radical splinter group, named the ‘North West Infidels’, was formed and the EDL’s founder and leader, Tommy Robinson, left. Bradford therefore plays an inauspicious but important staging post in EDL history – being both the place where the group first fragmented and where the leaderless organisation hosted its first, post-Robinson rally.

Bradford is also crucial to the study of responses to the EDL. In comparison to other Cities included in this study, local politicians and the police were arguably ‘ready’ for the EDL when they came in 2010 and 2013. Nine years earlier, the far-right had sparked some of the worst race-riots in recent times in the City. Six years earlier, the British National Party returned four far-right candidates to the local district council. MPs and Councillors were, therefore, well versed in the public-order and community cohesion challenges posed by the EDL when they first came in August 2010 – bringing forward earlier experiences of rioting in 1995 and 2001 in order to make sure that such events did not happen again.

The first part of this chapter aims to demonstrate how, in comparison to Birmingham, Bradford’s politicians arrived at this state of ‘pre-EDL’ readiness and the effect it had on their responses. Initially, we will look at the recent

history of Bradford. This will be in order to unpick some of the factors drawn upon by the EDL in 2010 and 2013. It will also serve to place local political responses to the EDL in context. We will then move on to analyse the specific preparations for and responses to the EDL and how they varied within and between two major EDL demonstrations in Bradford in 2010 and 2013. In both cases, we will find that the spectre of the 2001 'Milltown riots' were a key primer within anti-EDL responses and public-order protest management.

The second part of this chapter focuses on another former mill town within the Bradford Metropolitan District: Keighley. Keighley serves as an interesting counterpoint to Bradford. In particular, the EDL's August 2012 demonstration in the town showcases an increasingly unsavoury trend amongst the UK far-right to capitalise upon high-profile cases of child sexual exploitation (CSE) – with other recent examples including Rochdale in 2012 and Rotherham in 2014. We will therefore see how responses to previous cases of child sexual exploitation and far-right mobilisations in the town fed into – and even tainted - local elite approaches to the EDL's presence.

Finally, we will conclude with a comparative assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of exclusionary and inclusionary responses across the two cases – pooling lessons learnt in both instances. Echoing the introductory chapters, it will be suggested that inclusionary responses lead to a more sustained improvement in community relations. Moreover, particular focus will be given to the current leader of Bradford Council, David Green, and MP for Keighley and Ilkley, Kris Hopkins, who have been involved in grassroots attempts at engaging with (predominantly white working-class) communities prone to right-wing extremism.

5.2: Bradford – A 'Post-Riots' Response

a) Context

i) *Deindustrialisation and Migration in Bradford*

Bradford rose to prominence as a textile-manufacturing town during the nineteenth century. Along with many other Yorkshire Milltown's, the industrialisation of wool-making led to the transformation of a small rural market town (known for its cottage weaving industry) into a large and thriving metropolis, which consumed one fifth of Britain's wool a year by 1853

(Richardson 1976: 80). A sign of the increased activity during this period, the local population increased almost ten-fold from 13,264 in 1801 to 103,778 in 1851 (Ibid: 92). Civic monuments, like the Venetian-style City Hall and the Wool Exchange, still stand testament to this boom period when the City became known as the 'Wool Capital of the World'.

During the 1950s, however, changes wrought by innovations in North West Europe and Japan - as well as alterations to national labour laws - posed a fundamental challenge to Bradford's textile industry. In particular, mills in the area had to upgrade their machinery and change to a 24-hour shift cycle in order to keep up with competition on the Continent and elsewhere. Moreover, post-war labour shortages were further exacerbated by legislation banning women working nights in peacetime and a refusal by local residents to work the mills (Hill 2013: 173). This compounded a trend of decline that had started from the 1920s onwards, in which the Great Depression saw many mills either driven out of business or scaling back production (Keighley 2007:50).

In order to address employment shortages and adapt to this new shift cycle, Bradford's mill owners recruited labourers from the New Commonwealth in the mid-1950s. Most of these economic migrants hailed from Afghanistan, the Mirpur region of Pakistan, the Campbellpuri region of the Punjab, or Sylhet in Bangladesh and came as short-term, night-workers - intending to save money and enjoying a better quality of life when they returned home (Hill 2013: 175). The attraction of an improved standard of living and steady employment meant, however, that many short-term labourers settled, with changes in immigration laws seeing a fresh wave of migration in 1962 as men were joined by their spouses and children (Valentine 2006: 4). Around 26.8% of Bradford's residents now describe themselves as either Asian or Asian British (ONS 2011a). Two thirds of whom live in four wards skirting the City Centre (Bradford Libraries Archives & Information Service). Such an influx could not however save Bradford's ailing post-war textile economy; between 1950 and 1967, the number of textile firms dropped by a third and the number of people employed by textile firms was reduced by 50%. A sign of the inefficiencies of having so many small, family-run firms, the 1970s saw half of Bradford's textile firms being

incorporated into fifteen companies in order to take advantage of the economies of scale (Hill 2013: 171).

The decline of the textile mills did not, however, spell the end of industry in Bradford. When the manufacture of wool and cotton went into decline between the 1920s and 1930s (and then for a second time post-World War II), new industries - such as engineering and printing - came to fill its place, with further diversification coming later with the manufacture of televisions and tractors. Moreover, in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a sharp uptick in white collar jobs. Banking, insurance, local government and the civil service became popular areas of employment in Bradford (with an increase of 6,500 employees between 1968 -1973 alone) whilst manufacturing jobs almost halved (Richardson 1976: 124). Recession and unemployment in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, led to a sharp fall in economic outputs in the City (Lambert 2015). At the start of the twenty-first century, the financial and services sectors have replaced industry as key local economic assets – with Santander UK and the Morrison's supermarket chain locating their headquarters in the City. Today, the service sector makes up 82% of current employment in the Bradford area (Athwal et al July 2011: 9).

Like Birmingham, this mix of deindustrialisation and migration has posed a set of complex and separate socio-economic challenges or 'shocks' for the City – that have laid the conditions for far-right support. According to 2007 figures, one third of Bradford's Super Output Areas are in the 10% most deprived areas of the UK and infant mortality rates are twice the national average (ibid). Moreover, Bradford also has one of the lowest proportions of working age residents in employment in the UK and has the highest unemployment rates in the region (ibid). In addition, a 2003 report by the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism suggested that Bradford was a 'fragmented community' with segregation occurring along racial and religious lines in both education and housing (Allen 2003: 18). Meanwhile, those participating in the compilation of the post-riots Cantle report also suggested that they 'were "struck by the depth of polarisation" that existed' in Bradford (Cantle 2001: 9). Studies suggest that such segregation has been self-selecting and reinforcing – emanating from both 'white flight' (Ratcliffe 2001: 82) as well as the 'ghetto mentality' of some local

Pakistani-Bangladeshi residents, who hail from conservative rural areas where kinship ties are still a key part of community life (Valentine 2006: 5). No other town or City under study has been suggested to be more socially polarised or segregated than Bradford at this time, and provides a counterfactual to the multicultural harmony of Leicester.

ii) The 1995 Manningham and 2001 Milltown Riots

This mix of deprivation and polarisation came to a head in the summers of 1995 and 2001. In the former case, protest erupted in the Manningham area of the City after a football match outside a local police station got out-of-hand. Reports suggest local youths played 'cat and mouse' with the police as they were pursued through the streets (Buhler et al 2002: 8). Anger flared as rumours spread about the police assaulting a woman and a boy. Peace was restored after a meeting with community leaders a couple of days later. Crucially, the riot was contained within the Manningham precinct and was seen as the result of internal rather than external agitation. Out of the 16 convicted, four prison sentences were handed down. Moreover, £9 million of public money was invested in Manningham to prevent any disturbances from re-occurring (Harris 30th June 2002).

Six years later, however, Manningham was to see a repeat of the riots but on a 'much more serious scale' (*BBC News* 8th July 2001). In July 2001, disorder came about after an activist from the National Front hurled insults at passing Anti-Nazi League protesters. Tensions flared and the disorder moved up again into Manningham as local Asian youths tried to defend their families and community. Bricks, bottles and petrol bombs were hurled at the police as around 1,000, mostly Asian, youths were caught up in the disorder (ibid). Manningham's Labour club was also set alight and 23 members trapped inside, in what one scholar has describes as an 'attempted suicide by a community – a cry for help' (Valentine 2006: 7).

Unfortunately for the Asian men involved and their families, judges took a 'zero tolerance' approach to sentencing policy in the wake of the 2001 disturbances. In what can be considered a case of 'double-loop learning', where an organisation seeks to 'resolve incompatible...norms by setting new priorities' (Argyis and Schön 1978: 24), local courts handed out particularly punitive prison

terms. This was to combat a perception, particularly amongst the white working-class community, that the courts had pursued 'the soft option' six years earlier (Bradford 2: 2015). In the end, 278 people, including some as young as fourteen, were given sentences of up to five years for their involvement (Buhler et al. 2002: 9). Former Chair and Chief Executive of the Commission for Racial Equality and author of a major post-riots report, Lord Ouseley, collectively described the sentences as "savage" and "unjust" (Allen 2003: 8). As one local Councillor commented: 'several hundred young Asian men almost exclusively ended up ruining their lives' over that July weekend (Bradford 2: 2015).

More than ten years on, opinion is still mixed as to whether Bradford has learnt from the riots. Lanre Bakare, a University student at the time of the 2001 riots, argues that progress had been made. He cites the City's school exchange programme as a shining example of how Bradfordians have fought against segregation (Bakare 7th July 2011). Moreover, another article on the riot's tenth anniversary celebrated Manningham as having amongst the lowest crime rates in the City (*BBC News* 6th July 2011). Recent evidence suggests that ethnic mixing in Bradford is also on the rise (Kelly 2015). On the other hand, Ted Cattle, author of the Home Office report into the 2001 disturbances, remains unconvinced. On the tenth anniversary of the riots, he suggested that Bradford still remains "one of the most deeply segregated [Cities] in the country" (*BBC News* 7th July 2011). Cattle cited 'divided workplaces, schools, housing areas' as particularly problematic (*ibid*). Unsurprisingly, the local council disagrees. In an article marking the 10th anniversary of the riots, they were keen to point out that a number of initiatives have been put in place to challenge intolerance and to dispel myths amongst the local communities (*ibid*).

iii) Right-wing Extremism and 'Islamic Extremism' in Bradford

It is no surprise then that far-right groups have tried to exploit the deprivation and polarisation in Bradford for their own advantage – more so than in Birmingham. As far back as 1976, the National Front marched through the town. In what was later named the 'Battle of Bradford', local residents fought back against anti-migrant protesters (Yorkshire Film Archive). Meanwhile, in 2004, Bradford received the inauspicious reputation of hosting one of the British National Party's earliest breakthroughs. In the May elections that year, the party

claimed four council seats in the Keighley West, Wisbey, Wyke and Queensbury wards - seizing on white working-class uncertainty over settled Asian populations to take seats off Labour incumbents (*BBC News* 11th June 2004). Incidentally, this was a big boost for the far-right parties in the UK, which had historically weak support in Northern towns (Husbands et al 1980: 276).

Moreover, the local town of Keighley was unfortunate enough to host the former BNP chairman, Nick Griffin's, second bid to secure a Parliamentary seat in 2005. After a rather ugly campaign, Griffin came last with 9.2% of the vote against Labour incumbent, Ann Cryer (*Bunting* 14th February 2005). More recently, in May 2014, BNP offshoot, Britain First, hosted a series of 'Mosque invasions' in the City where the group handing out British Army Bibles and hectoring local Imams before leaving. At this time, ten Britain First representatives also turned up on the doorstep of Bradford's Lord Mayor, Khadim Hussain – much to the surprise of him and his family (Pidd et al 13th May 2014).

In addition, Bradford – in comparison to Birmingham - has also hosted instances of what groups like the EDL would label as 'Islamic extremism'. In 1982, Bradford was the first local authority to introduce halal meat for school meals and the Shalwar Kameez as official school uniform (Valentine 2006: 6). Moreover, in 1989, 1,000 British Muslims marched through Bradford and burnt a copy of Salman Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses' in protest at its portrayal of the Prophet Mohammed (Rahim 10th September 2012). In addition, Shehzad Tanweer, one of the 2005 7/7 bombers, was born in Bradford but lived in the Beeston area of Leeds (*BBC News* 6th July 2006). Finally, the following March four radicalised University of Bradford students were arrested on terror offences (Macleod 7th March 2006) whilst 2007 brought news of a Bradfordian school boy guilty of travelling to Pakistan for terrorist training (Gardham 25th July 2007). In sum, these isolated instances paint only a fragmented and weak picture of 'Islamic extremism' in Bradford. The EDL were, however, able to seize on these examples on their first visit to the City in Summer 2010.

b) Bradford's First EDL Demonstration (28th August 2010)

In late May 2010, the English Defence League announced for the first time that it would 'hit' Bradford. In what was popularly referred to amongst EDL activists as the 'Big One', the protest group visited Bradford on a bank holiday in the

middle of Ramadan (Burja and Pearce 2011: 191). This was not simply rhetorical; around 5,000 demonstrators were predicted to descend upon the City and eagerly anticipated the riot that would follow (Blake 2011: 139). To add insult to injury, activists within the EDL described the City as the '[Islamic] extremist's Northern stronghold' (Ibid: 138). It was appropriate therefore that one senior Bradfordian politician at the time described that there was 'a lot of nervousness' in Bradford when the EDL came in 2010 (Bradford 3: 2015). Expectation and hype did not materialize, however; only 700 EDL demonstrators turned up and were confined to Urban Gardens, an area close the City's Forster Square train station (Sawer 28th August 2010). The policing charge for the day, however, was well over a million pounds (*BBC News* 29th August 2010) – a 'costly response' according to one senior Bradfordian politician (Bradford 3: 2015).

i) Wider Preparations

Unfortunately for the EDL (and unlike Birmingham the year previous), the local authorities and police were on the 'front foot' when the EDL came to visit in August 2010. With the City's history of riots and complex questions about community cohesion in mind, Bradfordian politicians were keen to avoid any flashpoints that might have caused the riots happening again. As one former Senior Bradfordian Councillor (2: 2015), comments:

'We had several riots in Bradford. The last one was disastrous for the reputation in the district. The feeling within and outside the district was that all that needed to happen was a few right-wingers to turn up and the place would burn. So we had to look at how we would approach that.'

Numerous preparations were therefore set in train to minimise disruption and disturbance in the City. Firstly, a ban on the EDL marching was secured a week before the demonstration; this came after a 10,000 strong petition of local residents against the EDL's presence was collected by the anti-fascist outfit, Hope not Hate, and sent to the West Yorkshire Police (Lowles 17th August 2010). The police were therefore persuaded that there were "understandable concerns of the community" that a march would lead to a repeat of scenes, nine years earlier (*The Daily Telegraph* 20th August 2010). This appeared alongside

other, more common concerns seen at other EDL protests, such as the need to protect communities and local property (ibid). The issue of the ban was described as 'very positive' by one senior Bradfordian politician, despite it not being a 'chance to relax' (Bradford 3: 2015).

Secondly, West Yorkshire Police used 'overwhelming force' in order to make sure they were ready for every eventuality in 2010 (Bradford 2: 2015). On the morning of the demonstration, 1600 police officers from 13 forces gathered in a local stadium in an operation which was widely hailed as a local success and a national 'gold standard' for public-order management of the EDL (*Telegraph and Argus* 30th August 2010). Beforehand, numerous scenarios around arrests and rumour-busting techniques were practised (Bradford 4: 2015). Ishtiaq Ahmed, spokesperson for the Bradford Council for Mosques, described the police response as 'courageous' and 'appropriate' (*BBC News* 29th August 2010). Another Senior Bradford Politician described the police as being 'very understanding' and 'very helpful' (Bradford 3: 2015). In the end, police officers outnumbered EDL demonstrators by more than two-to-one.

In a sign of the nascent nature of police responses to the EDL and the chaotic nature of the early movement, this did not, however, stop significant cases of disorder breaking out. On the day of the August 2010 demonstration at 2pm, EDL supporters surged towards police lines as young people from the Asian community and anti-fascists gathered and came into sight in the Cheapside area of the City (Sawer 28th August 2010). Bottles, stones and smoke flares were thrown as riot police tried to force demonstrators back, with many EDL demonstrators escaping into a neighbouring building site behind the protest muster point. Police had to react quickly to the situation - putting on riot equipment to quell disorder amongst EDL protesters. In a distinctly counterproductive move, however, most missiles thrown by EDL supporters missed the police and hit other activists. It was also notable that at this stage the fledgling movement didn't have any stewarding that featured so heavily in the group's later protests, with no-one from within the movement keeping control of aggression and disorder.

Thirdly, an 'aggressive' youth and media strategy was also put in place in 2010 (Bradford 2: 2015). On the day of the demonstration, nearly 1,000 young people

were 'strategically' drafted out of the City to take part in a walk in South Wales and to see a football match in nearby Manchester (ibid). It also involved 'reaching out' to the 'voluntary sector' and 'back street gyms' to get across the message of no disruption to the young people of Bradford (Bradford 3: 2015). Moreover, community leaders and key community contacts were liaised with and kept informed about developments. Again this was with a view that they would be able to persuade the remaining young people to keep off the streets. For example, 'consequences cards' were distributed in the run up to the demonstration – alerting youngsters to the consequences of rioting (Bujra and Pearce 2011: 198). In addition, local businesses were spoken to with clear priorities set around reducing damage to property as well as the commercial reputation of the City. Importantly, senior local politicians and members of the police were also engaged in talks with the City's *Telegraph and Argus* Newspaper about their coverage of the event – with the hope that messages broadcast by the paper would not be counterproductive (JUST West Yorkshire 28th February 2011).

Fourthly, a community event, named 'Be Bradford – Peaceful Together', was held on the day at Infirmary Fields in Manningham. This was to give the community a voice as other anti-fascist events occurred elsewhere in the City (Bradford 4: 2015). A band, a bouncy castle and book stalls were set up and the local Pakistani-Bangladeshi community was invited to participate. Perhaps more importantly, however, was the event's symbolism – people from the Manningham area standing against events that had previously blighted their community and making sure they didn't happen again. Unfortunately, the community event was poorly attended (Bradford 1: 2014). Perversely, this was a sign of the effectiveness of local Mosques getting out the message that people should stay indoors and away from the main site of protest (ibid).

In the end, only five arrests were made on the day of the EDL's demonstration. This was mainly due to police's management of the event, which was widely heralded as 'paradigm of how to police [the] EDL.' (Bradford 2: 2015) It was also down to measures taken to make sure that the local Muslim community were not provoked or caught up in disturbances. The community chose to ignore the EDL in the end. Not everyone was however happy with the 2010

response. A book written by two scholars at the University of Bradford a year after the August 2010 demonstration suggested that: 'Hierarchical structures and the instinct to control remained obstacles to truly fluid relationships between those acting 'from below' with those making decisions 'above'.' (Bujra and Pearce 2011: 201) In any event, the August 2010 English Defence League demonstration was more problematic for the EDL themselves. A leading activist within the EDL, John 'Snowy' Shaw, was ejected from the group after a dispute over finances. This in turn led to the splintering and fragmentation of the EDL – with Shaw setting up the more ideologically radical and 'neo-Nazi' North East Infidels (*Hope not Hate* August 2012). This has become noted as a key factor in EDL decline (See Jackson 2011 & Busher 2014).

ii) Political responses

The advent of the EDL coming to Bradford also evoked a variety of political responses. Unsurprisingly, the initial news of the EDL coming to Bradford provoked a largely unified set of exclusionary responses. For example, local MP and former leader of Bradford Council, Kris Hopkins, stated that 'we must be careful not to give the EDL the oxygen of publicity they so keenly crave.' (Bourley 29th July 2010) Moreover, and as another local MP also suggested: 'the last thing that Bradford needs is the EDL marching through the City and equally the last thing we need is an opposing rent-a-mob as well.' (Bradford 5: 2015)

This exclusionary response was echoed by the local Labour party, but with differing measures advocated. For example, Marsha Singh, the late MP for Bradford West, was particularly active in building pressure for a ban at Parliamentary and local levels. In the end, he felt in his 'bones that [the demonstration would] lead to trouble' (Bourley 29th July 2010). He led an Early Day Motion in Parliament calling for 'Government departments to...quash this new non-political social movement' (HC Early Day Motion 2182) and helped pioneer the 10,000-strong petition before his untimely death in July 2012.

In addition, Gerry Sutcliffe, MP for Bradford South, took a similarly robust approach. Though late to publicly support a ban, Sutcliffe eventually declared his support by advocating that people sign the Hope not Hate petition to be sent to the Home Secretary in July 2010 (Black 30th July 2010). Moreover, tabling a

Parliamentary Question after the 2010 demonstration, Sutcliffe, whilst thanking the Home Secretary for banning the march, also asked if there were any further measures being enacted to restrict the activity of groups like the EDL beyond those that were already on the statute books (HC Deb, 6 September 2010, c5). Ian Greenwood, Labour Council leader at the time, was also late to publicly support a ban. It wasn't until late July that he asked the Home Secretary's consent for a ban, suggesting that 'everyone has a right to protest peacefully..., but the EDL's activities in other towns and cities across the country have resulted in significant disruption...' (Meneaud 27th July 2010).

In contrast, local Liberal Democrats adopted a more reflective approach that wished to 'not simply wait for the 'storm' to pass, but to harness it [for] fundamental change' in 2010 (Bujra and Peace 2011: 195). David Ward, former MP for Bradford East, was more hesitant in lobbying for a march ban than other local politicians. He insisted that it wasn't as straight forward as it first seemed and that the community needed to work together to deal with the 'EDL threat' (Bourley 29th July 2010). Moreover, another local Liberal Democrat Councillor also adopted this more reflective approach. Critical of the council leadership at the time, they also disagreed that banning the EDL march was not the way forward. This was both because it would replicate the same rigid policing approach that they perceived had led to the riots in 2001, but also that 'whether you like them or not they've got a legitimate right to demonstrate' (Bradford 4: 2015). Instead, 'a big community response' was needed where everyone in the local area was liaised about the policing of the day's events (ibid). Conservative MP for nearby Shipley, Philip Davies, took a different tack. In a July 2010 *Telegraph and Argus* article, Davies suggested that the best thing would be to simply ignore the EDL's presence and leave the police to treat the group as a 'law and order' issue (Bourley 29th July 2010).

iii) Discussion: Bradford's EDL Response and the 2001 Riots

While approaches diverged to the 2010 EDL demonstration, all political responses had the same underlying focus: to make sure that the riots did not happen again. Most of the officials interviewed had been involved in local politics for a number of decades before the EDL arrived and had been witness to the rioting. This provided a key mental marker and focusing device for efforts

against the EDL, and was a joined-up and cohesive community response to the presence of far-right protest in Bradford.

One interviewee, for example, was on their way to a local tip when they had to pull over to hear the coverage of the second riot: 'I was really really upset and I was thinking 'Oh my God' what is happening. One freak, twice what on Earth.' (Bradford 1: 2014) Meanwhile, another was actually on the streets in 2001 and visited many of the young men convicted: 'I actually as a local Councillor went in with the first or second within minutes of each other the kid who gave himself up and got sent down for five years' (Bradford 2: 2015). In addition, another Councillor (Bradford 4: 2015) had a son who was nearly caught up in the 1995 rioting and who described the riots as being a 'scar on the memory of Bradford.' (ibid)

In a sign of 'single-loop learning', where 'members of an organization respond to changes in the internal and external environments...by detecting errors which they then correct...' (Argyris and Schön 1978: 18), Bradfordian politician's response to this, therefore, was to learn the lessons of 1995 and 2001, and to try and implement them in their approach to the EDL. When interviewed most politicians were keen to stress the complicated but not problematic state of race-relations in the City and how Bradford and some sectors of the local Asian community had transformed into a burgeoning middle-class. Most local officials also classified 2010 as an exercise in reputation management - combating the negative media stereotypes about the town that had flourished after the 2001 riots. As one former Senior Councillor expressed: 'throughout all of the noughties, you'd have a situation where if you googled 'riot', Bradford would be top hits, and that was extremely damaging.' (Bradford 2: 2015)

More specifically, we can see how local politicians carried lessons from the 2001 riots forward. One former local MP, for example, tried to shift the rhetoric away from a sole focus on the local Asian community and towards how Bradford as whole was trying to combat the EDL's presence. Moreover, in their interventions about devolving local powers to ban certain groups, the same local politician also emphasised that Bradford had 'been through experiences that have enabled it to learn a great deal about dealing with events such as this and that local knowledge (I would of thought) is of value.' (Bradford 1: 2014)

Moreover, another prominent local politician's support of march bans emanated from a genuine concern about the impact on communities and particularly about the fragility of community cohesion in Bradford, post-riots.

Turning toward the council leadership at the time, a number of insights from the riots on how to better police the EDL demonstration in 2010 were brought forward. One of these was particularly apparent in their thinking about housing the EDL in an enclosed location. As one former Senior Councillor comments: 'The previous riot had happened there because there's all sorts of different ways in and out of it. It [was] a difficult place to police.' (Bradford 2: 2015) Lessons from 2001 were also instrumental in forming his liaison with the local community insisting that the local authorities wanted as little disruption from the local community as possible.

As mentioned before, one local Councillor's response was based on views that there had been a far too dogmatic institutional response in 2001 and that the EDL needed to be dealt with in a way that didn't scar the City again. This particular Councillor built on this in August 2010 by not being too rigid in imposing their own will on the demands of demonstrators and the local community but listening to them (Bradford 4: 2015). They also ensured that the local community were properly represented and liaised with during their work with the police and that all scenarios were considered when constructing an arrest strategy for the day's events (Ibid).

iv) Conclusion

In sum: the EDL's 28th August Bradford protest in 2010 sent a shock wave through the local community and political elites. Significant worries about a repeat of rioting nine years previous were evoked by the group's presence and it became a key focal point when the local authority came to construct its response to the group's presence. Fortuitously and in contrast to Birmingham in 2009, local elites were then arguably 'ready' when the group arrived in August 2010. A policing response - that has been since used in HMIC reports on public-order management - was rolled out and the local Muslim community decided to heed calls to stay away. In terms of political responses, these were largely exclusionary but with some pockets of ambiguity coming from local Liberal Democrats. Unlike Birmingham's first brush with the EDL, this did not however

stoke confusion amongst the police – with a clear push to ban the group from marching only being let down by some EDL protesters bent on disorder. In the end, then, the 2010 demonstration was a great result for the City – showing its resilience to a large scale public-order event organised by a right-wing extremist group.

c) Bradford's Second EDL Demonstration (12th October 2013)

The EDL's return to Bradford in autumn of 2013 marked a significant shift for the protest group and the approach taken by local elites. Compared to 2010, local leaders and police officers had a basis on which to learn lessons and implement real experience. It was also the first demonstration after the EDL's co-founder and leader, Tommy Robinson, exited the EDL - citing fears of far-right extremism within the movement as key to his departure (*BBC News* 8th October 2013). A 'national' rally, the second demonstration was held to protest concerns about issues including child sexual exploitation among the Muslim community (*Meredith* 12th October 2013). On the day, 2500 officers were drafted in to police over 300 EDL demonstrators with a total of 12 arrests made (*Bond* 12th October 2013). Almost to prove Robinson's point, rumours circulated before the demonstration that other notable factions of the UK far-right (such as the National Front) would be joining the October protest (*Pidd et al* 11th October 2013).

i) *Wider Preparations*

One of the first lessons implemented from 2010 was that a non-ban response could be as good as a march ban, as long as you had sufficient police resources and organisation to fend off instances of disorder on the day of the demonstration (*Bradford 2: 2015*). In contrast to the 2010 demonstration therefore, a ban on the march was not successfully secured. In the case of 2013, the local constabulary admitted that the banning of the demonstration was 'impossible' – pointing out that they didn't have the legal powers to do this (*ibid*). In the end, though, a march ban wasn't arguably needed. The police stepped up their resources - with 900 more officers compared to three years previous, and the EDL were successfully contained near Bradford's main interchange train station.

Another key difference to preparations and the response on the day in 2013 came as a result of a change in council leadership. In May 2012, the previous Council Leader, Ian Greenwood, was replaced by a Respect Councillor in his ward of Little Horton (Winrow 4th May 2012). This made way for the coronation of a new Council Leader, David Green, who led a less overt and aggressive campaign against the EDL's presence. Instead, Green hoped to stymie the inevitable 'hype' and press attention around the EDL coming to Bradford (Green 2015). For example, in the days leading up to the demonstration, Green deliberately cautioned the local community not to 'get embroiled or provoked' by the presence of the EDL or Unite Against Fascism (Black 10th October 2013). This was echoed by his Deputy, Imran Hussain, who encouraged a 'dignified and peaceful' response (*Telegraph and Argus* 10th October 2013a). He also suggested local residents should participate in a 'Bradford Together' event the Friday before the demonstration (ibid).

A second element of Green's strategy in 2013 was to try and put the rights of the local community and businesses before EDL demonstrators. In the lead up to the demonstration in 2013, Green wrote to the Prime Minister expressing his concerns that 'current legislation puts the emphasis on the rights of the demonstrators, not the community, despite evidence of the disruption caused and the real aims of some of the organisers of such demonstrations.' (*Telegraph and Argus* 8th October 2013) The results of this intervention weren't terribly successful, however. In an interview while visiting Bradford, David Cameron dismissed the case for reform – suggesting that banning marches was sufficient (*Telegraph and Argus* 10th October 2013b). Not perturbed, however, Green – in liaison with the police - was able to contain the EDL near Bradford's main Interchange station. This was away from the City's main shopping precinct in Kirkgate and Ivegate and built on the lessons of 2010 – where businesses had 'suffered greatly' (Green 2015). It also took a leaf out of Birmingham's book by moving the group away from a prominent City-Centre location.

