

The Far-Right and its uses of the Past

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Introduction

My research focused on far-right groups, such as UKIP, and how narratives, discourses and other symbols of the past are mobilised by the far-right to gain support and construct an identity. It is part of a larger, multi-national, interdisciplinary project involving historians, sociologists and critical theorists from countries such as Argentina. It is vital that academics consult and work with groups they are researching, when possible, and that we examine links to the past to ensure it is not repeated.

Teaching pack

Research assistant Poppy Lown and I co-wrote a teaching pack, which includes UKIP's rise, strategies of the far right and who is fighting the far right. We included a range of sources, such as articles, videos and podcasts so students can learn in different ways. The contemporary figures section is particularly important, to remind students that past ideology is prevalent today.



Conclusion

The far-right use nostalgia and links to the past to support their present demands, by attempting to replicate their perceived past successes and celebrate their historical heroes. Social media is a key channel for far-right recruiters and research is needed into the continually changing ways this is used. Knowledge exchange is crucial, so as not to exploit charities and organisations, and researchers can use their findings to help those on the ground working to fight the far-right threat.

I would like to thank the Laidlaw Foundation for this opportunity. My gratitude is extended to Cath Stinton, Vicky Bradbury, Erica Capecci, Claudia Wallner and Kazim Ukka for their insightful presentations and Nigel Bromage for his support. Huge thanks to my supervisor Dr. Anna Grimaldi for guiding me through this process.

Objectives

- To explore how symbols of the past are used to spread ideas
- To create a dialogue between researchers and civil society initiatives dealing with far right radicalism
- To discover how can research on the far-right's past support these initiatives and engage with the public

Symposium

The aim was to foster knowledge exchange. Attendees listened to the speakers and collaborated on group tasks. They designed data needed to be collected by their chosen charity, which gave an insight into what charities and organisations need and the perception of what they need. We discussed:

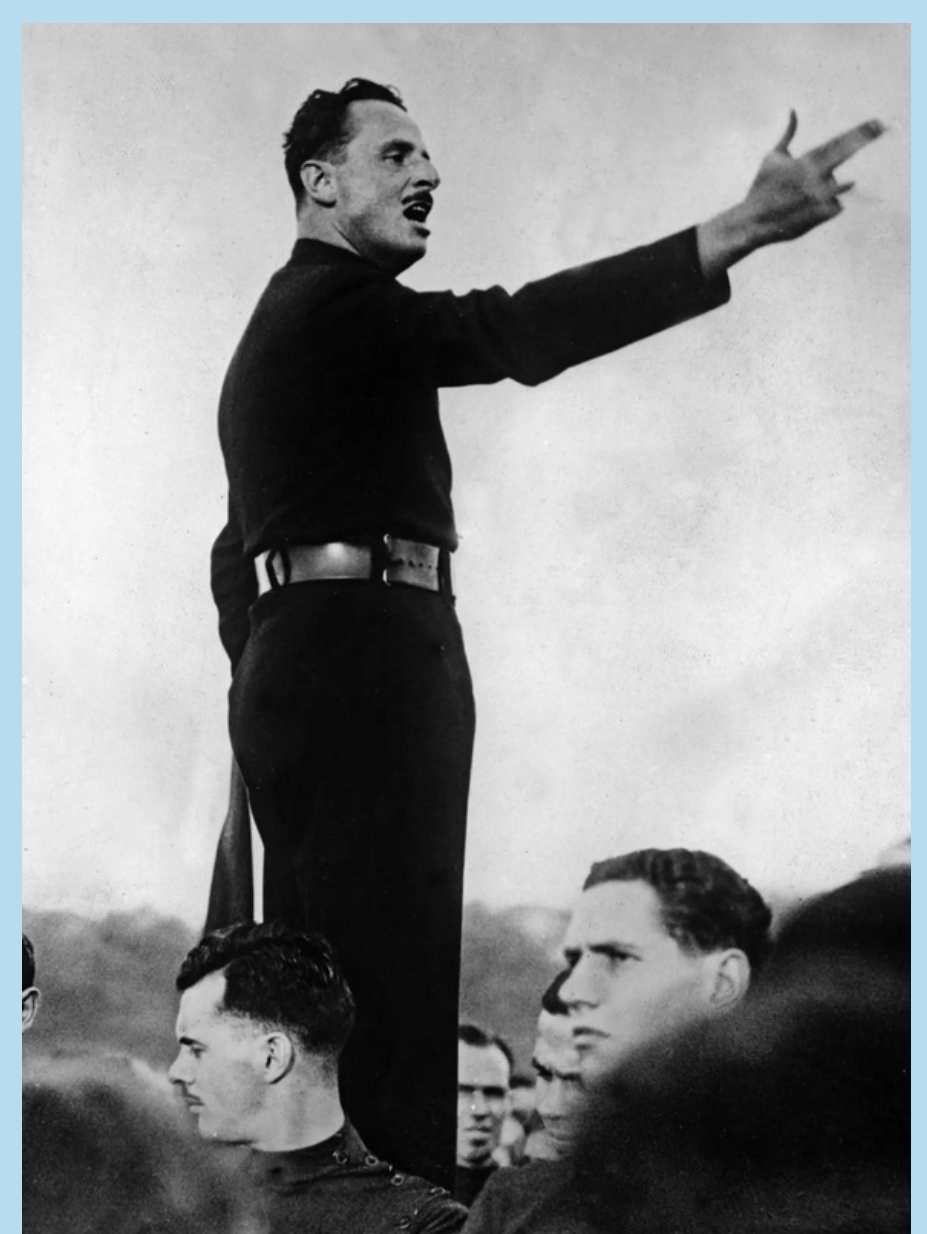
- Maintaining disengagement
- Consistent far-right fact checking on social media
- Identifying turning points by school year to target support
- Re-directing potential far-right supporters towards help
- Decoding language and symbols
- Research with empathy and without judgement.

Results

- Far-right groups have transnational links, to recruit and secure support
- Nostalgia and past heroes are called upon to recruit, but not historical female fascist leaders
- Policy intervention is needed, but it is difficult to influence with a far-right government in place
- It is hard to research those who have disengaged and ensure there is no danger to the individual. Care must be taken not to over-burden and over-traumatise them.

Methodology

For this project, I took a varied approach. On one hand, I analysed the contents of primary sources. I consolidated this research by organising a day-long symposium to facilitate debate between academic and non-academic stakeholders. I also carried my findings into the creation of a teaching pack, which allowed me to disseminate my work to fellow students.



Oswald Mosley (head of the British Union of Fascists 1932-40)



Nigel Farage (leader of UKIP 2006-2016)



A protest by far-right group Britain First