Psicothema

Development and validation of the Monopoly on Truth Scale. A measure of political extremism

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Abstract

Background: Extreme political attitudes have been on the rise since the economic and political crisis of 2008. This surge of extremism constitutes a real threat, as attitudes like these are dangerous for the peaceful, democratic functioning of society. A new cognitive style, Monopoly on Truth has been proposed, based mainly on the concept of naïve realism. **Method:** The development and validation of a scale for this new construct is the main objective of this study. A pilot study (N=209) was performed in order to gather the items that make up the final scale; and a main study (N=369) was conducted to test the validity and predictive power of the scale. **Results:** The validation is successful as the scale shows good reliability scores, while also proving to be linked to extremism-related constructs. Additionally, the scale shows signs of not being ideologically biased. **Conclusion:** Results show the scale to be a very useful tool for studying extremism and other political trends. Future directions and other implications of the Monopoly on Truth are also discussed.

Keywords: Naïve realism, moral superiority, polarization, political extremism.

Resumen

Desarrollo y validación de la Escala de Monopolio de la Verdad. Una medida de extremismo político. **Antecedentes:** las actitudes políticas extremas han experimentado un crecimiento constante desde la crisis político-económica de 2008. Esta oleada de extremismo constituye una amenaza real, debido el peligro que supone para el funcionamiento pacífico y democrático de la sociedad. Se propone un nuevo estilo cognitivo, el Monopolio de la Verdad, basado principalmente en el concepto de realismo ingenuo. **Método:** el desarrollo y validación de una escala para este nuevo constructo es el objetivo principal del presente trabajo, para ello se llevó a cabo un estudio piloto (N=209) con la finalidad de desarrollar la escala, así como un estudio principal (N=369) cuyo propósito fue la validación de la misma. **Resultados:** el proceso de construcción y validación fue satisfactorio ya que la escala muestra una buena fiabilidad y está vinculada con constructos relacionados con extremismo. Adicionalmente, la escala no muestra sesgos ideológicos. **Conclusiones:** la Escala de Monopolio de la Verdad es una herramienta de gran interés para el estudio del extremismo y otras tendencias políticas. Se discuten también direcciones futuras y otras implicaciones del Monopolio de la Verdad.

Palabras clave: extremismo político, polarización, realismo ingenuo, superioridad moral.

The recent economic and political crisis has been defined as the present century's Great Recession (Verick & Islam, 2010). In these times of crisis and uncertainty so-called Cycles of Protest tend to appear (Tarrow, 1992). In these cycles, new political movements also rise from the left and right of the ideological political continuum. Some of them demand radical changes in politics and society. Radical politics both from the left and right wing have recently experienced a rise in popularity (Mudde, 2014; Rooduijn, Burgoon, van Elsas, & van de Werfhorst, 2017). Radical politics are defined as extreme political movements that want to make fundamental changes to the existing order, mainly through changing the power and functions of the state (Kurian, 2011). At the same time, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, radicalism will advocate for extreme measures to retain or change a political state of affairs.

While at times society should be favored by some critical changes, and those changes would be beneficial and provide improved life conditions, the extension and generalization of extreme practices is problematic. It generates polarization, and threatens tolerance, which is one of the most nuclear values of democracy (Sullivan & Transue, 1999).

Multiple factors, both personal and situational, can be responsible for such bigoted and imperative attitudes and behavior. Yet one that seems to be a key factor is the belief that one's perception of reality is objectively and doubtlessly correct, something that resounds with what Ellis (1986) called 'Absolute Truth'.

This introduces the notion of naïve realism, defined as the tendency to believe that one's own ideas are an objectively truthful representation of the world (Griffin & Ross, 1991). Additionally, naïve realism implies a series of considerations about those who disagree with these views. Ward, Ross, Reed, Turiel, & Brown (1997) state that, since naïve realism makes

people think they interpret reality as it objectively is, everyone else should agree with them. If they do not, this may be due to three main reasons: a) people have not been exposed to the same information I have, b) people may be unable to reach reasonable conclusions from objective reality, or are too lazy to do so or c) people distort reality based on self-interest or ideological claims.

