Class 10: Politically Violent Activity

Local support and public reaction

Dr. Michael C. Zeller

Agenda for the day

- Opening notes
- Support in an armed conflict setting
- Poll: local support and public reaction
- Public opinion on political violence
- some 2025 PV news
- Any questions, concerns, feedback for this class?

Opening notes

Presentation groups

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

Support in an armed conflict setting

- Meier (2022)
  - Tamils in Sri Lanka
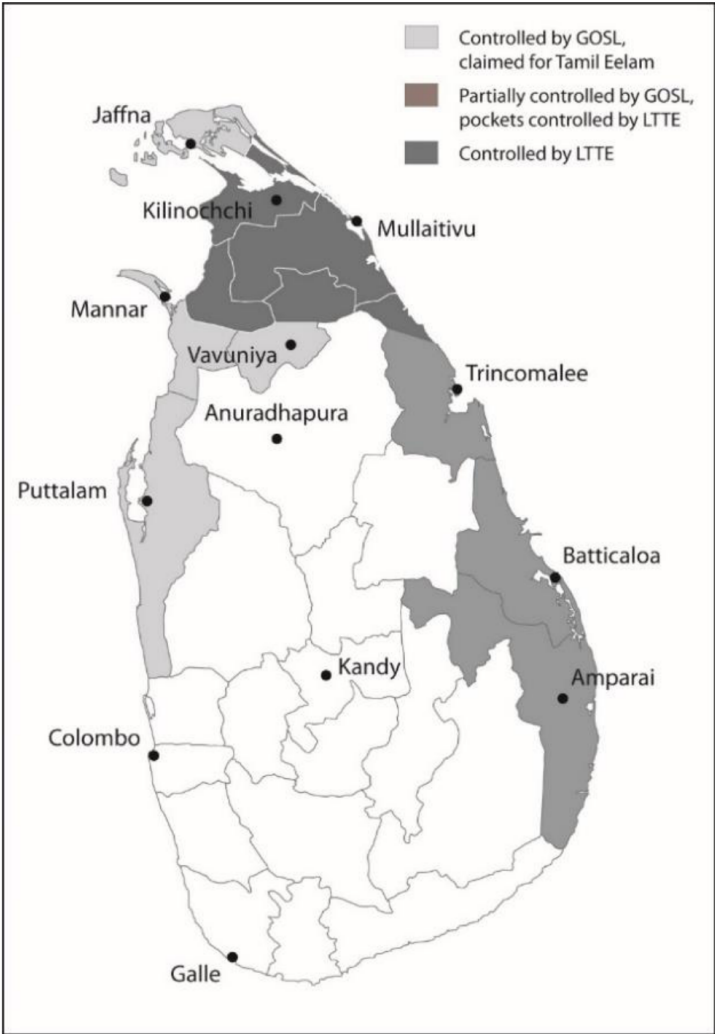 - territory
  - three patterns

Meier (2022) - context and research design

- anti-Tamil riots in July 1983, thousands of Tamils killed

  - drove armed conflict, with 8,000-10,000 strong Tamil Tigers

- Justification of approach: "*Focusing on actions alone would deprive us of a crucial facet of support relations: the meaning people attach to actors and events. For instance, we can only understand why respondents continued to support the LTTE despite their increasing brutality and hostility if we consider the beliefs and affects that composed support relations and upheld them regardless of the LTTE's ruthlessness.*"

  - actions, beliefs/meanings - epistemologic focal points

- Data: 30 life history interviews with former Tigers

  - "*sample is too small to derive generalizable conclusions ... enabling us to explore how people evaluate, make sense of and rationalize behaviors by conflict actors and to uncover some of the fluctuation, contradictions and ambivalences in peoples' beliefs and actions towards armed groups*"

Sri Lanka map

Table 2 – Territorial Control during the Sri Lankan Civil War

Source: Map published in Stokke 2006, reprinted with permission of the author

Meier (2022) - 3 patterns

1. political representation and social distance; (2) fear and the relevance of affective ties; (3) security and (forceful) recruitment.

	Pattern I	Pattern II	Pattern III
Local context	Government controlled; relatively sheltered from physical violence; high socioeconomic standing	Contested; high exposure to military violence; low socioeconomic standing	LTTE controlled; institutionalized violence through LTTE institutions; low socio-economic standing
Type of support-ive ties	Support ties based on political representation and respect or guilt	Support ties based on personal affection and fear	Support ties based on effective service provision (security and order)
Ambiva-lence	Acceptance of violence due to political necessity	Criticism of violence due to its arbitrariness and unpredictability	Predictability and desirability of effects justify harsh punishments; resentment about recruitment practices

Meier (2022) - 3 patterns

- respondents in LTTE territory, interacting with LTTE's political and administrative institutions, more likely to support LTTE, having experienced them as service providers rather than as armed attackers.

- LTTE support not "solely coerced or entirely free of force"

- (p. 171) "it is more fruitful to explore how civilians cope with and react to this ambivalence. As the empirical evidence has demonstrated, depending on the type of force and the group targeted, violence was perceived as more or less justified."

Take the survey at
https://forms.gle/VZJuzHbzXXtN LMU √

- local support necessary violent group to have success?

