

Class 2: Causes

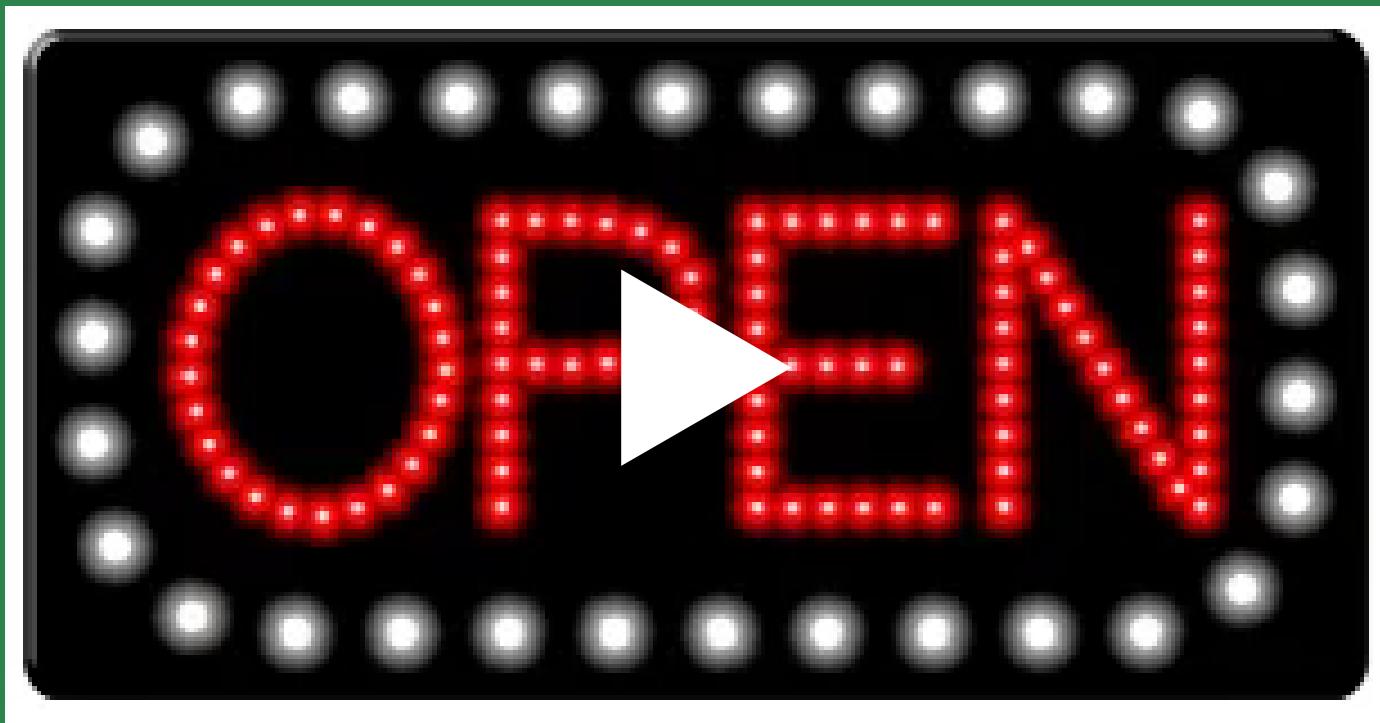
Setting the stage for political violence

Dr. Michael C. Zeller

Agenda for the day

- Opening notes
- A causal framework of political violence
- Politically violent groups connected to Germany
- Testing: determinants of right-wing terrorism in the U.S.
- Any questions, concerns, feedback for this class?

Opening notes



Presentation groups

Remember: topic to me at least by Week 4

December

January

Presentations line-up

Date	Presenters	Method
4 Dec:		TBD
11 Dec:		TBD
18 Dec:		TBD

A causal framework of political violence



LUDWIG-
MAXIMILIANS-
UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

Three organising questions (Crenshaw 1981)

- Terrorist violence communicates a political message; its ends go beyond damaging an enemy's material resources
1. **why** does terrorism occur?
 - *predictive/causal* questions
 2. **how** do the processes of terrorism work?
 - *processual/mechanistic* questions
 3. **what** are its social and political **effects**?
 - *descriptive* and *causal* questions

Common problems (Crenshaw 1981)

(still applicable to significant portions of political violence and research several decades on...)

- logical comparability
- specification of the relationship of variables to each other
- rank-ordering of variables in terms of explanatory power

3 levels of causation (Crenshaw 1981)

1. broad environment/contextual factors (**macro-level**)
 2. circumstances and actors (**meso-level**)
 3. psychological variables that encourage or inhibit (**micro-level**)
-
- these *levels* are a useful and widely applicable analytical framework

Context (macro-level): preconditions

Any ideas what is depicted here?



