




# THE DUPLEX STRUCTURE OF MODERN POLITICAL EXTREMISM

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## ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the identification of common grounds in the system of political extremism and making a distinction between the goals pursued by its left- and right-wing directions. The main results: detection of the wide and narrow approaches to the interpretation of the definition of political extremism, synthesis of its universal features, authorial understanding of the category of political extremism, and identification of the unity and struggle of opposites in the essence of political extremism.

**Keywords:** Political extremism. Left-wing political extremism. Right-wing political extremism. Power. Terrorism.

## ESTRUTURA DUPLEX DO EXTREMISMO POLÍTICO MODERNO

### LA ESTRUCTURA DÚPLEX DEL EXTREMISMO POLÍTICO MODERNO

#### RESUMO

O artigo foca na identificação de fundamentos comuns no sistema de extremismo político e fazendo uma distinção entre os objetivos perseguidos por suas direções de esquerda e de direita. Os principais resultados: detecção das abordagens amplas e estreitas à interpretação da definição de extremismo político, síntese de suas características universais, compreensão autoral da categoria do extremismo político e identificação da unidade e luta dos opostos na essência do extremismo político.

**Palavras-chave:** Extremismo político. Extremismo político de esquerda. Extremismo político de direita. Poder. Terrorismo.

#### RESUMEN

El artículo se centra en la identificación de motivos comunes en el sistema del extremismo político y en hacer una distinción entre los objetivos perseguidos por sus direcciones de izquierda y derecha. Los principales resultados: detección de los enfoques amplios y estrechos de la interpretación de la definición del extremismo político, síntesis de sus características universales, comprensión autoral de la categoría de extremismo político e identificación de la unidad y lucha de los opuestos en la esencia del extremismo político.

**Palabras-clave:** Extremismo político. Extremismo político de izquierda. Extremismo político de derecha. Poder. Terrorismo.

## INTRODUCTION

The number of political parties that choose extreme forms of violence and are affiliated with political extremism is growing on a global scale. The feelings of uncertainty and fear characteristic of extremists prompt them to pursue their ideological goal with zeal and conviction (McGREGOR, PRENTICE & NASH, 2013), which is typical of both left- and right-wing political extremism (VAN PROOIJEN, KROUWEL, BOITEN & EENDEBAK, 2015). As a result, extremism slows down any political changes, hinders and suppresses the autonomous commitment of groups and individuals, at least when it stands in the way of ambitions harbored by the ruling class (SHILS, 1996; LIPSET & RAAB, 1978). It should be noted that people may resort to violent extremism to resist their own feelings and restore their own and especially group-related lost economic, social, and psychological significance (JASKO, LAFREE & KRUGLANSKI, 2017). However, it is important to point out here that relative deprivation does not always lead to violent extremism or other forms of counter-normative behavior (POWER, 2018; VAN PROOIJEN & KUIJPER, 2020).

Political extremism is a multi-vector socio-political movement that originated together with the institution of the state and is based on political beliefs. As it was noted by A. Kruglanski, it is the significance of political beliefs that plays an important role in behaviorism (HETIARACHCHI & GUNARATRA, 2014; KRUGLANSKI, CHEN, DECHESENE, FISHMAN & OREHEK, 2009). Commitment to the main goal often suggests a willingness to make a personal sacrifice to serve one's ideology, even if includes harming members of outer groups (GINGES, HANSEN &

NORENZAYAN, 2010).

Participation in political extremism (KRUGLANSKI, JASKO, CHERNIKOVA, DUGAS & WEBBER, 2017) requires both sufficient motivation and abilities. Therefore, it is motivated by the necessity to feel one's own significance, in other words, to feel respected and valued (KRUGLANSKI, GELFAND, BÉLANGER, SHEVELAND, HETIARACHCHI & GUNARATRA, 2014). In the context of intensification of the political struggle between different forces, political extremism seems to be virtually the only solution to the emerging problems. It is connected with the fact that its adherents stick to absolutist and dogmatic beliefs, tend to dismiss contrary ideological views as secondary (VAN PROOIJEN & KROUWEL, 2017), and conceptualize political issues in clear-cut homogeneous categories (LAMMERS, KOCH, CONWAY & BRANDT, 2017).

