

HOW FEAR CAN BE TURNED INTO FAR-LEFT AUTHORITARIANISM

The mirror of extremes, material contradiction, and the centre where everyone meets

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Today I gained a wider perspective: the centre is where everyone meets. If I describe fear on only one side, I risk reproducing the exclusion I am trying to understand. This companion paper therefore examines how hardship and fear of the political right can also be redirected into moral certainty, ideological exclusion, coercion and segregation. It asks where the two extremes genuinely mirror one another, where they differ, and how a democratic centre can interrupt both without surrendering truth or justice.

Executive summary

The strongest defensible conclusion is not that fascism is literally both far left and far right. Fascism has a specific history as an ultranationalist, authoritarian far-right tradition [1]. The broader and better-supported conclusion is that authoritarianism and extremist closure can arise on either side of politics [2-8]. Extreme persecution and exclusion can emerge through overlapping human threat responses and institutional mechanisms while serving different values, targets and historical projects.

The shared pathway is conditional, not inevitable: hardship, humiliation, exclusion, uncertainty or perceived threat can activate bodily threat responses and increase the appeal of certainty. A movement can then organise those reactions institutionally: naming an enemy, moralising the conflict, rewarding conformity, punishing doubt, converting care into control and making coercion appear protective. On the far right, the enemy is often racial, national, religious or cultural. In an authoritarian far-left form, the enemy may be a class, property-holder, institution, dissenter, alleged reactionary or insufficiently pure ally. The route to persecution can overlap; the declared values, targets, frequency, scale and consequences must still be examined separately.

Central proposition

Fear is information about perceived danger; it is not an instruction about whom to exclude. Equality becomes self-defeating when it denies equal personhood to opponents, protects abundance from material sharing, or makes safety conditional on ideological obedience.

What the evidence supports	What it does not support
Authoritarian motives and dogmatic intolerance can occur on both the left and right.	Every socialist, liberal, conservative or radical is authoritarian.
Moral conviction can intensify dislike of political opponents across ideological camps.	Strong moral belief automatically causes violence or censorship.
Hardship and perceived unfairness can contribute to radicalisation pathways.	Poverty, disability, anger or fear predicts extremism in an individual.
Self-interest can defeat publicly egalitarian commitments when material costs become local and visible.	Affluent or liberal people never share, or are uniquely hypocritical.

What the evidence supports	What it does not support
Left- and right-authoritarian systems can converge on concentrated power, censorship and coercion.	Their ideologies, targets, prevalence, violence and historical consequences are exactly identical.

1. The perspective - and the correction that protects it

The insight begins with symmetry: if fear can be redirected toward the far right, fear of the right can also be redirected toward an authoritarian far left. A person who expects domination, racism, exploitation or loss of rights may seek safety in a movement promising absolute equality and decisive protection. The fear may concern a real danger. Misdirection occurs when a complex danger is attached to an entire class of people, disagreement is treated as proof of corruption, and the proposed cure removes the rights it claims to defend.

The correction is equally important. The word fascism should not be stretched until it means every form of authoritarian rule. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum defines fascism as a far-right, ultranationalist and authoritarian political philosophy [1]. Stalinism and the Khmer Rouge demonstrate severe far-left authoritarianism, not left-wing fascism. Precise terms preserve history and make the shared-mechanism argument harder to dismiss.

The duality

Far right and authoritarian far left may begin with different fears and promise different futures. Both can end by making one group the sole interpreter of justice, treating dissent as contamination, and concentrating power beyond peaceful correction.

