



From Shared Hatred to Internal Purge: Outgroup Construction, Cohesion, and Recursive Fragmentation in Ideological Life

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Abstract

This paper examines how ideological movements may achieve cohesion through shared hostility while simultaneously generating conditions for their own internal destabilization. Drawing on a structured conceptual and thematic review of scholarship in social identity theory, moral psychology, ideological authenticity, factionalism, and mediated outrage, the paper argues that outgroup construction can function as a powerful source of collective belonging, especially under conditions of uncertainty, grievance, and moral intensity. However, when enemy production becomes a dominant basis of solidarity, the same exclusionary logic that secures unity against outsiders may later be redirected inward. The paper conceptualizes this inward turn as recursive fragmentation, a process in which movements repeatedly narrow the circle of legitimate belonging through purity demands, loyalty tests, and accusations of betrayal. Rather than treating hostility as a mere emotional excess, the paper interprets it as a behavioral-social mechanism that can provide short-term affective cohesion while undermining long-term trust, plurality, and institutional durability. The analysis also situates this process within contemporary mediated environments, where outrage, denunciation, and public moral signaling may intensify both external antagonism and internal policing. The paper contributes an integrated conceptual model linking outgroup construction, affective cohesion, purity regulation, authenticity suspicion, and self-consuming fragmentation. It concludes that movements whose internal coherence depends too heavily on sustained enemy production face a structural risk of inward purification and progressive erosion of durable collective life. The paper closes by recommending future qualitative and discourse-based research on betrayal narratives, purity language, and internal boundary enforcement across ideological contexts.

Keywords: *ideological life; outgroup construction; affective cohesion; recursive fragmentation; purity policing; betrayal narratives; social identity*

Article History: Received January 31, 2026 | Revised March 3, 2026 | Accepted April 16, 2026

1. Introduction

Ideological life is often discussed in terms of conviction, vision, doctrine, and historical purpose. Movements present themselves as carriers of principles, defenders of justice, or guardians of a threatened moral order. Yet beneath their declared programs lies another, often more affectively potent social mechanism: the construction of an enemy. Collective life does not always consolidate around a shared positive future. It may also cohere through shared hostility, shared grievance, and shared opposition toward a perceived outgroup. This is one of the most unsettling features of ideological formation. Groups frequently appear most united not when articulating what they hope to build, but when identifying what they must resist, condemn, or remove (Lang et al., 2021). The enemy, in such cases, becomes more than an obstacle. It becomes a source of solidarity.

This pattern remains highly relevant in contemporary social life. Across political, religious, activist, and identity-based formations, public discourse increasingly reflects modes of belonging organized through antagonism (Barreneche, 2021). Movements and communities often emerge in response to real injustice, exclusion, or threat, and such origins should not be trivialized. However, the social psychology of collective commitment becomes more

complicated when opposition itself evolves from a strategic necessity into an identity-forming principle. Once this occurs, the boundary between moral resistance and affective dependence on hostility becomes difficult to trace. A movement may continue to speak in the language of justice or truth while becoming structurally invested in the continuous reproduction of enemies. In such cases, hatred, resentment, and moral suspicion do not merely accompany collective life; they begin to animate it from within.

The present paper is concerned with this transformation. More specifically, it examines how outgroup construction can generate cohesion within ideological communities while simultaneously planting the conditions for their eventual inward fragmentation. The central problem is not simply that groups may hate their opponents. Conflict, disagreement, and adversarial positioning are ordinary features of social and political life. The deeper concern arises when a movement's internal unity becomes disproportionately dependent on exclusionary energy - when belonging is secured less by shared constructive labor than by shared condemnation of an external other. Under these conditions, the outgroup performs several functions at once: it clarifies identity, simplifies complexity, channels frustration, and offers a morally intelligible explanation for suffering, failure, or uncertainty (Katsafanas, 2022; Nortjé-Meyer, 2019). The enemy becomes symbolically useful because it organizes emotion, meaning, and direction (Gabriel, 2020; Nortjé-Meyer, 2019).

Such a process is psychologically powerful because it responds to recurrent human needs. Individuals experiencing uncertainty, powerlessness, dislocation, humiliation, or moral confusion may be especially drawn to environments that offer interpretive clarity and collective purpose (Mueller, 2021). Ideological communities can provide precisely that. They furnish narratives of injury and redemption, define who belongs and who threatens, and reduce ambiguity by translating diffuse anxieties into morally legible conflict (Katsafanas, 2022; Mueller, 2021). In this sense, enemy construction is not merely a doctrinal device but a social-psychological resource. It binds persons to a collective by converting private dissatisfaction into shared moral intensity (Mueller, 2021). A person may enter the group believing in its explicit cause, but remains deeply attached because the group supplies recognition, certainty, and a target for blame (Mueller, 2021; Prooijen, 2022). This is one reason hostile cohesion can feel stronger, more immediate, and more emotionally satisfying than slower forms of cooperative institution-building.

Yet the same mechanism that consolidates identity may also destabilize it. If a movement is sustained primarily through opposition, then its coherence depends on the continued presence of something to oppose. When the original enemy weakens, becomes inaccessible, or no longer adequately sustains collective intensity, the movement faces a structural problem. It must either shift toward constructive work, which requires patience, compromise, and plural coordination, or it must reproduce the antagonistic energy on which it has relied. One way this occurs is through escalation: new enemies are identified, old enemies are reinterpreted, and suspicion becomes more refined (Katsafanas, 2022). Another way is through inward moral redirection. The logic of exclusion that was first aimed outward begins to operate within the group itself. Internal critics, hesitant supporters, impure adherents, and insufficiently committed members become suspect (Gabriel, 2020). Yesterday's ally becomes today's traitor. The enemy is no longer merely outside the boundary; it is discovered within it.

This paper describes this inward turn as recursive fragmentation. The term refers to a process in which the exclusionary logic used to define the group against outsiders is repeatedly reapplied to the group's own members, producing smaller and smaller circles of legitimacy. The group does not merely fragment in a general sense; it fragments through recursive acts of purification. Ideological cohesion, once established through outgroup construction, becomes increasingly difficult to sustain without intensifying standards of loyalty and orthodoxy (Mueller, 2021). Internal disagreement is reframed as betrayal, nuance as weakness, and complexity as contamination (Gabriel, 2020). The result is a self-consuming form of collective life in which the pursuit of purity gradually displaces the work of building, governing, persuading, or repairing. At that point, the movement may retain its moral fervor while losing its social durability.

