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## Thugs or Terrorists? A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe

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### Abstract

Despite Western Europe's extensive history of right-wing terrorism, a systematic categorization of key actors and events is lacking. This article aims to narrow this gap by proposing the first empirically derived typology of right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe. The article begins by introducing a method for reviewing and developing typologies, informed by relevant social science literature. This method is first used to review Ehud Sprinzak's seminal typology of right-wing terrorism. While Sprinzak merits recognition for having developed the only universal typology in the field, the review shows that his typology does not satisfy established criteria for typology building. Combining quantitative and qualitative post-WWII data, a new typology is therefore proposed, based on attack frequencies and differences in perpetrators' strategy and organization. This new typology facilitates sharper distinctions, both between different types of perpetrators and between different forms of violence.

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## Introduction

Having attracted relatively little attention for some time, right-wing terrorism returned to Western Europe's public eye in 2011 with the terrorist attacks in Norway and the disclosure of the German terrorist cell *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (NSU). To determine whether these were isolated events or signal a revival of right-wing terrorism in Western Europe it is helpful to (1) identify and explore past waves of right-wing terrorism and violence in this region and (2) categorize and compare the most important events and actors involved. Such comparative studies of right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe have so far been rare. In particular, no systematic categorization of key events and actors exists. Aiming to narrow this gap, this article proposes a typology of right-wing terrorism and violence, specifically tailored to the case of Western Europe.

Becoming increasingly popular in the study of terrorism and political violence, typologies constitute a particularly useful analytical tool for categorizing data, comparing cases, and developing theory (Ganor, 2008; Marsden, 2014; Marsden & Schmid, 2011). However, to boost a typology's theoretical utility, certain criteria must be met (Bailey, 1994; Collier, LaPorte, & Seawright, 2012; Doty & Glick, 1994; Elman, 2005; George & Bennett, 2005; McKinney, 1966). Ehud Sprinzak's (1995) seminal typology of right-wing terrorism remains to date the only universal typology in the field, and is the most frequently cited publication on right-wing terrorism more generally.<sup>2</sup> Its strength lies in being based on an explicit theory of how right-wing activists become terrorists – the theory of split delegitimization. However, as this article argues, this theory builds on vague concepts, shaky assumptions about right-wing activists, and empirical inaccuracies concerning past terrorist attacks. Moreover, it remains unclear exactly how Sprinzak derived his types from his theory, and his typology includes types that are not mutually exclusive. In short, Sprinzak's

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<sup>2</sup> According to search queries on "right-wing terrorism" on Google Scholar and Web of Science.

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typology does not satisfy established criteria for typology building. An alternative typology of right-wing terrorism is therefore needed.

Combining quantitative and qualitative post-WWII data, this article proposes the first empirically derived typology of right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> Western Europe was chosen because this region arguably has the world's most extensive history of right-wing terrorism – yet a categorization of such events does not exist. Furthermore, while most right-wing terrorists share some common characteristics, there are important regional dynamics that must be taken into consideration to fully understand why terrorism occurs at a given time and place.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, relevant typologies have been developed for regions such as North America (Kaplan, 1995; Perliger, 2012) and Russia (Laryš & Mareš, 2011), but not for Western Europe. Finally, existing databases on West European terrorism (Engene, 2004, 2007) enables the construction of an empirically derived typology for this region. Unfortunately, similar data is unavailable for Europe as a whole.

The article contributes in four ways: First, it provides a comparative analysis of key right-wing terrorists in Western Europe and their different paths towards terrorism. Notably, this analysis suggests that despite recent terrorist incidents, the threat from *organized* right-wing terrorism to West European citizens is likely significantly lower today than some 20 to 30 years ago.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, reliable and updated data on more loosely

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah V. Marsden (2014) makes a convincing case for the utility of empirically derived typologies in the study of terrorism and political violence.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Wilhelm Heitmeyer (2003, pp. 399–436) argues in his extensive review of the literature on right-wing violence that there are substantial differences between the American, East European, and West European contexts.

<sup>5</sup> This claim is supported by findings from a forthcoming study by this author documenting and analysing about 500 incidents of right-wing terrorism and violence across Western Europe between 1990 and 2015.

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organized forms of right-wing terrorism and violence is lacking, and more research is needed to document recent developments.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the article introduces a practical method for reviewing and developing typologies, informed by relevant social science literature. The method applies not only to studying terrorism and political violence; indeed it can be used to develop and review typologies in any social science field.

Third, by emphasizing differences in perpetrators' strategy and organization, the proposed typology offers sharper distinctions – both between different types of perpetrators and between different forms of violence – than typologies based primarily on ideological differences.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the typology offers a new contribution to the relatively small literature on right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe. While the comparative literature on European radical right parties and movements has grown steadily, the comparative literature on right-wing terrorism and violence in Europe peaked during the 1990s, but then largely stagnated (key examples include Bjørge, 1995, 1997; Bjørge & Witte, 1993; Hoffman, 1982; Koopmans, 1996; Pedahzur, 2001). This article seeks to contribute to an ongoing and much needed revitalization of this field of study (see e.g. Backes & Moreau, 2012; Caiani, Porta, & Wagemann, 2012; Taylor, Holbrook, & Currie, 2013).

The article starts by introducing five criteria that good typologies should satisfy. Next, these criteria are used to conduct a detailed review of Sprinzak's typology. Finally, the criteria are applied to develop a new typology of right-wing terrorism and violence, specifically tailored to the case of Western Europe.

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<sup>6</sup> A commendable contribution is in this regard Daniel Köhler's (2014a) recent study of German right-wing terrorism.

<sup>7</sup> Strategy and organization are among seven variables proposed by Richard Schultz' (1978) in his pioneering article on terrorism typologies.

