

A Tale of Two Outcomes: Understanding and Countering Extremist Narratives



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This chapter considers conceptualizations of extremism; discusses a variety of processes that can lead to extreme beliefs and extremist actions; explains how extreme beliefs and behaviors are often embedded within narratives that are grounded in strong motives and amplified by particular intense emotions (using narratives employed by Donald Trump as an example); and concludes by offering suggestions for countering extremist views.

1 Conceptualizations of Extreme Beliefs and Extremist Actions

According to the American Heritage Dictionary (n.d.-a), the first meaning of the word *extreme* is “Most remote in any direction; outermost or farthest.” It derives from the Latin *extrēmus*, the superlative of *exterus* which means outward. By this definition, extreme beliefs are those quite different from the norm; the more different, the more extreme they are. Consistent with this definition, Schmid (2014) maintains that a movement can only be defined as extremist by contrast to some non-extreme reference point. For example, Van Hiel and Mervielde (2003) operationalized extremism by an individual’s distance from the median value on left–right ideology and political party position agreement scales. Note that if extremity is deviation from the norm in any direction, one might be, for example, extremely (quite unusually) conservative, egalitarian, or pacifistic.

An *extremist* is “a person who advocates or resorts to measures beyond the norm, especially in politics” (American Heritage Dictionary, n.d.-b). So extremism can be also defined in terms of nonnormative behaviors (or goals), as well as, or instead of,

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beliefs (Borum, 2011). Behaviorally, one might be, for example, extremely (very unusually) religious, permissive, or fashionable.

Extremism may be studied on the individual, group, and societal levels (cf. Berger, 2019), and from context-dependent or context-independent perspectives. Individuals may be compared to population norms, groups to typical group behaviors, and societies to other societies, contemporary or historical. From a context-independent perspective, New England Puritan prohibitions on theater, secular music and dance, and common games (Daniels, 1993), as well as the Salem witch trials, can be regarded as extreme, even if they were endorsed by most group members, as might naturism as advocated by members of the Lebensreform movement in Germany (Williams, 2007).

However, in the political domain, scholars who study extremists or extremism typically have a prototype with particular content in mind (even if not all agree on what that content is). As discussed by Backes (2010), an intellectual tradition going back to Aristotle (that great advocate of moderation) conceptualizes political extremism as antithetical to the ideal of the constitutional state, which is pluralistic (regarding differing views as legitimate), oriented toward the common good, governed by laws (to which all, including rulers, must adhere), and characterized by popular self-determination (e.g., democratic). In contrast, political extremists are monistic (intolerant of opposition or even dissent), oriented toward particular interests (e.g., their own or those of their group), unregulated by laws or limits on the exercise of power, and autocratic. According to this conception, Soviet-style communism (in which there are no institutional controls on the power of the state), South African apartheid (in which established institutions served the interests of whites over blacks), and Nazism (in which there were no limits on state power and the state pursued the interests of one ethnonational group over others) are varieties of extremism (Backes, 2010, p. 185).

Contemporary prototypical conceptions of political extremism include willingness to engage in unlawful, undemocratic, or violent behavior to achieve political goals (Berger, 2018; Schmid, 2013). According to Berger, antagonism to outgroups is also a defining feature. Midlarsky (2011) defines political extremism as the seeking of power by a group (typically opposed to existing authorities), which limits individual freedom and engages in mass murder of actual and potential opponents. Schmid (2014) views religious extremists (e.g., Islamists) as close-minded dogmatists who believe in the absolute supremacy of their view and, if circumstances are favorable, are willing to impose it using authoritarian and potentially violent means.

Here we will proceed from the broad conceptualization of extremism as belief and/or behavior that is very different from the norm, and also incorporate prototypical conceptions of condoning, endorsing, or taking extralegal or violent actions. Extremists include those who advocate, endorse, or excuse highly counter-normative behaviors, as well as those enacting them. We will use, as concrete examples, specific norm-violating beliefs and extreme behaviors of American President Donald Trump. When we drafted this chapter in July of 2020, we wrote: "It may be difficult for some to accept that an elected American president is a political extremist. Trump has not directly ordered killings of civilians or seized power in a coup. However, as we will see, many of Trump's public statements and actions fall within

conceptualizations of extremism. These include statements that endorse or condone violence, his actual initiation of violent actions, and conduct contrary to American constitutional democracy and American laws.” In mid-January 2021, it appears that Trump’s unlawful attempts to remain in power after he was defeated in 2020 have shown that his words and deeds before and after the 2016 election (discussed in this chapter) were part of an unparalleled extremist pattern.

Followers of extremist leaders may also be regarded as extremists, especially if they give the leaders unqualified or unwavering support. This accords with conceptualizations of extremism in terms of belief rigidity (resistance to argument or evidence) or single-mindedness (in which one goal or value is pursued above and regardless of all other considerations; Schmid, 2013). Given these criteria, we will also examine factors leading to strong support for Trump and his norm-violating actions among his ardent supporters.

2 Pathways to Extremism

A majority of scholars who have examined the determinants of extreme behaviors (e.g., terrorist attacks) maintain that there is no single profile or etiology of an extremist (e.g., Bakker, 2006; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Horgan, 2003). For example, McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008) describe 12 mechanisms of political radicalization at the level of the individual (e.g., personal victimization), group (e.g., cohesion in response to threat), and mass public (e.g., reacting to the death of martyrs killed by police). In this section, grouping across specific mechanisms, we will briefly outline four general ways in which individuals might arrive at extreme beliefs or behaviors.

2.1 *The Cognitive Route*

Like other beliefs and attitudes, extremist beliefs can be learned via socialization, from one’s family of origin (e.g., Miklikowska, 2017), peers (e.g., van Zalk, Kerr, van Zalk, & Stattin, 2013), the internet and social media (e.g., Hassan et al., 2018), and educational (e.g., Siddique, 2009) and religious (e.g., Ahmed & Bashirov, 2020) institutions. However, many authors caution that neither learning nor socialization are unidirectional processes in which an individual passively absorbs presented or observed ideas. Instead ideas are evaluated, selectively pursued (Pauwels & Schils, 2016), and differentially adopted. This process can be influenced by interpersonal relationships (e.g., Sageman, 2004) and group affiliations (Neumann & Rogers, 2007), as well as life experiences such as personal crises (Wiktorowicz, 2005), deprivations and injustices (e.g., Moghaddam, 2005), and encounters with authorities (e.g., della Porta, 2018). These are given relevance and importance in terms of individual motives, needs, desires, and concerns (see discussion of the motivational

route below). However, in each case the cognitive content of the beliefs, and whether such content is accepted, rejected, or modified, either defines what is extreme or is central to understanding, organizing, and guiding extreme actions.

Several of the processes that Abelson (1995) discusses as producing the extremification of attitudes rely on cognitive mechanisms. These include (1) polarization produced when, in group discussion, more of the arguments voiced favor the position held by the majority, shifting the group's attitude further in that direction (Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977)—a type of informational social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955); (2) similar polarization occurring when individuals think about their own attitudes, and generate previously unconsidered arguments in support of their position (Tesser, Martin, & Mendolia, 1995); and (3) polarization occurring when prior beliefs bias the perception and evaluation of subsequent information (e.g., Nickerson, 1998) so that belief-consistent information is accepted and inconsistent information challenged or minimized.

2.2 *The Motivational Route*

As noted in the previous section, beliefs may be adopted and maintained because they serve functions for an individual (Katz, 1960), and this may be especially likely for beliefs that are extreme in the sense of being resistant to counter-argument and disconfirming evidence (Roseman, 1994). Motives, needs, and goals are also likely influential in extreme behaviors, insofar as deviance requires support to survive pressure and rejection from majorities who adhere to mainstream norms (e.g., Schachter, 1951). Other costs of adopting extreme beliefs and enacting extreme behaviors may include giving up comforts and pleasures of conventional lifestyles (such as sexual relationships or consuming alcohol) and, in the case of violent extremism, risking or sacrificing one's life (Bélanger, Caouette, Sharvit, & Dugas, 2014).

A wide variety of motivations can anchor extreme belief and action. These include self-interest (Howe & Krosnick, 2017); self-esteem or self-respect (Fiske, 2010); meaning (Frankl, 2000); personal significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014); reduction of uncertainty (Hogg, 2014) or of threats to individual or group identity (Seyle & Besaw, 2021); maintenance of group dominance (Piazza, 2017); redress of or revenge for grievances (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008; van den Bos, 2020), immortality or heavenly reward (Stern, 2003); and, especially in the context of groups, belongingness (Björgero, 2011; Borum, 2014), acceptance (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2006), and approval/honor/status (Venhaus, 2010). In some cases, individuals who take actions or positions more extreme than other group members may be admired as more dedicated or committed to the group or its goals (Abelson, 1995).

