

Explaining right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Grievances, opportunities, and polarization

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Abstract

Why have some Western liberal democracies experienced more right-wing terrorism and violence (RTV) than others? This question remains largely unanswered in existing research on the extreme right because (1) events data suitable for cross-national comparisons have been lacking, and (2) existing analyses fail to capture RTV's causal complexity, which involve multiple causal paths (equifinality) comprising causal conditions that become sufficient for the outcome only in combination (conjunctural causation). To help fill these gaps, this paper uses new events data from the RTV dataset in a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) research design, aiming to explain variation in the extent of RTV in 18 West European countries between 1990 and 2015. In doing so, the paper identifies two "causal recipes" that consistently distinguish countries with extensive RTV experience from those with low or moderate RTV experience. The first (North European) recipe involves the combination of high immigration, low electoral support for anti-immigration (radical right) parties, and extensive public repression of radical right actors and opinions. The second (South European) recipe involves the combination of socio-economic hardship, authoritarian legacies, and extensive left-wing terrorism and militancy. Notably, both recipes contain elements of "grievances" and "opportunities", suggesting that these two theories, which are conventionally seen as contrasting, may be more fruitfully seen as complementary. Furthermore, a highly polarized conflict between far right activists and their enemies represents a third necessary condition for extensive RTV to occur. A key to combating violent extremism on the far right therefore lies in disrupting rather than accelerating such polarization mechanisms, suggesting that openness and dialogue might work better than public repression, stigmatization, or aggressive confrontation.

Introduction

Since the end of WWII, the threat posed by right-wing terrorism and violence (RTV) has varied considerably over time and across countries in Western Europe. Existing research shows that RTV comes in waves, and scholars seem to agree that the most recent wave began around the late 1980s and ended during the early 2000s in most countries (Bjørngo, 1997, pp. 74–75; Koopmans, 1996; Merkl, 1995). Thus, following a relatively peaceful period, several experts

are now warning that a new outbreak of RTV might be brewing in Western Europe (Bartlett & Birdwell, 2011; Fekete, 2016; Ramalingam, 2014). These concerns have in turn been intensified by the ongoing migration crisis, by a prolonged financial crisis, by rising Islamist terrorism, and by growing support for radical right parties. However, because our knowledge about RTV's underlying causes remains limited, and because we lack updated events data, it is difficult to assess the credibility of such warnings, and to identify the most relevant countermeasures for dealing with this allegedly emergent threat.

To help fill these gaps, this paper uses new events data from the RTV dataset (Ravndal, 2016) to investigate why some West European countries have experienced more RTV than others between 1990 and 2015.¹ This question remains largely unanswered in existing research on the extreme right (Mudde, 2004, pp. 205–208). Although several scholars have looked into RTV's underlying causes (e.g. Bjørge, 1997; Hoffman, 1982; Koopmans, 1996; Sprinzak, 1995), their diverse propositions have yet to be investigated systematically across more than a handful of cases. In other words, we have been presented with a number of plausible hypotheses, but little systematic evidence has been offered to disprove or support them.

Furthermore, in those few instances where scholars have been able to generate systematic events data, they tend to investigate the isolated effects of only one or two independent variables, such as unemployment (Falk et al., 2011), immigration (Garcia, 2015), or at best the interaction between the economy and immigration (McLaren, 1999). Yet there are reasons to believe that more complex explanatory models are required to explain consistently why RTV has been more extensive in some countries than in others. For example, grievances caused by high immigration may be relevant for explaining why countries such as Sweden and Germany have experienced extensive RTV. At the same time, immigration has (until the recent migration crisis) been limited in countries such as Italy and Spain where RTV has nevertheless been extensive, indicating equifinality (multiple causal paths to the same outcome). Furthermore, high immigration alone does not necessarily lead to extensive RTV, as illustrated by cases such as Switzerland and France, unless it is combined with other conditions, indicating conjunctural causation (conditions that only in combination become necessary or sufficient for an outcome).

To resolve some of these problems, this paper applies qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) – a method designed precisely to capture causal complexity such as equifinality and

¹ By Western Europe, I mean all European countries that did not form part of the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War.

conjunctural causation (Ragin, 2014, pp. 19–33; Schneider & Wagemann, 2013, pp. 78–79). More specifically, I use QCA to investigate how six causal conditions proposed as being conducive to RTV in existing research (immigration, socio-economic hardship, authoritarian legacies, radical right support, radical right repression, and left-wing terrorism and militancy) relate to the extent of RTV in 18 West European countries between 1990 and 2015. This analysis results in two “causal recipes”, each containing three causal conditions, the combination of which appears to fuel hostility, polarization, and violence.² The first (North European) recipe involves the combination of high immigration, low electoral support for anti-immigration (radical right) parties, and extensive public repression of radical right actors and opinions. The second (South European) recipe involves the combination of socio-economic hardship, authoritarian legacies, and extensive left-wing terrorism and militancy. Notably, both recipes contain elements of grievances and opportunities, suggesting that these two theoretical approaches, which are conventionally seen as contrasting (Koopmans, 1996), may be more fruitfully seen as complementary (Bara, 2014). In addition, a highly polarized conflict between far right activists and their enemies represents a third necessary condition for extensive RTV to occur.

Conceptually, I follow Bobbio’s (1996) classic distinction between those on the left who support egalitarian policies designed to reduce social inequality, and those on the right who regard social inequality – or hierarchical order – as inevitable, natural, or even desirable. Furthermore, unlike their moderate counterparts, members of the *far* right share an authoritarian inclination (Bobbio, 1996, pp. 72–80), that is, an inherent need for sameness, oneness, and submission to group authority, resulting in intolerance towards diversity and individual autonomy (Stenner, 2005), and some form of nativism or ethnic nationalism (Mudde, 2007, pp. 15–23). I also distinguish between on the one hand radical right actors who use conventional democratic means to gain political power, and on the other hand militants or extremists, who openly reject democracy and favour violent or other non-conventional means to generate revolutionary change. Finally, I use the far right as a collective term comprising both radical and extreme actors when appropriate.

