Universiteit Utrecht

Adolescent risk factors for violent extremism

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Defining violent extremism

"Violent extremism is the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals.

https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/aboutus/Pages/what-is-violent-extremism.aspx

"Individuals who support or commit ideologically-motivated violence to further political goals"

Homeland security: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf

"Violent extremists are those who encourage, endorse, condone, justify, or support the commission of a violent criminal act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals."

US Dep of Justice: http://www.theiacp.org/Portals/0/documents/HomegrownViolentExtremismAwarenessBrief.pdf

Review of risk and protective factors

Possible risk factors
- *Prior aggression/delinquency*
- *Low self-control*
- *Social alienation*
- *Lack of political capital*
- *Low emotionality*
- *Lack of empathy*
- *Low morality*
- *Feelings of uncertainty*
- *Migration background*
- *Substance abuse*
- *Moral disengagement*
- *Family instability*
- *Social distrust*
- *Negative life events*
- *Contacts with CJS*
- *Feelings of injustice*
- *Gender*
- *SES*

Possible protective factors
- *Social bonds/attachments*
- *School achievement*
- *Parental control*
- *Tolerance*
- *Social supports*
- *Employment*
- *Education*

Four social and developmental risk domains

1. *Support for violent extremism is an extension of underlying propensity for aggressiveness and lack of impulse control (Borum, 2014)*

2. *Support for violent extremism is a response to poor parenting and weak bonds to social institutions (Bhui et al., 2012; LaFree & Ackerman, 2009)*

3. *Support for violent extremism is learned from exposure to political violence and violent media* **(Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2014; Pauwels et al., 2014)**

4. *Support for violent extremism is the result of negative coping with strain (Canetti et al., 2013; Hagan et al., 1995)*

Proximal mechanisms: legal and moral neutralization

Neutralization of moral and legal standards facilitates justification of extremist violence (Aly et al., 2014; Bandura, 1990; LaFree & Ackerman)

