

Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat

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Extreme right-wing violence and terrorism are a growing threat to Western societies. This form of political violence is also quite elusive and differs from others (e.g. jihadist violence) in some key characteristics. Since the September 11 attacks, policy makers, law enforcement and intelligence agencies as well as researchers have focused most of their attention on Islamic extremist violence and terrorism. This has led to an imbalance in the understanding of other threats, especially from the far-right, and adequate ways to counter it. This paper, using Germany as a main case study, argues that far-right violence has a potential risk of being misunderstood and under-classified, thus creating the perception among victims of that violence that democratic countries “are blind on the right side”. This erosion of trust in the rule of law and the monopoly of force is one goal of extreme right-wing terrorists. Specific recommendations to improve countering the threat posed by the far-right are avoiding double standards in dealing with political violence at all costs, swift and efficient appropriate legal actions against extreme right perpetrators of violence, an increase in funding for research about right-wing terrorism, a possible refinement of the legal definition of “terrorism” and a discussion about its relationship with “hate crimes”, as well as wide scale support for countering violent extremism (CVE) and deradicalisation programs targeting the far-right.

Introduction

Extreme right-wing¹ violence and terrorism are an increasing threat to Western democracies it seems. But is this threat from the far-right “hyped” and in reality just a minor issue when compared to other forms of terrorism? This policy brief aims to use the developments of extreme right-wing violence and terrorism in Germany (with examples from other countries for illustration as well), which has a long history of violence from the far-right, as a case study. This is done to better understand the specific characteristics of this form of political violence, which turn it into a potentially elusive threat. Germany also provides numerous lessons learned about how to handle this threat, due to failed as well successful approaches to combatting violent right-wing extremism that have been implemented there.

To underline that developments in right-wing extremism are grounds for concern in many Western states, the case study on Germany is preceded by a more general discussion of the threat. Just in the last months, media reporting across Europe and the North America provided ample indications of a potential rise of extreme right-wing violence. In Spain, a neo-fascist plotted the assassination of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and was arrested on November 8, 2018. The suspect reportedly wanted to take revenge for Mr. Sánchez's plans to exhume the remains of the right-wing dictator Francisco Franco.² Only two days earlier, on November 6, six right-wing extremists were arrested in France for plotting to attack and kill President Emmanuel Macron.³ Four days before, on November 2, a potential right-wing terrorist plot by two suspects was discovered in London.⁴ In the United States of America, the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue shooting on October 27, 2018 left eleven people dead and seven others wounded. It was carried out by an outspoken right-wing extremist, and classified as the deadliest act of anti-Semitic violence in U.S. history.⁵

Looking back further, it becomes apparent that right-wing extremists have perpetrated numerous significant terrorist attacks in Western countries. In Germany, the so called National Socialist Underground (NSU) cell assassinated 10 victims and attempted to kill 43 additional persons, conducting three bomb attacks and 15 armed robberies over a course of seven years between 2000 and 2007. It took years for the German authorities to even recognise (or acknowledge) that these violent incidents constituted a campaign of terrorist violence, and the events created one of the most significant crises of German law enforcement and intelligence agencies since the Second World War. Indeed, the NSU and its actions were characterised as “our September 11” by the German Federal Prosecutor General.⁶ In Norway, the combined bomb attack and shooting spree of right-

¹ This policy brief understands the extreme right and far right (used interchangeably) to be an overlapping web of groups and ideologies based on racially, ethnically or culturally defined superiority of one group and inferiority of all others (e.g. white supremacy, neo-Nazism, fascism).

² “Spain Sánchez ‘attack plot’: Police arrest gun suspect,” *BBC News*, November 8, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46138158> (accessed November 25, 2018).

³ Emmanuel Jarry, “France arrests six over plot to attack Macron: official,” *Reuters*, November 6, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-security/france-arrests-six-over-plot-to-attack-macron-official-idUSKCN1NB1KX> (accessed November 25, 2018).

⁴ Vikram Dodd, “Two men arrested in London on suspicion of far right terrorism plot,” *The Guardian*, November 2, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/02/two-men-arrested-london-on-suspicion-of-plotting-terror-attacks?CMP=share_btn_tw (accessed November 25, 2018).

⁵ Katie Zezima and Wesley Lowery, “Suspected synagogue shooter appears to have railed against Jews, refugees online,” *Washington Post*, October 27, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/suspected-synagogue-shooter-appears-to-have-railed-against-jews-refugees-online/2018/10/27/e99dd282-da18-11e8-a10f-b51546b10756_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.572df1ab2e9c (accessed November 25, 2018).

⁶ “Die NSU-Morde sind unser 11. September,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 25, 2012, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/generalbundesanwalt-harald-range-die-nsu-morde-sind-unser-11-september-11696086.html> (accessed December 13, 2018).

wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik on July 22, 2011, left 77 victims dead. In the United States of America, the white supremacist Dylann Roof shot and killed nine victims in the Charleston Church attack on June 17, 2015. This list, unfortunately, goes on.⁷

These highlighted attacks, which received considerable public attention, are infamous examples of a potential new wave of right-wing violence and terrorism. The Center for International and Strategic Studies (CSIS) found that the number of terrorist attacks by far-right perpetrators doubled between 2016 and 2017 in the United States and jumped 43% in Europe in that same timeframe.⁸ Supporting this notion, the Global Terrorism Index⁹ found that right-wing groups and individuals killed 66 people between 2013 and 2017, with 17 deaths and 47 of those attacks occurring in 2017.¹⁰ In the United States, this trend goes back several years, as data collected by the Washington Post showed “a decades-long drop-off in violence by left-wing groups, [while] violence by white supremacists and other far-right attackers has been on the rise since Barack Obama’s presidency — and has surged since President Trump took office”.¹¹

