# Ideology, Human Needs and Conflict –

# the Role of Fundamental Human Needs and Ideologies in Conflict and

# Individual Radicalization

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# Abstract

This doctoral thesis aims to integrate the theoretical and empirical insights of psychology and economics to explain the micro-foundations of ideologies, i.e., what ideologies are and how they can influence individual behavior and decision-making, in particular, within the conflict nexus. In detail, this doctoral thesis elaborates and integrates (1) theoretical assumptions that ideologies have the capacity to reconcile individual´s human needs; (2) a formal rational choice model to describe that individuals adopt ideologies that best match their underlying needs and preferences; and (3) provides empirical evidence that depriving individuals from serving their idiosyncratic needs and preferences can enhance the inclination towards ideological extremism. The thesis proceeds on the basic assumption that every human being possesses certain psychological and physiological characteristics as well as a multidimensional set of needs, desires, and preferences arising from these. These needs, desires, and preferences are mutable, interchangeable, and context-specific, that is, they can shift in the course of changed stimuli (e.g., information), circumstances or external conditions. Individuals strive to reconcile these needs to be physically and mentally healthy, and hence, search for viable means of reconciliation. Ideologies that are present in a social and cultural environment, or that are offered by particular groups or organizations, offer readily available mental frameworks for need reconciliation. Individuals, hence, choose an ideology, among those on offer, that resonates, or is consistent with their idiosyncratic needs, desires, and preferences. The ideological choice, however, is not only shaped by the ideological capacity to satisfy individual´s needs and preferences, but also by external conditions, such as the costs of information search and the cultural availability of various ideological alternatives. To amplify the theoretical assumptions and formal choice model, the empirical study provides evidence that individuals, whose underlying needs had been thwarted would be more likely to reach out to ideologically motivated extremist groups. The results indicate that individuals, in particular young males, whose needs for identification and (collective) existential security are thwarted, are more likely to reach out to extremist groups that espoused far right and religiously fundamentalist ideology.

# 1. Introduction

Despite a slight decline of conflicts and wars in 2019, compared to 2018, the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK) still reported 358 conflicts worldwide, of which more than 55 percent were fought on a violent level. The main driver of these violent conflicts was ideology, which also accounted for the highest number of violent crisis and wars worldwide (Figure 1.1).

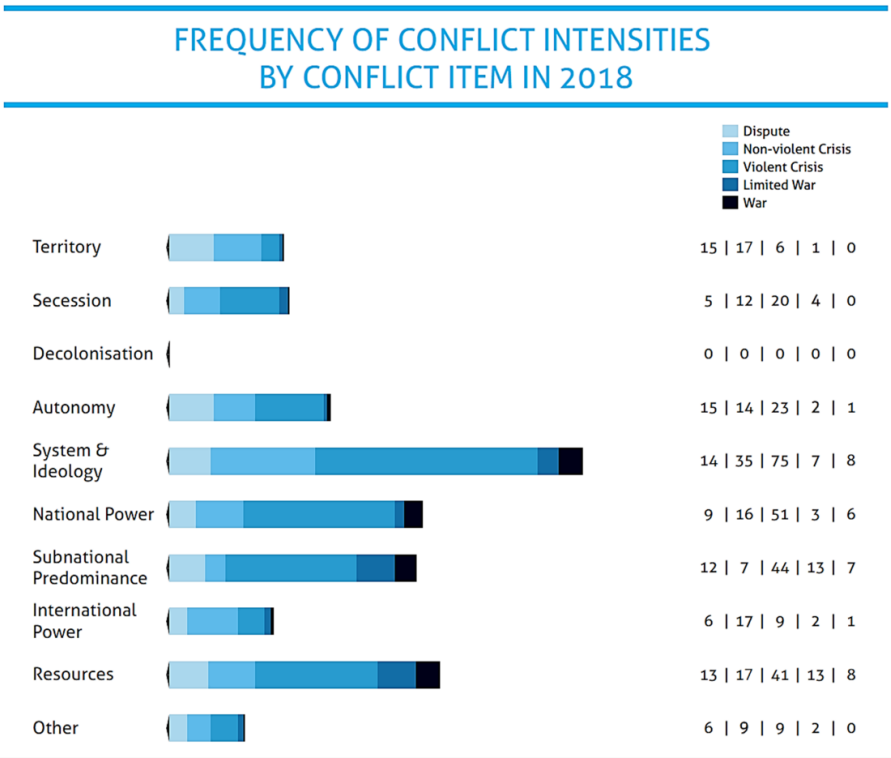


**Figure 1.1**: Frequencies of Conflict Intensities by Conflict Item in 2018.

Source: Heidelberg Institute for International Conflicts (2018)

Since 2001, and in particular after the 9/11 attack in the United States, more ideologically based terrorist groups have been formed than before. Especially religious fundamentalist groups represent the highest number of newly formed groups, followed by nationalist and left-wing extremist groups (Jones & Libicki, 2008). While left-wing groups accounted for the highest number of incidents between 2002-2007, religious and nationalist groups were responsible for a higher number of casualties (Table 1.1) (Gaibulloev and Sandler, 2019). Consistent with this, the study of Asal and Rethemeyer (2008) shows that ideologically motivated terrorist groups, in particular those motivated by religion and ethnic nationalism, are more lethal than non-ideological groups, especially when coupled with a high organizational size (more than 10.000

members). Overall, since 2001 more religious extremist groups were formed in lower-income countries, particularly in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) and in South Asia, while left-wing and nationalist groups predominate in higher-income countries, in particular in Europe, Central Asia and North America (Gaibulloev and Sandler, 2019; Jones & Libicki, 2008).

