Political Violence and the Mediating Role of Violent Extremist Propensities

Nele Schils
Ghent Univeristy, nele.schils@ugent.be

Lieven J.R. Pauwels
lieven.pauwels@ugent.be

Political Violence and the Mediating Role of Violent Extremist Propensities

Abstract

Research into violent extremism is lacking integrated theoretical frameworks explaining individual involvement in politically or religiously motivated violence, resulting in a poor understanding of causal mechanisms. Building on situational action theory, the current study moves beyond the dominant risk factor approach and proposes an integrated model for the explanation of political/religious violence, distinguishing between direct mechanisms and "causes of the causes." The model integrates mechanisms from different but complementary traditions. Following previous work, this study focusses on the causes of the causes influencing direct key mechanisms, violent extremist propensity, and exposure to violent extremist moral settings that explain political/religious violence. The theoretical model is tested using structural equation modelling. The analyses are based on a web survey (N = 6,020) among adolescents and young adults in Belgium. Results show that violent extremist propensity and exposure to violent extremist moral settings have direct effects on the likelihood of political/religious violence. These direct mechanisms are in turn determined by a series of exogenous factors: perceived injustice and poor social integration. The relationship between perceived injustice and poor social integration and political/religious violence is further mediated by perceived alienation, perceived procedural justice, and religious authoritarianism. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Introduction

Violent extremism is a widely discussed topic in both mainstream journals and academia and has been high on the international agenda ever since the events of 9/11. Recent events, such as the attack in Paris, the Buddhist killing of Muslims in Myanmar, and the growing extreme right violence in response to increasing migration, are just some examples that illustrate how the dynamics of violent radicalization can have dramatic consequences. Violent extremism can manifest as politically and/or religiously motivated violence.

Although considerable research has been conducted on violent extremism, the domain is still lacking overarching theoretical frameworks.[1] The existing theoretical frameworks are somewhat fragmented and poorly integrated, and research often does not move beyond the reporting of risk and protective factors.[2] As a result, the increased attention to violent extremism has not resulted in a better understanding of relevant causal mechanisms nor has it led to an integration of different explanatory levels.[3] In criminology, similar concerns have led to a renewed interest in the development of cross-level integrated theories that are internally coherent and consist of clear, substantive logical argumentation on direct and indirect mechanisms in the explanation of (adolescent) offending.[4] We argue that research in the domain of violent extremism will equally benefit from theoretical reflections and theoretical reconsiderations of the relevant risk factors: It is crucial that scholars ask themselves which risk factors should be considered of explanatory value and why (i.e., is there a

---

[1] Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theory," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4:4 (2011a): 7-36; Randy Borum, "Radicalization Into Violent Extremism: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4:4 (2011b): 37-62; Kris Christmann, "Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: A Systematic Review of the Research Evidence," *Youth Justice Board for England and Wales,* 2012; Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert, "Why Conventional Wisdom on Radicalization Fails: The Persistence of a Failed Discourse," *International Affairs* 86:4 (2010): 889-901.

[2] Noémie Bouhana and Per-Olof H. Wikström, "Theorizing Terrorism: Terrorism as Moral Action," *University College London*, 2008.

[3] Ibid; Per-Olof H. Wikström, "In Search of the Causes and Explanations of Crime," in Roy D. King and Emma Wincup (eds.), *Doing Research on Crime and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Per-Olof H. Wikström, "Explaining Crime as Moral Actions," in Steven Hitlin and Stephen Vaisey (eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* (New York: Springer, 2010), 211-239.

[4] Lieven Pauwels and Robert Svensson, "Violent Youth Group Involvement, Self-reported Offending and Victimization: An Empirical Assessment of an Integrated Informal Control/Lifestyle Model," *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 19:4 (2013): 369-386.

mechanism that links the factor with the outcome, and if so, what are the contributory intervening mechanisms?).[5]

In order to take a first step to fill this gap, we propose an integrated theoretical framework explaining political/religious violence as the behavioral component of violent extremism.[6] According to Schmid, violent extremism can best be defined as opposing dominant political positions and core (social or religious) values of the society it is part of, leaving no place for pluralism and always accepting violence as a means to achieve the group's goals. This can manifest as violent attitudes, violent actions (political/religious violence), or both.[7]

The integrated model we propose focuses on theoretical integration to differentiate between exogenous factors (causes of the causes) and direct mechanisms.[8] Building on a contemporary integrated theory of crime causation, i.e., situational action theory (SAT),[9] we integrate mechanisms derived from different criminological frameworks and apply these ideas to the explanation of political/religious violence. Our framework integrates an explanatory model that is capable of explaining why individuals come to see political/religious violence as an action alternative and an explanatory model that is capable of explaining why some kinds of individuals who see political/religious violence as an action alternative are triggered to carry out such actions. We will refer to these theoretical models as the social (developmental) model and the situational model,

---

[5] Deflem, Mathieu, *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Criminological Perspectives* (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2004).

[6] Pauwels, Lieven, Fabienne Brion, Nele Schils, Julianne Laffineur, Antoinette Verhage, Brice De Ruyver, and Marleen Easton, *Explaining and Understanding the Role of Exposure to New Social Media on Violent Extremism: An Integrative Quantitative and Qualitative Approach*. (Gent: Academia Press, 2014).

[7] In our integrated framework these violent attitudes are conceptualized as "extremist propensity" and political/religious violence is the dependent variable. For some well-known descriptions of the violent radicalization process leading to violent extremism, distinguishing between extremist attitudes or ideas and violent extremist behavior, see (among others) McCauley and Moskalenko's two-pyramid model and Moghaddam's staircase model. Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways to Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20:3 (2008): 653-673; Fathali Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist* 60:2 (2005): 161-169; Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *ICC Research Paper* (Den Haag: International Centre for Counter Terrorism, 2010); Mark Sedgwick, "The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22:4 (2010): 479-494.

[8] Wilhelm Heitmeyer, "Right-Wing Extremist Violence," in Wilhem Heitmeyer and John Hagan (eds.), *International Handbook of Violence Research* (New York: Springer, 2003), 399-436.

[9] Per-Olof H. Wikström, "Why Crime Happens: A Situational Action Theory," in Gianluca Manzo (ed.), *Analytical Sociology: Actions and Networks* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2014).

