Received: 15 April 2021 | Revised: 19 January 2022 | Accepted: 22 March 2022

DOI: 10.1111/kykl.12311

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

KYKLOS WILEY

Punishing or rallying 'round the flag? Heterogeneous effects of terrorism in South Tyrol

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Abstract

This paper studies the electoral effects of terrorism by examining a rich panel dataset on the South Tyrolean case. A Northern and predominantly German-speaking region of Italy, South Tyrol was the theater of a long war of attrition fought between the majority language group and the Italian state for autonomy and independence. Using detailed information on the whole record of 337 terrorist attacks occurring between 1956 and 1991, I find that (i) low-scale terror or attacks which targeted police forces negatively affected incumbent support; (ii) high-scale terror or attacks which targeted civilians or caused deaths were conducive of rally-round-the-Italian-flag momenta; (iii) support to terrorists sensibly drops after deadly attacks. These findings highlight the role of terror intensity and violence in driving the impact of terrorism on incumbent actors and terrorist organizations and help reconcile the coexistence of seemingly contradictory effects of terrorism documented in the literature.

1 | INTRODUCTION

At least since the attacks on 9/11, terrorism has received constant, worldwide attention from scholars, the media, and the public in general. However, a unanimous consensus upon the consequences of terror on voters' decisions is far from apparent.[1] Some have documented how individuals exposed to international terrorism exhibit a higher level

[1]There is also sizable literature on the economic effects of terror. See, for example, Enders and Sandler (1996), Abadie and Gardeazabal (2003), Gaibulloev and Sandler (2008), and Gupta et al. (2004) for distortionary effects on the government's fiscal decisions.

of anger (e.g., Belmonte, 2020; Bohmelt et al., 2019; Canetti et al., 2009; Gould & Klor, 2015; Schüller, 2016), commit more hate crimes (e.g., Hanes & Machin, 2014; Ivandic et al., 2019), and are relatively more supportive of extreme-right, nationalist platforms in search of more security (e.g., Berrebi & Klor, 2008; Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014; Peri et al., 2020). Other works have focused on the 9/11 attacks and have provided evidence for an increase in the popularity of incumbent actors, unity among political forces, and a general sentiment of strong in-group identity (e.g., Baker & Oneal, 2001; Chowanietz, 2011; Collins, 2004; Gaines, 2002; Skitka, 2005). On top of that, it is unclear how these conclusions can be generalized to a broader class of terrorism. International terrorism is, in fact, just a specific form of terror that relies on spectacular attacks and the killing of civilians to gain visibility (e.g., Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008; Gleditsch & Polo, 2016; Sanchez-Cuenca & De la Calle, 2009). This is at odds with the vast majority of terrorist attacks, which are less visible and less deadly for civilians.[2] Sanchez-Cuenca and De la Calle (2009, p.32) conclude that "*the focus on international terrorism is unfortunate*" as it "*truncates the sample of terrorist violence and it generates important biases*." Arguably, these biases can distort policy decisions by making counterterror measures potentially ineffective. This paper provides evidence on the electoral *effects* of terrorism using a unique quasi-natural experiment that allows one to exploit statistical power in a far-reaching heterogeneous analysis---an approach that is unusual in the literature.

I examine a series of 337 terrorist attacks committed in South Tyrol---a region of Italy as large as the state of Delaware. The focus on South Tyrol is both opportunistic and of theoretical interest for better understanding terrorism motivated by regional autonomy.[3] First, detailed information over the entire universe of the region's terrorist attacks was collected by an inquiry commission appointed by the Italian Senate in the 1980s to investigate the facts behind the past and ongoing attacks. The commission continued its work until the mid-1990s collecting information on the authors, date, materials employed, and targets of every attack since terrorism appeared in 1956 in the region. The length of the period and the rich micro-level information make this database a unique and invaluable source to study the effects of terrorism by isolating specific elements, such as the target and the scale of the attack, that affect the magnitude and direction of the backlash. In particular, this allows me to test, within a unifying framework, whether high-scale terror or attacks that targeted civilians or caused deaths (i.e., 9/11-like attacks) generate glue-like effects, or whether low-scale terror or attacks that targeted police forces generate negative effects on the incumbent support.

Second, the South Tyrolean setting represents a unique opportunity to study the consequences of the so-called ethno-nationalist terrorism---that is, domestic terrorism conducted for political autonomy and national independence by organizations that do not control a territory (e.g., Gleditsch & Polo, 2016; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007). South Tyrol was annexed to Italy at the end of World War I, from the dissolved Habsburg Empire, and forcedly Italianized during the fascist regime (1922–1943). Inflows of migrants from neighboring areas structurally changed the region's language group composition over the years, empowering the Italian-speaking minority over the German-speaking majority that traditionally populated the region. Demands for independence and more autonomy increased steadily but remained unfulfilled until 1991, causing a long war of attrition between the German-speaking group and the Italian state, which erupted in a series of terrorist attacks committed between 1956 and 1991. This institutional setting and the presence of a political force that promoted these requests politically (the *Südtiroler Volkspartei*, SVP) make this work the first, to the best of my knowledge, to provide quantitative evidence on whether and under which circumstances exposure to terrorism increases the support for the nationalist cause or lead people to take the distance from the terrorists, controlling for aspects that typically confound the effect.

[2]Asal and Rethemeyer (2008) argue that, over the 1998–2005 period, just one-fourth of the total fatalities caused by terrorism are attributed to international attacks. This share reduces to one-eighth if one excludes the 9/11 attacks. Furthermore, Sanchez-Cuenca and De la Calle (2009) document that, in Western Europe, over the 1965–2000 period, around 60% of fatalities caused by domestic terrorism involved police forces rather than civilians.
[3]Examples of ethno-nationalist terrorism with political motivations are abundant, including the attacks committed by the IRA (Irish Republican Army) in Northern Ireland, ETA (Basque Homeland and Liberty) in the Basque Countries, Terra Lliure (Free Land) in Catalonia, FLNC (National Liberation Front of Corsica) in Corsica, and Front de liberation du Quebec in Canada.

Methodologically, the institutional setting I examine has another important advantage: it allows one to hold the incumbent's ideological position fixed across 10 election rounds. This is important as prior works have documented that voters' reaction to terror is sensitive to the ideological position of the government party (Berrebi & Klor, 2008; Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014). During the period of analysis (1953–1992), *same* political actors contended, under the *same* electoral rules, seats in the Parliament in 10 national elections. Among these actors, *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) was the largest party in Parliament, governing throughout the entire period in successive coalitions. This means that, despite the large-*T* size of my panel dataset, I can test for differential trends across 116 South Tyrolean municipalities in the vote shares secured by the *same* incumbent party.

My results indicate that an additional terrorist attack is associated with a reduction in the incumbent electoral support. Such effect is, to a large degree, nonlinear, and the loss of votes is larger after intense periods of terror with frequent attacks or in areas with a larger fraction of Italian speakers. Interestingly, the occurrence of casualties moderates the negative effect of terror, which turns positive (though statistical imprecise) when the number of casualties reported is high. These findings are estimated by using municipality fixed effects and election year fixed effects and by controlling for other time-variant aspects. They are also robust to a number of checks, including reverse causality, pretreatment differential trends, biases induced by a selective migration from areas affected by attacks, and time trends. Further validation analyses that allow for geographical and cultural spillovers or for persistent political attitudes do not change my results qualitatively. Overall, my analysis reveals that intense periods of terror erode voters' trust in the government's capacity to fight against terrorism, whereas violent attacks (like the 9/11 ones) are conducive to rally (around the Italian flag) effects. My findings, therefore, robustly highlight the role of terror intensity and violence in demonstrating the coexistence of two seemingly contradictory effects of terrorism documented in the literature.

I next document that injuries among civilians generate an in-group identity shift around the government, whereas injuries among police are associated with a reduction in DC support. Killings prompted a general increase in support for the government party irrespective of the target. However, while the killing of a police officer is likely to act as a glue-like event, the killing of a terrorist can be seen as a successful counterterrorist action that may signal the government's capability in responding to the terror. Finally, I find that attacks against private targets (such as houses and vehicles) and services generally attended by civilians (such as banks, churches, and alike) or that generate substantial disruption to the population through long power outages in big areas, such as the attacks toward the overhead power line, were the most effective in undermining the DC's electoral power.

The effect of terror on the SVP vote share mirrors by a large degree the one estimated for the DC. Overall, I find a positive impact (though not statistically significant) on SVP support, which is driven by intense periods of attacks and attacks against the power network (which set large areas of Northern Italy in darkness). This effect is particularly large in areas with a big fraction of German speakers and, interestingly, turns negative when a high number of casualties are reported. Killings, in particular, drive the negative effect of terror. This means that attacks were an accepted and supported means to push the independence cause, especially within the German-speaking community; however, casualties and killings, in particular, induced voters to take the distance from terrorists. This is evidence of a constraint posed by the electorate on terrorists' activities (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007). Finally, I find limited evidence that the reduction in the DC vote share advantaged the right-wing party, the MSI. The effect is small and significant at a 10% level of confidence. However, I find a large effect when terror strikes private targets or in areas with a large fraction of Italian speakers.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 | Regional autonomy and ethno-nationalist terrorism

Demand for regional autonomy and national independence has greatly increased in the last 30 years, leading to the breakup of countries like Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union, which have reshaped the appearance of

Europe. Political economists have traditionally emphasized important political gains in separating (net of economic efficiency losses), stemming from conflicts in preferences in the redistribution levels between the country's regions (e.g., Bolton et al., 1996; Bolton & Roland, 1997). Such conflicts in tastes are relatively higher in countries characterized by a larger ethnic fractionalization (Alesina et al., 1999), making the problem of secession more pressing for the most ethnically diverse countries.

However, separation is rarely a peaceful event, but it frequently causes civil conflicts[4] between the state and the secessionist ethnic groups---conflicts that may take the form of *guerilla* or terrorism. The latter is generally called ethno-nationalist terrorism for its distinct political motivations (e.g., Gleditsch & Polo, 2016; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007; Sanchez-Cuenca & De la Calle, 2009) and is typically diffused in countries with a high state capacity (e.g., the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, France, the Russian Federation), where ethnic minority groups fight in clandestinity (e.g., Northern Ireland, Basque Countries, Catalonia, South Tyrol, Corsica, Chechenia).[5] Rebels cannot confront the state through conventional warfare and cannot aspire to take control of the territory they feel is their own. Violence is employed to hurt the state's authority so as to induce the state to withdraw from the territory under dispute or at least make concessions (e.g., autonomy) to the ethnic group (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007).

