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The effects on political orientation**

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What's left after right-wing extremism? The effects on political orientation*

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Abstract

Does radical right political violence favour or hinder public support for right-wing stances? Numerous existing studies have demonstrated that Islamic terrorism provokes a conservative shift, increases nationalism and induces negative sentiments towards immigration. However, little is known about the consequences of far-right terrorism, despite its incidence in Western societies. We leverage four waves of the British Election Study (BES) and use a quasi-experimental design to analyse individual political orientations shortly before and after terrorist attacks. We find that respondents distance themselves from the ideology associated with the perpetrator and shift away from ideological positions at the right end of the political spectrum. Furthermore, respondents are less likely to report nationalistic attitudes and immigration skepticism, core tenets of extremist right-wing political ideologies. Our findings suggest that the characteristics of the perpetrators and their driving goals are crucial factors shaping the impact of terrorism on public sentiments.

Keywords: Far-right extremism; terrorist attacks; political opinion; political ideology; quasi-experimental design.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, radical right parties have secured increasing public support in many advanced democracies and gained electoral ground, following political campaigns that exploited public anxieties around globalization and migration (e.g., Norris and Inglehart, 2019). At the same time, several countries have experienced political violence motivated by extremist right-wing ideologies (Piazza, 2017; Ravndal, 2018). Whereas these two phenomena are certainly distinct – and radical right parties use conventional democratic means to influence politics whereas extremists openly reject democracy (Mudde, 2007; Ravndal, 2018) – violence on the right often intersects with traditional politics. For one, the two groups embrace the same rhetoric characterized by frustration with the political establishments, support for authoritarian values, concerns about a dilution of national identity, as well as prejudice and intolerance towards ethnic and racial minorities (Mudde, 2007; Ravndal, 2018).¹

Although political activists seldom engage in actual violence and often condemn violent methods (Bjørge and Gjelsvik, 2017), little is known about the extent to which radical right political violence favours or hinders public support for the ideas they advance. Extremist individuals engaging in such activities often believe that their views are enjoying growing social legitimacy and acceptance (Perliger, 2017); and far-right movements express anti-immigrant and culturally protectionist positions that are often popular among moderate sectors of the electorate and promoted by mainstream conservative parties (Van Spanje, 2010; Wagner and Meyer, 2017; Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2018).

We ask whether right-wing terrorism affects political orientation and the support for ideas that are shared to varying degrees by conservative parties. Recent studies have investigated

¹The 2020 Hanau shooting in Germany, when nine people were killed by a far-right extremist, illustrates this point. Officials of the far-right Alternative for Germany party issued a formal condemnation of the murders. At the same time, they suggested that it was to be expected that, thanks to Angela Merkel’s refugee policies, a native German one day would “flip out” and commit a violent crime (FT, 23/02/2020).

how terrorism affects public opinion and have demonstrated that terrorist incidents lead to more support for right-wing parties (see, e.g., Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Aytac and Çarkoğlu, 2019). Yet, with the exception of studies on the 2011 terrorist attack in Norway (e.g., Fimreite et al., 2013; Jakobsson and Blom, 2014; Solheim, 2018), they have largely focused on Islamist extremism or assumed homogeneity in the characteristics of perpetrators and in their driving goals.

The perpetrators of radical right violence often express ideas that are becoming prevalent within some sectors of the wider society. If anything, diluted or more moderate versions of their driving ideology are shared by some segments of the public, such as a decreasing tolerance towards immigration or increasing concerns for the protection of national identities (Colantone and Stanig, 2018). Yet, there is an important moral dimension associated with violence; that is, its incompatibility with the values and needs of the general population. Violent tactics make it more likely that movements and political actors are perceived as unreasonable by citizens, who identify less with, and ultimately support less, the very ideas they promote (Simpson et al., 2018). Violence is particularly unlikely to resonate well in democracies, even when some of the demands may be considered legitimate by a segment of the society (Muñoz and Anduiza, 2019).² As such, negative views of the attack may lead people to dissociate not only from the terrorist, but also from their ideas (Jakobsson and Blom, 2014; Solheim, 2018). This simple argument leads to the theoretical expectation that *right-wing extremism pushes the public to distance itself from the attack and the perpetrator and thus makes it less likely to support far-right ideologies.*

We investigate whether right-wing extremism affects citizens' political orientation in the UK, an interesting and timely case study as a third of all terror plots since 2017 were driven

²In Appendix A.1, we offer additional theoretical insights on how radical right terrorist attacks contribute to affecting political ideologies.

by extreme-right causes.³ In December 2016, the UK Home Secretary proscribed the first extreme right-wing group, National Action, under the Terrorism Act 2000 (UK Home Office, 2018). And in 2019, “extreme right-wing” terrorism has been included in official threat-level warnings for the first time.⁴ We leverage four waves of the British Election Study (BES) and employ a quasi-experimental approach that exploits the occurrence of an unexpected event (terrorism) during the fieldwork of a survey to assign respondents into treatment and control groups as good as randomly (Muñoz et al., 2020). We complement this strategy by exploiting the panel dimension of the data, and control for individual baseline information to further address issues of unobserved confounding factors and differential response rates (Nussio, 2020).

We focus on two well-known incidents that were incited by extreme-right propaganda: the 2016 murder of MP Jo Cox by a 53-year-old gardener with far right views and links to British and American far-right political groups; and the 2017 Finsbury Park attack, when Muslim worshippers were attacked in north London by a man influenced by the propaganda of far-right anti-Muslim organizations, such as the English Defence League.⁵

We find that exposure to far-right terrorism shifts citizens’ ideological positions away from the ‘right’ ideology; that is, following these incidents, individuals are less likely to place themselves at the right end of the political spectrum. We also show that respondents are less likely to report nationalistic attitudes that have been shown to affect radical right voting, such as national identification and immigration skepticism (Rydgren, 2008; Lubbers and Coenders, 2017). This result suggests that there are some genuine shifts in the underlying at-

³Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/19/fastest-growing-uk-terrorist-threat-is-from-far-right-say-police>

⁴Available online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/far-right-terror-warning-uk-islamist-security-threat-attack-a9017296.html>

⁵Appendix A.2 offers background material on the two incidents and discusses the framing of the attacks and how politicians reacted to the incidents.

itudes typically associated with far-right electoral support, to the extent that these attitudes are less prone to social desirability bias. To lend further credibility to our causal claims, we implement the Muñoz et al. (2020)’s best practices in the form of falsification tests, placebo treatments, and several other sensitivity and robustness checks, and the results carry over.

2 Data and Methodology

We employ individual-level data from the British Election Study (BES) – an internet panel survey with a stratified random probability sample of citizens living in England, Scotland, and Wales. BES includes questions about the respondents’ socio-demographic attributes and political preferences, as well as questions designed to capture their attitudes on key issues, such as immigration and national identity. Exploiting information from the survey waves that coincide with terrorist attacks allows us to examine the causal effect of terrorism on people’s responses based on an ‘Unexpected Event during Survey Design’ (UESD, Muñoz et al., 2020).⁶ Our identification strategy relies on the assumption that the timing of attacks is exogenous (unexpected) and largely randomly assigned relative to that of the interviews, and thus individuals interviewed after the attack can be defined as the ‘treatment’ group whereas those interviewed before the attack can be defined as the ‘control’ group.

We consider two terrorist attacks that were motivated by far-right extremism: the murder of MP Jo Cox (16 June 2016) and the Finsbury Park attack (19 June 2017). Both attacks overlapped with recent BES waves (8 and 13, respectively) and received widespread coverage in national media outlets, which makes them particularly salient and impactful.⁷ The latter

⁶The UESD shares some properties with other research designs commonly used in social sciences, such as the Regression Discontinuity Design, the Interrupted Time Series design, or event studies. At the same time, it has a range of unique features and particularities that warrant some specific methodological considerations. For further discussion on this, please see Muñoz et al. (2020).

⁷Figure B.1 presents the spatial distribution of all terrorist attacks in Great Britain from 2006 to 2018, whereas Figure B.2 provides a timeline of the two sampled attacks in relation to their survey waves. Note

ensures that, regardless of where each attack occurred, individuals from all over the UK were potentially exposed to them. Indeed, as captured by Google Trends (Figure 1), the relative search volume for the term ‘terrorism’ went drastically up 24 to 48 hours after the two attacks, suggesting a notable nationwide interest in these events.⁸ The similar patterns of the relative search volume for the term ‘far right’ also indicate that the two attacks were correctly classified – and perceived by the large audience – as far-right terrorism.

[Figure 1 about here]

Our empirical model specification takes the following form:

$$\text{‘Right Orientation’}_{irw} = \gamma \text{‘Post-attack’}_{irw} + \delta \mathbf{Z}_{irw} + \lambda_{rw} + u_{irw} \quad (1)$$

where ‘Right Orientation’_{irw} is a binary indicator capturing ideological self-placement at the right end of the political spectrum (values 8 or more on the 0-10 left-right scale) for individual i , living in region (government office region) r , and interviewed in survey wave w ; ‘Post-attack’_{irw} is a binary indicator that takes value 1 if the individual was interviewed after the day of the attack, and 0 before the day of the attack;⁹ \mathbf{Z}_{irw} is a vector of variables that includes gender, age, age squared, level of education (low, medium, high) and employment status (employed, retired, student, and not working); λ_{rw} represents region-by-wave fixed effects; and, u_{irw} is an error term, clustered at the region level.¹⁰ Our parameter of interest, γ , measures the effect of terrorism on political orientation, with a negative value indicating that

that these were the only two ‘major’ far-right terrorist attacks that occurred between 2016 and 2019 and coincided with recent BES waves. As such, the choice of the two attacks is as random as their timing.

⁸As further evidence of the salience of the two attacks for the British public, we provide examples of national newspaper front pages covering the attacks (Figure B.3), and show that these incidents displaced attention from other key concerns and made individuals more likely to report terrorism as the top national problem (Figure B.4).

⁹To avoid measurement errors, we drop individuals who were interviewed on the same day of the attack.

¹⁰Our results persist when we use clustering at both the region level and the wave level.

exposure to terrorism drives the population away from a ‘right’ political stance. We employ short-range time windows before and after the attack (1-3 days’ bandwidths) to substantiate the as-if random treatment assignment assumption and to minimize the possibility of other events driving the estimated effects (Nussio et al., 2019).¹¹

An important identification concern is that our γ estimate captures pre-existing trends in political preferences, which are unrelated to the two terrorist attacks. To address this possibility, we focus on the sub-sample of survey participants who are interviewed twice (once during the attack’s survey wave and once more during the previous wave) and augment Eq. (1) with the lagged value of the dependent variable; that is, individuals’ right orientation as observed in the previous wave. This set-up enables accounting for the baseline level of our outcome variable (similar to a difference-in-differences design), and also controls for biases arising from the potential omission of unobserved characteristics (Nussio, 2020; Bove et al., 2021). This also means that our estimates are relatively more conservative as a lot of variation in the outcome variable is absorbed by the lagged value.

Figure 2 shows the share of respondents classifying themselves as ‘right’ (based on the definition above) before and after our sampled far-right terrorist attacks. A visual inspection of this figure provides some first evidence that, after this type of attacks, people are more likely to distance themselves from the ‘right’ ideology. We now turn to a more systematic analysis of the causal relationship.

[Figure 2 about here]

¹¹See Table B.1 for summary statistics and definitions of all variables included in Eq. (1), and Figure B.5 for histograms of the outcome variable.

3 Empirical Findings

3.1 Main results

Panel (a) of Figure 3 presents the results from estimating Eq. (1) using a linear probability model, based on 1, 2 and 3 days’ bandwidths; that is, when we compare individuals interviewed within 1 day, 2 days and 3 days after the attacks with those interviewed within 1 day, 2 days and 3 days before the attacks, respectively. The results confirm that exposure to far-right terrorism shifts citizens’ ideological self-placement away from the ‘right’ ideology. Specifically, the point estimates suggest that, after the attacks, ‘Right Orientation’ decreases by 0.02 to 0.04 points on a 0-1 scale; i.e., a decrease that amounts to 10% of the standard deviation of the variable. As expected, the estimates are less precisely estimated for the 1-day set-up due to the small sample size (low statistical power), which is one of the downsides of using very narrow bandwidths (Muñoz et al., 2020). For this reason, and also to account for the fact that the terrorism effect may take more than 24 hours to unfold, our inferences are based on the 2- and 3-days’ bandwidths. Panel (b) of Figure 3 investigates the sensitivity of these (baseline) results to excluding the control variables in vector \mathbf{Z}_{irw} , and to augmenting Eq. (1) with the lagged dependent variable (LDV). The effect of terrorism remains negative, statistically significant, and stable in size across specifications, which is quite reassuring as regards to biases arising from pre-existing trends and the omission of unobserved characteristics.¹²

[Figure 3 about here]

A threat to our identification strategy is that individuals with specific characteristics may respond to the survey at different points in time, and these characteristics may be predictive of the outcome. To further support our causal claims, we rely on entropy balancing to pre-

¹²See Tables B.4 and B.5 for the full regression results of Figure 3.

process the data and produce covariate balance between the treatment and control groups (Hainmueller, 2012).¹³ As shown in Figure 4, re-weighting the sample through entropy balancing produces very similar results as in Figure 3 (panel (b)).

[Figure 4 about here]

3.2 Further insights

Our *theoretical expectation* in Section 1 relies on the argument that individuals of right-wing ideology share some diluted versions of the same ideas promoted by far-right terrorists. As such, the (observed) terrorism-induced effect on ‘Right Orientation’ should be exclusively driven by individuals with broader right-wing positions. In order to test for this, we split the sample of respondents into a left-wing constituency and a right-wing constituency (values 0-4 and 6-10, respectively, on the left-right scale), and run the same regression set-up as in Eq. (1). To ensure that the results are not subject to post-treatment bias, we create the two groups based on information from the previous survey wave. The corresponding evidence, presented in Figure 5, lends support to the above interpretation: the treatment estimates for the right-wing constituency (panel (b)) are highly statistically significant and twice as large (compared to the baseline results), whereas those for the left-wing constituency (panel (a)) are very close to zero and fail to reach statistical significance.

