Parliamentary representation and right-wing violence

Evidence from Nazi street brawls

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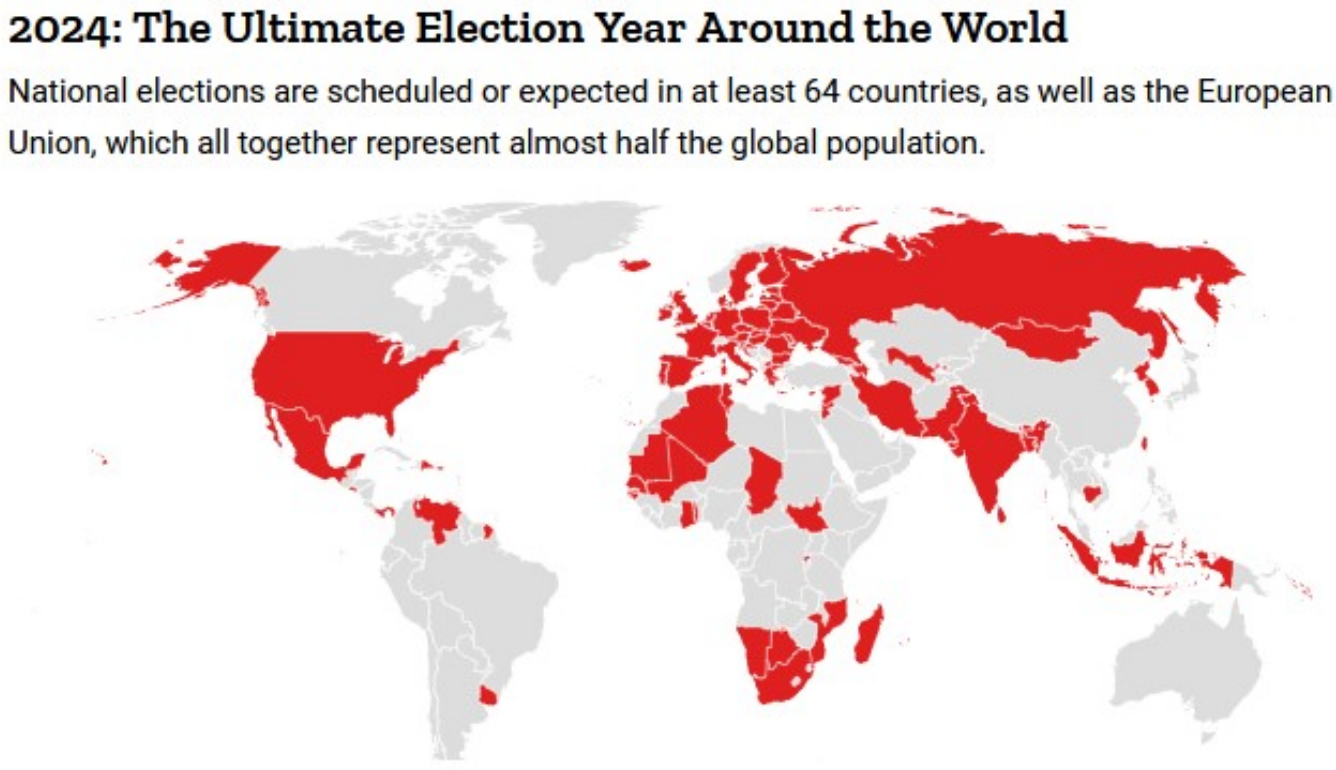
Idea: Elections as non-violent tool to transfer political power



Source: Time Magazine (2023)

Reality: looks different

Source: Washington Post (2021)

Trump warns US voters of a 'bloodbath' if he loses presidential election

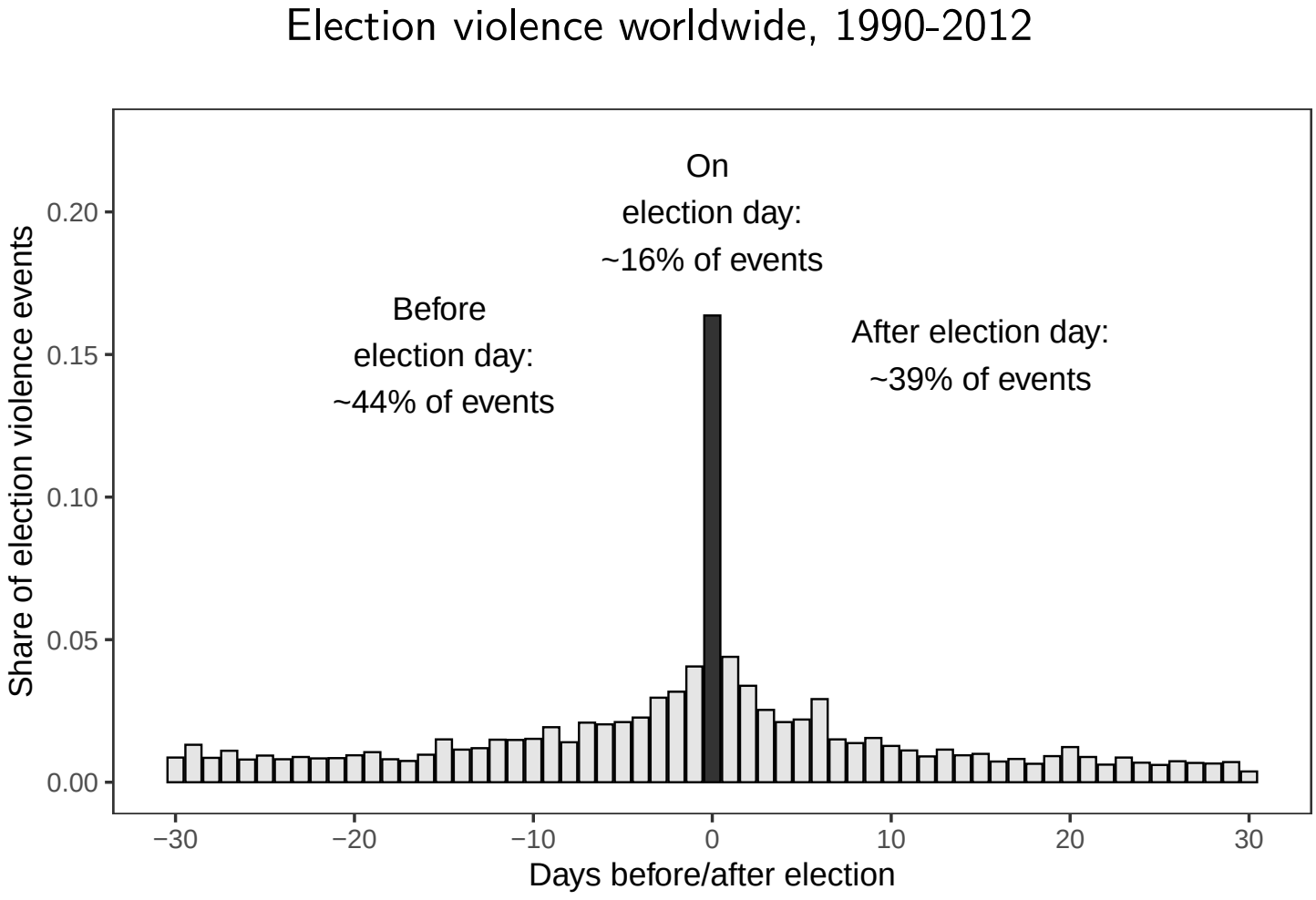
Former US president Donald Trump warned of a "bloodbath for the country" if he is not elected in November.

Issued on: 17/03/2024 - 10:47 3 min

President Donald Trump speaks to supporters during a rally at the Dayton International Airport on March 16, 2024 in Vandalia, Ohio. © Scott Olson, Getty Images via AFP

Source: France 24 (2024)

Post-election violence is widespread



Data from Daxecker, Amicarelli and Jung 2019

Puzzle

Why does election violence persist?

Competing explanations for post-election violence

We zoom in on the role of candidates from **excluded, radical parties**:

- Elections do not always produce clear-cut winners
- Radical parties are often excluded from government
- Elections create winners and losers *within* excluded parties among their candidates

Competing explanations for post-election violence

Who among winning/losing candidates is most likely to perpetrate post-election violence?

