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Class 9: Politically Violent Activity

Escalation and restraint

Dr. Michael C. Zeller

Agenda for the day

- Opening notes
- Antifa
- Poll: escalation and restraint
- Mechanisms of escalation and restraint
- A case of RWE restraint?
- Any questions, concerns, feedback for this class?

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Opening notes

Presentation groups

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Presentations line-up

Date	Presenters	Method
4 Dec:	Shahadaan, Kristine, Daichi	ethnography
11 Dec:	Bérénice, Zorka, Victoria, Katharina	content analysis
18 Dec:	Shoam, Aidan, Tara, Sebastian	QCA

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Antifa

- opening discussion
- debatable proposition and pressing policy issue
- antifa in Germany
- Copsey and Merrill (2020): antifa in the U.S.

Opening discussion

What should we, students of political violence, know about *antifa*? (causes? organisation/leadership? radical subcultures and mobilisation? strategies?)

is antifa a 'gang' (Pyrooz and Densley 2018)? is antifa a 'group' (LaFree 2018)?

- gang - 'durable and street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity' (Pyrooz and Densley 2018, 230)
- group - 'some stable organisation that persists over time and has some discernible leadership structure' (LaFree 2018, 249), see also GTF database: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

Debatable proposition: antifa as terrorist org.?

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Pyrooz and Densley (2018, 233): "the history of antifa reads like a history of violence"

vs.

Bray (2017, 169): "In truth, violence represents a small though vital sliver of anti-fascist activity."

Should state security (in Germany, elsewhere) designate antifa as *extremist/terrorist*

antifa (recently) in Germany

ARD series (in German): https://www.ardaudiothek.de/sendung/die-fascho-jaegerin-der-fall-lina-e-und-seine-folgen/94838298/

- 28-year-old antifa activist, Lina E., and three accomplices jailed for either membership of or support for a criminal organisation.
  - politicised/radicalised by revelations about NSU in 2011
- attacks on (assumed) right-wing extremists in Thüringen and Sachsen between 2018 and 2020
- judge…
  - acknowledged deficiency of criminal punishment of neo-Nazis
  - described right-wing extremism as a greater threat to Germany
  - but asserted 'even Nazis have inalienable rights'
  - criticized the defense lawyers for describing the trial as "political justice."

recent journal article: Jones and Schuhmacher (2024)

Copsey and Merrill (2020) - background

- Since 2001, right-wing extremists in the U.S. responsible for 110 politically motivated deaths — antifa: 0 (or maximum one, in case of 2020 death of Patriot Prayer supporter)

> In putting their "bodies on the line," militant anti-fascists aspire to defeat fascist organizing, to de-stabilize it, and ultimately de-mobilize it. At its root, anti-fascist militancy is the promise to effect intimidation, humiliation and de-moralization upon fascists. This involves a physical commitment to "no platforming" (p. 124)

- lots of informative background information about U.S. antifa in the article

Copsey and Merrill (2020) - research design

Copsey and Merrill (2020) - findings/points raised

- violent disruption of "fascist" assembly is an axiom of antifa praxis
- how far does the label 'fascist' extend?
  - "*legitimacy of anti-fascist action is thus drawn from the illegitimacy of its opponent*"
- antifa's "pre-emptive self-defence"
  - premised on (a) deadliness of fascist movements of any size and (b) rapid growth potential of fascist movements
- there are '*internal* tactical and rhetorical strategies that *limit* violence' from antifa — BUT, consistent danger of antifa slipping into glorification of violence