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## A Practical Method for Developing and Reviewing Typologies

A typology's scientific merit rests on the methods used to construct it and on its creator's ability to communicate these methods to the reader. From a broad reading of relevant social science literature, five criteria that good typologies should satisfy emerge:<sup>8</sup>

1. Clearly define the overarching concept of the typology
2. Specify whether the typology is descriptive or explanatory
3. Describe in detail how the types are (inductively and/or deductively) constructed
4. Propose an intuitive model or matrix of the typology
5. Consider a simpler solution with mutually exclusive types

These five criteria can also be seen as sequential tasks. While task one, three and four are intuitive and straightforward, task two and five may require some further elaboration.

Although typologies serve various functions, scholars seem to agree that two main categories of typologies exist: First, *descriptive typologies* characterize variants of a phenomenon. Routinely being used to organize data and compare cases, they offer a simplified yet systematic and analytically useful depiction of a phenomenon's subtypes and the characteristics distinguishing them.

Second, *explanatory typologies*, also known as typological theories help scholars test or develop theory. They "seek to identify the various causal mechanisms and pathways that link the independent variables of each 'type', or cell in a typology, with its outcome"(George & Bennett, 2005, p. 234).

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<sup>8</sup> My method of enquiry was the following: I identified frequently cited publications on typologies in quality social science journals over the past 20 years, in addition to authoritative books (Bailey, 1994; Collier, LaPorte, & Seawright, 2012; Doty & Glick, 1994; Elman, 2005; George & Bennett, 2005; McKinney, 1966). Next, I developed a list of criteria that good typologies should satisfy according to this literature. Finally, I eliminated criteria considered as too ambitious, such as the criterion of exhaustiveness, which requires knowledge about the entire empirical universe, and the criterion of having at least two dimensions or variables, which excludes one-dimensional typologies.

A couple of examples may be helpful here: In *Politics* (ND), Aristotle introduced one of the first typologies of political systems (Table 1):

TABLE 1  
ARISTOTLE'S TYPOLOGY OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Number of ruler(s)	Form	
	Normal	Perverted
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy

Aristotle's typology is descriptive because its constitutive variables do not follow from any explicit theory about how political systems emerge; they simply characterize different variants. Aristotle's typology marked the beginning of a millennium-long research tradition on political systems, offering more sophisticated and theoretically informed typologies. A famous example is Arend Lijphart's (1968) typology of democratic systems, developing the "polity" and "democracy" cells from Aristotle into an explanatory typology (Table 2):

TABLE 2  
LIJPHART'S TYPOLOGY OF DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS

Elite behaviour	Political culture	
	Homogenous	Fragmented
Coalescent	Depoliticized democracy	Consociational democracy
Competitive	Centripetal democracy	Centrifugal democracy

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In practice, an explanatory typology is a theory presented in a matrix in which the logically possible value combinations of the independent variables determine the possible outcomes on the dependent variable. The idea is that schematically presenting a theory will spur theory development in two ways: first, by encouraging thinking about all possible combinations of independent variables, the outcomes they produce, and the mechanisms linking independent variables with outcomes; and second, by identifying theoretically interesting causal relationships that can be tested empirically through cross-case comparisons and within-case analysis (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 254).

The fifth criterion – consider a simpler solution with mutually exclusive types – is inspired by the principle known as Ockham’s razor. This principle is to select the hypothesis with the fewest assumptions, and proceed to simpler theories as long as explanatory power is not compromised. The principle is clearly relevant for explanatory typologies aiming to develop theory. On this note, a key debate in the typology literature concerns how to reduce the number of cells, also known as “the property space” (Elman, 2005; George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 249–251).

The property space is created by cross-tabulating all variables in a typology – a useful mapping exercise for exploring causal relationships, or, in the case of descriptive typologies, for identifying essential distinguishing characteristics. Cross-tabulated typologies also ensure mutually exclusive types as long as all cases can be meaningfully scored on the selected variables, that is, no case can assume more than one score or value on any of the relevant variables.

The combined number of values on the descriptive/explanatory variables determines the size of the property space which grows exponentially and easily becomes unmanageable. Cells can thus be reduced by eliminating nonessential variables, by limiting the number of values on a variable, by merging similar variables, by merging or eliminating

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variables with identical scores, or by eliminating cells that are logically impossible.<sup>9</sup> The theoretical relevance of a variable should ultimately decide whether to keep it or eliminate it.

Finally, some literature stresses that explanatory typologies are more relevant for theory development (Doty & Glick, 1994; George & Bennett, 2005). A general advice is therefore to choose, whenever possible, explanatory typologies over descriptive ones. However, scholars are rarely free to make this choice because explanatory typologies require pre-existing theory (Elman, 2005, p. 296). Proponents of explanatory typologies may thus have overstated these typologies' theoretical relevance at the expense of descriptive typologies. Descriptive typologies can also be relevant for theory development, although they are not premised on pre-existing causal theory (Collier et al., 2012, pp. 227–228). They encourage empirical precision and deep thinking about how and why types differ, and thus ultimately about types' underlying causes – the question explanatory typologies seek to answer (Elman, 2005, pp. 296–298). Descriptive typologies can therefore be seen as a logical and sometimes necessary prelude to explanatory typologies when relevant theory is lacking.

Having completed this general but necessary section on typology building, I now turn to Sprinzak's typology of right-wing terrorism to see how it complies with the criteria outlined above. First, however, it is necessary to summarize his theory.

### **The Theory of Split Delegitimization**

Sprinzak's theory of right-wing terrorism arises from his work on what he called "the process of delegitimization" (Sprinzak, 1991). The essence of this process is a slowly evolving crisis of legitimacy between an insurgent group and the government. Terrorism is

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<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion on cell reduction, see Elman (2005, pp. 300–308).



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the peak of this process, which has three stages: (1) a crisis of confidence, (2) a conflict of legitimacy, and (3) a crisis of legitimacy.