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Non-elected candidates

- Frustration over losing
- Seek to reverse election outcomes

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Elected candidates

- Frustration over winning seat, but failing to gain political influence
- Capacity to mobilize personnel

Study context: the Weimar Republic

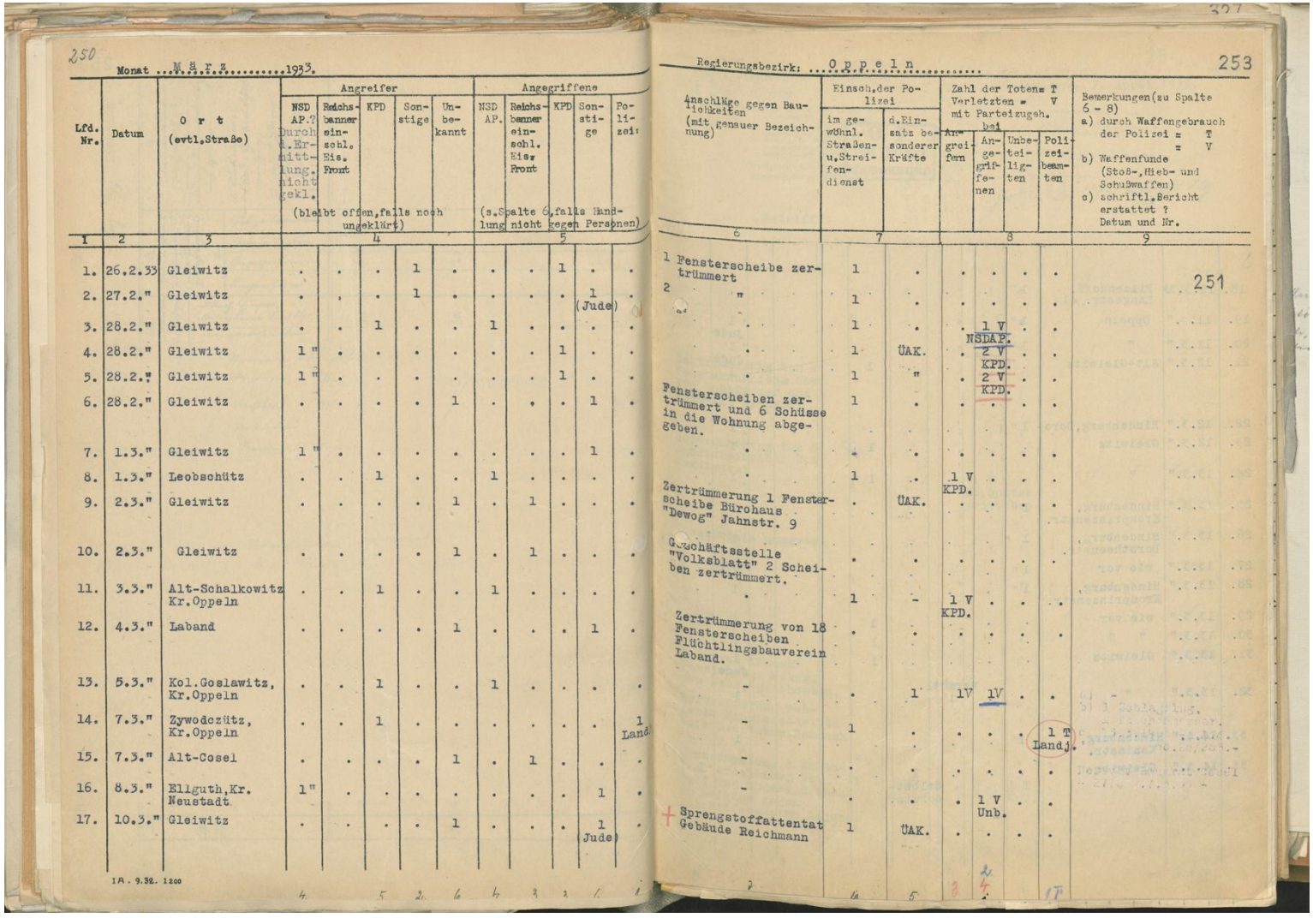
- Politics divided between "Weimar parties" and extremist parties
- Violence organized by political parties through paramilitaries (peak in 1932)
- SA was the paramilitary wing of the Nazi party, with 250,000 members in 1932
- Elections in July 1932 saw the Nazi vote share double to 37.3%
  - 230 NSDAP mandates (843 candidates)
  - No political perspective: Reich president Hindenburg rejected Hitler's demand to be appointed chancellor
  - New elections in November 1932

Source: Welt/picture alliance/akg-images (2017), fighting between the Rotfrontkämpferbund and the police in 1927

Source: NDR (2012), 7000 SA troops on "Bloody Sunday" 1932

Outcome: street riots in Prussia

Archived police records from the Prussian Ministry of Interior



250

Monat ...März.....1933.

Lfd. Nr.	Datum	Ort (evtl. Straße)	Angreifer: NSD AP.? Durch d. Ermittlung nicht gekl.	Angreifer: Reichsbanner einschl. Eis. Front	Angreifer: KPD	Angreifer: Sonstige	Angreifer: Unbekannt	Angegriffene: NSD AP.	Angegriffene: Reichsbanner einschl. Eis. Front	Angegriffene: KPD	Angegriffene: Sonstige	Angegriffene: Polizei
			(bleibt offen, falls noch ungeklärt)					(s. Spalte 6, falls Handlung nicht gegen Personen)				
1	2	3	4					5				
1.	26.2.33	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	.	.
2.	27.2."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	1 (Jude)	.
3.	28.2."	Gleiwitz	.	.	1	.	.	1	.	.	.	.
4.	28.2."	Gleiwitz	1 "	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.
5.	28.2."	Gleiwitz	1 "	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.
6.	28.2."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	.
7.	1.3."	Gleiwitz	1 "	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.
8.	1.3."	Leobschütz	.	.	1	.	.	1	.	.	.	.
9.	2.3."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	.	1	.	1	.	.	.
10.	2.3."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	.	1	.	1	.	.	.
11.	3.3."	Alt-Schalkowitz Kr. Oppeln	.	.	1	.	.	1	.	.	.	.
12.	4.3."	Laband	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	.
13.	5.3."	Kol. Goslawitz, Kr. Oppeln	.	.	1	.	.	1	.	.	.	.
14.	7.3."	Zywodczütz, Kr. Oppeln	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	1 Land.
15.	7.3."	Alt-Cosel	.	.	.	.	1	.	1	.	.	.
16.	8.3."	Ellguth, Kr. Neustadt	1"	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.
17.	10.3."	Gleiwitz	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	1 (Jude)	.

IA. 9.32. 1200

Regierungsbezirk: .....Oppeln..... 253

Anschläge gegen Baulichkeiten (mit genauer Bezeichnung)	Einsch. der Polizei: im gewöhnl. Straßen- u. Streifendienst	Einsch. der Polizei: d. Einsatz besonderer Kräfte	Zahl der Toten = T Verletzten = V mit Parteizugeh. bei: Angreifern	Angegriffenen	Unbeteiligten	Polizeibeamten	Bemerkungen (zu Spalte 6 - 8) a) durch Waffengebrauch der Polizei = T = V b) Waffenfunde (Stoß-, Hieb- und Schußwaffen) c) schriftl. Bericht erstattet ? Datum und Nr.
6	7		8				9
1 Fensterscheibe zertrümmert	1	.	.	.	.	.	
2 "	1	.	.	.	.	.	
	1	.	.	1 V NSDAP.	.	.	
	1	ÜAK.	.	2 V KPD.	.	.	
	1	"	.	2 V KPD.	.	.	
Fensterscheiben zertrümmert und 6 Schüsse in die Wohnung abgegeben.	1	.	.	.	.	.	
	.	.	.	.	.	.	
	1	.	1 V KPD.	.	.	.	
Zertrümmerung 1 Fensterscheibe Bürohaus "Dewog" Jahnstr. 9	.	ÜAK.	.	.	.	.	
Geschäftsstelle "Volksblatt" 2 Scheiben zertrümmert.	.	.	.	.	.	.	
	1	-	1 V KPD.	.	.	.	
Zertrümmerung von 18 Fensterscheiben Flüchtlingsbauverein Laband.	.	.	.	.	.	.	
-	.	1	1V	1V	.	.	
-	1	.	.	.	.	1 T Landj.	
-	.	.	.	.	.	.	
-	.	.	.	1 V Unb.	.	.	
+ Sprengstoffattentat Gebäude Reichmann	1	ÜAK.	.	.	.	.	

