

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM AND ITS DETERMINANTS: a theoretically integrative approach

Many studies, in their examinations and explanations of the causes of violent extremism, can be found to be lacking in an integration of the factors of individual differences in the causes of political or religious violence. Also most studies on the topic do not emphasize the role of causal processes in these phenomena. The present study tries to overcome this lacking. Hence, its purpose is to test Wikström's 'Situational Action Theory' (SAT). More specifically in relation to 'self-reported' 'right-wing political violence' (n = 723). To that effect this study examines the role of 'perceived grievances' and 'us-versus-them' attitudes to explain the causes of right-wing political violence. Key 'strain-related' variables are grouped under those two overarching concepts and are then integrated in the social model of SAT as 'causes of the causes', in this case then of right-wing political violence. The results of this analysis support the main hypothesis tested by this article: the secondary effects generated by the causes of the causes of (self-reported) right-wing political violence also manifest themselves in broader moral support for right-wing extremism, causing in their turn probabilistically more future violence, yet also in more self-control abilities, limiting or controlling the generation of more future violence. The limitations of this study are discussed in relation to suggestions for future scientific studies on the topic. Finally, policy recommendations are suggested.

Robin Khalifa (Faculty of Law and Criminology, University of Ghent)

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Political violence;
Situational Action Theory.

Introduction

In scientific literature, right-wing political violence is often depicted as the result of a dynamic process that is called upon to explain why individuals, or groups of individuals, embrace extremist world-views by perceiving violence as a viable form of action or rather a 'viable action alternative' as theorised by Situational Action Theory^{1,2}. As such, perceiving violence as a viable action alternative constitutes one of the main sub-processes within the broader process of pivoting individuals towards violent extremism, i.e. the process of violent radicalisation.³ Over the years, however, the violent radicalisation process has often been studied by adopting a so-called 'risk factor approach'. Scientific studies have since then generally focused on the importance of merely detecting and collecting risk factors to violent extremism, rather than considering the importance of genuine explanatory mechanisms and

¹ The term 'action alternative' refers to a specific action that a person can select from a set of other action alternatives. As a result, a person may see crime as an option for achieving certain goals, but they may also choose not to engage in criminal activity.

² Paul Ponsaers et al., "Onderzoeksrapport polarisering en radicalisering: een integrale preventieve aanpak," (FOD Binnenlandse Zaken, 2010).

³ Per-Olof H. Wikström and Noémie Bouhana, "Analyzing Radicalization and Terrorism: A Situational Action Theory," in *The Handbook of the Criminology of Terrorism*, ed. Gary Lafree and Joshua D. Freilich, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017).

direct causes of violent extremism.⁴ Most of the identified risk factors are therefore correlations of violent extremism and explain only part of the variance in for example right-wing political violence.⁵ This method of study contradicts the theoretical framework of the 'Situational Action Theory' (henceforth: SAT), which emphasises that one-sided risk factor approaches can be pernicious to an effective approach to crime in general and to violent radicalisation specifically.⁶ As such, it has been argued that by merely emphasising the role of risk factors, little knowledge is acquired about the various processes that link certain risk factors to certain outcomes, at different levels of explanation (individual,⁷ ecologic⁸ and systemic⁹).¹⁰ This raises concerns as to whether the academic approach towards violent radicalisation is dragging its feet, a thought which echoes the ideas of Wikström and Bouhana.¹¹ They argued that several factors, including the lack of integration between different (scientific) disciplines, have contributed to a scientific immaturity within the field of violent radicalisation and violent extremism.¹² Therefore, this study aims to apply SAT as the theoretical framework of this study, as SAT allows for the integration of different theoretical concepts originating from various theoretical perspectives, which in turn relate to specific scientific disciplines.

Most of the risk factors that have been referred to in scientific literature to explain violent extremism equally have their roots in different theoretical schools or perspectives. The 'strain perspective',¹³ for example, specifically focuses on the role of – among others – perceived injustice,¹⁴ political powerlessness,¹⁵ and 'us-versus-them' attitudes^{16,17} Furthermore, 'propensity theories' especially focus on the significance of individual tendencies in (violent) decision-making processes,¹⁸ such as one's individual propensity to choose violence as an action alternative.¹⁹ In addition, 'social learning theories' emphasise the importance of so-called extremist peers in the explanation of generation of violent extremist acts, in this case right-wing political violence.²⁰ Each of these theoretical perspectives – not listed exhaus-

4 Nele Schils and Lieven Pauwels, "Political violence and the mediating role of violent extremist propensities," *Journal of Strategic Security* 9, no. 2 (2016): 72-93.

5 Lieven Pauwels et al., *Explaining and Understanding the Role of Exposure to New Social Media on Violent Extremism: An Integrative Quantitative and Qualitative Approach* (Gent: Academia Press, 2014).

6 Per-Olof H. Wikström, "Why crime happens: A situational action theory," *Analytical sociology* (2014): 71-94.

7 The individual level of explanation refers to the micro-context.

8 The ecologic level of explanation refers to the meso-context.

9 The systemic level of explanation refers to the macro-context.

10 Nele Schils and Lieven Pauwels, "Explaining violent extremism for subgroups by gender and immigrant background, using SAT as a framework," *Journal of Strategic Security* 7, no. 3 (2014): 27-47.

11 Wikström and Bouhana, "Analyzing radicalization and terrorism: A situational action theory," 175-186.

12 Ibid.

13 As the name implies, the strain perspective is a theoretical perspective that emphasises the role of strains rule-breaking processes. These strains involve three main types of sources of tension emerging: situations that block positively valued goals, situations that deprive the individual of positively valued stimuli, and situations that create negative emotions. In other words, strains refer to situations in which the individual is confronted with feelings of injustice, because one's own situation or the situation of the in-group is perceived as detrimental as opposed to the situation of other individuals or (out-)groups.

14 Perceived injustice denotes discontent resulting from the perceived negative outcome of a social comparison process between the individual's (in-group) situation and the situation of other individuals or groups (out-group(s)). Perceived individual injustice refers to feelings of injustice pertaining to one's own situation(s), while perceived collective injustice denotes feelings of injustice that pertain to the situation(s) of one's in-group.

15 Political powerlessness refers to a subjective feeling of powerlessness in the face of political decision-making processes.

16 'Us-versus-them' attitudes generally denote negative attitudes towards the perceived out-group(s).

17 Robert Agnew, "General strain theory: Current status and directions for further research," in *Advances in criminological theory: Vol. 15. Taking stock: The status of criminological theory*, ed. Francis T. Cullen, J. P. Wright and K. R. Blevins (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2017), 101-123.

18 Max Albert, "The propensity theory: a decision-theoretic restatement," *Synthese* 156, no. 3 (2007): 587-603.

19 Benjamin B. Lahey and Irwin D. Waldman, "A developmental propensity model of the origins of conduct problems during childhood and adolescence," in *Causes of conduct disorder and juvenile delinquency*, ed. Benjamin B. Lahey, Terrie E. Moffit and Avshalom Caspi, (New York, Guilford Press, 2003), 76-117.