Broken down by perpetrators, the source of the main threat in the U.S. appears clear: “Of 263 incidents of domestic terrorism between 2010 and the end of 2017, a third — 92 — were committed by right-wing attackers (...). Another third was committed by attackers whose motives were either unknown or not clearly political. Islamist terrorists committed 38 attacks. And left-wing attackers were responsible for 34 attacks — about 13 percent.”¹² Furthermore, right-wing extremists have also shown a long-term interest in acquiring Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) weapons, which resulted in a number of CBRN far-right terrorist plots in Western countries (mostly in the U.S.), which luckily so far did not manage to come to fruition.¹³ Another development is the phenomenon of individuals participating in extreme right-wing terrorist plots without previous contacts to the extremist environment, something sometimes described as “Hive Terrorism”.¹⁴ All of the above appears to indicate a significant terrorist threat posed by extreme right-wing activists and groups.

On the other side, some statistics and research points to another direction. The Europol Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) for 2017, for example, attributes only 3 percent of failed, foiled or completed terrorist attacks to the extreme right (compared to 67 percent by separatists, 16 percent by jihadists and 12 percent by left-wing

⁷ For collections and analyses of extreme right-wing attacks in the United States and Europe, see for example the work of Erin Miller at The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) (e.g. <https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/ideological-motivations-terrorism-united-states-1970-2016>, accessed January 5, 2019) or Jacob Aasland Ravndal’s RTV dataset (e.g. <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/508/1008>, accessed January 5, 2019).

⁸ See Seth G. Jones, “The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States,” *CSIS Briefs*, November 7, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-far-right-extremism-united-states> (accessed November 26, 2018).

⁹ It must be stated, that the index is far from perfect, as for example the German NSU killings are not included.

¹⁰ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the impact of terrorism*, Sydney, November 2018, p. 3, <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf> (accessed December 5, 2018).

¹¹ Wesley Lowery, Kimberly Kindy and Andrew Ba Tran, “In the United States, right-wing violence is on the rise,” *Washington Post*, November 25, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/in-the-united-states-right-wing-violence-is-on-the-rise/2018/11/25/61f7f24a-deb4-11e8-85df-7a6b4d25cfbb_story.html?utm_term=.b469f49f0cfc (accessed November 27, 2018).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Daniel Koehler and Peter Popella, “Mapping Far-right Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Terrorism Efforts in the West: Characteristics of Plots and Perpetrators for Future Threat Assessment,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (August 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1500365>.

¹⁴ Daniel Koehler, “Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: What are the Contextual Factors behind ‘Hive Terrorism’?” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 6 (December 2018): 72-88.

extremists).¹⁵ Even though the number of arrests related to right-wing extremist terrorism within the European Union almost doubled to 20 in 2017 from 12 in 2016, it pales in comparison to other forms of political violence, at least in terms of numbers (e.g. 705 jihadists in 2017).¹⁶

But while the total numbers might be relatively small in the European context, the upward trend does seem to be continuing. In the United Kingdom, for example, the number of far-right terrorist arrests more than tripled from 2017 to 2018,¹⁷ but jihadists still constituted the largest share of the overall number of terrorism-related arrests.¹⁸ Based on these accounts, terrorism from the extreme right is not the most serious threat, at least within the European Union. This notion is supported by research by Ravndal, who found a general decline of extreme right-wing incidents resulting in the death of one or more victims since at least 2000 in Western Europe.¹⁹

Looking at Germany as a Case Study

A first problem with adequately assessing the threat posed by the far-right, is acquiring usable statistics. Ravndal's ground-breaking study, for example, focused on extreme right-wing killing incidents in Western Europe.²⁰ Looking at this metric in Germany already lays bare the issue: while the official count by the German Federal Criminal Police (Bundeskriminalamt – BKA) currently lists 83 victims killed by extreme right-wing violence since 1990, non-governmental organisations estimate the death toll of far-right killings at 169 for the same time frame.²¹ This difference in quite basic accounting indicates how difficult it is to get a balanced grasp of the threat level posed by the extreme right.

Looking at other types of extreme right-wing violence such as explosives attacks or arson, crimes usually but not always (legally) framed as terrorism, statistics from Germany indicate a surge during the so-called “refugee crisis” between 2015 and 2016.²² Indeed, attacks by extreme right-wing activists using explosives tripled between 2014 and 2015 (Figure 1), although they decreased again from 2016 onwards.

¹⁵ EUROPOL, *European Union Terrorism Trend and Situation Report*, The Hague, 2018, p. 9, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2018-tesat-2018> (accessed December 13, 2018).

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 55.

¹⁷ It must be noted that the majority of these arrests are for possessing and distribution of terrorist related propaganda and not necessarily for plotting a terror attack.

¹⁸ Lizzie Dearden, “Number of far-right terrorists in UK prisons triples as arrests hit new record,” *Independent*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/uk-prison-far-right-arrests-terrorists-conviction-national-action-a8398146.html> (accessed December 5, 2018).

¹⁹ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV Dataset,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 3 (June 2016): 2-15.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Offenbar mehr Opfer rechter Gewalt,” *Tagesschau*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/rechte-gewalt-101.html> (accessed December 2, 2018).

²² The term “refugee crisis” was widely used to denote the effects of over 1 million refugees applying for asylum in Germany in the years 2015 and 2016, as part of a European wide struggle with significantly increased refugee numbers as a result of the civil wars in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Africa.

