

MESSAGE, MESSENGER, OR RECEIVER: EFFECTS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY  
AND PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS ON FOREIGN POLICY  
DECISION MAKING

by

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## ABSTRACT

This project investigates the effects of social identity and personal characteristics on foreign policy decision making. The two main US political parties, Democrats and Republicans, were used as markers for social identity. Participants were first instructed to read a scenario regarding a hostile fictional country followed by a speech regarding the same fictional country. Two speeches were created using a content analysis of speeches from Democrats and Republicans prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Participants were randomly placed into one of four conditions. One condition paired a Democratic-themed speech with a Republican Speaker, another paired a Democratic speech with a Democratic Speaker, the third paired a Republican speech with a Democratic speaker, and the last paired a Republican speech with a Republican speaker. Participants then answered a survey that asked about their policy preferences regarding the fictional country. Manipulated variables were found to be insignificant, whereas the personality characteristics presented different levels of significance based on models of regression analysis. The data indicates that personality characteristics may be a more salient predictor of foreign policy preferences than social identity.

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## INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW, AND THEORY

Understanding psychology is integral to the understanding of politics. Given that politics is an institution that involves the interactions between people, an understanding of human beings is vital to the understanding of politics.

One major concept within psychology with far reaching implications for the world of politics is Social Identity Theory. First outlined by Henry Tajfel in 1970, Social Identity Theory explains that the social groups to which a person belongs provide a sense of self as well as esteem for the individual. The present study is an application of Social Identity Theory to the concept of political science, and more specifically, foreign policy. Within Social Identity Theory, there exists many important concepts. The first of which is the ingroup. An ingroup is any group to which a person belongs. As discussed below, an individual's ingroup is a major force in the shaping of their opinions, especially when it comes to novel issues. A person will exhibit bias towards other members of their ingroup, trusting and valuing their opinions more, and favoring this group over outside groups. Ingroups can form based on shared interests, ethnic background, worldview, political party, or any other characteristic an individual may possess.

A second concept within Social Identity Theory is the outgroup. When an individual becomes part of an ingroup, they also create outgroups. An outgroup is any group that is outside of a person's ingroup. Members of an outgroup can be members of an opposing sports team, people who prefer a different entertainment source from the individual, supporters of an opposing political party; any person who exhibits an identity that is different from the individual may be part of the outgroup.

In various studies, Tajfel demonstrated that splitting individuals even by the simplest dimensions can create a sense of group solidarity that leads to bias, both for their "ingroup" and

against their “outgroup” (Tajfel, 1970). Further research out of Rutgers University demonstrates that when judging the level of independence of a speaker in crafting a speech that represents their viewpoints, participants both attributed more independence to and recalled more of the messages when they were delivered by a member of their ingroup (Wilder, 1990).

Further, a study in 1990 demonstrates that participants have a low level of persuasion that is equal for well-crafted messages as well as poorly crafted ones, when the speaker is a member of the outgroup (Mackie et al., 1990). This idea was further demonstrated by Mackie et al. in 1992. In this study, participants were exposed to both strong and weak arguments from ingroup and outgroup speakers. Half of the participants heard the position of the message before it was delivered, and half of the participants heard the position of the message after it was delivered. The study found that when participants had prior knowledge of the position of the ingroup speaker, they accepted the ingroup position regardless of the quality of the message. Outgroup messages had virtually no persuasive effects, even with strong messages. This study supports the idea that individuals will agree with a member of their ingroup with demonstrably less persuasion needed than they will for members of the outgroup (Mackie et al., 1992). Human individuals clearly develop ingroup bias when placed in groups, and will understand, listen more intently to, and be more persuaded by messages from a member of their in group than from a member of their outgroup.

American politics is split into two main groups -- the Democrats and the Republicans. Though there are many other parties, the vast majority of American voters typically vote for either the Republican or the Democrat in elections. In recent years, American politics has increased in its tension and polarization. We can see this in the interactions between politicians

like Donald Trump and Nancy Pelosi. Given the hyper-polarized climate of American politics, it seems very pertinent to study how Social Identity can affect political views.

For the purposes of this study, an individual's ingroup will be their political party, while their outgroup will be the opposing political party. Thus, for a participant who identifies as a Democrat, another Democrat will be part of their ingroup, and a Republican would represent their outgroup. The Democrats represent the left side of the political spectrum, while the Republicans represent the right side of the political spectrum.

A Swedish study published in 2020 demonstrated that candidates who were most loyal to their political party's views received more votes, showcasing how a political party can serve as a unifying force that becomes an ingroup for the citizens (Folke and Rickne, 2020). This is further supported in a study by Fielding et al., where researchers presented arguments for a carbon tax policy with four differentiations- whether the policy was endorsed by members of the Republican or the Democratic Party and whether the policy was promoted using Democratic or Republican values. The study found that participants of both parties had more positive responses and greater support for the policy when they believed that it was endorsed by members of the political party they supported, their ingroup. They also found that Democratic participants had more favorable responses to the policy when it was framed through Democratic values. This was not found for Republicans in the experiment (Fielding et al., 2019). This study showed that regardless of the specifics of a message, people are more likely to support it when it is delivered by a member of their ingroup. As Cohen (2003) demonstrated, participants' attitudes towards a policy, even when participants were instructed to process the policy in an effortful way, were almost exclusively formed by whether or not the policy was within the stated position of their political party. They were able to find that this factor was more significant than the objective

content of the policy, as well as the participants' beliefs. Additionally, Kam (2005) found that when participants were less aware of certain issues, the position of their party was a major heuristic used to form their opinion.

