Political Violence and Anti-System Voting in Interwar Italy*

Edoardo Alberto Viganò   Bruno Della Sala   Stefan Stojkovic

Nils-Christian Bormann[†]

10,522 words

Abstract

Does political violence destabilize democracies? If so, how? We investigate the effect of violence on electoral support for anti-system parties in interwar Italy. Our theoretical argument identifies nationalist ideology as a key moderating variable that influences threat perceptions asymmetrically. Violence committed by the "enemies of the nation" increases electoral support for nationalist anti-system parties and reduces support for its perpetrators. Posing as defenders of the nation, nationalist parties benefit from violence targeted against the perceived threat. We collect novel actor-based and geospatial data of political violence in interwar Italy. Using a difference-in-differences estimator at the municipality-level, we estimate the effect of violence on support for anti-system parties in the 1919 and 1921 elections. Our results support the asymmetric returns to violence. We estimate increasing electoral support for the extreme nationalist Fascist party in municipalities that experienced either fascist or leftist violence after the 1919 election. In contrast, both types of violence decrease support for the Socialist party although the effect is not robust to strong spatial auto-correlation. Our investigation of mechanisms reveals that the effect of violence unfolds in rural rather than traditionally leftist, industrialized areas. Neither does it affect the vote shares of non-radical parties. Taken together our findings suggest that violence mobilized radical right supporters rather than suppressing the vote of core supporters of the left, and made some anti-system voters switch their vote from the radical left in 1919 to the radical right in 1921. We conclude by discussing the relevance of our finding for increasing violence in liberal democracies today.

Does political violence destabilize democracies? If so, how? We investigate the effect of political violence on electoral support for anti-system parties. Our theoretical argument identifies nationalist ideology as a key moderating variable that influences threat perceptions asymmetrically. Certain segments of voters at least tacitly support violence against perceived threats to the nation. Violent acts by these "enemies of the nation" decrease their electoral support and increase electoral support for nationalist parties. Posing as defenders of the nation, extreme right-wing parties electorally benefit from the violence that they target against the perceived threat.

We test these expectations in the context of interwar Italy, which experienced considerable political violence between non-state actors. The main political division was ideological between the fascist right and the revolutionary left. Historians describe the "Red Menace" posed by communist parties across Europe that threatened both nationalist myths through an international vision of world revolution and property rights in the shadow of the Russian Revolution (Brustein and Berntson, 1999; Gerwarth, 2012). Across Italy, fascist black shirts clashed with socialist activists between 1919 and the Fascist March on Rome in 1922 that resulted in the appointment of the Fascist party leader Benito Mussolini as prime minister, and the subsequent breakdown of democratic rule.[1]

We introduce newly collected violence event data for Italy between 1919 and 1922. The data generally follow the classification scheme introduced by the UCDP Global Event Database (Sundberg and Melander, 2013), and contain information on the actors involved in the violence, the location and time of the events, and the number of casualties. Our unit of analysis is the municipality (5,775 units). We focus on the two parliamentary elections in November 1919 and May 1921. Held against the backdrop of a severe economic crisis after the end of World War 1, the 1919 electoral contest resulted in unprecedented gains for the Socialist party that raised fears about communist rule. Wide-spread fascist attacks on leftist activists and supporters, tacitly approved by state officials, were followed by strong Fascist electoral gains in 1921. We use Geographic

---

[1]We capitalize Fascist or Fascism whenever it refers to the Fascist party. We use the lower-case fascist denominator when describing supporters of the Fascist party or Fascism as an idea, if it is unclear that these are actual party members.

Information Systems to match violent events on municipalities/counties, and employ a difference-in-differences design that estimates the changes in vote shares over time between violence-affected and non-affected municipalities.

Our findings align with our theoretical expectations. We observe a relatively greater increase in electoral support for the Fascist parties in municipalities that experienced either fascist or leftist violence between 1919 and 1921 compared to municipalities that did not. In contrast, the Socialist party lost support in municipalities that experienced violence prior to the 1921 election, relative to non-violent areas. Our analysis reveals that violence between the radical right and left had a stronger effect on Fascist and PSU vote shares in 1921 than violence committed by exclusively radical left actors. Finally, we find that most of the effect took place in rural areas where the Socialists had made unprecedented gains in the 1919 elections. In contrast, neither type of violence strongly affects more industrialized areas, suggesting that violence was most effective against rural voters who had switched to the Socialist party in 1919, and did not affect the core voter base of the Socialist party, the industrial working class.

Our study on the effects of political violence on electoral support for anti-system parties is important in the context of the rise of radical right-wing parties and increasing levels of violence in established democracies in Europe and North America (e.g., Art, 2022; Kalmoe and Mason, 2022). As of now, social scientists are struggling to assess the risk posed by modern right-wing parties to democracies because few, if any established democracies have yet failed. Comparison cases of democratic failures are typically drawn from regions that feature fewer commonalities with European and North American democracies, such as Latin America or civil war-plagued developing countries in Africa, the Middle East, and South/Southeast Asia (e.g., Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Walter, 2022). We argue that historical cases of democratic failure offer a promising alternative counterfactual to contemporary struggling democracies.

Specifically, our study contributes to three emerging research areas. First, our findings weigh in on a recent debate on the relationship between political violence and voter alignment with radical-right wing parties in contemporary democracies (Eady, Hjorth and Dinesen, 2023; Eger and Olzak,

2023; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Pickard, Efthyvoulou and Bove, 2023). Our results from an interwar democracy that actually failed align with those studies that find a positive effect of violence by the radical right and its opponents on voter support for radical-right wing parties. Second, our work on the short-term effects of violence complements studies that find a positive effect of medium to long-term legacies of interstate violence on radical right-wing party support in interwar democracies (Acemoglu et al., 2022; De Juan et al., 2023). Third, by putting the spotlight on violence between two non-state actors, our study adds to the literature on electoral violence which typically investigates violence perpetrated by incumbents or opposition parties against civilians (Höglund, 2009; Birch, Daxecker and Höglund, 2020).

Political Violence and Democratic Stability

Political theorists have long warned of the dangers of political violence for democratic stability: O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986, 11), for example, argue that "when violence becomes widespread and recurrent, the prospects for political democracy are drastically reduced." In a similar vein, Schedler (1998, 96) concur: "the list of . . . assassins or gravediggers of democratic rule . . . includes private men-at-arms (guerrillas, drug cartels, violent street protesters)." More recently, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) include politicians' "toleration or encouragement of violence" in their list of warning signs of authoritarian behavior in democracies at risk of backsliding. Against the backdrop of political violence in rich and frequently old democracies, such as a failed attempt to overthrow the US Presidential election in January 2021, the murder of democratic politicians by extremists in Germany and the United Kingdom, and the murder of journalists in Malta and Slovakia, understanding the effects of violence on democracy gains urgent relevance.

Yet beyond the scholarly consensus that military coups were threatening democratic survival during the Cold War (Bermeo, 2016), few studies explore the risk political violence poses to democratic survival, and they do not reach clear conclusions (Przeworski, 2019; Rød, Knutsen and Hegre, 2020). In contrast, an alternative scholarly perspective identifies political violence

and democracy as complements in the competition for power (Staniland, 2014; Harish and Little, 2017). Such electoral violence – the intentional use of violence by political actors "to influence the electoral process ...[in] the pre-election phase, the day or days of the election, and the post-election phase" (Höglund, 2009, 415-6) – results in deaths in 30% of elections held outside OECD countries. More than 50% of such elections experience non-lethal violence (Daxecker, Amicarelli and Jung, 2019). Most studies investigate when, where, and why electoral violence occurs (Daxecker, 2014; Fjelde and Hultman, 2014; Daniele and Dipoppa, 2017; Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019; Müller-Crepon, 2022). Others explore what effects electoral violence has on voter participation (Trelles and Carreras, 2012; Condra et al., 2018; Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020), chances of incumbent victory (Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski, 2018), or victim attitudes and behavior (see contributions in the special issue by Birch, Daxecker and Höglund, 2020, 8).

The maturing research on electoral violence outlines how violence decreases democratic quality and undermines the democratic process, particularly by depressing turnout or affecting vote choice. It has less to say on the risk political violence more broadly poses for democratic survival. We highlight three major reasons for this focus. First, research on electoral violence is becoming more and more disaggregated both in space and time (Birch, Daxecker and Höglund, 2020, 8), whereas democratic survival is a high-level, structural concept. Connecting these two levels of analysis raises thorny conceptual and data challenges. Second, widely-used measures of democracy create important hurdles to investigating the relationship between violence and democratic survival. They emphasize Dahl's (1971) "competitiveness" dimension over its "inclusiveness" counterpart, thus implying that threats to participation investigated in the electoral violence literature pose a lesser risk to democratic survival.[2] More worryingly, V-Dem, the Polity data, and to a lesser extent the dichotomous measure by Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013) explicitly refer to violence in their definitions of democracy, thus making any analysis between political violence and democratic survival circular.

Third, research on the actors of electoral violence is inchoate. According to Birch, Daxecker

---

[2] Przeworski et al. (2000) do not consider participation at all in their definition of democracy. Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013) focus on the legal requirement that at least 50% of male citizens can vote.

and Höglund (2020, 7), the field "has not yet sufficiently developed theories that explain the various perpetrators and targets of electoral violence." Most studies conceptualize the perpetrators of electoral violence as interested in manipulating electoral outcomes to their own advantage but implicitly accepting elections as a means of distributing power. Yet recent work distinguishes between actors who use violence to further political goals within a rough democratic framework and those who pursue a vision of government that is clearly non-democratic (Harbers, Richetta and Van Wingerden, 2023).

We build on these contributions and suggest a novel approach to overcome some of the difficulties in investigating the effect of political violence on democratic breakdown. Specifically, we draw on Harber et al.'s (2023) distinction between intra- and anti-systemic violence to study the threat of democratic breakdown through support for anti-system parties. Classic comparative work stresses the role of *anti-system parties* in threatening democratic survival (Sartori, 2005; Capoccia, 2005). Anti-system parties oppose the existing system of government, either by pursuing an alternative regime type or by pursuing changes to the boundaries of the polity (secessionism) (Capoccia, 2005, 34). We define democracy in a minimal way through free and fair elections for the legislature and the executive, and full male suffrage (cf. Boix, Miller and Rosato, 2013, 8). We consider parties as anti-system if they suggest or actively pursue changing the rules that reduce the freedom or fairness of elections, limit suffrage, or pursue secession.[3] Our central research question then becomes how organized (anti-system) violence affects electoral support for anti-system parties.[4]

By asking this question, we build on the strengths of the electoral violence literature *and* learn about the risk of democratic breakdown as a result of violence. First, by studying the effect of violent events on electoral outcomes, we keep the benefits of a disaggregated research design. Second, investigating electoral support for anti-system parties provides a more proximate outcome to democratic breakdown, which is the ultimate goal of many anti-system parties. Third, we take up Birch et al.'s (2020, 7) challenge to further theorize actors and their targets.

---

[3]This definition increases the relevance of our study as it travels to the contemporary period where parties such as the *Republicans* in the United States or the *Alternative for Germany* suggest or actively implement limits to suffrage.

[4]From here on, we will simplify the language by using the term "violence" to refer to political, organized, and anti-system violence.

Violence, Nationalism, and Voting for Anti-System Actors

The effects of violence on support for anti-system parties are far from clear. Both historical and contemporary anti-system parties frequently feature violent wings or are affiliated with violent non-state organizations, and use violence against political opponents (e.g., Schumann, 2010; Staniland, 2014). Yet, evidence from around the world suggests that voters dislike politicians associated with violence because they fear for their own safety, generally prefer peaceful interactions, or fear negative economic consequences of violence (Burchard, 2020; Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020; Garcia-Montoya, Arjona and Lacombe, 2022). Studies of violence by the radical right yield inconclusive results with some supporting a negative effect of violence on support for right-wing parties (Eady, Hjorth and Dinesen, 2023; Pickard, Efthyvoulou and Bove, 2023), while others reach the opposite conclusion (Eger and Olzak, 2023; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023).

