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Violent extremist tactics and the ideology of the sectarian far left

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Abstract

This study addresses the question of whether a relationship exists between sympathy for violent extremism and openness to ideological positions associated with the revolutionary far left. We begin by analysing the characteristics of British far-left sectarian groups: that is, small, ideologically homogeneous organisations, each of which rejects parliamentary politics as a route to socialism and instead aspires to become the 'vanguard party' of Leninist revolutionary theory. We distinguish the members of such groups from members of the public who identify as 'very left-wing'. We then develop a survey instrument derived from publications by sectarian far-left groups and pilot it on a stratified random sample of the self-identified 'very left-wing' ($N = 1073$). The data collected is then re-used as a boost sample for a nationally-representative sample of the British public ($N = 3823$). Using these data, we test the hypothesis of a positive association between the belief system disseminated by the sectarian far left – which we term 'revolutionary workerism' – and sympathy with violent extremist tactics. We find a relationship which is highly significant in both statistical and substantive terms: those who express strong agreement with revolutionary workerist ideas are far more likely to express sympathy with violent extremist tactics than those who express strong disagreement. We also find a positive relationship between sympathy for violent extremism and a geopolitical outlook resembling the 'anti-imperialist' ideology promoted by the sectarian far left, in that those who see the US and the UK (and, among the 'very left-wing', also Israel) as a greater threat to world peace than NATO strategic adversaries such as North Korea tend to be more sympathetic to violent extremism than those who do not.

1. Introduction

Our purpose in this study is to examine the relationship between radical left-wing ideology and sympathy for violent extremism. The British 'communist' or 'revolutionary socialist' far left has shown little evidence of organising political violence in recent years. However, we argue that the objective of revolution and the construction of narratives in which certain social groups are positioned as the enemy of the majority, as well as the categorisation of the UK and its allies as a threat to world peace, can potentially act to legitimate certain forms of violence when carried out in the UK. Accordingly, we use survey data (a) to measure sympathy for violent extremism and adherence to ideological viewpoints similar to those promoted by revolutionary left-wing groups and (b) to test the hypothesis of a positive relationship between the two. This work forms a complement to recent academic studies of the radical right (e.g. Ford and Goodwin 2014).

1.1 Definitions: what the sectarian far left is

The British far left has historically been comprised of a number of small, highly committed, ideologically homogeneous groups, most of which have conventionally been categorised as 'Trotskyist', 'Stalinist', or 'Maoist'. This division depends on lineage and corresponds only weakly with actual patterns of ideological differences between groups. Following Stephen Rayner's (1979) analysis of such groups as akin to religious sects, we refer to them collectively as the 'sectarian' far left. This term is used as it precisely identifies our object of study, distinguishing it from superficially similar organisations such as radical green and anarchist groups, as well as from 'new social movements' built around identity politics and from much looser groupings such as grassroots communities of supporters of left-wing parliamentary politicians. Although there is diversity between individual sectarian far-left groups, most of them hold three ideological tendencies in common.

1.2 Ideologies: what the sectarian far left believes

Vanguardism is the core ideology of the sectarian far left. Most influentially expressed by Vladimir Lenin in *What is to be done?* (1988 [1902]), it is a belief system structured around the ambition to replace the current social, economic, and political system with 'communism'. This is conceived as an ideal mode of existence in which there are no class differences, no state, and no market economy. Vanguardism is distinguished from related forms of radical left wing ideology by the idea that, while history inevitably moves towards communism, it will be able to reach that destination only *after* the workers have been led into a mass uprising by an elite cadre of professional revolutionaries, initiating a transitional phase known as 'socialism' or 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. Vanguardists do not take up arms against the state, because their long-term strategy is the weaponisation of the working class itself. They implicitly conceive contemporary society as a conspiracy against the workers (in contradiction of Marx; see Popper 1969, p. 125), and for that reason attempt conspiracies of their own: ultimately, to bring down the state and seize control of industry, but, in the shorter term, to take control of non-radical organisations in order to radicalise their members.

There would appear to be a contradiction at the heart of vanguardism. Revolution is understood *both* as the predestined self-liberation of the working class *and* as achievable only through the intervention of an elite leadership. Lenin, for example, argued that '[t]he teachings of socialism… grew out of… philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by the intelligentsia' and therefore 'could only have been brought to [the workers] from without' because 'the working class exclusively by its own effort is able to develop only trade-union consciousness' (1988 [1902], p. 98). The self-appointed task of sectarian far-left groups is thus to persuade the workers to accept their leadership. Small as they are, they would seem to have only the remotest chances of success. But, just as religious sects 'invok[e] notions of the "elect"' and faith in God in order to legitimate themselves, sectarian far-left groups invoke parallel 'notions of the role of the "vanguard party" which will usher in the new order' and 'faith in the proletariat once it has been purged of the pollution of bourgeois ideology and saved from incorrect, or at worst, traitorous leadership' (Rayner 1979, p. 99).

In addition to vanguardism, most sectarian far-left groups also adhere to a subsidiary ideology known as 'anti-imperialism'. In a sectarian far-left context, this term does not refer to a general policy of opposition to imperialism as usually understood – that is, as the control of one country by another. Imperialism in *that* sense can be opposed from many different ideological perspectives, and not only from those of the sectarian far left. The 'anti-imperialist' ideology adopted by most sectarian far-left groups rests on a highly specific

understanding of what the word 'imperialism' means. For that reason, we use the term 'anti-imperialism' in quotation marks throughout this study.

'Anti-imperialism' in this sense derives from a political and economic theory formulated in John Hobson's *Imperialism: a study* (1902) and further developed by Lenin in *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* (2010 [1916]). Hobson's ideas grew out of nineteenth century antisemitic conspiracy theory. He attacked 'not colonialism in general, but what he saw as its debasement from the 1880s as Britain, France, Germany and the United States extended their rule to the tropics' under the influence of so-called 'international financiers', whom Hobson asserted to be Jewish (Feldman 2019, n.p.). Lenin (2010 [1916]) integrated Hobson's ideas into his own theories about the impending collapse of capitalism, maintaining that a small number of creditor or 'usurer' nations now held the rest of the world in debt slavery, waging war in order to protect or extend their monopolies. 'Anti-imperialism' of this type justified Soviet support for national liberation movements *outside* the Soviet bloc, even if the leaders of those movements were nationalists with overt bourgeois or even fascist tendencies (see Shindler 2012, pp. 60-62, 73-76, and 140-141). By contrast, national liberation movements *within* the Soviet bloc were brutally suppressed (see e.g. Bociurkiw 1974).

In the post-colonial era, 'anti-imperialism' has come to be defined primarily in terms of an over-riding opposition to the US and its allies (see Rich 2018 [2016], pp. 14-17, Bolton and Pitts 2018, pp. 78-83, and Hirsh 2018, p. 196). It is this principle which forms the ideological basis for what is known as the 'anti-war movement' in contemporary Britain (see Cohen 2007, pp. 280-311). This is not a pacifist movement but an 'anti-imperialist' movement, and, as such, does not oppose military action *tout court*. For example, it never protests against military action carried out by or on behalf of strategic adversaries of the US such as Russia and Iran. That is because those countries are not counted among the great exporters of capital. When such countries exercise influence beyond their borders, including through military action, they are therefore seen as resisting, rather than embodying, 'imperialism'. Accordingly, the 'anti-war movement' instead organises demonstrations exclusively against the US and its allies, especially Israel and the UK, whose governments are conceived as acting on behalf of the financial powers at the centre of the usurious 'imperialist' system that the sectarian far left understands to be the *real* threat to world peace. At its most extreme, this theory reduces to the idea that, while there may appear to be many different wars, separate both in time and in space, there is in reality only one continuous war: the war that 'imperialists' wage on 'the oppressed'. Some on the far left adopt a much more sophisticated analysis. But for most sectarian far-left groups, being 'anti-war' equates simply to solidarity with anyone who is currently at war with a NATO member or ally.

Lastly, most sectarian far-left British groups additionally subscribe to an ideology of 'anti-fascism'. As with 'anti-imperialism', this term does not refer to a general policy of opposition to fascism as usually understood, and as such, it too shall be used in quotation marks throughout this study. It is likely that most British adults are anti-fascist in the broad sense that they reject the ideology of fascism. By contrast, the sectarian far left's 'anti-fascism' is an ideology in its own right – and one that rests on highly specific and not widely shared understandings of what fascism is, and why it should be opposed. From the 1920s, the official position of the Communist International was that what we would now term the 'social democratic' governments of the day were in reality 'social fascist' and therefore no better than the openly fascist Italian government of Benito Mussolini. From the beginning of the 1930s, this position was opposed by the exiled former Soviet politician and military leader Leon Trotsky, who recognised fascism as a unique threat that the communist leaders of the day were abetting, in part through their refusal to co-ordinate with social democrats (Trotsky 1971 [1931]). But even Trotsky had difficulty understanding that antisemitism and racism

were key organising principles for fascism – especially in Germany, where the Nazis saw the Jews not as mere scapegoats but as an enemy whose destruction was an end in itself (see Goldhagen 1996 and Herf 2006 on the relationship of antisemitism to German fascism and Wistrich 1976, p. 175 on Trotsky's incomplete recognition of its importance). Moreover, Trotsky's understanding of fascism only as a doomed strategy employed by financiers to save the capitalist system in its moribund final stages led him both to minimise differences between it and social democracy (see e.g. Trotsky 1971 [1934], p. 579) and to look forward to the 'immediate revolutionary situation' that he imagined would necessarily follow the supposedly inevitable internal collapse of the Nazi regime (Trotsky 1971 [1933], pp. 544-545). As war between the Axis and the Allied powers drew nearer, Trotsky chose 'proletarian defeatism' over collaboration with 'imperialists' (Wistrich 1976, p. 179) – even before the Hitler-Stalin pact turned the Communist Party of Great Britain against the Allied war effort.

Growing from these roots, the sectarian far left's 'anti-fascism' is a far cry from the anti-fascism of mainstream anti-racist organisations. It is an ideology which sees the problem of fascism primarily in terms of the obstacle that fascist organisations supposedly place on the path to otherwise inevitable proletarian revolution. This conviction is behind the emphasis that some sectarian far-left groups have placed on street-level confrontations with their counterparts on the far right, and explains many of their theoretical statements on fascism: for example, the assertion of '[w]orkers' control of society and industry as the *only alternative* to fascism' (this being the fourth of the International Socialists' four principles for unity among revolutionary socialist organisations, quoted in Rayner 1979, p. 220; emphasis added). Together with the assumption that antisemitism is merely an aspect of fascism, the far left's ideological 'anti-fascism' underpins the widespread left-wing conviction that anyone on the left is by definition not antisemitic (Rich 2018 [2016], pp. 197-198) – despite the long history of left-wing antisemitism (Fine and Spencer 2017) and despite the practical difficulty that many on the left evidently still face in distinguishing 'far-left' from 'far-right' discourse on topics such as Zionism and usury (Allington 2018).