2. Working definitions and boundaries

Term	Meaning used here	Boundary
Fascism	A historically specific far-right, ultranationalist and authoritarian tradition that subordinates the individual to an exclusionary national community.	Not a synonym for every dictatorship, harsh policy or disliked opponent.
Authoritarianism	An intolerant and morally absolutist motive to coercively impose values, a way of life or a social order [2].	Can appear on left or right; ordinary conviction and lawful government are not automatically authoritarian.
Far-left authoritarianism	An extreme political form that invokes equality, class liberation or revolution while suppressing pluralism, due process, opposition or individual autonomy.	Democratic socialism, social democracy, trade unionism, liberalism and anti-racism are not equivalent to it.
Liberalism	A diverse family of views concerned with liberty, rights, pluralism and limits on power; in everyday speech it may also mean socially progressive politics.	It is not synonymous with the far left, socialism or material equality.
Extremist closure	A state in which one doctrine becomes morally self-sealing: evidence, dissent and exit are treated as threats rather than correction.	Radical reform can remain democratic, evidence-responsive and non-violent.
The centre	A meeting practice grounded in equal dignity, a material floor, evidence, protected disagreement, accountability and reversible power.	Not the arithmetic midpoint between a fact and a lie, or between a victim and an aggressor.

Labels are not essences

A political label is not a diagnosis. A feeling is not destiny. Evidence of conduct must remain separate from guesses about inner motive. Boundaries against threats or harassment are not the same as segregation; the test is whether restrictions are necessary, proportionate, behaviour-based and independently challengeable.

3. The mirror mechanism

Research does not establish a universal horseshoe law in which both ends become identical. It does support overlapping processes: ideological conflict can produce intolerance on both sides [4]; moral conviction can heighten affective polarisation across camps [5]; political sectarianism combines othering, aversion and moralisation [6]; and reviews connect perceived unfairness and rigid, dogmatic thinking with radicalisation while stressing mixed evidence and multiple routes [7,8].

Stage	Far-right expression	Authoritarian far-left expression	Shared danger
Hardship or threat	National decline, cultural displacement, insecurity, disorder.	Exploitation, inequality, discrimination, loss of rights, reactionary power.	A real pressure is simplified into one total explanation.
Enemy image	Foreigners, minorities, dissidents, alleged internal traitors.	Owners, elites, institutions, alleged reactionaries, impure allies.	A category replaces evidence about individual conduct.
Moral identity	The pure nation or rightful people.	The pure movement, liberated class or uniquely righteous coalition.	Belonging requires an enemy and doubt becomes betrayal.
Control	Leader rule, policing of culture, hierarchy and exclusion.	Vanguard rule, ideological policing, compelled levelling or censorship.	Power becomes concentrated, opaque and difficult to reverse.
Normalisation	Emergency powers and discriminatory rules become ordinary.	Exceptional coercion is justified as necessary for equality or protection.	Means redefine the end; cruelty is renamed care.
Feedback	Resistance is proof that enemies are dangerous.	Resistance is proof that reactionaries or privileged interests remain.	Contradiction strengthens the doctrine instead of correcting it.
Ruin	Rights, truth, safety and social trust collapse under hierarchy and persecution.	Rights, truth, safety and social trust collapse under forced conformity and monopoly power.	The promised safety produces deeper fear and suffering.

4. What research supports

Authoritarianism can cross the left-right divide

A recent Cambridge Handbook treatment argues that authoritarianism should be distinguished from conventional liberalism and conservatism and defined by intolerant, morally absolutist coercion [2]. Costello and colleagues developed a left-wing authoritarianism measure around anti-hierarchical aggression, top-down censorship and anti-conventionalism, finding links with political intolerance, free-speech suppression and partisan aggression [3]. The construct remains debated, and the authors also found differences from right-wing authoritarianism. It is evidence of a possible left-authoritarian pattern, not permission to diagnose people from their policy views.

Moral certainty can turn opponents into contaminating outsiders

The ideological-conflict hypothesis proposes that people across ideological positions can be intolerant of groups whose values conflict with their own [4]. Research on moral conviction similarly finds that moralising politics can intensify affective polarisation among both liberals and conservatives [5]. Finkel and colleagues describe political sectarianism through othering, aversion and moralisation [6]. These processes help explain how fear of a real right-wing threat may expand into hostility toward anyone associated with the out-group.

Hardship contributes vulnerability, not destiny

Perceived unfairness, humiliation, uncertainty and blocked significance can contribute to radicalisation, but no single factor is necessary or sufficient [7]. Reviews of ideological psychology find meaningful similarities and differences across the spectrum [8]. The safe conclusion is conditional: hardship can

make certainty and belonging more attractive; ideology, organisation, leadership, networks, opportunity and individual choice determine how that need is channelled.

