

**The Political Psychology of National Security, War,
and Civil Liberties**

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AUTHORS' NOTE

This is a summary of existing empirical research into the psychological factors driving attitudes on national security, war, and civil liberties. While we draw conclusions at the end of this paper, we ask that the reader view these as tentative. Many of the strategies described here have been tried and were not enough to prevent previous wars, including the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, or the post-9/11 crackdown on civil liberties. At the same time, the fact that certain strategies were used and did not halt the Iraq invasion or the restriction of liberties is not proof of their inefficacy, only their insufficiency in these instances. Given this complexity, we have attempted to catalogue a large number of possible strategies. None of the recommended strategies are likely to be effective in all instances. It should be clear from the text where we are summarizing existing research and suggesting possible solutions to current challenges.

WHAT FACTORS AFFECT PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS CIVIL LIBERTIES?

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, political conditions have challenged the maintenance and expansion of human rights and civil liberties in the U.S. What does research tell us about the psychological factors affecting attitudes towards civil liberties?

Clearly a connection exists between feelings of security and concern for the basic freedoms of American citizens and foreign detainees. As would be expected, research shows that *perceptions of threat from abroad* are related to willingness to give up civil

liberties (Gibson 1998; Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, and Wood 1995; Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1982). For example, Davis and Silver (2004) found that after September 11, 2001 Americans were willing to sacrifice civil liberties for security. They also found that this willingness was highest among those with high trust in government, a trait more widely held by conservatives for whom respect for authority is a central value. This relationship between threat and civil liberties can be explained from an analysis of basic needs (Maslow 1954). As Davis and Silver (2004) point out, for most the need for safety and security ranks as more important as compared to the need for self-actualization and freedom. Thus, in line with the hierarchy of needs, people will prioritize security over freedom whenever they have to choose between the two.

Past research has found numerous individual difference traits are related to human rights and civil liberties attitudes. A number of studies have consistently shown that *Right Wing Authoritarianism* (RWA) negatively correlates with such attitudes (Altemeyer 1998; Moghaddam and Vuksanovic 1990; McFarland and Matthews 2005; Crowson et al. 2005; Crowson et al 2006; Cohrs et al. 2005a; Cohrs et al. 2005b). For instance, Cohrs et al. (2005b) found that those high in RWA were significantly more likely to support general restrictions in civil liberties and, more specifically, showed strong support for increased governmental surveillance measures. In addition, two studies found that RWA was a robust predictor of support for the endorsement of human rights restrictions in the name of the War on Terror, similar to restrictions found in the Patriot Act (Crowson et al. 2005; Crowson et al. 2006). Other studies have also found similar associations between *Social Dominance Orientation* (SDO) — the view that certain groups are inherently better than others and should dominate lesser groups in

society — and negative attitudes toward civil liberties and human rights. Specifically, McFarland and Matthews (2005) found that SDO was a negative predictor of one's commitment to human rights, and both Crowson et al. (2005) and Crowson et al. (2006) found that SDO predicted increased support for many of the human rights restrictions found in the Patriot Act (more research on SDO is summarized below.)

Level of education also plays a role in individuals' views on human rights. In a national survey of students, college seniors scored higher on concern for human rights than did freshman (Barrows 1981). In addition, Getz (1985) found a positive correlation between education level in adults and their overall attitudes toward human rights. However, it should be noted that some scholars believe that the increase in concern for human rights is not directly due to education about the world, but rather education about what is the socially appropriate response to such questions (McFarland and Matthews 2005).

Another predictor of support for human rights attitudes is a *general knowledge of the world*. Specifically, knowledge about global affairs positively correlates with caring about human rights (Barrows 1981) and agreement with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Grace and Van Velzer 1951).

WHY DO PEOPLE SUPPORT WAR?

A central tenet of the progressive agenda is to oppose and work to prevent unnecessary wars. This is a challenge, as public opinion on foreign policy has been combustible, reactionary, and easily manipulated since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

American progressives concerned with deterring future wars, such as a possible military

strike against Iran, may find useful political psychology research on the psychological roots of support for war. A thorough understanding of the psychological and social bases of war support may offer some building blocks for a political agenda designed to intelligently confront and undermine support for unnecessary wars in the future. Below we review relevant research on why people support war and other military engagements. Our review is broad, but it focuses most of all on the roles of “fear and loathing,” perceptions of threat, and inter-group prejudice on support for military action.

Perhaps more than any other factor, *perceptions of threat* and feelings of endangerment are strong predictors of support for war. This notion stems from research and theory that associate the perception of threat, especially threat from an out-group, with an increased likelihood of aggressive and militant stances (Gordon and Arian 2001; Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999; McFarland 2005). For instance, “Integrated Threat Theory” (Stephan and Stephan 2000) and “Social Identity Theory” (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986) both predict that feeling threatened by some out-group leads individuals to have heightened levels of out-group hostility and to support (or engage in) conflict with that out-group. For example, Oswald found a positive association between feelings of threat and anti-Arab hostility (2005). In that study, perceptions of threat were tapped using a five-item scale that measured participants’ sense of fear and vulnerability toward terrorist attacks. The strongest relationship was for the following item: “I feel personally at risk for being a victim of a terrorist attack.”

Along those lines, perceived threat of terrorism among Americans, specifically, leads to support for war — especially wars targeting Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East. Some previous research has directly examined the link between perceived threat of

terrorism and support for militant attitudes, policies, and leaders (Arian 1989; Friedland and Merari 1985; Huddy, Feldman, Taber, and Lahav 2005; Kam and Kinder 2007; Landau, Solomon, Greenberg, Cohen et al. 2004; Willer 2004). For example, Huddy et al. (2005) found that Americans who viewed terrorism as a major threat were significantly more likely to support the George W. Bush administration's foreign policy, one associated with preemptive war.