1.3 Tactics: what the sectarian far left does

The long-term objective of contemporary sectarian far-left groups is to lead the proletariat into revolution. However, there is no realistic possibility of that goal being achieved by any such group in the foreseeable future. This means that sectarian far-left groups should primarily be understood in terms of their short- and medium-term objectives of recruiting and indoctrinating members and 'building the movement' – which in practice usually means achieving influence over non-radical organisations. With revolution a distant goal, the tactics currently employed by a typical far-left sectarian group in the UK are orientated towards those short- and medium-term objectives, and can be summarised as follows:

a) Producing and distributing publications that reflect the group's specific ideology and promote its activities
b) Proselytising among non-members
c) Organising and co-opting strikes and protests in search of opportunities for (a) and (b)
d) Using reward mechanisms and 'political education' to reinforce conformity within the group
e) Campaigning to embed group members within the bureaucratic hierarchy of organisations such as trade unions, single-issue campaigning groups, students' unions, tenants' associations, and conventional political parties

It has been observed that some on the British left have 'g[iven] up on the revolutionary potential of the western working class' (Rich 2018 [2016], p. 14). But on the sectarian far

left, this goes no further than a change of emphasis for outreach purposes. As the leading theorist of Britain's largest Trotskyist group writes, '[i]n the absence, alas, of large-scale workers' struggles, movements [against war and fascism] have provided the soil in which new generations of socialists have been nurtured' (Callinicos 2019, p. 6). 'Anti-war' and 'anti-fascist' movements are thus assumed to have wider appeal than overt calls for a workers' uprising. But if those who are inspired to take part in such movements can eventually be persuaded to understand 'war' and 'fascism' in a Leninist or Trotskyist framework, then it may be possible to draw them into support for proletarian revolution. This is a contemporary twist on a classic recipe for radicalisation: leading people to see their specific complaints as impossible to address without total overthrow of the social order. As Lenin wrote, 'we must make it our concern to direct the thoughts of those who are dissatisfied only with conditions at the university or in the *zemstvo*, etc, to the idea that the entire political system is worthless' (1988 [1902], p. 149).[1]

Similar calculations would appear to lie behind the veneer of support that most sectarian far-left groups offer the current Labour Party leadership, despite their fundamental commitment to the idea that socialism and communism can only be achieved through extra-parliamentary means. The strategy appears to be for sectarian groups to express public support for left-wing politicians in order to radicalise those politicians' other supporters, popularise their own ideas, and build the networks of influence through which they eventually hope to lead the workers into revolt. For example, at the time of Jeremy Corbyn's first leadership campaign, the Alliance for Workers Liberty stated that '[a] Labour government… could not implement socialism if it wanted to' and argued that engagement in that campaign should instead be viewed primarily as an opportunity to 'renew socialist political ideas' (Solidarity 2015, p. 5). Similar statements have been made by other sectarian far-left groups. On 2 March 2019, a unanimously agreed resolution of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Provisional Central Committee) presented the Labour leader and his supporters somewhat negatively, decrying their 'vague notions of the spirit of 1945, Keynesian economics, and a Corbyn-led government ushering in equality, prosperity, and peace', but concluding on the positive note that 'once again, Marxists have a real opportunity to gain a wide hearing' as a side effect of developments within the Labour Party (CPGB-PCC 2019, p. 10). A speaker at the same meeting noted that other sectarian far-left groups such as the Socialist Workers Party were already 'hoping to win recruits from "disillusioned Corbynites"' (Manson 2019, p.11). Again, the model for this tactic is to be found in the works of Lenin:

> At present, it is often difficult for the British Communists even to approach the masses, even to make themselves heard. But if I address the masses as a Communist, and invite them to vote for [Labour MP Arthur] Henderson… I most certainly will be listened to. And being listened to, I shall be able to popularise the idea, not only that Soviets are better than Parliaments… but also that I am prepared to support Henderson by my vote in just the same way as a rope supports the man who has hanged himself.

> <div align="right">Lenin 1921 [1920], p.86</div>

It could be argued that the tactics described in this section may cause certain forms of social harm in their own right: for example, by interfering in the normal functioning of institutions created for another purpose. Our primary focus in this study, however, is on the ideology which the sectarian far left disseminates in the course of its activities, and on the relationship of that ideology to violent extremism.

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[1] A *zemstvo* was a local government unit in pre-revolutionary Russia.

1.4 Violent extremism and the sectarian far left

If sectarian groups on the British far left are to be considered extremist at the present time, this cannot be on grounds of any realistic prospect of their direct organisational involvement in any sort of imminent terrorist activity in the UK. Unlike far-left groups in some other European nations (see e.g. Weinberg and Eubank 1988, Kraushaar 2005), extant sectarian groups on the British far left have no history of using terrorist tactics in the hope of precipitating revolution. Furthermore, they do not engage in the 'performative violence' associated with some newer and more ideologically heterogeneous formations on the far left (see Juris 2005), and for the most part they no longer issue calls for violence of the kind that were made by some of their number in connection with Britain's inner city riots of 1981 (Shipley 1981, pp. 196-197) and that were systematically identified in a recent study of far-left propaganda distributed during the Greek riots of 2008 (see Gerodimos 2015).

However, the ideology of 'anti-imperialism' draws sectarian far-left groups, as well as their fellow-travellers across the broader left, into a position of solidarity with terrorist organisations and violently repressive regimes – *especially* if those organisations and regimes are actively engaged in military struggle against the US and its allies, including the UK (see Hirsh 2018, pp. 58-65). Although such solidarity does not currently extend to direct involvement in armed conflict, it has often been expressed through rationalisation of Islamist and (previously) Irish Republican terror attacks in Britain, usually by interpreting such atrocities within an 'anti-imperialist' framework that enables them to be presented as the result of British government policy. This is a specific example of the general tendency of western 'anti-imperialists' to project their own politics onto those who organise and carry out terrorist acts (Postone 2006, p. 97). For example, the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party responded to the London transport bombings of 2005 with the front-page headline 'This is about Iraq, Mr Blair' (Socialist Worker 2005, p. 1), as well as with an article arguing that if Britain wants terrorist attacks to stop, then it should begin by 'ending the occupation of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine' (Yaqoob 2005, n.p.).[2] To clarify the implied ideological point, the same issue of the newspaper featured a cartoon depicting the Circle underground line (on which two of the bombings had taken place) as a *vicious circle* in which 'empire' leads to 'terror' via 'poverty' and ultimately back to 'empire' via 'war' (Tim 2005, n.p.). These are absolutely standard arguments that will be familiar to anyone who has had contact with the sectarian far left.

Moreover, while not all sectarian far-left groups are committed to 'anti-imperialism', the core long-term objectives of the sectarian far left require willingness to engage in political violence at some point in the future. Accordingly, sectarian far-left groups tend to interpret public order incidents, rioting, clashes with police, etc in a positive light (see e.g. Lewis-Griffiths and Kimber's 2019 coverage of the 'yellow vest' movement in France). This follows from the vanguardist belief that a positive transformation of society can and must be achieved through overthrow of all existing institutions, and from the acknowledgement that such an overthrow is at some stage likely to involve violent conflict between those who support the revolution and the 'counter-revolutionary' forces to which they will find themselves opposed. Sectarian far-left groups therefore welcome expressions of militancy as

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[2] The front-page headline was a quotation from a speaker at a public vigil organised by the Socialist Workers Party-linked Stop the War Coalition, while the article was written by an official from the same organisation. That official was also the vice-chair of the Respect party: a joint venture between the Socialist Workers Party and the Muslim Association of Britain, whose platform has been described as 'an authentic representation of the SWP's brand of Trotskyite ideology, with an admixture of Islamist tenets' (Benedek 2007, n.p.).

a sign that the proletariat is advancing towards its destiny as the tool with which the revolutionary elite will 'smash the state' and destroy capitalism.

To re-iterate, sectarian far-left groups in the UK do not directly promote violence. But *openness to violent extremist tactics* is logically required by a commitment to 'revolution' as such groups typically understand the word. As Trotsky declared, '[t]he man who repudiates terrorism in principle – i.e. repudiates measures of suppression and intimidation towards determined and armed counter-revolution – must reject all idea of the political supremacy of the working class and its revolutionary dictatorship' (1922 [1920], p. 23). Once 'good' is identified with leading the workers into revolution and establishing the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', almost anything can be justified in the service of that goal.

1.5 Review of existing research

There is relatively little scholarly literature on the influence of the revolutionary far left in the UK. Recent cross-national studies have examined the ideological position of radical and far-left parties and their support across Europe (March and Mudde 2005, March 2008, March 2012, Peace, 2013, March and Rommerskirchen 2015, Gomez et al 2016, Fagerholm 2018), although some of the parties examined might more accurately be seen as populist than vanguardist (see Mudde 2004, pp. 549-550 on this key distinction). Further scholarship explores similarities between the extreme left and the extreme right (Rokeach 1960 and Bobbio 1996), and there is growing interest in how belief in conspiracy theories is associated with both left- and right-wing extremism (e.g. Prooijen et al 2015).

Of more direct relevance to this study is a body of work within political psychology that addresses the question of whether particular personality types are attracted to right- or left-wing extremism. The 1950s saw a surge of interest in the supposed 'authoritarian personality' as a hypothetical type with a psychological inclination towards fascism (Adorno et al 1950). However, the underlying research suffered from a somewhat partisan view of the relationship between authoritarianism and political position, which led to the neglect of left-wing authoritarian traditions such as communism (Shils 1954).[3]

Two frames for understanding authoritarianism on the political left were opened up by the newer concept of 'right-wing authoritarianism', defined as an inclination to follow established norms, aggress towards those perceived as deviant, and submit to established authorities (Altemeyer 1980). Firstly, it was argued that 'right-wing' authoritarians in this psychological sense are not attracted to specifically right-wing authorities so much as to established authority *per se*, and as such will behave in the same way in communist societies, if that is where they happen to have lived their lives: following the (communist) norms, submitting to the established (communist) authorities, and aggressing towards those regarded (by communists) as deviant (Altemeyer 1996, p. 218; see McFarland et al 1992 and de Regt et al 2011 for empirical support for this idea). Secondly, it has been proposed that an exactly parallel 'left-wing authoritarianism' might also exist, characterised by 'submission to authorities who are dedicated to *overthrowing* the established authorities', 'adherence to the norms of behaviour perceived to be endorsed by the revolutionary authorities', and 'general aggressiveness directed against the established authorities, or against persons who are perceived to support those authorities' (Altemeyer 1996, p. 219; emphasis in original). On this definition, not only communists but also anarchists and members of anti-establishment

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[3] For more on the biases of the original studies, see Martin (2001) – although it is noted that advocates of the idea of left-wing authoritarianism have in turn been accused of 'centrist bias' and 'anticommunism' (Stone and Smith 1992, p. 155).

right-wing groups such as the Posse Comitatus would be seen as *psychologically* left-wing, as left-wing authoritarianism is here defined not by adherence to any particular political programme but merely by an enthusiasm for overthrowing whichever authorities happen to be in power (Altemeyer 1996, p. 218).

