RTV Trend Report 2022

Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990 - 2021

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Preface

2021 Key Point Summary

The RTV Dataset 2021

Total
162 RTV events (attacks, plots and arms discoveries) were recorded for the year 2021.

Completed attacks
131 attacks were carried out in 2021 resulting in at least 197 people being severely injured.

Out of these 131 attacks, 106 were spontaneous in nature, whereas 25 attacks were premeditated.

Fatal attacks
2 fatal attacks were recorded: one in Germany linked to the COVID-19 pandemic with 1 fatality, and one racist attack in Spain with 1 fatality.

Attack plots and arms discoveries
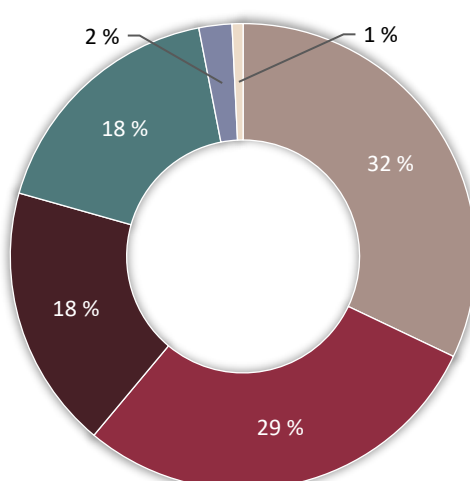18 attack plots were detected in 9 countries.

In addition, there were 13 discoveries of major arms repositories.

Countries
In absolute terms, most RTV events took place in Germany (N=46), followed by the United Kingdom (N=25) and Italy (N=23).

The RTV Dataset currently contains:
1882 events
226 fatal events
354 fatalities

Perpetrators of completed attacks
(n=131)
**32%** of the perpetrators were lone actors, including in the two fatal events.
29% of the perpetrators acted as part of a gang or informal group.
18% of the perpetrators were unorganised.
18% of the perpetrators formed part of a coordinated entity suspected of being affiliated with the far right.
2% of the perpetrators were unknown.
1% of the perpetrators acted as members of known organised groups.
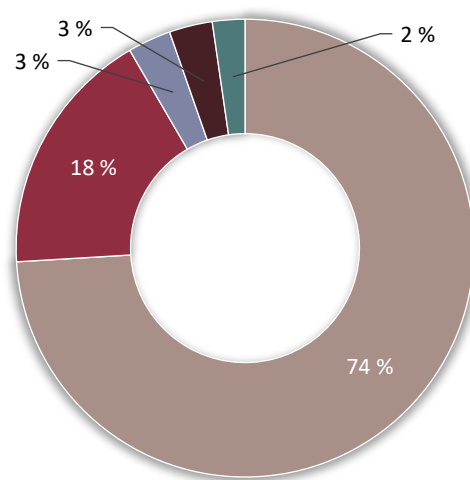
**Target groups in completed attacks**
(n=131)
74% of the attacks targeted ethnic and religious minorities. Of these, 80% were immigrants, foreigners, asylum seekers, or refugees.
18% of the attacks targeted political opponents, most of which were left-wing and anti-fascists activists.
3% of the attacks targeted marginalised groups, most of which were sexual minorities.
3% of the attacks targeted other groups, including COVID-19 related target groups.
2% of the attacks targeted state institutions, all of which were police officers.
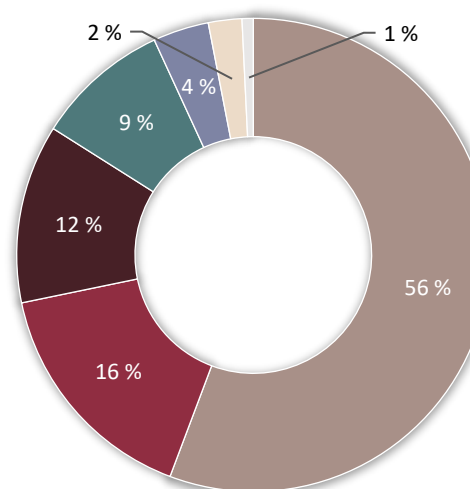
Weapons used in completed attacks
(n=131)
In 56% of the attacks, the primary weapon was beating/kicking.
In 16% of the attacks, the primary weapon was knives, bladed weapons, or sharp object.
In 12% of the attacks, 'other' weapons were used, such as cars, tasers, and pepper sprays.
In 9% of the attacks, the primary weapon was blunt instruments.
In 4% of the attacks, the primary weapon was arson/firebombs.
In 2% of the attacks, the primary weapon was firearms.
In 1% of the events, the primary weapon was unknown.

Contents

List of Tables

List of Boxes

List of Figures

Introduction

We are proud to present this year's update of the RTV dataset, which contains three major improvements that will benefit both academic and non-academic users across the world. First, following years of negotiations with data protection authorities, we have finally been granted permission to share information from all variables included in the RTV dataset with the public. The most notable difference for public users will be the inclusion of a qualitative description of each event, as well as more specific information about time and location. The full public version of the dataset is now freely available for download.

Second, to improve data consistency and intercoder reliability, one of our team members has manually reviewed all events included in the dataset since 1990. In doing so, some mistakes have been corrected, some events have been removed after further deliberation, and updated information and more detailed descriptions have been added to a considerable number of events. In sum, this major revision, which is described more in detail in our RTV Methodology, has made the RTV dataset even more consistent, reliable, and comprehensive than before.

Third, we have considerably improved our coverage of non-fatal but severe events for the period 2015-2021. In 2019, we developed a new and improved method for capturing relevant RTV events. For this year's update we have applied this new method backwards in time. In doing so, we are now confident that the dataset provides sufficient coverage for estimating trends in not only fatal events, but also severe non-fatal events from 2015 onwards. This essentially means that the number of events eligible for trend analysis and correlational research for the 2015-2021 period has risen from N=26 (fatal events only) to N=1237 (fatal and non-fatal events). This major improvement enables a range of new opportunities for analysing trends over time, differences between and within countries, as well as the relationship between fatal and non-fatal events. To fully exploit this last improvement, this year's trend report, which is the fourth of its kind, systematically compares figures from the 2021 update with trends from the 2015–2020 period, as well as longer-term trends of fatal attacks between 1990 and 2021.

These analyses result in five key insights. First, despite unsettling events with a potential effect on levels of right-wing terrorism and violence, such as the January 6th siege of Capitol Hill in the United States, COVID-19 related lockdowns, and anti-vaccine protests, 2021 did not bring about more right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe than in previous years. In fact, 2021 was the third least violent year since 2015 when counting all attacks (fatal and non-fatal); it was among the three least violent years since 1990 when counting fatal attacks only; and it was among the two least deadly years since 1990 in terms of fatalities. These findings contrast current media reporting portraying the threat from right-wing terrorism and violence as being on the rise.

Second, the biggest threat of severe violence from the far right does not come from (attempted) mass-casualty attacks carried out by lone actors, but from frequent 'small-scale' spontaneous attacks committed by informal and unorganized groups targeting ethnic and religious minorities. Mass-casualty attacks remain rare in Western Europe. Spontaneous racist violence is far more widespread.

Third, those who are behind fatal attacks carried out in Western Europe since 2015 are not particularly young but rather old(er) men with guns and deep-seated racist beliefs. In other words, while young extremists may be posing as potential terrorists online, those who actually carry out fatal attacks tend to be much older, at least in Western Europe.

Fourth, although the general trend in Western Europe is that right-wing violence is decreasing over time, there are still major differences between countries when it comes to attack frequencies, targeting, and perpetrator profiles. In other words, different countries are facing quantitatively and qualitatively different threats and need to tailor their responses accordingly.

Fifth, right-wing terrorist plots continue to rise, but many recent plots appear vague, reflecting increased government attention rather than a substantial increase in terrorist activity. While lone actors have dominated plot activity in recent years, group-based plots accounted for more than half of the plots recorded in 2021. Furthermore, a considerably larger share of this year's attack plots targeted state institutions and the government, including COVID-19 vaccine centres, political figures in charge of implementing COVID-19 measures, police officers, and the democratic system in general. This change in targeting may indicate the beginning of a new trend following COVID-19, wherein European governments could become increasingly exposed to right-wing terrorist threats.

The report begins by briefly outlining some key features of the RTV dataset, including its case inclusion criteria, data sources, and some methodological limitations. Next, we present key findings from the 2021-update regarding attack frequencies, cross-national variation, targeting, perpetrators, and weapons. We then move on to present two country case studies: Greece, which is the country with the highest number of both fatal and non-fatal attacks per capita over the past years, and the Netherlands, which stands out for being among the countries least affected by right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe. Interestingly, both countries have also experienced considerable support to far-right parties, but with opposite results in terms of right-wing violence. Finally, we introduce this year's selected topic, presenting preliminary results from a more nuanced plot coding currently being implemented to the RTV dataset.

Key features of the RTV dataset

The RTV dataset aims to offer a systematic assessment of the development of right-wing terrorism and violence in 18 West European countries since 1990.[1] To achieve this aim, the dataset only includes the most severe completed attacks in addition to attack plots and discoveries of major arms repositories (see Box 1 for more details about inclusion criteria). The reason for excluding less severe attacks is not that they are considered any 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 can be biased towards certain countries and time periods.[2]

Therefore, for events prior to 2015, we strongly advise users of the current version 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 most, if not all, fatal attacks between 1990 and 2021. However, due to technological and methodological advances over the last few years, our ability to cover non-fatal events has improved considerably. With these improvements, we believe we are approaching sufficient coverage for making inferences about severe non-fatal events from 2015 onwards. For more information about inherent biases in the RTV dataset that may lead to measurement error, please consult our RTV Error Profile.

Box 1: The RTV dataset
The current version of the RTV dataset covers the period 1990-2021 and contains a total of 1882 events. Of these, 226 were fatal, causing a total of 354 fatalities. 1707 events are coded as either premeditated or spontaneous attacks, while attack plots and discoveries of major arms repositories make up 175 events.

Each event included in the RTV dataset is coded on a range of variables, including time and location, perpetrator and victim characteristics, organisational affiliations, weapon types, number of casualties and wounded, and a qualitative description of each event. Detailed information about our coding practices can be found in our RTV Codebook.

Inclusion criteria
The RTV dataset includes all *severe* attacks and plots whose target selection is premised on a form of *right-wing beliefs* associated with *far-right ideology*.

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 three severity thresholds must be met: (1) the attack had a fatal, or near fatal outcome; (2) the perpetrator(s) proactively used potentially lethal weapons, such as knives, heavy blunt instruments, guns, or bombs, including attacks causing minor injuries only; (3) the attack caused major and/or disabling injuries, such as coma, unconsciousness, broken bones or other physical trauma, typically requiring hospitalisation or medical treatment.

By 'right-wing beliefs', we mean beliefs that are rooted in anti-egalitarianism. Anti-egalitarianism is understood as a politically right-wing ideology, supported by those who regard social inequality as inevitable,

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[1] These 18 countries are: 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) and our RTV Methodology.

natural or even desirable.[3] This includes ideas that certain races are superior to other races, that certain ethnic groups are entitled to dominate other ethnic groups in certain areas, or that men are superior to women. However, the dataset only includes violent attacks whose motivation can be linked to a specific form of anti-egalitarianism associated with far-right ideology. Besides anti-egalitarianism, the ideological core of the far right consists of exclusionary nationalism (or nativism) and authoritarianism.[4] Exclusionary nationalism holds that the nation-state should be inhabited by natives only, and that non-natives are considered a fundamental threat to the survival of the nation. Authoritarianism holds that society should be strictly ordered and that those violating the order should be punished severely. On an individual level, authoritarianism refers to those who have the most extreme preferences for oneness and sameness.[5]

These ideological constructs (anti-egalitarianism, exclusionary nationalism, and authoritarianism) – 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, these target groups include *ethnic minorities, religious minorities, sexual minorities, political opponents, liberal-democratic state institutions, and other marginalised groups*. The dataset includes attacks against these groups in cases where target selection was indeed premised on far-right beliefs, but excludes for example attacks against sexual minorities committed by religious fundamentalists, since the perpetrators are not driven by exclusionary nationalism. Perpetrators included in the RTV dataset do not necessarily subscribe to a coherent and comprehensive far-right ideology, such as Fascism or Nazism, but often espouse more general racist beliefs.

Methodology
Each year, the RTV dataset is updated by a team of research assistants working at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) under the supervision of the RTV Steering Group. Since the RTV dataset was initially developed in 2015, the methods used for data collection have changed, thereby improving our coverage of relevant events after 2015 considerably. See our RTV Methodology for a more detailed description of past and current methods.

Cases that have been reviewed but excluded because they do not satisfy the inclusion criteria have since 2020 been saved in our 'RTV Excluded Cases' dataset. This dataset currently contains 794 events. See our RTV Methodology for more information.

Sources
The RTV dataset is based exclusively on open or publicly available sources, including, but not limited to, media coverage, court documents, and openly available information from non-governmental organisations and anti-fascist groups. To ensure full coverage of the most important cases, a network of national experts has also been established. When consulted, our national experts provide country-specific information that assists the RTV team in clearing up the more complex events and identifying relevant source materials.

Availability
From 2022 on, the full version of the dataset, containing all information except for source links, is available for download to the public free of charge. The RTV dataset can be downloaded here.

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[3] Bobbio, Norberto, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).
[4] Mudde, Cas, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).
[5] Stenner, Karen, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Key findings from 2021

The current section presents key insights from the year 2021 concerning fatal attacks and fatalities, non-fatal events, country-specific similarities and dissimilarities, perpetrator types, target groups, and weapons. For each sub-section, we compare 2021-numbers with trends in fatal and non-fatal attacks since 2015, and trends in fatal attacks since 1990.

How violent was 2021?

Fatal attacks

Two fatal attacks were recorded in 2021, the same number as in 2020. Both were spontaneous attacks committed by lone actors resulting in one fatality. As illustrated by Figure 1, 2021 is with two fatal events situated among the three least deadly years since 1990. Thus, 2021 fits into a long-term trend of declining numbers of fatal attacks per year in Western Europe.

Figure 1: Fatal RTV events in Western Europe, 1990-2021
n=226
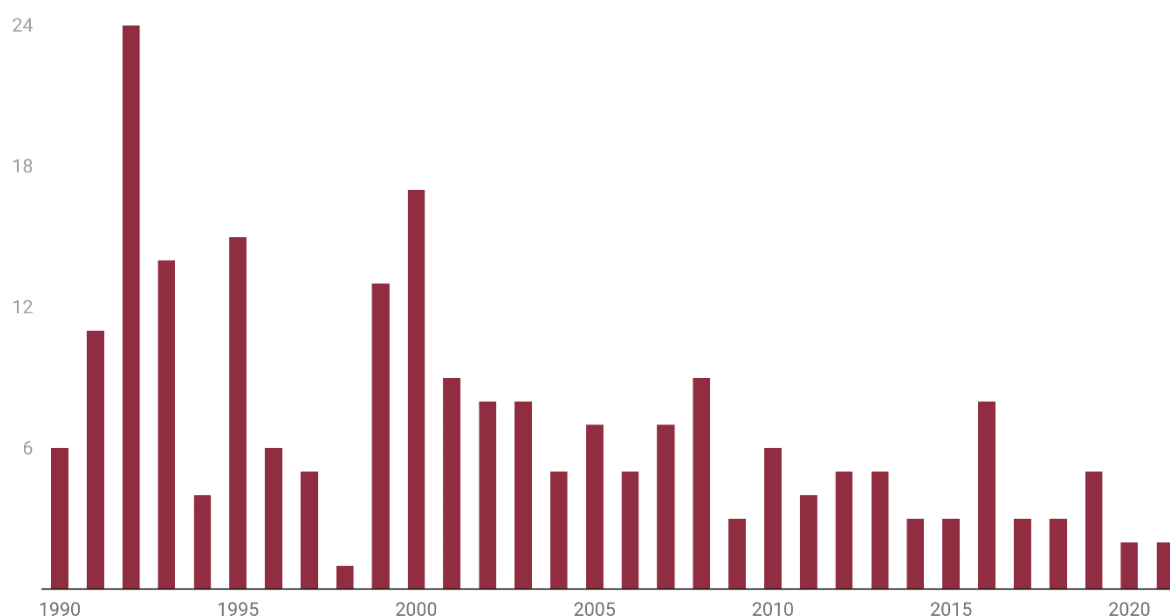
The first fatal attack occurred in Puerto de Mazarrón, Spain, on June 12th, when a 52-year-old man, a former paratrooper, shot and killed a 37-year-old man of Moroccan origin in a bar. The incident was preceded by racial abuse. After the victim confronted the perpetrator about the racist slogans, the perpetrator was asked by the staff to leave. However, he returned shortly after with a handgun and shot the victim three times, leading to fatal injuries. During house searches, the police discovered four shotguns and three illegally owned weapons in the man's possession.