A variable closely linked to these perceptions of threat – in fact, believed to be motivated by the desire for increased security and reduced threat – is right wing authoritarianism (RWA), which has been associated with support for militancy and war (Altemeyer 1988; Doty, Peterson, and Winter 1991). Duckitt (2001) and Altemeyer (1998) argue that feelings of fear and endangerment are the foundations of authoritarian attitudes. In turn, abundant research has linked RWA with support for military action (Cohrs and Moschner 2002; Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, and Kielman 2005; Crowson, Debacker, and Thoma 2005, 2006; Doty, Winter, Peterson, and Kimmelmeier 1997; Feldman and Stenner 2008; Izzett 1971; McFarland 2005).

Furthermore, certain worldviews related to feeling threatened lead to support for war. For instance, chronic perceptions of the world as a hostile, distrustful, and corrupt place have been linked to increased aggressiveness and authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988; Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, and Birum 2002; Bonanno and Jost 2006; Miller, Lynam, and Leukefeld 2003; Willer, Feinberg, and Laurison 2008). Consistent with this, research using the “Belief in a Dangerous World” scale has shown that perceptions of a hostile world lead to authoritarian attitudes and derogation of out-groups (Altemeyer 1988; Duckitt et al. 2002), which, as mentioned above, have been linked to aggressive

and violent attitudes toward out-groups, including support for war (e.g., Altemeyer 1988; Duckitt 2001; McFarland 2005). Furthermore, Willer et al. (2008) found that those who view others generally as untrustworthy are significantly more likely to support war.

There is also some research that examines the origins of perceived threat and, most specifically, right wing authoritarianism. Those high in RWA are believed to have had much harsher and more punitive (i.e., threatening) upbringings that emphasized strict adherence to rules and norms (Duckitt 2001). In fact, it is theorized that authoritarian attitudes manifest themselves in order to help combat the perpetual sense of threat and insecurity that was instilled during childhood.

Inter-group prejudice and the related construct of ethnocentrism are also major contributing factors to support for war. Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own group and that group's culture are superior to all others (Kam and Kinder 2007). Kam and Kinder (2007) used a direct measure of ethnocentrism and found it to be a robust predictor of support for war in Iraq. However, inter-group prejudice and ethnocentrism is more often operationalized in past research on war in other forms. The most common way of operationalizing them is by using the "Social Dominance Orientation" (SDO) scale. High SDO individuals tend to perceive the world as highly competitive and hierarchical, believing that certain groups of people (especially their own group) are inherently better than others and should dominate lesser groups in society (Duckitt 2001; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, Malle 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 1993; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). High SDO individuals are driven by in-group dominance motives to establish and maintain power over other groups. Furthermore, having a high SDO likely stems from having a tough-minded, power-hungry personality, and from viewing the world as a

“competitive jungle” that is ruthless and zero-sum (Duckitt 2001; Duckitt et al. 2002; but see also Jost and Thompson 2000 for a more complex view).

The properties of social dominance orientation are explained by “Social Dominance Theory” which contends that societies develop ideologies, or “legitimizing myths,” that provide justification for, and help maintain, group inequalities. Individuals high in SDO are much more likely to ascribe to these legitimizing myths and feel comfortable with prejudicial attitudes toward supposedly inferior groups. Along these lines, researchers have identified SDO as a foundational ideology behind prejudice (e.g., Duckitt 2001; Duckitt et al. 2002; Duckitt and Sibley 2007) and have empirically associated SDO with various forms of discrimination, including anti-black racism, anti-Arab racism, negative attitudes toward Middle Easterners, negative attitudes toward miscegeny, U.S. dominance over other nations, cultural elitism, and opposition to women’s and gay rights (Heaven, Organ, Supavadeeprasit, and Leeson 2006; Pratto et al. 1994).

Research on SDO has shown that it is also predictive of support for war and war-related activities. Specifically, in past studies SDO was positively correlated with pro-war attitudes and support for the US-led wars in Afghanistan and both wars in Iraq (Cohrs et al. 2005; Crowson et al. 2006; Heaven et al. 2006; McFarland 2005; Pratto et al. 1994), as well as support for the idea of going to war in pursuit of perceived national economic interests, such as oil prices (Pratto et al. 1994). More recent research based on American Environics data from the spring of 2007 shows that SDO also predicts support among Americans for a military attack on Iran (Willer et al. 2008). However, the militancy of those high in SDO disappears entirely for – and may even correlate

negatively with – support for wars framed as humanitarian (e.g. military efforts to prevent genocide) (McFarland and Matthews 2005; Pratto et al. 1994; but see also Cohrs et al. 2005). These findings suggest that SDO is related to pro-war attitudes, but only if those wars are perceived as dominance oriented.

Racial prejudice, though more difficult to study because of the stigma behind admitting one's racism, has also been examined in relation to war and group conflict. Individuals who harbor greater racial prejudice show greater preferences for their own group in an international context, possessing feelings of hostility towards out-groups both at home and abroad are correlated (Adorno et al. 1950; Allport 1954; Duckitt and Sibley 2007). Both feelings of racial prejudice and nationalistic attitudes towards other countries may reflect an underlying propensity for intolerance of other groups (Adorno et al. 1950; Herzon, Kincaid, and Dalton 1976). Such generalized prejudice has been shown to associate with hostility toward all out-groups (Fink 1971; Herzon et al. 1976). For instance, there is evidence suggesting that racial attitudes favoring minorities domestically are strong predictors of support for foreign policy aimed at assisting racial minorities abroad (Hill 1993; Klotz 1995; Oldmixon, Rosenson and Wald 2005). Sidanius and Liu (1992) found positive associations between support for the first Gulf War and three different measures of prejudicial racial attitudes, including belief in racial superiority. In addition, Herzon et al. (1976) found that prejudice (against African-Americans) was associated with support for increasing aggressive military action in Vietnam. Conversely, Barton (1968) found that support for racial justice domestically was associated with opposition to the Vietnam War.