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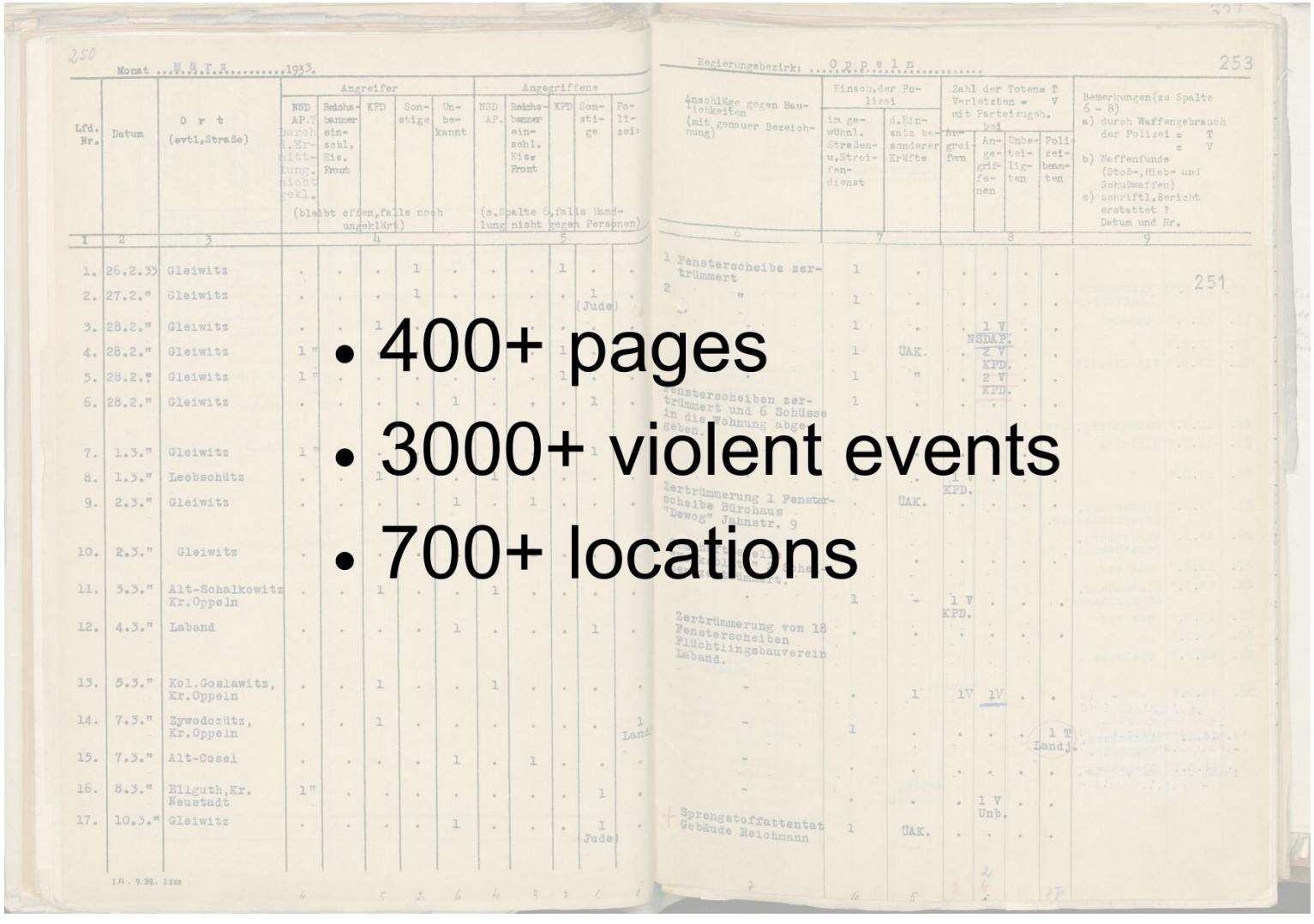
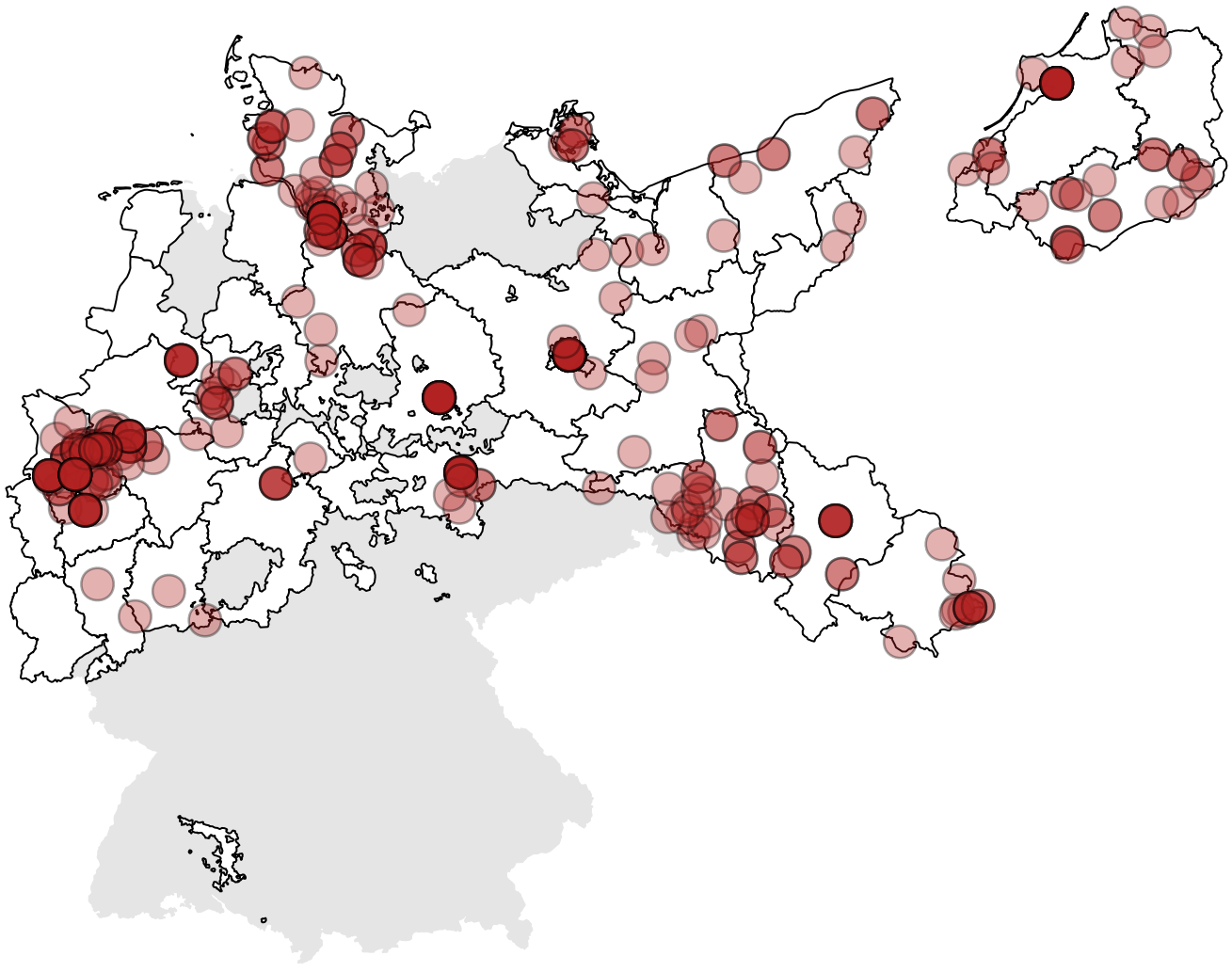
Outcome: street riots in Prussia

