



ASSESSMENT OF RADICALIZATION & VIOLENT EXTREMISM AMONG YOUTH IN SERBIA AND PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS

- RESULTS OF THE BASELINE STUDY -

Conducted within the project „*Youth for Change:
Building the resilience of Serbian youth through
youth engagement, leadership and development of
cognitive and social-emotional skills*“

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Even though there is a growing research interest and evidence on the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism, previous studies indicated no single cause (Mcgilloway, Ghosh, & Bhui, 2015), unique profile of psychopathology or personality traits that makes individuals more prone to radicalization and violent extremism (Demunter et al., 2019).

Several groups of risk factors were, however, identified. Accordingly, young people, in their formative years, living in Serbia – a region with a recent history of violent interethnic conflict, could represent the population of particular interest for exploring radicalization and violent extremism.

The main aim of this study was to assess the potential for radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia and to explore protective and risk factors for these phenomena. Our results are supposed to provide information for data-driven programs aiming to reduce and prevent radicalization and violent extremism.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 288 students aged between 15 and 18 (29% males) from Belgrade and Sandžak region participated in the study. They completed a comprehensive questionnaire assessing radicalization and violent extremism that was conceptualized as three dimensional Militant-Extremist Mindset, including 1) acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence in certain circumstances; 2) belief in divine power such as heaven and God, role of martyrdom, and afterlife pleasures; and 3) belief that there is something significantly wrong with the world we live in, and that the present-day world is vile and miserable. In addition, a comprehensive battery of psychological instruments was used to assess interethnic perception and interaction, as well as potential risk factors for radicalization and violent extremism that were grouped around two wide clusters:

1) contextual risk factors, including financial and socio-emotional deprivation and exposure to violence and hostile school environment and 2) psychological risk factors including self-concept and esteem-related factors, ideology-related factors, and interaction-related psychological factors.

RESULTS

Global social acceptance ratings of out-group showed no extreme out-group distance or rejection. Results revealed overall general positive attitudes of Serbs towards Bosniaks and vice versa. We observed somewhat higher distance towards Albanians among youth in the Belgrade area, and towards members of Roma ethnicity in both regions.

Results indicated that youth in Serbia is not prone to accept, justify, and advocate the use of violence and believes in divine power to a moderate extent. However, they show relatively pronounced tendencies towards perceiving the world as vile and miserable. When comparing regions in Serbia, it can be noticed that youth in Belgrade shows significantly more proviolence tendencies, perceive the world as dangerous place to a larger extent and believes in divine power less than youth from Sandžak.

The results have shown different contextual and psychological drivers for each dimension of the militant extremist mindset. *Belief in divine power* was best predicted by the level of religiosity, followed by authoritarian tendencies. In addition, results showed that those who came from dysfunctional families and were exposed to hostile school environments exhibited more pronounced views of the *world as vile and miserable*, indicating the importance of contextual factors in shaping such world view. Those supportive of intergroup hierarchies and innate inequalities were also more prone to perceiving the world as dangerous.

Finally, psychological factors were the only ones contributing to *pro-violent tendencies* among youth in Serbia, whilst contextual factors were not very predictive in that regard. Acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence thus seem to be related to attitudes which support favorizing certain groups at the expense of other groups, and group inequality; young people who reported feeling more socially isolated and lonely were also more likely to endorse violent solutions in intergroup relations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study results, recommendations for interventions regarding prevention and reduction of radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia are provided and discussed, such as:

- 1) interventions addressing attitudes towards intergroup relations,
- 2) interventions addressing social isolation and loneliness,
- 3) Interventions addressing family functioning and school environments,
- 4) Interventions addressing negative worldview.

INTRODUCTION

During the last few decades, there is a growing interest and research evidence emerging on the process of radicalization that can lead to extremism and violence. OSCE (2019) defines radicalization that leads to violent extremism as “dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, even legitimate, course of action”, while the term violent extremism refers to “acts of violence that are justified by, or associated with, an extremist religious, social, or political ideology”.

Radicalization may eventually lead to advocacy, support or engagement in violence and terrorism, but often radical ideas won't lead to violence, and individuals who are engaged in violence do not necessarily support any of the radical ideologies (Borum, 2012). In line with this, literature offers two common approaches to radicalization: 1) radicalization as a process that leads to violent extremism and 2) radicalization as a broader phenomenon of having far-reaching ideas of changing societies.

Regardless of the specific approach to radicalization, previous studies identified multiple causes that drive the phenomenon, such as global and regional politics, intergroup conflicts, group inequalities, social exclusion and marginalization, poverty, etc. (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008; Petrović & Stakić, 2018; CeSID, 2016). In addition, it was shown that threatened identity and self-uncertainty could cause a person to seek for and identify with groups that can offer strong boundaries and directive leadership, often including radical ideology and involvement in violence (Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Hogg, 2014).

Bearing in mind recognized drivers of radicalization and considering the context of past events and civil war in the former Yugoslavia, the increased violent radicalization and strengthening of right-wing movements in Serbia in the last decade of the last century does not come as a surprise. Despite democratic transition in Serbia in the early 2000s some authors have argued that right-wing movements continued to grow. These authors identify two main forms of extremism in Serbia - right-wing extremism and Islamist extremism (Petrović & Stakić, 2018).

One of the main strategies in countering radicalization and violent extremism is preventing radicalization of young people, who are being targeted as one of the most vulnerable groups and therefore more likely to become members of extremist groups (Silke, 2008). As mentioned above, some of the most emphasized individual drivers of radicalization are threatened identity and self-uncertainty. The fact that adolescents are in the process of identity forming, which often entails crises, makes them more vulnerable and prone to seek for stable identity and self-purpose in the extremist groups. Besides identity crises, there are other factors associated with radicalization and engagement in violence, especially among youth, such as social identification, status-seeking, and revenge-seeking (Dandurand, 2015).

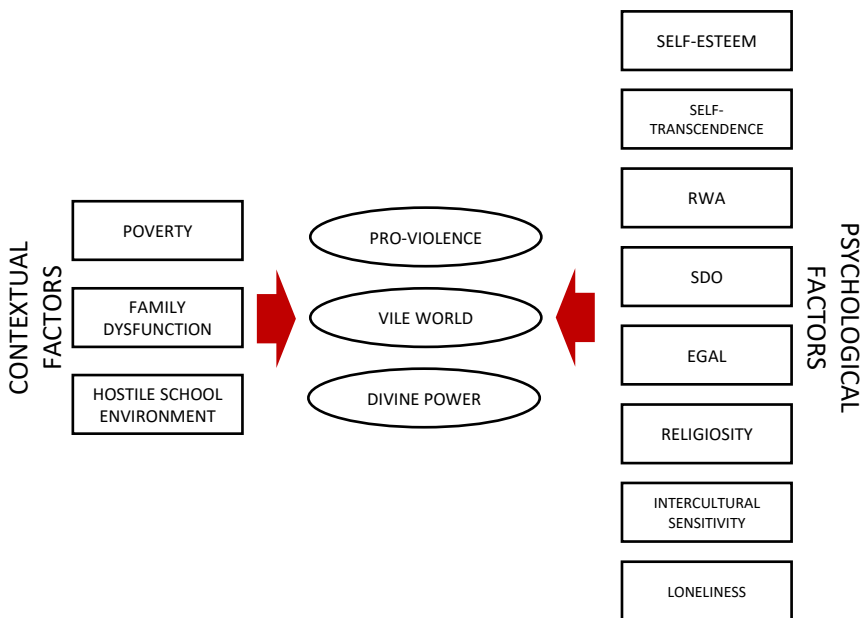
Previous studies that were exploring radicalization or related constructs among youth in different regions in Serbia indicated that young people in Serbia are disappointed, bitter, and distrustful towards social actors (CeSID, 2016), as well as more politically cynical compared to their peers from Western European countries (Žeželj, 2007). In addition, it was shown that Roma people and youth aged 15-19 were most likely to engage in violence (Petrović & Stakić, 2018). Regionally speaking, it was young people from South Serbia (CeSID, 2016). The same survey revealed that young people in South-Western Serbia have stronger religious identity (CeSID, 2016).

Despite the growing importance of the topic in question and local contextual factors that could represent additional risk factors for radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia, there is a lack of studies that have comprehensively assessed and explored drivers of radicalization and violent extremism in a single design.

With an aim of collecting data needed to inform evidence-based programs attempting to prevent and reduce radicalization and violent extremism, this study will explore these phenomena and related protective and risk factors. The young population was selected as the target group, as it was shown they represented a group under increased risk of involvement in radical groups and violence. In addition, in order to support ethnical and religious diversity in the

assessment of these phenomena, and to provide the perspective of youth from both majority and minority groups in Serbia, the study included young people from Belgrade and Sandžak area, i.e. South-Western region of Serbia.

Based on both theoretical concepts and the body of evidence from previous studies, protective and risk factors for radicalization and violent extremism within this study are grouped around two main clusters, which are explored in depth. The first group of factors includes contextual risk factors such as financial and socio-emotional deprivation and exposure to violence and abuse, which have been shown to be related to readiness for involvement in radical groups and violence. The second cluster includes psychological factors that have been shown to be drivers of radicalization and violent extremism, and can be grouped in two sub-clusters: identity and self worth (self esteem, self transcendence and self isolation/loneliness) and ideological views (right wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, egalitarianism, and religiosity). Additionally, this study aims to provide evidence on interethnic perception and interaction among youth in both regions, thus allowing for better understanding of the potential for intergroup conflict.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data was collected during September and November 2019. The sample consisted of 288 students attending high schools and technical schools in Belgrade, Sjenica, and Novi Pazar. Students were recruited in collaboration with the school psychologists and approached in predefined time during school hours. All participants and their parents or legal guardians were informed about the objective of the study and invited to participate on a voluntary basis. All participants who took part in the study or their parents/legal guardians signed the informed consent. All participants completed a set of questionnaires during group sessions on school premises. In line with recommended practices, we back translated the questionnaires that were not previously available in Serbian. Data was collected by trained psychologists and after filling the questionnaires all participants were debriefed. All personal information was kept confidential and all the data were anonymized prior to data analysis. All procedures adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki standards, and the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Psychology, University of Belgrade, Serbia (Protocol #2019-037).

Data analysis strategy. Descriptive measures (frequencies and averages) are shown on the level of entire sample and by regional subsamples. We also note if there are any significant differences between the subsamples. When interpreting those, the reader needs to bear in mind that due to the rather large sample size even small differences tend to be significant, so one needs to assess the range of it, i.e. whether they are substantial or not.