The second fatal attack occurred in Idar-Oberstein, Germany, on September 18th, and is considered the first killing in Europe linked to COVID-19 restrictions. A 49-year-old man shot and killed a 20-year-old gas station employee after having been requested to wear a face mask, as mandated by the German government in response to the pandemic. The victim had first refused to serve the man, as he appeared without a mask. One and a half hours later, the perpetrator returned with a mask, which he pulled down before shooting the victim in the head. The perpetrator was active in various far-right social networks and had expressed support for the

far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), COVID-19-related conspiracy theories, and climate change denial. He also shared far-right content on social media and welcomed what he believed to be an 'imminent war.'

Both cases began with spontaneous encounters in which the perpetrators were reprimanded for either using racist slurs or refusing to abide with COVID-19 regulations. Notably, both cases also involved male perpetrators around 50 years old owning guns.

Fatalities

With two persons killed, 2021 was among the two least deadly years since 1990 in terms of fatalities. Figure 2 illustrates these trends, in which each circle represents a fatal attack, and the circle size indicates the number of persons killed in each attack.

Figure 2: Fatalities per fatal attack in Western Europe, 1990-2021
n=226
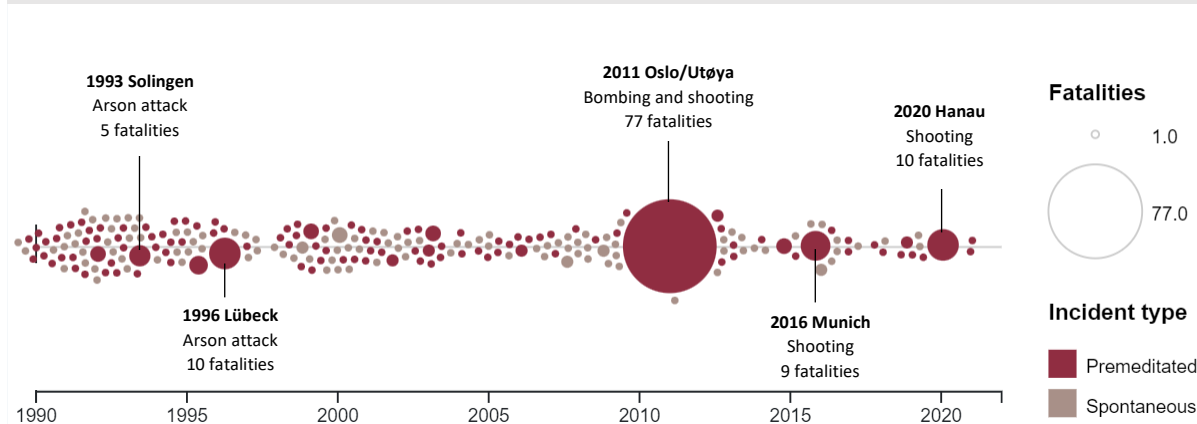
As Figure 2 shows, the number of fatal attacks in Western Europe more than halved in the 2010s (n=45) compared to the 1990s (n=99), during which many of the fatal attacks were committed by violent skinhead gangs. However, the figure also reveals that the previous trend of few fatalities per attack is changing somewhat due to a handful of mass-casualty attacks committed since 2011. The July 22nd, 2011 attacks in Norway killed a total of 77 persons, while the July 22nd, 2016 (Munich) and February 18th, 2020 (Hanau) attacks in Germany killed 9 and 10 persons, respectively.

While mass-causality attacks remain rare in Western Europe, several such attacks have occurred in liberal democracies outside of Europe in recent years, contributing to a persistent concern and increased government- and police attention towards the terrorist threat posed by the far right. Such attacks include the 2018 Pittsburgh and 2019 Poway synagogue shootings in the United States, the 2019 Christchurch Mosque shooting in New Zealand, the 2019 El Paso shooting in the United States, as well as the most recent shooting in Buffalo in 2022, also in the United States. The fact that all but one of these attacks occurred in the United States suggests that this country's liberal gun laws appear to increase the risk for mass-casualty attacks significantly.

**Severe, non-fatal attacks**

The trend of declining violence is also present when looking at severe but non-fatal RTV attacks between 2015 and 2021. In 2021, we recorded a total of 131 premeditated and spontaneous attacks compared to for example 182 in 2015 and 214 in 2016. As such, 2021 was the third least violent year since 2015, as illustrated by Figure 3. However, one should also keep in mind that

2021 was characterised by lockdowns and restrictions related to COVID-19, thereby reducing social interaction considerably in most West European countries. As such, it is reasonable to assume that there would be more violence with less restrictions.

Figure 3: Completed RTV attacks in Western Europe, 2015-2021
n=1110
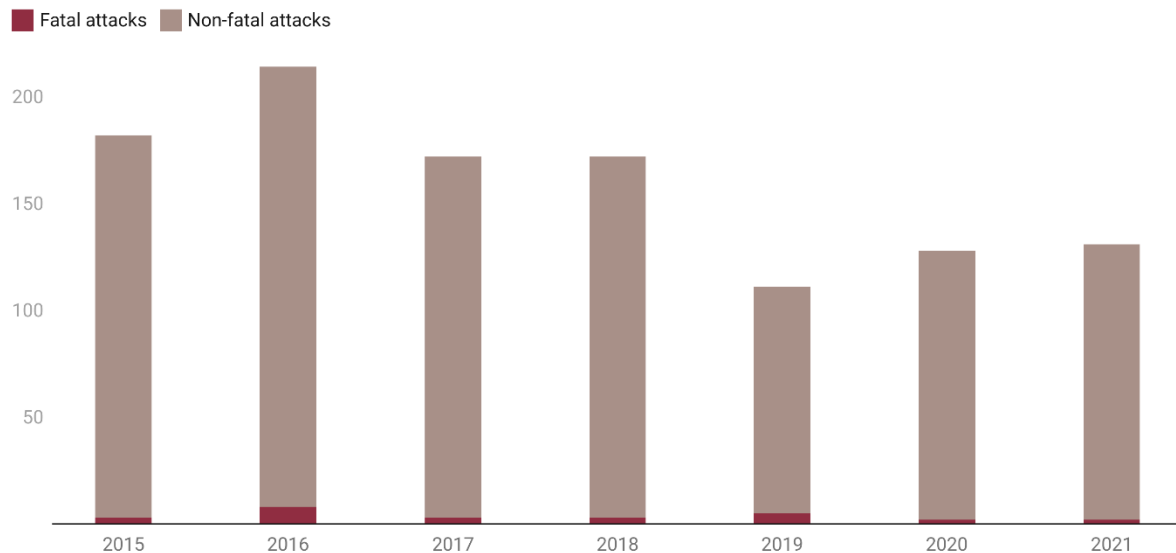
In addition to relatively few non-fatal events compared to previous years, few people were injured in most attacks in 2021. Figure 4 shows that more than 80% of the attacks in 2021 only led to one or two persons injured and only two attacks led to more than five persons injured. This fits into a general pattern as RTV events resulting in more than five people being wounded are rare and have decreased in frequency over time. Since 2015, attacks with more than five people wounded have primarily, but not exclusively, occurred in Greece (n=14), Germany (n=11), Italy (n=8) and France (n=7).

Figure 4: Number of wounded in completed RTV attacks in Western Europe, 2021
n=131
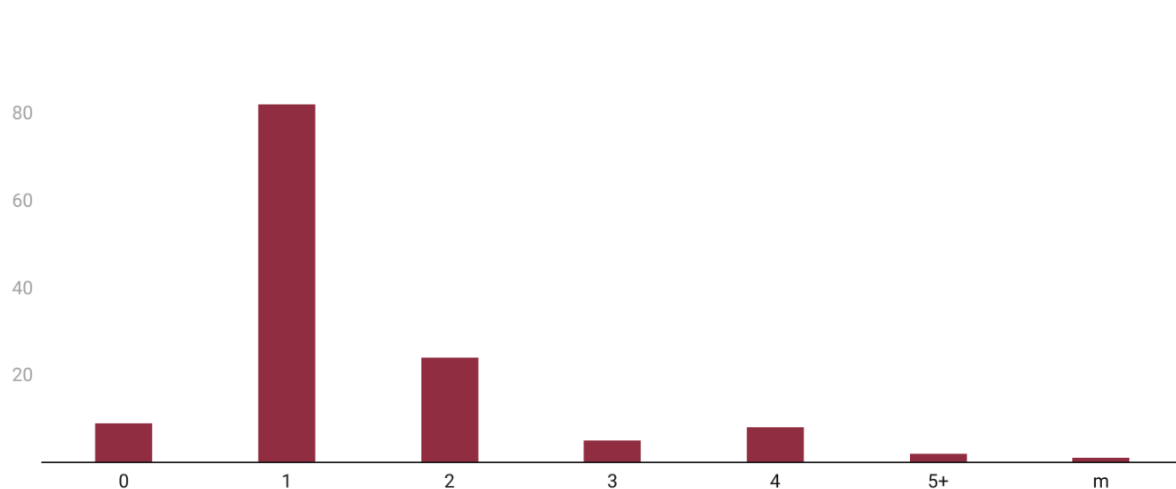
Note: 'm' = missing

One of the attacks with more than five persons injured occurred in France in connection with the first electoral rally of far-right candidate Eric Zemmour on December 5th. At the back of the rally,

the anti-racist organisation SOS Racisme had organised a non-violent demonstration and stood up on their chairs with 'No to Racism' written on their T-shirts. As a reaction to the stunt, nearby rally participants quickly began physically attacking the SOS Racisme activists, leading to five people injured. Among the far-right attackers were members of Reconquête and the Zouaves Paris, the latter of which was built on the ashes of the violent far-right Groupe Union Défense (GUD) and Bastion Social.

The RTV dataset also includes attacks with no physical injuries if there is a plausible risk that the attack could have led to severe injuries. In 2021, 9 attacks led to no persons injured but were considered severe enough for inclusion as they involved the use of incendiary devices, firearms, and arson attempts targeting people or buildings with people inside. For example, in Oldenburg, Germany, unknown perpetrators threw two incendiary devices at an inhabited refugee shelter during the night. The fire was quickly extinguished, and no one was injured. Since 2015, we have recorded 105 events related to attempted arson and throwing of Molotov cocktails against inhabited refugee accommodations and private homes of ethnic/religious minorities, but which resulted in no physical injuries. Notably, these and other types of premeditated attacks have decreased considerably after 2015, whereas spontaneous attacks have remained more stable, as illustrated by Figure 5.

Figure 5: Completed RTV attacks in Western Europe by type of incident, 2015-2021
n=1110
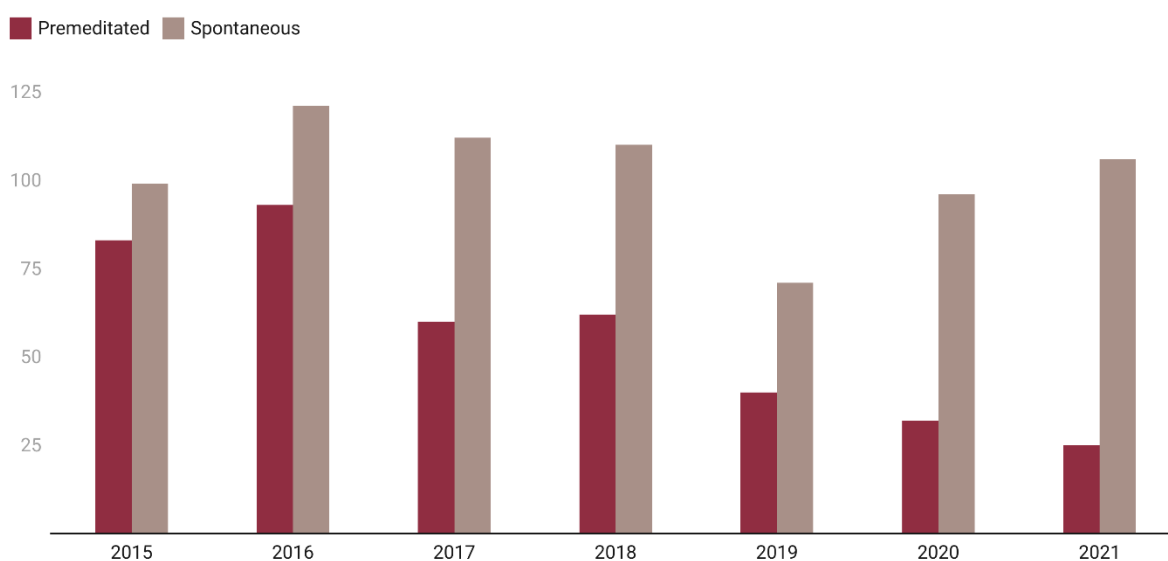
By scrutinising spontaneous attacks since 2015, we see that most of them are carried out by unorganised elements such as gangs and informal groups, unorganised constellations of people, and lone actors. Furthermore, among the spontaneous attacks carried out by these unorganised perpetrators, the large majority (88%) targeted ethnic and religious minorities. This clearly shows that the largest threat from the far-right in Western Europe stems from unplanned, unorganised, deep-rooted day-to-day (racist) violence rather than large-scale terrorist attacks.

Another relevant observation is that the spike of violence in 2016 seems to be driven by a substantial increase in attacks in Germany alone.[6] Out of the six countries with the highest

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[6] See Appendix 1 for an overview over the yearly dispersion of completed attacks in all 18 countries included in the RTV dataset.

absolute numbers of completed attacks in the 2015-2021 period, Germany constitutes an obvious outlier and is the key driver when it comes to inflating the 2015 and 2016 numbers with 90 and 125 severe completed attacks respectively. Many of these attacks were likely motivated by Germany's contested refugee policies at the time and committed by people unaffiliated to far-right groups. While 109 out of the 125 completed attacks in Germany in 2016 targeted ethnic and religious minorities, only one of these attacks were committed by organised groups or their affiliates.

By comparison, Italy, Greece, Spain, and France all witnessed a peak in RTV at later points. Therefore, if we remove Germany from the equation, not only would the peak of violence skew to 2017 and 2018, but the yearly 2015-2021 trend of violence would flatten considerably, and 2021 would match the 2015-2016 levels of right-wing terrorism and violence. In other words, different countries are facing different threats, as our next section shows.

Country comparisons

When comparing attack frequencies between countries, one should arguably take into consideration the absolute number of attacks in any given country, but also how a country's population size affects the relative number of events compared to other countries. In doing so, several trends can be derived from our data. First, in absolute numbers, a handful of countries have experienced considerably more fatal and non-fatal attacks than others have, both in 2021, and between 2015 and 2020, as illustrated by Figure 6.

