SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE

Work published in open access form
and licensed under Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial
ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

© Author(s)
E-ISSN 2724-2943
ISSN 2723-973X

Psychology Hub (2026)
XLIII, 2.1 (Special Issue), 9-20

When Extreme Goes Mainstream: Extremism and Democratic Involution

Sophia Moskalenko[1]*, and Arie Kruglanski[2]

[1] *University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia*

[2] *University of Maryland, Maryland, United States*

Article info

Submitted: 07 April 2026
Accepted: 21 July 2026
DOI: 10.13133/2724-2943/19349

Abstract

Contemporary democracies are in a period of transition marked by polarization, erosion of shared norms, and the normalization of political extremism. This paper examines how extremism—traditionally understood as marginal, deviant, or pathological—comes to be mainstreamed within societies. Building on the tradition of the Roman School of Social Psychology founded by Eraldo De Grada, the paper integrates micro-level motivational dynamics with macro-level social and cultural processes. We first introduce the psychology of extremism at the individual level, emphasizing the need for significance, identity fusion, and self-sacrifice. We then extend this framework to the societal level, examining how institutions, media environments, and cultural narratives reward extremity while penalizing moderation. Finally, we analyze how these processes enable the transition from fringe extremism to its normalization in mainstream political culture and everyday life.

Keywords: extremism; mainstreaming; significance quest; motivational imbalance; democracy; Eraldo De Grada

*Corresponding author.
Sophia Moskalenko
University of Latvia,
Riga, Latvia,
E-mail: sophia.moskalenko@lu.lv
(S. Moskalenko)

Introduction

Approximately eighty years after the post-World War 2 period that witnessed the consolidation of democratic institutions across Europe, many democracies now find themselves in a new phase of transition. Unlike earlier democratic crises marked by abrupt authoritarian takeovers, this transition is gradual and internally driven. It is characterized by intensifying polarization, declining trust in institutions, erosion of shared epistemic standards, and the increasing cultural normalization of positions and behaviors that were once considered extreme (Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025).

Political scientists have described this condition as one of democratic backsliding or disfigurement, in which democratic forms persist while their deliberative substance is hollowed out (Urbinati, 2014, 2019). Social psychology offers a complementary lens by focusing on the individual motivational and identity processes that make such transformations psychologically sustainable. From this perspective, democratic involution is not only institutional but motivational: it reflects changes in what kinds of individual commitments, identities, and sacrifices are culturally rewarded.

This paper addresses a central but understudied mechanism in this process: the mainstreaming of extremism. Rather than viewing extremism as a deviation by fringe actors, we examine how extreme orientations can become normalized and widespread through everyday cultural practices, institutional incentives, and identity dynamics. We argue that contemporary Western societies increasingly cultivate the psychological structure of extremism by rewarding motivational imbalance and penalizing moderation.

Our approach is grounded in the tradition of the Roman School of Social Psychology founded by Eraldo De Grada (1925–2012). De Grada's work was distinguished by its commitment to methodological rigor and its insistence on integrating psychological, social, and cultural levels of analysis (De Grada, 1972). His research on the authoritarian personality and on involutionary political processes sought to explain how ordinary psychological needs, when embedded in particular social arrangements, could contribute to large-scale democratic collapse (Adorno et al., 1950; De Grada et al., 1975).

In this spirit, we draw on contemporary psychological research on extremism and on cultural analyses of its spread in everyday life. Using empirical findings and theoretical models articulated in recent work on motivational imbalance and the quest for significance, we trace how individual-level extremism scales up to the societal level and becomes culturally mainstreamed.

Extremism as a Psychological Structure

A persistent limitation in both public discourse and portions of the academic literature is the tendency to define extremism by its ideological content (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2025; Moskalenko, 2023) or by its most visible behavioral outcomes, such as violence or illegality. Such definitions obscure the psychological regularities that unite otherwise disparate phenomena, ranging from political radicalization to nonviolent but rigid forms of overcommitment observed in work, family life, wellness practices, and digital identity performance. Contemporary social psychology instead conceptualizes extremism as a structural property of motivation rather than as a feature of a particular belief system (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025; Szumowska et al., 2024).

Within this framework, extremism arises when a single need, value, or goal becomes dominant within the motivational system, suppressing or marginalizing alternative concerns. This state of *motivational imbalance* reorganizes cognition, affect, and behavior around one overriding pursuit. As a result, attention narrows, moral evaluation becomes asymmetric, and behavioral constraints weaken insofar as they interfere with the dominant goal. Whereas normally people divide their time and efforts among many different goals, under the condition of extreme hunger, for example, the motivation to eat leads the individual to dedicate all their energy to procuring food, abandoning alternative pursuits, and forsaking normative constraints about how and what to eat. Extreme hunger will drive people to eat rotting food, tree bark, and even human flesh—all unacceptable under normal circumstances for health-related and moral reasons. Extremism, then, is marked by a prioritization of one goal above all others and at the cost of all normative considerations. Importantly, this structure is content-neutral: it can organize behavior around violent ideologies, but also around socially sanctioned pursuits such as professional success, moral purity, or parental devotion.

This broad motivational view echoes Eraldo De Grada's insistence that political and social pathologies cannot be reduced either to ideology or to personality traits alone. In his analyses of authoritarianism, De Grada emphasized the interaction between psychological needs and social arrangements, warning against explanations that psychologized political phenomena while ignoring the conditions that render certain motivational configurations adaptive or rewarded (De Grada, 1972; De Grada et al., 1975). Conceptualizing extremism as motivational imbalance preserves this non-reductionist approach: it places the phenomenon within universal psychological processes while remaining attuned to the social contexts that stabilize them.

Motivational imbalance is not inherently maladaptive. From an evolutionary perspective, the capacity to narrow motivational focus in response to acute threat or scarcity has clear survival value. In situations of immediate danger—physical threat, natural disaster, or need deprivation—suspending competing needs in favor of a single overriding goal can be adaptive and even lifesaving. When escaping enemies or predators, extreme focus and direction of effort are necessary for survival and, therefore, evolutionarily adaptive. Ethological and psychological research converges on the conclusion that organisms are equipped to prioritize one need at the expense of others when circumstances demand it (Keller, 2023).

