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**Psychological and structural antecedents of
intergroup violence**

Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation Summary

Doctoral School of Psychology

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The doctoral candidate's list of publications

Publications cited in the doctoral dissertation:

- Faragó, L., Ferenczy-Nyúl, D., Kende, A., Krekó, P., & Gurály, Z. (2021). Criminalization as a justification for violence against the homeless in Hungary. *The Journal of Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2021.1874257>
- Faragó, L., & Kende, A. (2017). Az elnyomás támogatása vagy az egyenlőség ellenzése? Az új szociális dominancia orientáció skála (SDO7) vizsgálata. *Alkalmazott Pszichológia*, 17, 115-135. <https://doi.org/10.17627/ALKPSZICH.2017.1.115>
- Faragó, L., Kende, A., & Krekó, P. (2019). Justification of intergroup violence – the role of right-wing authoritarianism and propensity for radical action. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 12, 113-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2019.1576916>
- Faragó, L., Kende, A., & Krekó, P. (2020). We only believe in news that we doctored ourselves: The connection between partisanship and political fake news. *Social Psychology*, 51, 77–90. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000391>

Other publications:

- Fejes-Vékássy, L., Ujhelyi, A. & Faragó, L. (2020). From #RelationshipGoals to #Heartbreak – We use Instagram differently in various romantic relationship statuses. *Current Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01187-0>
- Zábó, V., Faragó, L., Vargha, A., & Wooley, L. (2020). The differing effects of symbolic interpretation and inclusion of transcendence on life goals and mental health in Hungarian adults. *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, 2, 61-75. <https://doi.org/10.37441/CEJER/2020/2/2/7915>

1. Theoretical background

In my dissertation, I aim to address why people support violence against immigrants and minority groups, and investigate the structural conditions (e.g., relative deprivation and dissatisfaction, negative portrayal of outgroups in the media, criminalization of outgroups, perceived threat, the presence of fake news and conspiracy theories), and psychological factors (cognitive processes, worldview, and attitudinal orientations) in the acceptance and justification of intergroup violence. The context of research is Hungary, in which support for intergroup violence is fairly high: according to a think tank research representative to the Hungarian population, 25% of the respondents believe that living in a democracy is compatible with politically motivated violence, and 20% thinks that intergroup violence can be justified in some cases (Molnár et al., 2015). Despite conducting the studies in this specific context, I aimed to test general social psychological mechanisms, and claim that the generalizability of the results is not limited to this country. The context of Hungary only expands certain phenomena (e.g., anti-minority rhetoric, distribution of fake news) to a systemic level, which increase the likelihood of intergroup conflicts and violence in general.

Antecedents of intergroup violence

Group-based grievances and inequalities

Intergroup hostility and conflicts can be explained by two classical theories. The first one is realistic conflict theory (Campbell, 1965; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif, 1966), which posits that group competition for the valued scarce resources (such as land, jobs, or natural resources) increases intergroup hostility and violence (Rapoport & Bornstein, 1987; Sherif et al., 1961). The second influential theory is social identity theory, according to which groups are not only in need for material resources, they also compete for symbolic rewards, like positive social identity, group dominance, or respect (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). People are motivated to have a positive self-esteem, which can be achieved by belonging to positively rated social groups (Tajfel et al., 1971), but it comes along with the devaluation and dislike of outgroups (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Nonetheless, if one's identity is threatened (Fein & Spencer, 1997), or members of the ingroup perceive that the outgroup poses a serious threat, they can react with extreme hatred and violent intentions (see e.g., Thomsen et al., 2008), or intergroup oppression and genocide (Opotow, 1990).

In practice, the two theories are interrelated in intergroup conflicts: groups compete for scarce material resources and positive social identity, dominance, and respect at the same time. When members of groups have less of these valued resources than other groups, they feel discontent and grievance, which plants the seeds to processes leading to intergroup violence. Relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970) occurs when people feel that they are in a disadvantaged position, or their situation improves less than that of other people or groups, which evokes discontent. Empirical evidence analyzing longer time frames support that group-level grievances and relative deprivation consistently and strongly increases the probability of participating in aggressive political action (Regan & Norton, 2005; Siroky et al., 2020; Wimmer & Min, 2006).