- violent escalation tends to alienate the public, reducing support?

- most common reason people support politically violent groups?

A recent controversy

national pride or an affront to victims of the Troubles

📷 Republic of Ireland players celebrate after their victory over Scotland at Hampden Park on 11 October. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA
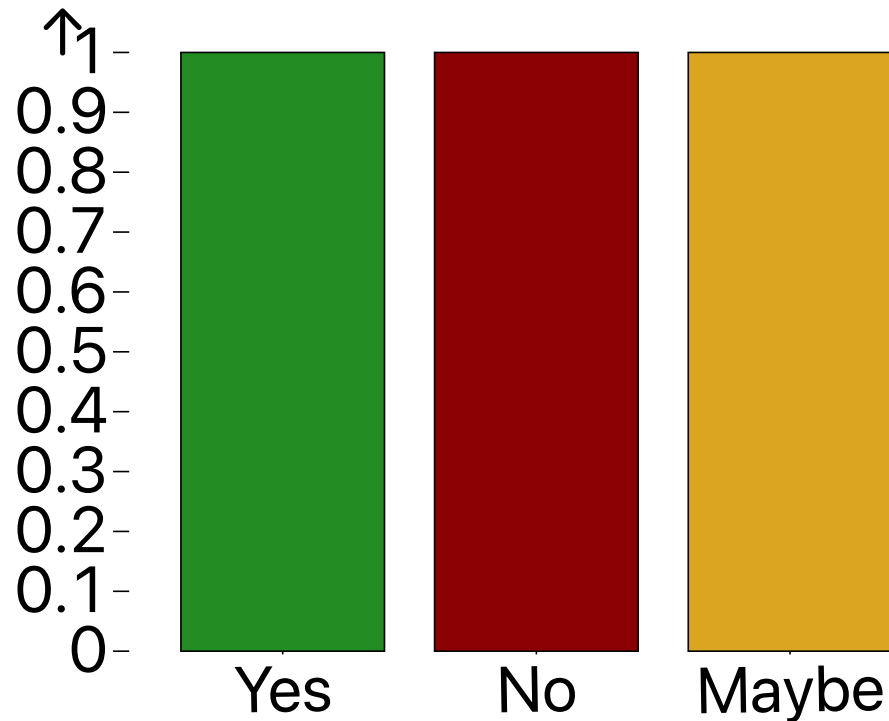
In October 2023, the Irish Women's Football team qualified for the Women's World Cup. In the days after, the Irish public was ablaze with debate, politicians took turns condemning and defending the players, and UEFA launched an investigation that ended in a 20,000 EUR fine. Why? For singing a certain song...

A recent controversy

Poll results (Respondents: 3)

LMU | LUDWIG-
MAXIMILIANS-
UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

local support necessary violent group to have success?

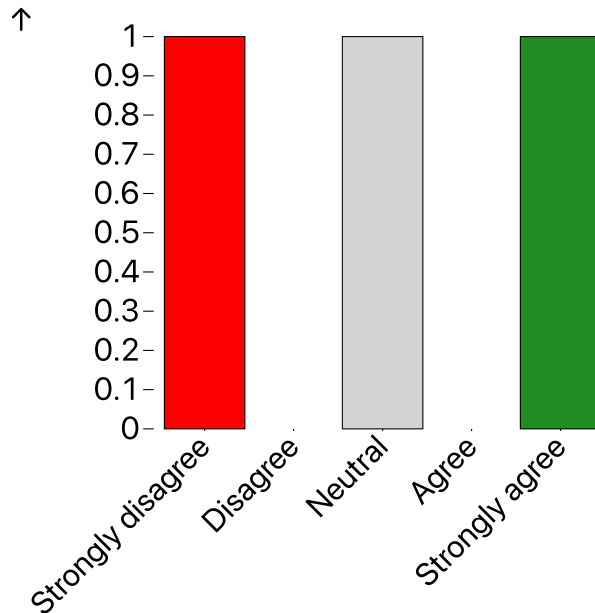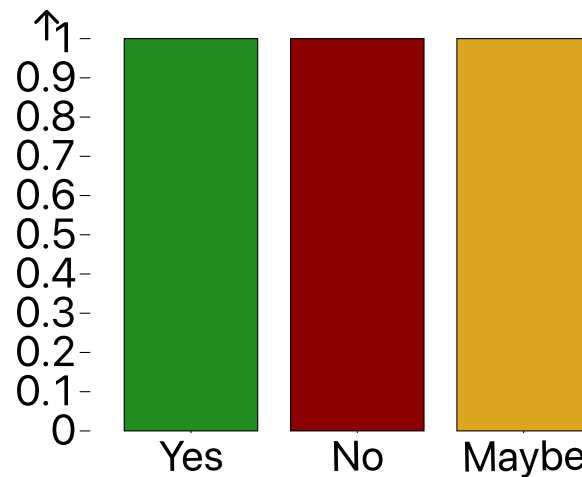**Why do you think so? What might 'success' mean and does that affect the 'necessity' of local support?**

