Social alienation as a bridge between unemployment and support for political violence

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Abstract

From a peacebuilding perspective, understanding the factors that lead to radicalization is the first step in preventing political violence, resisting its effects, and building solid pillars for peace. Along these lines, this research aims to explore the relationship between economic factors and radicalization, particularly between unemployment and support for political violence. As previous research has shown contradictory results, we suggest the need to explore the psychological factors that mediate the relationship between unemployment and support for political violence. Particularly, we suggest social alienation and moral disengagement. Therefore, we hypothesize that (H1) the unemployed will present greater social alienation, (H2) a greater sense of social alienation will be associated with greater support for political violence, and the relationship between employment status and political violence will be mediated by (H3) social alienation and (H4) moral disengagement. A study was conducted to test these hypotheses using a sample of employed ($N = 281$) and unemployed ($N = 285$) Spanish participants in Southern Spain. Participants completed a paper questionnaire in which they reported their employment status, social alienation, moral disengagement, and support for political violence. The results showed that the hypotheses were fulfilled and that social alienation and moral disengagement mediated the relationship between unemployment and political violence. According to these results, unemployment may encourage support for violence for political purposes. For this to be the case, perceptions of rejection must be considered. This underscores the need for interventions aimed at the welfare of the unemployed as well as their integration into society.

Keywords: Unemployment; Social alienation; Political violence; Significant quest theory

Public impact statement: This study suggests that the situation of unemployment can foster support for political violence when this situation gives rise to feelings of alienation. This

Social alienation and unemployment

underscores the need for interventions aimed at the welfare of the unemployed and their

integration into society.

In recent decades, the psychological perspective on human security has gained sufficient weight to become a new field of study (Hodgetts et al., 2022). While this field integrates different dimensions, radicalization and terrorism stand out given their potential to destabilize societies. Efforts have therefore focused on preventing these phenomena in what has come to be known as the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) (Koehler & Fiebig, 2019). From a peacebuilding perspective, a better understanding of risk factors is proposed to build capacity and empower citizens to deal with these factors (Abu-Nimer, 2018; Holmes, 2017; John, 2021). However, the understanding of risk factors has certain limitations, given the small number of empirical research studying the large number of risk factors that have been proposed (Wolfowicz et al., 2021).

In the present study, we explore one of the most controversial relationships: the link between economic factors and radicalization processes. Different investigations have highlighted the relevance of studying different economic factors, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, inflation, economic growth, and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, and their impact on radicalization and terrorism. The results show that this relationship is not clear, especially when participation in terrorist acts or organizations is considered a dependent variable (Boyd, 2016; Gelfand et al., 2013; Hunter & Biglaiser, 2020; Krueger & Malečková, 2003). Therefore, it has been proposed to move away from the structural perspective and focus on the individual level and examine psychological mechanisms to better understand the impact of economic factors on this phenomenon (Franc & Pavlović, 2021; Stern, 2016).

Under these precepts, the present study will focus on exploring the relationship between one of these economic factors, i.e., unemployment, and its relationship with the development of support for political violence. It is also intended to demonstrate that there are psychological factors contributing to the existence of radical attitudes in situations of unemployment, particularly social alienation and moral disengagement.

Unemployment and radicalization

Radicalization is understood as the "social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist political or religious ideology" (Horgan, 2009, p. 152). Therefore, radicalization is a factor that can contribute to the exercise of political violence or even participation in terrorist activities. However, in most cases, radicalization does not lead to violence (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand the mechanisms that foster radicalization as a first step in focusing preventive efforts on these mechanisms.

