



## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS CHARACTERIZING RELIGIOUS FANATICISM

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**Abstract.** *This article examines the individual and socio-psychological factors associated with the formation and maintenance of religious fanaticism. Drawing on personality psychology, social psychology, and the psychology of religion, the analysis focuses on perceived inferiority, inadequate self-evaluation, cognitive rigidity, emotional instability, frustration, aggression, social isolation, and group-based deindividuation. The article argues that no single personality trait or temperament type is sufficient to explain fanaticism. Rather, vulnerability develops through the interaction of personal difficulties, social conditions, rigid ideological interpretation, and reinforcing group processes. The findings support a multidimensional approach to prevention and psychological rehabilitation based on critical thinking, emotional regulation, social inclusion, and individualized assessment.*

**Keywords:** *religious fanaticism, personality psychology, cognitive rigidity, frustration, aggression, deindividuation, social isolation, psychological prevention.*

### INTRODUCTION

Religious fanaticism is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained only by religious commitment or by one stable personality characteristic. Religiosity and fanaticism are not synonymous: religious belief may support moral regulation, resilience, and social solidarity, whereas fanaticism is typically characterized by intolerance, absolutization of a single position, rejection of alternative interpretations, and readiness to subordinate personal judgment to a rigid doctrine or group. Therefore, a psychological analysis must distinguish ordinary religious commitment from destructive forms of ideological dependence.

The purpose of this article is to systematize the principal individual and socio-psychological factors that may increase susceptibility to religious fanaticism. The discussion is based on a theoretical review of works in personality psychology, social



psychology, and the psychology of religion. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between self-evaluation, cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, frustration, and group influence.

## **METHODS**

The study uses theoretical analysis, comparison, synthesis, and systematization of psychological literature. Classical approaches to inferiority and compensation, authoritarian and dependent behavior, freedom and conformity, temperament, and deindividuation were compared with works on the psychology and sociology of religion. The analysis is interpretive and does not claim that the listed characteristics constitute a clinical diagnosis or inevitably lead to fanaticism.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Perceived inferiority and compensatory behavior. Physical, material, social, or psychological difficulties may intensify feelings of inadequacy, especially when a person lacks constructive ways of coping with them. Adler's concept of inferiority and compensation suggests that perceived weakness may motivate development, but it may also be compensated for through dominance, rigid self-assertion, or identification with a powerful group. In this context, a destructive ideological community can provide a simplified identity, a sense of superiority, and an opportunity to demonstrate significance. This factor should not be treated as a direct cause; its effect depends on social support, coping strategies, education, and the person's broader environment.

Inadequate self-evaluation and identity difficulties. Individuality includes character, temperament, cognitive processes, motivation, worldview, abilities, and patterns of social interaction. A person with an unstable identity may evaluate the self either excessively negatively or unrealistically positively. Such polarization can strengthen the need for external approval and make a clear, absolute group identity psychologically attractive. A fanatical group may then replace personal reflection with prescribed roles, evaluations, and behavioral norms.

Temperament and emotional reactivity. High reactivity, impulsiveness, and low tolerance for delay may complicate emotional self-regulation. However, temperament alone does not produce fanaticism, and it is scientifically incorrect to identify any



temperament type as inherently fanatical. Eysenck's personality model shows that temperament-related dimensions describe broad behavioral tendencies rather than predetermined ideological outcomes. Their influence must be assessed together with character, social learning, life experience, and the ideological environment.

Aggression and rigid self-justification. Repeated humiliation, social exclusion, loss, or unresolved conflict may increase hostility and defensive behavior. When aggression becomes ideologically justified, a person may interpret criticism of the group as a personal attack. This contributes to a closed cycle: counterarguments are rejected, disagreement is described as hostility, and withdrawal from dialogue is presented as loyalty. Psychological prevention should therefore address not only aggressive behavior but also the cognitive interpretations that legitimize it.

Cognitive rigidity and reduced critical reflection. Fanaticism is often associated with dichotomous thinking, intolerance of ambiguity, selective attention to confirming information, and resistance to revising beliefs. Insufficient knowledge may increase vulnerability, but intelligence level alone cannot explain ideological dependence. More important are the habits of evaluating sources, comparing interpretations, recognizing manipulation, and tolerating uncertainty. Educational interventions should develop these skills without stigmatizing people according to intelligence or educational status.

Frustration and externalization of responsibility. Frustration arises when a goal is blocked or an important need remains unmet. If a person consistently attributes failure only to external enemies, the resulting resentment may be used by a radical group. The group offers a simple explanation of complex problems, identifies an alleged source of blame, and promises restoration of justice or personal importance. Constructive coping, realistic goal setting, and responsibility for one's own decisions reduce this vulnerability.

Social isolation and dependent belonging. Individuals who experience loneliness or communication difficulties may feel secure only among people who repeat the same views. The group then becomes the principal source of identity, approval, information, and emotional support. This dependence narrows social contacts and makes departure psychologically costly. The person may avoid family members, professionals, or alternative communities, thereby losing opportunities for corrective feedback.



Deindividuation and group reinforcement. In highly cohesive groups, anonymity, emotional arousal, ritualized behavior, and shared symbols can reduce individual self-monitoring. Classical research describes deindividuation as a condition in which personal responsibility and self-awareness may weaken under group pressure. Within a fanatical community, members repeatedly confirm common beliefs, standardize attitudes toward outsiders, and evaluate behavior according to group loyalty. The destructive doctrine can gradually dominate personal needs, interests, appearance, communication, and decision-making.

Emotional dependence and idealization. Intense attachment to a leader, doctrine, or symbolic goal may become a substitute for autonomous judgment. Fromm's analysis of escape from freedom explains why some individuals seek security in submission to an external authority. Idealization becomes psychologically dangerous when the object is treated as infallible, criticism is prohibited, and personal boundaries are dissolved. Healthy commitment, by contrast, preserves responsibility, reflection, and respect for other people.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The factors identified above indicate that prevention cannot be limited to information campaigns. Effective work should combine psychological assessment, family and community support, development of critical media literacy, emotional self-regulation, conflict-resolution skills, and opportunities for constructive social participation. Intervention must be individualized because similar behaviors may arise from different psychological and social conditions.

Specialists should avoid labeling religious people, temperament types, or people with psychological difficulties as potential extremists. Stigmatization may increase isolation and resistance to assistance. Ethical practice requires a clear distinction between lawful religious belief, rigid but nonviolent views, and behavior involving coercion, incitement, or violence.

## **CONCLUSION**

Religious fanaticism develops through the interaction of individual vulnerabilities, social experiences, rigid cognitive patterns, emotional dependence, and group



reinforcement. Perceived inferiority, unstable self-evaluation, frustration, aggression, isolation, and reduced critical reflection may increase susceptibility, but none of these characteristics is deterministic. Temperament and intelligence must not be interpreted as direct causes of fanaticism.

A comprehensive psychological profile should therefore assess personality, cognition, motivation, emotional regulation, social relationships, and the specific influence of the group. Preventive and rehabilitative measures are most effective when they strengthen autonomous decision-making, critical thinking, emotional stability, social inclusion, and personal responsibility.

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