Figure 6: Absolute numbers of completed attacks by country, 2021 and yearly average 2015-2020
n=131 (2021) and n=979 (2015-2020)
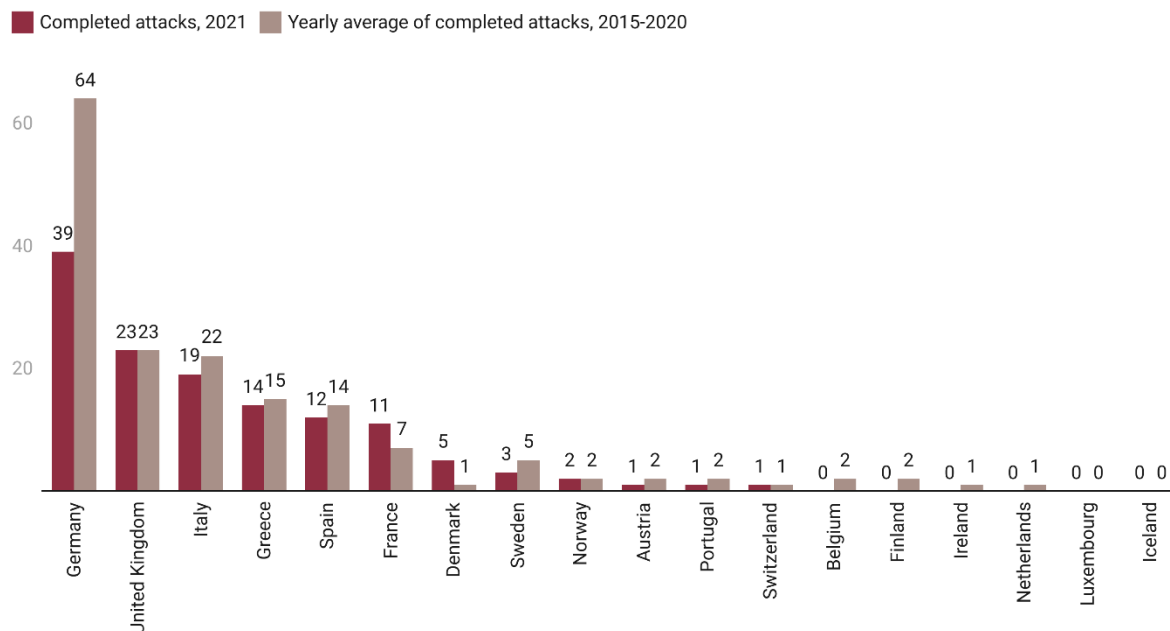
In absolute numbers, Germany clearly stands out with the highest number of attacks, followed by the UK, Italy, Greece and Spain. Figure 6 also shows that the number of attacks recorded in 2021 falls below average from the past six years for most countries, particularly for Germany. This discrepancy is partly driven by the increase in attacks in Germany in 2015 and 2016 related to the influx of refugees during those years.

By contrast, France and Denmark experienced more attacks in 2021 than in previous years. The most notable difference is in Denmark, with an average rate of one attack per year since 2015, but with as many as five attacks recorded in 2021. All these attacks were spontaneous in nature and targeted ethnic and religious minorities. In one of the cases, a Muslim woman was randomly approached by a man who attempted to tear off her hijab while punching and kicking her to the ground. Upon fleeing, the perpetrator shouted that she should leave and 'go back to her own country'. In another case, the perpetrator was on his bike when he started shouting racial slurs at a couple waiting for a bus. The perpetrator then got off his bike and started attacking the male with an iron bar.

By controlling for population size, the cross-national ranking is altered, as the below heat map (Figure 7) illustrates.[7] Here, darker colours indicate a higher number of completed attacks per capita. As we can see, Greece by far exceeds any other country, while Germany takes second place, even when controlling for population size. Furthermore, despite low absolute levels of violence, three Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, also rank relatively high, in part due to their small populations, but also because they have experienced more attacks than other countries with comparatively larger populations, most notably the Netherlands and France.

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[7] Iceland and Luxembourg are excluded from the analysis due to their small population size.

Figure 7: Completed attacks per (m) capita, 2015-2021
n=1109
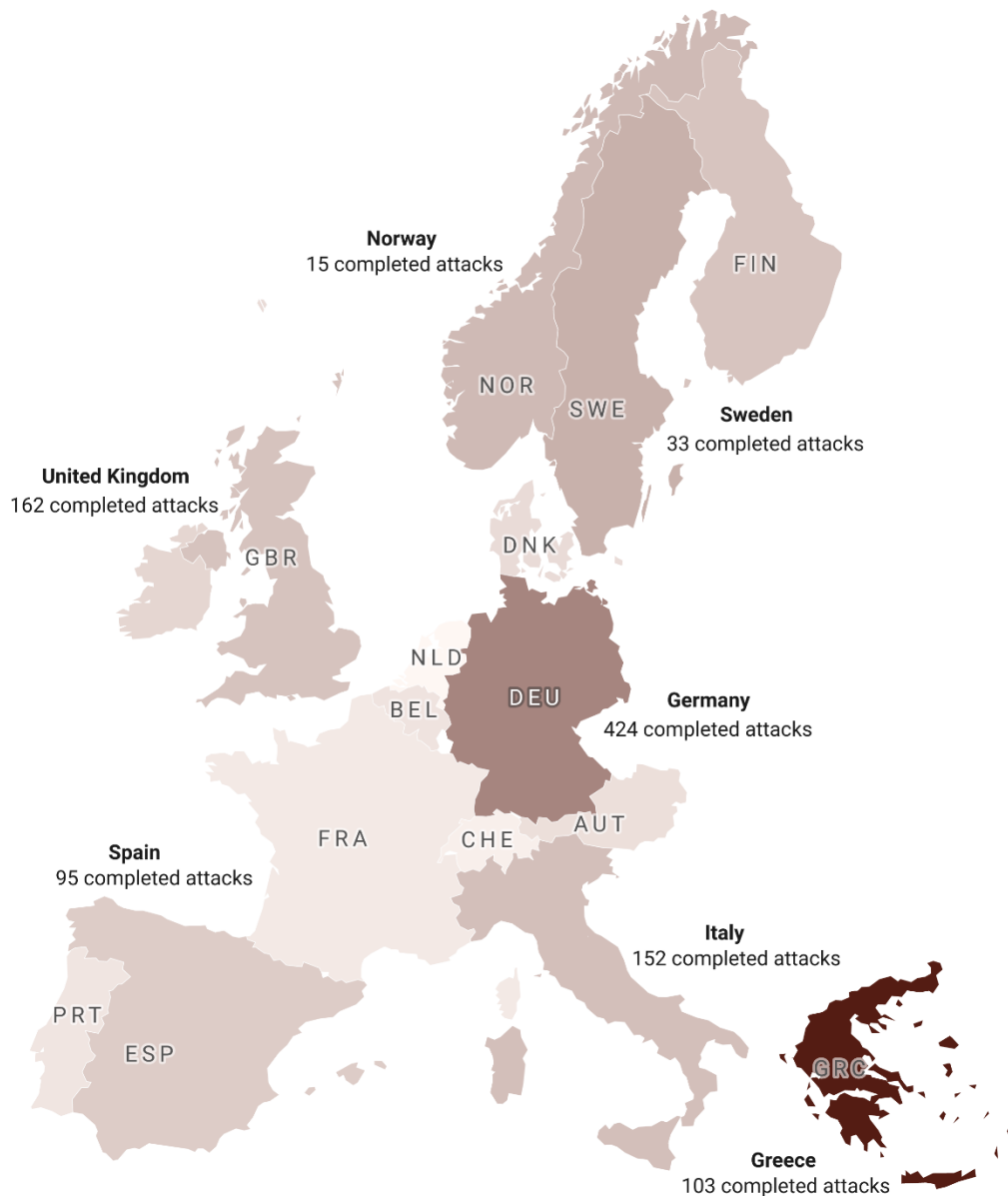
Finally, if we take a more long-term perspective by looking at the number of fatal attacks per capita, per decade, an interesting pattern appears, as displayed in Figure 8. Here, we see that between 1992 and 2001, Germany and Sweden were the countries with the highest number of fatal attacks per capita in Western Europe, followed by Spain. Then, between 2002 and 2011, Sweden ranked considerably higher than any other country, followed by Germany and the UK. Since 2012, however, levels of both fatal and non-fatal attacks have declined considerably in Sweden. By contrast Greece now stands out as the country in Western Europe with the highest number of both fatal and non-fatal attacks per capita since 2015. Interestingly, both countries have since 2012 experienced growing support to far-right political parties, with the rise of the Sweden Democrats in Sweden and Golden Dawn in Greece (until their ban in 2020), thereby

suggesting that the relationship between electoral support and violence is both complex and context-dependent.

Figure 8: Top three countries of fatal attacks per (m) capita, 1992-2021[8]
n=169
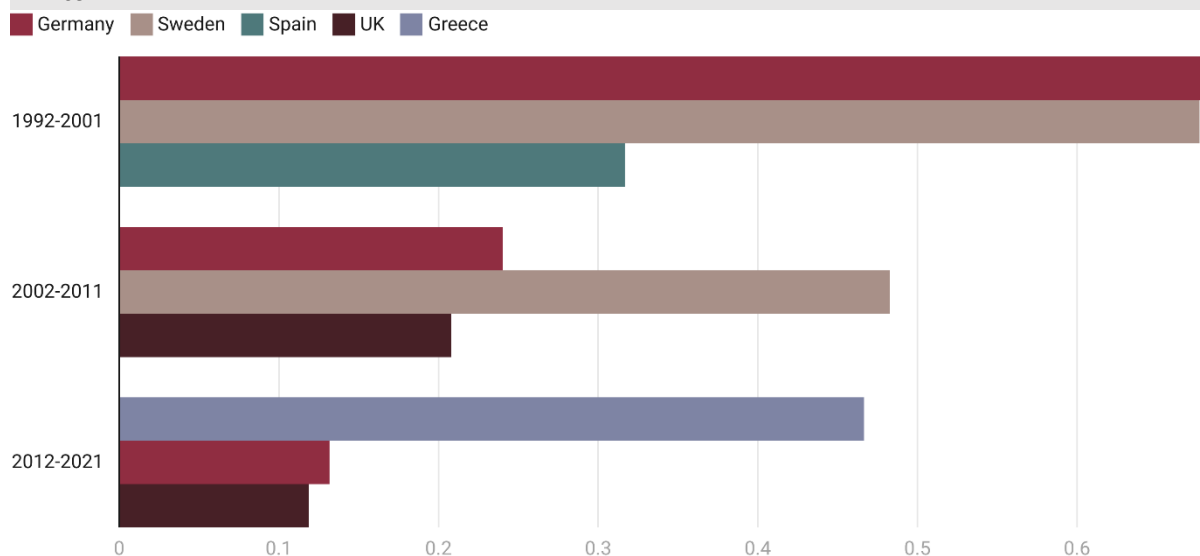
Target groups of right-wing violence

The RTV dataset includes 16 different target groups that may be grouped into five main categories, reflecting common enemies of the far right: (1) ethnic and religious minorities (immigrants and refugees, blacks, Jews, Muslims and Romas); (2) political opponents (left-wing activists, anti-fascists, pro-immigration activists, the media, separatists, and deserters from far-right groups); (3) state institutions (police and government representatives at the national and local level); (4) marginalised groups who deviate from norms idealised by the far right (sexual minorities and people who are homeless, have low social status, or mentally/physically disabled); and (5) others.

Figure 9 presents the target groups of all completed attacks in 2021. Consistent with previous years, ethnic and religious minorities were the most frequently targeted group also in 2021. If we disaggregate this group further, we find that out of the 97 attacks directed towards this group, 80 attacks targeted immigrants and refugees, 12 attacks targeted black people, four attacks targeted Muslims, and one attack targeted Jews. Note that when coding target group, we take the perpetrator's perspective and code the target group which the attack was intended to hurt. Thus, if a Sikh is attacked because the perpetrator believed the intended victim was a Muslim, we code the target group as 'Muslim'. Further, if Muslims are attacked because the perpetrator thought they were immigrants or foreigners, we code the target group as 'immigrant/foreigner'.

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[8] Countries with less than four fatal attacks in a ten-year-period are excluded.

Figure 9: Target groups of completed attacks in Western Europe, 2021
n=131
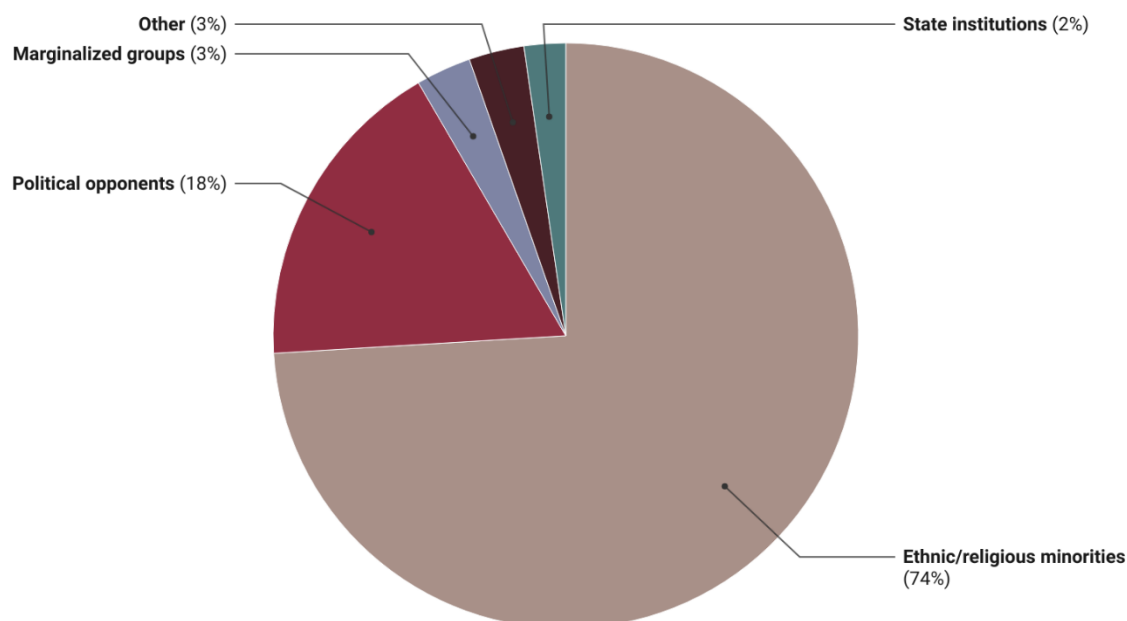
Political opponents were the second most frequently attacked group in 2021, most notably in Greece (N=9), France (N=5) and Spain (N=3). For instance, in Valencia, Spain, a man was attacked by a group of 10 far-right activists because of the shirt he wore. The shirt had 'working class' written on it, which the perpetrators perceived as a proof of the victim's left-wing ideology. The victim was first confronted on the street by one of the perpetrators, who began beating him. When the victim attempted to flee, the nine other perpetrators appeared, encircled him, and further beat him up, causing the victim to be hospitalised.

The 'other' category primarily includes COVID-19 related events and other attacks committed by people with far-right convictions where the target selection cannot easily be categorised into any of the existing target groups. In three of the incidents, all in Germany and including one of the two fatal events, the victims were assaulted as a result of asking the perpetrators to put on face masks, as mandated by government COVID-19 regulations. In another, a Swedish 25-year-old inspired by the 2015 Trollhättan school attack (during which teachers and students of Middle Eastern or African background were targeted), entered a school armed with an axe and a knife and injured one person who confronted the perpetrator in the canteen. After the attack, police discovered several Molotov cocktails placed around the school. Prior to the attack, the man had spray-painted his apartment with hateful messages, swastikas, and the phrases 'heil' and 'you shall die'.

In 2021, marginalised groups were targeted in four incidents, three of which were directed towards sexual minorities and one against a homeless person. For example, in Leverano, Italy, three men assaulted the owner of a gay bar who was also an LGBTQI+ activist. Breaking into the bar, the perpetrators smashed the furniture, shouted homophobic abuse, declared themselves as 'proud fascists', and attacked the owner. In Barcelona, Spain, three people with neo-Nazi aesthetics tried to set a homeless man on fire by pouring gasoline over the victim whilst he was sleeping.

Although attacks targeting marginalised groups and political opponents still occur, such events have decreased considerably both over time and relative to other groups. Figure 10 illustrates this trend by presenting target groups of fatal attacks from 1990 to 2021. When disaggregating the 'marginalised group' into its sub-components, we find that no fatal attacks targeting homeless or physically/mentally disabled persons have occurred since 2012, while sexual minorities have been fatally attacked once since 2005.

