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Targeting Taxonomy and Patterns of Political Violence in Stable Societies: Evidence from the Far Right in Italy

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ABSTRACT

Fundamental to research on political violence is a conceptual framework to identify and trace patterns of violence. The dimension of targeting has received considerable attention as research investigating these patterns have incorporated observations about the intention behind attacks. We contribute to this research agenda by proposing a taxonomy of targeting, which can be applied in political violence cases, from the typically high-intensity violence of civil war to the usually low-intensity violence of militant social movements. We position this targeting taxonomy in relation to the broader conceptual property space comprising patterns of political violence. To test the utility of our conceptual framework, we applied it to coding novel data on far-right political violence in Italy from 2013 to 2020. Our results reveal the trends of sustained political violence within a stable democracy like Italy. It is worth noting that Italy has less political stability than other European countries, most visible in the relatively frequent change of government. Nevertheless, its democratic system is stable: violent groups and individuals act violently, but target more situationally and collectively, less indiscriminately; the violence itself is typically noncritical; and, characteristic of far-right violence, it is directed more often against people than property. Our findings speak to the role of politically violent organisations within stable democracies, where violence is less intense than amid armed conflicts but nevertheless a menace to some social groups.

Introduction

How does sustained political violence manifest and evolve over time? This question is fundamental to research aiming to analyse the diverse forms of political violence used in many different context types. The challenging descriptive tasks of assessing the dimensions of inter-group violence, of identifying shifts in political violence, whether by a group or of a multi-organisational field, or of distinguishing the transitions between (relative) stability and widespread violence necessarily precede causal explanations about these phenomena. To enable reliable longitudinal and comparative research, conceptual frameworks must be clear and offer the analytical leverage to differentiate between different types of cases.

Scholarship on political violence, broadly referring to the use of force by a person or group with political motivations or purposes, has produced dimensions for analysing longitudinal trends. In particular, prior theorisation of 'patterns of political violence'[1] has sharpened analytical concepts underlying large-scale comparative research on political violence. Categorisation and analysis of sustained political violence have repeatedly looked at a handful of dimensions, including *frequency*, how often incidents occur, *repertoire*, the form of the violence, *technique*, the violent means used, and

targeting, the intention underlying why someone or something is attacked. Yet the study of political violence has primarily concentrated on the intense violence of armed conflicts, obfuscating the fact that patterns of political violence also exist in stable settings, in which there is regular political functioning and not the disruptive presence of ongoing civil conflict. Some case-based research rooted in social movement scholarship has examined political violence within stable polities,[2] but generating more rich description than broadly applicable comparative frameworks. A central concern of research on political violence and conflict is to detect the difference between stable and unstable settings and, more importantly, investigating what causes the varying levels of diffuse, low-intensity political violence to tip over into the intense, highly 'strategic and ordered' violence of armed conflicts.

We contribute to this far-reaching research agenda by developing a taxonomy of targeting and relating it to a conceptual property space of violence patterns. Applying this framework to novel data about incidents of far-right violence in Italy enables us to characterise the violent practices of the far-right movement sector.[3] Of particular note is how incidence of violence is evidently driven not so much by actual conditions but more by politicisation at certain moments: violence against migrants spikes in 2018—not when inward migration is most intense but rather when political actors, chiefly Matteo Salvini and the Lega party, are most insistently agenda-setting migration issues. This finding speaks to the interrelation of charged or even militant political rhetoric and politically violent activity. Furthermore, focusing in on one of the most important organisations in contemporary Italy, CasaPound Italia (CPI), we reveal the peculiarities of specific violent actors within the society-wide patterns, confirming that violent manifestations do indeed reflect intra-organisational processes of socialisation and group activism.

Our exploratory analysis within the contemporary Italian context demonstrates the potential of the targeting taxonomy to generate descriptive insights. However, our conceptual framework will be most useful in the broader work of causal analysis and comparative research. This paper's most essential contribution is to enhance that research agenda, informing projects investigating the tipping point between less intense, less ordered violence of stable political settings and the more intense, strategic and ordered violence of conflict settings.

In what follows, we first discuss the literature that speaks to the analytical tasks of categorising political violence. Then, we build upon this work by explaining the dimensions of sustained political violence and taxonomical differences in how violent attacks are targeted. We apply this conceptual framework to a novel dataset of far-right violence in Italy, discussing the motivating factors underlying the identified patterns. Our concluding section summarises our findings and contributions, and points to avenues for further research applying the targeting taxonomy.

Categorising and tracking political violence

Research on political violence has undergone a transformation in recent decades. Once sequestered in the niche of terrorism and security studies, inquiry into political violence has diversified. Besides extricating this topic from the silo of security policy-focused research and broadening disciplinary perspectives, diversification of research on political violence has also expanded in topical coverage. To understand dynamics of political violence, specific inquiry must be understood as part of a wide spectrum of political violence. Research[4] that encompasses this spectrum, including civil war and armed conflict, terrorism, and the more irregular political violence within stable and secure states has advanced the analysis of political violence.

Work categorising and tracking political violence has pursued three particularly important lines of inquiry. First, an extensive collection of research examines the causes of political violence. Crenshaw,[5] for example, sets out causes of terrorism from situational (macro), organisational (meso), and psychological (micro) factors—though the propositions subsumed under these causal factors have relevance for the whole spectrum of political violence.[6] Studies in this vein investigate remote and proximate conditions that stimulate political violence, for example: Koopmans[7] finds that opportunities shaped by political elites and seized on by

extreme-right parties help to explain spikes in racist violence; Løvlien[8] finds that relative deprivation increases the likelihood of supporting terrorist action; and Vegetti and Littvay[9] find that individuals who believe in conspiracy theories are more likely to endorse political violence. Such studies plumb the deep and complex interaction between the structural factors that enable or encourage political violence and the collective and individual agents that carry it out.

Second, scholars have looked closely at the diverse effects of political violence. In some cases actors have successfully used violence to alter or undermine election results,[10] while in other instances the experience of political violence has spurred on electoral participation.[11] In its immediate aftermath, political violence affects public debates about how to handle such extremism[12] and impacts attitudes towards actors perceived as associated to the violent actors.[13] Experience of political violence has enduring impacts on individuals and communities, which can fuel policy debates and actions long after violent incidents.[14] Groups enacting political violence have triggered grassroots resistance, both nonviolent[15] and violent.[16] The intent and consequences are as varied as the many forms of violence.

Finally, research essentially concerned with how to mitigate, minimise, and marginalise political violence from normal, nonviolent political engagement investigates the decline of violence and demobilisation of groups acting violently. Waning political violence might be driven by state action, such as bans and repression[17] or other forms of counter-action,[18] as well as by individual disengagement from violent groups.[19] Cronin[20] distils the decline of terrorist groups down to seven explanations: (1) capture or killing of the leader, (2) failure to transition to the next generation, (3) achievement of the group's aims, (4) transition to a legitimate political process, (5) undermining of popular support, (6) repression, and (7) transition from terrorism to other forms of violence. Similar to Crenshaw's[21] discussion of terrorism's causes; Cronin's[22] Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends." theorisation offers analytical leverage across the wider spectrum of political violence.

Yet fundamental to all of these endeavours is the conceptual framework to identify and trace patterns of violence. Investigating causes necessitates first identifying incidence of violence: by whom, where, when, and in what form. Effects vary according to the rate and manner of perpetrated violence. And decline in political violence, whether in absolute terms or in more subtle detection of moderating forms of violence, is recognisable only through tracing patterns. Recent work has attended to this essential descriptive task, conceptualising patterns of political violence in order to trace it over time and compare it between contexts. Let us look more closely at the patterned nature of political violence.

Patterns of violence between contention and conflict

The characteristics of politically violent activity are almost unimaginably diverse across contexts and circumstances. Yet the need to discern patterns of political violence, to be able to offer a diagnosis of that violence, has driven researchers to conceptualise dimensions of political violence that facilitate comparison[23] Foremost is the conceptual framework advanced by Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood,[24] that patterns of political violence consist of repertoire, targeting, frequency, and technique. Repertoires, they write,[25] are the "subset of all possible forms of violence against civilians" in which an organisation regularly engages, such as killing or wartime rape. Targeting refers to the intention underlying the use of political violence on someone or something. In other words, targeting is the answer to why someone or something was attacked. Frequency means the rate (of incidence, of prevalence, or of perpetration)[26] or simply the count of attacks deploying a certain repertoire with a certain targeting. Finally, technique refers to the means used to carry out an attack, such as a specific weapon or instrument.

Slightly recasting this conceptual framework can enhance its analytical leverage. First, it is obvious but important to state that sustained political violence occurs even in secure political settings. Patterns of political violence are therefore not limited to armed organisations and militarised conflict. They also exist in stable, democratic societies where state forces are capable of minimising violence and punishing transgressors. Yet state forces are on constant guard that varying levels of diffuse (even if

sustained) political violence never pass the tipping point where violence becomes the highly 'strategic and ordered'[27] action of concerted or even unified organisation.

