UK Race Riots and Demonstrations: Far Right Ideology, Online and Offline Activism

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Introduction

Contemporary societies are becoming more unstable, and amid nostalgic feelings of lost identity and representation, some individuals are drawn to populist right-wing movements and parties. In contrast, others become radicalised and are pulled towards civil unrest. As Young (2007) describes in The Vertigo of Late Modernity, late modernity is characterised by economic insecurity, cultural upheaval, and social fragmentation, leading to alienation, mistrust, and a longing for an imagined, more orderly past. These insecurities create fertile ground for movements that seek to restore an idealised bygone era, offering clarity and a sense of belonging in a climate of uncertainty.

Some contemporary far-right actors exploit these dynamics, drawing on Julius Evola's traditionalist philosophy, which suggests that cultural and spiritual values can forge identities across racial boundaries and rejects liberal modernity, egalitarianism, and democracy in favour of strict hierarchies and spiritual traditionalism (Evola, 2018). These groups portray themselves as guardians of a lost social order, framing cultural and demographic change as signs of societal decline and justifying exclusionary, essentialist ideologies as necessary for "restoration". Diverging from electorally-focused predecessors such as the British National Party, many modern far-right figures avoid formal politics, instead utilising digital platforms, transnational networks, and street-level mobilisation to promote non-democratic agendas (White et al., 2024; ISD, 2024). Memetic repetition of imagery and misinformation is a key tactic in such mobilisation, which appeals more broadly by employing less obviously ideological persuasion.

These strategies were evident during the UK riots of 2024, where disinformation on Telegram, falsely claiming a Muslim asylum seeker was responsible for a knife attack, helped

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trigger unrest across 27 towns (ISD, 2024). These tactics continue to underpin current anti-migrant demonstrations, often presented as grassroots "community defence" against foreign criminals, despite sometimes being coordinated through transnational digital networks (Verma et al. 2025). The article draws on secondary data and published media articles to compare and analyse the mechanisms and impact of political grooming, assessing the role of new technological tools in propagating far-right ideologies and how these ideologies can lead to civil unrest and hate crimes.

The far right, including both radical and extreme branches, shares hostility towards liberal democracy, minority rights, and institutional checks. While the radical right claims to align with democratic principles in name, the extreme right outright rejects democracy (Mudde, 2019). Through mainstreaming and mediatisation, ideas once marginal now gain legitimacy within democratically elected political parties (Brown et al., 2023). According to Macklin (2014), this ideological split is a strategy of the far right, which presents moderate views publicly while reserving extremist beliefs for a dedicated inner circle. This paper focuses on the extreme far-right and examines how the intersecting forces of late-modern social disorientation, Evolian traditionalism, transnational digital networks, and grassroots mobilisation have contributed to civil unrest in the UK. By contrasting Young's (2007) analysis of late modernity's insecurities with Evola's hierarchical, anti-modern worldview (2021), the paper highlights different analyses and trajectories of the current crisis. It argues that countering far-right mobilisation requires a multi-layered strategy: one that addresses structural inequalities, ideological narratives, and the technological infrastructures that enable radicalisation, to foster inclusive citizenship and civic participation, to reduce alienation and manipulation in late modern societies.

The following section examines how past episodes of racial unrest in the UK compare and contrast, analysing how today's far-right mobilisation both mirrors and diverges from earlier flashpoints.

Similarities and Differences with Previous Racial Unrest and Disorder in the UK

In 2024, the United Kingdom experienced a wave of civil unrest following a tragic knife attack in Southport, where a 17-year-old British-born Christian of Rwandan descent killed three children and injured several others. Despite these facts, misinformation spread rapidly online, falsely identifying the attacker as a Muslim asylum seeker and attributing an Arabic name to him (Wilson and Betts, 2024). This intentional racialisation of the perpetrator reflects a long-standing pattern in British history where racially charged rumours have often acted as catalysts for violence, especially in contexts of deprivation, institutional distrust, and marginalisation. As Solomos (2011) argues, understanding collective unrest requires examining the wider social, political, and economic conditions that underpin such events. He highlights how selective narratives and falsehoods, particularly when targeting racialised groups, can act as emotional triggers for broader disorder, reinforcing perceptions of cultural threat and group-based grievance.

