The Militant Extremist Mind-Set as a Conservative Ideology Mediated by Ethos of Conflict

2 authors:

Janko Međedović

Institute of Criminological and Sociological R…

29 PUBLICATIONS   **40** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Boban Petrovic

Institute of Criminological and Sociological R…

27 PUBLICATIONS   **12** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project Narcissism(s) and self-esteem(s) in cross-cultural context View project

BRIEF REPORT

AQ: 1

The Militant Extremist Mind-Set as a Conservative Ideology Mediated by Ethos of Conflict

AQ: au

Janko Međedović
Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade, Serbia and Singidunum University

AQ: 2

Boban Petrović
Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade, Serbia

The goal of this research was an exploration of the relations between the militant extremist mind-set (MEMS), ethos of conflict (EOC), and political ideology. A specific hypothesis that was tested in the study was that EOC can be a mediator of the link between conservative ideology and the MEMS. Research participants were selected from a community sample in Serbia ($N = 541$). Results showed that conservative ideology is positively associated with EOC. Conservatism is mostly related to MEMS also; however, a liberal ideology could be linked to the MEMS aspect of the belief of an unfair and unjust world. Finally, structural equation modeling showed that EOC can mediate the relations between conservative ideology and 2 out of 3 MEMS factors. The results showed that intergroup conflict can facilitate the development of militant extremist beliefs via radicalization of conservative attitudes.

Militant Extremist Mind-Set and the Ethos of Conflict

Ideology-driven violence is a complex phenomenon that represents an important challenge for policymakers worldwide. The most destructive form of ideology-based violence is terrorism. This can be defined as any form of violence directed at civilians or noncombatants that aims to intimidate or generate fear (United Nations, 2004). What are the psychological causes of terrorism or any violent behavior associated with ideology? A large body of empirical data show that various extremist beliefs lead to terrorist acts and militant extremism in general (Loza, 2007).

AQ: 4

JANKO MEĐEDOVIĆ holds a PhD. He is a Scientific Associate at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research and a lecturer at the Faculty of Media and Communication at Singidunum University. Both institutions are placed in Belgrade, Serbia. He has published several papers in scientific journals and presented more than 50 research results at scientific conferences. He was a Member of Committee for Serbia in COST action European Network of Conflict Research (ENCoRe). His research interest covers the topics of personality and social psychology of conflict and reconciliation.

AQ: 19

BOBAN PETROVIĆ holds an MA in psychology and currently attending PhD studies at the Faculty of Philosophy of University of Belgrade, Serbia. He is a research associate at the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research in Belgrade, Serbia. He was a MC Substitute for Serbia in COST action European Network of Conflict Research (ENCoRe). His research interests are focused on the issues of individual differences in human behavior, especially personality and social attitudes.

AQ: 20

CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING THIS ARTICLE should be addressed to Janko Međedović, Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Gračanička 18, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia. E-mail: janko.medjedovic@fmk.edu.rs

AQ: 21

Previous research has demonstrated that all of the topics specific to militant extremist thinking can be seen as a representation of three broad factors: (a) proviolence—the justification or advocacy of violence as a means of ideological goal attainment; (b) vile world—seeing the world as an evil, unjust, and miserable place; and (c) divine power—supernatural forces or utopian ideology that can serve as a cause and rationale for extremist acts (Stankov, Saucier, & Knežević, 2010). This concept is called the militant extremist mind-set (MEMS). Previous findings imply that the thinking pattern of militant extremists is not only typical for terrorist groups but also exists in the general population (Stankov et al., 2010).

What are the environmental factors that can generate or facilitate militant extremist beliefs? Can prolonged violent conflict lead to more extreme attitudes, the ones related to violence? Individuals involved in a long-lasting violent conflict are exposed to adverse experiences and a high level of psychological distress (Canetti et al., 2010). Therefore, they develop a system of beliefs that serves as a coping mechanism and provides an understanding of the conflict; however, at the same time, this allows the continuation of the conflict, and when the violence ends, it hinders reconciliation (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). This system of beliefs is called the ethos of conflict (EOC), and it consists of eight societal beliefs:

AQ: 5

- justness of in-group goals,
- concerns about security and threats,
- positive collective self-image of the in-group,
- beliefs about in-group victimization,
- delegitimization of the opponents,
- patriotism,
- beliefs about the importance of in-group unity, and

- the desire for peace as an ultimate goal that can be obtained only if the goals of the group can be fulfilled (Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Halperin, & Zafran, 2012).

