RTV Trend Report 2021

Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990 - 2020

Jacob Aasland Ravndal, Madeleine Thorstensen, Anders Ravik Jupskås and Graham Macklin

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Preface

C-REX would like to thank all the research assistants involved in the present update of the Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset: Charlotte Tandberg, Ragnhild Grønntun Nissen and Ingeborg Noren. In addition, we would like to thank all our international RTV experts who have contributed through reporting and reviewing cases for the RTV dataset.

2020 Key Point Summary

The RTV Dataset 2020

Total
149 fatal and non-fatal events were recorded for the year 2020

Fatal Events
2 fatal events were recorded, one in Germany with 10 fatalities and one in Portugal with 1 fatality
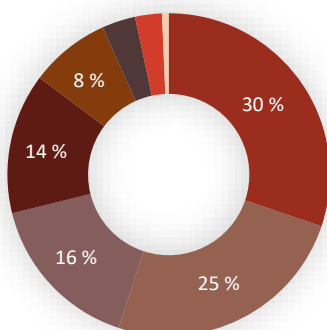
Non-Fatal Events
There were 147 events that did not lead to any fatalities, but 149 persons were injured

Countries
In absolute terms, most RTV attacks took place in Germany (N=53), followed by the United Kingdom (N= 25), Greece (N=17) and Italy (N=17).

The RTV Dataset contains:
1054 events
213 fatal events
343 fatalities

Perpetrators (N= 149)
30% of the perpetrators acted alone, including the two events with fatal outcome.
25% of the perpetrators were unorganised
16% of the perpetrators formed part of a coordinated entity suspected of belonging to the far right
14% of the perpetrators acted as part of a gang or informal group
**8%** of the perpetrators acted as members or affiliates of organized groups
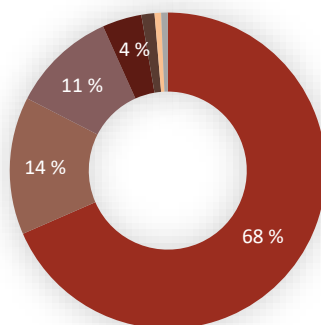
Target groups (N= 149)
68% of the attacks targeted ethnic and religious minorities, where half of these were immigrants, foreigners, asylum seekers or refugees
14% of the attacks targeted political opponents, most of which were left-wing and anti-fascists activists
11% of the events had unknown target groups, mostly relating to vague attack plots and discoveries of major arms repositories
4% of the attacks targeted state institutions, with an equal distribution between government and police
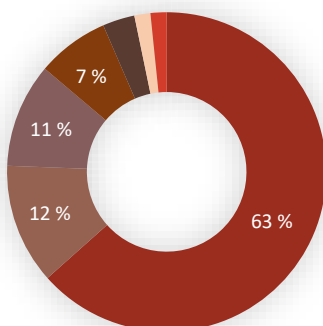
Weapons used in completed attacks (N=123)
63% of the events involved beating and/or kicking
12% of the events involved "other" as the primary weapon, i.e. broken bottles, undefined sharp objects, and dogs
11% of the events involved the use of blunt objects
7% of the events involved the use of knives and other sharp objects
3% of the events involved firearms
2% of the events involved explosives

Contents

List of Boxes

List of Figures

List of Tables

Introduction

The year 2020 was extraordinary with regards to the number of unsettling events with a potential impact on right-wing terrorism and violence (RTV). The COVID-19 pandemic generated conspiracy theories, economic crisis, and growing animosity toward European governments, fuelling far-right grievances. Controversy concerning the 2021 US presidential election caused unrest and revolutionary aspirations among far-right actors. And the US police murder of George Floyd generated new waves of Black Lives Matter protests across the world, at times confronted by violent counter-protesters from the far right. To what extent did these events affect right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe?

In this RTV Trend Report, which is the [third](#) of its kind, we present new and updated data on severe right-wing attacks and plots that occurred in Western Europe in 2020. We also compare these data with previous years to identify new developments and capture trends.

Our review identifies three key insights. First, relatively few severe attacks motivated by discontent or conspiracies relating to COVID-19 were registered, and most of these attacks were spontaneous and committed by groups of youths. Second, attacks targeting black people appear to become more frequent in Western Europe, as are registered attacks committed by uniformed personnel on active duty. Finally, while 2020 only saw two attacks with a fatal outcome, the number of attack plots rose considerably.

Besides describing these developments in more detail, this year's RTV Trend Report also introduces several additions to the dataset, including two new perpetrator categories, a more structured and systematic perpetrator coding scheme, and a dataset with all the reviewed cases that were not included in the final version.

The report begins by introducing some key features of the RTV dataset, before presenting key findings and trends from this year's update. Next, the report presents a case study of Portugal and a more detailed elaboration on two selected topics: the COVID-19 pandemic and the relationship between declining attacks and rising plots.

Key features of the RTV dataset

The main purpose of the RTV dataset is to offer a systematic assessment of the development of right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe.[1] To achieve this purpose, the dataset only includes the most severe attacks in addition to plots and discoveries arms repositories. The reason is not that less severe attacks are considered less important, but rather that such events are too many to be covered systematically and exhaustively. In fact, even coverage of the most severe attacks is biased toward certain countries and periods.[2] Therefore, we strongly encourage users of the RTV dataset to only use fatal events when comparing levels of violence across time or between countries. Such events receive broad news coverage and we can therefore confidently assume that the RTV dataset covers all fatal attacks between 1990 and 2020. Furthermore, due to technological and methodological improvements, our ability to cover relevant non-fatal events has improved over the past years. With these improvements, we believe we are approaching sufficient coverage for making inferences about severe non-fatal events from 2019 onwards.

Box 1: The RTV dataset
The current version of the RTV dataset covers the period 1990-2020 and contains a total of 1054 events. Of these, 213 had a fatal outcome and 841 were non-fatal.

Inclusion criteria
The RTV dataset includes all *severe* attacks and plots whose target selection is based on *right-wing* believes.

By 'right-wing', we mean those who regard social inequality as inevitable, natural or even desirable.[3] Most perpetrators of right-wing violence adhere to a *far-right* mix of *anti-egalitarianism*, *nativism* and *authoritarianism*.[4] These ideological constructs – and beliefs that are strongly associated with them, such as racism and conspiratorial thinking – produce a set of political and social groups considered as enemies of, and therefore legitimate targets for, the far right. Most notably, but not exclusively, these include ethnic minorities, religious minorities, sexual minorities, political opponents, state institutions and vulnerable groups.

By 'severe', we mean cases in which the perpetrator(s) appear determined or willing to inflict deadly or physically disabling injury on the victim(s). More specifically, to satisfy this criterion, at least one of the following severity thresholds must be met: (1) the attack has a fatal, or near fatal outcome; (2) the perpetrator(s) proactively use potentially lethal weapons, such as knives, heavy blunt instruments, guns, or bombs, including attacks causing minor injuries only; (3) the attack causes major and/or disabling injuries, such as coma, unconsciousness, broken bones or other physical trauma, typically requiring hospitalization or medical treatment.

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[1] In total 18 West European countries are covered by the dataset: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. For a more detailed introduction to the RTV dataset, see Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV Dataset", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 3 (2016).
[2] For a more detailed discussion of coverage and representativity, see Jacob Aasland Ravndal and Anders Ravik Jupskås, "Methods for Mapping Far Right Violence", in *Researching the Far Right: Theory, Method and Practice*, Stephen Ashe et al. (eds) (Oxon: Routledge, 2019).
[3] Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, trans. Allan Cameron (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[4] Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, (Oxford: Polity, 2019).

Sources
The RTV dataset is based exclusively on open sources, including, but not limited to, media coverage and openly available information from non-governmental organizations and anti-fascist groups. To ensure full coverage of the most important cases, national experts in most countries have been consulted in order to identify relevant source material and events.

Methodology
Each year the RTV dataset is updated by a team of research assistants. The update follows a four-step procedure. In step one, Boolean search strings tailored to each specific country are used to capture relevant news articles in *Factiva* and *Retriever*, two news databases covering most countries included in the RTV dataset. The RTV team then manually browses all relevant articles and gathers more information on relevant events before coding them into the dataset. In step two, the RTV team reviews country reports from our international RTV experts, who submit information about the events. The RTV team then gathers information about the events not discovered in step one before coding them into the dataset. In step three, the RTV team manually browses an extensive list of open sources for each country known to report on the events. Relevant events not discovered in step one or two are then coded into the dataset. In step four, the RTV team collectively reviews all candidate events to be included in the update to make sure they satisfy the inclusion criteria. Excluded cases are saved in our "excluded cases" dataset, which tends to include more cases than those included in the final and published version of the RTV dataset.

Availability
A limited version of the dataset, containing all information except date, description and links is available for download to the public. Researchers may apply for access to the full version of the dataset.

The 2020 Update

For the 2020 update, 189 new events were added to the dataset. Of these, 149 events occurred in 2020, while 40 events have been added to previous years, including three events with a fatal outcome as a result of new information. In two of these cases, both from 1999 in Germany and Norway respectively, the resulting death was the consequence of being chased by perpetrators with right-wing beliefs.[5] The third event occurred in 1990 in Germany, but was reopened in 2020 when a journalist revealed that a group had written a letter, confessing that they were behind the attack.[6] We also removed 11 non-fatal events from the dataset as the inclusion criteria have been slightly adjusted from the original version of the dataset. For the 2020 update, a total of 375 cases were reviewed, of which 189 were included (40 of these were from previous years) and 186 were added to the excluded dataset. As a result, the current version of the RTV dataset counts 1054 events in total. Of these, 213 events had a fatal outcome, resulting in 343 fatalities.

For this year's update, we added several new features to the dataset. Most importantly, we have added two new perpetrator type categories: *coordinated entities* and *professional entities*. The 'coordinated entities' category originated from difficulties of determining whether an attack

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[5] The argument for including these events is that they would not have occurred in the event of the perpetrators not racially targeting and physically assaulting the victims prior to their death. One of the incidents occurred in Germany and is known as 'the chase in Guben'. A group of youths attacked three foreigners – one managed to escape, one was severely injured and the third died after injuring an artery in his leg while kicking in a glass door. The second incident occurred in Norway and is well-known. A thorough review of court documents reveals that the main perpetrator had consistently racially insulted and physically attacked the victim. The circumstances around his death is unclear, but he either died from drowning after being chased or something more incriminating occurred.
[6] Allgaeu-rechtsaussen, November 6, 2020. "Ermittlungen nach 30 Jahren wieder aufgenommen". URL: https://allgaeu-rechtsaussen.de/2020/11/06/ermittlungen-nach-30-jahren-wieder-aufgenommen/

should be attributed to organized groups or to gangs/informal groups due to lack of information. This would typically be cases where available information suggests that the perpetrators are somehow associated with the far-right movement, but more concrete information about organizational affiliations or social ties are missing. As such, we have defined 'coordinated entities' as constellations of two or more people with an apparent far-right association, but where information about their affiliation to a group, cell, or gang, is missing.

The 'professional entities' category was added due to multiple observations of events involving on-duty uniformed personnel such as police officers, private security firms, or military personnel, acting as perpetrators of racist attacks. While the organizational entities these perpetrators represent may give them formal powers that can be abused against vulnerable target groups, it would be misleading to frame them as far-right groups. We therefore defined 'professional entities' as one or more perpetrators operating in capacity of their professional affiliation, typically the police, military or private security firms. For such cases to be included in the dataset, sufficient information regarding explicit targeting based on right-wing beliefs must be established.

This year's joint discussions about RTV perpetrator types also generated a decision tree that more precisely demonstrates how we distinguish between the different categories in our coding. This decision tree can be consulted in the updated version of the [RTV codebook](#).

