British Journal of Political Science (2025), **55**, e130, 1–21
doi:10.1017/S000712342510077X

British Journal of Political Science

ARTICLE

Right-Wing Terror, Media Backlash, and Voting Preferences for the Far Right

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(Received 22 August 2024; revised 27 June 2025; accepted 30 June 2025)

Abstract
How does right-wing terrorism affect electoral support for populist radical right parties (PRRPs)? Recent research has produced contrary answers to this question. We argue that only high-intensity attacks, whose motives and targets mirror PRRPs' nativist agenda, are likely to generate a media backlash that dampens electoral support for PRRPs. We test this argument by combining high-frequency survey and social media data with a natural and survey experimental design. We find that right-wing terror reduced support for the radical right party Alternative für Deutschland after one of the most intense nativist attacks in recent German history. An analysis of all ninety-eight fatal right-wing attacks in Germany between 1990 and 2020 supports our argument. Our findings contribute to an understanding of how political violence triggers partisan detachment and have important implications for media responsibility in the aftermath of terrorist attacks.

Keywords: terrorism; right-wing; radical right parties; attitudes; backlash

Introduction

Over the last decade, the Western world has witnessed numerous instances of intense right-wing political violence. The terrorist attacks in Norway and New Zealand, attacks against Congress in the United States, and the killings of public officials in the UK and Germany are some of the most tragic incidents. Previous research indicates that populist radical right figures and movements may play a role in fueling this violence, either by actively inciting attacks or by fostering the ideological breeding ground for violence (Nemeth and Hansen 2021). While this academic perspective seems plausible, do potential supporters of right-wing movements agree? Do voters hold radical right parties accountable for right-wing violence?

We aim to contribute to answering this question by investigating the effects of right-wing terrorism on public support for populist radical right parties (PRRPs).[1] While research on the attitudinal effects of terrorist attacks is expanding (Godefroidt 2023), there remain important gaps in our understanding of how right-wing terrorism influences PRRP support.

First, it is unclear whether PRRPs gain or lose *electoral* support from right-wing violence. Unlike the political effects of Islamist terror, the impact of right-wing attacks has received less

[1]Terrorism refers to the 'threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation' (START 2019). We classify it as 'right-wing' if it is inspired by extremist ideologies such as racism, antisemitism, and nationalism (Ravndal 2016).

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342510077X Published online by Cambridge University Press

scholarly attention (Godefroidt 2023). Existing studies on the effects of right-wing violence on the support for PRRPs reach opposing conclusions: while some studies find negative effects on PRRP support, others find positive effects (Pickard et al. 2023; Krause and Matsunaga 2023; Eger and Olzak 2023).

Second, we still do not fully understand the mechanisms that link right-wing terrorism to right-wing voting. Studies finding positive and negative effects of terrorism on PRRP support highlight that it is public interpretations of the causes of violence that determine attitudinal reactions. However, while some studies highlight that right-wing terror fosters blame attribution to PRRPs, others argue that it increases public concerns over immigration as a potential 'root cause' of violence (Eger and Olzak 2023).

To address these gaps, we propose and investigate a mechanism that links terrorist attacks to electoral support for PRRPs through a media backlash – news reports that connect terrorist attacks to PRRPs. Attacks that claim multiple victims (that is, 'high-intensity attacks') and reflect the nativist political ideology of PRRPs tend to generate such a media backlash. The backlash, in turn, (a) exposes citizens to statements, arguments, and evidence on the links between the ideology of the perpetrator and the program of the PRRP and (b) communicates that a majority of citizens believes that the PRRP is to blame for the attack. Both processes can reduce electoral support for PRRPs.

We investigate this argument in the case of Germany, the country in Europe that has experienced by far the highest number of right-wing violent attacks over the past thirty years. We proceed in three steps. First, we implement a single-case study, focusing on one of the most fatal right-wing terror attacks in recent German history: on 19 February 2020, a far-right extremist opened fire at a hookah bar in the city of Hanau, killing nine people and wounding five others.

We select the case of Hanau because the intensity, the motives, and the targets of the attack make a strong anti-PRRP media backlash particularly likely according to our theoretical argument. We use an 'Unexpected Event during Survey Design' (UESD, see Muñoz et al. 2020) to investigate the effects of the attack on voting intentions for the populist radical right *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD) in daily surveys. To address potential biases in self-reported voting intentions, we also draw on a behavioral measure: we investigate to what extent the attack has prompted people to 'unfollow' AfD party accounts on Facebook. Finally, we also replicate the UESD in a pre-registered survey experiment that allows us to control respondents' exposure to the media backlash and to account for self-selection of media content of certain segments of the population.[2] Across data sources and identification strategies, we document a robust negative effect of the Hanau attack on support for the AfD.

To assess the generalizability of our single-case results, we analyze all ninety-eight fatal terrorist attacks that occurred in Germany between 1990 and 2021 to systematically investigate treatment effect heterogeneity across different types of attacks and different intensities of media backlash. The results of these analyses are in line with our argument that only high-intensity attacks, with obvious nativist motives, directed against non-native minorities, generate strong media backlash and thereby dampen voting intentions for PRRPs.

Our findings make three contributions to the literature. First, we help to clarify a debate on the direction of effects of terrorism on right-wing voting by explicitly analyzing a mechanism that has been suggested, but not systematically tested in the literature (Solheim 2020; Eger and Olzak 2023; Krause and Matsunaga 2023; Pickard et al. 2023; van Spanje and Azrout 2019; Sabet et al. 2022). Our analyses demonstrate that right-wing attacks *can* have a sizeable but rather short-lived negative effect on support for PRRPs – but only in the presence of a strong media backlash.

Second, our research contributes to a broader literature on the attitudinal effects of various forms of political violence (Bauer et al. 2016). Our findings indicate that the magnitude and direction of these effects may not only depend on 'objective characteristics' of the violence but also

[2]The pre-analysis plan can be found at https://osf.io/6m4dz.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342510077X Published online by Cambridge University Press

on public discourses on the perpetrators, targets, and objectives. This finding connects research on the effects of violence on political attitudes with recent research on the impact of media campaigns on public perceptions of political actors and policies (Grossman et al. 2022; Foos and Bischof 2022; Devine and Murphy 2020).

Third, our findings also add to research on how unexpected events and shocks affect voting behavior. Previous studies demonstrate how various economic or political events shape voters' evaluation of political actors and parties (García-Montoya et al. 2022; Novaes and Schiumerini 2022). Our results indicate that similar types of events may have differential effects on voter behavior, depending on how public discourses frame associations between events and candidates as well as their political platforms.

Contrary Findings on the Effects of Right-Wing Terror

A large body of research shows that associations of political actors with violence can trigger backlash – reducing identification with and support for parties and candidates deemed responsible for the violence (Eady et al. 2023; Heger 2015; Kadt et al. 2024; Lebas and Young 2024; Rosenzweig 2021). Drawing on this research, this study aims to clarify an important controversy in the literature on the effects of right-wing terror on voting choices for PRRPs.[3]

Existing results regarding right-wing terrorism and political *attitudes* mostly point in the same direction: right-wing attacks tend to improve perceptions towards minority groups, reduce immigration skepticism, and make citizens shift away from nationalist attitudes (Jakobsson and Blom 2014; Solheim 2020; Pickard et al. 2023; Wollebæk et al. 2012). It is only when it comes to studying how these attitudes translate into *vote choice* that two sets of opposing findings emerge.

The first group of studies suggests that there is a negative effect of right-wing terror on support for PRRPs. Based on survey experiments in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, Jacobs and van Spanje (2021) show that exposure to news stories about a prevented right-wing terrorist attack can reduce self-reported preferences for PRRPs. Geys and Hernæs (2021) show that the 2011 terrorist attack in Norway led to a drop in support for party leaders of the right-wing Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*) as well as a shift in voting intentions and actual vote shares away from the PRRP. Pickard et al. (2023) analyze the effects of the Jo Cox MP murder (2016) and the Finsbury Park attack (2017) in Great Britain. After the attacks, citizens express a lower intention to vote for the right-wing populist UK Independence Party.

Another group of studies points in another direction. Comparing municipalities with successful and failed terror attacks, Sabet et al. (2022) show how the AfD benefits disproportionally from an increasing turnout in affected municipalities. Eger and Olzak (2023) investigate the effects of violent anti-refugee incidents (2014–2019). They find differential effects of right-wing violence: it increases support for PRRPs only among citizens with anti-immigration attitudes. This finding is in line with Krause and Matsunaga (2023), who find that right-wing violence increases support for the AfD – as former supporters of center-right parties turn to the AfD.