² I have also experimented with statistical analysis using the number of deadly RTV events per country-year (N=450) as my dependent variable. Although several statistically significant relationships were discovered, different statistical models (the most relevant being a negative binominal count model) yielded different findings, most likely reflecting the causal complexity underlying the phenomenon under investigation (RTV), but also limited variation in the variables included in the analysis, making conventional statistical analysis less appropriate.

The paper proceeds as follows. Part one combines RTV events data with other sources to illustrate cross-national differences in the extent of RTV in 18 West European countries between 1990 and 2015. Part two draws on existing theory and literature to identify the most relevant causal conditions for explaining this cross-national variation. Part three outlines how each condition included in my analysis has been measured and scored. Part four presents the results from my QCA analysis. In conclusion, the paper draws on these results to reflect on the paradox that countermeasures intended to constrain radical right politics appear to fuel extreme right violence, while countermeasures that may constrain extreme right violence would imply an advancement of radical right politics.

RTV in post-1990 Western Europe

A critical weakness in existing research on RTV in Western Europe has been a lack of systematic events data suitable for analysing cross-national variation. By comparison, research on RTV in the United States has progressed because systematic events data have been developed (Adamczyk et al., 2014; Chermak et al., 2013; Freilich et al., 2014; Kerodal et al., 2015). To overcome this challenge, this study uses new events data from the RTV dataset.³ Including only the most severe types of events, this dataset offers a modest but fairly consistent account of RTV in Western Europe between 1990 and 2015. More specifically, the dataset includes: (1) attacks with a deadly or near deadly outcome; (2) attacks involving active use of deadly weapons such as knives, firearms, and bombs; (3) major attack plots involving use of deadly weapons; (4) discoveries of bomb-making materials or major arms depositaries belonging to right-wing activists; and (5) other violent events that undoubtedly qualify as acts of terrorism. In particular, the dataset includes (nearly) all deadly RTV events. Considering that political and racist murders rarely occur in complete isolation from less severe forms of violence, such deadly events arguably also constitute a reasonably good indicator of right-wing violence more generally. The RTV dataset can therefore be used to compare frequencies of deadly events across time and space, and to make causal inferences about RTV more generally from these patterns with reasonable confidence.

Table 1 shows that deadly RTV events cluster around four countries in particular: Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain.

³ The RTV dataset can be downloaded at: <http://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/rtv>

Table 1. RTV attack frequencies and casualties

| Country | RTV events | Deadly RTV events (number killed) | Deadly events per average million inhabitants 1990–2015 |
|-------------|------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Austria | *23 | 1 (4) | 0.1 |
| Belgium | 6 | 3 (5) | 0.3 |
| Denmark | 19 | 1 (1) | 0.2 |
| Finland | 8 | - | - |
| France | 16 | 9 (11) | 0.1 |
| Germany | 122 | 82 (104) | 1,0 |
| Greece | 55 | 6 (7) | 0.6 |
| Iceland | - | - | - |
| Ireland | 4 | 3 (4) | 0.8 |
| Italy | 99 | 5 (6) | 0.1 |
| Luxemburg | - | - | - |
| Netherlands | 10 | 3 (3) | 0.2 |
| Norway | 25 | 3 (79) | 0.7 |
| Portugal | 3 | 3 (3) | 0.3 |
| Spain | 39 | 22 (22) | 0.5 |
| Sweden | 89 | 17 (20) | 1.9 |
| Switzerland | 1 | 1 (1) | 0.1 |
| UK | 59 | 31 (33) | 0.5 |
| Sum | 578 | 190 (303) | |

* All 23 events were carried out by one person: Franz Fuchs.

Besides these four countries, Table 1 also shows that Italy and Greece appear to have experienced extensive amounts of mostly non-lethal RTV. Furthermore, a closer look at Italy and Greece's records in the RTV dataset shows that regular events reports have only been available for limited periods, and that nearly all registered events cluster within these periods. A high number of events registered during limited periods indicates that Italy and Greece have likely experienced considerably more RTV between 1990 and 2015 than those events included in the RTV dataset, and thus considerably more RTV than most other West European countries.

The RTV dataset clearly has its limitations, and inferences about cross-national variation must be drawn with caution, particularly when including non-lethal events. With that caveat in mind, it seems reasonable to argue that Sweden, Germany, the UK, and Spain have experienced considerably more RTV per capita than other West European countries (being mindful that small countries with only a few deadly events, such as Norway and Ireland, score disproportionately high on deadly events per capita). Furthermore, the high amounts of (mostly

non-lethal) RTV events attributed to Italy and Greece during limited periods suggest that these two cases may also be considered as countries with extensive RTV experience.

Evidence from alternative sources corroborates these claims. For example, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the European Network Against Racism produce regular reports on racist violence in Europe.⁴ Although these reports lack systematic and comparable events data, they offer a qualitative assessment of racist violence in all West European countries. A systematic review of these reports shows that Sweden, Germany, the UK, Spain, Greece, and Italy are all portrayed as countries with extensive racist violence, and more so than any other West European country.

Another relevant source is the Domestic Terrorism Victims (DTV) dataset (De la Calle & Sanchez-Cuenca, 2011). DTV documents victims of deadly terrorism in Western Europe 1966–2005, including events motivated by the extreme right. Isolating post-1990 events and taking population size into account, Germany, the UK, Spain, and Sweden stand out, with far more RTV victims per capita than other West European country. In addition, Greece has a higher number of victims per capita than any of the other remaining countries, while Italy does not stand out in this particular statistic.

Finally, the internationally recognized non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented racist violence in Italy and Greece (Sunderland et al., 2012; Sunderland & Ward, 2011). Although lacking comparative perspectives, these reports suggest that both Italy and Greece have been marred by unregistered racist violence over the past decades. Ideally, similar reports would be available for all West European countries. However, it is reasonable to assume that the HRW's case selection relies on the fact that Italy and Greece have experienced extensive amounts of mostly unreported violence, while most other West European countries either have better reporting mechanisms or have experienced less violence.

