

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

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Abstract

This study investigates how political crises and security threats correlate with shifts in political extremism across different political orientations. Current academic discourse on extremism often relies on fragmented frameworks and one-dimensional methodologies. To address these gaps, this study develops a multidimensional conceptualization of political extremism that integrates cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions. This framework employs a political extremism Gauge instrument designed for context-independent cross-population comparative analysis. Using longitudinal data from six survey waves conducted in Israel between 2021 and 2024, the study challenges the assumption of uniform radicalization. Identical destabilizing events simultaneously mobilize and demobilize different political groups. The three dimensions of political extremism respond independently rather than uniformly during periods of instability, with various events associated with distinct radicalization patterns: some primarily drive recruitment or disengagement, while others push already radicalized individuals toward more extreme positions. The results suggest that extremism is a reactive phenomenon moderated by political orientation and the specific nature of the perceived threat. The methodology can be applied universally to monitor democratic resilience and analyze how societies respond to disruption.

Keywords: Political extremism; Destabilizing events; Political orientation; Multidimensional measurement; Democratic resilience

Introduction

Political extremism poses a critical threat to democratic countries (Bennett & Livingston, 2025; Ferrer & Palmisano, 2025). The study of political extremism faces three crucial barriers that limit our understanding of this phenomenon.

First, political extremism remains undefined in any universally accepted way, creating conceptual ambiguity (Bötticher, 2017; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010; Sotlar, 2004; Svetlichny & Khorev, 2022). The term 'extremism', rather than 'political extremism', is used even in an apparent political context (Onursal & Kirkpatrick, 2021; Scruton, 2007; UK Parliament, 2024). Absolute and relative approaches coexist within the current academic discourse. Relative definitions position extremists at the edges of the political spectrum, outside the mainstream, taking political ideas to their logical extremes (Coleman & Bartoli, 2015; Mandel, 2010; Scruton, 2007; Wintrobe, 2006). Absolute definitions associate a specific ideological content with political extremism, such as opposing a democratic constitutional state (Jungkunz, 2022; Midlarsky, 2011), monism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010), and a disregard for the lives, liberties, and human rights of others (Scruton, 2007). The fragmentation of the term into various subtypes may lead to differing interpretations and conclusions, creating ambiguity (Bjelopera, 2017) and challenging our capability to frame the phenomenon. Further contributing to the lack of clarity is the use of other terms, such as 'radicalism' and 'terrorism,' which overlap in definition (Allchorn & Orofino, 2023). Although much of the current literature emphasizes right-wing and Islamist extremism, the development of a truly universal definition necessitates an inclusive approach that captures additional extremist forms such as left-wing, environmental, and other ideologically motivated variants.

Second, the field tends to fragment extremism into discrete dimensions rather than studying it as an integrated whole. This fragmentation impedes cumulative theory-

building and produces incompatible empirical findings. Relying on a single feature or dimension when assessing political extremism can lead to overlooking various forms of it (Schmid, 2014) or to a biased understanding of the phenomenon. The ideological position is evident in almost all definitions of political extremism; however, its conceptualization and measurement vary significantly. Many scholars limit the definition to a left-right political position (van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019, 2022) using an ideological self-positioning scale to identify political extremism (Rigoli, 2023; Uba & Bosi, 2022; van Prooijen et al., 2015; van Prooijen & Kuijper, 2020). Other scholars use additional dimensions, including authoritarianism (Mudde, 1995), beliefs in superiority and intolerance towards opposing groups (Doosje et al., 2016; Ozer & Bertelsen, 2018), endorsement of violence (Schmid, 2013; Wintrobe, 2006), anti-democracy (Jungkunz, 2022; Mudde, 1995), actions toward replacing the dominant political system (Jackson, 2019), and the belief in a monopoly on truth (Dono et al., 2018).

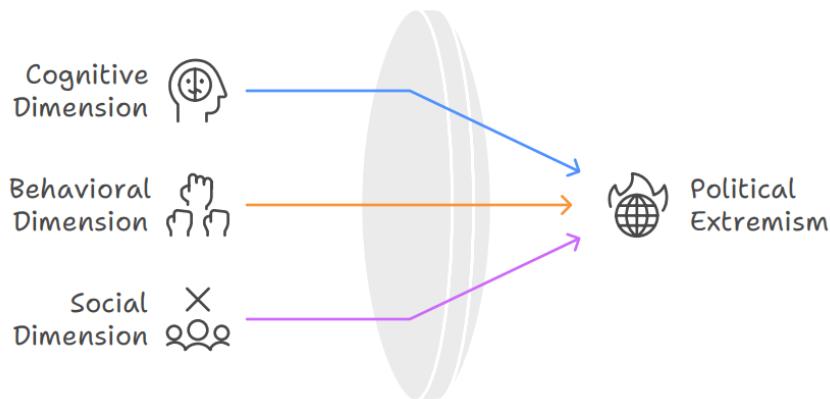
Third, cross-national comparisons prove challenging because extremism thresholds vary significantly across different political contexts. Cultural and political contexts shape definitions of extremism, leading to identical positions receiving different classifications across nations (Zuell & Scholz, 2019). Citizens of countries suffering from long-standing, deep-seated conflicts may perceive political violence as less extreme than that in countries with established peace and political stability (Canetti et al., 2009). Female extremist politicians in parliament might soften the perception of political extremism (Ben-Shitrit et al., 2022). People associate different political meanings with the terms 'left' and 'right' (Bauer et al., 2017; Jungkunz, 2022). Dolezal (2010) demonstrates that European Green voters can be difficult to categorize on a left-right economic or social scale. However, their environmental positions might be considered "extreme" in mainstream politics. This context-dependent challenge is further

exacerbated by the lack of standardized, consistent survey measures or scales to assess political extremism over time and across population groups (Jungkunz, 2022).

New Conceptualization

In response to these challenges, this paper advances a new, multidimensional conceptualization of political extremism (see Figure 1) grounded in three core dimensions: cognitive (ideological positions), behavioral (support of violence), and social (intolerance toward outgroups).

