



Research Article

The Psychology of Extremism in of Economic Crisis: A Dual-Perspective Study of 2025 Trade War

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Abstract. Trade wars, while motivated by economic goals, had consequences that transcended the economic realm, impacting social and political domains. This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate the relationship between the 2025 trade war and the potential emergence of violent extremism by interviewing two pivotal groups: former terrorist offenders, who provide insider insights, and terrorism analysts, who present outsider perspectives on extremist organizations. The results indicate that modern extremists can be classified by ideology, scope, generational cohort, and behavioral tendencies. The study emphasizes that global economic instability, resulting in local crises, can intensify extremism and criminal activity, especially in vulnerable groups. This study categorizes extremists into three classes based on their reactions to economic crises: “deradicalized,” “exploiters,” and “vulnerable.”

Keywords: 2025 trade war, economic crises, extremism, radicalism, terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, the United States under Donald Trump intensified trade tensions by imposing substantial tariffs on imports from the European Union, China, and ASEAN countries, aiming to protect domestic industries but generating significant global economic disruption (Reuters, 2025). These protectionist measures triggered market volatility, strained diplomatic relations, and provoked retaliatory policies, including potential EU counter-tariffs and ASEAN realignments toward alternative trade partners (AP News, 2025; Reuters, 2025). The resulting disruptions to global supply chains increased production costs and consumer prices, while economic uncertainty persisted despite temporary improvements in U.S. consumer confidence. Several economies, including Germany and parts of Africa, revised growth projections downward, reflecting the broader destabilizing effects of tariff-induced volatility (Axios, 2025; The Guardian, 2025).

These economic strains have intensified social tensions, creating conditions that extremist groups can exploit. Historical evidence suggests that economic crises often coincide with rising radicalization and political extremism. For instance, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security highlighted ongoing threats from domestic violent extremism driven by anti-government sentiment and conspiracy narratives (Department of Homeland Security, 2024). Similar patterns have been observed globally, including increased Pentecostal political mobilization in Brazil (Costa et al., 2019), the rise of radical nationalism in Finland during economic instability (Silvennoinen, 2016), and broader trends described in the “Age of Discontent,” where economic downturns fuel populism and radical movements (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2023).

The geopolitical and regional implications are also significant. ASEAN countries have sought alternative alliances in response to economic pressures, reshaping regional dynamics and creating opportunities for extremist narratives centered on perceived economic injustice. In the Middle East, economic destabilization and reduced investment have contributed to the resurgence of extremist groups such as the Islamic State, which exploit instability for recruitment and expansion (AP News, 2025; Control Risks, 2025). Although direct empirical evidence linking trade wars to extremism remains limited, broader research consistently shows that economic downturns correlate with increased support for extremist movements. Historical cases, including the Great Depression and the global financial crisis, demonstrate similar patterns, while longitudinal data from 23 EU countries confirm that declining GDP and rising unemployment are associated with greater electoral support for extremist parties (Klapisis, 2014; Doležalová, 2015).

The correlation between economic adversity and extremism has considerable complexity. In the United States, Republican contributors living in areas impacted by foreclosure exhibited diminished support for Tea Party candidates amid the housing crisis (Li, 2023). Conversely, studies on Russian terrorism indicate that economic crises can yield paradoxical effects on extremist activities: although economic hardship may incite public outrage and enhance terrorist motivations, it can concurrently restrict operational capacities by diminishing available resources

(Omelicheva & Webb, 2021). The findings indicate that the relationship between economic crises and political extremism is contingent upon context, with outcomes differing based on particular conditions.

This study aimed to investigate the complex relationship between the 2025 trade war and the possible comeback of violent extremism, as there was limited study addressing this connection, integrating perspectives from both extremist networks and external sources. This represents the novelty of this study. Moreover, the study investigates whether the economic disruptions of the 2025 US trade war might incite extremist violence, through comprehensive interviews with two primary stakeholder groups: past terrorist offenders, who provide insider insights, and counterterrorism specialists/experts, who offer external analysis. Hence, this study tried to clarify the potential link between trade-induced economic shocks and the rise of extremism, contributing to the formulation of mitigation methods during times of global economic and geopolitical instability.

TRADE WARS

Definition of a Trade War

Trade wars are economic conflicts in which countries impose tariffs or trade restrictions to protect domestic industries or correct trade imbalances (Adegboye et al., 2020; Batyrkanov & Kharlanov, 2024). They may arise from unequal trade advantages, technological competition, or protectionist policies, as exemplified by the U.S.–China trade war (Mishra & Karthik, 2020). Such conflicts typically escalate through reciprocal tariff increases, potentially evolving into full-scale trade wars with significant impacts on global trade, economic growth, and international relations (Batyrkanov & Kharlanov, 2024; Gould & Woodbridge, 1993).