Problems arise when this emergency mode becomes chronic, generalized, or culturally valorized outside contexts of genuine existential threat. We claim that modern social environments (especially social media environments) increasingly reward precisely the kind of narrow, all-consuming commitment that characterizes extremism (Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025; Kruglanski et al., 2021). Whether the focus is on conspiracy

theories, dieting, bodybuilding, or conspicuous consumption, social media infrastructure and algorithms are exquisitely designed to reward day-and-night engagement, obsessive social comparison, and competition—in other words, extremism (Kruglanski et al., 2022; Moskalenko, 2023). What's more, there are individuals and groups incentivized to promote extremism online. From influencers who earn their living by amassing devoted online followings to malevolent political actors who gain political power and campaign donations by encouraging conspiratorial narratives and cultivating radical online communities, the social media-driven "marketplace of ideas" is rigged to promote extremism. On an even broader level, the present-day Western culture, especially in the US, is designed to promote motivational imbalance, whether in the workplace, in consumer incentives, or in parenting (Kruglanski & Raviv, 2025). Cultural cliches illustrate its ideals: "Greed is good," "reach for the stars," "publish or perish," and "be all that you can be." When societies normalize extremism as a moral or aspirational ideal, motivational imbalance ceases to be situational and becomes dispositional, shaping identity and life trajectories. It also spreads from the fringes to the center, going from extreme to mainstream.

This transition is critical for understanding contemporary extremism. Rather than asking why some individuals "become extremists," the more informative question is how certain environments render extreme motivational configurations stable, rewarded, and resistant to correction. This analytical shift aligns closely with De Grada's concern for involutionary processes: gradual transformations in psychological and cultural norms that erode democratic capacities without dramatic institutional rupture.

Obsessive versus Harmonious Passion

Research on passion provides a crucial distinction between destructive motivational imbalance and more socially constructive forms of motivational foci. Vallerand and colleagues (2003) distinguish between *harmonious passion*, which integrates a valued activity into a multifaceted identity, and *obsessive passion*, which dominates identity and generates internal conflict. Harmonious passions coexist with other roles and values; obsessive passions crowd them out, "blinding" people to all concerns unrelated to their dominant motivation. Extremism aligns closely with the latter.

Obsessive passion is associated with rigidity, defensiveness, and difficulty disengaging from the focal activity, even when costs become evident (Vallerand, 2010). These characteristics closely mirror those observed in political and ideological extremism, where commitment persists despite personal harm, social isolation, or moral transgression. The psychological mechanism is the same: identity becomes increasingly organized around a single source of meaning, rendering alternative commitments psychologically irrelevant.

This identity narrowing has profound implications for judgment and behavior. Individuals experiencing motivational imbalance exhibit reduced tolerance for ambiguity, heightened need for certainty, and increased susceptibility to moral absolutism (Kruglanski et al., 2006; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Zmigrod, 2021). Ambivalence, compromise, and pluralism—cornerstones of democratic reasoning—are experienced not as virtues but as threats to coherence and self-worth.

Identity Fusion

Identity fusion further intensifies the dynamics of motivational imbalance. Fusion occurs when personal and collective identities become psychologically indistinguishable, such that threats to the group or cause are experienced as threats to the self (Swann et al., 2009). Identity-fused individuals display a willingness to engage in extreme pro-group behavior, including self-sacrifice.

Empirical research demonstrates that identity fusion predicts endorsement of extreme actions beyond what can be explained by ideological commitment alone (Swann et al., 2012). Identity fusion amplifies emotional intensity and moral certainty, producing a form of moral rigidity in which dissent is not merely disagreement but betrayal. It's one thing to share group values and be willing to contribute to group goals; it's another thing when the self is seen as inseparable from the group, its values and goals paramount, and deviation from group norms is seen as a moral failing. This kind of rigidity, characteristic of identity fusion, is central to the mainstreaming of extremism: once fusion becomes culturally normative, extreme commitment is no longer exceptional but expected.

De Grada's analyses of authoritarian dynamics anticipated this insight. His work emphasized how collective identities, when infused with existential significance, can override individual judgment and ethical restraint. Identity fusion provides a contemporary psychological vocabulary for this process, specifying the mechanisms through which collective meanings colonize personal motivation.

Self-Sacrifice, Sunk Costs, and Irreversibility

A defining feature of extremism is the willingness to sacrifice alternative values that do not advance the focal goal: health, relationships, career security, and even life itself are only means in service of the dominant goal. Self-sacrifice serves two related functions. Psychologically, it restores a sense of meaning and dignity for the individual engaged in self-sacrifice, which is particularly motivating if one suffered experiences of humiliation or loss of significance. Socially, self-sacrifice signals authenticity and moral seriousness to those who witness it, enhancing the status of the sacrificing individual within the relevant community (Belanger et al., 2018; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2018).

Once sacrifices have been made, disengagement becomes increasingly difficult. Sunk-cost dynamics and cognitive dissonance render doubt psychologically threatening: to question the cause is to risk acknowledging that one's sacrifices were unnecessary or misguided. Empirical studies of radicalization (gradual acceptance of violence in the name of a goal or a group; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009) document this escalation pattern, in which initial commitment leads to

incremental sacrifices that progressively foreclose exit options (Kruglanski et al., 2009; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Sageman, 2004).

These dynamics are not confined to violent or illegal movements. They appear in socially sanctioned domains such as extreme overwork, extreme sports, extreme hobbies, and rigid moral activism (Szumowska et al., 2024). In each case, sacrifice deepens commitment and reduces psychological flexibility, producing the same structural features observed in ideological extremism.

From a social-psychological perspective, extremism is best understood as the outcome of interactions between situational pressures, dispositional tendencies, and cultural reinforcement. While certain individual differences (such as intolerance of ambiguity, high need for cognitive closure, or authoritarian tendencies) may increase vulnerability to developing extremism, they are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for extremism to emerge (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; Zmigrod & Kruglanski, 2025). Extremism, therefore, emerges when ordinary psychological motives are channeled, amplified, and stabilized by social environments that reward imbalance.

Understanding extremism as a psychological structure rather than a categorical identity has important implications. It shifts analytical focus away from labeling individuals as extremists and toward examining the motivational ecologies that make extremism viable, attractive, and ultimately mainstream.