DISTRIBUTION OF TERRORIST INCIDENTS BY GROUP IDEOLOGY: 2002–07

| Ideology | Number of groups | Number of groups ended by 2007 | Number of incidents | Number of casualties | Number of incidents per group | Number of casualties per group |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Left wing | 29 | 13 | 322 | 919 | 11.1 | 31.7 |
| Nationalist | 30 | 13 | 124 | 2,415 | 4.1 | 80.5 |
| Religious | 41 | 12 | 216 | 3,482 | 5.3 | 84.9 |
| Right wing | 3 | 2 | 12 | 11 | 4.0 | 3.7 |
| Total | 103 | 40 | 674 | 6,827 | 6.5 | 68.3 |

*Notes:* Terrorist group data come from Jones and Libicki (2008). Data on terrorist (both transnational and domestic) incidents come from RAND (2012).

**Table 1.1**.: Distribution of Terrorist Incidents by Group Ideology: 2002-07

Source: Gaibulloev and Sandler (2019) p.281

Despite the evidence, the role of ideologies in conflict is still unsettled. Although after the 9/11 attack, the focus on terrorism and conflict increased tremendously among various academic disciplines, the most influential theories in this regard (e.g., Le Billon, 2001; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Ross, 2004; Humphreys, 2005; De Soysa, 2002) neglect the integral role of ideologies. Yet in recent years, the concept of ideologies has received more attention, linking ideologies to civil wars (Gutiérrez Sanin & Wood, 2014), terrorism (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008), and mass killings (Kim, 2018). Several researchers hence argue that "newly formed terrorist groups" are more successful and lethal in their operations because their ideologies are more supportive of violence and deadly acts (Lesser et al., 1999; Laquer 2004). On that account, taking ideologies into consideration is important as they set out "the moral framework within which [groups] operate" (Drake, 1998, p.53).

But what exactly are ideologies? How can they drive conflict onset and influence individual´s decision making? To answer these questions and understand the core dynamics of ideologies, an interdisciplinary approach is needed. Recent studies neglect the multidimensionality of ideologies and focus rather on their instrumental value. In political science ideologies are mainly portrayed as a strategic instrument for conflict actors to mobilize and recruit individuals, or as a source for normative commitments (Gutiérrez Sanin & Wood, 2014). Hence, the link

between ideology and terrorism is constantly brought into question, by arguing that "most people who hold radical beliefs do not engage in terrorism, and many terrorists – even those who lay claim to a "cause" – are not deeply ideological and may not "radicalize" in any traditional sense" (Borum, 2011, p.8). "[..], this ambiguity over ideology´s causal logic is at the root of an unresolved *macro–micro paradox*: the simultaneous presence in most conflicts of salient ideological patterns at the collective level but highly mixed underlying motives and beliefs at the individual level" (Leader Maynard, (2019), p.636). This means that despite empirical evidence of significant ideological effects on conflict, there is still debate of whether individuals are "true believers" or not.

Also, conventional rational choice models in conflict economics neglect the role of ideologies and argue that individuals join groups for economic reasons rather than as a result of their subjective beliefs. Thus, in most economic theories, individuals are perceived to be driven mainly by their economic self-interest, i.e., either for greed, loot, or gains from conflict victory (for a review see Cramer, 2002). However, such conventional rational-choice theories of individual participation in rebellion and conflict disregard the "free-rider" problem. The cost of participation is individual, but the benefits of any action are shared by all group members or supporters, regardless of the extent of their active participation. The subjective "rational-choice" in this case is to "free ride", given the high costs of participation and the expectation that the benefits of a successful terrorist campaign are shared. The question arises then is, what can motivate individuals to bear high personal costs of participation, when rational self-interest would rather favor individual non-participation? Taking this into consideration, it may be clear that the benefits of participating in rebellion, terrorism or conflict are, beyond economic, also psychological.

