

The Effect of Different Threat Types on Political Attitudes and Prosocial Behavior



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Abstract


Living in a world fraught with uncertainties and dangers, individuals frequently encounter threats that shape their political behavior and attitudes. Political scientists and psychologists have proposed various theories to explain how such threats influence political decision-making. According to Terror Management Theory (TMT), reminders of mortality lead individuals to cling more firmly to their preexisting attitudes. Similarly, the Motivated Social Cognition Model posits that, in response to threats, individuals—regardless of ideological orientation—tend to shift toward more conservative policies. While empirical support for these theories exists, their findings have often lacked consistency, preventing the establishment of a unified framework to explain the relationship between threat perception and political ideology. To address these contradictions, Chang and Eadeh (2020) adapted the Issue Ownership Model for political psychology, proposing that the impact of threats on political attitudes varies depending on the context, type of threat, and its framing. This model offers a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that different individuals may exhibit divergent political shifts depending on how they interpret and respond to specific threats. In this chapter, we synthesize insights from these three dominant theoretical perspectives, along with other relevant frameworks, to examine the intricate relationships between threat perception, prosocial tendencies, political ideology, and moral attitudes.


Keywords

Political attitude · Issue Ownership Model · ideology · threat · prosociality



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Since the emergence of collective life, humans have been exposed to various threats that have shaped their political attitudes and behavior at both individual and group levels (Jost et al., 2003; Nail et al., 2009). In the modern era, the rapid spread of news through social media significantly influences perceptions of threats (Mahmood et al., 2021). When threats are perceived through the lens of negative emotions such as fear and anger, they shape political attitudes and influence political behavior (Erisen, 2018). These threats vary in scale (individual, collective, or global), type (social, political, environmental, or ideological), and source (natural disasters, animals, or human actions). This review aims to examine existing theories that explain the impact of different threats on political attitudes, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in terms of explanatory power, inclusiveness of different types of threats, and consistency across empirical findings, and finally introduce the Issue Ownership Model as a framework to reconcile contradictions in the literature.

Throughout history, humans have faced numerous dangers and developed various defense mechanisms to protect themselves. For example, fire was discovered to combat the cold, weapons were created to defend against predators, and agriculture was developed to mitigate food shortages. These examples illustrate that threats differ in source, scale, and type, each requiring distinct solutions.

From a source perspective, threats can originate from nature, other living organisms, or human actions. Natural threats include earthquakes, tsunamis, pandemics, and famines, while threats from other living beings involve disease transmission and physical attacks. Human-induced threats encompass terrorism, aggression (both physical and psychological), economic crises, political instability, and conflicts. In terms of scale, threats can affect individuals, groups, societies, or even all of humanity. Economic threats, for example, may impact an entire nation or the global economy during a financial crisis, whereas the closure of a small business may affect only a limited group of people. Threats can also be categorized by type, including economic (e.g., recessions, wealth inequality), political (e.g., instability, authoritarianism, and conflict), environmental (e.g., natural disasters, climate change), and cultural (e.g., social change, migration-induced alienation, and intergroup conflicts). Each type requires different coping mechanisms. Economic recessions may require financial reforms, political uncertainty may call for strong governance, climate crises may demand sustainable policies, and social alienation due to migration may necessitate effective integration strategies.

To address these threats, humans have historically collaborated to form societies, evolving from small groups of 50–100 individuals into larger tribes, principalities, and eventually into modern nation-states (McDowell, 2018). As societies expanded and became increasingly complex, political systems evolved to manage threats more efficiently. In tribal societies, social stratification was relatively minimal, and conflicts were often resolved through informal agreements and collective discussions among members (McDowell, 2018). However, in contemporary societies, where millions of people coexist, representative democracy has emerged as a more practical alternative, allowing for more efficient decision-making in response to threats and crises (Boix, 2007).

Threat and Political Parties

In societies that practice representative democracy, groups that agree on appropriate solutions to societal problems and threats form various coalitions, with political parties being one type of such coalitions (White, 2006). Political parties and ideologies seek to gain power by legitimizing themselves within society through their proposed solutions to pressing issues. For example, in the U.S., the Republican Party typically advocates for conservative solutions. Its platform includes defending national and



traditional values, restricting immigration, promoting neoliberal economic policies, securing national borders, and opposing abortion (Republican Party Platform, 2016). In contrast, the Democratic Party supports social policies (e.g., affirmative action, hate crime legislation) and economic policies (e.g., social security, centralized healthcare) that align with a left-of-center ideology, emphasizing social justice and the rights of minorities and disadvantaged groups (Democratic Party Platform, 2020).