Groups that are perceived responsible for the injustices can become the targets of violence (Daskin, 2016). Scapegoating, the process of putting the blame on an outgroup for the frustrating conditions, not only targets groups “below” – disadvantaged, less powerful and incompetent groups – but also, groups “above”: competent groups that are perceived to be dangerous (Glick, 2002). The more grievances are blamed on the agents of the political system, the higher the likelihood of violence against them (Gurr, 1970).

The role of attitudinal orientations (right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation)

When it comes to the ideological or attitudinal affinity to embrace ideologies that justify political violence, individual differences also matter. Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA, Altemeyer, 1981) and social dominance orientation (SDO, Pratto et al., 1994) are important factors in explaining support for violence, and previous studies showed that RWA and SDO are the two most powerful predictors of generalized prejudice and other political attitudes (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; van Hiel & Mervielde, 2002). Right-wing authoritarianism is directly associated with the ideological justification of intergroup violence (Benjamin, 2006; 2016; Cohrs et al., 2005; Crowson, 2009; Dambrun & Vatiné, 2010; Faragó et al., 2019; Larsson et al., 2012). RWA-based prejudice is directed either towards groups that are physically dangerous, or towards groups that threaten the existing conventions and stability of society (Duckitt 2001; 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007). When outgroups are perceived threatening, people with high RWA are more likely to turn to aggression to defend their group. People high

on RWA feel morally superior to norm breakers, leading to hostile attitudes and violence toward them (Altemeyer, 2006; Thomsen et al., 2008).

In contrast to right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation is a general attitudinal orientation which predicts people's desire to create and maintain hierarchical relations among social groups, and support for group-based dominance and oppression of low-status outgroups (Pratto et al., 1994). Social dominance orientation is an important predictor of negative intergroup attitudes (Faragó & Kende, 2017; Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius et al., 2004), and it predicts prejudice against groups with low status like housewives, unemployed, or poor people, and against those groups that actively compete for scarce resources and therefore pose an economic threat to the ingroup (Asbrock et al., 2010; Caricati et al., 2017; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007; Matthews et al., 2009; Morrison & Ybarra, 2008; Thomsen et al., 2008). Social dominance orientation explains support for intergroup violence (Gerber & Jackson, 2017; Henry et al., 2005; Larsson et al., 2012; Lindén et al., 2016; Thomsen et al., 2008), and social dominators see aggression as a mean of maintaining intergroup hierarchy and dominance (Henry et al., 2005; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

The role of perceived threat and criminalization in intergroup violence

Outgroups do not have to pose real threat to the ingroup, only the perception of threat is enough to evoke negative intergroup attitudes and aggression. The Dual-Process Model of Prejudice (DPM, Duckitt 2001; Duckitt 2006) states that prejudice and violent intentions against outgroups has different underlying motives. Threatening and dangerous social situations or outgroups boost beliefs that the world is dangerous, and these beliefs heighten the perceived threat from dangerous outgroups. On the other hand, competing outgroups increase competitive-jungle world beliefs, increasing negative sentiments toward competing or low-status outgroups. The DPM model can also be applied to explain support for war and violence: dangerous and competitive worldview increased support for restrictions on human rights and civil liberties, and also endorsement for the US military invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Crowson, 2009).

The perceived threat evoked by outgroups is often caused by the media portrayal of these groups. The media are largely responsible for shaping the perceived reality of individuals, as they often broadcast threatening images and topics regarding outgroups, evoking threat in the perceiver (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Hoffner & Cohen, 2013; Van Dijk, 1993). If an outgroup

is portrayed in the media as posing either physical, economic, or symbolic threat (or all three) to the ingroup, the negative depiction increases intergroup anxiety (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016; Mastro & Robinson, 2000), resulting in negative outgroup attitudes (Meeus et al., 2009), and intergroup violence as well (Lewandowsky et al., 2013).

