

The Sources Of Leader Violence: A Comparison Of Ideological and Non-Ideological Leaders

Original Publication by **Michael Mumford, Jazmine Espejo, Samuel T. Hunter, Katrina E. Bedell-Avers, Dawn L. Eubanks, Shane Connelly**
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Synopsis by **Daniel Kan** '09, Claremont McKenna College

Despite modern advances, even in the 21st century ideological leaders such as Usama Bin-Laden incite acts of mass destruction. Violence, though not restricted to this type of leader, is an aspect of leadership that has been found to be more severe within ideologues. Possessing resources and power, ideological leaders have the ability to execute violence on a large scale. Yet, much of leadership research done today focuses on characteristics of and settings surrounding morally upstanding leaders. There has been less attention to research that focuses on this ideological violence brought about by leaders exemplified by Heinrich Himmler in World War II. Researchers Mumford, Espejo, Hunter, Bedell-Avers, Eubanks, and Connelly examine this leader archetype in their article, "The sources of leader violence: A comparison of ideological and non-ideological leaders."

The authors reasoned that ideologues are prone to violence due to four main factors. First, past studies have shown "ideological leaders may be prone to expression of the outcome uncertainty and negative life themes found to promote destructive acts." Second, those who do not share the leader's values are subject to condemnation and social violence. Third, ideological leaders may promote values that inherently sponsor superiority of a few, providing justification for violence. Fourth, this sense of justification provides a platform for violence: to deal with the injustice towards " 'unclean' others." Based on these assumptions, the authors argue that ideological leaders are more prone to violence than are the other two types: charismatic and pragmatic. Moreover they believe that destructive acts caused by the leader, and the severity of these acts, is related to the environment, organization and group variables.

The authors used 80 historical figures (e.g. Al Capone, Pol Pot, John Lewis, and Sheikh Hasina), separated by three categories (violent/non-violent, ideological/non-ideological, and west/non-western). Biographies were examined for several predictors within the categories of individual, group, environmental and organizational. The consistent observations by several doctoral-level I/O psychologists were adapted for the final measures, such as negative self-image and victimization. Data collection consisted of coding various parts of the leaders' biographies and rating to what extent each dimension occurred on a 5-point scale. The amount, type (intragroup, intergroup, institutional, and cultural), and severity of violence were also recorded for analysis.

After all the data was collected, the authors performed discriminant analyses to determine the validity of the measures. These analyses produced high factor loadings for several of the measures, with only two dimensions having less than two significant factors. Next, several dimensions of violence were run on the independent variables to examine the influence and impact of these factors on violence. Besides the significant controls included in the regressions, it was found that corruption, group insularity, value-based control, and economic difficulties were significantly related to the highest number of violence variables.

During their discussion, the authors addressed several limitations, one being the sole examination of one aspect of destructive leadership: violence. Another limitation brought up by the authors was the fact that they examined ideological leaders and the factors that predict violence. Pragmatic and charismatic leader violence was included as a general comparison, rather than to predict overall factors effecting leaders' violence. This study does start an exploratory effort into violent and destructive behaviors by ideological leaders. Variables such as entitlement, lower openness and information distrust were found to be significantly different between violent and non-violent leaders. Other variables such as "[g]roup insularity, institutional sanctioning of violence, and environmental corruption were also found to distinguish violent and non-violent leaders" with corruption and group insularity being strong predictors of violence. The authors emphasized that this finding implies that overlying broader dimensions (group, organizational, and environmental conditions) "may give rise to the emergence of violent leaders."

Previous research has shown that ideological dimensions influence leaders in a very specific way. In pursuit of their ideal vision, these leaders exercise value-based control over their cohorts. The authors believed that this would in turn force leaders to implement structures to break existing values. Therefore, through working towards a vision, ideological leaders might be more prone to violence than non-ideological leaders. In conclusion, the authors addressed the idea that while ideological leaders may be more prone to violence than others, there is a distinct difference between the processes promoting ideological violence and those of general leader violence. It is important to realize the factors and conditions that give rise to ideological violence because of the undying will of those who believe that their violent acts are truly just. Future studies regarding ideological violence are an important step to reducing modern violence.