However, traditional psychological theories argue that individuals join extremist groups or participate in rebellion, not for logical, rational reasons, but due to irrational thinking, emotions, or miscalculations (Crenshaw, 1998). Thus, psychological theories to explain the roots of violence, aggression or conflict have been long dominated by the assumptions of psychopathology (Shaw, 1986), an innate drive to release negative emotions (Freud, 1933), or as a response to external stimuli (Berkovitz, 1974). Others focused more on particular personality characteristics, predispositions, or socio-cultural environments. Especially in the 1950s and 60s, psychologists like Adorno (1950) and Rokeach (1960) aimed to identify particular personality characteristics that were receptive to right-wing authoritarian worldviews, in order to explain the rise of fascism and anti-Semitism in Europe. Adorno and

his colleagues argued that personalities that were characterized as action-driven, aggressive, anti-democratic and obedient to authority, with high preferences for conformity, tradition and hierarchy were more likely to adopt authoritarian attitudes and beliefs. Rokeach (1960) extended the theory and saw the core of the personality as dogmatism or closemindedness, while Allport (1954) saw it rather as uncertainty and anxiety. All these theories, despite their different conceptualizations, assumed that dysfunctional personalities could explain, at least partly, individual´s willingness to resort to violence and aggression. Other theories focused more on dysfunctional socio-cultural environments that can drive individuals to respond with aggression and violence to difficult life conditions (Staub, 2001). With the advent of social psychology, more theories emerged focusing on the role of group belongingness, social identity and intergroup relations in conflict onset. "Differentiating between "us" and "them", and devaluing "them", are essential, central roots of people turning against others" (Staub, 2001, p.78). According to that, a significant number of research, in particular in social and political psychology, has argued that aggression, violence and conflict can arise as a result of ingroup favoritism, outgroup hate, competition over resources and power, and the protection of one´s own (social) identity (Brewer, 1999; Halevy et al., 2008; Weisel & Böhm, 2015).

Following this argumentation, it becomes clear that individuals incur high personal costs by participating in conflict, not merely for self-interest, but also for the advancement of a group they feel attached to. McCauley and Moskalenko (2011), for example, argue that threat or felt injustice (real or imagined) of a group that the individual identifies with, can drive him or her to hostility and violence toward the perpetrators, without being personally affected by the threat or harm. Belonging to and identifying with a particular ethnic, social, or cultural group can have positive effects for the mental and physical health of individuals. Individuals derive their sense of self, self-esteem, and self-confidence not just from their own personal achievements or characteristics, but also from their identification and belonging to a particular group. In other words, group membership helps individuals to form their perception and evaluation of oneself and the social environment. This means that individuals derive their perceptions, attitudes, and preferences from their affiliation with social others and make choices in accordance with the shared group identity, norms, and values (Tajfel, 1981, Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Identifying with shared narratives, symbols and ideologies of a group or nation regulates feelings of attachment, certainty, stability, and order, which in turn generates a sense of orientation and confidence in how to process information, behave and act (Hogg & Adelmann, 2013).

On that account, to find meaningful explanations of how and why individuals engage in violence and conflict – when rational self-interest would rather favor non-participation – ideologies, which are shared within particular social, ethnic, or cultural groups, must be thoroughly taken into consideration. Ideologies can be defined as a set of norms, values, beliefs, and narratives that is shared within an identifiable group, and that provides palliative and ontological functions (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). The ontological function offers individuals alternative interpretations and explanations of reality, used to understand, and evaluate the social, economic, and political system of a given society. It provides narratives that enable individuals to link the past, present, and potential future, and integrate this coherent story with one´s own life and identity. This means that ideologies help individuals to fit the parts together in a coherent pattern and integrate them into a broader context, which are understood and shared by a group of people. Having consistent, predictable narratives and beliefs that explain and bring the complex world into order, and that guide how to perceive and make decisions, generates a sense of meaning in life. Hence, ideologies can be understood as mental meaning-making systems that are offered by a society, culture, or particular group and that help to process environmental stimuli (such as information), make decisions, and understand oneself and the social environment (the structure of society, the different groups in it, own social role and standing) (MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2014).

According to that, it becomes evident that groups and their internalized ideologies can provide a sense of meaning in individuals´ lives and help to fulfill a variety of fundamental human needs – such as the need for security, order, belongingness, and self-esteem. This doctoral thesis, hence, focuses on the capacity of ideologies to serve a variety of fundamental (psychological) human needs. These needs can be synthesized into three main categories: (1) existential, (2) relational, and (3) self-related human needs. The fulfillment of these needs is of utmost importance for individual´s physical and mental health, and hence, their frustration can drive individuals to engage in violent social conflicts. However, individuals vary in their need manifestations, i.e., they differ in the salience and intensity of their idiosyncratic needs, desires, and preferences. While some individuals may have stronger needs for order, control and certainty, others may exhibit stronger needs for autonomy and self-efficacy. This implies, that individuals choose ideologies that tend to best resonate with their idiosyncratic needs, and the extent to which specific ideological options are expected to satisfy them is a major determinant of their subjective utility. Ideology can be thus conceived as an object of choice: individuals choose an ideology that tend to "best" match their underlying needs and preferences, and how extensively they will participate and invest in it. This creates opportunities for ideological

entrepreneurs, such as extremist groups, organizations, political or religious leaders, to make offers that are psychologically appealing on multiple grounds. According to that, the choice of an ideology, and the membership in a particular group can be formalized in terms of a rational choice model. Using a rational choice model, and combining it with psychological reasoning, allows to understand and explain the choice of ideologies under various conditions and constraints. Presumably, the individual´s choice of an ideology is shaped not only by how well it serves his or her underlying needs and preferences, but also by the costs of information searches and the cultural availability of various ideological alternatives.