Not only media portrayal increases perceived threat from outgroups: stating that certain groups are criminals can have the same effect on intergroup relations. Laws are moral norms (Posner, 1997) that prescribe the appropriate and desirable behavior for individuals. They set the status quo due to the assumption of goodness because of their mere existence, and people will be more likely to adhere to them as they are motivated to preserve the status quo (Eidelman & Crandall, 2012). The politicization and criminalization of outgroups legitimizes prejudice (Bence & Udvarhelyi, 2013; Krekó et al., 2015; Langeegger & Koester, 2016; Udvarhelyi, 2014), which can increase ideology-based rejection, and gives legitimacy to exclusionary ideologies and violence against the criminalized outgroups. Therefore, if a law criminalizes a certain outgroup, it might even legitimize violence against this group (see e.g., Rajah, 2011).

Partisan motivated processes and the presence of misinformation

Not only news consumption exerts effect on how people see the world, but worldview and pre-existing attitudes also influence the type of information people consume, which have consequences for attitude polarization and intergroup relations. The term partisan motivated reasoning refers to the greater likelihood of acceptance of information that is consistent with people's attitudes and ideologies as strong and convincing, and the higher probability of rejection of inconsistent information because of its perceived weakness and invalidity (Lewandowsky et al., 2013; Lord et al., 1979; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Pasek et al., 2015; Peterson & Iyengar, 2009; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Washburn & Skitka, 2017). Partisan motivated information processing can easily lead to belief in attitude-consistent misinformation, which have detrimental consequences for intergroup relations (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). If the ideologically consistent information depicts a certain outgroup negatively, which allegedly poses threat to the ingroup and behaves dangerously or competitively, members of the ingroup will more likely find this information credible, leading to intergroup tensions and aggression (Lewandowsky et al., 2013). Therefore, conspiracy theories and fear-mongering fake news often justify hatred, discrimination, and violent behavior against the other group (see e.g., Bouvier & Smith, 2006; Gray, 2010; Kofta & Sedek, 2005). Acting against this threatening

outgroup will not be considered violence but legitimate self-defense (Kofta & Sedek, 2005), and misinformation strengthens the belief that violence is the only remaining option (think tank report of Bartlett & Miller, 2010). In this sense, misinformation works as a “radicalizing multiplier” (think tank report of Bartlett & Miller, 2010), polarizing the groups’ attitudes and behavior and thus increases support for violent acts.

2. Research questions

My empirical work aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do people justify aggression against outgroups with different quality of perceived threat? Can the presence of political discontent and grievance justify hatred and intergroup violence, or the acceptance and justification lie rather in individual differences (e.g., in right-wing authoritarianism)? How can blaming and violent intentions against powerful, high-status groups be justified?

2. How do legal changes associate with the acceptability of violence towards a criminalized group? Is the acceptance of a criminalizing law serves as a justification for violence against a criminalized outgroup? If yes, whether those high in right-wing authoritarianism or high in social dominance orientation use the law as a justification for supporting intergroup violence?

3. How do partisan motivated reasoning and identification with an opinion-based group affect fake news acceptance, and how partisan motivated reasoning is associated with support for intergroup violence?

I conducted three correlational studies to answer these research questions.

3. Study 1 - The effect of propensity for radical protest and right-wing authoritarianism on the acceptance of violence toward physically dangerous and symbolically threatening groups

In Study 1 (Faragó et al., 2019), we explored the acceptability of violence against groups that are perceived as harmful to the physical integrity of the ingroup (physically threatening groups), and against groups that are perceived as breaking the accepted norms and values of the

society (symbolically threatening groups) in the contemporary Hungarian context. Also, we investigated which groups have a higher chance of becoming victims of violence and what the social psychological mechanisms are that justify intergroup violence. Specifically, we were interested in the role of propensity for radical protest and right-wing authoritarianism in triggering political violence against different target groups.