The inability, and sometimes unwillingness, of some participants of the political process to satisfy their growing demands and ambitions within the legal forms and authorities, urges them on the slippery and quick slope of radicalization with further use of violence. As a result, two types of threats are formed in the public consciousness: symbolic and realistic ones. Symbolic threats arise as a response to threats to cultural norms, traditions, and the system of beliefs (STEPHAN & STEPHAN, 1993), while realistic threats originate when a group perceives other groups as a threat to its social well-being and deficient resources (OBAIDI, BERGH, SIDANIUS & THOMSEN, 2018). For instance, right-wing nationalist ideologies are inseparable from territorial revisionism and fear of extinction of the nation, i.e. collective angst (WOHL, SQUIRES & CAQUETTE, 2012). The hypothesis of this research is the following: modern political extremism is characterized by a strongly pronounced duplex structure (left- and right-wing) built on the same foundation.

## METHODS

The methodological basis of this research is represented by retrospective analysis of scientific works exploring the nature and essence of political extremism. The systemic comprehensive approach was chosen as the main research method. The usage of this approach allowed us to develop the structure of the “Maltese cross” of the essence of political extremism and fill it with content, while the resolution to portray the subject and scope of research consistently in the course of analysis of the objective reality of modern politically-motivated extremist activities allowed us to identify the correlation between left- and right-wing extremism and based on the obtained results create a scheme showing the duplex nature of political extremism.

## RESULTS

The research has shown that in theory and practice there is no universal approach to political extremism as a social phenomenon; in this connection, we suggest the following broad and narrow interpretations of the definition of political extremism. *In a broad sense*, political extremism is a form of political activity that does not recognize the main political principles or the constitutional order based on respect for human rights and freedoms and supports social isolation based on ideological, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other differences. *In a narrow sense*, it is an illegitimate and illegal form of activity carried out by political actors aimed at changing the existing political regime and system using violent methods and stirring up conflicts in a society based on identification features. If we apply the systematic cognitive approach to these two definitions, we can identify *the general features of political extremism*:

- *ignoring the democratic values that ensure equality of people, their legal status, and dignity in the course of attempts upon the legitimate and legal political framework with the use of violent means;*
- *rejecting the paradigm of tolerance, fairness, honesty, and usage of such extreme forms as nationalism, racism, social-class antagonism, and radicalism to achieve the goals of extremism and representing its integral part;*
- *propagation of degradation and discrimination of personality and identity in the course of fighting against all those people who do not agree with the simple and easily understood ideology as well as rejecting consensus that can be achieved while looking for ways of eliminating political contradictions.*

Relying on the assumption that safety needs are connected with culturally right-wing attitudes but economically left-wing views (MALKA, SOTO, INZLICHT & LELKES, 2014), we have concluded that political extremism is rooted in the political culture of power and opposition, which in many democratic countries is now lacking the tradition

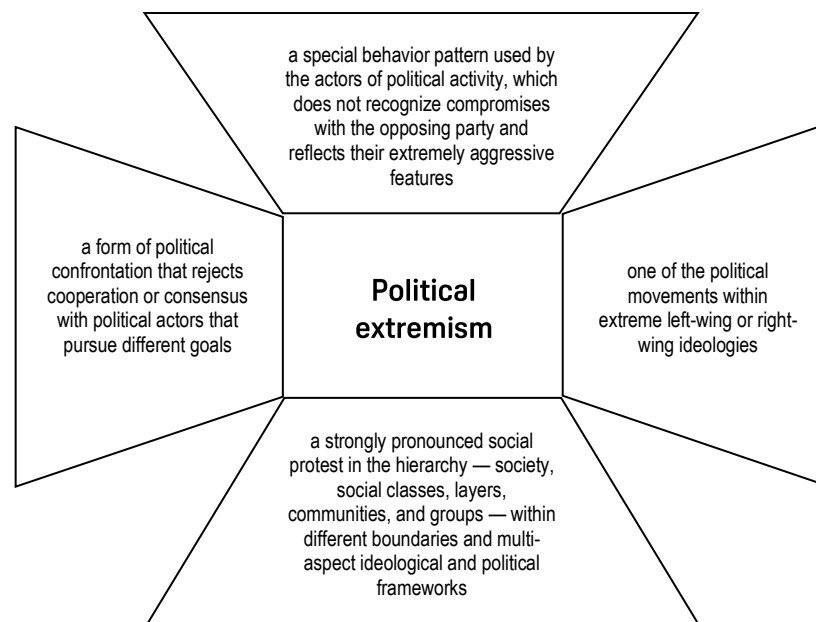
of tolerance and political compromise and can be manifested both at *individual and group levels* (political parties, alliances, movements, etc.):

- at the *individual level*— a set of attitudes contrasting sharply with the rules and norms of the political behavior of citizens generally accepted by society;
- at the *group level*— the core of party ideology incorporated into the program of its practical implementation and manifested in the ways how the political activity is conducted by social groups that function as actors of the political process.