- *Cognitive processes that distort the binding nature of morality and law*
- *Justifications acquired through socialization*
- *Enables 'drift' towards extremism*
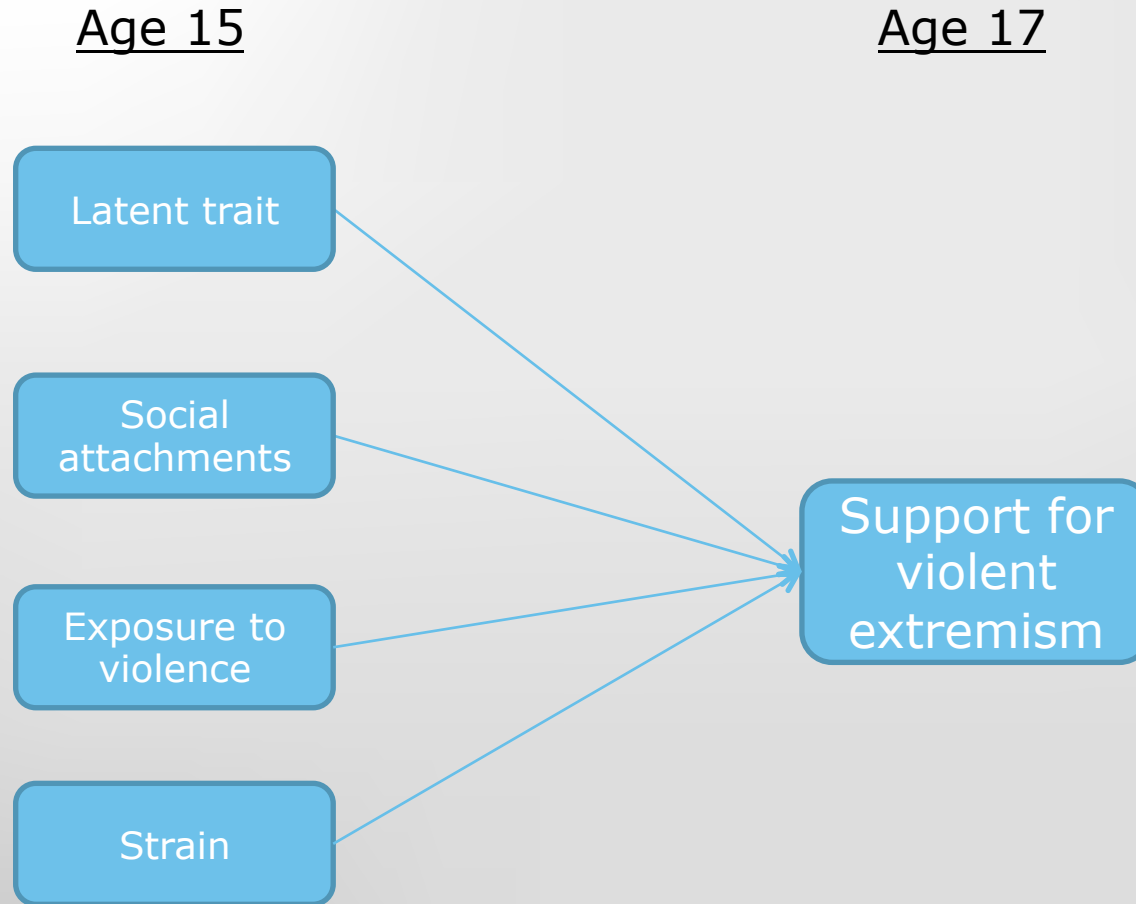
Moral and legal neutralization as mediating mechanisms
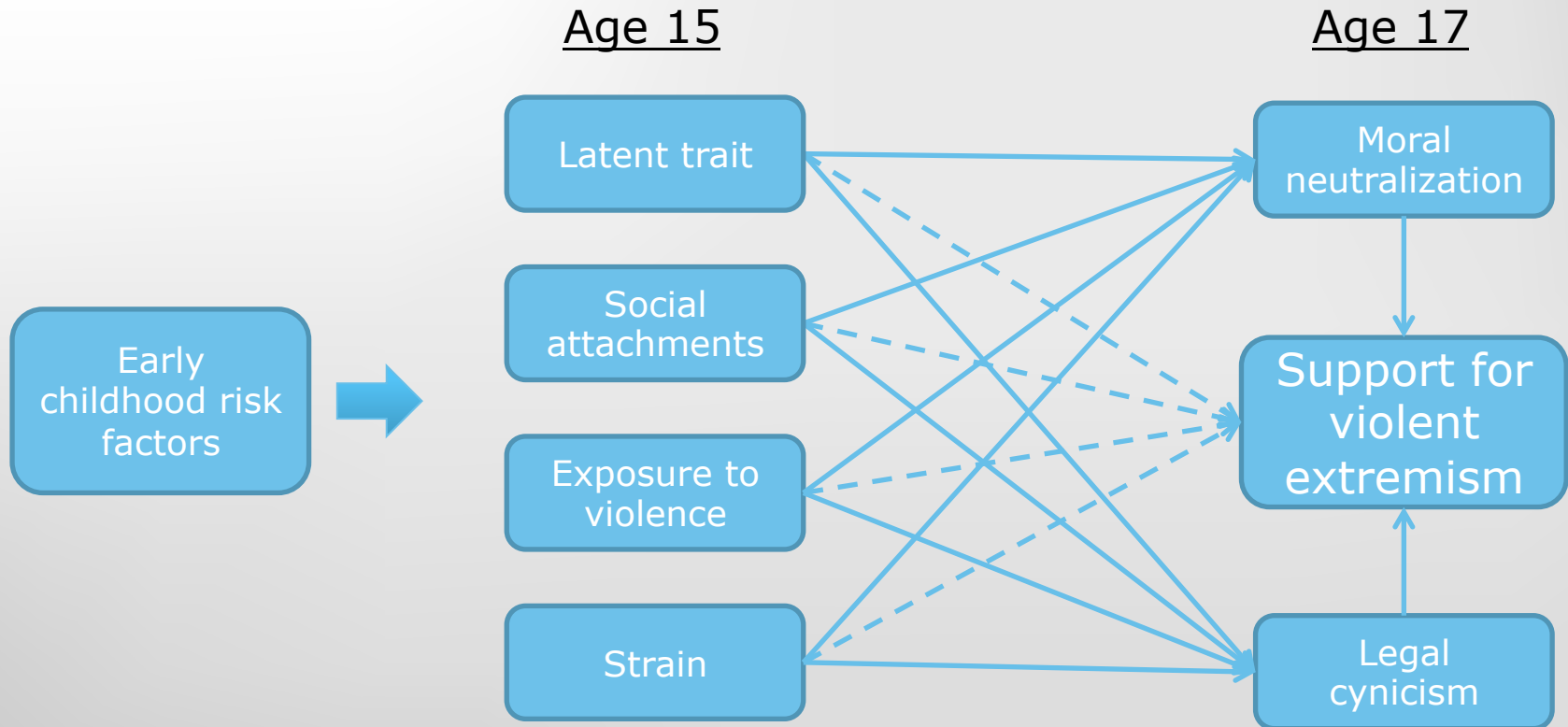
The Z-Proso Study

- Inclusion of a brief violent extremism measure in an ongoing longitudinal study in Zurich, Switzerland.

- Administered at age 17, summer 2015, wave 7.

Target Sample: All children entering year one of one of 56 primary schools in the city of Zurich in the autumn of 2004 (N = 1675). Median date of birth: October 1997; 51.9% male.

Main Study Outcomes: Aggression/violence/delinquency/substance use.

Selected Risk Factors: Parenting, adverse child events, self-control, aggression, moral development, legal socialization, social problem solving, media consumption, violent ideation.

Demographic Characteristics

National Statistics -- Foreign Born Population:

UK (2011): **11.8%**   Switzerland (2012): **28.5%**

National Statistics -- Muslim Population

UK (2011): **4.4%**   Switzerland (2012): **5.0%**

Cohort born in City of Zurich 1997 (age 17 in 2015)

Catholic and Protestant affiliation combined a minority	**46%**
Islam is the third largest religious group	**21%**
Both Parents born in Switzerland	**23%**
One Parent born in Switzerland	**27%**
Both Parents born elsewhere	**50%**

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Both Parents born in Switzerland	**23%**
One Parent born in Switzerland	**27%**
Both Parents born elsewhere	**50%**