Assuming that voters dislike violence and that party leaders seek to win elections, then there are three possible theoretical explanations for why party-associated actors nevertheless use violence. First, party leaders face a principal-agent problem and are not able to control the rank & file party members. In this case, violence associated with parties should reduce their vote shares. Second, violence suppresses the turnout of the opposing party more than it decreases support for the perpetrator. Empirically, we would observe decreases in turnout along with increases in violent parties' vote shares. Third, violence increases support for the perpetrator under certain conditions but not others. Specifically, we argue that nationalist parties can reap benefits from using violence if it is used in "defense of the nation." Whether or not parties benefit from violence depends on their type and the existence of a (perceived) threat to the nation.

Going beyond the classic definition of nationalism as a political ideology that aspires to congruence between state borders and cultural group boundaries (Gellner, 1983, 1), we add an attitudinal dimension to the concept that elevates in-group over out-group members (cf. De Juan et al., 2023).[5] Nationalism typically is a reactive ideology or attitude that arises in response to out-group

---

[5]Our definition resembles understandings of nationalism as exclusive, ethnic, or counterrevolutionary which all define a clear out-group in the form of ethnic or national minorities or class enemies (e.g., Snyder, 2000; Schrock-Jacobson, 2012; Tudor and Slater, 2021). In this paper, we focus on nationalism by the majority group, though our

6

rule (Gellner, 1983), and foreign or domestic threats (Shayo, 2009, 155). Where such threats exist or are perceived to exist, they increase nationalist attitudes among voters (Callens and Meuleman, 2023). In turn, violent threats by out-groups translate into greater electoral support for right-wing nationalist parties that promise to defend the nation (Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014). Simultaneously, it increases rejection of the out-group and affiliated non-nationalist political actors (Ferrín, Mancosu and Cappiali, 2020). While this finding is well established in the context of ethnically diverse societies (Lyall, Blair and Imai, 2013; Hadzic, Carlson and Tavits, 2020; Berman, Clarke and Majed, 2023), we extend it to ideologically divided electorates of the inter-war period, and the threat posed by socialist or communist actors, that were commonly associated with threats to the nation. For example, Weyland (2021) describes the fear of the spread of the Russian Revolution. Moreover, in many European states, right-wing actors evoked anti-semitic conspiracy theories in a putative link between communism and Jewish political dominance. We summarize our argument in two hypotheses:

H_{1a} Violence by non-nationalist anti-system parties increases electoral support for nationalist anti-system parties.

H_{1b} Violence by non-nationalist anti-system parties decreases electoral support for these parties.

The second step of our argument focuses on the link between in-group violence and support for nationalist parties. When the perceived threats against the nation go along with the experience of actual violence, voters find violence against the threat more acceptable (Canetti et al., 2013; Giavazzi et al., 2024). We argue that voters support the perpetrators of violence electorally if they are understood to act in the defense of the nation. Yet why do voters react asymmetrically to such violence?[6] We outline four mechanisms, two psychological and two rationalist, that explain the

---

theoretical argument could also be applied to minority groups that constitute local majorities.

[6]Costalli and Ruggeri (2015, 120), for example, argue that "radical ideologies are crucial nonmaterial factors for violent collective action", presumably referencing all such ideologies. Although their empirical analysis investigates resistance to Fascist rule by leftist insurgents, it is impossible to disentangle Fascist rule from German Nazi occupation, and thus it is impossible to rule out a nationalist motivation for violence. Similarly, Balcells and Kalyvas (2014) highlight the important entanglement of Communism with nationalist self-determination movements in numerous civil wars during the Cold War.

positive link between nationalist violence and voter support to nationalist parties, which other anti-system ideologies do not exhibit. All mechanisms share the idea that nationalist violence sends a credible signal to voters that nationalist parties are effective defenders of their interests.

First, nationalism's reactive nature makes its followers particularly sensitive to (status) threats, and thus more tolerant of using violence against such threats (Riaz, Bischof and Wagner, 2023). Social psychologists demonstrate that individuals tend to dislike losses more than they appreciate gains (Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler, 1991). Forward-looking ideologies like communism or inclusive cosmopolitanism promise future rewards whereas nationalism vows to defend the status quo or return to a, possibly imagined, past. Frequently, nationalists frame the status quo in cultural terms, but economic issues may also play a role, especially when conflict over territory becomes connected to nationalist projects (cf. Weiner, 1978). As a result of loss aversion, nationalist violence is thus more acceptable to voters on average, even if they generally dislike violence. Second, voters with greater authoritarian predispositions, a personality trait that makes individuals prefer conformity over individualism and obey authorities, tend to vote more frequently for politically right-wing actors (e.g., Osborne et al., 2023, 221). Confronted with majority-status threatening political demands and possibly violent challenges to authority by out-groups, voters with authoritarian predispositions desire the return of stability and order. Violence against the perceived outside threat then becomes a credible signal by nationalist parties that they will reassert order and stability. In turn, voters with authoritarian tendencies reward nationalist parties electorally.

Third, nationalism promises greater benefits than most other ideologies because its in-group tends to be relatively smaller to the (imagined) out-group. Nationalists promise benefits to a frequently ethnically defined group (cf. Wimmer, 2002). Nationalist politicians promise to favor in-groups over ethnic minorities, or other out-groups. Other radical ideologies, such as Communism, have larger in-groups that frequently extend beyond national boundaries ('workers of the world'). In sum, nationalist violence signals that nationalist parties will distribute club goods to their voters. Fourth, nationalism bridges class divisions. By shifting the focus from redistributional to status questions (Shayo, 2009), or by at least limiting redistributional demands, nationalism ap-

peals to wealthier voters. Nationalist violence, in particular when directed against actors demanding redistribution, sends an important signal to high-income voters about the capacity and resolve of radical right parties. In turn, these higher income voters may then fund nationalist parties and their election campaigns, which yields higher vote shares.

In sum, our three mechanisms suggest that nationalism's reactive nature appeals to voters from all backgrounds due to loss aversion. Nationalism particularly appeals to voters with authoritarian predispositions, and wealthier voters who see it as a welcome distraction from re-distributive demands. All of these voter groups see nationalist political violence as a credible signal of the nationalist party to defend their interests, and thus support the party electorally.

H_{2a} Violence by nationalist anti-system parties increases electoral support for these parties.

H_{2b} Violence by nationalist anti-system parties decreases electoral support for non-nationalist anti-system parties.

Case Selection

Encouraged by Birch, Daxecker and Höglund (2020, 10) and Kalmoe (2020), we focus on historical cases. Existing research primarily investigates hybrid and/or competitive authoritarian regimes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In few of these cases, democracy has failed outright, if it was ever fully achieved in the first place (cf. Levitsky and Way, 2023). Next to younger democracies, older, established democracies have been experiencing increasing levels of political violence (e.g., Riaz, Bischof and Wagner, 2023). The January 2021 attack on the US Capitol building and the murders of politicians Jo Cox in the UK and Walter Lübcke in Germany by far-right extremists are eerily reminiscent of the turbulent interwar period that saw half of Europe's democracies fail. To learn more about how much a threat violence poses to established democracies, we argue their historical versions constitute valuable counterfactuals.

Specifically, we focus on interwar Italy, where political violence, the rise of anti-system parties, and democratic demise went together. After the Versailles Treaty did not grant Italy several

promised territories, persisting class inequalities gave rise to rural and urban labour struggles and massive Socialist gains in the 1919 election (Gerwarth, 2016, 23). Benito Mussolini positioned the recently created Fascist party to oppose the "Red Menace." Allied with landlords and industrialists threatened by the insurrectionist labour movement, fascist Black Shirts attacked socialist strongholds by burning down workers' clubs and chambers of labour, beating socialist representatives, and killing leftist activists and strikers. Government authorities mostly did not interfere, or even implicitly supported the fascist violent campaign against the socialists (De Felice, 1965, 602–603). After break-through electoral gains in the 1921 parliamentary elections, Mussolini launched his March on Rome on October 28th, 1922 (Franzinelli, 2003). Although historians debate the extent of the threat posed by Mussolini's Black Shirts, the Italian King appointed Mussolini as Prime Minister effectively opening the road to dictatorship (Carsten, 1967).

Interwar Italy constitutes a most-likely case of the effect of violence on democratic breakdown (Acemoglu et al., 2022). As such, it is important to attempts of building broader theoretical expectations about the link between violence and anti-system support. Although some observers argue that interwar struggle between the radical left and right may be historically unique and have less relevance for contemporary right-wing challengers (Weyland, 2021; Acemoglu et al., 2022), we point to the centrality of nationalism in both interwar and contemporary democracies. Whereas the contemporary radical right bases its nationalist narratives on the putative threat posed by ethnically distinct migrants and political elites beholden to international organizations rather than the people, interwar nationalists identified the out-group as socialists under the direction of variably Russian Communists or a Jewish international network that threatened property rights and "racial" or national homogeneity.[7] Interwar Italy enables us to test our proposed theoretical mechanisms while establishing a link to contemporary democracies where nationalist ideology is once more associated with the rise of extreme right.

---

[7]Mussolini, for example, referred to Socialism as "Asiatic", thus emphasizing a foreign threat (Alcalde, 2017, 36).

Data

We adopt a disaggregated research design with high-resolution units of analysis. As individual-level data are not available for the interwar period, more highly disaggregated units reduce the risk of ecological fallacies. Therefore, we study 5,775 Italian historical municipalities. Italy held national elections in 1919 and 1921. For each of these election-years, we obtained results for all major parties in both countries. We then distinguish between pro and anti-system parties. We identify the Fascist and Communist/Socialist parties as anti-system in Italy. While hindsight facilitates that assessment, historians agree that in the aftermath of World War 1 a sizable faction of the Italian Socialist Party (PSU) aimed to install a non-representative democratic system, as evidenced by the decision to join the Communist International and by the revolutionary character of its platform (Gentile, 2021; Cardoza, 1982). At its 1919 congress, the Italian Socialist Party adopted a new statute claiming that "the violent seizure of power by the workers will mark the transfer of power from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, establishing the transitional dictatorship of the proletariat" (cited in Gentile, 2021, 67).[8]

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, both violent actions and public declarations in the early 1920s reveal the intent of the Fascist party to limit participation by political opponents and aim for non-democratic forms of government (De Felice, 1965). In a speech made in April 1921 in Bologna, for instance, Mussolini declared that "although one may deplore violence, it is clear that, in order to impose our ideas on the brains, we had to beat the stubborn skulls . . . We are violent whenever it is necessary to be so" (cited in Gentile, 2021, 176).[9]

Data on anti-system voting in Italy are drawn from Acemoglu et al. (2022), who collected information on fascist and socialist vote shares using several local and national newspapers, archives and data previously compiled by Corbetta and Piretti (2009).[10] Figure 1 shows the distribution of

---

[8]Translated by the authors.

[9]Translated by the authors.

[10]In 1919, the Fascist Party ran its own lists, while in 1921 it joined an anti-socialist electoral coalition including liberal and nationalist candidates, the *Blocco Nazionale*. For 1921, therefore, the Fascist vote share equals the proportion of elected Fascist candidates. Within the coalition, the number of successful Fascist candidates is identified thanks to information from the fascist newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* in almost half of the municipalities, and imputed in the remaining half (Acemoglu et al., 2022, 1248). The Socialist vote share in 1921 includes votes for the splinter

votes for the two anti-system parties for the 1921 election in Italy.

In order to assess the relationship between violence and anti-system voting, we collected new data on political violence for the interwar period following the well-established definitions and classification guidelines by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) Georeferenced Events Dataset (GED) (Sundberg and Melander, 2013). We consider all acts of organized violence between (agents of) a government and a non-state actor (Gleditsch et al., 2002), between two non-state actors (Sundberg, Eck and Kreutz, 2012), and by a government or a non-state actor against civilians (Eck and Hultman, 2007). Our information on violent events includes their location, timing, the actors involved, and the number of casualties or injuries.

We deviate from UCDP coding rules in three major ways. First, we do not limit ourselves to organized violence that occurs within the context of armed conflicts. As long as we observe organized political actors committing physical violence, we classify the events. Second, we include non-fatal violence. At a minimum, we require information that confirms the violence resulting in at least one injury. Third, we collect data on event-reports rather than events. For the purpose of this study, we aggregate event-reports to events by location and day.[11] In all other ways, we follow the UCDP GED coding rules, including its temporal, geographic, and casualty precision coding rules. That implies that we come up with a conservative count of violence because we ignore any report that lacks basic information on when or where the event took place, or who was involved.

