

# The Idea of Terror: Institutional Reproduction in Government Responses to Political Violence *Draft prepared for APSA 2019. Comments welcome.*

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## Abstract

Despite the recent global uptick in white supremacist terrorism, governments continue to face accusations of not taking the threat seriously, either discursively or in terms of policy responses. Why do acts of white supremacist violence consistently fail to constitute turning points for policy change in Global North countries? Rather than considering acts of political violence as critical junctures for change, I argue that such acts instead reveal how sticky institutions of power actually are. I develop a theory of hegemonic components of national identity that links institutionalized white supremacy to the differential treatment of non-white perpetrators, even when they are deemed terrorists, through a process of institutional reproduction. Drawing on interviews with German national security elites, I show that even when white supremacist violence is treated as terrorism, both legally and discursively, it does not engender policy responses and attitudinal changes on par with those following other terrorist threats.

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## 1 Introduction

On June 2, 2019, neo-Nazi Stephan Ernst shot conservative German politician Walter Lübcke in the head. In the aftermath of the assassination, commentators and politicians spoke of an overdue reckoning with white nationalist terrorism in Germany. Many connected Lübcke’s murder to a growing “epidemic” of white nationalist violence in the country,<sup>1</sup> from massive far-right rallies in Dresden<sup>2</sup> and Chemnitz<sup>3</sup> to massive weapons stockpiles and “death lists” in Mecklenberg-Vorpommern.<sup>4</sup> Others were explicit about the role of more mundane politics: Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), of which Lübcke was a member, said that any CDU member considering forming a coalition government with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) “should close their eyes and think about Walter Lübcke”.<sup>5</sup>

Lübcke’s assassination is far from the first time that political violence has been framed as a turning point for a government’s policies against white supremacist organizations and movements. Politicians called for renewed focus on white nationalist terrorism after the killing of peaceful protester Heather Heyer by a neo-Nazi in Charlottesville, VA in August 2017.<sup>6</sup> A similar outcry for expanded counterterrorism policy followed the August 2019 gun attack in El Paso, Texas by a white nationalist.<sup>7</sup> Yet efforts to counter violent white supremacy<sup>8</sup> frequently eschew the damning language of “terrorism”—and, more notably, are consistently under-resourced and under-prioritized in comparison to those aimed at other violent political ideologies and movements.<sup>9</sup> Why do acts of white supremacist violence consistently fail to constitute true turning points for policy change in Global

<sup>1</sup>“Germany Has a Neo-Nazi Terrorism Epidemic.” *Foreign Policy*, July 2, 2019. <https://bit.ly/31iHgzM>; “Verfassungsschutz will Blick auf Rechtsextremisten schärfen.” *Die Welt*, August 8, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2ZEZcnN>; “Nichts gelernt.” *TAZ*, July 30, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2yI1w1y>

<sup>2</sup>“PEGIDA’s fourth anniversary: Thousands in Dresden for rival rallies.” *Deutsche Welle*, October 21, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2yM5xlu>

<sup>3</sup>“Fighting the Far-Right and Neo-Nazi Resurgence in Germany.” *The Atlantic*, September 5, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2YyN0gM>

<sup>4</sup>“German far-right group ‘used police data to compile death list.’” *The Guardian*, June 28, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2xxMRpj>

<sup>5</sup>“Germany slow to hear alarm bells in killing of Walter Lübcke.” *The Guardian*, July 1, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2KPkn2Z>

<sup>6</sup>“A Year After Charlottesville, Not Much Has Changed for Trump.” *NPR*, August 11, 2018. <https://n.pr/2EohMzC>

<sup>7</sup>“World Reacts to El Paso Shooting and the Hate That Fueled It.” *New York Times*, August 6, 2019. <https://nyti.ms/2M3e8ct>

<sup>8</sup>To be clear, “violent white supremacy” is redundant, but I use the full phrase regardless to drive the point home.

<sup>9</sup>“Trump Shut Programs to Counter Violent Extremism.” *The Atlantic*, October 29, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2Da1B4R>; “Inside the Government, Addressing Domestic Terrorism Has Been Fraught.” *The New York Times*, August 11, 2019. <https://nyti.ms/33r3UrJ>; “Far-right fundraising not taken seriously by UK, report finds.” *The Guardian*, May 30, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2MZsEBt>

North countries?

Rather than considering violent events as critical junctures for institutional change (Capoccia & Kelemen 2007), I argue that such events reveal how sticky institutions of power actually are. Certainly terrorist attacks can lead to new policy priorities: contemporary international relations would look very different had the U.S. not responded to the September 11, 2001 attacks the way that it did. Focusing on attacks, or even patterns of attacks, as explanatory variables for policies surrounding terrorism, however, obscures the larger sociopolitical institutions that allow these attacks to be interpreted and acted upon (or not) in particular ways. I develop a theory of responses to white supremacist violence in Global North countries that links components of hegemonic national identity (Brudny & Finkel 2011) to the ways in which certain strands of violence are constructed as threats to society while others are left largely unchecked. In doing so, I suggest that even when white supremacist violence is called “terrorism”, that most abhorrent of crimes, it still receives less attention than other “terrorist” groups or movements because of the deep entrenchment of white supremacist power structures.

To illustrate how existing power structures are enacted and reconstituted through responses to political violence, I analyze three events in the German context: the high period of Red Army (RAF) activity from 1970 to 1977, the surge in low-level nationalist violence following state reunification in 1990, and the unmasking of the National Socialist Underground in November 2011. Based on fieldwork in Berlin, primary and secondary sources, and interviews with German bureaucrats and security professionals, I examine how political elites reckoned with and continue to make sense of the groups and ideologies behind these events, while at the same time *not* reckoning with other groups and ideologies executing and promoting violence around the same time. I find that, at least in the German case, events do matter for understanding responses to terrorism and political violence—*precisely because* they demonstrate how institutions of hegemonic national identity persist in German society.

Thus, this paper makes several contributions to our understanding of responses to political violence. First, I flip the dominant events-centric approach to studying terrorism (Schuurman 2019). By examining events as sites of institutional reproduction rather than change, I show that elite and societal attempts to make sense of political violence are in fact processes of fitting new events into familiar narratives. In this way, I follow in the tradition of critical theorists in examining responses to terrorism as opportunities for reinforcing state power (Nayak 2006; Dixit 2016), contributing a new case that demonstrates the broad utility of this approach. I further contribute the firsthand perspectives of security professionals themselves, which are rarely featured in

terrorism studies.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, my evidence underscores that white supremacist institutions are extremely difficult to uproot even when people are aware of and uncomfortable with them. To paraphrase feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, changing white supremacist institutions requires more than simply intending not to perpetuate them (Ahmed 2016, 150).