A principal advantage of the patterns of political violence framework is that it enables comparison between the many different contexts in which sustained political violence exists. Taking this further, there are two non-necessary components of targeting that likely vary systematically among different contexts. Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood[28] justifiably assert that, when attributed to a specific organisation, targeting denotes 'ordered and strategic' action. In other words, the necessary component of targeting, that is intention, has to be (at least theoretically) traceable at the organisational level, not merely the product of individual whim, not merely empirically observed violence without clear intention. We argue that the ordered and strategic elements are not necessary when the unit of analysis for which we are identifying patterned violence is broader than a single organisation. The violence patterns of a movement scene in a stable political setting, for example, may have some degree of being strategic and ordered, but far less than a paramilitary organisation in an armed conflict. Consider, for example, the case of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) in Finland: as an organisation it justified the use of political violence but claimed it did not engage in violent acts, merely applauding such acts when committed by others.[29] Finland's Supreme Court was not convinced and banned the NRM precisely because it had engaged in sustained political violence,[30] with intention, with a strategic view to furthering its goals. Consider also the right-wing terrorism and violence (RTV) dataset,[31] covering attacks and plots motivated by right-wing extremist beliefs in 18 Western European countries from 1990 onwards. RTV differentiates between (a) lone actors, (b) gangs and unorganised groups, (c) organised groups and affiliated members, and (d) coordinated entities— but violence by all these perpetrators similarly aims to advance right-wing extremist objectives. Targeting is happening in the stable Western democracies covered by RTV and in armed conflict zones because in both contexts (and others) there is intention and strategy in the conduct of political violence.

Second, we propose a taxonomy of targeting, visualised in Figure 1, that is applicable to all cases of political violence, from the typically high-intensity violence of civil war to the usually low-intensity violence of militant social movements. The targeting types that follow are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. For all targeted political violence, characterised by intentionality, attacks are either premeditated or unpremeditated. Call the latter-type *situational*.[32] In this type, the necessary intention to act violently is present, but not planned to the same extent as other forms of targeting. Think of riots or even more predictable tense contexts, such as encounters between duelling protests of far-right and leftist groups. Actors in these contexts may have some premonition about the potential for violence; they may be prepared, with weapons or tactics, should this potentiality
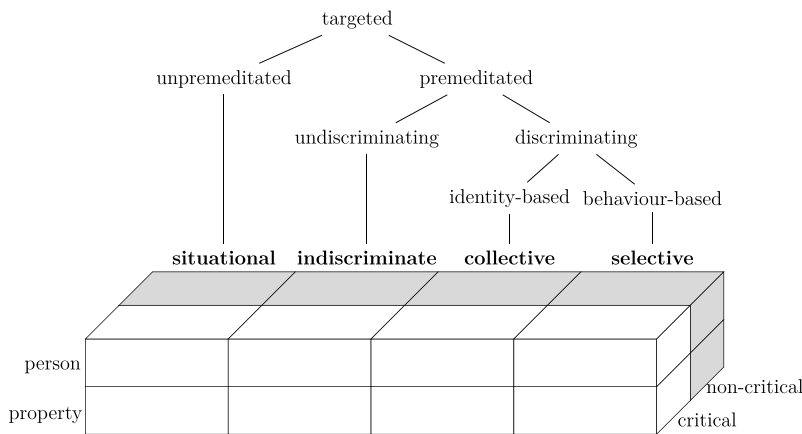

Figure 1. Targeting taxonomy and conceptual property space.

become reality—but it is still only contingent on how whether settings and circumstances open opportunities for violence. Situational targeting is thus responsive in nature. A recurrent example of situational targeting that we find in the data presented below is scuffling sparked by leafleting activity: far-right activists are distributing material in front of a school, an individual or a group expresses their disapproval, and a brawl breaks out. Unlike premeditated forms, situational targeting arises from immediate provocations and unfolds in response to perceived threats or opposition in real time.

Among premeditated targeted violence, attacks are either discriminating or undiscriminating. The latter specifies *indiscriminate* violence, where targeting pays no mind to individual traits, whether related to group status or to behaviour, nor distinguishes between combatants and civilians. The technique of planting bombs is closely connected with cases of indiscriminate violence, but one might also think of attackers firing into a (random) crowd. While indiscriminate targeting is rare in stable settings—we find only one instance of it in our data—including it in our conceptualisation can capture its more frequent occurrence in civil conflicts.

For premeditated violence that is targeted on the basis individual traits, we can divide between attacks that are motivated by group affiliation or identity. Call this *collective* targeting.[33] Persons or properties may be associated with a group through characteristics such as neighbourhood, occupation or use, ethnicity or ethnic affiliations, or other observable traits, what Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood[34] call 'identity-based targeting.' So long as the intention behind an attack is not about that particular individual but rather the collectivity to which they (seemingly) belong, then there is collective targeting. We can see a non-critical instance of this targeting type against property in a 2014 incident in our data where a group threw bags of feces and urine at the headquarters of the Gay Project association and shouted threats at members: there is clear premeditation, but the intention of targeting is an identity, not a specific behaviour or individual.

Alternatively, when someone or something is attacked on the basis of specific behaviour or function that is *selective* targeting. In this mode, political violence is directed against a clearly identified target. A person might be attacked because they are acting as an informant or because they are an important oppositional actor; a property might be targeted for the specific work done there—not just the type of work, which would be collective targeting—or the material contained therein. Selective is thus the most specific form of targeting. We see this type in data presented below when, for example, in 2017 two members of CasaPound's youth group (Blocco Studentesco) attacked a student representative who had criticised a far-right student council electoral slate.

Our targeting taxonomy can draw useful distinctions among the violence in armed conflicts as well as in militant social movement activity.[35] Determining the intent behind violent incidents can be difficult. For instance, news reports and police accounts do not always make it clear whether a clash between opposing groups stemmed from premeditated action or a spontaneous escalation of an unplanned encounter. While such ambiguity exists, it appears to be the exception rather than the norm. Our taxonomy builds upon the patterns of political violence framework[36] and improves upon prior targeting conceptualisations that, for instance, exaggerate the centrality of social ties.[37] Moreover, our typological spectrum, from situational to selective can be applied to political violence of all scales, from civil wars and armed conflicts to relatively low-intensity political violence.

Third, in Figure 1 the targeting taxonomy is positioned in relation to the broader conceptual property space comprising patterns of political violence. Whereas the width of the conceptual property space represents targeting, the height represents targeted entity, whether a person(s) or property.[38] Of course, attacks against property are also usually intended to harm people, at minimum by inconveniencing the people who own or use the property. But by referring to targeted entity, our conceptualisation simply asks, 'what entity is being acted upon?' In Figure 1, the depth simplifies repertoire to critical and non-critical violence.[39] Critical repertoires are where violence against persons is lethal or highly intense and where violence against property is destructive, imperilling structural integrity. Non-critical repertoires may involve serious injury of persons and grave degradation of property, but falls short of (near) lethality or structural damage.

Though the dimensions of the conceptual property space could be extended to provide finer distinctions, the framework we elaborate facilitates generalizable comparison across the spectrum of contexts as well as longitudinal comparison, that key aim and advantage of examining patterns of political violence. Similarly, alternative approaches might incorporate the accuracy of political violence, whether intended targets are hit or instead attacks incur accidental or incidental damage (or indeed are prevented), but we suspect the comparative utility of such a complication would be limited.

Political violence in Italy

We look to Italy and recent far-right political violence there to apply our conceptual framework. Italy and its far-right scene is a useful context in which to examine political violence for several reasons. First, Italy has had a diverse array of institutional political players, including far-right parties that have come into government. Frequent changes in government mean that the national political context in which far-right violence has played out has varied considerably. Second, there are numerous active far-right organisations engaged in or connected to political violence. This opens the possibility that inter-group dynamics *within* the far-right scene might affect overall patterns of violence, such as when organised competitors try to 'outbid' each other to attract more support. These far-right organisations also often contend against and clash with militant leftist organisations, representing another recurrent source of violence, as indeed is the case in several other European countries. Third, Italy has a long history of political extremism and sustained political violence, not limited to but prominently including far-right actors. This history and the many cases therein offer insights into the various forms, motivations, and socio-political dynamics that affect political violence. Consider this history.

Post-war Italy was born under the shadow of far-right violence, within the context of a negotiated pacification of the adherents of the Republic of Salò. This pacification allowed the nascent republic to secure the disarmament of veterans and support for the republican option, albeit at the cost of a general amnesty.[40] While arguably necessary to minimise opposition to the Italian Republic, the amnesty opened the way for figures from the fascist regime to (re-)enter Italian political life, most conspicuously under the umbrella of the Italian Social Movement (MSI).

From its inception, the MSI was marked by a phenomenon of "double membership," wherein many party members were also members or supporters of terrorist groupings that agitated and acted violently against the republican system. Militant anti-system attitudes permeated a wide swathe of MSI supporters, spanning from groups of university students to paramilitary organisations. MSI leaders, endeavouring to retain the support of far-right militants while also remaining a viable partner for right-wing political coalitions, maintained a pragmatic ambiguity on many episodes of violence.[41]

MSI permissiveness helped foster the emergence of two forms of far-right political violence: terrorism and neo-squadrism. Those enacting these forms of violence often maintained contact with parts of the MSI, though terrorist violence was largely covert, while neo-squadrist violence was overt. Terrorist violence took shape through groups like Ordine Nuovo and Avanguardia Nazionale,[42] which at times received support and encouragement for their bombings and other actions from MSI and perhaps also from state security actors. Neo-squadrist violence was even more closely connected to MSI as party members would join militants from aligned organisations in attacking leftist demonstrations and activists. Whereas the rate of terrorist violence in Italy—characterised by both indiscriminate and selective targeting and by high intensity—subsided in the time after the 1970s and 1980s violent tensions (the *Anni di Piombo*), neo-squadrist violence—more typically involving situational targeting and lesser intensity—endures as common among Italy's far-right scene. Alongside longstanding groups like the MSI's youth organisation, new politically violent groupings emerged, including skinhead groups, football hooligan clubs, and more recently organisations like Forza Nuova and CasaPound.