Trade wars, defined as deliberate efforts to harm other economies through tariffs or quotas, often lead to inefficiencies, uncertainty, and heightened interstate tensions (Irwin, 2017). Protectionist measures disrupt global value chains, distort market expectations, and influence investment behavior. They also increase production costs, generate inflationary pressures, and restrict trade and investment flows, with broad spillover effects across financial markets (Xu, 2024; Yilmaz, 2020). While short-term impacts may appear limited, escalating trade tensions pose long-term risks to global growth and economic stability, particularly by weakening market confidence and reducing corporate investment (Gunnella & Quaglietti, 2019; Caldara et al., 2019).

Historical Overview of Trade Wars

Historically, trade wars have taken various forms with significant economic and geopolitical consequences. In the 17th century, the Anglo-Dutch trade conflicts combined military and economic rivalry, with England's Navigation Acts (1651) restricting foreign trade and ultimately strengthening its maritime dominance (Israel, 1995). During the Great Depression, the U.S. Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act (1930) imposed high duties on over 20,000 imports, triggering retaliatory tariffs and a sharp decline in global trade (by approximately 65% between 1929 and 1934) thereby worsening the global economic crisis (Eichengreen & Irwin, 2010).

In the 1960s, the “Chicken War” between the United States and the European Economic Community reflected sector-specific trade retaliation, with U.S. tariffs on European goods (particularly light trucks) having long-term structural effects on the American automotive industry (Bown, 2011). More recently, the U.S.–China trade war (2018–2020) involved large-scale tariffs and counter-tariffs over issues such as intellectual property and trade imbalances, disrupting global supply chains, increasing costs, and heightening economic uncertainty while reinforcing economic nationalism (Bown & Kolb, 2019).

Consequences of Trade Wars

Trade wars generally lead to higher consumer prices, supply chain disruptions, retaliatory measures, and slower global economic growth, particularly in interconnected sectors. Evidence shows that the 2018–2019 trade tensions reduced world GDP by about 0.8% by 2020 (International Monetary Fund, 2019).

Disruption of Global Supply Chains

Trade wars often trigger economic disruption by destabilizing global supply chains, where production spans multiple countries. Tariffs increase the cost of intermediate goods, raising production expenses and reducing efficiency. During the U.S.–China trade war (2018–2020), U.S. manufacturers faced higher input costs, while Chinese exporters experienced declining demand (Bown, 2020). Supply chain-intensive sectors such as automotive and electronics were particularly vulnerable, with evidence showing that tariffs led to higher costs and reduced industrial output (Flaen & Pierce, 2019). Over time, this uncertainty prompted firms to delay investments, restructure operations, and relocate production, further amplifying global economic instability.

Consumer Price Inflation and Reduced Purchasing Power

Tariffs act as taxes on imports, typically increasing consumer prices and reducing purchasing power. During the 2018–2019 U.S.–China trade war, most tariff costs were borne by U.S. consumers and firms (Amiti et al., 2019), leading to lower demand, reduced profits, and slower economic growth. Prolonged trade conflicts also risk stagflation. Simulation studies estimate that large-scale trade wars could reduce global GDP by up to 1.96% and trade volumes by 17% (Bekkers & Teh, 2019), with direct GDP losses of 0.1% in the U.S. and 0.2% in China, and larger long-term declines of 1.6% and 2.5%, respectively (Tsutsumi, 2019). These effects are driven by reduced investment, weakened technological cooperation, and declining energy demand (Xia et al., 2019). While some countries may benefit from trade diversion, overall impacts remain negative, disrupting supply chains, altering comparative advantages, and destabilizing key industries (Bekkers & Schroeter, 2020; Tsutsumi, 2019).

Investor Uncertainty and Capital Flight

Trade disputes generate policy uncertainty that weakens investor confidence and delays business decisions on expansion, innovation, and hiring. This “wait-and-see” approach reduces investment and slows productivity growth (Handley & Limão, 2017). The impact is intensified when foreign investors withdraw, particularly from economically fragile or politically unstable countries, leading to currency depreciation, higher borrowing costs, and potential financial crises (International Monetary Fund, 2019).

Vulnerability of Emerging Markets

Emerging markets are particularly vulnerable to trade conflicts due to their reliance on exports and imported industrial inputs. Disputes between major economies like the U.S. and China often reduce export demand, disrupt capital flows, and weaken currencies in regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, increasing the risk of economic crises (World Bank, 2020).

Poverty

Trade wars influence poverty in developing countries through indirect and uneven effects. While trade can promote growth, its benefits are often unequally distributed (Mamoon, 2015). Trade conflicts exacerbate poverty via price volatility, labor market disruptions, reduced fiscal capacity, economic uncertainty, and slower GDP growth (Winters, 2020). The overall impact depends on market disruption severity, institutional capacity, and labor demand elasticity, with vulnerable groups (such as women, rural populations, and informal workers) most affected (Winters, 2020; Johns et al., 2015).