Context (macro-level): preconditions

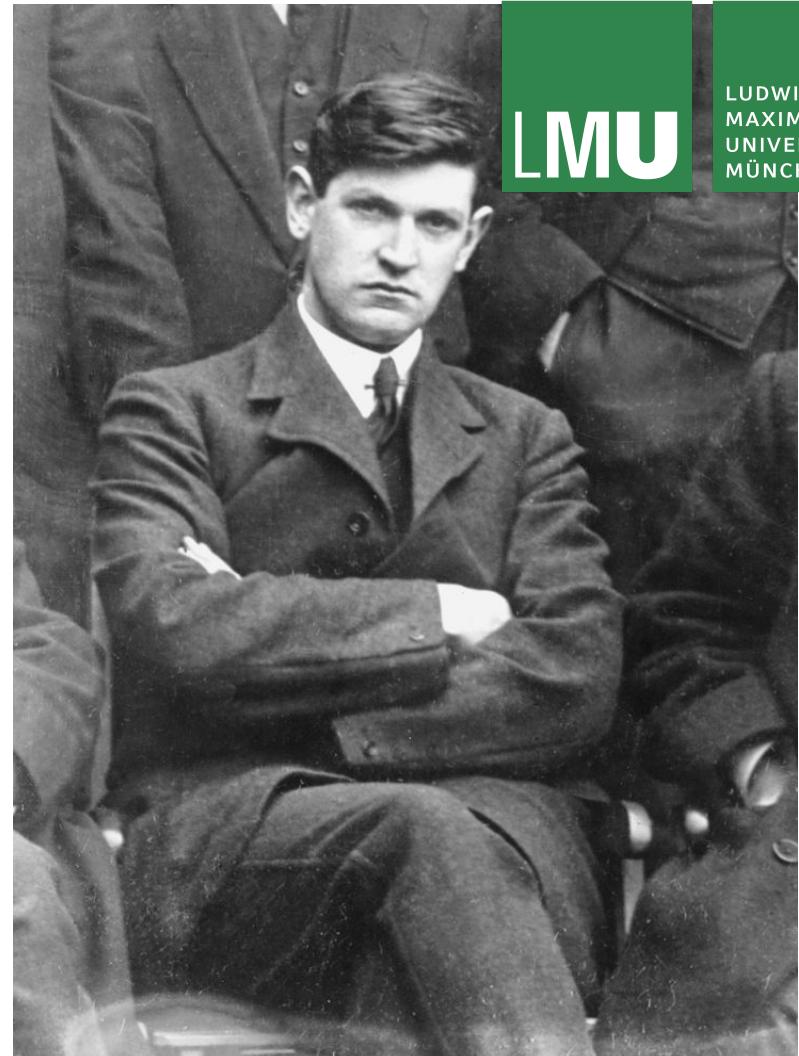
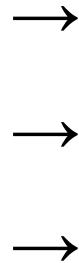
Context (macro-level): precipitants

- **precipitants**, specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism

a common pattern of government actions that act as catalysts for terrorism. Government use of unexpected and unusual force in response to protest or reform attempts often compels terrorist retaliation. (p384)

Examples?

Context (macro-level): precipitants



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Examples?

Circumstances (meso-level) (Crenshaw 1981)

- terrorist behaviour as “rational”
 - based on assumption that terrorist organisations have consistent sets of values, beliefs, and images of the environment. Hence, terrorism is seen collectively as a logical means
- variety of **goals**
 - from revolutionary - e.g., new state, new system
 - to (essentially) conservative - e.g., preserve social group relations, power arrangements

Circumstances (meso-level): variety of goals (Crenson 1981)

The observation that terrorism is a **weapon of the weak** is hackneyed but apt. (p387)

What does this mean? Do you agree?

- inexpensive, simple
- contrast: James C. Scott's book (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*

Psychological (micro-level): common traits (Crenshaw)

two fundamental questions about the psychological basis of terrorism:

1. why the individual takes the first step and chooses to engage in terrorism: why join? Does the terrorist possess specific psychological predispositions, identifiable in advance, that suit them for terrorism?
 - radicalisation and engagement
2. Why does involvement continue? What are the psychological mechanisms of group interaction?
 - persistence or endurance

Psychological (micro-level): common traits (Crenshaw)

- ego-defensive needs
- cognitive processes
- socialisation
- in interaction with a specific situation
- different acts of terror can carry differences in psychological demands
 - extremely discriminate (e.g., assassination) to broadly indiscriminate (recall patterns of violence conceptual framework)

