



# Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

**FULL REPORT**

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This CREST report is informed by a review of research on protective factors set out in an earlier report. You can find all the outputs from this project at: [www.crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/constraining-violence/](http://www.crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/constraining-violence/)

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## ABOUT CREST

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Findings</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Implications</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Next steps</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>The Good Lives Model</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Scope</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Sample</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>ANALYSIS</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Can involvement in violent extremist groups be understood as an effort to attain primary goods?</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>How are goods described?</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>The nature and function of goods can change</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Obstacles to achieving goods can help interpret pathways into and out of extremism.</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Characteristics of goods attainment in violent extremist groups</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Implications</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Caveats</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>What's next?</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1</b> .....	<b>28</b>

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report sets out the findings of research to understand the potential of the Good Lives Model (GLM) to interpret trajectories into and out of violent extremism and considers the implications for policy and practice.

The Good Lives Model (GLM) is a well-developed manifestation of a strength-based approach to rehabilitation. The model argues that focusing on developing strengths and enhancing protections, rather than solely managing and controlling risk factors, offers a more fruitful route to preventing (re)offending. The GLM has become an increasingly prominent part of efforts to rehabilitate criminal offenders, however its potential with respect to the violent extremist population has not been fully exploited.

This report is informed by a review of research on protective factors set out in an earlier report: *Conceptualising Protective Factors: Strength-Based Approaches* (Marsden and Lee, 2022) that established the theoretical foundation for the empirical research set out here.

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## FINDINGS

The analysis suggests that the model offers a coherent framework for analysing the trajectories of former right-wing extremists across the stages of pre-engagement, engagement, involvement, disengagement and reintegration. Based on analysis of 18 biographies and autobiographies of former far-right extremists, the research found that:

- Involvement in violent extremist groups can be interpreted as an effort to attain primary goods.
- Goods differ in importance and relate to each other in particular ways.
- The nature and function of goods can change over the course of someone's trajectory.

- Barriers to achieving goods seem to play a role in motivating people to seek alternative routes to achieving them through involvement in extremist groups.
- Obstacles, particularly internal and external barriers to achieving goods, can help interpret pathways into and out of extremism.
- Factors such as ideology, identity and socio-political context influence the attainment of goods and need to be further developed within the model.

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## IMPLICATIONS

The findings have implications for interventions which try to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE). Intervention design and case management processes would benefit from balancing out the dominance of risk-oriented approaches by:

### UNDERSTANDING GOODS

- Developing a detailed understanding of an individual's motivations and needs and the nature and function of goods relevant to them.
- Consider prioritising aspects of intervention which support goods relating to healthy living, relatedness and agency as these seem to represent core goods.

### MAXIMISING OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCESS GOODS

- Focusing on developing skills and strengths to enable individuals to attain goods in pro-social, normative ways.
- Supporting the attainment of goods through direct or indirect routes.
- Reducing internal and external capacity barriers that hinder the attainment of goods.

## DEVELOPING SELF-UNDERSTANDING

- Work with individuals to better understand their past and integrate group involvement in their life narrative.
- Provide opportunities for individuals to encounter the potential for redemption and explore what kind of redemption script might be available to them.

## CONSIDERING IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION

- Develop a GLM assessment framework that in practice, and ideally with the engagement of the individual concerned, helps identify core goods and barriers to achieving them pro-socially.
- Evolve the GLM framework so it is able to support diversionary approaches in the context of efforts to prevent violent extremism.

- Apply Qualitative Secondary Analysis to systematically look for patterns of goods and barriers across larger and more varied samples.
- Further investigate how factors such as ideology, identity and socio-political context influence the attainment of goods and how these factors interact with the GLM.
- Analyse the role of gender in relation to the GLM in greater depth and consider the implications for interventions.
- Understand the cross-cultural applicability of the GLM to explore whether goods are best understood as universal and/ or learn how they are shaped by socio-cultural factors.
- Assess whether the GLM can be applied to Islamist and left-wing extremist trajectories.

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## NEXT STEPS

The findings and limitations of this study suggest that future research should:

- Employ in-depth and larger-scale research to explore CVE practitioners' views of the GLM and strengths-based approaches.
- Assess whether the GLM can be applied in PVE interventions.
- Identify the implications of the GLM for risk assessment processes.
- Evaluate programmes that incorporate strengths-based approaches, including the GLM, to understand their influence on intervention outcomes.
- Analyse existing interventions to learn how the sequencing of strengths- and risk-oriented components can shape levels of engagement and motivation, and intervention outcomes.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Researchers and practitioners in the field of violent extremism have taken a variety of approaches to understanding why people become involved in extremist groups and what supports efforts to disengage from them. Perhaps the most common approach is reflected in the risk paradigm, which seeks to understand the particular configurations of risk factors that seem to be linked to offending and try to reduce risk by targeting them through interventions tailored to the individual (Marsden & Lee, 2022b). Critics of this approach have described the risk paradigm as ‘deficits-based’ (Maruna & LeBel, 2003) due to its focus on the negative aspects of an individual and their environment.

An alternative way to understand an individual’s trajectory in and out of extremist - and indeed other offence-supportive or criminogenic - spaces is to pay attention to what motivates involvement; understand the barriers someone faces in meeting their needs; and pay attention to the kinds of strengths they deploy in trying to meet their needs. The most appropriate framework to do this is the strengths-based approach to interpreting offending and efforts to desist from it.

In an earlier report produced for this research programme, Marsden and Lee explored the potential of strengths-based approaches in relation to violent extremism, arguing that the Good Lives Model (GLM) could be a useful way to understand trajectories in and out of extremist groups because it ‘pays attention to socio-ecological and subcultural contexts, norms and values, and their role in enabling or constraining opportunities to live meaningful, fulfilled lives away from criminality and terrorism’ (Marsden & Lee, 2022b).

However, despite the GLM becoming an increasingly prominent part of efforts to rehabilitate criminal offenders, few have looked at the model in relation to

the violent extremist population (see Dean, 2014 and Marsden, 2017 for exceptions). The aim of the research presented in this report is to explore whether the theoretical assumptions of the model can be applied to interpreting trajectories through violent extremism and consider the implications for policy and practice.

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## THE GOOD LIVES MODEL

The GLM is perhaps the most well-developed manifestation of a strength-based approach to rehabilitation. Rooted in positive psychology, it argues that focusing on developing strengths and enhancing protections, rather than solely managing and controlling risk factors offers a more fruitful route to preventing reoffending. This report briefly describes the GLM, as it has been comprehensively presented elsewhere (Marsden & Lee, 2022a).

- The GLM assumes that we seek to pursue eleven ‘primary goods’: *life* (healthy living); *knowledge* (being informed about things that are important to us); *excellence in play* (hobbies and leisure activities); *excellence in work* (including mastery experiences); *excellence in agency* (autonomy, power and self-directedness); *inner peace* (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress); *relatedness* (including intimate, romantic, and familial relationships); *community* (connection to wider social groups); *spirituality* (finding meaning and purpose in life); *pleasure* (feeling good); and *creativity* (using alternative, novel means to express oneself) (Ward et al., n.d.). These goods are achieved through so-called instrumental or secondary goods that take the form of approach goals (Ward et al., 2006). For example, joining a gym might fulfil primary goods such as healthy living, inner peace, pleasure, play and community.

