



SUBCULTURAL CONSTRAINT

LARPocalypse: Part Three

FULL REPORT

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FULL REPORT

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This report is part three of a three part series, which brings together two ideas that may help explain why violence does not emerge in the scale that might be anticipated: the brakes on violent action literature and the Good Lives Model (GLM). You can read the other two reports and all other outputs from this project at www.crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/constraining-violence/

ABOUT CREST

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- Subcultural constraint offers a way of interpreting why, despite their extreme rhetoric, some extremist subcultures produce comparatively little violence.
- While terrorism studies has traditionally focused on the causes of terrorism and acts of political violence, research is beginning to address the puzzle of why there is not more terrorism as a consequence of extreme beliefs.
- This report brings together two ideas that may help explain why violence does not emerge in the scale that might be anticipated: the brakes on violent action literature and the Good Lives Model (GLM).
- Both literatures, along with the preceding case study of Siege Culture (see *reports one* and *two* in this series) inform the idea of subcultural constraint.

BRAKES ON VIOLENT ACTION

- The brakes on violent action literature argues that the reasons why violence is not inevitably produced by extremist groups can be explained by internal brakes which lead participants away from violence. Several brakes have been proposed:
 - Strategic – identification of less violent or non-violent strategies thought to be more effective in accomplishing goals.
 - Moral – moral norms that inhibit moves towards violence or violence against specific targets such as civilians.
 - Ego maintenance – the self-conception of belonging to a group that does not engage in violence including the threat of sanctions for doing so.

- Out-group definition – changing conceptions of the outgroup including towards state security apparatus or segments of the public.
- Organisational - investment or divestment from goals and tools that relate to violence, for example developing a campaigning arm or giving up access to weapons.
- The concept of brakes on violent action has found some traction but researchers have noted the importance of context and the need to expand the brakes that have been identified to new contexts.
- Of note from a subcultural perspective is that such brakes often assume that participants are embedded in hierarchical structures with shared goals and strategies for achieving them. In contrast, subcultures, such as Siege, typically feature actors less tightly organised and have greater individual autonomy.

GOOD LIVES MODEL (GLM)

- The GLM is a criminological perspective that argues offending emerges when routes to achieving ‘goods’ are blocked.
- The goods the GLM assumes we are motivated by are:
 - Life (healthy living)
 - Knowledge (being informed about things that are important to us)
 - Excellence in play (hobbies and leisure activities)
 - Excellence in work (including mastery experiences)
 - Excellence in agency (autonomy, power and self-directedness)

- Inner peace (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress)
 - Relatedness (including intimate, romantic, and familial relationships)
 - Community (connection to wider social groups)
 - Spirituality (finding meaning and purpose in life)
 - Pleasure (feeling good)
 - Creativity (expressing oneself through alternative forms)
- Goods can be accessed in either pro-social or anti-social ways. Where pro-social routes to achieving goods are blocked, anti-social or maladaptive routes become more attractive.
- The GLM recognises that individuals are not just driven by risks and deficits, but are deploying strengths in order to achieve the goods that have come to matter to them.
- It encourages researchers and practitioners to think about the strengths needed to protect against offending, and the consequences when they're absent, rather than foregrounding the effort to assess and manage risk.
- Incorporating the GLM with the idea of subcultural constraint enables analysis to account for the interaction of meso level factors (i.e., the organisation, community, or group, such as those suggested by the brakes literature) and individual level motivations.
- There are four main points to the idea of subcultural constraint:
 - Subcultural constraint brings together micro (i.e., individual) and meso level processes - It acknowledges the challenges of interpreting brakes on violence in less organised spaces such as subcultures and takes account of the interaction between the individual level and the meso, subcultural level.
 - Subcultural constraint acknowledges the value and meaning extremist spaces and roles hold - Specifically subcultural constraint notes the importance of subcultural norms and values, suggesting that participation has meaning for participants and that even seemingly ephemeral activities can be significant for those undertaking them.
 - Subcultural constraint is informed by the roles subcultures make available to participants and the ways in which these roles provide access to goods. Bringing these levels of analysis together, subcultural constraint argues that subcultural participation is differentiated. Participants can carry out many roles; these roles may provide access to rewards that individuals find valuable. These can be considered goods in the language of the GLM.
 - Subcultural constraint and individual protections - The need for goods provided by participation in extremist subcultures may perform a protective function against engaging in violence or taking on more violent roles. Serious violence resulting in death, incarceration, or external efforts to suppress a subculture may risk destabilising access to goods it provides. Conversely, the barriers that might protect against moving from non-violent to violent roles may be more easily overcome where access to goods is destabilised, either through internal dynamics within the subculture, or external pressures, for example due to enforcement action.

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- Subcultural constraint is an idea that helps explain why people may participate in extremist spaces and yet remain non-violent. It is developed from both the brakes literature, the GLM, and draws on the earlier study of Siege Culture.

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- Subcultural constraints may therefore function to sustain ongoing, non-violent engagement because participants do not wish to lose access to opportunities to achieve goods and engage in roles that have subcultural value and meaning.
- It unites the micro level analysis of the GLM with the meso level analysis of the brakes literature whilst drawing on subcultural theory to offer an explanation as to why, despite the violence infused nature of extremist spaces, they often produce less violence than might be expected.
- This approach shows how, even in more loosely organised spaces, extremist contexts can incorporate constraints on violence where they provide access to goods and are meeting participants' needs.

LIMITATIONS

- This report, and the two preceding it have a number of limitations.
- Data on the extreme-right, in particular data focused on internal dynamics at the subcultural level is difficult to access. There is little first-hand data from those with direct experience of engaging in extreme-right subcultures. Likewise, much of the data that does exist is collected and published by political opponents seeking to discredit the extreme-right.
- Secondly, subculture as a concept does not lend itself to hard categorical boundaries. Texts, spaces, ideas and styles transmit fluidly across subcultural boundaries, making identifying the core of any one subculture difficult.
- Third, individual roles within subcultures can be 'fuzzy' and difficult to determine. Some are straightforward whereas others are harder to identify and may shift overtime.
- Finally, the GLM's suite of goods is expansive but sometimes difficult to relate to specific ideological

benefits of participation in spaces like extremist subcultures.

SO WHAT?

- This report, and the two previous ones, inform seven observations of relevance for practitioners:
 - There is an overlap between the concept of youth subcultures and the structure and function of some of the present day extreme-right.
 - The Siege Culture phenomenon is an example of a youth orientated extreme subculture that extends beyond labelled organisations.
 - Subcultural norms are intentionally alienating to outsiders but hold real meanings and have value for those participating within a subculture.
 - Participation in extremist subcultures is not uniform, participants may take on differing roles through their engagement with them.
 - Roles are not mutually exclusive and can vary by status and change over time; there were several examples of individuals holding multiple roles or roles changing over time in Siege Culture.
 - Paradoxically, where individuals are embedded in even an extreme subculture it may reward participation to such an extent that they are reluctant to engage in actions likely to destabilise their access to the subculture, most notably, terrorism. This can be conceptualised as subcultural constraint.
 - Conversely, destabilising events inside and outside of a subculture may change or threaten to change future access to rewards and goods, resulting in terroristic violence and terrorist roles appearing more attractive to participants.