Poll: escalation and restraint

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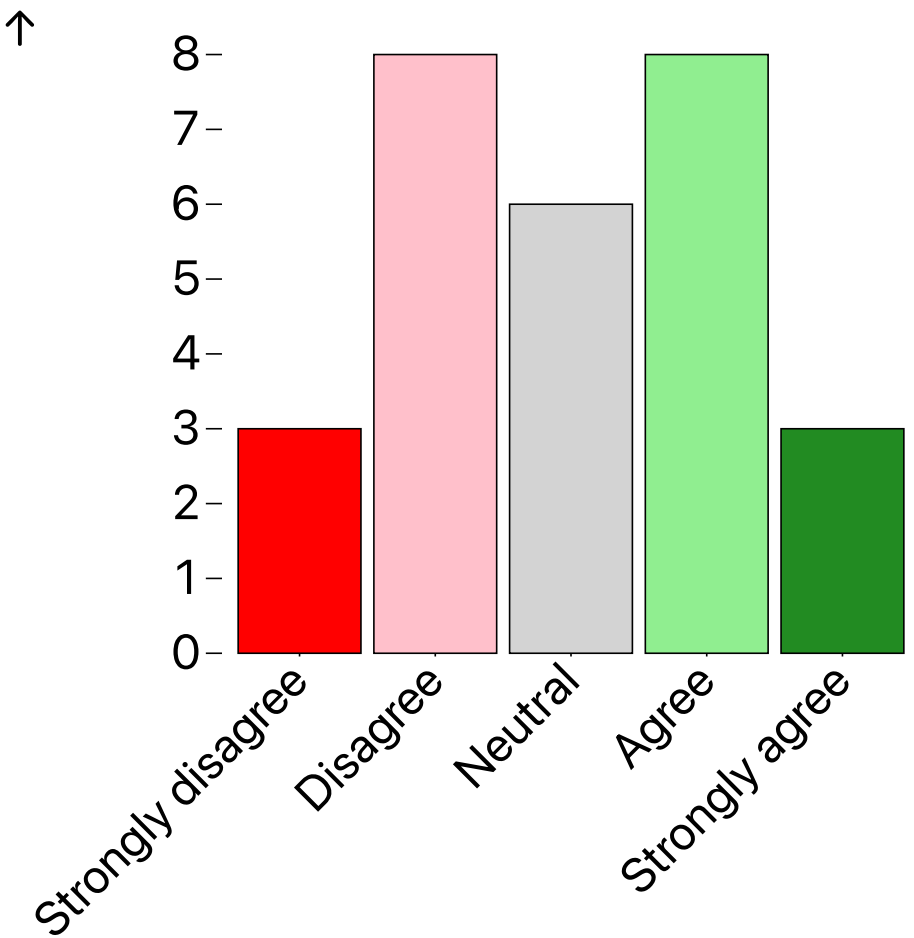
Take the survey at
https://forms.gle/12tV7fgjcAyC8iVG6

- ideology secondary to pragmatic issues in choosing to use violence?
- most important in allowing *restraint*?
- most likely to provoke *escalation*?

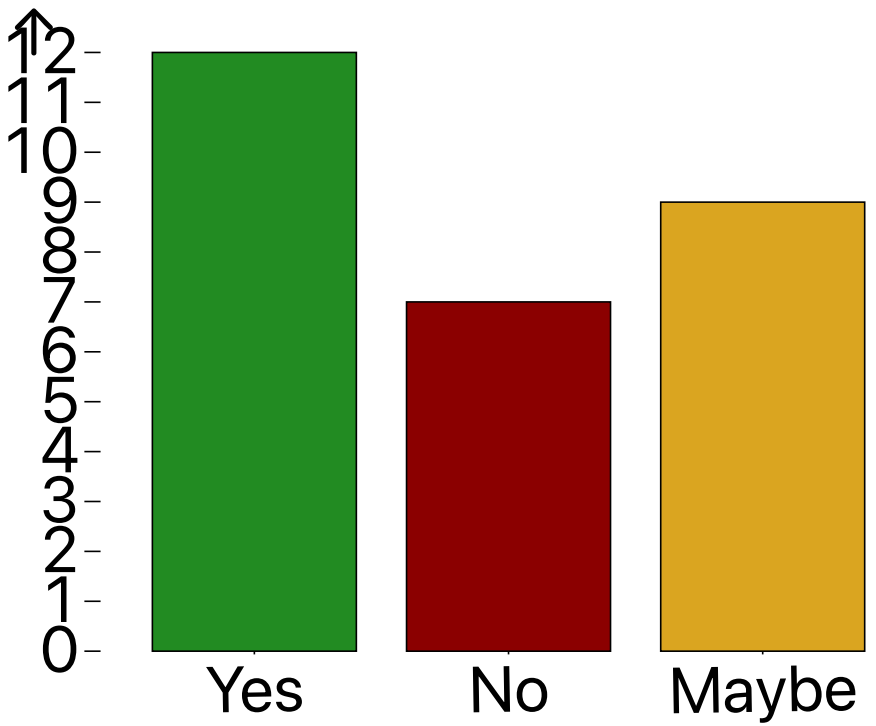
- should states remain open to negotiating with violent groups?
- groups more likely to escalate violence if they feel they are losing support?

