

RTV Methodology

Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990-2023

Supplementary material



Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX)

University of Oslo

February 2025

Suggested citation: Ravndal, J.A., Tandberg, C., Thorstensen, M., & Jupskås, A.R. (2025). *RTV Methodology*. Oslo: Center for Research on Extremism.

For data enquiries: post@c-rex.uio.no

About this document

The Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset documents right-wing terrorism and violence in 19 West-European countries since 1990. The main purpose of the dataset is to offer a systematic overview of the most severe types of completed attacks, attack plots, and preparations for armed struggle, whose target selection is premised on far-right beliefs. The dataset was first released in 2016 and has since 2018 been updated annually at the Center for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo.

Over the years, the RTV dataset has undergone several revisions and methodological enhancements. This document serves to describe the current methods employed for data collection and to provide an overview of the revisions and improvements implemented since the dataset's inception. The RTV Methodology should be read in conjunction with the [RTV Codebook](#) and [RTV Error Profile](#).

The document is structured in four parts. First, it outlines the evolution of the dataset's data collection methods. Second, it details the efforts made to apply the updated data collection methods retroactively from 2010 to 2018 and the backlogging process' final outcomes. Third, it elaborates on the changes made to the dataset over the last years, including the introduction of new variables and improved coding practices, and the implications of these changes for the dataset's analytical capabilities. Finally, it presents an overview of the Excluded Cases dataset, explaining the criteria for exclusion and the methodology for reviewing candidate events.

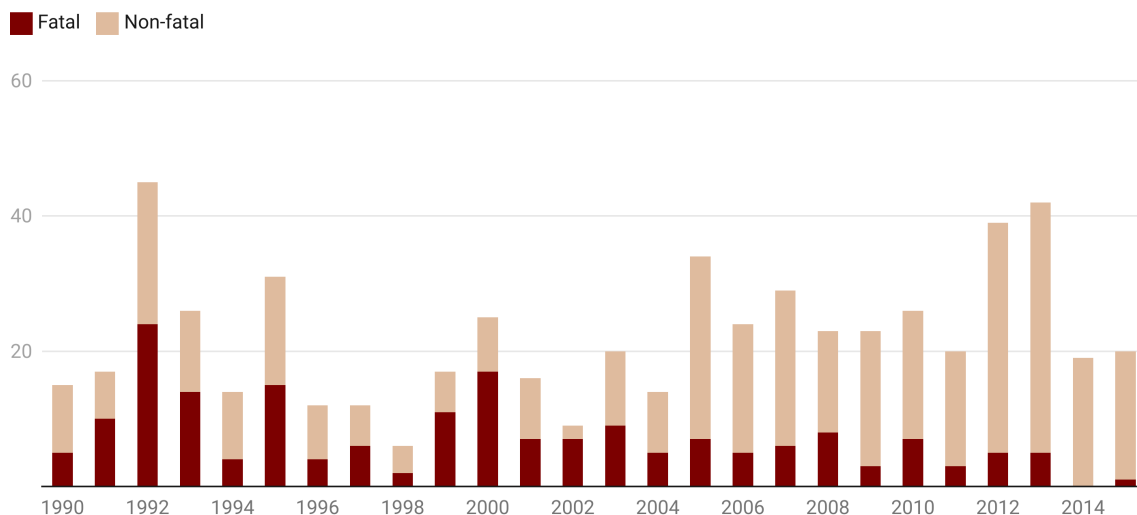
Data collection methods

Originally, the RTV dataset covered 18 West European countries in the 1990-2015 period. Events to be included were identified and registered by one person alone, and the aim was to cover all fatal and as many non-fatal attacks as possible according to two inclusion criteria: motive and severity. According to the first, the *target selection* had to be based on far-right beliefs. Second, the perpetrator(s) had to be determined or willing to inflict deadly or physically disabling injuries on the victim(s).

Information from a wide range of different openly available sources was used, including online newspaper articles, activist interviews and autobiographies, event chronologies and datasets, personal communication with experts, anti-fascists blogs and bulletins, court documents, online videos, and secondary literature.

This method rested on the assumption that, considering the severity and history of political and racist murders, fatal events rarely go unnoticed. As such, the developer believed that all, or at least a representative sample of, far-right fatal attacks would be reported, ensuring sufficient representativity across time and space. Users of the dataset were therefore advised to only use fatal attacks when comparing attack frequencies or making causal inferences. The original dataset comprised a total of 578 events, including 190 fatal attacks. Figure 1 depicts the number of events per year included in the original version of the RTV dataset, 1990-2015.

