Department of Political Science

Master's Degree in International Relations - Major: Security

Chair: Sociology of Terrorism and Political Violence

Right-Wing Extremism in Germany:

Historical Trends and Ideological Drivers

Prof. Alessandro Orsini

_____

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Marcello Cannizzaro

_____

CO-SUPERVISOR

Giulia Diem

_____

CANDIDATE

Academic Year 2023/2024

Extraordinary Session March & April 2025

Table of Contents

List of Acronyms

AFD - Alternative für Deutschland - Alternative for Germany

ANS - Aktionsfront Nationaler Sozialisten - Action Front of National Socialists

CDU - Christlich Demokratische Union – Christian Democratic Union

DA - Deutsche Alternative – German Alternative

DKP-DRP - Deutsche Konservative Partei – Deutsche Rechtspartei - German Conservative Party - German Right Party

DVU - Deutsche Volksunion - German People's Union

FAP - Freiheitliche Arbeiterpartei - Liberal Workers' Party

FDP - Freiheitlich Demokratische Partei - Free Democratic Party

GdNF - Gesinnungsgemeinschaft der Neuen Front - Ideological Community of the New Front

GDR - German Democratic Republic

HNG - Hilfsorganisation für nationale politische Gefangene und deren Angehörige - Relief Organization for National Political Prisoners and Their Relatives

NSDAP - Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei National Socialist German Workers‘ Party

NPD - Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands - National Democratic Party of Germany

NSU - Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund - National Socialist Underground

OEZ - Olympia-Einkaufszentrum - Olympia Shopping Center

RAN - Radicalization Awareness Network

SRP - Sozialistische Reichspartei - Socialist Empire Party

TE-SAT - EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report

UN - United Nations

U.S. - United States

WJ - Wiking Jugend – Viking Youth

“Der Rechtsextremismus ist unverändert die größte extremistische Gefahr für die Demokratie in Deutschland.”

Nancy Faeser, Bundesministerin des Innern und für Heimat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2023

“Right-wing extremism remains the greatest extremist threat to democracy in Germany.”

Nancy Faeser, Federal Minister of the Interior and Community of the Federal Republic of Germany, 2023

Introduction

In recent years, Europe has experienced a rise of right-wing violence, often driven by anti-immigration sentiments, islamophobia, and hostility toward ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ+ community. This upsurge has its roots in the convergence of several factors, including discontent among those who feel left behind by globalization, cultural disorientation, and accelerated migration trends. The appeal of right-wing extreme narratives and movements derives from exploiting people's anxieties and blaming societal problems on those perceived as foreign, different, or unfamiliar (Kruglanski, Webber, & Koehler, 2020, p.2). While far-right narratives have long been embedded in Europe's political discourse, they were largely rejected in the early post-World War II era. Now they have increasingly found their way into the political mainstream, becoming part of a "new normal" and fueling a growing incidence of extreme right-wing violence (Pantucci, 2016). These trends are mirrored in the electoral successes of right-wing parties all over the European continent.

Nonetheless, manifestations of right-wing extremism in different countries are uniquely shaped by each nation's cultural and historical context. Due to its deep and pervasive exposure to Nazi ideology in the past, Germany stands out in this regard. With the German reunification in 1990, liberal democracy was expected to introduce freedoms of expression, choice and movement to all citizens across both former states. However, alongside the democratic advancements, nationalist tendencies increased among significant segments of the population. For too long, politicians, the media, and law enforcement downplayed the severity of the issue, failing to respond with the necessary urgency. The exposure of the far-right National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist group in 2011, further revealed the state's inability to effectively recognize and combat the growing threat of right-wing extremism within its borders. Today, Germany's current societal landscape is shaped by rising extremist tendencies, signaling a growing potential for radicalization (Wagner, 2017). After an increase in the number of right-wing extremist demonstrations to 145 occurences in 2022, this number rose significantly again in 2023, reaching a total of 367 gatherings (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2023). Emerging from the shadows of the stereotypical skinhead neo-Nazis, the true danger of modern forms of right-wing extremism often remains unnoticed until it openly challenges state authority. It remains the greatest extremist threat to democracy in Germany (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2023).

This thesis is dedicated to the study of right-wing extremism in Germany. The research is structured around three core objectives. The first aim is to study the history of right-wing extremism in Germany post-WWII, in order to reveal how past movements laid the groundwork for today's political and ideological landscape in the far-right context. The second aim is to acquire theoretical knowledge about radicalization theories, and understand the role of far-right ideology in driving individuals to the escalation of extremist violence. The third aim is to gain empirical knowledge by applying the theoretical frameworks to two distinct case studies. Investigating recent cases of far-right terror in Germany, furthermore sheds light on its evolving nature and current dynamics. To obtain these research aims, this thesis therefore offers a historical, theoretical and case-study analysis.

The first chapter serves as a literature review, synthesizing academic debates and key concepts essential to understanding the broader research of the thesis. This chapter is crucial because it shapes the analytical efforts as it determines which concepts are considered in the examination and illuminates them. It begins by discussing the importance and challenges of defining terrorism, and continues by exploring how different scholars have approached the concept. In the next step, right-wing extremism is conceptualized. Academic literature includes a number of inter-connected terms and definitions relating to it, since right-wing extremism does not appear on a vacuum and has to be understood at one end of a spectrum (Mudde, 1995). Despite this complexity, the phenomenon possesses distinct features relating to its ideological foundations, the increasing involvement of lone actors, and the use of online spaces. By breaking down the research into these different sub-themes, a structured analysis is ensured. Finally, the relevance of studying right-wing extremism is discussed. Chapter one, overall, establishes the academic context for studying right-wing extremism and sets the stage for the subsequent chapters.

The second chapter is guided by the research question of how right-wing extremist and populist parties and movements have fared in Germany. The aim here is to understand what their historical roots and their basis of the continuing attraction is. By examining right-wing extremism from a longitudinal perspective, this approach provides a deeper understanding of continuities and transformations in extremist ideologies, beyond merely focusing on recent developments. Besides merely focusing on right-wing parties and their electoral success, the chapter furthermore expands the analysis to subcultures and informal networks. Offering a holistic perspective on how extremism operates both within and outside formal political

structures. This is particularly relevant in understanding why right-wing extremism continues to thrive despite legal bans of various extremist groups. By comparing the historical trajectories of right-wing extremism in East and in West Germany, the chapter additionally reveals how their distinct socio-political legacies influenced the resurgence of far-right ideologies in post-reunification Germany.

Fighting terrorism means being able to defeat extremism from its roots. This necessitates understanding the recruitment and the organizational and motivational mechanisms behind the radicalization process, targeting possible newcomers during the early stages of such process (Moghaddam, 2005). But counterterrorism strategies that rely solely on violent suppression do not seem to focus on the radicalization process itself. Insinuating terrorists are inherently predisposed to commit violence. To challenge such notion, the third chapter studies radicalization theories with a specific focus on the role of ideology in shaping extremist behaviour. It argues that terrorists are not born with a 'willingness to kill', but are gradually indoctrinated through ideological narratives. Hence, it demonstrates that ideology is not merely a post-hoc justification for violent behaviour, but an essential driver of it in the first place. Following this theoretical approach, a case study analysis is provided. Although it shows how personal grievances have shaped the radicalization process of the perpetrators, it discusses how the acts of violence are not simply an outcome of pathology but of deeply ingrained far-right ideologies.

The general societal perception of terrorism is usually largely focused on islamist fundamentalism. Right-wing terrorism is often dismissed as isolated incidents or attributed to mental illness, failing to recognize its systemic and ideological nature. Right-wing extremists internalize radical ideologies through manifestos, online content, and extremist networks, representing a long-term process of radicalization, rather than spontaneous acts of violence. The growing intersection of various right-wing ideologies furthermore suggests that far-right extremism is an evolving concept. This, as well as online radicalization and lone-wolf tactics, therefore, pose increasing challenges for law enforcement. By providing a research framework built around the interplay of various dimensions, including historical, political, economic and sociological factors, this thesis contributes to the scholarly research on right-wing extremism, the radicalization process and its violent expression.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This chapter discusses a selection of existing literature that analyses various concepts central to the study of this thesis. By identifying and clarifying the concepts under investigation, the analytical efforts of the research are shaped. First, the relevance of defining *terrorism* is examined, exploring the challenges and implications of conceptual ambiguity in terrorism studies. In the second section an analysis of competing definitions of terrorism follows. The third section delves into right-wing extremism as a distinct phenomenon. It investigates its core ideological components, as well as its distinct features, critically examining the concept of the *lone-wolf* and the role of digital platforms the right-wing scene. Lastly, the first chapter ends by discussing the relevance of studying right-wing extremism, emphasizing its increasing visibility and political impact internationally, and in Germany.

1.1 The Relevance of Defining Terrorism

As globalization fosters increased economic, political, and cultural interconnectedness among nations, it can also facilitate the spread of terrorist ideologies, networks, and tactics across borders. Countries find themselves facing similar security challenges and could adopt comparable policies and measures to combat terrorism. Understanding the concept of terrorism begins with recognizing the importance of its definition. However, despite its prevalence, defining the concept has caused confusion and ambiguity among both political leaders and academics. While some consider it unnecessary to devote more time to what they regard as a futile exercise, others perceive the lack of progress toward an agreed-upon definition as a flaw that remains to be addressed (Silke, 2018). The lively debates about the meaning of terrorism reveal a significant diversity in how different actors, such as governments, international organizations and academic scholars define the term. One obstacle to reaching a consensus is the issue of ‘definitional power’, which refers to who holds the authority to define terrorism, and for what purpose. The United Nations has made numerous attempts to establish a universally accepted definition. Despite being the most legitimate entity for such task, it has repeatedly failed to do so, due to disagreements among member states (Schmid, 2023). Hence, the literature on the relevance of defining terrorism is highlighted through the challenges

associated with it. These challenges not only make defining terrorism difficult in the first place, but validate the need for a more precise and consistent conceptualization.

There are similarities among the arguments of scholars discussing the relevance of defining terrorism. Many identify that the term terrorism is often misused due to its subjective application (Richardson, 2000). This subjectivity is deeply rooted in the political context in which terrorism has been defined and redefined over time. During the colonial period, imperial powers frequently labeled independence movements as terrorism, despite those groups considering themselves freedom fighters. This trend persisted during the Cold War, where opposing political powers branded insurgent movements as terrorist activity, often ignoring their broader objectives or context. Post-9/11, the 'Global War on Terror' further expanded the term, grouping together state and non-state actors under the broad banner of terrorism. These shifting political frames have left the term open to diverse, and sometimes contradictory interpretations, making it more susceptible to misuse. As a result, especially in the post-9/11 era, the term has become so widely applied that it often seems almost meaningless due to overuse (Richards, 2013). Schmid (2023) furthermore, argues that one factor driving this definitional difficulty are competing narratives. While some actors view terrorism as a form of political violence with strategic aims, others see it as senseless or criminal violence. The famous saying, "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter", highlights how the same act can be seen from diametrically opposing perspectives (Chomsky, 1988).

From an academic lens this can be seen as the problem of *conceptual stretching*. Kalyvas (2019) argues that overlapping definitions, not just of terrorism but of various forms of political violence, result in analytical confusion. These blurred distinctions make it harder to study political violence systematically as similar phenomena are often examined from different perspectives, yielding conflicting normative and legal claims. In a similar vein, Silke (2004) suggests, that many researchers seem tired of the difficulties in reaching a consensus on a definition. They have accepted the current state of uncertainty, allowing each to work within their own limited conceptual frameworks instead of pursuing the goal of a common definition. This vulnerability to abuse leads to its perception as a pre-theory stage concept, lacking a concrete definition. Consequently, the emergence of critical perspectives in terrorism studies are often not viewed as part of an established school of thought, but rather as simply 'being critical' (Richards, 2013). This lack of analytical clarity hinders scholars to advance theoretical development about terrorism.

The ambiguity not only complicates scholarly efforts to systematically study terrorism, but also opens the door for political manipulation of the term itself. As Silke (2004) argues, the difficulty in formulating both the subject of study, and its parameters, has led to analyses being shaped according to political needs, rather than objective criteria. For instance, actions by groups like Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State are often labelled as terrorism, based on the identity of the perpetrators rather than the nature of the act itself. This has led to what Schmid describes as 'flawed circular reasoning'. Any act of violence by a designated terrorist group is automatically assumed to be terrorism, without applying impartial analytical criteria. However, not only does this result in the difficulty of having meaningful discussions about terrorism, but on a macro-level, this also creates the danger of authorities abusing the term. Given that it carries strong moral and political implications, the term can be used strategically. As we have seen, historically, the term has been applied to various actors. Governments often frame terrorism in ways that align with their domestic or international security policies. Sometimes broadening the term to label political opponents or insurgent groups as terrorists. This can be observed in some authoritarian regimes, where dissenting groups are labeled as terrorists to justify state repression. The term can be exploited especially in populist politics, where it is used as a tool for delegitimizing dissent, rather than for genuine security concerns (Richards, 2013).

Terrorism has thus been defined more often in a broad, than in a narrow sense (Abrahams, 2010). It becomes clear that the manipulation of the term not only distorts its original meaning but has real-world consequences. This is also true when looking at how the ambiguity in defining terrorism hampers the effective development of counter-terrorism strategies. As terrorism transcends borders, international cooperation to address shared security challenges is needed (Richards, 2013). However, as Schmid (2023) describes, the broader the definition of terrorism - as exemplified in the 'Global War on Terror' rhetoric - the larger efforts are required to counter it, and the larger the danger of authority abuse in combating the phenomenon. Additionally, without a precise definition, terrorism can be conflated with other forms of violence such as guerrilla warfare or criminal acts (Jenkins, 2006). Governments may consequently struggle to develop effective responses that address the political motivations and psychological impacts which distinguish terrorism from such other forms of conflict. The definitional clarity is, hence, not only necessary to formulate policies that target the perpetrators, but also mitigate the broader fear and societal disruption that terrorism is designed

to create (Hoffman, 2006). The convergence in counterterrorism policies could manifest in various way; the adoption of similar legal frameworks, intelligence-sharing agreements, or joint military operations. Insights not only into the dynamics of cooperation but also the effectiveness of different approaches in addressing transnational security threats could be gained.

As presented, various scholars agree that the broad and ambiguous use of the term terrorism leads to significant consequences both in theory and practice. If the concerns raised by the various scholars are accurate, then the lack of a precise and universally accepted definition of terrorism will continue to hinder international cooperation, and perpetuate political manipulation of the term. However, these viewpoints also encounter a contrast with those critical of overly rigid conceptualizations, who argue these could fail to capture the evolving nature of political violence. These theoretical tensions will be further explored in the following section, where I will contrast and discuss competing definitions of terrorism.

1.2 Competing Definitions of Terrorism

As the discussion has shown, the definitional ambiguity surrounding the concept of terrorism highlights the relevance of conceptualizing the phenomenon. The next step is to examine competing definitions, as well as explore the implications of these differing conceptualizations. Defining terrorism lays the theoretical groundwork for an investigation of one of the most complex and challenging phenomena in the contemporary world. Illuminating competing definitions of terrorism is therefore not just an academic exercise, but has profound political, legal and social implications (Chenoweth et al., 2019). This will finally act as a guiding structure helping us understand the general criteria of what constitutes terrorism.

Terrorism is generally understood to be ‘coercive intimidation’. This underscores the fundamental characteristic that it is a planned, calculated, systematic act, and by anyone that belongs to an organization or ideological movement (Hoffman, 2006). Building on this general understanding, according to Hoffman (2006), terrorism is fundamentally and inherently political and about power, centered on the pursuit, acquisition or use of power, to achieve political change through violence, or the threat of violence. The scholar distinguishes between terrorism and other forms of violence, to underscore the importance of ideology and political

motivation in identifying terrorism. When comparing guerrillas or insurgents with terrorists, it becomes evident that they often employ similar tactics, such as assassination and kidnapping. These tactics furthermore have similar purposes, as to intimidate, coerce, or affect behavior through fear. However, despite both groups being categorized as 'irregulars', there are fundamental differences. Guerrillas or insurgents typically consist of numerically large armed individuals who operate as a military unit. They attack military forces and aim to seize and hold territory, exerting some form of sovereignty over the population. Formerly known as 'revolutionary guerrilla warfare', insurgents now even transcend mere hit-and-run attack; they employ coordinated informal and psychological warfare efforts such as propaganda, to mobilize popular support in their struggle against national governments or occupying forces. On the other hand, terrorists do not function openly as armed units, nor attempt to seize or hold territory, and avoid engaging enemy military forces in combat. They are constrained both numerically and logistically from undertaking mass political mobilization efforts and have no direct control over territory or population. To further illustrate his definition, Hoffman, also draws a distinction between ordinary criminals or lunatics, and terrorists. While the violent acts themselves may appear similar, the purposes and motivations driving them are distinct. Ordinary criminals or lunatics may act out of personal motives, such as financial gain or sexual abuse, with little concern for creating psychological repercussions beyond the immediate act, or generally broader consequences. In contrast, terrorists are driven by political motivations, seeking to change systems or influence public opinion. Hence, the fundamental difference lies in the deeply personal and egocentric motivations of ordinary criminals or lunatics, versus the political altruism inherent in terrorism (Hoffman, 2006).

Hoffman's (2006) purpose in differentiating is to clarify that while tactics like violence or intimidation may overlap between these groups, the key distinguishing factor of terrorism is its political aim. This distinction is crucial because it helps to avoid mislabelling diverse forms of violence. It ensures that counterterrorism strategies are appropriately focused on addressing politically motivated threats, rather than lumping them together with insurgencies or criminality. The political motivation behind terrorist acts is just as important as the violence itself, making ideology fundamental in identifying terrorist; a terrorist without a cause is not truly a terrorist. Terrorism is thus, according to Hoffman, not merely about the tactics used, but about the underlying purpose and ideology driving those actions. Thus, the terrorist can be seen as a 'violent intellectual', serving to disrupt established systems and norms.

Schmid's (2023) view aligns with Hoffman's (2006) in recognizing the need for a precise definition of terrorism that distinguishes it from other forms of political violence. Likewise, he differentiates terrorism by its political and ideological aims, but adds an important dimension; the psychological impact of terrorism. While agreeing with Hoffman's focus on political motivations, Schmid (2023) argues that many definitions of terrorism fail to capture its most distinctive feature, namely the strategic use of violence to instil fear in non-combatants. Altough the direct victims of an attack are chosen to spread fear, the real target is often the government and society as a whole (Sproat, 1991). Violence is meant to create ongoing terror within the larger community connected to the victims, disrupting a sense of safety. Terror, hence, acts as a psychological weapon for those who lack the resources to fight traditional armies, so civilians are targeted instead. This approach aims to send a message to a broader audience, pushing for changes that benefit the attackers' agenda. In this way, spreading fear is not the final goal, it is a means to an end (Schmid, 2023).

When analysing Schmid's (2023) definition of terrorism, it is interesting to contrast it with Richards (2013) as both scholars emphasize the psychological impact of terrorism, while approaching it from slightly different angles. For both, the psychological dimension is central to understanding terrorism, as it is used as a tool to manipulate and coerce people, governments, or societies into making political changes. However, as we have seen, Schmid places emphasis on the deliberate targeting of civilians or non-combatants as a key feature of terrorism. He highlights how terrorists use violence against civilians specifically to generate fear and influence political decisions. For Schmid, terrorism is not just about instilling fear, but about its strategic use in targeting vulnerable groups (non-combatants) to pressure governments or societies. Richards (2013), on the other hand, expands the scope of terrorism by arguing that targeting civilians is not a defining characteristic of terrorism. He contends that terrorists can attack various groups, including combatants, and that terrorism can occur even in the context of war. Richards (2013) focuses more on the purpose behind the violence, stressing that terrorism is about creating a broader psychological impact, regardless of whether the targets are civilians or combatants. Therefore, he proposes that the definition of terrorism should be purpose-based. The scholar proposes three preliminary assumptions when approaching the definition of terrorism.

1. An act is not inherently terrorist; while certain violent methods are often associated with terrorism, such as gun or bomb attacks, they are not inherently terrorist. The crucial

distinction between a violent act and terrorism lies in the application of additional layers of meaning beyond the physical violence. This, for example, challenges the UN and EU perspective and categorization of terrorism as a "wide spectrum of terrorist acts" or any other legal description of specific acts as terrorism. According to this definition there is no specific act of violence that is inherently terroristic. The act only becomes terrorism posteriori, through an attachment of intended consequences, or meaning.

2. Secondly, Richards asserts that cause-based definitions beyond political motives are unhelpful. He contends that terrorist acts may be employed by various actors, so there is not necessarily a need to identify the specific cause of an act, but rather the political intent behind it. This broader understanding of terrorism challenges the notion that terrorism is exclusively associated with particular ideologies or traditional organizations such as Al-Qaeda.
3. Thirdly, Richards challenges the notion that terrorism exclusively targets civilians or non-combatants. He argues that targeting civilians is not a defining characteristic of terrorism, and that terrorist acts can extend to various targets and even occur in the context of war. Therefore, terrorism cannot be seen as the "peacetime equivalent" of a war crime. This inclusive approach allows for a more balanced understanding of terrorism, acknowledging the possibility that individuals may sympathize with certain acts of terrorism, depending on the targets and intents involved.

In essence, Schmid (2023) ties the psychological impact more closely to the deliberate targeting of civilians, while Richards (2013) views terrorism as defined more by the broader intent and psychological effect, regardless of who the direct targets are. Richards takes a more inclusive approach, by arguing that terrorism can extend to different contexts and targets, including within warfare, whereas Schmid is more specific in associating terrorism with civilian targets.

Similarly to Richards' critique of attaching a direct meaning to specific acts of violence, as we have seen before, Kalyvas (2019) also warns that overextending the definition of terrorism risks applying the term too broadly. This can lead to including a variety of violent acts that may not fit the definition. To address this concern, he contributes to the debate by introducing a typology of political violenc. This typology attempts to clarify the distinctions between different forms of political violence, by identifying 11 distinct types, focusing on two main dimensions: whether the perpetrator is a state or non-state actor, and whether the victim is a state or non-state entity. This provides a more structured way to categorize violent acts,

distinguishing terrorism from other forms of political violence. Kalyvas' typology thus complements the distinctions made by Schmid and Richards. Schmid distinguishes terrorism from guerrilla warfare by emphasizing the deliberate targeting of civilians to create psychological impact. Richards expands this by focusing on the broader intent and purpose behind acts of violence. Similarly, Kalyvas' typology helps to systematically categorize terrorism alongside other forms of political violence, such as guerrilla warfare and state repression. This further reinforces the need for precise definitions that capture the unique characteristics of terrorism.