Figure 10: Target groups of fatal attacks in Western Europe, 1992-2021
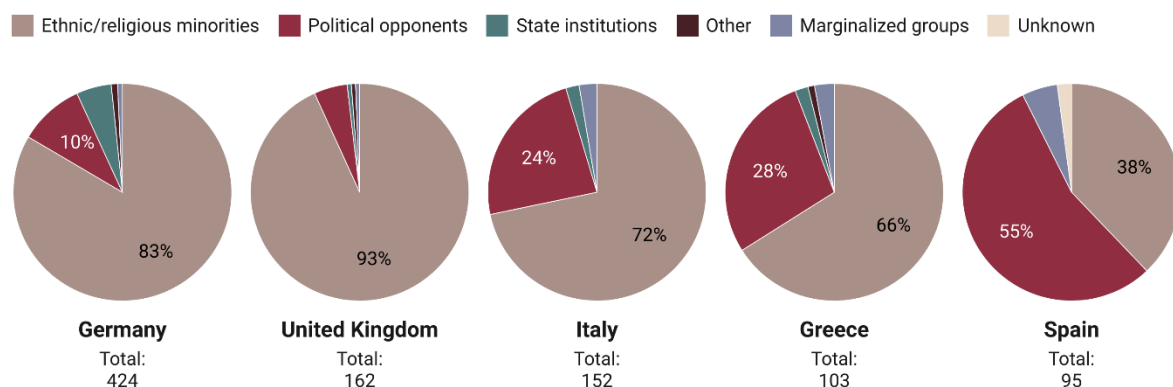*n=209*
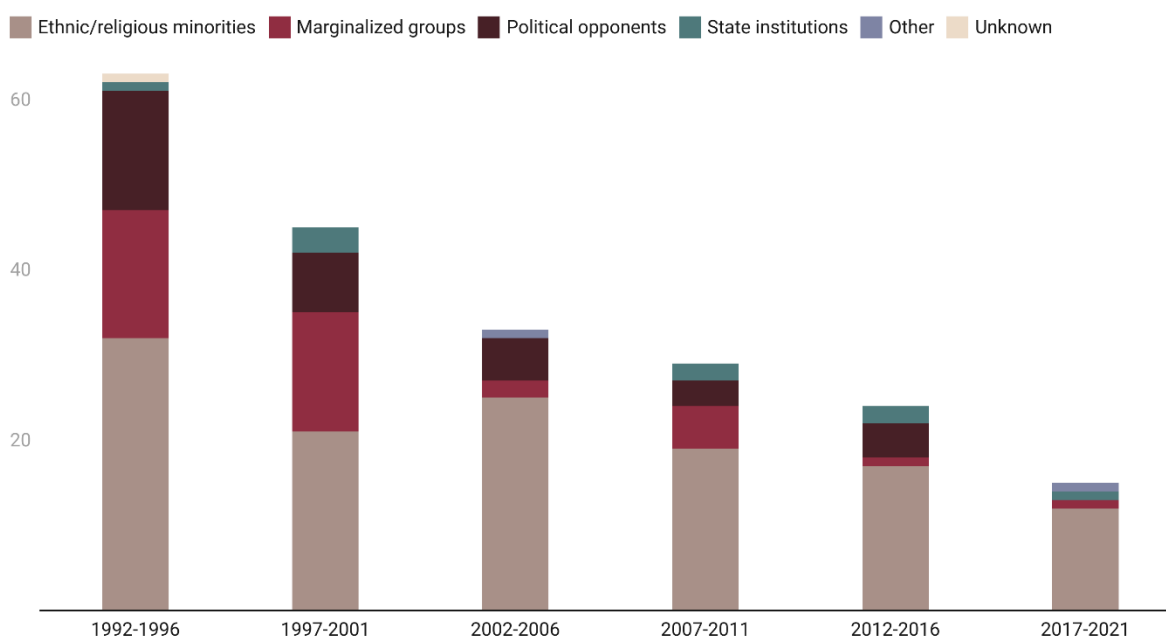
Ethnic and religious minorities are not only the most frequently targeted group across time and space, but also increasingly at the core of the attacks relative to other target groups. In the last decade, 75% of all fatal attacks targeted this group, and since 2015, 77% of all completed attacks were directed towards ethnic and religious minorities. Among these attacks were the 2020 Hanau shootings, the 2019 Halle synagogue shooting, and the 2019 Bærum mosque shooting. What is more is that fatal attacks explicitly targeting Muslims have gone from less than 1% during the 1990s to just over 13% in the 2010s, consistent with the view that in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and a series of jihadi terrorist attacks in Europe and beyond, persons perceived as Muslims have become a key target group for the far right.[9]

When comparing targeting between countries, several geographical patterns emerge. Most notably, Figure 11 shows that between 2015 and 2021, 83% of completed attacks in Germany, and as much as 93% of completed attacks in the United Kingdom, targeted ethnic and religious minorities. By comparison, in South European countries such Italy, Greece and Spain, political opponents make up a much larger share of those being attacked by the far right.

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[9] Fangen, Katrine, "Why did Muslims become the new enemy in Norway and Europe?" Blogpost, *RightNow*, Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), 2021.

Figure 11: Target groups of completed attacks by country, 2015-2021
n=936

■ Ethnic/religious minorities   ■ Political opponents   ■ State institutions   ■ Other   ■ Marginalized groups   ■ Unknown

Germany	United Kingdom	Italy	Greece	Spain
Total: 424	Total: 162	Total: 152	Total: 103	Total: 95

Perpetrators of right-wing violence

The RTV dataset distinguishes between nine different perpetrator types according to their type of commitment, degree of organisation, and the number of people involved. A brief definition of each perpetrator type is presented in Box 2.[10]

Box 2: Perpetrator types

Organised 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.
Unorganised	Two or more perpetrators with unknown or no 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.
Coordinated entities	Constellations of two or more people with a suspected far-right affiliation acting in a coordinated manner, but where information about their organisational affiliation is missing.
Shadow groups	Attacks claimed by formerly unknown groups.
Professional entities	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.

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[10] For more information on the classification of perpetrators, please see Appendix 2 in the RTV Codebook.

Figure 12 presents the perpetrators of completed attacks in 2021. Note that when assessing the involvement of organised groups in right-wing terrorism and violence, one should conduct analyses both with and without the category 'coordinated entities', as it represents cases where it has been difficult to determine whether the perpetrators belong to politically organised groups, or to more informal groups based on social ties, such as gangs.

**Figure 12: Perpetrators of completed attacks in Western Europe, 2021**
n=131
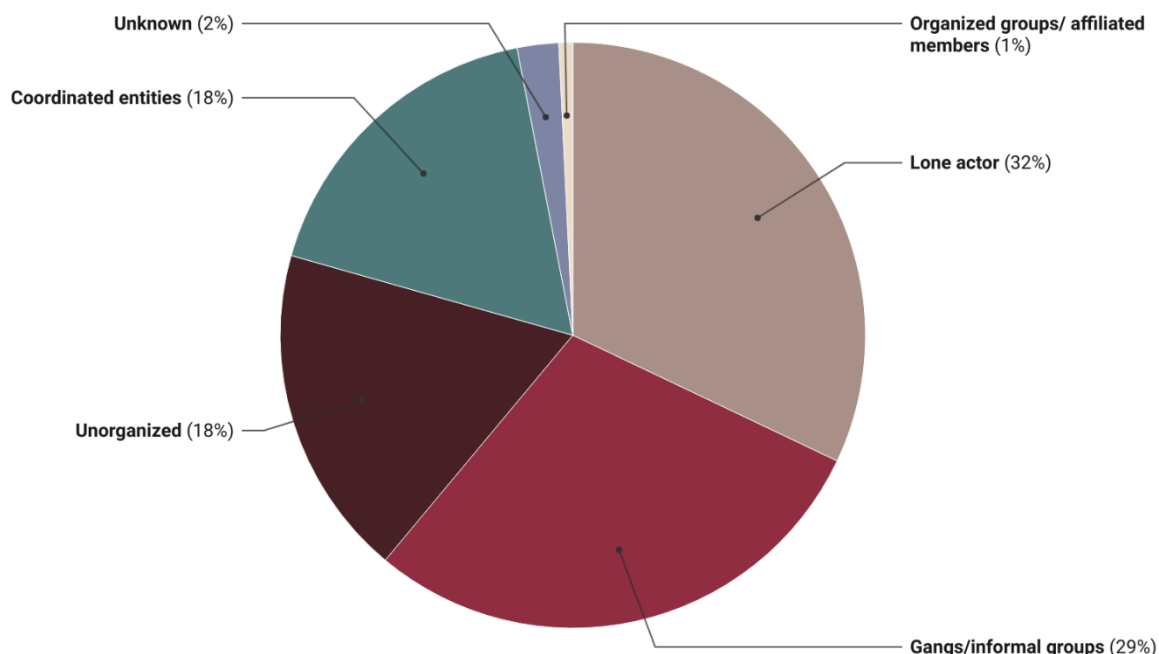
In 2021, only one registered attack was committed by a known organised group. This event occurred in France, during which four Kurdish men were attacked with bladed weapons, baseball bats, and iron bars by 15-20 hooded diaspora members of the ultranationalist Turkish 'Grey Wolves' group. By contrast, coordinated entities were behind 23 completed attacks (18%). Such entities are characterised by perpetrators who come across as politically oriented (and connected), but where concrete information about their organisational affiliations is missing. In seven of these events, we have sufficient information to connect at least some of the persons in the entity to a specific organised group, but we lack information to conclude that the group as a whole was politically organised.

For example, in one of the events from Thessaloniki, Greece, hooded far-right activists attacked left-wing students with iron bars, knives, baseball bats, and stones outside a school building. Among the perpetrators were members of the now banned Golden Dawn and Golden Dawn's Youth Front. However, it would not necessarily be correct to assume that Golden Dawn *as a group* was behind the attack; nor would it be accurate to say that *affiliated members* attacked the victims, as several participants in the coordinated entity were not affiliated with Golden Dawn. Neither were they unorganised or part of an informal group or gang. Similarly, in Rome, neo-Fascists infiltrated a protest against the COVID-19 Green Pass organised by various anti-vaccination groups. After deviating from the authorised protest path, several demonstrators attacked police officers guarding Italy's largest trade union, CGIL. The perpetrators included two leaders and other members of the neo-fascist party Forza Nuova, but also other activists with unknown affiliations.

In 2021, 66% of all competed attacks were committed by groups, predominantly by gangs/informal groups (29%), coordinated entities (18%), and unorganised groups (18%). Furthermore 92% of the attacks committed by informal or unorganised groups were of a spontaneous nature, thereby making spontaneous, group-based violence the biggest threat to victims of the far-right. However, if we look at fatal attacks only, this picture changes, as lone actors have been behind most fatal attacks in recent years, as illustrated by Figure 13.

Figure 13: Perpetrators of fatal attacks in Western Europe, 1992-2021
n=209
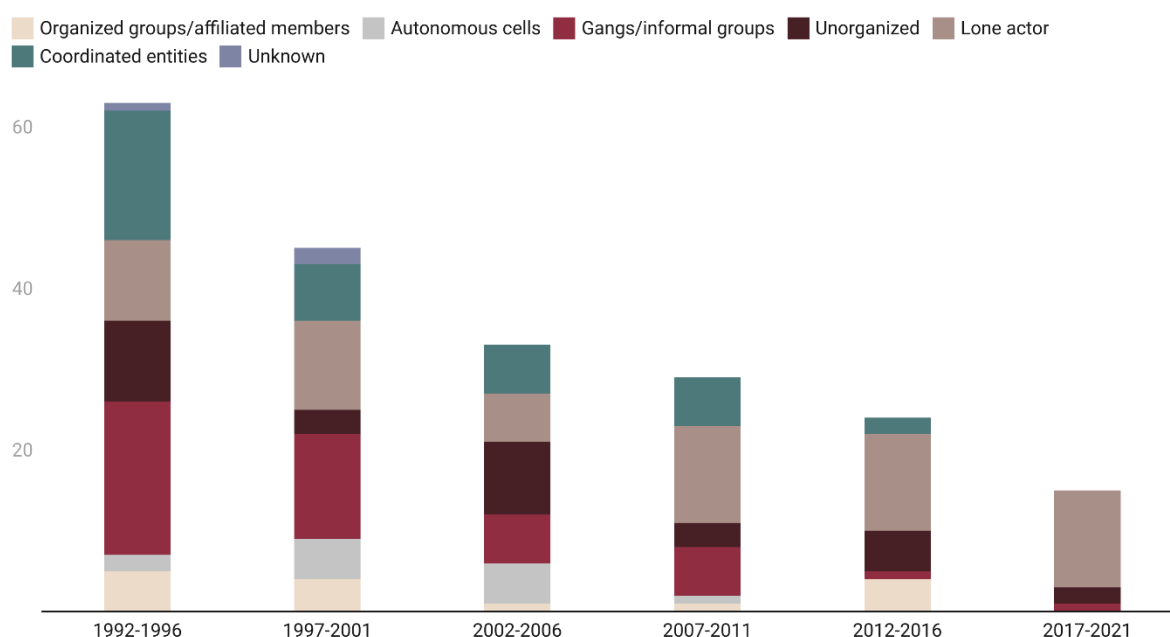
Lone actors make up an overwhelming share of fatal attacks since 2017, and all fatal attacks since 2020. In addition, 'lone actors' constitute the largest share of perpetrators behind attack plots and discoveries of major arms repositories. However, as underlined in the last year's Trend Report, the profiles of lone actors differ to a significant extent. While some lone actors are young, online radicalised men who planned their attacks beforehand, such as in the 2015 Trollhättan, 2016 Munich, 2019 Bærum, and 2019 Halle attacks, others are old(er) men with access to firearms triggered by confrontational encounters with their targets.

There has recently been much discussion among counterterrorism practitioners, policymakers and scholars about an increased threat coming from young individuals who are radicalised online. However, if we look at the age profiles of those who were behind the 26 fatal attacks recorded in Western Europe since 2015, only one perpetrator was below 20 years, only five below 25, whereas 12 perpetrators were more than 40 years old. The perpetrators of the most recent attacks from 2021 and 2020 were 49, 52, 76 and 43 years, respectively. In other words, while young extremists may be posing as potential terrorists online, those who actually carry out fatal attacks tend to be much older, at least in Western Europe.

Furthermore, fatal attacks by organised groups have become nearly non-existent in Western Europe. Fatal attacks committed by organised groups, affiliated members, and coordinated entities declined significantly – from about 50% during the 1992-2001 period, to about 15% since 2012, and no fatal attacks since 2017.

Turning to all completed attacks post-2015, Figure 14 shows that perpetrator types also vary between countries. While attacks in Italy, Greece and Spain involve a higher share of organised groups, affiliated members and coordinated entities, attacks in Germany and the United Kingdom were less organised. The relatively high proportion of perpetrators categorised as 'unknown' in Germany stem from many attacks from the 2015-2016 period in which unknown perpetrators threw incendiary devices, Molotov cocktails and smoke bombs at, and into, refugee accommodations.

By comparison, Greece saw the smallest share of lone actors and the highest share of perpetrators suspected, but not confirmed, of being organised – which has to do with the fact that in a considerable amount of the group-based violence, the perpetrators' modus operandi strongly indicate affiliation with the Golden Dawn. In 20% of the attacks carried out by coordinated entities, explicit information on modus operandi linked the group directly to Golden Dawn – as their so-called 'attack squads' often appear armed and unexpected, arrive on motorcycles, outnumber their victims, and reveal their political identity with clothing or slogans. You can read more about Greece in the country case studies further below.