The varying policies adopted by different parties to address social threats and challenges lead to the mobilization of distinct social groups around these political entities, each with its own interests. The Republican Party's coalition primarily consists of White Catholics, rural farmers, business owners, and older voters, while the Democratic Party's coalition includes young people, ethnic minorities (primarily Black and Asian communities), and university-educated voters (Aldrich et al., 2022). In addition to these foundational differences, political parties and coalitions adapt to emerging issues, introducing new policy proposals to address contemporary challenges. Consequently, political coalitions shift over time in response to evolving societal needs and political landscapes.

These shifts have been particularly evident in the U.S., especially in the 2016 elections. Historically, White voters without a university education were a reliable voting bloc for the Democrats; however, they have increasingly aligned with the Republican Party, arguing that the Democratic Party no longer represents rural concerns and has shifted too far left on social issues. Conversely, college-educated suburban voters—especially women—are increasingly supporting the Democratic Party, driven by concerns over threats to women's rights and democracy (Brewer & Powell, 2022).

In Europe, voter behavior, perceived threats, and political platforms are closely linked. Studies have found a positive correlation between the severity of the climate crisis, the frequency of climate anomalies in different regions, and the electoral success of parties advocating for green policies (Hoffmann et al., 2022). Meanwhile, globalist economic policies have been associated with the rise of right-wing populist parties and the decline of left-wing parties (Milner, 2021).

Türkiye presents an intriguing case study, as analyzing political coalitions and evaluating them through the traditional left-right spectrum is more complex than in the U.S. and Western Europe. This complexity provides a valuable opportunity to better understand political dynamics. This complexity arises because Turkish political coalitions are often formed based on short-term alliances of interest groups rather than ideological unity (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2016). The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*; AKP), which has been in power for approximately 23 years, initially pursued neoliberal and center-right policies in the 2002 elections, distinguishing itself from its predecessors—the National Salvation Party (*Millî Selamet Partisi*; MSP), Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*; RP), and Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*; FP). The broad coalition it built included former center-right, liberal, political Islamist, and nationalist groups (Özbudun, 2009). However, to maintain power in a shifting political climate, the AKP has adopted policies that appeal to different constituencies at different times. In its early years, the party embraced liberal policies (Gunter & Yavuz, 2007); between 2009 and 2015, it took steps to resolve the Kurdish issue (Coşkun, 2015); and after 2015, it increasingly pursued authoritarian, nationalist, and Islamist policies (Kaygusuz, 2018).

Similarly, opposition parties have undergone significant transformations. Between 2002 and 2015, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*; CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milletçi Hareket Partisi*; MHP) maintained a relatively close stance. However, since the 2015 elections, they have aligned with different coalitions. Under Deniz Baykal's leadership, the CHP adopted a nationalist and Euroskeptic position (Gülmez, 2008). In contrast, under Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the party shifted toward social democracy and a more conciliatory stance on the Kurdish issue, forming the Nation Alliance alongside the İYİ Party (which split from the MHP) and political groups that had broken away from the AKP, such as DEVA and the Future Party (Gülmez, 2013). Meanwhile, the MHP moved closer to the AKP,



forming the People's Alliance. The Islamist New Welfare Party (YRP) emerged in response to criticisms that the AKP had strayed from the National Vision movement, while the nationalist Homeland Party (MP) was founded in reaction to the CHP's perceived drift away from nationalist policies. Additionally, the nationalist Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi*; ZP) was established due to dissatisfaction with existing parties' responses to the migrant crisis. Further fragmentation occurred within leftist and pro-Kurdish groups. Disagreements within the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*; HDP)—now the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (*Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi*; DEM Party)—led the Workers' Party of Türkiye (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*; TİP) to contest elections independently, marking the first time in nearly 60 years that a socialist party won parliamentary seats. The 2023 presidential elections further reshaped Türkiye's political landscape. The failure of the CHP and the Nation Alliance to unseat the AKP government after 21 years led to the dissolution of the Nation Alliance. As of the 2024 local elections, political coalitions in Türkiye are increasingly being shaped by broader social consensus rather than rigid party alliances.

Despite these significant transformations, research on the relationship between perceived threats, political attitudes, and party support in Türkiye remains limited. One notable study examined the impact of terrorist attacks between the June and November 2015 elections. Following these incidents, the AKP increased its vote share by 9%, thereby ending coalition negotiations and securing a parliamentary majority (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2021; Kalaycıoğlu, 2016). Another example is the 2019 Istanbul mayoral election, which was annulled and rerun. In the second election, Ekrem İmamoğlu, who won the initial vote, expanded his lead over his opponent by 9%, suggesting that voters mobilized against what they perceived as a threat to democratic integrity (Svolik, 2023).