A third element of Green's response to the EDL was broader engagement with white working-class communities, who might have been susceptible to the EDL's diversity-phobic narrative. In particular, Green responded to a 2008 *BBC Two* documentary, 'Last Orders', based in a Working Men's Club in his Wibsey

Ward by holding surgeries there 'quite deliberately, quite provocatively' to engage with local residents views on questions of race and cultural diversity (ibid). These interventions were designed to combat prejudice and what he calls the 'folk law bubble' that emerges when different communities aren't in dialogue with each other. For example, Green would combat perceptions of criminality in the Asian community by illustrating in his conversations with local residents how it was evident in all communities.

Another key innovation which built on the lessons of 2010 EDL demonstration was more sensible proposals on the issue of banning orders. In the wake of an estimated £1 million loss to local business in 2010, West Yorkshire's Police and Crime Commissioner, Mark Burns-Williamson, asked the Home Secretary to provide Chief Constables with enhanced powers to ban demonstrations (*Telegraph and Argus* 15th October 2013). Local Liberal Democrat MP, David Ward, seconded this – suggesting that decisions on bans should be devolved to Police and Crime Commissioner (Ibid).

Lessons were also brought forward from the 2001 riots by the council leadership in 2013, albeit in a less overt way than in 2010. David Green, for example, made speaking on behalf of the local community a key part of his strategy in 2013, doing something the police couldn't do by articulating the feeling that 'there are challenges in Bradford that the people of Bradford want to sort out ourselves. We don't need people coming in and causing trouble.' (Green 2015) Moreover, we can also see lessons from the 2001 riots in his calls for calm the Friday before the protest. As Green articulates: 'it doesn't take much for something to kick off a bit...the Bradford riots...we know the damage that was caused to people's lives when they got embroiled in that.' (Ibid)

ii) Political Responses

Political responses in 2013 were more muted but no less exclusionary than in 2010. Local MPs, George Galloway and Gerry Sutcliffe, led a very vocal joint-campaign to get the EDL's October 2013 demonstration cancelled. For example, George Galloway sponsored an Early Day Motion, which called on a ban for the EDL March in Bradford, which Sutcliffe signed. Their grounds for getting the EDL banned were based on the potential for the group to 'incite racial division, hatred and violence.' (HC Early Day Motion 491) In addition to their

Parliamentary activities, both MPs went to the local press to mount pressure for a ban. More than a week before the demonstration took place, Sutcliffe and Galloway also released a joint statement in the *Yorkshire Post* (*Yorkshire Post* 2nd October 2013). Furthermore, they also sent a co-signed letter to West Yorkshire's Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable lobbying for a ban (Ibid).

Heightened campaigning around a ban in 2013 wasn't exclusively at the Parliamentary level of local representation, however. In one particularly provocative intervention, a Council motion to proscribe the EDL from Bradford was tabled by one local Respect Councillor, Alyas Karmani (*Telegraph and Argus* 23rd October 2013). The contents of the motion were to connect the EDL's penchant for political violence with terrorism. The motion was, however, quickly derided and didn't attract mass support amongst the local political community. As then Council Leader, David Green, commented at the time: using terror legislation to ban a group that people simply disagreed with was 'a step too far'. Leader of the Conservative Group, Glen Miller, added that: 'banning them gives them the publicity they need' (Ibid). In the end, the Council agreed to write to the Home Secretary. They asked for an urgent review to be made of whether decisions around banning orders could be taken locally (Ibid). This was based on the principle of localism, or that 'those closest to the local situation knew best'.

Another key difference in the 2013 political response was the heightened presence of community counter-mobilisations during and prior to the protests. Firstly, 'Bradford Together' – a joint venture of the anti-fascist group, Hope not Hate, as well as Bradford Women for Peace and the Bradford Council of Mosques – held a unity celebration on the Friday before the EDL demonstration (*Telegraph and Argus* 11th October 2013). Around 1,000 local people turned out for the vigil where over 2,500 green ribbons were tied to landmarks in the City-Centre (Meredith 12th October 2013). Members of the community were encouraged to write a message of hope on a postcard for a peace wall. Secondly, there was also a 'We are Bradford' counter demonstration held on the day of the demonstration itself. This involved local trade unions and faith groups and was part of the anti-fascist counter protest. David Green and

George Galloway as well as other local politicians attended the counter demonstration on the day of protest (*ITV News* 11th October 2013).

iii) Conclusion

In the end then, the 2013 demonstration was a calmer and more sedate affair that learnt from the lessons of the riots and from the 2010 EDL protest. Interviewees suggest that 'a more mature approach' had been arrived at in 2013 and that the police's use of 2010 as a 'training event' had put them in good stead when the EDL came again in 2013 (Bradford 6: 2014). The local authority and political actors had therefore obviously 'learnt from experience' leading to a 'dud event' in 2013 (Bradford 1: 2014). Moreover, Bradford had also shown 'strong unity and resilience' on the second occasion it had faced the EDL (*Telegraph and Argus* 13th October 2013). When asked, most local politicians put the diminished EDL numbers down to internal events within the group rather than as a direct result of 2010 interventions (Bradford 4: 2015). In any case, and again in another instance of single-loop learning, the fact that the EDL had been to Bradford before posed a key asset to local politicians – helping them to learn the lessons of three years previous.

5.3: Keighley – Balancing Tensions, Regaining Trust

'There are two elements to the communities that I represent. One is the white community, which needs confidence that something is being done about [child sexual exploitation]...and the other bit is the [Bangladeshi and Pakistani] community coming to terms with what is happening inside their community. That is very, very difficult for them.' Kris Hopkins (HC Home Affairs Cttee 5th June 2013), MP for Keighley and Ilkley.

'...most of politics is about relationships. Most of it has a trust element and understanding that sometimes allows you to say difficult things and use political capital in that process as well... And you can use that as the anchor and dialogue which you have.' Kris Hopkins (2015), MP for Keighley and Ilkley.

a) Introduction

The second key site of EDL demonstrations in Bradford was Keighley. In August 2012, the West Yorkshire Parish town was visited by the EDL after five local Asian men were convicted on child grooming charges. This allowed the

EDL to paint the local Muslim community in a particularly unsavoury light, and disrupt inter-community relations, and therefore community cohesion in a way not seen since the BNP's 2005 Parliamentary campaign there. This second section of the chapter will trace the story of the town's local MP, Kris Hopkins, and provides a standard of how complex social issues can be sucked into dealing with EDL protest. What will be found is that Hopkin's interventions in the case of 2012 were indeed tainted and disrupted by previous attempts at 'calling out' child grooming in the local Pakistani-Bangladeshi community within Keighley. Part of his response, therefore, was the more apolitical work of making sure that communities were safe, that policing was adequate and that people were kept out of harm's way, in order to rebuild trust and relationships with the local South Asian community.

b) Context

Keighley is a semi-rural West Yorkshire Parish just outside of Bradford, with a population of around 90,000 residents (ONS 2001a). The Parish is located in a valley between the Airedale and Keighley Moors in the South Pennines, and is famous for its proximity to the Brontë parsonage in Howarth (Keighley Town Council Website). Like Bradford, during the nineteenth century, Keighley rose in prominence as the third centre of the West Yorkshire wool and cotton trade (Keighley 1879: 119). Moreover, Keighley was also a leading manufacturer of the latest textile machinery – making the booming North-East textile trade possible. This saw the town's population swell from just under 6,000 in 1801 to just over 36,000 in 1891 (Dewhirst 1974: 108). Like Bradford, most of its civic architecture, such as the Victorian-era terraced buildings on Cavendish Street, are symbolic of this textile boom.

In contrast to this illustrious past, however, the post-war decline of Keighley's textile industry has had a significant impact on the town. Keighley's local economy now thrives on a mixture of tourism and local retail outlets – with services being the 'largest sector' in the local economy, employing 67% of the total working-age population in the town (VisitorUK.com). Moreover, the Parish contains wards that are in the highest 5% of the most deprived areas in the country (IMD 2010) - with 32% of children in families without work and 17% in families on out of work benefits (Bradford District Council September 2009). In

addition, 17% of children live in poverty and 30.2% of all employees are paid below the Living Wage (nearly 10% below the national average) (Northing Housing Consortium May 2015). As Conservative MP for Keighley and Ilkley, Kris Hopkins, pointed out starkly in his 2010 Maiden Speech: 'Educational attainment is low... Unemployment is high. Drug dealing and drug abuse is a big issue... On our estates, there is third-generation benefit dependency.' (HC Deb, 9th June 2010)

Like Bradford, Keighley also has a sizeable ethnic minority population. The first wave came as European Volunteer Workers from Eastern and Central Europe after the Second World War (Dewhurst 1974: 138). Most, however, came in a second wave to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s from the Mirpur region of Azad Kashmir in Pakistan and the Sylhet region of Bangladesh – quickly replacing residents who moved beyond the boundaries of the Parish before this period (Dewhurst 1974: 139). Keighley's second largest religion is now Islam, with 12,400 Muslims being counted in the 2011 census and some wards having up to 51% of their residents' coming from a Muslim background (ONS 2011b). While communities are not as segregated as Bradford, reports around the time of the 2005 Parliamentary elections suggested enmity was high between white working-class and Asian communities - particularly over the allocation of public resources (Bunting 14th February 2005).

One of the most salient social problems in the area, however, is child sexual exploitation (CSE). Over the past ten or so years, a disproportionate amount of court cases have been brought forward in the town on the issue – with only a handful of convictions. Not just the practice but the identity of the perpetrators has been scrutinised - with particular scorn heaped upon Asian convicts, who make up only a minority of those charged (Lachman 22nd November 2012). In 2004, for example, the British National Party won a Council seat by seizing on the local campaign of a mother whose daughter had been abused by a group of local Asian men (Trilling 15th August 2012). Such a case was a particularly unfortunate representation for the local Asian community – with one of the accused telling the court that 'white people train [their young girls] in sex and drinking... so when they come to us they are fully trained.' (ibid)

Moreover, local elites have spent considerable time and energy challenging the practice and taking on the issue (ibid). For example, Ann Cryer, Keighley's MP prior to 2010, raised concerns about localised grooming in her constituency as far back as 2003 (HC Home Affairs Select Committee June 2013). She was at the forefront of drafting the 2003 Sexual Offences Act, which criminalised grooming as well as helping to introduce new rules that allowed 'hearsay' evidence from the victim's parents to be permissible in court. In 2010, Kris Hopkins, her successor, remarked: 'Sadly, the abuse is still going on and the work of the police and social services is seeking to address it.' (HC Deb, 9 June 2010)

Both MPs have had difficulties tackling this issue, particularly when it has surfaced within the local Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Ann Cryer has noted that she faced a backlash for naming perpetrators as Muslim. This, plus calls for Asian children to speak English at home and her criticisms about transcontinental marriages (Bunting 14th February 2005), led to a great deal of tensions between her and resident ethnic minority communities within Keighley (HC Home Affairs Select Committee 2013). As shown from comments above, Kris Hopkins has also been vocal in calling out what he sees as the problematic nature of the 'patriarchal culture' and gender inequality found in some local Muslim communities (Hopkins 2015). His forthright views, lack of diplomatic language, as well as dealings with local white working-class communities on the subject has therefore had a negative impact on trust and his relationship with the local Asian community. As Hopkins (2015) acknowledges:

'I've not been shy in challenging the behaviour of some men in my town from the Pakistani and Kashmiri community who have been raping kids. And some people have then added to that conversation, and therefore I do not like that community. And therefore I must be racist.'

c) Keighley EDL Demonstration (4th August 2012)

Almost two years after the 2010 Bradford demonstration, then, the EDL came to Keighley in the Summer of 2012. In July 2012, ten Asian men were arrested on suspicion of grooming in the town (*Telegraph and Argus* 14th July 2012). In August 2012, the EDL scheduled a protest designed to highlight the

victimisation of white girls by Asian men and therefore weigh-in on the local debate around CSE in Keighley. In the end, only 150 EDL supporters turned out - with two arrests made (Baker 6th August 2012). The demonstration itself was widely seen as a 'damp squib' with EDL protesters confined to pub in the centre of Keighley (ibid). They were outnumbered by local residents who had come out to watch the protest (Knights 4th August 2012). *YouTube* footage suggests that the North East Infidels, an ideologically radical EDL splinter group, were also in attendance (*Slacker 1967* 4th August 2012).

i) Preparations and Political Responses

With an EDL demonstration on the horizon, Kris Hopkins, was thrust into coordinating a response in 2012. Commenting on the news of the demonstration, Hopkins said that he regretted that the group couldn't be banned but insisted that the local community should show restraint – suggesting that: 'What the rest of us must not do is respond in a manner which inadvertently furthers the malevolent aims of the EDL.' (*ITV News* 2nd August 2012) Moreover, in Hopkins' mind, the lack of a ban played to the town's advantage – denying the group 'oxygen' and a grievance around the stifling debate and freedom of speech (Hopkins 2015). Furthermore, he assured the local community that he had however been in contact with the local Chief Superintendent, Ian Kennedy. Hopkins had 'absolute confidence' in Kennedy and his officers to deal 'professionally and competently' with the EDL gathering (*Keighley News* 21st May 2012).

As someone who had been involved in local politics in the area for a while, Hopkins had experience of dealing with other far-right groups in the past. As Conservative Parliamentary candidate for Halifax in 2005, he had helped support trade union campaigns against former BNP leader Nick Griffin who stood for the Parliamentary seat of Keighley and Ilkley against Labour incumbent, Ann Cryer. He also had personal contacts who had dabbled with standing for the National Front before that. Moreover, Hopkins had tried to engage members of the local community who had voted BNP in the past and who felt excluded from mainstream politics as they perceived issues around immigration and child grooming were not being addressed (Hopkins 2015). In 2012, therefore, this formed part of his approach.

The second prong of his strategy, however, was around reassuring and engaging with the local Asian community as well as the local police. When the EDL's presence was announced, Hopkins started conversations with the police to manage the August 2012 demonstration (ITV News 2nd August 2012). The thinking behind this was to 'link the big agencies of Government and the local' and to start building bridges between the police and the local Asian community (Hopkins 2015). It was also to make sure that local 'hotheads' within the Asian community got the message to stay away and to reassure the local Muslims about the relatively small-scale nature of the EDL 'threat'. As Hopkins (ibid) notes:

'...the key thing was to try to reassure the local community that they were going to be cared for and looked after. And particularly young men from that community not justify it by getting very angry and upset about members of their family, elders, [and their] children at school, [being] intimidated by a bunch of thugs.'

One of Hopkins' main challenges, however, was getting the local Asian community on his side and on the side of the police. Shot to pieces by their experiences of the punitive sentences handed down during the 2001 riots, trust in the police in the Bradford Metropolitan District was at an all-time low. In a self-effacing anecdote, Hopkins (ibid) recalls visiting a Mosque with the police in the run up to the 2012 demonstration:

'...there were three or four hundred men in there...it was very straight-faced and you know respectful but not responsive. And it was actually only when we had got to the end of the piece where the policemen had spoken and I had spoken a couple of times that someone spoke a question and the whole thing just relaxed.'

As mentioned before, pre-existing tensions also emerged around how Hopkins had dealt with child grooming within Keighley's Asian community in 2012. Hopkins was aware that having challenged parts of the local Asian community about their attitudes towards child grooming, there would be consequences to his EDL approach, saying: 'having done that when you then knock on the door and say we've got the EDL coming and I'm going to support you, there's a

tension because there's a message going out that 'he doesn't like us' or 'he doesn't support us.' (ibid) Part of his preparations for the 2012 Keighley demonstration then was to therefore regaining that trust and fostering a closer relationship with that particular part of his electorate.

Fortunately, the approach paid off. Hopkins did indeed see the fruits of reassuring the community, building relationships and making the police more confident in the work they were doing – all of which may have been neglected or non-existent before:

'The good news is that the police created routes in which the community could go to the Mosque safely. People were actively guiding and protecting children and women along these routes. Away from the areas in which these idiots were going to appear.'
(ibid)

Moreover, local Councillors and youth workers patrolled streets around the main demonstration site on the day of the protest – all in the name of making sure that the town's young people stayed away and were not caught up in potential disorder (Knights 4th August 2012).

In the end, the EDL's presence in Keighley passed with only a small disturbance. For example, most local Councillors praised the local community for not being provoked into disorder (Baker 6th August 2012). One of the main outcomes was a more cohesive relationship between the local Asian community, the Police and Hopkins. As Hopkins (2015) comments:

'I think the key thing about it was that despite the fact that we didn't want the EDL here was actually as it turned out it was actually a very positive experience because the police actually managed to create a relationship with the community. A stronger relationship as a consequence. And I think not to underestimate the size of the challenge of the police building a proper relationship that did significantly help. They could see that this was their police service and they were caring for them.'

The legacy of the EDL's presence was not wholly unproblematic, however. The group had a chilling effect on the debate around the cultural and religious

factors that might have contributed to child grooming in the town. As Hopkins (ibid) has expressed: 'What we shouldn't do is be fearful of those thugs coming to a town, and that stopping or blighting the debate about some of the difficult conversations we should have.' The EDL demonstration therefore added a religious and racial element to the debate about child grooming in the town - stymieing conversations and efforts for the local community to come to terms with the latest instances of CSE. In contrast to the Bradford experience, which enabled the town to come to terms with a troubled period in its recent past, Keighley's 2012 experience only highlighted the scale of the issue facing the town going forward and how difficult it was to shed light on such a taboo topic.

ii) Conclusion

To conclude: the EDL's 2012 protest in Keighley demonstrates how issues of trust and confidence between local minority communities and elites tend to underlie, inform and complicate responses to the EDL. When the EDL came therefore, a lot of ground work had to be done by the local MP, Kris Hopkins, to rebuild trust and relationships that had soured around his denouncements on the issue of CSE. The positive effect of the EDL's presence, however, was more dialogue between political elites and these communities. The negative effect of the EDL's presence was, however, to highlight the uglier racial and religious dimension of the local debate surrounding a very sensitive issue. Like in Bradford, then, contextual factors informed a lot of the responses by local elites to the EDL's presence – perhaps more so than Birmingham, which had taken, it's learning from the EDL's first and initially disruptive demonstrations in the West Midlands City.

5.4: Conclusion

In sum, then, Bradford has evolved quite considerably in the fifteen years since the riots. Economic development is well underway with the arrival of the new Broadway shopping centre and we can now talk of a new burgeoning Asian middle-class in the West Yorkshire City. When the EDL arrived in the late summer of 2010, the group was still, however, able to draw upon community polarisation that, while it may have improved after the riots, was still a strong social dynamic in the area. Common to all approaches towards the EDL in Bradford was therefore an understanding that the riots should never be

repeated again. This helped galvanise the City's leaders behind a coherent public-order management response and gave them a narrative in which to express their opposition to the EDL. Crucially, when the EDL returned in 2013, lessons from the riots and the 2010 EDL protest were brought forward – making for a less fraught and more mature approach in light of the group's presence.

When we talk of the EDL's presence in Bradford, it is also important to consider the case of Keighley. As this chapter has discussed in great depth, responses to the EDL's protest there in 2012 were again shaped by contextual factors – namely, low-levels of trust in local politicians and the police within both Asian and white working-class communities. This meant local politicians had to go about engaging with and reassuring both communities that something was being done both with regard to the EDL protest and child grooming more generally. As Kris Hopkins' account of interventions around the time testifies, this was a difficult balancing act to follow - with pre-existing perceptions about how Hopkins had dealt with the issue of child-grooming serving to complicate matters further. The chief positive outcome of the EDL's presence, however, is that it gave Hopkins and local police the opportunity to restore trust within the Asian community. The EDL's presence did, however, come at great cost – polluting a particularly sensitive debate on child sexual exploitation in the town.

As we saw in Birmingham, however, political responses to the EDL in Bradford and Keighley have varied greatly and pivoted around the axis of exclusionist versus inclusionist approaches. The majority, such as Gerry Sutcliffe, George Galloway, Philip Davies and Ian Greenwood, advocated the former and revolved around themes of a robust 'law and order' response and bids to ignore the group's presence as much as possible. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, while this is understandable, the key pitfall of such a position is that it re-enforces the outsider status of a group like the EDL – preventing the group from moderating its ideology (Goodwin 2011: 23). More importantly, it only provides a short term 'sticking plaster' response to the longer term issues of social polarisation and political disengagement that has helped drive far-right activism in both towns over the past two decades.

In this respect, interventions by Council leader David Green and Keighley and Ilkley MP, Kris Hopkins, are particularly instructive. Both politicians showed well

thought out responses to difficult local questions around public order management, issues of race relations and how far you go in responding to a group like the EDL. In Green's case, this was an attempt to shift the terms of the debate towards community rights in how you negotiate EDL demonstrations and actually engage with the concerns of white working-class constituents in his ward. In Hopkins' case, this also centred on previous work with white working-class communities. As we've seen above, however, such work - plus his previous comments on CSE - frustrated his interventions in boosting relationships between the local Muslim community, himself and the local police when the EDL came in 2012. These more sustained interventions, however, went beyond simply treating the EDL as a 'problematic' and engaged with the drivers of the group's support, thus dealing with this particular form of anti-Islamic protest from the *bottom-up*. As we shall see in the following chapter, such inclusivism is neither always popular nor preferable – with the potential to stoke acrimony between lay and senior Council members.

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Chapter Six

Leicester – ‘Somewhere near the Clock Tower’

Chapter Outline

6.1: Introduction

6.2: Context

6.3: Leicester’s First EDL Demonstration (9th October 2010)

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6.6: Conclusion

‘What it did was to effectively close down the City for 24 hours; barriers were put around where there would be ... [the EDL’s] static demonstration and across the road from them...But it did certainly close down the City for a Saturday. And that certainly affected the way I thought about the appropriate response to the events in 2012.’ Sir Peter Soulsby (2015), elected Mayor of Leicester, on the October 2010 Leicester EDL Demonstration.

‘I understand [that] if you give the EDL an obscure place to go and if you allow people to go about their lawful business as much as possible then I’m more than happy to ignore them, but it’s hard to ignore an organisation when you give them the right to walk past the Clock tower which is symbolically, historically, geographically right in the centre of Leicester.’ Patrick Kitterick (2015), Labour Councillor for Castle Ward, on the February 2012 EDL demonstration in Leicester.

6.1: Introduction

Leicester is an important location for studying the EDL and political responses to it. In October 2010, the group held one of its most disorderly protests in the East Midlands City. 13 arrests were made on the day of the protest as demonstrators surged against police lines and tried to make a break for the (predominantly Muslim) Highfields area of the City. Moreover, in February 2012, the EDL returned to the City again; this time after a local teenager was attacked by four women of Somali-origin. Significantly, however, key lessons were learnt by local elites about how to approach and manage the EDL’s presence. In 2012, the police shifted their tactics away from confrontation towards consultation. This resulted in a sharp decline in arrests – with zero protesters being taken into custody on the day of the EDL’s second major demonstration (*Leicester Mercury* 6th February 2012).

The EDL’s presence in Leicester has not been without its difficulties, however. As will be highlighted later, the October 2010 and February 2012 demonstrations have marked a particularly acrimonious period in Leicester politics. On both occasions, lay Councillors and senior council officials failed to see eye-to-eye on how to deal with the EDL’s presence. For example, in 2010, there were disagreements over the ability of the EDL to have a platform in the City. Moreover, in 2012 and 2013, it was the ability of the EDL to march past the

town's clock tower and through the City-Centre. This caused the most controversy amongst Leicester's political elite – with many local Councillors seeing it as an affront to the multicultural identity of the City. Unlike anywhere else in this study, then, tensions between the heads of the City Council and local Labour Councillors have therefore been a consistent feature of EDL protest in Leicester.

This chapter will therefore examine how dealing with EDL protest has been both a time of public-order learning *and* political acrimony in Leicester. We will first look at the local history of the East Midlands City – detailing how (in comparison to Bradford) it became an economic and migratory success story, with a limited experience of extremism. Secondly, we will look at the 2010, 2012 and 2013 EDL demonstrations in Leicester. This will compare and contrast political elite and policing responses to the EDL as well as examining the particular sites of grievance between lay and senior members of the City Council. We will then conclude the chapter by reflecting on the curiosity of far-right protest in Leicester and how this contributed to a 'surprise element' when the EDL came to protest there in 2010. Finally, and like in the case of Birmingham, we will attempt to draw broader lessons from the Leicester case - suggesting that cohesiveness amongst elites is not a pre-requisite for a successful EDL response. Furthermore, as long as there is a clear lead at the top and lessons are learnt from the past, it can be suggested that EDL protest can largely pass without major disruption or disorder.

6.2: Context

a) De-industrialisation and Diversity in Leicester

Leicester is one of the largest and oldest Cities in the East Midlands. Located near the River Soar and the National Forest, the City used to be a Roman military outpost before becoming a market town in the early modern period. The building of the Grand Union Canal and the Midland mainline in the nineteenth century, however, aided the City to grow in prominence and Leicester gradually became famous for its engineering, shoe-making and hosiery during the Victorian era (Beazley 2011: 75). A sign of this boom period, Leicester's population increased from 68,000 in 1841 to 212,000 in 1861 (*Leicester City*

Council 'The Story of Leicester'). Moreover, it was at this time that the City's Haymarket Memorial Clock Tower was built - a major landmark in Leicester.

Unlike other UK post-industrial cities, like Birmingham and Bradford, Leicester has not been hit as hard by the decline of its large industrial base in the early- and mid- 20th Century. This was because of the diversity of local industry as well as a lack of reliance upon one primary industry, such as cloth-making (ibid). In the late 20th century, for example, metal fabrication was one of several economic sectors in the City – with electrical and precision engineering, printing, pharmaceuticals and food processing coming later (Lambert 2015). To give some idea of figures, in 1900, only 6,000 people were employed in engineering in Leicester. By 1939, the figure had risen to 13,500 and by the 1950s this jumped again to 29,000 (ibid). This was mainly due to Leicester's wartime economy – a time when munitions and armaments production spiked both locally and nationally.

Moreover, engineering increasingly overtook trades in hosiery and boot-making as the 20th Century wore on – with changes in fashion, machinery and international competition rendering the latter increasingly obsolete (Beazley 2011: 117-131). The result has been a strikingly robust industrial sector in Leicester, with 12% of local employment now coming from manufacturing (Hirsch et al, May 2014: 10). Like elsewhere, however, Leicester's local economy is still dominated by services - with just under a third of total local employment being in health and education alone (ibid). Above average employment in these areas is unsurprising, however – given that a large University and regional hospital are located within the City limits (ibid).

As the economic complexion of Leicester has changed, so the City has also gone under a significant demographic transformation. During the pre-war period, for example, economic migrants from Ireland as well as Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe came to Leicester. Moreover, post-World War II, this trend continued – with workers from the West Indies arriving to seek employment in the City. Furthermore, from the 1960's onwards, citizens also travelled from the Indian sub-continent to find work and a better quality of life. In the end, most moved to the Spinney Hill and Belgrave areas of the City and set up successful businesses and enterprises. A decade later, South Asians

escaping persecution from the Ugandan dictator, Idi Amin, came to the East Midlands City. In addition, during the 2000s, Dutch Somalis settled in the City - fleeing from 'a forced assimilation policy' and anti-Muslim hostility linked to the rise of the Dutch far-right party, Pim Fortuyn (Evans-Pritchard 21st December 2004). Finally, and after the 2004 enlargement of the European Union, a sizeable number of migrants came from Eastern Europe to Leicester - with Polish residents forming 1.9% of the local population at the last Census (*Leicester City Council* 12th December 2012).

Such sustained flows of migration have transformed Leicester into one of the most diverse and multicultural cities in the UK. Over 70 languages are spoken and some 45% of pupil's mother tongues are those other than English (*Leicester City Council* May 2008). Meanwhile, the 2011 Census found that 40.6% of local residents were either of Asian or mixed race Asian heritage, with Indians (28%) forming the largest minority ethnic group (Jivraj & Finney, October 2013). While Christianity remains the most practised religion in the City, 18.6% of the City's residents registered themselves as followers of Islam at the 2011 Census – with adherents to Hinduism not too far behind (*This is Leicestershire* 11th December 2012). The main places of worship for the City's Muslims are the Leicester Central Mosque and the Masjid Umar Mosque; the former having been guarded by the local Muslim community at the EDL's October 2010 demonstration in the City (*1mtzz* 10th October 2010).

Such levels of diversity have not been without their challenges, however. In 1981, for example, a riot broke out in the Highfield's area of the City. Coming as part of similar rioting elsewhere in the UK that summer, the Highfield's riot centred on acute disadvantage and a lack of facilities for the area's youth (*De Montefort University* 'Highfields Remembered'). Moreover, in August 2011, Leicester City Centre was enveloped with rioting again - with 70 officers being sent out to deal with 100-150 teenagers and adults who were involved in disorder (*BBC News* 10th August 2011). Again, these were 'copycat' events with shops, rather than people of a different ethnic or religious background, being the main target for rioters. Notably, neither had the same communal impact as the riots Bradford in 1995 and 2001 (*ibid*).