While terrorism's final goal is the region's independence, attacks leverage on intermediate goals to win the war of attrition, such as buying popular consensus and sending signals over the state's weakness to the region's population. Popular consensus is possible because terrorists fight for a common, national goal: the national independence (or regional autonomy). For example, the majority of the Irish Catholics wanted Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and join Ireland, with some deeming the IRA's activity as necessary to achieve this goal. Similarly, in South Tyrol, many German speakers aspired to join Tyrol and Austria and saw terrorism that disrupted Northern Italy's power infrastructure as an effective way toward that goal.[6]

Importantly, quantifying the popular consensus for terrorists is relatively easy. Generally, demand for regional autonomy is pursued through a two-leg strategy---a violent leg and a political leg---which makes terror and political moves trend together.[7] Sanchez-Cuenca (2007), for example, documents a strong correlation between self-reported popular support for terrorist organizations, measured through surveys, and electoral support for the related political parties in both the Basque Countries and Northern Ireland. Reaction to terrorism can thus affect support for parties fighting for regional autonomy as well as influence people's judgment over the government party's activity through punishment or rally effects. In the next section, I will give a short overview of the literature on the electoral effects of terrorism and explain how my study contributes to it.

2.2 | Electoral effects of terrorism

The literature that has examined the political effects of terrorist attacks is sizable and diverse in terms of methodology. A majority of these works take advantage of post-electoral surveys to study the effects on people's attitudes (e.g., Bali, 2007; Bohmelt et al., 2019; Deglow & Sundberg, 2021; Kuehnhanss et al., 2021). Fewer studies have examined electoral outcomes and voters' decisions (e.g., Gould & Klor, 2010; Kibris, 2011; Montalvo, 2011, 2012), and even less have utilized a panel dataset with repeated information over time (e.g., Gassebner et al., 2008).

[4]Sambanis and Milanovic (2014) estimate that one-third of the civil conflicts observed during the 1946–2010 period are motivated by national independence.

[5]In contrast, guerillas or civil wars, which are fought for the control of a state's territory, are diffused in countries with a low state capacity (e.g., Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007).

[6]Still today, nostalgic organizations celebrate the anniversary of the attacks on the South Tyrolean's power infrastructure that took place during the so-called *nigh of fires* (June 11, 1961). See, for example, the *Alto Adige* newspaper at https://www.altoadige.it/cronaca/alto-adige-gli-schtzen-illuminano-tralicci-di-rosso-1.2933652

[7]For example, *Sinn Fein* is a political party active in Ireland and Northern Ireland that was historically associated with IRA. Similarly, *Südtiroler Volkspartei* is the main political party in South Tyrol, which was systematically accused of being connected with the region's terrorists.

A vast majority of these works study the effects of international terrorism---that is, terrorist incidents "*in one country which involve victims, targets, institutions, governments, or citizens of another country*" (Sandler & Enders, 2004, p. 2). Even so, predictions are generally mixed. Some have indicated that international terrorism makes people more rightist and that such a shift is motivated by the search for a higher level of security (e.g., Berrebi & Klor, 2008; Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014; Peri et al., 2020). Others---specifically works focusing on the 9/11 attacks---have found evidence of a rally effect (e.g., Baker & Oneal, 2001; Chowanietz, 2011; Collins, 2004; Gaines, 2002; Skitka, 2005). The source of this variety of predictions has rarely been investigated.[8] A notable exception is given by Chowanietz (2011) that utilizes information on 181 terrorist attacks in Western countries and evidence of rallies around the flag on the major media outlets. Chowanietz (2011)'s cross-sectional results show a strong correlation between the violence of the attack (e.g., the number of fatalities) and the observation of rally effects. He also documents that the repetition of terrorist attacks within an electoral mandate decreases the likelihood of rally effects. Nonetheless, it is unclear whether such correlations can be interpreted as causal or are the result of unobservable factors. My work contributes to this literature by providing informative estimations based on the analysis of a large panel dataset and the study of a suitable quasi-natural experiment design.

There is surprisingly little research on the electoral impact of domestic and ethno-nationalist terrorism. A strong theoretical prediction of this literature is that attacks are aimed at increasing support for the national cause (e.g., McAllister, 2004). Descriptive analyses from the Basque Countries and Northern Ireland indeed show regularities according to which both the ETA's (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007) and IRA's political wings (Hayes & McAllister, 2001) peaked electorally during periods of low-intensity terrorism. Interestingly, Sanchez-Cuenca (2007) also demonstrates that support for *Herri Batasuna*, in the Basque Countries, dropped after attacks that caused a high death toll (such as the car bomb in Barcelona in 1987). However, it is unclear whether these patterns can be interpreted as causal. My analysis is, to the best of my knowledge, the first study that rigorously estimates the effect of terror on terrorists, providing important indications on which circumstances cause popular consensus to increase or drop.

3 | INSTITUTIONAL SETTING AND DATA DESCRIPTION

3.1 | Terrorism in South Tyrol

The terrorist season in South Tyrol was part of a long war of attrition between the German-speaking majority and the Italian state for a larger political autonomy and independence. The region was traditionally part of the Habsburg-Hungarian Empire. Following its dissolution, at the end of World War I, South Tyrol was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy.[9] At the time, the region was almost entirely German with only a few Italian speakers settled around the southern border (counting for less than 5% of the total population). A massive program of Italianization, conducted by the fascist regime, and inflows of migrants from neighboring regions structurally changed the language group composition of the region, empowering the Italian-speaking minority numerically (peaking 25% of the total in 1936) and over strategic sectors (industry and public sector).

The resentments of the German-speaking group grew progressively, especially after World War II, when expectations on rejoining Tyrol and Austria, were disappointed at the international level. Not only did the independence remain unaffordable but, throughout the entire period of study (1953–1992), the region's political autonomy was absent or low. Rome maintained jurisdiction over a vast set of departments, including public security and welfare, as well as tourism, agriculture, and forestry---sectors in which German speakers were economically specialized. This means that the Italian state had the right to decide and organize (through its local delegates) the health and school system or to decree in sectors in which only German-speaking workers were active (e.g., agriculture). On top of that,

[8]Instead, a number of studies have focused on the heterogeneous causes of terrorism, such as the groups' ideology (Kis-Katos et al., 2014) and the salience of the Cold War (Brockhoff et al., 2016).

[9]See Alcock (1970) or Steininger (2003) for a more exhaustive account of the region's recent history.

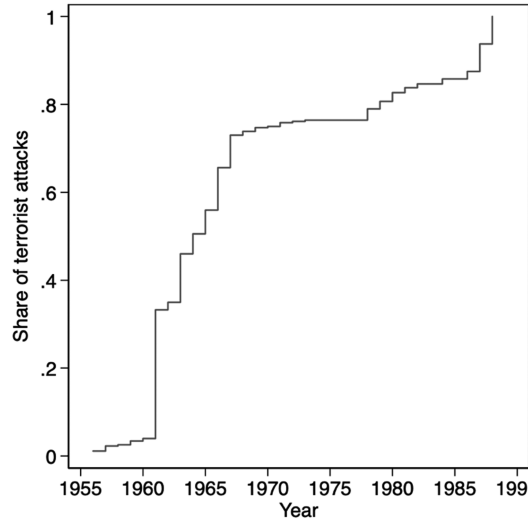


FIGURE 1 Cumulative distribution of terrorist attacks across 1956–1991

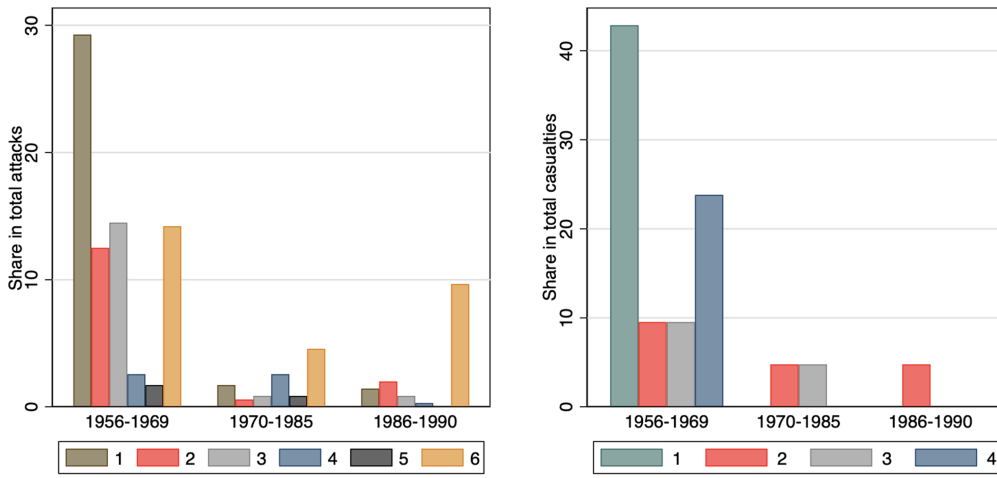
while bilingualism was restored in 1946 (after a ban imposed on the German language by the fascist regime), more than 95% of public servants were Italian speakers with many unable to speak German.[10] This means that a majority of the population (accounting for around two-thirds) were forced to communicate with the state in a language that was not their native one. All of these circumstances created ample support for political autonomy, both at the political (through the SVP party) and paramilitary levels (through terrorism) when the South Tyrolean question turned violent.[11]

The terrorist season unfolded through a series of 337 attacks, starting from 1956 to 1991, when the Italian Parliament eventually voted on granting jurisdiction on a large set of sectors to the autonomous region. I digitized the historical archive of the Italian Senate ("*Atti terrorismo e stragi prodotti dalla Commissione per il filone Alto Adige durante la X legislatura*"), which contains detailed information over the entire universe of terrorist attacks committed in the region. This source details the location of the attacks, date, authors, materials employed, and targets. It also includes information about the outcome of the attack---that is, whether it causes casualties (injuries and killings) distinguishing between civilians, police forces, and terrorists. Figure 1 illustrates the cumulative distribution of the attacks across the years. The first attack was committed on September 20, 1956, near Bolzano (the biggest center of the region). The explosion destroyed the overhead wires conveying electric power to the most important railway route, the Brenner route, that connected the region to the rest of Italy. Many other attacks followed, reaching a dramatic spike during the *night of fires* (June 11, 1961) when 37 raids damaged severely several electric pylons and set in darkness a large slice of Northern Italy. After that, terror grew steadily until 1969 when a season of relative peace was held for a period of around 10 years. Attacks resumed at the end of the 1970s and were marked by particular violence after 1986 when a new paramilitary group *Ein Tirol* (literally, "One Tyrol") conducted attacks predominantly against civilians.

