

Signals of Peace, Echoes of Violence: Distinguishing Visionary from Blind Extremism

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Periods of violent conflict generate not only casualties but competing moral visions. Some forms of extremism challenge injustice and imagine new moral orders; others defend threatened identities through destruction. This paper integrates psychological theory on extremism with longitudinal evidence from the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to clarify when radical commitment becomes visionary and when it devolves into fanaticism. Using quarterly surveys of Israelis and Palestinians (2000–2025) alongside time-series analyses of terror attacks and casualties, we find that attitudes do not merely mirror events, they anticipate them. Among Palestinians, support for violent resistance predicted later increases in terror attacks, while belief in a peaceful resolution and in the viability of a two-state solution forecasted reductions in violence. Among Jewish Israelis, rising support for peace negotiations preceded higher casualty rates, suggesting that gestures toward compromise may provoke extremist backlash before they can bear fruit. These patterns reveal two psychological pathways of extremism. *Blind fanaticism*, rooted in existential threat and group survival motives, transforms fear into aggression and sustains cycles of violence. *Visionary extremism*, by contrast, emerges from moral conviction and persists despite physical threat, seeking to transcend rather than avenge it. The alternating signals of peace and echoes of violence in public opinion reflect these competing impulses: defensive zeal versus transformative courage. Recognizing how societies oscillate between them may help identify moments when radical idealism can guide collective transformation rather than ignite renewed conflict.