

The Psychology of Offensive and Defensive Intergroup Violence: Preregistered Insights from 58 countries

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Abstract

Evolutionary theory and historical evidence suggest humans possess distinct psychological tendencies for defensive and offensive violence, which have insufficiently been considered in research. In a large-scale pre-registered study across 58 countries ($N = 18,128$), we demonstrate that violent extremist intentions manifest along two distinct psychological phenomena: defensive extremism, motivated by protecting one's group from (perceived) threats, and offensive extremism, driven by establishing group dominance. We show that these dimensions can (a) be reliably differentiated across diverse cultural contexts, (b) are distinctively associated with psychological dispositions, and (c) systematically differentiate countries varying in macro-level sociopolitical functioning and violence. Across nations, a two-factorial structure was observed that was invariant at the scalar level. Defensive extremist intentions were consistently higher than offensive extremism in 56 out of 58 countries, suggesting greater moral acceptance of protective violence. While psychopathy was positively related to both types of violent extremist intentions, those high in Machiavellianism and narcissism demonstrated particularly higher levels of defensive extremist intentions. By contrast, those scoring high on religious fundamentalism and social dominance orientation demonstrated particularly higher levels of offensive extremist intentions. Unexpectedly, liberal political group identification was associated with higher offensive but lower defensive extremist intentions. Crucially, offensive (but not defensive) intentions were associated with macro-level societal function, including political terror and internal conflict. These findings establish that defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions represent two conceptually different forms of extremism across a large and diverse range of countries, with consequences for research and practice.

Keywords: defensive, intergroup conflict, intergroup violence, offensive, psychology, violent extremism, violence

Significance Statement

Historically, intergroup violence has been motivated by both offensive and defensive goals, often blending narratives of protection with ambitions of domination. In a preregistered study spanning 58 countries, we show that defensive and offensive extremist intentions are positively correlated yet psychologically distinct, relating differently to individual and societal factors. Defensive extremist intentions were far more common and linked to narcissism and Machiavellianism, whereas offensive extremist intentions were associated with social dominance orientation and religious fundamentalism, were lower in more democratic and developed societies, and higher in those experiencing violence and conflict. This global evidence suggests that violent extremist intentions are not a single phenomenon but encapsulate two distinct motivational pathways, underscoring the importance of tailored intervention strategies.

1 Introduction

2 In mid-20th-century Europe, key elements of the Nazi regime orchestrated aggressive campaigns
3 of violence to secure power and assert dominance. While these actions were clearly offensive—
4 aimed at ideological subjugation and territorial conquest—Nazi propaganda invoked both
5 offensive and defensive narratives. Campaigns were cast as bold assertions of expansion, yet
6 simultaneously framed as pre-emptive and protective, portraying violence as necessary to defend
7 the Volk against alleged existential threats. This example illustrates how the same group can
8 mobilize extremist collective violence through intertwined offensive and defensive logic.
9 Recognizing this dual motivational structure is, thus, crucial for understanding how violent
10 extremism gains psychological traction and how adherents recruit participation. Violent extremism
11 is typically defined as the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that advocate, engage in, or support
12 ideologically motivated violence to achieve social, economic, or political objectives¹. Foundational
13 research on the motives of violence suggests that extremists often act not as rational actors
14 maximizing utility, but as devoted actors driven by deontological principles and sacred values that
15 are immune to material trade-offs^{2,3}. Furthermore, such violence is frequently perceived by
16 perpetrators as ‘virtuous’ that is as a morally necessary means to regulate, sustain, or redress
17 essential social relationships, rather than as a breakdown of self-control⁴.

18
19 Despite the low base rates of active perpetrators, violent extremism stands as a destabilizing
20 global challenge due to its potential to reshape global politics, security frameworks, and societal
21 structures in the 21st century^{5,6}. Its high human costs and destabilizing effects have generated an
22 extensive research enterprise aimed at uncovering its psychological underpinnings⁶. Yet, despite
23 significant advances, conventional psychological approaches have failed to recognize a critical
24 distinction illustrated by the example above. Violent extremism manifests in two fundamentally
25 different forms: defensive and offensive. Here, we establish in a pre-registered study spanning 58
26 countries that these dimensions represent distinct psychological phenomena that can (a) be
27 reliably differentiated across diverse cultural contexts, (b) are distinctively associated with
28 psychological dispositions, and (c) systematically differentiate countries varying in macro-level
29 sociopolitical functioning and violence. As such, we treat defensive and offensive violent
30 extremism as individual-level psychological tendencies. Because individuals are embedded in
31 societies, these tendencies can also be aggregated to characterize between-country differences.
32 This scaling-up from persons to populations has rarely been possible in violent extremism
33 research given the scarcity of large, multi-country psychological data.

34
35 Psychological research has measured behaviors, intentions, emotions, and attitudes related to
36 violent extremism with various scales⁷. Due to the inherent challenges of measuring actual
37 violence, researchers typically operationalize it through proxies such as violent intentions,
38 attitudinal extremism, aggression, and support for violent extremist actions. Some studies have
39 developed ad hoc measures to assess violent intentions, typically focusing on willingness to
40 engage in or support violence on behalf of one’s group^{8,9}. While these scales have advanced our
41 understanding of violent extremism, they conceptualize violent intentions without distinguishing
42 between their offensive or defensive motivations¹⁰⁻¹². Although some items in existing scales
43 might tap into one aspect, existing work has not systematically conceptualized or factorially
44 operationalized these two distinct forms of violent extremism. This distinction is critical because
45 throughout history, nearly every violent conflict has involved a complex interplay of both
46 motivations, each serving distinct psychological and strategic functions^{13,14}. Defensive violent
47 extremism can be characterized as reactive aggression, often motivated by the perceived need to
48 protect a group from threats, oppression, or annihilation. By contrast, offensive violent extremism
49 is characterized by proactive aggression aimed at expanding influence, imposing ideology, or
50 achieving dominance over others.¹ Political actors ranging from extremist groups like ISIS and

¹ Critically, we here employ ‘reactive’ and ‘proactive’ to distinguish between functional motivations rooted in threat reduction versus dominance seeking, respectively, rather than to denote the impulsive versus planned cognitive styles often associated with these terms in the interpersonal aggression literature.

White supremacists to state and non-state actors like Israel and Hezbollah all utilize a dual strategy: justifying offensive, expansionist goals through the narrative of defensive existential necessity (see Text S1 for details). Two common forms of violence, retaliation and punishment (see e.g. ¹⁵⁻¹⁷), fit within our framework when analyzed through their regulatory focus. Retaliation, being reactive to threat¹⁸, aligns with defensive motivations¹⁹ as explicitly captured in our scale. Punishment maps differently depending on its goal: defensive when preventing loss or deterring threats, offensive when acquiring new dominance. Our offensive items specifically measure promotion-focused acquisition rather than maintenance or retribution, thus isolating this distinct motivational pathway. Importantly, our framework focuses exclusively on intergroup violence, that is actions directed at outgroups to either protect one's group (defensive) or expand its dominance (offensive). Intragroup punishment used to maintain collaboration or internal hierarchies, while important, represents a distinct phenomenon outside our current scope.

Against this background, we propose that although defensive and offensive forms often coexist and may be positively correlated, they represent distinct psychological phenomena with partially separable correlates that reflect their different motivational logic. This distinction conceptually parallels evolutionary psychological perspectives. In addition to its focus on between-species differences, evolutionary psychology theorizes species-typical mechanisms that generate within-species variation via facultative calibration to local cues (e.g., threat, opportunity)²⁰. Research suggests that humans have evolved distinct psychological mechanisms for defensive versus offensive aggression^{13,14}, a view synthesized in evolutionary accounts of war that differentiate threat-driven protective responses from opportunity- and predation-driven strategies²¹. Moreover, individuals in different ecologies may be differentially sensitized to defensive (reactive) versus offensive (proactive) aggression²²⁻²⁵. Comparative work in human aggression identifies a bimodal architecture (proactive vs. reactive) distinguished by eliciting conditions, arousal profiles, and neural pathways. Proactive aggression tends to be more reward-oriented, and reactive aggression more threat-responsive (supporting separable motivational systems)²⁶. Defensive aggression is argued to have emerged as a crucial mechanism for group survival in response to external threats, while offensive aggression evolved as a strategy for resource acquisition and status enhancement²⁷⁻²⁹. Our distinction between two types of violent extremism further aligns with regulatory focus theory, where prevention focus (akin to defensive motivation) centers on avoiding negative outcomes and maintaining security, while promotion focus (similar to offensive motivation) emphasizes advancement toward and achievement of outcomes^{30,31}, mapping onto different appraisal patterns (vigilance vs. eagerness), affect (anxiety vs. enthusiasm), and action tendencies (risk aversion vs. approach). Just as regulatory focus theory has demonstrated that these two orientations involve distinct psychological processes that influence cognition, emotion, and behavior across domains, we expect defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions to reflect different motivational systems with distinct psychological correlates. This mapping is not merely illustrative; it generates our preregistered hypotheses about separability (H1), asymmetric mean levels (H2), differential trait covariation (H3–H5), and macro-ecological calibration (H6–H8).

Our first hypothesis (H1) proposes that defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions constitute factorially distinct components across samples from a large and diverse range of countries. To the extent that humans may possess separate psychological systems for defensive and offensive violence due to distinct evolutionary pathways and aligned with influential psychological theories on prevention and promotion, such intentions should be empirically distinguishable across diverse cultural contexts. We further hypothesize (H2) that levels of defensive violent extremist intentions will generally be higher than levels of offensive violent extremist intentions across and within countries. This prediction stems from several converging lines of evidence: First, defensive violence is typically perceived as more morally justifiable than offensive violence^{14,32}, which may shape the underlying motivational systems through socialization and internalization of moral norms. Second, experimental research demonstrates that in-group defense generates stronger coordination and cooperation than out-group

aggression, suggesting that more robust and latently activated psychological mechanisms and motivational systems likely evolved to support defensive rather than offensive violence³³.

To establish the convergent-discriminant validity of the distinction between defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions, we further predict that these constructs will be associated with partly overlapping but differently accentuated psychological profiles at the individual level. Our conceptual model posits two proximal motivational channels: a hierarchy–dominance channel (promotion-focused, opportunity-seeking) that is associated with offensive violent extremist intentions, and a threat–security channel (prevention-focused, vigilance) that is associated with defensive violent extremist intentions. Individual-difference constructs can load on one or both channels to differing degrees. Specifically, our third hypothesis (H3) proposes that religious fundamentalism, social dominance orientation (SDO), and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) will be more strongly linked to offensive violent extremist intentions than to defensive violent extremist intentions. Religious fundamentalism, characterized by strict adherence to religious texts and belief in the superiority of one’s religion, has been associated with out-group hostility and support for aggressive policies³⁴. Functionally, its absolutism and ingroup-supremacy claims map onto the hierarchy–dominance channel (promotion of ingroup hegemony), yielding a potentially stronger path to offense, with a secondary, yet weaker path to defense of sacred values. Similarly, SDO, reflecting a preference for group-based hierarchies and support for dominant-group supremacy, aligns closely with offensive violence aimed at establishing dominance^{35,36}. As a core construct in the political psychology of war, SDO captures a “competitive jungle” worldview³⁷ that provides a direct ideological justification for hierarchy-enhancing aggression and dominance-based military action³⁸. SDO is thus considered a key aspect of the hierarchy–dominance channel, showing a disproportionately stronger association with offensive than defensive intentions. RWA, characterized by submission to authorities, conventionalism, and aggression toward sanctioned targets³⁹, straddles both channels: its authoritarian aggression and norm enforcement bias toward offense (sanctioned outgroup suppression)^{40,41}, whereas its threat sensitivity and “dangerous world” view³⁷ may activate defense under perceived danger⁴². We therefore expect positive links to both forms of violent extremist intentions but a stronger link to offensive intentions.

Our fourth hypothesis (H4) predicts that narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (the “dark triad”)⁴³ will be primarily related to offensive violent extremist intentions. Narcissism, with its focus on grandiosity and entitlement, may drive offensive violence to enhance the status of one’s group⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶. Machiavellianism, characterized by strategic manipulation, may facilitate calculated aggression to advance group interests. Psychopathy, with its callousness and impulsivity, has been associated with both instrumental and reactive aggression⁴⁷, which could imply similar associations with both types of intentions. However, given the lack of empathy it involves, we predict that it will be associated with offensive violent intentions more so than defensive violent intentions as the latter intends to protect one’s group, which one needs to care about in the first place. Thus, H4 operationalizes a cost–benefit expectation: traits lowering empathic costs or increasing perceived coercive rewards should tilt toward offense. Next, we originally hypothesized that political group identification would be primarily related to defensive violent extremist intentions (H5). Strong group identification is positively associated with concern for the group’s welfare and willingness to sacrifice for its protection, including extremist intentions⁴⁸. However, during the measurement invariance tests, and before testing our predictions, we realized that two types of political identification were measured, namely conservative and liberal political group identification. As a deviation from our pre-registered hypothesis, we subsequently predicted that conservative group identification would be related primarily to offensive violent extremist intentions, while liberal group identification would be associated primarily with defensive violent extremist intentions². Conservatism is associated with maintenance of hierarchies, which often involves dominating other groups⁴⁹, while liberalism is associated with the defense of vulnerable

²Note that we find evidence contrary to this adjusted prediction (see Results).

groups⁵⁰. H5 therefore treats ideological identification as a cue to coalitional priorities⁵¹: hierarchy maintenance (offense) vs. protection of vulnerable groups (defense).