2.3 *The Emotional Route*

The field of psychology has alternated over time in viewing motivation (e.g., Cofer & Appley, 1964; Hull, 1943; Murray, 1938) or emotion (e.g., Izard, 1991; Plutchik, 1980; Tomkins, 1970) as primary energizers of behavior. Now it is widely recognized that both are needed to adequately understand influences on cognition and action (e.g., Reeve, 2018). The two constructs may play different roles as determinants. For example, Frijda (1986) proposed that the action tendencies and readinesses of emotions have priority (“*control precedence*”), intruding into thoughts and interrupting other behaviors (cf. Cannon’s 1932 emergency theory of emotions). Drawing on this work, as well as that of Tomkins (1970), Roseman (2013) proposed that motivational processes tend to govern behavior in response to relatively less important, less imminent, or slower changes in motive-relevant events, whereas emotions become increasingly preemptive as motive-relevant events are more important, imminent, and rapid. These views suggest that emotions may be particularly influential in initiating and maintaining beliefs and behaviors that seem imperative and are resistant to evidence and argument.

A number of theorists and researchers have proposed that emotions are important influences on extreme beliefs and behaviors. According to Midlarsky (2011), fear (of return to a subordinate position) was a causal factor in Chechen terrorism after a Russian invasion in 1999; anger (in response to a failed coup viewed as an injustice) was operative in the killing of half a million Communists by the Indonesian military and its allies in 1965; and shame (about perceived humiliation) contributed to the rise of Nazism after Germany’s defeat in World War I and the signing of the Versailles Treaty). Aumer and Erickson (2021) propose that members of extremist groups tend to share hatred toward members of an outgroup who are seen as a threat, and that this shared hatred serves social cohesion and protective functions. Rip, Vallerand, and Lafrenière (2012) found feelings of hatred to be an antecedent of a sample of devout Muslims endorsing actions such as “severe punishment” and “preparation for a holy war” after being shown Pope Benedict’s 2006 comments in Regensburg that disparaged Islam. Hope (e.g., for an ideal society) may be a crucial motivator and sustainer of extremist campaigns (Schmid, 2013).

2.4 *The Behavioral Route*

People may also exhibit extreme beliefs or behaviors partly due to individual differences in response propensities or in countervailing influences, such as impulse control. For example, individuals may differ in propensity for impulsive violence due to low levels of serotonin (reviewed in Manchia et al., 2020) or high levels of monoamine oxidase A, which breaks down serotonin (McDermott, Tingley, Cowden, Frazzetto, & Johnson, 2009). These may only be operative in combination with adverse childhood experiences (Reif et al., 2007) or current aggression-eliciting

events (e.g., provocation, oppression, political conflict; Hatemi & McDermott, 2012). A path analysis of survey data by Brandstätter and Opp (2014) found that the behavior-relevant personality variables of high openness to experience and low agreeableness predicted self-reported political protest activity. In these instances, individual differences related to behavior may make some individuals more prone to taking extreme actions, especially if those actions are provoked and/or incentivized by current environmental conditions.

Behaviors may also influence beliefs and additional behaviors through processes related to cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) note that having first engaged in a nonviolent task for a terrorist group may lead to justifying that behavior and becoming more willing to engage in violent actions such as using a gun or bomb.

3 Integrating Accounts of the Psychology of Extremism within Extremist Narratives

3.1 Five Belief Components

Each of the influences on extreme belief and behavior may operate with some degree of independence. However, as noted earlier they may also have combined and interactive effects. Our narrative theory includes components corresponding to the behavioral, cognitive, motivational, and emotional influences on extreme belief and action, and adds components recognizing the effects of norms (e.g., Pilecki, 2015) and identity-related processes (Seyle & Besaw, 2021). Here, as promised, we illustrate this theory using examples of extreme beliefs and behaviors of President Donald Trump and Americans who strongly endorse them. Salient examples are shown in Fig. 1.

In these narratives, the *evaluative* component encompasses motivational influences that reinforce or incentivize beliefs and behaviors. According to the theory, strongly held beliefs typically serve some function(s) for a person, making an important difference in a person's life. Thus the evaluative component is represented in terms of alternative motive-relevant outcomes differing significantly in desirability. For example, in his 2016 acceptance speech at the Republican convention in Cleveland, Trump (2016) described the alternative outcomes at stake in his run for the presidency to include vulnerability to attack vs. safety, and low wages and lost jobs vs. prosperity. As shown in Fig. 1, Trump contrasted the existing state and trajectory of the U.S. with the starkly different destination to which he said his election would lead—he would make America safe, rich, and great again.

The more important the outcomes that are believed to be at stake, and the greater the disparity between them, the stronger the incentive to maintain the belief system, and the more extreme the actions that can be warranted by the beliefs. Indeed, extremist belief systems tend to involve a claim that the ingroup's survival or freedom is at

Identificational component	Behavioral component	Normative component	Explanatory component	Evaluative component
Donald Trump	Restricts illegal immigration	Illegal is wrong		Our country ours again
"I am your voice"	Cuts regulations and taxes	Regs, taxes excessive	Made billions in business	America rich again
Says what he thinks	Cracks down on crime			America safe again
Forgotten Americans	Vote for Trump		Crowds at rallies cheer	America great again
White			Fox News hosts approve	We are respected
Virtuous (e.g., work hard)		We deserve respect		America proud again
Illegal immigrants	Take our jobs			Lost jobs, lower wages
Mexicans, drug dealers	Commit crimes		Murders in Chicago	Innocents killed
Islamic radicals	Commit terrorist acts		Benghazi disaster	Vulnerable to attack
Elites	Make huge profits	Shouldn't control us		
Crooked Hillary	Lies, enriches herself	They are biased	Condemned on Fox News	
Special interests	Keep rigged system in place	Undemocratic		Rich donors benefit
Dishonest media	Lie, conceal the truth		Crowds at rallies jeer	

Fig. 1 Belief components and emotions in Donald Trump’s 2016 nomination acceptance speech narrative (from Roseman, Steele, & Goodvin, 2019b)

risk (Berger, 2018). For example, Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, Leidner, & Saguy (2016) note that concerns about physical survival (mortality salience) were found to increase Iranians’ support for suicide bombings targeting Americans (Pyszczynski et al., 2006), Israelis’ support for a preemptive nuclear attack against Iran (Hirschberger, Pyszczynski, & Ein-Dor, 2009), and conservative Americans’ support for military actions to combat terrorism (Pyszczynski et al., 2006). Hirschberger et al. (2016) propose an expanded conception of existential threat beyond an *individual’s* death, to include a *group’s* physical annihilation, and its *symbolic* annihilation (e.g., obliteration of its identity or way of life) as well as concerns about past victimization. An example of symbolic identity threat was when white nationalists in Charlottesville in 2017 chanted “Jew will not replace us” (Spencer & Stolberg, 2017).

The *behavioral* component contains actions that can influence which of the contrasting outcomes will occur. If there are no actions by which important outcomes can be influenced, then low efficacy, helplessness, hopelessness, and depression may inhibit strong belief and instrumental action (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Baumeister, 1991; Ruiters, Kessels, Peters, & Kok, 2014; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). Extremist ideologies prototypically advocate actions such as using violence to achieve group goals, defying legal authority, and punishing deviants (Schmid, 2013). Particular extreme actions may be differentially appealing to different groups and individuals, depending on such factors as genetic predispositions (McDermott & Hatemi, 2017), personality (e.g., Bettencourt, Talley, Benjamin, & Valentine,

2006), socialization (Keniston, 1968), learning history (Altemeyer, 1981), and group and cultural norms (e.g., Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Staub, 1989).

In Trump's, 2016 campaign narrative, weak authorities had allowed and would (if they continued in power) allow illegal and criminal immigrants to take Americans' jobs and kill innocent citizens. In contrast, Trump would "restore law and order" by building a wall to halt illegal border crossings and cracking down on crime, and would cut regulations and taxes. According to our theory, support for a belief system's narrative is increased by approving and endorsing its recommended actions.

The *identificational* component names individuals and groups who take the actions and experience the outcomes specified in the belief system, along with the salient motives and attributes that explain their actions. "Crooked" Hillary Clinton ("puppet" of selfish special interests) and President Obama (who put her in charge of America's foreign policy) were the politicians whose actions and failures to act allowed terrorists and illegal immigrants with criminal records to threaten and harm Americans (Trump, 2016). Rich, successful Trump, who has "no tolerance for government incompetence...no sympathy for leaders who fail their citizens" would fight for "the forgotten men and women of our country" who work hard but have been "neglected, ignored, and abandoned." "I am your voice" he said, and "I alone can fix it."

In claiming to fight for hard-working yet forgotten men and women against a corrupt elite, Trump propounds a populist worldview (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). In also targeting Islamic radicals and illegal immigrants, portrayed as threatening the safety and economic security of Americans, it is a species of *right-wing* populism (Betz, 1994; Pelinka, 2013). The identities offered seem to have been especially effective in connecting with whites without college degrees who scored high on measures of racism and hostile sexism (Schaffner, MacWilliams, & Nteta, 2018). Such voters may have seen their economic and social status threatened by the loss of manufacturing jobs due to globalization, social policies designed to reduce racial and gender discrimination, and demographic trends, including immigration, that would soon result in a "majority minority" American population (Bobo, 2017). Those who saw themselves as working hard while immigrants and ethnic minorities cut into line in front of them and deprived them of the share of the American dream that they had earned (Hochschild, 2016) were thus invited into Trump's narrative, where they were recognized (Lamont, Park, & Ayala-Hurtado, 2017) and put "first," and thus restored to a pre-eminent or dominant position. Reicher, Haslam, and Rath (2019) discuss how Trump portrayed foreigners and self-interested American politicians as obstacles to the existence and expression of American identity—in the same way that Islamic radicals depict Jews and Christians.