[Figure 5 about here]

We next examine the impact of far-right terrorism on attitudes which are typically associated with far-right electoral support.¹⁴ To do so, we exploit information on the respondents’

¹³Table B.3 illustrates that this method corrects for all imbalances observed in our data (see Table B.2).

¹⁴According to a survey by ICM Research (Boon, 2010), the two main reasons given by respondents to explain their support for the British National Party are the party’s views of immigration and its interest in British people.

self-placement on a 1-7 ‘Britishness’ scale and their views towards immigration, as captured by their answers to ‘whether immigration enriches or undermines cultural life’, ‘whether immigration is good or bad for the economy’ and ‘whether the families of immigrants should be allowed (or not be allowed) to come to the UK’ – ranging from either 1 to 7 or 1 to 10, with higher values indicating more pro-immigration attitudes. We then construct four binary indicators of right orientation – taking value 1 for the top 25 percentile of the responses in the ‘Britishness’ question and the bottom 25 percentile of the responses in each one of the immigration questions – and run the same analysis as before.¹⁵ The corresponding results, reported in Figure 6, suggest that exposure to far-right terrorism does not only affect individuals’ self-positioning towards the right end of the political spectrum, but also makes them less likely to attest strong national identity and to report immigration scepticism.¹⁶ These results run counter to previous studies on how (Jihadi-inspired) terrorism generates negative perceptions of immigrants (see, e.g., Legewie, 2013; Böhmelt et al., 2019; Ferrín et al., 2020).¹⁷ Given the “tendency in academic scholarship, just as in popular discourse, to focus on negative attitudes towards immigrants” (Schwartz et al., 2019, p.18), our findings here highlight some of the conditions under which attitudes towards immigrants can actually become *less* hostile.

The results in Figure 6 can also address, *to some extent*, the possibility that our key outcome variable is susceptible to misreporting; i.e., survey participants falsify their preferences

¹⁵We do not control for the LDV, as the corresponding questions were not asked in the previous waves. Note that the effects persist when we employ composite measures based on the responses to all four questions (available in our replication files).

¹⁶Similar effects are obtained when we explore the treatment effect on citizens’ beliefs about traditional British values based on data from BES wave 13; see Figure B.6. Unfortunately, other questions that can be linked to extreme-right views (e.g., on ethnocentrism, authoritarianism and populist attitudes) are not available in the two waves of the attacks.

¹⁷Interesting, Van Hauwaert and Huber (2020) find that terrorism can promote patriotism and national solidarity without necessarily increasing out-group hostilities.

after the attacks to look as if they don't hold a far-right political identity. Even though it is not possible to distinguish between 'honest' and 'dishonest' answers – and rule out the possibility of social desirability being one potential mechanism¹⁸ – the fact that we find consistent effects across a range of different outcomes suggests that there are at least some genuine shifts in citizens' ideological stance following the attacks. This is also corroborated by the fact that we employ data from an online survey, a survey mode that has been shown to reduce social desirability bias in responses on sensitive topics compared to face-to-face interviews (Kreuter et al., 2008; Blinder et al., 2019).

Finally, one may ask whether exposure to far-right extremism can affect ideological scores through other channels. For instance, one may argue that, in the wake of the attacks, citizens move away from both extremes of the political spectrum and take more moderate positions – and thus converge towards more centrist attitudes. In Section C.1 of the Appendix, we experiment with alternative specifications of the outcome variable to test for the existence of other types of terrorism-induced shifts in political orientation. The estimates of 'Post-attack' fail to reach statistical significance when we employ a binary indicator capturing ideological self-placement at the left end of the political spectrum and when we consider the continuous version of the outcome variable based on the full left-right scale. This suggests that neither the effect is 'across-the-board' – i.e., far-right terrorism causing similar shifts within the entire political spectrum – nor there seems to be evidence of “deradicalization” with individuals on the left taking more moderate positions.

[Figure 6 about here]

¹⁸The very motivation to control prejudice can prevent underlying biases and stereotypes from shaping preferences and attitudes (Blinder et al., 2019). As nativist claims or immigration scepticism may face the same public scrutiny as far right political identities, one could argue that people are also less willing to reveal their true attitudes after the attacks.

3.3 Additional analyses and robustness checks

Appendix C presents additional analyses and robustness checks. In Section C.1, we show that our inferences do not change when ‘Right Orientation’ is re-coded to reflect more extreme right positions. In Section C.2, we employ the same empirical design to examine the impact of attacks motivated by Jihadi extremism. The results reinforce the argument that the two types of terrorism (far-right vs Jihadi-inspired) elicit changes in ideological positions in the opposite direction. In Section C.3, we explore the conditionality of the effects upon geographic distance. We find that the reported terrorism-induced shift in right orientation is relatively stronger for individuals living nearby targeted areas. In Section C.4, we re-estimate Eq. (1) separately for each of the two far-right attacks. In both cases, we find that individuals are less likely to report a ‘right’ ideological score after being exposed to an attack; even though the effects appear to be shorter-lived for the murder of MP Jo Cox (see also Appendix A.2 for a discussion). In Sections C.5 and C.6, we perform placebo tests based on alternative outcomes and alternative attack dates. None of the placebo tests return statistically significant estimates, providing further credibility to our results. Finally, in Sections C.7 and C.8, we show that the reported effects persist when we use a probit model, and when we employ matching techniques as an alternative approach to deal with imbalances in the treatment and control groups.

4 Conclusions

Does extreme right-wing terrorism cause ideological shifts? If so, in which direction? Given the incidence of far-right terrorism and the success of radical right parties and actors in many democracies, this research shows that far-right extremism does elicit changes in political views among the domestic audience but perhaps not in the expected direction: we find that far-right terrorism causes shifts away from ideological positions at the right end of the

political spectrum. At the same time, it does not affect the political orientation of individuals on the left. One popular theoretical perspective on how terrorism affects political beliefs is offered by the terror management theory. This theory predicts that death-related threats motivate individuals to seize upon whatever political ideology has served their needs in the past, be it liberal or conservative, thus reinforcing extant political beliefs. Our results do not seem to offer empirical support to this perspective.

As the general public has moral issues with violence tactics and is unlikely to justify violence, we argue that citizens are expected to be less likely (after the attacks) to support or identify with the goals of the perpetrator. As such, the use of violent tactics can erode the popular support for the ideology associated with the perpetrator of violence. If this is the case, citizens should also distance themselves from some of the core values of the perpetrators and their political views. As radical right-wing movements claim that non-native elements are threatening the homogeneity of the nation state, we show that terrorist violence can actually decrease nationalistic attitudes and trigger more tolerance, rather than more hostility, towards out-groups. Previous studies have usually focused on one attitude and shown that (Islamic) extremism benefits conservative parties, increase nationalism or leads to more negative attitudes towards immigration. We find effects in the the opposite direction, and following a far-right terrorist incident, respondents are more likely to voice political views in opposition of those of the perpetrator. In other words, far-right political violence leads to a relatively wide reduction in support for central right-wing extremist attitudes. Taken together, our results demonstrate that the characteristics of perpetrators and their driving goals cannot be ignored for a more nuanced understanding of the audience's reception and consequences of terrorist attacks.

Important avenues for future research can emerge out of our work. For one, the UK lacks a viable far-right party as the radical right has traditionally been associated with failure.¹⁹

¹⁹There is not even consensus among academics about the correct ideological label for the UK Indepen-

As this might point towards some sorts of uniqueness of the UK case, it would be interesting to investigate whether the results would be similar in countries with more successful far-right parties, like France or Germany. Our study suggests that far-right political violence could actually provoke positional shifts away from some of the most contentious political views associated with popular parties, such as the National Front in France. There are specificities to the UK case, as in all single-case studies, and we hope that future studies will be able to leverage a more extensive dataset and embed a quasi-experimental approach in a comparative design, so as to increase external validity.

dence Party (UKIP). For example, Mudde (2016) excludes UKIP from the family of “populist radical right” as UKIP’s core ideology does not contain the nativism used to define the group.

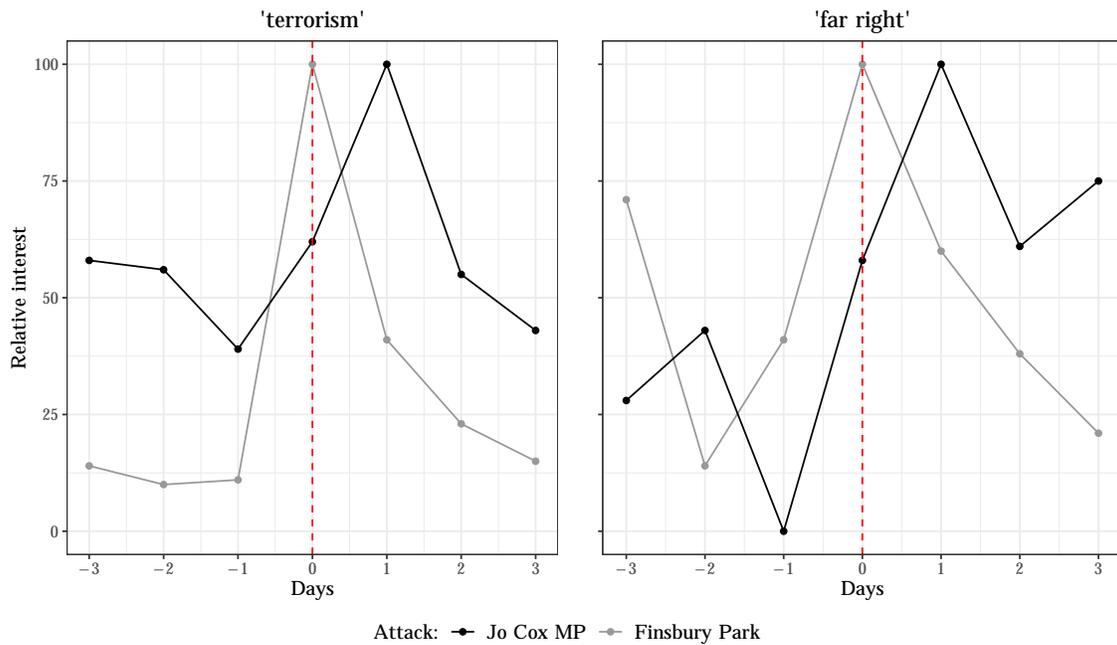
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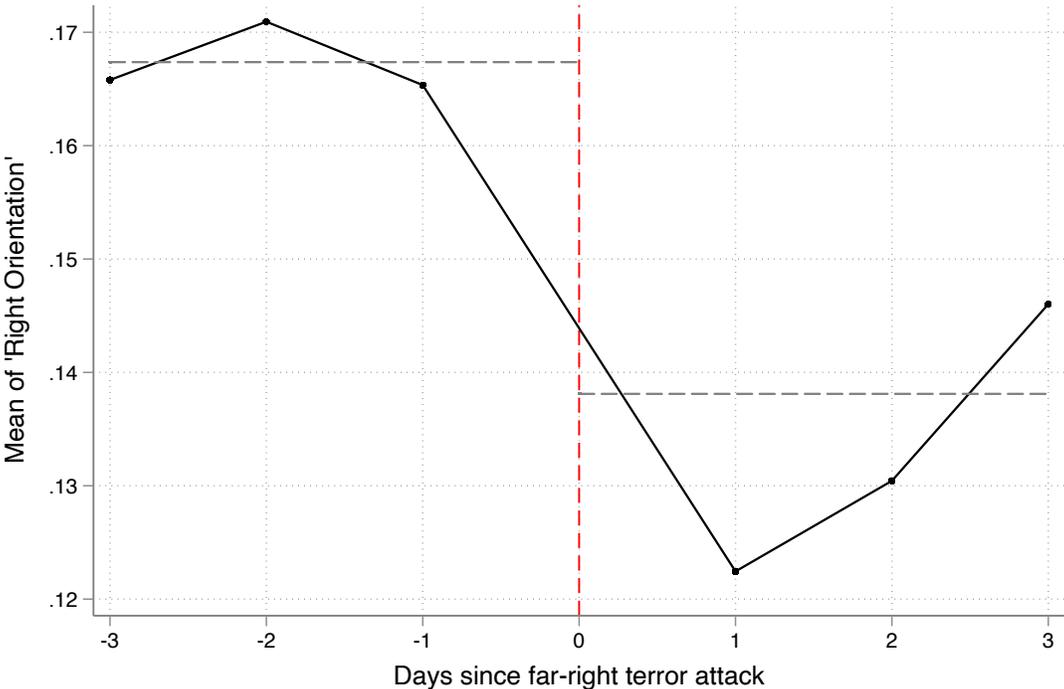
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Figure 1: Relative Google search volume



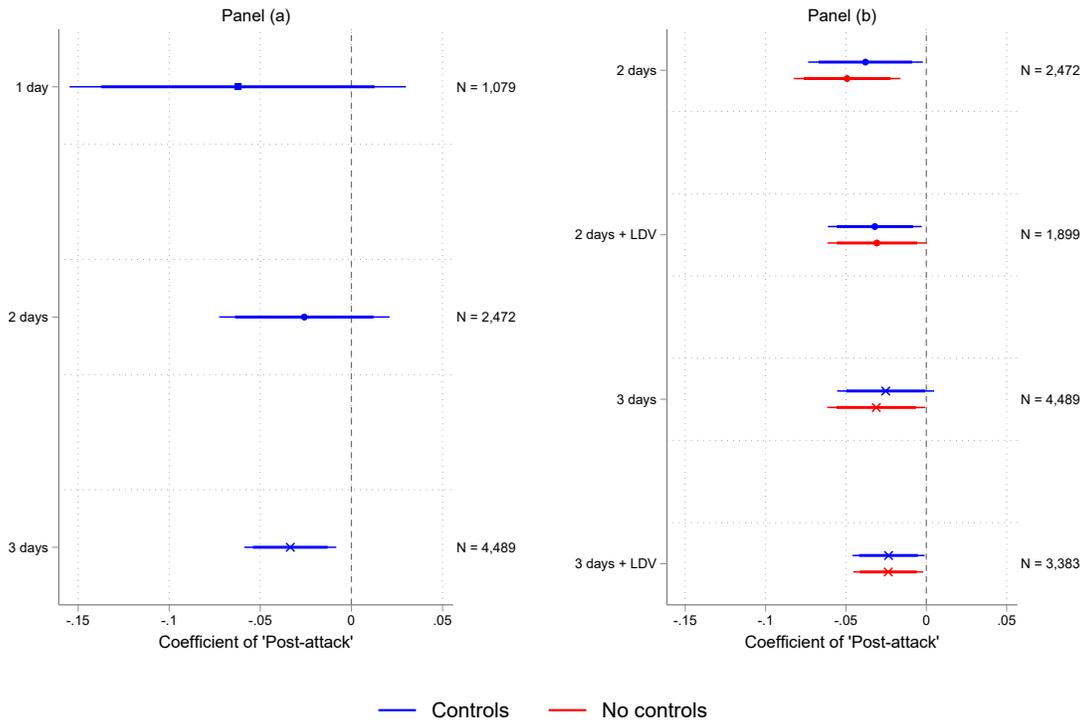
Notes: The figure reports Google Search intensity for the keywords 'terrorism' and 'far right' within the UK three days before and after each event. Relative interest is comparable within each keyword and attack. The day with the highest search intensity takes the value 100 and all other points in the series are relative to this value.