Sprinzak seeks to explain how members of political protest groups can transform into brutal and indiscriminate killers. He describes how an initial crisis of confidence between protesters and the government, through confrontations with the police, can escalate into a conflict wherein protesters question the regime's very legitimacy. At this point, the "psychodynamics" of small and isolated protest groups, including a "dehumanization of anyone associated with the regime," leads to a state of crisis wherein protesters can "disengage morally and commit atrocities without remorse" (Sprinzak, 1995, pp. 18–20).

Sprinzak uses this delegitimization process as a baseline for developing a theory of right-wing terrorism. To differentiate right-wing terrorists from other terrorists, Sprinzak distinguishes between "universalistic" terrorist organizations in direct conflict with the ruling government, and "particularistic" (right-wing) terrorist organizations fighting "private wars" against non-ruling groups (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 17).

A "split" occurs when at some point violence is also directed towards the government. This split ensues when a rightist group feels that the government is not protecting them from a perceived threat. In this case, Sprinzak envisages "an intense delegitimization vis-à-vis the unaccepted non-ruling target group and a diluted delegitimization towards the regime" (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 20). Hence, "the issue at stake is one of *split delegitimization, namely, a case where an uneven radicalization of a group of extremists develops against two separate units*" (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 20, italics in original).

### Reviewing Sprinzak's Typology

Having introduced this theory, Sprinzak presents six right-wing terrorist types (revolutionary, reactive, vigilante, racist, millenarian, and youth counterculture) "based on

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the identification of the *dominant principle* around which a rightist group is organized and on its relation to the dynamics of split delegitimization” (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 23, italics in original). In the following section, I discuss how this typology corresponds to the five criteria introduced above.

### 1. *Define the Overarching Concept*

Sprinzak offers characteristics of right-wing terrorist groups, but no explicit definition. He claims the split delegitimization theory identifies “the distinctive features of right-wing terrorism” (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 17). The split delegitimization theory emphasizes target selection as *the* distinctive feature of right-wing terrorists claiming that they target non-ruling groups before the government. However, this claim is incorrect for a number of important cases. Some of Western Europe’s best known right-wing terrorist groups, such as *l’Organisation de l’Armée Sécrete* and *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionario* directed their terrorist campaigns against the government either directly or indirectly (by attacking civilians). In particular, they did not consider immigrants or other minorities as their primary targets. A more recent example is Anders Behring Breivik, who bombed the Norwegian government quarters (eight persons killed) before murdering 69 members of the then-governing Norwegian Labour Party’s youth wing.

The type of target may indicate who is behind a terrorist attack, but it can be a deceptive indicator. For example, Italian neo-Fascists conducted several attacks disguised as left-wing terrorism (Ferraresi, 1996). Similarly, the 1980 bomb attack on the Jewish synagogue on Rue Copernic in Paris, in the midst of a series of right-wing terrorist attacks in France, was the work of Middle Eastern terrorists (Hoffman, 1982; Shapiro & Suzan, 2003). Yet several analysts, including Sprinzak, continued portraying it as right-wing terrorism (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 25).

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A second distinctive feature identified by Sprinzak is how right-wing terrorists come to choose violence as a means for political struggle. According to Sprinzak, violence and terrorism emerge only gradually when the group involved feels increasingly insecure or threatened (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 21). This radicalization pattern may well apply, but is not limited to right-wing terrorist groups. Many other terrorist attacks result from growing anxiety towards perceived threats, normally from a superior enemy.<sup>10</sup> Violent responses to perceived threats are hardly unique to right-wing terrorists, and therefore not a useful distinguishing feature.

Finally, a third feature identified by Sprinzak concerns how right-wing terrorists *feel* about using violence. According to Sprinzak, right-wing terrorists “do not feel remorse about their violence and the atrocities they cause,” and there is “no need to undergo a profound psycho-political transformation to become brutal killers” (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 22). However, no evidence is offered to support this claim; hence, the characteristic appears rather speculative.

## 2. *Specify Whether the Typology is Descriptive or Explanatory*

Is Sprinzak’s typology descriptive or explanatory? According to Sprinzak, the purpose is to organize data and compare cases, indicating a descriptive typology (Sprinzak, 1995, pp. 18, 22). At the same time, the typology is indeed based on an explicit theory of why and under what conditions right-wing groups resort to terrorism, indicating an explanatory typology. The problem is that the theory does not specify its explanatory variables. One possible interpretation, however, is that it has two explanatory variables: (1) perceived threats from non-ruling groups, and (2) government protection from perceived

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<sup>10</sup> The asymmetric relationship between terrorists and their enemies is highlighted by several terrorism scholars as one of several key traits of terrorism. For more details, see Schmid (2011).

threats. If this interpretation is correct, the theory predicts that right-wing groups who feel sufficiently threatened will resort to terrorism, first against non-ruling groups, then against the government if protection is lacking. If we dichotomize these explanatory variables, the theory can be presented in a 2x2 matrix as an explanatory typology (Table 3).

TABLE 3  
EXPLANATORY TYPOLOGY BASED ON THE SPLIT  
DELEGITIMIZATION THEORY

	Perceived threats from non-ruling groups	
	Yes	No
Government protection		
Yes	Single-targeting terrorism	No terrorism
No	Double-targeting terrorism (split)	No terrorism

This typology contains only two logical types, single- and double-targeting terrorism. How, then, did Sprinzak end up with six types? It appears that the dynamics of split delegitimization played only a secondary role in constructing the typology, while the main constitutive variable was “the *dominant principle* around which the rightist group is organized” (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 23 italics in original). Thus, the typology is not explanatory because this variable is not based on a theory. Rather, it is a descriptive variable identifying principles of group organization.

### *3. Describe How the Types Are Constructed*

Sprinzak does not elaborate on how this dominant organizing principle has been identified and operationalized. Instead, he systematically discusses the presence or absence of the dynamics of split delegitimization for each type. This discussion reveals that these dynamics are only partially present in most types and completely absent in others (Sprinzak, 1995, pp. 35–37). While Sprinzak could present these findings as an example of theory falsification, he does not acknowledge the apparent lack of consistency between his theory and his typology. Thus, the theory is not rejected, despite the conflicting anecdotal evidence introduced by the author himself.