Goals of the Present Research

AQ: 6

This research aims to explore the relations between EOC, the MEMS, and political ideology. The data analyzed in the present research come from Serbia, a country that experienced violent conflict between the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. The conflict ended after North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military intervention in Serbia in 1999. Kosovo proclaimed independence from Serbia in 2008. The EOC measured in the present study is related to the beliefs about this specific conflict and the Kosovo Albanians as the group that was involved in it. The primary hypothesis that led to the data analysis is that conservative ideology and more pronounced EOC are positively related to the MEMS.

There is a more specific hypothesis that will be tested in the present research. In their earlier work, Bar-Tal et al. (2012) proposed that EOC is a mediator of general conservative attitudes and conflict-related violence. We wanted to test a similar hypothesis: Can EOC be conceptualized as a mediator of the link between conservative ideology and the MEMS? This hypothesis is based on previous findings that the MEMS is correlated to attitudes similar to conservatism: dogmatism and religiosity (Stankov et al., 2010).

Method

Sample and Procedure

There were 541 respondents in this study. The average age of the participants was 24 years ($SD = 6.04$), with 24% of the participants being male. Average education was 14 years of formal education ($SD = 3.29$). Almost all of the participants (99%) were of Serbian nationality. Data were collected via an online study. No missing values were detected. Participants were motivated to participate by the possibility to receive feedback regarding their results on the administrated questionnaires, an opportunity that most of them used.

Measures

AQ: 7

Political ideology was measured using three scales. Conservative attitudes were assessed by two scales of the Authoritarianism–Conservatism–Traditionalism (ACT) Questionnaire (Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, & Heled, 2010): Conservatism and Traditionalism. These scales have 12 items each, with six of them reverse coded. As an indicator of liberal ideology, we used the abbreviated 10-item Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) Inventory, with five items that measure egalitarianism (Todosijevic, 2013). A higher score reflects more pronounced egalitarianism.

AQ: 8

EOC was measured using the EOC Scale (Bar-Tal et al., 2012). Eight societal beliefs are assessed with six items each. The original scale was translated into Serbian and adapted to the circumstances of the conflict in Kosovo. We consulted the author of the scale in the process of the scale adaptation and back-translation.

MEMS was measured by the MEMS Questionnaire (Stankov et al., 2010). The Proviolence scale has 10 items, the Vile World

Table 1

Prediction of MEMS Factors by Ideology and Ethos of Conflict

Predictors	Proviolence		Vile world		Divine power	
	β	r	β	r	β	r
Sex	−.21**	−.23**	−.04	−.06	−.01	−.03
Age	−.11**	−.15**	.02	−.04	−.13**	−.20**
Education	.02	−.09*	−.09*	−.14*	−.02	−.14**
Conservatism	.10*	.22**	−.20**	.09*	.10*	.46**
Traditionalism	−.05	.17**	.22**	.34**	.50**	.64**
Egalitarianism	−.19**	−.23**	.09*	.04	.02	−.06
Ethos of conflict	.23**	.29**	.35**	.40**	.11*	.50**
F	16.68**		19.91**		59.67**	
R^2	.19**		.21**		.45**	

Note. MEMS = militant extremist mind-set; R^2 = coefficient of determination.
* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

scale has six items, and the Divine Power scale has eight items. All of the scales included in the research use a standard Likert response scale on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = *I completely disagree*; 5 = *I completely agree* with the item. All of the scales used in the research were previously administered in Serbia, and their validity has been demonstrated.

