Summary of Research on Demographic and Personality Predictors of Support for Violent Extremism in Aotearoa New Zealand

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The Research Question

The research sought to address a critical gap in the Aotearoa New Zealand context regarding support for violent extremism (VE) by examining the demographic and psychological predictors of this support within a nationally representative sample of adults. This investigation was motivated by a global backdrop of rising lone-actor and ideologically motivated violence, including major domestic terror attacks like the one in Christchurch in March 2019.

Specifically, the study aimed to analyse which individual-level demographic and personality factors predict support for violent extremism, shifting the focus from characteristics of organized extremist groups to individual susceptibility factors.

The report systematically assessed the relationship between support for VE and a broad range of individual characteristics, including:

- **Demographic Factors:** Age, gender, socioeconomic status, education, political ideology, place of residence, and religiosity.
- **Personality Traits:** The Big Six personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and honesty-humility), along with trait self-control, perfectionism, and vengeful rumination.

The research utilized data from the Time 15 wave of the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS), involving responses from 32,857 adults collected during 2023–2024. This national probability sample included individuals 18 years or older, with a mean age of 52.78 years, and a demographic breakdown of 62.75% women, 36.21% men, and 1.03% gender non-binary people.

Key Conclusions

The analysis revealed two overarching conclusions: first, that overall support for violent extremism remains low in the New Zealand adult population; and second, that while significant predictors exist, their contributing roles are small.

1. Low Overall Support

Overall support for violent extremism was found to be relatively low in the general adult population of Aotearoa New Zealand. The mean levels of support were below the midpoint on the scale, suggesting that general sympathy for political violence and violent extremism is quite low.

2. The Small Role of Demographic and Personality Predictors

The study demonstrates that support for VE is not uniformly distributed across the population and is influenced by a confluence of demographic and personality factors. However, the data

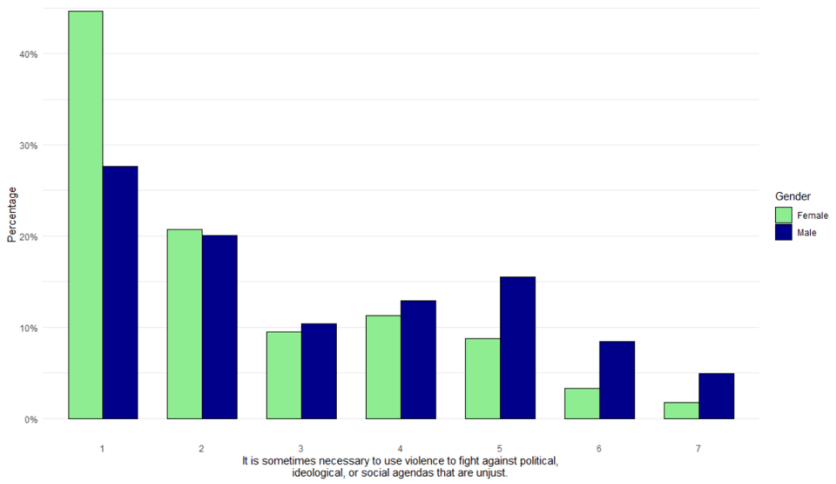
strongly suggests that **no single demographic factor or personality characteristic is a clear "red flag"** in predicting support for violent extremism. All identified predictors revealed what are considered small effect sizes.

Significant Predictors Associated with *Increased* Support for VE:

Demographic factors associated with a small but significant increase in support for violent extremism included:

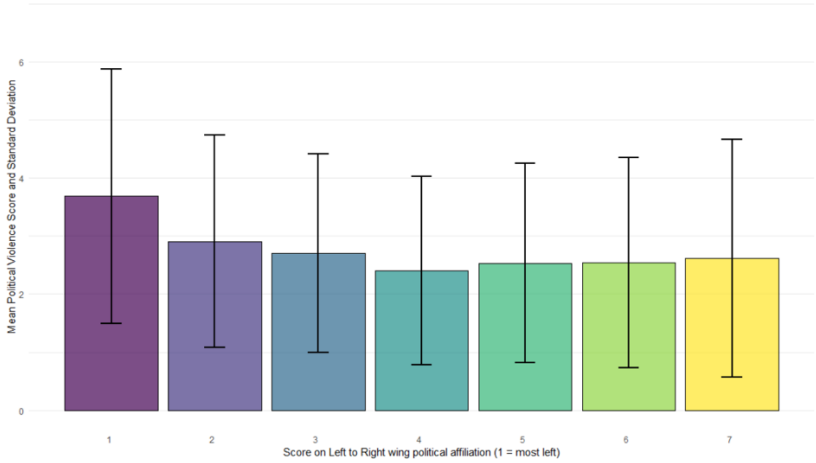
- **Gender:** Being male (this factor revealed a larger effect size than other demographic factors, although it was still considered a small effect in statistical terms).
- **Age:** Being younger.
- **Education:** Being more educated.
- **Political Ideology:** Self-identifying as more left-wing.

Figure 1. *Mean support for political violence by gender*



Note. Support for political violence scores range from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree

Figure 4. *Mean support for political violence by political orientation scores (left-right wing)*



Note. Support for political violence scores range from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree

Personality traits associated with a small but significant increase in support for VE included:

- **Narcissism:** Higher levels of narcissism.
- **Openness to Experience:** Higher levels of openness to experience.
- **Vengeful Rumination:** Higher levels of vengeful rumination, which refers to excessive ruminative thinking about past offenses.

Significant Protective Factors Associated with *Lesser* Support for VE:

Certain personality traits were identified as protective factors, demonstrating a significant negative relationship with endorsements of VE included:

- **Agreeableness:** Higher levels of agreeableness.
- **Conscientiousness:** Higher levels of conscientiousness.
- **Self-Control:** Higher levels of self-control.

Recommendations

No single demographic or personality factor is a ‘red flag’ in predicting support for VE in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, several demographic factors (being male, younger, extreme left-wing) and aspects of personality (e.g., high narcissism, low self-control) play small contributing roles in support for VE.

Notes

A full version of the research report is available from DPMC