Symmetry is not equality of incidence or harm

A comparison of US extremist incidents found left-wing actors were less likely than right-wing or Islamist actors to use violence and that left-wing attacks were less likely to be fatal [9]. Other contexts and measures can differ. This is why the paper compares mechanisms without claiming equal prevalence, lethality or responsibility in every place and period.

5. Hunger is more than an empty stomach

The earlier paper used hunger to describe a legitimate need that can make a poisonous political offer feel urgent. The metaphor can now be resolved into three related forms. They are not diagnoses and they do not automatically cause extremism. They identify gaps between what a person needs and what their present capacity or environment supplies.

Hunger	What is missing	How manipulation can redirect it	What nourishment looks like
Literal	Food, warmth, housing, health care and bodily safety.	A movement names a class or group as the reason necessities are scarce.	Reliable essentials, fair access, practical help and accountable provision.
Social	Belonging, companionship, respect, voice and a place to contribute.	Purity and enemy-making are sold as community; exclusion becomes proof of loyalty.	Open participation, reciprocal relationships, shared tasks and routes back after error.
Financial	Stable income, manageable debt, time, mobility and freedom from economic coercion.	Fear of destitution is used to demand obedience, or wealth is defended while equality remains symbolic.	A material floor, fair work, transparent allocation, mobility and power to refuse exploitation.

The UK data make these hungers visible. In FYE 2025, 9% of individuals lived in food-insecure households and 14% of children did so; 27% of children were in relative low income after housing costs [14]. In England in 2025/26, 7% of adults reported feeling lonely often or always. The rate was 11% in the most deprived areas and 4% in the least deprived; disabled people reported 14% compared with 3% among non-disabled people [17]. These are population patterns, not proof of individual political motives.

At the same time, the latest ONS household wealth release reported that the wealthiest tenth of Great British households had at least £1,200,500, while the least wealthy tenth had £16,500 or less [15]. Abundance and hunger can therefore coexist within the same national view. The ethical question is not whether every difference is theft; it is whether a society claiming equality tolerates preventable deprivation while protecting concentrated advantage from meaningful scrutiny or contribution.

6. How fear of the right can turn into far-left exclusion

Fear of the right can begin with accurate observations: racism, political violence, exploitation, attacks on rights, organised disinformation or authoritarian mobilisation. The distortion begins when vigilance loses resolution. A person becomes reducible to a label; proximity becomes complicity; questions become violence; and exclusion is treated as inherently protective.

Protective intention	Authoritarian drift	Corrective question
Protect vulnerable people.	Assume anyone who disputes a tactic intends harm.	What conduct occurred, what risk is evidenced, and what proportionate boundary is needed?
Prevent propaganda.	Give an authority power to suppress uncertain or disfavoured ideas without appeal.	Who decides, what evidence standard applies, and how can a mistake be corrected?
Challenge hierarchy.	Treat every person in a broad class as morally guilty or disposable.	Can responsibility be traced to actions, decisions and benefits rather than inherited

Protective intention	Authoritarian drift	Corrective question
		category?
Create safe spaces.	Build permanent ideological segregation and remove every route to encounter or return.	Is separation temporary and necessary, and is there a safe route to restored participation?
Advance equality.	Make resources, employment or services conditional on political conformity.	Would the rule remain acceptable if an opposing government controlled it?
Stop the far right.	Copy its certainty, collective blame, secrecy, leader protection or coercion.	Does the method preserve the equal humanity the stated goal requires?

The irony

A politics of inclusion can become exclusionary when it confuses safety with total agreement. A politics of equality can become segregated when those with abundance express solidarity in public but keep housing, education, opportunity, time and decision-making power behind closed doors.

7. Liberal values behind closed doors: the material test

The phrase is a moral warning, not a blanket allegation. Liberal and left-leaning people often support genuine sharing; a cross-national study found left-leaning individuals were more likely to donate and to be generous internationally [19]. Any fair account must retain that counter-evidence.