New spaces, forms of socialisation, and political priorities have spurred shifts in Italy's far-right scene. Today, political violence merges traditional forms of territorial rivalry with the antifascist world and chaotic aggression towards immigrants, aimed at 'defending the Motherland.' Yet how politically

violent far-right actors target and what patterns of violence exist remains obscure. The following sections examine those empirical manifestations of political violence in Italy.

Data and methods

To test the utility of our conceptual framework, we applied it to coding data on far-right political violence in Italy, which vastly exceeds other ideological strains of political violence in Italy.[43] Between 2013 and 2020, there is virtually no Islamist political violence in Italy (Tina Magazzini, Marina Eleftheriadou, and Anna Triandafyllidou, *The Non-radicalisation of Muslims in Southern Europe: Migration and Integration in Italy, Greece, and Spain*, Rethinking Political Violence (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71996-7). Italian state security reports (available online: https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/cosa-facciamo/relazione-annuale) for this period record no Islamist attacks in Italy. There is however far-left political violence, but it is consistently dwarfed by the number of far-right violence incidents. Italian state security reports mention 3 incidents in 2013, 3 in 2014, 7 in 2015, 4 in 2016, 11 in 2017, 5? in 2018, 16 in 2019, and 25 in 2020. Moreover, these incidents fit with a frequently observed pattern: whereas far-right violence tends to target people, far-left violence more commonly targets property. Our analysis relies on data of over 200 violent incidents by perpetrators motivated by far-right beliefs[44] from 2013 until the end of 2020. This motivation selection criterion aligns with other far-right violence datasets, such as the RTV dataset.[45] The initial, larger datawas drawn from the Antifascist Observatory project[46] by Italian anti-fascists[47] to catalogue incidents of far-right ('neo-fascist,' in the project's terms) political violence.[48] We validated this data by looking for independent accounts of the violent incidents from police and news sources, filtering out cases that could not be confirmed. Figure 2 shows that, though we capture a few more incidents than the RTV dataset, the overall trend is the same.[49] After this establishing this measurement validity, we hand-coded several categories to each observation, including type of entity targeted (i.e., person or property), type of targeting (i.e., situational, indiscriminate, collective, or selective), and intensity of violence (i.e., critical or non-critical).[50]

Three challenges that we addressed in our coding process are worth mentioning. First, there is the fundamental point about categorising, by virtue of their inclusion, all these incidents as cases of far-right violence. This point is not resolved merely by the incident's inclusion in the original dataset. In checking and recoding the data, we focused on clear signs of far-right affiliation or ideological motivations. Generally, to be affiliated with an organisation is to have enduring and traceable participation with the organisation, which might include an individual being officially registered as a member, regular participation in an organisation's events, presence within an organisation's internal forums and decision-making channels and processes. Indicators of far-right ideological motivations
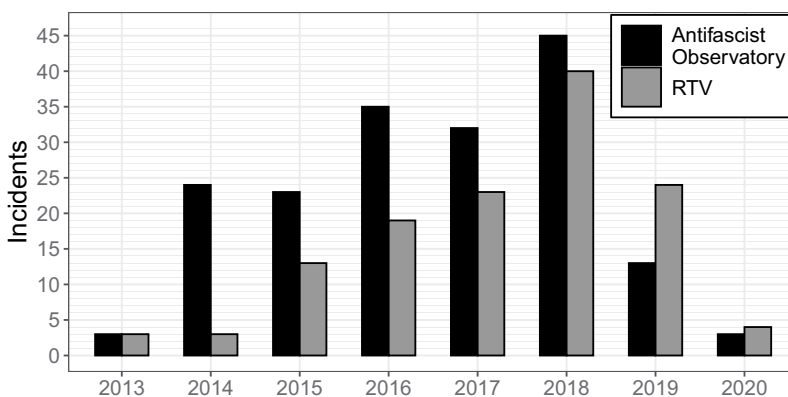

Figure 2. Comparison of number of far-right violent incidents captured by the Antifascist Observatory project and by the RTV dataset.

might include racist slurs directed at the victim, explicit ideological claims, or news reports that highlight the perpetrator's history and outline their political identity. However, it is essential to note that not every incident perpetrated by a far-right individual is an incident of far-right violence; that is, cases of far-right violence are distinguished by being motivated by group dynamics and/or by ideological justifications—both of these contain the essential component of intentionality. Incidents where no such intentionality could be detected were excluded from the data. A notable example is a group rape that occurred in Viterbo, originally included in the dataset. Both defendants are members of CasaPound (one even holding organisational office), and their political affiliation was highlighted by the media. However, the case does not present any clear ideological motivation and the specific form of violence is not typical of far-right organisations; in this sense, it differs from the violence directed against passers-by for apparently trivial reasons, which is rooted in an organised culture of violence.

Second, a recurrent feature of some far-right political violence, not only in Italy, is ambiguity about what leads to an incident. Particularly in violent altercations between far-right and militant leftists, accounts frequently diverge on the point of who initiated the altercation. This ambiguity is characteristic of situational targeting, where violent actors did not specifically plan to attack a certain entity but acted violently when the opportunity emerged. Relatedly, some incidents of situational targeting are not directed at militant leftists or migrants or other typical bêtes noires for far-right actors; instead, far-right actors sometimes attack mere passers-by. Though ideological justifications may be scant in such incidents, group dynamics are sufficient to motivate this sort of violence. Such violence is often rooted in socialisation rituals and practices of far-right organisations. For instance, in San Benedetto del Tronto, a group of CasaPound militants, including boxer Roberto Ruffini, attacked passers-by, sending six people to the emergency room. The following month, Ruffini reportedly carried out a similar assault on a passer-by—again, apparently without any reason. This is situational targeting; while the precise intention is unclear, there are no clear signs of premeditation. Such cases seem to reflect a political culture that glorifies and encourages violence.[51]

Third, like all incidents of political violence, the targeting of far-right violence may be inaccurate. In several incidents, attackers may perceive a target in a certain way and attack on that basis, such as when far-right actors perceive an entity as anti-fascist. So even if an entity is not actually anti-fascist or migrant or a member of some other category, far-right actors might target it based on that mistaken categorisation. In this way, our coding adopted the subjective perspective of far-right attackers, defining as (for example) 'anti-fascist' anyone demonstrably perceived as such by the attackers. In an extreme yet significant case, a young man in Bolzano was assaulted while walking past the Casapound headquarters simply because his phone ringtone was "Bella Ciao." The victim did not express any political views (moreover, the song "Bella Ciao" is also played, in remixed versions, in nightclubs), nor displayed any links to political organisations. In this case, and in similar instances, we categorised the target as anti-fascist, since this was the aggressors' apparent belief. This sort of incident was coded as collective targeting, as the victims were attacked as (presumed) adherents to a political ideology.

Patterns across Italy

Taking all far-right violence together, we see that the trend for 2013 through 2019 is for a fairly low number of incidents with periodic spikes. Throughout, incidents have clustered in the most populous regions, Lombardy in the north and Lazio in the central coastal region around Rome. Population density alone is insufficient explanation; however, since there are few incidents in Campania and Sicily. Rather, the dense ecologies of far-right organisations in Lombardy and (especially) Lazio are a likely cause for the intense concentrations of far-right violence.