However, due to the highly fluid nature of Turkish political coalitions and policy shifts, it remains unclear how various threats will influence political attitudes and behavior among individuals and groups. How, in that case, can we systematically explain the relationship between perceived threats and political attitudes and behavior?

Terror Management Theory

Researchers in political psychology and political science have proposed various theories to explain the relationship between threats and political attitudes and behavior. One of the earliest and most influential of these is Terror Management Theory (TMT), developed by Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon in 1986. According to TMT, reminders of mortality lead individuals to cling more strongly to their existing attitudes, political views, and beliefs (Greenberg et al., 1986). Human beings, as cognitively advanced creatures, are uniquely aware of their own mortality. This awareness gives rise to existential anxiety, creating a profound sense of terror. To cope with this existential dread, individuals construct and adhere to cultural and religious values that provide a sense of meaning and security (Pyszczynski et al., 2016).

Norms, traditions, values, and beliefs shape social reality, and by conforming to this reality, individuals seek a form of immortality—either literal or symbolic. Literal immortality refers to the belief in an afterlife, such as going to heaven, while symbolic immortality involves identifying with something larger than oneself, such as a lasting legacy or the continued dominance of one's worldview. These two forms of immortality are interconnected and can be activated depending on the nature of the perceived threat. Research has shown that both symbolic (Dechesne et al., 2003) and literal (Lifshin et al., 2015) immortality enhance self-esteem and buffer individuals against existential threats.

Numerous studies have provided empirical support for TMT. Individuals reminded of their mortality tend to enforce moral norms more strictly than those who are not. For instance, judges who were made aware of their own mortality recommended harsher fines for sex workers (Rosenblatt et al., 1989).



Similarly, right-wing Israelis exhibited stronger support for violent measures to retain control over the Gaza Strip (Hirschberger & Ein-Dor, 2006), Iranian students showed greater approval of martyrdom in violent actions against the U.S., and American conservative students were more likely than their liberal counterparts to endorse extreme military operations that risked civilian casualties (Pyszczynski et al., 2006). Mortality salience has also been found to increase ingroup bias (Castano et al., 2001), foster more favorable evaluations of like-minded individuals in social relationships (Greenberg et al., 1990), and enhance the willingness to form social bonds (Taubman-Ben-Ari et al., 2002). Additionally, reminders of death have been shown to increase support for charismatic political candidates who align with individuals' pre-existing political views (Kosloff et al., 2010).

However, not all studies on the effects of mortality salience have supported TMT's predictions. Some research has yielded contradictory findings, particularly regarding the relationship between death reminders and political attitudes. For instance, studies conducted after the September 11 attacks in the U.S. (Landau et al., 2004) and public opinion surveys (Gallup, 2022; Pew Research, 2008) found that support for President George W. Bush's conservative policies increased among both conservatives and liberals. These findings challenge TMT's assumption that mortality salience reinforces pre-existing beliefs, suggesting instead that it can lead to a general shift toward conservative positions in times of crisis.

Beyond contradictory findings, concerns have been raised about the methodological rigor of earlier studies testing TMT. Prior to the open science movement, data collection procedures were often opaque, and raw data and statistical analyses were not always accessible to other researchers. This lack of transparency raises questions about the reliability of many early findings. Replication studies conducted under open science standards and with greater statistical power (Chatard et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2019; Sætrevik & Sjøstad, 2019; Schindler et al., 2021) have often failed to reproduce the original effects, yielding inconsistent or null results. These discrepancies suggest that earlier findings may have been false positives, that the effect size of mortality salience may be too small to detect without extremely large samples, or that some original results may have been influenced by questionable research practices—such as hypothesizing after the results were known (HARKing; Kerr, 1998), or p-hacking (Head et al., 2015).

Given these issues, the Motivated Social Cognition Model was proposed as an alternative explanation for the conservative shift observed in response to terrorist threats. Unlike TMT, this model suggests that threat-induced conservatism is not necessarily tied to individuals' pre-existing worldviews but rather reflects a broader psychological tendency to seek stability and order in times of crisis. This perspective challenges the core assumptions of TMT and provides a new framework for understanding how existential threats shape political attitudes and behavior.

Motivated Social Cognition Model

According to the Motivated Social Cognition Model (MSCM), exposure to threats leads to a conservative shift in political attitudes and behavior (Jost et al., 2003). Conservatism serves as a psychological buffer against threats and uncertainty by promoting adherence to traditions and existing hierarchies, thereby helping individuals cope with anxiety. Numerous studies support the MSCM (Jost et al., 2017; Landau et al., 2004). For instance, Landau et al. (2004) found that reminders of the September 11 attacks increased support for the conservative leadership of George W. Bush. Similarly, in two studies conducted before and after the attacks, Nail and McGregor (2009) observed a conservative shift not only among conservatives but also among liberals and political centrists. Additionally, participants who were in close proximity to the Twin Towers during the attacks exhibited a notable increase in conservative political attitudes (Bonanno & Jost, 2006).



