

Codebook for the Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset

1990 - 2020
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Introducing the RTV dataset

The Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset documents right-wing terrorism and violence in 18 West European countries since 1990. The dataset was built following the 22 July 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway and the discovery of the German terrorist cell *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* in the same year. These two events exposed a critical need for more updated and systematic data on right-wing terrorism and violence in post-1990 Western Europe. The main purpose of the RTV dataset is to offer a systematic assessment of the most severe types of attacks and plots. The dataset excludes less severe events, not because they are considered less important, but because such attacks are too many to be covered systematically and exhaustively. The datasets includes both fatal and severe non-fatal events. However, as a general rule, only fatal events should be used to analyse variation over time or between places. Please refer to sections *Representativeness* and *Data Collection Methodology* for more information. For illustrating examples on how the dataset may be used, refer to our [trend reports](#). 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.

Inclusion criteria

For an attack to be included in the RTV dataset, two inclusion criteria must be met. First, the target selection must be premised on right-wing beliefs. Second, the severity of the attack must satisfy at least one of the severity thresholds listed below.

By ‘right-wing beliefs’, we mean those who regard social inequality as inevitable, natural or even desirable. Most perpetrators of right-wing violence adhere to a *far-right* mix of *anti-egalitarianism*, *nativism* and *authoritarianism*. 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 enemies of, and thus 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. The justification for a rather *broad* definition of ‘right wing’ – in which we include not only acts motivated by coherent far right ideology, but also those committed due to for example racist beliefs – is simply the major challenge of distinguishing between the two in practice. In most cases, it would be very difficult to determine whether the perpetrator subscribed to a coherent ideology.

By ‘severe forms of violent attacks and plots’, 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. In some instances, such as violence perpetrated by adults against children,

the severity threshold is lowered due to imbalance in power relations and unpredictable outcome by the perpetrator. In these cases, we assume the perpetrator had willingness if not intent to cause severe injuries.

The dataset also includes planned attacks (plots) likely to satisfy one or several of the above severity thresholds. Vague attack plots missing concrete information about target and/or weapons are included when they lead to arrests and are reported as plots, considering that the police saw the events as sufficiently severe for acting upon them.

Finally, the dataset also includes discoveries of major arms repositories belonging to people associated with the far right.

Representativeness

One may confidently assume that the RTV dataset covers nearly, if not all fatal attacks, in Western Europe since 1990 whose target selection was determined by right-wing beliefs. Such events receive broad news coverage and we have made an extensive effort to cover them all, including consultation with national experts. When it comes to non-fatal but severe attacks, plots, and discoveries of major arms repositories, one cannot assume full coverage for several reasons. First, the number of relevant and available sources has increased over time, especially after the introduction of the Internet, thereby also improving potential coverage of such events over time. Second, public reporting on RTV events varies considerably between countries, so that potential coverage is far better in some countries than in others. Third, our ability to identify relevant events has improved over the past years due to technological and methodological improvements. As a result, coverage has also improved considerably, especially after we begun using tailored search strings in media archives since 2019. This methodological change is also reflected in a substantial rise in the number of non-fatal events included in the dataset from 2019 onwards.

With these recent methodological improvements, we believe we are approaching sufficient coverage for making inferences about the entire universe of non-fatal but severe events from 2019 onwards. However, we are most likely not covering all such events. We therefore caution against using our records of non-fatal events for correlational analysis aimed at explaining variation over time or between places.

Data Collection and Methodology

RTV events from 1990-2015 have been registered manually by the same person, using information from a wide range of different sources, most of which can be accessed online from hyperlinks and permalinks embedded in the full version of the dataset, available to researchers upon demand. Events from 2016 onwards have been coded by different research assistants under supervision of the same person who registered the 1990-2015 period. These new events can be accessed online from permalinks embedded in the full version of the dataset (some 2016-events have yet to be stored as permalinks). Most of the information on events comes from online newspaper articles. Other key sources include activist interviews and autobiographies,

official and unofficial RTV chronologies and datasets, personal communication with RTV experts, anti-fascist blogs and bulletins, court documents, online videos, and some secondary literature.