What explains these contrary findings? The discrepancy does not seem to be related to systematic differences in outcome measures. Most studies across both groups focus on party preferences (Jacobs and van Spanje 2021 and Pickard et al. 2023 in the first group; Eger and Olzak 2023 and Krause and Matsunaga 2023 in the second group). There are also studies in both groups that consider actual election vote shares of right-wing parties (Geys and Hernæs 2021 in the first group and Sabet et al. 2022 in the second group).

Neither does the discrepancy seem to result solely from differences in the type of attacks under investigation. Research in the first group of studies has focused primarily on high-profile attacks

[3]Most research on the effects of terrorism on political behavior has focused on Islamist terror in Western Europe. Among others, findings show that attacks can help PRRPs advance xenophobic narratives by strengthening voters' conservative attitudes, trust in the nation, and out-group hostility (Godefroidt 2023).

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killing and/or injuring multiple victims (Geys and Hernæs 2021; Pickard et al. 2023). However, similar negative associations for right-wing terrorism and PRRP support have also been found for pure *threats* of attacks (Jacobs and van Spanje 2021). Studies in the second group have investigated a variety of localized, mostly non-fatal attacks (Eger and Olzak 2023) as well as datasets including the 'most severe types' of terrorist attacks (Krause and Matsunaga 2023).

Finally, opposing results may also be related to differences in study contexts – for example, in terms of characteristics of the respective PRRP, baseline PRRP support, or features of party systems. In fact, all studies finding positive correlations between right-wing attacks and PRRP support focus on the case of Germany. However, Jacobs and van Spanje (2021) find opposing results in a cross-country analysis that includes the case of Germany – casting doubts on the assumption that studies' case selection alone explains the discrepancy in results.

Based on the relatively small number of previous studies, we cannot rule out that any of these factors contribute to explaining the opposing results of the two groups of studies. However, we believe that empirical patterns hint at a related but more specific moderator: the two groups of studies capture different types of *public reactions* to terrorist attacks. While studies across both strands highlight that it is citizens' understanding of the causes of violence that determines their attitudinal reactions, the two groups differ in how they interpret the direction of public blame attribution.

The studies that find a *negative* effect of terrorism on right-wing voting suggest that people associate the right-wing violence with the PRRP itself. Jacobs and van Spanje (2021, 740) highlight that 'right-wing extremist terror threat could activate or reinforce a cognitive link' between PRRPs' political programs and terrorism. Consequently, people blame the ideology of the PRRP for the attack and distance themselves from the party (Solheim 2020; Bove et al. 2024b).

The studies that find a *positive* effect of right-wing attacks on PRRP voting propose that people associate the violence not with the PRRP but with immigration. Right-wing attacks increase the media salience of immigration, while PRRPs frame right-wing violence as a consequence of immigration. Thus, right-wing terrorist attacks increase immigration concerns among citizens and thereby increase – rather than dampen – support for PRRPs (Krause and Matsunaga 2023; Eger and Olzak 2023).

Consequently, a closer look at the public reactions to right-wing terror attacks may help to reconcile the previous opposing findings. Several recent studies demonstrate that media framing of events can affect political opinions and behavior (Grossman et al. 2022; Foos and Bischof 2022; Devine and Murphy 2020). More specifically, previous research indicates that the type of media framing of terrorist attacks can shape people's attitudinal reactions to these attacks (Matthes et al. 2019; Solheim 2021; Bove et al. 2024a). Building on these findings, we argue that the effects of right-wing terrorist attacks on PRRP support (positive or negative) depend on the way that the media reports on these attacks.

How Media Backlash Conditions the Effects of Terrorism

We propose a simple mechanism that links right-wing terrorist attacks to a decrease in support for PRRPs through anti-PRRP 'media backlash'. Figure 1 illustrates the main elements of this argument.

The term 'backlash' describes the reaction of dominant social groups to high-intensity events that threaten the status quo (Bishin et al. 2016). We conceptualize 'media backlash' as consisting of a sudden and substantive media reaction to right-wing terrorist attacks highlighting causal links between PRRPs' political programs and political violence (Solheim 2020).

Our argument focuses on backlash in 'traditional media' rather than on social media for two main reasons. First, newspapers, radio, or television news still constitute people's most important sources of information across most OECD countries (see Figure A.1 in the Appendix). Thus, we attribute the highest opinion-forming potential to this type of media. Second, research shows that news reports in these media often shape discussions in *social* media (King et al. 2017).

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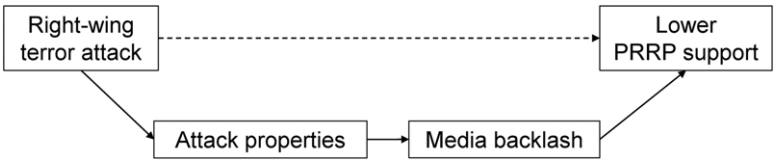


Figure 1. Proposed mechanism linking terrorism to PRRP voting through media backlash.

We highlight two processes through which media backlash can shape the effects of terrorist attacks. First, media reports 'frame' events (Goffman 1974). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) describe media frames as 'stories' providing meaning to real-world developments. These 'storylines' can shape people's attitudes by activating or altering the weight of considerations and by adding previously unavailable beliefs in individuals (Lecheler and De Vreese 2019). Thus, by framing right-wing terrorist attacks as consequences of PRRP rhetoric, the media can activate cognitive links between PRRPs and extremism and violence. Previous studies show that these links can undermine public support for PRRPs (van Heerden and van der Brug 2017; van Spanje and Azrout 2019).

Second, media reports inform their audience about the distribution of opinions in society by presenting opinion polls, interviews with politicians, and reports on public expressions of opinion such as demonstrations (Gunther 1998). According to public opinion research, the perceptions of dominant opinions can then produce attitude change at the individual level, as people feel an intrinsic need to be in agreement with others (Joslyn 1997). Thus, an anti-PRRP media backlash communicates to citizens that a majority of the population believes that PRRPs are to blame for the right-wing terrorist attack, making citizens align their interpretations to these dominant opinions and inducing a distancing process from PRRPs.

If strong media backlash can shape political opinions, then what determines the strength of the backlash? Building on previous research on moderators of media framing effects (Lecheler and De Vreese 2019), we argue that two main attack properties shape the likelihood of strong anti-PRRP media frames.

The first property is the intensity of the attack. Violent attacks do not always receive a high level of coverage in the media – depending on how journalists and editors evaluate the news value of attacks relative to other events. Previous research demonstrates that attacks with more 'dramatic' consequences tend to be associated with a higher likelihood that they are widely covered in the news (Kearns et al. 2019; Jacobs and van Spanje 2023; Hellmueller et al. 2022; Sui et al. 2017). Highlighting the role of variation in media coverage, Nussio et al. (2021) show how more intensive attacks tend to generate higher public attention to terrorism. This leads us to the cynical expectation that a high intensity of attacks (that is, above-average numbers of dead/wounded victims) constitutes a general prerequisite for substantive media reactions. Previous research suggests that this heightened media attention may also lead to more pronounced and more long-lasting attitudinal and emotional reactions of the population (Bove et al. 2024b).

The second property is the combination of the motive of the perpetrator and the identity of the victims. According to Mudde (2007), 'nativism' is at the core of PRRPs' narratives.[4] Right-wing terrorist attacks reflect this narrative if (a) they are motivated by the goal to create a homogeneous nation state and (b) if they are directed against non-native people (that is, 'immigrants'). After such attacks, the media will be particularly likely to articulate frames that link these attacks to PRRPs – because this link is obvious to journalists and because it induces outside actors such as politicians and experts to push this interpretation into the media (see Wlezien 2024; Lecheler and De Vreese 2019).

[4]'Nativism' refers to a nationalist and xenophobic ideology according to which states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group and that nonnative people constitute a threat to the homogeneous nation state (Mudde 2007, 19).

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We do not expect media coverage to be uniform. Some newspapers may be more likely to associate attacks with PRRPs than others. In particular, more right-leaning ones may be more likely to refrain from making such associations explicit in their reports on terrorist attacks. However, in cases in which the combination of the motive of the perpetrator and the identity of the victims makes ideological links to PRRP platforms obvious, we expect to see reports on these links in newspapers across the political spectrum of the mainstream media.