While scholars like Hoffman, Schmid, Richards, and Kalyvas focus on defining terrorism through political, psychological, and strategic lenses, Orsini (2015) introduces a micro-sociological perspective, through a study on extreme-left terrorism. This shifts the focus toward the personal and psychological mechanisms behind terrorist actions. Orsini (2015) contests the common belief that terrorists simply require courage. Instead, he emphasizes the concept of 'vile violence', in which victims are placed in situations with no possibility of escape. This conception complicates the existing narratives around terrorism, particularly in relation to the moral and psychological dimensions involved. He explains how terrorists manage fear and adrenaline to maintain control during violent acts, providing a more nuanced understanding of the psychological and sociological factors at play. This micro-level analysis enriches the broader definitional debate by showing how terrorism is not merely a matter of political violence, but involves complex human and social dynamics.

Summarizing the literature, terrorism is generally understood as the unlawful use of violence by non-state actors, with the intent of achieving political objectives. It typically manifests as a specific type of political violence that seeks to instill fear and exert coercion, often targeting neutral or innocent individuals. However, while civilians are frequently the primary victims, terrorism can also target military personnel, blurring the line between combatants and non-combatants. As Orsini explains, if terrorists were defined by their victims, ISIS suicide bombers attacking military personnel would not fit the label of 'terrorists' (Orsini, 2024). Rather, terrorism is defined as a tactic with the ultimate aim of creating terror among a larger population. The victims are instrumental in generating fear, but governments are often the true targets of such acts (Sproat, 1991). Thus, fear itself is not the end goal but rather a means to an end (Schmid, 2023).

1.3 Distinct Features of Right-Wing Extremism

A major question for researchers is whether terrorism in the far-right context displays unique tactical or strategic characteristics compared to other forms of terrorism. However, as seen before, one problematic issue connected to identifying and adequately classifying terrorism is the lack of conceptual clarity. This is also true for right-wing extremism; academic literature includes a number of inter-connected terms and definitions relating to it, since right-wing extremism does not appear on a vacuum and has to be understood at one end of a spectrum (Mudde, 1995). Despite this complexity, the phenomenon possesses distinct features that require systematic analysis. To provide a structured approach, the following part investigates right wing extremism by dividing the analysis into three distinct sections. In the first section, right-wing extremism is conceptualized by investigating its ideological foundations. The phenomenon known as 'ideological convergence' has blurred traditional far-right ideological boundaries, merging white supremacism, anti-government sentiments, racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, and conspiracy theories into a volatile and adaptable framework of extremism (Hoffman & Ware 2024). This ideological adaptability of modern right-wing extremism, is further demonstrated by exploring how it integrates elements from populist, anti-globalization, and anti-government movements. Furthermore, the two most consequential trends of modern far-right terrorism are, on the one hand, independent acts of violence, carried out by individuals in service of a broader movement, frequently labeled as *lone wolf attacks*. On the other hand, online radicalization and digital spaces, where right wing extremism is thriving and developing. As defining features of contemporary right-wing extremism, the lone wolf phenomenon, and extremist digital spaces are therefore examined in the second and in the third section.

1.3.1 Ideology

A key feature that distinguishes right-wing extremism from general far-right political stances or movements, is its rejection of democratic values and the rule of law. While right-wing radical movements may seek political change through legal or non-violent means, right-wing extremists endorse or actively use violence to achieve their ideological goals. This willingness to resort to force underscores a defining characteristic of right-wing extremism (Hoffman & Ware 2024). Consequently, right-wing extremism can manifest in various forms of politically motivated violence, including terrorist attacks, hate crimes, and spontaneous acts of violence.

Hence, right-wing terrorism, by its very nature, falls within the broader category of right-wing extremism. In other words, it is de facto right-wing extremism, as it represents an intentional and strategic use of violence to achieve ideological ends (Liger et al., 2022). Understanding right-wing extremism entails investigating the ideology it is based upon. There is not one structured and singular fixed doctrine; right-wing extremism draws from a variety of narratives, most of which are related to some form of intolerance. The following section explores some of the key concepts that define and shape far-right ideology.

A core concept of right-wing ideology is supremacism, hence the idea that as a group of people sharing a common element, such as nation, race, or culture, it is inherently superior and entitled to dominate others (Liger et al., 2022). The concept of supremacy therefore serves as the justification for an integral part of far-right ideology, namely racism, which advocates for the protection of a "pure" national or ethnic identity. Immigrants and ethnic minorities are typically seen as threats to this "purity", and violence is used as a means of defending the perceived "racial supremacy" (Koehler, 2016). Conspiracy theories such as the 'Great Replacement' are used to suggest that immigrants are systematically replacing the white population, fueling a sense of urgency to defend this ideological vision (Steinek, 2020). In the book 'Sacrifice' Orsini (2017) also explains how members of the right-wing extremist group he examines, view themselves as warriors fighting a "cultural and racial war", which again is framed as a "defense of European identity". This idea represents a further core concept of right-wing ideology; the fear of the decline of a European identity. Individuals believe they are fighting against what they see as the "Islamization of Europe" and the corruption of Western values by immigrants and leftists. In 'Sacrifice' it is also discussed how figures like Dominique Venner, a far-right intellectual, influence such views. His suicide is presented as a symbolic act of protest against the perceived erosion of European values, particularly the growing presence of immigrants and Muslims. In addition, right-wing extremist ideologies draw from various hateful sub-cultures that often oppose societal diversity and equal rights of minorities, promoting misogyny and hostility towards LGBTQ+ communities (Europol, 2021).

The criteria of exclusion in far-right discourse can consequentially be based on a variety of factors, such as ethnicity, culture, religion, and gender. Analytically these criteria are distinct, each with its own peculiar logic. Practically however, they are often intertwined, and must first be separated to reveal their respective rationales in right-wing thinking. Nevertheless, it becomes evident that one constant across all versions is the radical distinction between in-

groups and out-groups. This represents a further core concept of right-wing ideology (Melzer & Serafin, 2013). The "us versus them" narrative plays a crucial role in fueling group loyalty, as the threat posed by the out-group intensifies the sense of belonging and loyalty to the in-group. This loyalty is heightened through a simultaneous process of alienation from mainstream society, which is seen as corrupt, weak, or even complicit with the out-group. Members of right-wing extremist groups often see themselves as part of a 'parallel world', detached from the values of mainstream society (Orsini, 2017). The loyalty is further cultivated through the idea of personal and collective sacrifice. This narrative constructs extremists as "heroes" who must defend their people or nation from destruction, often at great personal cost. By framing their actions in terms of sacrifice, extremists are willing to subordinate their individual needs to the group's survival and success, thereby reinforcing internal loyalty (Orsini, 2017).

By labeling certain groups as the ultimate enemies, right-wing extremists furthermore legitimize violence as a necessary defense. As described before, this willingness to resort to force is a defining characteristic of right-wing extremism, embedded and justified within its ideology. Since the violence is directed against a direct enemy and as a defense against "existential threats", it is therefore carried out in the name of a "just" cause. This reframing of violence allows extremist to feel righteous in their actions, regardless of their brutality. Additionally, the dehumanization of the out-group removes further obstacles to violence (Orsini, 2017). The violence is furthermore extended to serve not only as defense of the in-group, but of national sovereignty as a whole; the state has allegedly failed to protect the nation from foreign invaders and internal enemies, and is consequently seen as complicit in its destruction (Steinek, 2020). Hence, the "us versus them" narrative often delegitimizes democratic processes and institutions. Political systems are portrayed as corrupt, manipulated by globalist elites, and unable to represent the "true interests of the native population". This opposition to the state is another critical element within right-wing ideology and can, for example, drive extremist groups to engage in anti-government violence (Hartleb, 2018).

Lastly, modern right-wing extremism has gradually expanded from these more 'classical' right-wing ideological themes towards mixed narratives that borrow elements from various ideologies, including populist, anti-globalization and anti-government movements. Especially anti-system narratives are gaining popularity in the right-wing extremist scene (Hoffman & Ware, 2024). Propaganda relies on disinformation and conspiracy theories to undermine

citizens' trust in democratic processes and democratic values (Liger & Gutheil, 2022). Overall, the ideological fluidity allows far-right movements to attract a broader base of supporters by tapping into a variety of social frustrations.

1.3.2 Lone Wolves

Unlike some other forms of terrorism, the threat from modern violent far-right extremism is more individual than organizationally driven. It is a movement where the parts are indisputably greater than the whole, as right-wing terrorists often operate in small cells or as lone actors (Hoffman & Ware 2024). Over the past decades, the phenomenon of the lone wolf has been observed in many countries, particularly within Western democracies (Hartleb, 2018). In the past, terrorists were typically recognisable as individuals carrying out violent acts on behalf of some existent organisational entity or movement that had an identifiable chain of command. Nowadays however, this criterion is no longer a reliable measure (Hoffman, 2019). Hoffman describes these actors as being inspired by well-known terrorist groups, yet operating autonomously from the margins. Contemporary terrorism thus also involves individuals who are ideologically motivated, inspired, and animated by a movement, a leader, or a mix of ideological mentors, but who neither necessarily formally belong to a specific, identifiable terrorist group nor directly follow orders issued by it (Hoffman, 2019). Those lone actors, have repeatedly shown their capacity to carry out substantial and devastating attacks. The strategy and planning techniques are often difficult to trace and the decentralized nature and absence of a formal hierarchical structure in these attacks make them particularly difficult to predict and prevent, necessitating a shift in both prevention, and counter-terrorism tactics. The lone wolf phenomenon remains one of the defining characteristics of contemporary right-wing extremism and one of its greatest threats at the same time (Hoffman & Ware 2024).

1.3.3 Digital Spaces

As established, the threat from modern violent far-right extremism is more individually than organizationally driven. Hence, when not structurally belonging to a particular group, right-wing violent extremists often seek out peers online. They become part of one or more online communities where they are exposed to propaganda and are more likely to be inspired to violent

action. By sharing a common language - with English as the lingua franca – not only international communication is possible, but also the far-right ideologies in themselves become international in nature. One example is anti-immigration extremism, which by now is a fully international concept (Hoffman & Ware 2024). Chat groups are also used to promote right-wing events. Examples include commemorative events for historical figures, which allow extremists to unite around historical narratives that resonate with their ideologies (Europol, 2024). Popular means of communication in right-wing circles range from freely accessible E2EE[1] applications, often used to communicate operational or more sensitive matters, to social media and other platforms where users post more sanitised content (Liger & Gutheil, 2022). Hence, the right-wing extremist internet scene is not confined to a single type of online space but instead consists of a patchwork of different platforms. Among these are also a selection of relatively new and highly accessible communication applications[2], many of which fall into the category of so-called 'dark social'. This refers not necessarily to the nature of the content, but to the challenges associated with monitoring and tracking its content (Conway et al., 2019). Additionally, video content is increasingly used to spread subtle forms of propaganda, as it is easier to conceal and integrate in mainstream platforms than text or images. Online platforms overall provide propaganda producers with a variety of functionalities that serve to enhance outreach, but also resilience to detection.

In recent years, particularly following the 2019 livestreamed attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, video games, gamer communities, and gaming-related platforms have gained significant attention in policy, practice, and academia focused on studying and preventing violent extremism. The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) has identified gaming platforms as 'hotbeds' for radicalization (Schlegel, 2021). Similarly, the 2021 EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) (Europol, 2021), as well as the 2024 (Europol, 2024) version, highlight the growing use of video games and gaming platforms as tools for spreading extremist ideology especially by right-wing extremists (Europol, 2024). These growing concerns about gaming platforms have further been mirrored in the exploitation of the 'gamification' of far-right ideologies; a phenomenon in which terrorism is framed as a video game, with violent acts rewarded through achievements and status upgrades (Schlegel, 2021). The number of people killed in attacks is, for example, often quoted as "scores", and carrying out acts of violence provides opportunities for online glorification, such as advancing certain

[1] End-to-End Encrypted
[2] Commonly referred to the simplified term "apps".

"ranks" within groups. In the right-wing sphere, Anders Breivik[3] is considered one of the first to incorporate this concept into his assault, and was also a keen gamer himself.[4] Especially many younger individuals are recruited by right-wing extremists on gaming platforms (Europol, 2024).

The expanding role of digital technology in radicalization cannot be overstated. As Simi points out, while social media did not create extremism, it has significantly amplified and normalized far-right ideologies, accelerating their mainstreaming in ways that were previously unimaginable. He describes digital platforms as having unleashed a terrifying power in terms of spreading propaganda, particularly among young people, while regulation struggles to keep pace (Blee et al., 2023). This underscores how the easy access to extremist content, coupled with the absence of effective oversight, has exacerbated the threat.

1.4 The Relevance of Studying Right-Wing Extremism

When 'terrorism' is mentioned, it is often immediately associated with the events such as September 11, 2001, or those in Brussels and Paris, where terrorist networks inflicted mass casualties. However, Europe has also witnessed a resurgence of militant right-wing extremism, marked by a rise in anti-immigration and islamophobic violence, as well as anti-government attacks and assaults on political opponents, ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQ+ community. In the United States, similarily, an increase in political violence of far-right nature has taken place (Koehler, 2016). Nevertheless, in public discourse today, Islamist fundamentalists are perceived as the primary threat, dominating terrorism-related media coverage. There is extensive and detailed reporting on the motives, radicalization processes, and dangers posed by Islamist terrorists to our society. Right-wing terrorists, on the other hand, seem to be treated as a marginal phenomenon. A sustained public debate does not take place in the same way (Hartleb, 2018). Instead attacks are perceived mostly as isolated events, with the perpetrators commonly dismissed as "mentally ill". However, reducing these acts to individual pathology overshadows the systemic threat posed by far-right ideologies (Manthe, 2020). They justify their acts of terror with pamphlets, videos, manifestos, and confessions, displaying a

[3] Anders Behring Breivik is the Norwegian terrorist who carried out the 2011 Norway Attacks, in which he killed 77 people.
[4] Breiviks most played game was the popular First Player Shooter (FPS) franchise, Call of Duty.

deep interiorization of extremist ideologies. The uncomfortable reality is that terrorism emerges from within society itself, and terrorists are human beings, not monsters or robots. They are individuals shaped by a radicalization process which quietly developes in isolation before explosively unfolding its impact (Hartleb, 2018). Additionally, as studied before, the growing intersection between right-wing extremism, populism, and anti-government sentiments indicates that right-wing extremism continues to evolve, incorporating broader grievances into its ideological framework. Furthermore, the shift toward lone-wolf attacks and online radicalization suggests that future threats will be harder to detect and prevent. If in the past, right wing acts of violence consisted mostly of isolated, sporadic outbursts, today, the internet and social media have transformed the landscape, connecting disparate, disillusioned individuals into cohesive ideological echo chambers. The digital age, hence, facilitates radicalization, serving as a platform to potentially inspire and motivate acts of violence. Overall, right-wing extremism is becoming more adaptive and resilient (Hoffman, 2019). The right-wing extremist scene in Germany has also gained momentum in recent years. Right-wing extremists are well networked and frequently organising large demonstrations and events. This rise is reflected by the total number of right-wing criminal and violent offenses which significantly increased by 22.4% in 2023, compared to 2022, reaching a total of 25,660 offenses (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2023). The definition of terrorism in German-language literature for a long time only considered endangerment of the constitutional state, or the intimidation of the general population, as defining criteria. This restrictive perspective has hampered a broader recognition and analysis of right-wing terrorism, limiting efforts to effectively address and counteract its growing impact. In recent years, more researchers have started to move away from this definition, adopting a broader approach that considers various manifestations of the phenomenon (Pfahl-Traughber, 2012).

As the threat of right-wing extremism is increasingly gaining significance, in recent years more academic research on this form of political violence has been developed. Important works include “Out of Hiding” by Blee, Futrell, and Simi (2023), “God, Guns, and Sedition: Far-Right Terrorism in America” by Hoffman and Ware (2024), as well as Blee’s (2017) “Understanding Racist Activism”, and “American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement’s Hidden Spaces of Hate” by Simi and Futrell (2015). The literature also discuss historical factors, ideological convergence that has blurred boundaries between narratives, as well as the increasing role of digital spaces - dynamics that also apply to Germany. This growing body of research underscores the global dimensions of far-right extremism.

Nevertheless, much of academic research is centered on the United States, while studies on this form of political violence in Germany remain limited. Leading to a gap in knowledge in assessing the threat posed by the far-right (Koehler, 2016). This thesis contributes to filling that gap by studying right-wing extremism in Germany. It firstly examines the historical evolution of the phenomeon. Then radicalization theories are investigated with a special focus on the role of ideology. Consequently the theoretical frameworks are applied to two different case studies, again shaping the research around the role that far-right ideology has played in the attacks.

Chapter 2: Historical Analysis

Since the end of World War II, Germany has experienced a long and unbroken history of right-wing movements, whether in the form of political parties, subcultural groups, or loose networks of individuals (Kruglanski, Webber, & Koehler, 2020, p.8). German right-wing extremism since 1945 - and persisting to the present - should be understood not only in terms of its organizational history, but also as a fluid sociological and cultural phenomenon (Schulze, 2021, p.102). The following chapter explores how after the collapse of the 'Third Reich' and the apparent discrediting of racism and nationalism, right-wing extremism was able to reconstitute itself in the young Federal Republic. The analysis in this chapter is therefore limited to the period after World War II. The persistence of right-wing ideas and the recruitment of followers was not achieved through political parties alone, but organizations and subcultural dynamics played a significant role. These are examined in the first part of the chapter. The second part of the chapter provides an investigation of the most prominent right-wing extremist parties since 1945.

2.1 Right-Wing Extremism in Germany from WWII until 1989

In the early post-war decades, right-wing extremists invested substantial resources to rebuild their movement, successfully creating effective spaces for articulation and recruitment (Schulze, 2021, p.102). Neo-Nazis are defined as right-wing extremists who not only excuse historical National Socialism, but actively regard it as an ideal. To distinguish them generationally from the so-called *Alt-Nazis*[5] who remained committed to their beliefs even after the fall of National Socialism, it is appropriate to reserve the term *neo-Nazi* for those socialized after 1945 (Schulze, 2021, p.125). Neo-Nazis advocate for a society grounded in the values of historical National Socialism, including authoritarian structures, racial hierarchy, and antisemitism. They often see themselves as "guardians" of the "German heritage", positioning themselves as combatants against modern democracy and cultural pluralism (bpb, 2021). The specific historical phase or faction within National Socialism with which individual neo-Nazis and their organizations most closely align, is of secondary importance and not discussed in this

[5] Old-Nazis

thesis. This would serve to differentiate internally within neo-Nazism but does not alter the classification under the ideological spectrum of right-wing extremism in general (Schulze, 2021, p.125). The following part explores the key developments of right-wing extremism separately in West and East Germany from the end of WWII in 1945 until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

2.1.1 Developments in West Germany

After World War II, the Allied victors[6] implemented a unified denazification policy aimed at democratizing and demilitarizing Germany. In the Western zones millions of Germans were scrutinized for their prior involvement with the Nazi regime; however, only a small fraction was categorized as 'primary offenders' or 'significantly burdened'. Consequently, after the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany, the vast majority of Nazis was able to resume their careers largely unimpeded or even begin new ones (Schulze, 2021, p.69). Former officials and supporters of the Nazi regime were thus not only largely integrated into the new system, but actively involved in building its institutions, shaping them in many ways. Some integrated quietly without necessarily changing their beliefs. Others formed networks of mutual support, and sought ways within the institutions to shape the new state according to their own ideals (Schulze, 2021, p.70). By the late 1950s, two-thirds of the leadership level of the Federal Criminal Police Office[7] consisted of former SS[8] members, with the proportion of former NSDAP[9] members even higher. From the perspective of Germany as a new state pragmatism played a key role; the professional expertise of former officials could be put to use. Their knowledge about Soviet military structures and the eastern European landscape gained during World War II made them valuable assets during the Cold War - despite their political past (Kruglanski et al., 2020, p.8).

In 1945, the Allies dissolved all Nazi-organizations, and until 1949 the re-establishment of political parties required a license issued by the Allied Control Council, preventing the official formation of an openly National Socialist party. To circumvent this, former Nazis strategically infiltrated small but promising new parties, occasionally rising to influential political positions.

[6] United States, Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France
[7] Bundeskriminalamt
[8] The SS (Schutzstaffel = Protection Squadron) was the elite guard of the Nazi regime.
[9] National Socialist German Worker's Party was the main political party of National Socialism under Hitler.

Kurt Georg Kiesinger, for instance, served as the third German Chancellor between 1966 and 1969 for the CDU[10], despite the fact that he had been an NSDAP member since 1933, and a high-ranking official in the National Socialist Foreign Affairs Office. Hans Filbinger, another prominent CDU member, was the prime minister of Baden-Württemberg from 1966 to 1978. He had to resign after it became known that he had issued death sentences as a navy judge between 1943 and 1945, as well as been an esteemed member of the NSDAP (Kruglanski et al., 2020, p.8). Nevertheless, far-right parties did emerge in the Western zones, and later in the young Federal Republic, some of which drew on predecessors from the Weimar Republic.[11]

While many former Nazis successfully integrated into the new society, a parallel right-wing extremist movement emerged that deliberately targeted younger generations. Since recruiting followers through political parties was only partially effective a significant portion of this role was taken on by other organizations. During the first post-war decades, right-wing extremists consequently invested substantial resources into rebuilding their own base, creating effective spaces for expression and recruitment (Schulze, 2021, p.101). The wave of postwar neo-Nazi crimes in West Berlin and West Germany in 1959 and 1960, which became known as the 'Schmierwelle'[12], was the first time the general public became widely aware of the existence of young right-wing extremists who identified with National Socialism (Stöss, 2007). However, it quickly became evident that these were not isolated acts carried out by individual extremists, but that in the late 1960s and 1970s various neo-Nazi groups and movements had emerged in the West (Manthe, 2020). One example of such groups was the *Aktionsfront Nationaler Sozialisten*[13] (ANS), founded by Michael Kühnen in 1977, which aimed to re-establish the NSDAP as a legal party. Part of its strategy was to gain public attention through intentional provocations. A well-known example is a demonstration in 1978 in Hamburg. A group of neo-Nazis dressed uniformly in black leather jackets gathered marching towards the city center. Some wore donkey masks and carried signs saying, "I, the donkey, still believe that Jews were gassed in German concentration camps"[14], drawing significant media coverage (Schulze, 2021, p.124). Kühnen explicitly described breaking taboos as a tactic to generate attention. After the ANS was banned in 1983 various other organisations formed, such as the *Gesinnungsgemeinschaft der Neuen Front* (GdNF)[15], which emerged as a network connecting

[10] Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands - Christian Democratic Union of Germany
[11] Right-Wing Extremist Parties are analysed under 2.3
[12] 'Graffiti wave'
[13] Action Front of National Socialists
[14] „Ich Esel glaube immer noch, dass in deutschen KZ Juden vergast wurden"
[15] Community of Conviction of the New Front

neo-Nazi groups or other affiliated organizations, including the *Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (FAP)[16], the *Wiking-Jugend* (WJ)[17] and the *Hilfsorganisation für nationale politische Gefangene und deren Angehörige e.V.* (HNG)[18]. The latter, for example, until its ban in 2011 supported right-wing extremist offenders and provided a platform for cooperation among competing neo-Nazi groups (Schulze, 2021, p.124).