- Offending (including terrorism offending) is considered a maladaptive means of achieving primary goods and is influenced by barriers/obstacles to attaining these goods legally and pro-socially.
- The GLM makes it possible to understand which goods matter in individual cases and has the potential to help interpret pathways into terrorism and violent extremism by identifying obstacles that make it difficult to achieve goods normatively (Ward & Fortune, 2013).
- According to the model, there are four types of obstacles: the use of inappropriate *means* to achieve the goods; a lack of *coherence* in the way the goods relate to one another; a lack of *scope*, where particular goods come to dominate, or some are neglected; and *capacity*, when an individual's internal cognitive, psychological or behavioural capacities, or their external circumstances, make it difficult to achieve primary goods pro-socially.
- Engaging in extremist subcultures is understood as a way of fulfilling desired goods that are otherwise difficult to achieve due to barriers. The extremist group influences its members' values and norms; shapes which goods are important; and provides opportunities to pursue them.
- The GLM has the potential to explain rather than describe trajectories into and out of violent extremism because it takes account of core motivations. The model can also explain the dynamic and non-linear nature of group involvement, by recognising that motivations can change, and that access to goods, and the presence of barriers also shift over time.
- Taking this strength-based approach is beneficial because it can inform intervention designs and delivery by “enhancing strengths and skills so the individual is better able to achieve goods in pro-social, legal ways, and in this way increase the potential for desistance from crime” (Marsden & Lee, 2020a, p. 13).

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## SCOPE

The report is part of the ‘Constraining Violence’ project and develops the ideas set out in the ‘Conceptualising Protective Factors: Strength-based Approaches’ (Marsden & Lee, 2022b) report which provided the conceptual foundation and suggested the next steps for this research agenda that we set out here.

The research had two main aims. Firstly, we wanted to explore whether the GLM is useful as an analytical framework. The necessary amendments and challenges that we encountered in applying the framework as an analytical tool are described in Munden et al.'s forthcoming report. Secondly, we wanted to examine the model's empirical and theoretical potential for examining trajectories in and out of violent extremist contexts. This report addresses this second aim. It attempts to answer the following overarching research questions:

1. Can involvement in violent extremist groups be understood as an effort to attain primary goods?
2. Can obstacles to achieving goods offer an explanation for pathways into and out of extremism?

In order to answer these questions, a team consisting of four researchers coded autobiographies and biographies by former right-wing extremists. An overview of the material and analytical approach is described below. As the research progressed a further two, secondary research questions were included in the study:

3. How are the goods described?
4. Are there patterns regarding barriers across the books?

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## SAMPLE

The data consisted of 18 autobiographies written by formers – men who had formerly been involved in right-wing extremist groups – from the Global North. Autobiographies were considered a useful

## INTRODUCTION

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

data source because they include an individual's personal experiences as well as the context of those experiences, meaning that the narratives can provide insight into the goods that are perceived to be important to the individual as well as potential contextual barriers or enablers.

The autobiographical format also allows for an exploration of complex processes over time. Whilst the majority of the books were autobiographies, the sample also included three biographies. These were included because the narratives seemed appropriately close to the described experiences. A full list of the books is included in Appendix 1.

Most of the formers were active extremist group members during the 1980's and early 1990's, with the exception of Ray Hill, who was active in the late 1960's, Christian Weißgerber who left in 2010, Derek Black who grew up as a white nationalist and left in 2013, and Robbie Mullen who was active in 2015-2016. The formers varied in the extent to which they were immersed in their groups. Some, such as Noble were completely embedded within their milieus, meaning that all the goods were attained within the group context. Others, such as Derek Black is described by Eli Saslow as living a double life where goods were achieved inside and outside of the group.



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# ANALYSIS

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The books used in the study were analysed using a coding framework which focused on the GLM's goods and barriers. The framework initially included four stages of involvement in extremist spaces: pre-engagement, engagement, disengagement, and reintegration. To better capture the differences in goods and barriers experienced at group entry and during group participation, a fifth stage was later inserted between engagement and disengagement. For a discussion on the methodological challenges and opportunities in applying this framework to the violent extremist population, see Munden et al.'s forthcoming report. The approach to analysing the books proceeded as follows:

1. The framework for the first phase of the coding process included a description of all primary goods identified for each stage of engagement along with a marker of whether the secondary good (how the good was sought) was considered to be normative, non-normative or counter-normative. Illustrative quotations for each coded good were noted. Internal or external barriers to achieving goods normatively (capacity), and conflict/tension between goods (scope and coherence) were also included.
2. Christian Picciolini's book 'White American Youth' was used as a pilot in order to increase inter-rater reliability and optimise the framework's functionality. All four researchers then replicated the analytical approach with four or five additional books. There were weekly meetings with the project lead and co-ordinating analyst to discuss findings and challenges.
3. The second phase of the coding involved:
  - a. Reducing the data to include only the three most important goods for each stage of engagement in order to facilitate the identification of patterns across books.
  - b. Rating these goods in order of significance based on the relative importance the author afforded them. Ratings were accompanied by quotations.
  - c. Descriptions of the good, how it was pursued, what opportunities there were for the good to be achieved, and other goods that seemed to relate to it were noted. Descriptions of barriers were also included.
  - d. Finally, the researchers noted down their overall assessment of goods and barriers across the trajectory for each book. Biweekly meetings helped resolve challenges or concerns regarding the approach and findings.
4. In parallel with the second phase of coding, the co-ordinating analyst worked to answer the research questions by examining the output from both phases of the coding and identifying patterns across all the data. Tentative answers to the research questions were discussed during the biweekly meetings.

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## CAN INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS BE UNDERSTOOD AS AN EFFORT TO ATTAIN PRIMARY GOODS?

The books illustrate that an array of goods were attained within extremist movements that the formers had previously experienced as hard or impossible to achieve in mainstream, normative ways. Not all the goods were described in each book, but all were mentioned several times across the autobiographies. The GLM provided a way of interpreting what motivated individuals, and how engaging in extremist spaces often provided a more accessible route to fulfilling these motivations than those available in their daily lives.

## ANALYSIS

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

Together, the analysis provides support for the argument that involvement in violent extremist groups can be usefully understood as an effort to attain primary goods, and that this process is informed by barriers to achieving goods in pro-social, normative ways.

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## HOW ARE GOODS DESCRIBED?

Exploring the patterns of goods and barriers across the books suggests that (i) goods differ in importance; (ii) relate to each other in certain ways; and (iii) can change over time.

In general, the formers described the fulfilment of more and better quality goods during group participation than in the pre-engagement and disengagement stages. Only a small number of goods were attained through counter-normative means motivated by a desire to attack or take down the system. The loss of group-related goods during disengagement was described as challenging, and efforts to regain these goods in normative ways played a key role during the reintegration stage:

**I was finally building a network of friends who had no connection with politics. Thus, in a purely secular sense, life was beginning anew.**

(Pearce, p. 90)

## SOME GOODS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OTHERS

Although the formers described the attainment of all the goods across their stories, healthy living, relatedness and agency were the three most commonly mentioned. Individuals valued different goods and achieved them in various ways, and the nature and importance of the goods changed at different stages of their trajectories.