This method of mobilisation through rumours and racialisation is not new. Webster (1995) traces a continuum of racialised unrest in Britain from the "race riots" of 1919 through later flashpoints such as Notting Hill in 1958, Brixton in 1981 and 1985, and the Broadwater Farm disturbance in Tottenham in 1985. Each episode, while shaped by specific local conditions, was rooted in systemic socio-economic inequalities and the persistent

racialisation of minority communities. In all cases, the initial participation tended to be spontaneous and localised, but antagonistic relations with police and the stigmatisation of urban minorities often worsened the outbreaks. Murji and Neal (2011) similarly highlight how narratives about place can influence the framing of riots, noting how areas such as Tottenham in London are repeatedly symbolised as spaces "haunted" by historical conflict, even as state responses often overlook the role of race in shaping both conditions of unrest and the official interpretations of them.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, white working-class mobilisation in London's East End provided an early example of racially motivated disorder rooted in what could be described as a spuriously imputed "cultural defence" dynamic (Van Broueck, 2001): the idea that individuals are encouraged to act outside the law in response to perceived threats to their cultural values and way of life. These disturbances, which culminated with the murder of Tosir Ali in 1970, were shaped by narratives of white victimhood and cultural displacement (Ashe et al., 2016). Powell's notorious "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968 acted as a catalyst, legitimising white anxieties and triggering an increase in racist violence (op cit). Far-right groups like the National Front (NF) actively exploited this atmosphere (op cit). According to Woodbridge (1993), the NF, under A.K. Chesterton, adopted a two-pronged approach: while openly opposing immigration to gain electoral support, it secretly maintained an ideological basis rooted in biological racism, extreme nationalism, and the repatriation of non-white residents. The party positioned itself as the spokesperson for an aggrieved white majority, claiming to defend Britain's desire to remain a white country. This narrative of white identity under threat was central to the NF's mobilisation efforts and laid the ideological groundwork for later far-right groups such as the British National Party (BNP). In 1984, the National Front embraced a radical new direction calling for ideological sacrifice and national revolution, heavily influenced by Italian fascism, with Nick Griffin initially steering the party towards a 'National Revolutionary' path amid weakened internal leadership (Hope Not Hate, 2017).

The provocation tactics of the NF and BNP re-emerged strongly during the 2001 riots in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford (Bujra and Pearce, 2011). Rhodes (2017) explains how these towns, situated in England's post-industrial North and among the most deprived areas in the country, became the stage for a new wave of racialised disorder. These areas were characterised by high unemployment, poor-quality housing, residential segregation, and long histories of hostility between the police and South Asian communities. Far-right actors, especially the BNP, exploited these conditions through marches, propaganda, and electoral campaigns aimed at inciting racial hostility and portraying white populations as victims of multiculturalism and immigration. Although the BNP was directly involved in heightening tensions, official responses, including the Cantle and Denham Reports, mainly downplayed the role of far-right mobilisation. Instead, the primary policy narrative framed the riots as results of cultural fragmentation and self-segregation among South Asian communities. As Rhodes (2017) notes, this signified a clear shift towards "colourblind" racism in New Labour's policy approach, where institutional and structural racism were overlooked in favour of a narrative that depicted minority communities as culturally insular and resistant to integration.

From Electoralism to Subcultural Wars: Continuity and Difference, The Radical Far Right's Cultural Turn

During the early 2000s, the BNP adopted a strategy of rhetorical moderation to gain electoral ground. Its public messaging downplayed overt racism in favour of a discourse centred on the defence of British cultural identity, particularly against immigration and multiculturalism (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2010). However, the party's core commitments remained fundamentally racialised, targeting Muslim minorities as existential threats to social order and national cohesion (Ford and Goodwin, 2010). Political analysts viewed this strategy as a calculated reframing of racial politics in cultural terms, designed to broaden appeal without alienating the electorate (Goodman and Johnson, 2013).