Indeed, it was widely suggested – in the wake of the earlier Milltown riots in the Summer of 2001 - that Leicester has been a success story in ‘how to do community cohesion’ (*BBC News* 29th May 2001), with individuals from the City’s minority religious and ethnic communities being actively integrated into the mainstream economic and political life of the City (Cantle 2001: 15). Crucially, levels of segregation are also not as high in Leicester as in other Cities in the UK (*Leicester City Council* May 2008: 15-16). Moreover, a 2008 survey found that 78% of respondents had a strong sense of identification with Leicester whilst 60% thought it was a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (Osman September 2008). Added to a lack of social polarisation, there is a sense of greater community cohesiveness in Leicester; something that has staved off political and religious extremism in the City.

b) Right-Wing Extremism and ‘Islamic Extremism’ in Leicester

One would therefore expect that right-wing and Islamist extremism hasn’t been an issue in Leicester. In terms of the former, this is a mixed picture. Historically, Leicester has seen its fair share of far-right groups and parties. During the 1970’s, for example, National Front (NF) activism became an unwelcome feature of the local political scene - seeking to take advantage of those uncomfortable with the arrival of new South Asian migrants at the time. In 1979, for example, the NF organised a mass rally in the City (*Leicester Mercury* 18th April 2014). Moreover, in the 1976 local elections, the National Front came within 61 votes of victory in Leicester’s Abbey Ward (Nash and Reeder 1993: 107). Finally, the NF also did well at the February 1974 General Election – managing to keep their deposits in Leicester East and Leicester West (ibid: 117). In the past ten years, however, the UK far-right has been relatively unsuccessful in mobilising Leicester’s residents to its cause. A leaked BNP members list in 2008 showed only 80 active members in the local party (Topping and Lewis 20th November 2008). Moreover, at the 2010 General Election, the BNP’s Parliamentary candidate for Leicester West, Gary Reynolds, only polled 6% of the popular vote (*BBC News* 7th May 2010).

Like historical and contemporaneous manifestations of far-right extremism, signs of Islamic extremism in Leicester have also remained persistently low. In

the past 15 years, there have been only two minor cases of what could be labelled as 'Islamic extremism'. In January 2002, for example, four Leicester residents were arrested on terrorism charges 'as part of the largest police anti-terror operation in Britain since September 11th 2001]' (Millar 19th January 2002). These were, however, outsiders who had not lived in Leicester until just before their arrests. Moreover, in April 2003, Brahim Benmerzouga and Baghdad Meziane were indicted for plans to make money, equipment and propaganda material available to Al-Qaeda (*BBC News* 1st April 2003). Again, both had entered Britain a short time prior to their arrest – suggesting that Leicester as a geographic location didn't feature prominently on their path to radicalisation.

6.3: Leicester's First EDL Demonstration (9th October 2010)

Bearing in mind the low-level of inter-communal tensions and Islamic extremism in Leicester, it is curious that the EDL would want to target the City. Moreover, and in contrast to Bradford, Leicester elites did not have a significant experience of rioting to draw from. On 9th October 2010, however, the EDL visited Leicester for the first time. About 2,000 EDL supporters turned out on the day to protest against the presence of 'Islamic extremism' in the City. Menacingly, rumours circulated before the demonstration that some EDL members wished to attack a Mosque before marching into the Highfields area of Leicester (*This is Leicestershire* 25th September 2010). On the day itself, the group were corralled at a protest site in the Humberstone Gate area of the City after being initially held at various muster points in Leicester (Treadwell 2014: 134). Despite Leicestershire police staging one of its biggest operations in 25 years, however, significant pockets of disorder broke out and 13 arrests were made on a mixture of drug, weapon and minor disorder offences. This happened as police fended off angry and frustrated protesters – some of whom had broken police lines and attacked a burger bar where Muslim residents were trapped inside (*Standpoint* 16th October 2010).

a) Wider Preparations

In the run up to the 2010 demonstration, retaining harmony was a key concern of local political elites in the City. As Ross Willmott (2015), then Leader of Labour Group, comments: 'we worked very hard in Leicester to create a sense

of security for all the different races and faiths [from the 1970's onwards], and people of different backgrounds and political views for that matter.' In the end then, local elites entered the planning for the demonstration in 2010 wanting to safeguard this sense of harmony.

Like in Keighley, the first set of preparations were centred on reassuring - and establishing a good channel of communication, with the local Asian community. For example, in the weeks leading up to the demonstration, Leicester City Council set up a special email address to encourage local residents to message-in concerns they had about the forthcoming protest (*This is Leicestershire* 18th September 2010). It also involved a large dimension of getting this message out over local media outlets. Various messages were sent out by the police and civil society to stay away from the demonstration. For example, Chief Superintendent, Rob Nixon, wrote a letter to the *Leicester Mercury* a week before the EDL protest telling local residents 'not to come into Leicester to confront the demonstrators.' (*This is Leicestershire* 1st October 2010) Moreover, faith leaders also issued a warning to members of Leicester's Muslim community to try not to be drawn in by the EDL's protest (*This is Leicestershire* 28th September 2010).

In addition, there was also a more hands-on, 'behind-the-scenes' approach taken by known community contacts to mitigate the community impact of the EDL's presence. For example, text-messaging 'trees' were established in order to quell any rumours being stoked either by the EDL or Muslim community on the day of the demonstration (Leicester 1: 2015). Another aspect of this community response was involving local NGO's, the local youth service and interfaith networks. This was in order to identify and target young people 'who were being whipped up into a frenzy' and 'to reduce them from boiling point to simmering.' (ibid) As one local official reflecting on 2010 comments: 'there was a real 'butterflies-in-the-stomach' anxiety about the EDL coming.' (ibid)

On the day of the demonstration itself, the Council's Chief Executive, Sheila Lock, took a prominent position in managing the EDL's presence in Leicester. She took on a hybrid role - being both in the City but also part of Leicestershire Police's 'Gold Command' that oversaw the broad strategy for the day's policing (Grant 2015). For example, on the day of the demonstration, Lock gave a joint

interview with Chief Superintendent, Rob Nixon, that was broadcast on the Council's *YouTube* channel. She also gave a radio interview to *Eava FM* (Coster 9th October 2010) and the *BBC's Asian Network* on the day's events as well as a TV interview with *ITV News (Leicestershire Police 9th October 2010)*. Such a forward role – nothing of which has been seen in Leicester or any other places since – drew heavy criticism from lay Councillors at the time of the October 2010 protest; as we will see in a moment. It did, however, provide concerted leadership at an uncertain time for the East Midlands City.

The second key preparation for the English Defence League demonstration was to apply for a ban against the EDL marching in the City. On the 25th September 2010, Councillors voted unanimously to veto the EDL's planned procession through the Highfield's area of Leicester (*BBC News 25th September 2010*). This was after a letter written to the Council from the Chief Constable of Leicestershire Police, Simon Cole, outlining his concerns about the impact of a public procession and the 5,000 protesters who were predicted to turnout for the 9th October event (*ibid*). In the end, a blanket ban was successfully granted by the Home Office for the march on the Monday before the EDL were due to arrive (Taylor 4th October 2010). The reason given for this by the Home Office again was the stock response of protecting communities and public property from the protest group.

A third prong on the day of the demonstration was around 'myth-busting' and the factual reporting of events. Like in Bradford, one of the biggest risks on the day was rumours, myths and propaganda spreading (Grant 2015). The police tried to combat this through their text messaging services within the local community and their social media presence. Moreover, Conservative Councillor Ross Grant, who had been given the award for Online Councillor of the Year in 2010 by LGiU (LGiU 2010), retweeted the police's messages as a way of rumour busting and reassuring the City's Asian residents (Grant 2015). This allowed Grant to take an active role that didn't involve becoming part of the counter demonstration (*ibid*).

Another aspect of the preparations was the involvement of community and faith groups in and around the 2010 demonstration. For example, a peace vigil was held on the Friday before the demonstration – with peace ribbons being placed

around the City (Lowles 1st October 2010). Moreover, the Bishop of Leicester held a special service in the City's Cathedral the day before the Saturday demonstration, and community events happened on the day of the demonstration itself to divert people away from Leicester City-Centre. In addition, there was also a community unity event held on the Sunday after the 9th October demonstration. Similar to the Bradford 2010 community event, this again was organised by the anti-fascist collective, 'Hope not Hate', and involved community stalls, music, and food. In the end, the community response was one very positive story coming out of 2010. As local MP, Jon Ashworth, commented in his maiden speech at the time: 'the people of Leicester [were] united in rejecting the EDL and what it stands for.' (HC Deb 8 June 2011)

Despite these preparations, trouble did however rear its head on the day of the October 2010 Leicester protest. On the way from muster points to the protest site, EDL demonstrators smashed pub windows and tried to break out of the police containment area at Humberstone Gate East (Treadwell 2014: 134). Moreover, a separate set of EDL protesters (who had been previously held in nearby Market Harborough) broke away from police lines and attacked a fast-food outlet. Meanwhile, when demonstrators got to the protest site, flares, smoke grenades and other missiles were thrown in confrontational clashes with riot police and anti-fascist counter protesters (ibid). Similar to the EDL's August 2010 Bradford protest, the EDL did not have the stewards present at later demonstrations. As Labour Councillor, Ross Willmott (2015), comments about 2010: 'the police couldn't cope with it. They weren't ready, they hadn't thought about [it].'

b) Political Responses

Responses by political elites to the EDL's presence varied greatly in 2010 with some taking on exclusivist responses and a minority taking a more inclusivist reaction to the EDL's presence. In the run-up to the 2010 demonstration, all of Leicester's three MPs were quite active in campaigning against the EDL's presence. For example, nearly a month before the EDL protest, Keith Vaz, MP for Leicester East, sponsored an Early Day Motion, which noted the 9th October demonstration and 'recognise[d] that this rally has the potential to be provocative and to threaten race-relations and community cohesion.' (HC Early

Day Motion 758) The main reason was to spread awareness among other Parliamentarians about the EDL's unwelcome presence in Leicester as well as to reinforce the views of his constituents (Vaz 2015). In 2010, Vaz was certain that a ban was 'the only option available' – considering the 'potential violence, huge disruption and damage to community cohesion within Leicester' (ibid).

Moreover, the City's three MP's released a joint statement two weeks before the protest - resolving that it would 'not affect Leicester's long and proud history of community cohesion.' (*This is Leicestershire* 25th September 2010) This, plus concerns about the potential for violence and 'huge disruption', were at the forefront of local Parliamentarians minds in 2010 (Vaz 2015). In addition, Leicester West's MP, Liz Kendall, further petitioned the Council to apply to the Home Secretary for a ban on the march – commenting on Leicester's diverse communities and adding that the EDL's brand of racism and discrimination was simply 'not welcome' in the City (Kendall 23rd September 2010). Furthermore, a vote was taken at a meeting of the whole Council that unanimously backed plans to ban the EDL's forthcoming demonstration (*BBC News* 25th September 2010).

The main story in terms of political responses in 2010 was, however, one of friction between the City's Councillors and the Council's Chief Executive, Sheila Lock. For example, Ross Grant (2015), Conservative Councillor for Knighton, was critical of the Chief Executive's presence amongst the protests on the day - suggesting that Lock's call to be part of the 'gold command' distracted police attention and resources away from the main protest. Moreover, a whole group of Labour Councillors were disgruntled at the EDL being able to demonstrate in the first place – suggesting that the police 'seemed to be facilitating the EDL's day out' (Kitterick 2015) and that the Council was taking an 'apolitical' and 'managerial' stand on what they deemed to be a deeply political issue (Willmott 2015). For example, Ross Willmott (2015), Labour Councillor for Rushey Mead, suggested that the Council had 'broken a very long tradition of not having the EDL, or the BNP or the National Front in the heart of our City preaching their divisive views' by not banning the EDL demonstrating completely in 2010 (ibid). In September 2002, for example, Willmott, then Leader of Leicester City Council, secured a ban by then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, on a march by the

National Front who wanted to protest against what it saw as the problem of 'Militant Muslims' within the local area (*The Daily Telegraph* 24th September 2002).

In the end, a number of the Councillors on the Labour Group took a direct action approach to the EDL's presence. Andy Connelly, Patrick Kitterick, and Ross Willmott (amongst others), all of who were key detractors in the Labour Group that year, joined the Unite Against Fascism counter protest. Connelly addressed the assembled crowds on the day, commenting that: 'It's important for us all that we don't leave our city to the EDL. Our trade unions and everyone need to stand together against the EDL. That's why this protest is so important.' (Ruddick 12th October 2010) Moreover, Willmott also addressed the counter protest – saying: 'I'm proud to be here today, to stand here and show that our City belongs to all people, and this territory must not be ceded to some neo-fascist thugs. It is vital that we do not clear the city centre.' (*Unite Against Fascism* 9th October 2010)

This is not to say that opinion about political responses to the EDL's presence was the same within the Labour Group. Ross Willmott, then Leader of the Labour Group, took the most robust line in 2010 – suggesting that the EDL should be banned *tout corp*. This was based on experiences of anti-racist campaigns during the 1980s. Moreover, another Labour Councillor, Patrick Kitterick, was also of the robust conviction that members of minorities and people of all ethnic backgrounds should have been encouraged to come into Leicester City Centre whilst the EDL should be sent to an isolated spot outside of town in order to 'normalise' the EDL's presence. This was based on the attitude that by: 'ignor[ing the EDL], you legitimise it, you say it's all OK and you just set yourself up for a growing problem' (Kitterick 2015).

In contrast, though, Andy Connelly, another Labour Councillor, was more circumspect when it came to applying bans for marches – conceding in interview that bans tend to lend publicity to groups like the EDL and should only be implemented when the conditions suggest it is beneficial (Connelly 2015). He did however see the merit of confrontation as a way of opposing groups, like the EDL, and toed the Labour Group line that they were unhappy with the institutional response to the 2010 demonstration by the Leicester Council's

leadership and police. Moreover, as a Councillor, he believed that there was a special expectation on him to stand against the EDL 'and their abhorrent views' and that their presence should be challenged so that progress towards their aims are impeded (ibid).

Other political responses in 2010, at the more inclusivist end of the spectrum, came from Ross Grant. Contrary to the Labour Group, Ross, a Conservative Councillor, privately supported plans for the EDL to march in 2010. This private conviction was due to the belief that for the EDL 'just being stuck in one place and getting frustrated' was a recipe for disorder (Grant 2015). Ross commented that the best course of action in the event of the EDL coming in 2010 would have been to 'normalise it' (ibid). For Ross, this meant not attending a counter protest. In the end, however, Grant publicly voted with the Labour leadership for a march ban – suggesting that, despite his personal feelings, it was more important for Councillors to 'all stand together' and be united against the 'EDL threat' (ibid).

c) Conclusion

In summary then, the EDL's 2010 visit to Leicester was a fairly disruptive and acrimonious chapter in the City's political history. Containment tactics used by police acted as a pressure cooker for EDL protesters and proved a major catalyst for the day's disorder. Moreover, this wasn't helped by dynamics inherent to the EDL on the day – with the group's consumption of alcohol, lack of stewards and determination to storm a prominent Muslim area, all key ingredients for disorder in the City. Overall, then, the impressions given by Leicester's 2010 preparations and response was protection of harmonious relations but also one that potentially underestimated the EDL's presence. As Ross Willmott (2015) suggests: 'the police couldn't cope with it. They weren't ready, they hadn't thought about [it].'

Turning to political responses, 2010 was also a particularly acrimonious time for relations between the City Council's Labour Group and Executive. For example, a sizeable number of Labour and non-Labour Councillors criticised the Council leadership's handling of the event - suggesting that the then Chief Executive took too much of a unilateral approach and shouldn't have allowed the EDL to protest at all. Whether this is fair or not is open to question, however - with the

then Council Chief Executive, Sheila Lock, providing strong leadership at a difficult time for the City. There were, however, signs of inclusivism by the Conservative Group on the Council at the time of the 2010 demonstration – with Conservative Councillor, Ross Grant, proposing that the EDL's presence should be 'normalised'. Such were, however, minority views when compared with the more strident voices coming from sections of the local Labour party – calling for a complete ban on the EDL's presence.

6.4: Leicester's Second EDL Demonstration (4th February 2012)

The EDL's second demonstration in as many years in Leicester came at a key crossroads for the group. After a demonstration in Blackburn in April 2011, the EDL had splintered and spawned a more ideologically radical group, the 'North West Infidels'. Meanwhile, in December 2010, the Labour-controlled Council approved plans for a newly elected mayor and in May 2011 veteran Labour politician, Sir Peter Soulsby, was duly elected with 55.3% of the popular vote (*This is Leicestershire* 6th May 2011). This change in leadership, plus a weakened EDL, had two important effects on the group's February 2012 demonstration in Leicester. The first was on numbers; only 800 EDL demonstrators turned out to protest the issue of suspended sentences for four Somali women who had assaulted local teenager, Rhea Page (*The Daily Telegraph* 6th December 2011). The second was on the level of disorder; no one was arrested during the second demonstration despite the EDL being allowed to march through the City (*BBC News* 4th February 2012).

a) Wider Preparations

One of the key lessons learnt from 2010 and built upon in 2012, then, was the approach taken towards the EDL by the Council. This was brought in by a change of leadership. Sir Peter Soulsby, a veteran of Leicester politics and the newly elected mayor, was adamant that the EDL would not 'effectively close down the City for 24 hours' (Soulsby 2015). For example, Soulsby was determined to continue 'as far as [he] could with business as usual' on the day of the demonstration and to keep 'physical confrontation [between the EDL and counter-protesters] to a minimum' (ibid). In the end, the chief outcome of this was: a) to allow the EDL to march, and b) a carefully choreographed route that would create as little disturbance as possible. As Soulsby suggests, this was a

'very well chosen route' that didn't come close to a Muslim-majority area and therefore robbed the EDL from encountering the City's Asian population and 'having a punch up' (ibid).

Building on this, there was also a major shift in policing tactics in 2012. While in 2010 a heavy-handed and largely prohibitive style of policing took place that sought to contain the activities of the EDL, in 2012, this gave way to a more low-key, non-confrontational style of public-order policing that allowed the EDL to flow more freely through the City (Treadwell 2014: 128). Like in Birmingham, two examples of this new smarter approach in 2012 were better dialogue and agreement with the EDL as well as a more neutral and softer stance on the day itself (ibid: 134). Moreover, EDL protesters were kept well away from flashpoint areas and were not subject to the same 'kettling' tactics, which had caused much of the disorder two years previous. According to one scholar, this was also symptomatic of a broader, national shift in how the EDL were policed between 2010 and 2012 - and was informed by the rationale that police confrontation effectively unifies a crowd. In order to avoid this therefore a more differentiated and gentle tack was adopted in Leicester in 2012 (ibid: 128).

This change in tack by politicians and the police did not, however, mean that the learning from 2010 was completely jettisoned. One key lesson that was brought forward from 2010 was the use of community networks and contacts to myth-bust and reassure the local Muslim community about any anxieties they had. For example, text-messaging networks were reactivated in order to get 'quick-time' counter-messaging out as soon as rumours arose (Leicester 1: 2015). Moreover, like in Bradford, interventions around young men at risk of getting involved in violent disorder were again put in place – with youth workers, NGOs and the local youth service all called to 'keep... a lid on community tensions' and keep an eye on individuals who would potentially seek 'some kind of reprisals against the EDL' (ibid). In addition, the active communications strategy in 2010 was also rolled out again and replicated. Designed to keep the local community informed and reassured about preparations in the run up to demonstrations, for example, Soulsby appeared in a number of *YouTube* videos. These happened before the 2012 event and showed Soulsby alongside Chief Superintendent, Rob Nixon, outlining his wish for there to be 'business as usual'

and emphasising that he was learning from the disruptive, 2010 experience (*Leicester City Council*, January - February 2012).

Moreover, in the week leading up to the demonstration, Soulsby gave a final video in which he picked out rumour-busting as a key weapon that could be used against the EDL (*Leicester City Council* 3rd February 2012), gave a broadcast interview with a local radio station (*EAVA FM* 1st February 2012), and wrote a letter to the *Leicester Mercury* outlining final preparations and decisions on day's events (*Leicester Mercury* 4th February 2012). When interviewed, Soulsby suggested his presence in the City's media was not to increase his reputation (though this certainly played a part), but informed by his conviction that 'there is an expectation and a mandate [for a City mayor]...to articulate the feelings of the people of the City ...' (ibid) This level of sustained engagement is commendable and replicated Sheila Lock's efforts two years previous.

b) Political Responses

While Leicestershire Police embarked on a major shift in their approach towards the EDL, the group's return to Leicester in 2012 did not see much of a change in terms of political responses - with only the content of the acrimonious comments differing. For example, Ross Willmott publicly criticised Sir Peter Soulsby's decision to allow the EDL to march in 2012. Unconvinced by the police's tactical change, Willmott took to the *Leicester Mercury* to suggest that the EDL would be 'effectively take control of these streets' and that disorder could break out at any point along the EDL's allocated route (*Leicester Mercury* 1st February 2012). Moreover, the ability of the EDL to march past the City's Memorial Clock Tower was also widely picked up upon. Many Labour Councillors saw it as an affront to the multicultural identity of the town – suggesting that the EDL should have been placed in a more 'obscure' location instead of a key central and symbolic location within the City (Kitterick 2015). As Patrick Kitterick (2015) elaborates: 'it's the key landmark ... if you try to direct anybody to anywhere in [the City] ... you'll say, "I'll meet you by the Clock Tower."'

Like in 2010, a number of Councillors on the Labour Group attended the UAF counter march on the day of the demonstrations to voice their dissent. Patrick Kitterick, Andy Connelly, Ross Willmott, and newly-elected Labour Councillor,

Lucy Chaplin, all attended the UAF counter protest. In the run up to the demonstration, Kitterick released a joint statement with other Councillors from the Castle Ward district of Leicester saying that he was ‘appalled and ashamed at the decision to allow the racist neo-Nazi English Defence League to march through the city centre past the Clock Tower.’ (*Leicester UAF* 1st February 2012) Moreover, Willmott repeated his criticism of Soulsby’s decision in the local press - suggesting that the EDL should have been restricted to a static protest outside of the city centre (*Leicester Mercury* 8th February 2012).

Political responses to the EDL in 2012 were not solely of the acrimonious type, however. Ross Grant, for example, decided not to respond to the EDL’s presence. With little to pick up on in social media, he took the approach of a ‘non response’ - reasoning that if you ‘actually don’t say anything...nobody would even [have] noticed [which] would be a good result.’ (Grant 2015) Moreover, Keith Vaz, MP for Leicester East, decided in 2012 to focus his interventions not on the group itself but on the cost to the public purse. For example, he made a number of representations to Press, Parliament and the then Policing Minister, Nick Herbert, about the fact that Leicester had to foot an £800,000 bill for the protest. This was to make sure that cuts in policing budgets didn’t ‘bite even deeper’ (Vaz 2015). Like in Luton in 2011, this intervention was successful and the City of Leicester was reimbursed £670,000 of the total cost.

c) Conclusion

In summary, both Leicestershire Police and Leicester City Council faced a much diminished EDL presence in 2012. Having splintered in April the previous year, the group did not have the basis to mount the same public order threat as when it had come two years previous. This did not however stop a thorough-going shift in tactics by the Police and local Council contributing to a deflated set of arrest figures on the day. Like in Birmingham in 2011, the 2012 demonstration, for example, saw the Police offer a far more low-key approach that meant that the EDL’s presence in Leicester was short and transitory. Moreover, Sir Peter Soulsby decision to allow the EDL to march helped funnel the group through a route that would cause as little as disruption as possible. As Keith Vaz MP (2015) commented: ‘The police did a stunning job... it was handled with supreme professionalism.’

Like in 2010, however, tensions between the local Labour Group and the Council leadership continued. This time it was around the subject of the EDL marching past the City's central Memorial Clock Tower. Many of those disgruntled by the decision turned up on the day to demonstrate their disapproval about the EDL occupying the symbolic heart of the City and a key place associated with Leicester's multicultural identity. There were however some signs of discontinuity between political responses to the EDL in 2012, when compared with 2010. For example, the cost of hosting repeated EDL demonstrations in Leicester became more prominent. Moreover, the City's only Conservative Councillor decided not to respond to the EDL's presence in 2012. In addition, Lucy Chaplin, then a newly elected Labour Councillor, joined the Group of Labour 'dissidents' on the City Council and protested at the UAF demonstration on the day of the 2012 demonstration. While, therefore, the police had become better at dealing with the EDL 'threat', acrimony still existed on the exact methods used to go about this.

6.5: Leicester's Third EDL Demonstration (1st June 2013)

The EDL's third and final visit to Leicester came less than eighteen months after the February 2012 protest and was a very different protest event compared to the two EDL demonstrations prior. Coming after the Woolwich attacks in late May 2013, 100 EDL activists arrived to lay a wreath for Drummer Lee Rigby and to walk from the City's Memorial Clock Tower to Victoria Park. A sign of lessons learnt by Leicestershire Police, only a dozen police officers visibly marshalled the EDL during the June 2013 protest – with a number of police vans held in reserve in case there was trouble between anti-Islamic protesters and the hundred or so anti-fascist demonstrators in attendance (*Leicester Mercury* 3rd June 2013). Fortunately, there was not a return to the scenes of October 2010 – with the wreath laying and walk passing off largely without incident (*ITV News* 1st June 2013). The EDL's 1st June mobilisation was one of a number of similar events happening in the East Midlands and across the country in the wake of the Woolwich terror attacks – a period that had seen an appreciable uptick in EDL support (from 25,000 to 75,000) and anti-Muslim attacks (up 373%) (Goodwin 23rd May 2013 & Feldman and Littler July 2014: 3).

a) Wider Preparations

The rather subdued outcome and course of events at Leicester's final EDL demonstration, however, belied the heightened local context around the protest event. Before the demonstration, there was intelligence received by local law enforcement and counter terrorism officers that it would be a 'huge demonstration' – with EDL members converging on Leicester from a number of nearby local towns (Leicester 1: 2015). Moreover, the EDL's choice to walk past Leicester's Memorial Clock Tower was again politically contentious. Police also were not sure whether 500, 100 or 50 people would turn up at the protest event (ibid). As one local official expressed: 'we were fearful of a repeat of what happened before [in 2010].' (ibid)

In terms of policing and the local authority response in 2013, however, things were far more low-key when compared to previous years. Like in 2012, Leicestershire Police allowed the group to march and issued a proportionate response tailored to the much diminished EDL presence. As a police spokesman noted before the demonstration:

'We will adopt a low-key policing style, with appropriate contingencies in place. We do not expect either event to disrupt normal business in the city centre, and encourage people planning to visit the city centre on Saturday to continue with those plans.' (Fagan 31st May 2013)

Moreover, the response by the City Council was also less heightened than before – simply because, according to one local official: local people and officials had got over the 'initial anxiety of 'oh, what does this mean'' (Leicester 1: 2015). In 2013, however, the same community networks used in 2010 and 2012 were remobilised, with more of an emphasis around rumour and myth-busting. The day therefore turned out to be 'a bit of a damp squib... because they [other post-Woolwich EDL demonstrations] were happening all over the country. It wasn't a national march.' (ibid)

b) Political Responses

Like in 2010 and 2012, however, this 'surface calm' belied political responses in 2013. Again, Patrick Kitterick along with two other Castle Ward Councillors

challenged the City Council's decision to allow the march to go ahead and for the EDL's ability to walk through the City Centre (Fagan 31st May 2013). In a statement, they suggested that 'the proposed march...has nothing to do with paying tribute to Drummer Lee Rigby and everything to do with dividing our city.' (ibid) Adding to this, a spokesman for Leicestershire's Federation of Muslim Organisations told a local paper that: 'It is right to pay respects to Drummer Lee Rigby but you have to ask whether it is necessary to march through the city centre.' (ibid)

c) Conclusion

In summary, then, the EDL's third and final demonstration was a far more localised affair compared to the two larger protest events that had preceded it. With media reports stressing that no-one outside of Leicestershire was attending the event (ibid), the day's march only mustered 100 EDL protesters. Partially to do with the diminished status of the EDL as an organisation, but mainly to do with the learning curve that Leicestershire police had been on since 2010 and 2012; responses by the police and local authority were on a much smaller scale than had be the case previously. Moreover, the local authority simply re-established community networks that had been so crucial in stopping the spread of rumours at previous demonstrations. In terms of political responses, we also saw slight continuity with 2012 – with Patrick Kitterick and others voicing their complaints at the Council leadership and the Police's decision to allow the event to go ahead.

6.6: Conclusion

Leicester presents itself as a curiosity in EDL research. Here is a town with arguably harmonious relations between different ethnic and religious communities as well as less pronounced socio-economic transformation but still has played host to a number of significant EDL demonstrations over the past seven years. Previously bereft of any far-right activism since the mid-1970s, the EDL's presence was therefore somewhat of an unexpected surprise for local elites in October 2010 – when the EDL decided to come in large numbers and target the predominantly Muslim Highfields area of the City. As, Ross Willmott (2015), a Labour Councillor at the time, commented: 'the police couldn't cope with it. They weren't ready, they hadn't thought about [it].'