- The principal implications for practitioners are:
 - The need to develop in-depth knowledge and understanding at the subcultural level through both research and intelligence.
 - The need to consider subcultural participation as both a potential risk and protective factor. As long as it provides access to desired goods then even extremist subcultural participation may be protective against violence.
 - This point emphasises the need for practitioners to consider the consequences of enforcement actions and any potential ripple effects within a target extreme subculture. This does not preclude enforcement action, only suggests that there is a need to be aware of possible consequences.
 - It may be possible to anticipate the consequences of enforcement action or internal disruption by developing an understanding of:
 - The structure of the subculture, by asking:
 - What roles does the subculture make available?
 - How might engaging in these roles provide access to goods?
- The subcultural norms and values at work, by asking:
 - What kinds of attitudes, behaviours and roles are valued and attract subcultural capital?
 - What goods hold value at the individual and subcultural levels?
- The barriers and opportunities to achieving goods, by asking:
 - What alternatives are there for individuals to access goods beyond the subculture?
 - What barriers might limit access to goods within and beyond the subculture?

OVERVIEW

This report is the final part of a three-part series that uses subcultural theory to interpret the constraints and protections against violence that may be embedded in extreme-right subcultures. This series of reports argues that right-wing extremism can be seen as a series of subcultures that normalise deviant beliefs. Participation is differentiated and not uniform; participants can take on various roles that may change over time.

Participation is seen as providing rewards for participants that they may find unobtainable in mainstream culture, for example the opportunity to meet like-minded people, or to use knowledge and skills they have developed. Violent roles such as direct action and terrorist roles come with a high potential cost. As imprisonment or death is a near certain result of serious violent action like terrorism, participants risk losing access to goods obtained in non-violent roles. In effect terrorist actors cash in their rewards, trading any current role for a single and temporary opportunity to play a terrorist role.

This mechanic helps to explain the seeming inertia of much of the extreme-right. Many of those embedded in subcultures, such as Siege Culture (the featured case study), are generally satisfied with their lot and are not likely to 'cash in'. Conversely, it also highlights the risks that come with instability within extreme subcultures. Where individuals lose access to roles and rewards for example, through legal action or internal changes, then judgements around the benefits and costs of cashing in may change.

This report ties together the first two reports in this series. Part one outlined the case for considering Siege Culture as an example of an extreme-right subculture, noting its role in setting norms around behaviours and beliefs and the importance of style and performance to its often young adherents. Part two developed the idea of differential participation. It highlighted and

described, based on the limited available data, the range of roles on offer within Siege Culture. These roles were seen as heterogeneous but not mutually exclusive and subject to change over time. This report builds on these two broad ideas to suggest a theory of subcultural constraint that may help account for the relative inertia of Siege Culture and the comparative lack of terrorist violence it has produced.

In addition to the previous reports on subculture, subcultural constraint draws on two further bodies of work. Firstly, research that has sought to interpret the breaks on violent action in extremist settings, and secondly, the Good Lives Model (GLM), a criminological theory that has sought to interpret the motivations of offenders as a route to supporting the move away from crime. Combined with the earlier analysis of subcultures these two perspectives lend weight to the idea that participation in extremist subcultures, for some actors, some of the time, may produce constraints or even afford some protections that lower the risk of engaging in violent terrorist offending.

This approach is not intended to minimise the risks of terrorist violence or the wider harms including hate crime and harassment that come from extreme-right subcultures. Instead, it seeks to understand what may inhibit individuals, and in some cases groups, from resorting to violence. Developing the idea of subcultural constraint suggests that the risk of violence may increase where individuals who once had access to subcultures, or particular kinds of benefits they make available, have their access to these spaces or goods threatened or curtailed. This can happen because of internal changes within a culture, or because of external enforcement action. The report appends a case study of the convicted terrorist plotter Jack Renshaw as an example of the risks of destabilising participation in extremist subcultures.

In its conclusions, this report suggests that subcultural constraint may help explain the relative inertia of Siege Culture as a specific tendency within the extreme-right. In the case of Siege Culture, for all its apparent militancy, most adherents benefited far more from the continuation of Siege Culture than they would have from becoming ‘saints’. The conclusions include several observations of relevance to practitioners including the need to further develop granular understanding of extremist subcultures, how such understanding can inform risk assessment, and how external interventions into extremist subcultures carry with them the potential to disrupt stable participation and unintentionally increase risk.

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It has become increasingly common for terrorism researchers to discuss non-violent outcomes of participation in extremist spaces as opposed to violent ones (Schuurman & Carthy 2023; Schuurman 2020; Busher & Björge 2020; Cragin et al 2016; Horgan 2012). As far back as 2012 researcher John Horgan argued that the focus on radicalisation was a side effect of the low base rates of actual terrorist behaviour; research focused on radicalisation because it was easier to identify and measure at a population level than much rarer terrorist violence. The result was an outpouring of research on radicalisation, a lot of it disconnected from terrorist violence. The renewed focus on non-violence and barriers to violent actions can be interpreted as a correction in a field that can struggle to explain some of the core issues it faces. The research set out in this series of reports is focused on the potentially protective role subcultures might provide against violent offending in some cases. As such it aligns with other research which is more concerned with what inhibits than what promotes violence.

This section brings two strands of research together to inform the concept of subcultural constraint and help explain the relative non-violence of Siege Culture. Theory and evidence are drawn from literature on the brakes on violent action in extremist groups; and

the Good Lives Model (GLM) of offending. These two differing strands roughly represent different levels of analysis. The brakes literature focuses on group dynamics that may inhibit the use of violence by group members. In contrast the GLM focuses on how individual level needs and responses may drive or limit offending. Although it overlaps slightly with both strands of literature, the idea of subcultural constraint sits somewhere between the two, describing the interlinkage of group level processes involved in creating and maintaining an extremist subculture with a subculture’s capacity to provide individual level rewards.

BRAKES ON VIOLENT ACTION

One common observation in research is that extremist groups are seldom as violent in actuality as they present themselves to be (Simi & Windisch 2020). Part one of this series has shown how Siege Culture, seemingly the most militant of extreme-right subcultures, produced a relatively limited amount of terrorist violence compared to the violent talk and performance that dominated the mostly online culture.

Research by Busher et al. (2019a) identified a range of group level processes that could help explain the incongruity between rhetorical and actual violence, describing these as “internal brakes”. They identified five overarching logics that could help to explain why violence did not occur (Busher et al 2019a):

- Strategic – identification of less violent or non-violent strategies thought to be more effective in accomplishing goals.
- Moral – moral norms that inhibited moves towards violence or attacking specific targets such as civilians.
- Ego maintenance – self-conception of belonging to a group that does not engage in violence including the threat of sanctions for doing so.
- Out-group definition – changing conceptions of

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the outgroup including towards state security apparatus or segments of the public.

- Organisational - investment or divestment from goals and tools that relate to violence, for example developing a campaigning arm or giving up access to weapons.

These five logics, and a range of sub-categories within them, were originally derived from three case studies, including one of the UK extreme-right in the 1990s (Busher et al 2019b). Examples from the extreme-right included the changed focus of the then dominant British National Party to electoral politics after their electoral approach began paying dividends in the early 1990s. Revolutionary violence was deprioritised as the group began to focus more and more on winning electoral campaigns: an organisational brake on violence. Brakes were not seen as being applied uniformly across the extreme-right. The “radical flank” (most notably the offshoot Combat18) was known to hold differing views from the main party but even here brakes were found to be at work. For example, the relatively courteous arrest of key Combat18 ideologue David Myatt was at one point credited with softening attitudes towards the police amongst the group (Busher et al 2019b: 21).