20 Albert Bandura and Richard H. Walters, *Social Learning Theory*, (Hoboken, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

tively – have frequently been adopted or used to explain different forms of violent extremism. However, each theoretical perspective falls short on its own, as they are generally lacking in providing insights into the actual causal²¹ processes leading to violent extremism. This explains why this study then combines the most important findings from both socio-psychological and criminological scientific literatures into an integrated conceptual model. Because SAT applies the principle of 'end-to-end integration',²² a sequential distinction can be made between both the direct and the indirect causes of right-wing political violence.²³ Additionally, SAT allows the integration of different theoretical concepts at different levels of explanation. In this way, the overall objective of this study is therefore to create coherence between socio-psychological and criminological literatures. More specifically, this study aims to assess the role of 'perceived grievances'²⁴ and 'us-versus-them' attitudes in the explanation of self-reported right-wing political violence. To achieve this objective, a secondary data-analysis will be conducted, which implies that this study will adopt an empirical-analytical approach.²⁵ In doing so, this study aims to answer the following central research question(s): what is the role of perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes in the explanation of self-reported forms of right-wing political violence and to which extent do these factors influence the individual's propensity to engage in violent right-wing extremism?²⁶

The theoretical part of this study, consisting of section one, focuses on the central assumptions of SAT and the theoretical integration of different concepts and perspectives adopted to explain right-wing political violence. In this section then a testable conceptual model is proposed. The empirical part of this study, consisting of sections two and three, covers the methodological part and thusly presents the actual results of the empirical analyses in relation to the testable model from section one. In the concluding section, the results of this study are discussed in relation to the study's central research questions and in addition, concrete recommendations are formulated regarding to the prevention of violent right-wing extremism as well as towards future scientific research.

Theoretical background

'Situational Action Theory' (SAT) – basic theoretical assumptions

SAT pertains to a theoretical framework in which insights from behavioural sciences can be exploited to explain why individuals either follow or do not follow moral rules.²⁷ As a result, SAT goes beyond the philosophy of more classical action theories by attributing a situational scope to the motivational component of human

21 For a general description of causality and causal mechanisms, the author refers to the work of Beebe et al, (2012).

22 End-to-end integration refers to a methodological principle through which the different mechanisms or factors of different theories can be integrated into one theoretical model. This entails a temporal ordering of the different causal variables, so that the dependent variables of one theory become the independent variables in the integrated theory.

23 Lieven Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze? Kritische toetsing en appreciatie van Wikström's situationele actietheorie*, (Den Haag: Boom criminologie, 2018).

24 Perceived grievances generally refer to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction. These can be related to political, social, or economic conditions.

25 The 'empirical-analytical approach' refers to an empirical research tradition in which the reproducibility of research and the verification of research results are considered fundamental principles.

26 This article is based on the authors' master's thesis. Additional research questions were answered. The results of these additional analyses can be obtained upon request.

27 Wikström, "Why crime happens," 71-94.

action.²⁸ As Wikström, the founder of the theory, puts it: crime is about breaking the rule of law, which generally refers to a moral rule-breaking process.²⁹ This involves a process through which individuals become motivated to break certain rules.³⁰ In this way, it has been argued that SAT's conceptualisation of criminal behaviour can be extended to any form of crime, emphasising that the process of rule-breaking is present in all forms of crime.³¹ Similarly, right-wing political violence could be conceived as a moral act, because extremist acts also involve a violation of a moral (behavioural) rule formulated by criminal law(s).³² In doing so, SAT does not attribute an absolute character to (criminal) laws, as they merely contain regulations that are subjected to a certain temporal order.³³ As such, laws should not be understood from a mere moralistic perspective, as laws are rather instruments within the broader process of social engineering and may hence also concern more generally applied rules of conduct.³⁴

SAT conceptualises crime as the interaction between humans as 'agents' and society as a contextual factor. In that regard, SAT assumes that: (1) humans have a natural tendency to follow rules, (2) humans are the source of their own actions and dispose of some agency and (3) the causes of human actions always include a situational dimension which involves an interaction between the individual and his environment to which he is exposed.³⁵ These assumptions are relevant to SAT's four basic premises about human action:

1. Selection processes (social selection and self-selection) do put certain individuals in specific settings, resulting in interactions;
2. The types of individuals present in specific settings are determined by historical processes of personal and social genesis;
3. Individuals' ultimate actions are the result of a 'perception-choice' process;³⁶
4. The 'perception-choice' process involves an interaction, which is initiated and determined by the properties or the characteristics of the individual and the environment.³⁷

SAT structures these premises into a social and situational explanatory model.³⁸ Whereas premises one and two relate to 'the social model', premises three and four rather relate to 'the situational model'.

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28 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 108.

29 Wikström, "Why crime happens," 71-94.

30 Per-Olof H. Wikström, "Crime as alternative: towards a cross-level situational action theory of crime causation," in *Beyond empiricism: Institutions and intentions in the study of crime*, ed. Joan McCord (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 1-37.

31 Per-Olof H. Wikström, "Individuals, settings, and acts of crime: Situational mechanisms and the explanation of crime," in *The Explanation of Crime: Context, Mechanisms and Development*, ed. Per-Olof H. Wikström and Robert J. Sampson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61-107.

32 Schils and Pauwels, "Explaining violent extremism for subgroups by gender and immigrant background, using SAT as a framework," 27-47.

33 Wikström, "Why crime happens" 71-94.

34 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*

35 Ibid.

36 The 'perception-choice' process refers to a process in which an individual perceives crime as an action alternative and chooses (deliberately or habitually) to carry out that specific action alternative.

37 Wikström, "Why crime happens," 71-94.

38 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*

Theoretical integrated model of the study

The social model of SAT

The social model of SAT accentuates the role of developmental mechanisms in the explanation of crime and explicitly focuses on the way in which these mechanisms are triggered by more remote or indirect causes.³⁹ These indirect causes – often referred to as ‘the causes of the causes’ – are defined by SAT in light of so-called emergent processes, which refer to how something evolves into its current state.⁴⁰ As such, these emergent processes seek to explain, on the one hand, why individuals differ in levels of criminal propensity (personal emergence) and, on the other, why certain settings differ in criminogenic levels and how certain individuals are exposed to a particular criminogenic setting (social emergence).⁴¹

Nonetheless, as Pauwels points out, examining ‘the causes of the causes’ (indirect causes) of criminal behaviour involves a complex challenge, because crime should then be analysed as an inverse problem.⁴² This entails proceeding backwards from right-wing political violence to the predefined direct and indirect factors and mechanisms of human action.⁴³ Various studies have differentiated the social model of SAT in this regard, depending on the scope and the subject of the study involved.⁴⁴ As previously stated, in this study, the differentiation of the social model concerns the integration of important strain-related variables (tensions/grievances as such, but also strain-induced variables). The goal is to relate these strain-related variables to the individual’s propensity to engage in violent right-wing extremism,⁴⁵ thus mainly highlighting processes of personal emergence. However, this is not the only viable strategy to encompass the social model of SAT, since other theoretical perspectives are equally compatible with the perspective of SAT in explaining right-wing political violence. Most of the theoretical concepts integrated into the conceptual model of this study find their origin in social-psychological literature and are also related to other theories such as the ‘Perceived Injustice Theory’, the ‘Integrated Threat Theory’ and the ‘Social Identity Theory’.⁴⁶

Though, one of the most important theories within the theoretical strain perspective comprises Robert Agnew’s ‘General Strain Theory’ (GST).⁴⁷ In this theory, tensions or grievances are related to crime, with three main types of sources of tension emerging: (1) situations that block positively valued goals, (2) situations that deprive the individual of positively valued stimuli, and (3) situations that create negative emotions.⁴⁸ In other words, strains relate to situations in which an individual is confronted with feelings of injustice, because one’s own situation or the situation of the in-group is perceived as detrimental as opposed to the situation of other individuals or (out-) groups.⁴⁹ These strains are often triggered by specific events at the micro, meso

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39 Wikström, “Why crime happens,” 71-94.