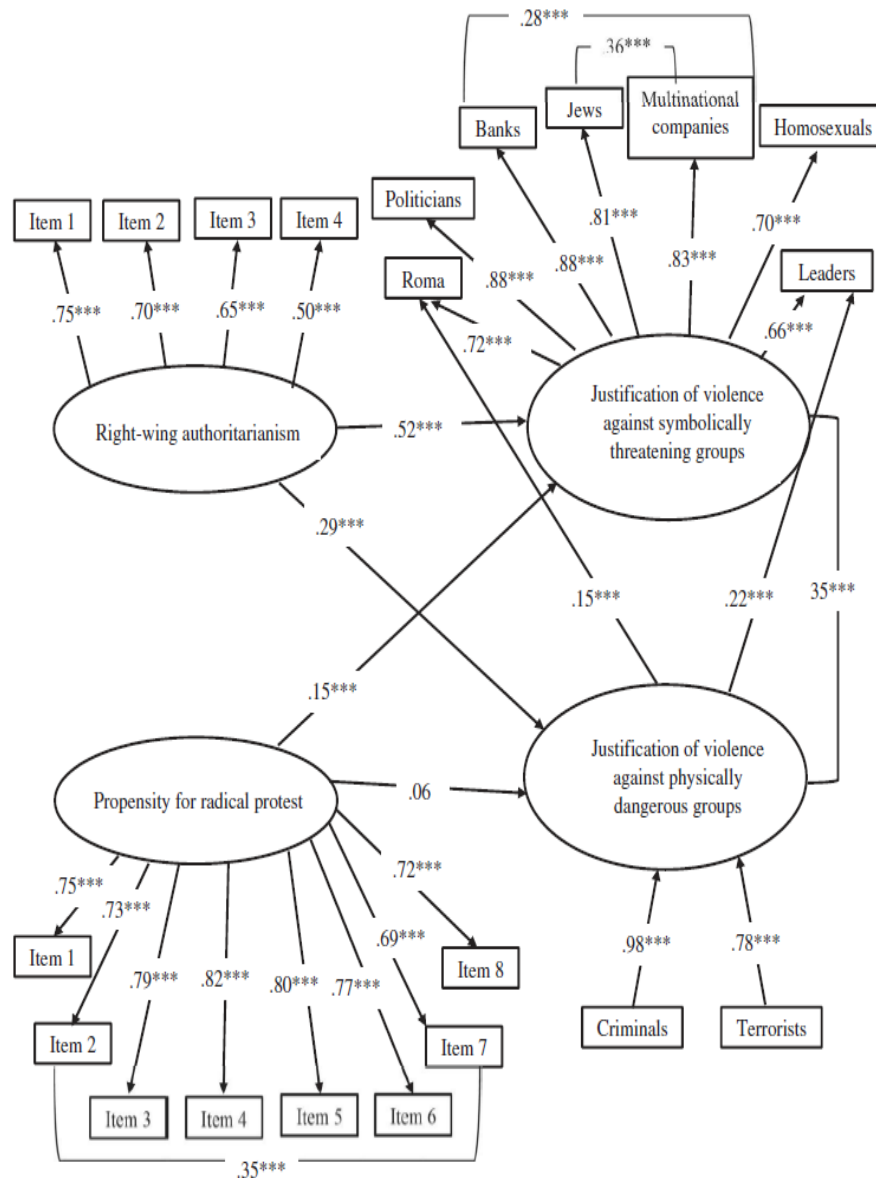
As RWA ensures the ideological, value-based legitimization that helps to let aggression be seen justified (Gerber & Jackson, 2017), we expected that RWA has a more important role in explaining the justification of violence against symbolically threatening groups than propensity for radical protest, which lacks such ideological component. We also presumed that those who justify violence against symbolically threatening groups would be higher in right-wing authoritarianism, because RWA gives an ideological basis for the justification of violence as a tool also against symbolically threatening groups.

We tested our hypotheses using computer-assisted personal interviews with a representative sample of Hungarian respondents ($N = 1000$), and measured propensity for radical action, right-wing authoritarianism, and justification of violence against different social groups. Target groups were selected to represent heterogeneous categories that often appear in Hungarian public discourse, such as the Roma, criminals, terrorists, politicians, banks, Jews, multinational companies, lesbian and gay people, and authoritarian leaders undermining democracy. Criminals were chosen to represent tangible deviance. Politicians, authoritarian leaders undermining democracy, banks, and multinational companies were included because they are perceived as influential, powerful, and they possess control over resources. Respondents had to evaluate whether the use of violence could be justified against these groups.