Figure 2: Share of respondents classifying themselves as 'right'



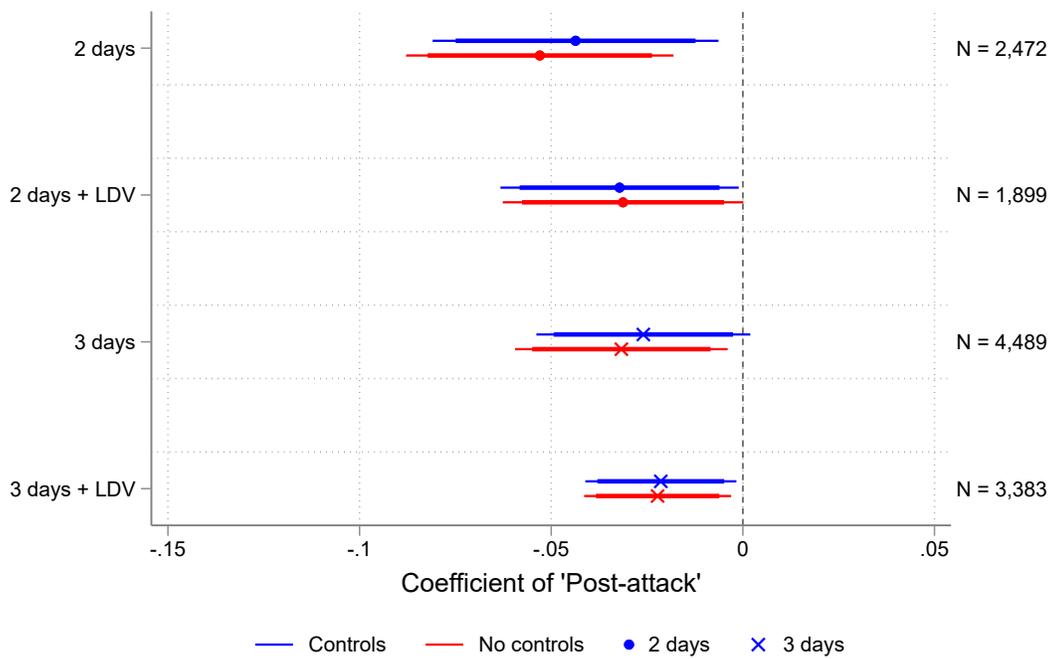
Notes: The figure reports the daily mean of 'Right Orientation' before and after the two sampled attacks.

Figure 3: The effect of far-right terrorism on people's right orientation



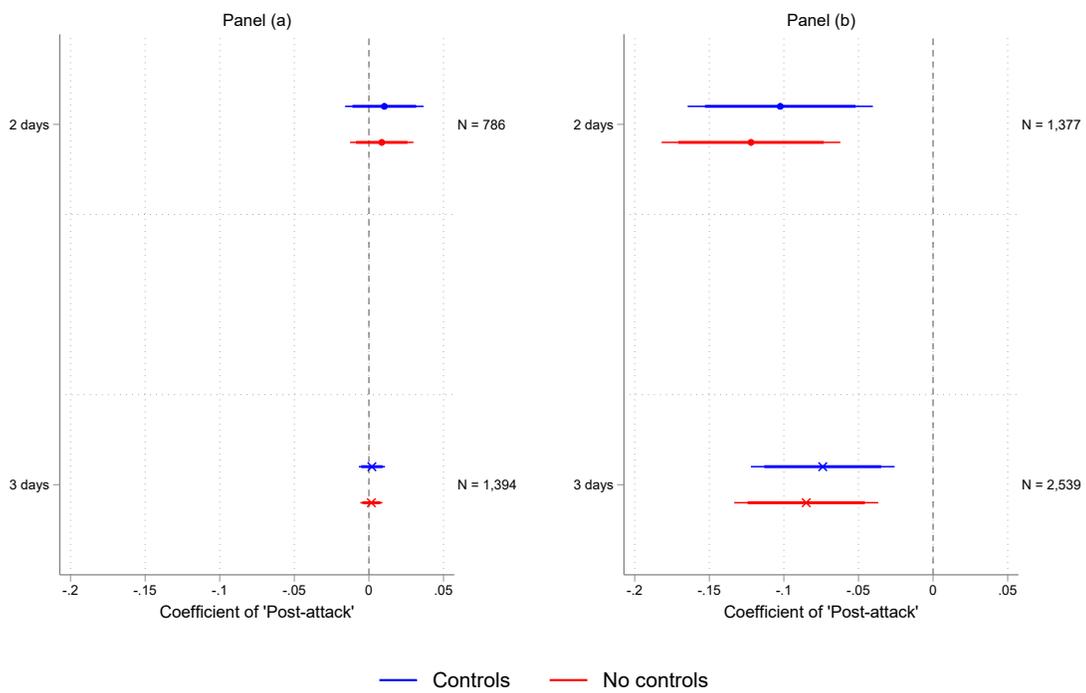
Notes: The dependent variable is 'Right Orientation'. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

Figure 4: Entropy balancing



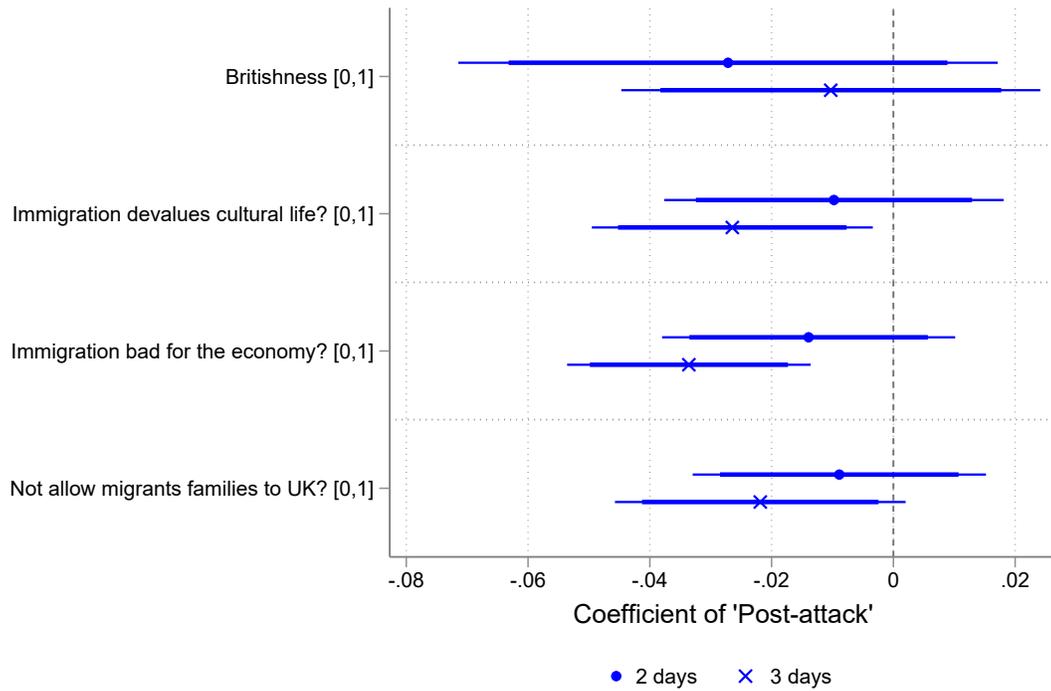
Notes: Estimates are balanced using entropy weights that match the mean, variance and skewness of covariates across the treatment and control units. See also notes of Figure 3.

Figure 5: The effect of far-right terrorism on people's right orientation: left-wing vs right-wing constituencies



Notes: Panel (a) shows the effects for the left-wing constituency (values 0-4 on the left-right scale) and panel (b) for the right-wing constituency (values 6-10 on the left-right scale). See also notes of Figure 3.

Figure 6: The effect of a far-right terrorism on people's perceived national identity and attitudes about immigration



Notes: The dependent variable is listed on the vertical axis. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects and controls. The 2-day (3-day) sample sizes (from top to bottom) are 2,014 (3,372); 4,095 (7,185); 4,056 (7,123); and 3,919 (6,881). Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

What's left after right-wing extremism? The effects on political orientation

APPENDIX

For Online Publication

A. Theoretical Insights

A.1 Terrorism and public attitudes

Terrorist attacks, committed by groups or single individuals, are a major source of public fear, and several studies have helped us make significant leaps in our understanding of how terrorist violence affects political ideology, tolerance, prejudice and support for non-democratic regulations (see, e.g., Huddy et al., 2005; Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Legewie, 2013; Hersh, 2013; Burke et al., 2013; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Birkelund et al., 2019; Ferrin et al., 2019; Aytac and Çarkoğlu, 2019; Larsen et al., 2020; Muñoz et al., 2020; Böhmelt et al., 2019; Belmonte, 2020). Yet, the bulk of extant studies have disproportionately focused on Islamic terrorism, which is one type of terrorist violence against civilians. Terrorism comes in different forms and, whereas left-wing or anarchist terrorism has been mostly active in the 1970s and 1980s – and it is now a rare occurrence – incidents of far-right terrorism have fast become a growing threat in the West. Emblematic events include the Norway attacks in July 2011 and the Christchurch mosque shootings in March 2019 in New Zealand; in both cases a right-wing extremist killed or injured more than 100 people. In addition to large-scale successful attacks with many victims, many countries recorded an increase in smaller-scale far-right terror plots that were foiled by security services.¹

The literature on terrorism and public opinion shows that right-wing parties receive a higher support in opinion polls following periods of more frequent and deadlier terrorist attacks (see, e.g., Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Economou and Kollias, 2015). This is because highly threatening situations encourage people to embrace political attitudes offering simple but cognitively rigid solutions to questions of security, and these solutions “are more likely to resonate with the cognitive and rhetorical styles of those on the political right than the left” (Jost et al., 2009, p.321). As a matter

¹Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-security/britain-foiled-22-attacks-since-march-2017-top-counter-terrorism-officer-says-idUSKCN1VU1YH>

of fact, fear of death and perceptions of a dangerous world are usually associated with the holding of broadly right orientations (Bonanno and Jost, 2006). Right-wing parties are also expected to possess an advantage in addressing security threats because they implement more stringent security policies or make fewer concessions to violent groups among other measures (Aytaç and Çarkoğlu, 2019).

Yet, these studies largely focus on Islamic terrorism which differs from far-right terrorism in many respects, in particular in the ideological aim of the perpetrators. According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), terrorism is “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation”.² As a result, the type of non-state actor perpetrating violence, and their political or religious goals, should contribute to how terrorism affects the audience and shapes public sentiments.

Although terms like “Jihadism”, “Jihadist” and Islamist are often applied inconsistently, Islamic terrorists are motivated by extreme interpretations of religious texts, and the main ideological tenets they elaborate include the imposition of Shari’a law via violent Jihad and the use of grievances affecting Muslims “aired in an overtly religious context” (LaFree et al., 2017, p.4). Far-right terrorism, on the other hand, cuts across a variety of religious and non-religious groups (LaFree et al., 2017), and is “motivated by various extremist right-wing political ideologies, including extreme nationalism, racism and white supremacy” (Piazza, 2017, p.52).³ Radical right violence also crucially intersects traditional politics as commonly ascribed motivations for violent right-wing extremism – such as economic grievances produced by a decline in manufacturing employment and societal changes leading to greater empowerment of racial minorities – are also associated with the success of populist right-wing parties (Piazza, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). As such, the very ideology underpinning the attack has important implications for our understanding of the effect of violence on public attitudes. Whereas Islamic or Jihadi-inspired terrorism is predominantly driven by religious motivation, right-wing terrorism is motivated by radical right *political* views, grounded in race-based identity, seeking to promote nationalism and endorsing its xenophobic form, “nativism”, which portrays non-native cultures as a threat to the homogeneity of nation-state populations (Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn et al., 2017). We expect this distinction to have important implications for the way terrorism shapes political ideology. Differences in

²Available online: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>

³Focusing on the target of violence, Ravndal (2018, p.47) argues that we can consider an attack as right-wing terrorism if the victims are individuals who belong to “a group predefined as an enemy or as unwanted by the far right”.

the identity of the perpetrators – and their predominant ideology – have largely been absent in the burgeoning quantitative literature on the impact of terrorism on public opinion.