These consequences derived from the naïve realism bias are linked to the emergence of extremist attitudes and polarization. Ellis (1986) linked extremist and fanatic behavior with irrational, absolute beliefs, that were at the root of intolerance, and Absolute Truth was one of them. These irrational beliefs imply absolute demands about ourselves and the world, as failure to meet those demands will in turn make us unworthy or the situation unbearable (Harrington, 2013). This explains the willingness to impose one's ideas by people who hold these absolute beliefs. On the other hand, naïve realism will lead to polarization (Ross & Ward, 1995) as one of its features is the inability to understand that others could have a valid and alternative view of reality based on the same information as one does. It has been observed how opposing partisans not only overvalued their rivals' extremism when assessing their attitudes, but also exaggerated their own side's extremism (Keltner & Robinson, 1996). Recognizing this bias helps processes of conflict resolution (Nasie, Bar-Tal, Pliskin, Nahhas, & Halperin, 2014).

Considering the aforementioned, it seems that as a result of the unaware and persistent presence of naïve realism, a cognitive style could play an important role in the surge and maintenance of extremism and polarization.

This proposed cognitive style, which we label "The Monopoly on Truth" has the following main characteristics: the predisposition to believe that one's political ideas are objectively better and more valuable for the whole of society; the underestimation of alternative ideas and those who hold them, to the point of seeing them as rivals; and the willingness to impose those ideas in the name of a greater good, where the ends justify the means.

The idea of a cognitive style that may induce extremist political attitudes and behavior has been examined in political psychology literature for years. The first study is that on authoritarian personality by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, (1950). This work was criticized mainly upon his ideological bias (Rokeach & Fruchter, 1956). These critics motivated other authors to look for a variable that could explain radical tendencies without being biased by ideology (Eysenck, 1951; Rokeach & Fruchter, 1956). The goal of those works may not have been reached as several studies found them to still be ideologically biased (Billig, 1979; Smithers & Lobley, 1978).

As regards the Monopoly on Truth variable, we find that its main theoretical foundation, the naïve realism bias, does not seem to be related to ideology (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). In fact, it has been observed that naïve realism bias plays a role in the development of false polarization among both liberal and conservative groups (Sherman, Nelson, & Ross, 2003). There is reasonable evidence that points towards naïve realism being present throughout the ideological spectrum. This will justify the claim of Monopoly on Truth, mainly based on the notions of naïve realism, also unbiased by ideology.

Therefore, the main objectives of this work are to develop and validate a measure for the Monopoly on Truth and to determine if it is indeed not biased by ideology.

Objective

The main goal of this pilot study was to develop a reliable measure that tapped the Monopoly on Truth variable.

Method

Participants

Sample comprised two hundred and nine (209) university students. One hundred and eighty participants were women (86.1%), and the mean age was 21.18.

Instruments

Three experts developed a total of 30 items, each one developing 10. From those 30 initial items 8 were discarded due to high resemblance in their phrasing. The remaining 22 items were ranked by the experts as a function of their theoretical adequacy with the construct. 9 items represented 100% rate of agreement. Participants completed this first version of the scale and also provided information about age and sex.

Procedure

Participants were informed of the purpose of their collaboration and confidentiality of data, and then answered the MOTS online through Qualtrics software.

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (v.21) software. The first stage of the analysis involved calculating the descriptive statistics of the items. Then an Exploratory Factor Analysis [EFA] (Principal Component Analysis, Varimax rotation) and an item analysis were performed.