Data collection proceeded in steps: First, we consulted relevant historical studies and country experts to prepare case-specific summaries of the major political actors, cleavages, and episodes of violence during the interwar period.[12] Second, we constructed country-specific dictionaries with all major *political actors* and word roots that describe *violent actions*, such as kill, wound, or clash. We pre-tested the dictionary on historical newspapers and optimized it by adding additional terms that were used when describing violent events. Third, we searched digitized historical newspapers


Communist party (ibid., 1277).

[11]Thus, we do not insist on two independent confirmations of an event to be included in our data, though it is possible to apply such a criterion by only considering events reported by different sources.
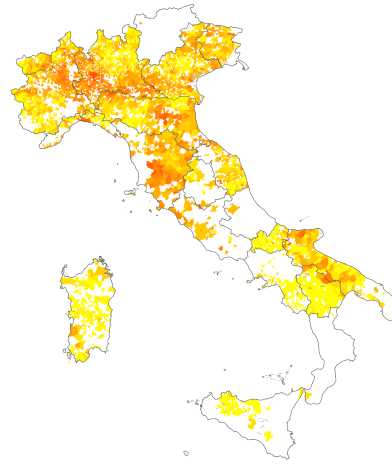
[12]Our research team includes four native speakers of Italian.

12

Figure 1. Vote shares of anti-system parties in the 1919 and 1921 Italian elections
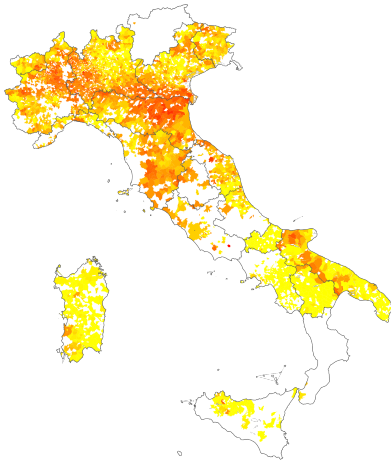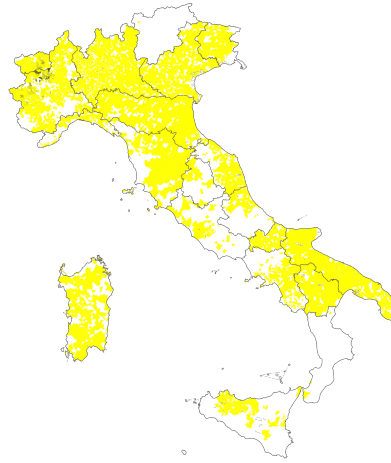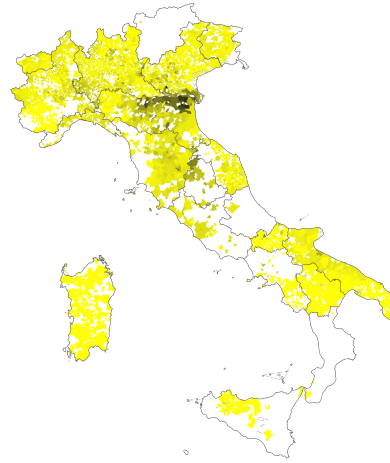

(a) Socialists

(b) Fascists

Note: White areas indicate missing data.

with the help of our dictionaries and classified the identified articles.

Specifically, we draw on two national Italian newspapers: *La Stampa* and the southern edition of *L'Avanti!*.[13] Published in Turin, *La Stampa* was a widely read newspaper with no strong ideological leaning, making it a good candidate to gather reports of political violence in our period of interest. The *L'Avanti!* was the major newspaper of the Socialist party that could over-report Fascist violence and under-report Socialist violence. Since the majority of the events in interwar Italy involves clashes between both sides, that potential bias is less problematic in our case. Between January 1st, 1919 and May 15th, 1921, the date of the second parliamentary election in our sample, we classified 636 unique events in *La Stampa* and 260 events in *L'Avanti!* (see Table A3). These events were linked to fascist or leftist violence in 111 and 169 distinct municipalities respectively (see Table A4).[14] According to historical accounts most of the violence took place in northern and central regions of Italy (Gentile, 2021; De Felice, 1965), and the geographic distribution of our data confirms this (see Figure A1). In line with the respective geographical foci of the two newspaper, we identify relatively more events of *La Stampa* in northern Italy than in the country's souce, whereas the pattern reverses for *L'Avanti!*.

We construct our key explanatory variables from these data in the following way. To investigate the electoral effects of political violence, we consider two categorical variables that capture whether fascist or leftist actors engaged in violence causing deaths within a municipality before the 1921 elections.[15] As both leftist and fascist actors were often involved in the same violent events, we also employ an alternative measure of leftist violence that focuses on municipalities where leftist (but not fascist) actors perpetrated violence. Violence involving left-wing actors without fascist participation mainly took place in the so-called *biennio rosso* (red biennium), a period (1919–1920) characterized by mass strikes and occupations of factories and land. For instance, in

---

[13]L'Avanti! was published in three regionally defined editions. While the general content did not differ between editions, the placement of editorial offices did bring more attention to geographically more proximate events. As La Stampa was situated in the north of the Italy, we opted for the southern edition of L'Avanti! to maximize coverage.

[14]Violence rose dramatically after the May 1921 election. Our data from La Stampa on the period May 1921 to late October 1922, when Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister, yields more than one thousand additional events.

[15]In a robustness test (Appendix E), we broaden our definition of political violence to include events causing either deaths or injuries.

December 1919 clashes between leftist strikers and the police in Mantua led to four deaths. Similarly, in April 1920 eight people died and more than forty were wounded in a conflict between farmers and the police during a trade union demonstration near Bologna.[16]

We have information on a number of relevant control variables including important socio-structural characteristics such as Italian municipalities' population size, their number of day laborers, sharecroppers, landlords, industrial workers, industrial firm shares, bourgeoisie shares, literacy rates, and agricultural/industrial strikes in 1913-14 which will help us control for baseline support for the Socialist party (all from Acemoglu et al., 2022).[17] These controls have two drawbacks. First, several contain information measured after exposure to violence, and in certain cases, these variables might introduce post-treatment bias. Second, all these controls are time-invariant and should not directly affect a difference-in-differences estimate. To address these shortcomings, we estimate our main models with and without controls, and interact the controls with a dummy for period after the 1919 election to investigate if their effects vary between the two electoral cycles. We also use some of the socio-structural variables to estimate heterogeneous effects by splitting our sample into industrialized and non-industrialized or urban and rural municipalities.

Empirical Analysis

Our preferred research design is a difference-in-difference estimator using linear regression to analyse the association between violence and vote shares (e.g., Cunningham, 2021, Ch.9). Adopting the diff-in-diff to our analysis challenge means the following: First, compute the average differences in vote shares of anti-system parties over time (different elections) in the same unit (municipality/county). Second, compare the average over-time differences of units that experienced violence (treatment) to those that did not (control).

The identifying assumption for this research design is that, if no treatment occurred, the differ-

---

[16]Figure A1 in the Online Appendix shows the geographic distribution of our violence data.

[17]Additionally, Acemoglu et al. (2022) provide information on geographic features including elevation and municipality size that might affect violence, but their relationship with voting is theoretically unclear.

ence between the treated group and the untreated group would have been constant over time. In our case, this means that absent political violence the change in fascist and socialist vote share across elections would have been the same in the group of municipalities which experienced political violence and in those which did not. While it is impossible to prove this assumption, showing that voting trends prior to violence exposure were statistically indistinguishable between units that later experienced violence and those that did not go a long way in making this research design plausible. Using information on the socialist vote share in 1913 enables us to test the parallel trends assumption for one of the anti-system parties. Visual inspection suggests parallel pre-treatment trends (see Figure A3 in our Online Appendix).

Since political actors decided whether to engage in violence and where, municipalities are not randomly assigned to treatment. The non-random assignment to treatment is not problematic in itself as it does not violate the parallel trends assumption and does not undermine our ability to identify average treatment effects on the treated (ATT) (Cunningham, 2021). However, it raises concern about the potential endogeneity of the treatment. For instance, fascists might have targeted violence to areas with pre-treatment characteristics favourable to the rise of fascism even in the absence of violence. In such a scenario, parallel trends would not hold. Although it is impossible to theoretically rule out this scenario, we address this concern in two ways: First, we explore the effect of only leftist violence, for which our data indicate parallel trends. Second, we test heterogeneous effects to check whether Fascist violence was more beneficial in some municipalities than in others, and compare these results to the prevalence of Fascist violence. Both tests alleviate the endogeneity concern.

We estimate the following models:

$$voteshare_{itp} = \beta_1 \times period_2 + \beta_2 \times violence_{itp} + \beta_3 \times violence_{itp} \times period_2 + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

We estimate the vote share for each unit i at each election t and run separate equations for each anti-system party p. We are primarily interested in the estimate β_3 which captures differences in electoral trends from the 1919 election (period 1) the 1921 election (period 2) between municipalities that experienced violence and those that did not. We run two regression models, one for fascist

16

and another for communist violence. We expect that β_3 should have a positive effect on Fascist vote shares, but a negative effect on Socialist vote shares ($H2$).

Results

Table I presents our main estimation results. Models 1 and 2 estimate the effect of violent events involving extreme right and left actors on the vote share of the Fascist party. Models 3 and 4 do the same for the vote shares of the Socialist party. As expected, the estimates of fascist violence in Models 1 and 2 are both positive, whereas the coefficient of leftist violence in Models 3 and 4 are both negative. All estimated treatment effects are statistically significant and substantially meaningful. Clashes between the actors of the radical right and left, i.e., almost all of the events captured by the fascist violence indicator, increase the vote share of the Fascist party by 7.3 percentage points relative to 1919 and municipalities that did not experience violence. Simultaneously, they suppress the Socialist vote share by more than 12 percentage points. The effects of leftist violence, both against fascists and other targets, is only slightly weaker: it increases the vote share of the Fascist party by 5.5 percentage points and decreases the Socialist party's electoral result by 9.6 percentage points. Thus, the effect of violence on vote shares is clearly asymmetric. Voters support nationalist anti-system parties when experiencing violence by the non-nationalist Socialist party ($H1a$) and by the nationalist Fascist party ($H2a$). Conversely, voters punish leftist parties that are seen as a threat to the political and economic status quo in municipalities where these parties committed violence ($H1b$) and in municipalities that experienced violence by the radical right ($H2b$).

One question about the results presented in Table I is whether the estimates of fascist and leftist violence are individually meaningful. After all, fascist violence in our sample almost always involves clashes with leftist actors. To address this issue, we test for the independent effect of leftist violence in Figure 2. The plot compares the coefficient estimates of leftist violence from Table I, with an alternative measure that captures only municipalities which experienced leftist

Table I. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence and antidemocratic party support in Italy, 1919-1921.

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.073***		−0.122***	
	(0.007)		(0.035)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.055***		−0.096***
		(0.006)		(0.028)
R-squared	0.172	0.170	0.008	0.008

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; constituent terms of the interaction not shown.

but not fascist violence. In line with our expectations, we find that the effect of exclusively leftist violence continues to exert a positive and significant effect on the vote share of the Fascist party (red point-range) and a negative effect on the vote share Socialist party (purple point-range). More importantly, neither of the two estimates of exclusive leftist violence differs significantly from our main estimates, and the two estimates of leftist violence on the vote shares of the two anti-system parties are clearly distinct from one another, thus reinforcing the hypothesized asymmetric consequences of political violence.

Mechanisms

We now turn to exploring the mechanisms that link violence and vote choice. In the absence of individual-level data, we rely on aggregate vote shares, though at a highly resolved geographical unit. We first explore whether the effect of violence operates through direct or indirect experience. We then turn to the question which type of voters violence is likely to influence.

