The dark side of conspiracy theories: Exploring the influence of conspiracy beliefs on violence responses and jury decision-making

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Memorandum

The research presented in this thesis was conducted whilst the author was a full-time postgraduate student in the Department of Psychology, Health, Science and Wellbeing at Staffordshire University.

The author has not been awarded a degree by this university or any other university for the work included in this thesis.

Aspects of the research outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 have been submitted for publication in the following paper:

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Dedication

My thesis is dedicated to my husband and children. Without your unwavering love and support, I would not have achieved this milestone.

Lucas, Dylan, and Cerys

I also dedicate this thesis to the indomitable Menton women of my family, past and present, who contributed to my life in a multitude of ways. You shaped the woman I am today

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Thesis Summary

The aim of this thesis was to explore the effect that belief in, and exposure to, conspiracy theories have on political violence and intergroup relations, with the latter focused on violent reactions and jury bias towards marginalised groups. Study 1 (N = 202) first demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs predicted political violence and, extending previous research, how the relationship held even when controlling for a measure of aggression. Study 2 (N = 138) then employed an experimental design, and despite finding that participants exposed to immigrant conspiracy theories (vs control) recorded higher conspiracy beliefs, there was no direct impact of conspiracy exposure on political violence. However, in Studies 3 (n = 160) and 4 (N = 211), intergroup conspiracy exposure (vs control) did *lead* to increased violent reactions towards minority groups (immigrants and Muslim immigrants), but only for individuals with high Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Study 3) and Social Dominance Orientation (Studies 3 and 4). These findings demonstrated that conspiracy exposure can affect violent reactions towards groups perceived as conspirators but that these effects are *conditional* on certain individual differences. Next, exploring the broader consequences of conspiracy theories, Studies 5 and 6 examined whether the negative consequences toward target groups could be extended to the context of juror decision-making when jurors assess the guilt of a (perceived 'conspiratorial') defendant. In Study 5 (n = 247), conspiracy beliefs were found to predict subjective likelihood of guilt scores toward Muslim immigrants and British defendants. Furthermore, in Study 6 (n = 219), mock jurors rated perceived Muslim immigrant defendants (vs British) as less likely to be rehabilitated, and this effect was conditional on Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs. Overall, the novel empirical work presented in this thesis demonstrates the negative effects of conspiracy beliefs on political violence and jury decision-making and groups perceived as conspirators.

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Introduction

Overview

Conspiracy beliefs refer to the attribution of blame for complex political and social events at the hands of secretive, malevolent groups that are often viewed as powerful (e.g., governments, Douglas et al., 2019) but can also be socially marginalised groups (e.g., Muslims, Jolley et al., 2020). The consequences of conspiracy beliefs can be widespread and impact the smooth running of societies (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). Worryingly, conspiracy theories are prevalent in political discourse (Douglas et al., 2019), can be used by politicians to influence voters (Barkun, 2017), and affect how politicians communicate with the public about important issues (e.g., public health messaging about COVID-19, Uscinski et al., 2020). Conspiracy theories have been apparent throughout history and are particularly evident during times of crisis (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). For instance, from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, conspiracy theories about the origins emerged rapidly. Notably, 31 per cent of US survey respondents indicated that the virus was purposefully created and circulated by China (Uscinski et al., 2020).

Indeed, research has demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs are popular (Oliver & Wood, 2014). For instance, a survey by YouGov and Cambridge University found that 60 per cent of British people believe in at least one conspiracy theory (Addley, 2018). Despite concern that the Internet is fuelling the popularity of conspiracy beliefs (Shekter-Porat, 2019), Uscinski et al. (2018) argue that conspiracy theories are not necessarily flourishing online and have always been popular within public discourse. For example, the analysis of 104,823 letters sent to the *New York Times* from 1890 to 2010—alongside national surveys and Internet sampling—concluded that conspiracy theorising remained stable during this period (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Supporting this point, conspiracy theories about the Turkish *Dönme* - a Jewish sect in the Ottoman Empire who converted to Islam in the 17th century—have spanned over a hundred years (Baer, 2013). Conspiracy theories relating to politics and

politicians are also found in Ukraine (Kuzio, 2011), Palestinian settlements (Allen, 2016), Venezuela (Carey, 2019) and Italy (Coco, 2015), and are increasingly becoming weaponised by populist politicians (Silva et al., 2017). Such examples demonstrate that conspiracy theories are not prescribed to distinct times, political ideologies or cultures but rather have the potential for broad social influence. Furthermore, these examples highlight how conspiracy theories, despite appearing to flourish on Web 2.0 (Morello, 2004; Saputra, 2019), have been present since before the age of the Internet and social media distribution.

Moreover, conspiracy theories are seemingly universal across social and cultural environments (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). Cultural environments, with differing norms and values, influence how conspiracy beliefs are conceptualised. Through anthropological analysis, West and Sanders (2003) found suspicion of power and conspiratorial thinking across various traditional and modern societies. During the 2019 trade war between the United States and China, a study designed to measure the extent of cultural influences on conspiracy beliefs found that Chinese respondents hold higher intergroup conspiracy beliefs than US respondents (van Prooijen & Song, 2020). Cultural dimensions of power distance values and vertical collectivism mediated between culture and conspiracy beliefs. The cultural norms of *power distance values* relate to cultural norms regarding the extent to which unequal power distributions in society are considered acceptable (Brockner et al., 2001). On the other hand, *vertical collectivism* refers to a sense of duty and obligation towards social structures that advance the in-groups goals at the sacrifice of the individual‘s goals (To et al., 2020). Power distance values and vertical collectivism point to a hierarchical society norm associated with Eastern, collectivist cultures like China, whereas Western cultures are associated with egalitarian, individualist norms (Torelli et al., 2020). This underscores the influence of cultural differences and situational context when interpreting the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs.

The popularity across cultures, timeframes, and politics underscores the relevance of advancing our understanding of conspiracy beliefs, particularly for groups who are targets of conspiracy theories. Previous research demonstrates that such intergroup conspiracy beliefs can have negative consequences for minority groups, such as prejudicial attitudes towards minorities, which can also be generalised to unrelated groups (Jolley et al., 2020; Swami, 2012). The aim of this thesis is to make novel advances exploring the effect that belief in, and exposure to, conspiracy theories have on political violence and intergroup relations, with the latter focused on violent reactions and jury bias towards marginalised groups (immigrants, Muslim immigrants). This literature review will explore research in reference to motivations of conspiracy beliefs and how these beliefs impact individual behaviour, in addition to the wider social impact of these behaviours. This will be followed by a review of political and intergroup violence, jury decision-making and the ways in which conspiracy beliefs may influence these domains. The chapter will end by introducing the current research programme.

The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories

The psychology of conspiracy theories does not investigate the validity of particular conspiracy theories (e.g., whether or not the US government faked the moon landing). Instead, psychologists are interested in understanding *who* is susceptible to these beliefs, *why* they are susceptible, and the possible outcomes these conspiratorial beliefs may deliver (van Prooijen, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to define the fundamental terminology which will be used in the literature review.

Definitions and Measurement

A *conspiracy* may be defined as a secret act by powerful, malevolent groups (Keeley, 1999). An example of conspiracy is the Watergate scandal of 1972 in the United States.

Associates of President Richard Nixon's re-election committee broke into the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate office park, to plant listening devices and steal documents. An attempted cover-up followed this by the Nixon administration, which was ultimately exposed, resulting in Nixon's resignation from the presidency. Watergate exemplifies the definition of conspiracy, the secretive behaviour of a powerful group of people. On the other hand, *conspiracy theories (*or *beliefs)* refer to the idea that significant political and social events can be explained as the secret acts of (perceived) powerful, malevolent groups (Brotherton et al., 2013; Douglas & Sutton, 2015), and this is in contrast to the mainstream narrative or accepted shared reality (i.e., the shared consensus of what *really* happened). Such an example could refer to the notion that the Bush administration was involved in the perpetration, and subsequent cover-up, of the 2001 9/11 terror attacks on the Twin Towers in New York. The official explanation of this event (i.e., the shared consensus) is that 9/11 was a terrorist attack. Therefore, whereas a conspiracy refers to an actual causal sequence that has occurred, conspiracy theories assert a conspiracy by (perceived) powerful groups that may be true or false (Douglas et al., 2019). Although these groups are often understood as governments or large corporations, conspiracy theories could be associated with any group perceived as powerful or deleterious (Douglas et al., 2019), such as ethnic minorities (Jolley et al., 2020). Rottweiler and Gill (2020) have perhaps provided a more encompassing and updated definition, "conspiracy theories explain the ultimate causes of distressing and complex political or social events with reference to secret plots conducted by malevolent groups, which either represent powerful (e.g., politicians, scientists) or socially marginalised groups (e.g., Jews, Muslims)" (p.1).

The terms *conspiracy ideation, conspiracist ideation*, *conspiracy mindset* or *conspiracy worldview* all refer to the tendency towards a generalised conspiracy way of thinking (Brotherton et al., 2013; Uscinski & Parent, 2014) as opposed to believing only in

specific conspiracy theories. This is reflected in the scales used to measure conspiracy theories. For instance, some scales contain items such as "*Lee Harvey Oswald collaborated with the CIA in assassinating President John F. Kennedy*" (Douglas & Sutton, 2011), which refer to specific conspiracy theories. Alternatively, conspiracist ideation measures a general conspiracist worldview, with items such as "*The government is involved in the murder of innocent citizens and/or well-known public figures and keeps this a secret*" (Brotherton et al., 2013). Although these two scales correlate highly with one another (Jolley et al., 2019), there are subtle differences in what is being measured. It may be that many people believe in conspiracy theories, but individual differences and environmental factors determine the *extent* of those beliefs. Imhoff et al. (2022) argue that important differences exist that distinguish a general conspiracy worldview from specific conspiracy beliefs. Whereas a general conspiracy worldview reflects an enduring perspective about how the world operates, specific conspiracy beliefs can be influenced by other contextual factors. For instance, Islamophobia and anti-immigration attitudes might contribute to the belief that Muslim immigrants are conspiring to achieve Islamic domination in Europe. This reiterates the importance of understanding the psychology of conspiracy theories since beliefs held by people determine their behaviour and impact on society (Van Prooijen, 2018).

Overview of Conspiracy Theory Research

Scholars investigating conspiracy theories have identified psychological and situational factors influencing the endorsement of conspiracy theories. In the early research, conspiracy theories were thought to be composed of a monological belief system, or "closed" mentality whereby one conspiracy theory is predictive of other, unrelated conspiracy theories (Goertzel, 1994). For instance, participants who demonstrated strong endorsement of conspiracy theories related to the United States 9/11 terror attacks were more likely to endorse unrelated conspiracy theories (Swami et al., 2011). Goertzel's (1994) seminal study

asserts that a monological belief system offers an understanding of novel occurrences of information that threatens currently held worldviews. As discussed, scales measuring specific conspiracy theories (Douglas & Sutton, 2011) and conspiracist ideation (Brotherton et al., 2013) have been found to correlate highly with one another (Jolley et al., 2019), which lends support to a monological belief system. COVID-19 conspiracy believers demonstrated strong monological endorsement of multiple conspiracy theories, including those that were mutually contradictory (Miller, 2020b).

Although a monological 'closed' belief system seems to offer a neat explanation of why belief in conspiracy theories may appear to cluster together, some limitations have been argued. Sutton and Douglas (2014) argued that rather than adhering to the close-minded assumption of monological theory, many believers demonstrated openness. Furthermore, what is construed as monologicality, may comprise multiple processes which assuage crucial psychological needs, which, in turn, motivate endorsement. Franks et al. (2017) conducted qualitative research, which indicated that conspiracy believers can be communal, politically active, and optimistic, which conflicts with the typical view of irrational, monological conspiracy theorists. Interestingly, Miller (2020) concedes that their study could not include all varieties of COVID-19 conspiracy theories, therefore some may not have aligned with the monological findings. To better understand the motivations for conspiracy beliefs, Douglas et al. (2019) have set out a framework comprised of three motivating factors: *epistemic* (e.g., the need to understand one's environment), *existential* (e.g., feelings of security within the individual's environment), and *social* (e.g., maintaining a positive self and group identity). These motivations will be described in the next section.

The Antecedents of Conspiracy Beliefs

This section will explore the antecedent of conspiracy beliefs in line with the framework which encompasses the epistemic, existential, and social motivating factors that underlie conspiracy beliefs. There will also be an overview of research that does not necessarily fit within this framework but is nevertheless important to provide a full understanding of why people believe in conspiracy theories.

Epistemic Motivations of Conspiracy Beliefs

Epistemic motivations of conspiracy theory beliefs refer to the need to understand one's environment. Heider (1958) explains epistemic motivations as an individual's need to understand their environment, such as the origins of events, to establish stability, security, and internal consistency. When clear explanations are absent, conspiracy theories may provide such explanations. Moreover, the distress caused by an uncertain or unstable world view is shielded by conspiracy theories (van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013). Cognitive closure refers to the process whereby snap judgments are made in need to reduce ambiguity or uncertainty (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Cognitive closure is a predictor of conspiracy theories, particularly when the official narrative of events is ambiguous (Marchlewska et al., 2018). It may be that the simple explanations offered by conspiracy theories, ease psychological discomfort, or they may also suggest shortcomings in the way that people process information.

How people process and analyse information from the world around them impacts how prone they may be to endorsing conspiracy theories. People who use intuitive rather than analytic thinking tend to be more prone to conspiracy beliefs. For instance, higher intuitive thinking and unpleasant emotions towards vaccines was associated with higher conspiracy beliefs (Tomljenovic et al., 2020) and lower analytical thinking predict conspiracy beliefs

(Ståhl & van Prooijen, 2018). Endorsement has also been linked with proneness for identifying patterns within random information (van der Wal et al., 2018; van Prooijen et al., 2018). In a related field, conspiracy beliefs have been linked with believers of the paranormal and supernatural who actively explore illusory meaning within their environments (Bruder et al., 2013; Dagnall et al., 2017; Dyrendal et al., 2021; Enders & Smallpage, 2019). These form information-processing deficits that are similar to biases that might spur conspiracy belief.

Also relevant is proportionality bias, which refers to assumptions that significant events should have equally significant causes (McCauley & Jacques, 1979). For instance, a global pandemic that shuts down the entire world cannot be the work of a simple virus but rather a sinister plot by nefarious actors (e.g., WHO, Chinese government, 5G technology companies, Darius & Urquhart, 2021; Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Šrol et al., 2022). Research suggests that when such events occur, this can lead to denialism of the official narrative in favour of a conspiracy explanation (Uscinski et al., 2020). For instance, Leman and Cinnirella (2007) presented participants with two hypothetical events, where a president was either killed or sustained minor injuries in a car accident. Participants were more likely to choose the conspiracy explanation where the president was killed. This is supported by Van Prooijen and Van Dijk (2014) who found similar results but with the conditional effects of perspective-taking (when participants adopted the perspective of the affected group related to the significant event).

The tendency to ignore contradictory evidence, in favour of information that which instead confirms beliefs, is referred to as confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998). This creates distorted thinking patterns, attitude polarisation and the creation of echo chambers which can influence social groups (Del Vicario et al., 2017; McHoskey, 1995; Shekter-Porat, 2019; Thorson, 2016). McHoskey (1995) argue that confirmation bias (or biased assimilation)

contributes to the belief in conspiracy narratives despite evidence to the contrary. This is supported by Leman and Cinnirella (2007) who found that participants were more likely to endorse fictitious accounts of an event when it confirmed their existing beliefs. Along with other heuristics such as illusory correlations (perceiving relationships where none occur, van Prooijen et al., 2018), and the need for cognitive closure (requiring answers to ambiguity, Marchlewska et al., 2018), this supports the argument that lack of analytical thinking contributes to conspiracy belief (Georgiou et al., 2019; Swami et al., 2014; Tomljenovic et al., 2020; van der Wal et al., 2018).

There are a number of other epistemic factors associated with conspiracy theories. Being prone to boredom was associated with conspiracy beliefs, which was mediated by paranoia (Brotherton & Eser, 2015). Possibly related to this are the findings that conspiracy theories are entertaining and may motivate beliefs (van Prooijen et al., 2022). For example, film and television content can be searched using 'conspiracy theory' as a key phrase and renders lists of popular titles such as *Mr Robot* (adult television series), *Gravity Falls* (children's television series) and *JFK* (feature film) (IMDB, 2023). However, this remains a relatively under-researched area, so initial findings should be viewed with caution. Particularly since Newheiser et al. (2011) found that belief in tenets of the film *The Da Vinci Code* was associated with death-related anxiety and existential threat.

Existential Motivations of Conspiracy Beliefs

Existential motivations of conspiracy beliefs refer to feelings of security within the individual's environment, and endorsing conspiracy theories may *promise* to alleviate these negative feelings (Douglas et al., 2017). For instance, the seminal study by Abalakina-Paap et al. (1999) indicated that conspiracy theories were associated with feelings of powerlessness. People require the ability to make sense of their environment, particularly during stressful life

events when their control is limited (Park, 2010). When stressful events occur, it can cause a decrease in control (e.g., powerlessness), resulting in an increase in conspiracy beliefs (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015). Adopting a conspiracy explanation may help to reclaim control through sense-making (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015) and alleviate feelings of existential threat (Newheiser et al., 2011). This demonstrates how conspiracy beliefs might be a reaction to experiences of psychological distress.

Traumatic world events increase levels of stress (Goenjian, 2000), can make the world feel unpredictable and disorderly (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015), and conspiracy beliefs may help to rationalise worldviews (Nefes, 2015). Of note, Swami, et al. (2016) uncovered significant relationships between stress, anxiety and conspiracy beliefs that support this notion. However, it should be noted that the anxiety-conspiracy link is somewhat complex and may vary according to trait level of anxiety or maladaptive anxiety (Swami, Weis, et al., 2016). For instance, individuals with higher anxious attachment (while controlling for known predictors of conspiracy belief) demonstrated higher specific, general, and intergroup conspiracy beliefs (Green & Douglas, 2018). Similarly, participants who registered higher anxiety and a lower tolerance for ambiguity scored higher in conspiracy beliefs. This underscores the influence of individual differences when exploring the antecedents of conspiracy belief.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic was a global event that undoubtedly created conditions conducive to the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs based on the epistemic and existential motivators of conspiracy beliefs. Pandemics are big events that need proportional causal explanations that can be explained by conspiracy theories (Leman & Cinnirella, 2007; McCauley & Jacques, 1979). Pandemics create crises that activate the need to alleviate feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness, which can be alleviated by conspiracy beliefs

(Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Franks et al., 2017; Liekefett et al., 2023; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Moreover, conspiracy explanations may alleviate psychological distress by sense-making and the decrease of the feelings of disorder created by a pandemic (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015). Indeed, consensus was that the COVID-19 pandemic was highly conducive to conspiracy beliefs which required the appropriate pandemic response control for these effects (Bavel et al., 2020). Unsurprisingly, higher COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs were associated with lower virus-prevention behaviour (Bierwiaczonek et al., 2022). However, the COVID-19 pandemic was not only associated with epistemic and existential motivations of conspiracy beliefs. Social motivations were also associated with the COVID-19 crisis (Hartman et al., 2021).

Social Motivations of Conspiracy Beliefs

Social factors motivating conspiracy theories relate to the preservation of a positive self and group identity. When in-group identity is threatened, perceived to be disadvantaged, or the in-group image is undermined in some way, then conspiracy beliefs about the outgroup may be formed (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999). An example of feeling positive about the self is the need to feel unique and possess rare knowledge about events, which were found to predict conspiracy beliefs (Lantian et al., 2017). Arguably, this may suggest a form of individual narcissism. Similarly, collective narcissism—the concept that in-group greatness depends on the recognition of others—was found to be a predictor of belief in conspiracy theories about out-groups (Cichocka et al., 2016). Specifically, collective narcissism was found to predict anti-Semitic conspiracy beliefs in Poland (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012) and conspiracy theorising during the 2016 US presidential election campaign (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018).

Intergroup conspiracy beliefs often can be interlinked with prejudice towards ethnic groups. For example, research has found that conspiracy theories about Jewish people were responsible for the most anti-Semitic behaviour within political spectrums (Bilewicz et al., 2013). It has also been shown that conspiracy theories about ethnic groups not only exacerbate prejudice towards that group (e.g., Jewish people), but conspiracy theorising about one group can affect feelings towards unrelated groups in the form of attitude generalisation (Jolley et al., 2020). Conspiracy theories, particularly during times of crisis, provide someone to blame (Šrol et al., 2022). Therefore, intergroup conspiracy theories may be a form of *scapegoating* (Berlet, 2009; Bilewicz & Krzeminski, 2010; Glick, 2002a; Reijntjes et al., 2013). When viewing the COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs with antecedents of existential and epistemic motivators, scapegoating is possibly a social impact of attributing blame for the occurrence. The dissemination of Sinophobic (prejudice towards Chinese people) conspiracy content and hate speech was found to be driven by COVID-19 on both mainstream (e.g., Twitter) and fringe (e.g., 4chan) social media platforms (Tahmasbi et al., 2021). These studies demonstrate how the endorsement of intergroup conspiracy beliefs can, not only be motivated by social factors, but also have negative social consequences when groups are targeted as conspiratorial. A review by Jolley, Marques, et al. (2022) has indeed highlighted the influence of conspiracy beliefs in relation to prejudice and other negative outcomes towards ethnic groups (e.g., violence).

Other Factors Contributing to Conspiracy Beliefs

A large quantity of research has concentrated on the psychological motivations of conspiracy theories. However, scholars have also investigated other elements which may predict the endorsement of conspiracy theories, such as overlapping factors related to demographical characteristics, politics, and ideology.

Specifically, there have been some links established between certain demographical attributes as predictors of conspiracy theory endorsement. For example, people with higher conspiracy theory endorsement were more likely to be men, unmarried, limited social networks, less educated, lower earners, unemployed, and belong to a minority ethnic group (Freeman & Bentall, 2017). For instance, unemployed and student men in South Africa were more likely to endorse conspiracy theories regarding HIV/AIDS (Hogg et al., 2017). However, it should be noted that when groups view themselves as threatened, underprivileged or undervalued, this can intensify conspiracy beliefs (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Arguably, within the context of the apartheid legacy in South Africa, the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs by Black South Africans of lower socio-economic status is understandable. This demonstrates that acknowledging historical, political, and socioeconomic context when exploring intergroup conspiracy beliefs is important.

Although most empirical investigation relating to conspiracy theory belief and education is correlational (Freeman & Bentall, 2017; Goertzel, 1994; Mancosu et al., 2017; Oliver & Wood, 2014; Uscinski & Parent, 2014), some exploration has taken place aiming to understand the link. Researchers suggest that conspiracy beliefs are related to attributing agency and intention where none exists, such as attributing emotion to nature. The relationship between lower levels of education and conspiracy beliefs was mediated by attributions of intentionality and agency related to inanimate objects and paranormal beliefs (Douglas et al., 2016). Moreover, Douglas et al. (2016) suggest that higher education counteracts the reasoning processes and assumptions of conspiracy theorising. In a similar mediation study, people with higher education were more likely to report cognitive complexity (i.e., sceptical of simple solutions for complex problems) and greater feelings of control (vs. powerlessness), which demonstrates that the complex nature between education and conspiracy beliefs (van Prooijen, 2017).

Conspiracy theories were previously described as sharing attributes with intergroup conflict (e.g., strong ingroup identity and perception of outgroup threat, van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). Therefore, it is unsurprising that conspiracy theories are present within politics, considering the competitive nature of the domain and shared attributes with other intergroup conflicts. In an analysis of letters to the editor of the *New York Times* between 1890 and 2010, Uscinski and Parent (2014) argue that "conspiracy theories are for losers" (p. 130). This analysis demonstrated that during periods when Republicans (i.e., right-wing president) were in power, conspiracy theory narratives originated from the left-wing accusing Republicans and corporations of conspiring. This situation would reverse when Democrats (i.e., left-wing president) were in power, with conspiracy theories aimed at Democrats, unions, and socialists. Similarly, during election events, those connected with political parties who failed to secure a majority were more likely to believe that voter fraud had occurred despite the lack of evidence (Edelson et al., 2017; Karp et al., 2018). These studies suggest that conspiracy theorising is not isolated to one side of the political spectrum. Moreover, conspiracy theories appear to be more prevalent at the extremes of political ideology (Bartlett & Miller, 2010; van Prooijen et al., 2015). Scholars have also explored whether conservatives are more inclined towards conspiracy beliefs than liberals but continue to find conflicting results (Douglas et al., 2019).

Conspiracy Beliefs and the Moderating Effects of Ideology

Moderators refer to variables, such as personality factors, which affect the strength of relationships between other factors (MacKinnon et al., 2007). For instance, if a moderator is found to be playing a role, the moderating factor can have a magnifying effect between independent and dependent variables. Literature across conspiracy theories (including violence and jury decision-making, which is relevant to this thesis) has highlighted Right-Wing Authoritarianism and/or Social Dominance Orientation as important predictors in these

areas (Densley & Peterson, 2018; Kemmelmeier, 2005; Swami, 2012), which may be relevant in the relationship between conspiracy beliefs, violence and jury decision-making.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) is rooted in the theory of the *authoritarian personality* first proposed by Adorno et al. (1950), following the rise of fascism in the 1930s. RWA predicts an individual's level of deference to authority and how strictly they adhere to social conventions (Altemeyer, 1998). High RWA can result in the oppression of subordinates and aggression towards groups who are negatively labelled by authorities (Altemeyer, 2003). Furthermore, high RWA is related to ethnocentrism, nationalism, politically right-wing ideology, adherence to strict law and order, supporting punitive social control, benevolent and hostile sexism, and prejudice (Altemeyer, 2003; Asbrock et al., 2010; Austin & Jackson, 2019; Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018; Renström et al., 2022). İn addition, Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is a personality factor that refers to the extent to which a person favours a hierarchical group-based social system (Pratto et al., 2006). A person with high SDO would support the dominance of one group over another (e.g. race, class, gender), despite the occurring inequality (Ho et al., 2012). Along with predicting similar issues as RWA (e.g. prejudice, right-wing political ideology, sexism), SDO has been shown to be a powerful predictor of intergroup attitudes and behaviour (Ho et al., 2012). Pratto et al. (2013) argue that SDO encompasses multiple perspectives of intergroup conflict, such as cultural and political ideologies and related theories.

Although RWA and SDO are independent individual difference measures, they are positively correlated with each other (Perry et al., 2013). The dual-process motivation model (Asbrock et al., 2010) proposed that together, RWA and SDO offer two dimensions of ideological attitudes and express different motivational goals and values. Once these motivational goals and values are activated, they may be influenced by social, intergroup and

situational factors resulting in outcomes, such as prejudice and violence (Thomsen et al., 2008). Furthermore, RWA and SDO were found to be moderate, positive predictors of conspiracy theory beliefs (Bruder et al., 2013; Dyrendal et al., 2021; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). Interestingly, in a study investigating Jewish conspiracy theory beliefs in Malaysia, RWA and SDO emerged as strong predictors of Jewish conspiracy theory beliefs (Swami, 2012). This seems to suggest that conspiracy theories regarding specific groups may serve an ideological need and that individual differences (e.g., SDO and RWA) may increase or decrease the effects of such conspiracy theories.

The Consequences of Conspiracy Beliefs

Although there is a robust framework and growing consensus of the causes of conspiracy beliefs, Douglas (2021) argues that these beliefs are not harmless and more needs to be understood about consequences of conspiracy beliefs. A review into the consequences of conspiracy beliefs also highlights the correlational nature of much of this research and the need for experimental and longitudinal explorations (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022).

Positive Outcomes of Conspiracy Beliefs

Conspiracy beliefs may offer some positive outcomes. Conspiracy theorising may increase at times of distress (van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013) which might be construed as a positive outcome since the conspiracy theory protects the destabilising effect of distressing events. Moreover, aside from merely regarding conspiracy theories as attempts to assign the responsibility of significant political and social events as the secret manoeuvres of powerful, malevolent groups (Rottweiler & Gill, 2020), Miller (2020) suggests that conspiracy theories may offer a critical evaluation of official explanations of events. These challenges against official explanations have historically demonstrated validity through the effective unearthing of bona fide conspiracies, such as Watergate or the Tuskegee human experiment. Over a 40

year period (1932 to 1972), the US Tuskegee Syphilis study assigned Black men to non-treatment control conditions without their knowledge (Thomas & Quinn, 1991). This point is raised by Clarke (2002), who suggests that conspiracy theory believers challenge society, resulting in greater openness, increased institutional accountability, and improved social explanations. However, it is worth noting that in both previously mentioned conspiracies were exposed by investigative journalists (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2010; McVean, 2019), not conspiracy *theorists*.

A thematic analysis by Franks et al. (2017) questioned the predominant opinion of quantitative research, whereby conspiracy theories indicate the presence of monological belief systems resulting in individuals who are paranoid, cynical, anomic, irrational and disengaged (Douglas & Sutton, 2015; Jolley & Douglas, 2014; van Prooijen & Acker, 2015). Alternatively, interviews conducted with people who ascribe to conspiracy beliefs found themes relating to critical inquiry, personal development, community adhesion and engagement in political action (Franks et al., 2017). Also, Franks et al. (2017) highlight those participants opposed the term *conspiracy theorist* or *conspiracy theory*, instead referring to themselves as engaging in an investigation, questioning prevailing narratives and conducting research.

Nevertheless, attempts to validate conspiracy theories are often coupled with extensive analysis of the event, which may offer the illusion of investigative facts. For instance, the '*magic bullet*' theory relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy utilises seemingly convincing evidence (e.g., analysis of a home movie produced by a civilian situated on Dealey Plaza) to back-up the theory that Lee Harvey Oswald alone could not have fired all the shots, despite empirical evidence to the contrary (Nalli, 2018). van Prooijen et al. (2018) assert that this may be rationalised as critical analysis of the official narrative. Due to

the secretive, unfalsifiable nature of conspiracy theories, the absence of proof can be construed as evidence of the extent of the 'cover up' (Keeley, 1999). However, belief in conspiracy theories do not only affect the believer but has dire consequences for the wider community.

Negative Outcomes of Conspiracy Beliefs

Research suggests that the negative outcomes of conspiracy belief are extensive and harm society (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). To start, whilst conspiracy beliefs may appear to promise to address psychological needs, which can be seen as a positive consequence, in reality, conspiracy beliefs are not satisfying. In recent longitudinal work exploring conspiracy beliefs within the context of satisfying psychological needs (e.g., anxiety, uncertainty), the researchers found no evidence to support psychological needs being addressed. Rather, these findings suggest that conspiracy beliefs might *increase* negative affect (Liekefett et al., 2023). Thus, conspiracy theories may not only negatively impact individuals, but also wider society. For instance, exposure to conspiracy theories about that climate change is a hoax was found to decrease intentions to engage in ecologically sustainable behaviour (Jolley & Douglas, 2014b). This is pertinent when considering that the United Nations warn of an impending climate change catastrophe if action is not undertaken to counteract effects (IPCC, 2013). In fact, the sixth assessment has revealed that climate change effects are now felt in all regions of the world (IPCC, 2022). Despite these warnings, YouGov found that climate change denial persists (Ibbetson, 2021). This is supported by research that continues to find evidence that climate conspiracy theories are an obstacle to mitigating climate change damage (Tam & Chan, 2023), with negative correlations between pro-environmental behavioural intentions and policy support (Biddlestone et al., 2022). This work highlights the dire need for interventions to counteract climate change denial when considering how a lack of behavioural and policy support change might impact wider society.

Anti-vaccine conspiracy theories also impact wider society, which is showcased by a recent public health alert issued in Britain. On the 21st of November 2023, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health issued a public health warning regarding worrying resurgences in children's diseases such as measles. The college went on to say that declining vaccination rates (particularly for measles, mumps and rubella) are related to misinformation and distrust in vaccine safety and were leading to the reintroduction of potentially life-threatening diseases in the United Kingdom (RCPCH, 2023). NHS services face increased pressure during the winter (NHS Providers, 2023) and occurrences such as this can add to already stretched public health services. The distrust and misinformation alluded to may be related to anti-vaccine conspiracy beliefs that have been studied, with findings that suggest a link between these conspiracy theories and lower vaccine uptake.

Exposure to anti-vaccine conspiracy theories resulted in reduced parental intentions to vaccinate a fictional child (Jolley & Douglas, 2014a). The first quarter of 2019 saw a 300 per cent increase in measles cases worldwide compared with the same period in 2018, which was attributed to the anti-vaccine movement (Mahase, 2019), demonstrating the gravity of anti-vaccine conspiracy theories upon wider society. COVID-19 also posed challenges for vaccine uptake. Conspiracy theories included notions that Covid-19 is a hoax or bioweapon (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2020), purposefully created by China (Uscinski et al., 2020), or spread by 5G technology (Jolley & Paterson, 2020). COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs predicted lower adherence to public health control measures and wellbeing plus, higher vaccine hesitancy and likelihood of Covid-19 diagnosis (Leonard & Philippe, 2021; Salazar-Fern et al., 2023; van Prooijen et al., 2023). Vaccine-related conspiracy beliefs pose challenges for public health, which once again shows the negative impact on wider society.

Conspiracy beliefs can affect health behaviours more widely, which can lead to severe illness and death. The policy of HIV scepticism by South African President Thabo Mbeki led to a reduction in anti-retroviral use favouring alternative and traditional medicine therapies (Grebe & Nattrass, 2012). This led to practices such as infant and child rape (Bowley & Pitcher, 2002; Meel, 2003) due to myths about 'virgin cleansing' as a cure for HIV (Leclerc-Madlala, 2002). HIV conspiracy theories, particularly related to origins, are believed to have hampered the rollout of the anti-retroviral program, despite the devastating impact of the pandemic (Hogg et al., 2017). Although HIV denial rhetoric has reduced in South Africa, only one in five Black adolescents from Soweto was able to correctly identify the origins of the disease (Hogg et al., 2017).

HIV conspiracy theories have also been found to be a barrier to condom-use. A survey of African Americans found that endorsement of conspiracy theories (e.g., HIV is a form of genocide; doctors put the virus in condoms) was associated with negative attitudes to condom use (Bogart & Thorburn, 2005). However, it is worth noting that the roots of such conspiracy theories might lie in *actual* harmful conduct experienced by African American communities through prejudice and discrimination in the US. Moreover, programs such as the Tuskegee Study (a 40-year program that studied untreated syphilis in African Americans and a proven conspiracy) add context to why conspiracy theories about HIV might be adopted in favour of official public health advice (Thomas & Quinn, 1991). Similarly, discrimination due to sexual orientation in gay and bisexual men, was associated with HIV conspiracy beliefs and negative attitudes towards HIV preventative behaviour (Jolley & Jaspal, 2020). In 2022, 39 million people were living with HIV and 630,000 people died of HIV-related illnesses worldwide (WHO, 2022). This highlights the urgency of encouraging behaviour (e.g., condom use) which reduces the spread of HIV and preventable deaths. Again, this

highlights the importance acknowledging historic sociopolitical injustices towards groups when considering intergroup conspiracy beliefs.

In addition to conspiracy beliefs that create tangible social impacts (e.g., measles outbreaks), some consequences may appear to be less impactful but nevertheless render social costs. For instance, organisational conspiracy theorising within the workplace was found to contribute to increased turnover intentions, decreased commitment to the organisation and job satisfaction, which lead to increased costs and decreased productivity for companies (Douglas & Leite, 2017). This highlights how conspiracy beliefs can affect productivity and have economic consequences. In another domain that can has negative impacts for companies and the economy are so-called white-collar and everyday crimes. Everyday crimes, which can be defined as common offences that most people commit during their life and may include behaviour such as accepting cash payment to avoid tax or not disclosing latent defects to buyers of goods (Karstedt & Farrall, 2006). The National Crime Agency reported that fraud and economic crime totalled £2.46b per year in 2022, which was a 17 percent increase on 2021 (NCA, 2022). In an experimental study, Jolley et al. (2019) found conspiracy exposure increased intentions to engage in everyday criminal behaviour. This causal pathway was mediated by anomie, which refers to the feelings of dissatisfaction that result in a breakdown of social values and associated with conspiracy beliefs (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). In addition to the economic impact, it may be that conspiracy beliefs influence how people feel about powerful institutions, increasing anomie and negative behaviour.

Taken together, a conspiracist worldview could be delineated as denial of the mainstream narrative, and a general suspicion or distrust about the social world. This is particularly salient when considering trust towards organisations such as governments and the

impact of political disengagement on democracy (Lewandowsky et al., 2013). For instance, conspiracy exposure resulted in lower intentions to engage in political behaviour such as voting (Jolley & Douglas, 2014b). Cross-cultural research conducted across 11 democratic nations, conspiracy beliefs was found to reduce trust in governmental institutions, which was enhanced by active social media use (Mari et al., 2022). Moreover, a recent review argues that institutions provide citizens with security and set social norms—a relationship which is disrupted by conspiracy beliefs (van Prooijen et al., 2022). This disruption thereby decreases citizens sense of security and prosocial behaviour, resulting in the erosion of interpersonal relationships. This suggests that conspiracy beliefs have social implications intergroup relations.

Intergroup relations can be blighted by prejudice. Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, such as Jewish people operating as a cabal, secretly controlling world affairs, predicted anti-Semitic attitudes (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). Cichocka et al. (2016) demonstrated that collective narcissism, which refers to the notion that ingroup greatness is dependent on the recognition of others, is a predictor of belief in conspiracies about the outgroup. Moreover, conspiracy theories relating to Jewish people accounted for most anti-Jewish behaviour within the political spectrum, and these beliefs were associated with authoritarian personality and social identity (Bilewicz et al., 2013). In a form of attitude generalisation, Jolley et al. (2020) uncovered how exposure to conspiracy theories towards Jewish people not only increased prejudice towards them but also to other non-associated minority groups. This work suggests that conspiracy theories regarding minority groups continue to proliferate prejudicial attitudes that have the potential for worrying intergroup relations, including conflict.

It has been argued that conspiracy beliefs are a social occurrence that shares attributes with intergroup conflict—strong ingroup identity coupled with the perception of outgroup threat (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). Intergroup conflict is defined by Böhm et al. (2020) as "the perceived incompatibility of goals or values between two or more individuals, which emerges because these individuals classify themselves as members of different social groups" (Böhm et al., 2020, p. 950), and influences attitudes (e.g., prejudice), emotions (e.g., fear) and behaviour (e.g., aggression). Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Sherif, 1966) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) consider the environmental factors which arouse prejudice and discrimination, resulting in intergroup conflict. Realistic group conflict (Sherif, 1966) proposes that intergroup conflict arises due to competition for resources that are perceived to be limited (e.g., money, power, or status). On the other hand, social identity principles are about viewing the ingroup as positively distinct from the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and can result in ingroup bias (Brown, 1995). Notably, ingroup bias does not naturally lead to prejudice or intergroup conflict (Molina et al., 2016) but can contribute thereto when intersecting with other elements such as perceived outgroup threat (see Birney, 2023).

Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) is a framework for understanding when prejudice and intergroup conflict may arise (Stephen & Stephen, 2000). Perceived threat to the ingroup can present in the form of realistic threat relating to material resources (e.g. status and money; as with realistic group conflict theory; Sherif, 1966),or symbolic threat to abstract commodities (e.g. social norms and core values, in line with social identity theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The concept of perceived threat features in conspiracy theory research (Bost & Prunier, 2013; Douglas et al., 2017; Uscinski, 2014; Uscinski et al., 2011) and could be viewed as a possible existential motivator of intergroup conspiracy beliefs that has a negative impact on social or ethnic groups. Moreover, using the ITT framework, symbolic threat was found to mediate the

relationship between ingroup identification and Islamophobic conspiracy stereotypes (Uenal, 2016b). It may be that perceived threat primes the ingroup to view the outgroup as conspirators.

Within the framework of US politics, both domestic and international, perceived threat emerged as predicting intergroup conspiracy beliefs (Uscinski et al., 2011). For instance, when one political party was in office, conspiracy theorising about that party would increase within the opposition party. Similarly, when a foreign threat was perceived, foreign conspiracy theorising increased. In addition to perceived threat, the perceived motive was also found to positively predict conspiracy theorising—the greater the magnitude of perceived motive by conspirators, the higher the likelihood of conspiracy theory belief (Bost & Prunier, 2013). Uscinski (2014) argues that a conspirator's motive, as a driving force of conspiracy theory belief, would have a higher likelihood of being accepted if the motive was perceived as threatening. Interestingly, *system identity threat* (i.e., the perception that society's character and core values are under threat due to social change) was established as a strong, positive predictor of conspiracy beliefs, and mediated by conspiracy ideation (Federico et al., 2018).

These findings demonstrate that the perception of threat plays a meaningful role in predicting and understanding why conspiracy theories may be endorsed and possibly fulfil an existential need to feel safe and in control of one's environment. Although there may be an argument for positive effects, the balance of evidence suggests that conspiracy beliefs have alarming negative social outcomes that need exploration. Considering perceived threat as a common predictor of both intergroup conflict and conspiracy beliefs, it is perhaps unsurprising that conspiracy theories proliferate between groups involved in conflict (Pipes, 1997). These works highlight the relevance of extending our understanding of *when* and *how*

conspiracy beliefs influence intergroup relations, and what the outcomes may be. Thus far, the literature has demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs can influence intergroup relations in a negative way (e.g., prejudice) particularly to ethnic groups (Bilewicz et al., 2013; Jolley et al., 2020). It is plausible that conspiracy beliefs may play a role in other negative forms, such as violence towards those perceived to be conspirators (e.g., ethnic minorities).

Conspiracy Beliefs, Political, and Intergroup Violence

Intergroup conflict was characterised as social psychology's 'problem of the century' by Fiske (2002). This aligns with recent report from the Institute for Economics and Peace (2023), that global conflict (including violence) has been on an upward trend over the past 15 years. There is emerging evidence that some forms of political and intergroup violence may be influenced by conspiracy beliefs. For instance, conspiracy beliefs were found to predict political violence (Uscinski & Parent, 2014), extremist violent intent (Rottweiler & Gill, 2022) and violent reactions in those who believed 5G technology was linked to COVID-19 (Jolley & Paterson, 2020). Moreover, Jolley, Marques, et al. (2022) warn of ways in which conspiracy theories and beliefs have been used in recent wars (e.g., Russian invasion of Ukraine). This section will provide an overview of violent behaviour, predictors of violence, before turning to the links between violence and conspiracy beliefs, which is the cornerstone of the current thesis.

The Antecedents of Intergroup Violence

The factors that contribute to intergroup conflict and violence are complex and multifaceted. Causes of violent behaviour include elements such as personality traits, environment, identity, ideology, and prejudice (Böhm et al., 2020). After the atrocities of The Holocaust, scholars have endeavoured to understand why people participate in or support violence against a group of people. One of the earliest theories was that of the authoritarian

personality, which was characterised as submission to authority (Adorno et al., 1950). Although personality theories have evolved over time, understanding individual traits help to understand the causes of hostility and violence.

Aggression refers to behaviour that is meant to harm another who does not wish to be harmed, and violence is a form of behavioural aggression intended to inflict extreme harm (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). *Trait* aggression refers to individual differences in aggression including interpersonal interactions such as physical aggression, which can range from low level harm to violent criminal behaviour (Bushman & Wells, 1998). Trait aggression has shown to be an effective predictor of aggressive behaviour (Anderson et al., 2008) in addition to acting as a moderator of the association between media violence and aggressive behaviour (e.g., people who were higher in trait aggression are more likely to demonstrate violent behaviour after consuming media violence). Moreover, trait aggression has been positively associated with the support for political violence (Kalmoe, 2014).

Personality differences in trait aggression influence violent and aggressive outcomes, therefore, researchers have attempted to develop assessment tools for measuring trait aggression. In particular, Buss and Perry (1992) developed an aggression questionnaire that introduced the concept sub traits to understand various facets of aggression namely, anger, hostility, verbal aggression, and physical aggression and is formulated by three elements—affective, cognitive, and instrumental behaviour. Anger, the affective element, encompasses physiological arousal and prepares for aggression. Hostility comprises feelings of unfairness, bitterness, and acrimony that represent the cognitive element. The instrumental behavioural element is verbal and physical aggression that involves harm towards a target. Buss and Perry (1992) tested these sub traits and found high correlations between verbal and physical aggression, but a weak relationship with hostility. There was a strong relationship between

anger and all 3 sub traits, which they suggest denotes a psychological link between the instrumental (verbal and physical aggression) and cognitive elements (hostility). This original questionnaire has been updated to the Brief Aggression Questionnaire (BAQ; Webster et al., 2015) to improve on efficiency but is still comprised of the original four sub trait scales.

Arguably, the BAQ (Webster et al., 2015) is a measurement of *direct* aggression, whereas aggression could also be viewed as *displaced* in certain circumstances. Denson et al. (2006) describe direct aggression as reprisal towards a provocateur, whereas displaced aggression refers to aggression towards an 'innocent' (someone who provides no justification for the aggression) target (Dollard et al., 1939). For instance, if a person is berated by their line manager but feels unable to retaliate, then targets their aggression towards an innocent colleague; this serves as an example of displaced aggression. This displaced aggression against an innocent party can sometimes take on the characterisation of *triggered* displaced aggression. In this instance, the aggressor perceives an innocent colleague as being hostile (e.g., they make an ill-timed joke) and retaliates in a disproportionate manner. Similar to the BAQ (Webster et al., 2015), the Displaced Aggression Questionnaire (DAQ) is measured using three sub trait elements (Denson et al., 2006)—angry rumination, revenge planning, and a general tendency to engage in displaced aggression (behavioural displaced aggression). As with the BAQ, Denson et al. (2006) identify these three sub trait measures as comprising of three elements—affective (angry rumination), cognitive (revenge planning), and behavioural (tendency to engage in displaced aggression). A review by Vasquez et al. (2010) argues that displaced aggression plays a role in gang related violence, particularly rumination. Similarly, Bushman et al. (2005) found that rumination maintained internal aggression which influenced reactivity to low-level provocation (i.e., triggered displaced aggression).

The origins of trait aggression range widely from factors such as genetic heritability (Caspi et al., 2002) to media violence exposure in childhood (Bushman & Huesmann, 2006). Demographically, aggressive behaviour is found to be higher in men than women although this is most applicable to physical aggression (Card et al., 2008; Dollard et al., 1939; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Farrell et al., 2016; Kalmoe, 2013) and tends to decrease with age (Chester, 2013; Huesmann et al., 1984). Participants high in trait aggression were found to be more likely to choose to watch violent content, report higher levels of aggressive affect, and behave more aggressively, compared to those with lower trait aggression (Bushman, 1995). Moreover, in a 22-year longitudinal study, trait aggression was demonstrated to occur across familial generations (i.e., grandparents, parents, children) and predict antisocial behaviour, intimate partner violence, and violent criminal behaviour (Huesmann et al., 1984). In addition to personality factors such as trait aggression, situational or environmental factors must also be considered when predicting violent outcomes (Böhm et al., 2020). The interplay between personality traits (e.g., aggression) and environment has been included in a theoretical framework to explain aggressive and violent outcomes.

Specifically, the General Aggression Model (GAM) recognises the influence of trait aggression on aggressive behaviour, and how environmental factors influence the expression of aggression (Allen et al., 2018; Anderson & Bushman, 2002). The GAM is a framework for understanding aggression which accounts for the role of multiple factors (e.g., social, cognitive, personality, developmental, and biological) on aggression and considers various outcomes, including intergroup violence (Allen et al., 2018). The GAM is comprised of three stages (input, route, outcome), which account for how individual differences, such as trait aggression, converge with situational factors to either increase or decrease aggression, which, in turn, results in either non-aggressive or aggressive outcomes (i.e., violent behaviour). This

model demonstrates how multiple psychological perspectives converge to explain aggression and intergroup violence, including political violence.