In 2018, an [international RTV expert network](#) was established, consisting of country experts in the majority of the countries included in the dataset. These experts suggest relevant RTV events, cross-check information, and provide supplementary sources where necessary.

From 2019 onwards, standardized Boolean search strings for media archives, including Factiva and Retriever, have been developed in different languages in cooperation with our international RTV expert network. As such, the current working methodology may be summarized as follows.

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 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 relevant events. The RTV team then gathers information about relevant 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 relevant 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.

Table 1: RTV Data collection methodology 1990-2020

| RTV Events | Data collection methodology | | | | Units for longitudinal, cross-sectional, and correlational analysis | |
|------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|---|------------------|
| | Supervisor | Research assistants | National experts | Boolean searches | Fatal events | Non-fatal events |
| 1990-2015 | X | | | | X | |
| 2016-2017 | X | X | | | X | |
| 2018 | X | X | X | | X | |
| 2019-2020 | X | X | X | X | X | X* |

* To be used with caution due to different practices in media reporting in the respective countries.

Coding units

Almost every coding unit in the dataset represents a single event. A handful of coding units (events) do however include multiple attacks, either because they happened consecutively and were carried out by the same perpetrator, or because they form part of a chain of events in which each independent attack would be considered too small to be included in the dataset.

VARIABLES

Variable 1: CaseID (only available in full version)

Each event has been given a specific identification number based on the year, month, and day when the event occurred. For example, 1 January 1990 becomes 1990-1-1. When several events occurred on the same date, a letter is added, beginning with 'a', to distinguish between each event (e.g. 1990-1-1-a). Some events lack information about day or month.

Variable 2: Year

Numerical (1990–20xx).

Variable 3: Month (only available in full version)

Numerical (1–12).

m – missing

Variable 4: Day (only available in full version)

Numerical (1–31).

d – missing

Variable 5a: Country code

| | |
|--------------|----------------------|
| 10 – Austria | 19 – Italy |
| 11 – Belgium | 20 – Luxemburg |
| 12 – Denmark | 21 – Netherlands |
| 13 – Finland | 22 – Norway |
| 14 – France | 23 – Portugal |
| 15 – Germany | 24 – Spain |
| 16 – Greece | 25 – Sweden |
| 17 – Iceland | 26 – Switzerland |
| 18 – Ireland | 27 – United Kingdom. |

Variable 5b: Country name

Text variable. English spelling.

Variable 6: City/village/location

Text variable. English spelling if it exists.

'm' - missing

'multiple locations' – for cases where the perpetrator(s) targeted several locations in the same attack or if police made arrestations in multiple places.

Variable 7: Incident type

1. *Premeditated attack* – incidents where perpetrators have targeted a predefined person or group.
2. *Spontaneous attack* – attacks triggered by random confrontations between perpetrator(s) and victim(s), associated with some predefined target group.
3. *Attack plot* – planned attacks by an identifiable group or individual involving deadly weapons or concrete plans that were intercepted by the police before the attack was carried out. Attack plots where the target and/or weapon are coded as 99 ('unknown') indicate a vague plot.
4. *Preparation for armed struggle* – discoveries of bomb-making materials or major arms repositories belonging to right-wing activists lacking specific attack plans.

Variable 8: Perpetrator type

The variable 'perpetrator type' refers to the nature of the violence, and not necessarily the perpetrator(s) themselves. For a more detailed overview on coding practice, please refer to Appendix I.