54% not born
in Switzerland

Religious Affiliation, Age 15, z-proso participants

N = 1423

Other 2%
Protestant 20%
None 18%
Hindu 5%
Muslim 21%
Catholic 26%
Orthodox 8%

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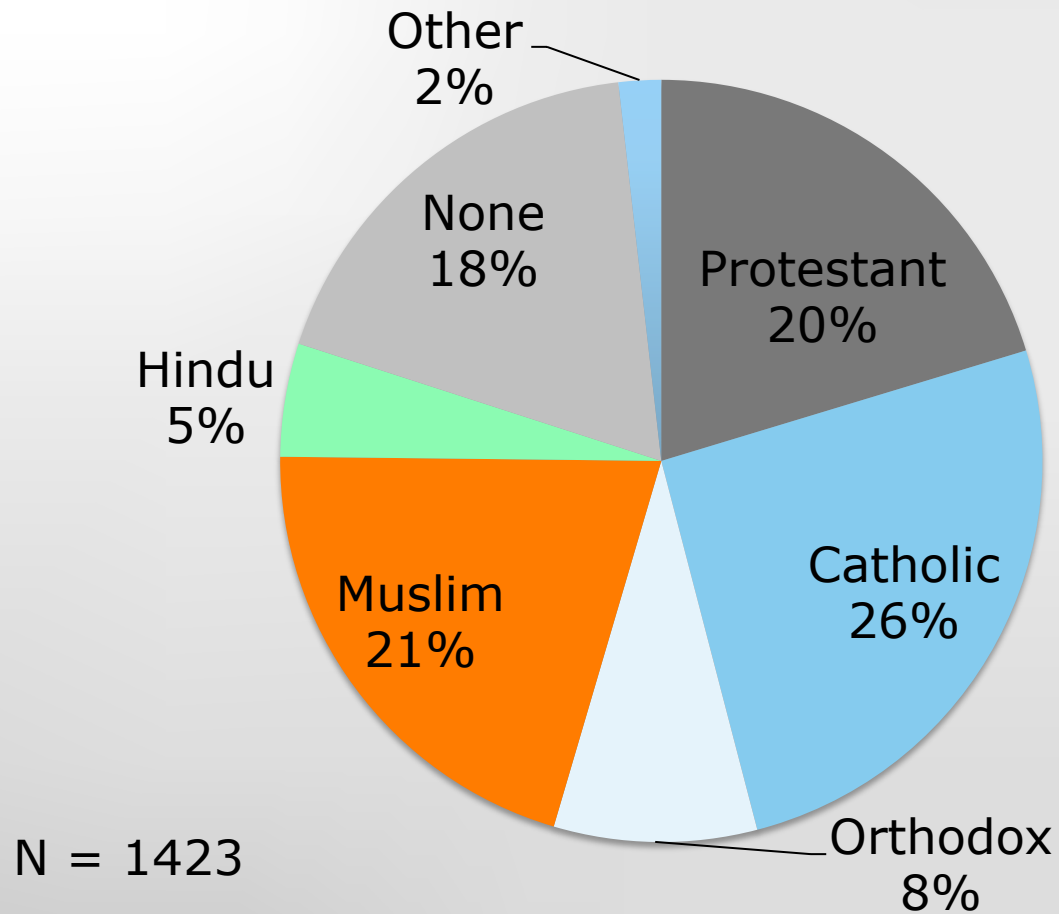
Measuring violent extremism

Goal:
- **Survey instrument for wave 7 of z-proso, age 17.**
- **Short and psychometrically tenable.**
- **Iterative process of item generation among project leaders.**
- **Selection of four items.**

- **Focus on justification of violence as a legitimate means to fight injustice and achieve political goals.**
- **General susceptibility to violent extremism rather than ideologically specific.**

Rules, Laws, and the Police
Below you find different statements about how people think about rules and laws. How much do you personally agree with the following statements...

❖**It's sometimes necessary to use violence to fight against things that are very unfair.**

❖**Sometimes people must use violence to defend their values, beliefs, or faith.**

❖**It is OK to support groups that use violence to fight against injustice.**

❖**It is sometimes necessary to fight with violence, attacks or kidnappings for a better world.**

Not at all true --- rather not true --- rather true – completely true.

Descriptive statistics

Range: 0 - 3
Mean: **= 0.82,** *sd* **= 0.68,** *Skew* **= 0.619.**
Cronbach's Alpha = .80 ("good")

	Not at all true	Rather not true	Some-what true	Fully true
It's sometimes necessary to use violence to fight against things that are very unfair.	29.5%	36.3%	27.8%	6.3%
Sometimes people must use violence to defend their values, beliefs, or faith	43.9%	31.5%	19.7%	4.8%
It is OK to support groups that use violence to fight against injustice	43.1%	33.0%	19.6%	4.2%
It is sometimes necessary to fight with violence, attacks or kidnappings for a better world	50.6%	17.7%	7.5%	1.8%