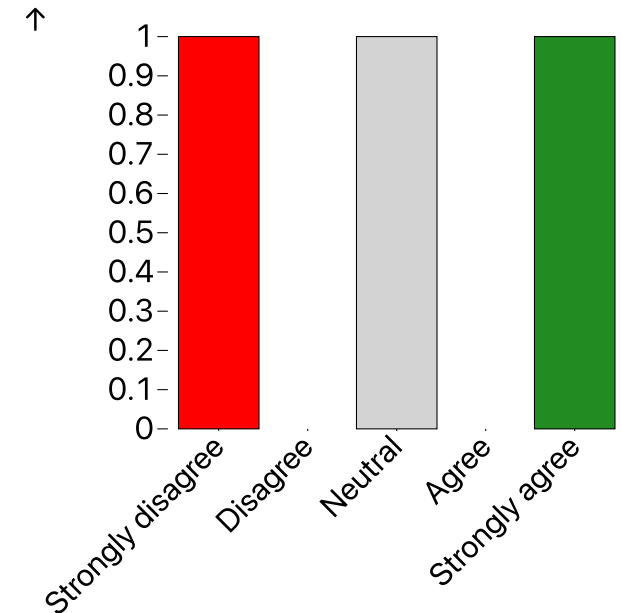# Poll results: reaction and repression

different reaction depending on ideological motivation of violence?

After an attack, following demand, should policymakers shift toward harsher policies?

state repres usually stre violent groups legitimacy?

Public opinion on political violence

- Setter and Nepstad (2022)

  - background

  - research design

  - mechanisms

  - findings

- Völker (2023)

  - concepts

  - visibility, resonance, legitimacy

  - influential actors

background on the George Floyd protests - Setter and Nepstad (2022)

- what are the most important points to know from this **context** and **catalysing event**?

- what factors might *escalate* activism to political violence? what factors might *restrain*?

refresher: logics of restraint/escalation

restraint

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)

escalation

Setter and Nepstad (2022) - design

- RQ: *When such events happen, how does this shape citizens' views on politically-oriented violence?*

- Context:

  - 'U.S. citizens expect protesters to conduct themselves nonviolently...' (p. 430)

  - YET - "people find violence more acceptable when traditional political methods are incapable of adequately addressing social injustices"

- Data:

  - from the **American National Election Study's (ANES)** 2016 and 2020 samples

how SMs influence public opinion - Setter and Nepstad (2022)

support for political violence (%) - (2022)

Demographic	2016	2020
Sample Overall	15.28	14.34
Extremely Liberal	14.55	30.79
Liberal	10.02	17.36
Slightly Liberal	16.83	16.23
Moderate	15.93	16.30
Slightly Conservative	14.84	8.59
Conservative	9.24	5.45
Extremely Conservative	12.71	8.22
White	11.79	10.89
Black	24.37	24.41
Men	16.45	14.13
Women	14.17	14.63
Age 18-29	28.40	30.42
Age 30-39	16.42	21.13
Age 40-49	14.54	16.85
Age 50-59	13.12	10.76
Age 60-69	9.86	7.15
Age 70-79	9.35	7.57
Age 80+	15.03	6.02
Attends Church	16.10	12.82
Does Not Attend Church	14.00	15.81

any numbers that you think are noteworthy?

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- "liberals became much more likely to find political violence acceptable ... conservatives became much less likely to find themselves in support of violence..."

- "Younger respondents were more likely to support political violence in 2020 ... while their older counterparts were more opposed than before"

support for political violence (%) - (2022)

Setter and Nepstad (2022) - findings

Table 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients and Odds Ratios Predicting Acceptability of Political Violence