A few definitional clarifications are in order before moving on. By “white supremacy”, I mean not only the dyadic relationships between whites and various racial others, but also the broader system of discursive and practical ties that generate and reproduce racial identities (Jung 2011, 10–11). White supremacy is therefore a system of oppression composed of a variety of institutions, narratives, and practices that naturalize whites as the dominant group in society. Throughout this paper, I use the “white supremacist” and “far-right” qualifiers interchangeably, following other scholars who emphasize the central role of racial domination in far-right movements (Blee 2002; Blee & Creasap 2010; Zeskind 2009).

I proceed as follows. First, I review how others have approached the study of policy responses to terrorism in Global North countries. Next, I present my theory of the role of hegemonic national identity in governing these responses—and the importance of institutionalizing and reproducing hegemonic identity for the maintenance of existing power relationships in society. I then investigate the case of Germany, presenting narratives and reckonings from national security elites that demonstrate this process of institutional reproduction, even and especially when elites are trying to change the discourse in Germany surrounding terrorism and political violence. I conclude by returning to the assassination of Walter Lübcke—which, having occurred not quite four months ago at the time of writing, provides an opportunity to examine processes of and perspectives on reckoning with political violence as they unfold.

## 2 How we understand government responses to terrorism

This paper starts from two ontological positions that are worth stating explicitly. First, I follow the critical terrorism studies literature in treating terrorism as an unstable, subjective category, the contents and characteristics of which vary from observer to observer (Jackson 2007; Phillips 2019; Stampnitzky 2013). Accordingly, I do not wish to reify the association of “terrorism” with any specific group, ideology, or cause. But constructed concepts still have tangible effects on the real world, and so I do aim to point out the similarities between groups, ideologies, and causes called “terrorist” and others

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<sup>10</sup>For an exception and example of how useful such perspectives can be, see Legrand (2018).

in the same political space that are not. This differential labeling in spite of similarities thus becomes a site for investigation of what “terrorism” actually means in a particular context, regardless of what government or academic definitions claim on paper.

I assume, further, that “terrorism” is constructed as a unique category of violence, one treated as qualitatively different from other forms of violence (Huff & Kertzer 2018, 56). Violence classified as terrorism may also be murder, for example, but the application of the “terrorism” label signals that this is especially reprehensible and incomprehensible (to the observer) murder that goes against accepted norms of who can do violence to whom and in what manner. “Terrorism” therefore spawns what Agamben (2005) calls a state of exception, one in which exceptional (extra)legal actions in response are not only made normatively permissible but also become understood as unquestionably necessary (Ní Aoláin & Campbell 2018). The issue of terrorism is perceived as so dire and so threatening that it demands the suspension of the usual order of things *for the purposes of preserving that order*—and by doing so, I argue, reveals that order’s fundamental character.

This paper is therefore concerned with the choice to not treat white supremacist violence as terrorism—whether according to legal definitions *or* based upon common practices of how violence deemed “terrorist” should be addressed—and why that might be the case. As the German case will show, even calling white supremacist violence “terrorist”, both as a legal classification and as a common description in public and official discourse, does not mean that subsequent counterterrorism policy will resemble policy formulated in response to other terrorist threats.

As it stands, there is little academic work on government responses to contemporary white supremacist violence, as well as on white supremacist terrorism in general (Simi 2010). In part, this may be because some of the violence is new: the rise of far-right populism in the U.S., Europe, and Australia has spawned numerous new violent political organizations and networks. Yet such organizations and networks did not appear out of the ether, but rather trace their own genealogies to older sources of violence. Rich historical accounts of far-right activity in the U.S. (Belew 2018), Germany (Köhler 2016; Rabert 1995; Pfahl-Traughber 2012), and throughout the Global North (Bjorgo 1995) emphasize that far-right violence, rather than being a series of isolated incidents by “lone wolves”, is frequently part of a larger organized movement that looks to and lauds predecessor organizations in crafting goals and messaging. The past therefore provides an important but under-utilized source of information that could not only shed light on contemporary dynamics of white supremacist violence but that is also *directly connected* to that violence.

Nor are contemporary patterns of government responses to white supremacist violence

particularly new. Studies of violence by the Ku Klux Klan and analogous groups in the U.S. stress the permissive environments in which these groups were allowed, if not encouraged, to flourish (Belew 2018; Newton 2009). Officials in Germany in the 1980s similarly expressed reluctance to pursue neo-Nazi violence with the same vigor directed at left-wing violence during the prior decade (Mcgowan 2006). Local authorities in Sweden in the 1990s similarly treated neo-Nazi and racist violence as youth “hooliganism”; when this violence was deemed a greater threat, most policies developed in response were administrative (i.e. bans on Nazi symbols) and not treated within a national security framework (Widfeldt 2001).

Global North governments today may have begun pursuing new programs in response to white supremacist violence, but these are historically the exception rather than the rule; further, there is considerable doubt about the degree to which these programs constitute window dressing as opposed to serious sea changes in national security policy.<sup>11</sup> Thus the problem remains: governments continue to respond half-heartedly to white supremacist violence, and scholars continue to lack theoretical frameworks for understanding the persistence of this pattern.

### 3 Incorporating hegemonic national identity

The missing link, I contend, is also perhaps the most obvious: race. The role of race and identity in affecting responses to political violence will feel familiar to scholars of the Global War on Terror, who have observed the role of “us vs. them” dichotomies in foreign policy discourse following the September 11, 2001 attacks (Holland 2013; Fattah & Fierke 2009), as well as the centrality of Islamophobia in how the U.S. public thinks about terrorism (D’Orazio & Salehyan 2018; Huff & Kertzer 2018). Scholars of the far-right have also written extensively on white supremacist and white nationalist ideologies in far-right political parties (Mudde 2016), social movements (Blee & Creasap 2010), youth cultures (Miller-Idriss 2018), and online communities (Caren *et al.* 2012; Simi & Futrell 2006).