Figure 14: Perpetrators of completed attacks by country, 2015-2021
n=936
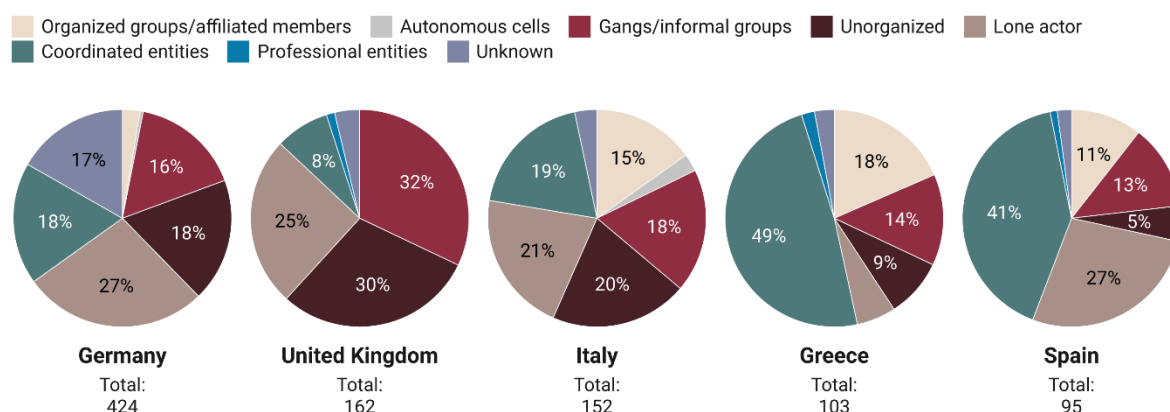
Weapons used in right-wing violence

The RTV dataset codes for 16 different weapon types that may be grouped into six main categories: (1) explosives; (2) firearms; (3) arson/firebomb; (4) knives/bladed weapons/sharp objects; (5) blunt instruments; and (6) beating/kicking. There is also an 'other' category, used for less common weapons such as cars, dogs, and sexual violence. Figure 15 presents the primary weapons used in completed attacks in 2021.

Figure 15: Weapons used in completed attacks in Western Europe, 2021
n=131
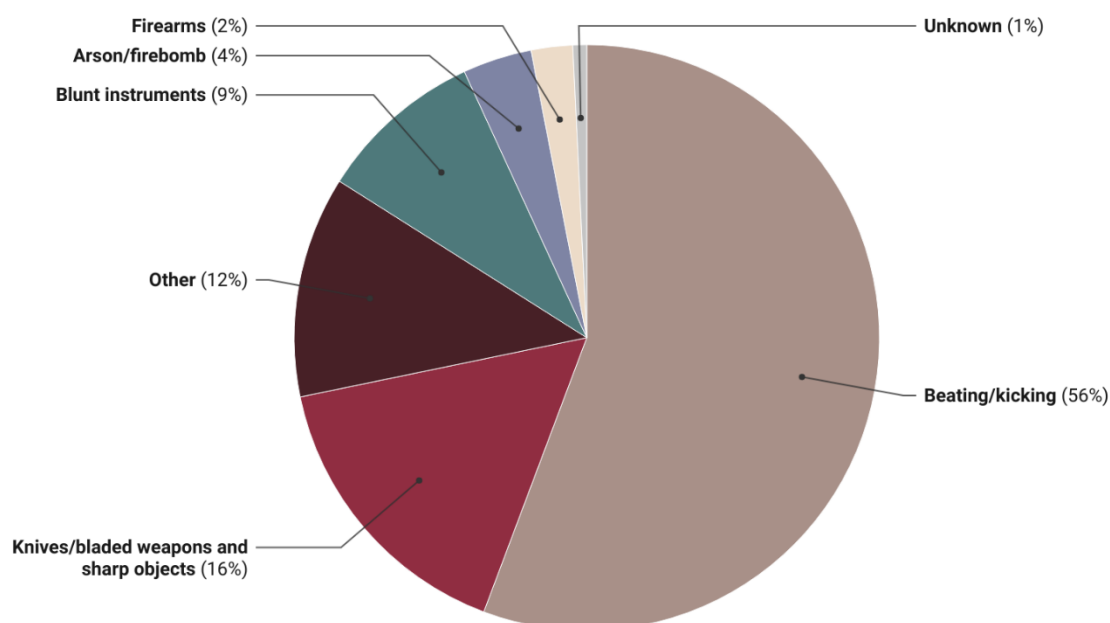
'Beating and kicking' continue to be the most prominent weapon type in severe right-wing attacks. In 73 out of the 131 completed events in 2021, beating and kicking was the primary weapon used, and in additional 16 events, beating and kicking was the secondary weapon used, often in combination with blunt instruments. 91% of these 89 attacks were spontaneous street confrontations, almost 60% of which were committed by informal or unorganised groups.

Notably, in 12% (n=16) of the completed attacks in 2021, the primary weapon type was 'other' weapons. In five of these events, pepper spray and animal repellent spray was used. In Switzerland for instance, a 78-year-old man racially insulted an Eritrean man and subsequently pepper sprayed him in the face. Similarly, in Germany, a couple started harassing a Turkish family in a xenophobic manner before spraying the father of the family and his four- and eight-year-old children with animal repellent spray – causing them to be transported to hospital in an ambulance. Moreover, four incidents saw cars or scooters as the primary weapon type. In Denmark, a group of friends were approached by another group shouting racial abuse. Ten minutes later, an additional 20 men arrived, and chased one of the victims. The victim was beaten with iron bars, a scooter helmet, and finally run over by a scooter. And, in France, a 72-year-old shouted racial slurs to the victim before driving off in a car, turning around, and running over the victim, who ended up with a neck brace and several fractures.

By displaying types of weapons used by different perpetrator types, Figure 16[11] shows that informal and unorganised perpetrators mostly used beating and kicking as their primary weapon in completed attacks 2015-2021. By comparison, organised groups, affiliated members and coordinated entities were more inclined than other perpetrator types to attack their targets with explosives, blunt objects, or 'other' weapons such as cars or fireworks. Arson attacks, Molotov
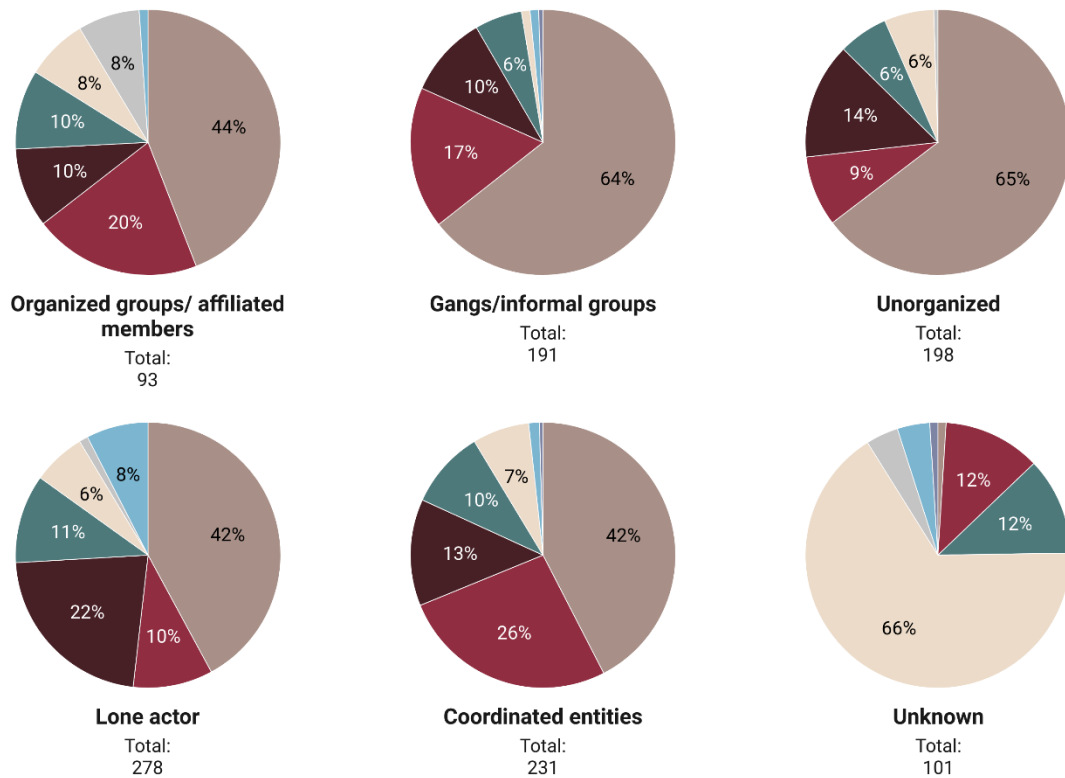
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[11] The perpetrator types 'autonomous cells', 'shadow groups' and 'professional entities' are excluded due to small N.

cocktails and firebombs were primarily used by unknown perpetrators, while lone actors were more inclined to use knives and firearms than the other perpetrator types.

Figure 16: Weapons used in completed attacks in Western Europe by perpetrator type, 2015-2021
n=1092

Legend: Beating/kicking — Blunt instruments — Knives/bladed weapons and sharp objects — Other — Arson/firebomb — Explosives — Firearms — Unknown

Organized groups/ affiliated members
Total: 93
(44%, 20%, 10%, 10%, 8%, 8%)

Gangs/informal groups
Total: 191
(64%, 17%, 10%, 6%)

Unorganized
Total: 198
(65%, 9%, 14%, 6%, 6%)

Lone actor
Total: 278
(42%, 10%, 22%, 11%, 6%, 8%)

Coordinated entities
Total: 231
(42%, 26%, 13%, 10%, 7%)

Unknown
Total: 101
(66%, 12%, 12%)

These findings are consistent with the weapons used in fatal attacks over time, as illustrated in Figure 17. The share of fatal attacks using firearms continues to increase relative to other weapons, while attacks with knives and other sharp objects have become less common. Notably, trends in weapons preferences correspond to trends in perpetrator types as well as whether attacks are spontaneous or premeditated: we observe fewer fatal attacks committed by gangs or unorganised groups, who typically approach their victims randomly and subsequently attack them with beating and kicking, knives, sticks or baseball bats, and relatively more attacks committed by lone actors, who to a larger extent use firearms in premeditated attacks.

Figure 17: Weapons used in fatal attacks in Western Europe, 1992-2021
n=209

Legend: Beating/kicking · Knives/bladed weapons and sharp objects · Firearms · Blunt instruments · Arson/firebomb · Other · Explosives
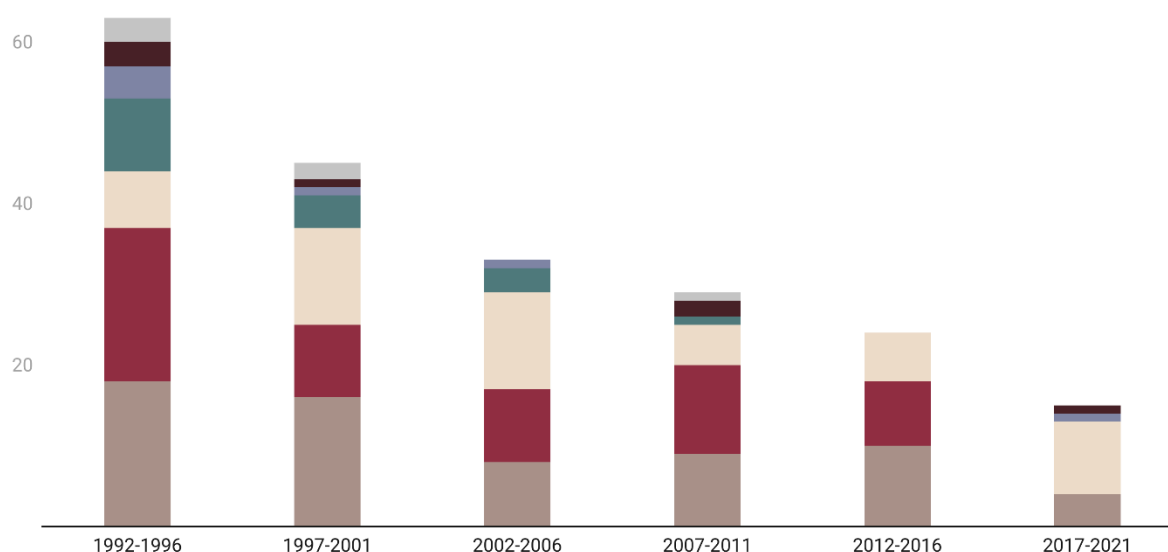
Country case studies

Each year, the RTV Trend Report presents short case studies of countries experiencing notable developments during the year covered by the report. Case studies from previous years have covered Portugal (RTV Trend Report 2021), Germany, Spain, Greece (RTV Trend Report 2020) and France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom (RTV Trend Report 2019). This year, we offer case studies from two countries at the opposite end of the right-wing terrorism and violence spectrum: Greece and the Netherlands.

Greece: historically rooted, strategic right-wing violence in urban areas

As mentioned above, Greece has become a hotspot for right-wing violence in Western Europe. Although levels of violence appear to have been higher in previous years, Greece had no less than 14 severe violent far-right attacks in 2021, as seen in Figure 18. This makes this crisis-ridden country the fourth most violent country in absolute terms in 2021 and the most violent country in Western Europe in relative terms, both in 2021 and in the 2015-2020 period (see figures 6, 7, and 8). Various crises, including economic recession, 'refugee crisis', legitimacy crisis and profound political polarisation seem to have created a 'perfect storm' in which right-wing (and left-wing) violence have increased in recent years.[12] These different crises have also produced quite distinct forms of right-wing violence, driven by different logics, and expressed in different ways.

Right-wing violence in Greece during the last decade has been associated with at least four different types of socio-political conflicts: (1) a long-standing conflict between the left and right, (2) racist violence against migrant workers, (3) vigilantism in response to the so-called 'refugee

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[12] See Rori, Lamprini, Vasiliki Georgiadou, and Costas Roumanias. "Political Violence in Crisis-Ridden Greece: Evidence from the Far Right and the Far Left." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 40, no. 1 (2022): 1-37; and Jupskås, Anders Ravik and Maik Fielitz. "Far-Right Violence in Greece in Comparative Perspective." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 40, no. 1 (2022): 95-115.

crisis' and (4) mobilisation related to the Macedonian name dispute. Macedonian-related violence was particularly prominent in 2018, whereas violent vigilantism was more prominent in 2019 and 2020. However, in 2021, almost all attacks were either violence against migrant workers or related to the deep-rooted conflict between left-wing and right-wing political groups, as Figure 18 shows.

Figure 18: Completed attacks in Greece by target groups, 2015-2021
n=103
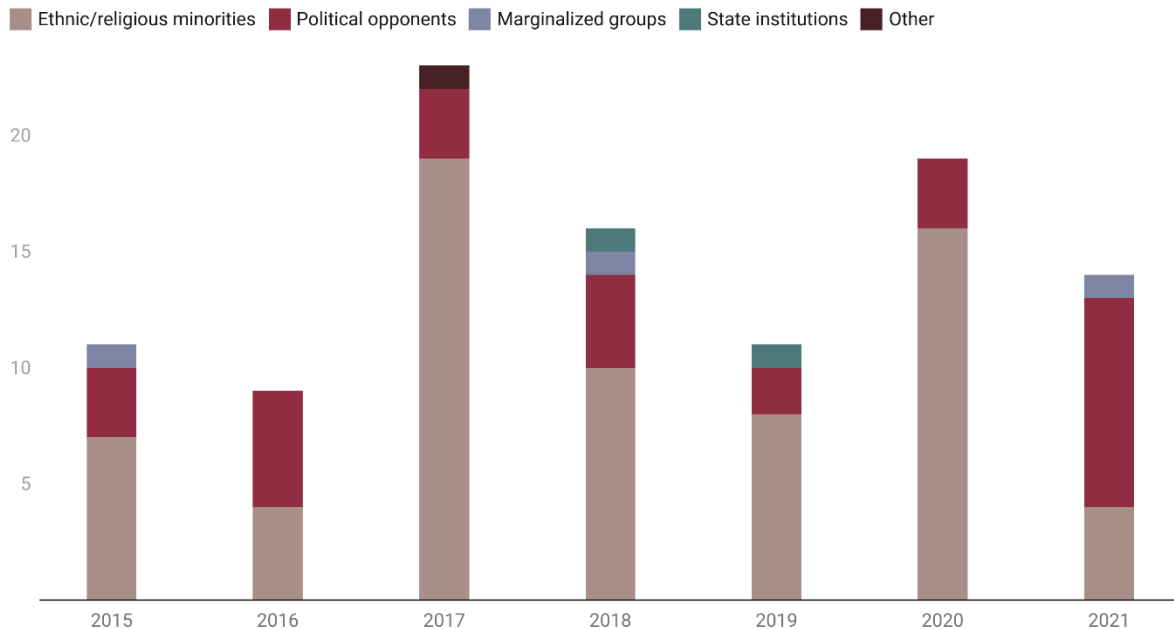
Attacks against migrant workers seem motivated by racism, typically take place in rural areas, and mainly target migrant workers of Pakistani background. For example, in Lassithi, Crete, a group of seven people who had been drinking together attacked two houses where 15 Pakistanis lived. The perpetrators entered the houses and beat the victims with random objects. They also robbed a minor, caused damage to the furniture, and upon leaving, fired five shots in the air with an unspecified firearm.