Before going deeper into the studies compiled for this doctoral thesis, a broad overview of the literature on conflict, violence and radicalization is examined. After expounding the lines of research followed in particular by economists and psychologists to explain why individuals join radical groups and bear high personal costs of participation in conflict, an outlook is given to reinforce the value added of this work.

## 1.1. State of Research

This section provides a broad overview of how both, economics, and psychology, conceive and elaborate questions targeting conflict and terrorism. Note that this is rather a brief, and non-comprehensive overview of the existing literature, which is more deepened and discussed within the four subsequent studies.

### 1.1.1. Conflict in Economics or the "Materialized Extremist Mind-Set"

Traditional rational-choice theories in conflict economics usually argue that individuals join terrorist groups or organizations as a result of economic calculations. While in some economic models, individuals fight for the rent associated with power, in others they fight according to religious or ethnic lines as maximizing agents, respectively (for a review see Cramer, 2002). However, in most economic models, groups or organizations are driven mainly by economic motives, either for greed, power or gains from the conflict itself. Hirschleifer (1994) for example postulates that individuals face a choice between production and acquisition. If the opportunity cost of acquisition is tolerable, then violence will occur. In other words, individuals choose violence and join radical groups, if it is more profitable at the margin than economic exchange and cooperation. Collier & Hoeffler (2004) support this argumentation in their famous "greed and grievance" study and endorse that opportunities for rebellion, rather than objective factors of grievance, tend to better explain the outburst of conflict. Opportunities for rebellion are influenced by financial feasibility, i.e., lootable primary commodities, and the cost

for rebellion, i.e., the availability of alternative peaceable economic activities. These "greed" variables are assumed to provide a better explanation of why individuals join violent groups, than "grievance" factors such as socio-economic exclusion, poverty and ethnic-, or religious polarization. Similar economic studies affirm the risk versus payoff tradeoff and argue that individuals will choose the violent option, if the payoff of war outweighs calculated risk (Grossman, 1999; Azam, 2001). This implies that "conflict, civil war, or insurrection is then an investment or resource allocation designed to raise the probability of toppling the government or of drawing monopoly profits from the loot or instant taxation of primary commodities. Rebellion is thus clearly akin to rent seeking: it is a distortionary devotion of resources to the pursuit of the fruits of imperfect competition" (Cramer, 2002, p.1847).

If this tradeoff is the basic premise in conflict models, under what circumstances do individuals or groups decide that violence and conflict are more profitable than cooperation or exchange? One of the most mentioned circumstances in this regard is poverty (see e.g., Krueger & Maleckova, 2003). Risk factors of economic fragility are perceived as significant determinants of conflict onset. Such economic risk factors include, among others, unemployment, poverty, migration, economic closure, or educational backwardness. Empirical evidence supports the link between economic fragility and conflict, and demonstrates that countries with high poverty, high child mortality and malnutrition, high undernutrition, and limited access to water sources are more prone to armed civil conflicts. Especially the lack of appropriate nutrition and health care tend to significantly increase the risk of armed conflict onset (Nafziger et al., 2000; Pinstrup-Andersen & Shimokowa, 2008). The poor, who are facing such severe socio-economic conditions, are hence perceived to have a "comparative advantage" in violence. The opportunity cost of insurgency, especially for young males who are living under precarious living conditions with few or any prospective alternatives, is clearly low (Hirschleifer, 1994). Empirical studies and policy communiques provide evidence that young males in poor countries join extremist groups, such as ISIS or Boko Haram, in particular for economic reasons (Ewi & Salifu, 2017).

However, beyond economic fragility, other factors have been also considered to explain individual´s willingness to participate in conflict. Although, conventional studies argued that grievance play a nonsignificant role in conflict onset, researchers like Azam (2001) insist that inter-and intra-ethnic redistributive resource allocations tend to fuel conflict and rebellion. In other words, group favoritism along ethnic, religious, or cultural lines, and the resulting grievance and discrimination of the excluded group, increase the likelihood of fighting. The felt frustration, injustice and aggression enable the rebels to mobilize support through

communicating the deficiencies in a given society. Others (e.g., Schneider, Brück and Meierrieks, 2015; Li & Schaub, 2004) argue that economic globalization, which increases grievance through income disparity, may also foster transnational conflict and terrorism, in particular. It can also function as an accelerator of global grievances through a demonstration effect, that is, felt injustice, frustration, and misery in one country can spill over to another through social media and the internet (Gaibulloev & Sandler, 2019). However, the globalization-conflict linkage is hardly empirically tested, and the present studies find no direct causality between globalization and conflict onset (Gassebner & Luechinger, 2011). Moreover, other studies show that neither poverty, nor GDP and inequality are conducive to terrorism and conflict (Krueger & Laitin, 2008; Abadie, 2006). The influential study by Krueger and Maleckova (2003) shows that most terrorist operatives and supporters do not have a poor socio-economic background but are rather well educated and better off than the general public. These results, again, led to enhanced reluctance to include explanatory variables like grievance, injustice, and inequality into economic studies to explain conflict, violence, and terrorism. They were perceived as not sufficient enough to trigger conflict onset (e.g., Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Barron et al., 2004). Instead, it has been claimed that "whatever else contemporary armed conflicts are about, powerful material interests clearly are significant in shaping the conflicts and in their causation" (Cramer, 2002, p.1849). Resources such as timber in Liberia, opium in Afghanistan, coca in Colombia or oil and diamonds in Angola are argued to be more significant in shaping and explaining conflict onset. The fight for control over such resources and the prospective economic gains tend to increase the willingness of individuals to join rebellious groups (Ballentine & Nitzschke, 2003).