In line with the crescendo of violent far-right incidents shown in Figure 2, we see that a spate of incidents occurred in 2018, including incidents in most regions. Just by incidence, 2018 is a curious outlier that invites further investigation.
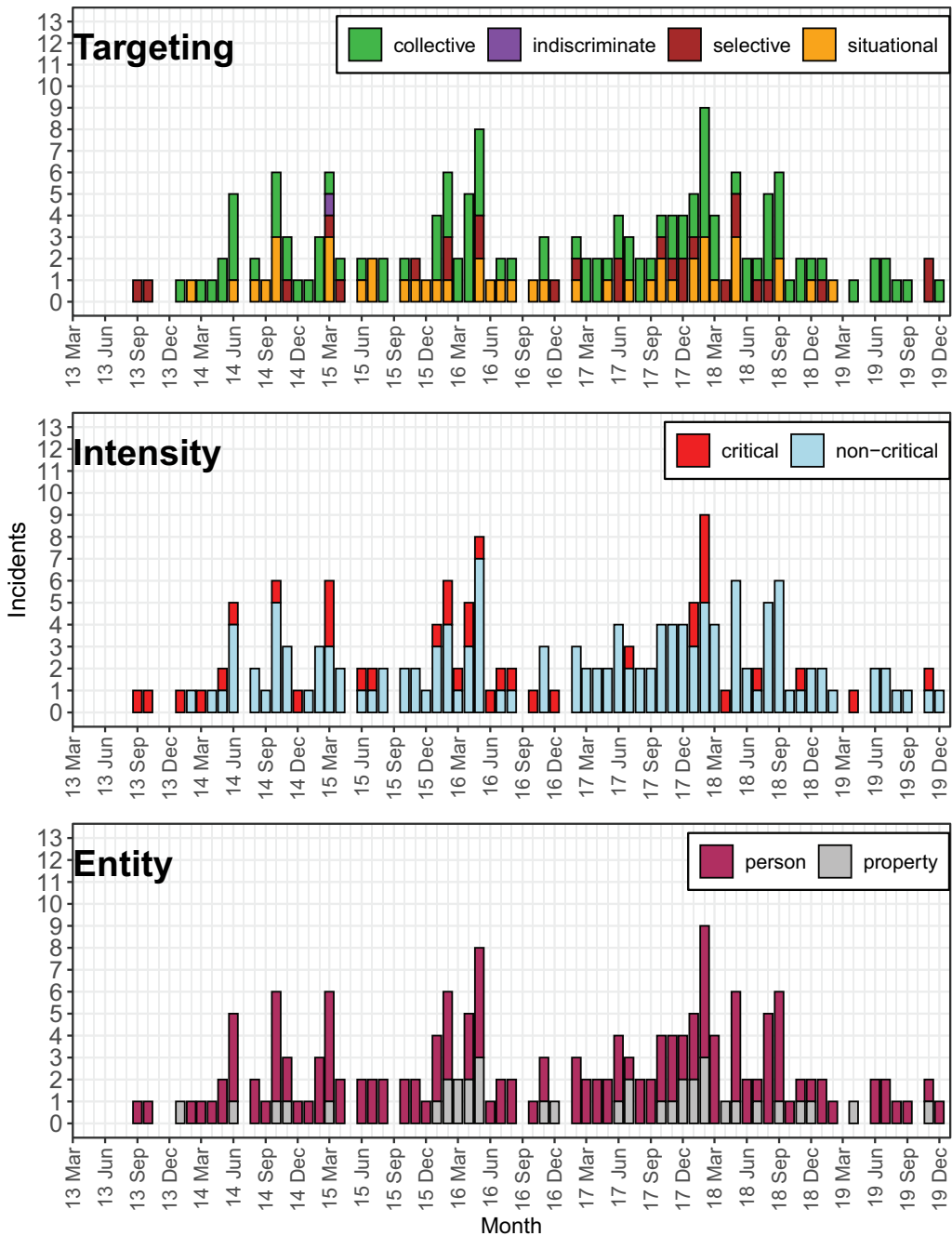
Figure 3. Monthly patterns of far-right violence incidents in Italy, by targeting type, intensity, and targeted entity.

We look to the categorical codes derived from our conceptual framework (Figure 1) to go beyond the mere count and geographic distribution of incidents and gain more analytical leverage. Figure 3 shows that most far-right attacks are directed against persons, rather than property, thus aligning with previous observations about this tendency of far-right violence. We also note that the vast majority of incidents are non-critical. This is typical of the lower intensity of violence by militant social movements, unlike the high intensity more common to civil wars.

Most revealing is the variation in targeting. Whereas some extant research[52] traces what individuals and groups are attacked (e.g., political opponents, immigrants), our taxonomy offers a novel perspective on how far-right political violence is targeted. There are recurrent incidents of selective targeting, mostly against anti-fascists, and a regular occurrence of situational targeting against the whole gamut of social groups: anti-fascists, ethnic minorities, politicians, students, and passers-by. (This wide swathe of victims is not surprising for situational targeting, where attacks are unpremeditated.) Yet the preponderance of incidents charted in Figure 3 involved collective targeting, that is attacks motivated by group affiliation or identity. Attacks against immigrants and ethnic minorities accounted for just three incidents in 2017; in 2018, it spiked to 18 incidents.

A typical example of this sort of far-right violence took place on June 11, 2018. In Caserta (Campania), three young Italian men drove up behind two Malian asylum seekers near a reception centre and shot at them with pellet rifles, which use compressed air to shoot dangerous but non-lethal pellets. Although the victims sustained only minor physical injuries, the psychological impact of such an attack was likely substantial. During the attack, the men shouted "Salvini! Salvini!," seemingly a clear demonstration of their political motivations. This sort of intimidation typifies the far-right violence of 2018. Other incidents followed the same pattern, leading several Italian media outlets to refer to 2018 as a 'summer of pellet guns' (*estate dei piombini*).

An incident later in the year further illustrates the apparent emboldening of far-right aggression in response to political rhetoric. On September 12, 2018, a 22-year-old Guinean refugee and university student was assaulted in Sassari (Sardinia) by a group of young men. The attackers said they could do as they pleased 'in their own country' and told the refugee to 'go home.' This language reflects the exclusionary discourse of then-Minister of the Interior Salvini and his Lega party, framing migrants and refugees as outsiders and legitimising hostility against them. Such rhetoric contributes to making an environment more permissive towards racially or politically motivated violence.

Looking at the data and individual cases, it is evident that 2018 marks both a qualitative and quantitative anomaly. The qualitative shift pertains to both the targets and the perpetrators. While attacks carried out by the largest far-right organisation, CasaPound Italia, decreased, there was a significant increase in attacks by individuals not directly or closely linked to any organisations. Incidents by these individuals almost wholly account for the increase in violence against immigrants recorded in the dataset—likely indicating an even larger underlying trend—while CasaPound continues to operate within the framework of territorial and personal conflict, for instance by attacking political opponents.

Macro-level conditions

Neither internal dynamics within groups nor any particular political strategy offer a satisfactory explanation for this spike of violence in 2018. Similarly, though Jacob Aasland Ravndal[53] offers a compelling explanation for long-term rates of far-right violence, it does not clarify relatively fleeting spikes of violence. For clues about the drivers of this 2018 increase, we turn our attention to the broader political context in Italy and to the type of political climate that emerged that year. General elections in March 2018 marked a major upheaval in the Italian party and ideological system, with some going so far as referring to the beginning of a 'Third Republic.' Not only was the incumbent ruling party, the Partito Democratico (PD), resoundingly defeated but the longstanding bastion of the Italian centre-right, Forza Italia, lost the predominant position it had occupied since its formation in 1994. In its place, the Lega party established itself as the leading party of the Italian right and the third largest in the country, eventually forming the first 'populist government' in Western Europe together with the Five Star Movement.

Compared to Forza Italia, Lega is distinguished by a fixation on immigration, marked Euroscepticism (though often subject to revisions and retractions), and a completely different communication style, typically populist, capable of 'breaking through' media barriers and monopolising attention. Furthermore, the abandonment of the party's regionalist roots (e.g., changing its name from

'Lega Nord' to simply 'Lega') necessitated some adaptation of its narrative, with traditional autonomist or separatist themes giving way to stridently nationalist rhetoric. Lega's leader, Matteo Salvini, upon forming the coalition government, became Minister of the Interior, occupying a position consonant with Lega's focus on immigration issues.

Simultaneous to this political upheaval, Italy was experiencing the waning phase of a migration crisis that had begun in 2013 in the aftermath of the Libyan war. The trend of decreasing immigration, falling from the crisis peak in 2016 and consolidated by the signing of the Italy–Libya agreements, continued in 2018: the number of landings dropped from 119,369 to 23,370, and in 2019 fell further to 11,471.[54] Yet these real terms of immigration do not align with the intensity of political debate and popular salience surrounding the issue. Indeed, there is no clear relationship between the actual number of landings, the amount of media attention, and popular perception of immigration levels as a 'threat.'[55] For example, news media in the first half of 2019 "dedicated the highest number of reports on immigration in the past 15 years, matching the coverage seen in the second (pre-election) half of 2017. In fact, in 2019, news related to immigration accounted for 11 percent of the total news produced by the seven main news broadcasts,"[56] despite the dramatically reduced number of landings. Conversely, when the second half of 2019 saw a slight increase in landings, media attention towards migration decreased.[57] At the same time, increased media exposure of migration phenomena in 2019 did not lead to heightened fear of immigration, which, on the contrary, saw a decline.

What instead seems to shape Italians' broad political perception of immigration—affecting the propensity of far-right militants to act violently—is the degree of politicisation about immigration. Media coverage in 2015, though not without sensationalism, was largely dominated by technical narratives concerning the logistical and humanitarian dimensions of migrant reception, such as rescue operations and housing logistics.[58] By contrast, political leaders became central to news coverage of immigration in 2018, setting previously technical issues in decidedly partisan political terms and, particularly from Salvini, framing immigration as a threat to national identity, security, and sovereignty.[59]

Such framing heightened issue salience and set up immigration to trigger threat perception. Previous studies on xenophobia in Italy revealed that the peak in hostile sentiments was recorded in mid-2018,[60] coinciding with Salvini's appointment as Minister of the Interior and several high-profile immigration cases.[61] While further analysis with our data is needed, by its relative absence in 2015 and conspicuous presence in 2018, politicisation corresponds much more clearly to the incidence of far-right violence than the other plausible causal factors mentioned above.

The degree of politicisation, specifically surrounding immigration, certainly shapes the political climate in which the patterns of violence we have observed take place: largely non-critical (though certainly serious) collective- and situational-targeted violence.

Meso-level conditions

Far-right political violence often emerges from inter-organisational dynamics: rivalries between different far-right groups or against anti-fascist organisations. Thus, an important factor typically underlying far-right violence are organisational ecologies in major cities. Explaining how and why these ecologies emerge and endure is complex and beyond the scope of this study, but the simple existence of these hubs of group activity can help clarify the dispersion of violent incidents evident in the data.

Italy's extra-parliamentary far-right landscape is centred around Rome and, secondarily the Lombard-Venetian area. More than anything else, this is why the regions of Lazio (around Rome) and Lombardy account for the majority of violent incidents each year. In both regions dense ecologies of neo-fascist groups exist, sometimes consolidated into larger organisations like Forza Nuova or CasaPound.