Given the above, we suggest that *political extremism* should be understood as a phenomenon that fits the following description (“the Maltese cross” of the essence of political extremism, Figure 1):

- *a special behavior pattern used by the actors of political activity, which does not recognize compromises with the opposing party and reflects their extremely aggressive features;*
- *one of the political movements within extreme left-wing or right-wing ideologies;*
- *a form of political confrontation that rejects cooperation or consensus with political actors that pursue different goals;*
- *a strongly pronounced social protest in the hierarchy — society, social classes, layers, communities, and groups — within different boundaries and multi-aspect ideological and political frameworks.*

Figure 1. “The Maltese cross” of the essence of political extremism



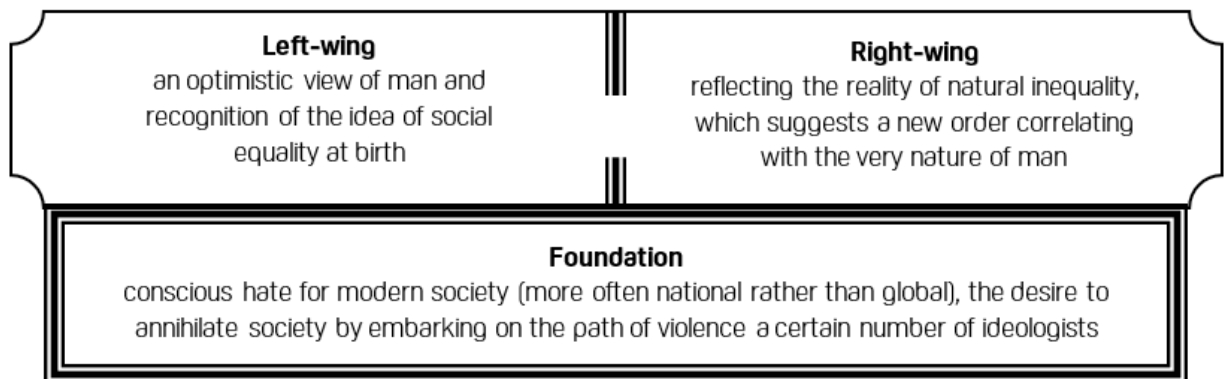
Source: Search data.

In our opinion, the reason for the emergence of extremist political parties in a certain country lies in the disappointment of society and the inability of state institutions to direct social energy towards standard democratic political practices. The actions taken by such parties are emotional, and their members have a subjective feeling that their interests have not been considered, while their activity represents a response to the marginalization of certain social groups within institutional policy. M. Brandt (BRANDT, REYNA, CHAMBERS, CRAWFORD & WETHERELL, 2014) shares a similar point of view and points out that both left-wing and right-wing political extremists are characterized by a relatively high level of prejudice against ideologically different groups. Robert F. Kennedy wrote in his book “The Pursuit of Justice” (1964), “What is objectionable, what is dangerous about extremists is not that they are extreme, but that they are intolerant. The evil is not what they say about their cause, but what they say about their opponents”. The research has shown that right-wing political extremism of the 21st century is an asocial phenomenon with *new characteristics*:

1. *It is rooted in the consequences of the long-running world economic crisis and a set of problems in the political sphere faced by modern states.*
2. *Its purpose is to maintain social discontent with state power within certain boundaries as well as high social inequality.*
3. *It highlights the presence of a systemic and structural crisis in the country, growing social disappointment, and fear for the future.*
4. *It is an opponent of a democratic constitutional state.*
5. *It is characterized by an authoritarian understanding of state and the opinion that one's belonging to a certain ethnic group, nation, or race determines this person's value and that individual rights and social care are giving way to collectivist "public-communal" patterns (anticulturalism).*

Comparative research into the left and right vectors of political extremism has shown that these two antipodal phenomena, despite all their differences, have three common features (Figure 2): *conscious hate for modern society (more often national rather than global); the desire to annihilate society by embarking on the path of violence; a certain number of ideologists* (Proudhon, Lenin, Gramsci, Stalin, Che Guevara, Mao Tse-Tung, Debord, etc.). In all other respects, their visions of the world are radically different. Left-wing extremists share an optimistic view of man and stick to Rousseau's idea of perfect equality at birth. Right-wing extremists, on the contrary, insist on reflecting the reality of natural inequality and call for a new order correlating with the very nature of man.

