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Van actie tot zelfverwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts

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ENGLISH SUMMARY: FROM ACTION TO SELF-REALISATION.

ROUTES OF ENTRY INTO FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

Why do people become active in Dutch far-right extremist (FRE) movements (active between 2015 and 2018), why do they stay active and to what extent does this correspond with the existing body of literature?

Since the end of the Second World War, researchers from different academic disciplines have been working on finding an explanation as to why people become active within far-right extremist (FRE) movements. Who joins and why? Early studies took a psychoanalytic turn and emphasised the psychological mechanism behind irrational attitudes. The Authoritarian Personality claimed that certain personality types tended more towards a fascist viewpoint. But a lack of empirical support has led to the qualification of The Authoritarian Personality as 'the most deeply flawed work of prominence in political psychology' (Martin, 2001).

However, the archetype that has led to the theory of The Authoritarian Personality (the bureaucrat with an obsession for orders and a longing for a strict regulated society in which rules are obeyed), has been observed in empirical research (Billig, 1978; Gielen, 2008) and authoritarianism has been indicated as a characteristic of those joining FRE movements (De Waele, 2012).

The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al. 1987; Hoggs & Reid, 2006; Hoggs et al., 2000) also provides insight with regard to why individuals join extremist groups. Although it doesn't explain why someone joins a group with a negative image when aspiring to a positive self-image, it does identify mechanisms such as a need for belonging, the search for group protection and the subordination of individual identities to a collective identity.

Grievance theories have indicated participation in far-right extremist groups by those with a low level of education, low income, economic insecurity and a fear of individual and/or relative deprivation (Christie & Jahoda, 1954; Lipset, 1959; Runciman, 1966; Selznick & Stenberg, 1969). The social movement theory has criticised this tendency to emphasise the marginal, pathological and violent attributes of joiners. It assumes that activists in FRE movements

have incentives to participate, often comprising a combination of personal gains and political goals (Klandermans & Mayer, 2006).

Other researchers have indicated that there isn't a 'one explanation fits all', but have empirically verified different reasons and combinations of reasons (Bjørgo, 1997; Blee, 2002; Goodwin, 2010), trajectories (Linden & Klandermans, 2007; De Waele, 2012; Pilkington, 2016) and motives (Klandermans & Mayer 2006; Linden, 2009).

The existing body of literature on right-wing violence has been assessed as 'diverse, disorganised and discontinuous' (Ravndal, 2017, p. 10). The same qualification is applicable to literature regarding the process of joining FRE movements: dominant theories and ongoing theoretical debates are hard to find. Empirical research is insightful, but often lacks a theoretical framework (e.g. Blee, 2002).

This dissertation focuses on narrowing the gap between theory and empiricism. Based on existing literature and 36 life-history interviews with Dutch far-right extremists (active between 2015 and 2018), five conceptual dynamical models were derived which give an overview of five different paths into FRE movements. Although every life-history is unique, there are common denominators.

RESEARCH METHOD

By attending demonstrations and observing gatherings frequented by individuals belonging to the Dutch FRE landscape from 2015 onwards, a national network of far-right extremists could be mapped. In order to be a potential interviewee for this study, individuals had to meet a baseline with regard to FRE views. Based on existing literature on right-wing extremist and radical-right ideologies (Mudde, 1996; Carter, 2005; Mudde, 2006), a practical approach for setting the criteria was chosen. Potential interview candidates were qualified as far-right extremists if they were *striving for a homogenous cultural or ethnic society by calling for or aspiring to a severe restriction of civil liberties and/or civil rights of religious and/or ethnic minorities.* In order to avoid keyboard warriors and occasional demonstrators (who only demonstrate when something is happening in their hometown or neighbourhood), interviewees also had to show a willingness to leave their home and travel at least 30 kilometres to meet like-minded people.