Party loyalty is the concept that members of a political party should uphold the ideals of that party, rather than emphasizing their own personal opinions. Parties all over the world seek to maintain a high level of party loyalty, making the party more unitary and coordinated in its messaging. A Canadian case study showed that political parties in Canada demand that candidates promote the party brand, relinquishing individual opinions and values in favor of centralized party messaging (Marland and Wagner, 2020). This shows the internal, ingroup functioning of political parties, which reward those that go along with party wishes and put pressure on those who dissent. In American politics, the hyper-polarized climate creates a great need for party loyalty. In fact, a study published in 2020 used virtual scenarios in which participants had to choose a candidate based on partisanship and policies deemed unconstitutional or undemocratic to demonstrate that participants valued other factors, such as partisan loyalty and political ideology, over certain democratic principles. In the study, only 13.1% of participants were willing to defect and vote against a candidate who shared their political party when that candidate violated democratic principles (Graham & Svulik, 2020). This study demonstrates that in the US, party loyalty is a highly valued concept, and paints American political parties as highly coordinated and cohesive.

A 1951 study investigating public opinion on foreign policy in the midst of a growing rift between the Democrats and the Republicans after years of a united front on international relations found that both general reactions to foreign policy and reactions to specific international issues were split along party lines in such a way that suggests that a sizable portion

of respondents were voting based on party rather than personal attitudes (Belknap & Campbell, 1951). What's more, a study published in 2020 demonstrated that the policy opinions of citizens changed immediately and to a great degree when the position of their party changed. This study jumped on the research opportunity that came with swift policy changes during the Great Recession in Denmark and found that those who self-identified as supporters of the parties that instituted these policy changes showed an increase in support for these kinds of policies, even though the policies were incongruent with the prior positions of the party and themselves (Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2020). These studies both demonstrate the large effects that Social Identity can have on the policy opinions of citizens.

In a study published in 2019, which analyzed the relationship between frequency of elite references and longitudinal public data regarding opinions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, finding that as the partisan cues became clearer and more available, and the conflict became more characterized by differences along party lines, citizens became more opinionated about the issue, suggesting that elite cues aided in the formation of opinions of citizens (Cavari & Freedman, 2019). Additionally, a survey conducted by US news outlets ABC and The Washington Post found that in 2013, 22% of Republicans in the US favored the US bombing of Syria in response to the use of chemical weapons by Bashar Al-Assad during the Obama administration. In 2017, it was found that 86% of Republicans favored the bombing that was being carried out in Syria for the same reason, only this time under the Republican Trump administration (Hohman, 2017). This provides further evidence that the political party of a leader supporting a policy is a big factor in whether individuals will support that policy.

Moreover, a study in 2008 investigated the effects of elite signaling in the media towards participant opinions of foreign policy events. The study found that messages from media outlets

with views congruent with the views of the participants affected the views of the participants in a way that was expected with Social Identity Theory, i.e., when a Democrat heard praise for Republican President George Bush from a left leaning media outlet, it increased their approval to a greater degree than when they heard praise from a right leaning outlet, and when a Democrat heard criticism from a left leaning media outlet, their approval was lower than for a right leaning media outlet. The data had the same patterns for Republican participants (Baum & Groeling, 2008). Clearly, Social Identity is a major factor in shaping the opinions of citizens, not only in domestic policy, but in foreign policy as well.

A study in 2018, however, found that participants' opinions on a novel foreign policy issue were more shaped by the opinions of foreign elites than the opinions of Democratic and Republican party elites (Guardino & Hayes, 2018). Additionally, a study on the foreign policy opinions of well-informed students in Turkey found that social identities such as religion were very impactful to results (Ciftci, 2013). These studies highlight that while political parties have a large effect on the opinions of their supporters, there are limitations to their power, as well as other social identities that may guide an individual's opinions on foreign policy. This makes a direct investigation on the extent that social identity through political parties influences foreign policy opinions very important.

Personality characteristics have also been shown to affect the decision making of citizens in regard to foreign policy. The effects of three psychological variables will be used in the study: Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), Distrust, and Need for Power.

The first psychological variable in the study right-wing authoritarian personality, or the RWA scale. A person with a higher level of authoritarian tendencies in their personality would be more likely to use force or violence to solve issues. This connection between Right-Wing

Authoritarianism and the use of violence is supported by a study by Faragó, Kende and Krekó (2019) on the rise of tension towards minorities in Hungary. The study investigates whether propensity for radical action or authoritarianism is a stronger predictor of inter-group violence. They find that those who justified violence against “symbolically” threatening outgroups were higher in Right-Wing Authoritarianism, and that Right-Wing Authoritarianism was much more strongly associated with justification of intergroup violence than propensity for radical action (Faragó et al., 2019). Right-Wing Authoritarianism is pertinent to the study because a person who scores higher on this scale may be more willing to use violence in their foreign policy decision-making. The hypothesis for this variable is that if level of authoritarian personality is higher, then willingness to use military force should increase as well.

The second variable is distrust. Meta-analysis by Margaret Hermann suggests that aggressive leaders are highly distrustful of others. (Hermann, 1980). Hermann also states that the distrust variable can also lead to higher suspicion in the motives and actions of others (Hermann, 2002). Distrust can make leaders assume negative ulterior motives for even the smallest of things, perceiving the actions of competitors or even just other people as potentially harmful towards them or their allies (Hermann, 2003). Additionally, a study out of the University of Central Florida in 2014 investigated the effects of two psychological variables, Need for Power and Distrust, finding that leaders with higher initiations into militarized interstate disputes had higher levels of distrust and Need for power, and found a significant main effect of distrust on the number of militarized interstate disputes (Smith, 2014).

