UNIVERSITEIT
GENT

FACULTY OF LAW

Angry white rebel? Study on the mechanisms and processes of participation in extreme-right groups

Doctoral dissertation submitted
in order to obtain
the academic degree of
Doctor (PhD) in the criminological sciences

Academic year 2015-2016

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Preface

At the start of this dissertation, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the persons involved in this work. Looking back at the past four years, it is fair to state that this PhD period has been a tremendous valuable learning experience. Therefore, it would like to start with thanking those people who gave me the opportunity to work on this project. At first, I would like to thank the person who encouraged me to apply for the PhD position, namely the supervisor of my Master thesis Prof. Dr. Em. Paul Ponsaers. In this regard, I would like to thank Paul for having confidence in my abilities. Next, I would especially like to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Lieven Pauwels for his guidance and tremendous support throughout my PhD. I enormously appreciate the time he has spent to support me in my learning process. Furthermore, it would also like to thank my co-supervisor Prof. Dr. Marleen Easton for the useful discussions we had and the opportunities she has given me. Subsequently, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Antoinette Verhage for her constructive comments and her support, especially during the qualitative part of this study. Thanks to the multiple informal meetings we had during the interview phase, I was able to critically reflect on both my research findings and my position as researcher. As last member of the original guidance committee, I like to thank Dr. Jaap Van Donselaar for his wise words and tremendous encouragements at the start of my PhD. It is with great pleasure that I look back at the stimulating conversations we had in The Hague. In the absence of Dr. Van Donselaar, the guidance committee was reinforced by Prof. Dr. Tore Bjørgo. In this regard, I want to thank Prof. Bjørgo for his willingness to join the guidance committee and his challenging critiques regarding the PhD during the last meetings of the guidance committee.

In addition to Paul and the members of the guidance committee, there are some people 'outside' the PhD whom I think should receive an 'honourable mention'. In first instance this PhD dissertation would not have appeared without the support of my colleagues. So, thanks for all the encouraging and pleasant conversations we had over the last years. Second, I would like to thank my anonymous 'experts on extreme-right' for providing me with a large amount of interesting information. Next, I would like to thank my brother Karel & his wife Laurence, my friends and relatives for showing interest in my work and for being there, when I needed them the most. A special thanks goes out to my girlfriend Lana for her love and tremendous support. Thanks to her support, I was able to struggle through the most difficult period of my PhD. Finally, a heartfelt thanks goes out to my parents for their inexhaustible support and love.

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List of abbreviations

ADVN: Archive and Documentation centre on Flemish nationalism

AN: Autonome Nationalisten, Autonomous Nationalists

β: standardized regression coefficients

BBET: Bloed, Bodem, Eer en Trouw, Flemish Combat 18 group Blood Honour Soil and Loyalty

CoPPRa: Community Oriented Policing and Prevention of Radicalisation

CT: Control Theory

ER: Extreme-right

ESS: European Social Survey

FDF: Front Démocratique des Bruxellois francophones

FN: Front National

FPO: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs

GST: General Strain Theory

HoGeSa: Hooligans Gegen Salafisten, Hooligans against Salafists

LGBT: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

n: total amount of respondents

NGO: non-governmental organisation

NPD: Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands

NSA: Nieuw Solidarist Alternative

NSU: Nationalsozialistischer untergrund

NSV: Nationalist Student Organisation

OR: Odds ratio

Pegida: Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident

R: points on the fact that the score of the question is reversed

R²: R-square, coefficient of determination

RADIMED: project on radicalisation and new social media

RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

RVF: Racial Volunteer Force

RW: Right-wing

RW: right-wing extremism

RWA: Right-wing Authoritarianism

RWD: Right-wing disruptive

SAT: Situational Action Theory

SCIF: Social Cohesion in Flanders questionnaire

SEM: Structural equation modelling

SES: Socioeconomic status

SL: Social Learning Theory

SMO: Social Movement Organisation

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

VB: Vlaams Blok (until 2004) Vlaams Belang (from 2004)

VMO: Flemish Militant Organization/Flemish Militant Order

VNJ: Vlaams Nationaal Jeugdverbond, Flemish Nationalist Youth movement

VNV: Vlaams Nationaal Verbond

List of figures and tables

Summary of the study

Research aim and questions

This research project focusses on the topic of participation in extreme-right movements with the aim to obtain an understanding of the underlying mechanisms and processes leading to engagement. International and national examples such as the Breivik case, the NSU, the case of Hans Van Temsche and the Flemish combat 18 group BBET have indicated the damage right-wing extremist may cause to life and property. Although official instances recognize that extreme-right groups are present in Flanders (State Security, 2008), it is remarkable to notice that the phenomenon has not received much attention within Belgian and Flemish criminological research (De Witte, 2006). It is thus unclear to what extent Flemish cases such as Van Themsche and the BBET are exceptional cases of extreme-right motivated violence or whether these cases are just the tip of the iceberg.

Given the relative unexplored nature of academic research on this field, this study starts with answering the descriptive research question: *How was the Flemish extreme-right movement established in Belgium and what does this movement currently comprise?* Subsequently, this study contributes to the understanding of criminal prone moral beliefs (i.e. moral support for right-wing extremism) and criminal behaviour (i.e. political violence) by answering the questions *What mechanisms are related to moral support for right-wing extremist violence? And how do these mechanisms for moral support influence the actual use of political violence? And which pathways of mechanisms lead to participation in right-wing disruptive groups?* Finally, the study examines the underlying motives and processes leading individuals to extreme-right group engagement where we answer the following interpretative research questions *What factors contribute to extreme-right group engagement and how are these factors constructed throughout the process of engagement? What actors are involved in the engagement process and what are their roles within extreme-right group engagement? What are the differences in engagement between the diverse extreme-right groups in Flanders?*

Our study contributes to the research field of extreme-right movements by which we aim to close different gaps within the literature. First, a limited number of studies have tested conceptual models on extreme-right motivated behaviour (cf. Boehnke, Hagan and Merkens, 1998; Doosje, Van den Bos and Loseman, 2012). Grounded on Popper's (1963) idea of theory testing through falsification, this study aims to test an integrated model which combines elements from social psychological and sociological traditions that have previously been applied to the study of violent youth groups. Second, our study on extreme-right movements can be regarded as a special case within the gang

literature. Decker and Pyrooz (2015) argued that much can be learned from the research tradition on gangs when we test theories of violent extremism. This study can thus be seen as a modest attempt in this regard. By integrating fragmented insight, we hope to stimulate theoretical elaborations and the development of more comprehensive perspectives that shed light on preventing or tackling the problem of right-wing extremist violence. Lastly, disregarding the study of De Witte (2006), this research is among the first to study the career (more specifically the process of engagement) of extreme-right activists in Flanders (cf. Billig, 1978; Blee, 2002; Fangen, 1999; Linden, 2009). As such, this explorative study hopes to inspire future research.

Methodology

The dissertation supports on triangulation of methods and data without the aim to integrate both quantitative and qualitative methods (cf. mixed methods). Both methods are used to contribute to the complementary purpose to explain the social phenomenon of participation in extreme-right movements. Within this study the quantitative (analytical) part supports on secondary data (i.e. European Social Survey and the RADIMED survey) and a self-administered web survey. The qualitative (interpretative) part, on the other hand, relies on an analysis of 23 face-to-face interviews with (former) members of extreme-right movements.

Grounded on the literature study an integrated conceptual model was developed, which was initially tested on secondary data, i.e. Radimed survey. The RADIMED survey, which was conducted by our research unit, was used to test certain assumptions of the conceptual model. Within this survey, variables were added which addressed both extreme-right attitudes and violent behaviour. To this end, the analysis of the secondary data served as the ideal test for the subsequent self-developed web survey (Elliot, 2015, 176). The latter self-developed web survey was put online between December 2012 and April 2013. The basic idea is that as students differ on political attitudes and behavior, we would need to find a way that guaranteed maximum variation in terms of right-wing extremism. Therefore, a link to the online questionnaire was placed on different web pages for targeting extreme-right youngsters on chat rooms of Neo-Nazi groups and extreme-right Flemish nationalist student organizations. In addition, the survey was spread through social media and online forums of universities and university colleges. The collected data was analysed by, on the one hand, logistic regressions which measured the separate effects of the investigated independent variables (Hosmer and Lemeshow, 2000) and, on the other hand, Structural equation modelling (SEM) path analysis to test the intermediate relationship of the mediating variables in the analysis (Bollen, 1989, Bollen and Long, 1993).

In addition to the analytical part, the interpretative was used to recount the experiences of (former) members of extreme-right movements. From June 2014 to April 2015, 23 semi-structured interviewed were conducted in accordance to the life story technique of Atkinson (1998) with the focus on the process of engagement (entry). Respondents were addressed during 'one-visit' observations (Zaitch, Mortelmans and Decorte, 2009, 286) or contacted through mail, telephone or via social media (i.e. facebook). Concepts were selected on the basis of the literature study. Specific attention was paid to the 'youth and education', 'ideology', 'membership', 'activities' and 'violence within the group'. Each interview was transcribed in detail and coded openly according to themes such as the important events, opinions and phenomena. Subsequently, axial coding was used to categorise the relevant codes, which enabled us to compare and reflect on the differences and similarities. Despite the apparent limited amount of interviews (23), this analytical method presented us with a large amount of rich data.

Results

Descriptive and analytical part

Crucial in the understanding of the extreme-right phenomenon is insight into the context in which the phenomenon is being shaped. On a macro level, it is noted that the transitional nature of globalization, migration and technology has fuelled the situation of the (post-)modern society (Jenkins and Gottlieb, 2007). From the seventies, movements have shown their protest against immigration. Most of these movements enunciated their concern or criticism on migration as degradation of work facilities, culture and Western values (Sela-Shayovitz, 2012). The emergence of the internet has not only improved communication, but has equally formed an ideal environment for extremist propaganda, practical organization and community building (Pauwels and Schils, 2014). In this regard, technological development (i.e. e-mail, mobile phone, internet, etc.) has facilitated the spread and internationalization of extreme-right ideology, symbols, clothing style and music (Sela-Shayovitz, 2012) with the creation of national segments of international extreme-right groups (such as Blood and Honour and Autonomous Nationalist).

In light of criminal behaviour, scholars have indicated the impact of participation in deviant groups. In accordance to social learning, individuals get shaped through the associations with delinquent actors surrounding the individual (Akers, 1998). These delinquent associations might (re-) define moral beliefs and provide opportunities for criminal behaviour. On this manner, SEM analysis revealed three pathways leading to right-wing disruptive (RWD) group participation. First, the reinforcing injustice model implies that an accumulation of negative feelings might progress to a

radical world view. The occurrence of such an event is the highest when strains are high in magnitude (Agnew, 2004), and strengthened by threatening and selective perceptions. Second, the self-control model disregards deprived situations and states that certain people have a stronger tendency to participate in risky environments. Therefore, RWD groups may form the ideal environment to address feelings of excitement, thrills, provocation and adventure. Lastly, we mark that right-wing exposure to racist or delinquent peers prior to participation may trigger RWD participation. In this perspective, it is argued that this prior exposure may facilitate or enhance attitudes, norms and routine activities associated with right-wing motivated disruptive behaviour.

Interpretative part

In line with Mellis (2007), this research shows that a cognitive opening is created through the interaction of supply (i.e. extreme-right groups) and demand (i.e. individuals attracted to an extreme-right ideology), nourished by a breeding ground of contextual factors and obstructed by a wall of resilience. Triggered by critical events (such as personal victimization), instigators might increase the option of (re)considering extreme-right engagement as viable alternative. However, it may also push -already searching- individuals (i.e. demand) or 'cognitively open' individuals towards the next phase. Another option is that the event of victimization may form a direct turning point to a cognitive opening. Furthermore, from the moment people become receptive for engagement, further steps towards engagement depend strongly on the effectiveness of building bonds with the new social network (i.e. socialisation) and the personal penetration of extreme-right cognitions (i.e. frame alignment).

Within the process of engagement, supply and demand are as dynamic products constantly under the influence of multiple actors. It is within this symbiosis of influences that these dynamic products are shaped as receivers of influencing messages. These messages may be directly derived from the surrounding environment or indirectly through national or local media. In general, three groups of actors can be distinguished, i.e. (1) personal environment (i.e. family and friends), (2) social conventional environment (i.e. school, sport and youth movement) and (3) the out-group (i.e. political establishment, ideological opponents and police and judicial services). Throughout the life career, actors may reinforce or inhibit the propensity of the individual to engage in extreme-right groups. Nonetheless, the Flemish extreme-right movement is largely divided in regard of ideology, provocative language and style. Dependent on engagement within a certain group, actors may adjust their influencing relationship.

Van der Valk and Wagenaar (2010) mentioned that individuals want to connect with groups which satisfy their needs. In the interpretative section of the research, three ideological groups (right-wing

nationalist, national solidarists, Neo-Nazi) were distinguished. In an 'ideal' situation, individuals would have the opportunity to connect with those ideological groups that fit their desire. However, aspects such as the presence of a (long-term) supply, legality and accessibility to the group might endanger the opportunity to connect. Throughout the reconstruction of activist careers, it appears that members have been part of a variety of groups. After initial engagement, members get exposed to a plurality of groups which were often previously unknown to them. Grounded on the experiences within the group, members continuously choose between remaining active within the extreme-right group, leaving the scène or exploring other internal (extreme-right) or external (hooligan, biker or leftist) environments.

Recommendations

Confronted with the growing effect of extremist groups, policy workers are faced with the challenge to adequately address the phenomenon. Thus far, response to these repulsive acts has been largely based on (short-term) visible symbolical measure in order to show government's willingness to act rather than on structural long-term solutions (Carlsson, 2006). In order to address the problem of right-wing extremist delinquent activity on a structural basis, it is important to deal with the causes with proper measures at proper time. Consequently, it is crucial to find and adopt a tailored prevention approach which takes the life course of radicalising youngsters into consideration and targets at different stages of development. Only then can an effective integrated approach be developed, together with the efforts of various willingly involved (frontline) actors, to provide a solution to criminal activity instigated by extreme-right motives.

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Samenvatting van de studie

Onderzoeksdoel en –vraag

Dit onderzoeksproject spitst zich toe op de deelname in extreem-rechtse bewegingen met het doel om inzicht te verwerven in de onderliggende mechanismen en processen die leiden tot deze betrokkenheid. Zowel internationaal als nationaal beroert extreem-rechts onze samenleving. Illustratief daarvoor zijn de zaak Breivik, het NSU en in Vlaanderen de zaak Van Themsche en de Combat 18 groepering BBET die aantonen wel schade rechts-extremisten kunnen aanrichten en dit zowel verbaal, fysiek als gericht tegen goederen. Hoewel officiële instanties erkennen dat extreemrechtse groepen (vb. Blood and Honour) ook in België manifest aanwezig zijn (Veiligheid van de Staat, 2008), is het verbazend vast te stellen dat het fenomeen tot op vandaag zo weinig aandacht heeft gekregen in zowel het Vlaams als het Belgisch onderzoek (cf. De Witte, 2006). Het is echter niet duidelijk of het geweld van Hans Van Temsche en de BBET alleenstaande cases zijn die extreemrechtse attitudes aanhangen, dan wel slechts het tipje van een ijsberg zijn.

Gegeven de relatief onontgonnen aard van dit onderzoek vangt de studie aan met het beantwoorden van de beschrijvende onderzoeksvraag: *hoe is de Vlaamse extreem-rechtse beweging ontstaan in België en hoe is deze beweging momenteel samengesteld?* Vervolgens, draagt deze studie bij tot de verklaringen deviante morele overtuigingen (i.e. de morele steun voor rechts extremisme) en deviant gedrag (i.e. politiek geweld) door het beantwoorden van de vraag *Welke mechanismen zijn gerelateerd aan de morele steun voor rechts-extremisme? En hoe zijn deze mechanismen ten opzichte van morele steun gerelateerd aan het gebruik van politiek geweld? En welke paden van mechanismen leiden er tot deelname aan rechtse ordeverstorende groeperingen?* Ten slotte, wordt in dit onderzoek dieper ingezoomd op de onderliggende motieven en processen die individuen leiden tot toetreding tot extreem-rechts groeperingen, waarbij we volgende interpretatieve vragen beantwoorden *Welke factoren dragen bij aan het proces van toetreding tot extreem-rechtse groeperingen en hoe zijn deze factoren doorheen het proces van toetreding geconstrueerd? Welke actoren zijn betrokken bij het proces van toetreding en wat is hun rol binnen het proces van toetreding? Wat zijn de verschillen, met betrekking tot het toetreden, tussen de diverse groepen binnen de extreem-rechtse beweging in Vlaanderen?*

Dit onderzoek draagt bij aan het onderzoek van extreem-rechtse bewegingen door diverse lacunes binnen de literatuur op te vullen. In eerste instantie heeft de literatuurstudie aangetoond dat een minderheid van de onderzoeken zich toegespitst heeft op het testen van conceptuele modellen ter verklaring van extreem-rechts gemotiveerd gedrag (cf. Boehnke, Hagan and Merkens, 1998; Doosje,

van den Bos and Loseman, 2012). Gesteund op Popper's (1963) idee van theorietoetsend onderzoek door falsificatie tracht dit onderzoek een integraal model met gecombineerde elementen uit de sociaal-psychologische en sociologische traditie te testen. In tweede instantie kan het onderzoek beschouwd worden als een speciaal geval binnen het onderzoek naar 'gangs'. Decker en Pyrooz (2015) geven aan dat het onderzoekstraditie op het vlak van gangs bepalend kan zijn bij het testen van theorieën over gewelddadig extremisme. Deze studie kan daardoor ook aanzien worden als een bescheiden poging om bij te dragen aan deze traditie. Door het combineren van gefragmenteerde inzichten, hopen we bij te dragen aan de theoretische ontwikkeling van een meer uitgebreid perspectief dat inzicht schept in de preventieve aanpak van rechts-extremistisch geweld. In laatste instantie draagt dit onderzoek bij aan het beperkte Vlaamse onderzoek (cf. De Witte, 2006) dat zich focust op de levensloop van extreem-rechtse activisten (cf. Billig, 1978; Blee, 2002; Fangen, 1999; Linden, 2009)

Methodologie

Deze scriptie steunt op een triangulatie van methoden en data zonder de intentie om kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve methoden te integreren (cf. mixed methods). Desalniettemin worden beide methoden gebruikt om tegemoet te komen aan het doel om het sociaal fenomeen van deelname aan extreem-rechtse bewegingen te verklaren. Binnen dit onderzoek steunt het kwantitatieve (analytische) deel op zowel secundaire data (i.e. ESS and RADIMED survey) en een eigen web survey. In het kwalitatieve (interpretatieve) deel, daarentegen, doen we beroep op een analyse van 23 diepte interviews met (voormalige) leden van extreem-rechtse bewegingen.

Gesteund op de literatuurstudie werd een geïntegreerd conceptueel model ontwikkeld dat initieel werd getest op secundaire data, i.e. RADIMED survey. De Radimed survey, die werd uitgevoerd door onze onderzoeksgroep, werd gebruikt om bepaalde assumpties van het conceptueel model te testen. Binnen de vragenlijst werden namelijk enkele variabelen opgenomen die gericht waren op extreem-rechtse attitudes en (politiek gemotiveerd) gewelddadig gedrag. De secondaire data fungeerde hierdoor als een optimale pre-test voor de navolgende eigen ontworpen vragenlijst (Elliot, 2015, 176). Deze eigen ontworpen vragenlijst werd online geplaatst van December 2012 tot April 2013. Door middel van deze online vragenlijst, die peilt naar de politieke attitudes en gedragingen van studenten, werd getracht om een voldoende grootte populatie rechts-extremisten te destilleren. Meer specifiek werd de link naar de vragenlijst verspreid op online chat rooms van Neo-Nazi groepen en extreem-rechtse Vlaams-Nationalistische studentenverenigingen. Daarenboven werd de vragenlijst verspreid via sociale media en online forums van universiteiten en hogescholen. De verzamelde data werd geanalyseerd door, enerzijds, logistische regressies die de specifieke directe

effecten testen ten opzichte van de afhankelijke variabele (Hosmer en Lemeshow, 2000) en, anderzijds, SEM pad analyses die de intermediërende relatie test van de mediërende variabelen (Bollen, 1989, Bollen en Long, 1993).

In aanvulling op het analytische deel focust het interpretatieve deel zich op de ervaringen van (voormalige) leden van extreem-rechtse bewegingen. In totaal werden in de periode van Juni 2014 tot April 2015, 23 semi-gestructureerde interviews afgenomen in overeenstemming met de life story techniek van Atkinson (1998) waarbij voornamelijk gefocust wordt op het proces van toetreding (entry). Respondenten werden gecontacteerd gedurende 'one-visit' observaties (Zaitch, Mortelmans en Decorte, 2009, 286), per telefoon, mail of sociale media (i.e. facebook). Concepten werden geselecteerd op basis van de literatuurstudie waarbij specifieke aandacht uitging naar de topics 'jeugd en onderwijs', 'ideologie', 'lidmaatschap', 'activiteiten' en 'geweld binnen de groep'. Elk interview werd volledig uitgeschreven en open gecodeerd volgens belangrijke levensgebeurtenissen, opinies en fenomenen. Vervolgens, werd gebruik gemaakt van axiale codering om de relevante codes te categoriseren waardoor vergelijking en reflectie op gelijkenissen en verschillen mogelijk werd. Niettegenstaande de schijnbare beperkte hoeveelheid van diepte interviews (23), heeft deze methode een enorme hoeveelheid aan waardevolle data opgeleverd.

Resultaten

Beschrijvende en analytische resultaten

Cruciaal binnen het begrijpen van het extreem-rechtse fenomeen is het kaderen van de problematiek binnen de context waarin het fenomeen zich heeft gemanifesteerd. Op macro niveau is dan ook merkbaar dat de veranderingen met betrekking tot globalisatie, migratie en technologie de (post-) moderne samenleving vorm hebben gegeven (Jenkins and Gottlieb, 2007). Reeds vanaf de jaren zeventig hebben sociale bewegingen de aandacht gevestigd en geprotesteerd tegen de komst van immigranten vanuit een bezorgdheid over de aantasting van werkplaatsen, cultuur en Westerse waarden (Sela-Shayovitz, 2012). De opkomst van het internet biedt voor deze groepen niet enkel een middel om de interne communicatie te verbeteren, maar eveneens vormt het een ideaal instrument om de praktische organisatie te verbeteren, extremistische propaganda te verspreiden en de gemeenschap uit te breiden (Pauwels en Schils, 2014). Op deze manier heeft de technologische ontwikkeling (i.e. e-mail, mobile telefoon, internet, etc.), de verspreiding van de extreem-rechtse ideologie, symboliek, kledingstijl en muziek, sterk gefaciliteerd (Sela-Shayovitz, 2014) door de creatie van nationaal afdelingen van internationale extreem-rechtse groeperingen (zoals Blood and Honour en de Autonome Nationalisten).

Wanneer we focussen op het crimineel gedrag wordt in de logistische regressie analyses duidelijk dat zowel persoonlijke als situationele invloeden een rol spelen. In lijn met de sociale leertheorieën tonen de resultaten aan dat individuen sterk worden bepaald door de associaties met delinquente actoren (Akers, 1998). Deze delinquente associaties kunnen zorgen voor een (her)definiëring van de morele overtuigingen en leveren opportuniteiten voor crimineel gedrag. In dit perspectief, tonen de SEM pad analyses aan dat er drie paden zijn die leiden naar deelname aan een rechtse ordeverstorende(RWD) groep. Vooreerst, het zichzelf versterkende onrechtvaardigheid model dat impliceert dat een accumulatie van negatieve gevoelens kunnen leiden tot radicale wereldbeelden. De kans op het optreden van een dergelijke radicaal wereldbeeld is het grootst als de strains sterk beladen zijn (Agnew, 2004) en deze gesterkt worden door bedreigende en selectieve percepties (Stappers, Reijnders and Möller, 1990). Vervolgens is er het zelfcontrole model dat, ongeacht de gedepriveerde situatie, stelt dat bepaalde personen een sterkere geneigdheid hebben om deel te nemen aan risicovolle activiteiten. Dergelijke sensatiezoekers zoeken voor (korte termijn) beloningen ongeacht de toekomst (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Bijgevolg kan een RWD groep de ideale omgeving vormen om aan hun gevoelens van opwinding, avontuur en sensatie tegemoet te komen. Tot slot, stipuleren we in het rechtse blootstellingsmodel dat personen die blootgesteld worden aan invloeden van racistische peers een grotere kans hebben om in een RWD groep terecht te komen. Daarom stellen we dat deze blootstelling zowel faciliterend als versterkend kan werken ten aanzien van attitudes, normen en routine activiteiten geassocieerd met rechts gemotiveerd delinquent gedrag.

Interpretatieve resultaten

Uitgaande van het model van Mellis (2007) toont dit onderzoek aan dat personen een 'cognitieve opening' ervaren door een interactie tussen aanbod (i.e. extreem-rechtse groeperingen) en vraag (i.e. individuen aangetrokken tot een extreem-rechtse ideologie), gevoed door een contextuele voedingsbodem en belemmerd door een muur van weerbaarheid. Getriggerd door kritieke levensgebeurtenissen (zoals het slachtoffer worden van geweld) kunnen personen extreem-rechts engagement (her)overwegen als een betrouwbaar alternatief. Niettegenstaande, kan een dergelijke gebeurtenis ook een verdere stimulans vormen voor reeds zoekende mensen (vragende of reeds cognitief ontvankelijke individuen). Een andere optie is dat de gebeurtenis (i.e. victimisatie) ook een direct keerpunt kan vormen voor onmiddellijk engagement zonder voorafgaande aanleiding. Voorts blijkt dat vanaf het moment dat personen ontvankelijk worden voor toetreding, verdere stappen naar het engagement sterk afhankelijk zijn van de effectiviteit van, enerzijds, het socialiseren met het (nieuwe) sociale netwerk en, anderzijds, het doordringen van het extreem-rechts gedachtengoed.

Binnen het proces van toetreding is duidelijk dat zowel vraag en aanbod dynamische producten zijn die constant onder druk staan van diverse actoren. Het is binnen deze symbiose van invloeden dat de dynamische producten gevormd worden en gestalte krijgen als ontvangers van beïnvloedende boodschappen. Deze boodschappen kunnen direct afkomst zijn van de zich omringende omgeving, maar kunnen ook indirect via de nationale en lokale media kanalen het individu bereiken. In totaal zijn er drie groepen van actoren die onderscheiden kunnen worden, i.e. (1) de persoonlijke omgeving (familie en vrienden), (2) de sociale conventionele omgeving (school, sport en vrije tijd bewegingen) en (3) de out-groep (politieke orde, ideologische opponenten en de politionele en justitiële diensten). Doorheen de levensloop kunnen actoren de geneigdheid van individuen om toe te treden versterken of afremmen. Vandaar verdienen deze actoren ook de nodige aandacht binnen een integrale aanpak van het fenomeen.

Aanbevelingen

In de zoektocht naar het verhinderen van extremism worstelen beleids- en praktijkwerkers met de moeilijkheid om een adequaat antwoord te bieden op het fenomeen. Het antwoorden op deze weerzinwekkende daden worden zijn dan ook vaak gebaseerd op symbolische (korte termijn) maatregelen die de publieke bereidheid van handelen aantonen, zonder dat een structurele lange termijn oplossing wordt aangereikt (Carlsson, 2006). De aanpak van het fenomeen noodzaakt adequate middelen voor de oorzaken, aangepast aan de tijdstip waarop de interventie tot stand komt. Daarvoor is het cruciaal om een op maat gemaakte preventieve aanpak te bieden die opgedeeld kan worden binnen verschillende stadia. Gegrond op de levensloop van de radicaliserende jongere kan men een effectieve geïntegreerde en integrale aanpak pretenderen die de bereidheid van diverse betrokken (eerstelijns) actoren kan voorzien in de aanpak van criminele activiteiten met extreem-rechtse motieven.

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

Parties and groups on the right-wing fringe of society have virtually been present in society. It is however remarkable that, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the 1980s emerged as a period of intense interest in the extreme-right discourse (Lubbers, Gijsberts and Scheepers, 2002). In particular, as the interest in the old economic left or right cleavage regarding governmental control and intervention began to wane in the public discourse, the new wave of immigration opened up room for polarization on the cultural cleavage. This polarization led extreme-right groups to focus even more on harsh repression, individual freedom, immigration problems, and the mentality of law and order (Achterberg, 2006)[1].

In an attempt to explain the 'calamities' of these *angry white rebel* movements, researchers have been investigating the personal profiles and motives for extreme-right voting behaviour (Billiet et al., 1990; De Witte, 1991; Hainsworth, 1992; Rees, 1984). For instance, German scholars examined the underlying reasons for the chain of violent acts against asylum seekers and asylum centres, especially after the collapse of the Berlin wall (Bleich, 2007; Heitmeyer, 1988, 2003; Miller-Idriss, 2009; Watts, 2001). An equal phenomenon was noticed in Scandinavia were new fascist and Nazi inspired movements popped up as extreme reaction against the new wave of immigration (Bjørgo, 1997).

Throughout the years, Belgium has equally been confronted with instances of anti-immigration and extreme-right inspired violence (see below). However, unlike other European countries, Belgium has not had a research tradition in the field of extreme-right movement. Most research efforts in this field have been undertaken from a political perspective (Billiet et al., 1990; Coffé, Billiet, & Cambré, 2002; De Witte, 1997, 2001; Jacobs & Rummens, 2003). Although these studies have provided us with some insight into the prevalence and mechanisms leading to extreme-right voting behaviour, little is known about extraparliamentary groups which are disconnected from the electorate level, but are located within the same ideological framework. De Witte (2006) was among the first to investigate scientifically Flemish extreme-right militant groups. The current study follows up on the topic and attempts to contribute to broadening the knowledge about this still widely unexplored terrain, i.e. participation in Flemish extreme-right groups. In this section we will present the research aims and the research questions. Then, we will describe the relevance of the study by discussing the prevalence of the extreme-right phenomenon (i.e. extreme-right opinions and ER related acts) and

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[1] Achterberg (2006, 52) argued in this respect that the collapse of communism at the end of the cold war has equally created the awareness of the downsizing of collectivism and socialism/communism which might opened perspective for anti-communist sentiments.

the theoretical as well as the empirical implications of this study. Next, we will zoom in on the choices we have made about the research design, the methodology and the research ethics. Lastly, we will provide an overview of the structure of the dissertation.

1. Aims and research questions

Since there is limited scientific and criminological knowledge of the phenomenon of extreme-right, this piece of research will first attempt to gain an insight into the contemporary structure of extreme-right movements in Flanders. In this descriptive part we address the following research question:

> $RQ1_{descriptive}$: *How was the Flemish extreme-right movement established in Belgium and what does this movement currently comprise?*

The second aim is studying the roots of ideologically motivated violence. Through a survey targeted at the Flemish youth, this study examines the underlying mechanisms for the moral belief in the use of right-wing motivated violence and the actual use of violence. This leads to the following analytical research questions, namely:

> $RQ2_{analytical}$: *What mechanisms are related to moral support for right-wing extremist violence? how do these mechanisms for moral support influence the actual use of political violence?*

> $RQ3_{analytical}$: *Which pathways of mechanisms lead to participation in right-wing disruptive groups?*

The last aim is to understand the motives and processes leading to engagement in extreme-right groups. Specifically, we are interested in the group processes which can account for the possibly illegitimate behaviour within that group. The relevant research questions are:

> $RQ4_{interpretative}$: *What factors contribute to extreme-right group engagement and how are these factors constructed throughout the process of engagement?*

> $RQ5_{interpretative}$: *What actors are involved in the engagement process and what are their roles within extreme-right group engagement?*

> $RQ6_{interpretative}$: *What are the differences in engagement between the diverse extreme-right groups in Flanders?*

These research questions indicate a diversity of concepts ranging from extreme-right to right-wing extremism. The concepts will be further discussed in the section on the 'conceptual and theoretical

framework'. The section below outlines the relevance of the study by elaborating on the prevalence and the theoretical, criminological as well as the practical added value of a study focussing on right-wing extremism.

2. Relevance of the study

2.1. Prevalence of extreme-right in Flanders

In exploring the impact of the extra-parliamentary extreme-right movement in Flanders, it is essential to gain a view of the proportion of present members in Belgium. However, certain obstacles impede the collection of such information. The majority of involved groups neither publish membership lists nor work with formal membership. Furthermore, members might repel the idea of contributing to studies conducted by 'mainstream society'. Thus, scholars need to be mindful that there is a certain 'unspecified number' with regard to the extreme-right population. Based on the election results and the representative European Social Survey (2015), the proportion of extreme-right sympathizers was approximated among the Flemish population. In addition, federal police statistics were consulted to have an understanding of the prevalence of (possible) extreme-right inspired delinquent acts.

Prevalence of 'extreme-right' sympathy

Since the 80s, migration has become a central topic on the public agendas of right-wing parties establishing themselves on the political field (Coffé, 2005). Grounded on a radical anti-immigration and repatriation discourse of immigrants, political parties started to gain support in diverse Western-Europe countries (Front National in France, Centrum Democraten in the Netherlands and FPÖ in Austria). The same was noted in Flanders where the Vlaams Blok became one of the best electorally performing extreme-right parties in Europe (Dewinter and Casals, 2005)[2]. When we zoom in on the electoral score (see Figure 1), the Belgian electorate has shown an enormous difference in frequency between Flanders (Dutch-speaking) and Wallonia (French speaking)[3]. However, strong resemblance is noted as regards the temporal evolution of extreme-right, with a steady increase in electorate until the peak in 2004. Since then, electoral support has declined and reduced to threshold of 5%.

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[2] By agreement of the other political parties to exclude co-operation and coalition with Vlaams Blok (i.e. Cordon sanitaire), the party was prevented government participation. Other extreme-right parties in Europe had more success. FPÖ, The Freedom party of Austria, for instance, was able to translate their high electoral score in 1999 -with almost 27 % of the votes- into government participation (Fallend, 2004). The French extreme-right party Front National was not allowed to participate at the National governmental level, but in contrast to its Flemish counterpart, it was able to acquire the statute of mayor in diverse municipalities and cities in France (De Witte, 2001).
[3] Belgium is a federal state, which implies that there are separate electoral districts. Flanders, the Brussels capital region and Wallonia have a secluded electoral constituency.
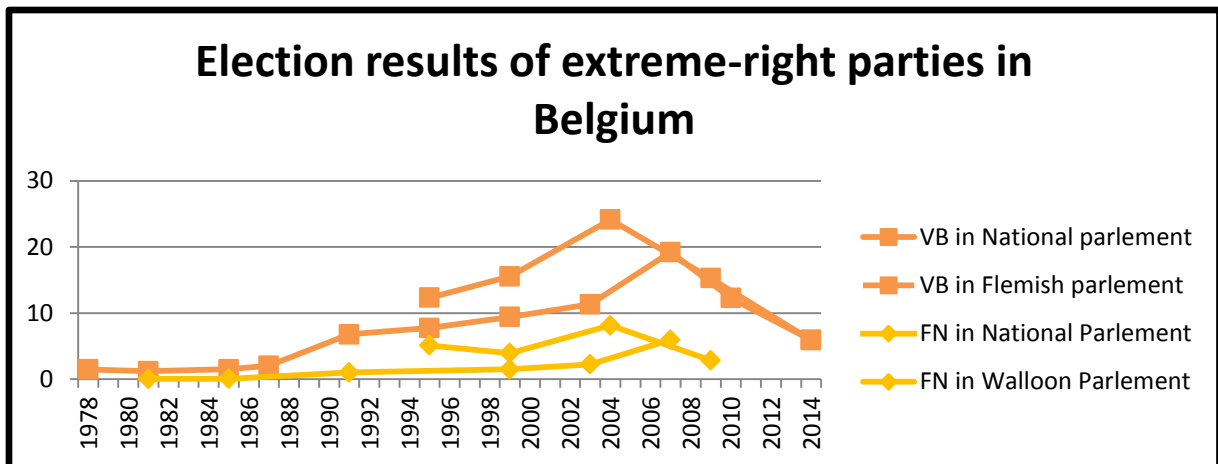
Figure 1: Election results of the Vlaams Blok (1978-2004), Vlaams Belang (2007-2014) and Front National (1981-2009), source until 2003: Federal Public Service Ministry of Interior (2008), from 2004: Public Governance Flanders (2015)

This decline might point to a decrease in extreme-right support. Nonetheless, fluctuations in voting behaviour do not imply the transition in extreme-right sympathy. On the one hand, people might be attracted by the extreme-right party to express their protest against the current policy (Billiet and De Witte, 1995). On the other hand, right-wing extremists might reject voting due to the fact that there is no party which can represent their interest, not even the extreme-right parties (Van Hiel, 2012). However, these electoral rates give us some insight into the volume of the breeding ground of possible sympathizers with right-wing political ideas.

Drawing on the secondary data from the European social survey, we can observe the evolution of extreme-right orientation over a period of 10 years. The results of the temporal comparison in light of extreme-right identification in Belgium are shown in Figure 2. The figure indicates that the percentage of respondents who identify themselves as 'extreme right'[4] remains relatively stable over 10 years during which an average of 3.27 % of the Belgians labelled themselves as extreme-right. When the extreme-right identification is divided by region, Flanders (3.35) seems to have the highest average score, followed by Wallonia (3.2) and Brussels (2.47). What is noticeable is that even in the heyday of the extreme-right party Vlaams Blok in 2004 (24.15 %) and Front National (8.12%), an equal marginal number of respondents, respectively 3.7% and 1.8%, labelled themselves as extreme-right.

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[4] The respondents received a left-right scale where they could position themselves from extreme-left (0) to extreme-right (10). In this study extreme-right was operationalised on the score 9 and 10.
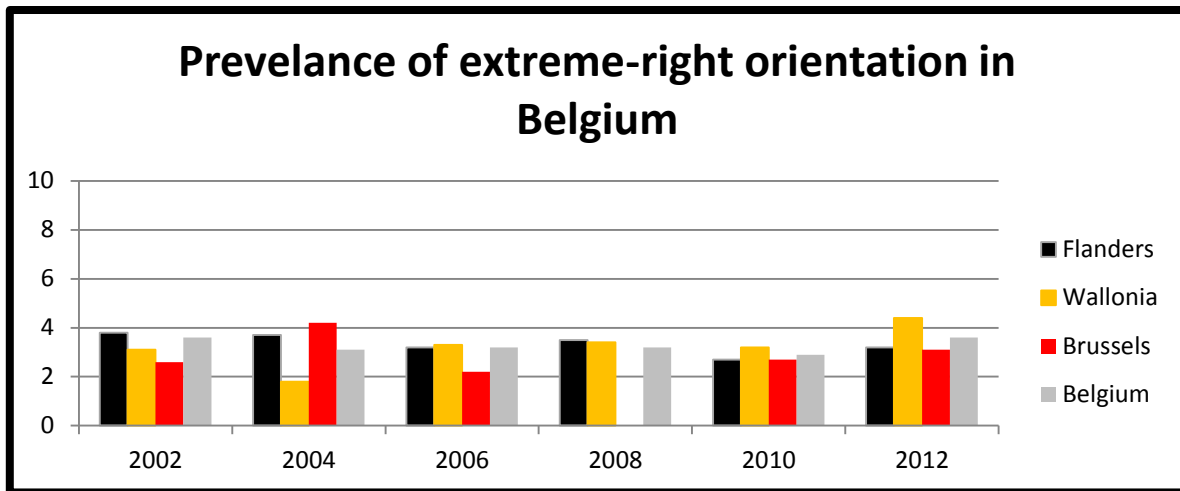
Figure 2: Extreme-right identification, source: European Social Survey (2015)

Although the above results indicate a marginal impact of extreme-right in the population, the question remains as to how this extreme-right proportion compares to that in other European countries. Figure 3 illustrates that Belgium can be considered as one of the lowest scoring countries concerning extreme-right orientation. In this regard, Belgium can be placed in the same category as its surrounding countries, i.e. the Netherlands (4.5), Germany (2.4), France (6.9) and Great-Britain (3.1). In general, it is observed that the countries who score lower than the average score (8.7) are mainly located in the north and the west of Europe. Exceptions are Hungary (7.6), Lithuania (5.8) and Russia (7.1). In contrast, the highest scoring countries are located in the middle, the south and the east of Europe with Kosovo (40.0) and Albania (23.2) being the highest scoring European state or country. Israel (23.1) which is considered an Asian country was also included in the questionnaire and it has the third highest score.
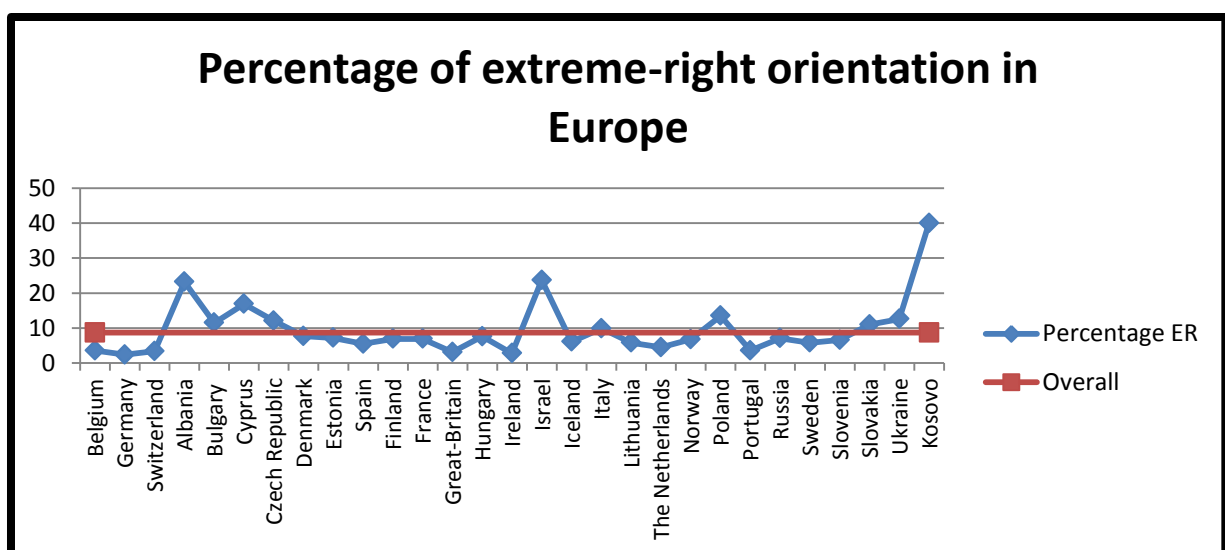
Figure 3: Prevalence of ER in Europe, source: European Social Survey (2012)

<u>Prevalence of 'extreme-right' related delinquent activities</u>

Compared with the two previous types of prevalence, it seems more difficult to measure that of extreme-right related delinquent acts in Belgium. During the research, it turned out that registered data do not take the ideological background of the perpetrator into account. Therefore, this study relies on fragmented data for an image of the prevalence of extreme-right related acts.

The statistics from the criminal police indicate that there exists an annual inflow of 463 registered 'extreme-right' related criminal files which record both the decrease in racist and xenophobic acts and the increase in Homophobic criminal acts (see Table 1). The Interfederal centre for equal opportunities in Belgium (2013) explained that the result might be biased by the increased attention paid to the phenomenon of Homophobic violence. Nevertheless, the centre made reference to the 'EU LGBT Survey' of the European Union agency for fundamental rights, emphasizing that this result is only the tip of the iceberg. In this survey, 35% of the Belgian LGBT population indicated that they have been discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation. The latter illustrates the discrepancy between the reported criminal activities and the actual perceived incidents, pointing to the phenomenon known as under-reportage. It is clear that victims of discrimination are still reluctant to report this criminal activity. Their reluctance may result from the 'normal' notification thresholds, such as time, money and courage, and the fear of victimization, shame and pride (Interfederal centre for equal opportunities, 2013). Besides the problem of under-reportage, these results fail to reveal any information about the perpetrators of these criminal acts, thus making it impossible to analyse to what extent criminal perpetrators are influenced by an extreme-right discourse.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Discrimination	518	537	505	493	453	369	410	442	321	496
Racism & Xenophobia	507	529	501	466	401	318	349	362	254	391
Homophobia	0	0	0	4	9	13	25	44	32	65
Not determined	11	8	4	23	43	38	36	36	35	38
Negationism	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Revisionism	0	1	1	4	4	0	1	1	5	2

Table 1: Criminal statistics by the Federal police (2015)

Seen from the relative marginal percentage of self-identification (3.35%), the Flemish extreme-right population can hardly be called a big movement. The statistics suggest that concerning these discriminatory acts extreme-right or right-wing extremist groups and individuals might have both a direct and an indirect effect on the outcome of right-wing inspired violence acts. The direct effect can be measured by the direct involvement of members in criminal activities. On the other hand, individuals might indirectly instigate criminal activities created through their strong 'awareness' of immigrant problems.

2.2.Theoretical relevance

There are diverse reasons for which this study is argued to carry significant conceptual and theoretical implications. First, this research has affirmed Popper's (1963) idea of theory testing through falsification. More specifically, the study has tested the usefulness of the integrative theoretical approach (see part III, Chapter 2 and 3) to explain right-wing extremist beliefs and behaviour. In doing so, next to a limited number of studies which have tested the conceptual models on extreme-right motivated behaviour (cf. Boehnke, Hagan and Merkens, 1998; Doosje, Van den Bos and Loseman, 2012), this piece of research has contributed to expanding the understanding of criminal prone moral beliefs (i.e. moral support for right-wing extremism) and criminal behaviour (i.e. political violence). Second, the study has lent support to the research tradition on gangs to investigate how the 'Eurogang' definition can be applied in the research on extreme-right groups (see part III, Chapter 3). Third, the *interpretative* part (see part IV) has drawn upon Wiktorowicz's model which combines the insights from both social psychological and social movement theories to investigate engagement in Islamic inspired extremist groups. In this perspective, the research has testified to the theoretical insights of diverse manifestations of extremist group engagement.

2.3 Criminological relevance

Past research has indicated possible consequences of engaging in deviant groups (Melde and Esbensen, 2011). Similar to the outcome of research on gangs, engagement in extreme-right groups can lead to diverse possible negative effects. Participants in these groups will become extremely vulnerable subjects through not only the growing exposure to confrontational violence but also the increasing propensity to use illegal acts (Van Donselaar, 1995). Furthermore, individuals might also face the risks of losing certain political or occupational rights, such as the *berufsverbot* or a professional ban in Germany (Dressler, 2012). This professional ban is not directly implemented in Belgium. Nonetheless, persons convicted for racism or discriminatory acts might receive severer punishments with the possibility of deprivation of their civil and political rights (Deklerck et al., 2009).

Consequently, this might implicate that convicted individuals may have less opportunities on the job market in that they cannot present a certificate of good conduct.

2.4 Policy relevance

Policy on the prevention of anti-establishment movements in Flanders could, as proved by the international literature, impact on the level of violence within the population (Bleich, 2007; Boehnke, Hagan and Merkens, 2007). In this regard, policy makers must bear in mind that the level of anti-immigration protest and violent activity might influence the life satisfaction level within the society. In Germany, Knabe, Ratzel and Thomsen (2013) revealed that regions with a high prevalence of extreme-right sympathy[5] had significantly lower levels of life satisfaction among foreigners. As such, it can be expected that polarized sentiments within these regions may trigger escalation of both parties (i.e. natives and immigrants). Policy makers should, therefore, not ignore signs of polarization and look for suitable crime and social policies as necessary complements to a safe and open-minded society (Knabe et al., 2013).