These developments illustrate how the far-right scene adapted to postwar conditions and continuously reconstituted itself, despite the defeat of National Socialism and denazification efforts. It was furthermore, bolstered by unresolved nationalist sentiments and sporadic support from disillusioned war veterans (Wagner, 2017). Additionally, by shifting into informal networks and employing targeted provocations, right-wing extremist movements also succeeded in recruiting new followers. The postwar period demonstrates the deep-rooted and adaptive nature of far-right currents in West German society, and also presents the foundation for the continuity and persistence of far-right ideologies in Germany, even after the fall of National Socialism.

2.1.2 Developments in East Germany

The *German Democratic Republic* (GDR) in East Germany, in German famously known as 'DDR'[19], rejected all forms of fascism, including any expressions of nationalism that resembled Nazi ideals. Simultaneously, it portrayed fascism as a Western phenomenon, and the West as susceptible to neo-Nazi revivalism. However, in reality, right-wing extremist ideas were not completely eradicated. While some individuals still held onto actual national socialist ideology, other far-right extremists did not necessarily stand out due to direct affiliations with Hitler or because they were organized in right-wing groups. Instead, they adhered to an extreme sense of national identity, evident in daily life through expressions of xenophobia, often resembling the ideology of racial superiority (Wagner, 2018). Such racist German nationalism would further be fueled by the GDR's ethnic homogeneity, economic isolation, and propaganda against foreigners.

Altough street violence might not necessarily be associated with the dictatorship or closed society of the GDR, right-wing acts of violence, swastika graffiti, or desecration of Jewish

[16] Free German Workers' Party
[17] Viking Youth
[18] Aid Organization for National Political Prisoners
[19] German Democratic Republic (GDR)

cemeteries de facto frequently took place, offering a glimpse into the simmering prejudices within its borders. But these acts of right-wing violence were still routinely dismissed as mere rowdiness, characterized as actions by hooligans or kids acting antisocially, without real ideological motivation. Authorities simply concealed the racist violence, offering more propaganda instead of addressing it (arte, 2024). When analyzing these violent expressions of right-wing extremism, it is however necessary to denote that subcultural right-wing movements, in fact, were not solely driven by ideological reasons. Unlike in the West, for the youth in the GDR an entry into the subcultures was associated with enormous risks. Those who decided to join, effectively went against the state, giving their members a sense of courage, strength, and camaraderie. Therefore, for some, far-right slogans and joining right-wing groups signified less an identification with National Socialism, but more a deliberate breaking of taboos against the GDR's anti-fascist state doctrine; effectively identifying with the enemy of their enemy (Stöss, 2007). Nevertheless, this was not the case for all and in any case, many of these violent cliques ended up evolving into more ideologically driven and networked small groups. Identifying not merely as 'skinheads' but as proper 'fascists'. The emergence of such right-wing scene occurred particularly in the larger cities such as East Berlin, Dresden, Rostock, and Leipzig (Schulze, 2021, p.127). Porath and Reinert (2014) from the *Opferperspektive*[20] association recall events in the Berlin suburbs during the late phase of the GDR:

"One of the most sensational right-wing acts of violence occurred on November 1, 1987, in Velten. Disguised as a class reunion, the so-called 'Gesamtsturm Velten-Oranienburg' organized a regional Nazi-skinhead gathering for around 100 followers and sympathizers. In the Weimann tavern, they shouted 'Sieg Heil' and sang Nazi songs while consuming large amounts of alcohol. After an argument with the owner, the visitors beat him, locked him in the basement, and destroyed the entire bar interior. The mob did not stop when the *Volkspolizei*[21] arrived. They attacked the officers, and after a warning shot was fired, they disarmed a *VoPo*[22] and used concrete slabs to destroy a police car. During the trial at the Oranienburg district court, the defendants were, for the first time, officially referred to as 'skinhead rowdies'. This was also one of the first times a GDR court addressed the neo-fascist ideology of the defendants." (Porath & Reinert 2014, p. 98).

[20] Victims' perspective
[21] The People's Police was the national uniformed police force of the GDR.
[22] Volkspolizist – Peoples' Policeman

One other prominent example, which further highlights that despite the GDR's denial of right-wing extremism, a violent neo-Nazi scene existed within its borders, was the attack by around 30-40 neo-Nazi skinheads on a concert in 1987. A rock and punk concert featuring the bands *Firma* and *Element of Crime* was taking place at East Berlin's Zionskirche[23], and ended in bloodshed when the skinheads that had gathered nearby stormed into the church, and assaulted everyone inside. Eyewitnesses later reported that the police observed the brutal violence conspicuously without intervening. Only six of the perpetrators were arrested afterward by the People's Police and officers from the *Stasi*[24], however, they were just held for a few hours before being released. The attack on the Zionskirche concert sparked an unexpected and, from the GDR leadership's perspective, unwelcome media response in both East and West Germany. West German media speculated that the People's Police had deliberately refrained from intervening during the attack. The GDR government instead attempted to counter this narrative by claiming that the right-wing attack was an 'import from the West' (Börnig, 2023). The Volkspolizei and Stasi launched an investigation, but all those interrogated denied having right-wing or neo-Nazi affiliations, with only one individual openly expressing racist views. The others presented themselves as explicitly apolitical and tried to shift the authorities' suspicion onto perpetrators from West Berlin. However, investigators quickly concluded – and this finding was kept secret for many years - that the perpetrators were not simply apolitical youths, but rather East Berlin skinheads operating strategically within right-wing extremist groups (Wagner, 2018). Charges were later brought against a small number of these skinheads, with the crime officially labeled as 'hooliganism', in line with the official party line of the authorities that neo-Nazis were not supposed, and did not exist within the GDR (Fugmann, 2022).

Due to the significant public discussion about the attack, authorities increased the sentences for 'hooliganism' beyond the typical legal limits under GDR law. This primarily aimed to placate the public and demonstrate that the regime was actively responding to, and condemning the attack. However, following the legal proceedings, no actual engagement with the young individuals involved in this right-wing extremist scene took place, besides the attempt to intensify indoctrination efforts within the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ)[25] (Börnig, 2023). The Skinhead attack at the concert was merely one of a series of closely connected events. Other occurrences such as demonstrations on the 100th anniversary of Hitler's birth in 1989, where

[23] Zion Church
[24] The Ministry for State Security
[25] The Free German Youth was responsible for the socialist indoctrination of the rising generation of young East Germans.

neo-Nazis gathered in public in several district towns across the GDR and foreign contract workers were persecuted, were not uncommon (Schulze, 2021, p.127). Still, the GDR continued to operate according to its state-mandated ideology, which asserted that fascism did not exist within its borders and was solely a product of the capitalist West,(Stöss, 2007). Hence, the state's rigid political control might have limited the visible growth of extremist groups, but did not de facto eliminate right-wing ideology. On the contrary, by ignoring its existence it was given effective spaces for its violent manifestation and recruitment, overall allowing it to harden. The failure of state propaganda and forced indoctrination to combat right-wing extremism, demonstrates the limitations of ideological suppression without meaningful engagement. The concealed racial and nationalist bias would especially become more visible after reunification, where it contributed to a broader, pan-German right-wing resurgence; overall showcasing the unintended legacy of the GDR's repressive, but ultimately ineffective approach to combating extremist thought. The events and trends following reunification are analysed in the next part of the chapter.

2.2 Right-Wing Extremism in Germany after the Fall of the Berlin Wall

The reunification of Germany in 1990 marked a turning point in the resurgence of far-right extremism. This period saw an alarming rise in racially motivated violence, the strengthening of neo-Nazi networks, and the emergence of pogrom-like riots, particularly in East Germany. While the GDR had officially rejected fascism and presented itself as an antifascist state, underlying racist and nationalist sentiments persisted and were now resurfacing (Wagner, 2017). West German neo-Nazis strategically recruited East German skinheads, leading to a wave of violence and state inaction, marking a critical era of far-right radicalization in Germany. In the 1990s, the bans on neo-Nazi organizations furthermore led to the rise of decentralized, informal groups known as *Kameradschaften*[26]. These grassroots groups, hard to ban due to their flexible structure, became hubs of right-wing extremism and violence. Despite the bans on several prominent comradeships, the movement persisted and peaked in the 2000s. Yet, rather than fading, far-right extremism adapted to new political and economic realities, finding renewed momentum in the wake of the 2007 financial crisis. The revival of the right-

[26] Comradeships

wing scene in Germany since then has been driven by economic instability and rising discontent with mainstream politics. Within this climate the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD)[27] emerged. Initially focused on economic issues, it quickly shifted toward nationalism and anti-immigration rhetoric. The 2015 refugee crisis further fueled right-wing tendencies, with AfD and Pegida purposedly exploiting fears surrounding European integration and globalization. The COVID-19 pandemic additionally played a role in strengthening right-wing extremism. Protests against lockdowns and vaccination measures provided a platform for conspiracy theorists and extremists to expand their influence. This period has seen the right-wing scene grow, blurring the lines between various far-right ideologies and broader public frustration. The period immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall, marked by the strategic outreach of West German neo-Nazis to the East and a violent wave of pogroms, along with the years shaped by subcultures like *Kameradschaften*, and the recent revival of the right-wing scene, are analysed in the following three distinct sections.

2.2.1 Strategic Outreach and Pogroms

As described before, racially motivated acts of violence had existed in the GDR long before the reunification (Kopke, 2014). However, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, East German skinheads and West German neo-Nazis now had the opportunity to form alliances. A shared hatred of foreigners appeared to be one of the primary connecting factors, with simple slogans like "Ausländer Raus"[28], serving as an identity marker. This rhetoric not allowed individuals to elevate themselves and project all of society's problems onto one specific and visible enemy, but also fostered collectiveness (Schulze, 2021, p.230). Various violent attacks started to take place across Germany such as at a migrant hostel in Berlin, where former guest workers of the GDR were victimized on a daily basis. Identification pamphlets[29] were hastily created to help police respond. These provided basic descriptions of skinheads, such as their bald look and black-leather bomber jackets, vividly illustrating how overwhelmed the authorities were. They lacked the experience to actually assess and address phenomena such as right-wing motivated

27 Alternative for Germany
28 'Foreigners out', a phrase still used by right-wing extremist nowadays - a recent scandal surrounding this specific slogan, has triggered outrage and serious public debate in Germany. A short video on social media showed young people partying and singing xenophobic slogans at the Pony Club, a popular bar on the island of Sylt.
29 Examples of these identification phamplets, can be found in Appendix A.

violence, as this was beyond the socialist framework they were accustomed to (Terra X History, 2024).

However, these spontaneous alliances, rooted in shared xenophobic values, did not remain isolated incidents. Immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, West German Nazis launched a strategic outreach to the East, quickly establishing a foothold. This had, on the one hand, ideological roots, as they viewed the former GDR as a more "ethnically pure territory", unaltered by immigration (Terra X History, 2024). On the other hand, they recognized that political allegiances in the East were still underdeveloped. Hence, the East was seen as fertile ground and both far-right parties and neo-Nazi organizations started to actively recruit within local right-wing youth scenes, with the latter being far more active. They were the ones who shaped the publicly visible image of pan-German right-wing extremism in its first phase after reunification of the country (Stöss, 2007). As one of the first far-right extremists to recognize the significance of the new federal states, Michael Kühnen[30], a prominent neo-Nazi, developed the 'Arbeitsplan Ost'[31] already in January of 1990. This plan outlined in detail strategies for building militant far-right structures within the former GDR (Schulze, 2021, p.128). By March of 1990, Kühnen had founded the 'GDR Section' of the *Deutsche Alternative* (DA)[32] in West Berlin, a group he had initially established in 1989 in Bremen. While other organizations attempted to maintain a facade of democracy, the DA openly aligned itself with the National Socialist tradition. Due to its explicit references to the NSDAP's ideology, the DA was ultimately banned in December 1992 (mdr, 2016). However its efforts alongside those of other far-right groups, helped lay the foundation for a more organized and militant far-right presence in East Germany.

Additionally, the early 1990s witnessed a series of violent pogroms that further cultivated right-wing extremism in East Germany (Kleffner, 2014, p. 80). One prominent example was the pogrom of Hoyerswerda in the region Saxony, which took place in September of 1991. The violence began on September 17, when a group of far-right youths attacked Vietnamese cigarette vendors, prompting them to seek refuge in a housing complex for contract workers from Mozambique and Vietnam. The attackers besieged the building throwing stones, while police initially hesitated to intervene. Over the following days the situation worsened, with local residents encouraging the violence. By September 20, the police finally secured the area

30 Michael Kühnen died from Aids in 1991.
31 'East Action/Work Plan'
32 Deutsche Alternative

around the contract worker residence, but the attackers shifted their focus to an asylum seeker shelter, home to over 200 refugees. The mob used stones, steel projectiles, and Molotov cocktails in their attacks. Authorities only evacuated the building on September 23, transporting the asylum seekers out of the city under police protection. Hence, evacuating the victims rather than confronting the perpetrators. Meanwhile, those celebrated, declaring Hoyerswerda "foreigner-free" (Adaire, 2019). Similarly, the pogrom in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in 1992, saw the state temporarily lose control, as rioters attacked a building housing asylum seekers. Over five days, hundreds of right-wing extremists, some traveling from other parts of the country, attacked the 'Sonnenblumenhaus', a housing complex that served as the central reception center for asylum seekers and home to around 100 Vietnamese former contract workers and their families. These attacks occurred under the applause of up to 3,000 bystanders, again creating a terrifying scene of racial violence[33]. Despite clear warnings of escalating tensions in the weeks leading up to the violence the police presence was minimal, leaving the victims defenseless (Warda, 2022).

The authorities' delayed and inadequate response, both in Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen, highlighted the significant societal and institutional failures in addressing xenophobic violence in the newly reunited country. It sent the dangerous message that there was no state protection for refugees and migrant workers, and consequently, no legal consequences for racist perpetrators. This not only emboldened far-right extremists, but also fostered a culture of impunity that radicalized perpetrators and inspired subsequent acts of violence (Dischereit, 2024). The significance of neo-Nazism post-reunification should therefore be seen in the context of this enormous wave of racist violence that shook East Germany in the early 1990s, and partly also the West of the country. In addition to the riots in Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen, incidents in Eberswalde (November 25, 1990), in Hünxe (October 3, 1992), Mölln (November 23, 1992), and Solingen (May 29, 1993) should be mentioned. These events forcefully documented that the brutal violence was not the work of individuals or small groups, but that the perpetrators encountered significant sympathy within the population, often even being encouraged in their actions. Manifest right-wing extremism was embedded in a broad environment of latent right-wing extremism (Stöss, 2007). This environment not only normalized far-right violence but also provided a fertile ground for the growth of neo-Nazi networks, including the NSU (Kopke, 2017).

[33] A picture can be found in Appendix B.

The attacks and acts of violence were initially documented primarily by antifascist groups. In many places, the activists involved, faced indifference from authorities and outright denial from local officials about the existence of such incidents. Local initiatives that pointed out these occurrences were often branded as 'troublemakers' (Kopke, 2017). State structures initially struggled, for various reasons, to acknowledge any political motives behind the often seemingly primitive perpetrators, and to classify the acts accordingly. This was facilitated by the fact that during that time, politically motivated crimes[34] were defined exclusively as state security offenses. Only if a perpetrator explicitly demonstrated a right-wing extremist mindset, such as, for example, displaying a swastika or giving a Hitler salute, the act was categorized as political, and of right-wing ideology. The sheer volume of offenses clearly motivated by xenophobia or racism forced a change in police recording criteria. The shift of an expanded concept of political motivation only took place in 2001, when new guidelines for recording politically motivated crime were introduced (Kopke, 2017).

Looking at the period following reunification it becomes clear that the relatively diffuse nationalist skinhead scene became politically radicalized after German reunification, quickly organizing and stabilizing itself (Wagner, 2014). In the power vacuum between the old GDR and the new Federal Republic of Germany, and amidst social insecurity coupled with a general, partly nationalist 'euphoria for Germany' the neo-fascist youth scene, especially in East Germany, grew rapidly (Funke, 1991). This period, also referred to as the 'Baseball Bat Years', was characterized by a national identity that was celebrated at the expense of those who did not conform to the newly unified Germany's vision of belonging. In organized neo-Nazi circles, the propensity for violence increased significantly. Institutional shortcomings to condemn and work against right-wing extremism were exacerbated by a broader societal tendency to empathize with perpetrators, rather than victims (Wagner, 2017). This leniency extended to the judicial system, where many offenders faced minimal consequences. The resulting culture of impunity not only failed to deter future violence, but also provided ideological validation for far-right extremists. Far-right youth was often depicted as 'misguided', and funneled into youth programs intended to rehabilitate them. Ironically it was within one of these programs that the later NSU trio was socialized. Substantial efforts to combat far-right extremism were undertaken largely by small civil society organizations and groups supporting victims. However, these initiatives frequently faced obstruction and, in some

[34] Politisch motivierte Kriminalität (PMK)

cases, outright criminalization by political authorities and the media, further hindering the fight against right-wing extremism (Wagner, 2017). The state downplayed the problem, and right-wing extremism was able to grow significantly, as the convergence of the far-right from the West and East Germany created opportunity for its rapid expansion.

2.2.2 Sub-culture: Kameradschaften

In response to these acts of violence, a number of small neo-Nazi parties and organizations were banned in the early 1990s. With these bans, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and several state ministries sought to curb the increasing right-wing extremist violence, while simultaneously demonstrating the government's ability to take action both domestically and internationally (Kopke, 2017). Following this wave of bans, Germany's neo-Nazi scene therefore entered a period of reorganization. Some joined established far-right parties, including the NPD[35], where the presence of primarily young individuals, particularly in East Germany, significantly contributed to the party's radicalization. Others sought new forms of organization, developing the concept of *Kameradschaften*. As these groups upheld cell-like, informal structures that were decentralized and flexible, it was harder to ban them under the law. The comradeships promoted the slogan "Organized will needs no party", signaling a shift away from traditional party structures in favor of grassroots groups. By 1998 there were approximately 80 such groups across Germany, and by 2003, this number had grown to around 160. Typically, these groups consisted of five to 25 members, composed of adolescents and young men aged 20 to 30. Over the years, thousands of individuals passed through these comradeships, which were responsible for an unquantifiable number of violent acts. These groups formed the core environment from which much of the right-wing terrorism of that period emerged (Schulze, 2021, p.129).

The comradeships quickly developed a distinct style of demonstration-based activism. Many of their demonstrations combined identity-driven historical narratives with overtly racist agitation against migration, or they focused on social issues such as labor rights. For example, neo-Nazis attempted to reinterpret the Labor Day on May 1, with slogans like "First of May - Work-Free Since 1933", linking it to Nazi-era policies (Schulze, 2021, p.130). The travel

[35] The NPD is analysed under 2.3.2

phases to and from demonstrations, as well as sometimes the events themselves, were frequently marked by acts of violence. Marches by militant neo-Nazis projected an aura of intimidation and served as implicit threats to political opponents. Many of the large-scale rallies organized by the militant neo-Nazis revolved around historical themes. Neo-Nazis in Dresden, for example, still today commemorate the anniversary of the Allied bombing of the city, portraying Germans as the "primary victims of World War II". These marches peaked in the 2000s, with up to 6,500 participants. Notably, in 2010, future AfD politician Björn Höcke was documented as attending one of these demonstrations (Pfahl-Traughber, 2012). Nevertheless, many comradeships faced significant challenges, as it became apparent that they offered less protection from legal bans and investigations than anticipated. Numerous groups were outlawed across Germany, including influential ones like the *Kameradschaft Tor* in Berlin (banned in 2005), or the *Kameradschaft Aachener Land* (banned in 2012) (Schulze, 2021, p.131).

As becomes clear, various developments within the socio-political culture of right-wing extremism in Germany took place. Nevertheless, between the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, Germany's security agencies believed that the extreme right-wing scene in Germany was fractured and incapable of actual organization and terroristic activity. This would change in 2011, when the NSU was discovered. Subsequent investigations revealed that its three members had been living underground for more than 13 years, carried out three bomb attacks, and assassinated 10 victims. This discovery occasioned an inevitable nationwide crisis of the country's security agencies. In the years following the discovery of the NSU, Germany witnessed the emergence of numerous additional right-wing terrorist groups, with members arrested in operations that recalled the wave of xenophobic violence seen in the early years after reunification. Meanwhile, traditional neo-Nazi groups and parties like the NPD experienced significant declines in political power. However, as these waned, rather than signaling a retreat of far-right ideologies, a broader revival of the right-wing scene would start with right-wing populism gaining momentum (Koehler, 2017).

2.2.3 The Revival of the Right-Wing Scene

As discussed before, right wing-extremism appears on a spectrum. Nevertheless, I purposedly label the period investigated in the following as the revival of the right-wing 'scene', since it

cannot be seen as exclusively extremist in nature. The following section examines how economic crises, political dissatisfaction, and shifting societal narratives fueled the right-wing scene in Germany starting in the late 2000s.