Several studies have focused on elucidating the relationship between unemployment and different factors related to radicalization and terrorism. Firstly, we found studies that analyzed the relationship between unemployment and the number of terrorist attacks and victims of these attacks. The outcomes of these studies do not appear to be conclusive, due to the diversity of the results. Some studies have found a significant relationship between unemployment and the number of terrorist attacks, with data from Israel and Lebanon (Benmelech et al., 2012; Krueger & Malečková, 2003); others have found no relationship, with data from Egypt, Turkey, and the United States (Akyuz & Armstrong, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2014; Piazza, 2017); while others have found significant relationships for some samples but not in others, with data from different countries around the world (Caruso & Schneider, 2011; Enders et al., 2016). Lastly, other researchers have found a relationship between unemployment and lower use of violence using data from Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines (Berman et al., 2011). Nonetheless, it has been highlighted that economic discrimination of minority groups, which integrates unemployment, appears to be a predictor of terrorist attacks, using data from 172 countries (Piazza, 2011). Unemployment is probably neither necessary nor sufficient for terrorism, and this relationship may depend on context and individual differences (Franc & Pavlović, 2021).

Secondly, we found studies that have analyzed the relationship between unemployment and membership in terrorist groups. For instance, Desmarais et al. (2017) found a relationship between employment and membership in terrorist organizations using a systematic review. Nonetheless, these authors concluded that the evidence was weak and that other individual and contextual factors had to be considered. In turn, Gouda and Marktanner (2019) found that youth unemployment, as opposed to overall unemployment, was a significant determinant of foreign fighters' tendency to join the Islamic State, using data from 81 countries. Similar relationships have been found in other countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Nigeria, and Pakistan (Bergema & van San, 2019; Fair, 2007; Ljujic et al., 2017; Onuoha, 2014; Reynolds & Hafez, 2019).

Thirdly, in relation to radical attitudes, the results were diverse. Some studies have found significant relationships between unemployment and outcomes such as support for suicide terrorism using samples from France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Berger, 2016), fundamentalist beliefs with samples from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Delia Deckard & Jacobson, 2015; Koopmans, 2015), and radical attitudes with a sample from Israel (Pedahzur & Canetti-Nisim, 2004); however, other studies found that these relationships were not significant in samples from Germany and the United Kingdom (Bhui et al., 2014; Decker et al., 2013). Providing some more clarity, Wolfowicz et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis, where they found that unemployment was a putative risk factor for developing radical attitudes. Although the authors found that unemployment had a small impact, another review suggested that it is related to other factors that have a stronger relationship with radicalization, such as social exclusion (Wolfowicz et al., 2022). In addition, employment has also been a common strategy in prevention and

deradicalization/disengagement programs (Lobato & García-Coll, 2022; Wolfowicz et al., 2022).

Considered together, this evidence seems to indicate that the relationship between unemployment and political violence relies more on psychological interpretations of their specific situation than on the objective economic situation (Franc & Pavlović, 2021). In this vein, unemployment is one of the factors with the greatest impact on individuals' perceptions. It is consistently associated with poorer mental health and social well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Mousteri et al., 2018). In turn, unemployment has been claimed to be a motive for youth to join terrorist groups and support political violence (Bullock, 2020; Reiter, 2021; Schmid, 2013). Walker and Mann (1987) conducted a study in Australia on unemployed people and found that those who perceived greater relative deprivation were radical in their protest orientation. This seems to indicate that it is not only the condition of unemployment but also the psychological interpretation of this condition which shows a stronger relationship with radicalization. However, to our knowledge, this is the only individual-level study conducted to assess the impact of unemployment on support for political violence taking into account other psychological variables. Moreover, in that study, the total sample was unemployed, which does not allow testing whether the effects were different for employed people. Therefore, more work is needed to elucidate this relationship, as well as possible mediator factors (Khalil, 2014).

Unemployment as a loss of significance

One variable that could mediate this relationship is the loss of significance, which could be a necessary factor in connecting unemployment with support for political violence. The significant quest theory (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2013, 2015) proposes that the main motivational force leading to violent radicalization is the quest for personal significance—a passionate need to count, to be someone, to be recognized, to matter. Three types of events

can trigger a significant quest: (1) the loss of significance, (2) a threat to one's significance, and (3) the opportunity to gain considerable significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Among these, one of the main triggers is the loss of significance—any instance that causes an individual to feel insignificant, such as failure in an important pursuit or a severe humiliation (Webber et al., 2018; Webber & Kruglanski, 2017).