The contemporary UK far right continues to operate a bifurcated strategy of political legitimacy and cultural insurgency, which aligns itself with meta-political strategies rooted in identity, belonging, and the rejection of modern democratic values. While the British National Party (BNP), under the leadership of Nick Griffin, sought some political legitimacy through the ballot box, more recent groups like Patriotic Alternative (PA) and various Active Clubs are reshaping far-right activism into a subcultural project animated by spiritual traditionalism, militant masculinity, and decentralised digital organising.

Patriotic Alternative (PA), founded in 2019 by former BNP activist Mark Collett, marked a strategic shift in the UK far-right landscape by rejecting formal electoral politics in favour of "community-building," online propaganda, and the promotion of the "White Genocide" conspiracy theory (Hope Not Hate, 2025). Once the most active far-right group in the UK, PA began to fracture from 2023 onwards amid rising public scrutiny, the imprisonment of key members, and internal divisions that led to the formation of splinter groups such as the Homeland Party and the National Rebirth Party (Hope Not Hate, 2025). Though weakened and increasingly dependent on fringe platforms and donations, PA remains a residual threat. Its alleged ties to former members of National Action, a proscribed terrorist group under the Terrorism Act 2000, further underscore its extremist potential (Home Office, 2016).

Despite its declining organisational coherence, PA continues to disseminate the Great Replacement worldview through digital subcultures, particularly on platforms like Telegram. Channels such as Active Club Scotland combine ideological content with lifestyle messaging around martial fitness, racial brotherhood, and metaphysical identity, reflecting a broader shift from electoral politics to identity-based mobilisation (Hope Not Hate, 2024). Kolb (2014) argues that such emotional subcultures provide meaning and belonging for individuals experiencing social precarity.

Historically, this strategy stems from earlier links between youth subculture and far-right mobilisation. Clarke's (1976) foundational study of skinhead culture argued that post-war working-class youth responded to economic and social upheaval by creating subcultural identities aimed at defending what remained of their community life. Their hyper-masculine style, aggression, and violence acted as symbolic defences against perceived middle-class interlopers and foreign invaders (Clarke, 1976). By the 1980s, as Bland (2019) explains, the far right had appropriated aspects of this cultural space. The National Front and British Movement co-opted Oi! music scenes, some football terraces, and aspects of skinhead fashion.

While the aesthetic markers of today's movements are more diffuse, the underlying logic remains. Telegram, Discord, TikTok, and some gaming platforms serve as the new venues

for cultural indoctrination and community formation. According to ISD (2024), the 2024 Southport riots revealed the scale and speed of this new subcultural mobilisation. Channels like Southport Wake Up ballooned from 44 members to nearly 15,000 in a matter of days, with over 45,000 posts across 55 channels between 19 July and 8 August 2024. These posts included mosque "hit lists," tactical guidance, far-right imagery, and "accelerationist" calls for violence, all framed within a language of existential crisis and racial destiny. This invocation of lineage and sacrifice reveals the depths of the far right's cultural project: the creation of an emotionally resonant counter-society that blends race, myth, and duty, similar to the NF Political Soldiers project of the early 80's when a small faction of devotees were committed to violent street violence (Bhargava, 2025).

As Verma et al. (2025) argue, far-right digital communities form part of a transnational web of influence spanning over 30 platforms, including Telegram, Gab, BitChute, and Odysee, linking UK chapters with global far-right actors such as the Nordic Resistance Movement, White Rabbit Radio, and conspiracy networks active during the US Capitol insurrection. This decentralised architecture allows local grievances, like fears about immigration or cultural decline, to be reframed as symptoms of a global civilisational war.

