

## TAKING THE CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANT THESIS ACROSS THE ATLANTIC. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VIOLENCE, RELIGION AND STIMULANTS USE IN RURAL NETHERLANDS

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*Building upon the Southern culture of violence research tradition, this article inquires the association between rural violence and Conservative Protestantism in the Dutch context. Based on data of 8,106 individuals, it was found that young rural Conservative Protestants living in villages were more likely to report that they had committed violence, as compared to their fellow believers living in urbanized areas. Furthermore, it turned out that the association between alcohol consumption and violence is stronger among this category of religious rural youth. Finally, this study demonstrates that, contrary to the prevailing notion of the idyllic rural, the violence rates between young Dutch rural dwellers and their peers living in the rest of the country are virtually similar.*

Keywords: rural violence, violence, alcohol, religion, rural criminology, rural sociology

### Introduction

Articles on rural violence or crime usually start with the assertion that the topic of interest has not yet attracted much scientific attention (see for instance Swanson 1981; and more recently Cebulak 2004; Carrington and Scott 2008). However, such statements are no longer entirely justified. In fact, various criminological approaches can be distinguished in this domain. One prolific branch is grounded on social disorganization theory (Petee and Kowalski 1993; Osgood and Chambers 2000; Barnett and Mencken 2002; Bouffard and Muftic 2006; Li 2011; Wells and Weisheit 2012; see for critiques and proposals for improvement Kaylen and Pridemore 2011; 2012; 2013). This theory says that the combined effects of economic deprivation, ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility and single parent families decrease a community's ability to exert informal social control over public space, which eventually may result in rising violence rates. Lee and collaborators have proposed a community approach (Lee *et al.* 2003; Lee 2008). Somewhat similar to social disorganization theory, this perspective relates the institutional—economic, social, religious and political—viability of rural communities to violent crime patterns. As both the social disorganization and the community approaches originate from early research in cities (Shaw and McKay 1942; Bursik and Webb 1982), an urban bias may hide the distinctive features of rural violence in these perspectives. Alternative approaches give more weight to the role of culture. A classic notion in this respect is the 'Southern culture of violence', which has inspired research into the role of honour and religion to explain the relatively high levels of violence in rural southern states of the United States (Gastil 1971; Ellison 1991; Nisbett and Cohen 1996; Ellison

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*et al.* 2003; Lee 2006; Lee *et al.* 2007; Lee and Ousey 2011). Australian authors, notably Carrington and colleagues (Hogg and Carrington 2003; Carrington and Scott 2008; Carrington *et al.* 2013), relate the violence of rural Australian men against themselves, their intimates and other men to their failure to fulfil cultural expectations of masculinity in times of changing socio-economic conditions in rural areas. Another branch of studies adapts a similar perspective to explain the violent abuse of rural women (Websdale 1995; 1998; DeKeseredy and Joseph 2006; DeKeseredy *et al.* 2007).

Despite the work that has been done in this area, the idea that violence occurs in big cities primarily is still ‘an article of faith in much criminological and social scientific inquiry’ (Carrington and Scott 2008: 644). Similarly, Lee (2006: 309) critiques the ‘myopic and nearly exclusive focus’ on crime in metropolitan areas (see also Smith 2012). While the ideology of the idyllic rural may want lay persons, policy makers and also social scientists to believe that violent crime rates are much lower or even nearly absent in rural areas, we should not take this for granted (Jones 2012).

This article aims to contribute to a more balanced view. Moreover, the goal is to put rural violence and its relationships with religion and stimulants consumption on the criminological agenda. While the analyses presented here rely on data that were not originally produced for the purpose of this paper and are thus inherently limited, they do show the potential of this research domain. Hence, this paper should also be read as an invitation to further explore this relatively uncharted terrain.

Following a culturally oriented perspective, this study is theoretically informed by the ‘Conservative Protestant thesis’ (Lee 2006; Lee *et al.* 2007). The idea is that the higher violence rates in rural southern states in the United States are related to this orthodox religion. This article connects this notion to prior work on rural alcohol cultures. The question is first to what extent the relationship between Conservative Protestants and violence also appears in rural Netherlands. Second, if such an association is found among Dutch rural Conservative Protestants as well, the question is to what extent this relationship is spurious and might be accounted for by these Conservative Protestants’ alcohol consumption patterns instead.

By investigating these questions, this article aims to advance our knowledge of rural violence in several ways. First, this study is one of the very few systematic comparative rural–urban analyses of violence in Europe (exceptions are Dingwall and Moody 1999; Ceccato and Dolmen 2011; 2013, but they do not provide rural–urban comparisons). Second, this article extends the tradition of research into violence in the rural South of the United States. While this tradition has demonstrated the link between Conservative Protestantism and higher violence rates in these states (Ellison 1991; Ellison *et al.* 2003; Lee 2006; Lee *et al.* 2007), the causal mechanism remains unclear. As prior US research did not take alcohol consumption into account, here it is proposed that the relationship might be spurious and the result of a particular alcohol culture among Conservative Protestants in rural areas.

This article distinguishes between a thinly populated countryside that includes small communities up to 5,000 inhabitants, and more densely populated rural communities ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 inhabitants, here called villages for short. Respondents from these two rural areas will be compared to their peers living in more urbanized areas, here referred to as the rest of the country.

To answer the above questions, this study analyses self-reported data of 8,106 Dutch rural and urban respondents aged 15–30 years old, collected by Statistics Netherlands.