Table II adds coefficients that capture the occurrence of violence in neighboring municipalities to our main difference-in-differences design from Table I. The models thus compare the changes in vote shares of anti-system parties between the 1919 and 1921 election between municipalities that saw fascist/leftist violence in neighboring municipalities and those that did not. Additionally,

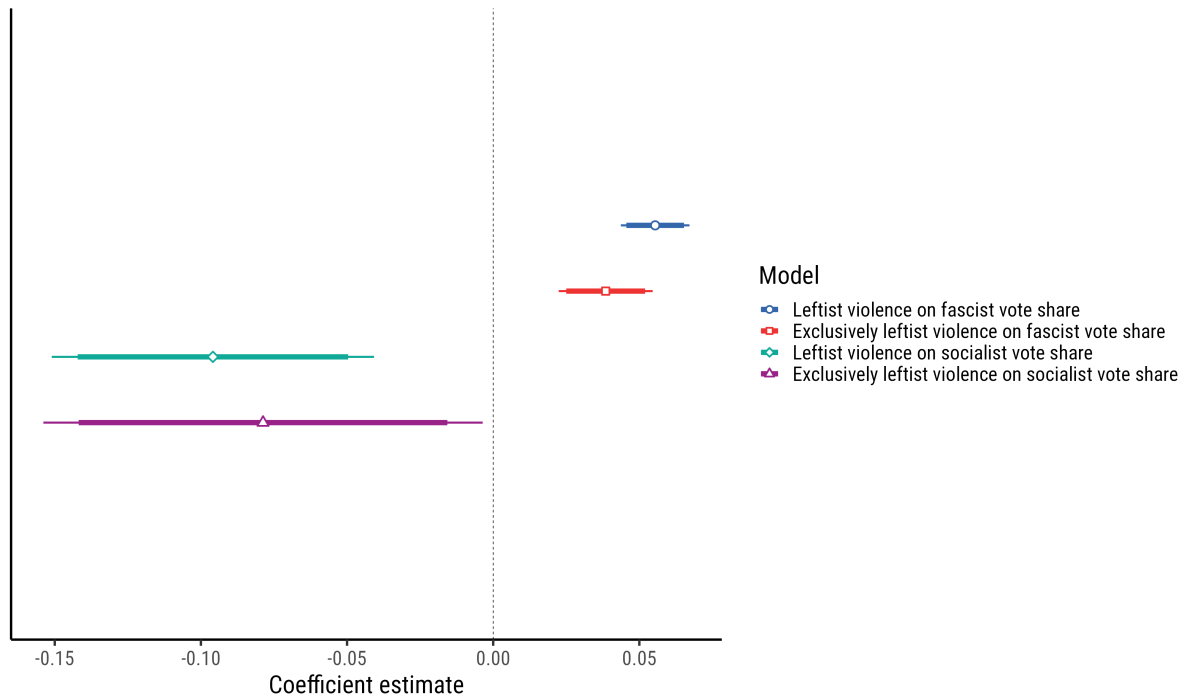Figure 2. Leftist violence and exclusively leftist violence

Model
- ⬤ Leftist violence on fascist vote share
- ⬤ Exclusively leftist violence on fascist vote share
- ⬤ Leftist violence on socialist vote share
- ⬤ Exclusively leftist violence on socialist vote share

Table II. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence in neighbouring municipalities and antidemocratic party support in Italy, 1919-1921.

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.061***		−0.101**	
	(0.007)		(0.034)	
Period 2 * Neighbor fascist violence	0.068***		−0.120***	
	(0.004)		(0.020)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.047***		−0.082**
		(0.006)		(0.028)
Period 2 * Neighbor leftist violence		0.049***		−0.087***
		(0.004)		(0.017)
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.204	0.192	0.028	0.027

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; constituent terms of the interaction not shown.

the specifications contain the original diff-in-diff effect of violence within the municipality. We note two key results: First, neighboring violence has a near-identical influence on anti-system vote shares as violence within municipalities. The estimated effect sizes resemble local violence in direction, size, and significance levels. Second, adding violence in neighboring municipalities only affects the estimated effects for local violence to a limited extent. None of the effects of local violence diminishes by more than 18%. Thus, the combined local and neighborhood effect of violence almost doubles compared to a mere local effect and increases support for the Fascist party by almost 13 percentage points on average. Our results thus indicate that Fascist violence did not only operate by "ruthlessly destroy[ing] socialism and its network of civic and political centres" (Alcalde, 2017, 75) but by evoking the Fascist party as defenders of order and/or scaring potential supporters of the Socialist Party. Hearing and reading about violence in neighboring municipalities affected vote choice by nearly as much as violence within the same municipality. The limited number of victims within municipalities further reinforces the interpretation that violence affects voters not because they experience it directly but because it paints the right as effective defenders against the Socialist threat and creates an atmosphere of fear.[18]

How did the direct or indirect experience of violence affect voters? Did it mobilize right-wing voters in 1921 that had not voted in 1919? Did it depress turnout among Socialist supporters? Or did it actually make some voters change their vote from the radical left in 1919 to the radical right in 1921? These questions are difficult to answer without individual-level data. However, we provide tentative results by exploring the heterogeneous effects of violence on support for anti-system parties. To do so, we split our sample two ways. First, we distinguish between more and less industrialized municipalities; second, we separate municipalities where agriculture dominates from those in which it does not.[19] We then explore whether the effects of violence differ between those samples.
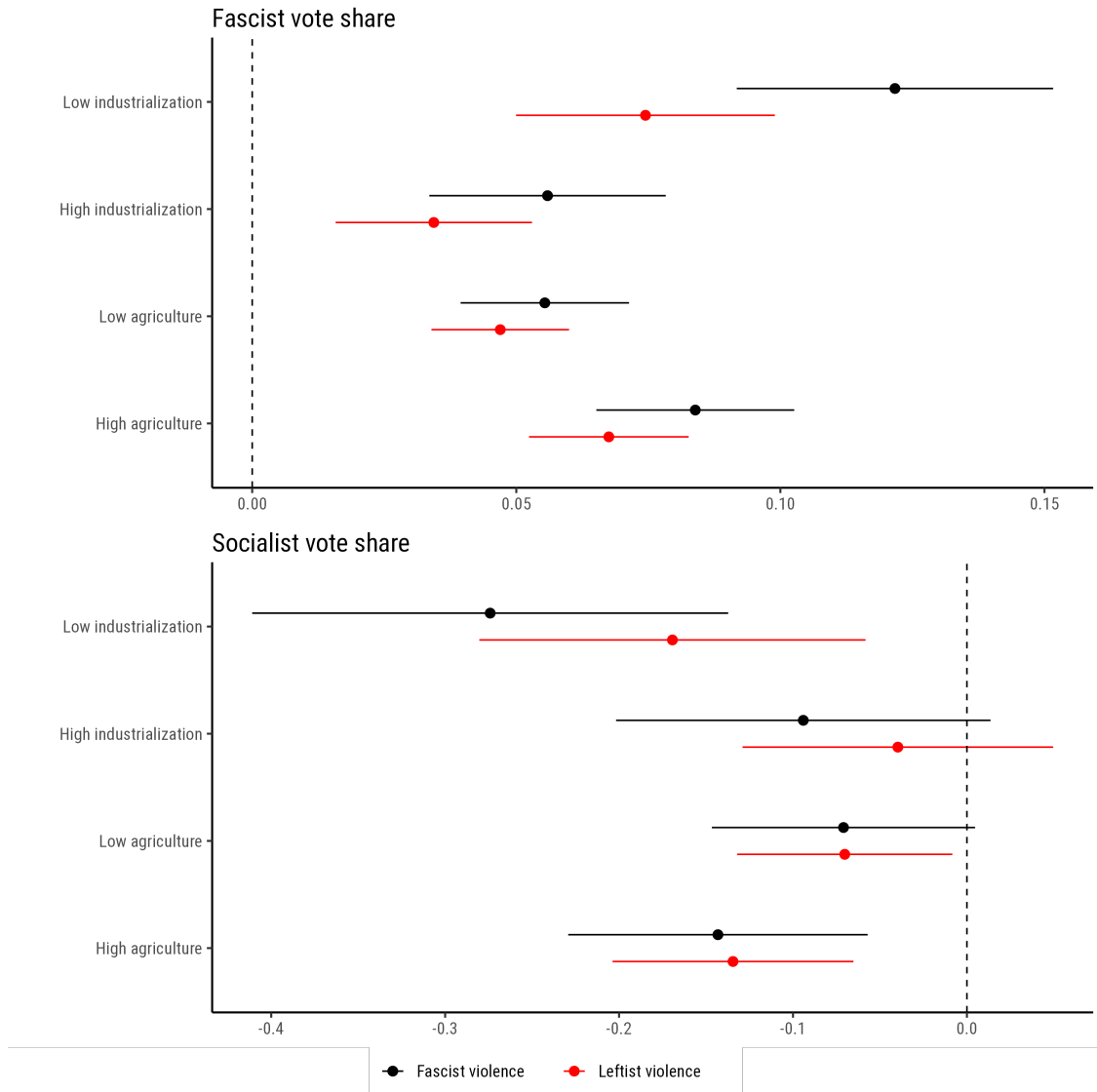
Figure 3 depicts the heterogeneous effects of fascist violence (black point-ranges) and leftist

---

[18]On average, there were 1.13 fatalities and 4.56 injuries per event.

[19]We split the sample at the respective medians of the variables *Share of industrial workers* and *Share of sharecroppers*.

Figure 3. Heterogeneous effects of political violence on electoral support

violence (red) on Fascist (top) and Socialist vote shares (bottom). Regardless of the sub-sample, the effect of violence by either actor increases Fascist vote share (top). Notably, the effect is particularly pronounced in less industrial and more agricultural municipalities. The differences between these sub-samples are statistically significant. Conversely, violence substantively reduces the Socialist vote share (bottom), especially in less industrialized municipalities. The impact of violence on Socialist electoral results is slightly stronger in more agricultural municipalities but the differences fail to reach statistical significance. Taken together these analyses suggest that violence had less of an effect on highly industrialized, Socialist strongholds. Thus, our results reject an interpretation that emphasizes reduced turnout among core supporters of the Socialist party, the industrial working class.[20] Rather, violence predominantly reduced the large gains the Socialists had made in the 1919 election in more rural constituencies with their promise of land reform, a finding that is consistent with historical interpretations (Brustein and Berntson, 1999, 163-4).

These findings align with the theoretical mechanisms we sketched above. First, nationalist violence benefited the Fascist party across all municipalities, suggesting that the general effect of loss aversion operated against perceived threat posed by the Socialist party. Second, in most democracies more conservative voters, and thus voters with greater authoritarian predispositions, inhabit rural rather than areas. If this pattern also holds for interwar Italy, the larger effect of fascist violence on Fascist vote shares in more rural areas indicates support for our second theoretical mechanism. Third, within rural municipalities, Fascist electoral support in 1921 seems to have been drawn from two sources: for one, landless peasants who abandoned the Socialists for Fascist candidates in 1921 because the party offered them land ownership rather than the socialization of large landholdings (ibid., 164); for another, the mobilization of middle and upper class voters who felt threatened by the Socialist program of land reform (Alcalde, 2017, 49). Electoral support from both of these groups hint at dynamics depicted in our two rationalist mechanisms. Radical-

---

[20]Moreover, descriptive turnout data at the province-level do not reveal any systematic relationship with violence (see Figure A2 in our Online Appendix.) These patterns suggest that the alternative explanation, where violence generally leads to electoral losses but depresses turnout more among out-group voters, is unlikely to hold in our case.

right violence against non-nationalist out-groups signaled the promise of *club goods* to landless peasants, and the defense of the economic *status quo* to middle and upper class voters.

Robustness tests

Our main results show that political violence by nationalist radical-right actor and non-nationalist radical left actors have a positive effect on radical-right vote shares but diminish electoral support for the left. Evaluating treatment and control units with respect to Socialist vote shares prior to treatment, we found no indication that these units developed distinctly (Figure A3). We are reassured by these parallel pre-treatment trends, which suggest that fundamental differences between treated and control units are unlikely. Nevertheless several other threats to the robustness of our results remain, among them omitted variable bias and strategic selection of treatment units, a form of reverse causality in which the perpetrators of violence strategically commit violence in those units in which they expect the highest payoffs in terms of vote shares. We begin by discussing the threat posed by strategic selection before contrasting the potential bias from omitting variables with possible bias from posttreatment variables (Dworschak, Online First).

We argue that strategic selection bias is unlikely to drive our results for two main reasons. First, we find that violence committed by leftist actors actually decreases the vote share of the Socialist party and leads to Fascist party gains. This effect runs counter to the logic of strategic selection. If leftist actors indeed targeted those municipalities where they expected the greatest vote gains, then we would actually underestimate the backlash effect of leftist violence. Second, historical accounts and our data show that Fascist violence was mostly reactive rather than anticipatory (e.g., Alcalde, 2017, 50&77). Radical right actors targeted leftist activists where the Socialists had made gains in 1919 (Acemoglu et al., 2022), or where radical-left actors had mobilized in both violent and non-violent ways prior to the 1921 election. Similarly, our data reveal that violence by the radical right did not cluster simply in rural areas, where the Fascist party achieved their largest gains, but was also common in industrial and urban areas where the Socialist party experienced smaller losses in the 1921 elections. These patterns accord with the bounded rationality interpretation

23

advanced by Weyland (2021, Ch.3), who argues that leftist activists in the early post-war years were inspired by the Russian Revolution and acted in the quasi-religious expectation of a global communist revolution. Similarly, the reaction by the nationalist right was driven by exaggerated fears of such a revolution, and met leftist gains with disproportional violence (ibid., Ch.4).