71

respectively. Although different aspects of this integrated model have been discussed elsewhere and some hypotheses have been tested, a detailed analysis of the full structural equation model has not been conducted.[10]

This study builds upon previous work and provides a detailed analysis, focusing on the social (developmental) model and the emergence of political/religious violence. As our model aims to offer a general explanation of violent extremism, and political/religious violence more specifically, right-wing, left-wing, and Islamist extremism are addressed simultaneously. Also, no further distinction is made between political and religious violence as we will define politically and/or religiously motivated violence as moral rule breaching as stated in the law, regardless of ideological background or motivation.[11]

In Need of an Integrated Approach to Violent Extremism

Research on violent radicalization and violent extremism has resulted in a long and still expanding list of risk factors possibly leading to violent extremism and the use of political/religious violence, depending on the individual and the setting.[12] However, such a risk factor approach is not capable of distinguishing between real causal mechanisms and mere correlates, causing confusion about what is and is not of importance.[13] Although risk factors are stable correlates that indicate the possibility of a certain outcome, only a number of them can rightly be interpreted as directly causal; the majority cannot. So far, scholars have not been able to agree on a general causal model of violent extremism.[14] There is disagreement on the relative importance of different levels of explanation

---

[10] Schils, Nele, and Lieven Pauwels, "Explaining Violent Extremism for Subgroups by Gender and Immigrant Background, Using SAT as a Framework," *Journal of Strategic Security* 7:3 (2014): 27–47; Pauwels, Lieven, and Nele Schils, "Differential Online Exposure to Extremist Content and Political Violence: Testing the Relative Strength of Social Learning and Competing Perspectives," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28:1 (2016):1–29.

[11] See also Juergensmeyer, Mark, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Oakland: Univeristy of California Press, 2003). Religion can provide an identity that is strong and easy to appeal to as well as a specific and unique set of transcendent moral justifications and symbols that make violence acceptable and therefore possible. However, the goal this violence has to serve is often (socio-)political (e.g., a society based on Sharia law) in nature and religious and political ideologies are often intertwined (e.g., religious nationalism).

[12] Bjørgo Tore, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, Perpetrators and Responses* (Oslo: Ascehoug, 1997); Horgan, John, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[13] Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I;" John Horgan, "From Profiles to Pathways, from Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalisation into Terrorism," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681:1 (2008): 80-94.

[14] Christmann, "Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism."

(individual and environment); correlation is misinterpreted as causation; and causal powers are sometimes ascribed to mere background characteristics (e.g., gender, origin, race, etc.). There is also discussion among scholars on distant versus proximate mechanisms.

This situation is almost identical to what can be found in the field of criminal and deviant behavior of adolescents,[15] which is equally criticized for being stuck in a risk factor approach as a consequence of poor understanding of causal mechanisms and the lack of integration.[16] Subsequently, in the last fifteen years, there has been a renewed attention within criminology to integrated theories that aim at internal coherence and clear substantive argumentation on the direct and indirect causes of crime.[17] Theoretical integration has often been refuted because of the fact that different theories were built on different assumptions about social order and human nature. However, most theories of crime causation are based on outdated images of human nature (e.g., the nature–nurture discussion), and therefore conceptual end-to-end integration between various incompatibly labeled theoretical frameworks becomes viable again.[18] If we focus on complementarity rather than differences between competing theories, theoretical integration can be thought of as an opportunity to build more comprehensive and solid theories producing scientific progress.

We believe integration has merits as long as it is built around an internal causal logic, i.e., logically distinguishing between proximate and distant factors. This implicates that it is necessary to gain insight into both the direct causes of offending and into the role of exogenous factors or indirect

---

[15] David P. Farrington, "Human Development and Criminal Careers," in Mike McGuire, Robert Morgan, and Ron Rainer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003); David P. Farrington, "Childhood Risk Factors and Risk-Focused Prevention," in Mike McGuire, Robert Morgan, and Ron Rainer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (ed. 4) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 602-640.; Loeber, Rolf and David P. Farrington (eds.), *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998).

[16] Wikström, "In Search of the Causes and Explanations of Crime."

[17] David P. Farrington, Robert J. Sampson, and Per-Olof H. Wikström, "Integrating Individuals and Ecological Aspects of Crime," *Revised papers presented at a workshop held in Johannesburg, Sweden*, (Stockholm: National Council for Crime prevention, 1992); Messner, F. Steven, Marvin D. Krohn, and Allen E. Liska (eds.), *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime: Problems and Prospects* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Wikström H. Per-Olof and Sampson J. Robert, *The Explanation of Crime: Context, Mechanisms and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[18] Laub John H. and Robert J. Sampson, *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70* (Harvard: University Press, 2003); Laub John H. and Robert J. Sampson, *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning points Through Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

causes (causes of the causes).[19] Wikström proposed that such integration should be built around a "developed theory of (moral) action through which levels of explanation can be integrated and factor's status as potential causes can be assessed."[20] The integrated framework to study individual differences in political violence that we propose is built on the principle of end-to-end integration. End-to-end integration entails the integration of mechanisms that play a role in different theories so that the dependent variables of some theories become the independent variables of the integrated theory.[21] It draws upon one of the most promising etiological theories of our time, the situational action theory,[22] and applies its philosophy to the explanation of violent extremism, and more specifically, to political/religious violence.

Applying the Logic of Situational Action Theory

Situational action theory (SAT) is a general theory of offending and aims at providing fundamental insight into the causal processes (mechanisms) leading to acts of crime, or more generally, moral rule breaking. It is an integrative theory, combining contextual and individual theories from different traditions.[23]

SAT is formulated as an "action theory" or an abstract account of what moves people to action, or more specifically crime, in certain circumstances or situations. SAT defines crime as acts of breaking moral rules as stated in the law.[24] Regardless of content, what all crimes have in common is that they break the law. SAT takes the standpoint that this process of rule breaking is the same for all crimes, making a general explanation of crime possible. By identifying acts of crime as the breaching of moral rules as stated in the criminal law, conceptual discussions

---

[19] Wikström and Sampson, *The Explanation of Crime*.

[20] Wikström, "In Search of the Causes and Explanations of Crime;" Wikström, "Explaining Crime as Moral Actions;" Opp, D. Karl, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique and Synthesis* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[21] Messner, Krohn and Liska, *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime*.

[22] Wikström, "Explaining Crime as Moral Actions;" Wikström, "Why Crime Happens."

[23] Recent studies of adolescent offending offered empirical evidence for important elements of the theory. See Olena Antonaccio and Charles R. Tittle, "Morality, Self-Control and Crime," *Criminology* 46 (2008): 497-510; Robert Svensson and Dietrich Oberwittler, "It's Not the Time They Spend, It's What They Do. The Interaction Between Delinquent Friends and Unstructured Routine Activity on Delinquency: Findings From Two Countries," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 38:5 (2010): 1006-1014; Per-Olof H. Wikström and Robert Svensson, "Why Are English Youths More Violent than Swedish Youths? A Comparative Study of the Role of Crime Propensity, Lifestyles and Their Interactions," *European Journal of Criminology* 5 (2008): 309-330.

[24] Wikström, "Explaining Crime as Moral Actions."

become dispensable. The explanation of crime lies in the question regarding why individuals breach moral rules when they know it is against the law to do so. The focus lies on the *breaking* of the moral rule, and not on the moral rule itself. Moral rules are indeed different in time and place, but that is not the issue when general explanations are sought of the process of law-breaking. Therefore, what differs between types of crime is not the explanatory process but the content of the offence. The same is true for political/religious violence.

