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Who Fears Strangers and Spiders: Political Ideology and Feeling Threatened

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WHO FEARS STRANGERS AND SPIDERS:
POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND FEELING THREATENED

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the University Honors Program
University of Nebraska Lincoln

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October 26, 2022

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Abstract

In this study, I evaluated the correlations between threat sensitivities and political ideology. Two hypotheses were tested. First, I hypothesized that conservatives would have higher social threat sensitivity than liberals, with social threat defined as a threat dependent on outgroup or social actions (Barclay & Benard, 2020). Second, I hypothesized that conservatives would have higher disgust sensitivity than liberals. To test these and related hypotheses I used a 2018 Qualtrics national demographically representative sample that included 1031 participants. To operationalize threat sensitivity, I used items asking participants to rate how threatened they felt by various fears. These individual items were then grouped by threat type: social, asocial, and disgust sensitive. Political ideology was operationalized through a Wilson-Patterson Conservatism Scale of issue positions. Conservatives were also broken into sub-groups-economic, social, and securitarian using the relevant Wilson Patterson items. My analysis did not find support for the initial hypotheses. Instead, compared to liberals, conservatives reported being less fearful of all fear types. Further analysis, however, revealed that only economic conservatives were less fearful of threats. In other words, social conservatives and securitarian conservatives were not LESS fearful than liberals. As such, this study provides the basis for further research regarding threat sensitivity and political identification.

Key Words: Political Science, Ideology, Fear, Conservatism, Disgust, Social Threat

Introduction

Understanding what makes an individual a conservative or a liberal often requires analysts to go beyond basic political preferences. When conservatives and liberals are compared using the Big Five personality traits for example, distinct correlations are found within the ideologies. While liberals tend to have higher levels of openness, conservatives tend to score higher in conscientiousness (Carney, et al. 2009). Another example can be derived from basic human values. Research has suggested that liberals and conservatives tend to prioritize different categories of values. While the values of self-direction and stimulation are correlated with liberals, conformity, tradition, and security correlate with conservatives (Schwarz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010). Conservatism in general has also been an extensive topic of research, with many attributes being correlated with conservatives and not liberals: preference for order, ego defensiveness, intolerance of ambiguity, not valuing imagination, and a perception that the world is a dangerous place (Jost, et al., 2003).

Fear and threat sensitivity may also distinguish the two groups. Current literature suggests that social fears and disgust sensitivity may correlate with conservative and liberal ideologies (Jost, et al. 2003; Brader, 2005; Inbar, et al., 2009; Hodson, et al., 2019). Further, it may be the case that certain groups within these two ideologies may be more sensitive to these fears than others; therefore, in this study, I investigate whether three particular types of conservatives have differing threat sensitivities. Because the focus of this study was to examine conservative traits, liberals were not categorized in the same way and were not within the scope of this research. The groups are economic conservatives, social conservatives, and securitarian conservatives.

Fears within Political Ideology

The evaluation of fear and its relationship with political ideology is not a new interest to scholars. The topic has been investigated thoroughly with mixed results. Current literature is conflicted as to what fears are most prevalent between ideologies. For example, while some previous researchers argued that fear of death was a commonality of conservatives (Wilson, 1973), new research suggests another answer. Castano et al. (2011) instead argues that when an individual is presented with reminders of their own mortality, they are likely to cling more closely to their preferred ideology, rather than a shift to conservatism.

Other types of fears are more accepted in research. For conservatives, these fears include that of uncertainty (Jost, et al. 2003) and social change (Sidanius & Pratto 1999). While further studies are necessary, some researchers contend that the leading factor is genetic, rather than environmental (Kendler, et al. 2001).

Social Threat Sensitivity

While previous literature focused on personality traits, such as uncertainty avoidance, little research has examined how ideology may be correlated with fears in social cases. In this study, I examine whether conservatives are particularly threatened by social situations, many of which could emanate from outgroups, or the threat derived from social interactions, are concerning to conservatives. The definition of social threat in this research are threats dependent on the actions of others, especially from outside groups, while asocial threats are not. These definitions are taken from a previous study which examined the overall perceptions of each (Barclay & Benard, 2020). Political science research suggests those who perceive outgroups as greater threats are more likely to have conservative ideology (Jost, et al. 2003; Brader, 2005). This tendency manifests itself in the form of more restrictive positions on immigration, crime, and terrorism. These policy positions can be seen as the result of greater outgroup fears. Hatemi,

et al. (2013) indicates that those who have social fears and phobias are more likely to have negative outgroup perceptions. Consistent with these previous findings, I aim to assess the relationship between fears and political ideology. Specifically, I seek to determine whether sensitivity to social threats, such as outgroup strangers, security threats from outside groups such as nuclear attacks, or intergroup social interactions such as the humiliation of public speaking, would increase the likelihood of an individual being a conservative.