The Quest for Significance: Micro-Level Foundations of Extremism

A central claim of contemporary social-psychological models of extremism is that extreme commitment is rarely explained by ideological content alone. Instead, it often reflects a *motivational solution* to a fundamental human problem: the need to matter. Significance Quest Theory identifies this need at the heart of many forms of extremism and frames radical commitment as a route to restoring threatened personal or collective worth (Kruglanski et al., 2009; Kruglanski et al., 2019; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025). In this section, we deepen the micro-level account by (a) specifying the phenomenology and sources of significance loss, (b) describing how narratives transform significance loss into morally compelling pathways of significance restoration, and (c) explaining how social reinforcement makes these pathways durable.

The human need for significance—mattering, respect, and meaningful recognition—operates across cultures and social contexts. What varies is not whether people seek significance, but which routes to significance are culturally available and institutionally rewarded (Moskalenko, 2024). In one culture, physical fighting is a rite of passage for young men, and the winner earns significance and high regard from peers; in another culture, however, fighting is likely to earn only scorn, because the normative way to compete for significance is through intellectual debates. The need for significance is the constant; what varies is the normative route to achieving it.

When socially legitimate routes to attain significance are blocked, scarce, or unreliable, the attraction of extreme routes increases (Kruglanski et al., 2019; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025). This logic, while relevant to the research on violent extremism, is not restricted to it. Extremism is a general human potential that can be cultivated by social, emotional, and informational contexts, including those that characterize everyday life (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025). Therefore, society-wide acceptance of extreme narratives and behaviors as normative is likely to result in an average normative shift such that what used to seem inconceivable becomes tolerable, and eventually ordinary.

De Grada's Roman School emphasized that political involution cannot be explained by psychologizing individuals while ignoring the cultural and institutional arrangements that distribute recognition, status, and belonging (De Grada, 1972; De Grada et al., 1975). Significance is a social currency conferred through the evaluative practices of communities and institutions.

The Costs of Significance Loss

In the Significance Quest framework, extremism is frequently precipitated by experiences of *significance loss*: moments when individuals feel humiliated, rejected, devalued, or invisible (Kruglanski et al., 2009). Significance loss can arise from multiple domains of life: failed relationships, job loss, public shame, social marginalization, and cultural displacement—and it can be experienced personally or collectively. Collective threats are psychologically consequential because people often experience their personal worth as intertwined with group status; a perceived attack on the group's identity or values can trigger a search for restored significance as a group member (Leidner et al., 2012).

Research on terrorism identified a consistent finding: many perpetrators of extremist violence do not present with psychopathology; instead, they articulate motives such as wanting to "make a difference," "defend their people," or "achieve honor" (Kruglanski et al., 2009; see also Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020). These accounts point toward a motivational rather than purely ideological pathway.

Importantly, threats to significance are not always dramatic. Small, repeated slights or "micro-humiliations" can accumulate and motivate compensatory behavior, especially when individuals lack recognized routes for regaining status or self-worth. This point matters for mainstreaming: cultural systems that normalize everyday disrespect, invisibility, or conditional worth can become chronic engines of motivational imbalance.

The same mechanism also appears in the phenomenon of "everyday extremism," where intense and exclusive commitment functions as significance repair even when it is not overtly ideological. For example, socially isolated individuals may become consumed by an online movement or identity community where they finally feel seen; professionals overlooked for recognition may develop an all-consuming drive to prove themselves; parents may invest entirely in a child's success as a proxy for personal worth (Moskalenko et al., 2022; Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). In each case, the quest for significance links nonviolent overcommitment with the same structural dynamics that underlie political radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025).

From Loss to Meaning: Narrative as Moral Technology

Significance loss, by itself, does not automatically produce extremism. A second component is required: a *narrative* that links the experience of loss to a morally resonant cause and specifies a route to restored meaning through action (Kruglanski et al., 2019; Moskalenko, 2024). Narratives perform several psychological functions simultaneously. They (a) explain suffering, (b) identify responsible agents and villains, (c) define a moral structure that clarifies who is righteous versus corrupt, and (d) prescribe action as necessary rather than optional. In this way, narratives are not just stories; they are motivational technologies that transform diffuse pain into directed commitment.

Contemporary radicalization models describe this process as a *means–narrative nexus*: extremism becomes likely when (a) a person is motivated by the need to restore significance, (b) exposed to a compelling narrative specifying how to do so, and (c) embedded in a social context that validates and reinforces the pathway (Kruglanski et al., 2019). This formulation dovetails with the broader "three pillars" account of radicalization—Needs, Narratives, and Networks—emphasizing that narrative is not merely content but a mechanism linking motive to action (Kruglanski et al., 2019).

In both violent and nonviolent forms, such narratives tend to divide the world into heroes and enemies, victims and villains, and to frame full commitment as a moral imperative. Importantly, culturally mainstream narratives can have a similar structure even when their content is apolitical: "hustle" and self-optimization cultures can imply that failure reflects insufficient desire; achievement systems can communicate that worth is conditional on measurable performance. These are culturally acceptable pathways into motivational imbalance and extremism (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Petersen, 2019).

Networks and Validation: The Social Consolidation of Extremism

A third component for extremism to become mainstream is the social environment (*network*). When narratives are embedded in validating networks, they become especially psychologically appealing. Social support provides recognition, belonging, and status—precisely the resources threatened by significance loss. In a De Gradian frame, the network component is where the micro-level motive becomes culturally consequential: it is the bridge between subjective need and collective form.

Contemporary online movements such as QAnon and Incel communities provide vivid illustrations. Both attract individuals who feel alienated and undervalued; each offers an explanatory narrative with clear villains and a promise of restored significance through membership and moral struggle; and each justifies extreme versions of both the narrative and the "recipe" for restoration of perceived lost significance (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021; Moskalenko, 2021; Moskalenko et al., 2022). These networks not only spread beliefs but also institutionalize norms of rhetorical intensity, offer a like-minded community, and provide a round-the-clock significance-boosting validation, escalating the costs of moderation or exit (Moskalenko et al., 2023).

When Significance Becomes Fragile: Escalation, Sacrifice, and Rigidity

A crucial insight in this framework is that *fragile* significance—an unstable sense of mattering—can amplify extremism. The more contingent or threatened one's significance feels, the more extreme one's behavior may become to protect or restore it (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025). Fragile significance also clarifies escalation. As individuals invest sacrifice into a cause, the psychological cost of doubt or defection rises. Commitment is reinforced by sunk-cost dynamics and cognitive dissonance, making withdrawal increasingly difficult and often producing further radicalization rather than moderation (Kruglanski et al., 2009; Kruglanski et al., 2019). This sequence: significance loss → commitment → sacrifice → deepened identification → rising cost of doubt—helps explain the durability of extremist commitment.

