

The Boundaries of Democracy:
Institutions, Representation, and
Violence Against Minorities

Tim Lars Allinger

The Boundaries of Democracy:
Institutions, Representation, and
Violence Against Minorities

PhD Dissertation

Politica

© Forlaget Politica and the author 2026

ISBN: 978-87-7335-348-6

Cover: Svend Siune

Print: Fællestrykkeriet, Aarhus University

Layout: Annette Bruun Andersen

Submitted August 29, 2025

The public defense takes place February 20, 2026

Published February 2026

Forlaget Politica

c/o Department of Political Science

Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University

Bartholins Allé 7

DK-8000 Aarhus C

Denmark

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Preface	15
1 Introduction	17
2 Theoretical Framework	23
2.1 Representing	24
2.2 Steering	28
2.3 Between Representing and Steering	32
3 Methods	33
3.1 Challenge I – Bringing Causal Structure into a Messy World	34
3.2 Challenge II – The Gap Between Attitudes and Behavior .	40
3.3 Overview of Papers	44
4 Findings	47
4.1 Expectations of Representation	47
4.2 Anti-refugee Violence as a Last Resort	50
4.3 Exclusionary Policies Increase Hate Crimes	56
5 Conclusion	65
5.1 What We Have Learned	65
5.2 What We Have Not Learned	69
5.3 What We Need To Consider	74
Bibliography	77
English Summary	89
Dansk Resumé	91

Acknowledgements

Doing a PhD makes you do things and go to places where you never would have imagined ending up. This insight hit me most vividly when I spent a full working day straying through Italian suburbs on Google Maps, looking for waste dumps. Yet, looking back, it feels like quite a fitting metaphor: long stretches of uncertainty, unexpected detours, and the constant question of whether you are still going in the right direction. And like spending hours alone scanning satellite images for garbage, a PhD can become disorienting when you are doing it in isolation. This is where the people around you become essential. They help you find the way out when you are stuck in a dead end, and just as importantly, they keep you from losing your mind in the process. I was lucky to have many wonderful people around me who did exactly this.

First of all, I would like to thank my two supervisors, *Dan and Rune*, for everything they have done for me. I am deeply grateful for your advice, for reading the same drafts over and over again, and for always giving me the feeling that things will work out one way or another. You have shaped not only this PhD, but who I am as a researcher. *Dan*, my journey in Aarhus would never have started without you. Although I quickly learned that I had never actually been planned for and arrived more as an accident after an unexpectedly successful grant recovery, I could not have wished for a better supervisor. Despite not always being able to be in Aarhus, you could not have been more present during my PhD. The more than 4,000 Slack messages (4,097 to be precise) I received over the three years are just the tip of the iceberg of your constant support. Because even when you were on parental leave and off Slack, you would still carve out some of your free time and invite me to (virtually or physically) join your walks and playground visits with your kid, just to answer all my questions. You were always there, supported me in everything, and even when I felt like it was all too much for me, I could come and talk to you. And during all these moments, discussing research with you was always fun, full of

new ideas, and allowed me to learn so much from you and your enormous creativity. You showed me how to think big and pushed me never to play it safe or settle for simple questions or easy answers. I am incredibly grateful for all of this. But of course, it was not all research and Slack messages – whether at team events or retreats, your easy-going and entertaining manner made being around you such a joy. *Rune*, while formally my co-supervisor, you always felt like the gift of a second main supervisor. Your absolute and unconditional enthusiasm for my ideas and plans was truly invaluable. Even when I made a decision that you would not have made yourself, you always supported me wholeheartedly, while at the same time forcing me to think things through from every possible angle, not once, not twice, but at least three times. Your comments and criticisms were always uncannily on point – often to an extent that hurt. Whenever I had hoped (consciously or unconsciously) to sweep minor problems under the rug or avoid uncomfortable questions, you would appear in our next supervision meeting and carefully uncover all of these weak spots. For that reason, I probably should have become anxious about our meetings – but I did not. On the contrary, our discussions were among the most enjoyable moments of the entire PhD. I learned so much from you, especially the importance of doing research carefully and slowly rather than in a rushed way. But beyond specific questions of writing, theory, or design, I also cherished that we could talk about so many different things. This ranged from very big questions about what political science should strive for and the normative implications of our work, to completely random topics such as how to make the best coffee. Added to all of this was your genuine care, your humor, and your remarkable talent for finding smooth transitions between different agenda points, all of which made it such a pleasure to spend time with you.

Kristian and Morgan, you were not only my postdoc colleagues in the DEMNORM project, but very quickly became like academic older siblings to me. I loved our discussions, and I learned an enormous amount from both of you. *Kristian*, you showed me how to actually finish things – and how to anticipate and pre-empt even the nastiest reviewer comments before they arrive. *Morgan*, you pushed me to think more broadly, beyond differences-in-means and technical details, and to ask what the deeper meaning and implications of our work really are (and thank you as well for

backing my small but passionate fight against using Stata in the project). But what I appreciated most were the moments beyond the desk: with you two around, it was guaranteed that things would never be boring, and I always felt surrounded by genuinely kind and thoughtful people. I am glad that we were so much more than just colleagues, and that we could share and do so many things together, both within and outside of work.

There are also people who are simply there with you every day: your office partners. I was very lucky to have two wonderful ones. When I started, *Aske*, you helped me with everything and got me on board during my first months. Through you, I also got my first real impression of what life as a PhD student actually looks like. Your calm and friendly way of being – and the fact that you were still able to watch football in the office despite being only a few weeks away from handing in – showed me that it is possible to do a PhD without being constantly stressed or going crazy, and helped take away many of the worries I had when I started. I also very much enjoyed our coffee sessions and the random chats in between, which made the new PhD life lighter and more fun. *Mads*, you accompanied me through almost my entire PhD, and during that time you had to endure countless rants about the Big Five and bad ggplots – as well as my questionable singing whenever I accidentally started humming along to my music while working (sorry about that). And yet, you always came back the next day. So many of my fondest memories are from our everyday office life: our coffee breaks, the random conversations that sometimes escalated and neatly bridged the time between two coffee breaks, and our spontaneous trips to play table football or table tennis. The office was always full of joy, bad jokes, and long discussions about how to improve those very bad ggplots. Someone once described us as an old married couple – and in a way, that probably sums us up quite well: a lot of teasing, but always building each other back up again when things were not going so well. Thanks for all of that!

While many of the people I met at the department made the time so special, two of them were not only colleagues, but also the people I came home to every day. *Lea*, despite our seemingly insurmountable cultural differences (it is called *Das Nutella*), I could not have imagined a better, kinder, or more humorous roommate. I will always fondly remember our evenings of loudly arguing with the TV whenever journalists

or politicians said something painfully misguided – usually followed by one of us declaring that this was exactly why people lose faith in politics. There are so many other moments I will always treasure as well, from failed cooking experiments and our shared love for Italo-Schlager to our Sunday-morning escapes from the real world while watching *Die Maus*. But most importantly, you also made our place feel like home, and I am enormously grateful for that. *Leon*, it was a real pleasure to share the apartment with you during your time in Aarhus, and I truly enjoyed our dinners, TV-series evenings, and simply spending time together. Your outgoing nature – and your ability to feel enormous joy, but also genuine outrage, in even the smallest moments – was so enriching. I am very glad that we became friends, and even more glad that this friendship continues to this day.

But also outside of my apartment, I have met so many people that became good friends along the way. *Daniel*, you started out as my mentor (and will always be) but very quickly also became a close friend. Your absolute positivity and your unshakable trust that everything will somehow work out were endlessly admirable, and spending time with you was always a joy, whether we were playing darts, strumming guitars, going for a hike, or just sitting together in a bar. *Julia and Lucas*, while I was supposed to be your mentor and help you with your problems (which I often failed to do rather spectacularly), I am glad to have met two such kind people. *Julia*, your affectionate and open nature – combined with your positive craziness, which has expressed itself in far too many ways to be reduced to just one here – made every encounter with you special. And *Lucas*, your calm and gentle manner, paired with your perfectly timed zingers, made being around you such a pleasure. *Edoardo*, I always loved your dry irony and sense of humor, but I am also grateful to you for always reminding me that our successes deserve to be celebrated. *MJ and Oksana*, thank you for challenging me on the badminton court, for somehow always knowing exactly how to abash me, and for just japping about the silliest things. *Emilie*, I cherished our conversations about research, and I am so glad to have found someone who shares my interests – but even beyond that, your kindness always made being around you a joy. *Nic*, you were such a fun companion, and I will never forget your lessons in how to dress appropriately. *Muzhou*, you made coffee breaks and hallway chats so

enjoyable, and I am grateful for keeping me updated on the latest viral trends about German stereotypes. And then there is the group of friends I will always remember as the most crazy, chaotic, and occasionally toxic (in the best way) bunch of people. *Hannah*, you always kept me on my toes by teasing me and introduced just the right amount of chaos into both office life and everything beyond it – all while being such a considerate and affectionate person. *Rasmus*, with your endless new dance moves, your striving for making everyone around you feel included, and all the things we could do together, being around you was always a joy. *Ida*, you somehow managed to embody moral and immoral at the same time, tried relentlessly to teach me the meaning of astrology, and were, throughout all of it, such a fun and wholehearted person. *Mathies*, your controversial takes never failed to enrich any conversation, your passion opened our eyes to the refined pleasures of the chocolate world, and your devotion as a friend was so adorable. *Mathias*, your mysterious aura, your journey from not even knowing *Mr. Brightside* to fully accepting (or loving?) it, and your gentle way of talking that somehow always made conversations escalate made every interaction with you memorable. *Leon* – not only as my roommate, but also as a central part of this group – your energy and your talent for talking yourself into trouble added so much to our chaos. *Maria*, you always seemed to have a sociological analysis ready for literally everything, but were just as quick to jump into any weird rant or absurd premise when it came to lovingly making fun of someone, which I always enjoyed so much. And *Mario*, with your funny and competitive spirit (which I could not admire more), and your impressive talent for digging yourself into ever deeper holes, it was always an absolute pleasure to be around you. Thank you all – without you, this experience simply would not have been the same.

I was also incredibly lucky to be part of a wonderful group of PhD students and postdocs/APs. Being around all of you was always a joy – whether in everyday office life or at the many social events and tours we shared, from our offices to countless Friday bars. I have great memories with so many people: *Alexandra*, *Ali*, *Anders*, *Ane*, *Ashraf*, *Aske*, *Benedicte*, *Bukh*, *Christian*, *Costin*, *Elizaveta*, *Emilie*, *Engdal*, *Francesco*, *Harald*, *Ida*, *Ida*, *Jake*, *Jannik*, *Julian*, *Karl*, *Kruse*, *Lasse*, *Laura*, *Laurits*, *Louise*, *Love*, *Lucilla*, *Lydia*, *Marc-Antoine*, *Mariam*, *Mikkel*, *Nanna*,

Niels, Paula, Rasmus, Robert, Samuel, Saral, Signe, Simone, Sofia, Tobi, Victor, William, and Winnie. Thank you all for creating such a warm and supportive community.

Beyond the many junior people, my PhD was made possible in countless ways by the great and kind people around me. In the Section on Political Behavior and Institutions, but also across countless workshops and informal exchanges, I was constantly surrounded by people with whom it was a joy to share ideas. I am grateful for all the moments and conversations, and want to especially thank *Kristina, Roman, Lasse, Svend-Erik, Suthan, the two Martins, Jan, Kim, Kees, Nick, Rasmus, Clara, and Mathias.* A very special thank you also goes to our PhD coordinators, *Helene and Lasse,* for always being on our side and fighting for us, and to our department heads, *Christopher and Peter Munk,* for consistently keeping an eye on the needs of young scholars. And finally, none of this would have worked without the fantastic administration – *Annette, Helle, Pernille, Ruth, Njall, Olivia, Anders, Kate, and Susanne* – who constantly supported me, reminded me of deadlines, and were still willing to help even when I showed up last-minute.

But not only in Aarhus – I also met a lot of great people during my research stay at Princeton University and the affiliated Mamdouha S. Bobst Center for Peace and Justice. This time was a defining part of my PhD and I am grateful for the people who made it so special. First and foremost, I want to thank *Rafaela* for hosting me, for discussing my ideas with such openness and generosity, and for always pushing me to think about the fundamental, bigger-picture questions. Our conversations were deeply insightful, and I took so much away from them. I am also very thankful to *Michelle and Christy* for always taking care of me and the other visitors, and for inviting us so warmly to the cozy Wednesday-morning bagels at the Bobst Center. *Francesco and Elettra,* thank you for sharing this visitor experience with me – for the many great conversations and for making this time so much fun. And finally, I am very grateful to the European Politics Research Group, especially *Vincent, Laura, and Florian,* for welcoming me so openly and for making me feel so included both academically and socially.

My biggest thank you goes to my family. I know I often struggled to explain what I actually do all day and what my PhD is about, and as

a result, much of it must have sounded repetitive and confusing to you (as you would kindly let me know from time to time). And yet, I always felt your complete confidence and trust in me. You have supported me in everything – not just during these PhD years, but throughout so many phases of my life as well. *Opa*, you always encouraged me to follow my interests and curiosities, and you were genuinely excited about me doing a PhD, which was truly comforting. And who knows – maybe my thirst for knowledge and discovery would never even have been awakened if you had not spent so many Sunday mornings with us watching Teletubbies for hours on end. *Jana*, we have been through so much together, and I know that I can always count on you being there for me. Your joy of life, your ability to find fun and excitement in new things, and your openness to the world are so enriching and inspiring. *Sven*, you have always been the big brother who took care of me, and I still fondly remember how you would come and check on me every evening before I fell asleep. You were always someone I could look up to – someone who went his own way, no matter what. And *Katrin*, *Pia*, and *Lea*: I have taken all of you so deeply into my heart, and I am so grateful that you are part of our family. *Mama*, there are no words that could come close to describing what you have done for us, what you have given up, and what you mean to me. It still amazes me how you managed to do it all, even when things were far from easy. With your unconditional love and support, you made me who I am today. You always showed us how important it is not only to look after oneself, but to care deeply about others. I am so, so grateful for everything you have done – and for everything you continue to be. But most of all, I am grateful that with all of you I will always have a home, no matter where I am living at the moment, and that I am welcomed back with so much love every single time.

Tim Lars Allinger,
January 2026

Preface

This report offers an overview and summary of my PhD dissertation *The Boundaries of Democracy: Institutions, Representation, and Violence Against Minorities*. The dissertation was written as the conclusion of my PhD project at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University. The dissertation consists of this summary report and the three research articles listed below. The report presents the core contributions of the articles, together with a discussion of the dissertation's overall theoretical framework, methodological challenges, and broader implications.

Paper A: Who Should Politicians Represent? How Winning an Election Influences Citizens' Views on Representation (Just Accepted at *The Journal of Politics*)

Paper B: Is this my Last Resort? Understanding Public Support for Hate Crimes against Refugees (*Working Paper*)

Paper C: Do Exclusionary Policies Increase Hate Crimes? Evidence from the Nomad Camps in Italy (*Working Paper*)

This dissertation was generously funded by the *Carlsberg Foundation* (Grant, NO. CF21-0459). I am deeply grateful for their support, which made this work possible.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Democracy is the only game in town. The problem is [when] people start to believe that it is not a game worth playing.”

— Ivan Kraster

Democracies are under growing strain. Across many countries, citizens are increasingly expressing a deepening sense of disillusionment with the institutions and actors meant to represent them, feeling that these are no longer acting in their best interest (Tormey 2014; Citrin and Stoker 2018; Pew Research Center 2024). This crisis is marked by declining trust in representative institutions, widespread political alienation, and a pervasive sense that something fundamental is failing. These struggles have been intensified by debates over immigration and ethnic diversity – one of the most contested issues in many democracies in recent decades (Grande, Schwarzbözl, and Fatke 2019; Dancygier and Margalit 2020). As societies become more diverse, the question of who belongs has moved to the center of political conflict. In this context, tensions over democratic inclusion and representation have grown more volatile, as citizens and political actors contest not only whose voices are heard, but also who counts as part of the political community – and, ultimately, who democracy is for.

Against this backdrop, citizens are increasingly turning away from democratic means of political expression and instead embracing attitudes and actions that fall outside the boundaries of democracy. This shift is most visible in the frequent attacks against refugees and other immigrant communities, which have surged again in recent years all across Europe (Frey 2020). The anti-immigrant riots in the United Kingdom in 2024 and Spain in 2025 only stand as the most visible manifestations of this broader and persistent phenomenon (BBC News 2024; Euronews 2025). Even more concerning is that such acts of violence are not universally condemned: Research shows that they often enjoy sizable public support across many countries (Dancygier 2023; Allinger and Bischof 2025; but see Westwood et al. 2022). This societal endorsement helps sustain an environment in

which potential perpetrators feel emboldened to act, allowing violence against minority groups to remain such a pervasive problem.

This development is concerning for three reasons. First, these acts inflict profound harm not only on the immediate victims but also on their broader communities, far exceeding the impact of non-hate-motivated attacks (Perry 2001; Paterson, Walters, and Brown 2019). This harm is troubling on its own, but also because it directly contradicts a core principle of liberal democracy: the protection of all individuals, including minority groups. Second, such attacks and their underlying hostility increase the risk of radicalization among members of the targeted communities, potentially drawing them toward other extremist groups (Lyons-Padilla et al. 2015; Mitts 2019). In this way, violence can set in motion cycles of retaliation that further destabilize societal cohesion. Third, the persistence and public toleration of these attacks risks normalizing violence as a form of political expression, posing a fundamental threat to the very norms that make democracy work.

But what keeps citizens within democratic boundaries, and what drives them to step outside them by supporting or even engaging in anti-minority violence? Prior research has long pointed to the role of individual characteristics, showing how personal traits, social-psychological dispositions, and group dynamics can make some individuals more prone to hostility and violent behavior toward minorities (e.g., McDevitt, Levin, and Bennett 2002; Dunbar 2003). Beyond individual factors, structural changes in society – such as demographic shifts and the resulting economic or cultural conflicts – have also been shown to fuel anti-immigrant violence (e.g., Krueger and Pischke 1997; Dancygier 2010; Gerstenfeld 2017). Finally, a growing body of work highlights the importance of situational triggers: Specific events such as referendums (e.g., Albornoz, Bradley, and Sonderegger 2020), terrorist attacks (e.g., Hanes and Machin 2014), or crimes attributed to refugees (e.g., Riaz, Bischof, and Wagner 2024) can act as catalysts, translating latent hostility into violent action.

