

Political Violence and Voting for Extremist Parties in Weimar Germany*

Nils-Christian Bormann[†]

Edoardo A. Viganò[‡]

Abstract

What is the effect of political violence on electoral support for extremist parties? We argue that voter reactions to violence are asymmetric because voters on the ideological right are particularly afraid of status loss. Invoking exclusive nationalist narratives, right-wing parties frame violence as a necessary defensive reaction to external threats and portray themselves as the most effective defender of unsettled voters. Empirically, we introduce novel event data and evidence from a historical case: Weimar Germany. Estimating difference-in-differences regressions on national parliamentary election outcomes at the county level, our results show that political violence in general and violence by the extreme right benefited the Nazi Party more than the Communist Party. Substantively, the NSDAP gained 2-6 percentage points in counties affected by violence. The voluminous historical literature supports the plausibility of our theoretical mechanism. Amid increasing levels of political violence in Western democracies, our findings raise concerns for democratic stability.

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[†]Professor of International Political Studies, Department of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, Witten/Herdecke University, Alfred-Herrhausen-Str. 50, 58455 Witten, Germany. Corresponding author: Nils-Christian Bormann (nils.bormann@uni-wh.de).

[‡]Visiting Professor, Department of Social Sciences, University Carlos III, Calle Madrid 126, 28903 Getafe (Madrid), Spain.

“When violence becomes widespread and recurrent, the prospects for political democracy are drastically reduced.”

– O’Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986: 11)

What is the effect of political violence on electoral support for extremist parties that threaten liberal democracy? The increasing levels of violence in Western democracies (Ruggeri, Daxecker and Prasad, 2025), including violence against politicians, hate crimes (e.g., Riaz, Bischof and Wagner, 2024: 1147), and right-wing extremism make this a pertinent question. Although there is a near scholarly consensus that political violence committed by ethnic out-groups benefits parties of the political right that advocate law and order policies (Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Rees and Smith, 2022; Godefroidt, 2023), recent studies of Germany find that even right-wing terrorism benefits the radical right Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) in terms of popular and electoral support (Eger and Olzak, 2023; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Sabet, Liebold and Friebe, 2025).¹ Why would voters support parties associated with a violent ideology? After all, most political scientists who study electoral violence agree that voters dislike violence (e.g., Rosenzweig, 2023).

We propose a novel argument that combines the psychological fear of status loss among voters with the critical role of ideology to frame violence. Although terrorism as a strategy may be effective for actors from diverse ideological backgrounds (Kydd and Walter, 2006), right-wing political actors are particularly well positioned to benefit from it. They draw on exclusive nationalism, a reactive ideology that promises the defense of a national in-group against external threats, to address and inflate fears among their followers after out-group violence. Moreover, nationalist ideology even justifies violent acts

¹According to Golder (2016: 478), radical parties call for a “root and branch” reform of the political system in which they operate, while extremist parties oppose democracy openly. In practice, the two are hard to distinguish. Given the historical context of our study, in which democracy failed, we refer to extremist actors for the rest of the study.

committed by the in-group as a necessary defense against external enemies. Compared to voters with left-leaning preferences, voters on the ideological right are, on average, more susceptible to both economic and cultural status threats that politically violent events evoke. Typically, right-wing voters are wealthier than left-wing voters and have more to lose economically. Personality characteristics, such as higher conscientiousness and lower openness, are more prevalent among more right-wing voters and make them feel more threatened by cultural change and disorder conveyed by violence. The push of status loss fears and the pull of exclusive nationalist ideology result in an asymmetric effect of violence on voter support for extremist parties.²

Empirically, we introduce novel newspaper-based event-level data of political violence in a prominent historical case: Weimar Germany. Our sample includes all event reports of political violence in the only complete newspaper from the time, *Voss Newspaper*. Non-state violence, in the form of clashes involving members of the extreme right Nazi Party's paramilitary wing, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), and various extreme left paramilitary outfits linked to the German Communist Party (KPD), dominates the sample. However, the sample also features state-based violence between police forces and supporters of either extremist party as well as one-sided violence against civilians. Focusing on the period 1928 to 1932 that begins one year before the onset of the Great Depression and sees the electoral rise of the political extremes on the far left and right, we investigate the role of political violence on electoral outcomes at the county-level.

Employing both classic and synthetic difference-in-differences estimators, we find that political violence in general, and by the extreme right in particular, increases voter support for Hitler's Nazi party by 2–6 percentage points in violence-affected counties relative to non-affected counties, specifically in the first electoral period. In contrast, the electoral

²For the interplay between emotions as a push factor and ideology as a pull factor in violent political mobilization, see [Costalli and Ruggeri \(2017\)](#).

outcomes of the extreme left Communist Party, or of other parties across the political spectrum, show weaker, non-robust, or even negative effects. The results for the Nazi party are robust to multiple specifications and to the random assignment of treatment in permutation tests.

Our study contributes to four research areas. First, our findings weigh in on the debate on the electoral effects of extreme right violence (Geys and Hernæs, 2021; Eady, Hjorth and Dinesen, 2023; Eger and Olzak, 2023; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Pickard, Efthymoulou and Bove, 2023; Daxecker, Deglow and Fjelde, 2025; De Juan, Haass and Voß, 2025; Sabet, Liebold and Friebe, 2025). Our results from interwar Germany align with those studies that find a positive effect of violence on voter support for radical right parties today. Second, by expanding our focus to non-state actor violence, our study adds to the literature on electoral violence, which typically investigates violence perpetrated by incumbents or opposition parties against civilians (Höglund, 2009; Birch, Daxecker and Höglund, 2020). Third, we contribute to research on emotions, ideology, and political violence (Petersen, 2002; Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015, 2017; Pearlman, 2016). Our argument aligns with those interpretations of fear that understand it as a mobilizational factor (Pearlman, 2016), but only when this party pursues an exclusively nationalist ideology.

Finally, we contribute to the broader debate on democratic backsliding in established democracies. Although many observers identify political violence as a danger to democratic survival (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, 1986; Schedler, 1998; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018), political scientists have produced few specific insights that connect violence to democratic deconsolidation or breakdown beyond the threat of military coups in new democracies. This detachment between normative concern and empirical insights results in part from the definitional equation of democracy and non-violence that feeds into the most widely-used democracy measurements.³ Our focus on the link between vi-

³V-Dem, the Polity data, and, to a lesser extent, the dichotomous measure by Boix, Miller and Rosato

olence and support for extremist parties in a historical European case that actually failed thus advances the backsliding literature in two ways: first, it provides empirical evidence for a theoretical link between political violence and democratic breakdown via electoral support for an extremist party. Second, it provides evidence on the risk of democratic breakdown that does not originate from cases in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East—cases that share fewer commonalities with most OECD members than their historical counter-parts (see [Kaftan and Bormann, 2025: 7](#)).

Political Violence and Voting

Classic theories of voting do not consider political violence a relevant explanatory factor of vote choices ([Downs, 1957](#); [Campbell et al., 1960](#); [Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1968 \(1944\)](#)). Similarly, the vast majority of research on political violence is not concerned with voting. For a long time, political scientists understood bullets and ballots as substitutes in the competition for power. However, recently, conflict researchers have highlighted the widespread practice of “election violence” as a complement to voting (see [Staniland, 2014](#); [Harish and Little, 2017](#)). Political actors employ such violence “to influence the electoral process [...] [in] the pre-election phase, the day or days of the election, and the post-election phase” ([Höglund, 2009: 415-416](#)). Election violence affects every second election in non-OECD countries and leads to deaths in every third election ([Daxecker, Amicarelli and Jung, 2019](#)). Most studies conclude that voters dislike politicians associated with violence ([Burchard, 2020](#); [Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020](#); [Siddiqui, 2022](#); [Rosenzweig, 2023](#)). Despite its widespread rejection by voters, incumbents frequently commit election violence. By inducing fear in voters ([Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019](#); [Young, 2019](#)), violence suppresses opposition turnout ([Trelles and Carreras, 2012](#); [Condra et al., 2018](#)), and [\(2013\)](#) explicitly refer to violence in their definitions of democracy, thus making any analysis between political violence and democratic survival circular.

thereby electorally benefits incumbents. The central logic of election violence is, thus, *deterrence* of support for political opponents.

Research on electoral violence studies democracies and hybrid regimes in the Global South. In economically developed democracies in Europe and beyond, incumbent-driven electoral violence has been and remains rare. Instead, the modal form of political violence is violence by non-state actors against civilians, state agents, or other non-state actors, often grouped under the label of terrorism. Studies of the effects of such violence—especially radical Islamist attacks—on vote choice suggest that incumbent governments and particularly nationalist, right-wing parties benefit electorally (Rees and Smith, 2022; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Godefroidt, 2023). The two theoretical logics that these studies propose are *rally-around-the-flag*, where voters become more supportive of governing parties in response to a crisis, and *salience* mechanisms, which suggest that voters under the impression of security threats see right-wing parties as the most competent actors in dealing with these threats.

Another strand of the literature investigates extreme right-wing terrorism and finds that such violence benefits nationalist, radical right parties (RRPs) in some cases, such as Germany and India (Eger and Olzak, 2023; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Daxecker, Deglow and Fjelde, 2025; Sabet, Liebald and Friebe, 2025), but not in others, for example, in Norway and the United Kingdom (Geys and Hernæs, 2021; Pickard, Efthymoulou and Bove, 2023). Although focused on a different perpetrator than work on Islamic terrorism, these studies invoke a similar salience logic to explain how political violence, specifically terrorism, shifts attention to issues that RRPs champion, most importantly immigration (Krause and Matsunaga, 2023: 2290). In contrast, studies that reveal negative findings invoke the rally-around-the-flag mechanism (Geys and Hernæs, 2021: 496), or suggest a *revised deterrence* effect, in which citizens who are appalled by violence distance themselves from ideological positions identified with the perpetrator, rather than withdrawing

from politics as predicted by the electoral violence literature (Pickard, Efthymoulou and Bove, 2023).

Despite their focus on terrorism, few of these studies interact with the literature on terrorist strategies. Kydd and Walter (2006) understand terrorism as a form of costly signaling to convince potential voters of the seriousness of its perpetrators. For example, the *outbidding* mechanism describes the utility of violence in a society divided into competing ideological or ethnic blocs, in which multiple political actors compete for the same voter base. Those parties or organizations that use violence against out-groups demonstrate to in-group voters that they are particularly committed to their cause. Unlike the deterrence or salience mechanisms discussed above, the outbidding mechanism then suggests that violence might benefit any actor that employs terrorist violence.⁴

The existing literature thus raises multiple questions. Empirically, why does right-wing terror increase voter support for RRP in some contexts but not in others? Theoretically, observing greater voter support for RRP after right-wing terror is consistent with both the competence and the outbidding logic. However, the outbidding mechanism should also operate for terrorist attacks by violent actors with non-right wing ideological orientations.⁵ In the remainder of this paper, we aim to answer these questions by integrating existing theoretical ideas into a psychologically grounded framework that explains why voters in general might support violence-affiliated parties, even if extremist nationalist parties will benefit more.

⁴Other mechanisms discussed by Kydd and Walter (2006) similarly suggest that terrorism works for perpetrators more generally. For example, the *provocation* mechanism highlights how relatively unpopular political actors use terror attacks against state forces to trigger a disproportionate response of repression by the incumbent government. Where the government reacts with indiscriminate violence, citizens, who were previously on the fence about the terrorist actor, might be driven into its arms.

⁵Balcells and Torrats-Espinosa (2018) find no effect of terrorist violence on vote choice when studying the Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). ETA clearly pursued nationalist objectives, yet its Marxist-Leninist goals place it on the extreme left of the ideological spectrum.

Loss Aversion, Nationalism, and Voting for Extremist Parties

Following Birch et al.'s (2020: 7) call to theorize “perpetrators and their targets”, we focus on two main actors. First, we group extremist parties that advocate or condone violence, party members, affiliated organizations, or sympathizers who commit violence against political opponents in the party’s name as *perpetrators*. Central to our understanding of perpetrators is that observers understand those individuals who commit violence as affiliated with the extremist party, even if they are not officially party members. Second, following the terrorism literature (Kydd and Walter, 2006: 50), we understand the primary targets of violence as the individuals who observe violence, its audience, rather than its victims (Daxecker and Prasad, 2026: 6).⁶ We further distinguish both perpetrators and the audience into *in-group* members, which encompass political elites and regular citizens who share ethnic identity or ideological convictions, and *out-group* individuals that differ on those dimensions.

Our theoretical argument begins with the audience. We advance a psychologically grounded mechanism that links violence and fears of status loss among voters. These fears encompass security threats, economic decline, cultural change, or any other development that calls into question the status quo of individual voters. Prospect theory predicts that the desire to avoid losses leads individuals to adopt riskier strategies than they otherwise would (Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler, 1991). Political scientists have demonstrated that fear of losing economic status is associated with voting preferences for the radical right in contemporary Europe (Im et al., 2023).