The need for power is our final psychological variable. In psychological research, the need for power has been associated with an increase in aggression. A study by Dutton and Strachan (1987) demonstrated a connection between this need and use of aggression. The

researchers conducted a comparison of adult male wife assaulters, maritally conflicted non-assaulters, and satisfactorily married individuals using Thematic Apperception Tests (TATs) scored for the need for power. Dutton and Strachan found that those individuals who had exhibited abusive behaviors towards a spouse had a higher need for power. Additionally, when the stimulus image for the TAT displayed an ambiguous male-female relationship, those who had committed assault scored higher in need for power than the average of both control groups combined (Dutton & Strachan, 1987).

The research of David Winter further contributes to the support for this phenomenon. In a study of all elected presidents between George Washington and Ronald Reagan (vice presidents who became president were not included), researchers used initial inaugural addresses to score each president for motivations, including achievement, affiliation, and power. The study found a significant correlation between the power motivation of the president and entry into war (Winter, 1987). Another such study by Winter (1980) was done on African leaders. This study used verbatim responses to questions from reporters that constituted no less than 900 words of content. These responses were then scored for the power, achievement, and affiliation motives. The study then had experts on African affairs rate various leaders for “war disposition” and “activity.” Winter found a significant correlation between the power motive and war disposition for the African leaders (Winter, 1980).

Findings from Margaret Hermann support this phenomenon as well. In 1980, Hermann analyzed the personality characteristics of world leaders, finding a correlation between the need for power, nationalism, and distrust of others. These studies further support the concept that interpersonal differences manifest in foreign policy differences and that the need for power is a

significant factor in the use of aggression among leaders, making this variable quite pertinent to the present study (Hermann, 1980).

The present research investigates whether social identity or participant characteristics have a greater effect on level of aggression in foreign policy. I will seek to determine if knowing the political identity of a speaker will influence the participant's agreement with the message the speaker delivers, or if their psychological characteristics are better explanations for variance in the participant levels of aggression. This will contribute to the current research by providing evidence that either supports the power that political parties have shaping voters' opinions on foreign policy, or the limits thereof. Using this background, the Dependent variable to be assessed in the present study is Level of Aggression in the participant's foreign policy decision making. The Independent variables are the Political Identity of the Speaker, Political Identity of the Speech, Political Identity of the Participant, Right-Wing Authoritarianism, Need for Power, Distrust, and the participant's gender. Based on the present research, the following hypotheses are generated:

#### Social Identity

H0:  $\mu$  agreement with a message typically associated with the opposing party presented by a speaker from their party =  $\mu$  agreement with a message typically associated with the opposing party presented by a speaker from the opposing party.

H1:  $\mu$  agreement with a message typically associated with the opposing party presented by a speaker from the subject's own party >  $\mu$  agreement with a message typically associated with the opposing party presented by a speaker from the opposing party.

The participants are predicted to have a higher level of agreement with messages that come from members of their “ingroup,” their political party, even when the message represents the position typically associated with the opposing party.

The study also includes the three psychological variables that may also influence the dependent variable.

#### Right-Wing Authoritarianism

H0:  $\mu$  level of aggression in foreign policy for participants with low levels of RWA  $\geq$   $\mu$  levels of aggression in foreign policy for participants with high levels of RWA.

H1:  $\mu$  level of aggression in foreign policy for participants with low levels of RWA  $<$   $\mu$  levels of aggression in foreign policy for participants with high levels of RWA.

#### Need for Power

H0:  $\mu$  level of aggression in foreign policy for participants with low levels of Need for Power  $\geq$   $\mu$  levels of aggression in foreign policy for participants with high levels of Need for Power.

H1:  $\mu$  level of aggression in foreign policy for participants with low levels of Need for Power  $<$   $\mu$  levels of aggression in foreign policy for participants with high levels of Need for Power.

#### Distrust

H0:  $\mu$  level of aggression in foreign policy for participants with low levels of Distrust  $\geq$   $\mu$  levels of aggression in foreign policy for participants with high levels of Distrust.

H1:  $\mu$  level of aggression in foreign policy for participants with low levels of Distrust  $<$   $\mu$  levels of aggression in foreign policy for participants with high levels of Distrust.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants

137 participants took part in the study. All participants were at least 18 years old. Some participants were recruited through political science classes, where they were given extra credit for participation. The other participants were recruited through the UCF participant recruitment website, SONA. This program was selected for its ease of delivering the study to a wide array of participants and for its ease of use. Participants were awarded one credit point for their participation in the study.

### Materials

- Scenario: A paragraph scenario discussing a fictional country. (Appendix A)
- Political Party Representative Speeches: Paragraph-long speeches that present a position on the fictional country discussed in the scenario. (Appendices B and C)
- Dependent variable: A four-item scale used to determine the participant's position on the fictional country (Appendix D)
- Need for Power Scale: A four item assessment of the need for power, developed by Schönbrodt, F, & Gerstenberg, F. (2012) (Appendix E)
- Four-Item F Scale: A scale used to determine authoritarian tendencies in the personalities of the participants. Developed by Lane (1955). (Appendix F)
- Faith in People Scale: A scale used to determine the trust that participants have in other people. This questionnaire was developed by Rosenberg (1957). (Appendix G)

- Questionnaire: The actual questionnaire, which assesses the variables nPwr, Right-Wing Authoritarianism, and Distrust, as well as subjects' positions on the fictional country of Tajfalan. (Appendix H)