On that account, conventional theories and models in conflict economics assume that foremost a "materialized economic mind-set" drives individuals to participate in conflict, in particular to increase their subjective utility. That is, individuals join a terrorist group or a radical political organization and form collective preferences, values, and objectives. In the deliberation process they select violence, terrorism, or rebellion as a viable and efficient course of action from a range of perceived alternatives, to reach the objectives of the group. One of the advantages of approaching the decision-making of such groups or organizations as a collectively rational strategic choice is that it enables to construct a standard rational-choice model and measure the observed deviations. Furthermore, it permits to make assumptions about preferences or goals of terrorist groups and organizations and helps to identify their different strategies and conceptions to adapt to new circumstances. Although such an economic analysis remains on a

rather abstract level, it enables to understand terroristic activities from a rational perspective, without characterizing them as pathological or irrational (Crenshaw, 2008).

### 1.1.2. Conflict in Psychology or the "Psychological Extremist Mind-set"

Departing from conflict economics, the traditional psychological literature examines the idea that individuals join extremist groups and participate in conflict not for reasonable or calculated reasons but for psychological. Factors such as group identification, social approval, and collective grievance are perceived, other than in economic literature, to be important determinants in explaining violent mobilization and conflict onset (Gurr, 1970; Muller & Seligson, 1987; Basedau & Lay, 2009). The psychology of terrorism, violence and conflict thus takes the assumption that individuals do not reason logically but are driven by psychological and dispositional forces (such as emotions, hatred, prejudice), which may at the end result in irrational decision-making. Furthermore, it is argued that in reality individuals are not able to calculate the possible consequences of the courses of action they choose. Incomplete information and imperfect knowledge about the available alternatives lead to miscalculations and decisions with bad outcomes (Crenshaw, 2008).

Theoretical (Freudian) perspectives assumed for a long time that psychological drives and hidden emotions, derived from unconscious forces, have a severe impact on individual´s willingness to fight. The frustration-aggression theory postulates that collective violence result from the simultaneous exposure of a number of individuals to the same frustrating stimuli. While Davies (1974) argues that frustration increases due to subjective need thwarting, Osgood (1961) focuses on the maladaptive mentality of individuals. Others have even speculated on the neurocognitive bases for collective "irrationality" or psychopathology that arises during conflict (Post, 1984). Several psychologists have thus promoted the view that violence, terrorism, and wars are symptomatic of psychopathology (Shaw, 1986). In this regard, antisocial, psychopathic, narcissistic, or borderline personalities have been linked to their enhanced willingness to participate in rebellion and conflict. The theory behind postulates that individuals who experienced a particular type of psychological damage or trauma in their early childhood tend to develop an "injured self". This damaged self-concept prevents individuals from integrating the good and bad parts of their self and understanding and accepting the strength and weaknesses of one´s own personality. Instead, they idealize their "good" and "successful" self and projects their hated weakness onto others. Unable to deal with his own self-deficiencies, an individual with such dispositions and experiences needs an external target to blame and attack to diminish one´s uncertain self (Post, 1990).

However, clinical interviews with imprisoned terrorists reveal no significant results which would support the idea of psychopathology as the drive for rebellion and terrorism (Rasch, 1979; Ferracuti, 1983; Knutson, 1981; Crenshaw, 1981). According to these authors, individuals who are participating in rebellion or terrorism neither display psychopathological symptoms nor particular personality dispositions that drive them to engage in conflict and terrorism (Shaw, 1986). Despite this evidence, a large number of studies (e.g., Adorno et al.,1950; Rokeach, 1960; Horgan, 2003; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008), in particular in personality psychology, insist that "people with particular personality traits and tendencies are drawn disproportionally to terrorist careers. Several authors have characterized terrorists as action-oriented, aggressive people who are stimulus-hungry and seek excitement" (Post, 1990, p.27). Other studies have argued that individuals who are drawn to violence and terrorism, have suffered several setbacks in their lives. An interdisciplinary study of 250 West German terrorist, of which 227 were left-wing and 23 right-wing adherents, found that the majority came from fragmented families, were in conflict with their parents and experienced educational failures. Accordingly, the authors argue that joining a terrorist group is seen as an anchor point to break the series of failure (Jäger et al., 1981). Similar studies, covering interviews and memoirs of incarcerated terrorists of the Red Army Faction (Bollinger, 1982), the Red Brigade terrorists in Italy and ETA terrorists in Spain (Ferracuti, 1983; Clark, 1983), found no indication of psychopathology or mental disorders, but observed similar personality traits, social backgrounds and a series of negative experiences.

