

Ruben Van Severen

Henri-Dunantlaan 2
Ghent, 9000, Belgium
+32 470 30 47 57
Email: ruben.vanseveren@ugent.be
Socials: [LinkedIn](#)

Summary Statement

At the heart of my work is the belief that a better understanding of the perspective of ordinary citizens can help democracies become more resilient in the face of growing distrust, polarization, and other contemporary political pressures. As a political psychologist at the Social Psychology Lab at Ghent University and a member of an interdisciplinary research consortium on changing local democracy ([link](#)), I focus on how citizens view representative democracy and alternative or complementary policy-making models. Specifically, I study how individual traits (e.g., cynicism, ideology) and contextual factors (e.g., crises, issue polarization) shape citizen evaluations *of* and engagement *with* these models. Through this work, I seek to bridge psychological insights and democratic theory to help build more resilient and responsive democracies.

Research Experience

Université Libre de Bruxelles | Research visitor (October 2025)
Centre for the Study of Politics (CEVIPOL), hosted by Prof. Jean-Benoit Pilet

Ghent University | Postdoctoral Assistant (2025 - present)
Department of Developmental, Personality, and Social Psychology (30%)
Department of Public Governance and Management (60%)

Ghent University | PhD Fellow (2021 - 2025)
Department of Developmental, Personality and Social Psychology
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Arne Roets

Ghent University | Research internship (2019-2020)
Department of Experimental Psychology
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Durk Talsma

Education

Ghent University | Doctor of Science in Psychology | Defended 2 September 2025
PhD Dissertation: *Representative democracy at a crossroads: Unpacking citizen preferences for alternative policy-making models*
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Arne Roets - Co-supervisor: Prof. Dr. Bram Wauters

Ghent University | MSc in Theoretical and Experimental Psychology (2019–2021)

Master Thesis (16/20): *Social media outlets and attitude polarization: How exposure to twitter feeds affects your opinions*
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Arne Roets

Ghent University | Bachelor in Theoretical and Experimental Psychology (2016–2019)

Research Output

A1 articles: 9 | Preprints: 1 | Book Chapters: 1 | Citations: 62 | h-index: 2

Van Severen, R., Roets, A., Van Muylem, D., Haesevoets, T., Van Hiel, A., & Wauters, B. (2024). Democratic and authoritarian government preferences in times of crisis: An experimental investigation. *Social Psychology*, 55(1), 37–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000538>

Van Severen, R., Haesevoets, T., Wauters, B., & Roets, A. (2025). Citizen preferences for decisional power levels and participatory instruments in local government. *Policy Studies*, 1–31.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2025.2539495>

Van Severen, R., Haesevoets, T., & Roets, A. (2025). From principle to practice: the limits of top-down referendums in reengaging political cynics. *Political Research Exchange*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2025.2546327>

Van Severen, R., Roets, A. (preprint). Divergence and Common Ground on How to Resolve Polarized Issues in America? Partisan Views and the Mediating Role of Instrumentality. Available at SSRN: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4889817>

Haesevoets, T., Verschuere, B., **Van Severen, R.**, & Roets, A. (2024). How do citizens perceive the use of Artificial Intelligence in public sector decisions? *Government Information Quarterly*, 41(1), 101906.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2023.101906>

Haesevoets, T., Roets, A., **Van Severen, R.**, Dierckx, K., & Verschuere, B. (2023). The public's preferred level of involvement in local policy-making. *Scientific Reports*, 13(1), 7146.

Wauters, B., Haesevoets, T., Verschuere, B., Roets, A., Steyvers, K., Pittoors, G., Berkvens, L., De Smedt, N., Goutry, W., & **Van Severen, R.** (2024). Closing a gap or creating a new one? Comparing support for participatory instruments among different stakeholders. *European Journal of Political Research*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12739>

Verschuere, B., Roets, A., Steyvers, K., Wauters, B., Berkvens, L., De Smedt, N., Goutry, W., Pittoors, G., **Van Severen, R.**, & Haesevoets, T. (2025). Analysing policy actors' preferences for different modes of governing in local

government. *Policy & Politics*, 1-22.

