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## **The Diffusion of Ethnic Violence in Germany:**

### **The Role of Social Similarity**

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January 2008

ISSN no. 1866-0614

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin  
für Sozialforschung (WZB)  
Social Science Research Center Berlin

**Research Area:**  
Civil Society, Conflict and Democracy

**Research Unit:**  
Migration, Integration, Transnationalization  
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**Order no.: SP IV 2008-702**



## **Abstract**

In this paper we develop and test an encompassing theoretical framework for the explanation of the geographical and temporal spread of extreme right violence. This framework combines internal precipitating factors related to ethnic competition, social disintegration, and political opportunity structures, which make certain localities more prone to exhibit ethnic violence, with diffusion variables that determine the degree to which ethnic violence diffuses across time and across localities. We employ an event history analysis of instances of racist violence in 444 German counties for the time period 1990-1995. In line with previous research we demonstrate that political opportunities, ethnic competition and social disorganization, media coverage, and the severity of previous violence are significant explanatory factors for the evolution of xenophobic violence. In contrast to previous research we find that geographical distance does not affect the diffusion of ethnic violence when controlling for social similarity which exerts a significant influence on diffusion. Results make a strong case for empirically neglected homophily arguments.

**Keywords:** Collective action, Diffusion, Germany, Social movements, Xenophobia

## **Zusammenfassung**

In diesem Papier wird ein umfassender theoretischer Rahmen für die Erklärung der geographischen und zeitlichen Ausbreitung rechtsextremistischer Gewalt entwickelt und getestet. Dieser theoretische Rahmen verbindet interne Auslöser, die mit ethnischer Konkurrenz, sozialer Desintegration und politischen Gelegenheitsstrukturen zusammenhängen und aufgrund derer bestimmte Ortschaften eher anfällig für ethnisch motivierte Gewalt werden, mit Diffusionsvariablen, die bestimmen, in welchem Grade sich ethnische Gewalt über die Zeit und über Ortschaften hinweg ausbreitet. Mittels Ereignisdatenanalyse werden Fälle rassistischer Gewalt untersucht, die sich in dem Zeitraum 1990-1995 in 444 deutschen Kreisen ereigneten. In Übereinstimmung mit früheren Befunden wird gezeigt, dass politische Gelegenheiten, ethnische Konkurrenz und soziale Desorganisation, Medienberichterstattung und der Schweregrad vorhergegangener Gewalttaten signifikante erklärende Faktoren für die Entwicklung fremdenfeindlicher Gewalt sind. Die Autoren stellen jedoch im Gegensatz zu anderen vorliegenden Studien fest, dass die geographische Entfernung die Ausbreitung ethnischer Gewalt nicht beeinflusst, wenn um soziale Ähnlichkeit kontrolliert wird, die einen signifikanten Einfluss auf die Diffusion hat. Die Ergebnisse liefern starke Argumente für das empirisch vernachlässigte Konzept von Homophilie.

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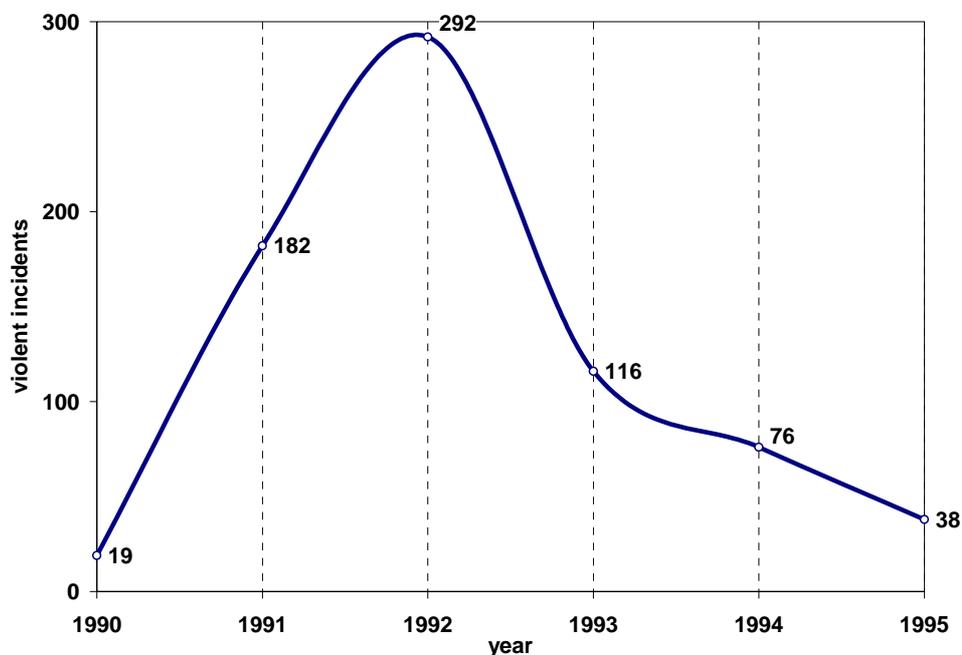


## Introduction

Following its reunification Germany witnessed a strong upsurge in extreme right violence targeting asylum seekers and other immigrant groups, peaking in 1992 and leveling off during the subsequent years (see Figure 1). This wave of violence resulted in up to a hundred casualties, thousands of injuries, and extensive material damage (Kurthen, Bergmann and Erb, 1997). In this paper we provide a systematic analysis of factors that can account for this wave of xenophobic violence. Our framework combines precipitating factors related to ethnic competition, social disintegration, and political opportunity structures, which make certain localities more prone to exhibit ethnic violence, with diffusion variables that determine the degree to which ethnic violence diffuses across time and across localities. Our approach brings together several strands of research, but adds a number of refinements, particularly where the determinants of diffusion are concerned.

