

**Right-Wing Violence and the Public Sphere in Germany:
The Dynamics of Discursive Opportunities**

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June 24, 2002

Word Count: 12,293 (including footnotes)

An earlier version of this paper was presented by the first author at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association in Anaheim, CA, in August 2001. The authors would like to thank Carol Mueller, Meindert Fennema, Suzanne Shanahan, and Jean Tillie for their useful comments and suggestions.

ABSTRACT

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This paper uses data on collective violence against immigrants from contemporary Germany to explore the link between violence and the public discourse. We argue that media attention for radical right violence, as well as public reactions by third-party actors to radical-right violence may encourage or discourage violent acts in a number of ways. Using a cross-sectional and time-series design that analyzes event counts, we find that differential public visibility, resonance, and legitimacy of right-wing violence amplify the rate of some types of violence, while diminishing the rate of other types of violence. Although this study concerns the role of public discourse on rates of anti-foreigner activity in Germany specifically, we argue that substantial benefits might result from extending this type of analysis on the impact of public discourse to collective action and social movements in other settings and time periods.

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Since the reunification of Germany in 1990, a wave of radical-right violence has swept over the country (e.g., Björger and Witte 1993; Kurthen, Bergmann, and Erb 1997; Ohlemacher 1994). Altogether more than a hundred people have been killed and thousands were wounded in a wide variety of collective attacks. Targets of this violence include a variety of asylum seekers, Jewish synagogues and cemeteries, memorials to the Second World War and the Holocaust, left-wing groups, as well as marginal social groups such as the handicapped, gays, or the homeless. Despite this heterogeneity, immigrants and asylum seekers were by far the most frequent victims of radical right violence in the 1990s. In this paper, we seek to explain the temporal and spatial patterning, as well as the targets of immigrant violence in post-unification Germany.

In Germany and elsewhere, popular and academic explanations for radical-right and xenophobic violence tend to emphasize socio-economic deprivations such as unemployment, community disintegration, and ethnic competition between natives and immigrants. Our findings reflect previous research in showing that most of these accounts have limited explanatory power. In analyzing right-wing voting, for example, some scholars find evidence supporting some arguments from competition theory (Lubbers and Scheepers 2001). However, in a variety of analyses from racial violence in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere, this perspective has not yet been able to explain why less threatening groups are often more targeted by violence than other more likely candidates for attack (e.g., see Olzak 1992; Belanger and Pinard 1989).

To address these limitations, we explore the link between radical-right violence and the public discourse surrounding various potential targets or threats. We argue that media attention for radical right violence, public reactions by third actors to radical-right violence, and public controversies surrounding the targets of such violence can encourage or discourage violent acts in a number of ways. Differential public visibility, resonance, and legitimacy of right-wing violence may thus amplify the rate of some types of violence, while diminishing or leaving unaffected the rate of other types.

By focusing on the role of the public sphere and public discourse in shaping the opportunities for right-wing violence, we aim to deepen our understanding of radical right and racist violence by amending existing deprivation and ethnic competition accounts. However, we consider that the theoretical perspective that we develop on discursive opportunities may be relevant beyond our specific concern with right-wing violence. In doing so, we hope to encourage more general theorizing about the dynamics of political mobilization and communication in the public sphere.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION ACCOUNTS

The legacy of pre-world war II fascism provides a ready explanation for contemporary surges in radical right violence in Germany. Advocates of this view search for causes of contemporary radical right violence in Germany that suggest similarities between economic hardship in the contemporary period and the period of economic crisis preceding the Nazis' rise to power. Thus, the popular, political, and academic debates over the origins of right-wing radicalism in contemporary Germany have emphasized strain theory explanations, which suggest that socio-economic deprivation and disintegration of community ties are the

primary causes of radical right violence (e.g., Heitmeyer et al. 1992).¹ This familiar argument holds that under worsening economic conditions, social groups threatened with marginalization become receptive to ideologies and demagogues who designate specific racial or ethnic minorities as worthy of exclusion and violence.

The socio-economic situation in Germany after reunification certainly makes this argument seem plausible. The merger of East and West Germany has so far failed to produce the 'flowering landscapes' promised by Chancellor Kohl on the eve of reunification, but has instead precipitated severe economic problems. The technologically backward and uncompetitive industrial infrastructure of the East has largely collapsed and investment subsidies from the federal government have not prevented the unemployment rate from rising from zero to about twenty percent within only a few years. This downturn in the economy was a shock for many East Germans, who were guaranteed life-long employment under communism. The per capita domestic product in East Germany still lags far behind that of the West and there is no sign of this gap becoming any narrower. The West has fared better only relative to the East. Among other things, because of the enormous amounts of public money spent on building up a modern infrastructure in the East and the resulting high tax burden, unemployment has also risen substantially in the West, from about six percent in the beginning of the 1990s to ten percent a decade later. Long Europe's most successful post-war economy, Germany now finds itself below the E.U. average on just about any indicator of socio-economic performance.

While the fact that levels of radical-right violence are much higher in the East than in the West fits the socio-economic deprivation explanation, detailed investigations at the individual level of analysis have not provided much support for this account. Helmut Willems

¹ For informative overviews of the German academic debate on the radical right, see Falter, Jaschke, and Winkler (1996) and Kowalsky and Schroeder (1994).

and his collaborators (1993) for instance found that the – mostly very young – perpetrators of radical right violence tended to be pretty average youth from normal family backgrounds, who were not more likely to be unemployed than others among their age group. The rhythm of radical right mobilization over time also shows no consistent connection to indicators of socio-economic development such as economic growth, unemployment or inflation, neither in the 1990s, nor during the longer time-frame of the post-war period (Koopmans 2001).

ETHNIC COMPETITION THEORY

Despite the widespread popularity of deprivation explanations, the weight of empirical evidence against them has been documented in research on racial and ethnic violence in the U. S. (Spilerman 1970; Olzak and Shanahan 1996). Ethnic competition theorists (e.g., Barth 1969; Olzak 1992; Myers 1997; Nagel 1995) have argued that what explains ethnic conflict is competition among racially- or ethnically-differentiated groups for the same resources, particularly competition in labor and housing markets.² While the deprivation model sees xenophobic 'scapegoating' as a basically unreflective psychological reaction to frustration and discontent, the ethnic competition perspective points to the rational-strategic foundations of ethnic strife in material conflicts over scarce resources (Bobo and Hutchings 1996).

Although these accounts of the mechanisms that generate ethnic conflicts diverge, the strategies and measures used by these two traditions are relatively similar. Thus, economic

² Ethnic competition theory aims to explain both violence by the majority group against minorities, and violence by disadvantaged against dominant groups (e.g., race riots). Here, we will only deal with the theory's account of the former, although its argument is very similar for both types of ethnic conflict.

downturns and rising unemployment are generally seen as heightening levels of ethnic competition and occupy a role similar to that suggested by deprivation theories. The ethnic competition mode is distinguished from deprivation models by its emphasis on demographic change, especially surges in immigration, which increase competition and conflict among ethnic groups (Olzak 1992). At the same time, critics point to several deficiencies in the model, including the inability of competition theory to explain why some ethnic or racial targets are more likely to be singled out for violence over others (Wimmer 1997). To begin to address this theoretical puzzle, we develop a line of argument highlighting the impact of discursive opportunities.

DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Why and how does the public discourse affect ethnic violence? Instances of collective ethnic violence rarely occur in isolation and are usually embedded in waves of ethnic contention. The crucial importance of diffusion processes has been noted in almost any study of ethnic violence (e.g., Myers 2000) and in studies on protest cycles in general (e.g., Tarrow 1989, Koopmans 1993). Yet the theoretical implications of this highly consistent finding have not been fully explored with respect to role played by the public discourse in the mass media. For diffusion to occur, channels of communication are necessary, and, at least in modern democracies, the mass media occupy a central role in this regard.

The recent rise of protest event analysis as a methodological tool for social movement studies and related research into the mechanisms of media selection have begun to sensitize researchers to the dependency of protest on media attention (Mueller 1997; Rucht et al. 1999). In the age of mass communication, protests that are completely ignored by the media are literally meaningless. Apart from the few onlookers who perhaps happened to be present at

the scene of the protest, neither the general public nor those authorities at whom the protesters had addressed their demands will have taken notice of the event and thus there is no way in which such "invisible" protests will ever diffuse to wider constituencies or have an impact on policies.³

However, not all instances of communicative action will receive the media attention that is necessary to reach wider audiences. We define *discursive opportunities* as the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chances of diffusion in the public sphere. Our argument starts from the assumption that the public sphere is a bounded space for political communication characterized by a high level of competition (see Hilgartner and Bosk 1988 for a similar argument). To be sure, the boundaries of the public sphere are not fixed, but can expand and contract over time. For instance, the rise of new channels of communication such as the internet, or the multiplication of existing ones, e.g. through cable and satellite television, may expand the structural boundaries of the public sphere. At the same time, increasing commercialization of the media and a shift toward entertainment and human interest rather than political content may lead to a contraction of the communicative space available for public discourse. In addition to such more structural and long-term trends, the public sphere may also fluctuate importantly within shorter time periods. For instance, the media generally pay more attention to political topics during periods just prior to an election than during times of routine politics.