Extremism

Extremism constitutes a complex danger to community cohesiveness and fundamental rights (Stankov et al., 2020; Sukabdi, 2024, 2025; Zinchenko, 2014; Zwicker, van Prooijen, & Krouwel, 2020). Characterized by the application of coercive violence to enforce ideological or belief systems (Baqai, 2011), its manifestations contest prevalent assumptions (especially concerning the ubiquity of religious extremism, which arises from intricate interactions between individual psychology and communal dynamics) (Liebman, 1983). Psychologically, extremism is regarded as a deviant conduct stemming from a motivational imbalance, when a singular demand becomes so preeminent that it eclipses other needs and behavioral standards (Kruglanski et al., 2017). Addressing violent extremism necessitates the identification of specific demands or motivations that lead to it, as well as the acknowledgment of external agents that influence or regulate the difficulty of executing extremist activities (Kruglanski et al., 2017).

Research indicates that extremism is driven by several psychological causes (Hogg, 2014; Ramos et al., 2015; Siev & Petty, 2024; Sunstein, 2009; Thomas, McGarty, & Louis, 2014; Webber et al., 2018). Significance quest theory identifies three primary causes: a profound desire for importance or purpose, a belief system that rationalizes violence, and reinforcement from like-minded others (Kruglanski et al., 2018). Relative deprivation, defined as the perception of being unjustly treated or possessing

less than others, is recognized as a significant factor elucidating numerous manifestations of violent extremism (Hogg, 2014; Sunstein, 2009; Thomas, McGarty, & Louis, 2014; Webber et al., 2018). This encompasses measures to alter or safeguard current social or political structures (Kunst & Obaidi, 2020; Ramos et al., 2015; Siev & Petty, 2024; Zwicker, van Prooijen, & Krouwel, 2020). Extremism can appear in both deleterious forms (such as terrorism) and beneficial forms (such as scientific advancements). It can affect various aspects of culture and individual decision-making (Kruglanski & Moskalenko, 2024). Comprehending the psychological determinants of extremism is crucial for formulating effective therapies aimed at mitigating perilous extremist behaviors and redirecting them towards more constructive avenues. These psychological insights provide a definitive framework for analyzing and addressing various manifestations of extremism across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

METHODS

Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the relationship between the 2025 trade war and violent extremism. The qualitative technique was employed to gather extensive information regarding the relationship between factors. Due to various challenges in terrorism research, including confidentiality concerns and skepticism from both authorities and terrorist perpetrators (Bhui et al., 2012; Shepherd, 2007), a qualitative methodology is more suitable for investigating the connection between the 2025 trade war and violent extremism.

Participants

This study involved ten deradicalized Indonesian terrorist offenders, a foreign (American) terrorist suspect, and eleven analysts/experts on terrorism (Table 1). Their ages ranged from 30 to 75 years. The terrorist offenders faced charges that included the Bali bombing, robbery, obstruction of justice, financing terrorism, involvement in worldwide terrorist networks, espionage, recruitment, and military training for terrorism. They were affiliated with militant organizations such as Jamaah Islamiyah/JI/Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Hezbollah. The eleven experts comprised forensic psychologists/terrorist profilers, senior officers from the Special Task Force Anti-Terrorism/Detachment 88 of the National Police (Densus 88), and several American, Indonesian, Malaysian, and Singaporean government think tanks (security consultants and advisors working for anti-terrorism agencies and various ministries), all of whom possess esteemed credentials.

Table 1. Participants of this study

Perspective	Initial	Sex (M/F)	Age	Field of expertise/ Case	Nationality/ Affiliation
Outsider (experts/)	ST	M	45	Intelligence	Indonesia
	N	M	62	Economics	Indonesia
	PI	M	63	International relations, military, and defence	Indonesia
	GI	M	55	Politics and religion studies	Indonesia

	R	M	44	Legal and human rights	Indonesia
	IS	M	58	Law and gender studies	Indonesia
	MS	M	41	Middle East Studies	USA
	KP	F	51	Psychology	Indonesia
	BS	M	75	Military and intelligence	Singapore
	DT	F	54	Journalism, gender, and human rights	Indonesia
	AA	M	47	Religious studies	Malaysia
Insider (former terrorist offenders/ suspects in extremist network)	AN	M	48	Terrorist recruitment and training	JI
	AT	M	45	Obstruction of justice	ISIS
	AI	M	48	Bombing	JI
	AD	F	23	Foreign fighting in Syria	ISIS
	TA	F	32	Terrorism financing	ISIS
	TS	M	49	Military training/camp	JI
	GL	M	32	Terrorism financing	ISIS
	WT	M	53	Terrorism financing	JI
	MI	M	45	Robbery	JI
	JI	M	61	Hiding information	JI
SM	M	41	Espionage (foreign fighting in Iraq)	Hezbollah	

The participants were selected based on their expertise and experiences. The experts possessed over ten years of experience in economics, social sciences, and/or counterterrorism. The former offenders/suspects were already deradicalized and whose names were recommended/referenced by counter-terrorism agencies/organizations (e.g., BNPT, Densus 88, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and others). We utilized inter-rater assessment in coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data acquired from participant interviews.