We continue to report correlation and regression analyses to test which are the most important determinants of militant extremist mindset.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The sample consists of 288 students aged between 15 and 18. Most of the students are between 16 and 17 years of age (86%). The participants were recruited from four high schools in Serbia: IX gymnasium and technical school “Drvo Art” from Belgrade region, Economic-Trading school in Novi Pazar and Technical high school in Sjenica from Sandžak region.

The gender and regional structure of the sample are shown in Figure 1 and 2, while the ethnic and religious structures of the sample are shown in Figure 3 and 4.

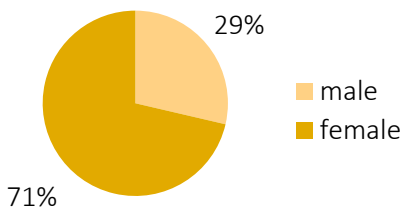


Figure 1. Sample structure by gender

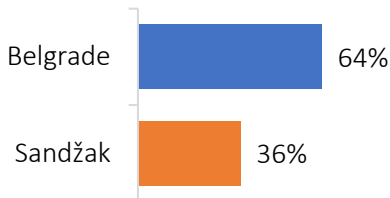


Figure 2. Sample structure by region

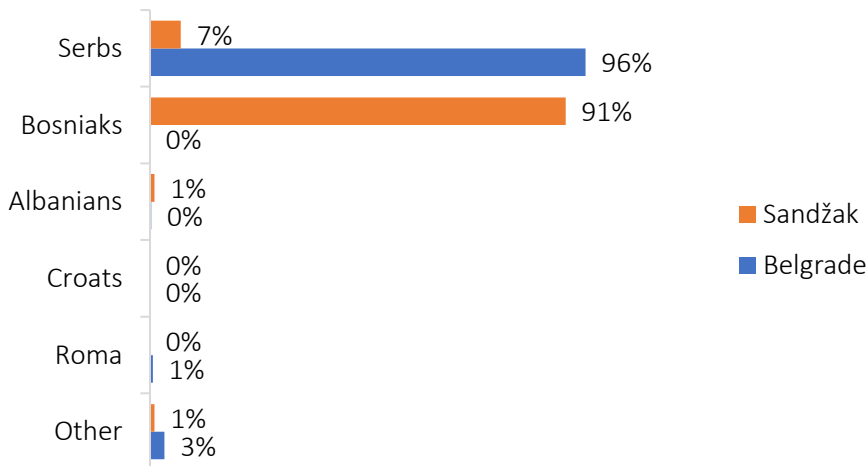


Figure 3. Sample structure by ethnicity

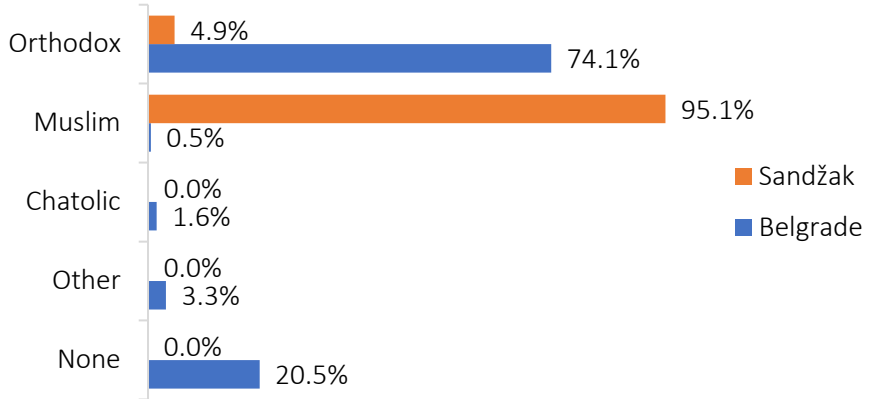


Figure 4. Sample structure by religion

In addition, the one-item measure was used for self-reported religiosity (“How religious are you?”), accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – not religious at all to 5 – very religious. The average self-reported religiosity for Belgrade and Sandžak regions is shown in Figure 5. As it can be seen, participants from the Sandžak region reported being more religious than participants from the Belgrade region.

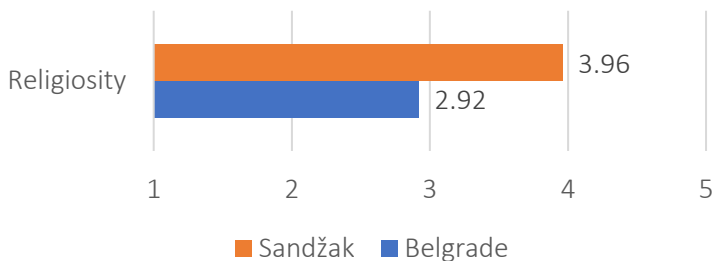


Figure 5. Self-reported level of religiosity

INTERETHNICAL PERCEPTION & INTERACTION

CONTACT BETWEEN ETHNIC GROUPS

We assessed how often adolescents from different ethnic groups have contact with one another, and how much they enjoy that experience.

Quantity of interethnic contact (Đorđević, 2015; Zezelj, Milošević-Đorđević, Van Niekerk, & Pavlović, 2019) was assessed by items describing the frequency of contact with one's in-group and outgroup members in different contexts. The groups assessed are the ones with the most expressed social distance among the population in Serbia (Albanians, Roma, Croats, Bosniaks, and the majority- Serbian group) (Biro, Mihić, Milin, & Logar, 2002).

Firstly, the contact was measured as the number of friends of different ethnicity (Albanians, Roma, Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbs) where participants indicated how many of their friends are members of each of these ethnic groups on a 5-point scale (1 – none, 2 – minority, 3 – half of them, 4 – majority, 5 – all of them).

The familiarity with the groups was assessed by single-item measure in which the participants were asked to assess how well are they acquainted with each of the given ethnic groups (1 – not at all, 5 – very well).

In addition, the number of contact across different contexts was examined. In particular, we used three 5-point items to measure frequency of interaction, such as contact in school, neighbourhood, and in free time.

Quality of contacts was assessed by the item describing pleasantness (positive-negative) of contact with in-group and out-group if a participant has ever been in direct contact with different groups. The participants rated pleasantness on a 10-point scale (1 – very unpleasant, 10 – very pleasant).

When all measures of contact were taken into account, the result has shown, as expected, that participants predominantly interact with their own group in different contexts. As shown in Table 1, participants from Belgrade have minimum contact, if any at all, with members of other groups, while participants from Sandžak have some contact with Serbs, as it is expected due to the ethnic composition in this region, but minimum contact with other groups, as shown in Table 2.

The results are similar regarding the group familiarity, i.e., the participants from the Belgrade region are the most familiar with their own group, while they are relatively unfamiliar with other groups. Similarly, in the Sandžak region, the predominant ethnic group reported being familiar with their own group, while having relatively low familiarity with out-group members, except for Serbs who were the second largest ethnic group in this region.

As for the pleasantness of contact, all participants rated contacts with Serbs and Bosniaks as highly positive, where 60% of participants from Sandžak rated contact with Serbs with a 9 or higher, and 47% of participants from Belgrade rated contact with Bosniaks with a 9 or higher. Significant differences were observed between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak in terms of assessing pleasantness of contact with other groups. Namely, participants from Belgrade reported having more negative contact with Albanians, more than 70% of participants rated it 5 or lower, than those from Sandžak, while youth from Sandžak reported having more negative contact with Croats and Roma, where more than 60% of participants rated it 5 or lower.

Table 1. *Contact with different ethnic groups - Belgrade region*

	Friends	Familiarity	Contact in school	Contact in neighborhood	Contact in free time	Contact pleasantness
Serbs	4.63/5	4.63/5	4.96/5	4.93/5	4.89/5	9.16/10
Bosniaks	1.61/5	2.55/5	1.76/5	1.92/5	2.22/5	7.76/10
Albanians	1.1/5	1.51/5	1.06/5	1.18/5	1.14/5	3.82/10
Croats	1.47/5	2.44/5	1.58/5	1.74/5	2.08/5	6.48/10
Roma	1.29/5	2.01/5	1.58/5	1.75/5	1.48/5	4.55/10

Table 2. *Contact with different ethnic groups - Sandžak region*

	Friends	Familiarity	Contact in school	Contact in neighborhood	Contact in free time	Contact pleasantness
Serbs	2.49/5	3.33/5	3.48/5	2.31/5	2.83/5	8.09/10
Bosniaks	4.50/5	4.79/5	4.84/5	4.80/5	4.81/5	9.81/10
Albanians	1.33/5	1.71/5	1.37/5	1.41/5	1.53/5	5.40/10
Croats	1.17/5	1.51/5	1.06/5	1.14/5	1.23/5	3.91/10
Roma	1.11/5	1.42/5	1.14/5	1.10/5	1.25/5	3.41/10

ACCEPTANCE OF OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

Group acceptance (as adapted in Žeželj, Milošević-Dorđević, Niekerk, & Pavlović, 2019). For the purpose of this research, group acceptance was measured by 4 items describing social distance, i.e., readiness to engage in relations of varying closeness with people from five ethnic groups. (e.g. *“I would not mind having a Serb/Bosniak/Albanian/Croat/Roma: as a neighbour/sharing a school desk with me/ as a close friend/ as a romantic partner”*). Each statement is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree, to 5 – strongly agree, where higher scores suggest higher acceptance of a relationship.

Figure 6 shows average responses to the question: *“I would not mind living in the same neighbourhood with...”*, where participants expectedly showed preference for their own group. Besides this, Belgrade youth demonstrated relatively high acceptance of Bosniaks, followed by Croats, while demonstrating the least level of acceptance for members of Albanian and Roma ethnic groups as acceptable neighbours. Similarly, besides their in-group members, Sandžak youth expressed the highest acceptance of Serbs as neighbours, followed by Albanians and Croats, while members of the Roma ethnicity were rated as the least acceptable neighbours.

A significant difference was found between Belgrade and Sandžak region in acceptance of Albanian ethnic group. Namely, participants from Sandžak were more ready to accept Albanians as neighbours. There is no significant difference in acceptance of Roma, where 30% of all participants rated it 2 or lower. Also, there was no significant difference in accepting Croats, where 55% of participants rated it 4 or lower.