While most research into rural violence and crime relies on official records (Kaylen and Pridemore 2013), such data may suffer from serious biases. Various scholars working in this field (Weisheit *et al.* 1994; Cebulak 2004; Donnermeyer and Barclay 2005; Hogg and Carrington 2006; Abraham *et al.* 2007; Kaylen and Pridemore 2013) suggest that rural residents are not only less likely to report crime due to a fear of retaliation in close-knit rural networks, but also due to a reluctance to ask authorities for help. Moreover, they note that police officers in rural areas are more likely to solve disputes informally. Thus, as rural crime is more likely to go unfiled, self-reported data have important advantages in researching rural violence in particular.

The structure of the article is as follows: the next section reviews the literature on rural violence, religion and alcohol cultures and specifies the research questions. It should be noted that the discussion of the literature is restricted to studies that focus on rural violence in the Global North, given the purpose of this paper. Before presenting the results of the analyses, the sample, the indicators and the analytical procedures are explained in a subsequent section. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the findings and proposes new questions to increase our understanding of rural violence.

#### *Prior Research on Rural Violence, Religion and Rural Alcohol Culture*

As indicated, one explanation as to why rural southern US states have higher levels of violence is known as the 'Conservative Protestant thesis' (Lee 2006; Lee *et al.* 2007). The argument is that Conservative Protestants are more likely to accept some forms of violence, such as violence that is used to defend against perceived attacks of personal honour, women, or one's family or property. As Lee (2006: 311) explains, this religion's view of justified violent punishment is grounded on literalist interpretations of the Bible that cite the use of violence to resolve various types of disputes as well as the use of violence as justified retributions from God. Ellison (1991) found that at the level of individuals, Southerners who attended church more frequently and who held images of a hierarchical God were more supportive of violence. At the level of communities, Lee (2006) found that larger proportions of Evangelical Protestants in rural areas were associated with a greater occurrence of various forms of violence, including assault, robbery and homicide.<sup>1</sup> Two studies point to a similar relationship between Conservative Protestantism and violence in the Dutch Bible Belt, which stretches from the South West (Province of Zeeland) through the heart of the country (the regions known as *de Betuwe* and *de Veluwe*). The Dutch Bible Belt comprises villages and small towns where a large proportion of the inhabitants adhere to a form of Protestantism that relies on literalist and conservative interpretations of the Bible. They are known as 're-reformed' Protestants (*Gereformeerd*) who separated from the mainstream Dutch Protestant Church (*Hervormd*) at the end of the 19th century. A report on the rural surroundings of the town of Ede in the centre of the Bible Belt noted various forms of public disorder and fighting among and between groups of Conservative Protestant and Islamic youth (Balogh *et al.* 2009). The violent incidents between these youth groups were part of confrontations during leisure time, often at night, and were not associated with religious animosity *per se*. In addition, Adang *et al.*'s (2007) study of New

<sup>1</sup> In a later study that included homicides only, Lee *et al.* (2007) found a significant effect of the proportion of Evangelical Protestants in urban, but not in rural areas.

Year's Eve celebrations in the Netherlands points to traditions of collective violence in villages in the Dutch Bible Belt, targeted against both peers and police. Given these studies, it seems worthwhile to undertake a more systematic and larger scale analysis of the relationship between violence and adherence to Conservative Protestantism in rural Netherlands. Thus, the first question that will be addressed here is to what extent young rural Conservative Protestants are more likely to use violence than other rural inhabitants.

The second correlate of rural violence considered here is alcohol consumption. It should be noted that the relationship between alcohol and violence is strongly influenced by cultural expectations that link collective drinking to the experience of disorder (Hommel *et al.* 1992; Lister *et al.* 2000; Graham and Wells 2001). For instance, a large-scale survey of European adolescents demonstrated that the relationship between alcohol intake and violence is much stronger for Scandinavian youth as compared to their Italian peers (Felson *et al.* 2011). Similar cultural differences may also exist between urban and rural areas within countries. Indeed, prior work conducted in the United States points to the existence of distinct alcohol consumption patterns among young rural inhabitants. For instance, in a research conducted in communities in Pennsylvania and Iowa, the authors argued that 'alcohol use may be so common in rural areas that few community characteristics [...such as structural disadvantage, poverty, low income, residential instability...] may predict it' (Chilenksi and Greenberg 2009: 297). In other words, whatever the degree of social disorganization, these rural youth drink considerable amounts of alcohol anyhow. In their review of US studies on rural crime and violence, Weisheit *et al.* (1994: 3) noted that 'alcohol is of particular concern in rural areas' while a large-scale survey found that 'alcohol use is pervasive' among rural middle school students living in the Upper Midwest of the United States (De Haan and Boljevac 2009: 63–64, see also Lambert *et al.* 2008; Swaim and Stanley 2011, who found a higher prevalence of alcohol use among US rural youth as compared to urban youth). One of the few European rural–urban studies comprises a large-scale survey among 15 years old German adolescents (Donath *et al.* 2011). The authors found that rural youth drank on more occasions a year, engaged more often in binge drinking (five drinks on one occasion) and had higher life-time prevalence for all alcoholic beverages than their peers in urban areas. Furthermore, research that relies on more intensive methods suggests that drinking alcohol plays an important cultural role in rural life. For instance, based on quantitative and qualitative research, Valentine *et al.* (2008: 33–35) report that both parents and youth in rural Cumbria regard excessive drinking as a normal part of growing up, and they note that parents display a tolerant attitude towards underage drinking. Similar attitudes were also reported by De Haan and Boljevac (2009) in their study in the Upper Midwest of the United States. In addition, ethnographies based on observations in rural pubs demonstrated the importance of rural drinking practices for young people's identity formation and sense of belonging in the countryside (Leyshon 2008) as well as for the 'performance of pub(lic) rural masculinity' (Campbell 2000: 571).