Disgust Threat Sensitivity

While threats posed by social situations are often associated with ideology, another potential factor is disgust sensitivity. Overwhelming research indicates conservatives are more likely than liberals to have higher disgust sensitivity. Further, it is this sensitivity that may be associated with higher needs of moral purity. Inbar, et al. (2009) explored this topic, finding that those who are more easily disgusted were more likely to form unfavorable associations with homosexual behavior. These tendencies also fall in line with conservative personality traits. Heightened disgust sensitivity helps explain these desires for orderliness and adherence to norms, as transgressors may be viewed as unclean or impure.

While attitudes towards social outgroups and disgust sensitivity are distinct and differing attributes, there is research that tries to explain the correlation between the two. Specifically, Hodson et al. (2013) found that when disgust was experimentally evoked, conservative participants were more likely to have negative outgroup attitudes. One theory as to why this correlation occurs contends that it is due to an evolutionary trend. This product, called the behavioral immune system, is an evolutionary method to protect ingroup members from outside pathogens. Some researchers suggest that social conservatism is a direct product of this strategy. Some conservative beliefs, such as social dominance orientation, religious fundamentalism, and

ethnocentrism, incorporate these negative outgroup attitudes and disgust sensitivity (Terrizzi, et al. 2013).

Conservative Ideology and Intragroup Differences

Though conservatives may vote for the same candidate, there are important intragroup differences within the ideology, with the goal of this study being to determine if there are differing levels of threat sensitivity depending on the type of conservative. While liberals can also be placed into similar categories, the purposes of this study are to examine the associations between social and disgust sensitive threats and conservatism. Because current literature suggests positive correlations with only conservatives, intragroup differences in liberal threat sensitivity were not evaluated. Generally, conservatives are placed in one of three distinct categories. The two more widely known are economic and social conservatives. Social conservatives prioritize traditional family values, cultural norms, and religion, while being willing to use federal power to obtain these goals (Busch, 2011). Often associated with libertarians, economic conservatives on the other hand desire limited government, especially in the realm of fiscal policy. As such, they support the reduction of U.S. government spending, reduced overall federal authority, and international free trade policies. While economic conservatives have different priorities in their policy decisions, they share more viewpoints with social conservatives than many would first expect. These include opposition to federally funded abortions and support for school prayer amendments (The People, the Press & Politics, 1994). While similar, they are still distinct groups. Oftentimes these policy positions differ on areas such as the legalization of marijuana, same-sex marriages, and non-interventionism. A more recent and less studied type of conservative is sometimes designated as a securitarian conservative. These conservatives tend to be those who supported President Trump in his election, prioritizing policies that they feel

protect the country from outsider groups, as well as promote personal safety from non-traditional groups. Their policy preferences included building a border wall, immigration reduction, national security interest, and tough responses to crime (Hibbing, 2020). While differing in the specific policies they prioritize, these three groups make up the majority of the conservative ideology and should be examined individually rather than collectively. The goal of this study is to determine whether these groups have different attitudes toward potential threats.

Hypotheses

In this study, I aim to determine how fear and threat sensitivity vary from liberals to conservatives and then with those holding a conservative ideology. Based on available research, social threats and disgust sensitivity are two attributes that may be thought to correlate with ideology. My first hypothesis is that conservatives will be more threatened by social than by asocial situations. As mentioned, those who have more negative perceptions of social and cultural outgroups tend to be conservative and perhaps this tendency is due to heightened threat sensitivity towards social threats. After all, social threats can arise from strangers, terrorists, nuclear attacks, or civil unrest. Asocial threats on the other hand, are those that could be generated by things such as heights or spiders. I predict that, due to the negative outgroup attitudes conservatives tend to report, they will evince greater threat sensitivity to social, but not to asocial, threats.

This first hypothesis closely ties into my second hypothesis, which states that conservatives will be more threatened by disgust sensitive threats when compared to liberals. This hypothesis is consistent with past literature associating higher levels of disgust sensitivity with conservatism (Inbar, et al., 2009). It naturally follows that this disgust sensitivity may be the

result of heightened fears of disgusting prompts. Therefore, self-professed conservatives should be more likely to express higher threat sensitivity toward disgusting stimuli.