Yet there continues to be little work on the role of white supremacy in *terrorism* (Blee

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<sup>11</sup>For example, the Joint Center for Countering Extremism and Terrorism (GETZ) in Germany oversees efforts to combat right-wing terrorism but was only formed in 2012 and is also expected to devote resources to left-wing and “foreign” terrorism. By comparison, the Joint Counterterrorism Center (GTAZ) has existed since 2004 and has only one issue in its portfolio: Islamist terrorism. The Office of Community Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, meanwhile, administered grants to organizations working to counter violent extremism of all stripes but had its budget slashed by 75% under the Trump Administration not quite two years after it was first created; grants to organizations working specifically with white nationalists were rescinded. For an exception in the case of U.S. sting operations against far-right extremists following the Oklahoma City bombing, see Norris & Grol-Prokopczyk (2018).

2005; Simi 2010).<sup>12</sup> Jenkins (2003) speculates that this is because white supremacists are not seen as “authentic” terrorists: they appear reckless, disorganized, and disconnected from any unified political goal. Readers will note similar motifs in this conceptualization of “authenticity” to those that appear in public discourse following white supremacist violence, characterizing perpetrators as mentally ill loners.

This, I argue, is the point. The lack of research on white supremacist terrorism mirrors a broader societal reluctance to talk about white supremacy as a systemic problem rather than the twisted fantasy of a few social outliers. I emphasize that this pattern is not malicious, nor is it always a conscious choice to overlook white supremacy. Rather, white supremacy is an institutionalized power structure that governs relationships between groups in society—namely, between those deemed “white” and everyone else.<sup>13</sup> By determining the social ordering of groups, institutionalized power structures such as white supremacy create sticky “rules of the game” (North 1990) that, though they may morph over time, retain their foundational character of advantaging some identities over others and presenting that ordering as normal.

To illustrate this point, I draw on the concept of hegemonic national identity, developed by Brudny & Finkel (2011) to explain variation in post-communist democratization in Russia and Ukraine. For Brudny and Finkel, national identity is a form of collective identity encompassing attitudes, beliefs, and commitments about the boundaries of a nation, who qualifies for membership, and how the sociopolitical and cultural structures in that nation should look and operate (815). National identities are neither singular nor static and thus experience contestation, or varying degrees of agreement about the content of that identity—what it means politically, socially, and culturally to be German, for example (Abdelal *et al.* 2009, 696).

Brudny and Finkel argue that, in situations of extremely low contestation, the content of a national identity becomes hegemonic and, in some cases, so deeply entrenched as to be perceived as “the natural order of things for the overwhelming majority of the population” (Lustick 1993, 44).<sup>14</sup> I contend, further, that certain *components* of national identity are more hegemonic than others—that is, they are so embedded in the construct of national identity, and so indispensable to its continuation, that not only are they usually uncontested, but they are typically not even thought of as contestable in the first place.

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<sup>12</sup>In making this judgment, I and others assess specific mentions of “terrorism” in scholarly work, however researchers define the term. It may be the case that some scholars study what other scholars call “terrorism” but use different language.

<sup>13</sup>This is a simplification: “everyone else” is a heterogenous category composed of groups affected in different ways by white supremacy, and how whites relate to different groups also varies.

<sup>14</sup>The concept is similar to philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony; see Lears (1995) for a thorough and readable treatment.

These components may not be openly recognized as constitutive of a national identity, even as they underpin it.

In post-communist Russia, the relevant component of national identity that achieved hegemonic status was imperialism. Capitalizing on pre-Soviet patterns of identifying Russian nationality with the entire Russian empire, the Soviets used this familiar script to privilege ethnic Russians and justify continued imperialist structures, including nondemocracy and xenophobia. Having become institutionalized in Soviet Russia, imperialist tendencies thus crystallized into hegemonic components of national identity that endured after the fall of the USSR (Brudny & Finkel 2011, 828). This example highlights two important features of hegemonic components of national identity: first, that they are extremely long-lasting, and second, that they can persist through enormous changes in domestic and international politics. Even if circumstances change, the underlying principles that govern power relationships may persist. Paradoxically, then, major shocks to a polity or political system can demonstrate which power structures are truly entrenched, and thus hegemonic.

I argue that violent events in the Global North constitute such shocks, and that subsequent discursive and policy responses underscore the hegemonic nature of white supremacy as a component of Global North identity.<sup>15</sup> In saying this, I do not suggest that all variation in responses can be attributed to a single rationale, conscious or otherwise, by state actors of perpetuating white supremacy. Rather, the repeated employment of particular kinds of discourses and strategies in the aftermath of political violence has the effect—again, conscious or otherwise—of reinforcing practices of racialization (Rana 2011, 213). Violence perpetrated by individuals belonging to identity groups viewed as incongruous with white supremacy, or acting on behalf of ideologies that challenge white supremacy's hegemonic status, becomes classified as "terrorism" and treated accordingly. Anecdotally, we observe this with the rush by the U.S. FBI's counterterrorism division to name "black identity extremists"<sup>16</sup> a domestic terrorist threat while no Ku Klux Klan member was indicted on terrorism charges until 2016;<sup>17</sup> with the call for U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano to resign after her agency released a report on the threat of right-wing extremism in 2009;<sup>18</sup> and with the tendency of law

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<sup>15</sup>There is some slippage here between "national" identity and a larger identity that we might call "regional", "Western", or as some would stress, truly "global" (Mills 1994).

<sup>16</sup>"The FBI's New U.S. Terrorist Threat: 'Black Identity Extremists'." *Foreign Policy*, <https://bit.ly/2MEemILb>

<sup>17</sup>The crime fell under the "weapons of mass destruction" heading: the perpetrator had planned to build a dirty bomb using an x-ray machine and set it off at a mosque in upstate New York. See "International (and Domestic) Terrorism Prosecutions", *Lawfare*, <https://bit.ly/2I40N0a>. Other members of the KKK have been imprisoned on charges of witness tampering and other lesser offenses.

<sup>18</sup>"U.S. Law Enforcement Failed to See the Threat of White Nationalism. Now They Don't Know How to

enforcement to label violence by mentally ill people of color “terrorism” while mental illness is used as a defense for white mass shooters (Khan-Cullors & bandele 2018).