While the researcher who proposed the 'left-wing authoritarianism' concept recalled encountering members of Maoist groups who appeared to exhibit such tendencies in the 1960s (Altemeyer 1996, p. 217), he found it impossible to identify *pure* left-wing authoritarians in convenience sample studies conducted in Canada from the 1990s onwards: what he found were, rather, individuals who exhibited both 'right-wing' and 'left-wing' authoritarian tendencies and who therefore might be considered to be 'wild cards' with the potential to attach themselves to conservative or revolutionary movements depending on the circumstances (Altemeyer 1996, pp. 220-230; Benjamin 2014 replicated this finding in the US). Be that as it may, a group of researchers in Belgium identified a large proportion of left-wing authoritarians among the small number of participants whom they were able to recruit from radical left-wing groups (van Hiel et al 2006, pp. 784-785). As violence was not promoted openly even by the group to which the most authoritarian participants belonged, the researchers speculate that their high levels of authoritarian aggression were a consequence of 'infer[ing] the legitimacy of [violent] actions' from the group's depiction of the established authorities as 'hostile, aggressive, and illegitimate' (van Hiel at al 2006, p. 789). This is similar to our argument that, rather than directly promoting violence, British sectarian far-left groups instead promote ideologies that *can potentially provide a viewpoint* from which certain forms of violent extremism *may appear justified*. However, we take the view that such a viewpoint may also be available to non-members who adopt the same or similar ideologies.

1.6 Hypotheses

Given the above, we expect a positive relationship between sympathy for violent extremism and adherence to ideologies promoted by the sectarian far left. Those who view the world in terms resembling those of the sectarian far left's 'anti-imperialism' are expected to have higher levels of sympathy for violent extremism. And the more completely an individual agrees with the ideology presented in sectarian far-left publications, the more likely it is expected to be that he or she will sympathise with at least some form of violent extremism. An 'anti-imperialist' worldview can be defined straightforwardly in terms of the countries an individual sees as a threat to world peace (see section 1.2, above), while a measure of agreement with the ideology of sectarian far-left publications did not exist prior to the research presented here and required creation as part of the research project (see sections 2.1 and 3, below). These expectations furnish us with three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a. Those who choose the US, the UK, or Israel as greatest threats to world peace from a list that also includes Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran will have higher levels of sympathy for violent extremism than those who do not.

Hypothesis 1b. Those who choose Russia, China, North Korea, or Iran as greatest threats to world peace from a list that also includes the US, the UK, and Israel will have lower levels of sympathy for violent extremism than those who do not.

Hypothesis 2. Higher levels of agreement with the distinctive ideology promoted in sectarian far-left publications will be associated with higher probability of sympathising with violent extremism.

2. Methodology

2.1 Stage one: formulation of statements representing current far-left ideology

In the first stage of the project, the researchers selected recent articles from three platforms associated with the sectarian far left: the *Socialist Worker*, the *Weekly Worker*, and *Counterfire*. These articles were read closely, with the aim being to articulate recurrent general principles.

Following a group discussion at which the articles were discussed, each researcher proposed statements expressing characteristic objectives, tactics, or items of ideology either identified from the publications under consideration or recalled from discussion with members of the far left (two of the researchers have extensive experience of qualitative research in this area, and one is a former Trotskyist activist). Statements were shortlisted through a voting process, with the top statements being scrutinised to see whether anything amongst them had been too closely duplicated or whether anything of importance had been left out; where this was considered to have happened, we returned to the publications and formulated more statements in discussion with one another. The process resulted in an agreed shortlist of 15 candidate items reflective of the tactics, objectives, and ideology of the British far left.

The full list is given below in section 3.1, but an example will now be used to show how statements can be related to specific articles. It is a quotation from a *Weekly Worker* article in which the Chair of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Provisional Central Committee), known as Jack Conrad, responds to an article by former Labour Party strategist, John McTernan. Like many commentators at that time, McTernan (2019) was recognisably paraphrasing a recent and highly influential analysis of conspiracy theory as the link between antisemitism and contemporary left- and right-wing populism, with their characteristically 'personalised' critique of social relations (Bolton and Pitts 2018). Rather than disavow this personalised critique, Conrad's response asserts it to be 'simply the truth', and briefly elaborates on a conspiracy theory which is purported to explain the existence of McTernan's article:

> McTernan says antisemitism 'can be easily moulded into a critique of capitalism'. It only takes one more small step to classify anti-capitalism itself as inherently antisemitic. Towards that end, he cites rhetoric about the 1% and economic inequality as having 'the same underlying theme – a small group of very rich people who cleverly manipulate others to defend their interests'.
>
> Once again, this is simply the truth. The capitalist class, a small minority, really do cleverly manipulate others to defend their interests. Paid lobbyists, the advertising-funded media, donations to political parties and campaigns, hiring PR companies, obtaining non-disclosure orders, employing professionals such as John McTernan – all this is very expensive (but for the members of the capitalist class, well worth it).

Conrad 2019, p. 9

The above-quoted article could thus be identified with two themes that were also seen elsewhere within the left-wing publications that we examined: first, the idea that society is as it is because the wealthy have arranged it to their exclusive advantage, and second, the idea that what appears in the 'mainstream' media is a manipulative falsehood disseminated on that minority's behalf. Our aim was to formulate highly general statements so that the resulting survey did not become a mere reflection of recent news topics. Thus we did not, for example, identify the purported lies of the 'mainstream media' with accusations of antisemitism against left-wing politicians and their supporters, even though that was the specific allegation not

only in the above but also in several similar articles, such as the *Socialist Worker* front page story which claimed that '[a] deluge of slurs on the left and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn over antisemitism are designed to weaken those fighting for change and to marginalise the Palestinians' (Socialist Worker 2019, p. 1).[4]

The questionnaire items related to the above are 'the wealthy make life worse for the rest of us' (referred to below as fl.wealthy.worse) and 'mainstream newspapers and TV channels tell lies to protect the ruling class' (referred to below as fl.msm.lies).

2.2 Stage two: survey of 'very left-wing' British adults

In the second stage of research, the 15 new items were combined with several existing survey instruments to produce a questionnaire that was sent to a stratified random sample of self-declared 'very left-wing' members of YouGov's online panel. (Quotation marks are used when referring to this sample throughout this study to emphasise that the sampling frame consisted of people who categorised themselves as 'very left-wing', rather than people who would necessarily have been categorised as such on some objective measure.) For the purposes of this study, the most important existing instrument was comprised of five of the six items which loaded onto the first factor of the SyFoR or 'sympathy for radicalism' scale (Bhui, Warfa, and Jones 2014), all of which relate to violent extremism. A sixth item, which related to the specific tactic of suicide bombing, was excluded. This was left out because suicide bombing is a tactic specifically associated with Islamism, and as such might not be appropriate for surveying other target populations than that for which the instrument was originally developed. It was replaced with a new item, namely 'street violence against anti-democratic groups'. This new item was added because it relates both to the 'squadist' tactic of physical opposition to members of fascist groups (advocated by some on the far left as appropriate for the present historical moment) and to the *imagined future necessity* of defensive violence to protect the revolution against counter-revolutionary forces. The wording of the item does not specifically identify either of those antagonists, leaving interpretation to the respondent: we argue this enables it to remain a plausible measure of support for violence across the political spectrum, and not only on the left.[5]

This resulted in a list of six items, each of which refers to a distinct form of violence or threatened violence in an implied context of political radicalism. Respondents were specifically asked for their level of sympathy with these forms of violent extremism 'when carried out in this country'. Thus, where respondents expressed sympathy with the use of bombs, one can interpret their responses in terms of sympathy for the use of bombs in their own country (whether they understood this to be the UK, or one of its constituent parts). This arguably 'raised the bar' of what would count as sympathy for violent extremism, but

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[4] This is a familiar argumentative manoeuvre known as the 'Livingstone formulation', i.e. 'refusing to answer a charge of antisemitism by responding instead with a counter-charge that those who talk about antisemitism are really engaged in bad-faith efforts to silence criticism of Israel' (Hirsh 2017, p. 6). When elaborated to this extent (i.e. accusations of a *propaganda campaign*), it arguably amounts to a conspiracy theory. This form of discourse is currently very common on the far left. One of the revolutionary socialist platforms that we examined was engaged both in an attempt to argue that leftist analysis requires the rejection of conspiracy theories, especially around the issue of Israel and Palestine (Rees 2019), and in the *simultaneous promulgation* of the idea that media reports of antisemitic incidents involving left-wing political figures are part of a 'propaganda campaign… to eviscerate any possibility of a socialist British Prime Minister, sympathetic to the Palestinian struggle' (Bryan 2019, n.p.).

[5] Note that, on the far left, the word 'democratic' does not imply representative electoral democracy. For example, a *Weekly Worker* article argues for the desirability of 'form[ing] the working class] into armed and democratic popular militias' (Parker 2008, n.p.).

removed any potential ambiguity around whether the additional SyFoR item could have been used to express support for pro-democracy protestors in authoritarian states. In order to assess adherence to something resembling the 'anti-imperialist' geopolitical outlook of the sectarian far left, a further multiple choice question presented respondents with a list of seven countries and asked them to choose those that they considered to be 'the greatest threat to world peace'.

Regarding the sampling strategy, our assumption was not that people identifying themselves as 'very left-wing' can all be assumed to be members or fellow travellers of the sectarian far left. Rather, it was that members and fellow travellers of the sectarian far left will tend to identify themselves as 'very left-wing', and that we would therefore be likely to sample more of them in this way than through random sampling of the general population. It is important to emphasise that this sample was *not* a self-selecting or convenience sample such as might have been obtained through social media: YouGov primarily recruits panellists through non-political third-party websites and incentivises participation; moreover, the great majority of its surveys are non-political.

Where responses to items were expressed in relation to a common scale (e.g. representing levels of agreement and disagreement), it was possible to present them in a random order. Possible responses to multiple-choice questions were also presented in a random order.

2.3 Stage three: nationally-representative survey of British adults

In the third stage, a shorter questionnaire was presented to a much larger, nationally-representative sample of British adults. This questionnaire comprised:

- The modified SyFoR scale discussed above (with items again presented in a random order), and
- Five items selected from the shortlist of 15 new items used in the previous survey. These were chosen on the basis of factor analysis and presented in a random order on a separate page

In measuring levels of agreement with revolutionary workerism in the 'very left-wing' sample, we used only the same five items that were presented to the nationally-representative sample, with the remainder being ignored. In this way, we were able to use the dataset collected by surveying the 'very left-wing' first as a pilot for the revolutionary workerism inventory, and then as a boost sample for the nationally-representative survey, increasing the sensitivity of our analysis by providing us with larger numbers of data points representing respondents at the more 'workerist' end of the ideological spectrum. See section 3.2 for lists of items.

In addition, two further items assessed:

- Attitudes to the same list of countries with which members of the far-left sample had been presented (again in a random order), and
- Attitudes to 'revolutionary socialist groups', 'British nationalist groups', and 'private sector' or 'profit-making' companies (identified as such and presented in a random order)

Fieldwork for the first survey was carried out from 12-17 April 2019. The sample ($N = 1074$) was stratified in accordance with YouGov's estimate of the demographic characteristics of self-identified 'very left-wing' British adults based on very large nationally-representative sample surveys at the time of the last general election. Fieldwork for the second survey was carried out by YouGov on 24-25 and 28-29 April 2019 as part of that company's daily

political omnibus poll, which aims to produce a nationally-representative stratified random sample of British adults ($N = 3823$).