Archived police records from the Prussian Ministry of Interior



- 400+ pages
- 3000+ violent events
- 700+ locations

Location of riots, August and September 1932

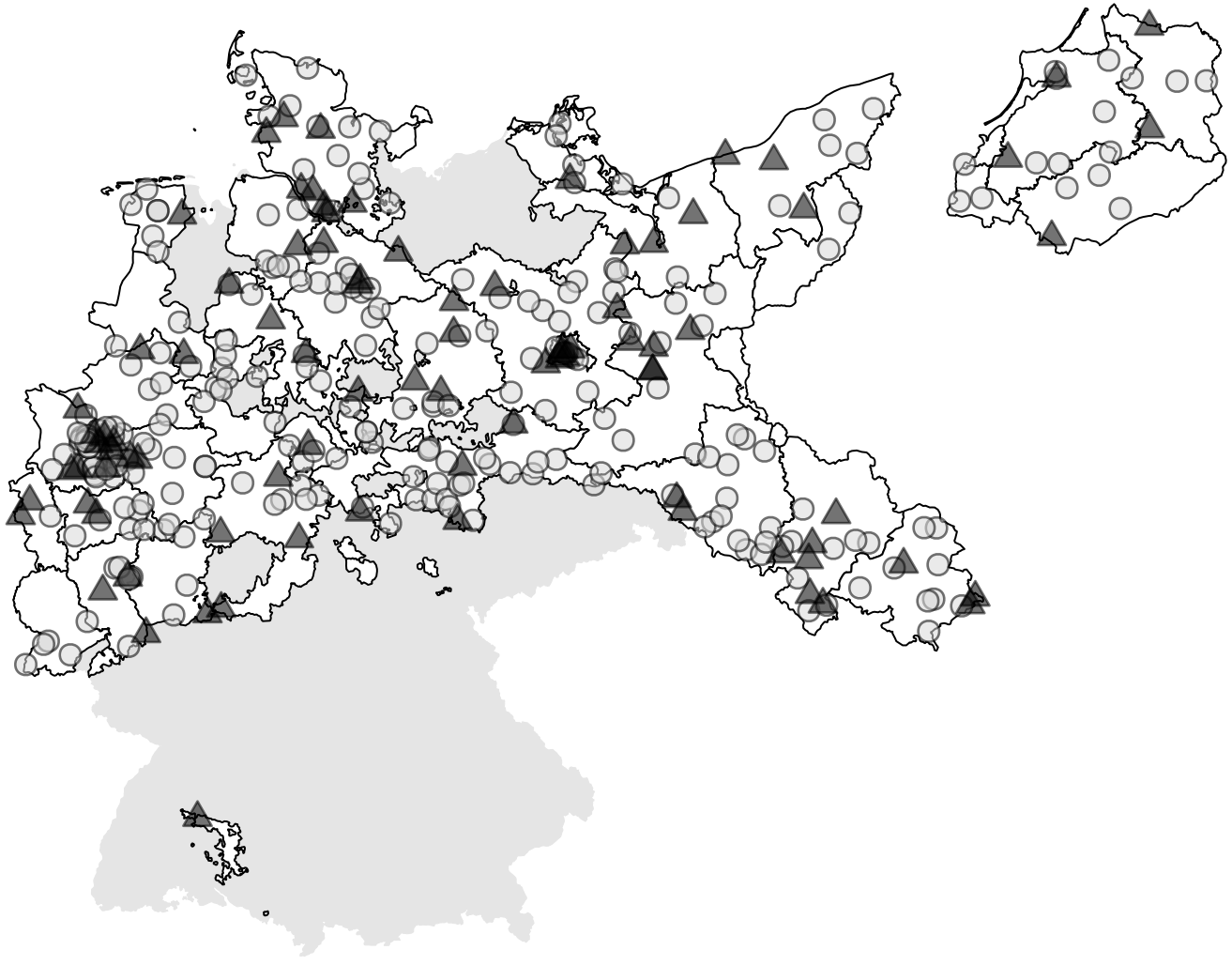


Comparing violence in home towns of elected vs. non-elected Nazi candidates in an RDD

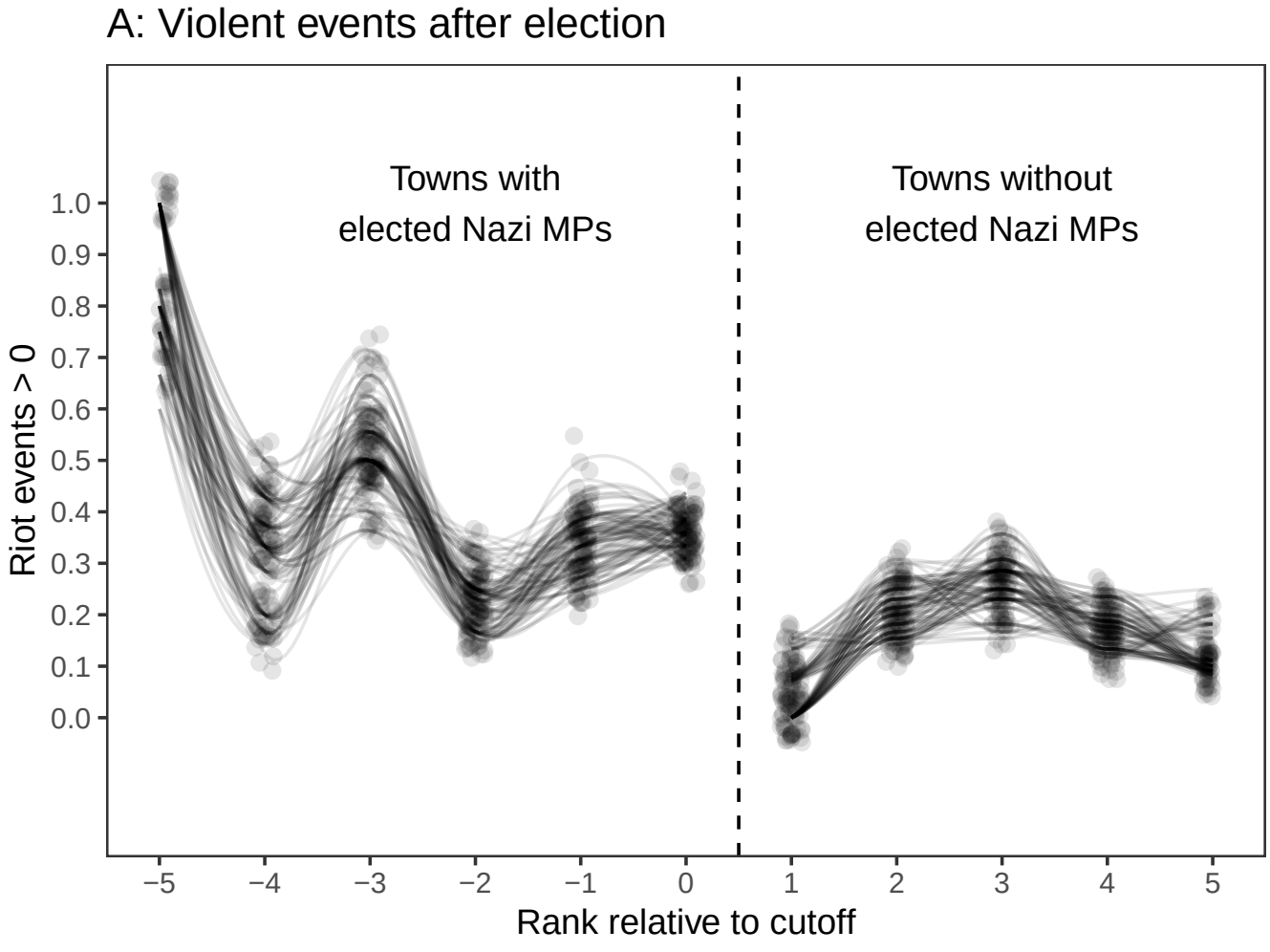
Example: NSDAP's candidate list of the "Düsseldorf-Ost" electoral district for the 1932 July elections

Candidate	Rank	Relative Rank	Status	Home town
Friedrich Karl Florian	1	-5	Elected	Düsseldorf
Willi Veller	2	-4	Elected	Wuppertal
Wilhelm Boerger	3	-3	Elected	Neuss
Theodor Oppermann	4	-2	Elected	Düsseldorf
Josef Klein	5	-1	Elected	Düsseldorf
Werner Scheibner	6	0	Elected	Wuppertal
Hermann Schroer	7	1	Non-elected	Wuppertal-Elberfeld
Rudolf Heukenkamp	8	2	Non-elected	Remmscheid-Lennep
Jürgen von dem Knesebeck	9	3	Non-elected	Ratzeburg
Wilhelm Pelzer	10	4	Non-elected	Neuss