The media framing of right-wing terrorism may not influence the preferences of the most radical right-wing voters. First, those voters may self-select news reports, avoiding media content that associates PRRPs with violence and extremism (Burghartswieser and Rothmund 2021). Second, even if these voters are exposed to the media backlash, their political convictions and related cognitive bias may make them more likely to dismiss arguments blaming PRRPs for right-wing terrorism (Arceneaux 2012).

Thus, we assume that strong and credible associations of PRRPs with extremist violence in the media are most likely to sway those voters that agree with PRRPs' anti-immigration policies, but disapprove of extremist ideas (Jacobs and van Spanje 2021; Collier and Vicente 2012). The effect of the backlash on this segment likely reduces the average public support for PRRPs. Thus, our main hypothesis is that right-wing terrorist attacks dampen public support for PRRPs, if the properties of the attacks generate a strong anti-PRRP media backlash.

Right-Wing Terrorism and PRRP Support in Germany

Since World War II, radical right parties have had limited success in German federal politics. The upper panel of Figure 2 displays self-reported voting intentions for right-wing parties over time. In the 1990s, far-right splinter parties like the DVU (German People's Union), the NPD (National Democrats), and the Republikaner/REPs (Republicans) had some success in state elections (most notably in the states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg) or European elections, but none of them was ever represented in the German Federal Parliament, the *Bundestag*.

The 'Alternative for Germany' (AfD) was established in 2013 as a single-issue party focusing on the Euro crisis and fiscal policy. Since then, the party has seen a constant reorientation to the radical right and an unprecedented rise in German politics. With a leadership change in 2015, the party began to focus on immigration as its new core issue. It capitalized on grievances related to the European 'refugee crisis', attracting voters from radical right and centre-right parties. Over the years, the AfD's agenda has grown increasingly populist and radical. In 2023, the party was represented in the *Bundestag*, and almost all state legislatures (see Arzheimer 2015, 2019 for detailed accounts of the rise of the AfD).

While the electoral success of the far right is a relatively new phenomenon in post-World War II Germany, right-wing *violence* has been frequent since at least the 1970s. The Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset (Ravndal 2016) records a total of ninety-eight fatal terrorist attacks in Germany for the period from 1990 to 2021. No other European country has experienced a similar level of violence. The lower panel of Figure 2 displays the temporal distribution and the number of victims of the fatal ninety-eight attacks. In fact, Germany alone accounts for around 40 per cent of all fatal right-wing attacks that occurred in the sixteen countries included in the dataset.

Particularly in the early 1990s, Germany experienced a wave of intense xenophobic attacks. These attacks clearly mirrored the nativist ingroup versus non-nativist outgroup rhetoric of the right-wing parties of the time: they were mostly perpetrated by groups of German skinheads against migrants and asylum shelters. While this violence had clear political objectives and was aimed at instilling fear among migrants and political opponents, it was not discussed under the label of right-wing 'terrorism'. The public debate changed in 2011, however, when German

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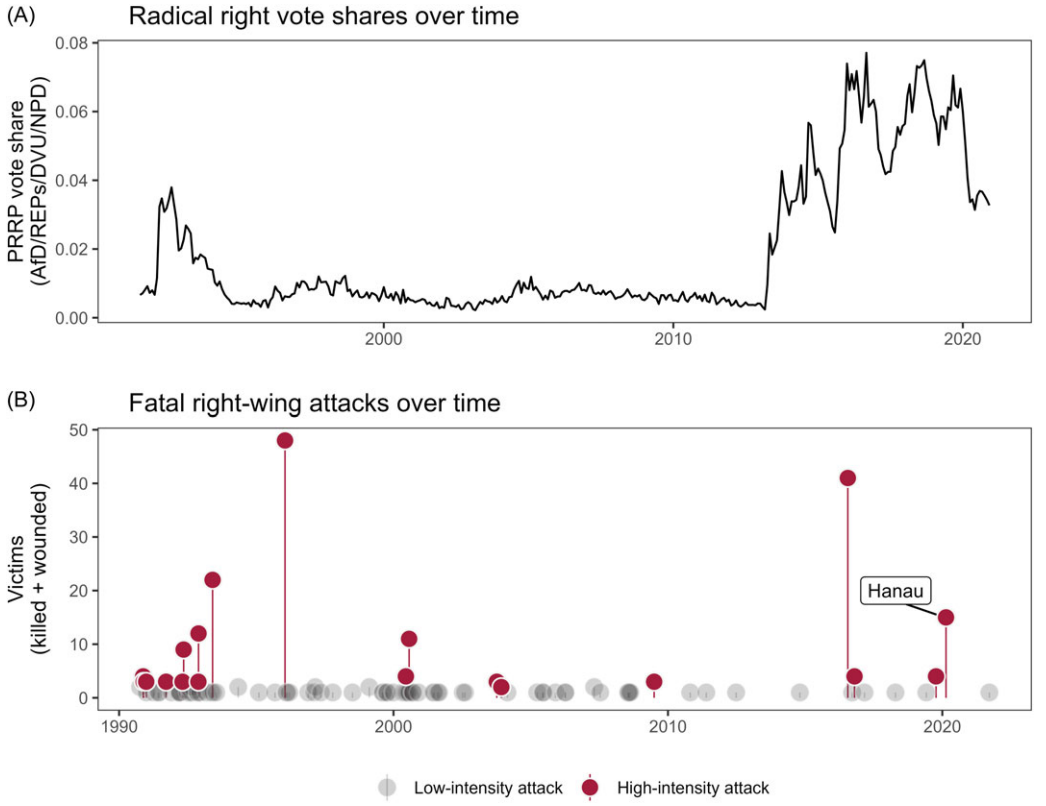


Figure 2. Right-wing voting and violence in Germany, 1990–2020.
Note: panel A displays monthly share of respondents who indicate they would vote for either AfD/DVU/NPD/Republicans, based on Forsa-Bus surveys. Panel B displays all ninety-eight right-wing attacks with at least one fatality as recorded by the RTV dataset (Ravndal 2016). We code attacks as 'high intensity' if they resulted in either two or more fatalities or two or more injured.

security services discovered the right-wing 'National Socialist Underground' (NSU), which allegedly assassinated at least ten persons over a period of almost fourteen years.

These and several other terrorist attacks in the 2000s differed from the violence in the 1990s in that the political motives and the identity of the perpetrator were not known immediately after the attacks, preventing any associations of the violence with the party platforms of PRRPs. In other cases, the violence was directed against the political left or against representatives of the state. Lacking obvious parallels between the victims of these attacks and the anti-migrant rhetoric of the PRRPs, they did not trigger any substantive debate on the role of PRRPs in instigating right-wing violence.

This changed, in particular, with the attack that took place on 19 February 2020 in the small city of Hanau, close to Frankfurt in Western Germany. At around 10 p.m., a 43-year-old German citizen opened fire in two shisha bars. The shooting killed nine people and injured five others. All of the victims had migration backgrounds. The attacker then fled the scene and later killed his mother before taking his own life.

The far-right background of the attack was evident. The gunman had posted a racist video and manifesto on his personal website, expressing hatred for migrants and for German citizens who had allowed immigrants into the country. The attack prompted massive public outrage. Tens of thousands of people attended demonstrations of solidarity and protests against racism (BBC 2020). The attack also triggered an intense public debate on the role of the AfD. Leading politicians and other prominent figures accused the AfD of creating the breeding ground for the racist attack (Guardian 2020).

