

Islamist Terrorism, Out-Group Trust, and Motivation to Control Prejudice

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Abstract

Using Norwegian survey experiments ($N=1,541$), we examined the relationship between Islamist terrorist threats and trust in out-groups, focusing on how this relationship was conditioned by the “motivation to control prejudice” (MCP) and emotions of anxiety. After exposure to a news story describing an Islamist threat scenario, the treatment group reported higher levels of trust in out-groups than the control group. High levels of MCP were linked to higher levels of trust; anxiety played an ambiguous role. Although anxiety had a strong negative effect on trust in out-groups, the positive effect of MCP increased with rising anxiety levels, thus making the people who were most scared also more trusting. Activation of social norms may, thus, bolster distrust.

In a Europe characterized by civil unrest and the rise of authoritarian populism, there is a widespread concern that we may be moving toward more fearful and polarized societies, with increasing levels of intolerance and distrust toward immigrants in general and Muslims in particular. The reasons for these developments are complex, and related to long-term economic and political trends. In the past few years, the threat of terrorism has emerged as a primary factor that may serve to deepen and aggravate existing cultural and political cleavages. Previous acts of terrorism have been shown to negatively affect the attitudes of people toward Muslims as well as other minority groups (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006; Traugott et al., 2002); as a

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result, these acts have increased public support for hawkish policies and for curbing of civil liberties (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003; Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005).

This study uses a survey experiment to examine the effect of an assumed Islamist terrorist threat on trust in Muslims and immigrants as “connoted out-groups”, with emphasis on the roles played by social norms and on the anxiety that the threat provokes. By the term “connoted out-groups”, we refer to groups that tend to be associated with a given type of terrorism in public discourse, and in this case specifically, to Muslims and immigrants who are being associated with Islamist terrorism. Studies of terrorist threats have pointed to the importance of the cultural norms that are evoked in relation to terrorism—especially how such norms may serve to prevent the development of general prejudice toward certain ethnic, cultural, or religious groups (Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2016; Nugier et al., 2016; Wollebæk, Steen-Johnsen, Enjolras, & Ødegård, 2013). Other studies have indicated that emotions of anxiety and anger have strong roles to play in shaping political and attitudinal responses in the population (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015; Huddy et al., 2005; Vasilopoulos, Marcus & Foucault, 2018). Recently, a growing literature also seeks to examine the interaction among emotions, norms, and cognition in explaining outcomes in terms of political attitudes (Kentmen-Cin & Erisen, 2017; Redlawsk, Civettini, & Emmerson, 2010; Vasilopoulou & Wagner, 2017). Emotions of anxiety have been shown to influence opinions in different stages of the opinion formation process, both related to initial attitudes, and to seeking and evaluating information (Vasilopoulou & Wagner, 2017). Anxiety can also influence motivated reasoning processes by creating an “affective tipping point”, where people are willing to consider new information more openly (Redlawsk et al., 2010).

This article contributes to this emergent literature on the relationships among emotions, social norms, and cognition in shaping attitudinal outcomes. We focus on the role of a particular social norm—the motivation to control prejudice (MCP), which motivates people to “avoid acting on biases against stigmatized minorities” (Blinder, Ford, & Ivarsflaten, 2013, p. 842)—and on how the activation of this norm is conditioned by the emotion of anxiety. Whenever MCP is activated, the theory suggests that people will be more inclined to engage in controlled cognitive activity, and to examine their attitudes more explicitly and systematically. Whereas previous studies have established a negative link between MCP and the development of prejudiced attitudes (Blinder et al., 2013; Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2016; Ivarsflaten, Blinder, & Ford, 2010), this study further develops MCP theory by examining how the activation of the norm may be conditioned by the emotion of anxiety.

In the following sections, we first lay out our perspective on social trust and how the threat of terrorism affects it; then, we specify the potential roles

of MCP and emotions. Based on existing theoretical and empirical insights, we develop a set of hypotheses to be tested. Next, we describe the survey experiments and the methods used before presenting and discussing the results of our analysis.

Theoretical Approach

The Impact of Terrorism on Social Trust

Social trust can be defined as the “belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid it, and will look after our interests, if this is possible” (Newton, 2007, p. 343). There exist a variety of theories of trust, conceiving of it either as based on rational calculation (Coleman, 1990; Hardin, 1993), on personal experience and socialization (Allport, 1954; Uslaner, 2002), or on societal factors such as a just and fair state (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005) and the presence of an organized civil society (Putnam, 2000).