Unit of analysis: Hometowns of NSDAP candidates



Main results: violence around cutoff



Probing mechanisms

1. Violence predominantly perpetrated by SA targeting Communists, not vice versa
2. Motivation for violence: SA units with many elected candidates reported more frustration over lack of political perspective
3. Capacity for violence: SA units with many elected candidates attracted more members

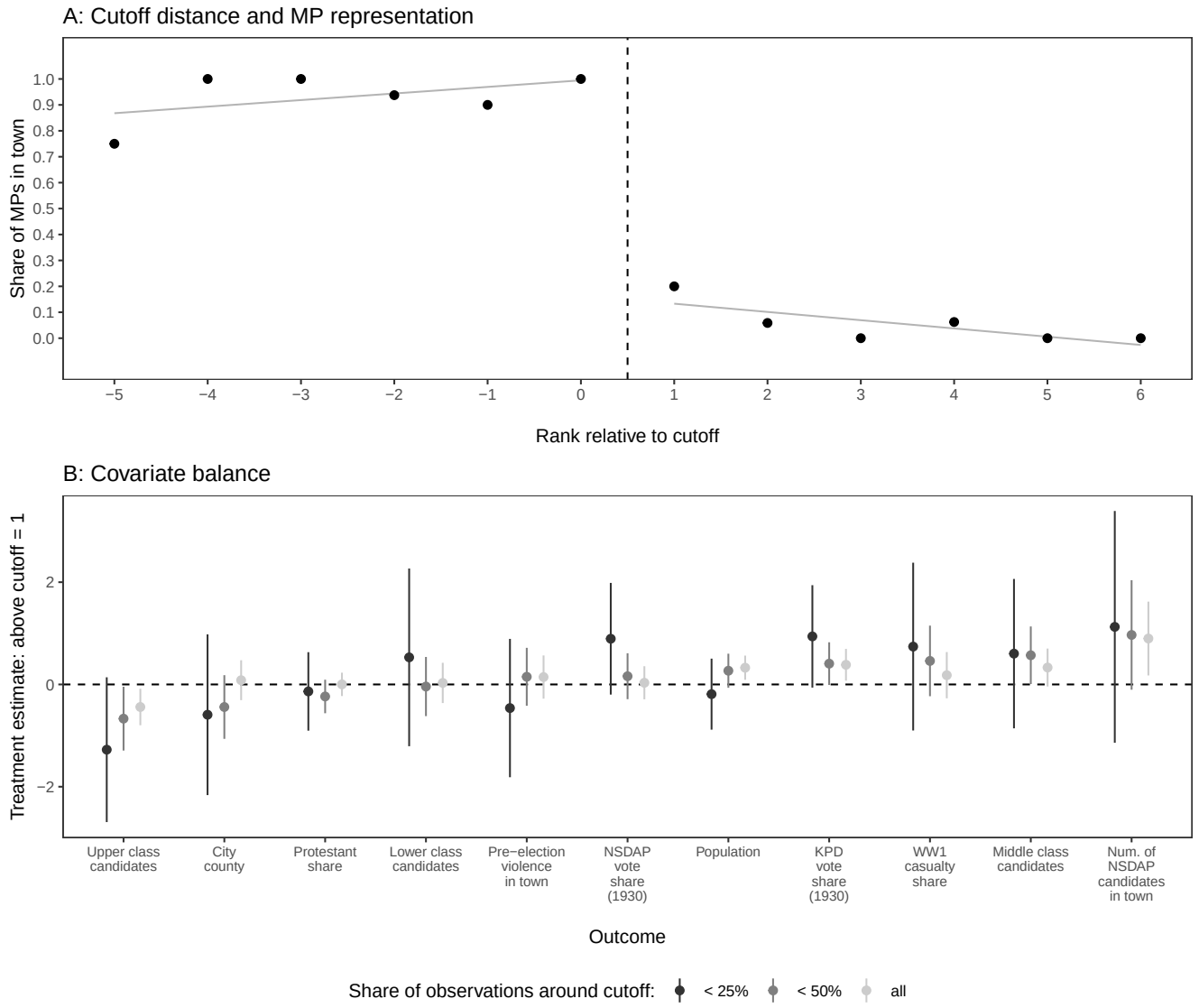
Central findings

- Frustrated “elected losers" can fuel radical post-election violence
- Effects driven by motivational and organizational mechanisms

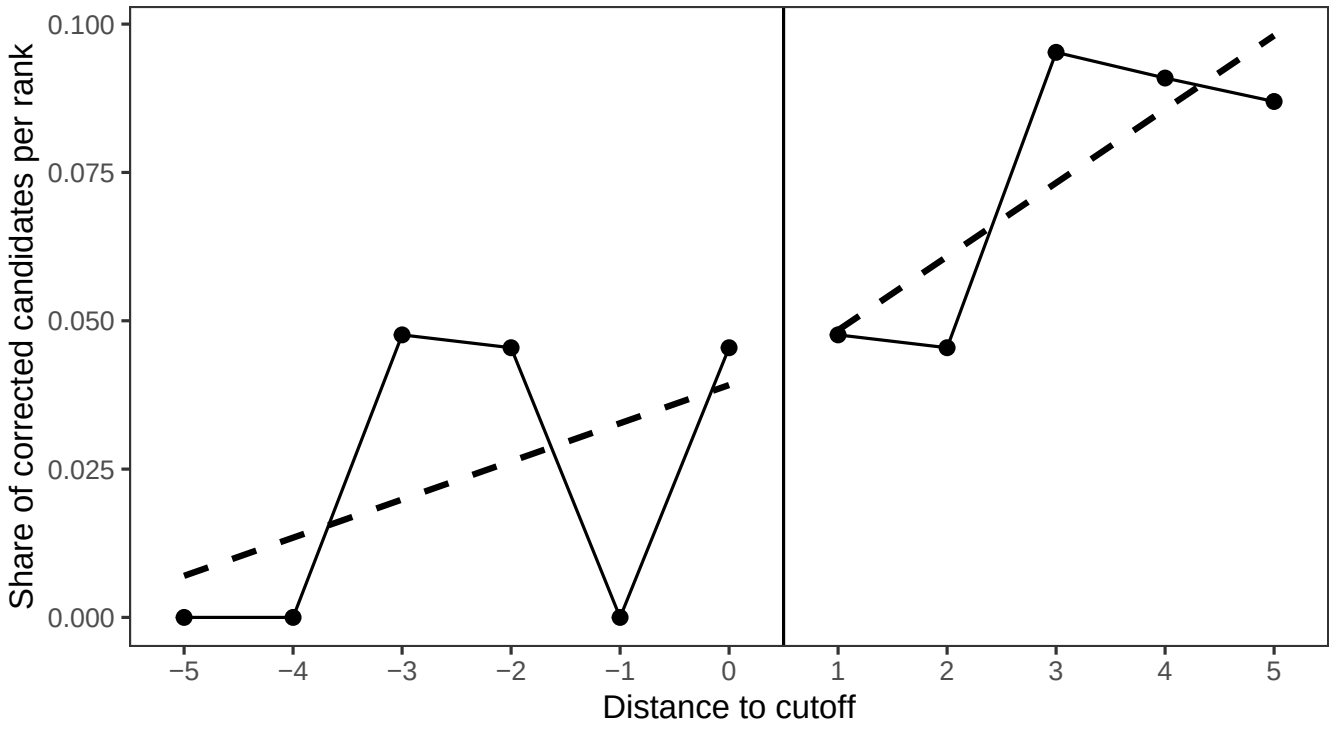
Implications & next steps

- Illustrates fundamental dilemma of dealing with radical parties: including them in government is dangerous for democracies, but excluding them can be dangerous (& violent), too!
- Next steps: Expand theory, probe scope conditions

Check of RDD identifying assumptions



Check of RDD identifying assumptions



Main results: effect size

	Sharp RDD			Fuzzy RDD		
	Observations around cutoff			Observations around cutoff		
	All	<50%	<25%	All	<50%	<25%
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Towns with MPs	0.36***	0.27*	0.57*	0.41***	0.33*	0.78+
	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.25)	(0.11)	(0.16)	(0.40)
Election district FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R2	0.137	0.211	0.303	0.116	0.180	0.045
Num.Obs.	344	178	69	344	178	69

Note: The table reports OLS estimates. Unit of observation is Nazi party candidates' home towns. Outcome is a dummy variable taking one if at least one violent event between SA and KPD forces occurred in a town. Coefficients for relative rank and relative rank $\times$ above cutoff are estimated, but omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by county reported in parentheses. Significance levels: $^{***}p < .001$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{+}p < .1$.

