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Anti-Muslim populism in the UK:

The development of the English Defence League

Joel Busher

While parties hailing from various hues of the far right have become an established part of the political landscape across much of Europe, in the UK the far right has continued to struggle to gain any significant electoral purchase. Even the supposed breakthrough of the British National Party (BNP) was short-lived and was restricted to local and European elections where low voter turnout can favour marginal parties. However, what has taken place in the UK – and in particular England and Wales – has been the emergence in recent years of two alternate strands of broadly nationalist populism, both of which have sought in one way or another to create distance between themselves and the more traditional far right. One of these has comprised the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), a political party that has campaigned on a platform of staunch euro-scepticism, strong anti-immigration rhetoric and the usual populist claims about the failings of the current political elite to listen to the voices of ordinary people. Although UKIP is yet to gain a parliamentary seat, it has enjoyed strong showings at European and local elections, gaining 23% of votes cast at local elections in May 2013. The other strand has comprised for the most part of a wave of street protests with a predominantly anti-Muslim focus, much of which has centred on the activities of a group called the English Defence League (EDL). It is the development of this second strand of populism – what I refer to as anti-Muslim populism – and the challenges that it might or might not pose that I focus on in this chapter.

Since the EDL first emerged, concerns have been expressed about the possible impacts of the group across a number policy areas: how it might further exacerbate extant community tensions; contribute to a rise in racially or religiously motivated hate crime; represent a significant and costly public order issue; emerge as a natural and more effective successor to the BNP – freed at least to some extent from the “racist” and “fascist” epithets that have been so damaging to the BNP’s public

support; or even contribute to an escalation of political violence through processes of “tit-for-tat radicalisation” (Jackson 2011) or “cumulative extremism” (Eatwell 2006) involving the EDL and some of the most radical Islamist groups. However, detailed analysis of the precise nature and extent of these possible challenges has been hindered both by a relative scarcity of detailed empirical research on the EDL and by the speed at which this fairly unstable social movement has evolved since it first appeared. What I aim to do in this chapter therefore is facilitate such analysis by examining three core questions about the development of the EDL, particularly since its initial period of expansion, and the wider wave of anti-Muslim populism to which it has been central. These are: (1) To what extent might the EDL and the wider anti-Muslim populist movement be described as being in decline?¹ (2) To what extent has the EDL or one of its off-shoots sought to mobilise around a broader far right populist platform than the group’s initial narrative about the threat of “militant Islam”? (3) To what extent has the tactical repertoire of anti-Muslim populism evolved beyond the formal street demonstrations that characterised the EDL’s early period of growth (a) towards involvement in more conventional channels of political action, or (b) towards the adoption of increasingly radical protest methods?

The discussion that I present here is informed by 16 months of ethnographic research into EDL activism in London and the Southeast of England² carried out between February 2011 and May 2012. Throughout this time I conducted overt observation before during and after EDL street demonstrations, meetings, and social events. I also carried out biographic narrative interviews with 18 activists, took part in innumerable informal conversations with grassroots activists and spent many evenings observing interactions between activists on the EDL forums and divisional Facebook pages.

The emergence of the EDL

¹ I wrote this chapter prior to the killing of a British soldier by two Islamist extremists in Woolwich, London, on 22nd May 2013. Not surprisingly, this event prompted a series of mobilisations by the EDL. Prior to these events, however, there had been widespread and well-founded discussion in policy, practitioner and academic circles about the decline of the EDL (e.g. Lowles 2012). Although I have edited this chapter since these events, I have not changed the shape of the discussion presented here because these events do not appear to substantially challenge the argument that I make.

² There are regional differences within the EDL in terms of the support base on which the group has drawn, the extent to which organisers restrict the use of overtly racist language, and activists’ preferred protest tactics. It is worth noting that, in comparison with some EDL activist groups elsewhere in the country, the activist community in and around London has tended 1) to be particularly insistent about the EDL’s opposition to the BNP, and 2) to be less dominated by people from a background in organised football-related public disorder.