Similar effects have been observed in other contexts. Following the 2004 Madrid terrorist attacks, participants demonstrated an increased tendency toward authoritarianism, anti-Arab and anti-Semitic sentiments, and conservatism, alongside a decline in their commitment to liberal values (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006). In Türkiye, the series of terrorist attacks and heightened uncertainty between the June and November 2015 elections contributed to a surge in support for the conservative ruling party, the AKP, which saw its vote share rise by approximately 9% within just five months (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2021).

However, some studies challenge the universality of the MSCM's predictions. For example, Lambert et al. (2010) found that while reminders of the September 11 attacks led to increased support for military action in Iraq, they did not produce a general conservative shift in political attitudes. Similarly, no significant change in attitudes toward immigration was observed following the Charlie Hebdo attack in France (Solheim, 2019) or the Mumbai attacks in India (Finseraas & Linstead, 2013). In contrast, the 2011 Norway terrorist attack led to a more positive shift in attitudes toward outgroups rather than increased conservatism (Jakobsson & Blom, 2014).

Given these inconsistencies with the theoretical assumptions of both TMT and the MSCM, new theoretical frameworks have been proposed to better understand the relationship between threat, political attitudes, and behavior. Among these are the Reactive Liberal Hypothesis (RLH) and the Negativity Bias, which offer alternative explanations for how individuals respond to threats in political contexts.

Reactive Liberal Hypothesis and Negativity Bias

The RLH was proposed by Nail et al. (2009). According to this hypothesis, liberals are more likely to adopt conservative values in response to threat and uncertainty, whereas conservatives' political attitudes remain unchanged, as they already endorse conservative values due to a chronic sense of threat. In Nail et al.'s (2009) study, liberals displayed ingroup bias under threat to the same extent as conservatives (Study 1), individuals with psychologically liberal traits (such as open-mindedness and tolerance) shifted towards psychological conservatism (characterized by dogmatism, intolerance of inconsistency, and a firm belief in the correctness of one's worldview) when exposed to threat (Study 2), and liberals opposed gay rights as much as conservatives (Study 3). Additionally, a study conducted before and after the 2005 London Bombings found that ingroup bias and prejudice against immigrants and Muslims increased, while support for the fairness dimension of Moral Foundations Theory declined (van de Vyver et al., 2015). The fact that these shifts were more pronounced among liberals provides further support to the RLH.

The tendency of liberals to react similarly to conservatives under threat has been linked to increased cognitive load (Skitka, 2002). According to this perspective, while liberals and conservatives may initially perceive the world in similar ways, liberals later revise their initial judgments in alignment with their political beliefs. However, under threat, heightened cognitive load impairs this revision process, leading individuals to rely on heuristics regardless of their ideological leanings. Consequently, liberals—who would otherwise adjust their views upon reflection—exhibit more pronounced shifts than conservatives when their cognitive resources are strained.

Neurobiological differences between liberals and conservatives have also been explored in this context. Studies suggest that liberals tend to have greater gray matter volume in certain brain regions, whereas conservatives have a larger right amygdala (Hibbing et al., 2014). This research contributed to the negativity bias hypothesis, which posits that such neurological differences may underlie ideological divergences in attitudes and behavior. In other words, one key concept proposed to explain the relationship between threat and political attitudes is negativity bias. According to this hypothesis, conservatives perceive the world as more negative and threatening than liberals and interpret negative



stimuli as more salient and influential than positive stimuli (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Numerous studies have found that conservatives exhibit stronger physiological and cognitive responses to negative stimuli. For instance, Oxley et al. (2008) reported a positive correlation between heightened physiological reactions to threatening stimuli (e.g., sudden noises, disturbing images) and support for policies such as military defense expansion, capital punishment, nationalism, and the continuation of the Iraq War. Similarly, Dodd et al. (2012) found that right-wing participants focused more intently on aversive stimuli and exhibited stronger negative reactions compared to left-wing participants. These findings are consistent with those of Carraro et al. (2011), who demonstrated that conservative participants responded more slowly to negative stimuli in a Stroop task (Study 1) and exhibited greater attentional bias toward negative stimuli in a dot-tracking task (Study 2).