1. *Organised groups* – known entities with five or more members whose association primarily relies on a strong commitment to right-wing politics
2. *Affiliated members* – two or more members of organized groups acting on their own initiative
3. *Autonomous cells* – clandestine entities of two to four members whose association primarily relies on a strong commitment to right-wing politics
4. *Gangs/informal groups* – Three or more acquaintances with a general right-wing commitment, but whose association primarily relies on social bonds
5. *Unorganised* – two or more perpetrators with unknown or no association to any specific right-wing group, cell, or gang
6. *Lone actors* – single perpetrators who prepare and carry out attacks alone at their own initiative
7. *Shadow groups* – unresolved attacks claimed by formerly unknown groups
8. *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.
9. *Professional entities* – one or more perpetrators operating in capacity of their professional affiliation, typically the police, military or private security firms.
99. unidentified perpetrator(s), but where targeting or other factors strongly indicate a far-right motivation.

Variable 9: Organisational affiliation

Text variable. Variables 9 and 10 list organisational affiliation(s) the perpetrator(s) may have had to known groups, movements, or parties on the far right at the time of the attack. Note that

such organisational affiliations do not imply that listed organisations are directly involved in the event.

'Unknown' – indications of perpetrator(s) belonging to a specific group or organization, but where the name is unknown.

Variable 10: Secondary organisational affiliation

Text variable – cases with single perpetrators with multiple organisational affiliations or multiple perpetrators with different organisational affiliations.

Variable 11: Lone actor no.

Numerical variable used to group events committed by the same lone actor.

Variable 12: Target group

This variable reflects perpetrator intention. For example, if a Sikh is targeted because the perpetrator believed the victim was a Muslim, target group will be coded as Muslim.

1. Jews
2. Muslims
3. Immigrant/foreigner/asylum seeker/refugee
4. Left-wing/anti-fascism
5. Government
6. LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender)
7. Gypsy/Roma
8. Pro-immigration activists
9. Black
10. Police
11. Homeless/low social status
12. Physically or mentally disabled
13. Deserters
14. Media
15. Separatist
16. Other
99. Unknown

Variable 13: Secondary target group

Same values as variable 12. Used if the perpetrator(s) targeted multiple persons or if one person was targeted for multiple reasons.

Variable 14: Weapon

1. Explosives
2. Petrol bomb/fire bomb/Molotov cocktail
3. Handgun
4. Shotgun/rifle
5. Automatic firearm
6. Knife/bladed weapon
7. Letter bomb
8. Beating/kicking (no weapons used)
9. Tear gas
10. Pepper spray
11. Blunt instrument
12. Chemical/biological weapon
13. Arson
14. Rocket launcher/grenade
15. Other
16. Car/vehicle
99. Unknown.

Variable 15: Secondary weapon

Same values as variable 14.

Variable 16: Weapons

Text variable – short description of weapon type.

Variable 17a: Fatal Events (binary)