All expressions of political/religious violence refer to the violation of criminal law.[25] Defining political/religious violence as another form of moral rule breaking, as stated in the law, has the advantage that all forms of political/religious violence are the same and thus this approach avoids conflicting perceptions and definitions. The focus lies on the fact that the moral rule as defined in law is breached and not on the validity of the moral rule or the righteousness of breaching it.[26] Furthermore, this reasoning provides the possibility of a general explanation of violent extremism, focusing on common pathways toward political/religious violence. Whether or not political/religious violence is committed out of different ideological or religious motivations, and whether or not the violence is perceived as just or not, it is all violence committed to breach the existing status quo; likewise, it all involves breaking moral rules as stated in the law.

By defining political/religious violence this way, the philosophy of SAT can be applied to the explanation of political/religious violence (Figure 1). Research into different, and essentially criminological, frameworks has already demonstrated their applicability to the explanation of political/religious violence. Using the SAT framework, other frameworks can be integrated to explain political/religious violence.

---

[25] Bouhana and Wikström, "Theorizing Terrorism;" Per-Olof Wikström and Kyle H. Treiber, "Violence as Situational Action," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 3:1 (2009): 75-96.

[26] This definition is in line with Schmid who states that to resolve confusion and end endless debates on what can and cannot be considered extremist, a benchmark is needed, best defined in relation to mainstream political activities and core values or moral rules. See Wikström, "Explaining Crime as Moral Actions;" Borum, "Radicalization Into Violent Extremism I;" Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review;" Mark Sedgwick, "The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion," *Terrorism and Political Violence.*

Figure 1: The SAT Framework, Which Explains Violent Extremism (Political/Religious Violence)

Social (Developmental)
Framework

Situational Framework
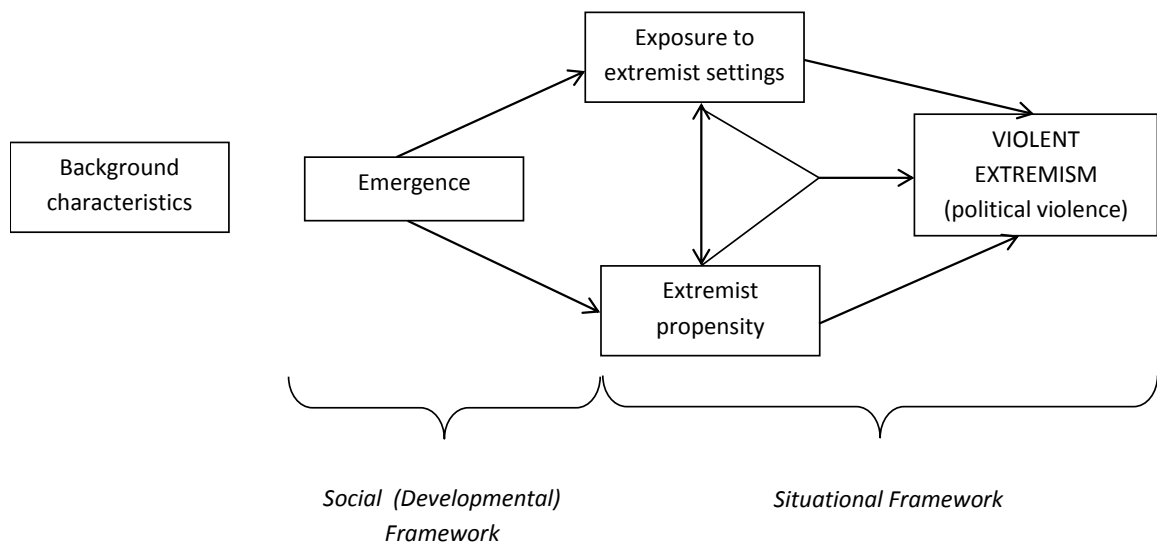
The theory is constructed around two main parts: A situational model and a social (developmental) model.[27] The situational model focusses on the situational mechanism explaining why individuals actually commit acts of political/religious violence in a given situation.[28] It explains how the interaction between individual propensity toward violent extremism and exposure to violent extremist moral settings determines a perception-choice process that can lead to political/religious violence. Given the circumstances, individuals perceive a number of action alternatives and choose to carry out one of these alternatives based on their own propensity and the characteristics of their setting. SAT regards elements of, and interaction between, propensity and exposure as the direct causes of political/religious violence because they initiate the perception-choice process and thus can move individuals to carry out acts of political/religious violence.[29]

The social (developmental) model focuses on triggering mechanisms[30] and explains how individuals develop violent extremist propensities, how settings acquire a violent extremist character, and how specific individuals become exposed to violent extremist settings. The exogenous factors

---

[27] Wikström, "Why Crime Happens."

[28] In SAT, a situation refers to a specific combination of an individual in a certain setting.

[29] Wikström, *In Search of the Causes and Explanations of Crime*; Sedgwick, "The Concept of Radicalization."

[30] More specifically, social and developmental mechanisms.

76

initiating these mechanisms are what criminologists often refer to as the "causes of the causes."

Based on this framework, we developed an integrated model for the explanation of violent extremism in the form of politically and/or religiously motivated violence (Figure 2). This model distinguishes between the personal and environmental interaction (direct mechanisms) on the one hand and triggering mechanisms (causes of the causes) on the other hand. The situational model of the theory has previously been tested and the results indicated that the role of exposure to violent extremist settings in political/religious violence is strongly conditional on one's level of violent extremist propensity. This finding holds across groups by gender and origin.[31] Therefore, the current article focuses on establishing the relationship between exogenous factors and violent extremist moral beliefs and the ability to exercise self-control on the one hand and the mediating role of both dimensions of violent extremist propensity in exposure to violent extremist moral settings and self-reported political/religious violence on the other hand.

Figure 2: Testable Integrated Model for the Explanation of Political/Religious Violence[32]
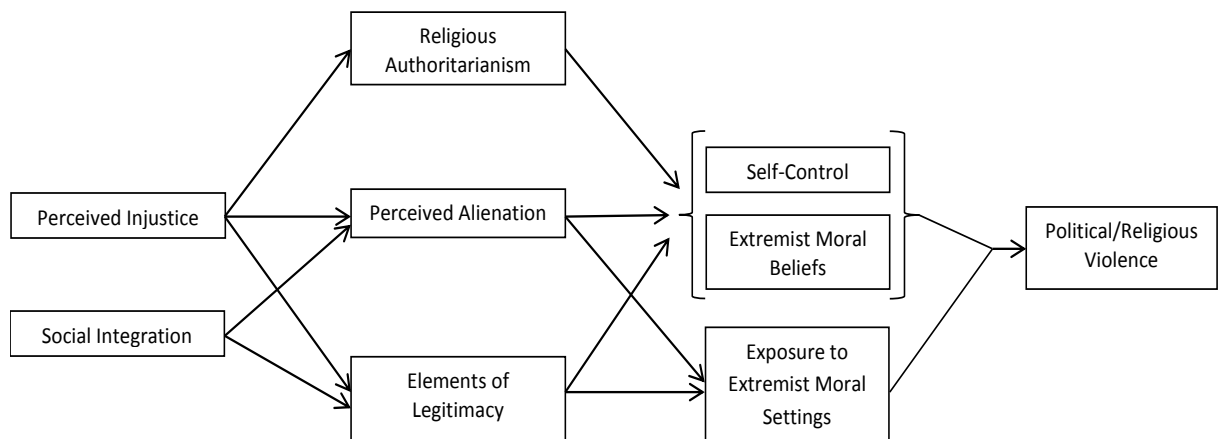
Elements of the integrated model

---

[31] Schils and Pauwels, "Explaining Violent Extremism for Subgroups by Gender and Immigrant Background, Using SAT as a Framework."