A majority of the attacks (about 74% of the total) were conducted during the so-called first phase (1956–1969) when paramilitary operations were carried out by the South Tyrolean Liberation Committee (*Befreiungsausschuss Sudtirol*, BAS). The BAS targeted predominantly the overhead power line that supplied electric power to the region

[10]See, in particular, Belmonte and Di Lillo (2021) on how economic specialization along ethnic lines caused persistent tensions between the two region's groups.

[11]In a rally that took place in Castel Firmiano/Sigmundskron Castle in Bolzano in 1957, 35,000 people gathered together to protest against the Italian occupation and the failure of any autonomy agreements.



(a) attacks by target (b) casualties by victim

FIGURE 2 Distribution of terrorist attacks and casualties by target and terrorist phase
Notes: The figure illustrates the distribution of terrorist attacks by target and terrorist phase. Terrorist phases are: 1) 1956–1969; 2) 1970–1985; 3) 1986–1990. In Panel (*a*), terrorist attacks are categorized by material target as follows: 1 = overhead power line; 2 = railway; 3 = police forces; 4 = monuments and symbols of the Italian group's collective memory; 5 = popular houses; 6 = private targets. In Panel (*b*), casualties are categorized by victim as follows: 1 = injured among police officers; 2 = injured among civilians; 3 = deaths among terrorists; 4 = deaths among police officers. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

and to part of the North of Italy (the olive bars in Figure 2a). The second most frequent target was private properties and civilians (the orange bars in Figure 2a)---a strategy that frequently recurred in the two other phases as well. The red bars draw the shares of attacks against the Brenner railway, whereas the gray ones indicate the shares of assaults against police officers and attacks aimed at damaging police stations/military barracks. As one can see, these two types were frequent during the first phase but scarcely utilized during the last one. Finally, the least recurrent targets were the monuments and other symbols of the Italian group's collective memory (in blue) and the popular houses (in black), one of the most important strategies the government used to expand the Italian presence in the German-speaking region.

Figure 2b also examines the distribution of casualties by victim-and-terrorist phase. I distinguish between wounded police officers (in green), wounded civilians (in red), killed terrorists (in gray), and killed police officers (in blue). It is immediate to see that, with about 85% of the total casualties in the region, the first phase stands out as the most violent. Fifteen police officers were killed and 24 were seriously injured. Attacks against civilians were less frequent but more stable across the three phases. In sum, the inspection of Figures 2a and 2b reveals that the first years were the cruelest and most violent but that the threat against civilians remained high until the outset of the 1990s.

In the regression analysis, I aggregate data at the municipality-by-election year level by assigning an attack to a municipality if the incident has occurred within its boundaries in the 5-year period before the election.[12] Table 1 reports the main statistics for this unit of analysis. The average municipality-by-election year pair was hit 0.295 times (standard deviation = 1.342). The table also reports the statistics for the number of attacks by material target and for

[12]To get a sense of the spatial distribution of the attacks, Figure A1 in the online Appendix maps the exposure to at least one terrorist attack across municipalities for each 5-year period. Note also that, in Section B in the online Appendix, I alternatively assign an attack to a municipality if the incident has occurred in the most proximate area and weight exposure using the geographical or cultural distance (or both).

the casualties at the same level of analysis. As one can read, for the municipality-by-election year pair, the average number is 0.025 for injuries and 0.011 for killings.

3.2 | The government's role in the fight against terrorism and the national elections

The Italian state that had jurisdiction over the region's security directly took over the governance of the operations against the region's terrorism. Initially, the local branch of the state (*Prefettura*) organized the defense of sensible targets in collaboration with the local police forces (*Carabinieri* and *Guardia di Finanza*). As the terrorist phenomenon became a more urgent matter, Rome organized a special force (*Compagnia speciale antiterrorismo*) to respond promptly and flexibly to terrorists. The minister of Interior Affairs was in charge of supervising the counterterror operations and referring to the Parliament about the situation in the region. The national parliament was indeed the arena where terrorist acts were discussed in heated debates and counterterrorism measures put on the vote.[13] Terrorism was, therefore, a salient aspect when South Tyroleans went to the ballot box to express their preference in the national elections.[14]

During the period of study, the Italian government party was stably the Christian Democrats (DC). The DC was a party of Catholic inspiration that ruled Italy from 1946 to 1994 when it was eventually disbanded. The DC outweighed the Communist party (PCI), the second-largest force. Together, the DC and the PCI accounted for about 60–70% of the national vote and, under a proportional rule, were both substantially represented in the Parliament. These two institutional forces were challenged, in some parts of Italy, like South Tyrol, by a neo-fascist party, the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI). This party, founded by former hierarchies of the Italian fascist regime, was particularly concerned in South Tyrol by the increasing empowerment of the German-speaking population at the expense of the Italian-speaking community. The wording and messages of the MSI were direct and blunt (unlike the ones used by the two institutional forces) and were headed to increasing tensions with the other ethnic group.

The political landscape in South Tyrol was, however, dominated by the South Tyrolean People's Party (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*, SVP), a regional and ethnic catchall political party. The SVP was founded in 1945 as a confederation of preexistent German-speaking parties with the goal of representing the South Tyrol's German-speaking population's interests in the Italian political arena, including the demand for a larger region's political autonomy. The party was also repeatedly accused of being connected with and providing support to the clandestine terrorist organizations by the Italian-speaking media and politicians. Therefore, variation in the vote share secured by the SVP could be, at least partly, informative over the support received by the terrorists.

To test whether exposure to terror explains, at least partially, time variation in the vote share of the DC, MSI, and SVP, I examine the vote across 10 consecutive National elections. Data are gathered from the online archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs[15] for the election years 1953, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1979, 1983, 1987, and 1992. Descriptive statistics are presented in Panel B of Table 1. As one can see, the DC secured a municipality-level average vote share of 7.843%, followed by the neo-fascist party (MSI) with 1.416%. The SVP was by far the largest party in the region, accounting for a municipality-level average of 73.435% of the total votes. The distribution exhibits a substantial variation around the mean for both of these forces (standard deviations are 9.890, 2.273, and 16.024, respectively). Finally, the turnout rate was quite high in the region, accounting for a municipality-level average of 94.543%. In light of the high mean, variability across municipalities was limited (standard deviation equals 2.85%).

[13]Using text analysis, Belmonte and Di Lillo (2021) show how recurrent the term `terrorism' was in the verbatim reports of the parliamentary sessions, wherein South Tyrol was the subject. See, in particular, Figure 15.

[14]Conversely, regional elections were not on security and terrorism but solely on the few subjects the nonautonomous region had jurisdiction over.

[15]https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/.

TABLE 1 Summary statistics — Main variables

Panel A. Terrorist attacks and casualties:	mean	sd	min	max	count
# Terrorist attacks	0.295	1.342	0	22	1,142
# Terrorist attacks by target					
Overhead power line	0.0867	0.679	0	14	1,142
Railway	0.0963	0.623	0	10	1,142
Police stations	0.0412	0.323	0	6	1,142
Collective memory	0.0464	0.282	0	4	1,142
Popular houses	0.0166	0.169	0	4	1,142
Private targets	0.00788	0.142	0	4	1,142
# People injured	0.0245	0.292	0	6	1,142
# People killed	0.0114	0.148	0	3	1,142
# Police officers injured	0.0193	0.271	0	6	1,142
# Civilians injured	0.00525	0.102	0	3	1,142
# Police officers killed	0.00788	0.129	0	3	1,142
# Terrorists dead	0.00350	0.0724	0	2	1,142
Panel B. Political parties and turnout (shares):					
Democrazia Cristiana (DC)	7.843	9.890	0	52.35	1,142
Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI)	1.416	2.273	0	24.85	1,142
Sudtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)	73.435	16.024	16.284	103.511[a]	1,142
Turnout	94.543	2.853	80.732	100	1,142

[a]The share exceeds 100 for the municipality of Stelvio in 1958. Excluding this observation does not affect results.

3.3 | Additional census variables

Table A1 reports summary statistics for additional variables employed in the analysis obtained from the provincial census volumes provided by the institute of statistics (ISTAT) in 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, and 1991. Information for the election years is imputed using linear interpolation---that is, using the information on the linear trend observed between the two closest censuses.

The basic covariates included in the regressions are the population and the shares of Italians in the population. As one can see, the majority of the villages were small, with an average number of 2,500 inhabitants in the region. Of this population, 11% belongs to the Italian-speaking group, on average, while the standard deviation is 17.37. As a robustness check, I also use the level of education in the Italian-speaking population (i.e., the number of Italian speakers with a bachelor degree, with a secondary school diploma, and who cannot read and write) and information on the distribution of the Italian-speaking workers across the hierarchical line (entrepreneurs, managers, and lower-level employees).