Our results showed that respondents accepted significantly more aggression against physically dangerous groups (criminals and terrorists) than against symbolically threatening groups (all other groups). Using structural equation modelling, we found that RWA was a stronger predictor of the justification of intergroup violence against both physically and symbolically threatening groups than propensity for radical action. Furthermore, a comparison of the groups also revealed that those who justify violence against symbolically threatening groups were also higher in right-wing authoritarianism. Our findings show that the though presence of political discontent and grievance can justify intergroup violence (at least against symbolically threatening groups), the justification lie rather in individual differences. Furthermore, though support for violence against high-status, influential groups like politicians, authoritarian leaders undermining democracy, banks, and multinational companies were not expected to correlate with RWA according to previous literature (see e.g., Duckitt & Sibley,

2007), our results show that violence against these groups can be justified by right-wing authoritarianism and to a smaller extent by propensity for radical protest. Powerful groups loaded on the same factor as other symbolically threatening groups, meaning that they also pose symbolic threat to the authoritarian person, at least in the Hungarian context.

Figure 1. The relationship between right-wing authoritarianism, propensity for radical protest, and the justification of violence against symbolically threatening and physically dangerous groups



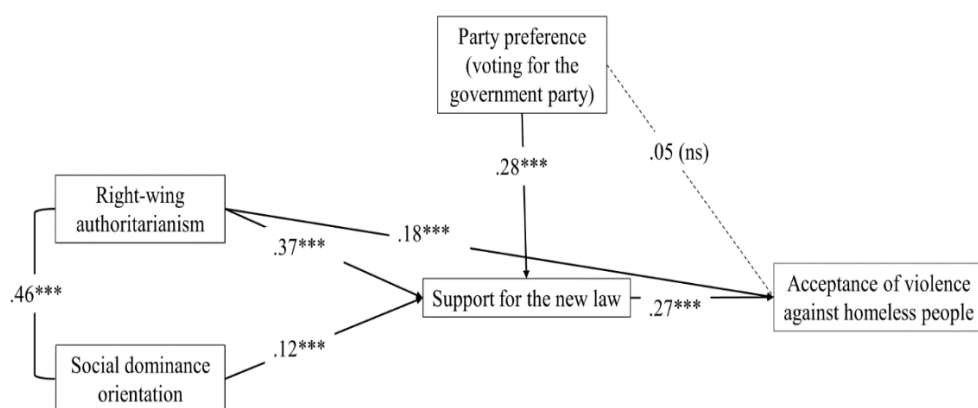
4. Study 2 - Criminalization as a justification for intergroup violence

In Study 2 (Faragó et al., 2021), we investigated the mechanism of supporting violence against homeless people, who are low in status and perceived as a both symbolically and physically threatening group (Hadarics & Kende, 2018; Lee et al., 1990; Snow et al., 1989). We aimed to explore whether a criminalizing law and the criminalization of homelessness could be used as a justification for intergroup violence, and what role attitudinal orientations, namely right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation, play in this justification process. We also tested if the justification mechanisms are universal, or they only apply to people with specific educational levels.

We assumed that both right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation would predict the acceptance of violence towards homeless people, and also hypothesized that the amendment of Fundamental Law (which openly criminalizes homeless people for living and sleeping in public spaces) would serve as a justification in this process.

Our hypotheses were tested using a convenience ($N = 196$) and a representative sample of the population of Budapest ($N = 674$). Using path analysis, we revealed that people high in right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation accept violence against the homeless, and support for the new law serves as a justification in this process, as it mediates the relationship between the ideological attitudes and violence.

Figure 2. The path model of acceptance of violence against homeless people (main study)



Our results also showed that education level modified the relationship between SDO and support for violence: SDO and acceptance of violence were independent from each other if

we considered those respondents who are less educated. Nevertheless, at higher levels of education SDO strongly predicted support for violence. This strong correlation means that violence against homeless people is accepted or rejected on an ideological basis by higher educated people, because they have a better understanding that supporting or opposing beliefs that enhance hierarchy can lead to violence or lack thereof.

