

Dealing with right-wing violence and its victims in England

Dr Neil Chakraborti

Department of Criminology
University of Leicester



Outline

3 key areas of discussion:

- Assessing the influence of the far-right in England upon levels of racist violence
- Understanding who the perpetrators of racist violence are
- Understanding who the victims of racist violence are

The far-right in England

- The British National Party (BNP):
 - Most successful far-right political party in Britain during the last 20 years
 - Significant presence in deprived, working class areas across England but increasingly popular in middle-class environments
 - Change of leadership in 1999 pivotal to the BNP's new 'modernised' image
 - Sustained success in local elections (strongholds in east London, Stoke and Burnley)
 - Capacity to influence mainstream politics
 - New 'respectable' image unpopular with some sections of its core membership

The far-right in England

■ Combat 18 (C18):

- Came to the fore during the early 1990s
- White supremacist movement containing a mixture of football hooligans, racist skinheads and disaffected neo-Nazis
 - 1=A; 8=H
- Fearsome reputation for violence against ethnic minorities, immigrants, left-wing radicals and anti-racist campaigners
- Popularity has waned during the past 10 years, but still an influential vehicle for intimidation

The perpetrators of racist violence

- Research evidence suggests that the perpetrators of racist attacks in England are most commonly so-called 'ordinary' people, and not members of the far-right
 - Sibbitt (1997): perpetrators of racist violence not committed to a racist ideology or to any political beliefs; instead, part of 'everyday' prejudice within deprived urban neighbourhoods
 - Ray, Smith and Wastell (2004): racist offenders not significantly different to other types of offenders who use violence to resolve disputes
 - Gadd, Dixon and Jefferson (2005): perpetrators not hardened race haters but those with lives characterised by deprivation, mental health problems, drug and alcohol problems and patterns of criminal behaviour
 - Chakraborti and Garland (2004): racist behaviour common among those keen to protect their locality from 'outsiders'; equally applicable to affluent and deprived areas, urban or rural

The victims of racist violence

- Research evidence suggests that the targets of racist violence are not always sufficiently well protected by existing policy
- Examples of typically forgotten or 'hidden' victims of racism include:
 - Gypsy Traveller communities
 - Asylum seekers
 - Eastern European migrants
 - Mixed heritage households
 - Mixed race individuals
 - Mixed race relationships
 - Rural minority ethnic households
 - Chinese communities

Conclusions

- Processes of racist perpetration and victimisation much more complicated than often imagined

BUT:

- Although far-right activists may only be directly responsible for a small proportion of offences, their ideas can retain a wider influence on 'everyday' perpetrators
- Far-right extremists sometimes commit more severe hate crimes which have a more profound impact upon victims