Political and Intergroup Violence

Political violence is defined by the World Health Organisation as the intentional employment of power or force to attain political objectives (WHO, 2002). This not only includes physical acts to achieve injury, but also psychological acts such as intimidation or deprivation (WHO, 2002). Political violence has many negative effects, such as deterioration of public health and wellbeing, the disruption of diplomacy, economic prosperity, and displacement of people (De Jong, 2010; Jahnke et al., 2022; Sandler, 2016; Sousa, 2013). Political violence also has the potential to erode intergroup relations and democratic processes. For instance, the Federal Ministry of the Interior for Germany reported another annual increase in right-wing violent politically motivated crime (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2022). This follows an increasing year-on-year trend of right-wing extremist attitudes, with one in twelve Germans sharing right-wing extremist worldviews and 6 percent advocating for a German dictatorship (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2023). Extreme political groups such as *Reichsburger* (known for extreme right-wing and white supremacy ideology) demonstrated a 55 percent increase in violent offences (2021–2022), of which a large proportion was identified as ethnicity-related hate crimes (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2022). These figures provide an example of how political violence disrupts intergroup relations and affects democracy; therefore, it is vital to understand the factors that contribute to this type of behaviour.

Personality variables have been found to influence the support for political violence by the state and violence against political leaders, with the effect magnified in those high in trait aggression (Kalmoe, 2013, 2014). Kalmoe (2013) utilised the original aggression

questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992) and found trait aggression to be a robust predicter for political violence. Moreover, these findings contribute to the generalisation of the GAM (Allen et al., 2018; Anderson et al., 2008; DeWall et al., 2011) beyond interpersonal violence, to include the support for political violence.

In addition to aggression traits, a recent meta-analysis identified a number of predictors of political violence in young adults (Jahnke et al., 2022). This meta-analysis synthesised cross-sectional effect sizes that included 95 samples from 23 countries. Some significant predictors included identification, realistic and symbolic threat, and negative intergroup emotions. Arguably, these predictors feature in intergroup relationship theories such as Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Sherif, 1966) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and Integrated Threat Theory (Stephen & Stephen, 2000). These theories include perceptions of disadvantage or unfair treatment by the outgroup (van Zomeren et al., 2008) and this occurs in both advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Leach et al., 2007). Notably, endorsement of intergroup violence across different group types (Black Lives Matter, immigrant-critical Swedes, and football supporters) was found to be significantly related to perceptions of in-group disadvantage (Lindström et al., 2023). This suggests a link to narcissism in the form of ego threat when the in-group is perceived as being unfairly treated (Baumeister, 1997). Similarly, perceived threat by Arab Israeli's was linked to support for violence against Jewish Israeli's (Rozmann & Yehuda, 2023). Perceptions of in-group disadvantage are also related to increased risk of radicalisation and terrorism.

The perception that one's group is being unfairly treated or is disadvantaged in some way, is captured within the notion of *relative group-based deprivation*, which is thought to contribute to political violence, radicalisation, and terrorism (Densley & Peterson, 2018; Doosje et al., 2012; Jahnke et al., 2022; Lindström et al., 2023; Rottweiler et al., 2022).

Relative group-based deprivation reflected positive associations with violent extremist attitudes and intentions, that was enhanced by individual differences such as a need for uniqueness (Rottweiler & Gill, 2022). Similarly, Strain Theory contends that when people experience strains during their life (e.g., perceptions of deprivation, discrimination, injustice), this can increase frustrations and anger, which can sometimes lead to violence and terrorism (Agnew, 2010). Although feelings of strain may not in and of itself lead to terrorism, but can be exacerbated by other factors (Rottweiler et al., 2022). For example, feelings of detachment from societal norms (e.g., anomie, Kearns et al., 2020), perceptions of collective victimhood (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Noor et al., 2017), and experience of discrimination (Bartlett & Miller, 2012) may contribute to political radicalisation and terrorism. Furthermore, social identification with religious or ethnic groups, who may share such experiences, can inspire the pursuit of justice for the in-group and promote extreme acts of violence (Marchment & Gill, 2020). Multiple complex factors contribute to political and intergroup violence, and some also feature within research related to conspiracy beliefs, suggesting conspiracy beliefs may also contribute violence.

Conspiracy Theories and (Political) Violence

Belief in and exposure to conspiracy theories can influence political behaviour in different ways. For instance, conspiracy exposure led to decreased normative political behaviour, such as intentions to vote or engage in legal protest (Imhoff et al., 2021; Jolley & Douglas, 2014b). Interestingly, however, conspiracy theories can also lead to an increase in non-normative political behaviour, such as political violence towards people in power (Imhoff et al., 2021). Similarly, a conspiracy worldview was positively related to the endorsement of political violence, such as harming a government official which could pave the way to radicalisation (Vegetti & Littvay, 2022). The 3N model of radicalisation refers to

three interlinked factors that work together to promote radicalisation - needs, narratives, and networks (Webber & Kruglanski, 2017). According to this model, an individual's need for significance can motivate them to seek out social networks that validate and share this need, while promoting a violence-justifying narrative. Conspiracy theories can provide a shared group grievance (e.g., a need for significance related to self-esteem) that ultimately justifies violence towards a 'culprit' who is responsible for that grievance (Kruglanski, Molinario, Ellenberg, et al., 2022; Kruglanski, Molinario, Jasko, et al., 2022). Although it may seem contradictory that conspiracy theories can both inhibit and stimulate political action, conspiracy theories that have an intergroup aspect and provide a clear culprit stimulate the need to engage politically (Kim, 2022). When this engagement is presented in the form of violence, this is a worrying aspect of political action that promote extremism.

Politically extreme groups, from various ideological standpoints, have been found to endorse conspiracy theories about their perceived enemies (Bartlett & Miller, 2010). An analysis of literature and propaganda material found Islamist groups to subscribe to the idea of Judeo-Christian-Capitalist groups waging a war against Islam. Liberal extremists endorse conspiracies about the global elite funding a 'new world order', while right-wing extremists tends to believe in Jewish cabals in control of global governments. Bartlet and Miller (2010) concluded that conspiracy theories are not essential for extremist behaviour but may serve as a "*radicalising multiplier*" that develops group cohesion, leading to increasingly extreme and violent behaviour. Moreover, radically extreme groups (compared to non-violent extreme groups or moderates) are more likely to promote violence by using conspiracy theories (Rousis et al., 2022), and radicalisation is thought to promote endorsement of a conspiracist worldview (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2023). This has serious implications when considering extreme political violence.

In a US study exploring associations between conspiracy beliefs and violence, participants with elevated levels of conspiracy endorsement were 50 percent more likely to endorse political violence as an acceptable way to communicate disagreement with the government (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Arguably, the insurrection at the US Capitol building on 6 January 2021 is an example of such a violent disagreement. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recognises conspiracy theories have been identified as a motivating factor for domestic terror in the US, identifying groups such as QAnon as an extremist group (FBI, 2019). QAnon, referring to a conspiracy theory claiming that the deep state is conspiring against Donald Trump, has emerged as a recurring theme in criminal cases related to the insurrection (Rubin et al., 2021). QAnon supporters are often perceived as right-wing extremists, although support can also be found from the extreme left side of the political scale (Enders et al., 2022). Moreover, they are also viewed as ideological, but QAnon support was found to be better explained by dark triad personality traits, a proclivity for non-normative political behaviour, violence, Christian nationalism and a conspiracy worldview (Armaly et al., 2022; Enders et al., 2022). This has implications for groups, such as immigrants, who are viewed as legitimate targets due to being viewed as conspirators.

McDonald (2018) argues that violent behaviour towards immigrants, or those who are perceived as facilitating immigration, have increased. Considering events such as the Tree of Life synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh, the US in October 2018, multiple mosque shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019, and the Walmart shooting in El Paso, US in August 2019 (Ahmed & Murphy, 2018; Bogel-Burroughs, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2019; Puschmann et al., 2022), all appear to be motivated by anti-immigrant sentiments. All the perpetrators of these shootings had posted online manifestoes supporting extreme right-wing ideology, targeting immigrants and affiliates. In a written statement to the US House Hearing (116th Congress) regarding global terrorist threats, Soufan (2019) highlighted how much of

right-wing extremist ideology is based on the assertion of the *"Great Replacement Theory"*. This conspiracy theory claims that Western culture is under threat, by a pernicious (mainly Jewish) cabal shifting demographic favour towards non-white immigrants.

Supporting such assertions, there have been recent studies providing empirical evidence of the links between conspiracy beliefs and violence. Specifically related to the Great Replacement Theory, belief in great replacement was associated with persecution of Muslims, Islamophobia and violent reactions, with the effects mediated by symbolic threat (Obaidi et al., 2022). In preprint data, conspiracy believers (i.e., conspiracy worldview) were found to be more inclined towards violent political action, with this pathway mediated by dissatisfaction with democracy (Bonetto et al., 2022). The influence of individual differences on the pathway between conspiracy belief and violent reactions have also been investigated. To start, conspiracy theories were positively associated with intentions towards violent extremism which was conditional on individual differences, such as lower self-control, higher self-efficacy and holding weaker law-relevant morality (Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). Furthermore, the COVID-19 global pandemic saw novel conspiracy theories emerge, such as the connection between the virus and 5G towers. Jolley and Paterson (2020) found belief in 5G COVID-19 conspiracy theories to be positively associated with the justification of real-world and hypothetical violence, alongside intent to engage in similar future behaviours. Moreover, those higher in paranoia and anger demonstrated stronger relationships, allowing us to understand *when* conspiracy beliefs might be linked with violent reactions.

Whilst this emerging work is promising, there has been limited investigation into the role of conspiracy beliefs and violent behaviour, therefore it necessary to put a spotlight on conspiracy inspired violence, which the current thesis has aimed to do. In essence, we need to learn more about *when* conspiracy beliefs are more likely to result in violence, particularly

towards those perceived to be conspiring. Aside from violent reactions, there may be a number of other negative outcomes for people viewed as conspirators. Another domain where conspiracy beliefs may have an effect is the criminal justice system.

Conspiracy Beliefs and The Criminal Justice System

Jury psychology is the study of psychological elements that influence jurors' behaviour, deliberations, and decision-making (Willmot, 2017). This includes understanding how cognitive biases and intergroup relations affect how jurors make decisions (Curley et al., 2022; Devine & Caughlin, 2014; Hunt, 2015). Conspiracy beliefs are also associated with a range of cognitive and social factors (Douglas et al., 2017) that may have an impact on jury decision-making. In the United Kingdom, all jurors are selected at random from the electoral register and, if selected, will form part of a 12-person jury in Northern Ireland, England and Wales (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2023; Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, 2023). In Scotland, a criminal jury is comprised of 15 people and a civil jury is 12 people (Scottish Courts and Tribunals, 2023). Although exceptional circumstances might occur whereby the Crown Prosecution Service may challenge the eligibility of a juror, or a person is disqualified from being a juror (see Juries Act of 1974), juror vetting is minimal in the United Kingdom (CPS, 2023). In the United States, however, prospective jurors are subjected to the process of *Voir Dire* which aims to identify prejudice, bias, or opposition to due process that can be used to set jurors aside (Saltzman, 2020). Literature suggest that the effectiveness of *Voir Dire* is mixed (Daftary-Kapur et al., 2010; Salerno et al., 2021; Saltzman, 2020). However, a long history of research exploring racial and ethnic bias suggests this is problematic in jury decision-making (Ewanation & Maeder, 2021; Ewanation & Maeder, 2023; Hunt, 2015; Maeder et al., 2012).

Jury Decision-Making

There are a number of factors that can affect jury decision-making; jury instructions, inadmissible evidence, scientific evidence, pre-trial publicity (Daftary-Kapur et al., 2010). Factors relating to race, ethnicity and culture continue to raise concerns about jury bias (Bothwell et al., 2006; Gamblin & Kehn, 2021; Hunt, 2015; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). Moreover, the adversarial court system may be confusing to jurors who may fall back on cognitive heuristics to make sense of environment and evidence (Curley et al., 2022). The purpose of a jury is to review the evidence impartially, deliberate with each other and ultimately come to a verdict. However, impartiality is not always clearly achieved as research into the influence of race and ethnicity on bias within the CJS (Hunt, 2015), serves as a reminder of how attitudes, beliefs and implicit biases could potentially lead to miscarriages of justice. Moreover, racial, and ethnic inconsistencies in the CJS have eroded trust and motivated civil unrest in the US (Bornstein et al., 2020).

Jurors tend to judge those from their out-group more harshly than those from their in-group (Hunt, 2015). This aspect of ingroup bias is referred to as the *similarity-leniency* effect (Kerr et al., 1995). Due to stereotyping and prejudice towards social or ethnic groups can cause jurors to attribute the criminal behaviour of outgroup defendants as innate features based on their culture or ethnicity, whereas ingroup criminality may be viewed as motivated by situational factors (Hunt, 2015). There is a higher likelihood that jurors will make internal attributions of criminal behaviour about outgroup defendants, than ingroup defendants (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). For instance, Black juvenile defendants may be judged as destructive or defiant when on trial for petty crime, while White juvenile defendants' criminal behaviour might be regarded as peer pressure-related (Rattan et al., 2012). Similarly, studies focussing on rape myths and a Black men demonstrate how Black defendants are judged more harshly in rape trials (Maeder et al., 2015). Moreover, biased jurors were found to

influence non-biased jurors during the deliberation process (Ruva & Guenther, 2017). This indicates how attitudes, implicit or explicit, and beliefs about certain groups may influence justice delivery efficacy. When considering the social and cognitive aspects, it may be that conspiracy beliefs contribute to jury bias.

Conspiracy Beliefs and Jury Bias

It has been argued that conspiracy beliefs foster mistrust in institutions, which leads to a decrease in feelings of security, thereby eroding trust between citizens (van Prooijen et al., 2022). Viewing others with paranoia, suspicion, and mistrust has been associated with conspiracy beliefs for some time (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Goertzel, 1994; Imhoff & Lamberty, 2018; Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Lee, 2017). Moreover, feeling of detachment from social norms, known as anomie, has been linked to conspiracy beliefs. For instance, exposure to general conspiracy beliefs increased intentions to engagement in low-level criminal behaviour (Jolley et al., 2019). Also, perceived economic equality predicted elevated beliefs in conspiracy theories (Salvador Casara et al., 2022). In both cases, anomie mediated these pathways. If conspiracy beliefs increase negative feelings such as mistrust (institutional and interpersonal), paranoia and anomie, this suggests that conspiracy beliefs may influence how jurors feel about the criminal justice system and defendants.

How people feel about institutions and people may affect how they process related information. Cognitive biases or heuristics refer to shortcuts used to process information with low effort, particularly to relieve cognitive load, and rely on factors such as stereotyping (Allport, 1954; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Instead of processing information about people based upon their individuality, stereotyping relies on cognitive shortcuts that categorise people according to overgeneralised beliefs about their group membership, such as gender or ethnicity (Birney, 2023). Curley et al. (2022) posit that jurors may draw on cognitive biases

to make sense of the unfamiliar criminal justice environment that may be cognitively overwhelming.

Conspiracy beliefs can be epistemically motivated when people are faced with uncertainty (Douglas et al., 2019). Arguably, being a juror in an unfamiliar environment (e.g., courtroom) assessing evidence that they might not understand (e.g., scientific information) could lead them to rely on stereotypical conspiracy beliefs. Should a juror endorse certain stereotypical beliefs which views a defendant as a conspirator, this might increase the likelihood of internal attributions of criminal behaviour. For instance, if a Muslim defendant was on trial for terror-related crimes and a juror held beliefs about Muslims importing terror to the UK, the conspiracy theory belief may lead the juror to attribute guilt due to the defendant being Muslim. Alternatively, concerning non-terror related crimes, the juror may also assess the defendant more harshly simply because they view Muslims as conspirators.

In addition to stereotyping, confirmation bias (i.e., seeking information to confirm existing beliefs, Nickerson, 1998) may relieve cognitive load experienced by jurors who are overwhelmed by the criminal justice environment (Curley et al., 2022). Leman and Cinnirella (2007) suggest that conspiracy-styled evidence was judged more believable when aligned with existing beliefs, which suggests that confirmation bias occurs within conspiracy theorising. Again, this has implications for defendants who may be associated with certain ethnic overgeneralisations that might be endorsed by jurors (e.g., Muslim people and terrorism). It is plausible that jurors may focus on evidence that aligns with the stereotypical beliefs that they hold about the defendant.

A review by Hunt (2015) showcases the effects that race, culture, and ethnicity have on jury decision-making and argue that jurors judge defendants from their outgroups more harshly compared with those from ingroups. Social motivations of conspiracy beliefs relate to

the maintenance of a positive group and self-identity (Douglas et al., 2019) and affects intergroup relations (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). When considering that intergroup conspiracy theories increase prejudice and can lead to attitude generalisation towards marginalised groups (e.g., Jolley et al., 2020), it is plausible that conspiracy beliefs may play a role in jury decision-making, particularly when the defendant belongs to an outgroup. Collective narcissism refers to the notion of ingroup greatness, can predict outgroup conspiracy beliefs, and was associated with perceived threat of immigrants to Britain during the Brexit referendum (Cichocka et al., 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2017; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). Again, this demonstrates that how conspiracy beliefs may influence jurors, particularly in England and Wales, and when the defendant is an immigrant.

To sum up, a range of epistemic and social motivations of conspiracy beliefs may also affect jury decision-making (e.g., stereotype bias and beliefs about the outgroup). It is plausible that, in addition to the cognitive biases and social intergroup dynamics that are already associated with jury decision-making, conspiracy beliefs may also play a role particularly when the defendant is part of a group that is associated with conspiracy beliefs. Part of the aim of this thesis to explore if conspiracy beliefs affect jury decision-making and how this related to defendants from marginalised groups.

The Current Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to explore the effect that belief in, and exposure to, conspiracy theories have on political violence and intergroup relations, with the latter focused on violent reactions and jury bias towards marginalised groups (immigrants, Muslim immigrants). Across 6 empirical studies, the following objectives will be explored:

1. To investigate the role played by conspiracy theories relating to political violence.
2. To investigate the role played by conspiracy beliefs relating to cyber violence.

3. To test how exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories affect violent reactions towards marginalised groups in Britain.
4. To investigate the role played by conspiracy theories about jury decision-making.
5. To explore how individual differences affect the pathways between conspiracy beliefs about violent reactions and jury decision-making.

Summary of Thesis Chapters.

Chapter	Chapter Name	Content	Objectives
1	Introduction	Literature review Thesis aims Study summary	Introduction of thesis 1-5 objectives (Ob 1-5)
2	The Role of Conspiracy Beliefs in Predicting Political and Cyber Violence	Study 1	To investigate the role played by conspiracy theories relating to political violence (Ob 1) To investigate the role played by conspiracy beliefs relating to cyber violence (Ob2)
3	Exploring the Mechanism Between Intergroup Conspiracy Exposure, General Political Violence and Violent reactions Towards Immigrants	Study 2	To investigate the role played by conspiracy theories relating to political violence (Ob 1) To test how exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories affect violent reactions towards marginalised groups in Britain (Ob 3) To test how individual differences affect the pathways between conspiracy exposure and violent reactions (Ob 5)
4	The Moderating Effects of Political Ideology Between Intergroup Conspiracy Exposure and Violent reactions	Studies 3 and 4	To test how exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories affect violent reactions towards marginalised groups in Britain (Ob 3) To explore how individual differences affect the pathways between conspiracy beliefs about violent reactions and jury decision-making (Ob 5)
5	Conspiracy Beliefs and Jury Decision-making	Studies 5 and 6	To investigate the role played by conspiracy theories about jury decision-making (Ob 4) To explore how individual differences affect the pathways between conspiracy beliefs about violent reactions and jury decision-making (Ob 5)
6	General Discussion	Discussion of all studies	Address objectives in relation to study findings (Ob 1-5)

Research Programme

To begin, Chapter 2 set out to explore the influence of conspiracy beliefs on cyber and political violence. Early research in the area demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs are positively associated with violence (e.g., Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Study 1 sought to replicate these links, but also extend this work and consider whether conspiracy beliefs *uniquely* predict violent reactions. This is important when considering appropriate interventions to target violent extremism. For this reason, Study 1 aimed to explore whether a link between conspiracy beliefs and violence remains when controlling for other known predictors of violence.

To enable a clearer understanding of the influence of conspiracy theories on violence to be achieved, it was important to control for aggression (Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). Aggression refers to behaviour that is meant to harm another who does not wish to be harmed, and violence is a form of behavioural aggression intended to inflict extreme harm (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Individual differences in aggression, referred to as *trait* aggression - differences in interpersonal interactions such as physical aggression (Bushman & Wells, 1998) - has been demonstrated as an effective predictor of aggressive behaviour (Anderson et al., 2008) in addition to being positively associated with the support for political violence (Kalmoe, 2014) and cyber violence (Escortell et al., 2020; Kokkinos et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2020; Zhang & Zhao, 2020). Thus, exploring whether conspiracy beliefs uniquely predict cyber and political violence - even when controlling for aggression - could provide a more robust understanding of conspiracy beliefs. Study 1 predicted that conspiracy beliefs, whilst controlling for measures of aggression, would be a significant, unique predictor of cyber violence and support for political violence.

Political violence exemplifies intergroup conflict and can be influenced by conspiracy beliefs (Barkun, 2017). Intergroup conspiracy beliefs (e.g., antisemitic conspiracy theories about Jewish world economic domination) bloom during periods of political uncertainty (Kofta et al., 2020), can lead to scapegoating of marginalised people, and increased intergroup conflict (Bilewicz & Krzeminski, 2010). Immigrants are a marginalised group that face increasing violence (McDonald, 2018). Examples range from violent protests against the housing of refugees in British hotels (Khan-Ruf, 2023) to deadly mass shootings in the New Zealand and the United States (Obaidi et al., 2022). Many of these violent reactions have been related to the *Great Replacement* conspiracy theory that warns of the replacement of White populations by immigrants (Obaidi et al., 2022). This perceived threat posed by immigrants as conspirators, may increase the justification of violence towards them, making this an important area of research. Using an experimental design, Chapter 3 (Study 2) set out to test if *exposure* to immigrant conspiracy theories increased violent reactions towards immigrants.

Another important aspect when investigating immigrant conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions is to understand the *mechanisms* between belief and violence. As such, it is important to test possible mediation pathways to explain *how* the effects between the independent and dependant variables occur (Hayes, 2013; MacKinnon et al., 2007). Study 2 employed three possible mediators—state aggression, blatant dehumanisation of immigrants, and collective British victimhood. It was predicted that exposure to conspiracy theories (vs control) would increase general political violence (political protest violence and political violence) and violent reactions (willingness and acceptance) towards immigrants, with the effects explained by mediating factors relating to state aggression, blatant immigrant dehumanisation, and collective British victimhood.

Individual differences in the form of political ideology are also important to consider in the conspiracy—violence link, in particular, Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). RWA and SDO can work as a dual-processing system whereby RWA predicts deference to authority (Altemeyer, 1998) and SDO predicts beliefs in a hierarchical group-based social system (Pratto & Shih, 2000). RWA and SDO are both related to prejudice and intergroup attitudes (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Ho et al., 2012) and have also been associated with conspiracy beliefs (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014; Swami, 2012). In Chapter 4 (Studies 3 and 4), an experimental design was used to examine whether exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants (Study 3) and, more specifically, Muslim immigrants (Study 4), increased violent reactions. It was also central to understand how individual differences affect this pathway in these studies, therefore trait aggression, RWA and SDO were included as possible moderators. Moderation analysis tests the magnitude of effects between two related variables (Hayes, 2013). Unlike mediators that inform *how* a relationship between two variables is constructed, moderators inform *when* these relationships are stronger or weaker (Karazsia & Berlin, 2018).

Study 3 predicted that exposure to conspiracy theories, related to the importing of terrorism by immigrants, would inspire the justified use of violence (violence acceptance and violent intent) towards immigrants. It was also predicted that these effects would be enhanced by personality variables; physical aggression, SDO, and RWA. Study 4 replicated the design of Study 3 but with focused more specifically at *Muslim* immigrants since this group has associated with conspiracy theories such as the infiltration of refugees by terrorists from Islamic countries (Marchlewska et al., 2018). Study 4 hypothesised that exposure to conspiracy theories about Muslim immigrants would increase violent reactions (motivation and willingness), but these effects could be conditional on SDO, RWA and trait anger.

One of the key objectives of this thesis is to understand how intergroup conspiracy beliefs influence target groups who are associated with conspiracy theories. Another domain where negative outcomes may occur is the criminal justice system, particularly jury decision-making. The purpose of a jury in England and Wales is to call upon regular citizens to evaluate evidence in court, deliberate on the evidence presented, and then decide whether or not a defendant is guilty or not guilty. However, this process can be influenced by extra-legal factors such as individual biases and intergroup relations which can lead to miscarriages of justice (Curley et al., 2022; Hunt, 2015). For instance, biased beliefs towards ethnic groups (e.g., Black people and their use of weapons and violence) has led to more punitive outcomes for Black defendants (e.g., Roberts, 2016). Moreover, confirmation bias (i.e., seeking information to confirm existing beliefs, Nickerson, 1998) may relieve cognitive dissonance experienced by jurors who are overwhelmed by the criminal justice environment (Curley et al., 2022). When aligned with existing beliefs, conspiratorial accounts of an event were judged more believable, suggesting that confirmation bias occurs within conspiracy theorising (e.g., Leman & Cinnirella, 2007). Therefore, much like biased beliefs about Black people and violence, it is plausible that such beliefs about the nature of Muslim immigrants and terrorism, may influence jury decision-making.

Therefore, Chapter 5 (Studies 5 and 6) investigated the influence of Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs in jury decision-making. Study 5 used a correlational design to explore the relationships between conspiracy beliefs (Muslim immigrant and general) and the likelihood of guilt towards two defendant types—British citizen and Muslim immigrant. It was predicted that a higher likelihood of guilt scores towards Muslim immigrant defendants would be predicted by general and Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs. Also, general (but not Muslim) conspiracy beliefs would predict the likelihood of guilt scores towards British citizen defendants. These relationships are predicted to be moderated by SDO. Study 6 then

used these correlational findings to inform an experimental design to test how conspiracy beliefs (Muslim immigrant and general worldview) influence the decision of mock jurors across three subjective outcomes—likelihood of guilt, length of custodial sentence, and likelihood of rehabilitation. SDO was included as a possible moderator of these pathways. It was predicted that when the defendant is a Muslim immigrant (vs British Muslim and vs British), the attribution of guilt and penalty will be higher for those who believe in conspiracy theories, with the opposite effect on rehabilitation.

Finally, Chapter 6 summarises the 6 studies of this thesis and revisits the objectives set out. Specifically, there is discussion outlining how conspiracy beliefs are linked to violence and jury decision-making and how individual differences contribute to these links. Moreover, the implications of this research will be explained in relation to political violence, intergroup violence, and jury bias. Finally, the limitations and future directions will be discussed.

Chapter 2:

The Role of Conspiracy Beliefs in Predicting Political and Cyber Violence

Chapter Summary

Conspiracy beliefs have been shown to influence a wide variety of negative social outcomes, including reduced intentions for vaccine use and increased prejudice towards minority groups. Emerging work is also finding links between conspiracy beliefs and violence. However, it is important to explore the isolated influence of conspiracy beliefs. As a starting point, Study 1 ($N = 202$) aimed to explore whether conspiracy beliefs *uniquely* influence cyber violence and support for political violence when controlling for a crucial predictor of violence—aggression. Specifically, this correlational study measured beliefs in conspiracy theories as a predictor variable of cyber violence (e.g., any form of online harassment or threats) and support for political violence. Also included were measures of trait aggression to control for known predictors of violent behaviour. Results demonstrated that conspiracy theories can play a unique role in support for political violence, at least when considering aggression. The synthesis of conspiracy theories and political ideology may offer insights into reducing political violence by addressing conspiracy beliefs.

Introduction

Conspiracy beliefs refers to the attribution of blame for complex political and social events at the hands of secretive, malevolent groups (Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). van Prooijen and Douglas (2018) describe conspiracy beliefs as sharing attributes with intergroup conflict—strong ingroup identity coupled with the perception of outgroup threat—that influences attitudes (e.g., prejudice), emotions (e.g., fear) and behaviour (e.g., violence). Moreover, conspiracy beliefs are linked to the idea of perceived and existential threat; therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that conspiracy theories proliferate among groups involved in the conflict (see Douglas et al., 2019; Pipes, 1997; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Considering the risk of violence from ongoing intergroup conflict, it is necessary to investigate the role of conspiracy beliefs in politically motivated violent conflict. In addition, considering how conspiracy theories are communicated online (Mahl et al., 2023), and thus, understanding the role of conspiracy beliefs in the digital world, may shed light on the links between conspiracy beliefs and cyber violence. These were the aims of the current chapter.

Conspiracy Theories and Political Violence

Researchers have begun investigating how conspiracy beliefs may influence offline violent behaviour. For instance, during the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, conspiracy theories relating to the connection between 5G towers and COVID-19 became widespread (Jolley & Paterson, 2020). Jolley and Paterson (2020) provide evidence that belief in 5G COVID-19 conspiracy theories was positively associated with a willingness for real-world and hypothetical violence, alongside intent to engage in similar future behaviours. Rottweiler and Gill (2020) also demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs were positively correlated with intentions towards violent extremism. Similarly, those with a general conspiracist worldview are more likely to engage with non-normative or illegal political actions (Imhoff et al., 2021). Arguably, politically motivated violence is an example of non-normative political behaviour,

which has also been shown to be connected with belief in conspiracy theories (Uscinski & Parent, 2014).

Indeed, politically motivated violence is an example of intergroup conflict and is sometimes influenced by conspiratorial discourse (e.g., Barkun, 2017). The World Health Organisation defines political violence as the deliberate use of force or power to achieve political goals and can include physical and psychological acts to injure or intimidate people (WHO, 2002). Political violence is often born out of institutional obstacles or inequalities that might occur between groups, as witnessed during *The Troubles* in Northern Ireland (Cairns & Darby, 1998). Political violence erodes trust and creates uncertainty between groups who are in conflict with each other, thus leading to further violence (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2019). Such conditions are ripe for the adoption of intergroup conspiracy beliefs.

According to Gøtzsche-Astrup (2019), feelings of uncertainty predict political violence. Uncertainty also features prominently within conspiracy theory literature (e.g., Douglas & Sutton, 2015; Jolley & Douglas, 2014; Kofta et al., 2020; Miller, 2020; Silverstein, 2002; van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013). When events create uncertainty, conspiracy theories offer simple explanations for complex situations and are attractive to people with a need for cognitive closure, characterised as a low tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty (Marchlewska et al., 2018). Cognitive closure is also associated with stricter adherence to ingroup norms (Chirumbolo et al., 2004), therefore, such a factor might be prevalent amongst violent extremist group members. Further, extremist groups have also been seen to use conspiracy theories as a way to enhance radicalisation of members (Bartlett & Miller, 2010). Thus, Basit (2021) argues that members with a high need for cognitive closure are more receptive to conspiracy theories and increases adherence to violent ingroup norms, despite the moral conundrum they may experience. This suggests that conspiracy

theories may serve to satisfy psychological and ideological needs that perpetuate cycles of violence between conflicting outgroups (Hebel-Sela et al., 2022).

Politics provides a stage for clashes of intergroup ideological beliefs characterised by winners or losers and are often associated with conspiracy beliefs (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Uscinski and Parent (2014) found that those who reported high levels of conspiracy beliefs were 50 per cent more likely to endorse political violence as an acceptable way to communicate disagreement with the government. Other work has shown that conspiracy beliefs tend to be stronger in those who hold more extreme political views on both the left and right wings of the political spectrum (van Prooijen et al., 2015). Supporting such empirical work, conspiracy theories have been identified by the FBI as motivating domestic terror in the United States (FBI, 2019). Similarly, a report about the effects of conspiracy theories on extremist groups - by the American Counterterrorism Targeting and Resilience Institute (ACTRI; Mohammed et al., 2020) - highlights the threats to safety posed by domestic groups such as Antifa and QAnon that are examples of left and right-wing ideology, respectively. QAnon is perhaps a perfect example of how a conspiracy theory, born and disseminated in cyberspace, results in offline violence.

The far-right QAnon movement developed after the posting of online messages, purported to be from an individual who presented themselves as a “deep state” whistle blower working as an agent for the American people by exposing the governmental elites (Kaplan, 2021). QAnon members also endorsed Donald Trump’s conspiracy theory of a corrupt 2020 election and went on to participate in riots at the US Capitol building on 6 January 2022, resulting in multiple deaths and injuries (Armaly et al., 2022; Kaplan, 2021; Rubin et al., 2021). It is plausible that this political violence was partly the result of online conspiracy theory echo chambers, leading to increased polarisation (Del Vicario et al., 2016; Zollo et al.,

2015) and conspiracy theory radicalisation (Abdalla Mikhaeil & Baskerville, 2023), resulting in real-world violence.

Akin to the religious element associated with Islamic extremism and violence, Armaly et al. (2022) found that Christian nationalism was associated with support for the Capitol riots, along with White racial identity, perceived victimhood and conspiracy beliefs. Armaly et al. (2022) points out that White supremacy is strongly associated with White identity and demonstrated by far-right groups, such as the Proud Boys, who promote political violence. Analysis of recruitment material of both radical far-right and Islamic groups found the inclusion of conspiracy theory narratives. This is enhanced in groups that promote the use of political violence to further the group's goals (Rousis et al., 2022). A relevant concept, then, is collective narcissism—which is the concept that in-group greatness depends on the recognition of others—and was found to be a predictor of conspiracy beliefs about out-groups (Cichocka et al., 2016). A meta-analysis found that people high in collective narcissism and conspiracy beliefs are more likely to support leaders who embody right-wing authoritarian values and demonstrate a willingness for violence towards groups denounced by such leaders (Golec de Zavala et al., 2022). It is therefore not surprising that collective narcissism was also found to be associated with support for the Capitol riots (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021), which was perpetrated by many members of extremist white supremacist groups, such as the Proud Boys.

The growing consensus in recent literature indicates a need for the inclusion of conspiracy beliefs within theoretical frameworks to explain political violence in current times (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2022; Vegetti & Littvay, 2022). Perpetrators of many extreme violent attacks (e.g., Oslo and Utøya Island in Norway) mentioned conspiracy theories such as the *white genocide* or *great replacement* conspiracy theory in their manifestoes. The conspiracy

theory is rooted Nazi-era propaganda and alleges the organised ‘replacement’ of White Western people through immigration (Obaidi et al., 2022). Although such events can be viewed as rare and extreme violent occurrences perpetrated by “lone wolf” attackers, the associated conspiracy driven ideology thrives within the communities that endorse extreme political views (Hebel-Sela et al., 2022; Kaplan, 2021; Rousis et al., 2022; van Prooijen et al., 2015). It is therefore imperative to continue investigations to help us understand how conspiracy theories are communicated, consumed and how this influences political violence during increasingly uncertain times. Although general societal violence has declined through the years, political violence remains prevalent (Kalmoe, 2014). Consequently, understanding how conspiracy beliefs may be contributing to the continuance of political violence is important.

Conspiracy Beliefs and Cyber Violence

Considering the realm of conspiracy theories within digital media and online spaces (see Mahl et al., 2022), it is plausible that conspiracy beliefs may influence cyber violence. Cyber violence is characterised as any digital action that threatens another person’s psychological, emotional or physical wellbeing (Alotaibi & Mukred, 2022). The term cyber violence includes other aggressive digital activities such as cyber harassment, cyber stalking, cyber bullying and cyber abuse (Grigg, 2012), and can include social media, mobile phones, blogs and email (Sabella et al., 2013). Another characterisation of aggressive digital behaviour, with the intention to cause distress in digital spaces, is referred to as *trolling* (Sest & March, 2017). Cyber violence might also be viewed as an extension of traditional face-to-face behaviour, but with some differences due to the lack of physical contact within digital spaces.

Cyber bullying might be a logical progression of traditional face-to-face bullying in a world that has migrated into digital spaces since both are forms of aggression or violence. Although there are many similarities between the two, cyber bullying differs from traditional or offline bullying in important ways. Cyber bullying is distinguishable due to the anonymity, lack of supervision and ongoing accessibility to victims through digital platforms (Sabella et al., 2013). Another facet that differentiates cyber bullying is that the status of perpetrator and victim is less distinct, whereas offline bullying tends to have clear aggressors and aggressor targets (Law et al., 2012). For example, in cyber violence, two people can mutually engage in sending and receiving aggressive messages or trolling behaviour. However, due to physical power imbalances, this is less likely to occur in offline spaces. Interestingly, people who have experienced bullying were found to have increased conspiracy beliefs (Jolley & Lantian, 2022).

Since physical power balances are not a factor in acts of cyber violence, there is a need to understand the factors that influence perpetration of aggressive cyber behaviour and if conspiracy beliefs might contribute in some way. As with traditional face-to-face violence-based behaviour, the literature suggests some trait personality factors that predict cyber violence (Escortell et al., 2020; Kokkinos et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2020; Zhang & Zhao, 2020). It would be plausible to assume trait aggression as playing a role in cyber violence but, due to the omittance of physical power imbalance factors, only certain sub traits might influence acts of cyber violence. This is perhaps demonstrated by Escortell et al. (2020) who found that preadolescent cyber bullies did not reflect particularly high aggressive traits, although this has the potential to change through adolescent development. In China, however, trait anger was found to be a strong, positive predictor of cyber bullying in adolescents (Yang et al., 2022). Similarly, a study of Korean middle school children (M_{age} = 13 years) found predicters of cyber bullying include previous experience of offline bullying or victimisation,

longer use of internet, and aggression (You & Lim, 2016). Much of the literature related to cyber violence tends to focus on school age children but such violence can also occur in adult populations.

Indeed, cyber dating abuse research highlights how cyber violence can be expressed in adults. Cyber dating abuse is characterised by abusive behaviour perpetrated within romantic partner relationships, using technology (Wolford-Clevenger et al., 2016) and includes behaviour such as, cyber stalking, threats, image-based abuse (i.e., "*revenge porn*"), impersonation, and verbal abuse (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). Deans and Bhogal (2019) found that, of all the aggression sub traits, hostility was the most prominent predicter of cyber dating abuse. Within the development and validation of a cyber abuse measurement scale, an item '*sending and/or uploading photos, images and/or videos with intimate or sexual content without permission*' (i.e., revenge porn) was found to be a form of direct aggression. This demonstrates how offline forms of aggression can evolve into the online aggressive outcomes and vice versa.

Whilst the internet is not believed to have increased beliefs in conspiracy theories (Uscinski et al., 2018), it may be detrimental to intergroup relations due to conspiratorial narrative within homogenous online group discussion, i.e. echo chambers (Bessi et al., 2015). Such conspiratorial narratives tend to increase in negativity with increased user engagement, particularly between polarised online communities (Bessi et al., 2015; Zollo et al., 2015). This may have implications for people who are perceived as conspirators, who might then experience increased cyber violence and abuse. For instance, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, instances of online Sinophobia—prejudice against Chinese people and culture—increased rapidly in cyber spaces. Sakki and Castrén (2022) used discursive methods to investigate how Sinophobic conspiracy theories harnessed humour in cyber

spaces to dehumanise Chinese people, portraying them as a threat and deserving of violence. Moreover, engagement within online conspiratorial echo chambers that is driven by social identity between users, is suggested to increase the risk of online radicalisation (Abdalla Mikhaeil & Baskerville, 2023).

The characteristics of online spaces, through increased access to targets and the provision of anonymity (Sabella et al., 2013), can support aggressive online behaviours such as cyber bullying (Law, et al., 2012), trolling (Sest & March, 2017) and cyber dating abuse (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). Aggressive cyber behaviour also has the potential to spill over into offline, in-person violence (Ojanen et al., 2015). Furthermore, online spaces can develop into conspiracist echo chambers that lead to increased polarisation, radicalisation, and have consequences for online communities viewed as conspirators (Abdalla Mikhaeil & Baskerville, 2023; Del Vicario et al., 2016; Sakki & Castrén, 2022; Zollo et al., 2015). It is imperative to understand the role of conspiracy beliefs within online spaces and if there may be implications for cyber violence, particularly if this also threatens the safety of people in offline spaces.

Current Research

The emerging empirical work linking conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions has typically explored simple (correlational) relationships between the concepts without controlling for other factors (e.g., Uscinski & Parent, 2014; Vegetti & Littvay, 2022) or if the simple relationship is *strengthened* by other variables (e.g., Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). However, exploring whether conspiracy beliefs play a *unique* role in predicting violent reactions when controlling for other factors is key before we assert that conspiracy beliefs may motivate violent reactions. Thus, the current research sought to replicate the past research and extend the work. Understanding the role of conspiracy theories is important

when developing interventions targeting political violence and extremism. It is, therefore, paramount to explore whether a link between conspiracy beliefs and violence remains when controlling for other known predictors of violence.

There are numerous factors that could be controlled to examine the isolated influence of conspiracy beliefs on violent reactions. As a starting point, however, it is proposed that one important candidate to control for in the first instance, enabling a clearer understanding of the influence of conspiracy theories to be gained, is aggression (e.g., Jolley & Paterson, 2020). Aggression refers to behaviour meant to harm another who does not wish to be harmed, and violence is a form of behavioural aggression intended to inflict extreme harm (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). A specific component of aggression is *trait* aggression, which refers to individual differences in aggression, including interpersonal interactions such as physical aggression, which can range from low-level harm to violent criminal behaviour (Bushman & Wells, 1998). Trait aggression is an effective predictor of aggressive behaviour (Anderson et al., 2008) in addition to being positively associated with the support for political violence (Kalmoe, 2014) and cyber violence (Escortell et al., 2020; Kokkinos et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2020; Zhang & Zhao, 2020). Thus, exploring whether conspiracy beliefs predict political violence - even when controlling for aggression - could provide a more robust understanding of conspiracy beliefs as a precursor to political evidence.

Study 1

The first study in the thesis set out to investigate the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and violence. In particular, the investigation focuses on the role of conspiracy beliefs across two violent aspects—cyber violence and support for political violence. Participants completed two measures of conspiracy beliefs, namely, *general* conspiracy beliefs that measure a general propensity to endorse conspiracy narratives (e.g., governments hide information from the public; Brotherton et al., 2013) as well as *specific* conspiracy theories

that measure specific events that have been associated with conspiracy theories (e.g., 9/11 conspiracy theories; Douglas & Sutton, 2011). Furthermore, participants completed two measures of trait aggression to enable a test of the unique predictive power of conspiracy beliefs to be explored. The first was The Brief Aggression Questionnaire (BAQ) which measures four facets of trait aggression—physical aggression, anger, verbal aggression, and hostility (Webster et al., 2015). Unlike the BAQ, which measures direct aggression, the Displaced Aggression Questionnaire (DAQ) measures indirect aggression - angry rumination, revenge planning and behavioural displaced aggression (Denson et al., 2006). Densen et al. (2006) explain this concept of aggression as targeted towards an innocent party, rather than the original provocateur. Participants also answered two outcome violent measures—cyber violence (cyber bullying adapted from Thomas et al., 2018) and support for political violence (adapted from Uscinski & Parent, 2014). It was predicted that conspiracy beliefs, whilst controlling for measures of aggression, would be a significant, unique predictor of cyber violence and support for political violence.

Method

Participation and Design

Participants *(N* = 202; M_{age} = 30.66, *SD* = 12.29; 41 men and 161 women) were recruited via a student online recruitment platform at a university, as well as social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in 2019. All participants were above the age of 18 and UK residents. The predictor variables comprised measures of conspiracy theories (general and specific), direct trait aggression (anger, hostility, verbal aggression, and physical aggression) and displaced aggression (angry rumination, revenge planning, behavioural displaced aggression) and demographic controls (age and gender). The criterion variables were a measure of support for political violence and cyber violence. Assuming a small to medium-sized effect size (R^2 = .08) for a ten-predictor variable regression required a

minimum sample size of approximately 197 participants for 80 per cent power of detecting the effect using GPower (Faul et al., 2007).

Materials and Procedure

Participants provided informed consent before commencing the questionnaire (see Appendix 1 to 3). First, participants completed the Brief Aggression Questionnaire (Webster et al., 2015), where they indicated their level of agreement on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The measure comprises 12 items, divided into four sub-scales of three questions: Physical Aggression (e.g. "*Given enough provocation, I may hit another person."; α* = .83), Anger (e.g. *"Sometimes I fly off the handle for no good reason."*; *α* = .67), Verbal Aggression (e.g. *"When people annoy me, I may tell them what I think of them."*; *α* = .75), and Hostility (e.g. *"I sometimes feel that people are laughing at me behind my back."*; *α* = .70).

Participants then completed the Displaced Aggression Questionnaire (Denson et al., 2006), where they indicated their level of agreement using a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The measure includes 31 items that are divided into three sub-scales: Angry Rumination (10 items, e.g. *"I keep thinking about events that angered me for a long time"; α* = .95), Revenge Planning (11 items, e.g. *"I often daydream about situations where I'm getting my own back at people"*; *α* = .91), and Displaced Aggression (10 items, e.g. *"When feeling bad, I take it out on others."*; *α* = .93).

Participants then completed two conspiracy beliefs measures indicating their level of agreement using a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The first measured a tendency to engage in general conspiracy theorising—general conspiracy beliefs (Brotherton et al., 2013), comprised of 15 items (e.g. *"The government manipulate, fabricate, or suppress evidence to deceive the public."* α = .95). The second was a measure of specific

conspiracy beliefs (modified from Douglas & Sutton, 2011) - comprised of 6 items (e.g., *"Scientists are creating panic about climate change because it is in their interests to do so* α = .83*).*

Finally, participants completed measures of cyber violence and support for political violence. Cyber violence was measured on an 8-item scale (Thomas et al., 2018) that provided some explanation about the characteristics of cyber aggression. Participants were asked to reflect upon their online behaviour - as individuals or within groups - during the preceding 3 months, then complete their responses to questions (e.g., *Sent or posted, mean or hurtful pictures/videos about someone;* α = .77). The responses for the cyber violence scale differed from other measures since the questions measured previous online behaviours (*0 = I have not done this; 1 = once or twice; 2 = every few weeks; 3 = about once a week; 4 = several times a week or more*). To measure support for political violence, participants completed a two-item scale adapted from Uscinski and Parent (2014); "*Violence is sometimes an acceptable way to express disagreement with the government.*" and "*Violence is an acceptable way to stop politically extreme groups in our country from doing harm*."). Participants indicating their agreement on a seven-point scale in (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*). Presentation of all measures was counterbalanced, and once complete, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

Data Checking

First, gender differences between men (n = 41) and women (n = 161) were explored using a Mann Whitney U test of difference. Men measured significantly higher than women with respect to physical aggression (men M = 3.46; women M 2.57; Z = -2.90; p = .004), revenge planning (men M = 2.32; women M = 1.98; Z = -2.22; p = .027), cyber violence (men

M = 1.40; women *M* = 1.20; Z = -2.85; *p* = .004), and support for political violence (men *M* = 3.09; women *M* = 2.12; *Z* = -3.54; *p* < .001). Correlations between all remaining variables and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Conspiracy beliefs (general and specific) were significantly and positively correlated with all aggression elements of the BAG (physical aggression, anger, verbal aggression, hostility), DAQ (angry rumination, revenge planning, behavioural displaced aggression), and criterion variables, cyber violence, and support for political violence. As expected, significant, positive correlations were found between all trait aggression, cyber-aggression, and support for political violence variables. Age was significantly and negatively correlated with hostility, angry rumination, revenge planning, displaced aggression, and cyber-aggression. As age and gender were linked with the variables of interest, these demographic variables were controlled for in the subsequent analyses.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlations for all variables in Study 1 (n = 202).

	Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Age	30.66 (12.29)	-	-.10	-.20**	-.06	-.07	-.13	-.40***	-.23***	-.22**	-.27***	-.28***	-.09
2	General conspiracy beliefs	3.95 (1.41)		-	.80***	.22**	.16*	.20**	.25***	.13	.21**	.28***	.13	.24***
3	Specific conspiracy beliefs	3.06 (1.43)			-	.18*	.16*	.19**	.33***	.16**	.26***	.29***	.16*	.24***
4	Physical Aggression BAQ	2.75 (1.66)				-	.37***	.48***	.23**	.30***	.46***	.31***	.23**	.41***
5	Anger BAQ	2.54 (1.19)					-	.29***	.31***	.40***	.46***	.50***	.28***	.16**
6	Verbal Aggression BAQ	3.84 (1.40)						-	.31***	.25***	.33***	.29***	.21**	.21**
7	Hostility BAQ	3.22 (1.47)							-	.51***	.49***	.47***	.24**	.17**
8	Angry Ruminate DAQ	3.51 (1.61)								-	.54***	.59***	.17**	.15**
9	Revenge Planning DAQ	2.05 (0.98)									-	.56***	.43***	.32***
10	Displaced Aggression DAQ	2.49 (1.28)										-	.25***	.16**
11	Cyber violence	1.22 (0.32)											-	.21**
12	Political Violence	2.32 (1.43)												-

Notes. * $p < .050$. ** $p <$. 010. *** $p <$. 001.

Hypothesis Testing

Initial checks uncovered evidence of considerable multicollinearity between the two measures of conspiracy beliefs (VIFs > 2.80). Such a VIF is above the threshold indicated by Johnston et al. (2018) as showing considerable multicollinearity. To address this issue, regression analyses were run separately for general and specific conspiracy beliefs. Thus, four multiple, linear regression models were tested with support for political violence and cyber violence as outcome variables. In the first two models (model 1 and model 2), two three-step hierarchical, multiple linear regressions were undertaken to test the hypothesis that conspiracy beliefs (general and specific, respectively), alongside known predictors (such as physical aggression) and demographics (age and gender), predict cyber violence. In the second two models (model 3 and model 4), two three-step hierarchical, multiple linear regressions were undertaken to test the hypothesis that conspiracy beliefs (general and specific, respectively), alongside known predictors (such as physical aggression), predict the support for political violence.

Predicting Cyber Violence

In regression Models 1 and 2 (see Table 2), predictors of cyber violence were tested within the framework of general and specific conspiracy beliefs, respectively. In Step 1, gender and age predicted cyber violence, with younger men being most likely to engage. In Step 2 and Step 3, gender, age, revenge planning, and anger all significantly predicted cyber violence. General conspiracy beliefs (Model 1), specific conspiracy beliefs (Model 2), behavioural displaced aggression, angry rumination, hostility, verbal aggression, and physical aggression were all non-significant predictors of cyber violence

Table 2

Hierarchical regression predicting cyber violence utilising gender, age, trait physical aggression, anger, verbal aggression, hostility, angry rumination, revenge planning, displaced aggression, general conspiracy beliefs (Model 1) and specific conspiracy beliefs (Model 2) in Study 1 (n = 202).

	Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	
1	Age	-.27***	-.21**	-.21	-.21**
1	Gender	-.23***	-.19**	-.18**	-.19**
2	Physical Aggression	-	-.04	-.04	-.04
2	Anger	-	.15*	.15*	.15*
2	Verbal Aggression	-	.06	.06	.06
2	Hostility	-	-.01	-.01	-.01
2	Angry Rumination	-	-.11	-.10	-.10
2	Revenge Planning	-	.34***	.34***	.34***
2	Displaced Aggression	-	.01	.01	.01
3	General conspiracy beliefs	-	-	.02	-
3	Specific conspiracy beliefs	-	-	-	.02
	R^2	.13***	.28***	.28	.28
	R^2 change		.15***	.00	.00

Notes. *p< .05. **p <. 01. ***p <. 001.
Criterion: Cyber violence

Predicting Support for Political Violence

In regression Models 3 and 4 (see Table 3), predictors of support for political violence were tested within the framework of general and specific conspiracy beliefs, respectively. In Step 1, gender but not age, predicted the support for political violence. In Step 2, gender and physical aggression were positive, significant predictors of the support for political violence; age, anger, verbal aggression, hostility, angry rumination, revenge planning, and displaced

aggression were all non-significant. In Step 3, general conspiracy beliefs (Model 3) and specific conspiracy beliefs (Model 4), respectively emerged as a positive, significant predictors of support for political violence, along with gender and physical aggression.

Table 3

Hierarchical regression predicting the support for political violence utilising gender, age, trait physical aggression, anger, verbal aggression, hostility, angry rumination, revenge planning, displaced aggression, general conspiracy beliefs (Model 3) and specific conspiracy beliefs (Model 4) in Study 1 (n = 202).

	Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	
1	Age	-.09	-.03	-.03	-.02
1	Gender	-.30**	-.18**	-.18**	-.18**
2	Physical Aggression	-	.30***	.30***	.30***
2	Anger	-	-.00	-.00	-.00
2	Verbal Aggression	-	.00	-.01	-.01
2	Hostility	-	.04	.01	.01
2	Angry Rumination	-	-.03	-.00	-.01
2	Revenge Planning	-	.16 ¥	.16 ¥	.15
2	Displaced Aggression	-	-.01	-.05	-.04
3	General conspiracy beliefs	-	-	.15*	-
3	Specific conspiracy beliefs	-	-		.16*
	R^2	.08***	.23***	.25*	.25*
	R^2 change		.14***	.02*	.02*

Notes. *$p < .050$. **$p <$. 010. ***$p <$. 001.
Criterion: Support for political violence

To test the robustness of both these significant models, diagnostic analysis was undertaken to check for assumption violations and model validity. No multi-collinearity or outliers were detected, and the distribution fell within normal levels. Scatter plots were produced to check for heteroscedasticity and curvilinearity, of which none were detected. To check for multivariate outliers, a plot of Leverage against Cook's distance to taken, of which none were detected. Model validity was tested by producing an alternative R^2 value using the PRESS statistic (Model 3 R^2_{PRESS} = 0. 141; Model 4 R^2_{PRESS} = 0. 140). These diagnostic tests support the robustness and validity of regression models 1 and 2. The results of Models 3 and 4 showcase that, when controlling for known predictors of violence such as trait aggression, both general and specific conspiracy beliefs, respectively, emerge as significant, positive predictors of support for political violence.

General Discussion

The aim of Study 1 was to investigate whether conspiracy beliefs (general and specifics) were a *unique* predictor of cyber violence and support for political violence. In this instance conspiracy beliefs did not predict cyber violence. In contrast, conspiracy beliefs—a general tendency and specific conspiracy beliefs - were predictors of political violence even when controlling for various measures of aggression. Demonstrating how conspiracy theories can play a unique role in support for political violence, at least when considering aggression, is notable because it further showcases the potentially damaging contribution of conspiracy beliefs. It is also timely, because it further demonstrates the potentially damaging contribution of conspiracy beliefs during a time when far-right groups are gaining political support within the mainstream.

For instance, the German Reichsburger group—known to have killed a police officer in 2016 - has increased membership from 10,000 in 2016 to 23,000 in 2022 (Goldberg,

2022). This group endorses similar conspiracy ideology to the US QAnon movement and is banned in Germany due to their far-right extremist ideology and known propensity for violence (Amadeu Antonio Foundation, 2021). Members of this group were recently arrested following an investigation into a coup plot against the German government (Kirby, 2022). These types of conspiracy ideology are in line with the *radicalising multiplier* thesis put forward by Bartlett and Miller (2010) and the findings of this study highlights this relationship between conspiracy beliefs and support for political violence on both extremes of the political spectrum, and extremist religious groups. Importantly, these findings further demonstrate the importance of including conspiracy beliefs in frameworks to explain current political violence behaviour (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2022; Vegetti & Littvay, 2022).

This work also supports the work in the US, which found that those who reported high levels of conspiracy beliefs were 50 per cent more likely to endorse political violence as an acceptable way to communicate disagreement with the government (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Scholars warn that conspiracy theories are promoted by radical violent extremists (Rousis et al., 2022) and should be considered a contributing factor to the incitement of political violence (Kruglanski, Molinario, Ellenberg, et al., 2022). Therefore, this work underscores the importance of considering conspiracy theories such as QAnon in volent extremism since conspiracy theories may play a *unique* role in predicting violent intent when accounting for aggression.

Limitations and Future Directions

The dissemination and proliferation of conspiracy theories in digital spaces (Douglas et al., 2019) and links to violent intentions (Uscinski & Parent, 2014) suggests conspiracy theories may contribute cyber violence. Within the context of this study, conspiracy beliefs did not feature as a predicter of cyber violence. Whilst this these findings are positive; it is

worth reflecting on the validity of using the measure that was selected and adapted from Thomas et al. (2018). The scale was developed as a cyber bullying measure and validated for use with adolescent samples, whereas the participants in this study were adults. Some researchers argue that measures need to be age appropriate due to language differences (Jolley et al., 2021), particularly when measuring cyber violence at different stages of development (Williford & DePaolis, 2019). For future, it would be appropriate to use online aggression scales that have been used with adult participants, such as the measures used by Xu et al. (2016). It is also possible that, within the context of the cyber model, conspiracy beliefs were more generalised and did not point the finger of blame towards a specific group of conspirators. Whereas, in the support for political violence, the conspiracy beliefs were directed as perceived conspirators—namely, the government. Future directions might consider incorporating an online target group that might be associated with conspiracy theories, to measure cyber violence.

Future research could attend to some of the limitations of this work. An experimental design would build upon these correlational findings and provide a more robust understanding of the impact of conspiracy beliefs and support for violence. Since 2012, hate crime in the United Kingdom has been increasing at an alarming rate, particularly in the racially and religiously motived category which comprises 49% overall (UK Home Office, 2022). These statistics indicate a necessity to investigate the effects of specific conspiracy beliefs targeted at groups perceived as conspirators, particularly when the group demographics include characteristics of race and religion (e.g., Muslim immigrants).

Finally, whilst there is evidence that the *links* between conspiracy beliefs and violence remain after controlling for aggression, there is an open question on how other known predictors of political violence may interact with conspiracy beliefs. Indeed, previous

research has found that the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and support for violence is conditional on individual differences (e.g., Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). It would be beneficial to explore how other individual difference variables, such as political ideologies, strengthen or weaken the link between conspiracy beliefs and violence. As such, these conclusions should be interpreted with this aspect in mind - conspiracy beliefs play a unique role *when controlling for various measures of aggression*. However, whilst aggression was examined as a control variable to indicate the effects of conspiracy beliefs, it should also be noted that aggression could be linked with conspiracy beliefs and political violence. For example, Jolley and Paterson's (2020) cross-sectional data demonstrated how conspiracy beliefs were positively correlated with anger, which predicted violent reactions. Therefore, now that a unique role of conspiracy beliefs predicting political violence has been established, it would be worth future researchers continuing to examine the conspiracy–anger connection.

Conclusion

In summary, results from Study 1 extend upon the work of Uscinski and Parent (2014) by providing empirical evidence that when controlling for aggression, conspiracy beliefs are a *unique* predictor for the support of political violence. Therefore, this work provides critical insight into the role played by conspiracy beliefs within the context of support for political violence and extremism. This is timely when considering increasing far-right support demonstrated by right-wing political gains in countries such as Italy and Sweden in the 2022 elections. However, this research is a starting point since it has only isolated the effect of conspiracy beliefs and support for political violence when controlling for measures of *aggression*. Future research should consider exploring the isolated effects of conspiracy beliefs as an important research endeavour, and thus, explore other relevant control variables.

These findings provide further evidence that conspiracy beliefs are an essential concept to consider when examining political violence and extremism. Furthermore, when contemplating the worrying increase in far-right violent activity and their endorsement of conspiracy theories, it would be timely to also isolate the specific groups who are viewed as conspirators. For instance, immigrants are central to the *white genocide* or *great replacement* conspiracy theory. It is also important to establish *why* conspiracy beliefs may influence violence, particularly targeted at minority group members. Therefore, Chapter 3 will investigate the role of mediating factors in the relationship between immigrant conspiracy beliefs and support for violence against immigrants.

Chapter 3:

Exploring the Mechanism Between Intergroup Conspiracy Exposure, General Political Violence and Violent Reactions Towards Immigrants

Chapter Summary

Conspiracy beliefs about marginalised groups such as Jewish people have been endorsed by multiple communities, spanning hundreds of years. This is particularly apparent during times of uncertainty or hardship (e.g., economic problems), whereby the finger of blame for these problems may be pointed at these marginalised groups. This scapegoating can increase support for negative behaviours, such as prejudice, towards members of these groups. One such group that has experienced such negativity are immigrants and refugees fleeing to Europe to escape war. The aim of Study 2 (n = 138) was to investigate if exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants increased support for violence against them and violence in general. These effects were expected to be mediated by state physical aggression, dehumanisation of immigrants, and collective British victimhood. Findings demonstrated that participants who were exposed to a fictitious article about immigrants importing terrorism to the United Kingdom reported higher conspiracy beliefs compared with a control. Although exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories was found to increase conspiracy beliefs, no mediating effects were found between exposure and violence (towards immigrants or in general). It is, therefore, important for future research to investigate *when* conspiracy theory exposure could affect political violence and violent reactions towards immigrants.

Introduction

Conspiracy beliefs - attributing blame for political and social events towards secretive, malevolent groups (Rottweiler & Gill, 2020) - have been established as a predictor of political violence (see Chapter 2). Political violence associated with far-right extremist groups is of particular interest due to the risks posed towards target groups, such as immigrants. The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and Europol both highlight the Great Replacement conspiracy theory (closely associated with the White genocide and Eurabia conspiracy theories), commonly endorsed by far-right extremist groups. This is due to the anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant rhetoric driving this ideological belief (Europol, 2020; RAN, 2021). These conspiracy theories propose that White European populations are under existential threat due to immigration and the erosion of traditional family values, which are orchestrated by Jewish cabals (Davey & Ebner, 2019). These groups use dehumanising communications of target groups and justify the use of violence against them due to the perceived in-group threat (Davey & Ebner, 2019; Europol, 2020; RAN, 2021).

Many perpetrators of extreme acts of violence against immigrants, such as Brendan Tarrant (perpetrator of multiple mosque shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019) and Patrick Wood Crusius (perpetrator of the Walmart shooting in El Paso, US, in August 2019), all mentioned the Great Replacement conspiracy theory in their manifestoes (Davey & Ebner, 2019; Manjoo, 2019). Moreover, as demonstrated by Robert Bowers (2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting) and Anders Breivik (2011 Norway attacks), groups viewed as enabling immigration are also potential targets of anti-immigrant violence (Ahmed & Murphy, 2018; Fekete, 2012). With immigration being a topical debate in the UK, it is important to understand more about the association of conspiracy beliefs and violence, particularly the risks posed towards immigrants.

Conspiracy theories have been identified by the FBI as motivating domestic terror in the US, identifying groups such as QAnon as an extremist group (FBI, 2019). QAnon, referring to a conspiracy theory claiming that the deep state is conspiring against Donald Trump, has emerged as a recurring theme in criminal cases related to the January 2021 insurrection at the US Capitol building (Rubin et al., 2021). Although QAnon is a US-based conspiracy theory, the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, which researches far right-wing activity, reports that the QAnon ideology has been adopted by known antisemitic groups in Germany (Amadeu Antonio Foundation, 2021). *Reichsbürger* groups believe that Germany remains at war with the Allies and their aim is to establish sovereignty in Germany. Aside from being associated with antisemitic conspiracy theories, the '*Querdenker*' movement also endorses anti-vax and Covid-19 conspiracy theories. They are known to display the 'Q' sign at rallies that often turn violent (Amadeu Antonio Foundation, 2021). The report on German QAnon activity argues that the QAnon belief in ritualistic child sacrifice feeds into very old antisemitic conspiracies of the same nature (Amadeu Antonio Foundation, 2021). Antisemitic conspiracy theories tend to increase during times of political unrest and uncertainty (Kofta et al., 2020), leading to scapegoating and intergroup conflict (Bilewicz & Krzeminski, 2010). Other minority groups who are also at risk of these sentiments may include immigrants.

Conspiracy Beliefs and Immigrants

Violent behaviour towards immigrants, or those who are perceived as facilitating immigration, have increased (McDonald, 2018). In recent years, some extreme acts of political violence have been aimed at immigrants, with media reports suggesting the influence of conspiracy theories. For instance, *Washington Post* reported that officials in Germany attribute the increase in right-wing aggression on conspiracy theory websites and inflammatory fake news (Faiola & Kirchner, 2017). More recently, *The Guardian* reported on the links between violent events that occurred since 2011 Norway attacks by Anders Breivik

(Rose, 2022). Right-wing terrorists such as Breivik, have referred to the *Great Replacement* conspiracy theory – the belief that White European populations are being deliberately replaced by ethnic immigrants – as a motivating factor for their violence (Davey & Ebner, 2019). This type of anti-immigrant conspiracy theory has been associated with prejudice (Jolley et al., 2020), lower reflective thinking (Jedinger et al., 2023), Islamophobia (Obaidi et al., 2022), and right-wing populism (Puschmann et al., 2022).

In a written statement to the US House Hearing (116th Congress) regarding global terrorist threats, Soufan (2019) also highlighted how much of right-wing extremist ideology is based on the assertion of the "Great Replacement Theory". The Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research on immigration attitudes and conspiratorial thinking in the US, released a report in May 2022. They found that 32 percent of Americans believe that native-born Americans are being replaced with immigrants for electoral gains. Also, 29 percent expressed concern that increased immigration threatens native-born Americans due to a perceived loss of economic, political, and cultural influence. These two key measures underscore the main tenets of the Great Replacement Theory and are widely disseminated across extreme right-wing groups (AP-NORC, 2022). Politically extreme groups tend to disseminate conspiracy theories which promotes beliefs of ingroup victimisation and increases the use of violence to achieve goals (Bartlett & Miller, 2010). Arguably, this suggests that conspiracy beliefs contribute to intergroup political violence in some way.

Conspiracy Theories and (Intergroup) Political Violence

An increase in petrol prices in 2018 was the catalyst for the political protest group that became known as the *Gelits Jaunes* or Yellow Vest Movement in France. The following year the *Gelits Jaunes* took to protest action again when regarding pension reforms. Although these might be viewed as legitimate reasons, these protest actions became the most violent

political protest movement in decades (Shultziner & Kornblit, 2020). Moreover, an IFOP poll for Conspiracy Watch and the Jean Jaures Foundation found the almost half of *Gelits Jaunes* believe in Zionist conspiracies of world domination, the far right-wing great replacement conspiracy theory, and that the French health ministry is plotting with pharmaceutical companies to cover up the dangers of vaccines (France 24, 2018; Wionews, 2019). Although this yellow vest movements share similarity with other *Occupy* movements (e.g., *Occupy Wall Street*) around the world—occupation of public spaces, feelings of socioeconomic inequality—the endorsement of marginalised group conspiracy theories and extreme political protest violence set them apart from other such movements (Shultziner & Kornblit, 2020). When considering that those more inclined to believe conspiracy theories were more likely to defend political violence (Uscinski & Parent, 2014), it is plausible that these beliefs contribute to violent political action.

Political action can be categorized as normative (i.e., utilizing legitimate and democratic means to action changes, for example, voting or authorized strikes) or non-normative (i.e., challenging or violating social rules and norms) with violent protest being the extreme action of non-normative political action (Tausch et al., 2011; Wright et al., 1990). Expressions of political action (normative vs non-normative) are associated with individual differences, ideology, and political attitudes (Kearns et al., 2020). Conspiracy beliefs were found to reduce intentions to vote (Jolley & Douglas, 2014b) which suggests that conspiracy believers might be less inclined to choose normative political action. Imhoff et al. (2021) sought to better understand when conspiracy beliefs lead to political action versus political inaction. Interestingly, people with higher conspiracist worldviews reported lower intentions to engage in normative, legal political action but higher intentions to participate in non-normative, possibly illegal political action (e.g., political protest violence). This makes sense if you consider the conspiracist view that powerful elites are plotting against society.

C*ollective conspiracy mentality* views outgroups as hostile and involves beliefs of existential threats (real or perceived) against the ingroup and ingroup victimization (Soral et al., 2018). Such collective conspiracy mentality and mistrust of the political system might provide justification for violence to defend against a threat perceived against the ingroup. Moreover, conspiracy beliefs might polarize the ingroup towards more extreme political action, such as violence (Bartlett & Miller, 2010).

It is important to understand how conspiracy beliefs influence violence, particularly when immigrants are viewed as conspirators. It may be that a perceived threat posed by an outgroup (e.g., immigrants) might increase conspiracy beliefs about their intentions towards the ingroup, thus motivating the justified use, and support, of violence against immigrant groups and their members. One way of investigating this would be to test if exposure to conspiracy theories increased violent reactions against immigrants, and if that pathway is mediated by other factors. So far, this research area has focussed on correlational methods (see Chapter 2), with a focus on political violence, therefore there is a need to investigate the effects between conspiracy beliefs and violence towards specific target groups within an experimental framework.

Exploring the Mechanisms Between Conspiracy Beliefs and Violence

In addition to explore the casual relationship between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions, it would also be advantageous to understand what factors might mediate the pathway between these concepts. Mediation refers to an intervening variable that is influenced by the independent variable and, in turn, influences the dependent variable (MacKinnon et al., 2007) and helps to explain, *how* effects between factors occur (Hayes, 2013).

One such mediator to consider is trait physical aggression, which is a well-established predicter of violence (see Allen et al., 2018; Bushman, 1995; Bushman & Huesmann, 2006; Kalmoe, 2015, see also Study 1) and is frequently measured on the Buss and Perry (1992) aggression scale. Trait aggression refers to an individual difference that is relatively stable over time, whereas state physical aggression refers to a more temporary state of being (e.g., Spielberger et al., 1999; Wilkowski & Robinson, 2010), which is likely impacted by exposure to stimuli (such as conspiracy exposure). Farrar and Krcmar (2006) argue that using trait measures of aggression lower the magnitude of the relationships between aggression and violence, particularly in short-term studies when priming participants. They successfully carried out a study to test the construct validity and reliability of a trait vs state version of the aggression scale, by rewording items from the aggression scale e.g., "*I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them*" (state) vs "*I would tell this person openly that I disagree with them*" (trait)). By measuring *state* physical aggression, the magnitude of effects was found to be more sensitive to priming than traditional trait aggression (Farrar & Krcmar, 2006). Previous research found that state anger mediated the relationship between conspiracy mentality and the justification and willingness for general violence (Jolley & Paterson, 2020). Therefore, when using exposure to stimuli to prime aggression, it may be more appropriate to measure state as opposed to trait aggression. That way, it can be tested whether *state* physical aggression mediates the relationship between conspiracy exposure and support for violence.

In addition to aggression another known predictor of support for violence against immigrants is dehumanisation. The concept of *dehumanisation* stems mostly from, but not exclusively, research domains of intergroup behaviour, and has been applied in areas such as gender, disability, and race-ethnicity (Haslam, 2006). Dehumanisation is a cognitive process of moral disengagement that views certain groups as more animalistic or mechanistic, than human (Haslam, 2006). It is thought to be a process that relieves feelings of guilt and

increases victim-blaming (Zebel et al., 2008) and is known to precede, and justify, acts of violence towards the outgroup (Denson et al., 2006). Similarly, dehumanising outgroups is found to predict intergroup aggression (Struch & Schwartz, 1989) and can occur simultaneously between two groups engaging in violent conflict (Bruneau & Kteily, 2017). It is also worth noting that dehumanisation can be enacted in subtle responses towards target groups, or in more blatant manners such as using overtly dehumanising language by political leaders (Bruneau et al., 2018). Across 5 studies conducted in 3 countries with multiples target groups, Kteily et al. (2015) tested measures of Blatant dehumanisation, compared with subtle dehumanisation. These studies were conducted in the US (target groups—Chinese, Arab, Hispanic American and African American people), Britain (target group—Muslim people), and Hungary (target group—Roma people) where blatant dehumanisation (vs subtle dehumanisation) was found to be a stronger predicter of hostility and physical aggression (Kteily et al., 2015).

Discussing scapegoating and genocide, Glick (2002a) discusses how anti-Semitism, dehumanisation and conspiracy theories related to financial gain and the spread of diseases, have been experienced by Jewish communities throughout time. Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic was arguably a time rife with conspiracy theories and prejudice against those who were believed to be behind the origins and distribution of the disease (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). Conspiracy theories not only pointed the finger of blame towards Chinese people - since China was the origin site of the virus—but also Italian and Roma people who were associated with the spread of the virus in Europe at the start of the first wave. These conspiracy theories were found to be associated with prejudice towards Chinese, Roma and Italian people, and willingness for violence and anti-government protests (Šrol et al., 2022). Moreover, participants who endorsed anti-Asian conspiracy beliefs were more likely to be politically conservative and dehumanise Asian and Asian-American people (Markowitz et al.,

2021). This demonstrates how conspiracy theories, dehumanisation and violence can be associated, particularly in times of threat.

In addition to aggression and dehumanisation, perceptions of collective violence is also a possible mediating candidate. Collective violence, is defined as "the instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group - whether this group is transitory or has a more permanent identity - against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives" (WHO, 2002, p. 215), and results in collective victimisation of the group that was harmed. The resulting psychological consequence is referred to as *collective victimhood*—the belief that the ingroup has been intentionally harmed by an outgroup (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). Also associated with collective victimisation, is scapegoating (Glick, 2002b). This is a form of prejudice (Allport, 1954) with roots in the frustration-aggression hypothesis, which refers to the aggression that results from the frustration when goals being denied (Dollard et al., 1939). Moreover, during times of widespread national frustration (e.g., economic deprivation), conspiracy theories that point the finger of blame at assumed conspirators (e.g., Jewish people), provide explanations for these problems (Bilewicz et al., 2013). As seen with the Holocaust, such scapegoating can result in extreme collective violence. Many Germans blamed a Jewish conspiracy for loss of World War 1 - known as the 'stab in the back' conspiracy theory (Uscinski et al., 2011) - resulting in economic hardships in Germany. As such, Jewish conspiracy theories led to the scapegoating of the Jewish population, underpinned by national German frustration, thus contributing to The Holocaust.

Although these group victimisation effects are associated with extreme intergroup conflict such as war or genocide, there is another aspect that relates to perceptions of ingroup victimhood as part of national identity. For instance, national identity, when aligned with

moral superiority, can ignite competitive beliefs of victimhood and lead to prejudice (e.g., anti-Semitism) against a group who have experienced collective victimisation (Krzeminski, 2013). Similarly, collective narcissism was found to increase beliefs of ingroup victimhood in Polish people, in turn, leading to anti-Semitism (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). Alongside authoritarianism, victimhood-based national social identity was found to be associated with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories (Bilewicz et al., 2013). Although much of the literature around collective victimhood focusses on anti-Semitism and related conspiracy theories, there is evidence that these effects might also be found in other marginalised groups (Jolley et al., 2020). Following the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, Islamophobic conspiracy beliefs were found to mediate the relationship between perceived Islamic threat and intentions to vote "Leave" (Swami et al., 2018). The relationship between conspiracy beliefs and perceived threat is well documented and is categorised as an existential motivation for endorsing conspiracy theories (see Douglas et al., 2019). It is plausible that, when faced with a perceived threat (e.g., Muslim immigrants are harbouring terrorists), this may increase beliefs of collective victimhood and result in aggression.

Study 2

Study 1 uncovered associations between conspiracy beliefs and political violence. To advance on this methodology, Study 2 set out to explore this effect within an experimental framework. Shifting to an experimental design is an advancement in the study of conspiracy beliefs, as there is a dearth of experimental work (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). Such a design in this thesis allows research questions around causality to be uniquely examined. The aim was to test whether exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants (vs. control) lead to violent reactions towards immigrants, in addition to general political violence. Furthermore, to extend our understanding of the pathways between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions towards immigrants, possible mediating factors were tested. In this way, we

could explore whether exposure to conspiracy theories increased aggression, which then increased the support for violence against immigrants. In addition, blatant immigrant dehumanisation was included as a second mediator between conspiracy theories and acceptance of violence against immigrants (Bruneau et al., 2018). Since conspiracy beliefs were found to be motivated by beliefs of unique ingroup victimisation, leading to outgroup hostility (Bilewicz et al., 2019) Bilewicz et al. (2019), collective British victimhood was included as a third potential mediating factor.

Four dependent variables set out to measure different aspects of violence. Two measures of general political violence - support for violent political protests and support for political violence—and two measure of violent reactions towards immigrants—acceptance and willingness to use violence. It was predicted that exposure to conspiracy theories (vs control) would increase general political violence (political protest violence and political violence) and violent reactions (willingness and acceptance) towards immigrants, with the effects explained by mediating factors relating to state physical aggression, blatant immigrant dehumanisation, and collective British victimhood.

Method

Participation and design

Participants (N = 138) aged between the ages of 18 and 70 (M_{age} = 34.38, SD = 10.48; 33 men, 105 women) were recruited via *Prolific* in 2019. The participant pool hosts over 130,000 participants, which includes people of different ages, sexualities, employment status, education level, religions, and political orientations. In this way, the aim was to recruit a diverse sample of the general population than prominently students to examine the research questions posed. In a between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (conspiracy theory [n = 70] vs. control [n = 68]). Participants in the

conspiracy condition read a fictional article relating to immigrants in the UK before completing a series of measures. Those in the control group were directed straight on to the complete all measures. The first measure presented was immigrant conspiracy theories, followed by three mediator measures—state physical aggression, blatant immigrant dehumanisation and collective British victimhood. Finally, four dependent measures were tested. Two measures of general political violence (political protest violence and political violence), and two measures of violent reactions related to immigrants (willingness to use violence towards immigrants and violence acceptance towards immigrants). The sample size was determined by conducting a power analysis with power set as .8 and alpha .05, using a medium effect size, that was determined from previous research on this topic that has explored mediation (e.g., Jolley & Douglas, 2014a, 2014b).

Materials and Procedure

Participants provided informed consent and a range of demographic information (age, gender, political orientation, annual income) before beginning the questionnaire (see Appendix 1, 2 and 4 for the items). First, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (conspiracy or control). In the control condition, participants only participated in answering the survey items, whereas participants in the conspiracy condition read an article about immigrants. The conspiracy article (Jolley, et al., 2020) raised questions about immigrants within the UK and whether or not they might be involved in importing terrorism. The term 'conspiracy theory' was not used in the article. The article is as follows:

> *"Many people believe that immigrants in the UK are involved in organisations that plan terrorist activities and aim to undermine the safety of British society. For example, are groups of immigrants working within secret networks on behalf of Islamic State (ISIS)? Are they working together to eventually attack British society*

from within? Questions such as these are widespread in the media and on the Internet, but should we pay any attention to them?

The answer is YES. There are many reasons to be suspicious of immigrants.

Specifically, after investigations in other countries, immigrants have been discovered working for secret terrorist organisations. For example, in recent attacks in Europe, officials discovered new immigrants amongst the terrorists. Further, officials have confirmed that terrorist organisations are closely working with experienced seamen who traffic tens of thousands of immigrants to Europe every month. Evidence is therefore mounting that immigrants arriving in European countries are embedded within, or somehow involved with terrorist groups. Why would this be any different here in the UK?

It is, therefore, unsurprising that a national poll in 2015 found that 35% of respondents believed that immigrants are involved in terrorist groups, and in a similar poll in 2016, this was as high as 53%.

Many also argue that immigrants are actively working, in secret, with terrorist organisations to spark a cyber-attack on British society. There is ample evidence supporting this view … [article continues] …

Participants in the control condition did not read anything. A series of measures were then completed, whereby participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree*), including a four-item manipulation measure of immigrant conspiracy theories (e.g., "*Immigrants are working with terrorist groups to eventually attack British society from within."* $\alpha = .90$; Jolley et al., 2020).

Three measures of mediator variables were then completed. Firstly, a one item of state physical aggression adapted from Farrar and Krcmar (2006) ("*If I had to resort to violence to protect my rights, I would*."). Secondly, participants completed a ten-item adapted measure of blatant immigrant dehumanization (adapted Bruneau et al., 2018) (e.g., "*Immigrants are savage, aggressive*." α = .95). A final mediation measure, collective British victimhood, comprised one item and adapted from Bilewicz et al. (2019) (e.g., "*No other nation suffers as much as the British do*.").

Four dependent variables were measured in Study 2. Firstly, adapted from Simon and Grabow (2010), the dependent variable comprised a three-item measure of support for violent political protest (e.g., "*I think violent protest actions are sometimes the only means to wake up the public*"; α = .64). Participants completed a two-item scale measuring support for political violence (adapted from Uscinski & Parent, 2014; "*Violence is sometimes an acceptable way to express disagreement with the government.*" and "*Violence is an acceptable way to stop politically extreme groups in our country from doing harm*."). The third DV measured willingness to use violence towards immigrants (e.g., "*I am prepared to use violence against immigrants in order to achieve something I consider very important*") using one item and (adapted from Doosje et al., 2012)

The final DV, adapted from the Maudsley Violent Questionnaire (Walker, 2005), measured six items related to violence acceptance towards immigrants (e.g., "*I wouldn't feel bad about hitting an immigrant if they really deserved it*"; α = .87). Presentation of all measures was counterbalanced and, once complete, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time. To note, due to the sensitive nature of this study, care was taken to counteract any effects caused from being exposed to the fictitious conspiracy article. Participants were urged about the importance of engaging with the debrief information which included

literature that refuted the notion of immigrants importing terrorism to the United Kingdom (see Appendix 8)

Results

Data Checking

Gender differences between men (n = 33) and women (n = 105) were analysed using Mann-Whitney U tests of difference due to unequal sample sizes. Men measured significantly higher than women with respect to aggression (men M = 4.40; women M = 3.50; Z = *-2.46; p = .014),* acceptance of violence towards immigrants (men M = 2.18; women M = 1.60; Z = -2.29; p = .022), and willingness to use violence towards immigrants (Men M = 3.94; Women M = 3.14; Z = -2.60; p = .010). An examination of whether the demographics significantly differed between experimental conditions and uncovered no significant differences (p > .05). An examination of whether conspiracy exposure increased immigrant conspiracy beliefs was then conducted. Supporting previous research by Jolley et al. (2020), results demonstrated that exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories (M = 3.12, SD = 1.51) significantly increased immigrant conspiracy beliefs compared to a control condition (M = 2.64, SD = 1.36), t(136) = -1.98, p = .049, d = 0.33.

Correlations between all variables and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4. Immigrant conspiracy beliefs were positively associated with age and both violent reaction measures towards immigrants (willingness to use violence towards immigrants, acceptance of violence towards immigrants) and all mediator variables - state physical aggression, blatant immigrant dehumanisation and collective British victimhood. Participants who were more politically right-leaning were older, reported higher immigrant conspiracy beliefs, blatant immigrant dehumanisation, collective British victimhood, and acceptance of violence towards immigrants. Also, there was a significantly negative association between political

protest violence and politically right-leaning participants. Aggression was positively associated with dehumanisation, victimhood, and all four violence variables. More right-leaning people reported higher immigrant conspiracy beliefs and violence acceptance towards immigrants and lower levels of general political violence.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations and Pearson product-moment correlations for all variables in Study 2 (n = 138).

	Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Immigrant conspiracy theories	2.88 (1.45)	-	.42***	.70***	.33***	.02	.08	.36***	.47***	.18*	.34***	.07
2	State physical aggression	3.71 (1.68)		-	.44***	.32***	.28**	.30***	.40***	.49***	.11	.13	-.03
3	Blatant immigrant dehumanisation	2.71 (1.13)			-	.46***	.12	.06	.52***	.49***	.16	.40***	.07
4	Collective British victimhood	1.75 (1.37)				-	.09	.17	.42***	.32***	.13	.23**	.01
5	Political protest violence	2.58 (1.17)					-	.60***	.36***	.18*	-.13	-.27**	.01
6	Political violence	2.20 (1.45)						-	.44***	.33***	-.15	-.15	-.11
7	Willingness to use violence towards immigrants	1.72 (1.10)							-	.41***	-.03	.15	-.06
8	Violence acceptance towards immigrants	3.34 (1.43)								-	.11	.22**	-.02
9	Age	34.38 (10.48)									-	.21*	.14
10	Political orientation	3.19 (1.29)										-	.04
11	Income	3.91 (2.45)											-

Notes. * $p < .050$. ** $p <$. 010. *** $p <$. 001.

Hypothesis Testing

Next, differences of violence measures between experimental conditions were tested. As age, gender and political orientation were linked with the variables of interest (see Table 4), a MANCOVA was employed controlling for these demographics. The overall Pillai's Trace was non-significant $F(4, 131) = 0.90$, $p = .465$, and as shown in Table 5, all violence responses between conditions were non-significant. This demonstrates that there was no direct impact of conspiracy exposure on violence, not supporting the hypothesis.

Table 5

One-way MANCOVA and descriptive statistics for the experimental conditions in Study 2 on violence measures (n = 138) controlling for demographics (age, gender, and political orientation).

Variable	Conspiracy *M* (*SD*)	Control *M* (*SD*)	*F*	*df*	*p*	np^2
Political protest violence	2.45 (*1.11*)	2.71 (*1.22*)	0.64	1, 137	.425	.01
Policial violence	2.17 (*1.50*)	2.23 (*1.39*)	0.06	1, 137	.803	.00
Willingness of violence towards immigrants	1.70 (*1.05*)	1.75 *(1.15*)	0.19	1, 137	.665	.00
Violence acceptance towards immigrants	3.17 (*1.43*)	3.50 *(1.42*)	2.77	1, 137	.098	.01

Mediation Analysis

To explore possible *indirect* pathways between exposure to immigrant conspiracy beliefs and violence, mediation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants increased political violence (support for violent political protest and political violence) and violent reactions towards immigrants (willingness to use violence against immigrants and violence acceptance towards immigrants) through the examined mediators. Specifically, PROCESS macro for SPSS, Model 4 using 5,000 bootstrapped samples (Hayes, 2015) was used to examine the mediating effect of state physical aggression, dehumanization, and collective British victimhood while controlling for demographics that linked with the variables of interest (gender, age, political orientation). All indirect effects were non-significant (see Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9 for full list of results). An interesting observation is that conspiracy exposure did not directly impact the tested mediators, explaining the non-significant indirect effects (see Table 10). This point is discussed in the General Discussion.

Table 6

Effects of mediation variables on political protest violence controlling for gender, age, political orientation (Model 4 PROCESS macro; n = 138).

Mediators	Total	Direct	Indirect
State physical aggression	-.16(.20); 95% CI [-0.545 - 0.231]	-.10(.19); 95% CI [-.471 - 0.271]	-.06(.06); 95% CI [-0.197 - 0.056]
Immigrant dehumanisation	-.16(.20); 95% CI [-0.545 - 0.231]	-.12(.19); 95% CI [-0.500 - 0.255]	-.03(.06); 95% CI [-0.165 - 0.058]
Collective British victimhood	-.16(.20); 95% CI [-0.545 - 0.231]	-.16(.20); 95% CI [-0.543 - 0.227]	.00(.03); 95% CI [-0.072 - 0.069]

Table 7

Effects of mediation variables on political violence controlling for gender, age, political orientation (Model 4 of PROCESS macro; n = 138).

Mediators	Total	Direct	Indirect
State physical aggression	.02(.25); 95% CI [-0.470 - 0.500]	.09(.24); 95% CI [-0.377 - 0.549]	-.07(.08); 95% CI [-0.257 - 0.075]
Immigrant dehumanisation	.02(.25); 95% CI [-0.470 - 0.500]	.04(.24); 95% CI [-0.447 - 0.520]	-.02(.04); 95% CI [-0.118 - 0.041]
Collective British victimhood	.02(.25); 95% CI [-0.470 - 0.500]	.01(.24); 95% CI [-0.462 - 0.489]	.00(.06); 95% CI [-0.080 - 0.151]

Table 8

Effects of mediation variables on Willingness for violence towards immigrants controlling for gender, age, political orientation (Model 4 of PROCESS macro; n = 138).

Mediators	Total	Direct	Indirect
State physical aggression	-.09(.19); 95% CI [-0.453 - 0.283]	-.02(.17); 95% CI [-0.368 - 0.322]	-.06(.07); 95% CI [-0.209 - 0.061]
Immigrant dehumanisation	-.09(.17); 95% CI [-0.453 - 0.283]	-.02(.16); 95% CI [-0.341- 0.299]	-.06(.10); 95% CI [-0.286 - 0.100]
Collective British victimhood	-.09(.17); 95% CI [-0.453 - 0.283]	-.09(.17); 95% CI [-0.426 - 0.251]	.00(.07); 95% CI [-0.161 - 0.126]

Table 9

Effects of mediation variables on acceptance of violence towards immigrants controlling for gender, age, political orientation (Model 4 of PROCESS macro; n = 138).

Mediators	Total	Direct	Indirect
State physical aggression	-.39(.24); 95% CI [-0.860 - 0.074]	-.30(.21); 95% CI [-0.720 - 0.125]	-.10(.11); 95% CI [-0.320 - 0.106]
Immigrant dehumanisation	-.39(.24); 95% CI [-0.860 - 0.074]	-.32(.22); 95% CI [-0.748 - 0.101]	-.07(.10); 95% CI [-0.286 - 0.129]
Collective British victimhood	-.39(.24); 95% CI [-0.860 - 0.074]	-.40(.23); 95% CI [-0.846 - 0.056]	.00(.06); 95% CI [-0.120 - 0.137]

Table 10

One-way MANCOVA and descriptive statistics for the experimental conditions in Study 2 on mediating measures (n = 138) controlling for demographics (age, gender, and political orientation).

Variable	Conspiracy *M* (*SD*)	Control *M* (*SD*)	*F*	*df*	*p*	np^2
State aggression	3.59 (1.65)	3.84 (1.72)	.85	1, 137	.360	.01
Blatant dehumanisation	2.71 (1.12)	2.71 (1.16)	.47	1, 137	.493	.00
Collective British victimhood	1.79 (1.33)	1.17 (1.42)	.00	1, 137	.973	.00

General Discussion

The aim of Study 2 was to test if exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants led to increased support for political violence and violent reactions towards immigrants. These effects were expected to be mediated by state physical aggression, dehumanization of immigrants and collective British victimhood. In this experimental study, exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories increased conspiracy beliefs for participants in the experimental condition. No significant differences between conditions were found for political violence (support for political protest violence and political violence) or violent reactions towards immigrants (willingness and acceptance). To explore the possible direct and indirect pathways between immigrant conspiracy exposure and violence (political violence and violent reactions towards immigrants), mediation analysis was undertaken. All mediation effects for state physical aggression, blatant immigrant dehumanisation, or collective British victimhood were non-significant. Exposure to conspiracy theories did not impact any of the mediator variables, thus resulting in the indirect effects being non-significant.

Whilst conspiracy exposure did increase conspiracy *belief,* the effects did not translate into any other direct outcome differences. This finding is welcome as it demonstrates that simple exposure does not directly increase. Whilst exposure to other types of conspiracy theories can have a direct impact (e.g., climate change and environment behaviours, Jolley & Douglas, 2014), the same is not true for violent extremism. Such a finding is an important advancement in the study of conspiracy theories.

To fully understand all the results, it is advantageous to explore the outcomes of the mediation analysis. First, it is worth noting that trait aggression refers to a relatively stable individual difference as opposed to *state* physical aggression, which is temporary and experienced by most people at some point in time (Farrar & Krcmar, 2006). In this study, mediation analyses demonstrated that participant's *state* physical aggression was not increased by exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories. This may indicate that mere exposure to conspiracy theories does not increase aggression. Whilst this is a positive outcome, it may be different for trait aggression. State anger was found to mediate the relationship between general conspiracy beliefs and violence in a correlational study (Jolley & Paterson, 2020). However, general conspiracy beliefs differs from intergroup conspiracy beliefs in that the former measures a general propensity to view the world with suspicion and is an individual level form of belief (Bruder et al., 2013; Hornsey et al., 2022). By contrast, intergroup conspiracy beliefs are targeted towards a specific group viewed as suspicious by some, but not all, people (Hornsey et al., 2022). The adaptive conspiracism hypothesis posits that intergroup conspiracy beliefs has evolved from a need to manage intergroup threats (van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018). The intergroup nature of the conspiracy beliefs measured in this study, may only affect people who view immigrants as threatening, therefore measuring *trait* aggression levels might be more applicable in this context, where such a variable was treated as a moderator.

Blatant immigrant dehumanisation also generated non-significant mediating effects between conspiracy exposure and violence. Again, there may be an individual difference aspect to consider. Although dehumanization is associated with negative intergroup relations (Haslam, 2006) the context of *who* the dehumanisers are and *who* they are targeting, is relevant. For instance, negative attitudes toward asylum seekers in Australia was predicted by high social dominance orientation which, in turn, was explained by a tendency to dehumanise (Trounson et al., 2015). Similarly, social dominance and right-wing authoritarianism was found to predict dehumanization and disgust towards Muslim immigrants (but not French Canadians) by English Canadians (Hodson & Costello, 2007). Social dominance orientation (SDO) is an ideological view that the world should be hierarchical (Pratto et al., 2006), and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is an ideological deference to authority (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Together, these two individual differences are found to predict a range of outcomes such as prejudice and right-wing political ideology (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Considering the associations between SDO, RWA and dehumanization, it may be that dehumanization is more likely to be displayed by specific people towards immigrants, rather than being increased by conspiracy exposure. Future research could explore such a possibility in greater depth.

Finally, collective victimhood is associated with perceived threat and scapegoating which can result in prejudice towards the target group (e.g., anti-Semitism; Glick, 2002). In this study, it was thought that a perception of immigrant threat may prime British collective victimhood resulting in scapegoating towards immigrants. However, conspiracy exposure did not increase collective British victimhood. A tendency to scapegoat is associated with individual differences (Rothschild & Keefer, 2023); therefore, as with aggression and dehumanization, collective victimhood (motivated by scapegoating) may only be apparent in

certain people. Again, simple conspiracy exposure might not impact such variables in everyone which is a positive outcome.

It is also worth considering the methodological design of this research, particularly in terms of mediation analysis. Mediating factors can help to explain the effect of a third variable between the independent and dependent variables and can be very constructive in exploring social psychological pathways (MacKinnon et al., 2007). For instance, anomie was found to mediate the pathway between exposure to conspiracy theories and intentions to commit everyday crimes (Jolley et al., 2019). Exposure increased feelings of anomie, which increased self-reported intentions. However, these effects were not found which may be due to the power of the study. According to simulation models of mediation, to achieve an 80 percent statistical power effect in a test of mediation whereby paths a and b have small effects, requires a sample size of 558 (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). This indicates that the sample size ($N = 138$) is considerably underpowered and may have increased the probability of a Type 2 error. The effects may also have been due to the specific focus of the conspiracy beliefs employed. It has been suggested that the content of conspiracy theories has an impact on who believes them (Golec de Zavala et al., 2022). Similarly, Swami (2012) demonstrated that anti-Semitic beliefs, along with ideological individual differences, emerged as strong predictors of Jewish conspiracy beliefs (Swami, 2012). This suggests that when investigating specific intergroup conspiracy theories, exploring *who* experiences exposure effects may be a more effective methodological strategy. Unlike mediating factors that inform *how* a relationship between two variables is constructed, moderators inform *when* these relationships are stronger or weaker (Hayes, 2013; Karazsia & Berlin, 2018).