These fluctuations in media attention imply that the public sphere is a *loosely* bounded space, but at any particular time and place it is a *bounded* space nonetheless. The number of

³ Of course, a certain degree of diffusion is also conceivable in the absence of mass media attention, by way of a movement's indigenous channels of communication, e.g. interpersonal networks or movement media. However, the scope and reach of such diffusion are likely to be very limited compared to diffusion by way of the mass media.

channels of communication (newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television networks, etc.) and the size of their respective news holes (pages, broadcasting time, etc.) are by necessity limited. Groups and individuals within democratic society present an overload of messages (compared to the carrying capacity of the media) in the public sphere. On a typical day in a medium-sized democratic society, thousands of press statements are issued by a wide variety of parties, interest groups, and voluntary associations, hundreds of demonstrations, pickets, and other protests are staged, thousands of individuals write letters to the media or call in on radio and television programs, and dozens of press conferences vie for the attention of the public. Almost every conceivable position regarding an extremely wide range of political issues is represented among this daily cacophony of messages. Away from the mainstream of issues that are generally considered important (e.g., rising unemployment) and positions to these issues that are considered legitimate at a particular time and place, each democratic society harbors a wide variety of groups and individuals who try to insert issues and positions in the public discourse that are less legitimately seen as part of the broad public interest (e.g., the interests of pigeon breeders).

Visibility

The discrepancy between the available space in the public sphere and the number of messages potentially available for inclusion implies that competition among groups who aim to get their messages across in the public discourse is inevitable. To understand the dynamics of this competition, we need to distinguish two categories of actors: the *gatekeepers* of the public discourse, on the hand, and the *speakers* of communicative messages, on the other (Neidhardt

1994).⁴ The gatekeepers of the public discourse are those who decide which messages to include in the particular communicative channel that they are responsible for, and how large and how prominent these messages will be displayed. The selectivity of coverage and the mechanisms of allocating prominence to covered messages are quite well known for the traditional mass media and include decisions about the size and placement of articles, or the amount and primacy of airing time.⁵

The actions of gatekeepers produce the first and most basic type of discursive opportunity that we can distinguish: *visibility*. Visibility depends on the number of communicative channels by which a message is included and the prominence of such inclusion. It ranges from 'invisible' messages that are not included in any channel at all, via messages with limited visibility, which are for example only covered by local media, to 'obtrusive' messages that are displayed prominently by most channels. Visibility is a necessary condition for a message to influence the public discourse, and, other things being equal, the amount of visibility that gatekeepers allocate to a message increases its potential to diffuse further in the public sphere (see Trouillot 1995; Schudson 1995).

From communications and media research we know quite a lot about the so-called 'news values' that shape decisions of journalists and editors to consider a given story as newsworthy. For instance, (geographical) proximity, the prominence and prestige of the speaker, and the level of violence and/or conflict, possibilities for dramatization and personalization, and the novelty of a story all raise the likelihood of being reported in

⁴ As will become clear below, the notion of 'speaker' is here meant in a broad sense, and includes those who 'speak' through nonverbal messages, such as violence against immigrants.

⁵ Even in the relatively non-hierarchical internet, portals, internet browsers, and search engines pre-structure access to information on the web in such a way that certain sites are more easily and more frequently accessed than others.

newspaper accounts (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Schulz 1997; McCarthy et al. 1996; Mueller 1997; Hug and Wisler 1998; Oliver and Myers 1999; Oliver and Maney 2000). Yet with the partial exception of proximity, news values are not objective in the sense that these characteristics of events, actors, or messages exist outside of, and prior to the discursive realm. Notions of who is considered to be prominent, and which issues are considered relevant or controversial have emerged from previous rounds of public discourse. They are social products that serve as a lens through which the vast array of events in public and private life are observed, and on the basis of which a small proportion of these events are selected for coverage.

Successful social movement organizers and other public actors try to anticipate these media selection mechanisms in the articulation of their messages. Many modern protests, including Greenpeace-style professional organizations involved in direct action, as well as more grassroots forms such as anti-globalization protests at international summits, are to an important extent scripted and staged to maximize the chances of drawing media attention. However, there are clear and usually severe limits to the degree to which actors such as social movements can influence the amount of visibility that is allocated to their messages. First, because of fierce competition with other speakers, some gain advantages because they are able to innovate at a faster rate than their competitors. Second, speakers can manipulate only a small number of dimensions of newsworthiness, and much of the variance in newsworthiness depends on how news values such as prominence or relevance have come to be defined in past public discourse. For example, statements by 'important' politicians tend to get covered to a large extent regardless of their substantive content or original presentation, whereas less prominent actors have to go to great lengths in order to realize their slight chances of access to the public discourse.

Resonance and legitimacy

While the relevance of if and how the media report events has been widely acknowledged, less attention has been paid to the fact that the diffusion chances of a given actor's messages also depends on how other, non-media speakers relate to them in the public sphere. This follows directly from the dialogic nature of the public discourse (Steinberg 1999). Other speakers may publicly express support for likeminded actors whose messages reinforce their own, or they may react with indignation and rejection to messages that challenge their own position in the public discourse. Sometimes public actors choose to ignore competitors in an attempt to deny them the attention that is crucial to a message's survival in the public sphere.

We envision the communication environment of any particular public actor as the source of two further types of discursive opportunity: resonance and legitimacy. In developing these concepts we have been inspired by the work on collective action frames of David Snow and his colleagues (e.g., Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1992; see also Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Our approach differs in that we do not focus on the radical right's own discursive mobilization strategies, but on the – largely strategically unanticipated – reactions that radical right mobilization encounters. Thus, we emphasize the effects of the discursive context, while Snow and his colleagues emphasize the internal perspective of the discursive strategies of social movement activists and organizers. We see these two perspectives as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Although gaining visibility is a necessary condition for communicative impact, the career of a discursive message is likely to remain stillborn if it does not succeed in provoking reactions from other actors in the public sphere. The degree to which a message provokes such reactions we refer to as *resonance*. Resonance can be conceptualized as having two types of ripple effects. First, resonance increases the original actor's chances to reproduce her message in the public sphere. Messages that resonate, be it negatively or positively, become in

the eyes of journalists and editors more 'relevant' and the actors behind them more 'prominent', which increases the speaker's chances to achieve a high level of visibility for similar messages in the future.⁶

Second, messages that resonate travel further. Through the reactions of other actors, the message of the original speaker is at least partially reproduced and may reach new audiences. For instance, less established actors (including social movements) might receive advantageous attention if established political actors express support for their demands. Such support carries the message to the constituency of the established ally in question, allowing the message to profit from that actor's prominence and prestige. This form of supportive resonance we will call *consonance*.

We find that the old adage that there is no such thing as bad publicity is also instructive. Even negative resonance, or *dissonance*, may to some extent be helpful to the diffusion of the original message. The rejection of a demand also reproduces it, diffusing it in the public sphere. Of course, the reproduction of messages by way of resonance is always imperfect. Even in the case of consonance, allies are likely to support or emphasize only certain aspects of the original speaker's message, e.g., in the case at hand, xenophobic violence found consonance in the public discourse regarding its aim to limit immigration, while simultaneously the violent means by which radical right groups sought to advance this aim were rejected by other speakers. The distortion of the original message is of course likely to be particularly strong in the case of dissonant reactions. Nevertheless, even a strongly negative public reaction to a message has to reproduce the original message to at least some

⁶ Resonance remains, however, distinct and logically independent from visibility because the mass media's criteria for newsworthiness do not necessarily correspond to what non-media actors in the public sphere consider relevant and important (as illustrated by the numerous reports on politicians' infidelities in the United States in recent years).

extent and thereby always runs the risk of providing potential imitators of the original message with a model for successful public action (e.g., Holden 1986 for the case of airplane hijackings).

While to some extent we can treat consonance and dissonance as having similarly positive effects on the discursive opportunities of a message, in other respects it must matter what the balance is between negative and positive responses in the public sphere. We define public *legitimacy* as the degree to which, on average, reactions by third actors in the public sphere support an actor or her claims more than they reject them. Defined in this way, legitimacy can vary independently of resonance. Highly legitimate messages may have no resonance at all because they are uncontroversial, while highly illegitimate messages may have strong resonance (e.g., for obvious historical reasons, anti-Semitic violence in Germany).

The relationship between legitimacy and a speaker's discursive opportunities seems a complicated one. All other things being equal, one might expect legitimacy to have a positive effect on the diffusion of a message. But, because of the complex relation of legitimacy to resonance and visibility, other things will rarely be equal. Ideally, speakers would prefer their messages to have high resonance and high legitimacy, but they will usually have to settle for less. This is because high resonance is often only achieved at the cost of an increase in controversy, which results in a net decrease in legitimacy. Conversely, highly legitimate statements usually provoke few reactions from other actors and the media will not be interested in endlessly repeating messages that are accepted by everybody.⁷ All in all, then,

⁷ The analysis of innovation in tactics in social movements illustrates this point. Research on tactical innovation suggests that tactics seen as “novel,” disruptive, violent, or dramatic raise rates of protest (McAdam 1983). However, these benefits do not continue to expand if others

we may expect a curvilinear reaction between a message's chances of diffusion and its legitimacy, with messages whose legitimacy is controversial generally better placed strategically than either highly legitimate or highly illegitimate messages.

DATA, VARIABLES, AND HYPOTHESES

To test our public discourse model, we analyze information on violence by radical right and xenophobic groups, as well as on the wider public discourse in Germany in the 1990s.

Newspaper content data were collected on the public discourse on the radical right as well as on immigration and ethnic relations issues. This included statements on immigration control and legislation, as well as all claims by, against, or on behalf of radical right and ethnic minority groups, even if they referred to other issues than immigration. The units of analysis are not articles, as is often the case in media content analysis, but single communicative acts by non-media actors, which we denote as 'political claims'. Such claims were included irrespective of their form and encompass not only public statements, but also political decisions, judicial actions, demonstrations and other protests, and violence.