40 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 52.

41 Per-Olof H. Wikström, Dietrich Oberwittler, Kyle Treiber, and Beth Hardie, *Breaking rules: The social and situational dynamics of young people’s urban crime* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2012).

42 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 29.

43 Schils and Pauwels, “Explaining violent extremism for subgroups by gender and immigrant background, using SAT as a framework,” 27-47.

44 See for example Hermans, 2015; Schepers, 2017; Schils and pauwels, 2016; Wikström, 2012; Wikström & Treiber, 2016

45 Propensity is the tendency to see and, if so, to choose acts of crime as a viable action alternative in response to a motivation (temptation or provocation).

46 Maarten De Waele, “Angry white rebel?: study on the mechanisms and processes of participation in extreme-right groups,” PhD dissertation, (Ghent: University of Ghent, 2015).

47 Agnew, *General strain theory*, 101-123.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

or macro level and differ significantly from person to person.⁵⁰ Put this way, violent right-wing extremist attitudes and right-wing political violence can therefore be considered as 'coping mechanisms' perceived by individuals, allowing to channel negative emotions emanating from these tensions or grievances.⁵¹ As such, both GST and SAT acknowledge the importance of negative affections in the processes pivoting individuals towards criminal choices.⁵² However, the strain perspective is somewhat deficient compared to SAT as it does not indicate how and why strains lead to crime, in this case then right-wing political violence.⁵³ SAT hence extends the strain perspective by pointing at the essence of causal mechanisms. In doing so, SAT refers to 'negative affections' by using the term 'frictions' and associates these frictions with the individual's sensitivity to frictions. In this sense SAT requires that a friction must be perceived by the individual as purposefully hostile before it can be considered a provocation.⁵⁴

In this study, perceived feelings of injustice and feelings of political powerlessness (as a dimension of perceived anomie⁵⁵) are included as subjective strains or grievances, referring to specific events or conditions that are negatively evaluated by the individual.⁵⁶ In addition, authoritarianism,⁵⁷ perceived group threat,⁵⁸ ethnocentrism,⁵⁹ and feelings of superiority⁶⁰ are depicted as strain-induced variables for the context of right-wing political violence.⁶¹ In order to maintain a clear structure, these theoretical concepts are grouped into two overarching concepts: 'perceived grievances' and 'us-versus-them' attitudes. In the following sections, each of these considered variables will be outlined theoretically.

'Perceived grievances'

Perceived injustice. As has been argued in scientific literature, perceived injustice appears to play an important role in pivoting individuals towards violent extremism.⁶² In Baumeister's study, perceived injustice is related to what he labels as 'the crystallisation of discontent'.⁶³ This refers to a subjective process in which the individual is tempted to make radical life decisions, prompted by the perception that

50 Allard R. Feddes, Lars Nickolson and Bartjan Doosje, *Triggerfactoren in het radicaliseringsproces*, (Expertise-unit Sociale Stabiliteit/Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2015), https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/2636988/172573_triggerfactoren_in_het_radicaliseringsproces.pdf

51 De Waele, "Angry white rebel?".

52 Agnew, *General strain theory*, 101-123.

53 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*.

54 Helmut Hirtenlehner, Johann Bacher, Heinz Leitgöb, and Doris Schartmueller. "Do morality and self-control protect from criminogenic peer influence? Testing multidimensional person-environment interactions," *Justice Quarterly* (2021): 1-36.

55 Anomie generally refers to a condition of instability, initiated by a breakdown of norms, standards and values.

56 Robert Agnew, "A general strain theory of terrorism," *Theoretical Criminology* 14, no. 2 (2010): 131-153.

57 The original concept of authoritarianism refers to an intrapersonal characteristic, whose relatively stable character is attributed to the intrapersonal conflicts caused by strict (moral) educational patterns.

58 Perceived group threat refers to both perceived realistic threats and perceived symbolic threats. Perceived realistic threats are given a more existential interpretation in this regard, as they refer to perceived threats that coincide with the continued existence of the in-group, the physical and material prosperity of the in-group and its members, and the political or economic power emanating from the in-group. Perceived symbolic threats, on the other hand, denote processes of attributing symbolic connotations to the in-group, especially referring to the shared beliefs and values of the in-group.

59 In literature, ethnocentrism is often conceptualised by two specific dimensions. The first dimension involves the in-group dimension, which relates to the perceived positive attitude(s) towards one's own (in-)group. of the perceived in-group. The second dimension comprises the out-group dimension, pertaining to one's negative attitude(s) towards perceived other group(s).

60 Perceived feelings of superiority are strongly connected with the in-group dimension of ethnocentrism. These feelings may thus be evoked by a strong identification with the in-group.

61 De Waele, "Angry white rebel?"

62 Ibid.

63 Roy F. Baumeister, "The crystallization of discontent," in *Can personality change?*, ed. Todd F. Heatherton and Joel Lee Ed Weinberger (Washington DC: American Sociological Association, 1994), 281-297.

positive situations or aspects in one's life are outweighed by the negative ones.⁶⁴ As a result, perceived feelings of injustice primarily consist of an affective component, which denotes discontent resulting from the perceived negative outcome of a social comparison process between the individual's (in-group) situation and the situation of other individuals or groups (out-group(s)).⁶⁵ Two specific types of perceived injustice are central to this study and will be combined to form an overarching scale construct:⁶⁶ 'perceived individual injustice' and 'perceived collective injustice'.