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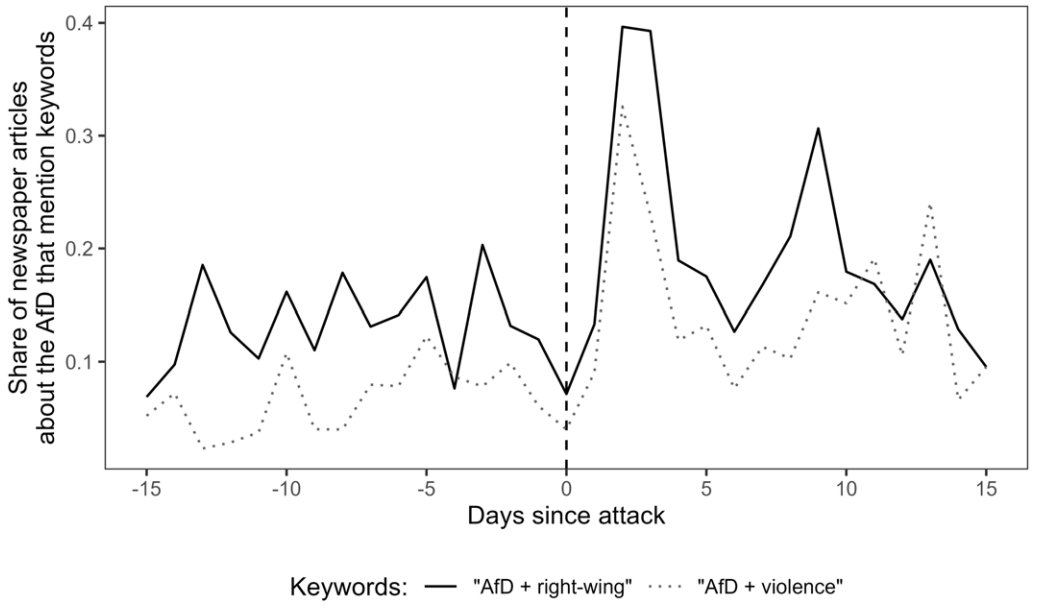


Figure 3. Media backlash against the AfD following the Hanau terror attack.
Note: the figure displays the share of German print and online articles mentioning 'AfD' in conjunction with right-wing extremism (search terms: *'AfD' AND 'rechtsextrem*' (right-wing)*) and violence (search terms: *'AfD' and 'gewalt' (violence)*) among all articles that mention the AfD in the days surrounding the Hanau attack. Newspaper data are taken from the Genios newspaper database (http://www.genios.de).

Figure 3 illustrates how German news heavily associated the AfD with violence and right-wing extremism. An analysis of the content of more than 400 of these newspaper articles published after the attack shows that more than 75 per cent imply that the AfD shares some responsibility for right-wing violence; only around 30 per cent include defenses of the AfD against such accusations. While we find that this backlash has been somewhat more pronounced among left-leaning newspapers, we find reports associating the AfD with the attack across the entire political spectrum of mainstream media (see more detailed information on this media backlash in the Appendix Section C.2). The subsequent sections investigate if such media reactions shape the effects of right-wing terrorism on citizens' voting intentions.

The Effects of the Hanau Terrorist Attack

We start our empirical analysis with a single-case study of the Hanau terrorist attack. According to our theoretical argument, we expect particularly strong negative effects of the attack on AfD support due to its high intensity, its obvious nativist motives, and its non-native targets, as well as the ensuing media backlash. We draw on three different data sources and employ two types of inferential strategies to identify the causal effects of the Hanau attack on PRRP support. First, we use daily survey data on voting intentions in an 'Unexpected Event during Survey Design' (UESD, Muñoz et al. 2020). Second, we replicate this analysis using a behavioral measure of AfD support: followers of AfD accounts on social media. Third, we investigate the results of an online survey experiment.

Effects on Voting Intentions in Daily Surveys

We use individual-level data from the Forsa-Bus survey to investigate the effect of the Hanau terror attack on voting intentions for the AfD (Forsa 2021). The Forsa-Bus samples and asks around 500 new respondents per day (as a repeated cross-section) about their electoral preferences

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and socio-demographic attributes. The survey is based on computer-assisted phone interviews and is representative of the German population of voting age.

In a UESD, the identifying assumption is that the timing of an event is exogenous to the timing of the interviews due to its unexpected occurrence (we discuss and investigate this assumption in Appendix Section B.1.1). In the context where the unexpected event is a terrorist attack, the attack divides the interview respondents randomly into a 'treatment' group (those interviewed after the attack) and a 'control' group (those interviewed before the attack). We define as 'treated' all respondents who were interviewed on or after 20 February 2020, and all those interviewed before 20 February 2020 as the 'control' group.

Our main specification takes the following form:

$$AfD\ voting\ intention_{id} = \beta\ Post - attack_{id} + \delta X_{id} + \epsilon_{id} \quad (1)$$

where $AfD\ voting\ intention_{id}$ is a dummy variable of the voting intention of individual i in survey day d for the AfD in the next state/federal elections. $Post - attack_{id}$ is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for all individuals interviewed on 20 February or later and 0 for those interviewed on 19 February or earlier. X_{id} is a vector of the following socio-demographic covariates taken from the Forsa-Bus: gender, state, birth decade, income level, education level, occupation status, religion, children, married, and mobile versus landline sample. All covariates are categorical and enter the models that include covariates as flexible dummies (see Appendix Section B.1.2 for covariate categories). ε_{id} is the error term. We compute heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. All models are estimated with OLS. The coefficient of interest β captures the direct effect of the Hanau attack on voting intentions for the AfD in the next state/federal elections. A positive sign of β indicates that an increased share of voters prefer the AfD in the next elections whereas a negative sign represents reduced support for the AfD.

The upper panel of Figure 4 displays trends for AfD voting intentions. They show a visible drop in voters' preferences for the AfD directly after the Hanau attack. The lower panel of Figure 4 shows the result of estimating Equation (1) with different bandwidths around the treatment date. The first specification uses the broadest treatment window of −15 to +15 days around the attack. We then narrow the bandwidth to five, three, and, most conservatively, one day before and after the attack. All models are estimated with and without a full set of covariates. Across models, we report a negative effect of the Hanau attack on voting preferences for the AfD. Similar to the visual patterns in the upper panels, the negative effect of the attack is most clearly discernible for AfD voting intentions in state elections – which is what we would expect given the AfD's higher popularity in state elections than on the federal level (Weisskircher 2020).

For both election types, the effect size ranges from about −1 to −3.8 percentage points. Effect sizes seem particularly large in models relying on a one-day bandwidth. We attribute this pattern to a single-day spike in AfD support on the day of the attack itself (interviews took place before the attack occurred) – mirroring similar upward and downward outliers pre- and post-treatment (see upper panel of Figure 4). Our preferred specification is the model that relies on a five-day bandwidth around the attack. It balances the trade-off between sample size and random noise on the one hand and exogeneity/narrow treatment window on the other hand. In this OLS model, the effect size is between −1.8 and 2.0 percentage points for the state elections, and around −1.7 percentage points for federal elections.[5] Given the AfD's overall share of about 11 per cent of vote intentions in the Forsa-Bus of 2020, this amounts to a loss of up to a sixth of the party's potential supporters as a consequence of the attack.

In Appendix B.1, we present a battery of robustness tests of our main results, following the advice for UESD robustness tests proposed by Muñoz et al. (2020), including balance tests,

[5]In Appendix B.1.9, we investigate treatment effect heterogeneity across socio-economic groups but find little evidence of variation in effect sizes across groups—with the exception of more pronounced effects among male respondents and respondents from East versus West Germany.

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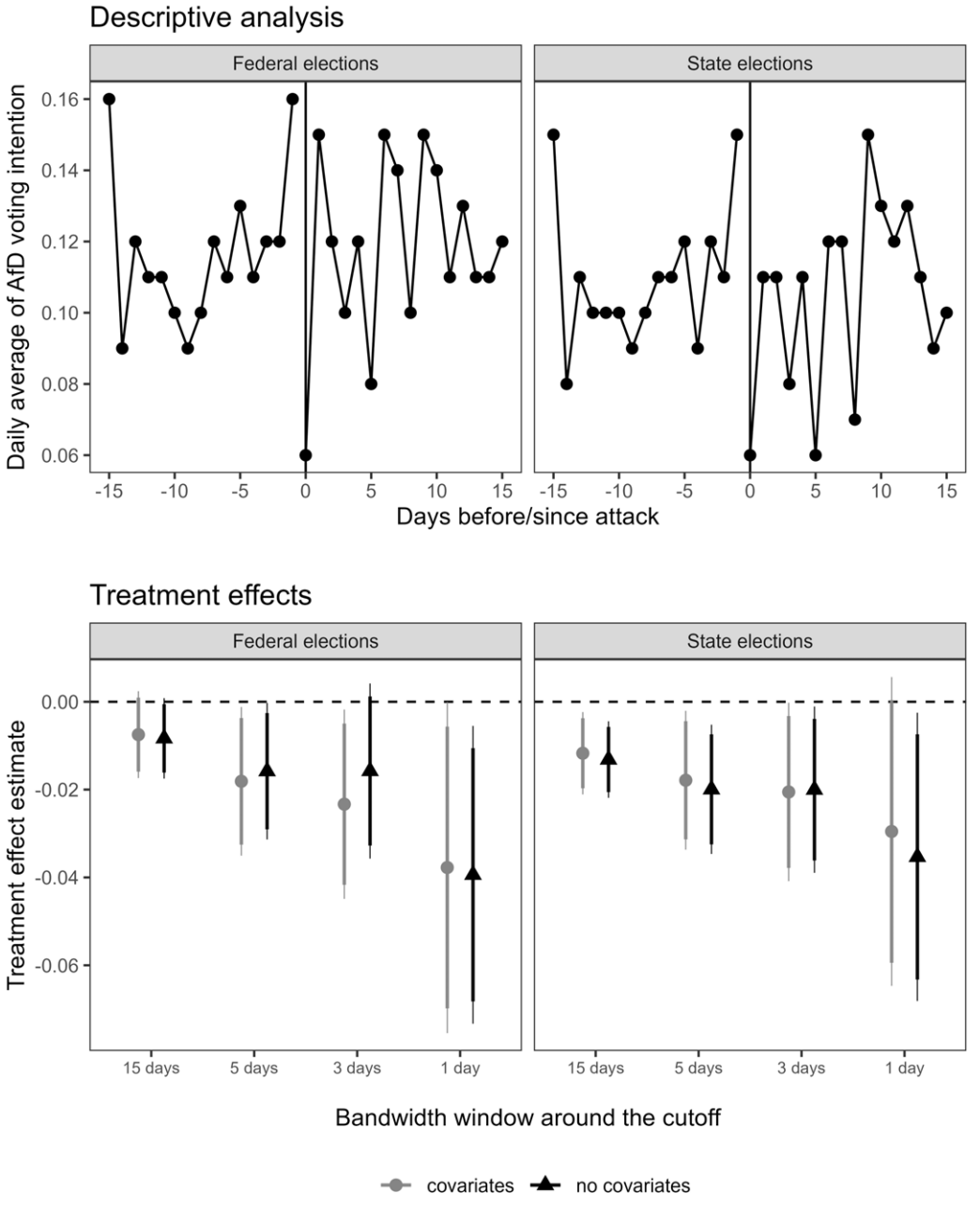