In addition to the validation of offensive vs. defensive violent extremist intentions at the individual level, we hypothesize differential associations with sociopolitical functioning at the macro-level. Testing these country-level associations serves as an ecological validity check: if intentions capture meaningful readiness for action, they should covary with behavioral and ecological regularities observed at the country level²⁹. We hypothesize (H6) that country-level scores on the Global Terrorism Index⁵² (GTI; compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace from event data; higher scores indicate more frequent and lethal terrorist incidents and greater associated harm) will be positively related primarily to offensive violent extremist intentions. Terrorism is often explicitly designed to destabilize existing power structures and impose alternative ideologies via violent extremism⁵³, which aligns closely with the proactive, system-challenging nature of offensive extremism. The GTI's focus on the frequency, lethality, and ideological motivations of attacks⁵² dovetails with the often premeditated nature of offensive violence. In such environments, offensive tactics may be rendered more visible and focal, potentially increasing perceptions of their efficacy and normativity⁵⁴. Thus, GTI approximates a high-competition ecology that should lower thresholds primarily for proactive offensive violent extremism.

For other country-level indicators, we predict (H7 and H8) that scores on the Global Peace Index⁵⁵ (GPI; a composite of ongoing conflict, societal safety and security, and militarization; higher scores indicate less peace) and GINI-assessed inequality (a standardized income-inequality metric where higher values indicate more unequal income distributions) will be positively and similarly related to both types of violent extremist intentions. By contrast, scores on the democracy index⁵⁶ (Economist Intelligence Unit composite of electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, culture, and civil liberties; higher scores indicate more democracy) were hypothesized to be negatively and similarly related to both types of violent extremist intentions. Inequality, political instability, and lack of democratic alternatives can be thought to create dual pressures on psychological motivations of violence: an opportunity mechanism, where weakened institutions and social control create power vacuums that groups may exploit to further their goals through violent means; and simultaneously a necessity mechanism, where instability threatens group security by undermining protective structures and routes of democratic influence, making defensive violence seem necessary for survival when institutional protections fail^{35,57}. Thus, despite somewhat mixed findings on these relationships at the macro level⁵⁸⁻⁶⁰, we expected to find associations between these macro-level indicators and individual-levels of both types of violent extremist intentions.

Finally, we hypothesize (H8) that country-level scores on the Human Development Index⁶¹ (HDI; UNDP composite of life expectancy, education, and income; higher values indicate greater human development) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP; national economic output; we interpret higher values as greater aggregate resources and state capacity) will be negatively and similarly related to both types of violent extremist intentions. Research indicates that such indicators are not directly or consistently linked to terrorism as a specific form of violent extremism (e.g., ⁶²). However, studies have demonstrated connections between these factors and broader aspects of violent extremism, including violent conflicts^{63,64}, for instance driven by lowered opportunity costs⁶⁵, perceived relative deprivation⁶⁶, and psychological dispositions to enhance and protect the social standing of one's group³⁵. Higher HDI and GDP typically co-occur with greater provision of public goods, institutional capacity, and social insurance, which increase the opportunity costs of violence and may dampen both dominance-seeking and threat-reactive motives. We therefore predict that HDI and GDP will be related to less defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions. Taken together, H6-H8 allow us to assess whether the offensive–defensive distinction translates beyond individual survey responses to patterns that characterize

national contexts. These indices function as ecological proxies for threat and opportunity that according to evolutionary accounts calibrate defense and offense systems^{26,29}.

We tested these predictions in a unique dataset comprising 18,128 participants from 58 countries/autonomous regions, representing one of the most comprehensive cross-country psychological investigations of violent extremist intentions to date. This diverse sample spans six continents; see Figure S1 for a complete overview. Its geographical breadth encompasses diverse political systems (from established democracies to emerging democracies and more authoritarian regimes), economic development levels (from high-income nations to developing economies), religious traditions (Abrahamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Shinto, and secular societies), and cultural contexts (individualistic and collectivistic, Eastern and Western, Global South vs. Global North). The sample's scope and heterogeneity, thus, provide a rare opportunity to examine the generalizability of these associations across a wide range of sociopolitical, cultural, and economic contexts worldwide (while acknowledging important sampling limitations, such as the samples primarily consisting of students, discussed later). As such, the present research offers several important theoretical and practical contributions. Whereas prior theory and experiments have established that defensive aggression can be more intense than offensive aggression and that humans show higher levels of coordination during defensive violence^{26,33}, they typically assess generic aggression or behavior in specific settings. In a large-scale study, we add that extremist intentions themselves at the psychological level fractionate into defensive versus offensive dimensions that are (a) psychometrically distinct, (b) differentially associated with theoretically relevant dispositions, and (c) patterned by national ecologies in ways predicted by evolutionary and institutional logics as has been hypothesized²⁹ but not comprehensively tested. Practically, recognizing the distinction between defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions holds significant implications for countering violent extremism (CVE) programs. Provided both types of violent extremist intentions are distinct, different intervention strategies may be required.

Results

As reported in more detail in the Methods section and Table S1, the two-factorial measurement model, distinguishing between offensive and defensive violent extremist intentions showed a close fit to the data even at the scalar measurement invariance level, $\chi^2 = 10077.30$, $df = 4214$, $p < .001$, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = 0.934, $RMSEA$ (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = 0.067, 90% CI [0.066, 0.068], $SRMR$ (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) = 0.059. The two resulting scales were moderately and positively correlated at the individual level, $r = 0.52$, $p < .001$, and moderately to strongly positively related at the country level, $r = 0.60$, $p < .001$ (calculated between country means). These findings supported the first hypothesis and allowed for valid mean-level comparisons between countries. We proceeded to test Hypothesis 2 with a multi-level model in which participants were nested within countries and responses to the two violence measures were nested within participants. All effects presented from here on are standardized. The model accounted for 10% of the variance in fixed effects and 58% of the total variance (including both fixed effects and random effects). The participant level explained 44% of the variance, while the country level explained 10% of the variance based on intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC). Importantly, the index variable differentiating between offensive versus defensive violent extremist intentions was significant, $\beta = -1.01$, 95% CI [-1.12, -0.90], $t(56.85) = -17.73$, $p < .001$. Offensive violent extremist intentions were substantially lower, $M = 1.77$, 95% CI [1.64, 1.90], than defensive violent extremist intentions, $M = 2.78$, 95% CI [2.66, 2.90], across countries and for all countries/autonomous regions except for Hong Kong and Pakistan (i.e., indicated by non-overlapping 95% CIs).

We next examined the role of individual level variables to test Hypotheses 3 through 5. To obtain unbiased and interpretable estimates, we followed within-between decomposition following standard procedures⁶⁷: for each Level-1 predictor, we include (a) the country mean of that predictor (between-country effect) and (b) a country-mean centered person score (within-country effect). In the first model, we estimated the associations across the two violence variables. In the

1 second model, we tested whether these associations were moderated by violence type. In Model
2 1 (see Table 1), at the individual level (within countries) and in order of strength of coefficients,
3 higher psychopathy, Machiavellianism, SDO, religious fundamentalism, narcissism, and RWA
4 were each associated with higher violent extremist intentions. At the country level (between
5 countries) and again in order of effect size, higher average religious fundamentalism,
6 Machiavellianism, and psychopathy were associated with higher violent-extremist intentions. In
7 Model 2 (see Table 2), several significant interactions emerged between violence type and the
8 predictor variables (within country). SDO and religious fundamentalism were more strongly
9 associated with offensive than with defensive violent extremist intentions (see Table 3 and Figure
10 1). By contrast, Machiavellianism and narcissism were more strongly linked to defensive than
11 offensive violent extremist intentions. Liberal political group identification showed divergent
12 patterns, being negatively associated with defensive but positively associated with offensive
13 intentions. Conservative political group identification showed a small interaction, but simple
14 slopes were not statistically significant.

1 **Table 1.** Associations of Individual Difference Variables with Violent Extremist Intentions Across
2 the Types of Violence
3

Variable	β	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
		lower	upper			
(Intercept)	2.76	2.66	2.85	56.32	36.98	<0.001
Violence Type: Offensive vs. Defensive	-1.03	-1.14	-0.93	-19.60	55.88	<0.001
<i>Centered Within Cluster</i>						
Social Dominance Orientation	0.15	0.13	0.17	15.28	94.76	<0.001
Religious Fundamentalism	0.12	0.09	0.14	10.03	49.78	<0.001
Right-Wing Authoritarianism	0.04	0.02	0.06	3.46	53.97	0.001
Machiavellianism	0.25	0.22	0.29	14.51	45.20	<0.001
Psychopathy	0.32	0.27	0.36	14.64	57.00	<0.001
Narcissism	0.07	0.04	0.09	4.78	56.94	<0.001
Conservative Political Identification	0.00	-0.02	0.02	0.00	62.79	0.999
Liberal Political Identification	0.00	-0.02	0.02	-0.07	57.34	0.942
<i>Country Mean</i>						
Social Dominance Orientation	-0.07	-0.17	0.04	-1.29	47.65	0.204
Religious Fundamentalism	0.38	0.25	0.51	5.77	50.66	<0.001
Right-Wing Authoritarianism	0.01	-0.10	0.12	0.20	48.44	0.841
Machiavellianism	0.20	0.10	0.29	3.96	48.58	<0.001
Psychopathy	0.10	0.01	0.20	2.15	47.53	0.037
Narcissism	-0.02	-0.11	0.07	-0.42	47.47	0.677
Conservative Political Identification	-0.05	-0.14	0.05	-0.96	50.26	0.343
Liberal Political Identification	-0.05	-0.12	0.03	-1.26	48.08	0.214
<i>AIC</i>	116076.80					
<i>BIC</i>	116576.45					
Pseudo R^2 (fixed effects)	0.31					
Pseudo R^2 (total effects)	0.57					

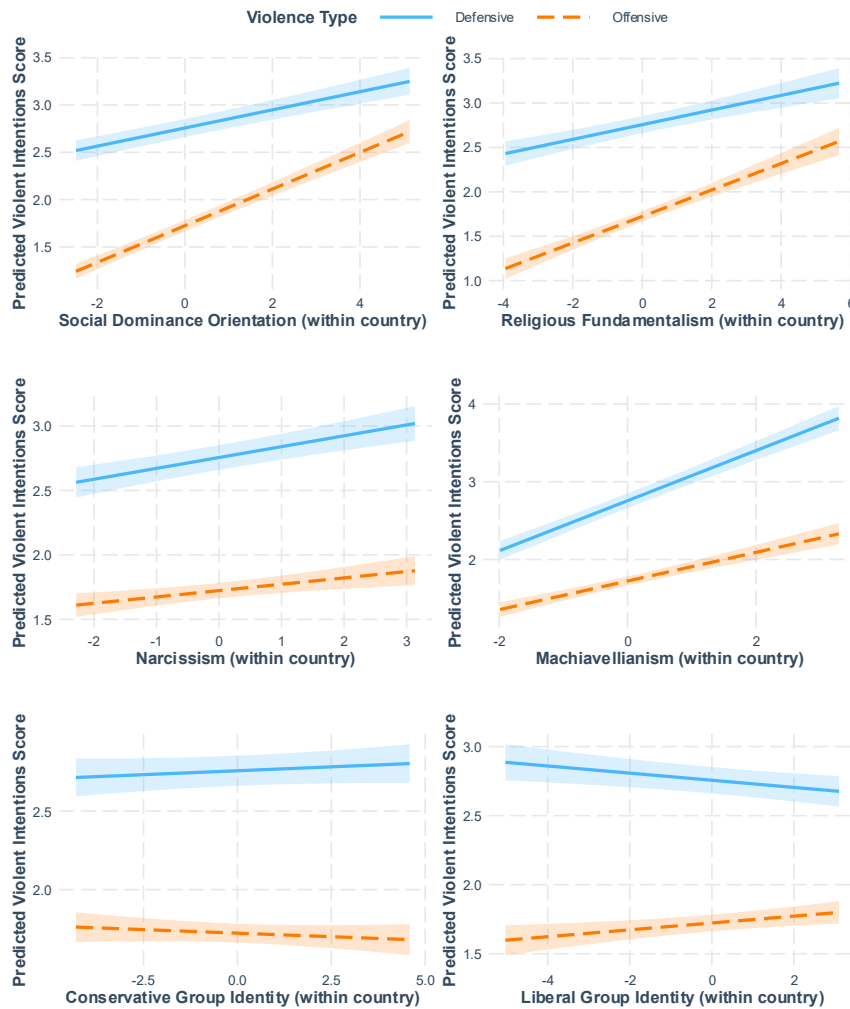
Note. A linear mixed model was estimated. β = Standardized regression coefficient. *CI* = Confidence Intervals. *z* = *z*-score. *p* = Two-tailed *p*-test. *AIC* = Akaike Information Criterion. *BIC* = Bayesian Information Criterion. R^2 = explained variance. All predictor variables are grand mean centered and standardized.