Interviewees came from several groups, such as *Identitair Verzet* (the Dutch branch of the Identitarian Movement), *DTG* (a far-right protest group against asylum centres and mosques), *Erkenbrand* (an ethnic-nationalist study

group) and three smaller groups that cannot be named because interviewees will be traceable and lose their anonymity. There were also 'freelance extremists' who consciously decided to operate on a more ad-hoc basis after experiencing several fractures with far-right groups. These freelancers affiliate themselves with FRE groups, but do not subscribe to a particular group.

Altogether, this led to a sample of 36 interviewees (31 male, 5 female). The youngest interviewee was 18 years old, the oldest 59. The average age was 34. Educational levels differed from not finishing high school up to completion of university degrees.

Life history interviews

Life-history interviews offer interviewees the opportunity to provide detailed biographical information. Where possible, the information provided was verified through cross-referencing with the data provided by other individuals related to a particular network or group, by complementing life-history interviews with extensive field research and background checks, doing follow-up interviews and making comparisons between different interviews.

Although these stories are subjective, they offer unique insights that can help to interpret lived experiences (Reuter, 1938; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Elliott, 2005). Interviewees do not present their lives as a collection of events but embed lived experiences in a time frame and social context, which is helpful when analysing changes and developments from a longitudinal perspective. It offers interviewees the opportunity to share their own analysis and perspective, to reflect on their actions and show the time frame in which they acted, which gives the interview more historical depth. Or as Kathleen Blee stated on her interviews with women of the Ku Klux Klan: "Standard interviews are often unproductive, yielding little more than organisational slogans repeated as personal belief. (...). By beginning with the respondent's own life story rather than with questions of beliefs or organisational commitment, respondents are less likely to present group dogma as a personal sentiment (Blee, 1993)."

Blee and researchers such as Tore Bjørgo, Pete Simi and Matthew Goodwin have also demonstrated that is crucial to interview far-right extremists when gathering qualitative research data on what motivates them.

Analysis of data

For the interview and its analysis, the interview model and codebook of Klandermans & Mayer (2006) was used, since it has proven to be very complete. At the same time, it mapped a lot of variables that have not been taken into account in their research. For example, sometimes researchers conclude that being angry with the government precedes activism, but they do not mention if this is because of a lack of opportunities, experienced injustice or whether it has to do with anomia.

By using the codebook, interviews that were similar could be grouped together. However, Klandermans & Mayer use their codebook to distinguish motives (instrumental, identity, ideology), whereas many more variables could be determined. Therefore, the existing body of literature was reviewed, and variables were operationalised. Loosely based on the conceptual model of De Waele (2012), interviews were analysed again and the process of joining was broken down into 4 different elements: (1) starting position, (2) possible catalyst, (3) identity, (4) moral support. This offers a more systematic method of analysis and also provides more insight on how variables relate to each other.

Relevant for the (1) starting position were the person's socio-economic background, emotions (disappointment, anger, pride, etc.) and a potential striving for political participation. At the same time, this starting position does not explain why someone joins an FRE group, whilst others in the same starting position do not. That is why a (2) (possible) catalyst must be present which transforms the starting position into an (3) identity. The adjective 'possible' is used because this is still a conceptual model and the catalyst has not been verified by using a control group. As for identity, this indicates how someone sees themself, who belongs to their 'own' group, and how those are perceived who belong to other groups. Altogether, the starting position, (possible) catalyst and identity contribute to (4) moral support before joining. Three categories of support were found: moral support for FRE, a positive attitude towards racism and a positive attitude towards violence.

Besides these discernible variables, becoming and staying active within an FRE group is also a process of meaning-making. Drawing upon the work of Klandermans & Mayer (2006), these dynamic models were extended with three different motives: (1) instrumental motives, (2) identity motives, (3) ideological motives). All five different paths showed a different combination of motives in the process of becoming active and staying active.