Figure 1: Conceptualization of Political Extremism



The cognitive dimension examines how extreme individuals hold their sociopolitical beliefs and the degree of rigidity characterizing their ideological commitments (Jost et al., 2009). This perspective combines categorizing extremism along the ideological spectrum (Schmid, 2013; Sedgwick, 2010), adding the inflexibility and intensity with which people maintain their views (Zmigrod et al., 2019). The behavioral dimension analyzes the extent to which individuals endorse and justify unconventional political tactics (Backer & Tausch, 2017; Shuman et al., 2016; Schumpe et al., 2020), spanning from unlawful demonstrations to armed confrontation. This aspect concerns the acceptance of forceful means to achieve political goals (Steinhoff & Zberman, 2008), including attacks on governmental structures intended to redistribute authority and resources (Weber, 1978), as well as violence between social groups (Tilly, 2003). The

continuum extends from lawful, peaceful activities to acts of civil disobedience, and then to violence and terrorist operations (Shuman et al., 2021). The social dimension addresses how individuals exclude others from political participation and personal association, irrespective of those individuals' group memberships. This aspect embodies the denial of pluralistic values and the erosion of equal rights and freedoms for all members of society (Backes, 2010; Scruton, 2007). It includes unwillingness to extend full civic participation to others (Gibson & Bingham, 1982; Sullivan et al., 1979) alongside interpersonal distancing driven by political or demographic differences (Ben Shitrit et al., 2017; van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019). This dimension investigates how people delegitimize rival perspectives and communities (Dono et al., 2018; Schmid, 2014; Waddell et al., 2024), independent of the particular ideologies or identities involved.

The theoretical contribution consists of synthesizing the most frequently cited dimensions in the academic discourse into a comprehensive, multidimensional conceptualization of political extremism, thereby capturing the complex interplay among cognitive, behavioral, and social manifestations of extreme political attitudes and behaviors. Although the research selects specific dimensions, the conceptualization is not constrained by particular ideological orientations, violence categories, or target outgroups.

Destabilizing Events and Political Extremism

Destabilizing events directly threaten the stability, legitimacy, or continuity of established political systems. While existing research has typically focused on specific types of events in isolation, usually linking individual events to a single dimension of political extremism (Canetti et al., 2013, 2018; Hirsch-Hoefer et al., 2014; Ozer et al., 2025), there has been a limited systematic examination of how different categories of destabilizing events affect multiple dimensions of extremism in distinct ways. Moreover, various

political orientations may respond differently to the same events, where identical stimuli may increase extremism within certain ideological groups while reducing it within others, making separate analysis by political orientation necessary to capture these differential effects. The present study addresses both research gaps by systematically examining how various types of destabilizing events affect multiple dimensions of political extremism across different political orientations.

Various destabilizing events can contribute to the emergence of political extremism. National crises, including wars and economic depressions, consistently correlate with increased extremism domestically, both on the right and the left (Kofman & Garfin, 2020; Rasler, 1986; Stohl, 1975; Vlachos, 2016). Immigration crises and large refugee influxes boost support for radical-right parties (Dinas et al., 2019) while state repression and the rise of the far-right contribute to left-wing extremism (Krüsselmann & Weggemans, 2023). Events perceived as group-based injustices or in-group disadvantages similarly catalyze political violence (Pauwels & Heylen, 2020; Pretus et al., 2023). The influence of electoral events on extremism appears more complex; although most studies indicate temporary spikes in partisan hostility during elections that subsequently subside (Jungkunz et al., 2024; Michelitch & Utych, 2018). Evidence from the 2022 US elections suggests that these elections have had more persistent effects on partisan animosity and support for political violence (Fasching et al., 2024). Natural disasters and health crises create particularly fertile ground for extremism, with evidence showing that such events enable extremist groups to exploit public anxiety through disinformation and anti-government narratives (Khalil, 2021), as notably demonstrated by the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on extremist online activity (Davies et al., 2023; Marone, 2022).

Political orientation plays a crucial moderating role in shaping citizens' levels of extremism across Western democracies. Individuals with right-wing political orientations demonstrate stronger associations with extremist attitudes compared to their left-wing counterparts, particularly regarding support for political violence and outgroup intolerance (Van Hiel et al., 2020). Studies comparing political violence across ideologies reveal that individuals affiliated with left-wing causes are consistently less likely to engage in violent behavior. At the same time, right-wing extremists show higher propensities for deadly attacks (Jasko et al., 2022). Evidence from Western societies indicates that political violence and hate crimes, two key manifestations of extremism, are overwhelmingly more likely to originate from individuals with right-wing political orientations than those with left-wing orientations (Jost, 2024). Right-wing political orientation correlates strongly with xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, and exclusion of ethnic and racial minorities (Jungkunz et al., 2024). However, left-wing political orientation can also lead to extremist manifestations, including intolerance toward perceived enemies such as capitalists, fascists, and supporters of traditional authority structures, with some left-wing groups promoting systematic persecution of outgroups based on class or political ideology (Guhl, 2025). Cross-national studies indicate that right-wing authoritarianism specifically predicts prejudice against groups perceived as socially threatening. At the same time, both political orientations can foster anti-pluralist attitudes and rejection of democratic norms when combined with extremist ideological positions (Costello et al., 2022).

The Current Research

This study represents the first empirical examination of how various destabilizing events differentially correlate with levels of political extremism among citizens with different political orientations across multiple dimensions of political extremism.

The research applies the new conceptualization of political extremism to examine how different destabilizing events, including security threats, political transitions, and constitutional crises, correlate with specific dimensions of extremism among Israeli Jewish citizens across distinct political orientations (left-wing, center-wing, right-wing). The three primary hypotheses are: (H1) various dimensions of political extremism respond heterogeneously to socio-political events, (H2) political orientation moderates these responses, and (H3) focusing on the more extreme population enables a more nuanced understanding of political extremism and radicalization processes.

Implementing the research in Israel provides distinct methodological advantages: the population experiences genuine, high-intensity security and political threats across multiple domains, avoiding the validity limitations of laboratory simulations; Israel's compact geography enables researchers to study populations facing similar objective threats while exhibiting potentially different subjective characteristics; and Israel's democratic tradition makes the study potentially applicable to other democracies.

The political orientations addressed in this research include center-wing orientations alongside traditional left-wing and right-wing perspectives. Following the end of the second Intifada (2000-2005), centrist parties established themselves as significant political entities in Israel (Agmon, 2025; Talshir, 2019). Approximately 25-33% of Israeli voters regularly support centrist parties, constituting an expanding bloc of predominantly educated middle-class citizens who remain committed to centrist alternatives rather than shifting between left and right poles (Talshir, 2019).

The study uses a novel Political Extremism Gauge that simultaneously measures all three dimensions, transforming them into indices of political extremism.

