
Militant Extremist Mindset in Post-conflict Regions of the Balkans

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Abstract

This study explores the structure of Militant Extremist Mindset (MEM) within a sample of participants living in areas with enhanced risk of intergroup conflict. We were also interested in comparing members of three different ethnic groups (Serbs, Albanians, and Bosniaks) on MEM measures. A short version of the MEM scale was created for future use. We found that the factorial structure of MEM was replicated in the sample composed of people from both sides of a conflict. Ethnic groups did not differ significantly on the Grudge component of MEM. Group differences were pronounced on the Pro-violence and Utopianism factors. Albanians scored higher than Bosniaks and Serbs on these two dimensions. However, significant differences were obtained on the Ethos of Conflict (EOC) factor when groups of Serbs living within and outside areas of recent conflict were compared.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, much research effort has been invested in the study of radicalization and the extremist (fanatical) mindset. Stankov, Saucier and Knežević (2011) cite the following dictionary definition of *mindset*: “A fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations”. In our own work, it is defined as “a pattern of beliefs, feelings, thoughts, and motivations that tends to be mobilized

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under facilitating conditions” (see Stankov, Saucier & Knežević, 2010a, p. 70). The label was inspired by President Obama’s foreign-policy speech in Cairo, in June 2009. He carefully avoided using the word “terrorism”, preferring “violent extremism”, thereby emphasizing both cognitive (“extremism”) and behavioral (“violent”) features of “terrorists”, rather than the effects (“terror”) of their activities.

The study of Militant Extremist Mindset (MEM) is psychological in nature, assuming that its sources are within the individual (Stankov et al., 2011). MEM is part of a broadly defined personality rather than being typical of a small group of clinical cases (Stankov et al., 2010a). It can be measured by asking people to agree or disagree with statements that describe one's feelings towards other people, institutions and courses of action. Crucial, of course, is the choice of statements. They have been carefully selected to approximate those endorsed by people who have engaged in or supported violent activities (see Stankov et al., 2010a, b; Stankov, Knežević, Saucier, Radović, Milovanović, 2018).

This paper extends our previous work by exploring MEM in three ethnic groups – Serbs, Albanians and Bosniaks - who have been engaged in what can arguably be classified as an “intractable conflict” (see Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Halperin, Zafran, 2012). These groups differ in terms of ethnicity, religious beliefs and social customs. By using samples from such groups, it may be possible to address questions about the nature of MEM and its potential for change. First, however, it is necessary to describe the constituent processes of MEM.

Components of MEM and their Assessment

The definition of MEM rests on a series of empirical studies that employed procedures of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The outcomes of these studies have been described elsewhere (see Saucier, Akers, Miller, Stankov, & Knežević, 2009; Saucier, Kenner, Iurino, Bou-Malham, Chen, Thalmayer, et al, 2015; Stankov et al., 2010a; Stankov, Higgins, Saucier, & Knežević, 2010b). We refer to the three main constructs that have

emerged from these studies as the ingredients or components of MEM and label them *Nastiness*, *Grudge*, and *Excuse*.

Nastiness: War and Pro-violence

In Stankov et al. (2010a), *Nastiness* was captured by the factor “War: Justification of violent acts”, while in Stankov et al. (2010b; 2018) *Nastiness* was captured by the “Pro-violence” factor. The “War” and “Pro-violence” factors identified in our studies are conceptually identical—i.e., they both indicate the acceptance, justification and even advocacy of violence in dealing with enemies. In the present study, we used only measures of Pro-violence (see Table 1). Our studies show that, compared to other components, most people do not agree with statements capturing *Nastiness*: the arithmetic means on a five-point Likert scale with 1 representing “strongly disagree” are slightly over 2 (“disagree”) (Stankov et al., 2010a; 2010b).

Grudge: West and Vile World

The *Grudge* factors identified in our studies to date differ in terms of specificity. In Stankov et al. (2010b) this factor was somewhat narrow and was labeled “West: Sins of the Western nations”. Two themes run through the items that define this factor. First, the West is seen as an aggressor that has committed violence against other countries, implying that revenge against the West is acceptable. Second, the West is seen as morally rotten, and the statements that fall into this category can be interpreted as attempts to demonize the enemy. Items used to measure the West factor in the present study are listed in Table 1.

In Stankov et al. (2010a; 2018) the *Grudge* factor is labeled “Vile World”; it is not limited to the West and it reflects general dissatisfaction with the conditions in the world today (catastrophism being one of its defining features, e.g., that the world is heading for destruction and the human race is facing calamity). In Stankov et al. (2018), however, the vileness of the world is primarily related to aspects of human nature (competitiveness, rationalism, materialism), and not to some general aspect of the world we live in (see Table 1

for items used to measure it). Again, a common feature of all three factors (West identified in Stankov et al., 2010b, and two forms of Vile World from Stankov et al., 2010a and Stankov et al., 2018) identified in our studies is a grudge that may motivate some people to take action. The more general Vile World factor can be seen as having a distal source whereas West is both more specific and closer to what people in a society may see as a threat to peace and stability

Excuse: God, Divine Power and Utopianism.

The Excuse factor also takes different forms in our studies, but they all enable people to justify in their own minds the nasty and violent things they tend to condone (Stankov et al., 2010a; 2010b; 2018). The items classified under the rubric of Excuse bring into focus higher moral principles and therefore imply noble motivation behind such acts. In Stankov et al. (2010b), the excuse factor was labeled “God: In the name of God”. In Stankov et al. (2010a) the factor was labeled “Divine Power”. In Stankov et al. (2018) this factor was labeled “Utopianism”. Since we see Excuse not to be restricted to religiosity, Utopianism may accommodate radicalized groups with atheistic orientation. The three factors of Excuse (God, Divine Power and Utopianism) are conceptually different, more so than components of Nastiness and Grudge. Nevertheless, even though they invoke different sources of moral authority, such as God or some kind of Divine Power or Utopian ideals, the common thread running through all these sources is a justification or an excuse for being pro-violent and having a grudge (see Table 1 for items used to measure these constructs).

