Integrating values and cognitive style in a model of right-wing radicalism

Marco Lauriola *, Renato Foschi, Luca Marchegiani

"Sapienza" University of Rome, Italy

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that multi-factorial models of ideology not only account for political orientation but also highlight its core aspects (Feldman & Johnston, 2014). Recently, Montuori (2005) argued that reasoning according to a "logic of disjunction that creates binary opposition" exacerbates what is termed the "totalitarian mindset" (p. 26). In this study we examined this hypothesis by testing a model in which a disjunctive binary logic mediates values and proxies for right-wing radicalism. *Methods*: 425 participants completed a survey on political orientation that included measures of social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism. Personal values, egalitarianism, and beliefs in a free society were also assessed as they are motives typically associated with ideology. Lastly, we assessed disjunctive logic based on a scale derived from a comprehensive study of ambiguity intolerance markers. *Results*: A structural equation model in which beliefs in free society, egalitarianism, security, universalism and traditionalism predicted right-wing radicalism was tested with or without interposing a disjunctive logic factor. Our findings show that disjunctive logic played a major role in predicting behaviors associated with right-wing radicalism.

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1. Introduction

Recently, Montuori (2005) has used the term "totalitarian mindset" to describe consistent "patterns of thinking and behavior that are extremely closed and intolerant of difference and pluralism" (p. 1). Montuori proposed that traits like authoritarianism and intolerance of ambiguity might exacerbate the totalitarian mindset, thus calling for a deeper psychological investigation. Importantly, the tendency to perceive intergroup relations in terms of a disjunctive logic that creates binary oppositions (e.g., good vs. bad) has a pivotal role in Montuori's essay. Furthermore, the totalitarian mindset concept bears a strong resemblance to modern right-wing radicalism, a political ideology reflecting a combination of conservative values and right-wing political attitudes. In this paper, we integrate Montuori's view with current personality research. In doing so, we pay attention to one's consistent use of binary oppositions, which we hypothesize to be a crucial cognitive style factor that turns conservative values into right-wing radical ideology.

1.1. Political values and ideology

In The Nature of Human Values, Rokeach (1973) proposed that two major values, i.e., freedom and equality, were enough to describe a variety of political attitudes. For instance, the supporters of western liberalism were thought to value personal liberty and equality. Conversely, the followers of right-wing authoritarian ideologies were thought to disvalue personal liberty and to accept social inequality. In view of that, Rokeach's model stressed the importance of values as the psychological foundations of political attitudes and challenged the popular left–right, or liberal-conservative representation of the political spectrum (see also Feldman & Johnston, 2014).

Current personality research has provided support for a circular model of ten basic personal values (i.e., self-direction, stimulation, universalism, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition and benevolence) arranged in a bi-dimensional space characterized by openness to change vs. conservation and self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence as constitutive dimensions (Schwartz, 2006). Specific values also separated right-wing voters from left-wing voters. For instance, right-wingers scored higher on tradition, security, conformity as well as on power and achievement, two clusters of values characterized by conservation and self-enhancement, respectively. By contrast, left-wingers scored

* Corresponding author at: Department of Social & Developmental Psychology, Sapienza Università di Roma, Via dei Marsi, 78, 00185 Roma, Italy.
E-mail address: marco.lauriola@uniroma1.it (M. Lauriola).

higher on universalism, benevolence and self-direction, that are related to self-transcendence and openness to change respectively (Schwartz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010).

Besides voting, right-wing political attitudes are well covered by two psychometric scales: the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (RWA; Altemeyer, 1981) and the Social Dominance Orientation scale (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) that assess anti-libertarian and anti-egalitarian tendencies, respectively (e.g., Feldman & Johnson, 2014; see also Duckitt, 2001). As it concerns the value correlates of political attitudes, research has shown that RWA was closely linked to conservation values (tradition, security and conformity) and SDO was more closely linked to self-enhancement and mediated the association of power and achievement values with economic conservatism (Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002). RWA and SDO are typically weakly positively correlated in research carried out in the United States and Canada, but European studies often revealed larger effect sizes (e.g., Duriez, Van Hiel, & Kossowska, 2005). Thus, it has been hypothesized that right-wing political attitudes tend to overlap in countries characterized by a strong ideological divide, including Italy (Roccato & Ricolfi, 2005).

1.2. Disjunctive logic or black and white logic

The RWA scale is a refinement of the *F*-scale, originally developed by the eminent Berkley group to identify personality characteristics that accounted for social prejudice in the years following World War II (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). One of these characteristics, i.e., intolerance of ambiguity, was originally defined as the "tendency to resort to black–white solutions, to arrive at premature closure as to valuative aspects, often at the neglect of reality, and to seek for unqualified and unambiguous overall acceptance and rejection of other people" (Frenkel-Brunswick, 1949, p. 115).