Meanwhile, violence perpetrated by individuals acting on behalf of white supremacist ideologies is less likely to be called “terrorist”—and, if it is extreme enough to receive the “terrorist” designation, it will still not receive the same treatment as other types of terrorism. This is important for both discursive and political reasons. Discursively, the construction of “terrorism” as incomprehensible and alien to accepted norms of political protest and resistance means that much is at stake in even informal designations: framing an issue as “terrorist” “automatically authorizes states to use forms of violence that they would otherwise be penalized for” (Dixit 2016, 33). Politically, calling white supremacist violence “terrorist”, given the connotations of that term, would require questioning a hegemonic component of national identity that, given its status as hegemonic, is explicitly designed not to be questioned. It would also require identifying the institutionalized structures that preserve white supremacy and, for some, the uncomfortable mundaneness of those structures in everyday life. Anecdotally, we observe this discomfort in discussions about policing white supremacist content online, with an employee at Twitter expressly stating that taking a more aggressive approach to white supremacist content on the platform would likely impact the accounts of some Republican politicians.<sup>19</sup>

To trace this dual tendency—calling violence by non-white perpetrators “terrorism” while not doing the same for white supremacist violence—in more comprehensive detail, and to demonstrate the utility of the hegemonic national identity frame in shedding light on why white supremacist violence rarely produces policy or normative change in the Global North, I turn to the case of Germany.

## 4 Methods: Elite perspectives from Germany

Germany is a perplexing case when it comes to white supremacist violence. Because of the Nazi era and the continued use of the Holocaust as the prototypical example of genocide in international discourse, one might expect little tolerance for and swift condemnation of white supremacist violence in Germany. Certainly this was my expectation before arriving in the field. Having lived in Berlin as a student, I was familiar with the public nature of reckonings with the past in Germany: situating the national memorial to the worst instance of state violence in a country’s history mere steps from the seat of the federal legislature was jarring to me as a U.S. citizen. I was also aware that these reckonings

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Stop It.” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 3, 2018. <https://nyti.ms/2PBXTEn>

<sup>19</sup>“Why Won’t Twitter Treat White Supremacy Like ISIS? Because It Would Mean Banning Some Republican Politicians Too.” *Motherboard*, April 25, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2LsHhhx>

were sometimes performative and far from perfect, but I nonetheless thought I would find more significant discursive and policy responses to white supremacist violence than in my home country, the United States. This assumed difference, along with my language skills, drove my case selection.

The reality on the ground in Germany is, of course, a lot more complicated. This complexity manifests in numerous ways, not least of which is the sheer variety of ideologies motivating political violence in the country. As delineated in the 2018 *Verfassungsschutzbericht*, an annual report from the Federal Ministry of the Interior on politically motivated crime, Germany experiences internal threats from right-wing, left-wing (including radical environmental groups), *Reichsbürger* (citizens of the empire; roughly equivalent to the U.S. sovereign citizen movement), Islamist, and “foreign” (Kurdish and Turkish nationalist) ideologies (BfV 2018). Accordingly, the German government has had many opportunities to employ the term “terrorism”, should it choose to do so, and develop subsequent policies in response. Germany is therefore a rich case in terms of responses to a variety of ideologies, allowing for observation of whether hegemonic components of national identity are invoked differently in response to different ideologies.

Most of my analysis here comes from a series of semi-structured elite interviews with German bureaucrats and national security professionals conducted in Berlin during the summer of 2019. I worked initially through a combination of professional contacts and cold emailing, then used snowball sampling to arrange the rest of my interviews. My interlocutors come from an array of professional backgrounds and party affiliations. Most were based in Berlin, though some worked primarily in other parts of the country and came to the capital on business. Notably, all were white, which is consistent with the lack of ethnic and racial diversity in the federal government: in 2016, the Federal Institute for Population Research found that only 14.8% of federal and 6.7% of local government employees had a migrant background (*Migrationshintergrund*, a term meaning that either they or one of their parents were not native-born German citizens).<sup>20</sup> I supplement my interviews with government and media reports, secondary sources, and informal on-the-ground interactions and experiences in Berlin.

Firsthand information from national security elites is a rare commodity in social science research, and the German case is no exception. In part, this is due to the bureaucracy of access: one of my interlocutors inadvertently included a long email chain

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<sup>20</sup>“German government ministries score poorly on diversity.” *Deutsche Welle*, May 27, 2016. <https://bit.ly/31xVwVk>. This is in comparison to about 25% in the general population. The *Migrationshintergrund* category includes individuals who are white but not German and so is an imperfect proxy for racial diversity.

in their reply to me, in which they had gone through three levels of approval for our interview. It is also a product of the German terrorism and counterterrorism community, which several people described to me as self-contained. I found that my interlocutors were frequently surprised, albeit pleasantly so, that a U.S. researcher was interested in their opinions. That my research struck them as novel afforded me an advantage in that they were more willing to speak with me; they had not yet been “overstudied”. Nor, as bureaucrats or staffers, were many of them used to their opinions being the center of attention. By framing my questions in personal terms and showing interest in my interlocutors’ experiences, I was able to establish rapport and encourage them to speak freely.

Researcher positionality is of particular concern in elite interviews due to power differentials and the issue of self-presentation: elites are powerful, privileged experts in their areas, which may place the researcher at a disadvantage in terms of status (Mikecz 2012). Navigating my status as a U.S., German-speaking researcher presented a challenge. On the one hand, my ability to speak German afforded me access to several elites who, by self-admission, could not have conversed comfortably in English. I have a classically German name, and I believe this had a hand in helping me gain access to elites, as my name showing up in their inboxes did not raise any eyebrows and they could make sense of why I might be interested in Germany, my description of my research aside. My political affiliation also mattered: it was important to several of my interviewees, for example, to learn that I am not a supporter of Donald Trump. Lastly, I shared a perceived racial identity with all of my interlocutors, which may have led them to speak more openly about issues that they would not have discussed candidly with someone from a different background.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, I was an unknown quantity in terms of my “expert” status. My interlocutors made vastly different assumptions about my degree of existing knowledge, and requests for clarification from more senior interlocutors seemed to result in a downgrading of my status. Meanwhile, interjections of “yes, I’m familiar” yielded approving nods and more detailed descriptions of responses to and interpretations of violent events and terrorist threats. I would also occasionally mention my professional background in the U.S. terrorism and counterterrorism community, which may have led me to be perceived as an equal in some circumstances—though in others, it completely derailed the interview because my interlocuter became more interested in asking me for my opinions on terrorism in the U.S. than in answering my questions.

