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A Double-Edged Sword? The UK's Counter Terrorism Framework and its Influence on Far Right Movements

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Abstract

The threat landscape is changing around the world, and these changes are felt acutely in the UK. With community divisions widening and threats evolving, the UK's counter terrorism framework aims to bring security to its population. The UK Government boasts of their 'world-leading' counter terrorism strategies and agencies and assure the public that they are equipped to protect the nation from any terror threat (HM Government, 2023: 2). However, as the far right have tightened their grip on Europe, the Islamist focus of the UK's counter terrorism framework is receiving more and more criticism. This dissertation will employ a mixed methods approach, largely performing content analysis of primary and secondary literature, supported by quantitative analysis of statistical data. This methodological approach is applied to investigate how the UK's counter terrorism framework, e.g. the strategies, and agencies involved, influences the far right. Specifically, it aims to analyse the UK's counter terrorism combats the far right threat and what impact does it have on the far right. This research paper will find that the UK's counter terrorism framework does not adequately address the far right threat, failing to recognise the danger it presents and, finally, concludes that the UK's counter terrorism framework facilitates the growth of the far right.

Introduction

The far right has become a growing security concern in the UK over recent years. For long, the public perception has been that the far right threat is nowhere near the threat posed by Islamist extremists, however, evidence suggests that this is far from the truth (Ibbetson, 2021; Smith, 2024; Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023). This misperception has not only allowed the far right to evolve in the UK, but has also contributed to it, as the far right often capitalises from anti-Muslim rhetoric (McGarry, 2018). The narrative of media reporting and government legislation on extremism and terrorism greatly emphasises the danger presented by Islamist ideologies, demonstrating a gap in the UK's counter terrorism focus (Allen, 2014; Powell, 2011; Alghamdi, 2015; Shawcross, 2023). The *Prevent* strategy, which aims to counter homegrown terrorism through community cohesion and surveillance has received criticism for its disproportionate and unequal focus on Muslim communities (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Thomas, 2012; Kundnani, 2009). It is this focus, which this thesis argues, has led the strategy to be unsuccessful in adequately quelling the far right threat. However, the *Prevent* strategy is not alone in its shortcomings, as the broader counter terrorism framework created by the UK government has also failed to mitigate, and has in some cases, contributed to the growth of the far right. This thesis aims to uncover the strategic approaches taken by policies and agencies of the UK's counter terrorism framework in tackling extreme right wing

ideologies and the extreme right wing terrorist (ERWT) threat, and how these approaches influence the growth of the far right.

Background

Before we are able to analyse the UK's counter terrorism framework's influence on the far right, we must first understand what it is we are discussing. The far right is growing in influence in the UK and around the globe. However, we still lack a clear, coherent, and universally accepted definition of the far right (Mudde, 2019). This is impactful for a number of reasons, making it harder for prosecutors to secure a suitable conviction against violent far right offenders and causing difficulties for security agencies preventing the ideology from spilling over into violence. Cas Mudde, a scholar at the forefront of far right research argues that 'there is no academic consensus on the correct terms for the broader movement and the various subgroups within it' (2019: 3). He argues that this lack of consensus stems from the changes in understanding of the 'left' and the 'right' (2019). The concept of the left-right division has taken on many forms since its inception during the French Revolution, from being defined in terms of support for the monarchy to being defined in terms of socio-economic policies during the industrial revolution (2019).

In today's world the left-right division is more commonly defined in terms of socio-cultural views, 'with the right standing for either authoritarianism

(versus the left's libertarianism) or nationalism (versus the left's internationalism)' (Mudde, 2019: 4). To support his argument, Mudde draws on the Italian philosopher, Norberto Bobbio's work, which 'defines the key distinction between left and right on the basis of their view on (in)equality' (Mudde, 2019: 4). He argues that the left believe inequality to be inherently bad and man-made, so it can thus be countered by an 'active state' and the right believes that inequalities are simply inherent to the differences between peoples and should not be interfered with by the state (Mudde, 2019; Bobbio, 1996). From this viewpoint, Mudde defines the far right as a group of those 'who are "anti-system," defined here as hostile to liberal democracy' (2019: 4). He furthers this definition, stating that this group is divided into the extreme right (e.g. fascism), which 'rejects the essence of democracy' and the radical right, which 'opposes fundamental elements of *liberal* democracy, most notably minority rights, rule of law, and separation of powers' (2019: 4). Despite the differences between the two subgroups, Mudde makes clear that 'both subgroups oppose the postwar liberal democratic consensus' but 'the extreme right is revolutionary' and 'the radical right is more reformist' (2019:4). In short, Mudde concludes that while the radical right trusts and believes in the power of the people, the extreme right does not share this sentiment (2019:4).

Understanding Cas Mudde's conceptualisation of the far right is vital to being able to clarify the UK government's and, by extension, the UK's

counterterrorism framework's understanding of the far right threat. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament released a landmark evaluation of the ERWT threat, titled *Extreme Right Wing Terrorism* in 2022. This paper states clear definitions of the far right, extreme right wing and extreme right wing terrorism. This report, sanctioned by the UK Government, defines the far right as 'an umbrella term to encapsulate the entire movement which has a far right political outlook in relation to matters such as culture, race, immigration and identity' (2022: 3). The definition goes on to clarify that the far right 'includes groups and individuals who hold that Western civilisations are under threat from 'non-native' people and ideas' (2022: 3). It furthers this point, stating that 'the term encompasses individuals and movements including the quasi-democratic and populist, and extends from the British National Party through to the proscribed National Action' (2022: 3). This definition is deliberately broad, due to the wide and varying ideologies within the far right. It is designed to encompass the three broad categories of far right ideologies, which were jointly agreed upon in 2019 by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP). These three critical security agencies have separated right wing extremist ideologies into, 'Cultural Nationalism,' 'White Nationalism,' and 'White Supremacism' (The Intelligence and Security Committee of

Parliament, 2022: 5).¹

The 2011 *Prevent Review* states that Al-Qaeda linked, or affiliated terrorism is the biggest terrorist threat to the UK, and contemporary rhetoric often echoes this statement (Home Office, 2011; HM Government, 2023). However, the UK Government's recent establishment of far right ideology definitions is a promising development and highlights its attempt to bring the extreme right wing (XRW) and ERWT into the UK's counter terrorism focus. The *Annual Report 2022-2023* clarified that today, 'Islamist groups based overseas, as well as transnational ERWT online communities, have continued to play an important role in driving the terrorist threat to the UK' (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023: 26). This statement is evidenced by The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) study which was published 10 years after the 2011 *Prevent Review*. This study found that there was a 320% increase in far right connected terrorist incidents since 2010 (The Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020, cited in Collins, 2021). This rising global trend is also applicable to the UK. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament found that 'the number of ERWT investigations, disruptions and *Prevent* referrals have all steadily increased since 2015' (2022: 16). In fact, data taken from MI5 shows that just under 30% of all 25 attacks which were prevented by authorities between the 22nd March 2017 and the 31st of January

¹ See appendix 1 – Table explaining the designated characteristics of these ideologies

2020 were motivated by an XRW ideology (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). Despite the IEP study and statements made in government publications such as the *Annual Review*, the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament published a contradictory statement in their report titled *Extreme Right Wing Terrorism*. The report states that there has been no observable ‘significant increase in specific mobilisation or radicalisation during this period, and ERWT investigations continue to constitute a significant minority of MI5’s CT casework’ (2022: 15). Moreover, Shawcross’ Independent Review of *Prevent*, which has been accused of having substantial defects and ‘no secure grounding,’ re-emphasises the Islamist threat (Shawcross, 2023; Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023). These conflicting statements from the UK Government, coupled with third party criticism and studies, which have found that there is a distinct increase in broader far right and violent far right activity, highlight that the research conducted as part of this thesis is pertinent and justified in its timing and scope.

Research Motivation

The interest for this research project stemmed from my undergraduate research project titled, ‘The Role of Cyclical Reporting of Government, Media and the Public in the Disproportionate Impacts of *Prevent* on Muslim Communities in the UK’. The analysis conducted as part of that dissertation found that the *Prevent* and rhetoric from political and media actors were harmful to cohesion between the many different cultural demographics. Those findings triggered

this research project's aim to 1) analyse the efficacy of the UK's wider counter terrorism framework (including policy such as *Contest* and the agencies responsible for carrying out policy objectives) in addressing the far right, and 2) uncover if the UK's counter terrorism framework is responsible for any growth of the far right. At the beginning of the research process, I determined two hypotheses: 1) the UK's counter terrorism framework does not adequately address the far right threat, and 2) the UK's counter terrorism framework has fuelled the far right. My hypotheses derived from previous research in surrounding topics, such as a research projects mapping the growth of the far right in the UK, analysing the media and the government's differences in rhetoric when discussing Islamist and extreme right wing terrorism, as well as the research conducted during the writing of my undergraduate dissertation. Previous research into the role of the UK's counter terrorism framework has evaluated its effectiveness as a counter terrorism tool or analysed the impact of the UK's counter terrorism framework on Muslim communities. This research project aims to fill a gap in the research and analyse the influence that the UK's counter terrorism framework has had on the growth of the far right in the UK to answer the research question, 'What are the effects of the UK's counter terrorism framework on the far right?'.

Structure

The first chapter of this thesis reviews the extant literature. This chapter is divided into two sections which discuss the scholarship on 1) the far right and

2) the securitisation of Muslims. The first section delves into the previous research on scholarly understandings of the far right and culture as well as the manifestations of the far right, namely, politics, extremism, and terrorism. The second section discusses the role of politics and the media in the securitisation of Muslims and the UK and the impacts of this phenomenon on the growth of the far right. The literature review is followed by the methodology chapter which will outline this research project's mixed methodology research design, research question, and theoretical framework. This dissertation will then have three substantive chapters titled, 'Examining the Threat from the Far Right,' 'Prevent, Muslims and the Far Right,' and 'The UK Counter Terrorism Framework's Approach to the Far Right.' The first substantive chapter will evaluate the threat posed by the political, extreme and terrorist far right manifestations. The second substantive chapter will evaluate the relationship between the UK's controversial *Prevent* strategy, the securitisation of Muslims and resultant the effect on the far right. And the final substantive chapter will discuss how the UK's counter terrorism framework has approached the far right threat by analysing the policy, agencies and terminology involved. Finally, from the analyses conducted, this thesis will conclude that the UK's counter terrorism framework has inadequately addressed the threat from the far right, failing to recognise the seriousness of the threat, and has actually facilitated its growth in some respects.

Literature Review

When discussing the far right, it is important not only to have a clear working definition, but it is also paramount to analytically distinguish and understand the relationship between, as well as the separation of, far right political parties, far right social movements, and far right terrorism. Although there are similarities in their varying ideologies, the workings and goals of these different groups will vary, as will their operations and their relationship to institutional politics and parties. This literature review will be divided into two sections. The first half will discuss the far right, while the second half will discuss the role played by the securitisation of Muslims in the growth of the far right. The first half of this literature review will discuss different scholarly definitions of the far right and adopt a definition that will serve as the basis of this thesis. Following this, we will delve into the existing literature on far right politics. Finally, I will discuss the previous literature on far right extremism and terrorism in the UK. The second half of this literature review will provide a definition of securitisation, as conceptualised by Didier Bigo and the Paris School, discuss the role played by UK's counter terrorism framework, such as *Contest* and in contributing to this phenomenon and then move on to discuss the media's influence in contributing to the securitisation of Muslim communities in the UK. Finally, the second half of this literature review will marry these topics and explain how they work together to empower the far right.

The Far Right and Culture

The rise of the far right in the UK would never have been predicted during and directly after the WWII era, due the nation's pride for their role in the defeat of Hitler and his fascist Nazi Party becoming a strong characteristic of national pride (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Yet despite this, scholars such as Sibley have declared that 'in the UK alone, the far right is the fastest-growing form of extremism' and the 2023 *Prevent* Report confirmed this assertion (Sibley, 2023; The Home Office, 2023). Pupcenoks and McCabe (2013) argue that this rise is rooted in the growing anti-Islamic sentiment present in the UK. The scholars focus on non-state far right actors and argue that the success of far right groups and parties was due to their commitment to democracy, institution and British ideals and their disdain for political elites, using these characteristics to exploit 'the public's increasing distrust of mainstream political parties and hostility toward immigrants' (Pupcenoks and McCabe, 2013: 172). They support this statement with Ivarsflaten's finding that throughout the 1980s and 1990s the radical right wing populist party family was solidified around anti-immigrant appeals (Ivarsflaten, 2008, cited in Pupcenoks and McCabe, 2013: 172). In today's manifestation of the far right, this anti-immigrant sentiment has been refocused on and conflated with anti-Muslim sentiment. Pupcenoks and McCabe pose that in Western Europe, the most common form of populist far right activity is 'exclusionary populism', which emphasises the incompatibility of the West and Islam, painting Muslims as an inherent and natural threat (2013: 172).