Strongly held beliefs often also have a *normative* component, which makes claims about the moral qualities of the actors, actions, and outcomes included in the narrative (Garrett & Bankert, 2018). Extremists typically see themselves as particularly virtuous (e.g., as having been victimized or treated unjustly), and their enemies as unethical or evil (Reicher, Haslam, & Rath, 2008; Sedgwick, 2007). They also see the outcomes that they seek as legitimate and good, and their beliefs and actions as absolutely right (justified in themselves or as necessary for the outcomes they deserve; Moghaddam, 2005). According to Bandura (1990, p. 163) "People do not

ordinarily engage in reprehensible conduct until they have justified to themselves the morality of their actions.”

In Trump’s 2016 campaign narrative, his opponents have bad motives (politicians put their interests, and those of their rich donors, above those of the country); take actions which are immoral in themselves (e.g., *illegal* immigration and other crimes are wrong because they are unlawful) and because they lead to outcomes that are unfair (e.g., hardworking Americans lose their jobs) or reprehensible (e.g., America is vulnerable to terrorist attack, and innocent citizens are murdered by criminals). Worthy purposes are used to justify questionable or unethical actions such as separating young children from their mothers at the southern U.S. border (to deter illegal immigration; American Immigration Council, [n.d.](#)) and torturing of detainees (to obtain information about possible terrorist attacks; Weaver & Ackerman, 2017).

Finally, to attract adherents, it is proposed that a belief system must be compatible with their ideas about the way the world works (see Wiktorowicz, 2005, on “frame alignment”). Thus ideologies have an *explanatory* component, containing principles, arguments, examples, and metaphors which demonstrate that the system of beliefs is true. It is especially important that the identified actors have the capacity to take the specified actions (and would indeed do so), and that those actions would in fact lead to the envisioned outcomes. For example, according to Wiktorowicz (2005), recruitment into the Islamic jihadist organization al-Muhajiroun was aided by Omar Bakri Mohammed’s use of religious evidence from the Qur’an and Islamic practices. Hafez and Mullins (2015) observe that violent Islamic extremists reframe suicide bombings as the acts of martyrs defending the faith, rather than as suicide (which is proscribed in Islam). McCauley and Moskalenko (2008, pp. 426–427) cite instances in which attacks from a group’s enemies (as in Al Qaeda’s September 11 attacks) can increase support for extreme responses against those enemies.

In his nomination acceptance speech, Trump (2016) explained the economic decline of American workers as due to politicians abandoning them for financial gain provided by corporate lobbyists. This fit with beliefs of most Americans, 65% of whom agreed (Pew Research Center, 2015) that “the economic system in this country unfairly favors powerful interests” (only 31% agreed that it “is generally fair to most Americans”). The proof of his ability to “make our country rich again” was the claim that “I have made billions of dollars in business making deals” (Trump, 2016, p. 20), and Trump’s alleged business success was cited repeatedly as a rationale by some who voted for him (Perry, 2017).

3.2 *Dramatic Structure of the Narrative*

According to our theory, the five belief components do not exist in isolation from each other, but are typically woven together into a dramatic story that tells of diverging paths toward very bad vs. very good outcomes (Roseman, 1994). The story tends

to have a predictable structure. It says that truly terrible things have happened, or could happen unless we act; but if we take the proper actions, then the terrible outcomes will be reversed or averted, and the enormously better outcomes will result. Political versions of this dramatic story tend to emphasize *group* identities, conflicts, and outcomes: Individuals and groups who are opposed to us (because of their bad motives or inferior abilities) are taking unjust actions that will lead to ruinous outcomes for our group; but if we do what we should, we can defeat them and survive and prosper.

According to Schmid (2013), in Al Qaeda's narrative the basic grievance is that the Zionist-Christian alliance is mistreating Muslims. There is a vision of the good society, the Caliphate, where Sharia law would rule. The path from the grievance to realization of the vision is jihad conducted by a heroic vanguard.

In one version of Trump's 2016 Republican convention narrative, as shown in Fig. 1, politicians, for their own benefit, were keeping in place a rigged system that sent factories overseas, while allowing illegal aliens to take jobs that rightfully belonged to Americans and to murder innocent citizens. Voting for Trump—the successful plain-speaking businessman who is the voice of the abandoned and forgotten people—would allow him to restrict illegal immigration, crack down on crime, and negotiate great trade deals, which would make America safe, rich, and great again.

3.3 *Emotions in the Narrative*

Grounded in the Emotion System theory (Roseman, 2011, 2013), and related empirical research (e.g., Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Goodvin, 2019; Roseman, Antoniou, & Jose, 1996; Steele, 2020), this model was elaborated by Roseman, Steele, and Goodvin (2019b) to encompass the influence of emotions. As in other types of stories, including narrative fiction (Oatley, 2002), autobiographical narratives (Habermas, 2019), historical narratives (e.g., Kane, 2001), and narratives constructed in the course of psychotherapy (e.g., Angus & Greenberg, 2011), emotions are generated toward the agents and recipients of action in ideological narratives, as well as in response to the specified actual, anticipated, and hypothetical situations, events, and actions, and appraisals of their moral aspects.

For example: insofar as outcomes are presented as unwanted, possible, and imminent, fear can be created; desired potential outcomes can generate hope; unfair actions may elicit anger; beneficial outcomes attributed to leaders may produce affection; and successful outcomes seen as caused by oneself or members of one's group can engender pride. As shown in Fig. 1, the emotions accompanying, supporting, and amplifying portions of Trump's narrative include fear (e.g., of crime and terrorism), anger (at immigrants taking Americans' jobs), contempt (for crooked Hillary), hope (e.g., of jobs brought back), affection (for Trump, whose "pledge reads: 'I'M WITH YOU – THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ... I will fight for you, and I

will win for you”’; Trump, 2016, p. 27; Reicher & Haslam, 2017), and pride (about being great again).

Another emotion, which is likely to be particularly important for extremism, is hatred. Indeed the way that Trump depicts many individuals and groups as malevolent enemies makes him a purveyor of hate (Roseman, Steele, & Goodvin, 2019b). According to appraisal theories (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Roseman & Smith, 2001; Scherer & Moors, 2019), emotions are typically elicited by evaluations of the relevance of events for a person’s motives (goals and preferences), with different patterns of appraisal eliciting distinct emotions (along with the phenomenology, physiology, expressive displays, action tendencies, and goals that tend to be characteristic of each emotion; Roseman, 2011). For example, research indicates that

- interpersonal dislike is characterized by appraisals that other persons are causing undesirable but not blameworthy events that must be accepted (Roseman, Steele, & Goodvin, 2019a);
- anger is elicited by unwanted events (e.g., Roseman et al., 1996) such as goal blockages (e.g., Ceulemans, Kuppens, & Van Mechelen, 2012), especially if perceived as caused by other persons (e.g., Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989) and unjust (e.g., Averill, 1982), and it seems that one should be able to do something about them (Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Smits, & De Boeck, 2003);
- contempt is characterized by perceptions of people as having undesirable qualities (Roseman, Steele, & Goodvin, 2019a), such as being immoral (Pilecki, 2015) or stupid or incompetent (Hutcherson & Gross, 2011);
- hatred is characterized by thoughts that an individual or group is evil and cannot be changed (Steele, 2020), and may be elicited by such perceptions (Fischer, Halperin, Canetti, & Jasini, 2018).

Thus attributions of unchangeable malevolence distinguish the phenomenology of hatred from that of interpersonal dislike, anger, and contempt. Labelling people as terrorists (Trump, 2016), rapists (see Washington Post, 2015), or thugs (see Chavez & Sanchez, 2020) characterizes them as inherently evil, bent on harm. In the same vein, Trump has repeatedly described Muslims as having “hatred of us” (Johnson & Hauslohner, 2017). Unchangeably malevolent people are likely to hurt us in the future if allowed to do so. Unlike in anger, where criticism and confrontation could change the target’s behavior (Fischer & Roseman, 2007), or in contempt, where shaming or shunning could prompt the target to inhibit or reform an undesirable quality (Roseman, 2018), in hatred the only way to prevent future harm is to incapacitate such enemies, either by destroying them (Fischer et al., 2018) or otherwise getting them out of one’s life forever (Steele, 2020), e.g., by segregating or deporting them. When feeling hatred, people are more likely than when feeling other negative emotions to fantasize about bad things happening to the object of their emotion, look for an opportunity to take action against them, attack them verbally or physically, encourage others to attack them, and want to get back at them, hurt them, have them suffer, and get rid of them (Steele, 2020). Experiencing hatred, people feel justified in attacking those who are seen as evil (Steele, 2020). For example, if immigrants from Mexico are criminals and rapists, one might ask for

cost estimates to build an electrified border fence, topped with spikes that could pierce a person's flesh, and surrounded by a moat filled with alligators or snakes, as Trump is reported to have done (Shear & Davis, 2019). If protesters at Trump rallies are "thugs," "lowlifes," and "very bad people...doing bad things," then they might not be treated so well (Chavez & Sanchez, 2020). Such extreme behaviors can also be instrumental responses to the appraisals of unchangeable malevolence, even in the absence of hatred, or if hatred had once accompanied or generated the appraisals but is no longer actively present (e.g., Fischer et al., 2018).