This problem deserves careful conceptual treatment because it sits at the intersection of several domains central to behavioral and social inquiry: identity formation, affective bonding, symbolic boundary maintenance, moral judgment, group cohesion, distrust, and factionalism. It also bears directly on current conditions marked by polarization, mediated outrage, rapid reputational cycles, and heightened incentives for public denunciation. In

digitally intensified environments, enemy construction is not merely episodic; it can become continuous, performative, and socially rewarded (Topinka et al., 2024). This makes the transition from external antagonism to internal policing especially important to understand. The issue is not confined to any single ideology, institution, or historical tradition. It concerns a broader pattern in collective human behavior: the tendency for movements organized through hostility to risk becoming dependent on the very antagonism that first animated them.

For this reason, the present study adopts a conceptual and thematic orientation rather than an empirical one. The purpose is not to claim universal causality or to reduce all ideological commitment to hatred. Nor does the paper assume that every movement defined by conflict necessarily deteriorates into internal purge. Rather, it seeks to clarify a recurrent pattern observable across different forms of ideological life: the movement from shared hatred, to intensified cohesion, to internal purification, and finally to recursive fragmentation. A conceptual approach is appropriate because the argument requires the integration of psychological, social, and interpretive insights that are often treated separately. The task is to construct an analytically disciplined account of how these processes relate to one another, where their boundaries lie, and why they matter for understanding both the appeal and the instability of exclusion-dependent collective formations.

Within this framework, the paper has four interrelated objectives. First, it aims to examine how outgroup construction functions as a mechanism of ideological cohesion, particularly through the organization of negative identity and affective solidarity. Second, it seeks to analyze how hatred, blame, and moral suspicion can become socially productive forces within movements, even when they appear publicly as merely reactive or defensive. Third, it aims to trace the transition by which externally directed hostility may be transformed into internal boundary policing, purity demands, and accusations of betrayal. Fourth, it seeks to argue that recursive fragmentation is not an accidental side effect but a structural risk within movements whose cohesion depends too heavily on sustained enemy production.

By pursuing these objectives, the paper contributes to a more precise understanding of ideological life as a behavioral-social phenomenon. It invites closer scrutiny of the difference between movements that oppose injustice while building durable forms of common life and those that increasingly require condemnation, purification, and exclusion in order to remain coherent. That distinction is analytically significant because not every morally intense movement is self-destructive, but movements whose social energy is overwhelmingly fueled by enmity may struggle to create stable and inclusive forms of collective existence. Understanding that tension is essential not only for the study of ideology, but also for interpreting the fragile moral psychology of belonging in an age increasingly shaped by polarized identification and recursive distrust.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Outgroup Construction and Negative Identity Formation

The literature on social identity provides the most immediate foundation for understanding why ideological groups so often rely on contrastive boundaries (Scholz et al., 2023). Classic and more recent review work in this tradition argues that identity is shaped not only by personal attributes but also by group memberships, and that group commitment together with features of the social context strongly influences how identity concerns become psychologically salient (Reicher & Hopkins, 2016). Threats to personal and collective identity, in turn, affect perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses (Bonsteel, 2012). This means that outgroup construction is not a secondary ornament of group life; it is often part of the mechanism by which membership becomes meaningful, emotionally charged, and behaviorally consequential (Berendt et al., 2023; O'Reilly et al., 2024).

From this perspective, ideological belonging is often stabilized through acts of differentiation (Areal, 2024). Groups do not merely announce who they are; they clarify who they are by identifying who they are not (Berendt et al., 2023). Negative identity formation emerges when this contrastive logic becomes central to self-definition (Mayer & Russo, 2023). The outgroup becomes useful because it sharpens symbolic boundaries, supplies a reference point for comparison, and provides a simplified explanation for tension, uncertainty, or moral disorder (Berendt et al., 2023). The literature does not suggest that all identity formation is antagonistic, but it consistently

indicates that boundary-making is intrinsic to group processes and that identity threat intensifies the importance of group distinctiveness (Sepahpour-Fard et al., 2024). In high-conflict environments, this makes opposition especially attractive as a socially efficient way of organizing belonging (Sepahpour-Fard et al., 2024).

Comparable work on feeder-school Facebook discourse suggests that digitally mediated community language can reveal shared values, trust signals, and identity-affirming expectations, although such discourse need not be antagonistic in form (Atento & Espelita, 2025).

What is notable in the broader literature is that the movement from difference to adversarial identity is often gradual rather than abrupt. Social identity research explains why comparison and positive distinctiveness matter (Hogg et al., 2004), but ideologically intense contexts often push this further by moralizing the boundary itself (Chalik & Rhodes, 2020). Once opposition becomes moralized, the outgroup is no longer simply different; it becomes dangerous, corrupting, or fundamentally incompatible with the group's sense of self (Gerard et al., 2024). At that point, the boundary performs more than a classificatory function. It becomes a moral line that stabilizes loyalty and channels collective energy. This is the conceptual transition on which the present paper builds: the literature on intergroup relations explains why boundaries matter (Lamont & Molnár, 2002), while the study of ideological life requires closer attention to how those boundaries become emotionally and morally indispensable.

2.2 Hatred, Resentment, and Blame as Mechanisms of Affective Cohesion

If outgroup construction supplies the boundary, affective processes help animate it. The literature on injustice, grievance, and radicalization shows that perceptions of unfairness, deprivation, immorality, and uncertainty are closely tied to tendencies toward radicalization in thought, feeling, and action (Bos, 2019). Reviews of injustice likewise emphasize the links among disrespect, anger, perceived injustice, retaliation, and retribution (Miller, 2001). These studies do not reduce collective mobilization to hatred alone, but they make clear that anger, grievance, and moralized resentment are not merely private reactions. They are socially consequential emotions that can orient people toward collective identification, justify confrontation, and intensify willingness to act against a defined opponent (Bailard et al., 2024).

This line of scholarship is important because it shifts the discussion away from abstract ideological commitment and toward emotional infrastructure. Collective formations often gain force when diffuse dissatisfaction is translated into legible blame (Rosenthal & Schlesinger, 2002). Feelings of frustration, humiliation, or disrespect become politically and socially binding once they are attached to a narrative of causation: someone is responsible, some group is to blame, some adversary embodies the injury (Homolar & Löffmann, 2021). Work on grievance politics and collective mobilization suggests that resentment is especially potent because it fuses moral judgment with personal and collective frustration (Capelos et al., 2022). In this sense, hostility can become adhesive. It does not only target an opponent; it binds the ingroup through a shared emotional interpretation of injury (Hoover et al., 2021).

Yet the literature also indicates an important analytical caution. Affective cohesion should not be confused with durable social solidarity (Jolibert, 2010). Anger and blame may accelerate mobilization, intensify commitment, and simplify moral complexity, but they do not necessarily generate stable institutional or relational forms (Forester & McKibbin, 2020). What they often generate instead is high-intensity moral alignment around perceived injury. Such alignment can be effective in moments of confrontation, but it also carries a structural risk: if the group's primary emotional coherence depends on shared grievance, then the group becomes invested in preserving grievance as a continuing basis for belonging (Táiwò, 2022). This is where hatred-based cohesion begins to diverge from constructive solidarity. The first can be rapidly mobilized through blame and resentment; the second requires slower practices of coordination, compromise, and building (Belleau, 2023).

