Transcript Q&A

From Voting to Violence? New Evidence on Far Right Supporters

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Question 1:
The panellists talked a lot about the radicalisation process on the extremes through propaganda, and so on and so forth. I'd be interested to know how you feel that mainstream politics and the media interact with this process. And particularly when we're thinking about the perceived threat of Islam as a cultural religious ideology, if you like. What role does the mainstream have in this process to the far right radicalisation?

Question 2:
Thank you very much. I just wanted to add that the recent comments from Sarkozy and in France certainly will give some kind of oxygen in terms of this issue about migrants or Islam. In your opinion, will that give some space for the far right to look towards moving into Europe, particularly where there seems to be a lot more discussion, very negative discussion around these issues?

Question 3:
I found the initial presentation useful, but I was not shocked. I was not surprised. The far right being in favour of violence? I never thought they were supporters of Mahatma Gandhi or the Quakers. So it's nothing surprising.

But the focus here has been on the attitude towards Muslims, Islamophobia, and of course again there is nothing new. But I always thought, and there were hints of that here tonight, that the far right is also shaking with anti-Semitism, homophobia, misogyny, indeed also statism. Now, the individual cases, I mean for example, the far right parties in Austria, they went on an absurd pilgrimage to Israel to express their support to Israel. Haider, now defunct, was gay. [Inaudible] in Holland once said, 'I've got nothing against immigrants, against Moroccans. It's just that there were too many of them.'

So I think here, the narrative is maybe a bit more complicated. The far right may be opportunistic, but certainly its platform is not just traditionally associated with some of the platforms. So yes, there is the focus on Islam, but there are other things as well. How can we cope with those?

Question 4:
Just picking up on those points. I definitely agree that there seems to be a tendency to pigeonhole divergent ideologies into a single thing. I mean, if we
compare Geert Wilders of Holland, again you may claim it's masquerading, but he claims to support Israel, feminism, the free market, things like that. Whereas Marine Le Pen in France is statist, an ex-leader who called the Holocaust a footnote of history, things like that. There are different things there. You could say that some of these parties are actually robust liberals, rather than far right.

Robin Niblett:
I'll give you a chance to take each of these points. I assumed we would get some European comparative stuff which interests us definitely at Chatham House. So Jocelyn, let me start with you. Do you want to start with a couple of these points? Either the [question about] Sarkozy, but these points made at the end as well about the variety of positions. Start with you and I'll finish with Matt.

Jocelyn Evans:
Let's deal with this last point first about the diversity, the heterogeneity there is within extreme right movements. Absolutely, as an academic who studies the extreme right, if you look at the literature, three quarters of it is defining, is there one single party family? Can you define it? If so, how? Because there is such diversity of views. So when you look at the Netherlands in particular, there are what we would class as, as you said, liberal policies mixed in with some more what we would conceive as hard right.

If you look at the Scandinavian case, the roots of that, that was from a very, very neo-liberal anti-taxi movement. They are all coming from different positions. What we've seen is that there has been a convergence. I mean, with some key exceptions, across time these parties have tended to start espousing similar policy sets, because the challenges that are facing their supporters in European countries are similar. And as those have become more similar, so the policies have converged. But you're right to point out that just because we say extreme right or far right, that doesn't necessarily mean the same thing in each country.

Robin Niblett:
But then what is the convergence point you think we're heading towards?
**Jocelyn Evans:**
Well the convergence point in the past has been on the anti-immigrant issue, but now that I mean we've been looking at immigration even in countries with a shortage in immigration like in Scandinavia, we're looking at settled communities. This is then when it moves over more into Islamophobia as opposed to an anti-immigrant issue. Because those are the groups that seem to separate out for the far right supporters as not belonging in that society or at least as they conceive it.