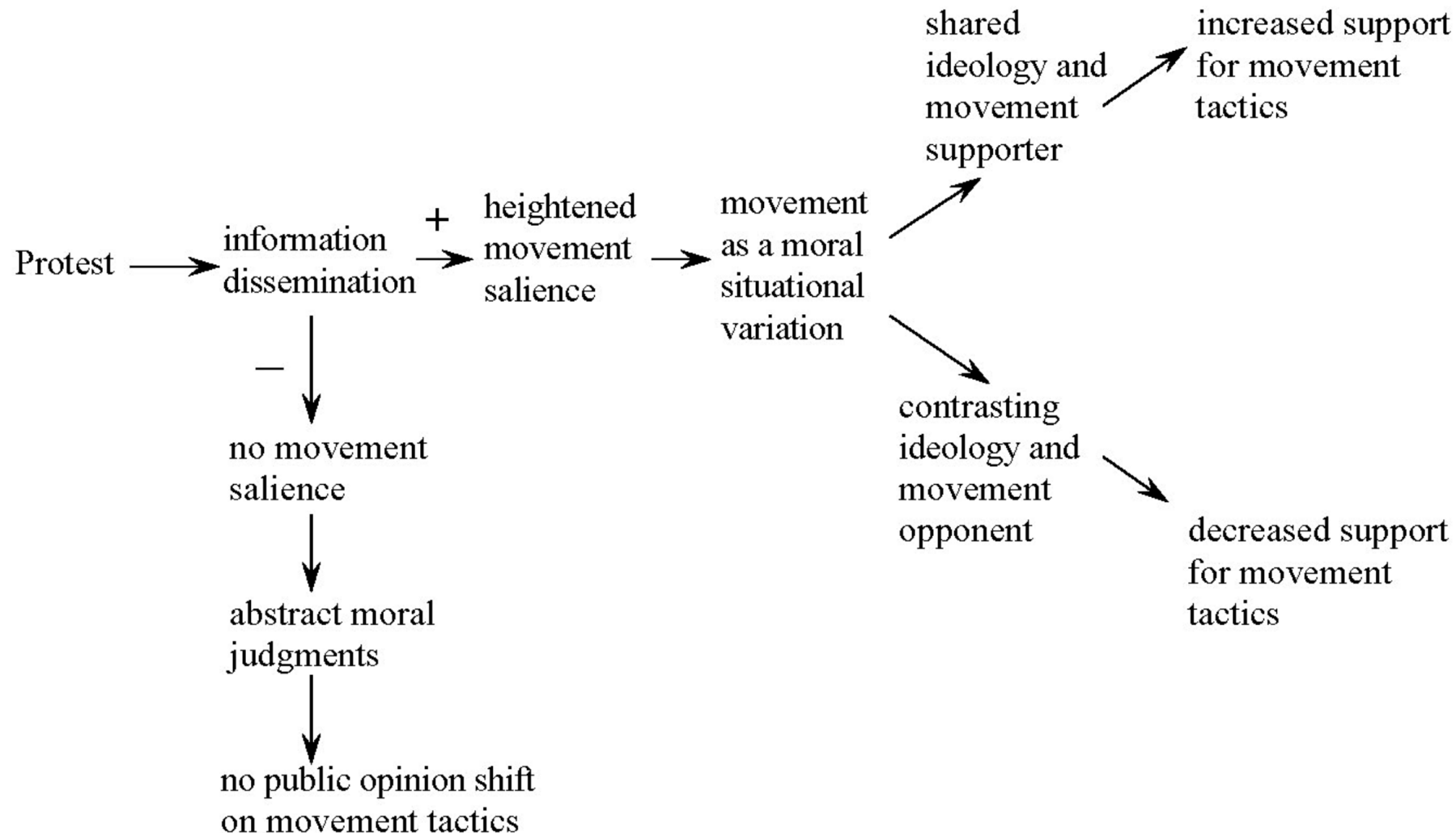|	2016 (Controls)	2016 (Complete)	2020 (Controls)	2020 (Complete)
BLM	-	.048 (1.050)* *.023*	-	.074 (1.077)*** *.017*
Liberal	-	-.048 (0.953) *.047*	-	.112 (1.119)** *.034*
Protest Participation	-	.636 (1.885)* *.261*	-	.446 (1.562)*** *.112*
News Consumption	-	-.191 (.826)* *.058*	-	.022 (1.002) *.053*
News Trust	-	-	-	.170 (1.186)*** *.041*
Age	-.022 (0.977)*** *.003*	-.017 (0.982)*** *.003*	-.038 (0.962)*** *.002*	-.037 (0.962)*** *.002*
Female	-.171 (0.842) *.114*	-.249 (0.779)* *.116*	.112 (1.11) *.079*	-.022 (.977) *.082*
College	-.380 (0.683)*** *.114*	-.329 (0.719)** *.117*	-.324 (0.723)*** *.080*	-.492 (0.610)*** *.083*
Church Attendance	.219 (1.244) *.118*	.215 (1.240) *.124*	-.128 (.878) *.080*	.116 (1.124) *.085*
White	-.740 (0.476)*** *.120*	-.650 (0.521)*** *.128*	-.696 (0.498)*** *.083*	-.518 (0.595)*** *.086*
Constant	-0.142	-.025	0.694	-0.918
N	2,824	2,824	5,888	5,888

Notes: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$; Odds-Ratios in Parentheses; Standard Errors in Italics
Source: American National Election Survey (2016, 2020)

Setter and Nepstad (2022) - findings

Figure 3. Revised Model of Social Movement Events as Situational Moral Shifters

Setter and Nepstad (2022) - findings

> the George Floyd riots functioned as a new "**situational variation**" that shifted people's attitudes, increasing the proportion of liberals and ardent BLM movement supporters who felt that the political violence was justifiable."

- **"people may shift their attitudes about political violence yet again when a different movement poses a new situational variation. In one instance, people can be supportive of political violence and then, in a different instance, be morally opposed to it. The key factor shaping beliefs in any particular moment is how a person feels about the movement that is using political violence."**

- What do we take from these findings? How does local support (or opposition) manifest cases you know of?

terrorist attacks and public debate – Völker (2023)

to what extent and how do terrorist attacks influence public debates? What are the differences between public debates after extreme right and Islamist terrorist attacks?

What do you expect, hypothesise?