### *4. Propose a Model or Matrix*

Sprinzak offers no model or matrix of his typology. Note, however, that Table 3 illustrates one way of presenting the split delegitimization theory in a 2x2 matrix.

### *5. Consider a Simpler Solution with Mutually Exclusive Types*

Sprinzak has offered the only universal typology of right-wing terrorism to date. This is praiseworthy; however, the typology's broad scope can also be seen as a weakness. By covering the entire world, Sprinzak is forced to include very different actors under the same label. He also lacks systematic data for such a large empirical universe. The typology therefore appears to have been built using anecdotal evidence rather than by systematically employing theoretical or empirical variables.

Furthermore, Sprinzak's types are not mutually exclusive. Although Sprinzak recognizes the problem, he does not try to solve it (Sprinzak, 1995, p. 22). A major weakness of his typology is therefore that several cases can be attributed to more than one type.

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Finally, it remains unclear exactly how the typology was created. Rather than extending and patching Sprinzak's typology, I therefore propose to develop a new typology of right-wing terrorism.

### **A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe**

I now apply the five criteria introduced earlier to develop a new typology of right-wing terrorism in Western Europe. Note that the emphasis on Western Europe is not intended to challenge the notion of a strong transatlantic relationship between the radical right in Europe and that in North America – a relationship that is well documented by the existing literature (Jackson & Shekhovtsov, 2014; Kaplan & Bjørge, 1998; Kaplan & Weinberg, 1998). Western Europe was chosen because the region lacks an adequate categorization of key actors and key events.

#### *1. Define the Overarching Concept*

The literature on right-wing extremism is a logical starting point for conceptualizing right-wing terrorism. However, the literature offers no unified definition of right-wing extremism. The problem arises from the existence of two distinct approaches to studying political extremism. The first approach relates extremism to political opinion: If your political opinions diverge dramatically from the majority opinion, you are an extremist.<sup>11</sup> The second approach relates extremism to the means activists use in pursuing their political goals: If you support illegal violence, you are an extremist, regardless of your specific political opinions.<sup>12</sup> While these descriptions admittedly exaggerate each approach, they

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview of 26 opinion-based definitions of right-wing extremism, see Mudde (1995).

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Heitmeyer (2003, p. 203).

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serve to illustrate why existing scholarship on right-wing extremism remains ambiguous concerning precisely what and who the objects of study are.

For the purpose of this article, right-wing *extremism* is understood as the support of using illegal violence to promote right-wing policies. What are right-wing policies? The left/right dichotomy originated during the French Revolution.<sup>13</sup> Since then, it has been given many new meanings. At its core, however, remains a fundamental divide between those on the left who support policies designed to reduce social inequality, and those on the right who regard social inequality as inevitable, natural, or desirable (Bobbio & Cameron, 1996). Right-wing extremists thus accept use of illegal violence to promote social inequality. The exact nature of such policies and the criteria used to make corresponding social hierarchies, or rules of segregation, are subject to change across time and space.

The majority of right-wing extremists are not physically involved in violence. Posting extremist messages online (i.e. encouraging violence) involves less risk than participating in violent street activism or even terrorism. Two additional distinctions are therefore helpful: between extremists and militants, and between militants and terrorists. A militant *physically* demonstrates a willingness to use violence to pursue political goals.<sup>14</sup> A terrorist uses or threatens violence strategically to affect an audience beyond the immediate target (Hoffman, 2006, p. 40). I shall not delve further into the terrorism definition debate. Although terrorism remains a contested concept, terrorism scholars broadly agree about its main features (Schmid, 2011). Right-wing terrorists are therefore defined as non-state actors who strategically use or threaten violence to affect an audience beyond the immediate target to promote social inequality.

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<sup>13</sup> The French king's supporters sat to the right of the National Assembly's president and the revolution's supporters sat to his left.

<sup>14</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines militancy as "favouring confrontational or violent methods in support of a political or social cause."

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## 2. Specify Whether the Typology is Descriptive or Explanatory

Because specific theories of right-wing terrorism are in short supply, notwithstanding Sprinzak's split delegitimization theory, a descriptive typology is proposed.<sup>15</sup> The typology aims to describe and categorize the most salient right-wing terrorist actors and violent perpetrators in Western Europe after WWII. Furthermore, by identifying and highlighting essential differences between key actors, the typology is also intended to generate thinking about the different socio-political conditions from which these actors emerged. As such, the typology may contribute to future theory development and perhaps also to future explanatory typologies.

## 3. Describe How the Types Are Constructed

I begin by examining available records of right-wing terrorist attacks in Western Europe post-WWII. The latest edition of Routledge's *Handbook of Terrorism Research* reviews the world's top 20 terrorism databases (Bowie & Schmid, 2011). Only four databases allow isolating right-wing attacks in Western Europe from other attacks. Two recently became unavailable (WITS and MIPT), thereby leaving us with The Terrorism in Western Europe: Events Data (TWEED) and Europol's annual EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This lack of theories is emphasized by Wilhelm Heitmeyer (2003, 2005) in his two reviews of the literature on right-wing terrorism and violence respectively. Note, however, that the social movement literature has recently produced several fruitful studies of right-wing militancy and terrorism in Western Europe (key examples include Albanese & Froio, 2014; Caiani, Porta, & Wagemann, 2012; Della Porta, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> The TWEED dataset is available at <http://folk.uib.no/sspie/tweed.htm>. TE-SAT is available at [https://www.europol.europa.eu/latest\\_publications/37](https://www.europol.europa.eu/latest_publications/37). A third relevant source not included in this review is the Domestic Terrorist Victims (DTV) dataset available at [www.march.es/dtv](http://www.march.es/dtv). Matching DTV data against TWEED data shows that the main patterns of right-wing terrorism largely overlap.



