

The Structure of Violent Extremist Ideologies

Violent extremist ideologies, rationales, and arguments typically are made of up of six core assertions or rhetorical elements. Generally, all six elements are necessary to persuade, radicalize, and mobilize people to conduct violent attacks; the loss or removal of one or more of the elements collapses the argument and undercuts the appeal of the ideology.

- Violent extremists use these six elements to argue that *the world has gone wrong because of the actions of an enemy who hates or threatens what is good. Now is the time when violence is necessary to prevent catastrophe. If we stay true to our righteous course, we will prevail.*

The chart below outlines each of these elements, what they provide to a violent extremist’s rationale, and what the rationale lacks once each element is removed.

ELEMENT	MESSAGE	WHAT THE ELEMENT DOES	ELEMENT IS NECESSARY BECAUSE
Decline	<i>The world has gone wrong ...</i>	Interprets someone’s world as decimated or in jeopardy.	Without <i>Decline</i> , the violent extremist sees no need to rescue their world.
Two Camps	<i>... because of the actions of an enemy who hates or threatens what is good.</i>	Identifies and demonizes an enemy who is to blame for the decline and depicts those who resist that enemy as heroic.	Without <i>Two Camps</i> , there is no enemy to combat.
Crisis Point	<i>Now is the time ...</i>	Creates a sense of panic that action must be taken now to save that world, and says all one holds dear now hangs in the balance.	Without <i>Crisis Point</i> , there is no sense that immediate action is required.
Method	<i>... when violence is necessary to prevent catastrophe.</i>	Provides the appropriate—even heroic—way to resist.	Without <i>Method</i> , there is no clearly defined way to resist the enemy.
Danger of Contamination	<i>If we stay true to our righteous course ...</i>	Prevents compromise or moderation of violent extremist views by depicting them as treason or complicity with the enemy or dangerous to the movement’s success, the salvation of the world, or one’s own soul.	Without <i>Danger of Contamination</i> , dialogue and compromise with perceived enemies is allowable to reach goals.
Reward	<i>... we will prevail.</i>	Provides a motivating image of victory or paradise for the movement or individual.	Without <i>Reward</i> , there is no goal to work toward.