Another threat to the robustness of our findings stems from omitted variables that correlate spatially and temporally with the violence, we observe between the 1919 and 1921 elections. We re-estimate our main specification from Table I with municipality-fixed effects and a range of time-invariant geographic and socio-demographic control variables from Acemoglu et al. (2022) that we interact with the dummy variable for the 1921 election to check if contextual, municipality-specific factors change the influence on election outcomes over time. The results of these models reduce the size of our main estimates by up to 40% but they remain statistically significant (see Online Appendix, Tables A5 and A6). We further probe the sensitivity of our results to omitted confounders using the simulation approach developed by Cinelli and Hazlett (2020). Even if we overlooked a confounder ten times as strong as one of our most influential controls, the share of veterans by municipality interacted with the post-1919 period, this would not invalidate our results (see Figures A4 and A5 along with discussion in Online Appendix).

Table III. Diff-in-diff spatial lag regression models of political violence and antidemocratic party support in Italy, 1919-1921.

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.035***			-0.047^*
	(0.005)			(0.023)
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.030***	-0.033	
		(0.004)	(0.018)	
N	10344	10344	10344	10344
ρ	0.602***	0.604***	0.662***	0.661***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Lagrange Multiplier test	394.32***	377.39***	28.54***	25.43***
Log Likelihood	18058.050	18060.530	3115.601	3116.204
AIC	-36104.100	-36109.070	-6219.201	-6220.408

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

We present one candidate for a potentially strong confounder, the influence of neighboring units on the outcome in a given municipality. At first glance, it seems plausible that units as small as municipalities should affect each other. Indeed, we find evidence of strong spatial autocorrelation when we fit our main specifications with spatial autoregressive (SAR) regression models in Table III (Anselin, 2013, Ch.6). All our estimates of spatial correlation (rho) exceed 0.6, a very sizable value. While our treatment effects on Fascist vote shares continue to be precisely estimated and point into the right direction in Models 1 and 2, only fascist violence has a significant effect on Socialist vote shares (Model 4).[21] These results indicate that political violence continues to increase the support of anti-system parties from the radical right, while its effect on radical-left parties is less robust. Importantly, we still reject the null of no difference between violence effects on the two different anti-system parties.

In light of recent advances in the understanding of bias from so-called "bad controls", it is, however, questionable whether we should include spatially lagged values of our outcome variable, or any other post-treatment controls, because we risk inducing post-treatment or collider bias

---

[21]It makes little sense to discuss the size of the treatment effects because they are mediated by the spatial autoregressive parameter.

([Cinelli, Forney and Pearl, Online First](); [Dworschak, Online First]()). Collider bias arises when the treatment (X) and the outcome of interest (Y) jointly cause a third variable (Z). Why would this affect our results? First, political violence pre-dates the electoral outcomes observed in any municipality i. Second, we have shown that violence in neighboring municipalities j affects electoral outcomes in municipality i. Third, the argument for including a spatial lag derives from the fact that outcomes in j affect outcomes in i and vice versa. Thus, spatial autocorrelation may well result from our treatment and be partially caused by our outcome.[22] This leaves us in a bind between omitted variable and posttreatment bias. It is likely that spatial diffusion processes operate because voting sentiments in one municipality affect voting sentiments in neighboring municipalities. Yet at the same time, part of the variation in the spatial patterns of electoral outcomes is caused by our treatment, thus inducing posttreatment bias. Caught between these two biases, we argue that the consistency in positive effects of violence on Fascist vote shares and in the differences between the effects of violence on Fascist and Socialist vote shares supports our interpretation of an asymmetric effect of political violence in favour of extreme nationalist anti-system parties.

Conclusion

In this paper, we argue that political violence committed by non-governmental actors has an asymmetric effect on their popularity. Whereas political violence committed by radical right, nationalist actors improves their electoral standing with the electorate and reduces vote shares for non-nationalist actors, violence by the latter has the reverse effect. We attribute these asymmetric consequences to differences in threat perceptions experienced by voters. Right-wing actors paint violence by non-nationalist actors as an attack on the nation and portray themselves as a defender of the people. Violence by the radical right then underlines their defensive capabilities. Our empirical analysis of violence and electoral support for the Fascist radical right and the Socialist radical left lends support to our theoretical argument. Radical-right violence leads to an increase in votes

---

[22]Similar considerations apply to several control variables that Acemoglu et al. (2022) obtain from the 1921 and 1931 census, thus after we observe our treatment and outcome measures. See Online Appendix C for details.

for the far-right Fascist party but decreases vote shares of the far-left Socialist party. Conversely, violence by the radical left has a detrimental effect on Socialist vote shares. Our research design makes it plausible that our results have a causal interpretation.

Our research eerily echoes recent findings on the positive correlation between nationalist violence and electoral support for nationalist, far-right parties in contemporary democracies (Eger and Olzak, 2023; Krause and Matsunaga, 2023; Prasad, Daxecker and Batra, 2024). Importantly, our analysis is the first that investigates actual electoral outcomes, rather than intended vote choice, in a democracy that later failed. Some observers question the relevance of interwar regime outcomes for the threat faced by contemporary democracies by pointing to the unique dynamics of ideological competition between communists and fascists in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and World War 1 (e.g., Weyland, 2021; Acemoglu et al., 2022). In contrast, we stress the parallels in past and present nationalist ideologies, and increasing levels of violence (Riaz, Bischof and Wagner, 2023). Our study thus contributes to a "[f]urther understanding when, why, and how national narratives of which types hinder or help democracy" (Mylonas and Tudor, 2021, 117). Yet, our study, as many contemporary analyses, only covers one case. To probe the generalizablity and possible boundaries of our argument, it is imperative to compare our results to other cases and types of violent nationalist competition and vote choice, such as ethno-nationalist conflict in interwar eastern Europe.

Next to addressing threats to democratic survival, our study also raises new questions for the literature on electoral violence. Specifically, our study heeds the call by Birch, Daxecker and Höglund (2020, 7) to "explain the various perpetrators and targets of electoral violence." We stress the motivations and constraints faced by nationalist and non-nationalist anti-system parties when engaging in non-state violence. Existing work on electoral violence, might explore how party ideology of incumbents as opposed to opposition parties affects the consequences of electoral violence, especially when determining vote choice. Moreover, our study contrasts with findings of voters' dislike of violence (Burchard, 2020; Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas, 2020; Garcia-Montoya, Arjona and Lacombe, 2022; Eady, Hjorth and Dinesen, 2023). Future work should explore the con-

ditions of voters' rejection of violence, which constitutes a strong "guardrail" against democratic deconsolidation.

References

Acemoglu, Daron, Giuseppe De Feo, Giacomo De Luca and Gianluca Russo. 2022. "War, Social-ism, and the Rise of Fascism: An Empirical Exploration." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 137(2):1233–1296.

Alcalde, Ángel. 2017. *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe*. Vol. 50 Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Anselin, Luc. 2013. *Spatial Econometrics: Methods and Models*. Vol. 4 Springer Science & Business Media.

Art, David. 2022. "The Myth of Global Populism." *Perspectives on Politics* 20:999–1011.

Balcells, Laia and Stathis N Kalyvas. 2014. "Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration, and Out-comes of Civil Wars." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58(8):1390–1418.

Berman, Chantal, Killian Clarke and Rima Majed. 2023. "From Victims to Dissidents: Legacies of Violence and Popular Mobilization in Iraq (2003–2018)." *American Political Science Review* Online First:1–22.

Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 27(1):5–19.

Birch, Sarah, Ursula Daxecker and Kristine Höglund. 2020. "Electoral Violence: An Introduction." *Journal of Peace Research* 57(1):3–14.

Boix, Carles, Michael Miller and Sebastian Rosato. 2013. "A Complete Data Set of Political Regimes, 1800–2007." *Comparative Political Studies* 46(12):1523–1554.

Brustein, William and Marit Berntson. 1999. "Interwar Fascist Popularity in Europe and the De-fault of the Left." *European Sociological Review* 15(2):159–178.

Burchard, Stephanie M. 2020. "Get Out the Vote–Or Else: The Impact of Fear of Election Violence on Voters." *Democratization* 27(4):588–604.

Callens, Marie-Sophie and Bart Meuleman. 2023. "Can Nationalism and Group Conflict Explain Cultural and Economic Threat Perceptions? Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Evidence from the ISSP (1995–2013)." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* Online First.

Canetti, Daphna, Brian J Hall, Carmit Rapaport and Carly Wayne. 2013. "Exposure to Political Violence and Political Extremism." *European Psychologist* 18(4):263–272.

Capoccia, Giovanni. 2005. *Defending Democracy: Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cardoza, Anthony L. 1982. *Agrarian Elites and Italian Fascism: The Province of Bologna, 1901-1926*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Carsten, Francis L. 1967. *The Rise of Fascism*. London, UK: B. T. Batsford Ltd.

Cinelli, Carlos, Andrew Forney and Judea Pearl. Online First. "A Crash Course in Good and Bad Controls." *Sociological Methods & Research* p. 00491241221099552.

Cinelli, Carlos and Chad Hazlett. 2020. "Making Sense of Sensitivity: Extending Omitted Variable Bias." *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series B: Statistical Methodology* 82(1):39–67.

Condra, Luke N, James D Long, Andrew C Shaver and Austin L Wright. 2018. "The Logic of Insurgent Electoral Violence." *American Economic Review* 108(11):3199–3231.

Corbetta, Piergiorgio and Maria Serena Piretti. 2009. *Atlante Storico-Elettorale d'Italia: 1861–2008*. Bologna: Zanichelli.

Costalli, Stefano and Andrea Ruggeri. 2015. "Indignation, Ideologies, and Armed Mobilization: Civil War in Italy, 1943–45." *International Security* 40(2):119–157.

Cunningham, Scott. 2021. *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dahl, Robert A. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Daniele, Gianmarco and Gemma Dipoppa. 2017. "Mafia, Elections and Violence Against Politicians." *Journal of Public Economics* 154:10–33.

Daxecker, Ursula E. 2014. "All Quiet on Election Day? International Election Observation and Incentives for Pre-Election Violence in African Elections." *Electoral Studies* 34:232–243.

Daxecker, Ursula, Elio Amicarelli and Alexander Jung. 2019. "Electoral Contention and Violence (ECAV): A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 56(5):714–723.

De Felice, Renzo. 1965. *Mussolini il rivoluzionario: 1883-1920*. Torino: Einaudi.

De Juan, Alexander, Felix Haass, Carlo Koos, Sascha Riaz and Thomas Tichelbaecker. 2023. "War and Nationalism: How WW1 Battle Deaths Fueled Civilians' Support for the Nazi Party." *American Political Science Review* Online First:1–19.

Dworschak, Christoph. Online First. "Bias Mitigation in Empirical Peace and Conflict Studies: A Short Primer on Posttreatment Variables." *Journal of Peace Research* pp. 1–15.

Eady, Gregory, Frederik Hjorth and Peter Thisted Dinesen. 2023. "Do Violent Protests Affect Expressions of Party Identity? Evidence from the Capitol Insurrection." *American political science review* 117(3):1151–1157.

Eck, Kristine and Lisa Hultman. 2007. "One-Sided Violence Against Civilians in War Insights from New Fatality Data." *Journal of Peace Research* 44(2):233–246.

Eger, Maureen A and Susan Olzak. 2023. "The Polarizing Effect of Anti-Immigrant Violence on Radical Right Sympathies in Germany." *International Migration Review* 57(2):746–777.

Ferrín, Mónica, Moreno Mancosu and Teresa M Cappiali. 2020. "Terrorist Attacks and Europeans' Attitudes Towards Immigrants: An Experimental Approach." *European Journal of Political Research* 59(3):491–516.