Healthy living was mostly related to physical and psychological safety, and often motivated group engagement and involvement. This effort to secure

a sense of healthy living reflected the fact that many formers had felt physically or psychologically unsafe in their pre-engagement environment:

**By the time I was twelve years old, in 1978, I had started drinking, had my first sexual experience, and had started doing drugs. I had been in lots of fights – many spurred on by my own father. I began to feel a raw hatred so strong it encompassed every part of my life. I felt like the world was my enemy.**

(Leyden, p. 16)

Over time, the threat and perpetuation of violence within and between extremist groups often resulted in feeling unsafe, constituting a barrier to healthy living. In many cases, this contributed to disengagement. Healthy living reoccurred in a different form during the disengagement and reintegration stages, where they worried about being reprimanded by the group or struggled with their mental health:

**It was not so much the random threats from the BM [British Movement] members or NF [National Front] hangers-on that concerned me. What frightened me more was the possibility that some of the more professional, armed men of violence in Europe would feel angry enough to arrange the kind of reprisal against which there is no real protection other than them not knowing where you are.**

(Hill, p. 283)

Relatedness was a central good represented across the accounts. The multifaceted and complex nature of relatedness is discussed throughout the report, as it functions as a unique good as well as a facilitator and barrier to other goods. Relatedness was particularly salient in the pre-engagement stage. All the formers perceived themselves to have few rewarding relations in their early lives, and found opportunities to gain

more supportive or rewarding versions of relatedness during engagement and involvement:

**Nobody fucked with Pat's family [movement co-leader], and he and I were closer to each other than we were to our actual siblings.**

(Michaelis, p. 51)

The centrality of relatedness throughout the trajectories may be partly due to the range of forms relatedness can take, including friendships and romantic, sexual, and familial relationships.

Agency was another key good described by almost all the formers. The group provided the opportunity to achieve a sense of agency, often through leadership positions or by providing an opportunity to 'get back' at society for perceived maltreatment prior to joining:

**Bullying others made me feel for a moment at school that at least those who laughed at others with me recognised me and thought I was cool. It gave me a feeling of sovereignty over myself and others. A feeling that was foreign to me at home.**

(Weißgerber, p. 29)

Agency was important across all stages and related to the movement's activities in a variety of ways including through asserting leadership and commanding the movement's internal and external processes:

**I loved the power, control, and influence I exerted over so many. I could get them to do whatever I wanted them to do for me – even kill for me.**

(Leyden, p. 51)

Relatedness and agency often co-occurred and functioned both as standalone goods and as facilitators and barriers to other goods. These dynamics are given

more attention in the section below which discusses how the nature and function of goods can change.

The idea of certain goods being more important than others is not explicitly recognised within the GLM but is consistent with other more established models of universal needs such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1958) and Self-determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although the GLM assumes that the weight of each good depends on the individual's life priorities, our findings provide support for a more general set of psychological processes underpinning the model. This may have implications for practitioners utilising this model, something discussed further in the conclusion of the report.

## GOODS RELATE TO EACH OTHER IN PARTICULAR WAYS

Patterns of goods emerged in the autobiographies, reflecting commonly recurring relationships between higher and lower order goods. Healthy living, relatedness, and agency often provided access to related goods in a systematic way. Equally, certain combinations of goods became valuable at different stages of individual trajectories.

Although generally less central to the accounts, primary goods that are less critical to survival, such as pleasure, play, creativity, work and knowledge, were present and seemed to relate to higher order goods in consistent ways. The autobiographies often indicated that certain needs had been satisfied - or certain goods attained - in order to achieve others. For example, the desire for relations with peers was described as a motivator for group membership/the good of community across the books, whilst goods such as play or creativity were rarely mentioned as a primary motivator. Instead, these goods became available in the form of access to parties or opportunities to adopt subcultural markers once the individual had become a group member and gained friends within the movement. This suggests there are hierarchies of goods relevant to interpreting motivations and trajectories into and out of extremism.

## ANALYSIS

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

## HEALTHY LIVING, INNER PEACE AND SPIRITUALITY

The core good of healthy living was often linked to the effort to achieve inner peace and pursue the good of spirituality (understood in terms of ideological commitment) during the pre-engagement and engagement stages. This was typically due to experiences of psychological or physical abuse and the need to obtain physical safety (healthy living) and manage negative emotions (inner peace).

In some accounts, these three goods were discussed in relation to ideological curiosity or conviction during the engagement and involvement stages where it provided a sense of meaning and guidance. Here, the ideology offered a sense of purpose, and a clear identity and self-confidence:

**But I was still a neo-Nazi. This was my role, my meaning, my mission.**

(Hasselbach, p. 295)

Due to their interconnectedness, a strong commitment to the group's ideology also had the potential to create a barrier to inner peace and healthy living due to a real or perceived threat from outgroups.

Healthy living, inner peace and spirituality also co-occurred in combination with agency in the reintegration stage. With time, exerting their agency outside the movement offered opportunities for the formers to redeem themselves and do something meaningful that would undermine the movement or its ideology. This allowed them greater access to healthy living and inner peace:

**When I had been a Skin, I had developed the attitude of not caring what other people thought. This time I was determined to use that attitude toward something positive—something that would make a difference in the world (...) I started to see the difference I was**

**making with my speaking within just a few months, which was satisfying.**

(Leyden, p. 159)

Group involvement could have significant consequences for the formers during the disengagement and reintegration stages and create barriers to achieving healthy living, inner peace and spirituality. The main barriers were through a loss of identity (healthy living), feelings of shame and guilt (inner peace) and loss of purpose in life (spirituality) which in many cases were prompted by leaving the movement.

## AGENCY, WORK AND KNOWLEDGE

Agency regularly related to the goods of work and knowledge. This combination of goods was often sought through a keen interest in attaining leadership positions, learning about and teaching others the group's ideology, which together required agency and resourcefulness:

**To be a leader, I knew I needed to show initiative, establish myself as dependable. Be innovative. I sorted the leaflets I'd been collecting from the older skinheads and began photocopying them at the local pharmacy, mailing them off to other skinheads with post office boxes halfway across the world.**

(Piccioloni, p. 94)

The group environment offered opportunities to climb the hierarchy within the movement relatively quickly, and often faster than might be possible in normative settings, for example in a regular job. By actively embracing a 'new truth' many of the formers became leaders relatively soon after joining their group (although this finding may also reflect the type of individual who chooses to write a book about their experiences so should not necessarily be considered representative). In some cases, their involvement in the movement could also provide an income:

**In a few short weeks, I had become one of the most widely known members of the National Front and in January 1978, as a reward for my labours, I began to work for the Party in a fulltime capacity. I was now living every young radical's dream of being a fully paid, fulltime revolutionary, giving his life to the Cause.**

(Pearce, p. 34)

**I didn't feel like I was throwing anything away or missing out in a single aspect of my life. After all, I had a car, I had girls, I had booze, a reputation as a bad/ass, and a nightlife that most kids my age or even older would kill for. By the time I turned 16, I had gotten my first tattoo, I had extremely close friends...**

(Leyden, p. 25)

## RELATEDNESS, PLEASURE, PLAY AND CREATIVITY

Relatedness often facilitated the attainment of other goods, particularly pleasure, play and creativity. These goods regularly occurred during the engagement and involvement stages, but rarely during the pre-engagement, disengagement, and early stages of reintegration.