Before discussing the development of the EDL and anti-Muslim populism, it will be useful to sketch out the emergence of the group. The EDL was formed during the spring and early summer of 2009. On 10th March 2009, at a home-coming parade for British soldiers returning from a tour of duty in Iraq, a handful of activists from a group called *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jammah* waved placards and shouted abuse at the soldiers (Copsey 2010). On the day, an angry reaction from some of those who had gathered to welcome the soldiers was contained by the police. However, these events sparked a series of mobilisations. First, a local ex-soldier called James Yeomans sought to organise a “Respect Our Troops” march in Luton for March 28th. Although this event was subsequently abandoned by the organisers amid concerns that the event would attract far right groups (Blake 2011, 14), within two weeks a crowd of approximately 200 people took part in a “Ban the Terrorists” march in Luton, and over subsequent weeks further demonstrations followed around similar themes. These events were organised under the banner of United People of Luton and through a loose coalition of individuals from football casuals³ groups, small patriot groups, and the rather nebulous “counter-jihad movement” (see Archer 2013; Williams and Lowles 2012). As the networks of people involved in these mobilisations expanded, the nascent group adopted the name of the English Defence League, with the first EDL demonstrations taking place in June and July.

There was initially considerable scepticism both among public authorities and observers of the far right about whether the EDL would either expand or endure for very long⁴. This was not the first time that there had been mobilisations against “militant Islam” by groups with their roots in the subculture of football-related public disorder. In 2004, a group called United British Alliance had carried out a series of demonstrations outside Finsbury Park mosque against the radical cleric Abu Hamza, and although this group even garnered coverage in the national media, these protests never escalated into a major or sustained series of mobilisations⁵. In addition, there was a quite reasonable expectation that either the truces between the various rival football groups would soon break down or that many of those involved in the EDL would make their way back to football-related disorder once the new football season arrived in mid-August. On top of this, the EDL soon found itself subject to considerable opposition both from various anti-racism groups and from

³ The football casuals are a strand of the UK’s subculture of football-related public disorder

⁴ Personal communications with police intelligence officers and with leading academic analysts of the British far right

⁵ Groups from the far right have been seeking to recruit among football supporter communities since at least as early as the late 1950s (Macklin 2014)

much of the mainstream media who balked at the EDL's claims that it was neither a racist nor a far right organisation.

Yet the truces did largely hold and relatively few activists went back to football. By building its protest narrative around socially embedded discourses about a supposed clash of cultures between the West and Islam⁶ rather than the more symbolically toxic theme of race, and by persistently asserting its organisational distinctiveness from the BNP and other traditional far right groups⁷, the EDL also managed to attract individuals who did not self-identify as far right or racist and would not have been willing to associate with organisations like the BNP. In fact, the EDL soon started to look and feel very much like a serious social movement group. It made effective use of new social media to build and communicate with its support base (Bartlett and Littler 2011; Jackson 2011), and in spite of the drinking, the football-esque chants and the occasional instances of public disorder, it became evident that its public protests were not just groups of "hooligans" taking to the street as a rabble: they were organised demonstrations with all the trappings of contemporary street-protests – appropriate permissions obtained from local authorities, speeches, songs, minutes of silence, placards, and teams of stewards clad in their fluorescent bibs coordinating proceedings (Busher 2013). Through the autumn of 2009 and throughout 2010 the EDL held more than one demonstration per month, often attracting in excess of 1000 participants (Jackson 2011). Estimates put the size of the EDL's active support at around 25,000-35,000 (Bartlett and Littler 2011), and at one point the EDL had a Facebook following of around 100,000.

So how has the EDL and this wave of anti-Muslim populism developed since this initial period of expansion?

Support for the EDL: To what extent might the EDL and the wider anti-Muslim populist movement be described as being in decline?