4 | TERRORIST ATTACKS AND INCUMBENT SUPPORT

4.1 | Empirical strategy

Figure 3 illustrates a set of scatterplots by election year (1953, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1979, 1983, 1987, and 1992). Each scatterplot distributes municipalities (as black dots) relative to the vote shares secured by the DC in a given election year (y-axis) and the number of terrorist attacks that occurred in the 5-year period before that

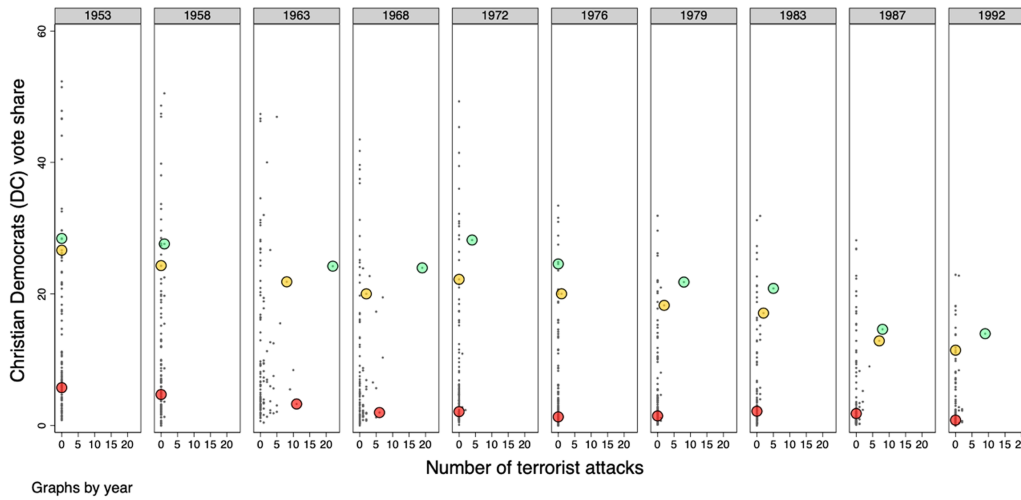


FIGURE 3 Government party vote shares and terrorist attacks across election years
Notes: The figure scatters the DC vote shares, in the y-axis, and the number of terrorist attacks, in the x-axis, by election year. Each circle is a municipality-election year pair. The green circles highlight the location of the city of Bolzano in the graph, the yellow ones Merano, and the red ones Campo Tures. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

election (x-axis). For illustrative purposes, the figure highlights the evolution of three municipalities: Bolzano/Bozen in green, Merano/Meran in yellow, and Campo Tures/Sand in Taufers in red. As one can see, Bolzano features four major shifts in the vote shares that are easy to single out graphically. During the elections held in 1963, the DC lost about 5 percentage points, after the city was struck 22 times. The party partially recovered in the 1972 elections, after a period of relative peace, but lost more than 10 points before the elections held in 1979 and 1987, when attacks resumed vigorously. Similarly, in Merano, the DC lost about 5 percentage points in 1968 after eight attacks, followed by 5 more in 1987 after seven attacks were reported. Finally, terrorists hit Campo Tures 17 times during the period 1958–1968 (11 before the 1963 elections and 6 before the 1968 elections). In 1968, the DC obtained a share of 1.97---that is, 58% fewer votes relative to 1958.

The relationship between votes and terrorist attacks can be studied more rigorously using the following regression framework:

$$y_{it} = \lambda_i + \mu_t + \beta_1 Attacks_{it} + X'_{it}\gamma + \varepsilon_{it}, \tag{1}$$

where i indexes municipalities and t election years. ε_{it} is the idiosyncratic error term that I cluster at the municipal level to account for potential redundant information within a municipality across elections. The outcome, y_{it}, is the DC vote shares in the main specifications, whereas the main explanatory variable is the number of attacks that occurred in a municipality i in the 5-year period before the election year t, $Attacks_{it}$.

The identification of β_1 may be hindered by a number of empirical difficulties. First, and most obvious, exposure to terrorism is unlikely to be as good as random. Terrorists typically seek media visibility (e.g., Jain & Mukand, 2004; Jetter, 2017) and aim at spreading terror and fear among the targeted population. As a result, bigger centers and areas with more out-group members could be more likely targets of terrorism. To absorb any of these fixed unobservables, which can explain differences in the exposure to terrorism across municipalities, the regression includes a set of municipality fixed effects, λ_i. The inclusion of municipality fixed effects allows me to test for differential trends in voting within a given municipality. However, electoral preferences may change in a given election

year for a number of reasons unrelated to terrorism. In the baseline, regression electoral shocks, common to the region, are absorbed by including a set of election year fixed effects, μ_t. In alternative models, I include terrorist phase fixed effects, Γ_T, in place of election year fixed effects, to capture peculiar features of each terrorist phase, T. Finally, to absorb the potentially confounding effects on electoral behavior caused by a change in other relevant aspects (i.e., other than the exposure to terrorist attacks), I include a vector, X_{it}, of time-varying characteristics. In the baseline specification, I control for changes in the population and the share of Italian speakers, two basic aspects that are likely to affect both the occurrence of terrorist attacks and the electoral behavior.

The coefficient of interest is β_1, which has to be interpreted as the effect of the exposure to an additional terrorist attack on the DC vote shares, within a municipality i, holding fixed the population and the share of Italian speakers. Theory suggests that exposure to terrorist attacks is conducive to a punishment effect (i.e., $\beta_1<0$). Clearly, the impact of terror may well be nonlinear. I then construct a set of dummy variables, $Attacks_k$, which is equal to 1 when the municipality-by-year observation falls in the k-th category, where $k=\{1,2,3,4\}$ is an index that takes on $k=1$ for municipality-by-year with no attacks, $k=2$ for those with at most 5 attacks, $k=3$ for those with at most 10 attacks, and $k=4$ for those with more than 10 attacks occurred. I then regress these dummy variables on the DC vote share, leaving the first category (i.e., $k=1$) as the baseline. This is written as follows:

$$y_{it}=\lambda_i+\mu_t+\sum_{k=2}^{4}\theta_k I[Attacks_k]_{it}+X'_{it}\gamma+\varepsilon_{it}. \tag{2}$$

To capture rally effects, I add the variable $Casualties_{it}$ which measures the number of casualties (injured and deaths) caused by the attacks occurred in the municipality i, in the 5-year period before the election t. As the number of terrorist attacks and the number of casualties are likely to vary together, I use Equation 2 as the baseline regression, as follows:

$$y_{it}=\lambda_i+\mu_t+\sum_{k=2}^{4}\theta_k I[Attacks_k]_{it}+\beta_2 Casualties_{it}+X'_{it}\gamma+\varepsilon_{it}. \tag{3}$$

It is worth remarking that β_2, the differential trends in the support for the DC induced by casualties, is estimated within each category of observations recording the same exposure to terrorism. When estimating Equation 3, I hypothesize that $\beta_2>0$.

4.2 | Additional identifying assumptions

Before presenting the estimation results, it is worth discussing three potentially relevant issues that concern my analysis: the sorting of terrorist attacks based on prior election outcomes, pre-trend differences, and the selection of voters induced by the attacks. Further robustness analyses will be presented later on.

First, one may question estimations based on a reverse causality channel spanning from voting to terrorism. Terrorist attacks, in fact, can be sorted according to some municipality characteristics; in particular, they can be strategically placed to further undermine the legitimacy of the government in areas where support is low. A negative $\widehat{\beta}_1$ can thus be the sorting induced by terrorist attacks rather than an electoral punishment effect. To investigate this possibility, I provide a test on whether voting outcomes in a municipality, at the beginning of an approximately 10-year period, predict a change in the number of attacks committed. I compute the change in the number of attacks that have occurred in the periods 1953–1963, 1964–1972, 1973–1983, and 1984–1992 and relate these changes to the DC vote shares in 1953, 1963, 1972, and 1983, respectively. A scatterplot of these 451 municipality-by-election data points is displayed in Figure 4. Figure 4 also adds a fit of the data points (the line in red). The slope coefficient in the graph is also reported in column 1 of Table A2 in the Appendix. The table also replicates the

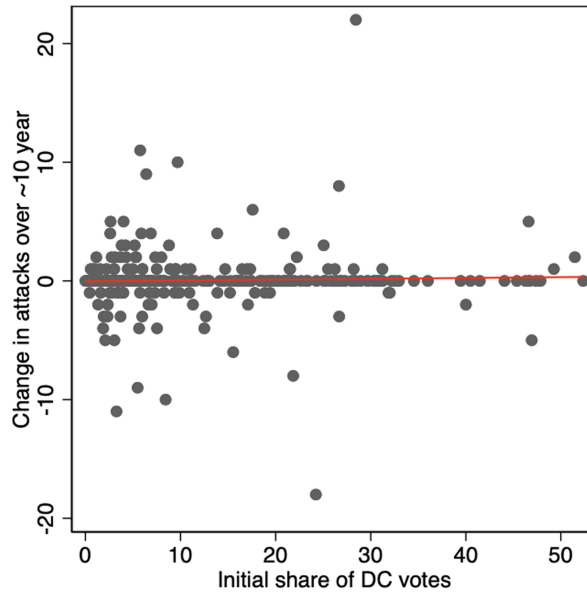


FIGURE 4 Initial share of DC votes on the change in the number of attacks committed
Notes: The figure illustrates the relationship between the initial share obtained by the DC in 1953, 1963, 1972, and 1983 (in the x-axis) and the change in the number of attacks committed within the periods 1953–1963, 1964–1972, 1973–1983, and 1984–1992 (in the y-axis). The total number of observations is 451. The red line draws the linear fit of the underlying scatterplot. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

exercise within each decade period (1953–1963 in column 2, 1964–1972 in column 3, 1973–1983 in column 4, and 1984–1992 in column 5). Overall, I do not find any indication that the hypothesized relationship exists. The only coefficient that is statistically significant estimated is the one displayed in column 4 for the period 1973–1983---a period of relatively low frequency in terrorism (see Figure 1). However, the estimated effect is positive and not negative as hypothesized; namely, it suggests that terrorist attacks were more likely to strike areas with higher support for the DC during that period. The effect is however very small: an increase of 1 percentage point in the DC share leads to a two-hundredth increase of a standard deviation in terrorist attacks. All other estimates are insignificant. In sum, while this exercise cannot rule out in full concerns related to a reverse causality channel, we conclude that sorting in the attacks based on prior election outcomes is unlikely.