The relationship between large-scale disruptive events such as terrorism and social trust has been theorized only to a limited extent. If we look at the question of social reactions to disruptive events in broad terms, however, a heightened sense of community within the in-group, that is, people with whom you share identities, religion, or ethnicity, combined with skepticism to the out-group seems to be the most general pattern (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011; Traugott et al., 2002). Several studies have indeed shown that people become more anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant following a terrorist attack (see Doosje, Zimmermann, Küpper, Zick, & Meertens, 2010; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006; Van de Vyver, Houston, Abrams, & Vasiljevic, 2016). Findings are mixed, however, and they vary across time and context. While some studies of reactions to the 2015–2016 wave of Islamic terrorism in Europe found an increase in prejudice (Cohu, Maisonneuve, & Testé, 2016; Solheim, 2017) and authoritarianism (Vasilopoulos, Marcus, & Foucault, 2018), a set of studies have demonstrated a lack of effect on immigration attitudes and xenophobia (Brouard, Vasilopoulos, & Foucault, 2018; Castanho Silva, 2018; Cohu et al., 2016; Economou & Kollias, 2019). Some studies also indicate that under certain conditions, social trust may in fact be strengthened in the context of terrorist attacks (Arvanitidis, Economou, & Kollias, 2016; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012). The Norwegian reaction to the 22nd of July attacks forms the most distinct example of such a reaction, since here, both generalized social trust *and* trust in people with different religions and nationalities increased right after the attacks (Wollebæk et al., 2012). Such effects tend, however, to be short lived (Arvanitidis et al., 2016; Wollebæk et al., 2013).

Theoretically, one can imagine a set of different mechanisms behind an eventual increase or decrease in social trust when faced with a terrorist threat. From a social-psychological perspective, both Attachment Theory (Nakonezny & Reddick, 2004) and Terror Management Theory (TMT) have argued that fear induced by terror may lead to a process of pulling together with kin or with those persons with whom you feel culturally or socially affiliated (Greenberg et al., 2003). This emotional response might, in turn, involve distrust in groups outside of the in-group. According to TMT, a core mechanism in shaping out-group hostility—and also, authoritarianism—is the experience of mortality (i.e. one's own mortality is made salient by the terrorist threat (Greenberg et al., 2003)). More recent studies within the TMT framework have, however, also indicated that in a situation of fear, the evocation of core aspects of a person's positive worldviews may curb the negative effects of threats (Motyl et al., 2011; Nugier et al., 2016). In the context of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris in 2015, Nugier et al. (2016, p. 80) conducted an experiment showing that the evocation of the core French value of “colorblind equality” made respondents less likely to see immigration as a symbolic threat. Several studies indeed indicate that the values and norms that are evoked in society in the context of a terrorist threat may be of importance to attitudinal responses (Gross, Brewer, & Aday, 2009; Nugier et al., 2016; Wollebæk et al., 2012, 2013). For example, the increase in out-group trust after the right-wing extremist attacks of 22nd of July in Norway can be attributed to the existing high levels of institutional and social trust prior to the attacks (Wollebæk et al., 2012). Those with the highest trust levels before the event were also the least fearful and the most trusting after the event (Wollebæk et al., 2013).

Despite some examples of negative and positive effects of terrorism on out-group trust, the existing literature on the relationship between terrorism and prejudice mainly shows non-existing or short-lived effects. We therefore hypothesize that:

H1: Individuals exposed to a terrorist threat from an out-group will not alter their connoted out-group trust

As indicated, however, both the trust literature and the literature on responses to terrorism indicate that existing values and norms in a setting may play a role in moderating responses in terms of trust. Moreover, a set of contributions also emphasize the role of emotions in shaping variations in political and attitudinal outcomes (Erisen, 2018; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, & Foucault, 2018). In the next sections, we first describe our specific approach to exploring the role of social norms in situations of terrorist threat, linked to the social norm identified as the “motivation to control prejudice” (MCP) (Blinder et al., 2013; Ivarsflaten, Blinder, & Ford, 2010), before turning to the relationship between MCP and anxiety.

MCP and Social Trust

According to Blinder et al. (2013), people's willingness to express negative feelings toward immigrants is curbed by a social norm called MCP. Citizens who have internalized this social norm are motivated to "avoid acting on biases against stigmatized minorities, even if they, knowingly or unknowingly, harbor such biases" (Blinder et al., 2013, p. 842).