## Procedure

The necessary materials for the study were delivered using the UCF Qualtrics System. First, participants received a consent document, to which they had to respond with affirmation of consent if they were to continue with the study. Participants were then randomly exposed to one of two speeches that represent the two opposing positions toward a fictional country. These positions were based on those held by the major political parties just before the 2003 invasion of Iraq and were derived from a content analysis of speeches delivered in Congress between January and March of 2003. When the speeches were given to the participants, each speech was delivered with a stated speaker who was either Republican or Democrat, meaning that these two variables together created four conditions on their own. There was a condition in which participants were exposed to a speech representing the Republican position, and told that it was delivered by a Republican, a condition in which participants were given a speech representing the Republican position, but were told that it was delivered by a Democrat, a condition in which participants received a speech representing the position of the Democrats, and told that it was delivered by a Democrat, and a condition in which participants were exposed to a speech representative of the position of the Democrats, but were told that it was delivered by a Republican. After exposure to the speech, participants received a paragraph outlining a situation involving the fictional country mentioned in the speeches. After reading this, participants were given a survey that determined their opinion on which direction the US should take regarding the fictional country. This survey also included questions that investigate the psychological variables

and asks general demographics questions. I analyzed the main effects of speaker political identity, message political identity, and participant political identity, along with the interaction effects across the three factors. The effects of the psychological variables were also analyzed and reported as regression models.

### Research Design

In selecting the case that will be the basis for the study, I first reviewed speeches representing the positions of each party regarding several different countries, including China, India, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. I found that the speeches delivered in the months prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were a perfect case for my study, in that the two sides had opposite positions in rhetoric. While the vast majority of the Republican Party supported escalating tensions and using force against the Hussein regime in Iraq, most Democrats discussed the lack of an imminent reason to go to war. Fully opposing political positions were necessary for the study, because the speeches delivered to the participants needed to represent two distinct sides.

After gathering the speeches on the case of Iraq, I systematically examined the speeches to determine what the positions of each party were at the time, going over thirty speeches for each side to determine if there was a group consensus and to extract common arguments. The creation of speeches based on the two sides of the issue required a significant degree of group consensus. When it was determined that the vast majority of the speeches on both sides were in agreement as to what direction the United States needed to take in regard to Iraq, I then selected fifteen pages of representative speeches for each side to content analyze, looking for patterns and concepts within the speeches, and I used those comments and patterns to construct the speeches for the study.

### Ethical Considerations

Given that this study will involve the use of human participants, ethics is a matter that needs to be considered. I completed the CITI training course for conducting ethical behavioral research using human participants and I submitted the study to the Institutional Review Board to ensure that it meets the ethical standards of that board.

## RESULTS

A three factor ANOVA was conducted using the Political Identity of the Speaker, the Political Identity of the Speech, and the Participant Political Identity, and calculated the mean scores per cell for the 2x2x2 design. As can be seen in the ANOVA results Table I, the participant political identity ( $F=19.21$ ,  $DF=1$ ,  $p<.01$ ) is the only significant main effect. This means that the political identity of the participants is a strong factor in explaining participant use of aggression. The interaction effect between the political identity of the speaker, the political identity of the speech, and the participant political identity approaches significance ( $F=3.32$ ,  $p<.1$ ), allowing a consideration of the 2x2x2 (eight cells) mean scores for an investigation of the effect of Social Identity on the level of aggression of the participants. The eight mean scores can be seen in Table II below.

TABLE I: THREE FACTOR ANOVA

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	220.179 <sup>a</sup>	7	31.454	4.596	.000
Intercept	7545.611	1	7545.611	1102.515	.000
SpeakerID	5.149	1	5.149	.752	.388
SpeechID	2.158	1	2.158	.315	.576
ParticipantID	131.497	1	131.497	19.214	.000
SpeakerID * SpeechID	9.111	1	9.111	1.331	.251
SpeakerID * ParticipantID	13.932	1	13.932	2.036	.157
SpeechID * ParticipantID	33.735	1	33.735	4.929	.029
SpeakerID * SpeechID * ParticipantID	22.741	1	22.741	3.323	.071
Error	732.308	107	6.844		
Total	10576.000	115			
Corrected Total	952.487	114			

TABLE II: MEAN SCORES FOR THREE FACTOR ANALYSIS

Participant ID	Democratic Speaker		Republican Speaker	
	Democratic Speech	Republican Speech	Democratic Speech	Republican Speech
Democrat	8.32	8.90	7.60	8.96
Republican	10.29	10.40	13.38	10.00

*Cell values are mean scores for aggression in foreign policy decision making*

Social Identity should affect the data like this: when participants share an identity with the speaker, i.e., they belong to the same political party, we would expect their mean scores to shift in the direction of the speech given by the speaker, even if the content of the speech does not match the typical values associated with that party. For instance, the mean score for aggression should be higher for Democratic participants when the speaker is presented as a Democrat, but the speech has (undeclared) Republican themes (higher aggression) than when the speaker is Democratic, and the speech has Democratic themes (less aggression). An example of this is in the cell with a mean score of 8.9, where Democratic participants received a Democratic-labeled Speaker giving a Republican-themed speech. This score is higher than the mean for Democratic participants with a Democratic speaker and a Democratic-themed speech (M=8.32). The rest of the data, however, show a different story.