More importantly, anything occurring before a period marked by an intense terrorist activity seems not to matter much in explaining the voting pattern. To show this, I design an event study, where the "event" is the first occurrence of a period of terrorism with mid-to-high intensity. Municipalities are then divided into two groups: locations that have never been exposed to more than five attacks in a 5-year period are gathered together in a "control group;" and municipalities that have been hit at least once by this level of terror are counted as "treated." Since the interest is in assessing the magnitude of pre-trend differences in the DC vote shares, I select the first period, with more than five attacks, as the major event within the latter group. So, the interest relies on the period prior to the occurrence of the event. This exercise is illustrated graphically in Figure 5. The vertical line indicates the occurrence of the event. The tick "0" is thus the first election after this period; "-1" is the first election occurring before the event; "1" is the second election occurring after this period; and so on. The point estimations are the residuals of the difference in the share of votes for the DC between the two groups of municipalities, relative to the first election occurring before the event (the baseline category). Estimations are conditional to a full set of municipality fixed effects and to the percentage of Italian speakers and to the number of inhabitants. Vertical spikes depict the 95%

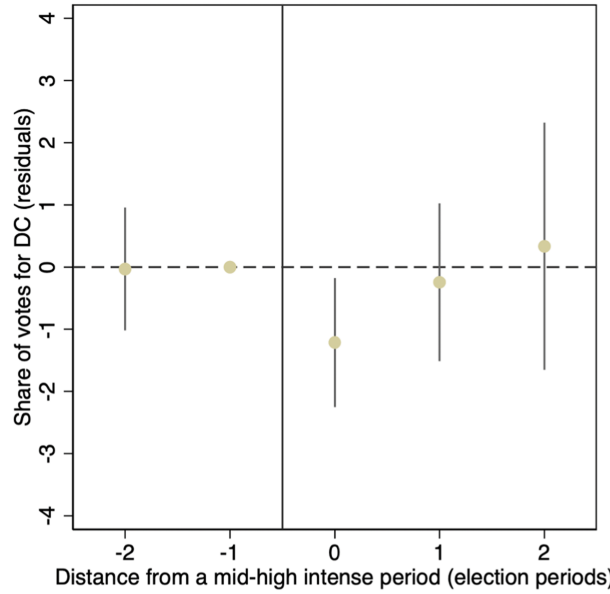


FIGURE 5 Event study for the occurence of massive terrorist attacks period
Notes: The figure illustrates an event study, where the "event" is the first occurrence of a period with more than 5 terrorist attacks. The tick "0" is the first election after the event; "−1" is the first election occurring before the event. The point estimates are the residuals of the difference in the DC share of votes between municipalities that have been hit at least once by more than 5 terrorist attacks in a 5-year period and municipalities that are not, relative to the first election occurring before the event (the baseline category). Estimations are conditional to a full set of municipality fixed effects and to the percentage of Italian speakers in the population and to the number of inhabitants. Vertical spikes depict the 95% level of confidence constructed from standard errors clustered at the municipality level. The graph zooms to the two furthest away election periods since the event occurred. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

level of confidence constructed from standard errors clustered at the municipality level. As one can see, before the occurrence of the event, there is basically no difference in the support for the DC in the two groups of localities. The two point estimates lie on the same 0-flat line, whereas those immediately after the event decline. This indicates, as hypothesized above, that support for the DC drops only after being hit by a series of mid-intensity terrorist acts.

Third, the analysis might be biased by the fact that terrorism itself has an effect on the voters' composition. The literature has documented that skilled workers and people with a higher level of education are typically more likely to selectively migrate out of a locality because of terrorism (e.g., Belmonte, 2019; Dreher et al., 2011). Belmonte (2019), in particular, uses the same data and context and finds that terrorism in South Tyrol prompted a push effect only for educated people (i.e., those with a bachelor degree or, at least, a high school diploma) and high-level workers (entrepreneurs and managers). Arguably, this makes it complicated to interpret β_1 using Equation 1 because a change in the voting pattern may be due either to differences in the remaining population or in the violence. To assess the direction and magnitude of the bias, I proceed by testing whether selective migration affects voting for the DC. I then use the same information provided in Belmonte (2019) on the number of Italian-speaking workers categorized according to the educational level or employment status. In column 1 of Table A3 in the Appendix, on the DC vote share. I regress the number of Italian-speaking people who held (*i*) a bachelor degree (*ii*) or a high school diploma or (*iii*) who cannot write and read. As one can see, variation in the two categories of people does not imply a change in voting for the DC. In column 2 of Table A3, I do a similar exercise by regressing the number of (*i*) Italian-speaking entrepreneurs, (*ii*) managers, and (*iii*) low-level employees on the DC vote share.

These estimates indicate that, within a municipality, an increase in the number of entrepreneurs is statistically significantly associated with a reduction in the support for the DC. Variations in the number of managers are rather not significant. While this analysis is not conclusive (it would in fact require more detailed information within each socio-economic group, unfortunately not available in the census), it hints at a downward bias in the estimation of β_1 using Equation 1. That is, the occurrence of terrorism induced Italian-speaking entrepreneurs to migrate out of South Tyrol, thus increasing *by this means*, the share of votes for the DC.

4.3 | Main results

Table 2 reports the estimate of β_1 using the DC vote share as the outcome. Column 1 includes municipality as well as election year fixed effects. The estimated effect is, as expected, negative and statistically significant at a 1% level and robust to the inclusion of basic controls, such as the total population and the share of Italian speakers (column 2). In column 3 of Table 2, I use terrorist phase fixed effects in place of election year fixed effects as a robustness check. Indeed, as explained above, tactics and terrorist groups were the same within each of these phases but different across them. When these heterogeneous aspects are absorbed, the effect slightly reduces but leaves results qualitatively unchanged. To assess the magnitude of the estimated effect in the baseline specification (i.e., column 2), it is important to recall that a standard deviation in the number of attacks is 1.342. Hence, the effect of a standard deviation increase in the number of terror attacks is $-0.185 \times 1.342 = -0.25$ percentage points---that is, around 2.5% of the sample period standard deviation in the DC vote share (which is 9.890).

Columns 4 and 5 of Table 2 test for a nonlinear impact of terrorism on DC support. Column 4 includes election year fixed effects, whereas column 5 includes terrorist phase fixed effects. Point estimates from column 4 are also illustrated graphically in Figure 6 as red dots and confidence intervals as vertical spikes. As expected, higher exposure to terror led to an even higher reduction in the support of the government party; however, the largest drop is

TABLE 2 Government party and terrorist attacks

	Dependent Variable is: Government party (Vote %)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
# Terrorist Attacks	−0.188*** (0.056)	−0.185*** (0.047)	−0.178*** (0.049)		
I[Attacks ∈ (0,5]]				−0.369 (0.260)	−0.455 (0.312)
I[Attacks ∈ (5,10]]				−1.898** (0.743)	−1.821*** (0.647)
I[Attacks > 10]				−2.915*** (0.396)	−2.979*** (0.620)
Municipality FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Terrorist phase FE	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,142	1,142	1,142	1,142	1,142
*R*2	0.466	0.539	0.500	0.539	0.501

The unit of observation is municipalities-by-election year. Time-variant controls are: population and the share of Italian speakers in the population. Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level. Symbols:
*$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

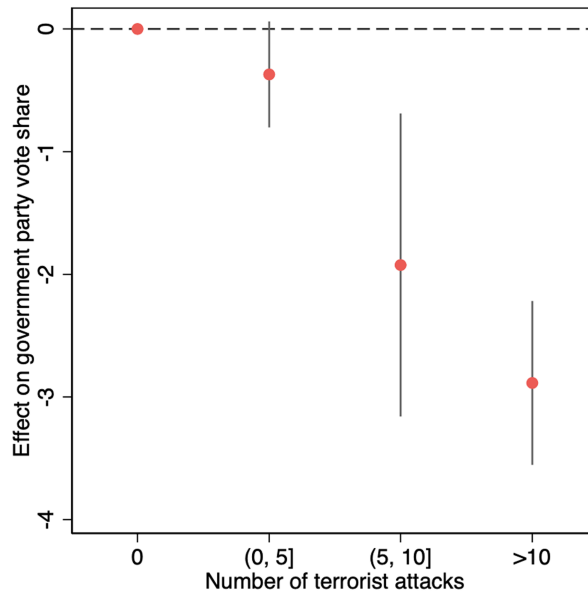


FIGURE 6 Terrorist attacks and votes for the DC party
Notes: The figure illustrates the nonlinear effect of terrorist attacks on the DC vote share by replicating column 4 of Table 2 that uses a discretized scale for the number of attacks. Each red dot is the point estimation of the differential effect relative to the baseline category (no attacks in the 5-year period prior to the elections). Vertical spikes draw the 95% level confidence intervals. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

documented between low- (1 to 5 attacks) and mid-intensity periods (6 to 10 attacks). To assess the magnitude, the effect within each group of observations has to be compared relative to the baseline category (the group of municipality-by-election years not exposed to any attack). So, for example, comparing high-intensity periods (more than 10 attacks) with peaceful periods yields a shift in DC votes, which accounts for about 29% the sample period's standard deviation.[16]

4.4 | Heterogeneous analysis

I next move on by testing whether injuries and deaths prompted an increase or a reduction in the support for the DC party. Estimates are reported in Table 3. Columns 1 to 2 replicate the baseline specifications (i.e., columns 2 and 4 of Table 2) for ease of comparison; column 3 adds the number of people injured as well as those killed in a terrorist attack to the column 2 specification, thus controlling for the dummies indicating the intensity of the exposure to terror, the number of inhabitants, and the share of Italian speakers. As one can see, while exposure to terror is associated with voters blaming the government for the lack of security, I find that an increase in deaths, as produced by terrorist attacks, can act as a glue-like factor contributing to unifying the entire Italian-speaking community (Baker & Oneal, 2001; Skitka, 2005). Contrarily, the effect is small and not statistically significant with respect to injuries and

[16]It is also useful to quantify how big the drop in DC votes is when a municipality moves from one category to another. Consider, for example, the jump between low- (1 to 5 attacks) and mid-intensity periods (6 to 10 attacks). The average number of attacks in the first category is 1.77, whereas that in the latter category is 7.73. This means that, on average, moving from a low- to a mid-intensity period increases exposure by about six attacks. The effect of one more attack is, therefore, $(-1.898 + 0.369)/6 = -0.255$, around 137% of the estimated effect in column 2 of Table 3.