In a sense, the surprise nature of the EDL's presence fed into the reactive public-order policing response in 2010 and therefore contributed to a breakdown in order on the day of the protest. For example, the banning of the EDL's presence meant that a containment strategy had to be used which – like in Bradford earlier that summer – arguably ramped up tensions amongst demonstrators. Moreover, the staggering of protesters allowed latecomers to enter the largely Muslim Highfields area of the City – creating a twin focus for the police and therefore splitting their attention. This, plus the EDL's determination to access Highfields and a lack of stewarding, created a 'perfect storm' for public disorder in 2010. When it came to Leicester in 2012 and 2013, therefore, key public-order management lessons were learnt and the EDL was allowed to march through the town. A change in policing tactics, then, helped keep public disorder at a low-level and led to a much more peaceful protest event in comparison to October 2010.

Whilst the presence of the EDL in Leicester has led to good policing outcomes (no disorder, zero arrests), the advent of group's protest has also marked a particularly poisonous period in the City's politics that has not been seen in any of the other cases under examination. Around each of the demonstrations in Leicester there were tensions and disunity within the Council chamber about: firstly, the EDL's ability to demonstrate at all and, secondly, the EDL's ability to march. The, admittedly small but significant, voices of some Councillors on the City's Labour Group, for example, disliked the Council Executive for giving the EDL 'a platform' in 2010. While in 2012 and 2013, it was the EDL's ability to march past the clock tower, seen as the symbolic heart of the City and part of Leicester's multicultural identity, which raised eyebrows. Sound management of EDL protest has therefore come at the cost of harmonious political relations in Leicester.

Such acrimony has dominated but not completely eclipsed other political responses to the EDL in the City, however. Councillors on the Labour Group have still found time to oppose the EDL through participating in and speaking at EDL counter demonstrations organised by the UAF. Moreover, there have been a wider variety of political responses apart from the hard-core of Labour 'dissidents' on the City Council (Soulsby 2015). For example, local Labour

Members of Parliament have stuck to a more legal-liberal exclusionary route - pulling Parliamentary, media and Governmental levers to try and petition against EDL protests and their related financial costs. In addition, Leicester's sole-Conservative Councillor has also taken a more pragmatic and cautious angle – agreeing with Labour colleagues to ban the EDL in 2010 to preserve unity and offering a 'non response' to the EDL in 2012 in order not to publicise the group's presence.

In sum then, this chapter provides an important counterfactual when managing and responding to EDL protest. The Leicester case suggests that you do not necessarily need a cohesive Council response in order to successfully intervene when far-right protest comes to town. Instead a clear lead at the top of the Council and the ability of both local politicians and the Police to learn public-order management lessons of previous mobilisations can be a vital building block when managing EDL protest. Whilst the former does help, the latter is sufficient grounds for dealing with anti-Islamic protest and the learning curve that it involves. Moreover, in some senses, the disagreements between local Councillors are better than unquestioning loyalty – providing a 'check' on the Council leadership. It is to this question of local democracy and the values of pluralism and tolerance to which we now turn – examining responses to EDL demonstrations in the South Bedfordshire town from where the group emerged, Luton.

Chapter Seven
Luton - 'Where it all began'

Chapter Outline

7.1: Introduction

7.2: Context

7.3: Luton's First English Defence League Demonstration (5th February 2011)

7.4: Luton's Second EDL Demonstration (5th May 2012)

7.5: Luton's Third EDL Demonstration (22nd November 2014)

7.6: Conclusion

'We ended up looking like Beirut with all these big metal containers where the police were managing them, and we said: "we're not having this again. If this happens in Luton, it's not going to look like this again.'" Hazel Simmons (2015), Leader of Luton Borough Council, commenting on the February 2011 EDL demonstration.

'We just wanted to try and give a much fairer balanced view of what the town was all about and I still do think to this day that the EDL have done massive damage to the town. It's going to be very very hard to pull that back up.' Sian Timoney (2015), Deputy Leader of Luton Borough Council, commenting on her approach to the post-2009 EDL demonstrations in Luton.

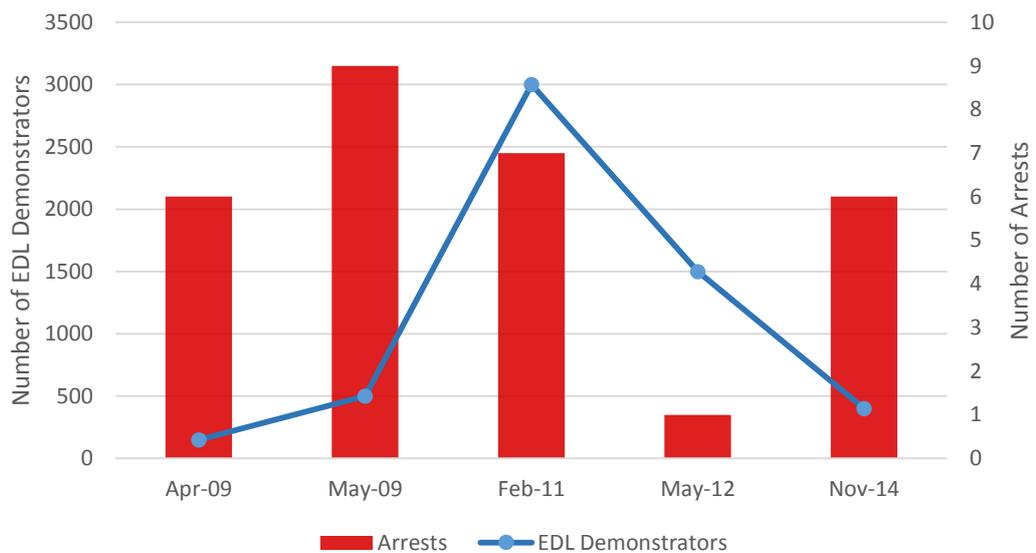
7.1 Introduction

Luton holds an infamous reputation in EDL studies, and therefore deserves special attention when examining political responses towards the EDL. In March 2009, a group belonging to Al-Muhajiroun, a now proscribed radical Islamist group, picketed the 2nd Royal Anglian Regiment's homecoming parade in the South Bedfordshire town (*The Daily Telegraph* 11th March 2009). Locals, infuriated by the sight of placards containing the words 'butchers of Basra' and 'baby killers', set upon the protesters who had to be shielded by police (Judd 11th March 2009). This anger sparked off an initial wave of localised protests under the banner of the United People of Luton (UPL). In June 2009, the UPL merged with the football hooligan collective, Casuals United, to become what we now call the English Defence League. This early story of emergence and coalescence has become the established narrative in the EDL research literature and demonstrates Luton's credentials as being the place 'where it all began' (Busher 2015, Copsey 2010, and Jackson 2011).

Less well-known, however, is the significance of the town within the group's subsequent protest cycle. In February 2011, for example, the EDL held one of its largest demonstrations in Luton – with 3,000 supporters cramming themselves into the town's relatively small high street (Taylor and Davis 5th February 2011). Moreover, the following May, over 1,000 EDL demonstrators returned to the town with 1,500 police officers drafted in from 27 police forces to manage the protest (*BBC News* 5th May 2012). More recently, the EDL mobilised 400 protesters in November 2014; this time to demonstrate against

the authorities' inability to stamp out 'Islamic extremism' in the Borough. Since 2011, therefore, Luton's politicians and police have had to devise public-order and community cohesion strategies to minimise the reputational cost of subsequent, large-scale EDL demonstrations in the town - drawing thousands of its activists back to where the group started.

Fig 7.1: Luton's Total EDL Demonstrators and Arrest Count, April 2009 – November 2014



This chapter will investigate this hitherto understudied period of EDL protest – examining how Lutonian politicians, Bedfordshire police, and the local community have dealt with the presence of EDL protest from February 2011 onwards. First, we will look at the recent history of the town - tracking the local drivers accountable for the EDL returning to protest and responses to the group, post-2011. Secondly, we will move on to look more specifically at instances of EDL mobilisation in the town – focusing on the elite responses to the EDL's demonstrations in February 2011, May 2012, and (latterly) November 2014. Finally, we will conclude by considering the impact of EDL's large-scale round of protests on Luton's politics. What we will find is that, while Luton has been a key site of innovation in dealing with and managing EDL protest, the extent to which this has been lawful and democratic still remains questionable. Before discussing this, however, we will first look at the twin processes of de-industrialisation and migration in Luton and how this informed - and shaped - the EDL's initial and subsequent waves of anti-Islamic protest.

7.2: Context

a) De-industrialisation in Luton

Located in South Bedfordshire, Luton came to prominence in the nineteenth century. During this period, Luton's sizeable hat-making industry turned what was 'essentially rural community' into 'a thriving industrial centre' (Dyer et al 1975: 106). Like Birmingham and Bradford, the population of Luton also rose dramatically during the industrial revolution. For example, the town's population rose from just over 2,986 in 1821 to just over 36,000 in 1901 (ibid: 101 & 195). Such a period was a veritable 'golden age' for the town - with gas lighting, the building of the Town Hall and the establishment of a local newspaper, all happening within just a twenty year period (Lambert 2015). The Town Hall (originally destroyed in July 1919 as a result of rioting) remains a thriving centre of civic life to this day – housing the key administrative and political branches of Luton Borough Council.

During the early Georgian period, however, the local hat industry entered a period of sustained decline and engineering industries became the new centre of economic life in Luton. In 1905, for example, Vauxhall Motor Company opened its largest manufacturing plant in the town. This supplied jobs for thousands of locals and saw the town continue to prosper. During the Second World War, for example, Vauxhall made tanks as part of the war effort and reached its height as a local employer in the late 1960s. The 1980s was a difficult period for Vauxhall, however - with major employment cutbacks happening during that decade. Moreover, in 2002, Vauxhall Motors significantly scaled down its Luton operation. It now only makes vans and commercial vehicles at its Osborne Road plant (*BBC News* 21st March 2002). Once a hub of local economic activity, the factory now employs only a fifth of the workers previously hired during its post-War heyday (*BBC News* 17th May 2006).

This decline in industrial output - from the 1980's onwards - has had a significant impact on the town. Several areas of inner-City Luton are classed as being in the top 10% of the most deprived wards in the country with little access to a reasonable level of healthcare, education and work opportunities (*Luton Borough Council* August 2011). Moreover, in 2012, unemployment hovered just above the national average (Guest and Johnson 2012) - with 1 in 5 of Luton's

working age population holding no qualifications at all (ibid). In addition, the town's child-poverty levels are amongst highest in the East of England – with 25% of the town's children living in households with low or minimal income (*Luton Borough Council* February 2008). In a 2010 article, the Canon of a local Anglican Church described Luton as 'a northern town in the south. The atmosphere reminds me of Oldham... It's a friendly industrial town, not Home Counties posh.' (Vallely 24th December 2010)

b) Diversity in Luton

During Luton's 20th century boom period, multiple waves of migration became part of what fuelled the town's economic success. The town was originally a site of migration for Irish and Scottish nationals in the early twentieth century, who came to build Luton's housing estates as well as parts of the M1 motorway and stayed. Like in Bradford and Leicester, the 1950s and 1960s also saw citizens from the Caribbean and Pakistan coming to Luton for a better quality of life and to work in the town's light industrial sector (Jackson 2011: 16). More recently, the early 2000's saw a rise of immigration from Central and Eastern Europe, with Polish nationals forming a significant contingent of recent residency registrations in the town (Mayhew January 2011).

As a result, Luton has become one of the first of - what Jivraj and Simpson (2015: 49) call - 'plural cities' in the UK, with no one ethnic group dominating the demographic landscape. For example, a significant proportion of the local population is now from either Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin, with Pakistani residents making up the largest minority ethnic group (ONS 2011c). Moreover, 122 languages are now spoken across the Borough and over 60,000 of the town's residents are born outside of the country (Simmons 2015). In addition, the town is also religiously diverse – with strong numbers hailing from Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh backgrounds. Furthermore, Luton has also recently seen a sizeable increase in the local Muslim population. At the last Census, over 24% of residents hailed from the Muslim faith (ONS 2011d). This saw an increase from 10% in the previous Census (ONS 2001b). Along with Leicester and Slough, therefore, it can be quite credibly asserted that Luton is one of the most diverse towns outside of London (Philipson 2013).

This level of diversity has not been without its challenges, however. While segregation between communities isn't as prevalent as other places in the UK, the 'formation of localised [predominantly Asian] communities' within the areas of Biscoe and Dallow have been deemed by some scholars as particularly problematic (Jackson 2011: 16). Moreover, in the mid-1990's, Kashmiri newcomers were met with hostility by longer standing Caribbean, Irish and Italian communities in the Bury Park area of Luton (Vallely 24th December 2010). Authors suggest (ibid) that an equilibrium between new comers and more settled populations was eventually met but again this episode highlights the social and cultural challenges posed by rapid transformations in local demography. As local Council Leader, Hazel Simmons (2015), states: 'cohesion in Luton is a priority. That takes over.' Indeed, in January 2010, Luton in Harmony was set up as a campaign aimed at 'promoting harmonious relationships across the town' through educational and cross-cultural initiatives (Luton 1: 2015). This has been largely successful - with 29,000 residents signing a neighbourly pledge in the initiative's first twelve months (*The Economist* 16th December 2010).

c) 'Islamic Extremism' and Right-Wing Extremism in Luton

Luton has also had brushes with both Islamic extremism and right-wing extremism – with the former making the most news headlines prior to 2009. In October 2001, for example, it was reported that three young men from the town went to join the Afghani Taliban (Smith 30th October 2001). In 2004, Salahuddin Amin – known as the fertiliser bomb plotter - was reported to be from Luton and had encouraged support for Jihadi fighters in the town (*BBC News* 30th April 2007). In 2005, Luton also became a staging post for the 7/7 bombers and in 2010 also housed the mastermind of the Stockholm bomb plot, Taimur Abdulwahab al-Abdaly.

Furthermore, Luton has also been long associated with key individuals and organisations within the UK's radical Islamist scene. Anjem Choudary's Al-Muhajiroun, a group linked to religious fundamentalism and international terrorism, has been 'strongly associated' with Luton for the last 10 years or more (Jackson 2011: 17). In addition, Luton played a formative role in radical preacher, Abu Hamza's, early religious practice. He practiced at a Luton

mosque in the mid-1990s before becoming an Imam in Finsbury Park (Sherwell 19th May 2014). This was of course until October 2012 when he was extradited to the US to face terrorism charges (*The Daily Telegraph* 5th October 2012).

On the other side of the extremist divide, prior to the EDL, far-right extremism was conspicuously absent in Luton. This is strange – given the significant socio-economic transformations that have occurred in the town over the past thirty years. During the 2000's, for example, the British National Party never polled above 5% in either the area's local or Parliamentary districts. While we know that key figures within the EDL were active in relation to the BNP locally, this was on a relatively low-level basis and only involved nominal membership of the neo-fascist party and the signing of candidate forms at local elections (ibid: 7). Moreover, a meeting and a high-profile march by the National Front in the mid-2000's were a damp squib with both being either cancelled or banned by local authorities – based on insurance and security concerns (*Luton Today* June 2006 & April 2007). In addition, the most significant recent mobilisation by another far-right group didn't come until June 2014 when the BNP offshoot, Britain First, hosted a series of 'Mosque invasions' in the (predominantly Asian) Bury Park area of Luton (*Tell MAMA* 16th June 2014). Prior to and apart from the EDL, therefore, right-wing extremism was very much on the fringes of Luton politics and only displayed a marginal presence in the town.

d) EDL Emergence and Coalescence in Luton, March - July 2009

Luton's reputation for very low-level far-right activity, however, changed dramatically in Spring 2009. On 10th March of that year, Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah, a branch of Al-Muhajiroun, picketed the homecoming parade of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment in the South Bedfordshire town (*The Daily Telegraph* 11th March 2009). As the parade reached Luton Town Hall, locals, infuriated by the sight of placards denouncing soldiers as 'butchers' and 'baby killers', set upon the twenty or so protesters who had to be shielded by police for their own protection (Judd 11th March 2009). Unsurprisingly, this initial disturbance was widely picked up by the national press – with both the *Daily Telegraph* and *Independent* filing articles on the day's events (*Daily Telegraph* 11th March 2009 & Judd 11th March 2009).

Over the coming weeks and months, an initial wave of localised protests took hold in Luton and a group, named the United People of Luton (UPL), was formed. The first of these protests was meant to take place on 28th March 2009. Thankfully, the march was later cancelled. This was due to concerns over the potential for violence and more established far-right groups targeting the rally as a platform for their own grievances (Blake 2011: 14). A second march was, however, arranged. On 13th April 2009, 150 protesters turned out to hold a 'Reclaim our Streets' rally organised by the anti-Islamic blogger, Paul Ray. 6 arrests were made as protesters demanded 'someone in authority be held to account' for the Al-Mahajiroun March protest (ibid). In a classic case of cumulative extremism, where 'one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms' (Eatwell 2006: 205), the UPL were spawned and mobilised around grievances to do with 'Islamic extremism' in the Borough. Luton therefore was quickly establishing the reputation of being 'where it all began.'

After the April 2009 demonstration, activities by the UPL quickly escalated from low-level protest towards a more menacing form of violent extremism. In the lead up to a 24th May UPL protest, a Mosque linked to a local figure in Bury Park's radical Islamist scene, Sayful Islam, was firebombed (Taylor 3rd June 2009). Moreover, the cause of the group shifted from direct opposition to Al-Mahajiroun towards a wider grievance with 'Islamism', 'the spread of Sharia Law' and 'Islamic extremism'. In the end, over 500 protesters turned out with 9 arrests made at the May 2009 demonstration, as members of the UPL protest tried to charge directly towards Bury Park (Wardrop 25th May 2009). In Bedfordshire Police and Luton Borough Council's first joint intervention against the fledgling group, the UPL were subsequently banned from holding marches in Luton for three months under the orders of then Home Secretary, Alan Johnson (*BBC News* 21st August 2009).

This escalation in numbers, and the creation of the football hooligan collective 'Casuals United' in Spring 2009, led to the formation of the English Defence League earlier that Summer. Most of the events around this period are not well recorded. However, Paul Jackson's (2011) account suggests that it was around this time that a central organisation appeared in Luton - with key members of the local football hooligan scene, such as Kevin Carroll and Tommy Robinson,

becoming more heavily involved in the group's day-to-day activities (p.15). Having been already been versed in violent disorder tactics on the terraces at Luton Town Football Club and involved in a 'Ban the Luton Taliban' protest in 2004, it seems somewhat inevitable that Robinson and Carroll would become more involved – the former a member of the local BNP party in 2004 and the latter a key part of the skirmishes at Anglian Homecoming parade in March 2009. In June and July 2009, the newly formed group began to coalesce and protests branched out from Luton and into Birmingham and Manchester.

Despite the EDL moving its protests away from Luton in mid-2009 and the subsequent ban, however, the town still continued to be associated with the group. In June 2010, for example, the *BBC* produced the documentary 'Young, British and Angry' in which extensive interviews were given with Carroll and other prominent EDL figures in Luton (*BBC Three* 2nd June 2010). Moreover, in September 2009, the *BBC* ran a feature length article on the EDL and Luton (*BBC News* 11th September 2009). Subsequently, there were three other documentaries commissioned in 2011 and 2012 that focus exclusively on Luton's role in spawning the EDL (*BBC Newsnight* 1st January 2011, *Channel 4* 29th February 2011, and *BBC Three* 20th February 2012) – all of which added to the media frame and narrative that Luton was a 'hotbed of extremism.' (*The Daily Telegraph* 13th December 2010) This negative media frame became a key driver behind responses to the EDL when it returned for subsequent marches in 2011, 2012, and 2014, and to which this chapter will now turn.

7.3: Luton's First English Defence League Demonstration (5th February 2011)

On 5th February 2011, the EDL decided to stage its first and largest 'national' demonstration in Luton. Whilst no specific grievance was stated, the context of the EDL returning to the town was symbolically important for the group: Luton was after all where the group had began and, as usual, the EDL were able to portray the town's large Muslim community in a particularly negative light. Giving oxygen to the EDL's cause, the then UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, chose to give a speech in Munich on the same day of the demonstration about the 'failure of state multiculturalism' and what he saw as the evils of 'passively tolerating extremism' (*BBC News* 5th February 2011a). The scene was therefore

set for a buoyant turnout – with predictions of upwards of 5,000 protesters being made in advance of the protest.

In the end, however, around 3,000 EDL supporters turned out for the event. Even though a ban was not secured, the level of disorder expected by the police and the local Borough Council was altogether absent – with seven arrests made for assault and weapons-related offences (*BBC News* 5th February 2011b). Despite this, however, the financial and symbolic cost of the EDL returning to Luton was already done; the public-order policing bill for the day exceeding £1.2 million alone with most shops along the town's high street being boarded up in anticipation of the group's arrival (Johnson 17th April 2011). Most importantly, the EDL was able to march through and occupy the symbolic heart of Luton: the town's main, St. George's square, which holds an equal status for Luton's residents as the Memorial Clock Tower in Leicester.

a) Wider Preparations

The run up to the 2011 demonstration saw a number of precautions taken by local elites to minimise the EDL's impact in Luton. Like in Leicester in 2010, the first set of preparations were around engaging with the local Asian community – reassuring nervous residents and targeting those likely to be caught up in disorder. This was facilitated through a flow of information from the Council into the local community about the day's events and how the protest event was likely to be managed. Businesses, taxi and bus drivers were all kept informed as the day developed as well as the local community through local news articles, television appearances and visits to community groups conducted by Council Leader, Hazel Simmons, and the Chief Superintendent of Bedfordshire Police, Mike Colbourne. As Simmons (2015) observes: 'the best bet is to get your community to understand what's happening and the only way to do that is through communication.'

Added to this, engagement involved a deliberate targeting of the young and vulnerable in 2011. Like in Bradford, Labour Councillor, Mahmood Hussain, conducted a number of meetings with young people in his Farley Hill Ward in the run up to the February 2011 protest (Taylor 31st January 2011). This involved responding to concerns by youngsters about the messages sent out by the EDL prior to the demonstration as well as telling them not to be provoked by

the group's presence. On the day itself, community centres were opened for local young people as a way of diverting them away from the demonstration (Simmons 2015). Moreover, another overriding concern was trying to make sure that the elderly were looked after and were not fearful of the forthcoming demonstration. Again, Mahmood Hussain, executive portfolio holder for adult social care, championed the cause of the elderly and took steps to make sure that they didn't feel 'prisoners in their own homes' on the day of the demonstration (Hussain 2015).

Thirdly, this type of engagement was also expressed within the more institutional mechanisms of the Council. A Community Cohesion Contingency Planning Group (CCCPG), which was convened in the weeks before the demonstration, acted as a community forum and facilitated discussion about how different communities were affected. It also allowed key community contacts to ask questions about preparations being made for the march and for residents of the town to be reassured about arrangements enacted by the police. It is important here to point out that the CCCPG isn't EDL specific. In 2011, it did, however, provide a place for Luton's local community to discuss concerns raised by the group's forthcoming protest and formulate a community response to the EDL's protest.

The second set of preparations prior to the EDL's 2011 protest was a more external facing response that – as alluded to earlier in the chapter - tried to limit the damage done to Luton's reputation. As Council Leader, Hazel Simmons (2015), comments: 'Luton's got an image [around the EDL] that's really been formalised by the press. So whenever something comes up about Luton, they talk about it. And we don't think it's fair because it does not reflect the town.' Sian Timoney, Councillor for Farley Hill and now Deputy Leader of the Council, was one of those who tried to combat this. In a 25th January 2011 article printed by *Socialist Worker*, she deployed this strategy suggesting that 'the majority of white people [in Luton] don't support the EDL... The vast majority of Lutonians aren't racist.'

Despite these preparations, the images broadcast on the day of the 2011 demonstration were not good for the town. Though only five arrests were made, metal barricades had to be erected to contain EDL protesters, shops were

boarded up to prevent damage and the group were able to occupy a symbolic part of the town centre: St. George's Square. This was much to the disappointment of local elites, who wished to minimise the EDLs impact on the town and who were being pressured by the local community to ban the group. This set the wheels in motion for the creation of initiatives to tackle this inconvenience at future EDL demonstrations.

b) Political Responses

The advent of the EDL coming to demonstrate in Luton evoked an array of political responses in 2011. Most took an exclusionary approach with a couple taking a more serious look at sustained responses to EDL protests. Hazel Simmons took a lead in providing an exclusionary response - refusing to meet with the EDL and enforcing a 'no-platform' approach when dealing with the group. This was despite the leader of the EDL, Tommy Robinson, wishing to meet with her in 2011 and was in response to numerous occasions where the EDL's former leader had either remonstrated with her in the street or at public meetings (ibid). Unsurprisingly, Simmons left it to the police to liaise with the EDL in early 2011.

Moreover, Simmons wrote along with the leaders of the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Council Groups to the Home Secretary in the run up to the 2011 demonstration (*Luton Today* 11th January 2011). Like in Bradford, Birmingham and Leicester, this was in order to attempt to secure a ban on the EDL marching in Luton and was raised amid concerns over the 'risk of serious disorder' (ibid). It was also pointed out by Senior Councillors that there were also concerns about further 'negative media coverage' being generated in the context of revelations that the 2010 Stockholm bomber had been a local resident (ibid). Ultimately, this intervention was unsuccessful; a ban was not granted and the expected wide-scale disorder did not materialise in the case of the 2011 demonstration.

Apart from using legal measures to exclude the EDL from Luton, another prong of the exclusivist response was a number of local Councillors and politicians engaging in direct action, street politics. For example, MP for Luton North, Kelvin Hopkins, who had written to the Home Secretary for a march ban (*Lancashire Telegraph* 3rd February 2011), was involved in Unite Against

Fascism's 1,000-strong counter demonstration in 2011. This was based on the conviction that unconditional responses are necessary for groups like the EDL. For example, when asked, Hopkins posits that 'whenever these kind of people raise their heads, you have to answer them.' (Hopkins 2014) Moreover, he saw his opposition in 2011 as vital to his role as an MP ('our voters would expect us to stand up and be counted not just to hide away') and was based on previous involvement in anti-racist campaigns during the 1960s (ibid).

Another representative to be involved in the direct action side of exclusionary responses was Sian Timoney. Sian also attended the 2011 counter demonstration (Timoney 6th February 2015). The reason for this was simple – as a Councillor she thought it was 'actually [her] role to stand up to people like that and say look that's just not acceptable.' (ibid) It was also a continuation of her attempts to counter incorrect and false assertions made by the EDL about the area – making it her job as an elected official to counter assertions made by the EDL and making sure that people have correct information about the town (ibid). An example of this came in 2010 when the television channel, *BBC Three*, released a documentary about the EDL entitled, 'Young, British and Angry' (*BBC Three* 2nd June 2010). Timoney, a Councillor from a predominantly white working-class ward where both of the group's leaders grew up, was asked to respond to allegations that more money was being spent in Asian parts of the town. In her reply, Timoney stated that this was 'entirely untrue' and took the presenter of the programme, Ben Anderson, to an area where money was being spent on a new kids play area in her ward (ibid).

In addition, a number of other local politicians took a similar direct action, exclusionary tack. Timoney's colleague and fellow Farley Hill representative, Councillor Mahmood Hussain, was also amongst their number in 2011. He was of the view that principled confrontation was a viable response – stating that politicians 'should respond as strongly as [they] can. You have to take on these racist groups head on' (Hussain 2015). Richard Howitt, MEP for the East of England, also turned out to speak at the UAF counter demonstration in 2011 - saying that 'the message to the EDL is clear: this is not your home, you are not welcome here.' (*Channel 4 News* 5th February 2011) A month prior to the 5th February demonstration, Howitt also signed a statement endorsing the UAF's

counter protest in Luton, suggesting that the ‘values of Luton are undermined by the activities of the EDL’ (*Unite Against Fascism* 12th January 2011).

In contrast, there were a number of local politicians who decided not to take a direct action stance in 2011. For example, Gavin Shuker, Labour MP for Luton South, refused to take part in the counter-protest on the day of the 2011 demonstration. His aim in doing this was to ensure the ‘normal running of things in the town on the day’ and to support the ‘peaceful determination [by local people] to get on with our normal lives.’ (Shuker 2014) Instead, the newly elected MP took to the airwaves – criticising the wisdom of the then Prime Minister, David Cameron’s, speech about the failure of multiculturalism on the day of a prominent EDL demonstration, holding joint press appearances with his Luton North counterpart, Kelvin Hopkins, and petitioning with Hopkins and local Councillors to ban the group’s march. In particular, he cited the potential for violence and the impact upon community relations as reasonable grounds to stop the EDL marching (*Luton on Sunday* 1st February 2011).

David Franks, Liberal Democrat Group Leader, also took a less confrontational line to the EDL’s presence in 2011. He admits to not being too sure in signing the 2011 letter calling on the ban of the EDL – suggesting that he is ‘not instinctively happy with banning things.’ (Franks 2015) In any event, he thought that the Home Office’s refusal ‘made [Luton’s] diverse population more determined that [it was] going to stick together and do something together.’ (ibid) In spite of Franks’ reticence, however, he made one of the most useful interventions in 2011. He wrote to the Home Office afterwards asking that the country and not just the town’s residents should shoulder the cost of the police operation. He was successful – with the Home Office agreeing to foot the £1.2 million bill for the day’s policing (Johnson 17th April 2011).

c) Summary

In summary then, the EDL’s February 2011 demonstration in Luton provoked an array of political and Council-led responses. In terms of the former, this was mainly around legal exclusion and direct action against the group while, in terms of the latter; it was about engaging the community in preparations for the march and combating negative media coverage around the event. On the day of the 2011 demonstration, however, it proved to be the most symbolically and

financially costly of the EDL marches in the town. Mobilising over 3,000 protesters and 1,000 counter protesters, it was able to bring Luton to a standstill - with shops boarded up and the town centre effectively on shut down for 24-hours. Moreover, despite applying for a ban, it was not granted. Local elites therefore did their best to signal their opposition to the group's presence and to ready the local community to withstand any tensions that may have had arisen as a result of the protest. In the end, however, these preparations were not enough to scotch the damage caused by the EDL to Luton's reputation and was something elites were keen to avoid at future EDL protest events.