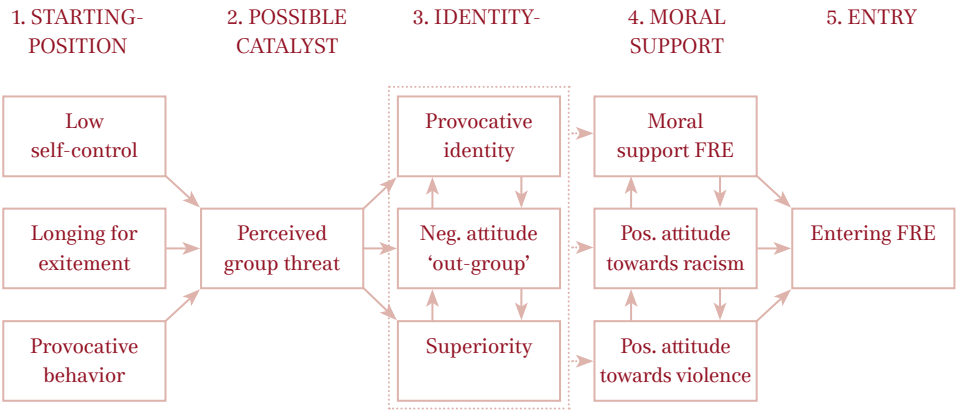
THRILL SEEKERS

Thrill seekers often start in a provocative violent and racist subculture early on. Violent clashes with rival groups are already being cultivated from a young age. These clashes are often with groups with members from a migrant background. Their (1) starting position is characterised by provocative behaviour, a longing for excitement and a low level of self-control. The possible catalyst (2) is a perceived group threat, stemming from a combination of violent clashes with other groups and an interest in either history or politics. This gives interviewees the feeling that there is a bigger battle going on that is related to what they encounter on a daily basis. This leads to an identity (3) in which interviewees take on a provocative identity, have a negative attitude towards the 'outgroup' and nurture feelings of superiority. When it comes to (4) moral support, before joining FRE groups, they nurture a moral support for FRE and have a positive attitude towards racism and violence.

The path of the Thrill Seekers is based on life-history interviews with 8 interviewees and shows many similarities with Billig's portrayal of the *Man of Violence* (1978) and Lindens *Revolutionary* (Linden & Klandermans, 2007; Linden, 2009). The violent lifestyle becomes a way of life and cultivates the us-against-them-narrative, which is a consequence of violent clashes with chosen opponents. Compared to the *Man of Violence*, the Thrill Seekers interviewed display the same kind of recklessness and hooliganism. Whereas Billig believes that the behaviour of the *Man of Violence* comes from the fact that his interviewees cannot express the deep love they feel for their country, the Thrill Seekers interviewed refer to low self-control, just as De Waele (2012) mentions in his research.

Most interviewees claim that they felt 'different' as a teenager and some felt unsafe, whether this was due to rival youth groups or an unstable situation at home (Wippermann et al., 2002; Kimmel, 2007; Pilkington, 2016). Therefore, the perceived group threat is often a matter of (personal) security. In the work of Bjørgo (2002), cultivating a provocative identity is also an important aspect of joining an FRE group, after which committing group violence becomes a way of life: 'Youth rebels go right.'

Conceptual model 1.1 Path of Thrill Seekers



When it comes to the motives for participation, which gives meaning to the process of joining, the Thrill Seekers interviewed mentioned an instrumental motive (creating an exciting lifestyle and a larger collective benefit from their efforts), as well as an identity motive (positive identity as a result of belonging to an 'in-group' and defending this group). After joining, they indicate an instrumental motive (striving for a 'white nation'), an identity motive (positive identity as a result of belonging to an 'in-group' and defending this group) and an ideological motive (creating a lifestyle based on ideology, passing on values and ideology to a new generation of activists).

POLITICAL SEEKERS

Political Seekers are often successful on a socio-economic level, socially committed and actively helping other people. They would like to address problems and summon politicians and administrators to bring a solution to the table. Often, they have tried this via local or national political parties and failed. After this, they became disillusioned with political options.