Table 2. Associations of Individual Difference Variables with Violent Extremist Intentions Between the Types of Violence

Variable	β	95% CI		t	df	P
		lower	upper			
(Intercept)	2.76	2.66	2.85	56.34	36.93	<0.001
Violence Type: Offensive vs. Defensive	-1.03	-1.14	-0.93	-19.59	55.88	<0.001
<i>Centered Within Cluster</i>						
Social Dominance Orientation	0.10	0.08	0.12	9.26	29724.25	<0.001
Religious Fundamentalism	0.08	0.06	0.11	6.49	65.70	<0.001
Right-Wing Authoritarianism	0.04	0.02	0.06	3.30	76.91	0.001
Machiavellianism	0.32	0.29	0.36	16.95	65.60	<0.001
Psychopathy	0.31	0.26	0.35	13.49	73.53	<0.001
Narcissism	0.08	0.05	0.12	5.47	80.69	<0.001
Conservative Political Identification	0.01	-0.01	0.03	1.16	100.88	0.250
Liberal Political Identification	-0.03	-0.04	-0.01	-2.87	89.06	0.005
Social Dominance Orientation $\times$ Type	0.098	0.075	0.12	8.526	17531.21	<0.001
Religious Fundamentalism $\times$ Type	0.067	0.048	0.085	7.138	17530.38	<0.001
Right-Wing Authoritarianism $\times$ Type	-0.003	-0.022	0.016	-0.32	17531.48	0.749
Machiavellianism $\times$ Type	-0.138	-0.168	-0.108	-8.912	17530.57	<0.001
Psychopathy $\times$ Type	0.02	-0.01	0.051	1.292	17530.91	0.196
Narcissism $\times$ Type	-0.035	-0.06	-0.01	-2.784	17530.66	0.005
Conservative Political Identification $\times$ Type	-0.019	-0.034	-0.004	-2.456	17533.64	0.014
Liberal Political Identification $\times$ Type	0.051	0.034	0.067	6.107	17530.52	<0.001
<i>Country Mean</i>						
Social Dominance Orientation	-0.07	-0.17	0.04	-1.29	47.66	0.203
Religious Fundamentalism	0.38	0.25	0.51	5.76	50.67	<0.001
Right-Wing Authoritarianism	0.01	-0.10	0.12	0.21	48.46	0.834
Machiavellianism	0.20	0.10	0.29	3.96	48.60	<0.001
Psychopathy	0.10	0.01	0.20	2.14	47.55	0.037
Narcissism	-0.02	-0.11	0.07	-0.42	47.49	0.679
Conservative Political Identification	-0.05	-0.14	0.05	-0.96	50.28	0.344
Liberal Political Identification	-0.05	-0.12	0.03	-1.26	48.10	0.214
<i>AIC</i>	115859.02					
<i>BIC</i>	116426.42					
Pseudo R^2 (fixed effects)	0.32					
Pseudo R^2 (total effects)	0.58					

Note. A linear mixed model was estimated. β = Standardized regression coefficient. CI = Confidence Intervals. z = z -score. p = Two-tailed p -test. *AIC* = Akaike Information Criterion. *BIC* = Bayesian Information Criterion. R^2 = explained variance. All predictor variables are grand mean centered and standardized.

1 **Figure 1.** Simple Slopes Showing Associations Between Individual-Level Variables and Violent
2 Extremist Intentions Depending on the Type of Violence



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4 *Note.* Ribbons indicate 95% confidence intervals.

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6 **Table 3.** Simple Slopes Estimates for the Significant Interaction Effects

	Defensive Violent Intentions				Offensive Violent Intentions			
	95% CI				95% CI			
	β	lower	upper	<i>P</i>	β	lower	upper	<i>P</i>
Social Dominance Orientation	0.10	0.08	0.12	<0.001	0.20	0.17	0.22	<0.001
Religious Fundamentalism	0.08	0.06	0.11	<0.001	0.15	0.13	0.17	<0.001
Machiavellianism	0.32	0.29	0.36	<0.001	0.18	0.15	0.22	<0.001
Narcissism	0.08	0.05	0.11	<0.001	0.05	0.02	0.08	0.003
Conservative Group Identification	0.01	-0.01	0.03	0.273	-0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.274
Liberal Group Identification	-0.03	-0.04	-0.01	0.005	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.007

Note. β = Standardized regression coefficient. *CI* = Confidence Intervals. *P* = Two-tailed *p*-test.

1 Finally, we tested the role of country-level variables. As reported in Table 4, the interaction terms
2 with violent extremist intentions type were significant for the GTI, the Democracy Index, and HDI.
3 The higher a country scored on the GTI, the higher its offensive violent extremist intentions, $\gamma =$
4 0.06 , 95% CI $[0.01, 0.11]$, $p = .015$, but no significant relationship was observed with defensive
5 violent extremist intentions, $\gamma = -0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.06, 0.05]$, $p = .787$, see Figure 2, Panel a.
6 Countries scoring higher on the Democracy Index reported less defensive violent extremist
7 intentions, $\gamma = -0.08$, 95% CI $[-0.15, -0.02]$, $p = .015$, but especially offensive violent extremist
8 intentions, $\gamma = -0.18$, 95% CI $[-0.24, -0.13]$, $p < .001$. Lastly, countries with a higher HDI showed
9 statistically significantly lower degrees of offensive violent extremist intentions, $\gamma = -2.15$, 95% CI
10 $[-3.10, -1.21]$, $p < .001$, but not defensive violent extremist intentions, $\gamma = -0.69$, 95% CI $[-1.72,$
11 $0.34]$, $p = .192$. To strengthen the generation of insights into actual rates of different kinds of
12 extremist violence in the world, we conducted an exploratory set of analyses, testing whether the
13 various violence sub-indicators of the GPI are differentially associated with offensive and
14 defensive violent extremist intentions (see Table S13). Simple effects showed that all indicators
15 were positively associated with offensive violent extremist intentions, except for number of
16 homicides, external conflicts fought, and deaths in external conflict (see Figure 2, Panel b). None
17 of the associations reached significance for defensive violent extremist intentions. Crucially, the
18 interaction between the indicators and the violence type was significant for five indicators,
19 demonstrating that intensity of internal conflicts, the scale of political terror, violent
20 demonstrations, internal conflicts fought, and the impact of terrorism had significantly stronger
21 associations with offensive violent intentions.
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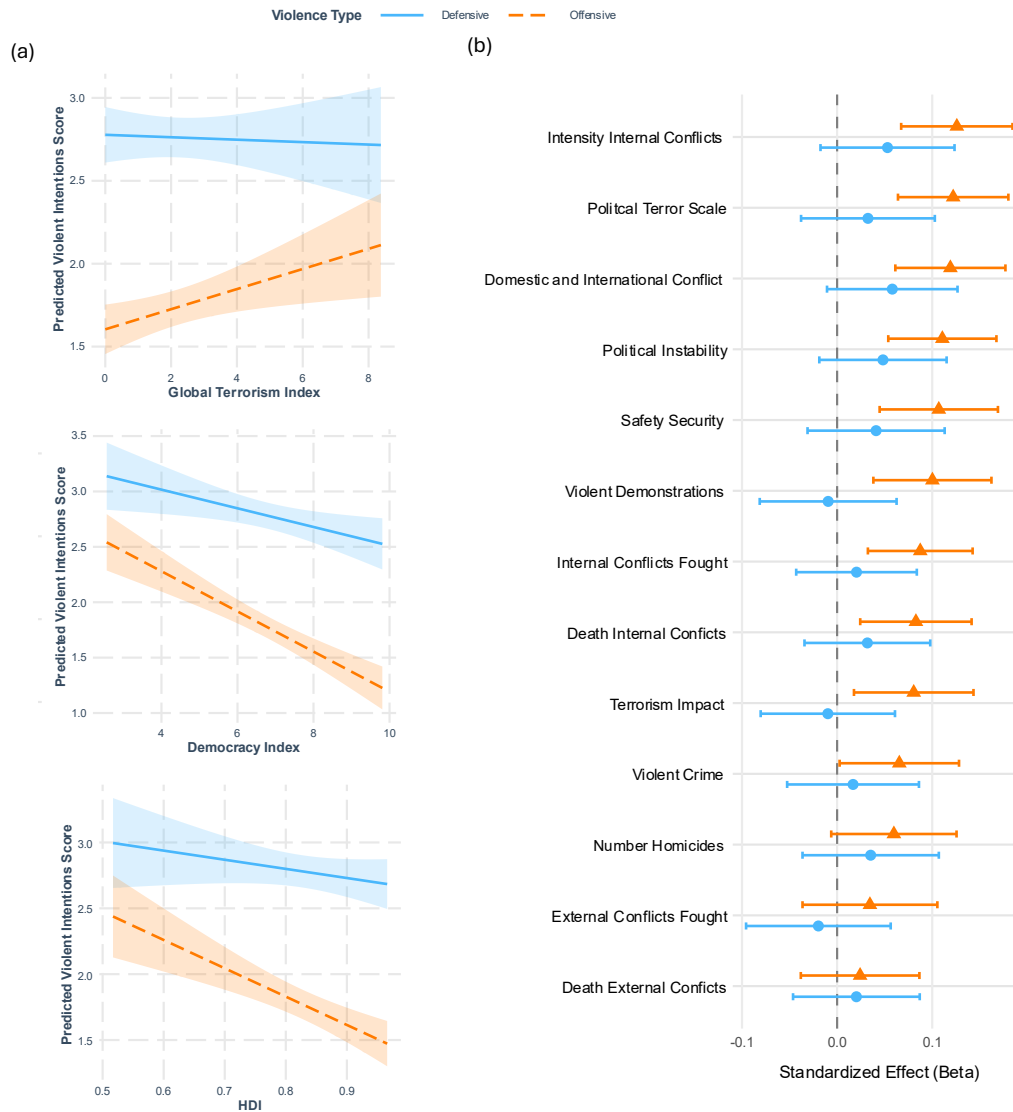
1 **Table 4.** Associations of Macro-Level Variables

Variable	γ	95% CI		t	df	P	Pseudo R^2	
		lower	upper				(fixed)	(total)
Model 1							0.11	0.57
(Intercept)	2.76	2.64	2.88	45.15	55.08	<0.001		
Violence Type: Offensive vs. Defensive	-1.03	-1.13	-0.93	-19.46	54.72	<0.001		
Global Terrorism Index	-0.02	-0.13	0.10	-0.27	55.25	0.787		
Global Terrorism Index $\times$ Violence Type	0.14	0.05	0.24	2.90	54.97	0.005		
Model 2							0.11	0.57
(Intercept)	2.76	2.64	2.87	45.60	55.10	<0.001		
Violence Type: Offensive vs. Defensive	-1.03	-1.14	-0.92	-18.60	54.65	<0.001		
Global Peace Index	0.08	-0.04	0.19	1.34	55.17	0.185		
Global Peace Index $\times$ Violence Type	0.09	-0.01	0.19	1.75	54.76	0.087		
Model 3							0.12	0.58
(Intercept)	2.77	2.65	2.89	45.84	55.85	<0.001		
Violence Type: Offensive vs. Defensive	-1.02	-1.13	-0.92	-19.25	55.85	<0.001		
Democracy Index	-0.14	-0.24	-0.03	-2.50	56.55	0.015		
Democracy Index $\times$ Violence Type	-0.16	-0.25	-0.06	-3.27	56.77	0.002		
Model 4							0.12	0.58
(Intercept)	2.78	2.66	2.90	44.47	55.93	<0.001		
Violence Type: Offensive vs. Defensive	-1.01	-1.12	-0.91	-19.14	55.81	<0.001		
HDI	-0.09	-0.22	0.04	-1.32	56.25	0.192		
HDI $\times$ Violence Type	-0.18	-0.29	-0.07	-3.27	56.24	0.002		
Model 5							0.12	0.58
(Intercept)	2.77	2.65	2.89	44.80	53.72	<0.001		
Violence Type: Offensive vs. Defensive	-1.02	-1.13	-0.91	-17.94	53.76	<0.001		
Gini	-0.08	-0.20	0.04	-1.26	54.31	0.212		
GDP per Capita	-0.15	-0.28	-0.02	-2.33	53.83	0.023		
Gini $\times$ Violence Type	0.04	-0.07	0.15	0.64	54.48	0.524		
GDP per Capita $\times$ Violence Type	-0.08	-0.19	0.04	-1.30	53.89	0.200		

Note. A generalized linear mixed model was estimated. γ = Standardized regression coefficient. CI = Confidence Intervals. z = z -score. p = Two-tailed p -test. AIC = Akaike Information Criterion. BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. ICC = Intraclass correlation coefficients. R^2 = explained variance. All predictor variables are grand centered and standardized.

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1 **Figure 2.** Simple Slopes Showing Associations Between Country-Level Indicators and Violence
 2 Depending on the Type of Violence. Panel (a) shows associations with the major indices Global
 3 Terrorism Index, Democracy Index, and HDI. Panel (b) shows associations with all violence sub-
 4 indicators of the Global Peace Index.
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8 *Note.* Ribbons indicate 95% confidence intervals.

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Discussion

Defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions constitute positively related yet factorially distinct components across samples from a diverse range of countries. As predicted, defensive violent extremist intentions were generally higher than offensive violent extremist intentions. Both findings provide large-scale confirmation for the notion that defensive violence often receives greater moral legitimacy than offensive violence^{14,32}, and evolutionary arguments that humans may have developed more robust psychological mechanisms for defensive violence³³. That defensive violence appears more morally acceptable than offensive violence is thus not a methodological limitation but follows from converging lines of research. The differential correlates we observe (e.g., SDO being most strongly associated with offensive and Machiavellianism and narcissism most strongly with defensive violent extremist intentions) further validate that respondents distinguished between these motivations. Specifically, SDO and religious fundamentalism showed almost twice as strong associations with offensive than defensive violent extremist intentions. This aligns with the conceptual foundation of SDO as a preference for group-based hierarchies and dominant-group supremacy³⁶, which naturally corresponds with offensive violence aimed at establishing dominance. Similarly, religious fundamentalism's stronger connection to offensive violent extremist intentions aligns with research linking it to out-group hostility and support for aggressive and expansive policies³⁴.

Our fourth hypothesis, predicting that dark triad personality traits would be primarily related to offensive violent extremist intentions, was not supported and, in fact, showed patterns opposite to our predictions for Machiavellianism and narcissism. These latter two traits predicted higher levels of both types of violence, but especially defensive violent extremist intentions. Individuals high in Machiavellianism, characterized by strategic manipulation and calculated behavior, may recognize that defensive framing provides greater legitimacy and social acceptance for violent actions, making it a more pragmatic choice for achieving their goals (see ⁶⁸). For narcissism, the stronger association with defensive violent extremist intentions might reflect hypersensitivity to perceived threats against one's group—an extension of the personal threat sensitivity often observed in narcissistic individuals^{45,69}. This interpretation is supported by the link commonly observed between personal and collective narcissism⁷⁰. Thus, narcissists may perceive threats to their group as threats to themselves, triggering primarily defensive violent responses. Psychopathy showed similar associations with both types of violent extremist intentions, contrary to our expectation of a stronger link with offensive violent intentions. Possibly, the sadistic and thrill-seeking characteristic of psychopathy may predispose individuals to violence generally regardless of its defensive or offensive nature as suggested by a recent meta-analysis⁴⁷.