Diffusion studies on mobilization have shown that geographical distance matters (e.g., Gould, 1991; Hedstrom, 1994; Myers, 2000; Andrews and Biggs, 2006). Most of these studies consider geographical distance to be a proxy for a social

Figure 1: *The evolution of xenophobic violence in Germany, 1990-1995*



Source: MERCI (Koopmans and Statham, 1999), European Protest and Coercion Data (2007).

relationship. But as Tarde ([1890] 1921) remarked long ago, geographical distance as such is not socially relevant; what matters is distance in the sociological sense. Few diffusion studies of protest in general, or of ethnic violence in particular, have however tried to measure social distance (or “homophily” as it is also known in the diffusion literature) directly. Studies that do examine social similarity (Soule, 1997) do not take into account geographical distance. In this paper, we show that when we include political, socio-economic, and demographic measures of homophily, geographical distance no longer matters, providing strong support for social similarity arguments.

We combine the homophily perspective on diffusion with insights from recent work that has shown that media attention creates “discursive opportunities” that facilitate the diffusion of protest. In line with earlier studies, we show that media visibility of events increases diffusion rates. We further provide strong evidence for a contested conjuncture in the literature on extreme right movements, which claims that xenophobic violence is lower where right-wing parties are strong. While the empirical literature contains several indications in this direction and it also fits findings for left-wing movements, much of the literature on xenophobia and the extreme right supposes (but rarely demonstrates) the opposite, namely that strong right-wing parties create through their anti-immigrant rhetoric a fertile soil for racist violence.

We investigate the merits of our approach through an analysis of data on xenophobic violence in Germany in the period 1990-1995. We methodologically improve over earlier studies on this topic in several ways. First, we combine two independently gathered datasets, one based on a detailed coding of a single national newspaper (see Koopmans, 2001), and another based on a more extensive search of a wide range of media sources (Francisco, 1996). Second, we analyze the data on a much more detailed level of analysis than previous studies. First, we employ event history analysis and therefore use information on the exact timing of events, in contrast to earlier studies, which have aggregated events to months (e.g., Brosius and Esser, 1995; Koopmans, 2001) or years (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004). Second, whereas earlier studies were conducted only on the national level or across the sixteen German federal states, we use the most fine-grained administrative unit for which statistical data are available in Germany, the county (“*Kreis*”), allowing us to compare, and analyze diffusion across more than 400 geographical units. We use a more fine-grained operationalization of social homophily across geographical units than any study of protest diffusion that we are aware of, which is based on pairwise calculations of differences regarding the demographic, political, and socio-economic characteristics of counties.

The structure of the paper is as follows. We first give an overview of theories of ethnic violence and introduce the various aspects of internal conduciveness and determinants of diffusion that we want to investigate in this study. We then introduce our data and method, and describe the operationalization of the various

theoretical concepts and the empirical expectations attached to them. The results provide strong support for the role of homophily and media attention in the diffusion of violence. In support of the political opportunity structure perspective, we also find that violence is lower where right-wing parties are electorally strong. To some extent we also find supporting evidence for ethnic competition (Olzak, 1986) and social disorganization theories of ethnic violence (Heitmeyer et al., 1992).

## **Conduciveness theories**

Theories of ethnic violence can be classified into two broad categories, which we label as “conduciveness” and “diffusion” theories. Conduciveness theories emphasize the local precipitating conditions that make certain cities, regions, or countries more likely to exhibit high rates of ethnic violence. Which precipitating conditions are emphasized varies across studies. An important strand of research has emphasized “ethnic competition,” the struggle between ethnic groups over scarce resources, most importantly jobs. In his classic study *Race and Culture*, Park (1950) claims that eventually all ethnic groups will assimilate to the host society. However, before this final destination is reached, societies pass through the transitional stages of the race relations cycle. One of these stages is the stage of ethnic competition in which ethnic minorities come to compete with the native population over scarce resources. Increased competition, argues Park, leads to an intensification of ethnic group identification, which in its turn produces more strict ethnic boundaries.

Later followers of the work of Park, of whom Olzak is perhaps the most prominent, have elaborated on his work and used it to study collective action based on ethnic boundaries (Olzak, 1986; Olzak and Shanahan, 1996). The main idea underlying this work is that rigid group boundaries that follow from ethnic competition are a necessary condition for the occurrence of collective action along ethnic lines. Ethnic competition theorists have mainly focused on labour market competition, holding that economic contraction and the presence of immigrants spark violent mobilization of ethnic groups. In this view, ethnic violence is most likely to occur where both ethnic immigration and unemployment rates are high (e.g., Bélanger and Pinard, 1991; Olzak, 1992; Nagel, 1996).