Attacks related to the political struggle between the left and the right, which is by far the most common form of violence in 2021, have several distinct features. First, the main targets of this violence are political opponents. In 2021, the attacks were carried out against a variety of different activists associated with the left, including members of the Movement Against Racism and the Fascist Threat (KEERFA), members of the Communist Youth and the Communist Party, as well as members of student associations at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Second, unlike in most West European countries, right-wing violence in Greece seems part of political strategy promoted by organised actors. Most of the attacks are premeditated rather than spontaneous and carried out by groups with a suspected far-right affiliation (coordinated entities). One specific strategy, which has a long history in Greek society, is to use violence to control public spaces by targeting specific events, demonstrations, or public gatherings. For example, in 2021, this happened during the Pride Parade in Thessaloniki; during an event in Neo Iraklio (Athens) marking one year since the conviction of members of the Golden Dawn party; and during a communist march in Eleftherias Square. Some of the attacks against journalists in 2019 and 2020 can also be interpreted as being part of the same strategy.

The extreme-right party Golden Dawn has been a key player in recent years. Even if the party was declared a criminal organisation and effectively banned in late 2020, Golden Dawn members are suspected to have been involved in several attacks in 2021. Moreover, the banning of this group has led to a fragmentation and radicalisation of the organised scene as more extreme groups have emerged, including Holy Corps and Propatria. Our data suggests that members of Propatria were responsible for at least one attack in 2021. Other groups may also have been involved in violence, but it is not always clear which group, let alone what kind of group, that are responsible for the attacks. Therefore, many of the perpetrators in Greece are classified as coordinated entities (see Box 2).

Third, this kind of violence mostly takes place in urban areas. Whereas previous years have seen multiple attacks on the Greek islands, almost all attacks in 2021 were carried out in the capital and largest city, Athens, and the second largest city, Thessaloniki, as illustrated by the below map (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Geographical distribution of completed attacks in Greece, 2021
n=14
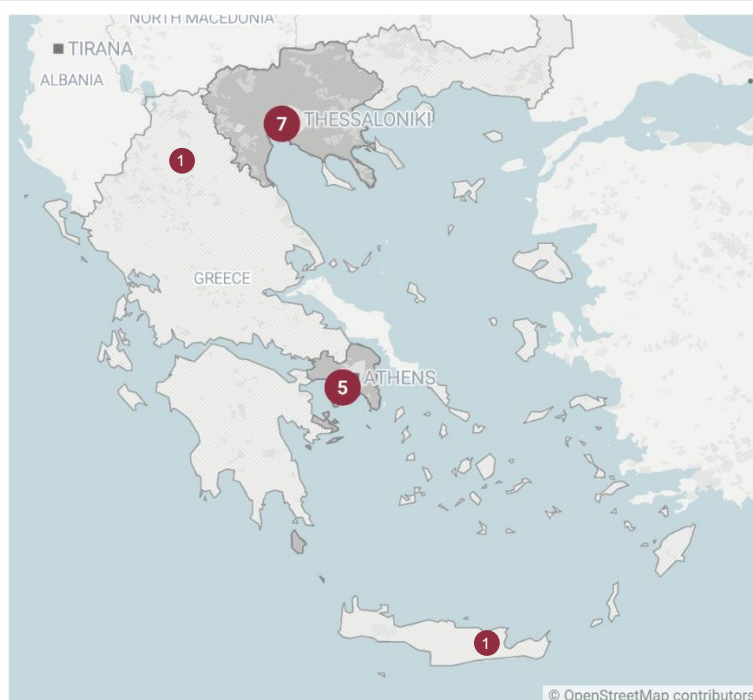
In Athens, these attacks are part of a series of ongoing violent clashes that have existed for many years. In Thessaloniki, however, the attacks represent a more recent phenomenon as the city became a stronghold for the far right in 2018 onwards. The development was exacerbated by nationalist rallies that took place in Thessaloniki against the 2018 Prespa agreement, which was reached to resolve the long-standing political conflict between Greece and the neighbouring country now known as North Macedonia.

Several of the attacks in Thessaloniki showed the strength of the far right. In early October, 150 far-right activists set up barricades outside a high school associated with left-wing demonstrators that had already been attacked several days in a row by groups of right-wing youths. The perpetrators then threw firecrackers and stones against journalists as well as police officers. Teachers at the school reported that Golden Dawn members from all Thessaloniki neighbourhoods had gathered outside the school.

This type of group-based urban violence is perhaps best seen as a long-term repercussion of the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) and the military junta rule (1967–1974). Both these events created a legacy of profound political polarisation, which have been amplified in recent years due to the intersection of economic recession, the 'refugee crisis', and political instability. Comparative survey data suggest that levels of 'affective polarisation' is much higher in Greece than all other countries in Western Europe.[13] The civil war and the junta regime also nurtured a 'culture of sympathy'[14] toward radical means of politics, including violence. So, even if the period since the fall of the military junta in 1974 has been characterised by an unprecedented degree of democratic stability, it has also seen many actors engage in political violence. With the continuation of economic, cultural and political crises, reinforced by the pandemic, as well as radicalising effect of the ban against Golden Dawn, there are good reasons to believe that Greece will continue to witness high levels of organised right-wing violence in the near future.

The Netherlands: consistently low levels of right-wing violence

While Greece has become a hotspot for right-wing violence in Western Europe, the Netherlands is situated at the opposite end of this spectrum. In fact, in 2021, the Netherlands experienced no severe right-wing attacks at all. When reading recent Dutch media reports, as well as publications from the Dutch Security and Intelligence Agency (AIVD), this may come as a surprise.[15] The AIVD report covering developments in 2021, for example, warned that that the possibility of terrorist attacks by extreme right-wing groups in the country is increasing. The report further noted that a violence-prone movement is becoming more prevalent among far-right groups, and its members glorify violence in closed online chat groups.[16]

However, the absence of severe right-wing violence in the Netherlands in 2021 is much in line with previous observations of this country. The RTV dataset shows that levels of right-wing violence have been comparatively low for decades. Since 1990, the starting year of the dataset, only three attacks with a fatal outcome have been recorded in the Netherlands, none of them during the last decade. The first recorded fatal attack occurred in Rotterdam in the year 2000, when diaspora members of the Turkish far-right group of Grey Wolves stabbed a Turkish human rights activist and severely wounded another. The year after, in Tilburg, a mentally disabled man with Somalian background was physically attacked several times by a gang before he subsequently died in an arson attack by the same gang. At the wall of the victim's house, the members of the gang wrote a rune sign and the texts "White Power" and "Power Rangers". The attack was the fifth one in three weeks against foreigners in Tilburg. The last recorded fatal attack occurred in 2010, when three polish men killed a taxi driver in his cab. One of the perpetrators had a Swastika tattoo and another stated that he chose the victim because of his "dark skin".

Notably, two out of these three fatal attacks were committee by far-right activists with origins form other countries.

When looking at non-fatal events since 2015, levels of right-wing violence also come across as surprisingly low in the Netherlands. Since 2015, only four completed right-wing attacks have been

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[13] Lauka, Alban, Jennifer McCoy, and Rengin B. Firat. 2018. "Mass Partisan Polarization: Measuring a Relational Concept." *American Behavioral Scientist* 62 (1): 107–126. doi: 10.1177/0002764218759581.

[14] Andronikidou and Kovras 2012

[15] Asiran, Abdullah, "Intel report warns of rising threat of right-wing terrorist attacks in Netherlands" Anadoly Agency, 2022.

[16] *2021 Jaarverslag AIVD*. Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 2022.

recorded, none of which had a fatal outcome. Although these attacks do not have the exact same modus operandi (e.g., two attacks were pre-mediated using Molotov cocktails and fireworks, whereas the other two seemed more spontaneous with beating and kicking as the primary weapon), they were all carried out by unorganized groups of rather young people and they all target ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims.

For example, in 2016, in Enschede, five people threw Molotov cocktails against a mosque, which was occupied by 30 to 40 people at the time. A passer-by managed to extinguish the fire and there was limited material damage to the mosque. According to the court, the men glorified Adolf Hitler and Fascism. On social media, they shared images with texts such as: 'Free up space for refugees? Auschwitz is currently empty!'. The group was charged with and convicted for attempted arson with terrorist intent.

Notwithstanding the severity of such events, a comparative perspective demonstrates the overall low level of right-wing violence in the Netherlands. Only two countries have had fewer attacks than the Netherlands since 2015: Iceland with no attacks and Luxembourg with one attack. Moreover, with more than 17 million inhabitants, the notion of the Dutch "exceptionalism" is further reinforced when levels of right-wing violence are adjusted for population size (see Figure 7).

This exceptionalism has been considered a puzzle in research on right-wing violence. In a comparative analysis of right-wing violence in Western Europe between 1990 and 2015, the Netherlands was the only "fully inconsistent case" in the sense that it had low levels of violence despite being characterized by a combination of conditions associated with extensive right-wing violence elsewhere (e.g., Sweden and Germany), such as the combination of high ethnic diversity and unsuccessful far-right parties.[17]

During the last decade, the far-right has become stronger electorally with parties like Freedom Party (PVV) and Forum for Democracy (FvD), providing an institutional channel to express discontent, but also propagating profoundly islamophobic (PVV) and even anti-Semitic (FvD) narratives, yet levels of right-wing violence remain low.

While more research is needed to fully explain the deviant patterns observed in the Netherlands, some observations can be made. First, low levels of violence do not seem to reflect effective counter-terrorism strategies. We have only registered one attack plot and one so-called "preparation for armed struggle" since 2015 in the Netherlands. Both incidents, which took place in Doornenburg and the Hauge, respectively, involved middle-aged men expressing desire to kill, or making threatening remarks towards Muslims. In other words, there does not seem to be much far-right terrorist activity to counter, and those who do engage in plots or preparation for armed struggle are lone actors rather than organized groups. However, the two incidents do provide additional evidence of the Islamophobic discourse of the Dutch far right, which became politically salient with the rise the right-wing populist party, Lijst Pim Fortuyn, in the early 2000s and reinforced by various societal elites after the high-profile Islamist killing of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004.

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[17] Ravndal, Jacob Aasland. "Explaining Right-wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Grievances, Opportunities and Polarisation." *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 4 (2018): 845-66.

Second, low levels of violence might instead be linked to low levels of political polarization, as suggested by several scholars. Ehud Sprinzak, for example, argued already in the 1990s that extreme-right "violence, and gradually terrorism, will only emerge when the group involved feels increasingly insecure or threatened [by their enemies]".[18] Similarly, Jacob Ravndal has developed this argument further, suggesting that "extensive [right-wing violence] is more likely to occur in countries with a highly polarized left-right conflict than in countries where the left-right divide is less pronounced."[19] The Netherlands (and Greece, see previous section) fits this argument very well. Comparative data on polarization – such as the mass affective polarization index – shows that the Netherlands is a clear outlier with the lowest score by far (0.06). Most countries receive scores between 0.18 (Germany) and 0.26 (Ireland), while the most polarized country in Western Europe score as high as 0.33 (Greece).

Selected topics

In addition to country analyses, the RTV Trend Report also covers some selected topics particularly salient to the year covered by the report. Selected topics from previous years have covered COVID-19 and the relationship between declining attacks and rising plots (RTV Trend Report 2021), online-inspired terrorism and attacks against politicians (RTV Trend Report 2020), and vehicular attacks and the disappearance of the skinhead scene (RTV Trend Report 2019). This year, we build further on last year's focus on plots, presenting a study based on a new and more nuanced plot coding currently being implemented into the RTV dataset.

Gauging the maturity and detection of right-wing terrorist plots

Assessments of terrorist threats should arguably consider both completed attacks as well as foiled and failed terrorist plots. In last year's RTV trend report, we noted a puzzling crossover pattern of declining attacks and rising plots. This prompted the question of whether this pattern resulted from more effective counterterrorism efforts (by detecting attacks that otherwise would have been carried out), or simply just increased government attention towards this threat (by intervening in cases that likely would not have materialised into attacks). With this year's extensive backlogging of events, we are now able to provide a fuller picture of plot activity in Western Europe between 2015 and 2021. In addition, we are in the midst of implementing a more nuanced plot coding, providing more details about the nature of these plots as well as the factors leading to their detection. In what follows, we share some tentative results from this new plot coding.[20]

By terrorist plots we mean the detection of people involved in planning terrorist attacks that have yet to be launched. We consider an attack to be launched the moment someone carries out an action expected to cause direct physical harm to a predetermined target, such as pulling a trigger, lightening a fuse, or stabbing someone with a knife.

When counting frequencies of terrorist plots, it is imperative to only include plots that are likely to have materialised into actual attacks had they not been detected or derailed. The reason is that some situations initially described as terrorist plots by the media, or the police, turn out to be

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[18] Sprinzak, Ehud. "Right-wing terrorism in a comparative perspective: The case of split delegitimization." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7.1 (1995): 17-43.

[19] Ravndal, "Explaining Right-wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe"

[20] Note that this coding is still not part of the publicly available version of the RTV dataset as more work remains to be done.

something else, or nothing at all, upon closer scrutiny. To address this counterfactual problem (what would have happened had the plot not been detected/derailed?), we have developed a plot hierarchy, classifying plots according to their 'attack plausibility'. Here, attack plausibility is determined by the intersection of two factors: (1) whether a specific target has been selected and (2) the extent and maturity of the plot's operational planning, including elements such as target reconnaissance, weapon acquisition, tactical considerations, and task allocation in plots with multiple perpetrators. The plot hierarchy includes five different plot categories, as illustrated in Table 1. Movement towards the upper-right corner implies increased attack plausibility.

Table 1: Plot maturity hierarchy

		Targeting		
		Unknown	*General*	*Specific*
Operational planning	*Complete*	-	-	Mature
	Well-underway	Semi-vague	Intermediate	Semi-mature
	Initiated	Vague	Semi-vague	Intermediate
	None	-	Vague	Vague

We argue that, as a rule, vague plots, as defined in Table 1, should not be included in estimates of terrorist threats because the large majority of such cases never materialise into actual attacks. By contrast, semi-vague plots may be relevant to include in estimates of terrorist threats. However, due to their level of uncertainty, they should always be compared against frequencies of more mature plots as well as launched attacks (the so-called plot-to-attack ratio). A high plot-to-attack ratio (the number of plots divided by the number of attacks) could suggest effective counterterrorism efforts (many planned attacks are detected and stopped) but it could also suggest a high level of repression toward perceived threats (many people are arrested for alleged attack plans that may not be real or sincere).

One should also keep in mind that plots are by definition characterised by more uncertainty than attacks, as plots essentially represent non-events. The threshold for interpreting a situation as a terrorist plot and then intervening to stop it may also vary over time and between places. In addition, it may well be that some plots are detected and stopped by the police and security services without the public ever getting to know about it. Therefore, one should be more careful about drawing conclusions about terrorist threats based on trends in plot activity compared to trends in attack frequencies.

With those caveats in mind, we may now have a look at our current plot data. Between 2015 and 2021, we have registered 74 plots in total, out of which 17 are currently coded as vague, as illustrated by Figure 20.