3. Scope of the research

3.1. The theoretical approach to radicalisation and extremism

Before going into the definition of terms as 'extreme right' and 'right-wing extremism', the concept of extremism is explained more deeply throughout the process of radicalisation. Radicalisation is a concept that has been extensively used in academic fields after the events of 9/11. It is in light of these events that the term is often equated with Islamic inspired forms of radicalisation, extremism or terrorism. Nonetheless, scholars have indicated that the concept is applicable to diverse manifestations of radicalisation (Easton et al., 2013). In this perspective, Gielen (2008) pointed out in her definition three manifestations of radicalisation, i.e. religious, political, and social and cultural radicalisation[6]. In our research context we find the definition by Geeraerts (2012, 26) particularly relevant and it states that:

Radicalisation is seen as a process whereby an individual comes to embrace values and opinions about a certain topic (e.g. animal rights, Nazism or religion) that gradually become more extreme and

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[5] This sympathy level was measured by the amount of support for extreme-right parties.
[6] Regarding this manifestation of radicalisation, the example of single-issue movements such as the ALF (Animal liberation Front) can be noted (more information on this specific topic is provided in Janssen, 2013 [Dutch] and Jamison and Lunch, 1992). A more concrete example of an extreme case of radicalisation is the case of Volkert Van der Graaf. On 6 May 2002, an environmental activist Van der Graaf shot the politician Pim Fortuyn to death. Van der Graaf indicated that he conducted his act for society, where Fortuyn was seen as a threat because the latter supported fur farms and had negative opinions on immigrants.

hence start to deviate more from the normative opinions, while at the same time finding it more difficult to accept opposite opinions. This may lead to ideological violence like terrorism.

Geeraerts (2012) points out that the process is not one-dimensional, which implies that several factors may impact radicalisation. A crucial aspect within the definition is the *alienation of mainstream society*. However, it remains unclear to what extent individuals need to be 'alienated' or 'deviated' from (mainstream acceptable) norms. In that respect, the reference category of 'mainstream society' itself is not free of radicalisation. Historical emancipation efforts, such as the French revolution or the Apartheid battle in South-Africa, might easily be seen as the radicalisation processes which drastically changed the society (Easton et al., 2013, Van de linde and Rademaker, 2010). These changes point to the relativeness of 'radicalisation' as determined by context, time and perception. An example of that dynamic aspect in a Belgian extreme-right context can be found in the Belgian Francophone league for Human rights. In its annual report, it was indicated that over the years government parties have implemented most aspects of the controversial 70-point plan of the Vlaams Blok. In the aftermath of the national breakthrough of the Vlaams Belang in November 1991, the Vlaams Blok constructed a plan which proclaimed to solve the 'immigration problem'. It included a plan to repatriate gradually non-European foreigners to their countries of origin, for the sake of the protection of the Flemish identity and the preservation of the principle of "own people's first" (Coffé and Dewulf, 2014). The 70-point plan was called unacceptable by the government parties in 1992; nevertheless, it appears that the ideas have stood the test of time (Demeulemeester, 2015).

Another crucial point within Geeraerts' definition of radicalisation is the gradual *willingness to use unconventional* measures. Concerning this aspect, scholars mark the difference between radicalism and (violent) extremism (Moghaddam, 2005; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008). In the phase of radicalism proponents are fond of the emancipating rights which often criticize or contradict the current mainstream (liberal democratic) value (Schmid, 2013). Precisely due to this critical view, radicalism and radical views are perceived as negative or even hostile to mainstream society. However, despite the fact that individuals operate at the 'fringe' of society, radical actors (i.e. as individual or group of individuals) accept to work within the legal framework of society. This latter point shows that extremism differs from radicalism. As such, extremism can be regarded as the superlative of radicalism, advocating a certain acceptance, support or actual use of violence to reach goals.

Finally, Geeraerts (2012) indicated that the process of radicalisation is individually based. In line with this aspect, individual's radical cognitions may not overlap with those of the group. In other words, a radical individual could be a member of extremist groups and vice versa. This situation, however, could create a cognitively imbalanced situation with regard to the targeted means to achieve the aim (Opp, 2009). This suggests that the role of group cannot be underestimated within the evolution of individual radicalisation (Borum, 2011).

In general, radicalisation has to be seen as a gradual (evolving through time, but not deterministic), complex (composed out of different causes) and dynamic (fluctuating over time[7]) process. Due to its dynamic character, it is often difficult to place individuals and groups within a certain defined phase. Moreover, Van Donselaar (1995) remarks that groups often publicly portrait themselves as radical (front-stage), while they might secretly propagate an extremist discourse (back-stage). Against this theoretical backdrop, our research delineates right-wing extremist behaviour as superlative of the extreme-right discourse, where moral beliefs justify criminal acts. A more detailed definition of right-wing extremism can be found in part I, Chapter 1.

3.2. The theoretical approach to extreme-right and right-wing extremism

Notwithstanding the fact that research on extreme-right has not encountered considerable difficulty in selecting appropriate cases, scholars have, however, struggled to convincingly define the concept (Linden, 2009, 10). There are a number of reasons accounting for this. Firstly, the concept of extreme-right is both academically and politically loaded. Extreme beliefs are positioned as opposed to those of the mainstream (Mudde, 2010), and hence, are inherently disconnected from the democratic society. Dependent on the context, certain groups within the extreme-right movement may be 'radical but tolerable' or 'extreme and intolerable'. In this range of acceptability it is noticeable that various labels (i.e. populist, radical right, far right, extreme-right, anti-immigrant, etc.) are used to determine the level of detachment from society (Van Donselaar, 1995). Secondly, social evolution has made it difficult to delineate the concept of extreme-right. While the term was previously predominantly associated with an ultraliberal economic position, nowadays it has shifted to allude to an increased focus on migration grounded on the ethnic cultural cleavage. This dynamism may complicate the historical comparison of extreme-right groups. Thirdly, as Mudde (1996) indicated in his review on extreme-right definitions, there are multiple concepts (i.e. racism, xenophobia, anti-communism, etc.) which can be added to the umbrella concept of extreme-right. However, scholars do not distinguish between the definers (i.e. essential elements of a definition)

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[7] The African National Congress, for instance, has changed from being an aggressive and violent movement to a political party embedded in the democratic system (Easton et al., 2013)

and the descriptors (i.e. certain characteristics or beliefs) of the social phenomenon (cf. Esbensen and Maxson, 2012, 6). This implies that including certain descriptors (e.g. anti-communistic discourse) might falsely exclude extreme-right oriented individuals who do not agree with certain aspects of the extreme-right discourse.

Despite the complication to define the concept of extreme-right, we considered it important to adhere to a benchmark to delineate the scope of our research. In taking the previous comments into account, three important definers have been filtered out. As a result, the concept of an extreme-right orientation can be defined as *a framework of values and beliefs which contradict the political establishment, in the interest of defending the nation against national traitors.* In this definition, we firstly mention the polarization aspect of anti-establishment groups which refers to an ideology which criticises –and possibly rejects- the mainstream political order and the contemporary democratic system (Linden, 2009; Fermin, 2009; Neumann & Rogers, 2007). Second, the definition points out that people strive for defending their own nation. In this regard, dependent on the cultural or the ethnic orientation, the nation in this research context might be interpreted as a Flemish nation or a nation of white people. Thirdly, the aspect of national traitors indicates the identification with the in- and out-group (Bjørgo, 1997). In this regard, Van Donselaar draws a difference between people alien to the nation (ethnic out-group) and people hostile to the nation (ethnical in-group, politically oriented out-group) (Van Donselaar, 1995, Van Donselaar and Rodriguez, 2008). In the descriptive section (part II, Chapter 1), we will elaborate on the aforementioned aspects of 'extreme-right' and 'right-wing extremism'.

3.3. Defining the Flemish extreme-right movement

<u>Flanders along the line of geographical demarcation</u>

As indicated above in the prevalence section, Belgium has as Federal structure which consisted out of a Dutch (i.e. Flanders) and French-speaking (Wallonia) part. Notwithstanding the possible interest of doing research in Wallonia, we opted to limit the scope of the research to the geographical area of Flanders. Firstly, it is noted that in the aftermath of the Second World War, the impact and resurrection of the extreme-right movement (and political party) has been more noticeable in Flanders than in Wallonia. This aspect is tackled in the descriptive part of the dissertation. Secondly, the federal structure has ensured that Belgium has become a state with subnations which have acquired more autonomy over the last decades (Billiet, Maddens and Beerten, 2003). In regard of movements this implies that active groups are determined by and inherently connected to this 'homogenous' Dutch speaking subnational context. Lastly, connected to this subnational context, we

point out that a large majority of the extreme-right movement is promoting the subnational Flemish identity. Therefore, rather than comparing the situation with Wallonia, our aim is to concentrate on this geographically and symbolically demarcated context.

<u>The extreme-right movement</u>

As we will further explore in the descriptive section of this dissertation, Flanders has dealt with an influx of sub-institutional, extraparliamentary forms of right-wing inspired groups, ranging from militant groups operating in the shadows of the extreme-right party Vlaams Belang to Neo-Nazi skinhead groups. However, these groups are connected within a broader Flemish extreme-right movement with a shared ethnic-cultural ideology[8]. As such, in line with Koopmans and Statham (1999, 228), but adapted to our study, we define the extreme-right movement as *those social movements and subcultural groups which mobilizes an ethnic-cultural framing of national identity against the idea of the (sub)nation as a politic and civic community*. In contrast to the personal orientation of extreme-right, this definition denotes the mobilization capacity of 'groups' within the broader 'movement'.

3.4. Conceptual approach of extreme-right and right-wing extremism

Taken the theoretical approach into account, the conceptualisation of right-wing extremism focuses on those aspects of an aberrant extreme-right ideology important in the prevention of criminal behaviour. Therefore, we operationalized the concept of right-wing extremism by the use of the concepts of (1) moral beliefs supporting the use of violence inspired by rightist motives; (2) the actual use of political violence; and (3) participation in informal right-wing inspired disruptive groups. These measures were chosen because of their self-nomination character. Due to the recurrent political and societal claims of the extreme-right connection with Nazism and Fascism, it is often difficult to scholarly define this highly contested concept of extreme-right. Therefore, interpretation of the concept 'extreme-right' was left open to the respondents and, as such, the personal self-labelling. Second, as this piece of research has a criminological instead of a political focus, we chose to analyse the mechanisms that instigates rule-breaking behaviour with an extreme-right motivation rather than unravel the ideology of extreme-right groups.

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[8] In line with Mudde, ideology is used to refer to the normative ideas on man and society as propagated by a certain group. As such, ideology is seen as *the body of normative(-related) ideas about the nature of man and society as well as the organization and purposes of society* (Mudde, 2002, 19)

4. Research design and methodology

4.1. Research Design

As Newmann and Benz (1998) noted, research has become less polarized in quantitative and qualitative practices. Researchers have gradually stepped aside from insisting on the marked ontological and epistemological differences between positivism and constructionism paradigms, and even attempted to integrate mixed methods (Creswell, 2003). Our research draws on both quantitative and qualitative methods for two separate study designs. We believe they are complementary to each other in exploring the social phenomenon of extreme-right. The following section will elaborate on the specific focuses in view of the postpositivism and social constructivism research paradigms.

Quantitative, analytical approach

In line with the account of postpositivism, this study has the aim to determine effects of possible causes as reductionist set of hypothesis (Creswell, 2003). Through validated measurements of moral beliefs and political violence, this study can contribute to the understanding of the objective reality (Firestone, 1987), which is the key epistemological difference from the qualitative method. While in quantitative research referent groups are used to compare certain claims of truth (e.g. perpetrators/non-perpetrators), qualitative research states that there is no access to reality other than the researchers' interpretation of reality (Sale et al., 2002).

Given the explanatory nature of the research in the Flemish context, a deductive analytical design was set up on the basis of previous empirical work (see part III, Chapter 2 and 3). However, constrained by the imperfection in the data (i.e. response rate, selection bias, etc.), we sought to falsify hypotheses. When the hypotheses are falsified, we can argue with great certainty that the theoretical assumptions are incorrect. Yet, there is another case in which there is a high probability that the assumptions are found in line with the reality. The latter falsification principle of Popper (1963) highlights the limitation of measures to prove theoretical assumptions with absolute certainty. Agreeing with Popper, Billiet (2008, 56), however, also recognizes that the dogmatic character of testing theoretical assumptions can create opportunities for new theoretical elements which would otherwise have eluded us. In this sense, our research is innovative in attempting to test and shape the knowledge on the social phenomena in the objective reality.

Qualitative, interpretative approach

In contrast to the objective reality, qualitative purists contend that knowledge is constructed out of multiple realities (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) where investigator and investigated cannot be separated as independent entities (Sale et al., 2002). As such, the investigated, as the source of reality, can be accounted for his or her construction and perception of social reality (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Hammersley, 2002). Starting from the individuals' point of view, this study is interested in the description and the characteristics of the interpretation of social behaviour by members engaged in the extreme-right movement. Our choice of the qualitative method is also supported by past studies on extreme-right that have highlighted the importance of qualitative in-depth research to obtain rich data of both group descriptives and personal motivations (Van den Bos et al. 2009; De Witte, 2006; Blazak, 2001).

As stated above, in view of the ontological and epistemological differences between the quantitative and the qualitative methods, we conducted two separate studies, with each targeting at different aspects of the social phenomenon. The study as a whole was not intended to grant a complete empirical cycle of deduction and induction, as stated by De Groot (cited in Billiet, 2008, 37-56). However, the interpretative part can shed light on the inductive approach, while the empirical section can lead to the establishment of theoretical and criminological insights (Mortelmans, 2009).

4.2. Methodology

Data collection

1) Secondary data

Due to the limited amount of information on the extreme-right movement in Flanders, we primarily opted to use secondary data. Although the data were originally collected for other purposes, certain elements of the secondary data were suited for the purpose of this dissertation.

First, to indicate the prevalence of the extreme-right phenomenon (see above) we relied on the European Social Survey (ESS).Financed by the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Commission, the European Science Foundation and academic funding bodies in each participating country[9], this international cross-sectional survey was conducted repeatedly in 20 European countries. As individuals were selected by strict random probability, a representative sample was obtained of Belgian and Flemish respondents above 15 years (ESS, 2015). In this dissertation, predominant interest lies in the extreme-right orientation of the Flemish population, both in terms of

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[9] This joint funding ensured that the survey was designed and carried out to a high standard, see ESS (2015)

evolution and magnitude (see above). Moreover, the spatial distribution of the survey provided grounds for interstate comparison. As such, we were able to benefit from this publically available data without high costs (i.e. time and money) (Elliot, 2015, Heaton, 2003). However, no additional questions were retrieved concerning extreme-right beliefs or behaviour.

Second, the RADIMED survey, which was conducted by our research unit, was used to test aspects of the conceptual model. At the outset of this piece of doctoral research, our research unit was assigned by the Belgian Ministry of Interior to conduct research into the role of new social media on radicalisation (Pauwels et al., 2014). Within this project our research unit decided to set up a survey investigating different forms of radicalisation (more detailed information on the RADIMED survey is provided in the analytical part (Chapter 2). In this survey, variables were added to address both extreme-right attitudes and violent behaviour. In fact, the analysis of the secondary data served as the ideal test for the subsequent self-developed web survey. The combination of the secondary and the primary data ensured that our conceptual model was tested on different populations, which improved the generalizability of the results (Elliot, 2015, 176). We were aware that scholars have pointed out the possible disadvantages of using secondary data (Heaton, 2003). However, the majority of arguments[10] were not applicable to this study in that although the research was conducted by another researcher within our research unit, joint meetings were scheduled to discuss the questionnaire and the procedure of the study. As such, the RADIMED survey offered the 'first-hand' secondary data. A minor point of criticism of the secondary data is that the purpose of data collection was slightly different (Heaton, 2003, 285). This implied that it was unable to test our complete extreme-right conceptual model. As a consequence, an additional web survey was added to test the latter model.

2) Web survey

The role of the internet has become omnipresent in modern-day society. Even the manner in which people communicate and interact has increasingly affected our daily lives (Elliot, Fricker and Schonlau, 2002; Conway and McInerney, 2008). The same is noticeable in the academic world, where scholars have addressed the benefits of conducting surveys on the Web (Schmidt, 1997, Greenlaw and Brown-Welty, 2009). The advantages of using web surveys include (1) the limited use of

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[10] Heaton (2003) offered an overview of the drawbacks of secondary data; i.e. the often difficult accessibility of the data (data was accessible to the researcher), problem in understanding the dataset (researcher was closely involved in the preparation of the research), different purpose of data collection (there is little difference regarding the purpose, and, in addition, both the RADIMED and self-developed questionnaire were administered as questionnaires aimed at measuring political attitudes). Finally, problems in regard of sampling and data quality were not applicable due to the strong connection to the research.

monetary resources (Bethlehem, 2010), (2) speed of data collection and dataset storage (Das, Ester and Kaczmirek, 2011), (3) the simplicity of data transfer (Manfreda and Vehovar, 2008), and (4) the automatic data input limiting the risk of human errors in the input of data (Schmidt, 1997). In the meantime, criticism has also been voiced concerning the response rate (Denscombe, 2009; Nulty, 2008) and under-coverage and (self-) selection bias (Bethlehem, 2010). More detailed information on data collection is provided in the analytical part (Chapter 2 and 3). However, it should be noted that the method of web survey enabled us to reach a broad population of Flemish youngster, even those 'hidden' from mainstream society (i.e. non-student, non-working population). As a result, we did reach an extreme-right population via internet forums and social media, and could compare an extreme-right population of respondents with a non-extreme-right population.

3) In-depth face-to-face interviews

3.1. Document analysis

Since the available scientific data were limited, we started with collecting relevant archive documents on extreme-right groups and individuals. The collection came from three main sources. First, an archive study was conducted in the State Archives of Beveren which keep a repository of grey literature including newspapers, national magazine articles, leaflets, pamphlets and photos of extreme-right group demonstrations or actions. In addition, we gained access to the old criminal files of extreme-right groups[11]. These files are mainly used to contact respondents and as background information during the interviews. Second, other stored information was collected from the Archive and Documentation Centre on Flemish Nationalism (ADVN) where detailed documentation (e.g. published magazines of groups, photos, newspaper articles, leaflets and notes of activities) was found. Lastly, websites and online forums were used to gather information on (1) the social genesis of the movement, (2) the expressed ideology, and (3) the relations and perception of other extreme-right groups. The information was not collected for analytical purposes[12] but provided background information during the interviews.

3.2. Targeting the 'hard-to-reach' population

As explained later in this dissertation, the extreme-right movement is characterized by, on the one hand, groups with an open character and, on the other hand, clandestine groups which are more

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[11] The State Archives of Beveren not only collect documents and information on right-wing networks, they are also in possession of official records of right-wing actors as well. It is through these old cases of right-wing related violence or delinquency that we gained an understanding of groups such as the 'Vlaamse Militanten Orde' (VMO).

[12] Most information on extreme-right groups is grey literature which is often fed with subjective information. For this reason we did not want to 'contaminate' the research by subjective information. In other words, these documents were used for informative purposes in support of the face-to-face interviews.

difficult to reach. The aim of the research, however, was to gain an insight into the broad picture of extreme-right movement. Hence, we opted to make use of a combination of the 'warm call' and 'cold call' approaches (Sadler et al., 2010).

At first, the 'warm call' ensured that the researcher stepped into the field to observe and establish contact with subjects within their setting. From November 2013 to April 2015, 20 'one-visit' observations (see Appendix 1 for more details) were made during the public appearances of the extreme-right movement (Zaitch, Mortelmans and Decorte, 2009, 286). These observations took place during debates, demonstrations, lectures, a criminal trial[13] and other Flemish nationalist meetings (such as the Ijzerbedevaart and Ijzerwake). During these (participatory) observations we favoured an overt approach (see below on research ethics). As such, the researcher presented the research as a social science project that focusses on Flemish nationalism and right-wing aspects of the movement. Important in the initial stage of the research was to develop rapport with the 'leaders' or other 'key figures' in the movement. These figures served as the 'gatekeepers' to other members within the extreme-right movement by the use of the snowball sampling technique (see Appendix 2) (Emmel, Hughes and Greenhalgh, 2007). Nevertheless, this technique turned out to be inefficient due to an imbalanced selection of respondents which only targeted a certain segment of the extreme-right movement (i.e. right-wing nationalist) and neglected other segments (i.e. Neo-Nazi and National solidarist groups) (Van den Bos et al., 2009; Sadler et al., 2010, 371).

In order to counter the imbalance arisen from the use of the 'warm call', the 'cold call' approach was adopted focusing on contacting individuals with whom no prior relationship had been established (Sadler et al., 2010, 371). On the basis of the archive study, individuals were contacted through mail, telephone or social media (i.e. facebook). Though this method we were able to target (former) members of clandestine groups, without the consent of the leaders or other key figures within the extreme-right movement. More information on the advantages and disadvantages regarding this method of data collection is presented in the interpretative part.

3.3. Face-to-face interviews

In search of the ideal method to collect data on identifying motivations and perceptions of extreme-right individuals, we resorted to the in-depth qualitative method to expand our knowledge (Yin, 2009). Given the marginalisation of extreme-right people's voice within society, the interviews can be seen as an important tool to recount their experiences, which are often suppressed by mainstream

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[13] From the 11th December 2013 I followed the trial of the Combat 18 group called BBET, which stands for 'Blood Bodem Eer en Trouw' (translated Blood Soul Honour and Loyalty).

society. In this way, we will deepen the understanding of the social and mental world of extreme-right individuals by exploring interactions, processes, behaviours and feelings contributing to active engagement (cf. Boeije, 2005, 36).

In line with the life story interview technique of Atkinson (1998), focus was placed upon the career of the activists. This approach serves as a *vantage point* from which the personal experience and the activists' career over time can be better understood (Atkinson, 1998, 126). As such, the interviewee takes the role of a narrator of his/her life, while the researcher's role is to guide the conversation following semi-structured interview questions on the basis of a topic list (see Appendix 3). More information about the interview technique can be found in the interpretative part of the dissertation.

<u>Data analysis</u>

1) Quantitative data analysis

For the analytical questions, we made use of the statistical analysis software packages of SPSS and Mplus. The former was used to perform logistic regression analysis, while the latter was used to manufacture path analysis for internal causal relations between the diverse theoretical constructs.

1.1. Logistic regression analysis

Given the constellation of the dependent variables, we were unable to perform linear regression analysis. The two dependent variables, i.e. moral support for right-wing extremism and political violence showed a highly skewed distribution because the majority of respondents had low scores on the dependent variables.

Due to the skewedness of the original scale variable of moral support for right-wing extremism, we categorized the scale variable into a low, medium and high moral support category. Given the fact that the dependent variable is a trichotomy, we primarily opted for the ordinal regression equation technique. The precondition for the execution of the ordinal regression states that the effect parameters need to be identical for every subgroup of the dependent variables (Kampen, 2007). Nevertheless, the test of parallel lines turned out to be significant, inhibiting us to use ordinal regression. As a viable alternative to the ordinal regression technique, we opted to use multinomial regression equation. This technique is a generalisation of the binary logistic model and allows us to gain an insight into the direct effects of the available set of independent variables (Retherford & Choe, 1993; Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). The generalisation of the model implies that the reference

category is used with respect to the two other categories. In this study, we chose to compare the medium and high levels with the reference category (i.e. low moral support).

In zooming in on the other dependent variables of political violence, it is noted that the majority of respondents gave a negative answer to the question on self-reported political violence. As the data was extremely skewed, the original scale of political violence was dichotomised. Logistic regression analysis was used to examine the separate effects of the investigated independent variables (Hosmer and Lemeshow 2000). This binary logistic regression is especially appropriate when the dependent variables are self-reported data. As such, the estimated effect was measured of a series of independent variables on the probability of having committed political vandalism (i.e. the odds ratio of having committed political violence). These odds ratios reflect the increase in the change in the dependent variable with respect to the value of the independent variable (Menard, 1995). More specifically, they indicate the odds[14] of the event of political violence (coded 1, political violence) in relation to a reference category (coded 0, no political violence).

Regarding data analysis it is important to control for possible contaminations. Consequently, an initial data analysis was performed, through the evaluation of the correlations, to check on multicollinearity. These tests on multicollinearity ensure that the independent variables should be independent from each other (Farrar and Glauber, 1967). Moreover, multivariate diagnostics were run to check for multivariate outliers. Outliers may bias our results towards extreme cases (Starkweither and Moske, 2011). Finally, due to the fact that logistic regressions measure the probability, the model should be fitted correctly. This implies that only the meaningful variables should be included. As such, a stepwise method was used to estimate the logistic regression (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000).

1.2. Structural equation Modelling

In addition to the logistic regression technique, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to test the model fit of our conceptual model. SEM was used in this dissertation as an extension of the analysis conducted in SPSS. It should be noted that similar attention was given to the possible terms of 'contamination'. Within the SEM technique, path analysis was used to get an insight into the complexity of the interrelationship between independent variables. Through a series of conducted structural equation models we were able to test the intermediate relationships of mediating

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[14] When the odds ratio gives a score higher than 1, a positive effect is measured. In contrast, an odds ratio <1 indicates a negative effect. The interpretation of odds ratios can be made easier by converting them to percentage terms using the following formula: [(Exp(B)-1] × 100%. (Pauwels et al., 2014)

variables in the analyses (Bollen, 1989, Bollen and Long, 1993). In so doing, these path analyses investigated the extent to which the model is reliable by measuring the model fit of the predicted data on matrices which contain the actual data (Muthén and Muthén, 2012). The basis for that model was inputted by the modeller/researcher at the start. As such, we started from a set of theoretical conceptual models which were tested by the use of the software programme Mplus (Muthén and Muthén, 2012). To assess the best fitted model we used model modification (i.e. modification indices) which led to stepwise improvement of the model fit.

2) Qualitative data analysis

In contrast to the analytical procedure of the quantitative research, qualitative analysis did not immediately follow after the collection of all data. In line with Creswell's (2007) analytical spiral, the research process continuously alternates between data collection and data analysis. As soon as the interviews were transcribed by the use of the software program F4, it was important to systematically classify the information of the interview. This technique of data management not only safeguarded the transcription of the interview, but also classified additional information such as the notes on the interview. These memos were convenient for three reasons. First, the memos were used to document more information on the interviewees, such as non-verbal communication, clothing, tattoos, etc. Second, memos were used to make notes of the informal conversations before and after the interview. During the research, it was well noted that interviewees started to mention names and events after the recording began. Although the focus of the interview was not to reconstruct events, the notes did provide interesting information which could be picked up in the subsequent interviews. Third, the memos revealed information about the interview settings. Although most interviews were conducted in a public place, in order to ensure safety, some of the interviewees persisted on recording the interview in their own homes. This provided the opportunity to take a look at the natural 'habitat' and interesting books, posters, or other symbols which were exposed in the respondents' home. Moreover, an insight could be yielded from the manner in which respondents display their beliefs by, for instance, decorating their houses with symbols. Finally, memos formed an ideal source of self-criticism directly after the interview (Decorte, 2009, 458). These notes contained a wealth of practical information, including disturbing noise during interviews and topics which were not (sufficiently) addressed[15] during the interview, etc.

Another manner to critically scrutinise the research is peer debriefing and the establishment of an audit trail. It is through the latter technique of transparency towards other researchers that the

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[15] When certain topics were not addressed during the interview, I re-approached the respondent by mail or telephone in order not to miss anything out.

research might produce reliable results to be replicated or tested in other research (Maesschalck, 2009, 142-143). Although the research was conducted by only one researcher, the research unit and the guidance committee played an important role in checking the topic list, the questionnaire, the coding procedure and the analyses over time. More specifically, I benefited from the offered expertise of a qualitative researcher who took the time to audit the procedures on a regular basis. This critical peer (i.e. fellow academic) perspective during the research ensured the ideal 'neutral' scope, which enhanced the reliability of the research results. Moreover, during the intense period of 'immersion' into the extreme-right movement, these moments of debriefing with peers were crucial in positioning my role as a researcher in the project.

When it comes to the analyses of the collected data, we relied on an open and axial coding system. In the first phase, meaningful segments were coded at a stringent detailed level which enabled a multitude of categories (Burnard, 1991). These units were then openly coded, but at the same time, correlated to the topic list. Grounded on the retrieved data, the codes were gradually re-evaluate and refined. In other words, the combination of a predetermined topic list and an inductive bottom-up coding procedure led us through an extensive, but relatively structured form of coding (Mortelmans, 2007). Moreover, the use of the qualitative software program NVIVO strongly facilitated the processes to change or adapt codes (Welsh, 2002).

After recoding and adapting the codes, we started to group categories of codes (cf. axial coding procedure). It is through this reduction of data that insights were gained into conceptual similarities (Decorte, 2009, 456-457). This contextualisation manifested itself through the inventories of characteristics of each category which describe or define certain concepts. As such, these themes function as the criteria for systematically comparing interviews (Boeije, 2002, 397). In contrast to the phase of open coding, the phase of axial coding focussed more on testing the codes of the open coding phase against new material. Consequently, new codes were created or assimilated (clustering) by which a structure of codes (cf. nodes) and subcodes (cf. child nodes) emerged (Bowen, 2008, 144). During the data analyses more nodes were coded than reported in this dissertation. This is because the scope of this research determines that we only focus on those codes relevant to the research questions.

Finally, in order to bring the data to a higher level of abstraction the last phase focused on selective coding of the data. In this research phase we tested the relations between different categories by searching for contradicting cases to counter certain preliminary conclusions (Boeije, 2006). For

instance, in the specific case on the topic of ideology we analysed whether all visions on migration were equal. Most respondents motivated their perspective out of cultural motives. Nonetheless, some respondents additionally motivated their anti-migration aspect because of racial motives. Therefore, in our analysis (see interpretative part) we focussed further on the difference between these two motivations for anti-immigration perspectives. Despite the fact that more data could be analysed (e.g. concerning other research questions related to the use of violence), we reached a point of data saturation in relation to the data on the engagement process. This means that additional data would become redundant from the deviant perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, 84-85).

5. Research ethics

Inherent to social research is the requirement to comply with the ethical considerations. In order to meet these quality demands, an ethical protocol was established by the Ethical committee of the faculty of Law of Ghent University. This piece of research has complied with 6 basic principles of social research (Verplaetse et al., 2015)

5.1. Respect for integrity, quality and transparency

Ramcharan and Cutcliffe (2001) stipulate that a poorly designed study is in itself an unethical practice. Therefore, it is crucial that the data are designed, collected and analysed under appropriate conditions. However, a well-designed study does not directly imply that the researcher has respected ethical assumptions, as shown by the Milgram experiment. Ethical considerations need to be seen as a crucial presupposition for a reliable and high quality research without the intent to physically or mentally harm respondents. With the aim of preventing the respondents from possible harm, we excluded the use of covert research (Bulmer, 2001). Although we considered the advantages of covert research on extreme-right individuals by studying them in their natural environment, a human centred overt research was preferred (Herrera, 1999). Covert research might have produced an unwanted effect on the general public involved in the research; nonetheless, the majority of people were often not aware of my presence because the observations were made in openly accessible events. However, when contact was made or questions were asked by people who were present and observed, they were informed about the conducted social study to safeguard the integrity and transparency.

5.2. Informed consent

Another important aspect to overt research is the ethical guideline of informed consent. Scholarly debate has focused on the question as to whether researchers need to inform respondents of the exact nature of the research process (Corrigan, 2003; Wiles et al., 2005). While a minimum amount of instructions on the research might be misleading, informing the respondents thoroughly of the formal procedure, however, on the other hand, might risk them losing interest in the research (Heath et al., 2009). In addition, some individuals may encounter difficulty in fully understanding the information that is given (Corrigan, 2003, 774). As such, we need to prevent that some aspects of the research may be detrimental to the conducted research and the reliability of the results.

In order to encourage the respondents to cooperate while keep them appropriately informed of the research process, the research was addressed to the respondents as a project to be conducted in social sciences with the focus on the Flemish right-wing movement. At first we did not want to emphasize too much on the criminological perspective of the research. Nonetheless, when respondents asked more details about the project and research field, it was communicated that the research was embedded in the criminological field with the focus on comparing different groups within the Flemish right-wing movement. Moreover, in the qualitative research phase we avoided using the term 'extreme-right', considering the fact that not every respondent labels him/herself as such. In addition, we were interested in how the respondents labelled the concepts and to what extent their label differed from the extreme-right label.

In practical terms, we respected in both the quantitative as the qualitative study the process of informed consent. First, the questionnaire provided a global introduction with information about the research, the research funding (i.e. funding by Ghent University) and the aim of the research (Health et al., 2009, 23-26). Second, during the interview period we opted to explain and record the informed consent to the respondent (O'Gorman, 2010, 522). Therefore, the respondents were fully aware of the fact that the interviews were recorded (with their consent) and that the data were to be used for research purposes. Moreover, respondents were informed that the interview would discuss some aspect of their activist career. They were also told that they could stop the recording or leave the research scene whenever necessary. Finally, it was explicitly mentioned that the recorded interviews would be used to facilitate the analysis of the interview.

5.3. Confidentiality and anonymity

Another aspect to the ethical considerations is maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality refers to the restriction of passing on detailed information to others, while anonymity is related to the protection of a person's identity. Heath et al. (2009, 34) remark that in social research confidentiality is merely seen as distributing information to others (e.g. in articles), but nevertheless without the notion that the information stems from a specific individual. For instance, although our research did not focus on restructuring illegal activities, some individuals provided detailed information on certain events. With the research grounded on the ethical principles at the start of the interview, respondents were convinced that the information they provided would not reach others, such as the police[16]. Meanwhile, anonymity was ensured with the use of three techniques. First, there was only one document with the real names of the respondents. In other documents, the respondents are referred to with pseudonyms. Second, we opted to include only minimum information in the publicly available documents. Lastly, the transcriptions of the interviews were also anonymised to avoid that during the crosscheck of the coding reliability, fellow researchers could discover the identity of the respondents.

5.4. Voluntary participation

Alongside the principle of informed consent, equal ethical importance should be given to the aspect of voluntary participation. As indicated above, the interviewees were informed that at any time during the interview they could leave the setting. Nevertheless, this does not exclude other possible involuntary involvement of participants. For instance, as the ethical protocol describes, young people under the age of 16 cannot give consent (Verplaetse et al., 2015). This study only focussed on respondents above the age of 16. Furthermore, all respondents were free to participate without any form of coercion.

5.5. Preventing damage to respondents and researcher

By abiding by the aforementioned ethic rules, potential damage to the respondents can be prevented. However, damage is not merely related to not following procedural rules. Respondents also need to be protected against themselves both during and after the interview (McCosker, Barnard and Gerber, 2001). Much has already been written on the ideological discourse of the extreme-right movement. However, the aim of this research is not to magnify personal extreme ideological vision which could damage and stigmatize the broad extreme-right movement. We were thus fully aware of the importance to place the related expressions in context.

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[16] Regarding this matter, adjustments would be made if respondents gave information about planned actions.

On the part of the researcher, within the context of extremist voices in society, the researcher must not be blind to possible dangers. Therefore, during the research safety measures were undertaken. Firstly, as indicated above, we preferred to conduct the interview in public places (e.g. pubs) where witnesses can be found to the conversation. However, eight respondents preferred to conduct the interview at home, without any 'witnesses'. Second, in cases where we expected a certain risk for the researcher (e.g. interviews in respondents' home or with interviewees having a criminal past), peers (e.g. fellow researchers, friends or parents) were given the task to make contact (e.g. sent a text or call) with the researcher after approximately 3 hours. Finally, information was given to the peers on the meeting place where the interview took place. To preserve anonymity, we did not disclose the name of the interviewee to peers. However, a brief description of the activist career and the initials of the researchers were mentioned in case of unexpected incidents.

5.6. Independent research

The last principle of the ethical protocol focusses on the independence of the research. Funded by the university, the research was not influenced by other parties outside of the university and there was no conflict of interest. This aspect of independency was also mentioned in the informed consent where exclusive funding of the research was attributed to the University.

6. Structure of the PhD

This dissertation will start with the chapter on an elaborate historical and theoretical overview of the extreme-right phenomenon in Flanders. The historical construction of the contemporary movement dates back to the independence of Belgium and was re-established after the Second World War. In relation to the European extreme-right movement we will determine whether the identified categories of the extreme-right movement can also be applied to the right-wing segment of Flemish society. Moreover, we will focus on the presence of social movements, and subcultural networks in the Flemish society and their relationship to violent activities. Furthermore, building on the literature review, we will investigate which sociological and (social) psychological mechanisms are related to right-wing extremist activity (i.e. membership and violence).

Chapter Two introduces the conceptual model grounded on the theories of social bonding, procedural justice and differential association to contextualise political violence. Relying on this conceptual model, we will examine the net-effects of the various theoretical variables using logistic regressions. The variables will be tested on both the readiness to use right-wing extremist violence (moral support for right-wing extremism) and the actual behaviour (self-reported political violence).

Subsequently, we will analyse to what extent moral support for right-wing extremism influences actual behaviour.

Chapter Three will further explore the insights derived from past theoretical and empirical contributions regarding participation in violent extremist groups. We will seek to establish an integrated framework useful for studying participation in right-wing disruptive groups. We will also analyse the interrelationship of the mechanisms mediating attitudes. We will propose that these mechanisms further increase the likelihood of right-wing disruptive group membership through the proximate mechanism (i.e. moral support for right wing extremism and exposure to racist peers).

Chapter Four, an interpretative chapter, will examine how people become engaged in radical or extremist groups. Scholars have attempted to explain this engagement from a multitude of social-psychological perspectives to understand the pathology of an 'irrational' behaviour. In contrast, social movement scholars have countered this research claim focusing predominantly on the rational explanations for the engagement. Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford (1986) strongly criticise the social-psychological approach to movement participation, stating that these scholars have neglected interpreting individual grievances. This chapter intends to provide a thoroughgoing understanding of the process of engagement in extreme-right groups by combining insights from social psychological and social movement theories.

The last chapter, *Chapter Five* will offer the concluding remarks which elaborate on the still many uncharted areas of research, thus point out future research directions. This chapter will also make recommendations for policy workers to (continue to) pay attention to this neglected manifestation of extremism (cf. Islamic radicalization).

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PART II: DESCRIPTIVE PART

CHAPTER 1: THE FLEMISH EXTREME-RIGHT MOVEMENT. STATE OF THE ART

Published as:

De Waele, M. (2013), Flemish youngsters and right-wing extremist groups. Status quaestionis, in Crawford, A., de Maillard, J., Shapland, J., Verhage, A. and Ponsaers, P. (Eds.), Crime, violence, justice and social order. Monitoring Contemporary Security Issues, Antwerpen, Maklu, 15-41.

Source: State Archive Beveren, demonstration by the VMO against guest workers[17] on 04/10/1980

We asked for workers, we got people instead

-Max Frisch-

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[17] Translation of quote: work in own region = work in own land, guest workers go home!

1. Introduction

Almost seventy years after the fall of the Nazi regime, extreme-right groups are still able to shock public opinion at both the politically engaged[18] and non-politically engaged levels[19] of society. Framed within the emotionally loaded history of the Second World War, contemporary right-wing extremism still has to contend with its association with mass murder, annihilation and conquest (Van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010). Recently the international media drew a great deal of attention to right-wing extremist political parties after the attack on 22 July 2011 by the right-wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik. These acts, and the description in Breivik's manifesto of various right-wing extremist parties in Europe as being of a like mind with him, were further confirmation of these associations (Van Driessche and De Lobel, 2011).

In recent years right-wing extremism has also raised major concerns in Flanders. In 2002, for example, there was the case of skinhead and extreme-right militant Jürgen Goris, who was known for his connection with the Flemish section of Blood and Honour[20]. Goris was convicted for the double murder of two young men at a party close to the city of Mechelen[21] (Noppe, 2012). Four years later, the eighteen year old Hans Van Themsche drew even more attention after his rampage through the city of Antwerp, where he intentionally shot three non-white people (Janzing, 2007). These extremist-related acts are certainly not a new phenomenon within Flemish society. Right-wing extremism has actually a long history in Flanders and goes back to the independence of Belgium in 1830 which gave rise to Flemish nationalism, a political stream within the Flemish movement (De Witte and Klandermans, 2000). During the First World War and the inter-war period radical movements such as the Verdinaso[22] and Vlaams Nationaal Verbond[23] began to emerge (Van Donselaar, 1995). Despite its stigma after the Second World War, right-wing extremist militant groups such as the 'Vlaamse Militanten Organisatie' (VMO) were able to re-establish themselves in society. In the 1990s, and especially since the election of 24 November 1991, also known as 'Black Sunday', right-wing extremist ideology in Flanders also became established within the political landscape through the victories of the right-wing extremist party 'Vlaams Blok'[24] and the libertarian party 'ROSSEM'. This rise of the political right and the related commotion within society created new opportunities for Belgian studies in the field of right-wing extremism (Billiet and De Witte, 2001; De

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[18] Consider, for instance, the recent media attention about the electoral successes of the Greek Golden Dawn Party and the French Front National.
[19] Such as the skinhead movement, neo-Nazi organisations, etc.
[20] Blood and Honour is a neo-Nazi organisation which was founded by Ian Stuart Donaldson, leader of the white power skin head band Screwdriver.
[21] City located in Flanders, in the province of Antwerp.
[22] Alliance of Diets National Solidarists.
[23] The Flemish National Alliance.
[24] Vlaams Blok (translated as 'Flemish Bloc') is the old name for the current Flemish Interest Party (Vlaams Belang).

Witte, 1991, 1992, 1997, 2001; Gijsels, 1992; Scheepers, Billiet, and De Witte, 1995; Spruyt, 1995; Swyngedouw, 1992, 2000). Research, however, has mainly been limited to the fields of politics and sociology which concentrate on the political rise of right-wing extremism, without pointing to the social danger of the non-electorally engaged extreme right groups.

Criminological and (socio-) psychological research in this area is very scarce in Flanders (De Witte, 1997, 2001; De Witte and Klandermans, 2000; Jacobs and Rummens, 2003; Noppe, 2012). Focussing on these disciplines may explain, as international research has shown, the reasons why people turn to extremist groups (entry), support or even commit violent acts during their engagement and - from a preventive point of view- also why people tend to leave these groups (exit) (Bjørgo, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2004, 2011; Heitmeyer, 1988; Heitmeyer and Hagan, 2003; Koopmans, 2006; Mudde, 2002; Sela-Shayovitz, 2011).

From a criminological perspective, the purpose of this article is to close this gap and gain insight into the presence of non-electorally engaged or extra-parliamentary extreme-right groups in Flanders. Different acts in diverse European countries (e.g. Germany, Scandinavia, Netherlands, UK, Ukraine) against asylum seekers or other 'enemies', have shown that the activity of extreme groups within Flemish society does not have to be minimalized (Bleich, 2007; Heitmeyer, 1988; Heitmeyer and Hagan, 2003; Miller-Idriss, 2009; Watts, 2001). Knabe, Ratzel and Thomsen (2013) indicate that increases in right-wing extremism within a native population can significantly reduce the life satisfaction of native people and immigrants within that society. This article will therefore start with a literature study posing the following question: 'Which extreme-right groups exist in Belgium and what are the characteristics of individuals within these extreme-right groups?' To answer the latter question this article will focus on three levels: the external (macro), social (meso) and the individual (micro) levels (Veldhuis and Bakker, 2012). However, before focussing on the different levels, the first section of this article will explain the difficulties in determining a clear definition of right-wing extremism. Many scholars have discussed its real meaning, but have not come to a universally accepted definition. This section will identify the problems and indicate the selected perspective for this article. The second section will focus on four categories within the European extreme-right movement as indicated by Goodwin, Ramalingam and Briggs (2012). A historical analysis will determine whether these categories can also be applied to the right-wing segment of Flemish society. Based on changes in society after the Second World (macro), some patterns of increasingly profound radicalisation can be differentiated throughout Flemish history. The third and last section will concentrate more on the social groups (meso) and individual (micro) level factors associated with

a right-wing orientation. Research in the fields of sociology and psychology can tell us more about factors associated with a right-wing orientation.

2. Defining 'right-wing extremist orientation'

During recent decades, scholars have discussed the exact definition of the concept of 'right-wing extremism' without reaching a clear consensus (Fermin, 2009; Heitmeyer and Hagan, 2003; Van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010; Van Donselaar, 1995). Miller-Idriss (2009: 97), for instance, concludes in her study of contemporary right-wing radicalism that 'there are many types of right-wing radicals, but […] these groups reflect distinct subcultures within right-wing extremism and radicalism'. This makes it difficult to give one clear definition which includes all aspects of the complex social phenomenon of 'right-wing extremism' or 'right wing radicalism' (Goodwin, Ramalingam, and Briggs, 2012).

At the most basic level we can say that 'right-wing extremism' refers in the first place to the competing political categorisations of left and right. Where the left can be seen as progressive, the right has a more conservative ideology. Both ends of the spectrum include people who express a radical worldview and are far away from the centre, namely the democratic constitutional state (Van Donselaar, 1995). On the right-wing side, for instance, extremists strongly prefer a world with fewer civil rights for the nation's minorities and for women (Sidlow and Henschen, 2008). The interpretation of the concept may, however, not be limited to this static position within the political spectrum (Huijgens, 2004). Right-wing extremism is actually greatly influenced by social and cultural changes within society (Van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010). The contemporary meaning of the concept of 'right-wing extremism' is, for instance, different from its meaning fifty years ago. Van Donselaar and Rodrigues (2008) define extreme-right *sympathisers* as people who have an aversion to elements that are either 'alien' or 'hostile to the nation'. The 'alien' aspect relates to the cultural diversity that people experience. During the Second World War this category was mainly associated with 'Jews' and 'gypsies'. Nowadays it has been extended to the general class of 'ethnic minorities', with a fixation on the Muslim population (Van Donselaar, 2009). The 'hostility' aspect, on the other hand, refers to the (political) enemies in the same ethnic group as the extremists. Depending on the time period and the ideological perspectives of the group, issues such as anti-liberalism, anti-socialism or anti-communism will be included. In this context Billig mentioned the relative position within the democratic system: 'Though a convincing definition of right-wing extremism has not been found, research work on political parties of the right has not had serious problems in selecting appropriate cases' (Billig cited in Linden, 2009: 10). Nevertheless, a clear definition of the concept is

needed to place the phenomenon in the social field.

When considering the concept of 'right-wing extremism', it is necessary to look at the complex and dynamic process of radicalisation which may lead to various (violent or non-violent) outcomes. Noppe, Hellinckx, and Van de Velde (2011) created a model which integrated the process of radicalisation, the staircase model of Moghaddam (2005), the model of Mellis (2007) and the pyramid model of McCauley and Moskalenko (2008). They thereby distinguish three phases, namely the phases of radicalism, extremism and terrorism. The latter phase is to be seen as the ultimate outcome and is rarely achieved. Radicalism on the other hand refers to the more ideological aspects without the intention of committing violent acts. Scepticism towards democratic institutions, support for Flemish independence and even fear or hatred towards foreigners are perfectly legal and are in themselves mostly not punishable if there is no behavioural manifestation which causes harm towards individuals or society. These radical attitudes or beliefs do not suddenly emerge, but arise from other historical issues within the radicalised person's life.

Within this context, Mudde (2002) states that the difference between radicalism and extremism is the fact that the first is opposed to the constitution, whereas the latter is hostile towards the constitution. Right-wing extremism is thus seen as the reinforcing step of radicalism and refers to the support and/or use of right-wing extremist related violence. This social phenomenon is often used as a set of complex multiple interrelated elements to explain the larger concept (Fermin, 2009; Miller-Idriss, 2009). Even central elements such as racism or xenophobia do not necessary have to play a role (Bjørgo, 1997). In this contribution we will however concentrate on two basic elements of right-wing extremism as described by Wilhelm Heitmeyer (1992) in his book *Rechtsextremistische orientierungen bei jugendlichen,* namely considering (1) an ideology of inequality between people as a nature given principle, and (2) an acceptance of violence as a legitimate form of political action (Heitmeyer cited in Bjørgo, 1997, p. 21). Relying on international research, it is possible to include - in addition to this definition - some optional elements such as authoritarianism, intolerance towards minorities, anti-communism/socialism, anti-liberalism, nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism and 'xenophobia' that correlate with the concept of right-wing extremism (Altemeyer, 1998; Bjørgo, 1997; Noppe, 2012). The latter can therefore be seen as an *umbrella concept* which covers a large number of complex, interrelated criteria which can be brought together under a dynamic heading. Mudde (2002) mentions that it is very difficult to find a consensus on the exact definition of the term because the term is not only used for scientific but also for political purposes. Related to that dynamic concept, the next section will however focus on groups which are associated with a right-

wing extremist orientation in the form of a discriminating ideology and the acceptance or use of violence.