Social Identity Theory and some parallel theories (e.g., “Realistic Conflict Theory,” “Integrated Threat Theory”) help explain where ethnocentrism may come from. These theories posit that in-group members, especially when group identity is salient (often because of perceived out-group threat or ambiguity) tend to have increased hostility and prejudicial attitudes toward the out-group members, stereotype them as being less cooperative and fair, and tend to punish them by withholding resources and rejecting offers from them in economic-game scenarios (Billig and Tajfel 1973; Brewer 1999; Brewer and Silver 1978; Kramer, Shah, and Woerner 1995; Tajfel et al. 1971; Voci 2006).

Blind patriotism (the unwillingness to criticize one’s nation) and nationalism (the belief that one’s own nation is superior to other nations) are also both closely interlinked with ethnocentrism and authoritarian attitudes. In fact, numerous studies have shown robust correlations between these variables and both authoritarianism and ethnocentrism (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1998; Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, and Birum 2002; Federico, Golec, and Dial 2005; Pratto et al. 1994; Schatz, Staub, and Lavine 1999). Blind patriotism and nationalism are both linked to authoritarianism and ethnocentrism. Specifically, it is theorized that authoritarians are more likely to also be blind patriots and nationalists because of the social cohesion, sense of security, and conformity it engenders. Those high in ethnocentrism are likely to be blind patriots and nationalists because these are viewed as mechanisms for expressing in-group superiority. Moreover, both blind patriotism and nationalism are strong predictors for war support. In fact, McFarland (2005) revealed that both the relationship between RWA and support for war, and the relationship between SDO and support for war, were mediated by blind

patriotism. This research suggests that individual difference variables linked to authoritarianism – RWA and SDO – may produce conservative attitudes because they produce blind patriotism.

Though little research exists empirically relating cognitive style and simplistic thinking to support for war, there is good reason to assume a connection. Past theory and research has found strong correlations between “intolerance for ambiguity,” low “openness to uncertainty,” and “need for cognitive closure” to conservative attitudes generally, including on foreign policy issues (Federico et al. 2005; Jost et al. 2003a; Jost et al. 2003b). Other scholars have specifically asserted that *simplistic, closed-minded thinking*, more typical of conservatives than liberals, tends to lead to greater support for war (Kruglanski 2004). This may be because the most simplistic approach to international disagreement and conflict is to fight, and such an approach is therefore more amenable to the cognitive style of more simplistic thinkers. It also may be that those with simplistic reasoning styles are less able to accept, and more threatened by, differences between the characteristics of their in-group and those of the out-group.

Another way to look at the roots of support for war is in terms of what *moral values* an individual is invested in. According to recent theoretical work by Haidt and Graham (2007), liberals and conservatives share values related to harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, with liberals being more motivated by these values. Haidt asserts that conservatives are also motivated by values related to in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Since liberals are more motivated by the harm/care value than conservatives, they are more likely to adopt pacifistic positions on international issues. At the same time, conservatives’ in-group and authority values are easily translated into war

support. Thus, one reason why conservatives support war more may be that their general moral values are more readily connected to that policy position. When liberals do support wars, they tend to be somehow attached to their values, such as war efforts with a humanitarian aspect like support for World War II or intervention in Bosnia.

One final factor that may promote war support is *mortality salience*. “Terror Management Theory” literature reveals that making people’s mortality salient increases the likelihood they will support violent acts and war. Terror Management Theory hypothesizes that “uniquely human awareness of the inevitability and potential finality of death creates the potential for existential terror, which is controlled by (a) maintaining faith in an internalized cultural worldview and (b) obtaining self-esteem by living up to the standards of value prescribed by that worldview” (Pyszczynski et al. 2006, page 526). Thus, when mortality is made salient, individuals will be more likely to fall back on their most cherished cultural norms and beliefs. Yet, since not everyone shares these norms and beliefs, these others become a threat that must be defused through both attempts at converting them away from, and by derogating, their “incorrect” norms and beliefs (Pyszczynski et al. 2006). Along these lines, terror management research has shown that when mortality is made salient, support for violence and war increases. For instance, Pyszczynski et al. (2006) found that after a mortality salience induction, Iranian students were much more likely to support martyrdom (as compared to a control condition). Similarly, these researchers also found that after a mortality salience induction, conservative American students were significantly more likely to support extreme military interventions (e.g., preemptive war, use of nuclear weapons, use of chemical weapons, and sacrificing civilians to kill Bin Laden.).

WHY DO PEOPLE SUPPORT OR OPPOSE INTERNATIONALISM?

Identifying which political psychology factors promote or inhibit international cooperation is a question of fundamental interest to progressive politics. Internationalism is essential for brokering treaties, achieving shared economic goals, working effectively through the United Nations, and maintaining global security. The variables which impact willingness to work with other countries are highly related to those reviewed above in relation to war support. Below we relate these and other findings to analyze what factors impact internationalist sentiment.

The political psychology literature has not focused on factors promoting internationalism, though a lot of research does exist on its opposite, ethnocentrism, which was discussed above. To understand internationalism and how to foster it, one can attempt to understand the foundations of ethnocentrism and, in turn, develop ways to decrease its influence. The tendency to think ethnocentrically is very possibly hardwired in human beings. However, the likelihood of ethnocentric thinking (caring only about the well-being of one's own group) is dependent on two main classes of factors: (1) circumstances (the situation), and (2) individual differences (Kam and Kinder 2007). In terms of circumstance, framing of issues plays a major role in shaping whether individuals' ethnocentric mindsets will be activated. For instance, a framing that fosters ethnocentrism would use "*us vs. them*" rhetoric and discourse (Kam and Kinder 2007). Thus, avoiding us vs. them framing issues may help neutralize ethnocentric thinking (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997).

Another situational variable that influences whether individuals employ an ethnocentric mentality is whether they *feel threatened*. As mentioned earlier, Social Identity Theory research (Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel 1981) reveals that when individuals feel threatened they are significantly more likely to focus on in-group and out-group differences. As above, research has also shown that when individuals feel threatened they are more likely to use simplified, closed-minded thinking (Fiske 1998; Fiske, Morling, and Stevens 1996) and one common form of such cognitively simple thinking is category-based reasoning which is closely associated with stereotyping and a focus on group differences rather than similarities (Kam and Kinder 2007). Thus, based on this research, internationalism should stem from the elimination of perceptions of threat, or at least the reduction of such threat.

