

inside the edl populist politics in a digital age

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DEMOS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The English Defence League (EDL) is the biggest populist street movement in a generation. Since it was founded in 2009 it has rarely been out of the news, with many commentators arguing that it represents a greater – and different – challenge to social cohesion than the British National Party (BNP), largely because its *modus operandi* is not organised electoral campaigning, but volatile street demonstrations.

Yet the make-up of the group itself remains a mystery. This is largely because the EDL has no formal joining procedures or membership list, and much of its activity – recruitment, organising, proselytising – takes place online. Thus the EDL is complex and amorphous, and its ideology remains unclear. While leaders of the EDL claim they are a pluralistic, liberal movement that is fighting Muslim extremism, chants heard at demonstrations and the vitriol frequently posted on the EDL's chat forums suggest otherwise. Similarly, the police and other groups have often struggled to gauge the scale of threat posed by the EDL, because it is difficult to estimate the relationship between the group's online membership and its active core of street protesters.

This lack of clarity about the EDL has led to diverse views on how to respond. Some civil society groups called for the group to be banned as an extremist organisation, arguing that the EDL ought to be included in the government's new counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, particularly after the recent terrorist attacks in Oslo.¹ Others – including Maurice Glasman – have called for dialogue to address the 'legitimate' concerns of their membership.²

It is in this context that we have undertaken the first ever large-scale empirical study of the EDL, which comprises responses from 1,295 sympathisers and supporters, and includes data on their demographics, involvement in EDL activity, political attitudes and social views. We also ran logistical regressions to determine what might motivate supporters to demonstrate in the streets.

The survey uses an online sample recruited through the EDL's Facebook supporters, which has been statistically weighted to

improve the validity and accuracy of any inferences made. Although online recruitment in social research is widespread, recruitment via social network sites brings novel challenges. Because this is an innovative research method with both strengths and weaknesses, we have included an in-depth discussion of the methodology used in chapter 3. Of course, many EDL supporters are not on Facebook, and so are out of reach of our survey. As such all references to EDL supporters refer to Facebook fans of the group. Nevertheless, because EDL supporters use Facebook as their central communicative and organisational tool, we are confident in making general inferences about the group as a whole. We have also conducted a small offline validity check to further strengthen the results.

The results shed new light on the group – its supporters, concerns, activities and motivations. It also provides broader insight about groups for whom online activism is a significant part of their activity.

Key findings

We estimate the total size of the active membership to be at least 25,000–35,000 people

Of these, around half have been involved in demonstrations and/or marches. The highest concentration of supporters is to be found around London. We estimate the highest hypothetical number of demonstrators the EDL could command in London is around 12,000. However, it is very unlikely they would ever achieve that. To attain this number would require every London based individual who has ever demonstrated at an EDL demonstration in London doing so, plus everyone outside London who has travelled over 100 kilometres to demonstrate on behalf of the EDL coming to London. The largest demonstration ever held by the EDL involved approximately 2,000–3,000 people. This compares to around 14,000 British National Party (BNP) members – although around half a million people voted for the BNP in the 2010 general election. Direct comparisons of size are difficult to make given ambiguities in the term ‘membership’.

The received wisdom that the EDL is a street based movement comprised of young thugs needs to be revised

Supporters are older and more educated than many assume: 28 per cent are over 30; 30 per cent are educated to university or college level; and 15 per cent have a professional qualification. There are far more male supporters than female: 81 per cent are male and 19 per cent female. Those who demonstrate might tend to be younger men, but EDL supporters also take part in a number of other activities, including leafleting, 'flash-demos' and legal challenges.

They are disproportionately likely to be out of work

A significant percentage of supporters are unemployed – although this is especially true of older supporters. Among 16–24-year-old EDL supporters, 28 per cent are unemployed, compared with a national average of 20 per cent for the same age group. Among 25–64-year-olds, 28 per cent of EDL supporters are unemployed, compared with a national average of 6 per cent.

The EDL contains democrats

A clear majority believe that voting does matter (approximately consistent with the national average), which suggests EDL supporters have some faith in the power of parliamentary democracy. Supporters also have broadly similar levels of trust in parliament and political parties as the national average. Although outbreaks of violence at many of their demonstrations suggest the organisation includes violent elements, supporters cite 'rule of law', 'individual freedom' and 'respect for human rights' among their top values.

Immigration is the biggest concern among EDL supporters

Although the group's leaders claim Islamic extremism is the EDL's primary *raison d'être*, supporters appear to care more about immigration: 42 per cent consider immigration one of the top two issues facing the country, with 31 per cent citing Islamic extremism.

The BNP is the most popular political party among EDL supporters

Although members of the BNP are not officially welcome at EDL demonstrations, 34 per cent of EDL supporters vote for the BNP.

Supporters have low levels of 'social capital' and high levels of pessimism

Only 32 per cent of EDL respondents, compared with 55 per cent for the general population as a whole, agreed with the statement 'in general, people can be trusted', which is considered to be a good proxy measure for social capital. The group is also extremely pessimistic about the future, compared with the general public.

Supporters join the EDL because of a combination of opposition to Islam or Islamism, and to preserve national and cultural values

Nearly half (41 per cent) of supporters claim to have joined the EDL because of their views on Islam. While some directed abuse at all Muslims, others made more nuanced criticisms, condemning 'political Islam' and 'Muslim extremists'. A large number cited a love of England, commitment to preservation of traditional national and cultural values, and representation of the interests of 'real' British countrymen (31 per cent) as their reason for joining. In many cases this amounted to a defence of liberal values from perceived outside forces such as Islam. It is of interest that no one cited immigration as an important reason for joining the group, although it is the biggest concern facing members.

Supporters demonstrate for the EDL because of a sense of injustice and pessimism combined with a belief that politics can make a difference

EDL supporters' lack of confidence in the legal and justice system, belief that Britain is on the wrong track, and pessimistic outlook about the future are important factors in explaining why they demonstrate on behalf of the EDL. Overall, the group is characterised by disproportionately low levels of trust in British institutions related to justice, law and order. However, their trust in political institutions is no lower than the national average.

The survey results raised a number of important points about the group more generally:

- 'Membership' of the EDL differs from that of other membership organisations. The EDL does not have members in the conventional sense. It is more accurate to describe the group's supporters as sub-groups of activists and

sympathisers. Only around half of online supporters have ever been on a march or demonstration.

- Given the relative youth and disorganised nature of the group, it is unsurprising that there are significant differences between the ‘official pronouncements’ of the leadership and individual supporters’ views. As the membership is disperse and fractious, it is difficult to infer what the group ‘believes’; rather, commentators and policy makers should restrict themselves to discussing what supporters think and believe, which is often quite varied. Individual comments made by EDL supporters on Facebook or other online forums do not necessarily represent the views of the whole group.

Recommendations

Police and other agencies concerned with the EDL have access to information (and experience) that we do not. Therefore, we limit ourselves to a small number of general comments for policy makers, based on our survey results.

Do not ban the group

The EDL is not one-dimensional, and members’ views are varied. The group is probably best described as a populist movement that contains some extreme right-wing and sometimes Islamophobic elements. Although there are some illiberal and intolerant sentiments voiced by some supporters in this survey (and at demonstrations), many members are in an important sense democrats. Allowing them to protest and demonstrate is an important way to ensure the group does not become more extreme.

Engage with genuine supporters

The EDL appears to be symptomatic of a new brand of loosely nationalist movements across Europe, which finds common cause in opposing a perceived Islamification of secular liberal and Christian societies. These groups lay claim to the mantle of the enlightenment, espousing support for fundamental liberal values of free speech, democracy and equality, which they seek to defend

from the threat of Islam. It is hard to know accurately when this language is being used as a cover for more sinister or intolerant views, and when it is genuine. There is little doubt that the EDL contains some racist and openly anti-Islamic elements – but this is by no means true of all supporters. The task ahead is to engage with those who are sincere democrats, and isolate those who are not.

A multi-faceted response

Anti-Islam and anti-Islamist sentiment is an important, but not the primary, concern among supporters. Any concerted effort to limit the group's support would therefore require addressing a much broader set of concerns about immigration, joblessness, pessimism and a general decline in social capital and trust in political institutions. These challenges transcend single groups like the EDL, but unless they are dealt with, groups like the EDL will continue to grow.