In the UK, the far right is represented both in politics and in civil society, with parties such as the British National Party and UKIP engaging in the political process and groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) and Britain First. Outwith these groups, the issue of the far right has grown so large that XRW groups have been proscribed, with National Action being the first far right extremist group to be proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT 2000) in 2016 (The Home Office and Rudd, 2016). Feldman and Jackson (2011) analyse the EDL's use of social media and public demonstrations to recruit and spread their ideology and views, specifically anti-Islam and nationalist sentiments. They argue that the EDL's confrontational, abrasive, and violent characteristics damage social cohesion, a component that is critical to the *Protect* pillar of *Contest*. Another prominent scholar in this field, Mulhall (2019) explores the evolution of the far right in the UK in its broader context. His analysis demonstrates the increasingly fragmented nature of the UK's far right movements, focusing on different ideologies. However, his analysis also found that this fragmentation does not inhibit these groups' potential for violence and extremism as they are often united by a common and underlying ideology, even between different nationalistic, White supremacist and identitarian groups. Above all, Mulhall's article demonstrates an ongoing requirement of far right movements, which recognises their resilience and capacity for adaptation even despite internal rifts.

Previously, scholarship on nationalism was focused on ‘political nationalism’ which examined the establishment of independent nations, however, as far right movements have begun to rise and take hold, so too has the need for wider research (Hutchinson, 2013; Schmidt, 1956; Terrance, 1991). In response to this, the divisions of far right ideologies, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, have received more academic attention in the international relations, sociology and even history fields in recent years. Cultural Nationalism, as understood by earlier scholarship was comprised of movements which aimed to establish independence, in the wake of imperialism and colonialism (Colclough, 2006). However, more current literature in the field of politics understands cultural nationalism as a movement which feels threatened by the presence of ‘non-native’ culture and seeks to form ‘national communities’ through disruptive political actions (Hutchinson, 2013: 76). These groups not only seek an independent nation comprised of ‘natives’, but also aim to establish a native culture by means of education which explicitly teaches their own values and morals (Hutchinson, 2013). Hutchinson divides the cultural nationalist movement into two sub-types: one which is ‘imbued with an ‘organic’ romantic conception of the nation as a historical community’ and its political counterpart, which relies on a homogenous and equal community within a territorial state (Hutchinson, 2013: 76).

Although Hutchinson takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on history, anthropology and cultural studies, his view is mainly characterised by his background as a government scholar. This viewpoint leads Hutchinson, and his peers to focus on the political side of cultural nationalism rather than the sociological aspects. Thus, he takes an approach which highlights the interplay between culture and politics, emphasising the role cultural nationalism can play in political movements and state-building processes. Furthermore, Hutchinson's approach examines the historical evolution of cultural nationalism, pointing out key moments which shaped its trajectory, allowing him to discuss the context-dependent nature of cultural nationalism. His scholarly background in the field of government studies leads him to focus more on the implications of cultural nationalism for policy and state governance, examining the way in which states employ cultural nationalism to solidify their authority and unify their populations. Furthermore, his analytical tools and concepts, such as ideology, power dynamics and statecraft are taken from the field of political science, leading him to frame cultural nationalism in terms of political strategy. This political lens is also seen in the works of Rabow-Edling (2007) and Malinova (2021). Both of these scholars' research focus on the role of cultural nationalism in the realm of politics, power and nation building while analysing the societal effects only as an aspect of the political implications. Spencer exemplifies this approach in her work *Rethinking Cultural and Political Nationalism* (2014). Although her research is mainly focused on the political implications of cultural nationalism, she also

examines the civil societal aspects of cultural nationalism across different Western societies to produce a more holistic analysis of cultural nationalism within the realm of political studies. Her analysis found that different societies had different interpretations of cultural nationalism. For example, the French saw equal citizenship as the assimilation of non-natives into French culture and language, while the British had a more political viewpoint, requiring non-Brits to not only assimilate into their culture but also adopt their political structure in British colonies. Her analysis also revealed the evolution of cultural nationalism over time, finding that in the twentieth century denial of other cultural was integral to the state's success, causing the scholarship on cultural nationalism to be focused on political nationalism, as the state was deemed the most important actor.

Woods and Debs (2013) critique the dominance of political studies in cultural nationalism for ignoring cultural approaches, suggesting a sociological perspective is more appropriate. They agree with political and international relations scholars that a shared culture is vital for nation building but contest that it is solely 'constructed, maintained, and transformed' from above. Instead, they present two views: one posits that shared culture is dictated in a 'top-down' approach by institutions like education systems and state mechanisms (Gellner, 2006; Weber, 1976; Giddens, 1985), supported by elite-implemented 'invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012). The other, from ethnosymbolists, argues that the top-down theory fails to address why

national cultures are able to be sustained through generations and felt so deeply (Woods and Debs, 2013; Smith, 2009; Grosby and Leoussi, 2007). They argue elite driven culture draws from enduring national symbols and traditions, emphasising religion's role in nationalism's enduring power. This perspective helps explain far right movements' use of cultural history and the emphasis on preserving traditional cultural against perceived external threats (Couperus, Tortola and Rensmann, 2023; Baysinger, 2006). However, it falls short in addressing the societal impacts of cultural nationalism.

The strong programme in sociology, as imagined by Jeffrey Alexander emphasises culture as an 'enduring and relatively independent social force' (Woods and Debs, 2013: 3). Therefore, the strong programme does not accept the role of the elites as the founders of culture, but instead argues that culture is resultant of its 'perceived proximity to the sacred', offering an explanation for its deeply felt impacts and longevity (Woods and Debs, 2013: 4). This programme has also faced criticism however, with scholars such as Gartman (2007) and Fine (2010) challenging its validity due to the lack of heed it pays to the role power plays in constructing and maintaining culture. This triggered Alexander to respond and in his recent works, he has specifically examined the relationship and interaction between culture and power, strengthening the strong programme and legitimising its use as an analytical tool (Alexander, J.C., 2008; Willa, S. and Alexander J.C., 2023). The evolution of the strong programme has enabled it to become a much more well-rounded analytical

tool, and given its great applicability to the far right. As the far right is seen throughout all levels of society and government, from political parties to grassroots movements, the strong programme's ability to look at the political as well as the societal impacts of culture helps explain the different movements within far right ideologies. Moreover, as culture features as a key aspect in nearly all far right ideologies, it has a wide relevance across movements (Couperus, Tortola and Rensmann, 2023).

Far Right Manifestations

Politics

Academics such as Mudde (1999) and Eatwell (2016) have discussed varying scholarly theories of the ideologies and theoretical foundation of the far right at length, with particular focus on the problematic single-issue theory. The concept of a single issue party is founded upon the seminal work of Lipset and Rokkan. Their 1967 book *Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction*, coined the term societal cleavage, which describes underlying divisions in a society, often based on religion, ethnicity, class, or geography. Some scholars such as Hartmann et al. define the single issue theory in the context of the far right as 'right wing extremism on the basis of only one single feature,' which, according to Husbands, and in line with Lipset and Rokkan's work, is typically immigration (Mudde, 2002: 10; Husbands, 1992). This is further consolidated by some scholars' belief that the term 'anti-immigration groups' would be the most appropriate label for far

right groups (Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie, 2005; Pupcenoks and McCabe, 2013). Dahl wrote in 1956 that there should always be a connection between the will of the public and the politics within a democracy (1956). This connection can be seen in sudden rises in single issue parties, which might indicate a shift in societal cleavages – that is, the emergence of new divisions or the changing importance of existing ones. So, it is therefore fair to say that through the lens of Lipset and Rokkan’s theory, a rise in single issue parties is a natural reaction to a rise in societal tension, and far right sentiment among the public.

A further step is triggered in the chain reaction caused by a rise in public far right sentiment in the broader political landscape. Ford and Goodwin (2014) argue that the ascent of single issue parties in the UK overcame a reluctance from the public to vote for an openly racist and anti-Semitic party. This reluctance was created by the defeat of the Nazis forming an integral part of the nation’s culture. The phenomenon of single issue parties overpowering the anti-fascist British culture is exemplified by the British National Party (BNP), who won two seats in the 2009 European elections (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Ford and Goodwin argue that, in this election, the BNP successfully found a way to ‘introduce a more toxic form of right wing politics into the mainstream’ (2014: 7). Norris and Inglehart agree that shifts in societal cleavages result in a rise of populism and encourage mainstream parties to adopt or entertain further right ideas and policies, but dispute Ford and Goodwin’s claim that

single issue parties play a role in this phenomenon (2019). Romeijn's work on the relationship between public opinion and party support for policies provides a solid foundation to understand this phenomenon on both ends of the political spectrum (2020). Romeijn's study focused on the positions of political parties in Germany on 102 policy proposals between 1998 and 2010. The policies ranged from taxes to military engagement in Afghanistan. Romeijn found that parties typically have two aims: 1) maximise their vote share to ascend into office, and 2) enact policy change (2020). These two factors are seen in combination typically when a party is seeking to be re-elected, and so they will support policies that are in line with public preferences (Romeijn, 2020). Romeijn discusses this relationship, but also discusses the niche to mainstream pipeline, using the example of the Green Party, who would be considered niche due to their emphasis on environmental issues. However once mainstream parties see support for the Green Party and start adopting support for environmental issues, the Green Party would no longer be considered niche (2020). This example helps to explain the single issue to mainstream pipeline in terms of the far right. If mainstream parties see single issue or niche parties garnering support, their power-seeking nature, will lead them to also adopt support for these same issues as the niche or single issue parties, thus mainstreaming what were formerly considered controversial ideas. Romeijn's paper concluded however, that although 'parties in opposition are very effective in taking policy positions that are popular with the public,' the

relationship between public opinion and political parties disappears once they are in office. (2020: 434).

Romeijn's work is important when discussing Norris and Inglehart's, and Ford and Goodwin's work, as it provides grounding for both studies' findings and highlights their theoretical differences. While Norris and Inglehart build on Inglehart's previous work on post-materialism, Ford and Goodwin (2014) grounded their work in the concept of 'grievance politics.' Both these studies are valid and empirically sound, but simply take different approaches, which produce different outcomes. Norris and Inglehart (2019) emphasise broader cultural shifts and societal trends, arguing that the rise of populist parties reflects a deeper cultural backlash. Meanwhile, Ford and Goodwin (2014) focus on electoral competition and political strategy, suggesting that mainstream parties adjust their approaches to maintain voter support in response to populist parties' success. Therefore, it is important to consider both studies when discussing the content matter of this thesis. Goodwin and Ford (2014) examine the rise of UKIP and its impact on the Conservative Party in the UK in their book *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain*. They find that a rise in anti-establishmentarianism, Euroscepticism and anti-immigrant sentiment drove UKIP's success and, as discussed above created pressure for mainstream right wing parties, such as the Conservative Party to adopt similar policies, thus indicating a real and

broader trend where far right political parties have the ability to influence mainstream policy, normalising more extreme right wing views.

Extremism

Mainstreaming of the far right has led to more prevalent far right extremism in the UK (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). Extremism has been covered extensively in previous research in the fields of sociology, international relations, criminology and others. Although each field has slightly different understandings and perspectives on terrorism, they all must agree on one point, in order for something to be considered extreme, it must be related to what is considered ordinary (Coleman and Bartoli, 2015). Coleman and Bartoli define extremism as ‘activities, (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) of a character far removed from the ordinary;’ while violent far right extremism is often characterised by the use of violent means to realise ideological, political, economic, religious or social goals (Coleman and Bartoli, 2015: 2; LaFree, Dugan and Millar, 2015; LaFree and Schwarzenbach, 2021).

Before 2000, terrorism and extremism were not considered central to criminology studies although there was a small amount of relevant research. However, since the turn of the millennium, there has been an uptick in criminologists delving into these topics (LaFree and Schwarzenbach, 2021). The main focus of these research projects has been in the pursuit of predicting

terrorist attacks and understanding radicalisation into and deradicalisation from violent extremism (LaFree and Schwarzenbach, 2021; Altier, Thoroughgood and Horgan, 2014; Pisoui, 2015; Mullins, 2010). More recently, a need for a framework to identify those who have the potential to commit acts of violent extremism has emerged (LaFree and Schwarzenbach). Therefore, criminological studies of extremism have begun to adopt some sociological perspectives and analytical tools (Savelsberg, 2006; Becker, 2019).