Disorganization theorists on the other hand state that collective violence is a product of malintegration of society. In line with the classical work of Durkheim, it is argued that the absence of social ties in combination with organizational dissolution and deteriorating solidarity increases the propensity for citizens to get engaged in collective violence (Oberschall, 1973). This strand of theorizing is particularly influential in the study of the extreme right and xenophobic violence and emphasizes that the “losers of the modernization process” (Heitmeyer et al., 1992) are susceptible to scapegoating immigrants for their problems (e.g., Krell

et al., 1996; McLaren, 1999). In contrast to ethnic competition theory, high levels of immigration are in this view not a necessary condition for xenophobic violence, as the main causes of ethnic violence are related to the anomic condition of the perpetrators, and immigrants may become scapegoats even where there are relatively few of them.

A third strand of theory treats ethnic violence as part of a wider political process and emphasizes political opportunity structure variables such as the party-political power configuration (e.g., Kriesi et al., 1995). In their four-country comparative study, Kriesi et al. (1995) showed that left-libertarian new social movements achieved the highest levels of mobilization during times when right-wing governments were in office. During such periods, these movements received more support from established left-wing parties. Conversely, they argued that during periods of left-wing dominance, new social movement mobilization is inhibited by a “reform” effect (in contrast to a “threat” effect under right-wing governments), which leads activists to choose the less costly and risky and in these periods of friendly government probably also more effective path of electoral politics and lobbying over extra-institutional mobilization. Several studies show that a similar relationship holds for the extraparliamentary radical right, which tends to mobilize most in countries where extreme right parties are weak. Koopmans found considerable evidence for this notion by comparing extreme right violence in eight European countries. Countries where extreme right parties were strongly represented in parliament experienced lower rates of xenophobic violence than countries in which extreme right political parties were electorally weak (Koopmans, 1996; see also Giugni et al., 2005).

## **Diffusion theories**

Their differences notwithstanding, the above theoretical perspectives all emphasize “internal” factors that make some localities more and others less likely to exhibit ethnic violence, either because of the psychological states of people in these localities caused by feelings of ethnic threat and anomie, or because of strategic considerations of the local political opportunity structure. By contrast, diffusion theories emphasize that decisions to engage in ethnic violence are not taken in local isolation, but are often based on imitation. As a result, ethnic violence, like other forms of protest (McAdam, 1982), often occurs in waves that diffuse rapidly across local and sometimes also national boundaries, as activists imitate the examples of like-minded activists in other localities (Biggs, 2003; Oliver and Myers, 2003). In emphasizing imitation, diffusion theories of ethnic violence build on the more general literature on the diffusion of innovations (Soule, 2004).

According to Rogers’ influential definition, diffusion is “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the

members of a social system” (Rogers 1995: 5). The diffusion perspective (for an overview, see Strang and Soule, 1998) has been applied to a variety of topics, including agricultural technologies and crop varieties (e.g., Rogers, 1995), drugs (e.g., Coleman et al., 1957; Burt, 1987), riots (e.g., Myers, 2000), business models (e.g., Strang and Macy, 2001), collective action frames (e.g., McAdam and Rucht, 1993), and the spread of democracy (e.g. Starr, 1991).

Which factors determine the diffusion chances of innovations? Gabriel Tarde’s study of the “laws of imitation” ([1890] 1921) still provides a useful starting point. Tarde begins by distinguishing “logical” from “non-logical” causes of diffusion. Logical causes are those that directly follow from the inherent and observable qualities of an innovation, non-logical causes are those that derive from the social relations between source and adopter. The reason why imitation is often based on social factors rather than on the inherent qualities of an innovation is that information about these qualities is often unavailable or incomplete and uncertain. Under conditions of limited information and uncertainty, following social cues is often an efficient way of finding adaptive solutions to life problems (Simon, 1983; Boyd and Richerson, 1985). However, imitation based on social cues can sometimes also be maladaptive. Rogers (1995) gives several examples of socially driven (non)adoption of innovations that were suboptimal or even harmful from the point of view of the innovation’s contribution to people’s quality of life.

A core finding from the diffusion literature regarding the social determinants of diffusion is the importance of “homophily” between sources and adopters, which Rogers defines as “the degree to which two or more individuals who interact are similar in certain attributes, such as beliefs, education, social status, and the like” (1995: 18-19). Tarde similarly observed: “In fact, it is as a direct result of the *distance* to the model, and not just of its superiority, that the latter’s influence is effective. *Distance* is to be understood here in the sociological sense of the word” ([1890] 1921: 243; emphasis in the original, our translation from the French). Why homophily between model and adopter should increase rates of diffusion is easily understood. Because of the similarity between the two, innovations that are used by a homophilous model are more likely to also be useful and relevant for the potential adopter. Conversely, the experiences of a model that is very different from the potential adopter do not necessarily constitute information that is very useful and relevant for the adopter.