Notwithstanding the important insights of these prior studies, they have underexplored a critical factor: the role of democratic institutions and their actors. Yet I argue it is precisely these institutions that structure political life, defining the opportunities for action and the boundaries of what citizens perceive as legitimate. Therefore, this dissertation shifts

the focus to the role of democratic institutions, guided by the following question:

How do democratic institutions shape whether citizens remain within democratic boundaries or step outside them by supporting or committing violence against ethnic minorities and immigrants?

The core argument of this dissertation is that democratic institutions perform a dual role in political life: They channel citizens' demands while also defining the boundaries of legitimate action. By *democratic institutions*, I refer to the structures of representative governance and the political actors who implement policies through them. I argue that understanding both functions is essential to addressing the central question of this dissertation. On the one hand, they represent citizens' interests and provide channels for them to influence policy, transforming conflicts into legitimate political participation (Easton 1965). On the other hand, democratic institutions steer and shape citizens' perceptions of who belongs within the political community and what actions are acceptable (March and Olsen 1984). In contexts of immigration and ethnic diversity, I contend that institutions face a balance they need to strike between representing and steering: Accommodating exclusionary demands risks normalizing hostility, while ignoring them can fuel frustration and support for violence.

Therefore, I argue that analyzing both sides of this dual role is crucial for understanding when citizens remain within democratic boundaries and when they condone or engage in anti-minority violence. To address this, the dissertation builds on three self-contained articles. Each tackles a distinct subquestion, and together they provide a comprehensive picture of the delicate balance democratic institutions must strike.

Paper A takes a first step and asks: *What do citizens expect from democratic institutions?* Understanding these expectations is crucial, as they help explain why people might step outside of their boundaries. The paper focuses on the role of local representatives, examining whom citizens believe these politicians should represent and whether these expectations shift with electoral outcomes. Drawing on evidence from German district MPs, the paper shows that citizens generally expect politicians to represent all citizens in their constituency, not just their own supporters. However,

this expectation weakens once voters' preferred candidate wins office, revealing a self-serving bias. At the same time, citizens continue to demand that their own interests be represented, even when they are not part of the majority. These findings suggest that citizens' evaluations of democratic institutions are likely to depend on whether they feel their own interests are being acknowledged and addressed.

But what happens when citizens feel that these democratic institutions, and specifically politicians, are not responding to their concerns? Paper B explores this question in the context of immigration and the admission of refugees, focusing on far-right voters, who typically harbor the strongest resentment toward refugees. The paper shows that when these voters perceive politicians as unresponsive, they become more supportive of attacks against refugees, despite having initially used non-violent means to express their demands. In this way, violence emerges as a *last resort* when conventional avenues of influence appear ineffective. By highlighting how perceptions of political responsiveness shape support for anti-refugee violence, the paper illuminates the role of the representative function of democratic institutions in either containing or fueling citizens' willingness to step outside democratic boundaries.

Paper C shifts from the representing to the steering function of democratic institutions and asks: *How do institutions shape citizens' perceptions of legitimate behavior toward immigrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities?* The paper shows that when local governments implement exclusionary policies based on ethnic identity, this signals that certain groups are less entitled to belong. Such signals, in turn, increase the likelihood of hostile and violent acts against these groups. By highlighting the steering function, the paper demonstrates how policy choices shape citizens' understanding of acceptable behavior, influencing the extent to which they act in ways that conflict with democratic principles.

Taken together, the three papers illustrate different facets of how democratic institutions shape citizens' attitudes and behaviors in two interconnected ways: by representing their interests and by signaling the boundaries of acceptable conduct. Each paper sheds light on a particular aspect of this broader framework, showing that citizens expect their views to always be represented, and that perceptions of institutional responsiveness influence whether they remain within democratic norms,

just as institutional signals about who belongs in the political community can fuel intolerance and violence.

In the context of immigration and ethnic diversity, this creates a difficult tension for institutions: Responding too readily to exclusionary demands risks normalizing hostility toward minority groups, while failing to address citizens’ grievances can generate frustration and increase support for anti-minority violence. The findings highlight how institutions must simultaneously channel public demands and enforce normative limits to maintain both legitimacy and stability. An overview of the papers that make up the dissertation is provided in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Overview of the Articles in the Dissertation

	Short title	Title	Status
Paper A	<i>Winner-loser</i>	Who Should Politicians Represent? How Winning an Election Influences Citizens’ Views on Representation	Just Accepted at <i>The Journal of Politics</i>
Paper B	<i>Last Resort</i>	Is this my Last Resort? Understanding Public Support for Hate Crimes against Refugees	Working Paper
Paper C	<i>Camps</i>	Do Exclusionary Policies Increase Hate Crimes? Evidence from the Nomad Camps in Italy	Working Paper

Based on these papers, this dissertation makes three broader contributions. First, it emphasizes the role of democratic institutions in explaining when and why citizens support or engage in violence against minority groups. While prior studies have primarily focused on personality-based or socio-structural explanations, this dissertation shifts the focus to the institutional and political context, highlighting the delicate balance institutions must strike between inclusion and exclusion and opening avenues for future research on the institutional determinants of anti-minority and other forms of political violence. Second, it advances the literature on political representation by moving beyond the electoral arena, showing how institutional decisions shape citizens’ perceptions and behaviors even outside formal political participation, and how failures in representation can push people even toward violent actions. Third, it contributes methodologically by demonstrating ways to achieve causal inference in a difficult and sensitive field, combining survey experiments and detailed case studies

to examine citizens' democratic understandings as well as their attitudes toward and engagement in violence. In doing so, the dissertation provides both substantive and methodological insights for studying these dynamics in the future.

Outline of the dissertation

The dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 develops the overarching framework, introducing the dual roles of democratic institutions – representing citizens' interests and steering perceptions of legitimate behavior – and linking these roles to violence against immigrants and ethnic minorities. It also situates the arguments of the individual papers within this broader framework. Chapter 3 discusses the main methodological challenges, including how to assess causality in complex real-world settings and the promises and pitfalls of studying citizens' attitudes and behaviors. This chapter also explains how each paper navigates these challenges. Chapter 4 presents the core findings of the dissertation. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the broader contributions of the dissertation, situating the results in relation to existing research, exploring their normative implications, and highlighting remaining gaps that warrant future investigation.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

“Opposites are not contradictory but complementary.”

— Niels Bohr

This chapter develops the theoretical framework underpinning the dissertation. At its core, this project asks how democratic institutions shape citizens’ willingness to step outside democratic boundaries and support or engage in xenophobic violence. To answer this question, we need to consider both sides of the institutional relationship: what citizens expect from democratic institutions, and how these same institutions shape citizens’ perceptions of acceptable political behavior.

Democratic institutions, I argue, serve a double role in sustaining peaceful political conflict and societal cohesion. I refer to these functions as *representing* and *steering*. On the one hand, they channel political demands by providing avenues for people’s views to be represented, allowing them to make their voices heard and influence political outputs (Easton 1965). This representative function transforms potentially disruptive discontent into legitimate political participation. On the other hand, democratic institutions steer the boundaries of political life by signaling who belongs, what kinds of actions are appropriate, and what democracy itself entails (March and Olsen 1984). Thus, in serving these two functions, institutions both represent society’s diversity of opinion and actively shape the contours of political contestation and the terms of societal co-existence.

I argue that regarding immigration and ethnic diversity – one of the most contentious issues in many societies – there is a fine line to navigate, requiring a careful balance between representing demands and steering boundaries. Elected representatives and institutions must acknowledge and address citizens’ concerns and grievances, yet their responses also signal who is part of the political community and what forms of action toward minority groups are acceptable. Straying too far in either direction carries risks. Over-accommodation through restrictive policies can normalize exclusionary or hostile demands and behaviors, while complete inattention

can deepen alienation and resentment. I contend that understanding this balance – and the consequences of failing in either role – is key to explaining when and why people move beyond democratic boundaries and become willing to approve of or commit attacks against refugee and immigrant groups.

In the following, I unpack the two functions of democratic institutions – representing and steering – in greater detail, discussing them from the perspective of citizens and exploring how they relate to citizens’ willingness to move beyond democratic boundaries by supporting or committing attacks on ethnic minority and immigrant groups. I conclude by synthesizing these dynamics into the theoretical framework that underpins the dissertation.

2.1 Representing

Citizens’ representation and involvement in the political process is a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy. As discussed in Easton’s (1965) seminal work, a central function of the political system is to convert inputs – including citizens’ demands – into outputs. Likewise, Dahl (1971) argues that democratic legitimacy rests on citizens having opportunities to influence policies that matter to them. In line with this, recent research emphasizes that "the quality of democracy is closely bound up with the quality of representation" (Wolkenstein and Wratil 2021: p.862), indicating that the way citizens’ views are represented in the political process is central to sustaining democratic legitimacy.

The meaning and practice of political representation has been the subject of extensive debate. Scholars have long examined what representation entails and how it should function (e.g., Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 2003; Rehfeld 2009; Saward 2010). In recent decades, empirical research has also focused on how citizens perceive and make sense of representation (e.g., Bowler and Donovan 2002; Blumenau, Wolkenstein, and Wratil 2025). Understanding these perceptions and expectations about how people want to be represented is important not only from a normative perspective (Disch 2015), but also for the stability of democratic systems themselves.

This is because their legitimacy hinges not only on the existence of formal procedures and participatory opportunities – it also depends on how citizens experience and interpret these democratic principles in practice

(Esaïasson, Kölln, and Turper 2015; Ferrín and Kriesi 2016). Even the most inclusive procedures will fail to stabilize democracy if people do not believe that their voices are heard and taken seriously. For democratic institutions to effectively channel political conflict into non-violent and legitimate forms of participation, people must believe that politicians are listening and responding to their interests and concerns, and that they have a chance to influence policies. This perceived responsiveness is critical for sustaining citizens' commitment to democratic norms.

Thus, to understand why people remain within democratic boundaries – and when they are willing to step outside them – it is crucial to examine how they perceive the representative role of politicians and institutions. Two key questions guide this inquiry. First, whose interests do citizens believe politicians should represent? Second, what are the consequences when people feel that politicians are not responding to their concerns about refugees and immigration – and particularly, when do such frustrations translate into a willingness to endorse anti-refugee violence?

Whom politicians should represent

Normative theories of democracy widely agree that politicians should represent the interests of citizens. This assumption also underpins much empirical work, which shows that many people expect politicians to be responsive to public opinion (e.g., Carman 2006; Rosset, Giger, and Bernauer 2017). A substantial body of research has explored whether representatives should prioritize national interests or those of their local constituencies (e.g., Bengtsson and Wass 2011; Vivyan and Wagner 2016). Yet this literature leaves a key question unresolved: Whom do citizens actually expect politicians to represent? This is the question I take up in Paper A.

A crucial distinction concerns whether citizens believe elected representatives should act on behalf of all constituents or primarily serve those who voted for them. The notion that politicians have a responsibility to represent even those who did not support them at the ballot box is referred to as *partisan surrogation* (Wolkenstein and Wratil 2021). Understanding these expectations is essential, as they shape how citizens evaluate whether the political system is functioning properly and how they judge the representative performance of politicians.

I argue that citizens' expectations about representation are not fixed, but malleable and shaped by self-interest. Extensive research demonstrates that self-interest guides a wide range of political attitudes and evaluations (e.g., Chong, Citrin, and Conley 2001), and I assert that the desire to have one's own views represented is no exception. When individuals find themselves on the losing side of an election, they become inclined to support the idea that politicians should represent all citizens. This tendency should be particularly pronounced in single-member-district systems, where a single representative serves the entire constituency. Here, losing-side voters have a strong incentive to expect the representative to cater to the interests of all citizens in their constituency – otherwise, their own local interests would lack direct representation in the policy process. Conversely, when individuals are part of the electoral majority, they should become more likely to believe that politicians should prioritize their own voters. This approach increases their chances of seeing their preferences enacted and receiving more focused attention from their representatives.

Taken together, I argue that citizens apply a double standard in their expectations of representation: They endorse inclusive representation when in the minority but favor more exclusive representation when in the majority. Ultimately, they want their own views to be represented as fully as possible – and are likely to judge politicians' responsiveness based on how well it serves that goal.

When politicians (seemingly) do not respond

Above, I argued that citizens hold strong expectations that politicians will respond to their concerns and act in their interest – even when they have lost an election. But what happens when people feel that politicians are not listening or responding to their concerns? Previous research shows that such perceptions undermine the legitimacy of policy decisions (Esaïasson, Gilljam, and Persson 2017; Arnesen and Peters 2018), fuel populist attitudes (Castanho Silva and Wratil 2023), and increase support for extremist parties (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou 2018).

In Paper B, I argue that these dynamics can also lead some individuals to support actions that fall outside democratic boundaries. This is particularly relevant in the context of immigration and refugee admission – a

policy area often marked by intense and emotional public debate (Freeman 1997; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008). When individuals hold strong negative sentiments toward refugees, the perception that politicians are acting against their interests – for example, by pursuing refugee policies perceived as overly permissive – can lead to an escalation. In such cases, individuals may become more likely to endorse violence; not necessarily by engaging in it themselves, but by approving of or justifying attacks against refugees.

This reaction can be explained by two underlying mechanisms. First, when individuals perceive that politicians are acting against their interests, it can fuel a sense of frustration, which may in turn increase support for violence as a form of emotional release (Berkowitz 1989; Jasper 2011). From this perspective, violence serves a cathartic function – offering a sense of control or relief in a context where people feel powerless or ignored. As a result, individuals who already harbor anti-refugee sentiments and perceive refugee policies as overly permissive may become more willing to accept or justify violence as an outlet for their frustration.

Second, beyond serving as an emotional outlet, anti-refugee violence can also be understood as instrumental action – a means to achieve concrete goals (Dancygier 2023). For one thing, such attacks may be seen as a way to deter refugees from settling in a particular area by sending a hostile signal and instilling fear (Watts 2001; Marbach and Ropers 2019). From this perspective, people may support violence if they believe it will directly reduce the presence of refugees. Furthermore, individuals may also view anti-refugee violence as a way to send a signal to political elites (Koopmans 1996; Dancygier 2010). Such attacks might either be used to draw their attention to the concerns of the population, or to pressure them directly to make concessions by adopting stricter immigration and refugee policies.

Altogether, this suggests that individuals who hold strong anti-refugee sentiments may become more likely to support attacks on refugees when they perceive politicians as acting against their interests – for instance, when they perceive refugee policies to be too permissive. In these situations, violence may be seen either as an emotional outlet or as an instrumental tool to change the situation (or both).

However, I argue that the link between permissive refugee policies and support for anti-refugee violence is not automatic. For many individuals,

such attacks may be considered as a *last resort* – something they endorse only when they feel that no other means of influence remain. Citizens have various channels to express their concerns and potentially influence policies, such as organizing protests or signing petitions. I argue that support for violence is more likely to emerge when these alternative avenues have been exhausted but are perceived as having failed.

This is because, first, such situations may create the perception that politicians are entirely ignoring public concerns – even after citizens have exhausted all non-violent means to communicate their concerns. This sense of complete unresponsiveness can heighten frustration (Easton 1965), which in turn may fuel even more support for violence as an emotional outlet. Second, even when violence is driven by instrumental rather than emotional motives, a similar pattern should emerge. Prior research suggests that people tend to prefer non-violent solutions (Gurr 1970; Koopmans 1996; Schumpe et al. 2018). In the case of anti-refugee violence, this might be due to moral objections to violence – especially if directed against other human beings – or because such violent attacks carry the risk of negative consequences. For instance, violent attacks can cause destruction of property and place a financial burden on the community, or refugees might commit retaliatory attacks that could even escalate into broader ethnic conflicts, all of which would ultimately also harm the local native population. These moral objections and potential risks might make people initially unwilling to support violence. However, they should receive less weight when people believe that there are no other means available.

In sum, I therefore argue that support for anti-refugee violence in response to permissive policies is most likely when non-violent options have been tried and failed. In these situations, individuals are more likely to view democratic institutions as failing to fulfill the function of representing their interests, making actions outside democratic boundaries feel more acceptable.

2.2 Steering

In the previous section, I argued that a core function of democracy is to represent citizens' interests and translate them into policy, and that when people feel this function is not fulfilled, they become more likely to

support violence, particularly in the context of immigration and refugees. However, I argue that representing citizens' views is not the only function of democratic institutions – they also steer citizens' understanding of democratic life and shape what constitutes acceptable behavior. In their seminal work on *The Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba (1963) already hinted at this two-way relationship: While a civic culture supports a stable political system, institutions themselves can help form that very culture. Even more explicitly, March and Olsen (1984) argued that institutions influence what individuals consider appropriate behavior.

This perspective has inspired a large body of research on *democratic learning*, which examines how institutions shape citizens' beliefs and expectations about democracy. Scholars have shown that individuals form opinions about democracy and appropriate behavior not only based on personal preferences or group interests, but also by learning from the institutional context in which they are embedded (e.g., Rohrschneider 1999; Heyne 2018; Ferrín and Hernández 2021). While often understood as the internalization and socialization of a system's core values, recent research suggests that institutions can also influence what people believe others think, thereby shaping broader norms, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., Tankard and Paluck 2016; Bischof and Wagner 2019; Valentim 2021). Importantly, even political institutions themselves, such as parties and electoral competition, can become arenas in which the boundaries of legitimate behavior are actively contested and reshaped (Daur 2024).

The steering effect of institutions, I argue, also extends to the realm of immigration and ethnic diversity. Especially through policies, institutions play a powerful role in defining the boundaries of belonging. Research on immigrants and ethnic minorities shows that their perceptions of their place in society are strongly shaped by the institutional context, particularly by immigration and integration policies (Bloemraad 2006; Mallet-García and García-Bedolla 2021; Rottmann 2023). These findings underscore the powerful role institutions play in shaping everyday experiences of how minority members think about their belonging in society.