Figure 4. The Hanau attack and AfD voting intentions.
Note: the upper panel displays daily averages of voting intentions for the AfD in the next federal (left panel) and state (right panel) elections before/after the Hanau attack. The lower panel displays coefficients from OLS models with 95 per cent (thin) and 90 per cent (thick) confidence intervals based on heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. The dependent variable is a dummy for voting intentions for the AfD in the next federal (left panel) and state (right panel) elections. Coefficients can be interpreted as percentage points. Covariates include dummies for: gender, state, birth decade, income level, education level, occupation status, religion, children, married, and mobile versus landline sample.

placebo tests, multiple bandwidths, falsification tests, analysis of non-responses, differently estimated standard errors, and consideration of survey weights. None of the tests significantly challenges our main finding.

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In Appendix B.2 we probe a series of alternative explanations. First, we assess the possibility that COVID-related events drive our main findings. We compare the salience of the pandemic and the Hanau attack in Twitter activity over time. While there was some increase in the public salience of the pandemic, the Hanau attack was the dominant issue during the first few days after the incident. Thus, it seems highly implausible that our main findings – especially the ones using small time windows – are driven by the pandemic.

Second, we assess the role of social desirability bias. Mirroring the approach of Singh and Tir (2023) we investigate the treatment effect on alternative outcomes that (1) gauge socially desirable 'society-supporting' behavior and that (2) should not be affected by the treatment: reported turnout in prior (pre-treatment) elections, reported AfD voting in prior elections, and non-responses. We find null effects of the attack on these placebo outcomes.

Third, we draw on monthly surveys on perceptions towards refugees to assess the alternative explanation that the attack changed citizens' attitudes towards refugees. We observe a small reduction in negative attitudes towards refugees only more than twenty days after the attack – after the announcement of COVID-related restrictions. This time gap makes it implausible that this attitudinal change reflects an effect of the Hanau attack.

Finally, we estimate treatment effects on support for other parties beyond the AfD. We do not find evidence that the Hanau attack triggered a swing in public opinion away from the smaller parties towards the governing parties (rally-around-the-flag). More generally, this analysis indicates that our main effect reflects a shift away from the nativist AfD to mainstream parties to the left of the political spectrum (that is, the Social Democrats and the Green Party).

Effects on AfD Support in Social Media

One potential weakness of our previous analyses is that they rely on self-reported intended voting behavior. It is unclear, however, to what extent respondents would really be willing to act in line with their survey responses. In the absence of actual voting data around the Hanau attack, we rely on an alternative behavioral measure: we investigate to what extent the attack prompted people to 'unfollow' AfD party accounts on Facebook. Contrary to the survey-based outcome investigated above, individuals must become active to signal a change in political preferences – a signal that is also unaffected by potential interviewer bias.

We consider the number of Facebook followers for accounts created by both state-level as well as federal-level representatives and entities. For every state we include the account of the party's regional association and, if existent, the official page of the AfD's faction in the state parliament. At the federal level, we include the accounts of the party's national association, the faction in the parliament, and every AfD representative who has been a member of the party's federal board during our period of investigation. Our final dataset includes information on fifty accounts in total. We collect information regarding daily numbers of followers for each account through the Intelligence Tool of the CrowdTangle project (CrowdTangle 2022).

The upper panel in Figure 5 shows average follower trends for federal- and state-level Facebook accounts of the AfD. We observe a discontinuous decrease in the average number of followers per Facebook page around four to five days after the attack for both federal- and state-level accounts.

As unfollowing requires a user to actively detach his or her name from an individual account, we think it is plausible that any observable effects of the attack will likely operate with a time lag. We validate this assumption by looking at another instance of user reactions to macro-political discourses: In January 2020, the head of the Bavarian state government publicly accused the AfD for the rise in antisemitic sentiment across Germany (Zeit 2020). While this led to a sharp decrease in Facebook users following the accounts of the AfD's branch in Bavaria, the reaction only materialized between three and four days after the beginning of the public debate. We therefore shift the cut-off in our estimation by four days. We replicate our main analysis using this alternative outcome and report the results in the lower panel of Figure 5. To account for time

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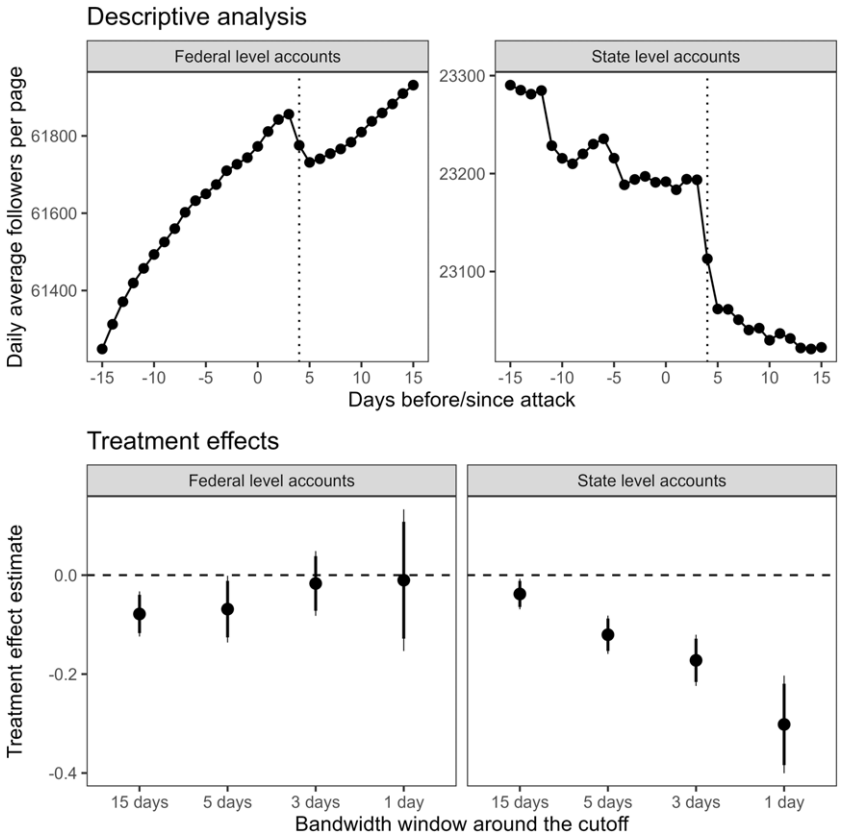


Figure 5. The Hanau attack and AfD Facebook followers.
Note: the upper panel displays daily average page likes for AfD accounts of federal-level (left panel) and state-level (right-panel) entities and representatives. The dotted vertical line indicates the cut-off used in our specification. The lower panel displays coefficients from OLS models with 95 per cent (thin) and 90 per cent (thick) confidence intervals based on heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. The dependent variable is the daily growth rate in the number of users who follow an account through a page like.

trends in the data, we use the daily follower growth rate as the outcome. Overall, the results mirror the findings regarding changes in self-reported voting intentions.