Similarity between models and adopters has also been shown to affect the diffusion of protest tactics (Soule, 2004). Studies of radical left movements in the United States and Germany show that frames and tactics spill over from one country to the other as a result of cultural linkages between the two that arise from mutual identification (McAdam and Rucht, 1993). In a similar vein, Spilerman (1970) hypothesized that collective ethnic identity made the spread of violent incidents between ethnic groups possible. Hence social movements create channels through which diffusion can take place simply by looking at and

identifying (Strang and Meyer, 1993) with similar movements in distant areas. The intensity of collective identification among social movement actors accelerates diffusion. In her study of the American anti-apartheid movement Soule (1997) focused on the proliferation of an innovative demonstrative tactic, the sit-in, across university campuses. Her results indicate that protest innovations spread more rapidly among university movements that shared structural characteristics, such as endowment size and prestige.

Another key finding from diffusion studies relates to what Rogers calls “selective exposure”: “Individuals tend to expose themselves to ideas that are in accordance with their interests, needs, and existing attitudes. Individuals consciously or unconsciously avoid messages that are in conflict with their predispositions” (1995: 164). This mechanism provides an additional reason why people are more likely to adopt information from people who are similar to themselves. However, people are not only selectively exposed to certain examples because these fit their own biases and predispositions, but also because people nowadays increasingly depend on the mass media to obtain information, and are therefore exposed to prominent coverage about some events, and may not learn anything about many other events. Diffusion studies of race riots have shown that indeed media coverage is an important determinant of diffusion (e.g., Danzger, 1975; Brosius and Esser, 1995; Myers, 2000). More recently, several scholars have linked the role of the media to the opportunity structure perspective by conceptualizing media attention as a “discursive opportunity structure” (Koopmans and Statham, 1999b; Ferree et al., 2002). Koopmans and Olzak (2004) have linked this idea to the diffusion perspective and showed that those forms of xenophobic violence in Germany were most likely to spread that were highly visible in the mass media. Selective exposure through the media is also contingent on event characteristics. As Myers (2000) demonstrates severe riots are more contagious and influential than smaller ones since they attract more media attention.

## **Data and dependent variable**

To explore the effect of local conduciveness and diffusion on racist violence we analyze data from 1990 to 1995 for all 444 German counties. We track all instances of xenophobic violence that were reported in two independently collected datasets. The first one was collected as part of a large project covering European protest and coercion in twenty-eight European countries from 1980 to 1995, conducted by social movement scholars affiliated with the University of Kansas (Francisco, 1996; Reising, 1999; European Protest and Coercion Data, 2007). The data were collected from digitally available news resources available in the Reuters textline library, which can be accessed through LEXIS NEXIS. The Reuters textline library covers over 400 international, national and regional wire

services, newspapers and magazines. For each instance of contention, the date, geographical location, number of arrests, number of participants, initiating group and target were pre-coded by means of the Kansas event data system (KEDS), a computer program that is capable of processing news articles and making initial coding decisions. The coding decisions were inspected manually and if needed adjusted afterwards. This data set includes a total of 253 violent incidents targeting foreigners in Germany for the time period 1990-1995. The second file utilized in this paper was collected in the context of the MERCI-project (Koopmans and Statham, 1999a). The MERCI-file contains violent incidents and other strategic political actions in the political field of immigration and integration. The data were manually coded from Monday, Wednesday, and Friday issues of the national newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* between 1990 and 1999. This database includes the date, geographic location, deaths, arrests and numbers of participants of 531 instances of anti-foreigner violence for the time period 1990-1995. Monthly aggregates of both files correlated highly (.91) indicating the comparability and reliability of the measurements. After integration of the files, 61 doublings, i.e. violent incidents covered both in the Francisco and the MERCI-file were merged. Another 36 events in the integrated file occurred in the same county on the same day. These so-called tied events were also merged into one event since the sequence models employed in this paper cannot handle durations of 0. This might be solved by adding up a small portion of time to one of the tied events. However this would require knowledge about the exact time order of events, which is absent in the present data file. The definitive analysis therefore included 687 events that took place in 220 of the 444 counties. Since the analysis solely relies on newspaper data one must be aware of the problem of selection bias that affects the use of this type of data. Therefore the integrated file's yearly aggregates were correlated with official police statistics obtained from the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* to see whether our data indeed grasp changes in extreme right violence over time correctly. The high correlation of .82 between the two sources gives us confidence that our data reflects real fluctuations in xenophobic violence.

## Analysis

We employ event history models to the data described above, focusing on the duration of time between violent events in each of the individual counties. We start our analysis on 1 January 1990 and end on 31 December 1995. This end date was chosen because the Francisco data set only runs until the end of 1995, but it also makes sense substantively. Our data (see Figure 1 above), as well as police statistics, and historical records (Kurthen, Bergmann and Erb, 1997) indicate that the wave of extreme right violence in Germany had subsided by the beginning of 1996. In total we analyze 1,131 subjects: 687 that end in racist violence and 444 spells that are right censored.

We make use of partial likelihood estimation as developed by Cox (Cox and Oakes, 1984). Cox regression, as opposed to other event history techniques; has as a main advantage that one does not need to specify the baseline hazard. Although some tools are available in current statistical packages to evaluate the parameterization of the baseline hazard, final choices for a parametric model should always be based on strong theoretical assumptions (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 2002), which are not always present in current social inquiry (but see Olzak, 1992).