Conclusion

The successful priming of immigrant conspiracy beliefs in this experimental study is notable and contributes to the experimental research in the conspiracy theory domain. As demonstrated by Jolley et al. (2020), this type of conspiracy exposure has detrimental effects for minority groups such as immigrants. Moreover, previous research has found that the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and support for violence is conditional on individual differences (e.g., Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). This demonstrates that exploring how other individual difference variables influence violent reactions towards marginalised people would provide much needed insight into this area. For instance, it would be worth exploring how political ideologies strengthen or weaken the link between conspiracy beliefs and violence. Developing on this point, Chapter 4 will investigate the moderating effects of SDO and RWA. These ideological individual differences were found to predict intergroup conspiracy beliefs (Swami, 2012), and are associated with conspiracy theories (Bruder et al., 2013; Dyrendal et al., 2021; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014) aggression (Altemeyer, 2003) and intergroup violence (Densley & Peterson, 2018). Therefore, Chapter 4 will explore *when* exposure to conspiracy theories about marginalised groups might lead to violent reactions.

Chapter 4:

The Moderating Effects of Political Ideology Between Intergroup Conspiracy Exposure and Violent Reactions

The studies presented in Chapter 4 have been published in the journal *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations:*

Schrader, T., Jolley, D., & Jolley, R. (2024). *Upholding social hierarchies: Social Dominance Orientation moderates the link between (intergroup) conspiracy exposure and violent extremism.*

Chapter Summary

The impact of intergroup conspiracy exposure on increased violent reactions towards targeted groups was explored across two experimental studies. Furthermore, the moderation effect of political ideologies was investigated. In Study 3 (N = 160, pre-registered), it was found that exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories (vs control) increased the willingness to use violence for those who reported higher Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). Study 4 (N = 211, pre-registered) sought to extend these results by focusing on a specific target group, Muslim immigrants. Exposure to Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories (vs control) increased motivation and willingness to use violence for those with higher SDO (not RWA). These findings showcase how exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories and violent reactions are conditional on RWA and SDO. Thus, when considering interventions, is crucial to consider the role of ideological worldviews when seeking to combat conspiracy-inspired violence.

Introduction

A *conspiracy theory*, which alleges that Europe is secretly undergoing '*Islamification*', proposes that a malevolent Muslim agenda exists to impose Sharia law upon Western society, thereby replacing Western culture with Islamic domination (Fekete, 2012). This theory, sometimes called Eurabia, has existed on the fringe for some time (Bat Ye'or, 1985, 2005) but has gained popularity since the 9/11 terror attacks (Uenal, 2016b). Anders Breivik, who identified as a *counter-jihadist* and opposed multiculturism in Norway, referred to Eurabia in his manifesto entitled *2083: a European declaration of independence*, before embarking on a deadly terror attack in Oslo (Fekete, 2012). Breivik has arguably inspired other perpetrators of violence (e.g., Brendon Tarrant targeting mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand) inspired by his ideology (Macklin & Bjorgo, 2021). Although such events can be viewed as rare and extreme violent occurrences perpetrated by "lone wolf" attackers, the associated conspiracy-driven ideology thrives within the communities that endorse extreme political views (Hebel-Sela et al., 2022; Kaplan, 2021; Rousis et al., 2022; van Prooijen et al., 2015). It is imperative, therefore, for researchers to understand how conspiracy beliefs contribute to violent extremism. In the current research, an experimental design tested the role of intergroup conspiracy exposure in the provocation of violent reactions towards immigrants who are the target of conspiracy theories.

Consequences of Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories are universal across social and cultural environments and can impact the smooth running of societies (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). In more recent times, conspiracy theories relating to the COVID-19 pandemic have drawn the spotlight upon the damaging societal effects of conspiracy theory beliefs on public health issues (see meta-analysis by Bierwiaczonek et al., 2022). However,

the negative consequences of conspiracy theories go beyond health therefore broadening our understanding of the motivations and consequences of conspiracy theory beliefs is timely.

Conspiracy theories have been shown to have a detrimental impact on important societal issues (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). As the psychology research domain of conspiracy beliefs gains momentum, a complex interaction of factors has emerged. There is a broad range of research documenting the consequences of conspiracy theories, ranging from matters such as politics, health, and the environment (e.g., Bogart & Thorburn, 2005; Jolley & Douglas, 2014a, 2014b; Uscinski & Parent, 2014). For example, exposure to conspiracy theories about vaccines decreased intentions to vaccinate a fictional child (Jolley & Douglas, 2014a). Similarly, exposure to conspiracy theories about climate change science decreased intentions to engage in eco-friendly behaviour (Jolley & Douglas, 2014b). In a similar vein, Jolley et al., (2019) demonstrated that exposure to conspiracy theories about significant events (e.g., 9/11) led to stronger intentions to engage in everyday crimes (e.g., accepting cash for items sold to avoid tax). This relationship was explained by anomie, which refers to feelings of dissatisfaction with society.

The consequences of conspiracy beliefs can also have an intergroup focus. Described by van Prooijen and Douglas (2018), conspiracy theories as a social occurrence shares attributes with intergroup conflict—strong ingroup identity coupled with the perception of outgroup threat. Intergroup conflict, can be defined as "the perceived incompatibility of goals or values between two or more individuals, which emerges because these individuals classify themselves as members of different social groups" (Böhm et al., 2020, p. 4), and influences attitudes (e.g. prejudice), emotions (e.g. fear) and behaviour (e.g. discrimination). Intergroup conflict has been described as social psychology problem of the century' by Fiske (2002) and has seen extensive investigation resulting in several theories. For instance, Realistic Group

Conflict (Sherif, 1966) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) consider the impact of environmental factors which result in prejudice and discrimination, resulting in intergroup conflict.

Positive distinctiveness of the ingroup, compared with the outgroup, is the central premise of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and can result in ingroup bias (Brown, 1995). Whilst social identity does not equate to negative attitudes or behaviour towards the outgroup, it may contribute thereto if the ingroup perceives a threat (e.g., symbolic threat such as social norms or core values) from the outgroup, (see Birney, 2023; Molina et al., 2016). Similarly, realistic group conflict proposes that intergroup conflict arises from competition related to perceived threat to resources (Sherif, 1966). Incorporating, principles from these two theories, Integrated Threat Theory is a framework for understanding when prejudice and intergroup conflict may arise (Stephen & Stephen, 2000). This framework aims to assess the factors result in negative intergroup relations and conflict and has been applied to intergroup conspiracy beliefs.

Uenal (2016) applied the framework of integrated threat theory to test the relationship between German ingroup identification and Islamophobic conspiracy stereotypes (e.g., "*German norms and values are threatened by the presence of Muslims*"). The *clash of civilisation* concept (a thesis arguing that religious and cultural identities would be the central motivation of post-Cold War conflict; Huntington, 1993) was applied as a form of symbolic threat (e.g. *"Islam is not compatible with democracy and human rights"*). This symbolic threat was found to mediate the association between German ingroup identification and Islamic conspiracy stereotypes (Uenal, 2016b). When considering how intergroup conflict is associated with perceived threat by the outgroup (Schmid et al., 2014), it is plausible that

intergroup conspiracy beliefs, in conjunction with the perceived threat posed by the outgroup (e.g., immigrants), may contribute to intergroup conflict.

It is perhaps unsurprising that conspiracy theories proliferate between groups involved in conflict (Pipes, 1997) since they share common social motivations with intergroup conflict, specifically to maintain a positive ingroup identity and safeguard against outgroup threat. When ingroup identity is threatened, perceived to be disadvantaged, or the ingroup image is undermined, then conspiracy theories about the outgroup may be formed (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999). Similarly, collective narcissism—the concept that in-group greatness depends on the recognition of others - was found to be a predictor of belief in conspiracy theories about outgroups (Cichocka et al., 2016). Further, Jewish conspiracy theories in Poland was found to be the strongest predicter of anti-Semitic behavioural intentions, including voting for a Jewish candidate or being within close proximity of a Jewish person (Bilewicz et al., 2013). Moreover, conspiracy theories about minority groups not only exacerbate prejudice towards that group, such as Jewish people, but conspiracy theorising about one group affected feelings towards unrelated groups, such as immigrants (Jolley, et al., 2020). These studies demonstrate how the endorsement of intergroup conspiracy theories is utilised in defence of the ingroup and can result in harmful conduct toward the outgroup. This social, intergroup factor forms the basis of the current research.

Conspiracy Theories and Violence

A review by Bartlett and Miller (2010) analysed the literature, propaganda, and ideologies of a range of extremist groups and found evidence of widespread conspiracy beliefs. The findings indicated that far-right groups tend to believe in Jewish cabals controlling world governments, far-left groups believe in international elite financiers who fund a ‘New World Order’, and Islamist groups subscribe to ideas of Judeo-Christian-

Capitalist groups waging a war against Islam. Bartlett and Miller argue that the frequency of conspiracies within extremist groups indicates a possible social function, perhaps promoting cohesion and the internalisation of group ideology. Although conspiracy theories may not be a prerequisite for extremism, they may serve as a "*radicalising multiplier*" promoting group cohesion and pushing the group towards more extreme and violent behaviour (Bartlett & Miller, 2010).

Violence towards immigrants, and those perceived as immigration facilitators, have increased (McDonald, 2018). This is particularly pertinent for Muslim immigrants since the 9/11 terror attacks, who are viewed as plotting to the Islamification of Western culture (Uenal, 2016b). Anti-immigrant conspiracy theories (e.g., great replacement) have been associated with violence towards immigrants (Adam-Troian et al., 2023; Jedinger et al., 2023; Obaidi et al., 2022; Puschmann et al., 2022). Anti-immigrant conspiracy beliefs are acknowledged to pose a terrorist threat in countries such as the United States (FBI, 2019; Soufan, 2019). This suggests that conspiracy theory beliefs may play a role in motivating violent behaviour aimed at those perceived to be conspiring.

Researchers have begun investigating how conspiracy beliefs may influence violent behaviour. For example, in Chapter 2, conspiracy beliefs were found to uniquely predict political violence even when controlling for various measures of aggression. These findings extended upon Uscinski and Parent (2014) who found that people high in conspiracy beliefs are twice as likely to oppose gun law reform and defend political violence. Moreover, an enhanced conspiracy worldview was found to increase willingness to engage in illegal, non-normative political behaviour (Imhoff et al., 2021). Rottweiler and Gill (2020) demonstrated that conspiracy theories were positively correlated with intentions towards violent extremism. However, this relationship was conditional on individual differences, such as lower self-

control, higher self-efficacy, and holding weaker law-relevant morality. During the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, conspiracy theories relating to the connection between 5G towers and COVID-19 became widespread (Jolley & Paterson, 2020). Jolley and Paterson (2020) provide correlational evidence that belief in 5G COVID-19 conspiracy theories was positively associated with justified use of real-world and hypothetical violence, alongside intent to engage in similar future behaviours. Anger was found to mediate the relationship, with the link between anger and violent reactions being strongest for those high in paranoia. The emerging work is uncovering links between conspiracy beliefs and violence, but that the link may be *conditional* on individual differences (e.g., self-control, paranoia), which indicates the possibility that other key variables could be essential to explore.

The Moderating Effects of Individual Differences: Aggression, SDO and RWA

Moderation analysis tests the magnitude of effects between two related variables (Hayes, 2013). Unlike mediators that inform *how* a relationship between two variables is constructed, moderators inform *when* these relationships are stronger or weaker (Karazsia & Berlin, 2018). When considering when the link between intergroup conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions could be more pronounced, individual differences such as aggression, Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and Right-wing Authoritarianism (RWA) are important candidates to consider. To begin, RWA is rooted in the theory of the *authoritarian personality* first proposed by Adorno et al. (1950), following the rise of fascism in the 1930s. RWA predicts an individual's level of deference to authority and how strictly they adhere to social conventions (e.g. Altemeyer, 1998). High RWA can result in the oppression of subordinates and aggression towards groups who are negatively labelled by authorities (Altemeyer, 2003). Furthermore, high RWA is related to ethnocentrism, nationalism, politically right-wing ideology, adherence to strict law and order, supporting punitive social control, benevolent and hostile sexism, and prejudice (Altemeyer, 2003; Asbrock et al., 2010;

Austin & Jackson, 2019; Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018; Roy et al., 2021). Another relevant factor is SDO, which is also a personality factor, but instead that refers to the extent to which a person favours a hierarchical group-based social system (Pratto et al., 2006). A person with high SDO would support the dominance of one group over another (e.g. race, class, gender), despite the inequality (Ho et al., 2012). Along with predicting similar issues as RWA (e.g. prejudice, right-wing political ideology, sexism), SDO has shown to be a powerful predictor of intergroup attitudes and behaviour (Ho et al., 2012). Pratto et al., (2013) argue that SDO encompasses multiple perspectives of intergroup conflict such as cultural and political ideologies, realistic group conflict and social identity theories. A review of group aggression literature suggests SDO contributes to intergroup aggression, such as extremism and gang-related violence (Densley & Peterson, 2018).

Although RWA and SDO are independent individual difference measures, they are positively correlated with each other (Perry et al., 2013). The dual-process motivation model (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010) proposed that together, RWA and SDO offer two dimensions of ideological attitudes and express different motivational goals and values. Once these motivational goals and values are activated, they may be influenced by social, intergroup and situational factors resulting in outcomes, such as prejudice and violence (Thomsen et al., 2008). Furthermore, RWA and SDO were found to be moderate, positive predictors of conspiracy theory beliefs (Bruder et al., 2013; Dyrendal et al., 2021; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). Interestingly, in a study investigating Jewish conspiracy theory beliefs in Malaysia, RWA and SDO emerged as strong predictors of Jewish conspiracy theory beliefs (Swami, 2012). This seems to suggest that conspiracy theories regarding specific groups may serve an ideological need and that individual differences (e.g., SDO and RWA) may increase the effects of such conspiracy theories. As these two personality factors have been associated with conspiracy theory belief (e.g., Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014; Swami, 2012), it is

plausible that people with higher SDO and RWA may be more likely to justify the use of violence, particularly towards (disadvantaged) groups who are perceived to be conspiring and perceived as a threat to the (advantaged) ingroup, such as minority groups.

In addition to personality factors, such as RWA and SDO, it is important to acknowledge that multiple factors contribute to aggression. The General Aggression Model (GAM) is a framework for understanding aggression which accounts for the role of multiple factors (e.g. social, cognitive, personality, developmental, and biological) on aggression and considers various outcomes including intergroup violence (Allen et al., 2018). The GAM is comprised of three stages (input, route, outcome) which account for how individual differences, such as trait aggression, converge with situational factors to either increase or decrease aggression which, in turn, results in either non-aggressive or aggressive outcomes (i.e., violent behaviour). Trait aggression, a personality factor that exhibits a stable predisposition to engage in interpersonal aggression, is commonly measured on the Brief Aggression Questionnaire and subdivided into physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility (Buss & Perry, 1992). Research indicates that trait aggression wanes with age (Huesmann et al., 1984), and men tend to exhibit higher levels than women (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Trait aggression has shown to be an effective predictor of aggressive behaviour (Anderson et al., 2008) in addition to acting as a moderator of the association between media violence and aggressive behaviour (e.g. people who were higher in trait aggression are more likely to demonstrate violent behaviour after consuming media violence). Moreover, trait aggression has been positively associated with the support for political violence (Kalmoe, 2014), with aggression also being linked with conspiracy beliefs (e.g., Jolley & Paterson, 2020). It is plausible, that alongside SDO and RWA, higher levels of trait aggression may also enhance the link between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions towards outgroups.

Present Research

Across two experimental studies, the role played by intergroup conspiracy theories was investigated in inspiring the justified use of violence—both the acceptance of, and willingness to use - violence towards immigrants. Whilst Studies 1 and 2 (Chapter 2 and 3) focused on political violence, Studies 3 and 4 has shifted to immigrants (Study 3), and then more specifically, to Muslim immigrants (Study 4). In both studies, an experimental design was employed to examine whether exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories can increase violent reactions and allows for the exploration around causality to be uniquely examined. Of note, a variety of factors that might moderate the link between conspiracy exposure and violence was also measured - specifically, SDO, RWA and trait aggression.

Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 (Chapter 2 and 3) have demonstrated that conspiracy theories play a role in physical aggression and violence. However, to better understand the influential factors of such violence, further research was required. Specifically, it was thought that the people belonging to social groups who are sometimes believed to be conspirators, may be a greater risk of experiencing aggression—for example, immigrants. Of relevance, research has shown that exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants increased prejudice towards that target group (Jolley, et al., 2020). Moreover, media reporting has suggested an increase in right-wing extremism influenced by conspiracy theories (Ahmed & Murphy, 2018; Manjoo, 2019). Study 3 set out to test how exposure to immigrant conspiracy beliefs affected the justified use of violence towards immigrants in the UK.

To better understand who may be may be most susceptible of violent reactions by immigrant conspiracy theories, measures of SDO and RWA were included. Justified use of violence was measured on two subscales—violence acceptance and violent intent. It was

predicted (preregistered: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/7THB5) that exposure to conspiracy theories, related to the importing of terrorism by immigrants, would inspire the justified use of violence (violence acceptance and violent intent) towards immigrants (*H1*). It was also predicted that these effects would be enhanced by personality variables; physical aggression, SDO, and RWA (*H2*).

Method

Participation and Design

A total of 168 participants between 18 and 66 (M_{age} = 30.62, *SD* = 11.87; 43 men, 119 women, 1 gender-fluid, 3 non-binary, and 2 prefer not to say) were recruited via the student online recruitment platform, *SONA*, from a university student pool, as well as social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in 2019 to 2020, and received no remuneration for taking part. All participants were above the age of 18, UK citizens, and were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (conspiracy theory article relating to immigrants in the UK [*n* = 78] vs control [*n* = 82]). At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they devoted their full attention to the study and if there were any distractions present during the study. Eight participants – who scored below 3 (out of 5, with 1 indicating no attention and many distractions) on the attention check questions - were removed from the analyses. The final sample size was 160 (M_{age} = 30.61, *SD* = 11.91; 38 men, 118 women, 1 gender-fluid, and 3 non-binary). The minimum pre-registered target sample size was 140 participants, determined by a power analysis with a power set of 0.8 and alpha .05, using a medium effect size derived from previous research (e.g., Jolley & Douglas, 2014a, 2014b) and over-recruiting 10% anticipating participant dropouts due to the recruitment method. However, due to the snowball sampling method, the final sample size exceeded the target. The IV was the conspiracy condition (exposure vs control), with violent reactions (willingness and

acceptance of violence) being the DV. SDO, RWA, and trait physical aggression were included as moderator variables.

Materials and Procedure

Participants provided informed consent and a range of demographic information (age, gender identity, nationality, income, education level, and political orientation) before beginning the survey (see Appendix 1, 2, and 5). To start, participants completed three potential moderating measures. The first was a three-item trait physical aggression measure adapted from the Brief Aggression Questionnaire (Webster et al., 2015; e.g., *"If I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will."* α = .83). The second measure consisted of the sixteen-item measure of SDO (Ho et al., 2012; e.g. "*Group equality should not be our primary goal*"; α = .92). The final moderator variable was a six-item measure of RWA (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018; e.g. "*What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity.*" α = .74). Participants indicated their agreement on a seven-point scale in all cases and presentation of these scales was counterbalanced.

Participants then read an article about immigrant conspiracy theories or nothing (control). The conspiracy article raised questions about immigrants within the UK and whether or not they might be involved in importing terrorism. The term ' conspiracy theory' was not used in the article. An extract of the article is as follows:

> *"... Specifically, after investigations in other countries, immigrants have been discovered working for secret terrorist organisations. For example, in recent attacks in Europe, officials discovered new immigrants amongst the terrorists… Evidence is therefore mounting that immigrants arriving in European countries are embedded within, or somehow involved with, terrorist groups…".*

Next, participants completed a four-item measure of conspiracy beliefs about immigrants (Jolley et al., 2019); e.g. "*Immigrants are working within secret networks on behalf of ISIS*"; α = .90). Participants indicated their level of agreement using a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Finally, participants completed two DV measures related to violent reactions towards immigrants. Firstly, one item measured willingness to use violence towards immigrants, adapted from Doosje et al. (2012) ("*I am prepared to use violence against immigrants to achieve something I consider very important*") was completed by participants. Secondly, a six-item acceptance of violence scale adapted from the Maudsley Violence Questionnaire (Walker, 2005) was used to measure acceptance of violence towards immigrants. (e.g., "*If an immigrant cuts you up in traffic, it's OK to swear at them*"; α = .89). Again, participants indicated their agreement on a seven-point, counterbalanced scales. Participants were then thoroughly debriefed on completing the study, particularly to counteract exposure to the fictitious immigrant article (see Appendix 8). This included support information and academic evidence to refute claims of importation of terrorism by immigrants and refugees.

Results

Data Checking

Data checks were first completed to explore if demographic variables were linked with the measured outcomes. First, gender differences between men and women were analysed using a Mann-Whitney U test of difference (participants who identified as gender-fluid [n = 1] and non-binary [n = 3] were omitted). Men measured significantly higher than women concerning physical aggression (men M = 3.42; women M = 2.71; Z = -2.13; p = .033), and willingness to use violence (men M = 2.34; women M = 1.69; Z = -2.86; p = .004). As shown in Table 11, age was also significantly positively correlated with immigrant

conspiracy beliefs, RWA, physical aggression and violence acceptance. Those who are more right-leaning politically reported higher levels of conspiracy beliefs, RWA, SDO, physical aggression, and violence. Further, it is also worth noting that significant and positive correlations were found between immigrant conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions. Conspiracy beliefs were also positively correlated with RWA, SDO, and trait physical aggression.

Table 11

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlations for all variables in Study 3 (n = 160).

		M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Acceptance of violence	2.90 (1.48)	-	.61**	.42**	.32**	.47**	.56**	-.08	.27**	-.25**
2	Willingness to use violence	1.86 (1.35)		-	.41**	.17*	.40**	.47**	-.05	.16*	-.10
3	Immigrant conspiracy beliefs	2.40 (1.31)			-	.40**	.54**	.34**	.07	.38**	-.16*
4	RWA	2.79 (1.05)				-	.53**	.11	-.03	.50**	-.23**
5	SDO	2.04 (.97)					-	.27**	.13	.44**	-.16
6	Physical aggression	2.92 (1.66)						-	-.10	.19*	-.18*
7	Income	3.12 (2.64)							-	.10	.19*
8	Political identity	2.64 (1.32)								-	-.16*
9	Age	30.61 (11.91)									-

Notes. *$p < .050$. **$p < .010$. ***$p < .001$.

Possible demographic differences between the experimental groups (i.e., confirming that the groups are comparable) were then explored. Surprisingly, it was found that level of income did differ between conditions; participants in the control condition reported lower income (M = 2.64, SD = 2.08) compared to the conspiracy condition (M = 3.57, SD = 3.02, t(144.43) = -2.29 p = .012; d = .06). There were no other demographic differences. This analysis does suggest that there is an income disparity between conditions, and thus, could be a confound when interpreting the results. Although the moderator variables were completed before the manipulation, experimental groups were also checked to ensure there were no differences between them. As shown in Table 12, and as expected, physical aggression, RAW and SDO were non-significant. Next, the manipulation check was assessedwhether conspiracy beliefs had increased. Previous research (Jolley et al., 2020) designed this manipulation and found that exposure increased conspiracy belief. In this study, differences were non-significant for conspiracy belief scores between the control (M = 2.30, SD = 1.32) and the conspiracy conditions (M = 2.50, SD = 1.31), t(158) = -0.94, p = .174, d = .15.

Table 12

Summary of moderator t-tests and descriptive statistics for the experimental conditions in Study 3 (n = 160).

Variable	Conspiracy *M* (*SD*)	Control *M* (*SD*)	*t*	*df*	*p*	*d*
Physical aggression	3.09 (*1.62*)	2.73 (*1.68*)	-1.39	158	.083	.22
SDO	2.06 (*1.02*)	2.03 (*0.91*)	-0.18	158	.428	.03
RWA	2.79 (*1.13*)	2.78 (*0.96*)	-0.08	158	.470	.01

The violent reaction measures (dependent variable) were examined for differences between experimental conditions. A MANOVA was run, and the overall Pillai's Trace was non-significant $F(2, 157) = 0.04$, $p = .958$, and, as expected and shown in Table 13, no significant differences between the conditions on any of the violent outcomes were uncovered. Although the manipulation check differences were non-significant, cautious examination of the predictions was undertaken, as it was theorised that moderation analysis might demonstrate reveal conditional effects related to the moderator variable trait physical aggression, SDO, and RWA between conspiracy exposure and the violent reactions.

Table 13

One-way MANOVA and descriptive statistics for the experimental conditions in Study 3 on political violence measures (n = 160).

Variable	Conspiracy *M* (*SD*)	Control *M* (*SD*)	*F*	*df*	*p*	np^2
Willingness of violence towards immigrants	1.89 (*1.46*)	1.83 (*1.24*)	0.07	1,159	.791	.00
Violence acceptance towards immigrants	2.93 (*1.52*)	2.87 (*1.45*)	0.07	1,159	.795	00

Hypothesis Testing

To better understand how individual differences influence the effects of conspiracy beliefs, moderation analyses were conducted to test the hypothesis that exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants may influence violent reactions towards that targeted group as a product of differences in SDO, RWA and trait physical aggression. Moderation analysis was undertaken using PROCESS macro for SPSS, Model 1 using 5,000 bootstrapped samples (Hayes, 2015). Each level of the moderator was generated by the pick-a-point method (Hayes, 2013): low (standardised variable: -1*SD*), moderate (standardised variable: 0), and high (standardised variable: +1*SD*).

The first DV to be tested was acceptance of violence towards immigrants. Age, income, gender, and political identity were correlated outcome variables, so they were controlled (see Table 11). Income was also controlled since it differed between experimental conditions. Moderation effects between the experimental condition and acceptance of violence for trait physical aggression (b = -.06, p = .629, 95% CI [-0.287 – 0.174]), SDO (b = .36, p = .090, 95% CI [-0.057 – 0.776]), or RWA (b = .31, p = .149, 95% CI [-0.113 – 0.737]) were non-significant and contrary to predictions.

Secondly, willingness to use violence against immigrants was tested while controlling for the same demographic variables as before (see Figure 1). As with acceptance of violence, trait physical aggression moderator effects were non-significant (b = -.12, p = .300, 95% CI [-0.361 – 0.112]). However, a significant interaction effect between SDO and the experimental condition on willingness was uncovered (b = .94, p < .001, 95% CI [0.556 – 1.325]). The interaction effect accounted for 11% of the overall variance of willingness to use violence (F(1, 152) = 23.41, p < .001). A simple slope test revealed that when SDO was at a high level, the effect of the experimental condition on willingness was significant in a positive direction (b = 1.02, p < .001, 95% CI [0.490 – 1.546]). When SDO was at a low level, the effect was significant in a negative direction (b = -.80, p = .003, 95% CI [-1.312 – -0.281]). However, when SDO was at a moderate level, the effect was non-significant (b = .11, p = .558, 95% CI [-0.259 – 0.478]).

Similarly (see Figure 2), a significant interaction between the experimental condition and RWA on willingness to use violence was uncovered (b = .80, p = .001, 95% CI [0.283 – 1.087]). The interaction effect accounted for 7% of the overall variance of RWA (F(1, 153) = 11.62, p = .001). As with SDO, a simple slope test revealed that when RWA was at a high level, the effect of experimental conditions on willingness to use violence was significant in a positive direction (b = .80, p = .009, 95% CI [0.202 – 1.386]). When RWA was at a low level, the effect was significant in a negative direction (b = -.64, p = .033, 95% CI [-1.224 – -0.054]). Again, moderate RWA levels was non-significant (b = .08, p = .711, 95% CI [-0.334 – .489]).

Figure 1

Simple slope moderator effects of SDO on willingness to use violence against immigrants between conspiracy exposure conditions Study 3 (Model 1 of PROCESS; n = 160).

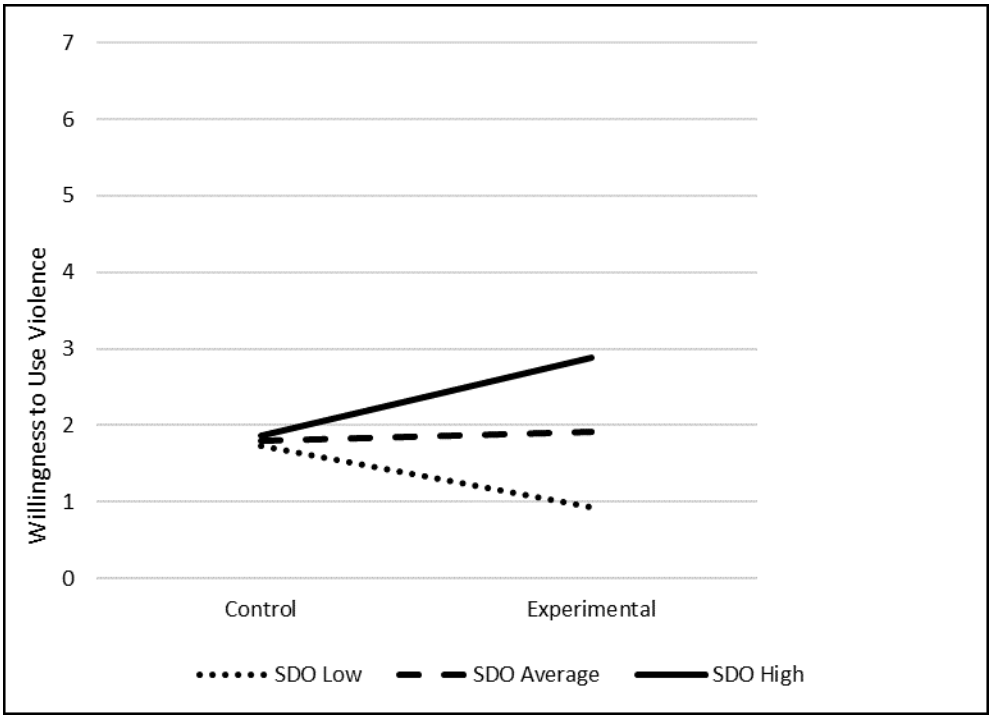
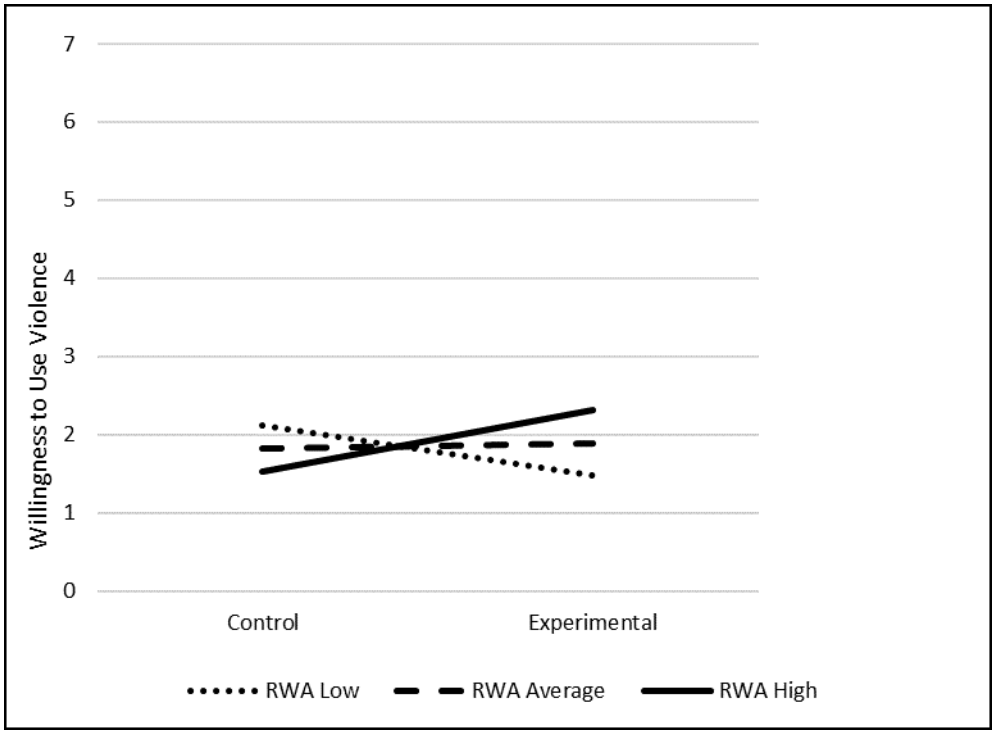


Figure 2

Simple slope moderator effects of RWA on willingness to use violence against immigrants between conspiracy exposure conditions in Study 3 (Model 1 of PROCESS; n = 160).



These results empirically support that exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories increases the willingness to use violence towards immigrants. Importantly, however, this link is conditional on high levels of SDO and RWA. That is, whilst there was no direct link between conspiracy exposure and willingness, when exploring the interaction between SDO and RWA, respectively, those with high levels and exposure to conspiracy theories reported a higher willingness to use violence. However, the same patten was not uncovered for acceptance of violence towards immigrants. This unexpected finding suggested a mismatch between the *willingness to use violence* and the *acceptance of violence*. It might be that the acceptance items were a little too unrelated to the conspiracy theory (plots and schemes) and the desire to get things to change (i.e., justifications for violence due to their "bad driving*",* which is unrelated to perceiving the group as conspiring).

Nonetheless, while these results appear promising, they should be viewed cautiously since the conspiracy manipulation was unsuccessful in increasing conspiracy *beliefs.* This is puzzling since previous research has found that this manipulation does increase conspiracy beliefs (Jolley et al., 2020), and the manipulation used in this study was unchanged. The manipulation was also successful in increasing conspiracy beliefs in Study 2. However, during data checks in this study, an income disparity between conditions was found. Participants in the control condition reported lower income than the conspiracy condition. A growing evidence base links economic inequality and conspiracy beliefs (see Salvador et al., 2022 for a review). It is plausible that participants who happened to be in the control condition had higher baseline conspiracy *beliefs*, thus rendering the manipulation check testing the success of conspiracy *exposure* ineffective. As such, building on the findings of Study 3, Study 4 sought to replicate and extend this work, thus providing confidence in the conclusions.

Study 4

In Study 4, replication of the Study 3 effect was sought, that exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants predicted willingness to violence towards immigrants, but that this effect was conditional on higher levels of SDO and RWA. However, building upon the limitations of Study 3 was also necessary. First, Study 3 focused broadly on immigrants, which, whilst extending previous work (Jolley et al., 2020), is limited in the regard that *immigrants* are a very broad group, and participants might have been thinking about a specific group when completing the measures. To increase the robustness of the findings, the focus was shifted to a specific group, Muslim immigrants, which has been a group that has been the target of conspiracy theories for many years. For instance, beliefs about Islamic domination of the West (Fekete, 2012) and the infiltration of terrorists within refugees from

Islamic countries (Marchlewska et al., 2018). These conspiracy beliefs have gained popularity since the 9/11 terror attacks and are common in far-right political ideology (Brown, 2019; Jedinger et al., 2023; Lee, 2017; Uenal, 2016b). Understanding the links between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions towards Muslim immigrants is timely.

Second, other methodological improvements were made. Study3 utilised a one-item measure of willingness to use violence, which was amended to include four items in Study 4. Further, the measure of violence acceptance was replaced (i.e., "*If an immigrant cuts you up in traffic, it's OK to swear at them*") with a measure that is more focused on a desire to bring about change (i.e., "*Unfortunately, you have to resort to violence against Muslims sometimes because this is the only way you to get things to change*"). Second, instead of measuring trait physical aggression as in Study 3 (which resulted in no effects) another component of trait aggression was employed, *anger*. According to the brief aggression questionnaire sub-measures, physical aggression is behavioural, and anger is emotion (Webster et al., 2015). Arguably, anger is the physiological arousal preceding, but not necessarily resulting in, physical aggression (Buss & Perry, 1992) and has previously been associated with conspiracy beliefs (Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Šrol et al., 2022). Therefore, focusing on *anger* (rather than physical aggression) suits the predictions better. Finally, greater care was employed with participant recruitment. In Study 3, a snowball sampling was used across a variety of platforms (e.g., Facebook, student recruitment). In Study 4, participants were recruited on one platform (Prolific) only.

In sum, Study 4 sought to investigate how exposure to Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories might increase the motivation and willingness to use violence against Muslim immigrants and also find such violence justified. It was hypothesised (pre-registered: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/9UN2T) that exposure to conspiracy theories about Muslim

immigrants would increase violent reactions, but these effects could be moderated by SDO, RWA and trait anger.

Method

Participation and Design

A total of 211 participants aged between 18 and 76 (M_{age} = 34.62, *SD* = 13.28; 63 men, 146 women, 1 non-binary, and 1 undisclosed) were recruited via the recruitment platform *Prolific* in 2020. All participants were above 18, UK citizens, and did not identify as Muslim. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (conspiracy theory article relating to Muslim immigrants in the UK [*n* = 105] vs control [*n* = 106]). As in Study 3, at the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they devoted their full attention to the study and if any distractions were present. No participants rated below 3 (out of five, with one indicating no attention and many distractions) on the attention check questions, therefore none were removed. The initial target sample size was 210 participants, which was an increase from Study 2 as the target in Study 3 was based on the recommended sample size for comparing two groups (*n* = 200; Brysbaert, 2019) and recruiting with potential exclusions on priori criteria. More specifically, the desired sample size (*N* = 200) would enable 80 per cent power to detect a difference corresponding to Cohen's d ≥ 0.40 (with α = .05). Again, as in Study 3, the IV was experimental condition (conspiracy vs control) and of justified use of violence towards Muslim immigrants (motivation and willingness to use violence) was the DV. Trait anger, SDO and RWA were moderator variables.

Materials and Procedure

As with Study 3, participants provided informed consent and demographic information before beginning the survey (see Appendix 1, 2, and 5). Participants then completed three potential moderating measures. The first moderator variable comprised a six-

item scale of RWA (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018) (e.g. "*The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers if we are going to preserve law and order*"; α = .74). The second measure consisted of the eight-item measure of SDO (Ho et al., 2015; e.g. "*An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.*"; α = .85). The final potential moderator was a three-item measure adapted from the Brief Aggression Questionnaire (Webster et al., 2015), and comprised of three items relating to trait anger (e.g., "*I have trouble controlling my temper*." α = .82). The presentation of the scales was counterbalanced, and participants indicated their agreement on a seven-point scale.

As with Study 3, but with the amendment of the target group from *immigrants* to *Muslim immigrants*, participants then either read the conspiracy article (adapted from Jolley et al., 2020) or nothing (control). The term 'conspiracy theory' was not used in the article. An extract of the article is as follows:

> *"... Specifically, after investigations in other countries, Muslim immigrants have been discovered working for secret terrorist organisations. For example, in recent attacks in Europe, officials discovered new Muslim immigrants amongst the terrorists… Evidence is therefore mounting that Muslim immigrants arriving in European countries are embedded within, or somehow involved with, terrorist groups…".*

Participants then completed a six-item measure of conspiracy beliefs about Muslim immigrants (adapted from Jolley et al., 2020, e.g., "*Muslim immigrants are often involved in secret plots and schemes intended to disrupt British society.*"; α = .93). Participants indicated their level of agreement using a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Finally, participants completed two dependent variable measures of violence towards Muslim immigrants. First, the motivation to use violence was comprised of three items

sourced from unpublished work by Lamberty and Leiser (2019) (e.g. "*Unfortunately, you have to resort to violence against Muslim immigrants sometimes because this is the only way you get things to change."* α = .92). Second, four items were completed to measure willingness to use violence towards Muslim immigrants (e.g., "*In general, I would be willing to use physical violence to fight Muslim immigrants."* α = .81, adapted from Doosje et al. [2012] and Lamberty & Leiser [2019]). After the manipulation, the presentation of the seven-point scales was counterbalanced. Once completed, participants were debriefed with the same detailed information presented in Study 3 (see Appendix 8).

Results

Data Checking

First, gender differences between men and women were analysed using Mann-Whitney U tests of difference (participants who identified as non-binary [n = 1] and undisclosed [n = 1] were omitted). Men measured significantly higher than women concerning SDO (men M = 2.71; women M = 2.36; Z = -2.36; p = .018). As shown in Table 14, age was positively correlated with conspiracy beliefs and RWA. Those who were right-leaning politically reported higher conspiracy beliefs, SDO, RWA and violent reactions. Higher levels of income were associated with SDO. Also, to note, conspiracy beliefs, SDO and RWA were all positively correlated with each other.

Table 14

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlations for all variables in Study 4 (n = 211).

	Variable	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Motivation to use violence	1.45 (0.84)	-	.67**	41**	.18**	.32**	.24**	.07	.24**	.07
2	Willingness to use violence	1.41 (0.87)		-	.33**	.31**	.31**	.22**	.05	.22**	.07
3	Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs	2.71 (1.41)			-	.40**	.60**	.13¥	.34**	.44**	-.03
4	SDO	2.46 (1.02)				-	.38**	.15*	.11	.48**	.16*
5	RWA	3.26 (1.02)					-	.04	.25**	.49**	.04
6	Anger	2.58 (1.20)						-	-.01	.02	.10
7	Age	34.62 (13.28)							-	.21**	-.03
8	Political identity	3.40 (1.34)								-	.12
9	Income	3.77 (2.68)									-

Notes. * $p < .050$. ** $p < .010$. *** $p < .001$.

Next, as in Study 3, demographics were checked for differences between conditions and found no significant differences ($p > .05$). As expected, there were also no experimental differences on any of the moderator variables (anger, SDO and RWA, see Table 15). Unlike Study 3, no income differences were found therefore was not used as a control variable. Then, as a test of whether the manipulation was successful, the difference between the experimental conditions and conspiracy beliefs was explored. The mean scores recorded between the control ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.28$) and conspiracy ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.12$) conditions significantly differed, indicating that the manipulation successfully increased Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs, $t(209) = -2.67$, $p = .004$, $d = .3.37$.

Table 15

Summary of moderator t-tests and descriptive statistics for the experimental conditions in Study 4 (N = 211).

Variable	Control *M* (*SD*)	Conspiracy *M* (*SD*)	*t*	*df*	*p*	*d*
Anger	2.68 (*1.27*)	2.47 (*1.11*)	1.29	209	.099	.18
SDO	2.51 (*1.07*)	2.41 (*0.98*)	0.67	209	.251	.09
RWA	3.21 (*0.94*)	3.32 (*1.10*)	-0.80	209	.213	.11

As with Study 3, a MANOVA test was then run on the dependent variables (i.e., violent outcome measure) where the overall Pillai's Trace was non-significant $F(2, 208) = 1.17$, $p = .31$. As shown in Table 16, and as expected, no significant differences were uncovered between the conditions on any of the violent outcomes. As with Study 3, an examination of predictions was sought, as it was theorised that moderation analysis would

reveal conditional effects between exposure and violent reactions related to moderator variables anger, SDO, and RWA.

Table 16

One-way MANOVA and descriptive statistics for the experimental conditions in Study 4 on political violence measures (n = 211).

Variable	Conspiracy *M* (*SD*)	Control *M* (*SD*)	*F*	*df*	*p*	np^2
Willingness of violence towards Muslim immigrants	1.47 (*0.92*)	1.41 (*0.75*)	0.30	1, 210	0.584	.00
Motivation to use violence towards Muslim immigrants	1.53 (*1.07*)	1.34 (*0.74*)	2.14	1, 210	0.145	.01

Hypothesis Testing

Motivated use of violence towards Muslim immigrants was the first dependent variable to test whether trait anger, SDO and RWA acted as moderators. As with Study 3, age, gender, and differences in political identification were controlled due to associations with variables of interest. Firstly, a significant, positive interaction was found between trait anger and experimental condition on the motivated use of violence (b = .26, p = .014, 95% CI [0.053 – 0.459]), which accounted for 3% of the overall variance (F(1, 204) = 6.18, p = .014). Simple slope analysis found significant moderating effects between trait anger and the experimental condition on motivated use at high levels (b = .50, p = .005, 95% CI [0.157 - 0.845]. Results were non-significant at medium (b = .19, p = .113, 95% CI [-0.046 – 0.434] and low levels (b = -.11, p = .512, 95% CI [-0.453 – 0.227]), respectively (see Figure 3).

A significant, positive interaction effect was also found between SDO and experimental condition on motivation to use violence against Muslim immigrants (b = .31, p = .008, 95% CI [0.083 – 0.538]), which accounted for 3% of the overall variance (F(1, 204) = 7.22, p = .008). A simple slope test revealed that when SDO was at a high level, the effect of exposure to conspiracy theories on the motivation to use violence was significant in a positive direction (b = .52, p = .002, 95% CI [0.195 – 0.854]). However, when SDO was at a moderate and low level, the effect was non-significant (b = .34, p = .747, 95% CI [-0.187 – 0.260] and (b = -.26, p = .114, 95% CI [-0.572 – 0.062]), respectively (see Figure 4). Non-significant interactions were found between the experimental condition and RWA on the motivated use of violence (b = -.07, p = .594, 95% CI [-0.306 – 0.176].

The second dependent variable, willingness to use violence towards Muslim immigrants, was the next dependent variable to test whether trait anger, SDO and RWA were moderators between exposure to conspiracy theory and willingness. As with motivation to

use violence, a significant, positive interaction effect was also found between SDO and experimental condition on willingness (b = .30, p = .006, 95% CI [0.087 – 0.513]), which accounted for 3% of the overall variance of willingness to use violence (F(1, 204) = 7.73, p = .006). Simple slope analysis revealed significant moderating effects between willingness and the experimental condition at high levels in a positive direction (b = .38, p = .015, 95% CI [0.075 - 0.691]. The results were non-significant at medium (b = .08, p = .489, 95% CI [-0.140 – 0.293] and low levels (b = -.23, p = .139, 95% CI [-0.537 – 0.075]), respectively (see Figure 5). Non-significant interactions were found between the experimental condition and RWA on willingness (b = -.31, p = .780, 95% CI [-0.252 – 0.189]) or trait anger (b = .10, p = .286, 95% CI [-0.085 – 0.288]).

Figure 3

Simple slope moderator effects of anger on motivated use of violence towards Muslim immigrants between conspiracy exposure conditions in Study 4 (Model 1 of PROCESS macro; n = 211).

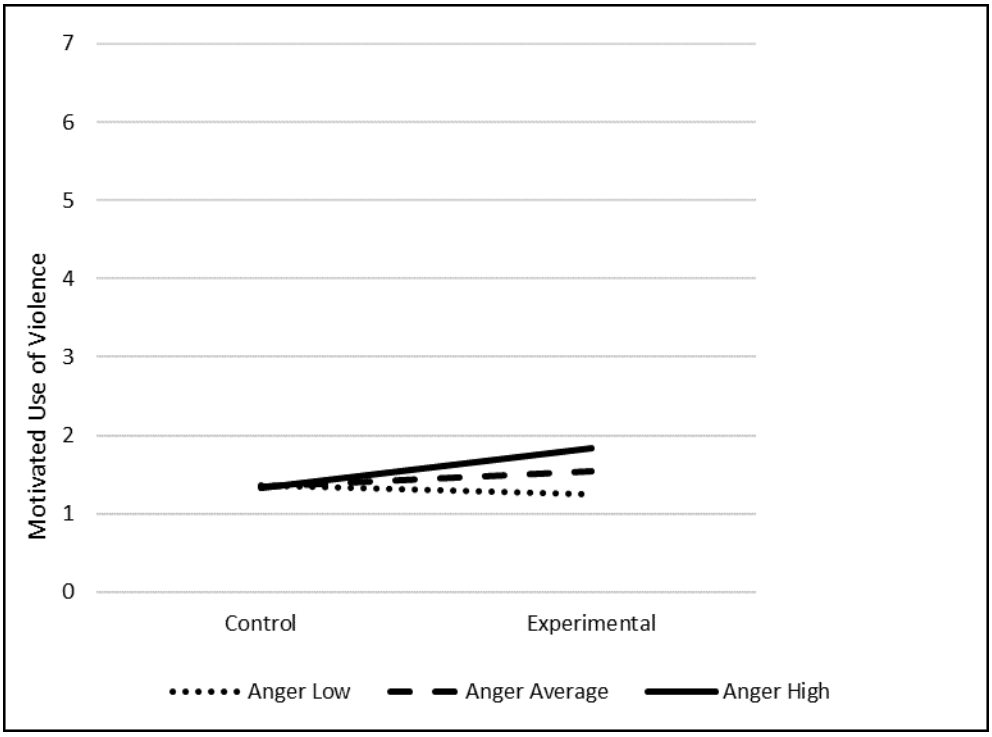


Figure 4

Simple slope moderator effects of SDO on motivated use of violence towards Muslim immigrants between conspiracy exposure conditions in Study 4 in Study 4 (Model 1 of PROCESS macro; n = 211).