Particular emotions also have differing implications for belief (e.g., Brader & Marcus, 2013) and action (e.g., Fontaine & Scherer, 2013; Frijda et al., 1989; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). Fear tends to increase seeking information about threats (e.g., Valentino, Hutchings, Banks, & Davis, 2008), and can thus decrease reliance on existing beliefs (MacKuen, Marcus, Neuman, & Keele, 2007) and increase openness to persuasion (Nai, Schemeil, & Marie, 2017)—although this may depend on the intensity of the fear and whether the new information or the existing information seems more relevant to the threat (e.g., Albertson & Gadarian, 2015; Easterbrook, 1959). In contrast, anger tends to boost confidence and certainty about one's existing beliefs (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006), and resistance to discrepant information (Suhay & Erisen, 2018). Thus fear could increase support for extremist narratives and candidates (Karwowski et al., 2020), particularly if they appear to provide relief from uncertainty (Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011). But anger can have similar or greater downstream effects (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). If individuals already have or are leaning toward extremist views, anger can increase confidence in them and decrease openness to opposing arguments or considerations, thus promoting belief rigidity.

With regard to the impact of specific emotions on behavior, Fischer and Roseman (2007) found that experiences of anger were characterized by short-term verbal attacks to try to force change in a target's behavior or get revenge, whereas experiences of contempt were associated more with relationship termination. Tausch et al. (2011) found that feeling anger was associated with self-reported likelihood of participating in normative protest activities such as demonstrations, and moderate nonnormative but nonviolent actions such as blocking highways. In contrast, contempt was associated with support for nonnormative violent actions such as setting fire to buildings and violence against military and civilian targets. However, in a study by Cheung-Blunden and Blunden (2008), rated anger (after seeing photographs of the September 11 attacks) fully mediated the effects of anti-terrorism attitudes on support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and for killing terrorists, government officials, soldiers, and civilians in those countries. Participants induced to feel anger toward an outgroup in an experiment by Mackie, Devos, and Smith (2000) reported greater motivation to confront, oppose, or argue with them, whereas those induced to feel contempt reported wanting to have nothing to do with them, avoid them, or keep them at a distance. Studies of autobiographical experiences of four interpersonal negative emotions indicate that interpersonal dislike is most characterized by avoidance (of the disliked person); contempt by ridicule and looking

down on the person; anger by yelling at the person; and hatred by fantasizing about bad things happening to the person, seeking vengeance, and encouraging attacks against the person (Goodvin, 2019; Roseman, Steele, & Goodvin, 2019a; Steele, 2020). Hatred was also the emotion most associated with wanting to get the target person out of one's life forever (Steele, 2020) and to suffer (Goodvin, 2019).

The combined influence of multiple emotions was suggested in a study by Pilecki (2015). He measured (1) the extent to which online participants perceived particular groups (e.g., immigrants) as violating moral principles; (2) the "other-condemning" emotions of contempt, anger, and disgust (Haidt, 2003); and (3) participants' support for policies varying in extremity, e.g., from allowing organizations to exclude those engaging in homosexual behavior (low extremity) to having homosexual behavior punishable by the death penalty (high extremity). He found that combined ratings of the other-condemning emotions mediated the relationship between the rated immorality of a group and the extremity of policies against them that participants supported. Matsumoto, Hwang, and Frank (2014) found that increased anger, contempt, and disgust in leaders' speeches in several countries preceded acts of aggression (e.g., revolution, invasion, or war) rather than nonviolent protest.

Felt emotions also produce tendencies to perceive situations and events in ways consistent with the appraisals that elicit those emotions (Han, Lerner, & Keltner, 2007). Thus, emotions can lead to extreme belief and behavior both directly (via the action tendencies characteristic of particular emotions) and indirectly (by priming emotion-related appraisals). For example, the perceived danger of terrorism is heightened by fear (e.g., Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003); opposition to citizenship for undocumented immigrants is amplified by anger (Banks, 2016); the prospect of prosperity is enhanced by hope (Reicher & Haslam, 2017); and the appeal of regaining lost status is magnified by envisioned pride (Hochschild, 2016). Abandoning beliefs that elicit emotions, or that are anchored by motives, may then be much more difficult insofar as this entails loss of the relevant feeling (e.g., of hope or pride) or associated goal (e.g., of prosperity or significance), or creates alternative unwanted affective states (e.g., hopelessness or depression; cf. Corner & Gill, 2019).

In presenting a story of vastly differing outcomes that are imminent and contingent on the actions of the audience (here, their votes; in narratives of radicalization, their joining a militant group, taking to the streets, or taking up arms), the dramatic structure of such narratives can engender passion—strong emotion created by the prospect of transformative events (Roseman, 2017). Movement between an intensely negative outcome (such as "death, destruction, terrorism and weakness;" Trump, 2016) and deliverance (Jamieson & Taussig, 2017) is proposed to produce greater passion, and thereby greater ability to produce extreme belief and behavior: (1) the greater the relevance of the outcomes for an individual's goals, (2) the greater the importance of those goals for the individual, (3) the greater the difference in desirability between the outcomes, and (4) the more imminent the outcomes appear to be (Roseman, 2011).

4 Applying the Narrative Theory to Help Explain Extreme Beliefs and Behavior of Trump and His Supporters

Taken together these five belief components and related emotions form a powerfully appealing narrative that may help explain the intense and enduring devotion of Trump's loyal supporters (Hibbing, 2020) despite his many norm-shattering behaviors (e.g., proposing a ban on travel to the U.S. based on people's religion, Rucker, DelReal, & Stanley-Becker, 2020; refusing to release his tax returns, Harwell, 2016) and scandals that would seemingly derail a presidential candidate (e.g., being accused of multiple sexual assaults, supported by being caught on tape talking of grabbing women by their genitals; agreeing to a \$25 million settlement of lawsuits over claims that Trump University was a scam; see Graham, 2017). Indeed at a 2016 Iowa campaign rally Trump famously boasted that his supporters were so loyal that he could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot someone and not lose any voters.¹ Such steadfast loyalty continued after his inauguration among 35% to 49% of U.S. adults,² despite a continuing stream of serious norm-violating actions, such as refusal to put his assets into a blind trust (Harwell, 2017); saying he believed Russian president Putin's denial of election interference over the consensus assessments of American intelligence agencies (Elving, 2020); and mocking the emoluments clause of the Constitution as "phony" (Collins, Jackson, & Subramanian, 2019).

Even before the 2020 election a number of Trump's behaviors resembled prototypes of political extremism. For example, on multiple occasions he encouraged, advocated, or directed violence and other punitive actions against political opponents. These include

- suggesting that his 2016 Democratic opponent should be imprisoned (Krieg, 2016), and, at his rallies, encouraging supporters to call for this (Washington Post, 2016);
- suggesting that she might be killed by "Second Amendment people" if she were elected and then appointed judges who curtailed gun rights (Corasaniti & Haberman, 2016);
- advocating and condoning physical attacks against protesters at rallies in Iowa ("Knock the crap out of him, will you"), Alabama ("Maybe he should have been roughed up"), and Nevada ("You know what they used to do to guys like that... they'd be carried out on a stretcher"), and promising to defend and pay legal fees for the attackers (Tiefenthaler, 2016);
- implying that those who provided information to the Ukraine scandal whistleblower should be executed (Levin, 2019).
- sending armed Federal agents into Portland to confront demonstrators despite opposition from the local governor and mayor (Bernton, 2020).

