Psychology, Society & Education

The role of motivational cultural intelligence as a protective factor against political violence

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ABSTRACT

Given the rise of violent extremism, it is crucial to explore protective factors that may mitigate such behaviors. This research investigates the role of cultural intelligence as a potential protective factor against political violence. Grounded in significance quest theory, it examines whether the quest for personal significance predicts support for political violence via the need for cognitive closure (H1). It also tests whether motivational cultural intelligence moderates this relationship: individuals with higher cultural intelligence may be less likely to seek cognitive closure under existential uncertainty, thus reducing support for violence (H2). Two studies were conducted. In Spain (n = 257; 71.9% women, M_{age} = 34, SD = 13.2), moderation analyses were used to test H2. In Israel (n = 322; 55.6% women, M_{age} = 36.4, SD = 12.7), both hypotheses were examined through moderated mediation analyses. Results showed that motivational cultural intelligence moderates the link between significance quest and need for cognitive closure. High cultural intelligence weakened the association between significance quest and cognitive closure, reducing support for political violence –but only when the quest for significance was low. When significance quest was high, it predicted support for violence via cognitive closure, regardless of cultural intelligence. These findings suggest that while cultural intelligence can be protective, its effect may be overridden by strong existential needs. Interest in learning from other cultures appears to buffer against political violence, but once the need for significance is activated, it may dominate other motivations and foster rigid thinking, ultimately increasing support for violence.

El rol de la inteligencia cultural motivacional como factor protector contra la violencia política

RESUMEN

Ante el aumento del extremismo violento, resulta fundamental identificar factores de protección que puedan mitigar estas conductas. Este estudio analiza la inteligencia cultural como posible factor atenuante frente a la violencia política. Con base en la teoría de la búsqueda de significado, se examina si dicha búsqueda predice el apoyo a la violencia política a través de una mayor necesidad de cierre cognitivo (H1). Asimismo, se evalúa si la inteligencia cultural motivacional modera esta relación, considerando que niveles elevados de inteligencia cultural podrían reducir la tendencia a buscar cierre cognitivo ante la incertidumbre existencial, disminuyendo así el apoyo a la violencia (H2). Se realizaron dos estudios. En España (n = 257; 71.9% mujeres; M_{edad} = 34, DT = 13.2), se evaluó la H2 mediante análisis de moderación. En Israel (n = 322; 55.6% mujeres; M_{edad} = 36.4, DT = 12.7), se examinaron ambas hipótesis a través de un modelo de mediación moderada. Los resultados indican que la inteligencia cultural motivacional modera la relación entre la búsqueda de significado y la necesidad de cierre cognitivo. Niveles altos de inteligencia cultural debilitan esta asociación y reducen el apoyo a la violencia política, pero solo cuando la búsqueda de significado es baja. Cuando dicha búsqueda es elevada, predice el apoyo a la violencia a través del cierre cognitivo, independientemente de la inteligencia cultural. Estos hallazgos sugieren que, aunque la inteligencia cultural puede ejercer un efecto protector, dicho efecto puede verse superado por necesidades existenciales intensas.

Political violence, including civil wars, government repression, terrorism, and mass protests, has been escalating globally, threatening societal stability. The Global Peace Index reports a 475% increase in deaths from internal conflict over the past 17 years (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024), with economic inequality, political repression, and inadequate governance as key drivers. Consequently, exploring protective factors that may prevent these forms of violent extremism has become more necessary than ever. In this regard, this research focuses on exploring the potential role of cultural intelligence as a protective factor against political violence (Lobato et al., 2018). Specifically, the quest for significance has been shown to be one of the main motivations behind violent extremism (Bélanger, Moyano, et al., 2019), generating a need to reduce uncertainty and facilitating support for political violence (Webber et al., 2018). Based on this, the aim is to test the moderating impact of motivational cultural intelligence on these relationships in two studies with samples from Spain and Israel.

Significant quest and extremism

The pursuit for significance is a fundamental human drive that shapes motivated behavior across various contexts (Fiske, 1992). The significance quest theory builds on this motivation to explain the psychological mechanisms underlying extremist behaviors (Kruglanski et al., 2022). The significance quest theory posits that individuals seek personal significance –the need to have social worth: to make a difference, to matter, to be somebody (Kruglanski et al., 2013, 2022)– after experiencing a loss of (or a threat to) significance or identifying a potential gain in significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Once this motivation is activated and becomes dominant over other motivations, individuals will seek to act in different ways to restore or gain significance (Schumpe et al., 2018).