There are some indications that rural drinking practices form an important part of Dutch rural life as well. For instance, according to the municipal and police officials who Balogh *et al.* (2009: 93–94) interviewed, a portion of the parents in the Conservative Protestant villages near Ede consider the intake of large amounts of alcohol by their children as a 'sin with a smile'. More generally, there is anecdotal evidence

that drinking alcohol, beer in particular, is an important element of Dutch rural youth culture. The drinking takes place predominantly during the weekends, in the village pub or perhaps more often in self-made drinkeries (Mulder 2005; Van Bergen and Otterman 2006; Verdurmen *et al.* 2012). These ‘booze shacks’ (literally translated from the Dutch *zuipheten*) are caravans, garages or cabins, that offer the opportunity to drink large quantities of relatively cheap alcohol with friends, notably for young rural males (Mulder 2005).

However, only few studies explicitly relate the alcohol consumption of rural dwellers to violence. For instance, in their case studies of crime prevention experiences in eight rural Swedish municipalities, Ceccato and Dolmen (2013) found that youth-related problems, particularly with regard to violence, alcohol and drug addiction were the most important concerns. Adang *et al.*'s (2007) observation about the tradition of collective violence in villages in the Dutch Bible Belt was referred to above. These authors also suggest that in addition to the excessive drinking at these events, there is also an abundance of hard drug usage (Adang *et al.* 2007: 226). Moreover, another Dutch study by Van der Torre (2006) explicitly reports that small communities in the Dutch Bible Belt are often confronted with hard drugs related problems among youth. Hence, it seems worthwhile to not only consider the consumption of alcohol but also the use of hard drugs.

The second question that will be addressed here is to what extent the amount of alcohol and hard drugs consumed differs between young rural residents and their peers who live in more urbanized areas. Moreover, it will be considered to what extent the relationship between alcohol consumption, hard drugs use and violence differs between young rural residents and their peers who live in more urbanized areas. Finally, the fourth question is to what extent alcohol and hard drugs consumption play a role in the relationship between rural violence and religion, in particular Conservative Protestantism. So far, earlier studies on the Conservative Protestant thesis have not considered the role of alcohol and drugs.

### *Data and Methods*

#### *Sampling, collection of the data and construction of the dataset*

This article is based on data collected by Statistics Netherlands, as part of their ‘Permanent Research of the Living Conditions’ (*Permanent Onderzoek Leefsituatie, POLS*). This research comprises a country-wide survey of the Dutch population. The sample is a random selection taken from the administrative files of Dutch municipalities, which contain basic information on all inhabitants of the Netherlands, such as gender, place and date of birth and marital status. As *POLS* is not intended to provide repeated longitudinal observations, each of these annual surveys includes information from different respondents. Response rates are about 60 per cent each year (Statistics Netherlands 2007).

The annual survey consists of a so-called basic module (containing questions on general background information, such as education level) and a specific module that contains additional questions. Only in 1997, 2001 and 2003 did this additional module include a series of questions that were specifically intended for monitoring the living conditions of youth aged 12–30 years of age. These questions are relevant for

the purpose of this study, as they consider, among other topics, violent behaviour and the use of alcohol and hard drugs. Given the sensitivity of these issues, these latter questions were completed by the respondents themselves with paper and pencil and were stored and processed separately (Statistics Netherlands 2005). Upon request and under conditions of privacy regulations, both modules are made available for researchers, courtesy of Statistics Netherlands. Statistics Netherlands (2005) also provide the instructions for how to merge the two modules through a key variable. The surveys conducted in 1997, 2001 and 2003 were combined into one dataset. Respondents younger than 15 were removed as violence is much less serious and harmful at these ages. The resulting dataset amounts to 8,106 individuals.

One might be sceptical of counting on the link between place of residence and violence as a source of insight about where violence occurs, as rural youth could commit violence while spending time in urban centres and *vice versa*. While the data does not allow for the specification of the places where the respondents actually committed violent acts, Dutch studies indicate that rural youth most often spend their leisure time, including night-life-related activities, in proximate rural, instead of urban places (Emmelkamp 2004; Van Bergen and Otterman 2006; Balogh *et al.* 2009). Moreover, even if rural youth would be more likely to commit violence outside of their rural environments, their violent behaviour may still be differently related to religion, alcohol and hard drugs consumption as compared to their urban peers.

### *Indicators*

#### *Violent behaviour*

This indicator is a binary variable, constructed by aggregating the following yes/no questions: ‘Have you ever taken part in a fight?’; ‘Have you ever hit or kicked a person such that he or she needed medical treatment?’ and ‘Have you ever wounded a person with a weapon?’ If respondents answered yes to one or more of these questions, they were assigned a score of 1. If they answered no to all three questions, they were assigned a score of 0. In the sample, 16.8 per cent of youth had fought once; ten per cent had hit or kicked someone such that the victim needed medical treatment once, and nearly two per cent had wounded a person with a weapon once.<sup>2,3</sup>

#### *Rural areas*

The urbanization index developed by Statistics Netherlands was used to identify rural areas (Den Dulk *et al.* 1992). This index categorizes the following areas on the basis of address density: non-urbanized areas (less than 500 addresses per square kilometre), sparsely urbanized areas (500–1,000 addresses), moderately urbanized areas (1,000–1,500 addresses), strongly urbanized areas (1,500–2,500 addresses) and very strongly urbanized areas (over 2,500 addresses). The first category (non-urbanized areas) is here called countryside and

<sup>2</sup> The proportions of youth who engage in these various forms of violence resemble those reported by Kruissink and Essers (2004: 10, Table 15) and Wittebrood (2000), who use different data sources.