2.4 Stage four: analysis

The primary object of the current study is to discover whether a relationship exists between openness to sectarian far-left ideology and sympathy for violent extremist tactics.

The existence of a relationship between sympathy for violent extremism measured using the modified SyFoR scale and choice of countries as threats to world peace (hypotheses 1a and 1b) can be assessed using Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests. The existence of a relationship between probability of sympathising with violent extremism as measured in the same way and the new measure of adherence to the belief system promoted by sectarian far-left groups (hypothesis 2) can be assessed through binomial logistic regression. For the purpose of testing the first of these relationships, the samples will be kept separate, as it is anticipated that the self-identified 'very left-wing' may have a different level of sympathy for violent extremism than the members of the nationally-representative political omnibus sample, which could obscure differences between mean levels among those within each sample who do and do not regard particular countries as threats to world peace relative to one another. For the purpose of testing the second, the two samples will be combined to produce a nationally-representative random sample *augmented with* a substantial 'boost sample' of self-identified 'very left-wing' respondents. This will increase the sensitivity of the analysis by providing what are anticipated to be larger absolute numbers of respondents at higher levels of agreement with the ideology disseminated by the sectarian far left.

2.5 Technical note

Analysis of findings was carried out using R version 3.5.1 (2018-07-02) with the packages psych (Revelle 2018), survey (Lumley 2004), wCorr (Emad and Bailey 2017), Hmisc (Harrell 2018), BBmisc (Bischl et al 2017), plyr (Wickham 2011), dplyr (Wickham et al 2019), and purrr (Henry and Wickham 2019). For visualisation, we additionally used the packages ggplot2 (Wickham 2016) and ggcorrplot (Kassambara 2018). Initial generation of tables was with the packages knitr (Xie 2015) and kableExtra (Zhu 2019). Demographic weights were calculated by YouGov and used throughout the study except where otherwise stated. Where numbers of observations (N) are cited, these are unweighted counts and may not precisely match the corresponding percentages, which are calculated on the basis of weighted counts and rounded to the nearest whole number. All correlation coefficients reported in this document are Spearman rank-order coefficients calculated using weighted data.

3. Measuring revolutionary workerism and sympathy for violent extremism

3.1 Piloting and factor analysis of new questionnaire items

As discussed in section 2.2, Table 1 presents the statements with which members of the 'very left-wing' sample were presented in order to develop and pilot test the new survey instrument for measuring adherence to the ideology disseminated by the sectarian far left. Levels of agreement with these statements are also presented in figure 1. A total of 12 of the new items attracted agreement from over 50% of the 'very left-wing' sample, with only three attracting agreement from less than 50%. These were 'Terrorists carry out attacks in the UK because of British Government policy', 'Parliamentary politics are a dead end', and 'I stand in solidarity with all targets of US military action'. The latter of these three was the only statement of the 15 to receive more disagreement than agreement overall. These items accordingly appear to have good face validity in capturing agreement with ideas circulating among the self-described 'very left-wing'.

Figure 2 gives the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient for each pair of items. These coefficients give a measure of how similar people's responses to each pair of items tended to be, with higher numbers indicating a stronger tendency for those members of the sample who agree with one item to agree with the other. Factor analysis works on the assumption that a single underlying tendency or 'factor' may be reflected in answers to multiple questions. The first thing that we have to establish is how many such factors we would need to hypothesise in order to explain the variation in the data. The scree plot in figure 3 is an approach to answering this. It suggests that a single factor is sufficient: that is, that members of the sample can be treated as expressing a single tendency in their responses to all 15 items. However, responses to some items may express this tendency more clearly than others, and it is those items that we will want to focus on in order to measure that tendency efficiently.

To discover which items these are, we look at their factor loadings (i.e. their correlations with the single hypothetical variable assumed to underlie responses to all of them). Table 2 shows the factor loadings for all fifteen questionnaire items. The item with the highest loading was fl.riseup (i.e. 'I would like to see workers rise up against their bosses') and item with the least was fl.zionism ('Zionism is a form of racism'). To reiterate, these were not the most and least popular items in the survey, but the items whose responses were most and least predictive of responses to all other items. So, for example, fl.zionism received agreement or strong agreement from more than half the sample of self-declared 'very left-wing' respondents, but the extent to which a given respondent agreed or disagreed with it tells us *relatively little* about the extent to which he or she was likely to agree or disagree with other items in the list.

Indeed, the most popular item overall, i.e. 'We must drive fascists off the streets', had only the seventh highest factor loading. This is not surprising: it will be seen below that far-right groups are perceived negatively throughout society as a whole. Thus, while far-left sectarian groups have a very specific understanding of what fascism is and why it should be opposed (see section 1.2), opposition to fascism may in and of itself be unable to play any particular role in distinguishing those groups and their supporters from anyone else. The two items which appeared to serve that purpose best (i.e. which were most correlated with the underlying factor) both concerned the need for a proletarian revolt against the capitalist order: fl.riseup ('I would like to see workers rise up against their bosses') and fl.capitalism ('Capitalism is essentially bad and must be destroyed').

Table 1: Statements reflecting aspects of the ideology of the sectarian far left

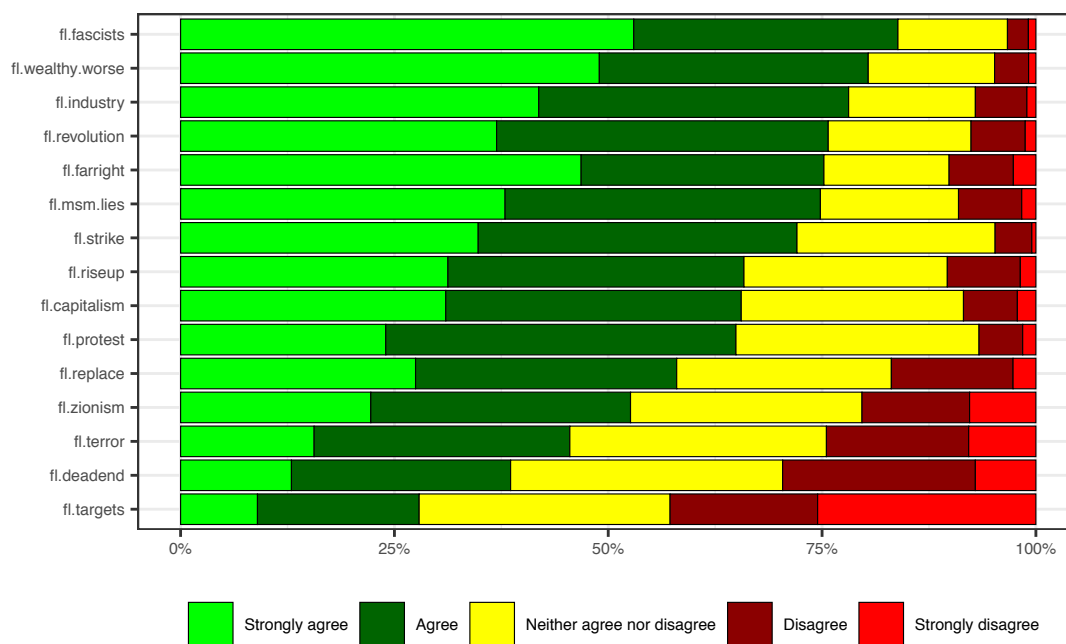| Item	Statement
fl.farright	The greatest threat to democracy has always come from the far right
fl.strike	We should always support striking workers
fl.deadend	Parliamentary politics are a dead end
fl.capitalism	Capitalism is essentially bad and must be destroyed
fl.industry	Industry should produce for need and not for profit
fl.terror	Terrorists carry out attacks in the UK because of British government policy
fl.zionism	Zionism is a form of racism
fl.targets	I stand in solidarity with all targets of US military action
fl.fascists	We must drive fascists off the streets
fl.replace	The current political system can't be reformed - it must be replaced
fl.revolution	This country needs revolutionary change
fl.msm.lies	Mainstream newspapers and TV channels tell lies to protect the ruling class
fl.wealthy.worse	The wealthy make life worse for the rest of us
fl.riseup	I would like to see workers rise up against their bosses
fl.protest	Protesting against the Government makes the world a better place

Figure 1: Agreement with statements expressing aspects of the ideology of the sectarian far left ('very left-wing' sample)
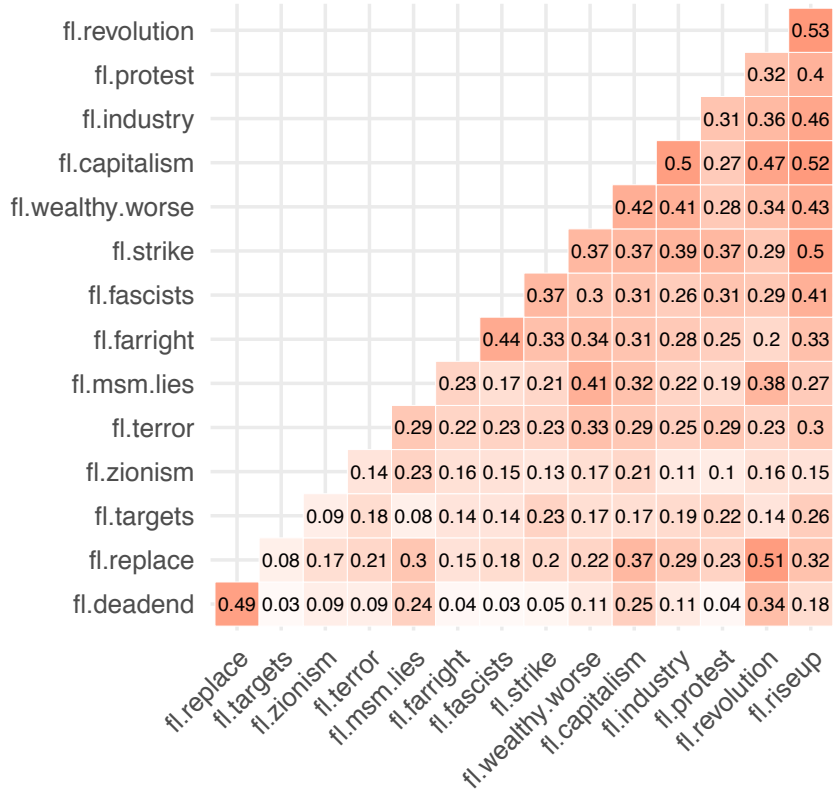
Figure 2: Correlations between statements ('very left-wing' sample)
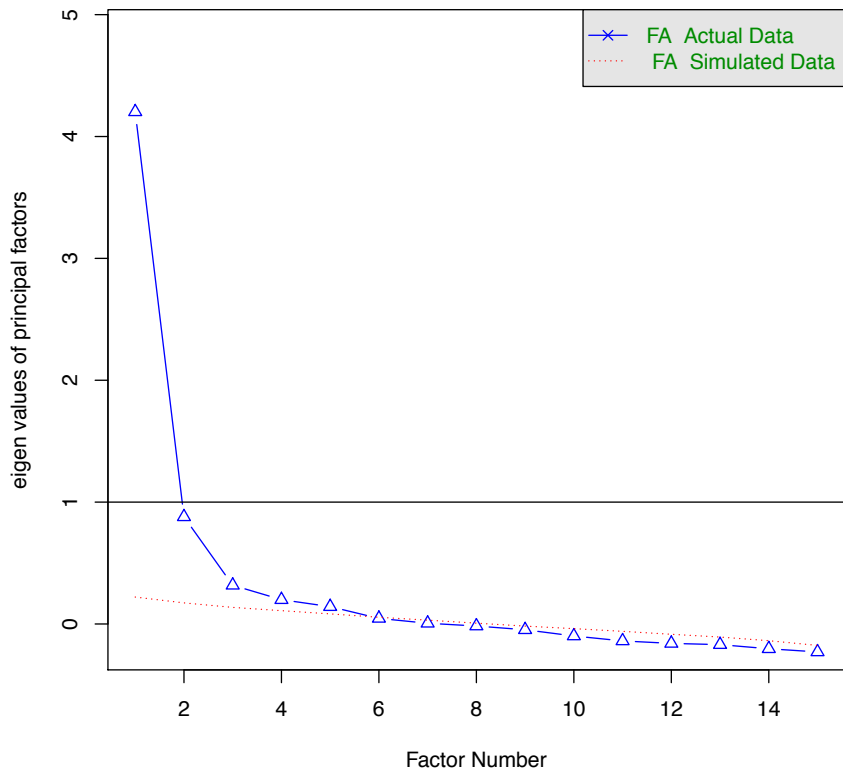
Figure 3: Scree plot of factors explaining variance in agreement with statements ('very left-wing' sample)