All these findings imply that individuals who join extremist groups and engage in rebellion or conflict do not show psychopathological characteristics but reveal similar socio-cultural backgrounds and negative experiences in their lives, such as educational failures, social exclusion, lack of meaning and achievements. The attribution error theory (Ross, 1977), however, argues that researchers, or in general human beings, tend to overestimate the role of personality characteristics in human behavior and underestimate the impact of external circumstances and environmental conditions. In other words, individuals tend to attribute aggressive behavior to stable personality characteristics and disregard the fact that such behaviors can be induced by situational factors and external conditions. On the opposite, if individuals identify with a particular group and if this group, or the members of this group do bad things or show aggressive behavior, they tend to rationalize their behavior as primarily the result of situational circumstances. This attributional bias has thus an impact on individual´s evaluation of others and may result in misleading diagnostic conclusions. Especially in the presence of limited data, as it is usually the case in conflict and terrorism research, the risk of

such attribution errors increases. Interviews with individuals, who joined radical groups are rare and those that have been caught due to terroristic activities may also be prone to biased information output. As a result, single behaviors or statements may be interpreted out of context and attributed to stable personality traits. “Often [such] diagnoses are based on the horror generated by terrorists acts and the simple assumption that normal people should be incapable of such acts without enormous guilt feelings” (Shaw, 1986, p. 361).

In this regard, social psychologists generated a large research output targeting group dynamics and social identity, by arguing that focusing only on personality characteristics to explain aggression and conflict would be misleading. Group-based processes play a significant role in explaining how normal, or psychologically healthy individuals without a particular personality constellation, can act aggressive and violent. While the realistic conflict theory assumes that competitive intergroup goals lead to conflict, the minimal group paradigm postulates that ingroup identification and belonginess alone would be enough to lay the basis for conflict. Over the past 45 years hundreds of experiments provide stable and significant results that the mere fact of being characterized as an ingroup member leads to ingroup favoritism and competitive intergroup behavior (Hogg, 2016). The theory behind argues that the subjective social identity is formed by individual´s awareness that he belongs to a certain group and that he shares emotions, values and ideas with that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social groups, whether small working groups, large ethnicities, or even radical terroristic groups, provide their members a shared identity that guides and prescribes who they are, what to believe and how to behave. Within the terrorism-context, for many individuals, actively joining and belonging to a radical group generate feelings they possibly never felt before, that is, acceptance, self-significance, and social approval (Post, 1990). Belonging to and identifying with a particular group converge own subjective feelings, attitudes and preferences to collective goals, visions, and preferences, which lead the individual to experience shared collective feelings, felt injustices and grievances. These collectively shared feelings and the shared group identity determine how individuals perceive themselves and the social environment, make decisions and behave. Thinking, perceiving, and behaving from a group perspective can thus have devastating consequences: even if the subject does not personally face grievance, injustice or failure, the grievance or injustice (real or imagined) experienced by a particular group which he belongs to, can drive him to engage in a course of retaliation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011). The subjective identity is perceived and evaluated in terms of positive ingroup associations, which implies that the status, the image, and social valence of the group attaches to the subjective self. Thus, social psychologists argue that individuals strive to preserve positive ingroup associations

and are thus willing to use whatever means necessary to protect the shared ingroup identity (Koomen & van der Pligt, 2016).

The uncertainty-identity theory goes further and suggests that subjective feelings of uncertainty about the self and one´s own environment tend to increase the willingness of individuals to join groups or organizations. "The more self-conceptually uncertain one is the more one strives to belong, particularly to groups that effectively reduce uncertainty – such groups are distinctive, with high entitativity and simple, clear, prescriptive, and consensual prototypes. In extreme circumstances, these groups might be orthodox and extremist, possess closed ideologies and belief systems, and have hierarchical leadership and authority structures" (Hogg, 2016, p.10).

And exactly these radical groups with clearly defined boundaries and a clear internal structure, internal homogeneity, common goals, and fate tend to attract masses of supporters. The rationale behind is that identification with a strong group diminishes self-uncertainty and that prototypes which are simple, focused, distinct and prescriptive are more effective than ambiguous and unemotional ideas (Hogg, 2010). According to that, empirical research (Hogg et al., 2010; McGregor, Nash and Prentice, 2013) revealed that increased feelings of threat and uncertainty result in greater tendency to identify rather with radical groups than with moderate ones. Dominant, homogenous, and action-driven groups provide a clear internal structure and explicit guidance for orientation, offer social order, stability, and perceived consistency, compared to their inoffensive and peaceable counterparts (Koomen & van der Pligt, 2016).