[32] Our model focusses on the explanation of political/religious violence and not on the explanation of why individuals join violent extremist groups or movements. It is highly plausible that some overlap exists between both explanations, but they certainly are different. We refer to the work of Karl-Dieter Opp for a discussion on insurgent group activities. Opp's model has partially inspired us. Opp, Karl-Dieter, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

Extremist propensity

Violent extremist propensity refers to the general tendency of individuals to support and perceive political/religious violence as a valid action alternative. This is essentially determined by a person's morality and the ability to exercise self-control.[33] *Violent extremist moral beliefs* refer to the extent to which individuals hold a positive attitude toward the use of violence to obtain political or religious goals. The *ability to exercise self-control* refers to one's ability to resist temptation and provocation and is formed by several individual traits, such as impulsiveness, immediate gratification, the lack of anger management, and thrill-seeking behavior.[34] Several studies on violent extremism have revealed that thrill-seeking behavior is often observed in violent extremists.[35]

Exposure to violent extremism

Exposure to violent extremist moral settings can be characterized as the time present in settings that are conducive to political/religious violence.[36] Extremist settings make the cultural transmission of violent extremist values possible through processes of signaling and social learning.[37] A setting's level of violent extremism is determined by the moral rules of the setting regarding violent extremism and the use of political/religious violence and the enforcement of these rules.[38] In SAT, both elements should be taken into account; it is the person–moral environment interaction that explains crime, and in this case political/religious violence. This has been documented by Schils and Pauwels.[39]

---

[33] Wikström, "Why Crime Happens."
[34] Gottfredson Michael R. and Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Harold G. Grasmick, Charles R. Title, Robert J. Bursik, and Bruce J. Arneklev, "Testing the Core Empirical Implications of Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 30:1 (1993): 5-29; Per-Olof H. Wikström and Kyle Treiber, "The Role of Self-Control in Crime Causation Beyond Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime," *European Journal of Criminology* 4:2 (2007): 237-264.
[35] Bjørgo, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence;* Michael King and Donald M. Taylor, "The Radicalization of Homegrown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models and Social Psychological Evidence," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23:4 (2011): 602-622; Jeff Victoroff, "The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49:1 (2005): 3-42.
[36] Wikström, "Why Crime Happens."
[37] Ronald L. Akers and Adam Silverman, "Toward a Social Learning Model of Violence and Terrorism," in Margaret A. Zahn, Henry H. Brownstein, and Shelly L. Jackson (eds.), *Violence, From Theory to Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).
[38] Bouhana and Wikström, "Theorizing Terrorism."
[39] Schils and Pauwels, "Explaining Violent Extremism for Subgroups by Gender and Immigrant Background, Using SAT as a Framework."

Perceived injustice

Perceived injustice refers to the feeling of being treated unfairly by society in comparison to others. Agnew's general theory of strains (GST) argues that strain, or negative treatment by others, leads to negative feelings that may lead to a number of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional outcomes, including violent attitudes and behavior.[40] Agnew identifies perceptions of injustice and discrimination as important stressors.[41] Many theories of (violent) extremism refer to perceived injustice as a triggering factor that helps to create a cognitive opening, i.e., makes people susceptible to violent extremist messages.[42]

Social integration

Some factors, such as commitment to school and attachment to parents, can reduce the negative outcome of strains.[43] Control theories have traditionally pointed out the importance of social bonds to society to keep individuals from offending.[44] The central argument is that individuals who have weak ties experience fewer constraints to deviate. Social bonds accumulate over life-domains, and previous research has demonstrated the strong cumulative effects of a lack of social bonds.[45] Sampson and Laub redefined social bonds in terms of social capital.[46] They argue that the social control following from participation in conventional networks and activities protects individuals from committing crime. Likewise, high

---

[40] Agnew, Robert, *Pressured Into Crime: An Overview of General Strain Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Robert Agnew, "A General Strain Theory of Terrorism," *Theoretical Criminology* 14:2 (2010): 131-153.

[41] Robert Agnew, "A General Strain Theory Approach to Violence" in Margaret A. Zahn, Henry H. Brownstein, and Shelly L. Jackson (eds.), *Violence: From Theory to Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

[42] King and Taylor, "The Radicalization of Homegrown Jihadists;" Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways to Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20:3 (2008): 415-433; Collin Mellis, "Amsterdam and Radicalization: The Municipal Approach," *Radicalization in a Broader Perspective* (Den Haag: NCTb, 2007); Fathali M. Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist* 60:2 (2005): 234-256; Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam," *Paper Presented at the Roots of Islamic Radicalism Conference* (Yale, 2004).

[43] Agnew, "A General Strain Theory of Crime;" Merry Morash and Boyongook Moon, "Gender Differences in the Effects of Strain on the Delinquency of South Korean Youth," *Youth and Society* 38:3 (2007): 300-321.

[44] Hirschi, Travis, *Causes of Delinquency* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1969); Walter C. Reckless, "New Theory of Delinquency and Crime," *A Fed. Probation* 25:42 (1961).

[45] Terence P. Thornberry, "Toward an Interactional Theory of Delinquency," *Criminology* 24:4 (1987): 863-887.; Terrence P. Thornberry, "Reflections on the Advantages and Disadvantages of Theoretical Integration," in Steven M. Messner, Marvan D. Krohn, and Allen E. Liska, *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime: Problems and Prospects* (Albany: Sate University of New York Press, 1989); Laub and Sampson, *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives.*

[46] Laub and Sampson, *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives.*

79

levels of social integration, or strong social bonds with parents and school, may decrease the chances of committing political/religious violence.

Perceived alienation (political powerlessness)

Confronted with perceived injustice (strains) and a lack of social bonds, individuals might begin to feel distanced or alienated from society and can develop the perception of not belonging.[47] In his study on personal alienation, Srole describes personal anomia as the individual experience of social disconnection and disintegration, which traces its origin to social and personality factors. [48] It refers more specifically to a breakdown of the individual's sense of attachment to society.[49] Anomic individuals often experience feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. Srole found that anomic individuals are more likely to have negative attitudes toward outgroups. Strains and poor social ties can contribute to feelings of powerlessness. Some empirical studies have linked feelings of (political) powerlessness to violent extremist ideology.[50]

Perceived procedural justice and police legitimacy

Analogous to social bonds theory, procedural justice theory (PJT) examines why people conform to the law.[51] Just like Laub and Sampson's theory of social capital, PJT accepts the thesis that controls can be weakened by structural constraints situated at the institutional level, e.g., the unfair treatment of individuals by the police and authorities. Perceived procedural justice and legitimacy may well be affected by social integration and perceived injustice.

