

Political Attitudes, Outward Aggression, and Self-Directed Violence

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Political Attitudes, Outward Aggression, and Self-Directed Violence

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Background

- Existing research indicates relationships between conservatism, particularly right-wing authoritarianism, and endorsement of political violence or approval of state violence (Johnson et al., 2012; McKee & Feather, 2008; Kalmoe, 2012).
- Research exploring political attitudes or values and generalized everyday aggression is more limited, but tends to indicate higher aggression among conservatives (Van Hiel et al., 2020).
- Conservatives tend to own firearms at higher rates than those identifying as liberal or moderate (McDermott et al., 2021), and conservative policy views are linked to increased suicides by firearm, as opposed to other means (Butterworth et al., 2018).

Methods

- Quantitative questionnaire distributed on Reddit, 42 total questions
- Measurement tools:
 - Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ-SF)
 - Suicidal Behavior Questionnaire (SBQ)
 - Social and Economic Conservatism Scale (SECS)

Results

- Outward aggression (BPAQ) scores were positively correlated with suicidal behavior (SBQ) scores, a.k.a. self-directed violence ($r_s = .376, p < .001$).
- Self-directed violence had a weak positive correlation with approval of gun ownership ($r_s = .220, p = .006$) and had a weak negative correlation with approval of law enforcement ($r_s = -.214, p = .008$).
- There was a very weak significant relationship between physical aggression and the death penalty ($r_s = .184, p = .023$).

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

	N	Percent
Age	Mean = 33.38	SD = 10.617
Gender		
Male	107	69.9%
Other than Male	46	30.1%
Female	35	22.9% ^a
Non-Binary / Genderqueer / Gender Fluid	11	7.2% ^a
Race/Ethnicity		
White	123	80.4%
Other than White	30	19.6%
Black/African-American	4	2.6% ^a
Latino/Latina	10	6.5% ^a
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.3% ^a
Alaska Native	11	7.2% ^a
Asian	1	0.7% ^a
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	1.3% ^a
Other		
Voter Registration		
Yes	142	92.8%
No	11	7.2%
Firearm Ownership		
Yes	71	46.4%
No	82	53.6%
Violence Perpetration		
Yes	41	26.8%
No	112	73.2%
Arrested ^b		
Yes	4	2.6%
No	37	24.2%
Guilty/No Contest ^b		
Yes	2	1.3%
No	2	1.3%

^a Percentage of the entire participant population, not just a percentage within the minority population

^b Frequencies for these items include only those who responded yes to the preceding question

Table 2: Bivariate Correlation of Variables, Spearman's Rho Correlation Coefficient (N=153)

	Age	Conservatism ^a	Economic Conservatism	Social Conservatism	Approval of Abortion	Approval of Military and National Security	Approval of Gun Ownership	Approval of Patriotism	Approval of the Death Penalty	Approval of Law Enforcement	Approval of Traditional Values	Approval of Religion	SBQ Total Score
BPAQ Total Score	-.323**	.042	-.029	.020	.060	-.005	.037	-.010	.081	-.059	.081	-.060	.376**
SBQ Total Score	-.071	-.066	-.012	-.117	-.068	-.134	.220**	-.053	-.035	-.214**	-.072	-.061	--

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

^a As measured by SECS

Research Questions

What relationship, if any, do political attitudes have with outward aggression?

What relationship, if any, do political attitudes have with self-directed violence?

References

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Discussion

- The association between outward aggression and suicidal behavior justifies the term “self-directed violence,” reinforcing Joiner’s interpersonal theory of suicidal behavior.
- The connection of outward aggression to self-directed violence implies a need for increased research that looks at both types of violence, rather than just outward or self-directed.
- Limited associations between political attitudes and outward aggression indicates that despite higher rates of political violence among conservatives, this trend may not mirror in everyday generalized violence.
- There was notable approval of gun ownership among those who rate higher on the Suicidal Behavior Questionnaire; although this may be in part due to the question about access to lethal means, it indicates a need for greater research into the confluence of gun ownership and suicidality.
- Although a weak correlation, the connection between physical aggression and approval of the death penalty reaffirms indications that aggression is connected to approval of state violence found in previous research, such as Kalmoe (2012).
- Social workers should note the relationship between outward aggression and suicidal behavior when completing clinical screening and when advocating for policy change, such as gun safety and violence prevention.
- The need for additional research in this area, particularly with larger and more diverse samples, is indicated.