In sum, the evidence presented here suggests that RTV in Western Europe clusters around six countries in particular: Sweden, Germany, the UK, Spain, Italy, and Greece. In the following, I discuss how this clustering might be explained using the existing RTV literature as a point of departure.

⁴ See <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/> and <http://enar-eu.org>.

Theoretical framework

The existing RTV literature may be characterised as diverse, disorganized, and discontinuous, which is also reflected in existing reviews of it (Heitmeyer, 2003, 2005). A number of different and at times conflicting explanations of RTV have been proposed, including but not limited to immigration (Garcia, 2015), social isolation and disintegration (Heitmeyer, 1993), a search for meaning and purpose in life (Griffin, 2003), threat perceptions (Sprinzak, 1995), elite behaviour and public discourse (Koopmans, 1996), and apolitical factors such as low socio-economic status, identity formation, or criminal dispositions (Bjørger, 1997). However, few of these explanations have been tested systematically using comparative designs.

The first (and as far as I know only) attempt so far to explain cross-national variation in right-wing violence in Western Europe was published by Ruud Koopmans in 1996. In this study, Koopmans aims to test what he portrays as two contrasting theoretical models: the grievance model, which sees protest and mobilization as a result of grievances caused by increased immigration and feelings of anomie among the socially marginalized; and the opportunity model, which emphasizes the role of political institutions, elites, and parties in shaping mobilization opportunities for social movements (Koopmans, 1996). Koopmans merits recognition for having offered the first comparative cross-national study of this kind. However, his analysis leans on a rather cursory depiction of right-wing violence in only 8 of Western Europe's 18 countries. In particular, he excludes highly relevant countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece. He also compares events data from different datasets that cannot be compared because they rely on different definitions of right-wing violence, different data collection methods, and different types of sources (Bjørger, 2003, pp. 793–794).

Furthermore, by approaching these two competing models as mutually exclusive, Koopmans creates a potentially false dichotomy between grievances and opportunities – two aspects of reality that may well co-exist and influence the level of right-wing violence, not only as different causal paths to the same outcome (equifinality), but also as causal conditions that become sufficient for the outcome only in combination (conjunctural causation). Koopmans is forthright about the inherent ambiguity of his findings (Koopmans, 1996, pp. 199, 208). It is therefore surprising that no one has attempted to conduct a similar study, only with more reliable data, or with a more appropriate research design.

Aiming to do just that, this paper investigates how six causal conditions proposed as being conducive to RTV (immigration, socio-economic hardship, authoritarian legacies, radical right

support, radical right repression, and left-wing terrorism and militancy) relate to the extent of RTV in 18 West European countries. My selection of causal conditions rests on three theoretical premises derived from existing research: (1) sufficient militant mobilization; (2) combining rather than contrasting grievances and opportunities; and (3) polarization.

First premise: sufficient militant mobilization

Based on a chronology of more than 3000 terrorist attacks in the United States between 1954 and 2004, the majority of which were right-wing, Hewitt found a strong relationship between the numbers of active militants, or what he labels “mobilized activists”, on the one hand, and levels of terrorism and violence on the other hand. At the same time, the number of unorganized sympathisers did not seem to influence terrorism and violence in the same way (Hewitt, 2003, p. 46). Assuming that these causal relationships apply also to the European context, a key condition to explain varying levels of terrorism and violence would be the number of active militants at any given time.

Both grievances and opportunities come across as relevant in this regard. From the grievance side, factors such as immigration, modernization, and socio-economic hardship have been proposed as being conducive to extreme right mobilization and violence (Garcia, 2015; Heitmeyer, 1993; Lipset & Raab, 1970). However, this approach has been criticized by social movement scholars for failing to “explain the causal mechanisms that intervene between macro-causes and micro-behaviours” and for emphasizing conditions that in isolation are “neither necessary nor sufficient” for the outcome of interest (Caiani et al., 2012, p. 9). For example, one can easily find countries in Western Europe, such as Switzerland and France, where immigration has been extensive but where RTV has been low or moderate.

From the opportunity side, social movement scholars have proposed looking at how political and discursive opportunities might shape militant mobilization. More specifically, extreme right mobilization has been proposed as more likely in countries where support for radical right parties is limited or blocked, thereby channelling people with radical right sympathies into more extreme forms of activism (Koopmans, 1996), and in countries where former authoritarian (fascist) experiences create favourable opportunities for militant mobilization (Gattinara & Froio, 2014).

Some social movement scholars also argue that racist violence is more likely to occur when the political elites and the media create favourable discursive opportunities for the extreme

right, most notably by framing immigrants as a societal threat (Koopmans, 1996; Koopmans & Olzak, 2004). The idea is that such discursive opportunities legitimize, and thus facilitate, extreme right mobilization and violence. However, while elites' negative framing of immigrants may have contributed to racist violence in some countries, particularly during the early and mid-1990s, it does not explain why countries with a more restrictive public debate on immigration, such as Sweden, have nevertheless experienced extensive RTV (Jørgensen & Meret, 2012). Furthermore, although immigrants constitute the largest target group in the RTV dataset, they represent less than half of the registered victims. The second largest target group are left-wing activists. Other significant target groups include homosexuals and homeless people. Western political elites and the media have hardly framed these target groups as societal threats, and elite framing therefore offers a less helpful explanation of these types of violent attacks.

Second premise: combining rather than contrasting grievances and opportunities

Grievances and opportunities were originally introduced as useful ordering concepts for the study of war (Starr, 1978), and have since become recurrent themes in the civil war literature (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). While conventionally approached as two competing theories, civil war scholars have more recently found that they may be more fruitfully approached as complementary because their implied causal mechanisms do not logically exclude one another (Ballentine & Sherman, 2003; Korf, 2005). By contrast, one may argue that opportunity-oriented explanations follow logically from grievances, and that grievances are necessary for explaining why some actors choose to exploit existing opportunities, while others remain inactive.