0 – Non-fatal event

1 – Fatal event

Variable 17b: Number of persons killed

Numerical variable

'm' - missing data

Variable 18: Number of persons wounded

Numerical variable

'm' - missing data

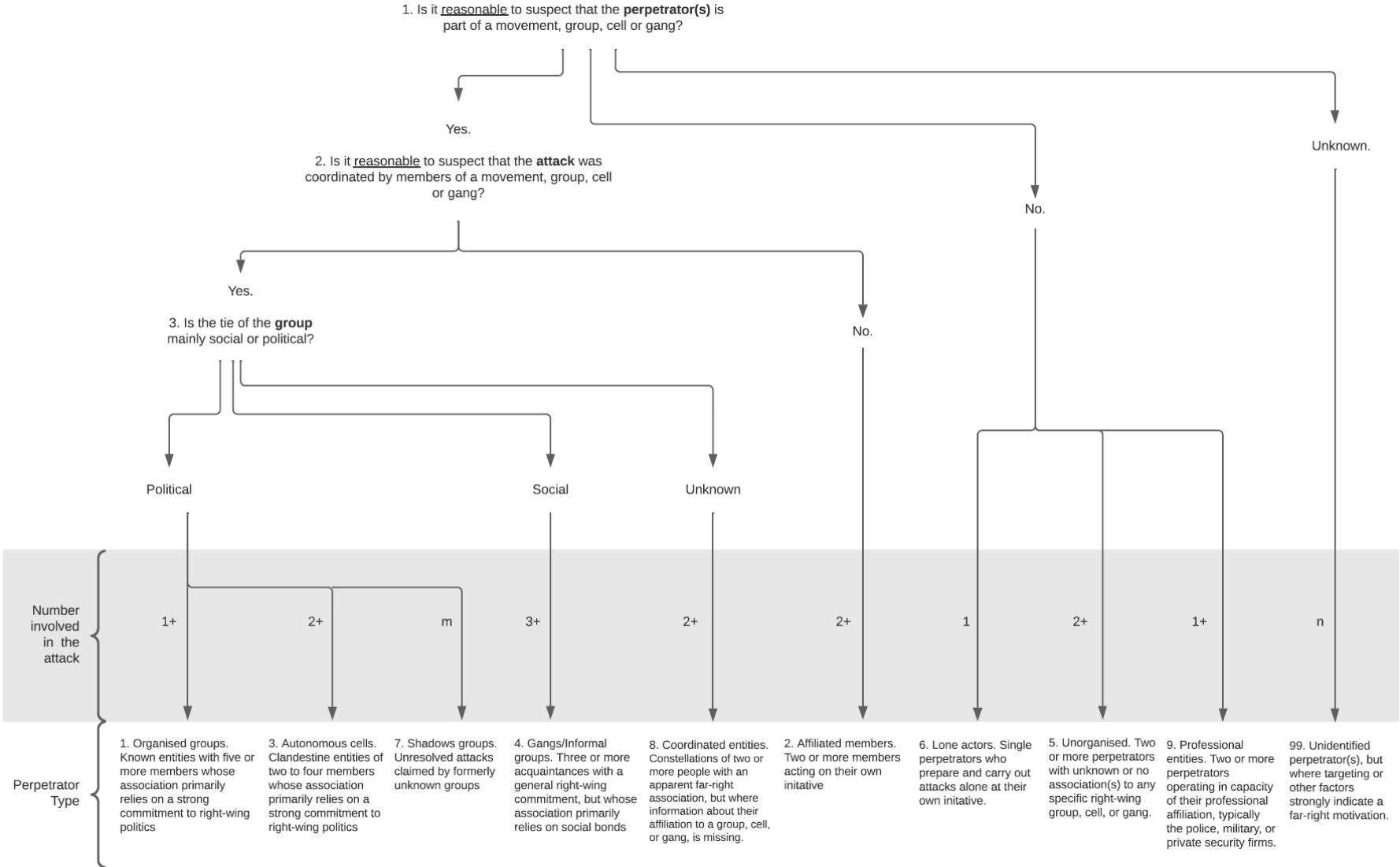
Variable 19: Comments/description (only available in full version)

Text variable – brief comment or description of event (more detailed descriptions are found in the corresponding source material available).

Variables 20-25: Sources (only available in full version)

Each variable/column represents a unique source. Online sources are embedded as hyperlinks or permalinks (some events have yet to be stored as permalinks)

Appendix 1: Perpetrator Type



Changes made in 2021

Adjustments to values for *perpetrator type* variable

- The addition of *coordinated entities* and *professional entities*. All relevant cases between 1990 and 2020 reviewed and changed.
- The value *gang* renamed to *gang/informal groups*
- Definition of the value *unorganised* changed from “two or more perpetrators with no known association to any specific right-wing group, cell, or gang” to “two or more perpetrators with unknown or no association to any specific right-wing group, cell, or gang”

Adjustments to the values for *the weapon types* variable

- The value *knife* changed to *knife/bladed weapons* to include other sharp objects such as machetes

A comprehensive backlog was established, logging all adjustments to previous coding resulting from new or updated information.