Results

Results are shown in Table 1. The final version of the scale was made up of 8 items, one was deleted to increase scale reliability. The scale resulted in two factors, with four items each, which were identified as the cognitive (α= .726) and behavioral (α= .671) components of the construct; α= .726 for the scale as a whole. This reliability is considered adequate for this first approach. Moreover, the item-total relation was also satisfactory, varying between .458 and .617 in F1 and between .386 and .558 in F2. Other than that, the scale had a solid theoretical background and both of its dimensions showed construct validity.

Discussion

The goal of this preliminary study was to create a reliable measure of Monopoly on Truth. The study is believed to be successful as the scale showed acceptable reliability and construct validity.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of the items, factor loadings and items analysis

Items	M	SD	F1	F2	Corrected item-total correlation	Alpha if the item is deleted
Cognitive factor (α= .726)						
3. My ideas are socially much fairer than those of my political adversaries [Mis ideas son socialmente mucho más justas que las de mis adversarios políticos]	4.62	1.52	**.802**	.129	.617	.600
19. If I defend my ideas it is because they are fairer than the rest [Si defiendo mis ideas es porque son más justas que el resto]	5.22	1.28	**.718**	.213	.532	.656
2. What I defend is what is objectively more convenient for the people [Aquello que defiendo es objetivamente lo que más le conviene a la gente]	4.71	1.39	**.707**	.056	.472	.692
4. My ideas defend the wellbeing of everybody not just that of a few people [Mis ideas defienden el bienestar de todos, no de unos pocos]	5.63	1.14	**.698**	.047	.458	.698
Behavioral factor (α= .671)						
8. To defend the interests of the people it is legitimate to resort to the use of force [Para defender los intereses de la gente es legítimo recurrir a la fuerza]	2.12	1.47	.088	**.791**	.558	.539
12. The improvement of society can justify an action otherwise reprehensible [La mejora de la sociedad puede justificar una acción que en otro caso sería reprochable]	3.78	1.54	.007	**.739**	.456	.602
14. When an idea is objectively good for the whole of society. it is legitimate to impose it even against the will of some [Cuando una idea es objetivamente buena para el conjunto de la sociedad, es legítimo imponerla, incluso contra la voluntad de unos pocos]	3.54	1.74	.162	**.660**	.423	.627
16. To pact with our opponents can lead us to failure in the quest for a better society [Pactar con nuestros oponentes puede llevarnos a fracasar en la búsqueda de una sociedad mejor]	3.31	1.64	.144	**.621**	.386	.648

Main Study

Objective

The goal is twofold: a) to confirm the factorial structure of MOTS and provide evidence of its validity; and b) to test if this new measure is not ideologically biased. To reach them, MOTS and other scales were completed (all instruments are described below).

Method

Participants

Sample size was calculated for a population representative of Spain for a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin of error. Three hundred and sixty-nine (369) Spanish participants took part in this study. 203 of them were women (55%) and mean age was 42.80.

Instruments

Monopoly on truth was measured through the scale developed and tested in the pilot study. Reliability increased when compared to that of the former study (cognitive factor, α=.83; behavioral factor α=.75; total scale α=.76). The explained variance for both factors was 61%.

Ideology was measured on an 11-point self-placement ideology scale, where left was scaled from 0 to 4, right scaled from 6 to 10, and 5 represented a centrist ideology.

Egalitarianism, *utilitarian individualism* and *ethnocentrism* were measured as another way of gauging ideology. The three scales from (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012) showed acceptable reliability (α of .83; .76 and .86 respectively).

Underestimation of others and *belief in a single truth* are subscales of the Dogmatism scale by Rokeach & Fruchter (1956) (α of .63 and .70 respectively).

Authoritarianism was measured using an revised measure of this construct by Elchardus & Spruyt (2012) (α= .78).

Tolerance. Tolerance was gauged using two different measures. The first was taken from (Aymerich, Canales, & Vivanco, 2003), and measures intolerance (α= .78). The other tolerance measure used is from (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004) (α= .90).