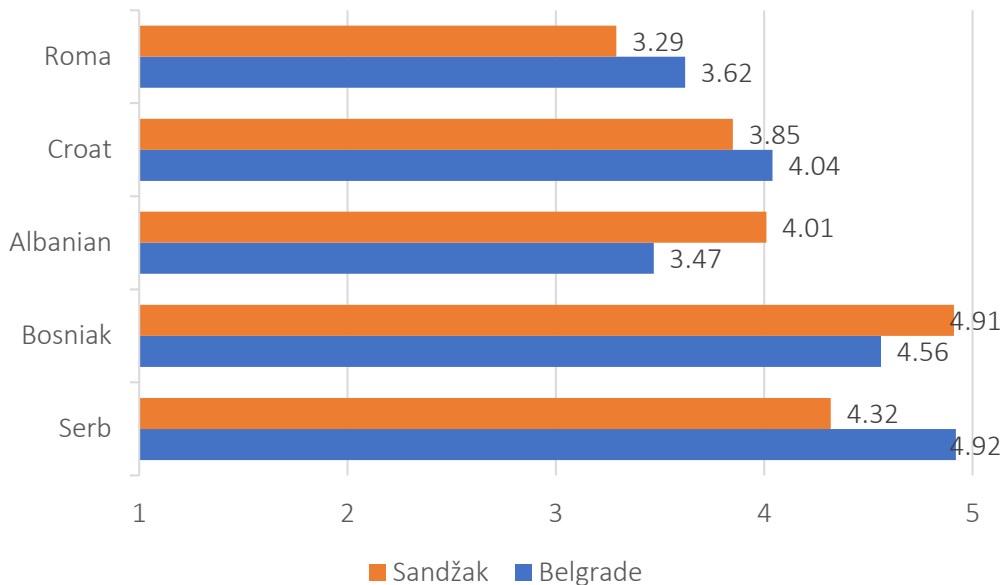


Figure 6. “I would not mind living in the same neighborhood with...”

The average responses to the question “I would not mind sharing the school desk with...” by region are shown in Figure 7. The preference for the in-group is constant, and the differences are similar to those found in the previous item. Namely, apart from members of their own ethnic group, Belgrade youth expressed the second-highest acceptance for sharing a school desk with a Bosniak, followed by Croat, while members of Albanian and Roma ethnic groups were rated as the most undesirable. On the other hand, youth from Sandžak region expressed no differences between accepting to share a school desk with members of their own ethnic group and Serbian classmates, followed by Albanian and Croat classmates, while showing the lowest level of acceptance for members of Roma group.

Comparisons between regions revealed a significant difference between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak in acceptance of Albanians, where participants from Sandžak shown higher acceptance for this ethnic group. On the other hand, no differences were found regarding the acceptance of members of Croat and Roma ethnic groups.

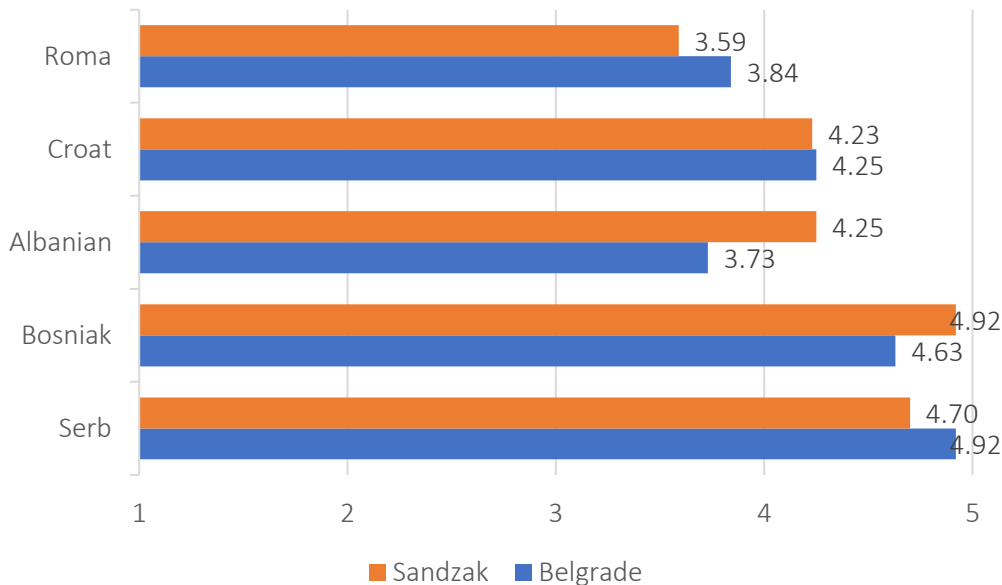


Figure 7. “I would not mind sharing the school desk with..”

The average responses to the question “I would not mind having a close friend who is...” are shown in Figure 8. Once again, the preferences of in-group members were found in both regions. Apart from that, participants from Belgrade would preferably have a Bosniak as a close friend, followed by a Croat, then a Roma, while the least desirable close friend would be the member of the Albanian ethnic group. Participants from Sandžak region wouldn’t mind having a Serb as a close friend, followed by members of Albanian and Croat ethnic groups, while Roma would be the least desirable close friend.

However, significant differences between youth from Belgrade and Sandžak were found in terms of acceptance of members of Albanian and Roma ethnic groups. Namely, youth from Belgrade expressed higher acceptance of Roma as a close friend than youth from Sandžak, who expressed higher acceptance of Albanians than participants from Belgrade. On average, every third participant from Sandžak would not mind having a Roma as a close friend, while every third participant from Belgrade would prefer not to have an Albanian as a close friend. No significant difference was found between regions in accepting members of the Croat ethnic group as a close friend.

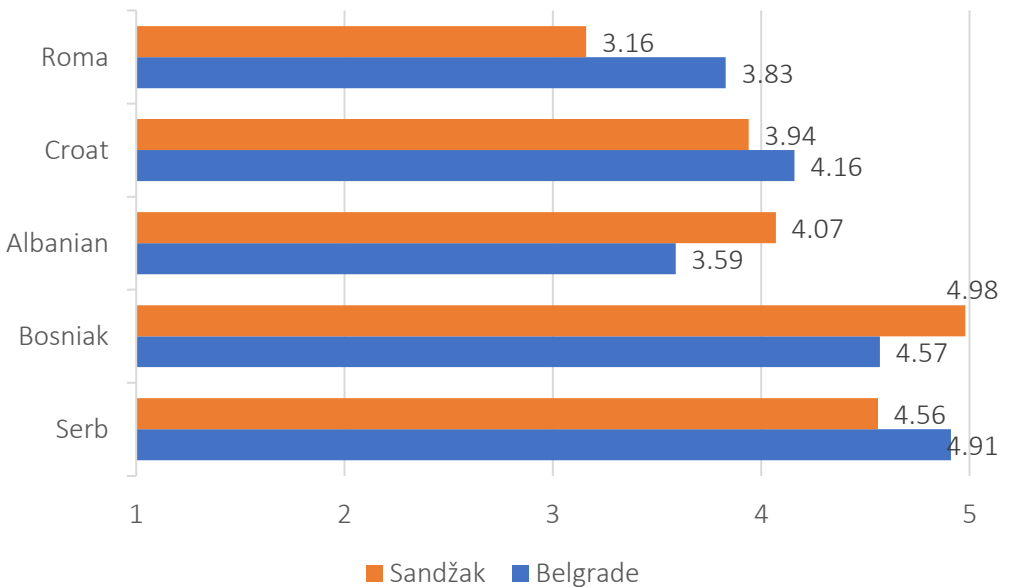


Figure 8. "I would not mind having a close friend who is..."

Figure 9 presents average scores of youth from Belgrade and Sandžak when asked: “I would not mind dating a...”. As expected, participants from Belgrade and Sandžak showed a pronounced preference for their own group, but significant differences were found in acceptance of dating a person from other ethnic groups. Namely, youth from Belgrade would, primarily accept dating members of the Bosniak ethnic group, followed by Croats, and they would likely not have members of Albanian and Roma ethnic groups as romantic partners.

Youth from Sandžak was unlikely to accept dating Serbs, Croats, or Albanians (without significant differences), while refusing members of Roma ethnic group as potential dating partners.

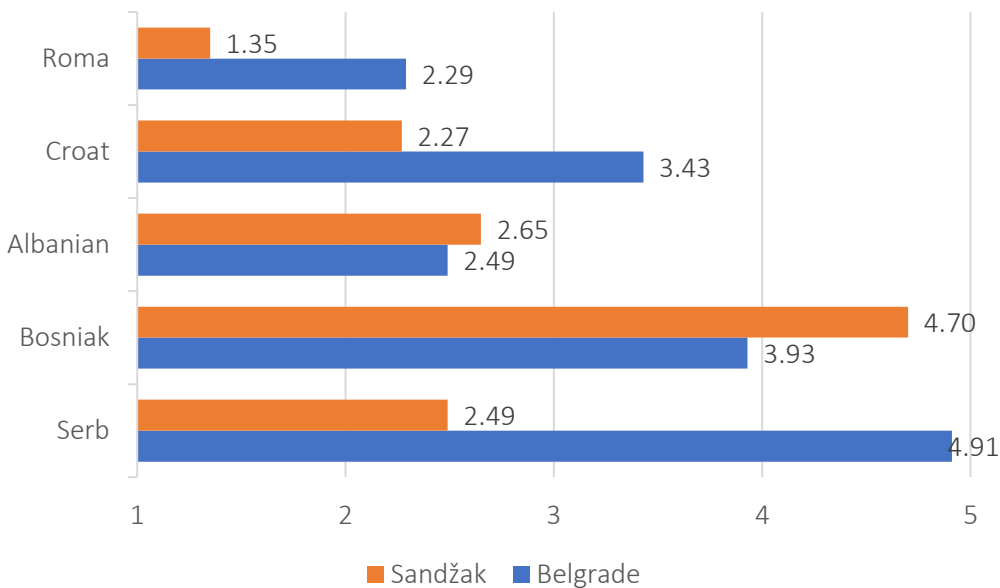


Figure 9. “I would not mind dating a...”

However, participants from Belgrade expressed significantly higher acceptance of all other groups compared to participants from Sandžak, except when it came to accepting dating Albanians, where youth from both regions expressed approximately the same level of acceptance. It should be noted that even though the acceptance of most ethnic out-groups is higher among youth in Belgrade, the acceptance of both Roma and Albanians proved to be very low suggesting marked distance and rejection of this kind of relationship with the out-group members of these ethnicities.

Global social acceptance ratings, i.e., ratings aggregated across different levels of closeness are shown in Figure 10. In general, besides from in-group preference, the Belgrade youth showed the highest level of acceptance for Bosniaks, followed by Croats, while the lowest level of acceptance was found for Albanians and Roma.

As for Sandžak subsample, the second-highest level of acceptance was found for Serbs and Albanians, where no significant difference was recorded, followed by somewhat lower acceptance of Croats, and the lowest level of acceptance for members of the Roma ethnic group.