Effects in a Survey Experiment

We implement a (pre-registered) survey experiment to provide further robustness of our findings so far and to probe the media backlash mechanism for the Hanau case. We administered the survey among 3,000 members of the online panel of the German provider Bilendi, focusing on the voting population of 18- to 74-year-old German citizens.[6] The sample is representative of that target population in terms of age, gender, and region.[7] Data collection took place between 13 April and 9 May 2023.

[6]With a sample size of 3,000 respondents we calculate 95 per cent power to detect effect sizes amounting to the magnitude of the effect sizes we find in the Forsa-Bus with a significance threshold of 5 per cent.

[7]We compare the sample composition between the Forsa-Bus data used for the Hanau analysis and the Bilendi data in Appendix Figure B.3.7. The samples show differences particularly in age composition: Bilendi respondents are, on average, younger than Forsa respondents. This is expected, given that Bilendi draws respondents from a (younger) online panel, while Forsa relies on phone-based interviews. The similarity of our findings across both samples strengthens the robustness of our findings, reassuring us that the effect is not driven by differences in sample composition.

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The experiment randomly assigned respondents to a control group and two treatment groups (see Appendix B.3.1 for the vignettes). All three versions of the survey confronted respondents with media content related to fatal violent attacks that occurred in Germany in 2020: newspaper headlines, press photos, and a bar chart of public opinion polls related to the respective attacks. We designed all three control and treatment conditions to be as similar as possible in terms of content and visualization.

The control vignette presents media information about an actual, but apolitical attack: in December 2020, a man ran over pedestrians with an SUV at high speed in the city of Trier, killing six people. Police investigations associated the attack with the perpetrator's mental health problems and alcohol abuse. We selected media content to reflect this apolitical nature of the attack.

The first treatment vignette presents headlines, press photos, and public opinion results on the Hanau attack. We designed the vignette to explicitly prime the radical, right-wing nature of the attack. The headlines emphasize the racist motive of the perpetrator and the migrant background of the victims.

The second treatment aims to explicitly prime respondents on the media backlash against the AfD following the Hanau attack. It differs from the first treatment condition in only two respects: first, while both treatment vignettes include pictures of public protest after the attack, the picture of the second treatment condition features a large sign with the slogan 'The AfD also fired shots', mimicking the way news media portrayed the connection between attacker identity and the AfD. Second, while both vignettes include figures reporting the results of opinion polls, the figure of the second treatment condition adds the information that 60 per cent of Germans agree with the statement 'The AfD shares responsibility for right-wing violence'.

Thus, contrary to the first treatment, the second treatment combines *both* suggested channels through which media backlash may reduce public support for PRRPs: (1) information on the motives of the perpetrator and the identity of the victims, activating cognitive links between PRRPs and terrorism, and (2) information on the distribution of opinions in society, highlighting that the dominant interpretation of the attack emphasizes the responsibility of the PRRP for the attack.

Our main outcome of interest is AfD party support. Our pre-registered expectation is that respondents exposed to media reports on the right-wing Hanau attack will display lower support for the AfD than respondents exposed to the apolitical Trier attack. In addition, if it is particularly the media backlash to the terror that drives respondents' alienation from the AfD, we should see a stronger negative effect of treatment two on AfD support than of treatment one.

We use two survey items to measure the dependent variable, AfD support. We asked respondents (1) how likely it is that they would ever vote for the AfD and (2) to what extent the political objectives of the AfD match with the respondents' political interests. Both items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from −3 to +3, allowing us to capture more nuanced changes in AfD support as opposed to a simple voting intention.[8] We create an 'AfD support' index by taking the mean of both items.[9]

Experimental assignment across the control and two treatment groups worked well (see Appendix B.3.2). Nevertheless, slight imbalances occur with respect to gender and political interest in treatment group 2. We therefore report results with and without adjustment for a set of pre-treatment covariates, as specified in the pre-analysis plan. Covariates include measures of

[8]In order not to prime the respondents on the AfD, we asked the same questions for all of the six largest German parties, randomizing the order of the parties.

[9]Deviating from our pre-registration, we use this index, rather than individual index components, as our main outcome variable to mitigate issues related to multiple hypothesis testing and for presentational clarity. Results are robust to using the individual survey items, see Appendix B.3.3.

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gender, age, political interest, education, and six items measuring party preference for all German parties in the *Bundestag*.[10]

Our survey also included an attention test that allowed us to assess treatment compliance – that is, the extent to which respondents really noticed the specific content of the vignettes presented to them.[11] Following our pre-analysis plan we only keep respondents in the control and treatment groups that correctly identified at least one of the three attention tests. Importantly, as we administered attention tests to both the control and the treatment conditions, we mitigate typical differential attrition problems (and resulting biases) that arise when researchers drop only *treated* respondents who fail an attention test (Aronow et al. 2019).[12]

The main results of the survey experiment are reported in Figure 6. The plot displays coefficients from OLS models that regress AfD support on differently specified treatment dummies with the control group being the reference category.

We report two main findings. First, we replicate the negative effect of the Hanau attack on AfD support from the UESD in the survey experimental set-up. Across specifications and treatment groups, we observe a negative point estimate of being exposed to the right-wing Hanau terror attack on AfD support compared to being exposed to the apolitical Trier attack. While estimates of models without covariates are noisy with large confidence intervals (grey coefficients), estimates become more precise once we included the pre-registered set of covariates. Additional analyses indicate that it is particularly supporters from the politically conservative/liberal spectrum, including AfD supporters, who are most affected by the treatment (see Appendix B.3.6).

We compare the effect size that we find in the survey experiment to the effect size estimates from the natural experiment reported above (see Appendix Figure B.3.5). Effect sizes are very similar between the two designs and data types: we estimate that the treated groups in the survey experiment are about 1.6 percentage points less likely to 'ever vote for the AfD', compared to −1.8 to −2 percentage points in UESD analyses with the Forsa-Bus data. The similar effect sizes reinforce our confidence of our main findings. In particular, they also suggest that the results of the UESD analysis are unlikely to be purely driven by compositional effects in the Forsa sampling before and after the attack, since sample composition is constant in the survey experiment.

Second, and contrary to our expectations, we do not find stronger effects for the more pronounced media backlash exposure (treatment group 2). Point estimates for the two treatment conditions do not differ in a substantive and statistically significant way. We view the presence of 'pre-treatment effects' as the most likely explanation for this result (Kane 2025): because most respondents have been exposed to the actual media backlash after the Hanau attack, both of our treatments may reactivate individuals' association of the party with right-wing extremism and violence. In line with this post hoc explanation, we find that respondents in both treatment groups agree more with the statements 'Many people in Germany blame the AfD for right-wing extremist violence', 'Extremist thought is widespread in the AfD', and 'The AfD increases the risk of conflict and violence in Germany'.

[10]We deviate from our pre-analysis plan by not including in our set of covariates twelve total measures for respondents' assessment of (a) all six German *Bundestag* parties' policies for/against refugees and (b) all six German parties' policy for/against Jewish citizens. A very large share of respondents simply did not know an answer to these questions leading to missingness rates of up to 20 per cent in these questions (compared to 1.3 per cent in the other covariates). We discuss this decision and present results showing that our main results are robust to including these covariates in Appendix B.3.3.

[11]We asked respondents to name elements of the content of texts, pictures, and figures shown in the vignettes – providing four response options out of which only one was correct.

[12]We test whether differential responses to the attention check between treatment and control groups potentially biases the results in Appendix 3.8. We do not find any statistically significant and substantively large differences in attention check success between treatment and control groups. For comparison purposes, we display results from samples with all respondents, as well as from samples that keep only respondents who pass at least one attention check (as shown in Figure 6) and who pass at least two attention checks, in Appendix 3.9.