If both hypotheses are correct, the results would further support some researchers' claims that the conservative ideology is a product of evolutionary trends to protect individuals from outside pathogens and threats (Terrizzi, et al. 2013). Not only that, but it would expand intragroup research on conservatism. As it stands, current research primarily focusses on the correlating attributes of the conservative ideology as a whole. By acknowledging the differences within the ideology, this study properly examines how apparent and consistent these attributes really are.

Methods

The dataset used for this study was collected through the online software of Qualtrics. The data was collected on a national level as a demographically representative sample during the summer of 2018 and came from a total of 1031 participants, who were all over the age of 18. After preliminary control questions of age, sex, income, education, and race, participants were asked how personally threatened they felt as a result of various concepts. These concepts ranged from being homeless to having heart disease. A total of 46 fear questions were asked, with participants rating their fear on a scale from 0 (not at all threatened), to 10 (very threatened). The survey also asked participants to rate how likely they would experience each of the threats described from 0% (definitely will not happen), to 100% (definitely will happen), as well as questions regarding their political participation and political knowledge.

For the first hypothesis, 14 items were deemed as “social threats” and were combined into an additive index. I determined an initial list of social threats using the definition described

previously, and then decided to reduce the overall list to 14 items. The specific items were: hate crime, identity theft, sexual assault, murder, stranger, cyber-attack, nuclear attack, terror attack, robbed/assaulted, socially humiliated, civil unrest, corruption, the grid collapsing, and public speaking. These were compared to another group of 17 items, also combined in an additive index, deemed as “asocial threats.” The same process was used to determine this threat type. These items were: cancer, earthquake, tornado, reptiles, enclosed spaces, animals, blood, fire, heights, insects, the dark, chronic conditions, heart disease, drought, flood, hurricane, and being struck by lightning. For the second hypothesis, 15 items were selected (and combined) as disgust sensitive threats. These items were: sexual assault, reptiles, animals, blood, insects, chronic conditions, communicable disease, air pollution, becoming ill, being hospitalized, cancer, germs, heart disease, the flu, and water pollution. While there is overlap between the social/ asocial scale and disgust sensitive threats, the individual threats were decided upon and chosen from each condensed threat type. The summated responses to these items constitute the primary dependent variables in my study.

To measure political ideology, 29 Wilson-Patterson items (ascertaining political stances) were posed to participants. These items asked participants to rate on a 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) scale their feelings toward each policy. These results were coded so that conservative positions (for example, disagreeing with abortion rights but agreeing with the death penalty) always were given higher numerical values; liberal responses were given lower numerical values, and moderate responses were in the middle.

These Wilson-Patterson items were also used to determine the various types of conservative. Questions often associated with each conservative type were categorized and assigned to each group. More specifically, social conservatives were identified as those

individuals who adopted strong conservative positions on abortion rights, LGBTQ rights, school prayer, premarital sex, biblical truth, abstinence only sex education, and the legalization of marijuana. Economic conservatives were identified as those individuals who adopted strong conservative positions on capitalism, socialism, government arranged healthcare, welfare spending, government regulation of business, small government, and lower taxes. Finally, securitarian conservatives were identified as those individuals who adopted strong conservative positions on the death penalty, foreign aid, expanded immigration, gun rights, and torture of terrorists.

Results

All analyses were conducted through SPSS using bivariate correlation and regression tests. First, I computed bivariate correlations between ideology and each social threat. The results are presented in Table 1. Note that every single social threat showed a negative, not a positive correlation with conservatism, meaning that when it comes to social threats, conservatives are less, not more, threatened than liberals. Not all social threats are from out-groups such as criminals and foreign nations, but it is the case that even for threats such as terrorist attacks (-0.62*, $p = 0.047$) and nuclear attacks (-0.114**, $p < 0.001$) conservatives were less and not more threatened than liberals. A separate bivariate correlation was also tested using the variables of ideology and social threat. This again resulted in a strong negative correlation (-0.119**, $p < 0.001$). To test for the reliability of these social threats, a Cronbach's Alpha test was also run. The results of this test were a high reliability of 0.95.