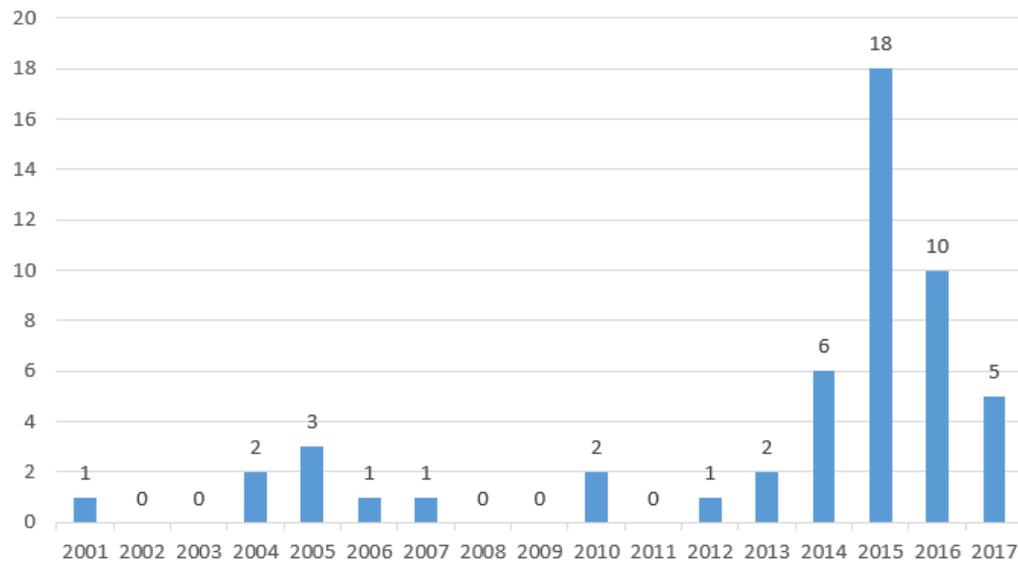


Figure 1: Extreme right-wing explosive attacks, 2001-2017²³

Arson attacks, another form of severe violence with the potential to create terrorism-related psychological effects, also increased significantly in 2015 and 2016. In 2016, the amount of attacks equal approximately 540 percent of the numbers in 2014. In contrast to explosive attacks, arson did not decrease until 2017 (Figure 2). Even though the majority of arson attacks were directed against uninhabited buildings designated as refugee housing units, incidents like the Salzhemmendorf attack on the night of August 27, 2015 became symptomatic for public perception of this form of extreme right-wing violence at that time. During that night, a building in the German town Salzhemmendorf housing about 40 refugees, was attacked with a Molotov cocktail by three perpetrators with clear extreme right-wing attitudes and motivation. Living in the part of the building that was attacked, were a mother and her three children (aged four to 11 years) from Zimbabwe. Luckily, the attack did not claim any victims. In the following trial starting February 10, 2016, the three main defendants (one woman and two men), of whom one was serving as a fire fighter and helped to put out the fire after the attack, confessed to the attack. Prosecutors were able to prove the “national socialist ideology” of the defendants, leading the court to convict all three of attempted murder, sentencing them to prison terms between four and a half and eight years.²⁴

²³ Source: cumulated numbers from annual intelligence reports (Verfassungsschutzberichte) from the German domestic intelligence agency. For the most recent version covering 2017, see: <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2017.pdf> (accessed January 11, 2019).

²⁴ “Brandanschlag in Salzhemmendorf: Acht Jahre Haft für Haupttäter,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 17, 2016, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/urteil-in-hannover-brandanschlag-in-salzhemmendorf-acht-jahre-haft-fuer-haupttaeter-1.2911626> (accessed January 11, 2019).

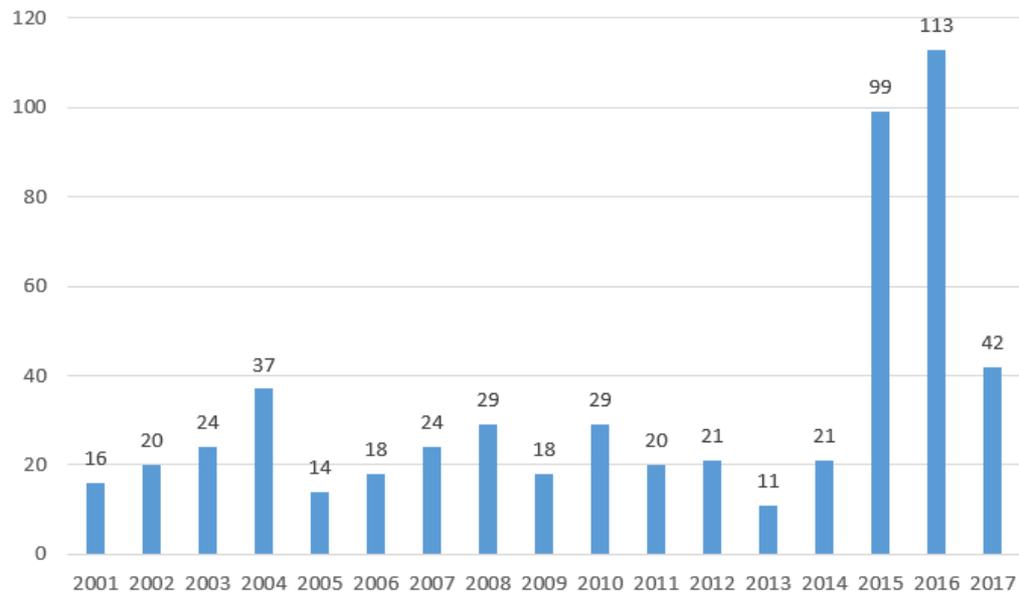


Figure 2: Extreme right-wing arson attacks, 2001-2017²⁵

So, the significant increase in refugees coming to Germany between 2015 and 2016 coincided with an equally significant uptick in extreme right-wing violence and, using the attack forms of arson and explosives as proxy indicator, arguably much of this deserves to be labelled as terrorism. In a following step, it is necessary to assess how these severe acts of ideologically motivated crimes have led to relevant terrorism prosecutions by the German authorities, especially by the German Federal Prosecutor General (Generalbundesanwalt GBA).