Materials and Methods

The empirical analysis uses a comprehensive six-wave study¹ conducted among Israelis between 2021 and 2024 via iPanel, the largest online panel in Israel. The sample used in this research consists solely of the Jewish population. Waves one (12/6/2021-01/13/2022, N=1608), two (05/23/2022-06/24/2022, N=1607), three (10/24/2022-10/31/2022, N=886), five (06/20/2023-06/26/2023, N=1524), and six (04/04/2024-04/30/2024, N=1114), employed randomly selected, nationally representative samples; wave four (01/12/2023-01/25/2023, N=671) functioned as a panel subset of wave three.

Each pair of survey waves coincided with a major destabilizing event, creating a quasi-experimental setting to observe shifts in political extremism. The events included:

- (i) Inland terror attacks in key Israeli cities,
- (ii) The dissolution of the Lapid-Bennett "Unity" government, leading to Israel's fifth election in nearly four years. The Unity government ended 12 years of right-wing governance under Netanyahu, and its dissolution after less than two years signalled the failure to establish an alternative to Netanyahu.
- (iii) The introduction of judicial reform by the new Netanyahu government.
- (iv) Netanyahu's dismissal of Defense Minister Gallant over his opposition to judicial reforms sparked immediate demonstrations across Israel. Protesters disrupted major highways and gathered at key political sites, forcing Netanyahu to pause the legislation to prevent "civil war." Continued public pressure ultimately compelled the Prime Minister to reinstate Gallant two weeks later.
- (v) The October 7 war is referred to as the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust, with a timing that is potentially connected to the strong

¹ The questionnaires and data used in this paper have been developed and collected by Prof. Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler and Prof. Julia Elad Strenger, based on generous support from the Program on Democratic Resilience and Development (PDRD), and from the institutionalized partnership between the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, Reichman University (IDC Herzliya)

divisions within the Israeli population due to the Judicial Reform. More than 1,219 people were killed, and 251 were taken hostage, most of them Israeli civilians.

The calculation of political extremism dimensions combines multiple related survey items into a single variable using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)². Each dimension uses a 1-to-7 scale, with 1 representing a low level of extremism and seven a high level of extremism. Respondents' self-reported political affiliations, rated on a 1-to-7 scale (where 1 represents right-wing and 7 represents left-wing), are converted into three political orientation categories: right (1-3), center (4), and left (5-7). Additional variables used by the analyses include religiosity (secular, traditional, religious, national religious, ultra-orthodox), education (elementary, high school, post-secondary nonacademic, academic, yeshiva, other), gender (male, female), and age group (18-30, 31-45, 46-60, 60)³.

Political Extremism Gauge

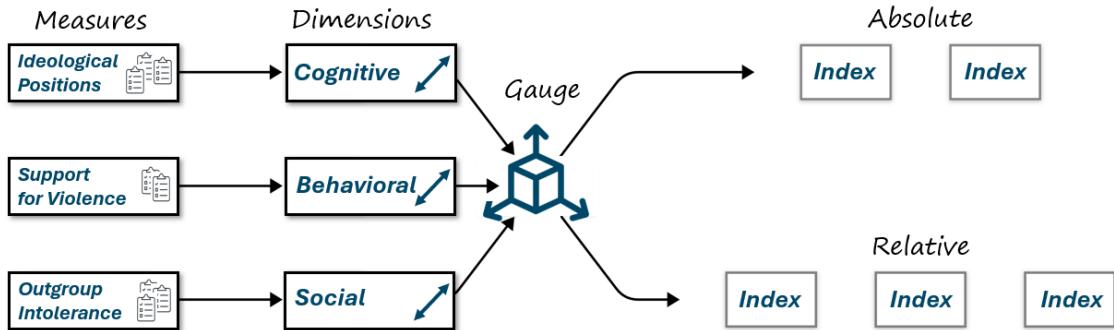
The Political Extremism Gauge converts the three political extremism dimensions into a set of indices that enable comparisons of extremism across different population groups⁴. The methodological strength of the political extremism gauge rests on its transition from absolute measurements to relative divergence. While absolute indices capture the central tendency of a population, they are subject to the contextual limitations previously discussed—specifically, the confounding effects of cultural response styles and national political climates, which can render cross-national comparisons of raw scores unreliable. The gauge resolves these issues by providing Relative Indices, which measure extremism as a structural property of the distribution rather than a fixed point on a scale.

² The calculation of the political extremism dimensions is detailed in the SI appendix

³ Descriptive information is provided in the SI appendix

⁴ Detailed information covering the gauge indices is in the SI appendix

Figure 2: Operationalization of Political Extremism



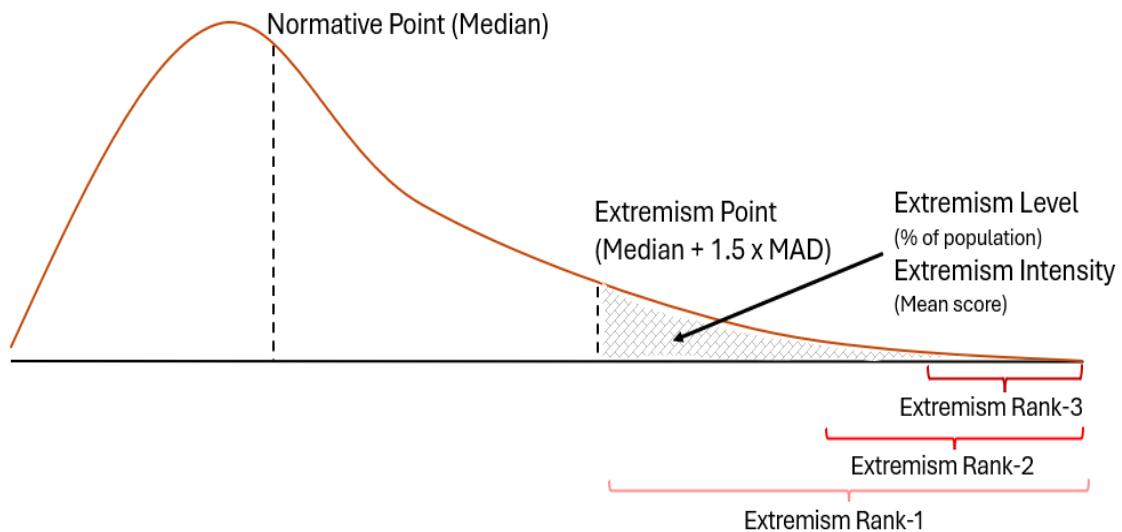
The Relative indices indicate the degree of deviation from the population's central tendency. This standardization neutralizes local idiosyncrasies. It allows researchers to compare how distinct populations diverge from their respective norms without the confounding influence of context-dependent baselines. Identification of the extremist segment is relative to the specific population norm. This approach shifts the analytical focus from raw values to the degree of deviation from a societal center.