Notably, extreme sacrifice appears not only in violent contexts but also in culturally valorized forms: gambling addiction; helicopter parenting; workaholism; "looksmaxxing" (extreme dedication to maximizing one's looks through dieting, supplementation, injections and surgery); substance abuse, etc. In each case, sacrifice converts commitment into psychological necessity, narrowing identity and reducing flexibility (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2018).

From Individual Vulnerability to Cultural Susceptibility

The quest for significance is a universal motive. And if extremism were only an individual psychological phenomenon, its societal impact would be limited by the rarity of extreme motivational configurations. Yet history repeatedly demonstrates that extremism can become widespread, normalized, and institutionally embedded. Nazi Germany is notorious for the broad support of Hitler's most extreme narratives, and mass engagement in radical action such as pogroms against Jews and Roma, participation in the Holocaust, and support for the violence of World War 2. But Nazi Germany is far from being a sole or even a rare example of extremism becoming mainstream. One could argue that several modern Western democracies are presently moving in the direction of broad extremism of both attitude and action, most notably the U.S., where extremism has surfaced in the context of conspiracies beliefs about the 2020 presidential election (Moskalenko et al., 2022); antisemitic views and actions after the Hamas attack against Israel on October 7 and the subsequent military action (Moskalenko et al., 2025) and, most recently, anti-immigrant action of ICE (Immigration service) in Minnesota. Across these different ideological categories, large numbers of Americans expressed extremist views and engaged in extremist actions that involved hate crime, hate speech, violent attacks against persons and property, and violent protests and riots. Understanding the transition from individual motivational imbalance to societal extremism requires a framework that bridges psychological processes and social structures.

De Grada emphasized gradual transformations in which ordinary psychological needs, when systematically shaped and rewarded by social institutions, produce collective outcomes that undermine democratic life (De Grada, 1972; De Grada

et al., 1975). From this perspective, societal extremism is not the aggregation of individual extremists but the stabilization of motivational imbalance through cultural norms, institutional incentives, and collective narratives.

Extremist Cultures: Institutionalized Motivational Imbalance

Historical cases in which entire societies are organized around extreme commitment illustrate most clearly how motivational imbalance can become culturally normalized. Social psychological analyses of such cases show that societal extremism does not arise from an accumulation of deviant individuals, but from institutional arrangements that systematically elevate a single value or goal above all others and distribute recognition, status, and moral worth accordingly (Arendt, 1951; Adorno et al., 1950; Kruglanski et al., 2021).

From a motivational perspective, extremist cultures are characterized by the elimination or severe devaluation of routes to significance alternative to the one meant to advance the culture and its interests, even if at the cost of the individual's own well-being. Individuals in extremist cultures are offered dignity, belonging, and moral standing only insofar as they demonstrate uncompromising dedication to the dominant collective aim. Under these conditions, extreme sacrifice becomes not only socially rewarded but psychologically rational.

Sparta: Militarized Significance and the Normalization of Sacrifice

Ancient Greek Sparta is an early example of a society structured around institutionalized extremity. Spartan culture subordinated nearly all aspects of life—education, family relations, emotional expression, and civic participation—to the singular goal of military supremacy and collective survival (Cartledge, 2001; Pomeroy et al., 2012). From early childhood, male citizens were subjected to the *agōgē*, a state-controlled system designed to cultivate endurance, obedience, and willingness to sacrifice personal welfare for the polis.

Psychologically, Spartan society offered a narrow and exclusive pathway to significance: honor and full civic worth were attainable primarily through martial excellence. Failure to meet extreme standards entailed social marginalization and loss of moral standing. This structure exemplifies motivational imbalance at the societal level, in which alternative values—family attachment, intellectual development, or individual aspiration—were systematically suppressed.

Importantly, Spartan extremity was not experienced as deviance by its members. It constituted the cultural norm. This illustrates a key point in social-psychological accounts of extremism: once imbalance is institutionalized, moderation itself becomes abnormal. What appears extreme from the outside is experienced internally as moral necessity.

Stalin's Soviet Union: Ideological Purity and Escalating Commitment

A more modern illustration of extremist culture can be found in the Stalinist USSR. Under Stalin, virtually all domains of life—work, science, art, and private belief—were subordinated to ideological loyalty to the Communist Party and its leadership (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Kotkin, 2014). Recognition, safety, and advancement were contingent on visible displays of commitment to the Party, while ambiguity or neutrality was interpreted as a political threat, complete with constant search for "enemy of the state, sham trials of suspected traitors, and harsh punishments for "treason," such as execution or sentence to decades of hard labor in Siberian GULAG. Extremism was thus a broad social norm in the USSR; moderation (with respect to support for the Communist Party) was an aberration punishable by death or prison.

Social psychological analyses emphasize that extremism-normalizing systems such as Sparta or USSR generate *fragile significance*: individuals' sense of worth remains perpetually contingent on continued demonstration of loyalty (Kruglanski et al., 2009; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025). This fragility creates powerful escalation dynamics. As individuals sacrifice relationships, careers, and moral boundaries, disengagement becomes psychologically costly due to sunk costs and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Rather than moderating behavior, prior sacrifice increases motivation to intensify commitment.

The Soviet case also illustrates that extremist cultures are sustained not solely through coercion. Many citizens derived genuine meaning and purpose from participation in the ideological project, experiencing significance through collective struggle and moral certainty (Arendt, 1951). This combination of fear and meaning rendered extremism stable and self-reinforcing at the societal level.

Nazi Germany: Collective Humiliation, Identity Fusion, and Moralized Violence

Nazi Germany provides a paradigmatic example of how extremist cultures can emerge through the interaction of collective grievance, identity fusion, and moralized violence. Following World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, Germany experienced widespread collective significance loss characterized by humiliation, economic instability, and perceived moral degradation (Volkan, 2001; Kershaw, 1998).

National Socialist ideology reframed this loss through narratives that identified enemies, promised restored dignity, and demanded total commitment to the racialized national community. Social identity processes played a central role: personal worth became fused with national rebirth, rendering sacrifice and aggression morally obligatory (Swann et al., 2012). Extreme behaviors were not framed as excesses, but as acts of moral courage and loyalty.