Perceived political powerlessness. It has been argued that political powerlessness is equally associated with right-wing political violence – though not exclusively political violence.⁶⁷ In that regard, political powerlessness refers to a subjective feeling of powerlessness in the face of political decision-making processes.⁶⁸ In situations of such political powerlessness, the disparities between the individual and the political authorities tend to widen, causing the individual to adopt destructive attitude towards the way society is structured, which bears on the provocation of negative emotions or reactions. Furthermore, political powerlessness is frequently referred to as a dimension of anomie, which, according to Srole, refers to a subjective feeling that emerges as a result of an individual's identification with certain societal distortions or dysfunctions.⁶⁹ McDill, on the other hand, characterises anomie as a dimension of 'Negative Weltanschauung'⁷⁰, which includes, in addition to anomie, two other dimensions: 'authoritarianism' and 'ethnocentrism' (infra).⁷¹

Perceived authoritarianism. The concept of 'perceived authoritarianism' finds its origin in the seminal work 'The Authoritarian Personality' by Adorno et al.⁷² The original concept refers to a stable intrapersonal characteristic, which is partly established by intrapersonal conflicts that are caused by strict (moral) educational patterns.⁷³ Authoritarian personalities are therefore supposed to be more inclined to discern between individuals or groups of individuals.⁷⁴ This coincides with the fact that authoritarian personalities are often apprehensive and reticent towards anything that is perceived as strange or unfamiliar. In that regard, other groups are often seen as immoral, inferior, or weak.⁷⁵ Yet, the original conceptualisation of authoritarianism did not endure for a long time. In 1981, Altemeyer criticised the views of Adorno et al. and reflected upon the operationalisation of the construct.⁷⁶ Altemeyer's criticisms primarily focused on the renowned F(ascism) scale by Adorno et al., which measured nine dimensions.⁷⁷ As a result, Altemeyer introduced his

64 Lieven Pauwels, Vanja Ljujic, and Ann De Buck, "Individual differences in political aggression: The role of social integration, perceived grievances and low self-control," *European journal of criminology* 17, no. 5 (2020): 603-627.

65 Agnew, *General strain theory*, 101-123.

66 Scale construction refers to the construction of statistical measurement instruments of theoretical concepts that can used to assess the effects of one concept on another.

67 Klaus Boehnke, John Hagan, and Hans Merckens, "Right-wing extremism among German adolescents: Risk factors and protective factors," *Applied psychology* 47, no. 1 (1998): 109-126.

68 Maarten De Waele, "Political violence among Flemish adolescents: The impact of moral support for right-wing extremism," in *Desistance, social order and responses to crime. Today's security issues*, ed. Joanna Shapland, Jacques de Maillard, Stephen Farrall, Axel Groenemeyer, and Paul Ponsaers (Antwerp: Maklu, 2014), 134-166.

69 Leo Srole, "Social integration and certain corollaries: An exploratory study," *American sociological review* 21, no. 6 (1956): 709-716.

70 Negative Weltanschauung generally refers to a negative worldview.

71 Edward L. McDill, "Anomie, authoritarianism, prejudice, and socioeconomic status: An attempt at clarification," *Social Forces* 39, no. 3 (1961): 239-245.

72 Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brenswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The authoritarian personality* (London: Verso Books, 2019).

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Maarten De Waele, "Flemish youngsters and right-wing extremist groups: status quaestionis," in *Crime, violence, justice, and social order: monitoring contemporary security issues*, ed. Paul Ponsaers, Adam Crawford, Jacques de Maillard, Joanna Shapland and Antoinette Verhage (Antwerpen: Maklu, 2013), 15-41.

76 Bob Altemeyer, *Right-wing authoritarianism*, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1981).

77 Adorno, Frenkel-Brenswik, Levinson, and Sanford, *The authoritarian personality*.

own construct: 'Right-Wing Authoritarianism' (RWA), which was defined as an ideological attitude that, in contrast to the conceptualisation of Adorno et al., should be perceived as a volatile rather than a stable personality characteristic. Later on, Altemeyer (1988) characterised 'the authoritarian personality' by three sub-components: (1) conventionalism, (2) authoritarian aggression (law-and-order) and (3) authoritarian submission.⁷⁸

Perceived group threat. Numerous studies have identified 'perceived group threat' as a powerful mediator of perceived injustice and of negative attitudes towards out-groups, bearing the potential to lower the threshold for individuals to engage in violent behaviour.⁷⁹ The 'Integrated Threat Theory' was largely responsible for popularising this concept.⁸⁰ This theory then attempts to explain the influence of perceived threats on negative attitudes toward other groups by emphasising the role of perceived symbolic and realistic threats.⁸¹ Perceived realistic threats are given a more existential interpretation in this regard, as they refer to perceived threats that coincide with the continued existence of the in-group, the physical and material prosperity of the in-group and its members, and the political or economic power emanating from the in-group.⁸² Perceived symbolic threats, on the other hand, refer to the threats that the individual perceives in relation to the symbolic connotations attributed to the in-group, especially referring to the shared beliefs and values of the in-group.⁸³ Hence, the social identity of individuals plays a significant role, as the individual will likely attribute the threats, which relate to the in-group, to their own social identity.⁸⁴ Although confrontation with an actual symbolic or realistic threat is by no means insignificant, it has been argued that the mere perception of a symbolic or realistic threat is sufficient for the individual to foster negative attitudes and to engage in violence towards the out-group(s).⁸⁵ This is particularly the case for individuals who attach great value to their social identity, such as adolescents.⁸⁶ In that regard, Ponsaers et al. contended that the relationship between perceived injustice and perceived group threat can be instrumental in the development of 'us-versus-them' attitudes, such as in the case of right-wing violence ethnocentrism and feelings of superiority, thereby fuelling group polarisation.⁸⁷

'Us-versus-them' attitudes

Ethnocentrism. Along with authoritarianism and anomie, ethnocentrism has equally been referred to as a component of '*Negative Weltanschauung*'.⁸⁸ As such, *Negative Weltanschauung* encompasses three attitudes associated with feelings of discontent and violent right-wing extremist beliefs.⁸⁹ In this regard, literature attributes a

78 Bob Altemeyer, *Enemies of freedom: Understanding right-wing authoritarianism*, (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1988).

79 De Waele, "Angry white rebel?".

80 Lieven J. R. Pauwels, and Ben Heylen, "Perceived group threat, perceived injustice, and self-reported right-wing violence: An integrative approach to the explanation right-wing violence," *Journal of interpersonal violence* 35, no. 21-22 (2020): 4276-4302.

81 Walter Stephan, Rolando Diaz-Loving, and Anne Duran, "Integrated threat theory and intercultural attitudes: Mexico and the United States," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2000): 240-249.

82 Walter Stephan and Cookie White Stephan, "An integrated threat theory of prejudice," in *Reducing prejudice and discrimination*, ed. Stuart Oskamp (Hove: Psychology Press, 2013), 33-56.

83 Ibid.

84 Stephen M. Croucher, "Integrated Threat Theory," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

85 Stephan and Stephan, *An integrated threat theory of prejudice*, 33-56.

86 Ben Heylen, "The dark side of human sociality: the evolutionary roots of contemporary prejudice and bias motivated behaviour," PhD dissertation (Ghent: University of Ghent, 2015).

87 Ponsaers et al., "Onderzoeksrapport polarisering en radicalisering."

88 De Waele, "Angry white rebel?".

89 Pauwels, Ljujic, and De Buck, "Individual differences in political aggression: The role of social integration, perceived grievances and low self-control," 603-627.

two-dimensional character to ethnocentrism.⁹⁰ The first dimension involves the in-group dimension, which relates to the perceived positive attitude(s) towards one's own (in-)group. These are merely positive attitudes resulting from a strong identification with the norms, values, beliefs, aspirations, etc. of the perceived in-group.⁹¹ Joining a social group, recognising, and ascribing shared norms, values, beliefs and aspirations to one's self-image and social identity can help to satisfy specific human needs while also having the potential to reduce feelings of insecurity. In that regard, Billiet et al. define in-group socialisation as the selective perception of the primarily positive characteristics of the in-group.⁹² The second dimension comprises the out-group dimension, pertaining to one's negative attitude(s) towards perceived other group(s). A strong identification occurs here as well, albeit as a 'counter-identification'⁹³ with the out-group (s).⁹⁴ Regarding the out-group dimension of ethnocentrism, this study explicitly focuses on negative attitudes towards immigrants in general, and Muslims and Jews in particular.