While the UK's Office of Communications (Ofcom) confirmed links between digital mobilisation and the 2024 unrest, it failed to address the infrastructure that allowed these movements to proliferate and coordinate so effectively. Verma et al. (2025) emphasise that far-right groups are not merely reactive but strategic, using AI-generated content, geolocated ads, and meme warfare to inflame tensions and spread disinformation, turning spontaneous anger into organised insurgency. This ideological and operational sophistication distinguishes the contemporary far right from its earlier forms. Norris (2024) describes this new configuration as a "networked movement" that encourages stochastic violence, plausibly deniable, decentralised, and arising from cultural immersion rather than direct command. The strategic use of platforms such as Call of Duty, Telegram, and short-form videos on TikTok to reach and radicalise disaffected youth marks a significant shift from electoral propaganda to participatory myth-making (Quinn & Milo, 2024).

Yet, the far right's cultural progress has not gone uncontested. Bland (2019) documents the success of 1970s anti-fascist campaigns like Rock Against Racism (RAR) and the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) in reclaiming subcultural spaces. These movements mobilised through punk, reggae, and football fan culture to foster solidarity across racial boundaries. RAR *"forged alliances between black and white musicians and fans,"* using culture as a tool of resistance (p. 148). Renton (2006) observes that these were not only physical confrontations but also symbolic battles over the definition of Britishness, class, and modernity. In the 2020s, counter-mobilisations such as Stand Up To Racism, Black Lives Matter UK, and youth-led anti-fascist collectives have aimed to remix this legacy for the digital age. As Ashe et al. (2016) argue, they blend street protest, online activism, and intersectional politics to challenge far-right narratives. By adapting aesthetics, slogans, and symbols, whether through TikTok campaigns or coordinated demonstrations, these groups seek to undermine the far right's claim to speak for the "authentic" nation.

Many involved in the 2024–2025 riots and far-right demonstrations may not view themselves as racist or far-right activists, but rather as concerned citizens striving for the civil rights of indigenous communities, with a sense of injustice amplified through social media. This rhetorical shift of right-wing groups from overt racism to indigenous civil rights, particularly the claims of policing leniency towards minoritised groups, continued into the

2024 riots and the anti-asylum protests of 2025 (National Centre for Diversity, 2024; House of Commons Library, 2024). However, the strategies of mobilisation evolved dramatically through the use of digital infrastructures. In contrast to the leafleting, rallies, and door-to-door canvassing of earlier decades, contemporary far-right movements used encrypted platforms such as Telegram and Discord, geolocated social media advertising, and AI-generated visual and textual content to spread inflammatory narratives portraying asylum seekers as existential threats to public safety, housing, and national identity (Verma et al., 2025; Sibley, 2024). These campaigns replicated some of the thematic core of NF and BNP propaganda but deployed algorithmically optimised distribution strategies that dramatically increased their speed and reach. Kolb's (2014) notion of "emotional subculture" captures how these movements operate through non-rational mobilisation, activating anger, fear, and resentment rather than political reason. The affective dimension of far-right mobilisation is key to understanding how online rumours, even when manifestly false, can produce real-world consequences (Cengiz and Vasilopoulou, 2022).

Civil Rights and Civic Wrongs

The transformation of far-right activism from centralised organisations to decentralised networks is what Meleagrou-Hitchens et al. (2018) define as the emergence of "post-organisational" extremism. These digital formations remain rooted in longstanding grievances, immigration, economic decline, and cultural loss, but operate within transnational ideological frameworks that blend racialised populism, conspiracy theory, and white victimhood. Verma et al. (2025) show how digital ecosystems facilitate this convergence, allowing local discontent to be absorbed into global far-right narratives. Through real-time dissemination across multiple platforms, these movements achieve rapid mobilisation without traditional command structures, creating flexible, horizontal networks that are difficult to monitor or disrupt using conventional counter-extremism tools.

The recent disturbances in Northern Ireland in 2025 illustrate this model of digital-fuelled racialised unrest. The immediate cause was a court case involving two Romanian teenage boys accused of assaulting a local girl, which sparked xenophobic outrage in Ballymena (Mohdin, 2025). This led to three nights of coordinated disorder across several towns, including Belfast and Lisburn. Rioters attacked police officers and homes of ethnic minorities with petrol bombs, fireworks, and bricks, injuring 17 officers and prompting the deployment of riot control measures (Lawless, 2025). Assistant Chief Constable Ryan Henderson condemned the attacks as "racist thuggery," emphasising the racially targeted nature of the violence (Al Jazeera, 2025). Residents in affected areas began marking their homes with signs indicating their nationality to avoid attacks, a chilling echo of historical patterns of ethnic scapegoating. Bakare (2025) frames the unrest within a broader pattern of loyalist anxiety, driven by demographic changes, economic stagnation, and perceived civic neglect.