The numbers for initial investigations (Ermittlungsverfahren), charges, verdicts and closings of proceedings without legal action regarding the paragraphs 129, 129a and 129b²⁶ of the German criminal code (i.e. forming of or membership in a criminal or terrorist organisation within and outside of Germany) have been regularly reported by the German Government in the parliament (Bundestag), responding to opposition party information requests. Figure 3 shows the development of the numbers for each factor over the last 16 years and it is clear that there has been an increase in terrorism investigations in parallel to the recent spike in extreme right-wing violence.

However, even if keeping in mind that one group could have been responsible for more than one arson or explosive attack, the number of new investigations still falls short of the overall level of severe violence (four and six new investigations in 2016 and 2017). It is also striking that the unusual spike of new investigations in 2012 (15) happened clearly before the so-called refugee crisis began and during a phase of comparatively little violent activity by the extreme right. This number was most likely a reaction to the NSU discovery in 2011, triggered by political and popular pressure. Just to give one comparative statistic: the number of the same type of new investigations by the same prosecutor against non-German citizens for jihadist terrorism in 2017 alone was 952 (with 460 closed).²⁷

²⁵ Source: cumulated numbers from annual intelligence reports (Verfassungsschutzberichte). For the most recent version covering 2017, see: <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2017.pdf> (accessed January 11, 2019).

²⁶ Another relevant criminal code would be §89a (preparation of a severe crime threatening the state), which was not reported to the parliament.

²⁷ "Rekordzahl an Terrorverfahren," Heute im Bundestag, Deutscher Bundestag, January 5, 2018, https://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/2018_01/-/535514 (accessed December 7, 2018).

This is of course not to say that perpetrators of far-right violence are not prosecuted in Germany. They are typically prosecuted under various criminal statutes (e.g. causing an explosion, possession of illicit-arms, attempted murder) and in many cases receive equal to even longer prison sentences as they would have been liable to receive under terrorism legislation. Instead, the relatively low number of far-right related investigations is likely the result, at least in part, from legal complexities, making it more difficult and resource intensive to prove the charge of forming a terrorist organisation or a terrorist intent in court, compared to (relatively simple) evidence requirements in the case of weapons or murder charges. For investigators and prosecutors, it is often a question of court economics: deciding how many resources to put into investigating a certain possible crime with a higher or lesser chance of resulting in a conviction in the end.

Nevertheless, even if the prison sentences equal or even surpass those of terrorism charges, the consequences for the overall discourse on far-right violence can be significant. For example, victims of extreme right-wing violence and terrorism might perceive to be “second class victims” and the severity of the crimes done to them marginalised in public discourse. Furthermore, the public perception of what constitutes the biggest threat to security could be distorted by simply using the “terrorism category” in a one-sided way. Finally, this also impacts the statistical representation of terrorist threats and policies based on these numbers. If there is a strong tendency to prosecute extreme right-wing violence not as terrorism for various reasons, then current counter-terrorism policies could be significantly flawed simply due to the wrong underlying threat assessments. So, the consequences are not a problem of criminal justice per se. However, they do result in long-term effects on the victims of right-wing violence, the general public perception of what terrorism is (not), and the statistical representation of far-right quasi-terrorist crimes.

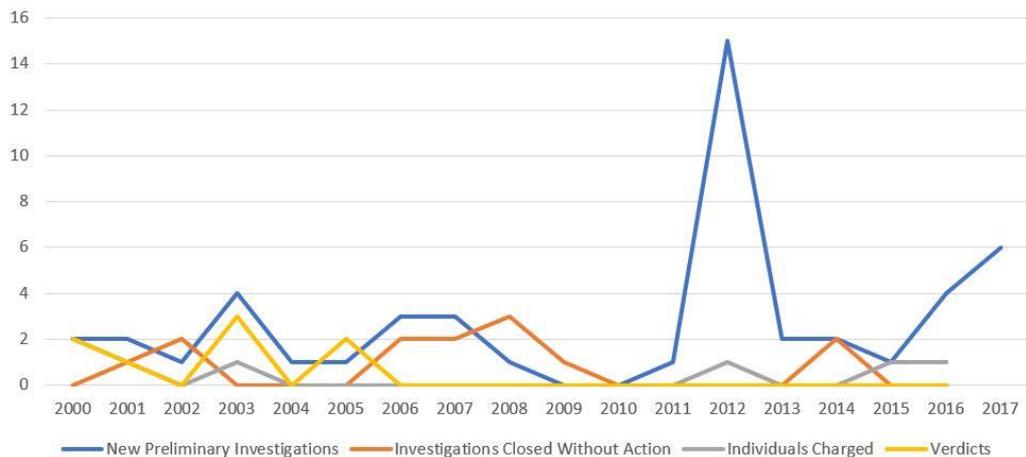


Figure 3: Judicial proceedings on §129(a, b) Criminal Code by Federal Prosecutor General against right-wing extremists²⁸