From the 3N model of radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2019; Webber & Kruglanski, 2017), it is proposed that the means to restore significance are provided by the reference group's narrative (Webber et al., 2020). In turn, the reference group is the one that grants significance to individuals who adhere to its narrative (Lobato et al., 2023). Most empirical studies supporting this theory have focused on validating its predictive power in explaining violent cognitions and behaviors (Da Silva, Amadio, et al., 2023). For instance, a recent meta-analysis has demonstrated the validity of the proposed relationships between the three factors and violent extremism (Da Silva, Trottier, et al., 2023), identifying a positive relationship between the quest for significance and violent extremism.

Need for cognitive closure

The need for cognitive closure refers to an individual's desire for definitive answers and a strong aversion to ambiguity (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). This need becomes particularly pronounced in contexts of heightened uncertainty, where individuals feel compelled to alleviate ambiguity by swiftly adopting a belief or making a decision (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). In this vein,

the need for cognitive closure plays a pivotal role in influencing decision-making processes, information processing, and responses to complex societal, political, and personal challenges.

The need for cognitive closure is strongly associated with political conservatism, as individuals with high need for cognitive closure are more likely to gravitate toward ideologies that prioritize stability, order, and resistance to change (Jost & Glaser, 2003). Conservative ideologies, by offering clear and definitive answers to complex social issues, provide a sense of comfort to individuals with high need for cognitive closure by reducing ambiguity (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011). Additionally, individuals with high need for cognitive closure may be particularly susceptible to extremist ideologies, which present simplistic, black-and-white solutions to societal challenges. These ideologies capitalize on the desire for certainty, offering a rigid worldview that reduces the complexity of reality (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009).

In relation to the quest for significance, Kruglanski et al. (2006, 2019) propose that a "collectivistic shift" occurs when individuals lose significance and turn to a group for a narrative that provides the means to regain it. This is more likely to increase the need for cognitive closure. Similarly, Webber et al. (2018) suggested that the loss of significance induces a mindset that drives individuals to seek certainty and closure. To test this hypothesis, they conducted four studies: two field studies with samples of incarcerated Islamic militants in the Philippines and former members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam detained in Sri Lanka, and two laboratory studies with American participants using experimental paradigms. These studies demonstrated that the loss of significance predicted extremism through an increased need for cognitive closure.

Cultural intelligence

Cultural intelligence refers to the ability to effectively navigate and function in diverse cultural contexts (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Earley & Ang, 2003). It encompasses four key dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, behavioral, and motivational. Individuals with high motivational cultural intelligence typically enjoy intercultural interactions, embrace new experiences, and manage the uncertainties that often arise in cross-cultural situations (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008).

The significance provided by cultural intelligence is evident in its impact on social dynamics and its role in facilitating effective adaptation in culturally complex environments. In this context, Moyano et al. (2015) found a positive correlation between cultural intelligence and life meaning, and a negative correlation with the need for cognitive closure. Moreover, cultural intelligence has been suggested as a protective factor against extremism and violent extremism (Trujillo & Moyano, 2018). Specifically, it is proposed that individuals with high cultural intelligence are less likely to adopt extremist ideologies or engage in violent behavior.

In order to test these assumptions, Lobato et al. (2018) conducted a study to examine the moderating effect of the four components of cultural intelligence on the relationship between

the loss of significance, radical intentions, and violent disinhibition. The results showed that motivational cultural intelligence moderated the relationship. Specifically, those with lower scores in this construct exhibited greater violent disinhibition. However, the other components of cultural intelligence (i.e., cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral) did not show significant effects.

There is partial evidence suggesting that motivational cultural intelligence, understood as an intrinsic interest in experiencing other cultures and interacting with people from different backgrounds (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008), could be a protective factor against violent extremism. More specifically, we believe that this motivation to explore other cultures could compete with the motivation to find significance, leading to greater tolerance for uncertainty, which, in turn, would reduce support for extremist means.