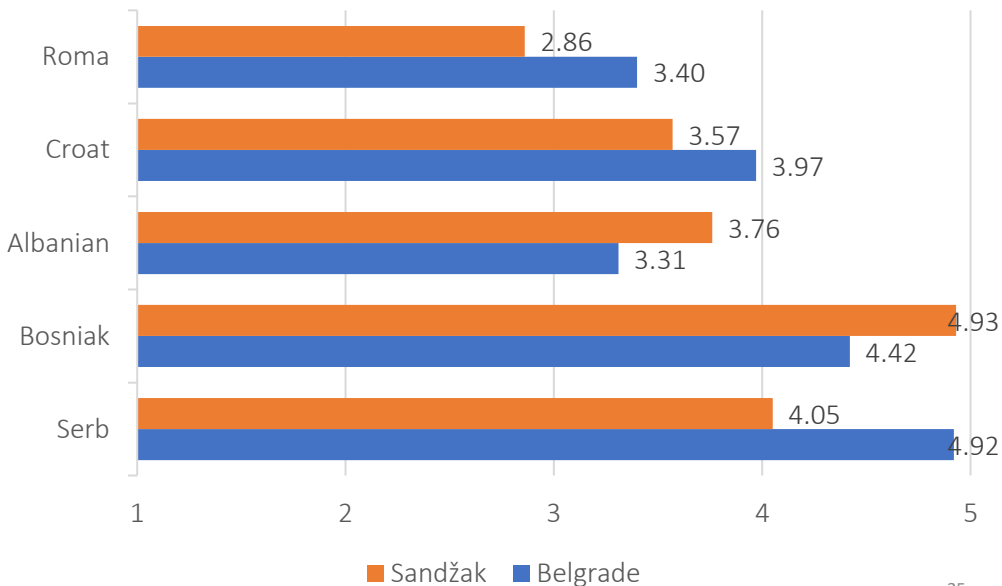


Figure 10. Global social acceptance

FEELINGS TOWARDS OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

In order to measure feelings towards different ethnic outgroups, we adapted the so-called “Feeling Thermometer” (Wilcox, Sigelman, & Cook, 1989). In this task, participants were requested to rate how they felt about members of each of the five aforementioned ethnic groups. Responses were given on a scale ranging from 0° (very cold) to 100° (very warm).

The results have shown the expected tendency of having warmer feelings towards in-group members compared to members of outgroups. As shown in Figure 11, youth from Belgrade has the warmest feelings towards Bosniak group, followed by Croats and Roma, respectively, and the coldest feelings towards Albanian ethnic group.

In Sandžak region, the warmest feelings, after their own group, are towards Serbs, followed by Albanians and Croats, and the coldest feelings are expressed towards Roma ethnic group.

The only significant difference between the two regions is found regarding feelings toward Albanians, where the youth from Belgrade region reported having colder feelings toward this group in comparison to youth from Sandžak. Namely, 85% of participants from Belgrade scored less than 50.

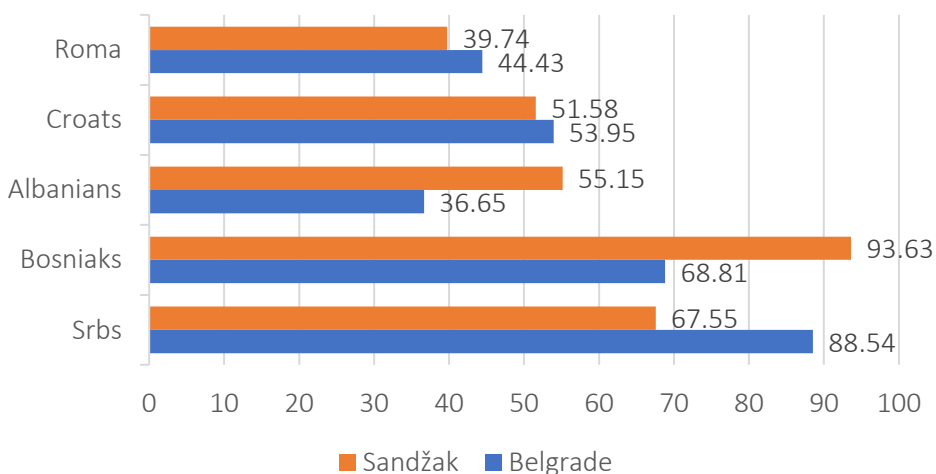


Figure 11. Feeling thermometer

CONTEXTUAL RISK FACTORS

PEER ABUSE

To assess whether young people have experienced peer-violence, we employed the **Peer Abuse Scale** (Olweus, 1996). It assesses the frequency of both verbal and physical bullying in school over the last school year. Bullying is assessed by using two forms of items, one for a victim of bullying and the other for a bully (e.g. *“How often did it happen during the last school year that someone verbally bullied you (insulted you, made fun of you, etc.) at school?”*; *“How often did it happen during the last school year that you physically bullied someone at school?”*). The scale consists of 4 items, each one followed by a 5 - point Likert scale (1 – never, 2 – once or twice, 3 – two to three times a month, 4 – approximately once a week, and 5 – few times a week).

Two more 5-point scale items referring to the frequency of physical and verbal conflict in a class were used, as well as the single-5-point item measuring the general feeling of safety in school (1 – I never feel safe at school to 5 – I always feel safe at school).

Figure 12 shows the comparison between self-reported verbal and physical bullying and perceived overall safety in school. Results have shown that peer abuse is relatively low and perceived general safety is high among youth in both regions. However, participants from the Belgrade region reported being in a somewhat more hostile school environment as indicated by a lower feeling of safety in school as well as more frequent conflicts in their classes compared to their peers from Sandžak.

On the other hand, no differences in the frequency of physical bullying were observed between regions and youth from both Belgrade and Sandžak area reported very low frequencies of physical bullying. However, significant differences were found regarding verbal bullying. Namely, both being a victim of verbal bullying as well as verbally bullying peers were reported more often in the Belgrade region than in Sandžak.

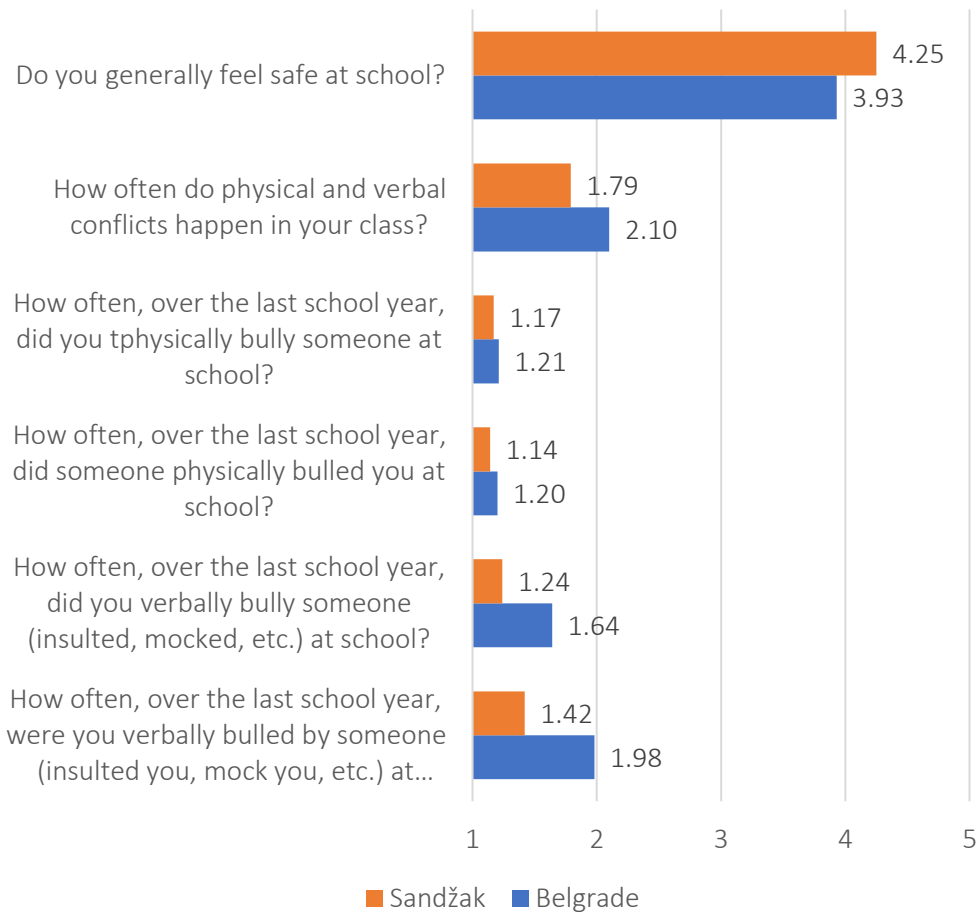


Figure 12. Hostility of school environment

FAMILY DYSFUNCTION AND POVERTY

Family dysfunction and poverty were assessed by **Bad Socialization Ccale** (Knežević, 2003). The scale consists of 10 items and two subscales: 1) *Poverty* that includes 4 items (e.g. “*There was never enough money in my family*”) and 2) *Family dysfunction* that includes 6 items (e.g. “*Physical and verbal conflicts happened often in my home when I was growing up*”). Each statement is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – completely false, to 5 – completely true.

On average, participants scored low on both scales, indicating that the majority of them do not perceive themselves as financially deprived during childhood or as exposed to conflicts within the family, abused or neglected by their family members (Figure 13). However, significant differences between young people from different regions in Serbia were observed regarding the poverty, where youth in Sandžak assessed themselves as being less exposed to poverty in comparison to youth in Belgrade. On the other hand, a trend-level difference was observed for the family dysfunction where Belgrade youth, on average, reported having more dysfunctional homes than their peers from Sandžak.

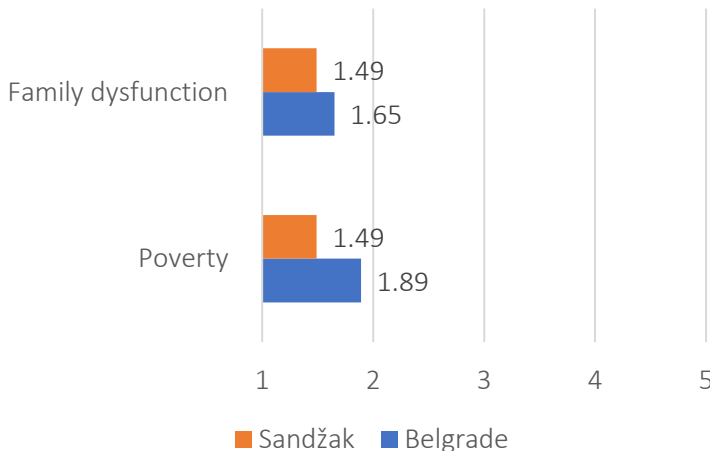


Figure 13. Family dysfunction and poverty scores

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROTECTIVE & RISK FACTORS

SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (Pratto et al. 1994; adapted in Todosijević, 2013) measures general attitude toward intergroup relations, accepting or opposing hierarchies as a natural world order. The scale consists of two subscales: 1) Group dominance (e.g. *“Some groups of people are just less worthy than others”*) and 2) Egalitarianism (e.g. *“All humans should be treated equally”*), both consisting of 5 items. Each statement is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – completely false, to 5 – completely true, where low scores on Group dominance scale and high scores on the Egalitarianism scale indicate attitudes supporting group equality.