BUT: avoid stereotyping the terrorist or oversimplifying: No single motivation or personality can be valid for all circumstances

Psychological (micro-level): normality (Crenshaw 19)



“the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality”

The West German psychiatrist who conducted a pretrial examination of four members of the RAF concluded that they were “intelligent,” even “humorous,” and showed no symptoms of psychosis or neurosis and “no particular personality type.” (p390)

Psychological (micro-level): difficulties (Crenshaw 1)

studying individuals engaged in terrorism presents problems:

- **preconditions** change over time and **precipitants** are unpredictable
- interviewing terrorists: may discover **subsequent rationalisations** instead of prior attitudes/motivations

Psychological (micro-level): endurance (Crenshaw 1)

Within terrorist groups, individual/group dynamics of ...

- commitment,
- risk,
- solidarity,
- loyalty,
- guilt,
- revenge,
- isolation

discourage a change in behaviour (and at the organisational level, strategy)—even when contextual conditions change.

Politically violent groups connect

Germany

- roster of organisations
- discussion of causes



(In)famous PV groups in or connected to Germany

“Those who only know one country, know no country” - Seymour Martin Lipset (inspired by Alexis de Tocqueville)

Antifaschistische Aktion (Antifa, Germany and elsewhere),
Blood and Honour (B&H, transnational),
Grey Wolves (Turkey),
Hammerskins (transnational),
Hezbollah (Lebanon, but also transnational),
Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT, transnational),
Islamic State (IS, transnational),
Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands ('Communist Party of Germany', KPD, Germany),
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, Sri Lanka),
Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands ('National Democratic

Party of Germany,' NPD, Germany),

National Socialist Underground (NSU, Germany),

Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê ('Kurdistan Workers' Party', PKK,

Turkey, Syria and several other countries including Germany),

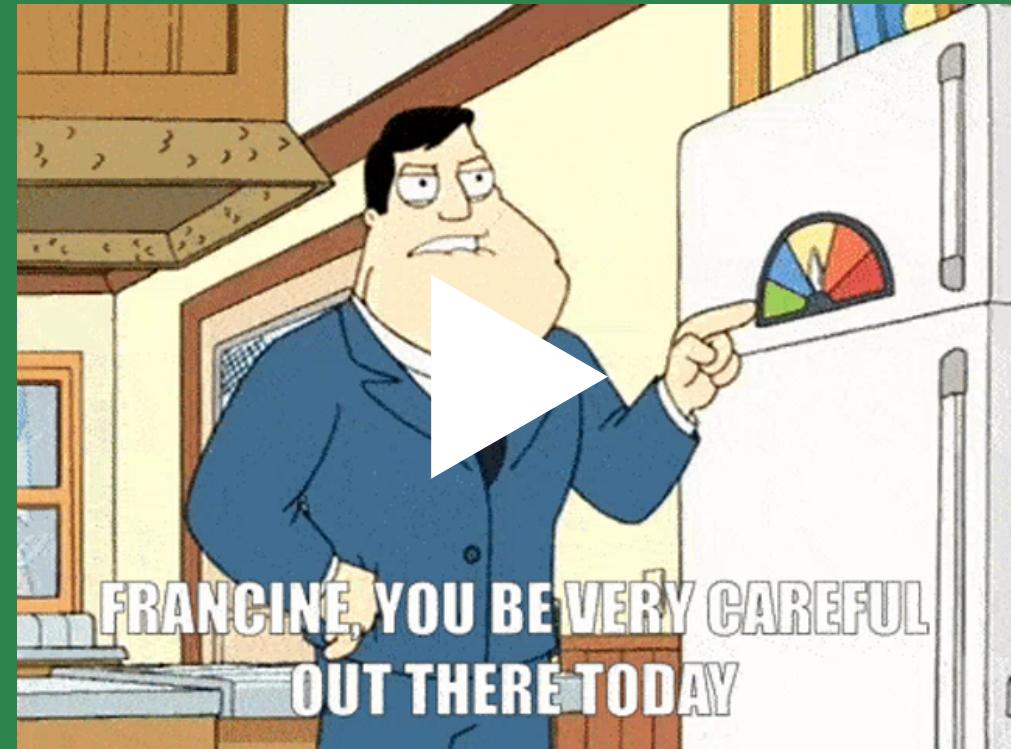
Rote Armee Fraktion ('Red Army Fraction', RAF, Germany),

Sozialistische Reichspartei ('Socialist Reich Party', SRP, Germany),

Die Rechte ('The Right', Germany)

Testing: determinants of right-wi...g terrorism in the U.S.