Figure 1: *Yearly far-right attacks in the original version of the RTV dataset (n=578)*



Current collection methods

The shift in methodology was a gradual process. After the RTV dataset was first released in 2016, a team of research assistants were employed at C-REX to contribute to further data collection in the annual updates. In 2018, an [International Network of National Experts](#) was established, and in 2019, a member of the [RTV Steering Group](#) began developing Boolean searches to be used in major media archives.

From 2019 onward, the RTV methodology is structured around a three-step procedure. In the first step, Boolean search strings tailored to the language and media reporting culture of each country are employed to capture relevant news articles. These search strings utilise operators such as AND and OR to combine multiple keywords, typically consisting of approximately 200 terms for each country. Our tests indicate that these Boolean searches successfully capture just over 80% of the events identified by previous methods, while also uncovering a substantial number of new events.

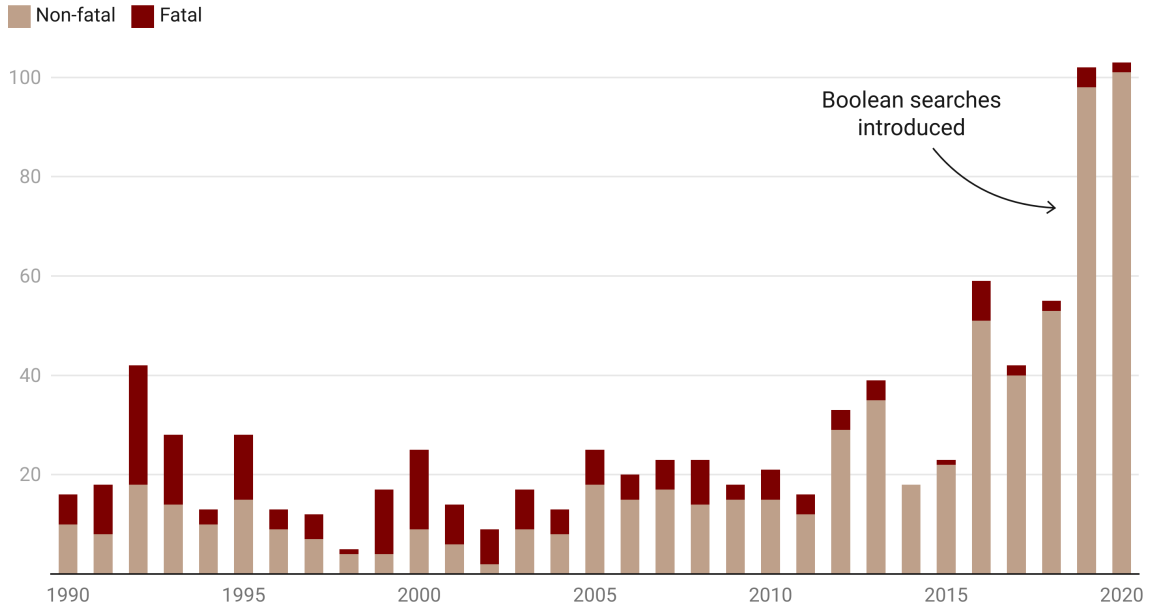
The search strings are primarily used in media databases such as Factiva and Retriever, with some application in Nexis Uni, covering nearly all countries included in the RTV dataset. During this initial step, RTV research assistants manually review the search results and candidate events. They then gather additional information about each event and proceed to code it. Depending on the size of the country, the Boolean search results for a single year can yield anywhere from around 500 news articles for smaller countries like Switzerland to as many as 8,000 for larger countries like Germany. Each identified event undergoes a thorough review by the RTV team to ensure it aligns with the criteria for a right-wing motive and falls within the RTV severity threshold (for more details, see the [RTV Codebook](#)).

In step two, the research assistants manually browse an extensive list of non-newspaper online sources known to report on relevant events for each country. This step is similar to the previous one-person manual review procedure. This is particularly important in countries where we either have low coverage in the news media databases (i.e., Iceland and Finland), where news media underreports relevant events (i.e., Greece), or where media language culture leads to less successful search results (i.e., Italy). Relevant events not discovered in step one are then coded into the dataset.