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<sup>21</sup>For example, one of my interlocutors spoke quite openly about the refugee crisis as a serious problem for counterterrorism in Germany. It is unclear if they would have shared the same viewpoint with a non-white interviewer.

My overall approach to the interviews was to ask broad, open-ended questions (e.g. “what are the major conversations happening in the German national security community right now”) and allow my interlocuters to answer freely and for as long as they liked with minimal interruption from me. They would often connect disparate ideas together as they talked, making sense of patterns in German responses to political violence in real time. Many admitted that they had not thought about some of my questions before, giving me confidence in their unfiltered answers. I used strategies from ordinary language interviewing (Schaffer 2006) to gain insight into how my interlocuters understood terms such as “terrorism” and “extremism”, which, I found, are used quite differently in Germany than in the U.S. I would restate my interlocuters’ points prefaced with “if I understand correctly”, note when language seemed inconsistent to me as a non-German (“earlier you said X, but now you seem to be saying y; can you explain?”), and ask directly about personal usage (“I’d like to understand how you use X; can you elaborate?”). In this way, I sought to both elicit natural usage of these concepts and then invite interlocuters to examine that usage in the context of describing political violence perpetrated by a range of actors.

#### 4.1 Event Selection

I selected historical episodes of political violence for further analysis via an inductive approach, noting which cases were frequently mentioned as significant by my interviewees for understanding German approaches to terrorism and counterterrorism. I focus on three periods of violence: the height of activity by the extremist left-wing Red Army Faction (RAF) from 1970 to 1977; low-level nationalist and racist violence in the aftermath of the 1990 German reunification; and the series of attacks committed by the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground between 2000 and 2007. These periods are important precisely because they are *not* unique events, but rather sustained episodes that could have sparked, and in some cases did spark, significant policy responses. Moreover, as sustained episodes of low-level violence, these episodes may be cases of more typical responses to violence, rather than extreme responses to “black swan” events such as the 9/11 attacks (LaFree *et al.* 2015).

One might reasonably question the degree to which my inductive approach allowed my elite interlocuters to “control” the narrative and further their preferred interpretations of the past. I find this concern unmerited for two reasons. First, individuals of various ages from diverse bureaucracies, political affiliations, and areas of expertise consistently brought up the same historical episodes, indicating that these episodes resonate for a broad audience as important for making sense of the German case. Furthermore, not all

of my interlocuters interpreted these episodes in the same way nor assigned them equal significance, casting doubt on the idea of one preferred state-level narrative (or at least that my interlocuters were out to further that narrative in our conversations).

Second, my interlocuters mentioned other episodes that I do not analyze here, indicating, as one might expect, that the full tapestry of German terrorism and counterterrorism is much richer than can be addressed in one paper. Some of these, such as the entire duration of the East German police state, are no doubt important but simply beyond the scope of a single paper. Others are similarly important but are easier places to observe ingroup-outgroup dynamics at work, such as the 2016 attack on a Berlin Christmas market by an Islamic State supporter. I do not include any event that came up only once in my interviews (e.g. the surge of nationalism during the 2006 FIFA World Cup, which was hosted by Germany) nor that occurred outside of Germany (e.g. the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent German reaction). The significance of external events on domestic understandings of terrorism, especially for events other than 9/11, is a promising area for future research.

## 5 Analysis

### 5.1 The RAF era

In the 1970s, a West German leftist organization calling itself the Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*, RAF) perpetrated a series of bombings, kidnappings, and murders of prominent Germans that stunned the West German security services, and the government responded swiftly with law enforcement crackdowns and new legislation designed to cripple future waves of terrorism. Interestingly, however, West Germany also experienced a parallel wave of political violence from the far right in the 1970s that engendered no similar response.

This relative ignorance is important for two reasons. First, the attention received by the RAF continues to affect how German elites conceptualize terrorism, both directly through legal mechanisms and indirectly by institutionalizing a mutually agreed-upon template for what terrorism looks like, with clear implications for policy. Second, the centrality of the RAF—and not of far-right violence—provides an initial example of significant white supremacist violence not being taken as seriously as a contemporaneous threat backed by an ideology unaligned with hegemonic power structures.

Between the organization's formation in 1970 and the dissolution of its second generation by 1978, the RAF committed numerous bombings, robberies, kidnappings, and

murders of German political and business leaders. Following four bombings in 1972 that killed five people (including four U.S. soldiers) and injured over 50, German authorities caught and arrested five key members of the RAF, including the organization's three founders. Despite this highly successful police operation, the RAF reconstituted and, in 1977, engaged in a series of murders and kidnappings, including that of industrialist and former SS officer Hanns Martin Schleyer, who was eventually killed. The West German government was so taken aback that the RAF's new leadership were almost all arrested within a year (Aust 2009).

At the same time that the RAF was taking off in the early 1970s, West Germany experienced a renewed wave of violence associated with the far right. According to the Federal Ministry of the Interior, 103 right-wing crimes with "terrorist motives" took place in 1970 alone (BfV 1971). Federal statistics show that 1971 remains the deadliest year for right-wing homicides on record (Köhler 2016, 101).<sup>22</sup> Between 1970 and 1972, Action Resistance (*Aktion Widerstand*, AW), an organization initially formed as the street activism wing of the National Democratic Party (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, NPD)<sup>23</sup> mobilized around 3,000 militants and perpetrated dozens of arsons and assaults (Köhler 2016, 76–77). Any number of other extremist organizations grew out of the remnants of the Nazi Party, continuing a pattern of white supremacist violence dating to the founding of West Germany in 1949 (Mcgowan 2006; Pfahl-Traugher 1999).

Such widespread far-right and neo-Nazi violence, while not as high-profile as the flashier RAF attacks, nevertheless killed more people in one year than the RAF did in its entire 28-year existence.<sup>24</sup> Still, it is the RAF, not the far right, that remains the focal point for ideas about terrorism in Germany. "There is always the RAF comparison in the security agencies, the media, and among the public," one interlocutor told me, "which is strange because there was also right-wing terrorism in the '60s and '70s." Several other national security elites echoed this sentiment. In general, elites acknowledge that right-wing terrorism—and here they do use the term "terrorism" consistently—is a longstanding feature of German politics, despite the fact that, as one person put it, "Before 9/11, 'terrorism' always meant 'left-wing' because of the RAF."

