



# Prejudice in the wake of terrorism: The role of temporal distance, ideology, and intergroup emotions



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## ABSTRACT

The shootings at the Canadian Parliament on October 22, 2014 received international coverage and fueled concerns about terrorism and growing Islamophobia. In the wake of this event, our two studies ( $n = 215$ ,  $n = 492$ ) investigated objective temporal distance, right-wing ideology, and intergroup emotions as predictors of prejudice, outgroup trust, and the restriction of civil liberties. Objective temporal distance from the shootings was also examined as a moderator of the relations between ideology and intergroup emotions with intergroup attitudes. Results showed that greater endorsement of right-wing ideologies, higher intergroup anxiety, or higher intergroup disgust were associated with greater prejudice and lower outgroup trust. Of particular note, participants who completed the survey further from (vs. closer to) the event reported more positive intergroup attitudes and were less likely to endorse restricting civil liberties. Objective temporal distance also moderated some of the associations between intergroup emotions with intergroup attitudes. Implications are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Public opinion polls demonstrate that terrorist activities carried out by individuals identifying as Muslim are followed by anti-Islam and anti-Muslim surges. For example, following an 81% surge of fatalities from terrorist attacks worldwide in 2014 compared to 2013 (Strobel, 2015), and a string of widely reported terrorist attacks in 2015, including the Charlie Hebdo shootings and the November 2015 Paris attacks, anti-Muslim assaults in the United States rose 69% in 2015 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015), reaching levels just shy of those post-9/11. Studies comparing levels of prejudice before and after attacks similarly show that terrorist events foster greater prejudice (Van de Vyver, Houston, Abrams, & Vasiljevic, 2016). Terrorist attacks often also correspond with less opposition to government surveillance and the restriction of civil liberties (Davis & Silver, 2004; Hodson, Esses, & Dovidio, 2006; Huddy & Feldman, 2011; Morgan, Wisneski, & Skitka, 2011; Pew Research Centre, 2014; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, & Foucault, 2017; Whitehead & Aden, 2002). Similar effects are also noted for perceived threat of terrorist attacks (Doosje, Zimmermann, Küpper, Zick, & Meertens, 2009; Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005; Oswald, 2005; Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004) or when viewing footage of attacks (Choma, Charlesford, Dalling, & Smith, 2015).

Of relevance to the present research, on October 22, 2014, a gunman shot and killed Cpt. Nathan Cirillo, who was ceremonially guarding the National War Memorial in Ottawa, Canada. The shooter then entered the Canadian Parliament, and after exchanging gunfire, was shot dead. Prior to the attack, the assailant recorded a video explaining that he was “retaliating” against Canada’s military involvement in Afghanistan and the proposal by then Prime Minister Stephen Harper for Canada to deploy fighter jets to Iraq. He believed Canada should “stop occupying and killing the righteous of us who are trying to bring back religious laws in our countries” (CBC, 2015). Canadian authorities confirmed that, despite the mental health issues plaguing him, he would have been charged with terrorism (Bronskill, 2016). Much of the news focused more heavily on his mental health as a contributing factor, but the fact that he had converted to Islam was noted. The implications for Muslim and Islam-sentiment were particularly salient as the event occurred only two days after another terrorist attack where a man, inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), struck two Canadian soldiers with a car, killing one of them (CBC, 2014).

To our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate objective temporal distance (from the shootings) alongside ideology and intergroup emotions. These variables were examined as predictors of prejudice toward Muslims, Islamophobia, intergroup trust of Muslims, and

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attitudes toward the restriction of civil liberties in the days and months following the shootings at the Canadian Parliament; a time when discussions of Muslims and terrorism were particularly salient for Canadians. We also considered objective temporal distance from the shootings as a potential moderator of the relations between ideology and intergroup emotions with intergroup attitudes. We were particularly interested in whether attitudes were more positive when participants reported their opinions at a time further from (vs. closer to) the event, and whether relations between ideology and intergroup emotions with intergroup attitudes were weaker when reported further (vs. closer) from the event.

### 1.1. Temporal distance

It is well documented that terrorism and collective tragedies negatively impact personal wellbeing (Norris et al., 2002; Slone, 2000; Stein et al., 2004). Noteworthy is that some research also shows that the personal consequences of terrorism for wellbeing lessen with time (e.g. Stein et al., 2004). A possible lessening trend has not been discussed at length with respect to intergroup attitudes. Fischer, Greitemeyer, Kastenmüller, Frey, and Oßwald (2007) propose that terror salience might be useful in understanding personal and social consequences of terrorism (see also Fischer, Greitemeyer, Kastenmüller, Jonas, & Frey, 2006), with the salience of terrorism following terror events heightening threats to social order. According to Tetlock (2002), people are more punitive when threats to social order are present versus absent. Testing this prediction in the context of terrorism, Fischer et al. (2007) found that German participants who read about a man who stole a car recommended harsher punishment when they completed the study the day after the London July 7, 2005 bombings (i.e. temporally close to the event) than if they completed the study four weeks after the event (i.e. temporally further from the event). Fischer et al. examined the effects of the bombings on a non-terror related outcome. Research documenting heightened prejudice toward Muslims and preferences for authoritarian policies in the wake of terror events (e.g. Davis & Silver, 2004; FBI, 2015; Huddy & Feldman, 2011; Morgan et al., 2011; Vasilopoulos et al., 2017) is consistent with the notion that terror-related threat effects are most salient closer to (vs. further from) a terror event. In this body of research, temporal distance is represented by objective time.