2.3 Purity, Orthodoxy, and the Social Policing of Ideological Belonging

The literature on internal moral regulation shows that once groups become highly invested in boundary maintenance, attention often shifts from those who oppose the group to who authentically belongs within it (Eibach & Oakes, 2023). Research on ideological authenticity argues that many episodes of political repression and internal discipline focus on distinguishing true believers from pretenders (Eibach & Oakes, 2023). Concerns about

ideological inauthenticity, especially when combined with incentives for feigned allegiance, can activate a suspicious mindset that selectively attends to cues of deviation among one's own comrades (Eibach & Oakes, 2023). This is a crucial development for the present paper because it shows that intense ideological belonging is not maintained only by hostility toward outsiders; it is also maintained by the active policing of insiders (Tietjen, 2023).

Related work in moral psychology strengthens this point by showing that loyalty, authority, and purity function as what some scholars call binding foundations (Morris & Stewart, 2022). These values are associated with loyalty to one's in-group, deference to authority, and heightened sensitivity to purity and sanctity, and are said to help bind communities together (Morris & Stewart, 2022). In ideologically intense settings, such values can deepen commitment and reinforce norms of cohesion (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; Zavala, 2023). At the same time, they can make dissent appear not merely incorrect but contaminating (Gray et al., 2022; Sekulak & Maciuszek, 2017). A disagreement can be reframed as disloyalty; compromise can be interpreted as collusion; ambiguity can be experienced as moral weakness. The more belonging is moralized through purity language, the easier it becomes for groups to redefine ordinary variation as evidence of corruption or betrayal (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; Tsai, 2021).

The literature therefore suggests that orthodoxy and internal policing should be treated as predictable developments in some forms of ideological life rather than as exceptional deviations (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; Whitehouse, 2002). Importantly, authenticity policing is not limited to formal authoritarian settings (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; McKay, 2019). Contemporary work indicates that even support for pragmatic compromise with adversaries can trigger suspicions that one is not a genuine member of the cause (Eibach & Oakes, 2023). This means that ideological communities may become increasingly unable to tolerate the very practices necessary for durable collective action, such as negotiation, internal pluralism, or strategic recalibration (Hansson & Dahlgren, 2022; Zschau et al., 2025). What appears initially as principled vigilance can gradually become a generalized suspicion regime within the group (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; Sperber et al., 2010). This is the threshold at which purity ceases to be a symbolic ideal and becomes an instrument of internal narrowing (Douglas, 2003; Schumacher, 2019).

At the institutional level, related work on diplomatic credibility similarly treats external legitimacy as dependent on internal coherence and governance integrity, suggesting that collective credibility cannot be separated from the quality of internal order (Atento, 2025).

2.4 Internal Betrayal, Factionalism, and Recursive Fragmentation

A substantial body of literature on factions and internal conflict shows that ideological organizations are often shaped as much by internal differentiation as by opposition to external rivals (Bakke et al., 2012; Bolleyer & Kölln, 2024). Studies of party and movement life note that factionalism affects policy, strategy, electoral performance, and even organizational survival (Cerón, 2013; Klingelhöfer & Müller, 2023). Some work further treats position-taking itself as an internal factional process rather than a simple expression of unified collective intent (Budge et al., 2010). These findings matter because they demonstrate that fragmentation is not a marginal problem at the edges of ideological life. It is a central structural possibility, particularly where organizations are held together by strong identities, competing interpretations of doctrine, and contested claims about legitimacy (Khan et al., 2025; Zietsma et al., 2017).

However, the present paper is interested in a more specific trajectory than ordinary factionalism in the organizational sense. The relevant literature becomes especially illuminating when factional dispute is joined to betrayal narratives and authenticity concerns (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; Lalot, 2023). Research on ideological authenticity suggests that suspicion of internal deviance can become an organizing logic of collective life (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; Soetens et al., 2023). Historical and contemporary studies of radical organizations also show how accommodation, moderation, or compromise may expose leaders and members to accusations of betraying the cause (Krause et al., 2022; Tepe, 2019). In such settings, internal disagreement is no longer processed primarily as strategic divergence. It is moralized as disloyalty (Sleat, 2023; Tosi & Warmke, 2022). That moralization changes the character of fragmentation, because it narrows the legitimate circle of belonging rather than merely multiplying viewpoints within it.

This is where the concept of recursive fragmentation becomes analytically useful. The literature on factionalism documents internal divisions (Bakke et al., 2012), but the recursive element highlights a reapplication of exclusionary logic within the group itself. The group first defines itself against an outgroup; later, similar standards of exclusion are reapplied inward against insufficiently pure insiders; the process can then repeat as new internal boundaries emerge. In this sense, fragmentation is not simply the breakdown of consensus. It is the iterative reproduction of enemy logic at smaller and smaller scales. The existing literature strongly supports the importance of internal divisions (Bakke et al., 2012) and authenticity policing (Eibach & Oakes, 2023), even if it does not always integrate them into one sequential model. That gap is precisely where the present paper seeks to intervene conceptually.

2.5 Contemporary Ideological Life and the Reproduction of Enemies

Recent literature on social media and moral psychology suggests that contemporary ideological environments amplify many of the dynamics discussed above. An Annual Review article on social media and morality argues that digital platforms accelerate and inflame moral psychology, fostering and rewarding norms of outrage (Bavel et al., 2023). The same review notes that people encounter more morality-related acts and experience stronger feelings of moral outrage from online content than from older media forms (Bavel et al., 2023). This matters because digital environments do not merely transmit ideological conflict; they reward its emotional intensification. Outrage becomes more visible, more socially reinforced, and more easily converted into a public signal of belonging (Rosario et al., 2024).

The literature also points toward a more specific mechanism: social learning in online networks can amplify moral outrage expression (Brady et al., 2021), and overperception of outrage in such settings can inflate beliefs about intergroup hostility (Brady et al., 2023). In parallel, systematic reviews cited in the same literature link media environments to political polarization (Kubin & Sikorski, 2021). Together, these findings suggest that mediated spaces do not simply host ideological communities; they shape the incentives under which such communities define themselves, perceive threat, and police their own boundaries. Constant visibility of conflict-centered discourse can normalize adversarial identity, making enemy construction feel permanent rather than situational (Cammaerts, 2022). When moral expression becomes performative and reputationally consequential, denunciation and suspicion can become attractive forms of group participation (Tosi & Warmke, 2020).