The potential complementarity between grievances and opportunities (or incentives) has also been convincingly demonstrated empirically to explain civil war onset using QCA analysis (Bara, 2014). This method may therefore also provide a useful tool for investigating how elements from grievances and opportunities might combine to explain cross-national variation in RTV in Western Europe. However, unlike countries experiencing civil wars, a belligerent conflict is not necessarily present in all West European countries. To explain why some West European countries have experienced considerably more RTV than others, a third component might therefore be fruitfully added to the grievance and opportunity models: polarization.

Third premise: polarization

My third and last premise concerns the nature and dynamics of ongoing conflicts between the far right and its enemies. This premise, too, builds on research derived from the civil war literature, but this time on the violent consequences of highly polarized conflicts (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005; Østby, 2008). Applying this concept to the West European context, I assume that extensive RTV 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. Polarization may in turn be accentuated via different mechanisms, such as violent confrontations between left- and right-wing militants, or through public repression and stigmatization of radical right actors and opinion, pushing some of the most ardent activists onto more extreme and clandestine paths.

Such mechanisms are well documented in existing RTV research, although rarely analysed comparatively or systematically across cases. Notably, Sprinzak (1995, p. 21) argues that extreme right “violence, and gradually terrorism, will only emerge when the group involved feels increasingly insecure or threatened [by their enemies]”. A number of other studies have also documented these types of confrontational mechanisms, which appear to be of a universal nature (Bjørgero, 1997, pp. 211–235; Fangen, 2001, p. 54; Löow, 1993; Merkl, 1995, p. 111; Weinberg, 1995). The most systematic exposition to date is provided by della Porta in her recent book *Clandestine Political Violence* (2013), tracing causal mechanisms such as “escalating policing” and “competitive escalation” (within and between extremist groups) across different contexts and ideological spaces, including the extreme right.

Finally, several scholars have noted that repressive measures meant to curb radical right actors and opinions have a tendency to fuel more extreme forms of activism (Art, 2011, pp. 44–49; Klandermans & Mayer, 2006, pp. 272–273; Minkenberg, 2006). These observations tie into a larger debate on the relationship between violence and repression (della Porta, 2014). They also tie into an ongoing debate on how to approach radical right parties, and whether repression and stigmatization of such parties and their sympathisers have the desired effects, or if such measures only contribute to further polarization (Van Spanje & Van Der Brug, 2007). On this note, existing research finds that, while high stigmatization might constrain recruitment, it also increases the inner spirit of extreme right groups (Simi & Futrell, 2009). Furthermore, different forms and degrees of stigmatization appear to have opposite effects on different types of extreme right activists (Linden & Klandermans, 2006). While extensive repression and stigmatization might fuel violence and militancy, a complete absence of repression and

stigmatization might also lead to the same outcome (given that a sizeable militant movement exists), as seems to have been the case in Russia (Enstad, 2015). High or low repression and stigmatization should in other words not be seen as mutually exclusive conditions, but rather as two alternative paths that may lead to a similar outcome (equifinality).

Not all conditions proposed as being conducive to RTV come across as equally relevant for explaining cross-national variation. Furthermore, the number of causal conditions to be included in a QCA analysis should be kept at a moderate level (Schneider & Wagemann, 2013, pp. 276–277). Consequently, using the three premises discussed above to inform my selection, I have opted for the six conditions listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Causal conditions included in the analysis

| Conditions | Theoretical foundation |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Ethnic diversity or immigration | Grievances |
| Socio-economic hardship | Grievances |
| Radical right support | Opportunities |
| Authoritarian legacies | Opportunities |
| Left-wing terrorism and militancy | Polarization |
| Radical right repression | Polarization |

Method - a short introduction to fuzzy set QCA

QCA is a comparative method for the social sciences invented and developed by the American sociologist Charles Ragin (1987, 2000, 2008). To investigate causal complexity such as equifinality and conjunctural causation, correlation-based methods require extensive interaction modelling whose results may be difficult to interpret meaningfully once the number of interacting variables exceeds two or three. By contrast, QCA is specifically designed to capture such causal complexity (Ragin, 2014, pp. 19–33; Schneider & Wagemann, 2013, pp. 78–79).

In QCA, both the outcome variable and the independent variables – or causal conditions in QCA terminology – are treated as partially overlapping “sets” in which cases may be members or not. For example, one may look at how the set of Western liberal democracies with extensive RTV experience (outcome variable) overlaps with the set of countries with high immigration and the set of countries with authoritarian legacies, as illustrated by the Venn diagrams in Figure 1. By quantifying and then cross-analysing such set memberships in a truth table, QCA helps

identify (combinations of) causal conditions that may be regarded as *necessary* or *sufficient* for the outcome. In the (imagined) example from Figure 1, we see that all countries with extensive RTV experience have experienced either an authoritarian regime, or high immigration, or both. However, we also see that none of these conditions are necessary for the outcome because they only cover a portion of the outcome set. Furthermore, because they also include cases outside the outcome set, they are not sufficient, and must be combined with additional conditions to become part of a consistent explanation.