Violence interacts with such fears in two ways. First, observing violence directly or

⁶We agree with Costalli & Ruggeri’s (2017: 924) suggestion that “emotions triggered by events that happened to other persons (...) are especially important in explaining political mobilization...”

knowing that it happened nearby induces fear for one's security. These fears increase if out-group members are the perpetrators of violence (McDoom, 2012; Weyland, 2021). In turn, voters seek protection against the threat, and those political actors who most convincingly promise such protection will benefit from these fears. Second, violence amplifies other fears, such as fear of immigration among voters who prefer cultural homogeneity. When immigrants are involved in violence, either as perpetrators or even as targets, voters support parties perceived as the most effective at addressing the concern raised by violence (Krause and Matsunaga, 2023: 2289-2290).

Both security fears and status loss fears are also consistent with the outbidding logic discussed above. Out-group violence raises voter demands for a strong party that protects the in-group. Violence by in-group perpetrators against the out-group identifies the party affiliated with it as the most determined defenders of in-group interests.⁷ In turn, voters choose to support the party that will most likely protect them from unwanted change. These are often extremist parties whose use of violence gives them a reputation for resolve to determine voters' interests.

Importantly, neither violence-induced fear of status loss nor the outbidding logic singles out any specific perpetrator as the logical benefactor of violence. Nevertheless, both the literature on terrorism in general and recent work that studies extreme right-wing violence in particular find that parties of the (radical) right are the main electoral benefactors of violence (Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Sabet, Liebold and Friebe, 2025).⁸ Yet, why would a violent labor strike against employer plans to limit workers' rights not benefit left-wing parties seen as most competent in defending workers' rights? Similarly, why would attacks from ex-

⁷One notable difference between the two mechanisms is that the outbidding logic sometimes predicts attacks on in-group rivals.

⁸This finding contrasts with studies on ethnically divided societies where multiple ethno-nationalist contenders compete for power (e.g., Rabushka and Shepsle, 2008; Vogt, Gleditsch and Cederman, 2021).

tremist right-wing perpetrators not raise security fears among a left-wing audience, and make it move closer to a left-wing party that promises it protection?

Although we do not exclude the possibility that left-wing or other political parties can benefit from violence, we argue that nationalist right-wing parties are more likely to profit. Central to our argument is the ideology of exclusionary nationalism, which elevates often ethnically defined in-group members above out-group members (cf. [Tudor and Slater, 2021](#): 707). As a reactive ideology, it arises in response to domestic or foreign threats ([Shayo, 2009](#): 155). Unlike other, forward-looking ideologies, like communism or inclusive cosmopolitanism, which promise future rewards, nationalism's reactive nature appeals to voters who are particularly sensitive to (status) threats.

Among the audience, out-group violence, whether feared or realized increases nationalist attitudes among voters ([Callens and Meuleman, 2023](#)). Average right-wing voters are also more susceptible to these fears than typical left-wing voters, as they are more likely to have “closed, rigid, and structure-seeking” personality traits rather than “flexible, and ambiguity-tolerant” ones ([Bakker, Lelkes and Malka, 2021](#)). Therefore, right-wing voters prefer order over chaos, stability over change, and homogeneity over heterogeneity. Out-group violence that threatens any of these preferences will therefore raise demand for a strong defense of the status quo.⁹ These voters also welcome violence by in-group actors who promise to protect order, stability, and homogeneity. If these assumptions about personality traits hold, their combination with prospect theory's prediction that individuals feel losses more severely than gains leads us to conclude that right-wing voters will more easily condone or accept violence to protect the status quo than left-wing voters.

Among perpetrators of violence, nationalist parties respond to out-group violence and fears of status loss and promise to defend the nation (in-group) from such threats to gain

⁹[Bakker, Lelkes and Malka \(2021\)](#) argue that part of the existing evidence is based on selection effects; [Federico and Malka \(2018\)](#) highlight the context-dependent nature of personality traits' impact. We understand these critiques to be directed at the strength of the hypothesized effect, not its fundamental operation.

greater electoral support (Giavazzi et al., 2024). They stoke these fears in their voter base by exaggerating threats (Weyland, 2021). Extremist violence against out-groups directs voters' attention towards the hypothetical threats against the status quo (Krause and Matsunaga, 2023). Furthermore, nationalist parties frame violent attacks against out-groups as a defensive action (Daxecker, Deglow and Fjelde, 2025), appealing to voters afraid of losing their own status. Finally, defensive frames preemptively address voters who dislike violence as a political strategy but generally sympathize with the goals of nationalist parties. Ideology is the critical *pull* factor needed to combine with the *push* factor of status loss fears to lead to voter support for a violent party (cf. Costalli and Ruggeri, 2017).

H_1 Out-group political violence benefits nationalist right-wing parties more than non-nationalist parties.

H_2 In-group political violence benefits nationalist right-wing parties more than non-nationalist parties.

In line with existing research on the impact of violence on voting, we argue that violent events “are mostly felt and manifested at the local level” (Berrebi and Klor, 2008). We argue that the effect of violence weakens with distance. First, greater proximity raises the chance that voters are emotionally affected because they know perpetrators, victims, or locations of violence. Second, news about violence reaches more people closer to a violent event than farther away from its occurrence. This assumption should hold particularly in a historical context where mass media were predominantly locally consumed newspapers.¹⁰ The Communist Georg Fischer captured the centrality of the local for the individual:

¹⁰On the importance of NSDAP presence in an area to reach voters, see Ohr (2013: 61). Similarly, Rosenhaft (2008: 9) emphasizes the centrality of Berlin's neighborhoods as the central unit of working class social life, where Communists and Nazis competed for local control.

Our political activity grew out of the narrow experiences of the times. Our young rebellion arose from daily observations of our environment. We only read about 'political strategy and tactics' in the Communist papers. Our political fight was provincial, our Lebensraum was a small town.

As quoted in [Mallmann \(1996: 241-2\)](#). Translated by the authors.

Thus, we understand all our hypotheses to operate near to the locations where violence occurred.

Case Selection

Weimar Germany constitutes a most-likely case of the effect of violence on the rise of RRP in the form of Hitler's National Socialist party ([Bermeo, 2003: 35-7](#)). If violence cannot be shown to increase the support for extreme right parties in this historical case, it would shed doubt on the generality of findings from contemporary Germany and India. Crucially, Weimar Germany allows us to test the effect of violence from two political extremes, the radical left and the radical right. Thus, it allows us to test the asymmetric effect of violence that we hypothesize.

We focus on the period 1928 to 1932, the period after the Great Depression, which saw the rise of Hitler's Nazi party and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). The Weimar Republic had already experienced economic crisis in the form of hyperinflation, mass violence in response to the 1918 German Revolution that brought democratization, and nationalist agitation in response to the Versailles Treaty in its early years (1919-1924) ([Jones, 2016](#)). We study the late 1920s and early 1930s for two reasons. Conceptually, much of the violence in the early 1920s came in the form of intrastate armed conflicts and was committed by or directed against the state. Violence in the early 1930s was commonly committed by sympathizers or members of various parties, and thus is comparable to

the low-scale violence that we observe in contemporary cases discussed in the literature (Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Pickard, Efthyvoulou and Bove, 2023; Daxecker, Deglow and Fjelde, 2025). Practically, we do not have election data for the crucial 1919 election, and will lose much variance if we drop the time period before the 1920 elections.

After the onset of the Great Depression in April 1929, SA stormtroopers and organized Communists increasingly engaged in deadly and physical violence (Winkler, 2018: 489). During the same period, the electoral fortunes of both parties rose. In the September 1930 parliamentary election, the Nazis unexpectedly became the second-largest party in parliament with 18.3% of the vote (1928: 2.6%), while the Communists came in third with a gain of 2.5 percentage points. The July 1932 election saw the NSDAP take the largest vote share of all parties with 37% of the vote, and the Communists rising slightly in voter support to cement their third place overall. Together, the two extremist parties now had a blocking majority in parliament. Despite NSDAP losses in the November 1932 elections, President Hindenburg followed the advice of nationalist politicians to appoint Hitler as Chancellor on 30 January 1933. Within seven weeks, Hitler and the SA arrested, killed, or drove political opponents into exile. On March 24, 1933, with Communist Party MPs imprisoned, exiled, or killed, the German parliament voted to grant Hitler dictatorial powers.

Data & Research Design

To investigate the effects of political violence on the various outcomes theorized above, we implement a multi-method design that consists of a quantitative analysis with high-resolution units of analysis *and* a qualitative plausibility probe of mechanisms in the voluminous historical literature on the final years of the Weimar Republic. In our quantitative analysis, we study election results in 1,011 German counties (*Kreise*) collected by Falter

and Hänisch (1990). This high level of disaggregation reduces the risk of ecological fallacy. We focus on the elections in May 1928 prior to the outbreak of the Great Depression, and two elections afterwards in September 1930 and July 1932. For each of these elections, we distinguish between pro-democracy and extremist parties. We identify the fascist NSDAP and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) as extremist parties that sought to overthrow German democracy after World War I (Winkler, 2018).

In order to measure violence, we introduce the novel Citizen Anger Interwar News (CAIN) dataset for Germany. The CAIN data includes event reports of political violence for the interwar period. Our definition of political violence considers incidents that result in at least one injury or death. Information on violent events includes their location, timing, actors involved, and number of casualties or injuries. For the purpose of this study, we aggregate event reports by location and day.¹¹

We collected the CAIN data in two steps: First, we consulted relevant historical studies and country experts to identify the major political actors, cleavages, and episodes of violence in interwar Germany. Second, we constructed a dictionary with all major *political actors* and word roots that describe *violent actions*, such as kill, wound, or clash. We evaluated the efficacy of the dictionary by comparing its matches with articles from periods in which historical scholarship described high levels of violence, and optimized it. We then applied the dictionary to *Voss's Newspaper*, the only interwar German newspaper for which a complete digital record exists. *Voss's Newspaper* was published in Berlin but was read among the liberal middle classes across Germany. Unaffiliated with any specific political party, it positioned itself in support of democratic and liberal actors. Our sample includes 2,491 event reports.¹²

We construct our key explanatory variables from these data in the following way. To

¹¹Beyond these characteristics, we follow the UCDP GED coding rules (Sundberg and Melander, 2013), including its temporal, geographic, and casualty precision coding rules.

¹²We validate our data against other, more limited data collection efforts in Appendix A2.

investigate the electoral effects of political violence, we consider three categorical variables that capture whether a given county experienced (1) any type of political violence, (2) political violence involving radical-right actors (or Nazi violence), and (3) political violence involving radical-left actors (or Communist violence) (Figure A1).¹³

We then estimate the local effect of violence on vote choice and turnout. We start by estimating a range of standard two-period difference-in-differences (DiD) models with violence as our treatment and party vote shares as our outcome. Standard DiD is a well-established method for estimating the causal effect of a treatment on an outcome by relating changes in treated units to changes in outcomes and comparing them to a set of control units. To identify DiD estimates as causal effects, the data need to meet the *parallel trends* assumption, which states that treated units would not look different in the absence of treatment (violence). This assumption is principally untestable but it is common to evaluate whether pre-treatment trends between treatment and control units violate the parallel trends assumption (e.g., [Cunningham, 2021](#): Ch.9).

As some, though not all, of our specifications do not exhibit parallel pre-treatment trends, we follow recent examples in political science and turn to the more complex synthetic difference-in-differences (sDiD) estimator ([Haas et al., 2025](#); [Barton, 2025](#)). Combining the advantages of difference-in-differences and synthetic control methods ([Arkhangelsky et al., 2021](#)), sDiD approach constructs a set of control units that closely match the treated units in terms of pre-treatment outcome trends. More specifically, the sDiD estimator creates a set of both control-unit and time-period weights: the control-unit weights ensure that the average outcome for treated units is parallel to the weighted average for control units, while time-period weights allow the post-treatment outcome of each control unit to differ by a constant from its weighted pre-treatment average. Compared to canonical difference-in-differences, the sDiD estimator relaxes the parallel trend assump-

¹³Appendix A displays descriptive statistics.

tion and performs better when the number of treated units is small, which is the case in our analysis (see [Table A5](#)).

We explore the effect of political violence on changes in vote choice and turnout between the 1928 election on the one hand, and the 1930 and June 1932 elections on the other. Since the number of newly treated counties decreases over time, we also present a model that considers the cumulative effects of violence occurring between the 1928 election and June 1932. We use the three elections from 1924 to 1928 to construct the control group based on pre-treatment outcomes. Because episodes of political violence occurred prior to 1928, we drop all units that experienced treatment before the 1928 elections to avoid confounding the estimated relationship. Figures [A11–A13](#) in the Appendix show that our sDiD manages to match the observed time trends of unexposed control units with those of treated counties.