Their (1) starting position has three variables: an inclination towards authoritarianism, perceived injustice and political disillusionment. For Political Seekers, a perceived group threat is the (2) (possible) catalyst that transforms the starting position into an (3) identity, in which a nationalist identity is cultivated, a negative attitude towards the 'out-group' is harboured and

interviewees regard themselves as superior. When it comes to (4) moral support, the interviewees reject violence and are ambivalent toward racism, but they do show moral support for an FRE movement before joining.

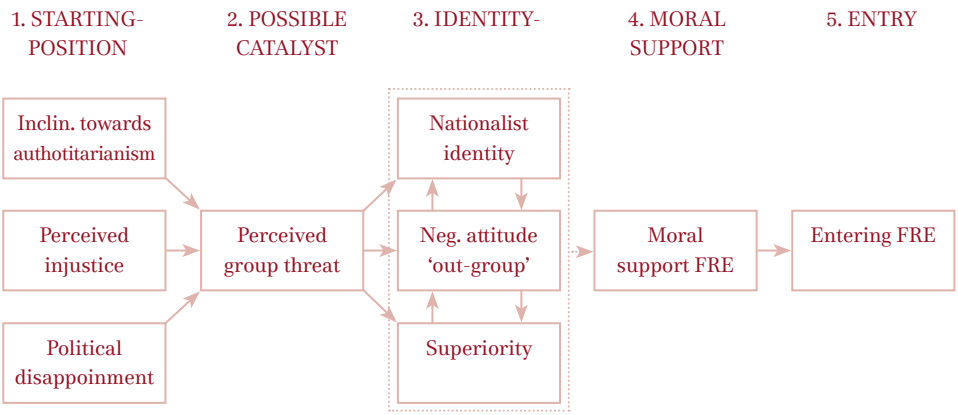
The path of Political Seekers was based on life-history interviews with 4 respondents. There is also a broad overlap with previous research. The combination of social involvement and nationalist pride is also prevalent in the joining process of the Political Wanderers in Linden's research (Linden & Klandermans, 2007; Linden, 2009). Unlike Linden's interviewees, respondents were not seeking the spotlight but were satisfied with a role in the background. Their activism is largely driven by certain political gains, just as social movement scholars have indicated before (Klandermans & Mayer, 2006). They are looking for new ways to mobilise others and establish collective action after experiencing political disillusionment.

Although not all Political Seekers interviewed had the authoritarian father Adorno et al. (1950) described, there are similarities with the archetype. Interviewees show attitudes that indicate an inclination towards authoritarianism, such as aspiring to a law-and-order-society with submission to authority. According to them, this can only be achieved by strict regulation of laws and obeying orders. They also want to protect society from external influences through collective compliance with traditional role patterns. Just like Billig's portrayal of the Authoritarian Man, Political Seekers are nostalgic for earlier times, when people still had a clear role and could fulfil their lives by working hard. This image shapes their normative framework on how they should live and how others should live.

The perceived group threat is above all a cultural and demographic threat for the interviewees. They strongly believe that the 'out-group' should not have the same access to resources as the people already living there. Anyone wanting to become a member of society has to first prove dedication and fight for their position. Political Seekers do not feel threatened at an individual level but they do worry about losing their status or socio-economic position (Lipset & Raab, 1977; Minkenberg, 2003).

Joining FRE groups following political disillusionment, is also something that came across in Goodwin's research on members of the BNP (Goodwin, 2010). And just like Bjørgo's 'national democrats', Political Seekers reject national socialism and neo-Nazism. If they do affiliate themselves with persons who are more extreme it is not because of a shared ideology but out of personal contact. After joining an FRE group, they often opt for a selective adoption of an FRE ideology, which is also the case for some respondents in Blee's research (Blee, 2002).

Conceptual model 1.2 Path of Political Seekers



When it comes to the process of meaning-making, several motives can be found that are used to explain why aspiring activists join the FRE movement and why they stay around. The joining process is explained by instrumental motives (doing something for society), as well as identity motives (stepping up for 'the Dutch people') and ideological motives (being patriotic). When reflecting on why they decided to stay active, they use a combination of instrumental motives (creating a broader support for their political views, helping FRE movements to formulate and spread their message), identity motives (stepping up for 'the Dutch people') and ideological motives (carrying out patriotism, translating this into nationalism).