TABLE 3 Government party and terrorist attacks -- Heterogeneous analysis

	Dependent Variable is: Government party (Vote %)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
# Terrorist attacks	−0.185*** (0.047)				−0.243*** (0.062)	
I[Attacks ∈ (0, 5]]		−0.369 (0.260)	−0.459* (0.265)	−0.472* (0.265)		
I[Attacks ∈ (5, 10]]		−1.898** (0.743)	−2.229*** (0.721)	−2.134*** (0.543)		
I[Attacks >10]		−2.915*** (0.396)	−3.321*** (0.480)	−3.324*** (0.497)		
# People injured			0.021 (0.183)			
# People killed			0.918** (0.405)			
# Police officers injured				−0.189* (0.104)		
# Civilians injured				1.067*** (0.124)		
# Police officers killed				1.162** (0.522)		
# Terrorists dead				0.762* (0.426)		
# Casualties					−0.112 (0.208)	
# Terrorist attacks × # Casualties					0.084** (0.039)	
Private targets						−0.282*** (0.053)
Overhead power line						−0.245** (0.096)
Railway						0.060 (0.254)
Police stations						−0.036 (0.258)
Collective memory						0.519 (0.413)
Popular houses						−0.414 (0.392)
Municipality FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,142	1,142	1,142	1,142	1,142	1,142
R^2	0.539	0.539	0.540	0.540	0.539	0.540

The unit of observation is municipalities-by-election year. Time-variant controls are: population and the share of Italian speakers in the population. Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level. Symbols: $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

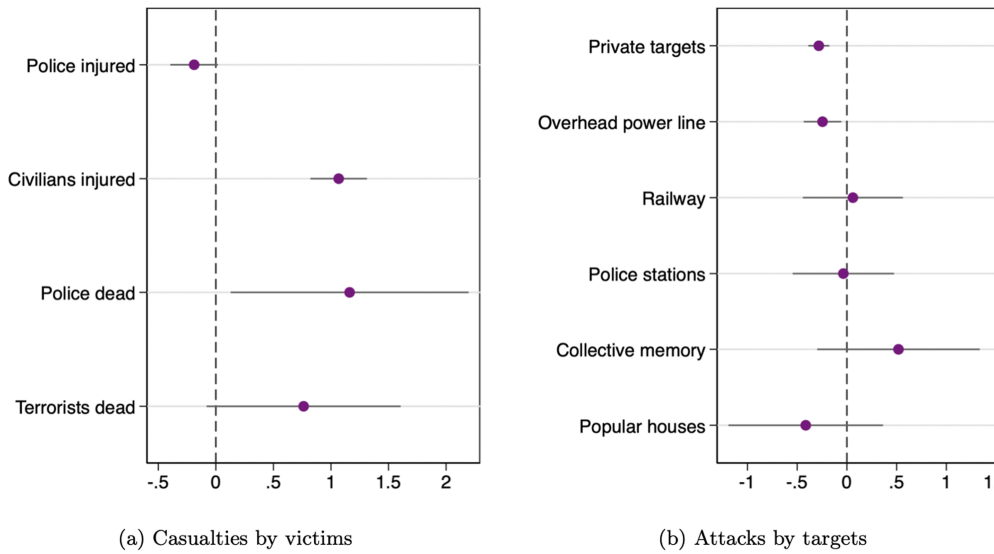


FIGURE 7 Heterogeneous effects of terrorist attacks on the DC support
Notes: The graph illustrates point estimations of the effects of casualties by victims (panel *a*) and attacks by targets (panel *b*) on the government party support, after controlling for the dummies indicating the intensity of the exposure to terror, the number of inhabitants, and the share of Italian speakers. These estimates are also reported in columns 3 and 4 of Table 3 in the online Appendix, respectively. Horizontal spikes mark the 95% confidence level. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

wounded victims. It is thus likely that injuries were not sufficient to generate an in-group identity shift around the government.

Column 4 further disentangles injuries and killings by victims (police officers, civilians, terrorists). The estimated coefficients are also illustrated graphically in panel (*a*) of Figure 7. Interestingly, injuries among police officers are associated with a reduction in DC support (the coefficient is −0.189, and it is statistically different from zero at the 10% level); conversely, injuries among civilians are associated with an increase in DC support (the coefficient is 1.067, and it is statistically significant at the 1% level). Killings prompted a general increase in support for the government party irrespective of whoever was the target. The estimated coefficient is 1.162 for the number of police officers killed and 0.762 for the number of fallen terrorists.[17] However, although the killing of a police officer is likely to act as a glue-like event, the killing of a terrorist can be seen as a successful counterterrorist action that may signal the government's ability to respond to the terror.

These findings indicate that deaths and injuries against civilians prompted a rally-round-the-Italian flag, inducing an increase in support for the government party. However, the effect of higher exposure to terrorism has a negative impact on it. It is therefore important to examine which of the two effects dominate, and in which circumstances. To simplify the interpretation, I employ as the main explanatory variable the count of attacks to capture exposure to terrorism. The results do not change when we use dummies as in column 4. I thus estimate the following specification:

$$y_{it} = \lambda_i + \mu_t + \beta_1 Attacks_{it} + \beta_2 Casualties_{it} + \beta_3 (Attacks_{it} \times Casualties_{it}) + X'_{it}\gamma + \varepsilon_{it}, \quad (4)$$

[17]Casualties among civilians occurred only within the period of 1958–1963. Hence, the election year fixed effects absorb the associated coefficient.

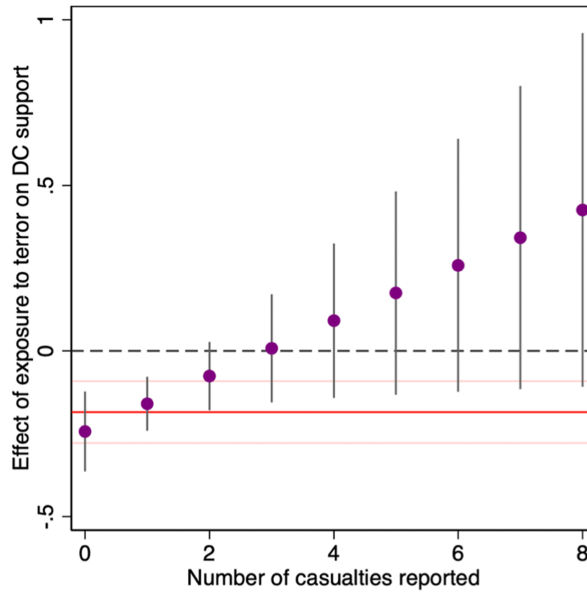


FIGURE 8 Marginal effects of terror exposure on the government party support
Notes: The graph reports the point estimates of the marginal effects of terror exposure on the DC support for various values of casualties reported. Vertical spikes mark the 95% level of confidence. The thick red horizontal line marks the estimated average treatment effect (as reported in column 1 of Table 3). Thin red lines depict the 95% level upper and lower bounds of the average treatment effect. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

where the variable $Casualties_{it}$ is the number of injuries and deaths recorded in the period t in the municipality i.[18] The remainder of the regression items are the same as shown in Equation (1): reg, including ε_{it}, which is the error term clustered at the municipality level. My interest relies on β_3, the net effect of casualties on voting (or the net effect of terror exposure).

Estimates are reported in column 5. Interestingly, although the direct effect of terror exposure (β_1) is negative and precisely estimated, the direct effect of casualties (β_2) becomes insignificant; β_3 is, however, positively estimated, indicating that casualties moderate the negative effect due to a higher level of exposure to terrorist attacks. This can be better appreciated in Figure 8, which displays the marginal effects of terror exposure on DC support for various values of the casualties reported. When no casualty is reported, the estimated effect of terror is negative and larger than the average treatment effect (red horizontal line) is. The magnitude of the effect shrinks when more casualties are reported. Importantly, the effect becomes positive when a large number of casualties are reported (although estimated imprecisely), suggesting the emergence of glue-like momenta in more deadly periods.

Finally, column 6 examines whether the effect of terrorism varies according to the attacks' material target. The regression includes the number of (*i*) attacks aimed at destroying electric pylons and damaging the overhead power line; (*ii*) attacks designed to damage the railway line, which connects the region with the rest of Italy; (*iii*) attacks against police stations and patrols; (*iv*) attacks against monuments and symbols of the Italian collective memory; (*v*) attacks aimed at ruining and destroying popular housing buildings; and (*vi*) attacks against private targets (such as houses and vehicles) and service providers that civilians generally visit (such as banks and churches). Estimates are also illustrated graphically in panel (*b*) of Figure 7 and reveal that attacks that put civilians' lives in danger, such as attacks against private targets (the coefficient is −0.282, and it is statistically different from zero at the 1% level),

[18]Injuries and deaths are summed up in order here to increase the statistical power.

and those that generated substantial disruption to the population through long power outages in big areas, such as attacks against overhead power lines (the coefficient is −0.245, and it is statistically significant at the 5% level) were the most effective in undermining the DC's electoral power. The effect is also negative yet not statistically significant when the attacks hit popular houses, one of the symbols of the Italian settlement strategy in the region. The effect is rather positive (although it is not significantly different from zero) after attacks were conducted against symbols of the Italian collective memory. Finally, I find no effect when attacks damaged the Brenner railway line, causing delays or service interruptions for the remainder of Italy, or when attacks targeted police stations or patrols, possibly as a net effect of the numbers of injuries and deaths estimated in column 3.

4.5 | The Italian-speaking group margin

Another important source of heterogeneity is the intensity of the Italian-speaking population. One may expect the reaction to terror to be greater in areas with more Italian-speaking members. For this reason, I replicate the specification reported in column 2 of Table 3 by interacting the dummies on terror intensity with the share of Italian-speaking members in the total population. Marginal effects for various shares are illustrated in Figure 9, where a higher presence of Italian-speaking members is represented by darker shades of green. The effect of low- as well as high-intensity periods on the DC vote share is relatively stable; it is mostly zero for the former and negative for the latter, irrespective of the Italian presence. Conversely, I find that more Italian-speaking members translate into a sensible larger negative effect of mid-intensity periods.