All in all, the data set includes more than 11,000 instances of claim-making during the period 1990-1999. It may be helpful to show some distinctions between public discourse and instances of right-wing violence in order to clarify our definitions. We identified 930 instances of radical right violent attacks as one of our two measures of right-wing violence (the other measure is based on official police reports). An example of a right-wing violent event is captured with this quote: "A crowd of 200 local youth shouting 'foreigners out!' and throwing stones, last night attacked a hostel for foreign workers in Hoyerswerda".

also adopt these tactics. At very high levels of tactical overlap, a highly shared tactical repertoire decreases the rate of protest (Olzak and Uhrig 2001).

We use reports of public discourse expressing claims on different categories of immigrants or on the extreme right to calculate measures of visibility, consonance, dissonance, and legitimacy (see below for further detail on the operationalization of these variables). The following report illustrates a claim which was included in our consonance measure because it expresses a negative attitude towards one of the radical right's target groups: "In a television interview yesterday, Chancellor Kohl said that the strong rise in the numbers of asylum seekers had taken the form of a 'state crisis'." The following is an example of a dissonant claim, which expresses a negative attitude with regard to the extreme right: "Federal President von Weizsäcker condemned the arson attack on the former concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, saying this is an outrageous act that brings shame on Germany". In the subsequent analysis, we explain radical right violence by investigating how its temporal and regional spread, as well as its targets were affected by the preceding public discourse on the radical right and its target groups.

The data were coded from all Monday, Wednesday, and Friday issues of the national quality newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*.⁸ This newspaper was chosen because pretests indicated that it paid more attention to the topics of interest than alternative sources. For

⁸Trained coding assistants used a standardized codebook to identify and code all relevant claims making activity from newspaper sources (available on request from the first author). Unlike many previous studies, researchers did not employ a predetermined set of keywords, but instead reviewed all sections of the papers for relevant articles that contained claims relevant to radical right-wing violence. Comparing six coders regarding their inclusion or exclusion of articles, a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .95 was achieved. Researchers then classified the claims by type from the selected articles. The fact that several articles included more than one relevant claim raised the potential for more coder disagreement. Nevertheless, these efforts reflected a respectable reliability coefficient of .92.

shorter periods of time, samples were drawn from other newspaper sources to check the representativeness of the primary source for the wider media landscape. These other newspapers were the national tabloid newspaper *Bild-Zeitung*, the Turkish immigrant daily *Hürriyet*, as well as three East German local newspapers. Comparisons of these newspapers displayed a consistent pattern. First, in any paired comparison, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* was by far the more inclusive source in terms of the number of claims reported. Second, these quantitative differences had only very small qualitative consequences. For instance, although the *Rundschau* reported more than four times as many claims as *Bild*, the distributions of claims across actors, issues and positions with regard to issues were almost the same.⁹ This indicates that the *Frankfurter Rundschau* can be considered representative for the wider German media landscape, at least regarding the type of information that we use for our analysis.¹⁰

We are well aware of the problem of selection bias that affects the use of newspaper data for many research purposes (e.g., McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Hug and Wisler 1998; Barranco and Wisler 2001). However, what interests us in this article is not the extra-media ‘reality,’ which we would attempt to measure through the news media. To the contrary, we are interested in positive and negative feedback relations between different types of claims

⁹ The few significant differences that we found followed directly from the specific audiences addressed by the more specialized newspapers. Thus, *Hürriyet* obviously reported more claims by Turkish organizations, while regional papers reported more about claims made in their own region.

¹⁰ An additional coding of editorials for the different newspapers did reveal important qualitative differences, with for instance the *Bild* editorials much more in favor of restricting immigration than those of the *Rundschau*. We exclude editorials and any other statements by journalists from our analysis in an effort to minimize this “editorial voice” effect.

within the public discourse, as represented in the media. However, regarding our dependent variable, radical right violence, we are of course also interested in reports of violence from other sources. Here we are fortunate that the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*), publishes statistics on this type of violence, which are based on police statistics gathered in the different federal states. The correlation coefficient between radical right violence in our newspaper data and in the official statistics is .53.

The newspaper and police sources did not vary much regarding the distribution of events over time, but they did vary substantially across the federal states. These differences are not, as one might have expected, due to the proximity factor, which could have led the *Frankfurter Rundschau* – which is based in West Germany – to report less about events in East Germany. The reverse is true: the proportion of Eastern events is much larger in the newspaper data when compared to the proportion reported in the official police statistics. It is difficult to ascertain precisely what causes this difference, but it may well be due to a tendency by Eastern police to minimize right-wing violence. Over the 1990s, there were continuous complaints about the lack of attention of the police in the East for radical right violence and so Eastern regional police forces may well have underreported such violence. To capture some of these sources of systematic differences in reporting, we compare the causal effects across these two measures of radical right wing violence. For all other measures relevant to economic hardship, competition, and political opportunity theories, we draw on data from the Federal Statistics Office (*Statistisches Bundesamt*).

The data on claims were aggregated by year and by federal state to construct a cross-sectional time series data set with 160 cases (10 years * 16 federal states), and variables consisting of counts of claims of a specific type (e.g., radical right violence) per year-state combination. Thus, we seek variation across states and over time in a panel design. We expect that the disturbance process (i.e., error terms that are correlated within states across time) will

be correlated across observations due to gradually changing but unobserved characteristics within states.¹¹ Moreover, we assume that autocorrelation processes will be strongest in adjacent years and less correlated in distant periods. We experimented with several specifications of the correlation matrix of these unobserved correlations, and found, consistent with other panel models of collective action, that a first-order autocorrelation specification provided a relatively good fit with the data, when compared with other possible specifications (including random effects models and models of unconstrained correlated errors).

We used an estimation procedure that is appropriate for this type of event count analysis, the method of Generalized Estimation Equations (using the XTGEE routine in STATA, version 7). Because of the fact that the variables consist of non-negative counts with overdispersion, a negative binomial distribution for the dependent variable was modeled, as well as a first-order autoregressive correlation structure, which is typical for time series (see King 1989 for a discussion of event count data). For the first part of our analysis, which focuses on explaining the volume of radical right violence, we use the police statistics as our dependent variable. In a second step, we focus on explaining the development of the tactical repertoire of radical right violence in the form of the targets it was directed against. For this analysis, we use the media data on radical right violence as the dependent variable, because the police data cannot be differentiated according to the target of violence.

The following independent variables – all measured for each year-state combination separately and lagged one year relative to the dependent variable – are used in the analyses:

Measures of socio-economic deprivation:

- the *gross domestic product* on a per capita basis;

¹¹ For an example using this procedure to model rates of transition across types of firms in the high tech industry in Silicon Valley California, see Baron, Hannan, and Burton 2001.

- yearly changes in the *unemployment rate*;¹²

The hypothesis derived from the socio-economic deprivation model is that high levels of these variables should be associated with high levels of radical right violence.

Measures of ethnic competition:

- *net immigration* from outside Germany per 1,000 inhabitants (number of immigrants from abroad minus number of emigrants to other countries);¹³
- the *interaction term* between net immigration and yearly changes in the unemployment rate.

The competition model predicts that immigration and unemployment and their interaction will have strong, positive effects on the level of radical right violence.

Measures of political opportunity structures:

- The *political color of the state government* on a right-left scale ranging from 1 (if the right-wing Christian Democrats [CDU] ruled alone) to 6 (for left-wing coalitions of Social

¹² We considered both the rate itself and yearly changes in preliminary analyses but the results were more robust in the models using yearly changes and so we report these results.

¹³ In preliminary analyses, we also considered the gross number of immigrants, uncorrected for emigration. However, this variable performed less well. Moreover, the net immigration variable more accurately indicates potential competition pressures as a result of migration. In addition, we investigated whether there was any effect from migration flows within Germany, which was not the case. Finally, we also considered the number of foreigners as a percentage of the population, which had no relation to radical right violence, either.

Democrats [SPD] and Greens).¹⁴ Years in which a change of government occurred were coded according to the government that was in power for the largest part of the year;

- The absolute difference between the percentage of CDU/CSU votes and SPD votes as a measure of the degree of *electoral competition* between the two major parties; the scores were then given a negative sign so that high (i.e., close to zero) scores on this variable indicate that both parties capture comparable shares of the vote, which will generally imply a higher level of competition than when one of the two parties clearly dominates.¹⁵

Does the presence of allies in positions of power help a movement? Studies on the connection between government composition and protest have shown that the levels of extra-institutional protest by distinctly political social movements are inversely related to the presence of allies in positions of power within established politics (Kriesi et al. 1995). This is because allies in office will be less inclined to support extra-institutional action, and at the same time there will be less need for social movements to resort to extra-institutional pressure when political friends are in power. For the case at hand, this implies that we expect the radical right to mobilize less under right-wing governments. Political opportunity theorists have also stressed the importance of elite conflict and competition, which open up opportunities for social movements to intervene in the political process (Tarrow 1994). Therefore, we expect a negative relation between the vote differential between the two major parties and the level of radical right violence, i.e. the level of violence is expected to be higher where the two main political parties are in close competition with one another.

¹⁴ The other codes were: 2 for a government of CDU and the centrist Liberal Democrats (FDP), 3 for coalitions of CDU and SPD, 4 for coalitions of SPD and FDP, and 5 for the SPD ruling alone.