This combination of goods was achieved through a mixture of normative and non-normative means. These included things like partying, consuming drugs and alcohol, making and listening to music, thrill-seeking behaviour, and various forms of self-expression:

**With glowing cheeks and pricked ears, they sat together in the wooden barracks with beer, schnapps, cigarettes, forbidden music, forbidden books, flags and pictures.**

(Bauer, p. 35)

These goods were often not available prior to joining but seemed to be readily available during group membership. In providing immediate gratification, they made the group an attractive milieu to belong to. For some individuals the attainment of goods such as relatedness, pleasure, play and creativity during group membership were sufficiently satisfying that counter-normative behaviours became less attractive. The attainment of certain goods may therefore, in some cases, mean that an individual has little to gain by terroristic violence:

The formers' preoccupation with the attainment of these goods challenges the idea that terrorism is an inevitable outcome of far-right group membership. If engagement in extremist spaces can be understood as a route to achieving primary goods as a function of barriers encountered in life outside the movement, there are potentially two mechanisms by which terrorism might be constrained:

1. If the individual's core needs are being met by engagement in the movement, there may be little additional incentive to pursue counter-normative or highly risky terrorism-related activities. These dynamics are of course complex. For example, the goods of relatedness or healthy living may be endangered if someone refuses to engage in politically motivated violence, leading the individual to see their involvement in extremist violence as a necessary route to retaining these goods. However, the achievement of goods has the potential to act as a constraint on terrorism.
2. Engaging in counter-normative, terroristic activities may endanger ongoing access to goods. For example, contributing to acts of terrorism carries far greater risks than more standard, non-normative behaviours. These risks exist both for the individual, who may be caught, and the movement, which may be disrupted. In both cases, the individual is risking the loss of personally salient goods as a result of engaging in violent extremism.

## THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF GOODS CAN CHANGE

The nature of some primary goods can change and may serve different functions at different stages of an individual's trajectory. This was particularly evident in two of the most frequently discussed goods: relatedness and agency.

### RELATEDNESS

Many of the formers described barriers to relatedness in the pre-engagement stage, experiencing relational difficulties such as humiliation, bullying, feeling left out, as well as challenging relationships with family members:

**As a young child I longed for my mom and dad. I worried at times that their absence was punishment for misbehaving.**

(Picciolini, p. 33)

During this stage, barriers to relatedness often led individuals to seek this good in other contexts.

Strong relational bonds were created during the involvement stage, mainly in the form of sexual/romantic partners or friendships with those already in the movement. The introduction to the group was often made by someone they looked up to within the movement who facilitated their entry:

**Yes, it was he who managed to get me into this shit, he knew exactly which buttons he would press to get me started and get out some of my hatred. I had never had anyone I could talk like I could with him.**

(Egonsson, p. 54)

Meaningful relationships with group members could in some cases sustain group participation once the individual had started doubting their involvement,

functioning as a barrier to disengagement. Conversely, relatedness could play a facilitating role during the disengagement stage, for example when relationships with other group members became conflicted. Becoming a father (all the books were by men) typically triggered and accelerated disengagement, driven by the need to protect their children and partner from possible danger caused by group participation:

**It was one thing to destroy my own life, but was it fair for me to destroy theirs? How much were my choices affecting their quality of life? These questions echoed within me as I began to second-guess my involvement in the white supremacist movement.**

(McAleer, p. 47)

The birth of a child often facilitated a reconnection with family and friends outside the movement which eased reintegration. Interactions with non-group members, including friends, new work colleagues, sexual/romantic partners or other group members who had already left the group also facilitated disengagement and reintegration:

**Paul, who had already buried his skinhead demons, served as a beacon lighting the way to salvation.**

(Michaelis, p. 105)

**Now, in some ways, Winfried<sup>1</sup> had taken that role and was giving me strength in the other direction - to become independent, to stop hating, to stop the violence - to leave Germany.**

(Hasselbach, p. 319)

Overall, the analysis found relatedness played a seminal role throughout individual trajectories, particularly

<sup>1</sup> The director and author Winfried Bonegel published Hasselbach's biography in collaboration with him and, inspired by it, subsequently directed a film about the neo-Nazi scene at the time of German reunification.

as a facilitator for change during the engagement and disengagement stages. Relatedness is a composite good which involves a number of different types of actors who serve different functions, from acting as a role model supporting group exit, an opportunity to achieve goods in more normative ways, or as a factor that changes the hierarchy of goods an individual is motivated by.

The nature of relatedness seems to shift over time, functioning both as a primary good and as a facilitator as well as a barrier to achieving other goods. This good would therefore benefit from being unpacked further in future research to maximise its usefulness as a theoretical concept within the GLM. For example, it may be useful to divide relatedness into different sub-categories such as friendships, family and romantic/sexual relations.

## AGENCY

Agency is a central and complex good that changes over time and serves different functions. This made it difficult to decipher the direction of influence, i.e., whether agency resulted in the achievement of other goods or whether other goods were sought with a view to gaining agency. For example, a desire for autonomy and freedom from authority figures (agency) often led to thrill-seeking behaviours (pleasure), and/or self-expression through extremist activities (creativity). Conversely, access to parties or social events (play); gaining knowledge about politics and ideology (knowledge); and being violent to feel safe (healthy living), could provide easier access to leadership and achieving power over others (agency).

Like relatedness, agency was particularly crucial during times of change. For example, the pre-engagement stage was frequently characterised by challenging circumstances, which increased the former's desire to change his life situation and (re) gain agency by pursuing goods in a different context. In the engagement stage, agency was often expressed through rebellion against family, certain outgroups, the state, or society as a whole. The need to rebel is

also representative of normal social development in adolescence, where creating an identity independent from parents and family becomes important:

**At some point you say to yourself, screw it, I'm old enough now, do my own thing. I don't have to live by your rules and constraints anymore, I won't be forced into anything. You don't care about me anyway, so I don't care about you either!**

(Bar, p. 16)

As discussed previously, agency was often associated with the goods healthy living, inner peace and spirituality, particularly for those who were curious about, or driven by, the group's ideology. The reciprocal relationship between these goods can be exemplified by one former's account of efforts to attain spirituality and agency. Weißgerber wanted to give meaning to his existence (spirituality) due to a "fear of losing sovereignty and self" (agency) (p. 63). For him, ideology provided a sense that his own and the movement's goals aligned in ways which afforded a sense of agency and reassurance (inner peace): 'At that time I had the feeling that my own being and desire were expressed through these words. (...) It felt true. And not just sort of true, but like the truth, my truth' (p. 61). Whilst healthy living, inner peace and spirituality provided a sense of agency, ideological conviction made Weißgerber feel more in control of his life and part of something bigger than himself.

Leadership and the commitment to the group often became a scope-related barrier where all other goods beyond agency came to be neglected. Disillusionment with group members or movement ideology could therefore lead to a loss of agency, which had the potential to facilitate disengagement.

In the reintegration phase, agency in combination with healthy living, inner peace and spirituality played a different role to that during group involvement. Here these goods were attained through the individual's efforts to be honest about their past, make amends for their

## ANALYSIS

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

wrongs, have a positive impact on society, and regain some level of status in a normative and pro-social way:

**The only hope I had of trying to wash away the evil I'd paid tribute to was by exposing it to the light.**

(Picciolini, p. 258)

These efforts were often pursued through awareness raising or political advocacy:

**He wanted to sound a warning to the biggest national audience he could find. He took out his computer and started to write what would later become an opinion piece for The New York Times.**

(Saslow, p. 238)

Many of the formers continue to work within the P/CVE context in order to raise awareness and help others who wish to exit extremist groups. The writing and publishing of their stories can be considered an effort to make amends and position themselves within mainstream society. These activities also provide additional goods such as work and knowledge.