Rome and the surrounding region of Lazio has long represented the epicentre of of far-right mobilisation in Italy. Neo-fascist groups active during the violent *Anni di Piombo*, such as the

Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari, were based in Rome. The legacy of militant far-right organising persisted beyond the abatement of violence in the 1980s.[62] Consider the example of Forza Nuova. This movement party emerged from the *Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore*, which had succeeded the Italian Social Movement (MSI), itself the post-war successor of Mussolini's Fascist Party.[63] Forza Nuova's founders, Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello, had engaged in militant activity in the 1970s and 1980s and were convicted for their affiliation to extremist organisations like Terza Posizione.[64] Figures like Fiore bridge those earlier generations of militancy to today's violent activism, maintaining the hum of far-right organising in Lazio. Given this favourable setting, it is unsurprising that the most prominent militant far-right organisation in Italy, CasaPound, emerged in Rome in 2003, expanding nationally beginning in 2008. Furthermore, far-right organisations in Lazio have repeatedly drawn on several mobilising networks, not least including football ultras. Many perpetrators in the data, as well as having far-right group affiliations, were connected to ultras groups. For instance, this includes two Lazio ultras who attacked a team of journalists in Rome. The profusion of far-right organisations (and supportive networks, like football hooligans) in Rome and surrounding Lazio, as well as an interrelated permissiveness for far-right activity in the region, helps explain why more violent incidents occur there.

While the far-right movement scene in Lombardy is less federated than in Lazio, the organisational ecology is more fragmented, the same sort of dynamics are present. Stable and persistently violent organisations like *Lealtà e Azione* and *Azione Skinhead Milano* build on earlier generations of militancy—including several proscribed organisations.[65] A strong subculture buttresses the far-right milieu: white supremacist rock music took root in Lombardy in the 1980s and 1990s,[66] influenced by the UK-based Blood & Honour network and embodied by Tuono Records music label and bands like A.D.L. As in Lazio, this stable, durable far-right ecology explains the consistent incidence of far-right violence in Lombardy.

Large and robust far-right organisational ecologies, most especially in Lazio and Lombardy, are a significant causal factor in the incidence of far-right violence. Further research can investigate the municipality-level spatial dynamics involved in this sort of setting for political violence.

CasaPound Italia

Our data confirms prior research that has established CasaPound Italia (CPI) as the most violent far-right movement organisation in contemporary Italy, at least in terms of the number of violent incidents connected to the organisation. To delve deeper into the patterns across Italy, let us consider this particularly important far-right group in isolation.

CPI was officially formed after activists from the youth section of *Fiamma Tricolore* split off in 2008.[67] CPI shares many features with so-called 'New Right' actors: an ideological emphasis on identity and cultural preservation, a concomitant aggression towards immigrants and non-ethnic Italians as well as political opponents (i.e., anti-fascist activists and leftists), and a repertoire of action often focused on direct action[68] used primarily to attract media attention.[69] Yet unlike other well-known New Right actors that reject (at least rhetorically) right-wing extremism, CPI embraces fascist ideology and history.

CPI's activism is varied, but aggressive militancy is the common thread through it all. Originally, squatting was the most conspicuous CPI action, which was part of a broader topical focus on housing for Italians and included demonstrations and social outreach activities. This background spurred the development of a complex internal structure consisting of many interest-based sub-organisations.[70] Community activism and internal structure that encourages immersion has led to a high degree of activist commitment [*Ibid*.; Sébastien Parker and John Veugelers[71]]. Yet CPI is not limited solely to movement activism; since 2011 it has participated in elections, first locally and then in the 2013 and 2018 national parliamentary elections and the 2019 European Parliament election. Accordingly, research has often labelled CPI a movement-party[72] CPI cannot count much success from its electoral

endeavours, a few local council seats,[73] but the election results show a small base of support through-out much of the country. A wide network of local sections.[74] has spurred on this spread of support.

While its activities include some tame forms, much of CPI's activism is shot through with violence. Its repertoire of direct action prominently includes invasion of community centres and other service provides that offer help to, among many others, migrants. Even where such action culminates in CPI members performatively reading out a statement, the 'storming' of buildings is distinctly menacing to workers and residents who CPI demonises. In its electoral activity, CPI militants have repeatedly attacked supporters or activists of other parties. And CPI's members have been connected to scores of violent incidents. Leaders, candidates, members take a strategically ambiguous position on violence:[75] not disavowing it, but suggesting that CPI only uses violence defensively, responding when attacked. Yet even casual observers of Italian news will likely have encountered cases of extreme violence connected to CPI, such as when one of the group's member murdered two Senegalese men in Florence in 2011. In the next section we look into the patterns of violence by CPI.

Patterns from CasaPound

Violent incidents connected to CPI are numerous—but they do not follow the same trends of far-right violence in Italy overall. Figure 4 shows a more even temporal distribution of incidents with the vast majority incidents clustering in areas where there are CPI sections, most especially Rome and the surrounding region of Lazio.[76] To test whether there is a significant degree of clustering between violent incidents and CPI sections,[77] we compute Ripley's K-function to measure spatial dependence.[78] Figure 5 shows the observed instances are consistently more likely than a random spatial distribution to cluster around places where there are CPI sections. This accords with what previous studies[79] have found about CPI: that members are socialised in violent milieus, heightening among some the willingness to act violently.

Our conceptual framework allows us to identify the distinct profile of violent incidents connected to CPI compared to the general patterns of far-right violence in Italy. Figure 6 shows that an even greater proportion of CPI incidents are directed against people and that, again, the tendency is for non-critical violence.

The targeting categories betray a shift in CPI-related violence: though there is a fairly steady incidence of situational violence, pointing to the 'militant' socialisation of CPI activists and the violent culture of CPI membership, collective targeting has become more infrequent and selective targeting has recurred, especially in late-2017 and early-2018. For example, in Ascoli (Marche) on November 23, 2017, two CPI activists attacked a 17-year-old student representative.[80] The student had criticised some other student representatives, including from the CPI-affiliated Blocco Studentesco. Aggression in response to this criticism was probably not ordered, but it fits with CPI's militant strategy[81] and socialisation processes that encourage members to act violently. Particularly within charged contexts where political tensions provoke more far-right agitation and violence, as in late-2017 and early-2018, affiliates of far-right organisations like CPI or the organisations themselves may drive a spike in violent incidents.

Further investigation of CPI—or other violent far-right groups—using of our targeting taxonomy and other patterns of violence could delve into the specific organisational mechanisms that spur members on to violence.[82]

Conclusions

Fundamental to understanding dynamics of political violence is having clear conceptual frameworks that provide analytical leverage within and between cases. Our revision of the patterns of political violence framework, chiefly by formulating a targeting taxonomy and relating it to a broader conceptual property space, offers a model for coding and comparative analysis. Applying the framework to dissecting recent far-right political violence in Italy revealed characteristics of sustained political
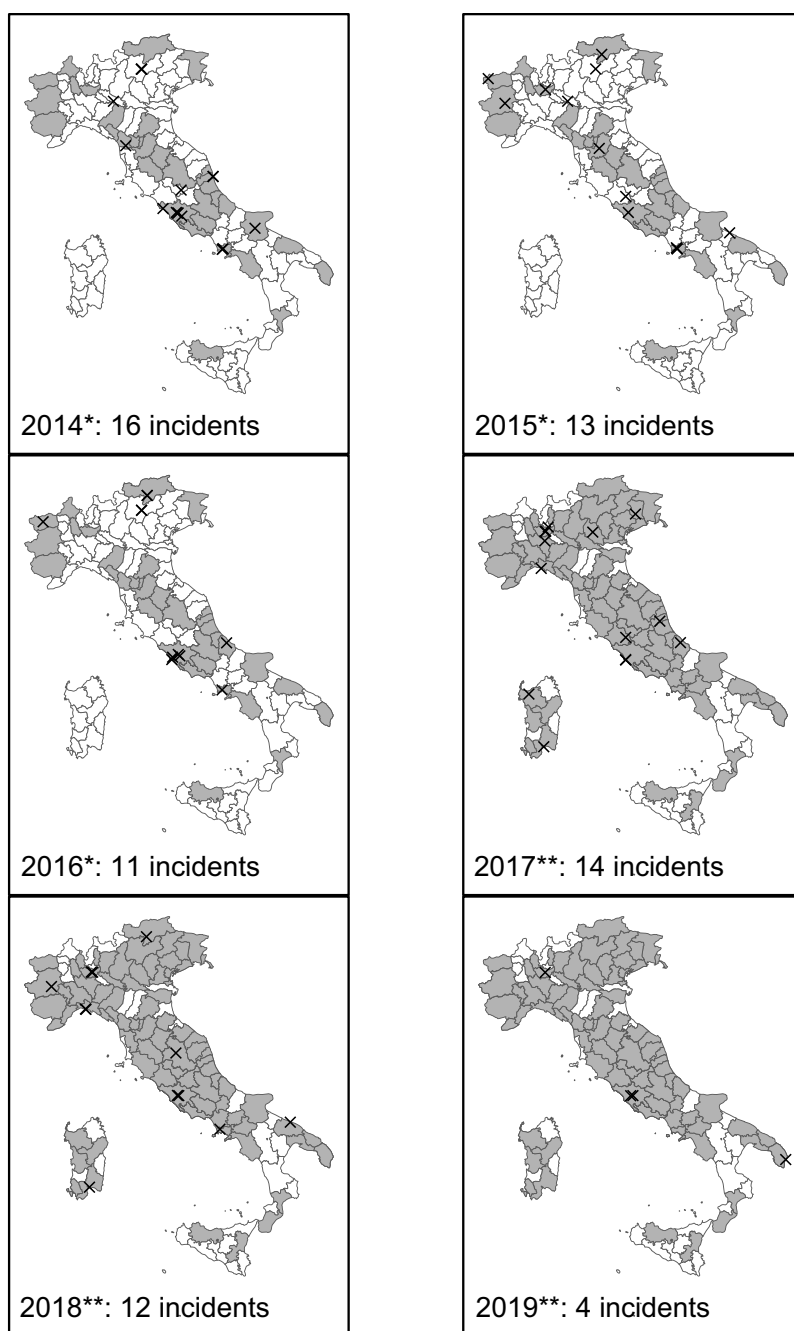
Figure 4. Map of violent incidents (X) connected to CPI, panelled by year. The underlying maps show provinces shaded where there is at least one CPI section (data from Froio et al. 2020; only available for 2013 and 2018, marked in the plots with * and **, respectively).