There are two clear individual difference variables that the political psychology literature suggests are associated with ethnocentrism: Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), both of which were discussed above, and both of which are correlated with political conservatism. Those high in RWA are likely to be prone to use ethnocentric thinking. High RWA individuals have strong social cohesion and conformity motives (Duckitt 2001). Out-groups, therefore, are perceived as a hindrance to such motives, which leads to derogation and militancy against those out-groups. Moreover, there is also reason to believe that certain situations, such as perceptions of threat, will make ethnocentric thinking even more salient. This should occur because one of the motivating forces behind RWA is the need for security. Social Dominance Orientation is, more or less, a measure of ethnocentrism in that it gauges how much individuals believe their in-group is superior to all other out-groups. Therefore,

those high on SDO should have a strong tendency to employ ethnocentric thinking and be especially ready to accept any us vs. them divisions, especially those that derogate or ostracize out-groups.

Thus, it can be asserted that individuals high in either RWA or SDO (or both) are the least likely to espouse international ideology or support international institutions. There is some empirical evidence to support this claim. For instance, Crowson et al. (2005) showed that both RWA and SDO were positively correlated with the belief that the U.S. should leave the United Nations and that the U.S.'s membership in the United Nations was dangerous to American safety. In addition, a variety of studies have shown that those high in SDO and RWA are significantly less likely to espouse universalistic values (Altemeyer 1998; Cohrs et al. 2005; Duriez and Van Hiel 2002; McFarland and Adelson 1996) that is conceptually similar to internationalism.

HOW DOES THREAT LEAD TO FEAR?

Briefly we will discuss here theory and research on how threatening stimuli promote fear in humans. Because perceived threats from abroad are so strongly related to support for war, willingness to sacrifice civil liberties, and support for conservative leaders, progressives should be especially concerned with what factors make threats fear-inducing. It is possible that knowing these factors will allow progressives to minimize the threats posed by events like terrorist attacks, and/or to draw attention to threats that progressives believe are more deserving of attention (e.g., the economy, the perils associated with ignoring the international community).

Myers identifies four ways in which threats promote fear. First, Myers (2002) argues that we are predisposed to *fear what was most dangerous to humans during our ancestral (evolutionary) environment*. For instance, snakes and spiders were a significant danger for hunter-gather bands and tribes. This may help explain why people in the present day are more likely to fear snakes than automobiles, even though the latter are far more deadly. Likewise, our ancestors had great reason to fear outsiders, which may explain present day tendencies to feel xenophobic. As Myers and other researchers argue, because we are predisposed to fear such (historical) dangers, it is much easier to develop phobias of them and much more difficult to overcome such phobias. Conversely, objects that posed minimal danger to our ancestors rarely produce fear or phobias for humans today. Thus, any threat that coincides with human beings' evolved predispositions of fear may be more difficult to defuse.

Second, Myers indicates that people *fear what they cannot control*. Citing Slovic (1987), he points out that people would much rather go skiing than eat foods with preservatives, even though it is estimated that skiing is about 1000 times more dangerous. They prefer skiing, Myers explains, because they feel they can control their fate since they are controlling the skis.

Third, according to Myers, people *fear what is immediate*. Things that are dangerous now or in the very near future are much scarier than things that will be harmful in the distant future. Myers cites young people's indifference to smoking as an example; they have little fear of smoking's harmful effects because those effects will not catch up to them for many decades.

Fourth, people *fear what is most available in their memory* (i.e., the availability heuristic). Even though horrible events reported on the news are extremely rare (e.g., plane crashes, terrorist attacks) people often report fearing such events far more than they do more mundane dangerous events (e.g., dying of a heart attack or diabetes). This seems to be due to the fact that these rare events and their accompanying horrors are more vivid and therefore accessible in people's memories. Because of this, also, people are more likely to overestimate the probability of being a victim of one of these extremely rare events, especially compared to the likelihood of being a victim of one of the more mundane events.

What then can be done to help people accurately assess threats that are contrary to progressive goals, such as those posed by terrorism? One thing that could reduce fear is to *give people a sense of control* in the face of threat. Support for war may come from a desire to do something, rather than be passive. If a horrible event occurs (e.g., a terrorist attack), provide ways for people feel a sense of control; explain what specific actions they can do so they feel less vulnerable.

However, it's worth noting that some ways of creating a sense of control may not succeed. For example, telling people to buy gas masks, duct tape, and plastic sheeting after September 11, 2001 did not quell public fears. Even if people viewed those activities as ways of reducing risk, they likely increased fear of terrorism and reinforced the frame that terrorism was a great threat that all Americans needed to be on guard against at all times. Thus, it is important to offer Americans a sense of control to defuse threats, but without inadvertently reinforcing the threat. This is an important concern that must be strategically considered whenever this recommendation is applied.

Understanding fear and how it can motivate action may also be useful for *diverting responses to threats to more constructive outlets*. Similar to the effect of having a sense of control on reducing fear, the psychological literature on fear has found that when people do feel fear they try to assuage it by taking action. The action can either be aggression or defense against the perceived threat. Which action an individual takes depends on a variety of variables including: (1) the efficacy of each of the available options, (2) who is advocating the actions, and (3) how each action is framed in terms of risk, especially in relationship to similar past events (Bar-Tal 2001; Ruiter, Abraham, and Kok 2001). People tend to choose the action that is viewed as specific, clear, efficacious, apparently low-risk, and prescribed by respected authority. Thus, to transform fear into support for isolationism instead of war, a strong leader could emphasize the efficiency and effectiveness associated with avoiding the high costs and future risks of engaging in foreign wars. Progressives could underscore how risky, inefficient, and ineffective previous wars, like Vietnam and Iraq, have been.