Therefore, motivational cultural intelligence is expected to reduce the need for cognitive closure, thereby decreasing support for political violence (Lobato et al., 2018; Moyano et al., 2015), whereas the significance quest would increase the need for cognitive closure, in turn increasing support for political violence (Webber et al., 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge, the relationship between these two motivations –understanding other cultures and finding significance– has not been previously tested. According to Kruglanski et al. (2019), the significance quest will lead to extremism when it becomes the dominant need, overshadowing other motivations (Bélanger, Schumpe, et al., 2019). Thus, when motivational cultural intelligence is higher, it may exert a stronger effect than the significance quest, reducing the need for cognitive closure and thereby decreasing support for political violence.

The present research

The importance of examining in greater detail the effects of motivational cultural intelligence lies in its potential use as an intervention to prevent radicalization and political violence. If the motivation to learn about other cultures can reduce uncertainty, counteracting support for the use of political violence, even when the significance quest appears as another competing need, it could be promoted to prevent conflicts and other forms of political violence that affect social coexistence. The aim of this study is to explore whether motivational cultural intelligence can serve as a protective factor by influencing how the quest for significance relates to the tendency to seek certainty, thereby potentially decreasing approval of violent political action. Therefore, consistent with previous research, it is hypothesized that the quest for significance will be related to support for political violence through the need for cognitive closure (H1). Additionally, it is also hypothesized that motivational cultural intelligence will moderate the relationship between the quest for significance and the need for cognitive closure (H2). Specifically, significance quest will positively relate to the need for cognitive closure when motivational cultural intelligence is low, whereas, when motivational cultural intelligence is high, significance quest will not be related to the need for cognitive

closure, which will remain low. To test these hypotheses, two studies were conducted. In Study 1, the proposed moderation in H2 will be examined, while in Study 2, using a different sample, both H1 and H2 will be tested together. Ethical approval to conduct both studies was obtained from the University of Cordoba Human Research Ethics Committee (Ref. CEIH-22-36).

Study 1

The first study was aimed to test the moderation effect of motivational cultural intelligence on the relationship between significance quest and the need for cognitive closure using a Spanish sample (H2).

Method

Participants and procedure

We conducted an online survey experiment. We invited the university community of a city in southern Spain (i.e., students, faculty, and administrative staff) to participate in a survey on current social issues via email. Additionally, the survey was published on various web portals and on Facebook. We collected a sample of 257 participants (72 men, 185 women) with Spanish nationality. The age range of the participants was 18 to 74 years ($M = 34$, $SD = 13.22$). Regarding education, seven had completed primary education, 15 had completed secondary education, 19 had completed vocational training, 88 were university students, 77 had finished their university studies, and 51 had completed postgraduate studies. In terms of religion, 72 identified as Christians, 13 as Muslims, and 172 as non-believers (selected the option "no religion"). Political orientation was measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale where 1 indicated an orientation towards the far left and 7 towards the far right, with a mean of 2.65 ($SD = 1.43$).

Measures

The following measures were included in the survey in the order they are presented. All items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Completely disagree* to 5 = *Completely agree*.

Significance quest. To assess significance quest, five items were used (e.g., "I am always searching for the meaning of my life," "I am looking for the meaning of my life"; α = .87) from the *Meaning in Life Questionnaire* developed by Steger et al. (2006) and adapted into Spanish by Góngora and Solano (2011). Higher scores indicate a greater significance quest.

Motivational cultural intelligence. To assess the motivational component of cultural intelligence, five items were used (e.g., "I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures," "I am confident that I can handle the stress of adjusting to a culture that is new to me"; α = .83) from the *Cultural Intelligence Scale* by Earley and Ang (2003), adapted into Spanish by Moyano et al. (2015). Higher scores indicate greater motivational cultural intelligence.

Need for cognitive closure. The scale adapted by Horcajo et al. (2011) from the *Revised Test of Need for Cognitive Closure* (Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005) was used, consisting of 14 items (e.g., "When I need to deal with a problem, I don't think much about it and decide without hesitation," "Any solution to a problem is better than remaining in a state of uncertainty"; α = .81). Higher scores indicate a greater need for cognitive closure.

Results

The Pearson's bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics for the variables are shown in Table 1. The significance quest and motivational cultural intelligence showed no significant relationship. Additionally, the significance quest was positively related to the need for cognitive closure, whereas motivational cultural intelligence was negatively related to it.