Procedure and Materials

A review of participant names, initial outreach, and communication with potential participants was conducted, followed by organized interviews with individuals who consented to participate in this study. Before the interviews, participants who agreed to take part in the study provided verbal consent to be involved. Interviews were conducted in May and June 2025 by the principal researcher of this study in Indonesia and the United States. Each participant engaged in a single interview session lasting approximately 30 to 40 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or English, with the researcher recording responses manually as participants opted against digital recording. Prior to concluding each interview, the researcher verified the written notes with the participant for accuracy to prevent misunderstanding and bias.

Analysis

The participants' answers were compiled in a table for qualitative analysis. This enabled researchers to identify key similar concepts. The researchers subsequently deliberated on the participants' replies and coding to ensure inter-rater agreement.

They subsequently analysed the data using an inductive approach to identify a general pattern.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extremists' Perspectives on the 2025 Trade War

The findings of this study suggest that up-to-date extremists can be classified based on their scope, gender, ideology, hierarchical position within terrorist organisations, role, occupation, motivations for joining terrorist groups, generational cohort, and behavioural changes (Table 2). Extremists can be categorised as female or male, leaders or non-leaders, entrepreneurs or labourers, economically or non-economically oriented, religion- or non-religion-based, non-deradicalized or deradicalized, and active or passive. Regarding scope, there exist both local/home-grown and global extremists. Generational classifications include Gen X (born 1965–1980), Gen Y (born 1981–1996), as well as Gen Z (born 1997–2012). The participants emphasise the Gen Z and younger cohort to anticipate the post-Artificial Intelligence (AI) age, as Gen Z is seen as a ‘cyber/digital generation’, fundamentally differing from preceding generations in many aspects of life. Although previous studies have recommended many classifications of terrorists or extremists, the participants of this study advocate for more simplified categories for pragmatic investigative objectives following the disbandment of Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) and the ‘zero-attack’ phenomenon.

Table 2. Classifications of contemporary extremists

Category	Type
Scope	Home-ground/local vs global
Gender	Female vs Male
Hierarchy in terrorist network	High-ranked (e.g., leaders, commanders) vs lower-ranked (e.g., technicians, couriers)
Work	Entrepreneurs vs non-businessmen/labourers
Ideology	Religion vs non-religion based (e.g., separatism, socialism, communism)
Motives to join network	Economic vs justice vs security vs social vs political vs adventure
Generation	Gen Z vs Gen Y vs Gen X
Level of radicalism	Low vs medium vs high
Change in behaviour	Non-deradicalized vs deradicalized vs unstable
Role	Active (i.e., recruiter, producer) vs passive

The findings demonstrate that local extremist networks possess a limited understanding of the 2025 trade war in comparison to their global counterparts. Furthermore, extremist leaders and businessmen possess a greater understanding of the 2025 trade war and its ramifications on the daily lives of individuals, in contrast to non-leaders and labourers. Interestingly, participants of this study explain that female extremists (*umahat*) lack comprehension of global trends and the conflict between nations (USA/allies and China/allies), in contrast to their male kins

(husband, father, son). Moreover, Gen Z extremists comprehend global news, including the 2025 trade war and its ramifications, as they consistently engage with news and podcasts on various online.

"Terrorists might be either homegrown or global. The global ones know that big countries might use them as proxies, so they might know about trade conflicts and other global problems. They are well-informed and watch the news because they will utilize any chance they have to propagate their narratives. But the ones who are homegrown don't know anything about trade wars or geopolitics." (participant of this study, a political analyst and advisor).

"We, Gen Z, watch news and listen to podcasts on YouTube, Twitter, and other sites. We know what's going on in the world, including the 2025 Trade War and how it will affect our economy. We even keep up with many trends and know that there are numerous layoffs and campus dropouts in Indonesia because of the economic crisis." (participant of this study, a former suspect/extremist).

"Our forensic clinical examination shows that these extremists and terrorists have serious problems in two parts of their brains: the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC). This means they don't understand global issues like the 2025 trade war between the US and China. The DLPFC is a very important part of the brain that helps with memory, decision-making, emotion management, executive functioning, and behavior that is focused on goals. The DLPFC has something to do with violent behavior and terrorism. The vmPFC is a critically important part of the brain for social and emotional functioning, like empathy, controlling emotions, and moral competence. It regulates anxiety and fear. The vmPFC mixes cognitive and affective information, which includes human values." (participant of this study, a forensic clinical psychologist)

"Don't underestimate us, we follow the news. We know what's going on in the world. We know about the trade war and other conflicts between the US and China, which affect Indonesia's economy in the end." (participant of this study, a bombing perpetrator).

"I doubt that extremists know about this thing (trade war). Their paradigm is different unless the great powers (USA and China) attack Muslim states." (participant of this study, a senior military and intelligence advisor for several governments).