Blinder et al. (2013) explain the expression of prejudices as a process involving automatic and controlled attitude components. Automatically activated attitudes are instinctive and reflexive. A stimulus "can generate automatic responses, such as the activation of emotions or of cognitive associations with other people or concepts" (p. 842). When responding to a question about attitudes toward out-groups, an internal conflict between such negative attitudes towards out-groups and their conscious efforts to avoid acting on these negative attitudes plays out (Blinder et al., 2013, p. 843). The social norm—MCP—which exists in Western societies (Ivarsflaten et al., 2010; Blinder et al., 2013) is a trigger for behavior to avoid the expression of prejudiced attitudes, either in front of oneself (internal MCP) or in front of others (external MCP). Examinations of the possible overlap between these two forms of MCP and different measures for socially confirmatory behavior show very low correlations (see Ivarsflaten et al., 2010, p. 431), indicating that MCP is a distinct norm, different from a general tendency toward social desirability.

For a person with low MCP, the prejudiced attitude will be automatically activated, whereas a person with high MCP will express attitudes that comply with the norm of nonprejudiced behavior. Theoretically, the motivation to control is assumed to need a trigger to remind people of the salient cultural norm and activate it (Blinder et al., 2013). If triggered, the stronger the MCP, the more likely the attitude displayed will be positive. Following this argument, we expect that MCP will lessen the negative effect of a terrorist threat on social trust, which leads us to the following hypothesis:

H2: Individuals with high motivation to control prejudice will reduce their out-group trust less than individuals with low motivation to control prejudices, when confronted with a terrorist threat scenario.

However, given that terrorism is a phenomenon that evokes strong emotions, and since much of the effect of terrorism is assumed to work through the evocation of anxiety and anger (Greenberg et al., 2003; Sinclair & LoCicero, 2010), we question whether the occurrence of strong emotion when exposed to a terrorist threat might impede the triggering of MCP, leading the automatically activated component of an attitude to be expressed. In the next section, we sketch out what existing literature tells us about the impact of emotions on political attitudes in the wake of terrorist threats, and develop hypotheses as to how anxiety may interact with MCP.

The Impact of Anxiety in Response to Terrorism

Research on the political psychology of terrorism has long been concerned with the impact of emotions on people's responses to terrorism (Huddy, Feldman, & Weber, 2007; Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003; Sinclair & Antonius, 2013). While anxiety is the only emotional variable examined in this study, it is useful for the theoretical understanding of anxiety to understand it in relation and contrast to anger. One well-established line of study has argued that anxiety and anger, which are both prominent emotional reactions to terrorism, have quite different political and social effects (Erisen, 2018; Huddy, Feldman, & Weber, 2007; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, Valentino, & Foucault, 2016). Studying the effects of 9/11, Skitka et al. (2006) found that whereas anxiety was associated with withdrawal-like attitudes (e.g., less support for military intervention and increased surveillance), anger was associated with typically aggressive attitudes (e.g., increased out-group derogation and confrontational responses to terrorism) and, indirectly, with reduced political tolerance of Arab Americans and other groups (p. 375).

Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) provide a general theoretical explanation for the differing effects of anxiety and anger through the concept of Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT), which suggests that anxiety will orient people toward new information regarding a threat and away from habitual views (e.g., predispositions toward out-groups including ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, and social dominance). Anxiety triggers what is often labeled a "system 2" type of thinking (Kahneman, 2011), which should lead people to withdraw from the situation and consider how they might cope with the threat. Anxiety, according to Marcus et al., is unlikely to drive support for risky or aggressive policies, candidates, or parties. Anger in response to these same threats, however, should drive up support for the political far right and for more aggressive policies (Marcus et al., 2000; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, Valentino, & Foucault, 2016).

Research on the effects of anxiety is not conclusive. Studies based on a TMT perspective have argued that anxiety does not lead to reflection and systematic thinking, but rather to a retreat to established worldviews and ideologies and thus "hardens narratives of struggle against a mortal enemy" (Sinclair & Antonius, 2013, p. 55). This would imply that people become less tolerant of out-groups. A set of studies have also served to specify and nuance the effects of anxiety on political attitudes, arguing that whether anxiety sets off learning processes will depend on whether "open minded learning is necessary for coping with a perceived threat" (Suhay & Erisen, 2018, p. 794). A human tendency toward ignoring threats, and toward seeking simple, self-protective solutions, at least if balanced information is not readily at hand, are among the factors that might explain why anxiety is not always linked to

learning (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015). In a study of various political attitudes and participation forms, Erisen (2018) showed that the differential effect of anxiety and anger depends on the domain of interest. For example, anger and anxiety are shown to have similar negative effects on political intolerance, but different effects when it comes to political mobilization (p. 143).