Subsequently, to test the proposed hypotheses, a moderation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018), specifically Model 1. The independent variable was the significance quest, the moderator was motivational cultural intelligence, and the criterion variable was the need for cognitive closure. Non-standardized betas, standard errors, p-values, and 95% confidence intervals are reported for each path and for the interaction. The results showed that both the significance quest ($b = .15$, $SE = .06$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [.04; .27]) and motivational cultural intelligence ($b = -.13$, $SE = .06$, $p = .025$, 95% CI [-.24; -.02]) were significant predictors of the need for cognitive closure. Additionally, the interaction between the two variables was also a significant predictor of the need for cognitive closure ($b = .17$, $SE = .09$, $p = .047$, 95% CI [.002; .34]). The moderation occurred at medium ($b = .16$, $SE = .06$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [.04; .28]) and high ($b = .29$, $SE = .09$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [.12; .46]) levels of motivational cultural intelligence, but not at low levels ($b = .03$, $SE = .09$, $p = .724$, 95% CI [-.14; .21]) (see Figure 1). The analyses were repeated by including some sociodemographic variables as covariates, specifically age, gender, education level, and political orientation. The results showed no significant changes in the relationships between the main variables.

Discussion

The results partially supported our second hypothesis. Although an interaction between significance quest and motivational cultural intelligence was found, the effects did not align

Table 1

Pearson's bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics for the variables

Variables	1	2	*M*	*SD*
1. Significance quest	–		3.28	1.08
2. Motivational cultural intelligence	.03	–	3.96	0.69
3. Need for cognitive closure	.18**	-.14*	2.62	0.63

*p < .05; **p < .01.

Figure 1

Interaction between the significance quest and motivational cultural intelligence on the need for cognitive closure
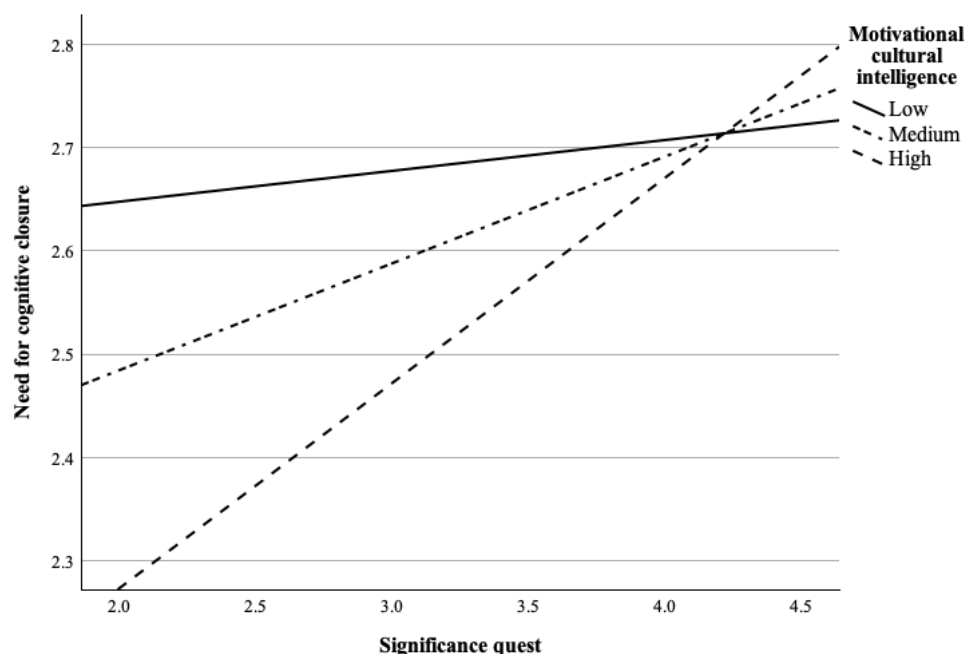
with the expected direction. It was hypothesized that the significance quest would positively relate to the need for cognitive closure when motivational cultural intelligence was low, whereas when motivational cultural intelligence was high, the significance quest would not be related to the need for cognitive closure, which would remain low. Nonetheless, the results revealed an opposite pattern: the quest for significance was related to the need for cognitive closure when levels of motivational cultural intelligence were moderate or high, but not when they were low. In other words, when the significance quest is low, high motivational cultural intelligence is associated with a low need for cognitive closure, acting as a protective factor. However, when the significance quest is high, the need for cognitive closure is high regardless of the level of motivational cultural intelligence. A possible interpretation of these results would be that, in line with significance quest theory (Bélanger, Schumpe, et al., 2019; Kruglanski et al., 2013, 2014, 2021), if significance quest is strong, alternative motivations are suppressed or devalued.