In the qualitative part of our analysis, we probe the plausibility of our theoretical mechanism by combining studies from two historical foci: on the one hand, work on political violence that carefully describes perpetrator strategies at the party-level, individual motivations of Communist and Nazi foot soldiers, and the characteristics of victims of violence; on the other hand, in-depth investigations into the determinants of voting at the national, regional, and local level. Historical research thus mirrors the long-practiced division of labor in political science that analyzed political violence and voting separately.¹⁴ Therefore, our qualitative exploration does not amount to full-fledged process tracing. Rather, it probes the alignment of theoretical assumptions, in particular motivations and actions, with their historical interpretations—both of historical actors and of historians. We seek to follow Møller’s (2022) advice to be critical of historical interpretations. We

¹⁴The most encompassing study of “Hitler’s voters” vote does not consider violence as a determinant of vote choices (Falter, 1991). Ohr (2013) studies the effect of Nazi propaganda on voting in a southwestern German region, but does not distinguish violence from other activities. Jones (2016) explores how political violence shaped the early years of the Weimar Republic, including citizens’ views towards the state, but does not explore voting in detail.

do so by using evidence from multiple sources and regions within Germany, by giving greater weight to statements from contemporaries rather than historians' judgments, and by triangulating historians' interpretations with our own data.

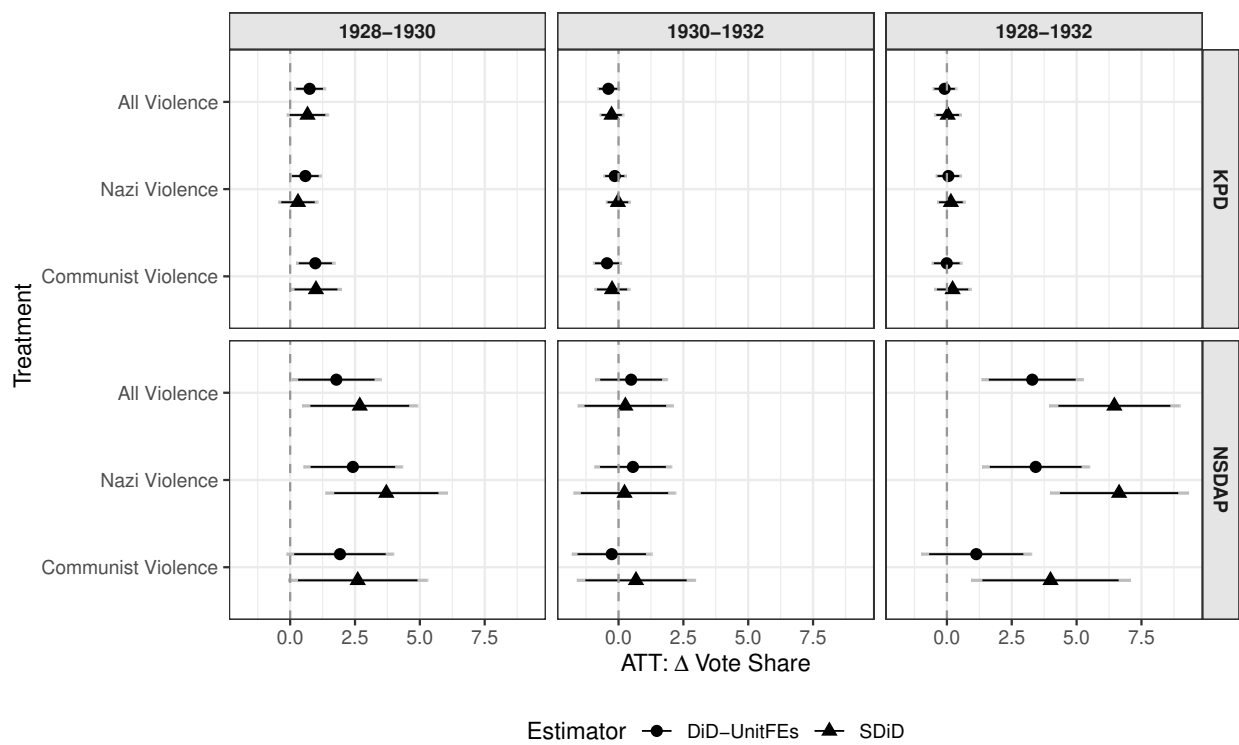
Analysis

Figure 1 displays the average treatment effects (ATT) of violence on differences in vote choice across counties. It depicts the three periods we analyze from left to right, and the main parties of interest, the German Communist Party (KPD) and the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) in the top and bottom panels, respectively. For each period and party, we compute the effects of violence, extreme-right violence, and extreme-left violence on changes in electoral support across two model specifications: classic two-period difference-in-differences with county-fixed effects (circles), and synthetic difference-in-differences (triangles).

First, we focus on the relationship between violence and KPD vote shares. Only in the first period (1928-1930) do our tests detect a positive and statistically significant effect of violence on vote shares in four out of six models. Effect sizes vary between increases of 0.6 to 1 percentage points, with the largest ones observed for Communist violence. In the second period (1930-1932), the effects are null or even negative. In the combined period (1928-1932), the estimated effects center on zero. The choice of modeling strategy does not meaningfully affect our findings, except in the first period model of Nazi violence, where the regular DiD estimator shows a statistically significant positive effect, but the sDiD estimator does not.

Second, the NSDAP, too, benefits from violence in the first period (1928-1930), with all tests statistically significant at least at the 10% level, but not in the second (1930-1932), where most analyses return statistically insignificant estimates. However, combining the

Figure 1: ATE of political violence on vote shares, DiD and sDiD models with 95% (grey)/90% (black) confidence intervals in three periods.



two periods reveals even larger positive effects of violence on vote shares in five out of six model specifications. Only the standard DiD estimate for communist violence does not significantly increase NSDAP vote shares. The sDiD specifications reveal increases in vote shares of up to 6.4 percentage points in counties affected by violence compared to unaffected ones. In both the first and pooled periods, the effect of violence on NSDAP vote shares is significantly greater than the effect of violence on KPD vote shares in the majority of specifications. The NSDAP benefits slightly more from violence that involves Nazi actors than from violence that involves communists, in particular in the pooled round. In the first and pooled periods, the estimates of violence on NSDAP vote shares tend to be larger, and sometimes significantly so, with the more conservative sDiD specification (triangles).

What explains the difference in the effect of violence between the first and second periods? We offer three interpretations. First, the absence of an effect in the 1930-1932 period might derive from the exclusion of pre-treated counties that experienced violence before 1930. Methodologically, we need to exclude such units. The much larger combined effect in the pooled period (1928–1932) that does not drop units treated in the period 1928-1930 makes this the most plausible option. Second, both the KPD and the NSDAP had much lower vote shares in the 1928 election, and their relative growth potential was larger.¹⁵ At face value, these results may imply that political violence only benefits smaller, lesser-known parties. Third, violence grew steadily and reached its peak during the election campaigns in 1932 (Figure A4). It is conceivable that the Voss newspaper did not capture all violent events during that period and that we thus undercount events in period 1930-1932. Assuming that violence has a positive effect on vote shares of extreme parties, a sizable number of false negative observations would attenuate the estimated effect of vi-

¹⁵However, the NSDAP gained more votes between 1930 and 1932 in absolute terms, adding another 19 percentage points in vote share compared to a smaller 15.8 percentage point gain between 1928 and 1930.

olence. Based solely on our quantitative data, we cannot distinguish between these three options.

In our Appendix, we plot the results from additional analyses of the effects of violence on the vote shares of the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the monarchist radical right German National People's Party (DNVP), the two main competitor parties of the KPD and NSDAP, respectively. The results reveal (Figure A5) the SPD as the main loser of violence, especially in the 1928-1930 and the pooled periods. All models of DNVP vote shares are negative but statistically insignificant. Taken together, these findings are consistent with H_1 and H_2 that nationalist, right-wing parties gain electorally from out-group and in-group violence, even if the evidence is more consistent for in-group violence.

Robustness

Having already probed the sensitivity of our results to modeling choice, we now investigate their robustness with respect to data quality, omitted variables, strategic anticipation effects, and by running permutation tests.

Underreporting of violence data is our greatest concern. We tackle it in two ways. First, we merge Elsbach's (2019) data on political murders by paramilitary groups into our dataset, and obtain 23 additional treated counties.¹⁶ Rerunning our main models does not change our findings for actors, periods, or outcomes (Figure A6). Second, we investigate the effect of violence on election results in neighboring counties. As violence clusters in space, we assume that the Voss newspaper, from which our data derives, most likely underreports violence in neighboring counties of those already affected by violence.¹⁷ We find similar effects of violence in neighboring counties on KPD and NSDAP vote shares

¹⁶About 16% more observations in the first electoral period, 17% in the second.

¹⁷Our assumption rests on two considerations. First, the spatial diffusion of violence is consistent with reports that Nazi stormtroopers frequently helped out in propaganda activities in nearby localities (Reichardt, 2007: 172-3). Second, violence loses news-value as it becomes more common in a particular region, and thus may be less reported in our national newspaper if it already occurred in a neighboring county.

(Figure 2) with one exception. Nazi-violence now also increases NSDAP vote shares in the 1930-1932 period. Together, these results indicate that our data underreports violence, in particular in the second period. Since false negatives, i.e., counties that experienced violence but were not reported in our newspaper, end up in the control group, our main models underestimate the true effect of violence on electoral support for radical parties.

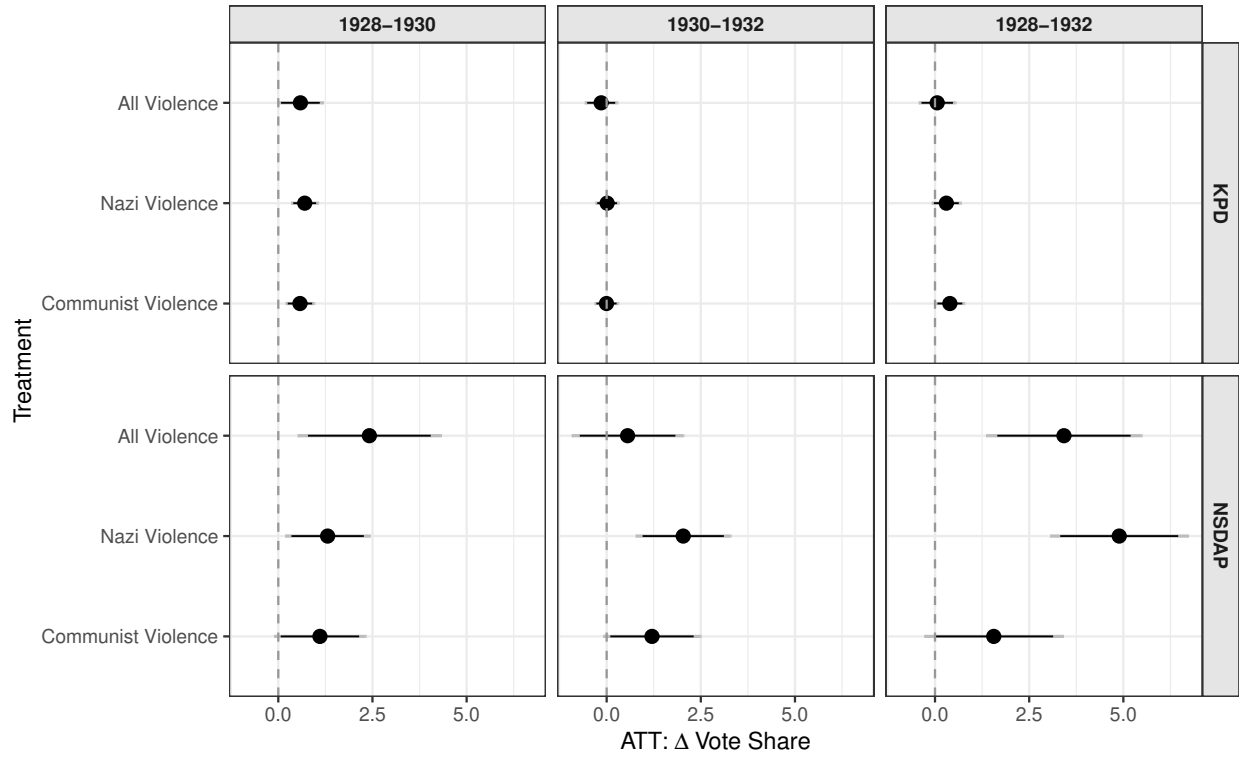


Figure 2: ATE of political violence on vote shares of the KPD and NSDAP parties in neighboring counties, sDiD models with 95% (grey)/90% (black) confidence intervals in three periods.

In DiD analyses, omitted variables pose a risk if they change in parallel with the treatment in treated units but not in control units. This eliminates many structural variables as confounders, which do not change (much) over a two-year period, such as major demographic indicators, sectoral composition, or geographic features. Other county-specific variation is absorbed by unit-fixed effects. More concerning are time-varying variables

that covary with violence. One such potential confounder could be the deterioration in economic conditions resulting from the Great Depression in 1929, which might have affected some counties more than others. For example, violence might be a proxy for local variation in unemployment induced by the Great Depression. We proxy deteriorating economic conditions with data on tax hikes by [Galofré-Vilà et al. \(2021\)](#). In particular, we leverage the county-level average income tax rate, i.e., tax revenues divided by taxable income. As this ratio increases both when tax rates are raised and when income drops, it captures local fiscal and economic deterioration.