In order to answer this question in a satisfactory manner, it is first necessary to note that ever since the EDL emerged, it has been difficult to generate a reliable assessment of the scale of its support. As the EDL is not a membership group, its boundaries have always been somewhat fuzzy. One way of estimating support has

⁶ See Adib-Moghaddam (2011) for a discussion of how a "clash mentality" has seeped into the very heart of public and political discourse.

⁷ A story that London-based EDL activists told me on multiple occasions was of how they had ejected Richard Barnbrook – until about 2010 one of the leading lights in the BNP – from one of their EDL London Division meetings.

been to look at the number of people “liking” its Facebook pages, but these estimates are rather unreliable: since 2011, EDL Facebook pages have been taken down on various occasions, meaning that the group’s Facebook support has been artificially reduced; Facebook “likes” give little indication of how active the support might be; and there is the problem of knowing whether the people on the EDL’s Facebook pages are actually supporters or whether they are in fact opposition activists, police, or academics trying to keep an eye on the group.

What is clear is that since around mid-2011 the EDL’s capacity to mobilise large numbers of people to participate in street demonstrations has by-and-large deteriorated. In February 2011, the EDL was able to attract approximately 3000 people to a demonstration in Luton, and activists were talking excitedly about the prospects of an even larger and symbolically more significant demonstration in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets – home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the UK. However, in spite of an extensive publicity campaign, the Tower Hamlets demonstration only attracted around 1200 participants. Two months later another supposedly major demonstration in Birmingham attracted only around 500 activists, and since then the EDL has struggled to attract even these kinds of numbers to their demonstrations. Even in the immediate aftermath of the killing of an off-duty British soldier by two Islamist extremists in Woolwich, London, on 22nd May 2013, the EDL was unable to attract more than 1500 activists to a demonstration in Newcastle on 25th May or more than 1000 activists to an event held in central London on 26th May⁸. The following week, a much-hyped⁹ national day of action proved to be a damp squib, with almost all of the local EDL gatherings attracting no more than a handful of supporters.

What is also clear is that the anti-Muslim populist movement has become considerably more fragmented since early 2011. One of the first major splits to take place within the movement came to a head in April 2011 when rival factions clashed at a demonstration in Blackburn, resulting in the separation of the North-West Infidels from the EDL. Since then other groups like Casuals United and March for England who had operated alongside and often under the banner of the EDL have been more assertive about their independence from the EDL, and several influential

⁸ It is of course possible that the EDL does manage to build further momentum from these events, but these turnouts do illustrate that the EDL’s capacity to mobilise large numbers of people for street demonstrations had waned at the time of writing this chapter.

⁹ By the EDL, but also by anti-EDL groups and some commentators in the media

regional and local leaders within the EDL have also challenged the national EDL leadership, leading to the formation of further splinter groups.

It might therefore seem that this wave of anti-Muslim activism has lost some of its initial energy and that any prospects of an imminent recovery are undermined by intra-movement factionalism. However, there are at least three reasons why, for the time-being, we might remain cautious about making claims regarding the decline of anti-Muslim populism.

First, there is little evidence that the EDL's core protest narrative about a threat posed to an imagined English/British/Western way of life from "militant Islam" has lost its resonance. Certainly, the decline in active support for the EDL has had little if anything to do with activists harbouring doubts about the core narrative. During the time that I was in regular contact with activists, there were multiple factors that did move individuals towards disengagement from EDL activism: disagreements over protest tactics; personal fallings out; being unable to support the financial costs of attending demonstrations up and down the country on a regular basis; other events in their lives – ill health, work, romance – that meant that they could no longer invest so much energy into the EDL; banning orders that prohibited them associating with other EDL activists; and the simple fact that the initial excitement of attending demonstrations had started to wear off. Even in the rare cases where an activist did cite ideological issues as their main motive for leaving the EDL, these issues were about the specific parameters of the protest narrative (see below) rather than about the core message.