The majority of studies on this topic focus on the threat of terrorism, as conservative political parties, coalitions, and platforms are generally perceived as more competent in addressing such threats. However, an important question remains: do conservative attitudes shift in response to other types of threats, and if so, how?

Parasite Stress Model

In the literature, several studies examine threats beyond terrorism, along with models developed within this framework. One such model, the Parasite-Stress Theory, posits that disgust is linked to pathogen-related dangers and serves as a protective mechanism against harmful situations and substances (Murray et al., 2011). The disgust response is involuntarily triggered by stimuli that pose potential threats to human health, such as feces, blood, corpses, and atypical sexual practices (e.g., zoophilia or necrophilia). Over time, disgust evolved to play a broader role, extending to moral judgments as well (Inbar et al., 2009). According to this model, individuals exposed to pathogen threats tend to conform more strongly to group norms and place greater emphasis on obedience (Murray et al., 2011). Pathogen threats and disgust have also been associated with ethnocentric attitudes, outgroup prejudice, and increased ingroup cooperation (Navarrete & Fessler, 2006), stronger support for policies favoring familiar immigrant groups while exhibiting more negative attitudes toward unfamiliar immigrant groups (Faulkner et al., 2004), and greater opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage (Smith et al., 2011). Although numerous studies have found correlations between disgust, prejudice, and conservatism, a key limitation of this body of research is its reliance on groups that are already distant from conservative ideology (Brandt et al., 2014; Inbar et al., 2009). However, when studies include groups that both conservatives and liberals perceive as outgroups, findings indicate that both ideological groups display intolerance toward the groups they define as outsiders (Brandt et al., 2014; Chambers et al., 2013) and engage in discriminatory behavior (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015).

Further complicating the relationship between threat and political attitudes, a study by Eadeh and Chang (2020) observed a liberal shift in participants' political attitudes when faced with threats related to healthcare access, air pollution, and corporate exploitation. This study is particularly noteworthy as it challenges the dominant trend in the literature, which generally finds that threats lead to a conservative shift in political attitudes and behavior. However, the broad and often ambiguous conceptualization of threat in political psychology presents challenges in determining how these findings should be situated within the field. To address these issues, the Compensatory Political Behavior Model, which provides a more structured framework for understanding threat and political ideology, will be examined in the next section.



Compensatory Political Behavior Model

In political science and political psychology, studies investigating the relationship between threat and political attitudes often define both threat and conservatism in broad and ambiguous terms (Crawford, 2017), making it difficult to clearly understand how these two concepts interact. To address this issue, Crawford (2017) developed the Compensatory Political Behavior Model, which categorizes threats into two distinct types: meaning threats and physical threats. Meaning threats are abstract and challenge individuals' identities or belief systems, whereas physical threats are concrete and pose risks to individuals' physical health and safety, such as terrorism and pandemics. The model posits that while meaning threats affect liberals and conservatives similarly—contrary to the assumptions of the negativity bias hypothesis—physical threats elicit stronger reactions from conservatives.

The model also distinguishes between economic conservatism and social conservatism in the context of threat responses. A review of the literature suggests that while social conservatism is closely associated with physical threats that trigger fear, there is no significant relationship between economic conservatism and physical threats (Smith et al., 2011; Oxley et al., 2008). These findings indicate that future research should not only define the type of threat (e.g., terrorism, pathogens, or climate change) but also specify whether the threat is economic or social to better elucidate the relationship between threat and ideology.

Psychological Distance

Beyond the type and definition of threats, psychological distance also influences political attitudes and behavior (Alper et al., 2020). According to Construal-Level Theory, individuals adopting abstract and concrete perspectives exhibit distinct responses to threats. Individuals adopting an abstract perspective approach threats ideologically and idealistically, leading to responses that are more consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs (Alper, 2018). In contrast, individuals with a concrete perspective evaluate threats based on context rather than ideology, making their responses more situationally dependent. Psychological distance refers to how close (in terms of time and spatial proximity) and probable a threat appears, influencing cognitive processing. As psychological distance decreases, people engage in more concrete thinking, whereas its increase leads them to rely more on abstract reasoning (Trope & Liberman, 2010). This suggests that the closer and more immediate a threat is perceived to be, the more context-dependent the proposed solutions become.

Empirical support for these ideas comes from a study by Ledgerwood et al. (2010), which examined political attitudes across four different issues: automatic organ donation after death, support for euthanasia, support for deporting illegal immigrants, and support for an all-inclusive healthcare system. These studies provide a valuable foundation for understanding how threats are perceived and processed. However, to assess the broader impact of threats on political attitudes and behavior, the next section introduces the Issue Ownership Model, which aims to integrate these perspectives into a more comprehensive theoretical framework.