Even though existing theories predict different effects of anxiety, they share a focus on how anxiety interacts with cognitive processes in conditioning attitudes in the wake of terrorist threat, and emphasize the distinction between intuitive reactions and systematic thinking (Erisen, 2018; Nugier et al., 2016; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, Valentino, & Foucault, 2016). As laid out in the previous section, we expect people with high MCP to reduce their trust in connoted out-groups less than others. Theoretically, the underlying reason would be that people who strongly embrace this norm would go through controlled cognitive processes, which might lead them to think that there is no reason to distrust, for example, ordinary Muslims or immigrants, based on acts performed by Islamist terrorist. Following the AI line of reasoning, one would expect that anxiety might enhance such controlled cognitive processes, since anxiety triggers system 2 thinking. It should be noted that in this logic, MCP is not seen as any durable disposition that would be revoked by anxiety according to AI, but as a specific motivation to controlled reasoning. It therefore seems likely that those high on MCP would be inclined to the controlled reasoning that MCP implies when put into a controlled reasoning modus by anxiety. Based on TMT theory, we might expect the opposite, that is, the emotion of anxiety will entail a retreat to established, implicit attitudes, and evade the systematic thinking that is involved in applying the norm of avoiding prejudice.

We formulate our expectations in line with the AI perspective, which gives us the following hypothesis:

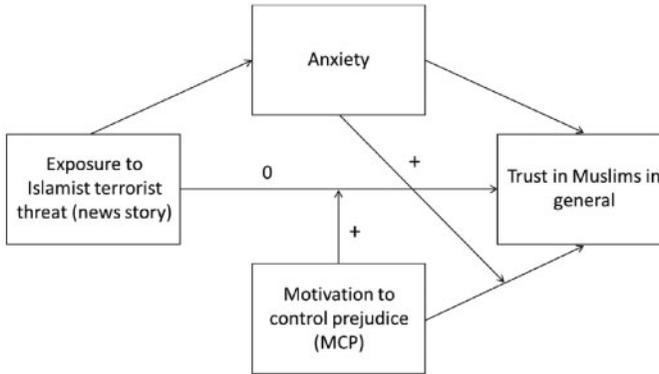
H₃: The interaction between anxiety and MCP will be positive

The theoretical model that we are testing through H₁, H₂, and H₃ can be depicted as in Figure 1.

We assume that the effect of being exposed to the terror scenario may be conditioned both by the emotion of anxiety and by the triggering of the social norm to avoid prejudice, MCP. While the effect of MCP is assumed to be positive and work through the activation of systematic thinking, the interaction with anxiety may either strengthen this process or lead to a retreat to automatically activated attitudes. In H₁, we test the overall relationship between exposure to the scenario and trust in connoted out-groups; in H₂, we test how levels of MCP condition trust; and in H₃, we test the interaction between anxiety and MCP.

Figure 1

Theoretical model for the relation between exposure to Islamist terrorist threat, anxiety, MCP, and trust in Muslims. MCP = Motivation to Control Prejudice



Method and Data

To investigate the question about how terrorist threats affect out-group trust, we designed a set of news story experiments that were embedded in a population-representative survey in Norway. The survey was carried out in January 2017, and was part of the Disruptive Event Project.¹ The survey was designed to capture public response to the terrorist attacks and contained questions about anxiety of new attacks (both sociotropic and personal), social and interpersonal trust, and political attitudes. A sample of 4,700 respondents was drawn from KANTAR TNS's Norwegian web panel, comprising 45,000 individuals.² The survey returned 2,063 complete answers, yielding a response rate of 44.6%.

In the experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to four different groups. Three of the groups received identical news stories, describing the disclosure by national security police of plans for a major terrorist attack in Oslo.³ The three stories were distinguished *only by the type of perpetrator involved*: an Islamist group of individuals who were born and raised in Norway, an Islamist group of foreigners who had recently arrived in Norway, and a right-wing extremist group. The fourth group was a control group that received a neutral story about the finding of a mysterious stone slab with inscriptions. The news stories were modeled on real news stories

¹A comparative project including Norway and France, Finland, Spain, and the USA. Funded through the Research Council of Norway's SAMRISK program, grant no. 238118.

²See <http://www.tns-gallup.no/vare-paneler/> for further description of the panel.

³See [Appendix](#) for a full replication of the news story as it was presented to the respondents.

describing terrorist threat, and were designed to trigger a feeling of imminent threat. The texts were revised by a Norwegian journalist in order to obtain as realistic a tone and format as possible.

For the purpose of the present analysis, the two groups receiving stories about a planned Islamist terror attack were merged, as we had no theoretical expectation that the distinction between “homegrown” and “foreign” Islamist terrorists would be of specific relevance to the effects on out-group trust. Our analyses indeed showed that the two scenarios evoked the same levels of anxiety and had an equal effect on out-group trust, and the effect was significantly different from the effect on the control scenario.⁴ The group receiving a story about a right-wing attack was excluded from the analysis, since the aim of the present article was to examine the effect of Islamist terrorism threats on trust in out-groups associated with Islam. In the present analysis, a treatment group of 1,019 respondents is compared to a control group of 522 respondents.