There is also scant evidence that anxieties about a cultural clash between Islam and the West have subsided among the general UK public. Even though 85% of respondents in one recent YouGov survey said that they would never consider joining the EDL, 29% said that they agreed with the values of the group (YouGov 2012a), whilst in another YouGov survey only 24% of respondents agreed that "Muslims are compatible with the British way of life" (YouGov 2012b).

A second reason to be cautious of claims about the demise of anti-Muslim populism is the persistence of the networks of individuals, *groupuscules* and cultural practices that have developed out of this wave of mobilisation – what in social movement parlance are called "abeyance structures" (Taylor 1989). Regardless of what happens to the EDL as an organisation over the coming months, the EDL's mobilisations have contributed to the creation of an extensive and lively social movement scene. EDL activism has given rise to new friendship networks and spawned local activist

groups. For many individuals, involvement with the EDL has also meant an introduction not only to new ideas (Lowles 2012) but also to new sources of information and “truth”, with most activists becoming increasingly distrustful of mainstream news media such as the BBC and turning instead to esoteric sources of information such as the various “counter-jihad” blogs and web forums.

Disengagement from these wider cultural and social networks lags a long way behind disengagement from participation in EDL demonstrations. For example, on leaving the EDL, several “former-activists” moved on to events organised by other campaign groups who mobilise around a slightly different agenda or adopt slightly different tactics but recruit from a similar pool of support; others have continued to be regular contributors to online discussions with current EDL activists; and even where activists have made quite clear that they no longer consider themselves part of the EDL, their friendship networks within the EDL activist community are usually sustained for some time after “leaving” the group¹⁰.

A third reason is that it is possible to overstate the degree of fragmentation taking place within the wider movement. There have undoubtedly been very public fallings out between the leaders of the EDL and its various off-shoots. However, in practice these groups continue to overlap. This is particularly the case at the grassroots of the movement where activists attend the demonstrations of multiple groups, none of which demand exclusivity from their activists. At the time of writing there are also cross-group talks taking place among the movement’s various leaders, and in the wake of the attacks in Woolwich there were calls from across the anti-Muslim populist scene for unity¹¹.

The protest narrative: To what extent has the EDL or one of its off-shoots sought to mobilise around a broader far right populist platform than the group’s initial narrative about the threat of “militant Islam”?

Although the EDL initially mobilised around a narrative about the threat posed by “militant Islam”, as is often the case in relatively young social movement groups, ever since these first mobilisations took place its activists have been engaged in an on-going process of negotiating and renegotiating the parameters of this protest narrative. For example, activists exchanged differing views over what constitutes

¹⁰ Here there appears to be some difference between the EDL and more clandestine far right groups where exit from the group often entails breaking off all social ties with activists (Bjørøgo 1998)

¹¹ Even Nick Griffin, the leader of the BNP, has reached out to the EDL, although the EDL leadership not surprisingly has shown little interest in any such collaboration.

“militant Islam”, whether they should in fact be protesting about all forms of Islam, who was to blame for the “Islamification” of Britain, who is in a position to do something about it, what the root causes were of this perceived problem, and so forth.

As the group has developed, this on-going negotiation has contributed to some broadening or loosening of the protest narrative. Perhaps most obvious has been a diminishing of efforts to draw a distinction between “moderate” and “militant” Islam. Whilst this has not been universally accepted across the activist community – I met three former EDL activists who cited this drift in focus as one of the main reasons for disengaging from the group, and four current activists who expressed concern that this loosening of the narrative meant they risked spreading their campaign resources too thinly – this trend has been widely adopted, and some activists have even embraced the usually derogatory “Islamophobic” label as something of a badge of honour when it has been flung at them during arguments with opposition activists on social media sites or during demonstrations.

Another area where there has been a noticeable broadening of the EDL narrative concerns a growing focus on responding to and confronting “the lefties” – activists from groups such as Unite Against Fascism or Hope Not Hate. This expansion of the narrative has been rooted in part in historically embedded lines of argument (see Hewitt 2005) about how the “the left” is colluding in or at least unwittingly facilitating the demise of the British way of life, but also in deeply personalised animosities acquired by activists through the course of their own or their fellow activists’ experiences of arguments and even physical confrontations with individuals from various anti-fascist groups who for most EDL activists have come to symbolise “the left”.