JUSTICE SEEKERS

For Justice Seekers, joining FRE groups starts with anger towards the government after they (or the people they know) feel they have been duped by governmental policy or decisions. They come from a lower-class background and feel that people with migrant backgrounds are being favoured, e.g. when it comes to social housing. The (1) starting position of Justice Seekers has three elements: perceived injustice, anomia and an inclination towards authoritarianism. The (2) (possible) catalyst is also a perceived group threat, because they believe the government is not taking care of its own people. When it comes to (3) identity, this leads to taking on a nationalist identity

after which they see themselves as the designated person to step up for 'the people'. They also show a negative attitude towards the 'out-group' and regard themselves as superior. When it comes to (4) moral support, there are differences among interviewees. As for the female Justice Seekers interviewed (n=3), they show moral support for an FRE group. The male Justice Seekers interviewed (n=6) also show a positive attitude towards racism, and some (n=4) towards violence too.

This path is almost identical with the model of De Waele (2012), who also indicates a starting position with a combination of anomia, perceived injustice and authoritarianism, combined with a perceived group threat. According to De Waele, this leads to a strong nationalist (Flemish) identity, a negative attitude towards the 'out-group' and superiority. However, De Waele does not mention a possible positive attitude towards violence. And when it comes to how 'anomia' is defined, De Waele also takes social isolation into account, which is not the case for the Justice Seekers interviewed. They all state that they have a very active social life. Interviewees are attracted to FRE because they feel politically powerless and FRE groups put words to their anger and offer solutions at the same time. Based on the social movement theory (Klandermans & Mayer, 2006), interviewees act at an instrumental level: they become active because they want to change something for themselves or others.

When it comes to an inclination towards authoritarianism, there is a difference compared to Political Seekers' authoritarianism. Justice Seekers do not have the same successful socio-economic position as Political Seekers. Although they do have far-right extremist attitudes on topics such as immigration and integration, they have left-wing attitudes when it comes to economic matters. They claim governments need to distribute their resources equally to create a fair society. Justice Seekers work hard, pay taxes and want to contribute to society. At the same time, they feel unable to overcome poverty. This was also mentioned by Goodwin when looking at members of the BNP (Goodwin, 2010). The combination of an inclination towards authoritarianism, racial prejudices and an intolerant attitude towards non-likeminded persons (such as 'the elite') also overlaps with Lipset's *working-class authoritarianism* (Lipset, 1951; Lipset, 1959), but more research is required.

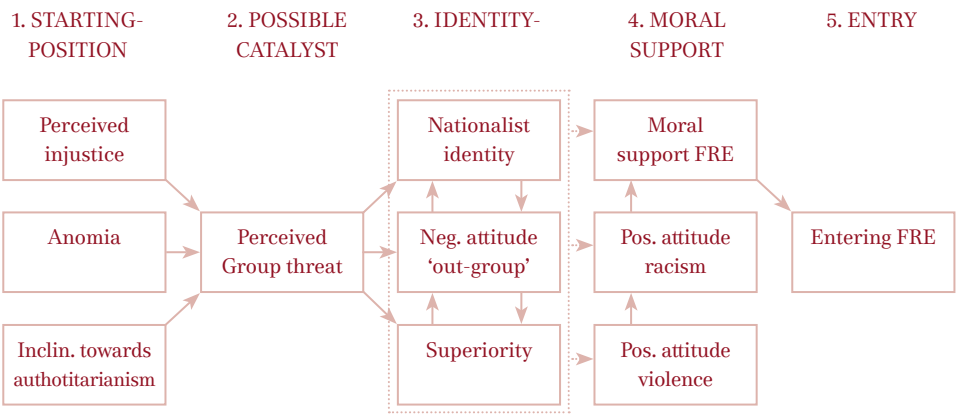
At the same time, the path of Justice Seekers has similarities with 'Converts' in Linden's research (Linden & Klandermans, 2007; Linden, 2009). However, an important difference is that all Linden's converts suffered from individual deprivation, whereas the Justice Seekers interviewed also claim they want to

step up for other people who are suffering (collective deprivation). This is also an important incentive in other research (e.g. Van den Bos et al., 2009).