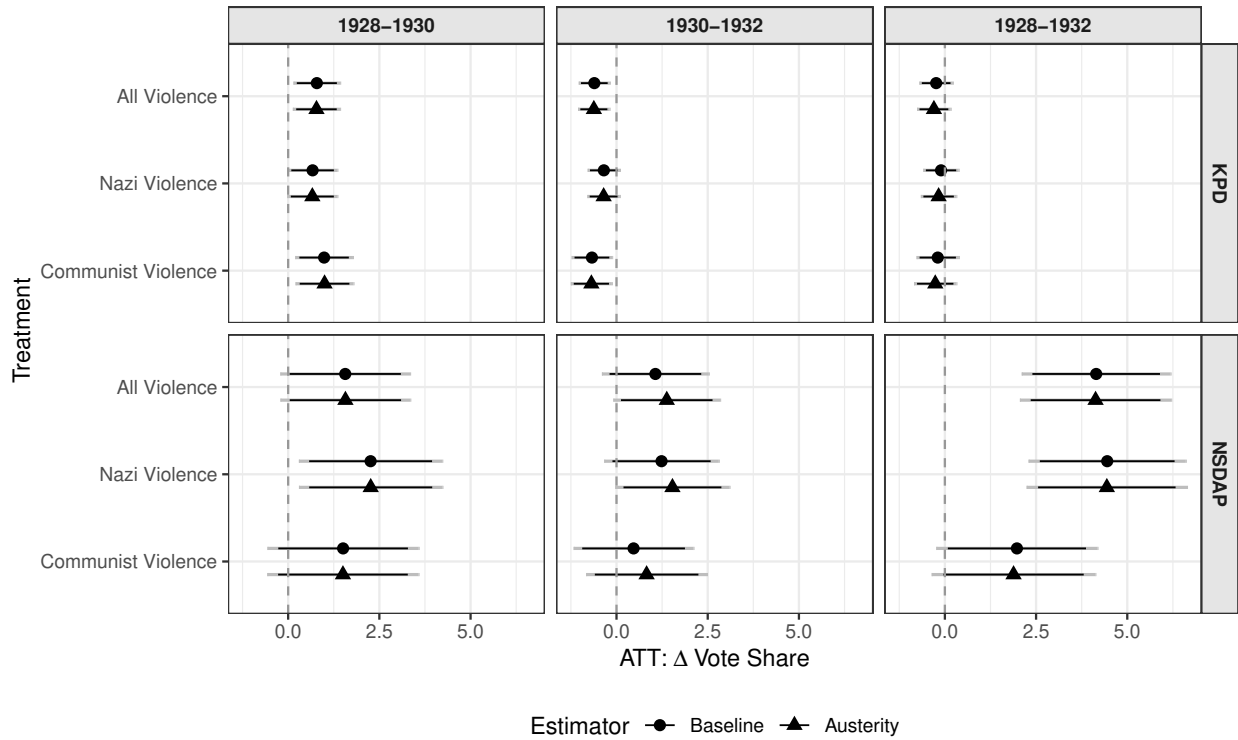


Figure 3: ATE of political violence on vote shares of the KPD and NSDAP parties with austerity measure control, DiD models w/ unit-fixed effects and 95% (grey)/90% (black) confidence intervals in three periods.

[Figure 3](#) reports estimates of the effect of political violence on extremist party vote shares while controlling for austerity. Because the standard sDiD estimator does not ac-

commodate control variables, we instead estimate conventional DiD models with county fixed effects. For comparison, we also report baseline estimates without controls (circles), as the tax data are missing for approximately 17% of counties. The results are reassuring: relative to the baseline specification, the estimated effects of political violence remain highly stable, and their statistical significance does not change after controlling for austerity.

Another potential confounder could be non-violent propaganda activities, such as SA marches or Communist demonstrations, that might have escalated into violence and arguably convinced voters to support extreme parties (Ohr, 1997b). We proxy the potential for propaganda activities with NSDAP local membership data provided by Selb and Munzert (2018). Figure 4 displays the estimates from DiD models with unit-fixed effects. We do not find large differences for the KPD, which is plausible given that we control for NSDAP rather than KPD organizational strength. We do find weaker results for the effect of Communist violence on NSDAP vote shares in the first period. All other results remain unaffected.¹⁸

Given the high degree of missingness in the austerity data and a slightly lower degree in the membership data, we use another indirect strategy to account for these time-varying confounders. Specifically, we explore spatial autocorrelation in vote shares using a spatial-DiD approach. Both economic shocks and regional strongholds of extreme parties exceeded county boundaries.¹⁹ Arguably, regionally concentrated shocks or activities should be visible in spatially correlated changes in vote shares. Despite high levels

¹⁸We also estimate models controlling for speeches by Hitler and Goebbels to account for broader propaganda activities. Although these speeches did not boost NSDAP vote shares (Selb and Munzert, 2018), they might be arguably associated with party violence in the aftermath of such speeches. We find slightly widening confidence intervals for violence effects on Nazi vote shares, but our main findings remain unchanged: the NSDAP benefitted from Nazi violence in both the first period and the pooled analysis (Figure A10).

¹⁹The Great Depression particularly hit industrial production in industry-heavy areas like the Ruhr or Saxony, which consisted of multiple counties. Figure A2 indicates regional party strongholds, which are likely to experience more propaganda activities.

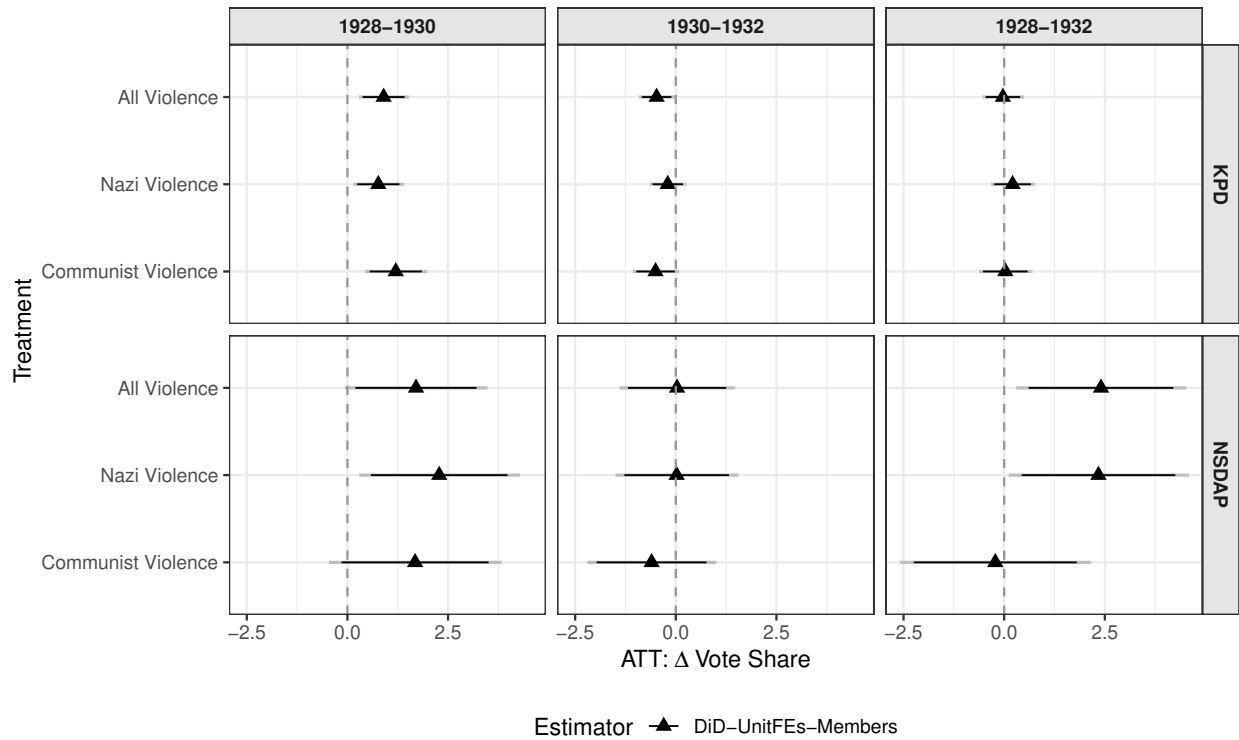


Figure 4: ATE of political violence on vote shares of the KPD and NSDAP parties with local NSDAP chapter members as a control, DiD models w/ unit-fixed effects and 95% (grey)/90% (black) confidence intervals in three periods.

of spatial autocorrelation, we only see a slightly attenuating impact on some of the main estimates, but no fundamental challenge to our earlier conclusions (Figure A7).

Next, we estimate the effect of violence on turnout to exclude the possibility that violence in fact deters voters from supporting other parties, but does so less for the NSDAP. Figure A8 in our appendix tests this conjecture for all violence-period combinations. We find that Nazi violence is associated with an increase in turnout in the second and pooled periods in sDiD specifications, while Communist violence is associated with a decrease in turnout in the DiD model in the second period. All other specifications return null results. If anything, non-state violence in the Weimar Republic had a mobilization effect for the extreme right, rather than a deterrence effect as reported in the electoral violence literature.

Strategic anticipation of the effect of violence might bias our findings upwards. If extremist actors perpetrated violence in locations where they expected to gain votes and refrained from committing violence where they expected it to undermine their electoral appeal, treatment would be assigned non-randomly. We argue against this possibility. First, while both the KPD and the NSDAP encouraged and discouraged violence at specific times, there was no centralized control over local party chapters or paramilitary units and their activities, making differences between localities over time an unlikely result of strategic planning. In contrast, there is evidence that our treatment, i.e., individual violence events, was mostly random. One of the most detailed historical investigations of SA violence suggests that “[m]any of the deaths and injuries were the consequences not of planned confrontations but of chance meetings and unplanned escalations of minor street violence” (Bessel, 1984: 96). Our reading of the events classified in our data confirms this assessment. Second, even if local party leaders strategically initiated violence, as NSDAP leader in Berlin, Joseph Goebbels, did after 1926 to attract attention to the party’s existence (Rosenhaft, 2008: 19), the strategy’s effectiveness was questionable (Paul, 1990: 139).

Overall, “it was mostly district or provincial SA leaders who ordered violent attacks, not higher-level authorities” (Winkler, 2018: 508). There was thus no centralized strategy that would coordinate violence. In the case of the KPD, changes in the party’s stance towards violence as a tactic were not driven by anticipated electoral effects in specific locations, but by directions from the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow (Rosenhaft, 2008: 79). Third, even when party leaders ordered violence to stop, local paramilitary actors did not necessarily heed those orders (e.g., Rosenhaft 2008: 123-127; Bessel 1984: 92).

Finally, we conduct randomization inference by assigning treatment to random counties 1,000 times and re-estimating the DiD models for which we found statistically significant results.²⁰ Two-tailed tests indicate that the estimated effects of (Nazi) violence on NSDAP vote shares are in the respective tails of the simulated distribution for the 1928–1930 and pooled periods. The estimated effects of any and communist violence on KPD vote shares are only in the tails of the distributions for the 1928-1930 period.

Overall, our quantitative results are inconsistent with the dominant explanations in the literature. The asymmetric effect of violence on vote shares does not support the deterrence explanation that suggests voters are repelled by violence. Similarly, it is incompatible with the outbidding logic, which predicts that extremist parties should benefit equally from violence. In contrast, our expectation that nationalist right-wing parties gain from in-group and out-group violence (H_1 and H_2) is broadly in line with the results that show consistent and greater gains from violence for the NSDAP than for the KPD. The results are also in line with voting theories that argue that right-wing violence raises the salience of issues that benefit right-wing parties (Krause and Matsunaga, 2023), even if they cannot explain why some of our models estimate a positive effect of Com-

²⁰We do not estimate permutation tests on the 1930-1932 period, which returned null results in our baseline specifications.

munist violence on KPD vote shares. Next, we turn to the historical literature to check for descriptions and interpretations in line with our proposed mechanism.

Probing the mechanism

Our argument links the psychologically grounded fear of status loss with the politically based ideological offering of different political parties. Regarding the push factor of fear, voters who are sensitive to economic or cultural status threats are most likely to respond to violence. These voters are more likely to be situated on the ideological right in the first place. Violence by out-groups creates status threats itself. Violence associated with nationalist right-wing parties increases the salience of issues that are important to voters who feel threatened. Regarding the pull factor of ideology, right-wing parties that pursue an exclusionary nationalist agenda including appeals to cultural homogeneity and/or law and order offer voters concerned by status loss protection against unwelcome change and even a return to a more ordered and homogeneous status quo ante. They justify their own use of violence as a necessary defense against out-group threats, which they frequently exaggerate (Weyland, 2021). In the following, we present historical interpretations that align with this theoretical logic.