Threat Type	Correlation (2-Tailed)	Significance (2-Tailed)
Hate crime	-.145**	0.000
Identity theft	-.096**	0.002
Sexual assault	-.148**	0.000
Murder	-.075*	0.016

Stranger	-.109**	0.000
Public Speaking	-.114**	0.000
Cyber Attack	-.100**	0.001
Nuclear Attack	-.114**	0.000
Terror Attack	-.062*	0.047
Robbed	-.091**	0.003
Socially Humiliated	-.143**	0.000
Civil unrest	-.107**	0.001
Corruption	-.120*	0.000
Grid Collapse	-.087**	0.005

Table 1: Bivariate Correlations Between Conservatism and Social Threat Type

NOTE: (* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$)

The same procedure was employed for asocial threats (see Table 2). Similar to the results for social threats, the data indicated that, across the board, every asocial threat was negatively correlated with conservative ideology except for heart disease and lightning, which were not significant. The tendency of liberals to be more threatened than conservatives is remarkably broad and does not vary a great deal from stimulus to stimulus or from social to asocial threats. Once again, another bivariate correlation was tested between ideology and asocial threats, resulting in a negative correlation ($-0.110^{**} < 0.001$). The Cronbach's alpha results were another high reliability of 0.948.

Threat Type	Correlation (2-Tailed)	Significance (2-Tailed)
Reptile	-.062*	0.048
Enclosed space	-.108**	0.001
Animals	-.098**	0.002
Blood	-.083**	0.007
Fire	-.083**	0.007
Heights	-.099**	0.001
Insects	-.111**	0.000
Dark	-.089**	0.004
Chronic condition	-.064*	0.041
Drought	-.098**	0.002
Flood	-.109**	0.000
Hurricane	-.109**	0.000
Tornado	-.063*	0.044
Earthquake	-.098**	0.002
Lightning	-0.060	0.053
Cancer	-.064*	0.041
Heart Disease	-0.041	0.191

Table 2: Bivariate Correlations Between Conservatism and Asocial Threat Type
 NOTE: (* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$)

After bivariate correlations were run between ideology and social/ asocial threats, another correlation was run between ideology and disgust sensitive threats overall. Due to the overlap in questions for this threat type and others, individual threat type correlations were not run. Between ideology and disgust, another negative correlation was apparent (-0.113^{**} , $p < 0.001$). These results were reliable, however, as the Cronbach's alpha test resulted in a 0.945. This was once again surprising given the extensive literature that would suggest otherwise.

After initial hypothesis testing, a broader analysis was conducted for correlations between ideology and fear overall by combining the social and asocial threats. By increasing the threat type total to 31, this would be used to determine whether the negative trend found in the previous sets were continuous across the majority of fears, regardless of being social or asocial. The analysis was conducted by first using the Wilson-Patterson test to differentiate ideology on a 1 to 7 scale (1=strongly liberal, 2=liberal, 3=somewhat liberal, 4=neither, 5=somewhat conservative, 6=conservative, and 7=strongly conservative). A bivariate correlation test between ideology and this overall threat group resulted in a significant negative correlation ($-0.119 < 0.001$). Then, the means for each groups' answers to the questions were analyzed (see Table 3 and Figure 4). The results were an overall reducing mean as ideology becomes more conservative. The more liberal an individual is, the more likely they would have higher threat sensitivity to overall threats.

Ideology	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Strongly Liberal 1	100.2316	95	48.64055
2	100.0515	136	46.02581
3	92.8141	156	40.25400
4	88.4545	330	41.45184

5	85.6713	143	38.82768
6	88.0446	112	43.20544
Strongly Conservative 7	81.6780	59	48.53383
Total	90.9108	1031	43.11637