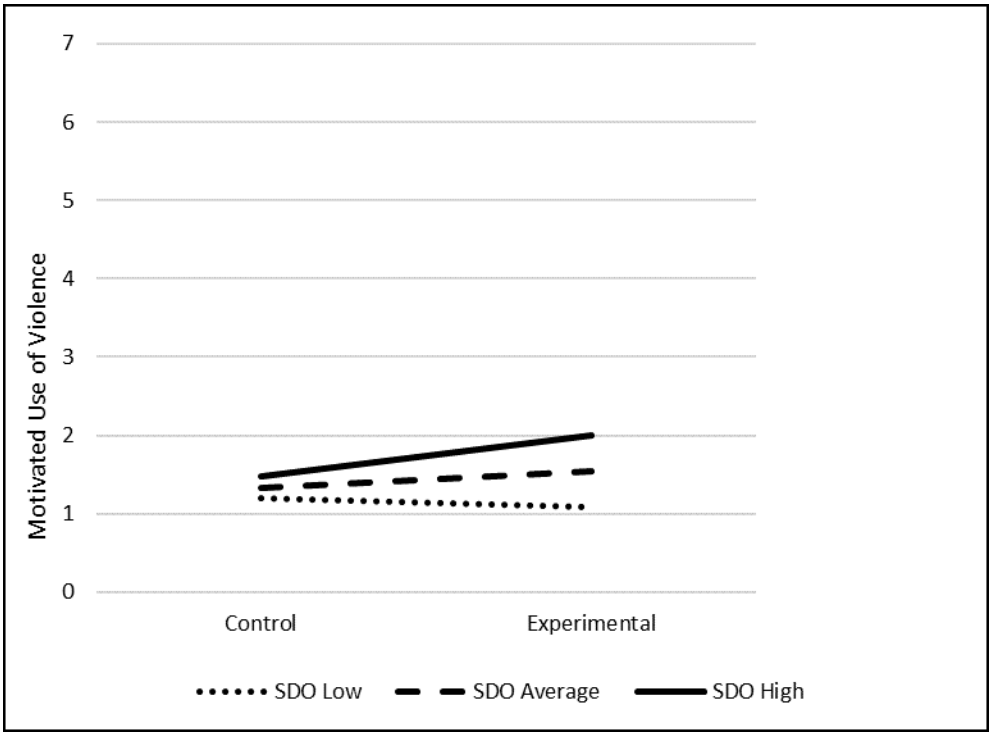
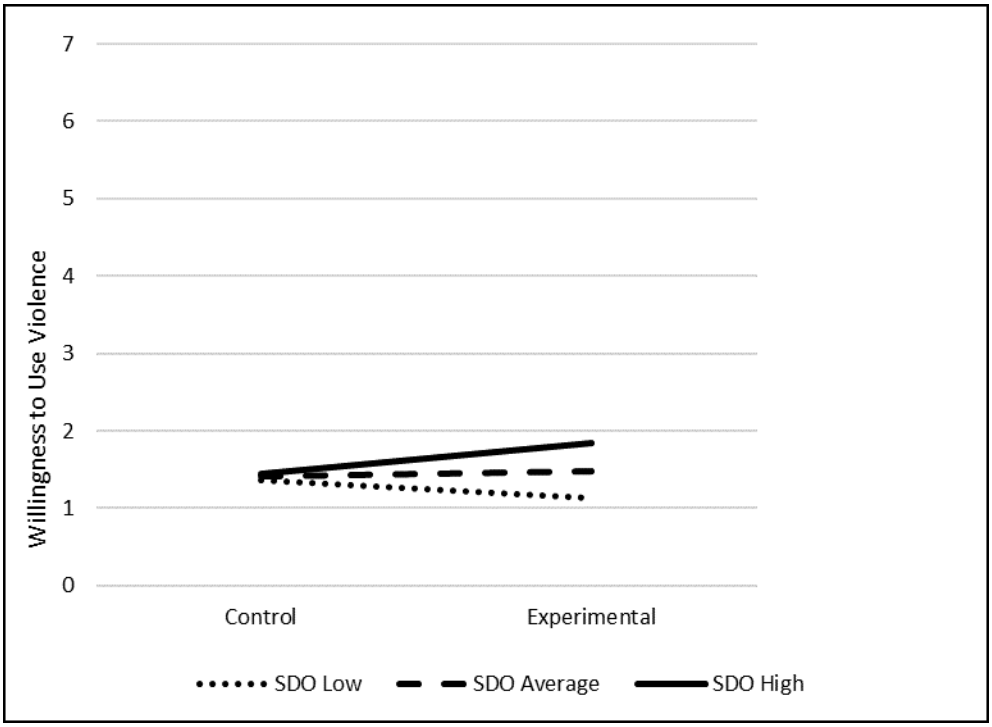


Figure 5

Simple slope moderator effects of SDO on willingness to use of violence towards Muslim immigrants between conspiracy exposure conditions in Study 4 (Model 1 of PROCESS macro; n = 211).



In summary, Study 4 replicated and extended upon the findings of Study 3 by again demonstrating that exposure to conspiracy theories has the potential to increase the motivation and willingness to use violence against Muslim immigrants, but only for people who are high in SDO. RWA was not associated with either violent outcome. Additionally, it was found that in the motivation to use violence towards Muslim immigrants, trait anger was a significant moderator on conspiracy exposure and motivated violence. For the most part, therefore, Study 4 replicates the findings from Study 3 in another group, Muslim immigrants, with some nuances for RWA and anger that will be discuss in the General Discussion.

General Discussion

Across two experimental studies, this work established that exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories increased the willingness to use violence towards the targets of conspiracy theories, but only for specific individuals. Specifically, Study 3 found that exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories increased violent reactions towards immigrants, for those with higher SDO and RWA. Study 4 then sought to replicate and extend these results. It was found that exposure to Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories increased violent reactions towards Muslim immigrants, but only for those who reported higher levels of SDO (regarding motivated violence and willingness to use violence) and trait anger (regarding motivated violence). RWA did not act as a moderator in this context. Importantly, this research design manipulated conspiracy exposure and established causality, thus, contributing to the dearth of experimental work in the literature. Together, these results provide compelling evidence of the interactional effects of broader perspectives of society—particularly SDO and RWA—and exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories on violence towards the target of the conspiracy theory.

These findings make numerous advances in previous research. First, previous work has focused on uncovering links between conspiracy beliefs and (political) extremist intentions (e.g., Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). However, this work might be the first to spotlight the empirical links between *intergroup* conspiracy theories and violent reactions towards those targeted by a conspiracy theory—(Muslim) immigrants. Secondly, an experimental design was employed to explore how exposure to immigrant (Study 3) and Muslim immigrant (Study 4) conspiracy theories impacted violent reactions. More experimental designs are needed in the study of conspiracy theories, even more so in the context of violent extremism, so this methodological advancement is notable. In both studies it was found that

simple exposure does *not* increase violent extremism and offers reassurances that simple conspiracy exposure is unlikely to make the general consumer extremist.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, how conspiracy *exposure* interacts with broader perceptions of society and levels of trait anger on violent reactions, was examined. Again, this work might be the first to demonstrate that higher levels of SDO and conspiracy exposure (vs control) resulted in greater reported willingness to use violence towards (Muslim) immigrants. Notably, this research extends the psychological work examining SDO and conspiracy beliefs by supporting the assertion that conspiracy theories, combined with factors such as SDO, may increase perceived outgroup threat (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). SDO is a powerful predictor of intergroup attitudes and behaviour (Ho et al., 2012) and captures multiple perspectives of intergroup conflicts, such as realistic group conflict, social identity, and cultural and political ideologies. As Swami (2012) demonstrated with anti-Semitic conspiracy beliefs in Malaysia, the enhancing effect of SDO in this work suggests that conspiracy theories regarding specific groups may serve an ideological need and that individual differences (such as SDO) may increase the effects of such conspiracy theories. Considering that the links between conspiracy theories and violence appear conditional on individual differences (e.g., Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020), our work notably extends understanding of the links between broader worldviews and intergroup conspiracy exposure to violence.

It should be noted that there was inconsistent evidence of RWA moderating the link between intergroup conspiracy theories and violent reactions. RWA did not emerge as a moderating factor in Study 4, despite demonstrating a conditional effect between immigrant conspiracy theories and willingness to use violence in Study 3. The divergence may be due to the change in focus from *immigrants* in general (Study 3) to the more specified group focus

of *Muslim immigrants* (Study 4). Such a change is important since SDO and RWA can demonstrate different effects depending on the target group (Cohrs & Asbrock, 2009). Indeed, research has also shown that the impact of RWA can vary depending on immigrant origin (Peresman et al., 2021). It may be that because a specific target immigrant group was not stated in Study 3, such a broad 'immigrant' definition appealed to those with higher RWA. Future research could pinpoint the boundary conditions of RWA *interacting* with conspiracy beliefs.

Trait aggression was also inconsistent between the studies and measures of violence. Trait aggression was measured in both studies but focussed on different aspects. In Study 1, *physical* aggression was not a moderator between conspiracy exposure and violent reactions. However, in Study 4, *anger* had a conditional effect between exposure and motivation to use violence (not willingness). This is interesting since it suggests that anger, being the emotional aspect of trait aggression (Buss & Perry, 1992), reacts with conspiracy theories to arouse a motivation to use violence towards *Muslim* immigrants. Future research might investigate this affective aspect of trait aggression to understand how conspiracy beliefs influence this and when such emotions are linked with violent reactions.

Limitations and Future Research

While the study has several strengths, limitations that could be addressed in future research must be acknowledged. For example, whilst the findings in Study 3 supported the predictions, the manipulation of conspiracy exposure did not directly increase conspiracy *beliefs.* Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution. However, the conclusions are strengthened by a successful manipulation exposure in Study 4, which replicated the core finding. Furthermore, participants were asked about their *willingness* to use violence towards immigrants (Study 3) or Muslim immigrants (Study 4). Such behaviour is illegal and socially

unacceptable; therefore, social desirability might have influenced the honesty of the answers. However, participants were assured anonymity, which may have mitigated this. Whilst measuring willingness allowed us to explore a sensitive area, as including a behavioural outcome is challenging for an online experiment, it should be highlighted that willingness or intentions do not necessarily evolve into behaviour (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). Future research could employ (online) experimental tasks that tap into aggression towards others. For instance, instead of using self-report violent reaction measures, participants could be instructed to allocate varying degrees of noise blasts (Denson et al., 2011) or measures of hot sauce (McGregor et al., 1998) to assess aggressive behaviour towards a target group member.

Furthermore, exploring the role of perceived threat in the context of cultural and political ideology may offer ideas for intervention. Reducing feelings of threat may, in turn, reduce violent reactions. Moreover, investigating ways to sever the link between SDO and conspiracy beliefs could, in turn, reduce the willingness to use violence against Muslim immigrants. Indeed, as demonstrated in Study 3, individuals who reported lower SDO and were exposed to conspiracy theories (vs control) reported lower violent reactions (although this effect was not significant in Study 4). Nonetheless, exploring how to reduce SDO is timely. Interestingly, associations between SDO and empathy have been established (Sidanius et al., 2013), with empathy mediating the relationship between SDO and prejudice (Nicol & Rounding, 2013). Future work might investigate the role of empathy within the framework of exposure to conspiracy theories and willingness to use violence, and how reductions in SDO might weaken the relationship.

Future research might also investigate if these findings are generalisable towards other minority groups (e.g., Jewish or LGBTQ+) and if the same political ideological moderators play a role with these groups. Finally, it would be worth also exploring

conspiracy beliefs from a different cultural perspective, such as how Muslims endorse Western conspiracy theories and how this might translate into behavioural outcomes. Such an investigation would foster a more holistic understanding of the role of conspiracy theories from opposing perspectives of the same intergroup conflict.

This research is timely when considering the increase in the incidences of hate crime. In the period from 2012 to 2022, racially motivated hate crimes have more than trebled from 35,944 to 109,843 in England and Wales (UK Home Office, 2018, 2022). Political rhetoric about immigration to Britain should take heed of these risks to decrease the potential for violence against immigrants, as demonstrated by the attack on the Dover, UK migrant processing centre in October 2022. The organization, Hope Not Hate, recorded 50 far-right protests in relation to the housing of refugees in hotels, in the six months leading up the June 2023 (Khan-Ruf & Lawrence, 2023). This is over and above the 102 percent increase on migrant accommodation harassment by far-right groups between 2021 and 2022 (Khan-Ruf, 2023). As demonstrated by the anti-immigrant violence outside of the Suites Hotel in Liverpool, March 2023 (Edrich, 2023) such protests can endanger the safety of immigrants in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

This research showcases how exposure to conspiracy theories targeting immigrants (Study 3) or Muslim immigrants (Study 4) can increase violent reactions towards those groups. Moreover, this work contributes to limited research using manipulation of conspiracy beliefs to establish causality. Importantly, however, these effects are conditional on higher levels of SDO and, when concerning immigrants (Study 3), also RWA. There is also some evidence of trait anger playing a role for motivated violent reactions (Study 4). This work builds upon previous research that has demonstrated the effect of individual differences on

the pathway between conspiracy beliefs and violence (e.g., Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020), where this work further highlights the potential risks associated with conspiracy beliefs when directed at targeted groups for specific individuals. Therefore, it is argued that, when considering levers for intervention, it is vital to also consider worldviews when seeking to break the conspiracy-violence link.

Chapter 5:

Conspiracy Beliefs and Jury Decision-making

Chapter Summary

Conspiracy beliefs can increase prejudice and violent reactions towards groups perceived as conspirators and are associated with cognitive biases. Implicit attitudes and cognitive biases are also associated with jury decision-making and can influence how jurors perceive guilt towards outgroup defendants. Across two studies, the influence of conspiracy beliefs as a form of jury bias was explored. In Study 5, a correlational design (n = 247) uncovered Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs as a predictor of guilt towards Muslim immigrant defendants. Furthermore, general conspiracy beliefs emerged as a significant predictor of guilt towards a British defendant. Accordingly, in an experimental design, Study 6 (n = 219) tested the effects of Muslim immigrant conspiracy exposure in a between-subjects design, where the defendant was either perceived as a Muslim Immigrant or a British citizen. Participants provided subjective ratings related to defendants—the likelihood of guilt, penalty length, and the likelihood of rehabilitation. Moderation analysis demonstrated that the pathway between perceived defendant identity and lower rehabilitation ratings of Muslim immigrant defendants was conditional on Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs. The same effects were not found for subjective ratings of guilt and penalty. This research is the first to uncover links between conspiracy beliefs and jury decision-making, which suggests that conspiracy beliefs may act as a form of jury bias.

Introduction

Emerging empirical work has demonstrated that *conspiracy beliefs*—which attribute blame to significant events at the hands of secretive, malevolent others such as governments and minorities (Rottweiler & Gill, 2020) can have an impact on violent reactions and can lead to negative outcomes for target groups (e.g., see Chapters 2 to 4). As evidenced by Jolley et al. (2020), conspiracy theorising about minority groups not only exacerbates prejudice towards that target group (e.g., immigrants) but can also affect feelings towards unrelated groups—referred to as attitude generalisation. Of relevance, data presented in the previous chapters have established unique links between conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy theory exposure and violent reactions. Specifically, conspiracy beliefs were found to predict political violence intentions (Study 1), and in an experimental design, intergroup conspiracy exposure led to increased violent reactions towards minority groups (immigrants and Muslim immigrants), although this link was found to be conditional on individual differences—Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Study 3) and Social Dominance Orientation (Studies 3 and 4). Together, this demonstrates that conspiracy beliefs have the potential for multiple negative outcomes for ethnic groups.

The Criminal Justice System (CJS), and particularly jury decision-making, is a research area with extensive evidence of negative outcomes for ethnic groups (Hunt, 2015). The murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis, US in 2020 sparked international outrage and reinvigorated discussions about racial bias within the CJS (Meikle & Morris, 2022). The Movement for Black Lives argue that racial bias within the CJS (from police officers to jurors) has negative implications for Black defendants, is rooted in biased beliefs about Black people and their propensity for criminality and is related to perceptions of intergroup threat (Cholbi & Madva, 2021). Considering the influence of conspiracy beliefs on perceptions of intergroup threat (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018), it is plausible that

conspiracy beliefs contribute to perceptions of intergroup threat within a criminal justice context. Moreover, Jolley, Marques, et al. (2022) argue that conspiracy beliefs have the potential to disrupt intergroup relations and can alter how perceived conspirators are judged. The focus of this chapter will explore the role of conspiracy beliefs and jury decision-making when the defendant is viewed as a conspirator (e.g., a Muslim immigrant).

The Criminal Justice System (CJS)

The CJS is a complex process, including the involvement of police officers, defence and prosecution lawyers, judges, and jurors. Arguably, the outcome of the CJS ultimately lies in the verdict handed down by a jury. The purpose of a jury is to review the evidence in an impartial manner, deliberate with each other, and ultimately come to a verdict of either guilty or not guilty (Curley et al., 2022). However, research into the influence of culture, race, and ethnicity on bias within the CJS (Hunt, 2015) serve as a reminder of how attitudes, beliefs and biases could lead to miscarriages of justice.

Hunt (2015) argues that jury bias related to culture, race and ethnicity is a network of complex factors that can lead not only to discrimination and unjust verdicts but also erode public trust in the CJS as a democratic institution. Similarly, racial, and ethnic inconsistencies in the CJS have eroded trust and motivated civil unrest in the US (Bornstein et al., 2020). An erosion of trust in institutions, such as the CJS, is interrelated with conspiracy beliefs and can increase suspicion between strangers, prejudice, and intergroup conflict (van Prooijen et al., 2022). These factors suggest that conspiracy beliefs may not only reduce public trust in the CJS as an institution but may also play a role in how society (including jurors) views defendants they perceive as belonging to conspiratorial ethnic groups. It is plausible that conspiracy beliefs, like other biased beliefs (e.g., rape myths related to defendant

characteristics; Maeder et al., 2015), may form part of the network of factors (Hunt, 2015) contributing to jury bias.

Jury decision making

Jurors in England and Wales are ordinary citizens between 18 and 75 who are called upon to decide whether a defendant is guilty or not. However, when this process is influenced by extra-legal factors, such as biased beliefs and intergroup dynamics, it undermines this legal process, increases the possibility of miscarriages of justice (Curley et al., 2022; Hunt, 2015) and increases public suspicion of the CJS (Bornstein et al., 2020). Research has identified a number of processes that contribute to how juries make decisions that can potentially change the course of people's lives (e.g., ethnicity).

Biased beliefs and ethnicity

Jurors may enter their role with preconceived attitudes, beliefs and biases before any evidence has been presented. For example, implicit biases are particularly troubling in the context of juries due to the unconscious nature of this phenomenon, even amongst people who oppose prejudice and discrimination (Roberts, 2018). Implicit bias is a term that encompasses two cognitive processes. Firstly, implicit stereotyping which refers to unconscious beliefs about the characteristics of specific social or ethnic groups (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Secondly, implicit attitudes that refer to unconscious evaluations of specific groups (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Implicit bias is measured using the Implicit Association Test (Project Implicit, 2011) which measures the magnitude of associations between concepts (e.g., Muslim immigrant) and evaluations (e.g., hostile) or stereotypes (e.g., jihadist). For instance, a juror may hold implicit stereotypes about Black people, their use of weapons and violence. Therefore, they may judge a Black defendant more harshly (or even presume guilt) on a violent, weapons-related case (Roberts, 2016). Cholbi and Madva (2021)

argue that such implicit biases contribute to the high volume of Black people facing the death penalty in the US. Implicit bias is not the only cognitive distortion that may influence how jurors assess evidence and defendants. Along with implicit bias, confirmation bias is also problematic within jury decision making.

Confirmation bias refers to the propensity to seek out information that supports an existing belief system whilst ignoring opposing evidence or views (Nickerson, 1998). This contributes to the development of polarised communities (i.e., echo chambers) that lack diversity and increase social influence creating homogeneity of beliefs (Del Vicario et al., 2017). Confirmation bias creates distorted thinking and may influence jury processes by obstructing jurors' ability to sufficiently analyse all relevant evidence presented to them and has the potential for wrongful convictions (Findley & Scott, 2006; MacFarlane & Cordner, 2008). Curley et al. (2018) argue that confirmation bias might relate to cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance refers to the mental discomfort that occurs when a person's beliefs and behaviour (or new information) are at odds and relief for this discomfort is sought (Festinger, 2001). Should jurors hold particular beliefs about the guilt or innocence of a defendant, they may find the evidence contradicts their beliefs, resulting in cognitive dissonance. Confirmation bias may offer relief by allowing jurors to focus only on evidence that confirms their pre-trial beliefs (Curley et al., 2018).

Research suggests that confirmation bias also features within conspiracy theorising. For instance, fictitious accounts of an event were judged more believable when they aligned with existing beliefs (Leman & Cinnirella, 2007). Linked to cognitive processes such as illusory correlations (i.e., perceiving relationships where they do not exist) and cognitive closure (i.e., the need for certainty as opposed to ambiguity), Goreis and Voracek (2019) argue that conspiracy beliefs may be partly explained as a product of cognitive shortcuts,

such as confirmation bias. Therefore, it is plausible that if a juror endorses conspiracy theories about a certain ethnic group, (e.g., Muslim immigrants importing terrorism to the United Kingdom) and a defendant is a Muslim immigrant, confirmation bias may cause them to only attend to information that confirms their prior held beliefs about Muslim immigrants. This may be particularly salient if the charges are terror related. This echoes implicit stereotypical beliefs that link Black people with hostility, violence, and weapons, which can lead to miscarriages of justice toward Black defendants (Roberts, 2016). Thus, these types of scenarios have an intergroup aspect that also has implications for jury decision making.

Intergroup relations and ethnicity

A meta-analysis exploring the characteristic effects relating to jurors (e.g., authoritarianism) and defendants (e.g., race) on guilty verdicts concluded that these interactions are complex, they can influence judgements of guilt and are concerning enough to justify ongoing investigation into this area (Devine & Caughlin, 2014). In particular, race and ethnicity are defendant characteristics that continue to be studied in relation to jury decision making (Adams et al., 2011; Bolotin, 2019; Estrada-Reynolds et al., 2023; Gamblin & Kehn, 2021; Hunt, 2015; Perez et al., 1993; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). Mock juror perceptions of guilt demonstrated significant discrimination towards defendants from racial and ethnic outgroups (Leippe et al., 2017). This underscores how intergroup relations and prejudice can affect how jurors perceive defendants from outgroups and attribute guilt.

Research relating to the *similarity-leniency effect* (Kerr et al., 1995), has found that jurors tend to judge those from their outgroup more harshly than those from their ingroup (Hunt, 2015). Stereotyping and prejudice regarding ethnic groups lead to jurors making internal attributions about behaviour (e.g., that the behaviour was due to innate characteristics of that group) as opposed to external attributions (e.g., that the behaviour was due to

situational factors, see Hunt, 2015). Similarly, there is a higher likelihood that jurors will make internal attributions of criminal behaviour about outgroup defendants, than ingroup defendants (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). For instance, Black juvenile defendants may be judged as destructive or defiant (internal) when on trial for petty crime, while White juvenile defendants' criminal behaviour might be regarded as peer pressure-related (Rattan et al., 2012). Similarly, studies focussing on rape myths and race have found that in the case of jurors believing the myths that Black men 'lust over' White women, they were more likely to judge a Black defendant more harshly in rape trials (Maeder et al., 2015). This type of racial disparity is likely to be influenced by prejudice or implicit racism.

One way to better understand how implicit racism influences jury bias is via the aversive racism theory. Aversive racism suggests that modern social norms reject prejudicial beliefs in favour of egalitarianism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). However, unconscious negative beliefs (e.g., implicit biases) towards ethnic outgroups persist (Dovidio et al., 2002, 2018; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Despite British legal procedures to negate aversive racial biases, jurors considered Black defendants (vs White) to have a higher likelihood of guilt and recidivism, allocated longer prison sentences and rated less likely to be rehabilitated (Hodson et al., 2005). This racial disparity can become more pronounced when factoring in victim characteristics such as race and attractiveness (e.g., in sexual violence cases when the defendant is Black and victim is White (Hunt, 2015; Maeder et al., 2015). Many argue that racial prejudice persists within jury decision making processes but is complex and may have underlying factors (Estrada-Reynolds et al., 2023; Leippe et al., 2017).

Notably, conspiracy beliefs have also been associated with prejudice towards minority ethnic groups and can affect intergroup relations in negative ways by altering the perceptions of groups viewed as conspiratorial (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). Interestingly,

characteristics/traits such as low vs high levels of communion (being friendly, trustworthy, kind) have been linked with demonisation and conspiracy theorising about offenders (Fousiani & Prooijen, 2019). This has implications if jurors hold negative views towards 'conspiratorial' defendants (i.e., belonging to an ethnic group viewed as being conspiratorial). This contributes to the potential for conspiracy beliefs to influence jury decision-making as a *form of bias.* Moreover, this type of conspiracy bias has the potential to influence jury deliberations, since biased jurors were found to influence non-biased jurors during the jury deliberation process (Ruva & Guenther, 2017).

Conspiracy beliefs as a jury bias

Cognitive biases and intergroup relations feature in both jury decision-making (Curley et al., 2022; Willmot, 2017) and conspiracy beliefs (Douglas et al., 2019) literature. The motivation for conspiracy beliefs can be categorised into three psychological factors: existential (to alleviate feelings of threat), social (to maintain a positive self and group identity), and epistemic (to protect beliefs when uncertain) factors (Douglas et al., 2019). When in ambiguous situations, jurors may become overwhelmed by the adversarial legal environment and revert to cognitive biases for sense-making (Curley et al., 2022). This might be a similar pattern to epistemic motivations for activating conspiracy beliefs when uncertain. Moreover, should a juror endorse certain stereotypical beliefs, which view a defendant as a conspirator, this might increase the likelihood of internal attributions of criminal behaviour. For instance, if a Muslim defendant was on trial for terror-related crimes and a juror held beliefs about Muslims importing terror to the UK, the conspiracy belief may lead the juror to attribute guilt due to the defendant being Muslim (e.g., Roberts, 2016). Alternatively, concerning non-terror related crimes, the juror may also assess the defendant more harshly simply because they view Muslims as guilty of conspiring.

More generally, people high in conspiracy beliefs may view suspected offenders with more suspicion, which would align with existential motivations of conspiracy beliefs. At the core, conspiracy beliefs represent a worldview associated with threat and mistrust (Goertzel, 1994; Mari et al., 2022; Pierre, 2020; van Prooijen et al., 2022), and associated with low morality when uncertain (van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013). Furthermore, when a suspected offender was viewed as lacking in communion (e.g., positive attributes such as trustworthiness), they were demonised and perceived as malevolent conspirators (Fousiani & Prooijen, 2019). This suggests that, when faced with uncertainty and perceived threat, conspiracy believers may attribute a higher probability of guilt towards those suspected of wrongdoing. This differs from the intergroup context which may be related to stereotypical beliefs about a target group (e.g., Muslim immigrants). Instead, this suggests that a conspiratorial worldview may predict a higher probability of guilt more generally.

A further consideration regarding jury decision-making is the effects of individual differences, such as SDO and RWA, which are found to enhance the effect of conspiracy beliefs (Bruder et al., 2013; Dyrendal et al., 2021; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). Kemmelmeier (2005) investigated the effects of SDO on jury decision-making and found high SDO in White jurors predicted anti-Blackness, whereas low SDO predicted pro-Blackness. Whichever end of the spectrum, both indicate bias and have the potential to influence how jurors assess evidence and reach verdicts. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, RWA and SDO are also featured as moderating the effect between intergroup conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions. It is possible that these effects may be replicated within the context of juror decision making when assessing the guilt of a ‘conspiratorial’ defendant.

Current Research

Previous studies in this thesis found that conspiracy beliefs about Muslim immigrants to the United Kingdom led to increased violent reactions toward that group, with the effect moderated by ideological individual differences (i.e., RWA and SDO, Studies 3 and 4). Continuing with this framework of exploring the consequences of conspiracy theories on target groups, Studies 5 and 6 will investigate if these conspiracy beliefs also impact decisions in the criminal justice system. Specifically, Study 5 first aimed to explore the relationships between conspiracy beliefs (Muslim immigrant and general) and the likelihood of guilt. Participants were asked to rate guilt across 12 crimes ranging in severity from fraud to murder related to two defendant ethnicities for both Muslim immigrant and British citizens. SDO was included as a possible moderator, and prejudice was measured as a covariate. It was predicted (pre-registered: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/9UN2T) that a higher likelihood of guilt scores towards Muslim immigrant defendants would be predicted by general and Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (*H1*). Also, general (but not Muslim) conspiracy beliefs would predict the likelihood of guilt scores towards British citizen defendants (*H2*). These relationships are predicted to be moderated by SDO (*H3*).

Extending upon the correlational findings of Study 5, and examining a specific jury context, Study 6 used an experimental design to investigate if the defendant's background (Muslim immigrant, British Muslim, and British) had an impact on attributions of guilt, penalty, and rehabilitation for a terror-related crime when participants took the perspective as a juror. Conspiracy beliefs (Muslim and general), alongside SDO, were measured as moderators. It was predicted (preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/rj2rt.pdf) that when the defendant is a Muslim immigrant (vs British Muslim and vs British), the attribution of guilt and penalty will be higher for those who believe in conspiracy theories, with the opposite

effect on rehabilitation (*H4*). As in Study 5, these relationships were predicted to be moderated by SDO (*H5*).

Study 5

The aim of Study 5 was to investigate potential relationships between Muslim immigrants and general conspiracy beliefs and how participants attribute the likelihood of criminal offences to certain groups (British citizens and Muslim immigrants). A correlational design was employed to test the relationships between conspiracy beliefs (general and Muslim immigrants) and how participants attribute the likelihood of guilt towards British citizens and Muslim immigrants. Crimes were selected from the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CCHI), which rates crimes according to harmful impact (Cambridge University, 2020).

In addition, to understand the unique relationship between these two variables, participants also completed a semantic measure of prejudice towards Muslim immigrants and British citizens, which are treated as covariates. Further, SDO has been associated with conspiracy beliefs (Dyrendal et al., 2021) and jury decision-making (Kemmelmeier, 2005); therefore, it was included to explore the possible moderating effects of ideological individual differences between conspiracy beliefs and jury decisions. To examine the predictions, multiple regression analyses on each crime and each defendant type (British citizen and Muslim immigrant) were used to assess which crimes were most strongly predicted by conspiracy beliefs (*H1* and *H2*). A test of moderation was also conducted to examine whether SDO moderate these relationships (*H3*)

Method

Participation and Design

A total of 260 participants *(M_{age} =* 32.86, *SD* = 12.22; 48 men, 206 women, 3 non-binary, 2 agender, 1 questioning) were recruited via a student online recruitment platform at a university, as well as social media platforms (Facebook, Tumbler and Twitter) in 2021 and 2022, and received no remuneration. The aim was to recruit 250 participants in accordance with guidance regarding sample size calculations to receive stable correlations (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Participants needed to fit the criteria for jury eligibility in England and Wales; therefore, they were required to be between 18 and 75 years old, hold British citizenship and reside in the United Kingdom. Through the analysis of demographic information, one participant was removed as they did not fit these requirements.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they devoted their full attention to the study and if there were any distractions present during the study. At this stage, 8 participants were removed due to scoring above 3 (out of 5, with 5 indicating no attention and many distractions) on the attention check questions. Finally, after reading the debrief information, participants were given another opportunity to withdraw consent, of which 4 further participants asked to be removed from the analysis. The final sample size was 247 (M_{age} = 33.25, *SD* = 12.49; 46 men, 196 women, 3 non-binary, 2 agender). Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs, a semantic measure of prejudice relating to typical UK citizens and typical Muslim immigrants, were included as control variables. SDO was also included as a possible moderator between conspiracy beliefs (Muslim immigrant and general) and the two DVs - the subjective likelihood of guilt ratings (UK citizen or Muslim immigrant).

Materials and procedure

Participants provided informed consent before providing demographic information (age, gender identity, political identity, annual income), including whether or not they had ever served on a jury or been a victim of a crime, before beginning the survey (see Appendix 1, 6, and 7). After that, participants were presented with the following preamble:

> *"There is often debate about whether or not the public is told the whole truth about various important issues. Also, there is debate about the effectiveness of society's structures and how this influences communities. The following questions are designed to understand your beliefs about these issues."*

Participants then completed 4 randomised questionnaires by indicating their level of agreement on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). This included a 15-item measure of general conspiracy beliefs (e.g., *The government permits or perpetrates acts of terrorism on its own soil, disguising its involvement*"; *a* = .94; Brotherton et al., 2013), and a 6-item scale of Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (e.g., "*Muslims immigrants are working with terrorist groups to eventually attack British society from within*." a = .87; Jolley et al., 2020). The items in these two conspiracy measures were randomly combined and presented as one scale to reduce the possibility of demand characteristics.

Next, an 8-item scale of SDO (e.g., "*An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.*"; *a* = .83; Ho et al., 2015) was included as a possible moderator. Finally, two control measures to assess prejudice were included (Hummert et al., 2002). Participants were asked to provide 5 semantic ratings to describe a *typical* British citizen (*a* = .91) and *typical* Muslim immigrant (*a* = .93) on a 7-point scale (e.g., 1 = *good*; 7 = *bad*).

Participants were then presented with various crimes sourced from the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CCHI). The CCHI is intended to add more nuance to crime recording that goes beyond numbers and allocates a harm seriousness measurement (Cambridge University, 2020). Crimes presented ranged from the least harmful (False statement, false entries in records and forgery; CCHI = 10) to the most harmful (Murder; CCHI = 5475), as well as those included in terror offences (e.g., Making, possessing, or controlling explosive substance with intent to endanger life; CCHI = 2920). Participants were asked to rate the likelihood of guilt of 12 individual crimes, where the defendant was either a British citizen or a Muslim immigrant (e.g., *How likely do you think the suspect is of committing this crime?* 1 = highly unlikely; 7 = highly likely). The crime/defendant combinations (24 in total) were counterbalanced. Participants were then debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

Data Checking

First, gender differences between men (n = 46) and women (n = 196) were explored using a Mann-Whitney U test of difference (non-binary [n = 3] and agender [n = 2] were not included). Men measured significantly higher than women with respect to prejudice towards UK citizen defendants (men M = 3.37; women M = 3.01; Z = -2.24; p = .025) and Muslim immigrant defendants (men M = 3.18; women M = 2.67; Z = -2.47; p = .013). Mann Whitney U tests were also conducted to assess whether differences occurred between participants who had served on a jury or been a victim of a crime. No differences were found between these groups (p > .05).

Correlations between all remaining variables and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 17. Muslim immigrant guilt was significantly and positively correlated with British citizen guilt, Muslim immigrant and general conspiracy beliefs, SDO, prejudice towards

Muslim immigrants and British citizens, and political identity. Muslim immigrant guilt was also negatively associated with annual income. British citizen guilt was also significantly and positively associated with conspiracy beliefs (Muslim immigrant and general), SDO, prejudice (towards Muslim immigrant and British citizens), and negatively correlated with age. Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs were positively associated with general conspiracy beliefs, SDO, political identity and prejudice (towards British citizens and Muslim immigrants). General conspiracy beliefs were positively associated with SDO, prejudice towards British citizen defendants (but not Muslim immigrants), and negatively associated with age. Positive associations were also found between prejudice towards British citizens and Muslim immigrants. As demographic variables were associated with variables of interest, further analyses will control for demographic variables where relevant.

Table 17

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlations for all variables in Study 5 (n = 247).

	Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Muslim Immigrant Guilt	3.51 (1.16)	-	.55***	.41***	.15*	.28***	.39***	.13*	-.03	.22***	-.16*
2	British Citizen Guilt	4.35 (1.21)		-	.17**	.32***	.18**	.14*	.24***	-.27***	.12	.04
3	Muslim Immigrant Conspiracy Beliefs	3.10 (0.54)			-	.31***	.63***	.49***	.16**	.10	.42**	-.10
4	General Conspiracy Beliefs	3.29 (1.31)				-	.26***	.06	.13*	-.26***	.16*	-.10
5	SDO	1.95 (0.95)					-	.37**	.15*	-.01	.46***	.07
6	Prejudice towards Muslim immigrants	2.77 (1.08)						-	.72***	.07	.19**	-.03
7	Prejudice towards British Citizens	3.08 (1.02)							-	-.08	.02	.01
8	Age	33.25 (12.49)								-	-.09	.03
9	Political Identity	2.68 (1.44)									-	.05
10	Annual Income	3.95 (3.06)										-

Notes: $^{*}p < .050$. $^{**}p < .010$. $^{***}p < .001$

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Hypothesis Testing[1]

The primary aim of this research was to explore the relationships between conspiracy beliefs (Muslim immigrant and general) and the likelihood of guilt for a variety of crimes across two models of perceived defendant identity—British citizens and Muslim immigrants. Initial checks found no multicollinearity between the two measures of conspiracy beliefs (VIFs < 1.80). Such a VIF is below the threshold indicated by Johnston et al. (2018) as showing no multicollinearity. Regression analysis was undertaken to explore possible predictors of the overall likelihood of guilt scores for Muslim immigrant (Model 1) and British citizen defendant models (Model 2). Model 1 used a three-step hierarchical, multiple linear regression, controlling for demographics (age, gender, political identity, and annual income), prejudice towards Muslim immigrants and SDO (due to highly significant correlation with DV's). Demographic variables were included at Step 1 (age, gender identity, political identity, annual income), SDO and prejudice at Step 2, and Muslim and general conspiracy beliefs at Step 3. The criterion variable (the likelihood of guilt by Muslim immigrant defendants) was a mean score of all 12 crime scores. Model 2 followed the same configuration as Model 1 for all 3 steps, with one change. At Step 2, prejudice towards British citizens replaced prejudice towards Muslim immigrants. Again, the criterion variable, the likelihood of guilt by British citizen defendants, is configured as a mean score of all 12 crimes.

Predicting Likelihood of Guilt—Muslim Immigrant Defendant (Model 1)

[1] As indicated in the pre-registration (https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6K8DR), the initial intention was to conduct tests of difference to examine the predictions. However, this was reconsidered in favour of regression analysis since this was more appropriate to accurately assess the crimes most strongly associated with Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs, and thus, a test of the predictions.

Political identity (right-leaning) emerged as a predictor at Step 1 only, along with lower annual income. Annual income also predicted the likelihood of guilt towards a Muslim immigrant defendant in Steps 2 and 3, along with prejudice towards Muslim immigrants. Finally, Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (not general) emerged as a strong predictor in Step 3 (see Table 18). General conspiracy beliefs, along with age, gender, and SDO, were all non-significant across Model 1. This illustrates how intergroup conspiracy beliefs about Muslim immigrants may play a role in higher attributions of guilt towards members of that group.

Table 18

Hierarchical multiple linear regression predicting Muslim immigrant likelihood of guilt by Muslim immigrant conspiracy (Model 1), controlling for age, gender, political identity, annual income, prejudice towards Muslim immigrants, and SDO in Study 5 (n = 247).

	Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
1	Age	.00	-.03	-.05
1	Gender	-.03	-.00	.01
1	Political identity	.23***	.11	.07
1	Annual income	-.18**	-.17**	-.13*
2	SDO	-	.12	.01
2	Prejudice towards Muslim immigrants	-	.32***	.26***
3	Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs	-	-	.23**
3	General conspiracy beliefs			.03
R^2		.08***	.21***	.24**
R^2 change			.13***	.03**

Notes. *p< .050. **p <. 010. ***p <. 001.
Criterion: Likelihood of guilt by Muslim immigrant defendant

Predicting Likelihood of Guilt—British Citizen Defendant (Model 2)

Age, not gender, emerged as a negative predictor across all 3 steps of Model 2. Prejudice predicted the likelihood of guilt towards a British citizen defendant at Steps 2 and 3, whereas SDO was only a predictor at Step 2. General conspiracy beliefs emerged as a strong, positive predictor at Step 3, whereas Muslim conspiracy beliefs were non-significant. Model 2 demonstrates how people with higher general conspiracy beliefs may be more likely to view a UK defendant as guilty (see Table 19).

Table 19

Hierarchical multiple linear regression predicting British citizens likelihood of guilt by general conspiracy beliefs (Model 1), controlling for age, gender, prejudice towards British citizens, and SDO in Study 5 (n = 247).

	Variables	**Step 1**	**Step 2**	**Step 3**
1	Age	-.27***	-.25***	-.21**
1	Gender	.01	.03	.04
1	Political identity	.10	.03	.02
1	Annual income	.04	.03	.06
2	SDO	-	.13*	.05
2	Prejudice towards British citizens	-	.20**	.18**
3	Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs	-	-	.06
3	General conspiracy beliefs	-	-	.21***
R^2		.08***	.15***	.19***
R^2 change			.06***	.04***

Notes. *p< .05. **p <. 01. ***p <. 001.
Criterion: Likelihood of guilt by British citizen defendant

Diagnostic analysis was undertaken to check for assumption violations and model validity to test the robustness of both these significant models. No multi-collinearity or outliers were detected, and the distribution fell within normal levels. Scatter plots were produced to check for heteroscedasticity and curvilinearity, of which none were detected. To check for multivariate outliers, a plot of Leverage against Cook's distance to taken, of which none were detected. Model validity was tested by producing an alternative R^2 value using the PRESS statistic (Model 1 R^2_{PRESS} = 0. 173; Model 2 R^2_{PRESS} = 0. 130). These diagnostic tests support the robustness and validity of regression models 1 and 2.

Moderation Analysis

Further analysis was undertaken to explore the moderating effect of SDO across two models. Firstly, the pathway between Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs and the overall likelihood of guilt scores for Muslim immigrant defendants was tested, controlling for demographics (age, gender, politics, annual income) and prejudice towards Muslim immigrants, with all effects being non-significant (b = .01, p = .812, 95% CI [-0.068 – 0.087]). The moderating effect of SDO between general conspiracy beliefs and the likelihood of guilt scores towards British citizen defendants, controlling for demographics (age and gender) was also tested with non-significant effects found (b = -.05, p = .366, 95% CI [-0.161 – 0.060]). This means that likelihood of guilt scores for both models were not conditional on SDO.

In summary, regression analysis showcased how both intergroup and general conspiracy beliefs may play a role in predicting the subjective likelihood of guilt scores across two defendant models—Muslim immigrant and British citizen. In Model 1, Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (not general) emerged as a significant predictor of the likelihood of guilt of Muslim immigrant defendants. Whereas, in Model 2, general conspiracy

beliefs (not towards Muslim immigrants) emerged as a significant predictor of the likelihood of guilt by British citizen defendants. As shown in Table 17, however, a correlation does exist between the variables. Yet, when Muslim conspiracy beliefs are also controlled for, this correlation is nulled. In helping explain this, researchers have demonstrated that general conspiracy beliefs can *predict* real-world conspiracy beliefs (e.g., Jolley, et al., 2022). Thus, in a multiple regression, the unique link between general conspiracy beliefs and Muslim guilt could be overshadowed by Muslim conspiracy beliefs, which are arguably a result of a more generalised conspiracy belief.

These findings demonstrate a new domain influenced by conspiracy beliefs and suggests that jurors who have a propensity for conspiracy theorising, may judge defendants more harshly. Moreover, these results highlight that, in addition to racial, ethnic, and cultural biases faced by marginalised defendants (Hunt, 2015), intergroup conspiracy beliefs may contribute to this complex convergence of bias factors.

Study 6

To extend upon the correlational findings in Study 5, Study 6 used a between-subjects experimental design to explore how conspiracy beliefs (Muslim immigrant and general) influenced jury decision-making. Unlike Study 5 that required participants to attribute guilt ratings from their own perspective, Study 6 required a more robust jury decision-making criterion. For instance, participants would be asked to take the perspective of a juror and apply legal criteria to their decisions. The aim of Study 6 was to assess if conspiracy beliefs (towards Muslim immigrants and general notions) moderated the relationship between the defendant's ethnic identity (Muslim immigrant vs British vs British Muslim) and subjective likelihood of guilt. Moreover, participants were also asked to provide a subjective penalty (the length of custodial sentence) and the likelihood of rehabilitation ratings. These added

elements were intended to provide a wider understanding of the juror decision making outcomes. A measure of SDO was included to test the possibility that SDO moderates the link between conspiracy beliefs, defendant ethnic identity and outcomes. Prejudice was included as a control variable along with a range of relevant demographics.

It was also important to select an appropriate crime that would be included on the indictment document, along with a brief context about the crime. Firstly, the crime needed to be significantly predicted by Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs and secondly, associated with Muslim immigrant but *not* British citizen defendants to isolate the effects towards Muslim immigrants only. Data from Study 5 identified four crimes that satisfied these criteria (see supplementary information for details): *Making, possessing, or controlling explosive substance with intent to endanger life* (CCHI = 2920); *Assault with intent to cause serious harm* (CCHI = 1460); *Possessing firearms or ammunition without firearm certificate* (CCHI = 10); *Racially or religiously aggravated fear or provocation of violence* (CCHI = 10). Out of these four crimes, "*Making, possessing or controlling explosive substance with intent to endanger life*" was selected as the most appropriate crime for use in the indictment document since it had the highest crime index rating (CCHI = 2920) of the selected four crimes. Evidence suggests that when conducting mock jury research to understand racial bias, and there is minimal evidence presented to mock jurors, the higher severity crimes (e.g., murder) reflect more pronounced racial-ethnic discrimination (Leippe et al., 2017).

It was predicted (preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/rj2rt.pdf) that when the defendant is a Muslim immigrant (vs British Muslim and vs British), the subjective likelihood of guilt and penalty sentence length would be higher for those who believe in conspiracy theories, with the opposite effect for rehabilitation (i.e. the effects were expected to be moderated through conspiracy theory beliefs, *H4*). Also, SDO was included as a possible

moderator between conspiracy beliefs *and* the other variables (*H5*). Prejudice towards Muslim immigrants was included as a control variable, along with age and gender. Furthermore, demographic variables that showed high correlations with dependent variables were also included as controls.

Method

Participation and Design

A total of 315 participants aged between 18 and 75 (M_{age} = 41.67, *SD* = 14.16; 79 men, 231 Women, 4 non-binary, and 1 agender) were recruited via the recruitment platform *Prolific* in 2022. All participants were eligible to serve on a jury in England and Wales (i.e., between the ages of 18 and 75 years, and British residents and citizens). This study presented participants with conspiracy theories that may be construed as Islamophobic; therefore, to minimise any potential distress, it was important to exclude people who identified as Muslim. This can be achieved using exclusion parameters within *Prolific*. To ensure that no Muslim participants were included in the data, participants were asked to provide information on religious identity. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (Muslim immigrant defendant [*n* = 106], British Muslim Defendant [*n* = 105] or British Defendant [*n* = 104]), which is above the recommend threshold of 100 participants per group (Brysbaert, 2019).