According to PJT, the perception of the legitimacy of the social and political system in general, and the authorities that represent that system more specifically, depends on the perception of procedural justice based on the assessment of the authorities 1) to be just and fair in their decision making; and 2) to treat civilians with dignity and respect.[52] If so, in

---

[47] Michael J. Mazarr, "The Psychological Sources of Islamic Terrorism," *Policy Review* 125 (2004): 39-60.
[48] Leo Srole, "Social Integration and Certain Corollaries: An Exploratory Study," *American Sociological Review* 21:6 (1956): 709-716. Srole departs form Durkheims' macro-sociological concept of anomy and translates it into a broader concept of individual dysfunction and malintegration in social systems. This is in fact more in line with Merton's conceptualization of anomy.
[49] See also MacIver, Robert M, *The Ramparts We Guard* (London: MacMillan, 1950).
[50] Peer Scheepers, Albert Felling, and Jan Peters, "Anomie, Authoritarianism and Ethnocentrism: Update of a Classic Theme and Empirical Test," *Politics & the Individual* (1992); Roy, "Al Qaeda in the West as a Youth Movement: the Power of a Narrative."
[51] Tom R. Tyler, "Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation," *Annual Review of Psychology* 57:1 (2006): 375-400; Tyler Tom R., *Why People Obey the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
[52] Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law*.

addition to perceiving the authorities as legitimate and thus to be obeyed, individuals will also perceive them as sharing the same norms and values.[53] Empirical research has shown that those who distrust the authorities are more likely to engage in crime and political/religious violence.[54]

Doosje, Loseman, and Van den Bos describe elements of perceived alienation and weak perceived legitimacy of authorities as important elements of a radical belief system that individuals develop in response to certain strains and insecurities, such as perceived injustice.[55] In turn, these elements influence the individual's morality concerning violent extremism and subsequently the use of political/religious violence.

Religious authoritarianism

The concept of authoritarianism was developed by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford as a relatively stable personal characteristic resulting from negative experiences during childhood that lead to intrapersonal conflict.[56] In his view, authoritarian individuals are quick to perceive others, especially from other (minority) groups, as weak or immoral.[57] Following conceptual and operational criticism, Altemeyer later conceptualized authoritarianism as a set of coherent learned attitudes rather than a stable intrapersonal characteristic.[58] The following three elements characterize authoritarian individuals: 1) conventionalism; 2) an emphasis on hierarchy and submission to authority; and 3) a "law and order mentality," which legitimizes anger and aggression against those

---

[53] Jonathan Jackson, Ben Hough, Mike Myhill, Andy Quinton, and Tom Tyler, "Why Do People Comply with the Law? Legitimacy and the Influence of Legal Institutions," *British Journal of Criminology* 52:6 (2012): 1051-1071; Tom R. Tyler and Jason Sunshine, "Moral Solidarity, Identification with the Community and the Importance of Procedural Justice. The Police as Prototypical Representatives of a Group's Moral Values," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 66:2 (2003): 153-165.
[54] Pauwels, Brion, Schils, Laffineur, Verhage, De Ruyver, and Easton, *Explaining and Understanding the Role of Exposure to New Social Media on Violent Extremism;* Maarten DeWaele and Lieven Pauwels, "Youth Involvement in Politically Motivated Violence: Why do Social Integration, Perceived legitimacy and Perceived Discrimination Matter?," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 8:1 (2014):134-153.
[55] Bert-Jan Doosje, Annemarie Loseman, and Kees Van den Bos, "Determinants of the Radicalization Process of Islamic Youth in the Netherlands: Personal Uncertainty, Perceived Injustice and Perceived Group Threat," *Journal of Social Issues* 69:3 (2009): 586-604.
[56] Adorno Theodor et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950).
[57] Bernhard Whitley and Stefania Aegisdottir, "The Gender Belief System, Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Orientation and Heterosexual Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men," *Sex Roles* 42:11 (2000): 947-967.
[58] Altemeyer Bob, *Enemies of Freedom: Understanding Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1988); Altemeyer Bob, *The Authoritarian Specter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

81

who deviate from social norms. Research showed that having an authoritarian personality is linked to susceptibility to violent extremism, especially in the case of right-wing extremism.[59]

Testable propositions

In the present study we test the following three specific hypotheses:

H1: Perceived injustice is indirectly and positively related to political/religious violence, violent extremist moral beliefs, and the ability to exercise self-control by enhancing feelings of perceived alienation and undermining perceptions of procedural justice.

H2: Social integration is indirectly and negatively related to political/religious violence, violent extremist moral beliefs, and the ability to exercise self-control preventing perceived alienation and shaping perceptions of procedural justice.

H3: Perceptions of procedural justice, perceived alienation, and authoritarianism mediate the relationship between perceived injustice and social integration on the one hand and violent extremist beliefs and the ability to exercise self-control on the other hand.

Data & methods

Data and sample description

Data were collected using 1) a classic paper-and-pencil survey among adolescents in the third cycle of secondary education (ages 16 to 18); and 2) a web survey among students and young adults who have left school (ages 16–24). The paper-and-pencil study was restricted to Antwerp and Liège which, apart from Brussels, are the two largest cities in Belgium (+ 100,000 inhabitants). All schools in the third cycle of secondary education were contacted in August and September 2012, for a total of 34 schools in Antwerp and 32 schools in Liège. Only three schools in Antwerp agreed to hand out the survey. Six additional schools in Antwerp and another six in Liège agreed to offer the survey online to their students using their online educational platform. The web survey consists of a self-administered questionnaire that is conducted online. Access could be gained through a link on the survey's web page on Facebook between

---

[59] De Waele and Pauwels, "Youth Involvement in Politically Motivated Violence;" De Waele Maarten and Lieven Pauwels, "Right-Wing Extremism and the Use of Violence: What is the Role of Perceived Injustice and Moral Support?," in Lieven Pauwels and Gert Vermeulen (eds.), *Update in De Criminologie VII : Actuele Ontwikkelingen Inzake EU-justitiebeleid, Cannabisbeleid, Misdaad En Straf, Jongeren En Jeugdzorg, Internationale Vrede, Veiligheid En Gerechtigheid, Gewelddadig Extremisme & Private Veiligheid En Zelfregulering* (Antwerpen: Maklu), 364-392; Victoroff, "The Mind of a Terrorist."