Perceived feelings of superiority. Finally, right-wing extremist belief systems have been brought in relationship with feelings of superiority. Right-wing extremists in Belgium, particularly in Flanders, have been linked to the belief that Flemish people are superior, which is typically accompanied by harsh and ethnocentric sentiments toward everything that is perceived as 'not Flemish'.⁹⁵ As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that a strong in-group identification – which refers to the in-group dimension of ethnocentric attitudes – is linked to strong feelings of superiority. The latter is equally plausible from the standpoint of 'Social Identity Theory'.⁹⁶ A strong identification with the characteristics attributed to one's in-group – as well as one's own social identity – can evoke feelings of superiority, which has already been called upon in scientific literature to explain why individuals tend to lower their threshold to engage in violent extremist narratives and violent actions.⁹⁷

The situational model of SAT

In addition to the social model of SAT, the situational model indicates the proximal or direct causes and the predetermined causal mechanism to explain self-reported right-wing political violence.⁹⁸ In that regard, the situational model emphasises the role of four crucial elements: (1) the individuals' criminal propensity, (2) the degree of exposure to a criminogenic setting, (3) the 'perception-choice process' and (4) the action itself (e.g. political right-wing violence).⁹⁹ As such, SAT allows us to assume that both the propensity to engage in violent right-wing extremism, as well as exposure to violent right-wing extremist settings, can be regarded as direct causes of right-wing political violence.¹⁰⁰ The interaction between these two components, in turn, triggers a situational causal mechanism, i.e. the perception-choice process.

90 Jaak Billiet, Rob Eisinga and Peer Scheepers, "Ethnocentrisme in de lage landen: opinies over 'eigen' en 'ander' volk in Nederland en Vlaanderen," *Sociologische gids* 39 (1992): 300-323.

91 Heylen, "The dark side of human sociality".

92 Billiet, Eisinga and Scheepers, "Ethnocentrisme in de lage landen," 301.

93 Notwithstanding the universal nature of social identification processes, they represent the basic mechanisms behind ethnocentric attitudes, which are associated with constructed (negative) prejudices, negative stereotypes, and negative attitudes towards the out-group(s).

94 Jaak Billiet, Rob Eisinga, and Peer Scheepers, "Ethnocentrism in the low countries," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 22, no. 3 (1996): 401-416.

95 De Waele, "Angry white rebel?".

96 Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict," *Organizational identity: A reader* 56, no. 65 (1979): 9780203505984-16.

97 Bertjan Doosje, Kees Van den Bos, Annemarie Loseman, Allard R. Feddes, and Liesbeth Mann, "My in-group is superior!": Susceptibility for radical right-wing attitudes and behaviors in dutch youth," *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 5, no. 3 (2012): 253-268.

98 Wikström, "Why crime happens," 71-94.

99 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules: The social and situational dynamics of young people's urban crime*.

100 Wikström, "Why crime happens," 71-94.

With regard to right-wing political violence, this situational mechanism refers to a process that encompasses two specific actions: (1) perceiving right-wing political violence as a viable action alternative and (2) choosing (habitually or deliberately) to act in accordance with this action alternative.¹⁰¹ However, according to Pauwels, the term 'situational' refers to the conception of rule-breaking behaviour as the result of a perception-choice process that is initiated by a specific person-environment interaction.¹⁰² As a result, the term 'situational' refers to the convergence of individual and environmental characteristics in space and time, rather than merely referring to the one-way effect(s) of environmental characteristics.¹⁰³ However, reality is often more complex and individual differentiations should be kept in mind. Individuals can be more or less likely to perceive political violence as a viable action alternative, and they may also be exposed to violent extremism in highly variable ways.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, SAT assumes that individual differences in moral transgression(s) are always characterised by a minimal interaction between propensity and exposure.¹⁰⁵

Propensity to right-wing extremism

"Crime propensity is the tendency to see and, if so, to choose acts of crime as a viable action alternative in response to a motivation (temptation or provocation)."¹⁰⁶ According to this definition, propensity to violent right-wing extremism can be understood as the general tendency of individuals to perceive and choose political violence as a viable action alternative.¹⁰⁷ SAT characterises propensity as a multidimensional construct that involves the interaction between an individual's morality and their ability to exercise self-control, both of which are likewise multidimensional constructs.¹⁰⁸

The multidimensional nature of morality thereby pertains to two specific dimensions that direct the perception-choice process:¹⁰⁹ (1) personal moral beliefs and (2) emotions of guilt and shame.¹¹⁰ In literature, a distinction has therefore been made between the cognitive and the affective component of morality.¹¹¹ On the one hand, personal moral beliefs represent the cognitive component of morality and refer to the individual's perceptions regarding how wrong it is to break a rule defined by (criminal) law.¹¹² Moral emotions, on the other hand, embody the affective component of morality and especially refer to emotions of guilt and shame, which may equally affect the perception-choice process.¹¹³ SAT contends that when individuals choose to act in a certain way, the action does not result directly from the intrinsic motivation(s) of the individual to act in that way. Instead, SAT assumes that one's motivations are linked to one's moral beliefs, which filter the specific temptations or provocations (the motivations) that the individual encounters in certain

101 Schils and Pauwels, "Explaining violent extremism for subgroups by gender and immigrant background, using SAT as a framework," 31-32.

102 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?* Kritische toetsing en appreciatie van Wikström's situationele actietheorie, 44.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid, 172.

105 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*

106 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*, 15.

107 Schils and Pauwels, "Explaining violent extremism for subgroups by gender and immigrant background, using SAT as a framework," 32.

108 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 45.

109 Wikström, "Why crime happens," 71-94.

110 Ineke Haen Marshall and Chris E. Marshall, "Shame and Wrong: Is There a Common Morality Among Young People in France, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and the USA?," in *Minority youth and social integration*, ed. Sebastian Roché and Mike Hough (Cham: Spinger, 2018), 29-59.

111 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 45.

112 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*

113 Wikström, "Why crime happens," 71-94.

situations.¹¹⁴ In that regard, literature has increasingly distinguished between 'trait-like morality' and 'state-like morality'.¹¹⁵ Whereas trait-like morality denotes one's personal moral beliefs that are developed over time and that can be regarded as a proxy for how likely an individual will engage in political violence, state-like morality denotes the personal rules that are only relevant within a given situation.¹¹⁶ As such, state-like morality refers to moral rules that are action-relevant and that direct the individual's perceptions within a specific human-environment interaction.