Results have shown that youth in Serbia on average score relatively low on Group Dominance scale, with less than 5% of participants scoring above 4. In addition, they score high on the Egalitarianism scale, with only 5% of participants scoring below 2. No significant differences were identified between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak (Figure 14). These results generally indicate that youth in Serbia is predominantly supportive of intergroup equality, with equal rights and opportunities for all.

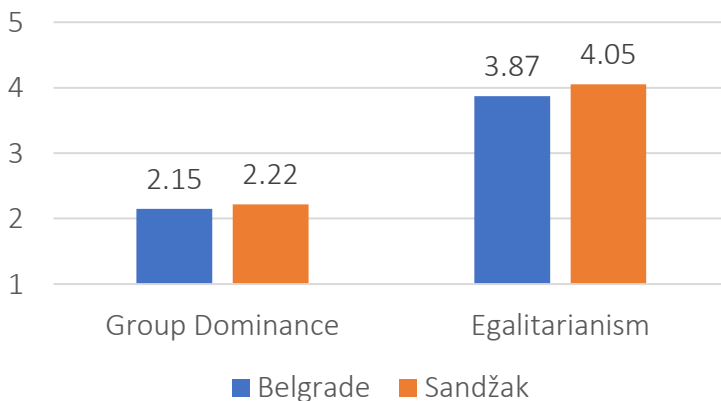


Figure 14. SDO scores

AUTHORITARIANISM

Right wing authoritarianism is a tendency to respect and obey authority and support conservative values. We measured it by RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1981, 1996; adapted in Todosijević, 2013). It consists of 9 items (e.g. *“The most important values that children have to learn are obedience and respect for authority”*). Each item is accompanied by a 5-point scale ranging from 1 – completely false, to 5 – completely true.

The results indicated that youth in Serbia show moderate levels of right-wing authoritarianism. A comparison between two regions, as seen in Figure 15, shows that youth in Sandžak exhibits significantly more pronounced right-wing authoritarianism attitudes than youth in Belgrade, although the difference was not substantial.

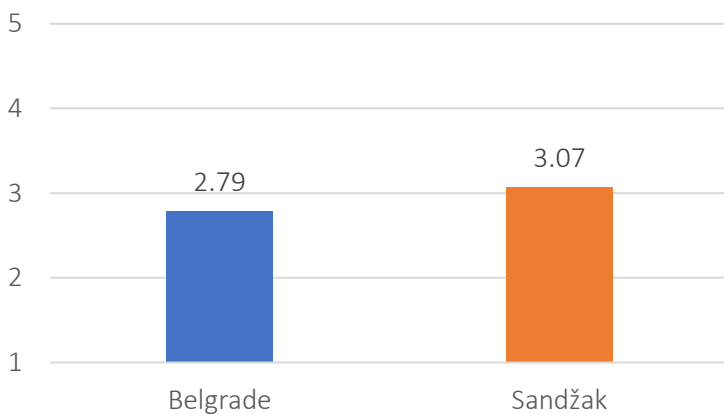


Figure 15. Right-wing authoritarianism scores

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem was assessed by the **Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale** (Rosenberg, 1979), a widely used and cross culturally validated instrument. It consists of two subscales 1) *Self-liking* (e.g. “I take a positive attitude toward myself”) and 2) *Self-competence* (e.g. “I am able to do things as well as most other people”). Each subscale consists of 5 items and the overall score can be used as an indicator of *general self-esteem*. Each item is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree, to 5 – strongly agree.

Results showed that young people in Serbia score very high on both subscales resulting in a high general self-esteem score (Figure 16) - this is a typical finding for this age group. Sandžak youth demonstrated significantly higher general self-esteem compared to their peers from the Belgrade area, mostly due to differences in self-competence ratings which proved to be higher in Sandžak youth; however, it needs to be noted that, although significant, these differences were not substantial. On the other hand, no differences between regions were found regarding the self-liking aspect of self-esteem.

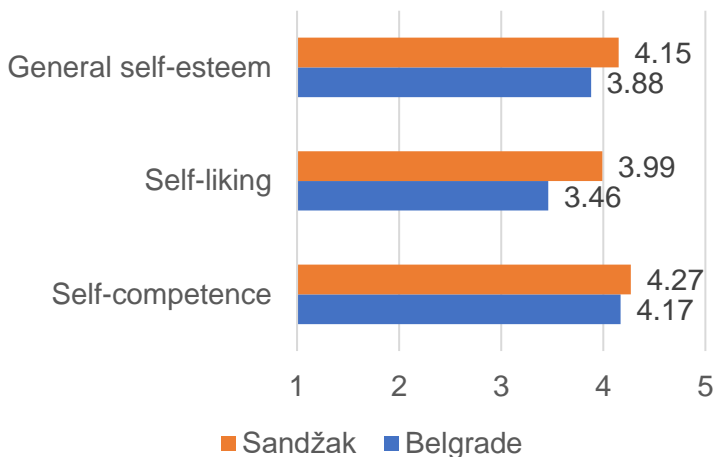


Figure 16. Self-esteem scores

INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Intercultural sensitivity was assessed by the Serbian version of the short **Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)** (Petrović et al., 2015). The ISS consists of 15 items and four subscales: 1) *Interaction enjoyment* has four items that describe positive or negative reactions to communication with people from different cultures (e.g. “*I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures*”), 2) *Interaction engagement* has four items referring to one’s feelings toward people from different cultures (e.g. “*I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures*”), 3) *Respect for cultural differences* subscale has four items describing tolerance and respect for people from different cultures and their opinions (e.g. “*I think people from different cultures are narrow-minded*” – reverse keyed item), 4) *Interaction confidence* has three items measuring one’s confidence when interacting with people from different cultures (e.g. “*I am pretty confident in interacting with people from different cultures*”). Each item is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree, to 5 – strongly agree.

Results shown in Figure 17 indicated that youth in Serbia score the highest on subscales *Interaction enjoyment* and *Respect for cultural differences*, while having somewhat lower scores on scales measuring *Interaction engagement* and *Interaction confidence*. No significant differences were found between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak on any of the subscales. However, a trend level difference was observed for the *Interaction enjoyment* subscale where Sandžak youth exhibited slightly higher enjoyment in interacting with people from different cultures than their Belgrade peers.

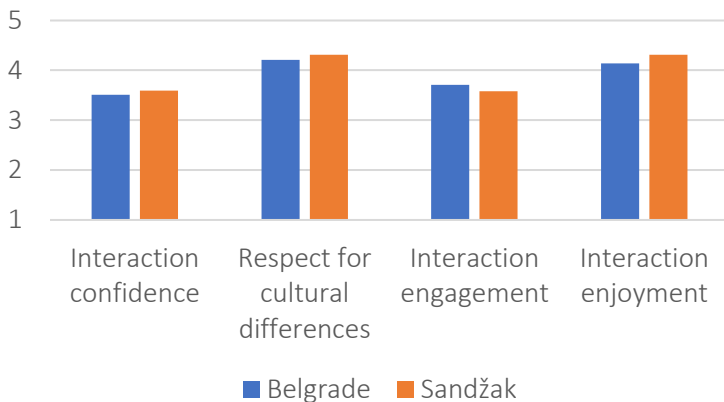


Figure 17. ISS scores

FEELINGS OF LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Subjective feeling of loneliness and feeling of social isolation were assessed by the UCLA **Loneliness Scale** (Russek, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). It consists of 20 items (e.g. “I lack companionship”), accompanied by a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - never, to 4 - often.

Overall, participants on average scored relatively low on this scale (Figure 18), with less than 13% of participants scoring above 2, indicating that feelings of social isolation are present among youth in Serbia to a lesser extent. No significant differences were observed between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak area.

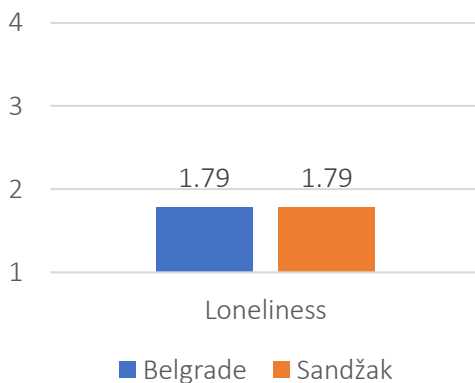


Figure 18. Loneliness scores

PERSONAL MEANING

A sense of personal meaning was assessed with **Personal Meaning Profile – PMP** (McDonald, Wong, & Gingras, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the 3-item subscale *Self-transcendence* was retrieved from the PMP scale. It was used for assessing interests that go beyond oneself and are related to the meaning and purpose of life (e.g. “I believe I can make a difference in the world”). Each item is accompanied by a 5-point scale ranging from 1 - strongly disagree, to 5 - strongly agree.

The results showed that young people in Serbia have moderately to highly pronounced beliefs relevant for overall personal meaning. Namely, they predominantly believe that they can make a significant contribution to society, that they can make a difference in the world, and that they are trying to make this world a better place. As seen in Figure 19, the only significant difference between regions was observed regarding the belief that they can significantly contribute to a society, which proved to be more pronounced in Sandžak than in Belgrade youth.