Why was it the RAF, and not the neo-Nazi organizations, that formed the basis for

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<sup>22</sup>Incidentally, 1971 is also the first year for which data are available. "Right-wing homicide" is a broad category, and its definition changed slightly after 2001 with the introduction of a new classification scheme for politically motivated crimes. These statistics are also highly contested by journalists and civil society actors, who accuse official numbers of undercounting incidents. Regardless, it is significant that the number of right-wing homicides in 1971 is still almost twice as high as the for the next highest year (23, in 1994); the definition of right-wing homicide did not change during this period.

<sup>23</sup>The NPD was one of three successor parties to the Nazi Party.

<sup>24</sup>The RAF is typically considered responsible for around 30 deaths. The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) reports that the RAF and its affiliate, the 2nd of June Movement, killed 17 people.

prosecuting terrorism in German criminal law? Section 129a of the German criminal code (*Strafgesetzbuch*) was developed in 1976 specifically to counter terrorism in the mold of the RAF (Zöller 2009). Because the RAF was a relatively hierarchical organization, Section 129a provides sentencing guidelines for organizations made up of at least three people, not single perpetrators or duos (author interview). Because the RAF engaged in extensive plotting before carrying out attacks, Section 129a focuses on *Vorbereitungshandlungen* (preparatory acts) to allow law enforcement to conduct investigations and pursue terrorist charges before an attack actually occurs (Zöller 2009). Neither of these features—hierarchical organization and extensive planning—were characteristic of the neo-Nazi organizations of the era. The genealogy of the law is clear and was unanimously agreed upon by my interlocuters.

The singular focus on the RAF during the 1970s could be explained by the fact that the violent far right was a disparate collective of many organizations,<sup>25</sup> most of whom were short-lived in part because law enforcement was committed to chipping away at the threat. Nevertheless, far-left violence garnered far more national-level attention and an introduction into the criminal code that affects how terrorism can be prosecuted in Germany to this day. One of my interlocuters pointed out that Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian self-identified Nazi who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011, could not have been charged with terrorism under German law because he was not part of an organization made up of at least three people. The violent far right, although its members were arrested and prosecuted, had no analogous lasting effect. Instead, white supremacist violence was treated as a criminal threat and addressed through traditional criminal means, while the RAF was welded into German memory as the prototypical example of terrorist violence. Hence, even though my interlocuters understood the white supremacist violence of the 1970s to be terrorism with the benefit of hindsight, the narration of this violence as *not* terrorism, or at least not as significant as RAF terrorism, has had lasting effects on German counterterrorism law.

What happens when there is no left-wing analogue to white supremacist terrorism—that is, what happens when white supremacist violence does not occur contemporaneously with comparable levels of violence from other sources? To answer this question, I move forward in time to the 1990s, following German reunification.

## 5.2 The post-reunification era

Although widely heralded as a triumph for the neoliberal world order, German reunification at the end of the Cold War came with a host of problems. As one scholar

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<sup>25</sup>Manthe (2018) identifies at least 22.

put it, “The Germans had two illusions in 1989. The West was under the illusion that nothing would change. The East was under the illusion that everything would improve immediately. Both were wrong” (Jain 1999, 253). A full analysis of the challenges of reunification is beyond the scope of this paper; here I wish to focus on the wave of nationalism after reunification and the violence that followed.

Unlike in the 1970s, white supremacist violence in the 1990s was not accompanied by widespread violence on behalf of another cause. Thus, the case of post-reunification violence allows for analysis of the German interpretation of and response to political violence in a relatively homogenous threat environment.<sup>26</sup> For some German national security elites, post-reunification violence—and the lack of a strong state response to it—set the stage for right-wing extremism in Germany today. For others, it barely registers.

Reunification provided an opportunity for German nationalism to rear its head, often in ugly ways. For immigrant communities, the early 1990s were a time of fear at heights not experienced since 1945 (Köhler 2016, 85). Official statistics for the period vary: according to the Federal Criminal Police (*Bundeskriminalamt*, BKA), there were 4,587 incidents of xenophobic violence in 1992, while the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, BfV) recorded 2,285 “right-extremist acts of violence” over the same period (Atkinson 1993). Perhaps the most infamous instance of violence of the era took place over three days in August 1992 and involved hundreds of militant right-wing extremists attacking an apartment complex for asylum-seekers in the Lichtenhagen district of Rostock, a city in northeastern Germany.<sup>27</sup> Almost 3,000 bystanders watched and applauded while the police and militants clashed—but the clapping, as one bystander admitted, was “against the police” and in support of the militants.<sup>28</sup> Similar incidents of sustained anti-immigrant violence occurred around the same time in Hoyerswerda, Solingen, and Mölln.

Such violence, some of my interlocutors stressed, was abnormal and completely out of line with the broader of culture of intolerance for nationalism in Germany. Because of the Nazi era, acts that would be considered patriotism in some other contexts, such as displaying the German flag, are to this day sometimes considered unacceptably nationalistic in Germany.<sup>29</sup> My interlocutors said that this was even more true in the

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<sup>26</sup>Of course, other groups and movements perpetrated violence in the 1990s, including Kurdish dissidents and the aforementioned Red Army Faction before its voluntary dissolution in 1998. None of these groups or movements, however, approached the level of activity of white supremacist and anti-immigrant groups, so it is impossible to rule out a lack of attention thereto on the grounds of objectively lower threat levels.

<sup>27</sup>It is unknown how many asylum-seekers, attackers, and bystanders were injured in the riots, as the official inquiry into the incident only lists 204 police injuries (Brandt 1993, 86).

<sup>28</sup>“Als der Mob die Herrschaft übernahm.” *Spiegel*, August 23, 2007. <https://bit.ly/2YVBXc6>

<sup>29</sup>A member of the German parliament (*Bundestag*) who announced in 2001 that he was proud to be

1990s. Other interlocuters took the opposite viewpoint, stating that the government did not treat white supremacist violence as a serious threat and drawing parallels to responses to far-right violence today:

“... unfortunately, for the big parties [the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party], there is no line in the sand with racism. This is similar to what happened in the '90s with increased nationalism and racist attacks and demonstrations. People reacted with understanding, and the effect was a strengthening of the far right that radicalized into terrorism.”