Violent Extremism Scale – Distribution of Scores
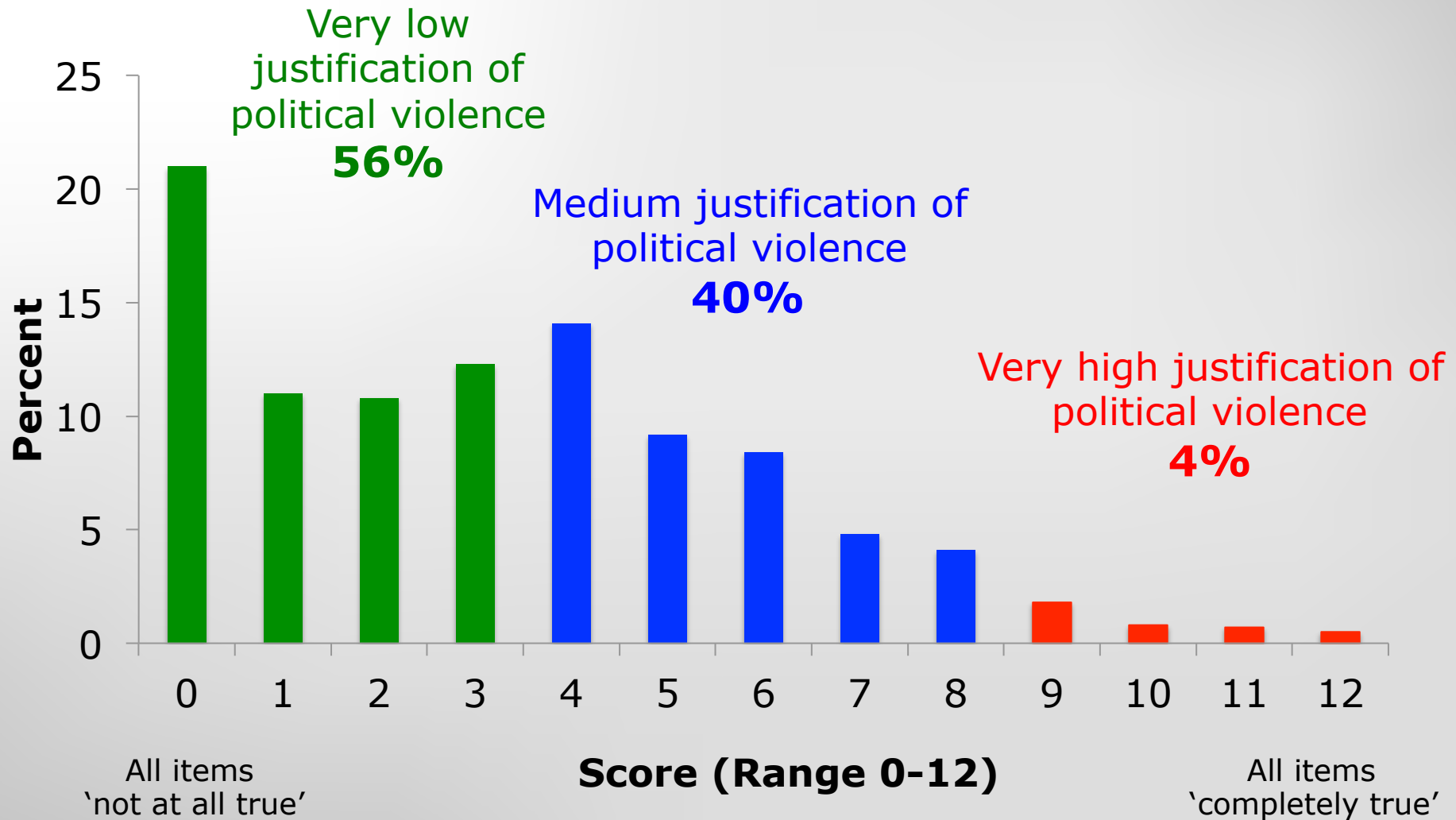
Theoretical pathway: Extremism as a latent trait

- ***Hypothesis: Support for violent extremism is an extension of underlying propensity for aggressiveness and lack of impulse control***

  - ***Latent trait (Age 15)***
    - *Reactive aggression*
    - *Proactive aggression*
    - *Physical aggression*
    - *Low self-control*

Theoretical pathway: Extremism as response to poor social attachments

- ***Hypothesis: Support for violent extremism is a response to poor parenting and weak bonds to social institutions***

- ***Parenting (Age 15)***
  - *Parental involvement*
  - *Positive parenting*
  - *Parental monitoring*
  - *Averse parenting (-)*

- ***School attachment (Age 15)***
  - *Bond with teacher*
  - *Bond with class*
  - *School difficulties (-)*
  - *School commitment*

- ***Social attachment (Age 15)***
  - *General trust*
  - *Police legitimacy*
  - *Resilient adults*
  - *Resilient friends*

Theoretical pathway: Extremism is learned from exposure to violence

- ***Hypothesis: Support for violent extremism is learned from exposure to political violence and violent media***

- ***Violent media consumption (Age 15)***

- ***Exposure to political instability and violence****
  - ***Violent political conflict in parents' country of origin***
    - *State failure index: stable, warning, alert (SFI, 2015)*