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## OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVING GOODS CAN HELP INTERPRET PATHWAYS INTO AND OUT OF EXTREMISM

The autobiographies describe a range of barriers facing efforts to attain valued goods which influenced their trajectories in visible and meaningful ways. The barriers had the following characteristics:

- The most common barriers were internal capacity (e.g., poor mental health) and/or external capacity (e.g., reduced access to important relations or social institutions).
- Capacity barriers were pivotal to trajectory changes during the engagement and disengagement stages.

- Tension (scope barrier) or conflict (coherence barrier) between attained goods was most often described in the disengagement stage, where the former recognised that group involvement limited access to all or some of the goods they desired.
- Violence was coded as a harmful way to seek goods (a means barrier) throughout group participation.

Barriers to achieving goods normatively prior to joining often prompted the formers to seek these goods elsewhere. For instance, one of the main barriers in the pre-engagement stage was the inability to access valuable relationships or wider communities. These were both important in themselves and provided access to other goods. These barriers were often informed by familial relationships: many formers experienced difficult parental relations, particularly with their fathers:

**This may be a harsh indictment, but the thing is, my parents were never there for me. Good grades were all that mattered (...) All they had was work and their Jesus shit.**

(Bar, p. 16)

The lack of relatedness led many to look for male relations outside the family unit, and group members were often described as family replacements:

**Skins were my family, the people who looked out for me, the people who are loyal and stuck up for me and would even fight for me.**

(Leyden, p. 26)

Few barriers to goods were described during the engagement and involvement stages. Instead, these stages were often characterised by the accessibility of a variety of goods that were often harder to attain outside the movement. Consequently, they were typically achieved in non-normative and sometimes counter-normative ways within extremist spaces.



Imprisonment was a distinctive external capacity barrier which disrupted the stages of engagement-disengagement-reintegration, impacting individual pathways in significant ways. For most of those who experienced imprisonment, their time in prison strengthened their previously held extremist views. Prison could also provide additional goods such as healthy living, relatedness and agency when they learnt about leadership and came under the influence of more experienced prisoners:

**Prison was also the ideal environment for acquiring the rudiments of Nazism. During my stay in various East German prisons, I met several old Nazi war criminals who were more than happy to explain their 'glorious cause' to me.**

(Hasselbach, p. 60)

**Sometimes however, lack of support during imprisonment exposed the fragility of relations within the group and resulted in a reconnection with family members: 'When I was arrested and jailed, my entire family and my wife's family remained supportive.'**

(Noble, p. 231)

Although the accounts only occasionally described conflicts between goods, group participation often led to scope and coherence barriers, where one or a few goods came to dominate or came into conflict with one other. Conflict between the goods (coherence) could sometimes lead to disengagement. For instance, several formers began disengaging once they experienced a conflict between valued goods within the group and the safety of their young children:

**I began to spend much less time fretting over securing the existence of my race and a future for white children and much more time with my child (...) The more time I spent with her the more it became imperative that I leave the movement.**

(Michaelis, p. 98)

During reintegration, the repercussions of being a former group member often became a capacity barrier to the attainment of goods. Several described concerns about retaliation from the group, with some formers receiving threats or actual acts of vengeance. Many formers struggled with their mental health due to shame or guilt, or due to the loss of the goods they had obtained within the group. Membership could also lead to a lack of social and work opportunities. The number of barriers and normative routes to attaining goods seemed to inform how easy disengagement and reintegration were perceived to be.

The formers often described the disengagement and reintegration stages as a time to realign the goods and overcome coherence barriers. The extent to which goods were achieved after leaving the movement depended to some degree on how long after group participation the books were written. For example, at the time of writing, Egonsson had only recently disengaged from his group and described frustration with the lack of attained goods. Others, like Meeink, published his book more than 20 years after group disengagement and described the attainment and alignment of goods in this way:

**My life was more perfect than I'd imagined it could be. I was in love with Valerie, involved in Matt and Riley's lives, friends with both Nina and Jessica, making my name as a professional speaker and being paid to play hockey.**

(Meeink, p. 331)

## ANALYSIS

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

## VIOLENCE

Violence or the imagined potential for violence was a distinctive and important concept that performed different functions across the trajectories and related to goods in a variety of ways.

Violence is endemic and pervasive throughout right-wing extremist movements which operate beyond the bounds of the internet, and intra- and intergroup violence is the norm. Ritualised, ceremonial acts of violence can be part of group initiation, where a recruit is expected to show commitment to the group through violent acts towards members of the outgroup. Such ritualised acts of violence are particularly prominent in far-right groups compared to other extremist groups.

Violent acts were performed in order to achieve different goods. During the engagement and involvement stages, violence appeared to be a non-normative route to achieving goods, representing a means-related barrier, where violence became a maladaptive secondary good to attain particular aims. For instance, across the autobiographies, violence provided a means of attaining physical safety (healthy living); ideological goals (spirituality); the opportunity to assert one's position within the group and gain admiration from peers (agency); and excitement (pleasure and play):

**Wow! What a buzz. The rush of adrenaline and testosterone was pulsing through my veins. It lasted maybe twenty minutes, but it left me feeling like I had never felt before: alive, humming, and excited. I became addicted to the violence, the fighting, the domination over another human being at any cost, and the sense of power from the fear that was created.**

(McAlear, p. 23)

Violence plays a complex role. As well as providing direct and indirect access to goods it can also function as a facilitator and a barrier. In many of the accounts, over

time, violence shifted from facilitating certain goods to becoming a barrier to others, particularly inner peace and relatedness, for example, where violence negatively impacted relationships outside the movement. Violent acts could also result in imprisonment leading to significant changes to an individual's trajectory.

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF GOODS ATTAINMENT IN VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS

This section highlights some of the characteristics that influenced the value ascribed to certain goods and the way in which they were attained, considering the role of ideology, identity, masculinity, and socio-political context. These characteristics were found to play important roles in the formers' trajectories, however they are not fully recognised within the GLM. This section will therefore provide an initial consideration of how these characteristics were reflected in the autobiographies, and hope to provide a starting point for further research to investigate their relationship to the GLM in greater depth.

## IDEOLOGY

Although the significance attributed to ideology varied, it was part of the narrative for all the authors. Typically, ideology was not at the forefront of the autobiographies, but served a guiding and influencing role. For a minority, ideology was considered the main motivation for group engagement and involvement. In these cases, political goals appeared to be a separate good adjacent to inner peace and spirituality. For example, Pearce explained that 'In 1975, at the age of fourteen, I began to dabble in politics. By the following year it would completely dominate my life' (p. 29). For others, ideology seemed to represent a context in which other goods such as agency, inner peace, work, knowledge, relatedness, community and creativity could be achieved.