Absolute indices include the Normative Point (NP), which represents the population median in each dimension, and the Extremism Point (EP), which serves as a threshold to identify the more extreme segment of the population. The Extremist Point (EP) is operationalized by adding K times the Median Absolute Deviation (MAD) to the established Normative Point (NP), expressed as $EP = NP + K * MAD$. Unlike mean-based thresholds or simple quantiles, this method creates a self-calibrating mechanism that offers greater resilience against the influence of outliers, which are inherent to radicalization studies. By using the MAD, the threshold adapts to the specific variance of each dimension and survey wave, ensuring that the identified "extreme" population is statistically distinct from the general public's central tendency. The constant K (set to 1.5 in this research) serves as an adjustable sensitivity parameter that researchers can tune across different survey environments without losing the underlying logic of the comparison. Setting the value of the K constant serves two methodological objectives:

excluding individuals with moderate characteristics from the extremist tail distribution and ensuring an adequate sample size and sufficient resolution (i.e., number of unique values) to facilitate robust statistical analysis.

The leading relative indices are the Extremism Levels (EL) and the Extremism Intensity (EIN). EL represents the percentage of the group above the EP in each dimension. EIN represents the mean intensity of that group. The relative indices also include three Extremism Ranks (ER1, ER2, ER3). These ranks represent the population percentage with at least one, two, or three dimensions above the EP.

Figure 3: Gauge Indices



Results

Does political affiliation moderate the impact of destabilizing events?

The analysis begins by examining how political affiliations (left-wing, center-wing, right-wing) moderate the association of various destabilizing events with political extremism across the dimensions of political extremism. This study uses Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) on each consecutive pair of political extremism survey waves. For the panel survey waves (3 and 4), the analysis employs a repeated-measures MANOVA. The MANOVA model includes the occurrence of the destabilizing event (0 for the first

wave and 1 for the second), political orientation, control variables for religiosity, education, gender, and age group, and an interaction between the destabilizing event and political orientation.

The results of the MANOVA across the entire population (Table 1) indicate that the inland T=terror event had the most significant multivariate impact on the dimensions of political extremism ($V = 0.019$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.019$). While the main effects of other events, such as the fall of the Bennett government or the October 7 war, did not reach statistical significance at the multivariate level for the whole population, the interaction between the Event and Political Orientation was significant across several stages. Notably, the inland terror event ($V = 0.013$, $p < .001$), the Gallant dismissal ($V = 0.006$, $p < .05$), and the October 7 war ($V = 0.005$, $p < .05$) all showed significant interactions, suggesting that the impact of these crises on extremism is moderated by whether an individual identifies as left-wing, center-wing, or right-wing.

Table 1: MANOVA results across the entire population

Variable	Inland Terror	Bennet Gov. Fall	Judicial reform §	Gallant Dismissal	Oct. 7th War
Destabilizing Event	0.019*** $\eta^2=0.019$	0.001 $\eta^2=0.001$	0.002 $\eta^2=0.002$	0.002 $\eta^2=0.002$	0.001 $\eta^2=0.001$
Political Orientation	0.066** $\eta^2=0.033$	0.124** $\eta^2=0.062$	0.135** $\eta^2=0.067$	0.095** $\eta^2=0.047$	0.066** $\eta^2=0.033$
Religiosity	0.056** $\eta^2=0.019$	0.053** $\eta^2=0.018$	0.055*** $\eta^2=0.018$	0.046** $\eta^2=0.015$	0.045** $\eta^2=0.015$
Education	0.021*** $\eta^2=0.007$	0.018*** $\eta^2=0.006$	0.035*** $\eta^2=0.012$	0.022*** $\eta^2=0.007$	0.020*** $\eta^2=0.007$
Gender	0.032** $\eta^2=0.032$	0.037** $\eta^2=0.037$	0.056** $\eta^2=0.056$	0.053** $\eta^2=0.053$	0.045** $\eta^2=0.045$
Age Group	0.040** $\eta^2=0.013$	0.050** $\eta^2=0.017$	0.071** $\eta^2=0.024$	0.043** $\eta^2=0.014$	0.037** $\eta^2=0.012$
Event × Political Orientation	0.013*** $\eta^2=0.006$	0.003 $\eta^2=0.002$	0.007† $\eta^2=0.004$	0.006* $\eta^2=0.003$	0.005* $\eta^2=0.002$

Variable	Inland Terror	Bennet Gov.	Judicial reform §	Gallant Dismissal	Oct. 7th War
Test statistic: Pillai's Trace. η^2 = partial eta-squared (effect size). *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .10. § Panel analysis (same respondents across waves). Destabilizing event: {0/1}, Political Orientation: {left/center/right}, religiosity: {secular, traditional, religious, national religious, ultra-orthodox}, education: {elementary, high school, post-secondary nonacademic, academic, yeshiva, other}, gender: {male, female}, Age Group: {18-30, 31-45, 46-60, 60+}					

A summary of per-dimension ANOVA for the entire population (reveals that the ideology dimension is the most reactive to external shocks. inland terror ($F = 17.580$, $p < .001$), the fall of the Bennett government ($F = 5.255$, $p < .05$), and the October 7 war ($F = 4.685$, $p < .05$) produced significant shifts in ideological extremism. Interestingly, the violence dimension showed a significant main effect only during the inland terror event ($F = 5.054$, $p < .05$). In contrast, the intolerance dimension remained statistically stable across all events when looking at the population as a whole.

Table 2) reveals that the ideology dimension is the most reactive to external shocks. inland terror ($F = 17.580$, $p < .001$), the fall of the Bennett government ($F = 5.255$, $p < .05$), and the October 7 war ($F = 4.685$, $p < .05$) produced significant shifts in ideological extremism. Interestingly, the violence dimension showed a significant main effect only during the inland terror event ($F = 5.054$, $p < .05$). In contrast, the intolerance dimension remained statistically stable across all events when looking at the population as a whole.