September and December 2012.[60] Flyers and posters were distributed in faculty and university buildings in Antwerp, Ghent, Louvain la Neuve, and Liège; the central faculties and administrational services for students of all universities and university colleges of Flanders, Liège, and Louvain la Neuve were sent an email invitation with a request to circulate the web link to the questionnaire's Facebook page. To reach non-studying young adults, posters were placed in different strategic places that attract a high number of the target population, such as popular pubs and bars, and many additional organizations, associations, and local youth clubs were contacted with a request to distribute the survey among their members.[61] A total of 6,020 respondents were reached, including 3,653 in Flanders and 2,367 in Wallonia. The average age of the respondents was 20 years. The majority was female (64.7%) with a Belgian native background (both parents born in Belgium) (76.2%), living in Flanders (60.7%), and self-reported to be religious (54.6%).

Measurement of Constructs

Several scale constructs are used to assess the relationship between exogenous variables, mediators, and self-reported political/religious violence. Due to the extensive nature of the concepts, only a general overview of the scale constructs is presented.[62]

Dependent Variables

Political/religious violence (alpha: 0.89) was measured by combining items that asked respondents how often, if ever, they have committed acts of political/religious violence toward property (e.g., vandalism, throwing things at the police, etc.) and items that asked respondents how often, if ever, they have committed acts of political/religious violence toward persons (e.g., fighting, threatening, etc.). The first set of items was derived from a Belgian study of nonconventional/illegal political participation by youth.[63] The second set of items was derived from a youth survey conducted by the Swedish Council for Crime Prevention.[64] As this scale is

---

[60] See *facebook.com/radimedonline* for the Flemish version and *facebook.com/radimeducl* for the French version.

[61] A more extensive overview of the data gathering process is outlined in Pauwels, Brion, Schils, Laffineur, Verhage, De Ruyver, and Easton, *Explaining and Understanding the Role of Exposure to New Social Media on Violent Extremism*.

[62] A detailed overview of the scale constructs will be provided by the authors upon request.

[63] Claire Gavray, Bernard Fourrnier, and Michel Born, "Nonconventional/Illegal Participation of Male and Female Youths," *Human Affairs* 22:3 (2012): 405-418.

[64] Säkerhetspolisen, *Valdsam Politisk Extremism: Antidemokratiska Grupperingar pa Yttersta Höger- Och Vänsterkanten. Stockholm* (Säkerhetspolisen, 2009); Wikström, Per-Olof, Dietrich Oberwittler, Kyle Treiber, and Beth Hardie, *Breaking Rules: The Social and Situational Dynamics of Young People's Urban Crime* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2012).

highly skewed, this variable is dichotomized (0 = never committed an act of political/religious violence; 1 = committed an act of political/religious violence at least once).

Exogenous and Independent Variables

Independent variables are drawn from the criminological theories that were used to construct the integrated model. Because most variables are highly skewed, all variables were dichotomized except for social integration and perceived injustice in order to obtain a more accurate analysis.

The first set of variables entails the mechanisms that are hypothesized to be directly related to political/religious violence. *Violent extremist moral beliefs* (alpha: 0.92) was measured combining three scales measuring support for religious, left-wing, and right-wing violent extremism. These items were originally used in a Dutch survey of attitudes toward violent extremism conducted by Doosje, Loseman, and Van den Bos.[65] *Low ability to exercise self-control* was measured by combining the following two subscales: Impulsiveness (alpha: 0.63) and thrill-seeking behavior (alpha: 0.73). The items for these two scales were taken from the attitudinal self-control scale used by Grasmick *et al.* (1993). *Exposure to violent extremist moral settings* is measured by a combined index of active exposure to online violent extremist content entailing online extremist communication (alpha: 0.69) and actively searching for online extremist contact (0 = does not seek contact with violent extremist individuals; 1 = deliberately seeks contact with violent extremist individuals). Exposure to violent extremist moral settings can occur in the real world and the virtual world: Violent extremists and terrorist groups use the Internet for propaganda and recruitment efforts.[66] Social media can be especially important since such media 1) make violent extremist narratives easily available; and 2) provide the necessary social bonds where social learning can occur.[67] Empirical research has shown that actively and deliberately searching for online violent extremist

---

[65] Doosje, Loseman and Van den Bos, "Determinants of the Radicalization Process."
[66] Josh Adams and Vincint J. Roscigno, "White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web," *Social Forces* 84:2 (2005): 759-778; Iftekharul Bashar, "The Facebook Jihad," *RSIS Commentaries* (2012); Deborah Brown and Andrew Silke, "The Impact of the Media on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism," in Andrew Silke (ed.), *The Psychology of Counter-Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2011); Robyn Torok, "Make a Bomb in Your Mums Kitchen: Cyber Recruiting and Socialisation of 'White Moors' and 'Home grown Jihadists,' *Paper presented at the Australian Counter Terrorism Conference* (Pert Western Australia).
[67] Geoff Dean, Peter Bell, and Jack Newman, "The Dark Side of Social Media: Review of Online Terrorism," *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* 3:3 (2012): 103-122; Robin L. Thompson, "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4:4 (2011): 167-190.

information, as opposed to passive exposure or accidental encounters, is especially related to political/religious violence across ideologies.[68]

Perceived injustice was measured by combining a scale measuring perceived personal discrimination (alpha: 0.89), or the feeling of being discriminated against by others in society, and perceived group discrimination (alpha: 0.95), or the feeling that the group one belongs to is discriminated against compared to others groups in society. The items were taken from the study conducted by Doosje, Loseman, and Van den Bos.[69] *Social integration* addresses the accumulation of low social ties to key institutions. An overall scale was constructed based on subscales that refer to attachment to parents (alpha: 0.84), parental monitoring (alpha: 0.82), academic orientation (alpha: 0.80), and school integration (alpha: 0.59).

Finally, a number of variables that are believed to mediate the relationship between violent extremist moral beliefs and low self-control on the one hand and "causes of the causes" on the other hand are studied. *Religious authoritarianism* refers to extreme dogmatic views with regard to religion. This scale is based on Althemeyer's authoritarianism scale (alpha: 0.87).[70] *Perceived alienation* (anomia) is derived from Srole's study of personal alienation (alpha: 0.85).[71] The scale has been extensively used in the European social survey. Further, elements of procedural justice are included. The scales for l*ow procedural justice* (alpha: 0.84) and *perceived legitimacy* (alpha: 0.80) have previously been used in the European Social Survey.[72] *Perceived personal respect* (alpha: 0.86) refers to whether or not an individual feels the authorities treat him or her with respect and dignity. The items were taken from Doosje, Loseman, and Van den Bos' study.[73]

Analysis Plan

Due to the extreme skewness of some variables and detected nonlinearity in the data, the dependent variable and independent variables are