The GLM offered an understanding of engagement as motivated by a need for safety (healthy living),

personal connections (relatedness), attraction to the aesthetic (creativity), managing negative emotions (inner peace), or a desire for agency or community but rarely by ideological conviction:

**I tried to find people who didn't know who I was, and that I could be friends with without having any preconceived opinions about me. All I wanted was to find a way to get rid of my anger. I could just as well have ended up in a left-wing party or entered the criminal track. But I had a note from the Swedish Democrats, so it felt easiest to contact them.**

(Egonsson, p. 53)

As the GLM is designed for non-politically motivated offenders, and due to the various ways in which ideology was expressed in the books, the application of the model to the extremist population may benefit from giving greater consideration to this concept. Kamruzzaman (2023) offers a more detailed analysis of how ideology relates to the GLM. Together, this suggests future research will benefit from recognising at least five different ways in which ideology seems to be relevant:

1. **Guiding principle:** a core motivation – possibly best captured by widening the definition of the good of spirituality – which helps individuals understand which goods are important and provides a route to attaining them through engagement in a wider movement.
2. **Emergent:** developing as a function of achieving other goods, for example, through relatedness where closeness to others facilitates greater affinity to certain ideas and values.
3. **Context:** by acting as an organising system for the movement, ideology may provide the setting within which many if not all other goods can be achieved, albeit in maladaptive ways.

4. **Requirement:** access to goods such as physical safety or relatedness may be predicated on the acceptance and/ or performance of certain ideological commitments, without which more salient goods cannot be achieved.
5. **Paradox:** Disillusionment can offer an exit route and create opportunities to gain goods through ideological opposition in the disengagement/ reintegration stages.

## IDENTITY

Identity is a complex and composite concept that is not fully articulated in the GLM. Identity is dynamic and shaped by experiences, relationships and cultural contexts. It is made up of an array of factors such as gender, social class, profession, religion, values and beliefs, physical appearance and hobbies, to mention a few. All the authors reflect this complexity and describe their identity in different ways. This made it difficult to place within the analytical framework. Across the books, all the goods were discussed in relation to identity in some way or another, demonstrating that the construction of a group-related identity is central to group participation.

The group provided the formers with an attractive and easily adoptable ‘identity template’ with clear instructions about how to look, think and act. Embracing this new identity seemed particularly appealing to individuals who describe feeling a lack of identity prior to joining, where the new identity created a route to other goods such as relatedness and community.

The construction of a group-related identity became a standalone good for some. For others, the group-related aspects of their identity were described as the result of attaining other goods rather than something they set out to achieve. Strong relations with other group members, conflict with outgroups, and the adoption of the group’s aesthetics and ideology resulted in a strong group-related identity.

## ANALYSIS

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

For some, the thought of losing their group-related identity created a barrier for disengagement. Despite reservations about the group's ideology and continued group membership, many formers were reluctant to give up the distinct and strong group-related identity:

**The difficulty that I had was that so much of my identity was invested in the ideology of white supremacy that I was not yet ready to give it up. The conundrum for anyone who is deeply dedicated to an extremist ideology is that identity and ideology become intertwined.**

(McAlear, p. 131)

Sudden changes to identity had the potential to influence individual trajectories. For example, when a new identity as a father had the effect of triggering and facilitating disengagement. Changes to the way individuals perceived themselves contributed to a re-evaluation of how previously important goods related to one another, which had the potential to influence change.

The importance of the extremist group identity became particularly evident in the disengagement and reintegration stages where a loss of identity and the need to (re)build a pro-social identity after leaving became a central concern. The costs of losing their group-related identity created a barrier for reintegration, and the authors often described a loss of identity due to the forfeit of group-related goods.

Due to the centrality of the concept of identity in shaping trajectories in and out of extremism, and the difficulties of fitting it within the analytical framework, further research on its position within the model may be beneficial. In doing so, it will be helpful to consider the following dynamics:

1. **Inter-relations:** identity has the potential to relate to a number of different goods, perhaps most saliently, relatedness and community. Understanding how it enables or inhibits access to these goods will give greater insight into how identity can be accommodated by the GLM.

2. **Directionality:** similarly to ideology, identity has the potential to act as (i) a guiding principle, driving motivation for engagement through a search for identity; (ii) an emergent process through which engagement with the movement leads to a change in the nature or strength of someone's social/group-related identities; (iii) an element of context within which movements are situated in relation to other identity groups and strengthened by intergroup conflict; or (iv) as a requirement, where adoption of an extremist identity is a prerequisite of acceptance.
3. **Relationship to barriers:** by examining when an individual's personal and/ or social identities impact access to goods, it may be possible to better understand its role in trajectories.

## GENDER

The GLM does not specifically deal with gender, but our findings suggest that it would be beneficial to consider this concept when utilising the GLM for members of the far-right and wider extremist movements. Gender is implicated in questions of identity and relates to goods by providing models of how different goods could and should be achieved, as well as informing which goods are most salient for individuals, for example in terms of relationships with parents – in particular fathers – and sexual and romantic partners.

Masculinity seems to relate to the good of healthy living, by providing an idealised norm of what and how this good might be achieved, and what is permitted. In hypermasculine groups, including those represented in the books, stereotypical male behaviour is often exaggerated, with all the books emphasising physical strength, risk taking, aggression and heterosexuality:

**NA wanted its members to reject all of the emotional weaknesses that had made them who they were when they were lonely, bullied schoolboys.**

(Mullen, p. 127)

Masculinity was sometimes coded as creativity when it entailed aesthetic changes, including getting tattoos and muscle building. Enhancement of the masculine image seemed to be linked to increased levels of self-esteem, at times enabling inner peace, and connectedness to likeminded peers (relatedness). Gender is also linked to agency, where many were driven by a motivation to develop masculine traits that allowed them to be more in control of their environment.

Gender was particularly relevant in relation to violence, where the group encouraged aggression towards outgroups. Gender therefore reflected some of the complexities described in the section on violence, where it sometimes provided a direct route to attaining goods, but at others, acted as a barrier.

Masculinity also had an ambivalent relationship to the good of relatedness. Some formers described aggression towards women, or the mistreatment of women who wanted to join the groups, and a general acceptance of misogynistic violence and language. Whereas others seemed to believe that displaying hypermasculine traits might lead to greater access to sexual or romantic partners.

Despite the important role of gender, few of the formers spoke about it directly. Although it would occasionally be recognised that women inside and outside the group were treated poorly, regret about past behaviours was generally related to violence towards men rather than violence towards women. This supports the idea that women were less esteemed than men and seen as secondary members, which helps to interpret the good of relatedness, and the kinds of relationships that were most valued.

Rigault Arkhis (2023) offers a more thorough review of the role of gender developed through the research.

## SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The different countries and socio-political contexts in which the books were situated were important in shaping individual trajectories, the goods that came to

matter, and the opportunities and barriers facing efforts to achieve them. Some contexts seemed to facilitate access to counter-normative routes to achieving goods, whereas others generated significant barriers.

British authors tended to describe social class as particularly salient to their capacity to attain goods compared to those based in other countries. All the British formers identified as working class and perceived that their access to goods was limited by barriers informed by their class background. For instance, Mullen described coming from a community that felt like it was falling apart. His decision to join an extremist group therefore felt to him less like a choice and more like a necessity in order to obtain the goods he desired.

The significance of the role of context was particularly evident in the German books, which were mainly set in the early 1990s. Experiences of marginalisation in the federal states of the former GDR after the fall of the Wall, coupled with other factors such as widespread anti-Americanism, created a breeding ground for right-wing extremist recruitment efforts. The 1990s in reunified Germany were subsequently also called the 'baseball bat years' due to massive waves of right-wing extremist violence.