"They know about the 2025 trade war because their groups have a Foreign Affairs division, meaning they always monitor developments that occur abroad, including the trade war between China and America. So, they study things like this, not only local politics but also global politics. I remember when I interviewed one of the leaders of JI, he said that his division monitors global political developments and with whom they must cooperate." (participant of this study, a senior journalist and analyst for governments).

The Expected Relationship Between the 2025 Trade War and the Rise of Extremism

The findings in this study show that participants split in opinions about the impact of trade war to the rise of extremism. Most participants argue that global economic challenges resulting in crises may increase the rise of extremism and

criminal behaviour, especially to at-risk communities or individuals. Many of them refer to pull and push factors in criminal studies, indicating that economic or financial crises can precipitate various societal issues. They elucidated that economic difficulties may serve as catalysts or supporting factors, among other variables such as socioeconomic disparity, injustice, political instability, and so forth, in the emergence of extremism. Nevertheless, a small contingent of four individuals argues that economic issues are irrelevant to extremism, asserting that ideology is the only driver of such behaviour. These participants were former leaders or high-ranking members of JI (Table 3).

The present findings reveal a divergence in participant perspectives regarding the potential impact of the 2025 trade war on extremism. A majority of participants posit that global economic instability may exacerbate extremism and criminal behavior, particularly among vulnerable populations. Drawing upon criminological frameworks, respondents highlighted how economic crises may function as both push and pull factors, interacting with other psychosocial variables (including socioeconomic disparities, systemic injustice, and political instability) to facilitate radicalization. Notably, a minority subset (n=4) of former Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) leaders and high-ranking members maintained that economic factors bear no significant relationship to extremism, asserting ideological commitment as the sole determinant of such behavior (see Table 3). This dissenting perspective underscores the ongoing theoretical debate regarding the relative weights of material deprivation versus ideological conviction in radicalization processes.

"People in underdeveloped regions who are still struggling, poor, and starving are more likely to commit terrorist attacks and become radicalized. For example, Poso. That's the fact. It's not easy to get people to do violent things while their tummies are full." (participant of this study, a high-ranked JI member).

"Everywhere, it has become a premise that the greater the socioeconomic inequality, the higher the crime rate." (participant of this study, a senior economic advisor of the Indonesian government).

"We are really offended when our acts are linked to money issues. Not all poor individuals in developing nations become terrorists. Our acts were based on our beliefs and ideology." (participant of this study, a bombing perpetrator, former JI member).

"Trade wars and economic crises cannot turn individuals into extremists, but tensions between India and Pakistan can, due to India's attacks against Muslims in Pakistan. There is a growing argument right now among Afghanistan ex-combatants over how to get to Pakistan from Indonesia to help our brothers and sisters there." (participant of this study, a former leader of JI).

"Economic crises can turn people to be extreme in mind. Financial issues are not the main driver, but can increase extremism - indirectly maybe, along with other issues such as injustice, discrepancy, and other grievances." (participant of this study, a senior JI member).

"Economic crises can lead to the rise of extremism as these can enhance existing or create new grievances." (participant of this study, a senior military and intelligence advisor for several governments).

"The worse the economy in a country, the higher the extremism in its people. When people have nothing to lose - poor and starving, it's easier to provoke them and escalate extremism in them. Just look at Yemen." (participant of this study, an American analyst).

Table 3. Participants' opinions on economic crises' impact to the rise of extremism

Insider (former terrorist offenders/suspects in extremist network)			Outsider (experts/analysts)		
Initial rank	and Statements	Agreement that trade war can lead to extremism	Initial rank	Statements	Agreement that trade war can lead to extremism
AN (JI, high-ranked)	"No, nothing to do with that. Because our actions are based on ideology."	✗	N	"It is agreed in many theories that economic inequality can lead to criminality."	✓
AT (ISIS, high-ranked)	"Yes, it can, therefore it is used in violent extremist narratives."	✓	PI	"Economic hardships can stimulate the rise of extremism, because vulnerable people in such situation will go to two things: gambling or extremism."	✓
AI (JI, high-ranked)	"For us, economic issues don't affect us. But for vulnerable people, economic difficulties may increase extreme thoughts."	✓	GI	"Economic troubles can be a catalyst in the increase of extremism."	✓
AD (ISIS, lower-ranked)	"Economic problems can lead to violent extremism, yet through a very long process."	✓	R	"Yes, because economic discrepancy is one of the push factors in extremism and terrorism."	✓
TA (ISIS, lower-ranked)	"Yes, economic grievance can be a trigger to make someone extreme in mind."	✓	IS	"No, economic troubles don't contribute to extremism, because the extremists witness that everyone also suffers, not only their network/ fellows. We all are suffering."	✗
TS (JI, high-ranked)	"For sure, yes, it can. Just like what happened in Poso."	✓	MS	"Yes, it can lead to extremism. Just look at Yemen."	✓