AQ: 9

Results

Relations Between Ideology, EOC, and MEMS

The first analysis was aimed at predicting the MEMS scales by ideology and EOC. In order to achieve that, three regression models were set.[1] Ideology and EOC were set as predictors, while MEMS factors were set as criterion variables. Participants' sex, age, and education are controlled for in the models also. Due to the expected skewness of the MEMS Scale, we used normalized measures (obtained by Blom's algorithm) in the analysis. All regression functions are statistically significant. The contributions of the predictors are shown in Table 1.

Fn1

As shown in Table 1, EOC is positively correlated with all three MEMS factors. In fact, it represents the best predictor of proviolence and vile world. Proviolence is predicted by conservative ideology. The relations between vile world and ideology are more complex: Egalitarianism and traditionalism are positively related to this MEMS factor, whereas the association between conservatism and vile world is negative. Traditionalism was the best predictor of divine power.

T1, AQ:10-11

AQ:12, 13

EOC as a Mediator of the Link Between Political Ideology and MEMS

In this analysis, EOC was modeled as a mediator of the link between political ideology and the militant extremist thinking pattern. The modeling was performed on the latent variables. Conservatism was measured with three ideology scales, EOC by

---

[1] Correlations between all examined variables, together with descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and the items of used inventories are shown in the Appendix.
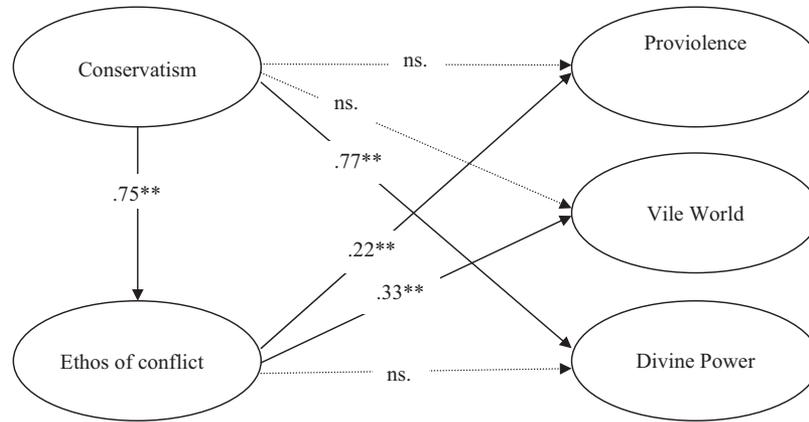
Figure 1. Ethos of conflict (EOC) as a partial mediator of the relation between political ideology and the militant extremist mind-set (MEMS). ns = nonsignificant parameter. * p < .05. ** p < .01.

eight societal beliefs while MEMS factors were modeled using the items of its scales as observable indicators. The fit of the model is adequate (χ^2 = 1,763.6, df = 54, p < .01; Normed Fit Index [NFI] = .91; Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = .90; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .03). The pathways between the examined variables are presented in Figure 1.

As shown in Figure 1, conservative ideology has a significant pathway to EOC and a direct pathway toward divine power. However, the link between conservatism and the two other factors of MEMS is mediated by EOC: The pathways from conservatism toward these are not significant, but the influence of EOC is.

Discussion

Political Ideology as a Disposition Toward MEMS and EOC

The present study provided new evidence of the associations between conservative ideology, EOC, and the MEMS. The findings show that conservative attitudes have systematic positive correlations with both the EOC and MEMS subscales. Egalitarianism has a negative correlation with proviolence. This result is in line with previous data. Previous studies have shown that political conservatism is positively related to out-group hostility and preferences toward aggressive actions against the out-group (De Zavala, Cislak, & Wesolowska, 2010).

The only result that contradicts the pattern that emerged in the relations between ideology and the MEMS is a positive relation between liberal attitudes and vile world. Egalitarianism had positive associations with this factor, and conservatism had negative associations with this factor. This result suggests the possibility that egalitarian attitudes are expressed in the opinion that the world is an unfair and unjust place heading toward destruction. This belief in and of itself does not necessarily imply the use of violence as a means of changing the current state.