---

[68] Pauwels, Brion, Schils, Laffineur, Verhage, De Ruyver, and Easton, *Explaining and Understanding the Role of Exposure to New Social Media on Violent Extremism*.
[69] Doosje, Loseman and Van den Bos, "Determinants of the Radicalization Process."
[70] Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter*.
[71] Srole, "Social Integration and Certain Corollaries."
[72] Mike Hough, Jonathan Jackson, Ben Bradford, Andy Myhill, and Paul Quinton, "Procedural Justice, Trust and Institutional Legitimacy," *Policing* 4:1 (2010): 203-2010. The difference between procedural justice and legitimacy is that the justice variable refers to people's overall picture of how citizens are treated by the police, while the legitimacy variable refers to the extent to which people perceive the authorities as legitimate.
[73] Doosje, Loseman and Van den Bos, "Determinants of the Radicalization Processes."

categorized (median dichotomization) and a log-linear analysis is preferred over a linear model. It should be stressed that the results of this operation did not alter any results, but as the effects are strongest in the highest category of the variables, it seemed natural to perform a log-linear model. In order to test the integrated model of political/religious violence, a series of log-linear path models were run. Path analyses allow for the testing of both direct and indirect effects. Log-linear path models are highly suitable for the analysis of categorical data.[74] All analyses were performed using MPlus 7.3. Only the direct effects are presented. The effect parameters are log odds.[75]

Results

While different models were run, we have restricted ourselves to the presentation of the best fitting model. The best fitting model has an acceptable fit (RMSEA = 0.03). RMSEA values below 0.05 are considered acceptable. The model is shown in Figure 3.

---

[74] Linda K. Muthén and Bengt O. Muthén, *Mplus Statistical Analysis with Latent Variables: User's Guide* (Los Angeles, CA: Muthén & Muthén, 2012).

[75] Log odds refer to the changing probability that a subject belongs to a certain category (e.g., committing political violence versus not committing political/religious violence). It reflects an increase or decrease in odds. A positive value indicates a positive effect, while a negative value indicates a negative effect. The interpretation of specific log odds can be made easier by conversion to odds ratios.

86

Figure 3: Tested integrated model for the explanation of political/religious violence (RMSEA = 0.03) [76]
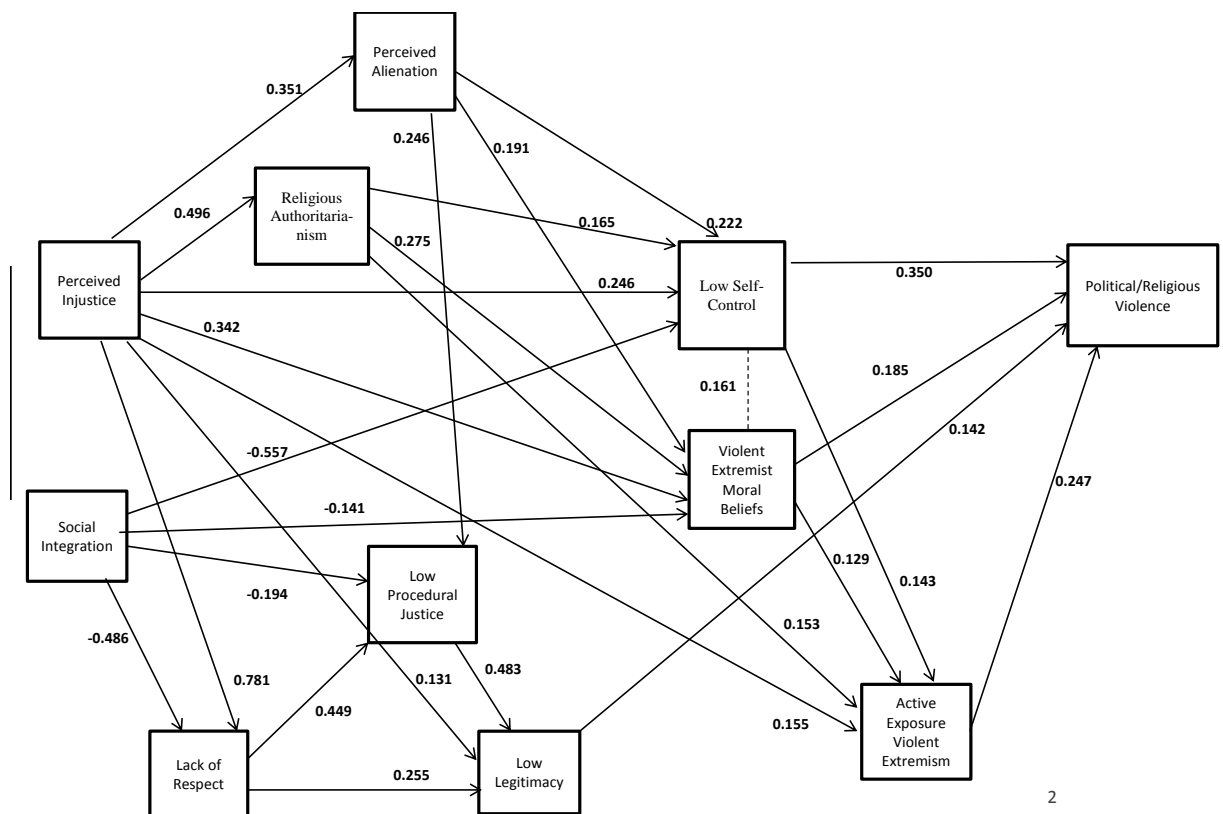
A low ability to exercise self-control (log odds = 0.35), violent extremist moral beliefs (log odds = 0.19), and active exposure to violent extremist moral settings (log odds = 0.25) are directly related to political/religious violence. Both dimensions of violent extremist propensity share a number of common causes and are still related to each other (0.16). As SAT (in the situational model) does not assume a causal relationship between violent extremist beliefs and the ability to exercise self-control with regard to the explanation of acts of political/religious violence, we did not draw a causal arrow between both constructs. However, from a developmental point of view, an increasing number of scholars seem to point to the fact that the ability to exercise self-control is causally related to moral beliefs.[77] A low ability to exercise self-control (log odds = 0.14) and violent extremist moral beliefs (log odds = 0.13) are positively related to exposure to violent extremist moral settings. These results are in line with the key assumption of situational action theory, identifying both violent extremist propensity

---

[76] Additional direct paths were found from low legitimacy to active exposure (log odds = 0.076) and from low legitimacy to low social control (log odds = 0.096). Since these effects are smaller than 0.1, they are negligible and not displayed here.

[77] See contemporary research regarding self-control and offending. Hay, Carter and Ryan Meldrum, *Self-control and Crime Over the Life Course* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2015).

(low self-control and violent extremist moral beliefs) and (active) exposure to violent extremist settings as direct key mechanisms explaining political/religious violence. The interaction between violent extremist propensity and exposure is not modeled in the present study as we are interested in both dimensions of violent extremist propensity as mediators. However, we have previously demonstrated that the effect of exposure to violent extremist moral settings is conditional on one's level of violent extremist propensity.[78]

In line with our expectations, there is a direct path from perceived injustice to perceived alienation (log odds = 0.35), authoritarianism (log odds = 0.5), lack of respect (log odds = 0.78), and low legitimacy (log odds = 0.13). However, there is also a direct effect on low self-control (log odds = 0.25), violent extremist moral beliefs (log odds = 0.34), and active exposure to violent extremist moral settings (log odds = 0.16).