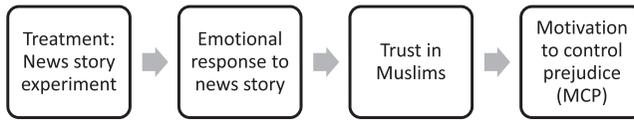
To measure respondents’ emotional responses to the news stories, we used the emotional response battery developed by Marcus, Neuman, and Mackuen (2015), in which anxiety is measured through three items.⁵ After reading the story, respondents were asked: “How does what you have just read make you feel?” Respondents were then asked to indicate their responses using a slider format and a 7-point scale. The three anxiety items—feeling anxious, feeling scared, and feeling fearful—were combined into an additive index for the analysis.

The dependent variable, out-group trust, is an additive index with two items: trust in “Muslims in general” and trust in “immigrants in general”. In the Norwegian context, it is not uncommon to establish an implicit or explicit link between “Muslims” and “immigrants” and Islamist terrorism (Winsvold et al., 2019). It should be noted, however, that limiting the dependent variable to “connoted out-groups,” that is, groups likely to be associated with Islamist terrorism, delimits the generalizability of the study to the relationship between such particular out-group and Islamist terror threat. The analysis cannot say anything about the effect of terror on out-groups per se. Trust was measured by the question: “How much do you trust different groups of people?” Respondents were presented with a variety of ethnic, religious, and political groups, and they were asked to indicate their degree of trust of these groups on a 7-point scale. The trust questions were posed directly after the questions about how the scenario made the respondents feel, and were assumed to tap into the eventual effect of the news story on social trust.

⁴See Appendix SA1 and SA2 for analysis of the relation between the two Islamist stories and fear and trust in out-groups.

⁵See Appendix for the full set of questions.

Figure 2

Experimental flow

MCP was measured by four items asking about the respondent's attitudes and feelings toward prejudice, with categories ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The items were replicated from earlier studies of MCP (Blinder et al., 2013; Ivarsflaten et al., 2010).

Figure 2 depicts the experimental flow of the study.

After receiving either the treatment (the news story on imminent Islamist terrorist threat) or the control story (about an Aztec stone slab), respondents were immediately asked about their emotional reaction to what they had read, followed by the question about level of trust in Muslims and immigrants. The MCP question was presented at the end of the questionnaire, along with a set of background variables. This means that respondents were not exposed to the question about how they handle their own prejudice as part of the experiment itself. This is in line with the design in previous studies (Blinder, Ford, & Ivarsflaten, 2013, p. 842), and reflects the fact that MCP is seen as an "internalized disposition" to obey to the norm. Theoretically, for MCP to be activated and affect the controlled part of an expressed attitude, the norm must be made salient by the context. In our experiment, there is no such explicit trigger. We believe, however, that the combination of our news story first focusing on the ethnicity of the potential terrorist and, second, asking about our trust in immigrants and Muslims as a group, may act as a cue inducing respondents to put up their guard against an often-discussed bias in the news: framing ethnic and religious minorities as representatives of a group rather than as individuals (Midtbøen & Steen-Johnsen, 2016).

Analysis

After being exposed to the news story, the respondents were first asked to rate the intensity of the anxiety the story generated on a scale ranging from 1 (not fearful at all) to 7 (extremely fearful). The respondents who had been exposed to the threat scenario reported being significantly more scared than those exposed to the control scenario. The mean value of the anxiety index in the treatment group was 4.09, while the mean value in the control group was 1.82.

Table 1

Trust in Different Social Groups. Control group and Treatment group.

Social group	Control group (neutral news story)	Treatment group (Islamist terror threat story)	<i>t</i>
	Mean value	Mean value	
Muslims in general	3.85 (1.46)	4.09 (1.50)	2.81**
Immigrants in general	4.00 (1.32)	4.34 (1.32)	4.36**
People of another religion	4.26 (1.21)	4.47 (1.24)	3.02**
People of another nationality	4.41 (1.18)	4.58 (1.15)	2.55*
Norwegians in general	4.69 (1.00)	4.87 (1.00)	3.07**
Christians in general	4.38 (1.21)	4.50 (1.29)	1.55
<i>N</i>	522	1,019	

Note. Trust is reported on a scale from 1 (no trust at all) to 7 (trust completely), after the exposure to a neutral news story (control group) or to a news story of an Islamist terror threat (treatment group). Mean values of trust for control group and treatment group reported. Standard deviations listed in parentheses. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Second, the respondents were asked how much they trusted different groups of people. Some of the groups were assumed to be perceived as in-groups: Norwegians in general and Christians in general;⁶ other groups were assumed to be perceived as out-groups: Muslims in general, immigrants in general, people of another religion, and people of another nationality. Trust was also indicated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (do not trust at all) to 7 (trust completely).