Just very briefly on Sarkozy moving to the right, I mean Sarkozy is the ultimate pragmatist. His election chances are looking slim at the moment. He needs to go hard right to try to win back support from Marine Le Pen. If he doesn't do that, he's sunk. Even if he does do that, he may well be sunk. The maths might not add up. Does this represent an opportunity for far right parties to move into France, or into Europe, rather?

Well look, Austria, France, they've had far right parties now for getting onto 40 years. There have been a number of initiatives that Jean-Marie Le Pen came to Britain a few years ago, Nick Griffin has gone out to France. But the European Parliament group show there are always stumbling blocks. There are always these differences between the parties because they have national interests at stake.

They can't seem to get along in the way that the mainstream parties, and particularly parties of government do. Parties of government have an incentive to get along in European groupings. Extreme right/far right parties don't. Because all they have is their ideology and the policies that they're pushing for. So the evidence to date is that it doesn't work well when you go to the European level for these groups. But that's not to say that there isn't another opportunity there and we'll see if that goes anywhere.

**Robin Niblett:**
Nick, do you want to pick up any of those points? I mean the one about mainstream media definitely needs touching on at some point and I don't know if you want to get onto that or any of these other points?

**Nick Lowles:**
Yeah, I'll just say a couple of points on that. I think obviously the elements of the mainstream media have helped frame the kind of thought process and
beliefs of some of the people who support the BNP or UKIP or whatever. Not just in terms of immigration or anti-Muslim prejudice.

But I think the point that a number of people made about identity and loss of identity, because I think that... I mean I remember campaigning, Stoke-on-Trent, Barking and Dagenham, particularly in places like Stoke-on-Trent, it was far less about immigration or anti-Muslim prejudice as opposed to loss of identity. I think the media helped frame that debate as well about the sense of loss and the sense of lack of pride, etc.

And it is quite interesting that if you look at the kind of inquiry into phone hacking and the media at the moment, a lot has been made of celebrities and invasion of privacy. But if you look at the way the media or elements of the media have run hostile anti-Muslim prejudice over the years, that's helped frame the whole discussion. And I think the focus in on certain extremists and their behaviour... I think that's really important. But I think the identity thing is one of the key points.

**John Cruddas:**

I'm very interested by these questions, the point about the complexity of this. In the sense that, the elasticity of it in terms of becoming different things and different political formations and mutating into different... I'll tell you how I sort of look at it – and you might say this is particularly appropriate for my own party – is that the two poles tend to be ones of economic liberalism and sort of remote cosmopolitanism.

And that creates an awful lot of space for other political definitions to emerge and contest those things. Because neither I would say adequately confronts this issue of almost physical boundaries or countries or those sense of home in terms of bricks and mortar. Which is a lot of what lies beneath this in terms of that shrill sour form of nationhood around loss and victimisation. And I don't think those political, those orthodox political frameworks are equipped to deal with it. Because they're almost teleological in their approach. They are built around... they're almost deterministic in the benefits to everyone. And that's just almost empirically not...

The other point I'd like to make though is, is there something more generally going on around violence in society? A greater nihilistic thing. And I don't just mean putting a foot through a footlocker. But other stuff in terms of, these issues and these visceral feelings are not solely the depository of the right. Is
there a generational thing within this as well? In terms of the generational transfers and who's picking up the debt for the crisis? And that alienation?

And are we, as a slight corrective to the body, are we maybe missing something in that we need to have maybe an acknowledgement that there might be other elements at work in terms of a coarsening of the language and popular culture, a Balkanisation of the political landscape, a generational fracture? Which all need research, not just in terms of the extreme right wing manifestations.

Robin Niblett:

These are good points and I think the point about nihilism and there being something sort of demographic perhaps about it and age, I was particularly struck when you did the age breakdown... You said generally older UKIP, BNP... there's a big lump in the 18 to 25 [age range], for UKIP of 22%. Which didn't have a red line around it but I mean it stood out. I don't know whether there is some element that people are being able to tap into which will draw a younger cohort into this group or not.