The concept of internal brakes has found some traction amongst researchers and has been applied to a wide variety of settings including Islamist terrorism in Southern Russia (Youngman 2020); Northern Ireland related terrorism (Morrison 2020; Dowling 2023); and the extreme-right group Action Zealandia in New Zealand (Wilson & Halpin, 2022). The mixture of contexts has inevitably thrown up some questions around the brakes typology. Youngman (2020) makes the point that, as on a car, internal brakes are only one set of variables and that the model does not account for other factors such as the wider operating environment, the social embeddedness of the group, and the charisma of leaders.

“...here is something deeper – going beyond the cognitive processes and

deliberate strategies that are the focus of the framework and relating to the actual composition of the networks and groups themselves – that also needs to be accounted for to fully capture the role of social ties in restraining violence.”

(Youngman 2020: 112)

Similarly, Morrison’s (2020) study of the Real IRA in the aftermath of the Omagh bombing noted the primacy given to the survival of the organisation in the face of widespread condemnation for the bombing. The newness of the group, only months old at the time, was suggested as one reason why they were acutely vulnerable to external pressure. Again, the external realities of the group were as much a factor as internal strategising.

Two studies focusing on the extreme right highlight that the gap between talk and action was often cavernous and characterised by fantasy and hyperbole. Windisch et al (2020) drew on a series of interviews with North American white supremacists which touched on the role of homicidal violence. Of note was that homicidal violence was often hypothetical, discussed mainly in the context of self-defence. In this case, lethal violence was generally only seen as acceptable where someone was acting defensively.

The gap between words and actions was even more stark in an analysis of Action Zealandia, an extreme-right group based in New Zealand. Based around a journalistic infiltration of the group, the account is strong on the internal details of participation. Most notable were the differences between supporters' online rhetoric and offline reality. One key brake identified in this case was that members constantly found fellow members to be disappointing offline. Examples included supporters being physically unfit, indulging in bad habits such as smoking and drinking, and falling short of their own claimed physical skills (Wilson & Halpin 2022).

“The event [a boxing event] was a disappointment even before the fighting began. Member N, the Auckland chapter head, stopped checking his messages the day before the event and didn’t attend. The bouts in a wooded area confirmed that Action Zealandia’s members were unfit and unskilled at fighting. Member B, at the time discussing creating his own street fighting group called Southern Order, lost his boxing fight to a junior member from Wellington. The poor performance of most members served to reduce rather than increase any potential radicalization to extremist violence.”

(Wilson & Halpin 2022: 14)

So far, the brakes literature has identified several key mechanics however, there are opportunities to expand it for different contexts.

From a subcultural perspective, one notable feature of existing research has been the focus on groups in the original typology, and that group level factors such as changing strategies or new experiences translate from leadership figures to those further down in a group structure. Switching from a group to a subcultural perspective, the connections between individual participants and those with greater influence and status is more ambiguous. Strategy and ideology are harder to police in a subculture where individual participants are free to draw on multiple ideological influences. The autonomy of individual affiliates within extreme-right subcultures such as Siege Culture suggests that individual level factors may play a much greater role in determining behaviours than the brakes literature’s tendency to focus on strategic decision making suggests. The lack of violence may come from participants thinking about their own interests as much as any wider organisation.

This does not mean that the meso level, be it framed as group or subculture, is unimportant. Values and norms espoused by extremist subcultures obviously play a

part in determining and shaping behaviours. Only that further consideration needs to be given to how individuals view themselves in relation to the broader subculture, their social relationships, and the potential rewards on offer.

The next section outlines the Good Lives Model (GLM) a theoretical framework that seeks to explain offending behaviour in terms of individual needs and access to goods. This potentially complements the brakes literature, adding a layer of individual level factors to the group level.

THE GOOD LIVES MODEL

Subcultural constraint overlaps heavily with wider criminological research and the efforts of some researchers to balance the focus on risk-oriented approaches by drawing more deliberately on strengths-based approaches and specifically the GLM.

Originally developed for working with sexual offenders, the GLM has been augmented to apply to extremist offending and terrorism (Marsden & Lee 2022). This section frames the earlier subcultural analysis and idea of subcultural constraint in the languages and concepts of the GLM. It provides further theoretical justification of this approach by developing the concept of subcultural goods. In particular, this analysis suggests that outside agencies are unlikely to have a monopoly on protective factors and that there can be “strengths in apparent deficits” (Fortune & Ward 2017: 3). That is, individuals are exerting agency and deploying individual strengths in order to meet needs and achieve things that matter to them, but the normative context in which they do this has led them to be perceived as deficits and risks (see Marsden & Lee 2022).

The GLM seeks to augment established risk-based approaches to offender management which prioritise empirical risk but often minimise the normative aspect of rehabilitative work (Ward & Fortune 2013: 30). Whereas the focus of rehabilitation is often on avoiding offending behaviours, the GLM adds an additional value-laden layer in which the idea of the good life is acknowledged as a positive goal for offenders. Rehabilitation is understood as identifying what a “good life” means for individual offenders and then building their capabilities and strengths in order to achieve these ends (Ward & Fortune 2013: 30).

The GLM is underpinned by the core assumption that we are all motivated by the pursuit of a set of basic goods, access to which is important for well-being (Ward & Fortune 2013: 36). The 11 primary goods are:

- Life (healthy living)
- Knowledge (being informed about things that are important to us)
- Excellence in play (hobbies and leisure activities)
- Excellence in work (including mastery experiences)
- Excellence in agency (autonomy, power and self-directedness)
- Inner peace (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress)
- Relatedness (including intimate, romantic, and familial relationships)
- Community (connection to wider social groups)
- Spirituality (finding meaning and purpose in life)
- Pleasure (feeling good)
- Creativity (expressing oneself through alternative forms)

<https://www.goodlivesmodel.com/information.shtml>

Secondary goods are those things that allow an individual to access primary goods. For example, achieving excellence at work is a primary good, holding a job which allows this to be achieved is a secondary good.

Offending behaviour occurs where access to primary goods is sought through maladaptive secondary goods i.e., criminality. This can be direct – for example attempting to achieve relatedness through sexual violence. Offending can also emerge indirectly as a “ripple” effect from attempts to obtain a primary good, for example turning to alcohol after a break-up reduces access to relatedness which has the potential to increase the risk of offending (Ward & Fortune 2013:

37). Rehabilitation requires firstly identifying which primary goods are priorities for offenders and then developing capacities to obtain these goods in pro-social ways.

The GLM takes account of the social and ecological level of analysis alongside the individual level. This meso-level social context is considered important in shaping the norms and values of individuals and providing – often uneven – opportunities to attain secondary goods which in turn allow individuals access to primary goods (Marsden & Lee 2022: 10). This level of analysis overlaps with the idea of a subculture. Subcultures are likely to be one of many social contexts of varying degrees of importance that individuals use to configure and prioritise goods in their own minds as well as identify permissible behaviours (Marsden & Lee 2022: 16). In addition, subcultures provide individuals with access to secondary goods, through engaging in different kinds of subcultural roles.

Extremist subcultures consist of social spaces with their own deviant norms and values, often characterised by distinct stylistic choices, and by defining themselves as outside mainstream culture. While the core norms of Siege Culture are anti-social and, in many cases are criminal, or verge on criminality, participation in Siege Culture might be considered comparatively less maladaptive than other potential secondary roles including lone actor terrorism. Viewed from the perspective of values-orientated rehabilitation, the context for the GLM is both legal and normative (Ward & Fortune 2013: 31). Siege Culture offers an alternative context which is counter-normative and often borders on the illegal, but one for which egregious illegality such as mass casualty violence is only one of several possible secondary goods.