GL (ISIS, high-ranked)	<i>"It can, because economic troubles can increase criminal activities."</i>	√	KP	<i>"Economic factors can increase extremism, but not directly."</i>	√
WT (JI, high-ranked)	<i>"It can but economy is not the only factor."</i>	√	BS	<i>"Economic hardships due to the trade war can enhance existing or create new grievances, hence increase extremism."</i>	√
MI (JI, high-ranked)	<i>"There is a possibility that trade war between USA and China and other countries will cause global economic crises, and lead to the rise of extremism everywhere."</i>	√	DT	<i>"Extremists will do the acts of terror when they have monetary resources, regardless the circumstances."</i>	×
JI (JI, high-ranked)	<i>"No, economic issues have nothing to do with us. We act based on ideology."</i>	×	AA	<i>"Global economic crises because of the 2025 trade war between the great powers can be used by terrorists and extremists to recruit more people into extremist groups."</i>	√
SM (Hezbollah, sympathiser)	<i>"Economic difficulties for sure can increase the level of extremism in people."</i>	√	ST	<i>"Yes, it can, that's why economic crises is effectively used by them for their propaganda to recruit more people."</i>	√

This study reveals a typology of psychological responses to economic crises among individuals with extremist affiliations. The findings demonstrate three distinct patterns of reaction and adaptation. First, there are individuals who have undergone significant belief system modification, having disengaged from violence. These individuals exhibit marked affective distress when confronted with economic crises, including inflation, rising prices, increased poverty, and heightened taxation. Their distress extends beyond personal circumstances to encompass broader societal impacts, and they maintain a determined commitment to peace advocacy regardless of external conditions.

In contrast, the study identifies a second category of extremist actors who occupy leadership or senior positions within their organizations and display high levels of radicalization. These "exploiters"-typed extremists individuals strategically exploit economic difficulties, turmoil, and chaos to advance their ideological objectives. They actively disseminate propaganda and recruit new members by framing economic crises as divine punishment for societies that fail to adhere to their

prescribed religious practices. This exploitative behavior reflects sophisticated cognitive framing techniques and deliberate manipulation of in-group/out-group dynamics.

A third, more passive group emerges from the findings - individuals who are 'muted' members on the periphery of extremist networks while experiencing significant economic hardship. These members demonstrate increased susceptibility to radicalization during periods of economic distress, though they typically refrain from active participation in organizational activities. Their vulnerability appears rooted in the intersection of material deprivation and pre-existing network affiliations.

The study's typological framework contributes to our understanding of how economic crises function as psychological stressors that interact differentially with individuals' positions within extremist hierarchies and their stages of radicalization. The findings suggest that economic instability does not produce uniform effects across extremist populations, but rather activates distinct psychological and behavioral patterns depending on individuals' organizational roles, belief systems, and personal circumstances. Thus, the study has identified three classifications of extremists according to their reactions to economic crises: 1) disengaged from violence/'deradicalized' individuals who persistently promote peace, 2) 'exploiters' who use economic challenges as a means to disseminate extremist narratives and recruit more followers, and 3) 'vulnerable' silent individuals who may adopt more radical ideologies in response to economic hardships.

"These economic issues are exploited by recruiters to spread their ideology. They argue that the crises happen because the government is secular or not applying certain religious practices across many aspects." (participant of this study, a high-ranked JI member).

"Historically proven, economic crises can cause discontentment and anger against authorities which can lead to resistance, fighting, and expressions of dissatisfaction against governments. The extremists use the issue of economic crises to blame the small group of minorities, the top 10%, the capitalists who own all the land and resources, and to promote hate-filled narratives or propaganda to get more people to join them." (participant of this study, a scholar of Islamic studies, high-ranked counselor to governments).

"High prices, low purchasing power of the people, and various manifestations of economic crises cause two things in vulnerable communities: 1) online gambling due to frustration, or 2) extremism as a means to transcend existence in this world and go to the afterlife." (participant of this study, an eminent professor in International Relations, Military, and Defense).

"Economic crises can cause someone to become extreme, but this is a very long process. Economic motives are not the only ones; they interact with other factors that can eventually cause people to become extreme. I am one example." (participant of this study, a young former ISIS member).

Urgent Policy Measures Needed to Mitigate Risks During the 2025 Trade War

The findings of this study reveal several threats that governments must confront following the 2025 trade war, based on perspectives from both internal and external extremist groups. Former terrorist offenders/suspects and experts in various fields highlight current threats/risks, including significant economic and social disparities, political instability, poverty, and the escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan into a religious conflict (Table 4).

"The current threat, in my opinion as an economist, is the governments' confusion and uncertainty in responding to BRICS versus the USA. This confusion stems from a lack of capacity." (participant of this study, a senior economic advisor to the Indonesian government).

"The current threat to handle is that the fallout from the Israeli genocide against Palestinians has radicalized several Salafi groups. Although the violence has not yet happened, a new leader or coalition could trigger future jihadi attacks." (participant of this study, a senior military and intelligence advisor for several governments).

"I think the current risks now are people's frustration and distrust in their governments' administrations. In many countries, governments have failed to win people's hearts. They fail us. People around the world feel ignored and disrespected by their governments. Governments see their people as stupid, but actually they are not." (participant of this study, a young former female ISIS member).