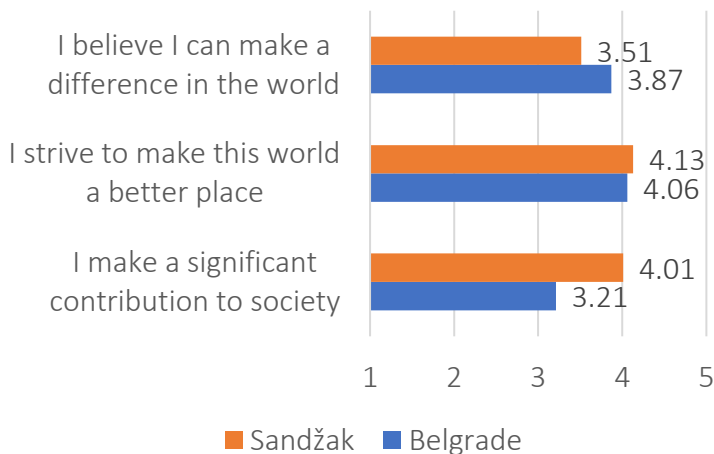


Figure 19. Personal meaning scores

RADICALIZATION & EXTREMISM

MILITANT EXTREMIST MINDSET

Militant Extremist Mindset - MEM was assessed via the revised MEM scale (Stankov, Knežević, Saucier, Radović, & Milovanović, 2018; Stankov, Saucier, & Knežević, 2010), consisting of 24 items that measure beliefs typical for the militant extremist thinking pattern. MEM items were grouped into the following subscales: 1) *Pro-violence* (10 items), referring to acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence in certain circumstances, such as revenge or redemption (e.g. *“Armed struggle is the only way that youths can redeem themselves and their society”*), 2) *Divine Power* (8 items), assessing beliefs about heaven and God, role of martyrdom, and afterlife pleasures (e.g. *“At a critical moment, a divine power will step in to help our people.”*), and 3) *Vile World* (6 items), referring to belief that there is something very wrong with the world we live in, that the present-day world is vile and miserable, and heading to its end (e.g. *“The world is heading to its end”*). Each statement is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - strongly disagree, to 5 - strongly agree.

The results shown in Figure 20 indicate that, in general, youth in Serbia scores low on Proviolence subscale, with less than 5% of participants scoring above 3, on a 5-point scale. When comparing regions in Serbia, it can be noticed that youth in Belgrade shows significantly more proviolence tendencies than youth from Sandžak.

Results indicated that young people in Serbia believe in divine power to a moderate extent, with youth in Sandžak scoring significantly higher compared to youth in the Belgrade area.

Additionally, the results have shown that the world is slightly above the average perceived by the youth of Serbia as vile, miserable place that is heading to its end, with approximately two-thirds of participants scoring above 3. This is particularly pronounced among youth in the Belgrade area, who scored significantly higher on this subscale when compared to youth in Sandžak.

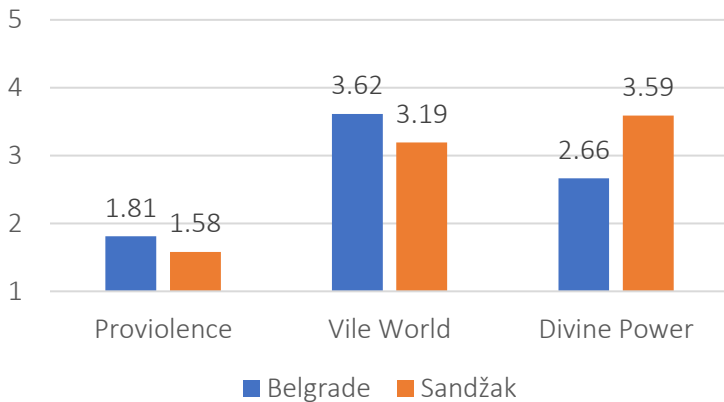


Figure 20. MEM scores

Figure 21 shows the comparison between average scores for items of the Pro-violence subscale in Belgrade and Sandžak.

Results have shown that Belgrade youth when compared to Sandžak youth scores higher on items „Armed struggle is the only way that youths can redeem themselves and their society“, „Killing is justified when it is an act of revenge“, „Our enemy’s children are like scorpions; they need to be squashed before they grow up“, while scoring significantly lower on items „All problems can be solved through negotiations and compromise“, and „A good person has a duty to avoid killing any living human being“.

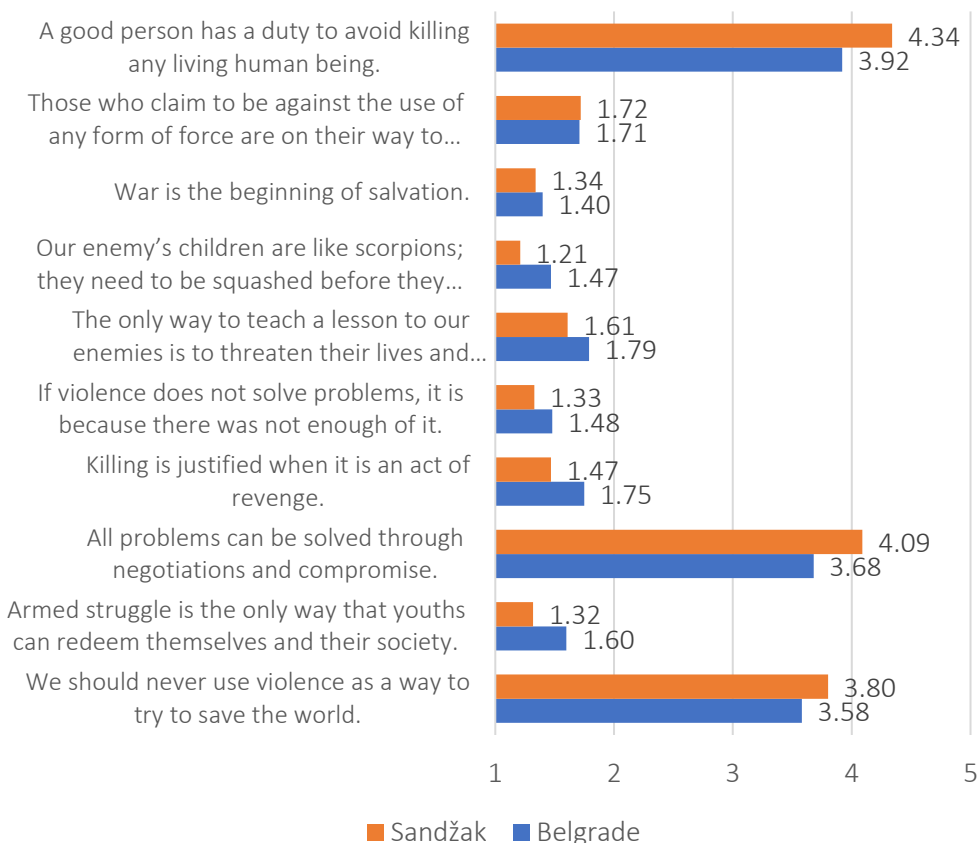


Figure 21. Pro-violence

Figure 22 shows the average scores for items of the Vile World subscale of MEM for Belgrade and Sandžak subsamples.

The results have shown that Belgrade youth scores higher than their peers from Sandžak on each individual item measuring the perception of the world as vile and miserable, except item „*Today the human race is on the edge of an enormous calamity*“ for which high scores can be observed in both samples.

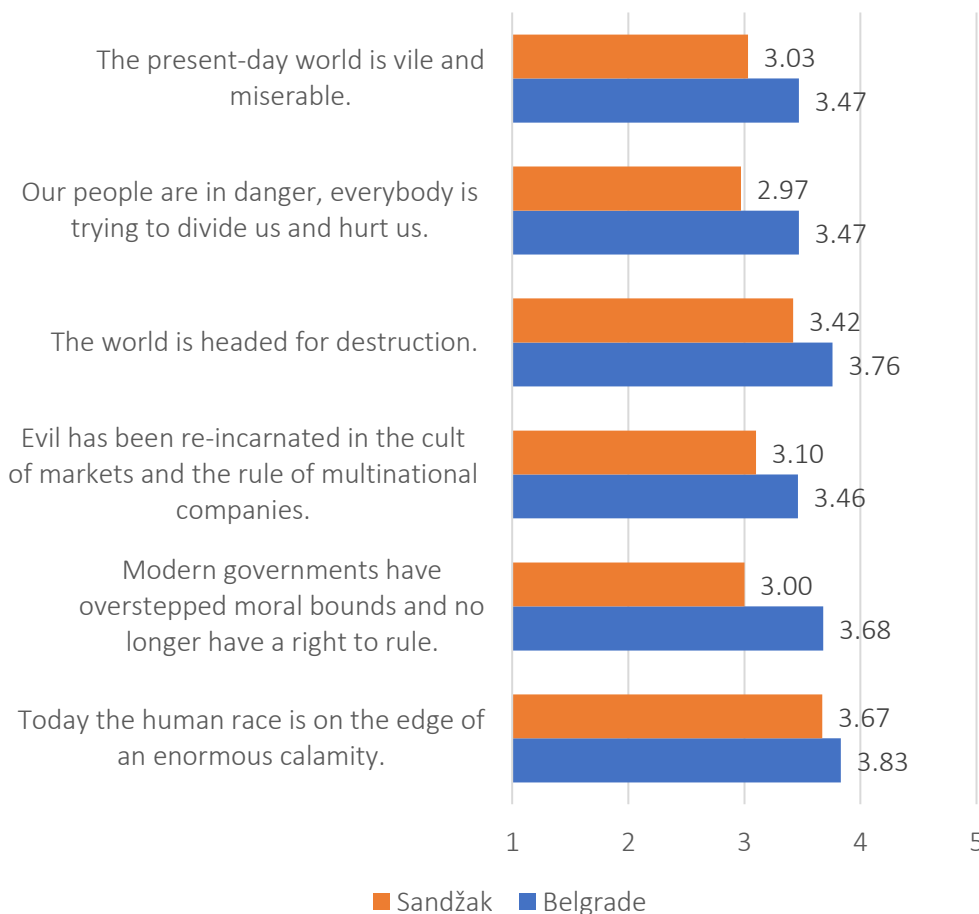


Figure 22. Vile World

Finally, Figure 23 shows participants' average scores for individual items measuring belief in Divine power, separately for Belgrade and Sandžak region.

Participants from the Sandžak region have shown significantly higher level of belief in divine power intervention, the role of martyrdom, and afterlife pleasures on each individual item compared to Belgrade youth.