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The idea of subcultural constraints borrows from both the brakes literature and the GLM. It also owes a debt to Gilbert Ramsay who was perhaps the first to highlight the structure of constraints and protections that might be at work within extremist subcultures when he posed the question ‘Why in the end, is there so much jihadism, and so relatively little violence?’ (Ramsay 2012 50).

Subcultural constraints help interpret how and why people might remain engaged non-violently in otherwise (at least rhetorically) extremely violent spaces. Extremist subcultures provide opportunities to engage in a range of different roles which are: valued by that subculture; may be unavailable in mainstream contexts; and provide a route to enabling individuals to achieve goods, such as community or creativity, in ways that are intrinsically rewarding. Further, if participants engage in acts of lethal violence, the subculture itself might be put at risk. Because of the precarity of contemporary extreme-right subcultures, characterised by a post-organisational, fragmented structure, the risk of disruption that violence might attract may be felt particularly acutely. For these reasons, subcultural constraints may function to sustain ongoing, non-violent engagement because participants do not wish to lose access to opportunities to achieve goods and engage in roles that have subcultural value and meaning.

Subcultural constraints bring together micro and meso level processes: The concept of subcultural constraint aims to interpret the relationships between individual, micro level processes and those at the subcultural or

meso level. It addresses the challenge facing efforts to interpret brakes that might be at work in more loosely organised spaces that are not characterised by the kinds of structure that generate organisational brakes. Subcultural constraints do this in a number of ways: By providing a way of interpreting the goods or needs engagement in extremist subcultures meet and which exist alongside the more explicitly political or ideological claims used to justify violence. By acknowledging that these goods can be met through engaging in a variety of roles which can be fulfilling and rewarding. And by recognising the subjectively defined and subculturally-informed value and meaning these spaces and roles can hold, the opportunity structure they afford, and the way this shapes the processes by which participants engage in extremist subcultures.

The constraints at work are dependent on how an individual sees themselves in the context of a wider subculture. In particular, the importance placed on participation by those engaged in these spaces, and the rewards they receive as a result. Subcultural constraints therefore operate across the meso-level focus of the brakes literature, and the individual, but socially embedded, focus of the GLM. They partially connect the two by recognising the relationship between the access to goods subcultures provide – which can reward stable engagement that isn’t overly disruptive – and the individual-level goods that motivate involvement, which are enabled by the roles that constitute individual engagement.

Siege Culture

Siege Culture is a good example of how individual and meso level processes can interact in influencing individuals. Report one identified Siege Culture is a transnational and highly digital extreme-right subculture. On one level Siege Culture provides an ideological worldview which includes a set of grievances and a superficially at least militant strategy for resolving these problems in the form of an extreme right revolution and the need for a ‘total Aryan victory’. At the same time, individual participants are seldom bonded to Siege Culture by organisational constraints. Physical organisations tend to be insubstantial and most participation takes place online. As a result participants are free to disengage whenever they like and are under no obligation to buy into the wider beliefs of the Siege Culture. The meso level brakes identified above are likely to be weak as individual participants are not embedded within firm leadership structures and are free to interpret ideology in their own way. However, the decision to participate in Siege Culture and buy into the values and their accompanying brakes on violence is also driven by individual needs, specifically the ability to access individual level goods that Siege Culture offers.

Subcultural constraints acknowledge the value and meaning extremist spaces and roles hold: Subcultural constraints are underpinned by the idea that extremist subcultures, however hostile and nihilistic they seem to outsiders, have value and meaning for participants. Participation is granular and people can engage in different roles that both make up the subculture and provide practical routes to achieving goods. The values attached to these roles are informed by the norms constructed within the subculture. Only very few of these roles involve actual violence. The structure of roles available within a given subculture therefore provides a variety of routes to achieving goods, most of which are non-violent, and in many cases reward stable engagement that doesn’t risk undermining the subculture, or a participant’s ability to access the roles and goods it makes available.

The previous report provided examples of different roles identifiable from public data about Siege Culture. Roles are not stable and they are not equal. Individual participants can hold multiple roles simultaneously, for example being both a propagandist and an ideologue.

Participants can also vary by status; participants with the same roles can be highly regarded or dismissed by their peers. Those well-regarded by others and seen as being knowledgeable or contributing to the subculture can be considered high-status. Those who are seen as uninformed may be thought of as low status. Roles can change over time, often times in relation to status. Within Siege Culture there were examples of individuals who were well-regarded suffering reversals and declines in status as a result of internal and external events, sometimes humiliating ones.

These hierarchies of roles and status, and their fluidity over time provide an opportunity structure that individuals navigate in ways that are informed both by their own motivations, and the norms and values that develop within the subculture. The means by which people negotiate these subcultural opportunity structures only sometimes rewards violence. In this way, the idea of subcultural constraints draws attention to the brakes and limits on violence that are also features of these spaces.

Roles in Siege Culture

The previous report identified a range of roles available to participants in Siege Culture. Roles were analysed using a three-part framework that included specific behaviours, status, and changes over time. Roles were primarily grouped by behaviour. The report identifies four overarching roles: organiser roles, offending based roles, ideological roles, and technical roles. Each overarching role contained several smaller sub-roles within it. For example, ideological roles included ideologues, propogandist, and policing roles. Roles were not considered mutually exclusive and one participant could perform multiple roles simultaneously. It was also possible for individuals to perform the same behaviours but differ in how others received their actions and the resulting status they gained. For example, two participants may produce propaganda, one may be well-received while the other may be criticised. Roles could also change over time, for example a participant may lose status as the result of a humiliation, take on additional roles, or have roles taken away from them.

Subcultural constraints are informed by the availability of goods: The granularity of participation and the multiple roles extremist spaces make available further integrate the idea of subcultural constraint with the GLM. Specific roles provide access to particular goods and/ or combinations of goods. While community is already a noted benefit of participation in extreme-right subcultures, other goods are also present. The example of Siege Culture demonstrates that participants had opportunities to access goods such as agency stemming from leadership roles, work exhibited in technical roles, and creativity inherent in propaganda-related roles (see Paalgard Munden et al. 2023 for more on the nature of goods in extreme-right subcultures).

Constraints on violence come from the value an individual attaches to subcultural participation. Where access to and participation in an extreme subculture such as Siege Culture is valued then an individual may, slightly paradoxically, be reluctant to engage in the

mass casualty violence the subculture appears to promote. As mass casualty violence (almost) universally ends in incarceration or death, the goods associated with access and participation would be lost. Participation in a subculture is for the most part much harder from a prison cell, although some do still wield limited influence as prisoners of war. Participation is even harder when dead, although the memorialisation of the 'saints' and 'martyrs' can be thought of as a specialised role.

A decision to engage in mass casualty violence is almost certain to alter an individual's role in the subculture, often to a less rewarding one. This brake was evident throughout Siege Culture where, despite militant rhetoric very few individuals engaged in any form of lethal direct action. Despite the presence of branded and seemingly organised groups and cells, there was no evidence of a coordinated terrorist strategy emerging from Siege Culture.

Goods and Siege Culture

The previous report identified a range of roles and sub-roles available in the context of Siege Culture. It is possible to draw connections between some of these roles and the goods described by the GLM.