Our decision to include new perpetrator types required an extensive review of previous relevant cases to ensure consistency in our coding. As a result, one of our team members has reviewed more than half of all RTV cases registered before 2020. In doing so, we have also been updating and extending the qualitative descriptions of many events, as these tended to be shorter and less detailed further back in time. The reviewer also came across some inconsistencies and errors in previous coding that we were able to correct – errors that had little or no substantial impact on the dataset as a whole. Permalinks were added to an increased number of events to secure availability in the future. As a result, the current RTV dataset is even more complete, consistent, and correct than previous versions. We will continue to review past events in the near future and thereby continuously improve the quality of the RTV dataset.

Future plans

We are currently planning four major expansions of the RTV dataset. First, we plan to apply our current data collection methods to previous years as a way of improving our coverage of non-fatal events. Our ambition is to produce more extensive data on severe non-fatal events, which enables comparisons across time or between countries. Preliminary investigations suggest that data availability gets severely compromised if we go further back than 2010, likely limiting our timeframe. Second, we will soon be collecting RTV data for Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as join forces with partners in the United States, to generate comparable data on right-wing violence for all Western democracies. Third, we are currently working on an expansion into Eastern Europe and will be publishing new and original data for parts of that region soon. Finally, we plan to cover Latin America in the near future as this region has experienced and is experiencing extensive right-wing terrorism and violence, but has been largely ignored in existing research.

Key findings from 2020

This section presents key findings from the 2020 update concerning fatal attacks and fatalities, differences between countries, perpetrator types, target groups and weapon types. Note that we use fatal events only when comparing trends over time, whereas non-fatal events are included when assessing 2020. We believe our coverage of non-fatal events during this update is sufficient for generalizing about key characteristics for this year.

Fatal attacks and fatalities

We have registered two fatal right-wing attacks in Western Europe in 2020. The first occurred on 19 February when a 43-year-old German man went on a shooting spree targeting two shisha bars in the city of Hanau, in central Germany. Nine people were killed and five wounded. After the attacks, the man returned to his apartment where he killed his own mother before committing suicide. Prior to the attack, the perpetrator published a manifesto and videos on his personal website outlining his conspiratorial worldview, including anti-migrant and racist sentiments.

The second fatal attack occurred in Portugal on 25 July, when a black person was shot four times at point-blank range and killed by an older white man. Witnesses testified that in the days prior to the attack, the perpetrator, a colonial war veteran, had racially insulted the victim and threatened to kill him with "guns from the colonies". You may read more about this attack in our case study of Portugal further below.

Both attacks were committed by lone actors, targeted ethnic minorities, and used firearms. However, while the first incident may classify as terrorism, and was labelled as such by the German Minister of Internal Affairs, the second incident did not appear to have the deliberate intent of affecting a political outcome by instilling fear in a wider audience.

Fatal attacks

With two fatal events, the year 2020 is among the five years with least fatal attacks since 1990 (see Figure 1). As such, 2020 fits into a long-term trend of declining numbers of fatal attacks per year in Western Europe. However, since 2001, the number of fatal attacks per year has been relatively stable with an average of five fatal attacks per year, thereby placing 2020 below average.

Figure 1: Number of fatal events, 1990-2020
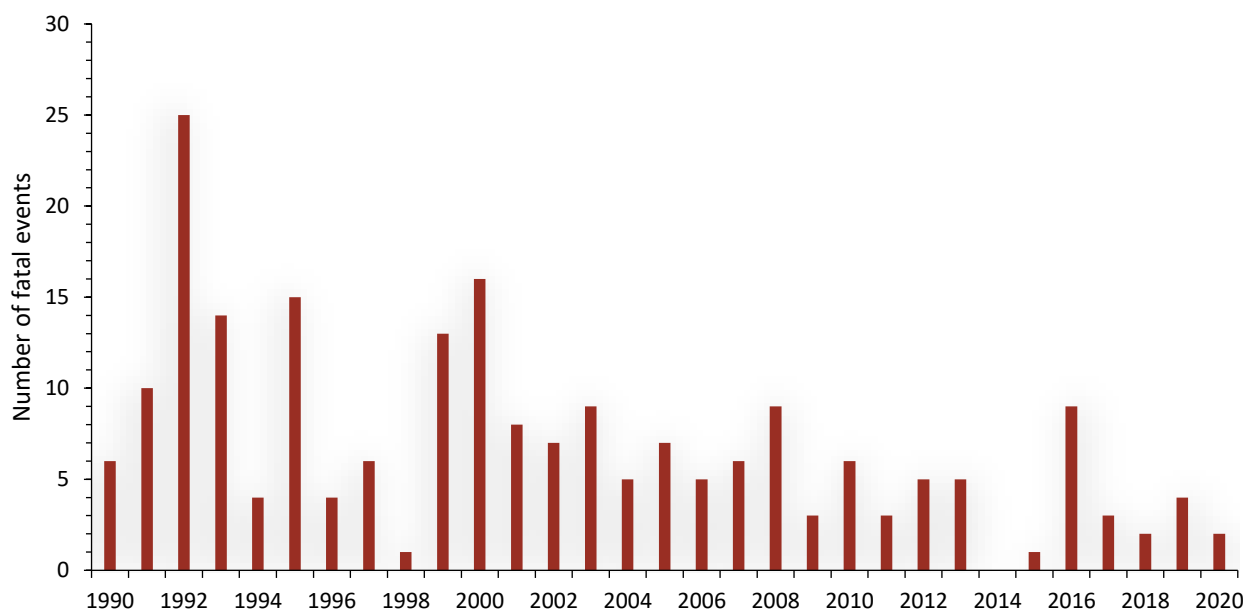
N = 213

Fatalities

While 2020 is among the five least deadly years in terms of fatal attacks, it is, with 11 fatalities, among the ten most deadly years in terms of fatalities. This demonstrates the impact of single mass-casualty attacks on estimating trends about relatively rare phenomenon. The discrepancy between the number of attacks and fatalities is clearly illustrated in 2011 with three fatal attacks, but a total of 80 fatalities, as a result of the 22 July attacks which led to 77 fatalities (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of fatalities, 1990-2020
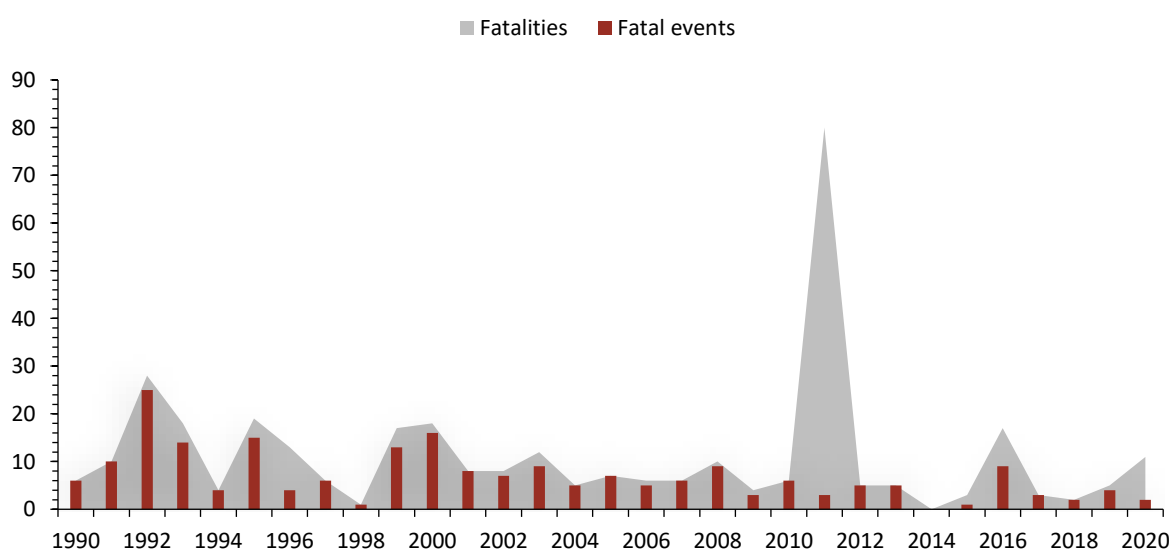
N=213

However, mass-casualty attacks such as 22 July and the Hanau shootings are relatively rare in Western Europe. Since 1990, only five attacks have led to five or more fatalities in Western Europe, and the 22 July attack is the only attack with more than 10 fatalities (Figure 3). A notable difference between past and more recent mass-casualty attacks is their modus operandi. While past mass-casualty attacks resulted from arson attacks where the perpetrators most likely did not aim to kill many people, perpetrators from more recent mass-casualty-attacks used firearms and were explicitly aiming to kill as many people as possible.

Figure 3 shows that in general, the frequency of fatal attacks has declined since the 1990s and almost all right-wing attacks with fatal outcomes have resulted in one fatality (191 of 213). This development can largely be ascribed to the replacement of multiple attacks by skinhead subcultures, targeting few people, to a small number of mass-casualty attacks by lone actors.

Figure 3: Number of fatalities per attack, 1990-2020


N = 213
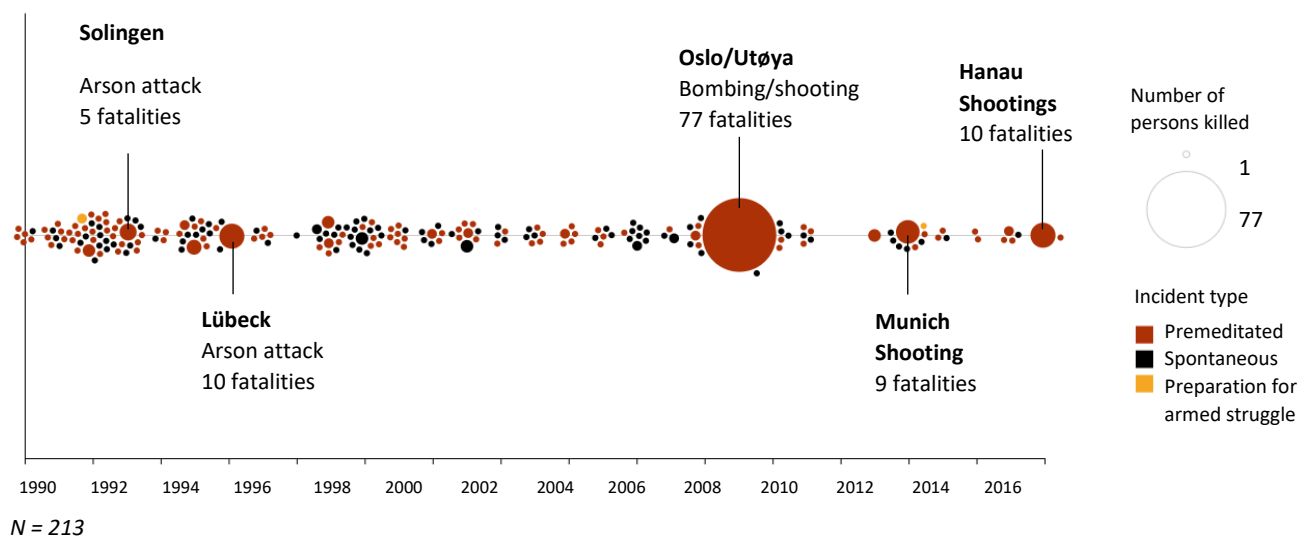
While most of the fatal-events were either premeditated or spontaneous attacks (N=211), two fatal events happened during the preparation for armed struggle. The first, in 1992 Germany, occurred when a group known as 'Werewolf Jadgeinheit Senftenberg' shot a driver during an armed robbery aimed to secure money for weapons to be used in overthrowing the government. The second, which took place in 2016 Germany, was the result of the special task force police raiding the perpetrators home in which he responded by opening fire, killing one and injuring three others. The perpetrator was part of the Reichsbürgerbewegung movement and the police found a large arsenal of firearms.