Empirical research on identity fusion helps explain the intensity and durability of such commitment. When personal and collective identities become psychologically indistinguishable, threats to the group are experienced as existential threats to the self, dramatically increasing willingness to engage in extreme pro-group actions, including self-sacrifice and violence (Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012).

As in other extremist cultures, Nazi Germany normalized motivational imbalance by rewarding purity, certainty, and sacrifice while punishing ambivalence and dissent. Extremism

thus became embedded not only in political institutions but in everyday social life, education, and family structures.

Extremist Cultures and Democratic Involution

Taken together, these cases illustrate a general social-psychological principle: societies become extremist when motivational imbalance is institutionalized and culturally rewarded. Under such conditions, individuals need not be persuaded into extremism; they are socialized into it. The availability of recognition, belonging, and moral worth through extreme pathways renders moderation psychologically and socially costly.

Crucially, this analysis does not confine extremist cultures to overtly authoritarian regimes. The same mechanisms—narrowed routes to significance, moralization of commitment, and escalation through sacrifice—can operate in democratic contexts when cultural and institutional incentives favor extremity. Understanding these historical cases, therefore, provides not only a retrospective explanation, but a framework for diagnosing contemporary democratic vulnerability.

Contemporary social psychology provides the tools to specify these processes. When societies repeatedly reward intensity, certainty, sacrifice, and exclusivity, they create environments in which extreme motivational configurations become adaptive rather than deviant (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025).

Normative Inversion and the Social Rewarding of Extremity

A central mechanism in the societal scaling of extremism is *normative inversion*: a process through which behaviors once considered excessive, dangerous, or antisocial become morally valorized, while moderation and ambivalence are redefined as weakness, disloyalty, or moral failure. Normative inversion mirrors, at the collective level, the motivational narrowing observed in individual extremism.

Historical analyses of authoritarian societies illustrate this mechanism. In fascist and totalitarian regimes, extreme loyalty, sacrifice, and ideological purity were rewarded, while restraint and pluralism were punished (Arendt, 1951; Adorno et al., 1950). Modern democracies can undergo similar processes without a formal authoritarian takeover. Research on group polarization demonstrates that deliberation within like-minded groups tends to produce more extreme positions over time, particularly when social identity and moral stakes are salient (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969; Sunstein, 2009). When such dynamics are amplified by media ecosystems and institutional incentives, they can reshape public norms.

From a motivational standpoint, normative inversion operates by altering the distribution of significance. Extreme commitment becomes a reliable route to recognition, belonging, and moral status, while moderation offers diminishing returns. In De Grada's terms, the social system begins to *educate motivation* toward involutionary ends.

Societal extremism is often catalyzed by narratives of collective threat. Recall that individual extremism is rooted in evolutionarily selected survival mechanisms, where an existential threat is most effectively addressed by single-mindedly focusing on the goal of overcoming it at the expense of all other concerns. It is not surprising, therefore, that extremism can be mobilized if individuals or collectives become convinced that they are facing an existential threat.

Social psychological research consistently shows that perceived threat—whether economic, cultural, or symbolic—intensifies identification with in-groups and hostility toward out-groups (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Riek et al., 2006). Whether this threat presents as "Great Replacement" orchestrated by the Global Cabal of Illuminati—as believed by conspiracists, or as the threat of never finding a mate to reproduce with because of feminism and lookism—as believed by Incels, an existential threat is a threat to significance that motivates extreme commitment to a course of action viewed as the most likely to overcome it. Collective threat narratives narrow collective attention in much the same way that significance loss narrows individual motivation.

Hogg and colleagues' uncertainty-identity theory provides a complementary account: under conditions of uncertainty (specifically, political and economic uncertainty that can be perceived as a threat to self or one's group), individuals gravitate toward groups that offer clear norms, rigid boundaries, and unambiguous worldviews (Hogg & Adelman, 2013). These groups often demand extreme conformity, thereby reinforcing motivational imbalance at the collective level. What begins as a psychological response to uncertainty becomes a social structure that rewards rigidity. When personal identity becomes fused with national, religious, or ideological identity, collective threats are experienced as existential threats to the self (Swann et al., 2009, 2012). At scale, identity fusion enables societies to mobilize extraordinary sacrifice and suppress dissent, as fused individuals view compromise as betrayal.

Contemporary research shows that modern institutions increasingly incentivize behaviors structurally analogous to extremism. Performance-based work cultures reward overwork and self-sacrifice while penalizing boundary-setting (Petersen, 2019; Hochschild, 1997). Political institutions reward outrage, loyalty, and moral absolutism rather than deliberation and compromise (Mason, 2018). Digital media platforms amplify emotionally charged and morally polarized content because it maximizes engagement (Brady et al., 2017; Tufekci, 2018).

From a motivational imbalance perspective, these institutional incentives systematically favor narrow, all-consuming commitments. Individuals who resist such pressures may experience significance loss—being ignored, marginalized, or labeled insufficiently committed—thereby increasing vulnerability to more extreme forms of identity and engagement.

Mainstreaming Without Dictatorship: Democratic Involution

One of De Grada's most prescient insights was that democratic involution need not involve abrupt regime change. Instead, democracies can hollow out from within as psychological and cultural norms shift. Contemporary political theory echoes this concern, describing forms of "disfigured democracy" or

"illiberal democracy" in which elections persist but pluralism erodes (Urbinati, 2014; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

From a social-psychological perspective, this involution occurs when extremism becomes motivationally and normatively mainstream. Citizens increasingly experience politics as a moral battleground rather than a deliberative process; opponents are viewed as enemies rather than adversaries; and compromise is framed as betrayal. Empirical studies show that affective polarization—emotional hostility toward political out-groups—has risen sharply even where ideological differences remain stable (Iyengar et al., 2019).

Crucially, these outcomes do not require widespread endorsement of extremist ideologies. They require only that extreme motivational structures—certainty, exclusivity, sacrifice—become culturally normative. This distinction is essential: societies can become extremist in form without becoming extremist in declared belief.

Societal Extremism as Motivational Ecology

This perspective reframes prevention and intervention. If extremism is mainstreamed through institutional and cultural incentives, then counter-extremism cannot rely solely on deradicalizing individuals. It must address the broader motivational environment: how societies reward balance versus extremity, pluralism versus purity, and deliberation versus certainty.