*Could also be interpreted as exposure to political strains and injustice

Violent political conflict in parents' country of origin: State Failure Index (2015)
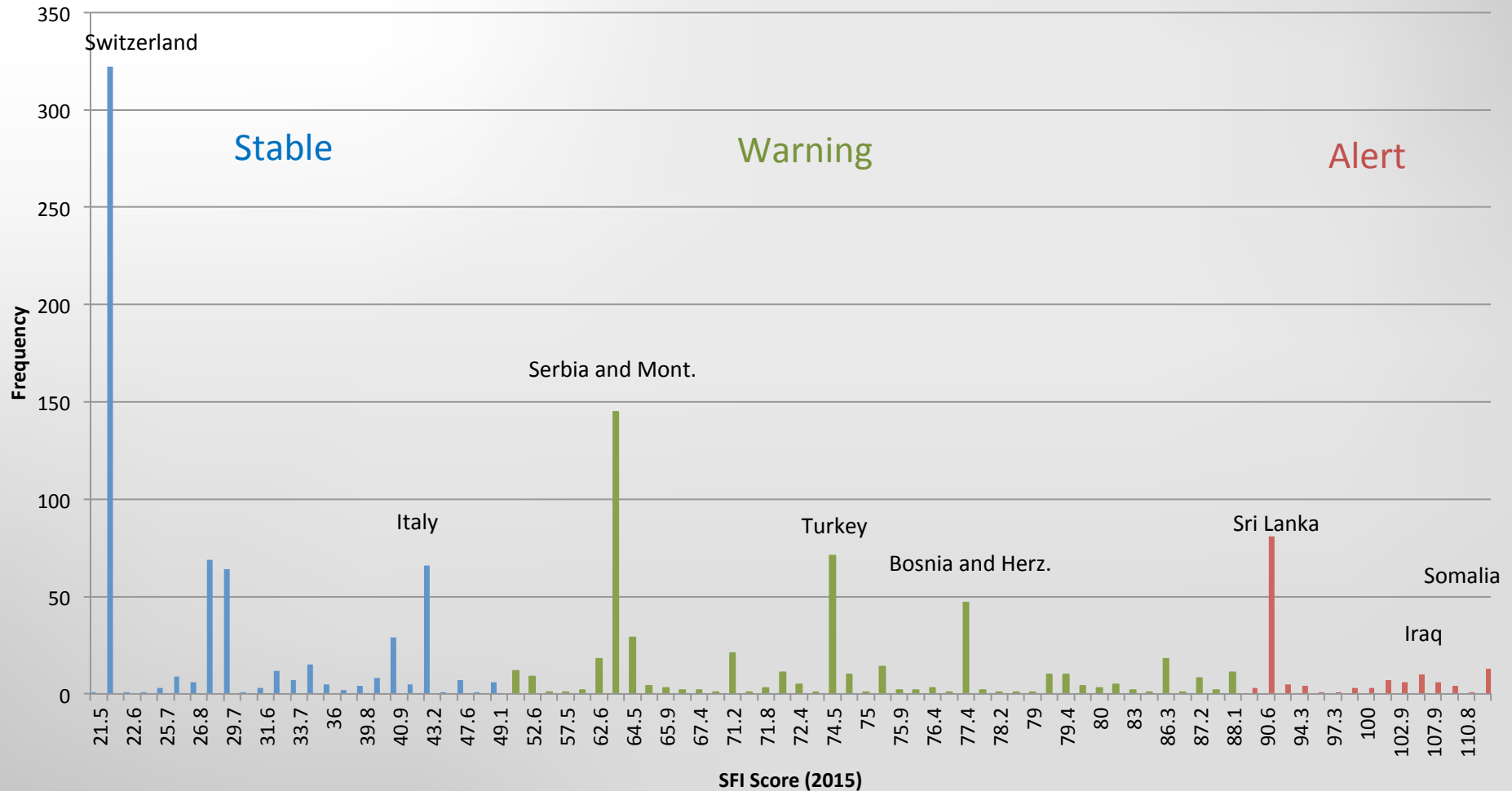
Theoretical pathway: Extremism is a response to strain

- *Hypothesis: Support for violent extremism is the result of negative coping with strain*

- *Negative life events (Age 15-17)*
  - *Contact with police*
  - *Censure at school*
  - *Parent lost job*
  - *Repeated a grade*

Analytical Procedure

- ***Step 1: Examine effects of theoretical pathways, controlling for socio-demographic risk factors***

- ***Step 2: Examine the mediating role of neutralization on violent extremism***

Results Table 1. OLS regression of support for violent extremism on theoretical pathways

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Male	.30***	.24***	.27***	.15***	.27***	.18***
	(10.91)	(8.75)	(9.97)	(4.24)	(10)	(5.08)
SES	-.11***	-.08**	-.10**	-.05	-.11***	-.05
	(-3.86)	(-2.71)	(-3.38)	(-1.72)	(-3.88)	(-1.76)
Muslim	.08*	.05	.07*	.04	.08*	.04
	(2.45)	(1.71)	(2.31)	(1.14)	(2.54)	(1.26)
Latent trait score		.26***				.17***
		(8.48)				(4.86)
Parental attachment score			-.05			-.03
			(-1.68)			(-1.05)
School attachment score			-.11**			-.05
			(-3.41)			(-1.75)
Social bonds score			-.11**			-.06
			(-3.32)			(-1.66)
Violent media				.23***		.09*
				(6.02)		(2.11)
State Failure Index (ref: Stable)						
Warning				.06		.03
				(1.84)		(0.96)
Alert				.08*		.06
				(2.56)		(1.95)
School censure					.10**	.06
					(3.28)	(1.85)
Police contact					.05	-.02
					(1.63)	(-0.83)
Repeated grade					.02	.01
					(0.59)	(0.31)
Parent lost job					.07*	.05
					(2.44)	(1.9)
N	1225	1225	1225	1215	1214	1204
R2	0.11	0.17	0.15	0.14	0.12	0.19