Volatile Regions in the Balkans: Ethnic Albanian and Bosniak Minorities in Southern Serbia

For historical reasons related to its geographic location on the pathway between Asia and Europe, quite a few regions in the Balkans are inhabited by several ethnic groups that may differ in terms of religion, language, customs and national identity. Every country in the Balkans contains ethnic minorities, some of which at any point in time may be more resentful of the existing state borders and political conditions.

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Serbia experienced a violent conflict between the Serbs and Albanians in the province of Kosovo. That conflict ended following the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) military intervention in 1999. Kosovo proclaimed independence from Serbia in 2008. Currently, there are simmering tensions in two regions in Southern Serbia where Serbs and non-Serbs (i.e., Serbs, Albanians, and Bosniaks) live together. Although within these particular areas non-Serbs are a majority, in the country itself Albanians and Bosniaks are a minority. Both areas are also economically impoverished in comparison to the Northern parts of the country.

One region is known as Preševo Valley. It is located on the Serbian border with Kosovo and the Republic of Northern Macedonia.² The two main townships are Preševo (90% Albanians) and Bujanovac (55% Albanians). Albanians differ from Serbs both in terms of religion (Islam vs. Orthodox Christianity) and in terms of language and ethnic background (links to an ancient Illyrian tribe vs. Slavic). Over the past two decades, an Albanian political movement in Preševo Valley has been active in demanding unification with Kosovo.

The other region, Sanjak (or Sandžak), is located in the South-Western part of Serbia, on the border with Bosnia, Montenegro and Kosovo.³ The majority of inhabitants (65%) identify themselves as Bosniaks, an ethnic label referring to Muslims of Slavic background. They speak a dialect of the standard, common language (formerly Serbo-Croatian) that is used as the main language of communication in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. Two townships from that region were included in this study: Sjenica (72% Bosniaks) and Prijepolje (34% Bosniaks). The political situation in Sanjak differs from that in Preševo in that there has been no recent movement towards separation from Serbia proper.

² Information about the geographic location of the area and an account of some recent conflicts can be found online: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preševo> (accessed June 12, 2019)

³ For geographic information see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sand%C5%BEak> (accessed June 12, 2019)

The Present Study

Militant Extremist Mindset (MEM) measures have never been administered to participants from regions at enhanced risk of intergroup conflict. It is reasonable to assume that intergroup tensions can facilitate radicalization of a large proportion of the population which, in turn, can cause an escalation of violence both locally and outside the region. This is because conflict may lead to an increase in the components of Grudge that could motivate those high on Nastiness, under the guise of some kind of Excuse, to engage in violent activities. Questions can then be raised about the relative standing of one group against the other(s) on different components of MEM, and relevant policy decisions could be made.

The existence of a conflict, however, points to a possible refinement in the assessment of MEM and its component of Grudge in particular. Conflict is usually between groups of people that are not only known to each other but are frequently also geographically/physically close. The source of a conflict is usually proximal – i.e., having to do with something specific to past or present interactions that have not been resolved in a satisfactory way.

In order to focus the Grudge component on conflicting groups, we adapted items from the Ethos of Conflict (EOC) scale to fit the local requirements in terms of target groups. Bar-Tal et al. (2012) define EOC as “...a relatively stable worldview that creates a conceptual framework, allowing human beings to organize and comprehend the prolonged context of the conflict in which they live... ..it serves as a prism through which society members process new information and judge particular situations that appear periodically...”(p. 42). EOC items used in the present study are displayed in Table 1. In the chosen EOC items, both members of one’s own and members of the opposing group are clearly identified by their names. Thus, a high score on these measures indicates that a person feels strongly that the actions of his/her group are “right” and those of the other group are wrong. Conceptually, EOC items can be interpreted as proximal assessments of Grudge that can be used in the presence of some, perhaps intractable, conflict. Over the past several years, the EOC was investigated in Serbia in relation to the ongoing conflict between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians (see Međedović & Petrović, 2013; 2016).

Međedovic and Petrović (2016) used EOC in an effort to develop a better understanding of the MEM in a sample of participants mainly from the Northern parts of Serbia, which are not involved in intergroup conflict. In their study, measures of conservatism, traditionalism and egalitarianism, together with the EOC scale (Bar-Tal et al., 2012), were used to predict MEM. EOC proved to be the best predictor of Nastiness/Pro-violence ($r = .29$, standardized $\beta = .23$) and an even better predictor of Grudge/Vile World ($r = .40$, standardized $\beta = .35$). This empirical evidence suggests that EOC may indeed be a proximal measure of Grudge. However, one should bear in mind that, although many aspects of EOC can be easily identified in the narratives of extremist groups, the concretization of the animosity towards the neighboring ethnic groups was not identified as the dominant feature of MEM. It can also be pointed out that MEM contains universal elements of a "... (meta)story of paradise, encounter with chaos, fall and redemption" (Peterson, 2018), reflective of personality characteristics of the individuals. EOC, on the other hand, emphasizes concrete ethnic animosities that are predominantly a result of historical and political contingencies and, as such, reflect broader malevolent political narratives. Hence, MEM and EOC may be considered two aspects of radicalization: the former representing general dispositions towards violent extremism that are akin to personality traits, while the latter reflects prejudiced attitudes towards the out-group that are related to the contingent situational/political influences.

Aims of the Study

We address three issues in this paper. First, are MEM statements measuring the intended constructs? In other words, is the factorial structure of MEM in the volatile Balkans region replicable and sufficiently close to the structure obtained in other parts of the world? Our expectation is that six factors – Nastiness/Pro-violence, Vile World, West, Divine Power, Utopianism and Ethos of Conflict (EOC) – will be confirmed. If fewer factors were to emerge, we expect that Vile World and West would coalesce into one factor (Grudge) and that the same would be the case for Divine Power and Utopianism (Excuse). Both outcomes

would be supportive of the MEM model. New EOC items can either become part of the Grudge factor (our first hypothesis) or, perhaps, define a separate factor which, in turn, has noteworthy correlations with Grudge and Pro-violence (our alternative hypothesis).