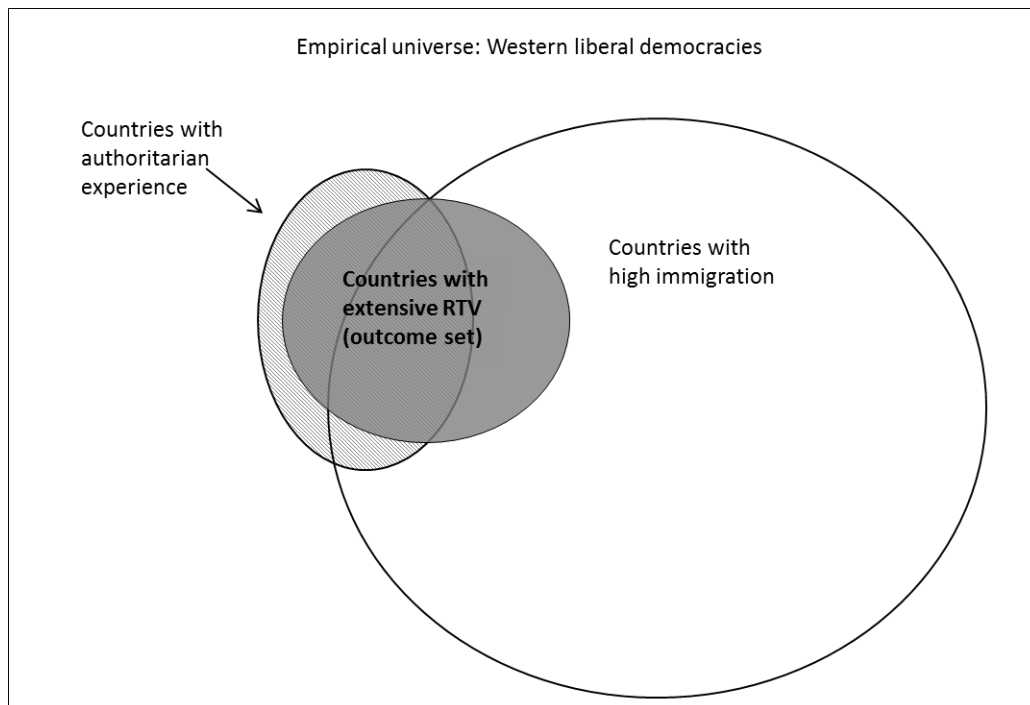


Figure 1. Venn diagrams illustrating set-theoretic reasoning

Fuzzy-set QCA also allows cases to have partial set memberships, reflecting the often fuzzy boundaries of many social science concepts (Goertz, 2006), such as “democracy”. In doing so, the researcher assigns scores of between 0 and 1, where 1 means full membership, and 0 means no membership, while 0.5 represents the critical cut-off point separating those cases that are considered to be more in than out of the set, based on the researcher’s substantive and theoretical knowledge (Ragin, 2008, pp. 82–83). Because of the asymmetric nature of set relations, crossing the cut-off point has much greater inferential implications than moving up or down on either side of this point. To critically assess any given fuzzy scores, one should therefore primarily consider which cases are above or below the cut-off point, before examining the relative position of cases to each other on either side of the fuzzy scale.

Finally, in terms of causal explanation, it should be noted that uncovering necessary or sufficient relationships between sets does not automatically imply that they are causally related. In fact, from a pure mathematical perspective, such set relationships say nothing about causality (Thiem & Baumgartner, 2016). However, given that the selection of causal conditions is theoretically informed, QCA represents a systematic method for identifying empirically consistent (combinations of) conditions whose implied causal mechanisms may then be further investigated using process-tracing or similar case study methods (Schneider & Rohlfing, 2013). As such, QCA may be complemented by case studies in the same way as large-N statistical analyses may be (Sambanis, 2004). However, as opposed to large-N statistical analysis, QCA may also be used for medium- and even low-N studies.

Measurements

The following paragraphs outlines how my outcome variable and causal conditions have been measured and scored according to standard QCA procedures. Each condition is calibrated as a four-level fuzzy variable with the following thresholds: 1.0 / 0.75 / 0.25 / 0.0. A more detailed description, including tables with raw scores and case distributions for all measurements, the negated set analysis, and robustness test scores, can be found in Appendix I.

Outcome variable

My outcome variable is the extent of RTV in each West European country between 1990 and 2015. To obtain a reliable measurement of this variable, I combine a quantitative measure with a qualitative assessment. My quantitative measure is the number of deadly RTV events per million inhabitants in each country between 1990 and 2015. Deadly RTV events arguably represent the most definitive and reliable measure of RTV. However, as explained previously, some countries have experienced extensive non-lethal violence, but relatively few deaths, and it would be misleading to place such cases below the cut-off point. In addition, small countries with only a handful of deadly events would get disproportionately high scores if only the number of deadly events per capita counted. I therefore use a second qualitative assessment to inform and adjust the ranking resulting from my quantitative measure. This qualitative assessment is based on a variety of sources documenting RTV across Western Europe, most notably events data from the RTV dataset, but also national hate crime statistics on right-wing violence (see Appendix II), as well as existing reports and literature on racist violence in different West European countries (see Appendix III). The cut-off point is set at 0.5 deadly events per million inhabitants, at which point a gap appears in the distribution of cases, effectively separating

Spain and the UK (both 0.5) from Belgium and Portugal (both 0.3). Appendix I gives a more detailed explanation of how each case has been scored.

Causal conditions

Ethnic diversity or immigration (diversity) has been operationalized as a macro condition (one that combines two measures) using the logical OR operator to combine measures of ethnic diversity with asylum seeker frequencies. I use the OR operator because low scores on one of these measures become less meaningful if the score on the other measure is high (violent far right activists do not seem to care about foreigners' citizenship status). My measure of ethnic diversity relies on Eurostat's (2014) figures for the relative share of a country's population born outside the EU – a type of measure used in previous research on ethnic diversity (Lolle & Torpe, 2011). Asylum seeker frequencies are based on Eurostat data documenting the number of asylum seekers registered annually between 1990 and 2014 in each country. Note that I have intentionally left out figures for 2015, when the migration crisis hit Europe with full force. The reason is that one may expect a temporal lag between increased immigration and militant mobilization and violence. Therefore, including these latest figures might give a misleading impression about the effects of immigration on RTV. Cut-off points and interval levels are in both measures based on case distributions, as well as a few cases whose raw scores indicate a middle position, but which are generally considered as having experienced either high ethnic diversity (the UK) or high immigration (Germany and Denmark).

Socio-economic hardship (hardship) was measured using Eurostat's so-called "at risk of poverty or social exclusion" variable, reflecting a population's share of people either at risk of poverty, or severely materially deprived, or living in a household with a very low work intensity.⁵ *Hardship's* fuzzy scores are based on each country's average AROPE scores in the period 2004-2014 (data on previous years are not available), and high and low thresholds are set according to the case distribution and the positions of cases known for their good (e.g. Norway) or bad (e.g. Greece) socio-economic performance. The cut-off point was set at 25 per cent, at which point a gap appears in the distribution of cases, effectively separating Spain (26) from the UK (24).