Note. Robust standard errors; t-values in parentheses; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
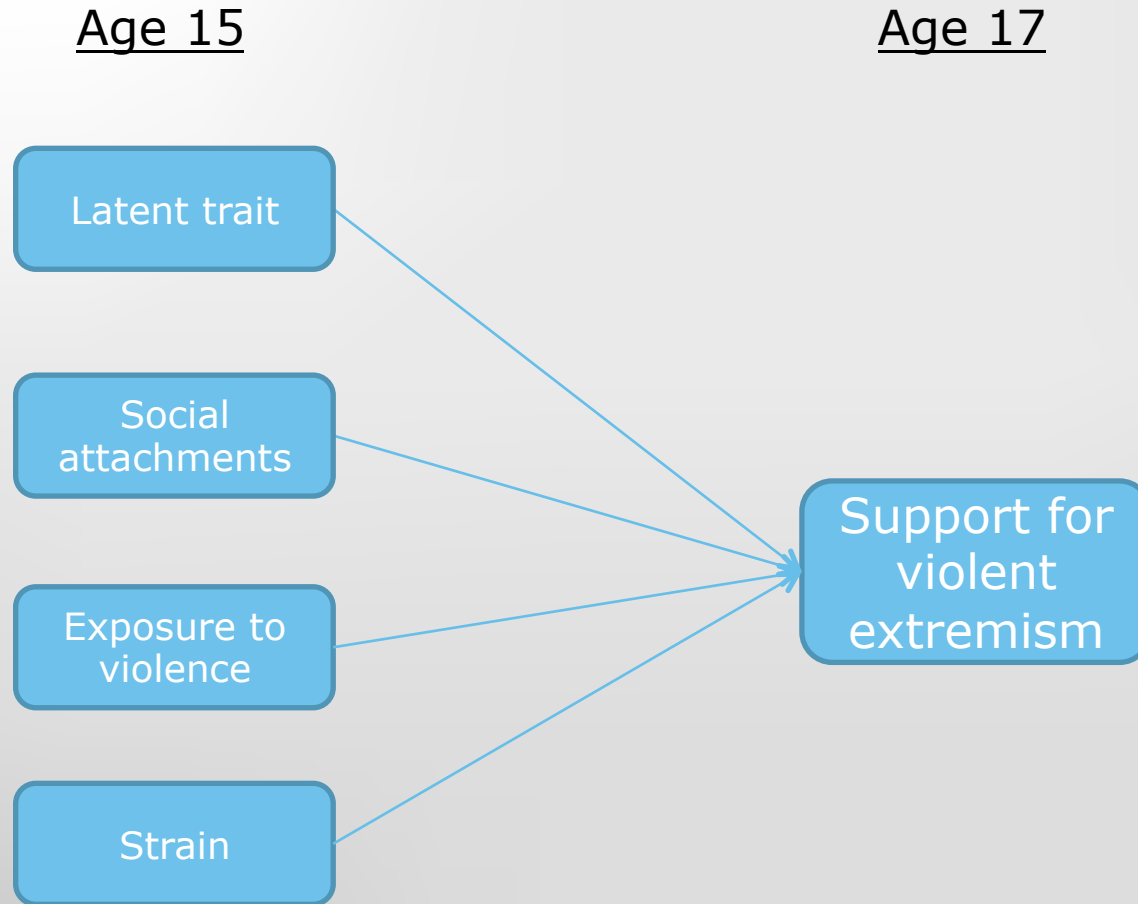
Results Table 2. Path analysis of mediating mechanisms on support for violent extremism

	Legal cynicism			Moral neutralization			Violent extremism		
	Beta	z	sig	Beta	z	sig	Beta	z	sig
Male	-.01	-0.15		.23	7.94	***	.10	3.05	**
SES	-.01	-0.41		-.02	-0.93		-.05	-1.81	
Muslim	.03	-1.12		.06	2.59	*	.04	1.56	
Latent trait score	.17	5.43	***	.21	7.72	***	.06	2.04	*
Parental attachment score	-.03	-0.98		-.07	-2.48	*	-.01	-0.2	
School attachment score	-.12	-3.87	***	-.02	-0.61		-.02	-0.74	
Social bonds score	-.13	-4.21	***	-.08	-2.79	**	.00	-0.12	
Violent media	.14	3.86	***	.21	6.34	***	-.01	-0.37	
State Failure Index (Alert)	-.03	-1.08		-.01	-0.48		.06	2.56	*
School censure	.09	3.44	**	.04	1.7		.03	1.07	
Police contact	.01	0.45		.01	0.37		-.03	-1.22	
Repeated grade	.05	2.08	*	.01	0.4		-.01	-0.23	
Parent lost job	.08	3.06	**	.06	2.68	**	.02	0.64	
Moral neutralization							.35	11.25	***
Legal cynicism							.22	7.72	***
Constant	3.62	26.52	***	3.03	24.71	***	0.57	3.71	***
R2							0.45		
Covariance									
Moral neutralization x Legal cynicism							.39	16.17	***

Note. N=1203; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Theoretical pathways generating support for violent extremism