Much of the sociological research into extremism, particularly far right radicalism and extremism has endeavoured to understand why those living in liberal democracies support far right parties, many of which disagree with the values of a liberal democracy (Rydgren, 2007, McLaughlin, 2014). Unlike criminology, which aims to understand the individual who engages in violent acts, sociology seeks to understand why extremist thought is tolerated and even at times supported by society. While the criminological perspective may be helpful in preventing attacks by the individual, the sociological perspective and understanding of extremism can aid in preventing societies' acceptance of extremism and even loosening radical thought's grip on a population.

The field of international relations generally views extremism through the lens of security. A realist perspective would concentrate on the security of the state and its government, whereas liberal and constructivist approaches focus on

human security, ergo, the security of the population (Hama, 2017). Although security is the main concern, international relations adopts some aspects of sociological research to understand the phenomenon of extremism (Altier, Thoroughgood and Horgan, 2014; Lake, 2002; Pearson, 2019; Vissing, 2022). In relation to issues such as globalism, immigration and economics, scholars such as those listed above have drawn on analytical tools and perspectives from sociology to analyse the causes behind and impacts of extremism through the lens of security. Daniel Trilling (2012) critically examines the experienced rise of far right extremism in the UK, delving into the violence and hate which is typically associated with groups. His analysis is rooted in the origins of far right extremism and highlights the seemingly responsive nature of these groups to perceived threats to their members' national identity and traditional British values, a term which is prevalent in the UK's counter terrorism framework (Trilling 2012; HM Government, 2023). Trilling noted a sinister trend within the far right, which is the progression from being a member of a far right political party to becoming a member of far right extremist groups.

After the failure of the BNP in the 2010 general elections, members of the party joined the EDL, with some going as far to join National Front, a right wing terrorist organisation (Trilling, 2012: 195). This phenomenon was brought on by feelings of disgruntlement with the UK's political system, and thus, ex-members felt the need to resort to more radical means in order to achieve their ideological goals (Trilling, 2012). Roose (2021) discusses a

different aspect of the far right. His work critically analyses the ways in which extremist ideologies have permeated into broader far right movements, such as the concept of the ‘manosphere’, and how this can blur the lines between accepted mainstream views and their more extreme manifestations. Although, like Trilling’s work, Roose’s chapter mentions the ideological connections between far right extremist groups and the wider far right, he focuses on the ultra-masculine and nationalistic aspects of extreme far right actors’ ideologies.

Terrorism

The demographic participating in extreme right wing terrorism has also evolved over time. Previously far right extremists and terrorists were typically older, working class white men (CBS News, 2022). However, today, we are seeing the technological and digital landscape revolutionise the phenomenon, and now far right terrorists are ‘characterised by a technologically aware demographic of predominantly young men’ (CBS News, 2022). Nilan, a youth psychologist writes about the role young people play in this movement, critically analysing four important themes, ‘youth,’ ‘class,’ ‘masculinity’ and ‘race’ and how they influence the far right (2021). She references Simi and Furtrell’s 2015 piece, writing that ‘supporting the far right is a decision usually made by 15–25-year-olds. After the age of 30, membership drops off’ (Simi and Furtrell, 2015, cited in Nilan, 2021: 1-2). She argues that this high frequency of young membership comes as a result of the recruitment methods

utilised by the far right, which target vulnerable white adolescent males, calling on Berlant's concept of 'cruel optimism' (Nilan, 2021). She supports her argument by pointing out the often-online nature of recruitment into the far right, which gamifies and capitalises on feelings of discontentment or anger that young people may feel towards the world (Nilan, 2021). Her findings are echoed in the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament's report *Extreme Right Wing Terrorism*, which states that 'the new ERWT threat is increasingly driven by the internet and characterised by a technologically aware demographic of predominantly young men, many of them still in their teens who are typically 'Self-Initiated Terrorists' (2022: 2). The pandemic saw an accelerated far right recruitment process as teens and young adults experienced growing fears about their futures and delved deeper into online spaces (Nilan, 2021).

The most violent and unpalatable manifestation of the far right in the UK is represented by terrorism. As outlined in the *Contest* policy, Terrorism is defined by the UK government as:

'The use or threat of serious violence against a person or serious damage to property where that action is: i) designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public; and ii) for the purpose

of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause' (HM Government, 2023: 7)

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament defines the concept of ERWT as 'the segment of the far right movement involved in politically motivated violence' (2022: 3). These definitions serve as an operational basis on which authorities can mitigate, prevent, and prosecute terrorist actions. According to the Intelligence and Security Committee, the far right in the UK can be traced back to the 1930s with the emergence of Sir Oswald Mosely's political party, the British Union of Fascists (2022). Later, groups such as Combat 18 (C18) were created, promoting openly neo-Nazi and White supremacist views. Groups such as these were founded as 'stewarding' groups, acting as security for events run by the BNP (The Intelligence and Security Committee, 2022: 9). As discussed above in relation to the BNP and National Front, C18 also split from the BNP in 1993 'on ideological grounds', further demonstrating the slippery slope from engaging in the political process, to engaging in violent extremism (The Intelligence and Security Committee, 2022: 9). The most famous example of far right terrorism in the UK in recent memory was the murder of Labour MP, Jo Cox by the White supremacist who had had no formal connections to but was inspired by National Front and the EDL, Thomas Mair (Macklin, 2019; BBC, 2016).

Abbas and Awan, and Blackbourn have studied the relationship between *Prevent*, Muslim radicalisation, and far right radicalisation. They found that the focus of *Prevent* on Muslim communities as a threat and “suspect community has allowed far right extremism to grow, to a certain degree, without scrutiny from the UK government (Abbas and Awan, 2015: 22, Blackbourn, 2021). A ‘suspect community’ is a group which is found to be problematic and a threat to society (Pantiazis and Pemberton, 2009). Often, a ‘suspect community’ assumes the role of scapegoat for issues faced by the State or other actors (Pantiazis and Pemberton, 2009). Blackbourn (2021) argues that the rise in far right terrorism has not resulted in the same changes in legislation that were enacted in response to the rise of Islamic terrorism. He continues that the public concern still lies mainly with Islamic terrorism (Blackbourn, 2021). It is clear from the existing literature on this topic, that there is a rising trend of ERWT and XRW in the UK that is not being met with the parallel effort and attention of the UK’s counter terrorism authorities or framework.

The Securitisation of Muslims and the Growth of the Far Right

Politics

Securitisation, as imagined by the Paris School, is the construction of something which is not necessarily a threat as a security issue, resulting in becoming a perceived threat, and thus, a security issue (Bigo, 2002). Bigo argued that security professionals and government actors are able to engage in

practices, such as surveillance and data collection, and construct security issues (Didier, 2002). Bigo and his Paris School contemporaries focus on the everyday practices and actions of the relevant actors which normalise extraordinary security measures in the name of protecting the referent object from the threat. In the case of this thesis, the referent objects are British culture and institutions, and the threat is Muslims. The issue of securitisation of Muslim communities has been studied extensively in recent years (Abbas and Awan, 2015; Ragazzi, 2016; Hillyard, 1993; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009). The clear statement of the 2011 *Prevent Review* that terrorism which is linked to, or influenced by Al-Qaeda presents the greatest threat to UK security, indicates that *Prevent* will dedicate most attention to Muslim communities (HM Government, 2011). Furthermore, *Prevent's* definition of extremism as 'active or vocal opposition to fundamental British values' will also add further scrutiny to Muslim communities due to their cultural and religious differences from the White British population (HM Government, 2011: 107). Kundani writes that any group or individual(s) which does not culturally identify with these 'fundamental British values,' or even disagrees with British foreign policy, could be tarred with the same stick as violent extremists or even terrorists (2015: 179). These factors combined with *Prevent's* call for neighbour reporting creates a risk that Muslim groups will be further excluded from British society and thus directly contradict *Prevent's* central tenet of community cohesion (Spalek and Imtoul, 2007: 192; Awan 2012: 1150; Kundnani, 2015: 167).

The extraordinary measures permitted as a result of the securitisation of Muslim communities can be seen in Project Champion. Project Champion was a surveillance operation in Greater Manchester, which saw authorised the installation of CCTV in majority Muslim areas (Awan, 2012: 1167). It can also be seen in the extended powers which were extended to police under the Terrorist Act of 2000 and the Terrorism act of 2006. As part of these powers, officers were allowed to stop-and-search members of the public. (Spalek and Imtoul, 2007). After the introduction of these powers, there was a 302% increase in Asian individuals being stopped, meanwhile there was only a 118% increase in White individuals being stopped (Spalek and Imtoul, 2007: 191; Awan, 2012: 1163; McCrimmon, 2022). These operations and findings from academics, combined with the focus of *Contest* on Muslim communities highlight the increasing perception of Muslims as being inherently suspect, alienating them from the community and causing divisions between sectors of society, namely Muslim and White populations. On an academic level, the focus that has been given to studying Islamist terrorism has not been met with an equal effort into studying far right terrorism. Koehler finds this shortfall worrying and believes that it leads to 'a dangerous level of ignorance' (2016). This ignorance is considered dangerous as, without sufficient academic studies that explore the phenomenon of far right terrorism, changing and enacting legislation can be challenging, due to a lack of supporting evidence bringing this issue to the awareness of those in power.

Media and the Public

In creating tensions between Muslim and White British communities, *Prevent*'s securitisation of Muslims has fuelled far right anti-Muslim sentiment (Abbas and Awan, 2015). The focus on Muslims on a political and societal level has shaped the media portrayal of Muslims. Petersen believes that the top priority in media headlines is conflict and by creating unrest between Muslim and White British communities, the UK's counter terrorism framework has given the media a cornucopia of stories (Peterson, 2003: 253). To support his argument, Petersen draws on Hartley's statement that the public's demand for 'democratic accountability' and the wish to be perceived as informed on world issues, creates a desire for knowledge of conflict, encouraging media outlets to produce frequent and disproportionate levels of reports on these events (Hartley, 2000: 40).

Lipmann and Klapper present two schools of thought on the role of the media. Lipmann believes that the consumer is influenced by the media (1950). He argues that the information provided to the public via the media is researched and produced by human actors, with their own biases, prejudices and agendas, and thus, as this information is passed onto the public, it can contribute to inaccurate perceptions of concepts and events (Lipmann, 1950). This understanding of the role of the media, believes that the information fed to the public can reinforce the requirement of the securitisation of Muslims and justify the extraordinary measures taken in the name of 'protecting' Britain.

On the other hand, is Klapper, who argues that the media ‘tends to reinforce the existing predispositions of its audience members’ (Klapper, 1963: 517). His theory argues that the media acts as an echo chamber of its consumers’ perception of the world, issues and events. Thus, the media simply bolsters the public’s opinions and, in this case, justifies the UK’s treatment of Muslims. The debate between these two scholars’ theories presents the age-old question, what came first the chicken or the egg? Here, presented as, the opinion of the public or the agenda of the media. Lipmann would have us believe that the media’s agenda controls the public’s opinion, while Klapper would have us conclude that the media merely echoes the public’s world views. It is possible however, that these two theories are not mutually exclusive. Although newspapers typically align themselves with political parties and promote their affiliated party’s agenda, they still rely on the consumer to purchase their content and, thus, must also reflect the public’s opinions (Harris, Fury and Lock, 2008; McCrimmon, 2022). Therefore, I argue that both Lipmann and Klapper’s theories can help explain the securitisation of Muslim communities in the UK today. Once Muslims have been portrayed negatively in the media, the public will include this narrative in their own perceptions, which will, in turn, receive media coverage.

Methodology

This chapter will introduce and justify the research methodology for this thesis regarding the influence of the UK's counter terrorism framework on the growth of the far right. In order to answer the research question, 'What are the effects of the UK's counter terrorism framework on the far right?', I adopted a mixed methods approach. This approach enabled me to conduct a qualitative content analysis of government documents, scholarly literature and news sources, as well as a quantitative analysis of secondary statistics concerning the impact of the UK's counter terrorism framework on the public, the growth of the far right and the terrorist threat in the UK. By performing a qualitative analysis of sociological, criminological, counter terrorism, media and political research fields, my research filled a gap in the research by drawing on these various fields of study to evaluate the efficacy of the UK's counter terrorism framework in combatting the far right threat and analysing the relationship it has had to the growth of the far right in the UK. This methodological approach, as well as the aims of this research project are novel, as the extant research projects have not pulled from such a range of scholarly fields. Furthermore, this study is the first to explore the relationship between the UK's counter terrorism framework and the far right, and specifically, the influence it has on the far right. My chosen methodology allowed for a deeper understanding of the relationship between different extremist ideologies, their motivations and the impact counter terrorism framework have on them. It also allowed a deeper understanding of the UK's counter terrorism framework

itself.