Perceptions of Intergroup Conflict Can Mediate the Link Between Conservative Ideology and MEMS

The results of the present research confirmed the hypothesis that EOC can be a mediator of the link between conservative ideology and

extremist beliefs. This finding is in line with the view of EOC as a mediator of conservatism toward specific intergroup conflict issues (Bar-Tal et al., 2012). The rationale of the model is as follows: Conservative persons are more prone to negative attitudes related to intergroup conflict, which can facilitate the emergence of militant extremist beliefs. This model can improve our understanding of the path from conservatism as a high base rate phenomenon to militant extremism as a low base rate phenomenon: EOC can contribute to MEMS adherence for conservatives.

It is interesting to note that previous research found that participants from Serbia had the highest degree of vile world beliefs compared to several other countries (Stankov et al., 2010). The authors provided a general explanation for this, claiming that the result is a consequence of distinctive economic and social events that took place in Serbia in its recent history. The results from the present study can empirically confirm this explanation and provide an even more precise answer: The view of a vile and unjust world is associated with negative out-group attitudes related to the Kosovo conflict and Albanians from Kosovo.[2] Several years after the previous study, the vile world belief still has the highest mean out of all MEMS factors in the present sample.

Concluding Remarks

The first hypothesis tested in this study was partially confirmed: Conservative ideology is related to proviolence and divine power; however, the perception of the world as a vile and unfair place is linked with both conservative and liberal attitudes. The specific hypothesis was also partially confirmed: EOC is a mediator of the link between the factors of conservatism, proviolence, and vile world; this is not true for divine power. This result shows that the greater endorsement of EOC can facilitate the justification of violence as a means for achiev-

---

[2] A more hypothetical but perhaps more valid explanation would involve the end of the Kosovo conflict as well. Since the conflict ended with the intervention of international alliance, i.e. NATO, and its military action in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, this could have led to the more generalized sense of victimization. More precisely, this occurrence could explain the association between the sense of victimization caused by Kosovo Albanians and the general belief that the world is an unjust and unfair place.

ing the ideological goals and the view of the world as an unjust, unfair, and exploitative place. The reliance on a divine authority as a source of legitimization of extremism was not mediated by EOC: The best predictor of these beliefs was traditionalism—an aspect of conservative ideology highly saturated by religious sentiments (Duckitt et al., 2010).

The cross-sectional design of the study prevents us from applying causal reasoning. The hypothesis tested in the study was that EOC is a mediator of conservatism toward MEMS; the main reason for this is that the violent conflict in Serbia happened before the data collection, and we assumed that the beliefs related to it could be a facilitator of a more general extremist thinking pattern. However, the opposite is possible as well: The individuals who endorse EOC could be the ones who have already developed a MEMS. This is an empirical question that can be addressed in future studies, together with the testing of practical interventions aimed at eradicating EOC and MEMS beliefs in postconflict societies.

References

Bar-Tal, D., & Halperin, E. (2011). Socio-psychological barriers to conflict resolution. In D. Bar-Tal (Ed.), *Intergroup conflicts and their resolution: A social psychological perspective* (pp. 217–240). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Bar-Tal, D., Sharvit, K., Halperin, E., & Zafran, A. (2012). Ethos of conflict: The concept and its measurement. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 18,* 40–61. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0026860

Canetti, D., Galea, S., Hall, B. J., Johnson, R. J., Palmieri, P. A., & Hobfoll, S. E. (2010). Exposure to prolonged socio-political conflict and the risk of PTSD and depression among Palestinians. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes, 73,* 219–231. http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/psyc.2010.73.3.219

De Zavala, A. G., Cislak, A., & Wesolowska, E. (2010). Political conservatism, need for cognitive closure, and intergroup hostility. *Political Psychology, 31,* 521–541. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2010.00767.x

Duckitt, J., Bizumic, B., Krauss, S. W., & Heled, E. (2010). A tripartite approach to right-wing authoritarianism: The authoritarianism-conservatism-traditionalism model. *Political Psychology, 31,* 685–715. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2010.00781.x

Loza, W. (2007). The psychology of extremism and terrorism: A Middle-Eastern perspective. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 12,* 141–155. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2006.09.001

Stankov, L., Saucier, G., & Knežević, G. (2010). Militant extremist mind-set: Proviolence, vile world, and divine power. *Psychological Assessment, 22,* 70–86. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0016925

Todosijević, B. (2013). Socijalni, psihološki i ideološki koreni nacionalističkih stavova u Srbiji [Social, psychological and ideological roots of nationalist attitudes in Serbia]. *Psihologija, 46,* 279–297. http://dx.doi.org/10.2298/PSI130411005T

United Nations. (2004). *Report of the Secretary-General's high-level panel* (Document No. A/59/565). New York, NY: Author.