One example is Republican participants in the condition with a Republican speaker and a Democratic-themed speech, which has a higher level of aggression than participants in any other condition ( $M=13.37$ ), even though social identity would predict a shift in the opposite. The mean for this condition, if Social Identity had an effect on the levels of aggression in foreign policy, would be expected to be lower than the mean for Republicans who received a Republican-themed speech from a Republican ( $M=10.0$ ). Additionally, it was expected that participants who were Democrats would have a higher level of aggression when they received a Democratic-themed speech from a Republican than when they had a Republican themed speech from a Republican, because of the expectation that a Democrat would go against the Republican speaker's position. What we find in the data, however, is a lower mean level of aggression ( $M=7.6$ ) for Democrats in the Democratic Speech-Republican speaker condition than Democrats in the Republican Speech-Republican speaker condition ( $M=8.96$ ). The Democrats were going along with the message delivered by the Republican speaker. Overall, in the data, there is no consistent effect of Social Identity found across the mean scores. In fact, the majority of the means in the analysis do not fit the Social Identity expectation. This is discussed further in the Discussion Section.

Another interesting aspect of the ANOVA results is the significant interaction effect between the political identities of the participants and the political leanings of the speeches,  $F(1,107)= 4.93$ ,  $p=.03$ . Because of the significance of this interaction, further analysis was necessary to investigate the direction and details of this interaction effect. The mean scores for the interaction of Speech ID and Participant ID can be found in Table III.

TABLE III: MEAN SCORES: SPEECH ID BY PARTICIPANT ID

Participant ID	Speech ID	
	Democrat	Republican
Democrat	8.05	8.94
Republican	11.93	10.16

*Cell values are mean scores for aggression in foreign policy decision making*

To further investigate this interaction, I looked at the simple effects of Speech ID within Participant ID. For the Democratic Participants, the difference in means across the Speeches was not found to be significant,  $F(1,113)= 1.57, p=.212$ . Even though the difference was not statistically significant, it is worth noting the direction of the difference in those mean scores: when the speech made the case for more aggression, the Democrats averaged slightly higher aggression, as one might expect. The Republican participants, however, had the opposite pattern. There is a significant difference in means for Republican participants across the speeches,  $F(1,113)= 3.99, p=.048$ . This difference went in the opposite direction of what was expected given the speeches. When Republican participants heard a speech that emphasized restraint, they had a higher mean level of aggression ( $M=11.93$ ) than when they heard a speech that emphasized aggression ( $M=10.16$ ).

The data suggests a kind of knee-jerk reaction among Republican participants to hearing a speech that emphasized restraint; hearing the suggestion of restraint actually led to more aggressive behavior, not more restraint. When we return to the cell values for full 2x2x2 ANOVA in Table II, we see that the greatest value for level of aggression was for Republican participants hearing a Democratic Speech from a Republican Speaker. This knee-jerk reaction to increase aggression when restraint is emphasized might be explained by the recent hyper polarization of politics. Republican participants perhaps read the restraint-themed speech and knew that it did not align with their Republican values, even though it was purportedly given by a Republican speaker, and they went the complete opposite way, choosing to act with even more aggression than they otherwise might have.

With a lack of Social Identity effect in the ANOVA data, the question arises as to what other factors may be influencing subjects' aggression levels. Thus, we turn to an analysis of the other factors included in the study by looking at regression models, which are presented in Table IV below. While they show no significant effect on the data in the ANOVA analysis, the two manipulated variables (the political identity of the speech and the political identity of the speaker) are included in the regression analysis to further investigate their possible effects. The first model in Table IV is the fully specified model with all independent variables included: speaker political identity (Speaker PID), political identity of the speech (Speech PID), participant political identity (Participant PID), Level of Distrust (Distrust), Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), Need for Power (nPwr), and Participant Gender Identity (Gender).

TABLE IV:REGRESSION ANALYSIS

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
<u>Independent Variable</u>					
Political Identity of the Speaker	-0.04 0.46	-0.02 0.46	0.02 0.48	-0.11 0.48	0.09 0.46
Political Identity of the Speech	0.39 0.46	0.39 0.46	0.13 0.48	0.19 0.48	0.37 0.46
Participant Political Identity	0.15 0.15	0.15 0.15	0.43*** 0.15	0.36** 0.15	0.17 0.15
Level of Distrust	0.14 0.09	0.14* 0.09	-- --	0.25*** 0.09	-- --
Right Wing Authoritarianism	0.34*** 0.10	0.35*** 0.09	-- --	-- --	0.38*** 0.09
Need for Power	0.04 0.07	-- --	0.15** 0.07	-- --	0.05 0.07
Participant Gender Identity	-0.61 0.45	-0.64 0.45	-- --	-0.67 0.47	-0.61 0.46
<u>Test Statistics</u>					
R <sup>2</sup>	0.23	0.23	0.10	0.14	0.21
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.19	0.19	0.08	0.11	0.18
N	136	136	137	136	136

Table Key:

Cell values are the B coefficient followed by the Standard Error below it.

Asterisks are significance indicators as follows:

\*=  $p \leq .10$

\*\*=  $p \leq .05$

\*\*\*=  $p \leq .01$

The only significant variable in the full model is RWA (B= .338,  $p < .01$ ); higher Right-Wing Authoritarianism is a significant predictor of higher aggression levels in subjects. Every one-unit increase in Right-Wing Authoritarianism in a participant's personality leads to an average increase in their level of aggression in foreign policy of .338. This begins to indicate that the factors that make up a participant's personality may have a greater effect on their foreign policy decision making than their Social Identity. Overall, the fully specified model does a

modest job of explaining variance in subjects' levels of aggression; the  $R^2$  value (.23) indicates that nearly a quarter of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by these variables.