The global financial crisis of 2007 and the Eurozone crisis that followed in 2010 provided fertile ground for the revival of the rigth-wing scene and its foothold in mainstream politics. Economic instability and widespread fear of unemployment in large parts of society eroded trust in democracy and its foundational values. While the German government led by Chancellor Angela Merkel pursued measures such as bailout packages for struggling Eurozone members, these policies were perceived by many as prioritizing European solidarity over German national interests. In 2013, the AfD emerged in this context. Initially founded as an economically liberal party opposing the Eurozone rescue policies, it tapped into growing frustration among citizens who felt left behind by globalization and European integration. By framing itself as a "defender" of German sovereignty against Brussels, the party sucessfully gained a foothold among voters disillusioned by the perceived failures of mainstream politics (Häusler, 2016). Profiting from economic deprivation that had led to a greater inclination toward right-wing extremist positions in large parts of society, and although the party's original platform was centered on economic issues, its rhetoric soon radicalized. The party quickly became focused on nationalism and anti-immigration policies, openly incorporating xenophobic rhetoric.

The migrant crisis of 2015 marked another significant point for the right-wing scene in Germany. Over one million refugees and asylum seekers, primarily fleeing war and persecution in the Middle East and North Africa, sought refuge in Europe, with Germany taking in the largest number. While Merkel's open-door policy was praised internationally as a humanitarian gesture, it sparked a lot of backlash domestically. Right-wing groups, including the AfD, exploited the situation by promoting xenophobic narratives, portraying refugees as a threat to German culture, security, and economic stability. Accusing the government of endangering "German identity" (Mareš, 2021). Slogans such as "Wir schaffen das nicht"[36] in opposition to Merkels' famous "Wir schaffen das", became rallying cries for far-right movements. Neo-Nazi networks and extremist organizations capitalized on the situation, organizing protests, and engaging in violent acts targeting refugees and immigrant communities. Movements like Pegida gained traction, with its demonstrations merging anti-immigrant sentiments with

[36] "We cannot manage this"

broader discontent about globalization and multiculturalism (Häusler, 2016). The migrant crisis, consequently, also blurred the lines between traditional far-right extremists and right-wing populists. By framing refugees as scapegoats for broader societal grievances, the right-wing scene mobilized a broad base of supporters, including individuals who had previously been uninvolved in politics.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the measures taken to contain it, and its impact on the population, created new dynamics in the revival and development of right-wing extremism. Some of the narratives during COVID-19 were globally widespread among right-wing extremists, while others were country-specific, tied to the political situation in individual nations (Mareš, 2021). As in many other countries, in Germany, the dissatisfaction of people with the impacts of pandemic measures was exploited, and heavily manipulated by right-wing extremists. The pandemic's far-reaching social and economic disruptions paired with the pressure governments faced to take decisions on speculative grounds, created fertile ground for conspiracy theories and anti-government sentiments. The number of demonstration and protests against government-imposed restrictions such as lockdowns, mask mandates, and vaccination campaigns, consequently, became rallying points for a diverse coalition of actors; previously apolitical individuals participating in demonstrations against COVID-19 measures, were suddenly in contact with individuals such as conspiracy theorists, anti-vaxxers, and right-wing extremists. These demonstrations became the locus for connection and recruitment and specifically in eastern Germany they attracted significant participation. The AfD actively supported these protests, framing itself as the "voice of the people" against the "Corona dictatorship" (Terra X History, 2024). This strategy allowed the party to position itself as political force opposing what was depicted as government overreach, thereby broadening its appeal. Altough these demonstrations were characterized by blurred lines between genuine right-wing extremism and non-ideologically motivated participants supporting anti-COVID-19 regulations, they nevertheless, reassured the right-wing scene as a whole.

Hence, it is plausible to state that the COVID-19 pandemic not only fueled the spread of conspiracy theories and anti-democratic sentiments, but also actively strengthened the entire right-wing scene in Germany. By capitalizing on widespread discontent, the far-right successfully infiltrated mainstream discourse, normalizing extremist narratives and broadening their base of support. The revival of the right-wing scene in Germany since the late 2000s is, therefore, closely linked to the socio-economic and political upheavals triggered by the

financial and Eurozone crises, the refugee crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these events created opportunities for right-wing populists and extremists to exploit public fears, discontent, and uncertainty, thereby broadening their influence and reshaping the political landscape. However, the revival of the right-wing scene in Germany cannot be seen as entirely a result of crises. As studied before, it is rooted in deeply ingrained ideologies and historical events, paired with unresolved societal tensions. Today, right-wing extremism in Germany is a complex phenomenon, and through recurring campaigns - sometimes more successful, sometimes less sucessful - it exploits societal developments, especially crises, to influence political conditions and disrupt the norms of social coexistence.

2.3 Right-Wing Extremist Parties post-WWII

In 1945, the Allies dissolved all National Socialist organizations and banned the creation of any successor parties to the NSDAP. Nonetheless, far-right parties were founded in the western zones and later in the young Federal Republic, some of which drew on predecessors from the Weimar Republic. The following section examines the most significant far-right parties since 1945.

2.3.1 Early Parties: DKP-DRP and SRP

The first right-wing conservative party formed after the war, established in 1946, was the *Deutsche Konservative Partei – Deutsche Rechtspartei* (DKP-DRP)[37]. At the first federal elections in 1949, in alliance with the *Gemeinschaft unabhängiger Deutscher* [38] (GUD) which was not permitted to stand independently, it achieved 1.8 percent of the votes. Due to a relatively strong performance in Lower Saxony (8.1 percent), it succeeded in sending five representatives to the first Bundestag, which comprised 410 members. Among these representatives were Adolf von Thadden, who would later become the chairman of the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD), and Fritz Rößler[39], a former National Socialist and propaganda official, operating under the alias Franz Richter (Kruglanski et al.,

37 German Conservative Party - German Rights Party
38 Society of Independent Germans
39 Fritz Rößler was exposed in 1952, arrested during a session of the Bundestag, and ultimately sentenced to one and a half years in prison.

2020, p.72). After gaining the five seats in the Bundestag, the party dissolved itself due to internal power struggles between the conservative and the openly National Socialist wing. Within the same year the latter split off and founded the *Sozialistische Reichspartei* (SRP)[40]. Fritz Dorls, a member of the Bundestag, who had been expelled from the DKP-DRP and was a former member of both the SA[41] and the NSDAP, became the chairman of the SRP. Generally, almost all prominent protagonist within the party had been former NSDAP members (Kruglanski et al., 2020, p.9).

Historical accounts reveal that SRP meetings went beyond mere political debate, addressing also social and cultural aspects. Meeting halls were decorated with imperial symbols and uniformed guards were present. Brass bands and drum corps performed anthems, such as, "Heil Dir Deutschland"[42], along with the "Badenweiler-Marsch"[43], music previously used by the NSDAP. Each gathering began with remembrances of the missing and prisoners of war, tributes to fallen Nazis, and homage to those sentenced in the Nuremberg Trials (Schulze, 2021, p.73). Following the SRP's split from the DKP-DRP, the latter lost influence, while the SRP achieved notable electoral success, winning 11 percent of the vote in the 1951 Lower Saxony state elections and 7.7 percent in the Bremen municipal elections. With approximately 10,000 members, the SRP became a political haven for many former high-ranking Nazis by being explicitly National Socialist, emphasizing loyalty to the concept of the 'German Reich', and promising a "solution to the Jewish question". Otto Ernst Remer became the most prominent figure within the party. He was a former Wehrmacht general who had played a key role in suppressing the 1944 coup attempt against Hitler. Remer still openly displayed his ongoing allegiance to National Socialist ideology. In October 1952, just three years after its founding, the Federal Constitutional Court banned the SRP due to its anti-constitutional orientation shortly after it had gained seats in two German state parliaments. Attempts to establish a successor organization ultimately failed (Schulze, 2021, p.73). Besides the emergence of the SRP, the DKP-DRP was also succeeded by the DRP. In the immediate postwar years, the DRP gained some prominence within right-wing circles. However, it failed both to match even the modest electoral success of the DKP-DRP as well as to benefit from the ban of the SRP in 1952 (Oppelland, 2022).

40 Socialist Empire Party
41 Sturmabteilung – Storm Division was the paramilitary wing of the Nazi party NSDAP.
42 'Hail to you, Germany'
43 'Badenweiler March'

2.3.2 Established Parties: NPD AND DVU

In subsequent years, a new unification initiative aimed to enhance the political prospects of the far-right in Germany. In November of 1964, the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) was founded (Schulze, 2021, p.76). It was, on the one hand, a response to the DRP's declining electoral results which had, in some cases, fallen below one percent, and on the other, represented a fresh attempt to establish a consolidated right-wing party before the 1965 federal elections. Leading this initiative was the dissolving DRP but members of other far-right groups and leaders also joined. Early on, the NPD sought to present itself as a moderate and pro-democratic force. The leadership of the party was assumed by Friedrich Thielen, who had parted ways with the CDU some years earlier. His CDU background was valuable to the NPD founders, as it helped sustain the desired narrative as being 'moderate' and helped counter the DRP's reputation as full of 'Alt-Nazis' (Oppelland, 2022). The NPD's program was certainly far-right, yet leaning towards national conservatism, aiming to appeal to traditional and middle-class citizens. However, internally circulated materials containing radical ideological elements revealed that the NPD's effort to appear moderate was always merely a façade (Schulze, 2021, p.76).

In the 1965 federal elections, the NPD secured 2.0 percent of the vote, marking a noteworthy achievement and establishing the party as a focal point for the extreme right. Between 1966 and 1968 the NPD competed in eight state elections. It won seats in seven state parliaments, with its strongest showing in 1968 in Baden-Württemberg where it received 9.8 percent of the vote. The entry into the Bundestag appeared almost certain. However, in the 1969 federal elections, the NPD unexpectedly only achieved 4.3 percent of the vote, failing to secure parliamentary representation. This setback led to immediate internal conflicts, resulting in membership declines[44], factional splits, and a radicalization of the party's ideology. By the early 1970s, the NPD's influence had significantly diminished, with representation confined to local councils (Schulze, 2021, p.77).

As analysed before the approaching unification of East and West Germany brought a significant shift in the broader social climate. Right-wing extremist groups, however, were

[44] From 28,000 in 1969 to 14,500 in 1972.

neither organizationally nor ideologically prepared for the German reunification despite it having been an aim for decades. The rapid growth of racist, far-right and violence-prone youth subcultures was not channeled by established political parties but mostly by neo-Nazi groups and organizations. These groups, though nominally often structured as political parties, did not focus strategically on electoral participation (Schulze, 2021, p.79).

The *Deutsche Volksunion*[45] (DVU) was one of the parties which benefited less from the reunification then it had anticipated. Founded in 1971 by Bavarian millionaire Gerhard Frey, the DVU initially operated as an association aimed at serving as an umbrella organization for 'patriots' after the NPD's electoral failure in 1969. In 1987 the DVU transitioned into a political party, with a significant breakthrough in 1998; in its first state election campaign in the new federal states it secured 12.9 percent of the votes, hence, 16 seats in the Saxony-Anhalt state parliament. It was the most popular party among 18 to 20 year-olds (Schulze, 2021, p.81). This success occurred despite the party's weak organizational structure in the region but due to its millions in campaign financing from the Bavarian headquarters. Frey's investments in Saxony-Anhalt had paid off. The DVU recruited its campaign helpers locally, displaying populist posters nationwide and promoting itself as the voice of East German discontent with the Federal Republic. It exploited racism, heightened fears and widespread frustration, tapping into a desire for an outlet that often focused on foreigners. Its campaigns carried clear racist undertones, with slogans like "Vote Protest - Vote German" (Terra X History, 2024).

With some time passing, and after years of insignificance, the NPD managed to regain relevance in the 2000s. Beforehand, a period of intense radicalization of the party had taken place, starting when Günter Deckert assumed party leadership in 1991. Under Deckert, the party opened its ranks to neo-Nazis, many of whom had been left without organized affiliations,following a series of bans on far-right groups in the early 1990s.[46] Additionally, Deckert emphasized historical revisionism as a key programmatic theme; in 1995, he was sentenced to prison after publicly endorsing a speech by U.S. Holocaust denier Fred Leuchter on the so-called "Auschwitz Myth". In 1996, Udo Voigt succeeded him as federal chairman, introducing the 'three-pillar strategy', "Kampf um die Köpfe, Kampf um die Straße, und Kampf um die Parlamente"[47]. This approach enabled Voigt to position the NPD as a dominant force in neo-Nazi protest movements, and to build grassroots support particularly in East

[45] German Peoples' Union
[46] The bans on far-right groups in the early 1990s is also described under 2.2.2
[47] "Struggle for minds, struggle for the streets, and the struggle for parliament"

Germany. The NPD had now entirely transformed from an electoral party into an ideological organization, with focus on mobilizing its neo-Nazi base (Schulze, 2021, p.82). With the DVU's recent electoral success as a backdrop, the NPD called for nationwide demonstrations on May 1, 1998, under the slogan, "Jobs First for Germans". This aimed to project a symbol of strength of these parties to the public, and underscore their cohesive national network (Terra X History, 2024). In 2004, the NPD achieved a major breakthrough in Saxony, winning 9.2 percent of the vote in state elections and securing seats in a state parliament for the first time since 1968. That same year, the NPD and DVU established the 'Deutschlandpakt'[48], agreeing not to compete against each other in future elections. The NPD subsequently won 7.3 percent of the vote in the 2006 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern elections, gaining parliamentary representation there as well (Backes, 2006). By 2007, party membership had reached a peak of 7,000. In 2009, despite some losses, the NPD retained its seats in the Saxon parliament with 5.6 percent of the vote, and in 2011, it maintained its presence in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern's parliament with 6.0 percent (Schulze, 2021, p.84).

In 2009 the DVU chair man Gerhard Frey had retired due to age, and without its main leading figure, the party seemed unable to exist. Following his departure, the NPD chose to compete directly against the DVU in the Brandenburg state elections, effectively breaking the 'Deutschland Pakt', and contributing to the DVU's loss of parliamentary seats. Despite this rivalry, both parties moved toward closer collaboration. In 2010, they agreed to merge, a process completed in 2012 after legal delays. This was, in effect, not a true merger but an absorption of the weakened DVU by the NPD. Contrary to expectations, the NPD gained little from this move; it saw no significant increases in electoral success, funding, or membership (Schulze, 2021, p.84). In the subsequent years, the NPD plunged into yet another crisis. In 2011, the party narrowly failed to enter the state parliament in Saxony-Anhalt, falling short with 4.6 percent of the vote. While a second unsuccessful attempt to ban the party played a minor role, a substantial financial penalty imposed by the Bundestag administration in 2009 - for irregularities in public funding accounting - proved far more damaging. This penalty significantly constrained the already financially struggling NPD, severely limiting its operational capacity (Schulze, 2021, p.84).

Two proceedings to ban the NPD were initiated before the Federal Constitutional Court. The first attempt in 2003 failed on procedural grounds, while the second attempt in 2017 was

[48] 'Germany Pact'

rejected as unsubstantiated. Although the court acknowledged the NPD's explicit hostility toward the constitution and its ideological alignment with historic National Socialism - aiming to replace the current constitutional order with an authoritarian state based on an ethnically defined 'people's community' - it determined that the party's current lack of political significance rendered it unable to achieve these objectives (Federal Constitutional Court, 2017). In June 2023, during a national convention, 77 percent of NPD delegates voted in favor of an immediate rebranding, renaming the party *Die Heimat*[49]. This change was divisive, as some members disagreed with the new name and image, causing splits within the party. Certain regional branches opted to retain the original name and operate independently. In January 2024, the Federal Constitutional Court imposed a six-year ban on public funding for the party, concluding that it remained fundamentally opposed to the principles essential to a free democratic constitutional state, actively seeking its elimination (Federal Constitutional Court, 2024). Today, the party has few members, and since 2013, apart from a small core base, most of its supporters have shifted their allegiance to the AfD.

3.3.3 The Rise of the AfD

In the recent history of the Federal Republic of Germany, the far right had repeatedly failed to secure representation in the Bundestag, despite numerous attempts over decades (Schulze, 2021, p.88). Today, however, the situation has changed; the groundwork previously laid by parties like the DVU and NPD, focused on shaping public opinion, organizing street-level activism, and entering parliaments, has been successfully capitalized by the AfD (Terra X History, 2024). Since 2017, the AfD has established itself as a significant far-right presence in the Bundestag. The AfD's ascent has been rapid and far-reaching. Within few years, it secured representation not only in the Bundestag, but also in all state legislatures, the European Parliament, and many local councils (Schulze, 2021, p.88). Founded in 2013 as a right-wing umbrella party, the AfD initially emerged in opposition to Chancellor Angela Merkel's eurozone bailout policies, presenting itself as a pro-market, economically liberal party positioned to the right of the CDU and FDP[50]. The party's name was carefully chosen, referencing Merkel's assertion that her policies about stabilizing the Eurozone were 'without alternative' to signal its challenge to that narrative. Combining market-driven EU skepticism

[49] The Homeland
[50] Freie Demokratische Partei - Free Democratic Party

with protest against eurozone policies, the AfD attracted early leaders from the CDU, FDP, and smaller organizations, including evangelical circles and far-right networks. From its outset, the AfD served as a unifying platform for right-wing forces outside the mainstream conservative bloc. Over time, two defining trends have shaped, and are shaping its trajectory: consistent electoral successes and an increasingly pronounced shift toward far-right radicalization (Schulze, 2021, p.90).

The AfD's core focus underwent a significant transformation starting in 2015, shifting away from its early neoliberal critique of the Euro. New priorities emerged, including strong opposition to Germany's refugee policies, the Islam, and migration in general. During that time the party's rapid rise was catalyzed by the 2015 refugee crisis (Virchow, 2017). As global conflicts such as the Syrian civil war led to a dramatic increase in the number of displaced people worldwide, a share of these refugees fled to Europe, with a substantial number arriving in Germany. In September 2015, the German government decided not to close its borders to refugees. With 722,370 first time applicants registered in 2016, Germany recorded almost 60% of all first time applicants in the EU Member States (BAMF, 2017). While large segments of German society expressed solidarity with this decision, a growing opposition emerged. Parts of this opposition evolved into a broader protest movement, which the AfD quickly identified as a political opportunity. The party actively embraced and amplified the movement's sentiments, including its frequently underlying racism. By late 2014, Alexander Gauland[51] had already set the stage for this strategic shift, leading a delegation of AfD members to a demonstration organized by Pegida[52] in Dresden (Schulze, 2021, p.90). At the AfD's party convention in July 2015, internal struggles emerged between Bernd Lucke, who had helped to found the AfD and advocated for a more moderate course, and the party's increasingly radical factions. Lucke was defeated and subsequently left the party (Tagesschau, 2015). In January 2019, after Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution designated the AfD a 'case to monitor', Lucke voiced his support for this scrutiny. More specifically, he raised concerns about members within the party whose loyalty to democratic principles was, in his view, questionable. He argued that the AfD had transformed into a latently xenophobic German nationalist party with far-right elements, while confirming that he would not establish the party

[51] A prominent AfD politican and figure, today "honorary chairman" of the party.
[52] PEGIDA: Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West is a pan-European, anti-Islam, far-right political movement

in its current form again. Reflecting on its trajectory, he stated that it had become a party he would not have founded and one he would not vote for (Spiegel, 2019).

Looking at the voting history of the AFD, it becomes clear how rapidly the party has gained popularity in German politics. In the 2013 federal elections, the year of its foundation, the party sill missed entering the Bundestag narrowly with 4.7 percent of the votes. However, already in the 2014 European elections it achieved 7.1 percent and secured seats in the state parliaments of Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia. By 2018, the AfD had successfully entered all state parliaments. Its record result of 27.5 percent in Saxony-Anhalt in 2019 was surpassed in 2024, when the AfD achieved 32.8 percent in Thuringia. This not only marked a new record high but also made the AfD, for the first time in its history, the strongest party in a German state. Close behind, the party achieved 30.6 percent in Saxony, where it was ranked second of all parties. While its strongest results were in eastern Germany, the AfD has also began to establish strongholds in the West. In 2023 it achieved its best result to date in a western German state election, becoming the second-strongest party in Hessen with 18.4 percent of the votes. In Bavaria it also made significant gains, securing 14.6 percent and ranking as the third-largest party (Decker, 2022). This marked a pivotal political shift, as the AfD has started to gain significant support not only in the East, but increasingly in West Germany as well.

Today, one of Germany's most influential right-wing extremists is the AfD leader Björn Höcke. As mentioned before, Höcke participated in a neo-Nazi demonstration in Dresden in 2010. In 2017, Höcke referred to the Holocaust memorial as the "Monument of Shame" in one of his speeches (Kamann, 2017). The increasing radicalization of the AfD has led to growing scrutiny of its branches by Germany's domestic intelligence agencies. The party's faction 'Flügel'[53] led by Höcke himself, was officially classified as 'proven right-wing extremist' in March 2019. Estimates suggest that more than one in five AfD members, and up to 40 percent in eastern Germany are affiliated with this faction. The party formally dissolved the 'Flügel' in April 2020, but given its informal structure this dissolution was largely symbolic (Schulze, 2021, p.95). In 2021, the Thuringia branch classified as 'proven right-wing extremist'. In 2024, the

[53] Wing

party as a whole was classified as a suspected case of right-wing extremism by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Tagesschau, 2024).

An incident in 2018 further underscores how the far-right has come to see itself as a powerful, unified movement, able to mobilize without repercussions. At a city festival in Chemnitz in August 2018, a young man was fatally stabbed by a person with migration background. Right-wing groups quickly exploited the incident, launching an intense anti-refugee campaign fueled by misinformation and rumors spread across social media. The days that followed saw a surge of violence: far-right hooligans and neo-Nazis attacked migrants and police indiscriminately, and engaged in antisemitic assaults, such as vandalizing the city's Jewish restaurant. Both the AfD and Pegida sought to capitalize on the unrest. Höcke and other far-right leaders organized a 'mourning march', with prominent extremists leading the procession. At the front were Höcke and members of the AfD's Saxony parliamentary faction. In the second row marched Lutz Bachmann and Siegfried Däbritz, key Pegida figures, followed by other right-wing extremists, including the future murderer of CDU politician Walter Lübcke, as well as individuals with connections to NSU supporters. Hans-Olaf Henkel, a former AfD Member of the European Parliament, left the party and expressed regret as early as 2015. He lamented that the AfD had turned into what he described as a "monster", evolving into a "light version of the NPD, contrary to his original intentions" (Frankfurter Allgemeine, 2015).

The AfD has successfully embedded itself in public discourse and is now a regular part of political discussions. The social rejection it once faced has diminished. In some states, despite being recognized as a far-right party, it continues to gain significant voter support. Previously seen as politically toxic, the party no longer carries the same stigma. The AfD emerged as a clear beneficiary of the refugee crisis, effectively tapping into existing sentiments within parts of the population. Given the extensive information now available about the party, it is reasonable to conclude that its supporters vote for it not out of ignorance, but in large parts precisely because of its far-right ideology. While the AfD formally endorses the constitution and democracy, distancing itself from National Socialism, it still includes factions that advocate only conservative, not explicitly far-right, positions. However, these moderates work within the same political project as the party's far-right elements and may soon be little more than token figures (Virchow, 2017).