A key take-away from exploring the German case study is that even a high potential for ideologically motivated violence from the far-right and actual acts of severe violence (e.g. explosive and arson attacks, targeted killings), do not necessarily translate into considerable numbers of terrorism prosecutions and convictions. This in turn might distort statistics collected for example by EUROPOL in the TE-SAT report, which

²⁸ Source: cumulated numbers from governmental replies to parliamentary inquiries (Bundestagsanfragen). For the most recent version covering 2017, see: <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/017/1901799.pdf> (accessed January 11, 2019).

specifically looks at terrorism-related arrests and prosecutions. While it goes beyond the scope of this Policy Brief to discuss the specific legal reasons for this, it is fair to say that other Western countries have also struggled with the problem of classifying certain acts of domestic extremist violence as “terrorism”.

An important example in this regard is the U.S., where the overlap between hate crimes and domestic terrorism, as well challenges posed by particular legal issues such as a lack of specific prosecutable criminal offenses under domestic terrorism legislation, has created significant challenges for law enforcement. It has also helped fuel a public debate about potential double standards when dealing with political violence,²⁹ which might also affect the general public perception of the nature of the threat of terrorism. A recent study for example found that terrorist attacks by Muslim perpetrators received, on average, 357% more news coverage than other attacks.³⁰ Hence, it should be considered as a possibility that far-right political violence might dwell in a legal grey zone, oftentimes avoiding clear labelling as “terrorist” and thusly creating an elusive threat. This is not to say that far-right terrorism necessarily parallels or even trumps other threats, for example from jihadist groups. It does, however, point to the fact that the frameworks and tools we use to describe and gauge political violence and terrorism might be significantly flawed.

Hate Crimes and Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism

Again, taking Germany as a case study, it is helpful to look at the overall level of extreme right-wing violent crime in comparison to very specific forms of attacks, like arson and bombings. These violent crimes display a much stronger variance but also increased significantly to a 16-year overall record high in 2016 since 2001, when the current definition system for the crime statistics was introduced (Figure 4).

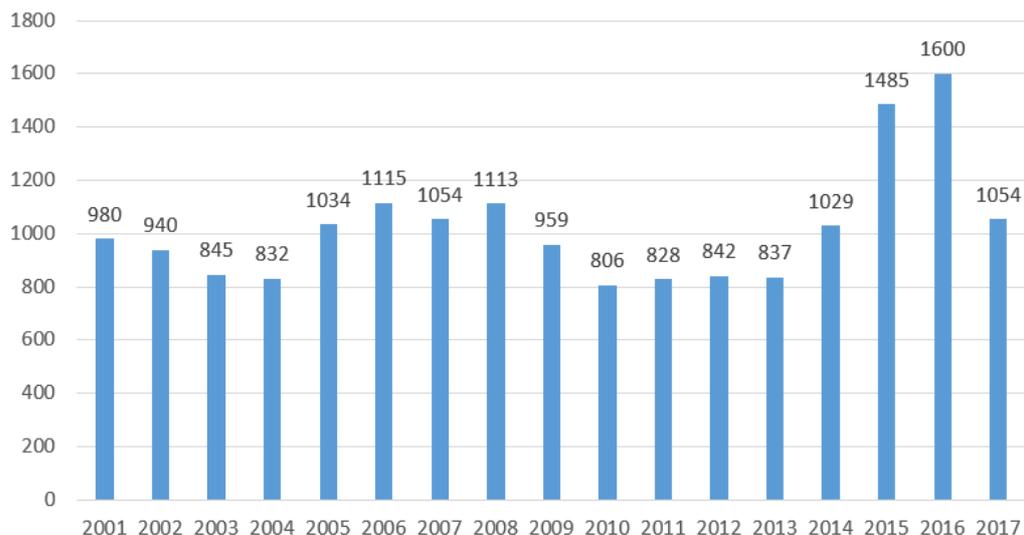


Figure 4: Extreme right-wing violent crimes, 2001-2017³¹

²⁹ See Kristen Mitchell, “Hate Crimes, Domestic Terrorism Not ‘Mutually Exclusive’,” *GW TODAY*, January 10, 2018, <https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/hate-crimes-domestic-terrorism-not-%E2%80%98mutually-exclusive%E2%80%99> (accessed December 3, 2018).

³⁰ Erin Kearns, Allison Betus and Anthony Lemieux, “Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention Than Others?” *Justice Quarterly* (April 2018), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2928138>.

³¹ Source: cumulated numbers from annual intelligence reports (Verfassungsschutzberichte). For the most recent version covering 2017, see: <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2017.pdf> (accessed January 11, 2019).

In many Western countries, right-wing violence has been analysed under the rubric of hate crimes,³² which do indeed share a number of characteristics with terrorism.³³ Hate crimes, defined here as “a criminal act that is motivated by a bias toward the victim or victims real or perceived identity group”,³⁴ may include the desire to “terrorize a broader group”.³⁵ The overlap between hate crimes and terrorism has led some scholars to label them close cousins, all the more so as “the target of an offense is selected because of his or her group identity, not because of his or her individual behaviour, and because the effect of both is to wreak terror on a greater number of people than those directly affected by violence”.³⁶ However, other scholars have disagreed and maintained that the differences between hate crimes and terrorism outweigh the similarities – arguing that the two are in fact two distinct forms of violence more akin to “distant relatives” than “close cousins.”³⁷ This counterargument emphasises such differences such as the relative lack of planning that presages hate crimes when compared to terrorist attacks and their generally more spontaneous nature, as well as the fact that perpetrators of hate crimes seldom seek publicity, whereas most terrorists actively seek it out.