In addition, it could be useful to try to establish proper context for the fear of terrorism. Objectively, Americans are confronted with many threats that are at least as dangerous to them as terrorism. It could be useful to encourage Americans to *view terrorism in a larger perspective*, as one of several threats to America's well-being, all of which we must work intelligently to counteract.

It could also be effective to defuse fear of terrorism by *portraying terrorists in different terms*. For example, it could be more constructive and accurate to portray terrorists as criminals, misfits, and deviants, rather than as an organized, unified, worldwide movement against America. Though of course terrorists do oppose many

American values and would like to attack America, conservatives have succeeded in portraying the terrorist threat against the U.S. as nearly as dangerous as the Soviet Union in the Cold War — a portrayal that many national security experts say inaccurately inflates their importance and efficacy. Terrorists could instead be painted as more like gang members: loosely organized groups with foolishly large ambitions and limited means to achieve them.

A common technique among clinical psychologists is to have patients confront their fears as a way to diminish them. Thus, a cognitive behavioral therapist might encourage someone scared of spiders to repeatedly interact with them until the fear is assuaged. It would be unwise to promote greater fear of terrorism among Americans in an effort to diminish that fear. However, progressive leaders could rhetorically *encourage some desensitization to fear of terrorism*. Americans could be told that they've seen the worst and survived it, that part of being tough on terror is to be steely and unafraid. Americans could be told that they now understand terrorism, having experienced as bad an attack as any country ever has, and will not be easily intimidated and pushed around by such threats in the future.

Lastly, this psychological literature on threat and fear suggests methods for *making Americans more concerned about factors progressives think are actually more threatening* to their well-being (e.g., the economy, America's retreat from the international community). For this to work, the threat of economic hardship should be cast in basic instinctual terms that evolution would have favored (e.g., describe the threat in metaphors of threatening animals or threatening outside groups, just as conservatives have portrayed the terror threat), emphasize Americans' lack of personal control over

their economic standing, emphasize the immediacy of economic threats, and appeal to images and memories that are highly accessible in memory (e.g., the unemployment and destitution of the Depression-era economy, the inflation and lines for gas of the 1970's, etc.).

To promote concerns about the U.S.'s insufficient engagement in the international community, appeals could be made to the immediate need for international cooperation to address global warming and terrorism, the low level of control the U.S. wields globally without allies, the global instability prior to nuclear arms treaties, the horrors of world wars that necessitated the United Nations, and the past treatment of U.S. POWs by other countries. However, it is important to remember that these sorts of threat-based appeals will only lead to support for progressive policies if they are explicitly connected to those policies as means for resolving the threat. And of course it should also be noted that using the same sort of fear-promoting political tactics as conservatives do could backfire in a variety of ways: by legitimizing such tactics, alienating progressives, undermining the credibility of progressive criticisms of "the politics of fear," and so on by increasing mortality salience, which is, as noted above, is correlated with support for restricting civil liberties and supporting war.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How can political psychology be used to promote support for civil liberties?

Several pressing issues fall under the umbrella of civil liberties, including torture, the military prison at Guantanamo, the Patriot Act, and racial profiling. In light of political psychology research, what conditions could foster support for banning torture, limiting

racial profiling, generating more positive attitudes towards American Muslims, and repealing the Patriot Act?

One approach for increasing concern for civil liberties that was specifically supported by past research is to *make people aware of their rights* (Cohrs et al. 2007). People cannot value what they are not aware of. That research aside, research on likely recommendations is mostly indirect, thus we will attempt to derive recommendations suggested by past research. It is likely that *feelings of being oppressed or denied rights personally* are the most effective ways to promote concern about one's rights, however this is not always possible or credible. Still, it is much harder to sell people on the importance of civil liberties based on (a) other people's rights being denied, or (b) rights being under threat only in the abstract.

Perhaps most effective would be to *portray the defense of rights and liberties as patriotic*, fundamentally American, and respectful to the purity and sanctity of the U.S. code of law. Such a framing approach cuts to the heart of conservative values typically neglected in progressive rhetoric, namely in-group/loyalty, purity/sanctity, and respect/authority. Arguments in terms of America, the Constitution, the founding fathers, the American Revolution, and so on could be especially attractive to American conservatives. In fact, many libertarian conservatives strongly oppose the Patriot Act and could be usefully worked with to create an appearance of credibility through bi-partisan opposition to that legislation. Those who do not support the restoration of American rights and liberties could be portrayed as an un-American out-group, different from and opposed to common Americans.

In addition to branding these political efforts as American and patriotic, the *fight for liberty could be portrayed as masculine*. Again, this could be achieved by tying the struggle to the American Revolution, founding fathers, and other famous American figures. Those who are reluctant to advocate for American liberties should have their toughness, loyalty, and resolve questioned since they are unwilling to stand up for their rights. If branded as masculine and patriotic, the struggle to restore Americans' rights could be plausibly connected with being tough on terrorism. It could be argued that those who will not stand up for Americans' rights and liberties cannot be trusted to stand up to foreign threats and terrorism, and that those who stand up for our rights at home are the same ones who will fight for them abroad.

However, there are drawbacks to framing progressive policies in hyper-masculine terms, and using the powerful tactic of emasculation to attack conservative critics. First, such an approach may reinforce authoritarian and conservative values, such as the belief that masculine traits are superior to feminine ones. Secondly, such an approach could have the immediate practical effect of alienating some women.

Davis and Silver's research (2004) suggests that Americans are less willing to give up their rights for greater security from terrorism if they have low trust in government. Thus, *fostering suspicion of the government's intentions* and questioning the need for rights to be suspended may be effective pathways to opposing the Patriot Act, for example. That said, it is not clear that "slippery slope" type arguments, which suggest that the U.S. could slide into totalitarianism, are likely to be viewed as plausible to most Americans, since they rely on abstract reasoning and may sound far-fetched.

In the specific case of torture, it may be effective to argue that the practice is destabilizing. Given individuals' great sensitivity to threats to security, if one could somehow credibly make the case that torture produces unreliable information, undermines alliances with sympathetic countries or creates unnecessary enemies for limited gain, it could be portrayed as destabilizing. Alternatively, one could argue that other governmental policies are more effective ways to increase security that do not require the sacrifice of rights and liberties. Such an approach could combat the biggest factor driving willingness to sacrifice liberty: fear of attack.