No other factor approaches significance in this particular model. One possible reason for this is the likelihood of multicollinearity between the independent variables. Several variables are significantly correlated, including RWA and Participant PID ( $B=.426, p<.01$ ). In the study, Republican participants were found to have higher RWA tendencies in their personality. Another significant correlation was found between RWA and Distrust ( $B=.365, p<.01$ ), meaning that those with higher levels of RWA were found to be less trusting of others. RWA was also correlated with nPwr ( $B=.302, p<.01$ ), meaning that those participants with higher levels of Right-Wing Authoritarianism in their personality also had higher levels of Need for Power. Finally, there was a slight correlation found between nPwr and Distrust ( $B=.239, p<.01$ ). Multiple correlations between independent variables in a study can produce multicollinearity, which can mask the effects of variables when included together in a regression model. For that reason, models other than the fully specified model were necessary for analysis. I ran many different versions of models with various combinations of the independent variables to look for patterns exhibited in the data. Examples of these additional models are also presented in Table IV and discussed below.

The second model includes Speaker PID, Speech PID, Participant PID, Distrust, RWA, and Gender. The Distrust variable approaches significance ( $B=.14, p<.1$ ), and the RWA variable is once again highly significant ( $B=.35, p<.01$ ). This means that for this model, the Distrust variable has a positive relationship with aggression; every increase of 1 unit for the Distrust variable produced an increase of .14 in the dependent variable, level of aggression. We find this same directionality in the relationship between RWA and the dependent variable, meaning that

as levels of Right-Wing Authoritarianism increase, the level of aggression increases in the participant's foreign policy choices. While gender is not significant in this or any of the models, the sign is consistent in all the models where it is included, and a bivariate regression model (not reported here) was significant, indicating that males tended to be more aggressive than females. Overall, this model is as valuable in explaining the aggression as the full factor model, with an  $R^2$  of .23, meaning that again, almost a quarter of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the variables in this model.

The third model highlighted the significance of nPwr and Participant PID, and included Speaker PID, Speech PID, Participant PID, and nPwr. Participant PID is highly significant ( $B=.434$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and nPwr was found to be significant ( $B= .153$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The relationship between Participant PID and the dependent variable is positive, indicating that those participants who are more Republican have higher levels of aggression in their foreign policy decisions. For every movement of one unit towards the Republican end of the PID scale, there is an increase in aggression of .434. NPwr also has a positive relationship with the dependent variable, meaning that as the level of nPwr increases in the participants' personalities, use of aggression in foreign policy increases as well. For every one unit increase in nPwr, there is an increase in aggression of .15. The  $R^2$  statistic of .10 for this model indicates that the model explains 10 percent of the variance in the dependent variable.

The fourth model highlights the significance of Participant PID and Distrust and includes Speaker PID, Speech PID, Participant PID, Distrust, and Gender. Participant PID is significant ( $B=.361$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and Distrust is highly significant ( $B=.245$ ,  $p<.01$ ). These relationships are congruent with other findings in the models: the relationship between PID and level of aggression is such that every one-unit shift towards the Republican end of the scale coincides

with an increase in aggression by .361. The positive relationship between Distrust and aggression indicates that a one unit increase in Distrust coincides with an increase in aggression of .245. The RWA variable is not in this model, and these two variables, Distrust and Participant PID, are generally significant only when RWA is not present. The effect of this model on the data is moderate. With an  $R^2$  of .14, 14% of the variance in level of aggression is explained by these variables.

The final model highlights the robustness of the RWA variable's significance across the data, and includes Speaker PID, Speech PID, Participant PID, RWA, NPwr, and Gender. RWA is highly significant ( $B=.378$ ,  $p < .01$ ): as RWA increases by one unit, level of aggression also sees an increase of .378 for this model. RWA is consistently the most powerful variable in explaining differences in levels of aggression in foreign policy decision making, and even when other variables that RWA is correlated with are present, the RWA variable holds its high level of significance. The effects of this model on level of aggression are not vast, though they are notable: with an  $R^2$  of .21, over one fifth of the variance in the dependent variable for this model can be explained by the variables present.

Even after controlling for RWA, nPwr, distrust, gender, and participant ID, the manipulated experimental variables in the study were not significant, meaning that they did not have a consistent effect on the dependent variable. The Participant PID variable is positively correlated with use of aggression and is the second most powerful explanatory variable behind RWA: Republican participants are more likely to use force in their foreign policy decision making than Democratic participants. Further, even though RWA and Participant PID are the strongest independent variables, they cannot be in the same model together because of their high correlation. Distrust also has a positive relationship with aggression, meaning that those who

have lower levels of trust in others are more likely to use force in their foreign policy decisions. The same relationship was found in RWA and nPwr, meaning that for all of the psychological variables, Distrust, Right-Wing Authoritarianism, and the Need for Power, the more a participant exhibits these characteristics, the more likely they are to use force against the fictional country. Finally, Gender was found to have a negative relationship with aggression, meaning that women are less likely to use force against the fictional country than men, though those findings are not statistically significant in the multi-variate models. Based on the findings, participant characteristics, including political party, gender, and psychological factors, have a greater effect on their decision making than their Social Identity.

## DISCUSSION

The findings above indicate that Social identity was not as important as originally expected in explaining variance in participant responses. One possible reason for this is the potential that participants were able to see through the speeches. This possibility is supported by the presence of a correlation between the Political Identity of the Speech and the Political Party the participant guessed that the speech represented. The correlation shows that a statistically significant portion of the participants were able to guess the actual party of the speech. If participants were able to see through the speeches, then the stated political identity of the speaker would likely not have as much of an effect on their perception of the speech, meaning that Social Identity would not be a factor.