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Coincidentally, the periods covered by these two databases link up. TWEED covers 1950–2004, while TE-SAT covers 2004–2013, although systematically only from 2006 onwards. Combined data from these two databases thus indicate general trends of right-wing terrorism 1950–2013, despite different registration methods.<sup>17</sup> TWEED registered 648 right-wing terrorist attacks 1950–2004 (approximately 6% of a total of 10,239 attacks). TE-SAT registered nine right-wing terrorist attacks 2006–2013, but only two in Western Europe. The remaining quantitative analysis is therefore based on TWEED data only.<sup>18</sup>

TWEED displays three waves of attacks: France in the early 1960s, Italy in the 1970s, and Germany in the early 1990s. France, Italy, and Germany also dominate the aggregate country share of casualties. Figure 1 and Table 4 illustrate attack frequencies and casualties. What do these patterns tell us?

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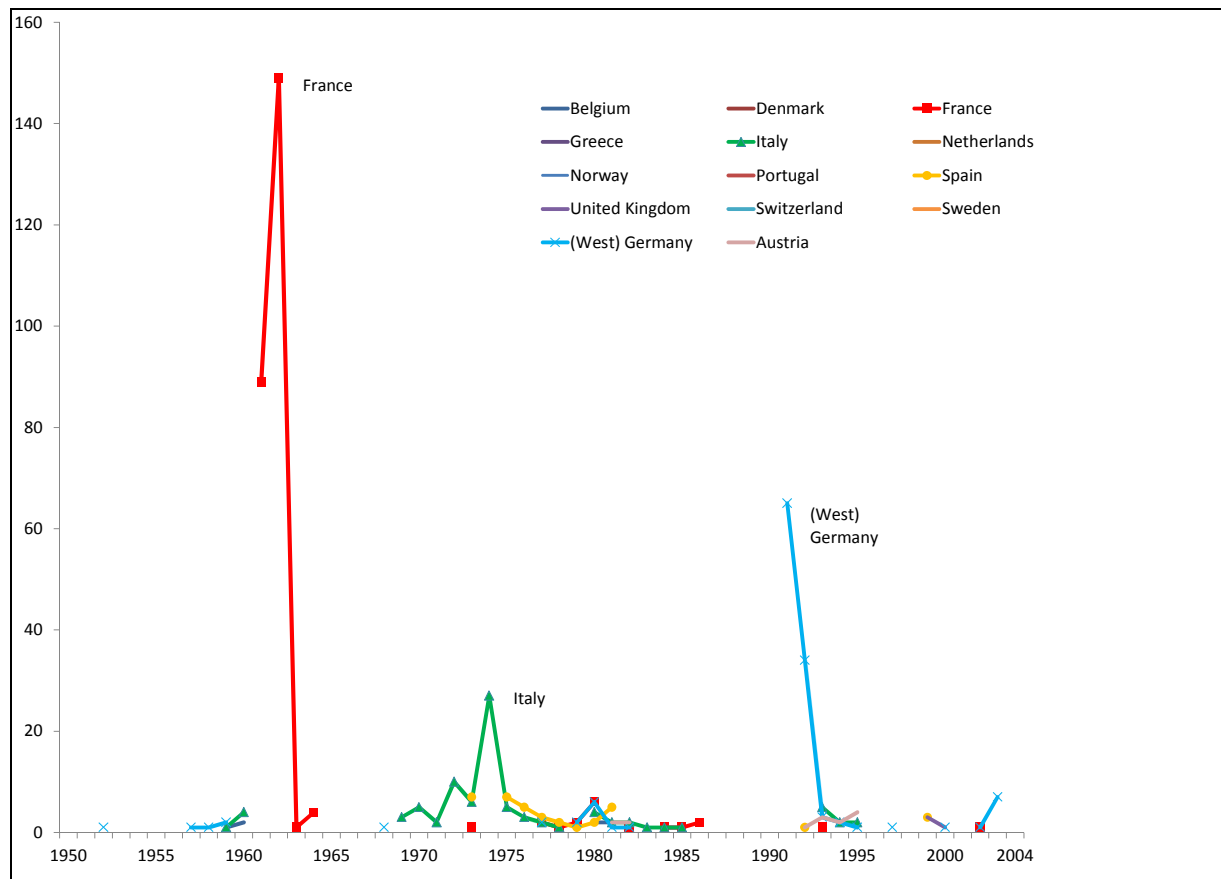
<sup>17</sup> TE-SAT is based on annual reporting from EU member states. TWEED is entirely based on *Keesing's Record of World Events*, available at <http://library.princeton.edu/resource/3894>.

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed discussion about the validity and reliability of TWEED data, see Engene (2004, pp. 50–58).

FIGURE 1

NUMBER OF RIGHT-WING TERRORIST ATTACKS IN WESTERN EUROPE

1950–2004



Source: TWEED: <http://folk.uib.no/sspje/tweed.htm>.

TABLE 4  
CASUALTIES OF RIGHT-WING TERRORISM IN WESTERN  
EUROPE 1950–2004

Country	Killed (Wounded)	Attacks	Intensity
Italy	162 (772)	89	10,5
France	89 (303)	262	1,5
(West) Germany	51 (267)	133	2,4
Spain	15 (56)	36	2,0
Belgium	7 (3)	12	0,8
Portugal	5 (4)	11	0,8
Austria	4 (4)	14	0,6
Switzerland	3 (5)	9	0,9
United Kingdom	2 (115)	10	11,7
Greece	1 (81)	65	1,3
Norway	1 (0)	2	0,5
Sweden	0 (4)	3	1,3
Denmark	0 (0)	1	0,0
Netherlands	0 (0)	1	0,0
Finland	-	-	-
Iceland	-	-	-
Luxemburg	-	-	-
Ireland	-	-	-
Sum	340 (1614)	648	

*Note:* Intensity is the sum of killed and wounded divided by number of attacks.