Figure 20: Plots in Western Europe by plot type, 2015-2021
n=74

Vague plot　　Semi-vague plot　　Intermediate plot　　Semi-mature plot　　Mature plot
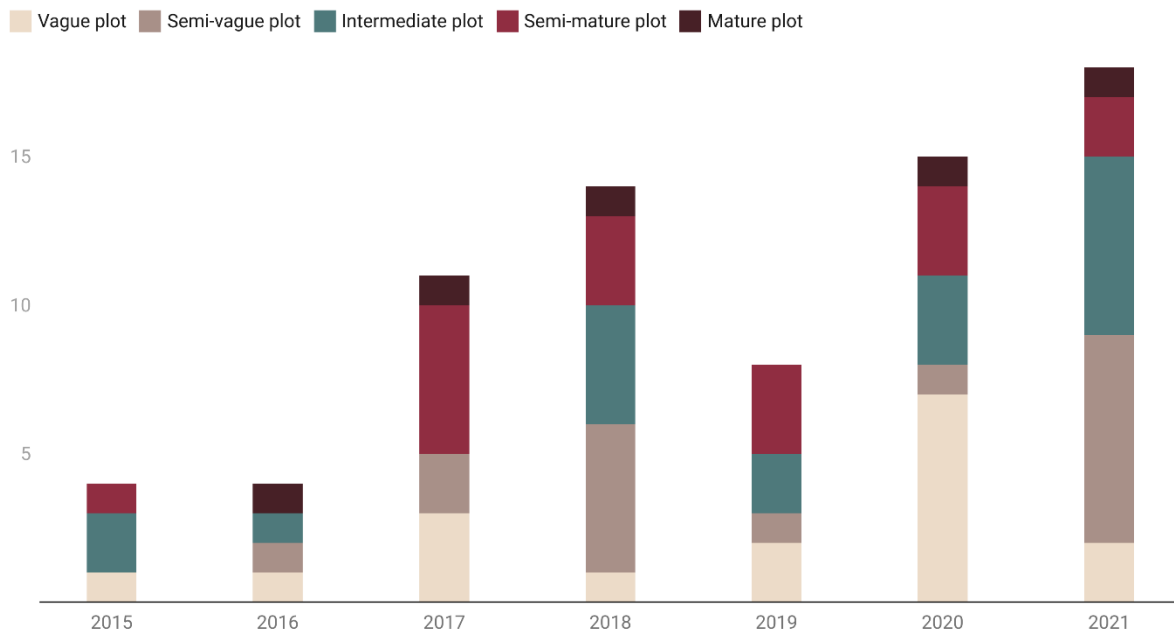
Although Figure 20 displays an increase in the total number of plots, we see that this growth primarily results from an increase in the numbers of vague and semi-vague plots, whereas mature plots remain rare and semi-mature and intermediate plots quite stable over time. An increase in vague and semi-vague plots may suggest an increase in attention towards this type of threat from security authorities rather than a substantial increase in terrorist activity. The likelihood of vague or semi-vague plots actually materialising into attacks is rather low, although not inconceivable. One should also keep in mind that vague and semi-vague plots may have developed into more mature plots if security authorities did not intervene at an early stage.

Among the 17 vague plots included, there was no evidence (in open sources) of actual operational planning in nine cases, whereas in six cases some form of operational planning was initiated, but information about potential targets was unknown. In the remaining two cases, information about operational planning was missing and the plan was directed towards a general target group, but no specific target had been selected. For example, in Germany, several year-long investigations against networks storing weapons and allegedly planning terrorist attacks against various target groups, have been closed, or ended with minor convictions, because the investigations were unable to find evidence of any concrete attack plans.

If we turn to the other end of our plot hierarchy, we see that only five plots are currently coded as fully mature between 2015 and 2021. Here, mature plots are planned attacks against specific targets whose operational planning is completed, meaning that the attack could have been launched in the near future had it not been for the intervention of some external force or some internal mishap. Interestingly, all five mature plots can be characterised as low-intensity attacks, meaning that the attacks were not aimed at mass-causalities using explosives of firearms. Instead, knives and a machete were the weapons of choice in four of these plots, targeting a gay pub, the French president, a UK solicitor, and a left-wing immigrant, whereas the fifth plot involved Molotov cocktails to be thrown against a beggar's camp.

Three of the five mature plots involved lone actors, one involved a coordinated entity, and one involved an autonomous cell. In this last plot, which occurred in Milano, Italy, four men aged 20

to 21 had founded a clandestine cell called Avanguardia Rivoluzionaria. They planned to attack a left-wing immigrant from Maghreb after a football match, but the police, who were informed about their plans, arrested the perpetrators before reaching their target. In the perpetrators' backpacks, the police found a baton, an 18.5cm knife, balaclavas, gloves, and Mussolini and Hitler postcards. When arrested, the perpetrators stated that they wanted to injure the victim with batons, but denied that they wanted to kill him, because then 'everything we aim for goes to shit.'

The majority of potential mass-casualty plots are found among those coded as semi-mature or intermediate, counting in total 35 plots. Of these 35 plots, 14 involved explosives and seven cases involved firearms. As many as 21 out of these 35 plots involved lone actors. For example, in Aberdeen, Scotland, A 25-year-old man was arrested for being in the possession of a cache of weapons, bomb-making equipment and manuals on how to manufacture explosives and chemical and biological weapons. The police found, among other things, hundreds of ball bearings, which are commonly used in pipe bombs, and rocket tubes capable of firing projectiles. A map showing the addresses of five mosques in the Aberdeen area was also discovered on his computer as well as a book manuscript entitled 'Combat 18 British Mosque Address Book'.

Besides lone actor plots, eight plots coded as either semi-mature or intermediate also involved organised groups, including the groups 'Oldschool society', 'Gruppe Freital', 'Freie Kräfte Prignitz' and 'Der harte kern' in Germany, 'Combat 18' in Greece, 'Honneur et nation' in France, and 'Ordine Ario Romano' in Italy. More details about these plots can be found in the RTV dataset.

Cases like these illustrate why we should also take plots into consideration when assessing the terrorist threat from the far right. Between 2015 and 2021, there were 26 events with a fatal outcome in Western Europe, killing a total of 47 people. However, in addition come 22 mature and semi-mature plots that were somehow detected. Had this not been the case, the number of fatal events and fatalities could have been considerably higher. A pertinent question is therefore – how were these plots detected?[21]

When implementing a more nuanced plot coding, we also coded for the types of factors that prevented each plot. Such information is not readily available for all cases, and in some cases the information remains rather uncertain. However, the general pattern still comes across as rather robust, namely that internal or random factors typically lead to plot detection, whereas traditional intelligence tools such as surveillance, infiltration or the use of informants were rarer. Among the 57 plots ranging from semi-vague to mature, many were detected as a result of public or private tips (17.5%), as illustrated by Figure 21. For example, in Liège, Belgium, a woman tipped the police about her 50-year-old partner with a criminal record who adhered to certain Nazi ideologies and had a fascination for Hitler. In his apartment, police found homemade explosive devices, explosive materials, smoke bombs, and metal objects. It turned out that the man wanted to bomb a mosque in the city.

A considerable portion of plots were also detected via open-source intelligence (OSINT), meaning online monitoring of extremist activity (17.5%). However, most of the online-detected plots were either vague or semi-vague.

Another common reason for plot detection is when perpetrators trigger investigations against themselves by making threats either privately or publicly (12.3%). For example, in

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[21] Note that in the following sections, vague plots have been excluded from all analyses and figures.

Neubrandenburg, Germany, a woman planned to execute an arson attack on public officials or people of Muslim faith by the end of May 2020 at the latest. She prompted an investigation against herself by sending out six anonymous threat letters to a police officer and two officials from Franconia, a Muslim association, and an association for refugee aid. All letters contained slogans with death threats and live pistol cartridges. She had acquired literature on the Internet on how to deal with explosive devices while getting the supplies needed. She also spied on several of the potential targets, their vehicles, and their homes.

Other prominent sources of detection include separate non-related police investigations (investigative snowballing, 10.5%), or simply chance encounter, typically during routine police controls (7.0%). At the same time, one should keep in mind that the numbers presented here are preliminary, and that information about plot detection is still missing in 17.5% of the cases.

Figure 21: Forms of plot detection in Western Europe, 2015-2021
n=57
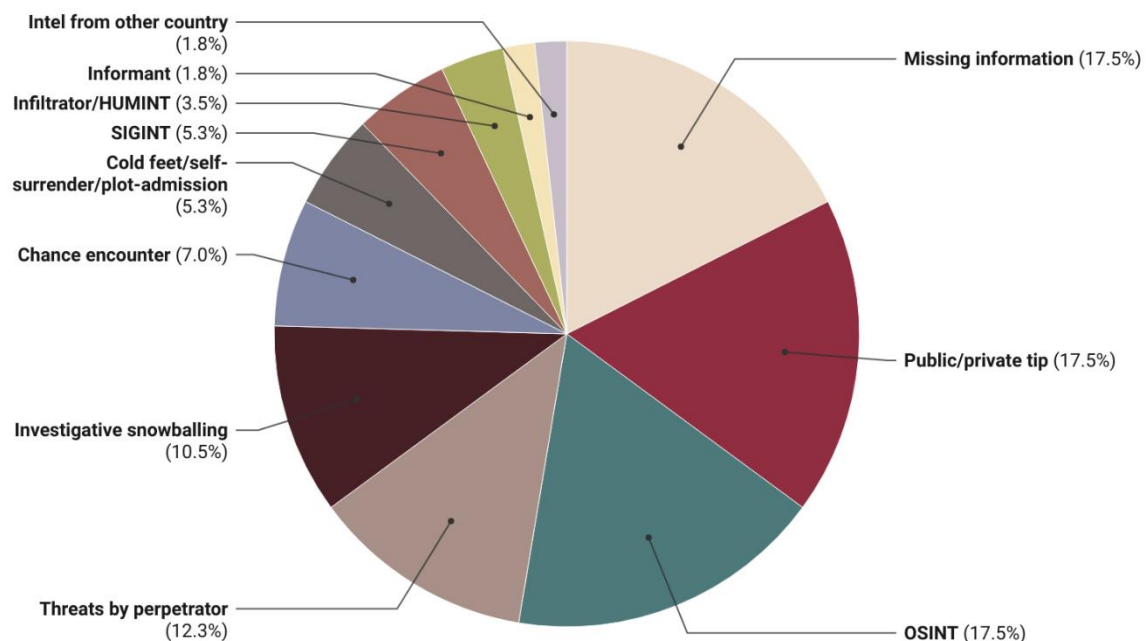
These tentative findings stand in contrast to similar research on terrorist plots in the United States (1987-2010) in which human intelligence (HUMINT), i.e., infiltrators and informants, detected 60% of all domestic plots.[22] One reason may be that the majority (72%) of the plots analysed in this study were inspired by radical Islamism, which in turn may have different dynamics than right-wing plots, such as more often being group- or cell-based. By comparison, lone actors were behind most right-wing plots, as Figure 22 shows. However, note that in 2021, more than half of our recorded right-wing plots were group-based, contrasting previous years (except 2015).
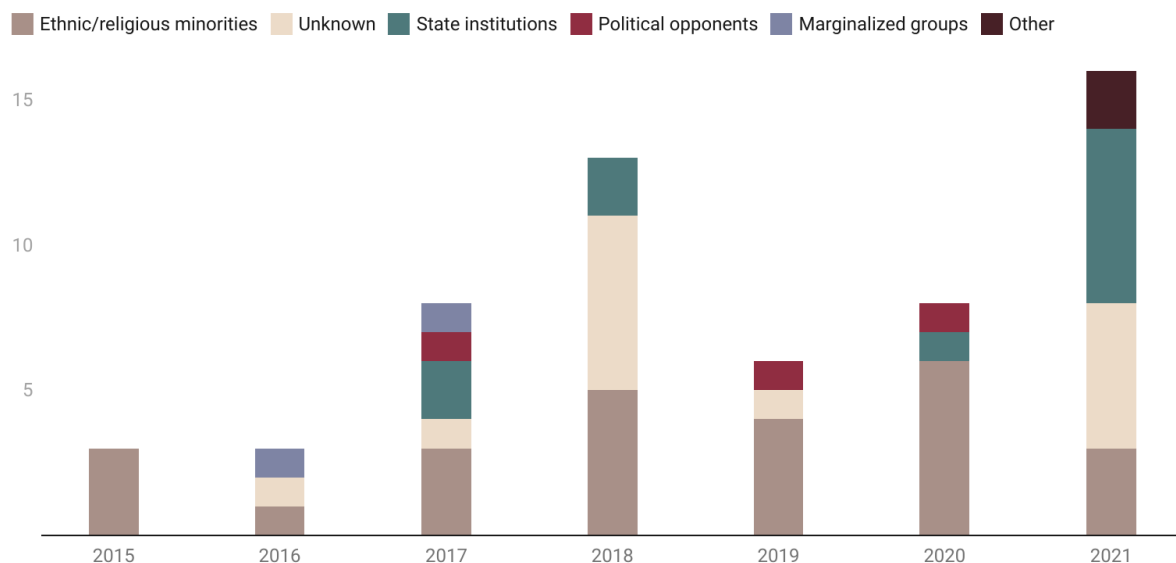
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[22] Dahl, Erik J. "The Plots That Failed: Intelligence Lessons Learned from Unsuccessful Terrorist Attacks Against the United States." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34, no. 8 (2011): 621-48.

Figure 22: Perpetrators of plots in Western Europe, 2015-2021
n=57

Lone actor ■ Organized groups ■ Coordinated entities ■ Autonomous cells
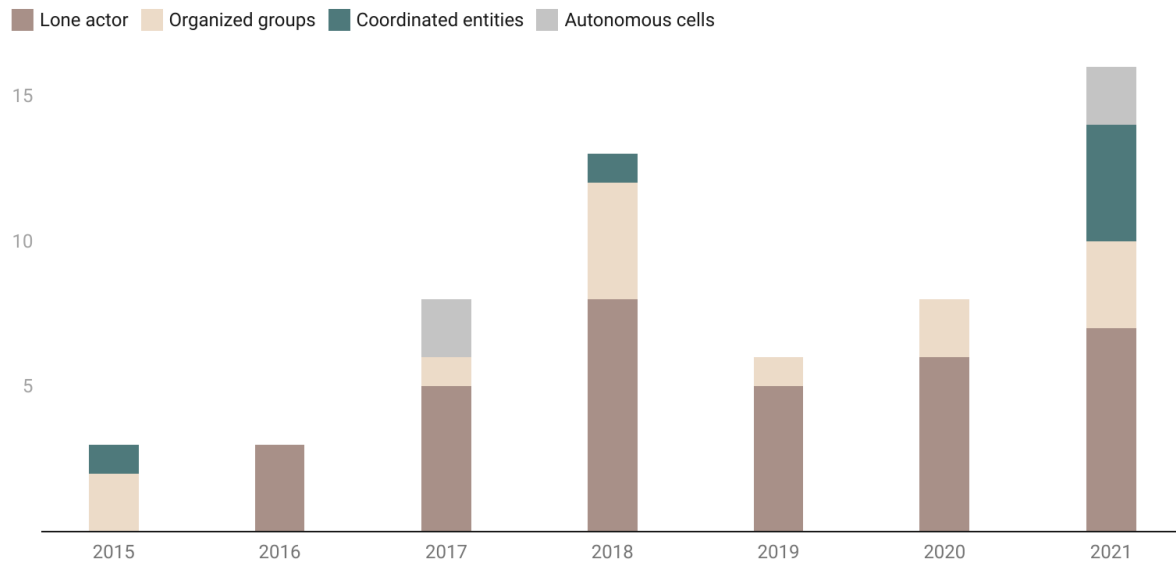
Turning to target groups, Figure 23 shows that in 2021, state institutions, for the first time, replaced ethnic and religious minorities as the most prominent target group in right-wing terrorist plots. In 2021 alone, we recorded six plots targeting state institutions, five against governments and one against the police. Out of the five plots targeting governments, three were COVID-19 related. For example, in Germany, five men and a woman aged between 32 and 64 were arrested in the investigation a group consisting of right-wing extremists and opponents of the COVID-19 measures. They plotted to kill Saxony's Prime Minister Michael Kretschmer (CDU). The planning was conducted via Telegram and some of the participants of a chat-group called 'Dresden Offlinevernetzung' also met in a Dresden park, discussing among other things the murder plot.