Downsize demonstration estimates

Police and other agencies ought to consider downgrading their estimates on the size and strength of the EDL's marches and demonstrations. The police in particular should build on our research to make more accurate predictions about the likely number of 'offline' activists in any given catchment area. Decisions about public resources required for EDL events should not be based on the group's own predictions, which tend to be inflated (although this is the case for most march organisers).

Online activism is dramatically and quickly changing how social movements and groups such as the EDL operate. This poses new difficulties for researchers and government alike to contend with. As more groups use social media sites to organise and proselytise, the relationship between the online presence of a group and its offline activism is becoming increasingly unclear. Getting a better understanding on the relationship between offline and online activism – for example how sentiments expressed online actually predict what happens offline – is one of the biggest challenges facing all agencies concerned with public order. Further detailed observational research work is required to understand this relationship in practice as it develops. Researchers and journalists

must exercise care in making these distinctions, and assumptions about Facebook fans being part of the EDL – such as in the case of Anders Breivik – should be made with care or avoided.

We hope this paper sheds new light on this nexus between offline and online activism, and offers new research methodologies that others will take up. Further research is clearly needed, as these issues are relevant beyond the specifics of the EDL. Demos will be releasing more work on the subject shortly.

1 BACKGROUND

History

The English Defence League (EDL) emerged in 2009 from the United Peoples of Luton, which Tommy Robinson (aka Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) formed when a local Islamist group protested against the Royal Anglican Regiment's return from duty in Afghanistan.

Its early supporters were drawn from the football 'casuals' scene, notably Luton's football firm, the Men-in-Gear, and a broader collection of self-proclaimed patriotic anti-Jihadi groups including the United British Alliance.³ During the EDL's first six months, this inchoate group arranged a number of demonstrations and protests, although many of these were hasty and disorganised. Throughout 2010, media coverage of the EDL grew, in turn leading more people to be exposed to the cause. Membership increased rapidly, forcing its leaders to adopt a more strategic approach to their activities by forming group hierarchies, splitting the management and administration of the group along area-based and thematic divisions (for example, into the youth wing, lesbian and gay division, and Jewish division).

By early 2011 the group had conducted well over 50 demonstrations varying in size and impact. Although the group publicly affirms the importance of demonstrating peacefully, its marches have often been accompanied by violence, anti-social behaviour, and arrests – often involving clashes with Unite Against Fascism (UAF). Allegations of threatening conduct against unsympathetic journalists contribute to the media's presentation of the EDL as a violent group of racist thugs.⁴

In response to the negative publicity, the group's recent activities appear to indicate a revised strategy, featuring smaller 'flash-mob' events and demos alongside fewer, better organised national level marches. This includes picketing what it considers 'Islamist' events, counter-protesting at 'Muslims Against Crusaders' demonstrations,

and targeting demonstrations against ‘radical’ mosques, forming ‘rings of steel’ at US embassies.

Similarly, the group has been keen to establish formal links with likeminded European movements such as the French Bloc Identitaire, the German Defence League and the Polish Defence League. The EDL has also played a key role in the founding of the European Freedom Initiative, which aims to bring together anti-Islamic groups from across the continent, alongside developing links with the US Tea Party and Stop the Islamification of America.

At the time of writing (October 2011) it has been reported that the EDL’s internal divisions have begun to erode the movement’s unity, with allegations relating to the embezzlement of funds and the group’s direction leading several groups, including the North-West Infidels, the North-East Infidels and the Scottish Defence League, to sever links with the main EDL.⁵ While such fissures may at least partly have been caused by long-standing football rivalries and power struggles, they have likely also been precipitated by EDL’s attempts to moderate its political agenda (by supporting Israel, deriding racism and employing human-rights talk) and style (by advocating for less violence), which some factions felt was a sign a weakness. Other early supporters of the EDL have left to join more aggressively anti-Islam groups, feeling that the EDL has lost focus on fighting Islamism.⁶

More recently, the EDL held a large demonstration in Tower Hamlets on 3 September 2011, where 1,000 EDL supporters clashed with 1,500 supporters of the UAF. The group’s leader, Tommy Robinson, was arrested for attending that EDL event, as his attendance contravened a condition of his most recent prison bail. EDL supporters also clashed with the organisation Muslims Against Crusades during a 9/11 remembrance moment of silence.⁷

The Coalition Government has adopted a confrontational attitude toward the EDL. Home Secretary Theresa May has banned marches in numerous neighborhoods across London. A ban she extended in anticipation of the 3 September event forced the EDL to replace the

march with a static demonstration.⁸ Prime Minister David Cameron has stated that supporters of the EDL are ‘terrible people’.⁹

What do EDL supporters believe?

The EDL’s mission statement specifies the group’s fundamental aims to be a commitment to human rights, support for democracy, opposition to Shariah law, the creation of an ‘open and honest’ discussion about the threats posed by Islamism, maintenance of traditional English culture, and solidarity with similarly minded governments of foreign countries which are united against ‘global Jihad’.¹⁰ While the organisation increasingly casts its objectives in the language of human rights, *Searchlight Magazine* has consistently asserted that the group is ‘racist and Islamophobic... from top to bottom’, alleging there are close affiliations between the group and the British National Party (BNP), far-right splinter groups and football firms.¹¹ A number of writers have named senior EDL figures as BNP members, including early leader Paul Ray, Kevin Carroll and Alan Spence.¹²

The EDL itself does not deny that some supporters have had a BNP affiliation in the past. Indeed, Tommy Robinson admits to having been a BNP member. However, the group does not accept the characterisation of the group as a BNP affiliate. It has often gone out of its way to distance itself from fascist groups, burning a swastika flag at one of its first demonstrations and brawling with members of the National Front in Birmingham.¹³ Similarly, the BNP has forbidden its members from joining the EDL.

Like many new groups, the EDL’s ideology appears to be complicated, mutable and often internally contradictory. Professor Colin Copus’ study of 25 EDL supporters showed that only half could be described as bellicose nationalists on the fringes of the far right; others were ordinary people who had voted for all of the major parties in the past, but were frustrated with the ‘privileges’ given to minorities by the governments and public sector organisations by whom they felt increasingly abandoned.¹⁴

Reflecting this, it is perhaps unsurprising that much of the EDL leaders’ vitriol is not directed at the Muslim community, but at the

government, which they perceive as pandering to Jihadis' demands, drowned in political correctness and marred by indefensible double standards.¹⁵ The movement is at pains to stress that it is not anti-Islamic, but rather anti-Islamist. That said, it is clear that many EDL supporters do not respect this distinction, with many demonstrations punctuated by chants that are clearly anti-Islamic. Many of the leaders' pronouncements on the subject, both in public and private, reflect a lack of clarity on this point.¹⁶

The EDL is understandably regarded as a major threat to cohesion and integration – especially in Muslim communities – by the government. According to Nick Lowles, the EDL poses two risks: first, that it acts as a standing army, ready to descend on towns in support of causes it supports; second, that it creates flashpoints, whipping up community strife and discord.¹⁷ Jon Cruddas has suggested it is a bigger threat than the BNP, principally because of its *modus operandi* – street demos that are intentionally provocative – rather than ballot box-based activism.¹⁸ This risks what Roger Eatwell calls 'cumulative extremism', where EDL marches encourage radicalisation in Muslim groups, which in turn reinforces the EDL's *casus belli*. Some police officers have gone further, voicing concern that the EDL's presence in an area could hamper counter-terrorism work more broadly.¹⁹

The EDL officially opposes violence in its demonstrations. As its website reports, 'we have no desire to cause trouble, just a desire to exercise our democratic right to protest'.²⁰ Nevertheless the content of posts to the walls of EDL and EDL-related Facebook pages offers reason to wonder whether all supporters concur with this official message.

The most recent, and controversial, accusation levelled against the group is that it inspired, or at least had some contact with, the Oslo terrorist Anders Breivik. This accusation is based on claims that he was a Facebook fan of the EDL and that he had limited (and anonymous) correspondence with other EDL supporters. The truth of these claims is not known, but it is clear from the evidence available that other EDL affiliates would have been unaware of his plans.

Such an outcome is unsurprising for groups like the EDL, many of whom have a large online presence. To join simply requires a click of a button, and consequently the group's leaders have little control over who joins. However, the Norway terrorist incident raises awkward questions about a rising tide of anti-Islamic sentiment across Europe – much of which is online – and how certain individuals might be inspired to act on it.

Who are the EDL members?