Polarization. Participants had to indicate their level of proximity with a series of political parties, from 0 to 10. Additionally, participants were asked about their preferred political option. A mean score of the difference between the assessment of the chosen party and the others was obtained as a measure of polarization. This instrument was inspired by a previous measure (Stroud, 2010).

Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaires online using Qualtrics software.

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (v.21) and Amos (v.21) software. Descriptive and correlational analysis, EFA, Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA), multiple regressions and ANOVA were performed.

Results

Confirmation of the factorial structure

The data analysis started once again with an EFA that replicated the solution obtained in the Pilot Study. After which a

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the MOTS scale was performed (see Figure 1).

Model showed a good fit, despite a significant Chi-square (χ^2 (51) = 80.70, p= .005). According to Ruiz, Pardo, & San Martín, (2010) a significant Chi-square calls for the assessment of other indicators. Those indicators showed satisfactory fit of the model (GFI= .97; CFI= .98; RMSEA= .05; SRMR = .04).

Validity evidence based on relationship with other variables

Validity of MOTS scale underwent a series of correlational tests. Among the constructs measured in the study, some were expected to positively correlate with the MOTS. Confirmation of the hypothesized relation will provide support in terms of validity of the scale. The constructs expected to positively correlate with the MOTS score were: underestimation of others, belief in a single truth and intolerance. Someone with high scores in MOTS has difficulty assuming other possible ways of thinking, and when confronted with people that do not share those views will be prone to ascribe that person with inability or self-interests. In other words, people scoring high in MOTS would only rely on their own views, making them more intolerant, and have a negative view of those who disagree with them. Results supported the hypothesized relation, as MOTS significantly and directly correlated with all three constructs (p= <.001) (see Table 2).

The relation between Monopoly on Truth and Authoritarianism is a more complex one. Authoritarianism is a previously developed "cognitive style" that theoretically measures tendency to manifest certain attitudes regardless of ideology, but in the end results in a scale biased to the right (Rokeach,1956). In fact, results of the present study show correlations between Authoritarianism and ideological self-placement, egalitarianism (negative correlation) and ethnocentrism (all of them p< .001). However, the constructs of Authoritarianism and Monopoly on Truth hold some similarities, especially as regards the imposition of certain ideas to the whole of society, even if violence is needed to do so. What may be different is the reason for that imposition. While authoritarian people assume that authority has to be followed at all times, and thus people should comply with the rules leaders impose, those with high scores in MOTS would show preference for the imposition of certain ideas, but on the basis that those ideas are objectively correct and better for society. Due to the commonalities between the two concepts, a significant correlation is to be expected. Nevertheless, said correlation should be small so as to treat them as separate constructs. Authoritarianism and MOTS significantly correlate, but this correlation is small (r (368)= .166; p= .001), hinting there is a solid conceptual difference between them.

Furthermore, as MOTS positively correlates with intolerance, its relationship with a tolerance scale logically works in the opposite direction. This is exactly what the results confirm, as MOTS and tolerance correlate negatively and significantly (p< .001) (see Table 2).