In this sense, De Grada's insistence on linking psychological motivation to cultural and institutional structures provides a framework for understanding how democracies can drift toward extremism not through coercion, but through the everyday normalization of motivational imbalance.

Cultural-level mainstreaming refers to the process by which the psychological structure of extremism—narrowed commitment, moral absolutism, and readiness for sacrifice—comes to be treated not as exceptional, but as normal, admirable, and even necessary in ordinary life. This transition marks an important inflection point. Once extremism is culturally normalized, it no longer requires explicit mobilization by charismatic leaders or crisis narratives. Instead, it is reproduced through routine practices, evaluative standards, and symbolic rewards embedded in daily life. In De Grada's terms, extremism ceases to be episodic and becomes *educational*: societies socialize individuals into motivational imbalance long before overt political conflict emerges (De Grada, 1972).

Everyday Extremism and the Expansion of the Concept

A key contribution of recent work in the psychology of extremism is the expansion of the concept beyond violence and ideology. Extremism should be understood as a *form of engagement* rather than a specific belief system: the same psychological structure can organize terrorism, political radicalization, professional overwork, moral crusading, or lifestyle purity movements (Kruglanski et al., 2021; Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2025). This reconceptualization is essential for understanding mainstreaming. Violent extremism remains relatively rare, but *extreme forms of commitment* are increasingly common and culturally rewarded.

Empirical research supports this continuity. Studies show that individuals who endorse extreme commitment in non-political domains also display higher intolerance of ambiguity, stronger moral absolutism, and greater susceptibility to polarized narratives (Zmigrod et al., 2020; Kruglanski et al., 2021). Cultural normalization of extremity thus creates a broad psychological substrate on which political extremism can later flourish.

At the cultural level, mainstreaming operates through incentive structures that moralize intensity. Commitment is no longer evaluated by proportionality or balance, but by visibility, sacrifice, and emotional force. The more one gives up time, health, relationships, the more authentic one's commitment appears.

This moralization of intensity reflects a shift in how significance is distributed. As discussed above, significance is conferred socially. At the cultural level, recognition increasingly accrues to those who demonstrate total dedication, while moderation is framed as complacency or moral failure. Empirical studies of moral signaling and virtue display show that extreme expressions of commitment often function as status signals, particularly in polarized environments (Petersen et al., 2021; Jordan et al., 2016).

De Grada's work anticipated this mechanism by emphasizing how cultural norms affect motivation. When societies repeatedly associate worth with sacrifice and purity, they cultivate citizens who experience balance and ambivalence as psychologically unsafe. In such contexts, extremism becomes not only acceptable but rational.

Media Ecologies and the Amplification of Extremity

Contemporary media environments play a central role in cultural mainstreaming. Digital platforms are structurally biased toward content that is emotionally arousing, morally charged, and identity-relevant—precisely the features that align with extreme motivational configurations (Brady et al., 2017; Tufekci, 2018). Algorithms amplify outrage, certainty, and conflict because these maximize engagement, inadvertently privileging extremist styles of communication over deliberative ones.

Research on moral-emotional language demonstrates that messages expressing moral outrage spread more rapidly and widely online than neutral or nuanced messages (Brady et al., 2017). Over time, this selective amplification reshapes cultural expectations: to be heard is to be extreme. Moderation becomes invisible, while extremity becomes synonymous with authenticity.

Cultural environments reward extreme expression not because of ideological alignment, but because of attention economies. The result is a feedback loop in which individuals learn—often implicitly—that extreme positions are the most effective means of gaining recognition and significance.

Polarization, Identity Performance, and Cultural Scripts

Cultural mainstreaming of extremism also occurs through identity performance. In polarized societies, identities become moralized: political, cultural, and even lifestyle affiliations

are treated as indicators of character rather than preference (Mason, 2018). Individuals are encouraged to "stand for something," with "standing" increasingly defined as adopting uncompromising positions.

Social identity research shows that when group identities are moralized, boundary maintenance intensifies and out-group derogation increases (Iyengar et al., 2019). Cultural scripts that equate commitment with moral worth push individuals toward clearer, more extreme identity signals. Ambiguity and cross-cutting identities—essential for democratic pluralism—become liabilities.

This process is particularly visible in online spaces, where identity is continuously performed and evaluated. Likes, shares, and public endorsements function as micro-rewards that reinforce extreme signaling. Over time, these practices normalize a style of engagement characterized by certainty, purity, and confrontation, even among individuals who do not endorse extremist ideologies.

An important implication of this analysis is that cultural mainstreaming of extremism does not require widespread grievance or crisis. It can emerge in relatively affluent, stable societies when significance becomes fragile and contingent. When recognition is scarce, conditional, or publicly evaluated, individuals are incentivized to pursue high-visibility routes to worth—often through extreme commitment.

Kruglanski and Moskalenko (2025) emphasize that fragile significance intensifies motivational imbalance. Cultural systems that tie worth to performance, visibility, or purity increase the volatility of self-esteem, thereby increasing reliance on rigid commitments. This helps explain why societies experiencing rapid social change can become fertile ground for extremism even without material deprivation.

From a De Gradian perspective, this represents a cultural involution: a narrowing of motivational repertoires available to individuals. Societies that once supported multiple routes to dignity and belonging increasingly funnel recognition through extreme forms of engagement.

Consequences for Democratic Culture

The cultural mainstreaming of extremism has profound implications for democracy. Democratic culture depends on proportionality, tolerance for ambiguity, and the legitimacy of disagreement. When extremism becomes normative, these capacities erode, even in the absence of institutional breakdown.

This erosion does not require citizens to endorse extremist ideologies. It requires only that extreme motivational styles—certainty, exclusivity, sacrifice—become culturally dominant. In such environments, democratic restraint feels psychologically untenable.

Cultural-level mainstreaming represents the final stage in the migration of extremism from margin to norm. What begins as an individual response to significance loss becomes socially reinforced, institutionally rewarded, and culturally expected. Extremism no longer appears extreme in the sense of being rare, aberrant, or fringe; instead, it appears responsible, authentic, and necessary.

This insight completes the arc initiated in De Grada's work. Authoritarian outcomes need not arise from mass pathology or overt repression. They can emerge from ordinary psychological motives cultivated within cultural environments that reward imbalance. Understanding this process is essential for diagnosing contemporary democratic fragility and for imagining forms of cultural repair that restore balance, pluralism, and proportionality as legitimate routes to significance.