This contemporary context strengthens the present paper's central concern. In digitally saturated environments, movements need not wait for major historical crises to reproduce antagonism; algorithmically and socially reinforced discourse can supply a continual stream of provocations, enemies, and tests of loyalty (Rocha et al., 2025). Solidarity may therefore become increasingly tied to repeated acts of public moral positioning rather than to sustained institutional or communal work. The literature does not support a simplistic claim that social media causes ideological decay, but it does support the argument that mediated environments intensify outrage, polarization, and conflict visibility (Bavel et al., 2023). Under such conditions, the transition from external hostility to internal policing may become faster, more visible, and more socially rewarded than in earlier organizational settings (Truijens & Hanegraaff, 2020).

Adjacent evidence from student digital-behavior research also suggests that online spaces can function as controlled environments for emotional regulation and low-pressure participation, reinforcing the need to examine not only what digital publics express but also how users inhabit them psychologically (Dancel et al., 2026).

2.6 Synthesis of Literature

Taken together, the literature indicates that ideological cohesion is not produced solely through shared doctrine or aspirational vision. It is also reinforced by contrastive identity processes in which group belonging becomes clearer under conditions of external differentiation, threat salience, and symbolic boundary maintenance (Harel et al., 2024; Westheuser, 2025). Social identity scholarship helps explain why such boundaries matter (Khadka, 2024), while adjacent work on grievance, moral emotion, and mediated outrage shows how those boundaries become affectively charged and behaviorally consequential (Brady & Bavel, 2021). Across these strands, a recurrent pattern emerges: outgroup construction clarifies belonging (Gerard et al., 2024), grievance furnishes emotional energy

(Capelos et al., 2022), and repeated exposure to conflict-centered discourse can stabilize hostility as a socially meaningful mode of participation (Kopytowska & Krakowiak, 2020).

A second pattern in the literature is the movement from external opposition to internal regulation (Fuente et al., 2020). Research on ideological authenticity shows that suspicion toward inauthentic insiders can become an organizing feature of collective life, especially when movements are concerned with sincerity, compromise, or hidden deviance (Eibach & Oakes, 2023). Work on loyalty, authority, and purity likewise suggests that some moral configurations strengthen internal binding while simultaneously increasing sensitivity to contamination, disloyalty, and norm violation (Zakharin & Bates, 2021). Taken together, these literatures suggest that the maintenance of ideological cohesion often requires not only the identification of adversaries (Zmigrod, 2020) but also the policing of membership itself (Eibach & Oakes, 2023).

This interpretive concern is consistent with narrative-oriented analytics work arguing that meaning-rich discourse should be examined through culturally and ethically mediated interpretation rather than reduced to surface-level textual signals (Atento et al., 2025).

A third pattern concerns instability. The literature strongly supports the idea that conflict-oriented and morally intensified environments can produce solidarity (Bigea, 2018), but it also suggests that such solidarity may be volatile (Biner, 2019). Social-media research shows that outrage and intergroup conflict are amplified in contemporary mediated spaces (Bavel et al., 2023), while studies of ideological suspicion and factional dynamics indicate that intense movements may become vulnerable to internal narrowing when authenticity and purity concerns escalate (Eibach & Oakes, 2023). What the literature collectively implies, though not always explicitly, is that cohesion built heavily on antagonism contains a structural risk: the same exclusionary logic that secures unity against an outgroup can later be redirected inward against increasingly suspect insiders.

A similar integrative logic appears in higher-education review work, where fragmented institutional pressures are treated as interacting systems rather than isolated problems, underscoring the value of synthesis when social processes reinforce one another recursively (Bermido et al., 2025).

2.7 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the strength of the existing scholarship, several gaps remain. First, the literature is often segmented by subfield. Social identity research explains differentiation and threat; moral-emotional research explains grievance and outrage; ideological-authenticity research explains suspicion and internal policing; digital-media research explains amplification and polarization. However, these bodies of work are rarely integrated into a single conceptual sequence that explains how movements can move from enemy-based cohesion to inward purity enforcement and then to repeated internal fracture. The fragmentation of the scholarship mirrors the fragmentation of the phenomenon: each component is well described, but the full progression remains undertheorized.

Second, the literature tends to document internal division without fully distinguishing ordinary factional disagreement from exclusionary recursive narrowing. Many studies address schism, polarization, and ideological conflict, yet fewer isolate the specific mechanism by which a movement repeatedly reapplies enemy logic within its own ranks. This leaves an underdeveloped account of how internal betrayal narratives, authenticity tests, and purity claims can progressively shrink the circle of legitimate belonging rather than merely generate plural internal camps.

Third, there is a human-interpretive gap. The literature demonstrates that outrage, identity threat, and binding moral norms matter, but it less often centers the lived psychological significance of these processes as mechanisms of meaning, certainty, and belonging. In other words, the empirical components are present, yet the broader behavioral-social interpretation of why hostile cohesion can feel morally stabilizing even as it becomes institutionally corrosive is less fully articulated. This gap is particularly important for a journal concerned with behavior, meaning-making, and social response under conditions of uncertainty.

2.8 Contribution of the Present Paper

The present paper responds to these gaps by offering an integrated conceptual model of ideological life that links five processes usually treated separately: outgroup construction, affective cohesion, internal purity policing,

betrayal-centered suspicion, and recursive fragmentation. Rather than discussing these as isolated tendencies, the paper argues that they can be understood as a connected sequence in which enemy construction first stabilizes identity, then intensifies affective solidarity, then normalizes exclusionary vigilance, and finally turns inward through increasingly narrow standards of legitimacy. This conceptual integration is the paper's primary contribution.

A second contribution is interpretive. The paper reframes hatred-based cohesion not simply as a moral failure but as a behavioral-social mechanism with short-term integrative power and long-term destabilizing consequences. This allows the analysis to avoid both reductionism and moralism. The argument is not that all ideologically intense movements are hate-driven, nor that all internal conflict is pathological. It is, rather, that movements whose cohesion becomes disproportionately dependent on sustained enemy production face a recurring risk of inward purification and self-consuming fragmentation. By clarifying this risk, the paper contributes a more precise vocabulary for distinguishing between adversarial collective action and structurally exclusion-dependent ideological life.

A third contribution is disciplinary fit. By keeping the analysis centered on identity, emotion, boundary maintenance, suspicion, and contemporary social discourse, the paper situates a philosophically resonant argument within a clearly behavioral-social frame. It therefore adds value not by claiming new empirical findings, but by organizing dispersed literature into a coherent account of how collective belonging can be built through hostility and then undone by its own logic of purification. In this respect, the paper contributes to IJBeSA's concern with meaning-making, social cohesion, interpretive behavior, and the fragile dynamics of collective life under contemporary conditions.

