

Institution: Teesside University
Unit of Assessment: 30 - History
Title of case study: “<u>Responding to Far-Right Extremism: The British National Party and English Defence League</u>”
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study comprises a set of qualitative and quantitative analyses of contemporary right-wing extremism in Britain. This research has been extended beyond academia to non-academic beneficiaries in Britain and continental Europe. The research has informed public debate amongst civil society (as indicated by take-up in NGO reports and the media). It has informed policy development (as evidenced by participation in Government advisory processes and through expert advice to Government). The research has also responded to personal and professional development needs of young people. Impact has derived from the quality of the underpinning research and from a variety of external engagement and knowledge transfer activities.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The key individual researcher is leading scholar of Britain’s far right, Professor Nigel Copsey (appointed Lecturer in History in 1996, conferred as Professor in 2010). Professor Copsey (with Dr Matthew Feldman) is co-founder and co-director of the recently established Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies (CFAPS). Copsey is the author of a series of qualitative and quantitative studies into the nature of contemporary far-right extremism in Britain. These outputs comprise the underpinning research (a body of work published over a sustained period between 2004 and 2013):</p> <p>Output 1, published as <i>Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest For Legitimacy</i> (Copsey, 2004) was the first in-depth academic history of the British National Party (BNP) which became an essential point of reference in the field. A meticulously researched account of the party’s historical development, it represented a significant contribution to our understanding of the present-day BNP as a recalibrated form of (neo) fascism.</p> <p>Output 2, published as ‘Changing course or changing clothes?’ (Copsey, 2007) examined the ideological makeover of the BNP within a rigorous conceptual framework of neo-fascism, offering a pioneering and critical case study of the BNP’s ideological ‘modernisation’.</p> <p>Output 3 (Copsey, 2008), a second edition of output 1. This updated and expanded the 2004 monograph, and in so doing, further advanced knowledge of British (neo) fascism.</p> <p>Output 4 (Copsey, 2010) - a commissioned report by inter-faith NGO Faith Matters, it offered the first qualitative analysis of the nature of the English Defence League (EDL). This report has become a key point of reference.</p> <p>Output 5 (Copsey, 2013) – a public lecture delivered at Amsterdam’s De Balie (April 2013). This lecture critically assessed contemporary political science approaches to ‘radical right-wing populism’, calling for deeper and more penetrating <i>historical</i> analysis. The full version of the lecture was published in the open source journal, <i>Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies</i>.</p> <p>Output 6 (Copsey et al., 2013) – a second commissioned report for Faith Matters (and the first by CFAPS), this text offered a quantifiable analysis of the extent to which Britain’s contemporary far right has been implicated in anti-Muslim hate crime.</p> <p>The major conclusions from this body of work were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The local electoral successes of the BNP after 2001 marked a significant turning point in the history of Britain’s far right (outputs 1, 3). • In a comparative context, Britain’s far right is not a strictly ‘exceptional’ case. In relation to other European countries the historical pattern of electoral failure could be explained more by supply-side factors (especially the absence of political legitimacy) than by demand-side

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factors (outputs 1, 3).

- Although election of any BNP candidates to Westminster remained improbable, the potential existed for the BNP to break through in a national 'second-order' election (as it did in the European elections in 2009) (outputs 1, 3).
- The 'modernisation' of the British National Party has been cosmetic. The party's attempt to rebrand itself as a party of '21st century popular nationalism', and thereby locate itself in a wider radical right-wing populist European trend, has been disingenuous. It is best understood as a recalibrated form of (neo) fascism (outputs 1, 2, 3, 5).
- The example of the BNP underscores the extent to which 'radical right-wing populism' is not detached from neo-fascism (output 5).
- The English Defence League is not a traditional far-right organisation. Even though it clearly had links to other far-right organisations, it should not be viewed through the prism of the established far right (output 4).
- The English Defence League is best understood as a deeply Islamophobic new social movement. Although lacking a recognisable fascist or neo-fascist ideological end-goal, its sometimes violent street presence presented significant challenges to social cohesion and community relations, particularly in terms of 'cumulative extremism' (output 4).
- The English Defence League (and not the BNP) has been the far-right organisation most implicated in the propagation of anti-Muslim hate (output 6).

3. References to the research

Outputs:

1. Copsey, N., (2004) *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* (Palgrave) [Research monograph].
2. Copsey, N., (2007) Changing course or changing clothes? Reflections on the ideological evolution of the British National Party 1999-2006', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 41, 1. DOI: 10.1080/00313220601118777.
3. Copsey, N., (2008) *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* (Palgrave) [Research monograph. Second, updated and extended edition].
4. Copsey, N., (2010) *The English Defence League: Challenging our Country and Our Values of Social Inclusion, Fairness and Equality*, London: Faith Matters [Commissioned Report]. [Http://tees.openrepository.com/tees/bitstream/10149/116066/4/116066.pdf](http://tees.openrepository.com/tees/bitstream/10149/116066/4/116066.pdf).
5. Copsey, N., (2013) 'Fascism but with an open mind? Reflections on the Contemporary Far Right in (Western) Europe', *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 2, 2013. DOI: 10.1163/22116257-00201008.
6. Copsey, N., (as lead author, 2013) *Anti-Muslim Hate Crime and the Far Right* [Commissioned Report], Teesside University: Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies. [Http://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/DocReo/Research/Copsey_report3.pdf](http://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/DocReo/Research/Copsey_report3.pdf).