7.4: Luton's Second EDL Demonstration (5th May 2012)

On 5th May 2012, the EDL returned to Luton to demonstrate against a 'Muslim group being allowed to march around the town hall' (*BBC News* 5th May 2012). This picked up upon an incident the previous October when another proscribed radical Islamist group, Muslims Against Crusades, were allowed to march in protest against a police raid (*Luton Today* 3rd October 2011). Moreover, the 2012 march was politically significant for the EDL: it marked the first demonstration after the formation of a joint venture with BNP offshoot, the British Freedom Party, a month prior (Townsend 28th April 2012). In the end, the 2012 demonstration attracted 1,500 EDL supporters and 1,000 'We are Luton' counter protesters to the South Bedfordshire town (*BBC News* 5th May 2012). In an improvement on the low-level disorder of the 2011 protest, only one arrest was made in either camp in 2012 - with 1,500 police officers from 22 forces across the country drafted in to maintain order (*BBC News* 5th February 2015). Again the EDL's presence came with a significant financial cost to the local area: the policing bill alone being well in excess of £800,000 (ibid).

a) Wider Preparations

The lack of disorder in 2012 wasn't a surprise to local elites, however. Unfortunately for the EDL, the group's 2011 demonstration sparked off a significant learning process within the town's council chambers about how they could better deal with this particular form of far-right protest. Not content with the EDL's ability to march up to the Town Hall and disrupt the local community, plans were set in motion to make sure that the rights of the community would be placed over and above the rights of protestors. The outcome of this was a

three-page document (Luton Borough Council February 2013), which outlined a new town centre policy for Luton. First formally voted in by Luton Borough Council in February 2013, this excluded any events from St. George's Square that were deemed as undermining 'commerce, cohesion and... community safety within the town' (Luton 1: 2015).

Part of the motivating force behind this new town centre policy was the key mental marker of metal barriers in 2011. As Hazel Simmons (2015) suggests: 'All the shop fronts had barriers on them. So we were determined as a town it wasn't going to happen again.' Moreover, another key motivating force was to issue the message that people could go about their daily business 'as usual' and protect the reputation of the town. Simmons continues: 'What we're trying to do is to get businesses trying to invest in Luton and if you get a front-page with all these barriers on it, who would want to come here and offer employment [to] people [who] might need [it]?' (ibid)

The impact of the new town centre policy was also significant to policing tactics at the 2012 demonstration. Following new orders from the Council, Bedfordshire police were able to move the demonstration up and out of the town centre and towards the Park Square area of Luton. Moreover, Luton Borough Council did something that, the likes of David Green, wished to do in Bradford – re-balancing the emphasis away from facilitating EDL protest and towards upholding the rights of the local community. The new town centre policy therefore was a very practical way of doing this without having to change primary legislation or having to wait on the Home Secretary to ban the EDL from marching.

This is not to say that the new policy was entirely unproblematic, however. Both the UAF and EDL strongly objected to the new policy. UAF leader, Weyman Bennett, stipulated that it was a 'big mistake' to prevent the UAF from assembling peacefully. Moreover, EDL leader, Tommy Robinson, stated that the town centre policy 'had nothing to do with the economy and the group was suffering discrimination.' (BBC News 26th April 2012) Moreover, the effect it has on local democracy and values of tolerance and pluralism is also dubious. For example, the new town centre policy now gives the Council and local police powers to block groups based on a whole host of nebulous factors. As

mentioned above, these include individuals or groups who pose a threat to local 'commerce', 'community cohesion', and the 'reputation' of the town (ibid). While being a major step forward in managing EDL protest, therefore, it could also be seen as a significant step back in terms of democracy, democratic pluralism and tolerance in the town – if used a draconian way.

Another change to come out of the EDL's return to Luton in 2012 was heightened community response. As Hazel Simmons (2015) comments:

'It's about Luton taking control of its community... It's the community saying, "actually this is our community we're going to protect our community". And I think that's been part of [our successful responses to the EDL] as well.'

This had two major manifestations in 2012:

The first major expression of this was a community counter-demonstration held under the banner of 'We Are Luton'. Organised by Unite Against Fascism, it involved a coalition of local faith communities and trade unions with over 1,500 people descending on Luton for the day's events as they marched from Wardown Park to St. George's Square. Both Kelvin Hopkins and Gavin Shuker lent their support to the initiative and spoke at the march in order to show that 'the EDL were not welcome here' and to 'celebrate our diversity' (*Unite Against Fascism* 4th May 2012). Moreover, the counter protest was also to show that Luton is 'one community and we must stand together in opposing the EDL.' (ibid)

A second sign of a heightened community response to the EDL's return in 2012 was a volunteering scheme. Over 100 volunteers from the local community wore yellow bibs on the day of the demonstration and acted as mediators between police and members of the community. According to a report about the scheme, volunteers also 'helped disseminate information, pick up and respond to community concerns in real time, and quash rumours.' (Ramalingam Dec 2012: 11) This provided a voice for the local community besides police liaison officers and was praised by the report as being 'particularly helpful' intervention when groups like the EDL comes to town (ibid).

While Luton's policing strategy and level of the community response changed, the more apolitical side of the Council's response remained the same. Like in

the run up to 2011 and in Birmingham post-2009, local shops and residents were encouraged to act as if it was 'business as usual.' (*ITV News* 25th April 2012) For example, Council leader, Hazel Simmons, insisted that the Council would 'support our businesses so they can trade as normal over the Bank Holiday weekend' (*BBC News* 26th April 2012). Moreover, other common themes included mentions of the EDL as not being welcome and unrepresentative of Luton. For example, on the day of the demonstration, Simmons was at pains to express her disappointment at the EDL's return and stressed that the day's events did not provide an accurate snapshot of Luton life (*BBC News* 5th May 2012). The motivation behind this was clear: to rehabilitate the town's reputation and to reduce the commercial impact of the EDL demonstrating in the town.

b) Political Responses

In terms of political responses, the variety in 2012 was not as extensive as in 2011. One significant change that happened, however, was MP for Luton South, Gavin Shuker, and his attitude towards direct action. Having abstained from the UAF demonstration in 2011, Shuker joined Kelvin Hopkins on the 'We are Luton' march. This change from passivity to confrontation was mainly about simply being more ready for the EDL's presence in 2012. For example, Shuker admits that he was slightly caught off guard by the EDL's 2011 demonstration: '...the first one ...was just unprecedented territory. We just didn't know what was going to happen.' (ibid) Shuker therefore simply had not time to formulate an adequate political response in 2011 – something he was keen to remedy in 2012. The change towards direct action was also catalysed by a deeper change in the way the 2012 counter protest was organised. As Shuker (2014) explains:

'Here [in 2012, it] was much more sense that this was about the community...[and] in particular to engage the mainstream of the Muslim community. Luton people vastly outnumbered the people from outside [in 2012] and I wouldn't think that that would be true of the first time.'

Moreover, in comparison to 2011, we also saw other evidence of learning amongst Luton's politicians. Sian Timoney, Labour Councillor for Farley, made a particularly mature intervention by warning counter protesters that 'emotions

run high and I would urge everyone to have a calm and peaceful protest.’ (Luton Today 25th April 2012) This was to prevent counter protesters from breaking their lines and running towards the EDL as well as to stop any actions that might have contributed negatively to the reputation of the town. This message, however, fell slightly flat as Timoney took a more belligerent tone elsewhere in 2012. For example, when talking to the far-left newspaper, *Socialist Worker*, Timoney stated that: ‘The EDL have threatened to come back to Luton every six weeks. I say they can sod off. We can come back every six weeks too.’ (*Socialist Worker* 5th May 2012)

In addition, 2012 saw Timoney’s Farley ward counterpart, Mahmood Hussain, come out to demonstrate at the ‘We are Luton’ counter demonstration. He saw his unconditional opposition as crucial. Drawing parallels to Nazism, Hussain was convinced that left unchecked the EDL would have risen to a higher and more influential stature in Luton (Hussain 2015). For example, he suggests that: ‘You have to take on these racist groups head on...if you were to ignore them, which is what happened during the Nazi’s, that people started laughing at the Nazis and saying, “Hitler is a joke”, but just look at the consequences of it.’ (ibid) Furthermore, Richard Howitt, MEP for the East of England, also came out to speak at the 2012 ‘We are Luton’ counter demonstration. He suggested that the EDL were a ‘foreign body’ in Luton and called upon Lutonians to reject the EDL ‘virus’ and ‘show we are immune to its threat.’ (Howitt 5th May 2012a) He also made links between the EDL and Oslo Bomber, Anders Breivik, insisting that the EDL’s recent venture into electoral politics must be ‘defeated’ (ibid). Finishing his address, Howitt rallied the audience by saying: ‘We will not be scared. We will not be provoked. [The EDL] are not Luton. We are Luton.’ (Howitt 5th May 2012b)

c) Conclusion

In summary, then, the decision by politicians on Luton Borough Council to draw - what one senior council officer refers to as ‘a line in the sand’ after the EDL’s 2011 demonstration - was a particularly significant event in the town’s management of EDL protest (Luton 1: 2015). This resulted in a new town centre policy that successfully excluded the EDL from the town’s key civic and shopping area as well as diminishing disorder on the day of the 2012 protest. It

also, however, had negative impacts – being widely derided by both the UAF and EDL as anti-democratic and discriminatory. It remains to be seen, however, whether the town centre policy has had such draconian effects. Moving on, when looking at the Council's other preparations, the EDL's 2012 protest spelt an increase in the role of community responses to the EDL when compared with 2011. In contrast, political responses to the EDL in 2012 were more muted - with some limited progression amongst one Labour Councillor (Sian Timoney) and Member of Parliament (Gavin Shuker MP) providing the only major departures when compared to political responses at the 2011 Luton protest.

7.5: Luton's Third EDL Demonstration (22nd November 2014)

2012 did not, however, spell the end of EDL activism in Luton. Two years after the May 2012 demonstration, the EDL came to visit the South Bedfordshire town again. Now leaderless, the group only mobilised 400 people in late autumn rain; this time to demonstrate against the authorities' perceived inability to stamp out 'Islamic extremism' in the Borough. Meanwhile, in quite a provocative act, around 100 'We Are Luton' counter protesters made their way to the Bury Park area of Luton to 'Stop the EDL' from entering the largely Asian area of the town (Parris-Long 13th November 2014). In the end, the march passed off reasonably peacefully – with six arrests being made and hundreds of police officers drafted in from as far afield as the East Midlands and Essex. Such a poor turnout was also a reflection on a broader EDL slump in support, post-Woolwich as well as an unsuccessful foray into local electoral politics. For example, in November 2012, EDL co-leader, Kevin Carroll, had taken part in Bedfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner Elections only to come second to last with only 10% of the vote (*Bedfordshire Borough Council* 15th November 2012). By November 2014, therefore, the EDL's grip on the town was receding. This was reflected in Luton's wider preparations and political response, to which we will now turn.

a) Wider Preparations

The response by the local Council and police in November 2014 rested in broad continuity with 2012. Like in 2012, the Council and Bedfordshire Police were on the 'front foot' when the EDL returned to Luton in November 2014. In its planning for the event, for example, police managed to push the procession of

the protest even further up the main shopping precinct towards the University of Bedfordshire. Whilst this did cause some minor disruption, it successfully moved the group out of the way on a key shopping day in the run up to Christmas. A marker of how things had changed since 2011, even the Leader of Luton Borough Council, Hazel Simmons, could boast that she was able to shop at the time of the 2014 protest. Moreover, the day's events were hardly picked up upon by the national press (*Luton Borough Council* 22nd November 2014) – a coup for Councillors concerned about the public image of the town, post-2009.

Like in previous demonstrations, another prong of the 2014 preparations was to get out the message that the town was 'open for business' and that shoppers should not feel discouraged from entering the town (*Luton Borough Council* 18th November 2014). In a communiqué on Luton Borough Council's website on the Tuesday before the protest, Council Leader, Hazel Simmons, reassured residents that the Council and Bedfordshire Police had been working together to 'minimise the disruption caused, that businesses and shops were supported to open as usual and that people were enabled to go about their normal daily lives.' (ibid) In addition, she also called for calm on the eve of the EDL protest and reassured local residents that measures had been put in place to 'ensure that disruption and inconvenience is kept to a minimum' (*ITV News* 21st November 2014). Finally, Luton Borough Council and Bedfordshire Police continued a text-messaging service they had started to use in 2011. Like in Bradford and Leicester, this was designed to quash rumours and keep local residents up-to-date with developments on the day's protest.

Not all was the same in terms of preparation for the EDL, however. One significant sign of change was the Council's readiness to better integrate community and local voices into the preparations for the forthcoming protest. As one former executive portfolio holder for social justice claims, the 'whole strategy in 2014 was much different' (Luton 2: 2015). For example, a key aim in 2014 was to make sure that people were 'feeling that they were being heard.' (ibid) Moreover, the meetings prior to the 2014 demonstrations allowed community members to get their concerns and needs across to council officials – facilitating a better dialogue between local residents and elites. It also allowed

for dialogue to flow the other way – with the Council using it to put out its key messages of ‘reassurance’ and ‘business as usual’ directly into the community.

b) Political Responses

As one might expect, the November 2014 demonstration did not see the same level - or variety - of political responses compared to previous EDL demonstrations in the town. Like at the EDL’s final demonstration in Birmingham, both of the town’s MPs (Kelvin Hopkins and Gavin Shuker) stayed away from the main protest site and made little or no interventions in the local press and in Parliament around the day’s events – with many limiting their response to signing a ‘We Are Luton’ and UAF ‘Unity Statement’ a few weeks before the protest (*Unite Against Fascism* 31st October 2014). Moreover, the response of the Council leadership was also restricted in 2014 - mainly expressing annoyance with the EDL’s return due to the group’s detrimental impact on the town’s reputation and economics prospects (*Luton Borough Council* 22nd November 2014). In a sense, however, the town had moved on from its initial anxiety – successfully accommodating and normalising the EDL’s presence within the rhythms of everyday life. In fact, the local Borough Council had become so adept in its dealings with the EDL that it was asked by the Department for Communities and Local Government to launch a partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. This was ‘to investigate the culture of the EDL’ and to disseminate best practice across other councils affected by EDL protest (*BBC News* 28th February 2012). In 2013, Luton therefore became a site of innovation for managing EDL protest.

Despite this overall muted political response in 2014, that year’s protest did not deter counter protesters. Sian Timoney was one amongst the 100 who turned out at the ‘We Are Luton’ counter rally in Bury Park. Timoney (2015) observes that the 2014 demonstration ‘went very peacefully and of course [due to the scale of EDL protest] it was a much much smaller scale overall.’ This type of principled response was reflected in Mahmood Hussain’s actions on the day as he also joined the counter protest. In an interview with the author, he suggested that he used his presence to reflect that – as an Asian, Muslim man - he was ‘not prepared in any shape or form to be intimidated by [the EDL].’ (Hussain

2015) This brand of direct action opposition was therefore alive and well in Luton in 2014 – albeit a diminished level.

c) Conclusion

In summary then, the EDL's November 2014 demonstration continued a trend of marked decline when compared to the group's first demonstration in the town three years previous. Whilst counter protesters were still happy to confront the EDL, many local elites chose to ignore the EDL's presence and made sure that the EDL's procession route did not affect the town centre. One important change in 2014 was, however, a heightened integration of local community within the Council public-order preparations for the protest event - consulting more widely on the concerns and needs of the local residents. By 2014, Luton's ability to adapt to far-right protest had also made the national stage. This was reflected in the then Communities and Local Government Secretary, Eric Pickles, asking the Council to set up a Special Interest Group on Far-Right Extremism in January 2013 – pooling expertise, sharing best practice and building capacity with other councils affected by this particular form of extremism (*Counterextremism.org* January 2014).

7.6: Conclusion

In sum: Luton has suffered more than most towns and cities within our sample over the past seven years. Being where the EDL emerged, subsequent demonstrations have not just been a test of how well they have been able to minimise the group's impact on the civic life of the town but also local politicians' ability to rehabilitate its reputation in the eyes of the national and international audiences away from the 'hotbed of extremism' media narrative. A hitherto understudied period of EDL protest, what has been found in this chapter is that the responses of Lutonian politicians to the EDL's post-2011 protests have been both exemplary and problematic: the introduction of the town's new policy allowing local elites greater control over EDL protest but also coming at a potential cost to democratic pluralism and tolerance. On a more positive note, public-order learning processes by the Council seem to have been extended on every occasion – with the EDL being moved further and further out of town at each subsequent protest. Moreover, the community has increasingly played a prevalent and integrated role in the Council's public-order approach to the group

– demonstrating the resolve of local politicians and residents to get to grips with particularly thorny cohesion issues when the EDL comes to demonstrate.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of political responses to the EDL's demonstrations have been exclusionary. Sian Timoney, David Franks, Mahmood Hussain, and Kelvin Hopkins MP all took robustly anti-racist, direct action approaches to the EDL. This was based on an anti-racist conviction or previous experience of anti-racist activism – with some differences as to the means of achieving this. Meanwhile, Hazel Simmons and Gavin Shuker MP tried to take more institutional and legal approach in opposing the EDL – resorting to changes in policy, preparations, and counter demonstrations to facilitate an anti-EDL response. This is not to stress a fundamental difference but a change in emphasis – ultimately uniting in an exclusionary action to restrict the EDL's protest space in the town.

The most exclusionary measure *par excellence*, however, was the Council's new town centre policy. This achieved what other leaders of councils across the country had struggled to do – adopting a robust way of placing community rights over the rights of demonstrators by excluding the EDL from a central civic space. In the end, however, serious questions can be raised about the legality of this response and how it has affected local democracy in the town. For example, questions still can be asked whether the town centre policy infringes upon people's right to peacefully assemble in the town. Moreover, it is unclear whether such measures when deployed in a draconian way could not simply be used to stifle democratic debate and dissent within Luton. The town centre policy therefore has nipped the EDL problem at the bud. In doing so, however, it has opened up a raft of other legal and moral questions about how far politicians should go in dealing with EDL protest. These issues will be picked up again in the conclusion. Before this, however, we will examine the case of responses to EDL protest in Tower Hamlets – the latest of many far-right mobilisations in the East London Borough.

Chapter Eight

Tower Hamlets – Anti-Islamic Protest in the East End of London

Chapter Outline

8.1: Introduction

8.2: Context

8.3: Tower Hamlets' First EDL Demonstrations (27th June 2009 and 20th June 2010)

8.4: Tower Hamlets' Second EDL Demonstration (3rd September 2011)

8.5: Tower Hamlets' Third EDL Demonstration (9th September 2013)

8.6: Conclusion

'East London has always been a hotspot between the far-left and the far-right and between community groups and those who are presenting simplistic extremist arguments and solutions to the complex problems of society. The EDL are the latest manifestation of racist organisations.' Jim Fitzpatrick (2014), MP for Poplar and Limehouse, commenting on historical mobilisations by the far-right and far-left in Tower Hamlets.

'You obviously have high profile groups both on sides of the EDL... [They] leave the disruption behind them and then it's the...community itself which has to pick up the pieces ... and reunite afterwards.' Peter Golds (2015), Conservative Group Leader on Tower Hamlets Borough Council, discussing the impact of EDL protest in Tower Hamlets.

8.1: Introduction

Tower Hamlets is a crucial area for studying far-right (and anti-fascist) activism in the UK. In 1936, the East London Borough laid host to the 'Battle for Cable Street' where 100,000 anti-fascist demonstrators blockaded a march by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. Moreover, this reputation extended into the early 1990's; when the area hosted scuffles between Anti-Nazi League and British National Party (BNP) activists as the BNP tried to secure an electoral victory in the Isle of Dogs area of Tower Hamlets. The EDL's most recent attempts to demonstrate in the Borough in 2011 and 2013, therefore, added another wave of far-right (and anti-fascist) activity to the already storied history of anti-minority activism in the area - albeit this time with a more anti-Islamic flavour.

Tower Hamlets is also a crucial area for studying the EDL and political responses to it. In the past five years, the Borough has gained a reputation for hosting some of the most high profile and disorderly demonstrations ever recorded by the group. For example, after a fairly low-scale and peaceful presence by the EDL in June 2009 and a cancelled demonstration the following year, action by the EDL escalated in September 2011 and September 2013 - when an estimated 1,000 and 500 of the group's protesters turned out respectively to highlight the problematic nature of 'radical Islamism' in Tower Hamlets. These provocative actions led to some of the highest arrest counts

witnessed at a single EDL protest – with nearly 300 counter-protesters arrested at the group’s September 2013 protest.

In this chapter, we will examine this latest wave of far-right activism and ask: how have local politicians and the Metropolitan Police Service responded to it? First, a detailed overview of the social and political history of Tower Hamlets will be given. This will examine the factors that have fuelled far-right mobilisations and responses in the Borough, as well as the more contemporaneous factors that may have informed EDL protest. In the second section of the chapter, we will move on to focus on demonstrations by the EDL over the past seven years – offering up a comparison between elite responses to the group in the cases of the 2009, 2011 and 2013 EDL protests. Finally, we will look at the significance of these mobilisations and counter mobilisations for the history of the Borough. We will also take a broader look at the demonstrable successes and failures when responding to this recent wave of anti-Islamic protest in Tower Hamlets. What we will find is that, while political responses to the group have been broadly successful, the operational policing response has not. As we shall see, this has not been a result of the lack of public-order management preparations by the Metropolitan Police Service, but as a direct result of local youths and militant anti-fascists being provoked into disorder by the EDL.

8.2: Context

a) De-industrialisation and Diversity in the East End

The East London Borough of Tower Hamlets grew to prominence in the 19th Century as a key naval hub for the expanding British Empire. Located next to the River Thames, several docks were created in the area to service trade and import goods - such as wine, wool and tobacco - from India and the Caribbean during the early 1800’s. As a result of this heightened economic activity and the arrival of Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe, the area’s population quickly expanded - experiencing a four-fold increase from just under 143,000 residents in 1801 to around 580,000 in 1891 (Kerrigan 1982: 40). Moreover, this prosperity continued well into the 20th Century. By 1938, 42% of British imports passed through the area (Eade 2000: 132). To this day, the docks stand testament to the area’s mercantile past – with the West India, Millwall, London, and St. Katharine’s still keeping their namesakes.

Added to this rich naval heritage, Tower Hamlets has also been host to an equally vibrant political and social scene during the 20th and late 19th Century. For example, the Borough hosted the ferment that would lead to the creation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1920's – with the likes of Lenin, Stalin and Rosa Luxemburg, all attending conferences in the area. Moreover, the prominent Suffragette, Sylvia Pankhurst, formed a breakaway East London Suffragettes movement in order to encourage activism by working-class women in the East End. Looking even further back, William Booth founded the Salvation Army in the area in August 1878 – offering up a unique blend of Christian mission and humanitarian aid to help the poor of Tower Hamlets. Finally, the East End also played a key role in establishing the trade union movement in England – with the 1889 London Dock Strike being one of the largest of its time.

Despite this early economic, social and political success, Tower Hamlets ran into economic difficulties from the mid-20th Century onwards. This was chiefly due to the decline of trade from the Empire and the area's inability to keep up with modern developments in the shipping trade. For example, colonial trade in London halved during the 1960s (ibid) and, by 1967, only carpet traders used the large warehouses that had been previously used to store other imported goods (*Port Cities London*). Moreover, the advent of containerisation during this period meant that most modern ships could not venture that far up the Thames; meanwhile, international competition saw an end to the area's thriving rag trade (Cox 2013: 393).

In the 1980's, and under the leadership of then Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, therefore, the London Docklands Development Cooperation (LDDC) redeveloped the area. The vision was to transform an industrial and maritime centre into a 21st Century 'water-city' (Eade 2000: 133). By 1991, the LDDC had completed its job, and turned what had become a relatively sleepy backwater into the UK's premier financial hub - with the likes of Barclays, HSBC, Citigroup and Morgan Stanley, all setting up their UK headquarters in the newly created Canary Wharf financial district. As one author suggests, this was typical of London's broader transition from an 'imperial Capital' to a 'global city' during this period (ibid).

In the shadow of dock cranes and warehouses, Tower Hamlets and the East End has, however, always been an area of great wealth but also of chronic social deprivation and poverty. During the 19th Century, for example, the East End 'rapidly expanded into a vast working-class area' (ibid 123) and became synonymous with the overcrowding, disease and criminality that now permeates popular culture. With a frequent turnover of seafarers and the presence of expensive and desirable goods, widespread criminality was the norm in the Victorian East End – with theft and prostitution amongst the Borough's key vices. Moreover, many of the poor people of London were forced to move to the area as a result of Government-sponsored slum clearance programmes. For the area's (mainly poor) residents, this resulted in rampant overcrowding and squalid living conditions that became the subject of Victorian novels by the likes of Dickens, Mayhew and Doré.

To this day, social disadvantage is still a large problem in the Borough. Despite housing enormously rich banking firms, most of Tower Hamlet's population still lead a deprived and overcrowded existence. For example, the Borough has the second highest rate of unemployment in London (*New Policy Institute (a)*) whilst child poverty is ten times larger when compared with London's most prosperous districts (*New Policy Institute (b)*). Tower Hamlets is also ranked amongst local authorities that have the highest number of areas described as 'most deprived' in England (Rogers 29th March 2011). Moreover, older pathologies still persist. In a 2007 report for London's Council, Tower Hamlets was identified as an area where 'disadvantage in income, health, housing and crime' were prevalent, as well as recording one of the highest population densities in London – with housing a real and pressing issue for the Borough's 254,100 residents (Hill 19th September 2014). As the *UK Polling Report* profile for the Borough's Poplar and Limehouse constituency highlights: 'The seat now contains incredible extremes, from extreme deprivation in the north of the seat to the gleaming skyscrapers and exclusive dockside developments of Canary Wharf in the South.' (Wells, May 2010)

Added to this (and like other towns and Cities in this study), Tower Hamlets has also seen numerous waves of migration over the past four centuries. As early as the 16th Century, for example, Huguenot's started arriving in the Borough.

Leaving the towns of Northern France, they continued their silk-weaving in the area – making Spitalfields ‘world famous for its figured silk and brocade’ (Eade 2000:126). More significantly, Ashkenazi Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe sought refuge in the Borough during the late 19th Century (Tartari 2013: 112). As a result, bakeries, jewellery shops and synagogues became key elements in the Borough’s built environment. This was until prosperous second and third generation Jewish settlers moved to London’s outer suburbs in the early 1970s (Eade 2000: 127). Moving forwards in time, the Borough was transformed again when another wave of migration occurred during the 1950s and 1970s. This time citizens of the Indian sub-continent came to Tower Hamlets (mainly from the newly created state of Bangladesh) and settled in the Brick Lane area of the Borough. This again saw another marked transition in the area’s built environment as Bangladeshi textile workers turned bakeries into curry houses, jewellery shops into sari emporiums and synagogues into mosques.

These two main waves of migration also transformed the East End Borough into one of the most diverse areas in the Greater London region. At the 2011 Census, for example, people of an ‘Asian’ or ‘Asian British’ background made up 41.1% of Tower Hamlet’s residents - with those of Bangladeshi origin representing nearly a third of the Boroughs populace (ONS 2011e). Moreover, there are 18 different ethnic groups in the Borough with 33% of households having more than one ethnicity (Jivraj and Simpson 2015). Adding to this ethnic diversity is Tower Hamlets’ religious diversity. At the 2011 Census, all major world religions were practised in the Borough – with Islam in the plurality, Christianity coming second and Hinduism third (ONS 2011f). This is again represented in the Tower Hamlets’ built environment – with the East London Mosque, Christ Church of Spitalfields and the Hindu Pragati Sangha Temple, all prominent local landmarks.

Despite such levels of diversity, community relations within Tower Hamlets are generally quite cohesive (Jones 6th May 2014). For example, according to a recent survey, 86% of local residents said that they get on well with their neighbours whilst 87% of people said community cohesion was good (Tower Hamlets 1: 2015). Moreover, and rather encouragingly, survey measures of

cohesion in Tower Hamlets have seen a 'steady improvement' over the course of the EDL's protest (Jones 6th May 2014). Perhaps another contributory factor to this is the conscious effort by the Borough Council to foster cohesion in the Borough. For example, Tower Hamlets Council has launched a 'One Tower Hamlets' Fund to help resource local projects that 'bring together residents.' (*Tower Hamlets Borough Council Website*) Suggestions on the 'One Tower Hamlet's website, for example, include joint projects to improve quality of life, tackle issues that undermine community cohesion, and build lasting relationships (ibid).

b) Far-right Mobilisations and Counter Mobilisations in the East End

In the past, Tower Hamlets' diversity has not, however, been without its difficulties. Strong identification by the Borough's white working-class residents with Tower Hamlets' Dockers and Cockney past has created significant resistance amongst this sector of the local population towards outsiders (Copsey 2008: 55). Moreover, local political parties have tried to seize upon this prejudice – with some going as far as labelling the local Liberal Democrats as the 'secret racist party' of London (ibid: 56). This also has not been helped by the presence of far-right activists and their testing of (quite effective) localised campaigns in the area – something that will be commented on below. This, plus population churns created by migration within the Borough, has meant that Tower Hamlets has become a key target of far-right (and anti-fascist) activity over the past eighty years. As Peter Golds (2015), Leader of the Conservative Group at Tower Hamlets Borough Council, comments: 'The history of the East End of London means we've had in the past all sorts of this lot starting [in the Borough] from ... Oswald Mosley onwards.'