How terrorist attacks distort public debates: a comparative study of right-wing and Islamist extremism

Teresa Völker [iD]

Center for Civil Society Research, WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Berlin, Germany

ABSTRACT
Previous research has shown how terrorist attacks attract media attention and influence public opinion and decision-makers. However, we lack a comparative assessment of the extent to which extremist ideologies matter and how they

Völker (2023) - key concepts (1)

- **Discursive opportunity structures** - pre-existing values and visions around issues in the broader political culture of a country (Koopmans and Olzak 2004)

  - *issue-specific* **discursive opportunity structures** determine which actors and issues gain access to and influence public debates (Völker 2023, 2)

- **discursive critical junctures** - moments that intensify polarisation and transform existing political alignments and visions around issues

  - **can you think of an example?**

Völker (2023) - key concepts (2)

Author's own discursive radicalisation model - how radical actors may shape public debates after critical events such as terrorist attacks

1. *visibility* - how much do events/actors attract attention

2. *resonance* - political reactions that radical actors and events provoke and how they shape discourse dynamics on contested issues

3. *legitimacy* - extent to which actors and issues resonate positively and gain support

Völker (2023) - research design

- data: mass media coverage after (for two weeks) all seven fatal politically violent attacks since 2015 (four by extreme right, three by Islamist)

  - 2016 in München, 2019 Walter Lübcke, 2019 Halle, 2020 Hanau; 2016 in Berlin, 2017 in Hamburg, 2020 in Dresden

- methods: relational quantitative content analysis, frame analysis, network analysis

  - *diagnostic* and *prognostic* frames

  - data and methods transparency! see online article:
    https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2269194

Visibility

Finding: the most publicised terrorist attacks were those where the debate centred on the ideological motives of the perpetrators and the political consequences of the act
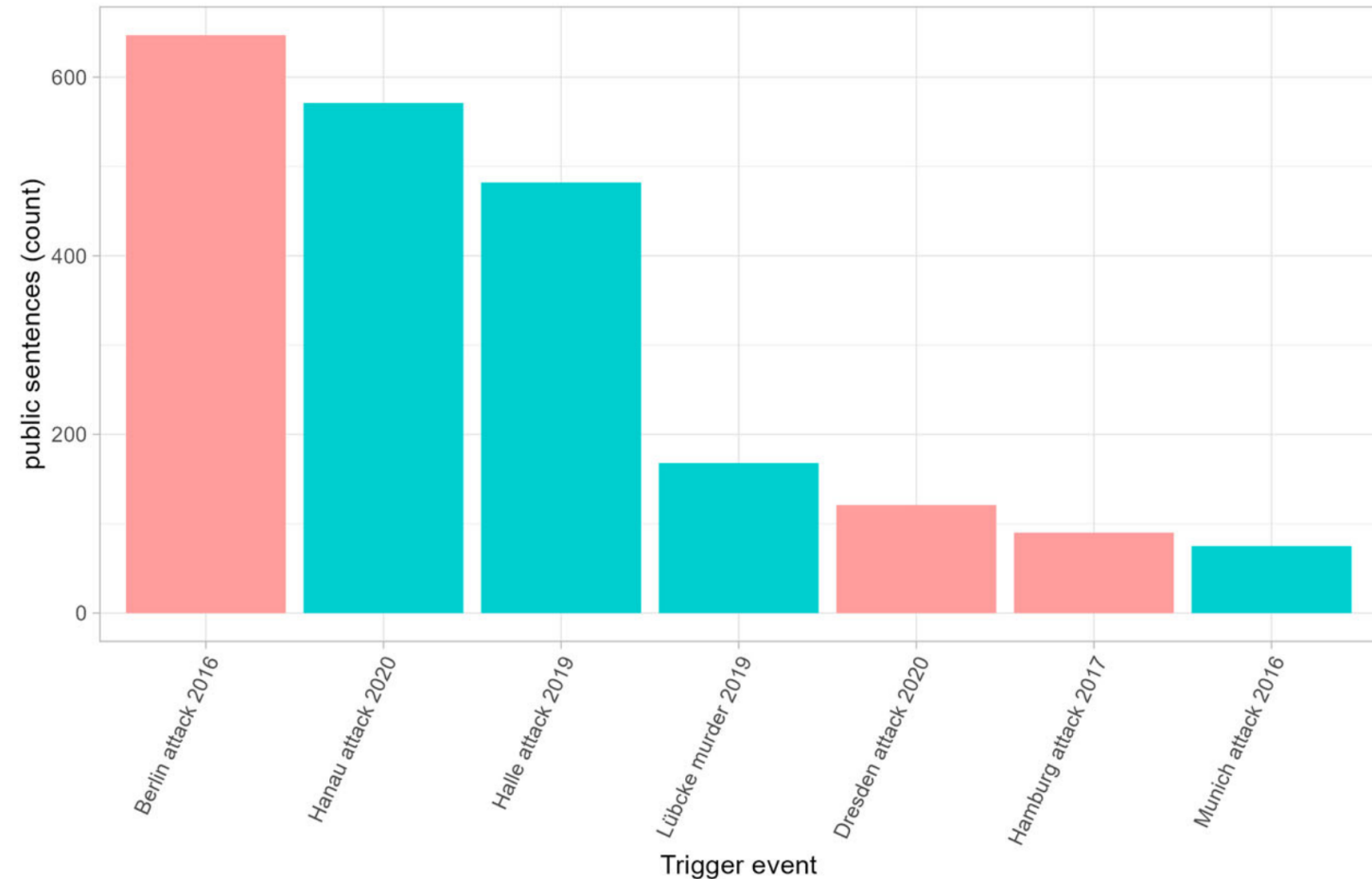

Figure 2. Visibility of terrorist attacks in German public debates.