¹⁵ This measure is based on the vote differential in state-level elections. For years in between elections, the vote percentages were interpolated.

Measures of discursive opportunities

- To measure *visibility*, we can make use of the fact that we have both media data on radical right violence, and extra-medial police data, which are more inclusive. In addition, among the newspaper reported radical right violent events, we can distinguish between those that were reported on the front page, and those that were reported less prominently. Combining these, we have two indicators of visibility: 1) front-page violence as a percentage of police-registered violence; 2) front-page violence as a percentage of all newspaper-reported violence. The first measure of visibility will be used in analyses using the police data as the dependent variable, the second in analyses using newspaper-reported violence as the dependent variable;¹⁶
- *Dissonance* is measured by all claims directed against the radical right and xenophobia, including a wide range of forms such as public condemnations, countermobilization, as well as state repression against the radical right;
- *Consonance* (with the radical right) is measured by all claims directed against immigrants and minorities, mostly in the form of public statements. Of course, in order to keep dependent and independent variables separated, our consonance measure excludes any anti-immigrant claims that were made by radical right organizations, spokespersons, or groups.
- *Legitimacy* is measured by the share of consonant claims among all claims on the radical right and xenophobia, immigrants and minorities. Here too, we exclude claims made by the radical right itself.

¹⁶ We also aggregated all counts of media-reported violence (front-page or not) as a percentage of police-registered violence as a third measure of visibility. As anticipated, this alternative indicator of visibility had similar but slightly weaker effects.

In line with the theoretical arguments outlined above, high levels of visibility, consonance and legitimacy are expected to lead to higher levels of violence. As we have argued, high levels of legitimacy may dampen rates of protest when a movement's claims (or tactics) become seen as uncontroversial, uncontested, and fail to gain media attention. However, given the position of the radical right at the margins of the German polity, we do not expect to observe this negative effect of very high legitimacy for this movement. The expectation with regard to dissonance is less clear: on the one hand, dissonant claims may further contribute to diffusion of violence by the (unintended) publicity that they give it; on the other hand, dissonance also undermines the legitimacy of violence and signals the mobilization of countermovements against the radical right.

Control variables

- The dummy variable '*East*'. Former East and West Germany are still very different in many respects. This variable measures whether there is a difference in the level of radical right violence between the East and the West that cannot be explained by the other variables in the model. The level of radical right violence is much higher in the East and this is certainly partly a result of the specific social structures and political culture that result from the heritage of forty years of Communism. Net of all other explanatory variables, we may therefore still expect a positive effect of Eastern location on the level of radical right violence;
- The natural logarithm of the state *population* in 1,000s. Since the dependent variable is a count of instances of radical right violence, it is of course likely to depend on the population size of a given state;
- The dependent variable lagged one year, which captures diffusion processes unexplained by the other variables in the model.

RESULTS 1: EXPLAINING THE LEVEL OF RADICAL RIGHT VIOLENCE

Figure 1 compares the total number of radical right violent events from the official police data and newspaper sources for Germany during 1990-1999. While the number (using the left-hand scale) of police reports is about ten-times higher than the number of newspaper reports (using the right-hand scale) of right-wing violence, the peaks and valleys are strikingly similar. From 1990 to 1992 we see a steep increase in violence, with the police reports numbering nearly 2200, which then decline until about 1995-96. In the final years of the decade, we see again a slight increase in the number of events reported, both by the police and by the newspaper. While the previous postwar decades were not uneventful, violence had not reached 1990 levels during the whole of the postwar period in Germany.

In addition to these fluctuations over time, there was considerable variation among the federal states. In absolute numbers, the highest levels were recorded in Northrhine-Westphalia (an average of 165 yearly events according to the police data) and the lowest in Bremen (6 yearly events). Since these also happen to be the most and least populous states, it is more illuminating to compare levels of violence on a per capita basis. Per million inhabitants, the average yearly number of radical right violent events ranged from 29 in the Eastern states of Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, to three in Bavaria in the West. Controlling for population size, the rate is clearly higher in the West than in the East. Both in the East and in the West, we find a divide between lower violence levels in the generally more prosperous and more conservative South, and higher levels in the economically weaker, mostly left-leaning regions of the North. Berlin, in line with its mixed East and West roots, displays an intermediate violence level (15 yearly events per million inhabitants).

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

To what extent can these temporal and regional differences be explained with traditional theories of ethnic violence? Table 1 compares a baseline model including only past violence levels, population size and Eastern location to deprivation and ethnic competition models. As the table shows, the deprivation model performs extremely poorly – which is in line with the results of many earlier investigations of ethnic violence but stands in sharp contrast to the popularity of this explanation in popular and political discourse. In spite of stark differences in economic and social conditions in East and West Germany, the gross domestic product (measured at the state level) has no impact at all on radical right violence. Perhaps most surprisingly given the prominence of this variable in many accounts of the radical right, changes in the unemployment level have no impact on violence. The inadequacy of unemployment as an explanation can also be seen if we follow its development over time. In West Germany, the lowest unemployment rates of the decade were recorded in 1991 and 1992 (7%; a decline of one percent from the 1990 level), in the middle of the violence peak, while the level peaked in 1997 (12%), long after the peak of violence. In the East, there has been a steady increase over the decade, from 10% in 1991 (for 1990 no figures are available) to a maximum of 20% in 1997-98, which again does not fit the development of violence.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Given the fact that the ethnic competition model partly relies on the same economic variables as the deprivation model, it is perhaps not surprising that this model (in the second column of Table 1) does not perform much better. The interaction term between immigration and (changes in) unemployment levels, which is at the core of ethnic competition theory, is completely irrelevant, as is unemployment as such.

However, the level of immigration does have a positive and significant impact on violence in the expected direction. The coefficient of .029 tells that as the log of net

immigration size rises one standard deviation above its mean (from 5.3 to 10.5, see Appendix A), the rate of right wing violence rises about 17% (because $\exp(5.3)^{.029} = 1.16$, compared to the effect of immigration one standard deviation higher, which is $\exp(10.5)^{.029} = 1.36$).¹⁷ While this impact of immigration is substantial, in the absence of an effect for the interaction with unemployment, we interpret this pattern as providing only partial support for the ethnic competition model.

Competition theorists argue that competition need not be objective, intentional, and may not even be recognized as such by participants (Carroll and Hannan 2000). If there were scant evidence of a connection between ethnic violence and the objective socio-economic situation (as there appears in the case of West Germany), then some subjective evidence of competition between immigrants and perpetrators of violence would be useful. In this view, a high influx of immigrants increased subjective *perceptions* of increased ethnic competition, regardless of whether or not this perception is justified (Belanger and Pinard 1989; Scheepers et al. 2002). Is this the case in Germany during this period? We find that many supporters of the radical right have voiced complaints that foreigners take away 'German' jobs, come to profit from the German social security system, are a threat to 'German' cultural values, and especially among the young the view is widespread that 'they are after our women' (Willems et al. 1993; Bergmann and Erb 1994).

Yet perceptions of threats may become relevant only after collective violence has occurred, or they may become salient only after a leader arises to foment unrest. These explanations raise questions about the reverse causal argument, in which perceptions are temporary but intermediary causal factors in violence. Such explanations imply that the

¹⁷ Because of missing unemployment data, Table 1 reports analyses for 148 cases, while we present descriptive statistics in Appendix A for 154 cases. This did not affect this calculation, though - the effect of immigration is the same.

fundamental mechanisms of competition are a kind of „black box,“ which we find unsatisfying.

To better explain this process of targeting foreigners, we turn instead to the dynamics of public discourse. In Table 2, we test our public discourse argument by investigating the impact on violence of discursive opportunities. In the models in Table 2, we retain the variables that were significant in Table 1, and add our key measures of discursive opportunities and two measures of political opportunity structure. Taking the first column showing the results for all states, we see that prior violence, population size, and immigration remain important predictors of violence. Of the political opportunity structure variables, high levels of party competition are indeed significantly associated with higher levels of violence. The composition of government does not have a significant effect, although it is in the expected direction.

Table 2 shows that the relationships of discursive opportunities with violence are strong and in the expected direction. A high degree of media attention for violence, as indicated by the visibility variable, indeed leads to higher levels of violence in the following year.¹⁸ The same is true for consonance, as measured by the number of negative claims by other actors than the radical right on migrants and minorities. High levels of such claims in the preceding year stimulated the radical right to intensify its violence. More concretely, using the means and standard deviations in Appendix A, we can calculate that as the number of consonant claims increase by one standard deviation above the mean, the effect of the coefficient .017 indicates that the rate of radical right violence in the following year rises by 25%.

¹⁸ This confirms earlier findings showing the effect of media attention on right-wing violence in Germany reported by Brosius and Esser (1995).

Conversely, dissonance, as measured by claims by other actors against the radical right and xenophobia, significantly and negatively decreased the rate of violence. As the number of statements in opposition to the radical right increased by one-standard deviation, the rate of right wing violence subsequently decreased by about 10%, across all states in Germany. When we compare the effect of dissonance across the Western and Eastern states, we see that this deterrence effect of anti-radical right statements is especially potent in the East.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

In the light of our theoretical arguments, the inhibiting effect of dissonant claims on violence is interesting. Recall that we argued that a high level of dissonance might be a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it can act as a disincentive for the radical right, because it indicates a lack of public support (which actors in the public sphere generally strive for), and it measures actual opposition in the form of mobilization by counterprotestors or repression by the state. On the other hand, dissonant claims give further public resonance to the radical right, which again may facilitate the diffusion of violence. The evidence in the table suggests that the first, negative effect clearly predominates, although we note that this may be because the positive resonance effect is already captured by the consonance measure. Contrary to the expectations, legitimacy does not play a role in explaining violence (at least not when Eastern and Western states are analyzed together).