In line with previous findings (Arvanitidis et al., 2016; Brouard et al., 2018; Castanho Silva, 2018), we expected no differences in the levels of out-group trust between the treatment group and the control group. Results show that H1 was not confirmed. The survey experiments instead did reveal a positive relationship: Those exposed to the terrorist threat scenario reported higher levels of trust in out-groups. The mean values of social trust for the treatment and control group are displayed in Table 1.

The social trust items were posed directly after the respondents had reported their emotional responses to the news story exposure. Both in the control group and in the treatment group, trust in Muslims and trust in immigrants were significantly lower than trust in all other groups, including trust in the two other assumed out-groups: “people of another religion” and “people of another nationality.”

⁶The TNS KANTAR web panel is representative only of the ethnic majority population in Norway. The dominant religion in Norway is Protestant Christian.

So, why does threat exposure lead to higher levels of trust in Muslims and immigrants? In our theoretical argument, we hypothesized that MCP may curb negative attitudes toward out-groups by triggering controlled thinking, hence leading the group with high MCP to reduce their out-group trust less than the group with low MCP after being exposed to the Islamist threat scenario. Could it be that the activation of MCP not only curbs negative reactions, but also even increases out-group trust? To check whether this is the case, we divided the sample into three groups according to their level of MCP.⁷

The questions included in the MCP index are posed at the very end of the survey in order not to be affected by the scenarios or affect the effect of the scenarios, and the index does not vary between the treatment and control groups,⁸ which means that MCP is not likely to have been affected by exposure to the threat scenario.

Figure 3 shows the marginal effects of the terror threat scenario on out-group trust for those with low and high MCP, respectively.

As we see from Figure 3, there is no effect of terror threat exposure among those with low MCP, whereas there is a significant positive effect of being exposed to a terrorist threat scenario among those with medium and high MCP.⁹ The difference in marginal effect between those with low MCP on the one hand and those with medium or high MCP on the other hand, is significant at a 95% level. The difference in marginal effect between the group with medium and high MCP is not significant, but the figure indicates an upward slope. The analysis supports the assumption that MCP plays a role in curbing the development of distrust in out-groups when people are exposed to a threat of Islamist terrorism. The fact that we find a positive effect of terrorist threat in the groups with medium and high MCP—not just a relatively less negative effect—than in the low MCP group is indicative that when triggered, MCP may serve not only to curb negative reactions but also to evoke positive ones. The active, cognitive effort to counteract one's own negative feelings or prejudices (Blinder et al., 2013), thus, seems to lead to the mobilization of a positive attitude. Our hypothesis, H₂, that individuals with high MCP will reduce their out-group trust more than people with low MCP, is thus supported.

Our next question is whether the anxiety induced by terrorist threat exposure affects the activation of MCP. Following the AI line of reasoning, we expected that anxiety would enhance the controlled cognitive processes, and

⁷Respondents with an MCP score higher than one standard deviation above the mean value of the MCP index is defined as having “high” MCP; respondents with an MCP score lower than one standard deviation below the mean value of the MCP index is defined as having “low” MCP. The middle group have MCP scores between one standard deviation below and above the mean.

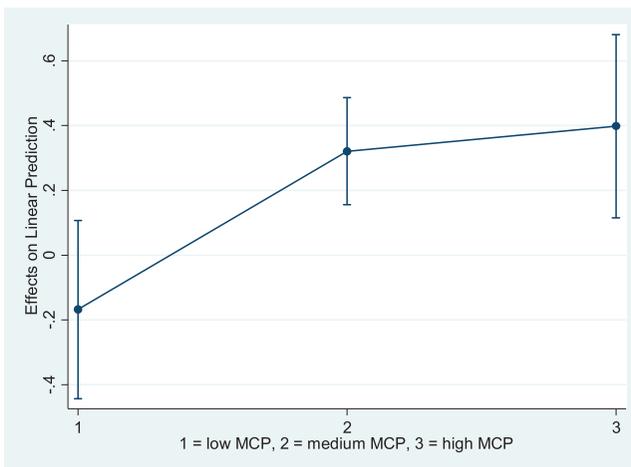
⁸10.44 as compared with 10.79 on a 20-point scale, near identical standard deviation.

⁹See Appendix Table SA₃ for full analysis.

Figure 3

Conditional marginal effects on out-group trust for exposure to terror threat scenario in groups with different levels of MCP.