5. Study 3 - The effect of partisan motivated reasoning on news consumption and support for intergroup violence

In Study 3, we aimed to examine the complex relationship between partisan motivated reasoning, fake news acceptance, news consumption, and support for intergroup violence. Study 3 comprises 3 sub-studies: in Study 3a, we investigated the effect of partisanship (supporting or opposing the government) on wishful political fake news acceptance using a representative Hungarian sample. In Study 3b, we replicated the findings of Study 3a with more fake news headlines to make our results more generalizable. In Study 3c, we explored the connection between partisanship, bogeyman news consumption, and support for violence against immigrant groups.

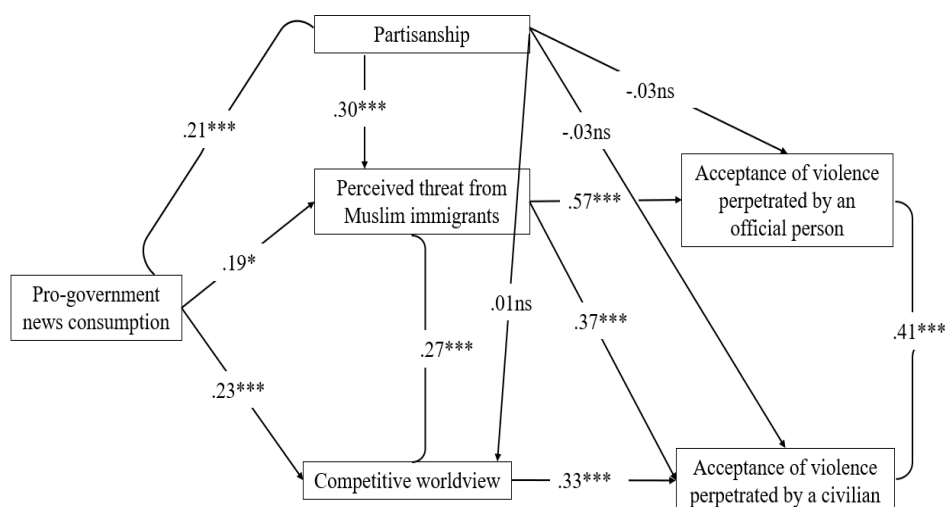
In Study 3a and Study 3b (Fragó et al., 2020) we investigated the process of political fake news acceptance in Hungary. We examined the effect of partisan motivated reasoning on belief in misinformation, as these two can be the antecedents of radicalization and intergroup violence (think tank report of Bartlett & Miller, 2010; Bouvier & Smith, 2006; Kofta & Sedek, 2005; Kull et al., 2003; Lewandowsky et al., 2013; 2017). Using a representative survey ($N = 1,000$) and a student sample ($N = 382$) in Hungary, we found that partisanship predicted belief in political fake news more strongly than other factors (conspiracy mentality and political orientation). Therefore, our findings confirmed that respondents accepted or rejected political pipedream fake news based on their political views. Identifying the mechanism of fake news acceptance and the susceptible groups is crucial to understand the role it plays in intergroup relations.

In Study 3c, we investigated the cumulative effect of threatening news consumption related to the immigration crisis on the acceptance of violence against refugees in Hungary. We hypothesized that those who would vote for the government party would consume more pro-government news than opposition news, and those who would support any of the opposition parties would show the opposite pattern based on partisan motivated processes. We also

presumed that long-term consumption of news that depict Muslim refugees as threatening, dangerous, and competitive would increase perceived threat, dangerous and competitive worldview (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016; Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Hoffner & Cohen, 2013; Mastro et al., 2007), and therefore negative intergroup attitudes and violent intentions (Lewandowsky et al., 2013; Meeus et al., 2009).