In view of the strong differences in violence levels in Eastern and Western regions of Germany, and the fact of forty years of separation on either side of the Cold-War systemic divide, it is not surprising that some of the patterns differ between East and West. The most important difference between East and West is that immigration levels are completely irrelevant in the East. In fact, in spite of much higher levels of anti-immigrant violence, there

are very few immigrants in the East. In 1991, the average percentage of foreigners¹⁹ in the five states was only 0.7%, a figure that by the end of the decade had risen to 1.9%. The 1991 figure, moreover, was a decrease rather than an increase compared to the previous level. During 1991 the German government forced many former GDR-guestworkers from third-world Communist states such as Cuba and Angola to return to their countries of origin. In the state of Saxony – site of the first large-scale anti-immigrant riot in Hoyerswerda in September 1991 – fewer foreigners lived by the end of 1991 than at the beginning of the year. The lack of an effect of immigration in the East – where the level of radical right violence is clearly higher than in the West – further undermines our confidence in the deprivation and ethnic competition models.

The other differences between the East and West are more marginal. Regarding political opportunity structures, the party competition variable is not relevant in the East, but the composition of government is in the expected direction. This means that in the East, radical right violence tended to be somewhat more prevalent when the left was in office in a state. The irrelevance of party competition in Eastern states is likely related to the fact that the composition of the party system is different in the East, where the post-Communist PDS captures about one fifth of the vote. As a result there are not two, but three major parties in the East and electoral competition is not accurately captured by our measure, which is only based on the CDU-SPD differential.

Regarding discursive opportunities, the results for the West resemble those for the whole country very much. All in all, the model explains violence in the West much better than in the East, which is probably partly due to the smaller number of cases in the East (there are five Eastern states as against eleven Western ones), which increases the relative importance of

¹⁹ In the German context, the percentage of foreigners is a good indicator of the size of ethnic minority populations since few immigrants have obtained German citizenship.

measurement error and random fluctuation. But we suspect that this is not the whole explanation and that there are regionally-specific factors, which explain variation within East Germany and that we have not included in our general theoretical models. One difference shown by our results is that the absolute number of consonant claims in the preceding year does not have a significant effect on radical right violence in the East, but instead legitimacy (i.e., the percentage of consonant claims among all claims on immigrants and/or the radical right) is highly significant and it is in the expected direction. Second, we find no effect of visibility (media attention for radical right violence) in the East. This may be due to the fact that the readership of our newspaper source is concentrated in the West. Had we used an East German newspaper source, we might have been in a better position to capture visibility effects on radical right violence in the East. Despite such differences between East and West in the aspects of the public discourse that are most relevant, the overall result in both parts of the country is that discursive opportunities exerted an important influence on the level of radical right violence in a direction conforming to our expectations.

RESULTS 2: EXPLAINING THE TARGETS OF RADICAL RIGHT VIOLENCE

We now ask if discursive opportunities can also explain the predominance of right-wing violence against asylum seekers compared to other potential targets. Table 3 gives an overview of the targets of radical right violence for the whole decade using the newspaper sources (recall that the police data does not distinguish targets using these specific categories).

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 3 shows that right-wing violence had a broad range of variation of targets. Besides the targets explicitly listed, the 'miscellaneous targets' category includes attacks against homeless persons, disabled persons, tourists, and journalists. One sizeable category was that of 'unspecific targets,' which includes acts of random destruction of property by radical right or skinhead groups, disturbances of popular festivals, or attacks where the victims were non-minority, average Germans in everyday settings, (e.g., people leaving a discotheque). The question is, of course, whether this distribution represented a relatively fixed rank-order of radical right aversion against different groups and targets (Pettigrew 1998: 80-81), or whether there are significant repertoire shifts that require explanation.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 2 suggests that there were indeed important shifts in the radical right's choice of targets. The figure shows the development over time of violence against the categories "asylum seekers", "other immigrant groups", and "unspecific targets" corresponding to the categories in Table 3. The category "other targets" combines all the remaining target categories from Table 3. The figure shows that, apart from some minor ups and downs from year to year, the level of violence against other and unspecific targets remained virtually unchanged across the decade. Therefore, the wave of violence was driven mainly by the growth and decline of violence against two particular target categories, namely asylum seekers, and to a lesser extent other immigrant groups.

Importantly for our argument, these choices of targets changed over the course of the wave of right-wing violence during the 1990s. Initially, immigrants and asylum seekers did not play a predominant role in the radical right's repertoire. In the year 1990, violence against asylum seekers and other immigrants made up only 5% and 15%, respectively, of all radical right violence. A year later, 48% of all violence was directed against asylum seekers and an

additional 32% against other immigrants. By 1992, asylum seekers alone accounted for 63% of the radical right's targets. Subsequently, the relative importance of these targets declined again, especially in the case of asylum seekers.

Were these repertoire shifts across targeted groups related to the differential discursive opportunities open to the radical right? The first column of Table 4 shows for different target groups the average visibility of attacks against these targets, as measured by the fraction of them that was reported on a newspaper's front-page. Attacks against asylum seekers were more likely than any other type of radical right violence to be reported on the front-page of the newspaper: 25% of attacks on asylum seekers received such prominent coverage. Violence against the other two categories of immigrants was somewhat less prominently publicized, with 22% of violence against ethnic German Aussiedler and 20% of violence against other foreigners (mostly former guestworkers such as the Turks) being reported on the front-page. Radical right violence that did not target immigrants was least likely to be prominently covered (16% front-page coverage).

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Whether the news media prominently covers a certain type of violence depends to an important extent on whether such violence resonates with ongoing public debates that refer to that particular target group. In the case at hand, this was most strongly the case for asylum seekers. As the second column in the table shows, asylum seekers were very prominent in the public debate in the 1990s, with almost 1,400 negative statements on this group over the course of the decade. This debate on asylum seekers was very controversial and focused on the issue of restrictions in the constitutional right to asylum. During the period 1991-1993, this issue was the most intensely debated issue in German politics. The asylum issue's public resonance is also demonstrated by the fact that surveys during this period showed that the

Germans considered the asylum issue to be "the most important current political issue in Germany", even before such issues as unemployment and the costs and consequences of reunification (Roth 1994). To a lesser but still important extent public controversies also raged over other immigrant groups, but as the second column of Table 4 shows, negative statements on other immigrant groups were only half as frequent as those on asylum seekers.

The third group of immigrants, the Aussiedler, is officially defined as ethnic "Germans" from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. They are the descendants of (originally) German-speaking groups who (mostly several hundreds of years ago) migrated eastward. According to the German constitution, they have the right to migrate to Germany and to receive German citizenship upon arrival (Bade 1992; Münz, Seifert, and Ulrich 1997). As a result of their privileged legal status and the lack of significant elite disagreement about their special rights, the Aussiedler issue had a very low public profile and although restrictive changes in application procedures were implemented to limit the huge influx of Aussiedler after the fall of the Iron Curtain, this happened away from the public eye without much controversy among the political parties. This is shown in Table 4 by the very low number of negative statements on Aussiedler compared to those on other immigrant groups. Negative statements on Aussiedler (86) were sixteen times less frequent than those on asylum seekers (1,376).

As a result of this low resonance of the Aussiedler issue in the public sphere, the level of violence against this group remained very low (see Table 3). The reason is not that radical right groups share the elite's view of the Aussiedler as part of the German people. They consider them as unwelcome "Russians", as do many average Germans (Pfetsch 1999). However, violence against Aussiedler met with little positive resonance in the public sphere and therefore was unable to diffuse to any significant extent. Instead, the radical right shifted its emphasis to other target groups and in particular to asylum seekers, as such violence

received positive feedback from the public sphere in the form of high levels of visibility, resonance, and legitimacy.

Ethnic competition theories suggest that competition intensifies as the size of a competing population grows. We reason that the relatively low levels of violence that targeted the Aussiedler provide evidence that runs counter to competition theories. The Aussiedler were the largest immigrant group in the 1990s, surpassing even the already massive influx of asylum seekers (e.g., in 1990 alone, 400,000 Aussiedler came to Germany, over the whole decade, they numbered more than two million). Unlike other immigrant groups, Aussiedler had immediate access to the same rights and entitlements as native Germans. For instance, they had rights to pensions and social security benefits as if they had always been living, working and paying social security and pension contributions in Germany. Moreover, special programs were set up to help Aussiedler find jobs, and they had priority access to housing.²⁰ In contrast, asylum seekers are not allowed to take up work, receive only a very low level of social assistance, and are barred access to the regular housing market. Therefore, there can be no doubt with which immigrant group German families and workers were most strongly in competition, namely the Aussiedler. Nevertheless, as a result of their low profile in the political debate, distinctions between the Aussiedler and native-born Germans were much less publicly salient than those between Germans and asylum seekers.²¹ Contrary to the public treatment of the Aussiedler issue, violence against asylum seekers was often followed by

²⁰ In the context of Germany's gradual reorientation away from an ethnic conception of citizenship, many of these privileges of Aussiedler have currently been reduced. By the end of the 1990s, the contrast between the treatment of Aussiedler became less sharply defined.

²¹ The comparison is made even more interesting if one considers that both asylum seekers and Aussiedler came predominantly from Eastern Europe, and the groups were therefore physically and linguistically indistinguishable.

statements by leading politicians on the need to curb asylum rights. Radical right groups may have interpreted such statements as legitimization of acts of violence against asylum seekers, providing further incentive to escalate attacks against this group.