Fears of status loss were central to the appeal of the NSDAP. Fears about the potential of the repeat of a Communist Revolution featured most prominently: “[T]he Nazi leadership counted on deep fears about the radical left, which were indeed widespread among elites and citizens” (Weyland, 2021: 186), and this fear of communist violence was a successful mobilization strategy (Nolte, 1987: 203). Every violent act associated with the KPD evoked memories of two failed Communist uprisings in 1919 and 1921 (see Jones, 2016), and painted the specter of the Russian Revolution. These fears gained credibility through the frequent clashes between the KPD and police forces that our data reveals (see

Figure A1). “[F]ear of revolution, fear of the left” was the main explanation for why voters from the lower middle class, the working class, and the upper class of Kiel voted for the Nazis (Hamilton, 2003: 59). Allen (2014 (1965) confirms the role of the NSDAP in the eyes of voters: “To most Northeimers the NSDAP was first and foremost an anti-Marxist party.”

Not only the perceived threat of Communist violence, but “the radical nature of the NSDAP and the readiness of its SA to resort to violence proved attractive especially where the left had always been viewed as the enemy...” (Schumann, 2010: 223). Although right-wing or bourgeois voters from the middle and upper classes “perceived the political violence of the extreme left as a serious threat to law and order, they excused Nazi violence as a regretful but necessary, and therefore ultimately legitimate means of national self-defense” (Siemens, 2017: 114). Attacking those parties that right-wing voters saw as a threat to their own status gave the NSDAP an even greater payoff: “The same people who were concerned to restore ‘law and order’ also often held aggressive antipathy toward the KPD and SPD, and the Nazis were able to profit from both sets of prejudice” (Bessel, 1984: 75).

Tragically, those voters who cared about law and order saw Nazi violence as an effective means to restore it. Rather than hurting the party, its own use of violence set the party apart from competing right-wing parties, such as the nationalist, monarchic DNVP, that respected law and order to a greater extent. “[T]he readiness of the SA to engage in violence probably helped the Nazi Party gather support, for there was evidence of a nationalist movement which really did mean to smash ‘Marxism’ rather than just talk” (Bessel, 1984: 96).

The Great Depression added economic anxieties to the security fears among the “middle class who no longer felt capable of mastering the situation and feared the coming of Bolshevism” (Noakes, 1971: 136). One of the most affected voter constituencies of the eco-

conomic downturn were small-plot farmers in northern Germany. Afraid to lose their land, the “convincingly militant posture of the NSDAP” demonstrated to these farmers that the party was an “effective representative of their interests” (Zofka, 2014 (1983: 61-2). Importantly, the agricultural policies of the NSDAP were “not too different from other parties, such as the DNVP. The difference to other parties was to be found in the party’s activist style” (Noakes, 1971: 125). This observation contradicts the salience mechanism proposed by studies of contemporary violence (Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Sabet, Liebald and Friebe, 2025). Voters turned to the NSDAP not because of a particular policy solution the party offered. Instead, they felt that the violent, extremist party was their most effective defender. Hitler recognized the attraction of violence early on:

Did you see how the masses come running when two people fight in the street. Cruelty impresses. Cruelty and raw force. The simple man on the street is only impressed by brutal force and ruthlessness. Women, by the way, too. Women and children. People need the wholesome fright.

translated by authors as cited in Botz (1983: 90)

Allen (2014 (1965: 32) quotes a female voter in his case study of the town of Northeim, who confirms that violence itself made the Nazis attractive, rather than particular policy ideas: “I was drawn by the feeling of strength about the party, even though there was much in it which was highly questionable.” Another Northeim citizen supported this view: “Most of those who joined the Nazis did so because they wanted a radical answer to the economic problem” (ibid., 86). Under severe economic duress, voters expected solutions, and “the Nazis appeared to be vigorous, determined and, above all, ready to use radical means to deal with the crucial problem—the depression ... only extreme measures would end the depression and only the Nazis were thought of as sufficiently extreme” (ibid., 92). Multiple historians embrace this interpretation of extremist violence,

characterizing the Nazi party as possessing an “image of resolve” in the eyes of voters (e.g., [Kershaw 2014 \(1983\)](#), [Paul 1990](#); [Ohr 1997a](#): 112).

Why did the NSDAP benefit from these voter demands for radical solutions more than the KPD? After all, the KPD proposed extreme solutions to both the economic and security concerns, and the outbidding logic suggests that the KPD should benefit. Moreover, its party leadership was clearly aware of the reputation of resolve that violence could give the party when strategizing how to counter the fascist threat ([Winkler, 1987](#): 642). At the end of the 1920s, the working class was divided between Communists (KPD) and Socialists (SPD), and “the Party that responded most vigorously [to the SA threat] could hope to win support from both” ([Rosenhaft, 2008](#): 25). KPD leader Ernst Thälmann explained the logic to the party’s Central Committee: “There must no longer be a single act of terror by the Nazi murderers without the workers everywhere reacting immediately with the most offensive, physical mass-struggle. What does this counter-action mean? . . . it means that the Social Democratic workers gain confidence in us, because they see that we are there and fight back” (quoted in [Rosenhaft, 2008](#): 73).

Still, we found no direct evidence of voters perceiving KPD violence as an act of resolve or of historians describing the party’s image as resolved. We argue that the two parties differed on the supply side, particularly in the effectiveness of their respective ideologies.

The NSDAP used two major propaganda messages to appeal to voters who perceived status threats. The first blamed scapegoats for all ills that might befall their potential voters, and clearly articulated the difference between the nation as the in-group and the ‘international’ out-group that posed a threat. The “NSDAP’s fervent nationalism” helped to “unify the country domestically” by identifying clear scapegoats ([Weyland, 2021](#): 178). Nationalist propaganda merged fears of communism with ethnic prejudice by creating the image of “Jewish-Slav Bolshevism” ([Gerwarth, 2013](#): 70). The basis for this tactic was

laid by nationalists that preceded the NSDAP:

'Bolshevism primarily means criminal tyranny, organized and led by the Jews,' one defamatory pamphlet in Munich claimed as early as 1919. Such proclamations set the tone for the following years, in which the nationalist right, building on the sharp rise in antisemitism that had occurred during the war years, increasingly identified 'Jews' and 'Bolsheviks' as national traitors, blaming all kinds of shortcomings and economic and social problems on the alleged influence of a Judeo-Marxist conspiracy.

Siemens (2017: 12)

Among nationalist parties on the right, the NSDAP managed to benefit most from this approach because Nazi propaganda and actions were the most extreme. "With its vicious attacks on the 'Marxists', the NSDAP actively took the lead in the class conflict at the local level, a conflict which was being intensified by the depression" (Noakes, 1971: 136). Even when SA members had murdered a union leader in cold blood, as in the town of Potempa in 1932, chief Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels reacted with an editorial entitled "The Jews are guilty" (Winkler, 2018: 513).

The second propaganda message was Hitler's *Legality Tactic*. Besides being a convicted traitor who had revolted against the state in 1923, and besides the widespread terror acts committed by the SA, Hitler portrayed the NSDAP and its paramilitary wing as the defender of law and order: "The party's strategy is necessarily a legal one. The SA is not armed. I intervene whenever I hear of a weapon ... If I heard that there were weapons somewhere, I would turn them over to the authorities" (statement by Adolf Hitler in a trial against SA members in 1931, as quoted in Kellerhoff, 2017: 233-4).²¹ As discussed above, middle- and upper-class voters believed these claims.

The KPD could not match this rhetoric. Its internationalist outlook that called for "World Revolution" made it impossible to attribute blame to ethnic minorities. The party

²¹Translated by the authors.

did paint the SA as a threat to workers, but its main ideological goal remained the overthrow of capitalism and the associated liberal-democratic state:

The KPD's appearance as the revolutionary party par excellence was the party's own fault. It painted this image through words and deeds. Party representatives spoke of "Sowjet Germany" and the elimination of the class enemy, they accepted terrorist violence committed in the party's name, they professed to preparing violent rebellion and illegality.

Winkler (1987: 395). Translated by the authors.

Our data confirm that the KPD engaged in more violence against the state than the NSDAP did (see Figure A1). In their words, too, KPD leaders frequently painted the Social Democrats as the main enemy, while many workers, and thus potential KPD supporters, clearly understood the NSDAP to be their main enemy (Mallmann, 1996: 373). Therefore, ideology-inspired actions and rhetoric undermined attempts to be the main defender of the working class, as many workers identified with the Social Democrats, the Weimar Republic, and the socio-economic benefits that party and state had brought to workers.

The KPD's stated goal of revolution had another negative effect on the party's electoral fortunes. It gave credibility to Hitler's fantastic claims of being the defender of law and order, and thus mobilized and united right-wing voters. In sum, political violence coupled with nationalist, extreme right-wing propaganda had greater appeal to middle class voters concerned with economic and security threats than violence coupled with revolutionary rhetoric had to working class voters.

Conclusion

In this paper, we studied the effect of political violence on electoral outcomes in the last years of the Weimar Republic. Our quantitative analysis shows two main findings: First,

extremist parties benefited from violence, but the NSDAP profited more and more consistently than the Communist Party. Second, increasing vote shares of extremist parties appear to stem primarily from transfers from rival parties rather than from increasing turnout in violence-affected counties. Our quantitative results for the Nazi Party align with studies of contemporary Germany and India (Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Sabet, Liebald and Friebe, 2025; Daxecker, Deglow and Fjelde, 2025; Daxecker and Prasad, 2026).

Theoretically, we explain the asymmetric effect of violence on extremist parties by combining voter fears of status loss and the particular appeal of exclusive nationalism in addressing these fears. Political violence pushes voters situated on the right-wing of the ideological spectrum to support extremist right-wing parties, because these voters are relatively more concerned with stability and security than voters on the left. Political violence by nationalist extremist right-wing parties pulls voters to support these parties, because their ideology frames violence as a defense against out-group scapegoats and promises voters to be the most effective defenders of their interests. This combination of push and pull factors explains why studies on contemporary Norway and the United Kingdom did not find an effect of political violence on support for extremist parties (Geys and Hernæs, 2021; Pickard, Efthymou and Bove, 2023). In Norway in 2011, there was simply no relevant exclusively nationalist, right-wing party competing for power. In the United Kingdom in 2016 and 2017, the UK Independence Party arguably was such a party, but the outcome of the Brexit referendum robbed it of its leader and most visible representative, thus leading to the party's decline in subsequent elections.

Our study has multiple implications for research on political violence in democracies (Ruggeri, Daxecker and Prasad, 2025). First, the deterrence effect diagnosed in the electoral violence literature does not operate in cases where non-state violence is the modal form of contention. In Weimar Germany, violence mobilized (also see Daxecker, Deglow

and Fjelde, 2025). Second, our findings raise questions for the outbidding logic of terrorist violence that suggests that in-voter support goes to the most extreme in-group party (Kydd and Walter, 2006). Frequently, political scientists investigate this logic in cases of secessionist armed conflict that pits one ethno-nationalist challenger against another (Horowitz, 1985; Rabushka and Shepsle, 2008). Our study shows that outbidding tactics do not work as effectively for non-nationalist/leftist actors (also see Balcells and Torrats-Espinosa, 2018). Future work should investigate whether nationalist or right-wing ideology or the combination of both are the crucial moderator for the effects of violence, for example by studying the effect of left-wing, nationalist extremists. Third, violence not only raises the salience of particular policy issues (Krause and Matsunaga, 2023), but voters also react to the image of resolve that violence bestows on extremist parties as the main defender against status loss fears. If this reputation effect has a major purchase on how voters evaluate extremist parties in contemporary democracies, a far stronger state response against extremist right-wing violence may be warranted.