Existing research on the size and membership of the group is extremely limited. Save for anecdotal evidence and a handful of small-scale qualitative studies, no serious attempt has been made to study the EDL in a systematic and empirically rigorous way. Without such study, the only information available about the group is that which it publicly shares itself, though for obvious reasons this cannot be claimed as reliable. Indeed, an excellent example of this unreliability pertains to the size of membership. The EDL regularly claims membership in excess of 50,000, but it is not clear what 'membership' actually implies. Threats of mobilising large numbers of people for various causes have, on the whole, failed to materialise, leading some analysts to speculate that there are no more than 5,000 members, 750 of whom form a 'hard core' who are active in arranging and organising events.²¹ Certainly, the largest demonstration to date was the Luton 'homecoming' in early 2011, which somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 people attended, although the level of policing indicates that authorities certainly expected far more.²²

The task of identifying 'members' hinges on specifying a concept of 'membership', which reveals the manner in which groups like the EDL organise. In contrast to traditional membership organisations, the EDL's supporters do not need to sign pledges or pacts. There is no central membership list, and no direct offline contact between many supporters. Much of the group's discourse is online, and events are organised and advertised primarily through Facebook and the EDL's own forum.²³ The relationship between hardcore members, affiliates and broader supporters is opaque.

Who these supporters, affiliates and sympathisers actually are is equally unclear. Newspaper articles about the EDL tend to assume they are a coalition of football hooligans, far-right extremists, and white working-class youths.²⁴ But the group also claims that a significant number of its supporters are women (the EDL ‘Angels’), although they are rarely seen in large numbers at demonstrations.²⁵

Much information about the group is a result of speculation based on very little supporting evidence. For example, Professor Copsey’s (otherwise excellent) report *The English Defence League* was based solely on newspaper reports and limited secondary analysis,²⁶ while Professor Copus’ work, which contains the most significant amount of primary research about supporters, was based on only 25 interviews.²⁷ Against this backdrop, this paper aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the group through the collection and analysis of a large-scale quantitative data set.

2 RESULTS

In order to include nuanced distinctions within the group, we analysed the data in three ways. First, we examined the occurrence of certain traits at a group-wide level, using the full 1,295 entry data set. Second, we compared the responses of EDL supporters with those of the ‘general population’ by analysing responses to similar questions in general population surveys where possible. Finally, we examined the differences between sub-categories of EDL supporters, particularly focusing on variation in attitudes between ‘demonstrators’ (those who had been on EDL demonstrations) and ‘non-demonstrators’ (those who had not). We also ran a regression to determine what factors might be significant in pushing people onto the streets. The results of these analyses, alongside demographic information drawn from Facebook, are presented below. We refer throughout to the respondents as ‘supporters’.

Demographics

Overall, 81 per cent of the EDL’s current Facebook group membership (there are a number of EDL Facebook groups) is male, and 19 per cent is female (n=38,200 as of September 2011). Of respondents to our survey, 14 per cent were female and 86 per cent male; we weighted this result to reflect this gender split. There was also a 14 per cent to 86 per cent split among self-declared members.

This survey recruited through an online poll. The extent to which online followers of the EDL are involved in offline activity is important. We asked respondents a number of questions about their involvement in the group, which once extrapolated against the total Facebook group offers some indications of the EDL as a whole.

We asked respondents if they considered themselves to be members of the EDL. Of the sample, 76 per cent said they did, and 23 per cent said they did not. By extrapolating this against the total Facebook membership, this suggests there is a minimum total membership of between 25,000 and 35,000 supporters across the UK.²⁸ We based this estimate on the fact that the central organisational apparatus of the EDL is the internet. It is through the internet that potential

sympathisers learn of the movement, leaders schedule and communicate details of new events, and fans express support and share stories. Given the centrality of the web to the EDL, it is plausible to think that nearly all EDL sympathisers have a Facebook presence. However, we use the term minimum because it is highly probably that there is a cohort of EDL supporters who are not on Facebook.

We asked respondents which major city was within 50 kilometres from where they lived. London was the city with the single greatest concentration of supporters (27 per cent), followed by Birmingham (16 per cent). The combined northern cities of Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle was home to 35 per cent (n=1,295). This, in part, may reflect the fact that the group was founded in Luton.

Nationally (based on the EDL’s current Facebook membership) 72 per cent of supporters are under 30, and 36 per cent are aged between 16 and 20 (table 1). Although the EDL is clearly a ‘young’ movement, 28 per cent of EDL Facebook members are over 30, and this figure may be higher for the EDL as a whole because Facebook penetration rates are highest among those under 30.

Table 1 Age of EDL supporters who are on Facebook (n=38,200)

Age group	Percentage
16–20	36%
21–25	24%
26–30	12%
31–40	14%
41–50	9%
51+	4%

Education and employment

We asked respondents what their highest educational level was. Overall, 55 per cent of supporters cited a school qualification (eg GCSE or A-level) as their highest level of education, and 30 per cent are educated to university or college level. Nationally, the current higher education participation rate is around 45 per cent.²⁹ These figures also need to be understood with the proviso that 20 per cent of EDL are *currently* students, so their highest education level may yet be increased.

A significant percentage of supporters are unemployed – although when this is broken down by age and compared with the national average, what sets EDL supporters apart is the high levels of unemployment among older supporters. Among 16–24-year-old EDL supporters, 27.5 per cent are unemployed, compared with a national average of 19.7 per cent for the same age group. Among 25–64-year-olds, 28 per cent of EDL supports are unemployed, compared with a national average of 6 per cent; 20 per cent of EDL supporters are currently students, although it is not clear at what level (n=804).³⁰

Membership and involvement

We asked respondents a series of questions about their EDL-related activities (table 2). These data suggest that the EDL is not simply a street-based demonstration movement, as it was in the first year of its existence. The sphere of activities of EDL supporters appears varied. The growth in new types of activity as the group matures deserves further research. The high percentage of online activism illustrates how important the internet is to the group's identity.

Table 2 Activities respondents had undertaken in the last six months (n=804)

Activity	Percentage
Online activism	52%
Local demonstration	44%
Travelled 100km or more for a national demonstration	24%
Leafleting	18%
Flash demonstration	11%
Other	9%
Legal challenges	5%
Travelled overseas	2%

It is also possible to estimate the potential size of EDL demonstrations in any given area by cross tabulating geographical location against activity type, and then extrapolating against the whole of the EDL Facebook membership (once trolls are discounted).³¹ On this basis we estimate that the hypothetical maximum number of demonstrators the EDL would ever be able to command for a demonstration in London is around 12,000. This number would require every single active supporter living in London to attend, combined with everyone outside London who has travelled over 100 kilometres in the past to do so. This is highly unlikely to occur, and a more realistic maximum figure for EDL supporters who would demonstrate in London is significantly lower. Indeed, the largest EDL demonstration to date involved between 2,000 and 3,000 people.

Political and social views

We asked EDL supporters a series of questions about their political and social views. In this section, we draw on UK wide comparative data where possible. By comparing EDL responses to our questions with national averages, more meaningful inferences can be made about the group.

We asked supporters if they felt Britain was on the right track (table 3). Overwhelmingly, they did not. The considerable variation between responses from EDL supporters and those of the wider general public is significant. This high level of pessimism among EDL supporters about the future is consistent with the results pertaining to their views on trust in general (see ‘Trust in institutions and people’ below). Both are often considered useful proxies of social capital.

Table 3 Whether EDL supporters and the general public feel Britain is on the right track (n=1,295)

	EDL supporters	National average ³²
Yes	8%	35%
No	88%	52%

We asked respondents what they considered were the five most significant problems facing the UK (table 4). The EDL’s official statements and literature claim its driving ideology is to confront radical Islam. In fact, it is immigration that exercises the group most – and a lack of jobs is considered to be more significant than terrorism.

Table 4 What EDL supporters and the general public think are the significant problems facing the UK (n=804)

Problems	Ranked as top 2	National average ³³
Immigration	42%	6%
Radical Islam	31%	N/A
Lack of jobs	26%	19%
Terrorism	19%	2%
Financial crisis	14%	N/A ³⁴

The top five responses to this question from the general public poll were overwhelmingly related to economic matters: rising prices (36 per cent); energy costs (23 per cent); unemployment (19 per cent); healthcare system (16 per cent); and pensions (14 per cent). This variation suggests that the EDL is disproportionately concerned with perceived cultural challenges, as opposed to economic ones – although it is to be noted that ‘lack of jobs’ is rated by EDL supporters as a more significant problem facing the UK than terrorism.