Indifference or lack of a robust response from state institutions against far-right aspirations sometimes acted as a facilitator or accelerator for individual trajectories to violence as described in the six German books. This provided an easier route to achieving goods in counter-normative ways than was the case in many of the other contexts. One example is the German Armed Forces, where right-wing extremist ideas and behaviour were often not sanctioned, thus enabling right-wing extremists to train at arms, meet like-minded individuals and further their ideological nationalist aspirations. The concept of counter- and non-normative ideas is challenged when state actors fail to enforce particular standards and rules as was often the case in these older, German books.

## ANALYSIS

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

More immediate contextual factors may also influence the attainment of goods. Tension caused by threat, surveillance or attention from outgroups operating in particular contexts had the potential to both generate barriers to goods, but also provided enjoyment as it increased members' confidence and sense of importance. Weißgerber and Piccionili describe how repressive police measures can consolidate the individual in right-wing extremist circles or represent a means for individuals to satisfy non-normative needs in the right-wing extremist group:

**I had not broken down in the face of this first test of courage and had stood my ground during my unofficial rite of passage. This earned me a certain prestige and also trustworthiness in circles where newcomers had to fight hard for both.**

(Weißgerber, p. 75)

**My desire to be part of the group grew the more the signs of surveillance – and the danger it suggested – became undeniable. This was the stuff of mobster movies. Serious good guys and bad guys in action.**

(Picciolini, p. 59)

The wider structural and political context influences an individual's actual and perceived opportunities to attain goods and should be considered when utilising the GLM. Rahlf (2023) uses the German (auto-) biographies examined here for a closer discussion of the importance of context, drawing attention to the following points:

1. The historical and cultural context inform the structure of barriers and incentives individuals face. Where wider institutions offer a permissive environment for extremist ideas, this can reinforce material opportunities and perceptions about the most appropriate way to achieve certain goods.
2. Contexts which do little to limit the propagation of extremist ideas create few incentives to disengage from extremist spaces as achieving goods pro-socially under these circumstances may be perceived as less attractive.

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# CONCLUSION

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This project set out to explore whether the GLM could usefully be applied to interpret trajectories through far-right extremist groups. To do this, we analysed autobiographies and biographies by former far-right group members which recounted their journeys into and out of extremist groups. The findings suggest that the GLM needs further development to account for the ideological and contextual specificities of the population under investigation. However, the model offered a coherent framework for analysing the formers' trajectories across the stages of pre-engagement, engagement, involvement, disengagement and reintegration, finding that:

- Involvement in far-right extremist groups can be interpreted as an effort to attain primary goods.
- Barriers to achieving goods seem to play a role in motivating people to seek alternative routes to achieving them through involvement in extremist groups.
- Goods differ in importance. Healthy living, relatedness and agency seem to be the most significant of those accounted for by the GLM.
- Goods relate to each other in particular ways. Certain goods often co-occur and are facilitated by the three most significant goods.
- The nature of the goods that matter to an individual can change over time.
- The function of goods can change over the course of someone's trajectory. Some goods function both as ends in themselves and as facilitators or barriers to other goods.
- Obstacles, particularly internal and external barriers to achieving goods, can help explain pathways into and out of extremism.

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## IMPLICATIONS

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The findings have implications for interventions which try to prevent and counter violent extremism. Rather than considering group participation as the result of different combinations of risk factors and individual vulnerabilities, the GLM suggests that individuals seek out primary goods within extremist spaces because of barriers to achieving them in normative and pro-social ways elsewhere.

Based on our findings, interventions for violent extremist offenders would benefit from incorporating strengths-based approaches, including the GLM, into intervention design and case management processes to counterbalance the dominance of risk-oriented approaches which focus on addressing deficits and mitigating risk (Maruna & Lebel, 2003). Further recommendations include:

### 1. Understanding goods

- Interventions will benefit from developing a detailed understanding of an individual's motivations and needs and the nature and function of goods that are relevant to them.
- Consider prioritising aspects of interventions which support goods relating to healthy living, relatedness and agency as these seem to represent core goods.

It is likely to be important to make individuals feel psychologically and physically safe (healthy living) so they have the capacity to obtain other goods. A sense of agency may be easier to achieve within a prevention programme compared to working with those within rehabilitation or prison and probation settings. Intervention programmes can still try to identify opportunities to maximise an individual's agency over the process they are going through and maximise opportunities for obtaining this good. For example,

## CONCLUSION

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

and where appropriate, by designing the rehabilitation programme to allow for some level of individual choice. This flexibility may also strengthen the working alliance between the practitioner and the client.

#### 2. Maximising opportunities to access goods

- Focusing on developing skills and strengths to enable individuals to attain goods in pro-social, normative ways.
- Supporting the attainment of goods through direct or indirect routes.
- Reducing internal and external capacity barriers that hinder the attainment of goods.

Recognising that goods relate to each other in particular ways and learning how goods group together in individual lives will allow interventions to identify a variety of routes to attaining goods that are significant to the individual. For example, if relatedness is challenging to attain, interventions might provide opportunities to achieve it indirectly through related goods such as play, for example through sports, or creativity through some form of artistic or cultural expression. These activities can provide an indirect route to engaging with wider pro-social networks.

Similarly, the attainment of a job (work) or further education (knowledge) may provide direct or indirect routes to agency. In this way, interventions can take a theoretically informed route to enabling intervention participants to access harder to reach goods through those that might be more readily available.

#### 3. Developing self-understanding

- Work with individuals to better understand their past and integrate group involvement in their life narrative.
- Provide opportunities for individuals to encounter the potential for redemption and explore what kind of redemption script might be available to them.

Being able to make sense of one's life can play a role in reintegration work and desistance for non-politically motivated offenders (Maruna, 2001) and those involved in extremism (Cherney & Koehler, 2023). According to Maruna, the development of a coherent pro-social identity and an understanding of one's criminal past creates opportunities for lasting change because it helps deal with feelings of culpability, stigma and lack of direction. By creating a so-called redemption script - asserting a pro-social identity throughout their trajectory and narrating desistance as a comeback story - individuals are able to start believing that something positive can come from their criminal past.

Our findings suggest that creating a redemption script associated with the attainment of goods such as agency, healthy living, inner peace and spirituality could be useful for former members of right-wing extremist groups. The redemption script was found in all the books and was particularly evident in the reintegration stage. The formers often emphasised (re) gaining and developing goods such as agency, healthy living, inner peace and spirituality in a pro-social way. Most of the authors described the achievement of these goods through meaningful activities that countered their previously held ideology.

#### 4. Considering implications for prevention

- Develop a GLM assessment framework that in practice, and ideally with the engagement of the individual concerned, helps identify core goods and barriers to achieving goods pro-socially.
- Evolve the GLM framework so it is able to help identify diversionary approaches in the context of efforts to prevent violent extremism.

The GLM provides a route to interpreting individual trajectories and motivations at the pre-engagement and engagement stages as well as in tertiary prevention contexts. Although the GLM has primarily been used in relation to rehabilitation, our analysis found that the GLM's approach of interpreting goods and barriers



can help interpret earlier stages of the radicalisation process. This implies that it may be beneficial to employ a similar framework in preventative work. The therapeutic implication of the GLM is that by providing opportunities to attain goods in pro-social ways, individuals are likely to be diverted away from seeking them out in anti-social settings such as extremist groups.