To illustrate this point, we briefly recount the events that occurred in the East German town of Hoyerswerda in September 1991. This was the first large-scale anti-foreigner riot in postwar Germany and attracted much attention in the media, both in Germany and abroad, and reactions from politicians of all political leanings. At the time of the riots, about 200 foreigners, on a population of 70,000, lived in the town. The riots, which lasted six days, began with attacks on former GDR guestworkers from Vietnam and Mozambique. The latter group had already received their expulsion orders and were scheduled to leave – and indeed left – Germany in October. Only on the fourth night did the riots expand to a hostel where a few dozen asylum seekers lived. This originally marginal aspect of the riots boosted media attention and became the dominant interpretive frame for the riots. The media described the event as an anti-asylum seeker riot and politicians of all types debated the consequences the events should (or should not) have for asylum policies. Conservative politicians argued that the events showed that asylum seekers had become an insupportable burden for the population, while their left-wing counterparts accused the conservatives of inciting the riots with their campaign to limit asylum rights. The events ended with the evacuation by the authorities of all the guestworkers and asylum seekers from Hoyerswerda and the local radical right's proud declaration of Hoyerswerda as the first "foreigner-free" city in Germany.

The public interpretation of the Hoyerswerda events as a riot against asylum seekers must be seen in the light of the fact that they occurred in the middle of a highly publicized and controversial political debate on asylum legislation, which had started about a month earlier. The claim that this debate 'caused' the events in Hoyerswerda is far-fetched, given the fact that asylum seekers were neither the initial, nor the main targets of the rioters (Karapin 2000). However, the asylum debate did cause the events in Hoyerswerda to be interpreted as an anti-

asylum seeker riot and thereby focused all the public attention attached to that debate on the Hoyerswerda events. It was within this interpretive framework that "Hoyerswerda" became a widely publicized icon with a distinct national political meaning – rather than the mainly locally embedded (Karapin 2000) outburst of racism that it originally was. Hoyerswerda subsequently led to a further intensification of the asylum debate as well as an enormous upsurge in radical right violence, which was focused heavily on asylum seekers. Thus, other radical right groups copied Hoyerswerda as a successful example not for what it really was, but as it had appeared in media reports and in the reactions of national politicians. The message that was conveyed to radical right activists by the reports and reactions in the media to Hoyerswerda was that attacks on asylum seekers were a recipe for prominent media coverage, wide resonance across the political spectrum, and, last but not least, for a certain degree of legitimacy, as many politicians at least partly blamed the victims and the problems they caused for the native population.²²

Our final step in the empirical analysis compares the effects of public discourse across events with different targets. Table 5 displays the results of regression analyses with three types of violence as the dependent variables: against asylum seekers, against other immigrants groups, and against all other targets (including violence against Aussiedler, for which numbers were too low to be analyzed separately). In line with the preceding arguments,

²² Before Hoyerswerda, from January to August 1991, our sources report only 36 acts of violence committed by the radical right, of which 22% were directed against asylum seekers. In the three months after Hoyerswerda, 100 violent events were registered in our media sample, of which 57% were directed against asylum seekers.

discursive opportunities were most important for explaining violence against asylum seekers, with all four variables attaining significant levels in the expected direction.²³

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

In the case of violence against other immigrants, discursive opportunities play a less prominent role than in the case of violence against asylum seekers, but we still find significant effects of visibility and legitimacy. The discursive variables do not contribute to the model of violence against all other targets. This is exactly the kind of pattern we had expected. During the period of study the public discourse was heavily focused on the issue of asylum seekers and to a lesser extent on other immigrant groups. Thus, our measures of discursive opportunities should affect violence against those target groups that were also at the center of public debate, and should leave other types of radical right violence unaffected. Along these lines we can also interpret the significant effect of the past level of violence for asylum seekers, and the absence of such an effect for the other target groups. This effect for violence against asylum seekers indicates the higher diffusion rate of this category of violence as a

²³ Apart from the consonance variable (see the footnote to the table) none of the discursive variables were specified for the target group in question. Theoretically, it would have been more adequate – and would possibly have strengthened the results – if legitimacy, visibility and dissonance had been computed for each target separately (e.g., percentage of front-page-reported violence against asylum seekers instead of the percentage front-page-reported for all violence). However, there were too many empty cells of state-year combinations with no violence against a target group, for which legitimacy and visibility measures are undefined. Dissonance cannot be decomposed because most statements condemned the radical right or xenophobia generally without differentiating by type of violence.

result of its resonance with public debates in the media. The discursive dynamics of the public sphere over the course of the 1990s thus strongly amplified the rate of violence against asylum seekers, to a somewhat lesser extent also contributed to the growth of violence against other immigrants, and left violence against other targets unaffected. These differential stimuli from the public sphere explain the shift in the target repertoire of the radical right which we saw in Figure 2 above.

Two other findings in Table 5 that deserve mention are the absence of effects of the political opportunity structure variables and the persistence of a strong effect of immigration in all three regressions. The effects of political opportunity structure measures (measured by government coalitions and party competition) are not significant in any models in Table 5. A plausible explanation for this finding is that the impact of political opportunity structure is mediated through the lens offered by public discourse on an issue, and therefore the political opportunity variables do not have an independent impact once we control for the relevant public discourse variables. This makes sense if we consider the fact that political opportunities depend fundamentally on public knowledge and understanding of these opportunities. In other words, public discourse informs and shapes the public response to shifts in the political landscape (Gamson and Meyer 1996).

The second important finding supports contentions from competition theory that hold that immigration provokes ethnic violence. Similar to findings from the United States, in Germany, high levels of immigration had a significant impact on levels of violence against all groups, even non-immigrants. Can we interpret this result as support for the ethnic competition model? It is not easy to answer affirmatively, because the largest and most threatening group (in terms of direct competition with the native-born Germans) were the Aussiedler. However, the amount of violence directed against this group was proportionately small, when compared to other groups. Only when taken together with the public discourse measures does the shift in targets of violence become understandable. That is, initially, rising

immigration may have provoked violence against a wide range of targets. Yet over time, with the growing focus of the public discourse on particular immigrant groups, we see violence concentrating on these publicly resonant targets, which were not necessarily the groups which stood most clearly in socio-economic competition with the perpetrators of violence.

DISCUSSION: THE DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE

It is useful to step back from the details of the analysis to assess the relative contribution offered here. In the tests of our argument about public discourse, we do not wish to be taken as presenting an unrealistic model that suggests a direct, mechanical causal link between public discourse and ethnic violence. Furthermore, we are aware that our insistence on a connection between mass media discourse and racist violence is in itself not original. In fact, this assumption arises commonly in the literature on race relations (albeit rarely scrutinized empirically). A typical example is the work of Teun van Dijk (1993) and others who have followed in his footsteps (Jäger and Link 1993). These authors present the view that stereotypes and outgroup classifications that are offered by the elite and mass media discourses, are adopted by racist perpetrators and inspire them to attack ethnic and racial minorities. While we share the assumption of a link between public discourse and racist violence, our explanatory model in this paper is very different from the direct causal linkages between elite discourses and popular racism suggested by these authors.

We propose a dynamic explanation of how the public discourse unfolds and affects radical right violence. Certainly among the hard core of the radical right, we may safely assume that racist attitudes and hatred of various minority groups are given, and are not produced anew by exposure to elite discourse in the mass media. As we have indicated, the radical right's net of hatred is cast wide, including (in addition to ethnic minorities and

immigrants) homosexuals, the handicapped, homeless people, left-wing groups, and symbols of state authority, such as state buildings, politicians, and forces of law and order. What we have set out to explain is why at certain times and places the radical right is able to successfully expand its activities against particular target groups (and not others).

We have argued that the expansion of the mobilization of the radical right – like any other type of collective action – depends on diffusion processes. In our view, the public discourse in the mass media affects radical right mobilization not by planting negative stereotypes in activists' heads, but because it acts as a selection process that differentially affects the reproduction (or diffusion) chances of different types of radical right mobilization. It is not even necessary that the mass media discourse contains any elements that can be taken as a direct legitimation or encouragement of ethnic hatred or racial violence. For instance, the visibility of violence against a particular target group such as asylum seekers in the mass media may increase simply because the position of this immigrant group is hotly debated in the public discourse, thereby making violence against asylum seekers more relevant in the eyes of the mass media than violence against other groups that are not the object of public controversy. In such circumstances, other public actors are also more likely to react to acts of violence against asylum seekers than they will to violence against other target groups. Right-wing violence against asylum seekers then becomes a discursive resource, which third actors can seize upon to strengthen their own side of the argument in the ongoing public controversy. Even if nobody in the public debate refers explicitly to asylum seekers in a negatively stereotyping way, the result is nevertheless a higher resonance of violence against this target group with concomitantly increased chances for its further diffusion.