We asked EDL supporters about their voting preferences (table 5). Overall, the BNP is the political party that EDL supporters are most likely to vote for.

Officially, the EDL’s leadership distances itself from the BNP. Many of the EDL’s official statements are anti-BNP, but these results suggest the leadership has difficulties in controlling the sentiment of many of its supporters.

Table 5 Voting preferences of EDL supporters and the general public (n=1,295)

Party	EDL	General public (2010 general election)
BNP	34%	2%
UKIP	14%	3%
Conservative	14%	36%
Labour	9%	29%
Lib Dem	3%	23%
Green	1%	1%

We asked participants whether they agreed with the statement ‘it doesn’t matter who you vote for’ (table 6; n=1,295). Although there is a high degree of scepticism about voting, the majority of respondents disagreed with this statement.

Table 6 Extent to which EDL supporters agree that it doesn’t really matter who you vote for (n=1,295)

Response	Percentage
Agree entirely	21%
Agree a little	14%
Disagree a little	16%
Disagree entirely	35%

Unfortunately, identical questions about voting attitudes do not exist. However, some sense of attitudes about the public’s perceived value of voting can be gleaned from the survey British Social Attitudes in 2009 (table 7).

Table 7 Extent to which the general public thinks it is worth voting, 2009 (n=1,017?)

Response	Share
It is not really worth voting	17%
People should only vote if they care who wins	23%
It is everyone's duty to vote	58%
No answer	2%

Source: British Social Attitudes, 2009³⁵

It is noteworthy that the responses from EDL supporters are not markedly different from those of the general public, and the group does not appear to be much more or less sceptical about voting than the general public at large.

EDL rallies are often marked by violence. We asked respondents whether they agreed that violence could be acceptable in certain circumstances (table 8; n=1,295). The response was inconclusive. While more than a third agreed entirely or a little, nearly half disagreed entirely or a little.

Table 8 The extent to which EDL supporters agree that violence is acceptable to ensure the right outcome

Response	Share
Agree entirely	15%
Agree a little	22%
Disagree a little	17%
Disagree entirely	30%

It is important to stress that this question must not be misinterpreted. Agreeing that violence is acceptable to ensure the right outcome does not necessarily imply the group is violent. Therefore these results *do not* mark the group out as either violent or non-violent. It could, for example, also encompass agreement

with British military action overseas – as in Libya, for which there was significant support across the country.

We also asked respondents what they rated as their most important personal value (table 9).

Table 9 What EDL supporters and the general public regard as their most important personal values (n=804)

Value	Percentage ranked in the top 3	
	EDL	National average ³⁶
Security	36%	N/A
Strong government	34%	N/A
Rule of law	30%	34%
Individual freedom	26%	26%
Respect for human life	25%	42%
Democracy	21%	23%

The two survey results are not directly comparable, because security and strong government were not options for the Eurobarometer survey.³⁷ However, a significant number of EDL supporters consider individual freedom, rule of law and democracy – key features of modern liberalism – as personally important. In fact, supporters’ responses matched national averages of responses from the general public. Those at the bottom of the EDL list include ‘respect for other cultures’ (3 per cent), ‘religion’ (7 per cent), solidarity (8 per cent) and tolerance (9 per cent).

The low proportion of EDL respondents who rated ‘religion’ highly as a personal value is particularly noteworthy, given that around 45 per cent of them described themselves as Christian. This high figure may reflect that much of the EDL’s official pronouncements and literature emphasises England’s Christian heritage. Nevertheless, the low significance accorded to religion is likely to be in part driven by a mistrust of religious – in particular Islamic – extremism.

Trust in institutions and people

We asked supporters about their levels of trust in general, which is often used as a proxy of social capital, and is known to be correlated with a number of other indicators of dissatisfaction (table 10).

Table 10 Extent to which EDL supporters and the general public agree that people can be trusted (EDL n=1,295)

	Tend to agree		Tend to disagree	
	EDL	National average ³⁸	EDL	National average
People can be trusted	32%	55%	47%	26%

Even accounting for the fact that EDL supporters were given the option to respond ‘don’t know’, there is an extremely large difference in percentage points between the views of EDL supporters and the general public on this subject. Low levels of social capital appear to characterise EDL supporters.

We asked supporters about their levels of trust in some of the key institutions of the UK, including the police, the judiciary, parliament, and the media (table 11).

Table 11 The institutions EDL members and the general public tend to trust (n=1,295)

Institution	Tend to trust		Tend not to trust	
	EDL	National average ³⁹	EDL	National average
Government	13%	28%	88%	68%
EU	15%	20%	85%	64%
Trade unions	32%	35%	68%	49%
Army	83%	85%	18%	10%
Police	37%	71%	63%	26%
Justice and the legal system	24%	50%	76%	45%
Religious institutions	23%	36%	77%	53%
Political parties	17%	13%	83%	82%
The press	15%	18%	85%	79%

Interestingly, the low levels of trust EDL supporters have in people (table 10) are not closely related to their levels of trust in social and political institutions uniformly. Although the levels of trust EDL supporters have in institutions are systematically lower than those of the general public, it is often by a small margin. The EDL supporters only report higher levels of distrust than the national average for certain institutions. Their levels of trust in political parties, mainstream media, the army, trade unions and the EU are not markedly different from those of the general public (although

the Eurobarometer poll has a ‘neutral’ option, which our survey did not).

However, there are some significant variations, which tend to relate to law and order. Most pronounced is that the EDL’s level of distrust in the police is far higher than that of the general public. This may partly be accounted for by the perception among many EDL supporters that they are treated badly at demonstrations and marches. There is also an extremely high lack of trust in the judicial system, which may partly be accounted for by a belief common among supporters that the legal system routinely hands down inconsistent rulings, which benefit minority or religious groups.

Reasons for joining

In order to get some sense of why people join the EDL, we asked an open text question, which allowed respondents to answer as they wished. We coded and categorised their answers according to eight common categories that kept emerging.⁴⁰

The most common reason for joining the EDL was opposition to Islam (expressed in various ways) (41 per cent). This reason was particularly common among men – 45 per cent of men compared with 28 per cent of women gave this reason. While some directed abuse at all Muslims, others made more nuanced criticisms, condemning ‘political Islam’ and ‘Muslim extremists’.

The second most common reason for joining the EDL was related to identity. Respondents referred to a love of England, commitment to preserving traditional national and cultural values, and belief in representing the interests of ‘real’ countrymen (31 per cent). In many cases this amounted to a defence of liberal values from perceived outside forces such as Islam:

Islam also needs to be recognised as a threat to our freedoms, also Sharia law isn’t fairplay, it isn’t British and has unequal rights and should be outlawed in the UK for these reasons alone.

The next most common reason given for joining the EDL was disillusionment – 17 per cent of respondents expressed disillusionment with the major political institutions, the political

elite (including the mainstream media) or the direction of their country. One respondent suggested that the government ‘had no backbone’; another said that it lacked ‘common sense’.

What drives EDL supporters onto the street?

The common perception of the EDL is that it is a street-based movement, but, as noted above, supporters are involved in a wide variety of activities.

The large size of our sample permits us to separate the results of EDL supporters who attend demonstrations and marches from those who limit themselves to online activity or other smaller campaigns such as leafleting or making a legal challenge.

To do this, we ran two models. First, we ran a simple cross-tab analysis to show differences in opinions and attitudes between those EDL supporters who march or demonstrate (‘demonstrators’) and those who do not (‘non-demonstrators’). Second, we employed a binary logistic regression model to weigh the impact of a range of attitudinal and demographic factors in shaping supporters’ involvement in demonstrations.

While such an approach cannot, as a result of the limitations of the data, let us reliably infer causation of what drives people to shift from online to offline involvement in the group, it can nevertheless indicate the significant linkages that may be fruitful for future research.

Attitudinal variation between offline and online activists

When comparing EDL demonstrators against non-demonstrators a number of interesting differences emerge.

Gender and age

There were slightly more female EDL demonstrators (27 per cent; n=118) than female EDL non-demonstrators (20 per cent; n=73). Demonstrators were, on the whole, slightly younger than non-demonstrators: 73 per cent (n=319) of demonstrators compared with 63 per cent of non-demonstrators (n=234) were under 30 years old. As one might expect, demonstrators were more likely to consider themselves ‘members’ of the EDL (88 per cent; n=203)

than were non-demonstrators (61 per cent; n=221) – which supports the assertion that demonstrating remains an important part of the group’s identity.