Comparing countries

In 2020, the number of events varied substantially between countries in Western Europe. Switzerland, Portugal and several of the Nordic and Benelux countries experienced far less events than other West European countries, whereas Germany, the United Kingdom, Greece, and Italy experienced more than twice as many RTV events as the remaining West European countries combined (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Number of fatal and non-fatal events, 2020

■ Violent attacks   ■ Attack plots/preparation for armed struggle
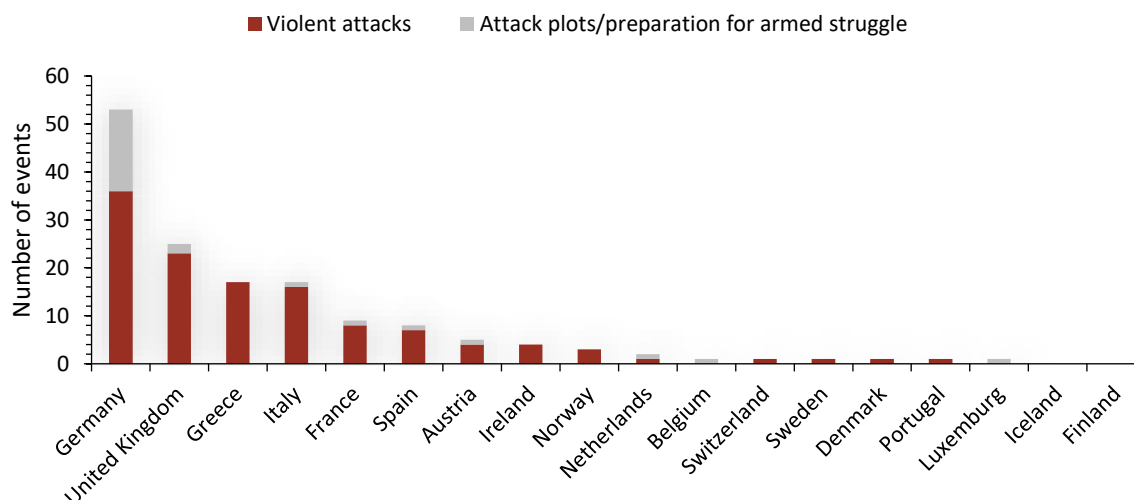
N = 149

However, to conclude that these countries experience far more right-wing violence than other West European countries is problematic. More than a third of the events in Germany are attack plots or discoveries of major arms repositories, possibly reflecting an increased attention and lower threshold for arresting people suspected of preparing attacks (more on this in our selected topics section further below). In addition, and most notably, these figures do not control for population. Figure 5 controls for these issues and shows the number of *completed attacks*[7] per 100.000 inhabitants in countries that experienced five or more RTV events in 2020.[8]

Figure 5: Number of completed attacks, per 100,000 inhabitants, 2020

■ Non-Fatal attacks   ■ Fatal attacks
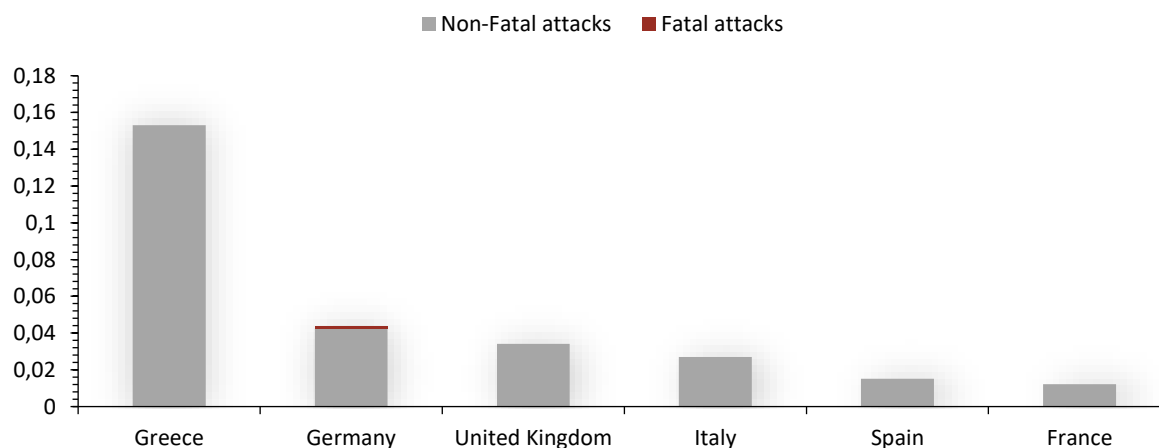
N = 107. Only countries with five or more fatal attacks between 1990 and 2020 are included. Population statistics derived from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

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[7] Number of premeditated and spontaneous attacks. Attack plots and preparation for armed struggle are not included.
[8] Limited to five or more events due to the susceptibility in small countries to reflect high political violence with low number of attacks.

As seen in Figure 5, the same four countries – Greece, Germany, UK and Italy – feature prominently. However, Greece with a population of more than 10 million replaces Germany with a population of about 83 million as the country with most RTV violence per capita, whereas United Kingdom with a population of about 67 million takes third place.

What these numbers suggest is that some West European countries do experience more attacks from the far right than others. By comparing the number of fatal attacks per country for longer time periods, we also see that many of the same countries feature prominently, such as Germany, the UK, Spain and Sweden (Figure 6). While Sweden and Spain have witnessed declining levels of violence, alongside increased support for far-right parties, the opposite appears true for Greece. In the last ten years, Greece has had the highest number of fatal attacks per 100,000 inhabitants.

Figure 6: Number of fatal attacks, per 100,000 inhabitants, 1991-2020

N = 167. Only countries with three or more fatal attacks within a ten-year period is included. Population statistics derived from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.
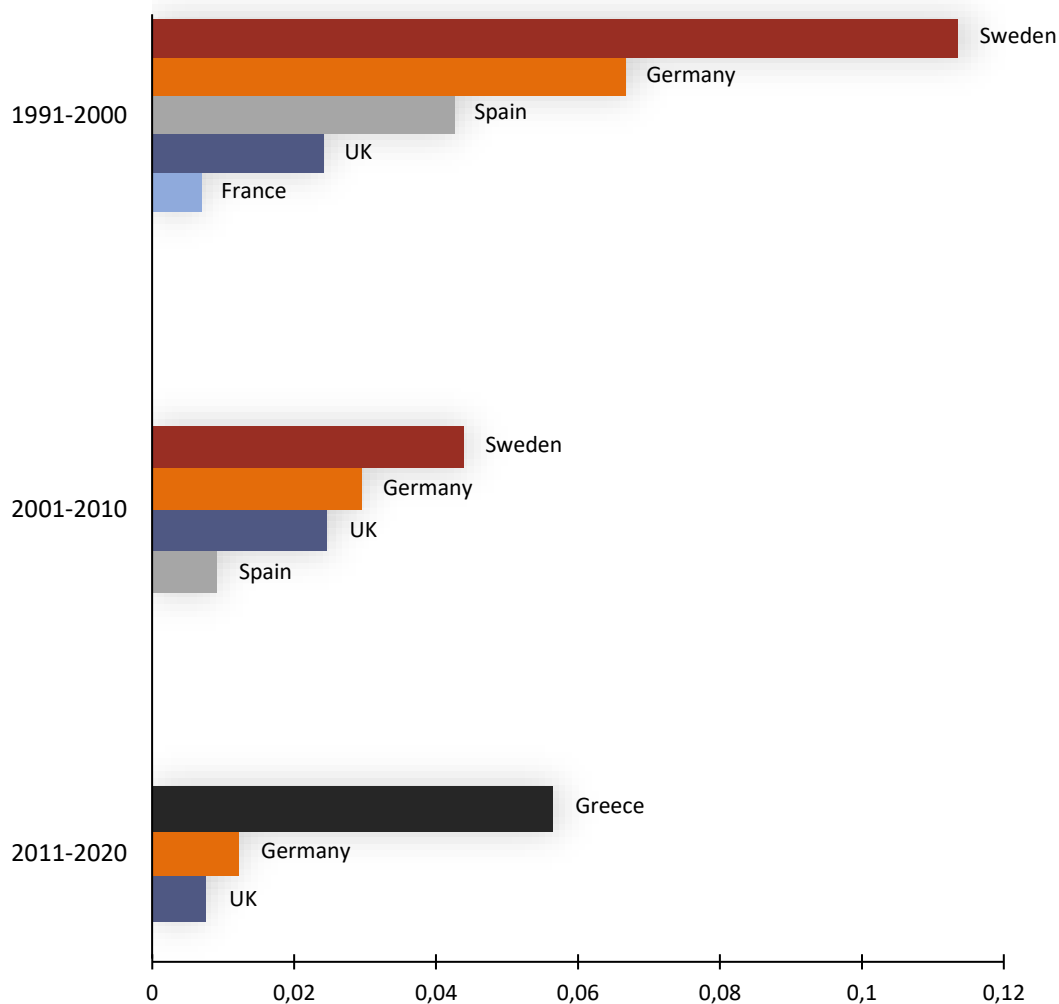
Perpetrator types

The RTV dataset distinguishes between nine perpetrator types according to their type of commitment, degree of organization and the number of people involved: organized groups; affiliated members; autonomous cells; gangs; coordinated entities; unorganized; lone actors; professional entities and shadow groups. There is also an 'unknown' category used in cases where there is too little information to determine the perpetrator type (see Box 2 for more information).


Box 2: RTV perpetrator types

Organized groups	Known entities with five or more members whose association primarily relies on a strong commitment to right-wing politics
Affiliated members	Two or more members of organised groups acting on their own initiative
Autonomous cells	Clandestine entities of two to four members whose association primarily relies on a strong commitment to right-wing politics
Gangs/Informal groups	Three or more acquaintances with a general right-wing commitment, but whose association primarily relies on social bonds
Coordinated entities	Constellations of two or more people with an apparent far-right association, but where information about their affiliation to a group, cell, or gang, is missing.
Unorganised	Two or more perpetrators with no or unknown association to any specific right-wing group, cell, or gang
Lone actors	Single perpetrators who prepare and carry out attacks alone at their own initiative
Shadow groups	Unresolved attacks claimed by formerly unknown groups
Professional entity	One or more perpetrators operating in capacity of their professional affiliation, typically the police, military or private security firms.
Unknown	Unidentified perpetrator(s), but where targeting or other factors strongly indicate a far-right motivation

For more information on the classification of perpetrators, please refer to the RTV Codebook.

Lone actors constitute the most prominent perpetrator type in 2020, as they have done for the past four years. In addition to being behind a significant number of violent physical attacks, lone actors were also behind the largest share of plots and discoveries of major arms repositories (coded as 'preparation for armed struggle', see Figure 7). Almost half the lone actor events were registered in Germany (N=21). Only three of these had known connections to existing movements (Reichsbürger movement), online networks (Feuerkrig division) and political parties (Der III. Weg). In addition, within Germany, lone actors far outnumbered any of the other perpetrator types.