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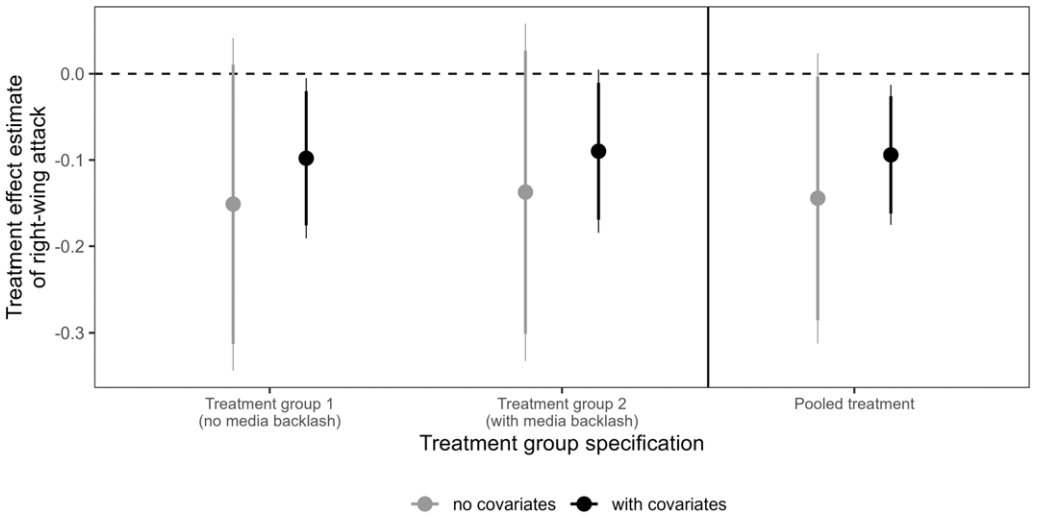


Figure 6. Replicating the effects of the Hanau attack in a survey experiment.
Note: the plot displays coefficients and 95 per cent (thin) and 90 per cent (thick) confidence intervals from OLS regressions of the AfD support index on differently specified treatment dummies (control condition is the reference group). The dependent variable is an index variable for AfD support, ranging from 1 (low) to 7 (high) and coefficients are on the scale of this index. Covariates specified in the pre-analysis plan: pre-treatment measures of gender, age, political interest, party preference for all six German parties in the *Bundestag*, including pre-treatment AfD preference.

An alternative explanation for the similarity of the effects of the two treatments could be that the information on the motives of the perpetrator and the identity of the victims has been enough to create a link between the attack and the party platform of the AfD. Additional information on public reactions and interpretations of the attack provided in the second treatment vignette may not have reinforced this link in any substantive way.

In Appendix B.3.4 we assess other potential mechanisms. First, we probe a potential impact of our treatment on attitudes towards refugees. However, we do not observe a precisely estimated effect of any of the two treatment variants on attitudes towards refugees.

Second, we test the possibility that treatment effects represent a pure social desirability bias. Our results suggest that at least parts of the main effects of the treatment without explicit media backlash prime may reflect social desirability bias. We do not see a similar pattern for our main backlash treatment.

Analysis of the Full Population of Fatal Right-Wing Attacks in Germany, 1990–2020

To what extent does our theoretical argument generalize out beyond the case of Hanau? And what is the precise role of media backlash in linking right-wing terror attacks to PRRP voting preferences?

We have selected the case of Hanau because it fits the two attack properties that are likely to generate media backlash – high attack intensity as well as a match between victim identity and a PRRP anti-immigrant narrative. But for our theoretical argument to hold more broadly, we should observe two additional empirical patterns (cf. Figure 1). First, attacks that lack these properties should not generate an observable media backlash against PRRPs. And second, the negative effect of right-wing attacks on PRRP voting intentions should be strongest in cases in which we observe a strong media backlash against the PRRP.

We turn to an analysis of the full population of fatal right-wing attacks in Germany between 1990 and 2020 to investigate these two observable implications – we draw on the RTV dataset to identify all ninety-eight attacks that resulted in at least one fatality (Ravndal 2016).

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In order to probe our first observable implication, we classify the ninety-eight attacks along two dimensions. First, we distinguish between low-intensity and high-intensity attacks. A high-intensity attack is one in which at least two or more people died or in which two or more people were wounded; low-intensity attacks are all the others. Second, we differentiate between different types of high-intensity attacks. We use RTV data on target groups to code attacks that were directed against individuals or groups that fall into the AfD's nativist outgroup definition: (1) Muslims and (2) immigrants/foreigners/asylum seekers/refugees. We also hand-coded information on perpetrator motives from news reports. We code attacks as reflecting PRRP narratives if news reports indicate that nativist motives of the perpetrators were obvious (for example, when groups of Nazis publicly attacked refugee shelters to create a homogeneous homeland) and/or formally reported by the police or other state authorities in the immediate aftermath of the respective attacks (on the day of the attack or the day after the attack). This classification allows us to compare three types of attacks: (1) low-intensity attacks, (2) high-intensity attacks that do not reflect PRRP narratives, and (3) high-intensity attacks that reflect PRRP narratives.[13]

We compare the extent of the media backlash across these three different types of attacks. We draw on a database of German newspapers to quantify the media backlash. We identify the daily number of articles including references to right-wing violence *and* PRRPs within three days before and after each violent attack. Crucially, since we extend the analysis all the way back to 1990, we do not only capture newspaper reactions to the AfD, but also to other PRRPs that were active before the rise of the AfD, such as the NPD or the *Republikaner*. We then calculate the share of PRRP articles referring to right-wing violence and PRRPs within these three-day windows and use the difference in this variable before and after an attack as a measure of the strength of media backlash.

Figure 7 displays the average level of media backlash across different types of attacks. The figure supports two core assumptions of our theoretical argument. First, we find that right-wing attacks of relatively low intensity generate only weak responses by media outlets on average. Second, while the share of articles discussing PRRPs and right-wing violence generally increases after high-intensity attacks, it is particularly those attacks targeting outgroups defined by PRRPs' nativist ideology and in which a perpetrator acts with a clear right-wing ideology that generate a high level of media backlash.

Are negative effects of right-wing attacks on PRRP support strongest in cases with high anti-PRRP media backlash? In order to probe this second implication of our argument, we extend the same UESD as used in the analysis of the Hanau case to the ninety-eight other fatal attacks. To measure support for PRRPs before the establishment of the AfD in 2013, our main outcome variable dummy codes the vote intention for any of the following three different parties (as well as the AfD). *Die Republikaner* (The Republicans), founded in 1983, entered the European and a German state parliament in the early 1990s. Contrary to The Republicans, the two other right-wing parties were both classified as 'right-wing extremist' by the German domestic intelligence service: The Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany, NPD), established in 1964, and The Deutsche Volksunion (German People's Union, DVU), founded in 1987 and later merged into the NPD.

Figure 8 shows the results of UESD analyses comparing right-wing voting intentions in five-day windows before and after attacks at different levels of media backlash in all fatal attacks (left panel) and in high-intensity cases where the motive of the perpetrator and the identity of the victim group coincide with the ideology of PRRP parties (right panel).

We report two results. First, we look at all fatal attacks and observe substantive and statistically significant effects only for attacks that were accompanied by substantive media backlash – in line

[13]Theoretically plausible would be a fourth category of low-intensity attacks with matching victim identity and perpetrator motives. However, as Figure 7 shows, low-intensity attacks do not generate any media backlash. As a result, we do not code victim identity/perpetrator motive for low-intensity attacks.

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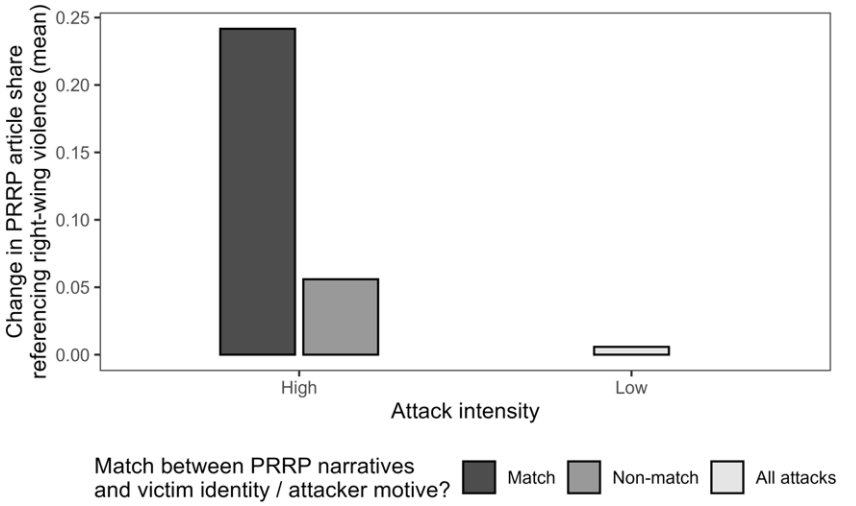


Figure 7. Properties of right-wing terrorist attacks determine the strength of media backlash against PRRPs.
Note: the plot displays the level of media backlash across different types of attacks. We measure the level of backlash by identifying all German newspaper articles mentioning a PRRP (search terms: *'AfD' or 'Republikaner' or 'NPD' or 'DVU'*) as well as articles referring to violence (search terms: *'Terror' or 'Anschlag' (attack) or 'Gewalt' (violence)*) within windows of three days around attacks. Newspaper data are taken from the Genios newspaper database (http://www.genios.de).