Finally, in step three, the RTV team collectively reviews all candidate events to be included in the update to make sure that they satisfy the two inclusion criteria. To resolve difficult cases, we consult our extensive network of national experts. In this process of discussing and consulting cases, excluded cases are saved in an RTV Excluded Cases dataset, which tends to include far more cases than those included in the final and published version of the RTV dataset. The entire process is each year supervised by the person who initially developed the dataset.

The change in methodology implemented in 2019 resulted in the 2020 RTV version incorporating two distinct data collection methods: the original approach from 1990-2018 and the new Boolean search methodology introduced in 2019. This last advancement significantly expanded our coverage of relevant non-fatal events, leading to a notable increase not only in the number of online sources searched but also in the number of documented attacks. Therefore, it is important to note that what initially appears to be a spike in the number of attacks in Figure 2, is first and foremost driven by improved data collection methods and thus represents a form for data collection bias.

Figure 2: *Yearly far-right attacks recorded in the 2020 version of the RTV dataset*

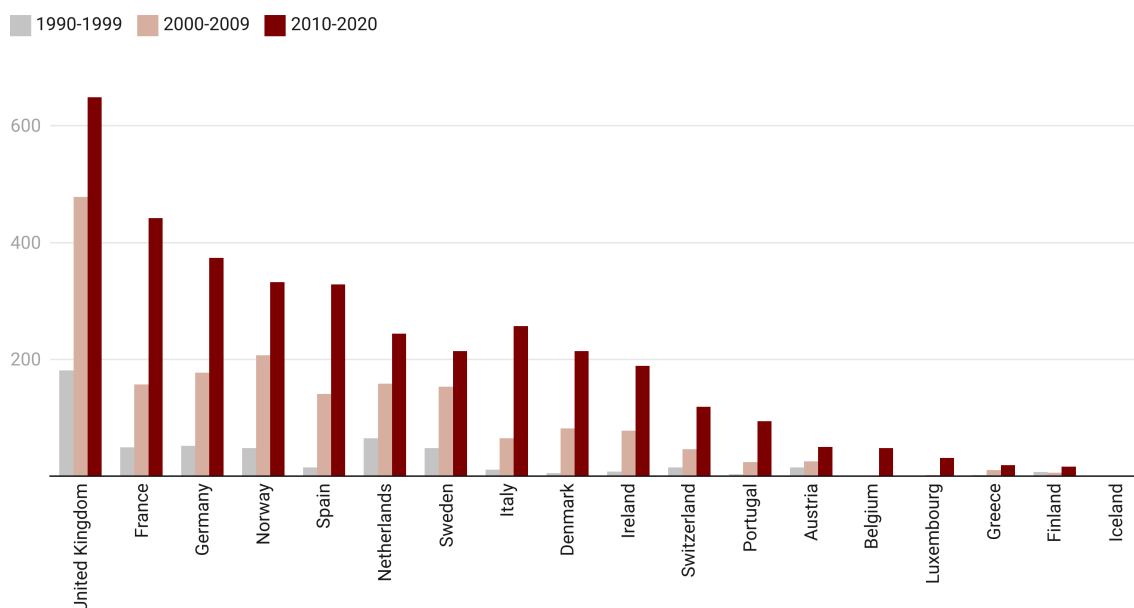


To address this issue, we decided to amend and revise the entire dataset while implementing a major backlog process that applied our new methodology retroactively. This was conducted in parallel with ongoing updates for subsequent years using the same three-step procedure.

Backlogging process

Substantial efforts were invested between 2021 and 2024 to apply the three-step procedure outlined above backward in time to the period between 2010-2018. The reason for not employing the new methods further back in time than 2010 is limitations in source availability and therefore also representativity. Prior to the backlogging, members of the RTV Steering Group scrutinised the availability of online newspaper sources in Factiva and Retriever, and underwent both a qualitative and quantitative review of the sources available from 1990-2020.