Figure 7: Perpetrator type, all events, 2020
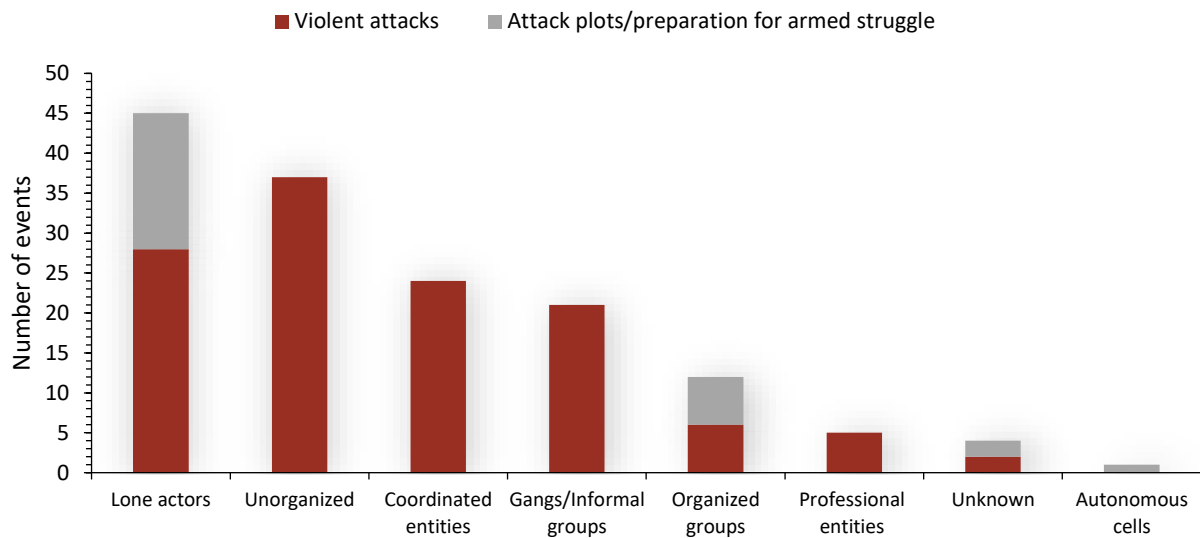
N = 149. Note that the categories "organized groups" and "affiliated members" are merged in this figure.

Lone actors were also behind both fatal attacks that occurred in 2020, although the profiles of these two lone actors differs. The perpetrator from Portugal appears to be a disillusioned elderly whose racist actions may be linked to his previous experiences as a colonial soldier (for more details, see our case study of Portugal further below). In contrast, the Hanau-perpetrator was a deeply conspiratorial person who had self-radicalized online and planned his attack as part of a larger revolutionary scheme.

Whether the Hanau-shooter was inspired by other perpetrators of right-wing terrorism, such as the perpetrator of the March 15 terrorist attacks in Christchurch or the 22 July attacks in Norway, remains unknown. However, there are similarities in modus operandi and the online self-publication of ideas to justify their actions. Nonetheless, more direct references to previous attacks as an inspiration source were found in several other events from 2020. In the United Kingdom, the police seized weapons from a young boy with ties to the chat group Feuerkrig Division (FKD). He had downloaded eleven clips of the New Zealand attacks, the 22 July attacks, the shooting in El Paso, and the Datyon and Garlic festival attacks, and he outlined details of lone actor attacks in his notebook. In the Netherlands, the perpetrator had been unable to secure a large arsenal of weapons, but carried a loaded pistol in his waistband and had directed threats against police officers and politicians online, writing things such as "I'm going for a higher number of deaths than Anders Breivik." During the house search, the police found 33,000 images and 1,500 videos with extreme-right content, including a documentary by the 22 July perpetrator and images of the attacks in Christchurch. In France, a former soldier was arrested after being suspected of planning an attack against the Jewish community. He had increasingly begun to post messages on social media, promoting "the great replacement" and presenting himself as a worshipper of the Christchurch shooter.

While some of the lone actors have acquired inspiration from previous mass-casualty attacks, a more common feature among lone actors is spontaneous attacks against people of ethnic and religious minorities. In contrast to the fatal event in Portugal, it appears that most lone actors do not have an intent to actively seek out a person or target group, but rather that the victim was

'in the wrong place at the wrong time' – for example while at the playground, refueling their car, taking public transport and so forth. As such, there is a stark contrast between perpetrators who actively pursue plans of committing large-scale attacks versus those with innate beliefs and views who attack people at random.

Another notable trend from 2020 is that the unorganized category figures more prominently than in previous years. For example, Greece has had close to none registered attacks from unorganized people in previous years. This year marks a shift as almost twenty percent of the perpetrators were unorganized. The cases ranged from a journalist who was attacked while reporting on locals preventing a boat of refugees from disembarking, to a Pakistani immigrant being racially insulted and attacked by his boss and colleague at the workplace. This trend may be driven by at least two different factors. First, recent studies of right-wing terrorism and violence have noted a tendency of more spontaneous attacks by people unaffiliated to the far-right movement.[9] Second, our improved data collection methods, most notably our tailored news database search strings, probably renders more information about racist attacks by unorganized perpetrators than our previous data collection efforts, which to a lager extent was based on sources covering known far-right actors and events.

Note also that our new perpetrator category 'coordinated entities' is the third most frequent perpetrator type. Unlike the lone actor and unorganized categories, this category suggests that someone with a far-right association was involved in the event. For example, in France, two volunteers from an association for social equality and ecology were attacked by a group of men, wearing balaclavas, after a toy drive. In the United Kingdom, two masked men racially insulted and attacked a black person with a machete, slashing his leg. In both these cases, the perpetrators actively prepared their attack and acted as coordinated entities. Combined with events involving organized groups and their affiliated members, we therefore see that also more organized units are involved in a considerable portion of contemporary right-wing violence.

Our second new perpetrator category, professional entities, is also present in 2020 with five events. In France, the victim had thrown himself into the river and police officers could be heard laughing and saying that they should have "hooked a ball on his foot." When they caught him, he was kicked, punched, and beat with batons from seven to eight police officers. The attack was caught on camera. The assault continued in the car, where a policewoman smashed the victims head to the ground with her foot.

When reviewing past events using these new categories, only two other events from 2005 and 2019 respectively, ended up in this new category. One reason may be that the revival of the Black Lives Matter movement has generated increased attention toward these types of attacks since 2020. However, we also suspect that more past events might have been included if this category had existed in previous rounds of data collection. It will therefore be interesting to track the development of this particular perpetrator type in future updates.

If we look at the distribution of perpetrator types for fatal events over time, the most notable trend is that the share of attacks by all perpetrator types except for lone actors is decreasing, as

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[9] Daniel Koehler, "Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: 'Hive Terrorism' as a New Tactic?," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 6 (2018); Matthew Sweeney and Arie Perliger, "Explaining the Spontaneous Nature of Far-Right Violence in the United States," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 6 (2018).

illustrated by Figure 8. In other words, when it comes to perpetrator types, fatal and non-fatal events are similar in presenting lone actors as the primary perpetrator, but dissimilar in that other perpetrator categories are behind the majority of non-fatal attacks, whereas lone actors have been behind the majority of fatal attacks for the past five years. In fact, in the last five years, organized groups have only been behind one fatal event. The event occurred in Helsinki in 2016, when a man was kicked in the chest by a member of the Nordic Resistance Movement, causing him to fall backwards, hitting his head on the pavement, dying one week later from injuries sustained. While members of NRM are encouraged to restrain their use of violence, the perpetrator was awarded a distinction "for his courage and his loyalty to the organization and his comrades and this was greeted by a standing ovation by all participants".[10]

Figure 8: Perpetrator type, fatal events, 2001-2020
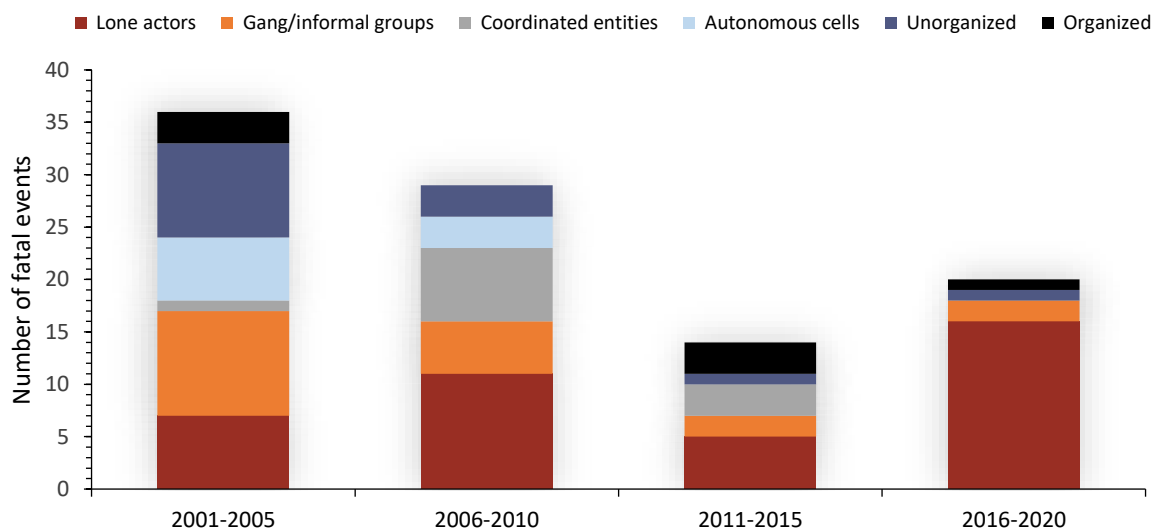
N= 99. Note that the categories 'organised groups' and 'affiliated members' are merged in this figure.

Incident and perpetrator types

Do different perpetrator types commit different types of violence? RTV events are categorized according to four incident types: premeditated attacks, spontaneous attacks, plots and preparation for armed struggle (see Box 3 for more information).

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

Box 3: RTV incident types

Premeditated attacks	are incidents where perpetrators have targeted a predefined person or group
Spontaneous attacks	are triggered by random confrontations between perpetrator(s) and victim(s), associated with some predefined target group
Attack plots	are planned attacks by an identifiable group or individual involving deadly weapons that were intercepted by the police before the attack was carried out
Preparations for armed struggle	are discoveries of bomb-making materials or major arms repositories belonging to right-wing activists lacking specific attack plans

Table 1 shows all RTV events from 2020, fatal and non-fatal, categorized according to perpetrator and incident type. Notably, spontaneous attacks (N=93) equals more than the other categories combined (N=56). This is the fourth time between 1990 and 2020 that spontaneous attacks outnumber premeditated attacks in the RTV Dataset. The rise in the number of events by the unorganized category most likely impacts the growth in spontaneous attacks. Therefore, this shift may also reflect improved data collection methods in recent years.

Table 1: Perpetrator and incident type, all cases, 2020

Incident type/ Perpetrator Type	Premeditated	Spontaneous	Attack plot	Preparation for armed struggle	Total
Lone actors	8	20	11	6	45
Unorganised	5	32			37
Coordinated entities	10	14			24
Gangs/Informal groups	4	17			21
Organised groups	2	4	2	4	12
Professional entities		5			5
Unknown	1	1	1	1	4
Autonomous cells			1		1
Grand Total	30	93	15	11	149

N = 149. Note that the categories 'organised groups' and 'affiliated members' are merged in this table.

As Table 1 shows, in 2020 both premeditated and spontaneous attacks were predominantly committed by groups of people, whereas lone actors were behind most of the attack plots and preparations for armed struggle. Violent attacks by groups were mostly spontaneous, against random people, involving racial slurs prior to the physical attack.