How can political psychology be used to undermine support for war?

At present progressives may be concerned about a variety of possible military scenarios. Perhaps most pressing is the possibility of a military attack against Iran. In our review we have emphasized the roles of perceived threat and inter-group prejudice on support for war. Though past research consistently demonstrates that perceived threat promotes support for war, it may be possible to undo or even reverse these effects.

As a preface to these recommended strategies, it should be noted that several were used in an effort to undermine support for and prevent the Iraq war. Of course these efforts did not prevent the U.S.-led invasion. However, for a variety of reasons this should not be taken as evidence that these interventions cannot work. First, the Iraq war was very hard to prevent given the recent memory of the attacks of September 11, 2001, the most significant attacks on American soil in U.S. history. Second, actual popular support for the Iraq war was not that high prior to the war; it was lower, for example, than was support for the first Gulf War. In fact, the Iraq war may have been the most resisted

American war pre-engagement since World War I. Thus, efforts to undermine support for the Iraq war may have actually succeeded — just not enough, for other reasons, to prevent the war. And finally, the Iraq war has become the least popular war in American history, including the greatest decline in support over time. Therefore, it may be worth looking carefully at the tactics that were used against the Iraq war as examples of techniques that can turn public opinion. But it may also be recognized that the declining support for the Iraq war may be largely a product of September 11th receding in Americans' minds.

Thus, the recommendations we derive below from the political psychology literature may be effective for achieving certain goals in certain political settings. While these recommendations are informed by past research, this should not be viewed as an inflexible handbook to follow rote. *Rather, it is important in applying our recommendations to take careful account of the specific characteristics of (1) the population targeted, and (2) the political context.* None of these recommendations will work at all times for all people.

One potentially effective – though not necessarily desirable – way to oppose war is to emphasize the virtues of *isolationism*. Espousing isolationism may work for two reasons: (1) it is one of the few rhetorical approaches with a track record of success in U.S. history, as the U.S. was slow to engage in both WWI and WWII because of prevailing isolationist sentiment; and (2) isolationism is an argument against war that traditionally has resonated with American conservatives.

How can isolationist rhetoric be deployed to prevent U.S. involvement in unnecessary wars? First, it could be argued that the U.S. should not solely suffer the costs

of providing international security that will benefit the whole world. Providing security for other nations, serving as the world's policemen, allows those nations to free-ride on our costly efforts. This resonates with Americans as unfair. It could also be argued that bearing the costs of the world's security actually destabilizes the U.S.'s position in the world by helping other countries, such as China, challenge us economically. Secondly, focusing on domestic security rather than international engagement can be pitched to Americans as a more intelligent, affordable, and effective way to keep the country safe.

Isolationist rhetoric – not doing other countries' security work for them, not tolerating international free-riding, focusing on domestic security rather than international engagement, taking care of ourselves and our homeland first – may resonate with American conservatives' sensibilities (patriotism, "America first," security). Isolationist rhetoric also restricts us to only international engagements that receive widespread support from other countries, exactly the sorts of engagements that are likely to be most acceptable to progressives. Notably, isolationism was not widely invoked as a reason to oppose the Iraq war, perhaps because the Bush administration early on very effectively co-opted the rhetoric of "going it alone."

One way to reverse the effects of perceived threat on support for war is to *emphasize the costs of war*. Opponents of war can underscore the threats posed by war in terms of lives, money, and international stability. Such an approach could potentially reverse the effects of perceived threat, or at least mitigate the tendency of this factor to promote support for war. If a credible case can be made that a military action, such as a preemptive strike against Iran, would somehow *undermine international and domestic*

security, that argument may be most effective since it could allow practitioners to reverse one of the most salient factors propelling support for war.

Another way to emphasize the potential harms and losses associated with a planned military action is to focus on *economic costs*. For instance, one could emphasize how much a war will cost taxpayers and question whether the uncertain gains make this worth it. In the specific case of Iran, negative economic consequences could be emphasized by (1) noting the enormous cost to taxpayers of the Iraq war, (2) making the case that the Iraq war is somehow tied to the U.S.'s economic downturn, and/or (3) claiming that future engagements in the Middle East will *increase oil prices*. It might be useful to describe alternate projects that could be implemented with the money saved from not rushing to war.

It might also be useful to counter portrayals of prospective military opponents as threats against America's interests and well-being. In the specific case of Iran, it might be effective simply to offer counter-evidence against claims that Iran is a real threat to the U.S., is actually pursuing nuclear weapons, etc. However, it is worth noting that countering claims of threat was ineffective in preventing the war against Iraq, even though evidence supported the counter-claims that Iraq did not pose a threat and that an invasion would be destabilizing to the U.S.'s position in the world. This may be because such counter-arguments inadvertently bolster the claim that the potential opponent is a threat by reactivating that frame; i.e., in George Lakoff's terms, trying to argue that Iraq is not a threat may be akin to asking people not to think of an elephant. Still another way to counter the effects of perceived threat in promoting war could be to offer the public an alternate source of security (e.g., international disarmament treaties, progress towards

disarming North Korea, port security) or by diverting attention to more pressing concerns (e.g. domestic economic crisis).

One temptation would be to attempt to decrease the fear of terrorism directly, since that fear tends traditionally to play to conservative policies more than progressive ones. One could attempt to do this by campaigning against “the politics of fear,” emphasizing the need for Americans to be strong and brave, etc. The actual threat of terrorism could be placed in proper context, as, for example, Americans are far less likely to die from terrorism than from a car accident. In certain moments, the fear of terrorism may be too strong for these approaches to be effective.