Do you want to pick up these points, Matt, and I think there's this issue again of pigeonholing? Is it a very complex opportunistic set of messages? Again, you've had a certain amount of consistency saying there is a central point here, but we're hearing from a number of people in the audience, comments here of a sense that this is a much broader set of instincts. Maybe clustered around what John was saying of just loss of identity.

Matthew Goodwin:

I think there is a central point and that point is a fundamental rejection of the principle of human equality. That is what every one of these parties share. Now, that could be manifested in terms of hostility to Muslims, Jews, the Roma, etc. It is a rejection of human equality.

But building on another point, I do think broadly we are at a very interesting point now in the evolution of the post-war far right, because you've had as Jocelyn said, four decades of parties investing in the ballot box strategy. Diversity hasn't stopped. Immigration has accelerated. Communities have become more diverse. And I do think that as is reflected in a French campaign at the moment, well okay, Marine Le Pen might scrape away maybe 18 - 19%. But she's still not taking power.
I get a sense, and this is just instinct. Let me take my academic hat off. But I get a sense looking at the forums and the parties and just generally, the way things are going, that there's been a shift in the discourse within the extreme right which is less willing to keep its chips on elections. And it's reflected in the EDL. It's reflected in Jobbik. It's reflected in movements that are far more combative, far more provocative, that are keen to develop pan-European alliances.

And in the past, before Norway, people said you're being alarmist, you're being speculative. After Norway, I think there is an opportunity to say, well actually is this shift happening? Is this really happening? Can we research it? Can we understand it?

Because the narratives that came out very strongly in Breivik's manifesto were these kind of ideas. And the psychiatrists who have dismissed Breivik as insane, I'm sure medical professionals, I don't know the guy, I'm sure he's mentally troubled. But what they've done is they've taken him out of the political context in which he was active. So they've not examined the wider subculture in which he was active.

Now you pick up one of these guys who's been in, say, the BNP's inner sanctum for ten years, and suddenly those motives, those rationales, those narratives, don't seem really that insane. When someone is being told over ten years, look, your kids are probably going to be extinct unless you do something. I mean this sounds really kooky.

But having sat in the living rooms of mothers and fathers who have told me this stuff, you know, they firmly believe it. And all they can see around the is this diversity happening and no one within the political establishment who is just saying to them, 'I know it's unsettling. I know it's destabilising. I know you're beginning to get anxious with this change,' instead we talk very, very coldly about this stuff. I think we need to maybe rethink that.

**Question 5:**

You've obviously demonstrated this emotional continuum from the extremely angry BNP to the slightly less angry UKIP but still very angry. I just wondered, have you done any analysis of the similarities or the differences between what could be described as angry UKIP and angry BNP? And linked in with that, is there any analysis of where those people are geographically? Because obviously the UKIP vote is much more – probably it could be argued
– home countries. Whereas the BNP is much more in sort of the more hotspots.

I just wondered whether some of that anger can be measured by the proximity they are to places that are changing. Like John’s Barking and Dagenham area. Obviously with vast amounts of social demographic change. Is there an issue to do with proximity determining the level of anger? You may not have done that yet, but I just wonder whether that’s worth exploring.

Question 6:
To what extent, and how, does foreign policy affect the growth of right wing extremism here at home?

Question 7:
There are so many things I want to say, but I think I’m just going to stick to the issue that we’ve just talked about, that Matt talked about, which is this relationship again to violence; between violence and the actual extreme right parties and their structure. Because what strikes me from what I can see around Europe is that you’ve mentioned BNP and you’ve mentioned various movements which are moving towards perhaps violence and less towards election and the ballot box.

However, there are other parties which I think are actually possibly still very much in that ballot box strategy. And you know, Danish People’s Party, and even Le Pen. It’s exemplified for instance by the rejection of... not the rejection, but really refusing to accept that people who commit the racist violence are actually affiliated to them. So Marine Le Pen recently did that, when a Socialist politician was attacked and anti-Semitic insults thrown at him and they were screaming, ‘Marine Le Pen, President!’ etc. She really rejected that she was associated other than they were associated with her.