<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, there are two ways to construct an ordinal rather than a binary variable based on these indicators. One would be to summate the answers on the three indicators, resulting in a scale ranging from zero to three. Another option would be to code these indicators on a scale that measures the severity of the violence, ranging from zero (never used violence) to three (wounded a person with a weapon). However, as 78.7 per cent of the respondents had never engaged in one of these forms of violence, both ordinal variables are extremely skewed and therefore less suitable for linear regression analyses.

comprises the least populated areas and small communities up to about 5,000 inhabitants. The second category (sparsely urbanized areas) is here indicated as villages; it consists of communities ranging from about 5,000 up to 10,000 inhabitants (Simon *et al.* 2007). These areas are contrasted with a category that combines all the other areas. In the remainder of this article, this latter category will be referred to as the rest of the country.

### *Religion*

Religiosity of the respondents was captured by questioning how often they visited church and if they adhered to a particular religion and if so, which one. The former indicator was a scale: 0 = never attends religious meetings; 1 = only seldom; 2 = less than once a month; 3 = once a month; 4 = two to three times a month; 5 = once a week or more often. Furthermore, respondents could indicate which religion they adhered to: mainstream Protestant (*Hervormd*), Catholic, Conservative Protestant (*Gereformeerd*), Islamic and other religions (Hinduism, Buddhism and other). These religions were included as dummy variables; the reference category consisted of respondents who indicated that they were not religious.

### *Alcohol consumption*

To estimate the degree to which rural respondents engaged in specific alcohol consumption patterns, two indicators were included. First, respondents were asked how many glasses of alcohol they drank during the weekend. This indicator seems appropriate, given prior work discussed above that points to the relationship between drinking large amounts of alcohol and having fun during leisure time in some rural areas. The answers ranged from 0 to 80.<sup>4</sup> Second, the survey included a self-reported measure of alcohol abuse. This was captured by the rather straightforward question: 'Do you think you drink too much alcohol?' Respondents simply had to indicate whether they thought this applied to them (= 1) or not (= 0).

### *Hard drugs consumption*

Respondents were asked a series of questions about if they had ever used the following drugs: cocaine, amphetamine, ecstasy and mushrooms (no = 0, yes = 1). The answers were summed and this resulted in a scale, ranging from zero to four (Cronbach's alpha = 0.803).

The following features serve as control variables in the analyses:

### *Gender*

Males are coded as 1, while females are coded as 0.

### *Educational level*

The educational level of the respondents was captured by questions about the type of education they were receiving at the time of data collection, or, in case they already completed their education, the highest educational level they had attained. This resulted in

<sup>4</sup> In the Netherlands, it is common usage to assess the amount of alcohol consumption based on the number of glasses or just 'drinks', even in scientific work (Poelen *et al.* 2005; Koning *et al.* 2010). These are rather imprecise measures, as it remains unclear how much and what type of alcoholic beverages were consumed. However, as the purpose of this study is to offer comparative rural-urban analyses of the relationships between alcohol consumption and violence rather than to provide precise estimations of the effects of alcohol consumption on violent behaviour *per se*, these indicators seem sufficient. Even so, readers might be interested to know that beer is the most frequently consumed alcoholic beverage among Dutch youth (Verdurmen *et al.* 2012: 51). It is usually served in relatively small glasses that contain only 20 to 25 cl (the English pint contains 57 cl).

the following scale: 1 = primary education (participants of age 15 who were attending primary education or who had dropped out of education at the time of data collection); 2 = lower secondary education (vocational programs and the first three years of general education programs); 3 = higher secondary education (the higher years of general education programmes) and 4 = higher education.

### *Age*

For ease of interpretation, the following age cohorts were constructed: 15–19, 20–25 and over 25 years old. In the analyses, the former categories were included as dummy variables, with the oldest respondents as the reference category.

### *Analytical procedures*

First, the average of each indicator was calculated for the two rural categories and the rest of the country. In the case of binary variables, percentages were calculated. It was then investigated if the averages or proportions differed significantly between the three areas. [Table 1](#) shows the results of these comparisons. In the second round of analyses, the impact of the indicators on the likelihood that respondents had used violence was estimated. Because violence is defined as a binary variable (1 = the respondent had at least once used a form of violence; 0 = the respondent had never used a form of violence), logistic regression analyses were used. These analyses result in so-called odds ratios. If the odds ratio is less than one, an increase in a given indicator decreases the likelihood that respondents had committed violence; if it is larger than one, the likelihood increases. The results of the logistic regression analyses can be found in [Table 2](#). In the first model, only the social demographic indicators were included (model 1), followed by religion (models 2 and 3) and alcohol and hard drugs consumption (models 4 and 5). In model 3, interaction terms were included to assess whether the effects of adherence to a religion were different per rural area. In model 4, interaction terms were added to estimate if the effects of alcohol consumption during the weekend, self-reported alcohol abuse and hard drugs intake differed per area. Finally, given the significant interaction between adhering to Conservative Protestantism and living in a village, model 5 included interaction terms that estimated if the relationship between alcohol consumption during the weekend, self-reported alcohol abuse and hard drugs intake on the one hand and violence on the other was different for these Conservative Protestant villagers specifically. In the last step, a parsimonious model was estimated, comprising the control variables and significant indicators only (threshold for removal  $P < 0.5$ ). To avoid problems of multicollinearity, the ordinal variables in the interaction terms were standardized. The highest variance inflation factor was 2.858, which indicates that such problems were negligible. In an additional round of analyses, models were separately run for each religious category. These models included the socio-demographic indicators, frequency of church visits, alcohol consumption during the weekend, self-reported alcohol abuse and use of hard drugs. The results are shown in [Table 3](#).