Table 2: ANOVA results for each dimension (Entire population)⁵

Dimension	Inland Terror	Bennet Gov.	Judicial reform §	Gallant Dismissal	Oct. 7th War
Ideology	17.580*** (-0.100)	5.255* (+0.233)	0.261 (+0.001)	0.069 (-0.026)	4.685* (+0.233)
Violence	5.054* (+0.033)	1.445 (-0.038)	0.345 (+0.089)	0.571 (+0.014)	2.103 (+0.118)

⁵ The detailed results of the MANOVA analysis are provided in the SI appendix

Dimension	Inland Terror	Bennet Gov. Fall	Judicial reform §	Gallant Dismissal	Oct. 7th War
Intolerance	0.000 (-0.045)	0.000 (-0.005)	0.035 (+0.019)	0.000 (+0.047)	0.000 (+0.001)

Values are F-statistics with significance stars. Mean shifts (Wave 2 - Wave 1) on the 1–7 scale are provided in parentheses for event effects. *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .10.

When narrowing the analysis to the more extreme population (those extreme in at least two dimensions), the results (Table 3) change substantially, indicating much greater sensitivity to destabilizing events. During the inland terror event, all three dimensions showed highly significant shifts: ideology ($F = 32.186$, $p < .001$), violence ($F = 8.849$, $p < .01$), and intolerance ($F = 18.831$, $p < .001$). Compared to the entire population, the mean shifts among extremists were far more pronounced. For example, the ideology mean shift was -0.954 among extremists, compared to -0.100 among the general population. The larger magnitude of change among extremists confirms that focusing on the "extreme tail" uncovers radicalization processes—specifically in behavioral support for violence and social intolerance—that are masked when only observing population medians.

Table 3: ANOVA results for each dimension (Extremists population)

Dimension	Inland Terror	Bennet Gov. Fall	Judicial reform §	Gallant Dismissal	Oct. 7th War
Ideology	32.186*** (-0.954)	3.953* (+0.398)	0.676 (-0.381)	0.002 (+0.097)	1.125 (+0.321)
Violence	8.849** (+0.361)	2.740† (-0.427)	0.240 (+0.298)	1.537 (+0.114)	0.233 (+0.088)
Intolerance	18.831*** (+0.557)	1.656 (-0.186)	0.383 (+0.182)	0.193 (-0.067)	0.115 (-0.059)

Values are F-statistics with significance stars. Mean shifts (Wave 2 - Wave 1) on the 1–7 scale are provided in parentheses for event effects. *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; † p < .10.

The findings provide strong support for the three primary hypotheses. First, the dimensions of extremism respond heterogeneously. At the same time, ideology is sensitive across the board, and the social (intolerance) and behavioral (violence)

dimensions fluctuate significantly only within the extremist subset during major security threats. Second, the significant MANOVA interactions confirm that political orientation moderates how citizens react to these crises. Finally, the stark differences between the whole population and the extremist subset validate the research framework: analyzing the extreme tail is essential for a nuanced understanding of radicalization. While the general population may show only slight ideological shifts, the extremist subset exhibits significant fluctuations across all dimensions, particularly during periods of heightened security or political instability.

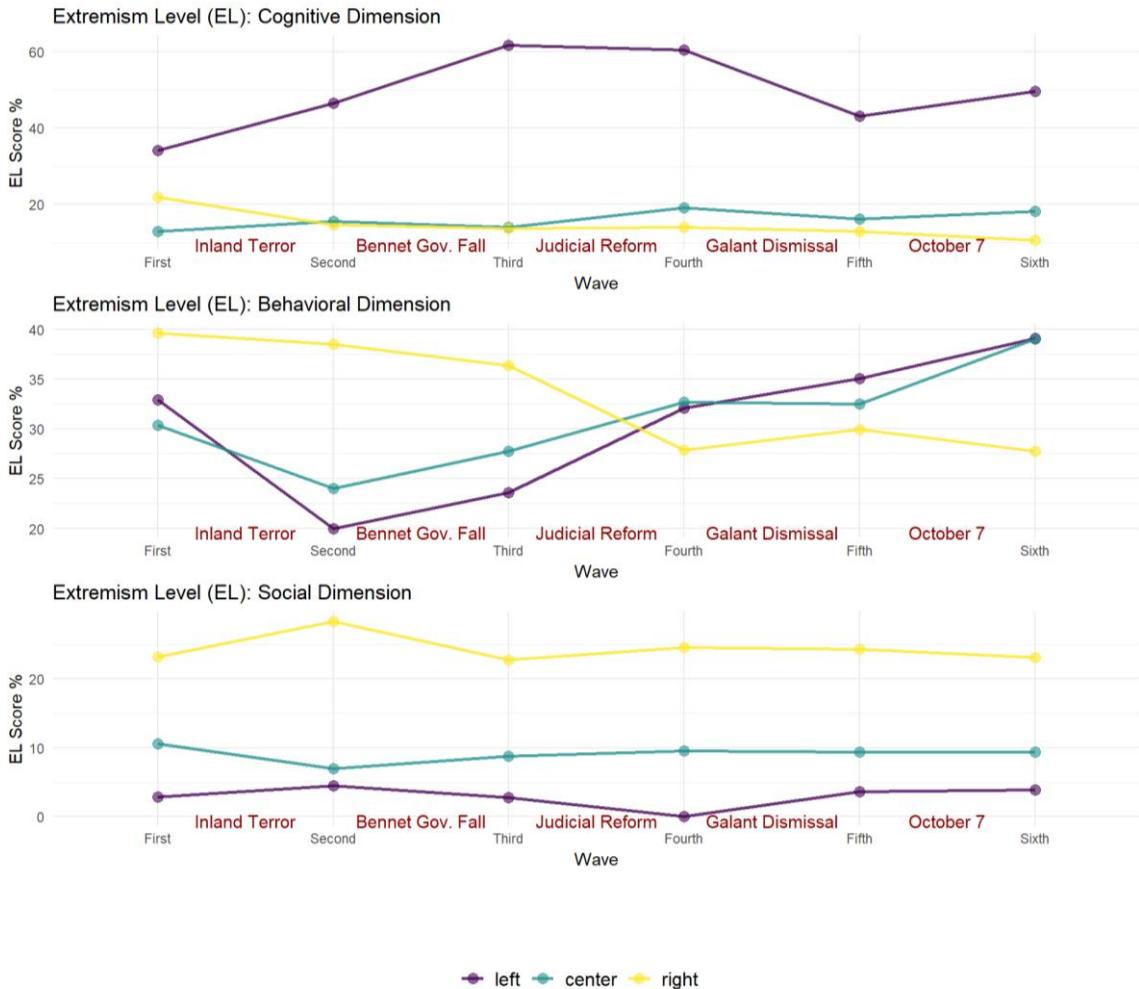
Dynamics of Political Extremism

To better understand the dynamics of political extremism associated with destabilizing events, this study conducted a longitudinal analysis of multiple gauge indices (Extremism Level, Extremism Intensity, and Extremism Rank).

