Crime, Social Control & Legitimacy

Punitive Public Attitudes, Fear of Crime and Resentments against Migrants – Interdependencies in an Age of Ontological Insecurity

Helmut Hirtenlehner

Univerza v Mariboru
Fakulteta za varnostne vede

1973–2013
40 let

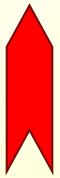
Punitive Public Attitudes, Fear of Crime and Resentments against Migrants – Interdependencies in an Age of Ontological Insecurity

Helmut Hirtenlehner

Universities of Linz

Problem description and research question

- **Deterrence theory: fear of punishment prevents crime**



rational-choice understanding
of individual decision-making

- **Mixed evidence for deterrence theory:**
  - severity of punishment has no effect
  - certainty of punishment sometimes relates to offending – results are inconclusive
- **Do people differ in their susceptibility to deterrent effects?**
  → moderating role of crime propensity (self-control)

Self-control Theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990)

- **Low self-control is the central cause of crime**
- **Low self-control = inability to take the long-term consequences of behaviour into consideration (when making behavioural choices)**
- **Tendency to devalue the temporally removed consequences of behaviour**
- **Self-control is a complex enduring trait**

Self-control Theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990)

Relationship to deterrence:

- **„Common cause thesis“:**
  Correlations between deterrence perceptions and offending are spurious, caused by the fact that people with low self-control both attach little meaning to the uncertain and delayed sanctions of the criminal justice system and are especially inclined to exploit the pleasures of criminal conduct
- **„Moderation thesis“:**
  People with high self-control are more responsive to uncertain and delayed legal sanctions than people with low self-control
  → high self-control increases deterrent effects

Situational Action Theory (Wikström 2010)

- **Person-environment-interaction initiates a perception-choice process which governs action**
- **People vary in their crime propensity (= tendency to see crime as a viable action alternative and choose it)**
- **Crime propensity is comprised of morality and self-control**
- **Settings vary in their criminogeneity**
- **Setting criminogeneity is comprised of moral context and deterrence**
- **It‘s all about interactions!** (Wikström et al. 2012)

Situational Action Theory (Wikström 2010)

- **Slightly different understanding of self-control: (= ability to align one's behaviour to one's moral values when faced with situational incentives to breach rules of conduct, or, in brief, ability to resist current temptations and provocations)**
- **Acts of crime occur when crime prone people are introduced to criminogenic settings**
- **Convergence assumption implies that criminogenic exposure, including the absence of deterrence, should only matter for people with a high propensity to offend**

Situational Action Theory (Wikström 2010)

Relationship to deterrence:

- **„Moderation thesis“:**
  People with low self-control are more vulnerable to sanction threats than people with high self-control
  → low self-control increases deterrent effects

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Deterrence perceptions decrease the likelihood of criminal behaviour (**Deterrence Theory**).

Hypothesis 2: The effect of deterrence perceptions on offending is reduced or cancelled when we control for level of self-control (**Self-Control Theory**).

Hypothesis 3: The effect of perceived deterrence on offending increases as self-control increases (**Self-Control Theory**).

Hypothesis 4: The effect of perceived deterrence on offending decreases as self-control increases (**Situational Action Theory**)

Method

Data

- **Austria:** Class-based online survey in 92 **Upper and Lower Austria**n high schools (grades 7 and 8; one class per grade and school) → 2,911 students (age 13 and 14 years)
- **Belgium:** Class-based written survey in 7 high schools (all classes of grade 7) in **Ostend** → 1,224 students (age 13 years)
- **Slovenia:** Class-based written survey in 9 high schools (two or three classes of grade 10 per school) in **Ljubljana** → 409 students (age 16 years)

Method

Sampling in Austria

- **Class-based online survey in 92 Upper and Lower Austrian schools in 7th and 8th grade**
- **Data gathering in spring and fall 2011**
- **Sampling design:**
  1. Random sample of 50 schools from Upper Austria and 42 schools from Lower Austria stratified disproportionally by type of school
  2. Random selection of one 7th and one 8th class per school
  3. Inclusion of all students per class
- **Data base: 92 schools – 184 classes – 2,911 students**
  (respondents mainly 13 and 14 years old)