3. The changing focus of right-wing extremism in Flanders

After the Second World War, Belgium was confronted by extreme groups, both on the left and the right side of the political spectrum. Although extreme-right groups were active in both the Dutch and French areas[25] of Belgium[26], only Flanders had to deal with a persistent right-wing infiltration into society and the democratic system. There are three reasons for this.

Van Donselaar (1995) notes that Flanders and Wallonia have a different view of the collaboration with the Germans during the Second World War. The period after the war was dominated by the split between 'good' people (allies) and 'bad' people (collaborators). The collaboration with the Germans seemed much more brutal in the French areas where it was compared with betrayal. The repression of these collaborators after the Second World War was also noticeable in Flanders, but nevertheless there were some justifications which could be made. To this end, collaboration was actually strongly linked to disloyalty towards the Belgian state, which was considered positively in the eyes of Flemish nationalists and played an important role in the resurrection of right-wing extremism in Flanders.

A second reason and also a consequence of the Second World War, is the presence of war memorials in Flanders (monuments, museums, war cemeteries, etc.). These places formed an ideal focus for the reunification of national and international extreme-right movements. On 10 March 2007, for instance, the Dutchman Stefan Wijkamp[27] organised a neo-Nazi gathering in a German military cemetery in Lommel[28], where he performed the Hitler salute in front of three hundred neo-Nazis (De Morgen, 2008). These places are known for their unique history, and form an ideal focus for right-wing extremist groups to celebrate their 'heroes'.

Flanders has seen, in contrast to Wallonia, an enormous electoral breakthrough by extreme-right political parties. As mentioned earlier, the extreme-right party 'Vlaams Blok' succeeded in a strong breakthrough in Flanders after 'Black Sunday'. The party experienced a steady electoral increase which in 2004 led to their peak of almost a quarter of the votes of the Flemish people (24, 15%), when they were considered one of the strongest extreme-right parties in Europe. The Walloon party

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[25] Such as the Front de la Jeunesse (1974-1983) and the Westland New post (1979-1984).
[26] Belgium consists of a French-speaking area (Wallonia), a Dutch-speaking area (Flanders), a small German-speaking area (the German-speaking Community) and a bilingual zone within the region of the capital, Brussels.
[27] Is an extreme-right activist and look-alike of Hitler. Therefore, he is also known as the 'Hitler of Kerkrade'.
[28] Flemish city, in the province of Limburg.

'Front National', on the other hand, could only convince 8.2% of the French-speaking part of Belgium (Coffé, 2005), The 'Front national' has now disappeared from the political stage, and although the successor of the Vlaams Blok, the Vlaams Belang is still active in Flanders, their success has stagnated and declined over the years. However, it is a sign that an extreme-right breeding ground is present within the Flemish society. Relying on this, the article will investigate the situation in Flanders. The following section will focus on the various extreme-right groups in Flanders, related to the European context.

3.1. A European perspective

Social scientists in Europe have carried out a number of studies into the profiles and motives of people who engage with or vote for political parties with a right-wing extremist orientation. These studies give us an insight into the prevalence of the phenomenon (the question of how many people have felt attracted towards the right-wing extremist views of political parties) and the factors associated with these views (covariates). Nevertheless, the phenomenon of right-wing extremism is not limited to political parties.

Goodwin et al. (2012) indicate that there are four categories within the right-wing extremist milieu in Europe, namely political parties, social movements, networks and lone wolves. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but each has a different perspective on ideology and the use of violence within their right-wing extremist setting. The first category includes the *political parties* who pursue the goal of shaping public policy through their elected members. Individual members may be linked with violence or criminality, but the parties themselves strive to operate within the law.

Within the second category, Goodwin et al. note that *social movements* contain people who identify themselves within a large network of people with a similar ideology who support an extreme-right ideology outside the political parties. However, they still seek to mobilize public support and are, as such, not formally involved in violent activities. These movements can also be seen as a channel for recruitment for both political parties and networks.

The third and newer category includes the smaller social and cultural groups or *networks* acting independently from political parties and the social movements. Within these networks, we find 'racial revolutionaries' with a national-socialistic ideology and identification with Nazi Germany. Bjørgo (1997) distinguishes these racial revolutionaries from the national democrats who are not based on Nazi ideology, focus primarily on anti-immigration themes and prefer to work within the

democratic political system, at least to the outside world (front-stage). This category is called a 'specialty group' within the typology of gangs in the United States. Maxson and Klein (1995) state that such groups are small (with 50 or fewer members), were founded at the beginning of the 1990s and focus mostly on violent offences and crimes against the property of non-white ethnic minorities. Klein (2001) indicates that the so-called traditional gangs cannot be detached from the American context. Weerman and Dekker (2005) mention within that context that these European groups rather consist of more informal youth groups and networks. This category contains what they describe as 'troublesome youth groups'.

The fourth and last category is that of the *lone wolves*, who tend to act on their own, in complete isolation. This phenomenon suggests that factors other than an evolving process of radicalisation, charismatic leadership, socialisation experiences and other group processes can lead people to commit crimes related to extreme right wing views. Flanders was, as previously mentioned, confronted with this phenomenon with for instance the rampage of Hans Van Themsche in 2004. The category of lone wolves does not fall within the scope of this research, which involves people within extreme-right groups, and so will be excluded. In this article we focus on the three remaining European categories of extreme-right groups and investigate whether these can be found within the history of Flemish society.

3.2. Re-emergence of Flemish nationalism

The Belgian independence in 1830 forms a starting point for the Flemish movement. This originally linguistic movement reacted against the 'Frenchification' of the Belgian state and wanted to obtain recognition and equal rights for the Dutch language (De Witte and Klandermans, 2000, p 702). At the beginning of the twentieth century and certainly after the First World War the movement began to develop a more cultural nationalistic ideology, which even led to the establishment of a Flemish nationalistic political movement called Vlaams Nationaal verbond (VNV)[29] and evolved in an extreme-right-wing direction with an anti-Belgian ideology (De Witte and Klandermans, 2000, p 702).

On 24 August 1930 the 'ijzertoren' was inaugurated in the West-Flemish city Diksmuide as a monument to peace with the slogan 'No more war' on all four sides of the tower (De Wever, 2008). Only nine years later, on 1 September this slogan turned out to be a utopian ideal. What followed was a period of mass murder, annihilation, conquest, treason and collusion which destroyed the message of peace from the inter-war period (Van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010). The repression of

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[29] Translated as the Flemish National Union.

the collaborators after the Second World War led to the apparent disappearance of Flemish nationalist groups such as 'Verdinaso' and 'Vlaamse Nationaal Verbond', which were present during the inter-war period. There were, however, still some Flemish patriots who appreciated the collaboration and the corresponding disloyalty towards the Belgian state (Van Donselaar, 1995). A few years after the end of the War, important Flemish Nationalistic symbols from the inter-War period, such as the 'ijzerbedevaart'[30] and the Flemish National songfestival (Vlaams Nationaal Zangfeest)[31] were reorganized and became symbols for the revival of Flemish nationalistic ideology (De Wever, 1997).

Extreme-right political parties and organisations in Flanders have always been closely related to Flemish nationalism, in contrast to Wallonia where such parties and organisations conducted a more Belgian national unionistic discourse (Coffé, 2005; Swyngedouw, 1998). The first signs of this Flemish nationalistic revival after the Second World War were found in the early 1950s with diverse attempts to form a political party. At the beginning of the 1950s this was realised with the formation of the 'Volksunie'[32]. The hard repression of collaborators after the war led to resentment among the nationalistic population. One of their main demands was the right to amnesty. It is therefore not surprising that Flemish nationalists felt the urgency to organise a common ideological group in the form of a political party or organization. Within the period of searching for that political voice in the democratic system, Flemish nationalists wanted to set up a militant organisation – outside the context of a political party - that could guarantee their security. At the beginning of the 1950s this organisation called the 'Vlaamse Militanten organisatie' consisted of approximately 30-40 members and had the purpose of protecting the political gatherings of the Volksunie (Verlinden, De Schampheleire, and Thanassekos, 1991). In 1971, VMO leader Bob Maes decided to dissolve the organisation due to intimidation from the judicial authorities, the 'left-oriented' social media and internal struggles regarding the lack of discipline of some members[33] (Claes, 2006).

3.3. Transition and radicalisation of Flemish nationalism

During the 1970s it became clear that the Flemish nationalist organisations had to deal with a process which Van Donselaar (1995) refers to as the 'adaptability dilemma', that is the balance

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[30] Annual pilgrimage in memory of the Flemish soldiers from the First World War.

[31] A singing festival with the aim of gaining more attention for Flemish music, including on the radio. They want to show that Flemish music is more than pop music and promote classic battle songs and anthems such as the Flemish Lion. A traditional element is the speech of the Algemeen Nationaal Zangverbond chairman, in which current Flemish aspirations are formulated.

[32] The Flemish National political party was active from 1954 until 2001 and had great electoral success in the 1970s and 1980s.

[33] Such as the confrontation with the Walloon party FDF where a member of the FDF was murdered.

between a strong profile without being criminalised or a more pragmatic course to suit the democratic system. The latter profile, however, had the potential to create resentment among the more radical members. This was the case with the Volksunie, where radical right supporters disagreed with the leftist course of the party which had created new opportunities within the political field and finally resulted in the founding of the political party 'Vlaams Blok'. This also points to the instability of these groups and confirms the social genealogy theory that extreme right-wing groups arise not haphazardly, but generally from other right-wing (extremist) formations (Van der Valk and Van der Schans, 2011). As mentioned previously, the VMO had also had to deal with internal squabbles leading to the dissolution of the Vlaamse Militanten organisatie in 1971. In that same year Bert Eriksson restarted the VMO and changed the name to the 'Vlaamse Militanten Orde' (Claes, 2006). This was the beginning of a more radical stance of the extreme-right militant organization. They no longer focused solely on the Flemish aspect, but became more involved with demonstrations against drugs, guest workers, abortion and anti-Flemish demagogy (Claes, 2006). On 4 May 1981 the VMO was condemned for organising paramilitary camps and as such functioning as a private militia with the intent to use violence.

The extreme right-wing also expanded during this period, with the creation of new Flemish nationalistic movements. Social movements such as the Nationalistische Studentenvereniging (Nationalist Students' Association, NSV) and Voorpost[34] (Vanguard) were founded in 1976 and formed an ideal means for explaining their ideas to Flemish youngsters. NSV is currently the biggest student association within Flanders and maintains close ties with the political party Vlaams Belang (De Witte, 2006; Van der Valk and Van der Schans, 2011). It can also be seen as one of the channels for recruitment for future political members. A second channel for recruiting ideologically engaged people is the extreme-right militant organization Voorpost, which strives for reunification between Flanders and the Netherlands. The main activity of both social movements is to conduct legal demonstrations without spreading a fascist or racist ideology.

3.4. Revival of Nazism

During the mid-1980s, Europe had to deal with a massive wave of immigration which evoked a strong sense of resentment against immigrants. This resentment even resulted in Scandinavia and Germany in widespread worship of the Nazi regime and the 'Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei' (NSDAP) and criminal acts against persons and their property (Bjørgo, 2002; Boehnke, Hagan, and Merkens, 1998). Many of these incidents were initially minimalized until the police arrested

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[34] Voorpost was the result of a split of the intellectual right-wing organisation Were Di.

participants in the racist youth scene in Oslo and Kristiansand, who turned out to be thirteen years old, or even younger (Bjørgo, 1997). This came as a huge shock to the parents of the teenagers, who decided to collaborate with other parents in the same situation by starting a parental network group. This network finally formed the basis for the Norwegian project 'Exit – Leaving Violent Youth Groups' which supports youngsters in their disengagement from violent (or violence-prone) groups. Later on, similar exit projects were started in Denmark (Exit Copenhagen) and Sweden (Exit-Sweden) (Bjørgo, 1997; Bovenkerk, 2011; Kimmel, 2007). Nevertheless, this problem was not limited to Scandinavia, but also arose in Eastern and Western Europe where it has been the subject of specific academic interest. In Germany especially, people were confronted with a revival of extreme right wing groups and with various violent acts against asylum seekers and asylum centres (Bleich, 2007; Heitmeyer, 1988; Heitmeyer and Hagan, 2003; Kimmel, 2007; Miller-Idriss, 2009; Watts, 2001). Following the Scandinavian example, Germany decided to start an exit project called 'Exit-Deutschland'. These projects focus mainly on the assessment of the disengager's safety and are more accessible than other governmental projects because they can operate independently. This is one reason why disengagers do not see these NGO projects as coming from the 'enemy'.

Within a Flemish context, it is noted that the increasingly expanding support for the 'Vlaams Blok' after 'Black Sunday' created enormous public concern. However, this turned out to be merely a footnote in the rise of racial revolutionary groups. In line with Scandinavia, Germany and the UK, Flemish people started to get confronted with violence from the extreme right. Nick Lowles, editor of the renowned international anti-fascist magazine Searchlight, attributes this activity in Europe to the internationalization of the skinhead scene during the late 1990s (Humo, 2003). It was the first time that Flanders had to deal with such an openly racist scene with various meetings to 'honour' their leaders.

One of the most important groups was Blood and Honour. This neo-Nazi group had their origin in Great Britain and referred to the slogan of the *Hitler jugend* 'Blut und Ehre'. In 2001 two sections arose in Flanders with the recognition of the English headquarters, namely Blood and Honour Flanders, and Blood and Honour Midgard (Noppe, 2012). As with the English Blood and Honour section their main activity was the organization of white power music and national socialist black metal meetings which also attracted people from the metal scene. Flanders turned out to be the ideal place for reunification of the international Blood and Honour organization due to the fact that the organisation could not be convicted by the judicial system[35] (cf. Germany[36]). Moreover, the police

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[35] Since there was no special legislation that could prohibit such meetings.

and judicial institutions initially had the impression that they could do nothing to forbid these meetings (De Standaard, 2010). However, due to the magnitude of these meetings and certainly after an undercover documentary by the German journalist 'Thomas Kuban', the public opinion gradually started to show their disgrace and dissatisfaction. The images of Kuban's work provided a horrifying picture of neo-Nazi skinheads shouting slogans such as 'Sieg Heil' and performing the Hitler salute. These meetings in Flanders were limited to expressions of xenophobia, discrimination and segregation. However, there are some examples of violence related to the Flemish section of Blood and Honour (see Noppe, 2012). The activities of Blood and Honour peaked in 2007 and 2008, when they organized concerts in Flanders which were attended by 300-600 people (State security, 2010). Their activity has reduced greatly since then, but there are still some core members present in Flanders.

Around these movements float splinter groups such as Combat 18. This organisation also has an international dimension, with a section in Flanders. Currently 17 members of the Flemish section are awaiting trial for arms trafficking, assault and battery, in the so-called the BBET trial, referring to a magazine called 'Blood, Soil, Honour and Loyalty' (BBET) published by the Flemish part of the Combat 18 network. The latter group is suspected of being a paramilitary group with the intention of committing terrorist actions (Noppe, 2012). The BBET group seems extinguished and replaced by a new fascist group, namely the Autonome Nationalisten[37] (AN) with members of right-wing extremist groups such as Voorpost and Blood and Honour

Apart from Blood and Honour, there are also groups such as the Nieuw Solidaristisch Alternatief[38] (NSA) who are primarily not based upon a racial revolutionary image. The NSA has however opted for a more 'hostile to the nation' approach with a focus on the system and the government as enemies of right-wing supreme ideology. Because of their common enemy, members of organisations such as Blood and Honour or Combat 18 are often present at various activities of the NSA (State Security, 2010).

3.5. A different relationship to violence

But what makes social movements or networks so different from political parties such as Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang? Firstly, there is the entirely different approach towards violence. Where the use of violence towards ethnic minorities is preached through the white power music of the

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[36] In 2000 the group Blood and Honour was convicted in Germany.
[37] Autonomous Nationalists.
[38] New Solidarist Alternative.

revolutionaries, the absolute abstention of violence is advocated by leaders of the political parties at least to the outside world (front stage). A good example of this was the reaction of Filip De Winter, an important member of the Vlaams Belang, to the fact that his name was mentioned in the 1,516 page manifesto of Anders Behring Breivik. De Winter reacted against this labelling by saying that 'his only weapon is a pencil to vote' (Van Driessche and De Lobel, 2011). Secondly, as previously mentioned, political parties must set out on a particular road, balancing on the edge of legality and searching for the balance between having a strong profile without being criminalized, and following a more pragmatic course within the democratic system (Van Donselaar, 1995). The party Vlaams Blok, for instance, was banned in 2004 from political activity because of their racist propaganda. Non-politically engaged groups on the other hand, have more 'freedom' although they also run the risk of criminalisation. Thirdly, international scholars have indicated that ideology is sometimes present to a lesser extent within the networks of racial revolutionaries (Bjørgo, 2002). This is mainly because these groups tend to consist of young people in search of their own identity and a group into which they could fit, rather than searching for a common meaning. There is however always some connection between the extreme group and the radicalized person. Van der Valk and Wagenaar (2010) mention, within this context, the mirror effect, where these youngsters connect with people whom they strongly want to resemble. It is clear that non-white people, for example, will not join extreme right wing groups. People stay within their 'environment'.

It seems clear that Flanders has a long tradition of groups or political parties which can be placed on the far right of the political spectrum. This article will focus on two categories within the European framework of Goodwin et al. (2012). Referring to the research question, the aim is to gain insight into extreme-right groups and factors relating to persons within these groups. This also excludes the category of political parties because they have already frequently been investigated in the political field and they tend to concentrate mostly upon a political ideology which strives to operate within legality. From a criminological point of view it is therefore more interesting to look at social movements and networks. In the following section, this article will highlight the factors associated with those individuals who are involved in extreme-right movements and networks.

4. Factors associated with involvement in extreme right wing groups

International qualitative research with former members of extreme groups in Scandinavia and Germany has given us insights into ideas related to right-wing extremism. The results of previous research have indicated that a minority of right-wing extremist offenders have broad ideological ideas. The majority of members are not politically active, but sympathize with a few ideas that are

typical of political parties with a right wing orientation (Huijgens, 2004). Although radicalised persons have no 'one size fits all' identity, scholars have tried to offer different potential explanations for the radicalisation process. External factors such as political, cultural and economic circumstances constitute our broad environment, but have no direct relationship with personal behaviour. General phenomena such as individualisation, modernisation, globalisation, and de-territorialisation of religion have certainly had an impact on mechanisms at a meso and micro level (Veldhuis and Bakker, 2007). This section concentrates solely on the explanations at these levels which are closer to the right-wing orientation of the individual and the extreme-right group.

4.1. Discontent

During the 1950s and 1960s there was a discussion within sociology about the causal interrelation between anomia, authoritarianism and ethnocentrism. McDill (1961) stated that these three dimensions formed what he called a 'negative weltanschauung', a negative worldview related to a form of discontent (Van de Velde and Pauwels, 2010). All three components of this worldview have already been shown to have high correlations with right-wing extremist attitudes.

The first traces of research on extremism in society began after the Second World War. The events of the war also had an impact on the way that scholars studied these subjects. Macro level approaches were replaced by research at the micro level, and research methods such as surveys found their place in the scientific world. In 1950, for instance, Adorno et al. developed a psychological explanation stating that individuals with an 'authoritarian personality' appear to have a strong connection with far right ideology (Adorno cited in Gielen, 2008). Severe punishment and the dominance of parents over their children during their upbringing means that children do not dare to criticize their parents, which leads to authoritarian and submissive characteristics in children. These people, from dissatisfaction with their own position which they experience as weakness, consider others as weak or immoral. They distinguish other social or ethnic groups as outside their own group (Gielen, 2008). People with an authoritarian personality are often supporters of nationalism and have ethnocentric attitudes. Sociological research by De Witte (1999), for example, suggested that authoritarian attitudes have a strong influence on biological racism, because these people fear everything that is different from their own community. Authoritarian people may also perceive homosexuals as threatening because they have a great belief in traditional role relationships, such as male superiority and female inferiority (Whitley and Ægisdóttir, 2000).

The concept of anomia owes its definition to the original concept of 'anomie' as described by Durkheim and Merton. These scholars referred to a state of society (macro) and 'the breakdown of those moral norms that limit desires and aspirations', called anomie (Deflem, 1989: 629). Srole

(1956) described the concept of 'anomia' as a state of mind expressed by individuals (micro) and 'a subjective feeling responding to societal dysfunctions' (Van de Velde and Pauwels, 2010: 112). According to Srole (1956) this concept of anomia contains five interrelated sub-dimensions (De Witte, 2001; Jacobs, Abts, Phalet, and Swyngedouw, 2001). Firstly, he mentioned the dimension of 'political powerlessness' referring to the discrepancy between the citizen and the political leaders. Secondly, 'social powerlessness' is defined as the view that social reality is chaotic and unpredictable. Thirdly, the anomic individual experiences a generalised socio-economic retrogression. The fourth dimension includes normlessness and meaninglessness regarding the institutionalised norms and values. Finally, Srole (1956) indicates that social isolation, in which social support in the immediate vicinity seems to disappear, is also related to anomia. Research has indicated that right-wing extremist ideology seems to correlate with the dimension of political powerlessness (De Groof, Debusscher, Derks, Elchardus, and TOR, 1999; Scheepers, Eisinga, and Felling, 1994). Previous research has indicated that this dimension of anomia strongly correlates with right-wing extremism attitudes (De Witte, 2001; Hagedoorn and Janssen, 1983). German research by Boehnke, Hagan and Merkens (1998), for instance, demonstrated that this concept has an indirect influence on right-wing extremist acts such as vandalism.

The final concept within the perspective of a 'negative worldview' is ethnocentrism, which includes two dimensions, as it refers to a positive attitude towards the 'in-group' and within that same context a related negative view of the 'out-group' (Hooghe and Reeskens, 2006; Jacobs et al., 2001; Meuleman and Billiet, 2005; Willems, 1995). Research has already indicated that ethnocentrism may lead to negative stereotypes, negative prejudices and negative behaviour towards minorities (Bircan, 2012). Tajfel and Turner (1974) indicate in their social identity theory that the shared experiences, values and norms of the group play a major role in the development of the social identity and status of the group in relation to its enemies. They refer to a psychological process that is involved in in-group socialisation and is related to the path that individuals take when entering a group (Guimond, 2000). Scheepers and Eisinga (1989) have built upon the theory of Tajfel and Turner, stating that there is not only a positive identification, but that the concept also contains a negative identification towards the 'out-group' (contra-identification). The 'in-/out-group' relationship allows people to break down the barriers to committing violent acts (Heitmeyer and Hagan, 2003; Van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010). Previous Flemish research has already shown that ethnocentric attitudes have a high profile within the NSV (De Witte, 2001). Through identification with the group, the group protects itself against all its enemies (Goodwin et al., 2012). Enemies can, however, by certain actions, undermine the value of the group, so that the group feels threatened in its social identity.

The research of van den Bos, Loseman and Doosje (2009) shows that youngsters who experience more of a threat to their group support right-wing ideology to a greater extent. Moreover, these youngsters are more positive towards right-wing extremist violence.

It is not surprising that individuals who are connected with extreme-right movements and networks hold as what McDill (1961) calls a 'negative worldview'. These extremist groups are already located at the far right side of 'mainstream' society and therefore hold anti-establishment ideology. Extremists are therefore seen as people who (1) fear everything that is different from their own society, (2) experience a large distance from political leaders and the political system and (3) have a strong identification with their own group.

4.2. Perceived injustice

Youngsters seem to experience a great deal of 'injustice' in their lives (Van den Bos et al., 2009). Research in the 1980s conducted by Eisinga indicates that people with a relatively low educational level are more likely to feel economically threatened and also are more likely to vote for right-wing extremism parties (Eisinga cited in Gielen, 2008). However, there is not much empirical evidence that confirms a relationship between social-economic background and extremism (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012). As well as absolute deprivation, Gurr (1970) distinguishes in his book, *Why Men Rebel*, the concept of relative deprivation where a person compares their own situation with the situations of others. In this concept the focus is not on absolute standards (such as educational level or being unemployed or poor), but a person's assessment of their own environment. Modern theories still make use of this concept of relative deprivation as an explanation for attitudes that correlate with right-wing extremism. Within their theoretical model Van den Bos et al. (2009) included the concept of 'perceived injustice', mentioning that feelings of relative deprivation and procedural injustice could lead to negative emotions towards society. These negative emotions can be expressed in the form of intended or actual use of violent and/or offensive behaviour. Two levels of relative deprivation can be distinguished, individual and collective deprivation. The first refers to an assessment of one's own situation as negative compared with that of other individuals. Within this deprivation, the individual can, however, still be motivated to change their situation. Youngsters may, on the other hand, have the idea that they are unlawfully excluded compared to other groups. This connects to a negative connotation with one's own group, which leads to social protest and collective action when certain goals are not achieved (Meertens and Prins, 2010). This perceived deprivation may lead to a stronger bond and positive thoughts within the group, allowing a greater degree of camaraderie and safety. In addition to the concept of deprivation, Van den Bos et al. (2009) also point to the importance of the concept of 'procedural injustice'. They show that people

are more susceptible to radicalisation when they feel that their group is mistreated. These negative emotions towards society have a strong impact on the radicalisation process of youngsters. Perceived unlawful treatment could lead to positive attitudes towards radical ideologies, perception of the authorities as less legitimate and growing ethnocentric and superiority sentiments.

4.2. Feelings of national superiority

As previously mentioned, Flemish nationalism has always had a close relationship with right-wing extremism. Nevertheless, this relationship can by no means be seen as a causal relationship. Pennings and Brants (1985) state in their research that right-wing extremism is characterised by strong anti-leftist opinion because of its supporters' rejection of multiculturalism and internationalism. Extreme-right wing groups are seeking instead to promote their own Flemish nationalistic in-group. This form of nationalism is often associated with feelings of superiority towards the Flemish people or the so-called superior race. Results from Scandinavian research into former members of extreme right wing groups have indicated that various extremists were convinced that they belonged to a superior group (Kimmel, 2007).

4.3. Thrill-seeking behaviour

Ethnographic research has suggested that ideological motivations are not the main reason for entering troublesome youth groups, but that new members are mostly motivated by opportunistic or criminal thrill-seeking motives (Bjørgo, 2002; Watts, 2001). People join as a reaction to personal frustration, searching for recognition, identity seeking and thrill seeking, and in search of adventure. Bjorgo (1997) mentions that some members of extreme groups are often socially frustrated youngsters who experience their own situation as discriminating and unjust. Together with perceptions of injustice, group threat or wishing to restore traditional values, these extremists may emerge to commit acts of violence. Bjørgo stated that this category is characterised by private problems, early school drop-outs and unemployment. These persons largely focus on and show willingness to commit violent acts (Van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010).

4.4. Age

Results from research within Scandinavia and Germany indicate that perpetrators of extreme-right violent acts are mostly between the ages of twelve and twenty-five (Bjørgo, 2002; Boehnke et al., 1998; McGowan, 2006). During this period the youngster is confronted with both bodily and mental changes. Research in Scandinavia, for instance, indicates that participation in neo-Nazi skinhead groups is often part of taking a first step towards adulthood (Kimmel, 2007). At the age of sixteen a

teenager is often confronted with situations which are newly legal, such as the use of alcohol, cigarettes and having sex. These legalisation ages vary across the different European countries, but form a certain reference point or symbolic 'rite of passage' (Hodkinson and Deicke, 2007). Secularisation, expansion of education and new styles of fashion and music in recent decades have ensured that identity and social status are no longer taken for granted. Efforts to create a personal profile within the contemporary modern social and economic system have a high risk of failure (Heitmeyer and Hagan, 2003; Hodkinson and Deicke, 2007). In comparison to elderly people, the mind-set of youngsters is often less nuanced and more divided into a strict separation of right and wrong. International ethnographic research has shown that the majority of members leave a group at the beginning of their twenties (Bjørgo, 1997; Gielen, 2008; Kimmel, 2007; Watts, 2001). However, if they remain in the group for a longer period, it is more likely that they will become strongly indoctrinated with right-wing extremist values such as xenophobia or the superiority of the Flemish nation or white race. Bjørgo (1997) indicates that there are some ideological activists within groups. They are long-term members of the group and often fulfil a leading role within the group.

4.5. Peer influences

Subcultural theories argue that youngsters experience uncertainty and injustice associated with their search for their own identity. In order to solve this, they create their own communities outside 'mainstream' society (Hodkinson and Deicke, 2007). The finding that right-wing extremist related crimes are often carried out by youngsters indicates that there are in fact things other than ideology (belonging to a group, sensation seeking etc.) among these groups. Social relations with friends are extremely important for the development of attitudes and engagement in deviant behaviour (Hawkins, 2000; Hill, Howell, Hawkins, and Battin-Pearson, 1999; Vernberg, Jacobs, and Hershberger, 1999). Sutherland (1947), for instance, states in his differential association theory that delinquency is actually a consequence of attitudes in favour of illegal acts. These attitudes have been seen as the mechanism by which delinquency is socially transmitted by way of social relations among peers. On the other hand, Warr and Stafford (1991) indicate in their study of data from the National Youth Survey, that peer attitudes certainly affect delinquency, but that the effect is actually smaller than the behaviour of peers. During early adolescence, the influence of delinquent peers plays an important role in the development of individual behaviour, since most delinquent behaviour is carried out in a group.

5. Conclusion

A good look at the history of right-wing groups in Flanders makes it clear that groups with a right-

wing extremist orientation have never actually been expelled from Flanders. They were, however, often wrapped in a broader Flemish nationalist framework. Goodwin et al. (2012) mention that right-wing extremist groups in Europe can be divided into four categories, where political parties, social movement, networks and lone wolves can be distinguished.

Extreme-right political parties are part of a long-lasting tradition within Flemish society, beginning even long before the Second World War. Repression after the war, however, caused a public absence of extreme right wing parties. At the beginning of the 1950s, however, Flemish nationalism started slowly but surely to recover the sympathy of Flemish nationalistically minded people. The creation of the political party 'Volksunie' was their political response to the severe repression after the war, with the aim of enforcing the right to amnesty. The party gradually gained more sympathy during the 1970s, but had to deal with internal problems between the left and right of the party. This eventually led to the separation of a radical right segment, which formed the extreme-right party 'Vlaams Blok'. From the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium this party began to obtain very good electoral results with a maximum of a quarter of the votes of the Flemish people in 2004. It is remarkable that both parties (i.e. Volksunie and Vlaams Blok) had to deal with the 'adaptability dilemma'. These political parties lived on the edge of legality in a search to find a balance between a strong profile without being criminalised or a more pragmatic course within the democratic system. The latter had the potential to create resentment among the more radical members, as was the case with the Volksunie. The party Vlaams Blok on the other hand was even banned in 2004 from political activity because of their extreme racist propaganda. This also points towards the instability of these groups and confirms the social genealogy theory that right-wing extremist groups arise not haphazardly, but usually from other right-wing (extremist) formations.

In addition to the political parties, social movements also had their impact on the political field by supporting political representatives. The Vlaamse Militanten Organisatie[39], for instance, had the initial goal of supporting the Volksunie through legal demonstrations. At the end of the seventies, the latter militant organization was strengthened by two new groups, namely the NSV and 'Voorpost', established in the seventies and forming an ideal organisation for the recruitment of youngsters and indoctrinating them into the Flemish or Diets ideology. Nevertheless, just as with political parties, these movements strove to operate legally in the eyes of the outside world by participating in legal demonstrations which could however end in civil unrest.

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[39] By this we mean the first and less radicalised VMO.

Flemish social and cultural networks caused even more civil unrest with their illegal actions and white power concerts. Flemish national democrats are predominantly found in groups such as VMO and NSA where they focus on an anti-democratic ideology. Racial revolutionary networks like Blood and Honour and Combat 18, on the other hand, focus more upon a neo-Nazi ideology propagated by white power music. However, though no serious acts of violence occurred during these activities, it was clear that these concerts with xenophobic and discriminatory expressions were unacceptable within society. The Vlaamse Militanten Orde[40] can also be placed under this latter category. After the change of name this group no longer solely focused on legal demonstrations, but became a more radical private militia.

In addition to the European model of Goodwin et al. (2012), Flanders has also had to deal with the actions of lone wolves. For example, the actions of Hans Van Themsche, who shot three non-white people, show that this category is also present on the far-right side. The latter category was excluded within this article, because the research primarily focuses on individuals within right-wing extremist groups.

The tragedy related to the Second World War, also caused a switch within research. Personal life events turned out to be a very interesting study of object. Concepts specific to individuals such as anomia, authoritarianism and ethnocentrism were therefore seen as the factors related to a form of discontent. These factors of personal dissatisfaction are also related to a right-wing orientation, in which it is seen that these people tend to experience much dissatisfaction with current asylum policies, society, government and the world in general. Such discontent is expressed only in regard to the 'enemies', the out-group. People within this area also tend to glorify their own values and the norms of their in-group, their ideological kin. The lack of identification with the out-group ensures that people may easily break down their barriers in order to commit illegal or even violent acts against others. Friends who support or show a willingness to commit violent acts within their own in-group could force others to take a further step towards illegality. Alongside such negative worldviews, these extremists often experience feelings of perceived (procedural) injustice and threats to their personal situation and/or the situation of their related group. Feelings of being mistreated by the government or governmental institutions can only increase the gap between the radical individual or group and 'mainstream' society. This growing gap only reconfirms the picture of others as the representation of everything that is bad and their own group as the only right way. They experience this way of living and their (Flemish and/or white) origin as superior.

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[40] After the change of name Vlaamse Militanten organisatie became the Vlaamse Militanten Orde.

As an exploratory study in the field of right-wing extremism, a few recommendations for further research may be suggested. First, it is clear that right-wing extremism is a complex social phenomenon that covers a large number of interrelated elements. Considering the dynamic construct of the concept, right-wing extremism is defined by two fixed elements, namely an ideology of inequality between people and an acceptance of violence. This can be supplemented by optional elements. Secondly, a distinction should be made between the categories of extreme-right groups in relation to the support and/or use of violence. Whilst political parties publicly strive to work using legal means and without the use of violence, social movements and certainly networks may hold a more radical profile where support for violence can be preached. At the white power concerts of Blood and Honour, for instance, diverse individuals performed the Hitler salute and spread words of hate towards Jews or immigrants. Flanders also had to deal with demonstrations of the VMO[41], Voorpost and NSV which often led to violent conflicts. Thirdly, further research in Flanders is needed in order to verify whether the characteristics are also applicable to the individuals within the Flemish social movements and networks. Through such theory-testing research we can gain insight into the attitudes of these Flemish militants in order to investigate their environment and their perspectives on violence.

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[41] Referring to both the Vlaamse Militanten Organisatie and the Vlaamse Militanten Orde.

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PART III: EXPLORATIVE PART

CHAPTER 2: EXPLORATIVE STUDY ON THE MECHANISMS OF MORAL SUPPORT FOR RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Published as:

De Waele, M. (2014), Political violence among Flemish adolescents. The impact of moral support for right-wing extremism, in Shapland, J., de Maillard, J., Farral, S., Groenemeyer, A. and Ponsaers, P. (Eds.), Desistance, social order and responses to crime. Today's security issues, Antwerpen, Maklu, 137-168.

Source: Krasnyi Collectif, Karim Brikci-Nigassa, anonymized.
Violent confrontation before meeting of Vlaams Belang on 3th of April 2014, Brussels.

"But he did not kill her, because in between dream and act
there are hindering laws and practical issues,
and even melancholy, that no one can explain
and that comes at night, when we all go to sleep"

-Willem Elsschot[42]-

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[42] English translation of poem by Willem Elsschot, 'the Marriage'. In appreciation of the contribution made by Dr. Jaap Van Donselaar

1. Introduction

International conflicts for political, religious or cultural reasons like the Arab spring and the Syrian uprising also leave their mark on European countries such as Belgium. Currently more than seventy Syria fighters have returned and are running the risk of prosecution. The discussion about the criminalization of these youngsters also sheds light on radical Islam groups like sharia 4 Belgium. The focus of both politics and academic research doesn't however solely need to concentrate on the danger of jihads. Academic research, especially after 9/11, seems to focus mainly on Muslim extremism and appears to worry less about the left-right polarization within their own society. Processes of globalization and mobilization of the last decades have, however, ensured that a wide diversity of people with different (religious) beliefs, cultures and identities characterize our current multi-cultural society. It also ensures that standing up for one's own identity and freedom of speech has an increasingly important role within modern society, such an important role that certain opinions or expressions may cross the line and disregard other fundamental rights (e.g. prohibition of discrimination[43]) within our liberal democracy. This contribution will therefore focus on personal morality and the effect of an aberrant right-wing morality on criminal behaviour. These attitudes favourable to rule breaking are seen within the light of classical theories such as differential association and social bonding theory, but also in contemporary influential theories, such as the situational action theory (SAT), as important causes of crime (Wikström, 2010) [44]. Different studies have found that morality is significantly related to offending (Bottoms, 2002; Hirschi, 1969; Wikström & Svensson, 2010; Antonaccio & Tittle, 2008) and Bottoms (2002:24) even stated that if real criminologist are to be true to their calling, they have to be interested in morality of individuals. Our contribution will therefore focus on Flemish youngsters' moral support towards right-wing extremism[45]. We have opted for Flemish youngsters between the age of 16 and 25 for two reasons. First, research in Scandinavia and Germany has indicated that perpetrators of right-wing extremist violent acts are mostly between the ages of 12 and 25 (Bjørgo, 2002; Boehnke, Hagan & Merkens, 1998; McGowan, 2006). To get a glance on the population of political offenders we have opted to focus on youngsters. Second, Flemish youngsters are rather neglected within the research on extreme political attitudes (some examples of research on Flemish youngsters: De Witte, Hooge, &

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[43] As mentioned in article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights

[44] Attitudes favourable to rule-breaking have already been studied by Sutherland (1947) and Farrington (1986) as causes of criminal behaviour. More recent research on the impact of morality by Wikström (2010) also includes these attitudes as moral rules of persons (i.e. what do persons perceive as right or wrong to do in a certain situation). In this article moral support for right-wing extremism is a an attitude favourable to rule breaking behaviour.

[45] Right-wing extremism is defined in this contribution by two basic elements: (1) an ideology of inequality between people as a nature given principle and (2) an acceptance of violence as a legitimate form of political action(De Waele, 2013: 17-19; based on Heitmeyer cited in Bjørgo, 1997, p.21)

Walgrave, 2000; Vettenburg, Elchardus, & Put, 2011). This research will therefore contribute to the current gap in literature on right-wing extremist sympathies among youngsters.

2. Integrated theoretical framework

More than 35 years ago Elliott, Ageton, and Canter (1979) argued that theories depending on a single variable (cf. strain, self-control, etc.) are only capable of explaining a small percentage of the variance in crime or criminal behaviour. It took scholars, however, until the late eighties to come up with important attempts to develop integrated theories of offending. Thornberry (1989) soon reflected on this development within criminological theory building and mentioned that theoretical integration is important to discover communalities in seemingly competing theories. Nevertheless, he also warns that scholars might run the risk of developing theoretical mush in which the fundamental purpose of theory constructions is neglected. Scholars who want to integrate theories focused, according to Thornberry, too much on reconciliation of the differences in spite of explaining a particular phenomenon. Our study therefore focusses on a conceptually integrated approach to explain the actual use of political violence. This means that we will include theoretical concepts of strain, procedural justice, social control and social learning to analyse their effect on the abovementioned dependent variable.

Within this contribution we will focus on a multifactorial social fact that requires an independent explanation, depending on a multi-disciplinary approach. Rather than testing competitive theories, we argue in light of Bernard and Snipes (1996) that different theories are conceived for making different, but not contradictory predictions. Furthermore, research has revealed that competitive testing of two or more theories to increase the knowledge about certain criminal behaviour did not lead to a wide array of test that yield conclusive results (Bernard & Stripes, 1996; Liska, Krohn & Messner, 1989). This study, therefore, wants to contribute to a more comprehensible and accurate model of political violence by investing in the complementarity of the different predictions of political violence. It is, however within this context, necessary that integration of different concepts should be built around an internal causal logic that makes a distinction between proximate and more distal factors (Bouhana and Wikström, 2010). The key message of an analytical approach to moral support for political violence is to take causation, human agency and the person-environment interaction more seriously to advance our knowledge about (political) violence, its causes and prevention. This has implications for the study of political violence: it is important to gain not only insights into what is referred to as the 'causes' but additionally to what can be referred to as 'the causes of the causes' of moral support and political violence (Wikström, 2010). Drawing on Jon Elster's (1989) proposal to explain social action around individuals' desires, beliefs and opportunities

/ constraints, we argue that an analytical sociological framework may offer an organizing paradigm to the study of political violence. Pauwels, Ponsaers, and Svensson (2010) and Wikström (2012) have argued for an analytical criminology, which shows very clear links to the analytical approach in sociology in order to provide more in-depth causal explanations of crime as social action. This contribution will give an explanation for both moral support for right-wing extremism and for the actual use of political violence depending on diverse theoretical concepts (see Figure 4), namely (1) social integration, (2) procedural justice and perceived legitimacy, (3) perceived discrimination, (4) personal attitudes and/or beliefs and (5) peer influences.
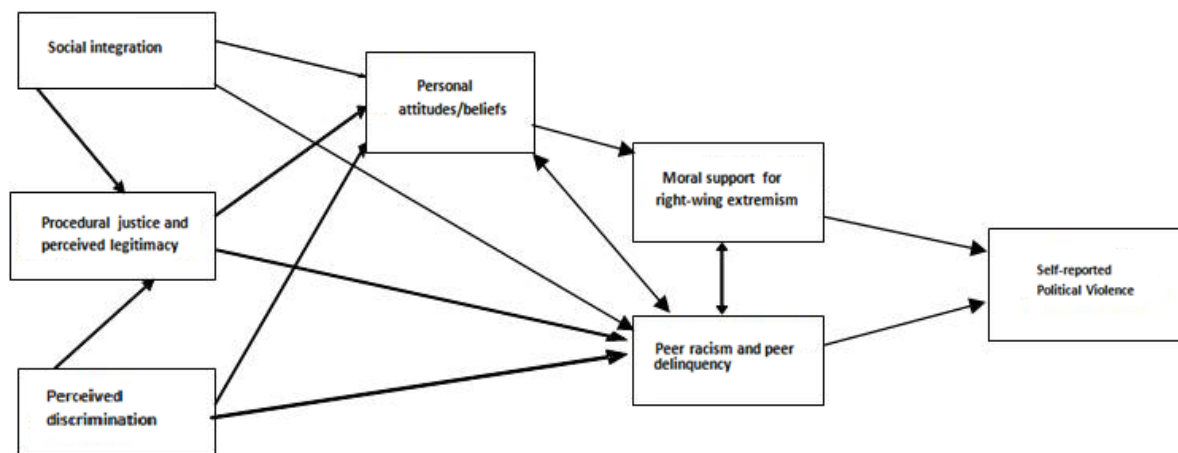
Figure 4: Conceptual integrated model of moral support for right-wing extremism

2.1. The role of social integration

Criminological research has a broad tradition regarding the impact of the social environment. Kornhauser (1960), for instance, already described in the sixties that people who lack integration with society search for substitute intermediary structures. Right-wing parties, movements and social or cultural networks could form a perfect replacement for broken bonds with parents, school or other institutions. Control theory has traditionally pointed to the importance of social bonds of the individual to society. In the late sixties, Hirschi (1969) pointed to the positive bonds of the individual with his/her parents, school and society as main reasons why people do not commit criminal acts. He stated that attachment to parents, commitment to school, involvement and conventional beliefs restrained individuals from committing delinquent acts. Although empirical tests of the social bond theory have sometimes used weak measures, there is evidence that the elements of the social bond are inversely related to the commitment of crimes (Kempf, 1993). Participation in a coherent social network built around social institutions such as family, school or individuals provides a means to enable people to live with critical situations (Boehnke, Hagan, & Merkens, 1998). Laub and Sampson (1993) noted that it is not the social bonds in themselves but the social control resulting from these

bonds that prevent youth from committing crimes. In that context, they state that the absence of informal social bonding such as parenting styles (supervision, warmth, consistent discipline), emotional attachment to parents in childhood, school attachment and attachment to peers and marital stability may have an important impact on the tendency to commit criminal acts (Laub & Sampson, 2005). Regarding this theoretical background, it is hypothesised that low levels of social integration (social bonds with parents, parental control, school bonds, social integration at school, family disadvantage and school performance) may increase the chances of morally supporting right-wing violent acts. Research by Hagan, Mekens and Boehnke (1995) on right-wing extremist orientation among East and West-German youth points out that insight into informal social control and school achievement can be extended beyond the explanation of crime to include extreme political orientation. They indicate that both parental control and school achievement effects a right-wing extremist orientation, through the intervening role of delinquent drift. Hopf, Riecker, Sanden-Marcus & Schmidt (1995) indicated that right-wing oriented people reported considerably more rejection by their parents and are often experiencing absence of loving personal attention. We, therefore, argue that social bonds with the family and school are important conditions that foster law-abiding through the individual's trust in the police as a legitimate element of law enforcement. Absence of social bonds, on the other hand, might foster extreme political beliefs and actual law-breaking behaviour.

2.2. Perceived personal and group discrimination as strains

Different theories have discussed the influence of injustice on criminal behaviour. One of the leading theories of injustice is Agnew's general theory of strain (GST)(2006), were perceptions of injustice are seen as possible stressors. The situation of strain or negative treatment by others leads to negative emotions, particularly anger and frustration, which necessitate coping strategies. In response to strain, one might be able to develop negative emotions (e.g., anger) towards other individuals or out groups (Heitmeyer, 2003; Van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010). GST identifies three main sources of strain: (1) situations that block positively valued goals (e.g., money, status, autonomy); (2) situations that remove positively valued stimuli (e.g., loss of spouse, theft of valued possessions); and (3) situations that produce negative stimuli (e.g., discrimination).

In their study on perceived discrimination Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam & Lalonde (1990) discussed the discrepancy between personal and group discrimination. It appeared that out of a variety of minority groups, individual members had consistently higher rates of group discrimination than discriminating feelings aimed at themselves. Taylor et al. argued that this discrepancy is due to

minimization of group members about their own personal experience with discrimination. Being called a racist name is an example of personal discrimination, whereas the belief that members of one's racial group are discriminated against in job interviews reflects an awareness of group discrimination. The study of Bourguignon, Seron, Yzerbyt & Herman (2006) on discrimination of African immigrants and Belgian women showed that perceived personal discrimination is negatively related to self-esteem. Such negative emotions could have deleterious consequences for an array of outcomes, including depression, anxiety disorders, high blood pressure, and other mental and physical health outcomes (Schnittker & McLeod, 2005; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Research has also turned out that racial discrimination may be seen as a stressor that leads to delinquency among minority groups (Simons, Chen, Stewart and Brody, 2003). It is therefore likely that other kinds of discrimination and injustice affect delinquency and problem behaviour in general and not only in minority groups. This study, therefore, hypothesis that perceived discrimination will increase the negative emotions (i.e. moral support for right-wing extremism) that contribute to political violence.