Yet stated values and costly local choices can diverge. In two US survey experiments, liberal homeowners supported egalitarian housing goals in the abstract but were barely more likely than conservative homeowners to support dense development in their own communities [18]. The result cannot simply be transferred to Britain, but it demonstrates a mechanism: when sharing has a visible local cost, property interest can override declared equality. UK research separately shows that housing costs and tenure contribute to inequality, with renters facing persistently high costs while low interest rates reduced costs for many owner-occupiers [20].

This gap is wider than housing. Symbolic solidarity is a statement, sign, vote, donation or identity that communicates concern. Material solidarity changes the allocation of money, land, access, risk, time or power. Both can matter, but the first cannot substitute for the second. A society cannot call itself inclusive merely because privileged spaces use inclusive language while people outside them remain hungry, isolated, priced out or unheard.

Claim	Material test	Warning against overreach
Everyone deserves housing.	Will suitable homes be permitted, funded and welcomed where opportunity already exists?	Development has genuine infrastructure and environmental trade-offs; objection is not automatically prejudice.
Everyone deserves a voice.	Can poor, disabled, non-graduate and dissenting people influence decisions without mastering elite language?	Expertise remains valuable; accessibility does not require ignoring evidence.
We oppose segregation.	Are schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces and networks actually shared across class and wealth?	People retain privacy, association and cultural community; enforced intimacy is not inclusion.
We believe in equality.	Are burdens, taxes, waiting, risk and sacrifice distributed as seriously as status and praise?	Equality does not mean identical treatment regardless of need, role or consequence.

8. Historical tests: different doctrines, convergent closure

Stalin's Soviet Union

Library of Congress archival material describes decision-making concentrated at the highest party levels with little input from below. Stalin's forced collectivisation and industrialisation entailed immense suffering, while police terror and strict party-state control secured his dominance and suppressed political unorthodoxy [11]. The stated socialist purpose did not prevent hierarchy; the party-state became a new unchallengeable hierarchy.

Democratic Kampuchea

Proceedings before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia describe a common purpose of implementing rapid socialist revolution and defending the party against internal and external enemies by whatever means necessary. Evidence includes forced population movement, collectivisation, coercion and crimes against humanity [12]. Equality language did not protect equal personhood once people were sorted into trusted and enemy categories.

Fascist Germany

The Nazi case belongs to the far right: an ultranationalist, racist and antisemitic ideology built an exclusionary national community, defined alleged internal enemies, destroyed pluralism and used state violence [1]. Economic and political turmoil aided its rise, but hardship did not mechanically cause it; developed ideology, leadership, institutions, propaganda and choices mattered.

Difference that must remain	Convergence that can be compared
Fascism elevates an exclusionary nation, race and hierarchy; communist authoritarian regimes claimed class liberation and enforced equality.	A single party or leader claims unique authority to interpret the collective good.
Targets, doctrines, economic arrangements and historical circumstances differ.	Opponents become enemies; propaganda replaces plural evidence; dissent becomes danger.
The scale and form of violence cannot be assumed equal across cases.	Coercive power becomes difficult to challenge, reverse or leave.
Democratic left and right traditions cannot be reduced to their extremes.	Rights disappear when ends are allowed to sanctify every means.

9. Duality without false equivalence

The duality is functional rather than geometrically exact. Both extremes can recruit the same broad human capacities - threat perception, group attachment, moral certainty and obedience - and organise them through enemy construction, information control, loyalty tests, coercive institutions and self-sealing feedback. This is a claim about overlapping mechanisms, not identical ideologies or outcomes. The mechanisms do not necessarily appear at the same frequency, intensity or historical scale, and they are directed toward different social categories and futures.

The falsifiable claim

When any movement - left, right or otherwise - treats one category as the source of complex suffering, makes dissent evidence of guilt, shields its leaders or doctrine from correction, and concentrates coercive power without due process, it is moving toward authoritarian closure. The claim should be revised if comparative evidence shows these mechanisms do not travel across ideological settings.

This formulation avoids two errors. The first is one-sided blindness: recognising only the authoritarianism of one's opponent. The second is empty both-sidesism: pretending every disagreement, tactic or harm is

equivalent. A fair comparison measures conduct, power and consequences rather than balancing labels for appearance's sake.