To conform to ecologically valid criteria, the defendant's ethnic identity could not be explicitly stated. Instead, a subtle manipulation was presented in each condition via the indictment document. Firstly, in the British citizen condition, the name and address were presented as "*John Smith (DOB 26-12-1994), of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham*". Secondly, the British Muslim condition was reflected as "*Syed Ahmed (DOB 26-12-1994), of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham*". Finally, the Muslim immigrant condition was reflected as "*Syed Ahmed*

(DOB 26-12-1994), of Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre". All three defendant conditions presented the same crime of "*One count of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*". At the end of the study, participants were asked to answer three manipulation check questions by selecting the name of the defendant's name (*In the piece that you read earlier, what was the defendant's name? John Smith / Syed Ahmed*), immigrant status (*Was the defendant an immigrant? Yes / No*), and the defendant's Muslim identity (*Was the Defendant Muslim?* Yes / No).

The intent was to remove all participants who did not answer all three manipulation questions correctly in each defendant condition (Muslim immigrant, British Muslim, British citizen). Although the subtle manipulation complied with ecological standards, results indicated that this form of manipulation did not work as prescribed due to a high number of participants who failed in the British Muslim and Muslim immigrant conditions. Five participants were removed from the British defendant condition, leaving 99 eligible participants. However, results from the British immigrant and British Muslim conditions indicated that the manipulation might not have worked as intended due to the high number of participants who failed the manipulation check (n = 96), leaving only 80 participants in the Muslim immigrant condition and 34 in the British Muslim condition. Due to the significant loss of eligible participants in these two conditions, participants from both conditions were pooled and assessed according to their *perception* of the defendant's identity (Muslim immigrant). Those who perceived the defendant as a Muslim immigrant were retained. Ninety-one participants did not meet this criterion and were removed (e.g., only perceived as Muslim but *not* an immigrant). Although this deviated from the original design, it was important to explore how intergroup conspiracy beliefs affect jury decision-making. Arguably, using perceived Muslim immigrant identity could still go some way to exploring this objective.

These changes resulted in two conditions: perceived British identity defendant (n = 99), which is unchanged, and perceived Muslim immigrant identity defendant (n = 120), which is a combination of two original experimental conditions. Therefore, the final eligible sample size was 219 participants aged between 18 and 75 years (M_{age} = 41.92, SD = 14.24; 53 men; 166 women). Despite this reduction in participants, the reconfiguration from three to two experimental conditions met the sample size met the criteria for comparing two groups (Brysbaert, 2019) and 80 per cent power to detect a difference corresponding to Cohen's d ≥ 0.40 (with α = .05).

In sum, a between-subject design tested how perceived defendant identify (Muslim immigrant and British citizen) influenced subjective guilt scores, subjective penalty scores, and subjective rehabilitation scores on a terror-related crime (making, possessing, or controlling explosive substance with intent to endanger life). The link was expected to be moderated by either Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs or general conspiracy beliefs. A third moderator, SDO, was also included to test the possibility that SDO moderates the link between conspiracy beliefs, perceived defendant identity and outcomes. One measure of prejudice was included as a control variable. Each of these predictions were pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/rj2rt.pdf); however, as three experimental groups were expected (rather than two), the analyses performed are a deviation.

Materials and procedure

As with Study 5, participants provided informed consent and demographic information (age, gender, political identity, annual income), which included whether or not they had served on a jury or been a victim of crime. This was included to assess if any differences existed between participants who had experienced victimisation from crime (or

not) and those who had experience of being jurors (or not). Next, participants completed four randomised questionnaires on 7-point scales (see Appendix 1, 6, and 7).

First, a 1-item measure of general conspiracy beliefs (e.g., *I think that the official version of the events given by the authorities very often hides the truth*; 1 = completely false–7 = completely true; Lantian et al., 2016). Second, a 6-item scale of Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (e.g., "*Muslims immigrants are working with terrorist groups to eventually attack British society from within*." *a* = .87; 1= Completely disagree - 7 = Completely agree; Jolley et al., 2020). Third, an 8-item scale of SDO (e.g., "*An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.*"; *a* = .83; 1= Completely disagree - 7 = Completely agree; Ho et al., 2015). To assess as a control variable, participants were finally asked to indicate their feelings towards Muslim immigrants on a thermometer scale (0 = extremely unfavourable; 100 = extremely favourable). All measures were randomised.

Participants were then allocated to one of three conditions (British defendant; British Muslim defendant; Muslim immigrant defendant); however, as described, the Muslim conditions have been pooled. In each condition, participants were presented with a preamble explaining the requirements of their participation:

> *You will be undertaking a task that requires you to imagine yourself as a juror in a Crown Court criminal case. You will be presented with a pamphlet that outlines what the expectations are for jurors in the United Kingdom. Please read this carefully. Once you have read the pamphlet, you will be presented with an indictment document informing you of the case details. Please read this thoroughly before answering the questions put forward to you.*

To create some authenticity of requirements of people undertaking jury duty, participants were presented with a *Notice to Jurors, CrimPR 26.3* (HM Courts and Tribunals Service,

2023) that was required reading prior to rating defendant guilt and penalty. The notice set out the legal responsibilities of all jurors, as follows (see Appendix 7):

> "*By serving on this jury, you are fulfilling a very important PUBLIC SERVICE. The means you have some important LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES. As a juror you have taken a LEGAL OATH or AFFIRMATION to try the defendant based ONLY on the evidence you hear in court. This means the FAIRNESS of the trial depends on you following a few very IMPORTANT LEGAL RULES. These rules are explained to you in this notice. You need to read these rules, and make sure you UNDERSTAND and FOLLOW these rules at all times. You should keep this notice with your SUMMONS at all times while you are on Jury Service.*
>
> *… continues"*

The notice goes on to explain the rules and the implications for compliance failure (e.g., criminal prosecution). Once participants had completed reading all the information on the pamphlet, they were presented with an indictment document detailing the defendant's name, date of birth, address, statement, and particulars of offence (see Figures 6, 7 and 8).

Figure 6

Indictment document in British citizen defendant condition in Study 6.

INDICTMENT

IN THE CROWN COURT AT BIRMINGHAM Case number: 20211027

THE QUEEN v John Smith

John Smith (DOB 26-12-1994), of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham, is charged as follows: -

STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

One count of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

John Smith, on 1 June 2021, was found to be unlawfully and maliciously in possession of precursor chemicals used in the production of homemade explosives. These items were found by police, stored in a backpack owned by the defendant.

Figure 7

Indictment document in Muslim immigrant defendant condition in Study 6.

INDICTMENT

IN THE CROWN COURT AT BIRMINGHAM Case number: 20211027

THE QUEEN v Syed Ahmed

Syed Ahmed (DOB 26-12-1994), of Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, is charged as follows: -

STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

One count of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

Syed Ahmed, on 1 June 2021, was found to be unlawfully and maliciously in possession of precursor chemicals used in the production of homemade explosives. These items were found by police, stored in a backpack owned by the defendant.

Figure 8

Indictment document in British Muslim defendant condition in Study 6.

INDICTMENT

IN THE CROWN COURT AT BIRMINGHAM Case number: 20211027

THE QUEEN v Syed Ahmed

Syed Ahmed (DOB 26-12-1994), of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham, is charged as follows: -

STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

One count of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

Syed Ahmed, on 1 June 2021, was found to be unlawfully and maliciously in possession of precursor chemicals used in the production of homemade explosives. These items were found by police, stored in a backpack owned by the defendant.

Once participants had read the indictment details, they were asked to answer three questions to measure subjective ratings of guilt, penalty (length of sentence) and rehabilitation based on the details presented. The subjective guilt rating (0 = Definitely not guilty; 100 = Definitely guilty) was presented as follows:

> *Based on the information presented, what is your impression of (defendant's name) guilt (of [defendant address]) of the aforementioned crime - possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life?*

To answer, please use the slider to indicate how certain your feel about [Defendant's name] guilt.

The subjective penalty rating (1 = minimum prison sentence; 20 = maximum prison sentence) was presented as follows:

The Sentencing Council of the UK sets minimum and maximum sentencing guidelines. For the crime of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life, the prison sentence recommendation is a minimum of three years in prison, to a maximum of life in prison. On the assumption that [defendant's name] (of [defendant's address]) is found guilty of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life, what penalty would you expect him to serve?

The subjective rehabilitation rating (1 = definitely disagree; 7 = definitely agree) was presented as follows:

In the UK, cognitive-behavioural programs are used to reduce reoffending behaviour. On the assumption that [defendant's name] (of [defendant's address]) is found guilty of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life, In the UK, cognitive-behavioural programs are used to reduce reoffending behaviour. Participation in these programs is offered to offenders. On the assumption that [defendant's name] (of [defendant's address]) is found guilty of Possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life, he will be given the chance to participate in such an offender rehabilitation program.

[Defendant name] of [defendant address] will benefit from an offender rehabilitation program.

Once participants had completed their subjective ratings, they were asked to answer the three manipulation check questions - defendant's name (*In the piece that you read earlier, what was the defendant's name? John Smith / Syed Ahmed*), immigrant status (*Was the defendant an immigrant? Yes / No*), and the defendant's Muslim identity (*Was the Defendant Muslim?* Yes / No). Participants were thoroughly debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

Data Checking

First, demographic variables were checked for participant differences and associations with test variables. Mann Whitney U tests found that participants who had previously served on a jury (n = 25; M = 68.40) allocated lower subjective guilt ratings (Z = -2.08; p = .037) than those who had not been jurors (n = 194; M = 76.22). No differences were found between participants who had previously been victims of crime, neither were differences between men and women found ($p > .05$).

Several significant correlations emerged (see full correlations matrix in Table 20). Likelihood of guilt was positively related to penalty length, both general and Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs, and political identity (right-leaning). Penalty was also positively related to general conspiracy beliefs. Likelihood of rehabilitation was negatively related to likelihood of guilt and penalty, Muslim immigrant and general conspiracy beliefs, age, and political identity (right-leaning), and positively related to prejudice towards Muslim immigrants. Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs were also positively related to general conspiracy beliefs, SDO, age and political identity, and negatively related to Muslim immigrant prejudice. That is to say, older, politically right-leaning participants were more prejudiced towards Muslim immigrants and held higher Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs. General conspiracy beliefs were also positively related to politically right-leaning

participants but lower in age. Right-leaning participants were also higher in SDO and prejudice towards Muslim immigrants. There were no significant associations regarding annual income. Since age and political identity were associated with variables of interest, further analysis will control for demographic variables where relevant.

Table 20

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlations for all variables in Study 6 (n = 219).

	Variables	**M (SD)**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
1	Likelihood of guilt	75.33 (17.24)	-	.26***	-.22***	.14*	.16*	.04	-.08	.03	.23**	-.05
2	Penalty rating	11.78 (5.30)		-	-.26***	.09	.16*	.01	-.04	-.02	.09	.03
3	Likelihood of rehabilitation	4.62 (1.72)			-	-.35***	-.20**	-.28***	.24***	-.16*	-.19**	-.05
4	Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs	2.49 (1.30)				-	.23***	.50***	-.59***	.27***	.43***	-.05
5	General conspiracy beliefs	3.88 (1.70)					-	.12	-.13	-.19**	.15*	-.04
6	Social Dominance Orientation	2.36 (1.05)						-	-.36***	.11	.43***	.06
7	Prejudice towards Muslim immigrants	63.93 (24.52)							-	-.10	-.28***	.02
8	Age	41.92 (14.24)								-	.11	.11
9	Political Identity	3.41 (1.70)									-	.04
10	Income	2.61 (1.48)										-

Notes: $^{*}p < .050$. $^{**}p < .010$. $^{***}p < .001$

Hypothesis Testing

Due to unequal variances between conditions, a MANOVA test could not be used; therefore, *Mann-Whitney U tests* were used to test for differences between conditions (see Table 21). Non-significant differences were uncovered for any of the outcome variables, which was expected as the effects are predicted to be explained by the moderation effects of conspiracy theories and SDO. Importantly, there were also non-significant differences for the moderators (conspiracy beliefs, SDO) and control variables (prejudice), thus, enabling the test of moderation to be conducted.

Table 21

Statistical results of Mann-Whitney U difference for test variables for Study 6 (n = 219).

Variables	British Defendant Mean (*SD*)	Muslim Immigrant Defendant Mean (*SD*)	Statistical Result
Guilt	75.35 (*16.27*)	75.31 (*18.07*)	Z = -0.06; p = .956
Penalty	11.44 (*5.07*)	12.06 (*5.48*)	Z = -0.81; p = .421
Rehabilitation	4.77 (*1.52*)	4.49 (*1.87*)	Z = -0.95; p = .340
Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs	2.34 (*1.23*)	2.62 (*1.31*)	Z = -1.80; p = .072
General conspiracy beliefs	4.07 (*1.68*)	3.72 (*1.68*)	Z = -1.5; p = .125
SDO	2.23 (*1.01*)	2.48 (*1.08*)	Z = -1.75; p = .080
Prejudice towards Muslim immigrants	64.87 (*23.54*)	63.16 (*25.38*)	Z = -0.54; p = .591

Moderation Analysis

Moderation analysis was undertaken to explore how Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs and SDO influence the effects of perceived defendant identity on subjective ratings of guilt, penalty, and rehabilitation. This analysis used the PROCESS macro for SPSS, Model 1 (Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs) and Model 3 (Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs x

SDO), respectively, using 5,000 bootstrapped samples (Hayes, 2015). Each level of the moderator was generated by the pick-a-point method (Hayes, 2013): low (standardised variable -1SD), moderate (standardised variable: 0), and high (standardised variable: +1SD). After that, the process was repeated using general conspiracy beliefs to examine if the effects replicate.

A significant interaction (see Figure 9) between Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs and subjective ratings of rehabilitation, controlling for age, gender, political identity, and prejudice towards Muslim immigrants was uncovered (b = .39, p < .027, 95% CI [-0.734 – 0.045]). The interaction effect accounted for 20% of the overall variance of rehabilitation (F(1, 211) = 4.97, p < .027). The simple slope test did not identify significant effects at high (b = - .60, p = .61, 95% CI [-1.226 – 0.028]), medium (b = -.10, p = .653, 95% CI [-0.540 – 0.339]) or low levels (b = .40, p = .206, 95% CI [-0.220 – 1.015]). However, the Johnson-Neymann effect is a more nuanced approach to understanding at what point the moderator becomes significant (Finsaas & Goldstein, 2021). According to the Johnson-Neymann effect, therefore, the moderating effect of Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs and experimental conditions happened between scale ratings of 4.30 (b = -.69, p = .049, 95% CI [-1.375 – -0.002]) and 7.00 (b = -1.86, p = .025, 95% CI [-3.478 – 0.236]) of the moderator. Therefore, these conditional effects only become significant just below the mean scores (M = 4.62). These findings demonstrate that when participants are high in Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs, they rated the perceived Muslim immigrant defendant as less likely to benefit from a rehabilitation program during a custodial sentence, compared with the defendant who was perceived to be a British citizen.

When examining whether SDO moderated the interaction between immigrant conspiracy beliefs and experimental exposure, no moderation was uncovered (see Table 23).

Further, when examining the remaining outcomes (guilt and penalty) no moderation was found for Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs and experimental conditions (see Table 22). Also, general conspiracy beliefs did not moderate any of the outcomes (see Table 22) and SDO did not act as a moderator of these effects either (see Table 23).

Figure 9

Moderation effect of Muslim conspiracy beliefs on subjective ratings of rehabilitation in Study 6 (Model 1 of PROCESS; N = 219).

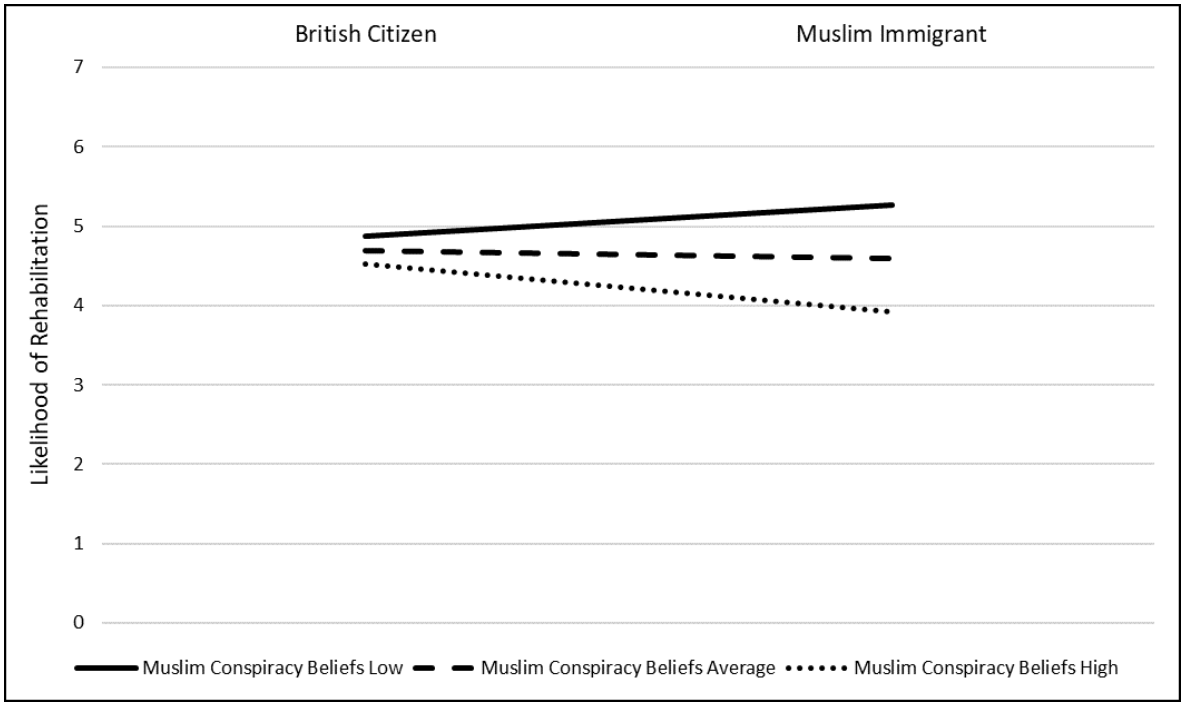

Table 22

Moderation effects of Muslim immigrant and general conspiracy beliefs, between perceived defendant identity (British citizen and Muslim immigrant) and subjective ratings controlling for prejudice (Muslim immigrants); age; gender; political identity; jury status (Model 1 PROCESS macro) in Study 6 (n = 219).

Dependent Variable	**Moderators**	
	Muslim Immigrant Conspiracy Beliefs	**General Conspiracy Beliefs**
Guilt	*b* = 2.57, *p* = .624, 95% CI [-1.039 – 6.176]	*b* = -2.18; *p* = .108; 95% CI [-4.853 – 0.486]
Penalty	*b* = -0.160, *p* = .783, 95% CI [-1.301 – 0.981]	*b* = -0.681; *p* = .111; 95% CI [-0.159– 1.522]
Rehabilitation	***b* = -0.389, *p* = .027, 95% CI [-0.389 – -0.045]** *	*b* = -0.133; *p* = .318; 95% CI [-0.394– 0.129]

Notes: *$p < .05$. **Bold** typeface indicates a significant moderation.

Table 23

Moderation effects of Muslim immigrant beliefs, general conspiracy beliefs and SDO, between perceived defendant identity (British citizen and Muslim immigrant) and subjective ratings controlling for prejudice (Muslim immigrants); age; gender; political identity; jury status (Model 3 PROCESS macro) in Study 6 (n = 219).

Dependent Variable	**Moderators**	
	Muslim Immigrant Conspiracy Beliefs *and* SDO	**General Conspiracy Beliefs *and* SDO**
Guilt	*b* = 1.38; *p* = .432; 95% CI [-2.083 - 4.849]	*b* = -0.91; *p* = .513; 95% CI [-3.633 - 1.820]
Penalty	*b* = -0.24; *p* = .661; 95% CI [-1.310 - 0.832]	*b* = -0.05; p = .904; 95% CI [-0.894 - 0.791]
Rehabilitation	*b* = -0.23; *p* = .161; 95% CI [-0.558 – 0.094]	*b* = -0.104; *p* = .423; 95% CI [-0.358 - 0.151]

In summary, the results indicate that conspiracy beliefs and SDO did not moderate the effects between perceived defendant identity—Muslim immigrant and British citizen—and subjective ratings of guilt and penalty. However, the pathway between perceived defendant identity and rehabilitation ratings of Muslim immigrant defendants was conditional on Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs. It should be noted that this was ascertained by the Johnson-Neymann interval method, where the predictor slope becomes significant just below the mean scores. Non-significant effects were shown for general conspiracy beliefs and SDO. This is discussed in the General Discussion. Further, although no effects were found in terms of guilt and penalty, these findings still provide interesting insight as to how some jurors view Muslim immigrant defendants and suggests that this may be motivated by stereotypical conspiracy beliefs about Muslim immigrants.

General Discussion

Studies 5 and 6 aimed to explore a novel area that might be influenced by conspiracy beliefs, namely jury decision making. In Study 5, Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (not general) significantly predicted subjective guilt ratings towards Muslim immigrant defendants. Also, general conspiracy beliefs (not Muslim immigrant) significantly predicted subjective guilt ratings towards British citizen defendants. Study 6 then demonstrated that the pathway between perceived defendant identity (Muslim immigrant vs British) and likelihood of rehabilitation was moderated by Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs, controlling for prejudice and relevant demographics. These results showcase that the effects of conspiracy beliefs have the potential to influence how jurors make decisions and how they view the rehabilitation of Muslim immigrant defendants.

These findings align with previous work (e.g., Hodson et al., 2005) who found mock jurors rated Black defendants as less likely to be rehabilitated in conditions where aversive (subtle) racism was primed. In Studies 5 and 6 prejudice towards Muslim immigrants was significantly associated with Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs, SDO, and likelihood of guilt, therefore was treated as a covariate. Nevertheless, conspiracy beliefs emerged as a significant moderator *even when* controlling for prejudice.

Also of note, Fousiani and Prooijen (2019) demonstrated that when an offender was perceived as low in communion (i.e., judged as less friendly, trustworthy, kind, etc), this predicted a conspiracy belief about the offender, with the effect being stronger when mediated by demonisation. Muslims and Muslim immigrants are often viewed as suspicious, hostile, and threatening by Western societies (Carr, 2006; Eid, 2014; Erisen & Kentmen-Cin, 2017; Lee, 2017). It may be that if a Muslim immigrant defendant is viewed in this way by

jurors, there may be an element of demonisation and conspiracy theorising that deems them to be unlikely to be rehabilitated.

This research also set out to explore if conspiracy beliefs affected subjective ratings of guilt and penalty (length of sentence), with non-significant effects being found in Study 6. A factor that may have contributed to these null findings was the *Notice to Jurors, CrimPR 26.3* (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2023). It may be that participants adhered to the stipulations set out in this notice (e.g., base judgement only on the evidence presented) when it came to guilt and penalty. However, rehabilitation did not form part of their legal requirements as a juror, therefore ratings did not need to be considered within this framework. This notice may be viewed similarly to jury instructions, which is provided to juries in order assess evidence and achieve a legally correct verdict (Lieberman & Sales, 1997). Although research has shown jury instructions can be challenging for lay people to understand, comprehension can be improved with the application of simple language and may also reduce the effects of unconscious race bias language (Baguley et al., 2017; Bolotin, 2019; Charrow & Charrow, 1979; Smith & Haney, 2011). The *Notice to Jurors, CrimPR 26.3* form is part of a wider range of criminal procedure rules for use in British criminal courts (England and Wales) and aims to provide clear and simple rules to jurors to follow (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2023). It is possible that this intervention successfully primed participants to supress any implicit bias, explaining why null effects were found for subjective ratings of guilt and penalty. Within the context of how juror make decisions, this is an encouraging finding.

Although significantly related to all test variables (except general conspiracy beliefs) in both Studies 5 and 6, SDO had no predictive or conditional effects in this research. This is surprising considering the moderating effects of SDO showcased on conspiracy exposure and

violence (Studies 3 and 4). Particularly since Kemmelmeier (2005) also demonstrated the conditional effect of SDO on guilt and sentence recommendations by White mock jurors towards Black defendants in two pathways (e.g., low SDO interacted with pro-Blackness and high SDO with anti-Blackness). However, violent reactions and jury decision-making are very different and may be influenced by other factors. The relationship between prejudice, political orientation and SDO may provide some explanation for the null effects in the current two studies. Social dominance theory is said to predict conservative political beliefs and a wide variety of prejudice, including ethnic prejudice, that preserve a hierarchical worldview (Pratto et al., 1994). Although there has been some debate as to whether prejudice towards ethnic outgroups is predicted or merely reflected by SDO, evidence suggests that the former is true (Kteily et al., 2011; Osborne et al., 2021). Similarly, SDO continues to be a significant predictor of right-leaning political conservatism (Choma et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2012; Pratto et al., 1994). Prejudice and political orientation were both included as covariates in the analyses of Studies 5 and 6 therefore it may that, as a predictor of both these covariates, the effect of SDO was muted.

The findings were inconsistent for general conspiracy beliefs in Studies 5 and 6. In Study 5, general conspiracy beliefs predicted guilt of UK citizens, but not Muslims, and in Study 6, general theorising did not moderate any of the outcomes (guilt, penalty, or rehabilitation). As with Study 5, this is unexpected particularly since correlations occur between all these variables. However, it is worth noting that there is a correlation between general conspiracy and Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs in each study. Previous work has demonstrated that general conspiracy theorising predicts specific conspiracy beliefs. For example, general conspiracy theorising was found to predict Brexit-specific conspiracy beliefs, which then predicted support for Britain leaving the European Union (Jolley, Douglas, et al., 2022). As with Study 5, therefore, it is possible that link between general

conspiracy beliefs and the outcomes (guilt, penalty, and rehabilitation) was obscured by Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs—which is an effect of general conspiracy theorising.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this research explores a novel research area, there are limitations to consider and address in the future. The mock juror format of Study 6 did not include any form of evidence evaluation or deliberation, which may have affected the outcomes. Assessing evidence is one of the primary objectives for jurors to make informed decisions about a defendant's guilt or innocence (Curley et al., 2018). Participants were not provided with any case detail or evidence; therefore, it may be that participants did not have enough information to assess guilt and penalty properly. In future research, it would be important to provide mock jurors with written evidence from an expert witness (e.g., forensic analysis). This may have provided a more holistic view of the case for jurors assess subjective ratings of guilt and penalty.

Deliberation between jurors is arguably an integral part of the jury process and is intended to average out jury bias, attend only to the facts of the case, and allow for scrutiny of extreme views (Curley et al., 2022). However, research in this area is mixed. Deliberation was found to strengthen bias and punitive action against Black defendants (vs White) in capital trials (Lynch & Haney, 2000, 2009, 2011a). In an opposite effect, mock jury studies have also found preliberation views predicted post-deliberation verdicts (Leippe et al., 2017). By this standard, the null guilt and penalty effects in this study would not have been affected by deliberation. However, factoring in the specific target group and intergroup conspiracy beliefs, deliberation may have influenced these effects.

One of the few mock jury studies that have compared Middle Eastern and White defendants produced interesting results (Adams et al., 2011). In two conditions whereby

defendant race was manipulated (Middle Eastern vs White), pre- and post-deliberation judgments of guilt and sentence-length were compared. Pre-deliberation scores were 52 percent and 61 percent, compared to 43 percent and 33 percent post-deliberation for Middle Eastern and White defendants, respectively. This supports the idea that deliberation diffuses bias. However, in conditions where implicit stereotypes of Middle Eastern people as terrorists was primed, deliberation did not reduce guilt ratings. Moreover, longer prison sentences were allocated to Middle Eastern defendants when eyewitnesses were the same race. These findings suggest that deliberation may have no effect on diffusing—or even potentially increasing - racial bias towards Muslim immigrants in particular. Since the jury decision-making studies were operated on online platforms, including a deliberation process was not possible. However, this is an integral part of the decision-making process (Curley et al., 2022) since deliberation can spread bias (Lynch & Haney, 2009, 2011b). Future research should consider including some form of deliberation, preferably in person, to get a more in-depth understanding of jury decision-making for particular ethnic groups.

Another aspect to consider is the conflation of 'Muslim' as both ethnicity and religion. In both studies, within the context of intergroup conflict, ethnicity and religion may be viewed similarly. For instance, during the Northern Irish conflict, 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' were viewed as being both religious and ethnic identities (Cairns & Darby, 1998). Furthermore, the use of 'Muslim' to denote ethnicity is often used in literature (Hasmath, 2022; Rasyid et al., 2022; Taufik et al., 2022). However, in the context of the current research, *who* participants are imagining (both Muslim immigrant and British citizen defendants) while completing the tasks is unknown. This might explain why so many participants failed the manipulation test in the British Muslim and Muslim immigrant conditions in Study 6.

Future research could address these limitations in several ways. Firstly, providing mock jurors with photographs of defendants (Bolotin, 2019; Ewanation & Maeder, 2023; Lynch & Haney, 2011a; Maeder et al., 2015) would a control for defendant characteristics by making ethnicity salient to mock jurors. Moreover, laboratory studies could be used to expose a group of mock jurors to a trial video that provides all relevant details of the case (Ruva & Guenther, 2017). In this way, defendant ethnic attributes, case and evidence detail can be controlled across all participants.

Secondly, there should be an aspect of deliberation to provide realistic exploration of how conspiracy beliefs affect jurors. This is particularly important for mock jury studies that specifically target Muslim immigrants and include conspiracy beliefs that prime Muslim immigrants as extremists. This might include pre- and post-deliberation ratings and include the use of a confederate to prime conspiratorial concerns about the defendant. This may provide more understanding of how and when conspiracy beliefs may affect jurors.

Future research should seek to explore beyond intergroup conspiracy beliefs. It is also important to understand how a general conspiratorial worldview influences how jurors attribute guilt more generally. Study 5 not only uncovered relationships between intergroup conspiracy beliefs and Muslim immigrant defendants, but also general conspiracy beliefs predicted subjective guilt ratings towards *British* defendants. These findings suggest a bigger picture but were not addressed in these studies. Research has already established some characteristics associated with offenders is associated with conspiracy theorising about them (Fousiani & Prooijen, 2019). Also, a conspiracy worldview is related to cognitive biases motivated by a need to understand the world (i.e., epistemic motivational factors, see Douglas et al., 2019). As explained by Curley et al. (2022), the nature of the CJS might be overwhelming to jurors who then fall back on heuristics to make sense of the adversarial

system. It may be that conspiracy beliefs contribute to these cognitive biases, motivated by epistemic factors to make sense of the criminal justice environment.

Conclusion

This unique research demonstrates that conspiracy beliefs may play a role in jury decision making. It also contributes to experimental research in the conspiracy beliefs domain. Study 5 demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs predict subjective likelihood of guilt scores toward Muslim immigrant and British defendants. Building on this work, in Study 6, mock jurors rated perceived Muslim immigrant defendants (vs British) as less likely to be rehabilitated and this effect was conditional on higher Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs. Therefore, this work suggests that conspiracy beliefs have the potential to influence juror's perceived guilt towards defendants whose group identity are accused of crimes that align with those beliefs, supporting the argument put forward by Cholbi and Madva (2021) and Roberts (2016). When considering the generalising effects between conspiracy theorising and prejudice across multiple ethnic groups (Jolley et al., 2020), these findings might have implications for multiple ethnic minority defendants. Moreover, a conspiracist worldview has the potential to contribute to jury decision making more widely, underscoring the importance of putting a spotlight on how conspiracy beliefs may bias jurors.

Chapter 6:

General Discussion

Summary of Thesis

Attributing blame for political and social events as the clandestine manoeuvrings of (perceived) powerful groups are referred to as *conspiracy theories* or *conspiracy beliefs* (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Brotherton & French, 2015; Goertzel, 1994; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). Events such as the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (Douglas & Sutton, 2008), and the 9/11 terror attacks (Swami et al., 2010) have become synonymous with conspiracy theories. Although conspiracy believers may view themselves as a unique 'informed minority' (Lantian et al., 2017), beliefs are widespread (Addley, 2018; Uscinski et al., 2020). Furthermore, conspiracy theories are universal across social and cultural environments (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). Although some research suggests that conspiracy beliefs can have some positive outcomes (e.g., Franks et al., 2017), a growing body of research suggests that conspiracy beliefs are not harmless and have dire consequences for society(Douglas, 2021; Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). This thesis set out to explore the effect that belief in, and exposure to, conspiracy theories have on political violence and intergroup relations, with the latter focused on violent reactions and jury bias towards marginalised groups (immigrants, Muslim immigrants).

Chapter 1 of this thesis introduced the psychology of conspiracy beliefs, outlining the three overarching psychological motivations for conspiracy theorising set out by Douglas et al. (2019)—epistemic (understanding your environment), existential (feeling in control of your environment), and social (maintaining a positive self and ingroup identity). Furthermore, a range of other motivations, including some demographics (Freeman & Bentall, 2017), negative intergroup relations (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018), political identity (Uscinski et al., 2022), and political context (Enders & Smallpage, 2019) were discussed. Chapter 1 also outlined the known social outcomes of conspiracy beliefs and identified the gaps in knowledge that this thesis aimed to address. Specifically, the chapter concluded by

introducing the thesis aims of exploring how conspiracy beliefs are linked with political violence, cyber violence, intergroup violence, and jury bias.

To begin investigating the thesis aims, the first empirical chapter (Chapter 2) explored the associations between conspiracy beliefs and (political and cyber) violent reactions. Specifically, Study 1 set out to investigate the isolated relationship between conspiracy beliefs and violence when controlling for an essential predictor of violent extremism, aggression. In particular, the investigation focuses on the role of conspiracy beliefs (general and toward specific events) across two violent aspects—cyber violence and political violence. It was predicted that conspiracy beliefs, whilst controlling for measures of aggression, would be a significant, unique predictor of cyber violence and support for political violence. As expected, regression analysis uncovered that conspiracy beliefs uniquely predicted political violence intentions when controlling for various (trait) aggression measures. However, there was no relationship revealed for conspiracy beliefs predicting cyber violence.

These findings support that of Uscinski and Parent (2014), who found that conspiracy theorisers are more likely to endorse political violence. There is also the argument for including conspiracy beliefs within frameworks that explain political violence and radicalisation (Kruglanski, Molinario, Ellenberg, et al., 2022; Vegetti & Littvay, 2022). Moreover, several organisations in the US and Europe have highlighted the impact of conspiracy theories on political violence, radicalisation, and extremism (Amadeu Antonio Foundation, 2021; FBI, 2019; RAN, 2021). The findings of Study 1 lend support to these arguments and demonstrate that conspiracy beliefs are a unique predictor of political violence, at least when controlling for aggressive traits. However, as discussed later in this chapter, we must not argue the ‘isolated’ relationship too strongly as only one (albeit important) factor was controlled for in Study 1.

The second study of this thesis was then presented in Chapter 3, which explored the mechanisms between intergroup conspiracy exposure, general political violence, and violent reactions towards immigrants. Importantly, Study 2 sought to shift the focus from correlational designs and employed an experimental design to test if exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants led to increased support for political violence (general political violence and political protest violence) and violent reactions towards immigrants (acceptance of violence and willingness to use violence). These effects were expected to be mediated by state physical aggression, blatant dehumanization of immigrants and collective British victimhood. In this experimental study, exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories successfully increased conspiracy beliefs for participants in the experimental condition. However, there was no direct effect of the manipulation on the violent measures, nor any of the mediators. As such, the analysis did not establish any mediating factors (i.e., physical aggression, dehumanisation of immigrants, or collective British victimhood) between conspiracy exposure and violent reactions (political or immigrant). Although the predictions in this study were not supported, the experimental design of Study 2 nevertheless demonstrated that exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants increased beliefs towards the target group, supporting previous research (e.g., Jolley, et al. 2020).

As there were no direct effects of conspiracy exposure on violent reactions, Chapter 4 focused on the moderating effects of political ideology between intergroup conspiracy exposure and violent reactions and presented the findings from Studies 3 and 4. While Study 1 (Chapter 2) uncovered a relationship between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions, this relationship was not replicated within an experimental design of Study 2 (Chapter 3). Thus, Study 3 sought to extend these findings by examining *when* conspiracy exposure may lead to violent reactions and if this pathway might be explained through other factors, such as Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). Violent reactions

were measured on two subscales—acceptance of violence and willingness to use violence. It was predicted that exposure to conspiracy theories related to the importing of terrorism by immigrants would inspire violent reactions (acceptance of violence and willingness to use violence) towards immigrants. It was also predicted that personality variables, such as physical aggression, SDO, and RWA, would enhance these effects. Unexpectedly and despite working in previous studies in this thesis (Study 2) and elsewhere (e.g., Jolley et al., 2020), the manipulation check was not successful in priming beliefs; therefore, moderation analysis was undertaken cautiously.

These results provide empirical support that exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories increases the willingness to use violence towards immigrants. Whilst no direct link between conspiracy exposure and willingness emerged, it is important to note that this link is conditional on high levels of SDO and RWA. However, this effect was not replicated with acceptance of violence towards immigrants. This suggested inconsistency between the *willingness to use violence* and the *acceptance of violence* scales. It might be that the acceptance items are not compatible with the conspiracy theory (plots and schemes) and the inclination for change.

The aim of Study 4 was to replicate and extend Study 3 while improving the limitations with a more robust design. Firstly, Study 3 focused on immigrants as a relatively wide group, and participants might have focused on a particular group while completing the study. Study 4 specified the target group as *Muslim immigrants* to reflect the content of the exposure article, which raised concerns about a link to terrorism. Secondly, the one-item willingness to use violence scale was amended to four items for a more robust and nuanced measurement. Physical aggression did not demonstrate any effects in Study 3; therefore, the third amendment was to include anger as the aggression measure. Since anger is the

physiological precursor of physical aggression (Webster et al., 2015), it aligned more with the predictions. Finally, recruitment was improved from snowball sampling across multiple social media and student participation platforms to one crowdsourcing platform (Prolific).

Study 4 investigated if exposure to Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories increased the motivation and willingness to use violence against Muslim immigrants. Like Study 3, it was hypothesised that exposure to conspiracy theories about Muslim immigrants would increase violent reactions, with the effects moderated by SDO, RWA and trait anger. Manipulation checks revealed that exposure to conspiracy theories about Muslim immigrants increased belief; therefore, the manipulation was successful. It was found that exposure to Muslim conspiracy theories increased violent reactions towards Muslim immigrants, but only for those who reported higher levels of SDO (regarding motivated violence and willingness to use violence) and trait anger (regarding motivated violence). RWA did not act as a moderator. Together, these results provide compelling evidence of the interactional effects of broader perspectives of society—particularly SDO—and exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories on violence towards the target of the conspiracy theory. These findings presented in Chapter 4 extend upon previous work that has demonstrated the effect of individual differences within the framework of conspiracy beliefs and violence (Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Levinsson et al., 2021; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). Furthermore, this research highlights the potential risks associated with conspiracy beliefs when directed at targeted groups for specific individuals. Also, insight is provided by these findings to consider the influence of conspiratorial worldviews when seeking interventions to sever the link between conspiracy beliefs and violence.

Importantly, therefore, Chapter 4 demonstrated that exposure to conspiracy theories about Muslim immigrants can lead to violent reactions from some people. Continuing with

the framework, Chapter 5 shifted the outcome focus from overt violent reactions to how conspiracy beliefs may impact decision-making, particularly a decision about a target individual (i.e., in the context of jury decision-making). The aim of Study 5 was to investigate potential correlational relationships between conspiracy beliefs (general and Muslim immigrants) and how participants attribute the likelihood of criminal offences to specific groups (British citizens and Muslim immigrants). Participants were required to provide subjective ratings of guilt towards British citizens and Muslim immigrants. In addition, to understand the unique relationship between these two variables, participants also completed a semantic measure of prejudice towards Muslim immigrants and British citizens as covariates. SDO has been associated with conspiracy beliefs (Dyrendal et al., 2021) and jury decision-making (Kemmelmeier, 2005), therefore was also included to explore the possible moderating effects of ideological individual differences.

Multiple regression analyses demonstrated that both intergroup and general conspiracy beliefs positively predicted subjective likelihood of guilt scores across two defendant models—Muslim immigrant (predicted by Muslim immigrant, but not general, conspiracy beliefs) and British citizen (predicted by general, but not Muslim immigrant, conspiracy beliefs). Unexpectedly, general conspiracy beliefs did not predict Muslim immigrant guilt despite previous research demonstrating that general conspiracy theorising predicts specific conspiracy beliefs (Jolley, Douglas, et al., 2022). It may be that these effects were obscured by Muslim immigrant beliefs which are arguably a result of more generalised conspiracy theorising. Further, SDO also did not feature as a moderating factor between conspiracy beliefs and the likelihood of guilt. Although participants did not take the perspective of being a juror, these novel findings suggest that jurors who have a tendency towards conspiracy theorising may judge defendants more harshly in a courtroom. In addition to other biases experienced by marginalised defendants (e.g., race, Hunt, 2015), these

findings suggest that conspiracy beliefs may also play a role in jury decision-making. It was important to examine whether this was a possibility empirically.

Therefore, Study 6 extended upon these findings and used a between-subjects experimental design to explore how conspiracy beliefs influenced jury decision-making in relation to the likelihood of guilt, sentence length, and likelihood of rehabilitation. To advance the methodology used in Study 5, jurors were required to take a juror's perspective. As required by real jurors, Study 6 requested that jurors apply legal criteria to their decisions. The aim of Study 6 was to assess if conspiracy beliefs (towards Muslim immigrants and general notions) moderated the relationship between the defendant's identity (Muslim immigrant *vs* British *vs* British Muslim) and the subjective likelihood of guilt. Moreover, participants were also asked to provide a subjective penalty (the length of custodial sentence) and the likelihood of rehabilitation ratings. These added elements provided a more comprehensive understanding of the juror's decision-making outcomes. As with Study 5, a measure of SDO was included to test the possibility that SDO moderates the link between conspiracy beliefs, defendant background and outcomes. Prejudice and a range of relevant demographics were included as control variables.

Therefore, it was predicted that when the defendant is a Muslim immigrant (vs British Muslim and vs British), the subjective likelihood of guilt and penalty sentence length would be higher for those who believe in Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories, with the opposite effect for rehabilitation. The effects were expected to be moderated through conspiracy theory beliefs, and these relationships further moderated by SDO.

To conform to ecologically valid criteria, the defendant’s ethnic identity could not be explicitly stated. Instead, ethnic identity was indicated by names and addresses. However, the subtle manipulation used did not work as intended. This was evidenced by the high number

of participants who failed in the British Muslim and Muslim immigrant conditions. The manipulation checks were comprised of 3 questions where participants were required to select the correct name of the defendant (John Smith or Syed Ahmed), select whether the defendant was Muslim (yes/no), and select whether or not the defendant was an immigrant (yes/no). Therefore, the design was adapted to assess participants' *perceptions* of the defendant's identity. All participants who perceived the defendant as Syed Ahmed, a Muslim immigrant, were retained and pooled into one condition. This resulted in a design change from three to two conditions (British citizen vs Muslim immigrant).

Study 6 did not find differences in outcome or moderator variables between conditions. Moderation analysis also did not find any effects related to conspiracy beliefs or SDO between conditions relating to guilt or penalty. However, there was a fascinating insight regarding how participants viewed rehabilitation. Through the Johnson-Neymann moderation method, it was determined that the pathway between perceived defendant identity (Muslim immigrant vs British citizen) and likelihood of rehabilitation was moderated by Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (but not general conspiracy beliefs), controlling for prejudice and relevant demographics. This means that participants viewed Muslim immigrant defendants as less likely than British citizen defendants to benefit from custodial rehabilitation programs if they were convicted of the crime. As with Study 5, it may be that general conspiracy beliefs were obscured by specific beliefs about Muslim immigrants.

In summary, findings from Chapter 5 venture conspiracy theory research into a new domain, that of the criminal justice system. The research indicates that conspiracy beliefs should be considered, in relation to jury decision-making, as a form of bias. In particular, conspiracy beliefs have the potential to influence juror's perceived guilt towards defendants whose group identity are accused of crimes that align with those beliefs. Furthermore,

conspiracist worldview has the potential to contribute to jury decision making more widely, highlighting how conspiracy beliefs may affect juror bias. The implications are discussed later in this chapter.

Thesis Objectives

Across 6 empirical studies, this thesis set out to explore the effect that belief in, and exposure to, conspiracy theories have on political violence and intergroup relations, with the latter focused on violent reactions and jury bias towards marginalised groups (immigrants, Muslim immigrants). Five primary objectives were presented in Chapter 1 and will now be reviewed in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 findings.

Objective 1: To investigate the role played by conspiracy theories in predicting to political violence

Study 1 explored whether conspiracy beliefs predict support for political violence when controlling for various types of aggression using a correlational design. Participants completed 2 measures of aggression - the Brief Aggression Questionnaire (Webster et al., 2015) and Displaced Aggression Questionnaire (Denson et al., 2006)—and two measures of conspiracy beliefs—general (Brotherton et al., 2013) and real-world (Douglas & Sutton, 2011). The dependent variable measured support for political violence with two items (Uscinski & Parent, 2014) - "*Violence is sometimes an acceptable way to express disagreement with the government.*" and "*Violence is an acceptable way to stop politically extreme groups in our country from doing harm*."). General and real-world conspiracy beliefs emerged as predictors of support for political violence, even when controlling for aggression. Study 1 found that conspiracy beliefs—a general tendency and real-world conspiracy beliefs - were predictors of political violence even when controlling for various measures of aggression.

These findings support the growing body of research demonstrating the influence of conspiracy theories on political violence and extremism. This includes extending upon the finding of Uscinski and Parent (2014), who found that conspiracy beliefs were positively associated with support for political violence, with 50 per cent of endorsers more likely to support violence against the government and politically extreme groups. Those with a generalised conspiracy worldview were also found to endorse the harming of government officials, suggesting a greater risk of radicalisation (Vegetti & Littvay, 2022), perhaps through the provision of a shared radical group narrative that promotes extremism (Kruglanski, Molinario, Ellenberg, et al., 2022). These findings, including Study 1, are limited by their correlational design. Nevertheless, this research aligns with experimental findings by Imhoff et al. (2021), who demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs increase participation in non-normative political protest.

The *Gelits Jaune* or Yellow Jacket protests in France exemplify non-normative action. Although motivations regarding socioeconomic inequality might be legitimate, these protests were marred by violence, with some sub-groups promoting Zionist domination conspiracy theories (Shultziner & Kornblit, 2020; Wionews, 2019). Politically extreme and deadly violence was demonstrated during the January 2021 insurrection in Washington, with many protesters demonstrating affiliation with QAnon (Armaly et al., 2022; Kaplan, 2021; Rubin et al., 2021). Politically extreme groups, including QAnon, were identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as promoting extremism through conspiracy theories (FBI, 2019). Similarly, the German *Reichsburger* group promotes extreme right-wing ideology, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and uses violence to achieve their goals (Amadeu Antonio Foundation, 2021). The findings from Study 1 contribute to the research that conspiracy beliefs influence political violence and extremism and demonstrate the importance of

including conspiracy beliefs in frameworks to explain current political violence behaviour (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2022; Vegetti & Littvay, 2022).

Objective 2: To investigate the role played by conspiracy beliefs relating to cyber violence

Study 1 tested two models of conspiracy beliefs and violence—political violence and cyber violence. Unlike political violence, cyber violence was not predicted by conspiracy beliefs. This was due to methodological flaws in the design of the cyber violence model. Firstly, the measure of cyber violence used was initially developed for measuring cyberbullying in adolescent people (Thomas et al., 2018). The measure included items such as "*Wrote mean and hurtful things to someone*" and "*Told someone that others would not like them if they did not do what I said*". Cyber violence measures need to align with the development of the target sample (Williford & DePaolis, 2019), and, more generally, the language of measures needs to be age-appropriate (Jolley et al., 2021). More importantly, the targets alluded to in the cyber violence measure (e.g., *someone*) were not specific enough to align with conspiracy beliefs that point the finger at a specific group (e.g., government or immigrants).