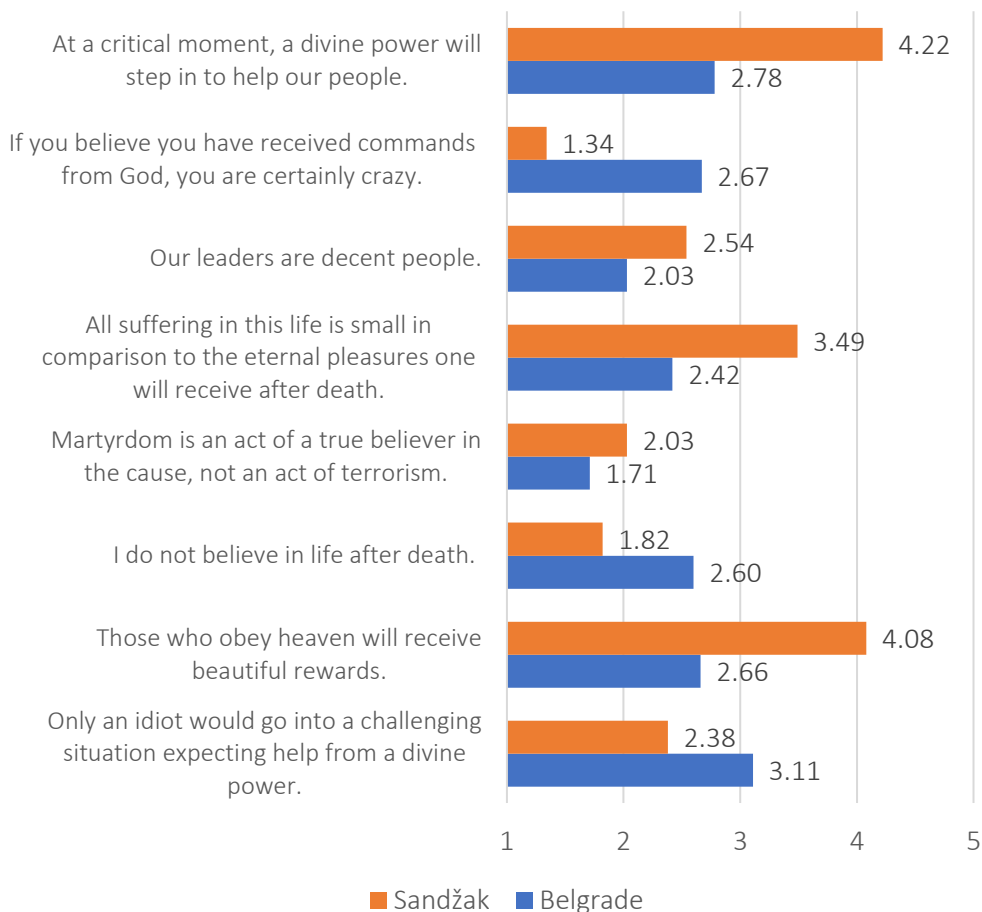


Figure 23. Divine power

PREDICTORS OF RADICALIZATION & EXTREMISM

This study conceptualized and provided in-depth examination of the two main clusters of risk/ protective factors for radicalization and extremism. The first group of risk factors is labelled as **contextual risk factors**, accompanying financial and socio-emotional deprivation, as well as schooling in a hostile school environment, operationalized by composite measures of poverty, family dysfunction, and rated feeling of safety, and frequency of verbal and physical bullying in school, respectively.

The second, very heterogeneous cluster is labelled **psychological risk/ protective factors** within which several psychological predictors of radicalization can be recognized, namely – self-concept and esteem-related factors (such as Self-esteem and Self-transcendence), ideology-related factors (Right-wing Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Orientation, Egalitarianism, and level of Religiosity), as well as interaction-related psychological factors (such as Intercultural sensitivity and feelings of social isolation and loneliness).

The first step in detecting the best set of contextual and psychological predictors of different aspects of radicalization a correlation analysis was performed on the data obtained from all participants that took part in the study. Table 3 in the Appendix shows the intercorrelations between all the measures used in this study.

The three dimensions of the Militant-Extremist Mindset have shown low to non-existent correlations. Namely, the Pro-violence dimension showed a low positive correlation with the perception of the world as Vile, while none of these dimensions had a significant relationship with the dimension of Divine power.

Additionally, the results have shown that aspects of MEM achieve differential relationships with different contextual and psychological factors and that MEM dimensions could to a varying degree be predicted using the given set of measures. The results of regression analyses are shown in Figure 24, 25, and 26.

Namely, both sets of predictors explained 50% of the variance of the Divine power aspect of the MEM. As seen in Figure 24, this aspect of MEM proved to be by far best predicted by the level of religiosity exhibited by a person, followed by authoritarian tendencies. Egalitarian attitudes proved to be the last significant predictor with relatively low predictive power.

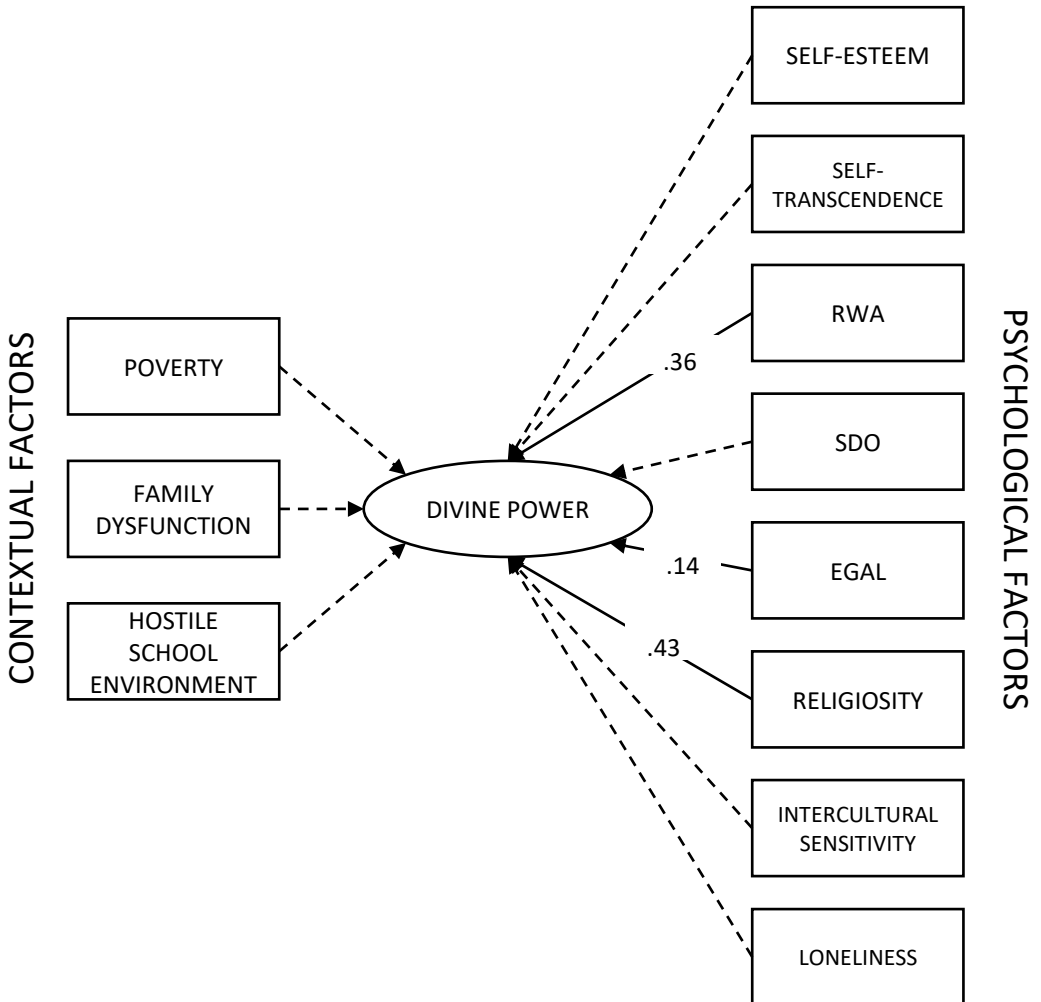


Figure 24. Prediction of Divine power

* Statistically significant regression coefficients are marked by full arrows

On the other hand, all the predictors used explained only 17.6% of the variance of the view on the world as vile. As seen in Figure 25, the perception of the world as vile and miserable can be predicted from both contextual and psychological factors. Namely, those individuals who come from dysfunctional families and hostile school environments exhibit more pronounced view of the world as vile. Among psychological factors, only Social Dominance Orientation proved to be a fair predictor of this aspect of MEM.

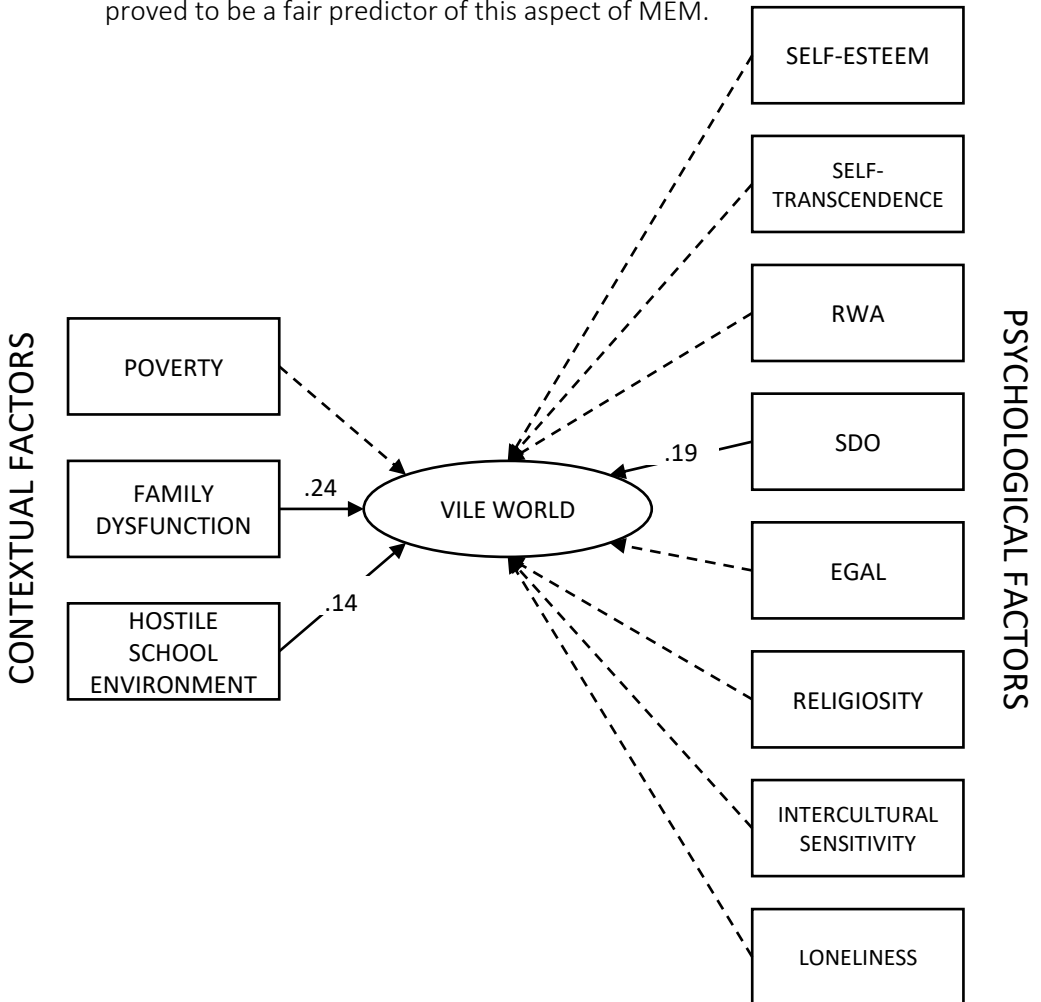


Figure 25. Prediction of Vile World

* Statistically significant regression coefficients are marked by full arrows

Finally, contextual and psychological variables taken together explained 42.9% of the variance of the Pro-violent tendencies. However, none of the contextual variables proved to be significant predictor of Pro-violence. In other words, psychological variables were the only ones contributing to the prediction of this aspect of MEM.

