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Dynamics of Disruption: How Security and Constitutional Events Shape Multidimensional Political Extremism

📍   📅 Submitted: December 31, 2025

📄 Summary

This paper proposes a multidimensional framework for measuring political extremism along cognitive (ideological rigidity), behavioral (support for violence), and social (outgroup intolerance) dimensions, and introduces a Political Extremism Gauge that defines relative thresholds (EP = median + 1.5 × MAD) to identify "extremist tails" within populations. Using six survey waves of Israeli Jewish respondents (2021–2024) timed around major destabilizing events (terror attacks, government transitions, judicial reforms, October 7th war), the study analyzes how extremism dimensions shift and how effects are moderated by political orientation, reporting significant heterogeneity across dimensions and orientations. The paper argues that events primarily affect extremism by recruiting/demobilizing individuals into/out of distributional tails rather than further radicalizing those already extreme.

👍 Strengths

Technical novelty and innovation

- The three-dimensional conceptualization is well-motivated and avoids one-dimensional conflation of ideology with extremism.

- The Political Extremism Gauge, with absolute and relative indices and a robust tail threshold (median + 1.5 × MAD), is a useful and portable idea for cross-context comparisons, in principle.

- Emphasis on distributional thinking (tails, intensity vs levels) is valuable and aligns with the need to move beyond mean-based analyses.

Experimental rigor and validation

- Six waves over multiple destabilizing events provide a rich longitudinal context with quasi-natural variation.

- The separation of whole-population and tail-focused analyses is conceptually aligned with the research questions and reveals different dynamics.

- Use of MANOVA to control Type I error inflation at the multivariate level before per-dimension ANOVAs is a reasonable first step.

Clarity of presentation

- The theoretical framing and dimension definitions are clearly articulated and supported by citations.

- The gauge's logic (NP, EP, EL/EIN, ER1–ER3) is explained coherently with intuitive figures.

Significance of contributions

- The research question—how destabilizing events shape different facets of extremism and how political orientation moderates these effects—is timely and important for democratic resilience.

- The proposal of a generalizable measurement strategy could be valuable if further validated across contexts and languages.

⚠ **Weaknesses**

Technical limitations or concerns

- The "recruitment/demobilization" mechanism is asserted but not convincingly demonstrated; evidence specific to transitions into/out of tails is not shown.

- The EP threshold choice (K = 1.5) seems somewhat ad hoc without visible robustness checks in the main text; reliance on the SI is noted but readers need core sensitivity results in the main paper.

- The center category is defined as a single scale point (4), which may be statistically fragile and conceptually narrow; it risks misclassification and unstable estimates.

- Claims of context-independence are not substantiated without measurement invariance testing and cross-cultural replication.

Experimental gaps or methodological issues

- Cross-wave composition changes and panel conditioning are not sufficiently addressed (sampling, weighting, nonresponse, attrition). Only Wave 3–4 is a panel; the rest are independent cross-sections.

- No demonstration of measurement invariance (configural/metric/scalar) across waves or political orientations; this is critical for comparing latent constructs over time and across groups.

- Analytic strategy remains largely descriptive/correlational. The design is not causal despite "quasi-experimental" language; more rigorous event-study/DID approaches are not employed.

- Limited covariate controls (only age, gender). In the Israeli context, religiosity, education, ethnicity, region, and socio-economic status are likely confounders correlated with both orientation and extremism dimensions.

- Effect sizes (partial eta-squared) and confidence intervals are not reported; Pillai's Trace values are given without df and standardized effect sizes.

- Multiple testing adjustments for per-dimension ANOVAs are not discussed.

Clarity or presentation issues

- Some phrasing is normatively loaded (e.g., describing judicial reform "aiming to erode... democracy"), which may undermine neutrality; better to use balanced characterizations with citations.

- Figures are described but not shown; the paper would benefit from actual distributional visuals (density/quantile plots) to support tail-based claims.

- Item content for the CFA is not presented; loadings, model fit (CFI/TLI/RMSEA/SRMR), and reliability (omega/alpha) are not reported.