We detected no direct path from social integration to perceived alienation, although there is a direct effect on lack of personal respect (log odds = -0.49) and low procedural justice (log odds = -0.19). We also observe a direct path from social integration to low self-control (log odds: -0.56) and violent extremist moral beliefs (log odds = -0.14).

Perceived alienation mediates the effects of perceived injustice, and there is a direct path to low self-control (log odds = 0.22), violent extremist moral beliefs (log odds = 0.19), and low procedural justice (log odds = 0.25). Perceived legitimacy translates social integration indirectly into political/religious violence through a series of intervening mechanisms: There is a direct path from lack of respect to procedural justice (log odds = 0.45) and low legitimacy (log odds = 0.26), and low procedural justice is directly related to low legitimacy (log odds = 0.48). Low legitimacy is directly related to political/religious violence (log odds = 0.14). This is in line with a key assumption of procedural justice theory (Tyler, 2006). Finally, authoritarianism is directly related to violent extremist moral beliefs (log odds = 0.28), low self-control (log odds = 0.17), and exposure to violent extremist moral settings (log odds = 0.15).

Discussion & Conclusion

These findings demonstrate that political/religious violence directly stems from moral violent extremist beliefs, a low ability to exercise self-control, and exposure to violent extremist moral settings. This is in line with SAT. The present study was not only interested in the mechanisms that can

---

[78] Pauwels, Brion, Schils, Laffineur, Verhage, De Ruyver, and Easton, *Explaining and Understanding the Role of Exposure to New Social Media on Violent Extremism.*

directly affect the likelihood of political/religious violence, but also in the "causes of the causes," which influence these direct mechanisms. The results of this study prove the feasibility and additional value of theoretical integration. By logically integrating different frameworks, a more comprehensive explanation of political/religious violence became possible by identifying different, but equally valid, causal pathways. This supports our claim that in order to advance research, researchers should move beyond vicious debates on which competing theory is wright or wrong and instead search for complementarity and integrated models.

We found that perceived injustice and social integration can be seen as important factors that indirectly bring about political/religious violence by influencing violent extremist moral beliefs and evoking active exposure to violent extremist moral settings. Next to enhancing authoritarianism, perceived injustice also strongly affects feelings of perceived alienation. Alienation itself is a part of a causal chain as it weakens personal levels of self-control, increases violent extremist moral beliefs, and negatively influences perceptions of procedural justice. Together with social integration, perceived injustice also increases the feeling that one lacks respect. This lack of respect, together with perceived alienation, leads to low procedural justice and eventually the perception of the authorities as being illegitimate, not sharing the same values, and thus not to be obeyed. This is important since this lack of legitimacy undermines compliance and confidence and thus directly enhances the chance of committing political/religious violence.[79] In short, perceived alienation and perceived legitimacy both play a major role in translating experienced strains into violent extremist propensity and exposure to violent extremist settings.

Research has often focused on the individual characteristics when explaining violent extremism, but ignored the wider circumstances and context in which this individual develops.[80] So far, socioeconomic deprivation has received a lot of attention from researchers without much result. Research trying to uncover socio-demographic profiles of violent extremists and terrorists only found mixed and contradicting results. Focusing on perceived injustice can put these results in perspective since feelings of injustice can be present among all layers of society. The perception of injustice by the individual, whether toward himself or the group, is what can link more macro-level social facts, such as poverty and

[79] Michael D. Reisig, Jason Bratton, and Marc G. Gertz, "The Construct Validity and Refinement of Process-based Policing Measures," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 34:8 (2007): 1005-1028; Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law*.
[80] Rik Coolsaet, "What Drives Europeans to Syria, and to IS? Insights from the Belgian Case," *Egmont Paper 75*.

89

inequality, to individual responses, such as political/religious violence.[81] This means violent extremism cannot be explained by mere socio-economical characteristics of certain groups or individuals, but is ultimately rooted in social conditions that trigger different individual characteristics, such as perceptions of injustice, which may in turn trigger mechanisms of recalibration.[82] This is partially backed up by recent research on foreign fighters, which often locates the starting point in experiences of strain and feelings of indignation and being lost, resulting in personal estrangement from society.[83]

It would be helpful here to provide some methodological concluding remarks. Our analysis is based on cross-sectional data, providing only a snapshot of what is likely to be a complex and interrelated phenomena. Although we do consider our results to be useful and of great relevance in an otherwise fragmented research field, we must allow for some nuance when interpreting the results. Furthermore, our study looked at right-wing, left-wing, and Islamic violent extremism simultaneously. A separate test of the model for each of these types of violent extremism is recommended to strengthen the general claim of the model. It is also not clear to what extent such a model would be applicable to other types of violent extremism, such as single-issue extremism. In addition, our study is limited to the Belgian context. It is advisable for future research to test the model in other social and political contexts. Future studies should also try to uncover the broader social, political, and economic contexts and conditions under which feelings of injustice and poor ties to society develop.

Finally, the present study has some limitations to take into account. First, using this theoretical framework, the variation in political/religious violence could only be partially addressed, meaning that the theoretical framework is incomplete. Second, the study relies on cross-sectional data, which are not optimal for making causal inferences as causes and effects are measured simultaneously. Future research should consider longitudinal designs. In this respect, much can be learned from gang research.[84] Third, although the web survey has considerably contributed to the survey response, some disadvantages have to be kept in mind. The researcher cannot completely monitor the process of response selection or

---

[81] James A. Piazza, "Types of Minority Discrimination and Terrorism," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 29:5 (November 2012): 521-546; James A; Piazza, "Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination and Domestic Terrorism," *Journal of Peace Research* 48:3 (May 2011): 339-353.

[82] Coolsaet, "What Drives Europeans to Syria".

[83] Ibid; Loobuyck Pieter (ed.), *De Lokroep van IS: Syriëstrijders en (De)Radicalisering* (Uitgeverij Pelckmans, 2015).

[84] Decker, Scott and Pyrooz, David. "Gangs, Terrorism, and Radicalization," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4: 4 (2011): 151-166.

the conditions under which the questionnaire is completed (the presence of others, anonymity, etc.). It is unclear to what extent our data are biased by this method of data collection.[85]

---

[85] See also Sonia Lucia, Leslie Herrmann, and Martin Killias, "How Important Are Interview Methods and Questionnaire Designs in Research on Self-Reported Juvenile Delinquency?," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 3:1 (2007): 39-60; Sean E. McCabe, Carol C. Boyd, Amy Young, Scott Crawford, and Duston Pope, "Mode Effects for Collecting Alcohol and Tobacco Data among 3rd and 4th Grade Students," *Addictive Behaviors* 30:4 (2005): 663-671.

91