Particularly important for this research, far-right terrorism has been portrayed by academics and commentators as the tip of a larger entity. The far right is often characterized by a large base of supporters (the base of the “iceberg”) who are usually engaged in low level violence (Perliger, 2012). At the same time, and more importantly, the act of violence is usually motivated by ideas that are becoming popular within the wider society and promoted by political parties.⁴ For example, the support for mono-culturalism national self-interest, the protection of national borders and the defence of national traditions against ethnic changes have gained currency among a large swath of the electorate in recent years (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). A non-negligible number of citizens have bought into the idea that refugees and immigrants increase the risk of terrorism (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Böhmelt et al., 2019; Nussio et al., 2019), while substantial portions of Western respondents in recent surveys agree that there is a fundamental clash between the values of their society and Islam.⁵ Moreover, as radical right parties constitute a fundamental challenge for established parties, their ideas are “contagious” and their success has led mainstream right parties to adopt anti-immigrant and culturally protectionist positions (Wagner and Meyer, 2017; Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2018).⁶ In fact, many conservative parties in Europe have co-opted the agenda of radical right parties by, e.g., embracing the definition of immigration as a national problem and increasingly addressing liberal-authoritarian issues (Van Spanje, 2010; Wagner and Meyer, 2017). In the 2019 general election, the former leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), Nigel Farage, went as far as to claim that the Tory manifesto resembled UKIP’s document in 2015 and included issues that he had campaigned on for years.⁷

Given the strong link between far-right terrorism and political alignment, we ask whether

⁴Case studies of right-wing terrorist violence suggest that many radical right extremists were at one point mentored, financed or involved with legitimate political parties and that initial contacts with the far-right ideology and the subsequent deepening of involvement were “facilitated by the fact that some of their ideas were shared by many representatives of the mainstream, or indeed discussed ‘down the pub’” (Pisoiu and Ahmed, 2016, p.176).

⁵Available online: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2019/02/03/westernmena-attitudes-religion-portray-lack-faith->

⁶As competition is not limited to the left-right dimension but also concerns cross-cutting issues, Abou-Chadi and Krause (2018) find that these reactions are not limited to the mainstream right.

⁷Available online: <https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/nigel-farage-tory-manifesto-is-copy-ukip-2015-manifesto-1321128>. Interestingly, a recent study finds that there are no differences between Tory members who voted Conservative and those who voted UKIP in 2015 on key issues, such as attitudes to non-EU immigration (Webb et al., 2017).

citizens, by dissociating from the attack and the use of violence more generally, distance themselves also from the core values of the perpetrator and their political views. As conservatives or individuals of right-wing ideology are likely to share some “diluted” or moderate versions of the same ideas promoted by far-right terrorists, we expect the attack to affect their political self-placement in a direction that dissociates themselves with this ideology.

Previous research has convincingly shown that Islamic terrorism attacks provokes positional shifts in reactionary and conservative directions (see, e.g., Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Economou and Kollias, 2015). We ask instead whether far-right terrorism can actually cause the opposite effect, thus decreasing conservatism and reducing the likelihood of reporting positions at the right end of the political spectrum.

A.2 Background material on the two attacks

We focus on two well-known incidents that were incited by extreme-right propaganda: the 2016 murder of MP Jo Cox and the 2017 Finsbury Park attack.

The British Member of Parliament, Jo Cox, was killed in the street in her constituency of Batley and Spen in Yorkshire, a week before the UK’s referendum on membership of the European Union (EU). She was assassinated by Thomas Mair, a 53-year-old white supremacist whose violent hatred extended to white people he deemed “collaborators”. In fact, investigators found evidence of extreme right-wing beliefs in Mair’s apartment and during a search of his online activities, which “showed him to be obsessed with the Nazis, notions of white supremacy and apartheid-era South Africa.”⁸ The attack was not immediately described in the context of a terrorist attack (see also figure B.3 for examples of newspaper front pages the day after the attack), although the media have later on depicted the perpetrator as a “far-right terrorist”.⁹ And while Mair was tried for murder, rather than terrorism, the persecutors said that Mair’s crimes were “nothing less than acts of terrorism” and the judge in his case made it clear, when delivering a whole life sentence, that he considered this to be a terrorist murder.

The attack caused a shock across Britain, leading to the suspension of campaigning for the Brexit referendum. Shortly after the incident, tributes were poured in for Jo Cox from across the political spectrum, including the Prime Minister David Cameron and the Labour

⁸Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-found-guilty-of-jo-cox-murder>

⁹Available online: Ibidem

party leader Jeremy Corbyn. Other party leaders also joined the tributes. Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish first minister, said Cox was a brilliant young MP just doing her job, while Nigel Farage, Member of the European Parliament, prominent Leave.EU campaigner and leader of the UK Independence Party, said that he was deeply saddened and offered his condolences.¹⁰ Following the incident, Union Flags on British public buildings, including the Palace of Westminster, Buckingham Palace, and 10 Downing Street, were flown at half mast.

As the man who murdered Cox later in the day shouted “Britain First”, the name of a far-right organization which has aligned itself with Farage’s party and policies, the parallels between some Leave campaign rhetoric and the terrorist’s motivations were pointed out (Jones, 2019). Yet, Farage himself responded that the murder was down to “one deranged, dangerous individual”,¹¹ dismissing any consideration that the tone of the political debate leading to the Brexit referendum contributed to a climate of hate and fear. Whereas mainstream political parties came together to express their sadness and horror, and the activities of the far-right groups came under the spotlight, their leaders seemed to have rushed, at least initially, to distance themselves from the attack, including Paul Golding, the leader of Britain First.¹² Other online activities recalled that one bad apple did not represent the entire group and refuted the claim that racist, anti-migrant rhetoric played any role in the attack.¹³ They also blamed mental health issues for what media and commentators described as an ideological attack, and even went so far as to accuse political opponents of staging a “false flag” attack.

As mentioned, Jo Cox’s assassination took place one week before the 2016 EU membership referendum. During the Brexit campaign, the fight against terrorism featured prominently in the public debate. The Leave campaign’s narrative of ‘taking back control’ made ample references to the threat posed by a borderless Europe, highlighting how the UK was powerless against terrorists. The Remain camp argued that the UK would be more secure inside the EU, because the EU had effective tools to fight terrorism (see Bove et al., 2021, for a discussion). David Cameron asserted that EU membership made Britain safer against

¹⁰Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jun/16/jo-cox-attack-politicians-support-and-shock>

¹¹Available online: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/nigel-farage-claims-all-remain-8236531>

¹²Available online: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/britain-first-jo-cox_uk_5762f6a6e4b0681487dcdcc1

¹³Available online: <https://globalcomment.com/10-obscene-reactions-from-the-far-right-to-jo-coxs-murder/>

terrorism, while prominent policy makers in the UK and abroad suggested that leaving the EU would present real risks to counter-terrorism efforts. As such, before the attack there was already quite a lot of attention around the issue of terrorism. Although the rival official campaigns suspended their activities as a sign of respect, campaigning resumed on Sunday 19 June and the media mostly focused on the referendum as such. A relatively high baseline level of attention towards terrorism before the attack, combined with an increasing focus on a fast-approaching EU referendum after the attack and the fact that the assassination was not immediately described in the context of a terrorist attack, could explain why the search for the term “terrorism” only exhibits a more modest increase in the wake of Jo Cox’s assassination, as Figure 1 shows.

The second attack involved a 48-year-old man, Darren Osborne, who drove a van into a crowd of Muslims near the Finsbury Park Mosque, in north London, on 19 June 2017, causing one death and injuring ten people. Darren Osborne appeared to have been motivated by anger over Islamist terror attacks in London and Manchester in 2017, and a child grooming scandal in Rochdale that involved men of Asian origin. The incident was described by politicians like Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, or the Prime Minister, Theresa May, as a terrorist attack and investigated by counter-terrorism police as an act of terrorism. Newspapers also described the incident as a terrorist attack (see Figure B.3).

Actors from the entire political spectrum openly condemned the events. The prime minister Theresa May praised London’s multicultural community and promised more efforts to fight against extremism, including Islamophobia.¹⁴ In a similar vein, the leader of the opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, said his thoughts were with those affected by the event and he condemned the incident as “an attack on all of us.”¹⁵ In addition to political actors, the attack was condemned by Christian, Sikh, and Jewish religious leaders. Prince Charles, among other public figures, also visited Finsbury Park Mosque to meet the community leaders and conveyed a message from the Queen.

Yet, unlike with the assassination of Jo Cox, several extremists posted praise of the attacker on Facebook. When far-right group, like Britain First, posted about the Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack on their social media pages, many responses tried to justify the attack on Muslims or defined the perpetrator as a “hero”.¹⁶

¹⁴Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/19/theresa-may-to-chair-cobra-meeting-after-finsbury-park-terror-attack>

¹⁵Available online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/finsbury-park-attack-jeremy-corbyn-theresa-may-video-reactions-mosque-watch-latest-a7797856.html>

¹⁶Available online: <https://more.bham.ac.uk/euro-islam/tag/facebook/>; <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/google-hosts-far-right-videos-urging-islamophobic-violence-fxgdwkw12>

In sum, three main differences seem to emerge between the two incidents: first, notwithstanding the unequivocal condemnation of the attacks from political leaders across the political spectrum and a strong media coverage, the framing of attacks by the media seems to have implied a clearer link with terrorism in the case of the Finsbury Park attack, whereas media and commentators were slower in framing Jo Cox's assassination as a terrorist attack. Second, whereas after Jo Cox's assassination far-right influencers and activists online tried to distance themselves from the attack, there were several cases of incitation of violence against Muslims and praise of the attack from far-right activists in the wake of the Finsbury Park attack. Third, the two attacks differ in the level of public attention to terrorism. In particular, a fast-approaching EU referendum means that the effects were likely to be shorter-lived for the murder of MP Jo Cox. We return to this issue in Section C.4.

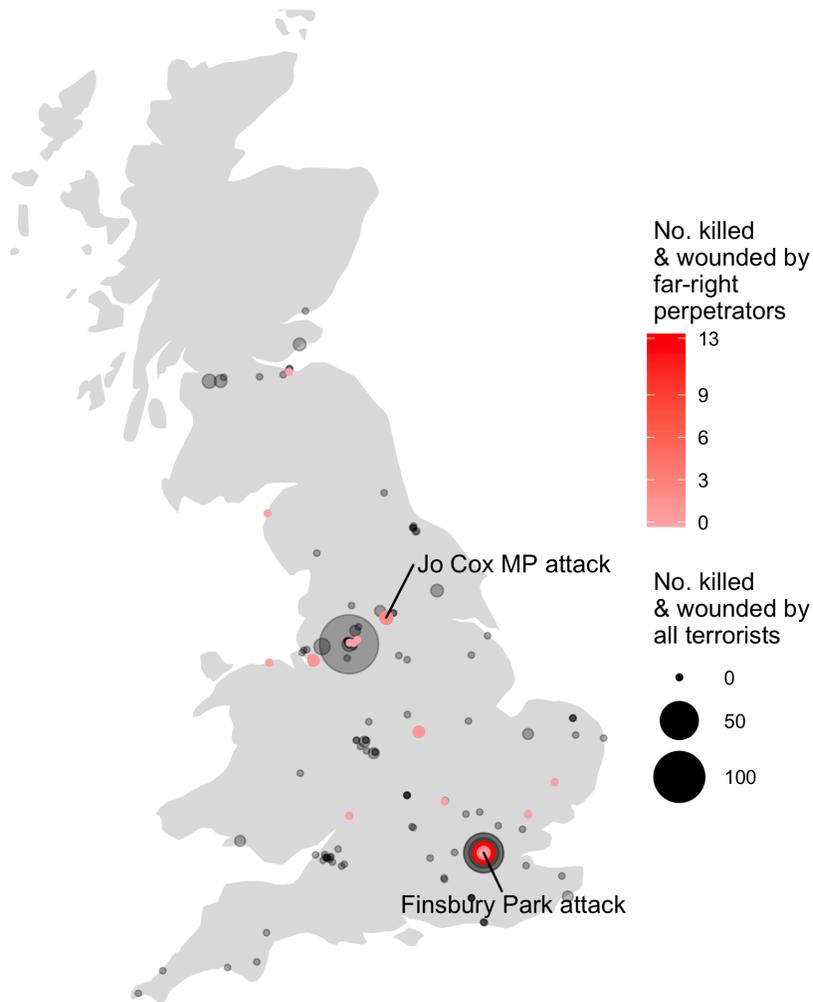
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/finsbury-park-terror-attack-van-latest-comments-glorifying-terrorism-reported-government-home-office-facebook-britain-first-a7798356.html>

B. Additional Information

- Figure B.1 presents the spatial distribution of all terrorist attacks in Great Britain from 2006 to 2018.
- Figure B.2 presents the timing of each far-right terrorist attack in our sample relative to the wave of the British Election Study that it coincides with.
- Figure B.3 provides examples of UK national newspaper front pages from the day after each sampled attack. The top row is for the Jo Cox MP attack and the bottom row is for the Finsbury Park attack.
- Figure B.4 explores the treatment effect on citizens' beliefs about the single most important issue facing the country. We consider 'terrorism' and the six other most popular issues: 'immigration', 'economy', 'inequality', 'health', 'Europe', and 'negativity'. We construct a binary indicator for each one of these issues coding respondents who believe that the corresponding issue is the most important national problem. The results indicate that: (i) after the two sampled attacks, individuals are more likely to report terrorism as the top national problem; (ii) exposure to terrorism sways public opinion away from other popular issues. This exercise confirms the salience of the two attacks for the British public, and that these incidents were correctly perceived by the large audience as acts as terrorism rather than violent crime.
- Table B.1 presents summary statistics and definitions for all variables in Eq. (1).
- Figure B.5 shows the distribution of ideological self-placement on the left-right scale of the political spectrum for the 2-day sample (panel (a)) and the 3-day sample (panel (b)); where 0 is the most left-wing and 10 is the most right-wing.
- Table B.2 performs balancing tests in observed characteristics across treatment and control units. This shows that there are differences in the mean of some covariates across the two groups, such as age and employment status.
- Table B.3 reports the mean, variance and skewness of covariates across treatment and control units after entropy balancing, showing that this method corrects for all imbalances observed in Table B.2 and makes the two groups identical.
- Tables B.4 and B.5 report the full regression results for panels (a) and (b) of Figure 3, respectively.