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## CAVEATS

There are several limitations that flow from the choice to use written autobiographies as our data:

- The narrative arc of autobiographies determines what experiences are foregrounded and thus what goods and barriers are presented. For example, Johan Egonsson's book is structured as a series of therapy sessions where he works on coming to terms with his past and moving forward, a framework which emphasises the attainment of goods such as inner peace and healthy living. Most of the formers, however, presented a redemption narrative and we recognise that the writing of autobiographical text is part of the construction of a positive life script. This is particularly evident in the description of reintegration where there is a strong emphasis on goods such as agency, inner peace, healthy living and spirituality.
- Some authors chose to only focus on certain parts of their trajectory. For example, some books do not include a pre-engagement phase, making it difficult to determine whether there were barriers to achieving goods normatively during this time. Similarly, the identification of goods in the reintegration phase is influenced by how soon after disengagement the books were written. Whilst some authors such as Johan Egonsson wrote their books soon after leaving and consequently report on few attained goods in this stage of the trajectory, most of the authors disengaged a considerable time ago. Despite these variances, taken as a whole and given the

relatively large number of books (for a qualitative study of this kind) a detailed analysis of all stages of the extremist trajectory was still possible.

- The stories are partial, tend to focus on critical events, and may purposefully omit certain experiences due to fear of prosecution, societal alienation or guilt and shame. Some formers may also have exaggerated certain situations because they wanted to make a name for themselves and/or generate publicity for their book. It may therefore be that certain goods and barriers are more systematically missing from the narratives. We recognise that their absence does not mean that they were not important, but because they were not foregrounded they cannot be considered in the analysis.
- Formers who choose to write a book about their involvement may differ significantly from the 'typical' group member. For instance, most of the authors held leading positions within their groups, had a high-profile media presence after leaving, and have reintegrated into society relatively successfully. We are aware of these shortcomings and recommend that the findings in this report should be tested with different samples, including other groups and single cases.
- As the analysis only included books by former right-wing extremists it remains unclear whether the findings apply to group members of Islamists and left-wing groups.

There are also some broader caveats about the nature of the GLM:

- The GLM was developed by and for individuals in a largely anglophone, Global North context which means that the model's primary goods may not be universal. Cultural context may also influence the perceived importance of goods. For example, the emphasis on agency could be explained by an individualistic culture where characteristics such as autonomy and self-sufficiency are highly valued. Indeed, it has been suggested that

## CONCLUSION

### Good Lives in Right-Wing Extremist Autobiographies

relatedness and knowledge may be more important in collectivist cultures (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Further research on the model's applicability in contexts beyond those it was developed in is therefore needed in order to understand whether the goods are more universally applicable, and to identify the implications for interventions.

- Gender is largely neglected in research on the GLM, and few books have been written by women who have left far-right groups. Together this means we do not have grounds for determining whether there are gender-related differences in goods or indeed whether the GLM is as useful in analysing the experiences of women.
- The current analysis was only able to test the model on a sample of white men from a Western culture, which is the population for which the model was originally designed. Other markers of identity such as religion and ethnicity are also likely to shape motivations and patterns of behaviour around goods and influence their various importance. Future research examining the application of the GLM to extremists should include samples that comprise women and people with various ethnicities and religious convictions.

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## WHAT'S NEXT?

In an earlier report from this research programme 'Conceptualising Protective Factors: Strength-Based Approaches', Marsden and Lee (2022) recommend that future research should "analyse the role of obstacles and opportunities to achieving goods in pathways towards violent extremism and examine pathways into and out of terrorism to understand whether direct and indirect means of achieving goods are observable in individual cases" (p. 20). The present study has sought to do this, and our analysis has allowed us to offer some tentative conclusions about the applicability of the GLM for members of far-right extremist movements. Taking the findings and limitations of this study as a starting point, future research could:

- Employ in-depth and larger-scale research to explore CVE practitioners' views of the GLM and strengths-based approaches.
- Assess whether the GLM can be applied in PVE interventions.
- Identify the implications of the GLM for risk assessment processes.
- Evaluate programmes that incorporate strengths-based approaches, including the GLM, to understand their influence on intervention outcomes.
- Analyse existing interventions to learn how the sequencing of strengths- and risk-oriented components can shape levels of engagement and motivation, and intervention outcomes.
- Apply Qualitative Secondary Analysis to systematically look for patterns of goods and barriers across larger and more varied samples.
- Further investigate how factors such as ideology, identity and socio-political context influence the attainment of goods and how these factors interact with the GLM.
- Analyse the role of gender in relation to the GLM in greater depth and consider the implications for interventions.
- Understand the cross-cultural applicability of the GLM to explore whether goods are best understood as universal and/or learn how they are shaped by socio-cultural factors.
- Assess whether the GLM can be applied to Islamist and left-wing extremist trajectories.

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# APPENDIX 1

Author(s)	Title	Country
<b>T. J. Leyden/ M Bridget Cook</b>	Skinhead Confessions: From Hate to Hope	USA
<b>Frank Meeink/Jody M. Roy</b>	Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead	USA
<b>Arno Michaelis</b>	My Life After Hate	USA
<b>Christian Picciolini</b>	White American Youth: My descent into America's Most Violent Hate Movement – and How I Got Out	USA
<b>Eli Saslow (about Derek Black)</b>	Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist	USA
<b>Tony McAleer</b>	The Cure for Hate: A Former White Supremacists' Journey from Violent Extremism to Radical Compassion	USA & Canada
<b>Stephan Michael Bar</b>	Fluchtpunkt Neonazi: Eine Jugend Zwischen Rebellion, Hakenkreuz und Knast  [Refuge Neo-Nazi: A Youth Between Rebellion, Swastika and Jail]	Germany
<b>Manuel Bauer</b>	Unter Staatsfeinden: Mein Leben im braunen Sumpf der Neonaziszene  [Among Enemies of the State: My Life in the Brown Swamp of the Neo-Nazi Scene]	Germany
<b>Ingo Hasselbach/Tom Reiss</b>	Führer-Ex: Memoirs of a Former Neo-Nazi	Germany
<b>Yuri Winterberg (about Odfried Hepp)</b>	Der Rebell: Odfried Hepp, Neonazi, Terrorist, Aussteiger  [The Rebel: Odfried Hepp, Neo-Nazi, Terrorist, Former]	Germany
<b>Philip Schlaffer</b>	Hass. Macht. Gewalt.: Ein Ex-Nazi and Rotlicht-Rocker packt aus  [Hate. Might. Violence.: An Ex-Nazi and Red-Light Rocker unpacks]	Germany
<b>Christian E. Weißgerber</b>	Mein Vaterland! Warum ich ein Neonazi war  [My fatherland! Why I was a Neo-Nazi]	Germany

<b>Matthew Collins</b>	Hate: My life in the British Far Right	UK
<b>Ray Hill/Andrew Bell</b>	The Other Face of Terror: Inside Europe's neo-Nazi Network	UK
<b>Matthew Collins/Robbie Mullen (about Robbie Mullen)</b>	Nazi terrorist: The story of National Action	UK
<b>Kerry Noble</b>	Tabernacle of hate: Seduction into right-wing extremism	UK
<b>Joseph Pearce</b>	Race with the devil	UK
<b>Johan Egonsson</b>	Ett liv i mörker [A life in the dark]	Sweden

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The logo graphic consists of three concentric, semi-circular red arcs on the left side, partially overlapping a solid red circle. The word "CREST" is written in white, uppercase, sans-serif font across the middle of the red circle.

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