Note: The figure shows how often Islamist (red) and extreme right (blue) attacks triggered public statements (absolute numbers) in public debates in the context of terrorist attacks between 2016 and 2020.
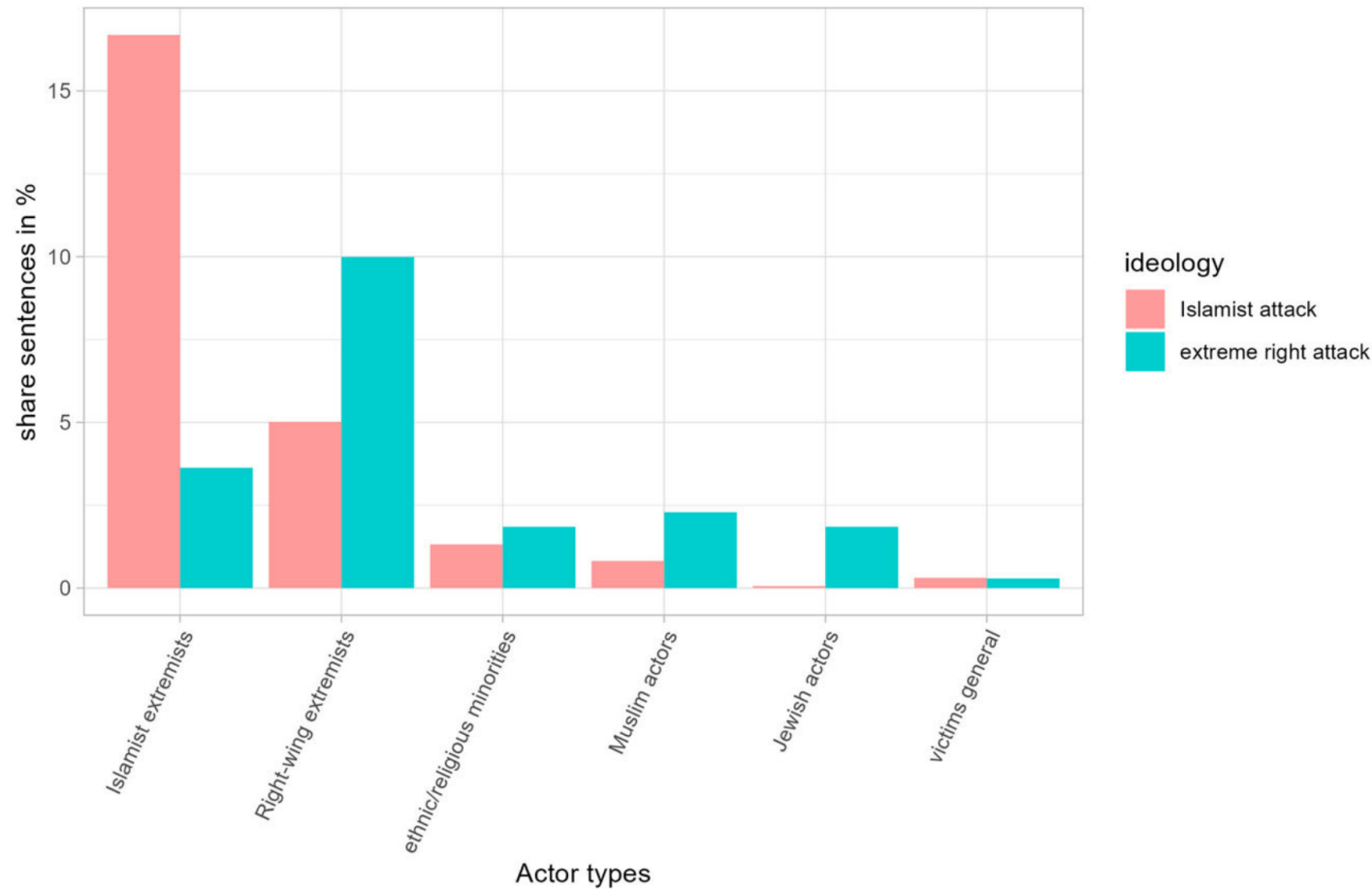
Visibility

Figure 3. Public visibility of extremists versus victims.

Note: The figure compares the share of statements portrayed in mass media by different actor groups after Islamist attacks (red) and extreme right attacks (blue).