The perceived group threat is not only a cultural and demographic threat, interviewees also worry about economic competition from migrants. Therefore, the possible catalyst also relates to grievance theories, e.g. the relative deprivation thesis and the modernisation losers thesis (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2006; Rydgren, 2007; Goodwin, 2010).

When it comes to perceived injustice, the female Justice Seekers interviewed (n=3) have had negative experiences with men from a migrant background, e.g. sexual assault in a public swimming pool. In the same way, Blee interviewed KKK women, who also described a moment of transformation after experiencing traumatising events (Blee, 2002). As a result, FRE groups are attractive because they are masculine and can offer protection. But Blee's interviewees regard themselves as victims, especially after taking on a subordinate role within the KKK. In this research, the female Justice Seekers interviewed took on an active role within an FRE group, which enabled them to transform victimhood into antagonism.

Conceptual model 1.3 Path of Justice Seekers



When explaining why they became active, justice seekers use a combination of instrumental motives (stepping in where the government fails), identity motives (stepping up for the 'hardworking Dutchman' who is being abandoned by the government) and ideological motives (being attracted by the homogenous

cultural- and/or ethnic ideology of FRE groups). Staying active is explained as a matter of instrumental motives (transforming dissatisfaction into concrete actions to improve situations for others), identity motives (stepping up for 'the hardworking Dutchman' who is being abandoned by the government, and sticking up for other FRE activists with whom they feel connected) and ideological motives (finding rational explanations for perceived dissatisfaction).

SOCIAL SEEKERS

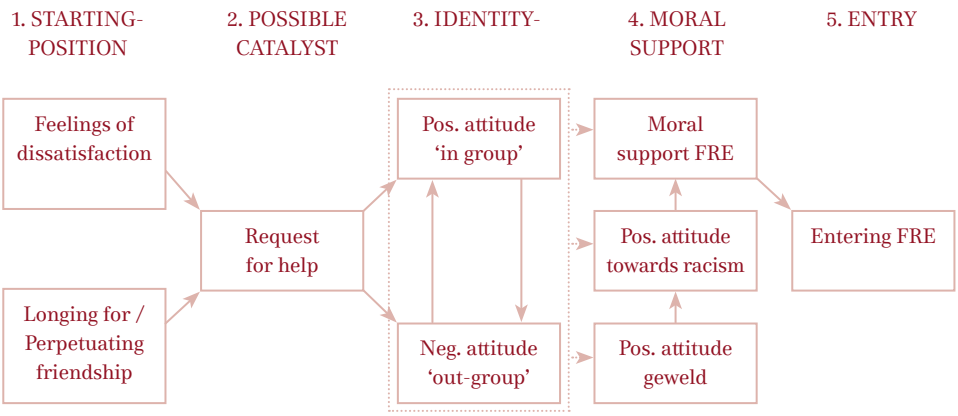
The path of Social Seekers starts with helping out a friend or someone they already know. They want to build a (friendly) relationship or perpetuate an existing relationship. Becoming active within an FRE group is something they would not do on their own. Their (1) starting position is characterised by (existing) feelings of dissatisfaction and searching for / perpetuating friendship. A request for help from someone they either already know or wish to get to know better is the (2) (possible) catalyst. This leads to an (3) identity in which interviewees have a positive attitude towards the 'in-group' and a negative attitude towards the 'out-group'. When it comes to (4) moral support, they show support for the person or people they already know, and they also have a positive attitude towards FRE. Whether they also have a positive attitude towards racism or violence depends on the person they are following into the FRE group. If the person they know has these positive attitudes, they will encompass it as well before becoming active. After joining an FRE group, Social Seekers continue to let other people decide what their role is.