Figure 3: *News media source availability by country, 1990-2020*

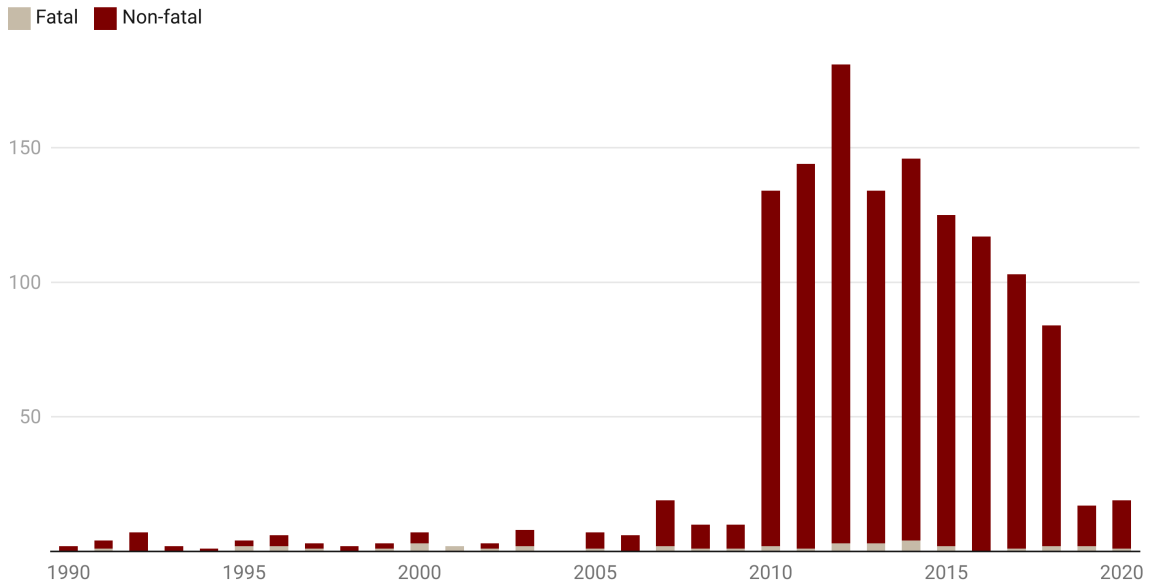


In terms of quality, we should preferably have access to major national newspapers, a left-wing paper, and regional papers for all major countries in the news databases. In terms of quantity, the number of newspapers accessible should be adequate in relation to population size. For the period 2010-2020, both the quality and quantity

of available sources were considered sufficient to continue the dedicated effort extending the Boolean searches back in time. However, as illustrated in Figure 3, the availability of sources drops considerably for most countries prior to 2010, indicating that systematic event coverage between countries for the periods of 1990-1999 and 2000-2009 with Boolean searches may not be feasible.

The backlogging process from 2010 onwards was finalised in 2024, resulting in as many as 1310 new RTV events added to the dataset, 89% of which comprised events in the 2010-2018 period. However, we also decided to include 142 events identified for previous or later years, as is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: *Number of new RTV events identified from the backlog process*

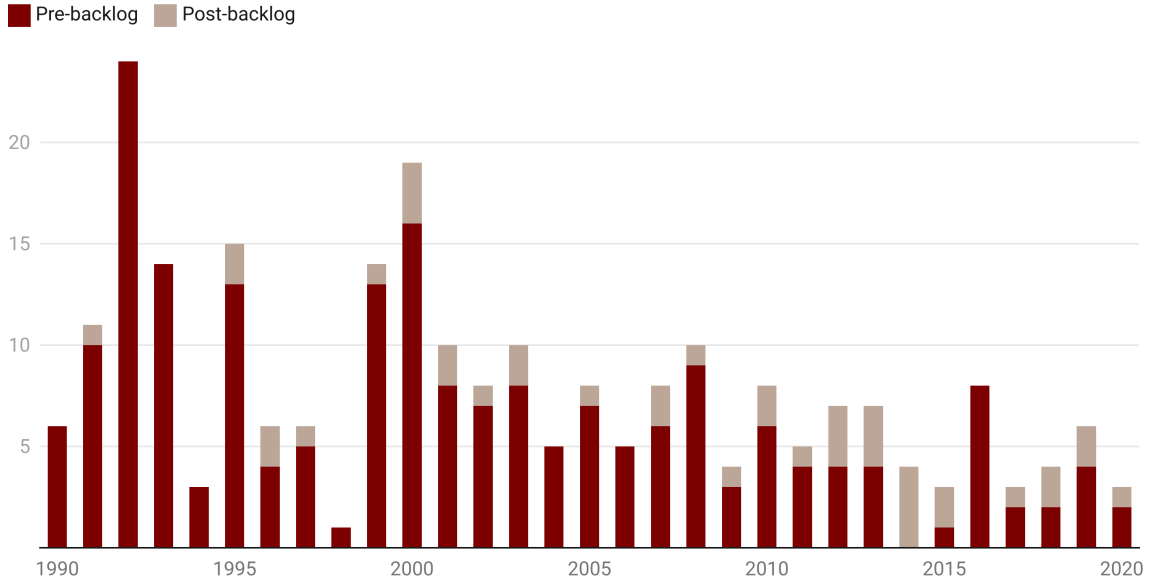


In sum, the 1310 new events comprise 392 premeditated attacks, 866 spontaneous attacks, 26 attack plots, and 26 discoveries of major arms repositories. The number of new events added varied considerably between countries, ranging from 514 in Germany, 225 in the UK, 143 in Greece, and 129 in Italy, to six in the Netherlands, five in Portugal, and 1 in Luxembourg.