But how can institutions and policies shape how majority members think about and behave toward immigrants and ethnic minorities? I argue that these signals shape not only how minorities see their own position, but also how majority members perceive the place of minorities

in society. In line with this, Weldon (2006) finds that the more strongly the dominant national culture is embedded in citizenship laws and policies, the less tolerant majority members tend to be toward ethnic minorities. Building on this, I argue that exclusionary policies portraying immigrants or minorities as outsiders can foster perceptions that they do not fully belong and can be mistreated. Such signals can increase the likelihood that majority members endorse or engage in discriminatory or violent hate crimes. Below, I explain in more detail how exclusionary policies can create an environment in which attacks on immigrants and ethnic minorities are seen as more acceptable.

When institutions steer perceptions of (non-)belonging

The core of my argument in Paper C is that exclusionary policies can increase the incidence of hate crimes against ethnic minority and immigrant groups. I define policies as exclusionary when they portray or treat these groups as not belonging or actively exclude them, particularly on the basis of their identity as a distinct group. Examples include restrictions on access to resources, bans on cultural or religious practices, and residential segregation measures (e.g., Green 2004; Abdelgadir and Fouka 2020).

Previous research shows that hate crimes often target those perceived as not entitled to belonging (Perry 2001; Miller-Idriss 2020). I argue that such perceptions can be steered and reinforced by exclusionary policies, leading majority members to perceive that certain groups are not fully entitled to belong. This, in turn, can increase the likelihood of violent and hostile attacks against minority members. Two mechanisms explain how such policies can entrench perceptions of non-belonging and thereby fuel hate crimes.

On the one hand, exclusionary policies can influence behavior through a direct channel. The state's legitimacy and authority give its actions powerful signaling effects, shaping public perceptions of who belongs and what behaviors toward them are acceptable. As discussed above, institutions play a central role in defining understandings of society and acceptable behaviors (March and Olsen 1984; Rohrschneider 1999; Tankard and Paluck 2017). Exclusionary measures therefore send a clear message that these groups are undeserving of full inclusion, legitimizing discrimination and

weakening norms of tolerance. Over time, such policies become *symbols of legitimate exclusion*, fostering perceptions that certain groups need not be tolerated and that majority members have a right to determine who belongs. This then increases the likelihood that individuals will act on prejudice in exclusionary and intolerant ways, including through hate crimes.

On the other hand, an indirect channel operates through the enduring conditions that exclusionary policies create, reinforcing social divisions and normalizing exclusion. For example, segregating minority groups into isolated areas not only signals their non-belonging but also shapes everyday perceptions of social order. This geographical and social separation increases the psychological distance between groups (Enos 2017), making ethnic boundaries more visible and deeply entrenched. This, in turn, amplifies the perceived otherness of minority groups, fostering the belief that they do not truly belong, thereby making discrimination and violence against them seem more acceptable.

In summary, exclusionary policies influence perceptions of ethnic and immigrant minorities' place in society through both direct and indirect effects. Directly, they signal who is entitled to belong and who holds the authority to decide this; indirectly, they create conditions that deepen social divisions and normalize exclusion. These changes affect what behaviors toward minorities are seen as acceptable and reshape majority-minority relations. Crucially, these policies do not necessarily alter individuals' personal feelings toward minority groups, but rather their sense of obligation to tolerate them, which in turn can legitimize violent acts like hate crimes.

I argue that these shifts in perception are not limited to specific groups but affect broader attitudes toward all minorities seen as different or undesirable. Social psychology research shows that people often divide others into *friends and foes* (Kam and Kinder 2012), leading to generalized negative feelings toward out-groups (Meuleman et al. 2019). Consequently, exclusionary policies can have wide-reaching effects, shaping behavior not only toward the targeted group but also toward other minority groups. This change in attitudes about whether minorities must be tolerated can fuel exclusionary and violent actions, including hate crimes, against various groups perceived as outsiders.

2.3 Between Representing and Steering

To summarize, this dissertation argues that democratic institutions serve a dual function. First, they must represent citizens by translating their demands into policies and actions – an essential foundation for maintaining legitimacy. I contend that citizens expect exactly this, yet their views on whose interests should be prioritized often follow a self-serving bias, making it inherently difficult for politicians to meet these expectations. Second, institutions play a steering role by defining the boundaries of democratic life, determining which behaviors and attitudes are considered acceptable or unacceptable.

When it comes to issues regarding refugees, immigrants, and ethnic minorities, striking a careful balance between these functions is crucial to prevent citizens from crossing democratic boundaries by endorsing or engaging in violence against members of these groups. On one hand, it is important that people feel their views are heard and addressed through democratic processes – without this sense of representation, especially when other non-violent political avenues seem exhausted, support for violence against minority groups may grow. On the other hand, by accommodating exclusionary attitudes through restrictive policies targeting immigrants or ethnic minorities, institutions risk reinforcing perceptions that these groups are not fully entitled to belong. This can legitimize hostile attitudes and increase the social acceptance of attacks against them. Ultimately, this dissertation highlights the delicate tension between representing citizens' views and steering democratic boundaries; failures in either function help explain why some individuals resort to violence against minority groups.

This theoretical framework underpins the empirical analyses presented in the following chapters. By linking the representative and steering functions of democratic institutions, it offers a lens for understanding not only how citizens form expectations of the political system, but also how institutional signals shape the boundaries of legitimate political behavior. The goal is to illuminate the tensions that arise when these two functions pull in different directions – a perspective that has received little systematic attention. While this framework does not aim to fully resolve these tensions, it marks a first step toward conceptualizing them and assessing their consequences for democratic stability and societal cohesion.

Chapter 3

Methods

“What is essential is invisible to the eye.”

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

In this chapter, I discuss the overarching methodological approach that underpins the three studies that make up this dissertation. While the individual papers draw on a diverse set of data sources and research designs, each with their own strengths and limitations, they all rely on quantitative methods. The goal here is not to outline each design in detail, which would add little to the overall understanding of the dissertation’s core claims and contributions. Instead, this chapter focuses on the broader methodological challenges involved in studying how political contexts and events shape citizens’ attitudes and behaviors, especially when addressing such sensitive issues as democratic understandings or xenophobic violence.

These challenges can be understood as reflecting a broader problem: the difficulty of observing what matters most – those things that are *invisible to the eye*, as the Little Prince famously had to learn. In essence, this means that we must attend not only to what is visible or readily observed, but also to what may remain hidden or overlooked. This guiding principle will help to illuminate the two central methodological challenges addressed in this chapter: (1) how to make credible claims about causal effects in a complex and dynamic world, and (2) how to study attitudes and behaviors in a way that ensures we are truly capturing what we seek to understand. I discuss these challenges in more detail below, followed by a brief overview of the data sources and research designs of each study, outlining how each addresses these difficulties.

3.1 Challenge I – Bringing Causal Structure into a Messy World

If we want to understand how a specific event influences an attitude or behavior, we ultimately need to answer the question: What happens when the event occurs, and what would have happened if it had not? For example, imagine a person, Simon, who lives in a municipality that hands out free ice cream to all residents during the summer. We want to know whether this affects Simon’s happiness. To do so, we would need to know how happy Simon is currently, but also how happy he would have been if the municipality had not distributed free ice cream. The challenge is that we cannot observe Simon in both scenarios simultaneously – only in the reality that actually occurs. This dilemma is known as the *fundamental problem of causal inference*: We can never observe the counterfactual outcome for the same individual or unit.

For this reason, we typically compare individuals to one another using a between-subjects design. In this example, that would mean comparing Simon to his friend Carl, who lives in a neighboring municipality that does not hand out free ice cream, and then assessing who is happier. However, Simon and Carl – and the municipalities they live in – may differ in many other ways. They might attend different schools, and the school in Simon’s municipality could be better funded because the area is wealthier, which might also manifest in their ability to afford and provide free ice cream. Consequently, any difference in their happiness might be driven by factors other than the ice cream distribution, making it difficult to isolate the true effect of the policy. Therefore, the main goal is to find observations that are as similar as possible except for the main variable of interest – in this case, free ice cream in the municipality. For example, we might compare only individuals who attend schools with comparable resources and who come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, so that differences in happiness are more likely to reflect the ice cream policy rather than other confounding influences. This approach is known as *conditioning on observables*. It is one of the strategies I use in Paper C (*Camps-Paper*) to compare the behavior of citizens in different municipalities.

But here the wisdom of the Little Prince becomes relevant: *What is essential is invisible to the eye*. There may be many important differences

between two individuals that we cannot observe, either because we lack the data or because we simply have not considered them. These unobserved factors, or confounders, make it extremely difficult – if not impossible – to find truly comparable individuals. As a result, our ability to draw credible causal inferences is threatened, since we cannot be certain whether differences in outcomes are due to the variable of interest or to hidden differences between the subjects.

Across the different studies, I employ a range of strategies to address this problem and ensure that the units being compared are truly similar, except for the one factor whose effect I am interested in. This helps minimize the influence of unobserved factors and increases confidence that any observed differences can be interpreted as causal effects. In one study, I use an experimental design in which the main independent variable is randomly assigned. In others, I rely on quasi-experimental designs using observational data to approximate the conditions of a true experiment and address potential confounding. I discuss these strategies, as well as their promises and pitfalls, in more detail below.

The experimental solution

One way to overcome the problem of confounding is through the use of experiments – often viewed as the gold standard for causal inference. In an experimental design, the researcher randomly assigns participants to different groups, where each group is exposed to a different condition. Because this assignment is random, it ensures that participants in each group are, on average, similar in all respects except for the treatment itself. In other words, there are no hidden or invisible differences between the groups by design. As a result, any systematic differences observed after the treatment can be attributed to the treatment rather than to pre-existing differences. This allows us to draw credible conclusions about causal effects by directly comparing outcomes across the groups.

In Paper B (*Last Resort*-Paper), I implement such an experimental design, embedded in an online survey. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of several vignette texts, each describing a situation in a hypothetical municipality in Germany. The vignettes systematically varied two key elements: whether citizens had previously protested and signed

petitions against the number of refugees in the municipality, and whether the local council had decided to accept more refugees or severely restrict their admission. Following this setup, the vignette described an attack on a refugee shelter. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they supported or opposed the attack. This design allowed me to identify how situational factors causally influence public support for violence.

Yet while experimental designs – especially survey experiments – are powerful tools for addressing problems of confounding and selection bias, they are not without limitations. One key challenge lies in the assumption of information equivalence across treatment conditions (Dafoe, Zhang, and Caughey 2018). This principle holds that all relevant background information remains constant across conditions, and only the construct one intended to manipulate differs between treatment conditions. However, in practice, treatments may unintentionally lead participants to draw different inferences about aspects not explicitly mentioned. For example, if one vignette mentions a protest while another does not, it may also alter participants’ perceptions of the scale of the refugee problem – a factor that was not meant to vary but may nonetheless influence responses. This threatens the internal validity of the experiment by making it unclear whether observed effects are due to the intended treatment or to these unintended inferences.

While it is never entirely possible to eliminate such concerns, I took several steps in Paper B to mitigate them. I designed the vignettes to hold key background factors constant – for instance, by clarifying that the local refugee policy was a decision made by the municipal council itself, not imposed from above. I also informed all participants that protests had occurred in neighboring municipalities, so that the absence of protest in the vignette could not be misread as the result of repression. Finally, I analyzed open-ended responses to test whether the treatments unintentionally altered perceptions of background factors. Although not definitive, this analysis suggested that participants’ interpretations of background characteristics did not vary systematically across conditions, helping to further reduce concerns about experimental confounding.

A second common concern with survey experiments relates to their *ecological validity*: the extent to which the findings can be generalized

to real-world contexts (Barabas and Jerit 2010). Because participants are asked to respond to hypothetical scenarios in an artificial survey environment, their reactions may differ from how they would behave or feel in the real world. To mitigate this concern in Paper B, I designed the experimental vignettes to closely resemble real-world situations. For example, I drew on multiple newspaper reports of actual attacks on refugee shelters to construct the scenarios. In a pretest prior to the main study, I also assessed how realistic participants found the vignettes to be. The results indicated that a large majority perceived the scenarios as realistic, helping to mitigate concerns about artificiality.

Still, one might reasonably ask what such an isolated experimental setup can tell us about real-world dynamics, or whether the treatments would have the same effects outside the isolated survey setting. For example, in the experiment in Paper B, one might question whether implementing a restrictive refugee policy would genuinely reduce support for anti-refugee violence. As I discuss in the paper, political communication by far-right parties could undermine this effect by fueling the perception that the policy is insufficient – regardless of what is actually being implemented.

Such concerns, often framed as a lack of *mundane realism* – i.e., whether people would encounter and process information in real life the same way they do in the experiment – are important, but they can also stem from misunderstandings about what experiments are designed to do (Druckman 2022). As Druckman argues, when experiments are theory-driven, mundane realism is not always necessary. The goal is not to replicate the real world in every detail, but to isolate and test specific theoretical mechanisms. In my case, the experiment aimed to examine whether the perception that political leaders are responsive to citizen concerns shapes support for violence. This perception was manipulated through variation in local policy decisions within the vignette.

Crucially, the objective was not to predict whether such policy changes would have the same effects in a complex, real-world setting. Rather, it was to test whether a core psychological construct – a feeling that politicians are not responding to citizens’ concerns despite them having used all non-violent means – can causally influence attitudes toward political violence. Of course, one must be careful in drawing broader conclusions from such experiments. They are not designed to forecast real-world behavior in

all its complexity, but to isolate and test specific theoretical mechanisms under controlled conditions. Therefore, before dismissing an experiment for lacking realism, it is essential to consider its actual purpose. While concerns about ecological or mundane realism are valid, they do not invalidate the broader insights that theory-driven experiments can offer about causal mechanisms. When interpreted appropriately, such designs remain a powerful tool for understanding how and why people respond to political events and policies in the ways that they do.

While field experiments could, in theory, offer a compelling way to study these dynamics in real-world settings – such as by partnering with municipalities to randomly vary policy decisions and observe public reactions – they are often infeasible due to ethical concerns, practical limitations, or resource constraints. As a result, a valuable complementary strategy is to use observational data in quasi-experimental designs, which seek to approximate the logic of experiments by leveraging naturally occurring variation. In the next section, I outline how I apply such approaches in Papers A and C.

The quasi-experimental solution

As discussed above, experimental designs are often considered the gold standard for causal inference. However, they also come with important limitations. Some questions simply cannot be addressed through experiments because the key factors of interest are difficult – or ethically or practically impossible – to manipulate. In addition, experimental settings, particularly in surveys, often fall short when it comes to capturing long-term effects or the complexity of real-world dynamics.

Therefore, Papers A and C employ quasi-experimental designs using observational data to complement and extend the insights generated through survey experiments. In these approaches, the researcher does not manipulate the treatment directly but instead leverages real-world variation that mimics the logic of random assignment and enables credible causal inference (Cunningham 2021). The goal is to identify observations that are as similar as possible in all relevant respects – except for the key independent variable of interest. By carefully selecting cases or exploiting naturally occurring events, I aim to isolate exogenous variation in this

variable. This strategy allows me to estimate causal effects in contexts where experiments are not feasible, while also gaining insight into how these processes unfold over time and within real-world environments.

In Paper A, I examine how election outcomes – specifically, whether an individual ends up on the winning or losing side – shape people’s views on political representation and perceptions of who democracy ultimately serves. A key challenge in identifying this effect is that simply comparing all winners to all losers is likely to produce biased results. For example, voters who supported a candidate who clearly won may differ systematically from those who backed a clear loser, e.g. because of differences in candidate characteristics that may also influence attitudes toward representation. To address this, I use a *regression discontinuity design (RDD)* that focuses on very close elections. The core idea is that when an election is decided by a narrow margin, the outcome is as-if-random (De La Cuesta and Imai 2016). This allows me to compare voters on either side of the win-loss threshold who are otherwise similar on average, isolating the causal effect of winning versus losing.

In Paper C, I study how the establishment of ethnically defined, segregated camps by local governments for a specific minority group influenced the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes. The key challenge is that the decision to establish such camps may have been endogenous to local attitudes – municipalities with stronger xenophobic sentiments might have been more likely to implement such policies in the first place, confounding the relationship between policy and violence. To address this, I implement a spatial spillover design, focusing on neighboring municipalities that were geographically close to a camp but did not decide on its establishment. Specifically, I compare hate crime incidence in neighboring municipalities near camps to that in other adjacent municipalities located farther away. For the former, exposure to the policy is plausibly exogenous, as they were affected by the presence of a nearby camp without having played a role in its implementation. This allows me to estimate the causal effect of these camps on hate crime prevalence. To further ensure that municipalities near camps are not systematically different from others, I employ an instrumental variable approach.¹

¹Presenting the underlying idea and approach is beyond the scope of this summary, but I elaborate on this strategy in more detail in Paper C.

Taken together, these designs enable me to study the research questions in real-world settings while minimizing concerns about unobserved confounding factors. However, they also have limitations. Unlike controlled experiments, quasi-experimental designs rely on stronger assumptions, since the researcher cannot fully control the assignment or randomization process. Many of these assumptions are ultimately untestable. The best approach is to provide suggestive evidence that these assumptions are plausible and to demonstrate robustness across a range of model specifications. This is precisely what I do in Papers A and C, where I carefully present such evidence to support the validity of the findings.

Yet even if we accept that the necessary assumptions for quasi-experimental designs hold, a second challenge remains: Researchers are often limited to existing real-world variation, which can make it difficult to isolate precise causal mechanisms. This is partly due to the complexity of treatments in observational settings, where multiple factors may interact or compound, obscuring clear interpretation. While this problem can also arise in experimental designs, it tends to be more pronounced in quasi-experiments because the researcher does not have full control over the treatment conditions. To address this, I rely on examining observable implications that can provide indirect evidence that supports or contradicts specific mechanisms. This approach helps to strengthen the theoretical interpretation of the causal effects identified.

3.2 Challenge II – The Gap Between Attitudes and Behavior

When studying anti-minority violence and other undemocratic acts, the ultimate concern is not just what people think, but what they do. Violent attacks against immigrants and refugees are concrete actions with immediate and often devastating consequences for victims, democratic stability, and social cohesion. Understanding when and why hostile attitudes translate into real-world behavior is therefore essential, as the shift from opinion to action marks the difference between potential and actual harm. Yet studying only behavior would obscure the motivations and psychological foundations behind such acts. Attitudes provide crucial insight into these drivers, and focusing exclusively on either attitudes or behaviors risks

drawing an incomplete picture. Inferring one from the other is problematic, given longstanding evidence of gaps between attitudes and actions (Wicker 1969) – a gap we can only bridge by studying them in conjunction.