2.3. The role of legitimacy

According to the *procedural justice model*, confidence and compliance depend largely on perceptions of fairness (Tyler, 2006). *Perceived procedural justice* concerns the integrity and fairness of the justice system. It constitutes a firm and durable set of attitudes toward the legitimacy of the institution (Reisig & Lloyd, 2007). Trust in the police's procedural justice and legitimacy has previously been identified as an important factor that contributes to compliant behaviour. Procedural justice theory has stressed the importance of institutions treating people fairly: by treating people fairly, institutions contribute to the acceptance of norms. Therefore we consider the absence of trust and legitimacy to be potential causal factors in the explanation of political violence. Several scholars have found an association between perceptions of police legitimacy on the one hand and different forms of public support for the police such as the willingness to cooperate with them and abiding by the law on the other hand (Tyler, 2006; Reisig, Bratton, & Gertz, 2007). According to Tyler, police strategies have to centre attention on building public trust so they will be perceived as legitimate and thus voluntary obedience will be achieved (Hough, Jackson, Myhill & Quinton, 2010). Analogous to social bond theory, procedural justice theory examines why people conform to the law, instead of asking why people are motivated to break the law. Yet, unlike social bond theory, procedural justice theory accepts that controls are weakened by structural constraints. These constraints are situated at the institutional level: the police, the criminal justice system, and so on can treat people unfairly, which may have consequences for the committing of (violent) crimes. The fact that procedural justice theory recognises the importance of strains, especially strains caused by institutions of law

enforcement, makes it an important candidate for theoretical integration of social bond and strain theory.

2.4. Interpersonal attitudes and beliefs as mediators

Individual beliefs and attitudes are considered to be important mechanisms that intervene in the relationship between social integration, perceived legitimacy and perceived discrimination on the one hand and the moral support for right-wing extremism on the other hand. The present study highlights several belief systems and attitudes as intervening mechanisms: religious authoritarianism, low self-control, and anomia.

In 'The Authoritarian Personality', Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford (1950) originally conceptualised *authoritarianism* as a relatively stable intrapersonal trait which results from enduring intrapersonal conflicts rooted in childhood experiences of harsh education. It was believed that the authoritarian person would suppress his feelings of anger toward his father and family and would later on replace it by an idealization of the situation in which he grew up. Consequently, the potential fascist was seen as a weakling who wanted to overcompensate his weak position by an exaggerated admiration for power and character (Gielen, 2008; Linden, 2009). It is out of these feelings that fascist and/or authoritarian persons project their repressed aggression on people whom they perceive as weak or immoral, especially ethnic minorities, homosexuals and women (Adorno et al., 1950; Whitley & Ægisdóttir, 2000). As the concept of authoritarianism and its operationalization were subject to many criticisms, Altemeyer (1998) tried to provide a more concise and clear definition of the concept: he conceptualised authoritarianism as a value syndrome that means three distinct elements: (1) conventionalism, which is a high level of compliance with social norms; (2) an emphasis on hierarchy and submission to authority; and (3) a 'law and order' mentality which legitimises anger and aggression against those who deviate from the social norms. Altemeyer (1981, 1988) neglects the idea of authoritarianism as an intrapersonal characteristic. Instead, he believes that authoritarianism consists of a set of coherent attitudes which is learned from peer groups and similar socialising agents (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988). Scholars have been using the concept of authoritarianism for determining extreme-right voting and extreme-right (political) activism. De Witte (2006), for instance, stated that extreme-right voters are being attracted to the authoritarian image of these political parties because they provide simple, straightforward solutions to problems of insecurity and crime. This authoritarian vision is mostly rooted within a discourse of negative attitude towards immigrants. Within their research on ethnic prejudice, Elchardus and Siongers (2010) confirmed that authoritarianism has a strong effect on ethnocentrism (i.e. negative attitudes toward out-group) and

feelings of national identity. Cohn and Modecki (2007) even found that authoritarianism was related to adolescent offending through its impact on a measure of negative attitudes towards the criminal justice system.

Another individual-level mechanism that is related to violent behaviour in general and thus may also apply in the context of political violence is *low self-control*. Self-control is an inhibitory factor that has previously been described as the opportunity, the ability, to resist the drive for immediate gratification. Hirschi and Gottfredson (1990) conceptualised the absence of self-control as a multidimensional trait that consists in yielding to immediate gratification, in preference for simple tasks, risk-taking behaviour, impulsiveness, volatile temper, self-centeredness. Hirshi (2004, 543) redefined the concept as the *"tendency to consider the full range of potential costs of a particular act"*. Empirical studies have shown that the dimensions of risk-taking behaviour, impulsiveness and volatile temper have consistent effects on self-reported offending, including violent offending (Pratt & Cullen, 2000). The present study will provide insight into the possibility that low self-control explains individual differences in political violence. Previous qualitative studies have also pointed to the importance of thrill-seeking motives in violent behaviour committed by right-wing extremists (Bjørgo, 2002; Watts, 2001). This study, therefore, wants to investigate whether low self-control only has an impact on delinquent actions or also affects the willingness to undertake right-wing delinquent acts.

Srole (1956) described the concept of *anomia* as a state of mind expressed by individuals (micro) and as *'a subjective feeling responding to social dysfunctions'* (Van de Velde & Pauwels, 2010: 112). According to Srole, this concept of anomia contains five strongly interrelated sub-dimensions.[46] Research has indicated that right-wing extremist ideology mainly seems to correlate with the dimension of political powerlessness (Scheepers, Felling, & Peters, 1989; Vande Velde & Pauwels, 2010). De Witte (1999) has shown in its study about subtle racism that political powerlessness can have a strong effect on both authoritarianism and negative attitudes towards foreigners. Boehnke Hagan, and Merkens (1998) studied risk factors related to right-wing orientation and were among the first to empirically test the relationship between social bonds, anomia and right-wing extremist acts such as vandalism. In that, they indicated that anomic aspirations indirectly increase both a right-wing orientation as well as school vandalism/ violence through their effect on delinquent drift caused

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[46] First, he mentioned the dimension of 'political powerlessness', referring to the discrepancy between the citizen and the political leaders. Second, 'social powerlessness' is defined as the view that social reality is chaotic and unpredictable. Third, the anomic individual experiences general socio-economic retrogression. The fourth dimension includes normlessness and meaninglessness regarding institutionalised norms and values. The fifth and last dimension of anomia is social isolation, in which social support in the immediate vicinity seems to disappear.

by the time spent in the leisure settings that are exposed to delinquency and right-wing extremism (Hagan, Merkens, Boehnke, 1995). Subjective alienation or anomia owes its definition to the concept of 'anomie' as described by Merton and is an individual-level counterpart of the concept of anomie. These scholars referred to a state of society (macro) and '*the breakdown of those moral norms that limit desires and aspirations*', called anomie (Deflem, 1989: 629). As German studies have indicated that anomic aspirations tend to have effect on both moral support for right-wing extremism and school vandalism/ violence, we hypothesize that Flemish youth with high levels of anomie tend to have both high levels of moral support for right-wing extremism and political violence.

2.5. The role of exposure to peer racism and peer delinquency as situational component

The role of peers in the aetiology of juvenile delinquency and violence is especially prominent in social learning theories (Akers, 1998; Bruinsma, 1992; Warr, 2002) but highly contested in control theories (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1990; Kornhauser, 1978; Hirschi, 1969). Differential association with delinquent peers is one of the strongest predictors of self-reported delinquency, and therefore we expect that this also applies to the study of political violence. The association with racist and delinquent peers provides two specific contexts of exposure to settings in which the use of violence either in general or for political reasons is supported. They are not only important in social learning theory, however, but also routine-activities/lifestyle theory (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Pauwels & Svensson, 2013). From a routine activities/lifestyle perspective peers are important as they may be responsible for the situational instigation to commit an act of (political) violence. In the present study we take into account peer delinquency and peer racism as important indicators of exposure to criminogenic moral settings, shaping the individual's routines and thus their lifestyle (Ceccato & Wikström, 2012; Pauwels & Svensson, 2013). Racist peers are assumed to influence political violence by providing definitions and attitudes which are tolerant of violence and by reinforcing delinquent behaviour through group processes. Peers can provide these rewards to stimulate the law-violating behaviour of their friends in group processes (such as loyalty and prestige in extremist groups) *Peer racism* refers to racist ideology in the peer group. It is thought that racist attitudes of peers may affect one's own attitudes similarly to the way in which peer delinquency affects one's own delinquency.

2.6. Moral support for right-wing extremism

As mentioned above a multitude of studies have found that measures of antisocial moral beliefs are significantly related to offending (Bottoms 2002; Hirschi 1969; Stams, Brugman, Deković, Van Rosmalen, Van der Laan & Gibbs, 2006; Svensson, Pauwels, and Weerman 2010; Antonaccio and

Tittle 2008). Bouhana and Wikström (2010), for instance, mention within their research on *terrorism as moral action* that one has a certain tendency to commit violent acts. They consider that individuals with law relevant moral values will not see crime as an alternative action. So delinquent actions will only be seen as an alternative action when one has non-law relevant moral towards a certain action. Nevertheless, violent action does not solely depend on the moral support for certain delinquent activity and low self-control. According to Wikström's SAT, exposure to action relevant features of the setting, relevant opportunities, action relevant moral context and frictions also determine whether one proceeds to violent activity. Research on right-wing violence has mostly been focussing on 'soft' measures of right-wing extremism by measuring the acceptance or readiness to use right-wing violence. This study, however, allows us to study the effect of one's moral support for right-wing violent acts on the actual self-reported political violence.

3. Hypotheses

Bearing on these five theoretical concepts, we present the following conceptually integrated model for the explanation of moral support for right-wing extremism (see Figure 4). Within this model we make a clear distinction, based on integrated situational action theory of Boehanna and Wikström (2008), between proximate/direct ('causes') and more distal causes ('causes of the causes'). The aim of this exploratory study is to get an insight into the direct effects of the aforementioned theoretical concepts on both moral support for right-wing extremism and politically motivated violence. The strength of these effects will be tested by adding new variables to the multiple blockwise regression. The order of introducing the variables into the equation is defined by the theoretical model. Specifically we set out to test the following hypotheses:

H1: *Social integration is negatively related to moral support for right-wing extremism and the use of political violence*

H2: *Perceived personal discrimination and group discrimination are both positively related to moral support for right-wing extremism and political violence.*

H3: *Police procedural justice and police legitimacy are negatively related to moral support for right-wing extremism and political violence, ceteris paribus*

H4: *Personal beliefs/attitudes (moral support for violent extremism, religious authoritarianism, impulsiveness, thrill-seeking, and political powerlessness) are positively related to moral support for right-wing extremism and political violence, ceteris paribus*

H5: *Exposure to racist attitudes of peers and peer delinquency are positively related to moral support for right-wing extremism and political violence, ceteris paribus.*

4. Data

The present study is the largest study of moral support for political violence conducted in Belgium. The questionnaire consists of multiple scales derived from different theories and is especially designed to test theories of political violence. The study aims at gaining insight into the relationship between attitudes towards right-wing extremism and self-reported political violence among Belgian youths and young adults. Data were collected (1) through a large-scale web survey of adolescents and young adults and (2) a paper-and-pencil survey among youths in the third cycle of secondary education in Antwerp and Liège. The present study is limited to the analysis of Flemish youths who live in Flanders, have the Belgian nationality and have parents with the Belgian nationality. The web survey consists of a self-administered questionnaire that was conducted online. Access was gained through a link to the survey's web page on Facebook. This survey mode requires almost no organisation, does not cause disruption to work time and leaves the decision to participate entirely to the students. Posters were placed visibly at different strategic places that attract a huge number of the target population. Additionally flyers were distributed in buildings of virtually all faculties of universities and university colleges and pamphlets were distributed among the students. To increase the response to the web survey, an e-mail invitation was sent to the central faculties and administration services for students with a request to circulate the web link to the questionnaire Facebook page. This method proved to be very effective. An important drawback is that the researcher cannot completely monitor the processes of response selection, i.e. s/he cannot verify the conditions under which the questionnaire is completed (the presence of others, anonymity,...). The motivation to participate in the survey is left entirely to the respondent. The fact that the questionnaire web page was visible on Facebook meant that a high number of respondents could be reached in a very short time. The web survey was online between September 2012 and December 2012 and the response was huge, with more than 3,200 respondents in Flanders. An additional paper-and-pencil survey was conducted in Antwerp in order to reach youths in compulsory secondary education. A total of 34 schools in Antwerp were contacted. In six out of these 34 schools a paper-and-pencil survey was conducted; the other schools allowed us to distribute flyers for the online survey. Important draw-backs for this method are the impossibility to monitor response selection, self-selection, and under-coverage (internet availability). It should however be mentioned that these issues (preparedness to answer survey questions, willingness to report) are central to the more traditional survey modes as well. This contribution focusses on the relation between moral

support and political violence. It is therefore fair to state that this web survey is contributing more to the explanation of the causes than to epidemiological or prevalence studies that try to gain insight into the prevalence of attitudes and behaviour. We do need to bear in mind that this approach only works if enough participants are willing to report aberrant moral support for right-wing extremism and admit violent behaviour. Of the 2879 participants, 74.6 % indicated to have low to medium levels of moral support for right-wing extremism. This means that 544 (25.4 percent) respondents showed high levels of moral support for right-wing extremism. Regarding violent activity, 123 individuals (5.3 percent) reported political violence. These might not be seen as representative for the Flemish population because of the formerly mentioned bias of the population. They do, however, allow us to make to make reliable statistical claims about this group. Still we have to consider the influence of our method on our population. Web surveys seem to be most popular among students and less among working youth. This is also noticeable among our populations, by which 95.2% have indicated to be students.

5. Measurement of constructs

In the present study numerous scale constructs were used to assess the relationship between the exogenous variables, mediators and self-reported political violence. Because of the extensive nature of the concepts that were used in the present empirical study, we chose to present a general overview of the scale constructs in the present paragraph and refer readers to the appendix 4 for a more detailed overview of the scales. We included question wording and additional factor loadings per item for each scale (see Appendix 4).

5.1. Dependent variables

Moral support for right-wing extremist violence refers to one's tolerance of the use of violence by right-wing extremist groups. This concept can be compared to Sutherland's definitions favourable to the violations of law and is thus a personal attitude that is favourable to the use of violence. A number of studies have found that the concept of antisocial values is significantly related to the committing of acts of crime (Bottoms, 2002; Chapple, McQuillan & Berdahl, 2005; Hirschi, 1969; Stams et al., 2006; Wikström & Svensson, 2010; Antonaccio & Tittle, 2008). *Support for right-wing extremism* was measured using items from a scale that measures attitudes towards the use of violence by right-wing extremists in order to reach political goals. Cronbach's alpha for this variable is 0.89. The items were taken from a larger scale used in a study by Van den Bos, Loseman, and Doosje (2010).

We measured *Political violence* by asking if respondents had ever "written a political message or political graffiti on a wall," "participated in a banned political action," "thrown stones at the police during a demonstration," "vandalised anything in the street or at the public transport stations" "damaged someone's property," or "set something on fire" because of their political or religious beliefs. The scale turned out to be internal consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. The scale is translated from Swedish and was originally used in a youth survey conducted by the Swedish Council for Crime Prevention (see Brottsförebyggande rådet och Säkerhetspolisen, 2009).

5.2. Independent variables

Independent variables were drawn from a number of theories that are well-known in the field of criminology. *Control theory* (CT) argues that social integration in a number of domains (attachment and commitment to school, attachment to parents, parental supervision, family structure, and academic success versus failure) restrains an individual from committing acts of crime. An overall social integration scale was constructed based on subscales that refer to school performance (never repeated a class/at least once repeated a class), parental disadvantage (no unemployment in family/ at least one parent unemployed), family situation (living with both parents/ other family situation), social bonds with parents (alpha: 0.84), social control by parents (alpha: 0.82), school social bonds (alpha: 0.59), and school integration (alpha: 0.80). The original scales were used to create risk scores and these risk scores (1= upper risk quartile) were then collapsed into a general scale that measures the number of risk factors. To study the impact of variables derived from procedural justice theory, the survey included items that measure trust in police procedural justice (alpha: 0.84), moral alignment (alpha: 0.77) and obedience to the police (alpha: 0.77) Police legitimacy comprises the right to govern and the recognition of that right by citizens. Both moral alignment (shared values between the public and the police) and obedience to the police are key dimensions of the concept of the legitimacy of the police and these scales were collapsed into one general legitimacy scale. These scales have previously been used in the European Social Survey (Hough, Jackson & Bradford, 2013) and have been additionally tested in a large-scale student survey in Belgium (Van Damme & Pauwels, 2013). The difference between police procedural justice and legitimacy is that the justice variable corresponds to the overall picture that people have about how citizens are treated by the police. The variable legitimacy, on the other hand, concentrates on the extent to which people perceive the police as legitimate.

Agnew's general strain theory (GST) argues that negative feelings may cause strain which can pressure adolescents into crime (by stimulating negative emotions and violent beliefs). *Perceived*

personal discrimination refers to the feelings that one is discriminated by other groups in society. Alpha is 0.89. *Perceived group discrimination* refers to discrimination of the group to which the respondent belongs. Cronbach's alpha is 0.95. The items were originally used in a Dutch survey of attitudes towards extremism conducted by Van den Bos et al., 2009)

In the present study a number of *attitudes/ beliefs that intervene* in the relationship between perceived injustice, perceived procedural justice and social integration are studied. These intervening mechanisms are religious authoritarianism, self-control, perceived political powerlessness and moral support for right-wing extremism. *Religious authoritarianism* was measured by using following seven items on a Cronbach's alpha is 0.89. Religious authoritarianism refers to extreme dogmatic views with regard to religion. This scale is based on Altemeyer's authoritarianism scale. Two dimensions of Hirschi and Gottfredson's (1990) conceptualisation of self-control were used in the present study: impulsiveness (the tendency to seek immediate gratification) and thrill-seeking behaviour (the tendency to seek adventure and kicks). The items for the two scales were taken from the attitudinal self-control scale used by Bursik and Grasmick (1993). *Anomia* (perceived political powerlessness) is derived from Srole's (1956) study of personal alienation. Cronbach's alpha is 0.85. This scale has been frequently used in the European Social Survey. Sutherland's differential association theory (DAT) and Akers's social learning theory (SL) can easily be applied to the study of political violence: from both perspectives it is argued that political violence is learned through differential associations with attitudes favourable to violence and racism. *Peer racism* measures racist behaviour of peers. This scale is adapted from Van den Bos et al. (2010). Cronbach's alpha is 0.68. *Peer delinquency* refers to respondents' perception of law-breaking behaviour by their best friends. This scale originates from the PADS+ study (Ceccato & Wikström, 2012). Cronbach's alpha is 0.70. All scale constructs were standardized before analysis, in order to make their effects comparable.

5.3. Demographic background variables and additional control variables

Finally some additional statistical controls were used in the multivariate analyses. *Age* (16-25yrs.) was a metric variable that expressed the respondent's age in years at the time of the survey. The survey was conducted in 2012 and respondents were recoded into three age categories for the analyses. The first were youngsters under the age of 18 (25.1%). The middle category was aged between 19 and 21 (63.4%) and the last category was above 22 (11.5%). *Gender* was coded one for females (64.1%) and one for males (35.9%). *Religious attendance* was measured on a five-point scale, i.e. attending a religious service once a weak (1.3%), once a month (3.3%), once a half year (22.1 %), once a year (35.8%) and never (37.6%). *Importance of religion* was measured by asking the

respondent how important religion was on a seven-point scale. We recoded the scale to very important (3.1%), average importance (28.2%) and not important (68.7%).

6. Analysis plan

Given the extreme skewness of the dependent variables, the original scale of moral support for right-wing extremism was divided into three equal parts, i.e. low, medium and high support for right-wing violence. Therefore logistic regression analysis was used to gain insight into the independent effects of the available set of independent variables (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). Given the fact that the dependent variable was a trichotomy, we originally used the ordinal regression equation technique. The test of parallel lines however turned out to be significant which means that the assumption that the effect parameters were identical for every subgroup of the dependent variables was incorrect (Pauwels, 2012). To this end, we opted to use the technique of the multinomial regression equation. The latter can be seen as a generalisation of the binary logit model (Retherford & Choe, 1993). As the dependent variables were separated into low, medium and high levels of moral support for right-wing extremism, we chose to compare the medium and high levels with the reference category (i.e. low moral support). The results will however only highlight the high extremist scores. The second depend variable (i.e. political violence) is highly skewed because a majority of the respondents answered negative on the question of self-reported political violence. We therefore opted to perform a binary logistic regression to estimate the effect of a series of independent variables on the odds of having committed political violence versus not having committed political violence.

7. Results

7.1. Moral support for right-wing extremism

The results of the blockwise multinomial logistic regression analyses of moral support for right-wing extremism are presented in Table 2. We assessed to what extent different theoretical frameworks are related to moral support. Within this regression model we present the net effects of indicators of a series of demographic background variables (model 1), independent of variables derived from procedural justice theory (model 2), perceived discrimination variables (model 3) and personal beliefs / attitudes (model 4). Finally, measures of peer deviance were added to model 5. This procedure was chosen to gain insight into the relationship between these independent socio-psychological measures and moral support for right-wing extremism, more specifically support for right-wing violence. Further, we also tried to identify potential mediators of the relationship between the independent variables and political violence.

In model 1 we tested the relationship between the control variables and moral support. As mentioned earlier, it was the intention of this research to analyse the relation between this theoretical frameworks and moral support. In order to facilitate reliable statements about this relationship, however, the independent variables need to be controlled by certain demographical background variables. In this research, we took five control variables into account, namely gender, age, attendance at religious services, the importance of religion and the social integration of people. If we look at the group with the highest levels of moral support, a positive relation can be found between gender (OR: 1.877), age and importance of religion. Regarding the age of the respondents, it is noticeable that with reference to the older category (>22), the younger the respondents are, the stronger their relation with moral support. A slightly positive significant relation can be seen (OR: 1.861) for those who attach great importance to religion. In contrast, a strong negative direct effect was found for social integration (OR: 1.197) on moral support for right-wing extremism. Nagelkerke R square is 5.80%. In model 2 procedural justice variables (i.e. procedural justice by police and perceived legitimacy) were added as explanatory variables. Legitimacy, in contrast to police procedural justice, has a significant negative effect (OR: 0.857) on moral support. Model 3 reveals that perceived personal discrimination, in contrast to group discrimination, has a strong positive direct effect (OR: 1.676) on moral support. It seems that the moral inclination to breach moral rules and use political violence is mostly related to the personal perceived injustice. Model 4 presents the personal attitudes related to moral support. It is noticeable that all personal attitudes/beliefs, i.e. religious authoritarianism (OR: 1.986), impulsiveness (OR: 1.412), thrill-seeking behaviour (OR: 1.18) and anomia (OR: 1.641) have a positive effect.

In model 5 peer influences were studied by entering peer racism and peer delinquency in the analysis. This model shows that there is a positive significant relationship between having racist peers and moral support for right-wing extremism (OR: 1.767). Overall we see a positive direct effect of gender (OR: 1.661), age (1.818), perceived personal discrimination (OR: 1.32), religious authoritarianism (OR: 1.939), impulsiveness (OR: 1.289) thrill-seeking behaviour (OR: 1.144), anomia (OR: 1.569) and racist peers (OR: 1.767).

Dependent variable: High moral support for right-wing extremism		Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5
Control						
gender (ref. female)		1.877***	1.842***	1.719***	1.977***	1.661***
Age (ref. >22)	<18	2.428***	3.381***	3.194***	1.943***	1.818**
	19-22	1.182**	1.591**	1.541**	1.274	1.236
Attending rel. serv. (ref.cat. 'never')	≥ 1 a weak	0.299	0.645	0.666	0.337*	0.349*
	once a month	0.362	0.644	0.64	0.55	0.557
	twice a year	0.747	1.028	1.021	1.1	1.066
	once a year	0.985	1.249*	1.254*	1.198	1.199
Importance of religion (ref.cat. 'not important')	average	0.93	1.18	1.174	0.887	0.875
	high	1.077*	1.885*	1.513	0.78	0.876
Social integration		0.835***	0.873**	0.936	1.037	1.067
Procedural Justice						
Police Procedural justice			0.94	0.99	1.079	1.084
Perceived legitimacy			0.857**	0.928	0.966	0.95
Discrimination						
Perceived personal discrimination				1.676***	1.4***	1.32**
Perceived group discrimination				0.991	1	1.022
Personal attitudes						
Religious authoritarianism					1.986***	1.939***
Impulsiveness					1.412***	1.289***
Thrill seeking behaviour					1.18**	1.144*
Anomia					1.641***	1.569***
Peer influences						
Positive attitudes towards racism						1.767***
Peer delinquency						1.036
Model evaluation						
Pseudo R² (Nagelkerke)		**5.80%**	**6.60%**	**10.60%**	**23.50%**	**27.30%**
Predicted		62.10%	62.80%	62.70%	66.10%	66.90%

Table 2: Multinomial logistic regression analysis of moral support for right-wing extremism on independent variables. *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

7.2. Impact of moral support for right-wing extremism on the use of violence

The previous analyses have shown that there is support for our conceptual model. However, we still need to find some confirmation for our hypothesis regarding the fact that a right-wing morality or the moral support for right-wing extremism has a significant effect on the use of violence.

Dependent variable: Political violence		Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5
Control						
gender (ref. female)		3.820***	3.311***	3.190***	3.110***	2.759***
Age (ref. >22)	<18	3.369**	3.219**	2.701*	1.549	1.45
	19-22	1.484	1.427	1.265	1.09	1.063
Attending rel. serv. (ref.cat. 'never')	≥ 1 a weak	2.669	2.089	1.904	1.645	1.539
	1 a month	0.974	1.019	1.004	0.961	1.083
	2 a year	0.647	0.719	0.69	0.77	0.83
	1 a year	1.007	1.064	1.095	0.985	1.022
Importance of religion (ref.cat. 'not important')	average	1.531	1.481	1.437	1.257	1.26
	high	3.892**	3.327*	2.863	2.201	2.582
Social integration		0.572***	0.638***	0.683***	0.707**	0.737**
Procedural Justice						
Police Procedural justice			0.926	0.955	1.015	1.009
Perceived legitimacy			0.642***	0.705*	0.764*	0.782*
Discrimination						
Perceived personal discrimination				1.028	0.861	0.84
Perceived group discrimination				1.445*	1.426*	1.453*
Personal attitudes						
Religious authoritarianism					1.344**	1.285*
Impulsiveness					1.722***	1.699***
Thrill seeking behaviour					1	0.916
Anomia					1.016	1.023
Moral support for right wing extremism					1.367**	1.308**
Peer influences						
Positive attitudes tow. racism						1.136
Peer delinquency						1.246**
Model evaluatie						
Pseudo R² (Nagelkerke)		**18.5%**	**21.9%**	**24.4%**	**31.6%**	**32.8%**
-2 LL		769.71	742.49	724.16	663.80	654.20

Table 3: Binary logistic regression analysis of political violence

Table 3 shows the results of the blockwise binomial logistic regression analyses of self-reported political violence. The only difference in the blockwise addition of the variables is that model 4 (personal beliefs) will also add moral support as an independent variable, to test the effect of moral support on self-reported delinquency.

Model 1 indicates that young boys under the age of 18 and persons with a high importance for religion have a bigger chance on committing political violence. As stated by Wikström (2010) these

background variables are no real causes for the explanation of crime. Background variables such as age, gender and religious importance can rather be seen a markers or symptoms of perpetrators of political violence. Looking at causes we see that the effect of social integration (OR: 0.572) confirms our hypothesis due to the fact that the latter variable has a negative significant effect on political violence. The procedural justice variables added in model 2 provide little change to the model evaluation. The abovementioned effects of the control variables and social integration remain and police procedural justice do not significantly influence the dependent variable. Perceived legitimacy towards police, on the other hand, has a negative significant effect (OR: 0.642) on political violence. The addition of discrimination variables in model 3 seems to have a decreasing effect on legitimacy and social integration, although both variables remain significantly negative. No effect is measured by discrimination on an individual level. The group dimension (OR: 1.445), on the other hand, has a positive significant effect on the use of violence. A large increase in explanatory power is gained in model 4 by the inclusion of personal attitudes. In contrast to the effects on moral support, no effect is measured of both anomia and thrill seeking behaviour. Religious authoritarianism (OR: 1.344), impulsiveness (OR: 1.722) and moral support for right-wing extremism have positive significant effect on political violence. The last model is extended by the influences of peers. While there is a positive significant effect by peer delinquency (OR: 1.246), racist attitudes by peers do not indicate any significant effect.

8. Conclusion and discussion

The present study was built on an integrated model that captured complementary elements of Social Bond Theory, Procedural Justice Theory and General Strain Theory to the variation of political violence. The key message of our analyses is that both control and motivational factors are related to the explanation of moral support for right-wing extremism and the actual use of political violent acts. Social integration is negatively related to moral support for right-wing violence which is consistent with social bond theory. It supports our assumption that social bonds with family and school are important condition for law-abiding/breaking attitudes. These results support the study of Hagan, Merkens and Boehnke (1998) who pointed to the importance of family and school, both as a context for social control and for social bonding. The same negative effect is measured by perceived police legitimacy. This may not come as a surprise, given that people with an extreme-right worldview tend to challenge all democratic institutions. Also in accordance with the theoretical framework, the results show a positive relation to perceived discrimination, though it appears that it is mostly the individual negative treatment by others that influences the moral support for right-wing extremism.

Legitimacy, social integration and perceived discrimination, thus, have strong effects on both dependent variables, independently of each other. The fact that these three different exogenous sources of individual variation in commitment to political violence have independent effects on moral support for right-wing extremism supports the idea of the complexity of the latter phenomenon: one theoretical framework is insufficient to provide adequate insight into the individual differences in moral support. These three related variables could be seen as the 'causes of the causes' of political violence. Discriminating feelings and social (des)integration provide a certain breeding ground for anger, frustration and a negative worldview. Therefore it is presumed that effects of these three exogenous variables could be partially mediated by personal beliefs/attitudes and peer influence. Further research is, however, needed to test the causal relations between these more remote causes of political violence and moral support.

On the level of the personal beliefs/ attitudes we found some very interesting results. First, it appears that religious authoritarianism is strongly related to moral support. Our findings suggest that there might even be a (hidden or neglected) layer of Christian fundamentalism in Flanders which is related to violent extremism. This finding is important as the debate on extremism seems to stress fundamentalism as a problem exclusively related to Islamic extremism. Second, our assumption that some effects are mediated by moral support seems to be strengthened by the measured effects of anomia. The results show that political powerlessness influences the support for violent activities related to right-wing extremism, but do not tend to have a significant direct impact on political violence. Third, moral support is related to lower levels of self-control. We studied the effect of thrill-seeking behaviour and impulsiveness separately, and found that both dimensions of self-control are related to moral support. Impulsiveness is, however, somewhat more strongly related to both moral support and the effective use of violence. This finding suggests that there is a difference between the two dimensions of low self-control. Violent activities are not so much determined by people in search for thrills. It is rather the impulsiveness of individuals that tend to engage in violence towards persons.

Fourth, we see that this study has indicated a positive direct effect of moral support for right-wing extremism on political violence. However, moral support does not lead solely to the use of political violence. The latter outcome rather depends on a multitude of factors, where one's tendency to commit violent acts also depends on the exposure to action relevant features (Bouhana and Wikström, 2010).

This brings us, finally, to another remarkable distinction, namely that between peer influences. We found that racist peers have a positive effect on moral support, whereas delinquent peers do not. It seems that persons who are exposed to pro-racist attitudes of peers tend to have a stronger moral support for right-wing extremist acts. When looking for own violent behaviour the roles are changing. It appears that not the racist attitudes, but rather the illegal behaviour of peers surrounding the individual prevails in the choice to commit violent acts. One must be very careful in interpreting the effect of peer delinquency, as recent research suggests that traditional measures of peer delinquency may be partially caused by the projection of one's own behaviour on the behaviour of peers (Young, Rebellon, Barnes & Weerman, 2013). It is unclear to what extent respondents who have committed some political crimes have overestimated the criminal behaviour of their peers.

The present study has several limitations which must be taken into account. First of all, this theoretical framework can account for only part of the variation in youth participation in violence and is thus incomplete. We have identified direct effects of social bonds, perceived police legitimacy, and perceived discrimination on violence that cannot be accounted for by exposure to peer delinquency, religious authoritarianism, or moral support for extremist violence. Future research should focus on additional mechanisms that translate social bonds, perceived legitimacy, and perceived discrimination into violence. This could be done using a social psychology approach. The model can easily be extended, however, by explicitly linking macro-structural properties to social bonds, procedural justice, and perceived discrimination. Second, we need to bear in mind that not all relevant variables were taken into account in the questionnaire. Although social learning theory was included in this research, we only included social learning processes of peers. Parental attitudes towards conservatism or extremism, for instance, were not included. Future research on this topic could examine the impact of the latter social learning process. A next logical step would be to test this model further as a full structural equation model, allowing us to establish relationships between the independent variables. Third, our theoretical model has been applied to explain individual differences in violence committed by adolescents and young adults. Future research should investigate to what extent the model also applies to adults. It is unclear to what extent the integrated framework is able to explain all types of violence in all age groups and across all settings. Looking at our sample we see that 95 percent of our respondents are students. The question remains whether this theoretical model is also applicable to young people who quit school. Fourth, the study is cross-sectional and therefore it is possible to determine the direction of the relationships because causes and effects are measured simultaneously. Fifth, blockwise regression does not allow to uncover the relationships between the independent variables. Structural equation modelling is

needed to determine the causal structure between all variables. Finally, we need to take into account that our results are based on a large-scale web survey and it is unclear to what extent they are biased (through undercoverage and self-selection) by this method of data collection.

Our findings are, however, consistent with a small but growing number of studies that empirically document the importance of procedural justice and discrimination as sources of political violence. Research into the domain of violence is important not only from an aetiological point of view, but also within the framework of prevention of violence, or, as Bouhana and Wikström (2010) have argued, if we cannot properly explain why and how people come to commit acts of violent extremism, we have no base from which to develop effective preventative strategies.

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CHAPTER 3: EXPLORATIVE STUDY ON THE PATHWAYS OF PARTICIPATION IN RIGHT-WING DISRUPTIVE GROUPS

Accepted for publication as:

De Waele, M. and Pauwels, L. (2015), Why do Flemish youth participate in right-wing disruptive groups? in Klein, M. and Esbensen F. (Eds.), *Gang Transitions and Transformations in the International Context*. London: Springer publications [47]

Our enemies are ruthlessly trying to destroy us, our Aryan spirit and our Aryan race itself in order that the tyranny they have created will endure. We must now fight a holy war in order to win-in order to pass on to others our message of freedom and our desire to live among our own kind in accordance with our natural and healthy Aryan customs

-Anonymous writer in name of Blood and Honour magazine number 'Whatever it takes'-

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[47] Maarten De Waele (MDW) wrote the initial draft of the literature review and ran the SEM path analyses in Mplus. Lieven Pauwels (LP) commented en adjusted some aspects of the literature review and path analyses. LP recommended the student to use modification indices and to ran some additional test with Mplus. MDW conducted additional test and wrote the results and discussion section. LP checked the analysis and commented on the overall version. After the initial submission, MDW and LP tackled the minor remarks of the anonymous peer review.

1. Introduction

There has been a long-standing tradition for gang research in criminological inquiries (Decker and Weerman 2005; Klein and Maxson 2006; Esbensen and Maxson 2012). While studies of troublesome youth groups in Belgium are still limited in comparison to other countries in Europe such as The Netherlands (Esbensen and Weerman 2005), there has been a mounting interest in the topic in Belgium (Pauwels, et al., 2011; Pauwels & Svensson, 2013; Van Hellemont, 2013; Vettenburg et al., 2013). Research on participation in right-wing extremist groups, however, has attracted relatively little attention in Belgium. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by presenting and testing an integrative model that is capable of explaining why extreme-right young people participate in disruptive groups (henceforth, RWD group participation).

Qualitative studies on neo-Nazi gangs and racist groups have supplied us with detailed information concerning motives for entry (Bjørgo, 2002; Sela-Shayovitz, 2012). This current contribution adopts a different perspective and analyses the role of a series of social-psychological mechanisms in prompting participation in right-wing extremist groups. Previously, Bouhana and Wikström (2010) argued that studies of terrorism and violent extremism suffer from a poor understanding of causal mechanisms and lack integration of explanatory levels. Bouhana and Wikström were not alone with this criticism, as a comparable statement was made earlier by Mudde (2002: 10) on the state of studies on right-wing extremism:[48] this lack of knowledge "[…] has been partly caused by the fact that the term is not only used for scientific purposes but also for political purposes." The social construction of this politically-sensitive concept is shaped by multiple actors, including politicians, academics and the media. Although this elusive concept has been a subject of interesting debate and calls for clarification from a criminological viewpoint, the present study is not aimed at extending the debate on how right-wing extremism can and should be best defined: our focus is on presenting and validating an integrated model which combines elements from social psychological and sociological traditions that have previously been applied to the study of violent youth groups. Previously, Decker and Pyrooz (2015) argued that much can be learned from 100 years of gang research when we test theories of violent extremism. This study can thus be seen as a modest attempt in this regard. By integrating fragmented insight, we hope to stimulate theoretical elaborations and the development of more comprehensive perspectives that can throw new light on preventing or tackling the problem of right-wing extremist violence.

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[48] For more detail on the definition of right-wing extremism, see e.g., De Waele, M. (2013)

In this paper, we first describe the integrated framework that has been used. Then, we introduce the sample, outline the methods and explain the data. Next, we present the results of path analyses and finally, discuss the findings.

2. An integrative mechanism-based approach

In criminology the idea that a single theoretical framework does not provide a salient explanation for offending and for participation in troublesome youth groups has long been acknowledged (Bernard & Snipes, 1996). Elliott, Ageton, and Canter (1979) indicated as early as in the late 70's that theoretical reliance on variables from one theory (cf. strain, self-control, etc.) for the explanation of offending has limited results in view of the moderate level of explanatory power for crime or criminal behavior. Furthermore, competitive testing of theories on criminal behavior did not yield conclusive results (Bernard & Snipes, 1996; Liska, Krohn & Messner, 1989). Nevertheless, theoretical integration does not come without restrictions. Some scholars have warned about creating theoretical mush by which the fundamental purpose of theory constructions is neglected (Thornberry, 1989). Besides, an integrative approach requires discovering communalities in seemingly competing theories rather than focusing on differences. Therefore, integration should build on an internal causal logic to explain phenomena, by which theoretical causation, human agency, and the person-environment interaction should be duly considered to advance knowledge, detect causes and take preventive actions. This implies that it is important to gain insights into both the proximate and the remote causes of RWD group participation (Wikström, 2010).
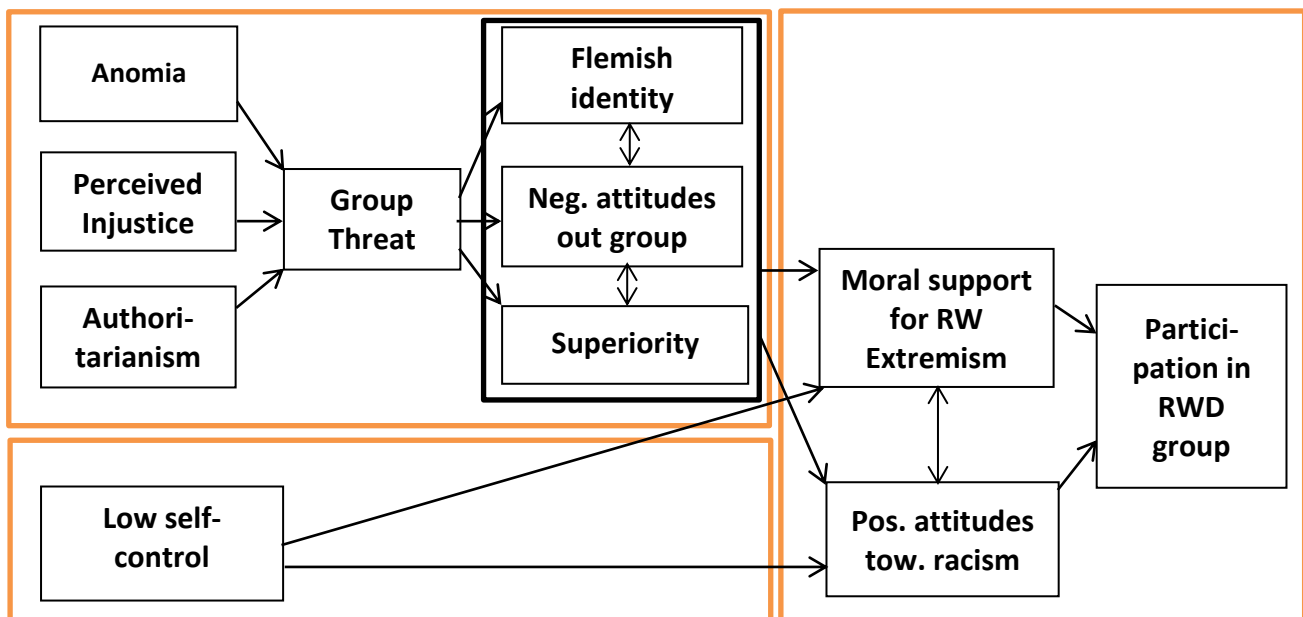
Figure 5: Conceptual model for the explanation of right-wing disruptive participation

Integrated theories have also been used in gang research (e.g. Thornberry, et al. 2003; Esbensen et al., 2010; Alleyne and Wood 2011). The conceptual framework presented in figure 5 elaborates on the existing models and integrates concepts from three different traditions: (1) perceived injustice / relative deprivation literature, (2) self-control, and (3) moral beliefs favourable to right-wing extremism and racist peer exposure.

We assert that perceived injustice, anomia and authoritarianism (the strain initiated model) on the one hand, and thrill-seeking behavior (low self-control) on the other, have consequences for RWD group participation through different routes. Social psychological mechanisms that represent discontent affect RWD group participation through a series of psychological mechanisms that have been identified in social identity theory, while thrill-seeking behavior affects the membership through the development of attitudes favourable to right-wing extremism and through the selection of racist peers. Both racist peers and moral support for RW extremism are considered proximate causes of RWD group participation.

2.1. Strain initiated model

Since the 1960s, studies of violent left-wing extremism have pointed to the effect of root causes which criminologists would label as strains. Within the field of criminology, it has especially been considered the merit of Agnew's general strain theory to stress the importance of perceived injustice. Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) argues that negative feelings may cause strain, which can pressure adolescents into crime (by stimulating negative emotions and violent beliefs) (Agnew 2006; 2011). In this respect, crime is a coping strategy. Subjective strains, such as perceived injustice and feelings of political powerlessness (anomia[49]) may act as stressors that may trigger one's involvement in disruptive groups. The latter feelings of strain, together with authoritarianism, can pave the way for developing moral support for the use of violence by right-wing extremist groups (henceforth, moral support for right-wing extremism). In the next paragraphs we explain how we conceive each of these strain-related concepts.

Perceived injustice and anomia as strain

Perceived injustice corresponds to the feeling of being treated unfairly as a result of the perception that the person itself or the group to which one belongs ('reference group', see Merton, 1957) are unjustly disadvantaged compared with other individuals or groups in society. This term thus

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[49] 'Anomie' was originally defined by Durkheim and Merton as a state of society (macro) and "*the breakdown of moral norms that limit desires and aspirations*" (Deflem, 1989: 629). It was later modified by Srole (1956), who described 'anomia' as a state of mind expressed by individuals with "*a subjective feeling responding to societal dysfunctions*" (Van de Velde and Pauwels, 2010: 112).

highlights the subjective perception and experience of it (Van den Bos et al. 2009). Runciman (1966) first introduced the term of relative deprivation in his study on attitudes of social inequality and his work inspired Gurr (1970) to operationalize the concept as a state of deprivation by which persons compare their own situation with that of others. Gurr particularly deserves the credit for translating this idea into the realm of studies of political violence. From the social psychological standpoint, Van den Bos et al. (2009) indicated in their study of Dutch native and immigrant youths that (the perception of) negative treatment indirectly leads to negative emotions towards out groups, and that societal disconnectedness or anomia was a very important mediator.

As regards social disconnection, Srole (1956) suggested that people with high scores on the anomia scale tend to feel helpless, alone, powerless and alienated from society. Previous studies have found that especially the dimension of political powerlessness[50] strongly correlates with support for right-wing ideology, and, indirectly, influences right-wing extremist violence and vandalism (Hagedoorn and Janssen, 1983; Boehnke Hagan and Merkens, 1998; De Groof Debusscher Derks Elchardus 1999; De Witte 2001; De Waele 2014). In addition, based on a large-scale Belgian survey conducted in Flanders and Wallonia, Pauwels et al. (2014) demonstrated that perceived injustice and alienation were strong predictors for moral support for left-wing extremisms, religious extremism, right-wing extremism, and political violence. A more detailed analysis of the Flemish data revealed that the direct effect of perceived injustice declined when the researcher controlled for other direct effects (De Waele 2014). However, the above mentioned studies were not designed to study the effects of social identity related concepts (e.g. group threat, Flemish identity, negative attitudes towards out-groups and superiority feelings). The present study therefore extends previous research and aims to advance the understanding of the negative consequences of perceived injustice. We hypothesize that the effect of perceived injustice and anomia on RWD group participation is indirect, mediated by the effect of group threat.

Authoritarianism as an exogenous variable

Besides perceived injustice, the strain-initiated model also incorporates authoritarianism as one of the first explanations for right-wing participation. Developed by Adorno and associates (1950) in their seminal work on 'The Authoritarian Personality', the concept of authoritarianism was a relatively stable intrapersonal trait which results from enduring intrapersonal conflicts rooted in

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[50] Srole indicated that the concept of anomia contains five strongly interrelated sub-dimensions. In this paper the concept is limited to the dimension of political powerlessness, given the political-related nature of the dependent variable. Furthermore, previous research in this field has indicated that right-wing extremist ideology mainly seems to correlate with this dimension (Scheepers Felling and Peters 1989; Vande Velde and Pauwels 2010; De Witte 1999). For more information on this topic see De Waele (2013: 28).

childhood experiences of harsh education. Adorno et al. argued that authoritarians consider others - out of dissatisfaction with their own position - as weak or immoral (Adorno et al., 1950; Whitley & Ægisdóttir, 2000). In contrast, Altemeyer (1998) disagreed with that view and instead rejected the idea of authoritarianism as a personality characteristic. He rather believed that authoritarianism consists of a set of coherent attitudes learned from peer groups and similar socialising agents (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988). Altemeyer thus reconceptualised authoritarianism as a value syndrome that comprises three distinct elements: (1) conventionalism, which is a high level of compliance with social norms; (2) an emphasis on hierarchy and submission to authority; and (3) a 'law and order' mentality which legitimizes anger and aggression against those who deviate from social norms. Authoritarians are often supporters of nationalism and share ethnocentric attitudes. Research even indicated that people with high scores for authoritarianism are showing displays of biological racism and fear things that differ from the traditional role relationship, such as homosexuality (De Witte, 1999). Therefore, it is plausible to assume that people having high levels of authoritarianism are more likely to exhibit higher levels of group threat.

Perceived group threat as mediator of perceived strains

Researchers often indicate the strong effects of group threat on forming prejudice against out-groups. Manifestations of prejudice are explained as a coping mechanism to establish group privilege (Blumer, 1958). This point is especially stressed in the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan et al. 2000). The theory was modelled after Pettigrew's theory of intergroup contact (Pettigrew 1988) and focuses on the conditions that lead to perceptions of threat, which in turn have an impact on attitudes and behavior (Wagner, 2008). In their experiment on threatening information about ethnic out-groups, Cohrs and Ibler (2009) demonstrated that high levels of right-wing authoritarian (RWA) feelings increased the likelihood of prejudicial attitudes (Heylen and Pauwels 2015). Perceptions of threat may endorse people to engage in violent activities to reduce feelings of anxiety and threat. Three dimensions of perceived threat have been identified in the literature, i.e. symbolic threat, realistic threat and intergroup anxiety (Stephan et al., 2002, Doosje et al., 2013). The first refers to the threat to the respondent's culture, which in our study is a threat to the Flemish/Belgian culture. Realistic threat, on the other hand, indicates the economic conditions and the influence of immigrant groups. Quillian (1995) maintained in his study that while threat is perceived by individuals, but the effect of prejudice is largely experienced in the context of intergroup relations between dominant and subordinate social groups. On the basis of these opinions, we hypothesize that perceived group threat has an indirect effect on participation in right-wing extremist groups through its effect on ethnocentrism and feelings of superiority.