Note. Confidence intervals at 95%. Respondents were either exposed to a news story describing an Islamist terror threat (treatment group = 1) or to a neutral news story (control group = 0). After the news story respondents were asked about their trust in different out-groups: "How much do you trust different groups of people? Indicate your trust on a scale from 1 (do not trust at all) to 7 (trust completely)." Out-group trust is an additive index with two items: trust in Muslims and trust in immigrants. MCP is an additive index of four items measuring different aspects of MCP. Low MCP is defined as one standard deviation below the mean and high MCP as one standard deviation above the mean level of the MCP index. Population sample, 2017 (N = 1,489). MCP = Motivation to Control Prejudice.



consequently, that the interaction between anxiety and MCP would be positive (H₃).

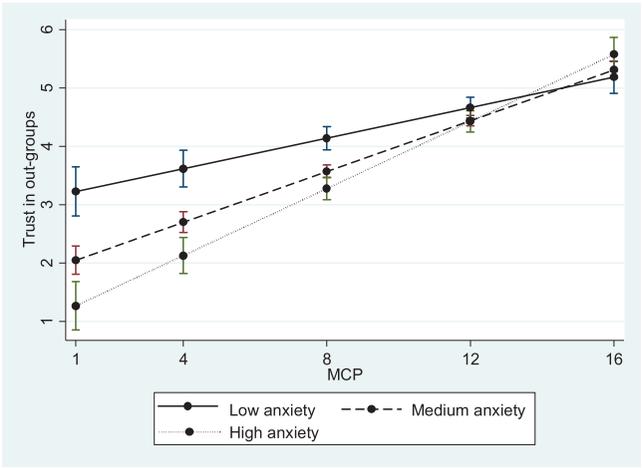
Figure 4 compares the effect of MCP on connoted out-group trust, for those with low, medium, and high anxiety levels, respectively. As anxiety levels related to the control story are irrelevant, this analysis is only made for the experiment group. Low and high anxiety levels are defined as one standard deviation below and above the mean value of the anxiety index for the experiment group.

As postulated by H₃, Figure 4 shows an interaction between MCP and anxiety: MCP has a strong positive effect on out-group trust with both the least and the most fearful, but the effect is larger with the more fearful and even larger with the most fearful (i.e., the slope is steeper). Figure 4 also shows that when uncurbed by MCP, the more anxious respondents are less trusting toward out-groups, indicating that unchecked fear has a negative effect on trust. When there is no MCPs, fear will activate the uncontrolled

Figure 4

Predicted trust values with 95% confidence intervals for different levels of MCP in the groups that reported of low, medium, and high anxiety.

Note. “High” and “low” anxiety is defined as one standard deviation above and below the mean. Only the treatment group is included. The treatment group was exposed to a news story describing an Islamist terror threat. Directly after the story respondents were asked to indicate their emotional response to the story. “Anxiety” is an additive index with three items. Each item is reported on a scale from 1 (not fearful at all) to 7 (extremely fearful). Trust in out-groups is an additive index of two items, trust in Muslims and trust in immigrants. Trust is reported on a scale from 1 (do not trust at all) to 7 (trust completely). MCP is an additive index with four items measuring MCP. The MCP index ranges from 0 (low MCP) to 16 (high MCP). Population sample, 2017 (N = 929). MCP = Motivation to Control Prejudice.



system 1 type of thinking, inducing people to express underlying prejudices. We included MCP, anxiety, and other variables likely to affect trust levels, in an ordered logistic regression analysis, displayed in Table 2. In the model, the effect of MCP and anxiety on out-group trust is controlled for party identification, political interest, religiosity, and general trust, in addition to the demographic variables age, gender, education, age, income, and employment status.¹⁰

The analysis shows that the odds of reporting high trust in out-groups after being exposed to the terror threat scenario increases with increasing MCP. In other words, persons with a high MCP are more likely to report high trust in out-groups, given that all other variables are held constant. At the same time, those who report feeling fearful after being exposed to the threat scenario are less likely to have a high trust in out-groups. We are not

¹⁰See Appendix for full set of questions and descriptive statistics for independent variables. See Appendix also for model with interaction between MCP and fear.