Issue Ownership Model

Due to contradictory findings in the literature, the predominant focus on terrorist threats, and evidence from some studies suggesting that threats do not influence general political attitudes (Lambert et al., 2010), the Issue Ownership Model (IOM)—originally used in political science—was adapted to political psychology to examine the effects of threats on political attitudes and behavior (Eadeh & Chang, 2020). The foundations of IOM, which was first introduced in political science, date back to the 1980s (Petrocik, 1996). According to this theory, political parties are perceived by the public as more



competent in addressing specific issues (Lefevere et al., 2015). For instance, in Europe, green parties are seen as better equipped to handle environmental problems, socialist parties with social security policies, and right-wing parties with immigration crises. In the US, the Republican Party is perceived as more effective in protecting traditional values and ensuring national security (Newport, 2014), whereas the Democratic Party is regarded as more capable of handling healthcare policies, social security, human rights protection, and environmental issues (Saad, 2007; Petrocik, 1989). According to the model, when a crisis or threat arises in a particular domain, public support tends to increase for the party, coalition, or policy proposal perceived as most capable of addressing the issue. However, political coalitions and the policies they endorse may shift over time, leading to changes in public perceptions of which party is better suited to handle specific problems.

Türkiye can be regarded as a unique case in this context as well. Between 1960 and 1980, the Republican People's Party (CHP), under Bülent Ecevit's leadership, adopted a social democratic platform, embracing left-of-center policies (Canyaş, 2015). These policies included social security programs, trade union rights, state-led economic policies, and human rights protections. By the 1970s, CHP had become the preferred party of the working class and peripheral urban neighborhoods (Doğan, 2019). However, following the 1980 military coup, leftist organizations were severely repressed, creating a political vacuum in these economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, which had traditionally benefited from leftist economic policies. By the 1990s, this vacuum was filled by the Welfare Party (RP) and its successor, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which combined Islamic cultural politics with welfare-oriented economic policies (Doğan, 2019). During the AKP's tenure, which emphasized welfare policies, low-income regions overwhelmingly supported the party, while CHP struggled to attract votes. For instance, in 2011, in Istanbul's economically disadvantaged districts, AKP received 59% of the vote, while CHP secured only 20% (Ciddi & Esen, 2014). Thus, while the political platforms of traditional right- and left-wing parties in Europe allow for relatively stable predictions regarding shifts in political support during crises (Seeborg, 2017), the fluidity of political party identities in non-Western countries, including Türkiye, makes it more difficult to determine which issues are most likely to influence party support.

IOM began to be utilized in political psychology in 2019. Studies in this field have explored how threats and societal problems influence individuals' political attitudes and behavior through the lens of IOM. The adaptation of IOM to political psychology is based on research conducted by Eadeh and Chang (2020). In their study, a liberal shift was observed among participants facing threats related to denied access to healthcare (Study 1), air pollution (Study 2), and corporate corruption (Study 3). This study represents a major contribution to the field of political psychology, as previous research predominantly focused on threats related to terrorism (Jost et al., 2003) and pathogens (Smith et al., 2011), which generally led to a conservative shift or stronger adherence to pre-existing political attitudes. A potential explanation for the inconsistencies between earlier theories is that different types of threats in different contexts may lead to either a conservative or liberal shift, or may fail to induce any change, and instead reinforce political polarization, particularly when no political ideology is perceived as more competent in addressing the issue.

Findings from Brandt et al. (2020) further support this perspective, based on World Values Survey data. Their study found that economic threats were associated with a shift toward left-wing economic values, whereas terrorist threats led to a greater endorsement of right-wing cultural values. The most significant contribution of this study lies in its cross-national analysis, as the data were collected from 56 different countries, demonstrating that the relationship between threat and political attitudes varies significantly across national contexts. However, the study did not provide a clear explanation for the underlying mechanisms driving these cross-national differences.



A growing body of literature suggests that different types of threats may influence moral attitudes and behavior in distinct ways. For instance, van de Vyver et al. (2016) conducted the first study examining moral judgments toward outgroup members before and after a real-life bombing event. The study found that participants exhibited increased attachment to in-group values and heightened prejudice toward outgroups, while the importance placed on the fairness dimension decreased. Notably, these effects were stronger among politically leftist (liberal) participants than among rightist (conservative) participants. However, a key limitation of this study is that the participants in the pre-test and post-test phases were different individuals, and the materials used to measure moral attitudes were not specifically designed for this purpose. Similar limitations are present in other studies investigating the psychological impact of terrorist attacks. For example, Bonanno and Jost (2006) found that survivors of the 9/11 attacks became more politically conservative afterward. However, this study was conducted on a small sample of only 45 participants, and similar studies in the field often suffer from low statistical power due to limited sample sizes. Additionally, most experimental studies investigating the effects of terrorist threats rely on manipulations that lack ecological validity. For instance, Tamborini et al. (2017) divided participants into two groups, with one group watching news reports about the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks while the control group watched unrelated news. The study found that participants who watched news about terrorism placed greater emphasis on the authority dimension. In another study, Vail et al. (2012) sought to increase death salience by showing participants images of destroyed buildings, while the control group viewed intact buildings. Participants exposed to destroyed buildings subsequently exhibited increased support for war against enemy countries and stronger social identification with their in-groups.