For the 2010-2018 period, we were able to identify eight previously missed fatal events. For the entire period, a total of 41 new fatal attacks were identified. As illustrated in Figure 5, this addition did not alter previously claimed trends or inferences made about fatal attacks in any substantial way, and was not scewed

towards certain periods nor places. This confirms our initial assumption that the RTV dataset’s coverage of fatal events is close to representing the entire universe of fatal RTV events.

Figure 5: *Total number of fatal attacks pre- and post-backlog, 1990-2020*



Finally, in addition to the new events added, hundreds of candidate events were reviewed and excluded, ending up in our Excluded Cases dataset discussed further below.

Major amendments

The initiative to amend the existing dataset was prompted by the introduction of a new perpetrator type, “coordinated entities,” in 2020. This necessitated a review of all existing events dating back to 1990 to ensure alignment with this new classification. During this review, we recognised the need for a systematic evaluation of all cases and coding to enhance data consistency and intercoder reliability. Given this requirement, we also opted to expand our list of weapon types and target groups to facilitate more detailed analyses, as well as incorporate geospatial variables such as latitude and longitude coordinates.

Consequently, between 2020 and 2024, all existing events and variables from 1990 to

2022 were reviewed and revised by members of the RTV Steering Group. Extensive efforts were made to trace outdated sources, update event descriptions, evaluate inclusion criteria, and refine coding practices in line with current standards. Additionally, each event was recoded to reflect a range of new variables and values.

During this process, over a hundred cases were removed, and thousands of changes were implemented for the remaining events. The majority of these changes pertained to weapon types and target groups aligning with the new categorisations, perpetrator types, and sources.

Significant efforts were also devoted to providing more comprehensive qualitative descriptions of all events, as the complete dataset (excluding sources) was made publicly available in 2022. By including longer descriptions, it becomes easier to identify relevant events for specific research purposes. For instance, indications that the perpetrator(s) were inspired by others or that the same perpetrator(s) were involved in multiple attacks are now mentioned in the descriptions, along with references to these incidents.

New variable values included the introduction of five new target groups: (1) persons in interracial relationships, (2) political representatives, (3) women, (4) randomly targeted civilians, and (5) international organisations. Additionally, 21 new weapon types were specified, encompassing various blunt instruments (e.g., baseball bats, brass knuckles) and sharp objects (e.g., machetes, broken glass).

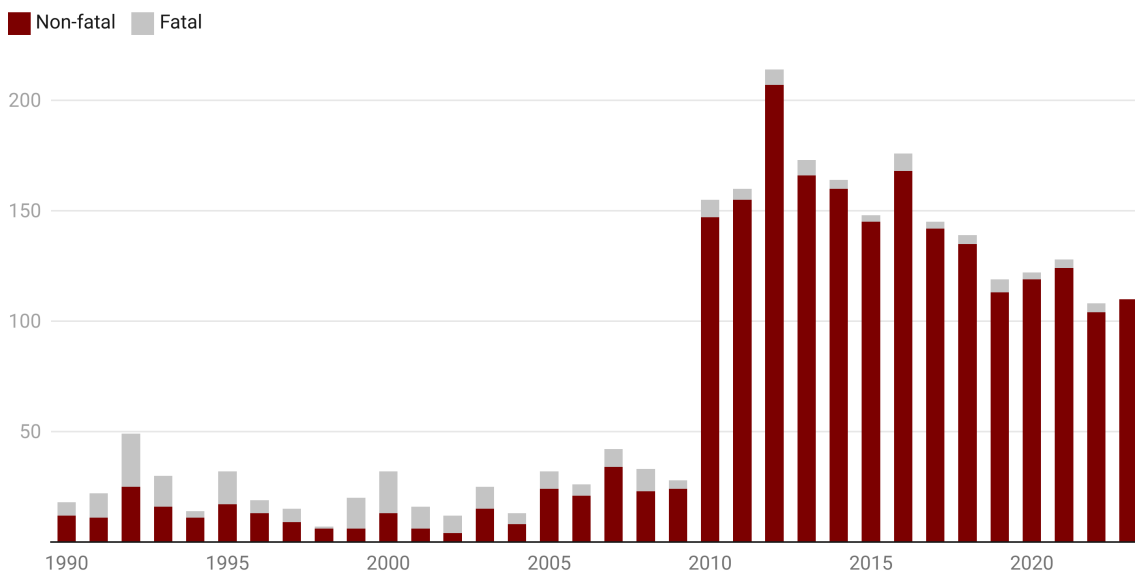
The dataset was further refined to establish a clearer hierarchy among known and suspected organised far-right groups, thereby improving analytical clarity. Furthermore, geographic coordinates were added for all fatal events recorded between 1990 and 2023 and for all non-fatal attacks occurring from 2010 to 2023. All sources were also stored as perma links to ensure that information is not lost over time. Finally, we decided to incorporate a new country in our list - Malta.