Figure 23: Target groups in plots in Western Europe, 2015-2021
n=57

Ethnic/religious minorities ■ Unknown ■ State institutions ■ Political opponents ■ Marginalized groups ■ Other

Similarly, in Belgium, a 46-year-old Belgian soldier was found dead of an apparent suicide after a manhunt for him had taken place over several days. He went into hiding after stealing an arsenal of deadly weapons from a military barracks, including a rocket launcher, a machine gun, and several grenades. Around 350 policemen and soldiers were involved in the search of the man, who was already being monitored by intelligence agencies because of his extreme-right views. Before he went missing, he left a note for his girlfriend which indicated that he 'planned to join the resistance and may not survive.' In the letter were also several threats against Belgium's top virologist, the person advising the government to lock down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, if we look at the distribution of plots between countries, Figure 24 shows that between 2015 and 2021, the UK, Germany and France stand out in terms of the absolute number of detected plots. Furthermore, if we look at the plot-to-attack ratio for fatal attacks, we see that this ratio is considerably higher in France (5.0) and the UK (4.2) than in Germany (2.2) as Germany has experienced more fatal attacks during the same period.

Figure 24: Plot-to-attack ratio by country, 2015-2021
n=74
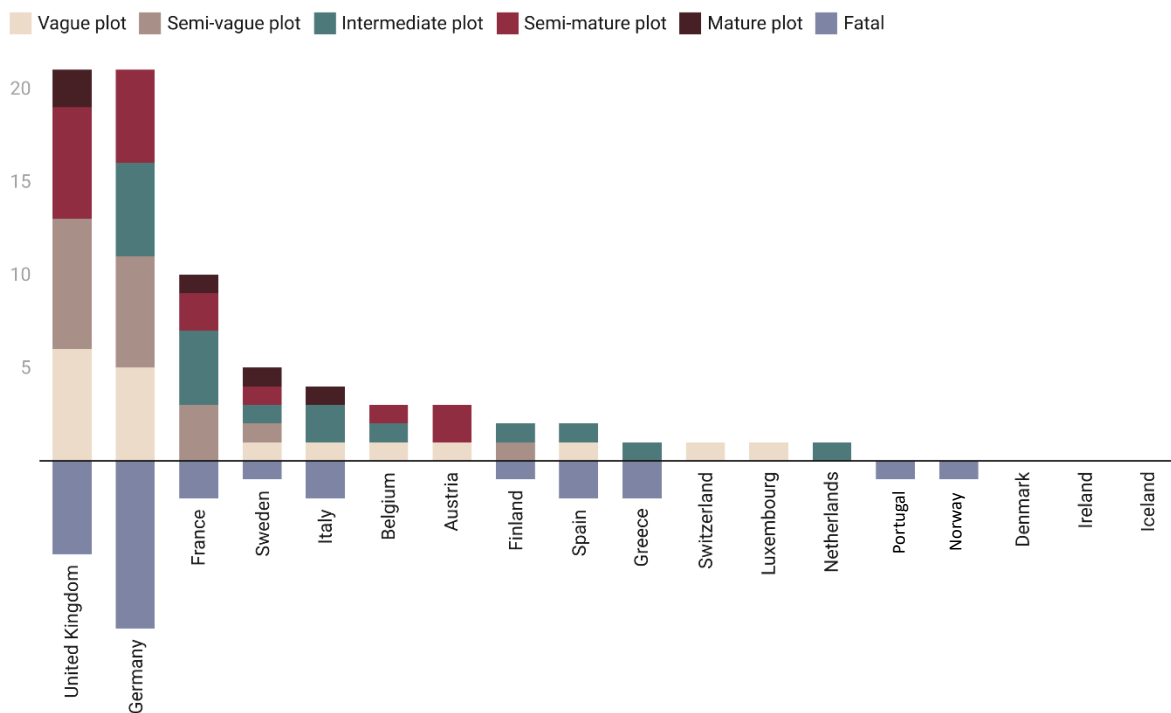
This finding has two possible interpretations. The first is that France and the UK have been more successful in detecting plots that otherwise would have materialised into fatal attacks, and therefore arrived at a lower ratio. The second interpretation is that Germany is facing a bigger threat and that the number of detected plots per country may not only reflect variation in terrorist activity but also in government attention towards this threat, thereby impacting on the number of detected plots. The fact that a considerable share of detected plots is coded as either vague or semi-vague would support this latter interpretation. As such, it is interesting to note that if we exclude vague and semi-vague plots, the plot-to attack ratio changes considerable for the UK (from 4.2 to 1.6), less so for France (from 5.0 to 3.5), while the ratio approaches one-to-one in Germany (1.1).

That the ratio changes less for France is partly a result of the low number of fatal attacks (n=2) but also its relatively high number of terrorist plots coded as intermediate, semi-mature, or

mature (n=7). For example, in Verdun, six people aged 22 to 62 were arrested and four charged for plotting an attack against the French President during a World War I remembrance ceremony. One of the suspects admitted during interrogations to plot to stab Macron with a ceramic knife to be smuggled through the security check (this was one of few plots coded as 'mature'). The knife was found in the trunk of the suspect's car. In another French plot, six members of the far-right militant group 'Honneur et nation' were arrested for plotting to bomb a Masonic lodge. The group did reconnaissance at the lodge and consulted online websites on bomb-making.

To conclude, terrorist plots are highly relevant when assessing terrorist threats. At the same time, our review of right-wing plots in Western Europe between 2015 and 2021 shows that many plots were quite vague and typically involved lone actors rather than organised groups. This might in turn explain why traditional intelligence measures such as infiltration, the use of informants and surveillance have proven less relevant in detecting these types of plots. Yet it is noteworthy that (1) the share of group-based plots was considerable in 2021, (2) that many of these group-based plots targeted governments, and (3) that they were in part driven by COVID-19-related grievances. This could suggest that a new type of group-based anti-government threat is emerging in Western Europe.

Conclusion

This year's update of the RTV dataset has been unique because we have, for the first time, been able to analyse trends not only in fatal attacks since 1990, but also in non-fatal attacks since 2015.

What have we learned from all this new data?

Arguably, the most important lesson learned is that the most significant threat of violence from the far right does not come from lone actors attempting to carry out mass-causality attacks, but rather from unorganised or loosely organised groups engaging in spontaneous attacks targeting ethic and religions minorities. Such 'everyday violence' is easily ignored by the media and policymakers when more spectacular terrorist attacks occur from time to time. However, as this year's trend report shows, lower-scale, but still severe, right-wing violence is probably causing more fear and intimidation among vulnerable target groups in Western Europe than mass-causality terrorist attacks are, considering their rarity in this region.

A second lesson learned is that we should be careful about exaggerating threats when, in fact, levels of violence are on the decrease. Such exaggerations may also cause unnecessary fear amongst vulnerable target groups. As we have learned through this year's update, 2021 was the third least deadly year since 1990 in terms of fatal attacks, the second least deadly year in terms of fatalities, and among the three least violent years since 2015 when counting all completed attacks, fatal and non-fatal.

That said, the cases described in this trend report, which is only a small selection of the 131 severe violent attacks recorded across Western Europe in 2021, testify to the fact that right-wing terrorism and violence still poses a challenge in this region. As the perhaps only region in the world exclusively composed of aspiring *liberal* democracies, it is a problem that people are being physically attacked simply because of the colour of their skin, their religion, their sexual orientation, their political preferences, or because they represent 'the government'. All but three (Iceland, Ireland and the Netherlands) out of the 18 countries included in our dataset experienced at least one severe attack or attack plot whose target selection was determined by right-wing beliefs in 2021. In other words, although some countries are facing a bigger threat than others, right-wing terrorism and violence poses a challenge that most West European countries will have to deal with in the foreseeable future.
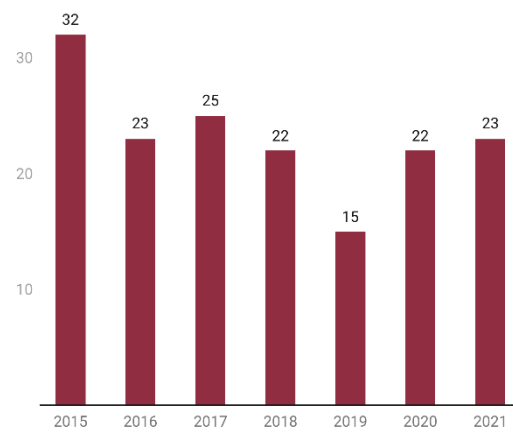
Meanwhile, for our next update, we will continue to document the most severe attacks and plots occurring in Western Europe in 2022. We will also continue our extensive backlogging exercise with the aim of stretching the coverage of non-fatal events back to 2010. We are also working on expanding the RTV dataset into other regions, including parts of Central and Eastern Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and perhaps even Latin America. Should you be interested in contributing to this work, please contact the RTV Steering Group.

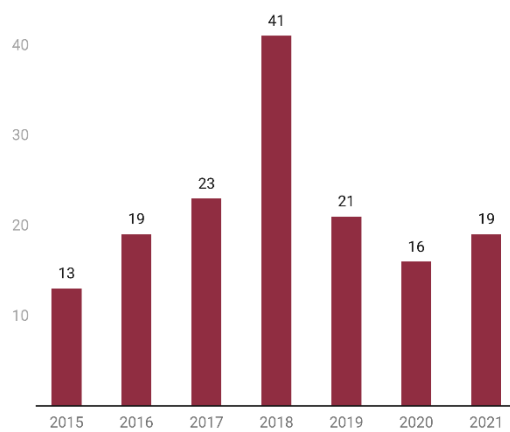# Appendix 1: Distribution of completed attacks (absolute numbers) per country, 2015-2021
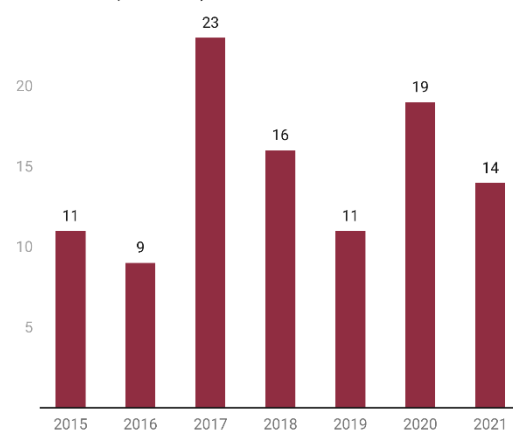
Germany (n=424)

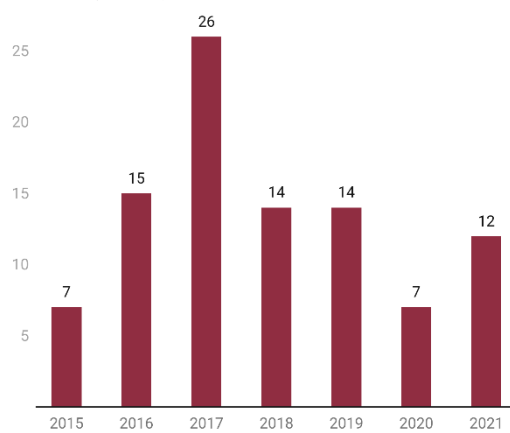| Year	Value
2015	90
2016	125
2017	47
2018	57
2019	31
2020	35
2021	39

UK (n=162)

Year	Value
2015	32
2016	23
2017	25
2018	22
2019	15
2020	22
2021	23

Italy (n=152)

Year	Value
2015	13
2016	19
2017	23
2018	41
2019	21
2020	16
2021	19

Greece (n=103)

Year	Value
2015	11
2016	9
2017	23
2018	16
2019	11
2020	19
2021	14

Spain (n=95)

Year	Value
2015	7
2016	15
2017	26
2018	14
2019	14
2020	7
2021	12

France (n=54)

Year	Value
2015	7
2016	3
2017	9
2018	11
2019	5
2020	8
2021	11
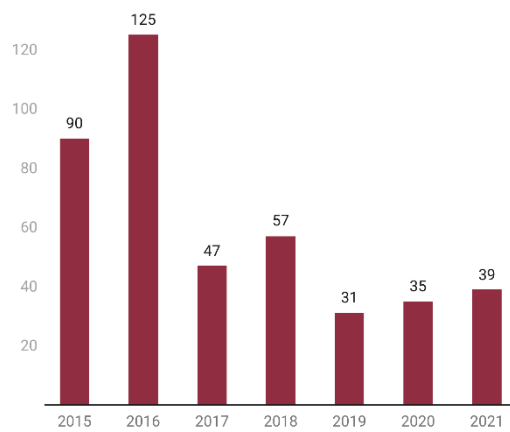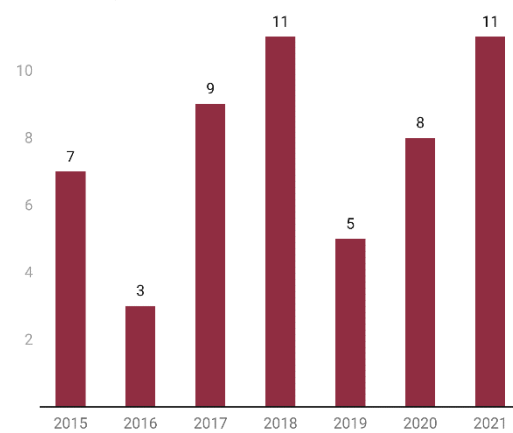
Sweden (n=33)
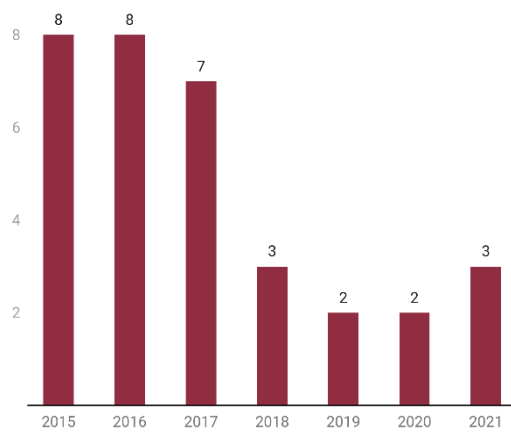
Norway (n=15)
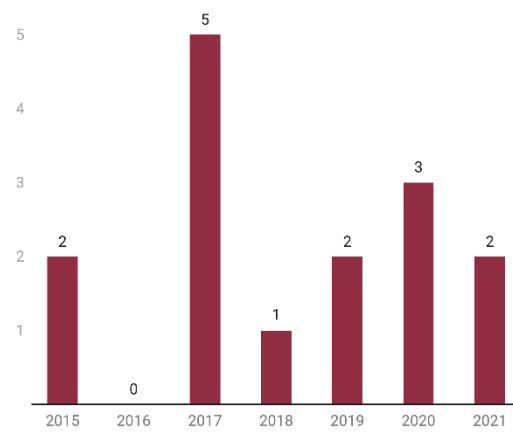
Finland (n=13)
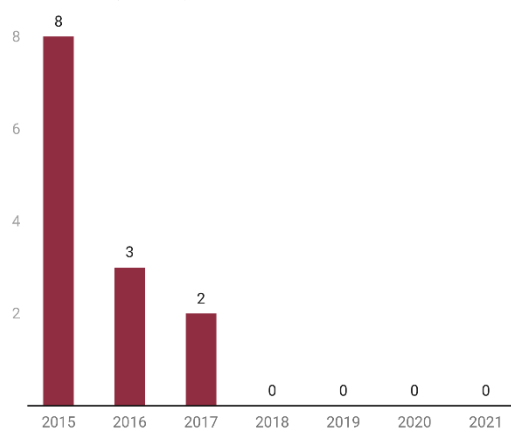
Belgium (n=12)
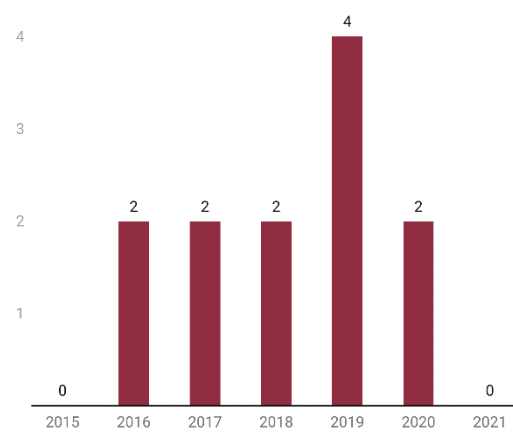
Austria (n=11)

Portugal (n=10)

Denmark (n=8)

Ireland (n=8)

Switzerland (n=5)

Netherlands (n=4)

Luxembourg (n=1)

Iceland (n=0)