Item	Factor loading
fl.riseup	0.74
fl.capitalism	0.69
fl.revolution	0.65
fl.wealthy.worse	0.61
fl.industry	0.60
fl.strike	0.58
fl.fascists	0.51
fl.protest	0.50
fl.replace	0.50
fl.msm.lies	0.48
fl.farright	0.48
fl.terror	0.45
fl.targets	0.29
fl.deadend	0.29
fl.zionism	0.27

3.2 The revolutionary workerist and modified SyFoR inventories

On the basis of the above analysis, five items were chosen as a measure of alignment with the complex of ideas disseminated by far-left sectarian groups. These comprised all those items with a factor loading of 0.60 or more, and are for convenience listed in table 3. We refer to these as the 'revolutionary workerist' inventory because all items relate to the narrative that the current 'capitalist' social order is bad and that the people who do well out of it are the enemy of the workers, who should rise up against their bosses in a revolution and replace capitalism with a new system in which the profit motive is abandoned in favour of a sense of the common good. We note that, while one of the primary purposes of this study will be to discover whether or not there is a relationship between adherence to this ideology and sympathy for violent extremism, there would clearly be grounds for viewing revolutionary workerism as extremist in its own right: if sincerely adopted as a belief system, it would imply scapegoating, mistrust of existing institutions, and de-emphasis on effective forms of civic engagement in favour of utopian hopes for a future transformation of society.

Although there were no items among the five that related to the ideology of 'anti-imperialism' (see section 1.2), we were still able to measure alignment with the dominant geopolitical worldview on the sectarian far left using a separate multiple-choice question. Accurate measurement of the sectarian far-left variety of 'anti-fascism' (as defined in section 1.2) was considered to be impossible at this stage: as explained, the high levels of agreement but relatively low factor loading of fl.fascists and fl.farright ruled both items out of the revolutionary workerist inventory. For this reason, we suggest that it would be desirable to

Table 3: Revolutionary workerist inventory

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

RevWork1	Capitalism is essentially bad and must be destroyed
RevWork2	Industry should produce for need and not for profit
RevWork3	This country needs revolutionary change
RevWork4	The wealthy make life worse for the rest of us
RevWork5	I would like to see workers rise up against their bosses

Table 4: Modified SyFoR inventory (adapted from Bhui, Warfa, and Jones 2014)

To what extent do you sympathise with or condemn the following actions when carried out in this country?

SyFoR1	Violence as part of political protests
SyFoR2	Threatening to commit terrorist acts
SyFoR3	Organising radical terrorist groups without personally taking part
SyFoR4	Committing terrorist acts
SyFoR5	Using bombs to fight injustice
SyFoR6	Street violence against anti-democratic groups

develop and pilot a separate instrument in order to distinguish individuals who reject fascism for non-radical reasons (e.g. because they believe in such concepts as racial equality, human rights, and the rule of law) from those who reject it for radical leftist reasons (i.e. because they see fascism as an obstacle to proletarian revolution).

All five statements were at the level of objectives and broad ideological statements: items mentioning the specific tactics of protest and strike were less strongly correlated and therefore not included in the inventory. On the other hand, this arguably provided for a cleaner comparison between the revolutionary workerist inventory and the SyFoR inventory, as the presence of tactics in *both* of the two inventories might have served to exaggerate or disguise any relationship between them. As explained in section 2.2, the SyFoR inventory was modified in order to switch an explicitly Islamist tactic for one more likely to be endorsed by non-Islamists. For the full list of items used, see table 4.

4. Description of samples

4.1 The characteristics of the 'very left-wing'

Comparison of the demographic characteristics of the two samples give us a picture of the likely characteristics of British people who self-identify as 'very left-wing'. As table 5 shows, the two samples are (after weighting) very similar with regard to gender and ethnicity, but members of the 'very left-wing' sample were substantially younger, more highly educated, far more likely to have voted Remain in the 2016 EU membership referendum, and (insofar as this is reflected in NRS social grade) rather more middle class. The high level of Remain voting supports our initial supposition that a survey of the self-declared 'very left-wing' will capture many respondents uninvolved with the sectarian far left: most revolutionary socialist groups in the UK campaigned for Leave and, across Europe, the far left tends to be associated with Euroscepticism (Fagerholm 2016).

It appears likely that, amongst those British adults who see themselves as 'very left-wing', one will find *both* members and supporters of sectarian far-left groups that view the EU as an obstacle to socialist revolution *and* the young, highly-educated, metropolitan social liberals amongst whom support for EU membership is strongest. Of course, the latter also comprise one of the main constituencies within which the sectarian far left has historically been able to recruit. In 1972, for example, the Socialist Workers Party found that, among its 2098 members, there were as many as 725 'white collar workers' and a total of 432 school and college students, but only 613 'manual workers', 109 unemployed people, and a mere four individuals who had retired due to old age (Rayner 1979, p. 222).

28% of members of the 'very left-wing' sample identified themselves as members of the Labour Party, while 5% identified themselves as members of the Green Party, and 16% identified themselves as members of trade unions, although equivalent figures were not available for the political omnibus sample due to cost constraints. 51% reported that they read the *Guardian* or the *Observer*, while very small percentages reported that they read the publications of the sectarian far left, with 5% reporting that they read the *Socialist Worker*, 3% reporting that they read the *Socialist*, and 1% each reporting that they read *Counterfire*, *Solidarity*, and the *Weekly Worker*.

Members of the 'very left-wing' sample were also asked to select the generic groups they considered most supportive of their political views from a list of seven. Respondents could choose up to three, with the groups in the list comprising: 'revolutionary socialist groups', 'British nationalist groups', 'Christian groups', 'Jewish groups', 'Muslim groups', 'black groups', and 'gay and lesbian groups'. 'Revolutionary socialist groups' were the most popular option, selected by 44% of the 'very left-wing' sample. This option was followed in popularity by 'feminist groups' (42%) and 'gay and lesbian groups' (34%). In addition to an identification with socially liberal politics, this finding suggests a widespread identification with the organised far left that might be considered inconsistent with lack of readership of its publications. British nationalist groups predictably came last (chosen by just 1%).[6]

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[6] YouGov updates its demographic variables periodically, and all respondents will have been asked to place themselves on its left-right political scale at a date no more than six months prior to the collection of data for this study. That even 1% of 'very left-wing' respondents should regard 'British nationalist' groups as politically supportive is surprising, but it seems possible that the individuals in question may have undergone an ideological journey from left to right in the last six months – or alternatively that they did not understand one or both of the terms 'British nationalist' and 'very left-wing'.

Table 5: Demographic characteristics of the 'very left-wing' and nationally-representative omnibus samples

	'Very left-wing' sample	Political omnibus sample
	Mean and standard deviation or percentage	*Mean and standard deviation or percentage*
Age	39.1 (15.8)	48.4 (17.2)
Gender: Female	52	52
Ethnicity: White (any)	93	94
NRS social grade: ABC1	68	57
Degree-level education	44	28
Voted Leave	10	41
Voted Remain	74	38
N	*1074*	*3823*

4.2 Explicit indicators of support for radical politics within the general population

Before focusing on the ideological tendencies that it was our primary purpose to measure and analyse, it is worth presenting some further descriptive statistics with regard to the nationally-representative political omnibus sample, as these will help to shed light both on how typical or atypical it is for a British adult to identify as 'very left-wing' and on how typical British adults might feel about the sectarian far left and the forces against which it pits itself.

As table 6 shows, the most common response to YouGov's regular request for placement on a left-right scale was to avoid answering, while the second most-common response was to answer by placing oneself in the centre. The dominance of the centre is also seen in figure 4, which visualises the frequency of non-missing answers. More respondents identified themselves as 'slightly' to the left or right of the centre than as 'fairly' left- or right-wing. And far more identified themselves in any of these ways than placed themselves at either of the scale's extremes, each of which was chosen by no more than about 3% of the sample. In other words, an overwhelming majority of respondents either declined to place themselves on the scale, or placed themselves somewhere near the centre of it. It would thus appear that the proportion of British adults who understand themselves to be 'very left-wing' or 'very right-wing' is likely to be very, very small. If these are social or cultural identities, then they are identities that only appeal to very small minorities. To speculate about the demographics for which the 'very right-wing' identity has the strongest appeal would be outside the scope of this study, but section 4.1 has already given a clear idea as to the demographic groups whose members would appear most inclined to claim a 'very left-wing' identity for themselves.