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Supplementary Material to *Political Violence & Anti-System Voting in the Weimar Republic*

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A Descriptive Statistics

Table A1: Summary Statistics: May 1928 Election Results and 1928-1930 Violence

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Vote share NSDAP	1,022	3.161	3.996	0.144	36.152
Vote share KPD	1,022	6.389	6.503	0.060	42.534
Vote share SPD	1,022	26.236	12.947	1.256	59.141
Vote share DNVP	1,022	14.681	13.273	0.510	78.720
Turnout	1,022	0.736	0.079	0.406	0.926
Violence (dummy)	1,025	0.053	0.224	0	1
Radical right violence (dummy)	1,025	0.038	0.191	0	1
Radical left violence (dummy)	1,025	0.034	0.182	0	1

Table A2: Summary Statistics: September 1930 Election Results and 1930-1932 Violence

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Vote share NSDAP	1,008	19.021	8.987	1.011	58.803
Vote share KPD	1,008	8.541	6.971	0.156	44.363
Vote share SPD	1,008	21.930	11.639	1.193	55.800
Vote share DNVP	1,008	6.979	7.383	0.344	49.219
Turnout	1,008	0.802	0.063	0.564	0.942
Violence (dummy)	1,009	0.080	0.272	0	1
Radical right violence (dummy)	1,009	0.067	0.251	0	1
Radical left violence (dummy)	1,009	0.056	0.231	0	1

Table A3: Summary Statistics: July 1932 Election Results

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Vote share NSDAP	1,008	19.021	8.987	1.011	58.803
Vote share KPD	1,008	8.541	6.971	0.156	44.363
Vote share SPD	1,008	21.930	11.639	1.193	55.800
Vote share DNVP	1,008	6.979	7.383	0.344	49.219
Turnout	1,008	0.802	0.063	0.564	0.942

Table A4: Summary Statistics: Time-invariant Control Variables

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Fatality rate soldiers WW1	1,022	0.408	0.032	0.000	0.505
Associations p.c.	864	0.001	0.004	0.0001	0.087
Associational membership p.c.	864	0.109	0.317	0.002	7.802
No. of religious places	1,025	0.665	1.324	0	10
No. of 1871 Memorials	1,025	3.215	5.113	0	49
No of WW1 memorials	1,025	15.764	17.648	0	158
Urban (dummy)	1,025	0.160	0.367	0	1
Spatial lag NSDAP	1,025	2.852	2.740	0.000	27.111
Spatial lag socialist vote	1,025	31.892	13.072	0.000	64.541
Population in 1900	897	56,278	56,601	4,367	705,738
Catholic pop. share	894	38.364	38.562	0.212	99.891
Urban pop. share	896	41.700	30.745	0.000	100.000
Elevation	1,025	243.188	201.029	0.000	1,196.875

Table A5: Number of treated units by model (synthetic difference-in-differences)

Model	Number of treated units
1928-1930	37
1930-1932 July	97
1928-1932 July	110

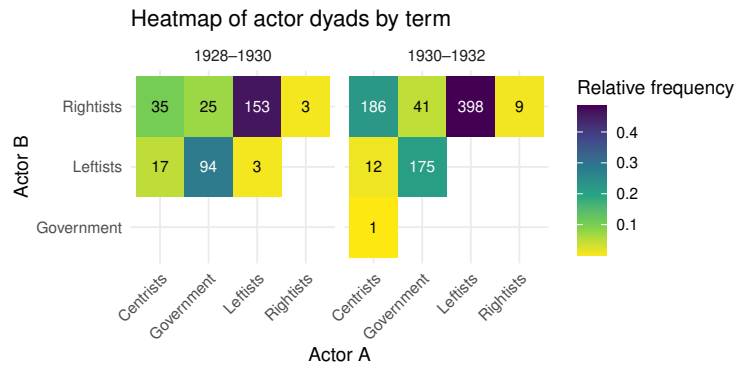
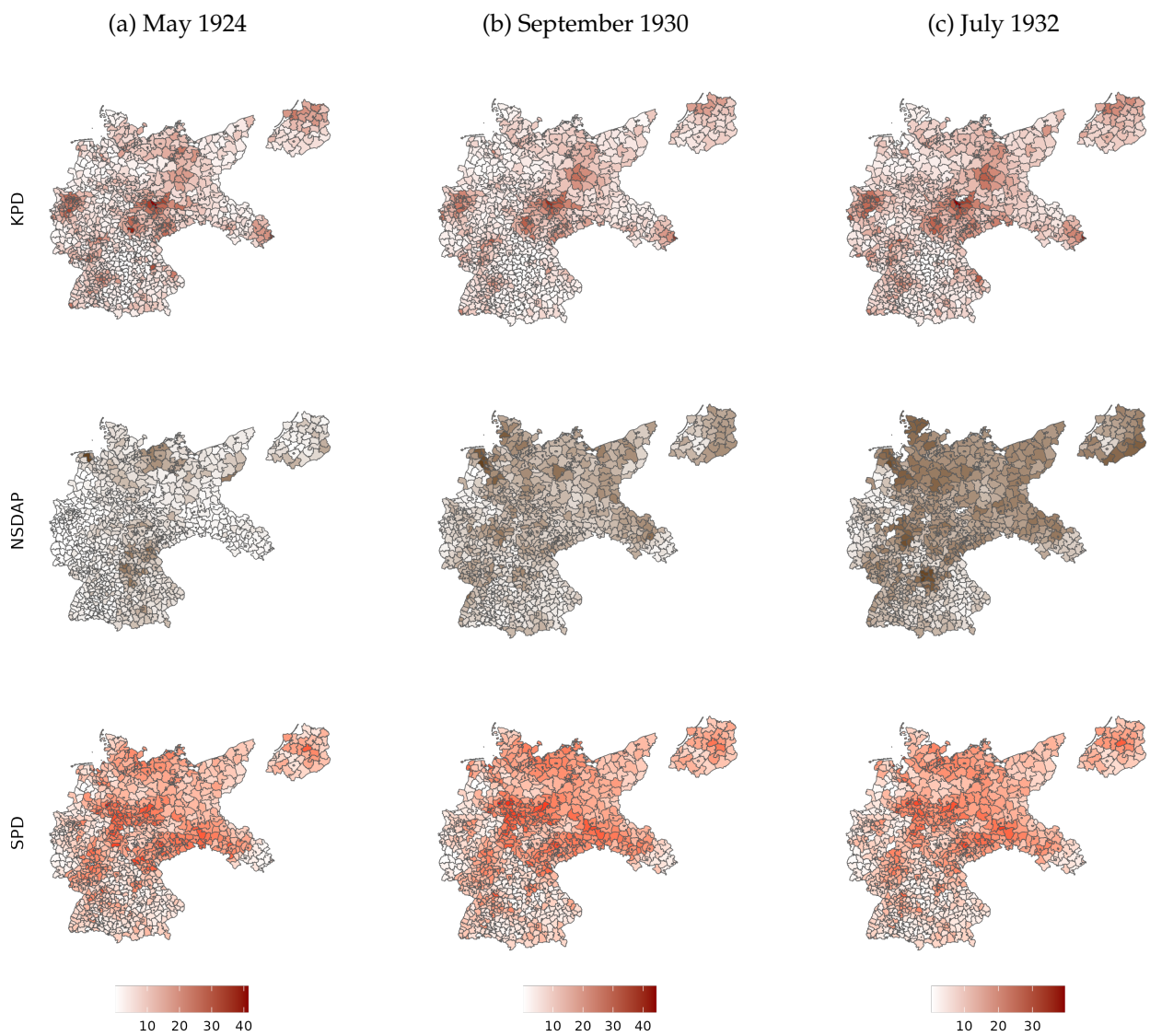


Figure A1: Actors involved in events of political violence in Germany, 1928–1932. Centrists label members of the Weimar Coalition, the Social Democrats and the associated Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold, the Catholic Center Party, and German Democratic Party (DDP). Government denotes army and police forces or other representatives of the state. Leftists encompass KPD, Rotfrontkämpferbund, and associated organizations/individuals. Rightists include NSDAP, SA, and associated organizations/individuals.

A.1 Outcome variable: county-level electoral results

Figure A2: May 1924, September 1930, and July 1932 parliamentary election vote shares at county level for the Communist Party (KPD), the Nazi Party (NSDAP), and the Social Democratic Party (SPD).



A.2 Validation of Violence Data

We compare our violence data against data on political assassinations collected by [Elsbach \(2019\)](#). The left panel of Figure [A3](#) displays the spatial location of event-reports that we use. The spatial distribution aligns well with major population centers (Berlin, Ruhr area), border disputes with Poland, and also reveals coverage of more rural areas, even though our newspaper is based in Berlin. The density of the data also seems to follow Elsbach's distribution of events. Unsurprisingly, the CAIN data features more observations, given its inclusion of non-fatal events and reports of state-based and one-sided violence non covered by Elsbach. Figure [A4](#) shows that the temporal distribution of the CAIN data closely tracks Elsbach's data, too.

Figure A3: Validating violent event-reports from interwar Germany, January 1924 to March 1933. CAIN on the left, Elsbach's data on the right.

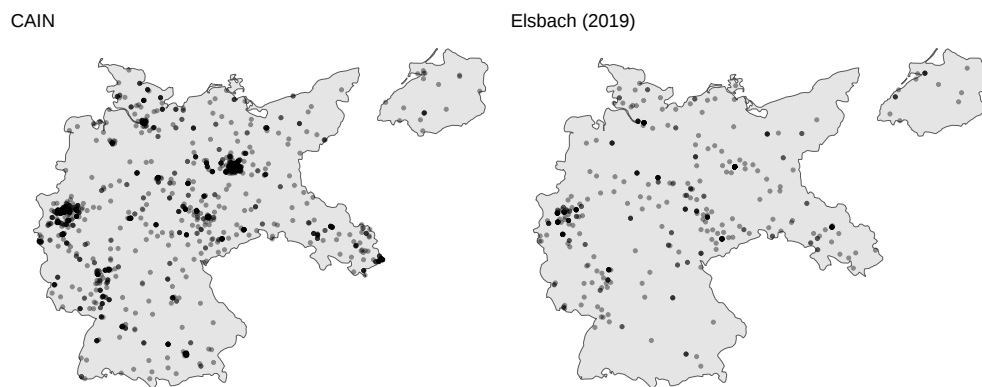
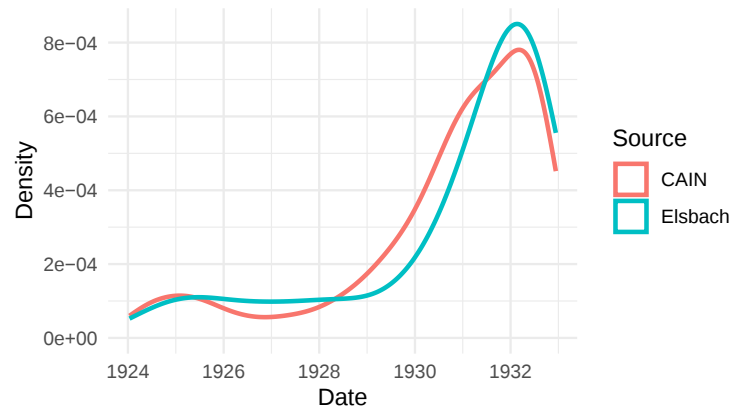


Figure A4: Validating violent event-reports from interwar Germany, January 1924 to March 1933. CAIN data in light blue, Elsbach's data in red.



B Additional Analyses

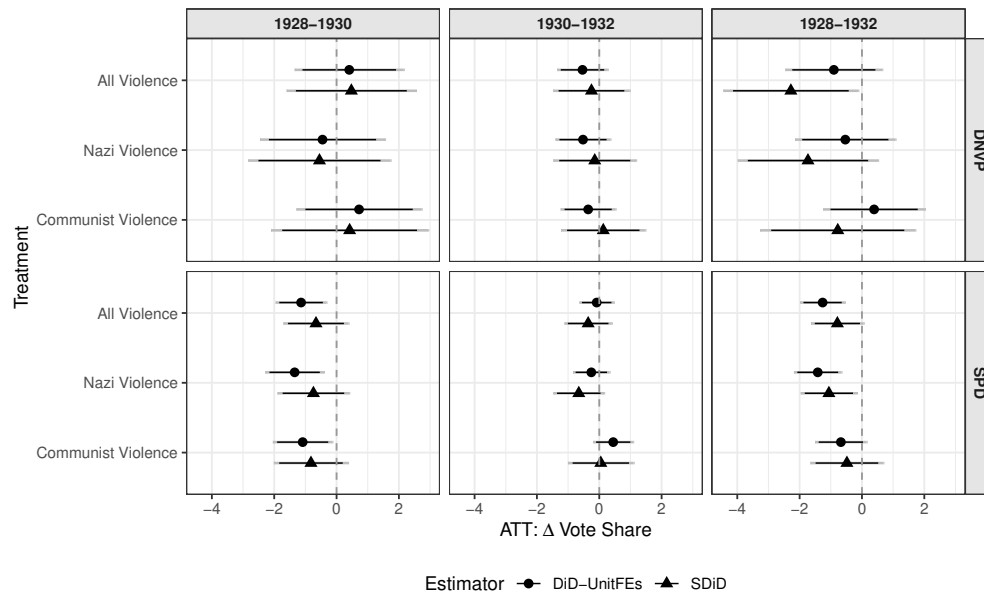


Figure A5: ATE of political violence on vote shares of the Social Democratic Party and the German Nationalist People's Party, DiD and sDiD models with 95% (grey)/90% (black) confidence intervals in three periods.