Table 2
Ordered Logistic Regression Analysis of Trust in Out-Groups

	Odds ratios	z	Standard errors
MCP	1.33	13.48**	0.03
Anxiety	0.93	-4.13**	0.02
Voting for immigrant-skeptic party	0.41	-3.89**	0.09
Voting for immigrant-friendly parties	1.10	0.53	0.19
Political interest	1.30	2.49*	0.13
Religiosity	0.96	-0.26	0.13
General trust in other people	1.38	4.57**	0.10
Age	0.99	-1.24	0.00
Gender	1.39	2.35*	0.19
Education	1.03	0.25	0.12
Employment status	0.78	-1.75	0.11
Income	1.13	2.47*	0.06

Note. Odds ratios, z -values, and standard errors reported. Only treatment group is included in analysis. Population sample, 2017 ($N=816$).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

able to examine through which mechanisms fear influences out-group trust in this case. For example, it could be interpreted as an effect of a cognitive shutdown (Sinclair & LoCicero, 2010), as a result of a reminder of one's own mortality (Greenberg et al., 2003), or even as the result of a cognitive process as described by AI (i.e., trusting the ordinary Muslim or immigrant seems less rational given the terrorist threat; Marcus et al., 2000). Figure 4 shows that the interaction between MCP and anxiety is positive, meaning that the effect of MCP on trust increases when anxiety levels increase. Such a process is consistent with the assumptions of AI (i.e. when anxiety increases, so does the necessity to scan the environment and reflect upon one's own dispositions). We, thus, find support for our hypothesis H₃, which predicted that the effect of MCP will increase as anxiety levels increase.

Concluding Discussion

In this article, we have examined the impact of being exposed to a news story presenting an Islamist terrorist threat on trust in connoted out-groups, that is, Muslims and immigrants. Based on mixed evidence within existing research about reactions to terrorism in different countries, we expected no effect of exposure to the story on out-group trust. Counter to our expectations, trust in out-groups was significantly higher in the experiment group than in the control group.

Based on our analysis, in situations of Islamist terrorist threat, MCP stands out as an important factor in enhancing expressions of trust in

connoted out-groups. According to the theory, MCP is a social norm that can be triggered in a given situation, which makes individuals actively counteract prejudiced judgment by engaging in controlled cognitive activity. In line with what AI predicts, such conscious considerations seem to be triggered rather than blocked by anxiety. Anxiety, in this case, spurs the individuals to scan and analyze the situation and to engage in systematic thinking. The role of anxiety in our analysis is not unequivocal, however, as anxiety also has a strong and independent negative effect on trust in out-groups. This is in line with current literature that emphasizes the varied effects of anxiety, depending on the type of threat and the context (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015; Kentmen-Cin, & Erisen, 2017; Suhay & Erisen, 2018). In a recent study on the effect of emotions on political intolerance, Erisen (2018) found that anxiety has a similar effect as anger in driving up political intolerance in a context where terrorism was highly salient. In this model, democratic values did not have a similar bolstering effect against intolerance as the interactional effect between anxiety and MCP demonstrated in the present paper. This may underscore the distinct characteristic of MCP as a motivation to *act* on prejudice, whenever triggered (Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2016).

The present study contributes to existing research on attitudinal responses to political stimuli by showing that normative processes may be underpinned by the emotion of anxiety in enhancing nonprejudiced responses. While AI has underscored the role of anxiety in triggering controlled cognitive processes (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, Valentino, & Foucault, 2016), our study indicates that some of this effect may be explained by the interaction with the social norm of controlling prejudice, MCP. Our study thus emphasizes the relevance of social norms for understanding the impact of terrorism threats on out-group trust. This is in accordance with other studies that have found similar attitudinal effects of the evocation of social norms related to cases of terrorism (Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2016; Nugier et al., 2016). If this is so, it is worth reflecting upon the underpinnings of this norm, and whether it varies culturally and between national contexts. As suggested by Nugier et al. (2016), cultural norms that are relevant to terrorism responses vary between national contexts. In this regard, it should be noted that this study was conducted in Norway, which has in its recent history a right-wing terrorist attack (i.e., the 22/7 attack). Studies of Norwegian short-term reactions to the attacks showed a comparatively uncommon pattern when it came to out-group trust; trust in people with other religions and other nationalities increased more than in-group trust (Wollebæk et al., 2012). Taken together with the strong and longstanding Norwegian identity as a high-trust society, one might assume that the norm

of resisting prejudiced judgment against out-groups in general is particularly salient in Norway.

Finally, this study should lead us back to the question about the conditions for social trust, and how these are affected by disruptive events such as terrorism. The fact that we see an effect of terrorist threat on out-group trust, even in a survey experiment, may lend some support to the notion that trust is a pliable attitude that may change with the circumstances. Moreover, the fact that motivation to control seems to play such a central role in moderating responses to terrorist threats is indicative of the importance of social norms and how they are culturally embedded to the understanding of how terrorism may impact trust structures in a given society. Given its recent history and the salience of social trust as a value, Norway may, hence, be considered a best case for observing how MCP curbs the development of negative out-group attitudes and lowering of social trust. More comparative research is needed to assess variations in this relationship.

Supplementary Data

Supplementary Material are available at *IJPOR* online.

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