### *Results: The Relationships Between Violence, Religion and Stimulants Use in Dutch Rural and Non-Rural Areas*

The discussion of the results follows the questions formulated above. But first, the prevailing myopic urban view will be counterbalanced by a discussion of the violence rates in the Dutch countryside, villages and more urbanized areas.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of young inhabitants of two types of rural areas and their peers living outside rural areas (N = 8,106)

	Min – max	Countryside = 1		Villages = 2		Rest of the country = 3		1 vs. 3		2 vs. 3		1 vs. 2	
		Mean (%)	s.d.	Mean (%)	s.d.	Mean (%)	s.d.	Pvalue	Pvalue	Pvalue	Pvalue		
Physical violent behaviour													
Ever taken part in fight	0-1	21.1%		20.8%		21.5%		n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
Ever wounded someone	0-1	17.1%		16.2%		16.9%		n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
Ever wounded someone such that victim needed medical treatment	0-1	9.2%		10.4%		10.8%		n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
Ever wounded someone with a weapon	0-1	0.7%		2.0%		1.8%		P = 0.002		n.s.		P = 0.002	
Gender (male = 1)	0-1	50.9%		50.4%		48.4%		n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
Aged 15-19	0-1	41.1%		39.8%		34.2%		P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.000	
Aged 20-24	0-1	27.9%		26.9%		31.2%		P = 0.011		P = 0.000		P = 0.000	
Aged 25-30	0-1	30.9%		33.2%		34.5%		P = 0.007		n.s.		n.s.	
Educational level	1-4	2.781	0.782	2.762	0.818	2.890	0.879	P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.000	
Frequency of church visits	0-5	1.343	1.637	1.291	1.513	1.008	1.504	P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.000	
Mainstream Protestant	0-1	13.7%		12.4%		7.3%		P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.000	
Catholic	0-1	29.7%		37.9%		22.5%		P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.000	
Conservative Protestant	0-1	10.8%		7.4%		5.3%		P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.000	
Islamic	0-1	0.9%		1.9%		6.4%		P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.001	
Other	0-1	3.7%		4.2%		5.9%		P = 0.001		P = 0.003		n.s.	
Not religious	0-1	41.2%		36.1%		52.6%		P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.002	
Alcohol during weekend	0-80	8.048	9.432	7.915	9.793	6.062	8.209	P = 0.000		P = 0.000		n.s.	
Drinks too much alcohol	0-1	6.6%		5.5%		6.6%		n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
Hard drugs	0-4	0.150	0.605	0.194	0.665	0.285	0.815	P = 0.000		P = 0.000		P = 0.000	

POLS data, Statistics Netherlands. All differences  $P > 0.05$  indicated as n.s. To determine significant differences, one-sided chi-square tests were used for all binary indicators and Bonferroni *post hoc* tests for all indicators at ordinal and interval level.

TABLE 2 *Logistic regression analyses of the likelihood of engaging in violence, odds ratios*

	Model 1 = rural areas + socio- demographic features	Model 2 = model 1 + religion	Model 3 = model 2 + interactions rural areas × religion	Model 4 = model 1 + stimulants	Model 5 = model 4 + interactions rural areas × stimulants	Model 6 = model 4 + interactions rural areas × Conservative Protestants	Parsimonious model
Countryside (ref. = rest of the country)	0.887	0.923	0.905	0.847*	0.794*	0.911	0.878
Villages (ref. = rest of the country)	0.866*	0.890	0.833	0.812**	0.789**	0.807	0.789**
Survey 2001 (ref. = 1997)	1.272**	1.275**	1.272**	1.231**	1.233**	1.224**	1.227**
Survey 2003 (ref. = 1997)	1.121	1.108	1.101	1.031	1.028	1.013	1.021
Male	4.662**	4.650**	4.652**	3.413**	3.405**	3.438**	3.420**
Age 15–19 years (ref. = 25–30 years)	1.141	1.154*	1.160*	1.217**	1.219**	1.228**	1.223**
Age 20–24 years (ref. = 25–30 years)	1.110	1.106	1.105	0.954	0.957	0.943	0.957
Educational level	0.610**	0.610**	0.609**	0.605**	0.605**	0.610**	0.604**
Frequency of church visits		0.861**	0.862**			0.901**	0.914**
Mainstream Protestant		0.895	0.855			0.925	
(ref. = not religious)							
Catholic (ref. = not religious)		1.075	1.103			1.071	
Conservative Protestant		1.038	0.832			0.799	0.794
(ref. = not religious)							
Islamic (ref. = not religious)		1.037	0.938			1.276	
Other (ref. = not religious)		1.056	0.995			1.033	
Interactions countryside × religion							
Mainstream Protestant			1.230			1.137	
Catholic			0.962			0.829	
Conservative Protestant			1.098			1.101	
Islamic			1.452			1.452	
Other			0.977			1.090	
Interactions villages × religion							
Mainstream Protestant			1.005			0.857	
Catholic			0.971			0.892	
Conservative Protestant			1.974*			2.231*	2.298**
Islamic			2.035			2.096	
Other			1.375			1.600	
Alcohol in the weekend				1.042**	1.043**	1.042**	1.041**
Drinks too much alcohol				1.395**	1.128	1.385**	1.411**
Hard drugs				1.578**	1.583**	1.546**	1.549**
Interactions countryside × stimulants							
Alcohol in the weekend							
Drinks too much alcohol							
Hard drugs							