In the political violence model, the conspiracy items target powerful groups such as state organisations and governments with items that include "*The power held by heads of state is second to that of small, unknown groups who really control world politics*" (Brotherton et al., 2013), and "*There was an official campaign by MI6 to assassinate Princess Diana, sanctioned by elements of the establishment*" (Douglas & Sutton, 2011). The targets mentioned in the support for political violence measures include; "*Violence is sometimes an acceptable way to express disagreement with the government*" (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). This demonstrates how the targets in both the conspiracy belief and political

violence measures are aligned in a way that they did not in the cyber violence model. Research has illustrated how prejudice, dehumanisation, and hate speech towards Chinese people aligned with the online proliferation of Sinophobic conspiracy theories (Sakki & Castrén, 2022; Tahmasbi et al., 2021). This suggests that a specific measure of intergroup conspiracy beliefs in conjunction with a cyber violence measure targeting that same group would have been a more robust design.

Objective 3: To test how exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories affect violent reactions towards marginalised groups in Britain

For a time, conspiracy beliefs were considered the odd musings of a fringe few that had minimal impact on the wider scheme of things (Keeley, 1999; Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009). However, research has demonstrated that conspiracy theories can be harmful (e.g., Douglas, 2021), they are popular (Addley, 2018; Wood & Douglas, 2015), and evidence is growing of dangerous social consequences (Jolley, Marques, et al., 2022). Conspiracy theories are disseminated widely online (Vosoughi et al., 2018), exposing a large number of people to these alternative narratives. So far, we know that exposure generally increases beliefs, and once these beliefs are endorsed, it is tough to change them (Jolley & Douglas, 2017). It is essential to understand how this exposure affects people.

Studies 2 and 3 exposed participants to a fictitious article that terrorists were entering Britain disguised as immigrants. Study 4 refined the target group to Muslim immigrants. These experimental studies compared conspiracy belief scores between two groups, whereby one group was exposed to the fictitious article and the other was not. In Studies 2 and 4, this manipulation demonstrated that the exposure group registered significantly higher conspiracy beliefs compared with the control. Surprisingly, in Study 3, this manipulation did not find a difference in beliefs between conditions despite the findings of previous work (Study 2;

Jolley et al., 2020). Data checking uncovered annual income disparities between the two groups—the control group recorded lower income than the exposure group—suggesting this may have confounded the results. Exposure to immigrant (Study 2) and Muslim immigrant (Study 4) conspiracy theories recorded significantly higher beliefs compared to the control groups. These results replicate similar research that found increased belief after conspiracy exposure (K. Douglas & Sutton, 2008; Jolley et al., 2018, 2019, 2020; Jolley & Douglas, 2014b; Van der Linden, 2015)

In any case, exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories increases the corresponding beliefs for the most part. Of importance, however, is how these increased beliefs might affect the target group. Studies 2, 3, and 4 explored how exposure to, conspiracy theories influenced a marginalised group—immigrants (Studies 2 and 3) and Muslim immigrants (Study 4). The focus was on violence in general and violent reactions towards the target group. No direct impact of conspiracy theory exposure was found on the violence measures in any study. However, explorations of the indirect effects yielded some interesting results. Mediators can explain how the independent variable impacts the dependent variable (Karazsia & Berlin, 2018) and provide more understanding of the indirect effects that might occur between them. Study 2 explored whether conspiracy theory exposure indirectly influenced violent reactions via several possible mediators—state aggression, blatant dehumanisation of immigrants, and perceived collective British victimhood. No indirect effects were found either, which is positive and demonstrates that mere exposure to conspiracy theories will not necessarily increase violent reactions in general or towards a target group.

Studies 3 and 4 took a different approach and explored moderation analysis, which explores the magnitude of effects between the independent and dependent variables (Hayes, 2013). These studies used Right-wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance

Orientation (SDO) as possible moderators since they are known to predict both conspiracy beliefs (Hartman et al., 2021; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014) and intergroup violence (Böhm et al., 2020; Thomsen et al., 2008). These findings ascertained that exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories increased the willingness to use violence towards the targets of conspiracy theories, but *only* for specific target groups. Specifically, Study 3 found that exposure to immigrant conspiracy theories increased violent reactions towards immigrants, but only for those with higher SDO and RWA. Study 4 then sought to replicate and extend these results. Exposure to Muslim conspiracy theories increased violent reactions towards Muslim immigrants, but only for those who reported higher levels of SDO (regarding motivated violence and willingness to use violence) and trait aggression (regarding motivated violence). RWA did not act as a moderator.

These findings make numerous contributions to the research area. Previous research has focused on uncovering links between conspiracy beliefs and (political) extremism (e.g., Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). These findings may be the first to highlight the empirical links between intergroup conspiracy theories and violent reactions towards people targeted as conspirators—(Muslim) immigrants. Furthermore, Study 4 is a methodological advancement on the correlational design of Study 1, spotlighting how exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories can increase violent reactions towards them. This work also contributes to a growing research area of showcasing how conspiracy theories influence (political) violence and extremism (Adam-Troian et al., 2023; Armaly et al., 2022; Enders et al., 2022; Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Kruglanski et al., 2022; Levinsson et al., 2021; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020; Uscinski et al., 2022; Vegetti & Littvay, 2022). In all three studies, it was found that simple exposure does not increase violent reactions. However, this was as predicted and offers reassurances that simple conspiracy exposure is unlikely to make the *general* consumer extremist. Instead, violent intentions were increased only under a cocktail of conspiracy

exposure *and* a specific worldview. Such an insight is important for interventions, which are discussed later in this chapter.

Objective 4: To investigate the role played by conspiracy theories about jury decision-making

Study 1 established a link between conspiracy beliefs and political violence, controlling for trait aggression. Studies 2, 3, and 4 then showed that exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories could increase beliefs (Study 2 and 4), lead to violent reactions towards the target groups (Study 4) and that this pathway is conditional on individual differences. This demonstrated that intergroup conspiracy beliefs have the potential for adverse outcomes when groups are viewed as conspirators, such as Muslim immigrants. These studies requested that participants indicate their intentions of violent behaviour, which allowed for exploration into a sensitive area. However, intentions do not necessarily equate to real-world behaviour (Sheeran & Webb, 2016); therefore, exploring a more applied area would be advantageous. Moreover, testing whether the effects established between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions might extend to other domains, such as the criminal justice system.

Studies 5 and 6 aimed to explore how conspiracy beliefs influence jury decisions. These studies measured participants' conspiracy beliefs towards the target group (i.e., Muslim immigrants), general conspiracy beliefs, SDO, and how they allocate guilt scores towards two different ethnic groups as defendants—British citizens and Muslim immigrants. In addition, Study 6 also included measures for custodial penalty and likelihood of rehabilitation to explore beyond the verdict of guilty or not guilty. If the effects of Studies 3 and 4 were to extend into jury decision-making, it would suggest the possibility of miscarriage of justice should jurors endorse conspiracy beliefs about the defendant's ethnic group.

The findings from these exploratory studies were mixed but interesting. Study 5 explored two predictive frameworks. Firstly, intergroup conspiracy beliefs predicted guilt ratings towards the target group, Muslim immigrant defendants. Secondly, general conspiracy beliefs predicted guilt ratings towards British citizen defendants. This indicated that intergroup and general conspiracy theories predict increased guilt ratings. Moreover, the findings suggest that contexts differ in terms of intergroup and general conspiracy theorising. Whereas the intergroup context may be related to stereotypical beliefs about a target group and the crimes they commit (e.g., Muslim immigrants), a conspiratorial worldview seems to predict a higher probability of guilt more generally.

The next step was to experimentally test these effects by manipulating the defendant's ethnicity within a more ecologically valid design. Participants in Study 6 were required to take the perspective a juror, including applying real-world judicial instructions to their decisions. Study 6 tested how the perceived ethnic identity of the defendant affected subjective ratings of guilt, penalty, and rehabilitation and if conspiracy beliefs—general and intergroup, moderated these effects. No effects were found for guilt and penalty. In the case of rehabilitation, perceived identity on the likelihood of rehabilitation was moderated by Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (controlling for prejudice and relevant demographics). This supports previous research that illustrated that mock jurors rated Black defendants as less likely to rehabilitate (Hodson et al., 2005) and extends this effect to Muslim immigrants who are viewed as conspiring against Britain. Studies 5 and 6 tested conspiracy theories in this novel area, and early indications show that conspiracy beliefs may influence jury decision-making. The implications of these findings are discussed further in this chapter.

Objective 5: To explore how individual differences affect the pathways between conspiracy beliefs about violent reactions and jury decision-making

A notable contribution to this research area was examining how conspiracy *exposure* interacts with broader perceptions of society. As discussed in Objective 3, Studies 3 and 4 demonstrated the conditional effects of the pathway between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions through SDO and RWA. The findings related to SDO, in particular, support the assertion that conspiracy theories may increase perceived outgroup threat (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). SDO is a powerful predictor of intergroup attitudes and behaviour (Ho et al., 2012) and captures multiple intergroups psychological perspectives around identity, culture and political ideology (Böhm et al., 2020). Similar to the effects of SDO on anti-Semitic conspiracy beliefs (Swami, 2012), these findings illustrate the enhancing effect of SDO, suggesting that conspiracy theories regarding specific groups may serve an ideological need and that individual differences (such as SDO) may increase the effects of such conspiracy theories. Considering that the links between conspiracy theories and violence appear conditional on individual differences (e.g., Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020), these findings notably extend our understanding of the links between broader worldviews and intergroup conspiracy exposure to violence.

As described, the moderating effects of RWA and intergroup conspiracy beliefs on violent reactions were somewhat inconsistent. Although demonstrating a conditional effect in Study 3, RWA did not emerge as a moderating factor in Study 4. SDO and RWA can react differently between target groups (Cohrs & Asbrock, 2009), with RWA demonstrating differing sensitivity to different immigrant groups (Peresman et al., 2021). The change in target group from *immigrants* (Study 3), which may bring to mind multiple ethnicities or nationalities, to *Muslim immigrants* (Study 4), which considerably sharpens the focus, may temper the effects of RWA. Further, SDO did not act as a moderator in Studies 5 and 6 (jury),

which indicates that SDO may only play a role when the outcome is violent in nature. Jury decision-making is very different from violent reactions, so may be influenced by different factors. Studies 5 and 6 included prejudice, political orientation and SDO variable, and the association these associations may explain the null effects which occurred. SDO is a significant predictor of right-leaning political conservatism (Choma et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2012; Pratto et al., 1994) and ethnic prejudice (Pratto et al., 1994). Prejudice and political orientation were both including as covariates in the analyses of Studies 5 and 6 therefore it may that, as a predictor of both these covariates, the effect of SDO was nullified. Understanding when and why these inconsistencies occur would better understand how RWA interacts with conspiracy theories.

Trait aggression, as a possible moderator, also demonstrated inconsistencies between Study 3 and Study 4. In Study 1, trait aggression was measured across four aspects—physical aggression, anger, verbal aggression, and hostility (Webster et al., 2015). Webster et al. (2015) describe these aspects as individual differences in terms of thoughts (hostility), emotions (anger) and behaviour (physical and verbal aggression). Physical aggression emerged as a significant predictor of political violence in Study 1 and, therefore, was included in Study 3 as a possible moderator. However, no effects were found on violent reactions. Along with other methodological changes in Study 4, *anger* was included as a potential moderator instead of physical aggression. Trait anger yielded a conditional effect between conspiracy theory exposure and motivation to use violence (but not willingness), which provides a fascinating insight into how aggression interacts with conspiracy theories. Anger, the more emotional aspect of aggression (Buss & Perry, 1992), appears to arouse a motivation to use violence towards *Muslim* immigrants. Exploring why this affective aspect of trait aggression enhances the effects of conspiracy beliefs on violent reactions would be beneficial.

Overall, it is clear that mere exposure to conspiracy beliefs does not translate into violent reactions towards target groups. Instead, exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories is enhanced in people with certain traits of aggression and ideology. This knowledge not only helps to understand when belief in and exposure to conspiracy theories pose a threat of violence towards target groups. It also helps to identify possible interventions to reduce violent reactions.

Implications of Findings

This thesis aims to make novel advances exploring the effect that belief in, and exposure to, conspiracy theories have on political violence and intergroup relations, with the latter focused on violent reactions and jury bias towards marginalised groups (immigrants, Muslim immigrants). This thesis explored these aims across 6 empirical studies and established that conspiracy beliefs influence support for political violence, and exposure increases beliefs in intergroup conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions. However, these violent reactions are conditional on individual differences (e.g., anger, RWA, SDO). Within the context of the criminal justice system, conspiracy beliefs predict increased attributions of guilt in general and towards a specified target group (e.g., Muslim immigrants). Intergroup conspiracy beliefs also indicate that Muslim immigrants are less likely to be rehabilitated during custodial sentences. The key implications of this research program will be outlined in this section.

Conspiracy Beliefs, Political Violence, and Intergroup Violence

Media publications have reported increasing fears about conspiracy theory-motivated political violence in the run-up to the US presidential election in November 2024 (Swenson & Kunzelman, 2023). Swenson and Kunzelman (2023) describe malicious online communications posted by the attacker of Nancy Pelosi's husband as echoing the QAnon

conspiracy sentiments. Similarly, Jensen and Kane (2021) investigated crimes inspired by the QAnon conspiracy theory (that originated on the 4chan site in 2017) and found that more extremist offenders were connected to QAnon than any other extremist group or movement in the United States. QAnon sentiments are not unique to the US and are associated with right-wing extremist groups in European countries like Germany (Amadeu Antonio Foundation, 2021). There is grave concern for the rapidly increasing popularity of such groups (e.g., Reichsburger group), who promote the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, oppose immigration, and actively espouse political violence (Europol, 2020; Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2023; Martin, 2018; RAN, 2021). Understanding how conspiracy beliefs contribute to political violence and extremism is, therefore, paramount in terms of counteracting this threat.

A common route to political violence and extremism is via radicalisation (Braddock, 2015; Braddock et al., 2022a; Jahnke et al., 2022; Marchment & Gill, 2020). Conspiracy theory narratives often occur in extremist propaganda and are used to intensify the radicalisation of members (Bartlett & Miller, 2010). Furthermore, political groups who promote violence for goal attainment are also more likely to endorse conspiracy theories, although the direction of this relationship is unclear (Rousis et al., 2022). Much research has focused on *who* is at risk of radicalisation and how this process is motivated (e.g., Bouhana, 2019). Although some personality factors may increase the probability of radicalisation (Braddock et al., 2022a; Corner et al., 2021), a more salient factor is the interaction with those already involved in extremism, who provide social identification and a compelling narrative. (Bouhana, 2019).

The narrative promoted by extremist groups appears to be an important part of facilitating radicalisation and violence (Braddock et al., 2022b). The 3N (needs, narratives,

networks) model offers insight into the mechanisms of radicalisation (Webber & Kruglanski, 2017). Conspiracy theories can provide a shared reality through networks that have a need for significance and a narrative that provides someone to blame (Kruglanski, Molinario, Ellenberg, et al., 2022; Šrol et al., 2022). Finding ways in which the power of these shared narratives is diminished might offer insights into reducing political and extreme violence and support for such violence. For instance, inequality due to socioeconomic and educational factors is thought to increase persistent feelings of insecurity that promote the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs (Adam-Troian et al., 2023). Such psychological distress is related to a need for significance that increases the risk of radicalisation and the adoption of extreme ideologies (van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019). This is exemplified by extreme groups (e.g., Gilet Jaunes) whose narratives highlight social injustices, endorse conspiracy beliefs, and use violence during political protests. Targeting social inequalities may contribute to diminishing the conspiracy narrative that contributes to political violence. This thesis demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs—a general tendency and real-world conspiracy beliefs - were predictors of support for political violence, even when controlling for various measures of aggression (Study 1). Demonstrating how conspiracy theories can play a unique role in violent extremism, at least when considering aggression, is notable because it further showcases the potentially damaging contribution of conspiracy beliefs.

In addition to political violence, this thesis also explored the effects of intergroup conspiracy theories and violence. The findings highlight that intergroup conspiracy beliefs have the potential for dire consequences towards groups perceived as *conspirators*. Belief in and exposure to conspiracy theories was shown to increase violent reactions towards immigrants and Muslim immigrants (Studies 3 and 4). Anti-immigrant attitudes are inextricably linked to social identity and intergroup conflict and tend to increase during economic crises (Cea D'Ancona, 2018). Immigrants are often viewed as threats to public

resources and culture, tend to invoke a need to protect the ingroup (Renström et al., 2022) and may result in the scapegoating of immigrants as a shared ingroup narrative (Berlet, 2009). Such scapegoating has often targeted Jewish populations (Glick, 2002b) but can be applied to any outgroup as a way to displace blame (Rothschild et al., 2012). People who scapegoat in this way tend to be high in collective narcissism when their ingroup identity image is threatened and need cognitive closure when they lack control (Rothschild & Keefer, 2023). Both collective narcissism and the need for cognitive closure are associated with conspiracy beliefs (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012; Leman & Cinnirella, 2013). Jolley et al. (2020) demonstrated that exposure to immigrant conspiracy beliefs increased beliefs and prejudice towards immigrants. This thesis shows that conspiracy exposure about immigrants could increase the risk of violence towards them, but the exposure-violence link is conditional on individual differences.

Research exploring conspiracy theories and violence is an emerging area in conspiracy theory research, and the indications are that individual differences are important. For instance, Jolley and Paterson (2020) found that state anger mediated a positive relationship between general conspiracy beliefs and general violence. Also, Rottweiler and Gill (2020) reported that, in addition to a higher conspiracy mentality predicting violent extremism, the effects were enhanced by self-efficacy, self-control and low-related morality. Similarly, Levinsson et al. (2021) ascertained that the association between conspiracy beliefs and sympathy for violent radicalisation was amplified by psychological distress. As part of exploring how intergroup conspiracy beliefs affect target groups, this thesis found that exposure to Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories increased beliefs and violent reactions towards Muslim immigrants. Importantly, this effect was conditional on individual differences. Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs increased violent reactions towards Muslim immigrants by those who endorse political ideologies related to SDO and RWA. The

emotional component of aggression, trait anger, also enhances the effects of conspiracy theories when violent intentions are motivated. Notably, this thesis showcased consistent pathways between conspiracy beliefs and violence through the hierarchical social factor of SDO, which is important within the context of immigrant groups.

SDO measures the propensity for beliefs in social hierarchies, can increase prejudice, and has negative consequences for immigrants (Caricati et al., 2017; Hodson & Costello, 2007; Thomsen et al., 2008). These negative effects are magnified for Muslim immigrants due to Islamophobia (Palmgren et al., 2023). Islamophobia is rife in Western countries (Uenal et al., 2021), and Muslims are the most dehumanised group in the United States (Kteily et al., 2015). Following the conflicts across the Middle East in 2015, the arrival of displaced people in Europe was dubbed 'The Refugee Crises'. The rejection of Muslim refugees, despite their plight, was found to be strongly associated with blatant dehumanisation (Bruneau et al., 2018). It is important to note that distinctions have been highlighted between Muslim and Ukrainian refugees. Ukrainians experienced acceptance, and their status as refugees was viewed as legitimate, whereas the motivations and legitimacy of Muslims as refugees were questioned (Palmgren et al., 2023). Similarly, British participants were more willing to help Ukrainian refugees than Yemeni Muslims, with social identity and perceived threat mediating these relationships (Sinclair et al., 2023). Such discrepancies between refugee groups require a better understanding of the underlying factors. Moreover, Islamophobic conspiracy beliefs, anger and SDO were all found to strongly predict Islamophobic outcomes, with conspiracy beliefs and SDO also interacting with fear (Uenal et al., 2021). The association between SDO and Islamophobia was mediated by symbolic and terroristic threats (Uenal, 2016a). This thesis extends this knowledge and showcases that exposure to and belief in Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories may contribute to how Muslim immigrants are treated. It would be interesting to explore if perceived threats (terroristic and symbolic) and fear, in

addition to aggression and individual differences, contribute to conspiracy theory-inspired violent reactions towards marginalised groups.

In summary, this thesis demonstrates how exposure to conspiracy theories targeting immigrants (Study 3) or Muslim immigrants (Study 4) can increase violence towards those groups. Importantly, however, these effects are conditional on higher levels of SDO and, when concerning immigrants (Study 3), also RWA. There is also some evidence of trait anger playing a role in motivated violent reactions (Study 4). This thesis builds upon previous research that has demonstrated the effect of individual differences on the pathway between conspiracy beliefs and violence (e.g., Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020), where this thesis further highlights the potential risks associated with conspiracy beliefs when directed at targeted groups for specific individuals. Notably, addressing the dearth of experimental work in this field, several studies in this thesis employed an experimental design. Such findings enable assertions around causality to be made, where exposure was shown to impact violent intentions for those with specific ideologies. Therefore, when considering levers for intervention, these results demonstrate how it is also vital to consider worldviews when seeking to break the conspiracy-violence link.

Therefore, this thesis has illustrated that conspiracy beliefs can contribute to political violence, even when controlling for trait aggression. Moreover, support for violence against marginalised groups is influenced by intergroup conspiracy beliefs. The effect of exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories on the support for violence against Muslim immigrants is conditional on individual differences (e.g., SDO). This conditional effect means that mere exposure to conspiracy theories will not affect all people. Going forward, it would be advantageous to understand the other factors that might contribute to violent reactions, such as perceived threat, fear and social identity.

Conspiracy Beliefs and Jury Decision-making

In Britain, the process of *Voir Dire* (i.e., jury selection based on background and bias assessment) is not practised, as in the US. When considering the influence of individual differences, prejudice, and conspiracy beliefs regarding particular ethnic groups, there may be an argument for exploring conspiracy beliefs as a form of bias to be considered within the criminal justice system of England and Wales. The effects of racial, ethnic, and cultural bias within jury decision-making are well documented in research (Bothwell et al., 2006; Daly & Pattenden, 2005; L. Ewanation & Maeder, 2023; Gamblin & Kehn, 2021; Hunt, 2015; Kemmelmeier, 2005; Lynch & Haney, 2000, 2011a), and has been described as a complex mix of intersecting factors (Hunt, 2015). This thesis has demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs may be a novel factor in jury decision-making. This is in the framework of intergroup conspiracy theories predicting a higher likelihood of guilt towards a target group and general conspiracy beliefs predicting a higher probability of guilt more generally. These effects emerged even though prejudice was controlled as a covariate. This is a novel area for conspiracy belief research, with many areas within the jury decision-making process to explore.

This has implications for defendants whom jurors may view through the lens of stereotypical conspiracy beliefs. Black defendants who are accused of violent and weapons-related crimes are judged with a higher likelihood of guilt due to beliefs that Black people (in general) have a propensity for violent and weapons-related crimes (Roberts, 2018). Also, findings demonstrated that when offenders are perceived to have low communion (e.g., less kind, trustworthy, and friendly), conspiracy theorising about the defendant and motives increases. It has also been established that Muslim immigrants are often viewed as suspicious, hostile, and threatening to Western society (Carr, 2006; Eid, 2014; Erisen & Kentmen-Cin, 2017). There are also beliefs that terrorist plots follow the path of Muslim

immigration and displacement despite no evidence to support this (Forrester et al., 2019). If a juror endorses beliefs that Muslim immigrants are plotting against British society in this way, they may judge the defendant more harshly.

Moreover, confirmation bias may motivate jurors to process evidence in a way that confirms their pre-existing beliefs about the defendant. It is plausible that jurors may rely on confirmation bias when assessing evidence if they endorse conspiracy beliefs about a defendant's group. Curley et al. (2018) argue that confirmation bias, brought about by cognitive dissonance, may motivate jurors to focus on evidence that confirms their pre-trial beliefs. This suggests that should a juror endorse stereotypic conspiracy beliefs about the defendant (such as Muslim immigrants importing terrorism), they may focus on evidence that confirms this belief. This thesis has identified that Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs predict a higher likelihood of guilt towards that group. This means that there is some possibility that defendants from conspiracy target groups may be at risk of wrongful convictions.

Although experimental differences were not established between a British citizen and Muslim immigrant defendants about guilt and penalty, this thesis did find that intergroup conspiracy theories moderated the link between perceived defendant identity and the lower likelihood of rehabilitation by Muslim immigrant defendants. This offers some insight as to how some jurors view Muslim immigrant defendants and suggests that this may be motivated by stereotypical conspiracy beliefs about Muslim immigrants. It would be interesting to explore this effect in more detail and understand why participants view defendants this way.

Looking at the links between conspiracy beliefs and jury decision-making more broadly, this thesis also found that general conspiracy beliefs predict a higher likelihood of guilt. This suggests that jurors with a conspiracist worldview may judge defendants more

harshly. Conspiracy worldviews are associated with several heuristics that may influence jury decision-making. For instance, the need for uniqueness and cognitive closure (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2017; Marchlewska et al., 2018) falls within the epistemic motivations of conspiracy beliefs (Douglas et al., 2017). Also, the idea of 'joining the dots' (i.e., illusory correlations) motivates people to link stimuli together when no links exist (van Prooijen et al., 2018). This may have implications for processing evidentiary information during court proceedings. It may be that conspiracist-prone jurors rely on cognitive shortcuts when assessing guilt. Aside from epistemic conspiracy belief motivations that may cause distorted thinking patterns, there is the general underlying suspicion associated with conspiracy theorising.

The increase in science scepticism (Rutjens et al., 2022) and the association with conspiracy beliefs (Rutjens & Većkalov, 2022) may pose challenges for expert witness testimony. If jurors are prone to conspiracy beliefs, they may view expert witness testimony with suspicion, impacting how they assess guilt or innocence. Moreover, conspiracy beliefs are associated with a lack of trust, both interpersonal and institutional (Green & Douglas, 2018; Greenburgh et al., 2019; van Prooijen et al., 2022). Mistrust and scepticism are at the core of conspiracy beliefs and will undoubtedly influence the criminal justice system. This thesis has applied conspiracy theory research to the novel area of jury decision-making and provided early indications that conspiracy beliefs predict higher guilt attribution. However, there may be a wide range of ways in which conspiracy theories impact the criminal justice system more widely.

At this time, we are experiencing increased polarisation, political violence, and hate crimes (Khan-Ruf & Lawrence, 2023; Martin, 2018; Nougayrede, 2019; UK Home Office, 2022); it is imperative to consider all factors that may contribute to hostile intergroup

relations and violence. The dissemination of hate speech, disinformation, and discriminatory conspiracy theories (LGBTQ+, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic) are increasing on social media platforms such as X, formerly known as Twitter (Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2023), and TikTok (Grandinetti & Bruinsma, 2023). It is now imperative that we seek interventions to reduce conspiracy beliefs and target the ideology that magnifies them. Such intervention ideas are discussed in the next section.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this thesis extends the knowledge about conspiracy beliefs and violence using experimental designs and ventures into the novel area of conspiracy beliefs as a form of jury bias, there are limitations to be considered. The limitations will be discussed, with the possibility of addressing them with future research. The statistical effects for Studies 2 to 4 were small. Nevertheless, conspiracy-inspired violence has the potential to cause harm to groups perceived as conspirators; therefore, small effects remain important. For instance, racially motivated hate crimes have trebled since 2012 in England and Wales (UK Home Office, 2018, 2022). Moreover, there could be increased safeguarding risks for immigrants in Britain due to increasing aggressive protests by far-right groups (increases of 102 percent between 2021 and 2022; Khan-Ruf, 2023). However, while Study 1 established an association between conspiracy beliefs and political violence, it is essential to note that the violence scale measured *support* for political violence, not actual behaviour. Across all four violence studies (Studies 1 to 4), participants were asked about their intentions to use violence. Such behaviour is illegal and socially unacceptable; therefore, social desirability might have influenced the honesty of the answers. Hopefully, the anonymous design of the research would have mitigated these effects, although it is difficult to know for sure. Further, while intentions of violence allowed for exploring a sensitive area with strict ethical considerations, it should be remembered that willingness or intentions do not necessarily

evolve into behaviour (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). Therefore, the findings must be considered considering the effects being limited to *intention* measures.

Retrospective power analysis, with a target of .80, was conducted across all 6 studies using G*Power post hoc tests with the exception of Study 2. Study 1 (N = 202; regression analysis) was calculated with the inclusion of 10 predictors and 2 criterion variables, an effect size of .33. resulting in a power effect of .99. Since G*Power cannot accommodate mediation analysis (Faul et al., 2007), the simulation models of mediation (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007) was used to assess approximate mediated power effect for Study 2 (N = 138; mediation analysis). According to simulation models of mediation, to achieve an 80 percent statistical power effect in a test of mediation whereby paths a and b have small effects, requires a sample size of 558 (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). This indicates that Study 2 is considerably underpowered and may have increased the probability of a Type 2 error. Study 3 (N = 168; moderation analysis) post hoc power analysis using the small effect size of .02 and 4 covariates for moderation analysis, found the power effect to be .60. Similarly in Study 4 (N = 211; moderation analysis) using 4 covariates and a small effect size, power was calculated at .70. This indicates the possibility of Type 1 errors in Studies 3 and 4. Study 5 (N = 260; regression analysis) calculated power by including 8 predictors and an effects size of .32, resulting in a power effect of 1.0. This may indicate the presence of a Type 2 error. Finally, Study 6 (N = 219; moderation analysis) with the inclusion of 2 covariates and an effect size of .08, the power effect was calculated at .90. In addition to lower power effects in some studies, there is also increased probability of Type 1 error due to the number of analysis run across studies (Banerjee et al., 2009).

Across all studies in this thesis, there were gender imbalances with women consistently outnumbering men. Although non-parametric tests were used to detect gender

differences, there is some question as to how meaningful such results can be (Dickinson et al., 2012). This is of particularly interest in relation to aggression and violence since men consistently scored higher than women across. Although, this is in line with prevailing research (e.g., Bijlsma et al., 2022; Im et al., 2018), it does raise the question ethics and representation in terms of gender beyond binary measurement (Cameron & Stinson, 2019). In addition to gender imbalances, this thesis excluded gender non-conforming participants in difference analyses. (Call et al., 2023) Call et al. (2023) argues that such practices of have the potential to promote inequities and call on the research stakeholders in psychology to consider the social justice and ethical decisions regarding the demographic data (collection, reporting, interpretation, and dissemination). Recruitment platforms such as Prolific, where adjustable demographic parameters could help to improve the quality of data that reflect a more balanced gender balance.

Also, the scales used to measure violence towards immigrants were inconsistent throughout the studies and could have been more robust. For instance, measures of violence (willingness to use and acceptance of violence) used in Study 2 and Study 3 may have had some validity issues. In both studies, the willingness to use violence scale comprised only one item, which was amended to include four items in Study 4. Similarly, the scale for violence acceptance used in Studies 2 and 3 was replaced in Study 4 because, upon evaluation, the original items measured both acceptance *and* willingness. Therefore, the measure of acceptance (i.e., "If an immigrant cuts you up in traffic, it's OK to swear at them") was replaced with a measure more focused on the desire to bring about change (i.e., "Unfortunately, you have to resort to violence against Muslims sometimes because this is the only way you to get things to change"). Therefore, the measures have been refined and improved through the body of work in this thesis. Notably, the effects, for the most part, are consistent when using 1-item vs multiple item scales, giving confidence in the earlier studies.

There was also a change regarding measuring aggression throughout the thesis. Study 1 established that physical aggression was a significant predictor of political violence; therefore, this was controlled for in Studies 2 (as state physical aggression) and 3 (trait physical aggression). However, conspiracy exposure did not increase (state) aggression, and (trait) aggression did not act as a moderator in Study 3. Therefore, this suggests that whilst aggression can predict violent reactions (Study 1), aggression does not seem to interact with conspiracy beliefs directly. Therefore, instead of measuring trait physical aggression in Study 4, a different component of trait aggression - trait anger - was employed. According to the brief aggression questionnaire sub-measures, physical aggression is behavioural, and anger is affective (Webster et al., 2015). Arguably, anger is the physiological arousal preceding, but not necessarily resulting in, physical aggression (Buss & Perry, 1992) and has previously been associated with conspiracy beliefs (Jolley & Paterson, 2020; Šrol et al., 2022). Therefore, focusing on anger (rather than physical aggression) suits the predictions more appropriately for Study 4. Here, anger was shown to act as a moderator. However, focusing on one measure more consistently may have been a more robust choice, but as explained, each study did require a slightly different component to be examined, so the variety should be seen as a strength of the work.

Whilst illustrating that the links between conspiracy beliefs and violence remain after controlling for aggression, it remains unknown how other known predictors of political violence may interact with conspiracy beliefs. Indeed, previous research has found that the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and support for violence is conditional on individual differences (e.g., Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). It would be beneficial to explore how other individual difference variables, such as political ideologies, strengthen or weaken the link between conspiracy beliefs and political violence. Consequently, the conclusions that conspiracy beliefs play a unique role when controlling for various measures of aggression

should be modulated. However, whilst aggression was examined as a control variable to showcase the effects of conspiracy beliefs, it is also worth noting that aggression could be linked with conspiracy beliefs and political violence. For example, in cross-sectional data, Jolley and Paterson (2020) showcased that conspiracy beliefs were positively correlated with anger, which predicted violent reactions. Therefore, now that this thesis has demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs uniquely predict political violence, future researchers should continue probing the conspiracy–anger connection.

The manipulation of conspiracy exposure was included unchanged from Jolley et al. (2020) in Study 2 and Study 3. Despite this manipulation successfully priming conspiracy beliefs in Study 2, it did not directly increase conspiracy beliefs in Study 3; therefore, the results must be viewed with this important caveat in mind. Data checking found income discrepancies between the experimental conditions (exposure *vs* control). Participants in the control condition reported lower income than those in the conspiracy condition. Evidence suggests tangible links between economic inequality and conspiracy beliefs (Adam-Troian et al., 2023; Salvador Casara et al., 2022). It is possible that participants in the control condition, per chance, had higher baseline conspiracy *beliefs*, thereby rendering the manipulation check testing the success of conspiracy *exposure* ineffective. Nevertheless, the findings are strengthened by a successful manipulation exposure in Study 4, which replicated the core finding that intergroup conspiracy theories increased violent reactions towards targeted groups in some people.

Studies 5 and 6 focussed on conspiracy beliefs and jury decision-making. Whilst this is an interesting and novel area, several methodological issues must be addressed. Firstly, Study 5 demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs predict a higher likelihood of guilt, but this was a correlational design. Therefore, more exploration is needed to understand the mechanisms

driving this effect. Secondly, the manipulation in Study 6 was perhaps too vague. In an effort to keep the design true to real court proceedings, defendants could not be identified as being Muslim immigrants or British citizens. This distinction was attempted using the information presented on the indictment form using name and address. Whilst this successfully distinguished British citizens defendants, the distinction between British Muslims and Muslim immigrants seemed to cause confusion. To improve clarity, this might be addressed by providing more context and crime details for mock jurors, including ethnicity. For instance, Pfeifer and Ogloff (2003) offered mock jurors with a clearer ethnic background information about defendants, a written crime report that provided context about the criminal behaviour, and clear criteria for meeting the legal standard of the crime. A similar experimental design would have provided more clarity for mock jurors to assess guilt and penalty ratings.

Importantly, mock jurors in Study 6 were not provided with any form of evidence to assess. Since this is a crucial aspect of the juror's decision-making process (Curley et al., 2018), it may be that participants did not have enough information to assess guilt and penalty properly. Perhaps providing mock jurors with written evidence from an expert witness (e.g., forensic analysis) may have provided more information to determine guilt and penalty. Since the jury decision-making studies were operated on online platforms, including a deliberation process was not possible. However, this is an integral part of the decision-making process (Curley et al., 2022) since deliberation can spread bias (Lynch & Haney, 2009, 2011b). Future research should consider including some form of deliberation, preferably in person.

Recruitment of participants provided some challenges across some violence and jury studies. Studies 1, 3 (violence), and 5 (jury) used snowball sampling across various platforms (e.g., Facebook, student recruitment) but did not always provide a diverse sample. For

instance, the manipulation of Study 3 failed due to income disparities between conditions. Studies 2, 4, and 6 were recruited only from the Prolific crowdsourcing platform, which provides researchers with the opportunity to set clear parameters (e.g., excluding Muslim participants who may be exposed to Islamophobic manipulation content). Crowdsourcing platforms offer samples that are more demographically diverse and have more competitive worldviews than students (Roulin, 2015), and recruitment via social media may face generalisability issues (Benedict et al., 2019). Had all participant samples been sourced from one controlled source (e.g., Prolific), data quality may have been more diverse and higher quality. However, a contextual factor is the resources available.

Further, on average, most participants did not report high conspiracy belief endorsement. Typically, the averages were around the scale mid-point (mid-point 3.5); for example, a mean of 3.88 for general conspiracy theorising in Study 5. Therefore, future research recruiting a sample of high endorsers would enable the effects reported in this thesis to be replicated. However, those who believe in conspiracy theories are distrustful of others, which can make recruitment into psychological studies challenging. Notwithstanding these challenges, recruiting such a sample would align with calls in the extremist literature to build an empirical base of those who *have* conducted violent acts (e.g., Allington, 2023; Cottee, 2023) opposed to merely community samples. Therefore, a fruitful line of work could be to examine how conspiracy beliefs are reported and discussed in a sample of individuals who have and have not conducted violent acts.

In addition to addressing the limitations, future research could expand on the findings of this thesis to explore interventions for reducing the adverse outcomes of conspiracy beliefs. For instance, SDO emerged as a significant moderator between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions. This presents opportunities to target SDO reduction to reduce violent

reactions. One way to reduce SDO is through empathy (Sidanius et al., 2013), with empathy mediating the relationship between SDO and prejudice (Nicol & Rounding, 2013). Future research could include empathy within the conspiracy theory-violence framework, focusing on exploring ways to invoke empathy and reduce SDO.

Another possible intervention is through intergroup contact. The intergroup contact hypothesis encourages groups to meet within an equal power structure to improve intergroup relations and reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954). Hailed as one of the most successful social psychology ideas (Dovidio et al., 2002), favourable intergroup contact reduced SDO (Meleady & Vermue, 2019). Specifically, Meleady and Vermeu (2019) demonstrated that negative contact with marginalised groups was associated with increased SDO, but positive contact reduced SDO. This suggests that targeting a reduction in SDO might be a way to reduce violent reactions towards marginalised groups. Moreover, intergroup contact has recently emerged to reduce intergroup conspiracy theories, even when controlling for prejudice (Jolley, Seger, et al., 2023). This is a welcome development, and these studies suggest that intergroup contact is an avenue for reducing conspiracy beliefs and SDO, thereby reducing the violent reactions towards marginalised groups.

Future research might also investigate if the findings from this thesis extend to other marginalised groups. Salvati et al. (2023) argue that Queer conspiracy beliefs are an overlooked group within the domain. For instance, harmful conspiracy theories referring to the ‘gay lobby’ who indoctrinate minors and disrupt social morality and traditional family values. This conspiracy belief also feeds into the notion that the expansion of gender expression beyond the binary is a plot against Catholicism and traditional values (O’Connor, 2020). Along with feminism, these conspiracy theories also feed into anti-Semitic and great replacement conspiracy theories that believe that these groups are contributing to White

extinction (RAN, 2021). The findings of this thesis suggest that groups perceived as conspirators are at risk of harm. Therefore, it is important to explore all marginalised groups who may be at risk.

This thesis has focused on how people of non-Muslim British identity view Muslim immigrants in Britain and how this might influence violence and extremism. However, Bartlet and Miller (2010) point out that conspiracy theories occur across all spectrums of extremist violence. It would be informative for future research to reverse the design and test Muslim (immigrant) sample conspiracy beliefs towards British non-Muslims with a focus on intergroup threat. Threat (symbolic and realistic) emerged as a strong predictor of hostility between Muslim and non-Muslim (western) samples, with the suggestion that reducing perceptions of cultural incompatibility and dehumanisation could mitigate this threat (Kteily et al., 2016; Obaidi et al., 2018). Also, this research was approached from a Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) perspective. Context and culture are important when interpreting psychological findings (Rad et al., 2018) and WEIRD researchers may approach studies differently from non-WEIRD researchers (Meadon & Spurrett, 2010). Whilst these studies identified SDO, RWA, and aggression as the individual differences that enhance the effects between conspiracy beliefs and violent reactions, this may be different if the target group was reversed.

Finally, this thesis has made mention of the great replacement conspiracy theory and its relevance for political violence and violence towards (Muslim) immigrants. However, belief in this theory was never measured. The great replacement conspiracy theory has multiple target groups, such as Jews, (Muslim) immigrants, feminists, and LGBTQ+ groups (RAN, 2021). The central tenet of great replacement is the so-called ‘extinction’ of White people due to replacement by immigrants, which is sometimes linked to Jewish global elites

who orchestrate this immigration to achieve world domination. Moreover, there is the notion that feminists and LGBTQ+ people defy gender roles and traditional family values, thereby causing the lowering of white population birth rates. Again, this feeds into the narrative that White people are fading away from society. Jolley, Paterson, et al. (2023) recently demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs have a significant impact on target groups. Therefore, future research should explore the great replacement conspiracy theory in conjunction with these target groups, how they interact and what the outcomes may be (Douglas et al., 2019).

Reflections on Study Design, Sampling, and Methodology

The studies in this PhD took place between 2018 and 2023 which coincided with the COVID19 pandemic and an influx of new research to the domain of conspiracy theories in psychology (van Prooijen & Imhoff, 2022). Therefore, new research meant that studies in this PhD program needed to respond to new information and adapt accordingly (e.g., survey measures). It is also worth noting that this thesis reflects the work of a self-funded doctoral researcher. This meant that some studies were funded, and others were not, resulting in different recruitment methods. Overall, this thesis reflects the challenges faced by doctoral researchers to conduct robust scientific research with limited resources whilst also showcasing the strengths and adaptability in a rapidly changing research environment. Below the learning derived from this thesis is outlined, with the aim of empowering future doctoral researchers in the field of conspiracy theory beliefs.

Measures of Conspiracy Theory Beliefs

Conspiracy theory measures tend to focus on two aspects, namely, specific events and general conspiracism (Douglas et al., 2019). The former denotes a rejection of the official narrative, and the latter, the beliefs in secretive groups with bad intentions. In addition, there are also measures that focus on specific groups, such as feminists (Jolley et al., 2024).

Measures of conspiracy theory beliefs were used in all studies but were adapted depending on the aims and outcomes of the studies as follows:

- Conspiracist Ideation Scale (Brotherton et al., 2013): Studies 1 and 5
- Belief in Specific Conspiracy Theories (Douglas & Sutton, 2011): Study 1
- General Conspiracy Beliefs – Single Item (Lantian et al., 2016): Study 6
- Immigrant Conspiracy Theories (Jolley et al., 2020): Studies 2 and 3
- Muslim Conspiracy Theories (adapted from Jolley et al., 2020): Studies 4, 5, and 6

The aim of Study 1 was to establish a link between conspiracy beliefs and political violence; therefore, it was important to use a wide variety of conspiracy items. For this reason, both the Conspiracist Ideation Scale (Brotherton et al., 2013) and the Belief in Specific Conspiracy Theories Scale (Douglas & Sutton, 2011) were employed. However, this was a large volume of items (22 in total) and, in conjunction with all other measures, resulted in a lengthy study that could potentially increase respondent fatigue (Jeong et al., 2023).

Once the conspiracy-violence link was established, Studies 2 to 4 focused on exploring conspiracy theories and violent reactions toward specific groups. Studies 2 and 3 measured Immigrant Conspiracy Theories (Jolley et al., 2020). This scale was modified for Study 4 to focus on Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories and included two extra measures. One to capture threat to British identity and the other included reference to Sharia Law. This served the aims of the study and comprised fewer items. Study 5, again an exploratory study, utilised the Conspiracy Ideation Scale (Brotherton et al., 2013) to capture general conspiracy theory beliefs and Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs. However, once again, this resulted in a lengthy measure of 21 items. However, this was addressed in Study 6 by using the 1-item General Conspiracy Scale (Lantian et al., 2016) which reduced the number of items and time

spent completing the study. Reducing the length of time thereby made this incentivised study more economical.

Future researchers should consider their conspiracy theory measures according to their designs and funding budgets. The 1-item General Conspiracy Scale (Lantian et al., 2016) offers a valid and reliable alternative to the lengthy Conspiracy Ideation measure by Brotherton et al. (2013). This is particularly salient for doctoral researchers who may face funding constraints. Furthermore, effective conspiracy theory measures depend on the context in which conspiracy theories are being explored (Adam-Troian et al., 2020). Researchers need to consider who the conspiracy theories relate to, and who believes them. For example, this thesis has established that conspiracy-violence link in the context of Muslim immigrants is endorsed by those with higher levels of social dominance. However, the conspiracy-violence link in the context of Covid-19 and 5G conspiracies were related to paranoia (Jolley & Paterson, 2020). This demonstrates how context and individual differences influence the best option for measuring conspiracy beliefs.

Measures of Political Violence

The inconsistency of measures of political violence was discussed in the Limitations and Future Directions section. However, it is worth discussing the scales used in each study and some alternatives to consider for future use. A recent meta-analysis synthesised a list of violence outcome measures that related to political violence, extremism, and terrorism (Wolfowicz et al., 2020, 2021). For the purposes of this thesis, only measures pertaining to political violence outcomes are applicable. The measures used in each study are as follows:

1. Support for political violence (Uscinski & Parent, 2014): Studies 1, 2 and 3.
2. Support for political protest violence (Simon & Grabow, 2010): Study 2 and 3.
3. Willingness to use violence against immigrants (Doosje et al., 2012): Study 2 and 3.

4. Violence acceptance towards immigrants (adapted from the Maudsley Violent Questionnaire by Walker, 2012); Study 2 and 3.
5. Willingness to use violence towards Muslim immigrants (adapted from Doosje et al. [2012] and Lamberty & Leiser [2019]); Study 4.
6. Motivation for violence towards Muslim immigrants (adapted from Lamberty & Leiser, 2019); Study 4.

As a starting point, the items used to measure political violence (from Uscinski & Parent, 2014) was a logical choice. At that time (2018), Uscinski and Parent (2014) was the only study that linked conspiracy beliefs and violence (support for political violence). Studies 2, 3, and 4 focused on intergroup conspiracy theories and political violence, which were measured in general and towards the target group. Furthermore, emerging research at that time suggested links between conspiracy beliefs and support for violent protest behaviour (e.g., Lamberty & Leiser, 2019). Therefore, Study 2 measured not only support for political violence (Uscinski & Parent, 2014) but also support for political violence specifically within a context of protest environments using measures adapted from Simon and Grabow (2010). In this way, and within the context of conspiracy theories and violence research being a fairly new research stream, including a measure of violent protest behaviour sought to explore find new links between violence and conspiracy theory belief. It is worth noting that Study 2 data collection and analysis occurred in 2019 when little research existed into the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and political violence (general or protest). However, newer research has found that conspiracy beliefs are associated with lower engagement in normative political engagement such as voting and increased non-normative behaviour such as violent protest (e.g., Imhoff et al., 2021). Future researchers would do well to use the measure set out by Imhoff et al. (2021) for measuring political protest violence since this measure better aligned to how this relates to conspiracy beliefs.

