

# Populist Eurosceptics don't gain from terrorist attacks

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Research led by the University of Kent has found that terrorist attacks in Europe don't increase support for populist parties.

In fact, people in Germany became more positive towards the EU after the 2016 Berlin Christmas market attack in that country, the researchers found.

The study, led by Dr. Erik Larsen with Professor Matthew Goodwin, both from Kent's School of Politics and International Relations, along with Professor David Cutts of the University of Birmingham, presents the first evidence on how terrorism can influence attitudes towards the EU. It used data collected in Austria, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland and Spain.

Since 2015, there have been a number of major terrorist attacks in European cities, including Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Liège, London, Manchester, Marseilles, Nice, Paris and Stockholm. An estimated 63 acts of jihadist terrorism in Europe and North America caused 424 deaths and 1,800 injuries between September 2014 and August 2017.

The Kent research centred on the [terrorist attack](#) on the Berlin Christmas market. Data on EU, immigrant and refugee attitudes was collected immediately after the attack to provide the researchers with a unique opportunity to study how perceptions changed in the aftermath.

Between December 2016 and February 2017 almost 7000 people in 11 countries were surveyed on their attitudes to refugees, whether immigration was good for the economy and cultural life, as well as the EU in general.

However, the researchers found that in the aftermath of the attacks people in Germany supported the European Union more but there was

no [fundamental change](#) in their attitudes towards immigration or refugees.

Dr. Larsen said: 'Because the data had already been collected, we had a unique opportunity to find out how people's attitudes towards topics such as the EU, immigration and refugees changed after a terrorist attack. We found people that people did not blame the EU or immigration. In fact in Germany people became more positive towards the EU after the attack. The findings suggest that it is important for politicians to consider how they themselves respond to such attacks as the public will follow their lead.'

The study suggests that further research is needed into the role that the reaction of the media or politicians has on how the public respond, and the effects of attacks over a longer period of time.

**More information:** ERIK GAHNER LARSEN et al, Do terrorist attacks feed populist Eurosceptics? Evidence from two comparative quasi-experiments, *European Journal of Political Research* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12342](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12342)

Provided by University of Kent

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