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTACH1eV1aA>

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/666113/approval-rate-of-donald-trump-for-the-presidential-job/>

In other instances, Trump acted or raised the prospect of acting in defiance of the Constitution, laws, or norms in order to gain or maintain power. For example:

- unlawfully soliciting the assistance of foreign governments in his election and reelection efforts (Rampton & Zengerie, 2019; Wertheimer & Eisen, 2019), which led to his impeachment.
- repeatedly talking about the possibility of remaining in office beyond the constitutionally set limit of two terms (e.g., Sonmez, 2019).
- during the third 2016 presidential debate and again on Election Day, Trump refused to say that he would accept the results of the 2016 election, if he lost (Kaczynski & McDermott, 2016),
- engaging in a sustained, multipronged effort to overturn his loss in the 2020 election. It included pressuring the Georgia Secretary of State to “find” enough votes to overturn his loss there, and warning that Raffensperger might be criminally prosecuted if he didn’t report the ballot counting as corrupt (Gardner & Firozi, 2021); pressuring state legislators and governors to ignore the popular vote and instead appoint a pro-Trump slate to the Electoral College (Fearnow, 2020); pressuring members of Congress to challenge electors from states he lost (Bade et al., 2020); and calling on Vice President Pence to reject Electoral College votes from states that Biden won (Schmidt, 2021). When these efforts and court challenges failed, on the day that Congress would meet to count the Electoral College votes and declare Biden the winner, Trump (who’d urged people to come to Washington for a “big” and “wild” protest; Berry & Frenkel, 2021) repeated to a large crowd the false claim that an election he’d won “by a landslide” had been “stolen from you, from me and from the country.” In his speech (Associated Press, 2021) Trump said that “We will not let them silence your voices. We’re not going to let it happen.” Challenging the certification of the election results was “a matter of national security,” necessary to “save our democracy.” He told them that “We must stop the steal” and made it seem feasible: “All Vice President Pence has to do is send it back to the states to recertify and we become president and you are the happiest people.” Though he had said that people would march “to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard,” toward the end of his remarks he told the crowd that “We fight like hell. And if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore...So...we’re going to the Capitol, and we’re going to try...and give our Republicans, the weak ones...the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country.” At the Capitol, where Congress was meeting, people had begun to clash with police and break through barricades before Trump’s speech ended, and when more from the rally arrived, agitation increased, and eventually the crowd stormed the building (New York Times, 2021). Watching the events on TV at the White House, Trump failed to deploy the National Guard to protect legislators or the Capitol (Giella, 2021) and initially resisted appeals from former and current aides and advisers to condemn the insurrection or demand that it end (Haberman, 2021). It wasn’t until 20 minutes after rioters broke into the building that Trump tweeted that people should support the police and “stay peaceful.” Then it wasn’t until

shortly after President-elect Biden appeared on national TV and called on Trump to demand an end to the siege that Trump released a video on Twitter (Ortutay, 2021), repeating the false claim that the election was stolen, but telling his supporters “We have to have peace. We have to have law and order... So go home. We love you. You’re very special.” Finally, it was only after he was impeached by the House of Representatives a week later that Trump released a video condemning the violence (Haberman & Schmidt, 2021). Whether or not Trump’s actions (and inaction once the riot had begun) qualify as involvement in an attempted *coup d’etat* (Snyder, 2020), they clearly violated constitutional norms and laws, were consistent with his earlier receptivity to the use of violence for political ends, and by the definition articulated above, confirmed him as an extremist.

At least some Trump supporters endorsed or acted in accordance with his extreme words and deeds. Recordings of Trump rallies show cheers and applause in response to his comments about remaining in office beyond his legal term, and condoning violence against protesters (Sonmez, 2019; Tiefenthäler, 2016). According to ABC News (Levine, 2020), as of May 30, 2020 there had been at least 54 incidents in which individuals or groups invoked Trump in connection with documented or alleged threats of violence, or actual attacks. Following Trump’s refusal to recognize the results of the 2020 election in November, there were death threats against election officials in states that failed to vote for Trump, protests by armed Trump supporters outside the homes of state and local officials, and attacks on black churches by Trump-supporting members of the Proud Boys, a right-wing organization that has been classified as a hate group (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.), which Trump refused to condemn in the presidential debate on September 29 (Derysh, 2020).

Thousands of people heeded Trump’s call to come to Washington on January 6: police estimated that between 25,000 and 35,000 heard his speech at the Ellipse (Knowles et al., 2021). Online, a number of participants had offered to help people bring guns and other weapons to Washington, and some protesters thought their efforts would make it possible for Trump to remain in power (Barry et al., 2021). When Trump told the crowd “We will not let them silence your voices” the audience chanted “Fight for Trump” (Associated Press, 2021). At the conclusion of Trump’s speech, hundreds online called for the storming of the Capitol (Frenkel, 2021). Many at the Capitol wore Trump regalia or carried Trump flags, and a large Trump 2020 banner was draped on the balcony. Some rioters explicitly invoked Trump’s call, like the man who said “I believed I was following the instructions of former President Trump (Rubin et al., 2021). Men in the crowd were seen carrying plastic zip ties used as handcuffs by police, perhaps suggesting they intended to take hostages (Barrett et al., 2021). A gallows had been erected near the Capitol Reflecting Pool, and a noose hung from it; inside, some searched for legislators, and one said later “We were looking for Nancy to shoot her in the friggin’ brain” (Papenfuss, 2021). During the insurrection, Trump tweeted that Pence “didn’t have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution,” and about ten minutes later some in the crowd chanted “Hang Mike Pence” (Evon,

2021). Police officers defending the Capitol were dragged and beaten by the mob, and one died after being attacked (Hill et al., 2021). After the insurrection, the Department of Homeland Security warned of a heightened threat environment posed by “ideologically motivated violent extremists” with grievances “fueled by false narratives”—an apparent reference to Trump’s claim that the 2020 election had been stolen (Kanno-Youngs & Sanger, 2021).

Our analysis suggests that Trump’s extremist behavior, as well as that of his most loyal supporters, may be initiated and maintained by the five specified belief components and supporting emotions, organized into or consistent with dramatic narratives, as discussed above. We use the plural “narratives” because the communications presented by extremist political figures and groups are multifaceted, potentially comprising an infinite number of combinations which may constitute equipotent variations that appeal to different audiences. For example, considering just the evaluative component, as shown in Fig. 1, for some Trump supporters attaining prosperity or wealth (as opposed to lost jobs or lowered wages; Blendon, Casey, & Benson, 2017) may be most important, while for others regaining status and respect (Lamont, 2018) may be paramount. Regarding the identificational component, adherents may be drawn into the narrative through a variety of social identities: political party (Jacobson, 2017), Christian religion (Martí, 2019), racial identification with whites (Tesler & Sides, 2016) or against blacks (e.g., Schaffner et al., 2018) or immigrants (Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck, 2017). Regarding what we have termed the explanatory component, some may have been convinced or reassured that Trump’s narrative was true because they believed his claims of great business success (Perry, 2017), while others trusted supportive coverage from Fox News or its commentators (Mitchell, Gottfried, & Barthel, 2017). In terms of emotions, some adherents may have resonated with Trump’s anger (at illegal immigrants portrayed as taking Americans’ jobs; Smith & Hanley, 2018), or contempt (at Trump’s allegedly corrupt, incompetent opponent), or, for those afraid of terrorists or criminals, felt hope (Roseman, Abelson, & Ewing, 1986; cf. Reicher & Haslam, 2017) that Trump’s restricting immigration or cracking down on crime would make them safe. The variations would seem to converge on the behavior of voting for Trump, though support may also have been increased or diminished based on agreement with or opposition to the particular actions Trump promised to carry out. For example, those high in authoritarianism might be especially attracted to his promise to enforce the country’s laws (there were 21 mentions of law, laws, lawful, or lawlessness in his nomination acceptance speech), while those low in agreeableness might find appealing his refusal to be “politically correct” (Trump, 2016).

In contrast to the varied motives, identifications, explanations, and emotions that may distinguish subgroups of his supporters, Trump’s personal narrative may be considerably simpler. Its evaluative component may center around self-glorification (McAdams, 2020) or feeling special (Malkin, 2019) rather than hated (Madhani, 2020). Observers see an extreme need for self-aggrandizement and superiority (Zimbardo & Sword, 2019) manifest, for example, in claiming that he is a “genius” (Diaz, 2018), that he was successful at everything he ever did (Wall Street Journal, 2018) and that even his questionable actions are “perfect” (Kiely, Robertson, &

Gore, 2019). He seems to need praise constantly (Schwartz, 2019) and to find criticism intolerable (Ayer et al., 2016). He angrily and contemptuously belittles detractors (Zimbardo & Sword, 2019), rivals (Malkin, 2019), and any who dare to raise doubts about even his demonstrably erroneous pronouncements (Law & Martinez, 2019). Central to his identity is being a “winner” rather than a “loser” (Jamieson & Taussig, 2017).

Personally powerful emotions seem to include: shame, as Trump frequently speaks of humiliation and other countries “laughing at us” (Chokshi, 2016); contempt (e.g., for rivals, seen as “failed” or “weak” losers, and for critics, characterized as “fake” or “dishonest”; Bump, 2019); and pride (about what he regards as his towering achievements, which he often represents as the greatest or biggest “in history”; e.g., Woodward & Yen, 2020). Behaviors Trump tends to rely on as instrumental to his goals involve verbal denigration (Jamieson & Taussig, 2017; Lee & Quealy, 2019), which can be an action tendency of contempt (Fischer & Roseman, 2007) or of anger (Averill, 1982); and sometimes encouraging or authorizing physical aggression, as reviewed above, which can also be an action tendency of anger (Berkowitz, 2012). Within the explanatory component, evidence for the validity of Trump’s narrative include (1) a zero-sum conception of international and social relations (e.g., Stiglitz, 2018), in which one party’s win requires another’s loss; and (2) Trump’s successes, such as winning the approval and affection of his supporters and becoming President (McAdams, 2020, p. 149; Russell, 2017; Wall Street Journal, 2018).