- Figure B.6 explores the treatment effect on citizens' beliefs about traditional British values. The analysis is based on available data from BES wave 13 (Finsbury Park attack). It shows that, after the attack, respondents are less likely to take a 'strong' positive position on the maintenance and stability of traditional British values.

Figure B.1: Terrorist attacks in Great Britain, 2006-2018



Source: Global Terrorism Database 2006 - 2018

Notes: Attacks where the perpetrator is defined as either “Anti-Muslim extremist” or “Neo-Nazi extremist” are classified as far-right and are shaded in red. All other attacks are shaded in black. The size of each point reflects the total number of people killed or wounded as a result of that attack.

Figure B.2: Timeline of events

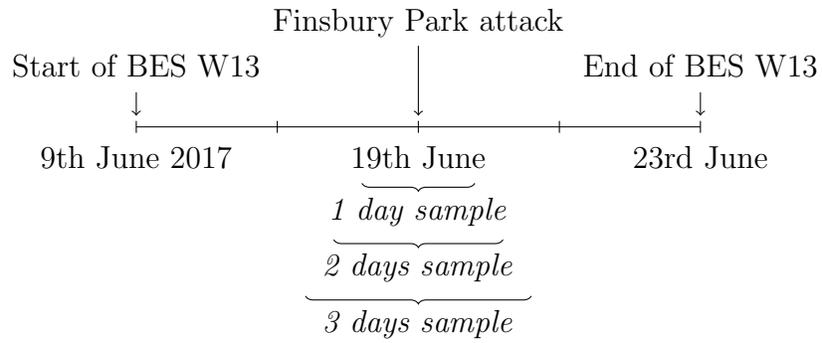
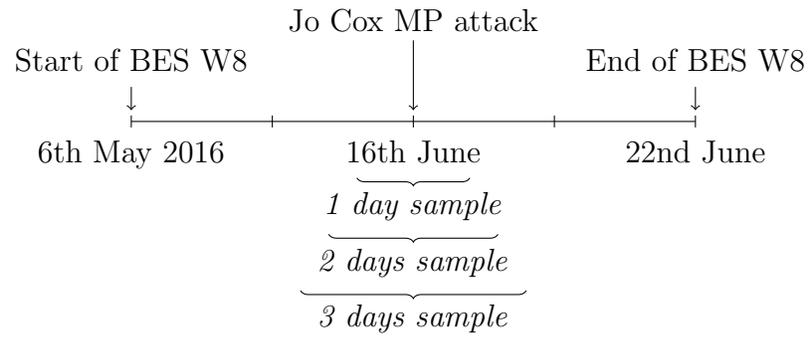
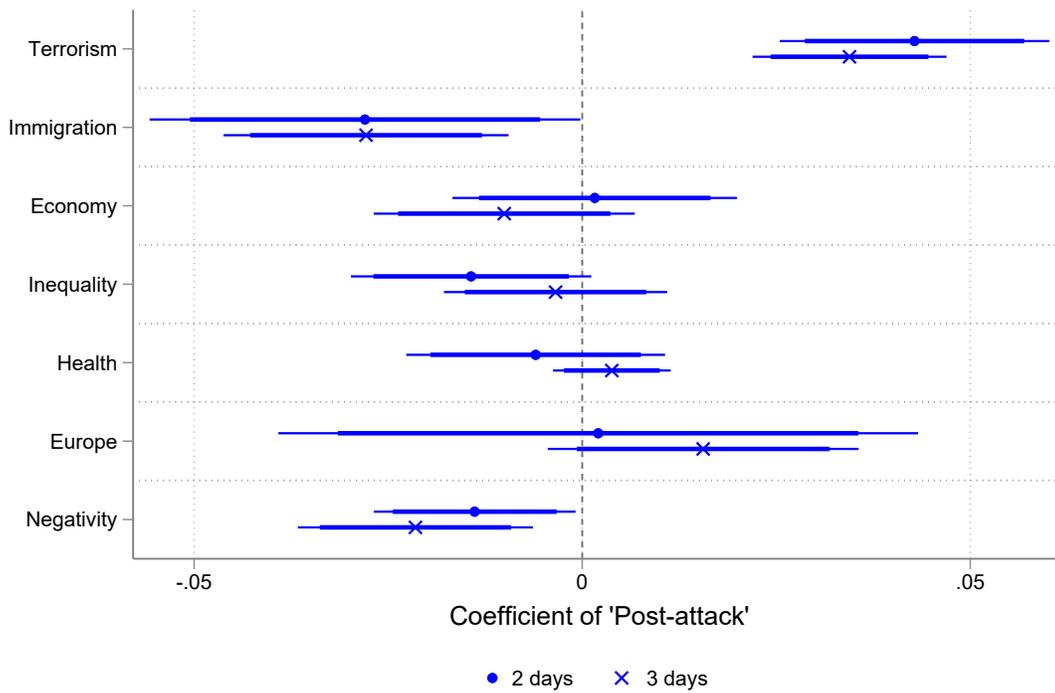


Figure B.3: Newspaper front pages from the day after the attacks



Figure B.4: The effect of far-right terrorism on people's perceptions about the 'most important issue'



Notes: The dependent variable is a binary indicator coding the 'most important issue' shown on the vertical axis. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects and controls. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

Table B.1: Summary statistics (3-day sample) and definitions for all model variables

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	Definition
Right Orientation	0.16	0.37	0	1	=1 if the respondent's self-placement on the left-right scale of the political spectrum takes values 8, 9 or 10; 0 otherwise
Post-attack	0.26	0.44	0	1	=1 if the respondent is interviewed after the day of a far-right attack; =0 if interviewed before the day of a far-right attack
Male	0.50	0.50	0	1	=1 if the respondent is male, =0 if female
Age	53.92	15.93	18	92	Age of the respondent
Age squared	3160.87	1619.04	324	8464	Age of the respondent squared
Education (high)	0.50	0.50	0	1	=1 if the respondent's highest level of education is a degree or higher
Education (medium)	0.40	0.49	0	1	=1 if the respondent's highest level of education is A-levels or GCSEs
Education (low)	0.10	0.30	0	1	=1 if the respondent's highest level of education below GCSE level or none
Employed	0.51	0.50	0	1	=1 if the respondent is in full or part-time employment
Retired	0.34	0.48	0	1	=1 if the respondent is retired
Student	0.03	0.18	0	1	=1 if the respondent is a full-time student
Not working	0.12	0.32	0	1	=1 if the respondent is not employed at all
Number of observations		4489			

Figure B.5: Ideological self-placement on the left-right scale of the political spectrum

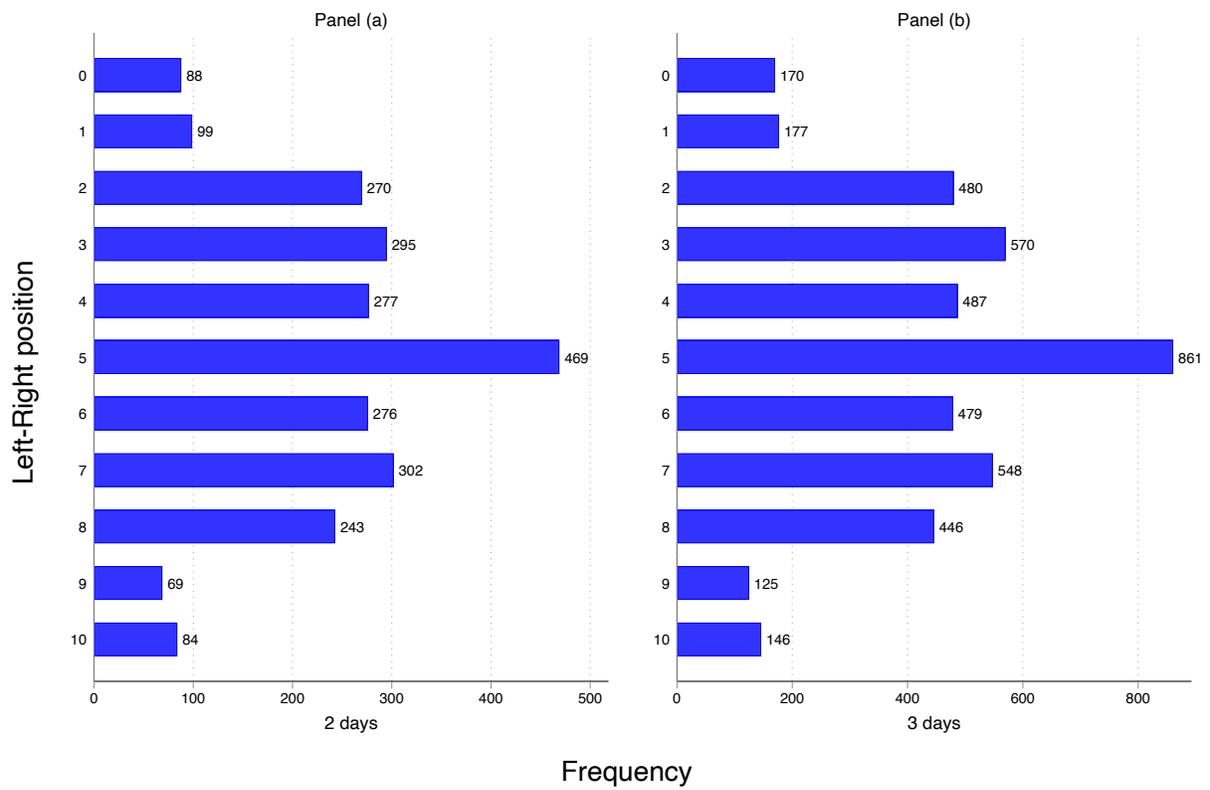


Table B.2: Covariate balance

	2 days				3 days			
	Mean Control	Mean Treatment	Diff.	<i>p</i> -value	Mean Control	Mean Treatment	Diff.	<i>p</i> -value
Male	0.51	0.51	0.01	0.82	0.50	0.50	-0.00	0.95
Age	54.95	49.15	5.80	0.00	54.66	51.81	2.86	0.00
Age squared	3259.72	2702.16	557.56	0.00	3232.16	2959.34	272.82	0.00
Education (high)	0.50	0.46	0.04	0.10	0.51	0.49	0.02	0.33
Education (medium)	0.40	0.45	-0.04	0.07	0.39	0.42	-0.02	0.17
Education (low)	0.10	0.10	0.00	0.81	0.10	0.09	0.01	0.53
Employed	0.48	0.54	-0.06	0.02	0.50	0.53	-0.03	0.06
Retired	0.38	0.24	0.14	0.00	0.36	0.30	0.06	0.00
Student	0.03	0.06	-0.03	0.00	0.03	0.04	-0.01	0.02
Not working	0.11	0.16	-0.05	0.00	0.11	0.13	-0.01	0.22
Observations	1,977	495	2,472		3,316	1,173	4,489	

Notes: This table shows the mean of covariates across treatment and control units, together with conventional *t*-tests for differences in means across the two groups.

Table B.3: Covariate balance after entropy weighting

	Treatment units			Control units		
	Mean	Variance	Skewness	Mean	Variance	Skewness
<i>2-day sample</i>						
Male	0.51	0.25	-0.03	0.51	0.25	-0.03
Age	49.15	287.07	-0.21	49.14	287.02	-0.21
Age squared	2702.16	2646179.58	0.25	2701.69	2645736.26	0.25
Education (medium)	0.45	0.25	0.22	0.45	0.25	0.21
Education (low)	0.10	0.09	2.72	0.10	0.09	2.72
Employed	0.54	0.25	-0.15	0.54	0.25	-0.15
Retired	0.24	0.18	1.20	0.24	0.18	1.20
Student	0.06	0.05	3.84	0.06	0.05	3.84
<i>3-day sample</i>						
Male	0.50	0.25	-0.02	0.50	0.25	-0.02
Age	51.81	275.75	-0.37	51.80	275.74	-0.37
Age squared	2959.34	2687725.49	0.09	2959.28	2687749.99	0.09
Education (medium)	0.42	0.24	0.34	0.42	0.24	0.34
Education (low)	0.09	0.08	2.82	0.09	0.08	2.82
Employed	0.53	0.25	-0.12	0.53	0.25	-0.12
Retired	0.30	0.21	0.87	0.30	0.21	0.87
Student	0.04	0.04	4.48	0.04	0.04	4.48

Notes: This table shows the mean, variance and skewness of covariates across treatment and control units, after re-weighting the sample through entropy balancing.