Study 2

To confirm the results of Study 1 (H2), the study was replicated with a non-WEIRD sample (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich et al., 2010) to ensure greater generalizability. In this replication, the focus was on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a prominent example of enduring political violence rooted in historical territorial disputes and national identities (Bickerton & Klausner, 2016). Moreover, to examine whether the predicted effects also forecast support for political violence (H1), a new variable was introduced in this study.

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited from various communities in Israel, with particular attention given to cultural diversity, before the events of October 7, 2023. Online platforms and community centers were used to reach a broader demographic. A total of 322 participants (143 men and 179 women) were included in the sample ranging in age from 19 to 68 years ($M = 36.4$, $SD = 12.7$). In terms of education, 14 participants had primary education, 34 had completed secondary education, 54 had vocational training, 112 were university students, 65 had completed their university studies, and 43 had completed postgraduate studies. Regarding

religious affiliation, 98 identified as Christians, 43 as Muslims, 7 as Hindus, 3 as Buddhists, and 171 as non-believers. Political orientation was measured similarly to Study 1 on a seven-point Likert-type scale with a mean of 3.12 ($SD = 1.51$).

Measures

The following measures were included in the survey in the order they are presented. All items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Completely disagree* to 7 = *Completely agree*.

Significance quest. To assess significance quest, two items were used (i.e., "I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant," "I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life"; $r = .36$, $p < .001$) from the *Meaning in Life Questionnaire* developed by Steger et al. (2006). Higher scores indicate a greater significance quest. Unlike the previous study, fewer items were used to facilitate participant recruitment.

Motivational cultural intelligence. To assess the motivational component of cultural intelligence, five items were used (e.g., "I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures," "I am confident that I can handle the stress of adjusting to a culture that is new to me"; $\alpha = .89$) from the *Cultural Intelligence Scale* by Earley & Ang (2003). Higher scores indicate greater motivational cultural intelligence.

Need for cognitive closure. To measure the need for cognitive closure, five items from the *Revised Test of Need for Cognitive Closure* (RT-NCC) developed by Pierro & Kruglanski (2005) were included (e.g., "When I need to deal with a problem, I don't think much about it and decide without hesitation," and "Any solution to a problem is better than remaining in a state of uncertainty;" $\alpha = .73$). Higher scores indicate a greater need for cognitive closure. Again, unlike the previous study, fewer items were used in order to facilitate participant recruitment.

Support for political violence. This construct was measured using five items from the belief toward violence scale developed by Bélanger, Moyano, et al. (2019; e.g., "Violence is necessary for social change," and "When using violence to further a just cause, everybody is fair game;" $\alpha = .6$). Higher scores indicate stronger endorsement of political violence as a means of achieving social or political goals.

Results

The Pearson's bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2. The significance quest and motiva-

Table 2

Pearson's bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics for the variables

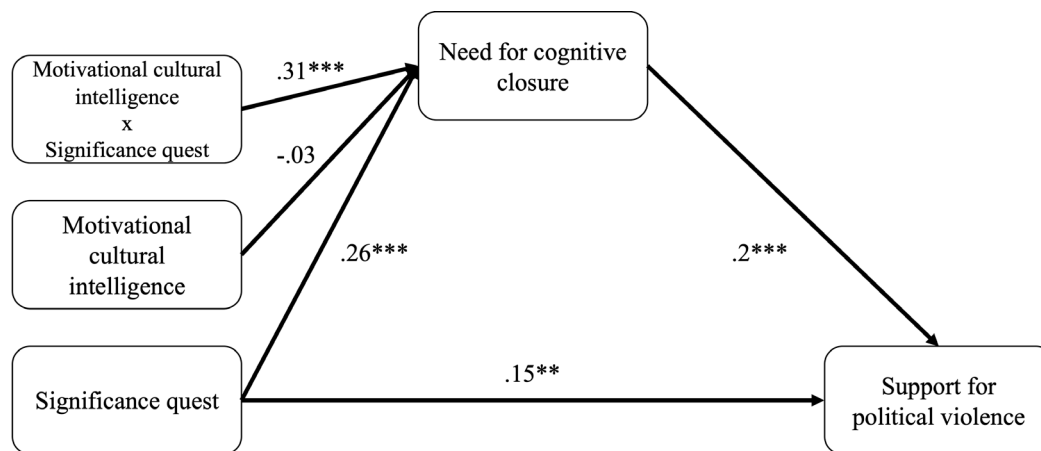| Variables	1	2	3	*M*	*SD*
1. Significance quest	−			5.9	1.22
2. Motivational cultural intelligence	.2*	−		4.96	1.34
3. Need for cognitive closure	.22*	-.01	−	4.84	1.17
4. Support for political violence	.21*	-.22*	.24*	2.76	1.12

*$p < .001$.