Female perpetrators were involved in more attacks during 2020 than in previous years. Sixteen attacks were recorded during the update, in which women either acted as the main aggressor, part of a group or participated in verbal abuse against the victim(s). Twelve of these occurred in Germany or the United Kingdom, while the remaining events took place in France and Ireland. In eleven of the cases, women actively partook in the violence and in four of these, women were the main aggressor of violence. While these are low numbers in comparison to the total number

of attacks recorded during the update, they deviate from previous years, where an insignificant number has been recorded. In most of the cases, the women acted as part of a gang or an informal group committing violent spontaneous attacks. However, one incident from Germany stands out in which a woman prepared for an arson attack on either public officials or people of Muslim faith. While information suggests she operated alone, she had joined a right-wing rock club as well as the party Der III. Weg and participated in demonstrations. To present date, no mass-casualty attacks in Western Europe has been perpetrated by women, and men are overrepresented as perpetrators of both fatal and non-fatal attacks.

Target groups

Who were the victims of right-wing terrorism and violence in 2020? The RTV dataset includes more than 15 different target groups that may be grouped into five main categories, reflecting common enemies of the far right: (1) ethnic and religious minorities (e.g. immigrants, refugees, blacks, Jews, Muslims and Roma); (2) political opponents (e.g. left-wing activists, the media, separatists, deserters, and pro-immigration activists); (3) state institutions (e.g. police and government representatives at the national and local level); (4) sexual minorities (LGBT+); and (5) vulnerable groups (e.g. people who are homeless or mentally or physically disabled).

In 2020, a large majority of events (102 of 149 events), including the two fatal events, primarily targeted ethnic and religious minorities (Figure 9). Political opponents were the second most frequently targeted group (21 of 149 events), with a majority of violent attacks targeting left-wing and anti-fascist activists (N = 16). Note that we only include street-level brawls between leftists and rightists initiated by the right. We exclude cases initiated by the left or where it remains unclear who initiated the fighting. The third largest target group in 2020 had an unknown target group (16 of 149 events). Most of these (N = 15) were either vague attack plots or discoveries of arms repositories.

Figure 9: Target groups, all cases, 2020
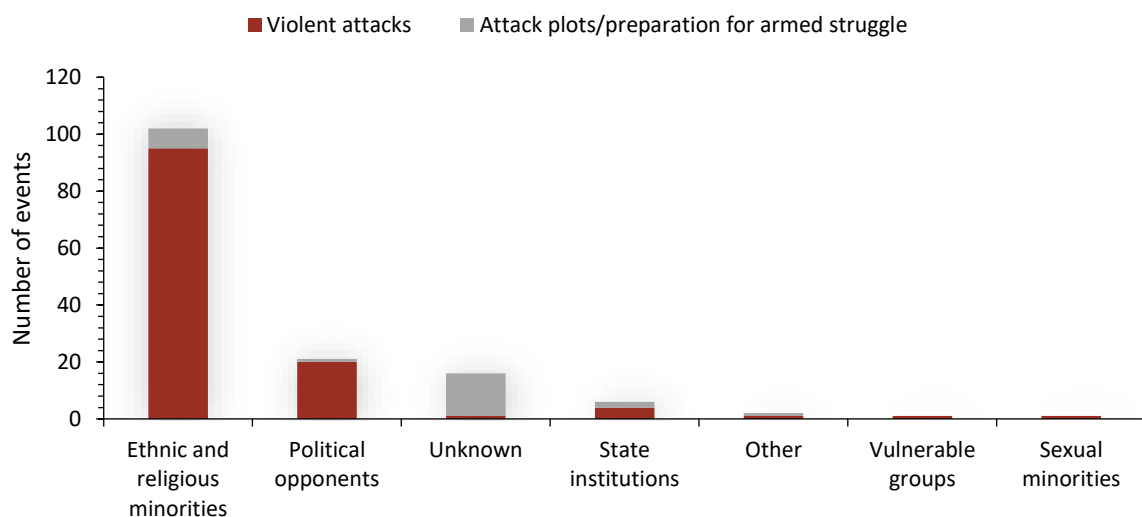
N = 149

By disaggregating the category 'ethnic and religious minorities' into its sub-components (Figure 10), we see that the immigrant/foreigner/asylum seeker/refugee category makes up a large portion of this target group (74 of 102 events). The second most targeted sub-category in 2020 was 'blacks' (17 of 102 events), which marks a significant increase from previous years, where this category has been nearly absent in Western Europe. Victims are coded as 'black' if the colour of their skin, rather than them being regarded as foreigners, is interpreted as the main motivation behind the attack. This practise may produce a bias toward countries where blacks are generally seen as a more integral part of the population, such as the UK, Portugal and France. Because black people constitute a considerable share of these countries' populations, they are not primarily target as 'immigrants' or 'foreigners' but rather because of their skin colour. Whether this increase results from an actual increase in attacks targeting blacks, or from increased media reporting on such events in light of Black Lives Matter protests, remains an open question. Muslims and Jews were less targeted in physical attacks, but in return the most targeted in attack plots and preparations for armed struggle.

Figure 10: Target groups within the "ethnic and religious minorities", all cases, 2020
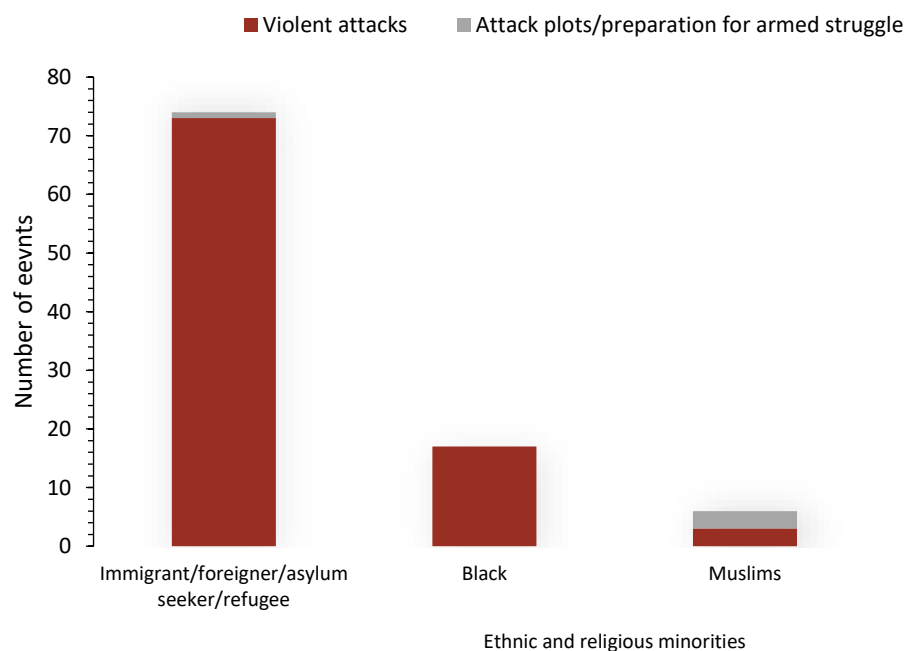
N = 102

Figure 11 shows the distribution of target groups in fatal events between 2001 and 2020, clustered into five-year periods. The relative share represented by attacks against ethnic and religious minorities has increased over time, but only because attacks against other target groups have decreased. Political opponents and vulnerable groups have been less targeted in recent years, while targeting of state institutions has increased.

*Figure 11: Target groups, fatal events, 2001-2020*
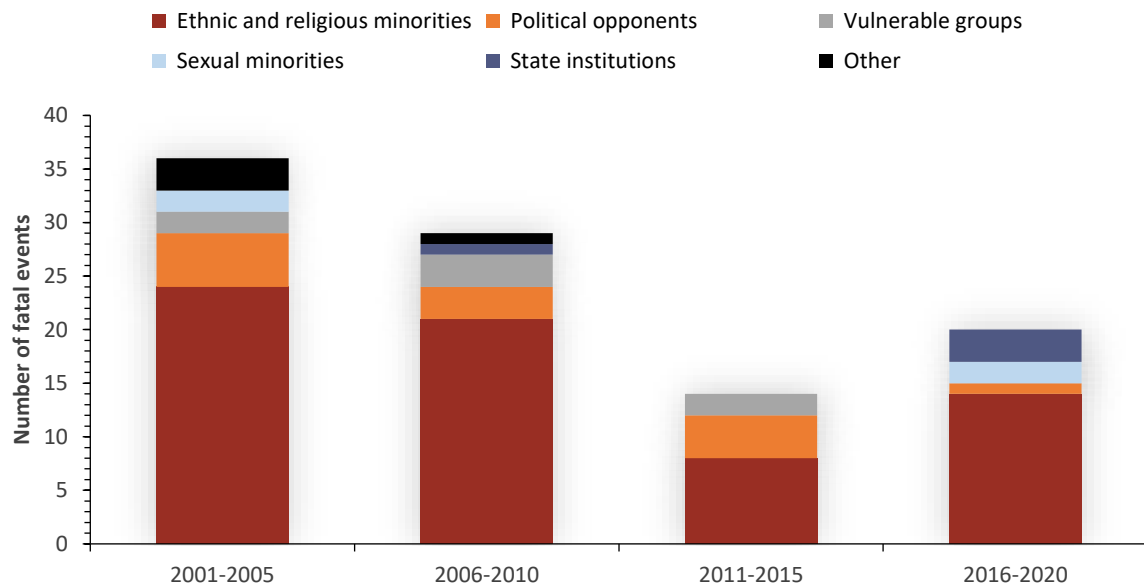
N = 99

From 2001 to 2020, ethnic and religious minorities comprised the largest target group .While vulnerable groups were targeted particularly in the 1990s, and to some extent during the beginning of 2000s, no fatal events targeting this group has been registered since 2012. Preliminary findings from the forthcoming RTV dataset on Eastern Europe indicate a similar development.

Weapon types

What kinds of weapons were used in right-wing attacks in 2020? The RTV dataset codes for more than 15 different weapons types that can be grouped into six main categories: explosives (including letter bombs); firearms (including handgun, shotgun/rifle, and automatic firearms); arson (including Molotov cocktails/petrol bombs/firebombs); knives; blunt instruments; and beating and kicking. There is also an 'other' category, used for less common weapons such as car attacks.

Figure 12 shows that, in 2020, the largest number of severe right-wing events in Western Europe are categorised as beating and kicking (78 out of 149). These events are often spontaneous street confrontations, and do not involve any weapons. In 28 of the cases, other weapons (such as shotguns, dogs and bottles) and blunt instruments (including baseball bats and brass knuckles), were used in violent attacks. The most deadly weapons, explosives and firearms, were coded in 24 of the events, primarily resulting from attack plots and discoveries of major arms repositories.