Poll results (Respondents: 28)

ideology secondary to pragmatic issues?

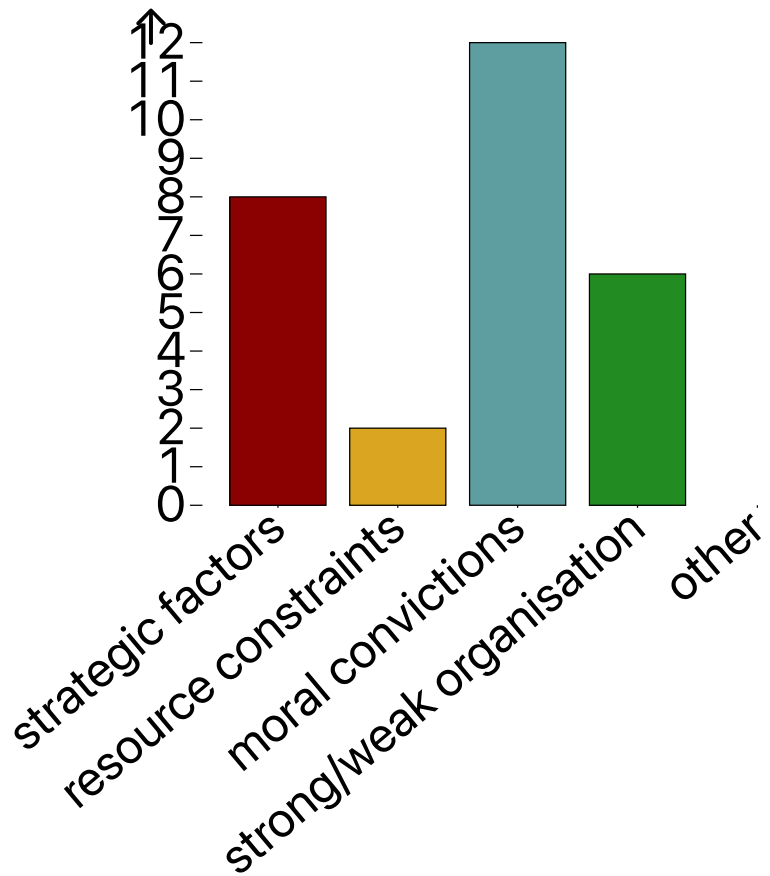


more likely to escalate if losing support?

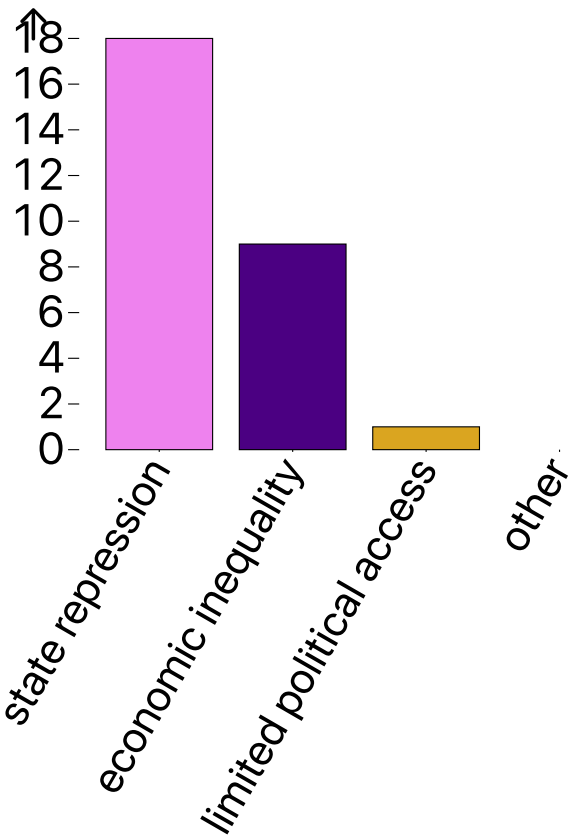


Poll results: escalation and restraint

most important factor allowing *restraint*?