5 Testing the Narrative Theory in Predicting Support and Voting for Trump

Roseman, Mattes, and Redlawsk (2019) tested the narrative theory using a module that they created for the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES; Ansolabehere & Schaffner, 2017). The CCES provided a probability sample of 1000 voting-age American adults. Although its “common content” portion was not designed to measure specific variables in the narrative theory, it contained items that could be used to assess those belief components not covered in the module.

To measure the identificational component, Roseman, Mattes, and Redlawsk (2019) averaged the strength of participants’ Republican partisanship; the extent to which their self-reported position on the continuum from extremely liberal to extremely conservative matched the position they assigned to Donald Trump; and how well they thought “cares about people like you” described Trump (Cronbach’s alpha for this 3-item index was 0.78). They also assessed identification *against* Blacks (with 7 items assessing anti-black racism and racial resentment, $\alpha = 0.81$) and against immigrants (2 items, $\alpha = 0.60$). The behavioral component was assessed via endorsement of three actions Trump said that he would take as President: deporting illegal immigrants, repealing the Affordable Care Act, and opposing EPA regu-

Table 1 OLS regression weights predicting Trump thermometer ratings from Trump belief system components and relevant emotions, including identification against Blacks

Model component	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. error	Beta		
(Constant)	9.103	1.119		8.132	0.000
Identification with Trump ^a	23.717	2.668	0.275	8.889	0.000
Identification against Blacks ^b	4.640	2.619	0.039	1.772	0.077
Evaluative ^c	6.985	1.941	0.084	3.599	0.000
Behavioral ^d	13.155	1.825	0.177	7.210	0.000
Normative ^e	4.059	1.513	0.055	2.683	0.007
Explanatory ^f	21.663	2.798	0.232	7.743	0.000
Hope re Trump	10.428	3.262	0.106	3.197	0.001
Enthusiasm re Trump	8.477	3.678	0.082	2.304	0.021
Pride re Trump	-6.579	3.705	-0.059	-1.776	0.076
Fear re Clinton	4.355	2.706	0.049	1.610	0.108
Anger re Clinton	4.941	2.772	0.060	1.783	0.075
Contempt re Clinton	5.484	2.611	0.061	2.100	0.036

^aRepublican partisanship, perceived liberal-conservative fit with Trump, and perception that Trump cares about people like you. ^bRacial resentment and racism index. ^cAbortion and gay rights restricted; gun rights strengthened; economy not deteriorating. ^dDeporting illegal immigrants, repealing Obamacare, opposing EPA regulation. ^eAuthoritarianism. ^fPerceiving Trump qualified to be President.

Adjusted R² = 0.70

lation of carbon emissions ($\alpha = 0.63$). The evaluative component was assessed by endorsement of three outcomes that Trump said would contrast with those that he attributed to Hillary Clinton (involving support for gun rights, and opposition to abortion and gay marriage) as well as the belief that the economy had gotten worse during the previous year (which Trump promised to reverse; alpha for this 4-item index was 0.63). The normative component was assessed using the 4-item American National Election Studies (ANES) authoritarianism scale (MacWilliams, 2016), which measures the relative importance of respect for elders, obedience, good manners, and being well-behaved (as opposed to independence, self-reliance, curiosity, and being considerate; $\alpha = 0.64$). The explanatory component was measured by participants’ rating of the extent to which Trump was “qualified to be President” (to reflect acceptance of the idea that his experience and talent as a businessman meant that he would be able to run the country). Participants also rated how often they felt three positive emotions (hope, enthusiasm, pride) and three negative emotions (fear, anger, contempt) when thinking of Trump and when thinking of Clinton, using questions in the format of the affect battery from the 2012 ANES.

These variables were then used to predict feeling thermometer evaluations of Trump (Tables 1 and 2), and voting for Trump as opposed to Clinton (Table 3). As shown in Table 1, measures of each of the five belief components, as well as hope

Table 2 OLS regression weights predicting Trump thermometer ratings from Trump belief system components and relevant emotions, including identification-against-immigrants

Model component	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
	<i>B</i>	Std. error	Beta		
(Constant)	8.502	1.140		7.459	0.000
Identification with Trump ^a	23.582	2.662	0.273	8.858	0.000
Identification against immigrants ^b	4.643	1.759	0.061	2.640	0.008
Evaluative ^c	6.979	1.926	0.084	3.623	0.000
Behavioral ^d	12.033	1.889	0.162	6.370	0.000
Normative ^e	3.882	1.511	0.052	2.569	0.010
Explanatory ^f	21.495	2.791	0.230	7.700	0.000
Hope re Trump	10.617	3.255	0.108	3.262	0.001
Enthusiasm re Trump	8.781	3.662	0.085	2.398	0.017
Pride re Trump	-6.622	3.696	-0.060	-1.792	0.074
Fear re Clinton	4.881	2.708	0.055	1.802	0.072
Anger re Clinton	4.584	2.770	0.056	1.655	0.098
Contempt re Clinton	5.180	2.609	0.058	1.986	0.047

^aRepublican partisanship, perceived liberal-conservative fit with Trump, and perception that Trump cares about people like you. ^bNo legal status to illegal immigrant dreamers or nonfelons. ^cAbortion and gay rights restricted; gun rights strengthened; economy not deteriorating. ^dDeporting illegal immigrants, repealing Obamacare, opposing EPA regulation. ^eAuthoritarianism. ^fPerceiving Trump qualified to be President.
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.70$

and enthusiasm when thinking about Trump, significantly predicted more positive evaluations of Trump. Identification against Blacks was a marginally significant predictor.

As shown in Table 2, measuring identification against immigrants instead of identification against blacks produced a very similar pattern, though with identification against the outgroup and contempt when thinking about Clinton becoming significant (rather than marginal) predictors.

Table 3 shows results when predicting the Trump vs. Clinton vote (rather than Trump evaluations) and therefore including emotions favoring Clinton (as well as those favoring Trump). As shown in Table 3, the identificational, evaluative, behavioral, and explanatory components were significant predictors of voting for Trump, as was contempt for Clinton. Fear when thinking about Trump predicted voting for Clinton.³

³In this analysis, enthusiasm when thinking about Trump predicted voting for Clinton. That could have occurred because the ANES question asks about enthusiasm when thinking about Trump, but does not specify about what or toward whom the enthusiasm is felt. Thus enthusiasm occasioned by thinking about Trump (and the kind of person he is) could actually be enthusiasm about voting for Clinton, in light of her opponent's character or actions.

Table 3 Logistic regression predicting voting for Trump (rather than Clinton) from Trump belief system components and all emotions (re Trump and Clinton)

Model component	<i>B</i>	S.E.	df	Sig.	Exp(<i>B</i>)	95% CI for Exp(<i>B</i>)	
						Lower	Upper
Identification with Trump ^a	2.811	1.080	1	0.009	16.622	2.003	137.927
Identification against blacks ^b	0.622	0.851	1	0.464	1.863	0.352	9.871
Evaluative ^c	1.197	0.521	1	0.022	3.309	1.192	9.185
Behavioral ^d	2.211	0.429	1	0.000	9.123	3.938	21.138
Normative ^e	0.347	0.422	1	0.412	1.415	0.618	3.237
Explanatory ^f	3.891	1.274	1	0.002	48.944	4.033	593.948
Hope re Trump	3.213	2.180	1	0.141	24.841	0.346	1781.810
Enthusiasm re Trump	-4.499	1.770	1	0.011	0.011	0.000	0.357
Pride re Trump	1.530	1.578	1	0.332	4.616	0.209	101.796
Fear re Clinton	2.230	1.729	1	0.197	9.296	0.314	275.478
Anger re Clinton	1.306	0.936	1	0.163	3.691	0.589	23.115
Contempt re Clinton	1.897	0.910	1	0.037	6.665	1.119	39.698
Hope re Clinton	-1.351	0.995	1	0.175	0.259	0.037	1.822
Enthusiasm re Clinton	-0.391	1.115	1	0.726	0.676	0.076	6.015
Pride re Clinton	-2.154	1.479	1	0.145	0.116	0.006	2.104
Fear re Trump	-2.930	1.115	1	0.009	0.053	0.006	0.475
Anger re Trump	-0.864	0.591	1	0.143	0.421	0.132	1.341
Contempt re Trump	-1.097	0.785	1	0.163	0.334	0.072	1.556
Constant	-1.481	0.313	1	0.000	0.227		

^aRepublican partisanship, perceived liberal-conservative fit with Trump, and perception that Trump cares about people like you. ^bRacial resentment and racism index. ^cAbortion and gay rights restricted; gun rights strengthened; economy not deteriorating. ^dDeporting illegal immigrants, repealing Obamacare, opposing EPA regulation. ^eAuthoritarianism. ^fPerceiving Trump qualified to be President.

Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.88$

In sum, this study found a significant amount of evidence for the narrative theory in predicting support for and voting for Trump. All belief components predicted Trump support, and all but the normative component predicted vote choice. Predictions about the co-occurrence of components were not supported, as no significant interactions were observed--perhaps because many different combinations of components could result in support for Trump. Interestingly, the most consistent emotion predictor across our dependent variables was contempt when thinking about Clinton. This echoes recent results showing felt contempt to be the most important negative emotion predicting voting against three out of four candidates in two U.S. Senate races in 2014 (Roseman, Mattes, Redlawsk, & Katz, 2020), as well as a significant predictor of voting in the 2016 Iowa GOP caucuses (Redlawsk, Roseman, Mattes, & Katz, 2018).

It is important to note that while we have presented evidence that Trump has made statements and taken actions that meet the criteria for extremism, this does *not* mean that all or even most of his supporters are perceiving him or his words and deeds as

extremist. As shown in Fig. 1, there are many different versions of the Trump narrative. Many who voted for him in 2016 may not have approved of the extremist aspects of his rhetoric and behavior—instead casting their ballots primarily against his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton (e.g., Margolis, 2020; Saad, 2016), or for Trump primarily because he was their party’s candidate (Jacobson, 2017) or because they thought that he’d bring back jobs and prosperity (Perry, 2017) or appoint anti-abortion judges to the Supreme Court (Edgar, 2020). Voters, and especially partisans, are notoriously selective in the information to which they attend, and how they interpret it and weigh its importance (e.g., Barnidge et al., 2020; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Redlawsk, 2006). A limitation of this study in shedding light on the focal questions of this chapter is that support and voting for Trump are not necessarily linked to his extreme words and actions, however salient these may be to his detractors.

On the other hand, the number and prominence of news reports about Trump’s controversial words and deeds suggest that many people simply looked past them to vote for him; and a significant proportion of his strong supporters seem to approve of his extremist rhetoric, judging by audience responses at pro-Trump rallies (see, e.g., Tiefenthäler, 2016). Despite his extreme statements and actions once in office, more than 74 million Americans voted for him in the 2020 election (46.8% of the votes that were cast).

Another obvious limitation is that the survey by Roseman, Mattes, and Redlawsk (2019) gathered correlational, not causal, data. Future research assessing the narrative theory’s variables as prospective predictors and determinants of specifically extreme beliefs and behaviors is clearly needed.

6 Using the Theory to Counteract Extremist Narratives

Our theory suggests at least three general ways to counteract extremist narratives, each of which has many variations.

6.1 Challenging Extremist Narratives

Insofar as extreme beliefs and actions are produced or maintained by narratives of the sort that we have discussed, it would seem they could be tempered or altered by modifying narrative components. Effective counter-narratives might alter any of the key belief components or emotions. For example, a counter-narrative to the one shown in Fig. 1 might target the identificational component, e.g., with evidence that Donald Trump really does *not* care about “people like you.” One might highlight the fact that Trump knowingly downplayed the severity of the coronavirus and discouraged wearing masks, endangering the lives of many Americans (Gangel, Herb, & Stuart, 2020); held rallies that endangered the health of his supporters (Carlisle, 2020); and tried to pressure schools to reopen even as cases of COVID-19 were at

unprecedented levels and increasing (Sullivan & Green, 2020). Instances like these suggest that Trump puts his own political interests above the health of both the general public and his supporters.

The evaluative component of Trump's narrative might be challenged with facts about outcomes of concern to potential adherents (e.g., that, while violent crime in the U.S. had indeed increased in 2015, it was down sharply since Obama became President, part of a decades-long trend; Berman, 2016). The behavioral component might be challenged with information that illegal immigrants commit *fewer* crimes than native-born citizens (Ingraham, 2018). The normative component might be addressed by documented accounts of Trump's illegal actions, discussed above. The explanatory component might be disputed by factual information about Trump's business successes and failures (e.g., Buettner & Craig, 2019).

Of course, it can be difficult to alter strong beliefs with facts. Facts may be in dispute, and the importance of a given set of facts can be hard to determine. Thus people with opposing views often talk past each other (Goertzel, 1992). Interventions employing the cognitive route must contend with selective exposure (Smith, Fabrigar, & Norris, 2008), selective recall (Kahan, Jenkins-Smith, & Braman, 2011), and motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990) operating through defensive processes such as viewing belief-consistent evidence as high in quality, and inconsistent evidence as deficient (Visser, Krosnick, & Norris, 2016). However, even if strong partisans may be resistant to persuasion, it seems that continued accretion of incongruent information over time can alter people's views (Redlawsk, Civettini, & Emmerson, 2010).

6.2 *Inducing Belief-Altering Emotions*

Insofar as emotions are producing or strengthening extremist narratives, efforts could be made to reduce, alter, or redirect them; or create emotions that would be incompatible with them or that support competing narratives.

Studies examining why some individuals leave extremist groups have found that one common reason is anger at the group or group leaders, e.g., for failing to deal with infighting (Simi, Windisch, Harris, & Ligon, 2019), or for actions that have led to many deaths (Jacobson, 2010). Thus, anger might also be directed at Trump for his divisiveness, or for delaying the government response to the coronavirus pandemic, which is estimated to have cost thousands of lives (Glantz & Robertson, 2020). Research has also found that disillusionment (Simi et al., 2019) or lack of respect for leaders (Jacobson, 2010) is sometimes cited by former members as a reason for disengaging from a terrorist group, and a number of authors suggest using satire (Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism, 2009), ridicule (Kessels, 2010), or negative portrayals of extremist leaders (e.g., as common criminals; Jacobson, 2010) as one part of efforts aimed at "rewriting the narrative" (Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism, 2009) promulgated by extremist groups. This suggests employing the emotion of con-

tempt, which is associated with perceiving others as having bad qualities and therefore rejecting them (Roseman, 2018). Contempt might be focused on Trump's ignorance (e.g., in suggesting unsound, unsafe coronavirus treatments; Dale, McDermott, Cohen, Vazquez, Steck, & Fossum, 2020); or incompetence (in mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis; cf. Hutcherson & Gross, 2011); or for his violation of moral standards (Bell, 2013) in lying continually (Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2020), or in hiding evidence (e.g., financial records, tax returns, subpoenaed documents in his impeachment trial), which resembles the behavior of ordinary criminals concealing their misdeeds (PBS Newshour, 2020). Counter-narratives might also attempt to elicit guilt (e.g., about ignoring Trump's association with white supremacists)—another emotion suggested as an antecedent of disengagement from terrorism (as when feeling “sinful” about causing harm; Jacobson, 2010).

Insofar as effective counter-narratives must also provide a pathway to a preferred outcome, including the emotion of hope is also likely to be important (Just, Crigler, & Belt, 2007). Indeed, Schmid's (2013) review concludes that using positive inducements rather than negative ones is the approach to deradicalization that has gotten the strongest empirical support. For example, the fear of crime might be assuaged by displays of hope, e.g., for unity, racial justice, and peace. Anger at undocumented immigrants might be countered by depictions of gratitude to immigrants for their contributions (e.g., as technological innovators, doctors and nurses, caregivers for the elderly, etc.), or empathic portrayals showing personal stories (cf. Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism, 2009) of immigrants dealing with the same problems (e.g., economic struggles, illnesses) as other Americans, and, like others, working hard to achieve their dreams. A counter-narrative might also encompass affection for an empathic, genuinely caring leader (Roseman, Steele, & Goodvin, 2019b).

6.3 *Constructing Counter-Narratives*

One interesting question is whether it may sometimes or even typically be more effective to construct a competing narrative (e.g., Dahlstrom, 2014; Gaard, 2014) rather than to challenge (in whole or in part) an existing one. For example, in court cases, the prosecution and defense offer different theories of the case, which are typically competing stories (Pennington & Hastie, 1992), each one specifying eliciting events, actors, motives, actions, and outcomes. Competing narratives are also offered by political campaigns (e.g., in presidential elections; Neville-Shepard, 2017; Smith, 1989), and in attempts at deradicalization (Da Silva, Fernández-Navarro, Gonçalves, Rosa, & Silva, 2020).

Our theory suggests that the most successful counter-narrative should contain all of the components of a coherent narrative, structured as a dramatic story. That is, it should specify alternative outcomes differing in desirability; actions that can be taken which affect those outcomes; groups and individuals with whom the audience

can identify, who take the actions and are affected by the outcomes; moral grounds on which the actions are justified and the outcomes are deserved; reasons to believe the narrative is true; and emotions which support the narrative. Due to their dramatic structure, cohesiveness, motive-relevance, and emotional impact, competing counter-narratives may be considerably more effective in reaching and persuading audiences than attempting to correct particular factual inaccuracies or challenging only one or two components of extremist ideologies.