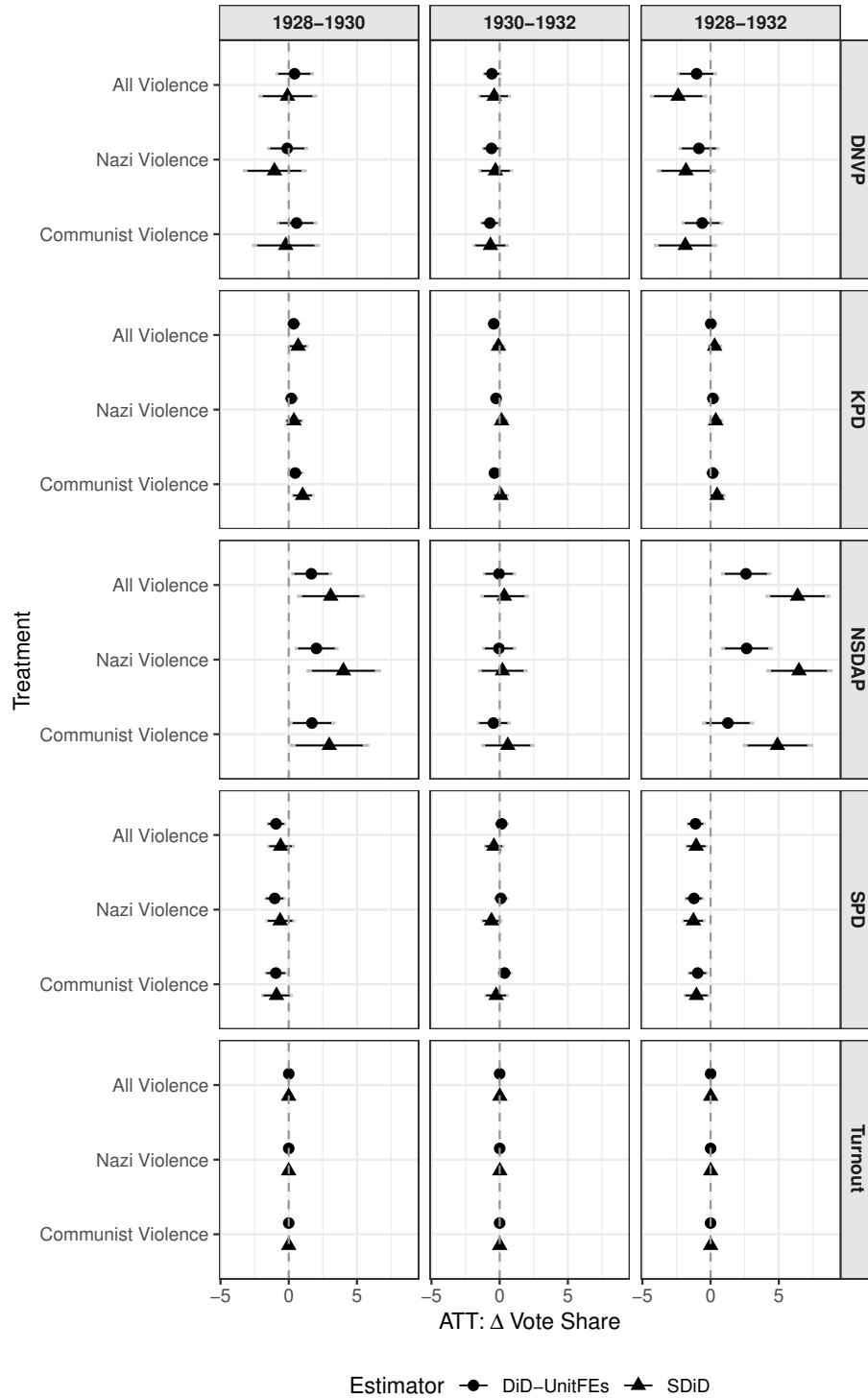


Figure A6: ATE of political violence (combined CAIN and Elsbach data) on vote shares of all parties in neighboring municipalities, , DiD and sDiD models with 95% (grey)/90% (black) confidence intervals in three periods.

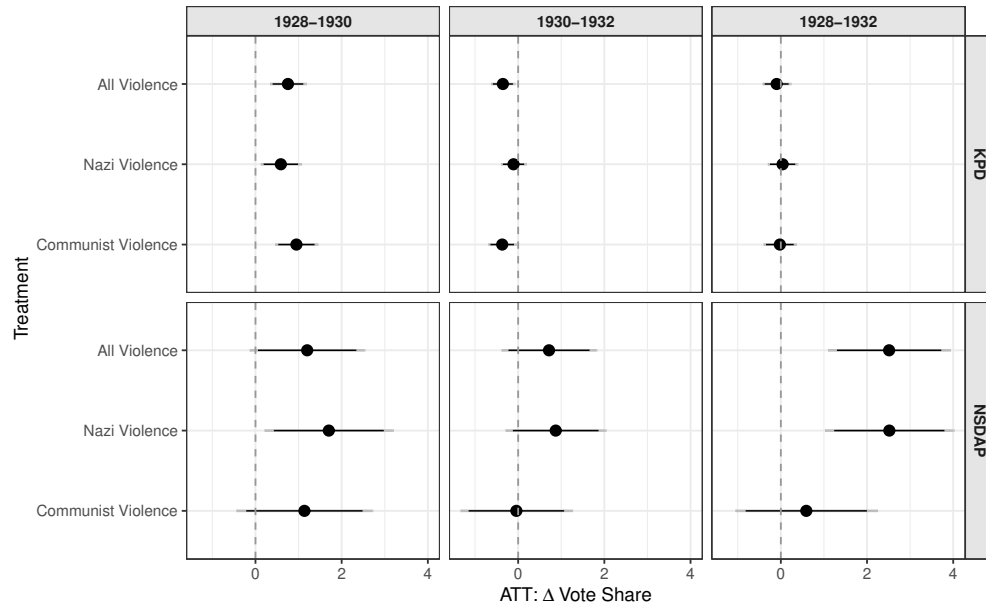
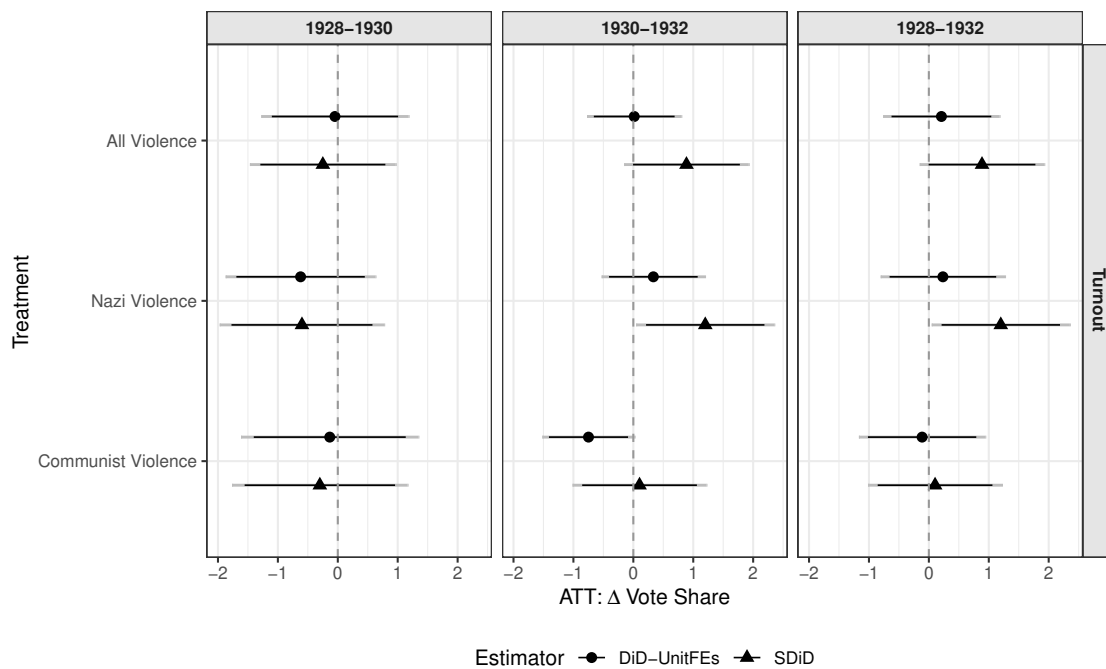


Figure A7: ATE of political violence on vote shares of the KPD and NSDAP with a spatio-temporal autoregressive DiD model with unit fixed effects, and 95% (grey)/90% (black) confidence intervals in three periods.

Figure A8: ATE of political violence on turnout, DiD and sDiD models with 95% (grey)/90% (black) confidence intervals in three periods.



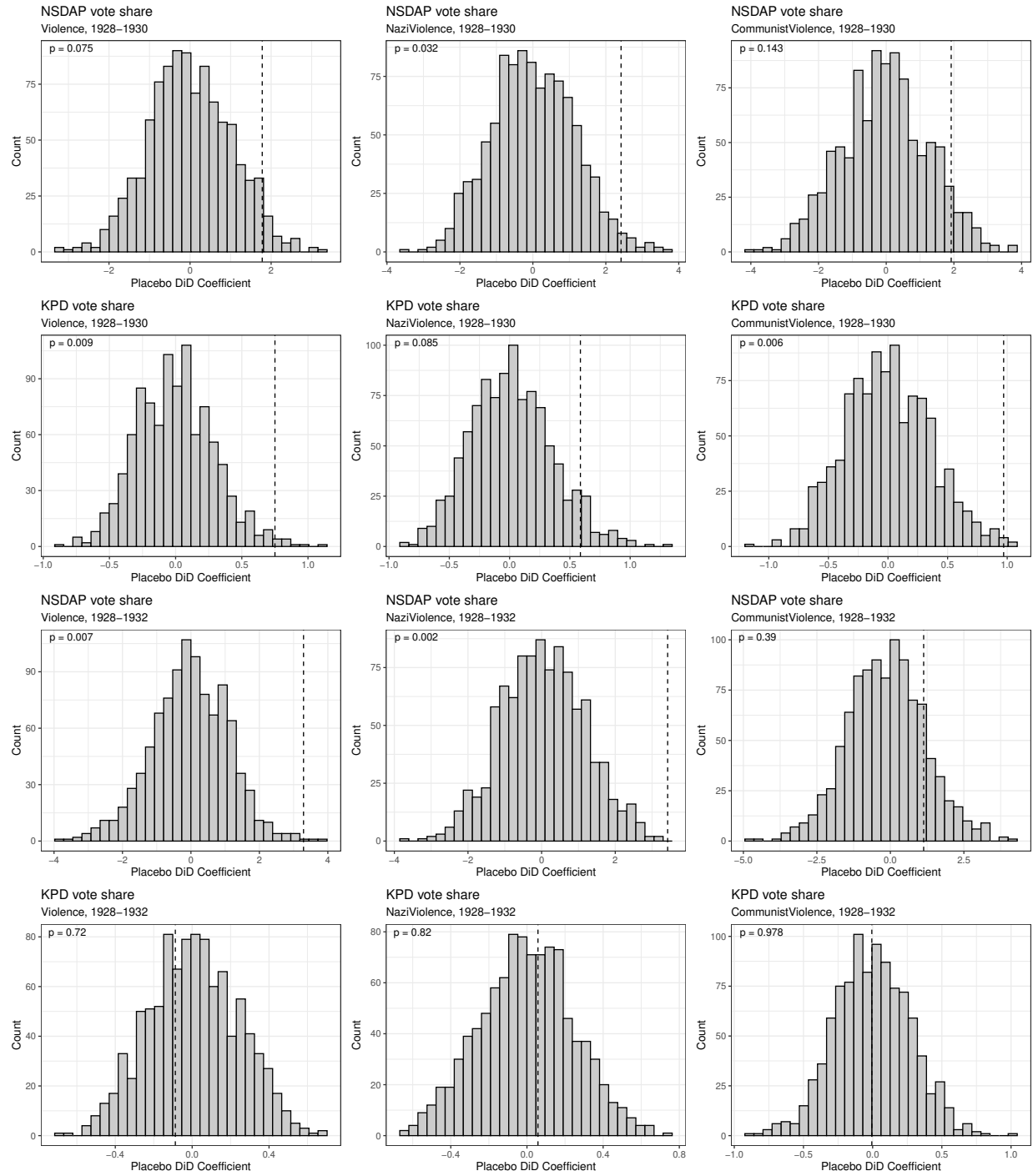


Figure A9: Permutation tests of effects of political violence on vote shares of the KPD and NSDAP. Comparing the estimated ATT (dashed line) of DiD w/ unit-fixed effects to randomly assigned placebo treatment across 1,000 simulations. p-values from two-sided tests.