Today, the AfD as a whole is largely shaped, driven, and dominated by its extremist factions, particularly in East Germany, where the influence of far-right ideologies is undisputed. The list

of inflammatory statements and demands from AfD members has become extensive, as have the connections between party members and openly far-right groups. Moreover, the AfD as a whole questions the principle of equality and actively challenges minority rights. Anti-Muslim racism is openly promoted and the equal treatment of religions is undermined. A return to and promotion of heteronormative family and partnership models remain another major policy point for the party (Virchow, 2017). Key sections of the party endorse an explicitly far-right concept of "the people", and racist rhetoric targeting "passport Germans" closely mirrors NPD language. Furthermore, AfD voters report a pronounced distrust towards the state and political institutions. This distrust is, in some cases, even stronger than among non-voters, who may also uphold a rejectionist attitude toward democracy, expressing it through abstaining from elections. In contrast, AfD voters actively use elections to exert influence, despite a significant proportion of them opposing democratic structures in principle. The AfD's attacks on democratic institutions are evident both within and outside of parliament, and its party program reflects these views. It describes popular sovereignty as a "fiction", claiming that "real power lies with a small, powerful political elite". The party now advocates not just for EU reform, but for a full 'Dexit', the withdrawal of Germany from the EU. The idea of a reformed democratic AfD free of extremist influences, as of today, is increasingly implausible, if not entirely naïve (Schulze, 2021, p.99).

2.4 The Prevalence of Right-Wing Extremist Tendencies in East Germany

The higher prevalence of far-right attitudes in eastern Germany is difficult to dispute, but the reasons for this phenomenon remain a topic of debate. Scholars largely agree that no single, monocausal explanation exists; rather, a combination of factors contributes to this issue (Schulze, 2021, p.266). Building on the previous analysis of right-wing extremism's historical evolution in both East and West Germany, the following section now discusses why these tendencies have remained particularly strong in the East**.**

As previously analysed, until the mid-1990s the focal point of organized right-wing extremism was in West Germany. The degree of organization was higher there than in the East and far-right parties achieved better election results. Right-wing extremism in the East, on the other hand, was predominantly characterized by more spontaneous, weakly organized, and ideologically less established protests – however, of particularly aggressive nature. It was

primarily subcultural in nature and strongly movement-oriented, involving groups such as skinheads, hooligans, and youth groups (Deicke, 2007). For this reason scholars repeatedly caution against viewing right-wing extremism in the East solely through an institutional lens; this overlooks the deep-rooted subcultural dynamics and local scenes of the phenomenon, whose significance is not grasped by merley investigating party membership or voting statistics (Stöss, 2007).

The second half of the 1990s was marked by a shift of the prevalence of structural right-wing extremism from West to East Germany. The East started to record an increased level of organizational structure alongside far-right parties achieving better election results in the new federal states than in the old ones. The growing support for right-wing extremism in East Germany during that period was also influenced by changes in the climate surrounding the public opinion. Initially, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, an atmosphere of euphoria fueled by economic growth, increased consumption and optimism about the future, swept through the East (Stöss, 2007). However, starting in 1992/1993, the pace of convergence with Western conditions slowed and the euphoria was replaced by a more realistic assessment of the situation. The absence of self-sustaining economic growth, deindustrialization, and mass unemployment fueled the emergence of 'Ostalgic' sentiments coupled with anti-Western attitudes. Many experiences were also marked by a sense of envy and the feeling of having sacrificed much during reunification. These were further reinforced by fantasies that migrants do not have to work and enjoy a better quality of life (Terra X History, 2024). While the disillusionment with the institutions and political system spread, right-wing extremist narratives gained more traction. The resulting comparatively high propensity of violence in the East was explained by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution as follows:

"Many people in East Germany perceive reunification as a dominance of Western lifestyles. They feel like second-class citizens, marginalized by West Germans. Some - especially young people - compensate for their sense of inferiority by lashing out at those who are weaker: foreigners, people with disabilities, and the homeless." (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 1998, pp. 7-8)

Many East Germans still today feel disadvantaged to West Germans, as well as marginalized in relation to foreigners (Knight, 2021). The low representation of eastern Germans in leadership positions across politics, business, and the judiciary further exacerbates this sense of collective humiliation (Schulze, 2021, p.268). This is often channeled into resentment

toward the political system, and at times expressed through racism. Additionally, it is important to note that parts of society who joined far-right subcultures following Germany's reunification as young individuals, never retained their ideological orientation. Structural and social conditions that facilitated the very emergence of right-wing extremist tendencies in the East were never fully addressed or resolved. The so-called "Generation Hoyerswerda", shaped by the racially motivated riots of the early 1990s, therefore, continues to influence the political climate in the region. Representing in parts the voters of the AfD (Schulze, 2021, p.267). These unresolved grievances have allowed far-right attitudes to endure, and are now influencing the present-day political landscape, overall fueling the prevalence of right-wing extremist tendencies in the East.

Meanwhile, as we have seen, far-right groups have always recognized the political opportunities in East Germany. Heavily investing resources in the new federal states after reunification, far-right extremists successfully exploited grassroots approaches, infiltrating with a down-top approach. This has included, and still includes, strong focus on regional politics as well as youth outreach efforts, always aiming to integrate into the everyday lives of communities. It is still today often framed and "idealized" as a stronghold of "healthy" values by the far right, such as a supposed preference for authority and ethnic homogeneity. A narrative that has been repeatedly reinforced throughout history (Terra X History, 2024). At the same time however, local right-wing extremism is often also downplayed in the East[54]. Far-right violence is frequently stripped of its political context and framed as isolated incidents. Consequently, civil society in eastern Germany operates under challenging conditions; those who openly address the problem of far-right violence frequently face backlash themselves. However, acknowledging and addressing the problem of far-right violence is not an act of disloyalty towards East Germany, but a necessary step toward effective solutions. Nevertheless, far-right extremism should not and cannot simply be labeled an "Eastern Problem". Structurally weak, sparsely populated areas undergoing demographic decline are particularly vulnerable to extremist tendencies, independently from its location (Schulze, 2021, p.269). The divides between thriving urban centers and struggling rural areas with weaker democratic cultures also exist in West Germany.

[54] In 2000, Saxony's Minister-President at the time, Kurt Biedenkopf, claimed that the people of Saxony were "immune to right-wing extremism".

Concludingly, the prevalence of right-wing extremist tendencies in East Germany today is a multifaceted issue. The region upholds some unique regional characteristics compared to West Germany. The historical transition from the GDR to reunified Germany left many in the East feeling marginalized and disadvantaged. These sentiments, compounded by socio-economic challenges like high unemployment, made the region fertile ground for far-right ideologies. The influence of subcultures, including Skinheads and hooligan groups, alongside the deliberate efforts of far-right organizations to build grassroots support, have entrenched extremist tendencies over time. Politically, the East today has experienced a shift towards greater support for far-right parties, specifically the AfD, driven by anti-migration stances and skepticism in existing democratic institutions. Clearly, it cannot be denied and ignored that East Germany still today has higher levels of societal unrest and dissatisfaction compared to the West, while political institutions are historically less embedded as stabilizing forces. Precisely because of these circumstances, a more nuanced understanding and analysis of the East's history in regards to right-wing extremism is needed. Pointing fingers with a "West German attitude" not only hinders progress but also risks fostering a false and dangerous sense of "superiority" within West Germany, further deepening the divide (Schulze, 2021, p.269). Germany as an entire country is facing a steadily growing threat from right-wing extremism – one of the most pressing challenges to its democracy, peace and liberty.

Chapter 3: Theories and Case Studies

The role of ideology in the radicalization process has been a subject of extensive scholarly debate. While some scholars argue that ideology serves as a mere justification for extremist behavior, others emphasize its causal role in shaping an individual's path to violence. Building on the extensive historical analysis, the third chapter examines the centrality of ideology in the radicalization process within the context of far-right violence in Germany. It aims to demonstrate that ideology is not only a post-hoc rationalization of violence but a fundamental driver of it. The chapter is structured into three main parts. The first part introduces two radicalization theories that emphasize the role of ideology: the DRIA Model by Orsini (2020), and the motivational imbalance theory by Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna (2019). The DRIA Model presents radicalization as a resocialization process unfolding in four stages, emphasizing how ideology provides individuals with a new cognitive framework and moral justification for violence. The motivational imbalance theory explains radicalization through the lens of psychological needs, demonstrating how ideology fulfills the *quest for significance* and legitimizes extreme actions. By analyzing these frameworks, this chapter provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how ideological commitment transforms personal grievances into violent extremism. In the second and third part of the chapter, these theories are applied to two different far-right attacks in Germany. The DRIA Model is used to analyze the 2016 Munich shooting executed by David Sonboly. The motivational imbalance theory is applied to the 2019 Halle synagogue attack executed by Stephan Balliet. This approach allows for a structured and analytical examination of the radicalization process of the two perpetrators. I have selected these two cases because of some distinct dynamics. The 2016 Munich attack initially defied classification as 'far-right violence', generating widespread public debate in Germany and highlighting the complexities in addressing ideological extremism. The 2019 Halle attack would have been the deadliest antisemitic massacre in Germany since World War II had the perpetrator succeeded in breaching the synagogue's doors. Moreover, its execution - framed as a *gamification of terror* - highlights the immense influence of digital spaces in radicalization processes. Finally, both attacks took place within the last ten years and reflect the evolving nature of far-right violence in Germany. Following each case study, a dedicated section analyzes the specific role that ideology played in the attacks. This approach ensures a focused discussion on how extremist ideology functioned as both a motivational and legitimizing force in the radicalization process of Sonboly and Balliet. The analysis

demonstrates that both perpetrators were not simply driven by personal issues but were deeply embedded in far-right ideological narratives, which shaped their perception of reality and justified their acts of terror.

3.1. Radicalization Theories

3.1.1 The DRIA Model

The DRIA model was first published in Alessandro Orsini's *Anatomy of the Red Brigades* (2011) and further developed in a series of articles and books devoted to jihadi terrorists, who succeeded in carrying out terror attacks in the West between 2004 and 2018. As there are hundreds of people who become radicalized every day, the DRIA model acknowledges that it is naturally not possible to trace so many individual paths back to just one sociological model. Hence, the model concerns the radicalization process of only one specific anthropological type, namely the "terrorist by vocation", or "vocational terrorist" (Orsini, 2013). This concept has been defined by Orsini based on the distinction between an individual who lives "off" politics, and an individual who lives "for" politics, which is drawn by Max Weber (1946). The former makes a career out of it, receiving a material recompensation in exchange for their service. The latter makes it its purpose of life, believing in being part of a greater, more noble cause, unrelated to financial gains. Accordingly, a "terrorist by vocation" refers to all those individuals who have decided to sacrifice their lives and the life of others, in order to fulfill a deep and interior spiritual need. While seeking to satisfy this inner need they are also obsessed with the idea of punishing others for their alleged moral corruption. This sacrifice is driven by the motivation to accomplish the spiritual mission, which is constructed upon the deep interiorization of radical ideologies (Orsini, 2020). To formulate the DRIA model, Orsini analysed the life of 39 vocational terrorists. After investigating their biographies, he concludes that the radicalization process leading to vocational terrorism represents a resocialization process which unfolds across four main stages. Hence, the DRIA model is an acronym for:

D - Disintegration of Social Identity
R - Reconstruction of Social Identity
I - Integration in a Revolutionary Sect
A - Alienation from the Surrounding World

The first two stages concern the individual's personality in regard to their creative abilities, addressing the so called 'cognitive radicalization'. The remaining two stages focus on the relationship between the radicalized individual and the revolutionary sect. Here the individual moves from a 'cognitive radicalization' to a 'violent radicalization' (Orsini, 2020).

Disintegration of Social Identity

The first stage of the DRIA model involves the disintegration of one's social identity. Typically, this process is the consequence of a series of dramatic experiences or childhood traumas that induce the individual to question his previous belief system, as well as place in the world. The persistent feeling of bewilderment triggers the desire to escape from reality, which can manifest both as a passive or active attitude, driving the individual to embrace new values which contrast with the old ones. This new mental framework is known as 'cognitive opening', and represents a turning point for the individual in question. Given the erosion of what they believed to be 'real', they seek new answers and values. Since this new mental framework triggers the search for an alternative interpretation of the world, it opens the possibility of adhering to radical ideologies - the necessity of finding a new set of values and a purpose in one's personal life, can motivate individuals even to explore the hypothesis of extreme changes. Hence, the 'cognitive opening' is not a solution in itself or shows what path to take. It merely represents an individual's availability to embrace a new system of ideas and is the starting point of a new existential adventure (Orsini, 2020).

Reconstruction of Social Identity

Those who witness the described existential crisis might go through the second stage of the DRIA model, which entails the reconstruction of their social identity. At this stage, people pursue the meaning of life they have lost over time, which has triggered the existential crisis in the first place. Having abandoned all their previous values, they now face the challenge of constructing a new reality. As such, the phase of reconstruction signifies a fundamental shift, a re-birth rooted in a new understanding of reality. It is therefore, according to Orsini (2020), above all, a "psychological undertaking". However, it is important to denote that at this stage there are many paths forward, and radicalization is but one of them. Individuals may opt to remain passive and resist change, or they may choose to reinvent themselves in constructive, non-radical manner. As Orsini (2020) explains, the creative aspect of the self can cope with an identity crisis in many ways. Hence, it is stressed in the DRIA model that those who experience

an identity crisis are neither condemned to moving to the second stage of the DRIA model, nor to the reconstruction of their social identity through a radical ideology. As Orsini (2020), influenced by Geertz (1973), underscores, one of the most significant facts about terrorists may finally be that they all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand different lives but end up having lived only one. Individuals, therefore, start their radicalization process in complete autonomy, seeking answers to overcome the hardships of their life, and some end up finding them in extremist narratives. Radical ideologies fit such search perfectly as they give a complete set of rules and values to follow and dictate how one should live their life. Ideology is, therefore, excellent at providing individuals with a new purpose and a perceived clear 'mission' filled with meaning; the ideal remedy for people who have lost their sense of direction and truth, due to the first stage of the model, the disintegration of their social identity.

If during the process of reconstructing their social identity individuals end up choosing a radical ideology, they will create a new "radical mental universe" for themselves. This mutates their worldview into a categorical "us-versus-them" mentality, and is, as Orsini (2020) explains, based on seven "Cognitive Categories":

1. Radical Catastrophism: the world is irreparably corrupt.
2. Waiting for the End: the world is destined to end as a result of this corruption.
3. Obsession with Purity: one should shield oneself from the corruption of the world.
4. Identification of Evil: certain people are to blame for the current state of the world.
5. Obsession with Purification: these people deserve to die.
6. Exaltation of Martyrdom or Desire to be Persecuted: if these people persecute me, it is evidence that I am on the right path, as they are "impure".
7. Purification of the Means through the End: given that the objective is salvation of my soul, murder is acceptable.

These categories represent the worldview an individual radicalizing under the DRIA model will adopt, becoming fully "cognitively radicalized". Hence, drawing on the sociological perspective of Weber (1946) and Geertz (1973), the DRIA Model views a terrorist by vocation as "an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun", where the webs of significance are of ideological substance. The radical mental universe consequentally, fundamentally transforms how an individual perceives and constructs their social reality

(Orsini, 2017). The world suddenly appears divided into two: friends and enemies (Orsini, 2020).

Integration in a Revolutionary Sect

After having acquired a radical ideology, individuals start searching for groups who share their same set of beliefs. This process of establishing connections with like-minded individuals can progress in two ways. The first option lies in creating direct personal bonds by meeting first-hand with those who share the same worldview. Nevertheless, meetings in person are naturally not always possible. Orsini (2020) describes, how in this case, both virtual groups and spaces as well as the concept of 'imagined communities' come to play a major role. The concept of "imagined community," developed by Anderson (1983), explains how human beings can take part in a group through the power of imagination. There are, for example, various cases of individuals claiming to be ISIS or al-Qaeda militants, even if they have never met actual members of those organizations. Whether joining a physical or virtual group, as well as being part of an imagined community, in any case this step offers individuals the opportunity to directly interact and engage in discussions with people who share their same opinions, further solidifying radicalization of the participants (Orsini, 2020).

Alienation from the Surrounding World

In the last and final phase of the DRIA model, individuals completely isolate themselves from the outside world and any external frequentation is cut off. As Orsini (2020) explains, such isolation from the outside world has both an explicit and a more hidden purpose. The first purpose entails the direct aim to entirely interrupt any social relationship to mainstream society. As such is perceived as deceptive and corrupt, the interruption allows the radicalized individual to feel morally superior. Additionally, interacting only with other individuals that are submerged in the same webs of significance feels reinforcing and validating. Secondly, potential interferences from the surrounding world, which could lead the individual to question their willingness to embrace terrorism, are avoided. As the person has embraced a radical ideology that is in stark contract with societal mainstream sets of beliefs and values, there is always a risk left that the latter may influence the individual in pulling back from its cause. Any exposure to negative comments as well as judgement is avoided. The individual cannot be morally challenged by anyone; hence, alienation acts as a barrier. Orsini (2020) explains how this last stage of the DRIA model is indebted to the contributions of many scholars of radical religious sects. Those agree in assigning a fundamental role to the isolation of their followers

from the surrounding world, to explain the phenomena of extreme deviance, like homicide and ritual suicide. Therefore, this stage, involving the alienation of the surrounding world, is needed and crucial in becoming a fully-fledged terrorist by vocation.

3.1.2 The Motivational Imbalance Theory

A further theory of radicalization that attributes a central role to ideology is the "Motivational Imbalance Theory" by Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna, set out in their book *Thre Pillars of Radicalization* (2019). At the basis of their theory the scholars lay out a psychological perspective on extremism, framing it as a general phenomenon that can manifest in various forms such as extreme diets, sports, or behaviours like substance addiction. Violent expression such as terrorism is viewed as just one specific form of extremism. Consequently, the analysis begins by addressing a fundamental question: why does an individual adopt any type of extremist behaviour in the first place?

The answer to this question is built upon the scholars' basic assumption that individuals possess a variety of basic needs. These needs can be divided into two categories: physiological needs such as rest and nutrition, and secondary psychogenic needs such as the need to feel loved, or the need to acquire a sense of fulfilment. Deprivation of any of these needs causes mental suffering and unease. Consequently, individuals are naturally inclined to avoid behaviors which satisfy only some needs while neglecting or undermining others, seeking instead to maintain a state of 'motivational balance'. However, when a basic need becomes acutely dominant this balance is disrupted. Now all mental resources are redirected towards satisfying the dominant need. But as an individual's mental resources are limited, these will have to be retreated from elsewhere; the surpression of certain needs will come at a cost along with the erosion of the behavioral constraints they typically enforce. As formerly constrained behavior is now liberated, the path is opened for extremism in all its forms. Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna (2019) underline this process by explaining that "the greater the imbalance, the larger the set of behavioral options for gratifying the dominant need"(p.40). In this way, the dominance of a single, unmet need can result in behaviors that were previously unthinkable, enabling the emergence of extremist tendencies.

As we have established, motivational imbalance occurs when a singular basic need takes precedence over all others, becoming the individual's sole focus. However, violent extremist

behavior undoubtedly remains relatively rare, even among those experiencing motivational imbalance. So what is it that leads individuals, which have already acquired a state of motivational imbalance, to adopt violent extremist behavior over other forms of extremism? The answer provided by the three authors lies in their theory of the three Ns - needs, narratives and networks.

Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna (2019) describe how among the basic human needs there is the fundamental desire to matter. This constitutes a universal, human motivating force, carried by various different desires such as the need for esteem, achievement, meaning or competence. The scholars conceptualize this as the *quest for significance* and identify it as the main underlying motivation for terrorism. According to them, the struggle for recognition under the quest for signifcance is therefore crucial in understanding the radicalization process that can lead to terrorism. However, for the quest of significance to practically induce any sort of behavior it must first be activated. This activation occurs in one of three major ways, as the scholars explain: (a) through a loss of significance or humiliation of some sort; (b) through an anticipated (or threatened) significance loss; or (c) through an opportunity for significance gain.

The first option that can activate the quest of significance is the loss of significance or humiliation, which can manifest both on a personal or social level. The former occurs when an individual suffers personal setbacks, failures, or humiliations that diminish their sense of self-worth. These feelings of insignificance can also arise from larger societal issues such as economic instability, political turmoil, or marginalization. The latter arises when an individual's group is humiliated or its core values are violated. For instance, many Muslim immigrants in Europe experience discrimination and Islamophobia, leading to feelings of disrespect and insignificance. The second option that can activate the quest of significance is the avoidance of significance loss. This means that only the fear and thought of possibly being humiliated or discredited can motivate individuals to adopt radical behaviors. The third and last option entails the opportunity for significance gain. This pathway refers to the prospect of achieving extraordinary recognition, respect, or importance through actions which are often tied to a broader cause. Within the context of terrorism, individuals may perceive violent action as opportunities to elevate their status within their ideological or social framework. In the martyrdom culture, for example, militants who are willing to sacrifice their life for the jihadi cause are considered as heroes and enjoy the respect and the esteem of their community (Kruglanski et al., 2019).

However, the quest for significance is insufficient to drive an individual toward violent extremism. A person may experience motivational imbalance with their quest for significance fully activated yet still channel their ambitions into peaceful, socially acceptable paths. Since even more, the resort to violence is typically condemned and in direct contradiction to societal norms, individuals seeking to take radical actions require a form of legitimization and social endorsement. This legitimization is provided by the second N of the scholars' theory: radical narratives. The ideology serves a dual function. On the one side, it fortifies the individual's quest for significance by validating that the individual has suffered injustices. By doing so, the ideology not only strengthens the individual's sense of grievance but also justifies the use of violence as a legitimate response to the perceived injustices. On the other side, the ideology provides the answer on how to solve the quest for significance. It offers a clear path to restoring significance, and, whether implicitly or not, the violence-justifying narrative points out that individuals who adopt radical behaviours and perpetrate violent acts, will receive the respect and the recognition that they are seeking for in. It conveys that by attributing to the cause of the ideology, the own sense of significance can be restored. In this light, the commitment to an ideology reveals to be not an end in itself but a means to fulfil the individual's needs. Ultimately, it forges the link between the need for significance and the outcome, which presents the violence.