However, these exceptions aside, there has been little move from within the activist community to mobilise around issues that would widen their protest narrative further. Although more generalised anxieties about issues such as immigration and Britain’s relationship with the EU resonate very strongly with much of the activist community (Bartlett and Littler 2011), there has been little indication of an appetite to hold street demonstrations around these issues. When activists have sought to do so, they have usually received embarrassingly little support – for example, a demonstration against the UK’s foreign aid policy and membership of the EU by the British Patriot Society, a group largely comprised of EDL or March for England activists, that took place in London on August 20th 2011 attracted fewer than 100 supporters, many of whom left the demonstration early to go to the pub rather than

listen to speeches in the rain. Much of the reluctance to mobilise around a broader set of issues appears to be due to a view among activists that these are “political issues” – issues that are better addressed and are being addressed through established political parties such as BNP or UKIP.

There has also been particular reticence about any moves to mobilise around issues associated with race, with most established activists acutely aware of how damaging accusations of racism are for the public image of the EDL¹². Concerns about associations with racism were for example one of the main reasons why some activists were hesitant about the EDL playing any role in the vigilante groups that emerged in response to rioting in London in the summer of 2011 (Busher 2012). Even forays into campaigning on the issue of “anti-white racism” – a theme that has long been a feature of the wider backlash against the politics of multiculturalism (Hewitt 2005) – have met with a mixed reaction from the activist community. For example, when a demonstration was called in Leicester in February 2012 amidst claims that a case of alleged anti-white racist violence had not been prosecuted as a racially aggravated incident due to the effects of the dreaded “political correctness”, several activists from London and Southeast England chose not attend, saying that whilst they had some sympathy with the cause they did not see anti-white racism as “an EDL issue”.

Protest tactics: To what extent has the tactical repertoire of anti-Muslim populism evolved beyond the formal demonstrations that characterised the EDL’s early period of growth?

When the EDL first emerged it did so as a street protest group. The use of demonstrations to “reclaim” the streets has been integral to the symbolism of the EDL, and demonstrations themselves were also very much part of the allure of the EDL for many people who became activists, offering multiple rewards that ranged from the more fleeting pleasures of protest – the adrenaline rush of encountering the opposition or the camaraderie engendered by marching shoulder-to-shoulder with fellow activists – to more prolonged and profound rewards – feelings of empowerment, forging a positive or even a “heroic” self-image (Treadwell and Garland 2011), or a sense of striving for a meaningful life.

¹² This is not to say that all activists’ aversion to mobilising around race-related issues was purely tactical. It was also a matter of movement identity – the vast majority of core activists in London and the Southeast held a quite sincere view that the EDL was not about race and therefore should not protest on race-related issues.

However, by early-2011 there were growing calls from across the activist community for the EDL to rethink its protest tactics. Many activists started to question whether this kind of protest was really sustainable (see above), and also whether these demonstrations were having any tangible impact – were demonstrations really the most effective way to make their voices heard? How often had they actually contributed to planning permission for a new mosque being withdrawn?

(a) Towards involvement in more conventional channels of political action?

The possibility that the EDL might move towards involvement in electoral politics was raised in the news media and by some segments of the activist community at least as early as the beginning of 2011, and in November 2011, in the back room of a pub in West Bromwich, the EDL leadership did eventually announce a pact with the British Freedom Party (BFP). Tommy Robinson and Kevin Carroll¹³ would sit on the BFP board, and EDL activists would be able to stand as BFP electoral candidates under appropriate circumstances.