In analyzing the dynamics of these positive and negative feedback processes in the public discourse, we have conceptualized the public sphere as a (loosely) bounded communicative space in which a variety of organizations, groups and individuals compete for public attention. Our model of the dynamics of the public discourse starts from the

assumption of diversity, in which there are a wide variety of messages that become available for inclusion in the public discourse every day. Given the restricted communicative space available, only a small proportion of these messages will be selected by the mass media (visibility), of these only some will be further diffused through the reactions of other actors (resonance), and of these in turn only some will achieve the status of legitimacy.²⁴

Our contention has been that radical right violence can be analyzed along these lines as a form of strategic communication in the public sphere. Despite the fact that such violence is a non-verbal form of communication and certainly not discursive in any normative sense of the word, its diffusion nonetheless depends on the public discourse in the mass media, just as conventional speech acts do. First, acts of violence that are ignored by the media will not be able to diffuse beyond their immediate social setting, while widely covered events (i.e., high visibility) will have a great likelihood of inspiring copycat events elsewhere. Such imitation of violence that becomes visible in the public sphere does not need to be unreflexive or irrational as suggested by the 'contagion' metaphor that is often used in conjunction with diffusion processes. To the contrary, given the fact that most attempts to achieve public attention are unsuccessful, the imitation of collective actions that have a high visibility in the

²⁴ The reproduction of the original message thus achieved is, however, often imperfect. This explains why there is no long-term tendency towards an increasingly uniform public discourse: if successful messages were reproduced unaltered, discursive opportunities would cumulate over time and the public discourse would soon converge on uniform standards of who and what is relevant and legitimate, and cease to be a discourse in the true sense of the word. Of course, there is a high degree of self-reproduction in the public discourse: what was prominent, relevant and legitimate yesterday is usually a good predictor of today's parameters. But ultimately the public discourse is kept alive by the perhaps small minority of 'distortions' or 'mutations' rather than by the perfect reproduction of messages.

public sphere is demonstrably rational, as such actions probably contain elements that attract media attention and can therefore be expected to produce the same effect for the imitator.

Second, we found that acts of violence that provoke more public reactions by third actors (resonance) will have better chances of reproduction. Every attempt at intervention in the public sphere ultimately seeks to provoke reactions by other actors, and acts that achieve this objective, signal a model for successful public action to others who share the same substantive aims (or who simply want to share the same degree of publicity). Third, if public reactions by other actors to a particular act of violence are at least partly positive (i.e., the message has a certain degree of legitimacy), diffusion will again be more likely. Most actors who intervene in the public sphere do so in order to mobilize support (McCarthy and Zald 1977), and we may assume that this holds even for radical right groups. Therefore, acts of violence that achieve a high degree of support from other actors are more likely to be copied than those that receive only negative reactions in the public sphere.

CONCLUSIONS

We began this paper by suggesting that ethnic violence in contemporary Germany presents a theoretical puzzle for researchers. Deprivation explanations rooted in the historical experience of economic crisis and the rise of fascism during the 1920s and 1930s do not explain contemporary right-wing radicalism satisfactorily. Ethnic competition arguments reveal that surges of immigration are an important part of the story, but they cannot explain why some groups are targeted over others.

We suggested that these explanations do not go far enough in explaining the timing and targets of violence in this, as well as in many other examples of ethnic conflict. Furthermore, none of these theories can explain why initially, right-wing violence in Germany

had heterogeneous targets, and later violence singled out immigrants and especially asylum seekers. To fill these gaps, we have emphasized the role of the public discourse as represented in the mass media. We have suggested a dynamic approach that rests on processes of selection and reproduction of events as a function of if and how journalists report them, and third actors react to them in the public sphere. We showed that high visibility, resonance, and legitimacy in the public sphere for prior events increased the rate of subsequent right-wing violence directed against the same target. Low visibility and strongly dissonant reactions to certain types of violence in the mass media, by contrast, decreased the subsequent rate of such violence. Thus, differential mass media coverage and public reactions to right-wing violence allowed some forms of violence to diffuse while inhibiting others.

We hope that other researchers studying the interplay between ethnic violence, immigration, and media influence will find themes that resonate in their own research. A line of argument that merits further investigation concerns the findings regarding the role of high levels of immigration, which remained an important predictor, net of our discursive variables. While the empirical evidence from the U.S. and Germany in this respect is consistent, it is not yet fully clear how the effects of immigration can be explained. We present one possibility here that suggests that immigration initiates diffuse levels of perceived competition, which can then be directed against any number of groups. We have shown how discursive opportunities affect the radical right's choice of targets and we have suggested that this process caused some groups to be more victimized than others. Seen from this perspective, ethnic conflict need not be directly related to objective socio-economic competition among ethnic groups. Instead, perceptions of ethnic competition and the singling out of particular immigrant groups as targets for racist attacks are strongly influenced by the extent and nature of the public discourse about different immigrant groups. However, the fact that the immigration effect does not disappear after the introduction of our discursive variables suggests that there are important threshold effects of both immigration and public discourse.

Recent work on diffusion models (Soule and Zylan 1997; Strang and Tuma 1993) in collective action research might further sharpen our ability to predict these thresholds.

We believe that our model of the dynamics of the public discourse and the role of discursive opportunities in shaping the diffusion chances of communicative messages has a relevance that extends beyond the explanation of ethnic violence. The theoretical assumptions of our model apply in principle to communicative action in the public sphere regardless of its form or content. The type of analysis we have presented here can be applied to other issue fields and other types of collective action. For instance, one might study how the public discourse on environmental issues affects the diffusion chances for environmental protest, by making some types of protest more visible, resonant, and legitimate, and others less so. Moreover, the application range of our approach need not be limited to social movement-like forms of mobilization. The model may also be applicable to the study of the careers of more conventional types of communicative messages, for instance in explaining the differential success of presidential or legislative candidates' attempts to introduce particular themes or positions on the public agenda during election campaigns. We hope to have convinced other researchers working on similar topics of the potential gains of taking into account the discursive context of mobilization and collective action in the public sphere. We also hope that our notion of discursive opportunities may help to bridge the gap between political opportunity structure and framing perspectives in the social movement literature, as well as to suggest some common grounds for a dialogue between the (often juxtaposed) 'political' versus 'cultural' approaches to collective action.

Finally, the kind of data we have used in our analysis suggests new ways in which researchers might use context information on public discourse in event analyses of collective action. So far, event analyses of collective action based on newspaper sources have gathered a relatively limited range of information, mostly restricted to the dependent variable (protest or collective action) and capturing little of the communicative context in which such protest

occurs. We suggest that the mass media may be used as a rich source of information about discursive context variables that may significantly improve our explanations of collective action.

Obviously, there is more to the public sphere than just newspapers, which are only one source of public discourse about collective action and its aims and targets. Television, radio, books, magazines, specialized journals, and internet web sites all carry information about events and debates surrounding them that could be coded and used in models of public discourse dynamics. Furthermore, analyses of communicative interaction outside the media in intra- and inter-organizational settings (work, educational, voluntary associations, etc.) might expand our knowledge of how public events are selected, filtered, reproduced, and discarded over time. Clearly our work based on newspaper accounts is merely a beginning step toward understanding how and why public discourse shapes collective behavior.

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Table 1: General Estimating Equation Effects on the Rate of Radical-Right Violence for Deprivation and Ethnic Competition Models, Germany 1990-1999^b

	Baseline model		Deprivation Model		Ethnic competition model	
	B	z-score	B	z-score	B	z-score
Radical right violence ^a	.004***	3.52	.004**	3.05	.005***	3.67
Log population size	.693***	5.82	.686***	5.92	.676***	6.17
Location in East Germany	.669***	4.12	.773**	3.12	1.01***	3.93
Per capita domestic product (in Euros)			.006	.30	.018	1.23
Unemployment Rate			-.042	1.11	-.036	0.75
Net Immigration/1000					.029***	3.96
Interaction: unemploy*immigration					-.001	.00
Wald chi-square	143***		124***		189***	
N	148		148		148	

Notes

***<p .001, **p<.01, *p< .05, + p<.10

^aAll independent variables (including the lagged dependent variable) are lagged one year.

^bFor the analyses in Tables 1 and 2, the dependent variable is taken from police data on radical right violence for the year 2000. Missing data left us with 148 state-year combinations with full information.

Table 2: Comparison of General Estimation Equation Estimates For the Effects of Public Discourse on Levels of Right-Wing Violence in Western and Eastern States in Germany, 1990-1999

	All states		Western states (includes Berlin)		Eastern states	
	B	z-score	B	z-score	B	z-score
Radical right violence ^a	.004***	4.59	.004***	3.78	.006**	2.96
Log population size	.638***	6.72	.623***	7.12	.399**	2.54
Eastern Location	1.09***	6.44	-	-	-	-
Net Immigration/1,000	.021***	3.45	.025**	3.64	-.012	.08
Government coalition (high = left-coalition)	.061	1.48	.054	.372	.094+	1.28
Party competition	.019*	2.55	.025**	2.11	.003	.201
Visibility	.980**	2.10	1.96***	6.56	-.315	.322
Anti-immigrant statements(consonance)	.017**	.00	.208***	3.91	.023	.385
Anti-radical right statements (dissonance)	-.008**	.00	-.008+	1.92	-.014***	3.64
Legitimacy	-.015	.21	-.127	.608	.662***	5.60
Wald chi-square	782***		2559***		290***	
Number of Cases	154		109		45	

Note:

^aAll independent variables (including the lagged dependent variable) are lagged one year.

***<p .001, **p<.01, *p< .05, p<.10

Table 3: Distribution of Targets/Aims from Newspaper Reports of Radical-Right Violence in Germany, 1990-1999

Targets	Percent
Asylum seekers	36.8
Other immigrant groups/ 'foreigners' unspecified	31.7
Jewish targets	3.9
Left-wing groups	8.1
Police	1.2
World War II memorials	2.5
Miscellaneous targets	1.2
Unspecific targets	12.8
Total	100.0%
Number of Events	930

Table 4: Visibility and Consonance Indicators for Right-Wing Violence Against Different Target Groups, Germany 1990-1999

	Visibility (percentage of violent events against target group reported on first page)	Consonance (negative claims by other actors than the radical right on target group)
Asylum seekers	0.25	1,376
Other immigrant groups/foreigners	0.20	723
Ethnic German Aussiedler	0.22	86
Other targets	0.16	-
All targets	0.21	-

Note: We did not collect data on negative claims on non-immigrant target groups of the radical right, such as homosexuals, the handicapped or the homeless. During the period under study, none of these groups generated as much political controversy as did the issue of immigration.