Age 15   Age 17

Latent trait

Social
attachments

Exposure to
violence   Support for
violent
extremism

Strain

Summary of results: theoretical pathways

Age 15   Age 17

Latent trait

Social attachments

Exposure to violence

Strain

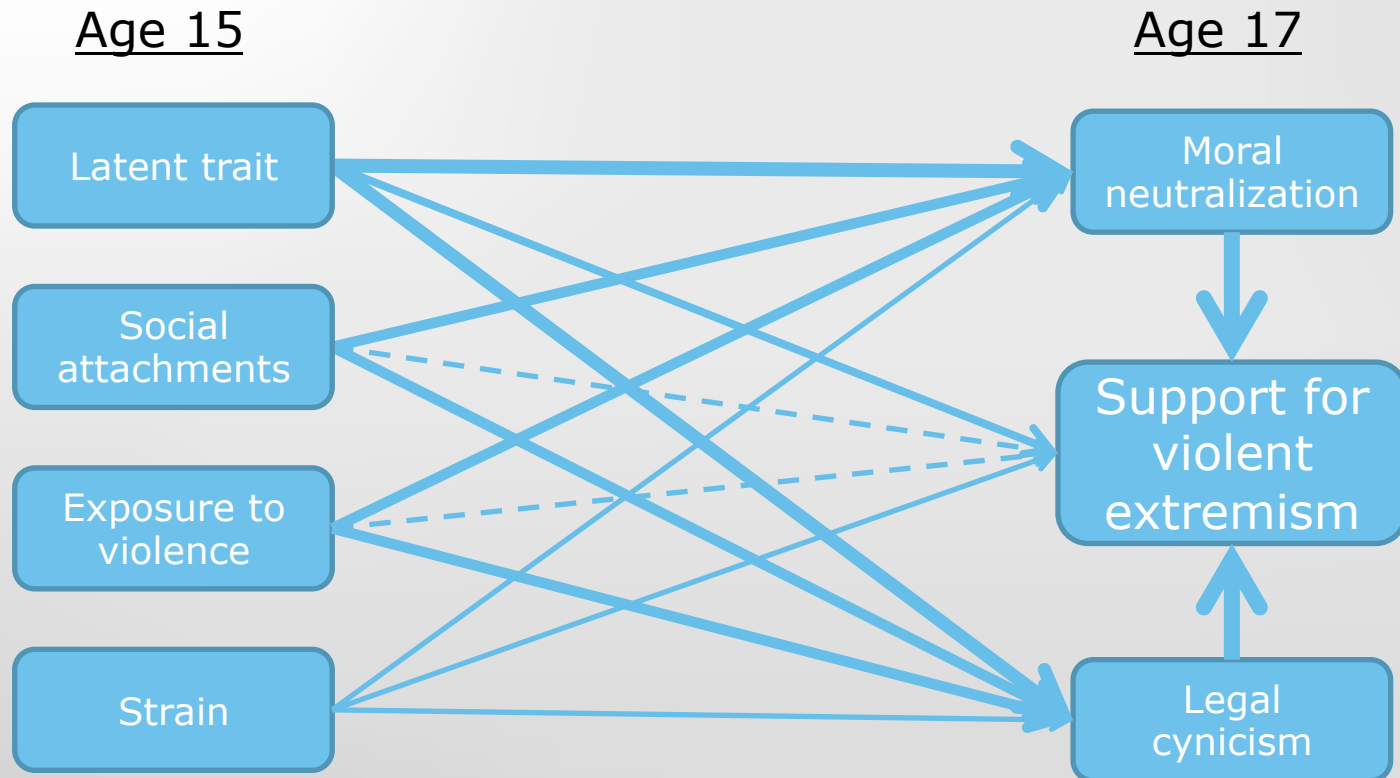Support for violent extremism
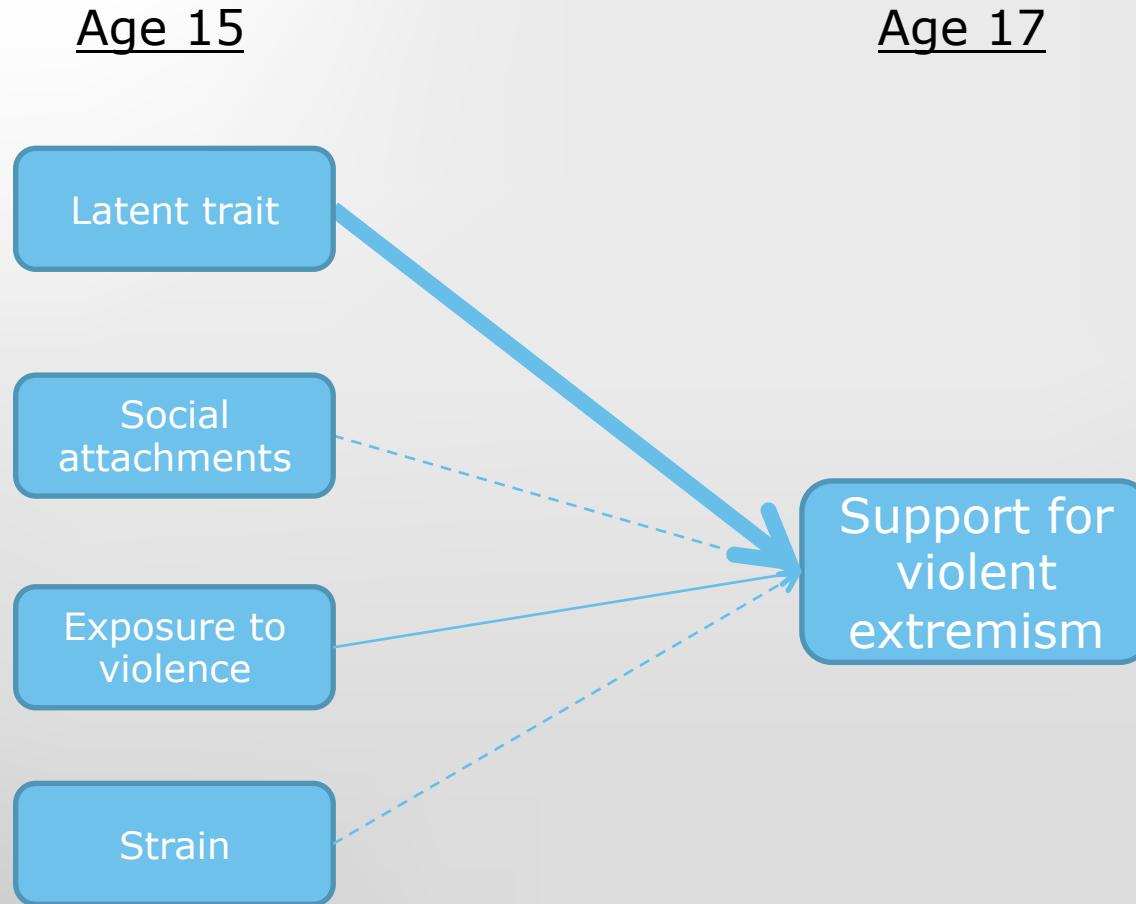
Moral and legal neutralization as mediating mechanisms