In fact, from this analytical framework, it has been mentioned that the loss of employment is a grievance that could lead to the loss of significance and thus trigger a significance quest (Bélanger, 2018). Moreover, the loss of significance has been associated with a collectivist shift—a greater orientation towards one's group and its norms and values (Kruglanski et al., 2014). In this vein, Jasko et al. (2017) performed a multivariate analysis of data from the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) and found that, when individuals were unemployed, they were more likely to turn into a violent narrative to pursue their ideological goals.

Loss of significance has been related to experiences such as humiliation (Kruglanski et al., 2015), perceived oppression (Lobato et al., 2018; Lobato, Moya, et al., 2020), anomie (Troian et al., 2019), incompetence (Dugas et al., 2016), social alienation (Bélanger, Moyano, et al., 2019), and uncertainty (Webber et al., 2018). However, from our perspective, social alienation appears to have the strongest relationship with unemployment, as suggested by Sirgy et al. (2017). Given that social alienation represents a feeling of rejection, we believe that unemployment will foster this feeling (Bäck et al., 2018).

Social alienation and support for political violence

Social alienation is considered a state of estrangement and detachment from society (Bélanger, Moyano, et al., 2019). This feeling usually undermines the need to adhere to social norms and moral standards. Therefore, several authors have considered social alienation as a triggering or facilitating factor of radicalization (Ganor, 2011; Kruglanski et al., 2008;

Pressman, 2009; Schmid, 2013; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Wiktorowicz, 2004). However, the empirical evidence of this relationship is limited. Most empirical studies have examined marginalization (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015). For example, Moyano et al. (2020) considered the lack of job training as a dimension of social exclusion, which is considered a risk factor for radicalization.

Despite this limitation, we found two recent studies examining the relationship between social alienation and political violence. Firstly, Bélanger, Moyano, et al. (2019) found evidence of a link between social alienation and political violence through four studies with correlational and experimental designs. Secondly, Troian et al. (2019) also conducted different studies in which they found that social alienation, although conceptualized as a factor of anomie, mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination or rejection and support for political violence. Considered together, both investigations provide evidence to hypothesize a relationship between feelings of social alienation and support for political violence.

Moral disengagement and support for political violence

The use of violence is generally morally prohibited. For an individual to use violence in a premeditated manner, there must be a moral justification that allows it. According to Bandura (1999), people engage in many cognitive maneuvers to proceed with unethical behaviors, such as violence, without self-recrimination, which has been termed moral disengagement. In this vein, it has been found that, when people can successfully justify aggression (moral disengagement), their self-concept is less likely to be threatened, even if they express support for activities that may harm or even kill other human beings (Aquino et al., 2007).

In the case of radicalization, moral disengagement is one of the most widely agreed risk factors. The process of moral disengagement allows extremists to commit acts of

violence by blurring personal responsibility, dehumanizing victims, minimizing

consequences, and using language to rationalize their actions. In a meta-analysis, Wolfowicz

et al. (2021) found that the factors associated with moral disengagement were among the risk

factors with the greatest impact. Moreover, extremists who do not employ moral

disengagement techniques are unable to justify the use of violence against their targets (Simi

& Windisch, 2020). Therefore, the weakening of societal social norms may generate

adherence to the social norms of other groups, which may promote the use of violence.

Providing some evidence, Bélanger, Schumpe, et al. (2019) found that moral disengagement

mediated the relationship between obsessive passion for a cause and intentions to use violent

behavior. Similarly, Bélanger, Moyano, et al. (2019) found that moral disengagement also

mediates the relationship between social alienation and support for political violence. These

results seem to indicate that social alienation may promote moral disengagement, which, in

turn, explains the support for political violence. However, there is little evidence supporting

the relationship between unemployment status and moral disengagement.