A third position is occupied by Mark Hamm, who argues that right-wing violence can actually be both a hate crime and terrorism depending on the degree to which it pursues political and social objectives, which would be – according to Hamm – a prerequisite for “terrorism” and lacking in “hate crimes”.³⁸ Based on this brief overview, it seems reasonable to assume that hate crimes and (right-wing) terrorism do share important characteristics and – to a certain level – are indeed linked to each other. This means that there is a risk that official statistics might misclassify right-wing extremist violence as hate crimes, when they might be more accurately described as terrorism and thus worthy of the extraordinary levels of public, political and law-enforcement attention often bestowed on this latter category.

What Do We Know About Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence?

Turning to the academic literature on right-wing terrorism, it is clear that the subject has not received nearly as much academic attention as for example Jihadist terrorism. In 2011, Alex Schmid found that out of 4,458 empirically-based peer-reviewed publications only a mere 0.6 percent related to domestic terrorism, a category under which right-wing terrorism was subsumed together with other forms of political violence for a long time.³⁹ Most publications related to the extreme right either focus on party politics and election results, subcultural manifestations (e.g. racist skinheads,⁴⁰ Ku Klux Klan,⁴¹ neo-

³² James B. Jacobs and Kimberly Potter, *Hate crimes: criminal law & identity politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³³ Kathleen Deloughery, Ryan King and Victor Asal, “Close Cousins or Distant Relatives? The Relationship Between Terrorism and Hate Crime,” *Crime & Delinquency* 58, no. 5 (October 2012): 663-688, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128712452956>.

³⁴ Randy Blazak, “Isn’t Every Crime a Hate Crime? The Case for Hate Crime Laws,” *Sociology Compass* 5, no. 4 (April 2011): 244-255, p. 245.

³⁵ Donald P. Green, Laurence H. McFalls, and Jennifer K. Smith, “Hate Crime: An Emergent Research Agenda,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, (August 2001): 479-504, p. 483.

³⁶ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malecková, “Does poverty cause terrorism?” *The New Republic*, June 24, 2002, 27-33, p. 28.

³⁷ Deloughery, King and Asal, “Close Cousins or Distant Relatives? The Relationship Between Terrorism and Hate Crime.”
³⁸ Mark S. Hamm, *American skinheads: the criminology and control of hate crime* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993), p. 107.

³⁹ Alex P. Schmid, “The Definition of Terrorism” in *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, ed. Alex P. Schmid (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 39-98, p. 461.

⁴⁰ E.g. Hamm, *American skinheads*

⁴¹ E.g. Kathleen M. Blee, “Becoming a Racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi Groups,” *Gender and Society* 10, no. 6 (December 1996): 680-702.

Nazis⁴²), or mobilisation strategies (e.g. white supremacist music,⁴³ online activity,⁴⁴ or clothing⁴⁵). Only a handful of scholars have attempted to study right-wing terrorism as such, oftentimes looking at specific countries or regions such as the United States,⁴⁶ Germany,⁴⁷ Scandinavia,⁴⁸ or Russia.⁴⁹

Another peculiarity of right-wing terrorism pointed out in the few comprehensive studies that exist, is the different relationship between the act of violence and communication to the public by right-wing terrorists as compared to their counterparts.⁵⁰ While there is widespread agreement among scholars that terrorism is essentially a form of communication to reach a target audience,⁵¹ right-wing terrorists, at least from certain countries, rarely connect their attacks with a sophisticated communication strategy or any form of claiming.⁵² This aspect is further complicated by the different albeit overlapping types of organised right-wing violence identified in the expert community.⁵³

Nevertheless, research on right-wing terrorism has increased and most recent works on the phenomenon have focused on biographical backgrounds of perpetrators and environmental context factors. This research shows the essential importance of subcultures for recruitment and radicalisation,⁵⁴ maps the organisational, strategic and target characteristics of right-wing terrorist actors,⁵⁵ or attempts to build standardised databases of right-wing terrorism to enable cross country comparison and analysis⁵⁶ (which has been common practice in other forms of terrorism for decades).

⁴² E.g. Raphael S. Ezekiel, "An Ethnographer Looks at Neo-Nazi and Klan Groups," *American Behavioral Scientist* 46, no. 1 (September 2002): 51-71 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764202046001005>.

⁴³ E.g. Robert Futrell, Pete Simi and Simon Gottschalk, "Understanding Music in Movements: The White Power Music Scene," *The Sociological Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (March 2006): 275-304.

⁴⁴ E.g. Daniel Koehler, "The Radical Online: Individual Radicalization Processes and the Role of the Internet," *Journal for Deradicalization*, (Winter 2014/15): 116-134.

⁴⁵ E.g. Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

⁴⁶ Arie Perlinger, *Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America's Violent Far-Right*, CTC at West Point, New York, 2012, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/challengers-from-the-sidelines-understanding-americas-violent-far-right> (accessed December 17, 2018).

⁴⁷ Daniel Koehler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century. The National Socialist Underground and the History of Terror from the Far-Right in Germany* (Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴⁸ Tore Bjørge, *Terror from the extreme right* (London/Portland, Or.: Frank Cass., 1995).

⁴⁹ Martin Laryš and Miroslav Mareš, "Right-Wing Extremist Violence in the Russian Federation," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 1 (January 2011): 129-154, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2011.534308>.