The first wave of far-right activity in Tower Hamlets came in the early 20th Century and was principally directed towards the newly arrived Jewish population. In 1901, for example, one of the UK's first far-right groups, the British Brothers League, was founded in Stepney and came out to oppose the 'Jewish aliens' in the Borough (Copsey 2008: 52). Moreover, one of the first and most famous instances of far-right mobilisation was on 4th October 1936 when Sir Oswald Mosley decided to march with 1,900 members of his British Union of Fascists (BUF) from the Royal Mint to Limehouse. On the day of the event itself,

however, a large crowd of East End Jews and Communists turned out to oppose Mosley's Blackshirts and erected a barricade across the width of Cable Street. After anti-fascists scuffled with police, Sir Phillip Game of the Metropolitan Police ordered officers to disperse the BUF at Embankment (Renton 2001: 141). This skirmish has now forever entered anti-fascist and local popular memory as the 'Battle for Cable Street'.

Moving forty years on, Tower Hamlets' second wave of far-right activity came in the 1970s. This time it had a more openly-racial angle and was aimed towards the Borough's Bangladeshi residents. In May 1978, for example, three teenage boys murdered a 25-year-old local textile worker, Altab Ali, near Whitechapel road as he walked home from work (*London Behind the Scenes*). A combination of local election victories by the National Front and tightening of national legislation on immigration provided the context for mounting tensions in the Borough. More locally, the murder also came in the wake of other, non-fatal attacks on the Bangladeshi community with bricks thrown through windows and human excrement smeared on doors. Moreover, the National Front had become ascendant locally – obtaining 23% of the vote in Bethnal Green's St Peter's Ward that year (Ibid).

Anti-migrant hostility did not end with Altab Ali's death, however. In the 1990's, for example, Tower Hamlets became a key site of far-right electoral ascendance again; this time by the National Front's electoral successor, the neo-fascist British National Party (BNP). In September 1993, a by-election was held in the Borough's Millwall Ward after the resignation of the previous Labour incumbent. In the end, the BNP candidate and former HGV driver, Derek Beackon, became the party's first Councillor - with a margin of just 7 votes. This would not last long, however. The local Church and other faith organisations were able to outmanoeuvre the BNP's campaigning efforts the following year – unseating Beackon less than a year after taking office through their successful mobilisation of ethnic minority voters. Anti-Fascist Action and the Anti-Nazi League's 'Don't Vote for the Nazis' campaign did not aid this. Poorly timed, it was derided by one local clergyman as 'extremely destructive' to local efforts in countering the BNP (Copsey 2000: 178).

As mentioned above, contextual factors were important in the BNP's breakthrough. Firstly, the local Liberal Democrat and Labour Parties tried to exploit anti-immigrant feeling by suggesting they were only in favour of 'housing for whites' during the campaign (Copsey 2008: 55). Secondly, the local press were also involved in making the BNP look like a mainstream contender in the eyes of Tower Hamlets' residents. For example, the *East London Advertiser* uncritically reported the Beackon campaign and 'legitimise[d] fears about invasion and the destruction of traditional culture' (ibid: 149-150). Most of all, however, the BNP were seen amongst the local white working-class community as the only party to authentically pick up upon the sense of loss posed by the decline of the docks and despair at the visible rise of economic globalisation in Canary Wharf (ibid: 55-56). This, plus a more professionalised and community-based form of activism, created a potent cocktail for far-right success in the Borough. Such was its effectiveness that it was scaled up and rolled out by BNP during the early 2000's, buoying it to numerous local and national electoral successes across the country.

c) 'Islamic Extremism' and Political Corruption in Tower Hamlets

Not just previously successful far-right campaigns but the presence of 'Islamism' and political corruption in Tower Hamlets can, however, be posited for a group like the EDL to demonstrate in Tower Hamlets. Taking the former (and despite claims to the contrary), Islamic extremism is a fairly low level occurrence in Tower Hamlets. For example, in July 2012, two Muslim men from the Borough, Mohammed Shabir Ali and Mohammed Shafiq Ali, admitted to fundraising for overseas terrorist organisations (*The Evening Standard* 31st July 2012). Moreover, in June 2014, the Government proscribed a radical Islamist Group, the Sharia project, after a march against the sale of alcohol in the Brick Lane area of Tower Hamlets (Barnett 27th June 2014). Finally, a shop owned by another radical Islamist, Anjem Choudary, was raided in December 2014 as part of a broader anti-terror offensive by London's Metropolitan Police (Jeory & Perring 24th September 2014). Like in other areas targeted by the EDL, these show the fairly fringe and peripheral nature of radical Islamism in Tower Hamlets – with no high-profile cases or prominent local links to Jihadi terrorism.

It therefore seems to be EDL folklore which fuels the group's charge that it is a 'no-go zone' for non-Muslims.

Despite 'radical Islamism' being a misnomer, then, claims of political corruption and electoral fraud are slightly harder to shake off. As early as 2010, for example, allegations of electoral malpractice surfaced when the then Labour Candidate for the newly created Mayorship, Lutfur Rahman, was deselected and a Police investigation was set up to detect alleged breaches of electoral law (Hill 21st September 2010). This sorry saga was added to in November 2014 when fresh allegations emerged about local grants being given to benefactors close to the Mayor's office. So serious were the allegations that the then Conservative Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, had to appoint commissioners to step in and take over the running of some key functions at Tower Hamlets Borough Council (Radojev 23rd April 2015). The closing chapter of this period came in April 2015, when - in an equally dramatic turn of events - 'Tower Hamlets First' Mayor, Lutfur Rahman, was finally removed from office over electoral fraud during his re-election campaign (*BBC News* 23rd April 2015). The Electoral Commission also struck Rahman's 'Tower Hamlets First' party off the electoral register – noting that the party had consistently underreported its finances since it was set up in September 2013 (*Electoral Commission* 29th April 2015).

Underlying this perception of political corruption, however, is the role of 'biraderi' or ethnic kinship networks in the Borough's electoral politics. While not unique to Tower Hamlets (see Peace et al 2014), it has been an important factor when looking at the drivers and causes of political corruption in the Borough. In an interview in 2013, for example, Lutfur Rahman indicated the importance of kinship networks within the Borough. When describing his own model of mayoral governance, for example, Rahman suggested that religious groups were the 'backbone of Tower Hamlets' and that 'nurturing community' meant 'building up religious outfits and charities', such as mosques, synagogues and lunch clubs (*The Economist* 9th November 2013). Moreover, Rahman reportedly used Council funds for political ends in this matter – withdrawing financial support from charities who liaised with opposing political parties (ibid).

This is not to say that such clan politics inevitably leads to financial and political corruption. In its purist form, it can mobilise voters who are not involved in politics and can be used to get over knowledge and language barriers experienced by minority communities. Moreover, it can also help minority candidates at the selection stage by getting over the hurdles of prejudice and racial bias amongst the majority population and onto the ballot paper. As demonstrated in Tower Hamlets, however, such a style of politics is also open to abuse. As one research report suggests, ‘biraderi’ - or the recasting of clan structures as kinship networks in the arena of electoral politics - can ‘undermine the principle of voters’ individual and free choice through a range of social pressures’ (Sobolweska et al 2015: 6).

As expected then, these episodes have been used to add grist to the EDL mill. In a speech at the group’s September 2011 demonstration in Tower Hamlets, EDL leader, Tommy Robinson, suggested that ‘Rahman was kicked out of the Labour Party for his Islamist extremist ideology’ and ‘link[s] to Islamist organisations.’ (*Slacker 167* 3rd September 2011) Moreover, in a direct reference to allegations of misappropriation of funds, Robinson further stated that Rahman ‘has taken a billion pound of tax payers money’ to fund ‘madrassas, segregation, and apartheid’ in the East of End of London (*ibid*). While the veracity of Robinson’s allegations are dubious, then, the EDL’s ability to seize on political corruption and then link it to the problematic nature of Islam provided a potent framing device when the group visited the East London Borough in 2009, 2011 and 2013.

8.3: Tower Hamlets’ First EDL Demonstrations (27th June 2009 and 20th June 2010)

Continuing a history of anti-minority protest visiting the Borough, the EDL launched its first demonstration in Tower Hamlets in June 2009; this time targeted at the centre of the religious life of the Borough’s 87,696 Muslims, the East London Mosque in White Chapel. Part of an attempt to develop the reach of the fledgling movement, only 40 EDL protesters managed to parade through a local market – singing ‘Rule Britannia’ - before being moved on by the police (Copsey 2010:8). EDL insider, Billy Blake, put the weak showing down to leadership failure – with event organiser, David Shaw, deciding not to turn up on

the day of the demonstration (Blake 2011:39). Whatever the circumstances, the EDL's first effort to branch out away from Luton was a resounding failure.

A year later, on 20th June 2010, the EDL attempted to demonstrate in Tower Hamlets again; this time outside the East London Mosque and against that year's Islamic Forum of Europe conference. In anticipation of the EDL's presence, however, conference organisers decided to cancel the conference - amidst fears of the risk posed (Hill 21st June 2010). Accordingly, the EDL cancelled their demonstration – triumphantly claiming that they had 'achieved a great victory by putting pressure on Tower Hamlets council to force the cancellation of the controversial conference.' (*English Defence League Website* 10th June 2010) In a bizarre turn of events, however, the anti-fascist 'Unity' march organised to counter that Sunday's EDL demonstration still went ahead. Key political and religious leaders from the Borough came out to support the event, and implied that the EDL did not even need to be present in Tower Hamlets in order to provoke a large-scale political response.

8.4: Tower Hamlets' Second EDL Demonstration (3rd September 2011)

Arriving within the provocative context of the London riots and Anders Breivik's Oslo terror attacks, the EDL mobilised for the first time properly on 3rd September 2011. Reasons for the march vary, but included defending of freedom of speech and depicting Tower Hamlets as a 'no-go' area for non-Muslims (*English Defence League Website* 3rd September 2011). In an embarrassing blow for the group, the EDL were however forced to hold a static rally at Aldgate on the day of the demonstration (Townsend 3rd September 2011). Around 1,000 EDL protesters turned out on the day with 44 EDL protesters arrested for their own safety as 100 local teenagers launched an attack on one of the group's buses after the demonstration (*BBC News* 4th September 2011). 1,500 counter protesters were also present at the demonstration. Based on intelligence that a sizeable number of unaligned counter protesters would turn up, the Metropolitan Police also put on what was described as a 'significant' operation – with around 3,000 police officers either on duty or held in reserve (*LBC* 2013). In the end, however the protest ended with the group in turmoil as the EDL's leader, Tommy Robinson, was arrested on breach of bail (Sam-Daliri 6th September 2011). It was, however, a success in terms of publicity for the group. As one

senior police officer states: 'because it got a Home Secretary ban and everything else, it became very high profile.' (Tower Hamlets 2: 2015)

a) Wider Preparations

The announcement of the EDL's intent to protest in July 2011 came as shock to local elites in Tower Hamlets. As the Leader of the Conservative Group of Councillors, Peter Golds, comments: whilst far-right protest was not a novel occurrence in the Borough, the EDL were still 'relatively new' at the time of the September 2011 protest (Golds 2015). In particular, local politicians were worried about the damage such a group would do to community relations, the potential repercussions it would have for the local Muslim community and the reaction it would provoke – particularly amongst local Asian men trying to defend their families and local community. As one senior council leader at the time of the first protest comments: 'it was learning curve for me... I think everyone was learning.' (Tower Hamlets 1: 2015)

Moreover, the first EDL protest came at an awkward time for Londoners and the East End more generally. Only a month earlier, places like Tottenham and Eltham had experienced one of the most disorderly periods in recent memory as looters rampaged through shops and set fire to buildings. Fortunately, no major incidents occurred in Tower Hamlets, but this disorder was particularly weighing on the minds of local policing elites as they prepared for the EDL's 2011 protest. For example, when commenting on the policing operation, one senior police officer stated that 'in August we had serious disorder in London and also that resulted in increased tension within our communities. What we've had to do is look at all those factors...'(LBC 2013) Moreover, the aims and objectives of the 2011 EDL Tower Hamlets operation were firmly tied within the parameters of getting London back to 'business as usual'. As Chief Superintendent at the time, Julia Pendry, noted: 'Following the appalling disorder in London in recent weeks, it's important London, its communities and businesses, can return to normality...' (BBC News 2nd September 2011)

Amid fears of a repeat of the riots, one of the first policing responses to the announced EDL demonstration was a ban on the group marching into the Borough. For example, in early August 2011, Tower Hamlets Borough Council passed a resolution calling on both the Metropolitan Police and the Home

Secretary to ban the EDL's demonstration (*Tower Hamlets Borough Council* 13th July 2011). Moreover, on 25th August 2011, the Metropolitan police announced that it was applying for a march ban on all demonstrations for thirty days after the 2nd September (Hill 25th August 2011). This was granted a few days later by the Home Secretary, Theresa May, who noted her concern about the need for communities and property to be protected (Walker 26th August 2011). This was again welcomed by the Metropolitan Police's Chief Superintendent, Julia Pendry, who added: 'our message is clear: we do not want people coming into the areas to attend these events' (ibid). Such an intervention was, however, significant – for the first time since the 1981 Brixton riots the Metropolitan Police had issued a blanket ban on demonstrations in the Capital. As Pendry noted at the time: 'we do not take [the EDL's presence] lightly.' (*BBC News* 2nd September 2011)

The blanket ban did not, however, receive a wholly warm reception and was subject to significant criticism. In an Op-Ed column for the *Guardian*, philosopher, Nina Power, objected to the measure as 'incredibly foolhardy', especially as it had the potential to stop an event commemorating the 75th anniversary of the 'Battle of Cable Street' (Power 30th August 2011). In addition, anti-fascist groups, in particular, saw the ban on their demonstration as a 'complete overreaction' that would prove counterproductive (Walker 26th August 2011). Moreover, Unite Against Fascism launched a petition on 26th August 2011 to re-install their right to march – suggesting that it was a 'huge attack' on the human rights and civil liberties of counter demonstrator (Unite Against Fascism 26th August 2011). The irony of the UAF's previous calls for an EDL march ban were not, however, wasted on one *Daily Telegraph* columnist, who stated that: 'In finding itself banned, Unite Against Fascism has fallen victim to its own brand of boneheaded illiberalism.' (O'Neil 29th August 2011)

While the riots were important context in September 2011, the learning which policing elites used when it came to the EDL's protest originated from previous EDL mobilisations and a shift in Metropolitan Police public-order management after the April 2009 G20 protests. For example, one Chief Superintendent at the time of the 2011 protest, recalls the EDL's demonstration against the building of a Mosque in Harrow as particularly informative – especially in the treatment of

EDL counter-protest. The reaction of the community against being penned in with Unite Against Fascism suggested to officers that you couldn't just 'separate the EDL as baddies and everybody else the good guys.' (Tower Hamlets 2: 2015) Moreover, the EDL were one of the first major protest groups to be subject to recommendations for containment to come out of the G20 protests. One of the strategies on the day of the 2011 protest therefore was a 'no surprises' approach which dictated that: 'Protesters and the public should be made aware of likely police action in order to make informed decisions.' (HMIC July 2009: 10) This was implemented through close liaison with the EDL (as well as local community and faith groups) about the location and organisation of the protest. The rationale behind this being that: 'as police, we can't do it ourselves. We need to the community to support us.' (Tower Hamlets 2: 2015)

The second set of preparations was the adoption of a broad media campaign to engage with the community and provide information about the forthcoming march. For example, in the week before the demonstration, Lutfur Rahman urged Tower Hamlets' residents not to 'support any initiatives designed to force confrontation' or defy the ban – suggesting that people should remain peaceful instead (Sam-Daliri 2nd September 2011). Moreover, on the Borough Council website, Rahman, along with the Borough's police commander, warned anyone planning to 'come to the borough to protest against the EDL to stay away.' (*Tower Hamlets Watch* 3rd September 2011) This robust media strategy was therefore designed to make sure that there was minimal confrontation on the day of the demonstration.

Added to this more mediatised form of community engagement was direct contact and meeting with Tower Hamlets Civil Society in the run up to the 2011 demonstration. For example, as one Tower Hamlet's Cabinet Member at the time comments (Tower Hamlets 1: 2015), they 'listened to all parties' in terms of Council officers, Councillors, community leaders and the organizations with Tower Hamlets and then acted on their 'feeling and concerns.' As this Cabinet Member went on to suggest, the main message was that: 'we had to make sure that they were protected' and that the community rather than political will was being expressed in planning for the day's events (ibid).

Moreover, a youth strategy was drawn up by the Council to make sure that young, Asian men within the community did not confront the EDL. This mainly involved ensuring young people stayed in the Borough's youth centres while the demonstration was taking place. Ultimately such activities, however, proved ineffective for a small group of local teenagers. A total of 100 in number attacked one of the EDL's buses as activists left the demonstration (*BBC News* 4th September 2011). Bricks and stones were thrown as the Metropolitan Police were forced to use a London double-decker bus to move the besieged protesters out of harm's way (*ibid*). As one senior police officer on the day commenting on the 2011 incident suggested: '[In the end] I don't think it came with the EDL and the politics. I think it came to: "we are now going to fight for the protection of our Borough."' (Tower Hamlets 2: 2015) In some senses then, police preparations were quickly rendered futile as local youths took it upon themselves to defend their community.

The third set of preparations that the local authority engaged in was to encourage a community response to the EDL's protest. This came under the banner of 'United East End', a coalition of Trade Unions, anti-racists and community groups set up in June 2010 to oppose the EDL's planned demonstration that year (*Counterfire* 9th June 2010). Supporters included many of the Borough's local politicians (Hill 21st June 2010). In the run up to the 2011 demonstration, a large rally of about 700 people was held at the London Muslim Centre on 31st July. This drew together key politicians, such as Lutfur Rahman and former London Mayor, Ken Livingstone, and was designed to act as a 'call for unity against the EDL and urge the biggest possible turnout' at the UAF's counter rally (*Unite Against Fascism* 30th July 2011). On the day of the September demonstration, they organised a counter rally to 'celebrate the East End's diversity and express its opposition to the racist English Defence League.' (*Unite Against Fascism* 22nd July 2011) Even Lutfur Rahman, then newly elected mayor of Tower Hamlets, encouraged people to turn out at the counter rally – suggesting that: 'If we stay at home we're leaving young people on the streets by themselves.' (Ward 23rd August 2011)

b) Political Responses

One of the most prolific campaigners in the lead up to the 2011 demonstration was Labour MP for Bethnal Green and Bow, Rushanara Ali. As early as 2010 she had already spoken at the 'unity rally' organised in opposition to the phantom EDL demonstration in the Borough that year (Hill 21st June 2010). Moreover, in July 2011 when the first, *actual* EDL demonstration was announced, she started researching previous policing responses to the EDL – submitting a question in Parliament about Home Office guidance on the matter (HC Deb 12th July 2010). More importantly, Rushanara Ali helped to organise the 25,000 signature strong petition that called for a ban of the EDL's 3rd September rally (Lowles 17th August 2011). Finally, on the day of the demonstration itself, Rushanara welcomed the Home Secretary's decision to ban the EDL – calling for 'calm in our community' and stating that the petition had shown the East End 'to be a powerful force in its opposition to the EDL march.' (Ali 25th August 2011)

In addition to this more liberal-legal stance, Rachel Saunders, Leader of the Labour Group on Tower Hamlets Borough Council, also mounted an exclusionary response. In the month preceding the demonstration, Saunders had written an in-depth piece on her own personal website about the EDL's forthcoming demonstration. In a post, dated 10th August, Rachel urged that the EDL be banned from Tower Hamlets – suggesting that their presence would create 'devastation' on par with the 2011 riots. Drawing on local collective memory, Saunders suggested that it would require a community mobilisation on a similar scale to the 'Battle for Cable Street' in order for the EDL to be successfully counteracted. A ban, she believed, would avoid this (Saunders 10th August 2011). In a further post, Saunders also added her support for the ban on the day of the demonstration itself. Writing on the Labour Party activist website, *Labour List*, she again referred to Tower Hamlets' history of anti-fascism and suggested that banning the group through legal means would have spared the local community from mounting its own response (Saunders 9th September 2011).

One of the least likely direct action responses on the day of the 2011 demonstration, however, came from Lutfur Rahman, the Borough's newly

elected mayor. Defying the ban, Rahman marched with fellow Councillors from the East London Mosque to the 'UAF/ United East End' protest site and past Whitechapel station (*Tower Hamlets Watch* 3rd September 2011). This was despite his earlier warning residents not to cause confrontation or for the assembly of counter protests (Sam-Daliri 2nd September 2011). Moreover, he gave a speech at the rally – thanking those who had turned up and encouraging people to stand in opposition to the EDL (ibid). He was joined on the day by his two deputy mayors, Oliur Rahman and Ohid Ahmed, with the latter wishing to send a clear message that the EDL were not welcome in Tower Hamlets (Rahman 2015). This was the continuation of an exclusionary response – started when Oliur had previously signed a petition against the EDL's phantom demonstration in June 2010 (*Unite Against Fascism* 7th June 2010). He deemed the United East End counter-rally in September 2011 important - suggesting it was vital 'that people come together and express their view in a lawful way, making sure that the community they live and work in is not divided.' (Rahman 2015)

The Labour Group and the mayor's office were not the only political actors present in responding to the EDL in 2011, however. Tower Hamlet's MP, Jim Fitzpatrick, and London Assembly Member, John Biggs, wrote to Theresa May calling on her to ban the march (Saunders 10th August 2011). Moreover, the leader of the Conservative Group, Peter Golds, was also very active. A month before the demonstration, he also signed a petition calling a ban on the EDL (*London Assembly* 10th August 2011), wrote to the Home Secretary calling for a ban, and threatened to link arms outside the East London Mosque - if a march ban wasn't secured (Miah 22nd August 2011). Golds' motivation for lobbying for a ban in 2011 was based on the disruptive and divisive reputation of the EDL as well as his belief of the group as not merely anti-Islamic but 'racist' (Golds 2015). In the end, he decided to stay away from the EDL protest - suggesting that a confrontational approach would have been 'counterproductive' and would have led to heightened disorder and tensions in the Borough (ibid). Fortunately for Golds, a ban was secured.

c) Conclusion

In sum: the EDL's first major demonstration in Tower Hamlets was a testing time for police and local elites alike. Here was a group coming into one of London's most ethnically diverse Borough's, just after one of the worst waves of rioting for thirty years, to protest at the presence of 'radical Islamism'. Fortunately, however, disorder was limited and a ban was secured by authorities that prevented the EDL from rampaging through key Muslim areas of Tower Hamlets. This was mainly as a result of political elites who rallied behind the cause of petitioning for a ban and restricted themselves to passive interventions in order stop the group. In addition, Council Group Leaders, like Rachel Saunders and Peter Golds, were able to evoke the symbolic history of anti-fascism within the Borough to rally the community against being provoked by the EDL. Unfortunately, however, the day's events were blighted by one incident in which some of Tower Hamlets' young people decided to confront the EDL at the last minute. The EDL's presence in Tower Hamlets in 2011 did however have one positive impact. In the light of the September protest and the sense of 'togetherness' fostered by the event, projects were set up to strengthen relationships between different communities (Jones 6th May 2014).

8.5: Tower Hamlets' Third EDL Demonstration (9th September 2013)

The EDL return to Tower Hamlets in the autumn of 2013 came amidst a burst of activity for the protest group. Riding on the wave of the Woolwich terror attacks, the EDL organised over 60 demonstrations, like the one in Leicester, as a memorial to Lee Rigby. According to official EDL sources (*English Defence League Website* 1st September 2013), however, the Woolwich attacks were not the main motivation for the EDL's 2013 demonstration in Tower Hamlets. Repeating their initial reason for protesting in 2011, the group still hoped to seize on scattered reports of 'Islamism' within Tower Hamlets to suggest that it had become a non-Muslim 'no-go' zone (ibid). Despite heightened anti-Muslim sentiment post-Woolwich (Feldman and Littler July 2014), however, the group were fortunately unable to capitalise on these events; only 500 EDL protesters turned out to demonstrate in Tower Hamlets in 2013.

This did not however see a diminution in the scale of disorder on the day. In 2013, 14 EDL demonstrators (including the group's leader) and 286 counter

protesters were arrested after a group of militant anti-fascists broke away from the UAF protest and towards the EDL's main protest site in Aldgate (Childs 9th September 2013). While the Metropolitan Police successfully prevented any clashes from happening, the act of counter protesters surging towards the EDL at Aldgate (and trying to blockade the EDL's march route at Mansell Street) led to one of the worst scenes of disorder at an EDL demonstration. With the policing operation and overtime for the 2013 EDL demonstration costing £1.9 million alone, the Borough's mayor, Lutfur Rahman, commented that it was 'further evidence' for a blanket policy of banning EDL marches in the Borough (Bailey 4th November 2013).

a) Wider Preparations

Unlike in 2011, however, a march ban was not successfully secured in the case of the EDL demonstration. In terms of policing interventions, the Borough commander instead decided to use powers under Sections 12 and 14 of the 1986 Public Order Act to alter the course of the EDL's march route – stopping it a third of a mile shorter than expected (HC Deb 5th September 2013). This was designed to prevent the protest from passing religious buildings or residential areas – meaning that the group were only allowed to skirt the perimeter of the Borough. The reason for this was all too clear; the Chief Superintendent at the time, Jim Read, suggesting that taking the group any closer would have been 'unnecessarily intimidating and likely to cause disorder and disruption.' (Taylor 6th September 2013) A full ban was, however, considered as going too far. As Read stated at the time: 'We must also uphold the right to protest, it is a fundamental part of our society.' (BBC News 4th September 2013) In the end, the EDL unsuccessfully challenged these restrictions, taking their plea to the High Court (*East London Advertiser* 6th September 2013).

Despite the sensible decision taken by the police to re-route the EDL, many people were critical of the efficacy and proportionality of the policing response during the 2013 protest. For example, local anti-fascists from United East End – aggrieved that they had not been kept up-to-date with plans - criticised the police for being indecisive and not finalising their policing strategy until the last minute (*Searchlight* 3rd September 2013). In addition, other radical-left groups criticised the police for using particularly heavy-handed tactics on the day of the

protest – with a record number of over 3,000 officers were deployed on the day of the demonstration, and officers using batons to stop protesters breaking police lines (Johnston and Kavanagh, 8th September 2013). Ultimately, however, order was maintained on the day of the protest and local residents were kept safe – a sign of a successful policing responses.

Like in 2011, there was a high-profile community response to the announcement that the EDL was coming again in 2013. United East End spent the weeks leading up to the demonstration distributing leaflets and organising meetings to mobilise a community response. Moreover, six days before the protest, the group held a press conference attended by political and religious leaders in the Borough – reiterating how they would, like anti-fascists ‘of old’, block the EDL from entering the Borough if needed (*Searchlight* 3rd September 2013). In the end, not feeling their calls for a ban were being listened to, they organised a sizeable counter demonstration on the day of the EDL protest at Altab Ali Park (De Peyer 25th July 2013). All-in-all, an estimated 5,000 counter protesters descended on Tower Hamlets in 2013 – almost ten times the EDL contingent and one of the largest counter protests reported in this study.

In addition, lessons were learnt from the outbreaks of violent disorder at the previous demonstration in 2011. Oliur Rahman, then Deputy Mayor, was charged with the local authority response in 2013. In the run up to the demonstration, Rahman made sure that he sent a ‘very clear message’ to the young people of the Borough to ‘behave and control themselves’ (Rahman 2015). This was a clear attempt to avoid provocation, misbehaviour and a repeat of scenes in 2011. Moreover, in 2013, a lot of work was done with interfaith and community organisations to make sure that news of the Council’s preparations got out into the community. Finally, Oliur oversaw preparations to avoid the EDL demonstration disrupting the community or damaging ‘any heritage or any buildings in the Borough.’ (ibid) This was rooted in the understanding that the EDL would target ‘Muslim institutions, i.e. mosque and madrassas in some cases.’ (ibid) Fortuitously, there was no repeat of disorder generated by local youths in 2013.

b) Political Responses

Political responses, whilst not qualitatively different, were on a heightened scale in 2013. For the first time in 2013, MP for Poplar and Limehouse, Jim Fitzpatrick, publically campaigned against the EDL protest. This was due to a personal objection at the group being able to march near a memorial on Merchant Navy Day – something that particularly struck a chord with Fitzpatrick who was made a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights in 2011 (Fitzpatrick 2014). Moreover, Fitzpatrick was sensitive to the context in 2013, seeing the EDL's decision to demonstrate in London post-Woolwich as 'clearly provocative' (ibid). In addition, his actions in 2013 came as part of a 'joint strategy' between himself and his Bethnal Green and Bow counterpart, Rushanara Ali MP. It also facilitated part of what he saw as his 'spokesperson' role as an MP – voicing discontents amongst the community he represented and ensuring that appropriate action was done to address this (ibid).