## 1.2. Gaps in the Literature and Outlook of the Thesis

Considering the large research output in both disciplines, it can be summarized that individuals join radical groups and participate in conflict for both, economic and psychological reasons. However, while there is still much debate whether factors like grievance and economic inequality significantly drive conflict onset, the role of ideologies is still unrepresented. Some social scientists have even proclaimed the end of the ideological era in the aftermath of World War II, by arguing that individuals do not have the cognitive and intellectual capacity to understand the philosophical premise of ideologies and that ideological constructs lack psychological and behavioral significance (Converse, 1964; Bell, 1960). As a consequence, very little research on the subject of ideology has been done in social science, and in took at least some decades for its re-integration (Jost, 2006). While in economics and political science, ideology remains a theoretical and empirical newcomer (Leader Maynard, 2019), in psychology a variety of studies have examined the motivational and cognitive underpinnings of ideologies. Following the pioneering assumptions of Adorno and colleagues (1950) that "ideologies have

for different individuals, different degrees of appeal, a matter that depends upon the individual´s needs and the degree to which these needs are being satisfied or frustrated"(p.2), psychologists like John Jost (2006) focused on the capacity of ideologies to address psychological human needs. In particular he argues that dispositional and situational factors can influence one´s psychological human needs, and hence, one´s political orientation, and that "human beings will always crave some form of ideology, that is, some way of imbuing social life with meaning and inspiration" (p.654). Addressing the psychological and behavioral capacities of ideologies allows to explore their features that are either overlooked or seen as redundant in political science or conflict economics. It allows to understand how ideologies can address and reconcile individual´s psychological human needs, influence individual´s perception of oneself and others, their behavior, as well as decision-making. Incorporating these psychological functions of ideologies into the conflict nexus, generates new insights of what exactly ideologies are and how they can influence political outcomes.

According to that, this doctoral thesis aims to integrate the theoretical and empirical insights of psychology and economics, in particular, to explain the concept and functions of ideologies, as well as their role in conflict behavior from a need-based perspective. In other words, this doctoral thesis follows and elaborates the assumptions that (1) ideologies have the capacity to reconcile individual´s human needs; (2) that individuals adopt ideologies that best match their underlying needs and preferences, which can be described by a formal rational choice model; and that (3) depriving individuals from serving their idiosyncratic needs and preferences can potentially lead to ideological extremism. The thesis proceeds on the basic assumption that every human being possesses certain psychological and physiological characteristics as well as a multidimensional set of needs, desires, and preferences arising from these. These needs, desires, and preferences are mutable, interchangeable, and context-specific, that is, they can shift in the course of changed stimuli (e.g., information), circumstances or external conditions. Individuals strive to reconcile these needs to be physically and mentally healthy, and hence, search for viable means of reconciliation. Ideologies that are present in a social and cultural environment, or that are offered by particular groups or organizations, offer readily available mental frameworks for need reconciliation. Individuals, hence, choose an ideology, among those on offer, that resonates, or is consistent with their idiosyncratic needs, desires, and preferences. The ideological choice, however, is not only shaped by the ideological capacity to satisfy individual´s needs and preferences, but also by external conditions, such as the costs of information search and the cultural availability of various ideological alternatives. The information regarding a particular ideology can be updated using empirical evidence or

experiences. This means, individuals process available information about particular ideologies on offer, to reveal how well one particular ideology resonates with their needs and preferences, and choose, at the end, from a rational perspective, the best possible ideological option, given the conditions and resources they have. A considerable amount of research states that difficult life conditions and lack of resources and opportunities to fulfill one´s needs and goals can drive individuals to hostility, aggression, and violence (Gurr, 1970; Burton, 1990; Staub, 2001). Certainly, this argumentation is reasonable, however, as mentioned before empirical studies provide evidence that harsh socio-economic conditions, poverty, and lack of education do not play a large role in conflictual behavior (e.g., Krueger & Maleckova, 2003). According to this, it may be reasonable to assume that neither precarious living conditions nor the frustration of basic needs lead directly to conflict and violence, but rather a combination of need thwarting and psychological and social effects that emerge in a group, which collectively share an identity, ideology, and ideals. Belonging to and identifying with a group, its values, norms, and narratives, can be a strong driving force to protect the group from collective threat and injustice. "These can lead to actions – by Israelis, Palestinians, the United States after 9/11 – in the course of which groups can abandon their deeply held principles, such as respect for the rights and lives of people, especially those seen as "them", outside the group. Not only actual attack, but the belief that someone *intends* to harm or attack you, has been found to increase aggression toward the potential harmdoer" (Staub, 2011, p.110).

All this said, this doctoral thesis aims to connect and integrate the theories concerning human needs, ideologies, and conflict, to enhance the understanding of human behavior. To my knowledge, there is no such theoretical framework to date that explains the need-ideology-conflict nexus. While pioneering assumptions, proposed by scholars like Burton (1990) or Staub (2011), emphasize the role of human needs and ideologies in political violence and conflict, they do not expound explicitly why individuals adopt particular ideologies and how these address individual´s human needs. To take up the established theories and findings and to enlarge the understanding of the need-ideology-conflict nexus, a book project has been initiated, which also provides the foundation for this doctoral thesis. The book "*Psychological Human Needs and Ideologies – Understanding the Role of Belief Systems in Social and Political Conflicts*", develops an interdisciplinary framework to explain the psychological and rational underpinnings of ideological choices. The main approach of the book is that ideologies, or belief systems in general, have the capacity to reconcile individual´s fundamental human needs that vary on a situational and dispositional level. This conceptualization conceives ideologies as the social and psychological product of individual´s fundamental (psychological) human needs,

preferences, and desires, which can, in extreme cases, conclude in extremism and conflict. This concept of ideologies and human needs, which is described extensively in the book, form the fundamentals of the three papers compiled for this doctoral thesis.