Fjelde, Hanne and Lisa Hultman. 2014. "Weakening the Enemy: A Disaggregated Study of Violence against Civilians in Africa." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58(7):1230–1257.

Franzinelli, Mimmo. 2003. *Squadristi: Protagonisti e Tecniche della Violenza Fascista, 1919–1922*. Milan: Mondadori.

Garcia-Montoya, Laura, Ana Arjona and Matthew Lacombe. 2022. "Violence and Voting in the United States: How School Shootings Affect Elections." *American Political Science Review* 116(3):807–826.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Gentile, Emilio. 2021. *Storia del Partito fascista: Moviemento e milizia, 1919-1922*. 2nd ed. Bari: Laterza.

Gerwarth, Robert. 2012. Bolshevism as Fantasy–Fear of Revolution and Counter-Revolutionary Violence, 1917–23. In *War in Peace–Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press pp. 40–51.

Gerwarth, Robert. 2016. *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End*. Macmillan.

Getmansky, Anna and Thomas Zeitzoff. 2014. "Terrorism and Voting: The Effect of Rocket Threat on Voting in Israeli Elections." *American Political Science Review* 108(3):588–604.

Giavazzi, Francesco, Felix Iglhaut, Giacomo Lemoli and Gaia Rubera. 2024. "Terrorist Attacks, Cultural Incidents, and the Vote for Radical Parties: Analyzing Text from Twitter." *American Journal of Political Science* 68:1002–1021.

Gleditsch, Nils Petter, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg and Havard Strand. 2002. "Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5):615–637.

Gutiérrez-Romero, Roxana and Adrienne LeBas. 2020. "Does Electoral Violence Affect Vote Choice and Willingness to Vote? Conjoint Analysis of a Vignette Experiment." *Journal of peace research* 57(1):77–92.

Hadzic, Dino, David Carlson and Margit Tavits. 2020. "How Exposure to Violence Affects Ethnic Voting." *British Journal of Political Science* 50(1):345–362.

Hafner-Burton, Emilie M, Susan D Hyde and Ryan S Jablonski. 2018. "Surviving Elections: Election Violence, Incumbent Victory and Post-Election Repercussions." *British Journal of Political Science* 48(2):459–488.

Harbers, Imke, Cécile Richetta and Enrike Van Wingerden. 2023. "Shaping Electoral Outcomes: Intra-and Anti-systemic Violence in Indian Assembly Elections." *British Journal of Political Science* 53(2):424–440.

Harish, S. P. and Andrew T. Little. 2017. "The Political Violence Cycle." *American Political Science Review* 111(2):237–255.

Höglund, Kristine. 2009. "Electoral Violence in Conflict-Ridden Societies: Concepts, Causes, and Consequences." *Terrorism and political violence* 21(3):412–427.

Kahneman, Daniel, Jack L Knetsch and Richard H Thaler. 1991. "Anomalies: The Endowment Effect, Loss Aversion, and Status Quo Bias." *Journal of Economic perspectives* 5(1):193–206.

Kalmoe, Nathan P. 2020. *With Ballots and Bullets: Partisanship and Violence in the American Civil War*. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY.

Kalmoe, Nathan P and Lilliana Mason. 2022. *Radical American partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL.

Krause, Werner and Miku Matsunaga. 2023. "Does Right-Wing Violence Affect Public Support for Radical Right Parties? Evidence from Germany." *Comparative Political Studies* 56(14):2269–2305.

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Crown.

Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A Way. 2023. "Democracy's Surprising Resilience." *Journal of Democracy* 34(4):5–20.

Lyall, Jason, Graeme Blair and Kosuke Imai. 2013. "Explaining Support for Combatants During Wartime: A Survey Experiment in Afghanistan." *American Political Science Review* 107(4):679–705.

Müller-Crepon, Carl. 2022. "Local Ethno-Political Polarization and Election Violence in Majoritarian vs. Proportional Systems." *Journal of Peace Research* 59(2):242–258.

Mylonas, Harris and Maya Tudor. 2021. "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24:109–132.

O'Donnell, Guillermo, Philippe C Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore, MD: JHU Press.

Osborne, Danny, Thomas H Costello, John Duckitt and Chris G Sibley. 2023. "The psychological causes and societal consequences of authoritarianism." *Nature Reviews Psychology* 2(4):220–232.

Pickard, Harry, Georgios Efthyvoulou and Vincenzo Bove. 2023. "What's Left After Right-Wing Extremism? The Effects on Political Orientation." *European Journal of Political Research* 62(1):338–351.

Prasad, Neeraj, Ursula Daxecker and Kartikeya Batra. 2024. "Sowing Discord: How Violence Transforms Political Identities and Cleavages." *Working Paper: University of Amsterdam* .

Przeworski, Adam. 2019. *Crises of Democracy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Przeworski, Adam, Michael E Alvarez, Jose A. Cheibub and Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Rauschenbach, Mascha and Katrin Paula. 2019. "Intimidating Voters with Violence and Mobilizing Them with Clientelism." *Journal of Peace Research* 56(5):682–696.

Riaz, Sascha, Daniel Bischof and Markus Wagner. 2023. "Out-group Threat and Xenophobic Hate Crimes: Evidence of Local Intergroup Conflict Dynamics between Immigrants and Natives." Online First.

Rød, Espen Geelmuyden, Carl Henrik Knutsen and Håvard Hegre. 2020. "The Determinants of Democracy: A Sensitivity Analysis." *Public Choice* 185(1):87–111.

Sartori, Giovanni. 2005. *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis.* Colchester, UK: ECPR press. First published in 1976 by Cambridge University Press.

Schedler, Andreas. 1998. "What is Democratic Consolidation?" *Journal of Democracy* 9(2):91–107.

Schrock-Jacobson, Gretchen. 2012. "The Violent Consequences of the Nation: Nationalism and the Initiation of Interstate War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56(5):825–852.

Schumann, Dirk. 2010. *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933: Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War.* Berghahn Books: Oxford, UK.

Shayo, Moses. 2009. "A Model of Social Identity with an Application to Political Economy: Nation, Class, and Redistribution." *American Political science review* 103(2):147–174.

Snyder, Jack. 2000. *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict.* New York, NY: Norton.

Staniland, Paul. 2014. "Violence and Democracy." *Comparative Politics* 47(1):99–118.

Sundberg, Ralph and Erik Melander. 2013. "Introducing the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 50(4):523–532.

Sundberg, Ralph, Kristine Eck and Joakim Kreutz. 2012. "Introducing the UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 49(2):351–362.

Trelles, Alejandro and Miguel Carreras. 2012. "Bullets and Votes: Violence and Electoral Participation in Mexico." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 4(2):89–123.

Tudor, Maya and Dan Slater. 2021. "Nationalism, Authoritarianism, and Democracy: Historical Lessons from South and Southeast Asia." *Perspectives on Politics* 19(3):706–722.

Walter, Barbara F. 2022. *How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them.* Dublin, IE: Penguin Random House UK.

Weiner, Myron. 1978. *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*. Princeton University Press Princeton, NJ.

Weyland, Kurt. 2021. *Assault on Democracy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wimmer, Andreas. 2002. *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Supplementary Material to

Political Violence & Anti-System Voting in Interwar Italy

Table of Contents

A Descriptive Statistics

Table A1. Descriptive Statistics: Anti-System Voting in Italy

Election Year	Party	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
1919	Fascists	5775	0.0038	0.032	0	0.66
1919	Socialists	5775	0.32	0.27	0	1
1921	Fascists	5358	0.051	0.071	0	0.8
1921	Socialists	5172	0.3	0.23	0	1

Table A2. Descriptive statistics: Independent and Control Variables, Italy 1919–1921

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Period 2	11550	0.5	0.5	0	1
Fascist violence	11550	0.019	0.14	0	1
Leftist violence	11550	0.029	0.17	0	1
Excl. leftist violence	11550	0.016	0.12	0	1
1911 Pop. (logged)	11550	7.7	1.1	4	13
Mun. Area (logged)	11550	7.5	1.1	2.3	12
Max. Altitude	11550	836	841	1	4810
Veteran (1896-1900) Share	11550	0.14	0.023	0.069	0.2
Foot Soldiers Casualties	11550	0.032	0.016	0	0.38
Day Laborer Share	11550	0.21	0.12	0.01	0.68
Landlord Associations	11550	0.05	0.22	0	1
Industrial Worker Share	11550	0.12	0.22	0	6
Literacy Rate 1911	11550	0.75	0.2	0.1	1
Bourgeoisie Share	11550	0.085	0.032	0.028	0.24

Table A3. Descriptive Statistics: Violent events in Italy, 1919–1921

Newspaper	Number of events
La Stampa	636
L'Avanti!	260
Total	**896**

Table A4. Descriptive Statistics: Number of treated municipalities in Italy, 1919–1921