Notably, however, measuring intolerance of ambiguity was easier said than done. This personality characteristic changed its theoretical and operative definition over time, from emotional ambivalence and Gestalt principles of closure, to need for cognition, to modern conceptions of ambiguity in decision science (Furnham & Marks, 2013). As a byproduct of the evolving nature of the construct, scales labeled the same often referred to different facets, at best, or to entirely different constructs, at worst (Lauriola, Foschi, Mosca, & Weller, 2014).

Consequently, despite recent reviews that renewed interest in the intolerance of ambiguity as a reliable proxy of political conservatism, ambiguity research was scattered and failed to clarify the process intolerant individuals would follow to embrace right-wing political attitudes (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003).

In this regard, Jost et al. (2003) maintained that political conservatism was motivated by the need to make sense of an uncertain and threatening social world. In this model, intolerance of ambiguity was just one of the many epistemic motives that were interposed between the psychological management of uncertainty and fear, and political conservatism; while the cognitive mechanism by which intolerance of ambiguity might exacerbate right-wing political attitudes still remained open for speculation and investigation.

Recently, Montuori (2005) proposed that the consistent use of an "either/or disjunctive logic", or "black-and-white thinking" by political leaders and their followers is a "key way of maintaining cognitive authoritarianism" (p. 27). In particular, Montuori (2005) pointed out that this cognitive style is particularly salient in social situations in which an out-group is defamed as threatening for the individual and the society, as also predicted by the Uncertainty–Threat model (Jost et al., 2003). Montuori (2005) has shown that in particular contexts, a "logic of disjunction that cre-

ates binary opposition that cannot be reconciled," exacerbated the totalitarian mindset (p. 26). Interestingly, the either/or disjunctive logic has remarkable similarities with specific criterion characteristics that originally defined intolerance of ambiguity (Bochner, 1965). So, there is reason to speculate that "cognitive authoritarianism" fits well with the original characteristics of intolerance of ambiguity.

1.3. Moral absolutism/splitting

In a recent study of the phenotypic structure of attitudes toward ambiguity, Lauriola et al. (2014) recovered three major factors that were highly replicable across different languages, heterogeneous samples and administration modes (*Discomfort with Ambiguity*; *Moral Absolutism/Splitting*, *Need for Complexity & Novelty*). Moral absolutism/splitting, described a stereotyped worldview that reflects "black-and white" thinking related to ambiguous behaviors of others in terms of moral opposites (e.g., people are right or wrong, good or bad, strong or weak, and so on). Notably, the best markers for the moral absolutism/splitting factor asked participants to endorse a number of either/or statements (see Section 2), thus being perfectly compatible with the type of disjunctive logic hypothesized by Montuori (2005).

Concurrent validity analyses showed that moral absolutism/splitting was relatively independent from similar measures used in political psychology (e.g., the Big-Five and the Need for Cognitive Closure) (see Lauriola et al., 2014), and it was the only one of the three major ambiguity factors that had a large and significant correlation with political orientation in a preliminary study used to pilot our hypothesis. It follows that moral absolutism/splitting has the potential to disclose meaningful relations of personal values with right-wing political attitudes (see also Napier & Jost, 2008).

Incidentally, it is worth noting that social psychologists in the authoritarian personality tradition originally viewed intolerance of ambiguity "in Freudian terms" as resulting from resolution of an "underlying emotional conflict" (Jost et al., 2003, p. 346). Accordingly, the hypothesized logic of disjunction underlying moral absolutism/splitting described a mental operation that has conceptual and empirical analogies with the "splitting of the object" (*objektspaltung*), i.e., a primary defense mechanism by which people fail to bring together positive and negative characteristics of the self and of the others (cf. Hinshelwood, 2008).

1.4. Aims and scope

The present study aims to show that one's consistent use of disjunctive logic in making social judgments plays a major role in predicting right-wing political attitudes and mediates between personal values and right-wing radicalism. Specifically, we focused on security more than on other values, due to its direct connection with the uncertainty–threat model of political conservatism. Security-minded individuals have been shown to value living in secure surroundings, want a vigilant state on watch against internal and external threats, and ask for a stable government ensuring social order (Jost et al., 2003; Schwartz et al., 2010).

To attain our goal, we administered a moral absolutism/splitting scale with Schwartz's and Rokeach's values and political attitudes to a community sample with heterogeneous political attitudes and tested full and partial mediation models in which values had both direct and indirect effects on right-wing radicalism. As extreme right-wingers are relatively rare as an ideological group, we surveyed men-on-the-street to collect a variety of ideological positions and defined right-wing radicalism as a latent variable that combines high RWA, high SDO and self-placement to the extreme right of the political spectrum.