A second reason to study attitudes is that, even without acting violently themselves, individuals may indirectly encourage violence by legitimizing it in the eyes of potential perpetrators (Sibbitt 1997; Bowling 1999; Gaßebner et al. 2001). Public attitudes and violent acts are thus deeply intertwined.² For these reasons, this dissertation examines both attitudes and behaviors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of democratic and undemocratic phenomena.

Studying attitudes and studying behaviors each present their own distinct challenges, which can again be summarized by the insight from *The Little Prince*: The things that matter most are often invisible to the eye. In the following, I outline the specific difficulties of examining each, show how these stem from the problem of what remains unseen, and explain how I address them in this dissertation.

The difficulties in studying behavior

Studying why and when people engage in behaviors outside democratic boundaries poses a major challenge: reliably and consistently measuring such behavior. Controlled observation methods, like field experiments, are difficult due to ethical concerns, the rarity of these events, and their high resource demands. Self-reported behaviors in surveys offer an alternative but are often unreliable due to social desirability bias and memory errors (Belli et al. 1999; Krumpal 2013). Moreover, asking about illegal behaviors, such as violence against refugees, raises ethical risks, including self-incrimination and potential psychological harm to respondents.

Therefore, researchers often must rely on existing observational data not originally collected for research purposes, such as official government statistics or media reports. This is what I do in Paper C (*Camps-Paper*). However, this approach presents significant challenges. The primary concern is reporting bias and measurement error, which can affect data regardless of its source. Many acts remain hidden or invisible to the

²Of course, one might also be interested in when and why people are willing to voice such attitudes publicly – a behavior in itself – but understanding the attitudes is still essential for grasping what people think and might want to express.

researcher's eyes. This underreporting may result from victims or witnesses being unwilling or unable to report incidents to authorities like the police or NGOs, or from these institutions lacking the capacity or willingness to fully document such events (McDevitt and Iwama 2016; Pezzella, Fetzer, and Keller 2019; Vergani and Navarro 2023). Consequently, a substantial *dark field* of unobserved violence persists.

This complicates efforts to draw meaningful comparisons and make inferences about the causes of such acts. Especially across countries, varying documentation practices make systematic comparisons nearly impossible. But even within a single country, where laws and procedures are consistent, underreporting can vary systematically. This issue becomes especially problematic when underreporting is correlated with key independent variables, as it may lead to capturing differences in reporting behavior rather than actual differences in the prevalence of violence.

While it is impossible to completely rule out the risk of reporting bias, Paper C takes several steps to mitigate these concerns. First, I exclude data sources that, based on theoretical reasoning, are most vulnerable to misreporting. Additionally, existing research suggests that violent attacks tend to be less susceptible to underreporting compared to other forms of harm (Dancygier 2010). By focusing the analysis specifically on violent incidents and testing whether the results remain consistent, I aim to alleviate concerns related to measurement error and enhance the reliability of the findings.

The difficulties in studying attitudes

When it comes to studying attitudes, a similar challenge arises. In this dissertation, I rely on surveys – the most common tool for measuring public opinion – to capture citizens' attitudes toward democracy and anti-refugee violence. I draw on both existing datasets (Paper A) and original survey data I collected (Papers B & C). However, despite their prevalence, surveys have important limitations and may fail to fully reveal the attitudes we aim to understand. Once again, this stems from the fact that some aspects remain hidden or invisible to the researcher.

First, there is a potential problem with who chooses to participate in such surveys. People with certain political views may be more inclined

to participate, while others – potentially with different or less socially accepted views – might opt out. This non-response creates blind spots in the data, making some segments of the population invisible to the researcher and leading to a potentially distorted picture of public opinion.

Second, the researcher can never be entirely certain that survey responses reflect participants' genuine attitudes. While many factors can contribute to this uncertainty, two stand out as particularly important. On the one hand, respondents may withhold or alter their true views due to social desirability pressures, feeling compelled to give answers they believe are socially acceptable (Tourangeau and Yan 2007). On sensitive issues like support for violence, this often means respondents underreport their actual support, claiming opposition even when they privately approve. This dynamic can lead to systematic underestimation of support levels. However, in online surveys – where no interviewer is present – social desirability bias appears to be less pronounced (Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau 2008; see also Bischof et al. 2025). On the other hand, inattentiveness during surveys can push estimates in the opposite direction: Random or careless responding may inflate measured support for violence, producing systematic overestimation relative to actual attitudes (Westwood et al. 2022).

All in all, these challenges make it difficult to form a descriptively accurate picture of public opinion. Multiple sources of bias can push estimates in either direction, yet their relative strength remains unknowable because they cannot be directly observed. To mitigate these issues, I implement census-based quotas for key socio-demographic characteristics in all surveys to ensure that samples closely resemble the overall population. I also screened out inattentive respondents to reduce the risk of distorted findings. While these steps help to address potential biases, they cannot eliminate them entirely. Consequently, descriptive inferences drawn from survey data must be made with caution.

Yet all of these concerns and biases are far less consequential when the goal is to estimate causal effects, particularly in experimental settings. If we assume that factors such as attentiveness and social desirability pressures are distributed equally across experimental conditions – a point I explicitly test in the respective papers – then these issues are unlikely to bias treatment effect estimates. Moreover, existing research on the

generalizability of survey experiments suggests that sample composition has only limited influence on the size or direction of estimated effects (Coppock 2019; Druckman 2022). Thus, while descriptive estimates of public opinion may be prone to error, the conclusions regarding causal relationships can be drawn with greater confidence.

3.3 Overview of Papers

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the different papers, highlighting the outcomes they examine (behavior vs. attitudes), the data sources they draw on, and the research designs they employ. The dissertation brings together a broad range of empirical materials and analytical approaches. By studying both attitudes and behaviors, it addresses the research questions from complementary angles and strengthens the robustness of the overall conclusions.

Table 3.1: Overview of Data and Research Designs

	Outcomes attitudes	Outcomes behavior	Explanatory variables	Design	Years	Unit of analysis	Data sources
Paper A (<i>Winner-loser</i>)	Views on representation	—	Winning or losing in election	Quasi-experiment: Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD)	2013-2021	Voters in Germany (N = 5,512)	Post-election surveys (<i>GLSES</i>) Election results (<i>Bundeswahl-letter</i>)
Paper B (<i>Last Resort</i>)	Support for anti-refugee violence	—	Protest activity & Refugee policy	Experiment: Factorial survey vignette experiment	2025	Far-right voters in Germany (N = 2,356)	Own data collection (with <i>Bilendi</i>)
Paper C (<i>Camps</i>)	Exclusionary views & support for anti-refugee violence	Hate crimes against refugees & immigrants	Exposure to exclusionary policy (Nomad Camps)	Quasi-experiment: Spatial spillover + Instrumental variable approach	2007-2020 (behavior) 2024 (attitudes)	Municipalities in Italy (N = 7,579) Adults in 5 metropolitan cities in Italy (N = 308)	Nomad Camps (<i>A21L</i>) Hate crimes (<i>Lunaria</i>) Government statistics (<i>ISTAT</i>) Own data collection (with <i>Cimt</i>)

Chapter 4

Findings

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

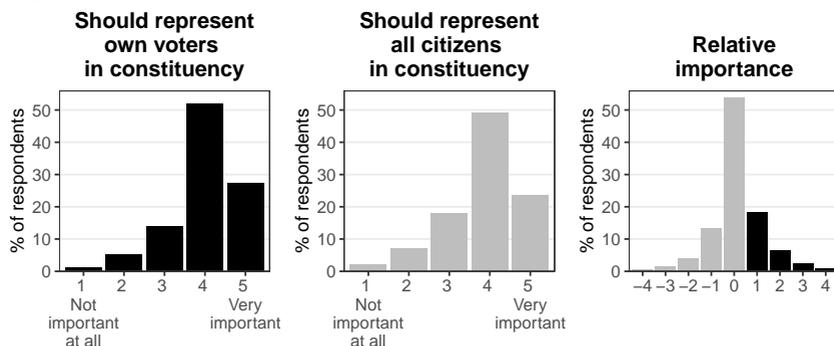
— James Baldwin

This chapter presents the core findings of the dissertation, structured around the dual role of democratic institutions in representing citizens’ interests and steering the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Since the individual papers discuss their cases, findings, and robustness in detail, I focus here on the main results. First, I take a closer look at the representing function of democratic institutions. I start by examining whom citizens expect politicians to represent, and how this depends on whether they win or lose an election. I then explore the consequences when politicians are perceived to fall short of this representing role, showing that far-right voters become more willing to endorse violent attacks on refugee homes when they feel that politicians are acting against their interests – but only after non-violent channels, such as protests or petitions, have already been pursued. Finally, I turn to the steering function, demonstrating that an exclusionary policy – the creation of segregated areas for Sinti and Roma in Italy – led to an increase in xenophobic hate crimes, not only against the targeted group but also against other ethnic minorities. Together, these findings highlight the tensions that can arise when the functions of representing and steering pull in different directions.

4.1 Expectations of Representation

To better understand the representing function of democratic institutions – and the conditions under which citizens may perceive it to be failing – a good starting point is to examine what citizens expect from their representatives. In particular, whose interests do they believe politicians should prioritize? I address this question using evidence from Germany, focusing on expectations toward local representatives in the national

Figure 4.1: Citizens' expectations of their local representative



parliament. In the German electoral system, each of the 299 electoral districts elects one representative through a first-past-the-post vote.¹ Thus, if representatives were to serve only the interests of their own voters, the local concerns of those who supported other candidates would receive no direct representation.

I draw on fine-grained survey data in which respondents were asked how important they believe it is for their district representative to represent (1) their own voters in the constituency and (2) all citizens in the constituency (GLES 2024). Focusing on district delegates is useful because local interests are typically among citizens' top concerns, while their single-member role creates clear tensions over whose interests should be prioritized – tensions that also arise at other levels of representation, such as with mayors or national governments. Hence, these items enable me to understand citizens' broader understandings of representation, and how these views vary depending on their own electoral status.

Figure 4.1 displays the distribution of responses. Most respondents consider it either somewhat or very important for district representatives to represent both their own voters (left panel) and all citizens in the constituency (middle panel). To assess which of these roles is prioritized, I calculate a measure of *relative importance*: Values greater than zero

¹Citizens also cast a second vote for a political party, which determines the proportional composition of parliament. Nonetheless, district MPs play an important role, often serving as the primary link between citizens and the national legislature (Saalfeld 2002).

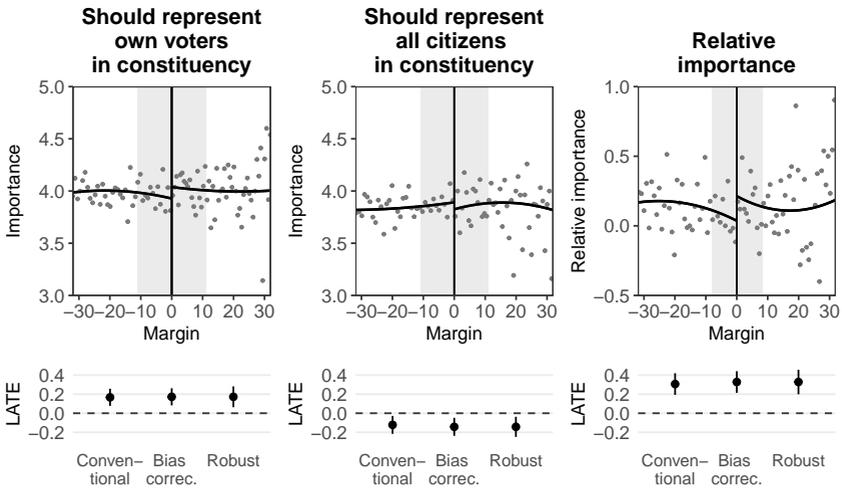
indicate a preference for representing one’s own voters, while values smaller than or equal to zero indicate a preference for representing all citizens (or viewing both as equally important). The results show that a clear majority of 72.5% believe representatives should be responsible for all citizens in their constituency equally (colored gray in the right panel), while only 27.5% think they should prioritize their own voters (colored in black). Overall, this suggests that there is a broad understanding of representation in inclusive terms, in which the interests of electoral minorities are also seen as part of a representative’s responsibility.

But how do these views differ depending on whether the MP is the one a respondent voted for? I have argued that support for such an inclusive conception of representation should be stronger among electoral losers, whereas winners are more inclined to expect the MP to prioritize their own voters. To test this, I rely on a *regression discontinuity design (RDD)*, comparing respondents whose preferred candidate narrowly lost with those whose candidate narrowly won.

The results are shown in Figure 4.2. Each panel plots the local averages of the respective outcome against the margin of victory or loss. Negative margins indicate electoral losers (left of the cutoff at 0), while positive margins indicate winners (right of the cutoff). In the left panel, which depicts how important respondents believe it is for their district MP to represent their own voters, there is a clear upward jump at the cutoff: Winners rate the importance of this focus 0.17 scale points higher than losers ($p < 0.01$). Conversely, the middle panel shows that winners rate the representation of all citizens in the constituency as less important, by 0.12-0.14 scale points ($p < 0.05$). These patterns are mirrored in the relative importance index (right panel), which displays a discontinuity of 0.30-0.32 scale points ($p < 0.01$). Notably, losers’ mean values cluster around zero, suggesting they see representing all citizens and representing a politician’s own voters as equally important, while winners place much greater emphasis on the latter.

Taken together, these results point to a clear self-serving bias in citizens’ expectations of representation: Citizens apply a double standard, demanding that their own concerns be prioritized when their preferred candidate wins, while expecting equal treatment when they lose. This creates cross-pressures that make it difficult for MPs to satisfy all expectations

Figure 4.2: Effect of winning/losing on representative conceptions



Note: Upper plots: Dots represent local averages, gray bars the chosen bandwidth in the conventional models. Lower plots: LATE with 95% confidence interval for different model specifications. SEs clustered by district-election dyads.

at once. At the same time, the findings underscore a crucial point: Even electoral losers continue to demand that their interests be represented and taken into account. This suggests that citizens’ judgments of whether democratic institutions are fulfilling their representative role are shaped by whether they feel their own voices matter.

4.2 Anti-refugee Violence as a Last Resort

In the previous section, I showed that citizens hold strong expectations that democratic institutions will address their concerns – even when those citizens did not support the winning party or candidate. But what happens when people feel that these institutions fail to live up to this expectation?

Paper B examines this question in the highly salient and emotionally charged domain of immigration, focusing on the admission of refugees. Few issues have so profoundly shaped the political landscape in recent years, and few provoke such strong reactions among segments of the population. I argue that when citizens who harbor deep resentment toward refugees

perceive politicians as acting against their interests – for instance, by adopting policies they view as overly permissive – they become more likely to step outside democratic boundaries and support violent attacks against refugees. Such support may arise either as an expression of frustration or as a strategic attempt to change the situation, by deterring refugees directly or by pressuring politicians to adopt more restrictive measures.

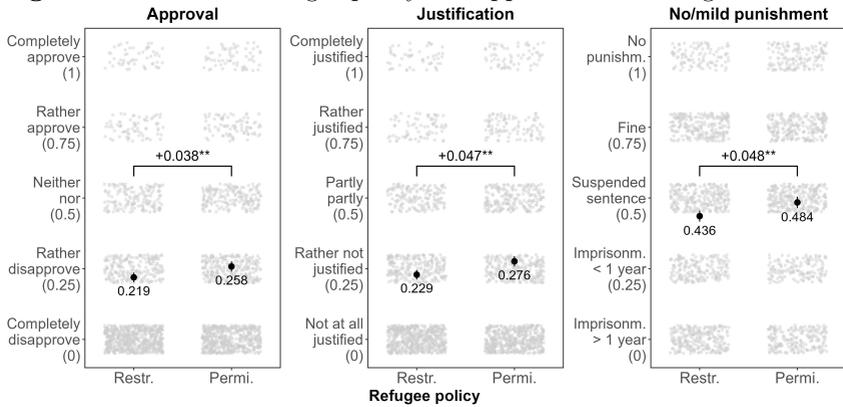
Importantly, I expect this dynamic to be especially pronounced when citizens have already relied on conventional, non-violent channels to communicate their concerns. If petitions, protests, or other democratic means fail to yield policy responses, frustration should deepen. In such cases, violence may come to be perceived as the only remaining option – a *last resort* when democratic institutions appear unresponsive.

To test the argument, I fielded a pre-registered survey vignette experiment with a sample of 2,356 far-right voters in Germany. This group is especially important to study because far-right voters are both the most likely to harbor strong anti-refugee sentiments and the most inclined to condone or support violence against refugees. Understanding how their support for violence emerges and under which conditions it increases is therefore central to explaining broader risks of democratic breakdown and intergroup conflict.

In the experiment, the participants read a vignette describing a hypothetical German municipality. The scenario systematically varied two factors: (1) whether local residents had engaged in non-violent political actions, such as protests or petitions, and (2) whether the municipal council adopted a restrictive or permissive refugee policy. The vignette then concluded with one of three types of violent attacks on a refugee shelter – vandalism, arson, or assault – reflecting the most common forms of anti-refugee violence in Germany.

After reading the vignette, participants' support for the attack was assessed with three items on a five-point scale: the extent to which they (1) approved or disapproved of the attack, (2) considered the actions justified, and (3) believed the perpetrators should be punished. Each taps into a different facet of support: approval reflects a direct evaluative stance, justification captures perceived moral or political legitimacy, and punishment gauges willingness to sanction the perpetrators. All items were recoded to range from 0 to 1, with the punishment item reverse-coded

Figure 4.3: Effect of refugee policy on support for anti-refugee violence



Note: *ns*: not significant; +: $p < 0.1$; *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$. Gray dots represent individual responses; black dots indicate means for each condition with 95% confidence intervals (whiskers). Numerical values above the brackets show average treatment effects (ATEs).