3. Methodology

This paper employs a structured conceptual and thematic review design. The study is non-empirical and does not draw on primary data, interviews, participant observation, surveys, archival coding, or experimental procedures. Its purpose is analytical rather than measurement-oriented: to clarify a recurring behavioral-social pattern in ideological life by synthesizing relevant scholarship across social psychology, moral psychology, group processes, media studies, and interpretive work on ideology, purity, and collective fragmentation. The design is appropriate because the paper seeks to integrate concepts that are often discussed separately in the literature rather than to test a discrete causal hypothesis through new data collection.

The methodological orientation of the paper is guided by the need to construct a coherent analytical sequence from an initially broad problem statement. The inquiry begins from a conceptual concern: some ideological formations appear to derive unusually strong cohesion from shared hostility toward an outgroup, yet this same exclusionary logic may later reappear within the movement itself in the form of purity policing, suspicion, and internal fracture (Bliuc et al., 2024; Nettasinghe et al., 2025). Because this pattern spans several literatures and is not adequately addressed within a single established empirical tradition, a structured conceptual review provides the most honest and useful approach. The goal is not to claim empirical novelty, but to derive conceptual clarity through disciplined synthesis.

3.1 Source Orientation

The paper draws primarily on peer-reviewed scholarly literature relevant to five domains: social identity and intergroup differentiation; grievance, resentment, and affective cohesion; moral binding, purity, and ideological authenticity; factionalism, betrayal, and internal fragmentation; and contemporary mediated environments that intensify polarization and denunciatory discourse. In addition to journal-based scholarship, the paper acknowledges the relevance of major interpretive and theoretical texts that have shaped thinking about mass commitment, ideological intensity, and collective hostility. Such texts are treated as conceptual anchors rather than as empirical evidence in themselves.

The source orientation is therefore selective rather than exhaustive. The emphasis is placed on literature that helps explain behavioral-social mechanisms, especially those relating to group belonging, boundary formation, emotional mobilization, legitimacy claims, and distrust within collective life. Works that are purely theological, purely metaphysical, or detached from questions of human behavior and social meaning are excluded from the

central analytical base, even where they may contain philosophically interesting reflections on evil, conflict, or moral judgment. This boundary is necessary to keep the manuscript aligned with behavioral and social analysis rather than allowing it to drift into abstract speculation.

3.2 Inclusion Logic

The inclusion logic of the paper follows relevance to the core research problem rather than a statistical or database-driven screening procedure. Sources were included when they met one or more of the following conditions: first, they offered explanatory value regarding how groups define themselves through opposition to others; second, they illuminated how grievance, blame, hatred, or resentment may function as socially binding or mobilizing forces; third, they addressed purity, authenticity, orthodoxy, or internal policing within ideologically charged environments; fourth, they examined internal factionalism, betrayal narratives, or fragmentation in collective formations; and fifth, they helped situate these processes within contemporary media environments that amplify conflict-centered identity performance.

Sources were not included merely because they addressed conflict in a general sense. Preference was given to scholarship that could be meaningfully integrated into the paper's central conceptual pathway from outgroup construction to recursive fragmentation. As a result, the review is structured around explanatory fit rather than disciplinary breadth alone. This allows the paper to remain focused on the specific question of how hatred-based cohesion can become self-consuming, rather than expanding into a general review of all work on ideology, polarization, or collective action.

3.3 Thematic Grouping Logic

The literature was organized into five themes in order to move from foundational mechanisms to escalated consequences. The first theme establishes how outgroups contribute to negative identity formation and symbolic boundary maintenance. The second theme examines how shared grievance, resentment, and blame contribute affective energy to collective identity. The third theme shifts inward by examining purity, loyalty, and ideological authenticity as mechanisms for policing belonging. The fourth theme analyzes internal betrayal, factionalism, and the repeated narrowing of legitimate membership. The fifth theme situates these processes in contemporary mediated environments that may intensify enemy production and public moral signaling.

This thematic progression is intentional. It allows the paper to build an argument sequentially rather than descriptively. Instead of presenting the literature as a series of disconnected findings, the review is arranged so that each theme clarifies a subsequent stage in the conceptual development of the problem. In methodological terms, the thematic grouping serves both an organizational and an interpretive function: it structures the review while also making visible a latent sequence that is only partially articulated in existing scholarship.

3.4 Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework of the paper is behavioral-social and analytic in orientation. The paper assumes that ideological life is not sustained by ideas alone, but by emotionally charged processes of belonging, exclusion, and moral interpretation. It therefore reads the literature through a framework centered on five interrelated constructs: identity formation, affective cohesion, boundary maintenance, suspicion, and fragmentation. These constructs are treated not as fixed variables but as interpretive lenses through which the selected literature is synthesized.

Within this framework, the paper does not attempt to pathologize all strong conviction or all conflict-oriented collective action. Instead, it distinguishes between ordinary adversarial positioning and forms of ideological life that become disproportionately dependent on enemy construction for internal coherence. The interpretive goal is to identify the conditions under which exclusionary identity formation becomes recursively destabilizing. In this sense, the framework is both diagnostic and cautionary: it seeks to clarify how certain forms of cohesion contain the seeds of inward dissolution.

3.5 Analytical Criteria

The analytical synthesis of the literature is guided by four criteria. The first is conceptual relevance: whether a source helps explain one or more elements of the paper's central sequence. The second is mechanistic clarity: whether the source contributes to understanding how a process works rather than merely naming its outcome. The third is integrative value: whether the source can be meaningfully linked to adjacent bodies of scholarship in a way that advances the paper's broader argument. The fourth is behavioral-social fit: whether the source remains grounded in human action, cognition, emotion, identity, discourse, or collective life.

Using these criteria, the paper develops a conceptual pathway in which outgroup construction clarifies identity, grievance consolidates affective solidarity, purity concerns intensify internal regulation, and repeated suspicion of insufficiently authentic insiders produces recursive fragmentation. This pathway is interpretive rather than causal in a strict empirical sense. It is offered as a theoretically grounded model of risk and tendency, not as a universal law.

3.6 Limitations of the Approach

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the paper is non-empirical and therefore cannot establish the frequency, universality, or causal strength of the sequence it proposes. Its claims are conceptual and synthetic, not statistical. Second, because the review is structured around thematic and explanatory relevance, it does not claim exhaustive coverage of all literatures on ideology, conflict, or polarization. Third, the model developed in the paper may illuminate some movements more clearly than others, particularly those characterized by high moral intensity and strong exclusionary discourse. It should not be applied indiscriminately to all collective formations.

A further limitation is that conceptual integration can risk imposing coherence on phenomena that are historically and contextually diverse. For this reason, the paper treats recursive fragmentation as a structural risk rather than an inevitable outcome. Finally, because the argument remains deliberately anchored in behavioral-social analysis, it does not attempt a full historical, institutional, or theological account of ideological movements. That narrowing is intentional, but it also places limits on the scope of the conclusions that can be drawn.