Contrary to our revised predictions, liberal political identification was associated with higher levels of offensive but lower levels of defensive violent extremist intentions, while conservative political identification showed minimal associations with both types of intentions. This pattern may be explained by the functional relationship between violence and the status quo among this particular group. Very liberal participants may perceive defensive violent extremism as preservationist, aimed at maintaining group security and existing boundaries. This aligns with system-sanctioning motivations often rejected by liberals, who are more likely to perceive the status quo as unjust⁷¹. Conversely, offensive violent extremist intentions are proactive and acquisitive, aimed at altering power dynamics⁵⁰. While conservatives are more likely to engage in system-defending behavior, liberals are more likely to engage in system-challenging collective action⁵¹. Thus, in the context of radicalization, the offensive factor may capture the psychological drive for revolutionary change (i.e., the willingness to proactively disrupt the current order), which aligns with the "change-oriented" nature of extreme liberal ideologies.

The country-level analyses provided partial support for our hypotheses, providing some evidence that offensive and defensive intentions map onto qualitatively different real-world ecologies. The significant relationship between the GTI and offensive but not defensive violent extremist intentions suggests that the frequent prevalence of terrorism normalizes offensive reactions. This

1 points to a potential feedback loop: we predict that elevated offensive intentions within a
2 population may translate into higher rates of realized societal violence, which in turn shifts social
3 norms to accept aggression, thereby further fueling violent intentions. The stronger negative
4 association between degree of democracy and offensive violent extremist intentions supports
5 institutional theories suggesting that democratic systems provide legitimate channels for pursuing
6 group interests, thereby reducing the perceived necessity of offensive violence⁷². However, the
7 weaker (though still significant) relationship with defensive violent extremist intentions suggests
8 that even in well-functioning democracies, perceptions of group threat may persist and motivate
9 defensive violent intentions. This nuanced pattern extends previous research that has primarily
10 examined democracy's relationship with general violence, treating the latter as a unidimensional
11 construct and without psychological data at the individual level. Similarly, our finding that HDI was
12 negatively associated with offensive violent extremist intentions while showing no statistically
13 significant association with defensive violent extremist intentions offers new insights. While
14 supporting the observation that economic and social development may often be unconnected to
15 certain forms of violent extremism as proposed in seminal work, it suggests that at least at the
16 level of psychological inclinations, HDI may primarily be linked to lower instrumental use of
17 violence for dominance (cf. ³⁵). Exploratory analyses of specific violence indicators further clarify
18 the empirical utility of the offensive vs. defensive distinction. Offensive intentions functioned as a
19 specific correlate of societal destabilization, tracking with political terror, violent demonstrations,
20 and internal conflict. Defensive intentions, despite being more widely endorsed, did not correlate
21 significantly with any of these outcomes. Crucially, this pattern addresses the concern that
22 offensive and defensive motivations are inextricably mixed in practice. If causality is confirmed in
23 future research, the fact that they show such distinct macro-level footprints suggests that
24 offensive extremism may be a psychological 'active driver' of internal political chaos and
25 terrorism, whereas defensive extremism represents a generalized posture of vigilance that does
26 not necessarily translate into systemic violent conflict. This dissociation may offer a vital
27 diagnostic insight: A population expressing high defensive intentions may be responding to
28 perceived insecurity without necessarily being on the brink of civil unrest, whereas a rise in
29 offensive intentions may serve as a more specific warning signal for internal conflict, political
30 terror, and active destabilization. Therefore, while violent acts in practice often blend defensive
31 and offensive motivations (which aligns with their correlation in our study), these motivational
32 systems are psychologically distinguishable with distinct macro-level expressions.

34 Our framework's value lies not in claiming all violence fits neatly into one category, but in
35 identifying the distinct psychological pathways that contribute differentially to violent extremism.
36 Still, our reliance on convenience student samples limits the generalizability of our results,
37 particularly to older and less educated populations. While our sample encompasses considerable
38 geographic and cultural diversity, it is not representative of the global population. Future research
39 should replicate our findings in regions not covered and with representative samples, including
40 some of the countries most affected by violent extremism. At the same time, the use of cross-
41 national convenience samples is often recommended as a particularly conservative test of
42 predictions and between-group differences, as it makes it more difficult to identify said
43 differences⁷³. The correlational nature of our data naturally precludes causal conclusions about
44 the relationships between individual difference variables, country-level indicators, and violent
45 extremist intentions. Relatedly, although our findings align with evolutionary perspectives, the
46 cross-sectional design cannot definitively attribute the observed patterns to evolved mechanisms.

48 Our focus on self-reported intentions rather than actual behavior introduces concerns about social
49 desirability bias. The higher endorsement of defensive violence likely reflects to considerable
50 degrees the greater moral legitimacy of protective compared to offensive violence. However, our
51 results suggest that this difference in legitimacy is not merely a methodological artifact, but a
52 functional feature of the extremist landscape. If defensive extremism were simply a benign
53 reflection of conventional morality, it should be weakly associated with dark personality traits.
54 Strikingly, we found the opposite: Machiavellianism, a trait defined by the strategic manipulation

of social perceptions, was more strongly associated with defensive than offensive intentions. This suggests that the defensive frame is not solely the domain of the truly moral; it is also the preferred tool of those who navigate hierarchies through manipulation. Machiavellians likely recognize that defensive frameworks provide a veil of legitimacy and reputational security that offensive dominance does not. Conversely, SDO was most strongly correlated with offensive intentions. This psychological double-dissociation highlights the utility of the distinction: the offensive scale captures the drive for naked dominance (SDO), while the 'Defensive' scale captures both genuine security concerns and the strategic weaponization of moral norms (Machiavellianism).

While self-reported intentions are established predictors of subsequent behavior⁷⁴, the relationship between violent intentions and actual violent behavior is complex and moderated by numerous situational factors⁶. For instance, it is possible that offensive and defensive violent extremist intentions differentially translate into behavior due to different incentive structures, norms, and group dynamics. To partially address external generalizability, we examined whether intentions covary with macro-level indicators that reflect realized violence and conflict-prone environments; the observed links offer ecological validity for the measures. Nevertheless, conversion from intention to action will depend on mobilization capacity, organizational infrastructure, state responses, and windows of opportunity, which future studies should model explicitly (e.g., through event-history designs). Furthermore, future research should test whether these distinct motivational profiles predict different tactical manifestations of violence. We hypothesize that offensive violent extremist intentions may primarily predict proactive, high-casualty attacks aimed at symbolic destabilization (e.g., terrorism targeting civilians or state infrastructure to project power), whereas defensive intentions may more strongly predict reactive mobilization, such as vigilante self-defense. Establishing such distinctive behavioral consequences would further validate the empirical utility of disaggregating these two forms of extremism. Relatedly, common-methods bias is a potential limitation. Several features mitigate (but do not eliminate) this concern: the two intention scales showed distinct correlational profiles with theoretically relevant dispositions and displayed differential associations with country-level indicators. These patterns are difficult to attribute to a unitary response tendency alone. Even so, common-method variance could inflate some associations. A related limitation is our operational focus on the intention to personally enact violence, as opposed to a more passive tolerance or support for it. This choice was guided by our goal to measure a construct as proximal as ethically and practically possible to actual violent behavior. Given the strong social non-normativeness of extremist violence (particularly when offensive) and the resulting skewed response distributions, future research should test the possibility that passive tolerance is a more widely endorsed attitude and may relate with increased strength to some of the psychological dispositions we measured. It is possible that such tolerance via social norms encourages violent extremist intentions and their translation into behavior. Future research should also adapt the scale to specific intergroup contexts, in which violence is expressed in qualitatively different ways. We intentionally did not anchor items to specific act-types. This abstraction is a limitation and a strength: it forgoes behavioral granularity, but it also enables cross-cultural assessment at a higher level of generality where direct translatability is better and construct overlap with culture-specific legal/moral categories is reduced.

Our offensive scale primarily captured acquisitive violence (i.e., actions aimed at increasing the group's power or altering the status quo; a promotion-focused goal). However, as noted in the introduction, violence is also used by dominant groups to maintain existing hierarchies through the punishment of subordinates or challengers. This form of hegemonic enforcement represents a hybrid category: it is offensive in its structural position (wielded by the powerful) but potentially prevention-focused in its goal (stopping change). Future research should profitably expand the taxonomy of violent extremism to distinguish between acquisitive offense (conquest) and maintenance offense (policing), as these may recruit distinct psychological mechanisms and justify violence through different moral pathways. Relatedly, we used the generic referent "my

group” to maximize applicability across heterogeneous identity landscapes (nation, religion, ethnicity, party, etc.). This choice mirrors the abstraction trade-off above. This level of abstraction prevents a test of specific justifications that may be highly relevant in certain religious or cultural contexts, such as violence enacted to “defend God” or “punish law-breakers.” Future research should therefore test whether the offensive–defensive distinction holds and how endorsement levels of retaliation and different types of punishment vary when these specific moral or religious entities, rather than the group itself, are the explicit objects of protection or advancement.

Fourth, a limitation of our research concerns the subjective framing of violence. Historical examples reveal that perpetrators of violence often frame their actions as defensive regardless of objective circumstances, exploiting the moral legitimacy associated with protection rather than dominance⁷⁵. This is not merely a strategic narrative; it reflects a ‘hawkish bias’ in human psychology⁷⁶. People show the tendency to attribute an adversary’s hostility to inherent dispositions, while conversely attributing their own hostile actions to situational constraints (i.e., being “pushed into a corner”). Thus, our measure of defensive intentions may be capturing this powerful cognitive bias, where actors perceive themselves as reacting, even when they are the ones provoking. This inherent challenge means that while our measures capture distinct psychological constructs at a psychological level, they do not necessarily reflect objective classifications of violent behavioral consequences at a level observable from the outside. Related to this complexity, the current findings raise important questions about the interactive dynamics between offensive and defensive violent extremism in ongoing conflicts. In contexts such as interstate or civil wars, offensive actions by one party often trigger defensive responses from another, creating escalatory cycles (see ⁷⁷). During these cycles, the distinction between offensive and defensive motivations can become increasingly blurred at the collective level, even as they remain psychologically distinct at the individual level. Indeed, leaders often fail to see how their own actions appear to their adversary⁷⁶. They may believe their non-threatening intentions are obvious, as U.S. leaders did during the Korean War. When the adversary, perceiving a threat, responds defensively, this defensive action is then misinterpreted by the first party as a sign of fundamental, unprovoked hostility, which, in turn, justifies a ‘defensive’ escalation⁷⁶.

Furthermore, power asymmetries may systematically shape how these forms of extremism manifest across different actors. State actors, with their greater resources and institutional power, may be more capable of pursuing expansionist offensive violent extremism under the guise of national security or preventive defense. Conversely, non-state groups, operating from positions of relative weakness, may be more constrained to defensive framings and tactics, even when harboring offensive aspirations. This consideration also bears on our sampling frame: because country teams primarily recruited students, respondents generally occupy lower institutional-power positions, which plausibly tilts expressed intentions toward defensive rather than offensive violent extremism. Accordingly, estimates of offensive endorsement in our study may be conservative relative to higher-power or status-advantaged populations; future work should therefore complement student samples with population-based and elite or practitioner.

Despite these limitations, the cross-nationally robust distinction between defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions has profound implications for how societies approach prevention and intervention. Our finding that defensive violent extremist intentions are consistently higher than offensive violent extremist intentions suggests that framing violence as defensive for legitimizing extremist actions may resonate most with the population. Consequently, counter efforts may benefit from addressing the narrative frames that portray violence as a necessary defense against existential threats. However, while defensive intentions are more widely endorsed, our macro-level data suggest they are less reflective of actual realized societal violence compared to offensive intentions. Because offensive intentions appear to be more closely linked to the presence of actual violence in societies, preventing their rise may be critical. The psychological profiles, which were differentially associated with defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions, suggest that individually tailored intervention approaches may be necessary (see ⁷⁸).

For instance, interventions among individuals predisposed to offensive violent extremism might account for SDO and religious fundamentalism, while interventions for those at risk of defensive violent extremism might need to account for Machiavellian tendencies and narcissistic threat sensitivity. At the societal level, our findings suggest that strengthening democratic institutions and human development may be effective in increasing macro-level resilience against offensive violent extremism, although future work needs to establish such an effect with designs that allow for causal inference. By contrast, addressing defensive violent extremism may require additional approaches focused on reducing perceptions of group-based threats and building intergroup trust. Taken together, these insights highlight the importance of distinguishing between defensive and offensive motivations in both research and practice, as doing so may sharpen theoretical understanding and enable more precise, context-sensitive violent extremism prevention.