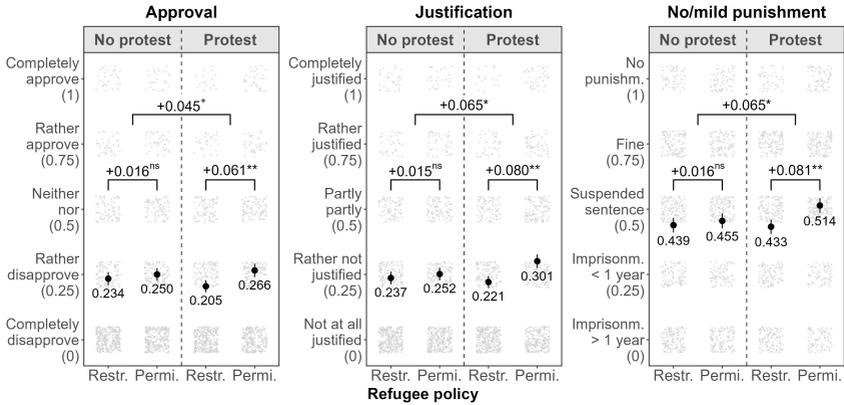
so that greater leniency (less punishment) corresponds to higher support.

Conditional support for violence

I begin by asking whether far-right voters respond to policy at all: Do political elites’ decisions influence these individuals’ willingness to support anti-refugee violence? To examine this, I compare respondents who saw a local council adopt a permissive policy – continuing refugee admissions – with those who saw a restrictive policy limiting inflows. Figure 4.3 presents the results. In line with expectations, participants in the permissive policy conditions express significantly greater support for the attack on the refugee home. Approval rises from 0.219 under the restrictive policy to 0.258 under the permissive policy – a 0.038-point increase. The same pattern emerges for justification and punishment, with slightly larger differences (0.047 and 0.048, respectively). All effects are statistically significant at the 1% level, indicating a consistent, robust tendency: Far-right voters are more inclined to endorse extra-legal violence when they perceive politicians as acting against their preferences on refugee admissions.

But is policy alone enough to shift people’s views on violence against refugees in every situation? Likely not. Many may still hold moral

Figure 4.4: Support for anti-refugee violence depending on previous use of non-violent means and refugee policy



Note: ^{ns}: not significant; +: $p < 0.1$; *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$. Gray dots represent individual responses; black dots indicate means for each condition with 95% confidence intervals (whiskers). Numerical values above the small brackets show the conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of a permissive refugee policy, conditional on prior presence of protests. The value above the large bracket at the top indicates the difference between these two effects.

objections to violence, recognize the risks and costs of such actions, and generally prefer non-violent solutions. I have argued that a permissive policy decision should be especially likely to increase support for violence when citizens have already pursued alternative, non-violent means – such as protests or petitions – to voice their concerns. In such cases, people may perceive violence as a *last resort*: either because repeated inaction fuels a heightened sense of frustration, or because they believe someone must "take matters into their own hands" to change the situation.

To test this, the vignettes also varied whether citizens in the municipality had engaged in protests and petitions. Figure 4.4 plots average support across the four conditions (black dots) for all three outcome measures. The results lead to an important conclusion: Support for the attack is consistently highest in the *last resort* condition – when citizens had protested and petitioned, yet the local council still adopted a permissive policy (the rightmost condition in each panel). This pattern holds when compared to every other condition, indicating that support is shaped not only by the policy decision itself but also by citizens' prior efforts to influence it.

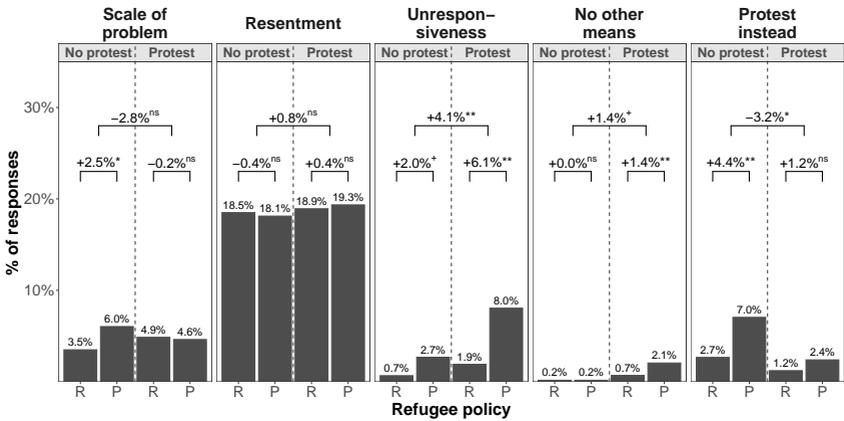
Yet it is possible that learning about citizen protests and petitions boosts support for violence, regardless of the policy outcome. Such information could, for example, strengthen *us versus them* sentiments toward refugees, making attacks against them seem more acceptable. If so, the high support in the *last resort* condition might simply reflect the additive effect of protest and an unfavorable policy. My argument, however, is that there is something distinctive about this combination: A permissive refugee policy should heighten support for violence only – or particularly – when it follows prior non-violent citizen action against such a decision.

Therefore, I estimate the effect of policy separately for cases with and without prior protest, allowing me to see whether it is truly the interaction that matters. Figure 4.4 displays these conditional effects above the brackets. On the left side of the first panel (no protest), approval for the attack remains largely unchanged between restrictive and permissive policies ($p = 0.36$). In contrast, the right side shows conditions where citizens in the hypothetical municipality had protested and petitioned against the number of refugees. Here, the effect is clear: Approval rises from 0.205 to 0.266 under a permissive policy, an increase of 0.061 scale points ($p < 0.01$). The same pattern holds for justification and punishment: A permissive policy increases support for violence only when preceded by protest and petitions. Importantly, the differences between these conditional effects reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < 0.1$ for approval; $p < 0.05$ for the others). This indicates that the combination is crucial – protest and policy do not merely add up, but must occur together to meaningfully shift support for anti-refugee violence.

Probing the mechanism

This finding offers important insights into the minds of far-right voters: Their support for anti-refugee violence does not exclusively reflect a deep-seated desire to inflict harm on refugees. Rather, some of this support appears sensitive to situational cues, indicating that the political context can shape violent attitudes. But why does a permissive policy increase support for attacks only when there had been prior protests and petitions? One possibility is that the combination of policy and protest signals amplifies the perceived severity of the refugee presence in the municipality,

Figure 4.5: Open-ended answers by treatment condition



Note: *ns*: not significant; +: $p < 0.1$; *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$. "R" denotes *restrictive policy*, "P" denotes *permissive policy*.

heightening threat perceptions and triggering defensive reactions. Or, as I argued before, could it be that far-right voters interpret this situation as evidence of political unresponsiveness, leaving them frustrated and with no other means to influence the situation?

Figure 4.5 can provide an answer to these questions. It displays the distribution of respondents' open-ended explanations for why they approve or disapprove of the attack. The two left panels show that perceptions of the scale of the refugee presence, as well as general feelings of resentment or threat, do not meaningfully differ across the conditions. This suggests that differences in perceived threat are unlikely to account for the treatment effects. In contrast, the *last resort* condition appears to particularly trigger feelings of political unresponsiveness (middle panel) and perceptions that no other means were available to influence policy (fourth panel). The fact that respondents bring up these arguments on their own when asked about why they approve or disapprove of the attack suggests that they are the most plausible mechanism behind the observed effects. This interpretation is further supported by responses in the *no protest + permissive policy* condition, where many participants emphasize that the residents should have first attempted non-violent actions, such as protests (rightmost panel). For these respondents, opposition to the

attack is not grounded in principled moral objections, but rather in the sense that violent action is only justifiable once non-violent avenues have been exhausted – providing additional evidence that far-right support for violence reflects a perception that it is a *last resort*.

All in all, these findings underscore the importance of the representing function of democratic institutions: Citizens with strong resentment toward refugees, here far-right voters, expect their concerns to be acknowledged and taken into account. When this expectation of responsiveness is not met – especially when people feel that no non-violent avenues remain – they become more supportive of violence. Yet this creates a fundamental tension: While responsiveness is crucial to maintaining citizens’ commitment to democratic norms, some citizens are willing to use the threat of violence as a way to force political concessions. Ultimately, the study therefore shows that when citizens perceive democratic institutions as failing, their adherence to democratic boundaries weakens, opening the door to support for violent attacks against refugees.

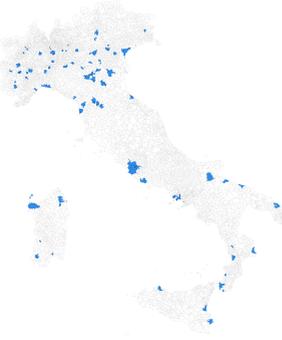
4.3 Exclusionary Policies Increase Hate Crimes

The previous chapters have provided insights into how the representing function of democratic institutions – and a perceived failure thereof – shapes citizens’ attitudes toward violence. However, representation is not the only way institutions can influence behavior. In Paper C, I shift the focus to the steering function of democratic institutions: how policies and practices shape what citizens perceive as appropriate behavior toward immigrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities. I argue that when institutions adopt exclusionary policies based on ethnic identity, they send signals about who belongs and who does not. Such signals can alter majority perceptions of minority groups’ place in society, fostering the view that these groups are less entitled to belonging and, in turn, increasing hostile and violent behaviors against them.

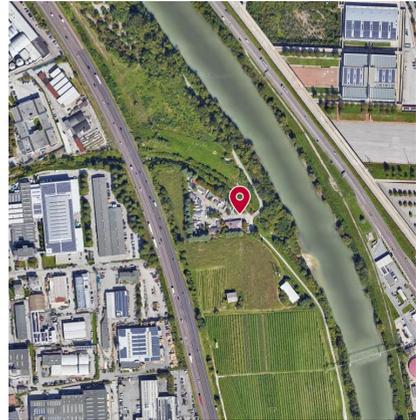
Testing this argument across countries is difficult, since both policies and the recording of hate crimes vary widely and are not easily comparable. Moreover, exclusionary policies are not easily amenable to experimental manipulation. For this reason, I turn to a concrete case in one country: an

Figure 4.6: Nomad camps in Italy and their isolation

(a) Municipalities with nomad camp



(b) Location in Trento



Note: Source: Associazione 21 Luglio (2023)

exclusionary policy that was implemented by several Italian municipalities targeting Sinti and Roma, an ethnic minority living across Europe.

The nomad camps in Italy

Sinti and Roma in Italy, and elsewhere, have historically been subject to negative stereotypes portraying them as nomadic, criminal, and socially deviant, despite the fact that most live sedentary lifestyles today (Picker 2010; Sevillano 2023). To manage and contain members of this ethnic minority, many Italian municipalities established so-called *nomad camps* – mono-ethnic and segregated settlements, also referred to as ghettos (Clough Marinaro 2009). Since 1955, 150 camps across 91 municipalities have been established. At their peak, these camps housed over 25% of Italy’s Sinti and Roma population, including both Italian citizens and migrants, many of whom remain in these settlements today. Figure 4.6a shows that these camps were established across Italy, illustrating the widespread institutionalization of this segregating policy.

Although the camps were sometimes officially presented as protecting the supposed nomadic lifestyle of Sinti and Roma, in practice they were

used to segregate these groups from the general population and control their mobility (Sigona 2005; Picker, Greenfields, and Smith 2015). Many residents were forcibly relocated or had no viable alternative but to live in these camps (ERRC 2000; Manzoni 2017). Statements by local officials confirm this intent: For instance, one mayor praised a site for being "isolated enough not to create problems of coexistence", signaling that political authorities openly framed these settlements as instruments of exclusion.

The exclusionary purpose of these camps also shaped their spatial placement. They were typically located on the outskirts of municipalities, in isolated or uncomfortable environments such as near busy roads, industrial zones, or waste landfills. Figure 4.6b provides a vivid example from Trento, where a camp is surrounded by a four-track motorway, a large river, and industrial areas. This deliberate spatial separation minimized direct interactions between camp residents and the majority population, illustrating the physical manifestation of exclusion, while political discourse reinforced its symbolic meaning.

At their peak, the camps not only housed substantial portions of Italy's Sinti and Roma population but were also highly visible to local residents commuting or working nearby. This visibility, despite the camps' seclusion, meant that majority populations regularly encountered these segregated spaces, making the exclusionary boundaries a salient part of the urban landscape. Newspapers and public discourse often reinforced this narrative, portraying the camps as necessary to maintain public order and questioning the possibility of coexistence.

Taken together, this case illustrates an exclusionary, ethnically targeted policy that operates both physically and symbolically to separate Sinti and Roma from the majority population. It provides a compelling empirical setting to test the argument that exclusionary policies can increase the prevalence of hate crimes. I argue that exposure to these segregated spaces heightens the majority residents' sense of entitlement to regulate social belonging and provoke intolerant behaviors toward groups perceived as outsiders, increasing the number of hate crimes against ethnic minority and immigrant group members.

To measure the prevalence of hate crimes in each municipality, I use a database compiled by the nonprofit organization *Lunaria*, which records

Table 4.1: The relationship between nomad camps and hate crime prevalence (cross-sectional)

	Hate crimes (per 10,000 inhabitants)						
	All hate crimes					Non-physical	Physical
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Camp (0,1)	0.629** (0.179)	0.654** (0.182)	0.593** (0.183)	0.467* (0.189)	0.496** (0.104)	0.376** (0.096)	0.120** (0.025)
Constant	0.260** (0.018)	0.332 (0.246)	0.606* (0.292)	0.423 (0.422)	0.426 (0.362)	0.342 (0.338)	0.085 (0.066)
Province FE		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment cov.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Post-treatment cov.				✓	✓	✓	✓
Method	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	G-Est.	G-Est.	G-Est.
Observations	7,597	7,597	7,597	7,597	7,597	7,597	7,597
R ²	0.002	0.017	0.019	0.024	0.018	0.017	0.014

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. +: $p < 0.1$; *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$.

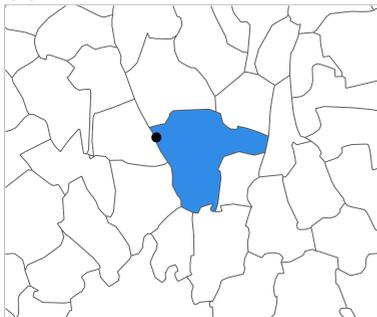
incidents targeting immigrants and ethnic minorities across all Italian municipalities from 2007 to 2020, totaling 3,595 cases. The dataset includes both physical attacks and non-physical incidents, such as verbal assaults. To ensure comparability across municipalities of different sizes, I normalize the total number of hate crimes by the population, reporting incidents per 10,000 inhabitants.

The relationship between nomad camps and hate crimes

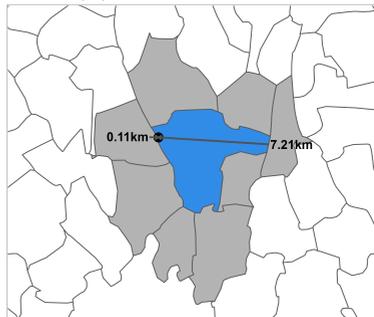
The most intuitive way to assess whether nomad camps are associated with higher hate crime rates is to compare municipalities that host one or more camps to those that do not. Table 4.1 presents these results, with the first row showing the key comparison: the difference in hate crimes per 10,000 residents between municipalities with and without a nomad camp. As shown in the first model, municipalities with a camp report, on average, 0.629 more hate crimes per 10,000 residents during the observation period. This difference remains robust even after controlling for political, socio-structural, and economic factors, including the share of residents with a migrant background. The pattern is clear: The presence of nomad camps is positively associated with higher hate crime rates.

Figure 4.7: Adjacent municipalities and their minimal distance to a nomad camp

(a) Camps are close to the border



(b) Distance measure



Note: Municipality that established a camp colored in blue (here: Sandrigo); adjacent municipalities colored in gray. The black dot depicts the exact location of the nomad camp.

However, a key challenge remains: Municipalities where residents had always been less tolerant of ethnic minorities and immigrants might have been precisely those where the local governments decided to establish such segregated camps for Sinti and Roma. This ties back to the *Little Prince* problem: Other factors may differ between these municipalities, and yet they might be invisible to our eyes. These unobserved factors could drive the observed positive relationship between nomad camps and hate crimes, rather than the presence of the camps themselves.

To rule out the possibility that such unobserved factors explain the findings, I make use of the fact that many nomad camps were often placed on the outskirts of the municipalities. Because one goal of the local governments with the nomad camps was to keep Sinti and Roma away from other residents, they were often placed near the outer border of the municipality. One example is shown in Figure 4.7a.

This placement has an important implication: Residents of neighboring municipalities located just across the border from a camp were equally exposed to it. In other words, they experienced the same "treatment" without their own local government having chosen to establish such a camp. For these municipalities, the presence of the camp is therefore

Table 4.2: Spillover effects

	Hate crimes (per 10,000 inhabitants)							
	All neighboring municipalities				Min. 1 munic. < 2.5km			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Min. distance (in km)	-0.013* (0.006)	-0.012* (0.006)	-0.011+ (0.006)	-0.011+ (0.006)	-0.018** (0.006)	-0.017** (0.006)	-0.015* (0.006)	-0.015* (0.006)
Constant	0.038+ (0.020)	0.393 (0.269)	1.181 (0.754)	0.402 (0.302)	0.052* (0.021)	0.420 (0.289)	1.354+ (0.813)	0.464 (0.312)
Neighbors-FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment cov.		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Post-treatment cov.			✓	✓			✓	✓
Method	OLS	OLS	OLS	G-Est.	OLS	OLS	OLS	G-Est.
Treated municip.	79	79	79	79	69	69	69	69
Observations	719	719	719	719	633	633	633	633
R ²	0.098	0.105	0.126	0.107	0.101	0.108	0.126	0.110

Note: Clustered standard errors by municipality in parentheses. †: $p < 0.1$; *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$.