Table B.4: Full regression results for panel (a)
of Figure 3

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Post-attack	-0.045 (0.134)	-0.038** (0.040)	-0.025* (0.092)
Male	-0.003 (0.868)	0.024 (0.109)	0.026** (0.029)
Age	-0.013*** (0.010)	-0.008** (0.044)	-0.003 (0.258)
Age squared	0.000*** (0.009)	0.000** (0.030)	0.000 (0.122)
Education (medium)	0.083*** (0.007)	0.067*** (0.003)	0.073*** (0.001)
Education (low)	0.135*** (0.006)	0.075** (0.020)	0.067*** (0.005)
Employed	0.098** (0.027)	0.048 (0.205)	0.046 (0.157)
Retired	0.051 (0.259)	0.045 (0.388)	0.041 (0.367)
Student	0.011 (0.857)	-0.041 (0.398)	-0.023 (0.583)
Sample	1 day	2 days	3 days
Region \times Wave FEs	✓	✓	✓
R-squared	0.063	0.045	0.036
Observations	1,079	2,472	4,489

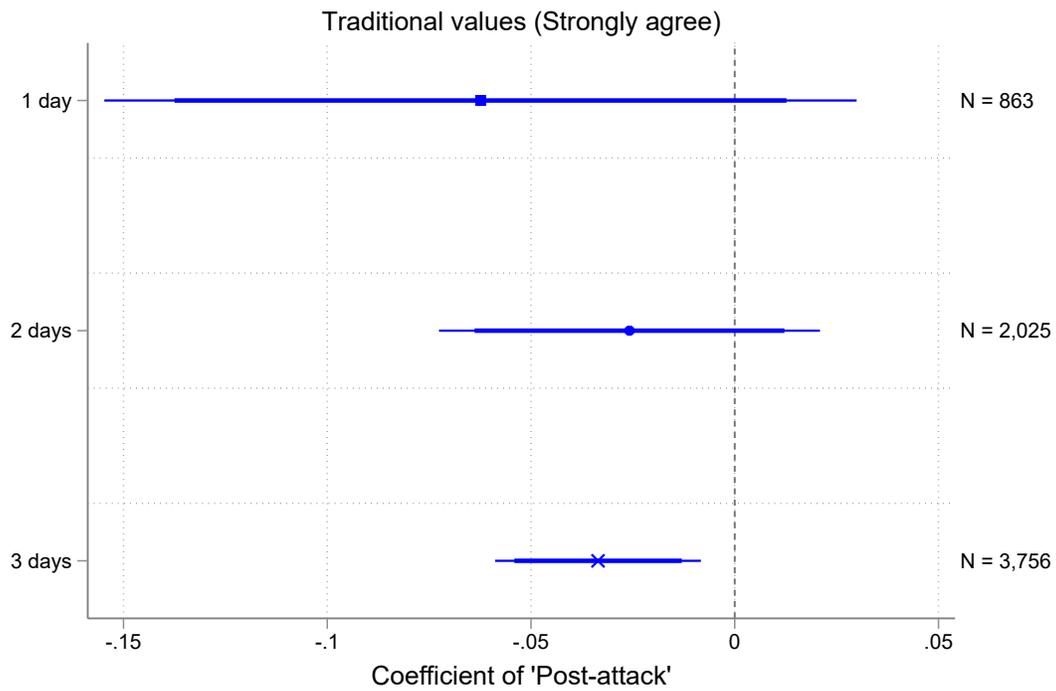
Notes: The dependent variable is ‘Right Orientation’. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. p -values are reported in parentheses; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.5: Full regression results for panel (b) of Figure 3

Sample:	2 days				3 days			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Post-attack	-0.038** (0.040)	-0.049*** (0.008)	-0.032** (0.035)	-0.031** (0.050)	-0.025* (0.092)	-0.031** (0.047)	-0.023** (0.042)	-0.024** (0.036)
Male	0.024 (0.109)		0.001 (0.970)		0.026** (0.029)		-0.002 (0.882)	
Age	-0.008** (0.044)		-0.005* (0.078)		-0.003 (0.258)		-0.000 (0.988)	
Age squared	0.000** (0.030)		0.000 (0.167)		0.000 (0.122)		0.000 (0.993)	
Education (medium)	0.067*** (0.003)		0.020 (0.150)		0.073*** (0.001)		0.021** (0.038)	
Education (low)	0.075** (0.020)		0.020 (0.436)		0.067*** (0.005)		0.002 (0.883)	
Employed	0.048 (0.205)		0.018 (0.356)		0.046 (0.157)		0.017 (0.314)	
Retired	0.045 (0.388)		0.027 (0.464)		0.041 (0.367)		0.022 (0.269)	
Student	-0.041 (0.398)		-0.003 (0.938)		-0.023 (0.583)		-0.003 (0.905)	
LDV			0.661*** (0.000)	0.668*** (0.000)			0.653*** (0.000)	0.658*** (0.000)
Region \times Wave FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R-squared	0.045	0.016	0.506	0.504	0.036	0.009	0.487	0.486
Observations	2,472	2,472	1,899	1,899	4,489	4,489	3,383	3,383

Notes: The dependent variable is 'Right Orientation'. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. p -values are reported in parentheses; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure B.6: The effect of a far-right terrorism on people's beliefs about traditional British values



Notes: The dependent variable is a binary indicator taking value 1 if the respondent 'strongly agrees' with the statement "Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values" (about 25% of observations); and 0 otherwise. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects and controls. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

C. Additional Analyses and Robustness Tests

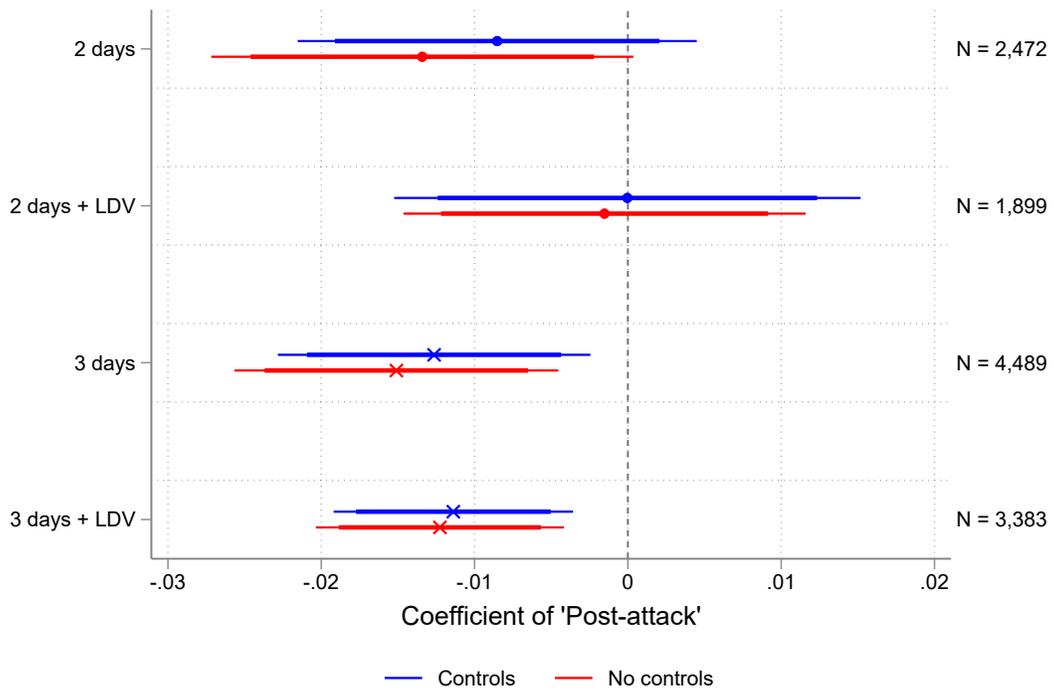
C.1 Alternative specifications of the outcome variable

Throughout our main analysis, the outcome variable ‘Right Orientation’ captures ideological self-placement at values 8 or more on the 0-10 left-right scale of the political spectrum. In Figure C.1a, we check the sensitivity of our results to re-coding the outcome variable so that it reflects more extreme right positions; that is, values 9 or 10 on the left-right scale. The estimates obtained point to the same direction: once again, we can see that exposure to far-right terrorism induces a shift away from the right end of the political spectrum. It must be noted that, based on this alternative definition, the outcome variable captures a much smaller number of individuals who classify themselves as ‘right’ (see Figure B.5); this can potentially explain the insignificant effects when we consider a very restrictive sample and specification (2-day bandwidth and lagged effects).

In Figure C.1b, we explore the treatment effect on ‘Left Orientation’; that is, a binary indicator that captures respondents who place themselves at the left end of the political spectrum (values 2 or less on the left-right scale). All specifications return statistical insignificant estimates, suggesting that exposure to far-right terrorism does not affect individuals’ self-positioning towards the ‘left’; i.e., it does not cause similar shifts across all ideologies within the political spectrum. The absence of an effect ‘across-the-board’ is also confirmed when we use the full scale of ideological self-placement and test for the impact of ‘Post-attack’ on the continuous version of the dependent variable (see Figure C.1c).

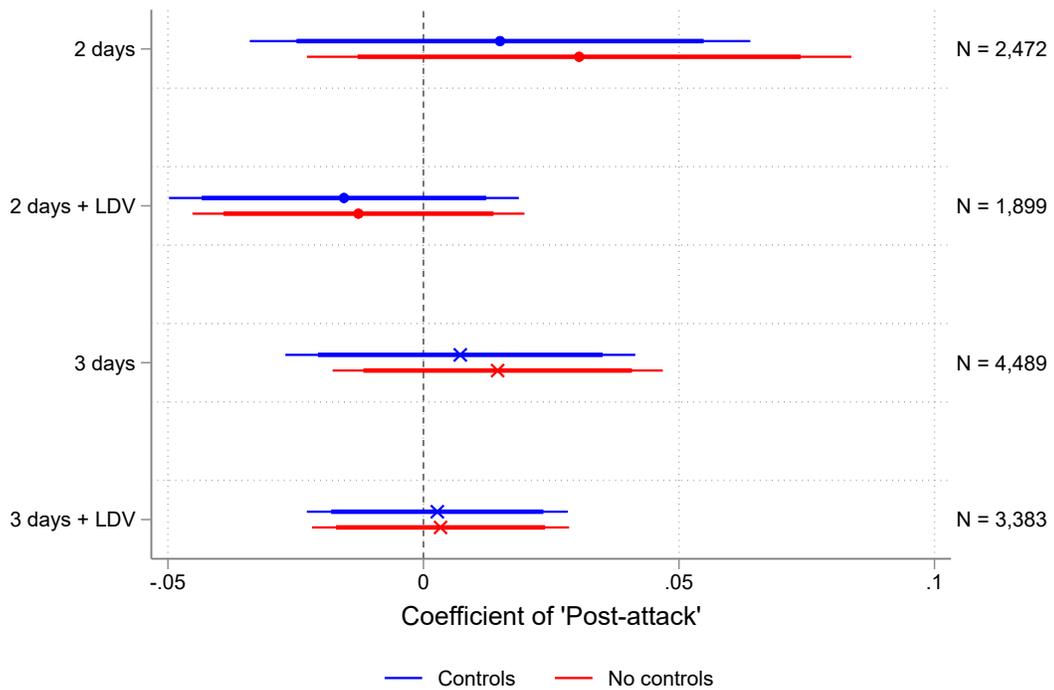
At the same time, the failure to find significant effects for ‘Left Orientation’ in Figure C.1b indicates that our key findings cannot be attributed to ‘deradicalization’: people moving away from both extremes and taking more moderate positions (and thus converging towards more centrist attitudes) after the attacks.

Figure C.1a: The effect of far-right terrorism on people's right orientation:
alternative definition



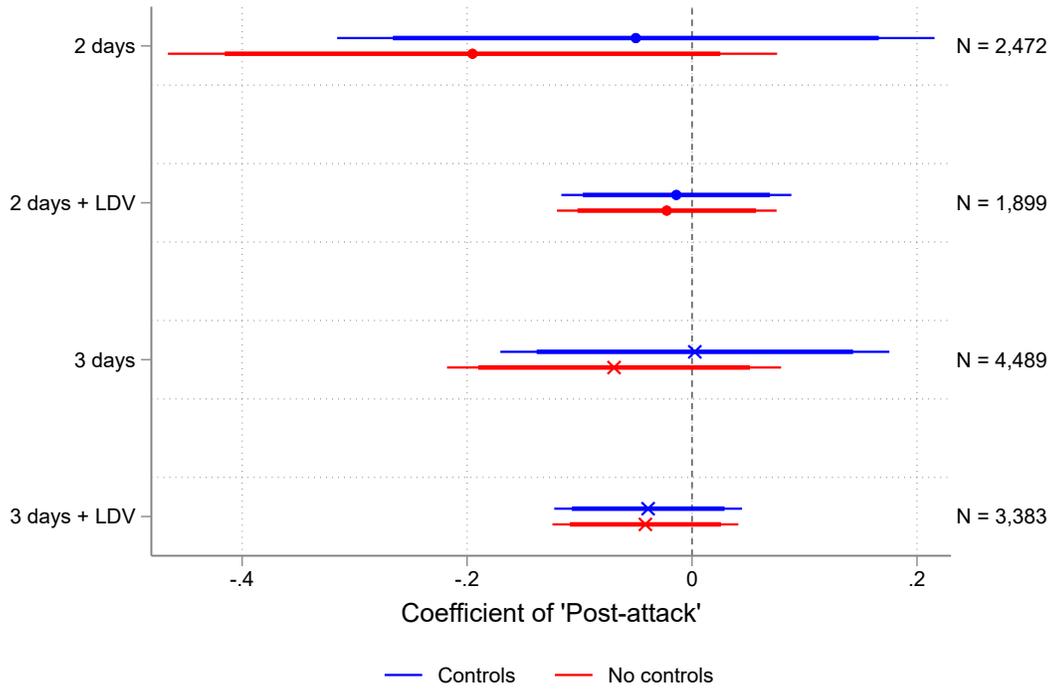
Notes: The dependent variable takes value 1 for individuals who place themselves at values 9 or 10 on the 0-10 left-right scale; 0 otherwise. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

Figure C.1b: The effect of far-right terrorism on people's left orientation



Notes: The dependent variable takes value 1 for individuals who place themselves at values 0, 1 or 2 on the 0-10 left-right scale; 0 otherwise. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

Figure C.1c: The effect of far-right terrorism on people's left-to-right orientation: continuous variable