Perhaps more effective for reducing fear of terrorism would be to ***challenge the portrayals of terrorists***. It could be effective to portray terrorists as disorganized groups of thugs to be treated like common criminals, rather than international threats to the entire country’s security, to be fought through large-scale wars. Another way to combat fear of terrorism might be to ***question the masculinity*** of one’s critics who try to promote fear of terrorism rather than courage. Research shows that people who appear neurotic, fearful, and worried are also seen as ***lacking masculinity*** and status (Anderson et al. 2001). It may be rhetorically effective to make light of the lack of strength and fortitude of those who would promote and advocate for fear in the face of terrorist threats. Responses that are prudent, careful, and effective could be painted as masculine, while militaristic responses could be portrayed as panicky, terrified reactions, and undignified for a country of America’s power and eminence. The U.S. should rise above fear and show leadership and strength to the world to communicate that we cannot be terrorized.

We have also emphasized how inter-group prejudice promotes support for war. This tendency could be countered by opponents of war in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most effective basis for undermining inter-group prejudice and antagonism is the invoking of an overarching identity connecting groups (Sherif et al. 1954; Levine et al. 2005). The key to overcoming inter-group prejudice that could lead to war is to help Americans identify or empathize with the citizens of the country to be attacked. This can be achieved by *emphasizing commonalities* between members of each group, by pursuing or focusing on some common, cooperative pursuit, or *invoking some common enemy* of, or threat to, each group.

Consider again the specific case of Iran. One strategy for defusing support for an attack on Iran could be to promote an identity connection with sympathetic people in the out-group. For example, making salient to Americans the existence of *children and innocent civilians* with no interest in politics in Iran could undermine animosity and dehumanization of Iranians as fundamentally different from us. Portraying Iranian people with familiar occupations and ways of life (teachers, doctors, businessmen, engineers, nurses, cooks) to that of Americans could also be effective.

As above, an alternate strategy for creating an identity connection with members of an out-group could be to shift focus to *common goals, enemies, or challenges*. Are there common enemies or challenges that could be invoked which are shared by the two groups, which would compel cooperation and possibly understanding, rather than competition and conflict?

Another factor driving war support reviewed above is preferences for *clear, unambiguous policies*. Perhaps no foreign policy is simpler to understand than war and

the idea of fighting the out-group. It is often far more cognitively complex to make the case against war. War supporters can easily counter their opponents as over-thinking the gray areas when action is required to protect the country's safety and interests. Thus it is essential to package opposition to war in a cognitively simple, understandable fashion. If the case against war requires a careful consideration of facts, details, and nuance, then it will very likely fail to win support of moderates and conservatives, both of which prefer more straightforward policies (Jost et al. 2003a; 2003b). Perhaps the best way to co-opt this factor for war opposition is to *emphasize the ambiguity of outcomes from war*, arguing that these consequences are more complex and unknown than those resulting from avoiding war. Isolationism and non-involvement in international conflicts are potentially a conservative default position, as was the case in the first half of the 20th century.

In addition to the factors we review above, a variety of other factors that relate to political psychology processes could also be harnessed to undermine support for war. For example, *masculinity* and *patriotism* are central to historically successful positions and policies in American politics (e.g. Deconde 2000; Ducat 2004; Willer 2005). It is quite easy to frame the case for war with another country as both masculine and patriotic, but not nearly as easy to use these factors to promote opposition to war. Nonetheless, such framing is essential to at least mitigate these very powerful factors propelling support for war. One strategy could be to mobilize significant patriotic and masculine figures, such as retired generals or war heroes, to caution against war. Alternatively, suggesting that prominent supporters of unnecessary wars are somehow *insecure in their masculinity*

could be effective, and indeed past scientific research has linked masculine insecurity and support for unnecessary wars (Willer 2005).

As further strategy for framing war opposition as patriotic and masculine, portray cautious use of the military as a sort of poised, responsible father image (e.g., Dwight Eisenhower, George Washington) while emphasizing that proponents are rash, impulsive, and irresponsible (Lakoff 2002). Portraying the military as a strong tool to be used carefully and calculatedly in the country's national interests allows the simultaneous promotion of military caution and masculinity/patriotism. ***Do not oppose war simply by promoting pacifism***, as that is an easily emasculated position. Rather, promote a model of military decision-making as strong, prudent, and calculated. Retired generals and veterans could be useful spokespeople for this vision of military decision-making.

Above we also reviewed how the moral values of conservatives may lead them to support a wider array of war scenarios than liberals (Haidt and Graham 2007). While liberals would only be expected to support wars related to justice or humanitarian goals, conservative values potentially lead to support for wars based in aggression, retaliation, or other sentiments. In light of this, framing opposition to war in terms of these distinctively conservative values (in-group loyalty, purity/sanctity, and authority/respect) could help undermine their connection to militarism. One could portray opposition to the use of military force as especially ***loyal to America and American values***. Here one could cite the venerable, American tradition of cautious militarism and focus on defense rather than unnecessary aggression. Emphasize the purity and sanctity of human life (that of young American servicemen, children and civilians in the country to be attacked). Also, emphasize the purity/sanctity of the U.S. military, and the need to protect its legacy

and use its force responsibly. Appeal to conservatives' respect for authority through strategic and *conspicuous use of retired military personnel who oppose the war* scenario.

In addition, several more general factors from social and political psychology could be employed to reduce support for war. For example, research on cognitive processes reveals that people are far more risk averse when they are *focused on potential risks and losses* associated with a course of action than when they are attending to the potential benefits (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). This tendency was utilized to promote support for war against Iraq by portraying inaction as risky in light of strong suspicions that Iraq possessed WMDs. A similar framing may be underway with respect to Iran as well. However, the same strategy can perhaps more intuitively be applied to war opposition. Emphasizing the costs of war, as opposed to the benefits, and the risks associated with those costs could be effective.

Additionally, one of the most consistent and reliable mechanisms of social influence is conformity pressure (Cialdini 2001). Human beings have a very strong tendency to adopt attitudes that they believe the majority of others in their group share. Supporters of war are traditionally quite effective at promoting an impression of great popularity of war. Further, identity processes work in such a way as to promote a presumption that all will support a military action against a potential foe. However, if at all possible this mechanism should be reversed and *potential military actions should be portrayed as being unpopular*, not yet supported by and/or suspicious to Americans, to whatever extent is practically possible. A feeling that a possible military action will inevitably be rejected as unacceptable to Americans should be fostered if possible.