Given the uncontrollable nature of terrorism, many studies have used manipulations designed to heighten death salience rather than directly addressing terrorism itself. More importantly, nearly all of these studies have been conducted in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) societies (Henrich et al., 2010). A meta-analysis of 323 studies on the effects of threat on political attitudes revealed that only seven studies had been conducted in non-WEIRD societies, highlighting the need for further research in diverse contexts. In Türkiye, for example, relatively few studies have examined these effects. One cross-sectional study analyzing the impact of bombing attacks between June 2015 and December 2016 found that public support for AKP (known for its conservative policies) increased in response to these attacks (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2021). Similarly, Erol (2022) analyzed Facebook data from 2018 to 2020, showing that the heightened salience of terrorist threats led individuals to identify more strongly with conservative political views.

From the perspective of TMT, one way people cope with threats is by engaging in prosocial behavior that reinforce their self-worth in alignment with their cultural values. Some research suggests that people who perceive economic threats are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2020; Serrano-Montilla et al., 2021). However, other studies have found the opposite effect. For instance, Twenge et al. (2007) reported that participants who experienced social exclusion threats exhibited lower levels of cooperation and generosity, donating less money in economic games. Studies examining the effects of terrorist threats on prosociality share similar limitations with those investigating political and moral attitudes—most measure intentions rather than actual behavior (Kumagi & Ohbuchi, 2000; Steinberg & Rooney, 2005). Furthermore, while some studies suggest that terrorist threats increase prosocial behavior (Penner et al., 2005), others have found the opposite effect (Streibel & Steenbergen, 2017). For example, Hirschberger et al. (2008) found that participants whose thoughts of death were made salient donated more money to charitable organizations than those who thought about toothaches. However, a more recent study by Heller and Halabi (2022) examining the effects of death salience manipulations on Israeli soldiers found that soldiers in the manipulation group were less likely to help Israeli Arabs in need compared to those in the control group.



A notable exception in the literature is Veliöğlu (2023), who was investigating how perceived earthquake risk influences moral judgments and prosocial behavior when the Istanbul bombing occurred on November 16, 2022. Shortly after the attack, the original study participants were re-contacted, allowing for a unique, ecologically valid examination of the causal effects of terrorist threats on actual behavior and self-reported intentions. The study found that after the bombing, participants' group binding (loyalty, authority, sanctity) values (measured using the Moral Foundations Scale-2; Atari et al., 2022) increased, while generosity behavior (measured using the Dictator Game) decreased. Participants who first read a threat-related text engaged in less cooperative behavior (measured using the Public Goods Game). However, no decrease in individualizing values was observed. Contrary to expectations, the change in moral attitudes following the bombing was not observed in political leftists, but rather in political rightists. Specifically, after the attack, right-wing participants placed less emphasis on individualizing values, leading to the development of the Reactive Conservative Hypothesis (RCH). According to this hypothesis, prolonged conservative rule and low democracy scores may cause leftists to feel perpetually threatened, leading to desensitization. This suggests that RCH is context-dependent, yielding different results in Türkiye compared to other Western countries. This study is particularly significant as it was conducted in a non-WEIRD society, incorporated behavioral measures, and achieved high ecological validity.

In February 2023, two devastating earthquakes (7.7 and 7.6 magnitude) struck the Türkiye-Syria border. Like Veliöğlu (2023), Varol (2023) was conducting another research at the time. Following the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, participants from the initial study were re-contacted, enabling an examination of the effects of earthquake threats on moral judgments and behavior. The findings revealed that perceived earthquake risk increased post-earthquake, accompanied by a significant rise in prosocial behavior, aligning with the study's hypotheses. However, moral sensitivity unexpectedly declined following the earthquake.