Missing related work or comparisons

- The paper could better engage with work on event-driven online hardening and threat responses (e.g., 2405.00459; 2206.04987), crisis-induced preference change moderated by media and exposure (2202.12339), and multi-factor psychometric modeling of extremism (2501.04820).

- No discussion of reporting fatigue or panel conditioning (2411.03774), relevant to repeated surveying.

- The role of inequality in fostering intolerance (2401.07873) and spatial-temporal clustering of political violence and "fields of upsetness" (2503.14399) could enrich theorization of recruitment/demobilization.

💬 Detailed Comments

Technical soundness evaluation

- The three-factor conceptualization is consistent with literature and arguably less contentious than ideology-only approaches; however, cross-wave/group comparability requires explicit measurement invariance tests. Without scalar invariance, changes in means (or thresholds) risk reflecting shifting measurement rather than substantive change.

- The EP definition using MAD is robust to skew and outliers; however, the choice of K = 1.5 should be stress-tested: show sensitivity to K ∈ {1.0, 1.25, 1.5, 1.75, 2.0}, and compare with percentile-based thresholds (e.g., 90th, 95th) and robust z-scores.

- The "recruitment vs intensification" claim needs formal decomposition: for each event, report changes in EL and EIN among those above EP, plus

transition matrices in the panel portion (Wave 3→4) to measure entry/exit vs within-tail mean shifts. For cross-sections, use distributional methods (e.g., RIF regressions, quantile regressions) to show where in the distribution changes occur.

- The center binning (exactly 4) compresses a continuum and likely yields a small and noisy subgroup. Consider a symmetric band (e.g., 3–5) or model orientation as continuous with interactions, with a robustness check via latent-class or spline-based orientation modeling.

Experimental evaluation assessment

- Sampling and weighting: clarify sampling frames, representativeness claims (panel provider? random digit dialing? online panel?), wave-specific weights, and how nonresponse/attrition were handled. Provide demographic balance tables and show stability of composition across waves.

- CFA details: list items, report fit indices (CFI/TLI/RMSEA/SRMR), factor loadings, and reliability for each wave and subgroup; test configural/metric/scalar invariance across waves and orientations. If scalar invariance fails, consider alignment optimization or IRT-based methods to compare latent means.

- Statistical reporting: add df, partial eta^2 (or generalized eta^2), confidence intervals, and standardized mean differences. For multiple ANOVAs, either rely solely on the MANOVA gatekeeper or apply multiple-testing corrections for follow-ups.

- Identification strategy: temper "quasi-experimental" language and adopt more rigorous event-study approaches where feasible. With repeated cross-sections, you can implement group-time ATT estimators or generalized event studies; see 2311.15458 for guidance on appropriate estimands and estimators under staggered/event timing. Even if causality remains out of reach, transparent estimands and diagnostics (pre-trends, placebo checks) would strengthen claims.

- Covariates: add education, religiosity/orthodoxy, socio-economic status, region, and ethnicity as controls. Consider interactions with political orientation to separate compositional from attitudinal shifts.

- Robustness: perform placebo intervals, alternative time windows, and checks for contemporaneous confounders (e.g., other salient events,

media cycles). Consider bounding exercises or sensitivity analyses for unobserved confounding.

Comparison with related work (using the summaries provided)

- Threat and hardening: Your findings of dimension-specific and orientation-moderated responses parallel evidence that offline shocks produce network/content hardening (2405.00459) and consolidation of attention under threat (2206.04987). Linking your "recruitment" mechanism to surges in participation/engagement observed online would strengthen external validity; even short auxiliary analyses of social media exposure around your events could triangulate mechanisms.

- Crisis-driven preference change: The moderation of event effects by political orientation aligns with 2202.12339, which emphasizes the roles of direct experience and partisan media. Incorporating measures of personal exposure (victimization, local incidents) and media consumption could test whether exposure vs media diet channels shape the heterogeneity you observe.

- Multidimensional extremism: The Extremist Eleven (2501.04820) offers a multi-factor lens derived from psychometric text embeddings. Position your dimension choices relative to those factors, and consider convergent validity tests (e.g., mapping your scales onto related constructs like authoritarianism, nationalism, dogmatism).