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TABLE 2 *Continued*

	Model 1 = rural areas + socio- demographic features	Model 2 = model 1 + religion	Model 3 = model 2 + interactions rural areas × religion	Model 4 = model 1 + stimulants	Model 5 = model 4 + interactions rural areas × stimulants	Model 6 = model 2 + model 4 + interactions rural areas × Conservative Protestants	Parsimonious model
Interactions villages × stimulants							
Alcohol in the weekend				0,922			
Drinks too much alcohol				2,057*			
Hard drugs				1,023			
Interactions villages × Conservative Protestants × stimulants							
Alcohol in the weekend						1,975	2,518*
Drinks too much alcohol						6,938*	
Hard drugs						1,912	
Constant	0,356**	0,404**	0,412**	0,290**	0,293**	0,310**	0,326**
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2$	0,169	0,178	0,180	0,243	0,245	0,252	0,249
Sample size	8,096	8,094	8,094	8,084	8,084	8,082	8,082

*POLS* data, Statistics Netherlands.  
\* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\* $P < 0.01$ .

TABLE 3 *Logistic regression analyses of the likelihood of engaging in violence per religious affiliation, odds ratios (models also include year of survey, gender, age, educational level, frequency of church visits, consumption of alcohol in the weekend, self-reported alcohol abuse and hard drugs consumption, effects not shown here)*

	Protestant	Catholic	Orthodox Protestant	Islamic	Other religions	Non-religious
Countryside	1.002	0.774	1.250	1.413	0.977	0.900
Villages	0.624	0.743*	2.364**	1.724	1.309	0.797*
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2$	0.281	0.248	0.331	0.158	0.187	0.254
Sample size	773	2,206	544	353	411	3,795

POLS data, Statistics Netherlands.

\* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\* $P < 0.01$ .

### *Rural and urban violence rates*

Taking all three forms of physical violence together, Table 1 shows that in each area of residence, about one fifth of all respondents had ever committed violence. Table 1 also provides the results for each of the three forms of physical violence separately. In all areas, taking part in a fight was the most frequent form of physical violence. A substantial proportion of youth in all three areas (around ten per cent) reported they had hit or kicked someone to such a degree that the victim needed medical attention. Wounding a person by means of a weapon was much more exceptional in all three areas. Respondents living in the countryside reported that they had committed this form of violence less frequently (0.7%), not only as compared to inhabitants of the rest of the country (1.8%), but also vs. their peers living in villages (2.0%).

Table 2 shows the results of logistic regression analyses of the likelihood that respondents had committed physical violence. The dependent variable includes all the forms of violence displayed in Table 1. Of course these results predominantly reflect the most common form of violence, partaking in a fight. Taking socio-demographic characteristics into account, Table 2 (model 1) shows that residents of villages differ slightly from inhabitants living in more urbanized areas. The odds ratio of 0.866 indicates that the former reported they were about 15% ( $1/0.866$ ) less likely to have committed violence as compared to the latter. The indicators of rural place of residence did not add much to the explanatory power (a model that included the two rural areas only resulted in a Nagelkerke's pseudo  $R^2$  that was close to zero), which is in line with prior rural–urban analyses of violence, delinquency and anti-social behaviour (Hagan and Foster 2001; Barnett and Mencken 2002; Elgar *et al.* 2003; Harden *et al.* 2009; Reijneveld *et al.* 2010; Li 2011; Weenink 2011; but see Bouffard and Muftic 2006 who found more pronounced rural–urban differences).

These results nuance the symbolic binary opposition between the dangerous city and the peaceful, idyllic rural (see also Jones 2012). Because these statistics report the prevalence of violence over the life time, it cannot be concluded that rural violence is, in the words of the Canadian rural youth interviewed by Hall *et al.* (2011: 4) a 'normal occurrence in life'. However, they do suggest that a substantial part of the young rural dwellers had committed violence once in their life, including the more serious form of hurting someone so badly that the victims required medical treatment.

*Religion and rural violence*

Table 1 indicates that the frequency of attending religious meetings is significantly higher in both rural areas as compared to the rest of the country. Furthermore, significant differences appear with regard to the type of religion respondents adhered to. In short, Protestant, Catholic and Conservative Protestant respondents were more likely to be found in both rural areas, whereas Islamic respondents, adherents of other religions and non-religious respondents were more prevalent in the rest of the country. In Table 2 (model 2), these indicators are related to rural violence. As a result, the effect of living in villages became non-significant. As separate analyses show, church attendance is associated with a lower likelihood of engaging in violence among inhabitants of villages in particular. Adherence to the various religions did not result in significant effects in model 2. However, model 3, which includes interaction terms between religious affiliation and rural place of residence, shows that the odds that young Dutch Conservative Protestants who live in villages reported they had committed violence was nearly two times (odds ratio = 1.974) larger than that of their fellow believers living in more urbanized areas. None of the other interactions between rural place of residence and religious affiliation yielded significant effects. To put this finding in perspective: the proportion of Conservative Protestants who had committed violence was 22.7 per cent for those living in villages, while this was only 13.4 per cent for their fellow believers living in all other areas ( $P = 0.008$ , based on  $\chi^2$  test), and 20.8 per cent for all other rural youth, whatever their religion (this difference n.s.).