As an example, the role of propagandist – a participant who creates propaganda material in either visual, audio, or audio-visual forms – may gain access to goods such as creativity through the act of generating appealing material. If work is well-received by others there may be additional related goods such as excellence in work, feeling like, and being recognised for, doing good work. There are many other potential crossovers between participant roles in Siege Culture and goods described by the GLM which overall illustrate the benefits of recognising the non-ideological goods individuals attain through engaging in the roles enabled through being part of Siege.

Subcultural constraints and individual protections:

At a group level, and from the perspective of the brakes literature, there exists then a likely subcultural brake. The more vibrant and engaging the subculture associated with a particular form of extremism, potentially the more reluctant well-embedded individuals may be to give it up. This is analogous to Busher et al.'s (2019a) concept of an organisational brake but is more fluid. As subcultures are organically formed, albeit with input from key influencers, a subcultural brake is less well-defined, articulated, or codified than an organisational one. Subcultural brakes are informed more by norms, values, and the character of the subculture than organisational decisions or cost-benefit calculations. More autonomous actors are more likely to be constrained by individual level factors than group level ones.

The GLM helps to explain individual level factors in more depth. The value placed on subcultural participation by individuals can be understood as being at least partly informed by the goods extremist spaces make available. Subcultural participation provides access to particular configurations of goods that characterise an individual's motivations and needs. Where access to these goods is blocked in pro-social

mainstream cultures, extremist subcultures provide a route to pursuing them.

Participation in an extreme subculture such as Siege Culture can be interpreted as a maladaptive response to a more universal set of human motivations: an attempt to acquire goods through anti-social actions. For those who become embedded in extreme subcultures and are thereby granted access to desired goods, even anti-social behaviours may be seen as protective against worse behaviours such as resorting to violence or mass casualty violence.

Viewed from this perspective even the overtly violent rhetoric of Siege Culture may be considered in a sense protective against violence where individuals have become embedded and dependent on the subculture for access to goods. Where the status quo is rewarding for participants, they are unlikely to want to disrupt it by engaging in mass casualty violence. This makes it possible for a subculture to be simultaneously extremely aggressive sounding to outsiders, but populated with actors who are invested enough to see the value in retaining access to the goods the subculture provides.

CASE STUDY: WHEN CONSTRAINTS FAIL

This case study is an example of when subcultural constraint appeared to fail. It takes the case of Jack Renshaw, a former affiliate of National Action, and applies the concept of subcultural constraint to see if it helps interpret his trajectory. The case study seems to suggest that the failure of constraint was driven, at least in part, by external police action and the likely consequences for Renshaw and the desperation that ensued. This failure however, was the final act of a much longer story in which Renshaw lost access to a wide array of goods over time which may have led to a greater dependence on an extreme-right subculture, specifically an element of post-proscription National Action, an early forerunner of Siege Culture.

SUMMARY

Jack Renshaw is currently serving life in prison with a minimum of 20 years for a plot to kill West Lancashire MP Rosie Cooper and police officer Victoria Henderson. Renshaw grew up in the North-West of England and was involved in far-right politics from a young age, joining the British National Party (BNP) as a young teenager. After being expelled from

the BNP in October 2014 Renshaw seemed to flirt with several extreme-right groups before falling in with the then legal National Action towards the end of 2015. He had reportedly been subject to police attention earlier, but a series of speeches made in 2016 brought renewed interest.

Police subsequently identified evidence of Renshaw grooming young boys online leading to his arrest in May 2017. Renshaw was arrested again after he disclosed his plan to kill Rosie Cooper and Victoria Henderson (the officer investigating him) to a group of (then proscribed) National Action members in a Preston Wetherspoons in July 2017. One of those present passed the information to Matthew Collins, an anti-fascist journalist at HOPE not hate.¹

The following case study is based on a timeline assembled from publicly available data which provides some background to Renshaw’s attack. Data on Renshaw, especially from before his plot was widely known, is highly partisan, much of it coming from coverage by the anti-fascist campaign group HOPE not hate.

Table 1: Jack Renshaw Timeline

Date	Event
1995	Renshaw born in Ormskirk, Lancashire. He would grow up in Skelmersdale and subsequently move to Blackpool, the centre of long-standing conspiracy theories around the disappearance of 14 year-old Charlene Downes (Perry 2018). An account given by UK far-right activist Jack Buckby who knew Renshaw as a younger man describes Renshaw as splitting his time between his mum and his dad in Skelmersdale and Blackpool (Buckby 2020).
c.2010	Student website The Tab reports Renshaw as encountering the far-right party the British National Party (BNP) at a ‘Justice for Charlene’ event in Blackpool. He subsequently joined (Barradale 2019). Vice News reports Renshaw as a member of the English Defence League for a short time before quickly becoming disillusioned (Perry 2018).

¹ Renshaw’s murder plot, set against the backdrop of HOPE not hate’s wider investigation of National Action, depicted primarily as consisting of Christopher Lythgoe’s North-West cell, was dramatised by ITV in 2022 as *The Walk In*. The show was branded “stupid, stupid, stupid” by Rosie Cooper who reportedly accused both ITV and HOPE not hate as using her as a “marketing tool” (Okell 2022).

Feb 2013	Jack Renshaw's writing (likely his blog) is quoted by HOPE not hate (HnH), apparently in defence of the EDL leader Tommy Robinson (Collins 2013a).
September 2013	Renshaw leaves Blackpool to study Economics and Politics at Manchester Metropolitan University. Renshaw is reportedly publishing a heavily antisemitic blog during this period (Barradale 2019).
27/9/13	HnH reports on Renshaw's attendance at the BNP's annual conference in Blackpool. Renshaw is described as "little Jack Renshaw" and is reported to be the star of the show and groomed by the party leadership. The piece also references Renshaw's attendance at Manchester Met including the line: "So, enjoy your time at Manchester Uni, Jack. Keep an eye out for the away team." (Collins 2013b)
30/9/13	A follow up piece by HnH about Renshaw's attendance reveals: "Obviously, we're not going to give the exact location where he lives, but as Jack has already been questioned once before by officers from the counter terrorist unit, it's pretty certain they will not be overly happy with him living there either." (Collins 2013c)
Jan 2014	Renshaw attends a Young BNP training weekend in Brussels organised by then MEP Nick Griffin. Reporting on the trip suggests that there are problems with Renshaw and other members and that he needed to have another BNP member to "settle his disputes" (Collins 2014a)
May 2014	Renshaw features amongst other members of the BNP youth wing in a widely mocked You Tube video – BNP Youth Fight Back. The video was heavily parodied online (Perry 2018; Gardner 2014)
July 2014	While a leader of the BNP youth wing and a student at Manchester Metropolitan University Renshaw was reported and mocked by HnH for complaining about his dog's homosexual tendencies on Facebook.
c. August 2014	In an interview to student website The Tab Renshaw complains that he is spat at and shouted at in the street in Manchester. He goes on to reveal he is into 'folk music', not a heavy drinker and not into socialising. He also describes the university as turning down his request to establish a BNP society (The Tab 2014b).
October 2014	Renshaw is expelled from the BNP amidst a split in the party Collins (2014b).
December 2014	HnH reports that BNP regional organiser Steve Squire uses an online interview to question Renshaw's sexuality (Collins 2014c).