Table 7 and figure 5 give an idea of how the population as a whole views the proponents of extreme left- and right-wing politics. When asked to express their view of 'revolutionary socialist' groups and 'British nationalist' groups on a five-point scale running from 'very positive' to 'very negative', the majority response in each case was 'very negative', while the second most popular response was either 'somewhat negative' or 'neither positive nor negative', and the third most popular was 'don't know'. Only 9-10% of respondents stated that they had a positive view of such groups, with a mere 2% of the sample choosing 'very

Table 6: Left-right political identity (nationally-representative omnibus sample)

Self-placement on left-right scale	Percentage	*N*
Very left-wing	3	*121*
Fairly left-wing	13	*520*
Slightly left-of-centre	15	*586*
Centre	18	*700*
Slightly right-of-centre	14	*534*
Fairly right-wing	9	*348*
Very right-wing	2	*60*
None	27	*954*
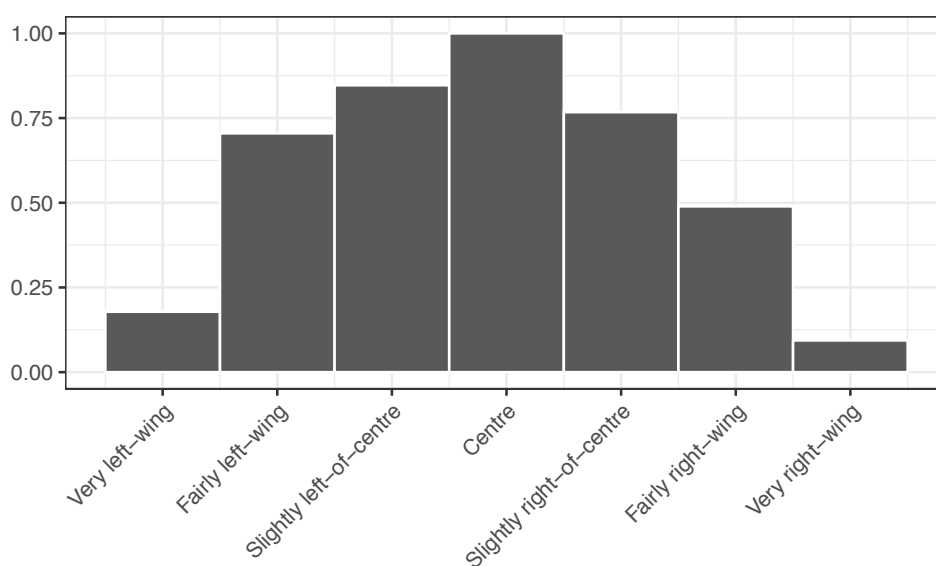
Figure 4: Left-right political identity (nationally-representative omnibus sample)

positive' for either. These findings would suggest that 'revolutionary socialist' groups are less unpopular than 'British nationalist' groups, but that neither of the two would be likely to win mass support without rebranding.

Given the centrality of anti-capitalism to far-left ideology, we also asked about 'private sector companies' (24-25 April wave) and 'profit-making companies' (28-29 April wave); see table 8 and figure 6. In each case, the most common response was 'neither positive nor negative', followed by 'somewhat positive'. 'Very negative' was the least common, falling not only below 'very positive' but also below 'don't know'. There is thus little evidence for widespread rejection of those who operate within the market economy – despite some evidence that the word 'socialism' is now regarded slightly more positively than the word 'capitalism' in the UK (Dahlgreen 2016; see also section 5.2, below).

View	'Revolutionary socialist' groups		'British nationalist' groups	
	Percentage	*N*	Percentage	*N*
Very positive	2	*61*	2	*71*
Somewhat positive	8	*321*	7	*239*
Neither positive nor negative	21	*804*	17	*643*
Somewhat negative	20	*799*	17	*655*
Very negative	32	*1250*	43	*1731*
Don't know	17	*588*	14	*484*
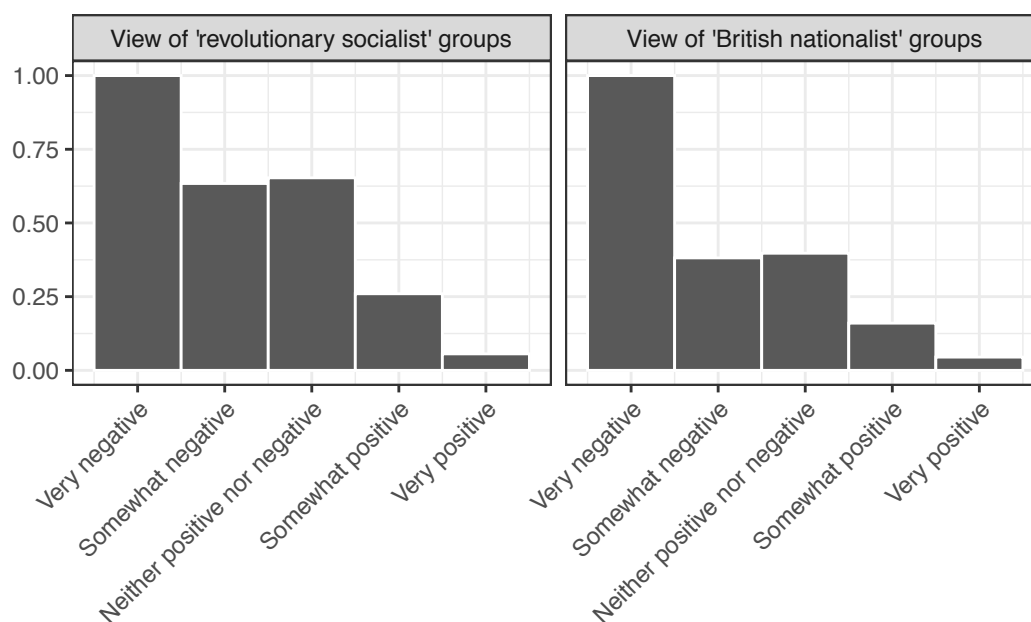
Figure 5: Views of 'revolutionary socialist' and 'British nationalist' groups (nationally-representative omnibus sample)

The typical British adult would thus appear to feel *positive or indifferent* towards private enterprise, to feel *very negative* towards both the 'revolutionary socialist' far left and the 'British nationalist' far right, and to be *very unlikely* to see him- or herself either as 'very left-wing' or as 'very right-wing'. On this level, the organisational scope for anything readily identifiable as 'far-left extremism' would appear to be somewhat limited. Our primary focus, however, is not on the direct influence of the sectarian far left, but on the influence of the ideology it promotes.

Table 8: Views of 'private sector' and 'profit-making' companies (nationally-representative omnibus sample)

View	'Private sector' companies		'Profit-making' companies	
	Percentage	*N*	Percentage	*N*
Very positive	7	*139*	9	*191*
Somewhat positive	26	*449*	27	*572*
Neither positive nor negative	34	*594*	35	*749*
Somewhat negative	15	*266*	14	*282*
Very negative	5	*81*	6	*124*
Don't know	13	*201*	9	*175*
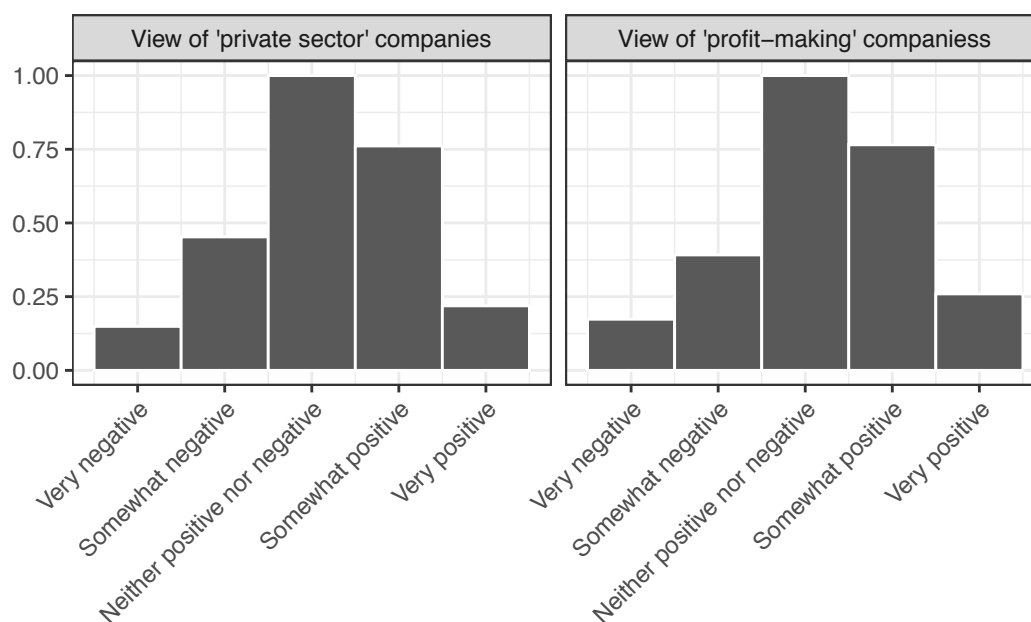
Figure 6: Views of 'private sector' and 'profit-making' companies (nationally-representative omnibus sample)

5. Revolutionary workerism and sympathy for violent extremism across both samples

5.1 Reliability of measures and distribution of scores

Tables 9 and 10 present standard measures of internal reliability, as well as mean values and standard deviations, for the revolutionary workerist and modified SyFoR inventories. Both on Cronbach's alpha and Guttman's lambda 6, the two instruments achieved a satisfactory level of internal reliability in both samples. Figure 7 shows the distributions of overall scores for revolutionary workerism and sympathy for violent extremism for each sample.

Table 9: Revolutionary workerism and sympathy for violent extremism ('very left-wing' sample)

Measure	α	λ_6	M	SD
Revolutionary workerism	0.80	0.77	4.03	0.72
SyFoR	0.87	0.88	1.60	0.78

Table 10: Revolutionary workerism and sympathy for violent extremism (nationally-representative omnibus sample)

Measure	α	λ_6	M	SD
Revolutionary workerism	0.86	0.83	3.02	0.95
SyFoR	0.84	0.83	1.25	0.53
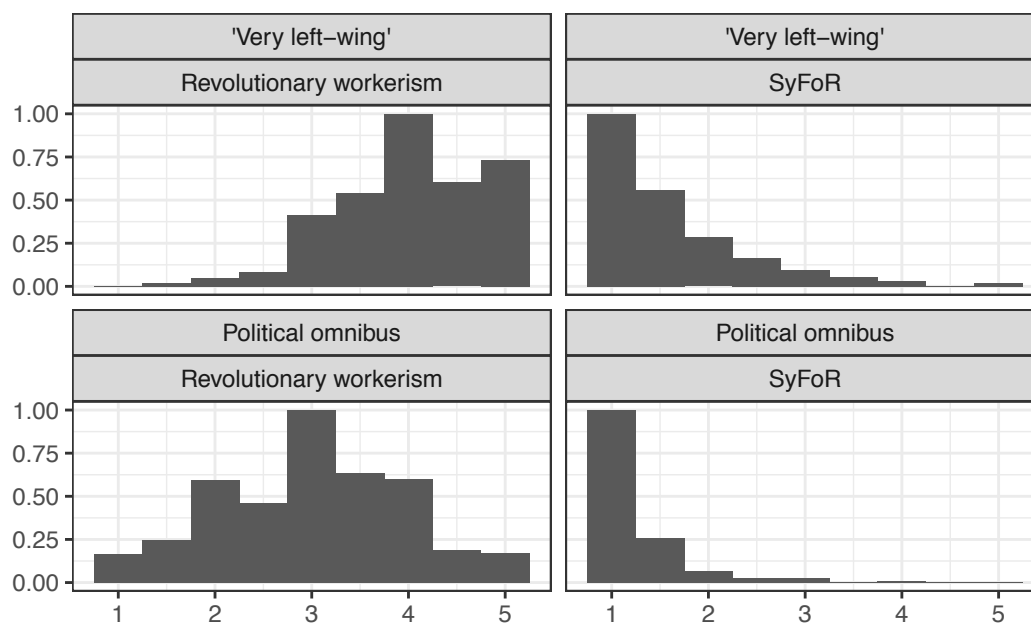
Figure 7: Revolutionary workerism and sympathy for violent extremism by sample

5.2 Levels of revolutionary workerism

In the 'very left-wing' sample, the mean revolutionary workerism score corresponded to overall agreement with the five items, while the mean revolutionary workerism score in the political omnibus sample corresponded to the mid-point between agreement and disagreement. A weighted, two-tailed Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test shows the finding of greater revolutionary workerism in the 'very left-wing' sample to be very highly statistically significant ($U = 34.27$, $DF = 4755$, $p < 0.001$).