In anticipation of the EDL's march, therefore, Fitzpatrick put considerable effort into campaigning against the EDL's presence. For example, when the EDL announced its march, Fitzpatrick vowed to do all he could to stop it - insisting that the EDL and their 'brand of hate' had no place in the Borough (De Peyer 14th May 2013). Moreover, in a joint letter with Rushanara Ali just a few weeks before the demonstration, he wrote to the Policing Minister, Damian Green, stressing his 'firm belief' that the EDL's demonstration posed a 'serious threat to both individuals and wider Tower Hamlets community cohesion' and that the group's 9th September 2013 demonstration should be banned (*Channel 4 News* 31st August 2013). Finally, he raised the issue of the EDL march being allowed to go ahead on Merchant Navy Day in a House of Commons debate – calling for the EDL to be 'peaceful' and that the Tower Hill memorial be protected (HC Deb 5th September 2013). In the end, Fitzpatrick (2014) believed that: the 'Police clearly felt they were able to keep control of that situation and in the end they probably just about did.'

Rachel Saunders, still Leader of the Labour Group, was also heavily involved in campaigning for a ban - both inside and outside of the Council Chamber. In September 2013, for example, she stated at a press conference hosted by 'United East End' that the EDL would not be allowed to march through Tower

Hamlets – promising that the local authority would make sure that ‘the police take responsibility to make sure they do not’ (*Searchlight* 3rd September 2013). In the same month, she also supported a motion within Tower Hamlet’s Council Chamber that committed Councillors to do all they could in banning the group (*Tower Hamlets Borough Council* 18th September 2013). Striking a parallel with 2011, Saunders attended the ‘United East End’ community counter demonstration at Altab Ali Park.

In comparison to 2011, Lutfur Rahman took a more prominent public campaigning role when the EDL returned in September 2013. For example, as early as 23rd August, the Mayor wrote a joint letter with other Senior UK politicians to the *Guardian* newspaper calling on the Home Secretary to ban the group’s march. This was based on the potential for ‘violence against local communities, property and the police.’ (Lock 21st August 2013) In addition, the Mayor showed particular verve when it was made known that the Metropolitan Police was not banning the EDL from marching – putting together a legal challenge against the Metropolitan Police for not stopping the group (De Peyer 30th August 2013). Finally, and before the September 2013 demonstration, Rahman also took particular offence with the EDL using Altab Ali Park - suggesting that it was ‘deeply provocative and gratuitous attempt by the EDL.’ (Unite Against Fascism 4th September 2013) Meanwhile, on the day of the demonstration, he spoke at the UAF counter rally – suggesting that he was ‘very fed up’ with the EDL’s demonstrations and that Tower Hamlets residents ‘just want[ed] to get on with [their] normal lives.’ (Townsend & Jenkins 8th September 2013)

Rahman’s Deputy, Oliur, also took the similar direct action approach to the EDL’s presence in 2013. He spoke at the UAF counter rally on the day of the demonstration – suggesting that the EDL were not ‘going to be welcome today, not ever’ and reiterating the importance of remaining united (*Fourman Films* 9th September 2013). Moreover, in the coming weeks, Oliur, like Rachel Saunders, proposed a Council motion that committed Councillors to do all they could to ban any forthcoming EDL demonstrations. When interviewed, Oliur (2015) insisted that a united view between politicians is an essential ingredient for success when the EDL comes to demonstrate – positing that the EDL ‘shouldn’t

be allowed to come to our Borough to divide our communities.’ Oliur (2015) also believed that Islamic extremism should be dealt with in the same way as the EDL – suggesting that such criminality and ‘evil’ needed to be rooted out of all communities and that their ‘hated message’ was not welcome. He was keen to avoid any ‘unnecessary tension’ in the Borough in 2013 (ibid). Another member of the Tower Hamlets First mayoral team, Councillor Ohid Ahmed, also turned out at the UAF counter rally on the day of the 2013 protest. He gave a speech in which he stated that there was ‘no room for the EDL in Tower Hamlets, these are our streets, and we are united and we will be united in the future, and we will make sure that the EDL doesn’t come in our Borough.’ (*Fourman Films* 9th September 2013)

Finally, the Conservative Group Leader on the Council, Peter Golds, was conspicuous by his absence in 2013. In the run-up to the demonstration, Golds made sure that his antipathy towards the EDL returning to the Borough was known by requesting for his vote on anti-EDL motion be noted in the minutes (*Tower Hamlets Borough Council* 18th September 2013). Moreover, in a re-run of 2011, Golds heeded police advice on the day of the demonstration and stayed away from the protest site – deciding to ignore the chaos caused by the EDL and choosing instead to carry on with his normal business of a constituency surgery in the morning and a social event in the evening (Golds 2015). In the interim, when the EDL had planned to demonstrate in nearby Walthamstow, Golds stuck to his previous view that the EDL were an ‘inflammatory group’ and that the Home Secretary was right to ban the group on that occasion (Hirst 25th October 2012). In the end, however, Golds believed that a unified response had been side-lined in 2013. The first factor to contribute to this was divisiveness generated by Lutfur Rahman’s May 2014 Mayoral campaign whilst the other was the unfortunate incident of the local Labour Party organising a barbeque on the same day as the demonstration (De Peyer 29th August 2013). The latter incident being used by opponents to question the seriousness of Labour attempts to combat the EDL.

c) Conclusion

In sum: the EDL’s return to the East End in September 2013 came amidst as equally inauspicious circumstances as the first. A few months after the

Woolwich terror attacks and a subsequent wave of anti-Muslim attacks (Feldman and Littler July 2014), 2013 saw one of the largest arrest counts at an EDL protest. This heightened arrest count was partially to do with the immediate context but was also due to the sizeable presence of militant anti-fascists on the day of the demonstration - desiring to break police lines and confront the EDL. Like in 2009 and 2011 then, it was the EDL's 'avowed opponents' who complicated policing interventions through provocation by the EDL.

Turning to political responses, these were more sizeable and broader-based than in 2011 – with the local Mayor, Lutfur Rahman, and MP for Poplar and Limehouse, Jim Fitzpatrick, joining the ranks in support of banning the group. In the end, however, two important political figures were all-but-absent in 2013. The first was Rushanara Ali who - though prominent in the case of 2011 - took a lower level role in that year's campaigning; instead she relied on a more collaborative approach with her neighbouring Parliamentary counterpart, Jim Fitzpatrick MP. The second was Conservative Group Leader, Peter Golds, who decided not to campaign on the issue in 2013, keeping his line of staying away from the EDL march.

8.6: Conclusion

Tower Hamlets holds an iconic status within EDL circles. With a high percentage of Muslim residents and one of London's largest mosques, the East London Borough has emerged in EDL 'folklore' as geographic spectre of (what the protest movement deems to be) the 'problematic face of Islam in UK society today'. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, however, the extent to which such caricature exists in reality is highly debatable. For instance, there have been no high-profile cases of Islamic extremism or 'no-go' areas in the Borough. Moreover, there have only been largely spurious and unfounded accusations about the influence of 'Islamism' at the party-political level – with electoral and financial malpractice being the only major instance of political corruption in the Borough.

This aside, however, such a potent frame has meant that the EDL's presence in Tower Hamlets has presented quite a test for local elites and the police. Not since Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts has there quite been such a period of high-scale visitation by the far-right and far-left to the Borough. For example, in the

case of Tower Hamlets in 2011 and 2013, rising public disorder and arrest figures continued to be a persistent feature of EDL protest. Surprisingly, this has not come from the EDL side but the group's 'avowed opponents' – both from within and outside the Borough. In turn, this has forced the Metropolitan Police to employ more and more robust policing tactics and aggressive arrest strategies – shipping EDL protesters out of the Borough in September 2011 and using containment techniques to hem in militant anti-fascists two years later.

In sum then, the EDL's protests in Tower Hamlets form the final case study of this thesis. It has been an inauspicious period for the Borough over the past several years. Faced with repeated waves of EDL demonstrations, both the Metropolitan Police and local political elites have thrown considerable time and resources at managing both the public order and community cohesion effects of the EDL and their opponents. Policing tactics have, however, had dubiously little effect on decreasing disorder and dealing with the counter-protester 'threat'. This, more than anywhere else, shows the problematic nature of counter-protesters in successfully managing EDL demonstrations. Moreover, this has been contrasted with well-organised and well-rehearsed political responses, which have shown a mixture of hard and soft exclusion. The Tower Hamlets case will therefore go down as another paradoxical period for EDL responses, and the inverse of Leicester – being able to successfully mobilise a political but not a similarly effective policing response in one of London's most diverse Boroughs.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion - National Responses and Beyond

Chapter Outline

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9.1 Introduction

Over the past seven years, the English Defence League has visited a number of towns up and down the country protesting at their concerns about the ‘creeping Islamisation’ of UK politics and society (English Defence League Website 22nd August 2016). This has placed an unprecedented test on the time, expertise and resources of political elites, the police and civil society. While a small and fragmented literature has charted the governmental, policing and civil society responses to this form of anti-Islamic protest (Copsey 2010; Goodwin 2013; Renton 2014; & Treadwell 2014), little is known about how UK politicians have responded to the group where the EDL has demonstrated the most: at the local level. This study addresses this lacuna. Using five structured and focused case studies (George and Bennett 2005), this thesis is the first to systematically map interventions by UK Members of Parliament and local Councillors towards this new protest movement – delving into the thinking and rationales that came with it and the successes and failures that local politicians have experienced in their dealings with the group. Such approaches were then mapped against an exclusionary-inclusionary typology – previously operationalised in relation to responses to far-right parties in Europe.

Whether these external responses have factored in the demise of the EDL (or not) is a moot point, the principal finding of this study has however been that, while the majority of local politicians interviewed have taken a largely restrictive and exclusionary approach to the EDL’s presence, there has been a vibrant array of rationales and other (more inclusionary) strategies that have been used in the process. Taken together, these may have had some sizeable (albeit indirect) effect on the fortunes of the group – limiting the rhetorical (and, in some cases, the physical protest) space of the EDL and therefore wearing down the fledgling movement. As alluded to throughout this thesis, though, it could also be down to intra-group dynamics – with the initial ‘buzz’ of a new, chaotic movement quickly giving way to a ‘scarcity mentality’ in late 2011 after a series of schisms and splits (Busher 2015: 131). In any case, and as noted in the thesis introduction, the organised UK far-right is in a current state of flux. “[P]olitically marginalised, fractured, leaderless and increasingly violent”

(Hopkins 8th February 2016), now is good a time as any to learn lessons about responses towards the EDL and other forms of far-right extremism in the UK.

In this concluding chapter, we will first conduct a brief discussion of the national context in which the above localised responses sit. We will then document, chapter-by-chapter, what we have discovered about the English Defence League and responses to it over the course of the thesis. This will be in order to highlight some of the rich empirical findings and contributions to the body of knowledge made during the course of the five case study chapters. In the third section of this concluding chapter, we will then look more broadly at the lessons, implications and policy recommendations that can be drawn from the thesis. We will do this by grouping them into three distinct areas: political, policing and anti-fascist responses. Finally, we will suggest future avenues of research for studying the EDL and political responses to it, before moving on to some closing remarks.

9.2: Context - 'Clean-hands' beyond the BNP? National Political Responses to the English Defence League

i) Introduction

In William M. Downs' (2012) monograph on Political Extremism in Europe, Downs suggests that the approach taken by Britain toward the contemporary far-right is one of 'clean hands', or 'ignoring the [Far-right] threat', such that the 'offending party cannot capture the attention they crave.' (p.32) He quotes former Home Office Minister Andy Burnham suggesting that the EDL's predecessor, the BNP, posed 'a very localised threat and I am worried that that if we give them too much coverage, it can back up the notion that they are a potent protest vote.' In contrast, Downs also quotes former Scottish First Minister, Jack McConnell, who warned that: 'these people are at their most dangerous if we ignore them.' (p.33) In some ways these statements capture the central difficulty of a 'clean-hands' response, trying on the one hand to keep responses low key but also trying to (or at least seen to be trying to) condemn the actions and values of such groups. As we will see, such a tactic has also been used by the UK Government and national-level political elites towards the EDL.

ii) National Political Responses to the English Defence League

One of the earliest notable national responses to the EDL was John Denham's intervention towards the group in September 2009. Denham, then Communities Secretary, likened the group to Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts (*The Daily Telegraph* 12th September 2009). In order to absorb some of the growth of far-right extremism more generally, Denham proposed £12 million investment in a 'Connecting Communities' programme - aimed at tackling social marginalisation and political disengagement in white working-class areas. His diagnosis was that the success of the EDL and other far-right groups had emerged out of a time of economic crisis (post-2007 credit crunch) and political crisis (post-2009 MP's expenses scandal) (ibid). This more community-focused inclusionary approach kick-started a strand of the UK national political response that would later be picked up by his Conservative successor, Eric Pickles, under the auspices of integration policy with the express aim of tackling the wider communal drivers of this particular form of extremism – or what Matthew Goodwin describes as 'softer' responses to the EDL, and involves '[u]npacking' and 'calming' anxieties that fuel such groups (Goodwin 2013: 14). This more socially conscious trend of EDL responses continued with the former head of Labour's internal policy review, Jon Cruddas MP. In October 2010, Cruddas suggested that what makes the English Defence League's anti-Muslim ideology so dangerous was its ability to connect with a 'growing cultural, religious and political battle that is emerging across Western Europe' (Cruddas 10th October 2010). Unlike Denham, Cruddas suggested that it is up to all UK political parties to 'choke off' drivers of EDL support through offering an 'animating, inclusive and optimistic definition of modern England' (Moynihan 25th October 2010).

Parallel to this was a nod to the – albeit small – threat of right-wing extremist terrorism in the renewed Prevent strand of the UK Government's broader counter-terrorism policy, CONTEST, in June 2011 (*HM Government* June 2011: 21). This started a key differentiation or distinction within the Government approach to the EDL between a more security-focused approach at the Home Office and a more integration-focused response at the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – with the former exhibiting what Matthew Goodwin calls a 'harder', exclusionary response, 'disrupt[ing] the

actual pathways into these groups.’ (2013: 14) An example of the DCLG approach, which became the lead government department to deal with extremism associated with EDL (DCLG 1: 2016), can be found in Department’s February 2012 policy report, ‘Creating Conditions for Integration’. This suggested that tackling extremism and intolerance fell within a wider effort to foster and protect social integration, and specifically mentioned the EDL as a key antagonist of social integration (DCLG Feb 2012: 2). It came after a period where ‘the Coalition Government was formulating its policies and it wasn’t initially clear what it wanted to do in the space [of domestic extremism]’ (DCLG 1: 2016) – with a more ad hoc policy of ‘talk[ing] to the local area to try and put them in touch with the right people’ going on between mid-2009 and early 2012 during the EDL’s initial wave of protests (ibid).

Perhaps the most direct anti-EDL intervention by a senior national politician at the time, however, came in comments made by Prime Minister, David Cameron, after the 2011 London riots. At Prime Minister’s Questions on 11th August 2011, David Cameron, led a broadside against the English Defence League – when he suggested that: ‘I’ve described some parts of our society as sick; and there is none sicker than the EDL.’ (HC Deb 11th August 2011, c1086) This initiated the start of a broadly condemnatory (rhetorical) strategy by the Coalition Government and other senior UK politicians – aiming to ascribe a ‘pariah’ status to the group without formal legal proscription. For example, on a visit to Manchester in March 2013, the then Labour leader, Ed Miliband, labelled the EDL as ‘abhorrent’ and suggested that the best way to counter the group was to issue a clean-hands, ‘non-response’ – encouraging local residents to ‘turn their backs’ on EDL protest. (Williams 1st March 2013).

The second major milestone, and what became the ‘centre piece’ of the government’s approach towards the EDL (DCLG 1: 2016), was the setting up of the Special Interest Group on Far-right Extremism in January 2013. As mentioned in the above empirical chapter on Luton, this was launched and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government in partnership with Luton and Blackburn in Darwen Council (*Counterextemism.Org* 2014). Such was the importance of the group’s first conference that the Communities Secretary himself, Eric Pickles, gave a keynote speech on

government integration policy. Entitled 'United in Britishness', Pickles singled out the far-right, far-left and radical Islamist groups as 'purveyors of hatred' that are 'anti-British' (Pickles 5th September 2013). More crucially, in an earlier speech, Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat Integration Minister at the time, stressed that 'local leadership is absolutely critical if we are to succeed in smashing the far-right in local areas.' (Foster 7th January 2013) This implied that the thrust of tackling extremism by groups like the EDL would not be devised centrally but through DCLG seed-funded, local projects that helped tackle the drivers of extremism. As one senior civil servant involved in counter-extremism policy at the time suggests: 'we saw [the EDL] as quite predominantly a local issue and one that we needed to support local areas on...' (DCLG 1: 2016) For example, between 2012 and 2014, this included initiatives by the Searchlight Educational Trust to organise news-sheets and community events in four areas vulnerable to English Defence League activity as well as Show Racism the Red Card's projects with young people to 'reject the narratives of groups like the English Defence League' (HC Written Statement 154 18th December 2014).

The fourth major intervention by a national politician on the EDL was a speech by Home Office Policing Minister, James Brokenshire, in March 2013 at King's College, London. In it, Brokenshire again restated the Government's position of condemning the EDL, their effects and their message (ICSR 13th March 2013). More interestingly, Brokenshire also hinted at the lower-scale of far-right terrorism when compared to Islamist or Al-Qaeda-inspired variants. In essence then, 'the Home Office and government ministers perceive the EDL as a...public-order problem rather than as a problem of [terrorism or] political violence.' (Skoczylis 2015: 92) In comparison, a panellist and civil servant from the Tackling Extremism and Hate Crime Division at DCLG, Ian Bradshaw, at the same March 2013 event suggested that, while violence may follow EDL protest, the government didn't wish to classify the EDL as an active terrorist organisation (ICSR 18th March 2013). Moreover, he suggested the broad thrust of DCLG's approach was not just the group itself and its supporters but the wider pool of people that are attracted to the group's ideas and methods. Again, we can see the differentiation here between 'harder' and 'softer' approaches – with the Home Office taking a more security-focused approach versus the

Communities and Local Government department that took a more sociological approach towards the anti-Islamic EDL.

Post-Woolwich, the national political response to the EDL then came to its third and final milestone - shifting to the guise of a broader response aimed at stemming anti-Muslim hate. As one civil servant suggests, this looked 'more at the effects of the EDL and others are having on that whole kind of narrative of Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain.' (DCLG 1: 2016) In a September 2013 speech to the Specialist Interest Group on the Far-right, for example, James Brokenshire again condemned anti-Muslim groups as 'divisive' and 'contrary to the values of respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.' (Brokenshire 6th September 2013) Moreover, Brokenshire also outlined state-led responses to counter anti-Muslim sentiment – mentioning the Government's national guidance on protective security measures for mosques, the ban of two leading 'counter-jihad' figures from the UK, and a cross-government action plan to tackle hate crime (ibid). Interestingly, and in terms of context, this came in the wake of the May 2013 Woolwich Terror Attacks and the Government's Extremism Taskforce that was setup in the wake of Woolwich.

Bringing this timeline up-to-date, two years later in October 2015, the Government's long-awaited Counter-Extremism Strategy was released. This came after the transfer of responsibility for domestic extremism from DCLG back to the Home Office in late 2014 (DCLG 1: 2016). In a speech delivered by David Cameron in July 2015, the Prime Minister set out the four pillars of the new Counter-Extremism strategy. This included confronting extremist ideologies, tackling violent and non-violent forms of extremism, emboldening Muslim communities to tackle extremism and building a more cohesive society (Grierson 20th July 2015). Moreover, the strategy document itself stated the Government's determination to tackle extreme right violence and the Islamophobia underpinning it – suggesting that the Government's ultimate aim would take a robust approach to the hate crime associated with such groups (*HM Government*, October 2015: 10).

iii) Conclusion

In sum then, and using Downs' (2012) typology, the main thrust of the national response toward the EDL has been a 'clean-hands' approach administered

through localised means. This has sought to rhetorically condemn the EDL and its values as well as using integration policy and public-order policing to provide, what Goodwin (March 2013) calls, 'soft' and 'hard' responses to the group. Rather than intervene directly against the EDL in a 'top-down' manner, Home Office and DCLG officials interviewed for this thesis stressed how important it was that the EDL should be tackled at the local-level and that as little oxygen as possible should be given to the group's cause through a set of high-profile national interventions (Home Office 1: 2016 & DCLG 1: 2016). Local authorities and constabularies have therefore largely been left to shoulder the responsibility of responses to the EDL and its cycle of protest – the main focus of this thesis, and to which we will return in the next section.

In addition to this, there has also been a noticeable 'twin-track' nature to the approach taken by central government towards the EDL. This has seen a division or distinction between a narrower security-led approach adopted by the Home Office and a broader integrationist approach adopted by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Mainly due to the low-level of national responses, there has been little or no tension here. It is however interesting to note that this separation was deliberately initiated in response to criticism about 'securitised social policy' under Prevent I (2007-11), through the mixing integration and security lenses. Whether the re-housing of counter-extremism policy back at the Home Office in late 2014 will reinstate this conflation will be an interesting one to watch. We will now, however, return to the more localised responses to the EDL – unearthing the findings and contributions found in the course of the above five empirical chapters.

9.3: Key Findings and Contributions - From Causes to Consequences

One of the key contributions of this thesis has been to move the emphasis of EDL research away from examining the causes and characteristics of the group and towards the impacts and policy consequences of EDL protest. In chapter two of the thesis, we started by conducting a review of the existing literature on the English Defence League. Symptomatic of the more causal and historical nature of the current EDL research literature, what we found is that there currently exist three conceptual camps on the EDL. The first suggests that the EDL are a traditional far-right outfit that has extended the causes and aims of

previous groups, such as the British National Party. The second suggests that the EDL is outgrowth of UK football hooligan subculture - albeit with a more political edge. The third camp treats the EDL as *sui generis*, or 'of its own kind'. Scholars from this third camp, such as Jamie Bartlett and Mark Littler (2011), Joel Buser (2013, 2014 & 2015) and Matthew Goodwin (2013 & 2016), challenge the more stereotypical views of the EDL as a group populated by young thugs. Instead, and using survey data and ethnographic participant observation, they have now arrived at a more empirically-grounded view of the EDL that paints a more nuanced and dynamic picture of the group's ideology, support-base, and origins. It is in this mould that this study's major contribution lies – refocusing the literature away from existing tropes on the group's characteristics and towards the more unexplored consequences of the group and its mobilisations.

In the second part of chapter two, we also spent considerable time detailing existing literature on a relatively neglected area within the EDL research: EDL responses. Nigel Copsey's (2010) report on the EDL was commended for its comprehensive treatment, especially at such an early time in the group's development. It was however challenged by the author on the basis that, while comprehensive, its main focus was not explaining responses and omitted the work of local political elites. It is hoped that the current study addresses this lacuna – systematically mapping in-depth, local politician's responses to the EDL. While too vague to prescribe specific *political* responses on its own, we used the 'harder-softer' descriptors created by Matthew Goodwin (March 2013) to generate the first typology of political responses towards the EDL. This used the 'exclusionary' vs. 'inclusionary' axis that can be found in the European literature on mainstream responses to radical right-wing populist parties, and was adapted to suggest that there are four possible responses to the EDL: hard exclusion, soft exclusion, inclusion, and a 'non-response.' The strength of this new typology is that it is specific enough to be of help in the UK but also general enough to be used abroad when dealing with other forms of anti-Muslim activism. This study therefore addressed another weakness in the existing EDL responses literature: no systematic theoretical framework for assessing EDL political responses

Chapter three provided an outline of the methodology used in the thesis. In it, we outlined not just the methodology used but also the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the project. Here, it was spelt out why studying the EDL and political responses to it are important, as well as the (philosophically) realist epistemology that helped guide the research project in a qualitative direction – aiding a move from simply explaining to understanding the rationales and motivations behind politicians EDL responses. This sets out the current study as different from the EDL response and even far-right response literature before – taking an in-depth assessment of the individualised rationales brought to bear on responding to far-right protest. Finally, the chapter concluded on a technical note - spelling out and justifying the semi-structured interviews and structured focused comparison techniques used in the project.

Chapter four revealed our first key findings about localised responses to the EDL. This revolved around the six major EDL demonstrations that occurred in Birmingham in 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2014 – providing examples of political responses across the EDL’s protest cycle. Over the course of the EDL’s demonstration in the West Midlands City, it was found that as political responses became more robust, police responses tracked the opposite arc: becoming softer and less confrontational over time. These twin-arcs, while running in parallel, contributed to the neutralisation of the EDL as a public-order threat. The increasing robustness of political responses was typified by the strategic shifts of two significant local politicians, Steve McCabe MP and Khalid Mahmood MP, who advocated increasingly punitive and exclusionary measures and was echoed by the increasingly explicit condemnation shown in the City Council’s statements towards EDL’s demonstrations.

The second case study in chapter five revolved around EDL demonstrations in another area that has experienced several, sizeable EDL protests: Bradford. In August 2010, July 2012, and October 2013, the EDL embarked on a sustained campaign to ‘hit’ the former mill-town and its neighbour, Keighley. This implicitly picked up upon the fractious nature of community relations within Bradford ‘post-riots’. What was found in the Bradford case was that rioting in the mid-1990’s and early 2000’s perversely helped local policymakers in their public-order preparations for the EDL’s presence in the Summer of 2010. The frame,

focus and resolve bred from an earlier period of significant disorder helped facilitate a vigilant attitude when the EDL came to demonstrate, and this - combined with a large police presence - prevented a re-occurrence of disturbances. Moreover, lessons learnt at this initial mobilisation were then also transferred across when the EDL returned in October 2013. This, combined with a leaderless EDL, saw a significant drop in public disorder on the day of the second protest. In terms of political responses, then, most of the motivating force behind local politicians' interventions was to make sure that riots never returned to the streets of Bradford again.

The third case study chapter moved the thesis on to consider the (somewhat curious) case of the EDL's presence in Leicester – a City that has recently been vaunted for the harmonious nature of community relations (*BBC News* 29th May 2001). In studying the EDL's 2010, 2012, and 2013 demonstrations in the East Midlands City, we found that the EDL's presence had spelt one of the most acrimonious periods in Leicester politics. This shows potentially deleterious and politically divisive effects of the group's mobilisations and responses to it. Despite this, however, Leicester has been a considerable success story in policing EDL protest – with Leicestershire police able to learn public-order management lessons from 2010 in order make sure that mass disorder didn't arise again in 2012 and 2013.

The fourth and penultimate case of EDL responses studied was the South Bedfordshire town of Luton. Still in recovery from being the site of EDL emergence, the group further tested elites in Luton by organising three subsequent demonstrations in February 2011, May 2012 and November 2014. Unsurprisingly, what this chapter found was that the key motivation behind the responses to EDL protest was to restore Luton's reputation from being 'where it all began'. One interesting outcome of this process was the creation of a town centre policy that effectively ruled out EDL marches from the town's central, St. George's square, and achieved what other Council leaders had only dreamt of – placing the rights of the community over the rights of protesters. It therefore stands as a key watershed in EDL responses and speaks of wider innovation by the Lutonian political elite within this period – co-convening a nation-wide Specialist Interest Group on Far-right Extremism to share best practice and

capacity building, also. This is not to say, however, that the town centre policy was an untarnished success. Key questions can – and should - be raised about the democratic and legal effect of selectively excluding protest from the town centre. Luton therefore also highlights the fraught nature of more robust EDL responses and revisits the classic liberal dilemma of where to draw the line when restricting ‘intolerant’ groups.

Our fifth and final case study chapter told the story of Tower Hamlets - a place not unfamiliar with historic far-right and anti-fascist mobilisations. Surprisingly, however, it was the EDL’s ‘avowed opponents’ that became a chief source of disorder when the group decided to protest in the East London Borough – as early as the summer of 2009. In September 2011, for example, a group of local teenagers took the decision to confront the EDL – vandalising a bus exiting the Borough after the protest. Moreover, when the EDL returned for a second time two years later, it was the turn of militant anti-fascists to cause mayhem - this time making a break from the main UAF counter rally to blockade the EDL’s march route. In the case of Tower Hamlets, therefore, one of the criminological issues highlighted about EDL protest has been the sometimes troubling nature of anti-EDL groups and their involvement in ramping up public disorder at EDL demonstrations. Tower Hamlets was, therefore, a poignant case to end on – showing how those wishing to ‘do good’ by opposing anti-Islamic activism can all too easily end up perpetuating the public-order problems posed by this particular form of protest.

In conclusion, the current study has made a significant contribution to the academic literature. First, it has brought about Busher’s (2014) ideal of shifting the scholarly focus away from looking simply at the causes and characteristics of the EDL and towards looking at the policy consequences of the group’s main repertoire of action: localised protest. Secondly, it is the first detailed examination of EDL demonstrations across the UK – picking out what drives EDL protest and how responses to EDL activism have developed over time in specific local contexts. This is also the first cross-case analysis of multiple related case-studies of its kind and the first comprehensive treatment of EDL protest across the group’s main cycle of protest. Thirdly, it is a rare study of a far-right social movement (Caini et al 2012: 4) and, even rarer, a study of

responses to such social movements, which tend to get overlooked by political scientists and sociologists in favour of more progressive forms of protest (Pilkington 2016: 8). This will be picked up upon in the penultimate section. Now we will turn to some of the lessons and policy recommendations that can be drawn from the current study.