Having explored the role of radical narratives in linking violence to significance, it is time to address the role that networks play in the radicalization process. As Orsini describes it in his article *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model* (2020), where he analyses the motivational imbalance theory, these have the function to serve as conduits through which individuals get acquainted with, and embrace the violent ideology that guides their attempts to restore their sense of significance. Beyond serving as an epistemic authority for individuals, the social network also executes a "rewarding function" as it demonstrates respect and appreciation to individuals who are seeking significance gain.

In sum, the radicalization theory proposed by Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna (2019) is founded on three factors: needs, narratives and networks. The need, or the motivational determinant, that arises from the quest for significance drives the individual to search for possible means to fulfil it. The ideological narrative both determines and justifies the means used in the quest for significance. The social network enables the individual to embrace the

ideology and enjoy the support of a group during the practical enforcement of it. It also serves as space of legitimation for the violence that comes with it.

3.1.3 The Role of Ideology

The role of ideology in the radicalization process of individuals has been a subject of debate among scholars. While some question its significance, the radicalization theories examined in this thesis all ascribe a central role to it. By revisiting the studied theoretical frameworks, this section narrows the focus on the ideological component within them. Consequently, theoretical clarity on the role of ideology in the radicalization process of individuals can be achieved before continuing with an analysis of real-life cases.

Orsini has analysed the motivation to join extremist groups in multiple different contexts, accounting both for the realm of left-wing violence such as the Red Brigades (Orsini, 2011), as well as right-wing violence such as neo-fascist movements (Orsini, 2017). His findings demonstrate that in both cases individuals undergo a process of radicalization driven by ideology. As we have seen in the DRIA model, the process of radicalization begins with an identity crisis during which terrorism is perceived as one of the ways out, hence, one of the solutions (Orsini, 2020). Therefore, the DRIA model assesses that terrorists are not mentally ill. Instead, their willingness to radicalize is the consequence and response to a series of dramatic experiences or traumas that induce the individual to question their belief system, and sense of purpose in the world. This sense of disorientation fosters a desire to escape from reality and seek a new set of values that provide meaning. Ideology fills precisely this void; it provides the individual with new cognitive categories through which to orientate themselves. It is therefore, not an a posteriori justification that answers why an individual degenerates to the point of violence - it rather upholds a causal power that drives individuals to the violence in the first place. Since a radicalized individual sees the world divided into good and evil, the motivation to eliminate perceived evil through terrorism relies on a profound ideological commitment. But committing severe acts of violence requires enormous mental efforts; ideology sustains these by providing justification and purpose. Consequently, from this perspective, terrorist organizations are firstly and fundamentally ideological phenomena, embodied in ideas, worldviews and cognitive categories. Then in some cases, they end up manifesting as violent acts such as shootings or suicide bombings. Ideology is therefore at the forefront of the radicalization process, as it is the key factor in determining whether the process

will even proceed in the first place. Without a compelling radical ideology, radicalization under the DRIA model cannot take root. Hence, in contrast to those terrorism scholars who view ideology as an after-the-fact rationalization, the DRIA model by Orsini (2020) conceives of "ideology as the necessary, albeit inadequate, condition for accepting the idea of killing and being killed."

Similarly to the DRIA Model, Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna (2019) also view ideology as a key motivating factor for terrorism. As established, according to the motivational imbalance theory, the radicalization process begins with the quest for significance in which an individual seeks ways to achieve personal meaning and relevance. Here, ideology becomes the primary means through which this quest is fulfilled as it offers answers on achieving their aims. Ideology therefore justifies extreme behaviors as necessary actions to achieve such goal of personal significance. While simultaneously framing it as serving an alleged collective good. In this way, ideology not only motivates radicalization but also provides the framework which ultimately leads to actual violent actions. Additionally, Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna (2019) emphasise that although networks are an integral part in the radicalization process, even here the radical narratives play the decisive role in driving a person to terrorism. Kinships and friendships while influential, cannot drive an individual to commit violent acts without the foundational support of a common worldview. Ideology presents the fundamental underpinning reason behind the creation of a network. As ideology justifies the use of violence, its central role becomes even more apparent: a social network can only promote violent extremism if its members embrace a radical ideology (Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna 2019). In fact, networks with a moderate narrative incompatible with violence are even known to facilitate individuals' exit from violent movements (Orsini, 2020).

In conclusion, the analysis of the DRIA model, and the motivational imbalance theory, underscores the central role of ideology in the radicalization process. While social networks and external influences play a role, they alone are insufficient to drive individuals toward violent extremism without the foundation of a radical belief system. Therefore, ideology does not merely serve as an after-the-fact justification, but functions as the driving force that shapes perceptions, sustains commitment, and ultimately legitimizes violent actions. This theoretical understanding sets the stage for the following case study analysis, where the practical implications of ideology in the radicalization of individuals will be further examined.

3.2 Case Study I

3.2.1 The 2016 Munich Shooting

On July 22, 2016, 18-year-old David Sonboly shot and killed nine people, severely injured five others, and then proceeded to commit his own suicide. Seven of the victims were Muslims, one was a Rom, and another a Sinto. In the weeks leading up to the attack, Sonboly acquired a pistol and ammunition through the dark web. Before the incident, he had created a fake account on facebook, encouraging a few young individuals that he knew from school to gather at a McDonalds near the Olympia Shopping Center (OEZ). On the afternoon of the attack, Sonboly went to the location where he could not enocunter any of the individuals he had contacted via Facebook before. After observing a group of young people for a while, he went to the restroom of the fast food restaurant, where he must have retrieved his weapon. Walking out of the restroom, shortly thereafter he began firing multiple times at the group of teenagers which was seated in a booth. Of the six children and teenagers targeted by Sonboly only a 13-year-old survived, managing to escape with life-threatening injuries. The perpetrator then left the restaurant and began shooting at fleeing individuals on the streets. Near an underground parking garage, he managed to hit and kill a 17-year-old boy, as well as a 45-year-old woman, who later succumbed to her injuries. Near a subway entrance, he then fatally shot a 19-year-old, and near the shopping center escalators, a 20-year-old woman. After killing 9 individuals within less then 10 minutes, Sonboly flew and hid in the bicycle storage room of a residential building close to the OEZ while the police was searching for him. Approximatly one and a half hours later he emerged from the building and shot himself when police spotted and confronted him on the streets. In total, Sonboly had fired nearly 60 rounds that day (bpb, 2021).

The following section investigates the radicaliation process of David Sonboly, through the lens of the DRIA model by Orsini (2020). This analysis not only allows to understand the radicalization process of the perpetrator in its different stages fully, but also sheds light on the role far-right ideology played in driving him to commit the attack.

Disintegration of Social Identity

The first stage of the DRIA model involves the disintegration of an individual's social identity. As we have seen, this process is typically the consequence of a series of traumatic experiences which induce the individual to question their previous belief system and sense of place in the world. In the case of Sonboly, various reports describe him as a psychologically disturbed

youth who had been a victim of bullying, leading to self-esteem issues and personal grievances. Various class colleauge revealed that Sonboly had openly expressed intense hatred for foreigners, repeatedly stating that "he will make them pay" for inflicting suffering upon him (Bannenberg, 2018). When applying the DRIA model, it becomes clear that it is crucial to mention these personal experiences of Sonboly; they resemble the trigger point the first stage of his radicalization process, the disintegration of his social idenity. As studied before, this stage leads to persistent feelings of bewilderment and the potential desire to escape from reality. It marks the emergence of a 'cognitive opening', which, according to the DRIA model, is a critical turning point in the radicalization process of individuals. It represents the breakdown of a person's old identity and the search for new answers and values. In Sonboly's case, investigations show how he deliberately chose to distance himself from his previous identity by forbidding anyone from calling him Ali, the birth name given to him by his Iranian parents. He went even further to officially change his name to 'David', which was not a German name by coincidence; his stated reason for this change was to not be seen and identified as a Muslim, as this would make him part of a group which he perceived as the enemy. Instead, Sonboly seeked, according to conversations with his parents, to be identified as "entirely German" (Spiegel Online, 2016). By analysing Sonboly's case under the DRIA framework it is, therefore, possible to recognize how his experiences of bullying and the associated trauma led him to question and ultimately disintegrate his social identity, mirrored in him changing his name and highlighting his desire to redefine himself. This behavior marks the starting point of Sonboly's radicalization journey under the DRIA model.

Reconstruction of Social Identity

Those who witness the described existential crisis might go through the second stage of the DRIA model, which constitutes the reconstruction of social identity. Having rejected former values, individuals face the need to rebuild their identity. This phase is therefore characterized by the pursuit of a new sense of meaning and purpose, representing an existential transition or 're-birth' to a new interpretation of reality. As analysed under the first stage of the DRIA model, Sonboly's personal experiences with bullying contributed to, on the one hand, the erosion of his former sense of self. On the other hand, it planted the seeds for the belief that foreigners (specifically those of Turkish/Muslim origin) were the enemy, eventually leading him to reject his birth name, seeking to distance himself from the identity he felt had contributed to his victimization. Hence, it becomes clear that Sonboly was particularly vulnerable to narratives that provide a validation for his personal grievances. This is the point

where radical ideologies come into play, as they provide Sonboly with the answers to make sense of his grievances. Firstly, far-right ideology mirrored his already existent belief that immigrants were responsible for his hardships. His deep internalization of the "enemy" is also vividly illustrated in the attack itself: as Sonboly was fleeing from the OEZ, he passed a parking garage north of the building, where he continued firing shots. From the parking deck, a resident sitting on his balcony started shouting "Scheiss Kanacke"[55] towards him, to which Sonboly shouted back that he "hates turkish people, and that he is German" (Mehmet, 2016). Therefore, far-right ideology provided Sonboly with reassurance that his hatred against foreigner was justified, providing him with a sense of validation and moral clarity. Secondly, it not only validated his grievances in the first place but also reframed them as part of a broader societal issue. This suddenly allowed Sonboly to not view his experience as an isolated and personal incident anymore, but as evidence of a larger conflict between "natives" and "foreigners". Far-right ideology hence not only helped Sonboly make sense of his personal pain, but also gave him a sense of belonging within a larger community that shares his perception of the "enemy". In sum, this means that by embracing far-right narratives, Sonboly was able to transform his feelings of victimhood into a mission-oriented identity, making him feel empowered and with a purpose - to fight for the preservation of a cultural or national ideal, against a clearly defined enemy.

Integration into a revolutionary sect

In the third phase of the DRIA model, individuals who have embraced a radical ideology will seek connection with like-minded groups or communities. This stage is pivotal in solidifying an individual's radicalization process as it provides both ideological reinforcement, and a sense of belonging within a group context. The integration process can manifest both physically through in-person networks, and virtually through online and imagined communities. The latter occurred in Sonboly's case, where this stage of the DRIA model becomes apparent through his engagement with various far-right chat groups[56] such as the "Anti-Refugee-Club" on the gaming platform 'Steam'[57]. Founded by American far-right extremist William Atchison, this group served as a virtual echo chamber where members reinforced one another's extremist worldviews such as their delusion of the superiority of the white, "Aryan" race, the

55 The phrase is an offensive and racist slur in German, usually used to insult individuals of Turkish or Arabic descent.
56 See Apendix C
57 Steam is a digital distribution service and storefront developed by Valve Corporation: https://store.steampowered.com

"degeneration of foreign subhumans", and a "contaminated society" (Bernstein, 2018a). Without ever meeting the group members in person, Sonboly consequently became part of an 'imagined community'. Here he felt understood and supported by individuals who shared his worldview. This virtual environment further reduced the likelihood of Sonboly questioning his beliefs. The importance of this imagined community is additionally highlighted by how Sonboly and Atchison[58] referred to themselves as "brothers in spirit", despite never meeting face-to-face (Hartleb, 2018). Sonboly's case consequently illustrates a key insight of the DRIA model: how virtual integration can be as impactful in the radicalization process as physical integration. Overall this network, built upon far-right narratives, provided Sonboly both with justification for his beliefs as well as further inspiration. This highlights the dangerous role such virtual communities play in normalizing and promoting violence, and how crucial they are in the radicalization process of individuals.

Alienation from the surrounding world

Conversations with Sonboly's parents and acquaintances reveal that over time his behavior became increasingly inaccessible. His parents stated that while Sonboly physically lived in the same house, there was virtually no interaction. He progressively distanced himself, retreating entirely into his own isolated, digital world (Bannenberg, 2018). Sonboly's disengagement from meaningful relationships such as friendships and family bonds, mirrors the core theme of this phase: the deliberate severing of ties to mainstream society. According to the DRIA model, this final phase of the radicaliztaion process serves two purposes. Firstly, it can reinforce an individual's belief that those outside their chosen realm are inferior or morally compromised. The isolation allows the individual to feel morally superior as it disconnects itself from the perceived corruption of the broader society. While Sonboly's withdrawal into his own four walls of his room and submergence into the virtual space might have also helped him in feeling validated as morally superior, it seems that, in his case, the alienation from the surrounding world serves even more a second and more implict purpose: to escape negative judgement. With his self-imposed seclusion he managed to avoid any criticism from people around him, freeing himself from any external moral checks. Immersing himself entirely into an echo chamber of radicalization. Consequently, it does not come by surprise that his parents describe

58 Three days after the attack, Atchison wrote an obituary for David Sonboly on the "Encyclopedia Dramatica". In his post, he stated that if the AfD and other right-wing groups came to power in Germany, they would erect a monument to the "hero" who was a "true Aryan" and a "true German", highlighting that he had exclusively killed migrants (Bernstein, 2018b).

how in the months leading up to the violence he would spent all of his free time alone in his room, rarely even joining his family for meals. If he was not at home in his room his parents would be surprised (Bannenberg, 2018). This situation aligns with the DRIA model's emphasis on the importance of isolation in the final stages of radicalization; his withdrawal from family or any sort of social interaction allowed Sonboly to become fully radicalized.

By investigating Sonboly's case under the DRIA model, we can trace and theoretically illuminate his radicalization process, which ultimately led to the attacks in 2016. Sonboly's experiences of bullying and alienation mark the beginning of his radicalization prcoess, as they led him to reject his previous identity, symbolized by his decision to change his name from Ali to David. This act represents a clear break from his past and an effort to redefine himself. Feeling alienated and insignificant, Sonboly sought answers to his existential crisis. Far-right ideology offered a clear and simplistic explanation for his suffering, valdidating his personal grievances. Furthermore, embracing far-right ideology allowed Sonboly to reconstruct his social identity around the idea of being part of an "us" (the native population) against "them" (immigrants), giving him a framework to view himself as a hero in a larger struggle. This sense of mission transformed his personal grievances into a perceived moral cause. His isolation deepened both physically and emotionally, enabling him to fully embrace the extreme beliefs without the interference of doubts or external moral challenges. The 2016 Munich attack, in which Sonboly targeted primarily young individuals of immigrant descent, was therefore not merely an act of violence driven by personal grievances but was ultimately rooted in the far-right ideology that he had internalized. Sonboly's actions can, therefore, finally be interpreted as those of an individual driven by deeply internalized radical ideologies rather than material or selfish incentives, aligning with the anthropological type studied under the DRIA model, namely a 'terrorist by vocation'.

3.2.2 The Role of Ideology

When investigating the 2016 Munich attack, one aspect stands out that is also true in other cases[59] of far-right violence in Germany (Lüdecke, 2020): the attacks were initially classified as 'non-political', and the connection to a far-right ideology was not addressed. In the Munich

[59] Such as the 2020 Hanau shooting (Lüdecke, 2020).

case, a long list of evidence known to the investigators from the start pointed to the perpetrator's far-right beliefs. Sonboly had performed the Hitler salute and drawn swastikas during psychotherapy. He had described his racist and antisemitic worldview in the "manifesto" on his computer, as well as repeatedly expressed it to various schoolmates. Lastly, he had planned the attack specifically for the day of the fifth year since Breivik's far-right terrorist attack in Norway (bpb, 2021). Nevertheless, the personal grievances of the 18-year-old, such as his experiences with bullying, were described as the primary motive for the attack in the 2017 report by the State Criminal Police Office and the Public Prosecutor's Office. Additionally, the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution regarded him as a "mentally ill avenger" and not a "terrorist fighter", and it was stated that Sonboly had drawn ideological influences from the realm of right-wing extremism but personal grievances were still always considered the primary factor (Kampf & Stroh, 2017). The fact that Sonboly's attack specifically targeted people with migrant backgrounds remained a mere footnote for the police who for a long time referred to the victims as "random targets". Around two weeks after the attack, the different nationalities were casually remarked as "likely just a reflection of the multicultural environment" at the OEZ crime scene, by the president of the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office (Mehmet, 2016). There appeared to be a strong reluctance to classify the attack as right-wing terrorism.

As mentioned, the justification for not classifying Sonboly's attack as politically motivated relied on the argument that his psychological issues were the primary motivation rather than any internalized far-right ideology. Another justification was based on the argument that Sonboly had never been part of a right-wing extremist organization. The political side seamlessly adopted these perspectives. After the investigation was concluded, Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann stated that calling it a right-wing extremist act seemed "somewhat far-fetched" (Kampf & Stroh, 2017). These justification have two main implications. Firstly, any attempt to frame the perpetrator as merely a "mad lone wolf" obscures the systemic threat posed by far-right ideologies. Secondly, it reflects the belief that only perpetrators that are part of established extremist groups before committing violent acts, can be classified as far-right terrorists. However, this reasoning is based on an outdated understanding that is no longer relevant in the digital age, where the phenomenon of lone-wolf terrorism has become increasingly prevalent.

Firstly, individual and political motives do not have to be mutually exclusive, and recognizing the intersection of mental health issues and ideology is essential. But while psychological factors may exacerbate the threat, they do not negate the ideological dimensions of radicalization. The DRIA model helps us understand how individuals like Sonboly may experience an identity crisis - hence, psychological disturbance - that eventually leads them to embrace an ideological narrative as a way to make sense of their disorientation. Ideology is therefore not merely an after-the-fact justification for violence, but it is a causal force that propels individuals toward violent actions in the first place. It offers a moral framework that divides the world into "good" and "evil", and provides the individual with cognitive categories to understand their sense of loss or trauma. It is the powerful motivator for violent action (Orsini, 2020). Thus, framing the attack solely as driven by personal grievances fails to capture the full scope of the motivation behind the violence. It oversimplifies the complex interaction between psychological factors and the ideological narratives. The Munich attack was not just the result of personal trauma, but was deeply informed by the ideological lens through which Sonboly understood the world and his place within it. The motivational imbalance theory aligns with this narrative. It is true that personal grievances, in Sonboly's case particularly his experiences with bullying, play a significant role in the radicalization. The attack is a way to restore perceived significance loss, which was triggered by these personal grievances. Yet, importantly, it is the ideology that provides the framework for that restoration; it justifies the violence, creating a perceived moral imperative to act. Ultimately, ideology remains the key factor that transforms personal grievances into violent action (Kruglanski, et al).

Secondly, ideological radicalization is not necessarily tied to organizational affiliation. The fact that Sonboly had no connections to right-wing extremist groups is no proof that he was not a terrorist (Hartleb, 2018). The DRIA model shows that an individual constructs a "radical mental universe" through selected ideological influences (Orsini, 2020). Sonboly's case aligns with this pattern; his worldview was shaped by far-right narratives of racial superiority and victimhood, which he used to justify his attack. While Sonboly did not integrate into a formal extremist group, he engaged in imagined communities of like-minded individuals, a concept central to the DRIA model. His use of online spaces indicate that he identified with a broader ideological movement, even if he acted alone. The motivational imbalance theory also highlights that social networks do not have to be formal organizations, they rather function as ideological incubators (Kruglanski et al., 2019). Sonboly's case represents a lone perpetrator

acting without the support of an organization. A product of self-radicalization, a "lone wolf". The criterion of belonging to an extremist group is outdated (Hartleb, 2018).

The initial conclusions by the authorities drew siginifcant criticism in Germany. Not only did the victims' lawyers criticize the authorities' claim that the attack was an apolitical act of mass violence, but various other voices also questioned this assessment. In light of the NSU murders - where investigators failed to recognize the violence as far-right terrorist acts for years - critics accuse security authorities and political leaders of downplaying right-wing terrorism in Germany. The classification by the Interior Ministry, stating that Sonboly had chosen only victims with a migration background due to "a personal but generalized enemy image of his former bullies", almost insinuates a slight justification for Sonboly's racist intents. The emphasis on the perpetrator's negative experiences with classmates should not divert the focus from the role that Sonboly's far-right beliefs played, as the violent action was unmistakably rooted in racism. Authorities should always publicly condemn racism, and be careful as to not justify it by referencing causes that align with the perpetrator's perspective (Kampf & Stroh, 2017).

The investigation continued, and eventually in 2018, the Federal Office of Justice concluded that the attack was a far-right extremist act. In 2019, the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office also revised its assessment of the attack's motives in its final report and concluded that it was "justified to speak of a political motivation within the framework of the politically motivated crime definition[60]". Prior to this, two out of three independent experts commissioned by the City of Munich had also already classified the incident as a 'politically motivated, far-right act', asserting that it should therefore be included in the constitutional protection report. The Munich Regional Court I, had already placed the attack in the same category as other far-right extremist acts, such as the NSU murders or the Oktoberfest bombing in the beginning of 2018 (Bernstein, 2018b). The re-classification of the Munich attack as a politically motivated crime from the far-right reveals the development in how right-wing extremism is addressed. It finally acknowledges the racist motive behind the attack and the perpetrator's far-right ideology. It is an important and long-overdue signal in the fight against right-wing terrorism in Germany. Recognizing the racist motive of the attack by both authorities and the public is also essential in assuring procedural justice for the victims' families.

[60] Politisch motivierte Kriminalität (PMK)

The attack, in which Sonboly targeted primarily young individuals of immigrant descent, was not merely an act of violence driven by personal grievances but was finally driven by the far-right ideology he had internalized. Without the ideology, his personal grievances would have eventually not driven Sonboly to commit terroristic activity. His choice of victims - Muslims, Romani, and other immigrants - reflected his radicalized worldview, which portrayed these groups as threats to his perceived sense of self and national identity. Pathologizing the perpetrator trivializes his crime; radical ideologies are not merely crazy figments of an individual's imagination, but an integral part of the radicalization itself. By focusing predominantly on psychological factors there is a risk of overlooking the political dimensions of such acts (Manthe, 2020). Comprehensive counter-radicalization strategies must address both the psychological vulnerabilities, and the ideological structures that enable far-right terrorism. Attempts to frame perpetrators like Sonboly as merely "mad lone wolves" obscures the systemic threat posed by far-right ideologies.