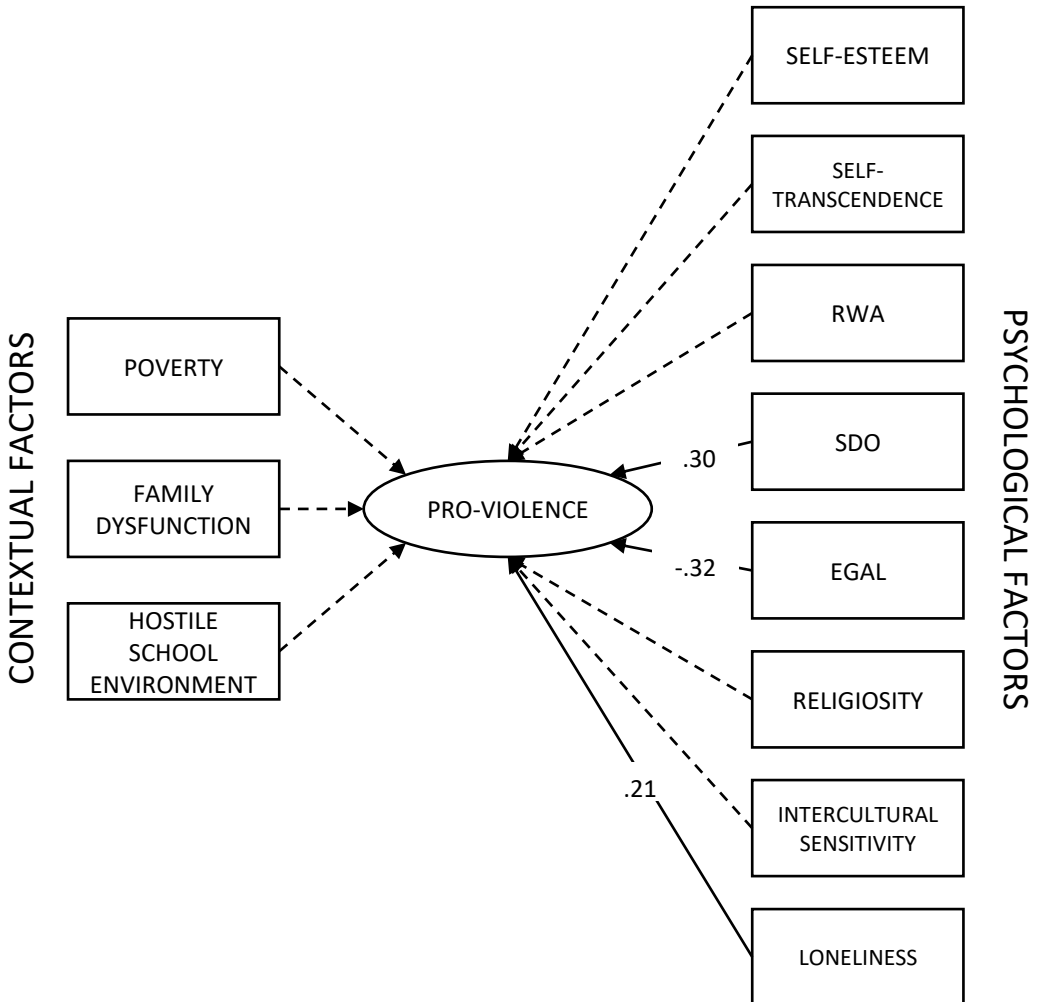


Figure 26. Prediction of Pro-violence

* Statistically significant regression coefficients are marked by full arrows

Namely, the best predictors of Pro-violence tendencies were the absence of Egalitarianism and the presence of attitudes typical for favoritism t certain groups at the expense of other groups. Finally, the level of social isolation and loneliness proved to be the last psychologically relevant predictor of the acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to assess the potential for radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia, and to explore risk factors for these phenomena in order to supply evidence for data-driven programs aiming to reduce and prevent radicalization and violent extremism.

In line with the main drivers of radicalization and violent extremism identified in previous studies, the assessed risk factors were conceptualized in two clusters: 1) contextual risk factors, including financial and socio-emotional deprivation and exposure to violence and hostile school environment and 2) psychological risk factors including self-concept and esteem-related factors, ideology-related factors, and interaction-related psychological factors. In addition, interethnic perception and interaction indicating the potential for intergroup conflicts were assessed.

Results of the study showed that participants from both regions predominantly interacted with their own group, were most familiar with their own group, and showed a preference for their own group. Global out-group social acceptance ratings, however, showed no extreme out-group distance or rejection. Among Belgrade youth the highest level of out-group acceptance was found for Bosniaks, followed by Croats, while the lowest level of acceptance for Albanians and Roma. In the Sandžak area, the highest level of acceptance was found for Serbs and Albanians, followed by somewhat lower acceptance of Croats, while the lowest level of acceptance proved to be for members of the Roma ethnic group. Results thus revealed the overall positive attitudes towards Serbs and Bosniaks, with a distance towards Albanians observed to a certain extent among youth in the Belgrade area and towards out-group members of Roma ethnicity in both regions.

In this study, radicalization and violent extremism proneness were conceptualized as three dimensional Militant-Extremist Mindset, which includes acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence in certain circumstances, belief in divine power such as heaven and God, role of martyrdom, and afterlife pleasures, and belief that there is something very wrong with the world we live in, and that the present-day world is vile and miserable, and heading to its end.

The results showed that, overall, youth in Serbia is not likely to accept, justify, and advocate the use of violence. The young people moderately believe in divine power, however this is strongly related to religiosity. The most worrying tendency of youth is their relatively strong perception of the world as a vile and miserable place. Regional comparisons, Although no dramatic differences were found, comparison between the regions shows that youth in Belgrade has significantly more proviolence tendencies, perceive the world as vile and miserable to a larger extent, and believe less in divine power than youth from Sandžak.

Our results once again support the previous research showing that, although they tend to form single, higher-order construct, the three components of the militant extremist mindset have different psychological and contextual roots. As expected, belief in divine power proved to be by far best predicted by the level of religiosity, followed by authoritarian tendencies. In addition, results indicated that those who came from dysfunctional families and were exposed to hostile school environment exhibited more pronounced views on the world as vile and miserable, stressing the importance of contextual factors in shaping this world view. Those supportive of intergroup hierarchies and innate inequalities were also more prone to perceiving the world as dangerous. Finally, psychological factors were the only ones contributing to *pro-violent tendencies* among youth in Serbia, whilst contextual factors were not very predictive in that regard. Acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence thus seem to be related to attitudes which support favoritism towards certain groups at the expense of other groups, and group inequality;. young people who reported feeling more socially isolated and lonely were also more likely to endorse violent solutions in intergroup relations.

Based on the results of the study, four groups of interventions for the prevention and reduction of radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia could be recommended:

1. The first one should address attitudes towards intergroup relations, including the promotion of intergroup equality and questioning attitudes favoring certain groups at the expense of other groups. Based on the study results, it could be assumed that this intervention might address radicalization and violent extremism both directly and indirectly.
2. The second group of interventions should address the experience of social isolation and loneliness, by both strengthening community networks and available social support mechanisms within the community, but also by providing psychological support for the youth in developing and strengthening meaningful relations with their families, peers, and community. According to the study results, the more one feels accepted, socially connected and less isolated, less proviolent tendencies she/he will have.
3. The third group of interventions should address family functioning and school environment, aiming to decrease violence and hostile atmosphere. These groups of interventions should provide support to families for coping with difficulties and gaining communication and peaceful conflict resolution skills. In addition, intervention should address peer abuse, and lead to less violent and hostile, and more supportive school environment.
4. The fourth group of interventions refers to a particularly alarming trend that we identified in young people who tend to perceive the world as a dangerous, hostile place, and other people as untrustworthy and competitive. This cynical belief should be challenged using the examples of mutual trust and cooperation. In that way, by building a more balanced view of the world, they might become less vulnerable to any extreme ideologies, but also more ready to engage in different forms of civic activism.

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APPENDIX

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MEASURES

Table 3. *Correlations between measures*

	VW	DP	EGL	SDO	RWA	SE	LON	ST	IS	POV	FD	HSE	REL
PV	.22	-.11	-.45	.48	.11	-.14	.34	-.01	-.41	.24	.17	.36	.03
VW		-.03	.12	.22	.04	-.11	.10	-.08	-.08	.20	.32	.23	-.08
DP			.18	.01	.54	.18	-.07	.15	-.03	-.12	.01	-.08	.57
EGL				-.26	.08	.05	-.11	.14	.39	-.10	-.00	-.26	.01
SDO					.26	-.01	.15	-.11	-.33	.11	.14	.32	.05
RWA						.10	-.00	.09	-.18	-.03	.10	-.00	.38
SE							-.49	.22	.24	-.35	-.38	-.25	.06
LON								-.17	-.22	.32	.36	.32	.05
ST									-.22	-.06	-.09	-.07	.12
IS										-.17	-.17	-.37	-.13
POV											.51	.35	-.01
FD												.35	.03
HSE													.04

Note. PV – Pro Violence; VW – Vile World, DP – Divine Power; EGAL – Egalitarianism; SDO – Social Dominance Orientation; RWA – Right-Wing Authoritarianism; SE – Self-esteem; LON – Loneliness; Self-Transcendence; IS – Intercultural Sensitivity; POV – Poverty; FD – Family Dysfunction; HSE – Hostile School Environment; REL – Religiosity; Statistically significant correlations are marked **bold**



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УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БЕОГРАДУ
ФИЛОЗОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ



Hedayah

countering violent extremism