Quality indicators:

Outputs 1, 2 and 3 were peer-reviewed. The research monograph published in 2004 (output 1) was acclaimed by Professor Roger Griffin, widely acknowledged as one of the leading global experts on fascism, as 'essential reading for the journalists of Britain's quality press and media who cover the BNP, and for all academics concerned with the ways illiberal forces of ethnocentrism are able to adapt to and by hosted by contemporary liberal political and civic space', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 29:1 (2005). In recognition of the significance of this scholarship, a second revised and expanded edition was published in paperback in 2008 (output 3). Outputs 1 and 3 have a combined citation count of over 70 on Google Scholar (Nov. 2013). Output 2 is still one of the most widely read online articles in *Patterns of Prejudice* (it has been viewed 448 times). Output 4 is being widely referenced in the emerging scholarly literature on the English Defence League (it has a citation count of over 15 on Google Scholar, Nov. 2013). Output 5 is the full length version of the inaugural public lecture of the *Fascism* journal. Output 6 is a 30-page independent, quantifiable analysis of data from the TELL MAMA project (a project organised by NGO Faith Matters). It is the first

detailed evidential report of both online and offline anti-Muslim hate crime in England and Wales and builds the foundation for further study in this area.

4. Details of the impact

In the period after 31 December 2007, the research embodied in Professor Copsey's ground-breaking history of the BNP (2004) complemented by his widely read 2007 article, continued to feature in national conversations occasioned by the BNP's electoral emergence. An entire chapter from output 1, on the 'modernisation' of the BNP, was taken up and published online by the Marxist discussion journal, *What Next?* Although the work was critical of Marxist perspectives on fascism, the preamble endorsed the underpinning research: "This is Chapter 5 of Nigel Copsey's excellent book *Contemporary British Fascism and the Quest for Legitimacy* (Palgrave 2004) which is highly recommended, particularly now it is available in a [2008] paperback edition" [1].

Extensively referenced prior to 2008 (his 2004 monograph was cited, for example, in a major public-facing Democratic Audit report into the growing appeal of the BNP published prior to the 2006 local elections), Copsey's book continued to draw citation in various reviews, reports, and policy documents circulated by civil society organisations (and thus contributed to wider public understanding of the challenges that the rise of the BNP presented). Examples of the different constituencies reached by this material include: the legal campaign group, One Law for All; the NASUWT; as well as various religious congregations [2]. Copsey's book was also selected for inclusion in the British Library's bibliography on the BNP one of 21 topical bibliographies that functions as introductory guide to the public [3].

In 2010 Copsey was commissioned by NGO Faith Matters to write the first detailed study of the newly emerging English Defence League. Through recognition of the quality of his research, Copsey caught the attention of Fiyaz Mughal, Director of Faith Matters. Working closely on dissemination with Faith Matters, Copsey's 10,000-word, public-facing report secured national media coverage (e.g. *Independent*, 28.11.10; BBC Radio 4, 12.12.10). Over 500 people immediately placed the *Independent's* article on their Facebook site. Through this channel alone, between 5,000 and 10,000 people (a conservative estimate) secured links to the report [4]. The report was cited by five news agencies; there was also take-up by various websites and campaign groups, including ENGAGE, an NGO working towards enhancing engagement by Muslim communities in national life, particularly in politics and the media [5].

In order to assist with raising awareness of contemporary far-right extremism amongst young adults, Copsey spoke to the Young Foundation at a central London event in March 2011. This event - "Are we entering a new politics of extremism?" - was chaired by Labour MP Rushanara Ali. It formed part of the UpRising project (a project dedicated to supporting young adults from diverse backgrounds as future leaders across public, private and voluntary sectors). Copsey spoke to an audience of around 100 stakeholder participants, mainly young adults from areas particularly affected by the challenges of right-wing extremism, such as Barking and Dagenham, Newham and Tower Hamlets.

This event was followed by an invitation from the Research and Documentation Committee of the Muslim Council of Britain to write a critical online opinion piece on the latest iteration of the Government's counter-terrorist *Prevent* strategy. The piece, which was aimed specifically at Muslim communities, was published online in June 2011 [6]. The revised *Prevent* strategy recognised an existential threat from far-right radicalisation. Informing implementation of *Prevent*, the Home Affairs Committee undertook an inquiry into the root causes of violent radicalisation. As part of this inquiry, Copsey contributed to the Home Affairs Conference on Violent Radicalisation in December 2011. In the subsequent Home Affairs Committee report, which was published in early 2012, Copsey was referenced in terms of reiterating the risks of 'cumulative extremism' [7].