3.3 Case Study II

3.3.1 The 2019 Halle Synagogue Shooting

On October 9, 2019, 27-year-old Stephan Balliet attempted to storm the synagogue in Halle, Germany, on Yom Kippur, Judaism's holiest day. He attempted to breach the locked entrance door using firearms but the door withstood multiple gunshots and homemade explosive devices. Failing to enter the synagogue with 68 people inside, Balliet instead shot a woman that was walking by, as well as a customer at a döner shop, where he aditionally injured various others. Balliet live-streamed the attack using a smartphone mounted on his helmet, turning his violence into a "spectacle". On his way to the crime scene, he declared in English: "Hey, my name is Anon, and I believe the Holocaust never happened". Prior to the attack, he had also uploaded a manifesto. His writings and livestream content revealed deep-seated antisemitic, racist, and misogynistic views, drawing heavily from far-right ideologies (Speit, 2021). He was arrested by the police and sentenced to life imprisonment for, among various other charges, two murders and 68 attempted murders. The following section investigates the radicalization process of Stephan Balliet through the lens of the motivational imbalance theory by Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna (2019). By highlighting the role of the quest for significance,

ideological narratives, and online networks, the framework sheds light on the psychological and social dynamics that drove Balliet to commit his act of violence.

The motivational imbalance theory posits that when individuals experience a loss of significance, they may seek to restore it through the quest for significance (Kruglanski et al., 2019). Balliet's personal tracectory reveals that despite achieving a strong academic record in high school, he dropped out of his university studies in chemistry after only a year due to experiencing health challenges and undergoing a major surgery. This marked a turning point in his life, as he abandoned the pursuit of a academic career and withdrew entirely from any type of professional life. Living with his mother in a state of prolonged unemployment, Balliet's daily existence became one of isolation and stagnation. His mother described him as spending all his time confined to his room, disengaged from the outside world, and harboring resentment toward societal changes (Spiegel Online, 2019). This period of unproductivity and lack of purpose can be understood as a profound loss of significance according to the motivational imbalance theory. Balliet's inability to find meaningful engagement or success in conventional domains of life such as education, work, and relationships, fueled his frustration and created a vacuum of identity and purpose - his quest for significance was activated.

However, as studied before, the quest for significance alone does not lead to violent extremism; individuals can also seek significance through peaceful means. Hence, to resort to violence they require some sort of legitimization and social endorsement. Such can be provided by radical narratives (Kruglanski et al., 2019). In Balliet's case, the far-right ideology he encountered online provided him with a simplistic but emotionally satisfying explanation; his failures and insignificance were not due to personal shortcomings, but were the result of larger societal forces, allegedly orchestrated by Jews, women, and immigrants. When Balliet was asked during his trials why, after dropping out of his studies, he had not sought new professional goals, he responded that he "no longer wanted to do anything for this society, which had replaced him with N****s and Muslims". His manifesto also reveals that his worldview allowed him to reframe his personal grievances as part of a broader existential struggle: his isolation and lack of relationships were attributed to women and feminism, which he believed had undermined traditional gender roles. His unemployment and aimlessness were linked to a conspiratorial belief that Jews controlled global economic systems to the detriment of white men. His dissatisfaction with Germany's changing social fabric, particularly the refugee crisis, was interpreted as an intentional destabilization by Jewish elites (Sieber, 2019).

Through this ideological framework, Balliet began to see himself not as a failed individual but as a potential hero in a "righteous" battle against the forces he held responsible for his insignificance. The motivational imbalance theory explains how these narratives serve a dual purpose. On the one side, they validate the individual's grievances and justify violence as a legitimate response. On the other side, they offer a clear path to restoring significance through radical actions (Kruglanski et al., 2019). The ideology thus links Balliet's need for recognition to violent outcomes, framing extremism as a means to fulfill his personal aspirations for respect and purpose.

In the motivational imbalance theory, radical networks are described as conduits through which individuals get both acquainted with, and embrace the violent ideology that guides their attempts to restore their sense of significance (Kruglanski et al., 2019). Balliet's case exemplifies this: the online spaces he frequented, were full of antisemitic conspiracy theories, portraying Jews as omnipotent figures responsible for global crises, immigration, and the erosion of traditional social norms. This narrative validated Balliet's frustrations, turning them into a broader moral grievance and justifying violence as a means to combat an imagined enemy. Within these online communities, acts of mass violence were glorified as heroic contributions to a supposed "racial war", encouraging him to view these as a path to restoring his significance. Hence, not only amplifiying his grievances, but also encouraging him to see himself as a "hero", in a larger ideological struggle. Perpertrators like Balliet furthremore seek audience and the spotlight of the camera, since in their view, this will let them appear like "a star in the global far-right scene", demonstrating his quest for recognition and validation (Sieber, 2019).

Additionally, these online forums also exploited the 'gamification' of far-right ideologies; a phenomenon where terrorism is treated like a video game with achievements and rewards for acts of violence (Schlegel, 2021). Breivik also described his planned attack as a video game in his manifesto, with levels to be reached. Such 'gamification' further distorted Balliet's sense of reality. His manifesto and preparations for the attack mirrored the structure of an ego-shooter game, explicitly referencing "achievements" for killing Jews, Muslims, and other minorities. This mindset was also evident in his live-streamed attack, where he sought to demonstrate his "skills". On the "Meguca" internet forum, the attack on the synagogue and the döner shop was met with approval. The victims however, sparked debate on the platform, since neither of them fit the antisemitic or racist stereotypes promoted in these online communities. Within this

gamified subculture, the goal is to rack up a high "score" in terms of fatalities. On the Wikipedia-inspired site "Encyclopedia Dramatica"[61], mass shooters, attackers, and terrorists are "ranked" accordingly on high score tables. In this context, two dead and two seriously injured are seen as "insufficient", resulting in Stephan Balliet receiving point deductions in the comments. However, he gained points from this crowd for successfully broadcasting his attack via livestream (Sieber, 2019). These structures overall highlight that, as described in the motivational imbalance theory, the network, on the one hand, functions as a social endorsement, legitimizing the violent acts. On the other hand, it demonstrates respect and appreciation to individuals who are seeking significance gain. By connecting with like-minded individuals in these forums, Balliet could hence, find a sense of belonging and purpose that had been absent in his offline life. Furthermore, as Balliet drives to the crime scene, he says: "Nobody expects the internet SS" (Sieber, 2019). By invoking the image of the "SS," a historical symbol of violent far-right extremism, it shows how Balliet is seeking to align himself with a legacy of violence and notoriety, enhancing his own sense of importance and purpose. The statement reflects his desire to be recognized as part of a larger, meaningful cause, which, as the motivational imbalance theory suggests, fuels the radicalization process of individuals.

In summary, Stephan Balliet's radicalization can be understood as a process in which a personal loss of significance - rooted in his failure to achieve success in education, work, and relationships - triggered his quest for significance, which was then shaped by far-right extremist narratives and online networks. These narratives allowed him to externalize blame for his grievances, portraying Jews, women, and immigrants as responsible for his failures. They confirmed his victimhood and provided a simplistic explanation for his frustrations. Hence, by committing violence, Balliet believed he could achieve his personal significance, gain recognition within the extremist subculture, and serve a higher ideological mission. Online extremist forums played a pivotal role in this process; they provided social reinforcement, making him feel part of a like-minded group. They also gamified terror, further desensitizing him to violence and framing his attack as an act of achievement. By addressing the three components - needs, narratives, and networks - applying the motivationl imbalance theory provides a structured and nuanced explanation of Balliet's radicalization process. Here, the theory's concept of the quest for significance is crucial to understanding Balliet's

[61] An online community website, where its members frequently participate in harassment campaigns. It was filtered from Google Search in 2010.

transformation: his stagnation and disengagement from society after dropping out of university, created a motivational imbalance. This imbalance redirected his mental resources toward restoring his sense of self-worth, making him susceptible to extremist narratives. Those, while reinforced by online networks, promised a path to significance through radical actions, ultimately leading the Halle synagogue shotting of 2019.

3.3.2 The Role of Ideology

The 2019 Halle attack was officially classified as a right-wing extremist terrorist act by the German government; his attack was premeditated and ideologically motivated, as evidenced by the manifesto he left behind as well as the live-streamed video of his actions. The German Justice Minister[62] explicitly referred to the attack as a "right-wing extremist terrorist act", and the General Federal Prosecutor[63] publicly highlighted that the attack was aimed at triggering further violence and inspiring others. The discovery of four kilograms of explosives in the attacker's vehicle further underscored Balliet's intent to cause mass casualties (Zeit Online, 2019). Balliet's case was hence without question driven by far-right ideology. What is also particularly significant is the attack's connection to a broader, transnational movement of right-wing extremist ideology and terrorism. Balliet consciously modeled his actions on the Christchurch mosque shooter, who killed 51 people in New Zealand earlier that year (Speit, 2021). As the motivational imbalance theory emphasizes, social networks are vital in radicalization, but only when underpinned by a radical belief system (Kruglanski et al., 2019). The pattern of imitation in Balliet's case underscores this dynamic, demonstrating how a radical ideology encourages further acts of violence. Balliet's radicalization process additonally illustrates a common modern trend. It takes place in the digital sphere rather than in traditional extremist organizations. Online forums, imageboards, and gaming platforms have become key sites for ideological indoctrination and networking among extremists. Balliet was part of such digital ecosystem, mirroring the integration into a revolutionary sect stage of the DRIA model; a shared worldview of hate is fostered, facilitating a sense of belonging and validation, and fueling the process of radicalization. Finally, the internet not only provided

[62] At the time, Christine Lambrecht.
[63] At the time, Peter Frank.

Balliet with ideological reinforcement but also served as a platform to share his attack in real-time, a tactic aimed at maximizing its psychological impact and reach (Speit, 2021).

In analysing the Halle attack, another important implication becomes evident: the intersection of misogyny with antisemitism and racism within far-right ideologies. Balliet deliberately played a intensely misogynistic song in his car to accompany his act.[64] It was chosen as a sort of "homage" to Alek Minassian, who killed eleven pedestrians with a van in Toronto, driven primarily by hatred of women. In his livestreamed video, Balliet furthermore stated that "feminism is to blame for the declining birthrate in the West", which according to him is also the reason for mass immigration, and "the root of these problems is the Jew". These expressions of Balliet's ideology could possibly tie into a broader movement, the so-called "Incel" (involuntary celibate) movement. The central belief within the Incel community positions feminism and women's empowerment as a threat to Western civilization, combining this with a wider conspiracy theory that also targets Jews and immigrants (Kracher, 2020). It is not possible to state with absolute certainty if Balliet can be categorized as belonging to that movement; his primary aim was the Jewish community, and when asked about it, he denied an answer. Nevertheless, the linguistic codes found in Balliet's online activities are common in the Incel community, and Minassian directly belongs to the community. Hence, this suggests an anti-feminism akin to that presented by Incel. The implications of this intersection of misogyny with extremism cannot be overstated. It is vital to recognize that while right-wing extremism is often analysed in terms of its racist or antisemitic elements, the misogynistic component is equally integral to the radicalization process for many individuals (Bongen & Schiele, 2019). Therefore, understanding this intersection is crucial for developing more comprehensive counterterrorism strategies that do not overlook the role that gender-based hatred plays in the radicalization process. The 2019 Halle attack exemplifies the potent and dangerous role ideology plays in the radicalization process. Balliet's violent actions, driven by a blend of antisemitism, racism, and misogyny, were not isolated - he was a participant in a broader ideological movement. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for crafting more effective counterterrorism strategies that address the full scope of ideological extremism in the digital age.

[64] The language is very explicit, such as: : "Hoes suck my dick, while I run over pedestrians"

3.4 Implications

When studying far-right violence, the natural question arises if it is possible to define a "typical" right-wing extremist. The perpetrators analysed in this chapter differ in age, educational background, and personal circumstances - offering a glimpse into the implication that far-right radicalization is not confined to a single sociological or psychological profile. However, as we have seen, they share commonalities in their engagement with far-right ideology, and their use of digital spaces as radicalization incubators. This underscores the need for German authorities to reconsider their established counterterrorism approaches. If the traditional model persists - viewing terrorism solely as a group-based phenomenon - there will be little progress in prevention and counterterrorism efforts. The conventional strategies of disrupting group dynamics, infiltrating organizations, and breaking links in hierarchical structures seem obsolete in the fight against isolated individuals who may never have met a like-minded extremist in person. The perception held by many authorities that militant right-wing extremism is exclusively rooted in the skinhead and neo-Nazi camaraderie scene, while it does not extend to seemingly harmless gaming platforms, is outdated (Hartleb, 2018). A far-right subculture is increasingly thriving in the niches of online spaces, shaped by racist hatred. It is highly interactive and deeply connected on an international scale. These digital spaces not only spread extremist narratives but also provide validation and social reinforcement, reducing the likelihood of ideological disengagement. Despite the growing evidence around this issue, authorities in Germany have been slow to address these digital breeding grounds for radicalization. While platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have faced scrutiny over their role in spreading misinformation and hate speech, extremist gaming communities and imageboards have largely remained under the radar (Sieber, 2019). Without proactive intervention in these online environments, the cycle of radicalization and violence will continue to escalate. Additionally, the initial reluctance to classify the Munich attack as a politically motivated act, reflects broader institutional challenges in recognizing and addressing far-right extremism. This issue was further fueled by the debate surrounding Sonboly's migration background - his parents had once arrived in Germany as refugees. Authorities repeatedly emphasized this detail, almost explictly insinuating that someone of migrant descent could not be a far-right extremist. This misplaced focus on Sonboly's identity only disturbed the discussion. Sonboly had internalized far-right ideologies, and referencing his foreign background only served to obscure this reality, further complicating the classification of his attack as far-right violence (Mehmet, 2016). This risks downplaying ideological motives,

underestimating the systemic threat posed by far-right extremism. Far-right violence and terrorism is emerging from within society itself and we should not think that this phenomenon is marginal. Nevertheless, the confrontation with it must not be driven by panic or sensationalism. Populist rhetoric, tabloid media, and even some public figures fuel exaggerated fears, portraying terrorism as an ever-present, all-encompassing threat. Instead, what is needed is a rational, evidence-based discussion that avoids hysteria and alarmism. Fighting terrorism means being able to defeat extremism from its roots. The objective lies in the understanding of recruitment, organizational and motivational mechanisms behind the radicalization process, targeting possible newcomers during the early stages of indoctrination (Moghaddam, 2005). The mere adoption of violent methods to counter terrorism do not seem to focus on the radicalization process of perpetrators, assuming that they are born with the willingness to kill. By applying theoretical perspectives to practical case studies, this chapter contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how ideology, far from being a superficial justification, serves as a central force behind the radicalization process in the context of right-wing extremism in Germany.

Conclusion

There is strong necessity in recognizing developments that stand in hostility to a free and democratic society. Given the historical trajectory of right-wing extremism in Germany and its ongoing manifestations, this thesis has investigated the ideological and structural factors underpinning this phenomenon. The first chapter of the thesis focuses on reviewing existing academic literature relevant to the study of right-wing extremism. It highlights the complexities and challenges in defining terrorism and investigates how different scholars have defined the concept. Following upon that, right-wing extremism is conceptualized by analysing its ideological foundations, the involvement of lone wolves as a distinct feature, and the role of digital spaces in spreading extremist narratives and radicalizing individuals. The chapter concludes by stressing the importance of studying right-wing extremism, as attacks are frequently labeled as isolated incidents executed by mentally ill individuals rather than being part of a systemic issue. Many studies on right-wing extremism either focus exclusively on historical trends or contemporary security threats. This thesis integrates both, allowing for a deeper understanding of how extremist ideologies persist, adapt, and evolve. Hence, the second chapter analyzes the evolution of right-wing extremism from the post-World War II period to the present. It demonstrates how despite the fall of the Third Reich, and efforts at denazification, right-wing extremist ideologies persisted in both East and West Germany. In West Germany, many former Nazis reintegrated into political and institutional structures, shaping post-war German society, while various neo-nazi organizations emerged. In East Germany, racist and nationalist sentiments persisted in large parts of society. The GDR's denial of the problem allowed extremist ideologies to develop in the underground, manifesting in youth subcultures like skinhead movements. The fall of the Berlin Wall furthermore led to a convergence of East and West German right-wing extremists, with neo-Nazi groups strategically recruiting in the former GDR. Pogrom-like riots, such as those in Hoyerswerda (1991) and Rostock-Lichtenhagen (1992), exposed violent xenophobia, often met with state inaction. The rise of comradeships as informal, decentralized extremist groups, allowed extremists to bypass legal restrictions. Economic instability, the 2007 financial crisis, and the 2015 refugee crisis fueled a new wave of right-wing extremism. The AfD quickly evolved from a Euroskeptic party into a vehicle for nationalist and anti-immigration rhetoric, legitimizing far-right views. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a platform for right-wing extremists to expand their influence, merging with anti-government and conspiracy theory movements. The third chapter explores radicalization theories to understand how individuals

transition from extremist beliefs to violent action. After investigating the frameworks on a theoretical basis, the DRIA Model is applied to the 2016 Munich shooting, and the Motivational Imbalance Theory to the 2019 Halle shooting. The perpetrators Sonboly and Balliet were both self-radicalized individuals rather than members of structured extremist organizations, which highlights the prevalence lone-wolf attacks within the context of far right violence. Both attackers furthermore absorbed extremist ideologies through digital platforms, and were influenced by global right-wing narratives, demonstrating the transnational nature of online radicalization. Their manifestos and symbolic choices reflected a variety and convergence of far-right ideologies. The analysis of their cases reveals that far-right ideology is not just a post-hoc justification but a driving force in their radicalization process.

The rise of online radicalization and lone-wolf attacks has made right-wing extremism more adaptive and difficult to counter. These findings illustrate the urgent need for updated counterterrorism approaches that consider these new realities. Framing terrorism as a group-based phenomenon fails to adapt to the contemporary realities of decentralized and internet-fueled extremism. As however with many threats to society, policymakers must strike a delicate balance between protecting citizens from extremist violence, and preserving the free and open expression fundamental to liberal democracy. This ongoing debate will shape the future of counter-extremism policies, especially in the digital space, where intervention into the "hotbeds" of radicalization is needed. It is also necessary, however, to see this form of organized violence in the context of the wider far-right movement in Europe and the West. Right-wing individuals and groups are very well connected across borders, displaying significant collective learning. Not rarely they even see each other as inspiration for their own tactics and modes of operation. While this thesis investigates right-wing extremism within the German context, its findings suggest that such movements cannot be fully understood in isolation. Future research should examine the extent to which far-right groups across Europe influence and reinforce each other, both ideologically and strategically. The internationalization of these networks means that counterterrorism efforts must also extend beyond national approaches.

Bibliography

Abrahms, M. (2010). Lumpers versus splitters: A pivotal battle in the field of terrorism studies. *Cato Unbound*. https://www.cato-unbound.org/2010/02/10/max-abrahms/lumpers-versus-splitters-pivotal-battle-field-terrorism-studies/

Arte. (2024). *White Power: Europas Rechtsextreme|Doku HD|ARTE* [Documentary]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWS4K1yZWNs&t=5s

Arzheimer, K. (2019). Explaining electoral support for the radical right. In J. Rydgren (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (pp. 143–165). Oxford University Press.

Backes, U. (2006). The electoral victory of the NPD in Saxony and the prospects for future extreme-right success in German elections. *Patterns of Prejudice, 40*(2), 129-141. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600634303

Baeck, J.-P., & Speit, A. (Eds.). (2020). Rechte Ego-Shooter. Von der virtuellen Hetze zum Livestream-Attentat. Sonderausgabe für die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. Christoph Links Verlag GmbH.

Bannenberg, B. (2018). *Die Amoktat des David (Ali) Sonboly: Kriminologische Betrachtung der Tat in München am 22. Juli 2016* [Gutachten]. Bayerisches Landeskriminalamt.

Bernstein, M. (2018a). Das Netzwerk der Todesschützen. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Bernstein, M. (2018b). Waffenhändler muss nach OEZ-Anschlag sieben Jahre in Haft. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/prozess-urteil-waffenhaendler-oez-anschlag-1.3830524

Blee, K. M., Futrell, R., & Simi, P. (2023). *Out of hiding.* Routledge.

Blee, K. M. (2017). *Understanding racist activism: Theory, methods, and research* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315461533

Bongen, R., & Schiele, K. (2019). Rechte Terroristen: Hass auf Frauen. NDR Panorama. https://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/sendungen/panorama/archiv/2019/Rechte-Terroristen-Hass-auf-Frauen,frauenhass100.html

Börnig. (2023). *Zwei Fallbeispiele*. Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung. https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/dossiers/rassismus-und-rechtsextremismus-im-spiegel-deutscher-teilung-und-einheit/zwei-fallbeispiele

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. (2017). *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2016: Asyl, Migration und Integration.*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge.

Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. (1998). *Rechtsextremistische Skinheads: Entwicklung – Musik-Szene – Fanzines*. Köln: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz.

Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. (2023). *Zahlen und Fakten: Rechtsextremismus.* Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/DE/themen/rechtsextremismus/zahlen-und-fakten/zahlen-und-fakten_artikel.html

Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat. (2023). *Bundesinnenministerin Faeser: Volle Härte gegen Extremisten.* https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2023/06/vorstellung-vsb.html

Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb). (2021). Vor 5 Jahren: Rechtsextremer Anschlag in München. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/336826/vor-5-jahren-rechtsextremer-anschlag-in-muenchen/

Cass.

Chenoweth, E., English, R., Gofas, A., & Kalyvas, S. N. (2019). *The Oxford handbook of terrorism.* Oxford University Press.

Chomsky, N. (2003). *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*. Metropolitan Books.

Chomsky, N., & Herman, E. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Conway, M., Scrivens, R., & Macnair, L. (2019). *Right-wing extremists' persistent online presence: History and contemporary trends.* ICCT Policy Brief. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. https://doi.org/10.19165/2019.3.12

Decker, F. (2022). *Wahlergebnisse und Wählerschaft der AfD.* Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb). https://www.bpb.de/themen/parteien/parteien-in-deutschland/afd/273131/wahlergebnisse-und-waehlerschaft-der-afd/

Deicke, W. (2007). Resistance and Commercialisation in 'Distasteful Movements'. In The Development of a National Opposition in East Germany. Cambridge University Press.