Table 1: Jack Renshaw Timeline

CASE STUDY: WHEN CONSTRAINTS FAIL

Subcultural Constraint

Jan 2015	Renshaw reportedly attends a meeting of the New British Union (Collins 2015a).
10/2/2015	The Community Security Trust reports that they worked with the Union of Jewish Students and the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) Jewish Society to make a complaint to MMU on the grounds of campus security following Renshaw publishing an anti-Semitic blog post promising 'Judeophile traitors' would be put on trial and Renshaw hoped, hung. He concluded with the phrase "Delenda est Judaica" which was interpreted as Judaism must be destroyed (CST 2020).
March 2015	Renshaw was mentioned in connection with British Voice, National Action and National Front (Collins 2015b).
May 2015	HnH reports police have "caught up" with Renshaw in Rochdale (Collins 2015c).
August 2015	Renshaw is among a group shut in the left luggage kiosk at Liverpool Lime Street while on a demonstration organised by National Action in Liverpool (Collins 2015d).
September 2015	At the start of what would have been his third year, Renshaw is kicked out of university following an investigation for racial hatred (Barradale 2019).
c.2016	Renshaw was reported to have joined National Action (Barradale 2019; Perry 2018). The group would be proscribed by the end of the year.
Feb 2016?	Renshaw addresses the Yorkshire Forum calling for the UK far-right to develop a "killer instinct" (Collins 2016a).
March 2016	Renshaw is recorded giving a speech in Blackpool to an audience of North-West Infidels and National Action referencing the UK as being on the wrong side of WW2. He is reported as currently working in a 'hardware' shop having applied to join the army (Collins 2016a; 2016b).
January 2017	Renshaw is arrested on suspicion of stirring up racial hatred for comments posted on Twitter and a speech made at the Yorkshire Forum, a far-right talking shop. Renshaw was interviewed by DC Victoria Henderson alongside another (male) officer. During the course of the investigation material related to child grooming is found on Renshaw's phone (Perry 2018).

Table 1: Jack Renshaw Timeline

19th May 2017	Renshaw is arrested on suspicion of child grooming. Victoria Henderson is again involved in the investigation (Perry 2018).
14th June 2017	Renshaw is reported as losing his hardware job and working in a pub where he was assaulted before working packing boxes. HnH refer to Renshaw as a “Hitler Dwarf Clone”. A June Facebook post from Renshaw features a meme of Jo Cox with the words “chat shit get banged” (Collins 2017).
1st July 2017	Renshaw discloses his plot to kill Rosie Cooper MP, take hostages, lure Victoria Henderson and kill her, and to die at the hands of the police. He has already purchased a knife. National Action leader Christopher Lythgoe advises Renshaw to destroy his electrical equipment ahead of the attack and tells him “don’t fuck it up”. Robbie Mullen passes details of the plot to Matthew Colins of HnH (Perry 2018). Renshaw began planning his attack just less than a month before he disclosed it which suggests he developed the plan approximately two weeks after being arrested on suspicion of child grooming (McGowan 2019).
July 2017	The CPS charge Renshaw with two counts of incitement of racial hatred. A court date is set for 2nd January 2018 (Perry 2018).
12th June 2018	Renshaw pleads guilty to preparing an act of terrorism.
17th May 2019	Renshaw is sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum of 20 years for preparing an act of terrorism and making threats to kill (McGowan 2019). As he was led to the cells Renshaw performed a forearm salute (Dearden 2019).

Table 1: Jack Renshaw Timeline

Viewed from the perspective of subcultural constraint the limited publicly available data on the Renshaw case suggests that there were several protective factors in Renshaw’s life that were removed or threatened prior to his announced plot.

Renshaw’s involvement in far-right politics was extensive and enduring. He joined the BNP at a young age and seemed to thrive in the environment being “the star of the show” at the party’s September 2013 conference. For an eighteen year-old from a modest background the attention and status is likely to have been significant. Renshaw seems to have taken his involvement with the far-right with him to university rather than used it as an opportunity to leave it behind, further suggesting that his involvement with the far-right is

likely to have been a key part of his identity and an important provider of “goods”.

The decision to attend university to study for a degree in Economics and Politics (CST 2020) may have been firmly intertwined with extreme-right activism. The choice of topic is typical of those with aspirations to go into politics. Renshaw continued his far-right activism and engagement with the BNP while on campus. His online postings were extreme and revealed a virulent commitment to anti-Semitism. Despite this, these political aspirations were at this point seemingly legal (despite being deeply anti-social) and superficially at least democratic.

A key juncture for Renshaw came in October 2014 after he was expelled from the BNP during a period of

CASE STUDY: WHEN CONSTRAINTS FAIL

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factional in-fighting leaving Renshaw without access to a far-right organisation for the first time in four years. Early in 2015 Renshaw penned an anti-Semitic blog post that would ultimately lead to him being expelled from university by September 2015, what would have been the start of his third year. While his expulsion from the BNP was the result of internal problems and the decline of the BNP, Renshaw's expulsion from MMU stemmed from a complaint by the Community Security Trust and Jewish groups (CST 2020). Internal and external factors combined to destabilise Renshaw's position within the far-right.

Renshaw spent much of 2015 attempting to re-establish himself within the UK far-right scene, seeming to tour various groups before ultimately falling in with National Action. By the start of 2016 Renshaw was part of a group that was either rapidly abandoning or had entirely abandoned electoral politics and was attempting to out-do Renshaw's previous political home, the BNP. By early 2016 Renshaw was reportedly a member of the still legal National Action and delivering in-person speeches that gained wider attention and ultimately generated police interest.

Renshaw re-established his role within the UK far-right scene by appealing to elements that rewarded rather than constrained extreme rhetoric and did not hold electoral ambitions. In terms of the GLM, Renshaw had regained access to the goods he once held through his participation in the BNP. When National Action was proscribed at the end of 2016 Renshaw continued to associate with others (although he was not convicted of being a member) despite the legal risks.

Renshaw's role and status were once again threatened by outside intervention after a police investigation into his speech-making identified child grooming material on his phone. Renshaw was in the process of being exposed as a homosexual paedophile in an environment virulently hostile to both homosexuals and paedophiles. Continuing involvement in the UK far-right, in any capacity, was likely to be impossible and so Renshaw developed a

plan. Forty-two days after he was arrested, Renshaw disclosed his plan to a group of National Action activists. His plan targeted politicians and police and focused specifically on Victoria Henderson, the police officer investigating Renshaw.

Whether Renshaw's plot would have gone ahead is unknown. There is a chance that the plot would have failed or that Renshaw would have gotten cold feet even if his announced intentions had not been disclosed to HOPE not hate. However, Renshaw's disclosed plot seems heavily motivated by his personal circumstances rather than a broader ideology. The targets were not related to Renshaw's anti-Semitism but to his exposure as a homosexual paedophile. Renshaw, who had made extreme-right activism a core part of his identity since his teenage years and had already found himself out in the cold once, was almost certainly about to be ostracised once again. Faced with a potentially bleak future Renshaw chose to plan and disclose an act of serious terrorist violence that seemed designed to provide some level of vengeance against the person he saw as most directly responsible for his situation: Victoria Henderson.

INSIGHTS

In Renshaw's case subcultural constraint failed as a result of both internal and external interventions. Internal factionalism led to Renshaw's loss of status with the BNP. External interventions in the form of a police investigation into child grooming offences led to the very likely prospect of more internal intervention and Renshaw being ostracised from his new home with the affiliates of National Action. If Renshaw was still active in the still legal BNP, or if he was able to continue engagement with the illegal rump of National Action and global Siege Culture, it seems unlikely that he would have planned to engage in the violence he did.