Conclusion: Extremism, Significance, and Democratic Vulnerability

This paper examined how extremism—traditionally treated as marginal, deviant, or pathological—can become culturally normalized within democratic societies. Drawing on contemporary social-psychological research, we argued that extremism is best understood not as ideological content but as a psychological structure: a state of motivational imbalance in which a single concern comes to dominate identity, meaning, and action. This structural approach helps explain why extremism appears across domains that differ radically in content yet share similar patterns of rigidity, moral absolutism, and readiness for sacrifice.

At the individual level, the quest for significance provides a powerful motivational engine. Experiences of humiliation, exclusion, or threatened worth create pressure for restoration, which can be satisfied through extreme commitment. Importantly, the same processes that fuel political radicalization also operate in socially sanctioned contexts such as work, leisure activities, parenting, lifestyle movements, and online identity formation. This continuity challenges sharp distinctions between ordinary commitment and radical extremism, revealing a common psychological architecture underlying both.

Extending this framework to the societal level clarifies how extremism can spread without requiring mass pathology or abrupt institutional collapse. When social norms, institutions, and media environments consistently reward intensity, certainty, and self-sacrifice while penalizing moderation and ambivalence, extreme motivational configurations become adaptive rather than exceptional. Through processes such as group polarization, threat-based identity narrowing, and normative inversion, societies can gradually shift toward forms of engagement that undermine democratic pluralism even as democratic procedures formally persist.

At the cultural level, mainstreaming represents the point at which extremism no longer requires explicit mobilization. Once extreme styles of commitment are embedded in everyday evaluative practices—what is admired, amplified, and morally praised—they are reproduced through routine social interaction. In such environments, balance and restraint lose their psychological and social viability, while extremity comes to signify authenticity and moral seriousness. Democracies may thus become extremist in form without widespread endorsement of extremist ideologies.

The broader implication of this analysis is that democratic vulnerability is not driven solely by particular movements,

leaders, or beliefs. It is also shaped by the motivational climates societies cultivate. When significance is fragile, and recognition is disproportionately distributed through extreme pathways, motivational imbalance becomes widespread. Addressing contemporary democratic fragility, therefore, requires attention not only to institutional design and political norms, but also to the everyday psychological incentives that shape how individuals pursue meaning, belonging, and worth.

Understanding extremism as a mainstreamable psychological structure shifts the focus of both research and intervention. Rather than asking only how to counter radical ideologies, it invites inquiry into how societies can restore multiple, proportionate, and non-exclusive routes to significance. Such environments are more likely to sustain the psychological foundations that democratic life requires: tolerance for ambiguity, acceptance of disagreement, and plural identity.

Ethical Approval
Not applicable

Data Availability Statement
Not applicable

Funding
Not applicable

Conflict of Interests
Not applicable

Author Contributions
All authors equally contributed to every part of the study.

Supplementary material
Not applicable

Declaration about the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process
No AI was employed in any stage of the study, including the writing process

Acknowledgments

References

Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D. J., & Sanford, R. N. (1950). The authoritarian personality. Harper.

Arendt, H. (1951). The origins of totalitarianism. Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Bélanger, J. J., Schumpe, B. M., Menon, B., Ng, J., Nociti, N., Zeigler-Hill, V., & Shackelford, T. K. (2018). Self-sacrifice for a cause: A review and an integrative model. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), The SAGE handbook of personality and individual differences (pp. 465–485). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526470317.n25

Bloom, M., & Moskalenko, S. (2021). Pastels and pedophiles: Inside the mind of QAnon. Stanford University Press.

Brady, W. J., Wills, J. A., Jost, J. T., Tucker, J. A., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2017). Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 114(28), 7313–7318. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1618923114

Cartledge, P. (2001). Spartan reflections. University of California Press.

De Grada, E. (1972). Introduzione alla psicologia sociale [Introduction to social psychology]. Bulzoni Editore, Roma.

De Grada, E., Ercolani, A. P., Areni, A., Ardone, R. G., D'Atena, P., Badolato, G., Gaudenzi, M., & Leuzzi, A. (1975). Autoritarismo e Fascismo Potenziale [Authoritarianism and potential fascism]. Bulzoni Editore, Roma.Festinger, L. (1957). A theory of cognitive dissonance. Stanford University Press.

Fitzpatrick, S. (1999). Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary life in extraordinary times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s. Oxford University Press.

Hochschild, A. R. (1997). The time bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work. Metropolitan Books.

Hogg, M. A., & Adelman, J. (2013). Uncertainty–identity theory: Extreme groups, radical behavior, and authoritarian leadership. Journal of Social Issues, 69(3), 436-454. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12023

Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. Annual Review of Political Science, 22, 129–146. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034

Jordan, J. J., Hoffman, M., Bloom, P., & Rand, D. G. (2016). Third-party punishment as a costly signal of trustworthiness. Nature, 530(7591), 473–476. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature16981

Keller, J. (2023, April 19). Quitting is a wildly underrated life strategy. Here's why. Big Think. https://bigthink.com/neuropsych/neuroscience-of-quitting/

Kershaw, I. (1998). Hitler: 1889–1936: Hubris. W. W. Norton.

Kotkin, S. (2014). Stalin: Volume I: Paradoxes of power, 1878–1928. Penguin Press.

Kruglanski, A. W., Bélanger, J. J., & Gunaratna, R. (2019). The three pillars of radicalization: Needs, narratives, and networks. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190851125.003.0004

Kruglanski, A. W., Chen, X., Dechesne, M., Fishman, S., & Orehek, E. (2009). Fully committed: Suicide bombers' motivation and the quest for personal significance. Political Psychology, 30(3), 331–357. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2009.00698.x

Kruglanski, A. W., Molinario, E., Ellenberg, M., & Di Cicco, G. (2022). Terrorism and conspiracy theories: A view from the 3N model of radicalization. Current Opinion in Psychology, 47, Article 101396. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101396

Kruglanski, A. W., Pierro, A., Mannetti, L., & De Grada, E. (2006). Groups as epistemic providers: Need for closure and the unfolding of group-centrism. Psychological Review, 113(1), 84–100. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.113.1.84

Kruglanski, A. W., Szumowska, E., Kopetz, C., Vallerand, R. J., & Pierro, A. (2021). On the psychology of extremism: How motivational imbalance breeds intemperance. Psychological Review, 128(2), 264–289. https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000260

Kruglanski, A. W., & Moskalenko, S. (2025). The psychology of the extreme. Routledge.