Ethnocentrism and Superiority as consequences of perceived group threat

Integrated threat theory provides the reason for which perceived threat results in bias-motivated behavior: it may foster ethnocentrism and feelings of superiority. In their research, Pennings and Brants (1985) stated that right-wing extremism is characterized by strong contra-identification with leftist opinion, multiculturalism and internationalism. In contrast, as indicated by the historical roots of Flemish nationalism, right-wing militancy is mostly connected with strong Flemish identity. Nevertheless, this relationship can by no means be seen as a causal relationship[51]. Tajfel and Turner (1974) worked on the influence of social identity and contended that shared experiences, values and norms of the group are crucial for the development of social identity and status of the group in relation to enemies. They referred to the social-psychological process of in-group socialization when individuals enter a certain group. On the other hand, not only a positive identification, but also a negative identification with the 'out-group' (contra-identification) needs to be mentioned (Scheepers and Eisinga 1989; Hogg and Terry 2000; Hooghe and Reeskens 2006). This "in-/out-group" relation allows people to break down the barriers of illegality (Heitmeyer, 2003; Van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010). Applied to the current study, in-group identification was measured as a strong identification with the Flemish people. In contrast, the contra-identification was derived from the negative attitudes towards the out-group (immigrants in general, Muslims and Jews). It is hypothesized in our study that both aspects of ethnocentrism have an impact on moral support for right-wing extremism and the exposure to racist comments by peers (henceforth, peer racism).

Connected to the sense of strong Flemish in-group identification is the feeling of superiority among the Flemish people or the so-called superior race. Results from Scandinavian research on former members of extreme right-wing groups have indicated that various extremists were convinced that they belonged to a superior group (Kimmel, 2007). These feelings of superiority can have an effect on positive attitudes towards the use of violence against Muslims (Van den Bos et al 2009). Therefore, we hypothesize that superiority has a positive significant effect on moral support. Likewise, we assume that people with higher feelings of superiority run a bigger risk of being exposed to racist comments by peers. This assumption is supported by the social selection effect worded as 'birds of a feather flock together' of Glueck (1950), who said that people join groups in which they can recognize themselves. Van der Valk and Wagenaar (2010) illustrated this as the mirror effect with which individuals connect with people who have similarities.

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[51] Although there is considerable overlap between Flemish nationalism and support for a right-wing ideology, it is clear that the one does not imply the other. For instance, currently Flanders deals with some right-wing national solidarist groups, who tend to focus less on the subnational context but more on geopolitical nationalist issues. Vice versa, there are also Flemish nationalist movements, without political orientation, aiming to gather a broad Flemish public regarding linguistic and cultural matters.

2.2. Low self-control initiated model

While the perceived injustice model has caught considerable interest, the role of self-control is by no means less important. Despite the fact that self-control theory was not originally developed to explain individual differences in right-wing extremist groups, Hirschi and Gottfredson (1990) claimed their theory was a general theory of crime. The central assumption in Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime is that low self-control increases the risk of offending, as well as other deviant and imprudent behaviours. A large number of studies have tested this proposition and empirical research has shown that low self-control is associated with offending among different samples (e.g. youth, college students, adults, males vs. females, criminals) and in different designs (Burton et al. 1998; Pratt & Cullen, 2000). More recently, attention has been paid to the concept of self-control in the explanation of troublesome youth group involvement (Kissner & Pyrooz, 2009; Esbensen & Weerman, 2005; Hope & Damphousse, 2002). Therefore, it is important to test empirically whether thrill-seeking behavior is an additional mechanism that exerts an independent effect on RWD group participation. Ethnographic studies have revealed that new members are often motivated by their own opportunistic or thrill-seeking motives (Bjørgo, 2002; Watts, 2001). Although ideological motivations are important in understanding acts of politically motivated violence, ideology is not always crucial for entering extremist groups. The search for adventure, i.e. thrill-seeking behavior, is one of the reasons frequently mentioned by (former) members of extremist groups. A pure self-control-based explanation would consider the lack of self-control to be the ultimate cause of right-wing extremist group involvement. Moral support for right-wing extremism, exposure to racist peers and participation in a right-wing extremist group would therefore all be common consequences of low self-control.

2.3. Proximate causes

Moral support for right-wing extremism

The concept of moral support for right-wing extremism refers to the individual's favourable attitude towards the use of violence by right-wing extremist groups. Radicalization is often defined as the process whereby individuals acquire a moral support for violence used in a means-to-an-ends fashion. Moral support for right-wing extremist violence constitutes a personal moral belief that favours the use of violence by right-wing extremist groups. In the perceived injustice induced model, moral support for violence is seen as the key mechanism by which perceived injustice, group threat, authoritarianism, and anomia, feelings of superiority, Flemish identity and ethnocentrism are translated into RWD group participation. A multitude of studies have found that measures of

antisocial moral beliefs are positively related to offending and gang membership, while those of prosocial moral beliefs are negatively related to offending and troublesome youth groups involvement (Esbensen et al. 2010; Hill et al 1999; Svensson, Pauwels, and Weerman 2010; Weerman and Esbensen 2005) and political violence and vandalism (Hagan, Merkens and Boehnke, 1995; Pauwels and De Waele, 2014).

<u>Exposure to racist peers</u>

The role of peers is especially prominent in social learning theories (Akers, 1998; Bruinsma, 1992; Warr, 2002) but highly contested in control theories (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1990; Kornhauser, 1978; Hirschi, 1969). Peer delinquency is one of the strongest predictors of self-reported delinquency, and therefore, it is expected to help explain right-wing extremist group participation. Differential association with racist groups provides two specific contexts of exposure to settings in which the use of violence is supported or considered as a means of justifying the ideological goals of the group. Differential associations are important not only in social learning theory, but also in routine-activities/lifestyle theory (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Wikström and Butterworth, 2006; Pauwels & Svensson, 2013). Reasoned from a routine activities/lifestyle perspective, racist peers are important as they may be responsible for the situational instigation to commit an act of (politically motivated) violence or become involved in a right-wing extremist group. In the present study we take into account exposure to peer racism as an important indicator of exposure to criminogenic moral settings, which shapes the individual's routines and risky lifestyle. In short, we summarize the hypotheses that are derived from the integrated approach as outlined in figure 5: the conceptual model

H1: Group threat is determined by authoritarianism, anomia and perceived injustice;

H2: Flemish identity, ethnocentrism and superiority are determined by group threat;

H3: Moral support for right-wing extremism is determined by superiority, Flemish identity, ethnocentrism and thrill-seeking behavior;

H4: Exposure to racist peers is directly related to thrill-seeking behavior, ethnocentrism and moral support for right-wing extremism;

H5: RWD group participation is directly related to moral support for right-wing extremism, exposure to racist peers and thrill-seeking behavior.

3. Data and method

3.1. Method and sample

Between December 2012 and April 2013 a self-administered questionnaire was made available online. In this study, we used a convenience sample of students. The basic idea was that as students differ on political attitudes and behavior, we would need to find a way that guaranteed maximum variation in terms of right-wing extremism. Therefore, a link to the online questionnaire was placed on different web pages for targeting extreme-right youngsters on chat rooms of Neo-Nazi groups and extreme-right Flemish nationalist student organizations. In addition, the survey was spread through social media and online forums of universities and university college students. It is therefore not surprising that our survey contains an overrepresentation of students in the population (94.7%), which implies that our sample is not representative, even for the population among adolescents and young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. However, we do not claim to make any generalization about the prevalence of RWD group participation. On the contrary, our aim is to analyse the proximate and remote causes of RW extremist group participation. This sampling approach allowed us to have a good grasp of the extreme-right population in Flanders. We were aware of other ways to possibly gain an insight into the political preferences of the Belgian population, as some representative surveys on socio-cultural attitudes are drawn every second year in Flanders. However, those surveys were not targeted at discovering RWD group participation. Overall, we were able to receive filled-out online questionnaires from 723 respondents. The majority of them was female (64.3%), student (94.7%) and was either Catholic (45.6%) or atheist (47.3%). In terms of the place of origin, the majority was from the eastern part of Flanders (64 %), with 34.7 and 29.3% of the respondents coming from the provinces of Limburg and Antwerp, respectively. The remaining respondents lived in Flemish Brabant and the Brussels Capital (10.1%), East Flanders (16.7%) and West Flanders (9.3%).

While the survey may not be seen as a nationally representative survey, its goal was to test a general theory, and therefore the sample can be seen as a test of the theory, particularly based on Popper's idea of developing potential falsifications for theories (Popper, 1963; Opp, 2009). This idea holds that if a theory is to be seen as a general theory, it should be applicable in different sub samples. However, we are trying to falsify the hypotheses stated above (Henrich et al 2010). Although an online survey has some advantages, it cannot ensure that researchers completely monitor the processes of response selection and that the condition of the questionnaire are verified completely (e.g. presence of others and anonymity). As a result, the motivation to participate is left entirely to the respondent, and therefore, data could have a selection bias. In this regard, it is important to

recognize the impossibility of monitoring response selection, self-selection, and under-coverage (internet availability). However, it should be mentioned that these drawbacks, including preparedness to answer survey questions, the willingness to report and too limited information on the participants, are also *discernible* in the more traditional survey modes (Dillman, 1978). Yet, we remain confident about the advantages of the online survey method: it is low in cost and is also easily analysed with the aid of software programs, such as SPSS and Mplus. Furthermore, web surveys are especially useful for explanatory research in studying the causes and correlates rather than the prevalence of the phenomenon for lack of randomization. Despite this restriction the percentage (4.1 %) is very similar to the percentages found in studies on political preferences (Maxson and Klein, 1995)

3.2. Measurement of constructs

In the present study numerous scale constructs were used to assess the relation between exogenous variables, mediators and dependent variables. In view of the extensive nature of concepts employed, a brief overview of the scale constructs is presented below. A more detailed overview of the scales can be found in Appendix 5, in which question wording, descriptives and the measure of scale reliability, i.e. Chronbach's alpha is included. All exogenous and independent constructs achieve an acceptable reliability coefficient of .62 to .92.

Dependent variable

Since there are no existing scales available on RWD group participation, we attempted to develop a measure of RWD group participation on the basis of the idea of funneling, which is paramount to the Eurogang definition of street gang membership. The Eurogang group provides a consensus definition which constitutes a gang as any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity (Weerman et al 2009; Esbensen and Maxson 2012)*.* Therefore, this contribution adopts aspects of the latter definition, and applies it to the context of right-wing extremism.

Our aim was to follow the Eurogang definition as closely as possible. We made a distinction between the essential elements of a gang definition (gang definers) and specific characteristics of the gang (gang descriptors) (Esbensen and Maxson 2012, 6). With regard to the disruptive group, we chose to work with parts of the Eurogang definition. The duration and size of the non-informal group were determined, and in accordance with the Eurogang definition, the group was restrained to respondents who were members of a group containing 3 or more persons for longer than three months (Weerman and Decker 2005). This approach made it feasible to identify 'active individuals'

with an acceptable minimum time period. However, different from the Eurogang definition, we did not focus on street-orientation. Although some overlap may exist between street gangs and right-wing extremist groups, the focus of the present study is on detecting young adults who can be placed on the far-right, and who are affiliated to right-wing social movements or subcultural networks which combine the political ideology with illegal acts. Despite the fact that many right-wing groups often partake in (illegal) political protest and occasionally "hang around" on the street, they cannot be seen as RWD group participants.

As mentioned earlier, RWD group participation was measured with the funneling technique. This means that we combined answers to one filter question and four follow-up questions to measure self-reported group participation, further narrowing the answers down with an additional question about right wing orientation and other group characteristics. The leading question was "do you consider yourself to be a member of a group of friends (not an organization or association) that frequently meets and considers itself as a group?" (1 = yes, 0 = no). The four follow-up questions were: (1) How long have you been a member of the group? (2) How big is your group? (3) Do members of this group get involved in fights with other cliques? (4) Are members of this group involved in law breaking? The last two questions were dichotomies (1 = yes, 0 = no). Respondents were categorized as involved in a 'disruptive group' if they answered affirmatively to the leading question, (1) where members for more than three months and (2) the group existed out of more than 3 persons. Regarding question 3 and 4, it was sufficient to score positive on one of the two follow-up questions. To the introductory question (n = 295), 40.8 % of the total sample answered positively, while (n= 70), 9.7% answered positively to the follow-up questions. In addition, the members were asked to position themselves on a left (0) to right (7) scale. From the latter group 30 respondents (4.1 %) positioned themselves at the extreme right spectrum (6-7). This latter group of 30 respondents is consequently regarded as disruptive group members with an extreme-right attitude, henceforth referred to as RWD group participation. Although we are aware of the fact that the operationalization does not necessarily make these groups extremist, we assume the group's acceptance of extreme-right members is an indication of tolerance towards the extreme-right ideology.

Exogenous and independent variables

Perceived injustice refers to the extent to which respondents feel they have been treated unjustly by others. In this survey, the others are not linked to specific persons (see Appendix 5). The questions are intended to measure the overall perception of both personal and group discrimination, and personal negative treatment. The combined scale measures items on personal discrimination, group

discrimination and personal treatment and has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.62. *Perceived personal discrimination* indicates one's feelings of being discriminated against in relation to other people in society. An example of the latter scale is "It makes me angry when I think of how I am treated in comparison to others". *Perceived group discrimination* refers to discrimination against the group to which the respondent belongs. Group discrimination is measured through questions, such as: "if I compare the group to which I belong with other groups in Belgium, I think we are treated unfairly". The last dimension of the perceived injustice scale is *Personal treatment* which raises questions about every day treatment of people by others, such as: "I think that if I have complaints about anything, that, normally, people listen to my opinion." The items were originally used in a Dutch survey of attitudes towards extremism conducted by Van den Bos et al. (2009) and validated in a study of Pauwels and Schils (2014).

In the present study, a number of *attitudes/beliefs* that intervene in the relationship with perceived injustice are studied. These intervening mechanisms are authoritarianism, anomia, ethnocentrism, Flemish identity, superiority and thrill seeking behavior. *Authoritarianism* was measured by using 11 items based on the three elements of Altemeyer's authoritarianism scale (conventionalism, hierarchy and submission, and law and order mentality). One example question to measure the construct is: "can people be divided into two distinct classes: the weak and the strong?"

As indicated in the theoretical section, *Ethnocentrism* was measured on the basis of both in-group, i.e. Flemish identity, and out-group orientation, i.e. negative attitude towards the out-group - in this case, migrants. The scale was derived from the research of Van den Bos et al. (2009) and the Social Cohesion in Flanders (SCIF) questionnaire (for more information see Appendix 5). Since Flemish identity is operationalized as a strong form of Flemish preference, we asked questions assessing how important it was for them to be Flemish or how proud they were to be Flemish. In contrast to the in-group questions, more negative attitudes were measured regarding the out-group, operationalized here as immigrants. For instance, one negative statement was: "Immigrants come here to exploit our social security". A few positive statements were also included in this category, for example, "we should welcome the immigrants who want to live in Belgium"(R[52]).

Derived from Srole's (1956) study of personal alienation, *anomia* was operationalized on the dimension of perceived political powerlessness. Questions were phrased as to the extent to which respondent (dis)believed that, for instance, there is no sense in voting, because the parties do what they want to do anyway.

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[52] The R indicates that the scores for this item were reversed

In the present study we also incorporated Hirschi and Gottfredson's (1990) conceptualization of self-control through the notion of thrill-seeking behavior (the tendency to seek adventure and kicks). The items were taken from the attitudinal self-control scale used by Bursik and Grasmick (1993). This scale has been frequently used in many delinquency studies (Pratt and Cullen 2000). The tendency to seek adventure was operationalized by statements, such as: "I sometimes find it exciting to do things that could be dangerous".

Personal superiority was operationalized as the fact that someone perceives him/herself as better than others. For instance, respondents were asked how strongly they (dis)agreed with the statement: "when people think differently, they are less valuable to me". *Perceived group threat* was derived also from the study of Van den Bos et al. (2009) and adapted to the Flemish context. It was measured regarding three out-groups, i.e. the immigrant in general, Muslims and Jews. However, the three categories of out-groups strongly correlated. The construct was operationalized in items probing to what extent respondents agreed that "Belgians do not get the respect that they deserve from Jews" or the reversed question "In Belgium, people from other countries have the right to be more important than Belgians".

Moral support for right-wing extremism was measured through items from a scale that measures attitudes towards the use of violence by right-wing extremists in order to reach political goals. The items were taken from a larger scale used in a study by Van den Bos et al. (2009). Three questions were asked, and one of them stated: "to what extent do you understand that some right-wing extremists use violence against the people who have the power in Belgium?" *Positive attitudes towards racism* was measured via the scale from Van den Bos et al. (2009). The exposure was operationalized as the near environment of the respondents. Therefore, questions were asked relating to the extent to which 'do you think your friends would think it is OK if …' One of these questions was related to violence, i.e. "do you think your friends would think it is OK if you would fight with an immigrant without any reason?" More information can be found in Appendix 5.

3.3. Analysis plan

To test the integrated theoretical model, a series of structural equation models were run in order to identify the direct and indirect effects. As the dependent variables are dichotomous, a logistic path model was tested using Mplus (Muthén and Muthén 2012). The results are shown in figure 6 in which only the direct effects of the beset fitting model are presented. These direct effects between the scale variables are standardized regression coefficients (β). All independent variables were

standardized before entering the equation. The direct relationships between independent variables (i.e. Moral support for RWE and positive attitudes towards racism) and the dependent variable (i.e. RWD group participation) are log-odds and should be interpreted as the one standard deviation change in the log-odds of the dependent variable, as the independent variables change with one standard deviation.

4. Results

The results are shown in two ways. At first, a detailed overview of the specific direct effects on the independent variables and the dependent variable is given in table 4. In addition, figure 6 displays the best fitting model to explain RWD group participation. Starting with the effects of the exogenous variables, it is noted that perceived injustice (β = 0.129), anomia (β = 0.241), and authoritarianism (β = 0.515) have strong effect on group threat. In total, the model indicates R^2 of 0.433, indicating that 43.3 % of the total variation of group threat is explained by the model. Although it was proposed in the conceptual model that anomia and authoritarianism were seen as exogenous variables, results also indicated positive direct effects towards the other exogenous variables. However, the coefficient of determination R^2 is much lower for both perceived injustice (R^2=0.048), anomia (R^2=0.095) and authoritarianism (R^2=0.071). A similar R^2 is measured for the fourth exogenous variable, i.e. thrill seeking behavior. In line with our conceptual model, the results confirm that our exogenous variables are to a large extent explained by factors that are not included in this model.

Another confirmation of our proposed conceptual model is found in regard to the outcome variables of group threat (i.e. Flemish identity, negative attitudes towards out group and superiority). Results confirm that group threat can be seen as a common cause of the three variables. Regarding the interrelationship of the three outcome variables, a strong relationship is found between the measures of ethnocentrism, i.e. Flemish identity (identification) and negative attitudes towards out-group (contra-identification). Furthermore, both measures indicate a reasonable to good fit of the coefficient of determination R^2, respectively 0.317 and 0.618. No positive significant relationship was found between superiority and ethnocentrism. Negative significant effects were measured from both anomia (β= -0.189) and superiority (β = 0.086) towards Flemish identity.

Independent variables(x)	Perceived injustice	Anomia	Authoritarianism	Group threat	Flemish identity	Negative attitudes tow. out group	Superiority	Thrill seeking behavior	Positive attitudes towards racism	Moral support for RWE	Participation in RWD group
	β	β	β	B	β	β	β	β	B	β	Log Odds
Perc. Injust.	---	0.174***	0.082**	0.129***	-0.058	0.028	0.088*	0.114**	0.095**	0.034	**0.001**
Anomia	0.183***	---	0.238***	0.241***	-0.189***	0.101***	0.005	0.052	-0.022	0.010	**-0.137**
Authoritarianism	0.084*	0.232***	---	0.515***	0.346***	0.209***	0.195***	0.053	0.077	-0.035	**0.043**
Group threat	---	---	---	---	0.102*	0.488***	0.160**	0.129*	0.089	0.060	**0.103**
Flemish ident.	---	---	---	---	---	0.189***	-0.111**	0.055	-0.022	0.005	**0.119**
Negative att. tow. out-group	---	---	---	---	0.339***	---	0.032	-0.185**	0.272***	0.227***	**0.127**
Superiority	---	---	---	---	-0.086**	0.014	---	0.054	0.002	0.140***	**0.032**
TSB	---	---	---	---	0.039	-0.074**	0.050	---	0.114**	0.171***	**0.150**
Pos. att. tow. racism	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	0.108**	**0.239**
Moral support for RWE	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	0.103**	---	**0.049**
R-square	0.048	0.095	0.071	0.433	0.317	0.618	0.119	0.042	0.234	0.197	**0.270**

Table 4: Specific direct effects of the independent variables. All effects are standardized beta coefficients, except for the direct effect on RWD membership

The proximate causes (moral support for RWE and positive attitudes to racism by peers) were strongly influenced by the negative attitudes towards out-group. The effect of the latter variable on positive attitudes towards racism (β =0.272) and moral support for RWE (β = 0.227) was positive. In contrast, no positive effect was found from this form of contra-identification towards the dependent variable of RWD group participation. A similar common cause of the proximate causes was found in the exogenous variable of thrill seeking behavior. Regarding the effects on the dependent variable, only one significant effect was measured, namely that of positive attitudes towards racism (β =0.239).

Figure 6 presents the best fitting model of the SEM path analysis (RMSEA=0.062). As hypothesized, anomia (β= 0.214), perceived injustice (β= 0.191) and authoritarianism (β= 0.667) are directly related to perceived group threat. Perceived injustice and anomia have both direct and indirect significant effects on group threat (see Appendix 6). The best fitting model indicates that perceived injustice has a positive effect on anomia (β= 0.214) and anomia has a positive effect on authoritarianism (β= 0.257)

Furthermore, there is a direct path from perceived group threat to Flemish identity (β= 0.411), negative attitudes towards out-group (0.767) and feelings of superiority (β = 0.296). The pathway of group threat on the dependent variable may run through the concept of ethnocentrism, involving both the in-group identification (Flemish identity) and the contra-identification with the out-group (negative attitudes towards out-groups). In line with the results of the direct effects in table 4, the results indicate a direct effect of contra-identification (β= 0.329), and no significant effect of in-group identification, on moral support for RWE. The effect of Flemish identity might be mediated by contra-identification which has an independent effect on negative attitudes towards out-group (β= 0.173). A positive significant effect is evident from contra-identification on positive attitudes towards racism by peers (β= 0.473). Likewise, no direct effects is found from Flemish identity on positive attitudes towards racism.

In line with the previous results, group threat operates as a common cause of both ethnocentrism and superiority. However, in contrast to the previous results, the best fitting model indicates a small, but significant effect of thrill seeking behavior (β= 0.071). Both contra-identification (β= 0.133) and superiority (β= 0.140) indicated a positive significant effect on moral support. Nevertheless, no effect occurred from superiority on positive attitudes of peers in regard of racism. The effect on the latter variable might be suppressed by the strong effect of negative attitudes towards the out-group.
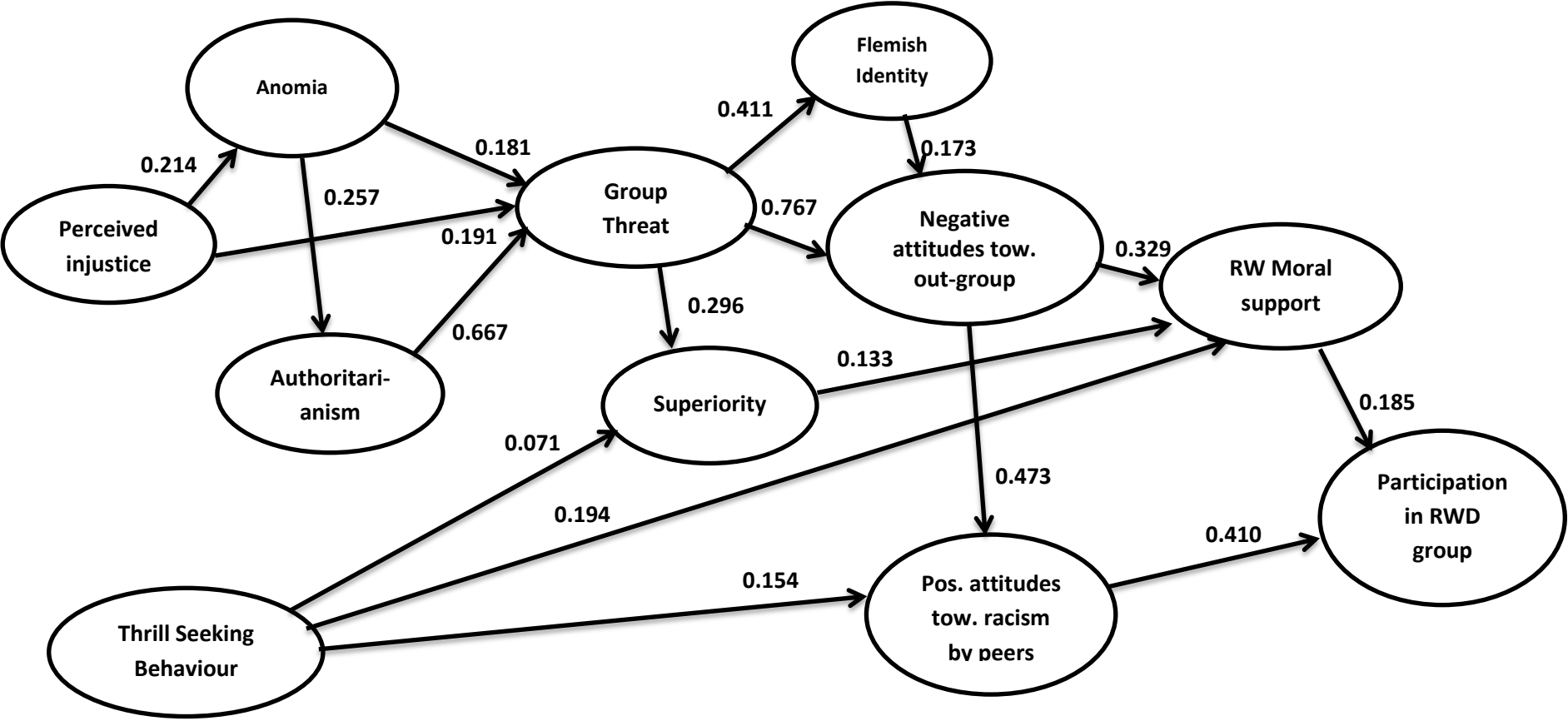
Fig. 6 Merged model for the explanation of participation in right-wing disruptive groups, RMSEA= 0.062. All parameters are statistically significant at the p < 0.05 level or better.

Thrill-seeking behavior exhibits a direct effect on exposure to racist peers (β= 0.154), but not on RWD group participation. Interestingly, in the best fitting model, there is no direct relationship between moral support for right-wing extremism and positive attitudes to racism by peers. In line with a key assumption of self-control theory, thrill-seeking behavior is a common cause of both moral support (β= 0.194) and positive attitudes towards racism.

There are only two direct effects on RWD group participation: moral support for right-wing extremism (log-odds[53]: 0.210) and exposure to racist peers (log-odds: 0.482). For interpretation, we calculate the odds ratio by taking the inverse log function. Results indicate that a one-standard deviation increase on moral support for RWE increases the likelihood of RWE participation with a factor of 1.23 (odds-ratio). Moreover, one-standard deviation increase in exposure to racist peers increases the probability of RWD group participation with a factor of 1.62 (odds-ratio) (Menard 2011).

5. Discussion and conclusion

The results have shown that RWD group participation partially stems from perceived injustice, group threat, authoritarianism and anomia. This is consistent with previous research that recognizes the triggering of feelings of both perceived and procedural justice by the lack of social integration with school and/or family (De Waele 2014; Pauwels and Schils 2014). Past studies have also confirmed that perceived injustice impacts on respondents' feelings of legitimacy about democratic institutions, such as the police. Such feelings of distrust might lower the threshold for illegal behavior and, likewise, support the motivation to RWD group participation.

Nevertheless, feelings of injustice do not directly trigger RWD group participation (see table 4). The results supported our hypothesis that group threat may trigger feelings of superiority and ethnocentrism (identification and contra-identification). Contra-identification, in particular, plays a major role in further translating the aforementioned strains into RWD group participation. These mechanisms derived from the social identity theory and the intergroup threat theory are directly related to moral support for right-wing extremism. Regarding our result that no direct effect was observed from in-group identification on moral support, Billiet et al. (2003) obtained similar results, and they attributed this result to the fact that *s*trong identification with national identity does not necessarily require a strong contra-identification with foreigners. In addition, our research only

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[53] Log odds reflect the increase in the change in the dependent variable (participation in RWD group vs no participation in RWD group) with respect to the value of the independent variable. The higher the value of the log odds is, the greater effect there is. A positive value indicates a positive effect, while a negative value denotes a negative effect.

measured the contra-identification with immigrants and not with other related out-groups, including leftist or the political establishment. Therefore, it can be inferred from respondents who feel aligned with the Flemish people and the nation that there exists a different in/out group connotation. Billiet et al. (2003) argued that national identity and attitudes toward immigrants are determined by the social representation of "nation". In-group is, thereby, built through shared images and beliefs about national in-group and its relationship to other groups or foreigners. In addition, the results also indicated a negative effect of anomia, as measured by political powerlessness, on Flemish identity. This indicates that persons who strongly identify with Flanders do not necessarily identify as a result of disillusionment with the political system. In contrast, it can be argued that political awareness and interest in politics could trigger Flemish identification.

On the other hand, thrill-seeking behavior is an additional important exogenous mechanism: it affects both moral support for right-wing authoritarianism and exposure to racist peers. We find both the perceived injustice model and the self-control initiated model highly compatible with each other: our study reveals that both models share common intervening mechanisms leading to RWD group participation. While this revelation is found to be the case for right-wing extremism, it remains to be seen if it would be applicable to the study of religious Islamic extremism and left-wing extremism. Future studies should attempt to gain an insight into the general character of these mechanisms.

Based on previous empirical tests of general models (see e.g. Van den Bos et al. 2009), the present study integrated a social-psychological model with a self-control initiated model, leading to different paths that explain RWD group participation. These findings are in line with those from past research (Pauwels and De Waele, 2014) but more importantly, they have extended our knowledge by stressing the importance of additional routes from social identity theory and intergroup threat theory. By discovering the different routes, we have contributed to a more thorough understanding of individual differences in RWD group participation. Future research, in consonance with the gang research, could explore the amplifying effect of RWD group participation on the development and persistence of violent behavior.

However, some limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First of all, our theoretical model has been applied to explain individual differences in RWD group participation among students. Future research should investigate to what extent the model also applies to the explication of RWD group participation in adults and in non-student populations. Second, the measure of RWD group participation is a constructed combination of personal ideological positioning and gang identifiers. In

this research we assumed that tolerating right-wing extremist participants was a measure of RWD group participation. However, to capture the total concept of RWD groups, future research might also include additional measures of ideological group positioning. Third, the study is cross-sectional and therefore not optimal for studying causal inferences, as causes and effects are measured simultaneously. Finally, our results are based on a large-scale web survey, and it is unclear to what extent our results are biased by this method of data collection.

Research into the domain of RWD group participation and political violence is important not only for the development and evaluation of criminological theories, but also within the framework of prevention of political violence. It is in this regard that studies of violent extremism and gang research can benefit from a vigorous definition that can enlighten us about aspects of political extremist groups, which live on the edge of mainstream society. In their recent work, Decker and Pyrooz (2011, 2015) point out how the study of terrorism, extremism and radicalization and gang research could mutually benefit from each other by comparing the similarities and contrasting the differences. First, they argue that in gang research, political belief and ideology are barely touched upon. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to consider combining the research concerns of Eurogang with the interest in left/right identification. When we apply the gang definition to RWD group participation, inquiries into the political beliefs of the group could then be undertaken and illuminated. Second, Decker and Pyrooz specify that the motivation of violence could differ between the two groups. We agree with this statement, but concurrently recognize that although the motivation could be different, the causal mechanisms of political violence might not. The strong effect of thrill seeking behavior, identified in the current research and past studies regarding political violence, underlines the prominence of Bjørgo's statement (1997) that ideology is far from the determining factor in joining right-wing groups (De Waele, 2014; Pauwels and De Waele, 2014). Finally, some scholars also indicate that there is a difference between the international aspect of terrorism and local gang activity. This brings us to the already cited view that the street oriented level of the definition of gangs cannot be applied to the research of RWD group participation. Although this aspect of street orientation could be a descriptor of some disruptive groups, it cannot be seen as a general definer (Esbensen and Maxson, 2012). Therefore, future research should consider the Eurogang definition in combination with inquiries into the political preferences by which the ideological connotation constitutes a part of the subcultural context. The continuation of work on a more comprehensive definition in the field of radicalization could also draw inspiration from the traditional research on gang, together with other traditional fields of political violence and political protest (e.g. Opp, 2009) so as to produce more profound research.

6. References

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PART IV: INTERPRETATIVE PART

CHAPTER 4: INSIGHTS ON THE PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

Submitted in Journal of social science as:

De Waele, M. (2015), From ideological discourse to puncturing bubbles. Insights into the process of engaging in extreme-right settings.

Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. A number of different approaches exist within the wider framework of this type of research, but most of these have the same aim: to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures.

(Holloway and Wheeler, 2013, p.3)

1. Introduction

Studies have indicated that the events of 9/11 have significantly increased anti-Islamic sentiments and manifestations of violent attacks against Muslims in Western European countries (Glaser, 2006). Regarding the Islamic State terrorist acts, society must not turn a blind eye to potential forms of home-grown anti-immigrant sentiments, as democratic institutions are regularly exposed to the continuing problems of racism, xenophobia and homophobia. In 2014, for instance, the Belgian police services received 496 reports on discrimination (Federal Police, 2015). In this context, it is not implied that extreme-right groups must be seen as the cause of these discriminating acts. Nonetheless, scholars must not ignore the contributing indirect (e.g. hate speech towards immigrants) and direct influences of discriminating acts on the mindset of extreme-right groups. In fact, recently a member of the extreme-right movement Voorpost was convicted for attaching stickers and graffiti on two mosques with slogans of 'stop Islam terror' and 'stop child rape'. The judge ruled that the slogans created a hostile atmosphere, demonstrating a profound intolerance and provoking a message against the freedom of religion (Het Nieuwsblad, 2015). Yet, this incident indicates that cultural and ethnic conflicts are still highly polarized and certain niches on the fringe of mainstream society are willing to go far in support of their beliefs.

Traditional research (cf. Adorno, 1950, Billig, 1978) on these forms of extremism primarily focussed on the 'irrational' behaviour in an attempt to explain the pathology of these aberrant world views (Mudde, 2007). As a response to this approach, social movement scholars, in contrast, emphasised 'rational' explanations for engagement in extreme-right groups (Linden, 2009). Against the contrast and tension between these two opposing approaches, Snow and colleagues (1986) criticised the approach of social psychology, stating that scholars neglect interpreting grievances in their explanation. Snow et al.'s criticism does not contradict the social-psychological explanation, but rather build on the social-psychological mechanisms to further explore the 'thoroughgoing understanding which requires both social psychological and structural/organizational factors' (Snow et al., 1986, 464). Opp (2009) alludes to this work, indicating similarly that although becoming a member refers to a real phenomenon, membership becomes effective as they become part of a mental model that frames values and beliefs.

Previously conducted quantitative research stressed the importance of social-psychological mechanisms (i.e. perceived injustice, authoritarianism, anomia and ethnocentrism) for explaining extreme-right participation in Flanders (De Waele, 2014). However, this strand of quantitative research has yielded limited insights when it comes to understanding the construction of these mechanisms in the process of engaging in extreme-right groups. Therefore, in this study in-depth

interviews were conducted with (former) members in order to highlight the process of engagement in Flemish extreme-right groups. The following questions are addressed:

1) What factors contribute to the development of an initial interest in extreme-right groups?
2) How do the identified catalysts impact on the process of joining extreme-right groups?
3) How do members attract individuals to engage in Flemish extreme-right group?
4) How do individuals internalise ideological frames and become socially integrated?

This article begins with the theoretical approach adopted for analysing the motivation for joining extreme and/or stigmatised groups. It then describes the research conducted from June 2014 to April 2015 regarding the interview method and the recruitment of participants. Next, the findings are discussed under several sub-themes, including the context and background characteristics, personal motives for engagement, the effect of catalysts in the process of engagement, the attraction of the movement, the framing perspective and the process of socialisation. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of the main findings.

2. Theoretical framework

The starting point for this theoretical frame is the contribution of Quintan Wictorowicz (2004) who conducted research on joining radical Islamic groups, such as Al-Muhajiroun, in the UK. His work not only inspires attempts to bridge the divide between explanations of various manifestations of radicalisation, it also offers an eclectic explanation of both social psychological and social movement theories. In line with Wiktorowicz's research on engaging in radical Islam groups, this article elaborates on three stages[54] in the process of extreme-right group engagement (i.e. cognitive opening, framing and socialization). Important aspect is that we do not perceive these processes as linear or determining process of joining. In contrast, the current theoretical approach highlights the dynamic process in which the different steps (cognitive opening, framing, and socialisation) can overlap or can occur at different moments in time. Diverse scholars have attempted to tackle the problem of causal events in time, giving rise to discussion on the chronological order of engagement (physical process) and radicalisation (mental process) of joining extreme-right groups (Bjørgo, 2011; Bjørgo and Horgan, 2009). Bjørgo commented that there is no 'one size fit all' convincing explanation to determine the exact chronological order. Hence, this study investigates how these three phases impact on the engagement process of Flemish extreme-right groups.

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[54] In this contribution we only focus on three out of the four stages mentioned by Wiktorowicz (2007). The stage of religious seeking has been left out of the persuasion model due to the fact that we focus on the engagement of political extremism.

2.1. Factors leading to a cognitive opening for an extreme-right ideology[55]

To become susceptible to new ideas and worldviews, people might externalize personal and absorb contextual influences, especially when previous belief systems are perceived as inadequate (Wictorowicz, 2004; Choudhury, 2007). In his model (see Figure 7), Mellis makes a distinction between the influences of the two involved actors, namely the demand and the supply side. On the demand side, Mellis places possible contenders for engagement in extreme-right groups. These contenders are experiencing a pushing effect towards the edge of mainstream society. In contrast, the supply side gathers the extreme-right groups responsible for pulling individuals towards the fringes of society. These groups try to create an attractive environment through diverse channels of recruitment[56] (social media, newspapers, magazines, demonstrations, etc.) in order to convince individuals that this group is an alternative option for engagement.
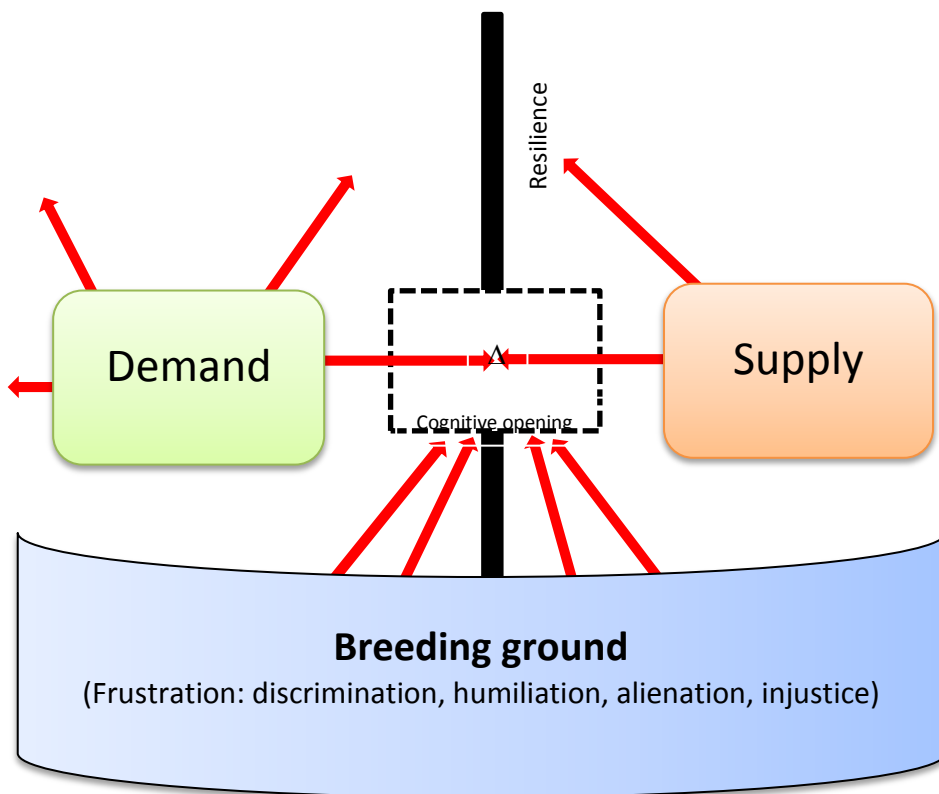
Figure 7: Cognitive opening based on the model of Mellis (2007, 27)

In addition, Mellis (2007) points out the risky environment of individuals (i.e. personal frustration through discrimination, humiliation, alienation and injustice) as the breeding ground to engage in

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[55] In line with Mudde, the term ideology is used to refer to the normative ideas on man and society as propagated by a certain group. Therefore, it is stated that ideology is seen as *the body of normative(-related) ideas about the nature of man and society as well as the organization and purposes of society* Cited in Mudde (2002)

[56] Pauwels et al. (2014) stipulate in this sense from an individual point of view, recruitment can be active (individuals search for a group) or passive (not an individual's deliberate choice), intentional (individual is aware of the engagement) or unintentional (individual is not aware of the engagement (individual is not aware of engagement).

extremist groups. It is that breeding ground that influences the personal receptiveness for an anti-establishment ideology. However, Mellis indicates that individuals do not automatically proceed to a cognitive opening. Individuals possess a certain 'wall of resilience' concerning the push and pull factors which may hinder the passage towards a cognitive opening[57]. Finally, it is noted that certain life events may facilitate the process of cognitive opening (Crenshaw, 1981; Melde and Esbensen, 2011; Veldhuis and Bakker, 2007). Turning or triggering points, in this perspective, might be the murder of an extreme-right leader, loss of spouse or negative experiences with immigrants.

In contrast to the work of Mellis, Bjørgo (2011) argues that scholars take for granted that changes in behaviour (engagement) result from changes in values and norms (radicalisation). Nevertheless, the relation between radicalisation and engagement seems to be far more complex. As such, Bjørgo and Horgan (2009) pointed out that while a certain proportion engages because of the cognitive alignment with the groups' ideology, there is a variety of internal driven motives pushing individuals to group engagement (e.g. provocation, anger, thrill seeking, etc.). In line with Bjørgo's remarks, Sax (2012, 117-154) marked in her historical study on motives for collaboration during the second World War that the Flemish soldiers had various incentives for their engagement (i.e. personal adventure, personal economic and financial benefits, material benefits, escaping employment, pressure by family, etc.). To this end, we want to examine which factors push and pull individuals towards (a cognitive opening for) the extreme-right discourse.

2.2. The mental process of frame alignment

In search of explaining the process leading people from being open for new ideas to engaging cognitively with a group, Snow et al. (1986) discussed the process of frame alignment which relates to the idea that groups need to empower people and enable them to identify with the cognitions of the extreme-right group. They indicated that the process of frame alignment provides the conjunction manifested in four processes between the individual frame and the interpretive framework of the social movement organisation (SMO).

The first element of the framing process is frame bridging. Snow et al. (1986) suggested that this is the initial link established between two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. This process is supported through organisational outreach and the distribution of information among interpersonal or intergroup networks. McCarthy (1997) indicated that in order to resonate frames, movements face the difficulty of addressing local

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[57] Relevant to this view, it can be argued that adolescents or people with a low level of ability to control themselves might be less resilient to internal and external influences

personal experiences. In this perspective, Conway and McInerney (2008) state that the current rapid communication of information through internet and social media enable movements to cover a widespread audience of possible activists. In contrast, Schils and Pauwels (2014) marked that online exposure of extremist messages only partially explains issues of political violence and differential association with racist peers. To this end, the scholars mark that an important mediating role is still reserved for real-world associations. Considering all these findings, we want to analyse what the initial 'frames' are for connecting the individual to the group, and how people got into contact with these extreme-right frames (in the real world or via social media).

Second, Snow et al. (1986) mentioned frame amplification as the process of clarification and invigoration of an interpretative frame. This amplification is specific to certain issues, problems or set of events which can be divided into two types: values[58] and beliefs[59]. In order to address the individual demand, groups tend to highlight or accentuate these values and beliefs by using attractive slogans. Appealing slogans by the Flemish extreme-right groups often refer to the immigration theme, with slogans such as 'Own people first' and '500,000 unemployed people, why guest workers?' (Derks, 2007). Accordingly, it is not merely innovative thinking but, rather, the manner in which the issue, event or belief is articulated that provides a particular interpretation (Benford and Snow, 2000). Hogg and Terry (2000) indicate that extremist groups respond to this by providing clear and sharp answers which appeal individuals in order to compensate their low levels of self-certainty.

Third, it is argued by Benford and Snow (2000) that certain values promoted by the SMO are not fundamentally rooted in the initial framework of the SMO. To enlarge the pool of adherents, SMOs need to broaden their scope and extend the boundaries of the earlier framework, referred to as frame extension. In Flanders, this can be demonstrated by the Vlaams Blok, which was originally founded as a party primarily focussing on the division of Belgium. This focus remained but towards the end of the Cold War, the party added the immigration theme to their discourse (Coffé and Dewulf, 2014), culminating in the programme of 70 points aimed at contesting immigration (Erk, 2005). This frame extension ensured that they increased their support over the years from a small single-issue party to the second largest party in Flanders in 2004.

Finally, Snow et al. (1986) held that in some instance frames need to be transformed when they are

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[58]Values are considered as being end-stated goals which movements seek to promote.
[59]Beliefs are elements which are more philosophical and ideational. They are cognitions that support or impede action in pursuit of desired values.

no longer appealing or need to be reframed in order to maintain support and participants. In particular, a distinction can be made between two forms of transformation. On the one hand, the transformation of *domain specific frames* is seen as the change to the perceived seriousness of the condition. Where the condition might have been unfortunate but tolerable, for example, the influx of immigrants, transformation of frames might create an awareness and adoption of an injustice frame towards the theme of immigration. On the other hand, transformation can also be connected to a shift of *global interpretive frames* as a kind of master frame that dominates the new primary framework according to which experiences and events are to be (re)interpreted.