The path of the Social Seekers is based on the life-histories of 5 interviewees and has similarities with Linden's Compliants (Linden & Klandermans, 2007; Linden, 2009). Compliants also followed someone they already knew into an FRE group, but most interviewees were partners of activists and scarcely regarded their activism as something positive (especially after experiencing stigmatisation). Some of Blee's interviewees (Blee, 2002) were also not content with their participation, but could not get out of it because they relied on the social network and protection their activism gave them. Interviewees in this research claim they did not feel any pressure to join or stay, and they think of their activism as something positive.

Seeking friendship or perpetuating an existing relationship, is also mentioned in the research of Bjørgo (Bjørgo, 2002). The Social Seekers interviewed do not have strong family ties and are looking for a substitute family.

Just like in Bjørgo's research, it is easy for them to become involved with FRE movements because groups are always looking for new members and embrace new recruits. Their desire for social connection can be explained by the social identity theory (Turner et al. 1987; Reynold et al., 2000; Postmes et al. 2006). They identify with their own group and take on a collective depersonalised identity that even makes them willing to subordinate their own will to the collective agenda (Galanter, 1999).

Conceptual Model 1.4 Path of Social Seekers



When it comes to motives for becoming and staying active, Social Seekers lack an ideological motive. Their motives for joining FRE groups are instrumental (starting or perpetuating a friendship) and identity (supporting someone they already know or would like to get to know better). The decision to stay active is based on an instrumental motive (sharing the goals of the FRE movement and the person they already know or wish to get to know better, and striving for these goals) and an identity motive (supporting someone they already know or would like to get to know better, and assisting the FRE group they subscribe to after joining).

IDEOLOGICAL SEEKERS

Ideological Seekers believe that they started to divide people in terms of tribes or races in their childhood. They claim that as a child, they were already racist and felt different from their parents and schoolteachers. However, most of them never thought they would subscribe to FRE, with the wrong kind of nationalism, stereotypical, too rigid and too many lowlifes. Ideological Seekers tend to search on the Internet for ideologies that support their views and look online for like-minded people with whom they can discuss and exchange ideas. This is how they became members of the so-called 'Alt Right'. They do not believe races or genders can be equal and believe every person should obey their place in society. At the same time, they regard themselves as part of a vanguard, which is why they spend a lot of time exercising and studying in order to become the best version of themselves.

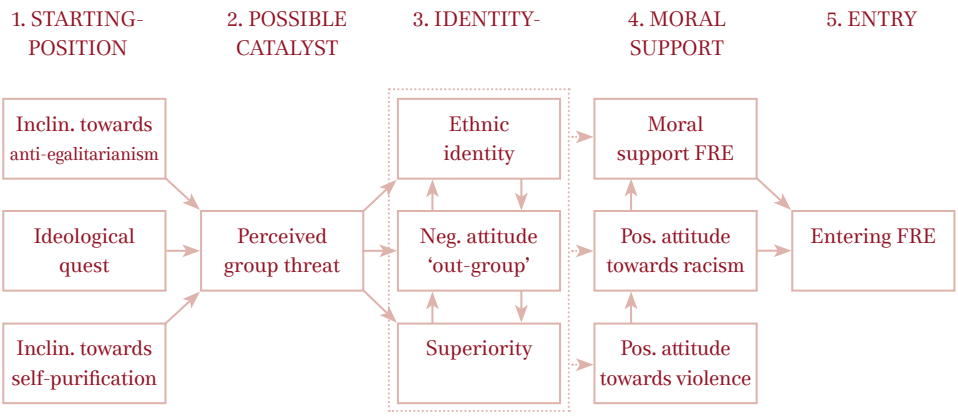
Their (1) starting position is characterised by an inclination towards anti-egalitarianism, an ideological quest and an inclination towards self-purification. A perceived group threat is the (2) (possible) catalyst. This transforms their starting position into an (3) identity in which they cultivate an ethnic identity, have a negative attitude towards the 'out-group' and regard themselves as superior. When it comes to (4) moral support, they have moral support for the FRE group before joining and a positive attitude towards racism. One individual also has a positive attitude towards violence.