To conclude, these results indicate that the Conservative Protestant thesis not only applies to Evangelical Christians in southern states of the United States, but at least partly to their rural Dutch fellow believers across the Atlantic as well. One important difference between prior US findings and the results presented here is that the violence rates of Dutch Conservative Protestants living in villages do not stand out because they are higher than the average violence rates in the (rural) population. Rather, they are particularly exceptional relative to their fellow believers who live elsewhere in the country. This latter finding has theoretical consequences, for the Conservative Protestant thesis posits that the higher violence rates among the adherents of this religion in the rural South of the United States are due to their religious beliefs *per se*. However, this is not plausible in the Dutch context, given the differences in violence rates within this religious category. Thus, it might be the case that the association between Orthodox Protestantism and rural violence is spurious. Before considering this issue in more detail, the following section analyses the relationships between rural violence and the consumption of stimulants.

*Alcohol, hard drugs and rural violence*

Alcohol consumption during the weekends was higher in both rural areas than in the rest of the country, as Table 1 indicates. Note that standard deviations exceed mean scores, indicating that variation within the rural categories and within the rest of the country category was large. Nevertheless, the finding that rural inhabitants drank more alcohol than their counterparts living outside rural areas does point to the existence of a rural alcohol culture, as suggested by the prior studies discussed above. Table 1 also shows that the proportions of respondents who thought they drink too much did

not differ significantly between the areas of residence. Interestingly, however, within the category of youth who consider themselves as problematic drinkers, the amount of alcohol consumption during the weekend differed significantly: respondents living in the countryside and in villages indicated they consumed respectively 19.17 and 21.19 glasses of alcohol on average during the weekend, while this was 15.68 in the rest of the country (not shown in Table 1). In other words, it seems that it takes more alcohol for one to consider oneself a problematic drinker in rural areas than in the rest of the country. Again, this finding points to the existence of a distinct rural alcohol culture. With regard to hard drugs intake, the picture is reversed: youth in both rural areas were significantly less likely to report the use of these types of stimulants.

Table 2 provides answers to the question about the extent to which alcohol and hard drugs consumption patterns are related to rural violence. Model 4 includes alcohol consumption during the weekend, the respondents' self-reported alcohol abuse and use of hard drugs. All three indicators yield significant effects. The odds ratio of alcohol consumption during the weekend (1.042) should be interpreted as follows: for each additional glass of alcohol, the odds that respondents reported to have committed violence increases four per cent. Moreover, the model shows that respondents in the countryside and villages are now respectively about 18 (1/0.847) and 23 (1/0.812) per cent less likely to have committed violence as compared to their peers in more urbanized areas. Separate analyses indicate that these changes are related to rural inhabitants' greater alcohol consumption during weekends specifically. In other words: young rural residents' greater alcohol consumption during the weekend is related to additional violence. To investigate if the relationship between alcohol and violence is different for rural respondents, interaction terms were included. Model 5 shows the results: compared to urban respondents, the likelihood that inhabitants of villages reported that they had committed violence when they thought they drank too much was two times larger (odds ratio of 2.057).

To summarize these findings: young inhabitants of both rural areas tend to drink more alcohol during the weekend, and this results in additional rural violence. Moreover, the relationship between self-reported problematic drinking and violence is stronger among young villagers in particular.

#### *Rural Dutch Conservative Protestants and violence*

To answer the question whether the relationship between Conservative Protestantism and violence is actually associated with stimulants use rather than religion *per se*, model 6 was run. As the parsimonious version has equal explanatory power, the discussion of the results focuses on this latter model.<sup>5</sup> First, Table 2 shows that the interaction between Conservative Protestantism and living in villages remains significant (odds ratio of 2.298). Second, the association between rural violence and alcohol consumption during the weekend is stronger among young Conservative Protestant villagers in particular (odds ratio of 2.518). These findings suggest that the relationship between young Conservative Protestants and rural violence is not due to their alcohol consumption as

<sup>5</sup>  $\Delta\chi^2$  parsimonious model vs. model 6 = -13.019, df = 14, n.s.

suggested above. Instead, they indicate that the alcohol culture of these youth further adds up to the likelihood that they had committed violence, rather than accounting for ('explaining away' in statistical terminology) the relationship between rural violence and this type of religion.

An alternative way to inquire into the relationships between rural violence and religion is to analyse the religious categories separately. The results are shown in [Table 3](#). For each religious affiliation, a model was run, similar to model 4 in [Table 2](#). As the interest here is specifically in the effects of rural place of residence, only these indicators are shown. These analyses indicate that the effects of rural places of residence are either non-significant or result in significant negative effects. Only the Orthodox Protestant youth who live in villages are significantly more likely to have committed violence as compared to their fellow believers living in more urbanised areas (odds ratio of 2.364). This finding casts doubts on the idea that the violence of young rural Conservative Protestants is associated with religion. Or at least, it suggests that the association between violence and this type of religion differs per place of residence.