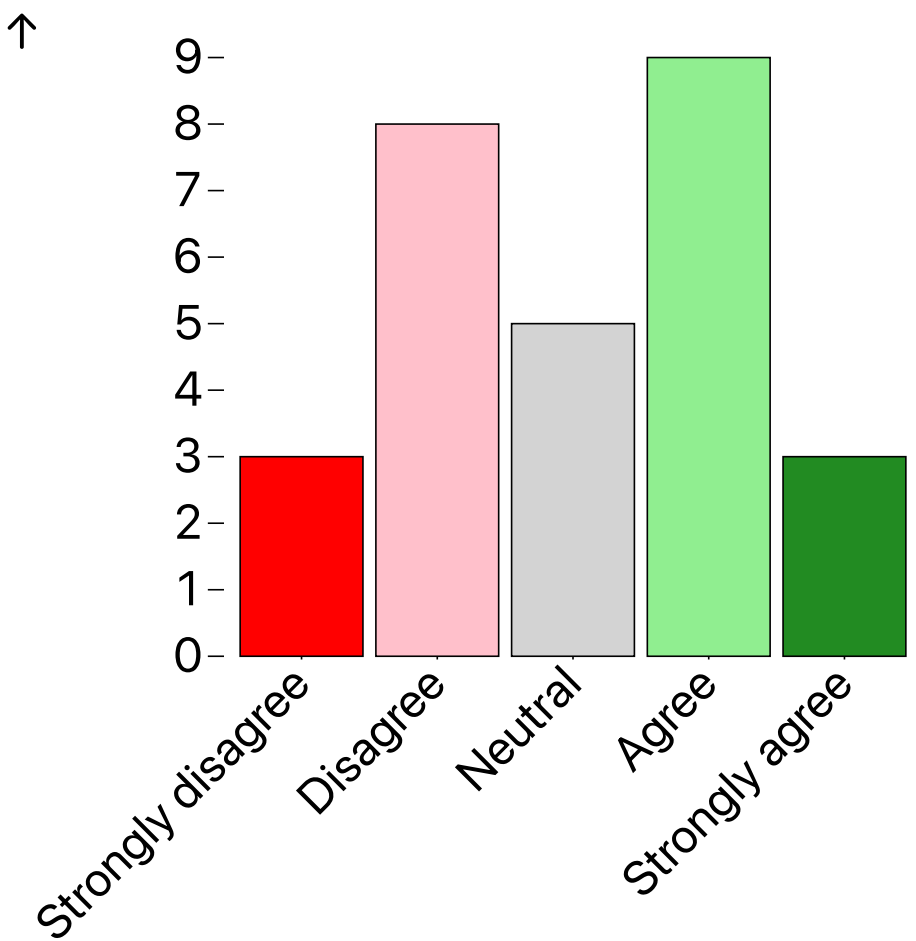


most likely to provoke *escalation*?



Poll results: negotiation

states should remain open to negotiating with politically violent groups?



relates to our Week 11-12 classes on state responses

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Mechanisms of escalation and restraint

- escalation and restraint concepts
- catalogue of mechanisms
- grouped/summarised mechanisms
  - restraint
  - escalation

escalation and restraint

- **escalation** - a rise in the frequency and/or severity of violent actions
- **restraint** - a deliberate restriction (either reducing or completely stopping) of violent actions

are there significant examples of escalation and/or restraint in cases you know of?