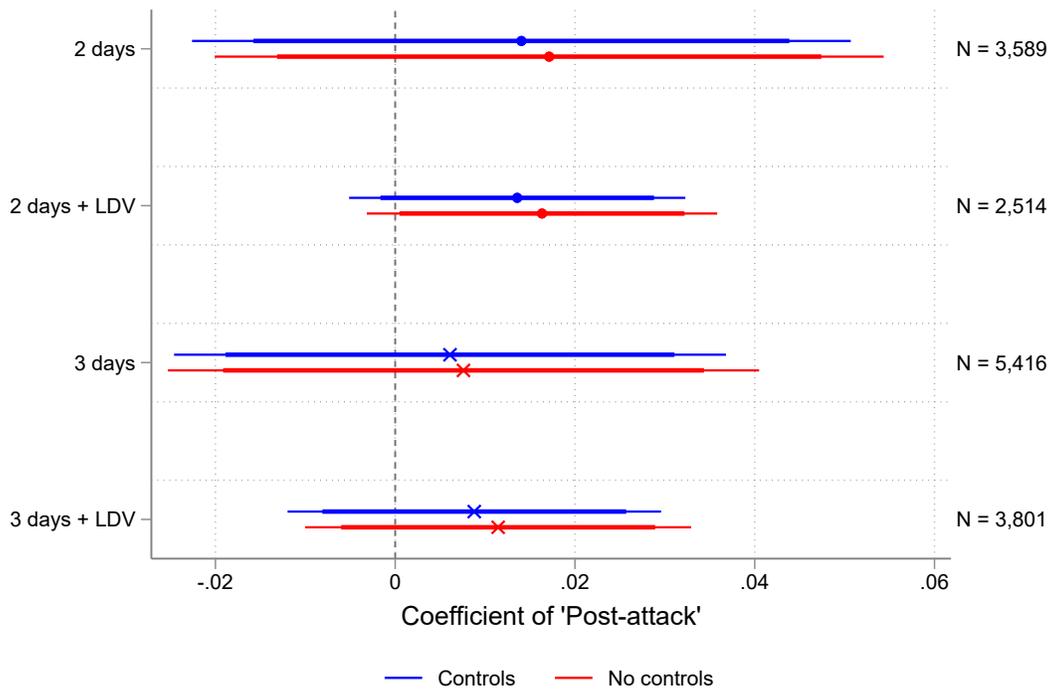
Notes: The dependent variable takes values between 0 and 10 on the left-right scale (see Figure B.5). All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

C.2 Comparison with Jihadi-inspired extremism

Extant studies show that Islamic terrorism can be an important driver of negative attitudes towards immigration – and Muslim immigrants in particular – as political leaders often link the issue of terrorism to unfettered immigration, and anti-immigration rhetoric continues to resonate well with voters (Nussio et al., 2019; Van de Vyver et al., 2016; Creighton and Jamal, 2015). At the same time, Islamic terrorism can cause a shift towards more right-wing ideological positions, since threats and fear of death encourage people to support cognitively rigid and because right-wing governments are purportedly less likely to accommodate violent groups’ demands (see, e.g., Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Economou and Kollias, 2015; Aytaç and Çarkoğlu, 2019).

Our study adds to this debate by showing that people’s reactions to terrorism varies with the identity of the perpetrator and their predominant ideology or motivations. As such, terrorism inspired by far-right extremism will have different effects on people’s ideological positions compared to terrorism inspired by Jihadi extremism. To provide further evidence that the effects are context-conditional, we run the same regression set-up as before – based on an ‘Unexpected Event during Survey Design’ (UESD) – but we now exploit information from Islamic terrorism. To this end, we consider two Jihadi-inspired attacks whose timing coincides with recent BES waves and which had widespread national media coverage and numerous casualties: the Manchester Arena bombing (22 May 2017, wave 12) and the London Bridge stabbing (29 November 2019; wave 18). Figure C.2 displays the treatment effect of these two attacks on ‘Right Orientation’. Even though the effect is not precisely estimated, it appears to be positive across all specifications (after Islamic terrorism, individuals are more likely to classify themselves as ‘right’), which is broadly in line with previous research and confirms that importance of the context.

Figure C.2: The effect of Jihadi-inspired terrorism on right orientation



Notes: The dependent variable is 'Right Orientation'. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

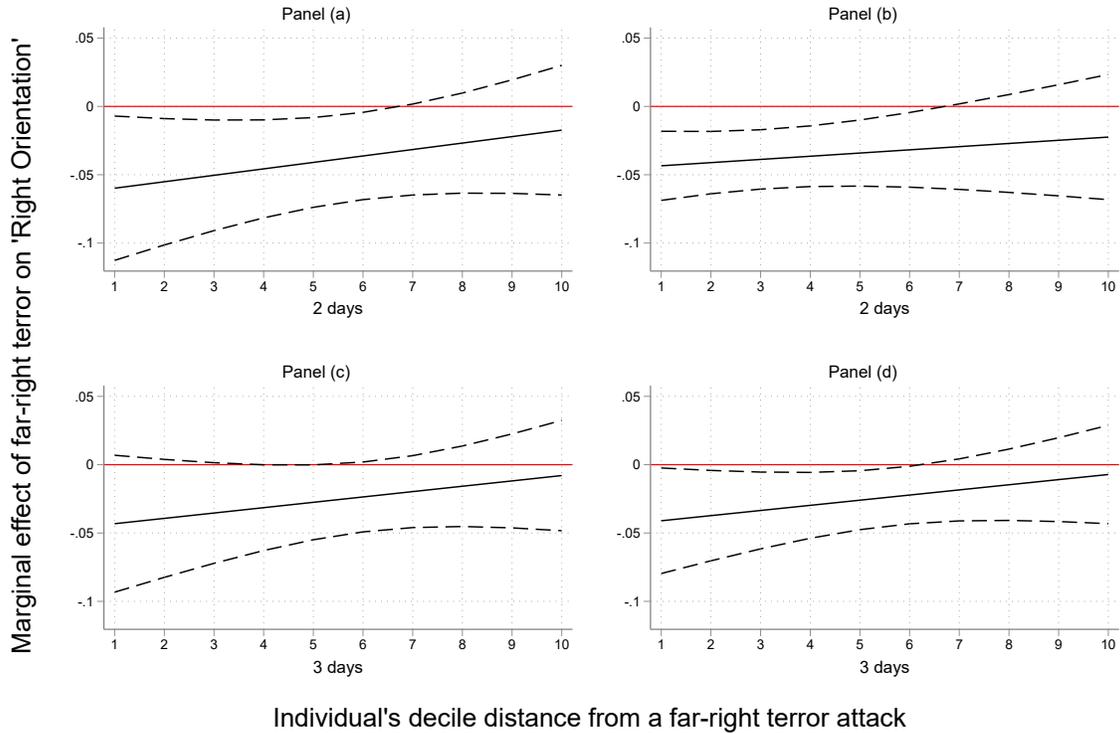
C.3 The conditional effect of distance

Physical proximity to a terrorist attack can amplify the perception of threat and the personal sense of vulnerability, and affect the extent to which the event is covered by the local media (Böhmelt et al., 2019; Bove et al., 2021). At the same time, distance from terrorism can reduce mortality salience as individuals feel less connected to the environment where the attack occurred. In line with these arguments, we expect that distance will act as a moderating factor whereby individuals that reside further away from an attack are less likely to change their ideological positions. Yet, the existence of a “proximity effect” has become a debated issue and Agerberg and Sohlberg (2021) find that individuals close to the attack do not display larger attitude changes than similar less proximate individuals.

To test whether physical proximity is an important factor moderating ideological shifts, we interact our treatment variable (‘Post-attack’) with the distance between the centroid point of an individual’s local authority district and the location of the far-right attack in the corresponding wave. We normalise the distance measure by splitting it into decile groups, where individuals in group 1 are the most proximate to the attack and those in group 10 are the furthest away. Using the estimates from the model with the interaction term, we calculate the margins of the ‘Post-attack’ variable and plot them over the respective values of the distance measure. Panels (a) and (b) in Figure C.3 report the margins for the 2-day sample, before and after the inclusion of the LDV, respectively; whereas panels (c) and (d) report the corresponding margins for the 3-day sample. The terrorism-induced effect on right orientation is indeed larger for individuals within the immediate proximity of the attack and it begins to move towards 0 as we consider individuals who are further away from the attack. This verifies the moderating role of physical distance in how individuals respond to (far-right) terrorism.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the estimated effect is negative across all values of distance and only fails to reach statistical significance when we consider the highest decile groups – which points to a rather weak dependence on physical proximity. As documented in this study, all individuals across the UK were exposed to the two attacks; yet, due to the mechanisms outlined above, the post-attack shift in ideological self-placement (away from the right end of the political spectrum) is relatively less pronounced for those living far away from the incidents.

Figure C.3: The conditional effect of distance



Notes: The dependent variable is 'Right Orientation'. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects and controls. Panels (a) and (c) show the margins before the inclusion of the LDV, whereas panels (b) and (d) show the margins after the inclusion of the LDV. Decile distance is the kilometer distance binned into deciles between the centroid point of an individual's local authority district and the location of the far-right attack in the corresponding wave. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Dashed lines signify 90% confidence intervals.

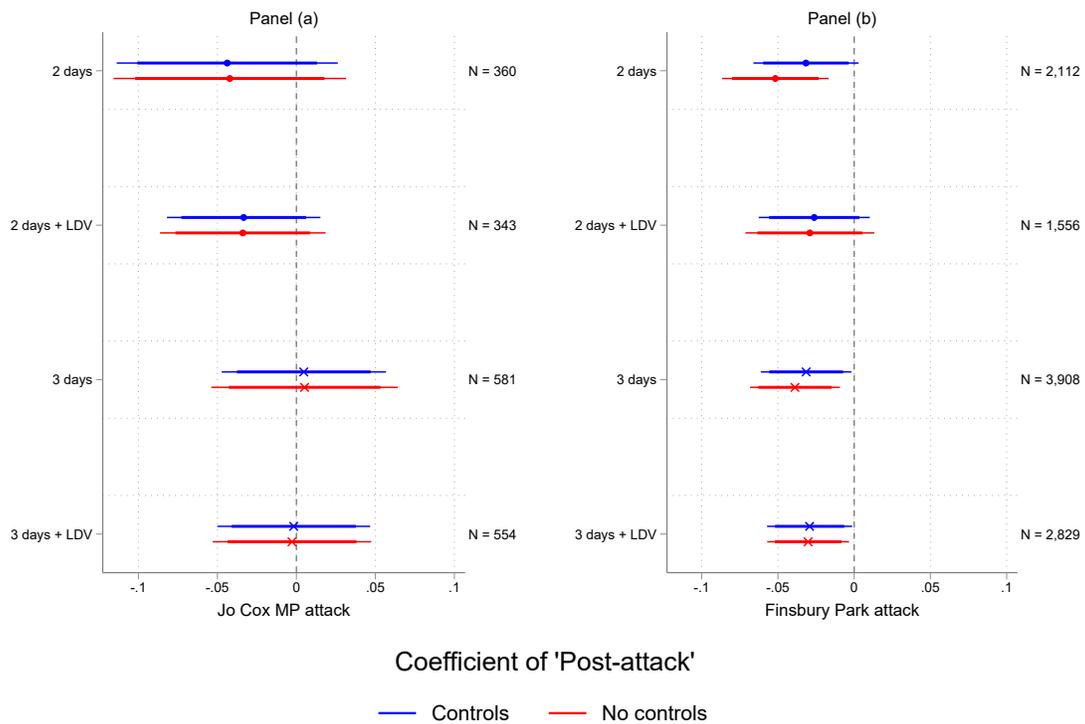
C.4 Results for individual attacks

Our baseline model (Eq. (1)) pools the treatment effects of the two far-right terrorist attacks together, and controls for region-by-wave fixed effects. The latter allows us to restrict the pre- and post-attack comparisons to individuals living in the same region and interviewed in the same wave. It also removes any biases arising from systematic differences in how the two waves are fielded (Balcells and Torrats-Espinosa, 2018).

In Figure C.4, we present the results when we estimate our model separately for each attack/wave. For the 2-day sample, we find consistent effects across the two attacks: both the murder of MP Jo Cox (panel (a)) and the Finsbury Park attack (panel (b)) cause a negative shift in right orientation, and this shift is of similar magnitude – even though it is less precisely estimated for the former attack due to the much smaller sample size (wider confidence intervals). However, when we look at the 3-day sample, the corresponding effect seems to persist only for the Finsbury Park attack. This is not so surprising given the timing and the context of the MP Jo Cox murder. This attack occurred just one week before the 2016 EU referendum, and, as a result, its media cycle was relatively short: after the initial shock, the media quickly returned to covering other referendum-related topics, which may have also affected the outcome variable. As such, a wider bandwidth for this particular attack increases the probability that the estimates capture, to some extent, other events correlated with the time of the interview.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the absence of positive effects across the two attacks, samples and specifications is quite reassuring as regards to the inferences drawn in this research note: far-right extremism does not elicit changes in ideological positions in the same direction as Jihadi-inspired extremism (as also documented in Section C.2).

¹⁷Running the analysis of Figure B.4 separately for each attack/wave reveals that, in both cases, individuals were significantly more likely to report terrorism as the top national problem after the corresponding attack. However, the estimated positive effect on ‘terrorism as the most important issue’ is smaller for the MP Jo Cox murder, possibly due to the timing of the attack so close to the referendum date. At the same time, we find that attention towards the EU referendum was substantially larger three days after the attack compared to one or two days after the attack. These additional results – that can be reproduced using our replication files – confirm that the political orientation effects in this case were more susceptible to other events. Finally, it is worth noting that the UK national newspapers were skewed in favour of the Leave vote in the referendum (Levy et al., 2016) and Jo Cox was a pro-Remain MP.