In Britain, the strategic focus on towns like Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, and Darlington demonstrates a deliberate effort to provoke discontent in regions already affected by structural inequality. According to Padley et al. (2024), 41% of children in Middlesbrough live in poverty, highlighting a broader pattern of neglect and instability. Far-right activists appear to have intentionally targeted these areas, where economic decline, low civic trust, and cultural disorientation create conditions conducive to radicalisation. By combining digital misinformation, algorithmic targeting, and emotional appeals, these groups turned latent

disaffection into organised protests, employing tactics previously seen in the "Killing of Keira" by the Alt-right in Berlin, Germany in 2018. Darmstadt et al. (2019) and Fattibene et al. (2024) document how far-right and conspiracist groups in the Republic of Ireland also manipulated platform algorithms to amplify disinformation, demonstrating the increasing sophistication of digital mobilisation. Castells (2012) and Gerbaudo (2012) similarly show how digital infrastructures have transformed protest organisation and political communication, enabling movements to cultivate shared identity and outrage without formal leadership or centralised institutions. Some of the far-right's mechanisms of decentralised activism lie in algorithmic pathways which may ultimately lead to further radicalising materials.

Algorithmic Pathways and the Decentralised Logic of Digital Radicalisation

Social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok use engagement-optimising algorithms that can unintentionally expose users to extremist content. As Hosseinmardi et al. (2021) demonstrate in their empirical analysis of YouTube's recommendation system, users can be quickly guided from mainstream content to radical-right material through a series of seemingly harmless video suggestions. This algorithmically generated pathway, often called a "radicalisation pipeline", works not through direct influence but through the cumulative effect of proximity, recommendations, and repetition. Shin and Jitkajornwanich (2024) extend this analysis to TikTok, showing how short-form video content, especially memes and emotionally charged audiovisual snippets, can act as entry points into more ideologically dense far-right communities, sometimes without the user's conscious realisation. More radical far-right memes serve not only as channels for ideological spread but also as incubators of affective and aesthetic subcultures (Bogerts and Fielitz, 2019). They build emotional communities based on shared grievance, alienation, and perceived loss of identity.

This model of radicalisation is quite different from the linear, top-down political communication strategies typical of 20th-century electoral campaigns. Where traditional far-right parties engaged voters through structured messaging and hierarchical organisation, today's digital far right thrives on virality, emotive subcultural aesthetics, and decentralised engagement. The architecture of these platforms rewards sensationalism, ambiguity, and repetition, traits that fit well with the meme-driven communication style of many far-right actors.

At the same time, digital radicalisation isn't confined to individual platforms but extends across a connected media ecosystem characterised by cross-platform migration and overlapping audience communities. As Ganesh (2025) argues, this has led to the emergence of "fuzzy collectivities", loosely connected digital publics and affective resonance, united by cultural symbols and algorithmic exposure. These communities resist traditional political labels, often engaging with far-right content without explicitly claiming it. This diffuse mode of engagement helps far-right narratives circulate widely without requiring ideological loyalty, enabling ambient forms of radicalisation that thrive in today's fragmented digital landscape. Such shifts mark a move from overt ideology-centred persuasion to environment-driven social conditioning. Zhang and Davis (2022) contend that the far right's success in this area is partly due to the ambient nature of its digital presence, its ability to blend entertainment, culture, and identity politics into a stream of content that normalises and spreads exclusionary worldviews. Algorithmic logic ensures that content is surfaced not for its truth or democratic value but because it is likely to generate engagement, often emotional, polarising, or conspiratorial.