Figure 12: Weapon types, all cases, 2020
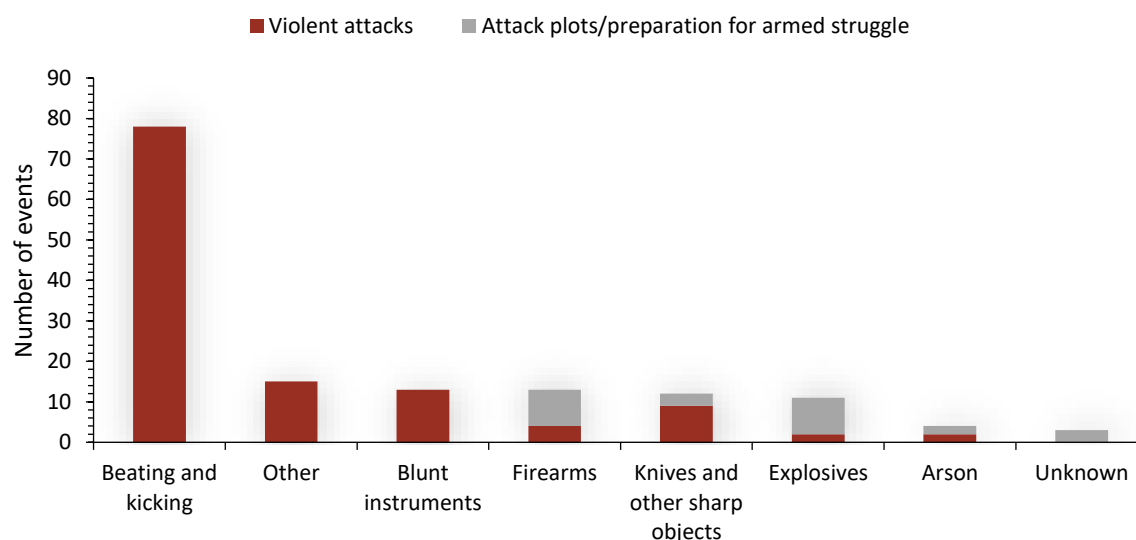
N = 149

If we look at weapons used in fatal attacks over time (*Figure 13*Figure 13), we see that the share of attacks using firearms increased significantly over last five years, while knife attacks have become less common. In addition, fatal attacks resulting from arson or the use of blunt instruments were more common during the early 2000s than in the last 15 years, while explosives have increased in the same period. These patterns correspond closely to changes in the perpetrators of fatal attacks, with fewer attacks by gangs and unorganized groups, who typically use knives or blunt instruments, to a larger share of attacks by lone actors, who have used explosives and firearms to a larger extent. Between 2001 and 2020, gangs used beating/kicking, knives or and/or blunt instruments in almost ninety percent of fatal attacks (N=19). Going further back in time, the findings remain consistent with the patterns of the 1990s. In contrast, lone actors have used explosives and firearms in almost 60 percent of fatal attacks since 2001.

Figure 13: Weapon types, fatal events, 2001-2020
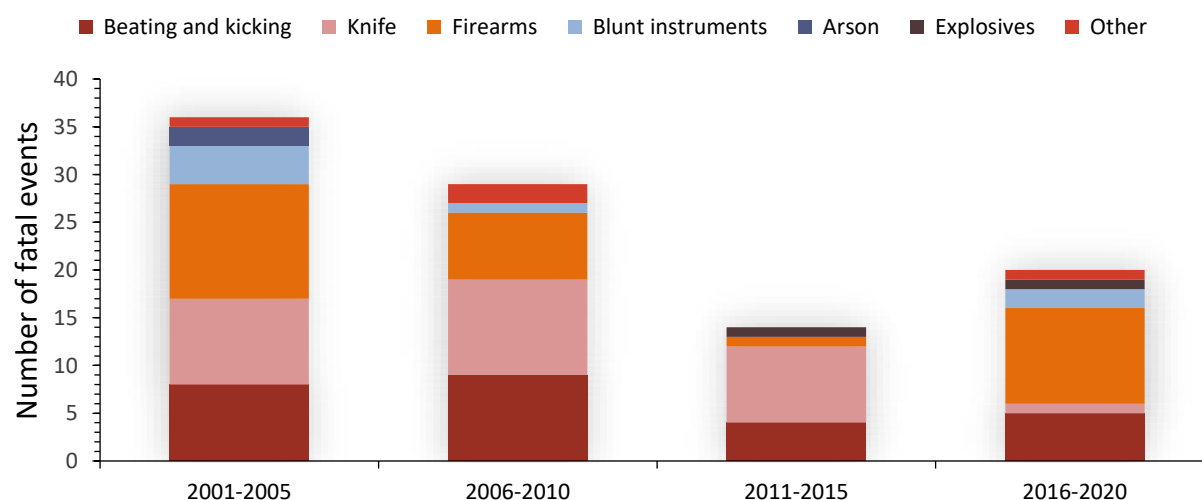
N = 99

Country case study

Each year, the RTV Trend Report offers short case studies of countries experiencing notable developments during the year covered by the report. Former [trend reports](#) have covered France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Spain and Greece. This year we provide a slightly longer report, but from one country only: Portugal.

Portugal: Racist killing with a colonial legacy

As already mentioned in this report, Portugal was one of two countries to experience a fatal right-wing attack in 2020. On 25 July, in broad daylight on a busy street in the Lisbon suburb of Moscavide, Evaristo Marinho, a 76-year-old white retired nursing assistant, shot and killed Bruno Candé, a 39-year-old black actor born in Lisbon with parents from Guinea-Bissau. The perpetrator has no known connections to extreme-right groups, but was notorious for his threatening behaviour vis-à-vis his neighbours.[11] In court, Marinho claimed that the killing "was something that happened very abruptly".[12] Evidence suggests, however, that he not only planned the attack, but also clearly intended to murder the victim.

Three days prior to the attack, Marinho and Candé had an argument over Candé's dog, in which Marinho expressed, according to witnesses, several racist slurs, such as *"Vai para a tua terra, preto!"* (Go back to your land, black!), as well as shouting degrading insults directed at his mother and other black women.[13] After Candé pushed him away, Marinho explicitly threatened to kill him. Determined to retaliate, Marinho returned several times to the same street where that quarrel occurred to find Candé, according to local news media.[14] When observing Candé three days later, he retrieved his gun from a code-locked suitcase,[15] placed six bullets in it, left the house and shot him several times at close range. After the first shot, Bruno Candé fell to the ground, and Marinho subsequently fired several more shots that struck vital organs.[16] He was then overpowered by several passers-by, but threatened to kill one of them as well.[17]

While the quarrel about the dog might have been the trigger event, the underlying motive was clearly racism, albeit initially dismissed by the police and denied by the perpetrator.[18] The perpetrator claimed it was all about getting back at Candé for what had happened three days

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[11] Expresso, June 30, 2020: "Assassino de Bruno Candé ameaçava vizinhos" URL: https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2020-07-31-Assassino-de-Bruno-Cande-ameacava-vizinhos

[12] Prime Time Zone, May 14, 2021. "Bruno Candé Homicide Confesses To Crime". URl: https://primetimezone.com/trending/bruno-cande-homicide-confesses-to-crime-zap/

[13] Diário de Notícias, January 19, 2021: "Foi ódio racial que matou Bruno Candé, acusa Ministério Público". URL: https://www.dn.pt/sociedade/investigacao-da-pj-provou-odio-racial-no-homicidio-de-bruno-cande-13247985.html

[14] BBC, June 29, 2021. "Bruno Candé: White man jailed for Portugal murder of black actor". URL: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57645012

[15] Prime Time Zone, May 14, 2021: "Bruno Candé homicide confesses to crime – ZAP" URL: http://primetimezone.com/trending/bruno-cande-homicide-confesses-to-crime-zap/

[16] Expresso, January 19, 2021: "Homicídio de Bruno Candé foi motivado por ódio racial, diz Ministério Público" URL: https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2021-01-19-Homicidio-de-Bruno-Cande-foi-motivado-por-odio-racial-diz-Ministerio-Publico

[17] Expresso, June 30, 2020: "Assassino de Bruno Candé ameaçava vizinhos" URL: https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2020-07-31-Assassino-de-Bruno-Cande-ameacava-vizinhos

[18] Diário de Notícias, July 27, 2021. "Morte de Bruno Candé. PJ não exclui crime racial, mas mantém opções em aberto". URL: https://www.dn.pt/pais/morte-de-bruno-cande-pj-nao-exclui-crime-racial-mas-mantem-opcoes-em-aberto-12472180.html

earlier, while the police said there was no evidence of a racist motive. Confronted with the testimonies of the witnesses, however, the police withdrew their initial claim. Yet, they have been heavily criticized for an increasing number of far-right affiliates in their national ranks,[19] and failure to respond effectively to racist violence.[20] In June 2021, the perpetrator was convicted of racially motivated murder and sentenced to 22 years and nine months behind bars.

In addition to the racist motive, some of the racist slurs by Marinho should be interpreted against the backdrop of Portugal's colonial history. In fact, one of the racist slurs included an explicit reference to the colonial history when he told Candé to "go back to the senzala [slave quarters]".[21] Contrary to most other European colonial powers, the Portuguese empire ended later due strong resistance against processes of de-colonization from Salazar's authoritarian far-right regime (1933-1974). As the regime fought in the "overseas wars" against liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Marinho was one of tens of thousands of Portuguese men conscripted to fight in Angola, where he served between 1966 and 1968.[22] The war experience seems to have had long-lasting impacts on him. Not only did he suffer from a post-traumatic stress disorder, but he also seems to have developed a distinct identity as a colonial war veteran. For example, when threatening Candé, he said he would use "guns from the colonies" and in prison he supposedly bragged about having "killed several like this (referring to Candé)" when serving in Angola.

While racially motivated violence is not uncommon in Portugal, the killing of Candé nevertheless differs from other severe right-wing attacks in recent decades. First, the RTV dataset shows that there have been few fatal events in Portugal since 1990. The last time a racially motivated murder took place was in 2003 when two Brazilian citizens – allegedly on behalf of a former member of an outlawed right-wing association called MAN (Movimento de Acção Nacional) – shot a black man at the entrance of the café he owned. Before this assassination, there were two killings in 1995. In one, a man from Cape Verde was fatally stabbed by one or more strangers during the night near a tourist resort in a series of similar racially motivated incidents. In the other, a group of 50 skinheads beat several blacks in the Barrio Alto. The assaults caused injuries to 11 people and one victim slipped into a coma and died the next morning. The group later established the Portuguese division of Hammerskins, inspired by a white supremacist group formed in 1988 in Dallas, Texas. The group rapidly replaced MAN as the key actor in Portugal's second period of extreme-right mobilization since the transition to democracy in 1970s.[23]

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[19] European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, October 2, 2018: "ECRI Report on Portugal" URL: https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-portugal/16808de7da

[20] European Network against Racism, 2019, "Racist Crime and Institutional Racism in Europe" URL: https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport2018_final.pdf; Euronews, June 29, 2021, "Bruno Candé: Portuguese man convicted of racist murder of black actor" URL: https://www.euronews.com/2021/06/29/bruno-cande-portuguese-man-convicted-of-racist-murder-of-black-actor

[21] Vidal, Marta (2020) "The murder of Bruno Candé has put racism – and colonial amnesia – under the spotlight in Portugal" in *Equal Times*, September 11, 2020. URL: https://www.equaltimes.org/the-murder-of-bruno-cande-has-put#.YN74YbvisuU

[22] Publico, January 29, 2021. "Um riso em tom de gozo fez arguido disparar cinco tiros contra Bruno Candé". URL: https://www.publico.pt/2021/01/29/sociedade/noticia/riso-tom-gozo-fez-arguido-disparar-cinco-tiros-bruno-cande-1948359. See also previous footnote for more information about Portugal's colonial history.