"Terrorism financing is now a real threat. Extremist narratives and propaganda on social media are often sponsored by terrorist groups. These groups frequently pay to spread extremist stories and propaganda online. Indonesians are generally kind and generous people, which is why these organizations collect money by tricking or manipulating ordinary citizens. They also utilize digital or cryptocurrency to transfer funds to locations like Syria." (participant of this study, forensic clinical psychologist).

Table 4. Current threats according to participants

		Insider (extremist networks)		Outsider (experts)
Initial rank	and	View on current risks	Initial	View on current risks
AN (JI, high-ranked)		The escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan into a religious conflict	N	Governments' uncertainty in responding to the USA-China trade conflict
AT (ISIS, high-ranked)		A new growing wave of violent extremism	PI	Poverty
AI (JI, high-ranked)		Injustice, corruption, oppression and economic disparities	GI	Governments' lack of empathy to their own people

AD (ISIS, lower-ranked)	Economic, politic, and social instability	R	Social Inequality (grievance/hatred)
TA (ISIS, lower-ranked)	People's frustration and distrust in administrations of governments globally	IS	Radical narratives, such as those about India vs Pakistan war which are often linked to religion
TS (JI, high-ranked)	Hunger and safety issues	MS	Economic inequality within and across nations
GL (ISIS, high-ranked)	Poverty and welfare issues	KP	Crimes and terrorism
WT (JI, high-ranked)	Disinformation, hoax, and dangerous radical narratives	BS	The consequences from the Israeli genocide against Palestinians
MI (JI, high-ranked)	Inequality and perceived injustice in society	DT	The birth of new cells of extremist groups post-2025
JI (JI, high-ranked)	Economic instability, poverty and sharp decline of people's purchasing power	AA	Economic inequality, disinformation, and extremist narratives are thriving during economic crises and are used to manipulate public sentiment
SM (Hezbollah, sympathiser)	Socio-economic discrepancies and injustice	ST	Recruitment of extremist groups

This study found recommended government responses and strategies to address current threats, as proposed by former terrorist offenders and experts. These include good governance, poverty eradication, effective counternarratives and deradicalization programs, and improvements in education and healthcare systems (Table 5).

"Governments everywhere should adopt a persuasive and inclusive approach, like those successfully used with Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, which led to its disbandment, and should reduce counterproductive actions such as aggression and repression toward people." (participant of this study, a senior former member of JI).

"The state should enhance all sectors, including eradicating corruption, advancing education to make it more affordable and accessible to the populace, and enhancing healthcare. Avoid creating frustration among people because frustration can lead to turbulence, chaos, criminality, extremism, and terrorism." (participant of this study, young former female member of ISIS).

"The dissolution of JI does not mean the end, because there is potential for new cells to emerge from those who disagree with JI's dissolution. There are also internal dynamics within JI post-dissolution that could lead to dissatisfaction and the emergence of new cells. Additionally, JI could change its name and strategy, and

infiltrate government or non-government agencies to influence policy. Regarding ISIS, it's crucial to monitor overseas instructions, as they are still consolidating and actively recruiting at this time." (participant of this study, a senior journalist and analyst for governments).

Table 5. Participants' opinions on prompt improvement by governments globally

Insider (former terrorist offenders/suspects in extremist network)		Outsider (experts/analysts)	
Initial rank	Strategies to Overcome Current Threats (Governments' Areas for Improvement)	Initial	Strategies to Overcome Current Threats (Governments' Areas for Improvement)
AN (JI, high-ranked)	Deradicalization and counter-narratives programs to vulnerable people	N	Educating people and focusing on strategic resources and commodities
AT (ISIS, high-ranked)	Continue deradicalization and counternarrative programs, maintaining the level of defence and security, and eradicating corruption in governments' administration	PI	Erasing poverty by: 1) eliminating corruption, 2) promoting socioeconomic equality, 3) enhancing welfare through the creation of employment opportunities, among other measures
AI (JI, high-ranked)	Implementing good governance, reducing inequality, as well as performing effective deradicalization and counter-narratives against extremism	GI	Constructing positive narratives through various ways, such as legislation, politics and community empowerment, that cultivate empathy; and improve the education curriculum
AD (ISIS, lower-ranked)	Strengthening all key sectors, including ending corruption, improving the quality, affordability, and accessibility of education, and enhancing healthcare	R	Countering radical narratives
TA (ISIS, lower-ranked)	Demonstrating respect and empathy to people and addressing public frustrations, especially in education and healthcare	IS	Suppressing radical narratives and educating vulnerable communities
TS (JI, high-ranked)	Enhancing societal safety as well as increasing employment opportunities	MS	Reducing economic disparities inside and across nations