Kruglanski, A. W., & Raviv, D. (2025). The quest for significance: Harnessing the need that makes the world go round. Taylor & Francis.

Kruglanski, A. W., & Webster, D. M. (1996). Motivated closing of the mind: "Seizing" and "freezing." Psychological Review, 103(2), 263–283. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.103.2.263

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). How democracies die. Crown.

Leidner, B., Sheikh, H., & Ginges, J. (2012). Affective dimensions of intergroup humiliation. PLoS ONE, 7(9), e46375. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0046375

Mason, L. (2018). Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity. University of Chicago Press.

McCauley, C. R., & Moskalenko, S. (2017). Friction: How conflict radicalizes them and us. Oxford University Press.

McCauley, C., & Moskalenko, S. (2025). Belief and behavior in radicalization: Clarifying the link in response to Peels. Terrorism and Political Violence, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2025.2580999

Moscovici, S., & Zavalloni, M. (1969). The group as a polarizer of attitudes. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 12(2), 125–135. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0027568

Moskalenko, S. (2021). Evolution of QAnon & radicalization by conspiracy theories. The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare, 4(2), 109–114. https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v4i2.3756

Moskalenko, S. (2023). The evolution of hybrid radicalization: From small group to mass phenomenon. In N. Stockhammer (Ed.) Routledge handbook of transnational terrorism (pp. 132–142). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003326373-14

Moskalenko, S. (2024). Down the yellow brick road: How socialization through early narratives shapes the quest for significance. In The Routledge international handbook of human significance and mattering (pp. 257–271). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003424437-24

Moskalenko, S., Burton, B. S., Fernández-Garayzábal González, J., & Bloom, M. M. (2023). Secondhand Conspiracy Theories: The Social, Emotional and Political Tolls on Loved Ones of QAnon Followers. Democracy and Security, 19(3), 231–250. https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2022.2111305

Moskalenko, S., González, J. F. G., Kates, N., & Morton, J. (2022). Incel ideology, radicalization and mental health: A survey study. Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare, 4(3), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v4i3.3817

Moskalenko, S., Freilich, J. D., Chermak, S., Gruenewald, J., & McCauley, C. (2023). Growth opportunities in American and British terrorism research. Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict, 16(1), 44-69. https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2023.2187072

Moskalenko, S., & McCauley, C. (2009). Measuring political mobilization: The distinction between activism and radicalism. Terrorism and Political Violence, 21(2), 239–260. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550902765508

Moskalenko, S., & McCauley, C. (2018). The marvel of martyrdom: The power of self-sacrifice in a selfish world. Oxford University Press.

Moskalenko, S., & McCauley, C. (2020). Radicalization to terrorism: What everyone needs to know®. Oxford University Press.

Moskalenko, S., Pavlović, T., & Bloom, M. (2025). Attitudes Toward Jews and Israel: Profiles Linked to Political Violence in the United States. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2025.2554106

Petersen, M. B. (2019). Evolutionary political psychology. Cambridge University Press.

Petersen, M. B., Osmundsen, M., & Bor, A. (2021). Beyond Populism: The Psychology of Status-Seeking and Extreme Political Discontent. In J.P. Forgas, W.D. Crano, & K. Fiedler (Eds.), The Psychology of Populism (pp. 63-81). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/puqzs

Pomeroy, S. B., Donlan, W., Burstein, S., & Roberts, J. T. (2012). Ancient Greece: A political, social, and cultural history(3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Riek, B. M., Mania, E. W., & Gaertner, S. L. (2006). Intergroup threat and outgroup attitudes: A meta-analytic review. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 10(4), 336–353. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1004_4

Sageman, M. (2004). Understanding terror networks. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (2000). An integrated threat theory of prejudice. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), Reducing prejudice and discrimination (pp. 23–45). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Sunstein, C. R. (2009). Going to extremes: How like minds unite and divide. Oxford University Press.

Swann, W. B., Jr., Gómez, A., Seyle, D. C., Morales, J. F., & Huici, C. (2009). Identity fusion: The interplay of personal and social identities in extreme group behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96(5), 995–1011. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013668

Swann, W. B., Jetten, J., Gómez, Á., Whitehouse, H., & Bastian, B. (2012). When past meets present: Identity fusion, social identification, and the tendency to cause harm. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102(2), 317–332. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024609

Szumowska, E., Molinario, E., Jasko, K., Hudiyana, J., Firdiani, N. F., Penrod, J., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2024). The extreme personality: Individual differences in proneness to motivational imbalance (Unpublished manuscript). University of Maryland.

Tufekci, Z. (2018). YouTube, the great radicalizer. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com

Urbinati, N. (2014). Democracy disfigured: Opinion, truth, and the people. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Urbinati, N. (2019). Me the people: How populism transforms democracy. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.Vallerand, R. J. (2010). On passion for life activities: The dualistic model of passion. Advances in Experimental Social

Psychology, 42, 97–193. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(10)42003-1

Vallerand, R. J. (2015). The Psychology of Passion: A Dualistic Model. Oxford University Press.

Vallerand, R. J., Blanchard, C., Mageau, G. A., Koestner, R., Ratelle, C., Léonard, M., Gagné, M., & Marsolais, J. (2003). Les passions de l'âme: On obsessive and harmonious passion. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85(4), 756–767. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.4.756

Volkan, V. D. (2001). Bloodlines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Webster, D. M., & Kruglanski, A. W. (1994). Individual differences in need for cognitive closure. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67(6), 1049–1062. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.6.1049

Zmigrod, L. (2021). A psychology of ideology: Unpacking the psychological structure of ideological thinking. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 30(6), 451–456. https://doi.org/10.1177/09637214211040221

Zmigrod, L., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2025). Extremism and ideology. In R. Peels & J. Horgan (Eds.), Conceptualizing Extreme Beliefs and Behaviors: Definitions and Relations (Extreme Belief and Behavior Series, Vol. 2). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780197760222.001.0001

Zmigrod, L., Rentfrow, P. J., & Robbins, T. W. (2020). The partisan mind: Is extreme political partisanship related to cognitive inflexibility? Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 149(3), 407–418. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/xge0000661