The present research

Based on previous assumptions and evidence, we propose that being unemployed will

increase the perception of social alienation and moral disengagement, leading to greater

support for political violence. We then hypothesize that (H1) the unemployed (vs. employed)

will present greater social alienation; (H2) a greater sense of social alienation will be

associated with greater support for political violence; and (H3) the relationship between

employment status and political violence will be mediated by social alienation. In addition,

moral disengagement, a relevant mechanism for people adhering to violence (Kruglanski et

al., 2014), was assessed to replicate its relationship with social alienation. Based on previous

evidence, moral disengagement mediates the relationship between social alienation and

support for political violence (Bélanger, Moyano, et al., 2019), which we aimed to replicate in

this research. However, according to the evidence presented, unemployment should not by itself lead to moral disengagement, but through the feeling of alienation. Thus, we hypothesize that (H4) moral disengagement will be reinforced by social alienation (and not by unemployment) as a second mediator in the previously proposed mediating effect of social alienation.

Method

Participants and procedure. The sample was recruited using the snowball sampling technique. Students from the same faculty of a university located in the south of Spain administered the questionnaire to their acquaintances in person using paper questionnaires during the first semester of 2016. A total of 566 participants (298 women; $M_{age} = 36.22$, $SD = 12.79$) were recruited after excluding students, housewives, and retirees. Regarding education level, 18.2% had primary education, 18.6% had secondary education, 11.1% had first-degree Vocational Education and Training, 12.7% had second-degree Vocational Education and Training, 12.9% had high school education, and 26.5% had university education. Half of the participants reported to be employed ($N = 281$; 134 women; $M_{age} = 38.12$, $SD = 12.32$), whereas the other half reported to be unemployed ($N = 285$; 164 women; $M_{age} = 34.34$, $SD = 12.99$). A total of 87.5% resided in the same province where the study was conducted; the remaining 14.3% resided in 14 different provinces. A total of 58.8% lived in cities, whereas 41.2% lived in rural areas. Regarding the employment situation in Spain, in the year that the data were collected, the percentage of unemployed people was 18.6%, especially among women (20.2%) and those under 25 years of age (42.4%; INE, n.d.). Nevertheless, these data were part of a downward trend after the 2008 crisis, with the previous year closing at a 20.8% unemployment rate. All participants provided their informed consent before completing the questionnaire and received debriefing upon completion. A post-hoc sensitivity analysis was performed using Monte Carlo power analysis for indirect effects (Schoemann et al., 2017).

Considering the sample size (N = 566) and α = .05, the power reached was .88. This implies that our sample is sufficient to detect a small-medium effect size.

Measures. *Employment status* was assessed by asking participants about their current employment status: employed, unemployed, student, housewife, or retired; those who chose different options (i.e., student, housewife, or retired) were removed from the sample, and the rest of the answers were dummy coded (-1 employed; 1: unemployed). *Social alienation*, operationalized as a feeling of detachment from Spanish society, was measured using nine items taken from the scale developed by Bélanger, Moyano, et al. (2019) (e.g., "I feel like a stranger in Spanish society" and "I keep myself apart from Spanish society due to my beliefs") (α = .69). The items were answered on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 6 (fully agree). *Moral disengagement* was measured with a short 7-item version of Bandura et al.'s (1996) scale, previously used by Bélanger, Schumpe, et al. (2019) (e.g., "Some people deserve to be treated like animals" and "Some people have to be treated roughly because they lack feelings that can be hurt") (α = .80). The items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 7 (fully agree). *Support for political violence* was measured using eight items taken from the belief towards violence scale developed by Bélanger, Moyano, et al. (2019) (i.e., "It is permissible to damage public property (e.g., bridges, government buildings) if it means people will listen," "I would burn a residential building if it helps a cause that I think is just," "Sometimes the only way to gain attention to a just cause is to damage property," "Sometimes, the death of civilians is necessary for social change," "To achieve political change, violence towards military personnel is sometimes needed," "To achieve political change, violence towards police officers is sometimes needed," "Violence is necessary for social change," and "I am prepared to use violence in support of my beliefs and values") (α = .88). The items were answered on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (fully disagree) to 6 (fully agree). The following

sociodemographic variables were also collected: gender (-1 = female; 1 = male), age, education, area (-1 = rural; 1= urban), and province (-1 = other; 1 = Córdoba).