Table 3: Means of Social and Asocial Threat Type by Ideology

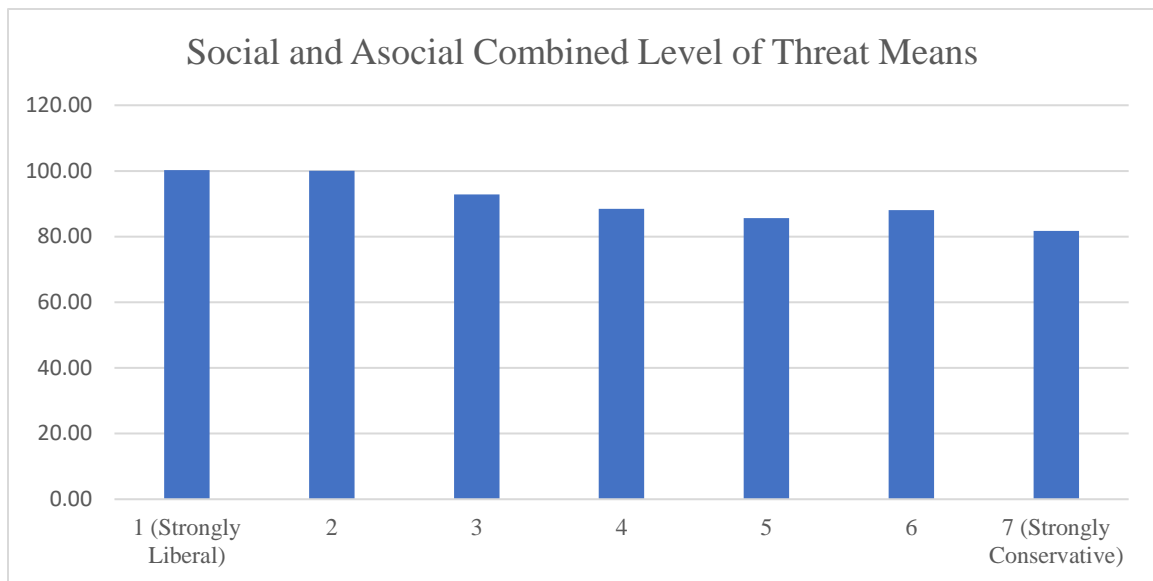


Figure 4: Graph of Social and Asocial Threat Type by Ideology (By Means)

Given that bivariate relationships can be misleading, in testing my final hypothesis concerning variations in threat sensitivity across types of conservatives, I conducted multivariate analyses using regression models. As mentioned previously, the three types of conservatives (social, economic, and securitarian) were determined by the degree of participant agreement on relevant topics in the Wilson Patterson battery. In the regression models used for social and disgust threat testing, the control variables of sex, income, education, age, and race were also included along with the three types of conservatism. A bivariate correlation of overall ideology with the three subcomponents of conservatism was first run to determine how clear-cut the groups are. While correlated, each type of conservative was distinct from each other (see Table

5). There were, however, limitations in this form of grouping. When Cronbach's Alpha tests were conducted, each conservative type did not have significant reliability: Economic Conservatives (0.596), Social Conservatives (0.760) and Securitarians (0.596). That being said, these models should allow us to tease apart any differences in the threat sensitivities of social conservatives, economic conservatives, and securitarians.

		Ideology	Securitarian Conservative	Econ. Conservative	Social Conservative
Ideology	Correlation (2-tailed)	1	.450**	.433**	.434**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
Securitarian Conservative	Correlation (2-tailed)	.450**	1	.500**	.465**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000
Economic Conservative	Correlation (2-tailed)	.433**	.500**	1	.353**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000
Social Conservative	Correlation (2-tailed)	.434**	.465**	.353**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	

Table 5: Bivariate Correlations Between Ideology and Conservative Type
NOTE: (* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$)

In Table 6, the dependent variable is an additive index of the social threats listed in Table 1. The regression results reveal an interesting difference between the conservative groups. With other variables controlled, social conservatism was not related to feeling threatened by social types of threats ($b = 0.005$, $se = 0.094$, $t = 0.050$, $p < 0.960$). On the other hand, securitarian conservatives displayed a significant and sizable positive relationship ($b = 0.290$, $se = 0.118$, $t = 2.456$, $p < 0.014$) and economic conservatives displayed a significant and even more sizable negative relationship ($b = -0.594$, $se = 0.123$, $t = -4.831$, $p < 0.001$). These results mean that the conservative group primarily responsible for the initial findings that conservatives overall are less threatened than liberal is economic conservatives. If political ideology is measured strictly

by social issues, liberals and conservatives are not different in degree of felt threat on social issues. This is a surprising finding, given that past literature that would predict a positive correlation. The increased moral purity often associated with social conservatives does not appear to have support in my findings. And if political ideology is measured by securitarian issues, conservatives are actually significantly more threatened than liberals. In other words, individuals who support the death penalty and reductions in immigration are more threatened by social issues than are individuals who oppose the death penalty and reductions in immigration. In this sense, my initial hypothesis was not totally incorrect; it merely needed to be applied to the kind of conservative whose policy positions most reflected a tendency to be threatened by social situations and particularly those involving what could be termed out-groups.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Significance
Sex	4.981	1.331	0.118	3.742	0.000
Income	0.263	0.195	0.047	1.348	0.178
Education	0.326	0.391	0.030	0.833	0.405
Age	-1.558	0.398	-0.128	-3.911	0.000
Nonwhite	3.372	1.523	0.072	2.214	0.027
Church Attendance	2.477	0.593	0.142	4.179	0.000
Securitarian Conservative	0.290	0.118	0.091	2.456	0.014
Econ. Conservative	-0.594	0.123	-0.171	-4.831	0.000
Social Conservative	0.005	0.094	0.002	0.050	0.960