Several wider observations follow from the Renshaw case. The first is that the police investigation into Renshaw's grooming had a destabilising effect on

his involvement in the extreme-right he seemed to depend on. This does not mean that crimes should go uninvestigated or that Renshaw should have been left alone for fear that he might do something violent. Only that in this instance the effects of a police investigation could have been anticipated as having a destabilising effect on Renshaw and that violence, attempted or real, was a real possibility of his position within the subculture being destabilised.

A second observation concerns the difficulty Renshaw would have had in accessing alternative pro-social rewards. Renshaw's activism was extensive and deep-seated and likely had a profound social cost for him. Renshaw's expulsion from university is an example of the stigma attached to extreme-right views but also how this stigma can shut down access to alternative sources of reward. This suggests that for Renshaw, by the time he had made it to university, his public profile and extensive coverage of his views meant that there was very little opportunity for Renshaw to leave the extreme-right, change his views, or find alternative prosocial ways to meet needs. To be clear, Renshaw did not do anything to dissuade this type of coverage and if anything seemed to revel in it. However, it also likely made him ever more dependent on the extreme subcultures he participated in while rendering him ever more distant from pro-social contexts.

A third and final observation concerns the treatment of Renshaw by external campaign groups. Renshaw's depth of commitment and profile attracted a level of notoriety when he was still very young. In part he worked to develop this notoriety, for example by giving interviews to a student newspaper. However, in doing so he also became a target for antifascist campaigners. The Community Safety Trust claims to have worked with other Jewish groups to raise security concerns about Renshaw with Manchester Metropolitan University (CST 2020). Likewise, HOPE not hate featured Renshaw regularly.

How Renshaw felt about his external coverage is unknown and there is every possibility that he

revelled in his notoriety at several points. At the same time, it is possible to see Renshaw as a relatively easy punching bag for campaigners and a way to meet campaign objectives and produce content appealing to their target audiences. HOPE not hate ran a story on Renshaw less than three weeks before he disclosed his plot and after he had been arrested for child grooming. The tone of coverage was humiliating, mocking Renshaw for a lack of physical prowess and having a low status job. The title of the article was: Whatever happened to... Part IV.

“Yes, it’s been non-stop excitement for the Hitler Dwarf clone. Especially the night he was collecting empty glasses (that was actually his high powered role) down the pub and got mouthy with two “Commie scum” who then decided to put him on his backside. Luckily for Jack, two lesbians actually protected him. Yes, the irony, seems as he has also suggested killing gays as well as Jews.

Well, we’re pleased to report that Jack Renshaw has found a new job, this time in Skelmersdale, also near Blackpool. Jack is bragging that he is the warehouse manager for a food company. That’s also a lie, by the way. He packs boxes for them. He also brags he stole a whole pallet of gravy granules. He is the Oxo-moron, no less.”

(Collins 2017)

There is no evidence to suggest that Renshaw's expulsion from university or hostile media coverage contributed to his decision to plan an attack. However, it is plausible that both contributed to and potentially exacerbated the context that Renshaw found himself in: effectively cut off from pro-social rewards, reliant on engagement with an illegal and likely soon to be hostile subculture, and subject to humiliating coverage by ideological opponents. Viewed from this perspective Renshaw's expressed desire to die for the cause seems far more understandable.

CONCLUSIONS

As with the broader study of subcultures, the Renshaw case study is limited to some extent by the available data, as the most detailed information on Renshaw and his life comes from partial accounts from anti-fascist campaigners. While much of the detail is likely to be accurate, it will undoubtedly be filtered through a political lens, one designed to discredit Renshaw and his politics. Much of the above analysis of Renshaw, his motivations, and the meaning of his participation, is speculative as no impartial insider account exists and Renshaw himself is currently inaccessible in prison.

Despite this limitation, Renshaw's case can be interpreted as a striking example of the dual nature of protective factors (Fortune & Ward 2017: 2). Renshaw's history includes the entire spectrum of normative, counter normative, and illegal contexts: student, extremist, and terrorist. At one time or another Renshaw tried out every approach to achieving his particular version of a good life. Renshaw's extremism early on in life, and his involvement in Siege Culture,

was undoubtedly a risk factor. His public involvement weakened potential opportunities that Renshaw may have encountered in normative contexts. Rather than reinventing himself at university Renshaw persisted in his views, cutting off access to secondary goods such as relationships, study, and employment opportunities that may have allowed him to achieve his good life.

Simultaneously, Renshaw's extremism can also be viewed as protective. It gave him a platform, status, and a chance to be creative that was otherwise inaccessible. As anti-social and extreme as Renshaw's fascism and in particular his anti-Semitism was, his role as a propagandist and attempts at being an organiser were key secondary goods. Ultimately, it was the likely imminent removal of these secondary goods that seemed to underpin Renshaw's terrorism. Seeking to preserve what goods he could, however temporarily and finally, Renshaw announced a planned terrorist attack that would allow him to be venerated within the subculture, and revenge himself on those he seemed to consider responsible for his misfortunes.

CONCLUSIONS

This section brings together the findings of this report on subcultural constraint, along with findings from the previous two reports in this series on Siege Subculture and Differential Participation. It describes the limitations of the analysis as well as setting out the main findings and insights for practitioners.

LIMITATIONS

This series of reports has presented a mix of theoretical and empirical analysis. While this series has sought to be thorough, it suffers from a range of limitations common to most research on the extreme-right.

First and foremost the analysis is limited by the range of the available data. Data about the extreme-right comes in the first instance from internal publications on a range of web platforms, many of them preserved through tools such as Internet Archive and the Repository of Extremism Aligned Documents. Collectively this amounts to a surface layer of data, all of it designed for public consumption or at least in the full knowledge that it will be read by political opponents. While some insight into the internal dynamics and meanings of extreme-right subcultures may be identifiable these sources of data are incomplete and badly in need of triangulation. We often know what extreme-right participants say, but less often do we know how this material is interpreted or expected to be interpreted by others.

In the second instance, data is external to extreme-right subcultures. A range of journalists, researchers and campaigners collect data and report on the extreme-right. This is often highly partial, focused heavily on the threat presented by the extreme-right, and in many cases seeks to actively humiliate extreme-right participants (see the case study of Jack Renshaw). At times, data has been put into the public domain without the knowledge of those in it as in the cases

of prominent leaks from chats and forums used by the extreme-right. This is among the most interesting available data but comes with ethical concerns and still lacks a fuller internal context. We know what leaked statements say to us, but we do not know what they mean to the intended audiences. Reliance on leaked data also has the side-effect of making access to participants' first-hand accounts harder as security grows tighter and participants are less likely to want to engage with outsiders.

Analysis at the subcultural level has traditionally relied on ethnographic methods, building on interpretive traditions within sociology: the subjective meaning for participants is prioritised over the objective reality of their behaviours. In the case of the extreme-right and Siege Culture specifically, this dimension is almost entirely absent from the data. Some work on the extreme-right has been able to speak directly to participants in various forms (e.g., Simi & Windisch, 2020), but this is often historically focused and draws on ideological and cultural contexts distinct from *Siege*. This is unsurprising: the more menacing and extreme the ideology, the less likely researchers are able to sit down and have a conversation with believers. Nevertheless, building an understanding of the internal dynamics of subcultures requires first-hand knowledge. As it stands this report is based on a more surface-level engagement with these spaces than a true ethnography.