Radical right support (support) was measured using data compiled by Minkenberg (2015, p. 8). Data have been added for seven cases not included in Minkenberg's study: Iceland,

⁵ See http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion

Ireland, Luxemburg, Portugal, Spain, Finland and Greece – countries where radical right parties have been electorally irrelevant, except for more recently in Finland (Finns Party) and Greece (Golden Dawn). I use 5-percent intervals based on the average percentage of votes given to radical right parties in parliamentary elections between 1990 and 2014. The cut-off point is set at 10 percent, at which point a gap appears in the distribution of cases, effectively separating Belgium (10.2) from the Netherlands (6.7). This cut-off point is also based on the theoretical expectation that support for radical right parties should exceed 10 percent to discourage alternative and more extreme forms of mobilization.

Authoritarian legacies (legacies) was measured using a mini-survey sent to a group of experts on former authoritarian regimes, asking them to rank West European countries according to their authoritarian experiences and legacies.⁶ More specifically, I asked them to rank countries on a 4-value scale where the full membership score (1.0) is given to countries still heavily influenced by extensive authoritarian experiences. The more in than out score (0.75) is given to countries with significant authoritarian experience still influencing parts of the population. The more out than in score (0.25) is given to countries that have some authoritarian experience, but are being influenced to a lesser extent by that experience today. Finally, the fully out score (0) is given to countries with insignificant or no authoritarian experience. Interim Nazi governments during WWII have not been considered as a relevant experience here because they arguably fuelled more resistance than support.

Radical right repression (repression) was measured using relevant academic accounts, most notably Art's (2011, pp. 44–49) discussion of repressive vs. permissive environments for radical right parties in Europe, van Spanje and van der Brug's (2007) research on ostracism of anti-immigration parties; and Bleich's (2007; Bleich & Lambert, 2013) research on government responses to hate crimes and racist associations in West European countries. Some countries included in my analysis are not referred to in these studies, primarily because they never had any prominent radical right parties. Such cases (e.g. Spain and Iceland) have been assigned the 0 score, while being mindful that extensive repression might have existed if radical right parties were more prominent, and that the non-existence of such parties could be interpreted as a result of extensive repression. The full membership score (1.0) is given to countries where existing academic accounts leave little doubt about a repressive environment. The more in than out score (0.75) is given to countries where existing academic accounts portray somewhat milder forms

⁶ This ranking exercise was given to relevant researchers at the Norwegian Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities: <http://www.hlsenteret.no/english/>

of repression, or to countries that have evolved from a repressive towards a more permissive environment, or the other way around. The more out than in score (0.25) is given to countries for which existing academic accounts testify to some but no consistent repression. Finally, the fully out score (0) is given to countries described as mostly permissive or not mentioned in existing academic accounts.

Left-wing terrorism and militancy (aggression) has been operationalized using three different measures: (1) left-wing terrorism 1990–2004 as indicated by the TWEED and DTV datasets; (2) left-wing terrorism and militancy 2006–2015 as portrayed by Europol’s annual Terrorism Trend and Situation (TE-SAT) reports; and (3) a mini-survey conducted among contemporary left-wing militants ranking their own movement’s size and visibility in different West European countries.⁷ The full membership score (1) is given to countries that score high on all three measures. The more in than out score (0,75) is given to countries that score high on two of three measures. The more out than in score (0,25) is given to countries that score high on one of three measures. Finally, the fully out score (0) is given to countries with low scores on all three measures.

All fuzzy scores are presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Fuzzy score matrix

| Country | RTV | Diversity | Hardship | Support | Legacies | Repression | Aggression |
|---------|------|-----------|----------|---------|----------|------------|------------|
| AUT | 0.25 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| BEL | 0.25 | 1 | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0 |
| DEN | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0 | 0.75 | 0 | 0 | 0.25 |
| FIN | 0.25 | 0 | 0 | 0.25 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| FRA | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0 | 0.75 | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0.25 |
| GER | 1 | 0.75 | 0.25 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0.75 |
| GRE | 0.75 | 0.75 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| ICE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| IRE | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0.75 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ITA | 0.75 | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0.75 | 1 | 0 | 0.75 |
| LUX | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| NED | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0 | 0.25 | 0 | 0.75 | 0 |
| NOR | 0.25 | 1 | 0 | 0.75 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| POR | 0 | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| SPA | 0.75 | 0.75 | 0.75 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0.75 |
| SWE | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.25 |
| SWI | 0.25 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0.25 | 0 |
| UK | 0.75 | 0.75 | 0.25 | 0 | 0 | 0.75 | 0 |

⁷ This survey was given over e-mail via an intermediary person. All respondents were informed about who and what the survey was for.

Analysis and results

Any QCA analysis should begin by searching for necessary (non-trivial) conditions. The fsQCA software has a specific function for the necessity analysis which should be conducted independently from the truth table analysis (Schneider & Wagemann, 2013, pp. 69–75). Table 4 shows the scores produced by this necessity analysis.

Table 4. Analysis of necessary conditions

| Condition | Consistency | Coverage |
|------------|-------------|----------|
| diversity | 0.86 | 0.50 |
| hardship | 0.45 | 0.68 |
| ~support* | 0.86 | 0.53 |
| legacies | 0.55 | 0.62 |
| repression | 0.52 | 0.71 |
| aggression | 0.52 | 0.94 |

* ~ symbolizes set negation, in this case the set of countries with no or low radical right support

These results suggest that none of the conditions included in my analysis are necessary for RTV (which would require consistency and coverage scores at least above 0.9). In fact, these results illustrate RTV's causal complexity. Conditions with fairly high consistency scores (*diversity* and *~support*) have low coverage scores, meaning that the outcome set constitutes a relatively small subset of these two conditions. In other words, while *diversity* (grievances) and *~support* (opportunities) may constitute important preconditions for right-wing violence in some cases, they must be combined with other conditions to become part of a consistent explanation, indicating conjunctural causation. Conversely, the only condition with a high coverage score (*aggression*), scores low on consistency, suggesting that left-wing terrorism and militancy may be relevant for some but not all cases in the outcome set, indicating equifinality. This brings us to the test for sufficiency, designed precisely to capture these types of causal complexity.