Education and employment

EDL demonstrators were slightly less likely to have been to university (42 per cent; n=183) than non-EDL demonstrators (48 per cent; n=174), and slightly less likely to be unemployed (20 per cent, n=87) than non-demonstrators (25 per cent; n=90).

Social and political views

There is a great deal of convergence between the two groups. There is very little difference between the top concerns and voting preferences of non-demonstrators and EDL demonstrators. Demonstrators are slightly more likely to be concerned about immigration, and slightly more likely to vote for the BNP, although by less than 10 per cent.

Measures of pessimism and optimism

EDL demonstrators are significantly more likely than EDL non-demonstrators to feel pessimistic about the future. More than half (52 per cent) of them said they expected their lives to get worse over the next 12 months (n=231), compared with 39 per cent of non-demonstrators (n=144).

Personal values

EDL demonstrators and non-demonstrators revealed slightly different personal values, although again the results were broadly similar. Demonstrators were more likely to cite ‘security’ as an important personal value (43 per cent, n=191) than non-demonstrators (32 per cent, n=118), and less likely to cite ‘respect for human life’ (19 per cent, n=82) than non-demonstrators (28 per cent, n=102).

Measures of confidence in institutions

There were a small number of variations in the amount of confidence EDL demonstrators and non-demonstrators had in different institutions. As might be expected, demonstrators reported significantly lower levels of confidence in the police than non-demonstrators: 70 per cent of demonstrators tend not to trust the police (n=306), compared with 56 per cent of non-

demonstrators (n=203). Interestingly, the only other institution in which EDL demonstrators and non-demonstrators had different degrees of confidence was the justice and legal system: 81 per cent of EDL demonstrators tend not to trust the justice and legal system (n=354), compared with 70 per cent of non-demonstrators (n=253).

Factors that increase the likelihood of EDL supporters demonstrating

While the above analysis provides some interesting insights into demographic and attitudinal variation between EDL demonstrators and non-demonstrators, it does not allow for any possible causal relationship to be drawn.

To make some initial inferences about whether certain attitudes or beliefs were more likely to result in an EDL supporter demonstrating, we ran a binary logistic regression model. We controlled for all the available demographic variables (age, gender, education and employment), and ran a separate regression against a number of attitudinal measures. By using odds ratios, we can make some general inferences about whether certain attitudes or demographic factors make someone more or less likely to demonstrate, when other factors are controlled for (the full results of the regressions are available in the technical appendix).

In general, pessimism about the UK's future appears to be one of the most significant factors in determining whether an EDL supporter will demonstrate. If a respondent disagreed with the statement that 'the UK is on the right track', there was a 68 per cent increase in the likelihood of them demonstrating, with confidence that was bordering on statistical significance ($p=0.064$). In addition, if a respondent agreed with the statement that 'the next 12 months will be worse than the last 12 months', there was a 41 per cent increase in the likelihood they took part in demonstrations, again with confidence that approaches statistical significance ($p=0.09$).

A lack of confidence in the justice and legal system increases the likelihood that an EDL supporter demonstrates by 43 per cent, with confidence that is bordering on statistical significance ($p=0.068$).

Equally, a lack of confidence in the police increases the likelihood of that an EDL supporter demonstrates by 57 per cent, with statistical confidence ($p=0.005$) – although it is likely that this measure is a confounding variable, because those EDL supporters who demonstrate tend to have no confidence in the police *as a result* of demonstrating. More moderately (and without attaining statistical significance), a lack of confidence in mainstream media was associated with a 23 per cent increase in the likelihood that an EDL supporter demonstrates ($p=0.32$), and a lack of confidence in the British government was associated with a 22 per cent increase in the likelihood that an EDL supporter demonstrates ($p=0.44$). A number of other measures yielded very small changes in the odds ratios, including confidence in trade unions, although without attaining statistical significance.

However, a lack of confidence in institutions was sometimes *negatively* correlated with the likelihood that an EDL supporter demonstrates. Although statistical significance was not achieved, having confidence in political parties was associated with a moderate increase in the likelihood of demonstrating ($p=0.35$), as was disagreement with the statement ‘it doesn’t matter who you vote for’ ($p=0.62$).

Interestingly, belief that violence is acceptable was only very slightly associated with an increased likelihood of an EDL supporter demonstrating (around 7 per cent), although this did not attain statistical significance ($p=0.65$).

As one might expect, age is also an important correlate of likelihood to protest. When controlling for demographics and a range of attitudinal covariates, being aged 30 or under is associated with a 57 per cent increased likelihood of an EDL supporter demonstrating – and this result achieved statistical significance ($p=0.46$).

These results need to be used with caution, because weaknesses in the sampling method mean that causal inferences cannot be made with confidence. Moreover, it is not possible to determine the flow of causality. Nevertheless, the results hint at some interesting insights. Belief in violence does not appear to be a major driver

pushing EDL supporters to demonstrate. Instead, it is a sense of injustice and pessimism about the future that encourages them to protest – a sense that may be exacerbated by the low confidence that EDL demonstrators have in the police. The fact that EDL supporters who have faith in political parties are *more* likely to demonstrate suggests there is some faith among EDL demonstrators in the power of politics to effect change, which is supported by other findings in this paper.

3 METHODOLOGY

Researching groups like the EDL is extremely difficult as their supporters are often secretive, extremely diffuse, and distrustful of ‘outsiders’, including academic researchers and journalists. What little is known of the group’s beliefs and makeup is often, as discussed above, the result of relatively small-scale qualitative studies or anecdotal testimony from former supporters. Our approach, seeking to collect quantitative data on a national level, represents the first large-scale and empirically rigorous quantitative study of the group. By engaging EDL supporters through one of their most trusted and widely used mediums (their online Facebook community) we sought to overcome the traditional difficulties identified above to paint an accurate picture of the group, its supporters and beliefs.

Data collection

We ran a Facebook advert notifying potential participants of an online survey for two short periods (5–11 May and 5–19 September 2011). We targeted the adverts at supporters of the seven most popular EDL-related Facebook pages, giving access to a total target population of 72,000 distinct UK-based supporters aged 16 or above (this number of 72,000 is above the current level of 38,200 because in the summer of 2011, the EDL’s Facebook account crashed and restarted).

In phase 1, our advert appeared on 969,592 separate occasions recruiting 674 participants, of whom 544 completed the survey. After removing participants with high levels of missing data or deliberately falsified results, the final sample size was reduced to just over 500 (n=502).

In phase 2 our advert appeared on 985,649 separate occasions recruiting 1,162 individuals. After removing trolls (see below) and individuals with high levels of missing data, the final sample size was reduced to 804.

Before the survey the research team discussed all questions relating to the literature on factors predisposing involvement in extreme protest groups, before piloting them with a small group of former EDL supporters. Then we made changes to the questions and format before the research leader approved them.

The final survey contained 20 questions, on subjects including participants' demographic profiles, social and family backgrounds, level of confidence in public institutions, EDL group involvement and national policy concerns.

We altered a small number of the questions between phase 1 and 2 to facilitate comparison with our other pan-European data. Where questions are identical, we combined the data sets. Where questions are only similar or different, we use the larger of the two data sets (phase 2).

Data analysis

We analysed data using SPSS, with each participant weighted against two demographic indicators (age and gender) before analysis, following the procedure for making statistical inferences from non-random web data outlined by Jelke Bethlehem.⁴¹

We decided to use Facebook principally because the site is the most popular mode of communication among EDL supporters. The group is one of a growing number of organisations and movements that use their online presence to recruit, organise and communicate with their membership, as well as to demonstrate their size in public pronouncements.

The use of an online sample does, however, lead to a number of significant difficulties, most notably:

- problems relating to the reliability of online data, principally regarding whether respondents answered accurately and truthfully
- problems relating to 'trolls' or bogus individuals who completed the survey intentionally to corrupt the results

- most significantly, the question of how well our online sample represents the EDL's offline population

This final issue has a significant impact on whether accurate inferences can be made from our study about the beliefs and activities of the EDL's 'offline' membership. This is one of the most serious questions facing researchers and policy makers investigating offline groups using online and social network data. We address each issue in turn below.

Reliability

It is entirely possible that participants may have given a 'sanitised' view of the EDL in our survey order to present a more favourable public image. However, the level of consistency across participant responses, alongside answers which may be considered detrimental to the group's image, suggests that this did not occur to a significant degree. We also guaranteed the anonymity of all participants, thus removing incentives to provide inaccurate feedback.