Materials and Methods

Participants

After excluding 7.94% of participants who failed two or more out of three attention checks as pre-registered and, in line with the ethics stipulations, 2.19% participants who indicated to be under 18 years old, a total of 18,128 participants from 58 countries who participated in the study were retained for analyses. Please note that we had aimed for 60 countries in our pre-registration, but two participating sites dropped out. Whereas 14 sites fell below the target sample size of 200, having an average of 156 participants (see Table S7), most exceeded it and the average number of participants was far above this set goal ($M_N = 312$, $SD = 188$). Thus, this nested dataset met the pre-registered common sample size recommendations for multi-level analyses testing for level-1 and level-2 effects, including cross-level interactions^{79,80}, for which higher level units are more critical than lower level units. Due to space limitations, a demographic overview of each country is presented in Table S7. Across the samples, the average age was 24.4 ($SD = 8.97$), 62.79% identified as women (33.97% men, 1.17% non-binary, 2.07% preferred not to report), and 90.77% were university students.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethics Board for Research Projects at University of Gdansk no. 22/202, with further national or institutional approvals obtained where required. Informed consent was obtained digitally from all participants, fully informing them about the scope of the study, its voluntariness, the guarantee of anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Data collection took place between March 2023 and December 2024. Researchers used forward-back or committee translation⁷³, and obtained local ethics approval where necessary. Because key terms (e.g., “extremism,” “defend,” “dominance”) vary in connotations across languages, teams discussed potential ambiguities to adopt conservative wording, preserving conceptual equivalence and group-referent focus. The English source remained the reference; discrepancies in back-translation were resolved by consensus based on intended construct definitions. No language required construct re-specification or scale structure changes; adjustments were limited to minor lexical choices preserving item meaning. To maximize cross-country comparability, researchers primarily recruited students. Co-investigators recruited undergraduates from their own or accessible institutions via list servers, student pools, and in-person convenience sampling. Fields of study were unrestricted, encouraging diversity. In Slovakia, Mexico, and South Africa, students were recruited via online panels from the national undergraduate population. Data were collected via a shared multi-lingual Qualtrics link. Due to the opt-in nature of the recruitment, standard response rates are not applicable. Break-off rates were not recorded. Predictions and analyses were pre-registered [here](#).

Items used a 7-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*), except dark triad items (5-point scale, identical endpoints). All scales were mean-scored. Individual and country-level correlations appear in Table S12. Table 5 lists violent extremist intention items; remaining items are in the [Supplementary Online Materials](#). Tables S1–S6 details factor analytic results; we provide an overview here. We evaluated absolute and relative fit (against the next less

constrained model) per recent large-scale cross-cultural research standards^{81,82}. Throughout the survey, three attention checks asked participants to select a specific answer on a Likert scale.

Scale development began with pilot research creating and refining items measuring **defensive and offensive violent extremist intentions**. Following psychometric guidelines⁸³, we conceptualized constructs based on distinctions between violence protecting one's group vs. enhancing group status or dominance. In the pilot (see Text S3, Tables S9-S11), we generated 20 initial items (10 per dimension) with parallel structure ensuring content equivalence. Senior intergroup conflict and radicalization researchers reviewed the pool for face validity and content relevance. We administered the 20-item version to three diverse samples (UK and Pakistan, minority/majority groups) to assess cross-cultural properties. Pilot analyses informed selection of the final 12 items (six per subscale) demonstrating optimal properties: superior factor loadings, minimal cross-loadings, and strong measurement invariance. Thus, in the present research, participants completed six matched items for **defensive violent extremist intentions** and **offensive violent extremist intentions** (see Table 5). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed close two-factorial fit at the scalar level: $\chi^2 = 10077.30$, $df = 4214$, $p < .001$, $CFI = 0.934$, $RMSEA = 0.067$, 90% CI [0.066, 0.068], $SRMR = 0.059$. Relative fit (scalar vs. metric) was satisfactory ($\Delta RMSEA$) or near-satisfactory (ΔCFI ; see Table S1). This model significantly outperformed an unsatisfactory unifactorial solution. Scale reliability was excellent across countries (defensive: $M_\alpha = 0.95$, $SD_\alpha = 0.03$; offensive: $M_\alpha = 0.97$, $SD_\alpha = 0.02$).

Table 5. Final Items Used to Measure Offensive and Defensive Violent Extremist Intentions.

Defensive Violent Extremist Intentions	Offensive Violent Extremist Intentions
1. I'm prepared to use violence to defend my group against others.	1. I'm prepared to violently attack others so that my group becomes more powerful.
2. I'm personally ready to physically hurt other people to defend members of my group who are being attacked.	2. I'm personally ready to physically hurt other people to increase the dominance of my group.
3. If I see violent attacks committed against my group, I am willing to retaliate with violence.	3. If I see an opportunity to make my group more powerful than other groups, I am willing to use violence to achieve it.
4. To defend members of my group that I care about, I will personally use violence against other people.	4. To increase the power of members of my group that I care about, I will personally use violence against other people.
5. I'm ready to personally carry out violence against people harming members of my group.	5. I'm ready to personally carry out violence against people to achieve a dominant position for my group.
6. To save members of my group from violent attacks, I am willing to engage in violence.	6. To help my group become mightier than others, I am willing to engage in violence.

We assessed **Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; $M_\alpha = 0.66$, $SD_\alpha = 0.13$)**, **Religious Fundamentalism ($M_\alpha = 0.74$, $SD_\alpha = 0.13$)**, **Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA; $M_\alpha = 0.61$, $SD_\alpha = 0.10$)**, the **Dark Triad (narcissism, $M_\alpha = 0.73$, $SD_\alpha = 0.07$; psychopathy, $M_\alpha = 0.71$, $SD_\alpha = 0.12$; and Machiavellianism, $M_\alpha = 0.80$, $SD_\alpha = 0.05$)**, **Conservative Group Identification ($M_\alpha = 0.88$, $SD_\alpha = 0.05$)**, and **Liberal Group Identification ($M_\alpha = 0.87$, $SD_\alpha = 0.05$)** using validated scales. CFA demonstrated acceptable to satisfactory metric invariance across countries, allowing for analyses of covariance. To ensure invariance, two items were omitted from the Dark Triad scale, and data from Pakistan were excluded from the SDO and RWA indices due to as close to 0. As pre-registered, in terms of macro-level variables, we obtained the following for the included countries: **Global Terrorism Index⁵²**, **Global Peace Index⁵⁵**, **HDI⁶¹**, **GINI Index**, **GDP per capita**, and the **Democracy Index⁵⁶**. Note that we always used the most recent estimate available for each country (see [Supplementary Online Materials](#)).

Analyses

All analyses were conducted using random intercept and effects multi-level analyses in R 4.2.2 with lme4 v. 1.1.36, lmerTest v. 3.1.3, jtools v. 2.3.0, and emmeans v. 1.10.7. No weights were applied. Interactions were graphed using the interactions v. 1.2.0 package and ggplot2 v. 3.5.1. dplyr v. 1.1.4 was used for data transformation. References to all libraries are presented in Text S2. Note that due to high correlations (see Table S8) and partly overlapping data sources used to calculate the indices violating the independence of observations, macro-level variables were tested separately, except for Gini and GDP per capita which were tested together to distinguish general wealth from unequal distribution). Note that we excluded Pakistan from models that included SDO and RWA as variables, given the absence of scale reliability. All *P*-values are two-tailed.

Data Availability Statement

The code and data to reproduce the results can be found in the [Supplementary Online Materials](#).

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Supplementary Materials

“The Psychology of Offensive and Defensive Intergroup Violence:

Preregistered Insights from 58 countries”

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Text S1. Real-world Examples of Mixed Offensive and Defensive Motives in Violent Extremism

While some extremist actions appear clearly defensive and others clearly offensive, the underlying motivations within a single movement often blend these elements¹⁵. For instance, in the explicit agenda of ISIS, defensive propaganda included the need to protect the global Sunni community (Ummah) from Western “Crusaders,” Shi’a governments, and “apostate” rulers¹⁵. Yet, this defensive mandate co-existed with offensive agenda: to establish a global caliphate through expansionist jihad. Similarly, White supremacist movements combine narratives of defensive emergency with an offensive revolutionary plan. A defensive part of their agenda is the preservation of the White race from a perceived “Great Replacement” fueled by immigration and multiculturalism^{16,17}. This narrative of protection goes hand in hand with their offensive agenda: the explicit goal of violently overthrowing existing governments and establishing White racial dominance. This dynamic is equally evident in the Hezbollah-Israel conflict, where each actor’s strategic posture demonstrates this defensive-offensive duality. Hezbollah’s operational framework is anchored in a narrative of “resistance” against what it characterizes as Israeli occupation and aggression¹⁵. This defensive positioning is coupled with offensive objectives that encompass both the ideological commitment to dismantling the Israeli state and the projection of regional influence. Conversely, Israel’s security doctrine emerges from defensive motivations centered on existential survival and civilian protection but coexist with offensive motivations including territorial claims grounded in historical narratives of entitlement to specific lands¹⁵.

Text S2. References to Statistical Software

All analyses were conducted using multi-level analyses in R 4.2.2¹ using the lme4² v. 1.1.36, and lmerTest v. 3.1.3 packages³. The jtools v. 2.3.0 package⁴ was used to obtain standardized estimates and intraclass correlation coefficients. Marginal means were obtained with the emmeans v. 1.10.7 package⁵. Interactions were graphed using the interactions v. 1.2.0 package⁶ and ggplot2 v. 3.5.1⁷. dplyr v. 1.1.4 was used for data transformation⁸. References can be found at the end of this document.

Measurement Invariance and Reliability Tests

Violent Extremist Intentions

Table S1. Measurement Invariance Test for Two-Factorial Offensive and Defensive Violence Scale

Model	χ^2	df	p	CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	sRMR
<i>Two Factors</i>						
Configural	6653.21	3074	< .001	0.960	0.062 [0.060, 0.063]	0.036
Metric	7896.59	3644	< .001	0.952	0.062 [0.060, 0.063]	0.054
Scalar	10077.30	4214	< .001	0.934	0.067 [0.066, 0.068]	0.059
<i>Two Factor With Second-Order Factor</i>						
Configural	6527.68	3016	< .001	0.960	0.062 [0.060, 0.063]	0.036
Metric	7894.42	3643	< .001	0.952	0.062 [0.060, 0.063]	0.054
Scalar	9938.60	4156	< .001	0.934	0.067 [0.066, 0.068]	0.059
<i>One Factor</i>						
Configural	38288.10	3132	< .001	0.604	0.191 [0.190, 0.192]	0.204
Metric	41852.59	3759	< .001	0.571	0.182 [0.181, 0.183]	0.220
Scalar	48720.55	4386	< .001	0.501	0.181 [0.180, 0.182]	0.236

Note. χ^2 = Chi-square, *df* = degrees of freedom, *CFI* = Comparative Fit Index, *RMSEA* = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, *sRMR* = Standardized Root Mean Residual. All values are scaled.

Social Dominance Orientation

We assessed **social dominance orientation** with a validated 4-item scale⁹³. An example item is “Superior societal groups should dominate inferior groups.” The measurement model proposed by the scale authors showed acceptable to satisfactory metric invariance (see Table S2), allowing for

analyses of covariance (as required by our hypotheses). The resulting scale had acceptable reliability, $M_\alpha = 0.65$, $SD_\alpha = 0.15$. However, Pakistan was an outlier with $\alpha = 0.00$. Omitting the country increased the reliability to $M_\alpha = 0.66$, $SD_\alpha = 0.13$. Thus, a mean score was calculated for all countries except for Pakistan.

Table S2. Measurement Invariance Test for Factorial Solution for Social Dominance Orientation Scale by Aichholzer and Lechner 9

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i> [90% CI]	<i>sRMR</i>
Configural				Fully saturated		
Metric	552.95	171	< .001	0.954	0.085 [0.078, 0.092]	0.056
Scalar	1356.22	228	< .001	0.865	0.126 [0.120, 0.132]	0.073

Note. χ^2 = Chi-square, *df* = degrees of freedom, *CFI* = Comparative Fit Index, *RMSEA* = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, *sRMR* = Standardized Root Mean Residual. All values except for the first model due to model specification are scaled based on MLR Estimation.

Religious Fundamentalism

Three items (e.g., “Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right.”) from the World Values Survey⁹⁴ assessed **religious fundamentalism**. The scale showed satisfactory fit at the metric invariance level (see Table S3). The resulting scale had acceptable reliability, $M_\alpha = 0.74$, $SD_\alpha = 0.13$.

Table S3. Measurement Invariance Test for Unifactorial Religious Fundamentalism Scale

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i> [90% CI]	<i>sRMR</i>
Configural				Fully saturated		
Metric	242.19	114	< .001	0.979	0.060 [0.051, 0.069]	0.044
Scalar	1415.40	228	< .001	0.802	0.129 [0.123, 0.135]	0.083

Note. χ^2 = Chi-square, *df* = degrees of freedom, *CFI* = Comparative Fit Index, *RMSEA* = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, *sRMR* = Standardized Root Mean Residual. All values are scaled. All values are scaled based on MLR Estimation.

Right-wing Authoritarianism

We used a validated short-form **right-wing authoritarianism** scale⁹⁵, consisting of three items (e.g., “Troublemakers should clearly feel the effects of the fact that they are unwanted in society.”). The scale showed satisfactory metric invariance (see Table S4). The resulting scale showed relatively low reliability, $M_\alpha = 0.60$, $SD_\alpha = 0.13$. Pakistan was, again, an outlier with $\alpha = -0.06$. Omitting the country increased the reliability to $M_\alpha = 0.61$, $SD_\alpha = 0.10$. A mean score was calculated for all countries except for Pakistan.

Table S4. Measurement Invariance Test for Unifactorial Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i> [90% CI]	<i>sRMR</i>
Configural				Fully saturated		
Metric	306.13	114	< .001	0.960	0.073 [0.064, 0.083]	0.042
Scalar	2878.80	228	< .001	0.452	0.193 [0.187, 0.199]	0.119

Note. χ^2 = Chi-square, *df* = degrees of freedom, *CFI* = Comparative Fit Index, *RMSEA* = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, *sRMR* = Standardized Root Mean Residual. All values are scaled. All values are scaled based on MLR Estimation.