The transition from structured electoral messaging to algorithmically driven radicalisation highlights a fundamental change in how far-right movements attract, engage, and mobilise support. Instead of targeting active political constituencies, modern far-right networks embed themselves in digital subcultures, using memes, decentralised branding, and platform mechanics to spread their ideology. This marks a shift from overt persuasion to circulation, from manifesto to meme, and from mainstream politics to the cultural logic of mobilisation. The rise of such "fuzzy collectivities" offers a useful lens for contrasting the potential of Young's optimism with Evola's cynicism. Both suggest decentralised, affect-driven networks; however, they are markedly different in social and democratic values.

Contrasting Young's Optimism with Evola's Cynicism

Jock Young's Vertigo of Late Modernity (2007) offers a largely optimistic view: while recognising social dislocation, insecurity, and cultural fragmentation in late modern life, he believes these issues can be addressed through structural reform, inclusion, and critical multiculturalism. For Young, alienation is not inevitable but results from obstructed citizenship and a failure of justice and equality that can be remedied through democratic renewal. In contrast, Julius Evola's (2018) writing presents a deeply pessimistic outlook, interpreting modernity as a civilisational decline stemming from a mythic, hierarchical past. His rejection of equality, liberalism, and modern rationalism leads to a fatalistic acceptance of authoritarianism and spiritual elitism. Whereas Young sees the potential for regeneration via solidarity and reform, Evola advocates only for restoration through militarised organisation and violent upheaval, a regression to a rigid traditionalist order.

Understanding the ideological, emotional, and socio-economic drivers of street violence is essential for developing effective responses. Echoing Windle's (2021) analysis of the 1991 Blackbird Leys riots, this paper challenges simplistic portrayals of rioters as a deviant "underclass" engaging purely in far-right "thuggery" based on rational choice. Instead, it explores how mediated extremist ideas interact with structural deprivation (Young, 2007), the emotional appeal of transgressive acts (Katz, 1988), and hostility towards authority. Policy strategies should therefore go beyond deterrence and incapacitation, addressing the emotional, socio-economic, and ideological roots of division and violence. Dame Sara Khan's (2024) review of threats to social cohesion emphasises how persistent disinformation has entrenched far-right narratives within specific communities, scapegoating migrants as the cause of social tensions. Yet, as Young (2003) notes, the challenge lies less in failed integration than in "obstructed citizenship," where economic inequality and segregation push marginalised groups into conflict.

Young's (2007) analysis of late modernity highlights a widespread sense of "vertigo," a disorienting state marked by insecurity, paranoia, cynicism, and social fragmentation. He identifies processes such as *Othering, Disembeddedness,* and *Essentialism* as socially harmful forces that weaken social cohesion and generate unrest. These are presented as indicators of a society that fails to offer equitable citizenship and a shared sense of belonging. In stark contrast, Julius Evola embraces these same dynamics, not as social disorders, but as essential elements of a hierarchical and traditional social order. Evola explicitly rejects the principles of egalitarianism and democracy, portraying social stratification and cultural differentiation as spiritually meaningful mechanisms for resisting the moral and cultural decline of modernity (Evola, 2018). By comparing each of Young's key criticisms with

Evola's traditionalist ideology, we gain a clearer understanding of the current ideological landscape. We can, importantly, outline a more hopeful, inclusive approach based on democratic renewal and social justice.

Othering is a deeply ingrained social and psychological process where certain groups, often ethnic minorities or those seen as culturally different from the dominant populations, are systematically marginalised and cast as outsiders. This process involves attributing negative qualities to those marked as *Other*, positioning them against those regarded as socially "normal" or culturally legitimate. These attributions are seldom harmless; they serve to devalue the humanity of targeted groups, suggesting they are less worthy, less entitled to rights, and less deserving of protection or respect. Through Othering, rights can be denied, structural inequalities are justified, and, in the worst cases, organised persecution or violence can occur. The race riots in London's East End between 1968 and 1970, described above, exemplify how *Othering* can escalate into violence.