Second, we compare Serbs, Albanians and Bosniaks on factor scores obtained from the structural analyses of MEM and EOC. We are interested in exploring if these three groups differ on the Nastiness, Grudge and Excuse factors. It is reasonable to expect that, in cases of conflict, both parties will be equally aroused and therefore there will be no differences between the groups on the MEM factors. However, as mentioned above, recent political conflicts have emerged between Serbs and Albanians. Therefore, if differences on the MEM scales were to eventuate, one would expect to find them in comparisons between Serbs and Albanians on one side, and Bosniaks on the other side. There has been no armed conflict between Bosniaks from Sanjak and either Serbs or Albanians in recent times and it can be assumed that Bosniaks will be located below these two groups on MEM factors.

Our further hypothesis is that the standing on MEM and EOC factors critically depends on a theoretically relevant contextual variable, i.e., living in the region that has experienced recent armed conflict. Thus, we expect to find significant differences between people (i.e., Serbs) living in the area of recent armed conflict (Preševo valley) and their kin living in areas with a reduced level of conflict (Sanjak and Western Serbia). We also expect the highest MEM scores among Albanians (participating and living in the area of recent conflict but being a minority in Serbia), followed by Serbs (participating in the recent conflict, but at the same time being a majority nation and living both within and outside the area of conflict) and finally, Bosniaks (not participating in the recent conflict and not living in the area of conflict).

Finally, if the factor structure is sufficiently similar to previous findings, it may be useful to construct a shorter version of the MEM scale. With the growing use of large-scale, longitudinal, multivariate, and multimethod studies, the need for psychometrically sound short scales is increasing.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

The study was based on convenience sample of 600 participants from the Southern regions of Serbia – Preševo Valley, Sanjak and Western Serbia. The total sample comprised 100 Albanians, 200 Bosniaks, and 300 Serbs (100 comparing themselves to Albanians and 200 to Bosniaks). The average age was 23.53 ($SD = 4.58$). There were 295 male participants and 305 females. The average number of years of formal education was 11.57 ($SD = 2.60$). The participants rated their economic position within the country of Serbia on a 10-point scale (1 = poor, 10 = rich) and the arithmetic mean was 5.39 ($SD = 2.83$).

A research publishing centre specializing in public surveys and employing trained survey specialists collected the data⁴. Paper-and-pencil versions of the questionnaires were employed for data collection during the month of March 2018. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Psychology, University of Belgrade, Serbia (Protocol #2018-006).

Measures

All 43 statements measuring Militant Extremist Mindset (MEM, 39 items) and Ethos of Conflict (EOC, 4 items) employed in this study are listed in Table 1⁵. The statements are grouped into Pro-violence (10 items), Divine Power (7 items), Utopianism (8 items), West (8 items), Vile World (6 items) and EOC (4 items). Each statement was accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree).

The EOC items were formulated to pit one's own nationality against that of the group with which they are in conflict. For example, Albanians were given the statement "It is well

⁴DEMOSTAT – research publishing centre: www.demostat.rs

⁵ We administered 8 items of the EOC – each EOC belief was operationalized by one item. Two items were removed because their presence led to poorer internal consistency of the total EOC score. Another two items did not mention the outside group explicitly and, on closer scrutiny, they were judged to have conceptual overlap with the MEM scales' items. Thus, four EOC items were retained for the analyses reported in this paper.

known that Serbs cannot be trusted” while Serbian participants were given “It is well known that Albanians cannot be trusted”. The same procedure was followed with the Bosniak version. The Albanian version of the questionnaire was translated into the Albanian language. To sum up, minorities (Albanians and Bosniaks) always assessed Serbs, while Serbs assessed either Albanians or Bosniaks, depending on which of these two minorities are prevalent in a particular region. Thus, Serbs from Preševo and Bujanovac assessed Albanians, while Serbs from Sanjak and Western Serbia assessed Bosniaks.

Statistical Analyses

Initial analyses were performed on the total sample using the traditional Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA, i.e., maximum likelihood followed by PROMAX) in the SPSS package. This was followed by ESEM (exploratory structural equation modeling, Asparouhov & Muthen, 2009) available in Mplus (Muthen & Muthen, 1998 – 2010)⁶. For the purposes of our work here, ESEM can be described as a combination of EFA and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). It is similar to CFA in that one can specify the loadings on the variables that define a particular construct such as Pro-violence, Divine Power, etc. It differs from CFA in that the other non-specified loadings are not fixed at zero and, while the program may try to get them close to zero, cross-loadings are allowed. In this paper, we also calculate factor scores and use them in comparisons between the ethnic groups. Finally, the Ant Colony Optimization algorithm emphasizing model fit (Marcoulides & Drezner, 2003) was employed in the creation of a short version of the MEM scale.

⁶ We did check measurement invariance between the three groups, but the fit was poor. This was at least in part due to the relatively small number of members in each group.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The first column in Table 1 presents arithmetic means and standard deviations for 43 statements based on a 5-point Likert scale for $N = 600$. The letter R following the statement indicates that the scoring was reversed in order to make it in agreement with the other statements measuring the same construct. The statement with the lowest arithmetic mean (1.82) is the first Pro-violence item in Table 1 (We should never use violence as a way to try to save the world) and the highest agreement ($M = 4.12$) is with EOC item 40 (The fact that Serbs/Bosniaks/Albanians have always lived in these spaces implies that they have the rights on this territory).

The items in Table 1 are grouped in terms of the constructs they are supposed to measure. In other words, the first 10 statements are expected to measure Pro-violence; the average score for these items is 2.30, similar to what we found in previous studies. The next group of seven statements is expected to measure the construct of Divine Power; their mean is 2.99, which is close to the mean of 3.09 for the eight items measuring the conceptually related construct of Utopianism. The average of the eight statements measuring West is 3.40 and the average for the six Vile World statements is 3.65. Finally, the four EOC statements have a mean of 3.51.