Dark Triad

We used the established Dark Triad 12-item scale⁹⁶. The scale measures **narcissism**, **psychopathy**, and **Machiavellianism** with each four items. To achieve acceptable metric invariance for a three-factorial scale, one item for psychopathy (i.e., “I tend to be cynical.”) and one item for narcissism (i.e., “I tend to want others to pay attention to me.”) had to be omitted. Note that the relative fit compared to the configural model was satisfactory ($\Delta RMSEA$) or close to satisfactory (ΔCFI). Thus, mean scores

with acceptable reliability were created for narcissism (three items, e.g., “I tend to want others to admire me.”, $M_\alpha = 0.73$, $SD_\alpha = 0.07$), psychopathy (three items, e.g., “I tend to lack remorse.”, $M_\alpha = 0.71$, $SD_\alpha = 0.12$), and Machiavellianism (four items, e.g., “I tend to manipulate others to get my way.”, $M_\alpha = 0.80$, $SD_\alpha = 0.05$).

Table S5. Measurement Invariance Test for Three-Factorial Dark Triad Scale after Omitting Items DTri_8 and DTri_10

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i> [90% CI]	<i>sRMR</i>
Configural	4952.44	1856	< .001	0.932	0.073 [0.071, 0.075]	0.052
Metric	6488.18	2255	< .001	0.907	0.078 [0.076, 0.080]	0.076
Scalar	14558.90	2654	< .001	0.739	0.120 [0.118, 0.122]	0.113

Note. χ^2 = Chi-square, *df* = degrees of freedom, *CFI* = Comparative Fit Index, *RMSEA* = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, *sRMR* = Standardized Root Mean Residual. All values are scaled based on MLR Estimation.

Group Identification

Adapting an established scale⁹⁷, we assessed two types of **group identification**: a politically conservative identification (four items, e.g., “Being a supporter of values such as tradition and social order is an important part of how I see myself.”) and a politically liberal identification (four items, e.g., “Being a supporter of inclusiveness and advancing the rights of disadvantaged groups is an important part of how I see myself.”). This conceptualization of conservative and liberal was chosen after discussions and evaluations among all collaborators to find political categories that are applicable and valid in all of the countries studied. A two-factorial solution showed strong metric invariance (see Table S6). This model also had a satisfactory fit relative to the configural model. Thus, mean scores were computed for politically conservative identification, $M_\alpha = 0.88$, $SD_\alpha = 0.05$, and politically liberal identification, $M_\alpha = 0.87$, $SD_\alpha = 0.05$.

Table S6. Measurement Invariance Test for Two-Factorial Social Identity Scale

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i> [90% CI]	<i>sRMR</i>
Configural	1203.87	464	< .001	0.980	0.071 [0.067, 0.076]	0.028
Metric	1734.10	692	< .001	0.972	0.069 [0.066, 0.073]	0.044
Scalar	3596.60	920	< .001	0.927	0.097 [0.093, 0.100]	0.059

Note. χ^2 = Chi-square, *df* = degrees of freedom, *CFI* = Comparative Fit Index, *RMSEA* = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, *sRMR* = Standardized Root Mean Residual. All values are scaled based on MLR Estimation.

Table S7. Demographics

Country	N	Age <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Gender			Occupation			Ethnicity								
			Women	Men	Non-binary	Working	In high-school	In university	White	Black	South/Southeast Asian	East Asian	Arabic/Middle East	Latinx	Indigenous	Mixed	Other
Albania	121	27.34 (8.51)	72.7%	22.3%	0.0%	33.1%	0.8%	62.8%	70.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	25.6%
Argentina	325	51.87 (15.98)	40.3%	36.9%	0.6%	10.5%	22.2%	46.5%	42.2%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	29.5%	0.3%	3.4%	2.8%
Armenia	324	20.44 (2.52)	59.9%	29.9%	0.3%	2.8%	1.2%	91.0%	71.0%	0.9%	6.2%	6.5%	3.7%	0.0%	0.6%	0.9%	5.2%
Australia	454	20.07 (4.72)	67.4%	29.7%	1.8%	0.7%	2.2%	96.0%	51.1%	0.2%	22.5%	16.7%	2.6%	0.2%	0.7%	3.1%	1.3%
Belgium	353	18.44 (1.44)	82.4%	14.7%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	99.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Bolivia	223	20.44 (6.37)	57.0%	33.6%	1.8%	1.3%	25.6%	67.3%	13.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	75.3%	0.4%	2.7%	1.3%
Bulgaria	189	31.44 (12.19)	42.9%	40.7%	1.1%	13.8%	2.6%	68.3%	81.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	0.5%
Cameroon	314	27.26 (10.36)	48.1%	25.2%	0.3%	5.4%	1.6%	79.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Canada	244	21.02 (3.47)	69.7%	27.5%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	99.6%	30.3%	3.7%	30.3%	23.4%	4.5%	0.4%	0.8%	3.7%	2.5%
Chile	445	23.89 (8.26)	47.4%	41.8%	3.4%	4.9%	24.9%	64.5%	8.3%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	75.5%	1.8%	2.2%	2.7%
Colombia	441	34.44 (15.92)	53.3%	37.9%	1.4%	22.0%	30.6%	40.1%	20.0%	4.3%	0.5%	0.2%	0.5%	61.0%	3.4%	2.0%	0.5%
Croatia	333	21.83 (4.83)	78.1%	15.9%	0.9%	1.2%	2.4%	92.2%	94.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Cyprus	291	22.07 (8.30)	55.7%	37.5%	2.1%	2.4%	1.0%	92.1%	69.8%	5.2%	1.7%	1.0%	11.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%	3.4%
Czechia	292	22.42 (3.45)	63.7%	31.5%	0.7%	1.7%	0.0%	94.5%	93.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	1.4%
Denmark	249	24.45 (7.36)	66.7%	19.3%	2.0%	0.8%	2.4%	85.9%	83.9%	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	0.4%	1.6%	1.2%
Ecuador	162	19.29 (2.91)	68.5%	27.2%	0.0%	0.0%	42.6%	53.7%	1.9%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	85.2%	0.0%	2.5%	4.9%
Egypt	168	21.38 (3.40)	79.2%	14.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	94.6%	34.5%	0.6%	1.8%	1.2%	51.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	2.4%
England	222	32.83 (11.58)	50.0%	47.7%	1.8%	16.7%	2.3%	81.1%	82.4%	2.3%	8.1%	2.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%
France	380	26.02 (9.74)	39.5%	48.7%	1.3%	15.5%	1.8%	73.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Georgia	343	21.34 (3.50)	60.6%	27.7%	0.3%	2.9%	0.0%	86.6%	85.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	2.6%
Germany	290	24.58 (5.19)	72.1%	25.9%	1.7%	3.8%	0.0%	95.9%	90.3%	0.3%	1.7%	0.3%	2.4%	0.7%	0.0%	2.4%	0.3%
Ghana	227	21.11 (3.82)	64.3%	35.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Greece	436	20.83 (4.34)	59.2%	34.2%	0.5%	2.3%	0.5%	92.0%	89.9%	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	4.1%
Hong Kong	224	21.06 (2.20)	49.1%	42.9%	5.8%	1.3%	1.8%	96.4%	0.4%	1.8%	6.2%	87.1%	0.9%	0.4%	0.0%	0.9%	1.3%
Hungary	774	22.23 (5.12)	72.7%	26.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.9%	97.0%	96.6%	0.0%	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%

India	284	25.17 (6.29)	63.4%	27.8%	0.0%	3.9%	0.4%	87.7%	7.0%	3.5%	50.4%	2.5%	2.5%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	17.6%
Indonesia	171	22.19 (3.54)	25.1%	63.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	92.4%	4.1%	2.9%	61.4%	2.9%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	16.4%
Ireland	235	38.20 (11.38)	67.2%	29.4%	0.4%	30.6%	5.1%	61.7%	89.4%	3.0%	0.9%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%	2.1%	0.9%
Israel	239	25.29 (3.27)	50.2%	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	95.4%	64.4%	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%	10.5%	0.8%	0.0%	8.8%	8.8%
Italy	1097	22.15 (3.83)	53.6%	37.6%	0.8%	1.2%	1.9%	89.4%	90.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.5%	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%
Japan	425	19.73 (1.22)	47.3%	38.8%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	86.8%	2.1%	0.0%	2.4%	77.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	1.6%
Latvia	324	25.45 (8.08)	58.0%	29.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.0%	88.3%	85.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	2.2%
Lithuania	308	23.05 (7.53)	46.4%	48.4%	0.3%	5.2%	0.6%	89.6%	91.2%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%	1.6%
Mexico	164	25.48 (5.35)	48.8%	45.7%	2.4%	3.7%	12.2%	81.1%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	89.6%	0.0%	1.8%	0.6%
Nepal	72	25.71 (7.13)	66.7%	22.2%	0.0%	5.6%	4.2%	80.6%	1.4%	0.0%	63.9%	16.7%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	5.6%	1.4%
Netherlands	242	20.10 (1.95)	85.1%	13.6%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	99.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
New Zealand	331	21.01 (7.41)	78.2%	19.9%	0.9%	0.6%	0.6%	97.9%	71.9%	0.6%	3.9%	4.5%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	9.1%	8.2%
Nigeria	184	23.81 (4.86)	45.1%	30.4%	0.5%	0.0%	1.1%	81.5%	1.1%	75.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	1.1%	3.8%
Norway	316	24.66 (7.24)	69.3%	25.6%	2.2%	0.6%	0.0%	96.8%	83.2%	0.6%	2.5%	1.3%	3.8%	0.0%	0.3%	2.2%	3.5%
Oman	135	19.43 (5.60)	75.6%	18.5%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	93.3%	23.7%	3.0%	1.5%	0.7%	45.2%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	14.1%
Pakistan	208	25.22 (2.08)	43.8%	55.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	99.5%	0.0%	0.0%	99.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Peru	361	23.20 (5.59)	61.2%	17.2%	0.3%	0.3%	27.7%	51.5%	3.9%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	68.4%	0.8%	3.0%	1.4%
Philippines	228	21.59 (2.24)	73.2%	21.9%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	98.7%	0.0%	0.0%	91.2%	2.6%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%	0.9%
Poland	485	23.93 (5.72)	63.5%	27.2%	1.0%	6.0%	1.2%	85.8%	91.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.6%
Portugal	182	35.76 (16.08)	53.3%	30.2%	1.1%	2.7%	3.8%	81.9%	81.3%	1.1%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	2.7%	0.0%	2.2%	0.5%
Scotland	168	30.25 (10.01)	48.2%	47.6%	3.0%	3.0%	0.6%	95.8%	92.3%	1.2%	3.0%	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%
Senegal	1084	23.51 (5.63)	42.1%	25.6%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	86.4%	0.3%	77.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	7.2%
Serbia	319	22.51 (7.82)	51.1%	37.3%	0.3%	7.8%	1.3%	82.8%	77.1%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	10.7%
Slovakia	226	26.19 (7.93)	57.1%	38.5%	0.9%	7.1%	0.9%	88.9%	94.7%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	1.3%
South Africa	153	26.01 (4.83)	51.0%	49.0%	0.0%	11.1%	1.3%	87.6%	5.2%	87.6%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.9%	2.0%
South Korea	294	20.32 (1.73)	54.1%	44.9%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	97.6%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	95.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%
Spain	382	35.74 (11.93)	79.8%	18.1%	0.5%	1.6%	28.5%	68.3%	89.3%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.5%	4.7%	0.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Sri Lanka	145	39.89 (9.73)	47.6%	35.9%	0.0%	34.5%	0.0%	50.3%	0.0%	0.0%	81.4%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%
Sweden	166	28.89 (9.80)	46.4%	48.2%	3.0%	4.8%	3.0%	89.8%	15.1%	0.0%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%
Thailand	263	20.26 (2.05)	67.7%	19.0%	9.9%	0.4%	1.1%	97.0%	0.4%	0.0%	89.7%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%

Turkey	339	22.32 (5.53)	82.6%	13.9%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	97.3%	70.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
U.S.	538	21.92 (6.55)	56.3%	37.5%	3.7%	1.1%	0.4%	96.7%	35.3%	8.2%	5.4%	5.2%	0.4%	29.2%	0.6%	10.2%	3.5%
Ukraine	236	20.20 (3.70)	51.3%	43.6%	0.0%	7.6%	0.0%	88.1%	82.2%	1.7%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	2.1%	6.8%

Note. Missing percentages = 'other' or missing values. NA = Not available.