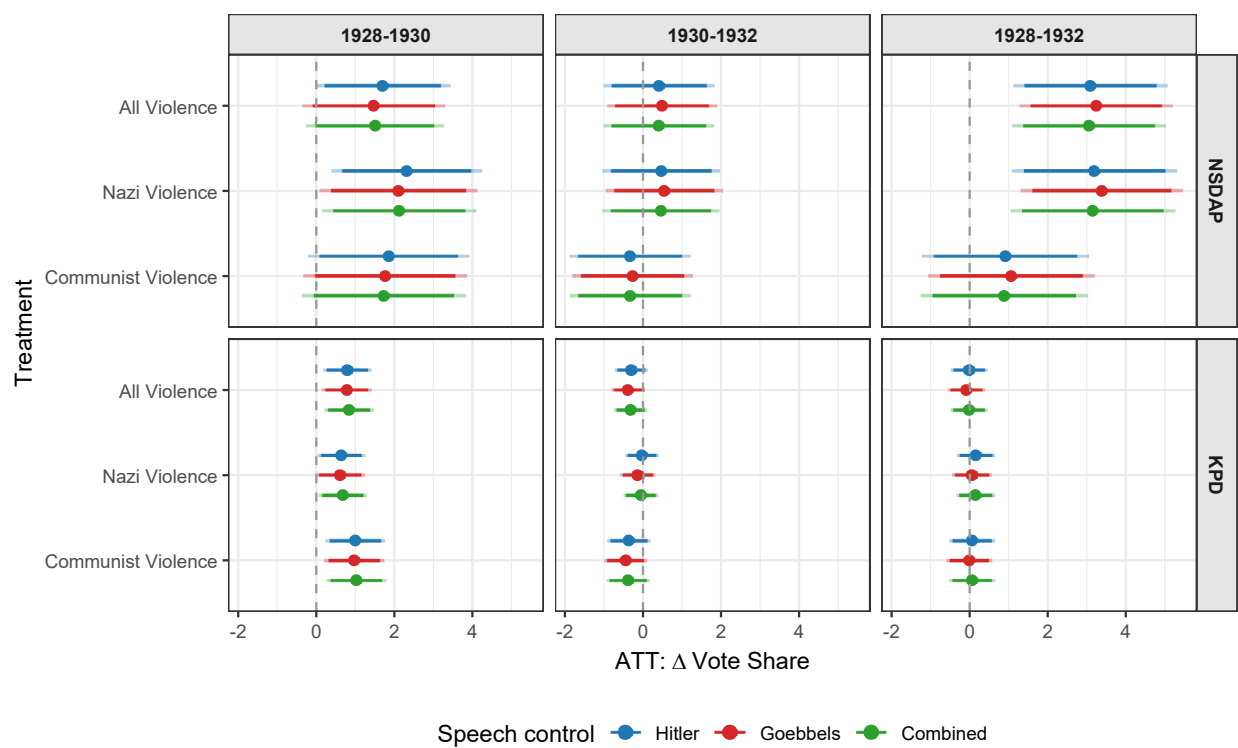


Figure A10: ATE of political violence on vote shares of the the KPD and NSDAP, DiD with unit fixed effects 95% (solid)/90% (transparent) confidence intervals in three periods.

C Parallel trends

Figures A11–A13 display the parallel plots for the sDiD from the pre-treatment periods. The periods correspond to the time between parliamentary elections. The integers on the x-axis thus identify the parliamentary elections in June 1920, May 1924, and December 1924 in the pre-treatment period, the May 1928 elections as the start of the treatment and the September 1930 elections as the end of the treatment period. In Figure A12, these periods shift to right and include the September 1930 elections as the start of the treatment period and the June 1932 elections as its end. In Figure A13, the June 1928 elections mark the beginning of the treatment and the June 1932 elections conclude the period.

The light blue line shows the trends of treated counties and the red line shows the corresponding trend for the synthetic control group. The dashed line parallel to the synthetic control trend indicates the counterfactual path that treated counties would have followed in the absence of treatment. The shaded red area indicates the weights assigned to each time period, and the black arrow marks the estimated average treatment effect on the treated (Arkhangelsky et al., 2021). Throughout all analyses, the pre-trend of the synthetic control group matches the pre-trend of the treated units so closely that the two lines are almost indistinguishable for the human eye.

Figure A11: Parallel trends for sDiD estimates, 1928–1930

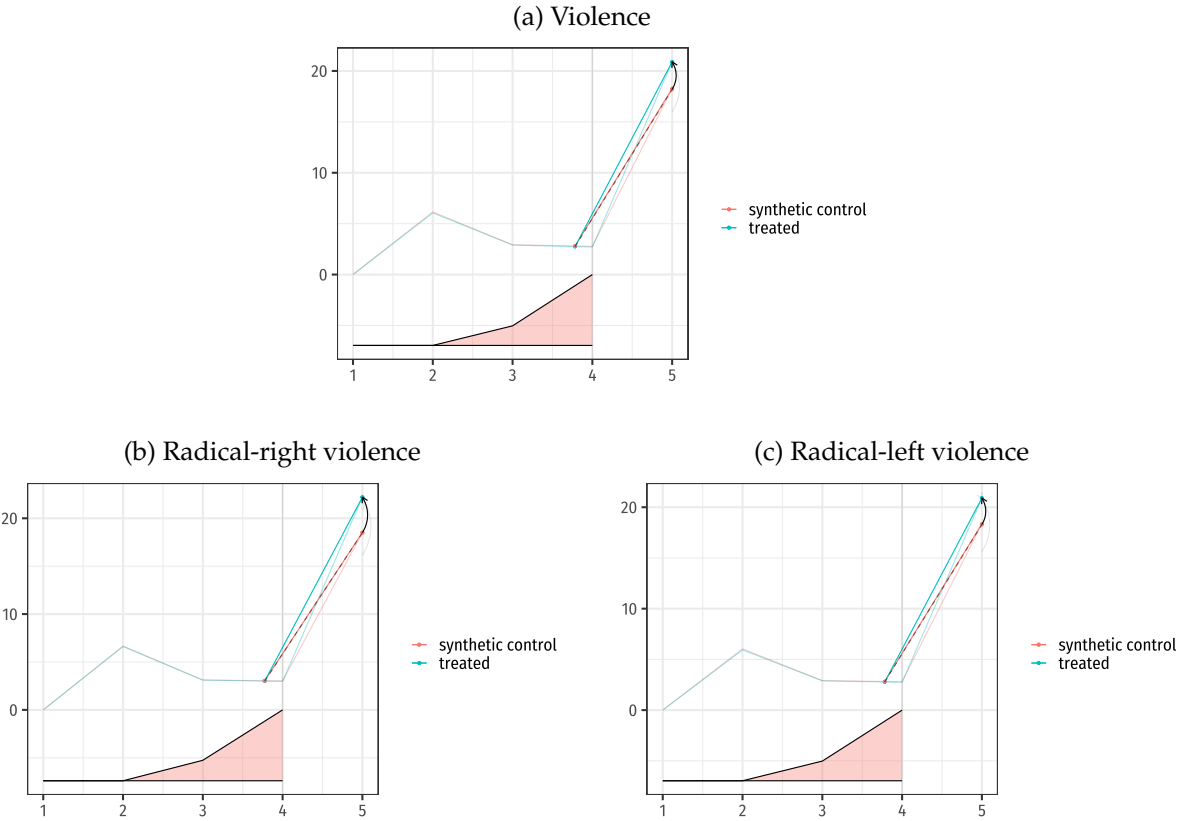


Figure A12: Parallel trends for sDiD estimates, 1930–1932 (June)

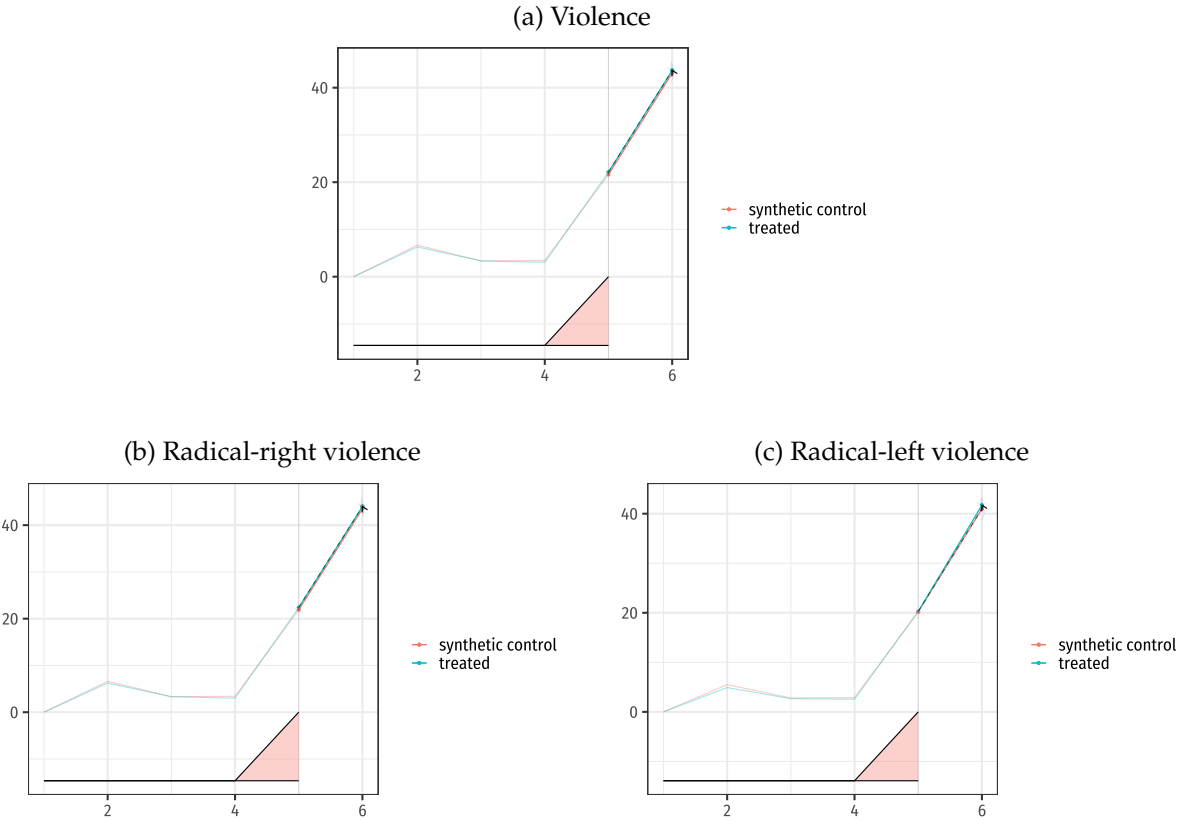
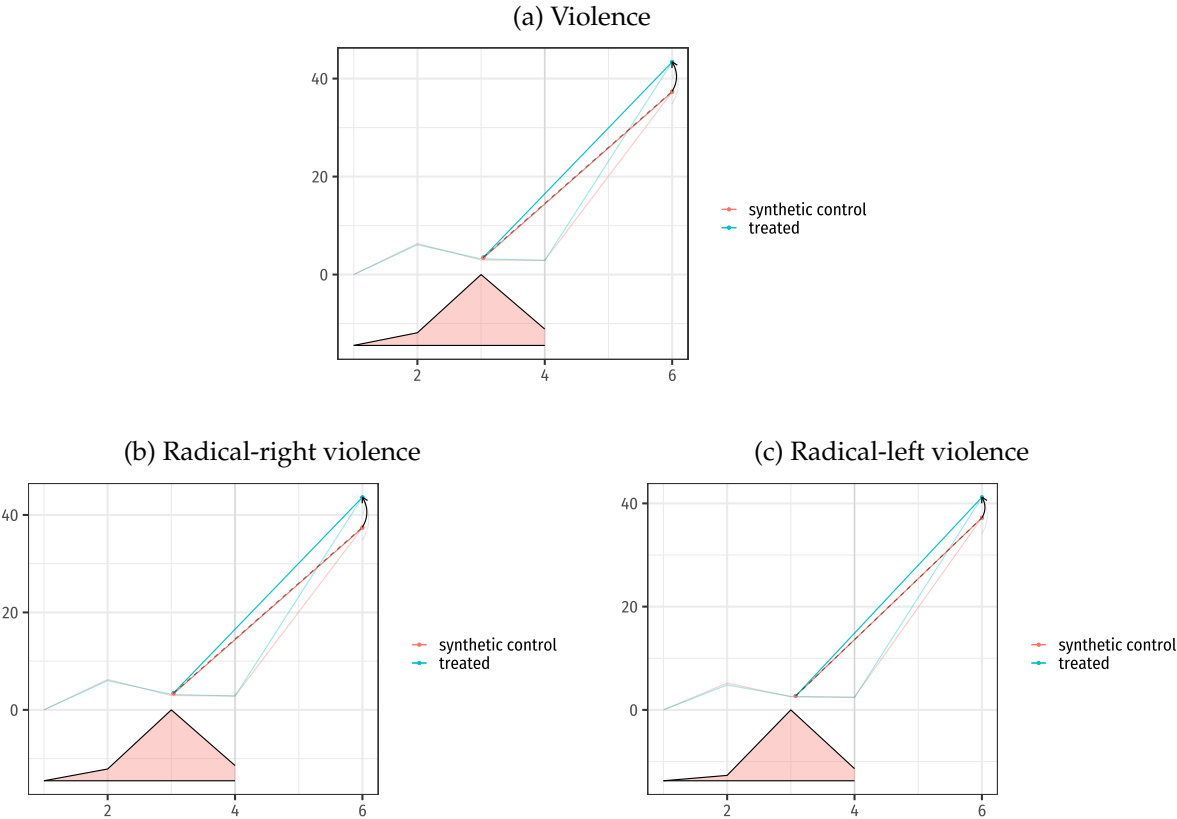


Figure A13: Parallel trends for sDiD estimates, 1928–1932 (June)



D References (Appendix)

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