Figure 5 shows political extremism across the six waves and for each dimension, examining the percentage of the population in the extreme tail (EL). In the cognitive dimension, the left exhibits the most volatile trend, with EL scores climbing sharply from 34% in the first wave to a peak of 62% in the third wave (Judicial Reform), before settling at 50% in the sixth wave (October 7 war). In contrast, the right shows a steady decline in ideological extremism, starting at 22% and reaching its lowest point of 11% by the sixth wave. The center remains relatively stable but low, fluctuating between 13% and 19%. In the behavioral dimension, both the left and the center show a long-term upward trajectory in support for violence; the left rises from 20% in the second wave to 39% in the sixth, while the center follows a similar path, ending at 39%. Conversely, the right's behavioral extremism decreases significantly from 40% in the first wave to 28% in the sixth. The social dimension reveals a persistent divide: the right maintains high levels of intolerance throughout, peaking at 28% in the second wave and ending at 23%, while the left remains

consistently low, even hitting 0% in the Fourth wave.

Figure 4: Dynamics of Extremism Levels

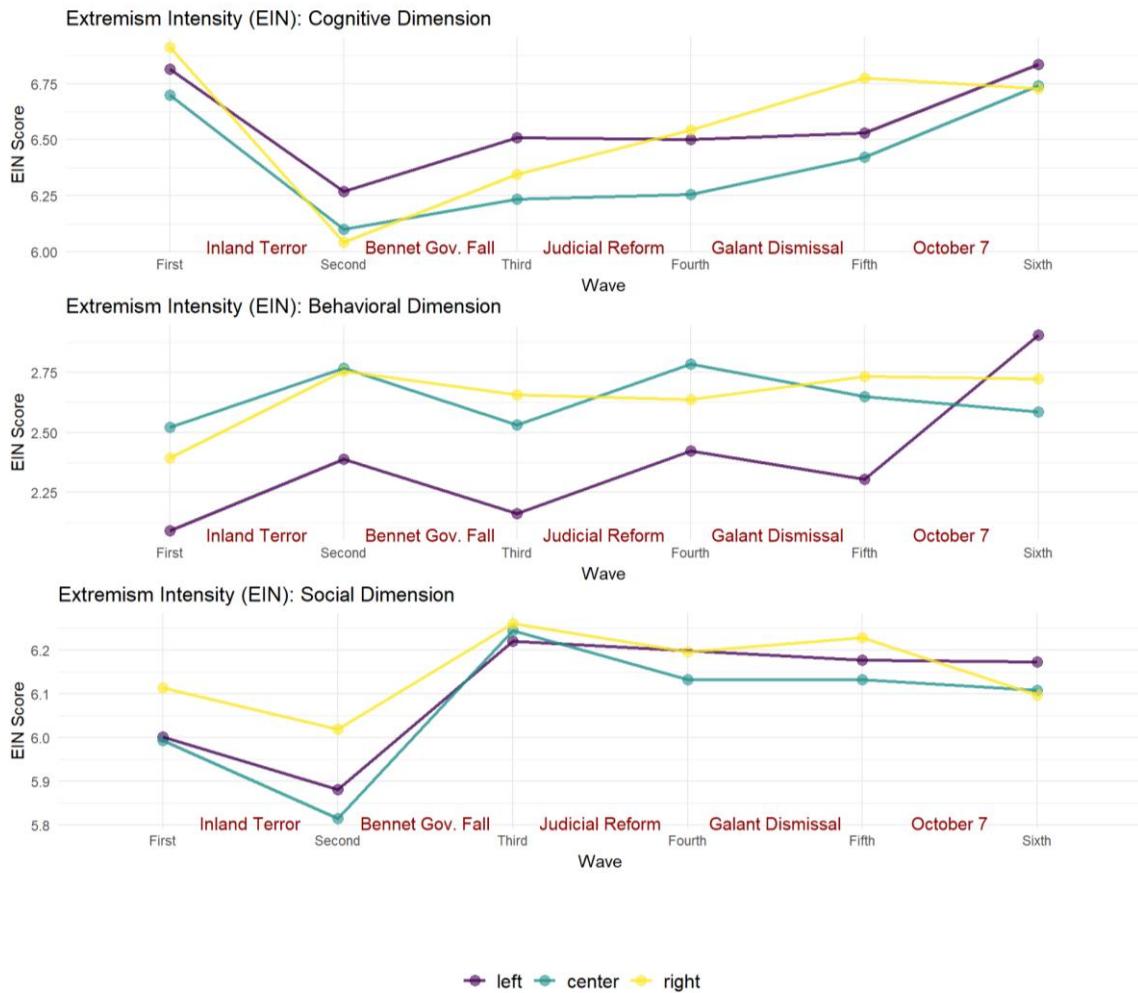


Comparing these trends across orientations highlights a "crisscross" effect between the left and right, depending on the dimension and event. For instance, while the left reacted to the judicial reform (third wave) with a massive surge in cognitive extremism (62%), the right actually saw a slight decrease in that same dimension (14%). However, in the social dimension, the right's extremism levels are consistently double or triple those of the center and left across all waves. behavioral extremism shows a unique convergence by the sixth wave, where the left (39%) and the center (39%) surpassed the right (28%) in their support for violence against the state or outgroups, suggesting that

the October 7 war and the preceding constitutional crises impacted the political center and left more aggressively in terms of behavioral radicalization.

Figure 5 shows the mean extremism score of the extreme tail (EIN). In the cognitive dimension, the intensity of extremism remains high and remarkably stable across all groups, with the left ranging from 6.81 to 6.84. At the same time, the right shows a slight recovery from a low of 6.04 in the second wave to 6.73 in the sixth.