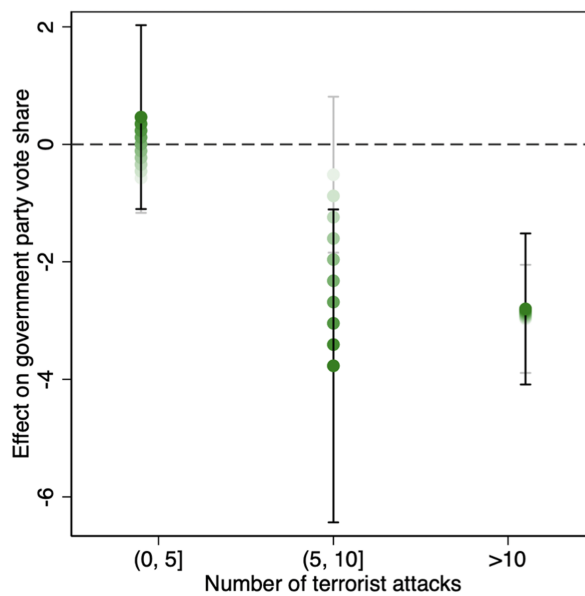


FIGURE 9 Marginal effects of terror exposure on the government party support for various shares of the Italian-speaking population

Notes: The graph reports the estimated marginal effects of being exposed to periods of a certain terror intensity on the government party support for various shares of the Italian-speaking population. The intensity of the share of the Italianspeaking population is captured through darker shades of green. Vertical whiskers mark the 95% level of confidence. For clarity, these are only reported for the minimum and maximum value of the distribution; that is, when the share is 0 (the whiskers are in light gray) and when the share is 0.9 (the whiskers are in black). [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

4.6 | Spatial and cultural spillovers

An attack may affect the region's entire population or propagate through geographically or culturally proximate areas. If this is correct, the above-described estimates would be biased. In Section B in the online Appendix, I therefore check the magnitude of the bias and the implications for my study. I check what the impact of terror is if one assumes that the entire population is concerned with it. To this aim, I recode data by assigning to a geographical proximate municipality the number of attacks committed in the neighboring one (Section B1). I find a null effect of terror. Next, I construct several indices of spatial proximity across the regional municipalities, and I check whether the closest areas are those affected mostly (Sections B1 and B2). Using an index that assigns little weight to the most distant areas, I find that the effect is negative in areas close to the locations of the attacks, and positive in the most distant ones. When I select only high-intensity periods, the latter effect vanishes (Section B3). Then, I check whether terror propagates through cultural proximate areas by assigning a higher weight to areas with larger shares of the Italian-speaking population (Section B4). I find that the estimated effect is negative (although statistically imprecise) only in areas with many Italian-speaking members. Finally, I combine the two propagation mechanisms in a full-fledged model (Section B5). I find that in areas spatially close to terror, the DC vote share drops; areas that are distant from the attacks increase DC support, but only where the presence of German speakers is predominant.

In sum, this analysis indicates that (*i*) the negative effect of terror on the share of DC votes survives only in very proximate areas spatially; (*ii*) such an effect propagates through more distant areas when one examines high-intensity events; and (*iii*) the effect is positive in areas far from the attack locations, but only in those locations where German-speaking members are prevalent.

4.7 | Further analyses

The online Appendix provides further analyses that validate my study. Section C corrects standard errors for spatial dependence (Colella et al., 2019; Conley, 1999). I find that the estimated coefficients' statistical precision is only marginally affected. Section D tests for whether the effect is concentrated in specific areas of the region or in the biggest centers. I do not find evidence of any geographical concentration of the effect; likewise, the estimated coefficients are relatively stable when the first and fourth deciles of the distribution of the population are excluded one-by-one. More demanding tests (e.g., excluding the fourth quartile, or keeping it only) make the effect statistically imprecise; however, the sign of the coefficients remains as expected. Section E checks for whether the effect is robust for the inclusion of a time trend. Neither the inclusion of a linear trend nor of a quadratic one, nor of a polynomial one of order 3, changes the estimated effect of terror on DC support. Finally, Section F tests whether persistence in the political attitudes explains the reduction in DC support. To this aim, I estimate a panel data model through a GMM estimator, which instruments the lagged level of the DC vote share using the past lags of the dependent variable (Arellano & Bond, 1991). This analysis suggests that part of the effect of terror is due to the erosion of the view of the government that voters developed over the years; still, the focal effect remains large and statistically significant.

5 | EVIDENCE FROM OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES AND VOTER TURNOUT

The analysis conducted above indicates that the government party lost voter support after terrorist attacks---support that was partially recovered when attacks were particularly violent so as to cause casualties. An important aspect is which party gained (or lost) from terrorism, or whether violence prompted a high (or low) turnout. In this section, I attempt to shed light on this question.

5.1 | Impact on SVP support

I start examining the effects of terrorism on the ethnic catchall German-speaking party---the *Südtiroler Volkspartei*, SVP. This analysis is of great importance for better understanding the terrorism that regional autonomy motivates. As explained earlier, the SVP was systematically accused of being the terrorists' political leg. This circumstance allows me to test whether a higher level of exposure to terrorism or specific types of attacks were effective means for buying popular support for the national cause. Therefore, I use the same regression framework with the SVP vote share as the outcome.

Regression estimates are reported in Table A4 in the online Appendix. Column 1 presents the estimate of the effect of an additional terrorist attack on SVP support (as in Equation 1). The estimated coefficient is near zero and is statistically insignificant. Column 2 reports the estimates of the nonlinear impact of terrorism captured by dummies for various levels of intensity (as in Equation 2). Also, in this case, I find that very-high-intensity periods (more than 10 attacks), high-intensity periods (more than five attacks), and low-intensity periods (at least one attack) do not have statistically different impacts compared with periods with no attacks (the baseline category).[19]

Next, I add the numbers of injuries and deaths reported (as in Equation 3). The estimates are presented in column 3. Although injuries have a null effect, killings are associated with a drop in SVP support. When we open the boxes that these two variables represent, distinguishing by victim (column 4), I find that both deaths from terrorists and police forces have negative impacts on the SVP vote share. Conversely, I find that injuries from police forces have a negative signed effect (possibly because they typically occur in highly life-threatening attacks), whereas those involving civilians are statistically insignificant. In column 5, I proceed by disentangling the direct effect of terror exposure from that which the occurrence of casualties mitigates, using Equation 4 and the SVP vote share as the outcome. I also compute the marginal effects, which are displayed in Figure 10 for various values of reported casualties. As one can see, unlike the average treatment effect, which is marked by the red horizontal line in the graph (see also column 1 of Table A4), the effect of attacks where no injuries or deaths were reported is positive and statistically significant. The point estimation is 0.148 (standard error = 0.072). The effect of a standard deviation increase in the number of attacks (standard deviation = 1.342) is therefore 0.20 percentage points, which accounts for 1.25% of the SVP vote share standard deviation. As the number of casualties reported increases, the effect becomes null first, then negative for high numbers of injuries and deaths. For example, I estimate an effect of −0.968 when eight casualties are reported---a drop in votes that accounts for 8.11% of the SVP vote share standard deviation.

Finally, column 6 investigates whether specific types of attacks drive the vote change. Relative to peaceful periods, the occurrence of attacks targeting overhead power lines has a positive and statistically significant (at the 5% level) effect on SVP support. Conversely, I find that the occurrence of attacks on railways, or those aimed at destroying Italian-group monuments are associated with a reduction in the SVP vote share (although the second coefficient is imprecisely estimated). I do not find particular patterns in votes behind attacks on private targets, police stations, and popular houses.

5.2 | Impact on MSI support

According to recent studies, terrorism is an important leverage for extreme right voting (e.g., Berrebi & Klor, 2008; Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014). In this section, I examine the evolution of the vote share of an extreme-right political party, the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), and I test how this evolution is associated with exposure to terrorism.

[19]Figure A2 in the online Appendix illustrates how the effect of being exposed to periods of a certain level of terror intensity varies according to the share of the Italian-speaking population. As one can see, in areas where the German-speaking population is predominant, low- and mid-low-intensity periods do not affect the SVP vote; however, the party experienced considerable gains in high-intensity periods. In these periods, the SVP lost votes in areas that the Italian-speaking population predominantly inhabited.

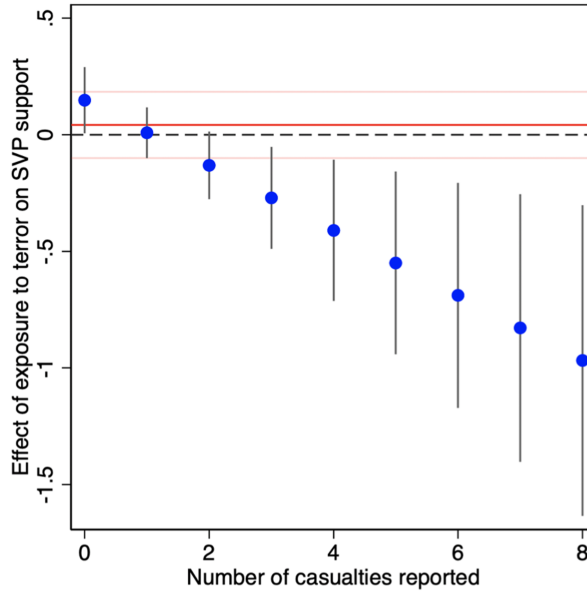


FIGURE 10 Marginal effects of terror exposure on the SVP support
Notes: The graph reports the estimated marginal effects of terror exposure on the SVP support for various values of casualties reported. Vertical spikes mark the 95% level of confidence. The thick red horizontal line marks the estimated average treatment effect (as reported in column 1 of Table A4). Thin red lines depict the 95% level upper and lower bounds of the average treatment effect. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Estimation results are presented in Table A5 in the online Appendix. Column 1 shows a positive (statistically significant at the 10% level) estimate of β_1 when the share of votes that the MSI party secured is employed in the left-hand side of Equation 1. This result thus corroborates previous findings in the literature by indicating that voters who punished the government party shifted their ballots to the extreme-right party. The effect is also relevant. The point estimation is 0.064. This means that the effect of a standard deviation increase is 0.086 percentage points (i.e., 0.064 times 1.342), explaining a shift of 3.8% in the sample period standard deviation in the vote share that the MSI achieved between 1953 and 1992.

Interestingly, when we move to a nonlinear estimation of the effect of terrorism (as formalized in Equation 2), I find that periods of intense terrorist activity drove the increase in the number of votes that the extreme-right party obtained (i.e., between five and 10 attacks occurring). Specifically, in periods featuring five to 10 attacks, the MSI vote share is 2.108 percentage points larger than it is in peaceful periods (column 2). However, when terrorism reached higher peaks (i.e., periods with more than 10 attacks), this difference is null.[20]

When I also include the number of casualties (column 3), I find that the extreme-right party did not gain support after injuries or deaths in the attacks were reported. The estimation of β_2 is indeed not statistically significant and is close to zero, relative to the size of the standard errors. This may suggest that the channel through which the rally effect emerged was the political concordance within the entire political community (Brody & Shapiro, 1989, 1991). This is corroborated by the analysis performed in column 4, where we add the number of casualties victim-by-victim. Although periods of intense terrorist activity still exert a positive effect on MSI support, injuries among civilians are

[20]In Figure A3 in the online Appendix I further show how the gain during periods of mid-intensity is considerable in areas where the Italian-speaking population is predominant.