⁵⁰ E.g. Bernhard Rabert, *Links- und Rechts-Terrorismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1970 bis heute* (Bonn: Bernard und Graefe, 1995).

⁵¹ See for example: Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism."

⁵² Koehler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century*.

⁵³ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Thugs or Terrorists? A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe," *JD Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 3 (2015): 1-38; Ehud Sprinzak, "Right-Wing Terrorism in a Comparative Perspective: The Case of Split Deligitimization," in *Terror from the Extreme Right*, ed. Tore Bjørge, (London: Frank Cass., 1995): 17-43.

⁵⁴ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*; Daniela Pisoiu, "Subcultural Theory Applied to Jihadi and Right-Wing Radicalization in Germany," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 1 (December 2014): 9-28; Pete Simi, Steven Windisch and Karyn Sporer, *Recruitment and Radicalization among US Far-Right Terrorists* (College Park, MD: START, 2016), retrieved from:

https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_RecruitmentRadicalizationAmongUSFarRightTerrorists_Nov2016.pdf (accessed December 17, 2018).

⁵⁵ Koehler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century*.

⁵⁶ Daniel Koehler, "German Right-Wing Terrorism in Historical Perspective. A First Quantitative Overview of the 'Database on Terrorism in Germany (Right-Wing Extremism) – DTG rwx' Project," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 5 (October 2014): 48-58; Ravndal, "Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe."

Recommendations/Lessons Learned

Based on the above and practical experience from countries with a long history of engagement against the far-right, such as Germany, it is possible to derive some key recommendations for policy makers and law enforcement agencies.

Avoid Double Standards between Various Forms of Political Violence

First of all, it is necessary to avoid double standards in dealing with right-wing violence and terrorism compared with other forms of political violence at all costs. Not only will victims of extreme right-wing violence point out a perceived hypocrisy, the perpetrators themselves will see it as a form of victory if they can ‘get away with murder’, i.e. commit crimes of a terrorist nature without being prosecuted for terrorism or labelled as terrorists.

Allocate Adequate Resources to Counter Right-Wing Extremism

This also translates into a need for adequate staffing and resources for investigators looking into the far-right. The United Kingdom, for example, allocated the lead to fight extreme right-wing violence to MI5 for the first time in October 2018,⁵⁷ signalling the shifted priorities and threat levels for the UK government. Germany, as another case in point, has also significantly stepped up group-based (i.e. forming criminal or terrorist organisations) investigations and prosecutions targeting the extreme right recently, resulting in some key trials and convictions, for example against the so called “Oldschool Society (OSS)”⁵⁸ or the “Freital” group.⁵⁹ Multiple other groups are currently being investigated by the German Federal Prosecutor General. In other countries, such as for example the United States, some observers claim that law enforcement has systematically disregarded the threat posed by the extreme right for decades,⁶⁰ resulting in the authorities’ potential disconnect with the violent milieu regarding available intelligence and threat assessments.⁶¹

Appropriate Judicial Responses

Appropriate judicial actions against extreme right-wing perpetrators of violent crimes must be quick and efficient. The Greek authorities slow process in the trial against members of the extreme right-wing Golden Dawn party, for example, might have had an impact on increased violence against migrants, refugees and political opponents

⁵⁷ Harriet Agerholm, “MI5 agents to take lead in fight against far-right extremism for first time,” *Independent*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/far-right-extremism-terrorism-threat-mi5-police-investigation-security-services-a8607106.html> (accessed December 3, 2018).

⁵⁸ “Bavarian court jails ‘Oldschool’ extremists,” *DW*, March 15, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/bavarian-court-jails-oldschool-extremists/a-37943239> (accessed December 4, 2018).

⁵⁹ “Neo-Nazi group jailed for terror attack plans against refugees,” *The Local de*, March 15, 2017, <https://www.thelocal.de/20170315/neo-nazi-group-jailed-for-terror-attack-plans-against-refugees> (accessed December 4, 2018).

⁶⁰ Janet Reitman, “U.S. Law Enforcement Failed to See the Threat of White Nationalism. Now They Don’t Know How to Stop It,” *New York Times*, November 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/03/magazine/FBI-charlottesville-white-nationalism-far-right.html?smid=tw-share> (accessed December 3, 2018).

⁶¹ Ryan Cooper, “America has a right-wing terrorism problem,” *The Week*, October 24, 2018, <https://theweek.com/articles/803667/america-rightwing-terrorism-problem> (accessed December 3, 2018).

including those due to testify by other far-right groups.⁶² Another example would be a trial against 17 neo-Nazis alleged of forming a criminal organisation and conducting multiple violent attacks in Germany, which ended in May 2017 without a verdict after almost five years of trial hearings due to a judge's retirement and successfully applied delaying strategies by the suspects' lawyers.⁶³ The extreme right-wing milieu will see slow and inefficient judicial actions as a weakness and attempt to exploit it in their favour.

Increase Funding for Research on Far-Right Violence and Terrorism

Furthermore, it is recommended to increase funding for research into far-right violence and terrorism, some of the most under-studied forms of political violence. It is essential to better understand the differences between violence and terrorism from the far-right and other ideologically motivated acts of violence. The relatively small body of research that does exist indicates some very significant phenomenological characteristics unique to far-right violence (e.g. the lack of claiming and sophisticated political strategies). For the authorities to adequately assess the threat posed by the far-right and react to it in the most effective way, to understand the phenomenon is absolute key.