9.4: Lessons and Policy Recommendations

Broadening out, what lessons can be drawn from the above cases studies? In particular, what we can recommend in terms of ‘best practice’ when dealing with the EDL and other forms of anti-Islamic activism? In terms of political responses, a ‘paradigm shift’ from exclusion towards inclusion can be thoroughly recommended. While a relatively benign ‘soft’ exclusivist track has been trodden by most elites in this study, it would be beneficial to see more elites engaged in locally-ran projects, such as ‘Be Birmingham’, ‘Luton in Harmony’, and ‘One Tower Hamlets’. This actively promoted interaction between diverse parts of different communities within a particular locale. It could also help rob the EDL of its prejudicial barbs – helping to ‘immunise’ communities against the anti-Islamic politics of the EDL and racist politics more generally (Pedahzur 2004). This is especially instructive given the recent rise in reports of racist and anti-Muslim attacks, post-Brexit (Sommers 11th July 2016).

A key policy recommendation based on this therefore would be more sustained interest and investment in such initiatives by local and national politicians. As highlighted above, this resonates with the Department of Communities and Local Government approach to tackling extremism as part of its broader, more localised strategy that promoted community integration during this period. On a similar note, we can recommend that more engagement by the government and politicians with the concerns of communities who have a weak sense of belonging or feel ‘left-behind’ (Ford and Goodwin 2014) is needed in order to better tackle extremist politics in the future. This was successfully attempted by Bradfordian politicians, Kris Hopkins MP and Councillor David Green, locally, and former Communities Secretary, John Denham, nationally, and could be a route to robbing more populist elements of the EDL’s agenda.

In terms of policing responses, this study also has important recommendations when it comes to managing EDL protest. In places like Birmingham and Leicester, it is clear that large, confrontational public-order policing strategies have been mostly ineffective in quelling disorder amongst EDL supporters. Drawing insights from crowd psychology (Waddington & King 2005) and the work of James Treadwell (2014), this thesis suggests that forceful containment tactics used within these strategies end up unifying large crowds against the police and therefore leading to mass disorder. On the other hand, more consensual, low-key approaches which engage in negotiations with protesters and communities both on the day and in the lead up to EDL demonstrations have seen disorder drop dramatically (Van Der Wal 2011:147). This is not a plea for the adoption of the latter irrespective of the challenge posed by protesters on the day of a demonstration. It might, however, be sensible to suggest that – after an initial high-scale response, either on the day or over a course of demonstrations – that these softer, lower-scale approaches should become the norm in policing EDL and far-right protests (ibid). As noted in the chapter on Tower Hamlets, this broadly follows key reforms in the field of public-order protest by the UK police nationally after the April 2009 London G20 protests that lead to a wider adoption of ‘no surprise’ tactics in public-order management (See HMIC July 2009). It would see a return to the ‘low-key minimal force image’ of UK policing more historically, also (Reiner 1998: 41).

In terms of anti-fascist responses, though not the main focus of the study, we can also posit some recommendations along the lines of arguments already made by Nigel Copsey (2010). Whilst militant anti-fascists (such as Unite Against Fascism) have been dogged in their confrontation of the EDL on the streets, this study has found such tactics to be counterproductive in two ways. First, the physicality of such opposition actually adds ‘grist to the EDL mill’ through responding to group’s dynamic of provocation. While the acts and principles of the EDL should not be condoned, confrontation can sometimes be counter-productive. In fact, and on a large number of occasions found in this thesis, physical confrontation draws more attention to the EDL and can result in mass disorder. The second is that by shouting ‘Nazi’, ‘Fascist’, or ‘Islamophobe’ at EDL supporters you actually risk hardening their resolve by strengthening

their beliefs that they are embattled and victimised minority (Oaten 2014). Instead, non-confrontational techniques, such as gathering petitions for march bans and being engaged in grassroots anti-racism projects, would better counteract the impacts and trajectory of such far-right groups. As Copsey (2010: 33) said nearly six years ago, ‘when EDL events go unopposed, they are more likely to pass off without major incident.’ A key recommendation of this thesis therefore is to implore anti-fascist activists to reflect on their tactics and explore more preventative means of dealing with the far-right in the UK. Based on the evidence presented in this thesis, one can argue that it is not just simply a case of outnumbering the far-right, but actually tailoring responses to target the drivers of anti-Muslim populism and prejudice that is appropriate for a particular local context. This, again, is highlighted and demonstrated in the work of Hope not Hate who ‘engage with communities and listen to what they say rather than simply “imposing strategy from outside”.’ (ibid)

Now some from within the militant anti-fascist scene may counter here and suggest that such street protest tactics have a long lineage of success in wearing down far-right movements – starting with the Battle for Cable Street and the British Union of Fascists in the 1930’s and continuing through to the National Front (NF) in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s as well as the British National Party in the 1990’s and 2000’s. What can be argued here is that this is a far too one-sided analysis of events. For example, the role of militant anti-fascists at the Battle for Cable Street is far more problematic than that day’s ‘legendary status’ suggests – with significant clashes being staged between anti-fascists and the police (Copsey 2000: 57). Moreover, it can be suggested that it was elite attempts during the late 1970’s to ‘manage racism’ that led to the dissolution of NF support (Eatwell 2000: 187) and that it was actually *in spite* of the Anti-Nazi League in the early 1990’s that the BNP’s breakthrough was reversed in the East End of London (Copsey 2008: 178). This thesis does not wish to nullify the need for more informal responses but problematizes the role of militant counter tactics as an effective strategy when dealing with far-right groups – adding to the sort of polarisation which is unhelpful in defusing the drivers of this particular form of political extremism.

9.5: Future Avenues of Research - Far-right Protest and Responses to it

Finally, it is also good to look at further avenues of study highlighted by the current research. For example, what outstanding work can be done on the group itself or its policy impacts? One future and potentially fruitful project would be a broader comparative project looking into political responses to far-right street protest across the European continent and how national and local elites have addressed and responded to such movements. Immediate examples that come to mind are PEGIDA in Germany and Bloc Sanitaire in France. The aim of this would be to create a broader (and more refined) typology of responses to anti-Muslim protest groups and contribute to the budding but underdeveloped literature on responses to the European radical populist right more generally (Mudde 2007: 277).

The second thing to say about this is that due to the clearly defined scope of the thesis, political responses, it was hard to provide adequate focus on the equally fascinating area of policing responses and how they have changed and adapted to this new form of far-right protest. While we have touched upon policing responses in some detail, it may be beneficial to interview more senior police officers from local constabularies involved in shaping the policing response to the group and asking whether policing extremist protest differs from any other 'public-order threat'.

Another response area that could be fleshed out is how anti-fascism has adapted and responded to the stimuli of the EDL. We know that the UAF has been one of the EDL's 'principal antagonists' (Copsey 2010: 32) over the past seven years and that the EDL's form of street-protest has seen 'attention' swing back towards the UAF (Renton 2014: 256) but we do not know what has shifted organisationally and tactically within the wider UK anti-fascist scene. In particular, there is an interesting analysis to be had of how the UAF's fortunes as a militant anti-fascist outfit have been boosted by the EDL and how Hope not Hate's more liberal brand of anti-fascism has been challenged by the advent of the group. It would therefore be instructive to have a look 'behind-the-scenes' of both of these organisations and interview the leaders of both Unite Against Fascism and Hope not Hate, providing an important contribution to the historic literature on anti-fascism in the UK.

Shifting from the elite to the mass-level, it would be interesting to do ethnographic work with anti-fascist activists about their experiences of how and why they get involved in counter demonstrations. While the key focus has been on the EDL's fairly disruptive form of activism (Busher 2013, 2014, & 2015), it would also be good to conduct work with those who have reacted against the EDL at a street-based level. On a related note, it would be interesting to do some more work examining the community response that has mobilised against the EDL in the areas highlighted in the thesis. Due to time and resource constraints, this was an area only lightly touched upon in the main body and deserves a separate and concrete focus in order to unpick how different citizens have understood and dealt with the EDL's presence as well as the role of more informal networks. In particular, and as highlighted by the 'Battle of Cable Street' in the Tower Hamlets case, it would be interesting to interrogate how historical memory plays into community responses – seeing how local groups 'construct and identify with particular narratives about historical periods or events' in order to form and shape their responses towards far-right protest movements (Hite 2011).

Switching from responses to work on the group itself, hardly anything systematic has been said in the academic literature on EDL protests. A mixed-methods study looking at the form, nature and numbers around EDL protests is therefore surely begging. In particular, this study has already made one major contribution by arriving at a more concrete understanding of the possible reasons for the EDL visiting a particular locale, and whether this is linked to historic extremist mobilisations, deindustrialisation, migration patterns or previous instances of disorder. Not to undermine this contribution, a more general look at the EDL's complete protest cycle from formation to Tommy Robinson's exit in October 2013, however, would be an instructive one – especially as the EDL's recent period of activism has been labelled: 'the most significant far-right street movement in the UK since the National Front in the 1970s' (Taylor 28th May 2010). This would further aid targeted policy interventions by police, politicians and security services as well as helping scholars and practitioners arrive at a more systematic understanding of what fuels anti-Islamic activism.

9.6: Concluding Remarks - Towards an 'Inclusivist Turn'?

To conclude then, the EDL's cycle of protest from June 2009 to present has tested policing elites, political elites and communities from across the UK. In response to the main research question, 'how have UK Members of Parliament and local politicians responded to the EDL over the past seven years?' three principal conclusions can be drawn:

The first is that political responses have been both varied and diverse. While the effect of the interventions, campaigns and rhetoric constructed by elites have been on the whole exclusionary, this thesis has found that there are some signs of inclusion. For example, David Green and Kris Hopkins in Bradford and Keighley saw attempts to engage with white working-class communities as part of their attempts to deal with EDL protest, whilst many have also engaged with Muslim communities in the lead up to the group's disruptive and sometimes violent demonstrations. Moreover, it is noteworthy to stipulate here that exclusion – the most popular tactic found in this study - doesn't simply come in one but many forms. For example, attempts by local politicians to exclude the group have not simply involved calls for proscribing the EDL - banning or restricting its demonstrations. It has also involved more indirect acts of exclusion. These involve lodging Parliamentary motions against the group, signing petitions and mobilising pressure for march bans – attempting to reduce the rhetorical and material space of the EDL through existing legal methods.

The second is that, when drilling down beyond *prima facie* responses, this thesis has found a welter of 'behind-the-scenes' reasons, role perceptions and understandings of the EDL. These have helped inform such responses – and vary even if they have the same exclusionary or inclusionary effect. For example, and as noted in Appendix A below, there are clearly practical, symbolic and contextual motives that help define both exclusionary and inclusionary responses. Moreover, the perceived role of a representative when the EDL comes to town also takes many forms and has an (albeit partial) bearing on how local political elites have constructed their responses to the EDL over the past seven years.

The third major conclusion of thesis is a (limited) commitment to seeing more longer-term preventative strategies being exercised by elites when the EDL and

other far-right groups come to town. The frequent use of exclusionary strategies by elites is not unexpected due to the popularity and short-term effectiveness of such techniques, but initiatives that are based around social interaction or elite engagement with community concerns are arguably the most effective when dealing with the drivers of political extremism in the long-term. This is not new. Efforts to foster social interaction have already been tried in Birmingham, Luton, and Tower Hamlets, but they could also be rolled out in the equally diverse areas of Leicester and Bradford. Such initiatives still however need to be sensitively structured and broached in a genuine way to work. They also need to be initiated and wanted 'from below' rather than something that is seen to be implemented 'from above'. Therefore, a more system-wide look at what other educational and civil society responses are required will also need to be factored into preventative work (Pedahzur 2004). Only then will the drivers of anti-Islamic protest be more comprehensively addressed. Only then will we have adequately responded to the EDL and its ilk in the all-important context of post-Brexit Britain.

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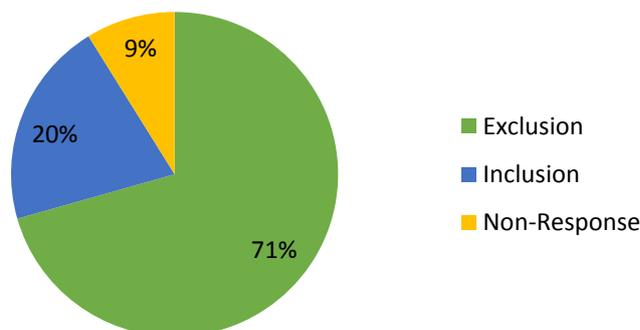
Appendix A: Summary of Interview Findings

In the course of this study, a total of thirty-four interviews were conducted with local Councillors and Members of Parliament. This, plus six additional interviews with behind-the-scenes policymakers, has provided a rich array of data that has been used and mentioned in the five individual case studies above. Here, however, we will consider the interview responses of local politicians collectively. This will be in order to show the sheer diversity of political responses towards the EDL. What might be surprising (and what is one of the major conclusions of this thesis) is that, though exclusionary responses are influential, the rationales and perceptions that politicians hold as to their role when the EDL comes to town are various. In this section, we will first start with the headline interview theme of 'responses' and move through sequentially to other themes of 'motives and rationales', and 'perceived response roles' to paint a picture of how, what, and why political elites have responded to the EDL over the past seven years.

i) Political Responses to the EDL

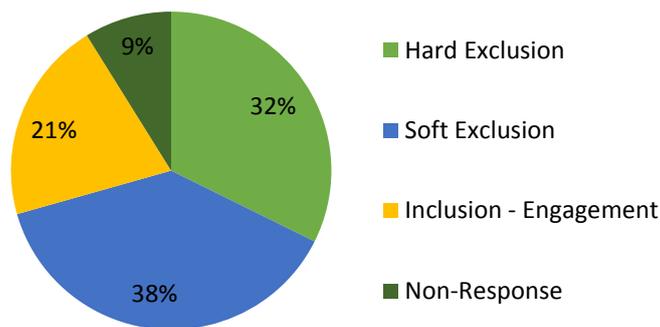
Unsurprisingly, the majority of political responses toward the English Defence League and their repertoire of street protests have been overwhelmingly exclusionary. As shown in the below pie chart, 71% of interview respondents were engaged in activities that were either designed to place restrictions on EDL protest or create a climate of hostility around the EDL's presence in a particular locale. There was, however, a division between the sort of means and measures that mainstream politicians took to achieve this.

Figure A.1: Exclusionary Vs. Inclusionary Responses



Perhaps the most frequently used strategy that was adopted was a ‘soft’ form of exclusion - outlined in chapter two. This involved petitioning police and the UK Government for march bans, making media statements or using Parliamentary procedures, and suggesting that there should be further legal reform in order to ‘hem in’ the EDL ‘threat.’ As shown in the below pie chart, such a tactic of ‘soft exclusion’ was found to be the most popular strategy overall - with just fewer than 40% of the sample adopting this approach. Moreover, it accounted for the plurality of exclusionary responses with 56% of exclusionists opting for the ‘soft’ approach. Soft exclusion most frequently used in Birmingham and Bradford – suggesting that some political weight within these locales was behind liberal-legal and more indirect forms of dealing with the EDL and its protests.

Fig A.2: Political Responses to the EDL - All



The second, most frequently used strategy was a harder-nosed, confrontational form of exclusion – again outlined in chapter two. This involved attending and speaking at counter demonstrations, suggesting extra-legal practices such as appeals for proscription or a total ban on marches, and involved a refusal to deal or speak with the EDL at all. Such a tactic of ‘hard exclusion’ accounted for 32% of elite strategies in the overall sample and 44% of exclusionist strategies. In particular, Leicester and Tower Hamlets were locales where such practices were most frequently employed. This is, however, unsurprising. A sizeable number of Councillors either attended or spoke at anti-fascist demonstrations in Leicester and Tower Hamlets.

The third most prominent strategy amongst the sample meanwhile was a form of inclusion. This is more typically known in the European literature on mainstream responses to right-wing populists as an ‘engagement’ strategy but

in the case of the EDL it has worked in one of two ways. The first (more social) side is for elites to liaise with and reassure Muslim communities about the EDL's presence. The second, more political side has been more historical work by local politicians to talk to local white working-class communities about their concerns regarding migration and integration and thus lessen their susceptibility in joining the EDL at its protests. As highlighted in the introduction, this has been considered in the literature as one of the more sustainable strategies in combating far-right protest, with elites having to actively engage with disaffected peoples and voters and therefore reduce the chance that local electorates would be drawn into this particular form of political extremism.

Remarkably, however, only 21% of respondents adopted 'engagement' as their main strategy. While there were some who were called upon to do 'engagement' work in the course of their roles as local cabinet members for community safety and cohesion, this was not a key prong of their personal, political approach towards the group. As one would expect, the majority were interventions concerned with making sure that local Muslim communities felt safe on protest days and that the young men in these communities were perturbed from EDL provocation. The locales where this more Muslim-focused type of engagement was most widely practiced by elites interviewed were in Bradford, Luton and Leicester – with local politicians in Bradford setting up a community event, Sir Peter Soulsby in Birmingham broadcasting EDL preparations and Mahmood Hussain in Luton making sure that elderly Senior citizens were unaffected on a march days. Disappointingly, it was only David Green in Bradford and Kris Hopkins in Keighley that demonstrated white working-class engagement – having spoken to communities about their concerns regarding immigration, culture and political disaffection.

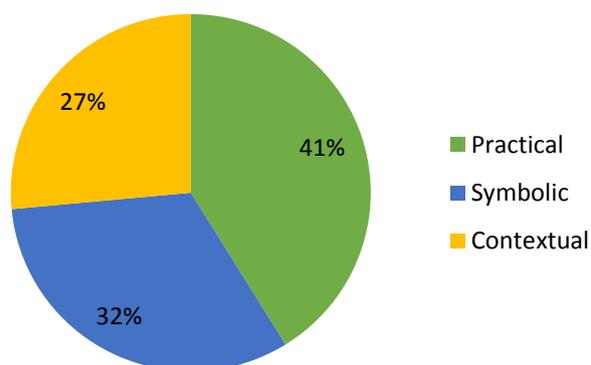
The fourth and final strategy adopted by local elites when responding to the EDL was a 'non-response'. This was in order to give the group as 'little oxygen' as possible and therefore to reduce the media attention that the EDL received. Despite the sensible motive behind such a strategy, this was the least popular amongst political elites interviewed. Only roughly a tenth (9%) of respondents used a 'non-response' as their main approach when the EDL came to demonstrate. Interestingly, this tactic was most frequently adopted by

Conservative politicians, who tended to take a more ‘libertarian’ approach to EDL protests – suggesting that EDL demonstrations should be allowed to take their course and for individuals to make up their own minds about the group’s views. Again, it was in Bradford, Leicester and Luton that these views were most common amongst local political elites.

ii) Personal Rationale and Motivations

Drilling down further, one interesting question that we need to pose for ourselves is why politicians feel the need to react to the English Defence League at all. In the case of a far-right social movement versus a political party, there is no electoral *need* to oppose these sorts of groups – as they don't contest elections they do not present a direct threat to mainstream politicians at the ballot box. Moreover, there is no statutory *need* for local politicians to get involved, as they are largely exempt from public-order legislation and ‘frontline’ public-order management operations. Therefore, one would expect that there must be a weighty political, normative or moral reason in order for them to devote so much time and resources in mounting (largely *exclusionary*) responses – without which there is no justifiable financial, practical or legal reason as to why they would or should issue these reactions and rebuttals. It thus makes sense to look, not just at the responses of elites, but also the rationales behind them.

Fig A.3: Response Rationales and Motivations



Unsurprisingly, given the challenges to public-order and community cohesion posed by the EDL, the most frequent reason given by interviewees for responding to the English Defence League were administrative, or ‘practical’,

one's. About 40% of respondents suggested that concerns around the cost of demonstrations to the police and local businesses as well as the threat of violence was a key reason for them to advocate exclusionary measures when the EDL came to town. Such a rationale was particularly popular in Birmingham where both of the MPs interviewed, plus the Deputy Leader of the Council and another junior Labour Councillor, all issued responses based on practical reasons. More broadly, such rationales more readily aligned with Councillors who had some sort of Cabinet or high-ranking position within a local authority area. Overall, it seemed that those advocating 'practical' motives tended to view the EDL as a 'public-order' rather than a political threat and possessed a more 'managerial' approach in dealing with the EDL and its protests.

In contrast, the second most frequently cited reason given by interviewees for responding to the English Defence League was of a more symbolic hue. Nearly a third of interviewees (32%) issued responses based on prior convictions about anti-racism or anti-fascism and the notion that far-right street group's need to be confronted and acted against because of their Islamophobic, nationalistic, and (potentially) fascistic politics. Unsurprisingly, such rationales were most popular in areas and amongst politicians where direct action and extra-legal measures were advocated. In particular, Leicester and Luton showed the highest proportion of elites advocating such a rationale. Surprisingly, those with symbolic motives did not privilege exclusivist methods. For example, MP for Keighley and Ilkley, Kris Hopkins, who used inclusivist measures around his work in 2012, spoke of 'trust' and of 'building relationships' as being important guiding principles.

The third most frequently given rationale put forward – and of a practical ilk too – was the use of context in justifying certain inclusionary and exclusionary acts. Again, just under a third (27%) of respondents within our interviewee sample suggested that previous instances of rioting or right-wing extremist activism had a bearing on how they responded to the English Defence League. Of this, a large number hailed from either Birmingham or Bradford. This is no surprise considering how riots featured so heavily in the minds of elites in the latter and how Birmingham's early and chaotic EDL demonstrations were cited by many

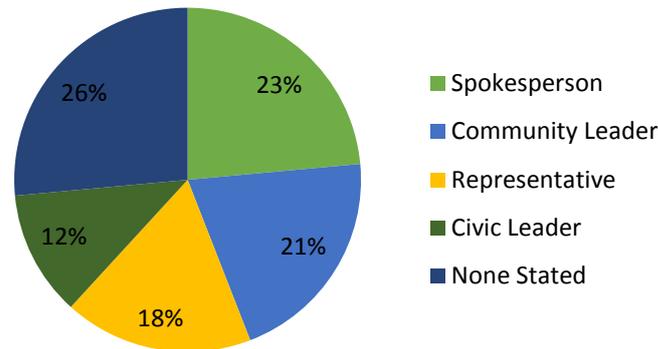
respondents as being something that they were keen to avoid or not see repeated.

Before we move on to the perceived roles of representatives, we must sound a note of caution about the above 'ideal types'. The first is that a great number of interviewees gave more than one rationale for their actions and could sometimes give as many as all three through the course of the interview. Motives and rationales were therefore assigned based on what was most typical within an interviewee's answers. Moreover, constructing these categories is more of an art rather than a science and therefore should be treated with caution. This is not an exhaustive list and such categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

iv) Perceived Response Role of MPs and Councillors

A third and connected aspect of EDL political responses are how Members of Parliament and Councillors perceive their roles in responding to EDL protest. This might appear obtuse but again a political actor's self-definition is important in drilling down as to why politicians feel the need to react when groups, like the EDL, come to the areas they represent. As noted in the typology section of chapter two, for example, Members of Parliament in the UK have no role in the legislative protocols that dictate whether marches are banned or curtailed. Meanwhile, Councillors have very little in the way of a decisive role when deciding about march bans or drawing up arrest strategies for a protest – with much of their work happening in consultation and liaison with the Senior police officers, local authority cabinet members and the Home Office. The author therefore asked each interviewee to define their role when the EDL come to town, in order to again drill down into the political, normative or moral motivations behind political responses. The result was an interesting mixture of self-assigned roles, with representatives perceiving themselves either as: a 'spokesperson', a 'community leader', a 'representative' or a 'civic leaders'.

Fig A.4: Response Roles



One of the more frequently used answers to the ‘response role’ question was for politicians to define themselves as a ‘spokesperson’. Just under a quarter of politicians interviewed (23%) again classified themselves as such. What respondents meant by this was that MPs and Councillors are able to use their privileged media and Parliamentary profile to ‘speak up’ and against the group. This may practically have involved proposing denunciations in the press or using Parliamentary procedures - such as motions, questions and debates - to campaign on the EDL issue. The ‘spokesperson’ role could also be enacted in an extra-legal sense. For example, speaking at counter rallies was also seen as a way of ‘voicing dissent’ and again uses the elevated position of a representative to add weight to such a cause. Either way, being a ‘spokesperson’ was a role assumed mostly by representatives in Luton when compared to other case study areas. This might have had something to do with local politicians standing up for their town’s reputation in the local and national press, and against the negative media stereotypes that may have grown up around the town’s brushes with right-wing and Islamist extremism.

A related and equally popular answer to the ‘perceived role’ question was for politicians to define themselves as a ‘community leader’. Broadly defined, around a fifth (21%) of respondents classified themselves within such a role. The actual meaning of a ‘community leader’ was diverse and contested amongst respondents. Most respondents suggested that a ‘community leader’ was someone who had a high-profile locally and embedded presence within a particular locale – either by virtue either of living within a community for a long

period or descriptively through being of the same demographic makeup of the area they represent. In terms of EDL responses, they deemed communities leaders as therefore being able to speak authoritatively about the needs and interests of members of the community when the EDL came and could therefore command respect. Interestingly, this 'community leader' status was most evident in Leicester and Birmingham

The third, more conventional descriptor employed by politicians when defining their role was that of a 'representative'. They saw it as part of their representative function to rail against the EDL's presence and to voice concerns of the communities they represented when the EDL came to town. Respondents conceived this as being both in a direct sense – bringing the concerns and issues of constituents to bear on the issue of hosting and managing EDL demonstrations – and in a 'virtual' sense, where politicians weighed constituent concerns with their own opinions and judgments when deciding how to act on an issue. Interestingly, only a fifth (18%) of the study's interviewee cohort defined their role as being a 'representative' - with the majority coming from either Birmingham or Tower Hamlets.

While all the above entail - to some extent - a non-administrative role for local elected representatives, just over a tenth of respondents (12%) defined their role as being a 'civic leader.' Interviewees who fell within this category tended to put practical considerations above communal or constituent concerns. When responding to EDL demonstrations, they would put the status of civic life within a town or City at the fore and would liaise with leaders of communities as a matter of course in their work. Interviewees within this group essentially saw responses to the EDL as a technocratic, pragmatic or administrative exercise. Interestingly, three interviewees from Birmingham and Bradford only evidenced this.

Finally, a sizeable number of interviewees (26%) did not (or were not) able to state what role an elected official has when the EDL comes to demonstrate. This might have been for the simple reason that they were not asked by the interviewer – given the low-priority nature of the question within the author's interview schedule - or did not respond to the interviewer's questions. Moreover, it might be to do with how they perceive the EDL. For example, they might see

the group as a 'public-order' and not a 'political' 'threat', and are therefore more likely to defer to the police on the matter – thereby eliminating their need to issue their *own* response. Without further investigation, however, this is only a matter of speculation.

v) Conclusion

To conclude, what this analysis suggests is that a large number of respondents constructed exclusionary responses to the EDL based on 'practical' reasons – with many perceiving that they had no role to play when the EDL came to demonstrate. What we have also discovered through this analysis is that, if we drill down beyond *prima facie* responses, we also find that the motives and self-defined response roles of elected officials are as various and diverse. For example, an exclusionary response can flow from a range of practical, symbolic or contextual considerations that a representative may hold – with many seeing themselves as 'community leaders'. Finally, what was surprising was the sheer number of elected representatives who perceived themselves to have a reason to intervene when the EDL comes to town or an (albeit informal) role to play - suggesting a significant chunk of politicians believe that there is a weighty political, normative or moral reason for responding to such groups.

Appendix B: List of Interviewees³

a) Birmingham

Birmingham 1. (29th April 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Birmingham 2. (14th August 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Jones, J. (16th September 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

McKay, J. (29th January 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Mahmood, K. (7th August 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

McCabe, S. (3rd December 2014) *Interview with William Allchorn*. London. In Person.

Tilsley, P. (26th February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Zaffar, W. (14th September 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

b) Bradford and Keighley

Bradford 1. (5th December 2014) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Bradford. In Person.

Bradford 2. (14th January 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Bradford. In Person.

Bradford 3. (1st July 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Bradford 4. (5th March 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Bradford 5. (14th January 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

³ Due to confidentiality, the names of some interviewees have been kept anonymous.

Bradford 6. (5th December 2014) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Bradford. In Person.

Green, D. (14th January 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Bradford. In Person.

Hopkins, K. (30th January 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Keighley. In Person.

c) Leicester

Connelly, A. (16th January 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Grant, R. (10th February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Kitterick, P. (16th January 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Leicester 1. (4th December 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Leicester 2. (13th March 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Soulsby, P. (8th April 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Vaz, K. (1st July 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Questionnaire.

Willmott, R. (16th January 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

d) Luton

Franks, D. (5th February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Luton. In Person.

Hopkins, K. (3rd December 2014) *Interview with William Allchorn*. London. In Person.

Hussain, M. (25th February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Luton 1. (6th February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Luton 2. (25th February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Luton 3. (2nd February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Shuker, G. (3rd December 2014) *Interview with William Allchorn*. London. In Person.

Simmons, H. (5th February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Luton. In Person.

Timoney, S. (6th February 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

e) Tower Hamlets

Fitzpatrick, J. (12th November 2014) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Golds, P. (19th March 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Rahman, O. (19th March 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Tower Hamlets 1. (14th August 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Tower Hamlets 2. (20th October 2015) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

f) National Responses

DCLG 1 (4th May 2016) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

Home Office 1 (23rd May 2016) *Interview with William Allchorn*. Leeds. Telephone.

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