Replication of the MEM's Factor Structure

Following common practice, we ran both EFA and ESEM analyses of the 43 MEM items specifying a different number (i.e., 3 to 8) of factors. Based on previous work, the expectation was that a 6-factors solution would be replicated and it would be possible to interpret the factors as Pro-violence, Divine Power, Utopianism, West, Vile World and Ethos of Conflict (EOC) along the lines indicated in the introduction. However, a 5-factors solution proved to be more interpretable.

EFA and ESEM analyses gave similar results, and the 5-factor ESEM solution is presented in Table 1. Results of the ESEM analysis show that the Chi-Square Test of Model Fit was 1632.00 with $df = 698$. This fit index is typically seen as satisfactory if the ratio of Chi-square and the df is between 2 and 3. Another two commonly used indices, CFI (0.864) and TLI (0.825), are somewhat below their suggested criterion value of .90. However, both RMSEA (0.047) and SRMR (0.037) are lower than 0.08 and 0.05 and are therefore acceptable. Overall, the 5-factors solution presented in Table 1 has reasonably acceptable fit indices.

The factor pattern matrix obtained from the exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM) procedure is presented in Table 1. There are several aspects of this matrix that need to be noted. First, asterisks (*) indicate the cells that are expected to produce significant loadings for a given factor. Second, all loadings higher than .30 are presented in Table 1. For some cells, both asterisks and loadings are present, confirming the expectations. For other cells, only one of these two bits of information is present, indicating that the expected loading is not confirmed. The factors can be interpreted as follows.

Factor 1: Pro-violence. The first factor has noteworthy loadings from nine out of ten statements that have been identified in our previous studies as measures of Pro-violence or a broader trait of *Nastiness*. The only statement that does not load on this factor is #2, which instead has a low (.32) loading on the last factor. There are two new loadings on this factor as well. Item #17 (Martyrdom is an act of a true believer in the cause, not an act of terrorism) and the low (.32) loading on item #25 (The unbreakable bond between the members of my group is sealed by the noble goals we are trying to achieve) do not modify its interpretation in a significant way. The Pro-violence factor that measures the acceptance, justification and even advocacy of violence in dealing with enemies is well replicated in the present study.

Factor 2: Divine Power. Five of the seven items expected to load on this factor do so. Thus, the factor is reasonably well defined. This is a component of *Excuse* that appeals to higher moral principles and supernatural forces and therefore implies noble motivation behind violent acts. It is important to note that both items that failed to load on the second factor

(items #12 and #17) have their loadings on the related Utopianism factor. Also, the nature of the Divine Power factor is not substantially changed by the additional loadings since three of these - items #18 (.53), #19 (.34) and #24 (.46) - were also expected to load on the related Utopianism factor.

Factor 3: Utopianism. Four out of eight items that were expected to load on Utopianism define this factor. From that point of view, this is perhaps a somewhat poor replication of the previous findings. However, it should be noted that one of the missed items (#23) has low communality and therefore has little variance in common with the rest of the battery and the other item (#25) is similar in that it has low loadings on two other factors. Finally, item #18 loads on the conceptually related Divine Power factor. Notice also that three additional loadings on the Utopianism factor (items #12, #14 and #17) were all supposed to define the Divine Power factor. Overall, we can conclude that, even though the evidence for the presence of two *Excuse* factors is not as strong as it is for the existence of Pro-violence, the existence of the Divine Power and Utopianism factors in these data has not been seriously challenged.

Factor 4: Grudge (West and Vile World). All eight items that were selected to measure Grudge against the West load on the fourth factor in Table 1. Also, all six items that were selected to measure Grudge defined as a perception of the world being threatening and unpleasant load on the fourth factor in Table 1. The Grudge factor is well defined by the items included in the present study. Additional loadings from some items – i.e., #16 (.34), #24 (.37) and #25 (.30) – are relatively small and do not change the interpretation substantially.

It would be reasonable to expect that the three hypothesized Grudge constructs – Vile World, West and the Ethos of Conflict (EOC) – would behave in the same way as the Excuse factors and define three, perhaps somewhat modified, originally intended factors. Instead, the statements intended to measure Vile World and West factors load on a single factor while new Ethos of Conflict items define a separate factor.

Factor 5: Ethos of Conflict (EOC). Four items were chosen to assess the feelings of Serbs, Albanians and Bosniaks toward each other and thus provide a proximal assessment of

Grudge. Two possible outcomes were mentioned in the introduction – EOC items can turn out to be a part of the other constructs or they may define a separate factor. As can be seen in Table 1, all four items defined a separate EOC factor. Furthermore, in accordance with the findings of Međedovic and Petrović (2016), it can be seen at the bottom of Table 1 that the EOC factor correlates moderately with Pro-violence ($r = .36$) and West/Vile World ($r = .34$) factors.

Correlations among the factors are also presented in Table 1. These correlations are relatively low and it is likely that a broad MEM factor will be weak. Therefore, MEM is best thought of as a set of symptoms, not as a trait like extraversion or neuroticism.

Overall, the findings reviewed above can be interpreted as evidence of a reasonable replicability of the MEM's factorial structure among the inhabitants of Southern Serbia. Three of the original MEM factors – Pro-violence, Divine Power and Utopianism - have replicated. Two factors – West and Vile World – have merged into one factor. This can be interpreted meaningfully as they are considered to be aspects of Grudge. Finally, a new putative measure of Grudge consisting of items that were based on the Ethos of Conflict (EOC) framework has been identified. These results indicate a satisfactory level of replicability (see Osborne, Costello, & Kellow, 2014).