Figure 2

Interaction between the significance quest and motivational cultural intelligence on the need for cognitive closure
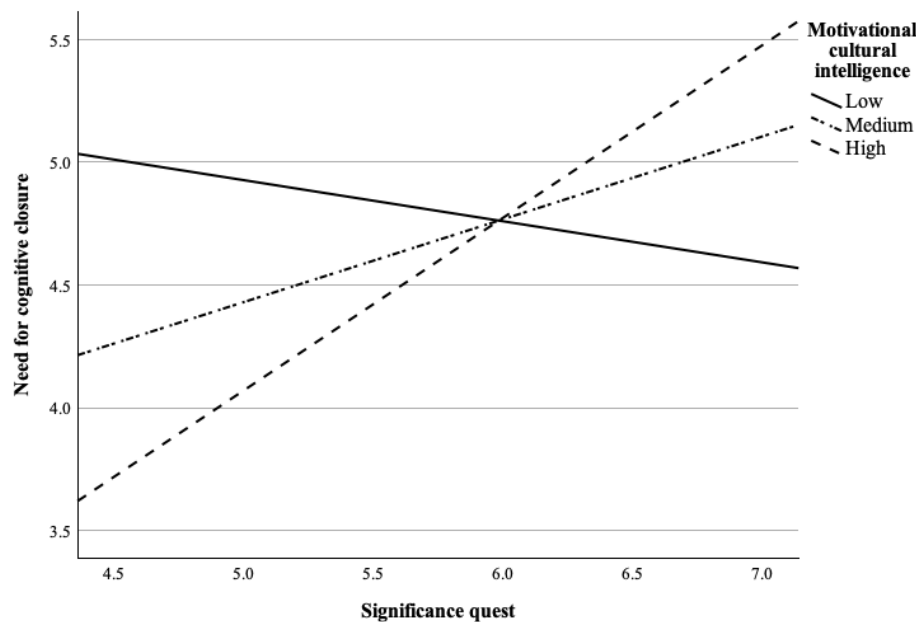
Figure 3

Effect of significance quest on support for political violence through need for cognitive closure moderated by motivational cultural intelligence

**p < .01, ***p < .001.

tional cultural intelligence showed a significant low correlation. Additionally, the significance quest was positively related to the need for cognitive closure, whereas motivational cultural intelligence was not related to it. The three variables were also significantly related to support for political violence: motivational cultural intelligence in a negative way and significance quest and need for cognitive closure in a positive way.

A mediated moderation analysis was conducted using the Model 7 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018). The independent variable was the significance quest, the mediator variable was the need for cognitive closure, the moderator was motivational cul-

tural intelligence, and the criterion variable was the support for political violence (see Figure 2). Non-standardized betas, standard errors, p-values, and 95% confidence intervals are reported for each path, for the interaction, and for the conditional indirect effects. The results showed that the significance quest ($b = .26$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.17; .36]) was significantly related to the need for cognitive closure while the motivational cultural intelligence was not ($b = -.03$, $SE = .04$, $p = .542$, 95% CI [-.11; .06]). Moreover, the interaction between the two variables was significantly related to the need for cognitive closure ($b = .31$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.23; .38]). The moderation was nega-

tively significant at the low levels of motivational cultural intelligence (b = -.17, SE = .07, p = .014, 95% CI [-.30; -.03]) and positively at the medium (b = .34, SE = .05, p < .001, 95% CI [.24; .44]) and high (b = .7, SE = .08, p < .001, 95% CI [.55; .86]) levels.