Table S8. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients Between Macro-Level Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Global Terrorism Index	-				
	0.56				
2. Global Peace Index (reversed)	[$p < .001$]	-			
	-0.35	-0.55			
3. HDI	[$p = .006$]	[$p < .001$]	-		
	0.15	0.17	-0.31		
4. Gini	[$p = .282$]	[$p = .002$]	[$p = .020$]	-	
	-0.17	-0.46	0.79	-0.34	
5. GDP Per Capita	[$p = .219$]	[$p < .001$]	[$p < .001$]	[$p = .010$]	-
	-0.30	-0.61	0.73	-0.24	0.73
6. Democracy Index	[$p = .026$]	[$p < .001$]	[$p < .001$]	[$p = .076$]	[$p < .001$]

Figure S1. Differences Across Countries. Random Effect Estimates and Error Bars Representing 95% Confidence Intervals for Offensive and Defensive Violent Extremist Intentions, Ordered by Average Violence Score (Across the two Dimensions)

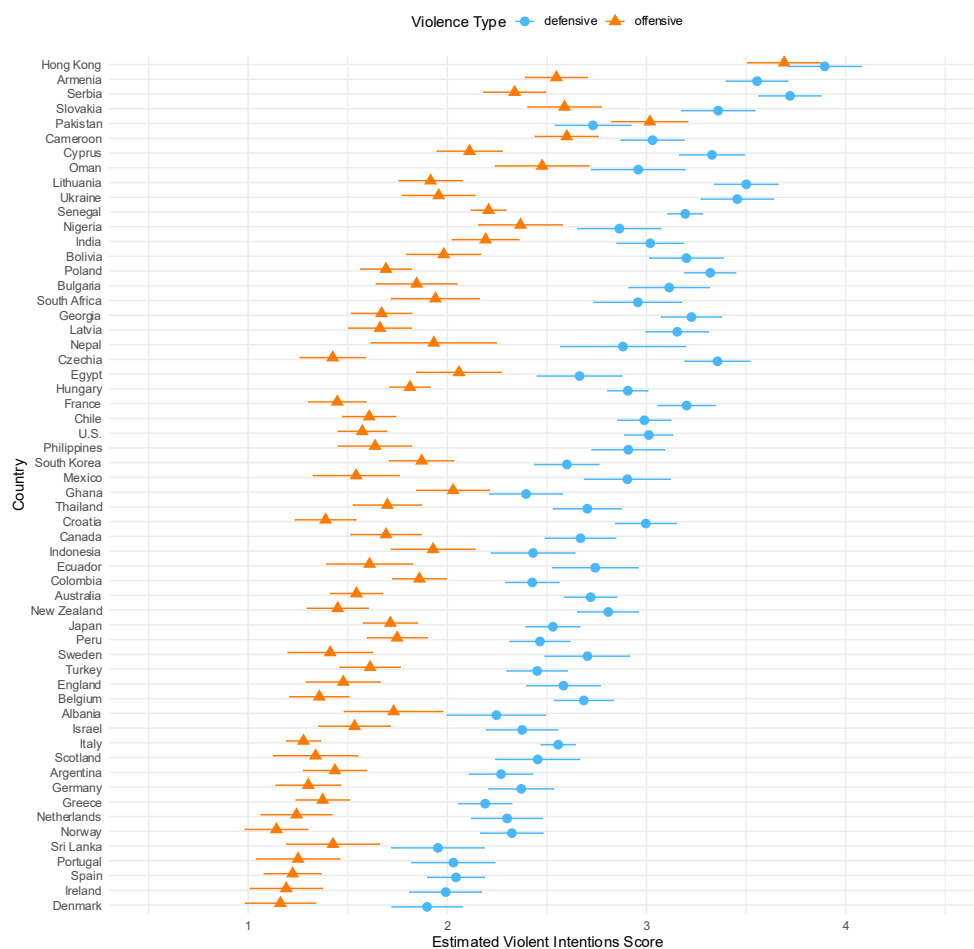
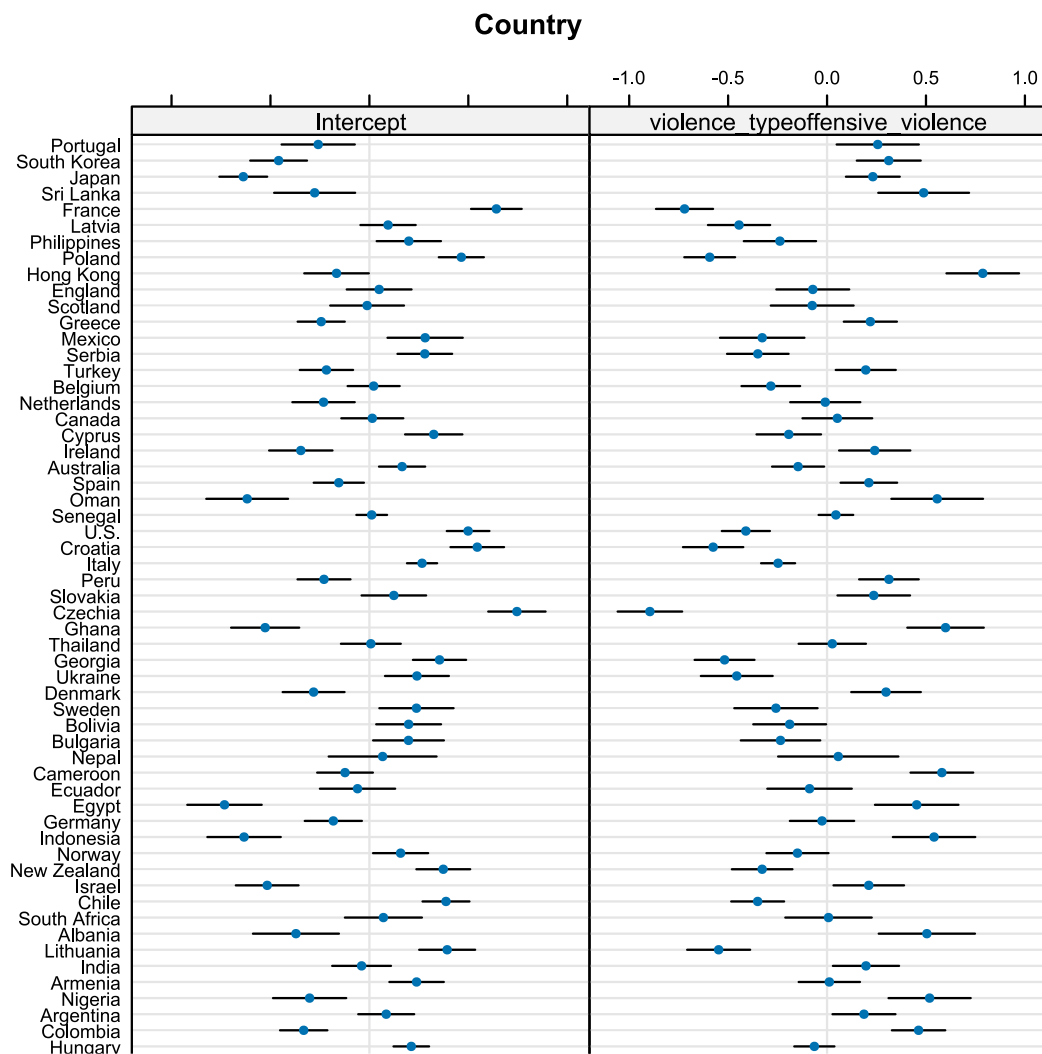


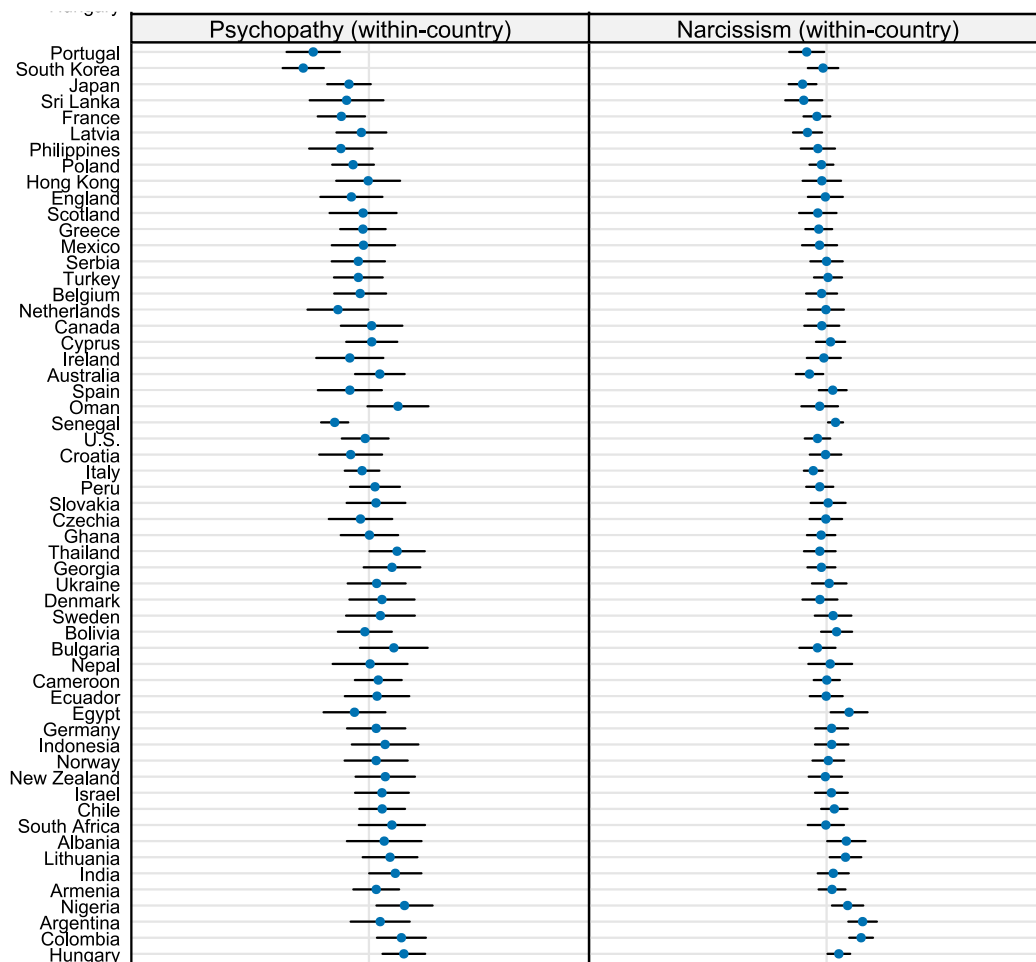
Figure S2. Random Effects for Model 1.



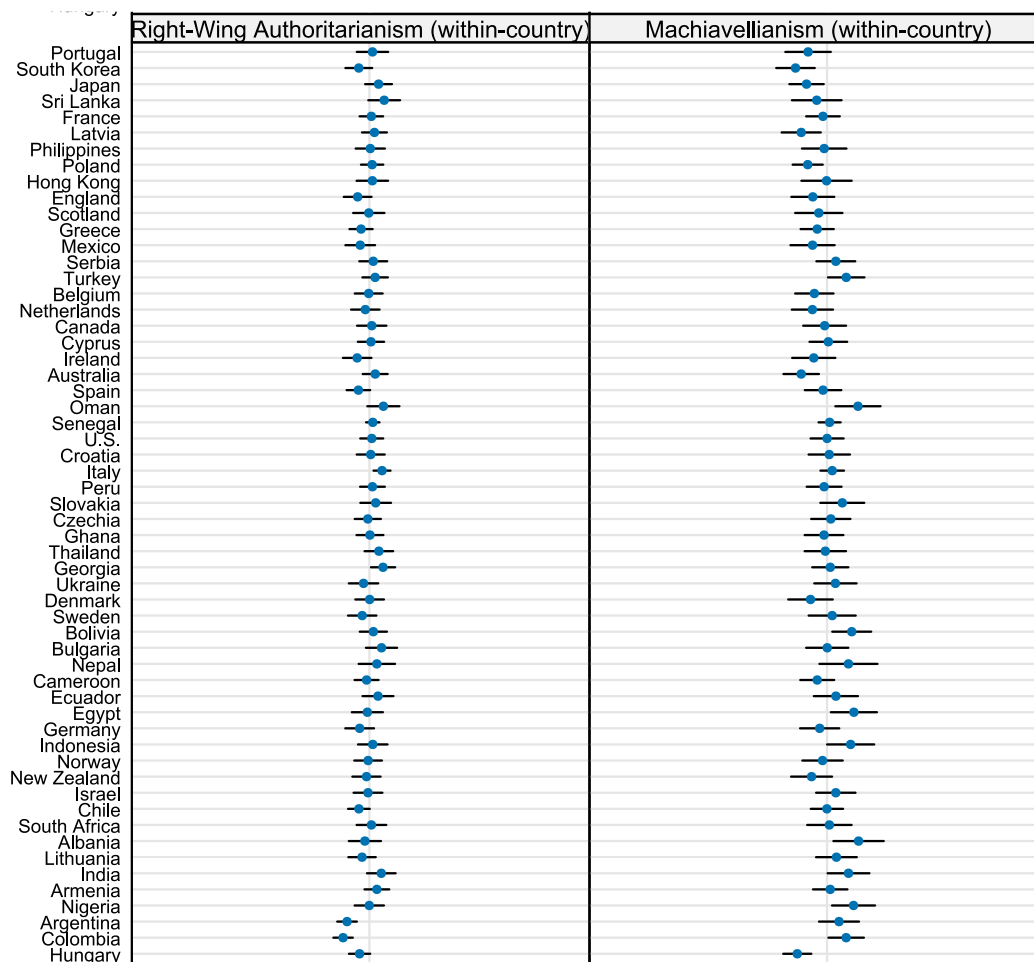
(continued)

	Conservative Political Identity (within-country)	Liberal Political Identity (within-country)
Portugal		
South Korea		
Japan		
Sri Lanka		
France		
Latvia		
Philippines		
Poland		
Hong Kong		
England		
Scotland		
Greece		
Mexico		
Serbia		
Turkey		
Belgium		
Netherlands		
Canada		
Cyprus		
Ireland		
Australia		
Spain		
Oman		
Senegal		
U.S.		
Croatia		
Italy		
Peru		
Slovakia		
Czechia		
Ghana		
Thailand		
Georgia		
Ukraine		
Denmark		
Sweden		
Bolivia		
Bulgaria		
Nepal		
Cameroon		
Ecuador		
Egypt		
Germany		
Indonesia		
Norway		
New Zealand		
Israel		
Chile		
South Africa		
Albania		
Lithuania		
India		
Armenia		
Nigeria		
Argentina		
Colombia		
Hungary		