violence within a stable political system—unlike conflict settings where armed groups engage in more 'strategic and ordered' violence. In this stable setting, where there is no ongoing civil war or armed conflict, violent groups and individuals also act violently, but target more situationally and collectively, less indiscriminately; the violence itself is typically non-critical; and, characteristic of far-right violence, it is directed more often against people than property. Yet important organisations supporting
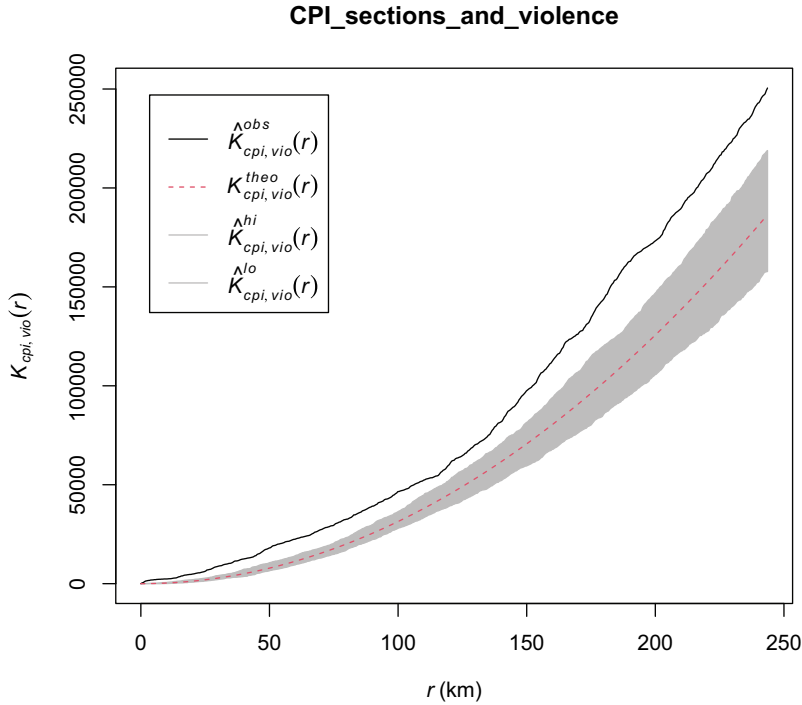
CPI_sections_and_violence

Figure 5. Measure of violent incidents connected to CPI within a radius of CPI section points. The observed (solid black) line shows that incidents consistently cluster around CPI sections rather than being more randomly distributed.

violence, like CasaPound, may diverge significantly from overall patterns of violence. Exemplifying this is CPI's greater propensity for situational targeting, driven by the organisation's socialisation of members, which fosters a culture of militancy.

This paper's contributions are threefold. First, the targeting taxonomy offers a stronger conceptual basis for research on political violence. It may be particularly useful to monitoring and data collection projects that seek to cover whole regions or more and enable comparative research. Such research might track and trace how stable states and societies fall into and rise out of civil conflict where targeted political violence is more frequent and more intense. Clear categorical codes for targeting will support this research agenda. Second, we apply our taxonomy and framework to novel data about far-right violence in contemporary Italy. Doing so, we suggest a way that research on far-right violence in Italy[83] can incorporate greater nuance than mere incidence; we build upon data collections like RTV,[84] identifying more incidents (particularly non-lethal incidents, where RTV's coverage is shakiest) and systematically disaggregating types of targeting in contemporary violence. Further research could extend our approach to other ideological strains of political violence, other periods, and other contexts. Finally, our exploratory analysis speaks to the role of politically violent organisations like CPI within stable democracies, where violence is less intense than amid conflicts but nevertheless a menace to some social groups.

We contend the approach advocated here offers a robust means of assessing patterns of political violence, but it is not without limitations. In coding the data from Italy, we adopted the sometimes-mistaken perspective of violent attackers. This analytical decision might not make sense in every setting of violence. Furthermore, the Italian context and the case of CPI enabled a longitudinal descriptive analysis, but the greatest utility of our conceptual framework is to be found in causal analysis and comparative research. We therefore hope that the framework will be of use to projects adopting such approaches and investigating, among other facets, the tipping point between less
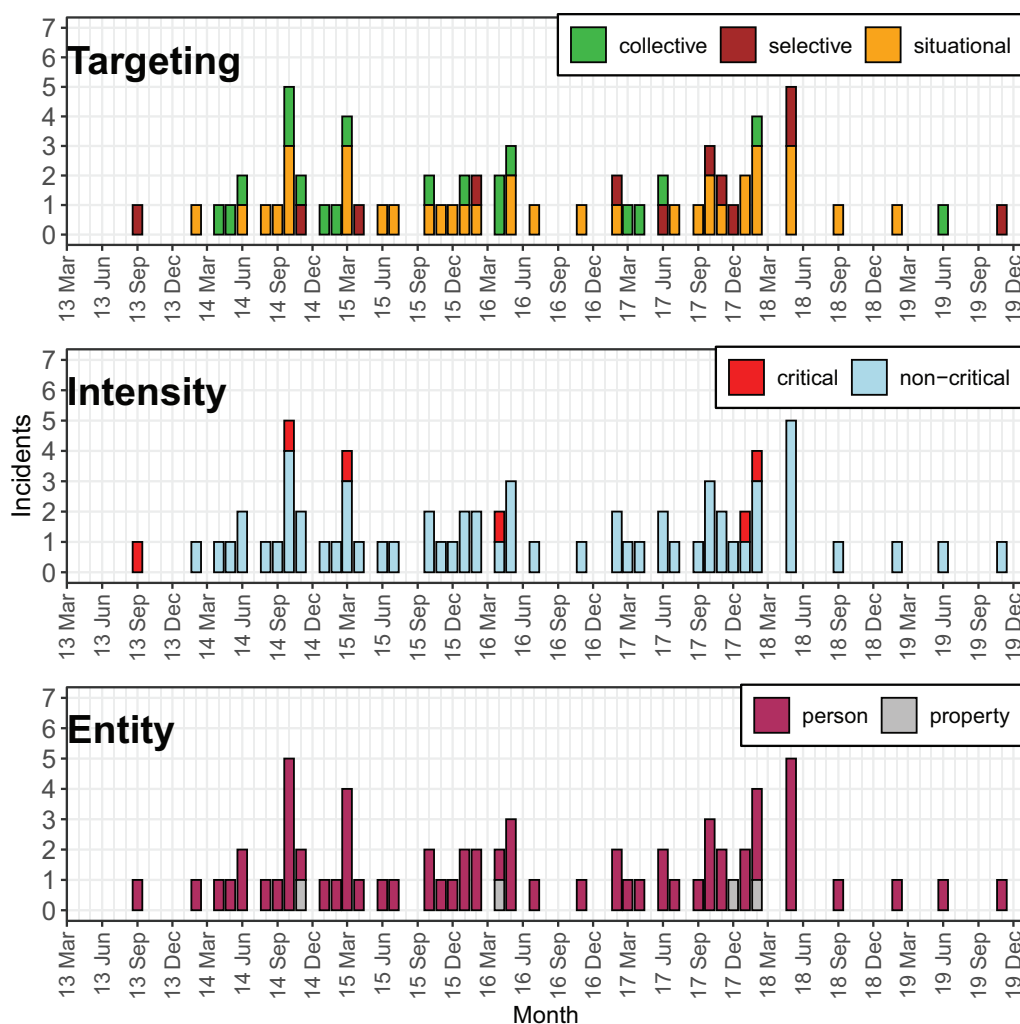
Figure 6. Monthly patterns of far-right violence incidents connected to CasaPound, by targeting type, intensity, and targeted entity.

intense, less ordered violence of stable political settings and the more intense, strategic and ordered violence of conflict settings.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure statement

Data availability statement

The data generated for this study is available from the corresponding author on request.