Differences between Ethnic groups on Measures of MEM

In this section, we consider the arithmetic mean differences between the three ethnic groups on our measures of Militant Extremist Mindset. For that purpose, we employ factor scores based on the solution reported in Table 1. These factor scores are standardized for each factor – i.e., the total mean is equal to zero and the standard deviation is equal to one. The findings should be seen as preliminary - detailed examination of group differences on MEM and a host of other measures collected from the same sample is being conducted at the time of this writing and will be reported subsequently.

Figure 1 presents arithmetic means for each ethnic group on all five factors. Negative signs indicate that the group is below the average on a given factor. Figure 1 also contains

ANOVA F-tests for the differences between the three ethnic groups on each factor. Ethnic differences on Grudge (West/Vile World) are not statistically significant ($F = 2.32$). Thus, the overall level of endorsement of the Grudge statements is almost the same among Serbs, Albanians and Bosniaks. To put it the other way, all three ethnic groups blame the West and are dissatisfied with life in the world today to about the same degree. However, it is still conceivable that there may be differences on one of the components. For example, it would be reasonable to expect that Serbs may score higher on the West factor since they were the target of NATO's intervention in the Kosovo conflict. A combined West/Vile world factor score may hide this difference. This possibility will be examined in more detail in a subsequent publication.

It is useful to compare ethnic differences on the West/Vile World factor with the differences on the EOC factor, which is supposed to capture a proximal aspect of Grudge. The F-test for the EOC is significant ($F = 14.61^*$). As can be seen in Figure 1, the largest mean difference (.74) is between the mean for Bosniaks (-.30) and the mean for Albanians (.44). The mean for Serbs (.07) is in-between. This is interesting since both Bosniaks and Albanians compared themselves to the Serbs in this survey; it clearly indicates that Bosniaks view Serbs in a more positive light than do Albanians. These findings are difficult to explain either by religious or ethnic animosities (which should have pitted both Albanians and Bosniaks against Serbs and vice versa). Arguably, the fact that members of the local ethnic communities were involved in violent ethnic conflict explains these findings. Despite the fact that Bosniaks and Serbs experienced a terrible conflict in Bosnia in the 1990s, this does not seem to have profoundly affected their local communities in the South of Serbia, but the conflict between local Albanian and Serb communities did. If we are right, the differences in EOC scores between Bosniaks and Serbs in Bosnia itself (i.e., where their local communities were in armed conflict) should be much more pronounced than what we have found in this study. The question of why the EOC mean score of Albanians is still higher than the mean score of Serbs will be addressed below. It is worth noting that Bosniaks and Serbs are closer to each other than they are to Albanians on the Divine Power factor.

The most pronounced ethnic differences in Figure 1 are on measures of Nastiness (Pro-violence, $F = 95.95^{**}$) and Excuse (Utopianism, $F = 44.99^{**}$); in both cases, Albanians have the highest average scores. With respect to Pro-violence, Albanians (1.13) score more than 1.5 standard deviations higher than Bosniaks (-.41) and more than 1.23 standard deviation higher than Serbs (-.10). As shown above, most people in our study do not endorse Nastiness statements strongly, the average score being around 2.30 on the 5-point Likert scale (see also Stankov et al., 2010a, 2010b). The present sample of Albanian participants is endorsing violent means for conflict resolution more than any other ethnic group we have studied to date - their average Pro-violence score exceeds 3 on a 5-point Likert scale. We cannot ascertain from the information obtained in this survey whether the endorsement of violence has anything to do with the tradition of blood feuds that continue to afflict Kosovo and Albanian society in general to this day (Boyle, 2010; Grutzpalk, 2002). It can also be at least partially ascribed to the fact that Albanians in our sample represent an ethnic minority (like Bosniaks) in Serbia and also live in the regions where armed conflicts took place recently (unlike Bosniaks). It could be, thus, that being an ethnic minority and living in an area of recent conflict can substantially increase militant extremism. Finally, it might be that some unidentified factor has led to a biased selection of the Albanian minority sample, such that the majority of participants stand exceptionally high on the MEM factors.

With respect to Utopianism, it can be seen in Figure 1 that Albanians (.73) are 1.09 standard deviations above Serbs (-.36). Thus, Albanians believe significantly more than Serbs that their actions enable creating an ideal, paradise-like world in future. A replication of this result and further analyses will be needed to explain this difference.

MEM among Serbs Living in and Outside Areas of Recent Conflict

In this study, the only ethnic group whose members live both in the areas of recent armed conflict (Preševo and Bujanovac) and in the areas where no armed conflict has recently taken place (Sanjak and Western Serbia) are Serbs. These two groups are compared on all five

factors extracted from MEM and EOC items in Figure 2. The differences between these groups are not significant on the Divine Power, Utopianism and West/Vile World factors. As predicted by our second hypothesis, the EOC factor differentiated highly ($F = 125.11^{**}$) between Serbs living in areas of recent armed conflict (arithmetic mean = .85) and those living outside these areas (arithmetic mean = -.32). Hence, the EOC factor is more sensitive to the dominant political animosities that led to a serious armed conflict than the rest of the MEM factors. This interpretation is also consistent with the claim that EOC is less rooted in personality than are the other MEM factors.

The comparison between Serbs and Albanians living in the area of recent conflict is also quite informative. As can be seen in Figure 2, the average EOC score for Serbs from the Preševo region (.85) is higher than the average score of Albanians (.44) from the same region that are presented in Figure 1. In this particular case, the ethnic group that is identified with the nation-state (Serbia) appears to be more self-righteous than the minority Albanians.

The results presented in Figure 2 also show that the Pro-violence factor may be affected by endemic ethnic animosities. Although comparatively small (mean difference between Serbs living within [.07] and outside [-.27] Preševo region is a third of the standard deviation), the effect is statistically significant. This finding was somewhat unexpected since Pro-violence is known to be related to personality characteristics such as sadism and psychopathy (Međedović & Knežević, 2019). Therefore, the finding that the Pro-violence factor might be influenced by prolonged animosities between ethnic groups that result in armed conflict is important for understanding MEM. It is interesting that, although there is a sharp difference in EOC scores of Serbs living in the areas of conflict and those living outside, and there is also some difference in Pro-violence scores between these two groups, the mean Pro-violence score of Serbs living in the area of recent conflict (.07) is still substantially lower than the mean score of Albanians living in the same area (1.13 in Figure 1). To gain further understanding of these findings, it would be important to have data on Albanians and Serbs from Kosovo itself because it is possible that scores on the Pro-violence scale might be connected to the minority status of a group participating in the conflict.