However, in specifying a Cox model two considerations should be taken into account. First of all it posits that variables included in the model shift the baseline hazard multiplicatively and that these shifts are constant over time: the proportional hazard assumption. This assumption can be tested by means of a Schoenfeld residual test. Schoenfeld residuals can be retrieved for each covariate by calculating the difference between the covariate value for a failed observation and the mean covariate value of all subjects at risk when the failure took place. Accordingly one has to fit a function of time to them and test whether there is a relationship. If the slope of the time effect does not significantly differ from zero, the proportional hazards assumption is met (Gould and Cleves, 2004). Inspection of the Schoenfeld residuals indicated that the proportional hazard assumption of our models was not significantly violated.

Second, the baseline hazard for event occurrence might vary across entities facing different structural settings. In light of this study it is likely that the baseline hazard varies between East and West Germany since so short after Germany's unification there was a high degree of social and economic divergence between the two regions. According to Heitmeyer (1993) it would not go too far to view East and West Germany as two completely separate societies only connected by institutional processes. Whether the xenophobic mobilization studied in this paper indeed took place in two completely different social settings can be checked by inspecting how the hazard of xenophobic violence evolved over time in the two regions separately. The estimated cumulative baseline hazard functions for East and West Germany show that xenophobic violence indeed evolved differently in both regions. Therefore we have stratified all observations by East/West region. Stratified models allow the baseline hazard to vary over groups but at the same time estimate coefficients that are constrained to be homogeneous and therefore allow for the inference of general causal relations for both regions. As a robustness check, we have also estimated a non-stratified model with an East-West dummy. Results were very similar. In addition, we estimated separate models for counties in East and West Germany. These models were also largely consistent with the ones presented below.

In our analysis, 130 counties experienced more than one instance of racist violence. Therefore our models are susceptible to unobserved heterogeneity leading to a downward bias in standard errors. We follow Myers (1997, 2000) in solving this problem by including a variable that taps the history of racist violence

for every county by counting the number of prior violent events that occurred. Since we also include variables that show more over time than geographical variation, such as the severity and visibility of previous violence, our observations are also nested in time points. We therefore estimate standard errors without assuming that counties measured on the same day are independent from each other.

## Independent variables

For all independent variables multicollinearity statistics were inspected that did not indicate problems. A correlation matrix is presented in Table A-1 in the Appendix. We begin by describing the variables that only vary cross-sectionally over counties. All data, unless indicated otherwise are collected from the 1994 Statistical Yearbook for Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1994).<sup>1</sup>

*Ethnic competition.* The proportion of foreigners as reported in the year 1994 and unemployment rates for the year 1993 are used as measures of ethnic competition. In line with ethnic competition theories we expect both variables to have a positive effect on the propensity for violence.<sup>2</sup>

*Social disorganization.* We use the total migration flow in and out of the county in thousands to gauge the social dislocation of a community. We further use the emigration surplus as an indicator of unfavorable socio-economic conditions in a county. Many rural East German areas experienced strong population losses due to emigration during the period of study, spurred by a lack of jobs and other opportunities for social mobility. Finally, we also use average life expectancy as an indicator of social problems. Parts of East Germany experienced significant drops in life expectancy as a result of the turmoil of reunification. Social disorganization theories lead us to expect more violence in counties that have high levels of migration, an emigration surplus, and a lower life expectancy.

*Political opportunity structure.* The percentages of votes in the 1994 Bundestag elections for the main extreme right party (the Republikaner), as well as for the established conservative parties (CDU and CSU), are used as indicators of the

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- 1 Statistics for East German counties were not immediately available after reunification in October 1990. In addition, in the years immediately after reunification many borders of East German counties were redrawn. We were therefore constrained to measure many independent variables time invariant, for the first year for which data are available after the redrawing of county boundaries, i.e. 1994. For some variables of potential interest – such as the local gross domestic product – data are incomplete for the entire period of our study. We therefore had to exclude these variables from the analysis.
  - 2 We also tried an interaction term of both variables. Due to serious problems of multicollinearity (the interaction term and the percentage of foreigners correlated almost .90) we decided not to include this interaction term in our model.

political opportunity structure. Previous studies of social movement mobilization lead us to expect that the stronger the electoral power of extreme right and moderate right parties, the lower will be the intensity of extreme right violence. The data has been collected from the election atlas<sup>3</sup>.

*Control variables concerning the size and status of counties.* All other things being equal, more populous counties will have a greater likelihood to experience a violent event than sparsely populated counties. In addition, violence in capital cities of the sixteen German federal states may attract more media attention because these are the places where media and wire service correspondents are concentrated. We control for these two county characteristics by including a Capital dummy and the population size in thousands.

We now move over to the description of the diffusion variables that vary for each county-day combination.

*General diffusion.* This variable counts the number of previous violent events that took place in all the other 443 counties. We experimented with several specifications and opted for a period of seven days. This is in line with earlier findings of ethnic violence in the U.S. (Myers, 1997). We did not include a time-decaying element as proposed by Myers (2000) since this complicates the interpretation of the coefficient. We expect a general positive effect between violence in other counties on the violence hazard.<sup>4</sup>

*Geographical proximity.* We used the inversed score of the closest county in which a violent racist attack took place in the preceding seven days to grasp the effect of geographical proximity. If for instance during the previous seven days two violent events took place, the proximity score of the geographically closest county is used. Distances between counties were calculated by means of the Great circle distance method. Theories on direct-tie diffusion would lead us to expect that there is a positive association between the violence hazard and the geographical distance of previous incidents of xenophobic violence.<sup>5</sup>

*Severity.* To tap the severity of violence we developed a scale based on four indicators: the number of participants in a violent event, the number of injuries, the number of deaths and the amount of arrests in such events during the previous seven days. A reasonable scale ( $\alpha=.66$ ) was developed by taking the mean z-score. Severe violence is expected to receive more exposure, leading to more diffusion in subsequent time periods.