To summarise, following major revisions and backlogging, the 2024-version of the RTV dataset includes a total of 2546 events, covering 19 West European countries in the 1990-2023 period. We still strongly advise users of the RTV dataset to only use fatal events when comparing levels of violence across time or between countries prior to 2010. 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 2023.

However, because of the technological and methodological advances addressed in this document, we believe we are now approaching sufficient coverage for making inferences also about severe non-fatal events from 2010 onwards. This assumption is supported by correlations between fatal and non-fatal events recorded after 2010. For more information about inherent biases in the RTV dataset that may lead to measurement error, please consult our [RTV Error Profile](#). Figure 6 illustrates the total number of included events in the current version of the RTV dataset, 1990-2023.

Figure 6: *Total number of included events by year, 1990-2023 (n=2546)*



Excluded cases

As the data collection process requires making subjective decisions on which events to include and exclude, we have created an Excluded Cases dataset. The dataset contains events that have been collectively reviewed by the RTV team, but which eventually failed to satisfy one or more inclusion criteria due to either lack of information or uncertainty regarding motive or severity. Keeping these events stored in a separate dataset enables us to return and revise events at a later point in time

when for instance a police investigation is complete or when new information is available, clarifying previous uncertainties. As the systematic recording of excluded cases only began in 2020, this dataset can not be regarded as an exhaustive list of all potentially relevant events.

There are currently more than 2000 excluded events in this dataset, categorised by reason for exclusion. Events are excluded based on motive if the motive is unclear, contested, or if there are multiple motives competing, making it challenging to determine the reason for target selection. An example of this is relational bonds linking the perpetrator and victim, such as in-laws, neighbourhood conflicts, or histories of bullying. Attack plots and weapon discoveries are excluded if they cannot plausibly be linked to any far-right sympathies, beliefs, or organisations, or if the plot is not directed towards a target group common to the far-right. Similarly, weapon discoveries are excluded if the perpetrator is assumed to be a weapon collector rather than preparing for armed struggles with far-right motives. If we lack explicit evidence of the perpetrator’s motive, the event can still be included if the far-right rationale for target selection was the *most plausible* of all potential motives.

Excluded cases based on severity include events where 1) the severity is too low, or 2) we lack information about the severity. Due to the large number of violent events motivated by right-wing beliefs, the RTV dataset only includes the most severe physical attacks, attack plots and armed struggle preparations. Therefore, intimidating or degrading acts such as verbal abuse, threats (online or otherwise), spitting, pushing, non-physically injuring beatings, vandalism, and material damage to empty buildings are excluded. While such acts of course cause other harms to the victims, these events are too difficult to systematically collect across time and place. Smaller discoveries of easily accessible legal weapons, are also excluded.

Another common determinant of excluded events is lack of information on contextual aspects to the case. This includes uncertainty regarding the sequence of events leading up to the violence, previous relations, or other suspected personal motives. Insufficient information about the perpetrator can also sometimes lead to case exclusion, for instance when we have information that a homophobic or anti-Semitic assault took place – without knowing whether the attack was motivated by right-wing extremism, radical Islamism, Christian fundamentalism, or something

else. Lastly, the dataset excludes cases of proportional self-defense and instances of violence — often linked to protests or demonstrations — where the initial aggressor cannot be clearly identified, provided the violence remains proportional.