Short Measure of MEM

One of the goals of this study was to construct a measure that can be used as a brief assessment of MEM. To this end, we utilized the Ant Colony Optimization (ACO) algorithm (Marcoulides & Drezner, 2003). The resulting short scale captures three MEM factors, each with four items: a) Pro-violence (items #5, #6, #7 and #10 in Table 1); b) Vile World (items #28, #36, #37 and #38 in Table 1); and c) Utopianism (items #12, #14, #22 and #25 in Table 1). Details about the procedures and statistics used in the application of the ACO can be obtained from the corresponding author.

Discussion and Summary

World regions experiencing ethnic friction and conflict may generate an increased radicalization of the population and result in outbursts of violence both locally and internationally. Measures for the assessment of militant extremist mindset (MEM) were developed in order to assess psychological dispositions towards militant extremism at a global level. This is the first study to collect MEM data from participants on both sides of an intergroup conflict. An additional set of items adopted from the Ethos of Conflict (EOC) scales (Bar-Tal et al., 2012) was included in order to assess participants' feelings towards the opposing side.

The aim of this paper was to see if the main constructs of MEM can be identified in a sample composed of participants from Serbia, both majority Serbs and members of the Albanian and Bosniak minorities. Overall, the replication turned out to be reasonably successful. A five-factor solution based on ESEM (Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling) analysis had marginally acceptable fit-indices. Three of these factors - Pro-violence, Divine Power and Utopianism – were mostly replications of previous findings. Two measures of Grudge – West and Vile World – did not separate but defined a single factor. Finally, EOC measures defined the fifth factor.

Although there are differences in content between Utopianism and Divine Power, as well as between Vile World and West, these constructs are conceptually close enough to consider them as expressions of the same latent tendencies, i.e., Excuse and Grudge, respectively. That was also apparent in the analyses we carried out in the construction of a short version of the MEM scale. Thus, it was possible to construct convincing one-dimensional models with the items capturing Pro-violence, Grudge (Vile World and West), as well as Excuse (Utopianism and Divine Power). The short MEM scale consists of 12 items, with four items per dimension.

Finally, the EOC factor is a new finding reflecting the level of group radicalization. The items are formulated in a way that names the groups in conflict. Any future use of these items would have to specify the groups involved. However, there appear to be important differences between EOC and the other MEM factors. In particular, the EOC items are likely to be more sensitive than MEM items to the group processes leading to political radicalization. The extent to which both MEM and EOC are susceptible to the dominant political narrative is a matter for further research.

Ethnic Differences in MEM

In our interpretations of the ingredients of MEM, we have emphasized that all three – Nastiness, Grudge and Excuse - are necessary to understand the behavior of a radicalized individual and his/her potential for violent actions. It is assumed that nasty social attitudes exist in every society and there are pronounced individual differences in the level of Nastiness. Those high on Pro-violence/Nastiness are akin to some groups of convicts who tend to endorse similar views. If there is an increase in the level of Grudge, Nasty people will be more likely to become engaged than those low on this disposition. Excuse, either religiously slanted or utopian in the case of atheists, serves as a justification for violent acts and, like Nastiness, it is a social disposition/attitude present within individuals in every society. Our initial assumption was that there will be small differences between ethnic groups on all MEM factors but that this may change when there is conflict between the groups.

Our findings indicate that ethnic group differences are not significant on the Grudge component of MEM – there is an essential agreement between Serbs, Bosniaks and Albanians about the responsibility of the West and the vileness of the world we live in. To some extent, this is surprising since Albanians were helped by the West in a major way during the Kosovo conflict, but they still seem to feel the same as Serbs and Bosniaks about the West’s deeds overall. However, interesting differences exist on the Ethos of Conflict (EOC) factor: Bosniaks and Albanians differ in the way they view Serbs, with Bosniaks being significantly more positive towards the majority Serb population.

The finding of a lack of ethnic differences on Grudge (i.e., West/Vile World) is perhaps not too surprising since it suggests that it is the social framework captured by the EOC that matters in conflict situations. By comparison, all three groups experience the perceived causes of suffering and pain measured by the components of Grudge in the same way. The important role of EOC is supported by comparing Serbs living in areas of recent conflict with their compatriots elsewhere. It is clear that the experience of a recent conflict leads to a significant increase in the level of EOC and, therefore, to the increase in the amount of blame directed towards the outgroup.

Ethnic group differences are pronounced on the Pro-violence factor, with Albanians standing higher than both Serbs and Bosniaks. This may be interpreted to imply that more Albanians than Serbs will be prepared to join in the action should a flare-up happen again, at least in the regions of recent conflict in South Serbia. The reasons for such an outcome will need to be examined further. A recent book edited by Pratto et al (2017) provides a more detailed account of the cultural differences between the national groups in former Yugoslavia.

There are also pronounced differences between Serbs and Albanians on the Utopianism factor. Our interpretation of this factor is similar to that of Divine Power – it is an Excuse for or justification of violence by invoking higher ideals. Notice, however, that a belief in an idealized world, which is emphasized by the Utopian statements, may also be interpreted as something worth striving for. Thus, it is possible that Albanians see these statements as encouragement rather than a simple Excuse.