Research Design

This thesis features both qualitative and quantitative analyses of existing research and literature of the research topics above as part of a mixed methods approach. Creswell writes that qualitative research methods are ‘a means for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem’ (2003: 4). By employing a qualitative research methodology, I was able to gain a more in-depth insight into the available information within the relevant fields of research and delve deeper into the impact of the UK’s counter terrorism on the growth of the far right in the UK, and, as part of that, the varying communities in the UK. Quantitative research, on the other hand, explains phenomena through the mathematically based analysis of collected numerical data, often statistics (Creswell, 1994). Although I did not produce any original data sets when conducting this research project, I did analyse secondary statistical data related to this project in order to support my qualitative analysis. After careful consideration of the ethical implications of this research project, I concluded that this research would not cause any harm to individuals or groups, as it did not involve any human subjects or the collection of original social media data. This research project was conducted in line with the University Ethics Committee (UEC) guidelines.

Theoretical Framework

In examining the effects of the UK's counter terrorism framework on the far right, this master's thesis adopted the framework of Securitisation as articulated by the Paris School. Building on key works of Didier Bigo, such as *Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease*, and *The (In)Securitisation Practices of the Three Universes of EU Border Control* (2014), this framework facilitates a nuanced analysis of how political and security actors construct 'Others' (often Muslims) as a security threat, through policy and agencies. This framework also allows for a detailed analysis of UK's counter terrorism framework's failure to adequately construct the far right as a security threat in line with the timeline of its growth.

Applying this theory within this framework allows for a detailed examination of the relevant policy, state and private actors, as well as the relevant discourse and narratives, that contribute to the process of securitisation. By scrutinising the interactions and relationship between political discourse, law enforcement practices, and public perceptions, this study aims to unveil the complex political and societal dynamics shaping the impact of counter terrorism policies on the far right within the UK context.

Methodological Limitations

A possible limitation of employing qualitative content analysis is the lengthy process that is inherent to the method (Anderson, 2010: 2). However, the scope of the qualitative analysis in this project was designed to ensure it would fit

within the time constraints of a master's research project. A further concern when conducting qualitative research is the potential for bias within the sources (Anderson, 2010). The reviewed literature could have been impacted by the writers' perspectives, beliefs and opinions, and thus, has the potential to be subjective. I have combatted this possible limitation by triangulating and supporting my qualitative findings with quantitative research, which analyses collected secondary statistics relevant to the chosen topics.

Conclusion

The mixed methodology approach, made up of both qualitative and quantitative analyses of previous literature and research regarding the influence of the UK's counter terrorism framework on the growth of the far right in the UK ensured a scientifically rigorous research process which produced sufficiently supported findings as a result. Moreover, the mixed methods approach combatted any potential weaknesses of a qualitative research approach by allowing for support from a quantitative analysis and vice versa. As this research project was based on analyses of previous literature in the relevant fields of political studies, media studies, counter terrorism studies, sociology and criminology, as well as primary literature such as the counter terrorism policies and strategies themselves, I was able to consider a broad cross-section of these sources and organise them in order to answer the research question in an empirically sound manner.

Examining The Threat from the Far Right

While historically, Britain has been a nation that is very tolerant of different political beliefs, religions and ethnicities, since 9/11 and 7/7 there has been a steep increase in the number and severity of these differences being perceived as threats to British people (Altheide, 2006; Baskan, 2022, Schmid, 2014; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012: 2; May, 2021: 1). This rise has been mirrored by and also influenced the rise of the far right (Altheide, 2006; Baskan, 2022). As was discussed in the above literature review, the far right spans across many domains such as politics, extremism and terrorism. This chapter of analysis will examine the threat posed by each of these different factions of the far right and provide a basis for the analysis of the UK's counter terrorism framework's effectiveness at responding to them. The first section will discuss the threat posed from the radical far right, analysing how the rise of populism and far right ideologies can cause the Overton window, which encompasses ideas deemed legitimate and acceptable in society, to shift to the right and even lead to violent extremism (Mackinac Center, n.d.). The following section will analyse the threat posed by far right movements to the UK's security. Split into two themes, the section will discuss the physical, and the online nature of the phenomenon, highlighting the threat of XRW violence and radicalisation. The final section will delve into an analysis of the ERWT threat. Following the same structure as the previous section, this discussion is split into the physical and online threat posed by ERWT. Here, this thesis will analyse the scale of

the threat faced and the blurring of the lines between the physical and virtual world, and how this can result in real world violence and terrorism.

Politics

Britain was long considered to be a two-party system, with the main two parties being the Conservative Party and the Labour Party (Wager, 2024). However, in the past decade we have experienced a breakdown of trust in the political system creating space for more fringe parties, particularly populist parties (Wager, 2024; Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). Populism is an ideology which separates the population into two categories, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Radical far right populism combines populism with authoritarianism and nativism (Mudde, 2017). One such party is the populist radical right, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Although UKIP presents itself as upholding the principles of patriotism, liberalism, traditionalism, as well as national-, political- and economic democracy, Baskan (2022), agreeing with Mudde, suggests it is just as easy to describe the group as nativist, xenophobic and nationalistic. Nativism, as defined by Mudde (2016) believes that a state should be inhabited solely by natives of the land and that non-natives pose a severe threat to the native population.

UKIP’s combination of populism and nativism was clear in their Brexit campaign. While they argued that the EU was corrupt and did not understand

the British people or their complaints, they also vilified immigrants, blaming the EU for the damage to Britain caused by ‘mass uncontrolled immigration’ (UKIP, 2018: 4). Nigel Farage, the leader of UKIP from 2014 to 2019, is the epitome of a populist political actor. He is charismatic, articulate, and knows how to engage with the ‘ordinary’ population (De Lange and Art, 2011). He also perfectly falls into the radical right category, expressing nativist and cultural nationalistic sentiments, while engaging in the political system (Stewart and Mason, 2016). What UKIP and similar parties such as the Brexit Party (now Reform UK) and the BNP excel at is constructing threat perceptions. They have weaponised the sociological change in Britain and ‘triggered people’s perception of threats such as migration, terrorism and dependency on the EU and the restrictions of freedom of expression’ in the pursuit of power (Baskan, 2022). The term “threat” implies that there is the possibility to hinder or prevent negative situations arising and so, in other words, UKIP and similar parties created a perception of a crisis and then developed radical ‘solutions,’ painting themselves as Britain’s saviour.

Threat perceptions comprise aspects of the politics of fear. Far right populist parties recognise the power of emotion and fear and utilise them to their advantage (Altheide, 2006; Kinnvall, 2014). The creation of migrants as a threat to Britain was seen to have devastating effects before, during and after the Brexit referendum (Clifton-Sprigg, Vujic and Carr, 2021). The UK experienced a peak in hate crimes on the 25th of June, the day after the result

of the referendum was announced, with 289 hate crimes and incidents being reported across England, Wales and Northern Ireland (BBC, 2016). However, the extremely high rates of hate crimes continued for the following three months after the referendum, mostly in areas that voted leave (Clifton-Sprigg, Vujic and Carr, 2021). These statistics are evidence of successful threat perception creation. The fact that the majority of these hate crimes and incidents took place in areas which voted to leave the EU demonstrates that populist far right rhetoric had successfully created a threat perception. This threat perception led people to believe that immigrants and non-White people constituted a serious danger to them and ignited a violent hatred for them, resulting in extremist violence.

Although these hate crimes are clearly the result of populist far right rhetoric in the UK surrounding the Brexit referendum, it is not where the success of far right rhetoric began. For populist far right parties such as UKIP to have so much influence on the population, their ideas had to be presented in mainstream news media and political platforms to receive such a strong public response. Mondon (2022) argues that UKIP's success could mean that they were in touch with rising concerns about issues of immigration and corruption of the political system. However, Mondon (2022) also puts forth that UKIP's success could instead be the result of their disproportionate media coverage. The media were complicit in creating the perception of immigrants as a threat to Britain. As Mondon (2022:2) puts it, 'no matter how clearly and thoroughly

a claim is debunked, the fact that it simply appears in the first place in legitimate publications ...mean the damage is done'. Thus, even if the claims made by populist radical right parties are refuted in the public arena, the fact that the mainstream media has broadcast far right sentiments to the mass public has legitimised them and it cannot be undone. In fewer words, Pandora's box has already been opened.

The result is that far right sentiment rises and, in order to combat losing votes to these fringe parties, mainstream political parties begin to adopt farther right policies while maintaining some of their core beliefs. This can be exemplified by UK Labour's 2015 manifesto adopting tighter fiscal policies (The Labour Party, 2015). A further example of this trend can be seen in the Conservative Party. Although the Conservative party has always been right wing, in recent years it has adopted both far right rhetoric and policies, with Conservative MPs like Suella Braverman using inflammatory language such as describing the arrival of refugees as an 'invasion' (Sky News, 2022). In terms of policy, representatives of the Conservative Party have expressed their desire to pull out of the European Convention of Human Rights as it impedes their ability to carry out actions, such as the relocation of refugees in Britain to Rwanda (Lowles and Mulhall, 2023). Even though the Conservative Party are adopting far right perspectives, a phenomenon has begun to occur where some Conservative members are either leaving or being kicked out of the party for extreme views. Former Conservative Deputy Chair Lee Anderson was

removed from the parliamentary Conservative Party after he refused to apologise for his Islamophobic statement that London Mayor Sadiq Khan was controlled by Islamists. After his removal, Anderson joined Reform UK, a populist far right party. Despite having openly xenophobic and Islamophobic members, Reform UK is predicted to gain the 3rd highest percentage of votes in the upcoming 4th July General Election (BBC News, 2024). This demonstrates that the mainstreaming of the far right has become so severe, that far right parties can become legitimate contenders, even in a first past the post system. This mainstreaming of far right sentiment makes it acceptable in society and on the political stage. Once mainstreaming has begun, media outlets will share more content vilifying immigrants and denigrating them as a “suspect community”, furthering the threat perception and nurturing emotions such as fear and hatred in the population. This leads the Overton Window to shift to the right causing politicians to “address” the public’s concerns through rhetoric and policy, legitimising far right sentiment, thus, increasing the threat and risk of far right extremism (Pauwels, 2021; Sibley, 2023).

Extremism

The UK has experienced such a rise in far right extremism, that in 2022, the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament published a reactionary report titled *Extreme Right Wing Terrorism*, analysing the threat and how to counter it. A likely trigger for this report is the 2019 finding that an extreme right wing terrorist attack in the UK was ‘a realistic possibility’ and authorities

now wish to address the extremist sect of the far right, before it graduates into terrorism (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 12). This is a drastic change from the finding just 7 years earlier that an attack was ‘unlikely’ (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 12). This pendulum swing is indicative of an issue that has grown rapidly, suggesting that preventative measures had been insufficient and unsuccessful, or that not enough heed had been paid to the issue when in its earlier stages. The report identifies the predominant demographic of those engaging in extreme right wing terrorism is ‘young men, many of them still in their teens who are typically ‘Self-Initiated Terrorists’ (S-ITs) (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 2). Due to the delineated nature of far right organisations, it is difficult to procure reliable figures on extreme far right group membership, however it is possible to record the attendance records at extremist events. Based on event attendees, the EDL was estimated to have between 25-35,000 active members, demonstrations in support of Tommy Robinson in June 2018 had between 10-12,000 attendees (Lee, 2019). The scale of in-person support for far right extremist organisations presents a very real risk for the public, as events such as these often turn violent, as was seen at the rally in support of Tommy Robinson that resulted in multiple injuries and numerous arrests (Gayle and Ntim, 2018). However, the scale of in-person support for far right extremist organisations is only the tip of the iceberg.

Less visible than physical attendance at extreme far right events, is the threat

posed from online far right extremists. The online space has revolutionised far right extremism and even led to the creation of new online spaces dedicated to spreading extreme far right rhetoric and hatred. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament breaks down online platforms used by members of the far right into 4 categories: Mainstream Social Media; Fringe Platforms; Extremist Sites; and Secure Messaging Applications (SMAs) (2022: 60). The Committee has found that mainstream platforms are used as an entry point to meet those that may be sympathetic to, but are thus far, uninvolved in the world of the far right. This dimension of the far right is a large contributing factor to the majority young/teen male demographic. This matter highlights the threat posed by far right extremists to our younger generations. Through the use of memes and watered down far right content, members of extreme organisations or lone far right actors indoctrinate and recruit young, typically boys, into their ideology, endangering the target, and those around him due to the isolating and often violent nature of far right extremism (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). This online nature poses yet another threat to the UK, as it allows individuals to be influenced by multiple ideologies, creating difficulties for law enforcement to profile and categorise radicalised individuals. (CBS News, 2022; Lee, 2017; Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 30, 52). Furthermore, because far right ideologies are able to spread quickly online, groups often open and close in very short periods of time, making it difficult to track individuals that may pose a security risk either by enacting violent extremism or indoctrinating

further individuals into the ideology (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 53). Thus, it is clear that the threat from far right extremism online is real and exacerbated by the challenges in effectively addressing it.