Figure 5: Dynamics of extremism intensity



The behavioral dimension shows more movement, particularly for the left, where intensity peaks at 2.90 in the sixth wave (October 7 war) after a period of fluctuation. The center and right show more consistent intensity levels, with the right maintaining a score

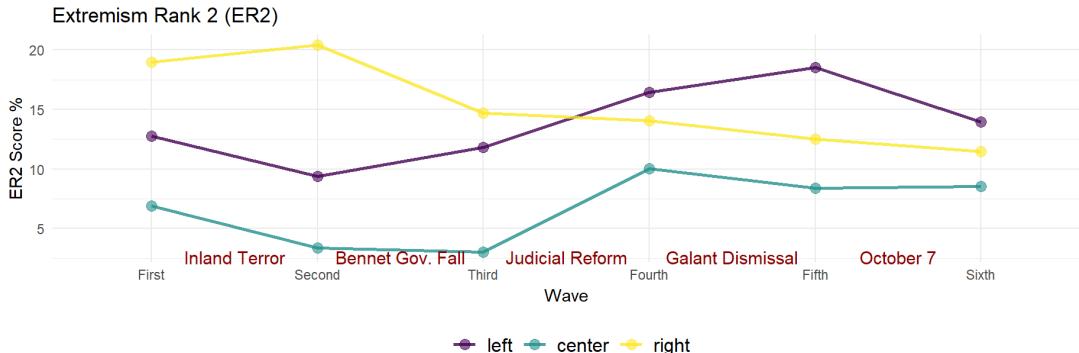
of 2.72 and the center at 2.58 by the final wave. In the social dimension, the right remains the most intense group throughout most of the study, peaking at 6.26 in the third wave. Following the Bennet government's fall, all three groups exhibit high, tightly clustered intensity scores around 6.1–6.25.

Comparing these trends reveals that while the number of extremists (EL) varies significantly by event, the intensity (EIN) of those who are extreme is relatively high and uniform across orientations. For example, in the social dimension, although the right has a much higher percentage of extremists than the left, those individuals on the left who are extreme are nearly as intense (6.17) as those on the right (6.10). In the behavioral dimension, a notable shift occurs in the sixth wave; the left's intensity (2.90) surpasses both the center (2.58) and the right (2.72), suggesting that the October 7 war not only increased the number of extreme individuals on the left but also deepened the severity of their support for violence.

The Extremism Rank 2 (ER2) data (

Figure 6), which tracks the percentage of respondents who are extreme in at least two dimensions, reveals distinct trajectories for each political orientation. The left shows an overall upward trend in multidimensional extremism, rising from 13% in the first wave to a peak of 19% in the fifth wave (Gallant dismissal), then declining to 14% in the sixth wave. The center follows a similar "hump" pattern, but at lower levels: starting at 7%, dipping to 3% during the judicial reform, then jumping significantly to 10% in the fourth wave, and ending at 9%. In contrast, the right exhibits a consistent and sharp decline in multidimensional extremism. The right began as the most extreme group at 19% and peaked at 20% in the second wave (fall of the Bennett government), but it steadily decreased thereafter, reaching its lowest point of 11% by the sixth wave (October 7 war).

Figure 6: Dynamics of the overall population ER2



Comparing these trends highlights a significant shift in the landscape of multidimensional extremism over time. In the first two waves, the right was significantly more likely to be extreme in multiple dimensions than the left and the center. However, by the fourth wave, the left (16%) surpassed the right (14%) and maintained that lead through the end of the study. The center's dramatic increase from the third wave (3%) to the fourth wave (10%) suggests that specific constitutional and political crises, such as the Gallant dismissal, acted as powerful catalysts for multidimensional radicalization among non-right-wing citizens. By the sixth wave, the left (14%) and the right (11%) have moved closer together in their ER2 scores, though they arrived at those scores from opposite directions.

Characteristics of the Extremist Population

The research examined the characteristics (political orientation, outgroup, gender, and age) of the more extremist population group, which had at least two dimensions with scores above the extremism threshold (EP). The most striking trend is the shift in the political identity of ER2 extremists. In the first three waves, the right-wing heavily dominates this group, peaking at 82.27% in the second wave. However, starting with the judicial reform (Wave 4), this dominance drops sharply to 58.42% and stays below 60% thereafter. Simultaneously, the left-wing presence in the ER2 group nearly doubles, rising from 10.45% to a peak of 22.89% by the fifth wave. This suggests that constitutional

crises "recruit" individuals from the left and center into multidimensional extremism, making the extreme tail more politically diverse over time.

Intolerance toward Israeli Arabs within the ER2 population shows a clear reactive pattern to security vs. political threats. In the second wave (inland terror), over half (52.27%) of the ER2 population identified Israeli Arabs as their least-liked group. In comparison, only 33.62% of the general population shared this specific outgroup preference. This figure dropped significantly during the judicial reform and Gallant dismissal (Waves 4 and 5) as political outgroups became more salient. However, it surged back to 37.88% following the October 7 war. This highlights how security threats refocus extremist hostility toward ethnic outgroups, while political crises temporarily diffuse that focus.

There is a profound gap between support for violence against the state and the outgroup. While the ER2 population shows relatively low support for attacking state institutions (peaking at 1.93), their support for violence against their outgroup is extreme, reaching 6.86 in the second wave. Even at its lowest point in the fifth wave (4.46), it remains significantly higher than any other violence metric. This indicates that multidimensional extremism in this context is primarily "horizontal" (targeting different social groups) rather than "vertical" (targeting the state regime).

The gender distribution within the ER2 group remains consistently skewed toward men when compared to the general population. While the overall population is split evenly at approximately 50%, the ER2 group is heavily male-dominated, reaching 66.04% in the third wave. Even as the political orientation of this group shifted and the total number of extremists fluctuated, the male majority remained robust, never falling below 56%.

Finally, the age of the ER2 population reveals a significant shift in the demographic profile of multidimensional extremists as destabilizing events progressed. In the initial waves, the extreme tail was younger than the general population, with a median age of 36.00 in the first wave. However, the median age increased steadily during the later periods, jumping from 37.50 during the fall of the government to 43.00 during the Judicial Reform. This demographic aging peaked after the October 7th war, where the median age of ER2 extremists reached 49.00, surpassing the general population median of 47.00. These findings suggest that while initial extremism may have been more prevalent among younger individuals, later constitutional crises and existential security threats radicalized older populations.

Robustness Tests

The primary robustness test⁶ evaluates the gauge's ability to identify the distribution tail of political extremism. The test uses a Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to identify various extremism profiles within the population. A strong association between specific extremist profiles and the extremism ranking indices (ER1, ER2, and ER3) will validate the core of the political extremism gauge. The results of the LPA Analysis revealed three distinct profiles along the dimensions of political extremism, achieving a strong classification quality. The analysis indicates a robust relationship between profile membership and extremist classification.

A second robustness test addresses the sensitivity of the research results to the boundary definition of the political orientation variable. An alternative configuration (Political Orientation 2) expanded the "center" category to include values 3-5, while narrowing the "right" (1-2) and "left" (6-7) categories to represent more distinct ideological poles. The results of the robustness analysis largely confirm the stability of

⁶ Detailed results of the robustness tests are provided in the SI appendix.

the original model - the core conclusions remain intact, particularly the heterogeneous response of extremism dimensions to significant external shocks.