Caveat

Although the structure of the MEM has been replicated with the total sample of Serbs, Albanians and Bosniaks, an important issue related to the measurement of the Ethos of Conflict (EOC) needs to be highlighted, namely, that the target nationality differs for each ethnic group, with Serbs comparing themselves to Albanians and Bosniaks while the other two ethnic groups compared themselves to Serbs. Our approach in this paper is to interpret the appearance of a well-defined EOC factor as supportive of the claim that EOC statements represent comparisons of one's own ethnic group with the out-group, whatever this other group may be. An alternative interpretation may be that each nationality has distinct views/feelings/opinions about other nationalities – i.e., Serbs would endorse EOC statements differently depending on whether they are comparing themselves to Albanians or Bosniaks. Under this interpretation, the obtained stable EOC factor can be seen as a fortuitous outcome at the level of analysis involving the total sample. Future research will need to address this issue.

Conclusions

The evidence reported in this paper supports the view that the nature of the Militant Extremist Mindset (MEM), i.e., its construct validity, does not change significantly when the instrument is given to samples of people who are involved on both sides of an intergroup conflict. Ethnic differences on the Grudge (Vile World and West) component of MEM were not pronounced and it would be interesting to find out if this finding generalizes to other conflict situations (e.g., Palestinian/Israeli). We found pronounced differences on Pro-violence and Utopianism components of the MEM but this finding may be specific to the differences in social backgrounds of the ethnic groups in the Balkans. From the security point of view, proximal Grudge captured by the Ethos of Conflict (EOC) measures may prove to be particularly useful in assessing the strength of blame of one group against the other.

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Table 1
ESEM Factor Pattern Matrix Based on 43 Militant Extremist Mindset (MEM) Statements from Serbs, Bosniaks and Albanians (N = 600)

	Factor Pattern					EOC
	Arithmetic Mean (SD)	Pro- violence	Divine Power	Utopianis m	West/ Vile World	
<u>Nastiness/Pro-violence</u>						
1. We should never use violence as a way to try to save the world. (R)	1.82 (1.15)	.61*				
2. Those who claim to be against the use of any form of force are on their way to becoming slaves.	3.02 (1.33)	*				.32
3. Armed struggle is the only way that youths can redeem themselves and their society.	2.34 (1.33)	.96*				
4. A good person has a duty to avoid killing any living human being. (R)	2.06 (1.27)	.58*		-.35		
5. All problems can be solved through negotiations and compromise. (R) ^a	2.13 (1.08)	.46*		-.31		

6. Killing is justified when it is an act of revenge. ^a	2.28 (1.36)	.97*
7. If violence does not solve problems, it is because there was not enough of it. ^a	2.35 (1.36)	.97*
8. The only way to teach a lesson to our enemies is to threaten their lives and make them suffer.	2.66 (1.37)	.73*
9. Our enemy's children are like scorpions; they need to be squashed before they grow up.	2.26 (1.35)	.83*
10. War is the beginning of salvation. ^a	2.11 (1.26)	.92*

Excuse/Divine Power

11. Only an idiot would go into a challenging situation expecting help from a divine power. (R)	2.59 (1.29)	.60*
12. Those who obey heaven will receive beautiful rewards. ^a	3.15 (1.34)	* .58
13. I do not believe in life after death.	3.13 (1.39)	.89*

14. All suffering in this life is small in comparison to the eternal pleasures one will receive after death. ^a	3.14 (1.24)	.47*	.50
15. If you believe you have received commands from God, you are certainly crazy. (R)	3.16 (1.33)	.62*	
16. At a critical moment, a divine power will step in to help our people.	3.29 (1.28)	.62*	.34
17. Martyrdom is an act of a true believer in the cause, not an act of terrorism.	2.50 (1.31)	.63	* .45

Excuse/Utopianism

18. Real life begins after one's life on Earth.	3.19 (1.36)	.53	*
19. One day, a just world, free of exploitation and dictatorship, will be created.	3.01 (1.25)	.34	.74*
20. My group is destined to accomplish important things.	3.02 (1.11)		.37*
21. One day, all people in this world will be united in truth.	3.06 (1.28)		.63*

22. I believe that a new type of human, free of greed and selfishness, will be created. ^a	3.20 (1.27)			.58*
23. There is a group of people whose uncompromised ideas and brave actions make my own life meaningful and worth living.	2.97 (1.21)			*
24. I am in awe of those who sacrifice their lives to the fight for truth and justices.	3.21 (1.23)		.46	* .37
25. The unbreakable bond between the members of my group is sealed by the noble goals we are trying to achieve. ^a	3.04 (1.07)	.32		* .30

Grudge/West

26. Western countries came with their fleets and mad dogs and settled in other people's homelands.	3.38 (1.15)			.59*
27. The West aggressively continues to keep our world under its control, so that it can suck its wealth and resources and keep it as a market for	3.60 (1.10)			.62*

consumer products.

28. The West is degraded by its rotten morals, its lack of dignified values, its AIDS epidemic, and its alcohol and drug addiction. ^a	3.42 (1.21)	.47*
29. Terrorism in the form of unfair torture and execution without trial is carried out daily by many Western countries.	3.44 (1.09)	.66*
30. The West uses advanced science and technology not for the welfare of humanity but for developing weapons and the capability of destroying the earth ten times over.	3.55 (1.09)	.73*
31. The West's salvation will only come with withdrawal from other people's land and stop support for corrupt leaders.	3.37 (1.12)	.57*
32. Western leaders have forced their people to believe that we are the cancer of the world, thus we must be eliminated.	3.20 (1.15)	.66*
33. It has become clear that the West has an unspeakable hatred for us.	3.23 (1.26)	.67*

Grudge/Vile World

34. Modern governments have overstepped moral bounds and no longer have a right to rule.	3.42 (1.11)	.54*
35. Today the human race is on the edge of an enormous calamity.	3.92 (0.99)	.59*
36. Evil has been reincarnated in the cult of markets and the rule of multinational companies. ^a	3.50 (1.07)	.57*
37. The world is headed for destruction. ^a	3.89 (1.06)	.60*
38. Our people are in danger, everybody is trying to divide us and hurt us. ^a	3.51 (1.21)	.63*
39. The present-day world is vile and miserable.	3.66 (1.15)	.64*

The Ethos of Conflict (EOC)

40. The fact that Serbs/Bosniaks/Albanians have always lived in these spaces implies that they have the rights on this territory.	4.13 (1.12)	.60*
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41. It is well known that Serbs/Bosniaks/Albanians cannot be trusted.	2.87 (1.44)	.96*
42. If Serbs/Bosniaks/Albanians are not united, there is a danger of them being destroyed.	3.84 (1.18)	.62*
43. Even though Serbs/Bosniaks/Albanians strive for peace, Serbs/Bosniaks/Albanians continue to cause confrontations.	3.20 (1.34)	.95*

Factor Correlations:

	1				
	.07	1			
	.25	.16	1		
	.13	.29	.30	1	
	.36	.19	.14	.34	1

Note: SD = standard deviation. Asterisks indicate expected loadings. Only loadings above .30 are presented. (R) = reverse keyed item.