In addition to the effect(s) of morality, SAT argues that the individual's propensity to break certain moral rules is also influenced by one's ability to exercise self-control. This refers to an (inner-to-outer) process by which a person succeeds in adhering to a personal moral rule when it conflicts with the moral norms of the setting.¹¹⁷ As this is a highly debated concept, in later literature, self-control has increasingly been described in relation to the specific motivational component of certain actions or behaviour. For example, following the perspective of SAT, Pauwels defines self-control as the degree to which an individual is able to make choices in accordance with their own moral convictions when confronted with temptations and provocations.¹¹⁸ As such, self-control is conceived as merely a stable, but not invariable, personality trait which is activated by a specific individual response to environmental stimuli.¹¹⁹ This differs from the conception of Gottfredson and Hirschi. They merely portrayed self-control as a non-dynamic personality trait.¹²⁰ On the contrary, SAT presents self-control as a situational trait, which is only at stake when the individual considers different action alternatives or when a moral conflict occurs.¹²¹ In this study, however, the ability to exercise self-control is rather measured non-situational by one of its dimensions, i.e. 'thrill-seeking behaviour'.

Exposure to right-wing extremism

"A person's criminogenic exposure is the extent to which he or she takes part in settings with criminogenic features."¹²² According to this definition, exposure to violent right-wing extremism can be interpreted as a 'setting characteristic'. This denotes settings in which violent right-wing extremist beliefs represent the general moral tendency, hence facilitating the transmission of cultural extremist values.¹²³ More specifically, exposure comprises two specific dimensions. The first dimension pertains to the moral rules that prevail within a specific setting to which individuals are exposed.¹²⁴ This for example includes the extent to which certain settings endorse violent right-wing extremist normative attitudes.¹²⁵ In addition, the second dimension pertains to the significance of external crime control mechanisms, for which SAT especially refers to the mechanism of deterrence.¹²⁶ Yet, the role of these mere external crime control mechanisms will not be further elucidated in this study.

114 Schils and Pauwels, "Explaining violent extremism for subgroups by gender and immigrant background, using SAT as a framework," 27-47.

115 Jean-Louis Van Gelder and Reinout E. De Vries, "Rational misbehavior? Evaluating an integrated dual-process model of criminal decision making," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 30, no. 1 (2014): 1-27.

116 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*, 9.

117 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*, 26.

118 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 45.

119 Ibid.

120 Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, *A general theory of crime*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990).

121 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 49.

122 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*, 11-12.

123 Schils and Pauwels, "Explaining violent extremism for subgroups by gender and immigrant background, using SAT as a framework," 27-47.

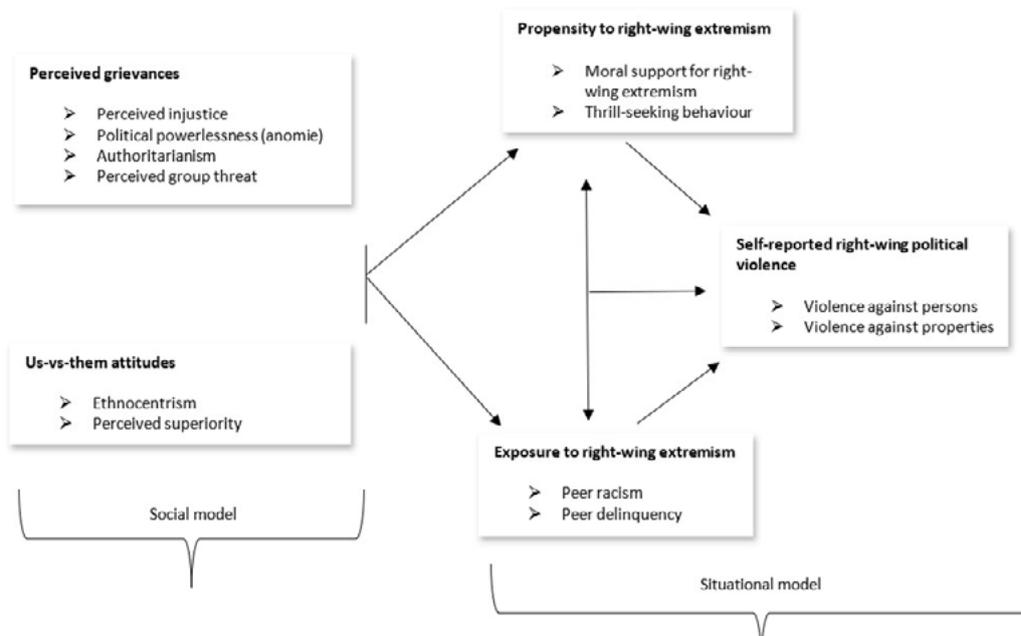
124 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*.

125 Schils and Pauwels, "Explaining violent extremism for subgroups by gender and immigrant background, using SAT as a framework," 27-47.

126 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*, 26.

In addition, SAT connects exposure to the motivations (temptations and provocations) that individuals may be confronted with in certain situations. These mainly involve situations in which the committing of crime becomes possible.¹²⁷ In this regard, it has theoretically been argued that an environment possesses certain characteristics, which refer to the criminogenic characteristics outlined in the preceding definition. SAT therefore refers to the situational effects of exposure to environmental characteristics.¹²⁸ In that regard, it is important to distinguish between the context in which people act (situational context) and the context in which people are socialised (socialisation context).¹²⁹ However, in criminological sciences, the possibilities of assessing exposure within its situational scope are somewhat limited.¹³⁰ In this study, it is thus intended to focus on the socialisation context, which is why exposure is measured indirectly by the number of delinquent and racist friends to whom respondents are exposed (social influence).

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study



127 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 26.
 128 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*, 40.
 129 Ibid, 15.
 130 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 26.

For the purpose of this study, several scale constructs are used to measure the central theoretical concepts as outlined in the theoretical part of this study. For reasons of economy, it is merely intended to provide a brief overview of the different scale constructs that are used to measure the central concepts in this study. For additional details about the data collection procedures, we refer to De Waele's doctoral dissertation, since this study draws on data collected in the light of this work.¹³¹

The dependent variable. 'Self-reported right-wing political violence' was measured using two subscales. The first subscale pertains to a measure of respondent's self-reported acts of violence against persons (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$), whereas the second subscale measures respondent's self-reported acts of violence against property (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$). Both subscales were combined as one total frequency scale, pertaining to a behavioural outcome variable of violent right-wing extremism.