Trolling

The second threat arose from the related issue of non-EDL supporters providing excessively negative responses to prejudice our results. One supporter of the EDL contacted us to raise the possibility that 'trolls' (people who were not supporters of the EDL, but had joined the groups in order to cause discord) would complete the survey, intentionally giving answers to reflect badly on the group and its supporters. Although the online ads were targeted at EDL groups, these are believed to be heavily infiltrated by supporters of the UAF and other organisations hostile to the EDL (not to mention numerous journalists and researchers). While this is accepted, we contended that the risk of would-be subversives completing the survey in numbers large enough significantly to prejudice the results within the short time frame in which the survey operated was so low as to render the risk of deliberate manipulation negligible. Our background research indicated that no more than 10 per cent of the EDL's Facebook group supporters could be trolls, lending further credibility to this view.⁴²

In phase 2, however, we were alerted to a small campaign by an anti-EDL group on Facebook whose members were filling the surveys in with the express intention of destroying the results. Once we collected the data we identified a number of responses which we believed to be from these individuals, mainly as they had explicitly stated in their answers to the open-response questions that they were anti-EDL. These were easy to identify and we removed them. In total, we removed just over 21 per cent of all responses for these reasons.

Offline validity

In order to increase the predictive validity of our results, we decided to apply a post-stratification weight (as mentioned above), using the known demographics of the online population to identify the correct balance of gender and age across the group as a whole. To do this, we gathered background data on the composition of target population using Facebook's own advertising tool (which is freely available for any user to access). We gave each participant a weighted value on the basis of the prevalence of their demographic profile in the population at large.

While such an approach is a significant improvement on the use of unweighted data, it cannot be automatically claimed as a reliable basis for making inferences about the offline group.⁴³ The use of social network surveys is subject to a well-known technical and methodological critique focusing on the nature of self-entry interest classification on Facebook, the lack of content reliability on social networking sites, and the lack of internet access and usage in the broader population, all of which are capable of irreparably biasing the results of the survey. As selection in this study relied entirely on participants entering large amounts of reliable personal data through Facebook, the use of which is precluded by a lack of internet access, it is possible that many group EDL supporters may not be present within the sample frame. Given that it is a self-select survey, there may also be a systematic self-selection bias – for example that more frustrated or active supporters were more likely to respond.

Jelke Bethlehem, a leading expert on online sampling techniques, has suggested that reliability can be increased to levels close to those achieved by random population samples by employing a post-stratification weight against offline demographics.⁴⁴ While this is doubtless true, the absence of offline demographic information on the EDL's makeup precludes the use of such an approach in this circumstance.

However, the drawing of distinctions between offline and online communities might be misleading for the EDL. As affiliation with the group's Facebook pages can be claimed as a prerequisite for, and thus proxy of, active membership in the broader 'offline' EDL community because of its high levels of social media usage (in the dispersal of the group's information and coordination of their 'real world' activities), findings from this study may well accurately represent the offline group. In order to test the extent to which there is a broad similarity between offline and online attitudes and behaviours, the research team conducted some short interviews with former members of the EDL to check whether the Facebook results were broadly in line with the membership as a whole – it was felt they were.

Further qualitative research could well further corroborate these findings; a point we acknowledge, and illustrates the need for further research in this area.

Other considerations

As this research focused on adolescents over the age of 16, no CRB check was necessary; consequently, none was sought. Similarly, it was not necessary for us to obtain informed consent from participant parents or guardians as Social Research Association ethics guidelines suggest such clearance should not be sought and is not required where investigating participants aged over 16. We sought and gained individual informed consent from all participants, who agreed to a consent statement presented at the start of the survey – failure to sign acceptance of this statement prevented them from participating further in the research. Although we targeted the survey only at people aged over 16, a small number of individuals stated they were under 16 when responding to the

question about age. We immediately deleted data relating to these people when it was clear they were aged under 16.

Participants were not fully briefed on the study's aims before completing the survey in order to avoid the exhibition of demand characteristics. We provided only a broad overview of the research at the start of the survey, and gave more detailed information on the project's aims only after the last question had been completed. We provided the contact details of the lead researcher to all participants to cover the eventuality that they had questions not covered by the debrief notes, but few participants made use of it.

We told participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time before completion as part of a preface presented alongside the consent statement. Later we reminded them of this right when they completed the survey via a paragraph in the debrief notes, offering the possibility of immediate withdrawal via a check box. No participants opted to withdraw in this way.

We observed ethical and legal considerations relevant to the storage and handling of data; all data were kept digitally encoded in an anonymous format, and we didn't store any data capable of identifying any participants. On completion of this project we placed these data in a publicly available data repository in compliance with guidance from the research councils.

We prepared for the eventuality that the research uncovered information with serious security implications, particularly relating to participant support for violence; we took precautions to absolve the researcher of moral responsibility towards the disclosure of information to agents of the criminal justice system by ensuring that the survey did not ask for precise details of acts of violence or illegal political protest. In order to preserve participant confidentiality (the deliberate exclusion by data capture systems of IP addresses) we removed from the researcher the means to identify and incriminate individual participants.

The research team repeatedly offered the leaders of the EDL a first viewing of the survey results, in case they wished to contest or comment on the findings. No one took up this offer.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

Below are the results of the logistic regressions presented in the third section of chapter 2 (‘What drives people onto the street?’). In each regression, gender, age, city, education and employment were controls. As outlined in the results chapter, the dependent variable was dichotomous. Individuals who responded that they had demonstrated or marched in the last six months were classed as ‘demonstrators’; individuals who had not were classed as ‘non-demonstrators’.

For each regression we employed a different independent variable. They were: the amount of trust respondents had in the justice system, the police, the British government, the mainstream media and political parties; the extent to which respondents agreed that ‘violence is acceptable to achieve the right outcome’; whether respondents thought the next 12 months would be better worse or the same when it comes to their life; to what extent respondents agreed that ‘the UK is on the right track’; and to what extent respondents agreed that in general most people cannot be trusted.

Table 12: to what extent does trust in the justice and legal system affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating?

Variables in the equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald		Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Whatisyourgender	0.007	0.221	0.001		0.974	1.007
	Howoldareyou			20.842		0	
	Howoldareyou(1)	1.168	0.302	14.995		0	3.216
	Howoldareyou(2)	1.094	0.285	14.707		0	2.986
	Howoldareyou(3)	1.01	0.283	12.754		0	2.747

	Howoldareyou(4)	0.635	0.274	5.382		0.02	1.887
	Whatisyournearestcitywithin 50km	0.026	0.172	0.022		0.881	0.975
	Whatisyourhighesteducation alqualification	0.19	0.161	1.388		0.239	1.209
	Whatisyouremploymentstatus	0.605	0.17	12.692		0	1.831
	f.justiceandthelegalsystem	0.359	0.197	3.319		0.068	1.432
	Constant	1.58	0.38	17.317		0	0.206
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Whatisyourgender, Howoldareyou, Whatisyournearestcitywithin50km, Whatisyourhighesteducationalqualification, Whatisyouremploymentstatus, f.justiceandthelegalsystem.							

Table 13 To what extent does trust in the police affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating?

Variables in the equation		B	S.E.	Wald		Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Whatisyourgender	0.035	0.219	0.026		0.873	1.036
	Howoldareyou			19.329		0.001	
	Howoldareyou(1)	1.107	0.298	13.821		0	3.026
	Howoldareyou(2)	1.056	0.282	14.031		0	2.873
	Howoldareyou(3)	0.979	0.279	12.311		0	2.662

	Howoldareyou(4)	0.637	0.27	5.552		0.018	1.89
	Whatisyournearestcitywithin 50km	0.054	0.171	0.098		0.754	0.948
	Whatisyourhighesteducation alqualification	0.12	0.16	0.567		0.451	1.128
	Whatisyouremploymentstatu s	0.644	0.168	14.669		0	1.904
	a.Thepolice	0.45	0.16	7.891		0.005	1.568
	Constant	1.556	0.355	19.191		0	0.211
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Whatisyourgender, Howoldareyou, Whatisyournearestcitywithin50km, Whatisyourhighesteducationalqualification, Whatisyouremploymentstatus, a.Thepolice.							

Table 14 To what extent does trust in the police affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating?