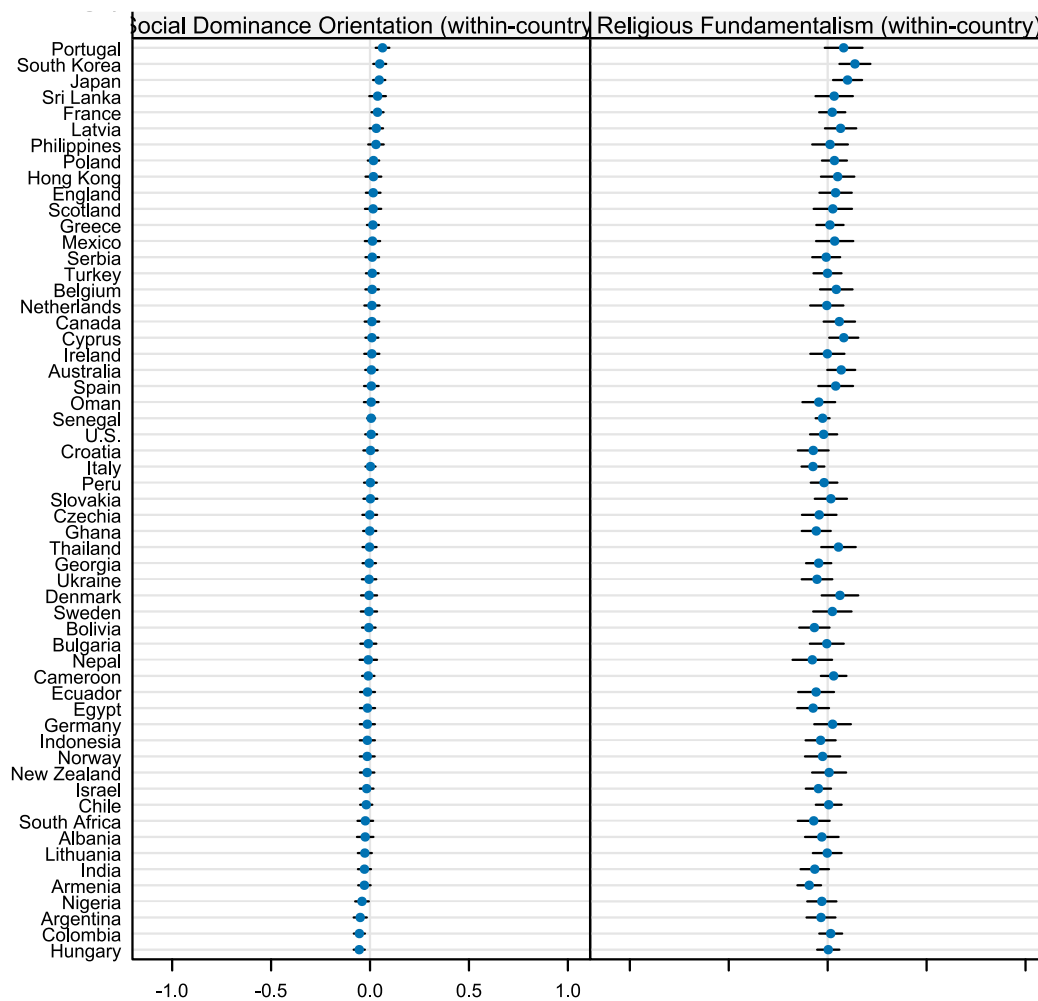
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Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Text S3. Development of Scale Items in Pilot Studies

We recruited 487 British participants (50.1% Muslims minority group members) and 270 Pakistani participants, ensuring a 1:10 ratio of items to participants in each subsample for factor analyses. The participants were recruited for a study described as dealing with “socio-political attitudes and individual differences.” The British participants were recruited via Prolific and compensated between £11.6 and £12.7/hour, and the Pakistani participants were recruited via a university pool and compensated with 3 Canadian dollars. Attention checks were included in both studies, leading to the exclusion of four British and five Pakistani participants who failed both checks, as well as the exclusion of two participants from each sample due to missing responses.

In the British sample, participants were on average 39 years old ($SD = 14.61$), with an equal gender distribution, and the majority reported being born in the U.K. (80.1%), holding a community college degree or higher (67.4%), and working full-time or part-time (68.4%). The Pakistani sample had an average age of 24 years ($SD = 3.12$), with a gender distribution skewed towards men (68.5%), and all participants were university students, most of whom were Punjabi (82.6%). The mean socio-political orientation was slightly conservative for the British sample ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 2.09$) and slightly left-leaning for the Pakistani sample ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.76$).

Participants in each sample completed the 20 items in total, with each ten items assessing defensive and offensive violent extremism (see Table S9). All items were rated on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Table S9. Initial Item Pool Tested in Pilot Studies

Defensive violent extremism	
1.	I'm prepared to use violence to defend my religious group against others.
2.	I'm personally ready to physically hurt other people to defend members of my religious group who are being attacked.
3.	If I see violent attacks committed against my religious group, I am willing to retaliate with violence.
4.	To defend members of my religious group that I care about, I will personally use violence against other people.
5.	I'm ready to personally carry out violence against people harming members of my religious group.
6.	I will use violence as a necessary means to defend my religious group.
7.	To save members of my religious group from violent attacks, I am willing to engage in violence.
8.	If my religious group is under attack, I will respond with violence to defend it.

9. I will participate in attacks on other people to defend my religious group.
10. I am willing to physically hurt others to defend my religious group.

Offensive violent extremism

1. I'm prepared to violently attack others so that my religious group becomes more powerful.
2. I'm personally ready to physically hurt other people to increase the dominance of my religious group.
3. If I see an opportunity to make my religious group more powerful than other groups, I am willing to use violence to achieve it.
4. To increase the power of members of my religious group that I care about, I will personally use violence against other people.
5. I'm ready to personally carry out violence against people to achieve a dominant position for my religious group.
6. I will use violence as a necessary means to make my religious group superior to other groups.
7. To help my religious group become mightier than others, I am willing to engage in violence.
8. If it furthers my religious group's ability to dominate others, I am willing to commit violence.
9. I will participate in attacks on other people to make my religious group stronger than other groups.
10. I am willing to physically hurt others if it helps my religious group to gain control over other groups and people.

We first conducted an exploratory factor analysis across the two British samples (data for these were collected first) with oblimin rotation. The analysis utilized principal axis factoring for extraction, a technique particularly well-suited for non-normally distributed data. The results revealed a two-factor structure accounting for 79.49% of the total variance in the data. The primary factor accounted for 43.26% of variance (eigenvalue = 11.33), while the secondary factor explained an additional 36.23% (eigenvalue = 4.57). Each item demonstrated strong primary factor loadings of at least .65, with minimal cross-loadings (below .28) on the alternate factor. These factor loadings are detailed in Table S10.

Table S10. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

	Factor loading	
	1	2
Factor 1: Defensive violent behavioral intentions		
I'm prepared to use violence to defend my religious group against others.	.88	.03
I'm personally ready to physically hurt other people to defend members of my religious group who are being attacked.	.90	-.05
If I see violent attacks committed against my religious group, I am willing to retaliate with violence.	.88	-.05
To defend members of my religious group that I care about, I will personally use violence against other people.	.89	.00
I'm ready to personally carry out violence against people harming members of my religious group.	.92	-.01
I will use violence as a necessary means to defend my religious group.	.88	.02

To save members of my religious group from violent attacks, I am willing to engage in violence.	.86	-.08
If my religious group is under attack, I will respond with violence to defend it.	.84	.01
I will participate in attacks on other people to defend my religious group.	.65	.27
I am willing to physically hurt others to defend my religious group.	.66	.21
Factor 2: Offensive violent behavioral intentions		
I'm prepared to violently attack others so that my religious group becomes more powerful.	-.10	.93
I'm personally ready to physically hurt other people to increase the dominance of my religious group.	-.06	.97
If I see an opportunity to make my religious group more powerful than other groups, I am willing to use violence to achieve it.	-.06	.98
To increase the power of members of my religious group that I care about, I will personally use violence against other people.	-.03	.94
I'm ready to personally carry out violence against people to achieve a dominant position for my religious group.	.00	.98
I will use violence as a necessary means to make my religious group superior to other groups.	.03	.93
To help my religious group become mightier than others, I am willing to engage in violence.	.09	.91
If it furthers my religious group's ability to dominate others, I am willing to commit violence.	.04	.91
I will participate in attacks on other people to make my religious group stronger than other groups.	.06	.86
I am willing to physically hurt others if it helps my religious group to gain control over other groups and people.	.17	.77

Note. The extraction method was principal axis estimation with a direct oblimin rotation. Factor loadings above .30 are in bold.

Next, we tested the measurement invariance of a 12-item scale, selecting the items with the strongest loadings from the UK results, and including the Pakistani data, in various variants: Religion (Muslim vs. Christian), Gender, Age (median split), Political Orientation (midpoint split), and Country (UK vs. Pakistan). As can be seen in Table S11, relatively close fit to the data was observed at the metric invariance level for all tests, although the RMSEA was above commonly accepted cut-offs. Scalar invariance was observed across countries based on the CFI and SRMR, although the elevated RMSEA should again be noted.

Table S11. Measurement Invariance Test of the 12-item, Two-Factorial Measure Across Various Characteristics

Invariance	Model Fit Indices								
	Configural			Metric			Scalar		
	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Solutions									
Religion	.967	.099	.042	.961	.102	.070	.961	.099	.070
Gender	.954	.113	.052	.931	.133	.093	.930	.128	.093
Age	.952	.121	.043	.938	.131	.077	.938	.125	.078
Political orientation	.966	.102	.043	.963	.102	.067	.962	.099	.068
Country	.972	.115	.027	.972	.110	.042	.963	.120	.056

Table S12. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients Between Individual Difference Variables at the Participant Level (Left Side of the Diagonal) and Aggregated Country Level (Right-Side of the Diagonal)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. SDO	-	0.60 [$p < 0.001$]	0.67 [$p < 0.001$]	0.30 [$p = 0.025$]	0.55 [$p < 0.001$]	0.23 [$p = 0.090$]	0.53 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.50 [$p < 0.001$]	0.35 [$p = 0.008$]	0.69 [$p < 0.001$]
2. Religious Fundamentalism	0.34 [$p < 0.001$]	-	0.82 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.13 [$p =$ 0.316]	0.30 [$p = 0.022$]	0.12 [$p = 0.385$]	0.75 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.06 [$p = 0.639$]	0.34 [$p = 0.009$]	0.76 [$p < 0.001$]
3. RWA	0.33 [$p < 0.001$]	0.45 [$p < 0.001$]	-	-0.03 [$p =$ 0.816]	0.33 [$p = 0.011$]	0.11 [$p = 0.435$]	0.75 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.21 [$p = 0.123$]	0.41 [$p = 0.002$]	0.68 [$p < 0.001$]
4. Machiavellianism	0.19 [$p < 0.001$]	0.04 [$p < 0.001$]	0.08 [$p < 0.001$]	-	0.66 [$p < 0.001$]	0.69 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.07 [$p = 0.584$]	-0.47 [$p < 0.001$]	0.47 [$p < 0.001$]	0.38 [$p = 0.003$]
5. Psychopathy	0.31 [$p < 0.001$]	0.18 [$p < 0.001$]	0.17 [$p < 0.001$]	0.52 [$p < 0.001$]	-	0.71 [$p < 0.001$]	0.19 [$p = 0.147$]	-0.47 [$p < 0.001$]	0.50 [$p < 0.001$]	0.67 [$p < 0.001$]
6. Narcissism	0.10 [$p < 0.001$]	0.10 [$p < 0.001$]	0.10 [$p < 0.001$]	0.51 [$p < 0.001$]	0.36 [$p < 0.001$]	-	0.16 [$p = 0.229$]	-0.28 [$p = 0.035$]	0.46 [$p < 0.001$]	0.46 [$p < 0.001$]
7. Conservative Identification	0.29 [$p < 0.001$]	0.39 [$p < 0.001$]	0.43 [$p < 0.001$]	0.01 [$p = 0.059$]	0.09 [$p < 0.001$]	0.09 [$p < 0.001$]	-	0.04 [$p = 0.783$]	0.32 [$p = 0.013$]	0.53 [$p < 0.001$]
8. Liberal Identification	-0.41 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.08 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.18 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.11 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.19 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.04 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.08 [$p < 0.001$]	-	-0.41 [$p = 0.001$]	-0.30 [$p = 0.023$]
9. Defensive Violence	0.19 [$p < 0.001$]	0.18 [$p < 0.001$]	0.15 [$p < 0.001$]	0.30 [$p < 0.001$]	0.31 [$p < 0.001$]	0.22 [$p < 0.001$]	0.11 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.11 [$p < 0.001$]	-	0.60 [$p < 0.001$]
10. Offensive Violence	0.36 [$p < 0.001$]	0.38 [$p < 0.001$]	0.25 [$p < 0.001$]	0.32 [$p < 0.001$]	0.41 [$p < 0.001$]	0.24 [$p < 0.001$]	0.18 [$p < 0.001$]	-0.12 [$p < 0.001$]	0.52 [$p < 0.001$]	-

Table S13. Effects of interaction terms between violence type of sub-indicators of the GPI are presented. Main effects are controlled for. All tests were conducted in separate models.

GPI Indicator	γ	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Number of homicides	0.02	[-0.04, 0.09]	0.72	55.48	0.477
Intensity of internal conflicts	0.07	[0.01, 0.14]	2.24	54.74	0.029
Violent demonstrations	0.11	[0.05, 0.17]	3.57	54.88	<.001
Violent crime	0.05	[-0.01, 0.11]	1.51	55.37	0.137
Political instability	0.06	[0, 0.12]	2.00	55.74	0.050
Political terror scale	0.09	[0.03, 0.15]	2.86	55.02	0.006
Terrorism impact	0.09	[0.03, 0.15]	2.90	54.97	0.005
Deaths from internal conflicts	0.05	[-0.01, 0.11]	1.66	55.37	0.103
Deaths from external conflicts	0.00	[-0.06, 0.07]	0.12	55.20	0.902
Internal conflicts fought	0.07	[0.01, 0.12]	2.33	55.99	0.023
External conflicts fought	0.05	[-0.02, 0.12]	1.53	54.91	0.131
Domestic and international conflict	0.06	[0, 0.12]	1.90	54.85	0.063
Safety and security	0.07	[0, 0.13]	1.98	54.66	0.053

Note. Three digits are presented where 95% CI bounds were .00 when presented with two digits.

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