The independent variables. The variable 'propensity for violent right-wing extremism' concerns a combined scale consisting of two subscales, i.e., 'moral support for violent right-wing extremism' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$) and 'low self-control'^{132,133}. Self-control is measured using the 'thrill-seeking behaviour' dimension (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.73$).¹³⁴ The variable 'exposure to violent right-wing extremism' is measured indirectly using a combined scale consisting of two subscales: 'peer racism' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.68$)¹³⁵ and 'peer delinquency' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$).¹³⁶ 'Perceived injustice' consists of a combination of two separate subscales, i.e. 'perceived group discrimination' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$) and 'perceived personal discrimination' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$).¹³⁷ 'Political powerlessness (anomie)' is measured by using a 5-point scale derived from Srole's research on 'personal alienation' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$).¹³⁸ Regarding the measurement of the concept of 'authoritarianism' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$), a 5-point scale from Altemeyer's research is used (11 items based on the three elements of Altemeyer's authoritarianism scale).¹³⁹ The measures of 'perceived group threat' are based on questions that gauge attitudes towards three out-groups: immigrants in general, and Muslims and Jews in particular (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$).¹⁴⁰ 'Ethnocentrism' is measured using its two dimensions, as outlined in the theoretical part of this article. The items measuring the in-group dimension relate to 'attitudes towards Flemish identity' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$), whereas the items for the out-group dimension measure 'negative attitudes towards immigrants' (SCIF¹⁴¹ questionnaire) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).¹⁴² Finally, 'perceived superiority' is measured using a 5-point scale from the study of Van den Bos et al. (Cronbach' $\alpha = 0.76$).¹⁴³

131 This study comprises a primary analysis of secondary data collected as part of De Waele's doctoral research. Adolescents aged 18 to 25 years were the target population for this web survey ($n = 723$). The sample pertained to a so-called convenience sample, implying that the survey mainly focused on that part of the population that is easily accessible, such as adolescents via the Internet. For an overview of the main characteristics of the sample and details of the data, we refer to the doctoral dissertation of De Waele (De Waele, "Angry white rebel?: study on the mechanisms and processes of participation in extreme-right groups.").

132 Moral support for violent right-wing extremism was split into scores above the median and scores below the median (median dichotomy) since few individuals exhibit high scores on this variable. A score below the median represents, in light of the SAT, high morality. A score above the median represents low morality.

133 Kees Van den Bos, Annemarie Loseman and Bertjan Doosje, *Waarom jongeren radicaliseren en sympathie krijgen voor terrorisme: Onrechtvaardigheid, onzekerheid, en bedreigde groepen* (Den Haag: WODC, 2009).

134 Harold G. Grasmick, Charles R. Tittle, Robert J. Bursik Jr, 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, no. 1 (1993): 5-29.

135 Van den Bos, Loseman and Doosje, *Waarom jongeren radicaliseren en sympathie krijgen voor terrorisme*.

136 Vania Ceccato and Per Olof H. Wikström, "Tracking social life and crime," in *The urban fabric of crime and fear*, ed. Vania Ceccato (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 165-190.

137 Van den Bos, Loseman and Doosje, *Waarom jongeren radicaliseren en sympathie krijgen voor terrorisme*.

138 Srole, "Social integration and certain corollaries," 709-716.

139 Altemeyer, *Enemies of freedom: Understanding right-wing authoritarianism*.

140 Van den Bos, Loseman and Doosje, *Waarom jongeren radicaliseren en sympathie krijgen voor terrorisme*.

141 'Social Cohesion In Flanders'.

142 Ibid.

143 Van den Bos, Loseman and Doosje, *Waarom jongeren radicaliseren en sympathie krijgen voor terrorisme*.

Analytical strategy

For the explanatory analyses conducted in this study, two specific types of regression models are used: a blockwise negative-binomial regression analysis and an 'ANCOVA' (Analysis of Covariance). Both models comprise more robust regression methods, as they use the 'maximum-likelihood method' to estimate the statistical parameters. Employing the other alternative, the 'Ordinary Least Square' (OLS) method, is frequently criticised when a study contains extremely skewed variables – such as self-reported right-wing political violence.¹⁴⁴ Hence, for the sake of methodological consistency, all analyses are conducted with robust standard errors.

The main hypothesis of this study is that the independent variables grouped under perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes (the causes of the causes) have indirect effects on the dependent variable total self-reported political right-wing violence.¹⁴⁵ This implies that two additional subsidiary hypotheses are tested:

Hypothesis 1a: The direct effects of the variables grouped under perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes on total self-reported political right-wing violence are discarded when the variables propensity to violent right-wing extremism and exposure to violent right-wing extremism are added to the statistical model.

Hypothesis 1b: The variables grouped under perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes do have direct effects on: (1) moral support for violent right-wing extremism and (2) the ability to exercise self-control.

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 144 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze? Kritische toetsing en appreciatie van Wikström's situationele actietheorie*, 75.

145 Upon request from the author, additional analyses can be obtained. These involve assumptions regarding both the direct effects of and interaction effects between the dimensions of propensity separately and the direct effects of and interaction effects between propensity and exposure to violent right-wing extremism.

Results

The effects of grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes on self-reported right-wing political violence

Table 1. Blockwise negative binomial regression model with self-reported right-wing political violence as dependent variable

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	B (SE)	Exp.(B)	B (SE)	Exp.(B)
Perceived injustice	0.504** (0.174)	1.655	0.295 (0.192)	1.343
Political powerlessness	0.414* (0.163)	1.513	0.239 (0.172)	1.270
Authoritarianism	-0.064 (0.303)	0.938	-0,176 (0.292)	0.838
Perceived group threat	0.082 (0.602)	1.085	0.132 (0.547)	1.141
Ethnocentrism	0.182 (0.476)	1.200	0.013 (0.367)	1.013
Perceived superiority	0.230 (0.261)	1.285	0.171 (0.216)	1.186
Propensity to RWE			0.685** (0.216)	1.984
Exposure to RWE			0.323** (0.115)	1.381
Model fit (AIC)	261.599		240.043	
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; Model fit null model: 283.715				

Model 1

Model 1 shows the effects of the considered independent variables on the dependent variable 'self-reported right-wing political violence', disregarding the effects of propensity and exposure to violent right-wing extremism. Only for perceived injustice and political powerlessness significant effects on self-reported right-wing political violence are found. The effects of both variables are positive, thus indicating that higher values on these independent variables go along with higher values on the self-reported political violence. All other independent variables do not have any significant effect on self-reported right-wing political violence.

Model 2

Model 2 shows the effects of the independent variables, accounting for the effects of propensity to violent right-wing extremism and exposure to violent right-wing extremism. It seems that the effects of both perceived injustice and political powerlessness are rendered insignificant when propensity and exposure are added to the statistical model. As in model 1, the effects of all other independent variables are insignificant. Yet, the effects of both propensity and exposure are significant and positive, though the effect of propensity is stronger compared to the effect of exposure to right-wing extremism. This suggests that the theoretical concepts of SAT exhibit stronger effects on self-reported right-wing political violence than the concepts from the other theoretical perspectives.

The effects of perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes on morality and self-control

Table 2. Multiple regression model with moral support for violent right-wing extremism as dependent variable (ANCOVA)

Independent variables	B (SE)
Perceived injustice	0.123** (0.044)
Political powerlessness	0.121(0.038)
Authoritarianism	-0.005 (0.049)
Perceived group threat	0.075 (0.045)
Ethnocentrism	0.234*** (0.059)
Perceived superiority	0.139** (0.047)
Model fit (R ²)	15.8%

Table 2 presents the statistical effects of the perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes on the dependent variable 'moral support towards right-wing extremism'. As can be observed, only perceived injustice, ethnocentrism and perceived feelings of superiority have positive significant effects on moral support towards right-wing extremism. Ethnocentrism seems to be the strongest predictor as regards to moral support for violent right-wing extremism. The independent variables included in this model collectively account for 15.8% of the explained variance in moral support for violent right-wing extremism.