The point about 'cumulative extremism' (one extremism feeding off another) was also made by Copsey at the Home Office in a closed meeting with the Research, Information and Communications Unit of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism in January 2012. The following month, Copsey's influential report on the EDL was selected as a key resource in a Cross-Government Working Group Report on anti-Muslim hatred [8]. Copsey also assisted in the drafting of an internal DCLG report on anti-Muslim hate crime in March 2012. Given his valuable research examining the rise and impact of the EDL, Copsey was then invited to participate in a private roundtable meeting of experts, activists and practitioners at St Ethelburga's Peace and Reconciliation Centre in London.

In the wake of the Breivik massacre in Norway, Copsey's work on the EDL featured in *forskning.no*

(an online newspaper devoted to disseminating Norwegian and international research) [9]. In May 2012 Copsey featured in a Finnish TV documentary – *Spotlight* – on the growing anti-Islamic movement in Europe (he had been approached after the programme’s chief reporter had read his report on the EDL). Filmed extracts from a Copsey lecture on the EDL and an interview were screened across two separate broadcasts (3.5.12) and (10.5.12) by the Finnish equivalent of the BBC [10]. Eager to further locate his research in the broader international context, on 25 April 2013 Copsey delivered a public lecture at De Balie, Amsterdam, to an audience of around one hundred. A condensed version of the lecture, which examined continuities between fascism, neo-fascism and radical right-wing populism, was published in the Dutch quality daily *NRC Handelsblad* (circulation approx. 200,000) [11].

As a pathway to sustaining future impact in this area, Teesside University launched the new Centre for Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Post-Fascist Studies (with Feldman as co-director). The decision to launch the Centre attracted extensive local, national and international media coverage (e.g., *Independent*, 29.12.12; *Guardian*, 14.1.13; *Muslim Weekly*, 18.1.13; BBC Radio 4, 27.1.13; *Gulf Times*, 30.12.12; *Philippine Times*, 13.1.13; FM4 (radio) Austria, 27.4.13). Norwegian MP, Håkon Haugli (Labour) submitted a question to the Norwegian Minister of Justice, asking whether a similar research Centre should be established in Norway [12].

Coinciding with its formal launch, the Centre published a quantitative report entitled *Anti-Muslim Hate Crime and the Far Right* in June 2013, featuring Copsey as lead-author. As part of our on-going engagement with NGO Faith Matters, this report attracted extensive media coverage, both nationally (e.g., *Independent*, 29.6.13; *Observer*, 30.6.13; Channel 4 News, 1.7.13; ITV *Daybreak*, 4.7.13) and internationally (*Zeenews.com* 29.6.13; *Zaman*, 1.7.13; *The Nation Pakistan*, 2.7.13, *Press TV*, 8.7.13). During a parliamentary debate on extremism and integration in early July 2013, the report was cited by Labour MP Keith Vaz in a question to Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Pickles recognised that anti-Muslim hate crime incidents should be graded [13].

Impact in this area is embedded and on-going. Beyond the impact assessment period, the resignations of the EDL’s leaders in October 2013 involved a belated recognition that the EDL had clear links to the extreme right, as Copsey had originally identified in his 2010 report. The Centre once again secured international media coverage [14]. Needless to say, an occupational hazard of this type of research is that it can impact upon the far right itself. The standard response is for groups, like the EDL and BNP, to dismiss it as the work of ‘biased leftists’ or ‘cultural Marxists’ [15].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. <http://archive.is/www.whatnextjournal.co.uk>
<http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/pages/politics/Copsey.html>
2. See ‘Enemies not Allies: The Far Right’ <http://www.onelawforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Enemies-not-Allies-web-version1.pdf>;
http://www.nasuwat.org.uk/consum/groups/public/@equalityandtraining/documents/nas_download/nasuwat_008149.pdf; <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/countering-political-extremism-more-information/>).
3. <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpsubject/socsci/topbib/bnp/bnp.pdf>
4. Email correspondence with Director of Faith Matters, 30.11.10.
5. See <http://iengage.org.uk/component/content/article/1-news/1121-new-report-examines-edls-islamophobic-agenda>
6. See <http://soundings.mcb.org.uk/?p=137>
7. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmhaff/1446/1446.pdf>
8. See C. Allen, Cross-Government Working Group on anti-Muslim Hatred: Scoping Exercise Submission (University of Birmingham: February 2012).
9. <http://www.forskning.no/artikler/2011/juli/294284>
10. Email correspondence with chief reporter Marko Hietikko, 12.3.12. Documentary online.
11. Copy of article (in Dutch) available on request.
12. <http://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Sporsmal/Skriftlige-sporsmal-og-svar/Skriftlig-sporsmal/?qid=56117>
13. See Hansard source (Citation: HC Deb, 8 July 2013, c5)
14. See for example: Reuters 8.10.13; *NBCNews* 8.10.13; *Arab Times* 9.10.13.
15. See <http://theenglishdefenceleagueextra.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/nigel-copsey-professor-of-anti-fascism.html>.