This finding is particularly striking for two reasons. First, the social desirability effect may explain why participants' reported attitudes deviated from their actual behavior. In Türkiye's collectivist culture, prosocial behavior—especially toward the in-group—is a social norm (İmamoğlu & Karakitapoğlu-Aygün, 1999; Kara, 2007). The observed decrease in moral sensitivity runs counter to researchers' expectations. Second, this result highlights the intention-behavior gap, a growing concern in psychology. A meta-analysis by Webb and Sheeran (2006) found that while manipulations intended to influence intentions typically have medium to large effect sizes, their actual impact on behavior is only small to moderate. This discrepancy arises because survey respondents often report socially desirable intentions that do not align with their real-world actions, leading to high false-positive rates in the field. While this study observed behavioral changes without corresponding shifts in intentions, it underscores the complex nature of how earthquake threats influence prosocial behavior, distinguishing them from terrorist threats. These findings align with the IOM, which posits that different types of threats elicit different psychological responses.

In conclusion, given that most studies in the field are conducted in WEIRD societies, research from a non-WEIRD country like Türkiye is valuable for improving the generalizability of findings. The contrasting effects of terrorist threats (reducing prosocial behavior) and natural disasters (increasing prosocial behavior) highlight the importance of threat type. Research suggests that man-made threats (e.g., terrorism) reduce prosocial behavior, whereas natural threats (e.g., earthquakes) increase it (Marjanovic et al., 2009; Zagefka et al., 2011). Understanding these dynamics provides deeper insight into the psychological impact of different types of threats.



Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the Issue Ownership Model (IOM) is promising as it offers potential explanations for the contradictions and commonalities among previous theories, its limitations remain unclear. As it has only recently been introduced to the political psychology literature and requires further testing across diverse contexts. Brandt et al. (2021) observed cross-country differences in the relationship between threat, political attitudes, and behavior, yet the underlying reasons for these differences could not be clearly identified. Since social science research is predominantly conducted in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) societies, the theories developed in this field often reflect the specific characteristics of these countries (Henrich et al., 2010).

For instance, according to the Motivated Social Cognition Model (MSCM), conservative ideology provides psychological protection against uncertainty and anxiety by upholding the status quo (Jost et al., 2003). However, the status quo itself varies significantly from country to country. In the US, where capitalist and free-market economic policies represent the dominant social and economic structure, these values are closely associated with conservatism. In contrast, in Eastern European countries, which were governed under communist rule for nearly 50 years, the economic status quo aligns with left-wing economic values (Thórisdóttir et al., 2007).

Similarly, the ideological positions of political parties and coalitions on specific policy issues differ between countries. For example, in the US, the Democratic Party—typically classified as center-left—and its supporters tend to exhibit more favorable attitudes toward immigrants than the Republican Party (National Immigration Forum, 2019). However, in Türkiye, public opinion polls on the deportation of Syrian asylum seekers reveal a different ideological alignment. Supporters of left-wing (CHP and HDP) and center-right (İP) parties are more likely to favor deportation than those aligned with the right-wing (AKP) and far-right (MHP) parties (Areda Research, 2022; Metropoll, 2021). These discrepancies illustrate that the meanings and implications of left and right ideologies differ across national contexts. Therefore, before applying political psychology theories cross-nationally, it is crucial to clearly define what left and right represent in each country, test the theory across varied political landscapes, and systematically analyze the factors contributing to cross-country differences.

Furthermore, the effects of different types of threats on political attitudes and behavior warrant closer examination. The literature has predominantly focused on threats perceived as having stronger influences on conservative political attitudes and behavior, such as terrorism (Jost et al., 2003; Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2017) and disease threats (Murray et al., 2011; Navarrete & Fessler, 2006). As a result, until recently, researchers did not seriously consider the possibility that threats could also lead to a liberal shift in ideological attitudes. However, studies by Crawford (2017) and Eadeh and Chang (2020) redefined the concept of threat, revealing that different types of threats can have distinct effects on attitudes and behavior.

Threats vary infinitely in terms of their type, magnitude, and source, and their effects on political attitudes and behavior depend on context and time. To explore these dynamics, a substantial body of research is required. Numerous real-world threats provide opportunities for studying their influence on political attitudes in different settings, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Satherley et al., 2022), earthquakes (Uslaner & Yamamura, 2016), tsunamis (Carlin et al., 2014), cyberattacks (Snider et al., 2021), economic crises and scarcity (Siltala, 2020), and climate change (Aktan, 2022). Conducting research across these various contexts will be essential to developing a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between threats and political psychology.



List of Basic Texts and Further Readings

Brandt, M. J., Turner-Zwinkels, F. M., Karapirinciler, B., van Leeuwen, F., Bender, M., van Osch, Y., & Adams, B. (2021). The Association between threat and politics depends on the type of threat, the political domain, and the country. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 47(2), 324-343. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014616722094618>

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