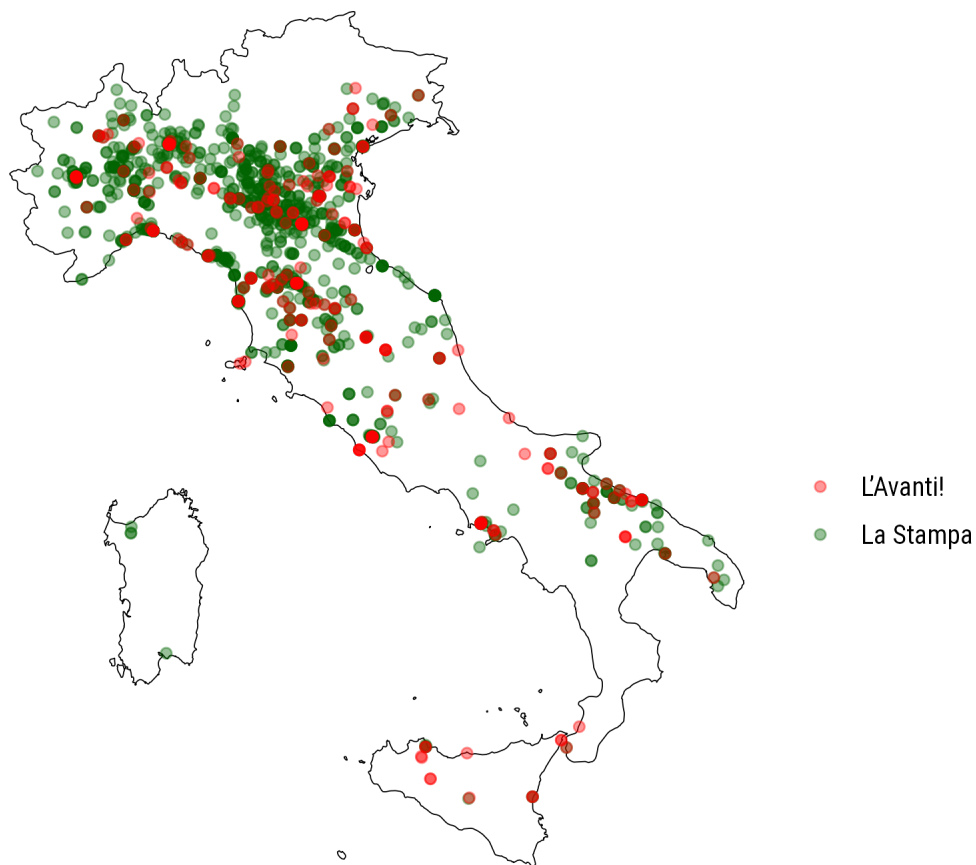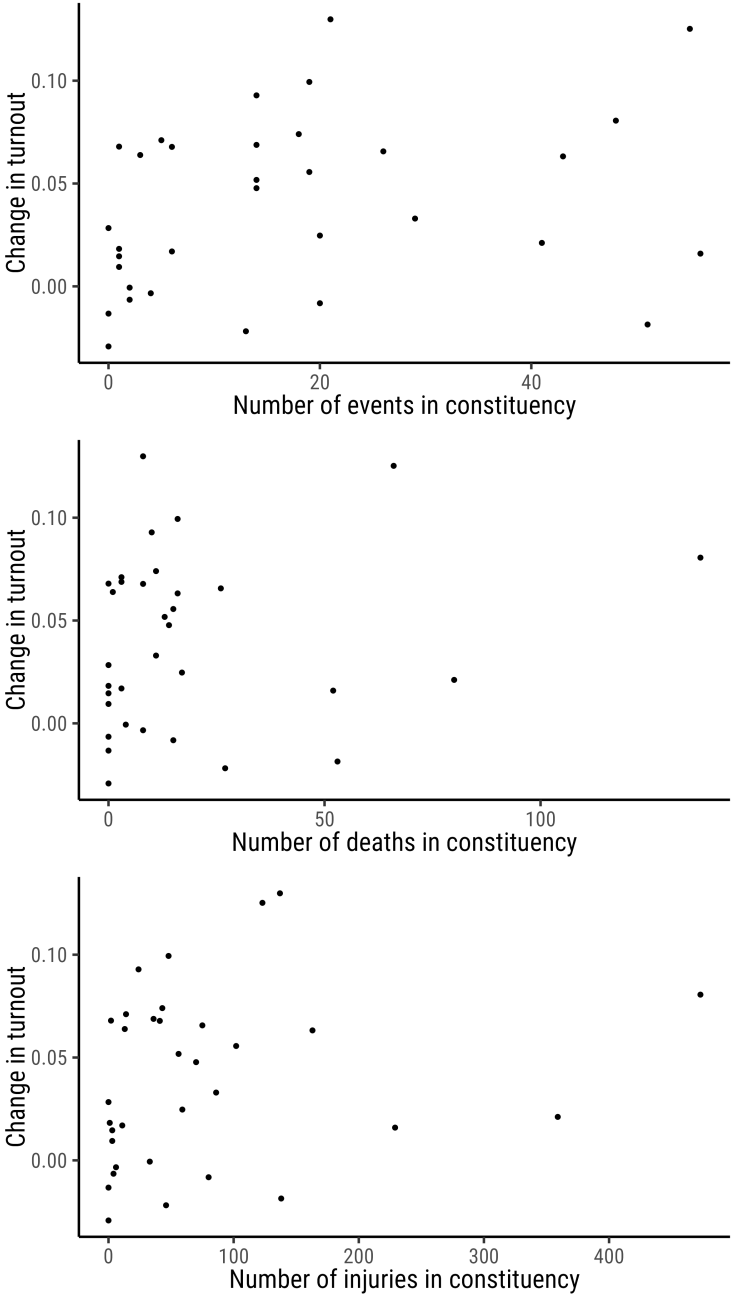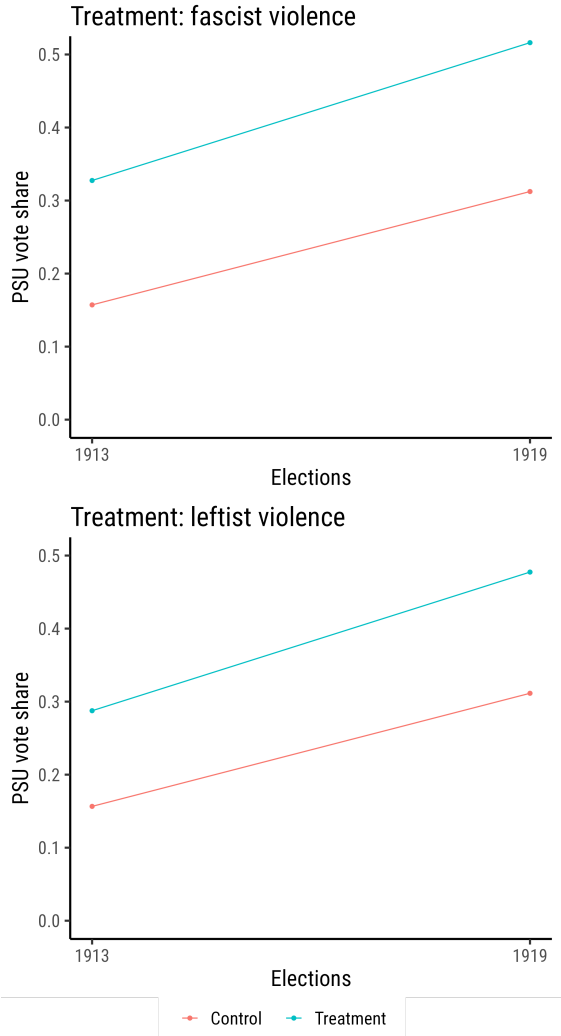| Treatment	Treated municipalities	Untreated municipalities
Fascist violence	111	5664
Leftist violence	169	5606
Excl. leftist violence	90	5685

Figure A1. Political violence in Italy, 1919–1921.

Figure A2. Political violence and changes in turnout (1919–1921) in Italy.

B Parallel Trends

Figure A3. Parallel trends for socialist vote share, 1913–1921

C   Robustness to Omitted Variables

In this section, we probe the robustness of our results to omitted confounders. Specifically, we re-estimate the main results from Table I once with municipality-fixed effects and once with multiple time-invariant controls that we interact with our election-dummy (*Period 2*). The fixed effects-specification tests for the influence of any municipality-specific effects that might affect our results. It particularly removes any variation that stems from differences between municipalities that experience violence only in *Period 2* but not in *Period 1* and municipalities that experience violence in both periods, the so-called always-takers. Adding period interactions with time-invariant controls helps us to evaluate the robustness of our results to a wide variety of socio-demographic and geographic controls that might exert a different effect on our outcomes of interest due to Fascist mobilization or other unobserved changes that occur in individual municipalities between the 1919 and 1921 elections. To probe the sensitivity of our results to additionally unobserved confounders, we implement Cinelli & Hazlett's (2020) simulation-based approach. We conclude the section by considering whether adding control variables might introduce post-treatment bias.

Table A5 adds municipality-level fixed effects to our main models from Table I. The estimates of violence on Fascist vote share are unchanged, reflecting the onset of fascist violence only after the strong showing of the Socialist party in 1919. The estimates of violence on changes in the Socialist vote share are slightly depressed but do not call into question the confidence in these results.

Table A6 re-estimates our main specifications and adds a range of potential confounder variables interacted with the dummy variable for the 1921 election (*Period 2*). Adding these controls reduces the effect of fascist and leftist violence on Fascist vote shares by one third and 40% respectively. Similarly, the decrease of the violence effects on changes in Socialist vote shares is almost exactly mirrored: fascist violence diminishes by 38.5% and socialist violence by 35.9%. In spite of these reductions of the estimated effect, all treatment effects remain statistically significant and substantively important.

Figures A4 and A5 simulate the vulnerability of our main treatment effects to potentially un-observed confounders following the procedure introduced by Cinelli and Hazlett (2020). The two plots in the top row of each graph show the effects of an unobserved confounder on the effect size of our main explanatory variables, fascist and leftist violence respectively. The bottom row displays the effect of potential confounders on t-values of our main treatments. Crossing the red line indicates reversion of estimated sign or drop of t-value below 1.995 ($p > .05$). Black triangles denote the estimated effect of our main explanatory variables. Red diamonds indicate the effect of a simulated confounder at five times the effect size of the share of veterans born between 1896 and

Table A5. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence and vote shares of anti-system parties in Italy, 1919-1921 with municipality-level fixed effects.

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.073***		−0.108***	
	(0.000)		(0.000)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.055***		−0.079***
		(0.000)		(0.000)
Constant				
Linear Covariates	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Municipality FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.025	0.024	0.001	0.001

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

1900 interacted with period 2, our strongest control, on our main estimates.

The simulation reveals two insights: first, the estimated signs of all our treatment effects are fairly robust to unobserved confounders. Omitting a confounder ten times the estimated effect size of our strongest control, the interaction between period 2 and the share of veterans born between 1896 and 1900, would barely alter the estimated effect sizes of fascist or leftist violence on the vote shares of the Fascist and Socialist party respectively.

Second, our estimates of fascist and leftist violence on changes in *Fascist vote shares* are more robust to omitted confounders than the respective treatments on *Socialist vote shares*. In the latter case, a confounder five times the size of the interaction between period 2 and the share of veterans born between 1896 and 1900 almost drops the estimated coefficients for fascist and leftist violence below the 95%-level of statistical significance. Moreover, such a confounder need only explain a very limited amount of variation in the outcome variable (partial R^2 of the confounder and outcome on the y-axis). In contrast, the effects of leftist and fascist violence on changes in Fascist vote shares is robust to a much larger confounder.

However, adding control variables to our main specification also runs the risk of inducing post-treatment bias, especially when a control is actually the cause of both the main explanatory variable, and its outcome (Cinelli, Forney and Pearl, Online First). Some of the controls that we employ clearly risk inducing such bias, as Acemoglu et al. (2022) rely on the 1921 and 1931 censuses to measure socio-demographic characteristics such as the share of industrial workers or

Table A6. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence in Italy, 1919-1921 with period-control interaction

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
P2 * Fascist violence	0.042***		−0.075*	
	(0.007)		(0.031)	
P2 * Leftist violence		0.032***		−0.064*
		(0.006)		(0.025)
P2	−0.136***	−0.135***	0.057	0.053
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.059)	(0.060)
P2 * 1911 Pop. (logged)	−0.003	−0.003	0.008	0.009
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.007)	(0.007)
P2 * Mun. Area (logged)	0.010***	0.010***	−0.017*	−0.017*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.007)	(0.007)
P2 * Max. Altitude	−0.00001***	−0.00001***	0.00001*	0.00001*
	(0.00000)	(0.00000)	(0.00001)	(0.00001)
P2 * Foot Soldiers Casualties	0.259***	0.265***	−0.156	−0.169
	(0.064)	(0.064)	(0.278)	(0.278)
P2 * Day Laborer Share	0.065***	0.063***	0.233***	0.236***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.048)	(0.048)
P2 * Landlord Associations	0.060***	0.064***	−0.175***	−0.180***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.021)	(0.021)
P2 * Industrial Worker Share	−0.004	−0.004	0.007	0.006
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.020)	(0.020)
P2 * Literacy Rate 1911	0.062***	0.059***	−0.101***	−0.099**
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.030)	(0.030)
P2 * Fascist Violence in Neighborhood	0.049***		−0.088***	
	(0.004)		(0.018)	
P2 * Leftist Violence in Neighborhood		0.034***		−0.068***
		(0.004)		(0.016)
P2 * Veteran (1896-1900) Share	0.312***	0.327***	−0.380*	−0.406*
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.187)	(0.187)
P2 * Bourgeoisie Share	0.242***	0.244***	0.814***	0.814***
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.161)	(0.161)
Constituent terms included	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.283	0.276	0.270	0.272