Variables in the equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald		Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Whatisyourgender	0.003	0.218	0		0.988	1.003
	Howoldareyou			17.887		0.001	
	Howoldareyou(1)	1.073	0.294	13.34		0	2.925
	Howoldareyou(2)	0.978	0.278	12.382		0	2.66
	Howoldareyou(3)	0.92	0.277	11.041		0.001	2.509
	Howoldareyou(4)	0.594	0.267	4.937		0.026	1.811

	Whatisyournearestcitywithin 50km	0.036	0.17	0.044		0.834	0.965
	Whatisyourhighesteducation alqualification	0.15	0.159	0.899		0.343	1.162
	Whatisyouremploymentstatu s	0.588	0.166	12.474		0	1.8
	c.Britishgovernment	0.199	0.259	0.592		0.442	1.22
	Constant	1.349	0.403	11.171		0.001	0.26
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Whatisyourgender, Howoldareyou, Whatisyournearestcitywithin50km, Whatisyourhighesteducationalqualification, Whatisyouremploymentstatus, c.Britishgovernment.							

Table 15 To what extent does trust in the mainstream media affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating?

Variables in the equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald		Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Whatisyourgender	0.054	0.223	0.059		0.808	1.056
	Howoldareyou			18.073		0.001	
	Howoldareyou(1)	1.088	0.304	12.779		0	2.969
	Howoldareyou(2)	1.065	0.288	13.717		0	2.901
	Howoldareyou(3)	0.965	0.285	11.43		0.001	2.625
	Howoldareyou(4)	0.646	0.277	5.438		0.02	1.908
	Whatisyournearestcitywithin 50km	0.025	0.173	0.02		0.888	1.025

	Whatisyourhighesteducation alqualification	0.224	0.162	1.915		0.166	1.251
	Whatisyouremploymentstatus	0.584	0.171	11.623		0.001	1.792
	g.mainstreammedia	0.209	0.23	0.825		0.364	1.232
	Constant	1.524	0.4	14.512		0	0.218
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Whatisyourgender, Howoldareyou, Whatisyournearestcitywithin50km, Whatisyourhighesteducationalqualification, Whatisyouremploymentstatus, g.mainstreammedia.							

Table 16 To what extent does trust in political parties affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating?

Variables in the equation		B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Whatisyourgender	0.016	0.218	0.005	0.942	1.016
	Howoldareyou			16.585	0.002	
	Howoldareyou(1)	1.001	0.301	11.068	0.001	2.721
	Howoldareyou(2)	0.979	0.284	11.892	0.001	2.662
	Howoldareyou(3)	0.918	0.28	10.74	0.001	2.504
	Howoldareyou(4)	0.559	0.272	4.233	0.04	1.749
	Whatisyournearestcitywithin 50km	0.036	0.171	0.044	0.835	0.965
	Whatisyourhighesteducation alqualification	0.187	0.16	1.362	0.243	1.205

	Whatisyouemploymentstatus	0.631	0.168	14.07		0	1.879
	d.politicalparties	0.221	0.237	0.873		0.35	0.801
	Constant	1.013	0.393	6.649		0.01	0.363
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Whatisyourgender, Howoldareyou, Whatisyournearestcitywithin50km, Whatisyourhighesteducationalqualification, Whatisyouemploymentstatus, d.politicalparties.							

Table 17 To what extent does agreement in the statement ‘violence is acceptable to ensure the right outcome’ affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating?

Variables in the equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald		Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Whatisyourgender	0.002	0.229	0		0.992	0.998
	Howoldareyou			17.111		0.002	
	Howoldareyou(1)	1.16	0.316	13.462		0	3.191
	Howoldareyou(2)	1.003	0.3	11.158		0.001	2.725
	Howoldareyou(3)	0.922	0.298	9.603		0.002	2.515
	Howoldareyou(4)	0.597	0.287	4.324		0.038	1.817
	Whatisyournearestcitywithin 50km	0.029	0.185	0.025		0.875	0.971
	Whatisyourhighesteducation alqualification	0.121	0.171	0.503		0.478	1.129
	Whatisyouemploymentstatus	0.5	0.18	7.696		0.006	1.649

	c.violenceisacceptablenoretherightoutcome	0.079	0.174	0.206		0.65	0.924
	Constant	1.051	0.377	7.763		0.005	0.349

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: What is your gender, How old are you, What is your nearest city within 50km, What is your highest educational qualification, What is your employment status, c.violenceisacceptablenoretherightoutcome.

Table 18 To what extent does agreeing with the statement that the next 12 months will be better than the last 12 months affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating?

Variables in the equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald		Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	What is your gender	0.084	0.257	0.108		0.743	0.919
	How old are you			13.065		0.011	
	How old are you(1)	1.173	0.355	10.931		0.001	3.232
	How old are you(2)	0.985	0.328	9.049		0.003	2.679
	How old are you(3)	0.901	0.324	7.739		0.005	2.462
	How old are you(4)	0.644	0.314	4.216		0.04	1.904
	What is your nearest city within 50km	0.013	0.2	0.004		0.947	0.987
	What is your highest educational qualification	0.02	0.191	0.011		0.917	1.02

	Whatisyouemploymentstatus	0.493	0.2	6.062		0.014	1.637
	Willthenext12monthsbebetterworseorthesamewhenitcomestoyourlifein	0.344	0.209	2.719		0.099	1.411
	Constant	1.243	0.453	7.546		0.006	0.288
<p>a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Whatisyourgender, Howoldareyou, Whatisyournearestcitywithin50km, Whatisyourhighesteducationalqualification, Whatisyouemploymentstatus, Willthenext12monthsbebetterworseorthesamewhenitcomestoyourlifein.</p>							

Table 19 To what extent does agreement with the statement ‘the UK is on the right track’ affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating?

Variables in the equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald		Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Whatisyourgender	0.071	0.222	0.102		0.749	1.074
	Howoldareyou			17.74		0.001	
	Howoldareyou(1)	1.077	0.305	12.514		0	2.937
	Howoldareyou(2)	1.031	0.289	12.751		0	2.805
	Howoldareyou(3)	0.989	0.284	12.115		0.001	2.689
	Howoldareyou(4)	0.638	0.278	5.268		0.022	1.892

	Whatisyournearestcitywithin 50km	0.016	0.174	0.008		0.928	0.984
	Whatisyourhighesteducation alqualification	0.118	0.161	0.536		0.464	1.125
	Whatisyouremploymentstatu s	0.614	0.171	12.905		0	1.848
	d.theUKisontherighttrack	0.524	0.283	3.422		0.064	1.689
	Constant	1.812	0.441	16.868		0	0.163
<p>a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Whatisyourgender, Howoldareyou, Whatisyournearestcitywithin50km, Whatisyourhighesteducationalqualification, Whatisyouremploymentstatus, d.theUKisontherighttrack.</p>							

Table 20 To what extent does age affect the likelihood of an EDL member demonstrating, when other attitudinal variables are held constant?

Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald		Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Whatisyourgender	0.008	0.282	0.001		0.978	0.992
	Howoldareyou	0.452	0.226	3.993		0.046	1.571
	Whatisyournearestcitywithin 50km	0.049	0.234	0.045		0.833	1.051

	Whatisyourhighesteducation alqualification	0.147	0.225	0.426		0.514	1.158
	Whatisyouemploymentstatu s	0.533	0.228	5.455		0.02	1.705
	d.theUKisontherighttrack	0.426	0.394	1.166		0.28	1.531
	Willthenext12monthsbebetter worseorthesamewhenitcome stoyourlifein	0.449	0.242	3.444		0.063	1.566
	e.ingeneralmostpeoplecannot betrusted	0.067	0.208	0.104		0.746	0.935
	Constant	1.308	0.553	5.601		0.018	0.27
<p>a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Whatisyourgender, Howoldareyou, Whatisyournearestcitywithin50km, Whatisyourhighesteducationalqualification, Whatisyouemploymentstatus, d.theUKisontherighttrack, Willthenext12monthsbebetterworseorthesamewhenitcomestoyourlifein, e.ingeneralmostpeoplecannotbetrusted.</p>							