So I’m just trying to think about how, again, how do you explore not just the supporters, but how that links back to the actual parties’ structures and whether they kind of assume or assert their relationship to these people? Because I think they’re trying sometimes to really move away from that.

Question 8:
A lot of the discussion tonight has been about attitudes towards violence which is a really valuable dataset. But in terms of understanding how attitudes
correlate with actual acts of violence, what types of new data do we need? What types of analysis and inquiries do we need to understand how these broader narratives of violence translate into a national security threat or actual violence?

**Question 9:**
Thank you. One word: deprivation. Deprivation seems to me to be linked to this very seriously. John coming from the area of the Ford factory is one example. Or the manufacturing areas, or the former manufacturing areas in the North. It seems to me that the solution to this has to be one of social policies of some sort.

**Question 10:**
You talk about policies and pathways to solve these problems, but the Institute of Islamic Studies this week actually published a document where it was demanding that the government put into schools Ofsted inspectors who were Muslims. Also they were demanding that all schools should have Muslim teachers in them. And that Muslim, or should I say Muslim-speaking, schools should be funded by the government.

Now these are methods which don't really actually encourage people in this country to support the Muslim community. Whilst we must work together, what are your sort of views on that?

**Question 11:**
I think if the frame is we've moved from an industrial to a post-industrial society and we've got increasing issues around the fragility of the economy and increasing insecurity, one of the key themes I think that's come across is the disconnection of a certain group of the population, of citizens with a political elite. And to that extent, how can politicians cease to be the villains in the piece and contribute to being the heroes in the piece in the future?

**Question 12:**
I was sort of curious, you talked about the rhetorical shift sort of away from prejudice against gay people, anti-Semitism, and I'm interested how far you think that's simply an expedient thing aimed at as part of anti-Muslim
prejudice, or whether that is in any way reflected in kind of the activist base and the voter support of the kind of the new far right.

**Question 13:**
My question is for John. I have experience with neighbourhoods of three of the far right councillors, and we've seen a shift now away from the ballot box. Do you think that's because the people who have been elected so far haven't been that good?

**John Cruddas:**
Solutions. Well, what interests me is actually how this chimes into debates around multiculturalism. And whether there is an opportunity now to move through this thing from assimilation, multiculturalism, into a sort of inter-culturalism. In terms of, how do you create intermediary spaces that can facilitate cohesion and respect and reciprocity? Based around the notion of a common life that we share, rather than this notion... your point I thought was really strong, Matthew, this notion that there is no equality behind this.

So how politically can you intervene around a different language of politics which is about what transcends those physiological characteristics, that Balkanised political landscape? And can you create inter-cultural spaces for that politics of recognition?

**Robin Niblett:**
Is the example that was given about Ofsted... Is that inter-cultural or not?

**John Cruddas:**
I just find that sort of symptomatic... I take the point. In terms of remedies... the other side of it, I'm increasingly interested in debates in Australia around, on the left, because I have a sort of interest in the left about how the left deals with it. Because I think in many respects it's more difficult for the left than the right. Is what is the left, or social democratic form of nation-building as a political project?

That's really difficult given empire, England, and the history of the left and racial absolutism and patriotism, pathology and all of these things. But that's
where we have to go in terms of what is a modern nation-building programme for social democracy.

And the BNP, there’s a lot of evidence to suggest that despite themselves they’ve polled well. And some of the experiences in office suggest that you're not really going to get a resolution to your housing issue because they're not going to be bothered to take up the case. That's not always going to be the case, though. And actually I think Nick knows probably best about this. You'll probably see over time they've learned better campaign techniques, better forms of representative politics as well. Even though they're now in a crisis electorally, they do mutate and change and learn very quickly in different forms in terms of political experience.