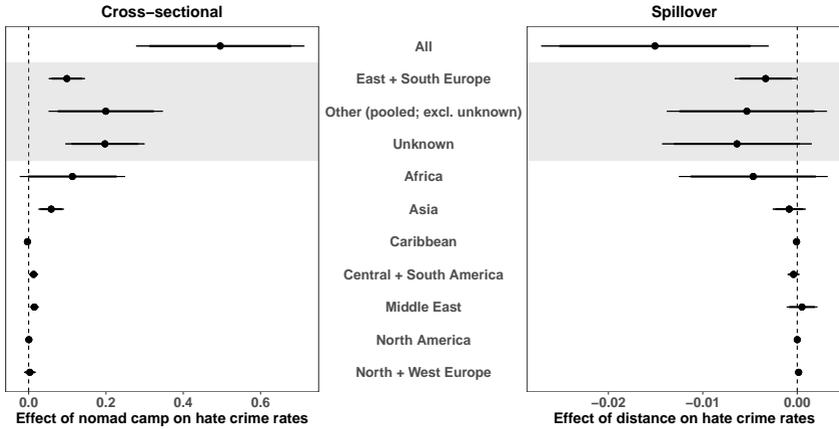
exogenous, meaning they did not "select into" hosting it. Thus, if the camps truly increase hate crimes, we should also observe higher rates in these adjacent municipalities.

To test this, I examine all municipalities neighboring the 91 municipalities that hosted a nomad camp (shown in gray in the example in Figure 4.7b). For each neighboring municipality, I calculate the shortest distance to the nearest camp and then compare hate crime rates between those located closer and those farther away. Figure 4.7b illustrates how this distance is measured. The underlying idea is straightforward: The farther a municipality is from a camp, the less likely its residents are to be exposed to the exclusionary signal the camp sends – and, consequently, the less likely they should be to engage in hostile or violent acts against immigrants or ethnic minorities.

The results, presented in Table 4.2, show a clear picture. Across all model specifications, there is a significant negative relationship between the minimal distance to a nomad camp and the prevalence of hate crimes in a municipality. This leads to an important conclusion: Municipalities located closer to a camp tend to record more hate crimes. Because this proximity is plausibly exogenous, these findings alleviate concerns that unobserved factors drive the observed relationship.²

²Some differences between municipalities closer to and farther from a camp may still exist. To address this, I employ an instrumental variable approach that leverages the

Figure 4.8: The effect of nomad camps on hate crimes against different immigrant groups



Note: OLS coefficients (point estimates) are reported along with their 95% (thin whiskers) and 90% confidence intervals (thick whiskers).

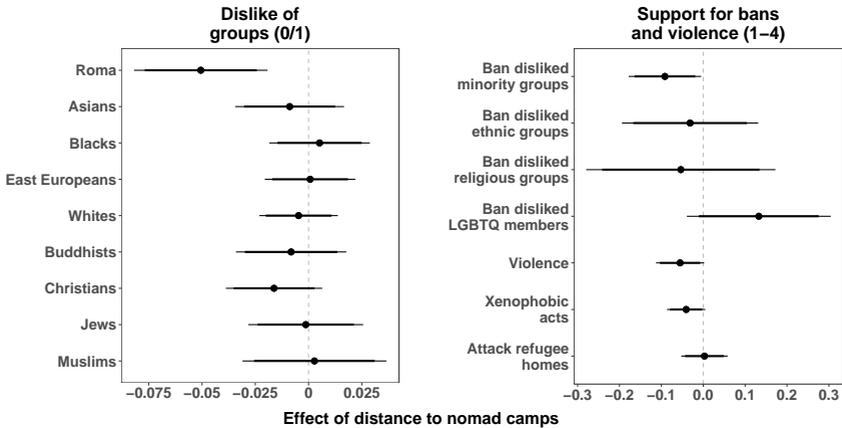
Mechanism: More than opportunity and dislike

The analysis shows that the establishment of nomad camps has a positive causal effect on ethnically motivated hate crimes. One possible explanation is that these camps provide more visible and accessible targets for xenophobic or extremist individuals, increasing opportunities for attacks. To distinguish between this "opportunity" mechanism and a broader shift in attitudes toward minority groups, I examine whether the rise in hate crimes is limited to groups directly associated with the camps (Sinti and Roma) or extends to other immigrant populations.

Using victim background data for roughly two-thirds of incidents, I find that hate crimes rise both against individuals from eastern and southern Europe (a proxy group for Sinti and Roma) and against other immigrant communities – particularly those of African descent, with whom Sinti and Roma have no historical ties. This broader pattern is inconsistent with a

fact that nomad camps were typically located near industrial areas. I use the distance to industrial areas as an instrument for the distance to a nomad camp and show empirically that industrial areas themselves have no independent effect on hate crimes. This provides a valid instrument, and the results remain robust, further strengthening the causal interpretation. I discuss this strategy in greater detail in Paper C.

Figure 4.9: Closeness to camps and attitudes toward minority groups



Note: Reported are OLS coefficients (point estimates) along with their 95% (thin whiskers) and 90% confidence intervals (thick whiskers). The models include municipality-fixed effects. Controls include age, gender, income, level of education, employment status, migration background, and distance to the centroid of the municipality.

pure opportunity-based explanation and instead suggests that the camps contribute to legitimizing exclusion and hostility toward ethnic minorities in general. Figure 4.8 visualizes these effects across both cross-sectional and spatial spillover models.

While the preceding analyses provide strong evidence that the establishment of nomad camps increases hate crime rates, the underlying mechanism and motivations remain uncertain. Because it is impossible to study the perpetrators directly today, I turn to geo-located survey data to examine whether living near such camps shapes broader societal attitudes toward minorities. Using survey data from 343 residents in five large Italian municipalities with nomad camps that was collected in February 2024, I calculate each respondent’s minimal distance to the nearest camp and assess whether proximity correlates with prejudice and support for exclusionary measures and violence against them. As shown in the left panel of Figure 4.9, respondents living closer to a camp are significantly more likely to express dislike toward Roma, but not toward other minority groups – suggesting that exposure to a nomad camp does not necessarily lead to a generalized prejudice against all ethnic minorities.

Instead, I argue that exposure to the nomad camps shifts majority members' perceptions of what constitutes legitimate behavior toward disliked ethnic minorities. The right panel of Figure 4.9 shows that those living closer to a camp are more likely to endorse extreme measures – such as allowing the majority to ban minorities from their neighborhood – and to justify violence against refugees (with significant effects on two of the three items). While these findings are correlational and based on a relatively small sample, they point to an important possibility: Institutionalized exclusion may not necessarily alter how much majority members like or dislike minorities, but it can reshape their sense of which forms of mistreatment are acceptable. In this way, exclusionary policies risk not only fostering individual acts of hostility but also cultivating a broader social climate in which intolerance and even violence against minorities are normalized as legitimate behaviors.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

“The scientist is not a person who gives the right answers, he’s one who asks the right questions.”

— Claude Levi-Strauss

This dissertation set out to answer the following question: *How do democratic institutions shape whether citizens remain within democratic boundaries or step outside them by supporting or committing violence against ethnic minorities and immigrants?* In this chapter, I discuss where the dissertation leaves us with regard to this question. I begin by outlining how the findings bring us a step closer to an answer. I then turn to the limitations of the dissertation, highlighting both what we still do not know and the new questions that arise from the findings. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the normative implications and dilemmas raised by the insights – and the debates that societies need to engage in to address the increasing strains on democracy.

5.1 What We Have Learned

This dissertation has approached the question of democratic boundaries from two perspectives: how citizens expect democratic institutions to represent them, and how those institutions can shape whether people remain within or step outside those boundaries. The theoretical framework guiding this work highlighted a dual role of institutions. On the one hand, they must foster a sense that citizens’ views and interests are taken seriously and that political change can be achieved through non-violent means. On the other hand, institutions also define and enforce the limits of acceptable behavior in a democracy.

The empirical findings provide three central insights. First, citizens overwhelmingly expect politicians to consider their interests, even if they have lost an election (Paper A). Electoral winners tend to favor a narrower, less inclusive view of representation – expecting politicians to primarily

represent those who voted for them – while losers overall insist that their voices must not be ignored. This suggests that democratic legitimacy, in citizens’ eyes, rests not only on elections but also on the perception that their concerns continue to matter. Second, when it comes to immigration and the admission of refugees, perceptions that institutions are ignoring citizens’ concerns can push individuals who are particularly predisposed to anti-immigrant sentiments – in this case, far-right supporters – toward endorsing violence, particularly when they believe non-violent avenues have been exhausted (Paper B). This underscores that responsiveness is crucial for preventing citizens from abandoning democratic means in favor of violence. Third, however, there is a tension: While Paper B suggests that failing to respond to citizens’ demands risks fueling support for violence, Paper C shows that responsiveness through exclusionary policies carries dangers of its own. Such policies can reshape norms of belonging and acceptable behavior toward minorities, legitimizing hostility and even violence against them – and in doing so, erode the very democratic boundaries they are meant to defend.

Taken together, the findings therefore indicate that the role of institutions in keeping citizens within democratic boundaries is more complex than it might first appear. Institutions and politicians must strike a delicate balance between fostering responsiveness and setting clear limits on acceptable behavior. Under certain conditions, these functions may even pull in opposite directions. A case in point is the nomad camps in Italy: Local politicians often established them under the impression that other residents did not want to live alongside Sinti and Roma. While politicians may have viewed this policy as responsive, it reinforced exclusionary attitudes and legitimized hostility and attacks – not only toward camp residents, but also toward immigrants more broadly. The broader implication is that both responsiveness to citizens’ views and guidance on acceptable behavior must be carefully weighed in democratic decision-making. Leaning too far toward responsiveness risks legitimizing exclusion and violence, while leaning too far toward boundary-setting risks fueling perceptions of neglect and pushing citizens outside democratic boundaries.

This perspective offers a new way of understanding anti-minority violence. While existing research has primarily emphasized the characteristics of individual perpetrators (e.g., McDevitt, Levin, and Bennett 2002; Dun-

bar 2003), socio-structural and economic conditions (e.g., Krueger and Pischke 1997; Dancygier 2010), or immediate trigger events (e.g., Albornoz, Bradley, and Sonderegger 2020; Hanes and Machin 2014), this dissertation shifts the focus to the role of institutions and political processes themselves.

Some earlier studies have hinted that the behavior of politicians and institutions matters (Koopmans 1996; Karapın 2002; Ziller and Goodman 2020), but I advance this line of inquiry in three ways. First, I formulate clear hypotheses about how institutional (un)responsiveness and steering shape whether citizens remain within democratic norms, and theorize how these functions can come into tension and even pull in opposite directions. Second, I provide empirical evidence on each mechanism using research designs aimed at identifying causal effects as rigorously as possible. By doing so, I seek to increase confidence in the conclusions and lessons that can be drawn. The findings suggest that both functions may indeed pull in different directions and, even in established democracies, may push citizens toward condoning or engaging in violent behavior. Third, I examine broader public support for such actions rather than focusing solely on individual perpetrators. While previous research has shown that such forms of community approval matter for those who commit violence (e.g., Bowling 1999; Gaßebner et al. 2001), public support has rarely been systematically studied. By analyzing broader public opinion around such attacks, this dissertation offers a more complete understanding of how anti-minority violence emerges and evolves. This perspective is particularly important in light of declining trust in democratic institutions, contentious debates on immigration, and the resurgence of violence against minority groups across Europe.

The broader implications

Beyond these immediate contributions, this perspective also has broader implications for debates on political representation and responsiveness (e.g., Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 2003; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008). For one, I contribute to an emerging perspective emphasizing the question of *how* citizens want to be represented (e.g., Disch 2015; Wolkenstein and Wratil 2021; Blumenau, Wolkenstein, and Wratil 2025). This is crucial for democratic legitimacy, both normatively and empirically. For another, this

dissertation advances our understanding of the consequences when citizens feel that democratic institutions are not fulfilling their roles. Previous research has shown that perceptions of unresponsiveness can increase populist attitudes (Castanho Silva and Wratil 2023) or shape perceptions of the legitimacy of political decisions (Esaïasson, Gilljam, and Persson 2017). I extend this perspective by showing that unmet expectations can push citizens to step outside democratic boundaries, creating a direct threat to democratic norms and, in some cases, manifesting in extremist behaviors and attitudes.

This dissertation also contributes to debates on how democracies respond to immigration and anti-immigrant sentiments, one of the most pressing issues in politics in western Europe and beyond (Berman 2024; Dancygier 2024). Prior research has largely focused on the electoral consequences of immigration-related policies, particularly the accommodation of far-right parties and positions, though findings remain mixed (see Dahlström and Sundell 2012; Krause, Cohen, and Abou-Chadi 2023 on the one hand; see van Spanje and de Graaf 2018; Chou et al. 2021; Hjorth and Larsen 2022 on the other). I extend this perspective by moving beyond the electoral arena to examine how such policies shape broader societal dynamics, an area that has received far less attention.

One of the few exceptions, Valentim, Dinas, and Ziblatt (2025), shows that mainstream politicians can erode anti-prejudice norms by making anti-immigrant statements, thereby influencing public sentiments toward immigrants. While such norm erosion may weaken social cohesion, my dissertation focuses more directly on explicit anti-democratic actions. Thus, I add nuance to this perspective by showing that the same policies and discourses may have reverse effects: They may signal to citizens that their concerns are being heard in the institutional arena, making individuals with strong anti-immigrant sentiments less likely to support violence. This suggests that both processes can operate simultaneously, producing an overall ambivalent effect: Larger segments of the population may grow more tolerant of "milder" forms of resentment, while a smaller subset becomes less inclined to endorse violence. In this sense, violence may function as a substitute for broader exclusionary attitudes (see also Koopmans 1996). However, as my findings also indicate, the effects depend critically on how such policies are implemented, since they may just as well embolden

potential perpetrators. I discuss this further in the next section.

Finally, this dissertation makes important methodological contributions to the study of political violence and hate crimes, a field where causal identification is notoriously difficult. I advance this research by leveraging subnational variation and carefully chosen case studies, which offer more credible leverage than broad cross-national comparisons and make it possible to isolate institutional dynamics that are otherwise hard to observe. A second contribution concerns the measurement of public support for violent acts. Prior work in this area has mostly relied on direct, ambiguous survey questions, which face well-known problems of validity and descriptive inference (Westwood et al. 2022). By instead embedding such attitudes in hypothetical yet realistic scenarios, I capture the situational conditions under which citizens condone or justify violence against minorities. This approach not only reveals patterns that would remain hidden with direct questioning but also provides a blueprint for future research. Taken together, these strategies highlight the value of combining innovative causal designs with carefully crafted vignette experiments in advancing the study of political violence and hate crimes.

5.2 What We Have Not Learned

Before turning to the dissertation’s broader normative implications, however, it is essential to reflect on the limitations of the work and to identify where further research is needed to draw more definitive conclusions. I discuss three main limitations: the country contexts in which the studies were conducted, the role of simplifications and their implications for real-world inferences, and the unresolved question of how institutions might achieve a balance between their representative and steering functions.

The limits of context

The three papers in this dissertation each focus on a single country: Papers A and B examine the German context, while Paper C looks at the case of the nomad camps in Italy. As discussed in Chapter 3, meaningful cross-country comparisons of outcomes – especially levels of violence – are extremely difficult given differences in reporting practices. For this reason,

I concentrated on cases within a single country, exploiting subnational variation to strengthen internal validity. Moreover, collecting original comparative data (e.g., cross-national surveys with embedded experiments) would have been prohibitively resource-intensive, making a single-country focus the only feasible approach.

Naturally, this raises questions about the generalizability of the findings. While certainty is not possible, the broader conditions in which these studies are situated – declining trust in democratic institutions (Pew Research Center 2024), politicized debates over immigration (Dancygier and Margalit 2020), recurring violence against refugees and immigrants (Engel et al. 2018), and public support for such attacks (Allinger and Bischof 2025) – are common across many democracies. In this respect, Germany and Italy do not constitute exceptional cases, which increases confidence that the mechanisms identified here may extend beyond the specific country contexts studied.

Still, important limitations remain. In this dissertation, the representing role of institutions (Papers A and B) was investigated only in Germany, while the steering function was examined only in Italy (Paper C). This means I cannot say with certainty whether the two functions operate simultaneously within the same country. There is, however, no obvious reason to assume that representation and steering do not work in tandem; indeed, the argument advanced here suggests that it is precisely their interaction that creates the institutional balance at the heart of democratic stability. This dissertation makes an important step by providing insights into how each function can unfold in practice, though in distinct contexts. Future research therefore should extend this inquiry by examining both mechanisms together within the same setting and by testing their operation across a broader range of democracies.

The promises and pitfalls of simplifying

A central feature of research on political phenomena is that it inevitably requires simplification. Political life is messy and complex, with many factors interacting at once. To uncover specific mechanisms, we need to abstract from this complexity and translate it into analytically tractable forms. This dissertation has done so in several ways – a strength, insofar

as it provides a clearer picture of how institutions function, how citizens perceive them, and how these perceptions shape behavior. At the same time, this act of simplification is also a limitation, as it leaves open how these dynamics play out in practice, where interactions are more intricate and less easily disentangled. In the following, I illustrate this tension with two examples from the dissertation.

In Paper A, I examine whom citizens expect politicians to represent. Although the study is grounded in real-world contexts – looking at expectations of actual politicians and how they are influenced by real election outcomes – it necessarily abstracts from the complexity of representation through the survey wording. Respondents were asked whether politicians should primarily represent their own supporters or all citizens in their constituency. While this is a crucial question, it is also a simplified one. In practice, representation is far more ambiguous, as there are many different ways to understand what representation means. For one, politicians must allocate limited time and resources, deciding whose concerns to prioritize. Audit studies show that politicians are more likely to respond to constituents who share their party affiliation (e.g., Butler and Broockman 2011; Schakel et al. 2025). The findings from Paper A map very well onto this, suggesting that such partisan biases may not only reflect politicians' preferences but also citizen demand, especially among electoral winners, who expect their interests to be privileged.

Yet when it comes to concrete policy choices, expectations are harder to specify. What does it mean, in practice, for politicians to "represent all interests"? Should politicians follow public opinion, thus acting as *delegates*, or instead act as *trustees* who assess what is best for their constituents even when this contradicts their immediate preferences (Eulau et al. 1959; Bengtsson and Wass 2010)? While the simplified question provides valuable insights into self-interested considerations, it leaves open what exactly citizens expect and how such expectations translate into the complexities of policymaking. Future research should therefore explore how citizens evaluate different forms of representation, whether in the allocation of attention, responsiveness to requests, or substantive policy decisions.