Table 6: Multivariate Regression Between Conservative Type and Social Threats

Does the same pattern appear for asocial threats? To find out, I estimated a similar multiple regression model with asocial threats as the dependent variable (see Table 7). In these findings, social conservatism was not significantly related to feeling threatened ($b = 0.097$, $se = 0.106$, $t = 0.909$, $p = 0.363$). Securitarian conservatism on the other hand, was significantly positively related ($b = 0.290$, $se = 0.133$, $t = 3.719$, $p < 0.001$). This was even more so than when

compared to social threats. This figure, however, may be overrepresented in this regression. When other conservative groups are not included, this correlation becomes insignificant ($b = 1.41$, $se = 0.111$, $t = 1.270$, $p = 0.204$). Similar to the regression for social threats, however, economic conservatism was significantly and negatively related to asocial threats ($b = -0.906$, $se = 0.139$, $t = -6.541$, $p < 0.001$). As was the case for social threats, when it comes to asocial threats, economic conservatives are the group that leads to the conclusion that conservatives in general are more threatened by asocial stimuli.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Significance
Sex	3.995	1.499	0.084	2.665	0.008
Income	0.276	0.220	0.044	1.257	0.209
Education	0.312	0.441	0.025	0.708	0.479
Age	-1.461	0.449	-0.106	-3.257	0.001
Nonwhite	3.495	1.715	0.066	2.038	0.042
Church Attendance	3.043	0.668	0.155	4.557	0.000
Securitarian Conservative	0.495	0.133	0.138	3.719	0.000
Econ. Conservative	-0.906	0.139	-0.231	-6.541	0.000
Social Conservative	0.097	0.106	0.034	0.909	0.363

Table 7: Multivariate Regression Between Conservative Type and Asocial Threats

Finally, I conducted a parallel multiple regression analysis using disgust sensitive threats as the dependent variable and the results are present in Table 8. Social conservatism was not related to feeling threatened by disgusting concepts ($b = 0.054$, $se = 0.046$, $t = 1.172$, $p = 0.241$) and securitarian conservatism was significantly and positively related to feeling threatened by disgusting concepts ($b = 0.182$, $se = 0.058$, $t = 3.145$, $p = 0.002$). The result regarding social conservatism is quite surprising, as it contradicts literature associating moral purity with disgust. As with social and asocial threats, economic conservatism was significantly and negatively

related to feeling threatened by disgusting concepts ($b = -0.371$, $se = 0.060$, $t = -6.166$, $p < 0.001$). Put differently, economic liberals are instead more threatened by disgust. Although difficult to analyze, this finding may be a product of the pollution and medical threats in the disgust group. Economic liberals tend to not trust large corporations and the private sector to have the public interest in mind, prompting government intervention. This is especially the case for environmental regulations and the necessity for affordable medical care to prevent serious conditions. Both examples were included in the economic group (government arranged healthcare, welfare spending) and disgust threats (air pollution, water pollution, chronic conditions, communicable disease, becoming ill, being hospitalized, cancer, germs, heart disease, the flu). A pattern has also developed that is quite informative. Whereas conservatives on the whole appear to be significantly less threat sensitive across the board, more fine-tuned analyses reveal that individuals with conservative positions on economic issues are indeed less threatened by individuals with conservative positions on social issues, who are not more and no less threatened than individuals with liberal positions on social issues. Moreover, individuals with conservative positions on so-called securitarian issues (immigration, criminal punishment, gun rights, border walls, and foreign aid) are in some cases MORE threatened than those who adopt liberal positions on those securitarian issues. This is particularly true exactly when it comes to social threats- exactly where it might be predicted to have occurred. After all, individuals who want to restrict immigration, own guns and build a border wall could very well be responding to an enhanced feeling of being threatened.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Significance
Sex	2.272	0.652	0.109	3.486	0.001
Income	0.132	0.095	0.047	1.385	0.166
Education	0.179	0.192	0.033	0.936	0.350

Age	-0.787	0.195	-0.130	-4.033	0.000
Nonwhite	1.790	0.746	0.077	2.400	0.017
Church Attendance	1.384	0.290	0.160	4.768	0.000
Securitarian Conservative	0.182	0.058	0.116	3.145	0.002
Econ. Conservative	-0.371	0.060	-0.215	-6.166	0.000
Social Conservative	0.054	0.046	0.043	1.172	0.241