*Source:* TWEED: <http://folk.uib.no/sspje/tweed.htm>

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Individual data for France, Italy, and Germany reveal a striking picture: only four terrorist groups were behind as much as 39% of the 648 right-wing attacks registered in TWEED, and 56% of all killings: *l'Organisation de l'Armée Secrete* (OAS) in France, *Ordine Nero* (ON) and *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (NAR) in Italy, and *Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann* (WSH) in Germany.

While only four groups conducted a significant share of the attacks, a much larger number of mostly unknown groups conducted the rest. Excluding one outlier, 65% of these attacks have unknown perpetrators.<sup>19</sup> Nearly half of these 65% happened in Germany 1991–1992, while the remaining half is distributed evenly across time and space, except for two smaller peaks in Italy in the 1970s.

As many as 42 known groups were behind the remaining 35% of the attacks – also distributed evenly across time and space. Of those 42 groups, only four conducted more than five attacks, and no one group conducted more than ten attacks. The majority of the known groups conducted only one or two attacks.

These numbers suggest that right-wing terrorists in Western Europe can be divided into two categories or types: one consisting of a handful of known groups responsible for a substantial number of attacks and killings, and one consisting of 42 known and even more unknown groups involved in only a few attacks, typically one or two. These initial patterns form the basis of the typology proposed below.

Next, by investigating specific cases from each category, additional type characteristics emerge. Such case studies may help identify new variables that can be used to compare and contrast the corresponding types. In addition, new types may appear that do not fit the original categories. For example, lone actors represent a potential third category or

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<sup>19</sup> On 17 December 1978, the Greek group *Organismos Etnikis Anorthosoos* claimed responsibility for 40 attacks (zero killed or wounded). The group never reappeared.

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type. Thus, based on a broad investigation of relevant cases, the following three *tentative* types are proposed and described below: elite-sponsored groups, subcultural networks, and lone actors.

*Elite-sponsored groups.* Elite-sponsored terrorists operated predominantly in France, Italy, Spain, and Germany between the 1960s and the 1980s. These groups had up to several hundred militants and were organized hierarchically with a centralized leadership. Their terrorist campaigns were motivated by international conflicts rather than by immigration, which had yet to become a contested issue in Western Europe. More specifically, their campaigns were products of elite-sponsored strategies meant to protect or reinstall former authoritarian regimes, and to obstruct their leftist enemies from gaining political power. The OAS, ON, NAR, and WSH are among the most important cases.

OAS is behind the largest number of right-wing terrorist attacks in history. TWEED covers attacks in France, but not in Algeria, where OAS was most active. From 1961–1962, OAS conducted 221 attacks in France, killing 63 persons and wounding 191. Former high-ranking French officers and a handful of civilians created OAS in February 1960. They wanted to protect the large, white, and privileged  *pied noir*  community then living in Algeria. Their strategic aims were therefore to prevent France from granting Algeria independence, and to defeat the socialist revolutionaries from the Algerian  *Front de Libération Nationale* . OAS soon developed into an advanced terrorist organization, benefiting from its founding officers' military experience. At its peak, OAS counted about 1,000 militants, divided into sectors, branches, and Delta commando units of 7–12 members

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(Harrison, 1989). These units conducted terrorist campaigns on two continents simultaneously including several assassination attempts on President Charles de Gaulle.<sup>20</sup>

The Black Orchestra refers to a shadowy Italian network assumed to be behind one of history's most extensive right-wing terrorist campaigns (Laurent & Sutton, 1978). Waves of left- and right-wing violence hit Italy between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. Among a multitude of militant factions, four right-wing groups stand out as key protagonists of this violent drama: *Ordine Nuovo*, *Avanguardia Nazionale*, *Ordine Nero*, and *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari*. These groups are assumed to be behind some of Italy's most devastating terrorist attacks, including the following bombings: Piazza Fontana in Rome (1969), Peteano (1972), the Italicus train (1974), Piazza della Loggia in Brescia (1974), and the Bologna train station (1980). These attacks were part of an elite-driven strategy known as "the strategy of tension" (Cento Bull, 2007). The strategic aim, understandable only in a Cold War context, was preventing Communism's influence in Italy and beyond. Those implementing it, mainly members of Italy's secret service and police, used right-wing militants to conduct terrorist attacks masked as left-wing terrorism to weaken popular support for Italy's Communist Party (Ferraresi, 1996).

Two of the deadliest attacks in the history of right-wing terrorism happened in 1980: the Bologna train station attack (85 killed and over 200 wounded), and the Munich Oktoberfest bombing (thirteen killed and 213 wounded). The latter has by several accounts (including TWEED) been attributed to the German militia *Wehnsportgruppe Hoffmann* (WSH), although this group was never convicted. Recent evidence, however, strengthens the alleged connection between WSH and the Oktoberfest attack (Paterson, 2015). WSH's strategic aim was overthrowing West Germany's socialist government and installing a new

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<sup>20</sup> Alexander Harrison (1989) has written the most authoritative account of the OAS. Other relevant accounts include Bocca (1968), Buchard (1963), and Henissart (1971).

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authoritarian regime (Fromm, 1998). They drew inspiration from the paramilitary assault division of the German Nazi Party –*Sturmabteilung* (SA) – that was influential in Hitler’s rise to power. WSH had at least six divisions across Germany, totalling about 400 members (Fromm, 1998). These divisions had access to substantial military resources and the group emulated a professional military organization with uniforms, ranks, and insignia. WSH members were also involved in international terrorism, reportedly collaborating with the Lebanese Phalange and with the PLO (Hoffman, 1982; Schmidt, 1993).