Table 5: General Estimating Equation Estimates for the Effects of Public Discourse on Violence against Asylum Seekers, Other Immigrants, and Other Targets of Right-Wing Violence

	Violence against asylum seekers		Violence against other immigrants		Violence against other targets	
	B	z-score	B	z-score	B	z-score
Violence against target group ^a	.055**	2.96	.030	1.29	-.025	.40
Log Population size	.567***	3.63	.544**	2.83	.358**	2.10
Eastern Location	2.77***	6.62	1.57***	3.20	1.99***	6.39
Net Immigration/ 1,000	.112***	7.68	.570***	3.23	.056***	4.26
Government coalition (high =left coalition)	.095	1.47	-.071	.69	.031	.31
Party competition	-.009	.47	-.016	.91	.004	.23
Visibility	.200**	2.41	.048**	3.07	-.010	.44
Anti-immigrant statements (consonance)	.063**	2.10	-.025	.67	-.002	.91
Anti-radical right statements ^b (dissonance)	-.026+	-1.76	.007	.81	.002	.89
Legitimacy	1.06+	1.66	.567+	.311	-.06	.14
Wald Chi-square	469***		263		589	
Number of Cases	138		138		138	

Notes: ***<p .001, **p<.01, *p< .05, +p<.10

^aAll independent variables (including the lagged dependent variable) are lagged one year.

^bColumn (1): dissonance includes only negative statements on asylum seekers. For Column (2) dissonance includes negative statements on other immigrant groups only. For equation (3), dissonance includes all negative statements against immigrants by other than the radical right.

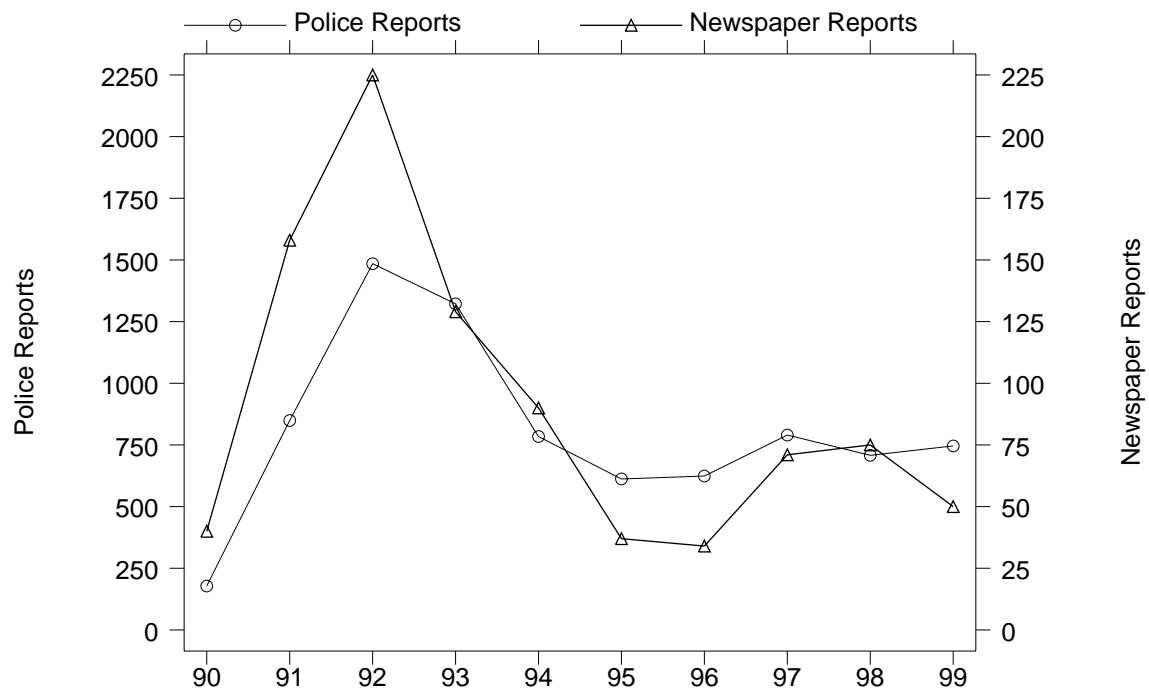
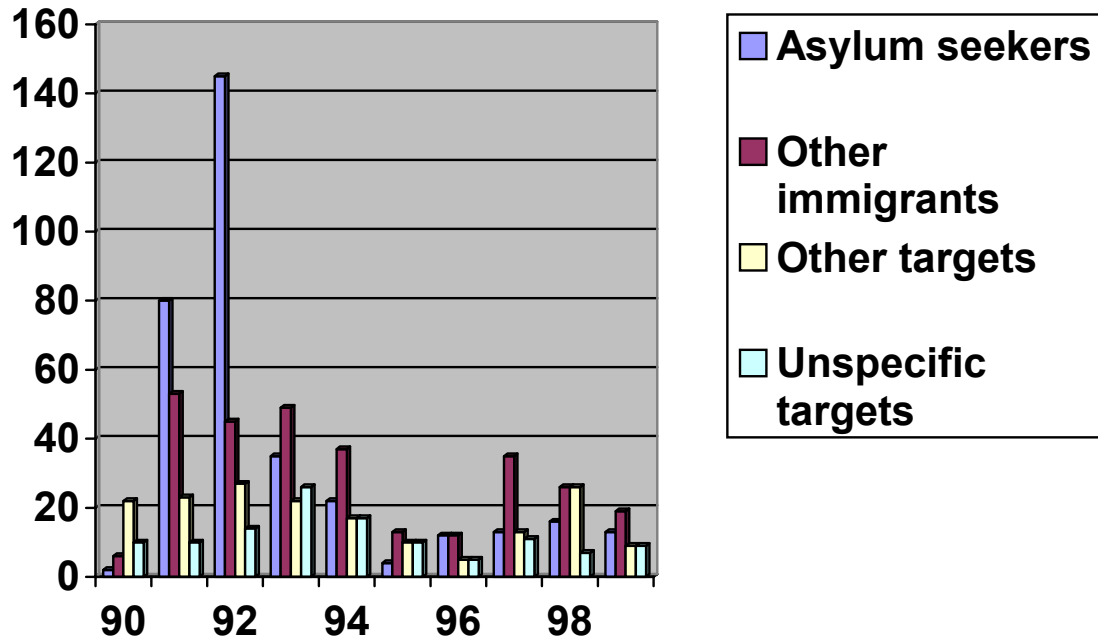


Fig1. Police and Newspaper Reports of Right-Wing Violence

Figure 2: Targets/aims of radical right violence, distribution and development over time, 1990-1999 (newspaper data)



Appendix A

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables Used in the Analysis
(154 States Analyzed in Table 2, Column 1)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Right Wing Violence ^a	52.4	50.0	1.00									
2. Log Population Size	8.2	.87	.48	1.00								
3. Former Part of East Germany (0, 1)	.29	.46	.15	-.21	1.00							
4. Net Immigration (per 1000 pop)	5.2	5.3	.02	.08	-.28	1.00						
5. Government Coalition (high=left coalition)	3.9	1.8	.09	-.19	-.23	.14	1.00					
6. Party Competition	10.1	7.1	-.17	.14	.12	-.19	-.35	1.00				
7. Visibility	.02	.05	.03	.09	.13	-.02	-.05	-.14	1.00			
8. Number of Anti-immigrant statements	8.6	9.1	.22	.52	-.44	.06	.13	-.00	-.09	1.00		
9. Number of Anti-radical right statements	18.1	14.6	.63	.40	.03	.06	.05	-.13	.05	.30	1.00	
10. Legitimacy	.38	.31	-.19	.15	-.39	.09	-.17	.12	-.13	.53	-.28	1.00

^a All covariates were lagged and measured annually at $t-1$.

Appendix B

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables Used in the Analysis
(138 States Analyzed in Table 5, Column 1: Violence Against Asylum Seekers)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Violence Against Asylum Seekers ^b	2.32	4.5	1.00									
2. Log Population Size	8.2	.87	.06	1.00								
3. Former Part of East Germany (0, 1)	.29	.46	.31	-.21	1.00							
4. Net Immigration (per 1000 pop)	5.5	5.5	.09	.08	-.29	1.00						
5. Government Coalition (high=left coalition)	3.9	1.8	-.07	-.18	-.26	.14	1.00					
6. Party Competition	9.2	7.1	.05	-.11	.16	-.20	-.43	1.00				
7. Visibility	.47	1.3	-.04	-.09	.15	-.03	-.03	-.17	1.00			
8. Number of Anti-immigrant statements	5.7	6.3	.20	.49	-.39	.21	.00	-.05	-.16	1.00		
9. Number of Anti-radical right statements	18.7	15.0	.23	.43	.00	.03	.05	-.15	-.05	.33	1.00	
10. Legitimacy	.38	.31	-.03	.11	-.39	.10	-.14	.14	-.24	.46	-.29	1.00

^a All covariates were lagged and measured annually at $t-1$.