Finally, another aspect to consider is the predictive power of MOTS. Since the Monopoly on Truth construct was conceived as
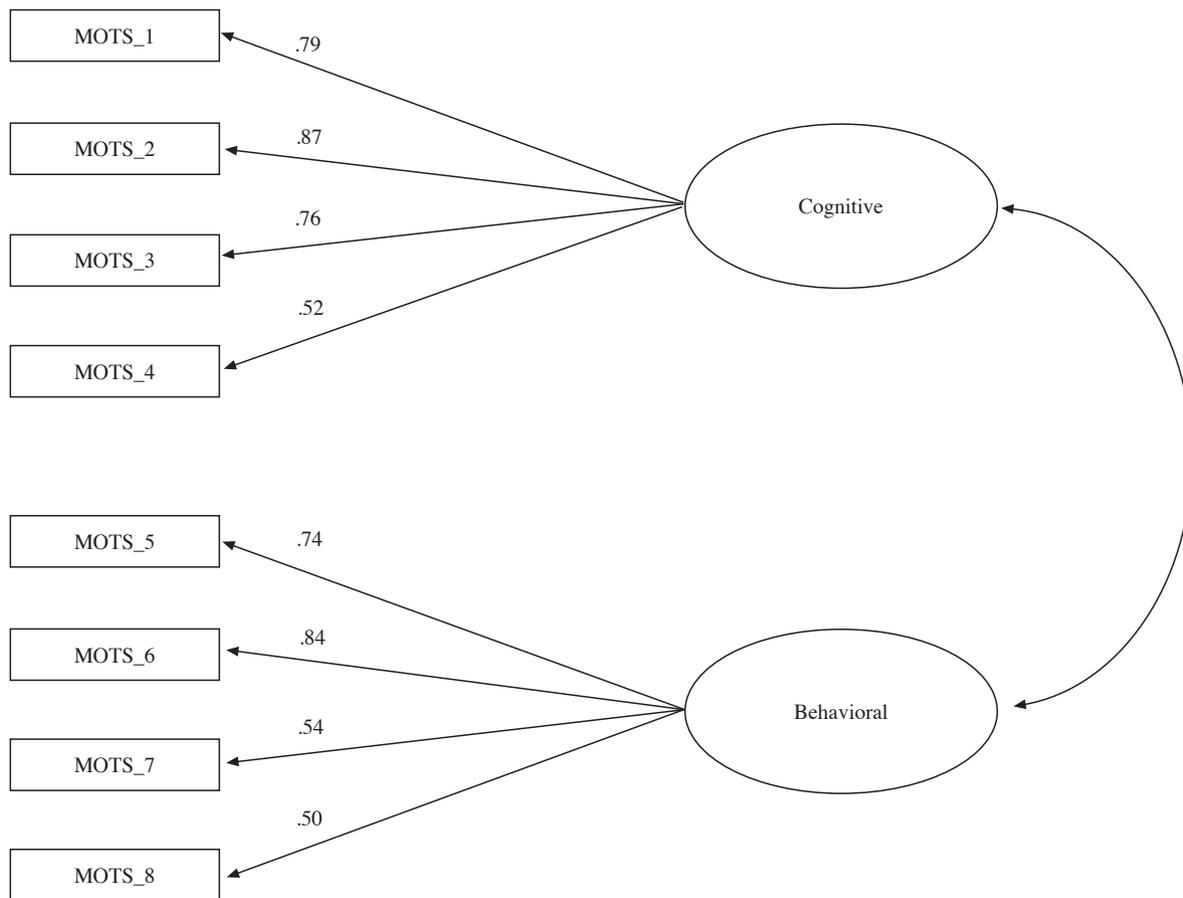

Figure 1. MOTS Confirmatory Factor Analysis indices

Table 2 MOTS correlation tests					
	Underestimation of others	**Belief in a single Truth**	**Intolerance**	**Authoritarianism**	**Tolerance**
Monopoly on Truth	.33**	.24**	.39**	.16*	-.25**
** p<.001, * p <.05					

a variable that could help explain group polarization, polarization was chosen as an appropriate variable to test the MOTS predictive validity. Previous to the report of the results of this analysis it has to be noted that the sample size was reduced for this procedure. As some participants did not satisfactorily complete the polarization measure, the sample for the predictive validity test was cut to 334 participants. A step-wise, linear regression analysis was performed, where polarization was the criterion variable, and MOTS, egalitarianism, individualism, ethnocentrism, underestimation of others, belief in a single truth, authoritarianism, intolerance and tolerance as the predictor variables. Results showed that the MOTS variable showed a higher Beta score, which points towards the MOTS as the best predictor of polarization among the variables in the analysis. However, the final model of the linear regression offered a fairly low explained variance (see Table 3).

Is Monopoly on Truth biased upon ideology?