In the specific case of Iran, the case could be made that Americans feel the military is over-committed, they fear another war like the Iraq war, they suspect Iran may not be the imminent threat it is portrayed as, they have learned from the Iraq experience, and so on. This could simply be done by pushing poll results demonstrating the popularity of the case against war. Research by Cialdini and others suggests that creating conformity pressure via the impression of unanimity or majority support for one's position is the most effective method of influence studied by social psychologists.

Longer-term, inter-group prejudices can be reduced, and inter-group sympathies promoted, through *education and international travel*. Perhaps no social structural factor is as effective for encouraging liberal and progressive policies as education (Bobo and Licari 1989; Lipset 1996), especially higher education. Increasing the average education level of Americans and the proportion of Americans pursuing a college education would help promote all progressive policies, not just opposition to war and other international conflict. In addition, the promotion of international travel also increases the extent to which individuals perceive people from other countries as human and similar (Bobo and Licari 1989; Jost, Nosek, and Gosling 2008; Leonard 1964; Lipset 1982).

As a final note, whenever possible those opposing war should avoid making people think about the possibility of their own *death*. Past research shows that mortality salience could propel support for war via many paths, including ethnocentrism, preferences for unambiguous cognitive processing, and perceptions of threat.

How could progressive leaders manage a potential security event?

As reviewed above, perceived threats from abroad have the potential to make almost all Americans adopt relatively conservative foreign policy positions (e.g. Willer 2004). Of specific interest in the post-9/11 climate is how American progressives can maintain support for their policies and leaders in the face of a possible outside threat to American security, either perceived or real. How might a security event tomorrow affect the viability of progressive politics in the U.S., and how could possible negative effects be mitigated?

Past research on the effects of terrorism on public opinion shows that fear of terrorist attacks were strongly related to support for President Bush from 2001 to at least 2004. But why? Landau et al.'s (2004) research suggests that the reason terror alerts led to greater support for Bush was because he was perceived as a charismatic leader. Others have speculated that terrorism led to greater support for Bush because he represented a very masculine, authoritarian, "take charge" leader who could effectively combat the sources of the terror threat (Willer 2005). Willer has also speculated that terror threats from abroad might be related to support for Bush simply because he is the current leader of the country, and threats from abroad lead to greater identification with significant figureheads strongly identified with the country, regardless of their particular politics (2004). Still other researchers have suggested that the feeling of threat from abroad could lead to preferences for simpler cognitive processing, and in turn greater support for relatively straightforward, dogmatic policies and political figures, such as Bush (Kruglanski 2004). Thus, it is not known exactly what aspects of a leader attract greater support when threats from outside forces confront a nation.

Despite this, we can speculate on some important characteristics a progressive politician would be advised to project in the wake of a security event. First, past research emphasizes that being a charismatic, unifying leader, as Bush was perceived to be after 9/11, is very effective. Also, it would be important for prominent progressive politicians to portray themselves as both masculine and patriotic. It is important to react quickly, decisively, and clearly in the perceived interests of the country. If conflict escalation is to be prevented, it is important to advance an alternate approach promptly and firmly, one that promises some tangible result in terms of greater aggressive protection of the country.

For example, one effective progressive reaction to a terror alert could be to propose swift, permanent improvements to the security of U.S. entry points (e.g. docks and ports) as well as chemical and nuclear plants. These are actions that progressives are already aligned with, represent meaningful improvements to national security, and do not involve attacking other countries. It would also be useful to frame undesirable reactions, e.g., the escalation of Middle East tensions, or an immediate military strike against an innocent target, as exactly the erratic response our opponents hope will happen from their attack.

In addition, a very significant security event can also be seen as an opportunity for progressives, whereas now it is only seen as such for conservatives. After 9/11 the U.S.'s credibility politically across the world was extremely high. Thus, a legitimate terror threat or attack could provide a foothold for pursuing international, diplomatic goals. Ironically, it is possible for a terror threat to be a weapon of peace as it would allow the credibility and unifying sentiment necessary to forge international alliances. At home, a security

event provides a standing leader with a great deal of power to advance his or her domestic agenda.

How can political psychology be applied to the promotion of internationalism?

What conditions would foster support for working with the UN, nuclear disarmament, and increased willingness to participate in international treaties? As mentioned in the review above, the avoidance of “us vs. them” rhetoric is essential for the ***promotion of a shared feeling of “groupness”*** with other countries. Also at a rhetorical level, referring to the U.S. and prospective international allies as “we” at all times is useful for fostering group identification. Also, useful for fostering group identification is the emphasis of significant similarities, pursue joint tasks involving cooperation, and invoke common (possibly symbolic) enemies.

As with deterring support for war, it is important to ***change perceptions of threat*** in order to maintain a spirit of international cooperation. Note that there is good reason to think that perceptions of threat could undermine the spirit of internationalism, even as it relates to unthreatening potential allies, i.e. the effects of perceived threat are partly, but not entirely, logical or rational. It may be necessary to reduce feelings of threat from the Middle East to promote cooperation with Western Europe. Methods for reducing the fear-promoting effects of threat were discussed above.

Still another way to promote internationalism is to argue that ***other countries should have to carry their weight*** since they will enjoy the benefits of our international efforts. In the case of efforts to pressure Iran to abandon nuclear ambitions, the case for international cooperation is pretty simple. We can simply argue that, while going it alone

is tempting, we would be letting other nations free-ride on our efforts. If we are going to take on such a costly project that benefits every country in the world, then every country that can afford it should be expected to chip in. This frames our international military and diplomatic ambitions as in the world's interests and also gives a nationally self-interested reason for internationalism, a frame that would be more attractive to conservatives, who generally see international cooperation as necessarily opposed to the U.S.'s interests.

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