Table 2. Multiple regression model with self-control ability as dependent variable (ANCOVA)

Independent variables	B (SE)
Perceived injustice	-0.192*** (0.045)
Political powerlessness	-0.061(0.042)
Authoritarianism	-0.087 (0.052) (p = 0.093) ¹⁴⁶
Perceived group threat	-0.033 (0.051)
Ethnocentrism	0.128* (0.055)
Perceived superiority	0.037 (0.044)
Model fit (R ²)	4.7%

Additionally, table 3 presents the statistical effects of the perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes on the dependent variable self-control ability. Perceived injustice has a significant but weak negative effect on self-control. Ethnocentrism has a significant positive effect on self-control and authoritarianism seems to have a weak negative borderline significant effect on self-control ability. All other variables do not dispose significant effects on self-control ability. The (adjusted) determination coefficient for this model equals 0.047, which implies that the independent variables account for 4.7% of the explained variance in 'self-control ability'.

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146 Borderline significant effect of authoritarianism.

Conclusions and discussion

In this study, we examined the role of perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes in explaining self-reported forms of right-wing political violence. The results indicate that perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes are important indirect factors in explaining right-wing political violence. The effects of some of the independent variables – grouped under perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes – on self-reported political right-wing violence are discarded when taking into account the variables 'individual propensity to violent right-wing extremism' and 'exposure to violent right-wing extremism'. In addition, moral support for violent right-wing extremism is partly determined by the direct effects of the variables grouped under perceived grievances and 'us-versus-them' attitudes. As such, moral support for violent right-wing extremism can be seen as an important sub-mechanism of the individual's propensity to violent right-wing extremism, lowering the threshold for individuals to engage in right-wing political violence. However, the same conclusions cannot be drawn for all of the indirect variables. Primarily, perceived injustice is an important source of strain that contributes to individual differences in moral support for violent right-wing extremism. Additionally, ethnocentrism and perceptions of superiority also appear to be important mechanisms in this same explanation, as they could increase one's moral support for violent right-wing extremism. Furthermore, additional analyses revealed that both propensity and exposure exhibit direct effects on right-wing political violence, and that a significant interaction effect exists, indicating that the effect of propensity on right-wing political violence is amplified by the effect of exposure to violent right-wing extremism (the results of these analyses can be obtained on request from the corresponding author).

However, irrespective from this study's contributions, future scientific studies should take into account a few limitations. First and foremost, the sample size of this study is small, which may explain the relatively small effect sizes of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Furthermore, because this study relied on secondary data, few choices were available regarding the operationalisation of the central concepts of this study. On the one hand, this had some implications for the central objectives and research questions, which as such needed to correspond to the data. On the other hand, this may have led to imperfections in the measurement of the central theoretical concepts, which in turn may have contributed to imperfect testing procedures.¹⁴⁷ This corresponds to a central tenet of SAT.¹⁴⁸ Since SAT assigns a situational dimension to different central concepts, situational measures require spatiotemporal data, which involve measuring the spatiotemporal convergence between the individual (and the individual's characteristics), the action (e.g. political right-wing violence) and the setting (and the setting's characteristics).¹⁴⁹ As such, scientific researchers are recommended to aspire to more situational measures of SAT-related concepts in general.¹⁵⁰ More specifically, studies should pay attention to the use of situational measurements in the inquiry of violent radicalisation and violent extremism. In that regard, researchers should definitely consider new methodological approaches when applying SAT to forms of political or religiously motivated violence. This could aid in drawing more coherent and nuanced distinctions between perceiving and choosing political violence as a viable action alternative. Using the 'Space-Time Budget' method,¹⁵¹ for example, could help to effectively measure the convergence of political violence (or crime) in space and time. However, because such research methods are relatively expensive and necessitate a high level of methodological knowledge,

147 Lieven J. R. Pauwels, *Kwantitatieve criminologie: basishandboek kwantitatieve methoden van criminologisch onderzoek* (Gent: Academia Press, 2017).

148 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 75-88.

149 Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, *Breaking rules*.

150 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 114.

151 This method aims at collecting detailed time diary data about the activities of individuals.

randomised scenario studies¹⁵² may provide an intermediate solution, though this should be carefully considered. Additionally, from a phenomenological point of view, future research should also continue to focus on various forms of violent extremism. Similarly, more research is required focusing on both younger and older populations, as well as on larger research groups. In this way, Situational Action Theory could serve as a framework for developing research projects on the topic of violent radicalisation, allowing multiple theoretical perspectives to be integrated in the explanation of violent extremism and crime in general. Yet, studies should also explore the application and integration of other perspectives within the framework of SAT, such as biopsychosocial perspectives. More longitudinal research should be established too, which could allow researchers to study the emergent processes from exposure to violent extremism to political violence.¹⁵³

This study has also some important policy implications regarding the prevention of violent radicalisation and right-wing political violence. The results of this study reinforce the notion of the importance of adopting a holistic approach regarding the prevention of violent radicalisation and violent extremism, referring to the need to incorporate both social (developmental) and situational prevention efforts. In that regard, efforts should be made to manipulate the causal processes and the direct causes that pivot individuals towards right-wing political violence. The perspective of Situational Action Theory could thus be used to align theoretical insights with complex phenomena such as right-wing political violence, but not exclusively political violence. More specifically, channelling the grievances of adolescents should be an important pillar in a variety of societal prevention initiatives. Perceived injustice, in particular, appears to be a significant indirect factor in explaining right-wing political violence among adolescents (18 to 25 years). It is therefore recommended to develop projects, programmes and portfolios that can aid with mitigating the potentially negative effects of perceived grievances. Additionally, adolescents should gain knowledge about the mechanisms underlying 'us-versus-them' attitudes. These objectives could be met by providing adolescent's tools to gain insights into the evolutionary dimensions and aspects of social identity, group processes, polarisation, and tribalism, as well as making adolescents aware of the potentially large-scaled dangers that could go along with these mechanisms. Reflecting on moral convictions and issues may help in reducing individuals' proclivity to distinguish between a 'we' group and a 'them' group.¹⁵⁴ Equally, preventive initiatives should raise awareness about diagnostic framing processes used by extremist groups, that present the world through binary 'us-versus-them' narratives.¹⁵⁵ In this respect, educational partners are and will continue to be critical stakeholders in prevention networks. Education bears the potential to provide adolescents with specific normative barriers that allow them to disengage from extremist views, conceptions, and attitudes. In this regard, concrete platforms could be established through which adolescents can be thought to adopt critical attitudes towards certain moral standards, moral convictions, and moral rules. However, when implementing preventive measures, the role of environmental factors should not be overlooked. Extremists do not live in a vacuum, as SAT acknowledges.¹⁵⁶ In that regard, this study has shown that delinquent or racist peers do play an important role in explaining self-reported right-wing political violence. Here, too, the provision of moderate narratives should be a real focal point in the prevention of violent radicalisation. ●

152 This method combines survey questions with randomly distributed vignettes that describe real-world situations (scenarios).

153 Pauwels, *Criminaliteit als situationele keuze?*, 183.

154 Micheal Vlerick, "Evolutie, tribalisme en een betere toekomst," *Humanistisch Verbond*, May 4, 2021, <https://humanistischverbond.be/blog/586/evolutietribalisme-en-een-betere-toekomst> (accessed October 28, 2021).

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