Terrorism

Although Islamist terrorism is still deemed to be the biggest threat to UK security, far right terrorism has grown to become a significant threat (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023). Between March 2017 and January 2022, 32% of attacks prevented by UK authorities were motivated by an ERWT ideology (CBS News, 2022). As it stands there are currently 6 proscribed extreme right wing terrorist organisations in the UK, with the most recent being added in April 2024 (Home Office, Cleverly and Tugendhat, 2024). Although the proscription of these groups has undoubtedly helped counter the threat posed by ERWT organisations, the real threat comes from S-ITs (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 15). S-ITs, which used to be termed “Lone Actors” or, problematically, “Lone Wolves”, due to the glorification of that title, are ‘persons who mobilise to threaten or use violence without material support or personal direction from a terrorist organisation; but who may be influenced or encouraged by the rhetoric or ideology of a group’ (Office for Security and Counter Terrorism, 2021, cited in Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 15). Therefore, although proscription of organisations may make it harder for these group members to convene, the online nature of ERWT means that their

rhetoric and ideology is easily spread to those with no formal affiliation to the groups. Thomas Mair, a far right extremist with no formal group membership to an ERWT organisation but who engaged with a myriad of extreme far right material online murdered Labour MP, Jo Cox during the EU referendum campaign (BBC, 2016). Mair is a prime example of the threat Britain faces from ERWT as a Self-Initiated Terrorist. He is also a prime example of the complexity of ERWT in the modern, digital age and the challenges this presents for the UK counter terrorism framework.

Of course, as extremism can lead to terrorism, the dangers of the online nature of XRW carry over into the threat posed by the online nature of ERWT. The technologies of the digital age remove barriers, as ERWT actors do not have to meet in person. They are therefore able to be inspired and informed by overseas actors much more easily than in previous decades, with the members of the UK's ERWT community having established links to XRW and ERWT groups in northern Europe (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). Thus, group and individual ERWT actors in the UK can learn from other XRW perspectives, enmeshing different ideologies and widening the scope of possible targets. They are also more knowledgeable in the digital, globalised world, and so are more informed on the goings on of the far right, meaning their ideologies, methodologies and target choices can evolve quickly and often, due to their constant access to new information. This ability is, of course, not exclusive to ideologically far right motivated

terrorism, but is exacerbated by the volume of actors who engage in the ideology online (Pauwels, 2021: 6).

The online nature of ERWT moves actors further away from reality, as seen in the gamification of ERWT attacks, such as the Christchurch attack which killed 51 people (Lakhani, White and Wallner, 2021). Much like many concepts covered throughout this thesis, there is no universally agreed upon definition of ‘gamification,’ however the Radicalisation Awareness Network relies upon Deterding et al.’s (2011:11) definition of gamification being ‘the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.’ Essentially, gamification is used as a motivating tool for behavioural change (Schlegel, 2020). The gamification of violent extremism is seen in different ideologies, such as the references to Call of Duty in Islamic State propaganda, however, ‘the predominant use of gamification emanates from the far right’ (Lakhani, White and Wallner, 2021: 8). Gamification of violent extremism in the far right blurs the boundaries between the real and virtual world, breaking down barriers for people to engage with terrorism (Lakhani, White and Wallner, 2021).

Moreover, the motivating factors do not only apply to those who are already committed to carrying out the terrorist attack, but it can inspire others, as they aim to beat the last attacker’s ‘stats’ (Hoffman and Ware, 2020; Regeni, 2022). The threat posed by the gamification of violent far right extremism and ERWT is particularly worrisome. It has the ability to remove actors from reality, thus lowering their inhibitions, while simultaneously motivating them and giving

them community and support. The isolated and victim status of many who engage in XRW, makes them particularly vulnerable being radicalised to the point that they engage in ERWT, as they will be particularly motivated by the community aspect of the online and gamified nature of ERWT (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022).

The threat from the gamification of violent far right extremism has already manifested in the UK, in the form of ‘Punish a Muslim Day’ (Lakhani, White and Wallner, 2021: 10). ‘Punish a Muslim Day’ was an example of bottom-up gamification, which relied on a points-based system with the points ranging from 10 if a participant ‘Verbally abused a Muslim’ to 1,000 if the ‘Burn or bomb a mosque’ or 2,500 if they ‘Nuke Mecca’ (Lakhani, White and Wallner, 2021: 10). The title itself implies that Muslims are a threat or are inherently bad, as they must be ‘punished’ for their actions. Although Punish a Muslim Day was not a strictly online event, it demonstrates the danger posed by the online nature of ERWT. The rules and behaviour that ERWTs and right wing extremists engage with online have here transferred into the physical world, posing a real danger to Muslims and wider British security. This epitomises the online ERWT threat, as its ire and violence are not just limited to the virtual world.

The far right, including its political, extremist and terrorist manifestations present a significant threat to the security of the British state and her citizens.

XRW and ERWT are blatantly dangerous, and their threat is obvious due to their violent nature. However, the quiet and gradual normalisation of far right rhetoric in the political sphere that is less discussed when analysing the threat from the far right in the UK. Although at surface level, this is a seemingly inconspicuous example of free speech, as has been touted by populist radical far right actors, it can be a gateway to violent far right extremism (Hymas, 2024). As discussed above, the rise of far right and anti-Muslim rhetoric on the UK's political stage has been met with a rise in violent anti-Muslim attacks (BBC News, 2016). On one of the largest platforms, populist radical far right actors are able to create a threat perception, portraying Muslims and non-Whites as a threat to British society and the security of British citizens, normalising anti-Muslim sentiment and far right rhetoric. This simultaneously lowers the barriers to people being radicalised and diminishes the public's sensitivity to the threat posed, making it easier to sympathise with radical and extreme right wing actors.

These effects make the threat of XRW movements much more severe. As society will be less sensitive to the dangers of XRW, there are less likely to be interventions before those engaged with XRW and broader far right ideologies may resort to violence. This allows far right ideologies to spread before adequate intervention is deemed necessary, meaning that authorities and policy must take a *reactive* stance, as opportunity for *proactive* and impactful action has been missed, leaving them at a disadvantage. The online nature of the

threat is also deeply concerning for the UK's security. The demographic of isolated young men and teenage boys who are being recruited into far right extremist movements via mainstream social media and then moving into the alt-media space is a threat. These young actors are drawn into far right ideologies and then further isolated into the echo chamber of alt-media, limiting the opportunity for their descent down the far right rabbit hole to be mitigated by alternative information and opinions. These phenomena do not always lead to terrorist acts, as attitudes do not always lead to actions, but they certainly have the potential to (Lygren and Aasland, 2023). The fact is a terrorist attack in the UK, which is motivated by far right ideology is a 'realistic possibility' (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 12). The normalisation of far right rhetoric combined with the often "deluded" state of ERWT actors compounds the impact of the gamification of ERWT acts as the barriers are once again lowered (Lloyd and Pauwels, 2021: 8). With 6 XRW groups having been proscribed and acts of violent far right extremism and extreme right wing terrorism having already taken place, British security is at risk, and so too is the cohesion of our societies as a result.

Prevent, Muslims and the Far Right

Policy and Strategy

As has been mentioned throughout this thesis, *Prevent* relies on citizens acting as Petty Sovereigns to report to the authorities anyone they perceive as being ‘at risk’ of radicalisation. This tenet occurs in tandem with the requirement of amicable integration of Muslims into British society (HM Government, 2011, 2023). Although these two concepts may be considered constructive in a vacuum, when analysed within the context of British society, including public attitudes and media framing and coverage, it quickly becomes apparent that these tenets do not complement one another. Discussing the impact of *Prevent* on Muslims and far right reaction is relevant and paramount to answering this thesis’ wider question, as anti-Muslim sentiment is central to nearly all forms of XRW and ERWT. Thus, this chapter will discuss *Prevent*, the resultant securitisation of Muslims, society and their influence on the far right.

According to the Home Office, *Prevent* ‘addresses the personal and social factors which make people more receptive to radicalisation, diverting people away from being drawn into violent ideologies and criminal behaviour’ (Home Office News Team, 2021). *Prevent* states that a lack of social cohesion can make individuals more vulnerable to radicalisation (Home Office, 2011). Therefore, the original *Contest* strategy was created such that *Prevent* would be responsible for promoting integration (Home Office, 2011b). However, the 2011 Review revealed that this will no longer be the case, and instead the

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government would take on this responsibility (MHCLG) (Home Office, 2011b). This decision came after *Prevent*'s funding of the integration strategy resulted in the securitisation of Muslims, with the Home Office stating that 'this has been a mistake' (Home Office, 2011b: 6). This dilemma was created by the simple fact that 'securitisation logic and integration logic are irreconcilable', and thus, the very strategy that aimed to integrate Muslims into British society simultaneously painted them as an inherent threat (Çilingir, 2020: 165). Although the handover of the integration responsibility to MHCLG was a positive change, much like other aspects of *Contest*, any work done will be counteracted by, and will have to overcome, previous failings.

The crux of the issue is that *Prevent*, along with the media, facilitated the perception of Muslims as a 'suspect community.' Taylor comments that, among many other factors, the connection between the allocation of funding from *Prevent*'s pathfinder fund and areas of high Muslim population evidence 'very visible efforts of *Prevent* to construct a British Muslim community that is the designated site for counter terrorism' (2020: 855). Furthermore, operations such as Project Champion have made it clear to the public that the UK Government perceive Muslims to be an inherent threat. Project Champion saw numerous visible and concealed cameras installed in predominantly Muslim areas around Birmingham (BBC News, 2011). This operation demonstrated the concept of securitisation perfectly, as Muslims were deemed

to be such an immediate and existential threat, that extraordinary measures were allowed, even at the breach of their rights (Krasteva, 2018). Project Champion allegedly breached articles 8 and 14 of the Human Rights Act, as it denied Muslims in Birmingham their right to privacy and their right to non-discrimination (Birmingham City Council, 2010; The Guardian, 2010). By commissioning an operation that undermined the human rights of Muslims in the UK, the government cosigned the perception that the persecution of Muslims was acceptable, potentially emboldening those carrying anti-Muslim XRW sentiments.

The Role of the Media

The *Prevent* Duty has seen the disproportionate reporting of Muslims to the Channel Panel. The introduction to this chapter made clear that it was important to avoid analysing *Prevent* and its effects in a vacuum. So, we must discuss the role that the media and the public have played alongside *Prevent* in facilitating the isolation and villainization of Muslims in the UK and the resultant impact on the rise of the far right, if we are to see the bigger picture of the relationship between the far right and the UK's counter terrorism framework. *Prevent*'s portrayal of Muslims in the UK has been facilitated by the media. Bleich et al. found that between 2011 and 2012, the terms 'Muslim' or 'Islam' were featured in 46% of the UK's news headlines (2015: 950). Just as there is a severe saturation of Muslims in the media, so too is there an overwhelmingly negative framing of Muslims in the media. As has been

clarified in the literature review chapter of this thesis, both Klapper and Lipmann's theories can facilitate the securitisation of Muslims, meaning that there is a cyclical relationship between the media and public opinion, just as government policy can shape and be shaped by public opinion. Therefore, the relationship between the government and public attitudes towards Muslims and immigrants can be intertwined with the media portrayal of these two demographics. Essentially, *Prevent* does not provide a profile of a 'terrorist' or someone who is at risk of radicalisation, so the media fills this gap, influencing those beholden to the *Prevent* Duty and others. Between 2018 and 2020, 60% of British media news articles framed Muslims and Islam negatively (Centre for Media Monitoring, 2021: 31). The former Deputy Editor of The Times, Ben Preston, believes that there is a growing hunger for negative portrayals of Islam in the media, demonstrating the inclusion of Islamophobia in Britain's Overton Window (Allen, 2014.). Although not explicitly connected to counter terrorism framework, the symbiotic cyclical relationship between the government, the media and the public have and continue to create a hostile environment for Muslims in the UK.

The role of the media is important when discussing the rise of the far right, due to its anti-Muslim characteristics, because the negative portrayal of Muslims, in both the political and media sphere, drives far right beliefs. Muslims in the UK have been the victims of 'othering,' which is the construction of 'homogenous groups with assigned characteristics turned into

hierarchised binary opposition’ – ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Çilingir, 2020: 167; Seidman, 2013). This ‘othering’ at the hands of the UK Government and media, contributes to the securitisation of Muslims (Çilingir: 167). Furthermore, even for those who do not actively engage in the far right, the media framing of a group, can quell any of their ethical concerns about the ramifications of securitisation, while simultaneously creating a negative attitude toward the securitised group (Boomgaarden and De Vresse, 2007). These consequences of securitising Muslims create the perfect environment to fuel far right movements, ideologies, and sentiments. By presenting Muslims as a threat to the UK in both policy and the media, it normalises anti-Muslim views, weakens any opposition and shifts the Overton window to the right, allowing more extreme views to come into the mainstream.