In Paper B, simplification arises from the experimental setup itself. I created a hypothetical, simplified environment to isolate the effects of different situational factors on support for anti-refugee violence. While

the scenarios were designed to approximate real-world conditions through realistic wording and descriptions, they necessarily omit other factors that could shape attitudes in the real world. In particular, political entrepreneurs may intervene in these dynamics (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Far-right parties and politicians could potentially amplify perceptions that even restrictive policies are insufficient, thereby influencing public support independently of actual policies being implemented. By abstracting from these complexities, the experiment provides clear insights into the underlying psychological mechanisms driving support for anti-refugee violence. Yet to understand how these mechanisms operate amid the full range of real-world influences, further research is needed.

Overall, this underscores that simplifications are often necessary, particularly when a phenomenon is still underexplored and first steps are needed to make it tractable. This does not diminish the value of the findings; on the contrary, they provide crucial insights into how specific processes operate. At the same time, it is essential to be aware of which real-world inferences such "simplified" studies can support – and which they cannot. Future research can build on these insights by examining them in more specific and detailed contexts to test the scope conditions of the arguments and further refine our understanding of these phenomena.

The unclear path to balance

The final – and perhaps most sobering – limitation concerns how institutions might act to strike a balance between their representative and steering functions. This dissertation does not provide guidance on the "right" way to achieve this balance. Its goal was instead to provide the first exemplary illustrations of the potential mechanisms and insights into how they unfold. Yet it cannot determine how these functions interact or condition each other. There are two main reasons for this limitation, both of which highlight important avenues for future research.

The first reason concerns the sheer variety of policies institutions could pursue, and the uncertainty about how each affects representative and steering functions. For example, Paper C examines the effects of an exclusionary policy on hate crimes, focusing on the nomad camps in Italy. While this is a theoretically and normatively important case, it nonetheless

represents only a single, and perhaps extreme, one. The findings show that such exclusionary policies *can* influence hate crimes, but they do not reveal whether similar effects would occur under different policies. While not entirely unique – there are striking similarities to other policies, such as detention centers in the United States or under the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum – it remains unclear how these dynamics generalize across policy types. A wide range of policies targeting immigrants and ethnic minorities exist (e.g., Heizmann 2016; Laurentsyeva and Venturini 2017; Abdelgadir and Fouka 2020), each potentially operating through different mechanisms. This limits the ability to draw firm conclusions about how institutions might balance representation and steering in practice. The effectiveness of any policy likely depends on its design, context, and the mechanisms it activates – highlighting a key avenue for future research.

The second reason why this dissertation cannot serve as a guidepost for striking the right balance relates to the time horizon over which institutional effects unfold. Relatedly, Claassen and McLaren (2022) find that the short-term effects of immigration differ significantly from its long-term consequences. Building on this, thus, some policies may appear effective in the short term – for example, highly exclusionary measures might reduce tensions or violence immediately by signaling responsiveness – but their long-term consequences could be quite different. Democratic values and understandings of legitimate political behavior develop only gradually, through repeated exposure to institutions and practices (Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003; Heyne 2018). If policies signal that certain groups do not belong or deserve equal treatment, they may reinforce negative stereotypes and normalize exclusion over time. Such long-term processes risk increasing hostility and violence against targeted groups, even if short-term effects suggest otherwise. This dissertation has not been able to fully account for these temporal dynamics, and future research is therefore crucial to understand how institutional responses play out not only immediately but also over the longer run.

For these reasons, it is difficult to draw direct and definite conclusions from this dissertation about how institutions can or should strike the balance between representation and steering. What the findings highlight instead is that different mechanisms may be at play and that both must be taken into account. This does not mean that achieving such a balance

is impossible; it means that further research is needed to understand how institutions can navigate these dynamics in practice.

5.3 What We Need To Consider

While the limitations discussed above must be kept in mind, this dissertation nonetheless raises important normative considerations. As outlined at the outset, attacks targeting individuals because of their group membership are not only devastating for victims and their communities, but also erode the foundations of democratic coexistence and social cohesion. It is therefore essential to reflect on what can – and should – be done to prevent such violence.

This dissertation demonstrates that democratic institutions can both help contain and fuel the threat posed by anti-minority violence. A central insight is that when citizens feel ignored by politicians and perceive no remaining non-violent avenues to make their voices heard, they become more willing to condone violence against refugees. This points to a seemingly straightforward solution: Institutions and politicians should seek to respond to the concerns of citizens with strong anti-refugee sentiments, ensuring they feel represented in the political process in order to reduce the risk of violence. At the same time, though, such responsiveness carries its own risks, as exclusionary policies can legitimize hostility and foster acceptance of mistreatment against ethnic minorities and immigrant groups. Yet this does not necessarily mean that balance is impossible – institutions may still be able to respond to such views without reinforcing or normalizing violence against minorities.

However, even if such a balance is possible in practice, the question remains whether it is normatively desirable. Responsiveness on these issues may conflict with other considerations. Immigration policies are constrained by human rights obligations, particularly regarding refugees, which may limit the kinds of responsiveness that are morally defensible (e.g., Gibney 2018; Ruhs 2022). Moreover, when grievances are rooted in racist or discriminatory views, the question arises whether these views merit recognition within a democratic framework. Democratic legitimacy does require that citizens feel their voices are heard, but it is an open question whether this obligation extends to those who deny the equal

worth or belonging of others, which are at odds with democratic principles of equality. This tension echoes Popper's (1945) paradox of tolerance: should democracies tolerate the intolerant? Crucially, this is not to suggest that all criticisms of immigration are normatively problematic; rather, it highlights that there *may* be principled reasons why some demands should not be met by democratic institutions.

At the same time, democracies face an additional normative dilemma. Reservations about responsiveness and immigration policies often stem from an *idealistic* perspective, focused on what would be normatively best in principle. Yet such an approach may overlook a realistic perspective that accounts for real-world constraints (Carens 1996). As Pevnick (2024) argues, restrictions that appear normatively objectionable in the abstract can nonetheless be justified under certain conditions if they are necessary to prevent democratic backsliding or even regime collapse. In this view, the protection of democratic stability constitutes a higher-order goal that may warrant difficult trade-offs. If hostility and violence against minorities are perceived as genuine threats to the democratic order, the same reasoning could support the conclusion that certain restrictive measures are justified, despite their moral costs, if they ultimately safeguard democracy itself by avoiding the entrenchment of violence as a tool in political conflicts.

Still, there is a potential but serious downside to simply adopting more restrictive policies to prevent a violent backlash. Conceding to such threats risks allowing democracies to be blackmailed, setting a precedent in which decisions are made not on principled grounds but because a minority threatens violence if it does not get its way. The danger is that citizens learn that violence "works", which may further entrench it as a political tool and ultimately undermine democracy. This concern is pressing not only in the case of violence against refugees and immigrants but also in light of the recent rise in other politically motivated attacks, such as against politicians, cultural institutions, and LGBTQ+ communities or events. Should democracies also yield to these attacks if they find enough public support? If citizens come to believe that violence is effective, it is likely to trigger further escalation. Democracies may therefore face the painful necessity of enduring – rather than yielding to – instances of violence if they are to prevent its normalization and protect the integrity of democratic decision-making, while simultaneously pursuing other means

to suppress attacks on ethnic minority and immigrant groups.

So how can societies prevent individuals from stepping outside democratic boundaries, and what measures should these societies be willing to take to achieve this, not least through democratic institutions? This is a deeply normative question that societies themselves must debate, as it inevitably involves difficult trade-offs. Yet to engage in this debate meaningfully, we need empirical knowledge about what actually works, together with insights into the unintended consequences that different strategies may carry. This dissertation has highlighted the crucial role of democratic institutions, showing that they can either help contain or risk fueling such transgressions. It is an important step forward. But if we are to move closer to an answer – one that is more complex than it might first appear – it must certainly not be the last.

Bibliography

- Abdelgadir, Aala, and Vasiliki Fouka. 2020. "Political Secularism and Muslim Integration in the West: Assessing the Effects of the French Headscarf Ban." *American Political Science Review* 114 (3): 707–723.
- Albornoz, Facundo, Jake Bradley, and Silvia Sonderegger. 2020. "The Brexit referendum and the rise in hate crime: Conforming to the new norm." *CeDEx Discussion Paper Series* 12.
- Allinger, Tim Lars, and Daniel Bischof. 2025. "Hate Crime Support across 13 Countries." *Working Paper* .
- Almond, Gabriel A, and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Arnesen, Sveinung, and Yvette Peters. 2018. "The Legitimacy of Representation: How Descriptive, Formal, and Responsiveness Representation Affect the Acceptability of Political Decisions." *Comparative Political Studies* 51 (7): 868–899.
- Associazione 21 Luglio. 2023. "Il Paese dei Campi."
URL: <https://www.ilpaesedeicampi.it/>
- Barabas, Jason, and Jennifer Jerit. 2010. "Are survey experiments externally valid?" *American Political Science Review* 104 (2): 226–242.
- BBC News. 2024. "Why are there riots in the UK?". Accessed: 2025-08-17.
URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg55we5n3xo>
- Belli, Robert F, Michael W Traugott, Margaret Young, and Katherine A McGonagle. 1999. "Reducing Vote Overreporting in Surveys: Social Desirability, Memory Failure, and Source Monitoring." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 63 (1): 90–108.

- Bengtsson, Åsa, and Hanna Wass. 2010. "Styles of political representation: What do voters expect?" *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 20 (1): 55–81.
- Bengtsson, Åsa, and Hanna Wass. 2011. "The Representative Roles of MPs: A Citizen Perspective." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 34 (2): 143–167.
- Berkowitz, Leonard. 1989. "Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis; Examination and Reformulation." *Psychological Bulletin* 106 (1): 59–73.
- Berman, Sheri. 2024. "The Future of Multiracial Democracy: Democracy and Diversity in Western Europe." *Journal of Democracy* 35 (4): 78–92.
- Bischof, Daniel, and Markus Wagner. 2019. "Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament?" *American Journal of Political Science* 63 (4): 888–904.
- Bischof, Daniel, Tim L Allinger, Kristian Frederiksen, and Morgan Le Corre Juratic. 2025. "Can Social Desirability Be Manipulated in Online Surveys?" *Working Paper* .
- Bloemraad, Irene. 2006. *Becoming a citizen: Incorporating immigrants and refugees in the United States and Canada*. University of California Press.
- Blumenau, Jack, Fabio Wolkenstein, and Christopher Wratil. 2025. "Citizens Preferences for Multidimensional Representation." *Perspectives on Politics* 23 (2): 588–610.
- Bowler, Shaun, and Todd Donovan. 2002. "Democracy, Institutions and Attitudes about Citizen Influence on Government." *British Journal of Political Science* 32 (2): 371–390.
- Bowling, Benjamin. 1999. *Violent racism: Victimization, policing, and social context*. Oxford University Press.
- Brader, Ted, Nicholas A. Valentino, and Elizabeth Suhay. 2008. "What triggers public opposition to immigration? Anxiety, group cues, and immigration threat." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (4): 959–978.

- Butler, Daniel M., and David E. Broockman. 2011. "Do politicians racially discriminate against constituents? A field experiment on state legislators." *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (3): 463–477.
- Carens, Joseph H. 1996. "Realistic and Idealistic Approaches to the Ethics of Migration." *The International Migration Review* 30 (1): 156–170.
- Carman, Christopher Jan. 2006. "Public preferences for parliamentary representation in the UK: An overlooked link?" *Political Studies* 54 (1): 103–122.
- Castanho Silva, Bruno, and Christopher Wratil. 2023. "Do parties representation failures affect populist attitudes? Evidence from a multinational survey experiment." *Political Science Research and Methods* 11 (2): 347–362.
- Chong, Dennis, Jack Citrin, and Patricia Conley. 2001. "When Self-Interest Matters." *Political Psychology* 22 (3): 541–570.
- Chou, Winston, Rafaela Dancygier, Naoki Egami, and Amaney A. Jamal. 2021. "Competing for Loyalists? How Party Positioning Affects Populist Radical Right Voting." *Comparative Political Studies* 54 (12): 2226–2260.
- Citrin, Jack, and Laura Stoker. 2018. "Political Trust in a Cynical Age." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 49–70.
- Claassen, Christopher, and Lauren McLaren. 2022. "Does Immigration Produce a Public Backlash or Public Acceptance? Time-Series, Cross-Sectional Evidence from Thirty European Democracies." *British Journal of Political Science* 52 (3): 1013–1031.
- Clough Marinaro, Isabella. 2009. "Between Surveillance and Exile: Biopolitics and the Roma in Italy." *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 1 (2): 265–87.
- Coppock, Alexander. 2019. "Generalizing from Survey Experiments Conducted on Mechanical Turk: A Replication Approach." *Political Science Research and Methods* 7 (3): 613–628.
- Cunningham, Scott. 2021. *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. Yale University Press.

- Dafoe, Allan, Baobao Zhang, and Devin Caughey. 2018. "Information Equivalence in Survey Experiments." *Political Analysis* 26 (4): 399–416.
- Dahl, Robert. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dahlström, Carl, and Anders Sundell. 2012. "A losing gamble. How mainstream parties facilitate anti-immigrant party success." *Electoral Studies* 31 (2): 353–363.
- Dancygier, Rafaela. 2010. *Immigration and conflict in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dancygier, Rafaela. 2023. "Hate crime supporters are found across age, gender, and income groups and are susceptible to violent political appeals." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 120 (7): 1–7.
- Dancygier, Rafaela. 2024. "The Future of Multiracial Democracy: Liberal Democracy in an Age of Immigration." *Journal of Democracy* 35 (4): 63–77.
- Dancygier, Rafaela, and Yotam Margalit. 2020. "The Evolution of the Immigration Debate: Evidence from a New Dataset of Party Positions Over the Last Half-Century." *Comparative Political Studies* 53 (5): 734–774.
- Daur, Valentin. 2024. "Legitimize or Delegitimize? Mainstream Party Strategy toward (Former) Pariah Parties and How Voters Respond." *American Political Science Review* pp. 1–16.
- De La Cuesta, Brandon, and Kosuke Imai. 2016. "Misunderstandings about the Regression Discontinuity Design in the Study of Close Elections." *Annual Review of Political Science* 19: 375–396.
- De Vries, Catherine E, and Sara Hobolt. 2020. *Political entrepreneurs: The rise of challenger parties in Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Disch, Lisa. 2015. "The "Constructivist Turn" in Democratic Representation: A Normative Dead-End?" *Constellations* 22 (4): 487–499.

- Druckman, James N. 2022. *Experimental Thinking: A Primer on Social Science Experiments*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dunbar, Edward. 2003. "Symbolic, Relational, and Ideological Signifiers of Bias-Motivated Offenders: Toward a Strategy of Assessment." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 73 (2): 203–211.
- Easton, David. 1965. *A system analysis of political life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Engel, Valery, Jean-Yves Camus, Matthew Feldman, William Allchorn, Anna Castriota, Ildikó Barna, Bulcsú Hunyadi, Patrik Szicherle, Farah Rasmi, Vanja Ljujic et al. 2018. Xenophobia, radicalism, and hate crime in Europe. Technical report European Centre for Democracy Development.
- Enos, Ryan D. 2017. *The space between us: Social geography and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- ERRC. 2000. Campland: Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy. Technical report European Roma Rights Center.
- Esaiasson, Peter, Ann Kristin Kölln, and Sedef Turper. 2015. "External Efficacy and Perceived Responsiveness - Similar but Distinct Concepts." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 27 (3): 432–445.
- Esaiasson, Peter, Mikael Gilljam, and Mikael Persson. 2017. "Responsiveness Beyond Policy Satisfaction: Does It Matter to Citizens?" *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (6): 739–765.
- Eulau, Heinz, John C. Wahlke, William Buchanan, and Leroy C. Ferguson. 1959. "The Role of the Representative: Some Empirical Observations on the Theory of Edmund Burke." *American Political Science Review* 53 (3): 742–756.
- Euronews. 2025. "How disinformation fuelled Spains anti-migrant riots after attack on pensioner.". Accessed: 2025-08-17.
URL: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/07/18/how-disinformation-fuelled-spains-anti-migrant-riots-after-attack-on-pensioner>

- Ferrín, Monica, and Hanspeter Kriesi. 2016. *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Ferrín, Mónica, and Enrique Hernández. 2021. “Preferences for consensus and majoritarian democracy: Long-and short-Term influences.” *European Political Science Review* 13 (2): 209–225.
- Freeman, Gary P. 1997. “Immigration as a Source of Political Discontent and Frustration in Western Democracies.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 32 (2): 42–64.
- Frey, Arun. 2020. “Cologne Changed EverythingThe Effect of Threatening Events on the Frequency and Distribution of Intergroup Conflict in Germany.” *European Sociological Review* 36 (5): 684–699.
- Gaßebner, Martina, Christian Peucker, Nikola Schmidt, and Klaus Wahl. 2001. “Analyse von Urteilsschriften zu fremdenfeindlichen, antisemitischen und rechtsextremistischen Straftätern.” In *Fremdenfeindlichkeit, Antisemitismus, Rechtsextremismus: Drei Studien zu Tatverdächtigen und Tätern*, ed. Klaus Wahl. BMI pp. 69–120.
- Gerstenfeld, Phyllis B. 2017. *Hate crimes: Causes, controls, and controversies*. Sage Publications.
- Gibney, Matthew J. 2018. “The ethics of refugees.” *Philosophy Compass* 13 (10).
- GLES. 2024. “GLES Cross-Section 2009-2021, Cumulation.” *GESIS, ZA6835 Data file Version 2.0.0* .
- Grande, Edgar, Tobias Schwarzbözl, and Matthias Fatke. 2019. “Politicizing immigration in Western Europe.” *Journal of European Public Policy* 26 (10): 1444–1463.
- Green, Simon. 2004. *The Politics of Exclusion: Institutions and Immigration Policy in Contemporary Germany*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Gurr, Ted Robert. 1970. *Why men rebel*. Princeton University Press.