2.3. Socialisation and joining extreme-right groups

The last aspect we want to address is the phase of socialisation. In contrast to explanations which focus on the cognitive evolution of individuals, scholars have worked on the understanding of processes of social inclusion of individuals in group engagement. Theories of differential association and social learning were among the first to mark the process of socialization among criminal groups and networks (Akers, 1998). Scholars noted in this perspective that forms of social interaction created an optimal environment in which individuals can adopt the definitions and values of the group (Sela-Shayovitz, 2012). As such, it is through forms of education in mundane activities such as 'study groups, lectures, interactions, discussions, social events, protest and other activities' that individuals become willing learners of the 'extra'-ideological[60] group values. To this end, new 'indoctrinated' member are trained to reproduce the groups' ideology and attract new followers (Wiktorowicz, 2004)

However, social contact does not solely fulfils the role of distributing group values and norms. Sitzer and Heitmeyer (2008) indicate that socialisation serves as a process of appropriation and interaction of social-emotional (affection, recognition, etc.) and material (money, symbols, magazines, etc.) conditions. Social-identity theorists have stipulated in this context that people who highly identify with a certain group undergo a process of depersonalization (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). As such, these individuals tend to fall in line of the group and obey orders of their group leaders (Turner, 1987, Hogg and Terry, 2000). Swann et al. (2009) have contradicted the latter by stating that it is not merely the identification process, but rather the fusing of identities that leads people to extremist behaviour. In line with the self-verification theory they point out that people base their identity on the treatment they receive from others inside the 'community'. As soon as the identity is formed, people use this frame to make predictions about the world and guide their personal behaviour (Swann et al., 2009).

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[60] With 'extra' ideological we point on the values and norms applicable in a certain group (f.e. internal regulations for members)

Besides the identification with a certain group, people likewise undergo a gradual process of contra-identification (Pennings and Brants, 1985). Bjørgo (2002) pinpointed on this matter that joining the extremist community may cut ties with the 'normal' community. This form of bridge-burning, along with creating a security consciousness (e.g. creating a sense of paranoia), mutual experiences of violence and community-building are essential for engagement of extreme-right groups. Moreover, it is expected that these feelings of paranoia and community Building may even further be enhanced when people experience (actual or symbolic) threat (Sela-Shayovitz, 2012).

3. Method

3.1. Interview technique & data analysis

Interviews were conducted on the basis of a semi-structured questionnaire which covered a variety of topics. Concepts (see topic list, Appendix 3) were selected on the basis of the literature study. Specific attention was paid to the educational context, the role of significant others such as parents, peers, relatives, etc.), personal perceptions including multiculturalism, (homo)sexuality, traditional gender patterns, national identity, violence, personal role within the group and extreme-right group activities. Each interview was transcribed in detail and coded openly according to themes such as the important events, opinions and phenomena. Subsequently, axial coding was used to categorise the relevant codes, which enabled us to compare and reflect on the differences and similarities. This analytical method presented us with a large amount of rich data, although some difficulties were encountered during the research.

3.2. Difficulties and limitations

Research on difficult to reach populations are indisputably faced with different drawbacks and limitations in regard of method and response rate. Three drawbacks can be identified, i.e. response rate, social desirable answering by the respondents and the relatively limited amount of data collection.

First, there have been considerable cases of rejection in recruiting of participants. Of the total of 85 people contacted through mail, telephone, informal contact and facebook messages, only 23 responded, which means the response rate was approximately 27% (23/85). Of the participants who responded, only 46 % (23/50) decided to participate. Those who refused to participate indicated four main reasons for their decision. At first most individuals indicated distrust of the research and/or the researcher. The stated reasons for distrust were: (1) the perception that studies about the right-wing scene are always taken out of context, (2) the rumour that the interviewer worked for the police and/or judicial services, or (3) the fact that the final report would provide police and judicial services

with information about their radical political group. The second reason was that some individuals had renounced their past and were not eager to discuss their previous life. One former member stated, 'I do not want to be remembered for the biggest waste of time in my life'. The third reason is related to prior unfortunate personal experiences with interviews by journalists and/or researchers. Finally, the last reason for non-participation was that people were not allowed to discuss group matters to strangers. These sort of 'omerta' rules have made it difficult to contact persons within certain groups. In this perspective, our research is not able to provide a comprehensively representative view of the number of respondents per group. However, the in-depth study can throw some light on the engagement process for each type of extreme-right groups (see below).

The second limitation of the research is inevitably the risk of the respondents providing socially desirable answers, in other words, 'inauthentic' answers to issues such as self-conducted violence and radical ideology. To anticipate this social desirability, numerous initiatives were undertaken. First, the sensitive topics of the study were discussed at the end of the interview when a certain amount of trust had been built between the interviewer and interviewee. Subsequently, we anticipated socially desirable answers by providing the in-depth investigation with prior information about the background of the respondent. On-line documentation, informal information from other respondents, open sources, criminal records and archive documents provided us with a great deal of background information about the respondent. This ensured that the statements of the respondent could be checked and that more profound questions could be explored. Regardless of the efforts we put in, future research might check for socially desirable answers or exaggerated stories to make a good impression[61].

Finally, the research is based on the number of respondents willing to participate in the interview. Due to the above stated drawbacks and the difficulty of identifying those members (e.g. there are no formal membership list), it is often hard to reach individuals. Moreover, the population covers not only a hard-to-reach population, but likewise a movement which is marginally active within the Flemish territory. Previous studies on extreme-right have only focused on voting behaviour and participation in right-wing nationalist groups (Billiet and De Witte, 2001). In contrast, this study focuses on the broad range of extreme-right groups, from Flemish right-wing nationalist to Neo Nazi groups (see below).

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[61]Certain respondents may 'spice' up certain stories to make a good impression. See Paulhus, D.L. (2002), Social desirable responding: The evolution of a construct. In: Braun, H.I., Jackson, D.N., Wiley, D.E., The role of constructs in psychological and educational measurement, Mahway, Erlbaum, 59-69.

Furthermore, to explore all possible influences of context, respondents were recruited from every province of the Flemish region. After the last series of interviews was conducted, no correlation could be established with the origins of the three different group types. Therefore, it was assumed that saturation point had been reached.

3.3. Respondents

From July 2014 to April 2015, twenty-three (former) members of an extreme-right group were interviewed (see table 5). A profile overview of the participants is included in appendix 7.

		Right-wing Nationalist (n= 9)	Neo-Nazi (n=8)	National Solidarist (n=6)
Type of group		Political Party, social movement	Social-cultural network	Social-cultural network
Relation to democracy		Accept and prefer to work within democracy	Reject democracy	Reject democracy
Reference group		Flemish nation	White nation	Flemish or European
Out-group[62]	Internal	National traitors (leftists, political establishment)	Racial traitors (leftist, political establishment)	National and racial traitors (leftists, political Establishment)
	External	Immigrants with a foreign culture	Jewish world domination and Muslim invasion	Jewish world domination and Muslim invasion
Consequence of immigration		Cultural mixing, loss of Flemish identity and destruction of the nation (cf. economy, criminality)	Racial mixing, blood pollution, clash of civilizations, Racial Holy War (RahoWa)	Cultural (and racial) Mixing, clash of civilizations, destruction of identity and nation

Table 5: Ideological differences between types of Flemish right-wing groups, based on the work of Bjørgo, 1997, 63-71)

Respondents were recruited through multiple channels. First, observations were made at demonstrations, debates, lectures, meetings. Some respondents were approached directly without any initial contact in the 'real world'. Potential respondents were contacted because (1) they had been mentioned in online documents, websites, chat boxes or open access criminal files, or (2) through snowball selection via previous contacts[63]. In the interviews it appeared that the

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[62] In line with Sprinzak's (1995) theory on split delegitimization where he argues that right-wing radicals have a primary conflict with an 'inferior' community (e.g. Muslims, Jews) and a secondary conflict with the government.
[63] The option of snowball sampling turned out to be unsuccessful. Most respondents were willing to talk anonymously, but when asked about other individuals within the movement most were not eager to (1) contact other individuals themselves or (2) mention the names of other members

interviewees held diverse ideological opinions about economics, society and topics such as Flemish independence and migration. We then distinguished three types of respondents: right-wing nationalists, neo-Nazi and modern national socialist and national solidarists. The first type[64] of respondents is the *right-wing nationalist*, who represent the radical to extreme-right segment of the broader Flemish nationalist movement. These respondents were and are active within political parties or well-organised social movement surrounding the political field. Most respondents label themselves as radical, militant, anti-Belgian, Flamingant, European, democrat and republican. Although criticising strongly the political establishment and the current democratic system, they prefer to work within the democratic system. As democrats they tackle the issue of immigration from the perspective that it undermines Flemish values and culture. Internationally similar type of nationalists is found among international movements and political parties such as Lega Nord (Italy), Partij Voor de Vrijheid (The Netherlands), Front National, War Raok! and Génération Identitaire (France), Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPO, Austria), Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden), Jobbik (Hungary) and SOMcatalans (Spain).

The second type of respondents indicated strongly the glorification of the German National Socialistic regime. These are referred to as *neo-Nazi's* and could be placed, according to Bjørgo's typology, within the scope of racial revolutionaries (Bjørgo, 1997). These respondents unanimously label themselves as extreme-right, radical, militant, national socialist, national solidarist, anti-Belgian, Flamingant and republican. In their vision, political parties and social movements are considered to be weak on crime and immigration. Therefore, they reject to work within the democratic system and propose a fundamental change to society out of loosely structured sociocultural groups of networks. Within this type, respondents attach great importance to their own race and show support for international networks such as Blood and Honour, Combat 18, Autonomous Nationalist, Swedish Resistance movement (Sweden) and the Nationalsozialistischer untergrund (NSU, Germany).

The last type of extreme-right respondents identified as the *national solidarists* demonstrated a strong aversion to the Nazi regime and the emphasis on race, at least to the outside world. These respondents label themselves as nationalist, socialist, solidarists, anti-Belgian (though not always), European, democrat and republican. They promote a modern explanation of the national socialist ideology with a focus on structural change in modern society which combines nationalism with

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[64] The type of respondents (i.e. RW nationalist, National socialist and National Solidarists) is determined by their membership of certain RW nationalist, National Socialist and National Solidarist ideological groups and the manner in which they label themselves as one of those three types.

economic socialism or solidarism[65]. However, some refuse to label themselves as national socialist or national solidarist due to the contaminated meaning of the word. Therefore, they promote themselves as geo-political nationalists and by referring to the importance of the European culture and the preservation of traditions. Their 'enemies' are often located within national and international institutions, such as those who control the financial and economic system (i.e., Jews). Within this type most respondents tend to support international movements such as Casa Pound (Italy), Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD, Germany), and the Golden Dawn (Greece).

4. Context and background characteristics

4.1. A hazardous environment

Examination of the background of the respondents did not yield any indication of connection between contemporary geographical location and extreme-right sympathies. However, when we analysed the context in which respondents started to engage in extreme-right groups, it is noticeable that 15 out of the 23 respondents were connected with the group in an urban environment. There are many reasons why urban environments tend to attract extreme individuals and groups. Firstly, in contrast to local municipalities, supply is larger in urban cities where a broader range of movements and networks are available to attract susceptible individuals. Secondly, certain cities have greater exposure to out-groups (i.e., leftist, Walloons or immigrants). Respondents, mainly those who grew up in Brussels[66], indicated that French and immigrants often look at Flemish people with disdain. Diverse stories were mentioned in which respondents (e.g. Achiel and Quinten) were verbally insulted as '*sale Flamand*' (dirty Flemish) or '*sale Blanc*' (dirty white). Thirdly, Achiel, who grew up in the city of Brussels, implied another triggering factor for engagement.

> One cannot imagine […] how strong the social loneliness is of regular Flemish people in Brussels […] The regular Flemish people in Brussels, who continue to speak Dutch, they are terribly alone. Really, that is and that was certainly the case with me. I won't say that we didn't talk with French people or so but it is a rather strange situation.
> (Achiel – Right-wing nationalist)

When the individual economic background was compared with group type involvement, it is noticed that right-wing nationalist were more broadly distributed on the economic scale in comparison to

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[65] Respondents explain the difference between solidarism and socialism out of the fact that national socialism promotes collaboration between different classes in society whereas national socialism does not.
[66] The Brussels capital is, in contrast to the unilingual regions of Flanders (Dutch) and Wallonia (French), a bilingual region. Flemish people indicate that the region is dominated by French speaking people. Therefore, they often feel discriminated or neglected.

sociocultural groups. Various right-wing nationalist respondents are in the possession of a college degree which is not surprising, given the fact that there is a broad influx of members coming out of the Flemish right-wing nationalist student movement. The majority of members of sociocultural groups can be placed in the lower-middle class. Personal economic background is not a decisive element within sociocultural groups, but might be a key marker of shared group sentiment. Neo-Nazi skinheads Ulbrecht and Victor grew up in a low-middle class family and although they indicated that this was not important for their own engagement, both indicated to feel strongly attracted by the working-class mentality among the skinheads. Right-wing nationalist Stijn mentioned that he initially thought he was left, because of his strong sentiment for working class men. However, after some disappointing adventures on the extreme-left scène, Stijn gradually turned to a right-wing nationalist discourse with focus on a suppressed Flemish population. These examples indicate that personal economic deprivation might form a trigger for possible activation of respondents to contest the contemporary democratic system.

4.2. An impressionable age

In line with the research on extreme-right groups, it was found that respondents tended to join the group at an early age (between 14 and 22). Some respondents even turned out to have been involved in the Flemish nationalistic movement long before their entrance in the Flemish right-wing group. The older respondents indicated that their first steps into the Flemish nationalistic movement were made within traditional Flemish youth movements such as Scouts, Chiro and KSA where traditional Flemish values are held and members attend Flemish national events such as the 'Vlaams Nationaal Zangfeest'[67] and the 'Ijzerbedevaart'[68]. Nowadays, this role of the youth movement is virtually exclusively reserved for the VNJ, the Flemish nationalist Youth Movement. Two respondents indicated that this early engagement in the Flemish movement encouraged them to remain active within the field. It has to be pointed out that this early engagement is connected to a broad Flemish nationalist discourse which is not necessarily associated with a certain political current. On the contrary, respondents indicated that this Flemish nationalist background significantly stimulated them to further grow on the right-wing nationalist scène due to the friendship ties established earlier.

Nevertheless, engagement within the right-wing movement does not seem to be solely determined by 'indoctrination' at early age. Respondents implied that at young age, they were more open to new

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[67] The Vlaams Nationaal Zangfeest is an event that promotes traditional Flemish music such as classic battle songs and folk songs (e.g., the Flemish 'anthem' De Vlaamse Leeuw). The organisation of this event is one of the key pillars of the Flemish nationalist movement. This year the slogan of the event was 'Sing Flanders Free', with a clear separatist message.

[68] The Ijzerbedevaart is an annual pilgrimage in memory of the fallen Flemish soldiers from the First World War.

ideas, attracted by action and more prone to retaliation. Piet, for example, indicated that his vulnerable position as a youngster, in combination with negative experiences with immigrants, had fostered his sense of willingness to engage with groups of like-minded individuals.

> I was then quite alone, shall I say. I didn't knew many people. I was 16, 17 years old and, yeah, totally not resilient and then you are an easy victim, of course. I was frustrated and that is how I rolled into these groups by searching for people […] because eventually you get such an aversion to these people and, yeah, then you search for equals and that has been the first step towards X (neo-Nazi network). (Piet –Right-wing nationalist, former Neo-Nazi)

This example displays the role of being a victim of violence from immigrants as a catalyst. Through the experience of violence, Piet's susceptibility for radical messages increased within a short period of time. The background to the situation indicated that Piet had been moved to a school with a concentration of Turks and Moroccans before he ran into trouble with the latter. As a youngster he felt terribly alone, misunderstood, vulnerable and treated unfairly, which nourished a strong breeding ground for him to accept alternative narratives to reclaim deprived rights.

5. Personal motivations for engagement

Becoming receptive to extreme-right influences is often strongly determined by internal driven motives. A pioneer on the process of entry, Bjørgo (2002), drew attention to 10 motives for entering the Nazi scène[69] in his article on *exit neo-Nazism*. Bjørgo said that respondents are often in doubt about themselves and in search for an identity, like-minded people or a sense of belonging. Diverse respondents expressed a similar quest. Kristof, a right-wing nationalist, for instance, claimed that he was very young when he started his ideological quest, together with a similar group of young people, in search of potentially interesting experiences. They started this quest because they were interested in aspects of Flemish nationalism, but had enough of the traditional Flemish nationalist discourse. The quest finally led him to participation in a national anarchistic scene. Hanne, on the other hand, felt misunderstood due to her sympathy for Flemish nationalist movements and desired a space where she could be herself. She, therefore, started to actively search for like-minded people.

> I had some friends in class, but I was more, yes, a loner, well not really a loner but because I just couldn't find myself in the discussion with the other students and in that way I wanted to

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[69] His ten indicates motives for entering a neo-Nazi group were (1) Ideology and politics, (2) provocation and anger, (3) protection, (4) drifting, (5) thrill seeking, (6) attractiveness to violence, weapons and uniforms, (7) youth rebels go to the right, (8) the search for substitute families and father-figures, (9) the search for friends and community and (10) search for status and identity.

search for an entourage or a group of friends or just acquaintances with whom I, in the first place, could tell my thoughts to in an untamed way without being shut off by dreadlocks and hippies, as a figure of speech, in the political and social sciences. (Hanne – Right-wing nationalist)

Hanne's narration indicates that people themselves often consciously make the first step to fulfil their needs. On the other hand, initial choices are not always based on an ideologically defined quest in order to explore their Flemish nationalist feelings. Many respondents indicated that, at an early age, they were open for exploring new ideas where engagement in right-wing groups was rather seen as an opportunity that had been afforded. Achiel revealed in that perspective that he would not have had any moral problems in joining a Francophone youth movement, but none of them came to him and he himself was too ashamed and too timid to ask if he could join them. Respondents also suggested that they had felt attracted to the discourse of the political counterpart (e.g. Claude, Stijn). In contrast to searching for a belonging or responding to feelings of deprivation, some respondents implied that they were actively seeking action and drawing attention in order to provoke people (e.g. Ignace, Claude, Victor). Victor indicated to have a self-centered vision and a claim for attention in his childhood and he still likes to engage in what he calls 'puncturing bubbles'.

Puncturing bubbles … I always liked that. I also liked to be the centre of attention, you know […] I was always happy to be in the spotlight and how that happened, good or bad that was not really important, just being seen by others, that was fun […] you really felt like a bad boy, a naughty boy when people pass you and say 'damn' what is that on his jacket?
(Victor – Neo-Nazi)

In accordance with the entry processes of Bjørgo, respondents (e.g. Ignace, Willem, Claude, and Daniel) pointed out they were drawn to the militaristic aspect of the extreme-right groups. Their fascination for guns and uniforms was one of the motives for joining the movement or networks.

6. Triggering the personal demand for engagement

6.1. Physical victimisation
The duration of radicalisation depends strongly upon the different cumulative push factors towards the cognitive opening. However, the process of engagement can accelerate in the presence or occurrence of certain events (i.e. catalysts). Negative experiences within the life course, as illustrated above, can be considered triggering the process (e.g. Piet, Frederic, Xavier). Nevertheless, not only

victimisation, but also the way of dealing with violent activities influences engagement. For instance, Frederic remarked that he was involved in a conflict during a soccer game at secondary school. During that conflict Frederic was beaten up by a person of another ethnic origin. When he complained about the incident to his principal, he received the following reaction:

> I was put under pressure to withdraw my complaint because I didn't want to deprive the boy, so actually I became like a victim, the perpetrator. Above that, they asked me 'Are you sure you are not a racist?' But I was 15 years old. I was a young guy and I had never been involved with politics, I didn't bother, me … I mean, of course I wasn't able to vote, my parents weren't interested in politics, that was boring. I was like, I'm what now? (Frederic – National solidarist)

Linked to his further career on the Flemish right-wing scène, this event surely triggered his involvement in an anti-immigrant discourse. From then on Frederic started to look for answers and was attracted by a poster of extreme-right political party Vlaams Blok which addressed the issue of impunity of immigrant groups. His search for answers finally led him to join the Flemish right-wing scene and evolve towards a National Solidarist discourse. To this end, victimisation does not have to be restricted to direct or actual forms of violence. Indirect forms of victimisation (e.g. violence towards family and friends) and perceptions of victimisation seem to exert an equal effect on enhancing the process of engagement.

6.2. Verbal victimisation

Victimization cannot be restricted to the direct impact of physical violence. Bo, for instance, indicated that she grew up in a Flemish nationalist environment because her family was closely involved in the Flemish nationalist scene. Being aware of 'indoctrination' she was subjected to in the right-wing nationalist group, Bo argued that she would have never become this Flemish-minded if there had not been so many anti-Flemish minded people stigmatizing the right-wing scene. Groups also often anticipate this 'bad' image building. Teun, for instance, indicated that the best propaganda for the right-wing is the leftists in that they try to create an image of the right-wing being the big fascist monster. In so doing, out-groups tend to encourage both rebellious and stigmatized characters of the extreme-right groups.

> Most people enter because of left counter-propaganda and at a certain moment we just put, under a fake name, on their forum [anti-fascist] the question, 'why didn't they organise a

counter-demonstration or a counter campaign?' Because in that way we knew that, we would attract more people. (Teun- Right-wing nationalist)

This example illustrates that, to some extent, extreme-right groups may equally benefit from their established negative reputation. To this end, rightist groups continue to widen the polarisation, aiming to attract more individuals by pointing out the exaggerated stigmatisation of their opponents. Consequently, potential members become more sensitised to and feel more reassured about protesting against the accusations of out-groups.

6.3. Bridge burning

The example of Frederic suggests that coping with negative events may instigate the search for radical messages. Negative life events, such as the loss of spouse or the disconnection of family ties might equally trigger openness to radical ideas. Nico (a former neo-Nazi), for instance, was 14 years old when his family ties were cut. After telling his parents the news that he would become a father, Nico was thrown out of the house. In his struggle of surviving he came into contact with right-wing skinheads. Although he indicated that he already had some interest in historical events of the NSDAP before entering the skinhead group, it was actually accidental that he ended up with a group of skinheads living in a house squat.

7. Creating an attractive environment

7.1. Supply 'meets' demand

Openness to radical ideologies depends not only on the demand of individuals, but also on the presence of a desirable supply side. Nonetheless, findings reveal that although the extreme-right demand may be present, people are often unable to connect with 'formal' extreme-right groups. Louis, for instance, had a strong desire to become a member of Blood and Honour. However, the supply was inadequate as the group was disbanded before he became interested. Regardless of the fact that Louis was not a member, he felt closely connected to the neo-Nazi scene and often met like-minded people at skinhead concerts. This suggests that 'supply' covers a broad network of 'formal' and 'informal' groups and individuals may have the option of a varied selection of groups from radical to extremist both in and outside the extreme-right scène. It is therefore not surprising that most of the respondents have been members of multiple groups throughout their careers, moving from radical to extremist groups and vice versa.

7.2. Recruitment

In order to boost the demand of extreme-right voices, members of Flemish extreme-right groups revealed three main recruitment activities, i.e. taking action, building an image through propaganda and targeted recruitment. First, activities are crucial to attracting members and creating a public profile. In this regard, the way in which groups undertake action strongly influences the sort of individuals a group want to attract. Ulbrecht indicated that carrying out controversial actions also had the aim to separate the wheat from the chaff.

> We invaded the student house in Ghent that was actually; yeah… we were going to do that when most of the students went to go eat. So a lot of attention … So we got in with a group, we chased everyone and put them outside, barricaded the doors and the adrenaline you feel and the tension […] And you have, like, nine out of ten who will be scared and turn away, but we don't need those nine out of ten, we are interested in that one individual. (Ulbrecht – National Solidarist, former right-wing nationalist and Neo-Nazi)

Attracting people through action might serve as an effective recruitment channel. Yet, in profiling the group through action, groups face the dilemma between working in- or outside the legal framework. Taking into account the historical perspective to right-wing nationalist groups over the years, Gerard mentioned that both sides of the dilemma have their advantages.

> Sometimes it is more interesting to obtain your goal by situations like we had in the Voerstreek because when you came home that evening you still saw some images on the TV and you heard it on the radio and you read it in the paper and so on. And now, when there is a demonstration which is prohibited, but you demonstrate anyway, after 15 minutes the media is gone because nothing happens […] On the other side, the positive thing is that if we apply to do something with X (Right-wing nationalist group), I have to be honest, in almost 99 percent of the cases we can do our thing, within certain acceptable arrangements. (Gerard – Right-wing nationalist)

The latter example indicates that the group may struggle with what Van Donselaar described as the 'adaptability dilemma' (Van Donselaar, 1995) which implicates that groups face the problem of choosing between, on the one hand, going to the mainstream and agreeing to work within the legal frame and, on the other hand, rejecting the legal frame with the risk of being convicted. Currently, the group tries to work within the legal frame by conducting legal actions which are approved by the

police and the city administration. This choice for legal actions under the surveillance of the police has restricted them to attracting more radical individuals to the scene. These latter individuals search their salvation in more radical non-conformist groups.

Second, groups try to build up a certain image using propaganda. Through the use of posters, music, and clothing, groups tend to create a comprehensive group identity suitable to attract newcomers. As indicated, one of the most powerful tools to distribute the groups' identity is certainly the internet and the use of social media. Nevertheless, in case of providing members with radical messages, respondents indicate that the internet might not always be the most appropriate medium. Victor alluded to the fact that groups struggle to provide their 'true colours' on the internet.

> I have looked at different national socialist websites […] Once I visited the homepage of the Ku Klux Klan and so … But websites are not really reliable stuff because they hide a lot on websites and they will never show their true colours. They will never put their whole manifesto on websites or they leave pieces out of it. […] I knew a couple of friends who were in it [group X] but on their website there is little written about it [ideology], but then they gave me a magazine in which I could look and there, of course, all the things were written down. So the most reliable lecture is the written lecture of the source itself. (Victor – Neo Nazi)

This example indicates that certain groups work with a hidden agenda, where the distributed front-office information stands in contrast with the back-office preached ideology. In so doing, groups hope to address a great number of individuals with different ideological opinions.

Finally, group members may adopt a direct active approach to convince individuals of joining the group. Members indicate that to convince individuals who are on the edge of the cognitive opening, a social approach is needed. Eric (a National solidarist) mentioned that to convince people it is not necessary to instil in individuals theories on nationalism, but rather 'convince them with the stomach' (i.e. food and drinks). The latter example emphasises the importance of socialization with group members prior to engaging in extreme-right groups (see below).

8. Manufacturing an ideological framework

Having become receptive to extreme-right discourse, respondents indicated a gradual process of mentality change. We noted that our respondents joined the group primarily because of their

concerns about the Flemish identity aspects or the immigration theme. Those who joined the movement in support of the Flemish aspect indicated their motivation as being related to (1) the Flemish-Walloon conflict and sense of justice, (2) intensifying their Flemish feeling and (3) having a romantic image of the Flemish movement. As indicated, distinction needs to be made between sympathy for the Flemish aspects and Flemish nationalist support. Achiel showed that, in his case, the initial sympathy for the Flemish linguistic aspects (Flamingantism) led to his ideological support for an independent Flanders:

> The feelings of nationalism actually grew out of my support for Flamingantism. In the beginning you fight for equal rights for the Dutch speaking and then I came to the conclusion that in fact we speak Dutch because we are a nation of people and there I drew the conclusion that our own nation of people has the right to have its own identity and an independent nation. And all those things have made me to become a nationalist. (Achiel – Right-wing nationalist)

In contrast, Daniel indicated that he did not specifically joined the Flemish extreme-right on the Flemish nationalistic ground, but rather because the Flemish right-wing nationalist groups demanded amnesty rights for those who had collaborated during the war. As son of a father who collaborated with the Germans during the Second World War, Daniel took his first steps into the movement because it addressed the deprived situation of 'those who were wrong during the war'. Besides the initial frame bridging of the Flemish aspect, most respondents of the sociocultural groups illustrated that the migration theme brought them into the movement. In fact, the frame bridging process was often triggered by (1) becoming personal physical or verbal victimization by immigrants (as illustrated by Piet and Frederic), or (2) indirect exposure to or word-of-mouth stories about immigrant violence.

Once the initial link is established between individual and group, further frame amplification and extension can be achieved. In the organised movements, elaborate interests in certain subjects are reinforced by lectures, debates and discussions. Loosely structured networks, on the other hand, often lack this form of knowledge introduction.

> No you don't get an education in X (Neo-Nazi Network), only propaganda. I'm not going to say that Y (Right-wing nationalist movement) are not involved in propaganda … They might put things into a more romantic perspective than they are in reality, for example, the actions in the 'Voerstreek' and so … but they have good education and those actions were historically supported and correct. (Piet –Right-wing nationalist, former neo-Nazi)

In his research on neo-Nazi gangs in Sweden, Kimmel (2007) indicated a similar role of the lack of education. He mentioned that neo-Nazi tends to take its ideology for granted. Therefore, nothing is to be learned from education or lectures. Ulbrecht underlined this point by linking to his own efforts to educate neo-Nazis.

> I was recruited to give education … but yeah it should be possible and most of these guys had their basic beliefs […] but were not open for a solid doctrinal education. Afterwards, in other movements, I have experienced good education, for example, in W (Modern NS), W was and still is, much better than Z (neo-Nazi Network) in the case of education. (UIbrecht – National Solidarist, former right-wing nationalist and Neo-Nazi)

Better organised movements, such as the right-wing nationalist groups, not only intensify the beliefs of the respondents by addressing the root causes of the problems, such as migration, but equally offer some practical values or guidelines for new members. Gerard, for instance, indicated that within his group, members receive many benefits. As such, militants who participate in risky actions approved by the movement can count on support from the movement when things turn out badly.

> So as you get arrested for actions that need to be undertaken on behalf of X (Right-wing nationalist group) and things were done the way they should been done, then X will pay everything, but really everything from the first until the last nickel: attorney fees, litigation costs, fines, everything. If that man has to go to jail, then we even go to his house and if he has a wife and children we ensure that they have no problems considering rent, food, and beverage and so on. On the other hand, we require that militants need to do what they are supposed to do. For example, there is no one who is allowed to drink alcohol before and during actions. (Gerard — Right-wing nationalist)

Gerard's example indicates that the movement transcends the idea of a group of friends; it is concerned with defending or achieving a mutual goal for which informal agreements are reached. Inherent to these agreements is reward which may appear in different forms: respect, giving a voice, participation in action, responsibility, acceptance and other elements.

When remaining in the group for a long period of time, people are likely to have undergone an ideological evolution. As presented above, Achiel's personal discourse has been extended over the years. As a result, he not only extended his initial interest in Flemish linguistic matters into a broader Flemish nationalistic discourse, he also adopted issues that had previously seemed irrelevant, such as

migration. Different respondents acknowledged a similar awareness shift from Flemish identification to a strong contra-identification with Walloons, with immigrants and the political system that allows migration. They also remarked that they experienced an evolution from a narrowly Flemish nationalist ideology to a wider geo-political ideological framework. Teun, for instance, revealed that his student organisation not only focused on Flemish nationalism, but gradually shifted towards a broader framework within which the anti-Israel party, Hezbollah, was strongly supported. Other respondents pinpointed the importance of a European-Russian collaboration, a framework that was completely absent before. Key figures within the Flemish nationalist scene have discussed this theme and inserted it into the Flemish right-wing agenda.

9. Becoming an integrated member

Although framing is important in order to convince and indoctrinate members, socialisation is vital to maintain membership. Members often withdrew from a diversity of groups stating that personal disagreements caused them to leave the group. In order to achieve strong socialisation with other group members, mutual trust needs to be built. In right-wing nationalist organised movements, trust is often based on the strength of the engagement, commitment to various events, helping with the organisation of events, plastering posters together. Nevertheless, Nico and Teun indicated that trust or respect is also built through non-ideological activities:

> I really could follow their [skinheads] way of thinking … just what they said … yes, and you arrive in that group and so you have a closer bond with these guys and, yes, if they ask you if you want to continue, then you just continue and just go with the flow […] I was always the first one who was ready for action [violent action] and, yeah, they had sympathy for that … the more you do for them, the higher they think of you. You get more respect, they know if they need you that you are ready and that is … that is the key … Brotherhood, being able to depend on each other even when it is difficult. Even when it's hard, you're there for each other. (Nico – former Neo-Nazi)

> X (Flemish student movement) was just more fun, the actions, that was fighting with the police, fighting with leftists when they attacked us. I was a shy person, not anymore. And you come into the student life and that was just more fun, that people … I was able to support a group of friends and I still believe that if you get drunk together, you have been attacked together by a big group that creates a bond which is impossible to break. (Teun –Right-wing nationalist)

These statements clearly show that ideological reasons are not the sole reason for engagement in both right-wing nationalist and neo-Nazi groups when it comes to long-term membership. The power of group involvement and cohesion lies in the processes of building trust and respect within the extreme-right community.

10. Discussion and conclusion

This article has offered evidence of the resemblance between the different manifestations of radical segments in society regarding the engagement process. Similar to the pathways that lead to radical Islam groups, it is noted that people initially become interested as a result of the interplay of various influences. The initial phase of creating a cognitive opening proves essential for engaging in radical and extremist groups (Mellis, 2007). People who are not open for radical messages will not consider group engagement as a possible action alternative. Nevertheless, moral values and beliefs are not static and may change by the occurrence of triggering events. Sometimes members even engage without the knowledge of entering an extreme-right group. Furthermore, results indicate that group engagement is strongest when individuals socially and mentally align with the group. In this perspective, it is difficult to analyse the chronological order and possible causal relationship of framing and socialization processes (cf. Bjørgo and Horgan, 2008). Rather, it can be argued that these two processes influence each other reciprocally.

At the basis of engagement lies the contextual breeding ground. In this light we have pointed to the importance of contextual factors as possible risk factors (cf. Boehnke, Hagan and Merkens, 1998). These risk factors of social exclusion (i.e. discrimination, loneliness, etc.) are noted, but appear to be absent in a majority of cases. The absence of a breeding ground of social exclusion is not illogical considering the fact that not everyone joins extreme-right groups driven by an urge of social belonging. It was noted that certain individuals engaged because of an ideological quest (e.g. Kristof, Stijn) or, at least, a search for finding like-minded people (e.g. Hanne). Most ideologists were retrieved in right-wing nationalist movement, while in line with Bjørgo (2002) Neo-Nazi members were mostly driven by non-ideological reasons. To this end, individuals indicated aspects, such as a personal search for an exploration of their personal identity (e.g. Kristof), provocation by ideological opponents (e.g. Bo), anger (e.g. Frederic) and search for adventure and sensation (e.g. puncturing bubbles)(e.g. Victor, Daniel).

On the other hand, personal motivations are stimulated by the presence of the supply. In order to convince individuals of group engagement, groups tend to use active[70] and passive[71] recruitment techniques. In a passive manner groups try to create awareness about their presence in the social field by setting up a webpage, online weblogs, putting up posters and conduct 'normal' group activities (i.e. lectures, debates, music concerts, demonstrations etc.). On the other hand, group members also actively recruit individuals by addressing their personal network (i.e. family and friends) (De Witte, 2006) or conducting targeted actions. Certain groups use subtle, soft measures to convince persons (e.g. dinner parties and lectures), while other groups explicitly express their uncompromising approach (e.g. Ulbrecht). Most respondents tend to see the benefit in these uncompromising acts due to the stimulating effect of media coverage on engagement. Nevertheless, it is noted that contemporary groups currently tend to perceive the costs of these actions as too high (e.g. conviction, loss of good relations with police, etc.). On the contrary, National Solidarist and Neo-Nazi groups have learned from the past (e.g. convictions after organizing concerts, convictions for hate speech in public areas, etc.) and currently prefer clandestine activities.

Noticeable, however, is that extreme-right groups are facing various difficulties in regard of mobilising individuals and sympathisers. Example of this is the limited number of activists that movements can motivate to turn out for public protests. Pegida[72], for instance, a movement organised against the Islamisation of Europe, was able to attract the support of almost 10,000 individuals on social media, and yet, could only rely on approximately 200 to 250 protesters when it comes to (legal and illegal) action (Knack, 2015). There are a number of reasons for this phenomenon. First, it may be argued that such right-wing nationalist groups face the difficulty of addressing the total demand, varying from radicals to extremists. Currently, movements tend to work within the legal framework and, hence, tend to lose the more extreme voices. As Victor indicates certain groups only proclaim a 'front-office' ideological discourse on websites to prevent penalization. To this end, extremist may perceive Pegida or other right-wing nationalist as to weak in regard of beliefs and boldness. Second, the discrepancy between followers and activists is not only noticeable within right-wing nationalist groups, sociocultural networks also suffer from a similar lack of mobilisation. From this perspective, Watts indicated that extreme-right groups have long been supported by (often politically neutral) skinheads, hooligans and motorcycle gang members (Watts, 2001). These groups shared symbols, ideas, and cultural events due to the appealing 'bad image' of the group. As Bjørgo (2002) stated, rebels take part in protests simply because that there is hardly

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[70] With active we mean a clear approach towards individuals with the aim to persuade individuals of group engagement

[71] With passive we mean that the activities are part of the 'normal', 'daily routine' activities of the group

[72] This stands for 'Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes' or Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the Occident.

anything more provocative than wearing Nazi symbols. Nevertheless, Neo Nazi groups[73] do not facilitate public recruitment of individuals due to their clandestine, underground method of operation. Third, as underlined by the political opportunity theory, problems of organisational strength are both internal and external to the group (Tarrow, 1994). Within the group, respondents often indicated that right-wing nationalist groups tend to hold on to an old-fashioned structure with a lack of leadership. External to the group, it is noted that partners on the Flemish extreme-right side meet each during certain events. However, groups do not tend to work together on a structural basis and certain groups even express great rivalry towards other groups on the right-wing side.

An additional motivating effect on the decision to participate may come in the form of crucial life events (i.e. triggering events). These catalysts can occur at different moments during the life course, either as a turning point or as a sign of acceleration of the engagement process. Relying on gang theory, Thornberry et al. (2003), indicated that in the process of engaging in deviant groups (such as gangs), group members might facilitate the use of violence. Nevertheless, our results indicate that becoming part of a Flemish right-wing group might also facilitate or enhance the risk of direct victimisation. Members who engage in extreme-right groups often openly show their 'true colours' by wearing symbols, clothing, hair style etc., thus, triggering the risk of conflicts with out-groups. Furthermore, it is noted that indirect victimisation can similarly trigger engagement in radical groups. In general, these findings demonstrate the salient role of coping with victimization and working on a comprehensive approach targeting all involved actors (Vynckier, 2012). Moreover, it appeared that individuals may likewise feel triggered by verbal accusations, creating strong polarization between left and right. This form of polarization in combination with the creation of collective fear may work as major platform for extremism (Van Stekelenburg, Oegema and Klandermans, 2010).

In addition to the pushing effect of triggering events, individuals likewise need to accept or, at least, tolerate the ideological aspects of the extreme-right group (Opp, 2009). The results show that individuals undergo a gradual cognitive process which starts with fragmented cognitive beliefs in order to progress towards a coherent discourse. Results indicated that right-wing nationalists and National solidarists undergo an (almost) complete process of framing values, beliefs and practical guidelines (Doosje et al., 2013). On the contrary, Neo-Nazi groups are less organized and lack leadership within their group. Conversely, structurally organized groups provide members with regular meetings (lectures, debates, informal discussions, etc.) where the ideological themes are discussed. Neo-Nazi members are mostly not interested in extensive theoretical insights, but rather

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[73] Moreover, this grouping makes it more difficult to track the presence and prevalence of relevant groups in relation to criminal behaviour.

search for a group where the theme is dealt with through action (Bjørgo, 2002). Kimmel (2007) supported this argument by stating that ideology is often taken for granted by neo-Nazi groups. However, although ideology appears less important for neo-Nazi members, it does offer members a framework consistent with their personal beliefs and values. Therefore, it can be concluded that the process of framing is present among engaged neo-Nazi members but often takes place less intensively.

Crucial for any kind of long-term membership is the aspect of socialisation. Within the Flemish right-wing scene much mobilisation is observed with members shifting from one group to another. The latter demonstrates that although individuals may align with the ideological aspects of the group and even identify with the aims of the group, they might not connect with its members. It likewise indicates the importance of personal recognition (cf. self-verification theory). To this end, members often describe their bond as akin to blood ties, stating the importance of comrades and blood brotherhood. Respondents pointed out that frequent contact in combination with shared positive and negative experiences (e.g. victimization) create a sense of trust. As pointed out by Sela-Shayovitz (2011), socialisation ensures that values -not specifically ideological values - are defined, and moral justification is given in order to take action.

As pointed out in this contribution, there are diverse aspects outside the ideological discourse (as cognitive aspect) which may explain engagement (e.g. puncturing bubbles). Therefore, we mark that, in regard of preventive initiatives a tailored approach is needed to address individuals during different moments in time (i.e. demand, cognitive opening and engagement).

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PART V: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

1. Introduction

As the final part of this dissertation, this chapter concludes with the response to the research questions and the restatement of the crucial sections discussed in the previous chapters. This dissertation started from a historical and theoretical overview of the literature. At first, this overview noted that the current constellation of the extreme-right movement is inherently connected to the context of striving for the preservation of the subnational Flemish cultural roots. However, in relation to the response to research question 1, we will elaborate on how the different segments of the broad extreme-right movement (i.e. right-wing nationalist, Neo-Nazi and National solidarists) have established themselves over the years and how these segments present themselves and dissociate from each other. Next, the theoretical state-of-the-art view has provided the basis for the development of the conceptual model. Testing this model has offered us, on the one hand, knowledge about the breeding ground and the mechanisms of beliefs and behaviour driven by extreme-right sentiments, and on the other hand, an understanding of the pathways leading to participation in right-wing motivated disruptive groups. Then, we have directed attention to a specific period of the activist career which allowed us to investigate the processes and actors influencing the engagement in different extreme-right groups.

Furthermore, we will discuss those aspects of the research which require a deeper examination. In reviewing on the research limitations related to the research design, methodology and results, specific recommendations will be made for future research and policy workers as well as practitioners dealing with the phenomenon of right-wing extremism. Finally, we will end with some concluding remarks on the depiction of extreme-right individuals as *angry white rebels.*

2. Responding to the research questions

Explaining a certain social phenomenon requires insights into the quantity, the origin and the interrelationship of the causes. This section will clarify these issues as regards the Flemish extreme-right phenomenon by responding to the following questions:

> $RQ1_{descriptive}$ *: How was the Flemish extreme-right movement established in Belgium and what does this movement currently comprise?*

> $RQ2_{analytical}$*: What mechanisms are related to moral support for right-wing extremist violence? How do these mechanisms for moral support influence the actual use of political violence?*

RQ3analytical: Which pathways of mechanisms lead to participation in right-wing disruptive groups?

In-depth research on extreme-right (former) members has rendered us information on the respondents' life course. Informed by the insights into the gradual rapprochement of individuals towards extreme-right group engagement, the subsequent section provides answers to the interpretative research questions initially introduced in Chapter One.

RQ4interpretative: What factors contribute to extreme-right group engagement and how are these factors constructed throughout the process of engagement?

RQ5interpretative: What actors are involved in the engagement process and what are their roles within extreme-right group engagement?

RQ6interpretative: What are the differences in engagement between the diverse extreme-right groups in Flanders?

Q1descriptive: *How was the Flemish extreme-right movement established in Belgium and what does this movement currently comprise?*

To understand the construction of the extreme-right groups in Flanders an insight is needed into the history of the Flemish Nationalist movement. Belgium is and has always been confronted with the distinction between the Flemish (Dutch) and the Walloon (French) people. The conflict between the two sub-nations goes back to the formation of Belgium, when the political elite were French speaking. Since the founding of Belgium, groups have fought for the rights for the oppressed Flemish population and their language. The breaking point for a reinforcement of these sentiments was the event of the World War I, where narratives indicate that Flemish soldiers were subjected to and often humiliated by Francophone commanders (Boijen, 1998). These feelings of suppression and discrimination towards the Flemish people formed a strong breeding ground for a radical ideological discourse[74]. This discourse remained intact during the Nazi era and ensured that different right-wing nationalists occupied local dominant positions during the war period (De Wever, 1991).

The repression after the World War II ensured that Flemish Nationalist movements were forced to operate in secret clandestine groups which restricted them to recruiting openly individuals (Bilsen

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[74] Pivotal to the radicalisation of the Flemish nationalist movement was the formation of the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond in 1933 under the leadership of Staf De Clercq, which gave rise to a symbolic change of the ideology of Flemish nationalism (Art, 2008; De Wever, 1992). The formation marked the end of an era of disputes and organizational fragmentation, and at the same time, it constituted the start of an extreme- right authoritarian Flemish nationalistic model.

and De Witte, 1997). However, the movement gradually resurrected with groups demanding amnesty rights for the Nazi collaborators. Flemish nationalist groups indicated that Nazi collaborators motivated these acts out of dissatisfaction with the Belgian state. Collaborators were often perceived as role models due to their loyalty to the Flemish nation[75] and the Flemish people (Coffé and Dewulf, 2014). As a result, Flemish nationalist movement used the repression towards the Flemish 'heroes' as new focal point to recruit people. Through the recruitment and rehabilitation efforts[76], it becomes clear that these sub-nationalist groups gradually resurrect and attract different ideological visions (Bilsen and De Witte, 1997). However, throughout the 70s diverse Flemish nationalist groups were involved in ideological unrest which led to new groups with a more radical right-wing discourse which focussed on the aspect of migration[77] (Achterberg, 2006). It is within this time period that the contemporary right-wing nationalist movement was constructed as an amalgamation of a Flemish nationalist and right-wing discourse.

Over the years, right-wing nationalist movements (i.e. VMO, Voorpost, NSV, and KVHV) have continuously promoted themselves as completely independent from the political party level[78]. These movements were aimed at restoring and safeguarding the nation with its unique Flemish culture and identity. Members of right-wing nationalist movements have indicated that they defend the interests of all people belonging to the Flemish cultural (and ethnic) community, aiming at creating a Flemish (or Dutch, see Voorpost) nation. In their ideology, Europe has to be seen as an extension of the nationalist discourse. The ideal Europe might, therefore, be a self-conscious Europe of free people, from the Atlantic to the Urals. On the militant action level, movements are striving to act within the legal framework of society by conducting 'clean' actions (Van der Valk and Van der Schans, 2011, 31). However, this does not exclude the fact that movements often explore the boundaries of legality. On 2 February 2015, for instance, the president of the movement Voorpost was convicted of hanging up banners, distributing leaflets and putting graffiti on walls with the slogan 'stop islamisation' and 'no Jihad in our street'. With regard to violence, Voorpost indicates on their website that although they are against warfare, certain circumstances might be justified, such as the urge for survival and the

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[75] In her dissertation, Sax (2012, 117-154) elaborates on the different motives for collaboration during the World War II. Motives were connected to the New Order mentality, the geopolitical issues, the battle against Bolshevism, adventure, personal economic and financial benefits, material benefits, escaping employment in Germany, and pressure by family. This contribution made the important discovery that, although after-war motivation often indicated that Flemish soldiers were fighting for the Flemish case, personal motives often prevailed.

[76] Since the 50s, the political party Volksunie and the social movement VMO (Flemish Militant Order) have strived for Amnesty rights for the collaborators during the war. In 1971, the party reached a historical score with 18.8 % of the votes (Art, 2008, 428). This strong electoral score was an indication that there was a breeding ground for rehabilitating the Flemish collaborators in society.

[77] At first glance the focus was mainly laid upon the guest workers. Gradually, this discourse shifted to the second wave of immigrants (i.e. Turks and Moroccans).

[78] Spruyt (2006) disagrees with this, indicating that Voorpost and Vlaams Belang are two branches of the same tree.

right for self-defence (Voorpost, 2014). Typical actions organized by these movements are manifestations during royal visits[79], right-wing nationalist student demonstrations or demonstrations against the language facilities in the suburbs of Brussels. In addition to this militant aspect, movements equally focus on ideological education from historical Flemish aspects to contemporary geopolitical themes.