**Nick Lowles:**

Just on the thing about the BNP and BNP councillors, I mean I think what we are seeing at the moment as the BNP politically are going down, they are becoming more extreme to try to take the space that the EDL are. And so for example in places like Burnley, in places like Liverpool, in Tameside, you're seeing the BNP kind of move to more of a street strategy because their votes are going down.

I just want to take up the point about the Muslim community, because I think we've got to be slightly careful here because we're talking about one organisation. So to say this has been demanded by the Muslim community, well, it's not. It's been demanded by one organisation. Now, all sorts of organisations say things which are right and which are wrong and I think we have to be careful.

One last point. I think, we're talking about new developments. We're also going backwards as well. If you look at what's happening with the EDL and what's happening on the streets, it feels like the 1970s. I mean I wasn't kind of running around the streets in the 1970s! But I mean, in the sense of if you look at the type of people coming into the EDL or getting active or getting involved in violence, it's a younger group to the BNP.

So you're getting this mix of new technology, the internet, being inspired internationally, anti-Muslim prejudice, with the old English tradition of street fighting and gangs. And just to give a kind of figure on it, I mean we work with colleagues up in the North East. Six months ago, we looked at the number of what we saw as activists. We're talking about BNP and EDL. And it was 150 people who were regularly active. And six months later, it's 250.
That rise, that 40-odd percent rise, is people who are into violence. And the football hooligan gangs who are coming in and becoming politicised. And I think in many areas of the country, that's the shift we're seeing. Kind of younger people, more violent. It plays out on the streets. But also I think gradually it will play out in other forms as well.

**Jocelyn Evans:**

I'll keep myself to just one of the questions about the parties in Europe that use the ballot box still. And I mean, it's simple. If you've got 20% of the vote, and you're working in a proportional system where you get allocated huge state funding for standing and doing well in elections, if you've got your representatives who are in government, you've got an enormous infrastructure to keep going. You've no incentive to say, 'Actually, we'll give that a rest and we'll move back into more radical forms of action.' These are large corporate structures, in a sense, that have an inertia to them and they succeed. Now, the difference with the BNP was it was going down that route and who knows whether that would have been eventually the outcome.

Just in terms of though Marine Le Pen rejecting the violence, that's because she has been heralded as the saviour of the FN because she is going to, to use the wonderful French word, dédiaboliser the party. Because don't forget, her father is the one with the two year suspended sentence for belting a Socialist candidate in the 90s.

So there's been a major transformation there, but again, these are pragmatic parties. They go the route that looks to be the one that gives them success. And that's not necessarily radical violence as we've described earlier.

**Matthew Goodwin:**

I wanted to make two points, one might answer your questions over the longer term and it links into the question about how can we take this research agenda forward and understand the difference between attitudes and action and what might lead somebody from the former to the latter.

I need probably about £200,000 from somebody to do a large scale research project where we can really explore some of that. But there are so many questions. I mean I could sit here all night, as Robin knows, and talk about this. I came in thinking it would be one research project six years ago and there's a lifetime of work in this. Simply because of the trends that Nick and everybody else has pointed out.
I mean, the point about political leadership, let me show you my political naivete right now in front of John. How about being honest to people about diversity? Okay? In the sense that levels of dissatisfaction among these supporters are so high, I'm sceptical that they can ever be brought back into the mainstream fold. We're talking upwards of 85 – 90%, not only rejecting the notion that the government has sensible policies on immigration, rejecting the idea that the government has been open and honest about immigration.

And people aren't stupid. They know that things like the caps aren't possible. But yet we somehow fail to just be honest with them and say, ‘This is profoundly troubling for you. Your community is rapidly changing.’ So we just leave them to groups like the BNP and the EDL that give them a particular narrative that embellishes those concerns into these ideas; ‘Well it's not your community, it's your group and your country.’

**Robin Niblett:**

Well, I'm going to stop there. We never have enough time for this conversation. Thank you to everyone for coming.