Finding: extremists (esp. Islamists) gain more discursive space after attacks

Resonance

- "politicians from right-wing parties were more visible than politicians from left-wing parties in political debates after extreme right and Islamist attacks"
  - Right-wing parties were able to share their perspective as subjects in the debate in 59% of political statements after Islamist attack; 57% after extreme right attack
    - AfD politicians often the most visible actors
  - *why do you suppose this is the case?*
- "the content of public debates after terrorist attacks was related to the ideological motive behind the attack"
  - after Islamist attacks there is a *broad* debate about immigration and asylum
    - "debate evolved around the question of how and to what extent migration and Islam may be a breeding ground for radicalisation"
  - after extreme right attacks there is a *narrow* debate about RW extremism
    - "focus of the debate was on the perpetrator's motives, individual radicalisation and right-wing extremism"

Legitimacy

comparing level of public support for issues and actors as object of statements one week before and one week after Islamist and extreme right attacks: captures change of (average) positions on issues and actors as the objects of statements (-1 stands for a negative relationship and 1 for a positive relationship) covered in the mass media

	Public legitimacy shift (average position)	
	Islamist attacks	Extreme right attacks
Statements referring to Actors		
extreme right actors	-0.18	-0.35
Islamist actors	-0.28	-0.37
Statements referring to Issues		
Islam	-0.35	-0.11
migration	-0.19	-0.55
nationalism	-0.19	-0.16
radicalisation	0.01	-0.06

Legitimacy

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Terrorist attacks reduce the public legitimacy of extremist actors and their political agenda in public debates

Legimacy

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legitimacy of Islam decreases more after Islamist attacks than the legitimacy of nationalism does after extreme right attacks (*issues*)

influential actors - Völker (2023)

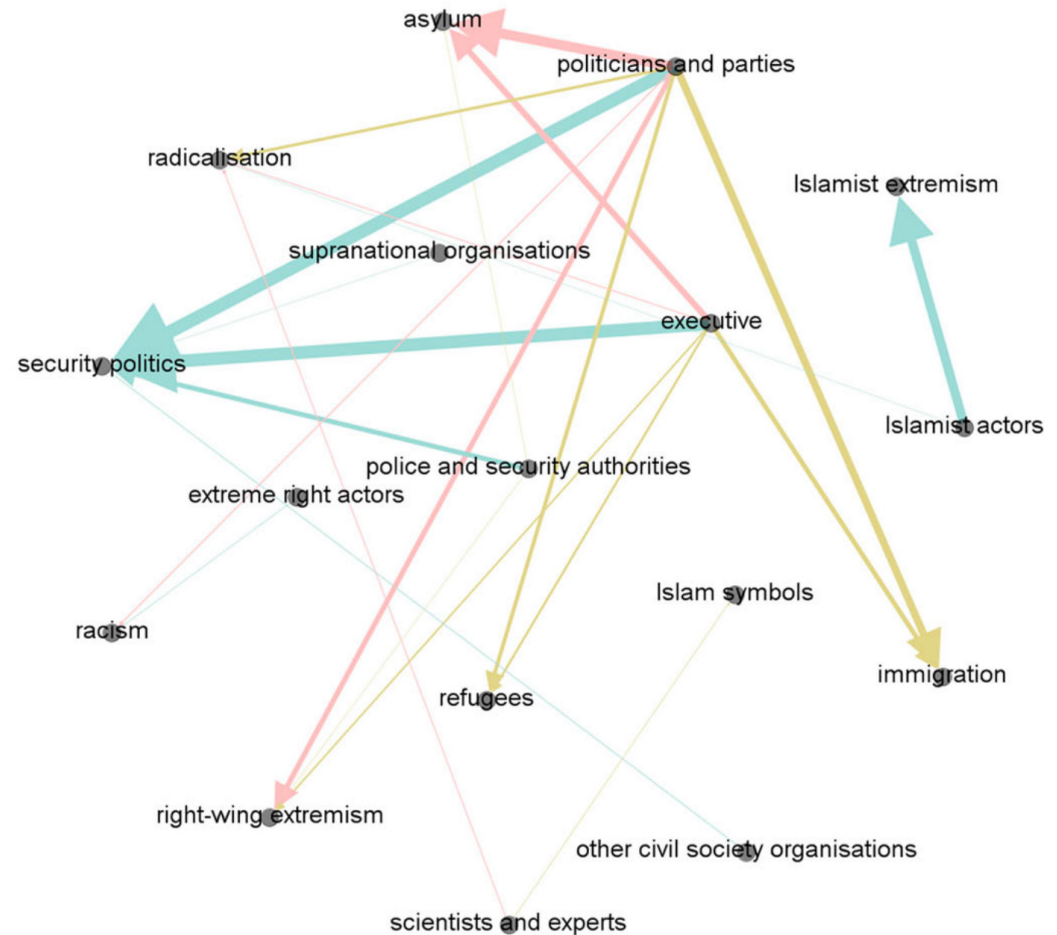Who were the most influential actors in pushing frames and issues onto the media agenda?

To answer this, Völker (2023) creates 'discourse networks'

- the discourse networks have two types of **nodes**: *actors* and *issues*

- directed ties (**arrows**) show which issues actors focus on

    - **size** of the arrow represents number of statements

    - **color** of the arrow represents average position

        ○ positive

        ○ negative

        ○ neutral

influential actors (after Islamist attacks)