The most critical measure of the sufficiency analysis – solution consistency – expresses the combined consistency of the proposed causal recipes derived from a truth table analysis. In other words, do the proposed combinations of conditions consistently explain the outcomes across the cases involved in the analysis? The second measure – solution coverage – expresses how much of the outcome set is being covered by these proposed causal recipes. The consistency cut-off level decided by the researcher also influences solution consistency and coverage scores. In my case, the truth table generated by the fsQCA software leaves two possible cut-off options: 1.0, including four of the six cases that are more in than out of my outcome set; or 0.82, including all six cases plus one case (the Netherlands) that is more out

than in (0.25) of my outcome set. Setting the cut-off level at 1.0 logically yields higher solution consistency (0.93 for the intermediate solution) but lower solution coverage (0.45 for the intermediate solution).⁸ Conversely, setting the cut-off level at 0.82 yields a somewhat lower but still acceptable solution consistency score (0.88 for the intermediate solution) and a higher solution coverage score (0.76 for the intermediate solution), as illustrated by Table 5.

Table 5. Solution terms from the intermediate solution

| Causal recipes | Raw coverage | Unique coverage | Consistency |
|---|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Frequency cut-off: 1.00 | | | |
| Consistency cut-off: 0.82 | | | |
| Assumptions: diversity*hardship*~support*legacies*repression*aggression → rtv | | | |
| repression*~support*diversity | 0.45 | 0.41 | 0.87 |
| aggression*hardship*legacies | 0.34 | 0.31 | 0.91 |
| Solution coverage: 0.76 | | | |
| Solution consistency: 0.88 | | | |

Opting for the 0.82 cut-off level, two causal recipes (intermediate solution) are derived from the logical minimization performed by the fsQCA software (* symbolizes the AND operator, → symbolizes sufficiency):⁹

diversity*~support*repression → RTV

hardship*legacies*aggression → RTV

If we look at the different cases covered by these two recipes, an interesting geographical pattern emerges: the first recipe covers North European countries with extensive RTV (Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Germany) while the second recipe covers South European countries with extensive RTV (Italy, Spain and Greece). In the first recipe, grievances caused by problems related to high immigration or diversity appear to have become particularly pronounced in a handful of North European countries that also lacked influential anti-immigration (radical right) parties during the period under investigation (1990–2015), thereby creating mobilization opportunities for the extreme right. Such militant mobilization has in turn been fuelled by extensive public repression and stigmatization of radical right actors and

⁸ The fsQCA software offers three solutions: complex, parsimonious, and intermediate, reflecting different degrees of simplifying and theoretical assumptions. I prefer the intermediate solution, where the researcher's theoretical assumptions are used to calculate logical remainders, that is, logically possible rows that are consistent with the empirical data fed into the analysis, but lacking empirical cases.

⁹ I have changed the order of the conditions according to the logical direction of the assumed causal path.

opinions in countries such as Sweden, Germany and the UK (Art, 2011, p. 48; E. Bleich, 2007; Van Spanje & Van Der Brug, 2007). While such repression and stigmatization may discourage some people from joining radical and extreme right groups, it may also push some of the most ardent activists onto more clandestine and revolutionary paths, ultimately leading to violence and terrorism.

In the second recipe, grievances caused by socio-economic hardship combined with the legacies of former authoritarian regimes create opportunities for mobilizing militant extremists on both sides of the political spectrum, intensifying an already polarized left–right divide. Once a sufficient number of militants have been mobilized on both sides, a reciprocal spiral of violence and terrorism is then likely to follow (Weinberg, 1995; Weinberg & Eubank, 1987). These dynamics are also echoed by the RTV dataset, most notably by the Italian and Spanish cases, where a majority of registered attacks have targeted left-wing militants as opposed to most other countries where immigrants constitute the largest target group. While attacks against left-wing militants in Greece are less covered by the RTV dataset (most likely because of limited data), several reports describe an ongoing street war between the militant left and the militant right in Greece (Faiola, 2014; Spillius, 2012) – a conflict that according to local experts is best understood in light of Greece’s former authoritarian regime (Sotiris, 2012). The continuity of these “old” left–right political cleavages is also indicated by the fact that Italy, Spain and Greece still have active communist parties (sometimes with parliamentary representation), a rare phenomenon in the rest of Western Europe (March & Mudde, 2005).

Uncertainty and robustness

What might we infer from these findings and are they robust? Importantly, the explorative character of QCA analysis implies provisional results that should always be followed by additional case studies and/or statistical analysis (Schneider & Wagemann, 2010, p. 400). Considering the causal distance between many of the conditions included in my analysis and actual terrorism and violence, more in-depth case studies tracing the causal mechanisms implied by each recipe are needed before drawing any conclusions with confidence. It is beyond the scope of this macro-comparative analysis to provide such detailed case studies, which would require different types of data and methods, including inside information generated by ethnographic studies and in-depth interviews.

With regards to robustness, Schneider and Wagemann (2013, pp. 284–295) propose three types of robustness tests for QCA analysis: (1) changing calibration thresholds; (2) changing

consistency levels for truth table rows; and (3) adding or dropping cases. The general rule is that the analysis can be regarded as reasonably robust if slightly adjusting any of these three elements does not result in substantive changes in the solution formulas' parameters of fit (consistency and coverage scores) or in the composition of the solution formulas. Thus, to experiment with different calibration thresholds, I ran a robustness test where the cut-off points for *diversity*, *hardship* and *support* (my frequency-based conditions) were determined by the median score rather than by the case distribution and the position of a few key cases, and where the intervals were set to be equally large (irrespective of how the cases cluster). This test gave fairly similar results as in my original analysis, except that *hardship* was added to the North European recipe, because the UK was included in the set of countries with socio-economic hardship with these alternative calibration thresholds. In addition, a third causal recipe mainly reflecting the German case was derived from this alternative analysis, combining all the elements from the other two recipes except for *hardship*, but with a unique coverage of only 0.07. The solution consistency score of these three recipes was 0.95, while the solution coverage score was 0.59. This robustness test thus suggests that socio-economic hardship may be more important than suggested by my original analysis, but only if we accept that the UK experienced considerable socio-economic hardship between 1990 and 2015, which is debatable. I therefore consider my original findings as reasonably robust after having performed this test.