Method

Sampling in Belgium

- **Class-based written survey in 7 high schools (grade 7) in Ostend**
- **Data gathering in fall 2009**
- **Sampling design:**
  1. Selection of all high schools from Ostend – 7 out of 9 schools agreed to take part
  2. Inclusion of all students of grade 7 per school
- **Data base: 7 schools – 1,224 students**
  (respondents mainly 13 years old)

Method

Sampling in Slovenia

- **Class-based written survey in 9 high schools (grade 10) in Ljubljana**
- **Data gathering in spring 2011**
- **Sampling design:**
  1. purposive sampling of 9 out of 32 high schools from Ljubljana – selection orientated at type and size of school
  2. random selection of two or three (depending on size of school) classes of grade 10 per school
  3. Inclusion of all students per class
- **Data base: 9 schools – 19 classes – 409 students**
  (respondents mainly 16 years old)

Method

Measures

- **Offending:** Self-reported versatility of offending (**variety scales** reflecting the number of different offenses committed in the year before the survey)
- **Deterrence:** Perceived **risk of getting caught** when committing a certain crime (property and violent crimes)
- **Self-control:** modified and abridged versions of the self-control scale developed by **Grasmick** et al. (1993) – as suggested by Wikström et al. (2012)
- **Sex:** girls (0); boys (1)

Method

Statistical Analysis

- **Problems with testing interaction effects in non-linear models → low power to establish moderation relationships**
- **Estimation of linear regression models with clustered robust standard errors**
- **To control for spurious interactions, the quadratic terms of „deterrence“ and „self-control“ were added to the equations** (Lubinski & Humphreys 1990)
- **STATA 12**

Correlation matrix

	Low deterrence	Low self-control	Offending
Austria			
Low deterrence	1.00		
Low self-control	.32***	1.00	
Offending	.42***	.41***	1.00
Belgium			
Low deterrence	1.00		
Low self-control	.20***	1.00	
Offending	.23***	.55***	1.00
Slovenia			
Low deterrence	1.00		
Low self-control	-.00	1.00	
Offending	.20***	.22***	1.00