Mechanisms of escalation and restraint

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relational arena	Violence-enabling mechanisms	Violence-inhibiting mechanisms
Within movement arena	A1.1. Intensification of threat narrative A1.2. Foregrounding of revolutionary goals A1.3. Declining influence of moderates A1.4. Valorisation of violence A1.5. Ident. violence as a viable or necessary strategy A1.6. Fear of missing out A1.7. Preparation for violence	B1.1. Campaign/issue deprioritisation or closure B1.2. Foregrounding non-revolutionary goals B1.3. Persistent or expanding influence of moderates B1.4. Disassociation from violence and/or ident. violence as counter-productive B1.5. Rules limiting the use of or opportunities for violence B1.6. Within-movement backlash against violence
movement-opposition arena	A2.1. Increasingly hostile emotional entrainment between activists and their opponents A2.2. Increased mutual expectation of violence A2.3. Increased availability of 'legitimate' targets A2.4. Sudden power imbalance between opposing groups	B2.1. Tactical and/or emotional disentrainment B2.2. Limited expectations of violence B2.3. Steady balance of power within situational contexts B2.4. Achievement of dominance without need for (further) violence
movement-political environment arena	A3.1. Diminishing political opportunities A3.2. Growing ident. of 'corrupt elites' as 'the enemy' A3.3. Radical flank actors become the focus of political and/or media attention A3.4. Elites endorse polarising issue frame A3.5. Elites Legitimate violence	B3.1. Ways to pursue goals through less extreme means B3.2. Alliance of movement and political or cultural elites B3.3. Elite allies withdraw support in response to rising use or threats of violence by movement actors
movement-security forces arena	A4.1. Comm. breakdown between activists and security A4.2. Loss of control by state security actors	B4.1. Open communication between security and activists B4.2. Security forces maintain control (without breaching societal norms of appropriate policing)
movement-public arena	A5.1. Decoupling of movement from general public A5.2. (Part of) public endorse of polarising issue frame A5.3. Legitimation of violence by members of the public	B5.1. Activists emphasise import of broad public support B5.2. Key constituencies criticise 'inappropriate' violence

summarising logics of restraint - (Busher et al. 202[illegible] and Ravndal 2020)

('ascending the ladder of abstraction,' Sartori 1970)

1. A **strategic logic** (violence is counterproductive in the present circumstances)
2. A **moral logic** (certain forms of violence are illegitimate)
3. A **logic of ego maintenance** (we are not a violent organization)
4. A **logic of outgroup definition** (softening views on putative outgroups)
5. An **organisational logic** (the organisation evolves in ways that undermine the logics of violent escalation)

summarising logics of escalation - Busher et al. (201

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('ascending the ladder of abstraction,' Sartori 1970)

1. **framing logic** (intensity of context/threat, revolutionary goals, glorification of violence, violence as viable/necessary, increasing vilification of 'enemies')
2. **strategic logic** (cope with changing dynamics with opponents and/or state, deal with diminishing opportunity, loss of state control)
3. **organisational logic** (declining moderate influence, logistical/practical preparation for violence)
4. **constituency/social logic** (endorsement/legitimation from elites and/or public, politics/media focuses on radical flank)

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A case of RWE restraint?

- Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) at a glance
- Tore Bjørgo on NRM
  - findings

NRM at a glance

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Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) - Tore Bjørgo

Tore Bjørgo on Why the Nordic Resistance Movement Restrains its Use of Violence (Bjørgo and Ravndal 2020)

Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) - Tore Bjørgo

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1. *When, why does NRM permit use of violence*?
   - no **moral restraints**, rather violence perceived as **counterproductive** (to gaining support and freely propagating views)
   - try to **expand boundaries of acceptable violence** with acts against police and political enemies
2. *Why, how does NRM restrain use of violence*?
   - to maintain **strategic position**
   - commit members to **maintaining nonviolent discipline**
3. *How does NRM leadership respond to cases where members overstep and act violently*?
   - **honouring** rather than **punishing** activists who overstep
   - BUT ALSO **distancing** from any affiliation or connection

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Any questions, concerns, feedback for this class?

Anonymous feedback here:
https://forms.gle/NfF1pCfYMbkAT3WP6

Alternatively, please send me an email: m.zeller@lmu.de

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