^a Items included in the short MEM scale.

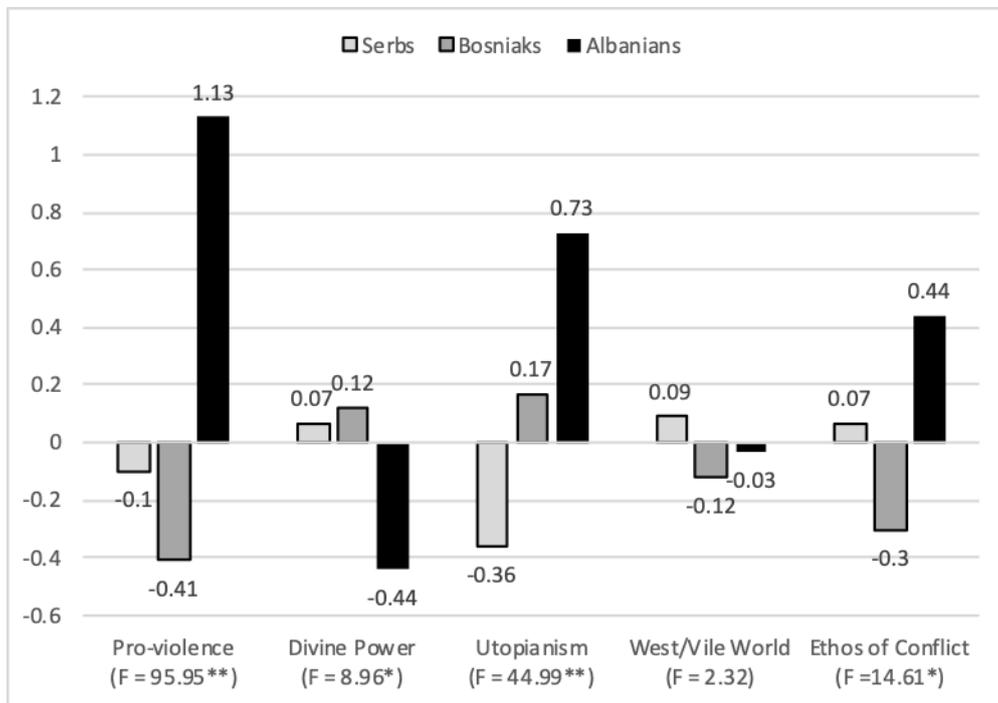


Figure 1. Arithmetic means for Serbs, Bosniaks and Albanians based on standardized factor scores from the solution in Table 1. All F-tests have degrees of freedom $df = 2,598$ and $* = p < .01$, $** = p < .001$.

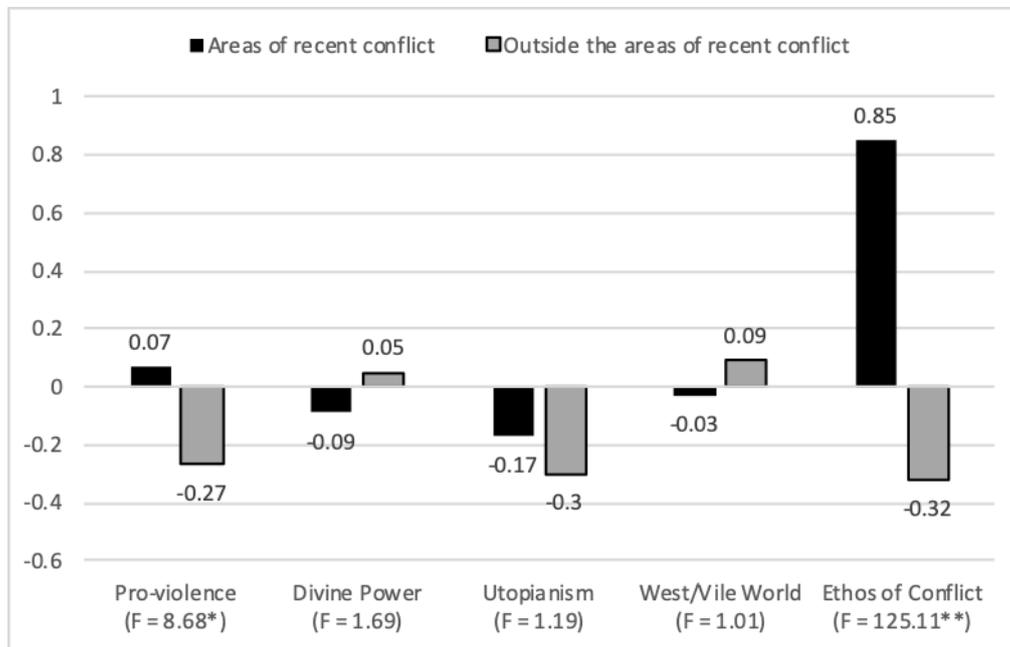


Figure 2. Arithmetic means for Serbs living in the areas of conflict and no-conflict based on standardized factor scores from the solution in Table 1. This is a breakdown of the total sample of Serbs presented in Figure 1. All F-tests have degrees of freedom $df = 1,253$ and * = $p < .01$, ** = $p < .001$.

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