One of the main objectives was to prove that MOTS is unbiased to ideology. Results supported this idea through several different tests. First, the correlation between the MOTS and ideological self-placement was non-significant (p= .705). Concurrently, data showed that the MOTS neither correlated with Egalitarianism (p= .783) nor Ethnocentrism (p= .259), both scales of ideological nature that in turn did correlate with ideological self-placement (with associated values of p< .001).

In addition to correlation, independence of MOTS from ideology was tested using a factor ANOVA on the MOTS scores with ideological self-placement as a factor. A first test was performed on three groups: left, including those that scored 0 to 4 in ideological self-placement; center, those who scored 5; and right, participants that scored from 6 to 10. Tukey HSD comparisons showed no significant differences between left and right, but differences between left and center and right and center were significant (see Table 4; Figure 2).

Additionally, another factor ANOVA was performed with different groups, this time the sample was divided into extreme left, extreme right and non-extremists. The groups were made up based

on the quartiles in the scores of ideological self-placement scale, as the inferior and superior quartiles represented extreme left and right respectively. Similarly, in the last ANOVA, results showed significant differences between both extremes and the non-extremist group; while no significant difference resulted from the comparison between extreme left and extreme right (see Table 4, Figure 3).

Discussion

The main goal of this work was to develop and validate a measure of Monopoly on Truth, a cognitive style variable that could influence political attitudes and behavior while not being biased with the subjects' ideology. The proposed variable has a

Table 4 Tukey HSD Comparison for MOTS score				
			95% CI	
Comparisons	**Mean MOTS Difference**	**Std. Error**	**Lower Bound**	**Upper Bound**
Ideology Center vs. Ideology Left	-.47*	.16	-.85	-.09
Ideology Center vs. Ideology Right	-.71*	.17	-1.11	-.30
Ideology Left vs. Ideology Right	-.23	.11	-.49	.02
F(2, 366)= 8.70; η²= .04				
No extremism vs. Extremism Left	-.71*	.12	-1	-.42
No extremism vs. Extremism Right	-.59*	.11	-.87	-.32
Extremism Left vs. Extremism Right	.11	.14	-.21	.44
F(2,366)= 23.29; η²= .11				
* p < .05				

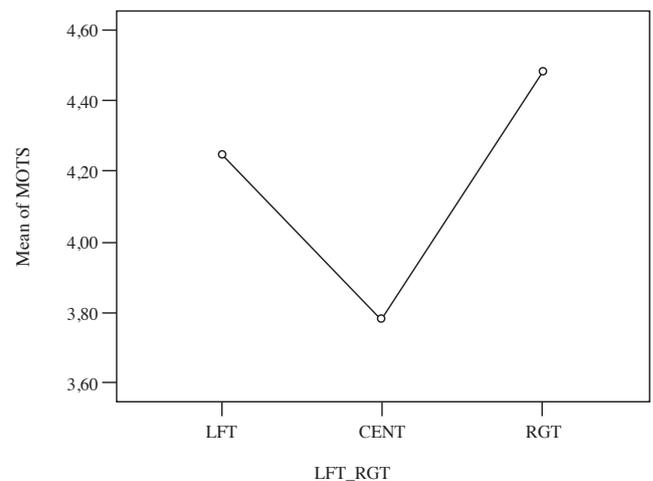| *Table 3* Regression model for polarization					
	B	**Std. Error**	**β**	**t**	**p**
Monopoly on Truth	.45	.09	.26	4.97	<.001
Individualism	-.35	.08	-.25	-4.22	<.001
Authoritarianism	.16	.06	.15	2.48	.013
Egalitarianism	-.20	.09	-.11	-2.05	.041
F(4,330)		10.47**			
R²		.13			
** p< .001					