Animosity Towards Muslims

This volatile environment has been conducive to the expansion and growth of XRW ideology. In 2019, Hope Not Hate found that Islamophobic sentiment had replaced immigration as the key motivator of far right movements in the UK (Hope Not Hate, 2019). Their 2024 State of Hate Report revealed that the while the key motivator of the far right has returned to being anti-migrant sentiment, that this was a record year of participation in anti-migrant demonstrations, and that ‘special anger is reserved for people of colour and especially Muslims’ (Hope Not Hate, 2024: 12). This finding supports the finding that far right ideologies often bleed into and contradict one another,

with Cultural Nationalism being the most far reaching far right ideology (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 24). Quarashi writes that ‘the *Prevent* strategy has been at the forefront of disseminating and normalising Islamophobia across society, by inscribing its assumptions and prejudices into the structural operation of numerous institutions’ (2018:3). He continues his argument stating that the political discourse around Muslims and counter terrorism is often then included in media rhetoric, highlighting the influential relationship between government and media institutions and their role in perpetuating anti-Muslim sentiment, a key driver of XRW movements.

The focus that *Prevent* and the rest of *Contest*’s earlier manifestations had on Islamist terrorism and Muslims in general homogenised and conflated Muslims with Islamist terrorism. When discussing powers granted to police under TACT 2000, the Muslim Council of Britain has stated that ‘the police are misusing their new powers’ and reference the McPherson report, highlighting institutional racism in the British police force (The Guardian, 2004). The government have justified their actions, including the breaches of Muslims’ human rights as being in the interest of the public’s safety (Boswell, 2007: 1; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002 cited in Çilingir, 2020: 166). In doing so, the Government and law enforcement once again normalised the maltreatment and villainization of Muslims in Britain, isolating them, and thus, contradicting their own counter-terrorism objectives. *Prevent*’s own logic states that higher social integration and lower rates of isolation will reduce the

risk of radicalisation in vulnerable individuals and communities. However, the securitisation of Muslims has led to Muslims feeling isolated from British society and persecuted by authorities (Elsayed, 2023).

Prevent's definition of extremism as 'active or vocal opposition to fundamental British values' leaves those who disagree with British foreign policy or who do not culturally identify with these values as being labelled as extremists (Home Office, 2011: 107; Kundnani, 2015). The radical far right and far right extremists capitalised on this terminology as they perceived it as justifying their Cultural Nationalist ideology. The failures of this phrasing became clear to the UK Government and in March, the definition of extremism was changed to:

‘the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to: 1. negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or 2. undermine, overturn or replace the UK’s system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or 3. intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2)’ (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2024).

The new definition aims to disrupt ‘extreme right wing and Islamist extremists who are seeking to separate Muslims from the rest of society and create division within Muslim communities’ (Department of Levelling Up, Housing

and Communities and Gove, 2024). This new definition seeks to address both Islamist and right wing extremism and terrorism, showing authorities' reflection on the threat presented by both and beginning addressing the gap in counter terrorism policy.

Cumulative Extremism and Reciprocal Radicalisation

By *Prevent*'s own logic, isolation and extremism leads to radicalisation, which leads to terrorism (Home Office, 2011). However, as has been discussed above, *Prevent*'s initiatives have repeatedly left Muslims feeling ostracised, othered and isolated from British society. Thus, it is fair to conclude that while *Prevent* may be successful in preventing the radicalisation of some, it could also lead to the radicalisation of Muslim individuals. Wood draws on Horgan's finding to conclude that 'emotional vulnerability, or a social need, is a particularly prevalent risk factor that underlies many extremism theories' (2020: 6). The isolation and discrimination that come as a consequence of belonging to a suspect community can leave people emotionally and economically vulnerable, and without support. Research has shown that Muslims in the UK tend to experience lower wages and housing standards than non-Muslims (Social Mobility Commission, 2017; Office for National Statistics, 2020a). These statistics make clear the higher social need experienced by Muslims in the UK, and the Government's failure to address them. Thus, these communities are left in a state of uncertainty, a factor which Hogg, Kruglanski and van den Bos (2013), argue is linked with extremism.

The securitisation and resultant isolation of Muslims that occurs because of *Prevent* highlight not only severe failings of the Government to support minorities within British society, but also create *more* contributing factors placing Muslims at risk of radicalisation, contradicting its mission.

Although the disproportionate impacts felt by Muslim communities at the hands of *Prevent* are discouraging in their own right. The threat of reciprocal radicalisation contributes to these failures' impact on the security of the UK. McGarry (2018) defines reciprocal radicalisation as 'a concept that suggests extremist groups become more extreme in response to each other's activity.' McGarry's definition draws on Eatwell's concept of 'cumulative extremism.' Eatwell (2006) coined the term, referring to Islamists, anti-Islamist, and the ability of two clashing extremist ideologies to fuel their counterpart's animosity. When looking at far right recruitment or promotional content from groups such as NS131, Scottish Dawn or System Resistance Network, it is common to see them capitalise from Islamist terrorism and the anger felt by the public (McCarry, 2018). After the murder of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, EDL members turned out to demonstrations in almost record breaking droves (Lygren and Aasland Ravndal, 2023). This display created mass worry around Britain that an 'irreversible spiral of violence' had been triggered, with even Tell MAMA coordinator being unable to 'see an end to this cycle of violence' (Taylor and Siddique, 2013). However, despite this seemingly newly inspired panic, this was not the first instance of cumulative

extremism on British soil. Indeed, the EDL was born from it. The XRW group was formed in retaliation of Al Muhajiroun's protests against the return of British soldiers from Afghanistan (Lygren and Aasland Ravndal, 2023). An example of Islamist terrorism fuelling the XRW and ERWT fire could be seen in 2018, where, following the multitude of Islamist terror attacks in the UK in 2017, there was a clear rise in extreme right wing terrorist attacks and plots (Lee, Reder and Greig, 2022: 13). Although this increase in ERWT events will also be influenced by the proscription of National Action, opening the door for these acts to be viewed legally as terrorism, the rise in anti-Muslim attacks in 2017 also follows the Islamist terror attacks (Lee, Reder and Greig, 2022; Tell MAMA, 2019). Feldman argues that in this 'perfect storm of populist prejudice, radical Islamist propaganda and right-wing cultural racism have together attempted to turn the notion of a 'clash of civilisations' into a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy' (2012:3). Feldman's argument and Eatwell's concept of cumulative extremism are backed by Ebner's statement that XRW ideology will grow stronger in areas with a high Islamist population (2017). In terms of what is actually experienced by the concerned communities, Muslims experience a spike in hate crimes in the period following Islamist terrorist attacks (Ivandic, Kirchmaier and Machin, 2019).

Eatwell's 'cumulative extremism' is not the perfect concept, however. As is pointed out by Lygren and Aasland Ravndal (2023), after the murder of Lee Rigby, Islamophobic attacks did settle to levels experienced prior to the attack.

So, Lygren and Aasland Ravndal propose a different term, ‘reciprocal intergroup radicalisation’ (RIR) (2023: 392). They support their new terminology with the finding that ‘attitudes do not translate easily into actions’ (2023: 391). Therefore, although *Prevent* and the resultant securitisation of Muslims in the UK, combined with Islamist terrorist attack incidents, create an environment conducive to the spread of XRW ideology, it may not be a direct causation of a spike in ERWT (Lygren and Aasland Ravndal, 2023). In their comparative study of RIR in Norway and Britain, Lygren and Aasland Ravndal found that British police approached the issues of the EDL and Al Muhajiroun very differently, with Al Muhajiroun (an alias for The Saved Sect) being proscribed, while the EDL was given ‘a more conciliatory approach’ (2023: 402). Lygren and Aasland Ravndal believe that this difference was a contributing factor to the RIR that was took place in Britian but was not able to occur successfully in Norway. The UK’s counter terrorism framework, including policy, especially *Prevent* and law enforcement, has created an environment of divide and facilitated the ‘us versus them’ mentality which is resultant of securitisation. The lack of action *Prevent* took to counter the growth of XRW and ERWT created a sense of injustice for Muslims in the UK, furthering their feelings of isolation. Furthermore, it also allowed the normalisation of XRW ideologies, as there seemed to be no punishment, government response, or mitigation for their actions. Therefore, when a response was finally made, members of the far right felt as though their rights were being taken from them and found a way to place this blame on the non-

Whites and Muslims. Thus, they were able to feed into their victim status, and strengthen their ideology (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022).

The securitisation of Muslims as a result of *Prevent* has exacerbated societal divisions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK. The resultant villainization and portrayal of Muslims as an inherent threat to British security has emboldened anti-Muslim sympathisers, including members of the XRW and ERWT community. Simultaneously, *Prevent* and the wider counter terrorism framework in the UK has overlooked the threat of far right extremism, allowing it to grow and spread unchecked until the problem grew so large it forced government and law enforcement into a reactionary response. The issue here is that there was no robust preventative framework in place and so authorities and policy are on the backfoot, so to speak, trying to mitigate this threat. Not only do authorities now need to mitigate the growth of XRW and ERWT, they also need to attempt to put out the flames which were ignited by their very own 'Muslim-only' focused policy (Thomas, 2012).

The UK Counter Terrorism Framework's Approach to the Far Right

The UK's counter terrorism strategy is considered to be 'a world-leading counter terrorism capability' (HM Government, 2023). It has had many successes such as the disruption of 39 late-stage terrorist plots between the 2018 and 2023 *Contest* publications. The first two publications of *Prevent* (2003 and 2011) were almost entirely focused on Islamist terrorism with little mention of ERWT, except to acknowledge the existence of a few ERWT actors and assure the population that they are not a serious threat to the UK or Europe (HM Government, 2011: 41). Embarrassingly, this statement came mere weeks before the far right terrorist attack in Norway, which killed 77 people. This clear misjudgement of the situation highlights the lack of attention the UK counter terrorism framework was paying to the far right during this period. However, the 2018 and 2023 publications of *Contest* paint a different image, with both publications stating that ERWT is a growing threat to the UK's security (HM Government 2018; HM Government, 2023). This change, as well as the rise in *Prevent* Channel reports relating to concerns involving ERWT ideologies highlights the growing prevalence of the broader far right, including the radical far right, far right extremism and extreme right wing terrorism (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023). This chapter will analyse how the UK's counter terrorism framework tackles the far right. First, this chapter will discuss counter terrorism policy and tactics, analysing and evaluating their impacts on the far right and their effectiveness. This will be followed by a discussion surrounding the organisation of counter

terrorism agencies in countering the ERWT threat, analysing the impact different agencies have had on tackling ERWT. Finally, this chapter will delve into the terminology used in the UK's counter terrorism framework in relation to the far right, far right extremism, and ERWT. This discussion will cover the importance of terminology and the impact it can have on counter terrorism approaches.

Policy

The mainstreaming of far right politics threatens the efficacy of counter terrorism policies. Once the ideology of the far right has been mainstreamed and included in the Overton Window, it begins to raise challenges for effective counter terrorism. One of the pillars of *Contest, Prevent*, 'tackles intent' to commit acts of terrorism by identifying those at risk of radicalisation, supporting their rehabilitation and disengagement from extremist ideology (His Majesty's Government, 2023: 29). The backbone of this strategy are the members of local government, the criminal justice system, those working in education, childcare etc., health and social care, the police, who are saddled with the *Prevent* Duty (Home Office, 2015). These people assume the role of 'petty sovereigns'. 'Petty sovereigns,' a term coined by De Goede and Butler, describes a 'plethora of actors who hold some autonomy in specific areas and exercise certain powers, yet are not accountable nor absolute sovereign in all spheres' (May, 2021: 17). However, a critique that has been posed by many academics, politicians and members of the public has been that *Prevent*

provides no profile of a terrorist (Perliger, Koehler-Derrick and Pedahzur, 2016). Therefore, these petty sovereigns, who are bound by the *Prevent* Duty, must draw on their understanding of what a terrorist is to conclude who is at risk of radicalisation. The majority of these understandings will come from the representation of terrorists in the media, and, due to the conflation of Islam and terrorism which is so often featured in the media, this can cause misinformed reporting to *Prevent* (Allen, 2014; Powell, 2011; Alghamdi, 2015).