A second limitation, but one that is baked into the level of analysis, is that subculture does not often map onto hard boundaries. Subcultures are broader than specific platforms and particular texts. They encompass ideology, style, and relationships in ways that do not lend themselves well to discrete analysis. As a result, analysis of a broad subculture cannot focus on a single platform or coherent dataset and say that it is representative. It is instead messy, unstructured, and bounded only by shared sensibilities.

CONCLUSIONS

Subcultural Constraint

A third limitation extends the inherent fuzziness of subculture to subcultural roles. Roles can be multiple, overlapping, and many may not be represented in the limited data available. Some are relatively straightforward, key ideologues are often celebrated publicly and are therefore more easily identified in the data. More mundane roles are often harder. There is much less in the data about who participants turn to when they need security advice or specific individuals they might admire physically. As a result, the roles offered in this series of reports are more exemplars drawn from the data rather than an exacting typology.

A fourth limitation extends from the GLM and in particular its consideration of primary goods. While the goods on offer are internally consistent they do not mesh exactly with subcultural theory. In particular much of the attraction of subcultural participation in terms of rejection of mainstream norms and the establishment of alternative norms is absent from the GLM framework which does not seem to accommodate a need to rebel and break taboos, within its list of universal goods.

INSIGHTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Despite the limitations on data, this analysis, in conjunction with the previous two reports, suggests several conclusions that may be of interest to practitioners.



1. There is an overlap between the concept of youth subcultures and the structure and function of some of the present day extreme-right.
2. The Siege Culture phenomenon is an example of a youth orientated extreme subculture that extends beyond labelled organisations.
3. Subcultural norms are intentionally alienating to outsiders but hold real meanings and have value for those participating within a subculture.
4. Participation in extremist subcultures is not uniform, participants may take on differing roles through their engagement with them.
5. Roles are not mutually exclusive and can vary by status and change over time; there were several examples of individuals holding multiple roles or roles changing over time in Siege Culture.
6. Paradoxically, where individuals are embedded in even an extreme subculture it may reward participation to such an extent that they are reluctant to engage in actions likely to destabilise their access to the subculture, most notably, terrorism. This can be conceptualised as subcultural constraint.
7. Conversely, destabilising events inside and outside of a subculture may change or threaten to change future access to rewards and goods, resulting in terroristic violence and terrorist roles appearing more attractive to participants.

As paradoxical as it may sound there is good reason to think that some forms of participation in extremist subcultures protect against the use of serious violence by participants. For all its militancy, the subculture that sprang up around Siege and associated spaces was sufficiently rewarding for participants that most did not want to take their participation too far, at least in part because doing so would endanger the rewards participation provided. The result was an extreme and militant space which openly endorsed and promoted

terrorism but did not ultimately lead to a major terrorist attack. The ramifications of this are manifold but fall into two main categories: understanding and risk.

UNDERSTANDING

Overall knowledge around extremist subcultures is poor and research is needed to improve it. The influx of researchers to the extreme-right space has not led to meaningful engagement with the various subcultures that make up the extreme-right ideological landscape. Instead, research tends to home in on groups without recognising the wider scenes they are emblematic of. Gilbert Ramsay made the point almost a decade ago that this type of knowledge is often stigmatised both in research and reality (2011: 226).

The dominance of psychological paradigms in terrorism research means that all too often actual ideological and cultural expertise is somehow seen as irrelevant. In-depth research on extremist subcultures is made harder by the fact that much of the data, especially that focused on interpersonal connections and individual cases, is outside the public domain. To date (to the researchers' knowledge) no one with a connection to Siege Culture has willingly participated in research.

Researchers need to take extreme-right subcultures seriously. The rush to condemn extreme-right material often blinds researchers to the possibility that others, often those with very different experiences and values to researchers, find value in extremist material. What seems hateful and ephemeral to those outside of a subculture may be seen as deeply compelling by those within it; potentially all the more so for mainstream condemnation.

Research also needs to engage with extremist subcultures in a granular way. Such an approach requires better access to data and a willingness to take it seriously and is essential to unpicking the monolithic conception of the extreme-right that tends to dominate. The differences between different subcultures, and even the tensions within them, are all important in understanding why specific participants

are drawn to specific subcultures are specific times.

RISK

These findings also have ramifications for those interested in risk management around those who may engage with extremist subcultures of various types. The most obvious implication – and most easily verified fact – is that participation in extremist subcultures generally does not lead to violent offending. While the risks associated with embedding norms and values that see violence as either a legitimate tool to achieve political goals or as necessary for survival should be clear, they may not be as immediate as they first appear.

Another observation is that some forms of participation in extremist subcultures may be protective for some participants. As long as participation provides rewards (goods in the language of the GLM), however impoverished and anti-social they may be to mainstream eyes, then those participating may be reluctant to trade them in for the infamy of being a mass casualty attacker. The risks associated with extremist subcultures are dualistic, on the one hand fixing participants in a firmly oppositional and antagonistic world which drives various anti-social activities, but also providing them with enough reward that, once embedded, many are unlikely to give it all up to go further.

Assuming these arguments hold then the greater risk lies on the periphery of extremist subcultures amongst actors who adopt the beliefs and values of the subculture but enjoy little of the subcultural rewards. The costs of action are much greater for those with identifiable roles, status, and subcultural capital, while those on the margins have little to lose. High profile mass casualty attackers are seldom high profile before they are mass casualty attackers.

For those with sufficient investment in an extreme subculture another scenario may play out where individuals either lose or are at risk of losing access to extremist subcultures. This could be potentially as a result of internal developments such as a change in role

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or more likely status as a result of internal disputes or happenstance. In other cases, including the case study of Jack Renshaw below, change may come as a result of external action, in Renshaw's case, police action which was likely to precipitate a loss of status and access to the UK Siege Culture scene.

Where individuals lose status and access, the incentives around participation may change dramatically and an actor may decide that rather than lose access to the goods they have become dependent on, they may instead wish to attempt to attain status by engaging in mass casualty violence. This suggests that law enforcement and others with risk management responsibilities will benefit from understanding the internal dynamics of subcultures and how they may change as a result of external intervention and the second order effects that flow from it. Placing roles and status in jeopardy through arrests and investigations may have consequences for individuals dependent on them for goods. This does not mean that law enforcement should not actively police extremist subcultures where legally justified, only that they should take account of the possible consequences of these interventions, and that planning for these outcomes should be informed by a detailed understanding of the social dynamics at play inside any extremist subculture.

The overriding theme of this research is not too different to the observation made by Mark Hamm: "culture matters - and it matters profoundly" (2008: 337). As the majority of researchers and those policing and managing extremist subcultures are generally well-connected to, and dependent on, the societies they protect (even academics) it is harder to view extremist subcultures as having much appeal. This is only exacerbated by subcultural tendencies to alienate mainstream sensibilities as far as possible. The end result is an empathy gap in which those policing extremism must work hard to understand the appeal of seemingly deeply antisocial motivations and rewards. This gulf in understanding disincentivises granular understanding.

Behind the hateful performance extremist subcultures are in many respects similar to all manner of youth subcultures that have become a normal part of post-war societies. Their participants, despite their views, are pursuing similar things to everyone else: community, agency, creativity and status. For those that are able to find them, albeit deeply anti-social versions, then mass casualty violence seems to be an unlikely outcome. Mostly it is those who are either unable to meet their needs, or those who are at risk of losing access to valued rewards, that are likely to go further.

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