Who perpetrated the violence?

Results by attacker

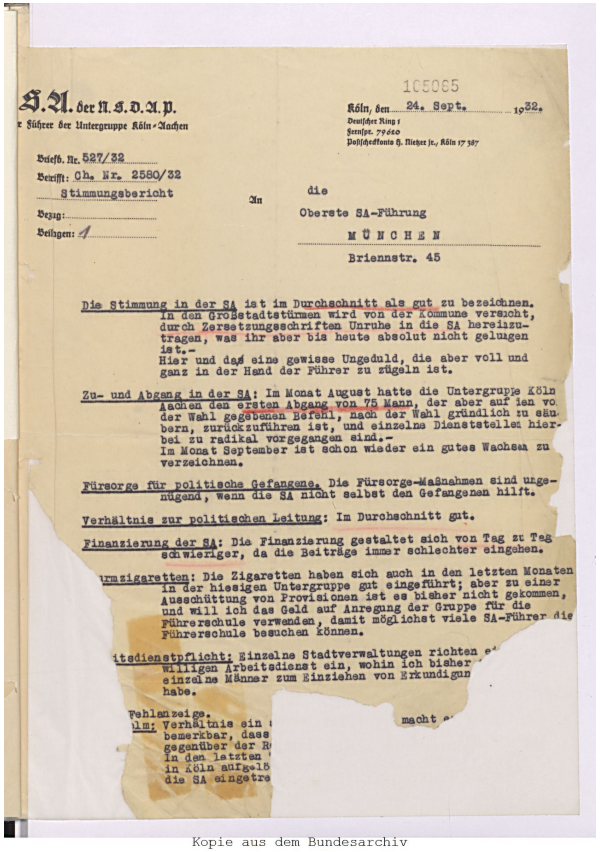
	SA		KPD	
	Attacker	Target	Attacker	Target
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Towns with MPs	0.228*	0.132	0.155	0.221*
	(0.105)	(0.119)	(0.105)	(0.112)
R2	0.202	0.210	0.142	0.217
Num.Obs.	178	178	178	178

+ p $<$ 0.1, * p $<$ 0.05, ** p $<$ 0.01, *** p $<$ 0.001

Note: The table reports OLS estimates. Unit of observation is Nazi party candidates' home towns. Coefficients for rank and rank $\times$ treated are estimated, but omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by county reported in parentheses.

Exploring potential mechanisms: The role of the SA

26 SA “mood reports"



S.A. der N.S.D.A.P.
Führer der Untergruppe Köln-Aachen

Köln, den 24. Sept. 1932.
Deutscher Ring 5
Fernspr. 79640
Postscheckkonto H. Nieher jr., Köln 17 587

Briefb. Nr. 527/32
Betrifft: Ch. Nr. 2580/32
Stimmungsbericht
Bezug:
Beilagen: 1

An die
Oberste SA-Führung
MÜNCHEN
Briennstr. 45

Die Stimmung in der SA ist im Durchschnitt als gut zu bezeichnen. In den Großstadtstürmen wird von der Kommune versucht, durch Zersetzungsschriften Unruhe in die SA hereizutragen, was ihr aber bis heute absolut nicht gelungen ist.-
Hier und da eine gewisse Ungeduld, die aber voll und ganz in der Hand der Führer zu zügeln ist.

Zu- und Abgang in der SA: Im Monat August hatte die Untergruppe Köln Aachen den ersten Abgang von 75 Mann, der aber auf den von der Wahl gegebenen Befehl, nach der Wahl gründlich zu säubern, zurückzuführen ist, und einzelne Dienststellen hierbei zu radikal vorgegangen sind.-
Im Monat September ist schon wieder ein gutes Wachsen zu verzeichnen.

Fürsorge für politische Gefangene. Die Fürsorge-Maßnahmen sind ungenügend, wenn die SA nicht selbst den Gefangenen hilft.

Verhältnis zur politischen Leitung: Im Durchschnitt gut.

Finanzierung der SA: Die Finanzierung gestaltet sich von Tag zu Tag schwieriger, da die Beiträge immer schlechter eingehen.

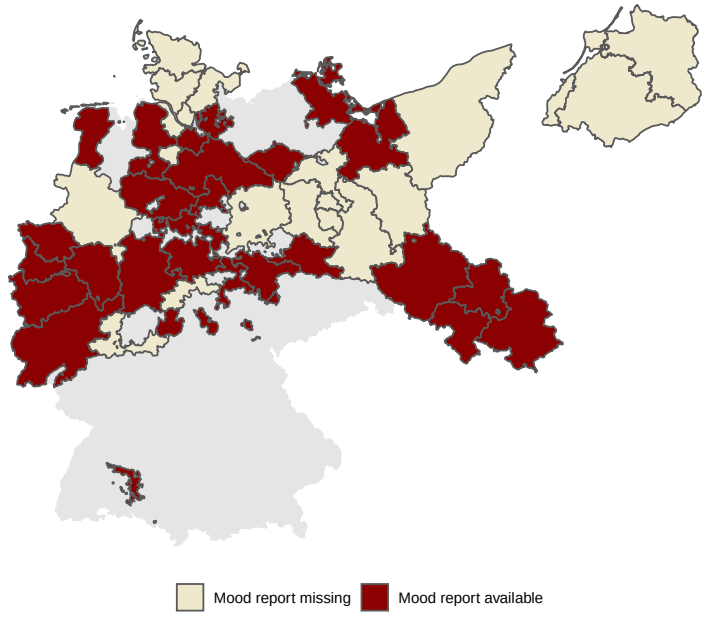
...rmzigaretten: Die Zigaretten haben sich auch in den letzten Monaten in der hiesigen Untergruppe gut eingeführt; aber zu einer Ausschüttung von Provisionen ist es bisher nicht gekommen, und will ich das Geld auf Anregung der Gruppe für die Führerschule verwenden, damit möglichst viele SA-Führer die Führerschule besuchen können.

...itsdienstpflicht: Einzelne Stadtverwaltungen richten e... willigen Arbeitsdienst ein, wohin ich bisher ... einzelne Männer zum Einziehen von Erkundigun... habe.