4. Analytical Synthesis / Results and Discussion

The analytical synthesis of the reviewed literature suggests a patterned sequence in ideological life that can be stated with reasonable conceptual clarity. The sequence begins with identity vulnerability and interpretive need, develops into outgroup-centered cohesion, intensifies through moralized vigilance, and may culminate in inward-turning purification and repeated internal fracture. This paper does not present that sequence as a universal law. It presents the sequence as an integrated interpretation of dispersed scholarship: a model of risk that becomes especially relevant when collective identity is sustained less by constructive institution-building than by continuing symbolic conflict. Social identity and group-influence research support the foundational premise that group identification, salience, and identity threat shape how people align themselves with collective norms and how intergroup distinctions become behaviorally consequential (Scholz et al., 2023).

4.1 From Identity Need to Enemy-Based Belonging

The first analytical finding is that hostile cohesion becomes intelligible when ideological belonging is understood not merely as assent to ideas but as a response to uncertainty, threat, and the need for orientation. When individuals experience ambiguity about status, meaning, moral order, or group standing, movements that provide sharp distinctions between us and them become psychologically attractive. The outgroup simplifies complexity. It gives conflict a face, distributes blame, and converts diffuse unease into morally legible opposition. In this sense, outgroup construction is not only a classificatory act. It is a meaning-making act. It organizes the social world into a structure that can be inhabited emotionally as well as cognitively. This inference is consistent with scholarship showing that identity threat heightens the need to restore a positive or secure social identity and that group processes become stronger under salient intergroup conditions (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2004).

This also helps explain why movements organized around hostility can initially feel more coherent than movements organized around construction. Building institutions, sustaining plural coalitions, and negotiating internal difference are slow and often affectively unrewarding tasks. By contrast, enemy-centered belonging offers

immediacy. It furnishes a shared object of attention and a common moral posture. The psychological economy is therefore asymmetrical: condemnation can unify faster than construction. The literature does not imply that all strong movements are hate-based, but it does support the view that antagonistic differentiation can provide rapid symbolic cohesion when identity concerns are acute (Denemark, 2021; Hogg et al., 2010). That is the first step in the model developed here.

4.2 Affective Cohesion and the Productivity of Grievance

The second finding is that once a boundary is established, grievance supplies the emotional energy that stabilizes it. The reviewed literature indicates that outrage, resentment, and blame are not merely by-products of ideological life; they can serve as socially productive forces. They convert perceived injury into solidarity, and they allow private frustrations to be experienced as participation in a larger moral drama (Boonstra & Söderberg, 2024; Pinich, 2019). What holds the group together, then, is not simply agreement about principles but a shared emotional interpretation of wrong. Studies of social media and morality are especially useful here because they show that outrage is often rewarded, amplified, and socially reinforced, while moralized discourse is linked to identity signaling, attention capture, and intergroup conflict (Bavel et al., 2023; Crockett, 2017).

This affects the internal texture of collective life. Where grievance becomes central, the group's emotional equilibrium depends on the continued recognizability of injury and the continued availability of someone to blame. A movement may still articulate a positive vision, but its day-to-day affective coherence can increasingly come from shared denunciation rather than shared construction. In that condition, hostility ceases to be episodic. It becomes infrastructural. For this reason, this paper uses the term shared hatred not as a rhetorical exaggeration but as shorthand for an exclusionary emotional regime in which resentment, outrage, blame, and moral suspicion become binding forces. It is not that every member feels identical hatred, but that the collective identity is increasingly stabilized by recurring negative affect directed at an adversarial other. The literature on moralized online discourse strengthens this interpretation by showing how low-cost outrage expression, positive social feedback, and algorithmic amplification can produce self-perpetuating cycles of moral signaling and conflict escalation (Bavel et al., 2023; Crockett, 2017).

4.3 From External Enemies to Internal Tests of Authenticity

The third finding is the decisive turn in the argument: exclusionary logic does not remain safely external. Once a group becomes accustomed to securing cohesion through moralized boundary enforcement, the same interpretive habits can migrate inward. The literature on ideological authenticity makes this especially clear. It shows that many episodes of repression and internal discipline focus on distinguishing true believers from pretenders, and that concern about ideological inauthenticity can activate a suspicious mindset oriented toward reading comrades for signs of insincerity or deviance (Eibach & Oakes, 2023). It also shows that support for pragmatic compromise may itself become suspect, since compromise can be interpreted as hidden alignment with the adversary (Eibach & Oakes, 2023).

This is analytically important because it reveals a structural continuity between outgroup hostility and internal policing. The movement does not abandon the logic of enemy construction; it relocates it. The object of vigilance shifts from obvious outsiders to questionable insiders. At this stage, ideological life becomes increasingly hermeneutic: members are not only judged by explicit commitments but by inferred motives, ambiguous gestures, tonal deviations, and degrees of enthusiasm. The social atmosphere thickens with interpretive suspicion. Orthodoxy is no longer merely a doctrinal condition but a performative and affective one. Members must appear sufficiently aligned, sufficiently intense, and sufficiently untainted. This is the point at which cohesion begins to depend not only on shared hostility outward but on the continuous scrutiny of loyalty inward. The movement becomes a site of moral inspection.

4.4 Recursive Fragmentation as a Self-Consuming Dynamic

The fourth and central finding of the paper is that this inward policing can generate what may properly be called recursive fragmentation. The term is necessary because ordinary words such as division, disagreement, or factionalism do not capture the specific mechanism at issue. The literature on intra-party and intra-movement

factionalism shows that internal conflict is a significant feature of organizational life and can affect strategy, policy, performance, and even survival (Klingelhöfer & Müller, 2023). It also indicates that neither permissive nor prohibitionist approaches fully prevent conflict or splintering (Lourenço et al., 2023).

However, the conceptual model advanced here goes beyond ordinary factionalism. Recursive fragmentation occurs when the group repeatedly reapplies its exclusionary standards to ever smaller circles of belonging. A first round of suspicion identifies compromised insiders. A second round questions those who defended them or failed to condemn them strongly enough. A third round narrows legitimacy still further by intensifying purity expectations. In this pattern, the group does not simply split into stable camps; it repeatedly shrinks the zone of recognized authenticity. Exclusion becomes iterative. The enemy form is reproduced at progressively smaller scales. This is the mechanism behind the title's phrase, 'internal purge': not necessarily formal expulsion in every case, but the ongoing moral and symbolic elimination of insufficiently pure members from the circle of full legitimacy.

What makes this recursive is that each round of purification strengthens the interpretive habits that make another round possible. Suspicion normalizes further suspicion. Purity language normalizes stricter purity tests. Public condemnation normalizes more exacting demands for visible conformity. Over time, the movement may retain high moral intensity while losing organizational resilience, internal trust, and practical capacity. Everyone is still interpreting, exposing, and purifying, but fewer are building, persuading, or governing. The literature strongly supports the components of this account - identity threat, outrage amplification, authenticity policing, factional vulnerability (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; Smith & Kelly, 2024) - even if it has not always assembled them into this exact sequential model. The present synthesis suggests that the self-consuming character of some ideological formations lies precisely in this recursive transfer of enemy logic from outside to inside.