### *Conclusion and Discussion*

This is the first European study that offers systematic, large-scale comparative analyses of the relationships between rural violence, alcohol and religion. Let us consider the insights it has produced by returning to the questions. Concerning the first question, it appeared that, while the violence rates of young rural Conservative Protestants did not differ significantly from other rural youth, they also reported that they had committed violence more often as compared to their fellow believers living elsewhere. This finding has an important theoretical consequence: while the Conservative Protestant thesis posits that the higher violence rates among the adherents of this religion are due to their religious beliefs *per se*, this study shows that the relationship between Conservative Protestantism and violence depends on the place where youths live. The fourth question follows up on this issue, asking whether the association between this religion and rural violence is spurious. Here, it was proposed that these young Conservative Protestants' stimulants intake may account for the relationship. However, the analyses suggested that this was not the case, even though it turned out that the association between alcohol consumption during the weekend and violence is stronger among this category of religious rural youth in particular.

As for the second question, it appeared that young rural inhabitants not only drank markedly more alcohol during the weekend, but the self-reported problematic drinkers among them also consumed more alcohol than similar self-reported problematic urban drinkers. Thus, this study provides further evidence of distinct rural alcohol consumption patterns that were also found in other studies in the rural Global North. Somewhat contrary to prior, but less extensive Dutch analyses that point to hard drugs problems in small communities in the Dutch Bible Belt ([Van der Torre 2006](#)), the rural dwellers in this study reported a lower amount of hard drugs intake than their peers living in more urbanized areas. The third question related rural youths' stimulants consumption to violence. Here it was found that young rural dwellers' larger amount of alcohol intake during the weekend was related to additional violence. Moreover, it appeared that village dwellers who considered themselves to be problematic drinkers more often

reported that they had committed violence. Also, and again in contrast to prior but less extensive Dutch work (Adang *et al.* 2007), this study did not find a significant relationship between hard drugs use and rural violence. In addition to these answers, this study demonstrates that, contrary to the prevailing notion of the idyllic rural but in line with prior US studies, the violence rates between young Dutch rural dwellers and their peers living in the rest of the country are virtually similar.

Before outlining how to move forward in the study of rural violence, some limitations of this research that may have affected the findings need to be addressed. The main shortcoming is that, while there is a hierarchical structure in the data with places of residence on the higher level and individual respondents on the lower level, the data set does not allow for multi-level analyses. If it had been possible to cluster respondents according to postal code for instance, a community level could have been constructed with indicators such as the average religiosity or the average alcohol consumption at that higher community level. Such a multi-level approach not only makes more sense conceptually, but it also allows for more refined and more robust statistical estimations. There is a risk now that features of a small number of communities are statistically exaggerated. For instance, it might be the case that certain villages with a tradition of violence and excessive alcohol consumption are overrepresented in the sample. Rather than taking into account that these features actually belong to the community level (which comprises a smaller sample), they may now be blown up as features at the lower level of individual respondents (comprising a much larger sample). Fortunately, this risk is reduced given the efforts of Statistics Netherlands to arrive at a nation-wide representative sample.

A second shortcoming is that the data does not allow for much differentiation between rural places. While the differences between inhabitants of villages and the countryside presented here demonstrate again that the idea of a single homogenous rural area ('the countryside') is invalid (Halfacree 1993; Murdoch *et al.* 2003; Cloke 2006), there is of course more variety between rural places than differences in population density. Take, e.g. the economic development of rural areas: whereas one area may suffer from long-term unemployment and deprivation, another may benefit from tourism due to its attractive scenic beauty or opportunities for leisure activities.

Finally, one of the aims of this article is to make the topic of rural violence and crime more visible in criminology. Therefore, what follows are suggestions for future research, based upon the findings presented here. First, more ethnographic detail is needed to understand how religiously informed attitudes towards the world are differently associated with violence in rural and urban settings. The stronger relationships between violence, alcohol and adherence to Conservative Protestantism among village dwellers might be a consequence of their more intense involvement in and exposure to community life: they might be more likely to rely on violence as a form of self-help or conflict management. Inhabitants of rural communities are often more reluctant to ask formal authorities for help and this tendency might be even stronger in more closed and inward looking communities such as the Conservative Protestant villages in the Dutch Bible Belt. As for violence as self-help, interesting comparisons can be made between villages and the less densely populated countryside as well. On the other hand, this religion produces strong social and moral boundaries that may justify violence against non-believers specifically

(see Balogh *et al.* 2009, who reported on confrontations between Conservative Protestants and Islamic youth).

Second, while prior work points to the importance of drinking alcohol as a social activity and as part of identity formation in rural communities (Campbell 2000; Mulder 2005; Van Bergen and Otterman 2006; Leyshon 2008; Valentine *et al.* 2008), engaging in collective violent action itself may also be part of rural identity formation (see for instance Spaaij 2008; Jackson-Jacobs 2013 on the relationship between collective identities and violence). Following up on this, future research may fruitfully invoke the literature on the performance of rural masculinities (for instance Campbell 2000; Leyshon 2008; Carrington *et al.* 2013) in this respect. Thus, another series of questions revolve around the issue of how rural violence is related to drinking alcohol, notions of masculinity and identity formation processes and how and to what extent these processes differ between rural and urban youth.

The rural drinking practices found here can be contrasted with what rural dwellers—parents and their children in particular—themselves tend to believe about alcohol consumption. As discussed above, studies report that they consider rural drinking as non-problematic, safe and relatively innocent, while they associate urban drinking with anti-social behaviour (Van Bergen and Otterman 2006; Valentine *et al.* 2008; De Haan and Boljevac 2009). By positioning rural drinking on the positive side of the symbolic rural–urban dichotomy, rural dwellers might negate the negative consequences of the rural alcohol culture they tend to extenuate. Future studies in this area may contribute to attempts to start a more open discussion about the meanings and consequences of drinking alcohol in rural life, specifically in relation to the use of violence.

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