[23] Marchi, R. and da Silva R., "Political Violence from the Extreme Right in Contemporary Portugal," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 6 (2019): 27-42

Second, almost all severe forms of violence in recent years have been associated with this group – the Hammerskins. In fact, since the transition to democracy in the mid-1970s, Portugal has struggled with organized forms of right-wing violence.[24] Severe forms of far-right violence carried out by lone actors (like Marinho) is rare. Between 2013 and 2015, the Hammerskins were responsible for at least three severe violent attacks targeting left-wing activists, homosexuals, and a black person. The attack against the latter, in which a group of five skinheads verbally insulted, beat and stabbed a black man, was known as an initiation ritual for new members. Due to the group's activities during these years, police ended up arresting 17 activists in a large operation that also uncovered arms repositories and Nazi propaganda. In recent years, the Hammerskins has been less involved in severe violence, but affiliated members tried to run over a leading figure of the antifascist movement with a car in 2019.[25]

Whether last year's lone actor attack is indicative of a new trend of far-right violence in Portugal is, of course, too soon to tell. However, the topic of racism and racist violence have certainly been put on the agenda in Portugal during the last year due to two examples of police brutality in 2020, which several actors have attributed to racism. These two events are not included in the RTV dataset due to lack of information about the motive, but might be included in future versions if new information suggests otherwise. In addition to the killing of Candé and cases of police brutality, there have been several other incidents, including death threats against black MPs, which despite being severe, do not fall into the universe of the RTV dataset. Another reason why racism is on the agenda is breakthrough of a radical right party, Chega, in 2019 and the mobilization by the black community in early 2020 – inspired by the Black Lives Matters marches in the US – in what was allegedly the biggest anti-racism rally ever seen in the country. The Chega leader responded with a counter-protest in which he was seen doing the Nazi salute while holding a banner reading, "Portugal is not racist."[26] As political polarization usually, but not always, produces more violence, it is important keep a close eye on the development in Portugal in the coming years.

Selected topics

Each year, the RTV Trend Report also covers a few selected topics that come across as particularly salient from the year covered by the report. Previous topics have included vehicular attacks, the disappearing skinhead scene, online-inspired terrorism, and attacks against politicians. This year we provide more details on two selected topics: the COVID-19 pandemic and the relationship between declining attacks and rising plots.

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[24] Marchi, R. and da Silva R., "Political Violence from the Extreme Right in Contemporary Portugal," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 6 (2019): 27-42

[25] SOL, January 28, 2019. "Núcleo Antifascista condena "tentativa de homicídio" em Braga" URL: https://sol.sapo.pt/artigo/644074/n-cleo-antifascista-condena-tentativa-de-homicidio-em-braga

[26] The Guardian, September 28, 2020. "Portugal records surge in racist violence as far right rises" URL: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/28/portugal-sees-surge-in-racist-violence-as-far-right-rises?CMP=share_btn_tw; Expresso, July 26, 2020. "Chega diz que assassinato de ator Bruno Candé não foi por racismo" URL: https://expresso.pt/politica/2020-07-26-Chega-diz-que-assassinato-de-ator-Bruno-Cande-nao-foi-por-racismo

COVID-19

The potential impact of the Coronavirus pandemic upon far-right mobilisation and violence emerged as a significant concern from March 2020 onwards. A range of far-right actors moved quickly to try to capitalise upon this unprecedented public health emergency albeit with mixed success. For example, at the fringes of the extreme right, numerous "accelerationist" Telegram channels began very early on to push the idea that the virus could be utilised to help "collapse" the system. However, for all the hard talk, little came of such discussions to actually deliberately contract and spread the virus.

In the United States, two cases in particular highlighted how the conjunction of conspiratorial thinking, far-right beliefs and the virus could combine to propel actors into violent action. This includes one activist, killed in a confrontation with the FBI who had wanted to bomb a hospital to "create enough chaos to kick start a revolution" and another man who derailed a train, travelling at full speed, close to the US hospital ship USNS "Mercy" in the belief that the resultant media coverage would "wake people up." The Department of Homeland Security warned that the virus had "created a new source of anger and frustration" for many and was providing the "impetus" for new acts of domestic terrorism. Indeed, the lockdown appears to have played a significant role in the plot by a US militia group to kidnap the Governor of Michigan.

In Western Europe, incidents of violence and terrorism related to the pandemic have been relatively few. The findings are premised on the perpetrator or perpetrators explicitly mentioning the virus during the course of an attack or if the incident and/or target selection suggests such a link. Out of the 149 events registered, only nine were recorded as meeting these criteria. Three of the incidents occurred in Ireland; three in Italy; and three in the United Kingdom. In contrast, seventy-four incidents were recorded in which immigrants/foreigners were attacked in Western Europe, making targeting relating to the Coronavirus comparatively low.

This is not to suggest that Coronavirus did not underpin innumerable cases of racial harassment and less severe violence, involving racist abuse and spitting for instance. What the data does suggest, however, is that the level of severe violence has not been as high as one might have expected. None of the attacks resulted in fatalities, which is not to underplay the seriousness of the violence that took place. In addition, there have been death threats against a range of targets from racial minorities to politicians to 5G engineers (as well as the destruction of 5G mobile cell-phone masts which some claimed were being used to spread the virus or curtail civil liberties) during the course of the pandemic, but physical violence has been rarer.

Regarding the perpetrator types, none of the nine attacks emanated from organized groups. One of the events, which occurred in the United Kingdom in February, was perpetrated by a gang and involved five youths beating and kicking a Singaporean man after yelling "Coronavirus" at him. Only one attack was perpetrated by a lone actor. This case, which took place in Livorno, Italy, was the most serious incident recorded and involved a man throwing an incendiary device into a Chinese-run business causing an explosion and fire, which damaged the property and caused two people to receive hospital treatment. Most of the attacks, however, were committed by unorganized people attacking people perceived as Chinese by the perpetrator, including the remaining attacks in Italy, Ireland, and the United Kingdom (N=7). In Ireland, two

men and two women racially insulted and attacked a Chinese restaurant and its owners, yelling "You dirty yellow bastards, you brought the virus into the town." The attack led to one person being admitted to the hospital. In another event in Ireland, a woman was racially insulted before being pushed into the Dublin canal.

To sum up, despite a growing concern and some activists fantasizing about using the Coronavirus to accelerate the breakdown of "the system", the pandemic did not lead to a spark in right-wing terrorist attacks in Western Europe. However, the pandemic did result in more xenophobic and unorganized violence targeting Chinese-looking victims. As such, the pandemic illustrates how a specific crisis quickly results in new groups being perceived as legitimate targets of right-wing violence.

The relationship between declining attacks and rising plots

A notable trend in recent years has been a considerable rise in the number of attack plots and discoveries of major arms repositories held by far-right activists. What is puzzling is that the number of fatal attacks has been at an all-time low during the same period, as illustrated by Figure 14. How can we explain these contrasting patterns? Are we seeing less fatal attacks and more foiled plots because the police are now intervening before such attacks can materialize? Or, is the rise in registered plots simply a result of increased attention from the police and the media towards this threat, whereas declining fatal attacks reflects an actual decline of this threat regardless of police interventions?

To approach a tentative answer to these questions, it may be helpful to take a closer look at plots and arms discoveries to assess their maturity, perpetrators and geographical patterns.

*Figure 14: Number of plots and preparation for armed struggle and fatal attacks, 1990-2020*
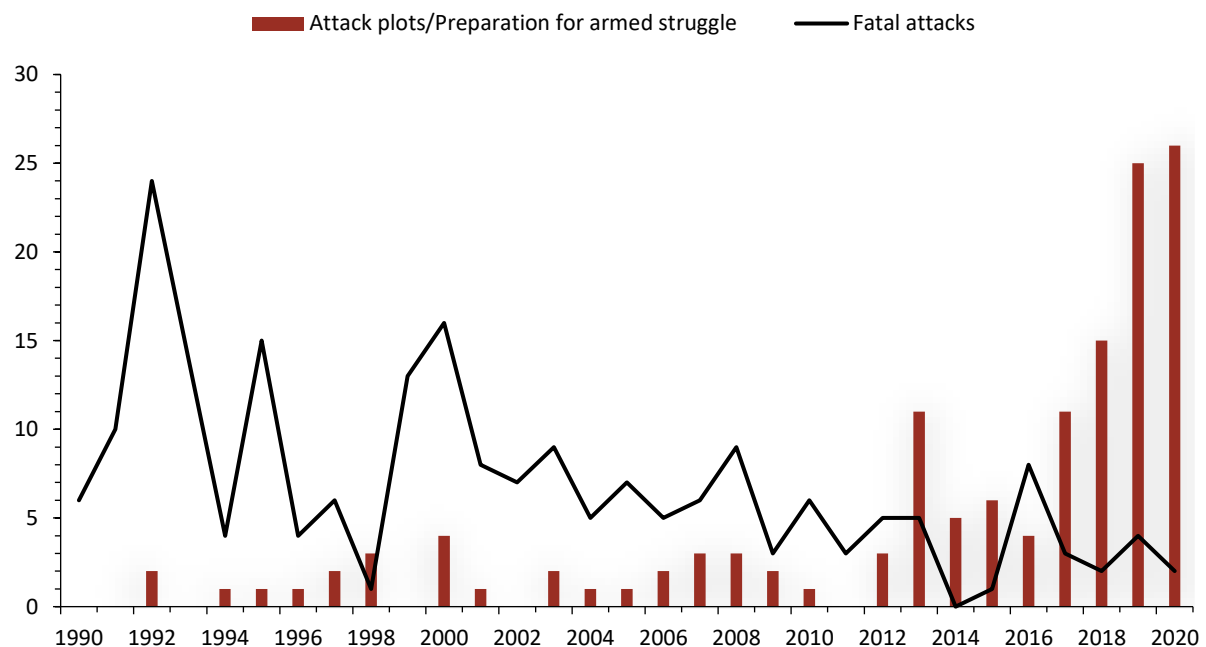
N = 136

With regards to maturity, all plots and discoveries of major arms depositories included in the RTV dataset between 1990 and 2020 (N=136) were reviewed. Registered plots were categorized

into two sub-categories: (a) *mature plots* – plots with an identified target whose operational planning is approaching a stage where it is ready to be executed; and (b) *vague plots* – plots with an unknown or undetermined target, or whose operational planning is pending or at a primitive stage. In addition comes our existing category called '*preparation for armed struggl*e', defined as discoveries of bomb-making materials or major arms repositories belonging to right-wing activists lacking specific attack plans. Figure 15 shows the distribution of these three categories over time:

Figure 15: Distribution of mature plots, vague plots, and preparation for armed struggle, 1990-2020
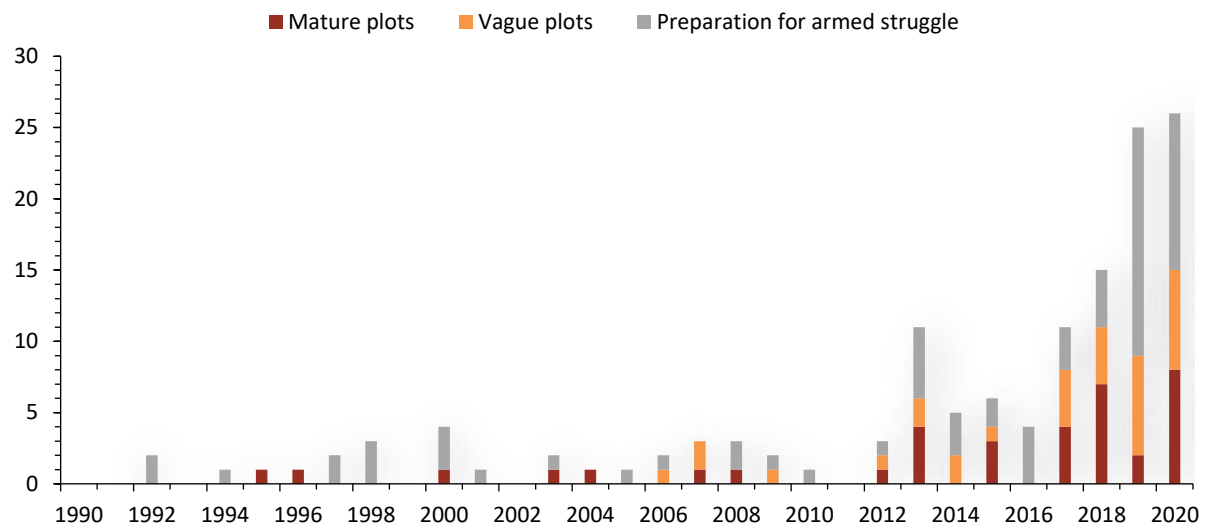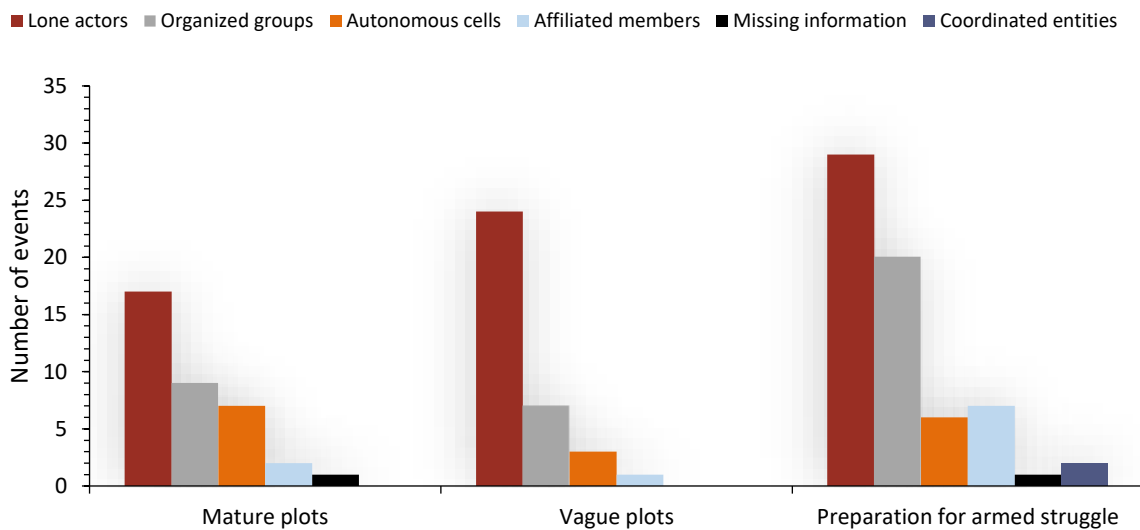

N=136

Several insights may be derived from this figure. First, the number of mature plots is remarkably low for the entire period, but with a notable increase over the past four years. This stands in contrast to well-documented plots by Islamist terrorists, which have increased in Europe since 2000, with an average of about six plots per year.[27] Thus, while foiled plots arguably constitute a major element of the Islamist terrorist threat in Europe, the same cannot be said for the extreme-right terrorist threat, at least not until recent years.[28] Second, the number of vague plots and discoveries of major arms repositories have increased considerably over the past nine years. This suggests that police and intelligence agencies increased their attention towards the extreme-right threat during this period and to a larger extent intervened early. When looking at the declining levels of fatal attacks, we may reasonably assume that vague plots and major arms repositories also existed before the 2010s, but drew less attention from the authorities. It is also noteworthy that the rise in apparent plot activity begun the year after the 22 July terrorist attack in 2011, which clearly caught the attention of many European governments. That said, it may also be the case that plots that were discovered before the 2010s never reached the public eye as the police and domestic intelligence agencies were less open about their activities and the media less interested in covering these types of events.

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[27] Petter Nesser (Forthcoming). "Introducing the Jihadi Plots in Europe Dataset (JPED)". The Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI).
[28] Thomas Hegghammer and Neil Ketchley, "Measuring Terrorism," preprint (SocArXiv, September 4, 2020), https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/t72yj.

Next, we may look at the kinds of perpetrator types involved in these types of events. As Figure 16 shows, lone actors are predominant also when it comes to plot activity. However, organized groups comprise a considerably larger share of plots and discoveries of arms repositories compared to completed attacks, both fatal and non-fatal (see Figures 7 and 8 above). One reason could be that increased attention from the police and intelligence agencies naturally gravitates toward the more organized elements of the far-right universe, which are known and therefore easier to respond to. Still, even on this measure, lone actors represent the most significant threat.
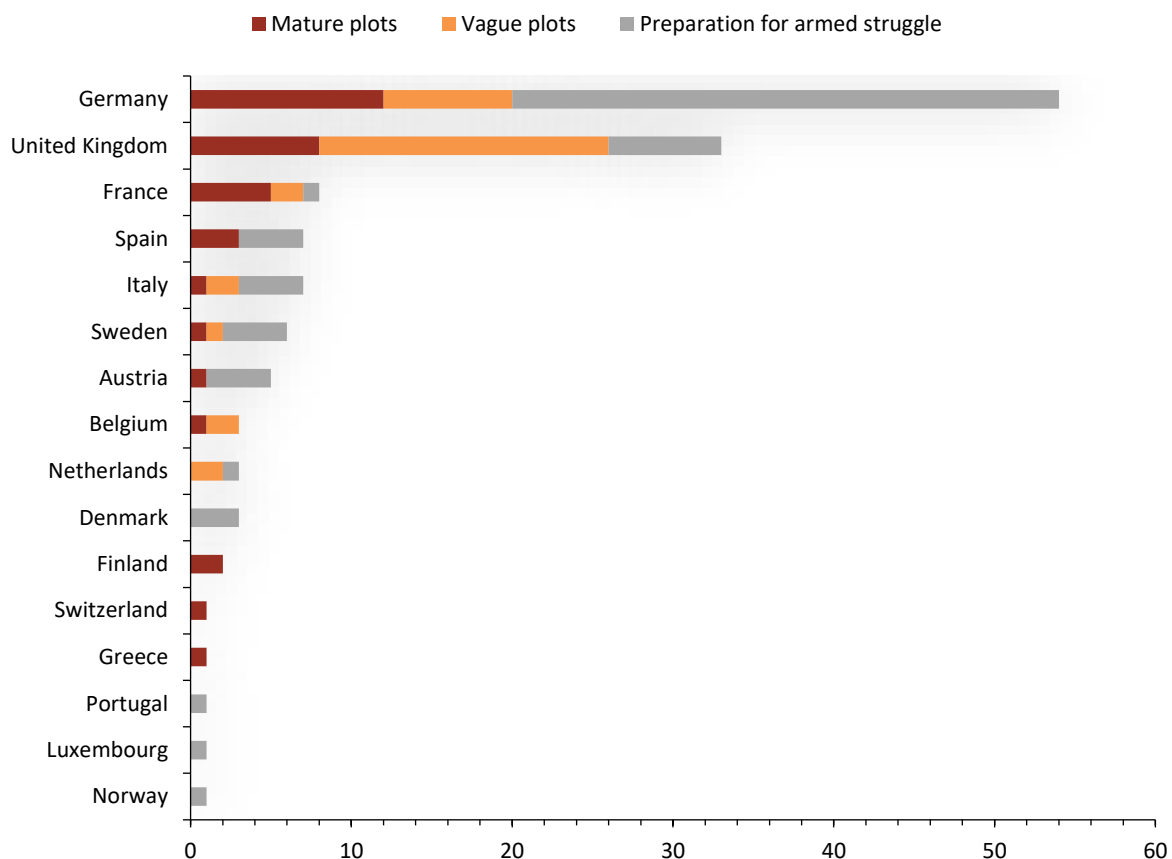
Figure 16: Perpetrators of attack plots and preparation for armed struggle, 1990-2020

N=136

Finally, as Figure 17 shows, some West-European countries appear to pursue a more proactive approach towards this threat compared to others.

Figure 17: Attack plots and preparation for armed struggle, by country, 1990-2020

N=136

Countries that have experienced more completed attacks also appear to be intervening more against plots and preparations for armed struggle. The only clear exception is Greece. While they have had the highest level of completed attacks in the last ten years, when controlling for population, only one mature plot has been recorded. This suggests an imbalanced relationship between the established level of violence and the amount of attention toward this threat from the police. Further, we see that Germany and the UK, who have had high levels of violence in the last thirty years, stand out, particularly when it comes to vague plots and discoveries of major arms repositories. Whether this signals an unwarranted level of government repression toward the far right in these countries, or a warranted reaction to a higher threat level, remains an open question. Note that we have not controlled for population size in this figure. When doing so, Germany remains at the top while Sweden comes in second place before Austria and the UK. We should also keep in mind that countries might differ in how often they share information about foiled plots publicly, which in turn will affect these figures.

To sum up, the decline in fatal attacks is probably not a direct result from a rise in foiled plots. First, most of the plots we have registered are rather vague, and many of them would probably not have materialized into an actual attack without police interception. Second, some potentially fatal and mature plots have indeed been disrupted, meaning that the number of fatal attacks might have been somewhat higher without police interventions. Lastly, the rise in plot activity probably reflects increased attention toward this threat from the authorities just as much as an actual increase in plot activity.

Conclusion

What have we learned from mapping RTV events in 2020? A first lesson is that major societal crisis tapping into grievances held by the far right do not necessarily translate directly into severe violent actions in the context of Western democracies. While we have observed substantial mobilization and protest relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, very little of this protest has materialized as severe violence. That said, there might be a time lag effect here. For instance, many violent reactions to the 2015 refugee crisis occurred in 2016, and most of the nine fatal attacks registered in 2016 related to the refugee crises. As such, it is too early to conclude that the COVID-19 pandemic did not generate a substantial rise in the number of RTV events. Such effects may also be produced indirectly by way of fuelling socio-economic grievances, grinding down societal trust, in particular trust in governments, and leaving many young people jobless while not being able to seek out new opportunities elsewhere due to imposed travel restrictions.

Second, increased targeting of blacks may indicate that conflicts relating to ethnic identity are becoming more salient in contemporary West European societies. The Black Lives Matter movement has generated growing awareness, confidence and sensitivity concerning ethnic identity issues among minority groups in European societies as well as among their white majority counterparts. The general trend appears to be growing recognition in the general population of minority grievances relating to ethnic identity. This dynamic may in turn fuel more extreme responses from members of the white majority that do not approve of such a development. We may therefore expect continued targeting of blacks and other minority groups in future attacks, particularly in places where these minority groups are becoming more self-assertive.

Third, the police and intelligence agencies appear to have been more attentive toward extreme-right threats over the past few years compared to previous periods. This is indicated through the rise of intercepted vague plots and discoveries of major arms repositories belonging to far-right activists at a time when the number of fatal attacks has been at an all-time low. This development is particularly notable in some countries that historically have experienced more right-wing terrorism and violence than others have, such as Germany and the United Kingdom. A pertinent question is therefore whether this increased attention is having the intended effect of countering the threat, or whether it may also be producing backlash effects. We know from existing research on other forms of political violence, such as Islamist terrorism and separatist terrorism, that overly harsh repression tends to generate more rather than less political violence.[29] Whether or not this might be the case here is too early to tell, but a critical question that should be pursued in future research.

The RTV team will continue to monitor and register these and similar developments in the future. As mentioned, we are currently working on several expansions of the dataset as well as

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[29] Gary LaFree, Laura Dugan, and Raven Korte, "The Impact of British Counterterrorist Strategies on Political Violence in Northern Ireland: Comparing Deterrence and Backlash Models*," *Criminology* 47, no. 1 (2009): 17–45; Donatella della Porta, "On Violence and Repression: A Relational Approach," *Government and Opposition* 49, no. 02 (April 2014): 159–87; James A. Piazza, "Repression and Terrorism: A Cross-National Empirical Analysis of Types of Repression and Domestic Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 1 (2017): 102–18.

closer collaboration with partners in the United States who manage the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). Our aim is to provide a systematic overview of the evolution of right-wing terrorism and violence at a global scale. Should you have access to relevant information about RTV events in or outside Western Europe and may be interested in collaboration with our team, or serve as one of our international RTV experts, please contact us.