	to ensure that people can fulfil their basic needs		
GL (ISIS, high-ranked)	Improving general welfare, especially for individuals vulnerable to radicalisation, offering employment to disengage individuals from violence, as well as maintaining deradicalization efforts	KP	Establishing a banking and non-banking framework that inhibits the financing of terrorists, alongside media counternarratives to mitigate extremism
WT (JI, high-ranked)	Adopting a persuasive and inclusive approach and avoiding aggression and repression to people	BS	Ceasing the Israeli genocide against Palestinians
MI (JI, high-ranked)	Implementing good governance which is full of integrity and transparency	DT	Monitoring to religious parties, new cells of extremist groups, and social media propaganda, and making effective programs to address extremism
Jl (JI, high-ranked)	Improving law enforcement, legal system, and economic opportunities	AA	Addressing economic inequality, countering extremist narratives, and monitoring emerging extremist group that may arise during times of economic turmoil
SM (Hezbollah, sympathiser)	Addressing socio-economic inequality	ST	Fixing governments' communication which promote empathy and reduce tension

As a discussion, recent developments in Indonesia further reinforce the contemporary relevance of this study. In late August 2025, the country experienced widespread mass protests that, in several locations, escalated into riots and violent unrest. Initially driven by public dissatisfaction over rising living costs, taxation policies, and perceived political privilege, these demonstrations gradually evolved into broader expressions of socioeconomic grievance and distrust toward state institutions. The protests, which spread across major urban centers, involved large-scale mobilization of students, workers, and civil society groups, and were accompanied by clashes with security forces, arrests, and reports of property damage (BBC News, 2025; The Guardian, 2025). Importantly, the escalation of unrest was further intensified by triggering incidents of perceived injustice, illustrating how economic pressures can interact with symbolic and emotional factors to amplify collective action. From a psychological standpoint, these events exemplify how

economic strain (when combined with perceived inequality and governance dissatisfaction) can create fertile conditions for radical narratives and, in some cases, the emergence or strengthening of extremist tendencies. As such, the Indonesian case provides an empirical illustration of the mechanisms identified in this study, particularly the role of economic crises as indirect yet powerful catalysts in the broader ecology of extremism.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the 2025 trade war, while primarily an economic policy instrument, has generated multidimensional consequences that extend into the psychological and sociopolitical domains. The findings confirm that economic disruptions do not operate as direct or deterministic causes of violent extremism; rather, they function as *contextual amplifiers* that intensify existing grievances, inequalities, and identity-based tensions. In this sense, the trade war acts as a structural stressor that interacts with individual-level psychological vulnerabilities and group-level dynamics.

A key contribution of this study lies in its dual-perspective approach, integrating insider accounts from former extremist actors with outsider analyses from experts. This combination reveals that extremism in times of economic crisis is neither monolithic nor uniformly driven. Instead, it is shaped by differential access to information, organizational roles, ideological commitments, and generational characteristics. The identification of three distinct response patterns (*deradicalized*, *exploiters*, and *vulnerable* individuals) highlights the heterogeneous ways in which economic shocks are cognitively interpreted and behaviorally enacted within extremist ecosystems.

Importantly, the findings reinforce the argument that ideology remains a central driver of extremism, but its mobilization is often facilitated by material and psychological conditions such as perceived injustice, relative deprivation, and loss of meaning. Economic crises, including those triggered by trade conflicts, therefore play an indirect yet significant role by creating fertile ground for recruitment, narrative framing, and grievance construction. This underscores the need to move beyond binary debates (whether extremism is driven by ideology or economics) toward a more integrative framework that captures their interaction.

From a policy perspective, the study suggests that effective counter-extremism strategies must be multidimensional, combining macroeconomic stability, social protection, and psychologically informed interventions. Addressing poverty, inequality, and governance deficits is as crucial as disrupting extremist narratives and strengthening resilience at the individual and community levels. The findings also emphasize the growing importance of digital spaces, particularly among younger generations, where global economic narratives are rapidly interpreted and politicized.

Despite its contributions, this study also reveals several avenues for further research. First, future studies should employ longitudinal designs to examine how economic shocks (such as trade wars) translate into radicalization trajectories over time, rather than relying on cross-sectional or retrospective accounts. Second, there is a need for multilevel quantitative modeling that integrates macroeconomic

indicators (e.g., inflation, unemployment, trade volatility) with micro-level psychological variables (e.g., perceived injustice, identity threat, need for significance) to better understand causal pathways. Third, comparative cross-national research would be valuable in identifying how different political, cultural, and institutional contexts mediate the relationship between economic crises and extremism. Additionally, future research should explore the role of digital ecosystems and algorithmic exposure in amplifying crisis-related grievances, particularly among Gen Z populations who exhibit higher awareness of global economic dynamics. Finally, interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate neurocognitive, behavioral, and computational methods could advance early detection models of radicalization risk, enabling more targeted and preventive interventions.

In conclusion, this study highlights that the psychology of extremism in times of economic crisis cannot be understood in isolation from broader structural transformations. Trade wars, as manifestations of global economic conflict, not only reshape markets but also reconfigure perceptions of injustice, identity, and belonging (factors that lie at the core of radicalization processes).

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