Appendix

AQ: 18

Measures, relations between them ant the scale items examples

Table A1

Correlations, Descriptive Statistics, and Reliabilities of MEMS, Political Ideology, and Ethos of Conflict Scales

Measures	M	SD	α	Correlations													
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
MEMS																	
1. Proviolence	1.59	.59	.82	1													
2. Vile world	3.38	.81	.66	.11**	1												
3. Divine power	2.39	.78	.78	.33**	.09*	1											
Political ideology																	
4. Conservatism	3.50	1.30	.85	.29**	.06	.36**	1										
5. Traditionalism	4.45	1.45	.85	.25**	.30**	.35**	.60**	1									
6. Egalitarianism	3.82	.69	.68	−.11*	.05	−.08	−.20**	−.11*	1								
Ethos of conflict																	
7. Justification of aims	3.33	.87	.83	.20**	.36**	.21**	.34**	.50**	−.06	1							
8. Beliefs about security	2.89	.60	.58	.22**	.25**	.25**	.36**	.49**	−.12**	.51**	1						
9. Delegitimization	3.06	.59	.69	.17**	.28**	.10*	.23**	.36**	−.11**	.60**	.38**	1					
10. Patriotism	2.56	.71	.72	.25**	.24**	.33**	.51**	.61**	−.07	.53**	.57**	.37**	1				
11. Unity	2.90	.56	.60	.13**	.34**	.22**	.42**	.53**	−.15**	.55**	.45**	.42**	.53**	1			
12. Positive collective self-view	2.60	.79	.79	.29**	.26**	.34**	.48**	.64**	−.14**	.68**	.58**	.54**	.64**	.56**	1		
13. Victimization	3.09	.67	.72	.14**	.36**	.14**	.27**	.47**	−.12**	.70**	.46**	.64**	.48**	.49**	.66**	1	
14. Beliefs about peace	2.72	.38	.34	.03	.15**	.08	.19**	.24**	−.20**	.31**	.27**	.33**	.25**	.26**	.36**	.34**	1

Note. Spearman's rho coefficients of correlations are shown. MEMS = militant extremist mind-set.
* p < .05.   ** p < .01 (two-tailed).

(Appendix continues)

Table A2

Measures and Examples of Items

Measures	Example of items
MEMS	
1. Proviolence	*If violence does not solve problems, it is because there was not enough of it.*
2. Vile world	*The present-day world is vile and miserable.*
3. Divine power	*At a critical moment, a divine power will step in to help our people.*
Political ideology	
4. Conservatism	*Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.*
5. Traditionalism	*The "old-fashioned ways" and "old-fashioned values" still show the best way to live.*
6. Egalitarianism	*We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.*
Ethos of conflict	
7. Justification of aims	*The exclusive right of Kosovo Serbs to land stems from it being their historical homeland.*
8. Beliefs about security	*Enforcing military actions is the most efficient means to eliminate threats to the country's security.*
9. Delegitimization	*Albanians in Kosovo have always been characterized by untrustworthiness.*
10. Patriotism	*Fostering a feeling of loyalty to one's homeland should be one of the most important goals of the educational system.*
11. Unity	*If Serbian people are not united, they are in danger of annihilation.*
12. Positive collective self-view	*Serbs have always been known for their wisdom.*
13. Victimization	*During the conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Serbs were usually the victims of Albanian aggression.*
14. Beliefs about peace	*Most Serbs have always aspired to resolve the conflict with the Albanians in Kosovo peacefully.*

Note. MEMS = militant extremist mind-set.