Moral and legal neutralization as mediating mechanisms

Age 15   Age 17

Latent trait

Social attachments

Exposure to violence

Strain

Moral neutralization

Support for violent extremism

Legal cynicism
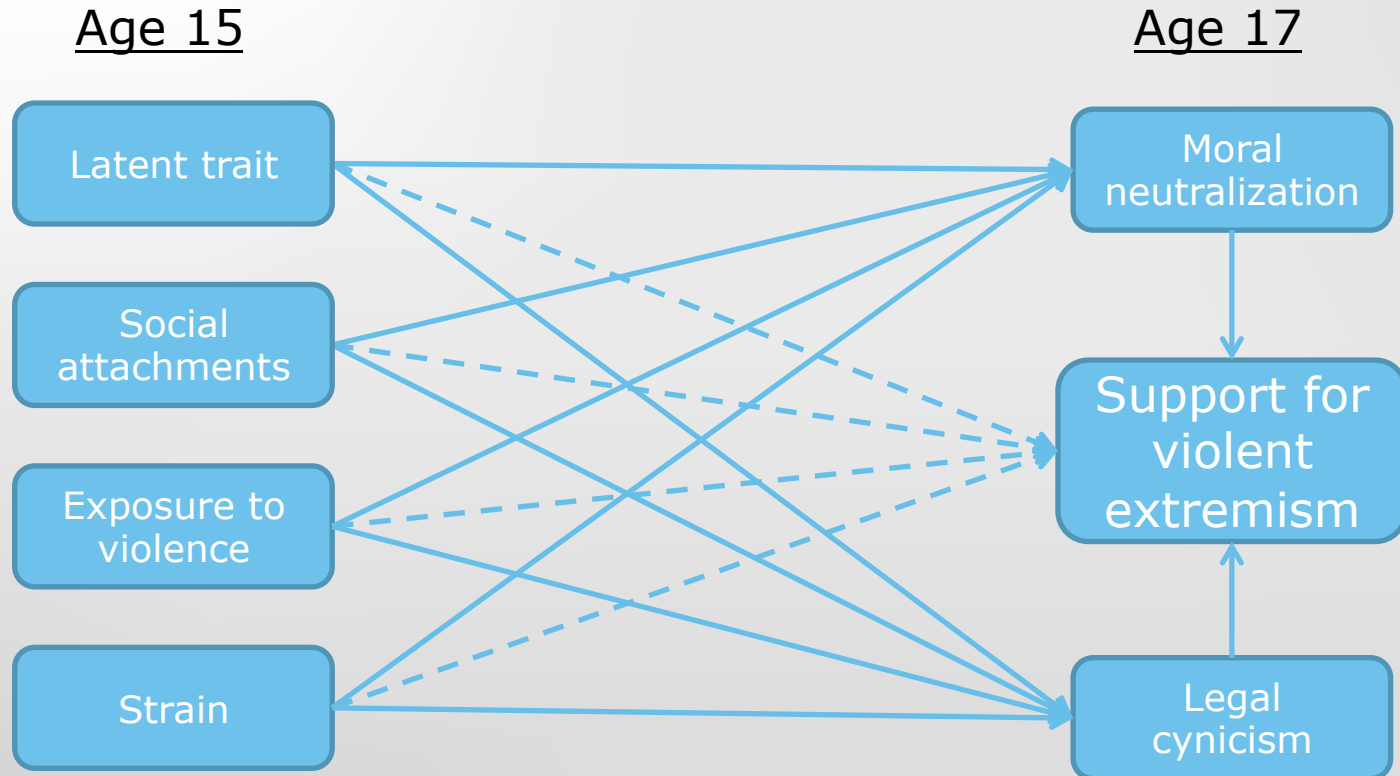
Summary of results: theoretical pathways

- ***Support for violent extremism consistently associated with gender (male) and aggressive behaviours***

- ***Lack of social attachments not directly related to support for violent extremism***

  - ➢ ***Contribute to processes of moral and legal neutralization***

- ***Exposure to media and political violence/strain related to higher support for violent extremism***

- ***Negative life events not directly related to extremism***

- ***Religion not associated with support for violent extremism once other factors are controlled***