In a related literature, psychological or subjective temporal distance (i.e. perceptions of how close or far away an event feels; e.g. Liberman & Trope, 1998; Ross & Wilson, 2002) has also been implicated in reactions to terror events (e.g. Magee, Milliken, & Lurie, 2010). For example, Van Boven, Kane, McGraw, and Dale (2010) found that participants who were asked to describe the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech in emotional (vs. neutral) terms were more likely to perceive the shootings as psychologically closer. Thus, temporal distance, real or perceived, is relevant for appreciating peoples' reactions to terror and tragic effects. Drawing on these literatures, we proposed that being closer to (vs. further from) terror events, in terms of objective temporal distance, will also have intergroup implications.

### 1.2. Individual differences in ideological beliefs

To gauge the possible significance of temporal distance from terror events for intergroup outcomes, we investigated objective temporal distance alongside robust predictors of intergroup and public policy attitudes: namely, ideology and intergroup emotions. The link between authoritarian ideology and intergroup prejudice is well documented (Altemeyer, 1998; for a meta-analysis, see Sibley & Duckitt, 2008), with longitudinal research indicating a causal role of ideology (Asbrock, Sibley, & Duckitt, 2010; Duriez, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & De Witte, 2007; Kteily, Sidanius, & Levin, 2011; Sibley, Wilson, & Duckitt, 2007). Two of the most common indices of authoritarian ideology are right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1981, 1998) and social

dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Cotterill, Sheehy-Skeffington, Kteily, & Carvacho, 2017). Individuals who more strongly (vs. weakly) endorse RWA strictly observe traditional social conventions, uncritically acquiesce to legitimate authorities, and support authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1998). Individuals higher (vs. lower) in SDO prefer and support hierarchically structured intergroup relationships over egalitarian ones (Sidanius et al., 2017; Sidanius, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001).

According to the Dual Process Model of Prejudice and Ideology (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2017), RWA and SDO predict both unique and shared prejudices. Both RWA and SDO predict prejudice toward dissident groups (e.g. feminists) as these groups present a social threat as well as a challenge to the existing hierarchy (Asbrock et al., 2010; Cantal, Milfont, Wilson, & Gouveia, 2015; Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007). Both are likely to underlie Muslim/Islam prejudice as Muslims might be perceived as dangerous, lower status, and dissenting. Several studies have documented a link between right-wing ideology and Muslim/Islam prejudice. Using the Islamophobia scale (Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, & Timani, 2009) that taps fear of Muslims and Islam specifically, Lee et al. (2013) found that RWA related to affective-behavioural and cognitive subdomains of Islamophobia ( $r = 0.36$ ,  $r = 0.31$ , respectively). Similarly, Uenal (2016) reported that greater SDO related to greater anti-Muslim and anti-Islam prejudice in a sample of German participants ( $r_s = 0.39, 0.41$ , respectively). Hodson, Choma, et al. (2013) found SDO to predict anti-Muslim prejudice after controlling for intergroup disgust, RWA, need for structure, and political conservatism. Imhoff and Recker (2012) found that RWA ( $r = 0.62$ ) and SDO ( $r = 0.49$ ) correlated with 'Islamoprejudice' (i.e. prejudicial views of Islam). Hence, there is evidence that authoritarian beliefs are associated with negative opinions of Muslims and Islam.

Researchers have also found that RWA and SDO relate to perceiving Muslims as threatening (Kauff, Asbrock, Issmer, Thörner, & Wagner, 2015; Uenal, 2016). Matthews and Levin (2012) showed that RWA and SDO related to perceiving Muslims as a value threat and an economic threat, and to feeling anger and disgust toward Muslims. Others have also observed implications for discrimination: Kauff et al. (2015) reported that people higher on RWA indicated they would be less willing to send their children to school with a teacher wearing a headscarf or move to a district where many Muslims lived. Therefore, the robust connection between right-wing ideology and prejudice seems to extend to prejudice toward Muslims and Islam.

### 1.3. Intergroup emotions

In addition to ideology, emotions are strong predictors of intergroup prejudice (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Mackie & Smith, 2002). Arguably, the most commonly studied intergroup emotion is intergroup anxiety, or the experience of uneasiness and discomfort around actual or expected interactions with outgroups (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Intergroup anxiety can be "chronic" or "episodic" (i.e. dispositional or situational; Paolini, Hewstone, Voci, Harwood, & Cairns, 2006; Stephan, 2014). According to Stephan (2014), intergroup anxiety consists of three facets: affective (i.e. feeling apprehensive, distressed or uneasy), cognitive (i.e. appraising an expected or actual intergroup interaction as negative), and physiological (i.e. raised blood pressure, skin response, cortisol levels, etc.). The intergroup anxiety scale assesses intergroup anxiety toward specific groups or anxiety about interacting with outgroups, generally, and reflects individual differences in intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Intergroup anxiety has consistently been associated with negative evaluations of outgroups (see e.g. Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006).

Much of the research investigating whether intergroup anxiety relates to anti-Muslim attitudes has been conducted in the context of intergroup contact, with intergroup anxiety mediating the effect of

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