- **nodes**: *actors* and *issues*

- **directed ties** (**arrows**) show which issues actors focus on

  - **size** of the arrow represents number of statements

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    - positive, negative, neutral
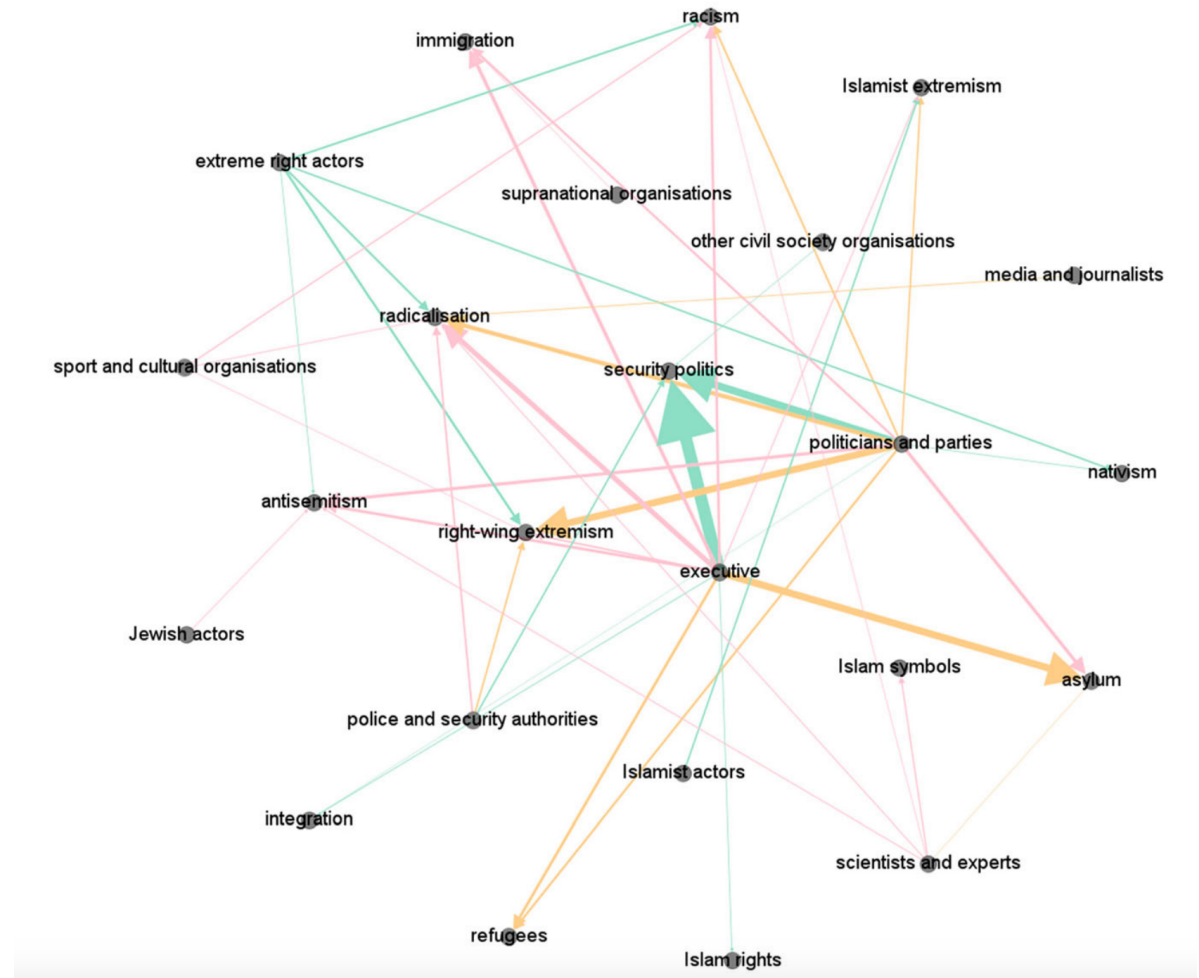

a) *Islamist attacks (top)*

influential actors (after extreme right attacks)

- **nodes**: *actors* and *issues*

- **directed ties** (**arrows**) show which issues actors focus on

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  - **color** of the arrow represents average position

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b) extreme right *attacks (bottom)*

Völker (2023) - findings

- similar actor constellations emerged and dominated public debates after terrorist attacks

    - **governmental actors** and **political parties** drive post-attack debates

    - emphasis is on **security policies** and **strengthening counter-terrorism** ('securitisation')

Public and political reactions drive state policy and repressive responses (covered in the next two weeks)

(*relates to repressive responses that we will address in Week 12*)

some 2025 PV news

- Extreme right (online) group 'Terrorgram' listed as terrorist group by U.S. (Al Jazeera 2025)

- WWII historical reparations between Poland-Ukraine (Rankin 2025)

- Coup plotters (2022) jailed (Guardian staff 2025)

- Extreme right groups recruiting younger and younger (Bryant 2025; Litschko 2025)

- Germany bans *Königreich Deutschland* group (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat 2025; Zeit Online 2025)

- investigate reporting on extremist networks on Facebook (Firoz 2025; Jürgens 2025; Duncan et al. 2025; Hernandes et al. 2025)

- high rate of proscription in France (Amsallem, Audureau, and Geoffroy 2025)

- transnational terror group operating in Ukraine (Makuch 2025)

- TikTok's online trust and safety team replaced by AI (Kerr 2025)

- Irish rap group banned from Canada for 'glorifying terrorism' (PA Media 2025; Weaver 2025)

- UK government's use of double agent in northern Ireland conflict (Carroll 2025)

next meeting

- state responses

- in the meantime…

Io Saturnalia! and happy holidays

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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