Interestingly, there was no correlation between revolutionary workerism and positivity towards British nationalist groups within the nationally-representative political omnibus sample ($r_s = -0.03$, $DF = 3689$, $p = 0.068$). This is consistent with the view that, while those in strong agreement with the ideas of the sectarian far left may have distinctive *reasons for rejecting* the organised far right (see section 1.2), they are no more likely reject it than most other people, because rejection of the organised far right is simply normal in contemporary Britain (see sections 3.1 and 4.2).

On the other hand, there was a positive correlation between revolutionary workerism and positivity towards revolutionary socialist groups within the omnibus sample ($r_s = 0.32$, $DF = 3689$, $p < 0.001$). However, while 69% of members of that sample who expressed an opinion took a 'somewhat negative' or 'very negative' view of revolutionary socialist groups, just 41% were in an overall position of disagreement with all five items in the revolutionary workerist inventory (i.e. had a revolutionary workerism score of less than 3.00). This suggests that the general British population is rather more open to the ideology which the sectarian far left disseminates than it is to the sectarian far left itself.

To give an idea of what that this openness means in practice, 23% of members of the nationally-representative political omnibus sample agreed with the statement 'Capitalism is essentially bad and must be destroyed', while 45% agreed that 'The wealthy make life worse for the rest of us'. While that is much lower than the 67% and 81% of members of the 'very left-wing' sample who agreed with the same statements (respectively), it remains a remarkably high level of agreement for a clear statement of revolutionary anti-capitalism and a conspiratorial view of the world in which social problems are blamed on a wealthy minority.

5.3 Levels of sympathy for violent extremism

The mean SyFoR score for both samples corresponds to condemnation of violent extremism. However, the mean score for the political omnibus sample was closer to strong condemnation than to condemnation 'to some extent', while the mean score for the 'very left-wing' sample was closer to condemnation 'to some extent' than to strong condemnation. A weighted, two-tailed Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test shows the finding of greater sympathy for violent extremism in the 'very left-wing' sample to be very highly statistically significant ($U = 15.13$, $DF = 4702$, $p < 0.001$).

The mean differences between the samples may seem slight, but they reflect the fact that the 'very left-wing' sample contained a much larger minority of respondents who were sympathetic to violent extremism. Table 11 shows the proportion of members of each sample who did and did not express sympathy with at least one form of violent extremism. Comparison of the two samples suggests that people who identify as 'very left-wing' are several times more likely to sympathise with violent extremism than members of the

population as a whole. This finding is very highly statistically significant ($X^2 = 331.45$, $DF = 1$, $p < 0.001$).[7]

To get an idea of what this means in practice, we can again look at specific items. 6% of members of the nationally-representative omnibus sample sympathised with the most popular modified SyFoR item, i.e. 'street violence against anti-democratic groups', while just 3% sympathised with 'violence as part of political protests', and the remaining items received sympathy from 1-3% of the sample. But 24% of members of the 'very left-wing' sample sympathised with 'street violence against anti-democratic groups', while 18% sympathised with 'violence as part of political protests', and the remaining items received sympathy from 4-6% of the sample.

Although such crude comparisons certainly indicate a greater likelihood of finding someone who sympathises with violent extremism among the self-consciously 'very left-wing' than among the general population, they *also* indicate that the great majority of individuals who identify as 'very left-wing' *do not* sympathise with violent extremism. However, our purpose in this study was not to compare those who do and those who do not identify as 'very left-wing', but to investigate the relationship of aspects of sectarian far-left ideology to sympathy for violent extremism. We suggest that understanding this relationship may help to clarify why there are individuals who do and do not sympathise with violent extremism to be found both among those who understand their politics to be 'very left-wing' and among those who do not understand their politics in such a way.

Table 11: Comparison of samples by individuals expressing sympathy with at least one form of violent extremism

	Sample: Political omnibus		**Sample: 'Very left-wing'**	
	Percentage	*N*	Percentage	*N*
Sympathies: 0	91	*3524*	71	*767*
Sympathies: 1+	9	*299*	29	*307*

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[7] Chi-square test with unweighted counts. Note that 'very left-wing' members of the political omnibus sample were *not* excluded from the count. Thus, this is not a comparison between those who do and those who do not identify as 'very left-wing', but a comparison between those who identify as 'very left-wing' and the general population (which itself includes, as we saw in section 4.2, a very small proportion of individuals who identify as 'very left-wing').

6. Sympathy for violent extremism by geopolitical outlook

As we have seen, agreement with the piloted statements designed to express a strong form of 'anti-imperialist' ideology were not strongly correlated with items representing other aspects of far-left ideology, for which reason they were not included in the revolutionary workerist inventory. However, adherence to something resembling an 'anti-imperialist' worldview was assessed with a less direct question: 'Which, if any, of the following countries represent the greatest threat to world peace?' Presented in a random order, those countries were the US, the UK, Israel, North Korea, China, Russia, and Iran, and respondents could choose up to three. As explained in section 1.2, the first three of these countries, but not the remaining four, are seen as 'imperialist' by most of the sectarian far left, and accordingly targeted by Britain's 'anti-war' movement, which only opposes military action when carried out by those states that it recognises as great capitalist powers. We expected that levels of sympathy for violent extremism would be higher among those who chose countries that most of the sectarian far left would categorise as 'imperialist' than among those who did not.

As table 12 shows, the characteristically 'anti-imperialist' categorisation of the US as a threat to world peace was adopted by three in every four members of the 'very left-wing' sample. Nearly one in three chose Israel, the third most popular choice. Interestingly, Russia was the second most popular choice after the US, selected by nearly half of respondents, which indicates that the self-identified 'very left-wing' may include a substantial proportion of individuals whose geopolitical views are not in alignment with the 'anti-imperialism' of most sectarian far-left groups.[8] By contrast, table 13 shows that, in the nationally-representative political omnibus sample, the US was only the third most popular choice, falling below Russia and North Korea, while the bottom two choices were not the UK followed by Iran but Israel followed by the UK. This suggests that the 'anti-imperialist' worldview discussed above is far less common among the general population than it is among the self-described 'very left-wing'.

Tables 12 and 13 also show the results of a series of weighted, two-tailed Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests comparing levels of sympathy for violent extremism among those who do and those who do not choose each country as a 'greatest threat to world peace'. In the 'very left-wing' sample, choosing Israel, the US, the UK, or (unexpectedly) China was associated with greater sympathy for violent extremism (statistically significant for China and the UK; very highly statistically significant for Israel and the US), while the choice of North Korea was associated with lesser sympathy for violent extremism (very highly statistically significant). Choosing Russia or Iran was associated with lesser sympathy for violent extremism, but this was not statistically significant. With regard to this sample, hypothesis 1a was therefore fully supported, while hypothesis 1b was supported in relation to North Korea only.

In the nationally-representative political omnibus sample, the choice of the UK or the US as a threat to world peace was again associated with greater sympathy for violent extremism (very highly statistically significant), while the choice of Russia, North Korea, or Iran was associated with lesser sympathy for violent extremism (highly statistically significant for Russia; very highly significant for North Korea and Iran). The choices of Israel and China were associated with higher and lower sympathy (respectively), but this was not statistically significant. With regard to this sample, hypothesis 1a was therefore supported with regard to the UK and the US (but not Israel), while hypothesis 1b was supported with regard to Russia, North Korea, and Iran (but not China).

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[8] In this connection, it may be worth recalling the high proportion of Remain voters noted in section 4.1.

Table 12: Countries regarded as 'greatest threat to world peace' ('very left-wing' sample)

				SyFoR	
Greatest threat	*N*	**Percentage**	**MRS**	*U*	*p*
The US	*802*	75	+0.08	3.51	< 0.001
Russia	*515*	48	-0.03	-1.51	0.130
Israel	*352*	32	+0.07	3.35	< 0.001
North Korea	*314*	29	-0.11	-5.70	< 0.001
China	*137*	13	+0.06	2.10	0.036
The UK	*109*	10	+0.07	2.10	0.036
Iran	*75*	7	-0.07	-1.51	0.130
None of these	*22*	2	+0.02	0.31	0.759

Degrees of freedom: 1048

Table 13: Countries regarded as 'greatest threat to world peace' (nationally-representative omnibus sample)

				SyFoR	
Greatest threat	*N*	**Percentage**	**MRS**	*U*	*p*
Russia	*1998*	51	-0.03	-2.68	0.007
North Korea	*1642*	42	-0.04	-3.79	< 0.001
The US	*1226*	32	+0.04	3.58	< 0.001
Iran	*940*	25	-0.04	-4.31	< 0.001
China	*757*	20	-0.02	-1.85	0.065
Israel	*495*	13	+0.01	1.02	0.309
The UK	*64*	2	+0.23	4.79	< 0.001
None of these	*115*	3	+0.06	1.69	0.090

Degrees of freedom: 3652

7. Sympathy for violent extremism by revolutionary workerism

In order to test hypothesis 2, the two samples were combined together, and logistic regression was used to estimate the probability that an individual will sympathise with at least one form of violent extremism, given that individual's level of agreement with the items in the revolutionary workerist inventory. We found an individual's agreement with revolutionary workerist ideas to provide a strong and highly statistically significant indicator of the likelihood that he or she will sympathise with one or more forms of violent extremism, even after demographic controls. Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 14 presents a percentage breakdown by gender, mean age, and mean level of revolutionary workerism for individuals who do and do not sympathise with at least one of the forms of violent extremism in the SyFoR inventory. Table 15 presents the same information for SyFoR items 3-5 only, these being the most obviously dangerous forms of violent extremism of the six: namely, actual rather than threatened terrorist actions, organisation of 'radical terrorist groups', and 'using bombs to fight injustice'.

Tables 16 and 17 present the coefficients for a total of four binomial logistic regression models, with table 16 modelling the probability of sympathy with any SyFoR item and table 17 modelling the probability of sympathy with any of SyFoR items 3-5 only. Each table presents the coefficients for two models, the first with radical workerism as the sole predictor, and the second with age and gender as demographic controls. In order to facilitate comparison, age was standardised to the range 1-5, with 1 corresponding to the age of the youngest members of the two samples and 5 corresponding to the age of the oldest members of the two samples. All of these predictors were found to be very highly statistically significant with regard to both sets of SyFoR items, with radical workerism increasing the probability that an individual will sympathise with violent extremism, and age and female gender reducing it.