To be precise, Chapter 2, *Conflict Economics and Psychological Human Needs,* presents an excerpt of the book, which was extensively elaborated with Thomas Gries, and which is published as a working paper in *Center for International Economics (CIE) Working Papers, Paderborn University, No. 135/2020.* The paper illustrates in detail what fundamental human needs are, why human beings strive to satisfy them, and why the human-need perspective can substantially contribute to conflict economics. In doing so, we reviewed more than 400 theoretical and empirical studies from various academic disciplines to identify the needs that are fundamental and universal for each human being. Needs can be understood as a condition or tension in an organism that when activated, directs human behavior. There is no doubt that human beings have basic needs, such as the need to survive, to drink, and eat, but they also have fundamental psychological needs that they wish to satisfy. This implies that there are dimensions to needs and demands that go beyond the necessity to preserve human physical existence – i.e., psychological, or mental needs that we classify, according to theoretical and empirical evidence, into existential, relational, and self-related human needs. Existential needs encompass a variety of needs that imply a safety-seeking mechanism. They are induced by conditions of threat, uncertainty, and ambiguity, which drive individuals to attain a sense of safety, certainty, and control in their lives. In this regard we identify the human need for (existential) safety/security, order, control, ambiguity avoidance, consistency, and predictability. These needs describe the human necessity to secure one´s own existence, to experience a sense of control over one´s life, and to live in an ordered, predictable, and consistent environment. However, human beings are social beings and need attachment to social others to survive and maintain mental health. So, the second group of needs describe the human drive to form relationships, to feel accepted and belonged. In this regard, we consider the need for belongingness, identification, and social approval, but also the human need for pro-sociality, that is, the innate human drive to care, help, and feel empathy for others. But individuals are not only social beings, but also have distinct personalities. Every human being strives to develop their own self-concept, make autonomous choices, feel efficacious in their aspirations and decisions, and have a positive view of themselves. In this regard, human beings have fundamental self-related human needs – i.e., need for self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-determination.

Chapter 3, *The Market for Belief Systems – A Formal Model of Ideological Choice*, is a joint work with Thomas Gries and John Jost, a social psychologist from the New York University. In this paper, which is published as a working paper in *APSA preprints*, a pre-publication platform from the American Political Science Association (but currently accepted in *Psychological Inquiry*), we developed a formal rational choice model to explain ideological choice. Here, again we stress the importance of fundamental psychological human needs, which individuals wish to satisfy, and that ideologies provide viable means for need reconciliation. It follows that ideological offers that are expected to satisfy those needs that are viewed by the individual as highly important, will be more desirable and therefore more likely to be chosen. Implementing standard tools, usually used in economics and political science – in particular, the rational choice model, the distance theory of voting and the characteristics demand theory and combining them with theory and research in political psychology – allows us to understand the ways individuals make ideological choices, given external conditions and constraints, and explain individual-level variation in the decision-making process. We also include material consumption preferences into the model to better understand the trade-offs between the costs of information acquisition and expected gains of finding a good ideological match. Taken all together, we can describe the choice of an ideology, as a choice depending, not only on how well the ideology matches individual´s needs, but also on individual´s resource constraints (e.g., time, income, access to information), the ideological offers provided by particular groups or cultural environments, and the available information needed to reveal the potential match of those ideologies on offer.

Chapter 4, *Searching for Alternative Worldviews – How Need Thwarting, Group Characteristics and The Social Environment Determine Ideological Extremism*, is a single-author paper that is published as a working paper in *APSA preprints*. The paper tests empirically, whether need thwarting can enhance the chances that individuals actively reach out to ideologically motivated, extremist groups, prior of showing violent behavior. The study compiled and analyzed data from two main sources, first, the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS), which is a deidentified, cross-sectional, quantitative dataset based on more than 2,200 individuals in the United States, and second, the Reputation of Terror Groups dataset (RGT), which includes information about 443 terrorist groups operating over the last three decades. The main hypothesis in this study is that individuals whose underlying psychological needs had been thwarted would be more likely to reach out to ideologically motivated extremist groups. The results indicate that individuals, in particular young males, whose needs for identification and (collective) existential security are

thwarted, are more likely to reach out to extremist groups that espoused far-right and religiously fundamentalist (Islamic) ideology and, to a much lesser extent, far-left ideology. To be precise, individuals who felt disconnected from American values and beliefs, and hence whose need for identification was thwarted, turned out to be twice as likely to reach out to extremist groups compared to someone who identified with the American social value system. Likewise, individuals who experienced grievance pertaining to group-level threats or injustice, which thwarted their need for existential safety/or justice, were one a half times more likely to join an extremist group, than individuals who did not report a similar grievance. This study provides some preliminary evidence consistent with the formal choice model, described in Chapter 3, insofar as it suggests that individuals whose underlying needs are thwarted are more likely to choose a particular ideology to find need reconciliation.

And finally, Chapter 6, *Concluding Remarks*, outlines, and discusses the general findings and implications of this doctoral thesis.

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