* ….. p < .05 ** ….. p < .01 *** ….. p < .001

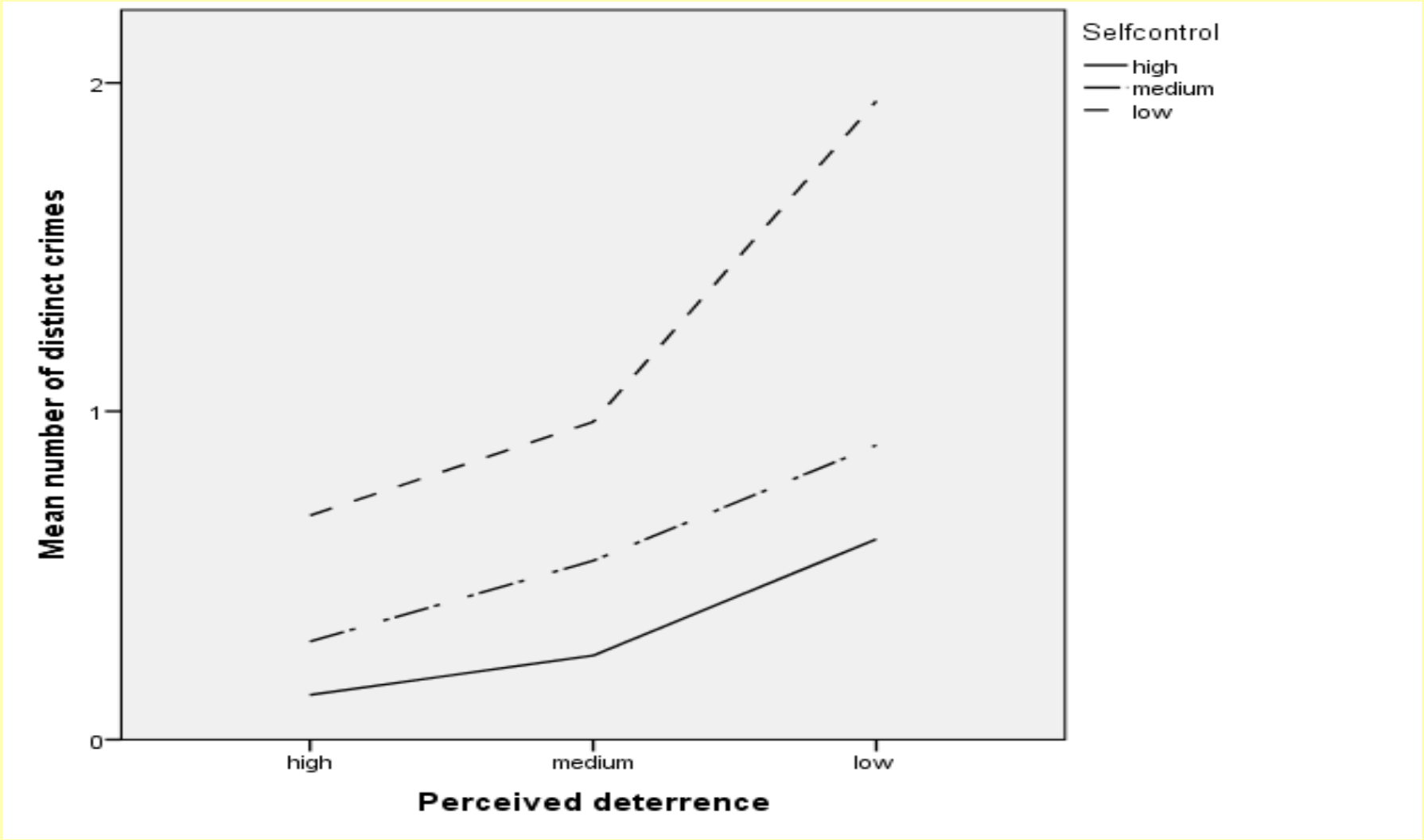
OLS regressions predicting offending

	Model1		Model 2	
Variables	b	SE	b	SE
Austria				
Low deterrence	0.535***	.047	0.404***	.041
Low self-control			0.388***	.030
Self-control*deterrence				
Low deterrence (sq.)				
Low self-control (sq.)				
Sex				
R^2	.173		.256	
Belgium				
Low deterrence	0.514***	.078	0.236***	.062
Low self-control			1.225***	.060
Self-control*deterrence				
Low deterrence (sq.)				
Low self-control (sq.)				
Sex				
R^2	.051		.322	
Slovenia				
Low deterrence	0.166***	.030	0.166***	.031
Low self-control			0.176**	.053
Self-control*deterrence				
Low deterrence (sq.)				
Low self-control (sq.)				
Sex				
R^2	.041		.087	

	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Austria						
Low deterrence	0.373***	.035	0.326***	.026	0.349***	.036
Low self-control	0.379***	.027	0.380***	.025	0.374***	.027
Self-control*deterrence	0.240***	.037	0.165***	.032	0.242***	.037
Low deterrence (sq.)			0.080*	.032		
Low self-control (sq.)			0.081**	.025		
Sex					0.211***	.047
R^2	.298		.309		.305	
Belgium						
Low deterrence	0.248***	.064	0.436***	.071	0.249***	.064
Low self-control	1.213***	.057	1.163***	.056	1.211***	.058
Self-control*deterrence	0.256***	.068	0.204**	.064	0.257***	.068
Low deterrence (sq.)			-0.184***	.042		
Low self-control (sq.)			0.279***	.049		
Sex					-0.000	.001
R^2	.335		.366		.335	
Slovenia						
Low deterrence	0.174***	.033	0.204***	.036	0.157***	.031
Low self-control	0.164**	.044	0.151**	.040	0.164**	.045
Self-control*deterrence	0.122*	.052	0.132*	.061	0.120*	.053
Low deterrence (sq.)			-0.080**	.027		
Low self-control (sq.)			0.080	.047		
Sex					0.142	.081
R^2	.115		.142		.122	