Table 8: Multivariate Regression Between Conservative Type and Disgust Threats

In addition to these results, descriptive statistics were also run for all conservative and threat types. These results are in Table 9 and reflect both the means and standard deviation of each variable.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Threats	42.216	21.071
Asocial Threats	48.694	23.785
Disgust Threats	18.908	10.458
Economic Conservatives	23.814	6.644
Social Conservatives	29.021	6.059
Securitarian Conservatives	26.591	8.401

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics of All Variables

Some of the control variables were also significantly related to felt threats. The most prominent of these were age, sex, race and church attendance (income and education were consistently unrelated to felt threat). Church attendance had a significantly positive correlation with overall fear. Whether the focus was on social ($b = 2.477$, $se = 0.593$, $t = 4.179$, $p < 0.001$), asocial ($b = 3.043$, $se = 0.668$, $t = 4.557$, $p < 0.001$), or disgust sensitive threats ($b = 1.384$, $se = 0.290$, $t = 4.768$, $p < 0.001$), individuals who attended church regularly had higher levels of felt

threat, once other factors in the model were controlled. Second only to church attendance was the impact of age. Our results show negative correlations with social ($b = -1.558$, $se = 0.398$, $t = -3.991$, $p < 0.001$), asocial ($b = -1.461$, $se = 0.449$, $t = -3.257$, $p = 0.001$), and disgust ($b = -0.787$, $se = 0.195$, $t = -4.033$, $p < 0.001$) threats. The older an individual is, the less overall fear they expressed in our study. Another significant control variable was that of sex. On average, females expressed higher threat sensitivity on social ($b = 4.981$, $se = 1.331$, $t = 3.742$, $p < 0.001$), asocial ($b = 3.995$, $se = 1.499$, $t = 2.665$, $p < 0.001$), and disgust sensitive fears ($b = 2.272$, $se = 0.652$, $t = 3.486$, $p < 0.001$). The last significant control variable was that of race. Those who identified their race as something other than white were more likely to feel threatened by social ($b = 3.372$, $se = 1.523$, $t = 2.214$, $p = 0.027$), asocial ($b = 3.495$, $se = 1.715$, $t = 2.038$, $p = 0.042$), and disgusting concepts ($b = 1.790$, $se = 0.746$, $t = 2.400$, $p < 0.017$). Overall, young, liberal, nonwhite, females who attend religious services regularly tend to feel more threatened.

Discussion

The data from this study initially do not offer support for the first and second hypotheses. When testing for correlation between ideology and social vs asocial fears, both sets of threats resulted in a negative correlation between conservative ideology broadly defined and threat type. On the 31 total items asked, liberals expressed greater felt threat than conservatives and on 30 of the 31 this relationship was statistically significant ($p < .05$). Only the threats of lightning strikes and heart disease did not produce a statistically significant relationship. These results indicate that conservatives are less threatened than liberals by social and asocial threats. As such, the results seemed quite inconsistent with hypothesis one.

The results also did not offer support for our second hypothesis, as the findings continued the trend reported regarding the previous analyses. The disgust sensitive items were significantly

and negatively correlated with conservatism. Liberals tended to have higher threat sensitivity toward disgust sensitive threats on all questions asked. This is especially surprising given the extensive literature on disgust sensitivity being positively correlated with conservatism (Inbar, et al., 2009; Hodson et al., 2013).

While these results do contradict a great deal of literature, one dataset does align with these findings. In a 2014 random sample study by Chapman University, researchers collected similar data to this research. They asked participants about both their political orientation and their threat level regarding fifty-seven different fears. Of these threats, only four were significantly positively correlated with conservatives, while nineteen were significantly negative. The other thirty-four had no significant difference (Chapman University, 2019). While this study did not exactly mirror the results of the Chapman University study, it was similar in that liberals overall tend to be more fearful of potential threats.

Though there was little support for my hypotheses, when conservatives were treated as a group, categorizing ideology along three distinct spectra- social issues, economic issues, and securitarian issues- yields a different and more promising conclusion. First, social conservatives generally did not display a tendency to be more threatened than social liberals. This pattern is especially surprising when it comes to disgust sensitive threats. As previously mentioned, high disgust sensitivity has been found to be associated with conservatism, and is especially apparent in social conservative policies, such as LGBTQ rights.