- Halikiopoulou, Daphne, and Sofia Vasilopoulou. 2018. "Breaching the Social Contract: Crises of Democratic Representation and Patterns of Extreme Right Party Support." *Government and Opposition* 53 (1): 26–50.
- Hanes, Emma, and Stephen Machin. 2014. "Hate Crime in the Wake of Terror Attacks: Evidence From 7/7 and 9/11." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 30 (3): 247–267.
- Heizmann, Boris. 2016. "Symbolic boundaries, incorporation policies, and anti-immigrant attitudes: what drives exclusionary policy preferences?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39 (10): 1791–1811.
- Heyne, Lea. 2018. "The Making of Democratic Citizens: How Regime-Specific Socialization Shapes Europeans Expectations of Democracy." *Swiss Political Science Review* 25 (1): 40–63.
- Hjorth, Frederik, and Martin Vinæs Larsen. 2022. "When Does Accommodation Work? Electoral Effects of Mainstream Left Position Taking on Immigration." *British Journal of Political Science* 52 (2): 949–957.
- Hobolt, Sara Binzer, and Robert Klemmensen. 2008. "Government responsiveness and political competition in comparative perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (3): 309–337.
- Jasper, James M. 2011. "Emotions and social movements: Twenty years of theory and research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37: 285–303.
- Kam, Cindy D., and Donald R. Kinder. 2012. "Ethnocentrism as a Short-Term Force in the 2008 American Presidential Election." *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (2): 326–340.
- Karapın, Roger. 2002. "Antiminority Riots in Unified Germany: Cultural Conflicts and Mischanneled Political Participation." *Comparative Politics* 34 (2): 147–167.
- Koopmans, Ruud. 1996. "Explaining the rise of racist and extreme right violence in Western Europe: Grievances or opportunities?" *European Journal of Political Research* 30 (2): 185–216.

- Krause, Werner, Denis Cohen, and Tarik Abou-Chadi. 2023. "Does accommodation work? Mainstream party strategies and the success of radical right parties." *Political Science Research and Methods* 11 (1): 172–179.
- Kreuter, Frauke, Stanley Presser, and Roger Tourangeau. 2008. "Social desirability bias in CATI, IVR, and web surveys: The effects of mode and question sensitivity." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72 (5): 847–865.
- Krueger, Alan B., and Jörn Steffen Pischke. 1997. "A statistical analysis of crime against foreigners in unified Germany." *Journal of Human Resources* 32 (1): 182–209.
- Krumpal, Ivar. 2013. "Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: A literature review." *Quality and Quantity* 47 (4): 2025–2047.
- Laurentsyeva, Nadzeya, and Alessandra Venturini. 2017. "The Social Integration of Immigrants and the Role of Policy A Literature Review." *Intereconomics* 52 (5): 285–292.
- Lyons-Padilla, Sarah, Michele J. Gelfand, Hedieh Mirahmadi, Mehreen Farooq, and Marieke Van Egmond. 2015. "Belonging nowhere: Marginalization & radicalization risk among Muslim immigrants." *Behavioral Science & Policy* 1 (2): 1–12.
- Mallet-García, Marie L., and Lisa García-Bedolla. 2021. "Immigration Policy and Belonging: Ramifications for DACA Recipients Sense of Belonging." *American Behavioral Scientist* 65 (9): 1165–1179.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 2003. "Rethinking Representation." *American Political Science Review* 97 (4): 515–528.
- Manzoni, Chiara. 2017. "Should I stay or should I go? Why Roma migrants leave or remain in nomad camps." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40 (10): 1605–1622.
- Marbach, Moritz, and Guido Ropers. 2019. "Not in My Backyard: Do Increases in Immigration Cause Political Violence?" *SSRN Electronic Journal* (18).
- March, James G, and Johan P Olsen. 1984. "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life." *American Political Science Review* 78 (3): 734–749.

- McDevitt, Jack, Jack Levin, and Susan Bennett. 2002. "Hate crime offenders: An expanded typology." *Journal of Social Issues* 58 (2): 303–317.
- McDevitt, Jack, and Janice A Iwama. 2016. "Challenges in Measuring and Understanding Hate Crime." In *The Handbook of Measurement Issues in Criminology and Criminal Justice*, ed. Beth M Huebner, and Timothy S Bynum. John Wiley & Sons pp. 131–155.
- Meuleman, Bart, Koen Abts, Koen Sloopmaeckers, and Cecil Meeusen. 2019. "Differentiated threat and the genesis of prejudice: Group-specific antecedents of homonegativity, islamophobia, anti-semitism, and anti-immigrant attitudes." *Social Problems* 66 (2): 222–244.
- Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2020. *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right*. Princeton University Press.
- Mitts, Tamar. 2019. "From Isolation to Radicalization: Anti-Muslim Hostility and Support for ISIS in the West." *American Political Science Review* 113 (1): 173–194.
- Paterson, Jenny L., Mark A. Walters, and Rupert Brown. 2019. "Your pain is my pain: Examining the community impacts of Islamophobic hate crimes." In *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia*. Routledge pp. 84–96.
- Peffley, Mark, and Robert Rohrschneider. 2003. "Democratization and political tolerance in seventeen countries a multi level model of democratic learning." *Political Research Quarterly* 56 (3): 243–257.
- Perry, Barbara. 2001. *In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes*. Routledge.
- Pevnick, Ryan. 2024. "Immigration, Backlash, and Democracy." *American Political Science Review* 118 (1): 332–344.
- Pew Research Center. 2024. Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, but People Around the World Are Critical of How It's Working. Technical report.
URL: www.pewresearch.org

- Pezzella, Frank S., Matthew D. Fetzer, and Tyler Keller. 2019. "The Dark Figure of Hate Crime Underreporting." *American Behavioral Scientist* .
- Picker, Giovanni. 2010. "Welcome 'in'. Romani migrants and Left-wing Tuscany (1988-2007)." *Proceedings of International Conference Romani Mobilities in Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. pp. 152–165.
- Picker, Giovanni, Margaret Greenfields, and David Smith. 2015. "Colonial refractions: the Gypsy camp as a spatio-racial political technology." *City* 19 (5): 741–752.
- Pitkin, H. F. 1967. *The concept of representation*. University of California Press.
- Popper, Karl R. 1945. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. One-volume edition ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rehfeld, Andrew. 2009. "Representation rethought: On trustees, delegates, and gyroscopes in the study of political representation and democracy." *American Political Science Review* 103 (2): 214–230.
- Riaz, Sascha, Daniel Bischof, and Markus Wagner. 2024. "Out-group Threat and Xenophobic Hate Crimes: Evidence of Local Intergroup Conflict Dynamics between Immigrants and Natives." *The Journal of Politics* 86 (4).
- Rohrschneider, Robert. 1999. *Learning Democracy: Democratic and Economic Values in Unified Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rosset, Jan, Nathalie Giger, and Julian Bernauer. 2017. "I the People? Self-Interest and Demand for Government Responsiveness." *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (6): 794–821.
- Rottmann, Susan Beth. 2023. "Forced Migration and the Politics of Belonging: Integration Policy, National Debates and Migrant Strategies." *International Migration Review* .
- Ruhs, Martin. 2022. "Who cares what the people think? Public attitudes and refugee protection in Europe." *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 21 (3): 313–344.

- Saalfeld, Thomas. 2002. "Parliament and Citizens in Germany: Reconciling Conflicting Pressures." In *Parliaments and Citizens in Western Europe*, ed. Philip Norton. Routledge pp. 43–65.
- Saward, Michael. 2010. *The Representative Claim*. Oxford University Press.
- Schakel, Wouter, Markus Baumann, Diane Bolet, Rosie Campbell, Tom Louwerse, and Thomas Zittel. 2025. "How political and social constituent traits affect the responsiveness of legislators: A Comparative Field Experiment." *European Journal of Political Research* 64 (1): 229–250.
- Schumpe, Birga M., Jocelyn J. Bélanger, Mauro Giacomantonio, Claudia F. Nisa, and Ambra Brizi. 2018. "Weapons of peace: Providing alternative means for social change reduces political violence." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 48 (10): 549–558.
- Sevillano, Ana Belén Martín. 2023. "Nomadism as Ancestral Homeland in the Romani Culture." *Discrimination* 5 (1): 1–18.
- Sibbitt, Rae. 1997. *The perpetrators of racial harassment and racial violence*. London: Home Office.
- Sigona, Nando. 2005. "Locating 'the Gypsy problem'. The Roma in Italy: Stereotyping, labelling and 'nomad camps'." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (4): 741–756.
- Tankard, Margaret E., and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. 2016. "Norm Perception as a Vehicle for Social Change." *Social Issues and Policy Review* 10 (1): 181–211.
- Tankard, Margaret E., and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. 2017. "The Effect of a Supreme Court Decision Regarding Gay Marriage on Social Norms and Personal Attitudes." <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617709594> 28 (9): 1334–1344.
- Tormey, Simon. 2014. "The contemporary crisis of representative democracy." *Democratic Theory* 1 (2): 104–112.
- Tourangeau, Roger, and Ting Yan. 2007. "Sensitive Questions in Surveys." *Psychological Bulletin* 133 (5): 859–883.

- Valentim, Vicente. 2021. “Parliamentary Representation and the Normalization of Radical Right Support:” *Comparative Political Studies* 54 (14): 2475–2511.
- Valentim, Vicente, Elias Dinas, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2025. “How Mainstream Politicians Erode Norms.” *British Journal of Political Science* 55: e105.
- van Spanje, Joost, and Nan Dirk de Graaf. 2018. “How established parties reduce other parties electoral support: the strategy of parroting the pariah.” *West European Politics* 41 (1): 1–27.
- Vergani, Matteo, and Carolina Navarro. 2023. “Hate Crime Reporting: The Relationship Between Types of Barriers and Perceived Severity.” *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 29 (1): 111–126.
- Vivyan, Nick, and Markus Wagner. 2016. “House or home? Constituent preferences over legislator effort allocation.” *European Journal of Political Research* 55 (1): 81–99.
- Watts, Meredith W. 2001. “Aggressive Youth Cultures and Hate Crime.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 45 (4): 600–615.
- Weldon, Steven A. 2006. “The Institutional Context of Tolerance for Ethnic Minorities: A Comparative, Multilevel Analysis of Western Europe.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (2): 331–349.
- Westwood, Sean J., Justin Grimmer, Matthew Tyler, and Clayton Nall. 2022. “Current research overstates American support for political violence.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 119 (12).
- Wicker, Allan W. 1969. “Attitudes versus Actions: The Relationship of Verbal and Overt Behavioral Responses to Attitude Objects.” *Journal of Social Issues* 25 (4): 41–78.
- Wolkenstein, Fabio, and Christopher Wratil. 2021. “Multidimensional Representation.” *American Journal of Political Science* 65 (4): 862–876.
- Ziller, Conrad, and Sara Wallace Goodman. 2020. “Local Government Efficiency and Anti-immigrant Violence.” *Journal of Politics* 82 (3): 895–907.

English Summary

Democracies today face increasing strain. Citizens show declining trust in political institutions and growing feelings of alienation – struggles that have been intensified by contentious debates about immigration and ethnic diversity in recent years. In this environment, more and more individuals are turning to undemocratic attitudes and behaviors, vividly demonstrated by the rising number of violent attacks against immigrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities across Europe. Troublingly, these attacks often also enjoy a degree of public support. This development is deeply concerning: Such violence inflicts severe harm on victims and communities, undermines social cohesion, and threatens the foundations of democratic coexistence.

How can we explain why some citizens remain within democratic boundaries while others turn to violence against immigrants and ethnic minorities? This dissertation addresses this question by examining the role of democratic institutions. Whereas prior research has emphasized individual traits, socio-structural conditions, and situational triggers, I focus on how institutions both structure political life and shape perceptions of legitimacy. I argue that they perform a dual role: representing citizens by channeling their demands into the political process, and steering them by defining who belongs and what forms of action are acceptable. In the context of immigration and ethnic diversity, this creates a difficult balance: Accommodating exclusionary demands risks normalizing hostility, while ignoring them risks fueling frustration and violence.

To shed light on these aspects, this dissertation builds on three papers that examine the different functions of democratic institutions in order to explain when and why citizens may step outside democratic boundaries. The first paper asks what citizens expect from their representatives, showing that voters whose preferred candidate wins are more likely to expect their representatives to prioritize their own supporters. In contrast, voters whose candidate loses still demand inclusive representation and that their views be taken into account. This suggests that citizens expect their

interests to matter even after an electoral loss and may not see decisions as legitimate simply because they were made by elected politicians. The second paper examines what happens when citizens feel that politicians are unresponsive to their demands. It shows that far-right voters are more likely to support anti-refugee violence when they perceive politicians to be acting against their interests and when non-violent means of influence have failed, suggesting that such violence may be seen as a last resort. The third paper turns to the steering function of democratic institutions. It focuses on the consequences of exclusionary policies based on ethnic criteria, showing that when institutions signal that some groups do not fully belong, this legitimizes hostility and increases the likelihood of violence against immigrant and ethnic minority groups.

Together, these findings show that democratic institutions both contain and fuel citizens' willingness to move beyond democratic boundaries, revealing a delicate balance between their role in representing citizens and steering them. Leaning too far toward representation risks normalizing exclusionary demands and hostility, while leaning too far toward steering risks fostering frustration and support for violence. The challenge for democracies is to manage this tension in ways that preserve both legitimacy and stability.

This dissertation therefore offers a new perspective on anti-minority violence by highlighting the critical role of democratic institutions and political processes. By doing so, it further contributes to broader debates on political representation and on how democracies respond to immigration and ethnic diversity, showing that institutional decisions influence societal dynamics well beyond elections and revealing the delicate balance between responsiveness and boundary-setting. The findings also carry normative implications: Democracies must navigate the tension between addressing citizens' concerns and upholding ethical and inclusive norms, recognizing that leaning too far in either direction can undermine legitimacy, social cohesion, and the very foundations of democratic life.

Dansk Resumé

Demokratier oplever i dag et stigende pres. Borgerne viser faldende tillid til de politiske institutioner og en voksende følelse af fremmedgørelse – en udvikling, der er blevet forstærket af omstridte debatter om indvandring og etnisk mangfoldighed i de senere år. I dette miljø vender stadig flere mennesker sig mod udemokratiske holdninger og adfærd, hvilket mest tydeligt kommer til udtryk i det stigende antal voldelige angreb på indvandrere, flygtninge og etniske minoriteter i hele Europa. Det er bekymrende, at disse angreb ofte også nyder en vis grad af offentlig opbakning. Denne udvikling er dybt problematisk: sådan vold påfører ofrene og samfundene alvorlig skade, underminerer den sociale samhørighed og truer grundlaget for demokratisk sameksistens.

Hvordan kan vi forklare, hvorfor nogle borgere forbliver inden for de demokratiske rammer, mens andre vender sig mod vold mod indvandrere og etniske minoriteter? Denne afhandling behandler dette spørgsmål ved at undersøge de demokratiske institutioners rolle. Mens tidligere forskning har lagt vægt på individuelle træk, socio-strukturelle forhold og situationelle udlødere, fokuserer jeg på, hvordan institutioner både strukturerer det politiske liv og former opfattelsen af legitimitet. Jeg argumenterer for, at de udfylder en dobbelt rolle: de repræsenterer borgerne ved at kanalisere deres krav ind i den politiske proces, og de styrer dem ved at definere, hvem der hører til, og hvilke former for handlinger der er acceptable. I forhold til indvandring og etnisk mangfoldighed skaber dette en vanskelig balance: at imødekomme ekskluderende krav risikerer at normalisere fjendtlighed, mens det at ignorere dem risikerer at nære frustration og vold.

For at belyse disse aspekter bygger denne afhandling på tre artikler, der undersøger de forskellige funktioner, som demokratiske institutioner har, med henblik på at forklare, hvornår og hvorfor borgere kan træde uden for de demokratiske grænser. Den første artikel stiller spørgsmålet om, hvad borgerne forventer af deres repræsentanter, og viser, at vælgere, hvis foretrukne kandidat vinder, er mere tilbøjelige til at forvente, at

deres repræsentanter prioriterer deres egne tilhængere. Derimod kræver vælgere, hvis kandidat taber, stadig inklusiv repræsentation og at deres synspunkter tages i betragtning. Dette tyder på, at borgerne forventer, at deres interesser tæller, selv efter et valgnederlag, og måske ikke anser beslutninger for legitime, blot fordi de er truffet af valgte politikere. Den anden artikel undersøger, hvad der sker, når borgerne føler, at politikerne ikke reagerer på deres krav. Den viser, at højreekstreme vælgere er mere tilbøjelige til at støtte vold mod flygtninge, når de opfatter, at politikerne handler imod deres interesser, og når ikke-voldelige midler til at udøve indflydelse har slået fejl. Dette tyder på, at sådan vold kan ses som en sidste udvej. Den tredje artikel drejer sig om demokratiske institutioners styrende funktion. Den fokuserer på konsekvenserne af ekskluderende politikker baseret på etniske kriterier og viser, at når institutioner signalerer, at nogle grupper ikke fuldt ud hører til, legitimerer dette fjendtlighed og øger sandsynligheden for vold mod indvandrere og etniske minoritetsgrupper.

Tilsammen viser disse resultater, at demokratiske institutioner både indeholder og nærer borgernes vilje til at overskride demokratiske grænser, hvilket afslører en delikat balance mellem deres rolle som repræsentanter for borgerne og som styrende instanser. At læne sig for langt mod repræsentation risikerer at normalisere ekskluderende krav og fjendtlighed, mens at læne sig for langt mod styring risikerer at fremme frustration og støtte til vold. Udfordringen for demokratier er at håndtere denne spænding på måder, der bevarer både legitimitet og stabilitet.

Denne afhandling tilbyder derfor et nyt perspektiv på vold mod minoriteter ved at fremhæve den kritiske rolle, som demokratiske institutioner og politiske processer spiller. Dermed bidrager den yderligere til bredere debatter om politisk repræsentation og om, hvordan demokratier reagerer på indvandring og etnisk mangfoldighed ved at vise, at institutionelle beslutninger påvirker samfundsdynamikken langt ud over valgene og afsløre den delikate balance mellem lydhørhed og grænsesætning. Resultaterne har også normative implikationer: demokratier skal navigere i spændingen mellem at imødekomme borgernes bekymringer og opretholde etiske og inkluderende normer, idet de erkender, at en for stor vægt i den ene eller anden retning kan underminere legitimiteten, den sociale samhørighed og selve grundlaget for det demokratiske liv.