Figure 2. ANOVA for the scores of MOTS with ideology as factor
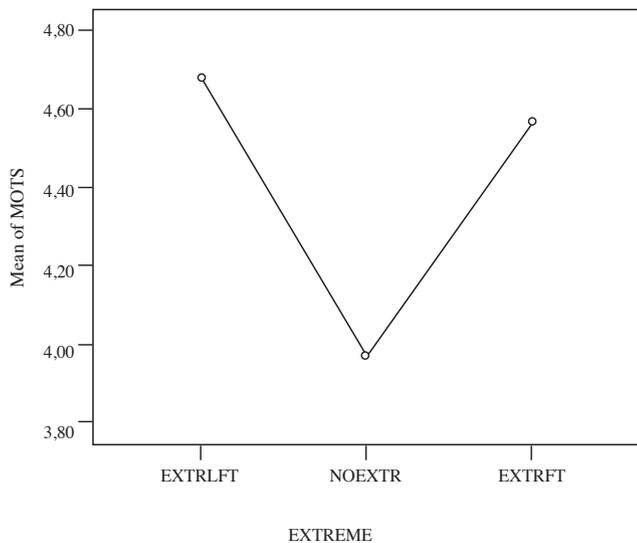
Figure 3. ANOVA for the scores of MOTS with extremism as factor

solid theoretical background and the resulting scale showed good indicators in reliability and its relation with related constructs point towards its validity. At the same time, results showed that MOTS is unbiased by ideology in a number of different tests. This is a key circumstance as the MOTS could help to better understand some of the behavioral commonalities between people on the left and right of the ideological spectrum. It also allows for an explanation of the polarization process regardless of its ideological nature, which could in turn help explain extremism or radicalism.

The fact that 'centrists' showed lower scores in the MOTS when compared to leftists and rightists may have to do with their natural approach to politics. Lakoff defines them as biconceptuals (Lakoff, 2014), this is, people that share values typical of the left and the right depending on the issue they evaluate. This may be an advantage regarding the ability to take others' differing opinions into account, which leads to a lower MOTS score.

The hypothesized relation between MOTS and extremism was also confirmed through the different statistical analyses. As MOTS correlates with underestimation of others and intolerance positively and with tolerance negatively; it also predicted polarization. Although the effect size of these results is not great, it has to be noted that the measures used are sensitive to social desirability, and it is difficult to measure these constructs while completely eliminating this issue. We are aware that this is a slight limitation of this work, but the fact that the MOTS significantly correlates and predicts these variables regardless of this obstacle also speaks about its efficacy as a measure. Another phenomenon MOTS could help explain is the rise of populism (Kriesi, 2014; Mudde, 2004). Populism is defined by Mudde as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people" (Mudde, 2004, pp.543). The fact that it is based on a confrontation between two groups, where the ingroup is good and the outgroup bad as an intrinsic characteristic, clearly resounds with the ideas behind the MOTS.

Also, the rise of populism and extremism seem to be related, as several studies claim, particularly in the case of the right-wing, but also the left-wing (Mudde, 2014; Rooduijn et al., 2017; Rydgren, 2010). This opens up an exciting, new route of study, with the goal of determining the interplay between all these variables.

An interesting reflection about the MOTS has to do with its implicit moral character. Moral variables have recently been used in the study of political behavior, with encouraging results (Skitka & Morgan, 2014; Vilas & Sabucedo, 2012). In the MOTS, one's ideas are expressed to be better for the whole of society, progress and the wellbeing of people. In this sense, people who try to impose those ideas could be conceived as a moral example (Walker & Hennig, 2004).

This moral dimension of MOTS is a characteristic that could be very valuable in the study of extremism or radicalization. The moral system of beliefs is one efficient way of justifying extremist behavior and rule-breaking in general (Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012). Harrington (2013) proposes a link between socio-political extremism and utopian beliefs about the perfectibility of man and society, also related to the will of imposing one's ideas for the benefit of society, a tendency assessed in the MOTS.

Overall, the MOTS represents an exciting prospect that opens up new routes of research regarding political behavior and could even help understand political processes of great importance nowadays, such as polarization, extremism and populism.

Acknowledgements

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