Figure 2. The duplex of political extremism



Source: Search data.

We have also concluded that in the 21st century, there is no room for a genuine division between left- and right-wing extremists. Certainly, there are dividing lines, but they are neither dogmatic nor reflecting longstanding classifications. This difference should rather be called a controversy caused by diverging interests of political groups in terms of their true political representation.

## DISCUSSION

Two kinds of political extremism are analyzed in the scientific literature: *left-wing* and *right-wing*. However, scientists do not have a single point of view as to what level of dogmatic intolerance is the most characteristic of left-wing and right-wing political extremists. For example, J.-W. Van Prooijen (VAN PROOIJEN & KUIJPER, 2020) believes that left-wing extremists do not show a high level of dogmatic intolerance, whereas M. Rollwage (ROLLWAGE, DOLAN & FLEMING, 2018) and other scientists insist that both right- and left-wing political extremists are characterized by a high level of dogmatic intolerance.

### Left-wing political extremism and its trends

The left wing of political extremism usually sticks to "liberal" or "progressive" views relying on the assumption

that people are generally good, and the government is responsible for all its citizens to a certain degree. The ideology of this movement is based on the values and traditions of the socialist, communist, and labor movements, feminism, gender equality, the environmental movement and sustainable development, peace and international solidarity, human rights, humanism and antifascism, progressive and liberal thinking. The main aim of this movement is to change the existing state and social structure by replacing democracy with the communist or anarchic system.

In the 21st century, the number of adherents to left-wing political extremism is growing. For instance, in Europe, there is a whole radical left-wing network, whose activity is well-coordinated. Only in 2016 within the territory of Germany (population — 81.4 million people), there were 28,500 left-wing extremists, 8,500 of whom were considered to be violent. Left-wing extremist organizations exist in Italy, Greece, Sweden, Switzerland, and other countries. The Europol's European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report mentions "a dramatic growth" in terrorist attacks performed by members of left-wing extremist groups from 2015 to 2016. However, it should be noted that not all kinds of radical left-wing extremists are considered equally violent. Analyses of terrorist attacks committed between 1998 and 2005 revealed that "leftist" groups were significantly less likely to kill than religious groups, and anarchist groups were the least likely to engage in lethal attacks (WEBBER, KRUGLANSKI, A., MOLINARIO & JASKO, 2020). At the same time, according to Europol, anarchist groups are more violent than other left-wing extremist movements.

A characteristic feature of the current stage of development of left-wing political organizations is their focus on countering globalization processes. It is due to this reason that left-wing anarchist extremists have been displaying an increasingly growing activity over the last few decades. In many countries across the globe, especially in the urban environments, there are dozens if not hundreds of thousands of adherents to anarchism. Anarchist groups have even emerged in the countries where there had never been any of these: Nigeria, Turkey, Lebanon, and Bangladesh. Another trend of left-wing extremism in the 21st century is the emergence of structures integrating all main ideological directions of this kind of extremism and opposing the processes of modern globalization — the anti-globalization movement, which includes about three thousand organizations all over the world. The most popular one is ATTAC, whose aim is to fight with "the devil's trinity": the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and global companies. Another large-scale movement is "Reclaim the Streets", which zealously demands forgiveness of external debts of third world countries, which, as members of this organization believe, accumulated as a result of policies imposed on them by the IMF officials and EU leaders.

In some Southeast Asian and Latin American countries, left-wing extremist structures are no less active. Maoist extremist groupings operate here, focusing on guerrilla forms of armed struggle ("people's war" theory) and the leading role of the peasantry in such struggle ("surrounding the cities from the countryside"). As a result, terrorist attacks continue in Myanmar, Malaysia, the Philippines, and some other Southeast Asian countries. Left-wing radical structures act similarly in Latin American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, etc. For instance, in Columbia since the 1960s there is an active rebel movement initiated by left-wing pro-communist extremists. In Europe, left-wing extremist structures are the most active in Germany, where ideological heirs of the Red Army Faction (RAF) have been formed: the German Communist Party, the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany, Socialist Alternative, and others. A study released by the Free University of Berlin (February 2015) shows that about 20% of respondents believe that revolution is the only way of implementing reforms aimed at improvement of living conditions, 20% see the rise of a new fascism in Germany as a real danger, over 30% agree that capitalism inevitably leads to poverty and hunger, and 48% are worried about the deep-rooted xenophobia in modern-day Germany (SURVEY RESULTS: ONE FIFTH OF GERMANS WANT REVOLUTION).