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Notes

1. Especially Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín and Elisabeth Jean Wood, "What Should We Mean by 'Pattern of Political Violence'? Repertoire, Targeting, Frequency, and Technique," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 1 (March 2017): 20–41, doi: 10.1017/S1537592716004114.
2. E.g., Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Sidney G Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511973529.
3. It is worth noting that Italy has less political stability than other European countries, most visible in the relatively frequent change of government. Nevertheless, its democratic system is stable.
4. E.g., Lorenzo Bosi, Chares Demetriou, and Stefan Malthaner, eds., *Dynamics of Political Violence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).
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6. We also echo Crenshaw's (Crenshaw, 380) prescient call for greater attention to comparability in studying terrorism and political violence.
7. Ruud Koopmans, "Explaining the Rise of Racist and Extreme Right Violence in Western Europe: Grievances or Opportunities?" *European Journal of Political Research* 30, no. 2 (September 1996): 185–216, doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.1996.tb00674.x.
8. Eline Drury Løvlien, "Radical Beings? How Group Identities Impact Willingness to Justify Terrorism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): 33–57.
9. Federico Vegetti and Levente Littvay, "Belief in Conspiracy Theories and Attitudes Toward Political Violence," *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica* 52, no. 1 (March 2022): 18–32, doi: 10.1017/ipo.2021.17.
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11. Desmond Ang and Jonathan Tebes, "Civic Responses to Police Violence," *American Political Science Review* 118, no. 2 (June, 2023): 1–16, doi: 10.1017/S0003055423000515.
12. Teresa Völker, "How Terrorist Attacks Distort Public Debates: A Comparative Study of Right-Wing and Islamist Extremism," *Journal of European Public Policy*, (October 1, 2023–28): doi: 10.1080/13501763.2023.2269194.
13. E.g., Werner Krause and Miku Matsunaga, "Does Right-Wing Violence Affect Public Support for Radical Right Parties? Evidence from Germany," *Comparative Political Studies* 56, no. 14 (June 2023): 1041402311690, doi: 10.1177/00104140231169021.
14. Vincenzo Bove, Georgios Efthyvoulou, and Harry Pickard, "Are the Effects of Terrorism Short-Lived?" *British Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 2 (April 2024): 536–45, doi: 10.1017/S0007123423000352.
15. E.g., Javier Argomaniz, "¡Basta Ya! The Basque Civic Movement and Nonviolent Resistance to Eta's Terrorism," *Journal of Pacifism and Nonviolence* 2, no. 1 (May 2023): 1–33, doi: 10.1163/27727882-bja00010.
16. E.g., Corinna Jentzsch, *Violent Resistance: Militia Formation and Civil War in Mozambique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
17. E.g., Graham Macklin, "'Only Bullets Will Stop Us!'—The Banning of National Action in Britain," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 6 (2018): 104–22; Michael C. Zeller and Michael Vaughan, "Proscribing Right-Wing Extremist Organizations in Europe: Variations, Trends, and Prospects," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 36, no. 8 (2024): 985–1007, doi: 10.1080/09546553.2023.2240446.

18. Daniel Koehler, "Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat," Policy {{Brief}} (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2019), https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep19617.pdf.

19. E.g., Tiana Gaudette, Ryan Scrivens, and Vivek Venkatesh, "Disengaged but Still Radical? Pathways Out of Violent Right-Wing Extremism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2022): 1–26, doi: 10.1080/09546553.2022.2082288.

20. Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 7–48.

21. Crenshaw, "Causes of Terrorism."

22. Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends."

23. E.g., Daniel Koehler, "German Right-Wing Terrorism in Historical Perspective. A First Quantitative Overview of the 'Database on Terrorism in Germany (Right-Wing Extremism)'," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 5 (2014): 48–58; Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Thugs or Terrorists? A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe," *Journal for Deradicalization* 15, no. 3 (2015): 1–38; Jacob Aasland Ravndal and Tore Bjørgo, "Investigating Terrorism from the Extreme Right: A Review of Past and Present Research," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 6 (2018): 5–22; Miroslav Mareš, "Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Hungary at the Beginning of the 21 St Century," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 6 (2018): 123–35; Caroline Guibet Lafaye and Pierre Brochard, "Methodological Approach to the Evolution of a Terrorist Organisation: ETA, 1959–2018," *Quality & Quantity* 56, no. 4 (August 2022): 2453–75, doi: 10.1007/s11135-021-01203-w.

24. Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, "What Should We Mean by 'Pattern of Political Violence'?"

25. Ibid., 24.

26. Per Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, "What Should We Mean by 'Pattern of Political Violence'?" 24, rate "might be the number of events per member of some referent population (*incidence*), the fraction of the referent population that suffered at least one such event (*prevalence*), or the number of events or persons of the targeted group per member of the armed organization (*rate of perpetration*)."

27. Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, "What Should We Mean by 'Pattern of Political Violence'?"

28. Ibid.

29. Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Why the Nordic Resistance Movement Restrains Its Use of Violence," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 6 (2020): 37–48.

30. Tommi Kotonen, "Proscribing the Nordic Resistance Movement in Finland: Analyzing the Process and Its Outcome," *Journal for Deradicalization* 29, no. Winter (2021): 177–204; Zeller and Vaughan, "Proscribing Right-Wing Extremist Organizations in Europe."

31. E.g., Jacob Aasland Ravndal et al., "RTV Trend Report 2023. Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990–2022" (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2023).

32. Ravndal et al., "RTV Trend Report 2023" make the distinction between premeditated or unpremeditated as well, but refers to the later as 'spontaneous.'

33. Cf. Abbey Steele, "Seeking Safety: Avoiding Displacement and Choosing Destinations in Civil Wars," *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 3 (May 2009): 420, doi: 10.1177/0022343309102660.

34. Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, "What Should We Mean by 'Pattern of Political Violence'?"

35. For the latter, we note that the taxonomy might be particularly useful for the further development of the RTV dataset, which currently codes attack plots as 'general' or 'specific' targeting (Ravndal et al., "RTV Trend Report 2023"). The targeting taxonomy could bring greater clarity to the coding of this important dataset.

36. Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, "What Should We Mean by 'Pattern of Political Violence'?"

37. E.g., Emil Aslan Souleimanov, David S. Siroky, and Peter Krause, "Kin Killing: Why Governments Target Family Members in Insurgency, and When It Works," *Security Studies* 31, no. 2 (March 2022): 183–217, doi:10.1080/09636412.2022.2079997.

38. This simple distinction captures a recurrent difference in patterns of right-wing and left-wing violence, that right-wing violence is more commonly against people; left-wing violence, more commonly against property.

39. The conceptual property space omits technique as the component of patterns that tends to offer the least analytical leverage.

40. Davide Conti, *L'anima Nera Della Repubblica: Storia Del MSI* (Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, 2013).

41. Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 25, 210.

42. Both banned in the 1970s, cf. Zeller and Vaughan, "Proscribing Right-Wing Extremist Organizations in Europe."

43. Between 2013 and 2020, there is virtually no Islamist political violence in Italy (Tina Magazzini, Marina Eleftheriadou, and Anna Triandafyllidou, *The Non-Radicalisation of Muslims in Southern Europe: Migration and Integration in Italy, Greece, and Spain*, Rethinking Political Violence (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-71996-7). Italian state security reports (available online: https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/cosa-facciamo/relazione-annuale) for this period record no Islamist attacks in Italy. There is, however, far-left political violence, but it is consistently dwarfed by the number of far-right violence incidents. Italian state security reports mention 3 incidents in 2013, 3 in 2014, 7 in 2015, 4 in 2016, 11 in 2017, 5? in 2018, 16

in 2019, and 25 in 2020. Moreover, these incidents fit with a frequently observed pattern: whereas far-right violence tends to target people, far-left violence more commonly targets property.