In 2017, a year in which Muslims were often conflated with terrorists in the media due to the prevalence of Islamist terrorist attacks, 3,197 individuals were ‘referred for concerns related to Islamist extremism’ (Home Office, 2018: 4). Of these 3,197, only 662 were progressed to the discussion stage at a Channel Panel, and only 179 were found to need support from the Panel (Home Office, 2018). These figures highlight the excessive rates at which those associated with Islam are conflated with terrorism, compared to those that are actually found to be at risk. Meanwhile, those referred to the Channel Panel in the same period due to concerns about right wing extremism were much fewer. Between 2017 and 2018, only 1,312 individuals were referred to the Panel for concerns related to right wing extremism (Home Office, 2018: 4). Of these individuals, 427 were discussed by the Panel and 174 received support from the Panel (Home Office, 2018: 4). There were only 5 fewer right wing extremists who received support from the Channel Panel than Islamist

extremists, evidencing the scale at which right wing extremism had grown.

Despite this, the UK's counter terrorism framework still focused on Islamist extremism, not yet providing a robust strategy to counter it.

Although '*Contest* remains an ideologically agnostic approach', more recently it has begun to include strategies specifically to counter ERWT and XRW (HM Government, 2023: 24). The Channel Panel will provide 'tailored interventions' to help individuals desist and disengage with whichever extremist ideology they are entangled with, meaning that those motivated by a far right ideology will receive the support they require (HM Government, 2023). Moreover, in order to prevent unnecessary referrals of Muslim individuals due to a disproportionate association of Islam and terrorism, the *Prevent* vulnerability framework will be tightened (HM Government, 2023). Better training will also be provided to those under the *Prevent* Duty, alleviating some of the unfounded scrutiny faced by British Muslim communities, while educating those under the *Prevent* Duty on other ideologies, such as XRW (HM Government, 2023). These initiatives were first announced in *Contest* 2018 and have proven successful. There has been significant reduction in the number of individuals being referred to and adopted as a case by the Panel in relation to concerns of Islamist extremism. Meanwhile, those referred to and adopted as a case by the Panel in relation to concerns of XRW ideology remained roughly the same (Home Office, 2018; Home Office, 2023b). These developments highlight a change in the

perception of the public and the government, and attitudes towards Muslims and ERWT, with further understanding and a more serious outlook on the latter issue being adopted.

The Home Office has also launched strategies to tackle the modern facets of terrorism, specifically the spread of ideology and extremist content online. One of the primary tactics has been to ‘build strong counter terrorist narratives’ and cultivate relationships with the private sector ‘to ensure there are no safe places for terrorists online’ (Home Office, 2023: 9, 10). The UK also seeks to invest in technology that would be able to ‘automatically identify and remove terrorist content before it is accessible to all’ (Home Office, 2023: 9). These two initiatives seek to *pursue* those engaging in online extremism and terrorism, and *prevent* others from being radicalised. Initiatives to achieve these policy goals were actualised in the form of obtaining royal assent for the Online Safety Bill and establishing Ofcom as ‘the independent online safety regulator’ with the power to enforce the removal of illegal content (Home Office, 2023: 32). Although this initiative covers all extremist ideologies, as *Contest* claims to take an ‘agnostic’ approach, the Intelligence and Security Committee have stated that there will be a focus on ERWT online behaviour (2023: 73). This will greatly assist the UK in countering the spread of ERWT ideologies due to the number of individuals engaging with and being radicalised by ERWT materials online. Previously, the focus had been on cooperation with private sectors to safeguard users from seeing or engaging

with violent or extremist materials online. Although this strategy is also featured in *Contest 2023*, and as part of the Online Safety Bill, by establishing Ofcom as having primacy over the issue, authorities will be better able to streamline their counter-terrorism efforts and communication (Home Office, 2023)

In line with discussions between CTP, MI5 and JTAC, which began in 2015 surrounding the best approach to tackle the ERWT threat, some methods of countering Islamist terrorism were applied to countering ERWT (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023). One of these methods has been proscription. Proscription is a tool that can disrupt potential terrorist threats (Intelligence and Security Committee, 2022: 97). An organisation which ‘commits or participates in acts of terrorism, prepares for terrorism, promotes or encourages terrorism, or is otherwise concerned in terrorism’ can be proscribed at the discretion of the Home Secretary (Home Office, 2024). As stated by Lord Sharp, proscription ‘is a powerful tool with severe penalties, criminalising membership and invitations of support for the organisation’ (House of Lords, 2024). These powers can, in some cases, cut terrorist organisations off at the knees, as was the case with National Action, as in 2017 its proscription led to the arrests of 25 members as well as the addition of its aliases to the original proscription (Intelligence and Security Committee, 2023). More than countering ERWT on a legal and legislative level, by proscribing ERWT groups and arresting ERWT actors, the government make

clear that XRW is a serious issue, changing the public perspective and bringing awareness to the fact that terrorism is not just a 'Muslim issue'. The proscription of National Action and those that have followed will undoubtedly be a contributing factor to the rise in awareness of the dangers of far right extremism and terrorism, and the resultant rise in ERWT related *Prevent* referrals (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023).

Some efforts had been made towards the end of the Labour government's time in office to address the growing populist far right sympathy in the UK. In the lead up to the 2010 elections, labour began to take note of the 'growing political strength of the BNP' and so established the Connecting Communities Fund (Thomas, 2012: 80). This fund was dedicated to combat areas that were experiencing 'far right related political tensions', which were found to be certain majority white, working class regions (Thomas, 2012:80). The allocation of this fund was praised by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry and local authorities for its intelligence and risk-based approach to community cohesion initiatives (Thomas, 2012). Despite these praises, the structure of *Prevent* hampered the Connecting Communities Fund potential, as at this time, far right terrorism was considered to be a domestic issue and did not meet *Contest's* international terrorism remit (Thomas, 2012). Thus, the Fund did not receive *Prevent* funding or support. This knock was compounded by the short life of the initiative, as when Labour lost the 2010 General Election, the programme was halted (Thomas, 2012).

Despite these blows, the risk-based approach was taken into consideration when disseminating *Prevent* funding from 2011 on. Unfortunately, this was not enough, and although the fund had been an encouraging step towards combatting the spread of XRW ideology, there were only minor amendments made to *Prevent* and it maintained its ‘Muslim-only focus’, failing to overcome its structural deficiencies.

Agencies

The responsibility of handling the ERWT threat in the UK was held by Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP). Meanwhile, MI5 dealt with Islamist terrorism, as they felt this fell within the remit of national security, while ‘Domestic terrorism’ did not (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). Despite the apparent clarity of their roles, conversation began surrounding CTP’s ability to effectively counter ERWT. This led to CTP and MI5 agreeing that MI5 should ‘have primacy for high priority investigations and leads regarding Extreme Right Wing Terrorism’ (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 12). However, in 2015/16, CTP expressed that it wished to share the responsibility with MI5, as they were unsure of how to handle the different threat posed by ERWT (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). The nature of the ERWT is characterised by decentralised, ‘lone-actor’ (now referred to as Self-Initiated Terrorist, or SI-T) attacks, which differed greatly from the other forms of terrorism that CTP would typically handle, such as Islamist terrorism

(Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). This decision marked a significant change in the UK's approach to countering ERWT and a long overdue acknowledgement of the serious threat and growing complexity of ERWT. Moreover, it underscored the failings of the UK's counter terrorism framework in producing a holistic, well-rounded approach thus far.

The announcement of this change was followed by the publication of David Anderson Q.C.'s Independent Assessment of MI5 and Police Internal Reviews. Anderson's assessment played a crucial role in carving out the division of responsibilities in keeping Britain safe from terrorism. The Independent Assessment found the need for the creation of a formal process, agreed upon by CTP, MI5, and the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) to allow more MI5 involvement in assessing potential ERWT threats (Anderson, 2017). Anderson came to this conclusion after learning that MI5 had no intelligence on Darren Osbourne, who committed the Finsbury Park attack, and that CTP had not investigated him prior to the attack (Anderson, 2017: 21). This concerning finding highlighted a deadly gap in the UK's counter terrorism agencies understandings of their roles, a complete breakdown in communication between the two vital agencies, and the need for change.

Despite CTPs call upon MI5 in 2015 to share the ERWT workload, in an effort to strengthen the UK's counter terrorism abilities, Anderson found that MI5 was still unwilling to investigate CTP's caseload, as they felt the ERWT threat

(then referred to as Domestic Terrorism) was not worthy of their input, as the culture in the organisation persisted and agents believed it did not fall within their remit of responsibility (Anderson, 2017, cited in Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 70). The friction between these two central counter terrorism agencies, and the lack of understanding of their role in the issue created an ineffective process. Consequently, and tragically, Osbourne was able to prepare and carry out his attack without any disruption, killing Makram Ali and injuring a further 11 people, evidencing a gap in the UK's counter terrorism framework. Following these events and Anderson's assessment, steps were finally taken to enhance MI5's role in countering ERWT. As was recommended by Anderson, a formalised process was created, and MI5 was engaged in investigating the high-priority ERWT cases. This change began the process of addressing the deficiencies found by Anderson. The end goal was to leverage MI5's intelligence and analytical capabilities to create a robust and responsive counter terrorism apparatus that had a finger on the ERWT pulse.

Although it is possible and likely that MI5 is not undertaking as many investigations in the field of ERWT, this highlights a problem that has been discussed at length by scholars and academics such as Joel Taylor, Tahir Abbas and Imran Awan. Their explanation is that UK counter terrorism efforts are committed to focusing on Islamist terrorism, because, as Taylor puts it, there are 'very visible efforts of *Prevent* to construct a British Muslim community

that is the designated site for counter terrorism (2020: 855; Abbas and Awan, 2015).

With the incorporation and cooperation of MI5, authorities are now able to better address the threat posed by the online nature of ERWT. MI5's expertise in intelligence gathering and analysis has proven to be helpful in countering the often covert and fragmented nature of the ERWT threat (Ratcliffe, 2008). These successes have been evidenced by the proscription of ERWT groups such as National Action in 2016 and the 5 other ERWT groups that have been proscribed since (Home Office, Cleverly and Tugendhat, 2024). Furthermore, between 2017 and 2021, 10 ERWT plots were disrupted, highlighting the new framework's success in identifying and countering threats posed by far right extremists (Basu, 2021). Promisingly, MI5 have implemented 102 of the 104 recommendations made by the OIR, including taking overall operational responsibility of ERWT (McCallum, 2023). The British Government argues that this transfer of primacy 'ensures a more joined-up approach' to tackling terrorism. They have also created relationships with organisations such as the Alan Turing Institute to gather and process data more effectively (McCallum, 2022). This partnership in particular is beneficial in countering the ERWT threat as they are focusing on large volumes of fragmented data, which embodies the threat posed by ERWT (Dennehy, 2022). Halford's analysis of the counter terrorism command policing structure and its impact on intelligence sharing between the police and security services found that nearly

a quarter of respondents in Counter Terrorism Units (CTU) found technology to be an obstacle before the introduction of the newer counter terrorism policing structure, which included MI5 in its investigations (Halford, 2023). This finding is important, as the authorities are now better able to tackle the online nature of XRW and ERWT. Despite these improvements, the framework is not perfect; there are still cracks in terms of how these agencies cooperate and coordinate with one another due to a lack of clear jurisdictional boundaries (Halford, 2023). The progress that has been made in countering the ERWT threat is clear since the inclusion of MI5. But in order to achieve continued success, the collaborative framework between CTP, MI5 and JTAC must be refined, as it is clear that misalignment between agencies could be the UK's Achilles heel if not effectively managed.

Terminology

Terminology has played a large role in the UK's countering of ERWT and, just like the threat, it has evolved rapidly over the past decade. Even the term ERWT, was only adopted by Government agencies during the OIR proceedings (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). The terminology that is now used operationally is as follows; **Far Right (FR)**, which is an 'umbrella term to encapsulate the entire movement which has a far right political outlook in relation to matters such as culture, race, immigration and identity'; **Extreme Right Wing (XRW)** which refers to 'right wing extremist groups and individuals within the far right, who maintain active

opposition to democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and respect for and tolerance of different faiths/beliefs; and **Extreme Right Wing Terrorism (ERWT)** (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022: 3).

Previously, XRW and ERWT were referred to as ‘Domestic Extremism’ and ‘Domestic Terrorism’ respectively. These terms described ‘everything from proscribed right wing extremist organisations ... to left wing and ‘single issue’ groups’ (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). The first issue with this terminology is that it is simply too broad (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). The breadth of ideologies covered by this term made it difficult for authorities to counter the far right threat as it did not address the specific nuances of ERWT and XRW ideologies (Center for Security Policy Studies, 2021). Furthermore, the broad term makes communicating the threat difficult, as it is not clear exactly what kind of terrorist threat is being discussed (Talley, 2021). More than just conflating different ideologies, the issues caused by this broad terminology echo the issues caused by a lack of a universal definition of terrorism; in operational terms, it can create issues for government and law enforcement agencies to enact efficient strategies and prosecute ERWT and other domestic terrorist actors.