- Inequality and intolerance: 2401.07873 shows intolerance can escalate absent new mutants under inequality; consider conditioning on perceived economic insecurity/inequality to see whether social-intolerance shifts are moderated by economic context.

- Spatial-temporal clustering and "fields of upsetness": 2503.14399 suggests clustering and heterogeneous triggers; briefly discuss whether regional proximity to events or local threat intensity modulates tail recruitment in your data.

- Methodological guidance for causal panel/event designs: 2311.15458 provides a roadmap for event-study diagnostics and estimators; even if you remain descriptive, adopting their recommended estimands and robustness checks would enhance credibility.

- Survey design: Consider whether reporting fatigue/panel conditioning (2411.03774) could affect wave-to-wave shifts, especially in the panel pair; discuss and, if possible, adjust.

Discussion of broader impact and significance

- The gauge could help monitor democratic resilience and inform early-warning systems, but labeling "extremists" has ethical and policy risks. Emphasize safeguards: anonymization, aggregate reporting, transparency about thresholds, and avoidance of stigmatization or punitive uses without due process.

- Generalizability: The claim of context-independence is aspirational. A path to broader impact would include cross-national replications, translation and cultural adaptation of items, and formal measurement invariance across languages and political systems.

⑦ Questions for Authors

1. Can you provide full CFA details (item lists, loadings, fit indices) and evidence of configural/metric/scalar invariance across waves and political orientations? If scalar invariance does not hold, how do you justify comparing means and thresholds over time?

2. How sensitive are your findings to the choice of EP threshold ($K = 1.5$) and to alternative tail definitions (e.g., 90th/95th percentile, robust z-scores)? Please report main results under several thresholds.

3. What evidence supports the "recruitment/demobilization" mechanism versus intensification among existing extremists? Can you show transitions across EP in the panel (Wave 3→4) and distributional decompositions (EL vs EIN) for each event?

4. How were samples obtained and weighted in each wave, and how stable are demographic compositions across waves? Did you adjust for nonresponse, attrition, or panel conditioning? Any checks for reporting fatigue effects?

5. Why is "center" defined as exactly 4 on a 1–7 scale? How do results change if center is defined as 3–5, or if orientation is treated as continuous with spline interactions?

6. Did you control for additional confounders (religiosity, education, socio-economic status, region, ethnicity) that are salient in the Israeli context? If not, how might omitted-variable bias affect your moderation findings?

7. Given the politically sensitive framing of some events, can you rephrase descriptions to maintain neutrality and provide references for contested characterizations (e.g., the judicial reform debate)?

8. Do your conclusions hold when using your relative indices (EL, EIN, ER1–ER3) as outcomes rather than only means and F-tests? Showing shifts in ranks and tail proportions would directly connect to your core claims.

9. How would you adapt and validate the Political Extremism Gauge for non-Israeli contexts and non-Jewish populations (e.g., Arab citizens of Israel), and what is your plan to establish cross-cultural measurement invariance?

10. Have you considered event-study or DID-style analyses with robustness checks (placebos, pre-trend diagnostics) as outlined in 2311.15458 to better separate event effects from secular trends?

⊘ Overall Assessment

This paper tackles an important problem with a thoughtfully multidimensional conceptualization and offers a promising measurement idea in the Political Extremism Gauge. The empirical setting is rich, and the main qualitative findings—heterogeneous dimension responses and moderation by political orientation—are plausible and useful. However, the empirical analysis remains largely descriptive and correlational, with key claims (particularly the recruitment/demobilization mechanism and the instrument's context-independence) insufficiently supported in the current form. To be competitive at a top-tier venue, the authors should strengthen measurement validity (invariance testing, CFA reporting), broaden controls and robustness checks, incorporate distributional and transition analyses to substantiate tail dynamics, and align the event-analytic approach with modern panel/event-study methodology. With these improvements and a more neutral presentation style, the contribution could become a valuable reference for monitoring democratic resilience and for comparative extremism research.

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