44. Cf. Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), doi: 10.7228/manchester/9780719057939.001.0001.
45. Ravndal et al., "RTV Trend Report 2023."
46. The Antifascist Observatory, which has even been praised by mainstream Italian journals (e.g., https://www.open.online/2021/09/04/mappa-aggressioni-fasciste-italia/), is a project of the *Isole nella Rete*, an offshoot of the European Counter Network. The Observatory collects and republishes reports of far-right violence. In this way, it is like many other anti-fascist research initiatives throughout Europe.
47. Specifically, by the *Isole nella Rete*, which was founded in 1996.
48. Available online: http://www.ecn.org/antifa/article/5489/. The Antifascist Observatory's data collection focused on violent perpetrator's affiliation with political movement organisations, but it is worth mentioning that several perpetrators had other relevant social affiliations, such as with football hooligan groups.
49. Other data sources for Italy exist, which might capture incidents unreported in our data. One is the interior ministry's Observatory for Security against Discriminatory Acts (*Osservatorio per la sicurezza contro gli atti discriminatori*, OSCAD) office, which is tasked with tracking racist violence. Another is the National Office against Discrimination (*Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali*, UNAR), which publishes annual reports that include accounts of racist violence. There is also the 'Lunaria' association, which maintains a 'Chronicle of Ordinary Racism,' cataloguing discriminatory incidents. These alternative sources have their own drawbacks, but may nevertheless offer promising avenues for further research on patterns of violence in Italy.
50. Additional coding is listed in our codebook, provided in Appendix I.
51. This is even the case when it seemingly serves no political purpose. Consider, for example, concerts by the band ZetaZeroAlfa (whose frontman is among the founders of CPI), where during performances of the song "Cinghiamattanza," the audience is invited to remove their belts and use them to strike each other.
52. Especially Ravndal et al., "RTV Trend Report 2023."
53. Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Explaining Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Grievances, Opportunities and Polarisation," *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 4 (2018): 845–66, doi: 10.1111/1475-6765.12254.
54. Ministero dell'Interno, "Dipartimento Per Le Libertà Civili e l'immigrazione: Cruscotto Statistico Giornaliero," *Cruscotto Statistico Giornaliero*, December, 2019.
55. Paola Barretta et al., "Notizie Senza Approdo: Settimo Rapporto Carta Di Roma 2019" (Rome: Carta di Roma Association, 2020).
56. Barretta et al., "Notizie Senza Approdo," 31; In original: "Il primo semestre del 2019 dedica all'immigrazione il numero più alto di servizi degli ultimi 15 anni, pari a quanto registrato nel secondo semestre (pre-elettorale) del 2017. Nel 2019 infatti le notizie legate al tema dell'immigrazione rappresentano l'11 percent del totale delle notizie prodotte dall'insieme dei 7 Tg."
57. Eurispes, "Rapporto Italia 2020" (Rome: Eurispes: l'Instituto di Ricerca degli Italiani, 2020), 921; Barretta et al., "Notizie Senza Approdo," 34.
58. Osservatorio Europeo Sulla Sicurezza, "Terzo Rapporto Carta Di Roma—Media e Immigrazione" (Rome: Carta di Roma Association, 2015); Osservatorio Europeo Sulla Sicurezza, "La Ricerca Della 'Gioventù Perduta': Un Futuro, Oltre La Paura" (Rome: Osservatorio Europeo Sulla Sicurezza, 2016).
59. Eurispes, "Rapporto Italia 2020"; In 2018, political leaders were featured in 38 percent of prime-time broadcasts focused on immigration (48 percent in public television news, the most widely watched by Italians). 64 percent of newspaper articles referenced political figures' statements in the headline (Eurispes), reflecting how (especially far-right) politicians had come to dominate framing of immigration. (See also Osservatorio Europeo Sulla Sicurezza, "L'Europa Sospesa Tra Inquietudine e Speranza: Il Decennio Dell'incertezza Globale" (Rome: Osservatorio Europeo Sulla Sicurezza, 2017), 22.
60. Osservatorio Europeo Sulla Sicurezza, "Immigrazione e Sicurezza Percepita" (Rome: Osservatorio Europeo Sulla Sicurezza, 2020); Ipsos, "Il Gradimento Degli Esponenti Del PD e Le Preoccupazioniper l'immigrazione," *Governo Italiano: Presidenza Del Consiglio Dei Ministri*, 2020.
61. For example, the controversies around the Aquarius, a NGO-operated rescue ship, and the Diciotti, a rescue ship of the Italian Coast Guard, which the Ministry of the Interior blocked from landing and disembarking rescued migrants.
62. Elia Rosati, *CasaPound Italia: Fascisti Del Terzo Millennio* (Milano: Mimesis, 2018).
63. Angela Bourne and John Veugelers, "Militant Democracy and Successors to Authoritarian Ruling Parties in Post-1945 West Germany and Italy," *Democratization* 29, no. 4 (2022): 736–53, doi: 10.1080/13510347.2021.2012160.
64. Federica Frazzetta, *L'onda Nera Frastagliata: L'estrema Destra Nell'Italia Del Nuovo Millennio* (Milano: Mimesis, 2022).
65. Zeller and Vaughan, "Proscribing Right-Wing Extremist Organizations in Europe," 992, 994.
66. Kirsten Dych, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016).

67. This foundation refers to CasaPound Italia; CasaPound itself, as mentioned above, was founded in Rome in 2003. See Caterina Froio et al., *CasaPound Italia: Contemporary Extreme-Right Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 27 f on the deeper roots of CasaPound/CPI.

68. Andrea L. P. Pirro and Pietro Castelli Gattinara, "Movement Parties of the Far Right: The Organization and Strategies of Nativist Collective Actors," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (2018): 367–83, doi: 10.17813/1086-671X-23-3-367; Froio et al., *CasaPound Italia*; Rosati, *CasaPound Italia*.

69. Pietro Castelli Gattinara and Caterina Froio, "Getting 'Right' into the News: Grassroots Far-Right Mobilization and Media Coverage in Italy and France," *Comparative European Politics* 17, no. 5 (2019): 738–58, doi: 10.1057/s41295-018-0123-4; Pietro Castelli Gattinara and Caterina Froio, "When the Far Right Makes the News: Protest Characteristics and Media Coverage of Far-Right Mobilization in Europe," *Comparative Political Studies* 57, no. 3 (March 2024): 419–52, doi: 10.1177/00104140231169029.

70. Froio et al., *CasaPound Italia*, 62–80.

71. Sébastien Parker and John Veugelers, "Both Roads Lead to Rome: Activist Commitment and the Identity-Structure Nexus in *CasaPound*," *Social Movement Studies* 21, no. 5 (September 2022): 590–607, doi: 10.1080/14742837.2021.1935228.

72. E.g., Pirro and Castelli Gattinara, "Movement Parties of the Far Right."

73. As part of a 2015 election alliance (Sovranità), Mimmo Gianturco won a seat on the Lamezia Terme council. In 2015, Andrea Bonazza won a seat on the Bolzano council with 2.4 percent; then, in May 2016, Bonazza, Maurizio Puglisi Ghizzi, and Sandro Trigolo won seats with 6.7 percent of the vote. Also in 2016, Gino Tornusciolo won a seat in Grosseto; Francesca Bruno, a seat in Isernia; Andrea Miscia, in Roman suburub of Sant'Oreste. In June 2017, CPI won eight per cent in Lucca's election and sent two activists, Fabio Barsanti and Lorenzo del Barga, to the city council. Andrea Nulli won 4.8 percent and gained a seat on the Todi council. And in November 2017, CPI's candidate, Luca Marsella, won a municipal council seat in Ostia with 9 percent of the vote.

74. Froio et al., *CasaPound Italia*, 30–32.

75. Cf. Bjørgo and Ravndal, "Why the Nordic Resistance Movement Restrains."

76. Froio et al., *CasaPound Italia*, 31.

77. The authors thank Pietro Castelli Gattinara and Caterina Froio for sharing their data on the locations of CPI sections in 2013 and 2018.

78. Cf. Adrian Baddeley, Ege Rubak, and Rolf Turner, *Spatial Point Patterns: Methodology and Applications with R* (Boca Raton: Chapman & Hall/CRC, 2015).

79. E.g., Froio et al., *CasaPound Italia*.

80. See https://www.ilrestodelcarlino.it/ascoli/cronaca/botte-davanti-alla-scuola-c90876fa.

81. Cf. Froio et al., *CasaPound Italia*.

82. E.g., Lorenzo Bosi and Donatella Della Porta, "Micro-Mobilization into Armed Groups: Ideological, Instrumental and Solidaristic Paths," *Qualitative Sociology* 35, no. 4 (2012): 361–83, doi: 10.1007/s11133-012-9237-1; Victor Lundberg, "'The Antifascist Kick': A Signifying Cultural Practice in the History of Transnational Antifascism?" *Fascism* 9, no. 1–2 (December 2020): 272–87, doi: 10.1163/22116257-09010007; Larissa Daria Meier, "Spatiotemporal Variation in Armed Group Recruitment Among Former Members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam1," *Sociological Forum* 37, no. 2 (June 2022): 510–32, doi: 10.1111/socf.12805; Asya Metodieva and Michael C. Zeller, "Influences of Islamist Radicalization: A Configurational Analysis of Balkan Foreign Fighters in Syria," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2023): 1–26, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2023.2213967.

83. Alessio Romarri, "Do Far-Right Mayors Increase the Probability of Hate Crimes? Evidence From Italy," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2019), doi: 10.2139/ssrn.3506811.

84. Ravndal et al., "RTV Trend Report 2023."

Appendix. Codebook

Var. Name	Var. Type	Var. Description	Var. Values/Categories
LAT	Numeric	Latitude (approximately) of violent incident	e.g., 41.119453
LON	Numeric	Longitude (approximately) of violent incident	e.g., 16.86244
TYPE	Nominal	Cateogry of violent incident assigned by Antifascist Observatory, in English	e.g., Casa Pound
TYPE_IT	Nominal	(*from original data collected by Antifascist Observatory*) Cateogry of violent incident assigned by Antifascist Observatory	e.g., Casa Pound
DATE	Date	Date of violent incident	e.g., 22.09.18
LOC	Nominal	Location of violent incident, usually a municipality	e.g., Bari
REGION	Nominal	Region in which violent incident occurred	e.g., Apulia
REPETOIRE	Categorical	Repertoire of violence in incident (following Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017)	assault/raid; destruction; homicide
TARGET	Nominal	Social group targeted in violent incident	e.g., anti-fascists
TARGET_ENTITY	Categorical	Entity targeted in violent incident	person; property
TARGET_TYPE	Categorical	Type of targeting in violent incident	collective; indiscriminate; selective; situational
INTENSITY	Categorical	Intensity or severity of violent incident	critical; non-critical
TECHNIQUE	Categorical	Technique of violence in incident (following Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017)	arson; beating; brawl; scuffle; shooting; stabbing; trespass; vandalism
PREVENTED	Categorical	Was the violence prevented by police or other intervention?	YES; NO
ARRESTS	Numeric	Number (if any) of arrests following incident, if known	e.g., 0
DESC_EN_TRANS	Nominal	Description of violent incident from Antifascist Observatory, in English	
DESC_IT	Nominal	(*from original data collected by Antifascist Observatory*) Description of violent incident from Antifascist Observatory	
LINK_ECN	Nominal	Link to the violent incident on Antifascist Observatory (*from original data collected by Antifascist Observatory*)	
LINK1	Nominal	Link to news story about the violent incident	
LINK2	Nominal	Additional link to news story about the violent incident	
LINK3	Nominal	Additional link to news story about the violent incident	