Because of the dissatisfaction with the militant and ideological discourse of the right-wing nationalist groups, a new openly National Socialist movement came to be active in Flanders. The first signs of these groups were noticeable at the end of the 80s. After the conviction of the VMO as private militia, members started to look for new informal initiatives to regroup their activities. In line with the emergence of the Neo-Nazi skinhead scene in Great Britain and other European countries, groups were slowly but surely generating an openly racist and Nazi glorifying scene. In his dissertation on neo-Nazi groups Bjørgo (1997, 63-71) describes this group as 'racial revolutionaries' with personal enemy images regarding Muslims and Jews. The scene has nowadays evolved to an international network with different groups (e.g. Blood and Honour, Combat 18, Autonomous Nationalist) in different geographical sections in Europe (e.g. Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, Great Brittain and Scandinvia). Remarkable is that this international network adopts leftist symbols and operational tactics, such as wearing black hoodies and other clothing style (Hamm, 2009). The contemporary network in Flanders is marginal but present and under the leadership of individuals known by the judicial authorities. The activities of these groups have plummeted in recent years. However, as the social genealogy theory indicates, new groups tend to arise often with a similar ideological frame and a different name. In this regard, the latest active group within this white power ideology is Racial Volunteer Force (RVF). RVF is a combination of Francophone and Dutch speaking members of different Blood and Honour sections, and was founded in Great-Britain in 2002 as a splinter group of Blood and Honour. Their activity has, until now, been limited to participation in demonstrations, organized by other groups (mainly right-wing nationalists).

In contrast with the openly national socialist oriented organisation, national solidarist groups try to create an alternative option besides the right-wing nationalist and National socialist groups. These groups reject working within the contemporary democratic political system, and propagate an alternative modern form of nationalism. They also hold that right-wing nationalist groups are too pragmatic, and overly unambiguously focussed on the Flemish independency. Thus, they tend to label themselves as being 'on the left side of labour and on the right side of morality'. The left is

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[79] Famous slogans during these manifestations are 'put a bomb under the kingdom' and 'Delphine Queen', referring to the illegitimate child of King Albert II

thereby seen as a criticism of the liberal, financial and supranational capitalist society. The task of the groups is therefore to present a positive message of national sovereignty grounded on a state driven by economic recovery and reconciliation. On the other hand, the right side reflects the call for a stop with granting asylum and remigrating all immigrants. In this respect, the current form of multiculturalism gives rise to an ethno-religious fragmentation of society, which creates the current clash between civilizations (Nieuw Solidaristisch Alternatief, 2013). Therefore, these groups focus not only on the Flemish nationalistic aspect, but also on the broader geopolitical level to deal with the problems of migration and alienation. In this regard, they highlight the necessity of an identitarian struggle to defend the peoples and their traditions. Their activities are focused on both action and education. Members of the groups are often represented during demonstrations of other movements (such as the NSV) or during typical Flemish traditional events (such as the Ijzerbedevaart). Besides, the groups provide education for their members in the forms of debates and lectures. In 2009, the NSA, a Nationalist solidarist group, planned to organize a youth congress to recruit radical youngsters. This event –which was filmed by national television- caused controversy due to the fact that members from an Italian band expressed their sympathy for the Fascist Mussolini regime. In addition, the president of the NSA was convicted of inciting racial hatred. These incidents compelled the NSA to operate underground and remain staying underground. Another noted type of activity of nationalist solidarist groups is their active involvement in demonstrations against homeless immigrant people[80] and leftist[81] or in support of the Golden Dawn party. It is through these actions that members of national solidarist are considered prone to violent activities.

More recently the phenomenon of virtual extreme-right groups has entered the extreme-right movement. As an adaptation of the French, English and European defence leagues, Flemish sympathizers created a Facebook page with a Flemish defence league. This phenomenon started in 2012 with the claim for demanding respect for the Flemish identity and forming resistance against the suppression of the Flemish language, tradition and habits. Their main goal is to provide evidence of the criminality of the Islam and Sharia. To this end, members of the Flemish defence league regularly portray Islamists as rapists, murderers and thieves in order to make people aware of the cruelty of this religious belief. Consequently, they call for an extension of the right for self-defence (i.e. legalisation of weapons for Flemish people). Throughout their network on Facebook, the Flemish defence league has reached more than 8.000 followers up until 2 September 2015.

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[80] Members of Nation were arrested after beating up a Polish homeless (Metro, 06/06/2015). However, Rechts Actueel (a forum for Flemish right-wingers) indicated that the members of Nation were threatened by the illegals.
[81] During a Vlaams Belang meeting on 3 April 2014 a protest of the extreme-left ran out of hand, starting a fight between Nation members and extreme-leftists (see Het laatste Nieuws on 4 April 2014 for more information).

Finally, people do not have to be formally engaged in a group to be influenced by an extreme-right ideology. Loose connections between people of similar beliefs and values about societal themes (e.g. migration) may equally provide the opportunities for forming extreme-right informal groups. These loose networks of people often form a melting pot of diverse scenes with a mix of audience, such as football hooligans, bikers, skinheads, right-wing nationalists, national solidarists, who regularly meet at right-wing related concerts or events. An example of this kind of event was the HoGeSa and Pegida movement in Germany. This group is also active in Flanders with the claim to protect the fatherland against the Islamic threat. Pegida has currently attracted nearly 10,000 individuals through the social media. However, it appears that they are only able to recruit maximum 250 participants for their illegal[82] and legal[83] demonstrations.

Q2analytical: *What mechanisms are related to moral support for right-wing extremist violence? How do these mechanisms for moral support influence the actual use of political violence?*

In search of finding the mechanism underlying right-wing extremism, multiple causes and effects have been measured. Nevertheless, important in the understanding of the phenomenon is that the results have shown a distinction between significant effects and mechanisms related to the explanation of the social phenomenon (Bouhana and Wikström, 2010). Despite the fact that variables might reveal a significant effect on the dependent variable, they can rarely be seen as social mechanisms. In accordance with Sampson (2008, 128), we argue that these mechanisms may form the *plausible contextual process that accounts for a given phenomenon, in the ideal case linking putative causes and effects*. Based on the results in the exploratory studies presented in Chapter 2 and 3, Table 6 provides an overview of breeding ground, mechanisms and possible outcomes of moral support for right-wing extremism.

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[82]In the beginning of 2015, Pegida Vlaanderen submitted different applications to demonstrate in the city of Antwerp. Nonetheless, the applications were repeatedly refused by the Antwerp city council for safety reasons due to the increased level of threat after the terrorist act in Verviers on 15 January 2015 and the terrorist attacks on the employees of Charlie Hebdo. After several refusals, the movement decided to illegally demonstrate on the 2 March 2015. During that demonstration, 227 members received a municipal administrative sanction (Het Laatste Nieuws, 2 March 2015).

[83] A reason for the limited support might have been the illegal character of the demonstrations. However, subsequent demonstrations indicated an equal number of 200 to 250 participants (Seveno, 14 april 2015).

Breeding ground for moral support		Social mechanisms in the explanation of moral support		Possible Outcomes
Macro contextual factors	Demographic situation	Anomia	Perceived injustice	Participation in a RWD group
	Economic situation	Authoritarianism	Sensation or thrill seeking	Disorder
	Personal mobility	Lack of perceived legitimacy	Exposure to radical settings or racism	(Political) Vandalism
	Technological development	Negative attitudes towards out-group	Delinquent peers	(Political) Violence
Micro contextual factors	Micro social-economic position	Superiority	Perceived group threat	Voting for extreme-right party
	Negative personal experiences	Positive attitudes towards in-group	Perceived discrimination	
	Unequal treatment	Social disintegration	Lack of procedural justice	

Table 6: Overview of causes and outcomes of moral support for right-wing extremism

Crucial in the understanding of the extreme-right phenomenon is an insight into the context in which the phenomenon is being shaped. On a macro level, it is noted that the transitional nature of globalization, migration and technology has fuelled the situation of the (post-)modern society (Jenkins and Gottlieb, 2007). Signals of that evolution are extremely noticeable in the changing focus on migration. As revealed in the descriptive part, movements in the 70s and 80s already showed their protest against immigration. Most of these movements enunciated their concern about or criticism of migration as degradation of work facilities, culture and Western values (Sela-Shayovitz, 2012). In this respect, scholars have identified the aspect of an almost irreconcilable 'clash of civilizations' between the western modern society and the Islamic values (Huntington, 1993, Veldhuis and Bakker, 2007). More than ever people are confronted with (influences of) other cultures due to conflict zones, extensive personal mobility and capabilities of human communication (Huntington, 1993; Quayle and Taylor, 2011). The emergence of the internet has improved communication, and yet has equally formed an ideal environment for extremist propaganda, practical organization and community building (Pauwels and Schils, 2014). Moreover, the technological development (i.e. e-

mail, mobile phone, internet) has facilitated the spread and internationalization of extreme-right ideology, symbols, clothing style and music (Sela-Shayovitz, 2012) with the creation of national segments of international extreme-right groups (such as Blood and Honour and Autonomous Nationalist).

In addition to the technological and demographical changes, socio-economic change might have equally triggered mechanisms. Historical events, such as the collapse of the class system in response to the economic crisis in the 1930s, have illustrated the effect of rapid economic change (Gielen, 2008). This period produced the grassroots for different extreme-right parties which encouraged a disorganized, structureless mass of angry, disgruntled and desperate individuals. In short, macro-economic decreases might instigate mechanisms such as anomia through the erosion of norms and values, or at least, as Opp (2009, 17) observed, lower the costs of mobilization in anti-establishment groups.

More closely related to the individual are micro factors influencing the personal 'at risk' context (Veldhuis and Bakker, 2007). In line with Legge (2008), our research results have indicated that social disintegration with institutions might be an important mediating mechanism underscoring unemployment, vulnerability and usefulness among youngsters. Heitmeyer (2008) attributed this personal disintegration to the failure of social institutions and communities to provide basic material needs, social recognition, and personal integrity. Furthermore, this intermediate mechanism of social disintegration may explain the ambiguous results regarding the influence of socio-economic status (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012). As Eisinga (cited in Gielen, 2008) proclaimed, low education and income may trigger extreme-right sympathy (i.e. measured as an extreme-right vote) indirectly through the instigation of intermediate mechanisms, such as economic threats. Our conclusion is that weak social position arising from the lack of social integration, negative life events or unequal treatment does not automatically trigger action.

In our lives some people are exposed to disadvantaged settings (e.g. unemployment, loss of spouse cutting ties with friends or family). However, only a minority of this population are subject to aberrant worldviews (Van den Bos, 2009). Personal ability or perseverance to cope with disadvantaged situations can help some individuals to be more resilient to setbacks (Euer et al., 2014). On the contrary, persons receptive to setbacks might end up being in an extremely disadvantaged and alienated position with an increased risk to perceive radical discourses as a viable alternative. Moreover, people also differ as regards the perceptions of possible disadvantaged events. Depending on individuals' definition of unjust, certain situations (e.g. loss of spouse) can be

perceived as 'tragic, but destiny' or 'tragic, and unjust'. In the latter case, people might cope with their perceptions of injustice through anger and frustration (Agnew, 2006; Doosje et al. 2013). Besides, perception of threat may reinforce negative perception (De Witte, 1999; Whitley and Ægisdóttir, 2000). From an attacked position (e.g. impairment of norms and values, religion and culture) people may direct their negative perceptions towards multiple actors, i.e. procedural institutions (i.e. lack of procedural justice), immigrants (i.e. ethnocentrism), and political establishment (i.e. political powerlessness).

In line with the threatening vision of the in-group, people can demonstrate strong attitudinal connection with authoritarian feelings. This strong focus on the preservation of religion, (Flemish or white) nation, (Flemish or Western) norms and values will strengthen the belief that the framework of the in-group is predominant (Altemeyer, 1988). To this end, people tend to promote the superiority of their nation by showing a symbolic Nationalist connection through a Flemish identity (De Witte, 2006; Lubbers, Scheepers and Jaspers, 2009). In contrast, attitudes deviating (cf. national traitors, deterioration of family values) from that nationalist discourse are perceived as inferior, which may justify unconventional actions against the out-group (cf. neutralisation technique of Sykes and Matza, 1957).

Individual propensity for right-wing extremism develops in relation to not only personal morality, but also the ability of individuals to control themselves. Some people strongly support delinquent acts, but are capable of controlling themselves from violent behavior. It is through the interplay of moral support and self-control that people create a certain degree of moral propensity. This propensity may instigate violent behaviour when moral rules of the setting allow violent behavior and individuals lack the ability to control themselves (cf. high levels of thrill seeking behaviour and/or impulsiveness) (Wikström, 2010). On the other hand, social actions are equally determined by setting rules[84] and exposure to racism and delinquent activity. Our results have indicated that the interaction of propensity and exposure might drive people to engage in a diversity of possible outcomes.

Although our research has mainly focussed on the violent outcome of RWD group participation, we have argued that the interaction of moral propensity and exposure is likely to lead to a multitude of outcomes, which might enhance individuals' chances of further engagement in the exposed group.

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[84] There is a difference between setting and exposure. Exposure indicates a setting created by social and self-selection where individuals are often confronted with in daily life. Setting is a part of the environment of the individual and a set of settings is the action territory of an individual. Within this setting, a situation might occur as a result of the combination of propensity and exposure (Wikström, 2010)

Then, the combination of situational and personal moral assumptions might impel individuals to opt for a certain type of criminal behaviour (e.g. disorder, vandalism, antisocial behaviour and violence).

Q3$_{analytical}$: Which pathways of mechanisms lead to participation in right-wing disruptive groups?

In the light of criminal behaviour, the research results in Chapter 2 have indicated the importance of participation in deviant or disruptive groups. Therefore, Chapter 3 has focussed on those mechanisms instigating associations with delinquent actors. In order to prevent individuals from participation, it is crucial to understand the pathways leading to group participation. In this respect, our research results indicated three available pathways.

The first pathways of mechanisms illustrate that participation may result from a *reinforcing injustice model.* As indicated above, people may experience diverse feelings of injustice. The analytical results have indicated that the feeling of injustice can be influenced by (1) social disintegration with school, parents and society (i.e. anomia), (2) perceived discrimination in everyday life (i.e. personal and group discrimination), and (3) perception of injustice by authority (i.e. procedural justice, perceived legitimacy). An accumulation of these feelings might grow into radical world views (e.g. ethnocentrism). However, the reinforcement of feelings of injustice is not merely determined by the absolute number of negative events, as certain situations are 'higher' ranked than others. In accordance with Agnew (2004), we have argued that the magnitude of strain (e.g. feelings of injustice) might be at least as important as the accumulation of feelings of injustice. Furthermore, as indicated above, feelings of injustice can be strengthened by threatening perceptions of the group to which people belong. In this regard, negative perception might be reinforced if there is frame consistency between injustice and threat, directed to a certain out-group (cf. Opp, 2009, 268). Lastly, Stappers, Reijnders and Möller (1990) state that people hold selective perceptions by screening out those messages in line with their beliefs and values. Similarly, extreme-right members will signify favourable message (e.g. illegal actions by immigrants) and use unfavourable messages (e.g. positive impacts of immigration) as sign of conspiracy (Esses et al., 2001).

The *self-control model*, in contrast, disregards the deprived situation and indicates that certain people have a stronger tendency to participate in risky environments. These thrill or sensation seekers search for short-term reward systems (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). In this regard, RWD groups might provide the ideal environment for addressing feelings of excitement, thrills, provocation and adventure. Nonetheless, it is questionable whether these thrill seekers are able to

remain active for long-term participation in a certain group, as needs are not limited and thrill seekers might constantly need to reaffirm these feelings of sensation. Moreover, groups with multiple thrill seekers are more exposed to illegal behaviour (Kissner and Pyrooz, 2009) and have higher risk of criminal prosecution which may shrink the 'survival' range of the RWD group. However, the preventive scope may reach beyond group boundaries as the majority of hate crimes are committed by thrill seekers (Levin and McDevitt, 1999).

In contrast to the aforementioned models, we can distinguish a third model of *right-wing exposure* inspired on the work of Thornberry et al. (1993). Thornberry and colleagues argue that there are three possible models between delinquent group membership (i.e. 'gangs') and personal delinquency (I.e. selection, facilitation and enhancement). These pathways indicate a selection effect with which the association between gang membership and delinquency is spurious due to the fact that a common set of factors (cf. perceived injustice, self-control) explain both delinquency and gang involvement. However, the facilitation and enhancement pathways additionally suggest that deviant group participation might facilitate or enhance these attitudes, norms, and routine activities associated with right-wing motivated disruptive behaviour. These moral beliefs may in turn increase individuals' involvement in criminal behaviour. It is through a learning process, as well as by (re-) defining moral beliefs and providing opportunities for delinquent or prosocial behaviour that participation can be achieved (Akers, 1998). As such, we mark that exposure to racist peers may lead to RWD group participation.

Finally, in line with Thornberry and colleagues, we can argue that there might be an enhancing aspect from which selection and facilitation are combined (Thornberry et al. 1993). In this respect, facilitation and enhancement might not operate as delineated units, but tend to have a reciprocal influence which may stimulate (further) engagement.

Q4[interpretative]: what factors contribute to extreme-right group engagement and how are these factors constructed throughout the process of engagement?

In line with Mellis (2007), this study has shown that a cognitive opening is created through the interaction of supply and demand, nourished by a breeding ground of contextual factors[85] and obstructed by a wall of resilience (see Figure 8). Triggered by critical events[86] (indicated in red arrow

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[85] Over the years, the Flemish extreme-right scene has been able to display its discourse on various themes, i.e. amnesty rights for collaborators, Flemish independence, immigration and religion, in order to address feelings of injustice and discrimination on behalf of the native population.

[86] Triggering events for the Flemish extreme-right scene were, for instance, the negotiations on the Egmont pact, the battle on linguistic matters (e.g. Leuven-Vlaams), and the 9/11.

in Figure 8), these instigators might increase the option of (re)considering extreme-right engagement as viable alternative. For instance, personal victimization may trigger people to search for answers (i.e. increase in demand). However, it may also push individuals who are in the process of searching (i.e. demand) or who are 'cognitively open' towards the next phase. Another option is that the event of victimization may transform a direct turning point into a cognitive opening. With respect to the supply side, critical events such as 9/11 or the influx of refugees might have changed the focus of some extreme-right groups on short notice. The blue arrow, on the other hand, denotes a gradual influencing relation. As such, it is possible that the influx of refugees might not immediately stimulate the supply; however, in the long term it may lead to the emergence of new anti-refugee group. Furthermore, from the moment people become receptive to engagement, further steps towards engagement depend strongly on the effectiveness of building bonds with the new social network (i.e. socialisation) and the personal penetration of extreme-right cognitions (i.e. framing).
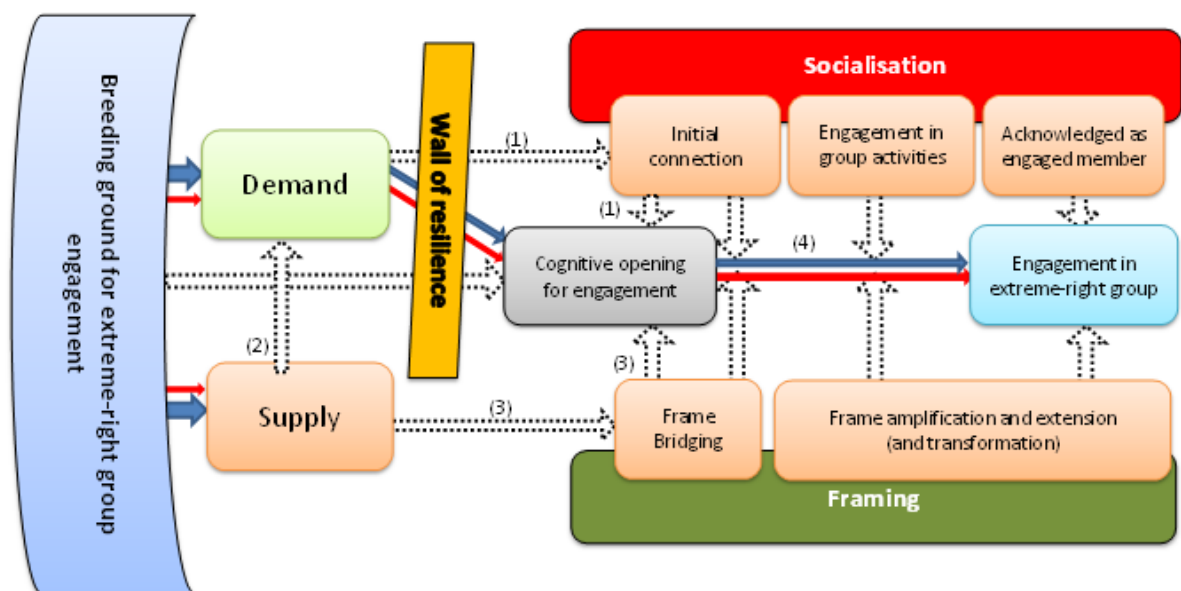
Figure 8: Process of engagement in extreme-right groups

Starting from Mellis' model on the cognitive opening, we have developed a comprehensive model which makes four major amendments as illustrated in Figure 8. First, an influencing (dotted arrow) effect (1) is added from demand towards initial social group contact. Our results have indicated that people are often in search for friends and belonging, without initially considering the ideology of a certain group of peers. Therefore, socialisation prior to cognitive change might be an alternative path to becoming receptive for extreme-right engagement. Second, the supply side is not restricted to passively (2) pulling individuals to cognitively accepting their discourse. Groups adjust and actively amplify their 'frameworks' to connect with individuals. Therefore, the supply side might actively

create awareness (3) through bridging the process of framing (e.g. active recruitment by groups). Third, people who are cognitively open to engagement (sympathizers) can be driven to actual engagement (4). In this phase, social mechanisms (e.g. community building) and social psychological mechanisms (e.g. groupthink, peer pressure) come into play by supporting both mental and social incentives for engagement.[87] Lastly, we have opted for another construction of the breeding ground. Mellis (2007) reports a breeding ground of frustration containing strong perception of discrimination, depravity, injustice, humiliation, alienation, double standards, hostile media, Islam under attack, lack of perspective, democratic hypocrisy. In contrast, we have claimed that distinction has to be made between breeding ground and mechanisms leading to participation. The breeding ground consists of contextual factors on the macro and the micro level (see $Q2_{analytical}$) which impact on supply (i.e. the amount of extreme-right groups) and demand (i.e. youngsters vulnerable for an extreme-right discourse).

The missing link within the model of engagement seems to be the mechanisms leading to participation (cf. the analytical part, Chapter 2 and 3). However, in the interpretative part attention was paid to the construction of 'causes' of participation through the process of engagement. We have thus argued that the mechanisms of the static measure of participation may affect the dynamic process of engagement in three ways. First, it could be that the breeding ground leads to the increase in mechanisms, such as perceived injustice, group threat and anomia. To respond to these mechanisms, people may actively search for opportunities (supply). In this case, the mechanisms of participation play a guiding role for the cognitive opening. Second, another possibility is that individuals socialise with peers who raise their awareness of the deprived situation. In so doing, peers enhance the mechanisms (e.g. feelings of injustice) through the processes of framing. Finally, there is the intermediate option, which says that people might tend to enhance their perception of injustice after the processes of framing. In consequence, individuals reinforce their already high level of injustice after engagement. It indicates that, through the process of engagement, groups acquire the ability to (1) amplify the necessity and empower people to engage in extreme-right groups, (2) to displace their feelings of injustice from the individual to the group level and vice versa, and (3) to externalise the root cause of perceived injustice through scapegoating[88]. It is through this form of

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[87] Ongoing debate has focused on the differences and relationship between the physical and psychological processes[87] of (dis)engagement (Horgan, 2009; Noricks, 2009; Dechesne, 2011). A distinction is made between radicalisation as gradually becoming more receptive to a certain discourse and engagement as the physical social connection with the group. In this aspect, it is noteworthy that both aspects of mental and social engagement strongly interact and tend to work as a reinforcing spiral.

[88] Social media pages, internet forums or paper-administered journals of extreme-right groups contain much 'evidence' which demonstrates the criminality of the out-groups, varying from scandals of left politician to accusations of rape by foreigners.

scapegoating and collective feeling of injustice that a stronger ethnocentric (us/them) distinction, both on the individual and the group level, can be created (Taylor et al. 1990).

Q5interpretative**: Which actors are involved in the engagement process and what are their roles within extreme-right group engagement?**

Within the process of engagement, supply and demand are regarded as the dynamic products constantly under the influence of multiple actors (see Figure 9). It is within this symbiosis of influences that these dynamic products are shaped as receivers of influencing messages. These messages may be directly derived from the surrounding environment or indirectly through national or local media. In general, three groups of actors can be distinguished: (1) personal environment (i.e. family and friends), (2) social conventional environment (i.e. school, sport and youth movement) and (3) the out-group (i.e. political establishment, ideological opponents and police and judicial services).
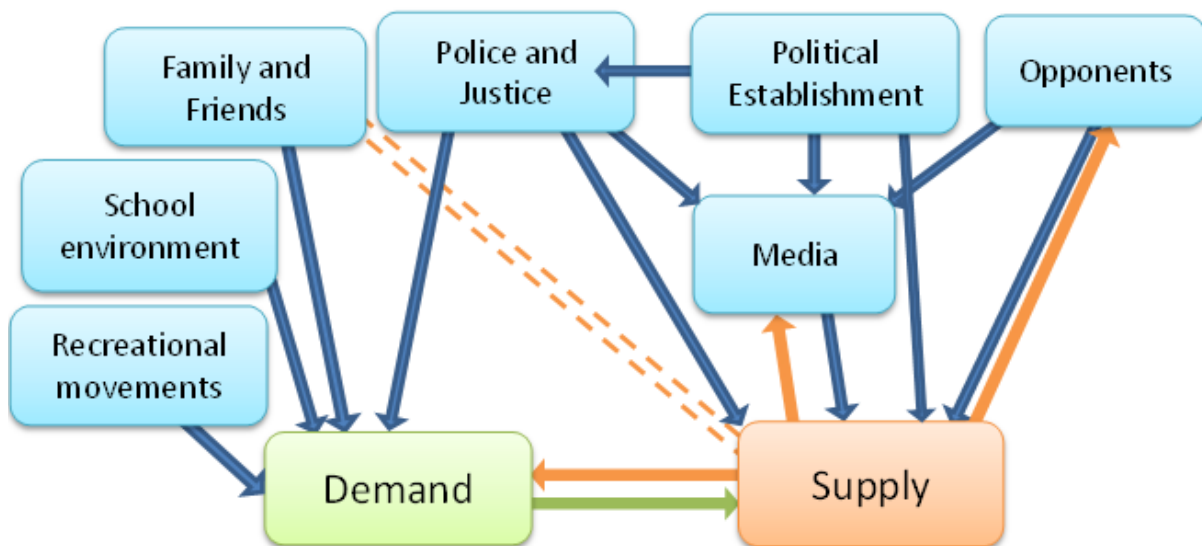
Figure 9: Influences of actors surrounding extreme-right supply and demand

As in most cases, ***Parents and family members*** are the closest connection to the personal environment. Results have turned out that these actors might have an ambiguous influencing role in the engagement process. On the one hand, parents might be connected to the supply (see the orange dashed line) and try to transfer their extreme-right feelings to their children. Parents may take the role of both moral and social facilitator for engagement. De Witte (2006) describes a similar role of parents in his study on Flemish extreme-right militants (i.e. right-wing nationalists). He maintains that especially members with roots in radical families strongly support ideology, family

environment and the extreme-right social network. On the other hand, parents can also contribute to the activist career by total rejecting their children. In line with Bjørgo's work on Neo-Nazi groups, our respondents indicated that breaking the bonds with their parents formed a crucial moment for further engagement (Bjørgo, 2002). Nonetheless, the role of parents should not be exaggerated. Parents or family members might have a pushing effect on engagement, but the relationship between family member(s) and child might also remain untouched through engagement, even when people engage in neo-Nazi groups[89].

As pointed out in the explanatory section, *friends or peers* may form an ideal facilitator for extremist behaviour. On the contrary, friends might also have an inhibitory impact on group engagement and delinquent behaviour. Important with regard to this inhibitory activity are (1) the strength of ties with their friends, (2) the extent to which friends have knowledge of the engagement[90] and (3) the individuals' perception of the approval of engagement by friends. When friends do not accept engagement, individuals are confronted with an imbalanced situation. To restore the imbalance, individuals have the choice between disengagement and cutting ties with friends (Opp, 2009, 275-303). The latter option to disrupt conventional friendship ties might further open up the path for extreme-right community building and delinquent behaviour (Hirschi, 1969; Vitaro, Trembley and Bukowski, 2001).

Another important factor in the polarization and engagement of extremist groups is the role of *ideological opponents* (mainly leftist and immigrant groups). Consistent with Noppe et al. (2011), our results have indicated that polarisation of outsiders might create a justification for taking up an active role in the group. Respondents even indicated that their activism is largely based on the negative perception by outsiders. Polarized groups magnify statements and reports on the 'dangers' of the opponents through diverse 'in-group' media channels (e.g. internet blogs, magazines) and national media. The results have thus confirmed that the supply side often actively stimulates polarization by encouraging opponents to act (e.g. encouraging leftist to organize a counter demonstration).

Conventional workers within the *school* and *recreational environment* are often the first to detect signs of extreme-right group engagement (cf. Gielen, 2008; Grubben, 2006). Teachers, sport coaches

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[89] This does not mean that parents are always supportive of the choice of their children. Respondents indicated that their parents were not always satisfied, even upset, with their choice for engagement. However, it has not led the parents to cut ties with their children. In this regard, respondents pointed out that their parents were especially worried that something would happen to them.

[90] Some respondents indicated that most of their non-engaged friends were not always aware of (1) their engagement and (2) the type of group they have joined.

and other supervisors (e.g. scouts leaders) are generally confronted with youngsters receptive to new insights. For these young people, engaging in radical discourses might be one of the possible alternative routes for identity development (McGowan, 2006; Kimmel, 2007). Coping with the presence of right-wing radical youngsters is not an easy nor convenient task for institutions. In undertaking action, actors need to bear in mind that they might possibly reinforce radical beliefs, or, conversely, trigger ideological opponents (leftist, immigrants) to a radical discourse. However, ignoring the signs might risk behavioural escalation which may yield enormous damage to the image of the institution.

An important role in the labelling of extreme-right is preserved for the local and national *media*. In this respect, results from this study have shown that media depictions may have both positive and negative effects. Negatively labelling extreme-right groups, for instance, as racist or fascists may ensure that a certain segment of support will leave the scene. Nonetheless, most individuals already have an impression of media being subjective. Therefore, media depiction can be interpreted as yet another confirmation of the stigmatization by mainstream society. As indicated above in $Q4_{interpretative}$, the selective perceptions of people may lead them to an entrenched 'tunnel vision' ideology, leaving no room for dissenting opinions (Stappers, Reijnders and Möller, 1990). Furthermore, our respondents indicated to have been intensely attracted to the provocative and uncompromising character of the group (cf. Bjørgo, 2002). Fuelled by the image of the media, radical supporters might be attracted by the uncompromising label. In relation to this phenomenon, Bjørgo (2002)asserts that 'rebels go to the right' in that there is hardly anything more provocative than the adoration for the Nazi or fascist regime.

Lastly, a final actor intervening respondents, directly or through national media, is the government. The ***political establishment*** has, over the years, showed its power to implement regulations specifically targeting fascist and extremist organisations[91]. Since 1981, legal forces have been provided with means to combat racism and discrimination. This includes severe punishment and possible deprivation of civil and political rights (Deklerck et al., 2009). These legal initiatives indicate the standards and the (symbolic) response of the government to the evolving deviant phenomenon. The ***police and the judicial services*** are then provided with the means for tackling those who fall under the jurisdiction (Grubben, 2006). On the whole, not only the sanction aspect but also the

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[91] A specific law against private militia was introduced before the World War II in order to ban fascist street gangs (Ponsaers et. al, 2013). In 1995, the negationism law came into effect and prohibited the denial, minimization, justification and approval of the genocide and holocaust. Furthermore, laws were included to penalize instigation and giving 'publicity' to racism, discrimination, xenophobia and homophobia.

treatment of police and judicial actors can influence individual behaviour (Tyler, 2003, 2006, Jackson et al, 2012, Van Damme and Pauwels, 2013).

Throughout the life career, actors may reinforce or inhibit the propensity of individuals to engage in extreme-right groups. Nonetheless, the Flemish extreme-right movement is largely divided in terms of ideology and provocative language and style. Dependent on engagement within a certain group, actors may adjust their influencing relationship.

Q6interpretative: What are the differences in engagement between the diverse extreme-right groups in Flanders?

Van der Valk and Wagenaar (2010) mention that individuals want to connect with groups that satisfy their needs. In the interpretative section of this dissertation, three ideological groups (right-wing nationalist, national solidarists, Neo-Nazi) were distinguished. In an 'ideal' situation, individuals would have the opportunity to connect with those ideological groups that fit their desire. However, aspects such as the presence of a (long-term) supply, legality and accessibility to the group might endanger the opportunity to connect (see Table 7).

First, on the organizational level, right-wing nationalist groups tend to have a more professional structure which enables them to 'survive' in the long term[92]. Important aspects to this survival are the organizational strength and the ability to attract resources (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Klandermans, 1984). The first success factor is that right-wing nationalist groups have succeeded in establishing a (Flemish) *nationwide structure* of group sections with an overarching administration. This core administrational board is designated over a certain long-term period and responsible for the structural functioning. Due to the broad geographical spread and central coordination, groups can deal with possible drawbacks such as the loss of leading figures. In contrast, subcultural groups are geographically more concentrated and have a limited number of members. In order to maintain active in the field, subcultural groups will need to cope with the legacy of outgoing executives. Furthermore, in the interest of structural functioning, groups largely depend on the long-term *financial situation* (Tilly, 1978; Jenkins, 1983).

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[92] Contemporary right-wing nationalist groups such as Voorpost and NSV are active since the end of the seventies (De Waele, 2013)

		Right-wing Nationalist (1)	Neo-Nazi (2)	Modern National Solidarist (3)
Organization	**Presence of groups?**	Most groups active since the seventies or earlier	First signs on the end of the 80^s. Tend to pop up and disappear	First signs on the end of the 90^s. Tend to pop up and disappear
	Structure of groups	Broad and nationwide	Centralized in certain cities	Centralized in certain cities
	Leadership and administration	Central administration with representatives from different sections	Charismatic leader with small amount of core members	Charismatic leader with small amount of core members
	Financial situation	Central administration controlling financial situation	Dependent on temporal success	Dependent on temporal success
Structural ties	**Ties with democratic institutions**	Connection with conventional institutions, such as police services, before and during demonstrations	No connection with conventional institutions	No connection with conventional institutions
	Ties with groups within the extreme-right movement	Alliances and collaborations with other (1) groups + no open connection with (2) + tolerating (3)	Sense of rivalry among (2) groups + no open connection with (1) + tolerating (3)	Sense of rivalry among (3) groups + strongly criticizing but tolerating (1) + no open connection with (2)
Accessibility	**Public accessibility?**	Low threshold for engagement due to publicly accessible events	Higher threshold for engagement due to closed meetings	Higher threshold for engagement due to closed meetings
	Recruitment	General recruitment = 'the more the merrier' policy	Specific recruitment = Targeting non-compromising youth	Specific recruitment = Targeting people through an alternative modern ideology as an intermediation form between (1) and (2)

Table 7: Overview of differences between groups

In this respect, Cotter (1999) says that one of the main reasons for the resurrection of the skinhead and Neo-Nazi scène is the popularity of the white power music, providing the scene with a financial influx. Nevertheless, this influx has not led to structural change and expansion of organizational skills, resulting in the group becoming dependent on temporal 'success' factors, such as leadership and the attractiveness of the scene. All these aforementioned aspects ensure that right-wing nationalist groups are better equipped to deal with setbacks. As stated in the interpretative part, there has to be a supply to meet the demand. For instance, due to the strong volatility of Neo-Nazi groups, it is difficult for a Neo-Nazi individual to engage in Neo-Nazi groups for a long term. Individuals who

adhere to a Neo-Nazi ideology might engage in the right-wing nationalist movement[93], or other 'rebel' groups (i.e. hooligans, biker scene, and informal cliques) or renounce engagement.

Second, engagement depends on the manner in which groups maintain contact with 'external partners' in both the in-group and out-group. On the one hand, committed *alliances or collaborations* with other groups on the Flemish extreme-right segment, as 'partners in crime', might be the equally important financial influx. These contacts may produce positive scale effects on the group through the exchange of resources (e.g. financial or physical support during events). Likewise, they can affect individual members. When people have good connection with associated groups, they are more likely to remain active within the extreme-right movement even when the group is disbanded. On the other hand, groups may have a structural advantage when they have a strong *connection with conventional institutions*. In general, right-wing nationalist groups tend to work within legality by maintaining contact with policy and police services. This connection lowers the personal risk of engagement and is extremely beneficial in light of gaining the acceptance of policy and police actors to legally demonstrate[94]. Subcultural groups, on the other hand, are more hostile towards democratic institutions, forcing them to operate in clandestine groups. Beneficial for these groups is that they are able to attract the more radical segment of the extreme-right movement. In attracting the radical scene, Neo-Nazi groups try to address youngsters through a combination of an appealing provocative scene (especially dress code and stirring music[95]) and an ideological narrative that focusses on cultural threats and conspiracy against the white race (Cotter, 1999). Thus, Neo Nazi's seem more attracted to the tough image and the ability to shock people (e.g. puncturing bubbles), as opposed to ideological elaboration (Bjørgo, 2002). Meanwhile, engaged individuals run a greater risk of criminal prosecution. In Belgium, members could be convicted when it can be demonstrated that individuals are members of a group which repeatedly promotes racism or xenophobia[96].

Lastly, the underground method of Neo-Nazi groups and National solidarist groups ensure that the latter groups are less accessible than right-wing nationalist groups. Due to the strong anti-establishment discourse and the, thereby affiliated, higher risk of prosecution, groups are restricted

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[93] However, groups of right-wing nationalist movement often refuse Neo-Nazi members due to their bad reputation.

[94] These legal and low-threshold actions may provide the optimal opportunity for sympathizers to enter the scène.

[95] In order to maximize the shock value, punks were the first to become interested in the Nazi regime and displayed swastika's on t-shirts and armbands in public (Cotter, 1999). In reaction to this politicization of the punk scène in the 70s, skinheads also grew into a far more politically engaged subcultural source of hate thoughts, toughness and aggressiveness (Moore, 1993; Cotter, 1999). The skinhead subculture underwent a transformation from a working class community which favoured reggae music to a hard, masculine style, noticeable in attitude, clothing and music. Diverse established racist groups noted the appealing counter-culture of the working-class men and started to recruit skinheads to join their political groups (Blazak, 2001)

[96] See art. 22 of the law of 30 July 1981 for criminalizing certain acts of racism or xenophobia, *BS* 8 August 1981.

to recruiting from a limited pool of sympathizers. At the same time, anti-establishment groups tend to attract the attention of security and police services causing even more suspicion and paranoia among members. As a result, group leaders often opt to remain 'small in number, but radical in thought'. As such, the leader can have more control of the 'true nature' of its members. To counter the limited accessibility to engagement, national solidarist groups tend to actively recruit from other extreme-right circles in order to attract 'trustful' and motivated individuals.

In general, the previous overview has illuminated the differences between different groups in the extreme-right spectrum. Nonetheless, scholars should be mindful that membership is not restricted to engagement of a well-defined unit. Throughout the reconstruction of activist careers, it appears that members have been part of a variety of groups. After initial engagement, members are exposed to a plurality of groups which are often previously unknown. With the experiences gained from the group, members continuously choose between (1) remaining active within the extreme-right group, (2) leaving the scene or (3) exploring other internal (extreme-right) or external (hooligan, biker or leftist) environments. When the latter post-engagement process is included in the model of engagement, a feedback loop needs to be added for engaged extreme-right individuals who decide to engage in another extreme-right group (see Figure 10).
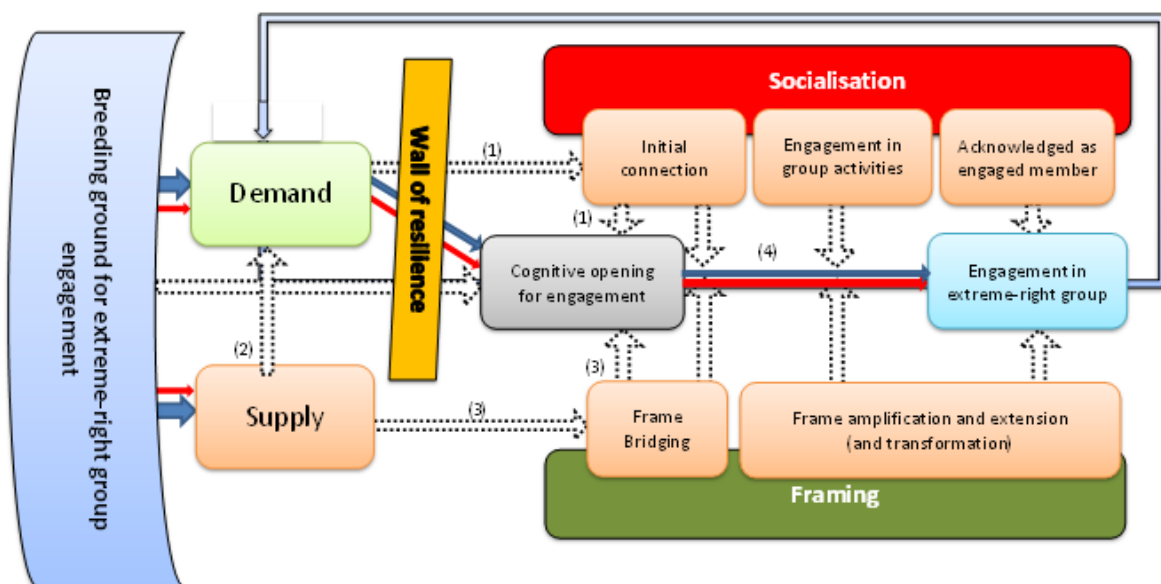

Figure 10: Process of engagement in extreme-right groups with feedback loops

3. Limitations and recommendations for future research

3.1. Analytical quantitative part

The aim of the exploratory study was to analyse those factors contributing to the understanding of right-wing extremist beliefs and violent manifestation. The study thus embarked on a web survey targeting a broad young Flemish population. The original method used by our research group to target the right-wing population was a combination of school survey and online web survey[97]. However, due to the small number of schools willing to participate in the paper-and-pencil survey (often because of the huge demand for surveys in schools), the web survey technique offered a suitable substitute to reach the Flemish youth. Nevertheless, the employed research method has a number of drawbacks, thus leaving room for improvement regarding the use of web survey method.

<u>Method and sampling</u>

First, the results of the web survey indicated an overrepresentation of the school youth population. To test the validity of the conceptual model, future research may concentrate on the non-school population (e.g. working youth, unemployed youth and adults). Furthermore, research should not be restricted to the right-wing population. The model could be tested on other group manifestations (e.g. other radical groups[98], cults, sects, gangs and troublesome youth group) and in relation to other outcomes (e.g. vandalism and disorder). Conducting these types of targeted research will extend our knowledge of the communalities and differences of the mechanisms influencing the manifestation of different criminal group participation.

Second, certain individuals might be more willing to fill out the survey than others. The surveys were announced under the names of 'questionnaire regarding the use of social media and political beliefs by youngsters' and 'questionnaire regarding social and political beliefs about and attitudes towards Flemish nationalism'. Hence, due to self-selection and disinterest, certain individuals could not be convinced of participation (Schmidt, 1997). However, in line with Nulty (2008), efforts were taken to minimize the selection bias and maximize the response rate. Both surveys were easily accessible to respondents with the use of software packages (thesistools). In addition, attractive incentives (i.e. IPod and cinema tickets) were used as a persuasion technique for the 'disinterested' people. Furthermore, multiple reminder emails and messages were posted on Facebook and right-wing

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[97] This method was used for the RADIMED project where 33 schools in Antwerp were contacted to conduct a paper-and-pencil survey. However, only 9 were willing to take part. Three schools were prepared to hand out the questionnaires during school hours, while the other 6 schools agreed to introduce the research in class together with the remaining information and link to the web survey (Pauwels et al. 2014, 114-115). In addition, 6 schools agreed to put up posters in their schools with information on the web survey.

[98] i.e. political (e.g. leftist), religious (e.g. Islamic, Christian, etc.) and single-issue (e.g. Animal liberation front)

online forums. However, certain individuals might not appreciate these repeated mails, which may even create hostility towards the researcher (Schmidt, 1997). During the spread of these reminder mails, certain negative reactions were expressed by forum members. However, they were largely limited to verbal insults. However, future research in this field should be cautious about possible hostile actions towards the researcher[99].

Finally, our results have indicated the limitation of cross-sectional research to measure the reciprocal effect of some of the measures. As noted by Thornberry and Porter (2001, 60), further research should focus on the strength of causes of RWD participation over time, i.e. before, during and after group participation. In addition, longitudinal research could also offer more information about the duration and propensity of criminal acts throughout the career[100] (Esbensen and Huizinga, 1993). However, it should be noted that the disadvantages of longitudinal research method are high cost and long time. An alternative to reduce the cost is to design a cross-sectional questionnaire with a longitudinal character. Thus, it might be interesting to analyse the relationship between RWD group membership and delinquency in different moments in the career of group participants (Melde and Esbensen, 2011; Menard and Elliot, 1994; Esbensen and Huizinga, 1993). Ideally, research should also include longitudinal measures of victimization to analyse the exposure to risky environments.

Measurements of constructs

Despite the fact that all scales have been tested several times in research with the internal consistency and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) carefully checked, several suggestions can be made to improve the strength of the questionnaire in future research.

First, improvement can be made regarding the current definition of *participation in RWD group*. This variable was constructed as a combined scale of a personal ideological left/right positioning and gang identifiers. Furthermore, it is noted that respondents might have experienced difficulties positioning themselves on the one-dimensional left-right scale due to contradictory left/right views (e.g. left vision on economics, right vision on immigration). Further research might include additional characteristic measures of the RWD group. Besides, research might also add some self-nominating

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[99] This is one of the reasons why we refrained from giving any personal information such as phone number and address about the researcher in the study.

[100] For instance, American longitudinal studies on gangs have contradicted the media-promoted stereotypes of youth becoming gang membership for life (Esbensen and Huizinga, 1993). These studies indicated that very few members remain active for longer than a year, and many of those youth registered dislikes about gang participation. Esbensen and Huizinga (1993) further professed, on the basis of the longitudinal Denver study, that a majority of members are peripheral or transitory, drifting from one group to the other. Other longitudinal studies based on the Pittsburgh, Rochester, Seattle and the GREAT sample confirmed the brief trajectories of gang members (Pyrooz, Sweeten and Piquero, 2012)

questions on participation in political parties, social movements and subcultural network groups. In doing so, scholars might gain a better insight into the activist career of the respondents.

Second, future research should consider the effect of self-projection when asking questions about relevant peers in the environment. Questions about the behaviour of peers might be very useful in the light of sensitive topics, such as racism and delinquency, as respondents tend to judge racist attitudes or delinquent behaviour of their peers instead of their own. This point has been similarly noted by Young et al. (2013) who hold that scholars need to be careful in interpretation of these variables due to the self-projection of one's own behaviour towards the behaviour of peers (i.e. acceptance of racism, delinquent activity) . On the whole, the relation between delinquent peers and personal use of violence remains a complicated issue.[101].

Third, improvement can be made in relation to the additional measures of constructs. In the current study, the focus was on group threat towards immigrants and identification with the Flemish people. However, no measures were used to investigate group threat towards other out-groups (i.e. political establishment, Walloons, etc.) and identification with other in-groups (i.e. white people, Belgians, etc.). Besides, certain variables such as anomia and strain might need to be more thoroughly tested for more profound knowledge of their impact.