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NOTES

- ¹ Association of Pakistani Lawyers, National Association of Muslim Police.
- ² Maurice Glasman interview in the April 2011 edition of Progress magazine. See S Shackle, 'Maurice Glasman: "I intend to take a vow of silence for the summer"', *New Statesman*, 28 Jul 2011, www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/07/blue-labour-immigration-2 (accessed 17 Oct 2011) for discussion.
- ³ N Copsey, *The English Defence League: Challenging our country and our values of social inclusion, fairness and equality*, Faith Matters, 2011, <http://faith-matters.org/images/stories/fm-reports/english-defence-league-report.pdf> (accessed 17 Oct 2011).
- ⁴ See for example JN Parkinson, 'Far right embraces fatwas', Comment Is Free (blog), *Guardian*, 4 Nov 2009, www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/nov/04/fatwa-english-defence-league (accessed 17 Oct 2011).
- ⁵ It is difficult to be certain about the provenance of some of these claims and counter-claims about the EDL splintering. See D Edwards, 'EDL splinters but fascist threat remains real', *Revolution*, 18 May 2011, www.socialistrevolution.org/2696/edl-splinters-but-fascist-threat-remains-real/#comments (accessed 17 Oct 2011). We sought confirmation from the internet 'admin' of the group The Black-eyed Girls, 13 Jan 2011.
- ⁶ Interview, Charlie Flowers, member of Cheerleaders Against Everything, 30 May 2011.
- ⁷ 'Muslims against crusades and English Defence League clash at 9/11 silence', *Metro*, 11 Sep 2011, www.metro.co.uk/news/875111-muslims-against-crusades-and-english-defence-league-clash-during-9-11-silence (accessed 17 Oct 2011).
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- ⁹ J Authi, 'David Cameron makes dash to West Midlands', *Birmingham Mail*, 6 May 2010, www.birminghammail.net/news/birmingham-news/2010/05/06/david-cameron-makes-dash-to-west-midlands-97319-26385771/ (accessed 17 Oct 2011).
- ¹⁰ English Defence League, 'Mission statement', <http://englishdefenceleague.org/about-us/mission-statement/> (accessed 17 Oct 2011).
- ¹¹ N Lowles, 'Policing the English Defence League', *Searchlight*, 20 Feb 2011.
- ¹² S Cressy, 'The Extremist Defence League', *Searchlight Magazine*, Oct 2010.
- ¹³ Interview with Tommy Robinson, 8 Oct 2010.
- ¹⁴ This is Leicester, 'So, who are the English Defence League exactly?', 7 Oct 2010, www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk/English-Defence-League-exactly/story-12039127-detail/story.html (accessed 18 Oct 2011).
- ¹⁵ Interview with Tommy Robinson, 8 Oct 2010.
- ¹⁶ For example, the decision made by the EDL leadership to invite the Pastor Reverend Jones to give a speech in the UK in 2010.
- ¹⁷ D Casciani, 'Who are the English Defence League?', BBC News Online, 11 Sep 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/8250017.stm> (accessed 18 Oct 2011).
- ¹⁸ J Cruddas, 'English Defence League is a bigger threat than the BNP', *Guardian*, 10 Oct 2010, www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/oct/10/john-cruddas-english-defence-league (accessed 19 May 2011).
- ¹⁹ R Lambert, 'Educating the English Defence League', *New Statesman*, 5 Feb 2011, www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/02/edl-islam-luton-muslims (accessed 18 Oct 2011).
- ²⁰ Pyrus, 'Tower Hamlets: not just another peaceful EDL demo', English Defence League, 8 Sep 2011, <http://englishdefenceleague.org/tower-hamlets-dem/> (accessed 18 Oct 2011).
- ²¹ Interview with Charlie Flowers, 'Cheerleaders Against Everything', 30 May 2011. This is partly based on the EDL chat forum, which has 5,266 unique views from separate IP addresses.
- ²² Author's estimation based on attendance
- ²³ Interview with [secret source] and Copsey, *The English Defence League*.
- ²⁴ Copsey, *The English Defence League*.
- ²⁵ Interview with Tommy Robinson, 8 Oct 2010.
- ²⁶ Copsey, *The English Defence League*.
- ²⁷ Professor Copsey's work is cited in an article entitled 'So who are the English Defence League exactly', available here: <http://www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk/English-Defence-League-exactly/story-12039127-detail/story.html>
- ²⁸ The troll estimate is based on a combination of interviews with experts about the EDL's Facebook activity, and the survey responses, which included large numbers of self-declared trolls. We estimate this to be between 10 per cent and 20 per cent. The final number might be slightly higher because the EDL's

Facebook group shrunk dramatically after it was taken down and restarted. We offer a wide margin of error because of uncertainty about total troll numbers and the fact that the EDL's Facebook group was recently closed down and restarted.

²⁹ BIS, 'Participation rates in higher education: academic years 2006/2007–2008/2009 (provisional)', *Statistical First Release*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 31 Mar 2010.

³⁰ Our source for figures at a national level is the Poverty Site (www.poverty.org.uk/index.htm), which derives its data from the government's Labour Force Survey. The 'unemployment rate' percentage in the national data is the proportion of the 'economically active' population who are not working (the number who are unemployed divided by the number who are either in paid work or unemployed, excluding those who are 'economically inactive'). Respondents were classified as economically inactive if they were neither in paid work nor within the definition of 'unemployed'. Respondents were defined as unemployed where they had no paid work in the survey week, were available to start work in the next fortnight, and had either looked for work in the last month or were waiting to start a job already obtained.

³¹ This is obtained by calculating the weighted survey responses for activity type for everyone who has attended local demonstrations in London in the last six months, and lives within 50km of London, plus everyone who lives outside London and has travelled over 100km to attend a demonstration. This is then extrapolated against the total EDL group, discounting trolls.

³² Eurobarometer survey, 2011. The wording of the EDL survey and Eurobarometer survey question is slightly different. The EDL survey question was 'To what extent do you agree with the statement Britain is on the right track'; the Eurobarometer survey question was 'At the present time, would you say that, in general things are going in the right direction or the right direction in the UK?'

³³ Eurobarometer survey, 2011

³⁴ The Eurobarometer survey does not have a direct comparison, but does have 'current economic situation' (12 per cent).

³⁵ *British Social Attitudes*, 2009,

www.natcen.ac.uk/media/606622/bsa%202009%20annotated%20questionnaires.pdf (accessed 18 Oct 2011).

³⁶ Eurobarometer survey, 2011.

³⁷ The research team felt that the Eurobarometer survey in its original form was not appropriate for a single issue group such as the EDL, and results may have been misleading as it lacked what might be considered conservative options

³⁸ British Election Study, 2010, University of Essex.

³⁹ Eurobarometer survey, autumn 2010.

⁴⁰ Once the data were collected, we coded the responses to the open-response question 'Why did you get involved with the EDL?'. We used eight categories: EDL values, identity, anti-immigration, anti-Islam, anti-EU, disillusionment, integrity, and economics. We allowed responses to be placed in multiple categories. A further 'Other' category was used for those responses giving a reason that could not be classified using the other categories. Responses that did not answer the question or that expressed support for the EDL without giving a reason were not categorized. In the following summary of the findings, 'respondents' refers only to those respondents whose answers were categorized.

⁴¹ J Bethlehem, 'How accurate are self selection web surveys?' Discussion Paper 08014, Statistics Netherlands, 2008.

⁴² Interview with Charlie Flowers, Cheerleaders Against Everything, 30 May 2011.

⁴³ See Bethlehem, 2008.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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JOSEPH ROWNTREE
FOUNDATION

The English Defence League (EDL) is the biggest populist street movement in a generation. Yet the make-up of the group and what its members believe remain a mystery because it has no formal joining procedures or membership list and much of its activity takes place online. While leaders of the EDL claim they are a pluralistic, liberal movement that is fighting Islamic extremism, chants heard at demonstrations and the vitriol frequently posted on the EDL's chat forums suggest otherwise.

It is in this context that we have undertaken the first ever large-scale empirical study of the EDL, which comprises responses from 1,295 sympathisers and supporters, and includes data on their demographics, involvement in EDL activity, political attitudes and social views. The results show that, although the EDL is usually understood as an anti-Islamic or anti-Islamist demonstrating group, the reality is more complex.

Supporters are characterised by intense pessimism about the UK's future, worries about immigration and joblessness. This is often mixed with a proactive pride in Britain, British history and British values, which they see as being under attack from Islam. Although their demonstrations have often involved violence and racist chants, many members are democrats who are committed to peaceful protest and other forms of activism.

The collection of large amounts of data from social media presents new opportunities for social research to understand the relationship between off- and online activity. As more movements combine - and blur - virtual and real protest, these questions will become increasingly urgent and important. These surveys, collected through Facebook using a new methodology, offer new ways forward in exploring this challenge.

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