Figure C.4: The effect of far-right terrorism on people's right orientation: individual attacks



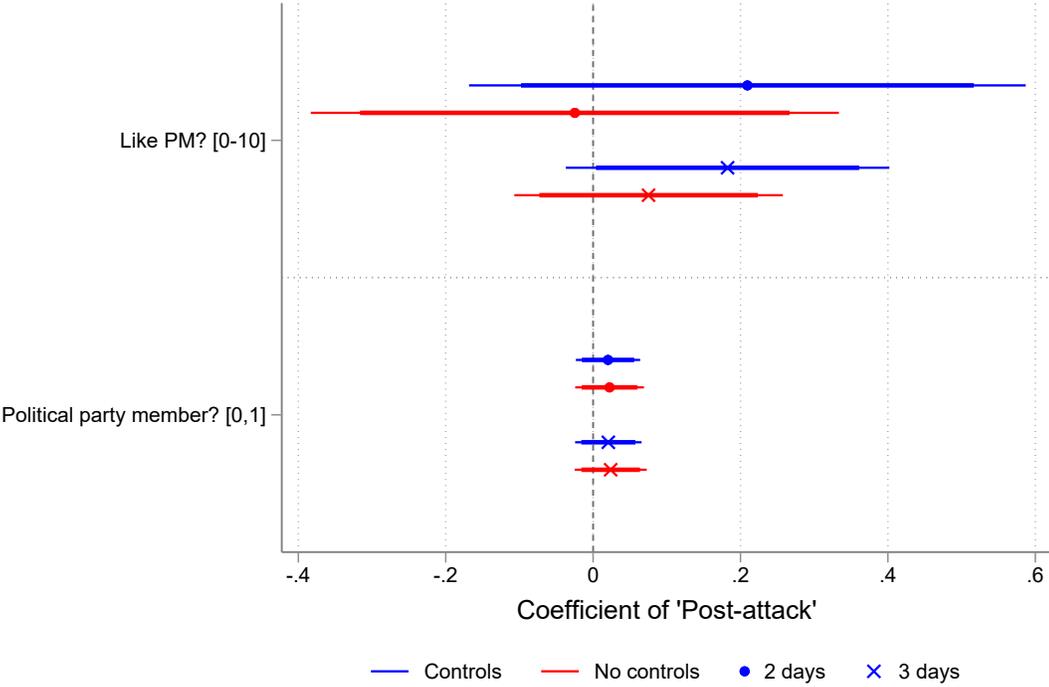
Notes: The dependent variable is 'Right Orientation'. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

C.5 Placebo: alternative outcomes

A potential threat to our identification strategy is the presence of collateral events; that is, the succession of reactions triggered by the unexpected event of interest, which may jointly affect the outcome variable (Muñoz et al., 2020). If, for instance, incumbents are held accountable for terrorist attacks, then the observed (negative) effect on right orientation can be explained by a lower post-attack support for the incumbent (right-wing) government,¹⁸ rather than a shift in ideological positions. Similarly, if terrorism leads to greater interest in politics, then our results may be driven by a change in respondents' political involvement levels rather than their distancing from the ideology of the perpetrator. To rule out these possibilities, we perform placebo tests where we examine the effect on two alternative outcome variables: a measure of favourability towards the Prime Minister (PM) on a 0-10 scale (where 10 is the most favourable view) and a binary indicator for being a member of a political party. The results from these tests are shown in Figure C.5. In both cases, the 'Post-attack' estimates are very close to 0 and fail to reach statistical significance, suggesting that our results cannot be attributed to other terrorism-induced reactions.

¹⁸Both attacks occurred during a right-wing administration: David Cameron was the PM at the time of the MP Jo Cox murder, and Theresa May was the PM at the time of the Finsbury Park attack.

Figure C.5: The effect of far-right terrorism on placebo outcomes

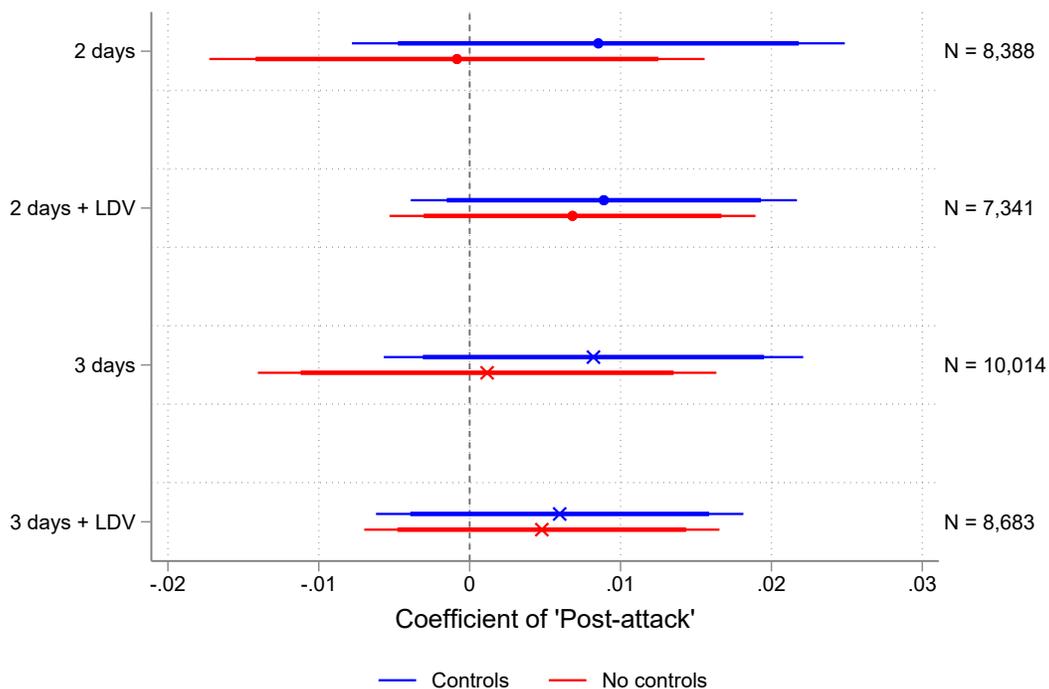


Notes: The dependent variable is listed on the vertical axis. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

C.6 Placebo: alternative attack dates

To further address the possibility that pre-existing time trends could bias our findings, we test for the presence of such trends before the two attacks took place. To do so, we consider placebo treatments at an arbitrary time point at the left of the cutoff points, as recommended by Muñoz et al. (2020). More precisely, we set the placebo attack dates to be 1 week prior to the actual dates and run the same regression set-up as in Figure 3 (panel (b)). As expected, these placebo attack dates have no significant effect on people's right orientation and there is no evidence of pre-existing trends in the same direction (see Figure C.6).

Figure C.6: The effect of far-right attacks on people's right orientation: placebo attack dates

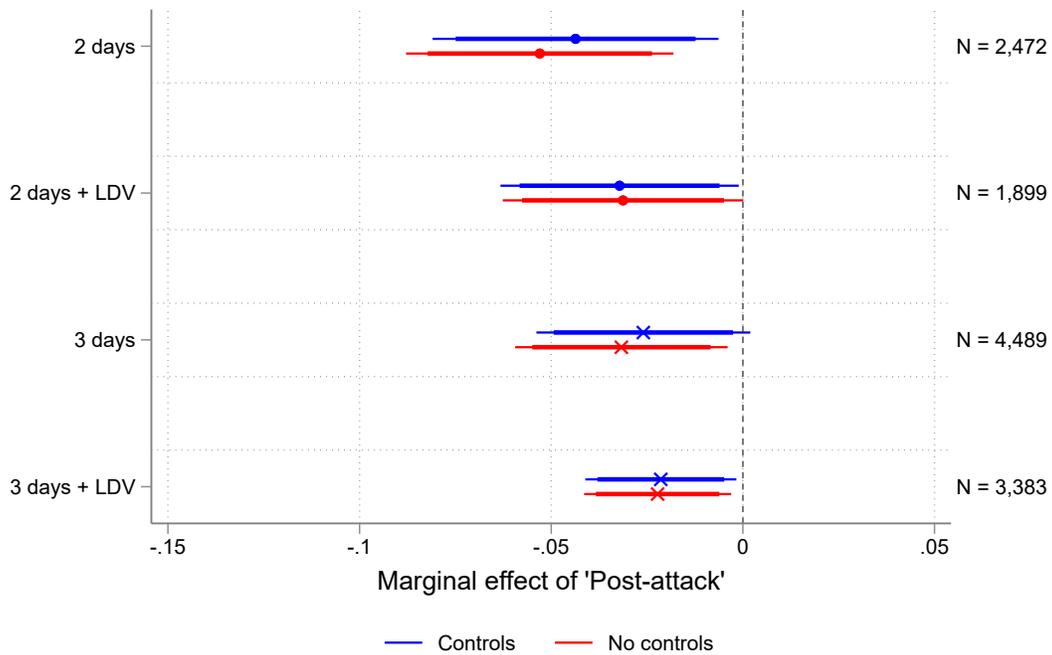


Notes: The dependent variable is 'Right Orientation'. The placebo attack dates are set to be 1 week prior to the actual attack dates. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

C.7 Alternative estimation method: probit model

Throughout our main analysis, we estimate treatment effects on a dichotomous classification of political ideologies using a linear probability model. In this section, we check the sensitivity of our baseline results (Figure 3, panel (b)) to using a probit model. As shown in C.7, the choice of the estimation model does not affect our inferences.

Figure C.7: The effect of far-right terrorism on people's right orientation:
probit estimation



Notes: The dependent variable is 'Right Orientation'. All specifications include region-by-wave fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the region level. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

C.8 Dealing with imbalances: coarsened-exact matching

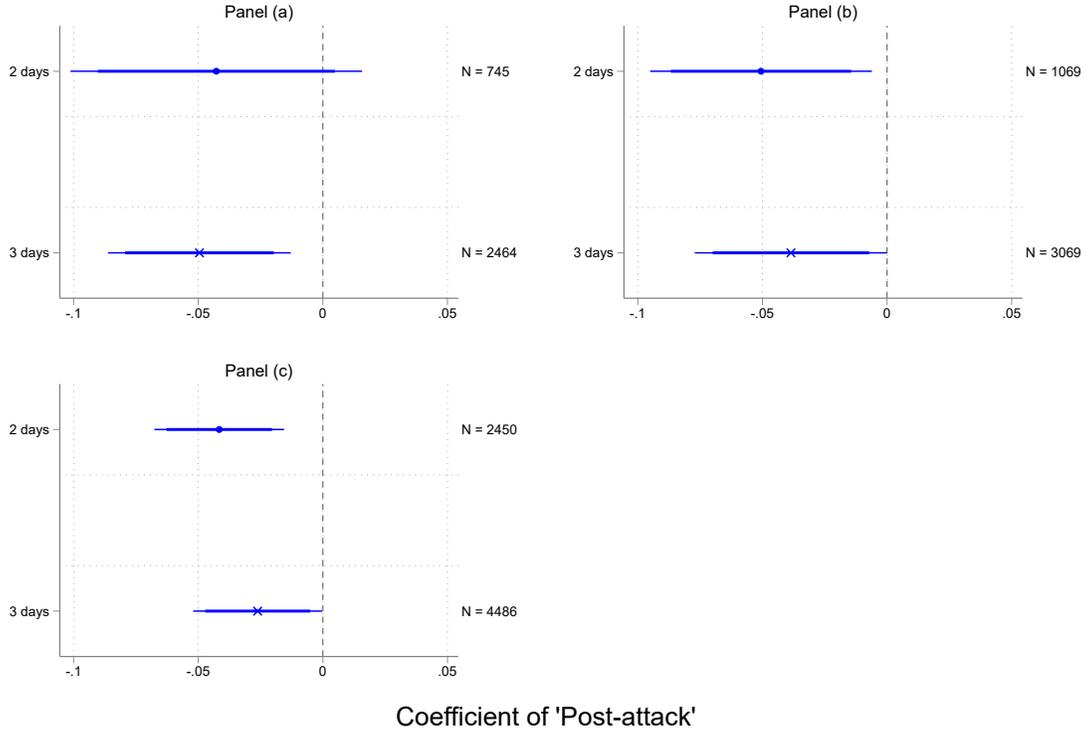
In our main analysis, we correct for differences in observed characteristics across treatment and control groups using entropy balancing. An alternative approach to deal with such imbalances is to pre-process the data through matching techniques; that is, to match treated units with a carefully selected group of matched control units. In this section, we check the robustness of our results to using matching techniques. To do so, we rely on coarsened-exact matching (CEM).¹⁹ This is a recently developed matching procedure that requires fewer assumptions, is more easily automated, and possesses more attractive statistical properties than other matching procedures, such as propensity score matching (Blackwell et al., 2009). It also has the advantage that it guarantees a reduction in imbalance after matching. This, however, comes with a cost. Units that cannot be matched are dropped, and thus it typically produces fewer matches than other methods, which can be problematic in finite samples – especially when we match on a large number of variables. To account for this limitation, we experiment with three sets of matching covariates: first, we use the full set of control variables in vector \mathbf{Z}_{irw} ; second, we use only the significant control variables (i.e., we exclude the employment status variables which fail to reach statistical significance in columns (1) and (5) of Table B.5); and third, we use only the lagged measured of ‘Right Orientation’, which seems to absorb the impact of the other control variables when added to the model (see columns (3) and (7) of Table B.5). In all three cases, we also restrict the matched control units to come from the same region and the same survey wave as the treated units.²⁰

Figure C.8 reports the treatment effect on ‘Right Orientation’ after performing matching based on these three specifications: full set of controls (panel (a)); significant controls (panel (b)); and LDV (panel (c)). The evidence obtained is in line with our previous findings. The treatment effect is negative and statistically significant in all specifications but one (full set of covariates; 2-day sample), where it appears to be borderline insignificant due to the small number of matched observations. Overall, the results indicate that individuals who are exposed to a far-right attack are less likely to classify themselves as ‘right’ compared to individuals who are not exposed to a far-right attack but are similar across a number of observable characteristics.

¹⁹The idea of CEM is to temporarily coarsen each variable into substantively meaningful groups, exact match on these coarsened data and then only retain the original (uncoarsened) values of the matched data.

²⁰For example, in the second specification, we identify control units that are of the same gender and age, have the same level of education, live in the same region, and are interviewed in the same wave, as the treated units. The matched 3-day sample (in the second specification) has a total of 3,069 individuals, of which 901 are treated and 2,168 are controls, and is split into 491 strata combinations.

Figure C.8: The effect of far-right terrorism on right orientation:
coarsened-exact matching



Notes: The dependent variable is 'Right Orientation'. The matching covariates are: all variables in vector \mathbf{Z}_{irw} (panel (a)); the statistically significant variables in vector \mathbf{Z}_{irw} (panel (b)); the lagged measure of 'Right Orientation' (panel (c)). In all three panels, the matched control units are also restricted to come from the same region and the same survey wave as the treated units. Binary variables are matched exactly on. Continuous variables (age and age squared) are coarsened using the Scott automatic coarsening algorithm. Fat (thin) lines signify the 90% (95%) confidence interval.

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