4.5 Contemporary Ideological Life and the Acceleration of the Cycle

The fifth finding is that contemporary mediated environments likely accelerate this sequence. The reviewed literature on social media and morality indicates that online systems often amplify outrage, harassment, intergroup conflict, and identity signaling while rewarding moral signaling. Outrage receives social feedback, becomes normalized, and can be reinforced by algorithms that increase exposure to ideologically congruent and divisive content. The same literature notes that heavy exposure to such environments can distort perceptions of polarization and animosity, making hostility appear both more common and more necessary than it may actually be.

From the standpoint of the present paper, the significance of this is not merely technological. It is structural. In earlier forms of ideological life, production of enemies may have depended more heavily on episodic crisis, leadership rhetoric, or organizational campaigns (Maneri, 2010; Triplett, 2024). In contemporary settings, the media environment itself can supply a continuous stream of provocations, denunciations, and loyalty performances (Smith & Kelly, 2024; Valaskivi et al., 2022). This lowers the threshold for antagonistic cohesion and shortens the distance between external outrage and internal policing (Azzone, 2022, 2022). A member need not formally defect to become suspect; hesitation, tonal moderation, or insufficiently visible indignation may be enough. The movement's cohesion is therefore maintained through an almost continuous circulation of moral stimuli. Under such conditions, recursive fragmentation is not guaranteed, but it becomes more thinkable, more rapid, and more socially reinforced.

4.6 Integrated Interpretation

Taken together, the analytical synthesis yields a four-part interpretive model. First, ideological formations can draw strength from identity needs intensified by uncertainty or threat. Second, outgroup construction and grievance provide rapid affective cohesion. Third, once exclusionary vigilance is normalized, the movement becomes prone to internal authenticity policing. Fourth, that policing can become recursive, producing repeated narrowing of legitimate belonging and thus fragmenting the movement from within. This sequence explains why some formations appear most unified at the very moment they are becoming structurally unstable. The visible intensity of belonging can conceal a deepening dependence on suspicion.

The broader implication within Section 4 is therefore precise: movements organized disproportionately through enemy production may gain short-term symbolic clarity and emotional solidarity, but they also generate the internal conditions for distrust, orthodoxy escalation, and self-consuming fragmentation. The enemy is useful for cohesion,

yet the prolonged need for enemies makes cohesion increasingly fragile. Once a movement cannot sustain itself through constructive common purpose, it must continue feeding the boundary mechanism that once unified it. At that point, yesterday's external antagonist no longer suffices, and the logic of exclusion searches for fresh material closer to home. That is the core behavioral-social insight generated by this paper's synthesis of the literature.

5. Discussion of Findings and Implications

The analysis developed in this paper suggests that the most important issue is not whether ideological groups have enemies, since some degree of opposition is normal in social and political life, but whether a movement becomes disproportionately dependent on enemy construction as a source of internal coherence. The literature reviewed across social identity, moral psychology, ideological authenticity, factionalism, and mediated outrage supports the conclusion that hostility can function as a binding force under conditions of uncertainty, threat, grievance, and moral intensity. At the same time, this literature indicates that when cohesion is stabilized primarily through exclusionary vigilance, the movement risks transferring its logic of suspicion from external adversaries to internal members. This transition is the paper's central interpretive claim: outgroup construction may initially solve the problem of belonging, but if it becomes the dominant basis of solidarity, it also generates the conditions for inward narrowing and fragmentation.

One implication for behavioral and social analysis is that collective hostility should not be understood merely as an emotional excess added onto otherwise rational ideological commitment. In many cases, hostility is part of the architecture of belonging itself. Groups may come to depend on blame, denunciation, and moral opposition because these provide clarity, intensity, and symbolic order more rapidly than the slower work of construction, persuasion, or institutional maintenance. This helps explain why some movements appear strongest when they are most agitated and why intense solidarity can coexist with long-term fragility. The solidarity is real, but it is affectively overconcentrated in conflict. Such cohesion may mobilize quickly, yet it is less capable of sustaining plural internal life because it normalizes the interpretive habits of suspicion, boundary policing, and moral exposure.

A second implication concerns identity and meaning-making. The paper's argument suggests that enemy-centered cohesion often answers deep human needs for orientation, certainty, and moral placement. This is why the problem cannot be dismissed as simple irrationality. Movements organized through antagonism may feel existentially meaningful to participants because they convert private frustration and ambiguity into a shared structure of interpretation. The enemy is socially useful because it explains injury, sharpens purpose, and transforms diffuse unease into morally directed participation. For this reason, the study of ideological fragmentation must remain attentive to the lived rewards of exclusionary belonging. People are not only trapped by such formations; they are often sustained by them, at least temporarily, because they offer psychological legibility in conditions of uncertainty (Hogg et al., 2006, 2008). That point is important for IJBeSA because it locates ideological hardening within processes of coping, meaning, identity, and social interpretation rather than treating it as merely doctrinal extremity.

A third implication concerns ethics as lived social experience. When a movement's internal life becomes increasingly structured by purity, authenticity, and betrayal, moral judgment shifts from evaluating actions and arguments to evaluating persons and degrees of membership (Eibach & Oakes, 2023; McCann & Bishop, 1992). Under such conditions, disagreement is less easily processed as internal plurality and more readily interpreted as contamination, compromise, or hidden disloyalty (Farooq et al., 2024; Kunst et al., 2018; Travaglini et al., 2014). The ethical problem is therefore not confined to external aggression; it includes the corrosion of internal trust and the shrinking of legitimate moral space within the group. This is one reason the paper distinguishes between adversarial collective action and structurally exclusion-dependent movements. A movement may resist, criticize, or oppose real injustice without making exclusion the principal grammar of belonging. The danger emerges when condemnation becomes the primary route to recognition and when visible hostility becomes a test of sincerity (Johansson & Laippala, 2020; Táíwò, 2022). At that point, ethical seriousness is displaced by escalating performances of purity.

The paper also carries implications for contemporary mediated life. The reviewed scholarship on social media and morality suggests that current communication environments intensify outrage, moral signaling, and perceptions of polarization (Bavel et al., 2023). This does not mean digital media mechanically produce ideological decay, but it does suggest that they lower the cost of denunciation, increase its visibility, and reward emotionally vivid forms of conflict participation. As a result, the movement from external enemy construction to internal policing may be accelerated in mediated spaces where public alignment is continuously monitored and where hesitation, tonal moderation, or insufficiently visible indignation may be interpreted as weakness. In these environments, recursive fragmentation becomes easier to reproduce because moral suspicion can circulate quickly, reputational judgments can harden rapidly, and group membership is increasingly performed under conditions of constant exposure.