Although Ideological Seekers definitely have an inclination towards authoritarianism (Adorno et al., 1950), this is mainly expressed in anti-egalitarianism. A society based on discipline and punishment is not enough for them, they are striving to restore an alleged natural order. The Ideological Seekers interviewed state that they already had these views before joining, but this has not been very prevalent in research on people that join FRE movements. The same goes for their inclination towards self-purification, which overlaps with research on Salafism and Jihadism, but seems a new concept for FRE members.

The perceived group threat is an ethnic threat. Ideological Seekers fear a so-called 'Great Replacement' as a consequence of lower birth-rates and migration. Their ethnocentrism corresponds with dividing the world into stereotyped categories, from which feelings of superiority and a negative attitude towards the 'out-group' become a logical consequence (Turner, 1975; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, Stets et al., 2000).

The path of Ideological Seekers is relatively new in research on FRE, which is partly to do with the fact that most of them operated online for a long time. They only became part of the mapped national Dutch network because of the establishment of the Dutch ethnic nationalist study group Erkenbrand. This study group provided an option to shift their activism from online to offline.

Conceptual Model 1.5 Path of Ideological Seekers



Ideological Seekers have a wide range of motives to explain their joining a group: an instrumental motive (challenging themselves intellectually and physically, brainstorming with ideologically like-minded people with regard to a larger battle and a potential response), identity motive (a strong identification with who belongs to the 'in-group', accompanied by the idea of a perceived group threat – e.g. 'The Great Replacement'), and an ideological motive (ideology as a tool to rationalise racist feelings, ideological confirmation of their world views, ideological quest). As for staying active, all three motives can be indicated. The instrumental motive (challenging themselves intellectually and physically, brainstorming with ideologically like-minded people with regard to a larger battle and a potential response), identity motive (a strong identification with who belongs to the 'in-group', accompanied by the idea of a perceived group threat – e.g. 'The Great Replacement'), and an ideological motive (creating a lifestyle based on ideology, in which a select group of people philosophise on how to save 'the people', ideological self-development) are present.

CONCLUSION

Although the four prominent theories that have sought to explain why people become involved in FRE (the Authoritarian Personality, social identity theory, grievance theories and the social movement theory) have shortcomings, the observations on which these theories were based are still valid.

Model 1.6 Perceived variables from existing theories explaining joining FRE groups

	STARTING POSITION	(POSSIBLE CATALYST)	IDENTITY
AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY	– Tendency towards authoritarianism – Anti-egalitarianism	(none)	– Feelings of superiority (as a result of one's own attitudes)
SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY	– Provocative behaviour – Seeking friendship or perpetuating an existing friendship – Perceived injustice (towards the 'in-group')	– Perceived group threat – Request for help from an acquaintance	– Adopting group identity – Positive attitude to 'in-group' – Negative attitude to 'out-group' – Feelings of superiority (as a result of adopting a group identity)
GRIEVANCE THEORIES	– Anomia – Perceived injustice and feelings of dissatisfaction (as a result of deprivation)	(none)	(none)
SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY	– Political disillusionment – Perceived injustice and feelings of dissatisfaction (which result in instrumental actions)	– Request for help from an acquaintance	– Adopting an activist identity

There are FRE activists who show an inclination towards authoritarianism, there are activists who perceive a group threat, there are activists who fear they will suffer as a result of economic competition from migrants and there are activists who call for political changes. These theories in themselves are not an all-encompassing explanation. However, when they are regarded as complementary, especially when enhanced by insights from leading empirical research, a structural contribution can be made with regard to answering the question as to why people become active within FRE movements. Only then can researchers systematically investigate and back up plausible hypotheses with evidence.