By taking part in social and political debates and protests, left-wing political extremists try to make their position more acceptable for society, recruit new members or supporters and use them to achieve their goals, one of which is to increase the public recognition of their methods. To achieve their strategic objectives, they make use of active alliances and campaigns. The international network of protests is also an important component of their strategy. Apart from that, in recent times, left-wing political extremist organizations have started to involve young people actively, who were earlier out of the scope of their attention and influence. They also started resorting to more violent and less ideological youth culture. Meanwhile, only 5% of young voters in Hungary, 6% in Poland, and 9% in Slovakia believe that joining a political party would make a difference compared to an average of 12% across the EU, according to a Eurobarometer poll (WHY CENTRAL EUROPE'S YOUTH ROLL RIGHT).

## Right-wing political extremism and its trends

The right wing, which promulgates conservative or regressive views, is characterized by faith in selfish human nature and the belief that achieving a goal is equivalent to a certain price. Its behaviorism is based on the nationalist approach and anti-socio-cultural pluralism favoring restrictive immigration policy (MINKENBERG, 2013; GREVEN, 2016). The slogan of right-wing extremists is the following: “The government should not force more productive citizens to subsidize less entrepreneurial ones”. It should be noted that the forms of manifestation of this movement are various: terrorism; taking hostages; picketing, blocking, and causing damage to state or administrative institutions and buildings of foreign offices; mass riots; public calls for the seizure of power through violence; threats to political leaders, activists, statesmen, and public figures, and other kinds of violence.

Scientists consider right views to be “a normal pathology” of liberal industrial societies and as a “potential” inherent in the western world and at the same time contrary to its values (GREVEN et al., 1967). The brightest illustrations of this phenomenon include the growth of right-wing extremism in the West and the influence of ISIS in the Middle East (YEE, 2019). Right-wing political extremism is based on the ideology of neo-Nazism, racism, and chauvinism; its main distinctive feature is extreme aggressiveness of its doctrinal patterns and total destruction of the opposing forces. Right-wing political extremism manifests itself in the UK and Germany to the greatest degree, where neo-Nazis represent a wide range of parties, organizations, and movements, the activities of which are aimed at “cleaning” society of other ethnic and religious groups — in the first place, immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East. In this respect, it is telling that the most famous neo-Nazi groupings, such as Blood and Honor, Combat 18, the skinhead movement, etc., originated in the UK and spread all over the world from this country.

About 11% of German citizens feel nostalgic about the time of the Nazi Reich (SURVEY: ABOUT 11% OF GERMAN CITIZENS WOULD LIKE A “FUEHRER” TO RULE THE COUNTRY). Other European countries also suffer from right-wing extremism: Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Ukraine. The main activity of right-wing extremists in these countries is focused on clashes with law enforcement forces, violence against the black population and immigrants, Islamophobia, revising the history of fascism, neo-Nazism, and ethnic cleansing. Metastases of right-wing extremism, including neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism, and racism, can also be found in the USA, where over 800 extremist organizations are promulgating the ideology of hate for representatives of other races and religions. Right-wing politicians, who oppose immigration and promote the policy under the slogan “in the first place for original residents” gain voters’ support (HERVIK, 2011; LENTIN & TITLEY, 2011). Blatant racism and white nationalism they promulgate have found new communication channels in social media and developed plenty of platforms on the Internet (HORSTI& NIKUNEN, 2013; KESKINEN, 2014). As a rule, they use skinheads and so-called *kibole* — an aggressive controllable wing of football fans; to promote anti-Islamic views, they focus on the rights of homosexuals. (NOROCEL, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

As we see, modern left-wing and right-wing kinds of extremism have antipodal goals; however, despite this, they share a common foundation, which includes conscious hate for one’s own society and the desire to annihilate it — in the first place, by using radical forms of violence. Therefore, we believe that the hypothesis of this research has been proved.

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