Making sense of this disagreement requires differentiating between the official narratives of major events and the larger institutionalized power structures that make such events possible in the first place. As Miller-Idriss & Rothenberg (2012) highlight in their study of citizen conceptualizations of the German nation, the positions of elites—which are often expected to be clear and consistent in public discourse—do not trickle down directly to the population. Certainly the German government expressed shock and outrage at the riots in Rostock-Lichtenhagen and elsewhere, with officials calling such attacks “horrifying and shameful” and “totally unacceptable”.<sup>30</sup>

Yet while I was in Germany, I heard many stories from young people who had grown up in small towns far away from the liberal Berlin bubble in the 1990s about who regularly heard racist and antisemitic slurs on the playground. Public opinion polls from 1991 show that about 21% of Germans in the former East and 38% in the former West expressed sympathy for “radical rightist tendencies”.<sup>31</sup> Neither 21% nor 38% is a majority, and not all racist rhetoric or beliefs lead to violence. I do not mean to suggest that most Germans tolerated white supremacy in the 1990s; the historical record does not support this. Still, these stories and statistics indicate that what was broadly “unacceptable” in the 1990s was violence. The ideology underpinning it, while also abhorrent to most Germans, did not seem to merit strong responses from the state beyond words of condemnation.

It is possible, of course, that the security agencies would have liked to respond more strongly to white supremacist violence in the 1990s but were unable to do so. In the former East, the police were severely under-resourced following reunification, and security forces were not used to combating street violence. There was also concern about using excessive

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German was called a “skinhead” and “racist hooligan” by other legislators. For an account of this dynamic in English, see “Schröder Joins Debate, Taking Side of Pride in Germany”, *New York Times*, <https://nyti.ms/33tWbcc>.

<sup>30</sup>“A Wave of Attacks on Foreigners Stirs Shock in Germany.” *The New York Times*, October 1, 1991. <https://nyti.ms/31uFhIO>

<sup>31</sup>See <https://nyti.ms/31uFhIO>.

force in the style reminiscent of the Communist era.<sup>32</sup> Still, the applause from bystanders in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, as well as initial insistence from Interior Minister Lothar Kupfar that the riots had not been dangerous or threatened the lives of asylum-seekers despite all evidence to the contrary,<sup>33</sup> indicates that far-right ideologies were not entirely absent from the story either. As one of my interlocuters put it, “The problem isn’t the violence. The problem is the ideology.”

That the violence of the 1990s is remembered primarily by security elites as a manifestation of racist ideology and not as terrorism has had two effects. For some, post-reunification violence served as a precursor to white supremacist terrorism today: as we will see in the case of the National Socialist Underground, some of the most prominent far-right groups of the 21<sup>st</sup> century got their start in neo-Nazi milieus during the 1990s. For others, the anti-immigrant violence of the period feels out of place in a discussion of terrorism in Germany. Despite not facing competition for press coverage or memory space from other types of violence, and despite its similarities to neo-Nazi violence of the Cold War period that was called terrorism, post-reunification white supremacist violence remains an ancillary part of the narrative of German terrorism, if it is perceived to belong in that narrative at all.

### 5.3 The post-NSU era

Given the consistency with which Germany experienced white supremacist violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps the uncovering of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU) in November 2011 should not have been as stunning as it was. Yet the organization, which murdered 10 immigrants and one police officer and executed two bombings over seven years, was widely viewed as unpredictable and unprecedented, including at the highest levels of government.<sup>34</sup> Many treated the NSU as a milestone in German security policy, and the subsequent investigation finally prompted the creation of security infrastructure for right-wing terrorism akin to that already in place for Islamist terrorism.<sup>35</sup>

Eight years later, however, the overwhelming consensus among German national

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<sup>32</sup>“Mistakes admitted in efforts to end Rostock riots.” *The Independent*, August 28, 1992. <https://bit.ly/2Mbh5aL>

<sup>33</sup>“Damit konnte niemand rechnen.” *Spiegel*, August 31, 1992. <https://bit.ly/2H2s4Pw>

<sup>34</sup>“Die Hintergründe der Taten lagen im Dunkeln – viel zu lange.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 23, 2012. <https://bit.ly/2YI0oKH>

<sup>35</sup>The Joint Center for Countering Extremism and Terrorism (*Gemeinsames Extremismus- und Terrorismusabwehrzentrum*, GETZ), the German government’s premiere forum and central coordination hub for security cooperation on right-wing terrorism, was founded in 2012. Its analogue for Islamist terrorism, the Joint Counter-Terrorism Center (*Gemeinsames Terrorismusabwehrzentrum*, GTAZ), has existed since 2004.

security elites is that the NSU failed to constitute a turning point in the German approach to far-right violence. Although institutional competencies and procedures have changed, my interlocutors agreed that discourse about and attitudes toward white supremacist terrorism have not, although not always to the same extent or for the same reasons. How they made sense of this development reveals and re-emphasizes the lasting power of white supremacy as an institutionalized power structure in the face of a major terrorist event.

Having worked together in neo-Nazi organizations in the state of Thüringia since the mid-1990s, Uwe Böhnhardt, Uwe Mundlos, and Beate Zschäpe, with the help of 100–150 other neo-Nazi associates, would go on to murder 10 Greek and Turkish individuals and a police officer between 2000 and 2007, as well as set off two bombs targeting Iranian and Turkish migrants, injuring 23 in total. The attacks took place across Germany, from Munich in the south to Dortmund in the west to Rostock in the north. Following a series of botched bank robberies in November 2011, Böhnhardt and Mundlos committed suicide rather than submit to the authorities. Zschäpe turned herself in four days later (Köhler 2016).

I was living in Berlin at the time, and the discovery that these crimes, which had been investigated as separate incidents and remained unsolved, were in fact connected and the work of white supremacists created an uproar in the press and shock among ordinary Germans. It is difficult to convey how little the NSU fit into accepted narratives of terrorism and political violence in Germany. As mentioned previously, the RAF remained the prototypical example of terrorism for some Germans. For others, it had been replaced by some nebulous Islamist threat: “We say ‘terrorist’ with IS [the Islamic State] in the back of our minds,” one elite told me in 2019, as an example of how little had changed. “The conversation about, and understanding of the meaning of, terrorism has been Islamist since 2001,” another explained. “Everyone has Islam in their heads,” said another.