The theoretical significance of the paper lies in its effort to connect mechanisms often treated separately. Existing scholarship explains intergroup differentiation, grievance, authenticity policing, factionalism, and outrage amplification, but it less often assembles them into a single behavioral-social model. The present analysis proposes that these are not isolated phenomena but potentially linked stages in a broader sequence. This does not amount to a universal theory of ideological decline, and the paper does not claim that every morally intense movement will become self-devouring. Some collective formations retain strong identities while still preserving institutional depth, plural internal life, and constructive capacity. The point is narrower and more defensible: where enemy production becomes a dominant source of cohesion, the movement's own interpretive structure may incline it toward internal purification and repeated narrowing of belonging. Recursive fragmentation is therefore best understood as a structural risk, not as an inevitable fate.

That boundary of inference is important. Because the paper is conceptual and review-based, it cannot determine how frequently this sequence occurs, under what exact institutional conditions it intensifies, or which moderating factors most effectively interrupt it. It also cannot adjudicate all historical and political differences among movements. The argument is analytic rather than predictive. It identifies a recurring pattern supported by converging literatures, but it does not claim that all ideological conflict reduces to hatred or that all internal discipline is pathological. Some forms of boundary maintenance are ordinary features of organized life. Some factions are strategic rather than purgative. Some movements emerge from legitimate oppression and require strong oppositional clarity. The paper therefore does not condemn conflict as such; it asks when conflict ceases to be instrumental and becomes constitutive of belonging in ways that undermine durable common life.

The broader value of this discussion is that it offers a framework for interpreting a familiar but insufficiently theorized phenomenon: why some groups seem most morally intense at the moment they are becoming least capable of sustaining trust, plurality, and institution-building. The answer proposed here is that antagonistic cohesion contains an internal tension. It can produce solidarity, but it does so by normalizing a boundary logic that may later be turned inward. Once that happens, purification begins to replace construction, and denunciation begins to replace common labor. The movement remains animated, but its animation becomes increasingly extractive rather than generative. For behavioral and social inquiry, this is a significant insight because it shows how certain forms of belonging can simultaneously satisfy the need for meaning and erode the conditions for durable collective life.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has argued that ideological movements may derive substantial short-term cohesion from outgroup construction, shared grievance, and affectively charged opposition; yet those same mechanisms can generate long-term instability when they become the primary basis of belonging. The central conclusion is that hostility is not merely an incidental feature of some movements but may function as a social adhesive that binds members through shared blame, symbolic contrast, and moral clarity. However, when such cohesion becomes disproportionately dependent on sustained enemy production, the movement risks reproducing its exclusionary logic within its own ranks. At that point, external antagonism is gradually supplemented or displaced by internal authenticity tests, purity demands, and accusations of betrayal. The result is not simply disagreement or factional diversity, but a narrowing cycle of legitimacy that this paper has conceptualized as recursive fragmentation.

A second conclusion is that the instability of hate-centered cohesion is best understood as structural rather than accidental. The problem does not lie only in the presence of enemies, since opposition is common in social and political life. Rather, the problem lies in the movement's increasing inability to sustain solidarity without recurrent acts of exclusion. When condemnation becomes a principal route to belonging, hostility ceases to be instrumental and becomes constitutive of group identity. In such conditions, suspicion becomes socially rewarding, visible intensity becomes a marker of sincerity, and internal pluralism becomes harder to maintain. What appears externally as moral unity may therefore conceal a progressively shrinking circle of acceptable membership.

A third conclusion is that this pattern must be interpreted as a behavioral-social process rather than as a purely doctrinal or political one. The paper has shown that enemy-centered cohesion addresses deep human concerns with meaning, certainty, identity, and moral orientation. This is why movements structured through hostility can feel compelling, stabilizing, and even redemptive to participants. Their force does not arise from abstract ideology alone but from their ability to transform diffuse dissatisfaction into emotionally and morally organized belonging. Yet precisely because they answer these needs so powerfully, they may also displace the slower practices necessary for durable collective life, including trust-building, internal plurality, deliberation, and constructive institutional labor.

A fourth conclusion is that contemporary mediated environments likely intensify these dynamics by rewarding outrage, public denunciation, and visible alignment. Although the present paper has not advanced an empirical claim about digital causality, the reviewed literature supports the view that contemporary communication systems amplify the social visibility of hostility and reduce the cost of continuous moral signaling (Bavel et al., 2023). This makes ideological cohesion more vulnerable to cycles of accelerated suspicion and rapid internal narrowing. As a result, the distinction between principled collective action and exclusion-dependent movement life becomes even more important under present conditions.

In light of these conclusions, several recommendations follow. First, future research should examine the proposed sequence empirically to determine how frequently and under what conditions outgroup-based cohesion develops into recursive fragmentation. Comparative qualitative studies, discourse analyses, and case-oriented investigations of movements, advocacy networks, religious communities, and digitally mediated publics would be especially valuable. Such studies could explore how purity language, betrayal narratives, authenticity policing, and public denunciation operate in actual group settings.

Second, future scholarship should distinguish more carefully between ordinary factional disagreement and recursive exclusion. Not all internal division is self-consuming, and not all oppositional movements are structurally dependent on hatred. Research should therefore identify the moderating factors that prevent antagonistic cohesion from becoming inwardly purgative, including leadership style, institutional norms, tolerance for internal dissent, and the presence of constructive shared projects that can sustain belonging without constant enemy reproduction.

Third, researchers in behavioral and social sciences should continue to explore the connection between ideological intensity and meaning-making. The present paper suggests that exclusionary belonging is often psychologically attractive because it offers clarity, purpose, and moral placement. Understanding this attraction is essential for any serious account of polarization, group hardening, and collective distrust. Analyses that focus only on misinformation, irrationality, or extremism may miss the deeper experiential rewards that make hostile cohesion so durable.

Fourth, there is a practical recommendation for institutions, communities, and organized movements. Collective entities seeking long-term durability should remain attentive to whether their internal life is oriented more toward building than toward purifying. This does not require abandoning principled opposition or moral clarity. It does, however, require vigilance against the normalization of suspicion as a routine mode of belonging. Where visible hostility becomes the chief evidence of loyalty, the risk of recursive fragmentation increases substantially.

Finally, the paper recommends continued conceptual work at the intersection of identity, affect, morality, and social discourse. The phenomenon examined here is unlikely to disappear, particularly in environments marked by uncertainty, grievance, and accelerated communication. For that reason, understanding how movements move from

shared hatred to internal purge is not only a matter of political analysis but also a matter of understanding the fragile social psychology of belonging in contemporary life.

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