As was discussed in the Limitation and Future Directions section, the configuration of these measures was changed between Study 3 and Study 4 after reflecting on the meaning of the items. For future research, it would be best to use a scale that measures intentions and attitudes about political violence toward Muslim immigrants and captures right-wing ideology. The one-item scale adapted from Doosje et al. (2012) is classified in this way by Wolfowicz et al. (2020, 2021), but there are other scales that would perhaps provide a more nuanced measure of political violence towards Muslim immigrants. After consideration of the scales including the meta-analysis by Wolfowicz et al. (2020) two measures of political violence, which can be adapted to a Muslim immigrant target group, would be appropriate for replication. Firstly, the Justification for Radical Violence (Nivette et al., 2017) comprising of 4 items:

1. It's sometimes necessary to use violence (against Muslim immigrants) to fight against things that are very unjust
2. Sometimes people have to resort to violence (against Muslim immigrants) to defend their values, convictions, or religious beliefs
3. It's OK to support groups (like the English Defence League) that use violence to fight injustices (such as allowing an influx of Muslim immigrants into the UK)
4. It's sometimes necessary to use violence (against Muslim immigrants), commit attacks, or kidnap people to fight for a better world

As demonstrated (text within brackets), this measure can be adapted to any target group associated with conspiracy beliefs, to measure justification for radical violence.

The second measure to be considered is that Justification of Violent Extremist (Kalmoe, 2014) comprising 5 items:

1. When politicians are damaging the country, citizens should send threats to scare them straight.
2. The worst politicians should get a brick through the window to make them stop hurting the country.
3. Sometimes the only way to stop bad government is with physical force.
4. Some of the problems citizens have with government could be fixed with a few well-aimed bullets.
5. Citizens upset by government should never use violence to express their feelings.

This measure captures justification of violence specifically towards the government and politicians who represent institutions frequently associated with conspiracy theories (Mari et al., 2022). As with the conspiracy theory measures, when exploring the conspiracy-violence link (political, extremism) the context is important. Researchers should ensure that the target of the conspiracy theories measure aligns with the target in the political violence measure.

Open Science Practices

Unlike Studies 3 to 6, Study 1 and Study 2 were not pre-registered. Open science practices aim to reduce bias and improve the robustness of scientific research (Hardwicke & Wagenmakers, 2021). Preregistration of research aims to reduce hindsight bias, increase research integrity, and address replication crisis (Nosek et al., 2018). This process requires researchers to state the hypothesis, expected outcomes, and methodology and is becoming a necessary requirement for funding (Simmons et al., 2021). Although, some argue against the growing practice due to limitations of creativity and adaptability of researchers (McDermott, 2022; Pham & Oh, 2021). This could be particularly limiting for exploratory research, as was the case for Study 5. Study 5 aimed to explore the novel links between conspiracy beliefs and jury decisions and focussed on two target groups. Since the research area of conspiracy

beliefs and jury decision-making is a brand-new branch of research introduced in this thesis, exploratory research was necessary to establish if conspiracy beliefs produced effects in jury decision-making. A preregistration was undertaken with limited knowledge of the best methodology to explore these effects. Once the data was collected and initial checks conducted, it became clear that the planned analysis was not suitable. A data analysis change was implemented that was different to the preregistration which may be viewed as problematic. However, exploratory research is perhaps at higher risk of bias making preregistration more desirable (Dirnagl, 2020). Moreover, preregistration simply separates planned, from unplanned research and should be communicated clearly (Simmons et al., 2021). Thus, Study 5 was adapted appropriately, an open account of the data analysis was provided, and this yielded informative results despite the deviation from the preregistration.

Recruitment Methods and Sampling

It is also worth reflecting on the different recruitment methods used for data collection. Although all studies used an anonymous online survey format, Studies 1, 3, and 5 recruited participants using snowballing across multiple social media platforms and Sona (a student recruitment platform). Recruitment using social media can be effective for hard-to-reach participants, but there are questions regarding ethical use and data quality (Gelinas et al., 2017). Similarly, Sona participants were all psychology students and data quality tends to be lower (Douglas et al., 2023). However, with limited funding, social media and Sona provide accessibility to data.

It should also be noted that conspiracy theory beliefs can fluctuate in response to social and political events (e.g., Jolley, Douglas, et al., 2022; Romer & Jamieson, 2020). The studies using social media and Sona for recruitment took several months (e.g., Study 5 took 6 months), increasing the risk of events affecting base levels of conspiracy beliefs within the

sample. Moreover, social media and Sona recruitment presented difficulties in screening participants who may have been affected by the content of the studies. In Studies 2, 4, and 6, participants were recruited on Prolific. This platform yields high-quality data (Douglas et al., 2023) which can be collected within a few hours and provides screening mechanisms to avoid exposure to sensitive content. However, this form of recruitment is only accessible when there is access to adequate funds which can be difficult for self-funded postgraduate researchers. Overall, due to the different recruitment practices adopted across this thesis, there are undoubtedly differences in data quality across the 6 studies. Nevertheless, although the aim should always be for high quality, representative data, postgraduate researchers need to adapt practices according to funding and time limitations.

Another pertinent recruitment issue to consider is the under-representation of men. This is particularly important in Studies 1 to 4, where men consistently score higher on violence measures compared to women. Across all studies, there was under-sampling of men compared to women. When considering radical behaviours or political violence, it is important to note that the composition of gender differences can affect the magnitudes of effects in relations to testing factors and violence outcomes (Wolfowicz et al., 2021). Gender differences in political violence were noted in Study 1 with these differences continuing across all studies. Had funding constraints not been an issue (a problem that had a direct effect on recruitment methods, as previously mentioned) all future studies could have been designed to recruit equal numbers of men and women. Future research should aim to recruit more balanced samples in relation to gender.

In response to demands for higher statistical power required to publish in social psychology, research has become reliant on larger participant samples accessed via self-report data collected online (Sassenberg & Ditrich, 2019). Unsurprisingly, all studies in this

thesis were conducted in this way using both incentivised and non-incentivised recruitment methods. Whilst this is certainly the most economical method, self-report data is not without its limitations. For example, self-report data is susceptible to response biases (e.g., acquiescence and social desirability) in addition to sampling bias (Brenner & DeLamater, 2016; Kreitchmann et al., 2019). Whilst providing incentives can increase response completions rates (McGonagle & Freedman, 2017; Oscarsson & Arkhede, 2020; Singer & Ye, 2013), this may increase the likelihood of participation bias and reduce the quality of data (Göritz, 2010; Heerwegh & Loosveldt, 2006). This is due to the motivation to provide meaningful responses being secondary to that of obtaining the incentive, particularly in online surveys (Göritz, 2010). Therefore, it might be assumed that non-incentive studies produce more meaningful responses. Studies 1, 3, and 5 might be classified as non-incentive studies since participants did not receive remuneration (vs recruitment on Prolific). However, these studies cannot be classified as non-incentivised in all cases. In addition to recruiting participants on social media platforms, data was also collected from Staffordshire University students in exchange for Sona credits as well as reciprocal survey participation on postgraduate student online platforms (e.g., Survey Exchange). One form of incentivised online survey recruitment that may be considered for future research is a lottery (e.g., offering a lucky draw of monetary value such as an Amazon voucher) since this is found to improve response without guaranteed incentive (Singer & Ye, 2013).

Finally, it would be remiss not to reflect on the design of the experimental studies in this thesis, particularly Studies 2 and 4. In these studies, participants were exposed to a pro-conspiracy article raising suspicions about the immigrants to the UK. Considering that 60 percent of British residents believe at least one conspiracy theory (Addley, 2018), it could be argued that researchers should test participants base levels of conspiracy belief (pre-test) and compare scores between experimental groups. It is worth noting that in Study 3 the

manipulation did not result in significant differences in the same way that it did in Studies 2 and 4 and indeed with Jolley et al. (2020). With pre-testing, researchers could detect naturally occurring similarities or differences between experimental groups which would provide more informed results relating to manipulation. In the context of postgraduate researchers, including pre-testing might exert more pressure on already strained resources (completion time and data collection funding) but it would improve the robustness of experimental designs.

Conclusion

The key aim of this thesis was to explore the effect that belief in, and exposure to, conspiracy theories have on political violence and intergroup relations, with the latter focused on violent reactions and jury bias towards marginalised groups (immigrants, Muslim immigrants). This thesis has demonstrated that conspiracy beliefs, in general, are associated with support for political violence (Study 1) and higher subjective ratings of guilt towards (British but not Muslim immigrant) defendants (Study 5). Moreover, intergroup conspiracy theories contribute to negative intergroup relations by increased violent reactions towards marginalised groups (immigrants and Muslim immigrants) in those who are more inclined towards right-wing ideology (SDO and RWA, Studies 3 and 4). Intergroup conspiracy beliefs are also strongly associated with higher attributions of guilt towards marginalised defendants (Muslim immigrants, Study 5). Moreover, intergroup conspiracy beliefs were shown to moderate the link between perceived Muslim immigrant defendant identity and the lower likelihood of rehabilitation of Muslim immigrant defendants (Study 6). Future research should consider these findings in relation to developing interventions that target the

mechanisms that enhance conspiracy beliefs, thereby reducing the adverse outcomes within society and towards marginalised groups.

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Supplementary Analysis

Crime selection for Study 6 (Chapter 5)

It was necessary to select an appropriate crime that would be included on the indictment document, along with a brief context about the crime, for Study 6. Firstly, the crime needed to be significantly predicted by Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs and secondly, associated with Muslim immigrant but *not* British citizen defendants to isolate the effects towards Muslim immigrants only. Data collected from Study 5 was used to ascertain the most appropriate crime to use on the indictment manipulation document for Study 6. Regression analysis was used to explore which crimes are firstly, significantly predicted by Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs and secondly, associated with Muslim immigrant but not British citizen defendants. Each of the 12 crimes was analysed in a three-step hierarchical regression across two models (Muslim immigrant defendant and British citizen defendant) controlling for age, gender, and prejudice (towards Muslim immigrant and British citizen).

Four crimes emerged that met *these* criteria (see Table 24): *Making, possessing, or controlling explosive substance with intent to endanger life* (CCHI = 2920); *Assault with intent to cause serious harm* (CCHI = 1460); *Possessing firearms or ammunition without firearm certificate* (CCHI = 10); *Racially or religiously aggravated fear or provocation of violence* (CCHI = 10). Out of these four crimes, "*Making, possessing or controlling explosive substance with intent to endanger life*" was selected as the most appropriate crime for use in the indictment document since it had the highest crime index rating (CCHI = 2920) of the four crimes. Evidence suggests that when conducting mock jury research to understand racial bias, and there is minimal evidence presented to mock jurors, the higher severity crimes (e.g., murder) reflect more pronounced racial-ethnic discrimination (Leippe et al., 2017).

Table 24

Summary of hierarchical regression results demonstrating British crimes (criterion variables) predicted by Muslim immigrant conspiracy beliefs (predictor variable) across two defendant models—Muslim immigrant and British—and Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CCHI) in Study 5.

Crime	Muslim Immigrant Defendant	British Defendant	CCHI
Murder	$B = .30$; $p < .001$	$B = .20$; $p = .001$	5475
Making, possessing, or controlling explosive substance with intent to endanger life	$B = .33$; $p < .001$	$B = .10$; $p = .111$	2920
Assault with intent to cause serious harm	$B = .23$; $p < .001$	$B = .09$; $p = .142$	1460
Death by dangerous driving	$B = .03$; $p = .704$	$B = .16$; $p = .010$	1095
Production of a controlled Class A drug (e.g., Cocaine)	$B = .18$; $p = .010$	$B = .21$; $p < .001$	547
Robbery of Personal Property	$B = .19$; $p = .008$	$B = .24$; $p < .001$	365
Racially or religiously aggravated wounding or grievous bodily harm	$B = .27$; $p < .001$	$B = -.01$; $p = .863$	357
Violent disorder	$B = .24$; $p < .001$	$B = .17$; $p = .007$	182
Burglary of a residential dwelling	$B = .12$; $p = .090$	$B = .22$; $p < .001$	19
Possessing firearms or ammunition without firearm certificate	$B = .26$; $p < .001$	$B = .10$; $p = .123$	10
False statements, false entries in records and forgery	$B = .28$; $p < .001$	$B = .17$; $p = .008$	10
Racially or religiously aggravated fear or provocation of violence	$B = .35$; $p < .001$	$B = -.05$; $p = .449$	10

Notes: **Bold** typeface indicates crime adheres to assessment criteria for most appropriate crime for indictment manipulation

Appendices

Appendix 1: Conspiracy Theory Measures

Studies 1 and 5: Conspiracist Ideation Scale (Brotherton et al., 2013)

This scale was used in Studies 1 and 5

Conspiracist Ideation Scale (Brotherton et al., 2013)

There is often debate about whether or not the public is told the whole truth about various important issues. These following questions are designed to assess your beliefs about some of these subjects. Please indicate the degree to which you believe each of the following statements is likely to be true.

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement.

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. The government is involved in the murder of innocent citizens and/or well-known public figures and keeps this a secret.
2. The power held by heads of state is second to that of small, unknown groups who really control world politics.
3. Secret organizations communicate with terrorists but keep this fact from the public.
4. The spread of certain viruses and/or diseases is the result of the deliberate, concealed efforts of some terrorists/organizations.
5. The government manipulate, fabricate, or suppress evidence in order to deceive the public.
6. The government permits or perpetrates acts of terrorism on its own soil, disguising its involvement.
7. A small, secret group of people is responsible for making all major world decisions, such as going to war.
8. Evidence of assassinations is being concealed from the public.

9. Technology with mind-control capacities is used on people without their knowledge.
10. New and advanced technology which would harm current industry is being suppressed.
11. The government uses people as patsies (people upon whom the blame for something falls; scapegoat; fall guy) to hide its involvement in criminal activity.
12. Certain significant events have been the result of the activity of a small group who secretly manipulate world events.
13. Some UFO sightings and rumours are planned or staged in order to distract the public from real alien contact.
14. Experiments involving new drugs or technologies are routinely carried out on the public without their knowledge or consent.
15. A lot of important information is deliberately concealed from the public out of self-interest.

Study 1: Belief in specific conspiracy theories (Douglas & Sutton, 2011)

This scale was used in Study 1.

Belief in specific conspiracy theories (Douglas & Sutton, 2011)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement.

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. Scientists are creating panic about climate change because it is in their interests to do so.
2. There was an official campaign by MI6 to assassinate Princess Diana, sanctioned by elements of the establishment.
3. The AIDS virus was created in a laboratory.
4. The attack on the Twin Towers was not a terrorist action but a governmental conspiracy
5. The American moon landings were faked.

6. Governments are suppressing evidence of the existence of aliens.
7. Lee Harvey Oswald collaborated with the CIA in assassinating President John F. Kennedy.

Studies 2, 3, and 4: Conspiracy theory article (Jolley et al., 2020)

This (Muslim) immigrant manipulation was used in Studies 2 (immigrant) and 3 (Muslim immigrant).

Conspiracy theory manipulation

Participants assigned to the pro-conspiracy condition will receive the following:

Please read this short excerpt from a recent Internet article about immigrants' involvement in international events. We will ask you some questions about the excerpt later in the study, so please read it carefully.

> Many people believe that (Muslim) immigrants in the UK are involved in organisations that plan terrorist activities and aim to undermine the safety of British society. For example, are groups of (Muslim) immigrants working within secret networks on behalf of Islamic State (ISIS)? Are they working together to eventually attack British society from within? Questions such as these are widespread in the media and on the Internet, but should we pay any attention to them?
>
> The answer is YES. There are many reasons to be suspicious of immigrants.
>
> Specifically, after investigations in other countries, (Muslim) immigrants have been discovered working for secret terrorist organisations. For example, in recent attacks in Europe, officials discovered new (Muslim) immigrants amongst the terrorists. Further, officials have confirmed that terrorist organisations are closely working with experienced seamen who traffic tens of thousands of (Muslim) immigrants to Europe every month. Evidence is therefore mounting that (Muslim) immigrants arriving in European countries are embedded within, or somehow involved with terrorist groups. Why would this be any different here in the UK?

It is, therefore, unsurprising that a national poll in 2015 found that 35% of respondents believed that (Muslim) immigrants are involved in terrorist groups, and in a similar poll in 2016, this was as high as 53%.

Many also argue that (Muslim) immigrants are actively working, in secret, with terrorist organisations to spark a cyber-attack on British society. There is ample evidence supporting this view … [*article continues*]...

Studies 2 and 3: Immigrant conspiracy theories (Jolley et al., 2020)

This was used in Studies 2 and 3.

Manipulation Check: Belief in immigrant conspiracy theories

Please rate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

(1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

1. Immigrants are working within secret networks on behalf of ISIS.
2. Immigrants are working with terrorist groups to eventually attack British society from within.
3. Immigrants are often involved in secret plots and schemes intended to disrupt British society.
4. Immigrants do not work together to support terrorist organizations. (R)

Studies 4, 5, and 6: Muslim immigrant conspiracy theories—adapted (Jolley et al., 2020)

This scale was used in Studies 4, 5, and 6.

Please rate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

(1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*)

1. Muslim immigrants are working within secret networks on behalf of ISIS.
2. Muslim immigrants are working with terrorist groups to eventually attack British society from within.

3. Muslim immigrants are often involved in secret plots and schemes intended to disrupt British society.

4. Muslim immigrants do not work together to support terrorist organizations. (R)

5. Muslim immigrants are plotting to impose Sharia law in Britain and the rest of Europe.

Muslim immigrants do not threaten British identity and culture. (R)

Study 6: General conspiracy beliefs (Lantian et al., 2016)

1 = completely false–7 = completely true

- *I think that the official version of the events given by the authorities very often hides the truth*

Appendix 2: Violence Measures

Studies 1, 2, and 3: Support for Political Violence Scale (Uscinski & Parent, 2014)

This scale was used in Studies 1 to 4.

Political Violence (Uscinski & Parent, 2014)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement.

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. Violence is sometimes an acceptable way to express disagreement with the government.
2. Violence is an acceptable way to stop politically extreme groups in our country from doing harm.

Study 1: Cyber-aggression Scale - Modified (Thomas et al., 2018)

This scale was used in Study 1.

Cyber-aggression Scale - Modified (Thomas et al., 2018)

Please read the following information carefully.

A person is experiencing online aggression when another person or group of people uses the Internet or mobile phones to:

- send them mean, hurtful or threatening messages using words, pictures, or videos.
- send other people mean or hurtful messages about them.
- share secrets, private information or spread rumours/lies to make others not like them.
- ignore, leave a person out, not let them join in or pretend to be them online.

It is online aggression when these actions happen again and again, and it is difficult for the person to defend themselves or make it stop happening.

In the past 3 months, have you taken part in acts of online aggression towards another person or group of people - on your own or as part of a group?

1. Called someone mean or hurtful names.
2. Wrote mean or hurtful things to someone.
3. Sent or posted, mean or hurtful pictures/videos about someone.
4. Made fun of someone in a mean or hurtful way.
5. Told someone that others would not like them if they did not do what I/we said.
6. Ignored someone or did not talk to them, on purpose.
7. Left someone out of a group or an activity, or did not allow them to join in, on purpose.
8. Told other people someone's secrets or private information about them, to hurt them or make others not like them. Spread lies or rumours about someone, to hurt them or make others not like them.

Response option: 0 = I have not done this; 1 = once or twice; 2 = every few weeks; 3 = about once a week; 4 = several times a week or more

Studies 2 and 3: Support for Political Protest Violence - Adapted (Simon & Grabow, 2010)

This scale was used in Studies 2 and 3.

Political Protest Violence - Adapted from (Simon & Grabow, 2010)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. I would participate even in a protest action which may involve a confrontation with the police
2. I think violent protest actions are sometimes the only means to wake up the public
3. I would support only nonviolent protest actions

Studies 2 and 3: Willingness to use violence against immigrants - Adapted (Doosje et al., 2012)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement.

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. I am prepared to use violence against immigrants in order to achieve something I consider very important.

Studies 2 and 3: Violence acceptance towards immigrants - Adapted from Maudsley Violent Questionnaire (Walker, 2005)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. It is OK (or normal) to hit an immigrant if they hit you first.
2. I wouldn't feel bad about hitting an immigrant if they really deserved it
3. Because anyone can suffer hurt and pain, you should not hit immigrants.
4. If an immigrant cuts you up in traffic, it's OK to swear at them.
5. It is OK to hit an immigrant who threatens your family.
6. It is OK to hit an immigrant who threatens your partner.

Study 4: Willingness to use of Violence towards Muslim immigrants—Adapted (Doosje et al., 2012; Lamberty & Leiser, 2019)

People have different views about how much they legitimize violence, particularly against groups who threaten their community. We are interested in your personal views. Please indicate how much you agree with each statement.

1 (*strongly disagree*) – 7 (*strongly agree*)

1. I am prepared to use violence against Muslim Immigrants in order to achieve something I consider very important.
2. In general, I would be willing to use physical violence to fight Muslim Immigrants.
3. I would never use physical violence against a Muslim immigrants myself. (R)
4. In certain situations, I am quite willing to use physical violence against a Muslim immigrant to assert my interests.

Study 4: Motivation for Violence towards Muslim immigrants - Adapted (Lamberty & Leiser, 2019)

1. Unfortunately, you have to resort to violence against Muslims sometimes because this is the only way you to get things to change.
2. It's a good thing that there are people who let their fists speak against Muslims when things can't go on any other way.
3. I think it's good if there are people who also use violence against Muslims to bring back order.

Appendix 3: Violence Predictor Measures—Aggression

These measures were used in Study 2.

Study 1: Brief Aggression Questionnaire (Webster et al., 2015)

Brief Aggression Questionnaire (Webster et al., 2015)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement.

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

Physical aggression (sub-scale)

1. Given enough provocation, I may hit another person.
2. If I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will.
3. There are people who pushed me so far that we came to blows.

Anger (sub-scale)

4. I am an even-tempered person*
5. Sometimes I fly off the handle for no good reason
6. I have trouble controlling my temper

Verbal aggression (sub-scale)

7. I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them
8. When people annoy me, I may tell them what I think of them
9. My friends say that I'm somewhat argumentative

Hostility (sub-scale)

10. Other people always seem to get the breaks
11. I sometimes feel that people are laughing at me behind my back
12. When people are especially nice, I wonder what they want

Study 1: Displaced Aggression Questionnaire (Denson et al., 2006)

Displaced Aggression Questionnaire (Denson et al., 2006)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement.

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

Angry Rumination

1. I keep thinking about events that angered me for a long time - Anger Rumination Scale (Sukhodolsky et al., 2001)
2. I get "worked up" just thinking about things that have upset me in the past. - Emotional Control Questionnaire (Roger & Najarian, 1989)
3. I often find myself thinking over and over about things that have made me angry - Emotional Control Questionnaire
4. Sometimes I can't help thinking about times when someone made me mad - Displaced Aggression (original item)
5. Whenever I experience anger, I keep thinking about it for a while - Anger Rumination Scale
6. After an argument is over, I keep fighting with this person in my imagination - Anger Rumination Scale
7. I re-enact the anger episode in my mind after it has happened - Anger Rumination Scale
8. I feel angry about certain things in my life - Anger Rumination Scale
9. I think about certain events from a long time ago and they still make me angry - Anger Rumination Scale
10. When angry, I tend to focus on my thoughts and feelings for a long period of time - Displaced Aggression

Revenge Planning

11. When someone makes me angry, I can't stop thinking about how to get back at this person - Anger Rumination Scale

12. If somebody harms me, I am not at peace until I can retaliate - Dissipation-Rumination Scale (Caprara, 1986)

13. I often daydream about situations where I'm getting my own back at people - Emotional Control Questionnaire

14. I would get frustrated if I could not think of a way to get even with someone who deserves it. Forgiveness of Others Scale - (Mauger et al., 1992)

15. I think about ways of getting back at people who have made me angry long after the event has happened - Emotional Control Questionnaire

16. If another person hurts you, it's alright to get back at him or her. Forgiveness of Others Scale

17. The more time that passes, the more satisfaction I get from revenge. Dissipation-Rumination Scale

18. I have long living fantasies of revenge after the conflict is over. Anger Rumination Scale

19. When somebody offends me, sooner or later I retaliate - Dissipation-Rumination Scale

20. If a person hurts you on purpose, you deserve to get whatever revenge you can. - Forgiveness of Others Scale

21. I never help those who do me wrong. - Dissipation-Rumination Scale

Displaced Behavioural Aggression

22. When someone or something makes me angry, I am likely to take it out on another person -Displaced Aggression

23. When feeling bad, I take it out on others - Displaced Aggression

24. When angry, I have taken it out on people close to me - Displaced Aggression
25. Sometimes I get upset with a friend or family member even though that person is not the cause of my anger or frustration - Displaced Aggression
26. I take my anger out on innocent others - Displaced Aggression
27. When things don't go the way I plan, I take out my frustration on the first person I see - Displaced Aggression
28. If someone made me angry, I would likely vent my anger on another person - Displaced Aggression
29. Sometimes I get so upset by work or school that I become hostile toward family or friends - Displaced Aggression
30. When I am angry, I don't care who I lash out at - Displaced Aggression
31. If I have had a hard day at work or school, I'm likely to make sure everyone knows about it – Displaced Aggression

Study 1: Cyber-aggression Scale - Modified (Thomas et al., 2018)

This scale was used in Study 1.

Cyber-aggression Scale - Modified (Thomas et al., 2018)

Please read the following information carefully.

A person is experiencing online aggression when another person or group of people uses the Internet or mobile phones to:

- send them mean, hurtful or threatening messages using words, pictures, or videos.
- send other people mean or hurtful messages about them.
- share secrets, private information or spread rumours/lies to make others not like them.
- ignore, leave a person out, not let them join in or pretend to be them online.

It is online aggression when these actions happen again and again, and it is difficult for the person to defend themselves or make it stop happening.

In the past 3 months, have you taken part in acts of online aggression towards another person or group of people - on your own or as part of a group?

9. Called someone mean or hurtful names.
10. Wrote mean or hurtful things to someone.
11. Sent or posted, mean or hurtful pictures/videos about someone.
12. Made fun of someone in a mean or hurtful way.
13. Told someone that others would not like them if they did not do what I/we said.
14. Ignored someone or did not talk to them, on purpose.
15. Left someone out of a group or an activity, or did not allow them to join in, on purpose.
16. Told other people someone's secrets or private information about them, to hurt them or make others not like them. Spread lies or rumours about someone, to hurt them or make others not like them.

Response option: 0 = I have not done this; 1 = once or twice; 2 = every few weeks; 3 = about once a week; 4 = several times a week or more

Appendix 4: Mediation Measures

Study 2: State Physical Aggression Adapted from (Farrar & Krcmar, 2006)

Please rate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

(1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

1. If I had to resort to violence to protect my rights, I would.

Study 2: Dehumanization of immigrants Adapted from (Bruneau et al., 2018)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. Immigrants are refined, cultured.
2. Immigrants are rational, logical.
3. Immigrants are capable of self-control.
4. Immigrants are mature, responsible.
5. Immigrants are backward, primitive.
6. Immigrants are savage, aggressive.
7. Immigrants are lacking morals.
8. Immigrants are barbaric.
9. Immigrants are cold-hearted.
10. Immigrants are wild.

Study 2: Collective Victimhood—Adapted (Bilewicz et al., 2019)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. No other nation suffers as much as the British do

Appendix 5: Moderator Measures

Study 3: Physical Aggression - Brief Aggression Questionnaire (Webster et al., 2015)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

Physical aggression

1. Given enough provocation, I may hit another person.
2. If I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will.
3. There are people who pushed me so far that we came to blows.

Study 3: Social Dominance Orientation (Ho et al., 2012)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

Pro-trait dominance:

1. Some groups of people must be kept in their place.
2. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.
3. An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.
4. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.

Con-trait dominance**:**

5. Groups at the bottom are just as deserving as groups at the top.
6. No one group should dominate in society.
7. Groups at the bottom should not have to stay in their place.
8. Group dominance is a poor principle.

Pro-trait anti-egalitarianism:

9. We should not push for group equality.
10. We shouldn't try to guarantee that every group has the same quality of life.
11. It is unjust to try to make groups equal.
12. Group equality should not be our primary goal.

Con-trait anti-egalitarianism:

13. We should work to give all groups an equal chance to succeed (R)
14. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups (R)
15. No matter how much effort it takes, we ought to strive to ensure that all groups have the same chance in life (R)
16. Group equality should be our ideal.

Studies 3 and 4: Right-wing Authoritarianism Short (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. It's great that many young people today are prepared to defy authority. (Conservatism or Authoritarian Submission) (R)

2. What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity (Conservatism or Authoritarian Submission)

3. God's laws about abortion, pornography, and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late. (Traditionalism or Conventionalism)

4. There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse. (Traditionalism or Conventionalism) (R)

5. Our society does NOT need tougher government and stricter laws. (Authoritarianism or Authoritarian Aggression) (R)

6. The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers, if we are going preserve law and order. (Authoritarianism or Authoritarian Aggression)

Study 4: Anger - Brief Aggression Questionnaire (Webster et al., 2015)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. I am an even-tempered person*
2. Sometimes I fly off the handle for no good reason
3. I have trouble controlling my temper

Study 4, 5, and 6: Social Dominance Orientation Short (Ho et al., 2015)

Please indicate how much you agree with each statement

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

Pro-trait dominance:

1. An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.
2. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.

Con-trait dominance:

3. No one group should dominate in society (R).
4. Groups at the bottom are just as deserving as groups at the top (R).

Pro-trait anti-egalitarianism:

5. Group equality should not be our primary goal.
6. It is unjust to try and make groups equal.

Con-trait anti-egalitarianism:

7. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups (R)
8. We should work to give all groups an equal chance to succeed (R)

Study 6: Moderator Belief in immigrant conspiracy theories (Jolley, et al., 2020)

Please rate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

(1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

1. Muslim immigrants are working within secret networks on behalf of ISIS.
2. Muslim immigrants are working with terrorist groups to eventually attack British society from within.
3. Muslim immigrants are often involved in secret plots and schemes intended to disrupt British society.
4. Muslim immigrants do not work together to support terrorist organizations. (R)
5. Muslim immigrants are plotting to impose Sharia law in Britain and the rest of Europe.
6. Muslim immigrants do not threaten British identity and culture. (R)

Appendix 6: Control Measures

Study 5: Semantic Prejudice Control Measure - Adapted (adapted from Hummert, et al. 2002)

Please indicate how you would describe a typical Muslim immigrant on the following scales:

- beautiful–ugly
- good–bad
- pleasant–unpleasant
- honest–dishonest
- nice– awful.

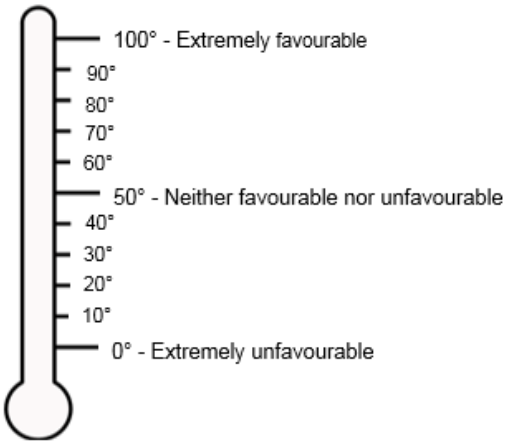
Please indicate how you would describe typical UK Citizen Immigrants on the following scales:

- beautiful–ugly
- good–bad
- pleasant–unpleasant
- honest–dishonest
- nice– awful.

Study 6: Prejudice Thermometer Control Measure (Haddock et al., 1993)

Please describe your feelings towards Muslim immigrants by selecting the appropriate value on the feeling thermometer below.

You can choose any number between 0° and 100°. The higher the number, the warmer and more favourable you feel towards people from future generations, the lower the number, the colder and less favourable you feel towards them.


100° - Extremely favourable
90°
80°
70°
60°
50° - Neither favourable nor unfavourable
40°
30°
20°
10°
0° - Extremely unfavourable

Appendix 7: Criminal Justice Materials

Study 5: Likelihood of Guilt Crimes

You will now read through a list of official criminal offences related to the UK Criminal Justice System. After each offence, you will be given a list of religious groups. Please select how likely each group would be to commit such a criminal offence.

1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree)

1. **Murder (5475)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
2. **Making, possessing or controlling explosive substance with intent to endanger life (2920)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
3. **Assault with Intent to cause Serious Harm (1460)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
4. **Death by dangerous driving (1095)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
5. **Production of a controlled Class A drug - e.g. Cocaine, (547)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
6. **Robbery of Personal Property (365)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant

7. **Racially or religiously aggravated wounding or grievous bodily harm (357)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
8. **Violent disorder (182)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
9. **Burglary of a residential dwelling (19)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
10. **Possessing firearms or ammunition without firearm certificate (10)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
11. **False statements, false entries in records and forgery (10)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant
12. **Racially or religiously aggravated fear or provocation of violence (10)**
    - UK Citizen
    - Muslim Immigrant

Study 6: Notice to Jurors, CrimPR 26.3 (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2023)

Your Legal Responsibilities as a Juror

By serving on this jury you are fulfilling a very important **PUBLIC SERVICE.** This means you have some important **LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES.**

As a juror you have taken a **LEGAL OATH** or **AFFIRMATION** to try the defendant based **ONLY** on the evidence you hear in court.

This means the **FAIRNESS** of the trial depends on you following a few very **IMPORTANT LEGAL RULES.** These rules are explained to you in this Notice.

You need to **READ** these rules, and make sure you **UNDERSTAND and FOLLOW** these rules at all times.

You should keep this Notice with your **SUMMONS** at all times while you are on Jury Service.

What Would Happen If You or Any Juror Did Not Follow These Rules?

If you do not follow the rules in this Notice, you may be in **CONTEMPT OF COURT** and committing a **CRIMINAL OFFENCE.** This is because these rules about what you can and cannot do as a juror are **ORDERS OF THE COURT** and also part of the **CRIMINAL LAW.** You can be prosecuted for breaking these rules, and if you are found guilty the maximum sentence is two years in **PRISON,** a **FINE** or both.

THE RULES

Looking for Information About Your Case

It is **ILLEGAL** for you to **LOOK** for any information at all about your case on the **INTERNET** or **ANYWHERE ELSE** during the trial.

This means you **CANNOT LOOK** for any information about:

- Any **PERSON** involved in the case. This means any **DEFENDANT, WITNESS** or anyone associated with the case including the **JUDGE** and **LEGAL TEAMS.**
- The **CRIME or CRIME SCENE.**
- The **LAW** and **LEGAL TERMS** used in the case.
- **COURT PROCEDURES.**

It is also **ILLEGAL** for you to ask **ANYONE** else to **LOOK FOR YOU.**

News Stories about Your Case

This also means that if you see or hear any stories about your case in the **NEWS** you should **NOT PAY ANY ATTENTION** to them.

All the information you will need to decide the case will be given to the jury in the **EVIDENCE** you hear **IN COURT** and the instructions on the **LAW** that the **JUDGE GIVES** to the jury.

Discussing the Case: 2 Rules

There are **2 RULES** every juror must follow about discussing their case.
One rule tells you what you can discuss about the case **WHILE THE TRIAL IS GOING ON.**
The other rule tells you what you can discuss about the case **AFTER THE TRIAL IS OVER.**

RULE 1: DURING THE TRIAL

This is from the moment you take the juror oath until the judge finally discharges you from serving on the jury at the end of the trial.
During the trial you can **ONLY DISCUSS** the case with the **11 OTHER JURORS** on your jury and only when you are **ALL TOGETHER** and there is no risk of you being overheard.

This means that during the trial you **CANNOT DISCUSS** the case with **FAMILY, FRIENDS** or **ANYONE** else. Discussing the case means writing or speaking about the case in person or on any **SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES** such as Facebook or Twitter or on blogs and chat rooms.

RULE 2: WHEN THE TRIAL IS OVER

Once the trial is over and you are no longer serving on the jury, you **CAN DISCUSS** the case with anyone. But there is **ONE EXCEPTION.**

Even after the trial is over, you **MUST NOT DISCUSS** what was said or done by you or any other member of the jury while the jury was in the **DELIBERATING ROOM** trying to reach a verdict, unless it is for the purpose of an official investigation into the conduct of any juror.

What If Someone Tries to Speak to Me about the Case During the Trial?

It is **ILLEGAL** for anyone who is not on your jury to **TRY TO SPEAK WITH YOU** during the trial about the case or try to influence you in any way about your decision in the case. If this should ever happen it is very important that you **TELL** the **COURT IMMEDIATELY.** If it happens when you are not at court you should **CALL THE POLICE.**

Collective Responsibility of Your Jury

ALL 12 MEMBERS OF THE JURY must follow these rules.

The jury **MUST ACT AS A GROUP** to make sure that everyone on the jury follows the oath you have each made to follow these rules.

What Do I Do If I Think Any of These Rules Have Not Been Followed?

If you think that any of these rules have not been followed during the trial it is extremely important that you **TELL THE COURT** about this **IMMEDIATELY**, but do not discuss it with your fellow jurors or anyone else.

To tell the Court, you can speak with your **USHER** or **JURY OFFICER** or you can write a note to the **JUDGE** and give it to the usher.

Why Do I Need to Follow These Rules?

It is your **DUTY** to **REPORT** any **BREACHES** of these rules by anyone, including any juror. This is necessary to ensure the trial is **FAIR.**

If every juror does not follow these rules the **TRIAL** may be **STOPPED**, the jury dismissed and the trial will have to start again with a new jury.

This will cause **PROBLEMS** for everyone involved in the case and will waste everyone's time and a lot of taxpayers' **MONEY**.

Help and Guidance for You at Any Time

If you have any concerns about what to do as a juror at any time you can always **SPEAK WITH THE JURY OFFICER** or **SEND A NOTE TO THE JUDGE.**

The Jury Officer and the Judge are both there to help you carry out your important role as a juror properly.

What If I Feel Upset About My Experience as a Juror After the Trial?

When the trial is over, if you feel **UPSET** about anything to do with your case or if you just want to **TALK** about how you felt being a juror, **HELP** is available. Your **GP** can help you find free counselling services. You can also talk to the **SAMARITANS** any day at any time you like in your own way about whatever is bothering you, no matter how small it may be. You can call them for **FREE** on **116 123** or **EMAIL** at: **jo@samaritans.org**

SAMARITANS

2018-01-CCE

Study 6: Indictment Document & Subjective ratings (British citizen condition)

INDICTMENT

IN THE CROWN COURT AT BIRMINGHAM Case number: 20211027

THE QUEEN v John Smith

John Smith (DOB 26-12-1994), of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham, is charged as follows:-

STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

One count of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

John Smith, on 1 June 2021, was found to be unlawfully and maliciously in possession of precursor chemicals used in the production of homemade explosives. These items were found by police, stored in a backpack owned by the defendant.

Dependent variables 1: Subjective Guilt Rating

Based on the information presented, what is your impression of John Smith's guilt (of 25 Elm Street, Birmingham) of the aforementioned crime - *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*?

(1 = Definitely not guilty; 100 = Definitely guilty)

Dependent variable 2: Subjective Penalty Rating

The Sentencing Council of the UK sets minimum and maximum sentencing guidelines. For the crime of *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*, the prison sentence recommendation is a minimum of three years in prison, to a maximum of life in prison. On the assumption that John Smith (of 25 Elm Street, Birmingham) is found guilty of *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*, what penalty would you expect him to serve?

(*1 = minimum prison sentence; 7 = maximum prison sentence)*

Dependent variable 3: Subjective Rehabilitation Rating

In the UK, cognitive-behavioural programs are used to reduce reoffending behaviour. On the assumption that John Smith (of 25 Elm Street, Birmingham) is found guilty of *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*, to what extent do you think this offender might benefit from such a rehabilitation program?

(1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)

Study 6: Indictment Document & Subjective ratings (Muslim immigrant condition)

INDICTMENT

IN THE CROWN COURT AT BIRMINGHAM Case number: 20211027

THE QUEEN v Syed Ahmed

Syed Ahmed (DOB 26-12-1994), of Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, is charged as follows:-

STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

One count of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

Syed Ahmed, on 1 June 2021, was found to be unlawfully and maliciously in possession of precursor chemicals used in the production of homemade explosives. These items were found by police, stored in a backpack owned by the defendant

Dependent variables 1: Subjective Guilt Rating

Based on the information presented, what is your impression of Syed Ahmed's guilt (of Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre) of the aforementioned crime - *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*?

(1 = Definitely not guilty; 100 = Definitely guilty)

Dependent variable 2: Subjective Penalty Rating

The Sentencing Council of the UK sets minimum and maximum sentencing guidelines. For the crime of *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*, the prison sentence recommendation is a minimum of three years in prison, to a maximum of life in prison. On the assumption that Syed Ahmed (of Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre) is found guilty of *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*, what penalty would you expect him to serve?

(*1 = minimum prison sentence; 7 = maximum prison sentence)*

Dependent variable 3: Subjective Rehabilitation Rating

In the UK, cognitive-behavioural programs are used to reduce reoffending behaviour. On the assumption that Syed Ahmed (of Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre) is found guilty of *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*, to what extent do you think this offender might benefit from such a rehabilitation program?

(1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)

Study 6: Indictment Document & Subjective ratings (British Muslim condition)

INDICTMENT

IN THE CROWN COURT AT BIRMINGHAM Case number: 20211027

THE QUEEN v Syed Ahmed

Syed Ahmed (DOB 26-12-1994), of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham, is charged as follows: -

STATEMENT OF OFFENCE

One count of possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

Syed Ahmed, on 1 June 2021, was found to be unlawfully and maliciously in possession of precursor chemicals used in the production of homemade explosives. These items were found by police, stored in a backpack owned by the defendant

Dependent variables 1: Subjective Guilt Rating

Based on the information presented, what is your impression of Syed Ahmed's guilt (of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham) of the aforementioned crime - *possession or production of a controlled Class A drug*?

(1 = Definitely not guilty; 100 = Definitely guilty)

Dependent variable 2: Subjective Penalty Rating

The Sentencing Council of the UK sets minimum and maximum sentencing guidelines. For the crime of *possession or production of a controlled Class A drug*, the prison sentence recommendation is a minimum of seven years in prison, to a maximum of life in prison. On the assumption that Syed Ahmed (of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham) is found guilty of *possession or production of a controlled Class A drug*, what penalty would you expect him to serve?

(*1 = minimum prison sentence; 7 = maximum prison sentence)*

On the assumption that Syed Ahmed (of 25 Elm Street in Birmingham) is found guilty of *possession or production of a controlled Class A drug*, what penalty would you expect him to serve?

(*1 = Seven years imprisonment; 7 = Life imprisonment*)

Dependent variable 3: Subjective Rehabilitation Rating

In the UK, cognitive-behavioural programs are used to reduce reoffending behaviour. On the assumption that John Smith is found guilty of *possessing or controlling explosive substances with the intent to endanger life*, to what extent do you think this offender might benefit from such a rehabilitation program?

(1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)

Studies 6: Manipulation Check

- Please select the name of the defendant (John Smith / Syed Ahmed)
- Do you believe that they were an immigrant? (Yes / No)
- Do you believe that the defendant was Muslim (Yes / No)

Appendix 8: Miscellaneous Study Material

Studies 1 to 5: Attention Check

Now, please answer the three questions below honestly.

1. During the study, have you devoted your full attention? (1, no attention, 7, full attention)

2. Were there any distractions during the study? (1, many distractions, 7, no distractions

Studies 2, 3, and 4: Debrief - Counteract effects of exposure article

DEBRIEF—IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for taking part in this study. We would like to provide some further information about the purpose of the study and what we expect to find.

The purpose of this study is to explore the idea that people who endorse conspiracy theories about Muslims, may be prone to higher levels of aggression and violence towards Muslim people. Conspiracy theories concern many significant social and political events, where they explain the causes of these events as the actions of secret, powerful and malicious groups. Research into the effects of conspiracy theories on society have found some worrying outcomes. These include reducing people's intentions to engage in activities such as voting and vaccination. Moreover, conspiracy theories have been found to increase prejudice, discrimination and intentions to engage in criminal activity. We are therefore committed to gain insight into the negative effects of conspiracy theories and how to reduce these effects.

In this study, half of participants were asked to read a piece of text that presented an argument that immigrants are involved in conspiracies against Britain, and the other half did not.

It is important to note that the article was completely *fictional* and created for the purposes of exposing participants to conspiracy theories regarding Muslim people.

We then asked you to fill in a questionnaire regarding conspiracy theories about immigrants. In addition, we asked you questions about your views and feelings about violence towards immigrants. We are interested to investigate whether exposure to conspiracy theories about immigrants may lead to increased acceptance of violence toward immigrant people. This is important when considering the rise of hate crimes and populism in UK, and the rest of the world, and how this affects members of immigrant groups.

We would now like to provide you with factual information regarding immigration and terrorism. A report by the Cato Institute, a public policy research organisation, has published a working paper entitled, "*Do immigrants import terrorism?*", and the conclusion of this paper is as follows:

"Concern that immigration could help spread terrorism to destination countries is widespread. This has been particularly true since September 11, 2001 in the United States. Similarly, in Europe there are fears of the mass immigration of Muslims originating from war torn areas in MENA spreading terrorism to Europe. We empirically investigate these fears and found that they are largely mistaken.

Using an instrumental variables strategy to identify variation in bilateral migration derived from the initial distribution of immigrants in a country, ***we found no empirical evidence to suggest that increases in the share of immigrants from abroad is significantly correlated***

with higher rates of terrorism. *These results hold for immigrants from both Muslim MENA and conflict-torn countries of origin. Finally, our results are robust to optimal covariate subset selection techniques using the Belloni et al. (2014a) post double selection framework.*

Our cross-country study cannot rule out any connection between any pairwise immigration relationship and terrorism. It certainly does not imply that known terrorists should be allowed to immigrate into countries where they would wish to do harm. ***However, our study's important public policy implication is clear: fear-of-terrorism inspired restrictions on immigration, Muslim immigration, and immigration from conflict countries are misguided.****"* (Forrester, Powell, Nowrasteh, & Landgrave, 2019, p. 15)

If you would like to read the paper in full, it can be found by following this link:

https://www.cato.org/publications/working-paper/do-immigrants-import-terrorism

In this study, you were asked to answer questions designed to measure your feelings regarding the dehumanization of immigrants, state physical aggression, acceptability of politically motivated violence, political protest violence, and violence acceptance towards immigrants. We would like to be clear that aggression, dehumanisation and violence towards immigrants, and violence in general, should not be promoted or enacted under any circumstances. Failure to do so could result in serious harm and possible action by services within the criminal justice system.

Your details will be kept confidential at all times, and complete anonymity will be maintained. Raw data will be kept on a password-protected computer, which will only be accessible by the researchers. In the case of the data being used for academic publication, materials may be kept until ten years have passed from the date of publication. An anonymised version of the data for this study will be made publicly accessible, on a

permanent basis, via the Open Science Framework. Any personal Information that could directly identify you will be removed before files are shared by the researcher or results are made public.

As a reminder, your participant number is unique to you. If you wish to withdraw your data, you need to contact the researcher using the contact details below and quote your participant number. You can do so for 2 weeks from this date. No other information is required, and you will not be asked to provide a reason.

If you have been affected by some of the issues that have been raised in this study, however, and would like you to need further support, you can get in touch with:

MIND - https://www.mind.org.uk/ or call 0300 123 3393

Samaritans - https://www.samaritans.org/ or call 116 123

Stop Hate UK - https://www.stophateuk.org/ or call 0800 138 1625

British Police hate crime support - https://www.report-it.org.uk/ or call 101

If you would like to k now what to do if you witness harassment of an immigrant person, the following link provides a practical illustrated help guide

https://www.buzzfeed.com/ryanhatesthis/someone-made-a-guide-for-what-to-do-when-you-see-islamophobi

If, however you feel like you need further support or information in person, please get in touch with your local Health Care Professional, you can find your local GP here:

https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/GP/LocationSearch/4

For more detailed explanations, or if you wish to know the results of the study, please contact the researcher using the contact details below.

Thank you again for your participation and please click on the link below to end the study.