Table 14: Comparison of sympathisers and non-sympathisers, SyFoR 1-6

		Gender (%)		Age		Rev. workerism	
Sympathies	*N*	**Female**	**Male**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
0	*4291*	54	46	47.49	17.26	3.14	0.97
1+	*606*	34	66	39.10	16.00	3.90	0.93

Table 15: Comparison of sympathisers and non-sympathisers, SyFoR 3-5

		Gender (%)		Age		Rev. workerism	
Sympathies	*N*	**Female**	**Male**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
0	*4712*	53	47	46.81	17.28	3.22	0.99
1+	*185*	32	68	36.95	15.66	3.80	0.97

If we consider levels of revolutionary workerism only and ignore controls, then we would estimate that an individual at the lowest level of revolutionary workerism would have about a 2% chance of sympathising with any form of violent extremism and about a 1% chance of sympathising with one or more of the most obviously dangerous forms of violent extremism, but that these would rise to about 36% and about 11% respectively for an individual at the highest level of revolutionary workerism.

However, the demographic controls make a substantial difference to an individual's estimated chances of sympathising. For example, a woman in her nineties is estimated to have only a 9% chance of sympathising with one or more of SyFoR 1-6 and a 1% chance of sympathising with one or more of SyFoR 3-5 even at the highest level of revolutionary workerism, while a man of 18 at the same level of revolutionary workerism is estimated to have a 56% chance of sympathising with one or more of SyFoR 1-6 and a 22% chance of sympathising with one or more of SyFoR 3-5. At the lowest level of revolutionary workerism, a man of that age is estimated to have only a 5% chance of sympathising with one of the forms of violent extremism covered by SyFoR 1-6 and a 4% chance of sympathising with one of those covered by SyFoR 3-5, while a woman in her nineties is estimated to have virtually no chance of sympathising with any form of violent extremism whatsoever.

Table 16: Regression coefficients, SyFoR 1-6

	Model I				**Model II**			
	Estimate	**SE**	*t*	*p*	**Estimate**	**SE**	*t*	*p*
(Intercept)	-5.01	0.21	-23.86	< 0.001	-3.25	0.26	-12.46	< 0.001
Rev. workerism	0.89	0.05	16.50	< 0.001	0.78	0.05	14.63	< 0.001
Age					-0.42	0.05	-7.60	< 0.001
Gender: Female					-0.92	0.09	-9.70	< 0.001

Residual degrees of freedom (model I): 4755; Residual degrees of freedom (model II): 4753

Table 17: Regression coefficients, SyFoR 3-5

	Model I				**Model II**			
	Estimate	**SE**	*t*	*p*	**Estimate**	**SE**	*t*	*p*
(Intercept)	-5.36	0.32	-16.99	< 0.001	-3.14	0.40	-7.87	< 0.001
Rev. workerism	0.65	0.08	7.97	< 0.001	0.49	0.08	6.14	< 0.001
Age					-0.58	0.09	-6.36	< 0.001
Gender: Female					-0.90	0.15	-5.85	< 0.001

Residual degrees of freedom (model I): 4755; Residual degrees of freedom (model II): 4753

Figure 8 visualises the relationship between revolutionary workerism and sympathy for violent extremism on the basis of Model I for SyFoR 1-6 and Model I for SyFoR 3-5 (i.e. without controls). The black line shows the estimated chance of sympathising with at least one form of violent extremism and the grey ribbon shows the 95% confidence interval for the estimate, while the red bubbles show the actual rate of sympathy for members of the sample at each level of revolutionary workerism (rounded to the nearest 0.25). As the bubbles show, the estimated percentage chances are very close to the actual percentage frequencies at which individuals across the scale of revolutionary workerism were observed to sympathise with violent extremism.
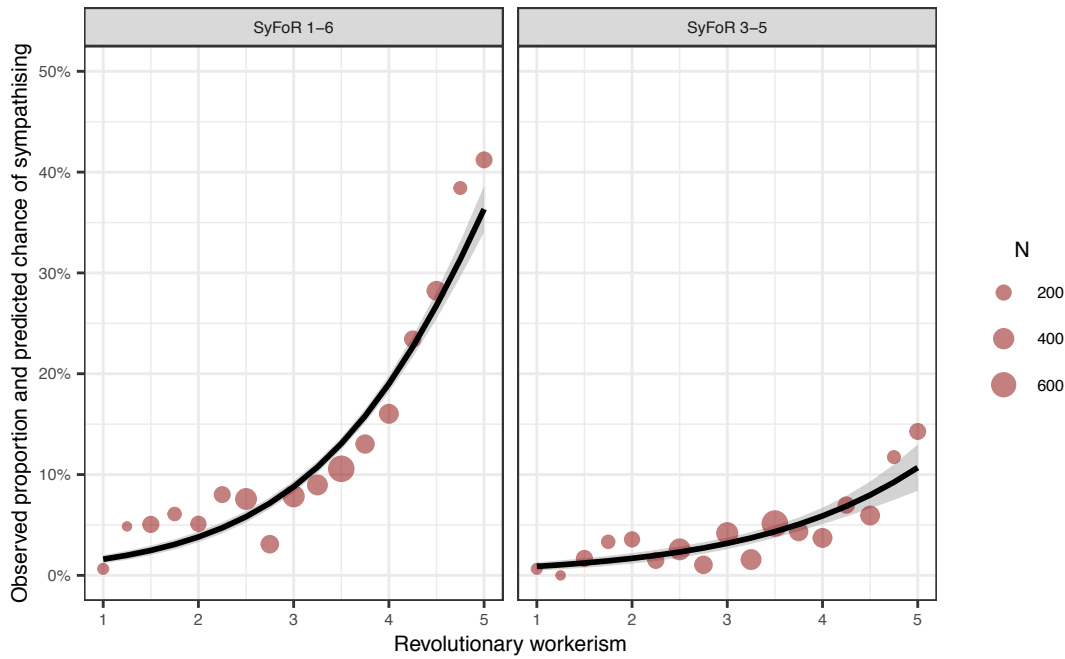

Figure 8: Percentage chance of sympathising and observed proportion of sympathisers by level of revolutionary workerism

8. Conclusion

This is a first set of summary findings from a new and unique dataset. We provide estimates of levels of agreement with revolutionary workerist principles, adoption of a geopolitical outlook resembling the 'anti-imperialism' of the sectarian far left, and sympathy for violent extremism both among those self-identifying as 'very left-wing' and among the wider British population. More importantly, we also provide estimates of the relationships between sympathy for violent extremism and the two aforementioned ideological tendencies.

Our findings suggest that although very few British adults identify as 'very left-wing' or have a 'very positive' view of 'revolutionary socialist groups', there are much larger numbers who are in a position of agreement with regard to salient components of the revolutionary workerist ideology expressed in the publications of the sectarian far left. Moreover, our findings suggest that there is a positive relationship between sympathy for violent extremism and both revolutionary workerism and an 'anti-imperialist' geopolitical outlook.

The probability of sympathising with at least one form of violent extremism was found to increase with level of agreement with revolutionary workerist ideology. It was also found to decrease with age, and to be higher among males than among females, such that young males in strong agreement with revolutionary workerism are estimated to be at a particularly high risk of sympathising. Moreover, with the exception of the positive finding with regard to China among the 'very left-wing' (which was at the lowest level of statistical significance), our findings were consistent with the expectation that those with a geopolitical outlook resembling the sectarian far-left ideology of 'anti-imperialism' would be more sympathetic to violent extremism than those with a geopolitical outlook that does not.

While political violence is now relatively rare in Britain, our findings suggest that opportunities may exist for political entrepreneurs to radicalise those open to revolutionary workerism and 'anti-imperialism'. We observe that capitalising on such opportunities would require strategies to recruit outside the ecological niche currently occupied by sectarian far-left groups, although we note that online media can potentially provide a dissemination and recruitment infrastructure that bypasses traditional channels (see Gerbaudo 2018 on populist exploitation of this approach). Further research will be necessary to establish the role of the Internet in the dissemination of the ideologies studied here. But given the possibilities that now exist for political mobilisation without the need for a conventional party structure, we suggest that the generally negative public image of the organised radical left may in the long term prove to be a lesser drag on the political potential of radical left-wing ideas than the British public's clear lack of antipathy towards private enterprise.

To reiterate, we see no evidence that sectarian groups on the British far left currently have the capacity or the inclination for direct organisational involvement in terror activities of any sort. But even without the connection to violent extremism, the revolutionary workerist ideology that such groups promote may from a certain point of view be considered extremist in and of itself, as it has the clear potential to damage political trust and to discourage individuals from taking part in more effective modes of civic engagement. The implication of the five statements that make up the revolutionary workerist inventory is that civilisation as it now exists is so irredeemably corrupt that the most valuable and authentic form of engagement with it is to seek its destruction and replacement. This is an anti-civic ideology promoted by groups that are characterised by extreme scepticism towards electoral democracy and the rule of law, and that devote themselves to interfering in civil society organisations for the sake of utopian long-term goals that will never be achieved.

Moreover, while the effects of sectarian far-left group activity are likely to be mitigated by the unpopularity and small size of the groups themselves, we would caution against dismissing the possibility of increased prominence for individuals and organisations espousing similar ideologies when recent years have seen notable successes for political entrepreneurs mobilising support on the basis of ideas hitherto seen as the territory of the radical right (see Ford and Goodwin 2014). Electoral success for an equivalent movement on the left could have far-reaching consequences. It has been suggested that those with a psychological need for 'leaders who must be obeyed', 'enemies who must be ruined', and ' "party discipline" that must be followed' turned away from the political left in the late 20th century because they 'kn[e]w which way the wind [was] blowing' – i.e. because they recognised that there was no realistic chance of overthrowing the actually-existing social order (Altemeyer 1996, pp. 219-220 and 229). It is conceivable that a populist movement employing revolutionary workerist rhetoric might have the potential to reverse this hypothetical trend by providing authoritarians of that stripe with a left-wing outlet whose prospects appeared more plausibly encouraging than those of the current sectarian far left. Given the findings reported here, it seems plausible that such an eventuality might be accompanied by the mainstreaming of sympathy for certain forms of violent extremism.

The evidence of this study is that a relationship exists between sympathy for violent extremism and the ideas promulgated by the sectarian far left. Even without the direct promotion of violence, we suggest that beliefs of that nature could plausibly provide vulnerable individuals with a motivation to break the law, potentially putting themselves and others in danger. In that context, we note that the most lethal examples of recent terrorist actions from the far right have been perpetrated not by organised fascist groups but by 'lone wolf' attackers radicalised through exposure to ideologies circulating online (see Pantucci 2011 and Berntzen and Sandberg 2014 for analysis of the most intensively studied case). The findings of this study give no reason to assume that left-wing ideas would be incapable of playing an analogous role.

With the political landscape in a state of flux, it would be prudent to monitor for all developments carefully.

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