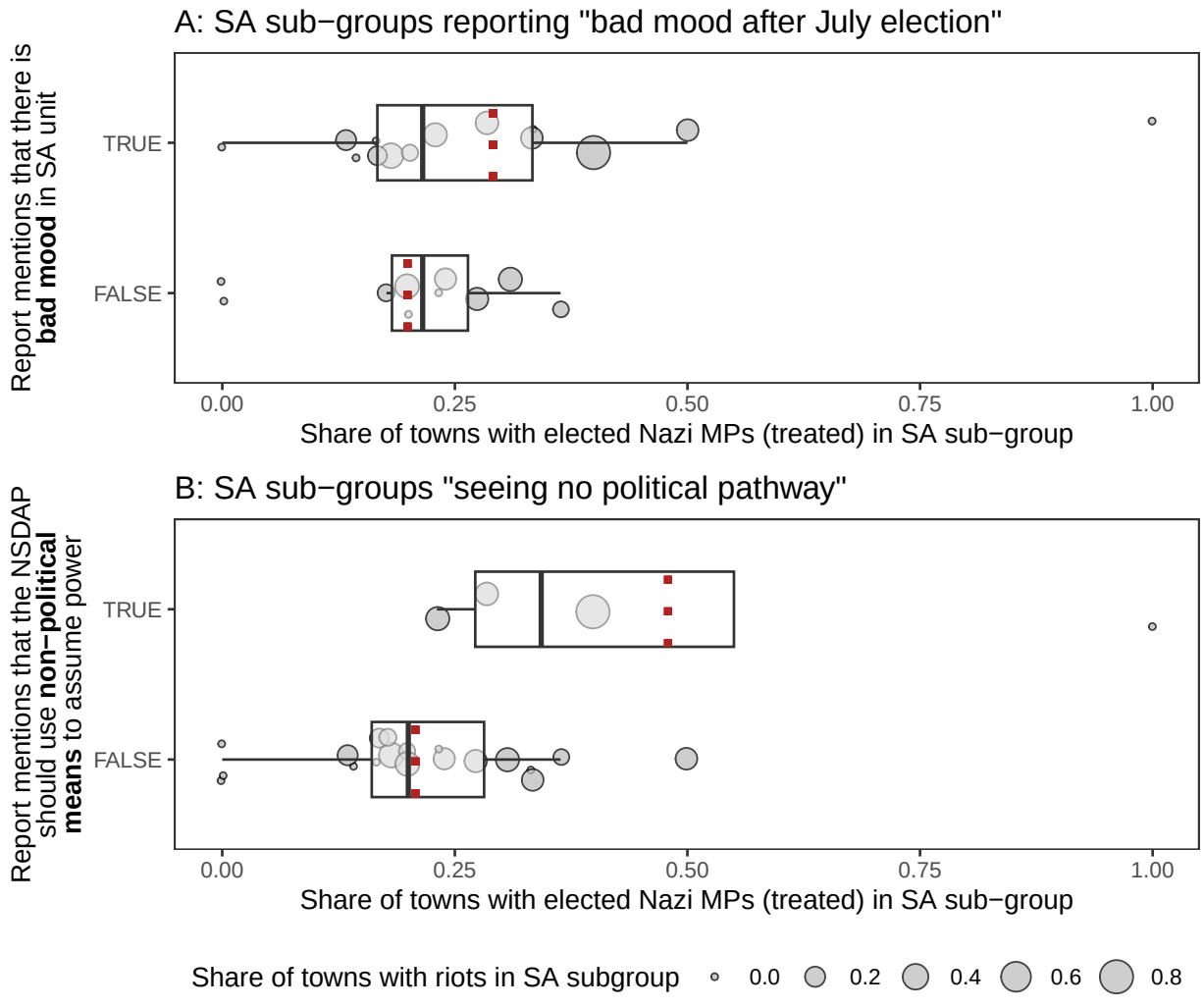
...Fehlanzeige.
...lm: Verhältnis ein ... macht ...
bemerkbar, dass ...
gegenüber der R...
In den letzten ...
in Köln aufgelö...
die SA eingetre...

Kopie aus dem Bundesarchiv

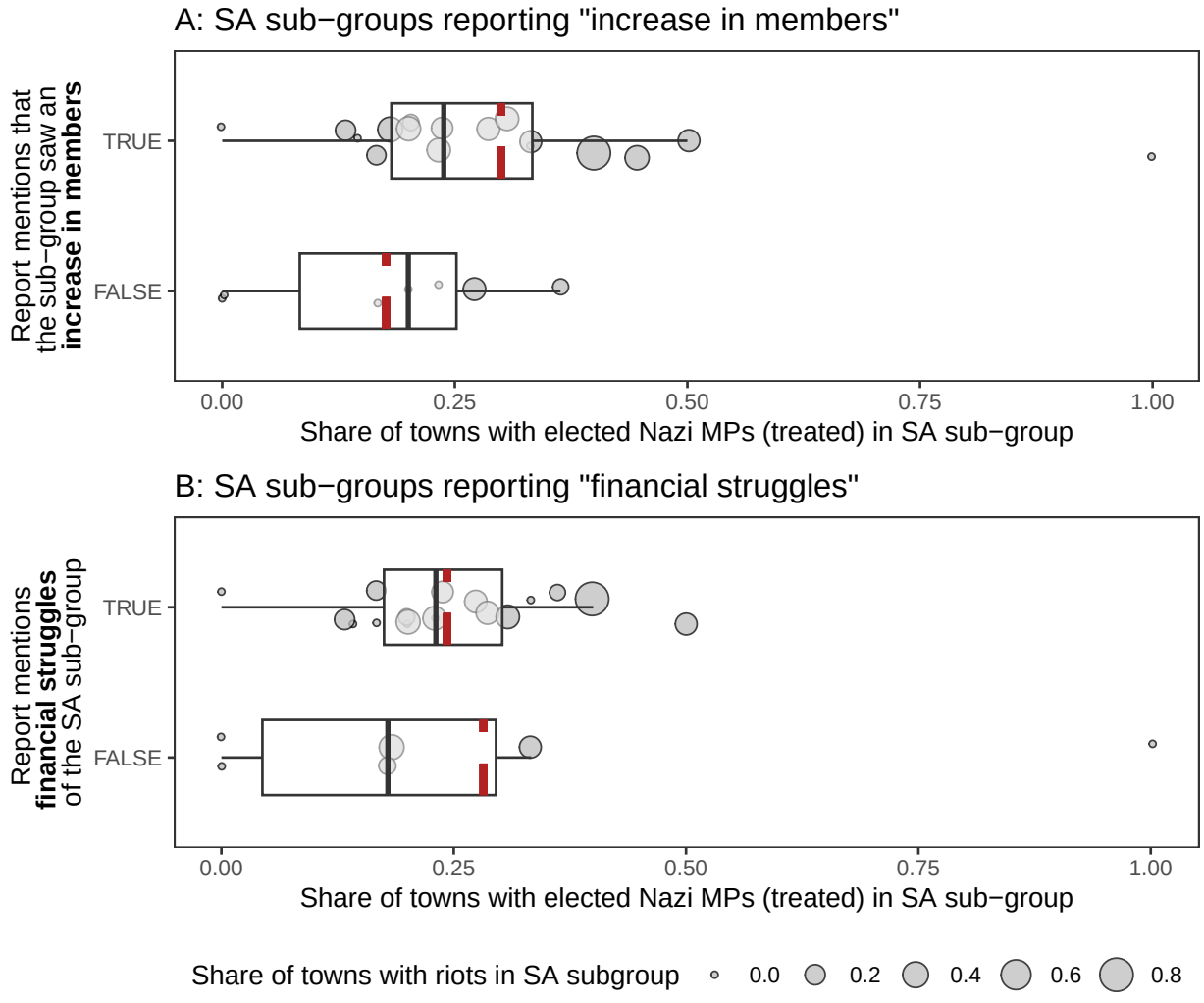
Availability of SA “mood reports"



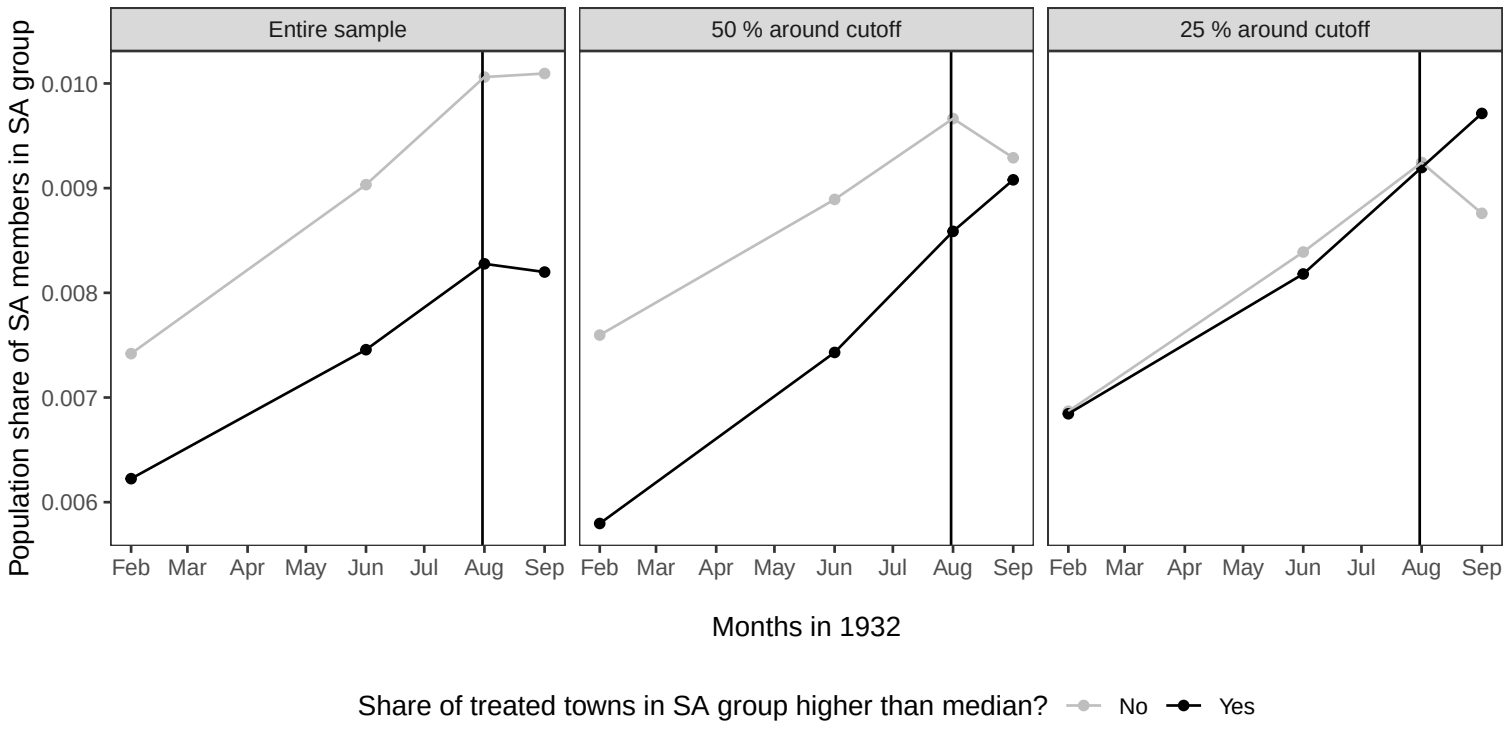
Election winners and motivation for violence I