*Subcultural networks.* While elite-sponsored groups diminished in the 1980s, right-wing subcultural networks flourished in the 1980s and 1990s (Bjørgero, 1997; Bjørgero & Witte, 1993; Merkl & Weinberg, 1997). One contributing factor to this new wave of right-wing activism was the large influx of non-western immigrants that Western Europe experienced during the late 1980s and 1990s, in combination with an emerging and increasingly violent skinhead subculture.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to elite-sponsored groups, subcultural networks have little support beyond their own underground movement. They may express general antipathy towards immigrants, political enemies, and the government through symbols and propaganda, but rarely present concrete political demands. Sometimes, an attack’s primary aim may simply be to gain respect and influence within a group or social network. Subcultural networks are largely nationally oriented and only rarely involved in international terrorism. While concerned about immigration, they are also motivated by their endless street war with leftist militants.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the best account of the emergence of the European skinhead subculture is found in the introduction of John Hamm’s (1993) pioneering study of American skinheads.

<sup>22</sup> For insider accounts, see for example Collins (2012), Salas (2003), and Schmidt (1993).

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Existing literature suggest that violence by subcultural networks has been distributed over at least two generations: The first generation was behind a wave of attacks (primarily targeting immigrants) in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Koopmans, 1996). Most attacks were conducted by unorganized racist youth mobs, skinhead gangs, and hooligans with limited ideological motivation, and no overarching strategy (Bjørge & Witte, 1993).

The second generation emerged in the mid-1990s and consisted of smaller autonomous groups that were better organized and more ideologically motivated. These groups typically had no leadership beyond their own cell structure, but were connected through a loosely organized network of similar groups, sometimes referred to as a groupuscular network (Griffin, 2003; Jackson, 2014; Virchow, 2004). Compared to the first generation, they conducted fewer but more targeted attacks, not only against immigrants, but also against left-wing and government targets.<sup>23</sup> Many such groups were inspired by the strategic principle of leaderless resistance, introduced by the American white supremacist Louis Beam (1992). Their strategic aim was to incite a revolutionary war between races.

*Lone actors.* Finally, lone-actor terrorism consists of attacks or plots that nobody except the individual perpetrator is aware of. While lone actors carry out their operational planning in isolation, they are generally seen as strongly influenced by existing political movements, typically through online activities (Kaplan, Lööw, & Malkki, 2014). Recent research also suggests that while most terrorists are normal, psychologically speaking, a significant share of lone actors suffer from mental disorders (Corner & Gill, 2014).

One study, which analysed 198 lone actor attacks, found that right-wing actors constituted the second largest category (17%), next to attacks in which the perpetrator's ideological conviction remains unknown (Spaaij, 2012). A similar study of 119 lone actors

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<sup>23</sup> One example would be the UK-based group Combat 18. See Lowles (2001) and Ryan (2011).



found that 34% were right-wingers (Gill, Horgan, & Deckert, 2014). In short, lone actor terrorism is not exclusively a right-wing phenomenon, but right-wing motivations are overrepresented compared to other political ideologies.

#### 4. Propose a Model or Matrix

Having described some key characteristics of and differences between these three tentative types, we may now illustrate them using a model or a matrix. Table 5 offers an initial overview of eight descriptive variables (all of which were used in the above discussion to compare and contrast the three tentative types).

TABLE 5  
TENTATIVE TYPOLOGY OF RIGHT-WING TERRORISM IN WESTERN EUROPE

Variables	Types		
	Elite-sponsored groups	Subcultural networks	Lone actors
Organizational structure	Hierarchy	Network	N/A
Leadership	Centralized	Decentralized	N/A
Group membership	Large (>100)	Small (<50)	N/A
Known political strategy	Always	Sometimes	Sometimes
Affiliation to former right-wing regime	Yes	No	No
Sponsorship	Elites	Subculture	None
Significant access to military resources	Yes	No	No
International terrorism	Yes	No	No

Not yet cross-tabulated, these variables are meant to help illustrate key differences between three *ideal* types as an intermediary step towards a more rigorous categorization. This means that deviations may and will occur. For example, most terrorist attacks from subcultural groups and lone actors occur within a national context. However, there are exceptions to this rule, such as when a Danish affiliate of the UK-based group Combat 18 in 1997 attempted to send letter-bombs from Sweden to UK addresses, or, when the Austrian-based lone actor Franz Fuchs targeted people in Germany, also with letter bombs.

#### 5. Consider a Simpler Solution with Mutually Exclusive Types

As already explained, cross-tabulating variables ensures mutually exclusive types and encourages simple solutions because the number of variables and/or values must be limited to achieve a manageable property space. If all eight variables in Table 5 were to be cross-tabulated, we would end up with  $2^8=256$  cells (assuming only dichotomous cells) and 253 potentially new types in addition to the initial three. Clearly, cell reduction is needed to create a simpler typology.

One technique for reducing cells is merging similar variables. The variables “organizational structure,” “leadership,” and “group membership” can for example be merged into the variable “organization” with three values: “strong,” “loose,” and “absent.” Another cell reduction technique is to merge or eliminate variables with identical scores on several types. Most of the dichotomous variables in Table 5 can be eliminated because they score identically on subcultural networks and lone actors and are therefore not helpful for distinguishing between them.

The theoretically most relevant variables should be kept. Terrorism is always part of a political strategy, which, in turn, helps explain why an actor engages in violence. If a

strategic aim is lacking, or is not political, we are likely not dealing with terrorists. As shown by the preceding discussion, violent attacks from subcultural networks and lone actors are not always motivated by specific political strategies. It may therefore be useful to apply a dichotomous “strategy” variable to distinguish thugs from terrorists, although the former may also have a terrorizing effect on their victims.

Cross-tabulating these two variables (organization and strategy) results in a 3x2 matrix (Table 6). We may then consider whether all types are logically possible, whether they can be populated with relevant cases, and try to find an appropriate label for each type.