Those activists in favour of such a move saw this as a logical next step if the EDL was to become a more effective campaign group, and in November 2012 when Kevin Carroll stood as a BFP candidate in the Police and Crime Commissioner elections for Bedfordshire, he gained a not unrespectable 8,675 votes (10.6% of votes cast). However, few if any people either observing or involved with the EDL would describe the EDL-BFP alliance as having been a success – from the beginning, the move received scant support from grassroots activists and in October 2012 Robinson himself left the BFP¹⁴. Rather, the story of the EDL-BFP alliance has served to highlight at least two underlying obstacles to the electoral ambitions of some segments of the EDL activist community.

First, this ill-starred foray into electoral politics made clear just how difficult it would be for the EDL to forge a political alliance that would meet with the approval of the activist community. The alliance with the BFP was unpopular in part because it was with the BFP. Even by the standards of the British far right, the BFP is a political minnow – established in 2010, with the exception of Kevin Carroll's campaign the BFP has only ever fielded 6 candidates in local elections, polling between 0.6% and 4.2%. As such, most EDL activists were rightly sceptical that this

¹³ The main spokespersons for the EDL. Tommy Robinson's official name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon.

¹⁴ Although Robinson claimed that he had chosen to leave the BFP in order to concentrate on the EDL, rumours circulated among EDL activists that he had been asked to leave the BFP because he had come to be seen as a public-relations liability.

alliance would achieve anything in electoral terms, and several expressed concern that it would simply “split the nationalist vote”. Due to an expectation that the British public would simply perceive the BFP to be a new version of the BNP, some activists were also concerned that an alliance with the BFP would undermine their efforts to distance the EDL from the far right and rebuff accusations of racism. Far more popular would have been an alliance with UKIP (see Stanley 2013). However, UKIP has repeatedly made clear that it does not want any form of association with the EDL, even including a phrase in the terms and conditions of its membership form stating that a person could not join UKIP if they had formerly been a member of the EDL¹⁵.

What the attempt to build an EDL-BFP alliance also highlighted was that this kind of move towards engagement with electoral politics actually clashed with many activists’ sense of the EDL’s organisational identity and of their own personal identities as activists. Most activists saw the EDL as “a single issue group” and themselves as movement activists – as “the feet on the street” - not as part of a political party. Much of activists’ hostility towards the EDL-BFP alliance was associated with a feeling both that the EDL was turning into something that they had “not signed up to” and that this new strategic direction represented a move by the national leadership towards an increasingly top-down form of leadership with which they were uncomfortable.

(b) Towards increasingly radical protest methods?

There have also been some indications of a move in another tactical direction that would have quite different implications for the kinds of the challenges that anti-Muslim populism might pose – a move towards the adoption of increasingly radical protest methods.

For some time, part of the activist community has been pushing for EDL demonstrations to become more aggressive and hostile, either for tactical reasons – some activists claimed that this was the only way they could get people to take notice of the EDL, or because they felt demonstrations had lost some of the excitement of the earlier events when groups of activists did break out of police cordons and managed to brawl with some opposition protestors. There have also been moves within parts of the activist community to shift the protest effort more generally away from formal demonstrations and towards increasingly radical forms

¹⁵ Although there have been instances in which EDL activists and supporters have become UKIP activists (e.g. Hookham and Gadher 2013)

of action. For example, since late 2010 some activists have been keen to stage “flash demonstrations” which, unlike formal demonstrations, are not carried out with appropriate permissions from or liaison with the relevant public authorities and tend to be more likely to result in physical confrontations. There have also been several instances of groups of EDL activists attempting to use force to disrupt meetings or events being held by what they consider to be their Muslim or left-wing opponents. In the most extreme cases, some individuals associated with the EDL have been convicted of involvement in religiously or racially aggravated criminal actions, such as vandalising or carrying out attacks on mosques.