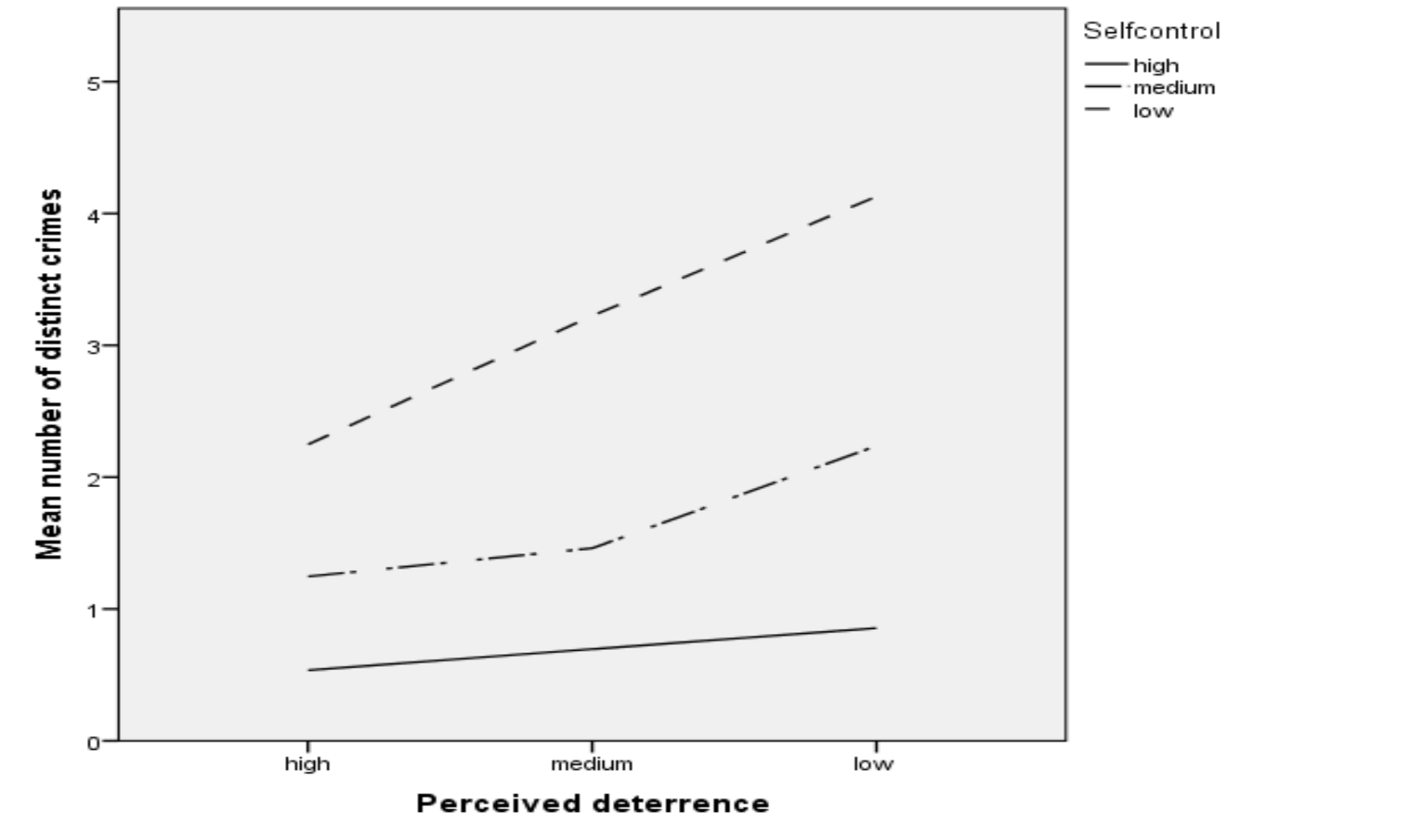
Interaction of deterrence and self-control