TABLE 6

TYPOLGY FRAMEWORK

Organization	Political strategy	
	Yes	No
Strong	A	D
Loose	B	E
Absent	C	F

*Elite-sponsored groups* (cell A), such as the OAS and NAR, are strongly organised groups, aiming to conserve or reinstall authoritarian regimes and to undermine their leftist enemies. These groups gradually disappeared from Western Europe as the Cold War came to an end and the legacies of former authoritarian regimes evaporated. Note, however, that large hierarchic militant groups have been active in Western Europe also after the end of the Cold War. Examples include the German *Skinheads Sächsische Schweiz* – a group consisting of up to 140 members that was banned in 2001, or, the still active Swedish group *Svenska Motståndsrörelsen* with well beyond 100 active members in several divisions in Sweden, Finland and Norway. However, these and similar groups have never been accused

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of being involved in large-scale terrorist campaigns. One reason may be that they lack significant elite support – a decisive factor for facilitating and justifying the terrorist campaigns of their predecessors. Indeed, these groups have more in common with more loosely organized subcultural networks.

As described earlier, violence by subcultural networks has been distributed over at least two waves of attacks. The first was attributed to racist *mobs, gangs, and hooligans* (cell E) with limited ideological motivation and no overarching strategy. Although terrorizing their victims, such attacks do not necessarily qualify as terrorism because their strategic aim is unclear. The second wave consisted of more targeted attacks intended to incite revolutionary war. The perpetrators organized in small *autonomous groups or cells* (cell B) inspired by the strategic principle of leaderless resistance. The German NSU-cell provides an example (Köhler, 2014b).

Some lone actors, such as Anders Behring Breivik and David Copeland, expressed their strategic aims clearly through political manifestos or in court. Both were *lone actors* (cell C), Copeland aiming to incite a war between races, Breivik aiming to incite a war between cultures. Other *violent loners* (cell F) fail to express their aims clearly, either because they act spontaneously or because they have no clear strategy. Labelling such perpetrators as terrorists would be misleading.

Finally, some groups appear equally or more interested in making money than in politics. For example, in 2005, 18 members of a Spanish neo-Nazi network were arrested for storing and selling weapons, including dozens of shotguns and a grenade launcher, and for advocating violence through their website (El Temps, 2008). Yet their activities apparently did not involve the planning of terrorist attacks. In 2009, UK police rounded up a global arms ring supplying white supremacists worldwide with firearms and explosives (Bounds & Boxell, 2009). These were right-wing *crime syndicates* (cell D), but not terrorists.

Such criminal groups may however act as supporters of more politically oriented clandestine groups. For example, the Austrian group “Object 21” which controlled large parts of the red light scene at the German-Austrian border, used money and explosives acquired through criminal activity to support other and more politically oriented groups in Germany and Austria (The Vienna Review, 2013).

Summing up the discussion in the last few paragraphs, Table 7 presents a simplified (fewer variables) yet more nuanced (more types) version of the typology introduced in Table 5. The typology includes an additional dimension categorizing perpetrators into two overarching types of violence: terrorism and criminal violence. This dimension is included to illustrate the inherent ambiguity of right-wing terrorism as a concept, and its close relation to other forms of violence, such as hate crimes (see Deloughery, King, & Asal, 2012).

TABLE 7  
TYPOLOGY OF RIGHT-WING TERRORISM AND  
VIOLENCE IN WESTERN EUROPE

Organization	Political strategy	
	Yes	No
Strong	Elite-sponsored groups	Crime syndicates
Loose	Autonomous groups/cells	Mobs/gangs/hooligans
Absent	Lone actors	Violent loners
Type of violence	Terrorism	Criminal violence

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## Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to systematically categorize Western Europe's most important right-wing terrorists and violent perpetrators after WWII. As such, the proposed typology should only be seen as an initial step towards more explanatory oriented studies of past and present actors. Its strengths lie in its simplicity and in the fact that its types are derived from a combination of empirical patterns (TWEED attack frequencies), case studies, and the typological criteria introduced earlier.

While the proposed typology offers only limited insight into the causal mechanisms underlying its proposed types, certain aspects could be interesting to pursue further in future studies. For example, the interplay between international conflicts, regime types, and elite behaviour could be key for understanding the rise and fall of large-scale right-wing terrorist campaigns. Consequently, given Western Europe's current political situation, the threat from strongly organized right-wing groups appears to be significantly lower today than some 20 to 30 years ago. The reason is that the majority of attacks and killings were conducted by a type of elite-sponsored groups that are less likely to operate in contemporary Western Europe. As long as the legacies of former authoritarian regimes continue to evaporate, and democracies consolidate, Western Europe provides less fertile ground for such large and well-organised terrorist groups.

At the same time, we lack reliable and updated data on more loosely organized forms of right-wing terrorism and violence. This type of violence tends to fall beneath the government radar, and is often reported as hate crime rather than terrorism. The low number of right-wing incidents reported by Europol's annual terrorism report is an indicator of this problem. There is therefore a critical need for more empirical research to document recent developments. A commendable contribution in this regard is Daniel Köhler's (2014a) recent study of German right-wing terrorism.

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In terms of future theory development, the proposed typology also suggests that right-wing terrorism should not be treated as a monolithic phenomenon, and that different actor types must be studied independently. A logical next step would therefore be to develop more actor-specific theories, possibly by use of explanatory typologies. Such actor-specific theories may in fact prove more universally valid than any universal theory or typology of right-wing terrorism. For example, rightist lone actors may not be so different from leftist or jihadist lone actors. Some of the proposed types may thus apply also outside the right-wing extremist domain. The proposed typology could therefore potentially prove useful for analysing other forms of terrorism and political violence, considering the universal nature of its constitutive variables, strategy and organization.

Although the proposed typology is descriptive rather than explanatory, it can be used as a springboard for further explanatory analysis. Rather than contrasting descriptive and explanatory typologies, we should ask how they relate, and how we can move from description towards explanation when relevant theory is lacking. This question has so far not been adequately addressed by the social science scholarship on typologies. A more nuanced understanding would certainly boost the theoretical utility of many typologies, including the one proposed in this article.

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