Another possible reason for the lack of a visible Social Identity effect is the potential that participants came into the study knowing their party's values and usual policy vision and stuck to that message. The majority of participants in the study came from Political Science classes on a large college campus. Being young students studying political science, these participants may have been familiar with the position their party might hold. This may have still been an effect of Social Identity, as participants may have selected based on their social group's normal policy vision. This would explain certain aspects of the 8-cell mean scores, such as the tendency for Republican participants to have higher levels of aggression when the speaker was presented as a Democrat but the speech had Republican themes than when the speaker was presented as a Democrat and the speech had Democratic themes. It also helps explain the data found in the two-factor interaction analysis between the speech and the speaker, where it was found that Republicans had a knee-jerk reaction to the speeches: when they heard a speech that emphasized restraint, they had higher levels of aggression.

Another factor that might have had an influence on the lack of Social Identity effect on the present data is the reality of unequal Ns for the factors in the study. I set the survey site Qualtrics up to randomly assign students to one of the four treatment conditions, assuming that the randomization would result in at least somewhat similar cell sizes. However, this was not found to be the case. In addition, of the total number of participants in the study (137), 22 had to be dropped from the ANOVA analysis, due to their selection of Independent for their Political Identity. This left a total of 115 participants for the ANOVA analysis, which had eight different conditions. Finally, of that 115, a large majority of the participants were Democrats (88), leaving just 27 Republican participants. While ANOVA statistics are generally robust for unequal-n situations, these larger disparities may have had an adverse effect on the investigation into the effect of Social Identity.

A discussion of internal and external validity is necessary for further interrogation of the results. Internal validity is the extent to which a research study creates conditions in which their manipulations are the only differences between the experimental groups. This is achieved through randomization and minimization of confounding variables. Because the present research used identical conditions aside from the manipulations, and participants were placed into these conditions randomly, it can be assumed that the study had internal validity. There are problems, however, with external validity in the study, as there are with many experiments. Because participants were college-aged students, the participants used may not be a good representation of the country today in education level, income, age, and involvement with the political process. The data surrounding the psychological variables has a higher level of external validity, due to the fact that these characteristics are present throughout the population and have been found to correlate with the higher levels of aggression found in the study.

Because the manipulations were found to not have a great effect on participant choices, a discussion of how these manipulations could be improved is necessary. The speeches used in the study were simply text speeches. Further studies might include audio or video speeches, which may carry more weight when presented to participants than a text-only speech. Additionally, content analysis of a more recent conflict for use with the speeches may have been a better option. While the use of the Iraq war served its purpose in that it was long enough ago for participants to fail to guess the conflict that the speeches came from (only 22 correct guesses out of 137), it may have been too long ago for the positions of the parties to hold relevance in today's politics. Content analysis of more recent conflicts would be able to determine this.

Using the data found in the study, other factors showed greater effect on the level of aggression in participants than the manipulated variables. Participant characteristics had substantial effects on the dependent variable. Those who were more distrustful of others in the study had higher levels of aggression in their decision making than those participants who had low levels of distrust. Another pattern in the analysis of the data was the Need for Power, which increased along with aggression in foreign policy. The political identity of the participants also had an effect: Republicans were more likely to use higher aggression levels as a tactic to solve the situation with the fictional country.

While all of these variables showed significance throughout various models in the regression analysis, there was one variable that stood out: Right-Wing Authoritarianism. This variable was consistently significant and had the same direction across all models, with extremely low p values. This variable consistently and significantly correlated with levels of aggression in foreign policy decision making, showing that it may be one of the most important psychological factors in determining levels of aggression in foreign policy.

We begin to see here the major effects of participant psychological and political characteristics in determining level of aggression in foreign policy. While more research and more participants are needed to determine the true effects of social identity, the present data showcases that in the question of message, messenger, or receiver, the answer may be the receiver: characteristics of individuals are effective at predicting levels of aggression in foreign policy cases, and that finding has important implications in many areas such as democracy, intelligence, and the real-world of foreign policy making.

## APPENDIX A: SCENARIO

The United States is confronted with a decision regarding an important island country in the Pacific Ocean. The country of Tajfelia has been hostile to the United States and her allies in the past. More recently, the island nation has stated their commitment to preserving peace, though many are wary of that commitment. Historically, Tajfelia has tried to develop some specialized and dangerous military weapons. Recently, however, they have agreed to allow oversight of their weapons program by the United Nations and the United States. Tajfelia is ruled by an authoritarian dictator who has maintained a tight control on his citizens, curtailing free speech, press, and assembly, while also violating human rights extensively. While the nation does not currently have any clear capabilities of attacking the United States, there are concerns about their stockpile of weapons, their intentions toward their neighbors who are friendly with the US, and their capability of endangering US security interests.

## APPENDIX B: REPUBLICAN REPRESENTATIVE SPEECH

My fellow Americans,

Today we face a grave threat posed by the country Tajfalan. This evil and brutal regime wields unlimited power to repress free speech and violate the human rights of its citizens. They continue to act as a belligerent force, destabilizing the Middle East and jeopardizing US interests. It is my belief that any argument for options other than war with Tajfalan is severely misguided. We do not want to go to war, but Tajfalan has already set us down a path towards war with their escalatory behavior and stockpiling of weapons.

The other side is of the opinion that this war can be avoided and that there are still options for peace. In holding this opinion, my colleagues are actively preventing the United States from carrying out the necessary operations to ensure freedom and security for our citizens. If Tajfalan is allowed to continue without repercussions, we may see a breakdown of global security unseen since the expansion of Germany during World War II.

Appeasement is not the answer. If we want to stand up for the American values of freedom, democracy, and peace, it is with a heavy heart that I recommend that we meet this challenge with force. Tajfalan is a bully, and the only way to deal with a bully is to bully them back.