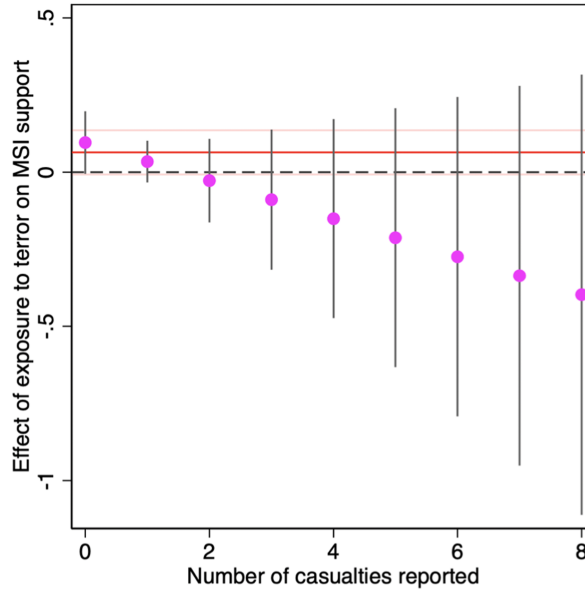


FIGURE 11 Marginal effects of terror exposure on the MSI support
Notes: The graph reports the estimated marginal effects of terror exposure on the MSI support for various values of casualties reported. Vertical spikes mark the 95% level of confidence. The thick red horizontal line marks the estimated average treatment effect (as reported in column 1 of Table A5). Thin red lines depict the 95% level upper and lower bounds of the average treatment effect. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

conducive to a sensible reduction. In column 5, I run a fully saturated regression, where the number of attacks and the number of casualties also enter in a multiplicative way (as in Equation 4). The interaction term coefficient is negative as expected; however, the estimate is statistically imprecise. The inspection of the marginal effects, however, reveals that the impact of terrorism is positive only for attacks with no casualties reported (Figure 11). As attacks brought forward injuries and deaths, the effect became null first and then positive, although it was not statistically different from zero. This may indicate that after deadly attacks, MSI members set aside their disagreement with the government's policies in an attempt to find a solution to the South Tyrolean question.[21]

Finally, in column 6, I check whether specific types of attacks triggered the positive effect of terror on the MSI vote share. In line with results shown in column 4, I find that attacks against private targets are behind the extreme-right party's gains.

5.3 | Comparing the impacts of terrorism among the DC, SVP, and MSI

In Figure 12, I offer a comparison of the effects of terrorism on the three above-analyzed parties' vote shares. I start from panel (*a*), which reports the estimated effects of the number of injuries by victim on the DC vote share (purple dots), SVP vote share (blue dots), and MSI vote share (magenta dots). These are the estimated coefficients presented in column 3 of Table 3, column 4 of Table A4, and column 4 of Table A5, respectively. The graph provides a sense of

[21]These findings are in line with the study in David et al. (2018), which indicates that the scale affects the impact on right-wing voting.

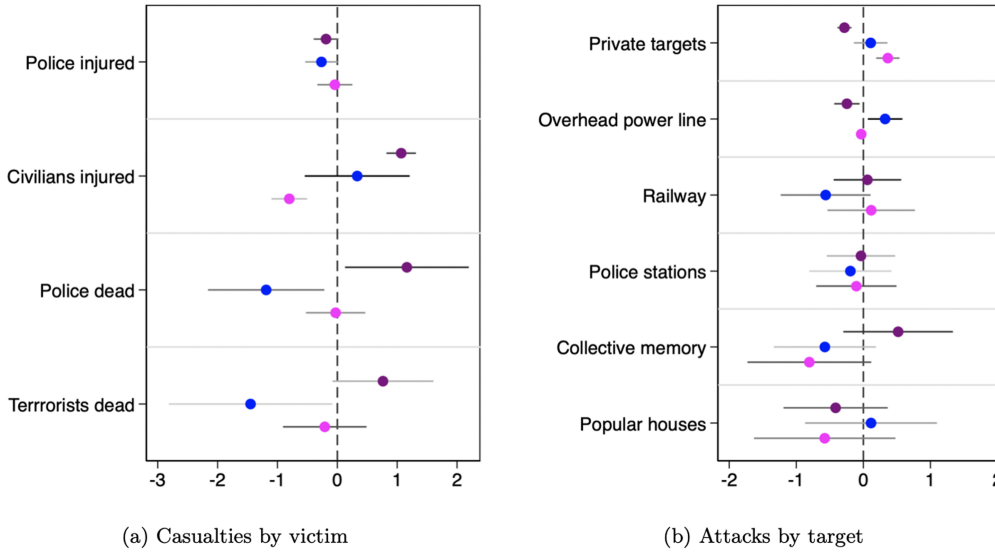


FIGURE 12 Heterogeneous effects of terrorist attacks on DC, SVP, and MSI support
Notes: The graph illustrates the estimated heterogeneous effects of casualties (panel *a*) and attacks (panel *b*) on the three main parties' vote shares. Purple dots mark point estimations using DC vote share as the outcome (these estimates are also reported in columns 3 and 4 of Table 3). Blue dots mark point estimations using SVP vote share as the outcome (these estimates are also reported in columns 4 and 5 of Table A4). And magenta dots mark point estimations using MSI vote share as the outcome (these estimates are also reported in columns 4 and 5 of Table A5). Thus, the estimated effects are obtained by controlling for the dummies indicating the intensity of the exposure to terror, the number of inhabitants, and the share of Italian speakers. Horizontal spikes mark the 95% confidence level. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

the shift in votes between these parties when particular casualties occurred during terrorist acts. A clear pattern emerges from its inspection. Deaths are associated with a sensible drop in support for the SVP party. This is evidence of a constraint that the electorate on terrorists' activities posed (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007). The DC, however, increased its vote share following killings in what was likely a rally effect (e.g., Chowanietz, 2011). I do not find particular effects on extreme-right voters.

Injuries prompted a heterogeneous pattern even within a party electorate. Injuries against civilians also substantially increase support for the government party; This time, however, I do not find evidence of terrorists' punishment from SVP voters; votes come, at least in part, from MSI voters who set aside hatred to unify around the Italian flag when they felt the threat of terror. When police officers are, again, the target of terror, I do not find any particular reaction from the latter group of voters. However, I find evidence of a reduction in support for both the DC and SVP. The interpretation is clearly different. Although the former likely signals an ineffective state capacity to fight terrorism (e.g., Berrebi & Klor, 2008; Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014; Peri et al., 2020), the latter, again, signals the German-speaking electorate strategy for setting a constraint in the terrorists' activity.

The pattern is less straightforward when it comes to the impacts of various types of attacks (panel *b* of Figure 12). Still, interesting findings emerge. Attacks against overhead power lines, for example, represented a victory for terrorists, as SVP support increased, and the DC was punished. This is because these attacks signaled the government's incapacity to respond to repeated attacks of the same kind. SVP voters did not particularly appreciate attacks against Italian monuments, and Italian-speaking ones who unified around the government particularly felt them. Finally, attacks against private targets were events that favored the extreme-right party strategy, determining a shift in votes from the government party.

5.4 | Changes in the voter turnout

I finally inspect the effects of terror on voter turnout. Prior works have shown that terror is an important determinant of political participation, as terror can make political participation more salient in light of an increasing threat to their lives (Balcells & Torrats-Espinosa, 2018; Robbins et al., 2013). I find mild evidence for South Tyrol terrorism. As reported in column 1 of Table A6, the estimated effect of an additional attack is positive yet statistically insignificant. High-scale terror events seem, however, to have triggered participation (column 2), particularly with injuries among civilians and deaths among police officers (column 4). Casualties generally exert a positive effect on participation (column 5): attacks with high numbers of casualties have a positive and statistically significant effect on turnout (Figure A4). Finally, I do not find particular patterns when inspecting various types of attacks (column 6).

6 | CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the prominent attention received from scholars, policy makers can barely rely on clear predictions about terrorism's electoral effects. On the one hand, the literature has focused on international terrorism, overlooking a myriad of terrorist wars combated domestically. This has generated a statistical bias in the conclusions one may derive from data due to the artificial truncation of these events' distribution. On the other hand, terrorist attacks differ prominently from one another. Thus, to understand the effects of terror, one needs to examine the peculiar features of each institutional context. This makes it complicated to generate quick, operational predictions to fight terrorism. This paper takes advantage of a unique historical setting capable of generating information on various types of terrorist attacks. Despite relying on a specific case, the frequency of the attacks and the length of the terrorist period generate considerable variation in the terror intensity and violence between electoral sub-periods. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to be able to leverage substantial statistical power to examine the heterogeneous electoral implications of terror within a unifying framework.

Two important indications emerge from this analysis. First, my results indicate that voters punish the government party when terror causes disruption or signals insecurity through intense periods of attacks. However, they unite around the government when terror becomes particularly violent, causing killings and seriously threatening civilians' lives. In such a way, my study helps to reconcile two seemingly contradictory electoral implications of terrorist attacks on government support. Second, my study lends weight to a wealth of qualitative research that has examined the effects of domestic terror on support for ethno-nationalist terrorists, such as the IRA or ETA. Frequent attacks signal a weak state capacity and buy support; however, violence and deaths induce people to distance themselves from terrorists. The digitalization of the historical archives and the release of previously unexplored historical data should provide the opportunity to further improve our understanding of the implications of terrorism in the future. This is especially true in regions such as Northern Ireland, the Basque Countries, Corsica, or Catalonia, where similar domestic wars of attrition were fought for more autonomy between the terrorists and the state.

The fact that part of the population deems terrorists worthy of support is important to remark and to further explore in future research. Countermeasures to respond effectively to ethno-nationalist terrorists should be designed in a different way compared with those put in action for fighting international terrorists. States cannot rely only on the use of force but should instead deploy other means, including a forward-looking political view capable of overcoming past tensions. In this respect, South Tyrol is a case that eventually proved to be successful. The question was highly debated in the Italian Parliament for decades, typically with punitive and uncompromising tones; it was resolved only when a vast majority emerged that stably recognized the region's specificity as well as the right to self-determination within a highly inclusive institutional setting.[22] In other words, major concessions and identity recognition were critical to stopping terrorism in South Tyrol.

[22]See, in particular, Steininger (2003) on the factors that made South Tyrol a successful example of the peaceful coexistence of various language groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Open Access Funding provided by Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo within the CRUI-CARE Agreement.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available at https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ks077f43uk6id6y/AABykaeeStvYUy7CYKpwIjeka?dl=0.

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How to cite this article: Belmonte, A. (2022). Punishing or rallying 'round the flag? Heterogeneous effects of terrorism in South Tyrol. *Kyklos*, *75*(4), 536–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/kykl.12311