Election winners and organizational capacity for violence

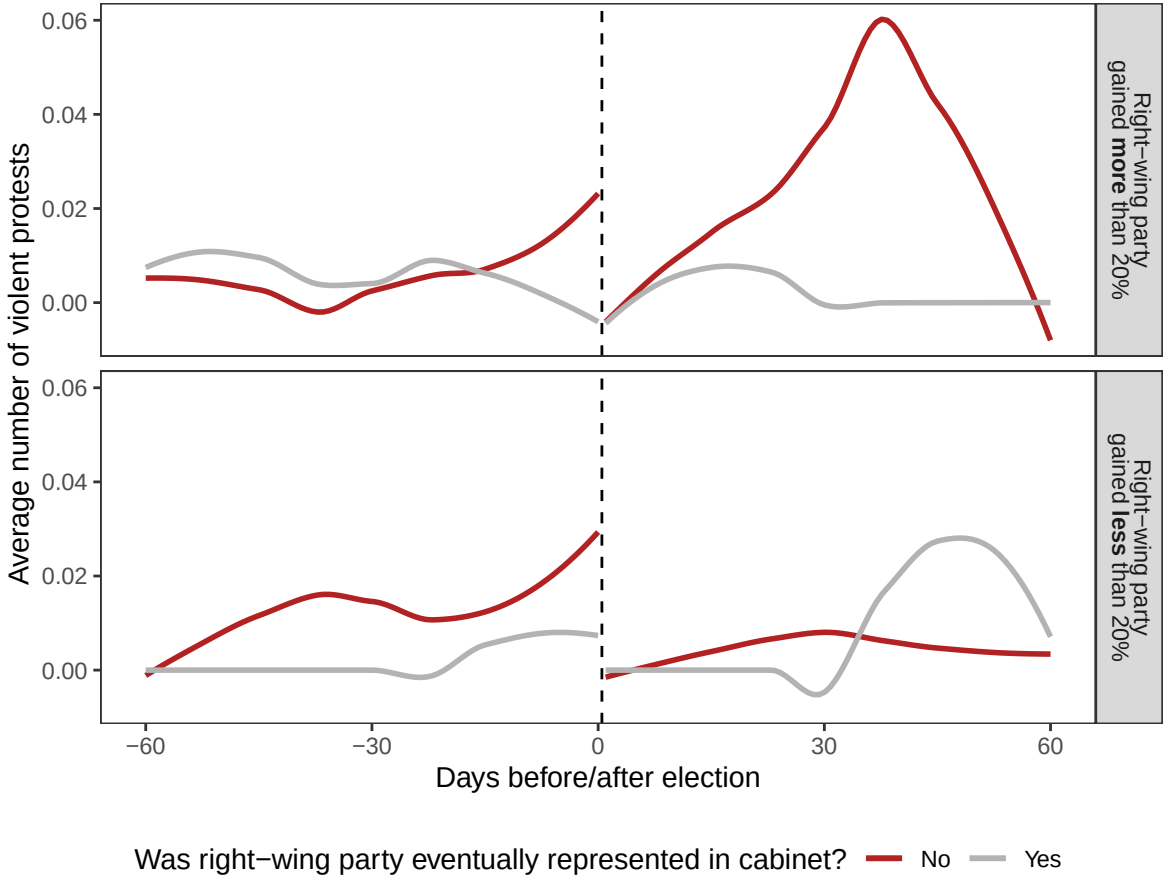
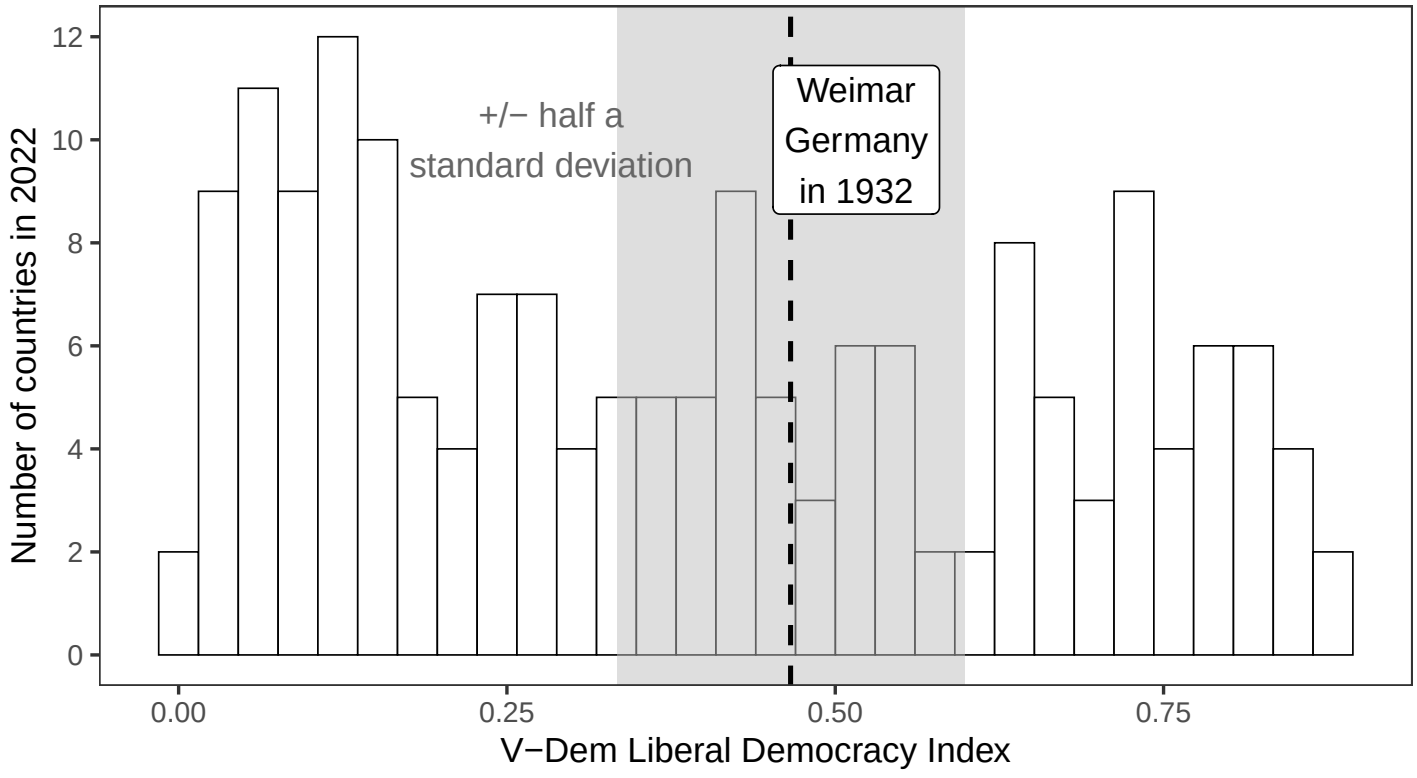


Election winners and organizational capacity for violence



(How) Does this help us explain other cases?

Evidence from right-wing protests before/after 85 elections in 11 European countries between 2009-2020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