10. The centre is where everyone meets

The centre in this paper is not a political brand and not a demand that every answer be halfway. It is a civic meeting architecture. People may arrive with conservative, socialist, liberal, religious, ecological, nationalist or unaligned convictions. They meet on a protected floor: equal personhood, freedom from violence, material survival, evidence, due process, the right to speak, the right to refuse coercion and the possibility of peaceful correction.

Open-centre principle	Operational test
Equal personhood	Are rights attached to being human, or made conditional on class, identity, usefulness or agreement?
Material floor	Can every person obtain food, shelter, health care, safety and a meaningful chance to participate?
Protected disagreement	Can an opponent question policy without being collectively blamed, threatened or economically erased?
Evidence resolution	Are observation, inference, unknowns and assertions recorded separately?
Proportionate boundaries	Are restrictions tied to evidenced conduct, limited in scope and open to independent appeal?
Shared burden	Do those with greater capacity contribute materially, or is equality demanded mainly from those with least?
Reversible power	Can leaders, rules and emergency measures be reviewed, corrected and peacefully removed?
Route back	Can a person admit error, repair harm and return without permanent ideological contamination?

Not neutral between harm and safety

Meeting does not require a threatened person to sit with an aggressor, a factual institution to present a lie as equal evidence, or a court to ignore proven conduct. The centre protects encounter by establishing a rights floor and stopping coercion.

11. Help and care as interruption

A punitive response alone can deepen humiliation and confirm a movement's siege story. Material help alone can leave propaganda and coercive organisation untouched. The interruption must work at several levels and adjust to the actual gap between demand and capacity.

Help, care and recovery

Help temporarily contributes capacity where there is a deficit. Care monitors how that relationship changes and adjusts support. Help bridges an unbearable gap; care watches the crossing; recovery restores sufficient capacity for independent action.

Need or mechanism	Intervention	Safeguard or measure
Literal hunger	Immediate food, housing, debt, health and safety support.	Access without political loyalty tests; record whether the gap actually closes.
Social hunger	Shared tasks, accessible civic roles, mentoring, supported contact and routes to contribution.	Belonging must not require an enemy; participation must be voluntary and safe.

Need or mechanism	Intervention	Safeguard or measure
Financial hunger	Stable income, fair work, manageable debt, mobility and independent advice.	Do not convert assistance into surveillance, patronage or obedience.
Threat certainty	Name what is known, unknown and being tested; schedule review.	Correct publicly; do not manufacture reassurance or inflate danger.
Collective blame	Separate people, policies, institutions and evidenced actions.	No coercion based solely on party, class, race, religion, diagnosis or one lawful belief.
Purity spiral	Protect questioning, dissent, whistleblowing and dignified revision.	No permanent stigma for good-faith error; conduct-based boundaries remain clear.
Movement toward violence	Proportionate safeguarding, lawful investigation, exit support and risk management.	Independent review; necessity, evidence, attribution and time limits.

12. Safeguards against misuse

Misuse risk	Required protection
Calling ordinary left politics extremist	Distinguish reform, protest and democratic socialism from dehumanisation, coercion and preparation for violence.
Diagnosing people from labels	Use behaviour, context and independently reviewable evidence; never infer dangerousness from class, party, disability or lawful belief.
Using 'the centre' to silence injustice	The centre must retain equal rights, material reality and evidence; it cannot demand politeness instead of remedy.
Treating boundaries as censorship	Separate proportionate safety rules from unaccountable suppression; publish criteria and appeal routes.
False equivalence	Compare prevalence, severity, power and outcomes empirically; do not manufacture symmetry.
Excusing harm because it began in fear	Explanation guides prevention and proportional response; it does not erase accountability or another person's remedy.
Covert emotional manipulation	No hidden fear induction, personalised psychological targeting, loyalty scoring or secret viewpoint surveillance.
Forced material equality	Redistribution must remain lawful, transparent, proportionate and rights-respecting; need does not erase due process.

13. How to test the model

The mirror model is a research and communication proposal, not a validated diagnostic instrument. It should be tested comparatively and designed to discover asymmetry, failure and harm rather than to prove the author's preferred balance.