## APPENDIX C: DEMOCRAT REPRESENTATIVE SPEECH

My fellow Americans,

Today we face an important choice that will define who we are as a nation for many years to come. The regime in Tajfalan is both brutal and repressive. At this time, however, it is my firm belief that the threat posed by Tajfalan is not at a level that warrants the use of force. We must remember that war should always be a last resort, and until every other option is exhausted, I believe that we should not consider it. Many of our citizens understand firsthand the horrible toll that war can take on the innocents of both sides.

Another concern of mine regarding military intervention in Tajfalan is the economic toll it would take. If our country declares war, large segments of our budget will need to be diverted to carrying this out. This means that money will be taken out of our children's schools, the Medicare and Medicaid programs that assist our most vulnerable, and many other great government programs.

We must strive to set an example to the global community for how a peaceful democratic country should act. An escalation of tensions would not only tarnish our image as a peace-loving nation, setting a bad example for the world, it may also harm the relationships we have with our allies.

## APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

1. Would you support sending US ground troops into Tajfalan?
2. Would you support the US conducting air strikes and other similar operations in Tajfalan?
3. Would you support a US-military led removal of the regime in Tajfalan?
4. Instead of a military response, would you support peaceful economic, legal, and diplomatic methods for responding to Tajfalan?

## APPENDIX E: NEED FOR POWER SCALE

1. I enjoy bending others to my will
2. I am willing to use aggressive tactics to get my way
3. When people challenge me I want to put them down hard.
4. I want to twist others around my little finger.

Schönbrodt, F, Gerstenberg, F. (2012)

## APPENDIX F: FOUR-ITEM F SCALE

1. What young people need most of all is strict discipline by their parents.
2. Most people who don't get ahead just don't have enough will power.
3. A few good leaders could make this country better than all the laws and talk.
4. People sometimes say that an insult to your honor should not be forgotten. Do you agree or disagree with that?

Lane (1955)

## APPENDIX G: FAITH IN PEOPLE SCALE

1. Some people say that most people can be trusted. Others say you can't be too careful in your dealings with people. How do you feel about it?
2. Would you say that most people are more inclined to help others, or more inclined to look out for themselves?
3. If you don't watch yourself, people will take advantage of you.
4. No one is going to care much what happens to you, when you get right down to it.
5. Human nature is fundamentally cooperative.

Rosenberg (1957)

## APPENDIX H: FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

We would now like to ask you some questions about the policies that you think would be best in dealing with Tajfalan. Please answer each question by selecting a number on the scale from 1-5, with 1 being that you strongly oppose the policy and 5 being that you strongly support the policy.

1. Would you support sending US ground troops into Tajfalan? (Circle One)

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support

2. Would you support the US conducting air strikes and other similar operations in Tajfalan? (Circle One)

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support

3. Would you support a US-military led removal of the regime in Tajfalan? (Circle One)

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support

4. Instead of a military response, would you support peaceful economic, legal, and diplomatic methods for responding to Tajfalan? (Circle One)

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. No one is going to care much what happens to you, when you get right down to it.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. People sometimes say that an insult to your honor should not be forgotten. Do you agree or disagree with that?

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Human nature is fundamentally cooperative.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. A few good leaders could make this country better than all the laws and talk.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. If you don't watch yourself, people will take advantage of you.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Please answer option 5.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. Most people who don't get ahead just don't have enough willpower.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. Would you say that most people are more inclined to help others, or more inclined to look out for themselves?

1	2	3	4	5
Almost all people would help others	Most people would help others	An equal number of people would help others as would help themselves	Most people would look out for themselves	Almost all people would look out for themselves

8. What young people need most of all is strict discipline by their parents.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. Some people say that most people can be trusted. Others say you can't be too careful in your dealings with people. How do you feel about it?

1	2	3	4	5
Almost anyone can be trusted	Most people can be trusted	The same number of people can be trusted as cannot	Most people cannot be trusted	Almost no one can be trusted

Please respond to the following statements to the best of your ability, based on your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement.

1. I enjoy bending others to my will.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Rather Disagree	Rather Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I am willing to use aggressive tactics to get my way.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Rather Disagree	Rather Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. When people challenge me I want to put them down hard.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Rather Disagree	Rather Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. Please answer option 1.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Rather Disagree	Rather Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I want to twist others around my little finger.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Rather Disagree	Rather Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Finally, please answer each of the following questions on yourself and your perceptions of the study.

1. What gender do you identify as?

Man

Woman

Prefer not to say

2. What is your Age? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, or Independent

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strong Democrat	Not Strong Democrat	Independent, Near Democrat	Independent	Independent, Near Republican	Not Strong Republican	Strong Republican

4. In a brief sentence, please tell us what you think this study is trying to investigate.

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5. Regardless of the politician's stated party, do you think the speech you read sounded more like a Democrat or a Republican?

1	2	3
Democrat	Independent	Republican

6. Did the scenario remind you of any global conflict in history? If so, please tell us which one. \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX I: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

**Institutional Review Board**

FWA00000351  
IRB00001138, IRB00012110  
Office of Research  
12201 Research Parkway  
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

January 29, 2021

Dear Matthew Chin:

On 1/29/2021, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Simulated Foreign Policy Decision Making
Investigator:	Matthew Chin
IRB ID:	STUDY00002660
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent Form Complete, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Political Speeches on Fictional Country, Category: Test Instruments;</li> <li>• Questionnaire, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</li> <li>• Recruitment Announcement, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Request for Exemption Form, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Scenario on Fictional Country, Category: Test Instruments</li> </ul>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu). Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Katie Kilgore  
Designated Reviewer

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