Acknowledge Relationship between Hate Crimes and Terrorism

Another important key lesson is facilitating an open discussion about the relationship between hate crimes and terrorism on the one hand, and about the applicability of current legal frameworks on right-wing terrorism on the other. A strong case could be made for viewing hate crimes as "close cousins" to terrorism. Nevertheless, if used, the hate crime label can have the side effect of misrepresenting the true extent of far-right violence and terrorism. In this regard, reporting mechanisms about right-wing terrorism should not only be based on legal prosecutions and convictions using the 'terrorism' label, but also consider the psychological effects on the target group of the violent acts and the specific attack forms used. As the legal label 'terrorism' seems inadequate in many countries to realistically grasp the phenomenon of extreme right-wing violence and terrorism, a more holistic descriptive framework is warranted. A key strategic goal of extreme right-wing actors is to undermine trust into the monopoly of force of democratic governments and the rule of law. If populations targeted by the far-right perceive to be less protected, the strength of democracies, plurality, might be turned against the democratic culture.

Expand 'Exit Programs' for Right-Wing Extremists

In addition, countering violent extremism and deradicalisation, for instance through so-called 'exit programs', both on the governmental and non-governmental level, must be expanded against all forms of violent extremism, including the extreme right. Germany is a prime example here, since the country has almost three decades of practical CVE experiences in this regard since the early 1990s. By now, all types of CVE programs targeting the far-right are firmly established within the German counter-extremism and

⁶² Patrick Strickland, "When Prosecuting Far-Right Violence Fails," *The New Republic*, October 30, 2018, <https://newrepublic.com/article/151947/prosecuting-far-right-violence-fails> (accessed December 3, 2018).

⁶³ "Koblenzer Neonazi-Prozess eingestellt," *Spiegel*, May 30, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/koblenzer-neonazi-prozess-endgueltig-eingestellt-a-1149853.html> (accessed December 3, 2018).

counter-terrorism landscape. In 2014 for example, an overview study counted 18 exit programs for right-wing extremists in Germany, of which 12 were governmentally run.⁶⁴ And this is only a very small fraction of the vast number of programs working in a more preventative or early intervention-oriented framework against the far-right. In 2016 an overview study by the German Federal Criminal Police counted 267 CVE projects in Germany targeting the far-right.⁶⁵

This shows that both governmental and non-governmental CVE programs can work in this field, provided that there is a plurality of funding sources available. Other countries' decision to deliberately deny funding for CVE programs targeting the extreme right, e.g. in the United States,⁶⁶ can be seen by the far-right themselves as handing them a 'free pass' and encourage more violence.⁶⁷ However, CVE and exit (or deradicalisation) programs alone do not automatically yield positive results, but must be embedded in national CVE strategies and, more importantly, be subjected to rigorous quality standards and scientific evaluations.⁶⁸ As with any other field working with potentially high-risk clientele, ill-designed programs with a lack of evaluations and quality oversight might even increase the risk. Last but not least and connected to the previous point, funding opportunities for programs of any type countering extreme right-wing radicalisation or violence should be diversified across different institutions (e.g. Interior, Social, Family, Health or Research Ministries) to avoid excluding specific carriers of these program who might shed away from accepting financial support from some governmental sources out of fear to be stigmatised in their own community.

Conclusion

Many indications point to a growing or at least partially underestimated threat to Western countries posed by the extreme right. Terrorism prosecution and legislation seems to not accurately catch violent tactics and organisational forms used by the far-right. It also seems to be more difficult to clearly label extreme right-wing violence as 'terrorism'. Both aspects might distort official statistics and threat assessments. While this should not mean that the danger posed by the far-right necessarily equals or even trumps other forms of political violence and terrorism, it still indicates that resources, threat assessments and counter-measures have partly been potentially wrongly allocated in the past.

Extreme right-wing violence directly targets the foundations of democratic culture: pluralism and tolerance. It instils fear among its victims and negates the status quo and monopoly of force established through the rule of law. This means that even if not legally classified as 'terrorism', far-right violence can have long term deteriorating effects on

⁶⁴ Michaela Glaser, Sally Hohnstein and Frank Greuel, "Ausstiegshilfen in Deutschland. Ein vergleichender Überblick über Akteure und Vorgehensweisen," in *Hilfe zum Ausstieg? Ansätze und Erfahrungen professioneller Angebote zum Ausstieg aus rechtsextremen Szenen*, ed. Peter Rieker (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2014), 45-76, p. 47.

⁶⁵ Florian Gruber, Saskia Lützing and Uwe E. Kemmesis, *Extremismusprävention in Deutschland - Erhebung und Darstellung der Präventionslandschaft*, Bundeskriminalamt, 2016, p. 20, retrieved from: <https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Publikationen/Publikationsreihen/Forschungsergebnisse/2016ExtremismuspraeventionInDeutschland.html> (accessed December 17, 2018).

⁶⁶ Laura Strickler, "Trump admin will apparently not renew program to fight domestic terror," *NBC News*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-admin-will-apparently-not-renew-program-fight-domestic-terror-n926361> (accessed December 4, 2018).

⁶⁷ "Trump's Homeland Security department gives right-wing extremists a pass," *Washington Post*, August 31, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trumps-homeland-security-department-gives-right-wing-extremists-a-pass/2017/08/31/a0164ab4-8455-11e7-ab27-1a21a8e006ab_story.html?utm_term=.188c66c62743 (accessed December 4, 2018).

⁶⁸ Daniel Koehler, "How and why we should take deradicalization seriously," *Nature Human Behavior* 1, 0095 (May 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0095>.

democratic societies. Ideologically motivated violence from all backgrounds must be taken seriously. The recommendations presented in this short Policy Brief are only a first step to address this imbalance.

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Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat

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