Regarding the outcome variable, the support for political violence (see Figure 3), the significance quest (b = .15, SE = .05, p = .002, 95% CI [.05; .25]) and need for cognitive closure (b = .2, SE = .05, p < .001, 95% CI [.09; .30]) were significantly related. In addition, the total indirect effect was significant (b = .06, SE = .02, 95% CI [.02; .11]). In particular, the indirect effect was not significant at the low levels of motivational cultural intelligence (b = -.03, SE = .02, 95% CI [-.08; .0003]) but significant at the medium (b = .07, SE = .03, 95% CI [.02; .12]) and high (b = .14, SE = .05, 95% CI [.05; .24]) levels. The analyses were repeated by including several sociodemographic variables as covariates, specifically age, gender, education level, and political orientation. The results revealed no significant changes in the relationships between the main variables.

Discussion

The results supported hypothesis 1 and, once again, partially supported hypothesis 2. First, it was found that the significance quest was positively related to the support for political violence through the need for cognitive closure, in line with the findings of Webber et al. (2018). These results can be interpreted using the 3N model of radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2019), according to which the need for significance increases uncertainty, which is reduced by accepting narratives that indicate how to achieve that significance. Second, although an interaction between the significance quest and motivational cultural intelligence was found, the effects did not align with the expected direction. While it was hypothesized that the significance quest would be related to the need for cognitive closure when motivational cultural intelligence was low, but not when it was high, the results showed that the significance quest was positively related to the need for cognitive closure when levels of motivational cultural intelligence were medium or high, and negatively related when motivational cultural intelligence was low. Similarly to Study 1, when the significance quest is low, high motivational cultural intelligence is negatively associated with need for cognitive closure, acting as a protective factor. However, when the significance quest is high, the need for cognitive closure is positively associated regardless of the level of motivational cultural intelligence. As in the first study, the results seem to align with significance quest theory (Bélanger, Schumpe, et al., 2019), indicating that alternative motivations are suppressed or devalued when significance quest is strong.

General discussion

This research intended to explore the role of motivational cultural intelligence as a protective factor against radicalization. Specifically, it investigated whether motivational cultural intelligence could act as a protective factor, reducing support for political violence by influencing the connection between significance quest and the need for cognitive closure. To this end, two hypotheses were proposed: H1) quest for significance will be related to support for political violence through the need for cognitive closure, and H2) motivational cultural intelligence will moderate the relationship between quest for significance and need for cognitive closure. Thus, it was expected the significance quest to be positively related to the need for cognitive closure when motivational cultural intelligence is low but not when it is high, such that higher motivational cultural intelligence is associated with lower levels of need for cognitive closure when there is a significance quest.

The results confirmed the first hypothesis, but only partially confirmed the second hypothesis. Regarding the first hypothesis, Study 2 confirmed that the significance quest was positively related to the support for political violence through the need for cognitive closure. This mediation demonstrates how existential uncertainty fosters cognitive rigidity, making individuals more susceptible to extremist ideologies and violent behaviors. Although these results align with the studies by Webber et al. (2018) and confirm their findings, they also extend them in at least two ways. First, while Webber et al. (2018) confirmed the mediating role of the need for cognitive closure in the relationship between significance loss and extremism, Study 2 confirms this mediating role between quest for significance and extremism. Although they have sometimes been used interchangeably, the loss and need for significance are not the same. As identified by Da Silva, Amadio, et al. (2023), the loss of significance is not the same as the quest for significance: "an experience of significance loss is conceived as a trigger for the need for significance, whereas significance quest is conceived as a motivational force leading to violent extremism (p. 66)". Accounting for this distinction, Wood and Hales (2024) found that the simple loss of this need did not always show a direct relationship with extremism, whereas the quest for the need did. This could be interpreted as meaning that the loss of significance does not always lead to the emergence of a need strong enough to override other needs and drive extremism (Kruglanski et al., 2019). Second, these effects have been replicated in a sample from a so-called intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013), suggesting that the importance of factors such as the significance quest and the need for cognitive closure also appears to apply to this type of conflict.

In the case of the second hypothesis, it was confirmed that there was an interaction between the significance quest and motivational cultural intelligence in both studies. However, the interaction did not occur in the expected direction. On the one hand, while it was expected that the significance quest will be positively related to the need for cognitive closure when motivational cultural intelligence is low, no such relationship was found; in this condition, the significance quest showed no relationship with the need for cognitive closure, which remained high. On the other hand, it was hypothesized that when the motivational cultural intelligence is high, the significance quest will not be related to the need for cognitive closure, which will remain low. Nonetheless, in this condition, the significance quest was positively related to the need for cognitive closure. In brief, higher levels of motivational cultural intelligence were associated with grea-