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3 [www.wahlatlas.de](http://www.wahlatlas.de), data retrieved on September 7, 2004.

4 We also experimented with a squared diffusion term to model the decaying effect of diffusion. This did not alter the relations presented below. However we decided not to include the variable because its inclusion caused some concern with respect to multicollinearity.

5 We also experimented with the mean inverted distance and the square inverse root functions (Hedstrom 1996; Andrews and Biggs, 2006) of distance. Results with all three parameters are similar.

*Media visibility.* Three types of media visibility are measured to test selective exposure arguments.

- *Visual:* the percentage of events in other counties in the preceding month that was covered with an accompanying photograph.
- *Front page:* the percentage of events in other counties in the preceding month that was covered on the front page.
- *Both datasets:* the percentage of events in other counties in the preceding month that was covered in both the Koopmans and Francisco datasets on extreme right violence in Germany.

Since all variables are highly skewed all values were log-transformed.<sup>6</sup> All three indicators are expected to make preceding events more visible to prospective imitators. Previous events that were accompanied by visual cues in the media, and that received front page coverage are more likely to be imitated than those that received less coverage. Because the two datasets are based on different media samples, we interpret the presence of an event in both datasets also as an indicator of media visibility. The higher the number of media sources that cover an event, the more likely it is that this event will cause copycat events elsewhere.

*Social similarity (homophily).* Six measures that gauge social similarity between transmitters and adopters of collective violence are utilized. First of all we consider the share of incidents in the preceding week that occurred in the same Bundesland and same part of the county (East or West Germany) to be important indicators of political and socio-cultural similarity. Only a few years after reunification, the division between East and West was (and to this day is) an important cleavage in German society and an important source of collective identification. The same also holds for the federal states, which are not only political and administrative units with a substantial amount of autonomy, particularly in the cultural domain, but also an important source of identification, although the extent of such emotional attachments varies somewhat from one Bundesland to the other. We therefore expect activists to be more strongly influenced by previous events that occurred in the same part of Germany and in the same federal state, even when we control for geographical distance.

We also expect other indicators of political, socio-economic, and demographic similarity to play a role. We expect activists to be more strongly influenced by previous events in other counties that are perceived as being similar to their own county in the sense that they are populated by similar people (rural/urban) with a similar political leaning (left/right). The rural/urban and left/right divides are influential cleavages in German society and therefore play an important role with respect to social identification (Lepsius, 1990). In addition, we assume that activists will be more inclined to copy behaviour from people who are confronted

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<sup>6</sup> 1 was added to deal with zero values.

with a similar demographic situation in terms of the level of immigration. For instance, we expect conservative rural counties with small immigrant populations to be especially influenced by counties with similar characteristics, particularly if they are in addition situated in the same part of the country and in the same Bundesland. Net of these specific measures of social similarity, geographical distance may still pick up unmeasured aspects of similarity, although we hope that by including our detailed measurement of specific similarity measures we can wholly or largely explain away the theoretically underspecified geographic distance effect. Political left/right similarity is measured as the inversed difference in the percentage of CDU/CSU votes between a particular county and the most similar county that had an event in the preceding week.<sup>7</sup> Socio-economic similarity is measured by the inversed difference in the percentage of the working population that is employed in the agrarian sector between a particular county and the most similar county that had an event in the preceding seven days.<sup>8</sup> Demographic similarity is measured by the inversed difference in the percentage of foreigners between a particular county and the most similar county that experienced an instance of racist violence during the preceding seven days.

*Time-varying control variables.* Earlier research on xenophobic violence in Germany shows that such events occurred disproportionately on weekend nights, often linked to excessive alcohol consumption (e.g., Willems and Hill, 1993). In addition, we explore systematic seasonal variation, in particular whether violence was more likely during the warmer months of the year when many people, both racist perpetrators and their victims, are out in the streets. We therefore control in our analysis for weekend days and the summer months.

## Results

Table 1 presents the results of the stratified Cox regression. We present hazard ratios, the hazard of a particular case divided by the hazard of a case that scores one point lower on the relevant covariate. In the first model we include the measures that tap the conduciveness of counties to violence, adding controls for previous incidents in a county (history of violence), population size, whether a county is a political capital or not, as well as the summer and weekend dummies.

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7 We additionally considered similarity measures based on the percentage of votes for the Greens, the PDS (post-communists), and the Republikaner, but these did not attain significance once the CDU-based variable was introduced. We therefore concluded that the percentage of CDU votes best summarizes the political leaning of a county.

8 We additionally considered similarity regarding industrial employment, but found no significant effects once percentage agrarian was included. We therefore concluded that the cleavage between urban and rural counties, which is best captured by the percentage employed in the agrarian sector is the most relevant measure of social similarity for the case at hand.