Young (2007) situates this process within a broader critique of social stratification, arguing that the dominant narrative of a meritocratic Britain conceals the extent to which class and ethnicity continue to restrict access to education, employment, and social mobility. By hiding structural disadvantages, the narrative of meritocracy allows dominant groups to justify exclusion by depicting marginalised populations as deviant or undeserving, with their struggles seen as personal failings rather than consequences of systemic inequality. Therefore, Othering functions not only as a rhetorical device but also as a means to legitimise and uphold structural inequalities. In contrast, Evola's traditionalist philosophy depicts group distinctions and hierarchies as reflections of a natural and unchangeable order, rejecting egalitarianism as a cause of cultural and spiritual decline (Evola, 2018). Far-right groups, both historically and today, utilise this worldview to justify exclusionary rhetoric and their mobilisation efforts, whether through physical campaigns, like the NF's "neighbourhood defence," or through digital propaganda, such as in the asylum hotel protests. From this perspective, campaigns of hostility are reframed as acts of cultural preservation rather than manifestations of prejudice or aggression. These examples demonstrate that Othering is not a fixed or purely rhetorical phenomenon. Instead, it is a multi-layered process that responds to technological and social changes while maintaining its fundamental purpose: to rationalise exclusion, legitimise inequality, and approve hostility.

Disembeddedness –Mulholland (2024) observes that the far-right riots of 2024 disproportionately targeted some of the most economically deprived areas in England, towns subjected to years of deindustrialisation, the decline or withdrawal of public services, and severe local government funding cuts under successive Conservative administrations. Simultaneously, investment in job creation and regeneration projects to offset these losses has largely evaporated, leaving many residents, particularly younger people, facing diminished prospects and little hope for a secure or meaningful future.

Young (2007) interprets such disembeddedness, the detachment of individuals and communities from stable social, economic, and cultural moorings, as a product of economic decline, community erosion, and neoliberal restructuring, which leave populations vulnerable to the appeal of reactionary and exclusionary movements. Within this framework, far-right mobilisation operates as a "magical recovery of belonging", echoing Clarke's analysis, by offering embittered communities a reconstructed identity rooted in opposition to out-groups. Conversely, Evola situates disembeddedness within a spiritual, rather than economic, crisis, depicting it as the result of liberalism and modern secularism dismantling

hierarchical traditions. His proposed remedy is a return to rigid, pre-modern structures of identity and belonging, a vision contemporary far-right actors interpret as a mandate for radical social reordering (Evola, 2018). This framing reframes deprivation and isolation not as material injustices, but as symptoms of a mythologised cultural and spiritual decay, justifying authoritarian and exclusionary solutions.

Essentialism—refers to the belief that certain groups of people possess inherent, unchangeable characteristics that define their identity, often framed in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, or nationality. These characteristics are imagined as biologically or spiritually fixed, rather than socially or historically contingent. Such thinking tends to produce stereotyping, exclusion, and the marginalisation of individuals and communities, as people are reduced to categories and judged not by their actions or contexts but by traits they are assumed to embody. Essentialist ideas form a core ideological pillar of the contemporary far right, which asserts that certain racial or cultural groups are fundamentally incompatible and must be kept separate to preserve their supposed "purity" and integrity.

The new far right, gaining traction across Europe and the UK, has integrated essentialist concepts into a broader blend of nationalism, xenophobia, and populism. These movements construct narratives of cultural and racial superiority, presenting themselves as the guardians of national identity against perceived threats from immigration, multiculturalism, and globalisation. Essentialism is central to these narratives because it reframes cultural change not as a challenge to be navigated but as a battle for survival, in which racial and cultural boundaries must be defended. These ideologies are amplified through digital ecosystems, particularly social media, encrypted networks, and AI-driven content, which facilitate the spread of disinformation, emotive propaganda, and hyper-local mobilisation (Verma et al., 2025).