Using a convenience university student sample ($N = 197$), we found that supporters of the government were more likely to consume pro-government news outlets than supporters of the opposition, while supporters of the opposition showed the opposite pattern, in line with partisan motivated processes. Supporters of the government perceived Muslim immigrants more threatening than supporters of the opposition but did not perceive the world significantly more dangerous or competitive than the opposition. Government supporters accepted violence perpetrated by an official person to a greater extent than supporters of the opposition, but the difference disappeared for violence committed by a civilian. Using path analysis, we revealed that pro-government news consumption predicted higher support for both kind of intergroup violence, and these connections were mediated by increased threat perception and competitive worldview. While perceived threat was important for both kinds of violence, competitive worldview only predicted civilian violence. As partisanship was controlled in all analyses, our models show that though increased threat is associated with both partisanship and bogeyman news consumption, competitive worldview and violent intentions were the result of news consumption and not partisanship.

Figure 3. The path model of pro-government news consumption (Study 3c)



6. Discussion

In my doctoral dissertation I investigated the structural and psychological antecedents of the justification of intergroup violence in an illiberal democracy. I conducted three studies to test the effect of propensity for radical protest (resulting from group-based injustices and grievances), general attitude orientations (right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation), criminalizing law against a low status and marginalized outgroup, partisan motivated processes, perceived threat, and competitive and dangerous worldview in the acceptability of intergroup violence.

In Study 1, the novelty of our contribution in the literature of right-wing authoritarianism is that we widened the categories that represent symbolic threat. Previous studies that aimed to investigate the dual-process model of prejudice used groups that cause disunity and disagreement in society like atheists, feminists, protestors, or groups criticizing authority, and ethnic or sexual minorities that seems to reject and violate the norms and values accepted by the authoritarian person (Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007; Hadarics & Kende, 2018), and RWA predicted prejudice, hostility, and violence towards them (Altemeyer 2006; Thomsen et al., 2008). We also included powerful and influential groups like politicians, authoritarian leaders undermining democracy, banks, and multinational companies, all which possess control over resources, and were not expected to correlate with right-wing authoritarianism. Nonetheless, these groups loaded on the same factor as other symbolically threatening groups, which means that they all pose threat to the authoritarian person. Our research shows that RWA justifies violence also against groups that have high status and seems competent (Fiske et al., 2007) at least in a post-socialist country. The system change and the recent economic crisis heightened people's intolerance for inequality and their demand for redistribution (Tóth, 2008), and perhaps made authoritarians distrust and hate these groups for violating these principles.

The main contribution of Study 2 is that the acceptance of the criminalizing law mediated the effect of the general ideological attitudes on support for violence. Previous studies mentioned the role of dehumanizing discourses (Misetics, 2010; Tosi, 2007), and tested the effect of negative stereotypes (Hadarics & Kende, 2019) in the justification of violence, but our results show that the legalization of punitive behavior can also serve as a justification mechanism in itself. Another novelty of Study 2 is that this justification mechanism was influenced by educational level, as the association between SDO and violence increased with higher levels of education, suggesting that especially for highly educated people the criminalizing law legitimizes the use of violence for maintaining the intergroup status quo.

In Study 3, though it was already well-known that perceived threat from outgroups increases intergroup tensions, prejudice, and support for violence (Caricati et al., 2017; Cohrs & Asbrock, 2009; Duckitt, 2001; 2006; Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007; Meeus et al., 2009; Morrison & Ybarra, 2008; Lewandowsky et al., 2013; Perry et al., 2013; Sibley & Duckitt, 2013; Sibley et al., 2007; Stephan et al., 1999), the novelty is that we measured partisan motivated reasoning, news consumption, perceived threat from Muslim refugees, dangerous and competitive worldview, and support for violence committed by an official and by a civilian against Muslim refugees in one comprehensive model. Furthermore, though previous research analyzed the political discourses and the media representation of Muslim refugees in Hungary (see e.g., Kenyeres & Szabó, 2016; Kiss, 2016; Mendelski, 2019; Vidra, 2017), no research was conducted to investigate the above mentioned processes and the effect of the Hungarian pro-government and opposition media consumption on violent intentions against refugees. Therefore, our research sheds light on how partisan motivated news consumption and the presence of bogeyman news about Muslim refugees increase perceived threat from immigrants, the perception of the world as a competitive place, and support for violence against people who are victims of a humanitarian crisis.

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