ter tolerance for uncertainty, reducing reliance on rigid cognitive structures and undermining the support for political violence; however, when the significance quest was high, motivational cultural intelligence did not exhibit a moderating effect, and the significance quest was related to the support for political violence through the need for cognitive closure. Although future studies are necessary to provide an appropriate interpretation of the interaction results, a possible interpretation can be offered based on the meaning maintenance model (Heine et al., 2006). According to this model, disruptions in meaning frameworks lead individuals to reaffirm alternative frameworks. That is, once the significance quest is triggered, other motivations, such as understanding other cultures, are placed in the background, and individuals seek to reaffirm other meaning frameworks in the more easily recognizable and relational areas, which may be more focused on their own culture than on other cultures. This would be in line with significance quest theory, which posits that if the commitment to the goal of meaning is sufficiently high, alternative goals, values, and concerns are suppressed or devalued (Bélanger, Schumpe, et al., 2019; Kruglanski et al., 2013, 2014, 2021).

One of the major implications of these findings lies in the proposal that motivational cultural intelligence acts as a protective factor against radicalization. Based on the results, the answer is ambiguous. On the one hand, fostering motivation to learn from other cultures could serve as a protective factor, reducing both uncertainty and support for political violence. On the other hand, the outcomes of a prevention program aimed at promoting motivational cultural intelligence could be undermined if a significance quest emerges. Nonetheless, this does not invalidate the idea that other culture-related factors might serve as protective mechanisms, such as an acculturation process based on integration (Arafat et al., 2024; Lyons et al., 2015). Moreover, new research questions arise, such as whether other factors related to open-mindedness, such as the personality trait of openness –which has been shown to act as a protective factor (Wolfowicz et al., 2021)– are also diminished in the presence of significance quest. In brief, the findings suggest a new line of research focused on the interaction between protective factors and their effects on radicalization when a significance quest is present (Lobato et al., 2023). Further studies exploring other motivations that suppress this quest could shed new light on radicalization prevention research.

According to the results, interventions aimed at reducing support for political violence should be tailored to the participants (Lobato et al., 2024). That is, those beneficiaries with low levels of significance quest would benefit more from interventions aimed at improving intercultural relationships and promoting motivation to learn more about other cultures (Mickus & Bowen, 2017). However, beneficiaries with higher levels of significance quest would benefit more if, in addition to improving intercultural relationships, the reduction of quest for significance was prioritized. This could be achieved by creating new support social networks that provide meaning and narratives that promote peaceful means of achieving significance. For instance, some studies have shown that sports are an effective means of creating such networks (Moyano et al., 2022), while social mentors can encourage the reduction of the significance quest (Lobato et al., 2024).

Despite the valuable insights provided by this research, there are some limitations that need to be mentioned. First, the cross-sectional design of the study and the absence of manipulations prevent establishing causal relationships between the variables studied. Therefore, new experimental studies that manipulate the independent variables are necessary to confirm the causality of the findings in this research. In this regard, implementing interventions aimed at fostering interest in cultural differences to prevent radicalization could be useful in clarifying the findings of these studies. Second, although the study was conducted in two distinct contexts (Spain and Israel), further studies would be necessary to generalize the findings. Last, building on the post hoc interpretation derived from the meaning maintenance model (Heine et al., 2006), several aspects stand out that, if evaluated, could provide more concrete answers. Specifically, the inclusion of factors such as the perceived importance of one's own culture over others, the quality of relationships with individuals from different cultures, or the specific aspects of the meaning framework that are threatened and trigger the significance quest could yield intriguing results.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research provides robust evidence that motivational cultural intelligence moderates the relationship between the significance quest and need for cognitive closure. Specifically, when the significance quest is low, motivational cultural intelligence serves as a protective factor associated with lower need for cognitive closure, which in turn is linked to reduced support for political violence. However, with an increase in the significance quest, this motivation becomes stronger than motivational cultural intelligence, undermining its protective effects.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: F.H.A.
Methodology: F.H.A., R.M.L.
Software: R.M.L.
Validation: F.H.A., J.G.C.
Formal analysis: F.H.A., R.M.L.
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Visualization: F.H.A.
Supervision: M.M., J.G.C.
Project administration: M.M.
Funding acquisition: M.M.
Writing – Original draft: F.H.A.
Writing – Review & editing: R.M.L., J.G.C., M.M.

Funding

Declaration of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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