Young (2007) sharply critiques essentialism as a false and destructive construct, identifying it as "a key mechanism by which xenophobia and racialised violence are justified, through the portrayal of minorities as irredeemably different and beyond the reach of shared belonging" (p. 89). For Young, essentialist thinking obscures the structural causes of social divisions, economic inequality, institutional exclusion, and the erosion of social safety nets, by presenting these divides as rooted in the intrinsic qualities of groups rather than the failings of policy or power structures. In his view, combating alienation and unrest requires "inclusive remedies aimed at dismantling barriers to participation and addressing structural inequality, rather than amplifying divisions through racial or cultural essentialism" (Young, 2007, p. 93). In contrast, Evola considers essentialism a core virtue rather than a threat, positioning it as the philosophical foundation for a hierarchical and exclusionary social order. Evola suggests that racial, cultural, and spiritual differences are neither accidental nor negotiable, but form the bedrock of a natural order in which hierarchy and separation are necessary for the preservation of civilisation. (Evola, 2018). For Evola, social fragmentation is not a problem to be solved through integration or equality, but a symptom of a civilisation weakened by liberalism and secular modernity. His solution is a radical return to pre-modern, rigid structures of belonging and identity, a vision contemporary European and UK far-right actors invoke to legitimise calls for cultural restoration, segregation, and authoritarian renewal.

This contrast between Young's critical optimism and Evola's rigid traditionalism exposes two fundamentally different views of social fragmentation. For Young, unrest, exclusion, and hostility stem from inequality and alienation, requiring radical, inclusive reform efforts.

For Evola, they signify spiritual and cultural decay that can only be countered through restoring hierarchy and cultural uniformity. Modern far-right movements, from online networks to street groups, adopt Evola's stance, framing unrest and even violence not as social issues but as morally justified acts to "restore order" and oppose what they see as the destructive forces of liberal modernity. In this way, essentialism becomes both the core ideology and a powerful mobilisation tool for the new far right. By reducing complex social and economic problems to fixed categories of identity and threat, essentialism weaponises fear and disconnection. It connects historical far-right tropes, from Powellism and National Front propaganda to anti-Muslim rhetoric of the EDL and DFLA, with 21st-century digital propaganda, AI-driven disinformation, and targeted online campaigns, maintaining its effectiveness as a driver of exclusion, unrest, and violence today.

Conclusion: Countering Far-Right Extremism through Counterveillance, AI, and Collective Action

The resurgence of far-right extremism, amplified disinformation, and anti-migrant violence demands a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond reactive law enforcement to effectively combat it. As Young (2007) argues in The Vertigo of Late Modernity, contemporary societies are afflicted by "vertigo", a state of disorientation caused by economic instability, social fragmentation, and cultural upheaval. This insecurity fuels paranoia and alienation, which far-right groups exploit by offering scapegoats, often migrants or minorities, to redirect public frustration into violent mobilisation. Addressing these issues requires interventions that target not just the symptoms but also the underlying structural and cultural causes of unrest. A strategic plan must first acknowledge, as Young (2003) notes, that such unrest is driven less by failed integration than by "obstructed citizenship," where economic inequality and segregation divide marginalised groups. Tackling this challenge involves substantial investment in distressed towns and cities, revitalising services, and creating spaces that foster a sense of belonging and social cohesion (Padley et al., 2024; Mulholland, 2024). Redistributive actions must be combined with civic renewal to bridge the gaps that extremists seek to exploit.

White et al. (2024) emphasise that far-right violence is often mischaracterised as "thuggery," obscuring its sophisticated cross-border infrastructure, including links to international state and non-state influencers, as well as financial actors in the fossil fuel and banking sectors (Lewis, 2025). Events like the Southport riots, triggered by false claims about a Muslim asylum seeker, demonstrate the need for proactive tracking and disruption of these networks (ISD, 2024). Digital regulation must evolve to address these threats. To counter the current crisis, structural reform alone is insufficient and must be supported by cognitive activism (Earl, 2017), the monitoring of extremist narratives, and the building of transnational networks. Equally, civic action, including counter-demonstrations, is also required.

Finally, integration policies must adopt critical multiculturalism (Young, 2003), moving beyond token gestures to guarantee migrants and refugees have fair access to citizenship, education, and opportunities. By investing in inclusion, challenging disinformation with evidence, fostering civic resistance, and tackling structural inequalities, we can create communities resilient to both the disorientation of late modernity and the manipulation of far-right extremism.

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