Element	Minimum design
Samples	Include people across ideological positions, non-aligned participants and communities experiencing different kinds of hardship.
Measures	Separate fear, grievance, dogmatism, dehumanisation, censorship support, political violence, material need and actual conduct.
Comparison	Test whether mechanisms differ in prevalence, strength, targets and outcomes across left, centre and right.
Material layer	Measure food security, housing, debt, loneliness, disability access and participation rather than using ideology as a proxy for hardship.
Intervention	Compare material support, structured listening, evidence separation, cross-group tasks and exit

Element	Minimum design
	support with usual practice.
Harms	Track stigma, retaliation, surveillance, minority targeting, forced contact, service exclusion and increased polarisation.
Governance	Independent ethics review, privacy protection, published methods, adverse-event reporting and participant withdrawal.
Stopping rules	Pause if threats, doxxing, coercion or discriminatory service exclusion increase; publish null and adverse findings.

14. Evidence and correction register

Claim	Evidence status	Limitation or correction rule
Authoritarianism can occur on left and right.	Supported conceptually and by emerging measurement research [2,3].	The left-authoritarian construct remains debated; do not diagnose individuals.
Both extremes can show dogmatic intolerance.	Supported in reviews, with mixed evidence on symmetry [4,7,8].	Update as comparative reviews improve; report asymmetries rather than smoothing them out.
Fear and hardship can contribute to radicalisation.	Plausible within multi-route unfairness, threat and significance research [7].	Not necessary or sufficient; do not profile poor, angry, disabled or frightened people.
Moral conviction can heighten polarisation.	Supported across ideological camps [5,6].	Moral conviction also motivates courageous, democratic action.
Affluent liberal values can diverge from material sharing.	Supported in a US housing case and broader housing/wealth evidence [15,18,20].	Not universal, not uniquely liberal and not direct proof about Britain as a whole.
Extreme persecution and exclusion on left and right are caused by exactly the same physical mechanisms.	Partly plausible, but 'exactly' is not established. Human threat responses and group processes can overlap; institutions and outcomes vary.	Use 'overlapping human and institutional mechanisms'; retain differences in values, targets, doctrine, frequency, violence, scale and history.
Fascism exists on both far left and far right.	Contradicted by standard historical definition [1].	Use 'authoritarian extremism on both sides'; reserve fascism for its far-right tradition.
The open centre can interrupt both pathways.	Normative and testable design proposal.	Pilot before scale; measure rights, material outcomes, trust and harm, not agreement alone.

Correction invitation

If a source is misread, a symmetry overstated or a safeguard missing, the correction belongs in the public record. The proposal is offered to be improved, not defended as an identity.

Conclusion

The wider perspective is not that left and right are secretly the same. It is that no side owns immunity from fear, self-interest, exclusion or concentrated power. Far-right fascism and far-left authoritarianism carry different histories, values and targets. Extreme persecution can recruit overlapping bodily threat responses, group dynamics and institutions in either setting. When hardship is converted into a total enemy, moral certainty replaces evidence, routes of correction close and coercion becomes the price of belonging, the route to action begins to rhyme even though its values and consequences remain historically distinct.

Literal, social and financial hunger make the contradiction visible. People can hear inclusive language while remaining outside the house, the institution, the neighbourhood, the profession or the budget. Equality that never crosses the door is an image of equality. Freedom that ignores hunger becomes freedom mainly for those already able to exercise it.

The centre is therefore where everyone meets under conditions that stop domination: equal personhood, material survival, evidence, protected disagreement, proportionate boundaries, shared burden, reversible power and a route back after error. Fear should be heard. Harm should be stopped. Neither should be allowed to select a human category as the final answer.

The social-technology principle

Different extremes can speak different moral languages while recruiting overlapping human and institutional mechanisms of closure. Interrupt the route before fighting only over the label: relieve the hardship, restore resolution, protect dissent, share materially, and keep power open to correction.

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Evidence status: peer-reviewed research, official statistics and primary historical institutions are separated from this paper's original metaphors and design proposals. Sources were accessed 28 August 2026. Web publications can be corrected or updated; follow the linked source and record the version used.