As the NSU murders were narrated in the press and official discourse, much of the blame fell on the security agencies for not connecting the dots between the incidents. Due to the federalized nature of German law enforcement, local police are often not aware of cases in neighboring states that may be connected to their own. Cooperation is further complicated by the *Trennungsgebot* (separation rule), a provision of the German constitution that forbids information-sharing between the police and intelligence agencies.<sup>36</sup> The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, BfV; roughly equivalent to the U.S. FBI) in particular faced heavy

<sup>36</sup>The *Trennungsgebot* is a reaction to the politicization of law enforcement under the Nazi regime and the fear that such politicization could occur again. One interlocutor explained the rule’s effects to me thusly: “There will be an individual, and the police will come forward with information, and the intelligence services will come forward with information, and it’ll be the same information, but they don’t know that they have the same information.”

criticism from the political left, and policy reforms included granting it more power to coordinate cases like the NSU case at the federal level.

Despite these and other reforms, however, security elites repeatedly said that nothing had really changed with respect to combating far-right extremism and terrorism, despite the widespread agreement that the NSU's actions were in fact terrorism. One interlocuter, after providing an exhaustive list of reforms including new police powers, new federal bodies, and new legislation, nevertheless insisted that these reforms were not systematic. "The state police get more resources, and the Verfassungsschutz gets more analysts," they said. "There is a short period of attention [after incidents], but the impact is mostly just more personnel." At the same time, when asked how one would know that the government or a security agency were actually taking white supremacist violence seriously, the most common answer among my interlocuters was "more personnel".

What explains this simultaneous desire for the very policy that the government is pursuing and the persistent belief that the government, despite pursuing that policy, does not take the threat seriously? Digging deeper uncovered that elites believed a discursive and attitudinal change regarding white supremacist violence also needed to occur. Yet such change is extremely difficult to engineer. "Discourse tends to snap back," one interlocuter explained. Another described a predictable six-week period of talk following a major attack before things "return to normal". Even those interlocuters who appeared most committed to prioritizing white supremacist violence as a threat still had reservations about being too quick to respond—a position expressed both by those interlocuters and by others critical of their parties or agencies.

This tension reveals the complexity of situating the NSU, a clear case of white supremacist violence, within an institutional structure that demands not acknowledging the role of white supremacy in its own perpetuation. In narrating the NSU attacks and determining the government response, elites chose to position the NSU as being *in* German society, but not *of* it—that is, the NSU was a product of something fundamentally opposed to notions of German-ness, because no "true" German would have engaged in such acts of violence (Graef 2018, 13). Thinking otherwise would have required acknowledging that the ideology motivating the NSU cell, while extreme, had deeper roots in German society in the form of a hegemonic component of national identity: white supremacy. And so white supremacist incidents continue to fall short of being true turning points; to treat them as such, even if one wants to do so, would require a serious confrontation with how white Germans benefit from white supremacist institutions. Even well-intentioned white people are inclined to resist such a confrontation because they benefit from white supremacy as a system.

As one interlocuter put it:

“When it comes to left-wing terrorism or Islamist terrorism, the view is that this terrorism threatens society as a whole and the foundations of society: property rights, democracy, Christian values, Western values [switches to English and rolls eyes] whatever that means. [switches back to German] This is just my theory, but the victims [of far-right attacks] were ‘only’ migrants.”

I then asked them how they would know if the government were taking the threat of white supremacist terrorism seriously. “More personnel,” they said.

## 6 Conclusion: Returning to Walter Lübcke

“What has changed?” a former bureaucrat said, reiterating my question. We were seated at a leafy café on the west side of Berlin, just over a month after Walter Lübcke’s assassination. “The attack was legible<sup>37</sup> for most Germans,” they continued. “Lübcke is the great breaking point.”

Once again, a white supremacist attack seems to merit a sea change in how a government discusses and makes counterterrorism policy. In this paper, I have argued that despite discourse that constructs violent events as turning points for policy, such events actually demonstrate the stickiness of existing power relationships within society. Using firsthand insights from national security elites in Germany, I have shown that in the case of white supremacist violence, even attacks and organizations referred to as “terrorist” do not receive the same treatment as those perceived to stem from other ideologies. The position of white supremacy as a hegemonic component of national identity throughout the Global North, including in Germany, means that to seriously reckon with the phenomenon of white supremacist violence would require questioning a system whose existence depends on not being questioned.

How does this logic suggest that the response to Walter Lübcke’s assassination will play out? Some of my interlocuters were quick to point out what was different about the attack: while it is common for the far right to target politicians, actually attacking them is rare—and attacking them *successfully* is rarer still. One elite noted that the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Lübcke’s party, was seriously discussing refusing to cooperate with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the state legislatures, which if true would represent a significant change in the German political landscape. Others were

<sup>37</sup>My interlocuter used *fassbar*, which is difficult to translate directly. The word means tangible or graspable in the sense that something resonates or fits into existing scripts.

more pessimistic. “It’s not a milestone,” one asserted. “The reaction to Lübcke is not fear about terrorism,” said another. “This [far-right attacks] aren’t something that people think affects everyone.”

A search of several major German news sources for Lübcke’s name reveals that as of August 2019, the incident was still being referenced in stories about right-wing extremism, gun regulations, and state surveillance.<sup>38</sup> The perception among elites, however, is that many politicians have moved on. Speaking in August, one security professional told me, “There is a lack of real pressure from politicians to change anything.”

The German parliament returns from its summer recess on September 9, when it will have to address proposals to devote more resources to right-wing extremism raised at the end of June. The new parliamentary session will put Lübcke back in the public discourse, potentially reigniting debates about how to address white supremacist violence in Germany. It is possible that both more personnel devoted to far-right terrorism and attitudinal changes about the seriousness of the phenomenon will follow. Yet if the past is any indication, the assassination of Walter Lübcke will persist in German narratives as a turning point in name only.

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<sup>38</sup>e.g. “Sorglose Behörde.” *TAZ*, August 8, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2KGRuTX>; “Bouffier: Keine Waffen für aktenkundige Extremisten.” *Die Welt*, August 12, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2GZUIAS>; “Gib mir ein kleines bisschen Sicherheit.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, August 7, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2MdBOFZ>

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