Dischereit, H. (2024). *Vor aller Augen: Pogrome und der untätige Staat*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb). https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/505377/vor-aller-augen-pogrome-und-der-untaetige-staat/

European Commission. (2017). *Eurostat news release: 3-16032017-BP-EN*. Eurostat. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7921609/3-16032017-BP-EN.pdf/e5fa98bb-5d9d-4297-9168-d07c67d1c9e1

Europol. (2021). *European Union terrorism situation and trend report (TE-SAT 2021).* Publications Office of the European Union.

Europol. (2024). *European Union terrorism situation and trend report (TE-SAT 2024).* Publications Office of the European Union.

Federal Constitutional Court of Germany. (2017). *No prohibition of the National Democratic Party of Germany as there is no indication that it will succeed in achieving its aims*. https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/EN/2017/bvg17-004.html

Federal Constitutional Court of Germany. (2024). *The party Die Heimat (previously: Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands – NPD) is excluded from state funding for six years*. https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/EN/2024/bvg24-009.html

Frankfurter Allgemeine (2015). *Früherer Vize-Vorsitzender: Henkel bezeichnet AfD als „NPD light“*. Faz.Net. https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/frueherer-vize-vorsitzender-henkel-bezeichnet-afd-als-npd-light-13901465.html

Fugmann, C. (2022). *Neonazi-Szene in der DDR: Überfall auf die Zionskirche*. MDR. https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/ddr/politik-gesellschaft/kultur/neonazi-szene-in-der-ddr-ueberfall-auf-zionskirche-102.html

Funke, H. (1991). „Jetzt sind wir dran". Nationalismus im geeinten Deutschland. Berlin

Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures. Basic Books.

Hartleb, F. (2018). Einsame Wölfe: Der neue Terrorismus rechter Einzeltäter. Hoffmann und Campe.

Häusler, A. (2016). Die Alternative für Deutschland: Programmatik, Entwicklung und politische Verortung. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside terrorism*. Columbia University Press.

Hoffman, B. (2019). *Back to the future: The return of violent far-right terrorism in the age of lone wolves.* War on the Rocks. https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/back-to-the-future-the-return-of-violent-far-right-terrorism-in-the-age-of-lone-wolves/

Hoffman, B., & Ware, J. (2024). *God, guns, and sedition: Far-right terrorism in America.* Council on Foreign Relations.

Jenkins, B. M. (2006). The new age of terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Islam*, *25*.

Justiz NRW. (2019). *Pressemitteilung: VG Köln - AfD und die Verfassungsschutzbeobachtung*. Verwaltungsgericht Köln. https://www.vg-koeln.nrw.de/behoerde/presse/Pressemitteilungen/Archiv/2019/03_190226/index.php

Kalyvas, S. N. (2019). The landscape of political violence. In E. Chenoweth, R. English, A. Gofas, & S. N. Kalyvas (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of terrorism* . Oxford University Press.

Kamann, M. (2017). *Was Höcke mit der „Denkmal der Schande"-Rede bezweckt*. Die Welt. https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article161286915/Was-Hoecke-mit-der-Denkmal-der-Schande-Rede-bezweckt.html

Kampf, L., & Stroh, K. (2017). Morde am OEZ: "Ich bin kein Kanake, ich bin Deutscher!" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/amoklauf-oez-muenchen-1.3693124

Koehler, D. (2016). Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe: Current Developments and Issues for the Future. *PRISM, 6*(2), 84–105. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26470450

Koehler, D. (2017). Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: The National Socialist Underground and the History of Terror from the Far-Right in Germany. Routledge.

Kracher, V. (2020). Incels: Geschichte, Sprache und Ideologie eines Online-Kults (1st ed.). Ventil Verlag.

Kruglanski, A. W., Bélanger, J. J., & Gunaratna, R. (2019). The three pillars of radicalization: Needs, narratives, and networks. Oxford University Press.

Kruglanski, A. W., Webber, D., & Koehler, D. (2020). The radical's journey: How German neo-Nazis voyaged to the edge and back. Oxford University Press.

Liger, Q., Gutheil, M., Faion, M., Dzhekova, R., Stoyanova, N., Sabev, M., Ralchev, S., & Comunale, T. (2022). *Right-wing extremism in the EU.* Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, European Parliament.

Lüdecke, T. (2020). Wichtiges Signal: OEZ-Attentat endlich als PMK rechts eingestuft. Amadeu-Antonio-Stiftung. https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wichtiges-signal-oez-attentat-endlich-als-pmk-rechts-eingestuft-50975/

Manthe, B. (2020). Rechtsterroristische Gewalt in den 1970er Jahren: Die Kühnen-Schulte-Wegener-Gruppe und der Bückeburger Prozess 1979. Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 68(1), 63-94. https://doi.org/10.1515/vfzg-2020-0003

Mareš, M. (2021). *Aus Krisen Kapital schlagen: Wie gewaltbereite RechtsextremistInnen die COVID-19-Pandemie ausnutzen und Lektionen für P/CVE*. Europäische Kommission.

MDR. (2016). Rechtsextremismus: Michael Kühnen und die „Deutsche Alternative". https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte-gegenwart/politik-gesellschaft/rechtsextremismus-michael-kuehnen-deutsche-alternative-100.html

Mehmet, D. (2016). Der Terror von München, der nicht so recht ins Bild passt. *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*. https://heimatkunde.boell.de/de/2016/08/17/der-terror-von-muenchen

Melzer, R., & Serafin, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Right-wing extremism in Europe: Country analyses, counter-strategies, and labor-market-oriented exit strategies.* Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Moghaddam, F. M. (2005). Staircase to terrorism: A psychological exploration. American Psychologist, 60(2), 162.

Mudde, C. (1995). Right Wing Extremism Analysed. *European Journal of Political Research*, 27.

Oppelland, T. (2022). Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD). Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. https://www.bpb.de/themen/parteien/parteien-in-deutschland/500849/nationaldemokratische-partei-deutschlands/

Orsini, A. (2011). Anatomy of the red brigades: The religious mind-set of modern terrorists. Cornell University Press.

Orsini, A. (2013). Interview with a terrorist by vocation. Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 8(672–684).

Orsini, A. (2015). Are terrorists courageous? Micro-sociology of extreme left terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 38*(3), 179–197.

Orsini, A. (2017). Sacrifice: My life in a fascist militia. Cornell University Press.

Orsini, A. (2020). What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *46*(1), 68–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1738669

Orsini, A. (2024). *Ucraina, Palestina: il terrorismo di stato nelle relazioni internazionali*. PaperFirst.

Pantucci, R. (2016, June 28). *Ignored by the authorities, emboldened by Brexit, Europe's far right is surging. The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/28/brexit-europe-far-right-rightwing-extremists-politics-terrorism

Pfahl-Traughber, A. (2012). *Geschichte des Rechtsterrorismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Eine Analyse zu Entwicklung, Gruppen und Vergleich. Einsichten und Perspektiven, 8*, 56–71.

Porath, J., & Reinert, M. (2014). Kontinuitäten in Oberhavel und Ostprignitz-Ruppin: Rechte Gewalt im Fokus. In Kopke, C. (Ed.), Angriffe auf die Erinnerung an die nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen: Rechtsextremismus in Brandenburg und die Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen (pp. 97–108). Berlin.

Richards, A. (2013). Conceptualizing terrorism. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 37*(3).

Richardson, L. (2000). Terrorists as transnational actors. In M. Taylor & J. Horgan (Eds.), *The future of terrorism*, pp. 209–219. London: Frank Cass.

Schlegel, L. (2021). *Extremists' use of gaming (adjacent) platforms: Insights regarding primary and secondary prevention measures. Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), Publications Office of the European Union.*

Schmidt, A. (2023). Defining terrorism. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*.

Schulze, C. (2021). *Rechtsextremismus: Gestalt und Geschichte* (marix Sachbuch). marixverlag.

Sieber, R. (2019). Anschlag von Halle – Inszeniert wie ein Ego-Shooter. Magazin der rechte rand, Ausgabe 180. https://www.der-rechte-rand.de/archive/5454/halle-anschlag-ego-shooter/

Silke, A. (2004). The road less travelled: Recent trends in terrorism research. In A. Silke (Ed.), *Research on terrorism, trends, achievements and failures*. London: Frank

Simi, P., & Futrell, R. (2015). *American swastika: Inside the white power movement's hidden spaces of hate* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Speit, A. (2021). Rechtsextreme Gewalt in Deutschland. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. https://www.bpb.de/themen/rechtsextremismus/dossier-rechtsextremismus/324634/rechtsextreme-gewalt-in-deutschland/

Spiegel Online. (2019). Die wirre Welt des Attentäters Spiegel Online. https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/halle-saale-stephan-balliet-bereitete-tat-seit-monaten-vor-a-1291500.html

Spiegel. (2019). *Rechtsradikale Einsprengsel: Parteigründer Lucke spricht sich für Beobachtung der AfD aus*.
Spiegel Online. https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/afd-bernd-lucke-spricht-sich-fuer-afd-beobachtung-durch-verfassungsschutz-aus-a-1250739.html

Sproat, P. A. (1991). Can the state be terrorist? *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 14*(1).

Steinek, Victoria/Zetinigg, Birgit (2020). Islamist and Right-Wing Extremist Propaganda. A

literary analysis on the mechanisms and impact of violent extremist narratives online, SIAKJournal − Zeitschrift für Polizeiwissenschaft und polizeiliche Praxis (1), 68-78, Online: http://dx.doi.org/10.7396/2020_1_F.

Stöss, D. (2007). *Rechtsextremismus im Wandel* (ISBN 978-3-89892-790-1). Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Tagesschau. (2015). *Nach Abwahl vom AfD-Vorsitz: Lucke wendet sich ab*. Tagesschau. https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/afd-parteitag-119.html

Tagesschau. (2019). Frauenhass und Rechtsextremismus: Der Fall Halle. Tagesschau. https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/panorama/frauenhass-rechtsextremismus-101.html

Tagesschau. (2024). *Oberverwaltungsgericht Münster: AfD-Einstufung als Verdachtsfall ist rechtens.* https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/afd-ovg-verdachtsfall-100.html

Terra X History. (2024). Geschichte der Rechtsradikalisierung in Ostdeutschland|Doku HD| ZDF [Documentary]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-tLKmLy6h4

Virchow, F. (2016). *Nicht nur der NSU: Eine kleine Geschichte des Rechtsterrorismus in Deutschland.* Erfurt.

Wagner, B. (2014). Rechtsradikalismus in der Spät-DDR. Zur militant-nazistischen Radikalisierung.

Wagner, B. (2017). Rechtsextremismus und Rechtsradikalismus in Deutschland: Überblick über Geschichte und aktuelle Tendenzen. Journal EXIT-Deutschland. Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur, 04, pages. https://journal-exit.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/149-549-1-PB_BW_Ne.pdf

Wagner, D. (2018). *Vertuschte Gefahr: Die Stasi & Neonazis*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb). https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-teilung/stasi/218421/vertuschte-gefahr-die-stasi-neonazis/

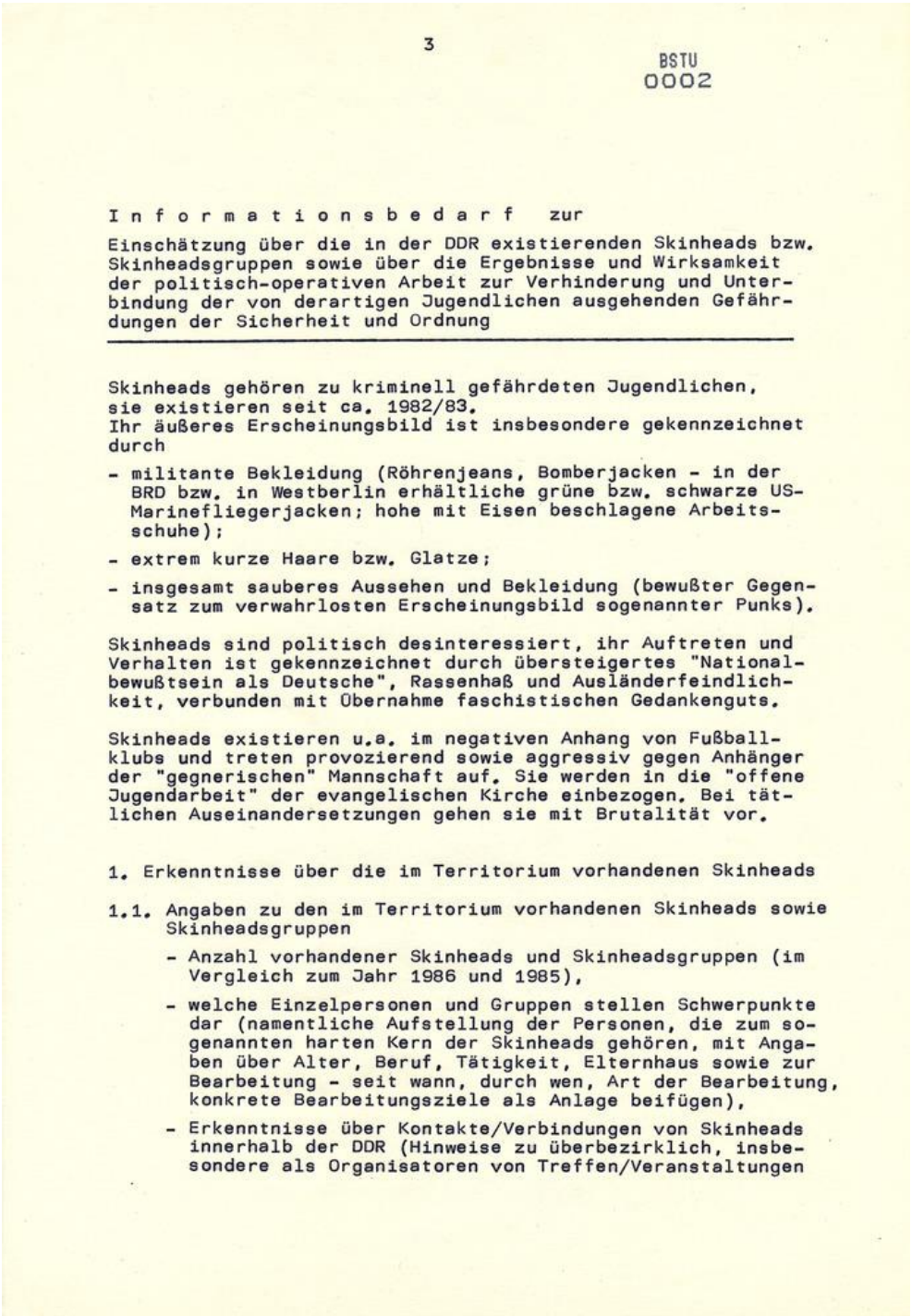
Warda, R. (2022). Das Pogrom in Rostock-Lichtenhagen: Zäsur, Symbol, Folgen. Bericht des Ostbeauftragten. https://www.ostbeauftragter.de/ostb-de/themen/bericht-des-ostbeauftragten/blicke-auf-ostdeutschland/das-pogrom-in-rostock-lichtenhagen-zaesur-symbol-folgen-2080824

Weber, M. (1946). Politics as a vocation. In H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (Eds.), From Max

Zeit Online. (2019). Halle: Regierung spricht von rechtsextremistischem Terroranschlag. Zeit Online. https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2019-10/halle-regierung-spricht-von-rechtsextremistischen-terroranschlag

Appendix

Appendix A



3

BSTU
0002

I n f o r m a t i o n s b e d a r f zur

Einschätzung über die in der DDR existierenden Skinheads bzw. Skinheadsgruppen sowie über die Ergebnisse und Wirksamkeit der politisch-operativen Arbeit zur Verhinderung und Unterbindung der von derartigen Jugendlichen ausgehenden Gefährdungen der Sicherheit und Ordnung

Skinheads gehören zu kriminell gefährdeten Jugendlichen, sie existieren seit ca. 1982/83.
Ihr äußeres Erscheinungsbild ist insbesondere gekennzeichnet durch

- militante Bekleidung (Röhrenjeans, Bomberjacken - in der BRD bzw. in Westberlin erhältliche grüne bzw. schwarze US-Marinefliegerjacken; hohe mit Eisen beschlagene Arbeitsschuhe);
- extrem kurze Haare bzw. Glatze;
- insgesamt sauberes Aussehen und Bekleidung (bewußter Gegensatz zum verwahrlosten Erscheinungsbild sogenannter Punks).

Skinheads sind politisch desinteressiert, ihr Auftreten und Verhalten ist gekennzeichnet durch übersteigertes "Nationalbewußtsein als Deutsche", Rassenhaß und Ausländerfeindlichkeit, verbunden mit Übernahme faschistischen Gedankenguts.

Skinheads existieren u.a. im negativen Anhang von Fußballklubs und treten provozierend sowie aggressiv gegen Anhänger der "gegnerischen" Mannschaft auf. Sie werden in die "offene Jugendarbeit" der evangelischen Kirche einbezogen. Bei tätlichen Auseinandersetzungen gehen sie mit Brutalität vor.

1. Erkenntnisse über die im Territorium vorhandenen Skinheads

1.1. Angaben zu den im Territorium vorhandenen Skinheads sowie Skinheadsgruppen

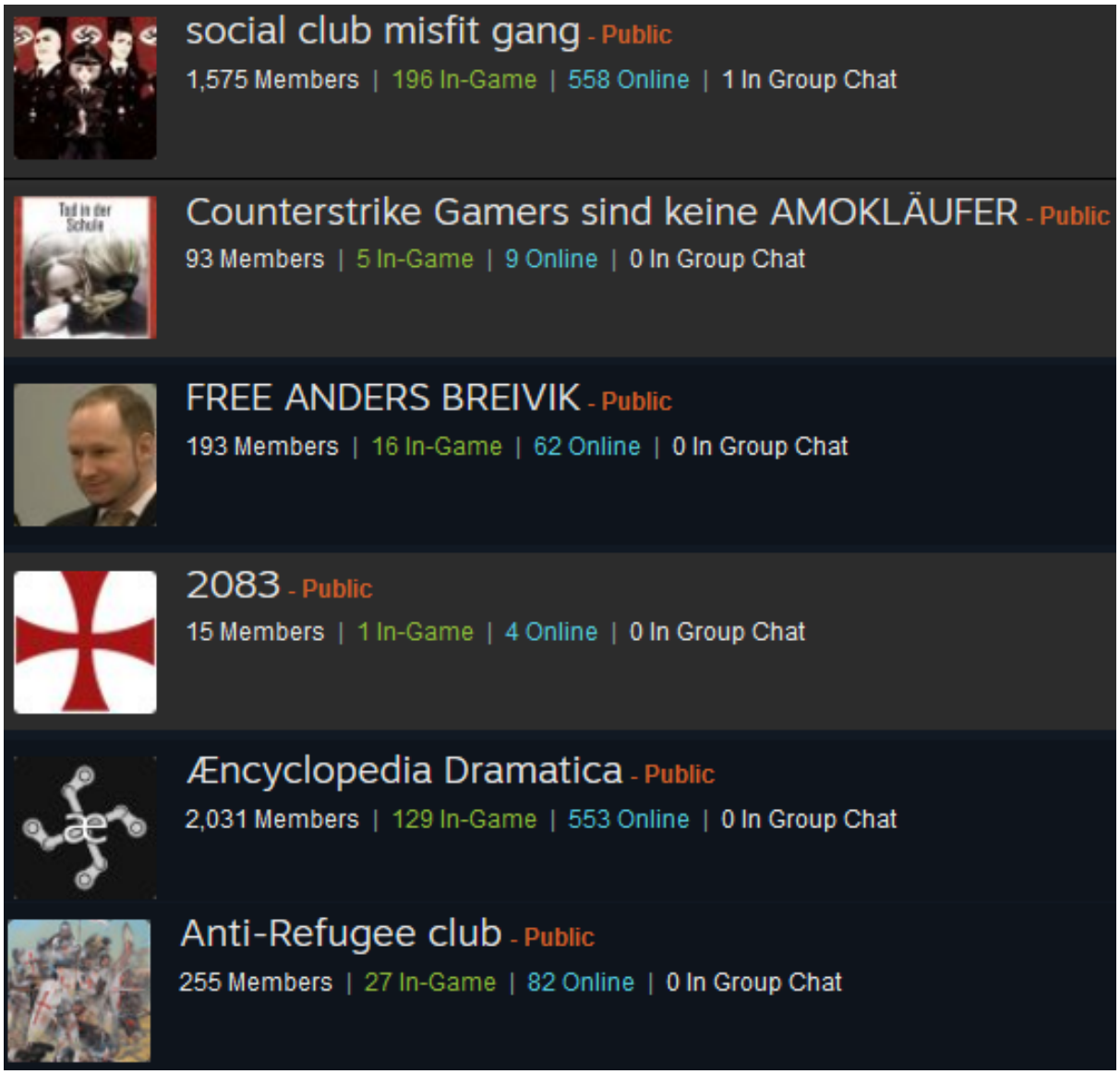
- Anzahl vorhandener Skinheads und Skinheadsgruppen (im Vergleich zum Jahr 1986 und 1985),
- welche Einzelpersonen und Gruppen stellen Schwerpunkte dar (namentliche Aufstellung der Personen, die zum sogenannten harten Kern der Skinheads gehören, mit Angaben über Alter, Beruf, Tätigkeit, Elternhaus sowie zur Bearbeitung - seit wann, durch wen, Art der Bearbeitung, konkrete Bearbeitungsziele als Anlage beifügen),
- Erkenntnisse über Kontakte/Verbindungen von Skinheads innerhalb der DDR (Hinweise zu überbezirklich, insbesondere als Organisatoren von Treffen/Veranstaltungen

Identification pamphlets describing some basic characteristics of Skin Heads, such as the bald look, the wearing of black-leather bomber jackets and a clean appearance, in contrast to ‘punks’. Retrieved from: https://www.stasi-mediathek.de/

Appendix B

Far-right rioters on August 24, 1992, in front of the ‘Sonnenblumenhaus’ in Rostock-Lichtenhagen. Retrieved from: https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/505377/vor-aller-augen-pogrome-und-der-untaetige-staat/

Appendix C



Groups on Steam. Sonboly, was active in the groups[65] "social club misfit gang", "Counterstrike Gamers are not mass Shooters" and "Anti-Refugee Club". Retrieved from: https://www.der-rechte-rand.de/archive/5454/halle-anschlag-ego-shooter/

[65] These groups do not necessarily exist in this form anymore today.