Fourth, although it is impossible to involve all the relevant variables in the questionnaire, future research might include the following variables to improve the understanding of the phenomenon. At first, our research covered questions concerning social bond and control of parents (Chapter 2, social integration), yet we did not ask any questions about the political orientation of the parents. Furthermore, our research did not include absolute measures of social economic status (SES). Although we assumed that SES does not have a direct effect, it might be interesting to investigate the impact of SES on perceived injustice and the indirect relation to other causes of right-wing extremism.

The last limitation concerns the inconsistent use variable names by scholars. During the literature review we noted that similar variables are often operationalized under different labels. An example is political powerlessness which is used in our research under the term anomia, but is often referred to as political alienation (Finifter, 1970; Pantoja and Segura, 2003), political legitimacy (Nagel, 1987), or

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[101] Therefore, during the research period we decided to focus predominantly on the reasons underlying why youngsters tend to engage in these 'RWD' groups, rather than on the possible effect of delinquent peers on personal violence.

political disintegration (Alesina, Spolaore, Wacziarg, 1997). Therefore, we advocate the use of general applicable terms for consistency and coherence within the field.

Research design

The conducted exploratory research can be considered a theoretical simplification of reality where our conceptual model serves as one of diverse conceptual explanations of the dependent variables. This statement can be supported by the indicator of the coefficient of determination R^2, which suggests that improvement can be made as to the explanation of the variation of the dependent variables. In the previous section we point out that although choices have to be made about including certain scales in quantitative research, future research might include more measures. Our item non-response rate, for instance, was considerably high in our research design. Of a total of 1400 respondents who started, only 761 fully completed the questionnaire. To compensate for this issue, researchers should strive to find the balance between the magnitude of the questionnaire and the inclusion of relevant questions.

3.2. Interpretative qualitative part

Departing from the observation that the broad extreme-right research population has never been scientifically investigated in Belgium, the study was aimed at combining aspects of explanatory and interpretative research. Building upon the results and limitations connected to the research, we make further recommendations to optimize academic research in this field.

First, follow-up studies should focus on populations who are more difficult to reach in this study, i.e. women. For the in-depth interview only two female members were eager to participate. One explanation for this imbalance in gender is that women seem to be lesser present in extreme-right groups, although not entirely absent within all diverse groups. Another reason could be that a great number of respondents were contacted through social media because they were mentioned in document or publicly available criminal files. These files on group participants tend to focus mainly on male members. The highly limited number of female participants indicates that the study might be subject to gender bias. Therefore, further research should direct more attention to gender balance and the role of women in extreme-right groups.

Second, the discussion session of the interpretative article already briefly mentions the restriction of self-selection and response rate. Inherent to studies on hard-to-reach populations, and especially on anti-establishment populations is the multitude of people who refused to contribute to research

owing to distrust or the intention to bury their past and prior bad experiences (Teitler, Reichman and Sprachman, 2003). As mentioned, people were contacted through both 'real life' activities (e.g. lectures, demonstrations) and the social media. In this respect, it is noted that respondents who were personally approached in real life were more eager to co-operate. One explanation might be the effect of - known in marketing jargon as- the 'warm call', i.e. a call with whom the researcher shared a positive prior conversation (Sadler et al. 2010, 370-71). Sadler et al. (2010) mention that results of the reverse 'cold call' related to random contacts with whom no prior relationship is built can be more vulnerable to self-selection and might lead to a higher refusal rate. Another explanation is that people of right-wing nationalist are easier to contact than people from subcultural groups. Right-wing nationalist are, as stated in the results section, more open and publicly oriented. They tend to regularly organise lectures, educations, seminars, demonstrations and other events which are publically available, and hence, easily accessible to researchers. On the contrary, subcultural groups tend to organize more closed or limited accessible meetings. In addition, members of right-wing nationalist were not eager to provide the researcher with contact information of members of subcultural groups. Therefore, diverse snowball starting points were used in order to reach all actors within the population (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). In this respect, efforts have been made to reach a broad and varied population of respondents, both in terms of geographical location, number of groups (and group sections) and absolute number of respondents. However, to test the validity, further research might consider more involvement in personal contact (cf. 'warm call') by conducting participatory observations within certain groups.

Third, as Mottier (2005) observes, research is restricted to the interpretation of reality by the respondent, and researchers are only interpreters of the interpretation by the respondent. So far research on the retrospective nature of engagement might have been influenced by certain memory errors of the respondent. In retrospect, some of our respondents were older than 60 and entered the group when they were teenagers, and as a result, they might have blurring or distorted memory which means certain key information might have lost (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). In addition, these interviewees might reinterpret their engagement process in the light of contemporary events[102], exerting an influence on the supplied data. Therefore, follow-up studies need to take account of these possible constraints and can counter these memory and interpretation biases by back-office information (cf. methods part 3) and contacts with other actors surrounding the individual (parents, friends, opponents, etc.) to check the reliability of the narratives.

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[102] Former members, for instance, might interpret their previous engagement differently from members who are still active in the group.

Fourth, the results have indicated the importance of socialization and the fact that socialization should be seen within a broad spectrum of social network relations (i.e. not restricted to the socialization of a certain group). Therefore, another aspect to enhancing our knowledge of the characteristics of engagement is deepening our understanding of the social embeddedness of these groups (Kleemans and Van den Bunt, 1999). In this sense, scholars need to transcend the traditional deviant network or group participation as in/out dichotomy, and study the broader social network picture of social structure and criminal embeddedness (Pyrooz, Sweeten and Piquero, 2012). To increase our understanding of the impact of group membership on the commitment of extremist violence, it would be useful to integrate insights from gang and organized crime literature (e.g. McGloin, 2005; Sarnecki, 2001; Simpson, 2010; Crenshaw, 1981; Schmid, 1996). More specifically, research could contribute, through the use of social network analysis (SNA), to the understanding of the emergence and composition of right-wing networks and the intertwining relation between extreme-right actors and actors both in and outside the right-wing setting.

Pyrooz and colleagues (2012) suggest that there might be many similarities between the diverse social networks and 'criminal' groups. Therefore, they mention that *if embeddedness extends across contexts, this will aid in developing a larger, more comparative knowledge base of deviant social networks to the benefit of gang research in particular and criminological research in general* (Pyrooz et al. 2012, 22)*. Future research should delve into the field of right-wing social networks, while obtaining insights from studies of organized crime, gangs, and of engagement and disengagement of extremist groups. Rigorous research in this field is necessary to address the problems of recruitment, further intertwined radicalisation structures and the influence of virtual contacts (Conway and McInerney, 2008; Pauwels et al., 2014). Young people, especially in adolescence, are specifically susceptible to external influences of extremist networks. Understanding how these social networks function is useful for a holistic approach to general crime prevention (Rostami and Leinfelt, 2012, Bjørgo, 2013).

4. Recommendations for policy and practice

Confronted with the growing effect of extremist groups, policy workers are faced with the challenge to adequately address the phenomenon. Thus far, response to these repulsive acts has been largely based on (short-term) visible symbolical measure in order to show government's willingness to act rather than on structural long-term solutions (Carlsson, 2006). In order to address the problem of right-wing extremist delinquent activity on a structural basis, it is important to deal with the causes with proper measures at proper time (see Table 8 for an overview). Consequently, it is crucial to find

and adopt a tailored prevention approach which takes the life course of radicalising youngsters into consideration and targets at different stages of development.

	Prevention			Repression and after care
	Universal	Selective	Indicated	
Targeted population	General population	Sympathizers and potential perpetrators (i.e. cognitively open population)	Population at risk = Group or criminal engagement	Criminal perpetrators
Preventive focus ~ model & actors of engagement	- reducing breeding ground - reducing personal demand - strengthening wall of resilience - media policy - social policy ~ school, leisure time,	- providing 'alternative' narratives to counter receptiveness to an extreme-right discourse - responding to vulnerability (e.g. victimization) - increasing knowledge of frontline worker ~detection	- crime prevention through empowerment conversation by frontline workers - the inclusion of parents within the prevention of crime - the inclusion of desisters as experts	- turning to specialized custom-made support - increasing knowledge of frontline worker ~detection (i.e. prison staff) -increasing procedural justice
Aim	Resilience to radical messages	Early detection	Preventing (further) criminal behaviour	Preventing (further) criminal behaviour

Table 8: Preventive approach in regard of right-wing extremist behaviour

Universal prevention

With the aim of providing a tailored approach to prevent ideological inspired criminal activities, policy makers should not shift their focus on certain manifestations of extremist inspired criminal activity. In order to tackle the diversity of outcomes of right-wing extremism, general forms of crime prevention are necessary in order to better monitor the breeding ground of feelings of injustice, discrimination and alienation, which has the potential to propagate anti-democratic actions.

In line with Carlsson (2006), we recommend that the available preventive initiatives and possibilities among the institutional frameworks be analysed before new (symbolic) institutions are introduced, aiming at solving the 'pathology' of extreme-right engagement. In fact, many preventive initiatives appear to be hidden in the daily work activities of public institutions. Therefore, as the research of Noppe et al. (2011) on installing preventive measures for radicalisation in Belgium indicates, policy makers should primarily focus on (1) strengthening the present social policy initiatives (especially education, employment and integration) and (2) providing regional and local work packages. In the

aftermath of the departure of several foreign fighters, the Flemish government[103] decided to develop a strategic framework and action plan to combat radicalisation (read: Islamic radicalisation). The preventive chapter of the action plan denotes a diversity of positive preventive initiatives to support the needs of local actors with the emphasis on welfare, scholarly education and employment (Vlaamse Regering, 2015). In specific, the Flemish government refers to investments for pathways to employment of radicalised youngsters (and former foreign fighters[104]) in 'affected cities and municipalities'. Nevertheless, preventive issues on community development, social work, education and employment pathways must not become a preferential treatment for certain populations. Policy makers must be aware of the possible stigmatization of other populations in society in areas critical to general crime prevention.

Special attention should be paid to the school and educational context of youngsters. Schools need to strive to narrow the in-out group gap between people with different (ethnic) backgrounds. Grubben (2006) indicates that schools often try to decrease this diversity by making children aware of the presence of different cultures within a certain country, without truly explaining the native culture. However, in order to thoroughly understand the diversities of and similarities between cultures, school might first explain the internal diversity of the Flemish culture (Grubben, 2006, 61). It is from the historic and cultural perspectives that an insight can be gained into issues such as socio-economic position, migration, culture, religious diversity and feelings of discrimination and racism.

Aside from strengthening the traditional forms of social policy on a general level, people might need to reinforce their 'wall of resilience'. National and international studies have indicated that building resilience and empowering youngsters against radical and extremist messages through training show positive results (Gielen, 2008; Euer et al. 2014). The aims of these trainings are to develop skills and competences such as critical thinking, to enhance problem solving skills and self-confidence, and to create stronger awareness of tolerance for other people, self-reflection, negotiation, and team work. Since early 2015 the 'Bounce resilience tools' project has started in Belgium (Euer et al. 2014). This is a first step towards empowering and integrating youngsters in society. On the long term further research should clarify whether the current tool is effective in dealing with the various manifestations of radical and criminal behaviour in a Flemish context. However, these resilience

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[103] The federal structure of the Belgian government ensures that the prevention of radicalisation is controlled by both the Federal state and the sub-state communities. The federal level is responsible for safety measures such as data and information exchange, prosecution, denial access to the territory, withdrawal of nationality, arrangement with respect to internet and social media, whereas the sub-state government is in charge of prevention, sensitization and early detection of the phenomenon (Vlaamse Regering, 2015)

[104] The employment measures targeting foreign fighters need to be seen as curative, and therefore, further initiatives seem desirable to rehabilitate foreign fighters.

training sessions are part of the-often-hidden daily life activities (Carlsson, 2006). Therefore, it is difficult to measure the exact effect of such activities on the prevention of delinquent behaviour.

As the last universal prevention recommendation, policy makers should have greater awareness of media channels as important catalyst in the process of engagement (see above). It is through the use of personalized extreme-right magazines that members are periodically provided with information on ideology, upcoming events and (music) style. Although the use of internet has, to a large extent, taken over this source of information, group magazines still appear periodically in the form of paper, online blogs or private mail newsletters. These forms of media are largely private and, as long as being acceptable within the purview of human rights, not subject to repression. In this respect, preventive and repressive policy measures should be avoided being turned into an 'ideological police' instrument, regulating the cognitions of individuals (Pauwels et al. 2014).However, policy makers might reconsider the possibility of supporting the distribution of 'alternative' narratives on topics such as immigration, religion and Flemish culture[105].

Selective prevention

In an urge of exploring one's own identity, people often actively search for a group to fulfil their personal needs. In the interest of preventing sympathizing youngsters from entanglement with extreme-right groups or networks, it is recommended that the emerging phenomenon be detected at an early stage. Grounded on our results, three initiatives are provided to enhance early detection.

First, it is noted that different respondents indicated victimization by immigrants prior to their engagement. These forms of victimization might occur in various modalities (physical or verbal, direct or indirect), and give rise to various forms of coping. In line with Vynckier (2012), we argue that victims might search for forms of compensation to answer their feelings of anger, frustration or fear. Especially in highly charged conflicts based on ethnic, cultural, linguistic or ideological differences, it remains crucial not to stigmatize or blame the parties involved in the conflict. The victims searching for compensation can be accomplished by (informal) victim/offender mediation or, when mediation is not desirable[106], allowing the victim to express his feelings (of revenge). Dependent on the circumstances, this role of 'conflict mediator' can be carried out by different actors, from school teacher/principal, police officer or trained social to judicial worker.

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[105] These narratives might be used during popular media events to enlighten a positive message. Example of this technique is the 'say no to racism' campaign supported by the UEFA and FIFA where in a commercial football stars said no to racism in different languages.

[106] In certain cases, it might be undesirable to confront victim and offender, when there is, for instance, a great risk of escalation. In addition, in criminal cases it might be impossible to conduct victim/offender victimization, when the offender has disappeared or is unknown.

Second, early detection might only become effective when 'frontline workers' are aware of the signals of possible (further) radicalisation. In this regard, the European Commission launched the CoPPRa[107] project which produced tools for frontline police officers to detect and prevent radicalisation (Debroux, 2010). During a one-day training, police officers are informed of the symbols and the external characteristics and backgrounds of diverse extremist groups (Clerix, 2010)[108]. Nevertheless, in order to increase the chances of early detection, police services might externalize their knowledge. In so doing, an adjusted version of the CoPPRa training could be taught to possible external 'frontline' partners such as schools, social or street workers, prison staff (in case of repression) and other interested parties.

Finally, it is noted that certain people are more vulnerable to engagement than others (e.g. victims, people in deprived situations, etc.). Therefore, prevention initiatives might employ narratives that specifically counter or, at least, provide an alternative message to those targeted radicalizing population. Ongoing debate on the effectiveness of counter-narratives in counteracting Islamic radicalisation has provided scholars with knowledge of how narratives can be used to raise doubt about cognitions and the use of violent actions (Ashour, 2011, Leuprecht et al, 2010, Weilnböck, 2013). Crucial in the effectiveness of projects in using the technique of counter narratives is that messages are delivered by trusted sources without (visible[109]) connection to government organisations. In this regard, preventive workers need to rely on the trustworthy and credible relation between radicalising youngsters within a certain 'vulnerable' community and the messenger of the narratives. Therefore, it is recommended that prevention focus on parallel actions combining 'recreational' activities (e.g. sport events, team-building activities) with lecture series on related topics (e.g. testimonials[110], video material) (cf. Helmus et al., 2013).

Indicated prevention

As the final element in the preventive measures, it is recommended that policy makers aim at targeting people engaged in right-wing extremist groups[111]. In the light of harm reduction[112],

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[107] The COPPRA project stands for the Community Oriented Policing and Prevention of Radicalisation.

[108] To use this information in the field, police officers receive a pocket guide containing the relevant information.

[109] The Government can have a structural and financial supportive role in the establishment and continuation of these projects.

[110] Personal biographies or testimonials from former members who have experienced similar events through the life course might address sympathisers of that group more directly and intensively (Weilnböck, 2013, 405).

[111] The term 'right-wing extremist' groups refers, in this context, to those groups preaching hate towards society. In the Flemish extreme-right scene specific attention is devoted to National Solidarist groups and Neo-Nazi groups, in considering the fact that they openly reject democracy and preach hate towards society and/or immigrants. In contrast, right-wing nationalist groups mostly try to work within the democratic system. However, this does not exclude the fact that some right-wing nationalist groups might promote more illegal actions.

[112] Harm reduction both for society (direct and indirect victimization) and the extreme-right member (e.g. criminal prosecution).

initiatives should primarily focus on preventing (further) criminality and violence. In order to prevent youth from proceeding into violence, policy makers should provide a comprehensive approach of multiple actors.

As frontline workers, police officers are often the first conventional institution to get into contact with extreme-right groups in relation to criminal activity. As pointed out by our in-depth research, police and public services tend to maintain a good relationship with most right-wing nationalist groups on the basis of reaching mutual agreements on duration, security rules and magnitude of public actions. Relevant to this, it is recommended that these ties be preserved and a secure environment be offered so that these groups can express their ideology[113]. However, it is more difficult for police officers to openly engage with members of subcultural groups, regarding the clandestine character of these groups. Nonetheless, grounded on good practices in Scandinavia, it is recommended that police officers install the so-called 'empowerment conversation'[114] (Fangen and Carlsson, 2013), which forms a response to certain signals or illegal actions of youngsters engaged in extremist groups. The purpose of such a conversation is not to penalize and label the youngsters as criminal, but rather to identify those motives for engagement (and criminal activities). Meanwhile, this conversation can make youngsters and their parents aware of the possible negative outcomes of further group engagement. With these efforts in place, police officers[115] can then create a basis for reorientation and behavioural change. Evaluation of this technique has shown positive results, although questions remain in the Scandinavian countries concerning the implementation this technique in youth work and educational institutions (Carlsson, 2006). On the contrary, Bjørgo and Carlsson (2005) point out that one of the strengths of this technique is that the police, as messenger, makes a distinct strong impression on both youngster and parent. Therefore, as good practice and in line with the community oriented approach of the Belgian police, much can be learned from this informal technique in daily life practices of frontline police workers.

Furthermore, initiatives should consider including parents within the prevention programme of further criminal activity (Rieker, 2006). However, as indicated in the results section, it might be practically impossible or undesirable to involve parents in the preventive work. Parents may hold similar ideological opinions (Huijgens, 2004) or conversely, may be completely detached from their children. Nevertheless, especially concerning the latter detached situations, social work should

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[113] As long as the expression of the ideology remains within legal boundaries.
[114] Noticeable is that this practice of empowerment conversation not only might be used towards right-wing extremist members, but can be installed as a general crime prevention technique utilized by police officers.
[115] Important to mention is that Norwegian police corps, even the small ones, have a minimal occupancy of one preventive police officers per police corps (Fangen and Carlsson, 2013).

encourage parents not to turn their back to their children (Carlsson and Decker, 2005). Further preventive work will only be hampered if the relations between parents and child are jeopardised. In some instances, parents also benefit from contact with 'partners in misfortune'. Therefore, prevention initiatives might reconsider the implementation of parental networks, through which parents can exchange mutual experiences, understanding, support, and supervision to restore trust with the child (Wagner, 2001; Carlsson, 2006; Bjørgo, 2011). Yet, involvement of parents in the project should always be guided by a mediating social or preventive worker, preceded by an analysis of the family situation.

Finally, it is recommended that former right-wing extremist group members be involved in any prevention project. As indicated in the descriptive part, over the years these formerly involved members have contributed to the success of the project 'Exit – Leaving Violent Youth Groups' (Bjørgo, 1997; Bovenkerk, 2011; Kimmel, 2007). Yet, when including former members in prevention project, policy makers and preventive workers need to make a risk assessment regarding these formerly involved members. Furthermore, De Jong (2014) remarks that crime prevention organizations or institutions might face the difficulty of explaining to their employees and partners that they are working together with people with a criminal record. Nevertheless, various disengagement projects have demonstrated the positive role of including former members in daily life activities. Basing upon their own experiences, former members are capable of connecting with radicalising youngsters through shared experiences, emotions and sentiments. As a result, former extremist members may offer a rich source of information. Therefore, preventive initiatives should investigate how this source can be implemented within the organization, varying from passively providing information about the group to actively working for disengagement projects.

Repression and after care

If lessons can be learned from historical events, policy makers must agree that repression is not a panacea in the combat against violent extremism. In contrast, repression against the collaborators after the Second World War and the banning of the VMO as private militia has not led to a long-term solution to the problem. On the contrary, it has often formed a pushing mechanism for further (and more radical) action and engagement. However, as the final point of a safety approach to right-wing extremist illegal behaviour, imprisonment measures might be necessary as the last resort. Research on criminal careers has already pointed out that recidivism rates are higher among detainees (Wartna, 2009). In specific, penalization of politically motivated crimes might be another confirmation of the marginalization and stigmatization by the justice system of the extreme-right

ideology (Veldhuis and Bakker, 2007). On the other hand, isolation during imprisonment might discourage members to continue this life style.

Repressive actions should be carried out with the aim of restoring trust between perpetrator and the criminal justice system. Members of ideologically aberrant groups have an overall lack of trust in the police and the judicial services, and thus tend to challenge their legitimacy. Yet, contact with these services can be another confirmation of this negative perception by which people are triggered to accept violence as a legitimate act (cf. quantitative part). On the contrary, various studies on procedural justice have indicated the impact of good treatment by the police and criminal justice system (Tyler, 2003, 2006, Jackson et al, 2012, Van Damme and Pauwels, 2013). In order to rehabilitate people in society, negative sanctions should be accompanied by positive tailored incentives such as opportunities for self-fulfilment, (re-)introducing 'healthy' friendships, employment and sports interventions. Seen from the explanatory results, feelings of perceived injustice might arise from more deeply rooted causes of social disintegration or perceptions of discrimination. Therefore, preventive workers will need to manufacture a customized after-care approach to treating all underlying causes in the prevention of (further) criminal behaviour.

5. Concluding remarks

In 1938 Robert K. Merton wrote his work on social structure and anomie that rebellion could be seen as an alternative reaction to deviancy, a way in which individuals *seek to institutionalize new procedures oriented toward revamped cultural goals shared by members of the society, change the existing structure rather than to perform accommodative actions within this structure.* (Merton, 1938, 681). This bears a striking resemblance to our contemporary image of extremism that on the extreme-right side *Angry white rebels* form the image of a rebellious individual striving to restore the right of the white nation. Especially the Neo-Nazi and National solidarist groups fit this depiction. However, in contrast to the depiction of rebels, the majority of groups within the extreme-right movement appear to be willing to work within the conventional frameworks in compliance with the goals and means of mainstream society. In this sense, a major responsibility, but concurrently an opportunity lies with the government. When the mechanism is examined, it is noteworthy that social problems often lie at the root of the process. Our respondents have indicated that aspects of 'social loneliness' and 'vulnerability' have driven them to become receptive to extreme beliefs. As such, this expression of extremism is equally a problem with the mechanisms of disintegration, injustice, anomia, alienation, threat and other emotions. Therefore, in our society we must strive to strengthen social cohesion and include individuals in social conventional networks. As Carlsson (2006) states, preventive actions are often hidden within everyday practices of actors in society. The

topic of extreme-right thus should not be taken out of perspective to influence mental processes (deradicalisation). In contrast, policy initiatives should grant people's willingness or right to freedom of expression within certain boundaries. They should also implement the approach to manifestation of radicalisation within a broader scope of crime prevention scheme in which solutions are provided to tackle social mechanisms. Only then can an effective integrated approach be developed, together with the efforts of various willingly involved (frontline) actors, to provide a solution to criminal activity instigated by extreme-right motives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: One-visit observations

1) Demonstration by the Flemish Nationalist Student organisation NSV in Leuven (08/03/2013)

2) Lecture by a former SS officer of the Flemish youth battalion, organized by the Flemish Nationalist student organisation KVHV (18/03/2013)

3) Lecture by Prof. De Wever at the headquarter of the KVHV on the Flemish movement (04/11/2013)

4) Ijzerbedevaart, Annual pilgrimage in memory of the fallen Flemish soldiers (11/11/2013)

5) Colloquium "we are the youth. Revolutionary youth in the Evening Land" organised by the NSV in Antwerpen, (30/11/2013)

6) Observation at the courtroom in Dendermonde for the hearing of the members of the Flemish Combat 18 splinter group Bloed Bodem Eer en Trouw (BBET) (11/12/2013-12/12/2013 + 07/02/2014 + 04/11/2014)

7) Debate organized by NSV Antwerpen between the president of the youth sections of the Flemish Nationalist parties NVA and Vlaams Belang (20/02/2014)

8) Lecture organized by NSV Gent on the Ukraine revolution (13/03/2014)

9) Demonstration by the NSV in Antwerpen (20/03/2014)

10) Demonstration by the Flemish movement VVB in Brussel for self-determination and independence (30/03/2014)

11) Lecture organized by the NSV gent on the Marnix organization (01/04/2014)

12) Memorial service in remembrance of Dr. August Borms, Flemish Nationalist executed in 1946 (13/04/2014)

13) Lecture organized by Voorpost on "the peoples of Europe" in Duffel (17/04/2014)

14) Lecture organized by NSV Leuven on "New paganism as sociological answer on religious radicalisation" (22/04/2014)

15) Ijzerwake, Annual pilgrimage in memory of the fallen Flemish soldiers . More radical version of the Ijzerbedevaart (24/08/2014)

16) Debate on Europe organized by NSV Leuven (15/10/2014)

17) Ijzerbedevaart (11/11/2014)

18) Observation in Flemish Nationalist bar in Antwerp (14/11/2014)

19) Colloquium organized by Voorpost in Edegem on Identitaire resistance in Europe (30/11/2014)

20) Demonstration by NSV against the NAVO in Gent (12/03/2015)

Appendix 2: Respondent selection and snowball sampling

■	Mail
■	Telephone
■	Facebook

Observation	Achiel	→ Gerard
		→ Bo

Observation	Claude	→ Eric → Ignace
		→ Frederic

Cold Call	Hanne	→ Quinten
		→ Raphael

Cold Call	Louis	→ Michiel

Observation	Olivier

Cold call	Daniel	Kristof	Nico
	Piet	Stijn	Teun
	Ulbrecht	Victor	Willem
	Xavier		
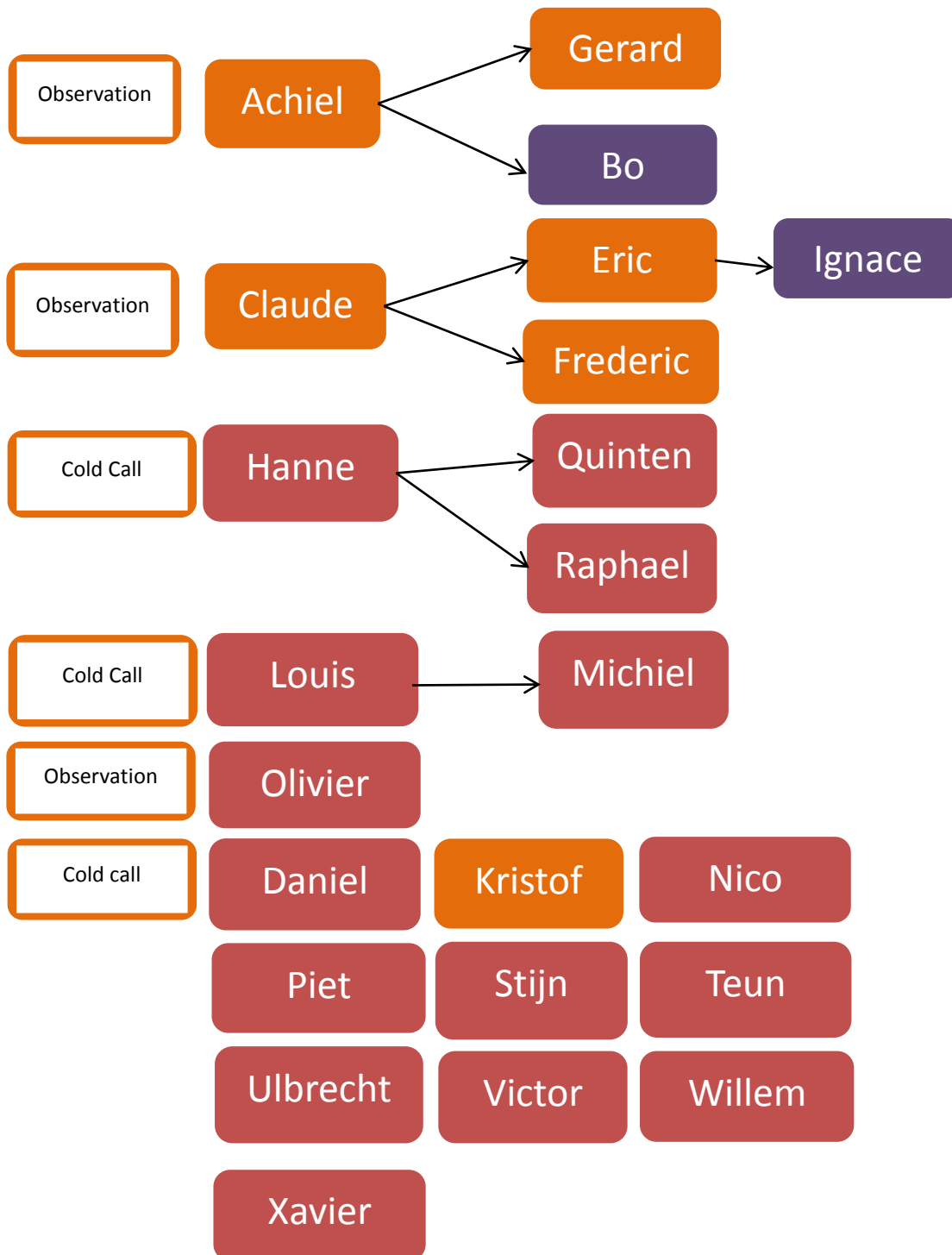
Appendix 3: Topic list

Personal information respondent

Name
Date of interview
Place of interview
Place of residence
Age
Gender
Group activity
Religion

List of concepts (respondent indicates whether the concept is applicable and indicates why this is applicable to him or her)

Radical
Militant
National solidarist
National socialist
Anti-Belgium
Belgian
European
Extreme-right
Flamingant
Euro-Russian
Democrat
Anti-Democrat
Republican
Green-right
Capitalist

Youth and education

Role of parents within the activist career
Experiences during youth
▪ Home
▪ School
▪ Leisure time
Experiences with other cultures
Life events related to engagement

Ideology

Development of ideology over the years
Vision on the multicultural society
Influencing actors in the construction of ideology

Reasons for choosing activist career (above political career)

Membership

Entrance in the group
Actors influencing the engagement
Positive aspect of participation
Negative aspects of participation
Relations with other members
Size of the group
Reasons to leave the group or possible considerations to leave the group
Internal structure of the group

Activities

Number of activities
Sort of activities
Participation in activities
Violence during activities

Violence within the group

Violence among members
Conflict with out-groups
Willingness to use violence
Experiences in regard of violence

Appendix 4: Question wording and factor loading

Scale construct	Cronbach's alpha	Scale construct	Cronbach's alpha
Perceived procedural justice	0.84	Anomia (Political powerlessness)	0.85
Perceived legitimacy	0.80	Moral support for RWE	0.89
Group discrimination	0.95	Peer racism	0.68
Religious authoritarianism	0.89	Peer delinquency	0.70
Impulsiveness	0.63	Political violence	0.87
Thrill-seeking behaviour	0.73	School social bond	0.59
Social bonds with parents	0.84	School integration	0.80
Social control by parents	0.82	Personal discrimination	0.89

Table 9: Overview of scale constructs and reliabilities

Police procedural justice (five-point scale): the police . . . "treats adolescents with respect", "respects the rights of adolescents", "takes the time to listen to people", "takes fair and impartial decisions", "is prepared to explain their decisions and actions when asked". (scale from European social survey, round 5; also Jackson et al. 2012)

Overall police legitimacy is measured by combining two highly correlated legitimacy subscales (r= 0.80, p < 0.001). Obedience to the police (five-point scale) "It is your duty to do what the police tell you even if you disagree?", "it is always unacceptable to disobey the police", "I back the decisions made by the police even when I disagree with them", "When the police orders me to do something I do it, even if I don't like how they treat me". **Moral alignment** (five-point scale) "Police have the same sense of right and wrong as me", "if the police does not arrest somebody, they will have a good reason for that", "I generally support how the police act", "I have respect for the police". (based on the scale from European social survey[116], round 5; also Jackson et al. 2012)

Perceived personal discrimination (five-point scale): "It makes me angry when I think of how I am treated in comparison to others", "I think I am worse off than others in Belgium", "I have the feeling of being discriminated", "If I compare myself with others in Belgium than I feel unfairly treated ". (Van den Bos, Loseman, and Doosje 2010)

Perceived group discrimination: (five-point scale): "I think the group to which I belong is worse off than other people in Belgium", "It makes me angry when I think of how my group is treated in comparison to other groups in Belgium", "I have the feeling that the group to which I belong is discriminated, "If I compare the group to which I belong with other groups in Belgium, I think we are treated unfair". (Van den Bos, Loseman, and Doosje 2010)

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[116] See further information on questionnaire at www.europeansocialsurvey.org

Religious authoritarianism (five-point scale): "People should pay less attention to religion and should instead develop their own moral standards", "God has given a flawless and complete way to happiness and salvation. This path must be followed without exception", "A figure like Satan does not exist", "It is more important to be a good person than to believe in God and religion", "Whenever science and sacred scripture conflict, science must be wrong", "In fact, there are only two kinds of people: righteous people whom God will reward and the others who will not be rewarded", "No single book of religious teachings contains all the intrinsic, fundamental truths about life", "To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion (Altemeyer, 1996; Altemeyer and Hunsberger 2004)

Support for right-wing extremism (five-point scale): "I understand that some right-wing extremists use violence against the people who have the power in Belgium", "I can understand right-wing extremists who disrupt the order", "I can understand right-wing extremists who use violence against others". (Van den Bos, Loseman, and Doosje 2010)

Peer delinquency (four-point scale): Have your friends been involved in . . . "taking something from a shop/supermarket", "stealing money or other goods from somebody", "damaging or destroying something", "hitting someone on purpose so that the person needed care", "breaking into a car/building". (Ceccato and Wikström 2012)

Pro-racist peers (four-point scale): Do you think your friends would think it is OK if . . . "you would say that you don't want to have anything to do with immigrants?", "you would write 'stop immigration' on a public wall", "if you would fight with an immigrant without any reason". (Van den Bos, Loseman, and Doosje 2010)

Impulsiveness (five-point scale): "I always say what I think, even if it is not nice or smart", "If I want something, I do it immediately", "I lose my temper easily", "When I am really angry, other people better stay away from me". (Grasmick et al. 1993)

Thrill-seeking behaviour (five-point scale): "I sometimes find it exciting to do things that could be be dangerous", "I often do things without thinking of the consequences", "Sometimes I will take a risk just for the fun of it". (Grasmick, Title, Bursik, and ARneklev 1993)

Parental attachment is measured using following items: "I can get along well with my parents", "I think the comments of my parents are important", "I like to spend my free time with my parents", "I can talk well with my parents". (scale from European social survey)

Parental control (five-point scale): "My parents know with who I am when I am not at home", "My parents know where I am when I am not at home", "My parents know how I behave when I am not at home". (scale from European social survey)

School social bonds (five-point scale): "I put little effort in studying", "I am not interested in getting high points", "Studying is very important for me", "I always study, even if I know there will be no test". (scale from European social survey)

School social integration (five-point scale): "I can get along well with most of my classmates", "I have the feeling of belonging to the group in my class", "I can count on the help of pupils in my class", "I feel left alone in my school". (scale from European social survey)

Self-reported politically motivated vandalism (four-point scale): Have you ever . . . "vandalised anything in the street or at the public transport stations (e.g. bus stops, bicycles, streetlights or something else)", " participated in a political action that was not allowed", "thrown stones at the

police during a demonstration?", "destroyed something on the streets because of your political or religious belief", "damaged someone's property because of your political or religious belief", "set something on fire because of your political or religious belief". (Gavray, Fournier, and Born 2012)

Self-reported politically motivated violence (four-point scale): Have you ever . . . "fought with someone because of your political or religious belief", "threatened someone on the internet because of your political or religious belief", "threatened someone in the streets because of your political or religious belief", "hit a foreigner", "… hit a capitalist". (Brottsförebyggande rådet och Säkerhetspolisen 2009)

Descriptives

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Std
Gender	0	1	0.3591	0.47983
Age	0	2	0.8642	0.58943
Attend religious services	0	4	3.0507	0.91615
Importance of religion	0	2	1.4048	0.89727
Social bonds	-1.1245	3.2855	-0.0829	0.97054
Police procedural justice	-3.0570	5.6186	0.0749	1.02303
Police legitimacy	-3.5758	2.6864	0.0581	1.01688
Perceived personal discrimination	-0.8848	3.5191	-0.0116	1.02786
Perceived group discrimination	-0.7039	3.3538	-0.0117	1.01625
Religious authoritarianism	-1.2302	4.8277	0.0852	1.02287
Impulsiveness	-2.4666	2.8454	-0.1643	0.96293
Thrill-seeking behaviour	-1.5737	2.8975	0.0975	1.00746
Anomia	-2.1882	2.2212	0.0523	1.01430
Support for RW extremism	2	4	2.6876	0.84991
Peer racism	-1.0651	4.8409	0.0085	1.0095
Peer delinquency	-0.9522	8.9788	-0.0247	1.0457

Table 10: Descriptive statistics

Correlations

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Pro racist peers (1)	1													
Peer delinquency (2)	.217**	1												
Procedural justice (3)	-.090**	-.156**	1											
Perceived legitimacy (4)	-.084**	-.232**	.561**	1										
Personal discrimination (5)	.214**	.150**	-.232**	-.271**	1									
Group discrimination (6)	.176**	.155**	-.223**	-.250**	.823**	1								
Religious autoritarianism (7)	.148**	.113**	-.026	-.020	.211**	.183**	1							
Moral support for RWE (8)	.369**	.189**	-.110**	-.152**	.263**	.214**	.268**	1						
Political vandalism (9)	.137**	.241**	-.141**	-.214**	.151**	.185**	.159**	.172**	1					
Political violence (10)	.180**	.253**	-.134**	-.185**	.169**	.195**	.188**	.209**	.767**	1				
Impulsiveness (11)	.278**	.228**	-.186**	-.194**	.226**	.188*	.179**	.319**	.162**	.201**	1			
Thrill seeking behaviour (12)	.248**	.358**	-.184**	-.239**	.197**	.158**	.151**	.225**	.167**	.161**	.439**	1		
Anomia (13)	.208**	.110**	-.208**	-.198**	.200**	.167**	.114**	.264**	.055*	.099**	.281**	.200**	1	
Social integration (14)	.159**	.248**	-.212**	-.202**	.218**	.209**	.016	.113**	.159**	.153**	.192**	.241**	.151**	1

Table 11: Correlations

Appendix 5: Question wording and scale construct

Perceived injustice (five-point scale translated from Van den Bos Loseman and Doosje 2009): "It makes me angry when I think of how I am treated in comparison to others", "I think I am worse off than others in Belgium", "I have the feeling of being discriminated", "If I compare myself with others in Belgium than I feel unfairly treated ". "I think the group to which I belong is worse off than other people in Belgium", "It makes me angry when I think of how my group is treated in comparison to other groups in Belgium", "I have the feeling that the group to which I belong is discriminated, "If I compare the group to which I belong with other groups in Belgium, I think we are treated unfair". "I think I am being treated with justice" (R), "I think I am being treated with respect" (R), "I think that, most of the time, I am being treated fairly" (R), "I think that if I have complaints about anything, that, normally, people listen to my opinion" (R).

Group threat (five-point scale translated from Van den Bos Loseman and Doosje 2009): "In Belgium, Muslim themselves as better than Belgians", "Most Muslims in Belgium will never understand how Belgians are", "In Belgium, people from other countries do not understand what is written in the Belgian constitution (for instance, that everyone can say what he or she thinks and everyone has to be treated equally)", "In Belgium, people from other countries have the right to be more important than Belgians", "People from other countries get to much money from the Belgian government in comparison to the Belgians", Non-Muslims in Belgium do not get the respect that they deserve from Muslims", "In Belgium, people from other countries do not understand how Belgian see the world", "In Belgium, Muslims have, in comparison to Non-Muslims, other values about their work", "If you do business with the Jews, you have to be extremely careful", "Belgians do not get the respect that they deserve from Jews", "Jews want to dominate everything", "Most Jews think that they are better than others", "Muslims should not try to change the norms and values of Belgians", "In Belgium, people from other countries have other norms and values than Belgians", "Many companies in Belgium will prefer to work with people from other countries, instead of Belgians, even if Belgians are more suitable for the job", "Jews incite war and give us the blame"

Superiority (five-point scale translated from Van den Bos, Loseman and Doosje 2009): "What I think is the truth", "I think that if everyone would properly reflect, they would think the same as me", "I think that everyone should be like me", "When people think differently, they are less valuable to me", "it scares me if people think different than me", "I actually never met people who think different than me"

Anomia (five-point scale from Srole's study of personal alienation 1956, dimension of political powerlessness) "There is no sense in voting, the parties do what they want to do anyway", "Parties are only interested in my vote, not in my opinion", "So many people vote in elections that my vote doesn't make any difference", "During the elections parties promise things, but eventually nothing changes", "Most politicians promise a lot, but nothing is done", "Politicians have never learned to listen to people like me", "Actually there is not even one politician that I would trust", "In general, we can support on our political leaders to take the best decisions" (R)

Negative attitudes towards the out-group (in this case immigrants) (five-point scale derived and translated from the SCIF[117] questionnaire): "Immigrants come here to exploit our social security", "Immigrants are a threat to our culture and customs", "In general, immigrants can't be trusted", "If the number of jobs decreases, the immigrants should be sent back to their own countries", "The presence of different cultures in is an enrichment for our society"(R), "Immigrants contribute to the wealth of our country"(R), "We should welcome the immigrants who want to live in Belgium"

Authoritarianism (five-point scale derived from Altemeyer 1988): "obedience and respect for authority are the two most important virtues children have to learn", "young people are often rebellious, but the will have to adapt as they get older", "what we need most, more than laws and institutions, is a few courageous and devoted leaders in whom people can put their faith", "People can be divided into two distinct classes: the weak and the strong", "Sex crimes, such as rape and attacks on children, deserve more than mere imprisonment; such criminals ought to be publicly whipped, or worse."   , "Most of our social problems would be solved if we could somehow get rid of the immoral, crooked, and feebleminded people", "If people would talk less and work more, everybody would be better off", "People should have more respect for our national heritage and habits", "those who break the law must be strongly punished to learn what is right and wrong", "Laws need to be executed, especially regarding rioters and revolutionaries"

Flemish identity (five-point scale, translated from Van den Bos, Loseman and Doosje 2009): "It is important to me to be Flemish", "I am proud of being Flemish", "The fact that I am Flemish is totally not important to me" (R), "I think that there can only be a beautiful world if everyone is proud to be Flemish", "It makes me scared that people are not proud to be Flemish"

Moral Support for right-wing extremism (five-point scale translated from Van den Bos Loseman and Doosje 2009): "I understand that some right-wing extremists use violence against the people who

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[117] Social cohesion indicators in Flanders (SCIF)

have the power in Belgium", "I can understand right-wing extremists who disrupt the order", "I can understand right-wing extremists who use violence against others".

Positive attitudes towards racism   (four-point scale, derived and translated from Van den Bos Loseman and Doosje 2009): Do you think your friends would think it is OK if . . . "you would say that you don't want to have anything to do with immigrants?", "you would write 'stop immigration' on a public wall", "you would fight with an immigrant without any reason".

Thrill-seeking behavior (five-point scale derived from Grasmick Title Bursik and Arneklev 1993): "I sometimes find it exciting to do things that could be dangerous", "I often do things without thinking of the consequences", "Sometimes I will take a risk just for the fun of it".

Left/Right identification (seven-point scale from extreme left to extreme right): Where do you position yourself on a scale from (1) extreme-left to (7) extreme-right.

Participation in disruptive groups (five-point scale derived from the Eurogang definition and left-right identification questionnaire): "Do you consider yourself to be a member of a group of friends (no organisation or association) that frequently meets and considers itself as a group? " (1 = yes, 0 = no). Four follow-up questions were (1) How long have you been a member of the group? (2)How big is your group? (3) "Do members of this group get involved in fights with other cliques?" (4) "Are members of this group involved in law-breaking?". To maintain the right-wing disruptive group respondents need to score positive on the introduction question, question (1) and (2) and question (3) or (4). Furthermore they had to indicate a score 6 or 7 on the left/right scale.

Scale construct	Cronbach's alpha	Scale construct	Cronbach's alpha
Positive attitudes towards racism by peers	0.85	Group threat	0.76
Perceived injustice	0.62	Authoritarianism	0.92
Flemish identity	0.83	Superiority	0.76
Moral support for right-wing extremism	0.87	Low self-control	0.71
Anomia	0.87	Negative attitudes towards out-group	0.88

Table 12: Overview of scale constructs and reliabilities

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Std
Perceived Injustice	-1,02	4,28	0	1
Authoritarianism	-2,65	2,93	0	1
Anomia	-2,48	2,78	0	1
Group threat	-2,69	3,17	0	1
Flemish identity	-1.94	1.75	0	1
Negative att. tow. out-group	-2,24	3,01	0	1
Superiority	-1.25	3.79	0	1
Thrill seeking behavior	-1.54	3.21	0	1
Positive attitudes towards racism	-1.83	2.99	0	1
Moral support for right-wing extremism	-1.45	4.16	0	1

Table 13: Descriptive statistics

Appendix 6: Indirect effects

Total indirect effects of independent variables on the dependent variable

Independent variables	Perceived injustice	Anomia	Authoritarianism	Group Threat	Flemish identity	Negative attitudes tow. out-group
RWD group participation	0.067 (0.000)	0.089 (0.000)	0.170 (0.000)	0.266 (0.000)	0.050 (0.001)	0.295 (0.000)
Independent variables	Superiority	TSB	Moral support for RWE	Positive attitudes towards racism		
RWD group participation	0.028 (0.029)	0.115 (0.000)	/	/		

Strongest specific indirect effects

- **Perceived injustice** (0.067***)
  Perceived injustice > Group Threat > Negative attitudes towards out-group > Positive attitudes towards racism > Participation in RWD groups (0.033**)

- **Anomia** (0.089***)
  Anomia > Authoritarianism > Group Threat > Negative attitudes towards out-group > Positive attitudes towards racism > Participation in RWD groups (0.029***)

- **Authoritarianism** (0.170***)
  Authoritarianism > Group Threat > Negative attitudes towards out-group > Positive attitudes towards racism > Participation in RWD groups (0.155***)

- **Group threat** (0.266***)
  Group Threat > Negative attitudes towards out-group > Positive attitudes towards racism > Participation in RWD groups (0.179***)

- **Negative attitudes towards out-group** (0.295***)
  Negative attitudes towards out-group > Positive attitudes towards racism > Participation in RWD groups (0.225***)

- **Flemish identity** (0.050**)
  Flemish identity > Negative attitudes towards out-group > Positive attitudes towards racism > Participation in RWD groups (0.038**)

- **Superiority** (0.028*)
  Superiority > Moral support for RW extremism > Participation in RWD groups (0.028*)

- **Thrill seeking behavior** (0.115***)
  Thrill seeking behavior > Positive attitudes towards racism > Participation in RWD groups (0.072**)

Appendix 7: Characteristics respondents

Category	Age			Gender		Membership		TOTAL
	<30	30- 40	> 40	Men	Women	Involved	Former	
RW Nationalist	5	1	3	7	2	7	2	9
Neonazi	5	1	2	8	0	4	4	8
Nat. Solidarist	1	2	3	6	0	6	0	6
TOTAL	11	4	8	21	2	17	6	23

Table 14: Characteristics Respondents