Results

Firstly, we calculated the mean differences between employed and unemployed individuals using Student's t-test. As shown in Table 1, significant differences were found only in social alienation. Those who were unemployed presented higher scores ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.83$) than those who were employed ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.81$). The Pearson's bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics for the remaining variables are shown in Table 2.

[Insert Table 1]

[Insert Table 2]

Subsequently, we used the PROCESS macro to conduct a mediation model (Hayes, 2018; Model 6) with employment as a predictor, social alienation and moral disengagement as serial mediators, and support for political violence as the outcome variable. In addition, gender, age, education, area, and province were included as covariates. The 95% confidence intervals of the indirect effects were obtained using 10,000 bootstrap resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The results of the mediation analysis showed a significant indirect total effect, $b = .04$, 95% CI [.01; .07] (see Figure 1). In particular, the indirect effects through social alienation ($b = .03$, 95% CI [.01; .06]) and social alienation and moral disengagement ($b = .01$, 95% CI [.001; .01]) were significant, while the indirect effect through moral disengagement ($b = .001$, 95% CI [-.02; .02]) was not significant. In contrast, the direct ($b = -.04$, $SE = .03$, $p = .236$, 95% CI [.03; -.05]) and total effects ($b = .001$, $SE = .04$, $p = .989$, 95% CI [-.07; .07]) were not significant.

Regarding the effects of sociodemographic variables, gender only showed a significant effect on support for political violence ($b = .10$, $SE = .03$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [.03; .16]). Age showed a significant effect on social alienation ($b = -.01$, $SE = .003$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.02; -

.01]), moral disengagement (b = -.02, SE = .004, p < .001, 95% CI [-.02; -.01]), and support

for political violence (b = -.01, SE = .003, p = .019, 95% CI [-.01; -.001]). Education only

showed a significant effect on moral disengagement (b = -.07, SE = .03, p = .010, 95% CI [-

.13; -.02]). The area had a significant effect on social alienation (b = .08, SE = .04, p = .023,

95% CI [.01; .15]), moral disengagement (b = -.12, SE = .05, p = .024, 95% CI [-.22; -.02]),

and support for political violence (b = .10, SE = .03, p = .002, 95% CI [.04; .17]). Finally, the

province showed a significant effect on social alienation (b = -.10, SE = .05, p = .043, 95% CI

[-.20; -.003]) and support for political violence (b = .15, SE = .05, p < .001, 95% CI [.06;

.24]).

[Insert Figure 1]

Discussion

From a peacebuilding perspective, it is necessary to develop more resilient and

inclusive societies. To accomplish this task, the first step is to identify the risk factors that

may facilitate support for political violence (Holmes, 2017). Contributing to this task, the

present study focuses on the relationship between the economy, particularly unemployment,

and radicalization. Unemployment is a major social problem, and its consequences range from

deterioration of mental health to impoverishment of social welfare (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005;

Mousteri et al., 2018). However, the relationship between unemployment and radicalization

remains controversial and it has been proposed that this relationship depends on

psychological variables. Based on this premise, we conducted a study to assess the role of

social alienation and moral disengagement in the relationship between unemployment and

political violence support. We hypothesized that (H1) unemployed (vs. employed) people will

be further socially alienated; (H2) the sense of social alienation will be associated with greater

support for political violence; (H3) the relationship between employment status and political

violence will be mediated by social alienation; and (H4) moral disengagement will be

reinforced by alienation as a second mediator in the relationship between employment status and political violence.