<https://doi.org/10.1332/03055736Y2024D000000048>

Van Hiel, A., Dierckx, K., Depauw, H., Tissot, T., **Van Severen, R.**, Fontaine, J., Roets, A. (2024). The relationship between cognitive and emotional abilities and ideological attitudes among adolescents. *Journal of Personality*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.13007>

Bostyn, D. H., Gouwy, M.-C., De Craene, E., Vanmechelen, C., Scheirlinckx, J., Tissot, T. T., **Van Severen, R.**, van den Bogaard, D., Waterschoot, M., Geenen, F., Depauw, H., Coenye, J., Taquet, J., Xu, X., Dierckx, K., Van Damme, S., Van Hiel, A., & Roets, A. (In Press). Beyond Hypothetical Trolleys: Moral Choices and Motivations in a Real-life Sacrificial Dilemma. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Van Severen, R. (2024). 'Power to the people!' Maar denken alle burgers daar hetzelfde over?. In B. Verschuere, T. Haesevoets, G. Pittoors, A. Roets, K. Steyvers, & B. Wauters (Eds.), *Lokale democratie in Vlaanderen. De kijk van burgers, middenveld, politici en ambtenaren*. (pp. 73–81). Brugge: Vanden Broele.

Conference Presentations

Van Severen, R., Haesevoets, T., Wauters, B., Roets, A. (2022). When democracy becomes more than voting: The impact of citizen participation on attitudes, roles, relationships and legitimacy perceptions of citizens. Poster presented at the Research Day Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Ghent, Belgium.

Van Severen, R., Roets, A., Van Muylem, D., Haesevoets, T., Van Hiel, A., & Wauters, B. (2022). Under threat people become less democratic: An experimental study on legitimacy perceptions of non-democratic governance in times of crisis. Poster presented at the 75th Annual Meeting of the Belgian Association for Psychological Science, Leuven, Belgium.

Van Severen, R., Roets, A., Van Muylem, D., Haesevoets, T., Van Hiel, A., & Wauters, B. (2023). Do citizens become less democratic in times of crisis? An experimental investigation. Poster presented at the International Convention of Psychological Science 2023, Brussels, Belgium.

Van Severen, R., Roets, A., Van Muylem, D., Haesevoets, T., Van Hiel, A., & Wauters, B. (2023). Do citizens become less democratic in times of crisis? An experimental investigation. Paper presented at the International Society of Political Psychology 2023, Montréal, Canada.

Van Severen, R., Haesevoets, T., Roets, A. (2024). The Ironic Effects of Direct Democracy on Political Cynics: An Empirical Case Study. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Belgian Association for Psychological Science, Brussels, Belgium.

Grants

Ghent University | Mobility and Sabbatical Fund Grant (€1,000) | Travel support to present at the International Society of Political Psychology, Montréal, Canada (2023)

Teaching & Supervision

Ghent University | Supervision of 14 students with their Masters' Theses (2021-present)

Ghent University | Creation of digital tutorials for the course *Social Psychology* (2022)

Ghent University | Grading responsibilities for the course *Social Psychology* in the Psychology, Criminology, Political Science, and Sociology programs (2021–present)

Academic service

Peer Reviewer for *Politics & Governance* (Impact Factor: 2.5) (2025)

Peer Reviewer for *Applied Psychology: An International Review* (Impact Factor: 4.3) (2025)

Evaluator & Moderator, Summer School on Local Governance, Madrid (2022): Assessment of research papers and moderation in post-presentation discussions.

External Thesis Evaluator, Ghent University (2021-present): Evaluation of Master's theses in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences

Societal Outreach

ECPR The Loop | Author | Blog post in *ECPR The Loop* presenting findings from article in *Political Research Exchange* to general political science audience

Knack.be | Author | Opinion piece based on my doctoral research in a national magazine with ~3 million monthly readers (<https://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/politiek/de-ironie-van-de-politieke-cynicus-de-kloof-tussen-democratische-principes-en-de-praktijk/>)

Mensenkennis.be | Author | Wrote a research communication article on political cynicism

Newsletter Dissemination | Author & Contributor | First-authored 2 newsletters and co-authored 9 others (June 2022–present), sharing research insights with Belgian practitioners, policymakers, and citizens

Miscellaneous

Human8 (previously: InSites Consulting) | Traineeship (2021) | Reporting based on extensive market research data for a UNICEF Brand Barometer project

Music Academy Tielt | Jazz and Classical Piano (2005–2022) | Laureate of 2014

Academic references

Prof. Arne Roets | Professor of Social Psychology, Ghent University | Email: arne.roets@ugent.be | Phone: +32 9 264 64 17

Prof. Bram Wauters | Professor of Political Science, Ghent University | Email: bram.wauters@ugent.be | Phone: +32 9 264 97 23