Securitarian conservative threat sensitivity on the other hand, produced results much more consistent with Hypothesis one. As defined before, securitarians are conservatives that emphasize and promote personal and national security interests. As operationalized here this group strongly supported building a border wall, gun rights, and the death penalty. Compared to

individuals opposing these particular issue positions (i.e., liberals on securitarian policies), individuals supporting these positions reported being more threatened by social threats. This finding is consistent with my first hypothesis to an extent. While social threats produced a positive correlation with securitarians, one of the regressions in this study suggests an even greater correlation with asocial threats. This result must be examined further, however, as no such correlation was found when not compared to other conservative types. If this latter regression is more accurate, this finding is consistent with this line of thought (public policies can do very little to assuage threats posed by spiders and enclosed spaces). Securitarian conservatives tend to prioritize in-group interests and they often seek to avoid social outgroups. It makes sense that such desires are related to greater tendency to feel social threats. Overall, further research is necessary to determine whether asocial threats are as positively correlated as one of the regressions suggests. Finally, the positive correlation to disgust sensitive threats is also consistent with expectations and may be explained by a heightened sense of moral purity and the opposition to outgroups (Inbar, et al., 2009). Securitarians may desire to sustain moral purity by keeping outside cultural norms and outsiders away. Given that the data was taken in 2018, this increased threat sensitivity by securitarians may be the result, in part, by former President Trump. Because his voting base was concerned with national and personal security issues, the president may have channeled and increased threat sensitivity overall by these individuals. By focusing on imminent perceived national threats, President Trump may have elevated fears by securitarians, resulting in the findings of this study.

Across all fear types, economic conservatives expressed significant negatively reduced felt threat. Put differently economic liberals, frequently called progressives, expressed the greatest level of felt threat. One way of interpreting the results is by viewing economic

conservatives-often called libertarians-as those who have few fears, and as a result see little need for government intervention and therefore prioritize limited government. They believe that individuals should have more rights to pursue their own interests without government or societal interference. Because of this, less emphasis is placed on restrictive social policy, as the breaking of traditional conservative societal norms are not a fear by this group. In short, economic conservatives may be less fearful due to a belief of free agency and the acceptance of society as a whole.

An additional note should be made, however, regarding the definition of social threats in this study. This study combined outsider group threats, as well as socially created threats in the operationalization of social threats. Research in this area has primarily focused on conservative attitudes towards social outsiders, rather than threats that would arise from social interaction. If a larger focus was put on outgroup threats (i.e., strangers or racial outsiders), my results may have been more in line with past literature.

With that, another limitation of this study was the low levels of reliability for the separate conservative types. While each conservative type was expected to score high on the Cronbach's Alpha tests, it should be noted that these low results may have impacted the findings of this study. Further testing should determine the extent of these differences in policy preferences, and where the lines between conservative groups should be drawn.

In sum, the findings of this study provide insight into the relationship between felt threat and political ideology. Conservatives defined broadly feel significantly less threatened than do liberals. This finding applied regardless of fear type. Upon further analysis, however, a more interesting story is in evidence. Economic conservatives are much less threatened than economic liberals across all types of threat: social, asocial, and disgusting. In contrast, social conservatives

are sometimes more threatened by social threats, and securitarian conservatives, with regard to social threats at least, are significantly more threatened than individuals who adopt liberal positions on securitarian issues.

With these findings in mind, future research should take special care when identifying the political ideology of its participants. Past literature focused on finding the intergroup differences in attributes and traits between conservatives and liberals. While this study intended to follow this pattern, the initial findings prompted a necessary investigation into why conservatives appeared to be less threatened. Because of a renewed focus on the intragroup differences within ideology, this research contributes towards the differences in conservatism as a whole. Although conservatives may agree on policy in many respects, the specific attitudes may be more stratified than general. This study provides a basis for further research on attitude differences between and within political ideology and the common factors that gives them identity.

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Appendix

Threat Sensitivity Questions

Please indicate how threatened you, personally, feel by each of the following items on a 0 - 10 scale with 0 being "not at all threatened" and 10 being "very threatened".

1. Being homeless
2. Extreme hunger
3. Being the victim of a hate crime
4. Being the victim of identity theft
5. Being the victim of sexual assault
6. Being unemployed
7. Dying
8. Murder
9. A reptile (e.g., snakes or lizards)
10. A stranger
11. An enclosed space
12. Animals/ mammals (e.g., dogs or rats)
13. Blood
14. Engaging in public speaking
15. Fire
16. Heights
17. Insects (e.g., spiders)
18. The dark
19. A chronic condition (e.g., arthritis or diabetes)
20. A communicable disease (e.g., tuberculosis or Measles)
21. A cyber attack
22. A drought
23. A flood