Austria



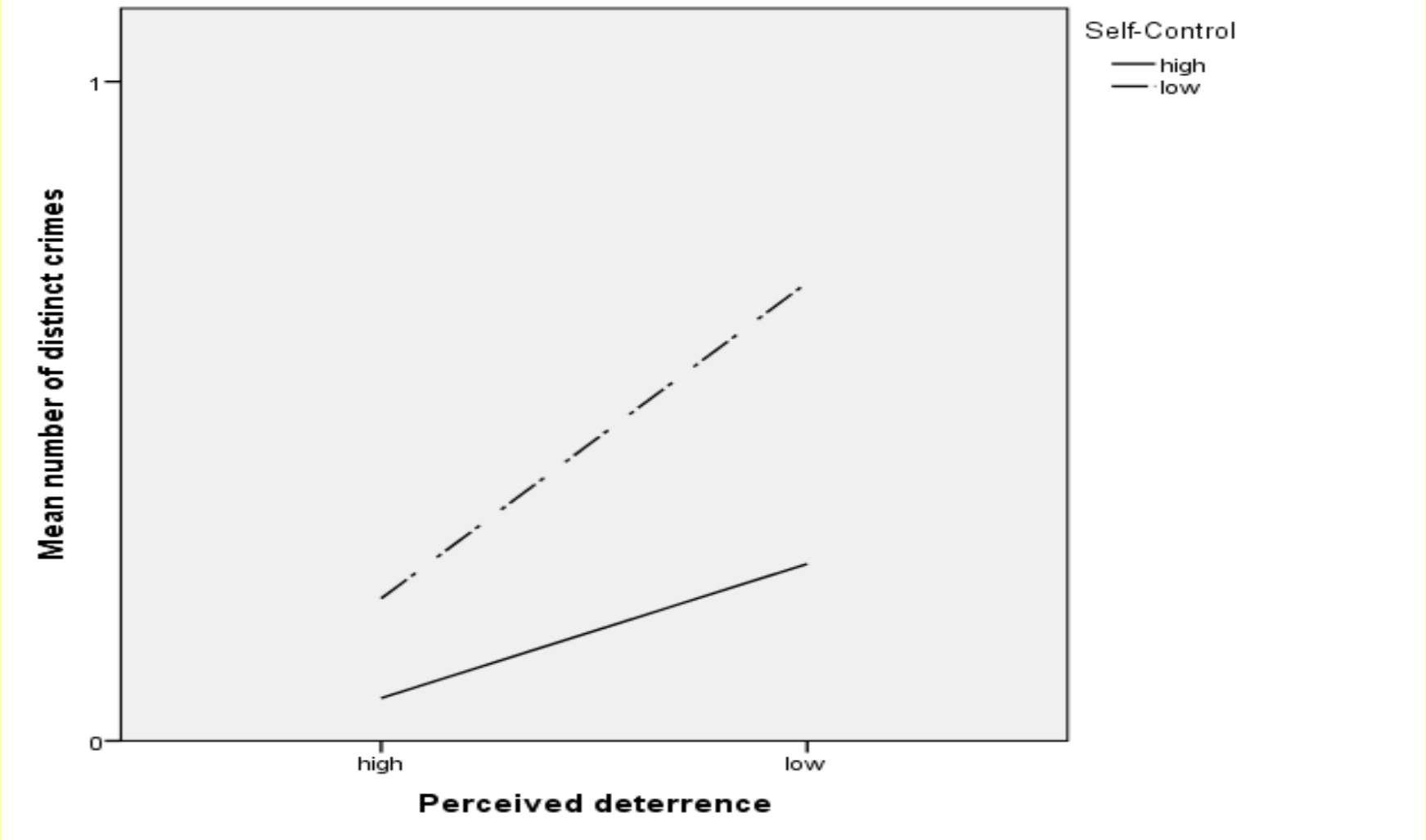
Interaction of deterrence and self-control

Belgium



Interaction of deterrence and self-control

Slovenia



	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Austria						
Low deterrence	0.373***	.035	0.326***	.026	0.349***	.036
Low self-control	0.379***	.027	0.380***	.025	0.374***	.027
Self-control*deterrence	0.240***	.037	0.165***	.032	0.242***	.037
Low deterrence (sq.)			0.080*	.032		
Low self-control (sq.)			0.081**	.025		
Sex					0.211***	.047
R^2	.298		.309		.305	
Belgium						
Low deterrence	0.248***	.064	0.436***	.071	0.249***	.064
Low self-control	1.213***	.057	1.163***	.056	1.211***	.058
Self-control*deterrence	0.256***	.068	0.204**	.064	0.257***	.068
Low deterrence (sq.)			-0.184***	.042		
Low self-control (sq.)			0.279***	.049		
Sex					-0.000	.001
R^2	.335		.366		.335	
Slovenia						
Low deterrence	0.174***	.033	0.204***	.036	0.157***	.031
Low self-control	0.164**	.044	0.151**	.040	0.164**	.045
Self-control*deterrence	0.122*	.052	0.132*	.061	0.120*	.053
Low deterrence (sq.)			-0.080**	.027		
Low self-control (sq.)			0.080	.047		
Sex					0.142	.081
R^2	.115		.142		.122	

Conclusions

- **Findings consistently support SAT‘s conceptualization of the interplay of deterrence and self-control**
- **The impact of deterrence depends on individual level of self-control**
- **Deterrent effects are greatest for adolescents with low self-control**
- **Robustness of findings across countries and methods enhances confidence in the validity of the results**

Thank you very much for your attention!

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Helmut Hirtenlehner

Situational Action Theory