The results confirmed that the hypotheses were fulfilled. Those who were not employed reported greater feelings of social alienation than those who were employed, indicating a greater disconnection from societal social norms. This result is in line with the proposition that the economic system is a social structural condition that generates alienation (Lystad, 1972). Particularly, being unemployed is another alienation-producing social structural condition related to work. The results also showed that social alienation is related to moral disengagement and support for political violence. This result replicates and adds value to the study of Bélanger, Moyano, et al. (2019), as the same patterns were confirmed with a different sample.

On the other hand, social alienation mediated the relationship between employment status and support for political violence. In other words, unemployed people showed higher feelings of alienation, which fostered support for the use of political violence. This result challenges the evidence that establishes a non-existent relationship between economics and radicalization (Bhui et al., 2014; Decker et al., 2013). According to our results, the economy and, more specifically, unemployment may encourage the support of violence for political purposes, although, for this to be the case, perceptions related to rejection must be involved (Bäck et al., 2018). Supporting this idea, social alienation and moral disengagement mediate the relationship between unemployment and support for political violence. However, moral disengagement did not have any relationship with employment status. Unemployment by itself generated neither moral disengagement nor support for political violence. Thus, we conclude that a relationship between the economy and radicalization exists at the individual level when unemployment gives rise to feelings of alienation and rejection.

Regarding sociodemographic variables, being male was associated with greater support for political violence, in line with the findings of a previous meta-analysis (Wolfowicz et al., 2021). In addition, younger age was associated with greater social alienation, moral disengagement, and support for political violence, as seen in the findings of the mentioned meta-analysis (Wolfowicz et al., 2021). In turn, higher education was only associated with less moral disengagement. This relationship replicates previous results, which found that individuals with a lower education level were more inclined to disengage from moral sanctions than those with more education (McAlister et al., 2006). Residing in an urban environment, as opposed to a rural one, was associated with greater social alienation and support for political violence, although also with less moral disengagement. This is an interesting finding that could show that integration or attachment to national identity is more successful in rural settings; however, the literature is limited, and future studies should test this hypothesis (Pisoui & Ahmed, 2016). Finally, participants from the province of Córdoba showed less social alienation and greater support for political violence than those residing in other provinces.

From a theoretical point of view, this study supports the role of the loss of significance as a contributing factor to radicalization processes. Social alienation resulting from unemployment is another factor that leads to a loss of significance and deterioration of the bond with societal social norms, with the subsequent significant quest (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2013, 2015). Consequently, unemployment and, more importantly, the attitudes derived from it, should be considered a potential trigger in radicalization processes. This research also advances Jasko et al.'s (2017) research by focusing on the role of psychological factors that mediate unemployment and radicalization. In contrast to other postulates that focus on the onset of radicalization of social bonds, such as the devoted actor model (Gómez et al., 2017), these results imply that different factors and mechanisms may be involved in these processes,

resulting in the elucidation of different pathways (Khalil et al., 2019; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008), which does not eliminate the possibility that such social ties may be formed at later stages. However, it could also be that this disengagement from national identity, accompanied by feelings of alienation, encourages identification with other groups with totalitarian ideologies (Hogg, 2014).

In the applied field, radicalization undermines peacebuilding, and it is necessary to cut these processes at the root. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the factors that may facilitate support for political violence to focus efforts on its prevention or mitigation. According to our results, social alienation resulting from unemployment is a risk factor that must be addressed to curb the radicalization process. This underscores the need for interventions aimed at the welfare of the unemployed and their integration into society. Interventions should be based on aspects of social relationships, such as support groups. As research has shown, the alienation derived from unemployment could favor the inclusion of these people in extremist groups (Jasko et al., 2020; Lobato, Moyano, et al., 2020; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to generate a support network for the unemployed to promote their integration and thus promote more peaceful and just societies.