As expected, we find positive effects for capital cities for population size. In line with previous research the model shows that extreme right violence is overrepresented during weekends, when the violence risk is almost 90 percent higher than on regular weekdays. Xenophobic violence is however not more likely to occur during the summer months. Although the parameter has a considerable positive effect in the first model, it turns insignificant when the two diffusion parameters are added, indicating that the summer effect is actually mediated by diffusion.

Turning to the more theoretically interesting results of the first model, we find some support for ethnic competition theories. The number of foreign immigrants in a county has a positive impact on violence. A county with a one percent higher immigrant population share has a six percent higher violence hazard. While this immigrant effect is substantial, we find no association between unemployment rates and ethnic violence, providing only partial support for the notion that ethnic violence follows from competition between ethnic groups over scarce resources such as jobs.

The first model also shows considerable support for social disorganization theories. Population instability in the form of high migration flows increase the rate of xenophobic violence. Crisis-ridden counties that experience net population losses due to emigration also have higher rates of violence. By contrast, areas with a higher than average life expectancy experience fewer xenophobic events. In line with disorganization theories we thus find that xenophobic violence is associated with anomic conditions and social problems.

We additionally find strong support for political opportunity structure approaches. The electoral strength of both extreme right and moderate right parties has an inhibiting effect on violent mobilization. Xenophobes in counties where the right, and especially the extreme right, has a stronger position in local parliaments are less inclined to revert to violent tactics. In a county with one percent more votes for extreme right parties the intensity of extreme right violence is more than 30 percent lower. The second model in table 1 goes beyond the precipitating conditions in particular counties and introduces two general measure of diffusion, the effect of previous events in other counties, and the geographical proximity variable. The number of violent events during the previous seven days in the rest of Germany, which taps general diffusion processes, has a strong and positive influence on subsequent rates of anti-foreigner violence in a particular county. Each preceding incident results in 0.04 percent more violence. The geographical proximity variable is also significant and in the predicted direction, offering preliminary support for the notion that violence in counties close to a given county has an additional positive effect over and above the general diffusion effect.

Model 2 adds the variables relating to the severity of previous events, and the intensity of media coverage that they attracted. The results support our selective exposure predictions. Severe violence and violence that appears on the front

**Table 1:** *Cox regression stratified by East/West region of instances of anti-foreigner violence in Germany 1990-1995 on county and event characteristics*

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>		<i>Model 4</i>	
	<i>Hazard Ratio</i>	<i>Clustered S. E.</i>						
History of violence	1.017	.014	1.016	.014	1.027**	.014	1.027**	.013
Summer	1.838**	.265	1.192	.167	1.048	.140	1.061	.142
Weekend	1.876**	.266	1.817**	.227	1.825**	.222	1.823**	.220
Population	1.002**	.001	1.003**	.001	1.002**	.001	1.003**	.001
Capital	1.520**	.236	1.474**	.229	1.472**	.228	1.541**	.240
Unemployment	1.006	.013	1.004	.014	1.006	.014	1.007	.014
Foreigners	1.070**	.017	1.063**	.018	1.064**	.018	1.066**	.018
Total migration	1.431**	.201	1.420**	.190	1.441**	.192	1.486**	.200
Emigration surplus	2.602*	1.111	2.646*	1.139	2.480*	1.059	2.010*	.800
Life expectancy	.872**	.035	.891**	.035	.892**	.035	.884**	.034
Votes extreme right	.692**	.050	.719**	.052	.721**	.052	.739**	.053
Votes moderate right	.985**	.006	.983**	.006	.982**	.006	.986**	.006
General Diffusion			1.039**	.005	1.036**	.005	1.037**	.005
Geographic proximity			3.575**	.732	2.169**	.521	.521	1.073
Violence severity					1.466**	.162	1.417**	.151
Front page					2.903**	.930	2.840**	.915
Both data sets					3.633*	2.188	3.271*	1.877
Photo					5.162**	3.339	5.628**	3.567
Same Bundesland							2.345**	.554
Same region							1.266	.223
Political similarity,							1.635**	.334
Economic similarity							1.476**	.245
Demographic similarity							1.443**	.224
Log-Pseudo-likelihood	-3862.2		-3626.67		-3601.34		-3580.39	
Spells	1131		1131		1131		1131	
Failures	687		687		687		687	

\* p < .05 (one tailed).

\*\*p < .01 (one tailed).

page, is visualized with a photo, or which is reported in more than one media source diffuses faster than violent events that receive less exposure.

In the third and final model we enter the social similarity variables. Nearly all estimated coefficients support homophily arguments of diffusion. Preceding violence has a stronger impact on subsequent rates of mobilization when it occurs in the same Bundesland and is initiated in politically and socio-economically similar regions that are confronted with similar rates of foreigners. The effect of preceding violence that occurs in the same East/West region is also positive and in the expected direction, but it does not reach statistical significance. Hence we conclude that our theoretical expectation is confirmed that local right-wing activists were more inclined to copy behaviour from their counterparts in counties where people experience similar economic, political, and demographic circumstances. Interestingly, geographical distance becomes insignificant once the similarity indices are included in the model. This indicates that the effect of geographical distance is actually caused, as Tarde suggested, not by geographical proximity as such, but by the fact that proximate areas tend to be socially similar.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper we have tried to embed research on xenophobic violence in a framework that combines notions on structural conduciveness with diffusion theory. Contrary to previous studies on extreme right violence in Germany we focus on the most fine-grained administrative unit for which statistical data are available in Germany, the county. This allowed us to test in more detail than before whether dominant theories of ethnic violence such as ethnic competition theories, social disorganization perspectives and political opportunity approaches can account for extreme right violence. Our analysis partially supports the first approach and finds suggestive evidence for the latter two perspectives.