The conflation of ERWT with domestic terrorism has created a parallel with Islamist terrorism, which has been deemed to be international (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). As Islamist terrorism is the UK’s

biggest terrorist threat according to the government and population surveys, this has created the perception that the issue is coming from abroad, diminishing the gravity of the domestic issue, and further othering British Muslims (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023; Taylor, 2020; Smith, 2024). This perception of ERWT as a domestic threat, while Islamist terrorism is seen as an international threat, hinders authorities' ability to fully appreciate both of their natures. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament's Assessment of *Extreme Right Wing Terrorism* states that 'it is likely that links to other countries and individuals exist' (2022: 41). It is, however, difficult to ascertain specific details about the international threat as there is no universal definition of terrorism, meaning that what one country may consider a terrorist act, another may consider a hate crime (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023). We do know for certain though that there are connections between ERWT groups in the UK and the Nordic Resistance Movement and Nordic Strength which operate in Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, as well as online international connections with Sonnenkrieg Division and other groups (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). Furthermore, individuals who are motivated by far right ideologies, are able to be inspired by international far right activity. This is especially dangerous due to the rising prevalence of far right extremism in northern European countries (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023). The clear connections between UK and international ERWT groups was dismissed by the term domestic

extremism/terrorism, and therefore, its true nature was not able to be effectively tackled by counter terrorism agencies, creating gaps through which XRW and ERWT movements could grow and evolve.

Although the terminology has now changed, since the OIR's recommendations, and authorities are clearer on what they are tackling, much of the damage has already been done. The changes in terminology and agency organisation have only come into effect in stages since 2018, and being so behind the trend, ideology spread, groups grew and individuals were indoctrinated while authorities' understanding of, and control over, the ERWT threat were weak. It is widely understood by scholars and political actors that not enough attention, or gravity was given to the ERWT threat previously, and in recent years all parties seem to be increasingly taking notice. However, there is still evidence of government actors failing to keep up. When discussing ERWT, *Contest* 2023 states that there is 'a domestic terrorist threat which is less predictable, harder to detect and investigate' and a 'persistent and evolving threat from Islamist terrorist groups overseas' (HM Government, 2023: 4). Later, in the very same document, however, the policy states that 'the threat from ERWT in Western countries is increasingly a transnational issue in terms of radicalising influence, inspiration and communication (HM Government, 2023: 11). The confusion and outdated and unhelpful terminology in the most recent *Contest* publication evidences failures of the

UK's counter terrorism framework to move with the times, still falling back on 'how things used to be done.'

The UK's counter terrorism framework has had many successes in tackling the threat posed by the far right, far right extremism and extreme right wing terrorism. It has seen the proscription of ERWT groups such as National Action in 2016 to Terrorgram in 2024 (Intelligence and Security Committee, 2023; Home Office, Cleverly and Tugendhat, 2024). Furthermore, *Contest* 2023 has shown a deeper understanding of the nature of the threat posed by these phenomena, acknowledging the fragmented, online nature of ERWT and proposed new strategies to tackle them. The UK's counter terrorism framework has also shown signs of reflection as seen in MI5's response to Lord Anderson's independent assessments, including the OIR (McCallum, 2021). The changes that have been made since the OIR have been tangible, with more public awareness of the ERWT threat and improved counter terror investigations since the inclusion of MI5 and JTAC in CTP counter-ERWT operations. However promising these changes are, they have come late in the game, with actors such as Darren Osbourne and Thomas Mair being able to carry out lethal attacks due to the disorganisation of authorities and lack of attention paid to the threat they posed to the UK's security. The late acknowledgment of the threat also allowed far right ideologies to spread without much hinderance. Although not every person who encounters XRW ideology will go on to become a terrorist, the lack of gravity paid to the

situation has meant that those who have been exposed may not see these ideologies to be as dangerous as they truly are. Thus, they may not pay attention to the warning signs, or may even sympathise with those that express ERWT sentiments. The developments in the UK's counter terrorism framework are a promising start, but they are now having to play catch up to counteract authorities' previous failings.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to fill a gap in the field of counter terrorism by determining the influence of the UK's counter terrorism framework on far right movements. In pursuit of this goal, this research paper firstly conducted a review of the extant literature on the issues of defining the far right, the varying manifestations of the far right (specifically movements, extremism and terrorism), and the influence of the securitisation of Muslims on the growth of the far right. This literature review discussed and clarified key terms used throughout this dissertation, such as the far right, extremism and securitisation. This literature review also provided context of key issues to provide the background information required to conduct a nuanced and exhaustive analysis of the relationship between the UK's counter terrorism framework and the far right in the UK. The methodology chapter of this thesis explained the aim stated above, the hypotheses determined at the beginning of the research process, and justified the mixed methodology approach employed to answer the research question, 'What are the effects of the UK's counter terrorism framework on the far right?'. The methodology chapter lead into the first of three substantive chapters which sought to 1) explain the threat of the far right in the UK, 2) examine the relationship between the UK's prominent *Prevent* strategy, the resultant securitisation of Muslims and the growth of the far right, and 3) analyse how the UK's counter terrorism framework has addressed the far right.

The first substantive chapter, titled The Threat from the Far Right, evaluated three different sectors of the far right: the political far right, far right extremism, and extreme right wing terrorism. It discussed the relationship between these three different sectors, clarifying their roles in the broader far right. The first section of this chapter found that the political far right combines populism and nativism, wielding these two ideologies to construct threat perceptions, portraying Muslims and non-native Britons as a threat to Britain. This chapter referenced the case of Brexit, analysing the rhetoric used and the hate crimes that took place in the immediate aftermath, to demonstrate the relationship between the political far right and violent far right actors. This chapter also found that once populist radical right politics make their way into mainstream politics, a snowball effect begins, as mainstream politicians feel the need to address the public's concerns in order to maintain support, shifting the mainstream to the right and thus, legitimising far right sentiment.

The second section addressed the threat from far right extremism, finding that the UK has experienced a stark rise in far right extremist activity. This section also addressed the scale of far right extremist movements in the UK and their nature. This analysis found that the online faction of XRW is widespread and fractured while physical attendance and membership to XRW movements is large but less prevalent. This section of the chapter also found that the online faction of right wing extremism poses a great threat to UK security as it is difficult to track and allows for individuals to be influenced by multiple

different ideologies in echo chambers, making it harder for authorities to mitigate radicalisation.

The final section of this chapter addressed the threat posed by ERWT. It analysed the state of ERWT threat making clear that although ERWT groups and organisations are a danger, the biggest ERWT threat comes from S-ITs, who are not necessarily affiliated with a terrorist organisation, but who have been inspired by the rhetoric and ideology of a group or groups, for example, Thomas Mair. This section went on to find that the online nature of far right extremism is carried through into ERWT, allowing for terrorist actors to engage with, learn from and be inspired by others. Moreover, it has resulted in the ‘predominant use of gamification of violent extremism’ (Lakhani, White and Wallner, 2021: 8). Analysis performed in this section found that ERWT in the UK has already threatened and damaged Britain from the murder of MPs to random violence against Muslims to inspire terror within the British Muslim community (Lakhani, White and Wallner, 2021). Finally, this chapter found that the mainstreaming of the far right on the political stage allowed for the normalisation of far right ideologies and sentiments, lowering the government and the public’s sensitivity to the threats posed by them. These effects allow the far right to grow in the UK, opening the door to far right extremism and ERWT.

The second substantive chapter of this dissertation then delved into *Prevent*'s securitisation of Muslims and its impact on the far right. This chapter found that *Prevent*'s tenets of community cohesion and the *Prevent* Duty negate each other, as 'securitisation logic and integration logic are irreconcilable' (Çilingir, 2020: 165). This finding was heralded by an evaluation of *Prevent*'s overall efficacy in achieving these goals. This chapter also analysed the roles played by the media, the government and the public in the designation of Muslims as a 'suspect community' by discussing the media and public discourse in relation to Muslims, as well as counter terrorism initiatives such as Project Champion. This analysis found that *Prevent* had facilitated the securitisation of Muslims and went onto conclude that this securitisation actually facilitated the spread of far right sentiment and ideology. Going further, this section also found that this securitisation and resultant normalisation and spread of far right sentiment has created an environment conducive to RIR and cumulative extremism. Thus, it directly negates *Prevent*'s objective of 'tackling the ideological causes of terrorism' (HM Government, 2023: 30). This chapter concluded that, through the securitisation and villainization of Muslims, the UK's *Prevent* strategy has, in fact, exacerbated societal divisions between Muslims and non-Muslims, failing to mitigate the fallout of its 'Muslim-only focus' (Thomas, 2012: 81). As a result, this has emboldened anti-Muslim sympathisers, including XRW and ERWT actors.

The final substantive chapter of this thesis analysed how the UK's counter terrorism framework has attempted to tackle the threat from the far right. This chapter was split into three sections, 1) policy 2) agencies and 3) terminology. The first section analysed the policy that has been put in place to counter the far right threat, discussing initiatives to counter anti-Muslim sentiment, the online nature of ERWT and XRW and ERWT organisations. This section found that some policy had shown signs of authorities recognising the gravity and scale of the XRW and ERWT threat, such as the Connecting Communities Fund and the proscription of ERWT organisations beginning in 2016. Although this analysis found the proscription of ERWT organisations to be a successful tool in countering the far right, the dismantling of the Connecting Communities Fund once the Conservatives won the 2010 election demonstrated the Government's failure to adequately understand and mitigate the XRW threat. The second section of this chapter, which addressed counter terrorism agencies' role in countering the far right, discussed the evolution of security agencies' involvement in countering XRW and ERWT. This section evaluated their success in tackling the threat and found that there was great dissonance between different security agencies, such as CTP and MI5, which created gaps through which far right ideology was able to grow and ERWT attacks were able to be carried out successfully. This section did discuss the promising fact that these agencies were seeming to take on board the recommendations from independent assessments, having enacted 102 of the 104 OIR recommendations and cultivating relationships with other

organisations such as the Alan Turing Institute. This analysis concluded that there had been successful progress in these areas, however there is still much to be desired, as a lack of cohesion between agencies remains problematic.

The final section of this chapter discussed the role terminology has played in the UK counter terrorism framework's ability to tackle the far right. This section clarified the key terminology in use, critiqued the previous terminology and analysed the impact terminology has had on the success of the UK's counter terrorism framework in mitigating the growth of XRW and ERWT. This section found that the conflation of domestic terrorism and ERWT, and international terrorism and Islamist terrorism was damaging to the UK's counter terrorism framework's ability to adequately address the threats posed by each of these ideologies. One contributing factor here, is found in the remits of different counter terrorism agencies, preventing collaboration between MI5 and CTP. Another came from the failure to address the very real international links to ERWT in the UK. By looking over this extremely important factor, the UK was left unable, and apparently unwilling, to address the international influences and support ERWT actors were receiving from abroad. Furthermore, the 'catch-all' term 'domestic terrorism' was too broad to allow authorities to effectively counter the different ideologies included in this bracket, especially ERWT. It also diminished the threat, as domestic terrorism was consistently deemed to be a low-level threat. This misconception was noted by the OIR, which criticised the use of the term 'domestic terrorism' and

made clear that the UK's counter terrorism framework was failing to appreciate the seriousness of the ERWT threat. Finally, this chapter concluded that the UK's counter terrorism framework has been successful in some areas of countering ERWT but has repeatedly failed to adequately recognise the scale and depth of the threat until much too late. Furthermore, the analysis found that the UK's counter terrorism framework has enacted counterproductive initiatives as seen in the *Prevent* strategy. It also concluded that these shortcomings have created the opportunity for XRW ideology to spread and for ERWT attacks to occur. These findings signal a clear failure of the UK's counter terrorism framework to counter the growth of XRW ideology, violent far right extremism and ERWT, and evidence that areas of the UK's counter terrorism framework have, in fact, facilitated the growth of the far right in the UK.

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Appendix 1

<u>Far Right Ideology</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>
Cultural Nationalism	• Belief that mass immigration of ‘certain ethnic and cultural groups (typically Muslims)’ will trigger the end of Western Culture (The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). • Often equated to anti-Islam groups (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). • Typically presented through disapproval of exhibitions and symbols of other cultures. E.g. wearing the burqa or the perceived rise in the practicing of shar’ia law (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022).
White Nationalism	• Against all immigration from non-White populations (Intelligence and

	Security Committee of Parliament, 2022). • Call for a ‘White-homeland’ to be created either by the partition of countries or forced repatriation of ethnic minorities (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022).
White Supremacism	• A belief that White persons are innately superior to other races (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2022).