However, here again divergence from the EDL’s more established tactical repertoire of formal street protest has met with resistance from within the activist community. A large proportion of the activists whom I spoke with did not want their demonstrations to become more hostile or violent. Throughout 2011 and the first half of 2012 I listened to lengthy discussions during local EDL meetings about strategies for actually minimising violence, drunkenness and drug use during demonstrations; in the autumn of 2011, after a series of demonstrations in the Midlands were marked by greater than average levels of public disorder, some activists I knew declared that they would no longer travel to demonstrations outside the Southeast of England; and some individuals even cited trouble during demonstrations as one of the principle motives for stepping away from the EDL altogether. There has also been resistance to the routine¹⁶ adoption of other more radical protest tactics. For example, at least in London and the Southeast some local EDL organisers often discouraged the use of flash demonstrations. Even in the wake of the recent killing of a soldier in Woolwich by two Islamist extremists, whilst there was in the first instance an unruly and aggressive flash demonstration by EDL activists, the EDL soon sought to distance itself from acts of retaliatory violence: the leadership issued a statement saying that they did not condone the spate of attacks perpetrated against mosques, and much of the activist community soon moved back towards organising more socially accepted modes of protest such as memorial marches and charity fundraisers.

Activists offered a number of reasons as to why they were reluctant to see the group shift towards the adoption of more radical methods. These included concerns that a further souring of relations with the police might lead to greater restrictions being imposed on future EDL actions; concerns that it would further weaken their claims

¹⁶ Some of the activists who in general claimed to oppose the use of more radical methods did occasionally participate in actions such as “flash demonstrations”.

to be a legitimate protest group; concerns that more aggressive EDL activities could undermine the strategic position of other campaigns in which a number of EDL activists were involved but which were not badged as EDL campaigns – such as locally-based campaigns to oppose the building of a new mosque in their area; and in some instances it was a matter of tactical taste and a feeling that more radical forms of protest simply “are not for me”.

Discussion: Looking forward

One must of course be cautious about trying to predict how anti-Muslim populism might develop from here, particularly given the instability of the movement. However, the EDL’s evolution to date does provide some indications as to the more and less likely trajectories both of this group and of anti-Muslim populism in the UK – and those who wish might use this to inform their analyses of the nature and extent of the challenges posed by the EDL and anti-Muslim populism in the UK. Based on the discussion in this chapter, I would make four suggestions.

First, even though the EDL itself has seen its capacity to mobilise sustained support diminish since early 2011, it seems that anti-Muslim populism is likely to be part of the UK’s cultural and political landscape for some time to come. What appears most likely is that groups like the EDL will continue to operate in one form or another, enjoying occasional spikes of support around critical events such as the attacks in Woolwich.

Second, whilst a wider set of issues such as immigration, euro-scepticism and even race might resonate with many of the people who have engaged with the EDL, there has been little evidence to date that the EDL or one of its immediate off-shoots would either seek to or be able to effectively mobilise substantial protest activities around these issues. Third, it seems highly unlikely either that the EDL or one of its off-shoots will either transform itself into a political party capable of achieving significant purchase at the ballot box, or will be able to form any kind of electorally meaningful political alliance.

Where the picture is least clear is in relation to the fourth point: the prospect of anti-Muslim populism moving towards increasingly radical and possibly violent protest tactics. At this stage it is difficult to assess how any fragmentation of the anti-Muslim populist movement will affect protest dynamics – e.g. one concern would be that the declining influence of leadership structures could lead to a further decline in discipline and a heightened risk of disorder and violence. Furthermore, as the spike

in anti-Muslim incidents following the killing of a soldier in Woolwich (Taylor and Siddique 2013) indicates, critical events can be conducive to a wider adoption of more radical protest tactics. However, what the development of the EDL to date and the wider research on hate crime and social movements would seem to indicate is that: 1) any shift towards the adoption of more radical protest methods in the wake of critical events is likely only to be a short-term phenomenon (see START 2013); and 2) whilst the adoption of more radical and even violent protest tactics might appeal to a segment of the anti-Muslim activist community, any concerted move in this direction by the EDL or one of its off-shoots would be likely to alienate a substantial proportion of the group's support base, leading to a further fragmentation of the movement.

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