$^{***}p < .001$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{*}p < .05$

Figure A4. Simulating omitted variables to probe robustness of fascist (left column) and leftist violence (right column) on Fascist vote share in Models 1 & 2, Table A6.
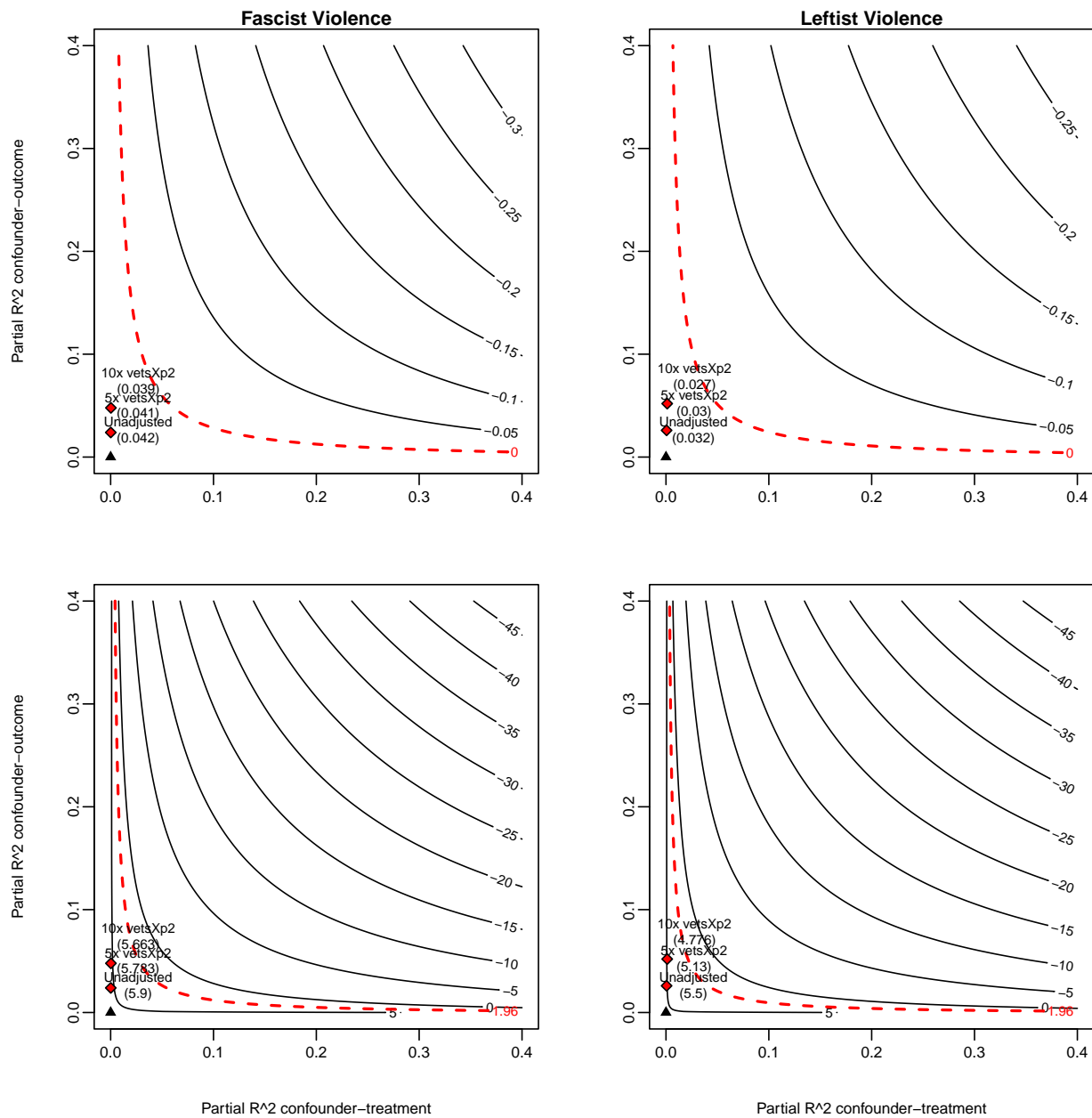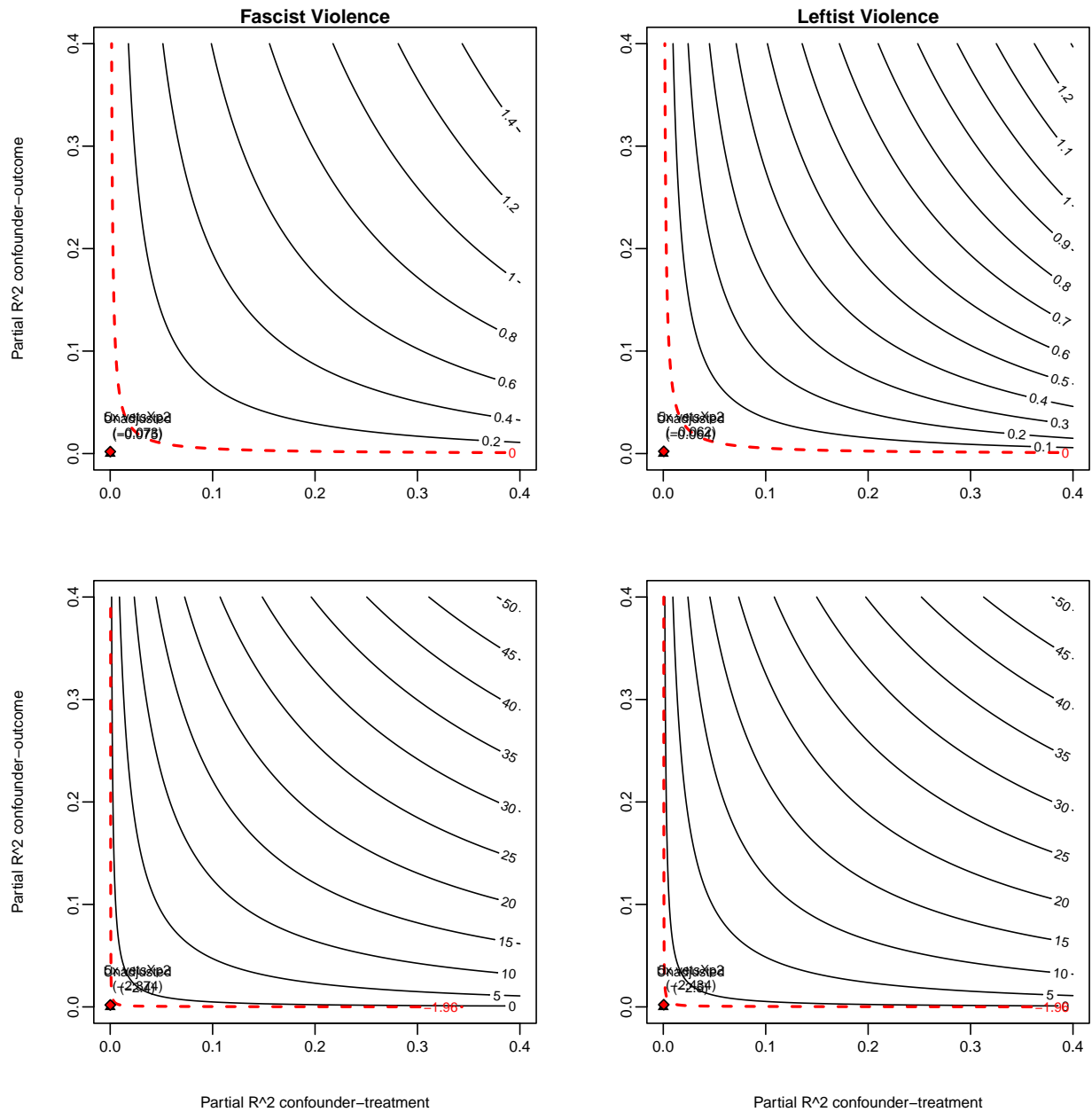
Figure A5. Simulating omitted variables to probe robustness of fascist (left column) and leftist violence (right column) on Socialist vote share in Models 3 & 4, Table A6.

day laborers in a given municipality. These measurements may be clearly affected by both violence prior to the 1919 and 1921 elections, and the respective election outcomes.

The worst offender of post-treatment bias is the spatial lag of our outcome variable that we add in Table III. Electoral outcomes in municipality j are certainly influenced by our outcome of interest, the vote shares of the Fascist and Socialist parties in municipality i. Moreover, we know that our main explanatory variables affect electoral outcomes in neighboring units, thus creating a situation in which electoral outcomes in municipality j may be caused by both X_i and Y_i. They therefore constitute "common effects" or a "bad control". The dilemma is, of course, that not including the spatial lag creates omitted variable bias, as Y_j clearly affects Y_i. The key question that arises is whether the common association arises from a causal relationship between Y_i and Y_j. Most likely, the strong spatial autocorrelation rather represents common and deep socio-structural characteristics that two neighboring municipalities share. We find it less likely that the choices of voters in municipality j truly cause the vote choices in municipality i or vice versa. Even if some of them did, they would both be affected by our treatment, political violence. Thus, we argue that models that control for many of the geographic and socio-demographic characteristics rather than the spatial lag capture some of the common, underlying features of municipalities, and diminish the risk of omitted variable bias when not including the spatial lag, while avoiding the introduction of post-treatment bias.

D   Robustness to Standard Error Specification

Table A7. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence and vote shares of anti-system parties in Italy, 1919-1921 (heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors).

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.073***		−0.122***	
	(0.012)		(0.031)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.055***		−0.096***
		(0.009)		(0.026)
Period 2	0.046***	0.045***	−0.011*	−0.011*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Fascist violence	−0.002*		0.204***	
	(0.001)		(0.022)	
Leftist violence		−0.003***		0.166***
		(0.001)		(0.019)
Constant	0.004***	0.004***	0.312***	0.311***
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.172	0.170	0.008	0.008

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Table A8. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence and vote shares of anti-system parties in Italy, 1919-1921 (region-clustered standard errors).

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.073*		−0.122**	
	(0.029)		(0.046)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.055*		−0.096**
		(0.022)		(0.035)
Period 2	0.046***	0.045***	−0.011	−0.011
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Fascist violence	−0.002		0.204***	
	(0.003)		(0.040)	
Leftist violence		−0.003		0.166***
		(0.003)		(0.032)
Constant	0.004	0.004	0.312***	0.311***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.041)	(0.041)
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.172	0.170	0.008	0.008

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Table A9. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence and vote shares of anti-system parties in Italy, 1919-1921 (province-clustered standard errors).

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.073**		−0.122**	
	(0.022)		(0.041)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.055***		−0.096**
		(0.016)		(0.031)
Period 2	0.046***	0.045***	−0.011	−0.011
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Fascist violence	−0.002		0.204***	
	(0.003)		(0.036)	
Leftist violence		−0.003		0.166***
		(0.003)		(0.032)
Constant	0.004	0.004	0.312***	0.311***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.034)	(0.034)
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.172	0.170	0.008	0.008

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Table A10. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence and vote shares of anti-system parties in Italy, 1919-1921 (circondario-clustered standard errors).

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.073***		−0.122***	
	(0.016)		(0.032)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.055***		−0.096***
		(0.013)		(0.027)
Period 2	0.046***	0.045***	−0.011	−0.011
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Fascist violence	−0.002		0.204***	
	(0.003)		(0.029)	
Leftist violence		−0.003		0.166***
		(0.003)		(0.026)
Constant	0.004	0.004	0.312***	0.311***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.022)	(0.023)
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.172	0.170	0.008	0.008

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Table A11. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence and vote shares of anti-system parties in Italy, 1919-1921 (municipality-clustered standard errors).

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.073***		−0.122***	
	(0.012)		(0.026)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.055***		−0.096***
		(0.009)		(0.019)
Period 2	0.046***	0.045***	−0.011***	−0.011***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Fascist violence	−0.002*		0.204***	
	(0.001)		(0.022)	
Leftist violence		−0.003***		0.166***
		(0.001)		(0.019)
Constant	0.004***	0.004***	0.312***	0.311***
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.172	0.170	0.008	0.008

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

A14

E   Robustness to Independent Variable Operationalization

Table A12. Diff-in-diff regression models of political violence and antidemocratic party support in Italy, 1919-1921 with violence operationalized as injuries or deaths.

	Fascist vote share		Socialist vote share	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Period 2 * Fascist violence	0.064***		−0.113***	
	(0.006)		(0.026)	
Period 2 * Leftist violence		0.054***		−0.100***
		(0.005)		(0.022)
Period 2	0.045***	0.044***	−0.010*	−0.009
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Fascist violence	−0.003		0.184***	
	(0.004)		(0.018)	
Leftist violence		−0.003		0.168***
		(0.003)		(0.016)
Constant	0.004***	0.004***	0.310***	0.308***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.003)
N	11133	11133	10947	10947
R-squared	0.176	0.175	0.011	0.013

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

F Examples of newspapers reports

Figure A6. Violence report from L'Avanti, 8 March 1921

Tragici fatti a Casale

La Camera del lavoro assalita

Quattro morti e numerosi feriti

MILANO, 7.

E' giunta qui la notizia di gravi fatti avvenuti a Casale.

Una cerimonia fascista si è risolta in un assalto alla Camera del Lavoro. Gli operai si sono difesi. Ne è sorto un violento conflitto nel quale si sono lamentati quattro morti tra fascisti e lavoratori. Tra i feriti c'è il noto capitano De Vecchi.

La forza pubblica ha iniziato un fuoco di fucileria contro la Camera del Lavoro e vi ha puntato contro anche un cannoncino intimando la resa. I locali sono stati poi occupati dalla truppa che ha proceduto all'arresto di tutti quelli che vi si trovavano.

Figure A7. Violence report from L'Avanti, 22 March 1921

Una battaglia a Greco Milanese

Due morti e molti feriti

Ci giunge da Milano notizia di gravi fatti accaduti a Greco Milanese dove si sono recati molti fascisti per una delle solite manifestazioni provocatrici. Nel conflitto fra fascisti e socialisti vi sono stati due morti: un fascista ed una donna, ed una quarantina di feriti.

Un morto a Mesola di Ferrara

Anche a Mesola di Ferrara sarebbe avvenuto ieri sera un conflitto fra fascisti e socialisti. Non si conoscono i particolari. Si sa soltanto che vi è un morto.

Figure A8. Violence report from La Stampa, 2 January 1920