For example, a counter-narrative to the one that Trump used to justify extreme behaviors might contrast the outcomes of unity and peace with those of division and conflict-related injury and death; actions of cooperation and compromise, rather than competition and attacks; superordinate inclusive group identities (e.g., as Americans) rather than partisan ones; the morality of reciprocity (fairness) and care as more important than authority, loyalty and purity (or cast authority and loyalty as pertaining to an overarching group identity, and purity in terms of standards of god-like love or kindness); and culturally accepted explanatory truths, principles, or historical examples of how cooperation resolves social dilemmas or other conflicts, and results in preferable outcomes for all in the long run. For example, one such narrative might say that Donald Trump, to further his personal political ambitions, has attacked minorities, immigrants, and political opponents (setting Americans against their fellow citizens) and violated the Constitution and the law to gain power and try to remain in power. His unlawful actions and their negative effects on people make us angry (and we have contempt for the selfishness that they demonstrate). But if people come together and support a leader who will pursue policies aimed at improving the welfare of *all* Americans, then all will benefit. We know that divided we fall, and we can hope that united we will stand. If we love our neighbors and support each other, as we did when facing the Depression and powerful foes in World War II, we can overcome the problems that we face, restoring peace and prosperity.

Note that the preceding paragraph provides merely an illustration of how a counter-narrative might be constructed from belief components and emotions. We are not claiming it is the best narrative, or even a superior one. We would predict that the more that a narrative can address the most important current concerns of its target audience, connect with their salient identities, offer justifiable actions that will attain their goals (according to the ways that they believe the world works), and resonate with their emotions, the more likely it will attract their strong belief. The specific contents of effective narratives will vary over time, as situations, concerns, and beliefs change.

6.4 Addressing Grievances and Aspirations

At the heart of strongly held systems of belief are the motivations of believers (Roseman, 1994), such as desires for safety, prosperity, and respect (e.g., see Trump, 2016). In addition, the ground that underlies, rationalizes, or allows many cases of

seeking, accepting, or acting on political extremist ideology is perceived injustice (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Moghaddam, 2005), seeing desired outcomes as wrongfully denied or unfairly distributed.

To be more than empty rhetoric, efforts to counter extremism must go beyond constructing stories about desirable and just outcomes. They must create those outcomes in reality. According to the report of the Presidential Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism (2009), “political and economic reform” is “the best strategic response” for “reducing the pool of recruits to radical extremism” (p. 9). “If grievances can be expressed peacefully and mediated through democratic institutions, citizens are less apt to turn to more extreme options... Prosperous democratic societies that respect the rights of their citizens are more resilient and less susceptible to political instability and radicalization” (p. 13).

When such recommendations are implemented, there is evidence that they work. In a careful analysis of the history of popular response to the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) terrorist group in Spain, Alonso (2010) found that political reforms preceded dramatic declines in ETA’s support. Public views of ETA were changed by democratization that involved granting significant political autonomy to the Basque region, including the creation of regional legislative, judicial, and executive institutions, along with recognition of the Basque language. Whereas in 1978 almost half of Basque adults viewed ETA members as patriots or idealists, by 1989 less than a quarter viewed them favorably (Alonso, 2010, pp. 24–25).

7 Looking Back and Looking Ahead

7.1 *What Have We Learned?*

This chapter offered a conceptualization of extremism as significantly norm-violating beliefs and behaviors, with a focus on prototypical political extremism that involves acceptance of violence and illegal means to achieve political ends. We discussed cognitive, motivational, behavioral and emotional pathways to extremism, and integrated these influences within a narrative theory with identificational, behavioral, evaluative, normative, and explanatory components structured into a dramatic story of justified action taken to overcome an imminent threat (supported and amplified by particular negative and positive emotions). We described survey research that tested the ability of variables from the theory to predict Americans’ support and voting for Donald Trump, which found some empirical evidence for each of the five hypothesized belief components and the emotions of enthusiasm, hope, fear, and contempt. We also discussed how our theory might be used to challenge extremist narratives and construct effective counter-narratives.

7.2 *Future Research Needed*

Going forward, this narrative theory requires replication and extension. Can it help explain additional diverse examples, such as extremism in different societies and cultures (Gelfand, LaFree, Fahey, & Feinberg, 2013); religious fundamentalism as well as terrorism (Pratt, 2010); left-wing as well as right-wing populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012)? Attempted replications might test:

1. whether all five belief components are *necessary* for persuasive narratives. Roseman, Mattes, and Redlawsk (2019) found they each predicted thermometer evaluations of Trump, but the normative component did not independently predict vote choice;
2. whether some components are more important than others. Roseman, Mattes, and Redlawsk (2019) found that the identificational and explanatory components accounted for the largest share of variance, but this could have reflected the particular measures used—research with alternative measures is needed;
3. whether some emotions are more potent amplifiers of the narrative than others. For example, Schmid's (2013) review concluded that positive inducements for disengagement from terrorism were generally more effective than negative ones. Do findings about motivational influences (rewards vs. punishments) extend to positive vs. negative emotions? Are hope and anger, whose associated appraisals involve potential positive outcomes, and the power or ability to attain them (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006; Roseman & Evdokas, 2004) particularly potent emotions (Roseman et al., 2012)?
4. whether the various belief components and emotions have *interactive* effects. If narratives tell coherent stories (e.g. Pennington & Hastie, 1992; Roseman, 1994) then combinations of multiple components should have synergistic effects on the strength of belief and on behavior. In contrast, Roseman, Mattes, and Redlawsk (2019) found only main effects of the belief components and emotions.

7.3 *Applications Needed*

This chapter has suggested how our theory could be used to counteract extremist narratives, applying it to the example of Donald Trump's rhetoric. Would this actually affect people's beliefs and behaviors? Would such interventions succeed in preventing people from adopting extreme populist beliefs or joining extremist groups in other countries, or help in convincing them to disengage from such beliefs and organizations?

One interesting question is whether aiming to change behavior is generally more likely to succeed than attempting to change attitudes. Research from a dissonance theory perspective finds that when beliefs and behavior are in conflict, people tend to alter their beliefs (e.g., Fotuhi et al., 2013). Based on interviews with former members, Horgan (2008) concludes that leaving a terrorist group rarely results

from, and is rarely accompanied by, abandonment of radical beliefs. More often, the departure may be occasioned by competing role demands such as becoming a parent (Jacobson, 2010) or getting a job (Bjørge, 2009). Over time, depending on the extent to which alternative behaviors, coping responses, engagement, and supports are established, extremist narratives may be gradually abandoned or replaced (Barrelle, 2015).

Another question is the extent to which one should focus on social processes when attempting to counter extremist narratives. Extremist behavior is almost always a group or relational phenomenon (Schuurman et al., 2019). Entry into such groups is typically through familial and other social networks (Sageman, 2004) or outreach from group members (Hafez & Mullins, 2015); group processes (e.g., social learning, conformity) are often involved in the acquisition and maintenance of extremist beliefs (e.g., Goodwin & Darley, 2012); whether friends and associates leave or remain in extremist groups affects the related decisions of individuals (Simi et al., 2019); relationships with family and friends are often cited as reasons for leaving extremist groups (Simi et al., 2019); and the formation of supportive social contacts and relationships is important to successful reintegration of former extremist group members (Sulkowski & Picciolini, 2018). The operation of social processes is not inconsistent with the narrative model we have outlined. Rather, acknowledgement of their influence reminds us that social motives may be prominent in the evaluative component; the behavioral component often consists largely of collective actions; the identificational component typically involves social identity (Seyle & Besaw, 2021); norms are socially defined; and explanations are socially constructed and validated (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Applying our model to understanding or altering extremist narratives must take into account, and often work through, social and group mechanisms.

Our approach implies that applications of the theory must proceed from particular conditions in each instance, such as the specific grievances and aspirations of potential adherents (e.g., correcting racial inequities; attaining political autonomy; providing economic betterment). Best might be a multifaceted approach, like that exemplified by the Presidential Task Force report (Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism, 2009), which offered numerous theoretically and empirically grounded specific recommendations. It would also be useful to identify which among them has greatest support from extant research (as per Schmid's, 2013 review) or are likely to have greatest impact according to new theoretical formulations.

In applying the theory, it is important to recognize that different interventions are likely to work best for different audiences and under differing conditions (Kessels, 2010). Even within a given extremist group, different members may join through different processes (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008) and disengage for different reasons (Windisch, Simi, Ligon, & McNeel, 2016). In addition to the different motives of different individuals and groups in the evaluative component, different worldviews will make different arguments, historical examples, and metaphors relevant and convincing in the explanatory component.

Finally, we would be remiss if we failed to acknowledge that extremism might be necessary or beneficial in some instances (see, e.g., Rovira Kaltwasser's 2012 discussion of populism functioning as both a threat and a corrective for democracy). As citizens of a country born of violent revolution against an exploitative colonial power, Americans remain aware that sometimes prevailing norms, laws, and political institutions are unjust and oppressive, and need to be reformed or even overthrown. Similarly, many would maintain that some wars, which employ violence for political and other ends, need to be fought (e.g., to prevent fascist conquest, or end slavery). The difficulty, of course, is knowing when resorting to unlawful means or violence are truly necessary. While extremist narratives often contend that they are the only ways to attain vital and legitimate goals (Berger, 2018), the enormous costs of uprisings, revolutions, and wars (e.g., Hacker & McPherson, 2011), and the history of would-be tyrants, groups, and nations misrepresenting their private aims as beneficial and necessary for the general welfare (e.g., Crossman, 1950) argues that the bar for accepting such assertions should be very, very high.

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