The third robustness test ensured that the observed fluctuations in political extremism across the six waves represent genuine reactions to constitutional and security crises rather than artifacts of shifting sample composition. We employed two distinct methodological paths: (i) Internal Validity Path (Mechanistic Robustness), utilizing an "Equal Balancing" approach where the proportions of political groups (left, center, right) were set to be identical (33.3% each) across every wave. (ii) External Validity Path (Population Robustness) applying a "Targeted Balancing" approach using The Israeli Democracy Index 2024⁷ (20% left, 28% center, 52% right). The results across all three dimensions of extremism, cognitive, behavioral, and social, indicate high structural stability, confirming that the study findings are not sensitive to sampling fluctuations.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, it uses a quasi-experimental design based on naturally occurring destabilizing events. This approach provides stronger validity. However, it prevents definitive causal inferences. Potential confounding factors may affect the results. These include concurrent societal changes or media influences. The analysis does not fully account for these factors.

Additionally, the data are derived exclusively from self-reported survey measures among Jewish Israelis, introducing risks of social desirability bias, particularly in responses to sensitive items related to political violence and intolerance. The novel political extremism gauge, although validated through latent profile analysis, remains context-specific to Israel's political landscape and requires further testing in other democratic settings to

⁷ The Israeli Democracy Index 2024 / Analysis of Voting Trends and Intentions in Israel: Review of 2024 <https://en.idi.org.il/media/26705/madd-d2024-eng05print.pdf>

establish broader applicability. Finally, the study's focus on short-term effects across six waves spanning 2021 to 2024 may overlook longer-term extremism trajectories or cumulative impacts of the events.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that extremism is not a static trait but a reactive phenomenon that shifts in nature and intensity in correlation with socio-political destabilizing events. While the right initially showed higher levels of multidimensional extremism, the domestic constitutional crises—specifically the judicial reform and the Gallant dismissal—shifted the "extremism burden" toward the left and center. By the sixth wave (October 7 war), a notable convergence occurred: the left and center reached their highest levels of behavioral extremism (support for violence), while the right's extremism across most indices trended downward. The divergent patterns suggest that the perceived threat to democratic institutions and national security catalyzed left-wing radicalization. At the same time, the right experienced relative moderation, or "cooling," in its extremist tail during the transition from opposition to government.

The political status of this group and the emergence of a unifying national crisis can explain the observed moderation of right-wing extremism during the later waves of the study (Cavari & Efrat, 2026). As the right-wing transitioned from opposition to the governing coalition, the institutionalization of their political goals through state-led initiatives, such as the Judicial Reform, likely reduced the perceived necessity for non-normative or extremist tactics. Furthermore, the onset of the October 7 war triggered a "Rally 'round the flag" effect, a phenomenon where existential security threats temporarily suppress domestic ideological friction in favor of national cohesion.

The finding that the political center surpassed the right-wing in behavioral extremism by the final wave suggests that the center is not immune to radicalization.

Scholars describe this process as mutual radicalization, where extreme actions or perceived threats from one political faction fuel increasingly radical responses from opposing or moderate groups (NordForsk, 2024; Pfundmair et al., 2024). In the Israeli context, the domestic constitutional crises and security failures appear to have acted as catalysts for this mechanism. When pro-democratic citizens in the political center perceive existential threats to democratic institutions, their psychological and behavioral responses change. If conventional political channels—such as standard elections or parliamentary debate—appear insufficient to protect democratic governance, these individuals may adopt more extreme attitudes and support non-normative behaviors.

Intergroup threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) further clarifies this trend. In highly polarized environments, one group can perceive the same event as a victory while another can perceive it as an existential threat (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009). For the center and the left, the judicial reform was not a policy disagreement but a symbolic and realistic threat to their cultural and political safety. This perception lowered the threshold for endorsing radical tactics. These findings suggest that multidimensional extremism in modern democracies is often a reactive phenomenon triggered by the perceived collapse of institutional safeguards.

The analysis of the Extremism Level (EL) and Extremism Intensity (EIN) provides critical insight into the mechanisms of radicalization correlated with destabilizing events. Extremism can spread through recruitment and demobilization mechanisms, increasing the size of the tail, or through intensification of existing radical beliefs and behaviours of the extremist population. Different events, as well as the same event within different political orientation groups, can trigger different mechanisms. The

analysis of population transitions to/from the extremist group of the survey panel waves (three and four) clearly demonstrates⁸ this understanding.

Conclusions

The results support the study's three hypotheses. First, various dimensions of extremism respond heterogeneously to socio-political events. The judicial reform caused a massive spike in the left's cognitive extremism but had a negligible impact on their social extremism. At the same time, the Gallant dismissal served as a primary driver of behavioral radicalization in the center, but it caused the left's social extremism to drop to zero. The contrasting patterns prove that extremism is not a monolithic rise across all fronts but a targeted reaction in specific dimensions. Second, political orientation moderates these responses, as evidenced by the inverse reactions seen in the ER2 and cognitive tables. The fall of the Bennett government radicalized the right (peaking at 20.43 in ER2) but moderated the left. Conversely, the judicial reform and Gallant dismissal radicalized the left and center, while the right's metrics largely declined or remained flat. Orientation determines whether individuals perceive an event as a victory (moderating) or an existential threat (radicalizing). Third, analyzing the more extreme part of the population enables a more nuanced understanding. The robustness analysis firmly established the gauge's ability to identify the distribution's more extreme tail of political extremism. The gauge indices (EL, EIN, ER) revealed shifts that standard mean-based analysis would likely miss.

Understanding what drives the dynamics of political extremism requires further investigation to establish the causal mechanisms underlying our findings and the relationships between threat perceptions and the effects of political events on extremism.

⁸ Detailed analysis of extremists' transitions is provided in the SI appendix

Future research shall further test the gauge to determine whether the relative indices can minimize bias when conducting comparative research across different countries or extended time frames.

The study contributes to the academic discourse on political extremism by providing a universal methodology for monitoring extremism and providing a theoretical basis for understanding how socio-political destabilizing events heterogeneously affect distinct population groups. The use of a new multidimensional framework that integrates cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions captures the dynamic interplay of radicalization processes. Analysis of the population's "extreme tail" reveals nuanced trends in radicalization that standard mean-based analyses often obscure. These contributions strengthen democratic resilience, identifying political extremism surges during times of national disruption.

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