In addition, our study design offered opportunities to investigate how and when ethnic violence spread from one geographical area to another. In line with previous studies we find that selective exposure, caused by the severity of violence and the intensity of media coverage reinforces diffusion processes. Moreover our results show that violence spreads more rapidly among certain categories of counties. Violent behaviour is imitated more rapidly when the adopting and transmitting counties resemble each other with respect to political, socio-economic, and demographic structures. This confirms the theoretical assumption that similar actors are more inclined to identify with each other, which subsequently leads to a form of mutual understanding and connectedness that carries diffusion processes (Strang and Meyer, 1993). Tactics that are used by

homophilous models are moreover more likely to be useful and relevant to potential adopters than tactics of heterophilous models.

A particularly interesting result of our analysis is that geographical distance, which in our initial models affected the diffusion of violence turned out to have no substantial effect anymore once we controlled for social similarity. This is suggestive evidence for the importance of homophily since it implies that it is not confounded by geographical proximity. This result also indicates that the spatial diffusion effects that are found in many studies may actually be crude proxies of social similarity, which lose significance once more specific measures of social similarity are taken into account. There is a tendency among recent scholars of social movement diffusion to regard geographical distance as a measurement of existing network ties (Hedstrom, 1994; Myers, 2000; Andrews and Biggs, 2006). However, if distance does not affect diffusion once controls for social similarity are added this notion might have to be reconsidered.

However, for our present study we did not have actual measurements of social networks at our disposal so the question whether geographical distance to some extent captures network relations remains unresolved. It is very well possible that part of the shared variance between social and geographical similarity covaries with network ties, as birds of a feather tend to flock together (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954). In order to further investigate the relationship between geographical proximity, social similarity, and network ties, we are currently planning to collect data on sports league networks (especially amateur soccer leagues), fascist band tours, and organizational networks of extreme right organizations to disentangle actual networks among right-wing youth in Germany.

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**Table A-1: Correlation matrix of independent and control variables**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
<i>1. History</i>	1.00																							
<i>2. Summer</i>	.01	1.00																						
<i>3. Weekend</i>	.00	.00	1.00																					
<i>4. Inhabitants</i>	.47	.00	.00	1.00																				
<i>5. Capital</i>	.31	.00	.00	.44	1.00																			
<i>6. Unempl</i>	.18	.00	.00	-.07	.01	1.00																		
<i>7. Forei</i>	-.03	.00	.00	.35	.20	-.47	1.00																	
<i>8. SocialD</i>	-.15	.00	.00	-.05	-.13	-.47	.20	1.00																
<i>9. Emigrati</i>	-.18	.00	.00	-.09	-.26	-.19	-.19	.36	1.00															
<i>10. Life expec</i>	-.24	.00	.00	.03	.00	-.49	.34	.28	.13	1.00														
<i>11. Vote extr</i>	-.16	.00	.00	-.03	-.06	-.46	.46	.22	.01	.27	1.00													
<i>12. Vote m</i>	-.24	.00	.00	-.22	-.21	-.34	-.11	.19	.29	.25	.37	1.00												
<i>13. Gendiff</i>	.00	.09	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	1.00											
<i>14. Geo.</i>	.05	.07	.02	.00	.00	.01	-.01	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.37	1.00										
<i>15. Sev</i>	-.02	.06	.01	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.37	.61	1.00									
<i>16. Fronte</i>	.01	.06	.01	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.08	.25	.16	1.00								
<i>17. BothD</i>	-.03	.09	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.09	.12	.18	.14	1.00							
<i>18. Photo</i>	.01	.14	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.20	.13	.07	.05	.01	1.00						
<i>19. S. Bun</i>	.02	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	.03	-.02	-.02	.01	-.03	-.04	-.01	.09	.24	.11	.06	.02	.04	1.00					
<i>20. S.E/W</i>	.03	.03	.01	-.01	.01	.05	-.04	-.02	-.01	-.03	-.01	-.01	.20	.57	.25	.13	.01	.09	-.03	1.00				
<i>21. Poll sim.</i>	.09	.04	.01	.08	.08	.03	.16	-.06	-.16	.04	-.02	-.14	.37	.70	.46	.19	.08	.11	.17	.39	1.00			
<i>22. Soc sim.</i>	.08	.04	.01	.05	.03	.06	.04	-.02	-.05	-.02	-.07	-.19	.38	.57	.38	.19	.07	.12	.19	.33	.54	1.00		
<i>23. Pr sim.</i>	.05	.05	.01	-.05	-.03	.08	-.16	-.03	.02	-.07	-.08	.01	.40	.67	.48	.19	.10	.14	.25	.47	.53	.46	1.00	

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