Regarding consistency cut-off levels, I have already described how different consistency cut-off levels (1.0 versus 0.82) yielded different parameters of fit, especially on solution coverage, because the 1.0 cut-off level included only four of six cases from the outcome set. By setting the consistency cut-off point at 1.0, and thereby defining the 0.82 row (containing Sweden, the UK, and the Netherlands) as insufficient for the outcome, the "North European" causal recipe is replaced by a new recipe that is substantially reconcilable with the original recipe (because *diversity* * \sim *support* * *repression* are still included) but more restrictive because two conditions are added to the recipe (*legacies* and *aggression*). Conversely, by including the 0.82 row, all six cases from my outcome set are included plus the Netherlands, which is the only fully inconsistent case, being a full member of the North European recipe, but with an RTV score of only 0.25. As such, the Netherlands represents an interesting case for further investigation (perhaps the Dutch liberal mindset is a barrier against RTV?). The QCA convention is not to include rows with a consistency of lower than 0.75. Excluding a 0.82 row therefore makes little sense, and, considering that in doing so, one of the proposed recipes

remains identical and the second substantially reconcilable, I consider my original findings to be reasonably robust after having performed this test.

The final robustness test (dropping or adding cases) entails certain practical barriers in terms of finding relevant cases. To be sure, by dropping some of the most contradictory cases, such as Portugal (*legacies + hardship* but *aggression* = 0) or the Netherlands, my consistency and coverage scores would indeed improve. Adding East European cases is not an option for the time being, because comparable RTV data are lacking, perhaps with the exception of Russia where RTV has definitely been extensive since 1990 (Arnold, 2010; Laryš & Mareš, 2011). However, considering Russia's current semi-autocratic regime and recent political history, this case may not fit well into the theoretical framework used here to explain RTV in the context of Western liberal democracy. Finally, the United States represents a relevant case with available RTV data (Freilich et al., 2014). However, in the United States, RTV appears to occur under somewhat different conditions (more emphasis on religion, survivalism, and anti-federalism) than in Western Europe.

Summing up, despite being fairly robust, the findings presented here should be seen as provisional rather than definite, and the analysis would benefit from being completed by case studies or statistical analysis documenting variation over time (inherently difficult with QCA). As such, the analysis may serve as a useful point of departure for future more fine-grained RTV research.

Conclusion

Existing research on the extreme right offers few consistent explanations of why RTV has been more extensive in some countries than in others. To help fill this gap, this paper used new RTV events data in a QCA research design. This analysis arrived at two causal recipes, each containing three causal conditions, the combination of which appears to fuel hostility, polarization, and violence. First, there is a North European recipe that involves the combination of high immigration, low electoral support for anti-immigration (radical right) parties, and extensive public repression of radical right actors and opinions. Second, there is a South European recipe that involves the combination of socio-economic hardship, authoritarian legacies, and extensive left-wing terrorism and militancy. Notably, both recipes contain elements of “grievances” and “opportunities”, suggesting that these two theories portrayed as

contrasting by Koopmans (1996) in his pioneering study of extreme right violence, may be more fruitfully seen as complementary.

The North European recipe does provide some support to Koopmans's study, in particular that the relationship between radical right support and RTV may (under certain conditions) be negative. However, unlike Koopmans theory, in which such limited support must combine with elites' negative framing of immigrants to trigger racist violence, my findings suggest that it is rather elites' negative framing of radical right actors and opinions that distinguish countries with extensive RTV (e.g. Sweden and Germany) from those with moderate or low RTV experience (e.g. Denmark and Switzerland). As such, this finding challenges the dominant view on how the public discourse on immigration might influence extreme right mobilization and violence. It suggests that a predominantly pro-immigration elite perceived as hostile towards people with anti-immigration concerns might be exploited by the extreme right to mobilize new followers and to motivate terrorism and violence.

This argument ties into a more general finding emerging from this analysis, suggesting that a highly polarized conflict between far-right activists and their enemies, including leftists, political elites, and the public at large, represents a necessary condition for extensive RTV to occur. The relevance of polarization and threat perceptions have been emphasized in previous research aiming to explain RTV (Sprinzak, 1995), political violence more generally (della Porta, 2013), and intolerant attitudes and behaviours across a wide range of countries and contexts (Stenner, 2005). By implication, a potentially effective cure for RTV could be to limit immigration and be more accepting towards radical right actors and opinions. However, considering the inherently intolerant policies that these actors seek to implement, this cure comes with a bitter aftertaste from a liberal democratic perspective. This liberal's dilemma has no easy solution, as is also demonstrated in previous studies (Kirshner, 2014; Pedahzur, 2001). It warrants a demanding balancing act between upholding core liberal democratic principles such as the freedom of expression and political freedoms for all people, including those on the far right, on the one hand, and trying to prevent any form of antidemocratic or violent behaviour on the other.

The ongoing migration crisis is currently fuelling fear, uncertainty, and polarization in a number of West European countries. A main ambition must be to stop such fears from translating into intolerant and violent behaviour, and thereby risking a new outbreak of RTV in this region. Recognition, open-mindedness, and dialogue might then work better than exclusion,

public repression, or aggressive confrontation. At the same time, we should be mindful that too much lenience towards people and parties with authoritarian inclinations – just like too much repression or aggression – may have adverse effects, and could result in limited freedom for all, especially those who think and act differently.

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