- Piazza (2017)
 - theorising and testing causes



Piazza (2017) - testing causes

- Three groups of motivations (p. 54)
 - economic hardships and **grievances** (mechanism: drive resentment and support for terrorism)
 - greater inclusion and empowerment of women and racial minorities (mechanism: **perceived threat** to privilege)
 - resentment toward the U.S. political system and government (mechanism: necessitates ‘resistance against tyranny’)

Lays out differing theoretical/empirical contentions/findings about these motivations—and sets out to resolve them (theory-based and empirics-based **puzzles**) (Day and Koivu 2019)

Piazza (2017) - research design

the study uses a cross-sectional panel time series design to examine the predictive quality of a series of state and national-level economic, social and political indicators on counts of domestic terrorist attacks launched by right-wing terrorist movements and individuals in the 50 US states for the period 1970–2011.

Let's break this down:

Piazza (2017) - research design



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- ‘cross-sectional panel time series’ = different clusters of analysis over time
 - ‘in the 50 US states for the period 1970–2011’ = state-year is the unit of analysis (see Note 14)
- ‘predictive quality’ = research objective, *predict* (rather than ‘describe’ or ‘explain’), here meaning *inferential statistics*
- ‘series of state and national-level economic, social and political indicators’ = the (groups of) *independent variables* (IVs), corresponding to the 3 groups of motivations
- ‘counts of domestic terrorist attacks launched by right-wing terrorist movements and individuals’ = *dependent variable* (DV)

Piazza (2017) - research design

Variable group	Indicators
Economic grievance	Per cent in poverty
	Per cent employed in manufacturing
Societal changes	Number of individual farms in state
	Rate of abortion
'Big government'	Per cent of labour force that is female
	Change in non-white state population
	measure of Democrat party dominance
	U.S. President a Democrat in given year
	Average income tax rate

Reading a regression table

Remember: regression is a tool for understanding a phenomenon as a linear function (generally) → $(y = mx + b)$

Piazza (2017) - abridged regression table

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]
<i>Percentage Below Poverty Line</i>		0.054 (0.034)			0.026 (0.034)	0.012 (0.032)
<i>Manufacturing Employment</i>		3.751 (6.751)			22.804 (18.584)	30.732 (21.832)
<i>Change, No. of Individual Farms</i>		2.532 (1.953)			-1.427 (2.748)	-0.226 (2.946)
<i>Abortion Rate</i>			0.029** (0.010)		0.026* (0.012)	0.022† (0.013)
<i>Female Participation in Labor Force</i>			0.102** (0.033)		0.183† (0.100)	0.209† (0.125)
<i>Growth of Non-white Pop (%)</i>		0.026 (0.016)			0.016 (0.020)	0.015 (0.016)
<i>Democrat Control of State Government</i>			0.055		-0.010	-0.043
<i>US President Democrat</i>				(0.076)	(0.085)	(0.082)
<i>Federal Income Tax Rate</i>			0.673** (0.247)	0.837** (0.284)	1.164** (0.404)	
			0.043 (0.138)	-0.275 (0.232)	-0.295 (0.313)	

Piazza (2017) - findings (interpreting reg. table)

- right-wing terrorism **not rooted in economic grievances**, **political stress**, or structural economic change
- ‘gendered’ dimension to right-wing extremist activity: **where women are becoming more empowered, right-wing terrorism is more frequent**
 - predictors associated with women’s rights significantly boost the incidence of right-wing terrorism
 - “*On average, increases in state-level abortion rates or women’s participation in the workforce produce fewer than 0.05 more right-wing terrorist attacks per state per year.*”
- of ‘big gov.’ motivations, only the dummy variable for a Democrat U.S. President is significant
 - suggests **only peak-level and highly visible political predictors** are associated with increased incidence of right-wing terrorism

Piazza (2017) - conclusions

1. economic factors are not reliable predictors of terrorist activity
2. social factors help drive right-wing terrorism. ('ills afflicting "traditional" American society')
3. partisan control over government matters at the national level, but not the state level, in determining right-wing terrorism

Any questions, concerns, feedback for this class?

Anonymous feedback here:

<https://forms.gle/NfF1pCfYMbkAT3WP6>

Alternatively, please send me an email: m.zeller@lmu.de

References

- Crenshaw, Martha. 1981. "The Causes of Terrorism." *Comparative Politics* 13 (4): 379–99.
- Day, Christopher, and Kendra L. Koivu. 2019. "Finding the Question: A Puzzle-Based Approach to the Logic of Discovery." *Journal of Political Science Education* 15 (3): 377–86.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2018.1493594>.
- Piazza, James A. 2017. "The Determinants of Domestic Right-Wing Terrorism in the USA: Economic Grievance, Societal Change and Political Resentment." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34 (1): 52–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894215570429>.