This study has some limitations that must be made explicit. Firstly, given that the employed and unemployed groups were natural, outside the control of the researchers, it cannot be considered a manipulation, and consequently, the proposed directionality and causality are more in line with theoretical frameworks than evidence. The possibility that feelings of social alienation give rise to a situation of unemployment is an alternative that should be tested in the future. Secondly, we only assessed employment status. Other characteristics of the unemployed, such as duration, age, future prospects, and having or not having a family, could play an essential role in feelings of alienation. Likewise, certain jobs have been associated with alienation, such as white-collar workers, professionals carrying out

new social roles, businessmen abroad, and people who see little hope of advancement (Lystad, 1972). Therefore, job satisfaction could also play an important role in social alienation. Whether alienation also leads in these cases to moral disengagement and support for political violence seems plausible but remains to be demonstrated. Along the same lines, it has not been demonstrated whether the effects found are contextual to the population surveyed or may depend on other factors, such as the level of social inequality and its perception (Sánchez-Rodríguez & Moreno-Bella, 2022). Understanding unemployment or attributions of its causes (Sainz et al., 2022) could play an important role. Thirdly, the study assesses disidentification with Spain, although it does not assess identification with other smaller groups, which could be the source of positive attitudes towards the use of political violence (Hogg, 2014). Future studies should consider identification with other groups, particularly those whose social norms are favorable to the use of this type of violence.

To conclude, a loss of significance—the need to stand out and feel important—is associated with social markers such as employment status. A loss of this status, such as being unemployed, can generate feelings of estrangement and detachment from society, which, in turn, may activate psychological mechanisms that facilitate support for violence in order to achieve political objectives, resulting in greater support for these acts and, in the worst case, the use of violence itself.

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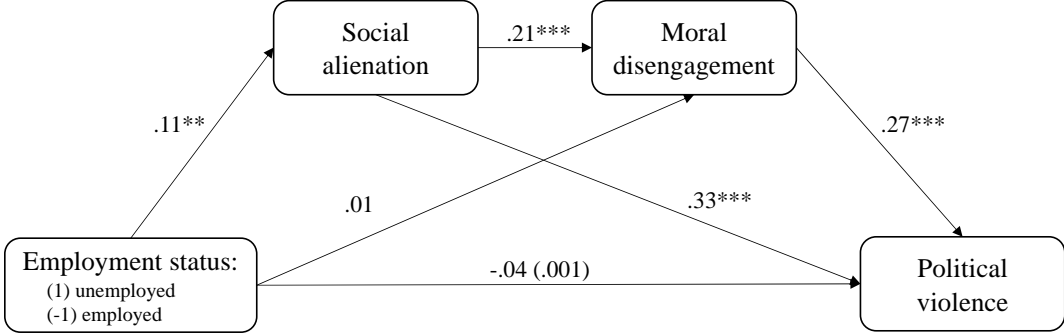
Figure 1

Results of the mediation analysis

Note: Standardized coefficients are presented; Direct effects are presented first, followed by total effects in parentheses; *p* < .05; **p* < .01; ***p* < .001.

Social alienation and unemployment

Table 1

Differences in means in all variables according to employment

	Employed *M* (*SD*)	Unemployed *M* (*SD*)	*t*	*p*	*d*
Social alienation	2.69 (0.81)	2.90 (0.83)	3.16	.002	.26
Moral disengagement	3.12 (1.23)	3.21 (1.24)	0.92	.359	.07
Political violence	1.53 (0.82)	1.60 (0.88)	0.89	.373	.08

Social alienation and unemployment

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and Pearson's bivariate correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	*M*	*SD*
1. Gender	–								-.04	1.00
2. Age	.11*	–							36.22	12.79
3. Education	-.08	-.22***	–						3.63	1.88
4. Area	.03	.01	.24***	–					0.18	0.99
5. Province	-.05	-.04	-.06	-.06	–				0.71	0.70
6. Employment status	-.11**	-.15***	.01	.02	.19***	–			0.01	1.00
7. Social alienation	-.03	-.15***	-.02	.08	-.06	.13**	–		2.80	0.82
8. Moral disengagement	.06	-.17***	-.10*	-.10*	-.05	.04	.23***	–	3.16	1.24
9. Political violence	.13**	-.19***	-.03	.10*	.08	.04	.40***	.35***	1.57	0.85

Note: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.