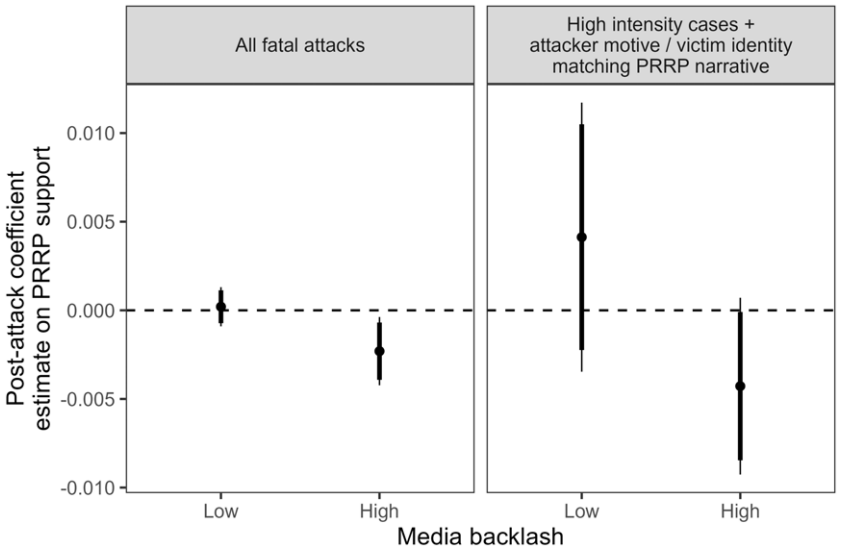


Figure 8. The effect of right-wing terrorism on PRRP voting intentions across different types of right-wing attacks, 1990–2020.
Note: the plot displays coefficients of OLS models that predict voting intentions from a post-attack dummy for any of the following PRRPs: AfD, DVU, NPD, Republikaner (REP) using daily Forsa-Bus surveys with 95 per cent (thin) and 90 per cent (thick) confidence intervals, based on robust standard errors. Dependent variable is a binary indicator of vote intention and coefficients can be interpreted as probabilities. We use a +/− five-day window around each attack date and remove all survey days that overlap across attacks. Models include attack ID fixed effects as well as the following covariates: state (*Bundesland*), gender, education, employment status, and birth year. We estimate separate models for (1) each of the two categories of possible attacker/victim constellations and (2) the full sample and a sample that keeps only respondents from the states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg before 1995. We use the median of all cases with non-zero values in our backlash measure to identify high backlash cases.

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with our theoretical expectations (left panel). Second, in order to rule out that the characteristics of the attacks confound the moderating effects of the media backlash, we hold the type of attack constant and focus only on attacks that are clearly motivated by far-right ideology and directed against outgroups matching PRRPs' nativist ideology (right panel). Even when conditioning on the type of attack, we still find evidence that only those attacks that are accompanied by high levels of media coverage linking PRRPs and right-wing violence elicit anti-PRRP effects (effect estimates are statistically significant at the 10 per cent level).

Taken together, the patterns presented in Figure 7 and Figure 8 therefore suggest that it is indeed the media backlash – driven by attack properties – that shapes the effect of right-wing violence on PRRP support.

Discussion

How does right-wing terrorism shape voting intentions for far-right parties? Combining a natural and a survey experiment, we show that right-wing terrorism can reduce support for populist, radical right parties by a substantial amount. We also test a mechanism that has been proposed, but not systematically tested so far: voters turn away from the PRRP only when the attack causes a media backlash against the radical right party. This is most likely for high-intensity attacks whose motives and targets reflect nativist agendas of PRRPs.

These results help to reconcile conflicting results in the literature about the effects of right-wing political violence on citizens' attitudes towards radical right parties. Our findings suggest that it is a combination of properties of attacks and media frames that shapes how voters react to right-wing political violence. Consequently, our results complement rather than contradict the findings on potentially positive effects of right-wing violence: while some right-wing attacks may increase support for the radical right (Krause and Matsunaga 2023), we identify the conditions under which this causal link can break down – namely when attacks generate a pronounced media backlash.

Do these findings reflect a true change in preference for right-wing parties or only a short-term shift in reported voting intentions? While we cannot test this directly, two pieces of evidence suggest our results reflect a short-term shift in reported voting intentions rather than a change in deeply held attitudes: first, we report null effects of right-wing attacks on attitudes towards migrants, both in the natural and in the survey experiment. If right-wing violence caused a profound preference change, we would have expected to see some positive attitude change towards immigration. This interpretation is in line with previous research showing that attitudinal change (beyond short-term voting intentions) may only materialize as a result of repeated exposures to media backlashes over the course of several years or even decades (Grossman et al. 2022; Bischof and Wagner 2019).

Second, we find that the negative effect of right-wing violence becomes smaller over time, suggesting the effect recedes as the media backlash gradually disappears (see Bove et al. 2024b for a similar argument on the role of the media cycle). Our results indicate that the media backlash after the Hanau attack waned after around ten to fifteen days (see Figure 3), while the main effect on PRRP voting intentions decays around fifteen days after the attack (see Figure 4). Thus, longer media attention on terrorist attacks might plausibly contribute to sustaining the dampening effects of these attacks on PRRP support.

Future research could make use of carefully designed survey and list experiments to investigate the determinants of the scope and persistence of the distancing effect triggered by the media backlash to right-wing violence. Bove et al. (2024b), for example, show how the intensity of attacks determines the longevity of their effects on risk perceptions and emotional reactions. This research could be extended to other attitudinal outcomes such as party preferences.

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Future research should also probe in more detail how the media landscape shapes the media backlash effect. Germany, the empirical context of our study, has a media landscape that is comparatively less polarized due to the widespread use of public broadcasting (Fletcher et al. 2020). Moreover, a large majority of German citizens rely primarily on traditional media for information (see also C.2 in the Appendix). If citizens' media consumption is more fragmented or polarized, however, such as in the United States, the media backlash in the aftermath of right-wing terror might play out very differently. Nonetheless, research indicates that extreme forms of right-wing political violence can still lead to distancing from the political right, even in a fragmented media landscape, as seen in the aftermath of the insurrection at the US Capitol (Eady et al. 2023).

The conclusions from our study yield important implications for the media and the public. The media plays a significant role in shaping the attitudinal effects of terrorist attacks – depending on their framing of perpetrators, motives, and consequences of attacks, right-wing terrorism will be more or less likely to either strengthen or dampen support for right-wing actors, reinforcing or weakening polarization of society (Bove et al. 2024a). Thus, our findings underscore the ethical responsibility of journalists, editors, and social media personalities to clearly identify and publicize links between political ideologies and political violence.

However, we also concur with the note of caution expressed by Eady et al. (2023): while we do observe a distancing effect from extreme positions in the aftermath of violence, our reported effect sizes are only moderate. There is still a substantive fraction of voters who are not swayed by even a strong media reaction against right-wing ideology after an attack – and there is evidence that those who do distance themselves from the far right might revert to their old views once social pressure recedes, let alone those cases where right-wing violence might actually spur support for the extreme right (see for example Krause and Matsunaga 2023). Future research would therefore benefit from studying much more closely why such extreme world views persist, even in the face of acts of violence that can be clearly linked to a potentially murderous ideology.

Supplementary materials. Supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342510077X.

Data availability statement. Replication data for this article can be found in Harvard Dataverse at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WINOQM.

Acknowledgments. We thank Benny Geys, Laura Jacobs, Sascha Riaz, and participants at the APSA annual meeting 2022 and the NEPS conference 2022 for excellent comments and feedback. We are grateful to Niclas Lüssenheide, Tanja Korte, Lara Kleemann, Sophie Wille, and Jakob Metzger for excellent research assistance.

Financial support. Felix Haass acknowledges funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement No 863486).

Competing interests. None to disclose.

Ethical standards. The survey research was conducted in accordance with the protocols approved by the University of Osnabrück's ethic committee.

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Cite this article: De Juan A, Haass F, and Voß J (2025) Right-Wing Terror, Media Backlash, and Voting Preferences for the Far Right. *British Journal of Political Science* 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342510077X

https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342510077X Published online by Cambridge University Press