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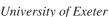
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What Are You Afraid of? Authoritarianism, Terrorism, and Threat

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Research on authoritarianism has provided conflicting findings on its relationship with threat. Some studies indicate that in the face of heightened threat individuals with stronger authoritarian predispositions express more right-wing and illiberal preferences; others suggest that it is individuals at the other end of the continuum, with weak authoritarian dispositions—libertarians—who are most likely to change and express such attitudes. Extant efforts to reconcile the differences have been unsatisfactory. We offer a new perspective in which both processes may occur simultaneously. Higher authoritarians are responsive to elevated "normative threat," characterized by dissatisfaction with established parties and their leaders and perceptions of "belief diversity," while libertarians respond with more right-wing and illiberal preferences to heightened physical and personal threat, such as from terrorism, which does not affect high authoritarians. We suggest different contexts in which normative threat and personal threat vary, and we are thus likely to see change either in individuals toward one or other end of the authoritarian continuum or among both. Drawing on data in the quasi-experimental context of the 2017 general election in Britain, during which there were two terror attacks, we confirm this pattern in a setting in which both personal and normative threat were elevated.

KEY WORDS: authoritarianism, terrorism, threat, illiberalism

What makes individuals willing to forsake liberal or moderate preferences in favor of less permissive, more conservative, alternatives? This question is of perennial interest to social science, particularly in an era characterized by a myriad of threats, from terrorism and pandemics to the economic and cultural concerns prompted by migrant flows. Yet there are competing claims in extant literature in which the role of authoritarianism seems to wax and wane. On the one hand, leaders like Donald Trump may appeal precisely because they foment a sense of threat from immigration to America's global dominance that activates support from individuals with authoritarian predispositions (Feldman & Stenner, 1997). On the other hand, increased threat can have the greatest effects on individuals at the opposite end of the continuum—those low in authoritarian predispositions, or "libertarians" —causing

¹We follow Stenner (2005; see also Flanagan and Lee 2003) both in using the term "libertarian" for low authoritarians and employing "libertarian" and "authoritarian" as shorthand rather than to suggest a dichotomy in which all individuals belong in one or other group. We acknowledge that "libertarian" has been used somewhat differently by other authors (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2019). Hetherington and Weiler (2018) prefer "fixed" [worldview] for authoritarians and "fluid" for libertarians but this is problematic given that, as we will demonstrate, the influence of both worldviews is fluid contingent on type of threat.

them to favor more aggressive and conservative policies to tackle the threat. This dynamic seemed to occur after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Hetherington & Suhay, 2011).

The puzzle is at the heart of problems of democratic backsliding because it addresses the question of which kinds of individuals—libertarians or authoritarians—are more likely to compromise liberal democratic values in the face of threats. Efforts to resolve the competing claims have pointed to factors like differences in how threat is defined (Feldman, 2013; Hetherington & Suhay, 2011; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009), variation in context (Feldman, 2013), and variation in the effects of emotions (Vasilopoulos et al., 2018). Yet, we will argue, they have fallen short because they do not consider that rather than being mutually exclusive (Claassen & McLaren, 2021) perceptions of distinct types of threat may affect authoritarians and libertarians differently, while also occurring simultaneously.

Like Hetherington and Suhay (2011), who examine the impact of 9/11 on conservative shifts in preferences in the United States, we draw on a quasi-experiment during the 2017 U.K. general election, when terrorist attacks occurred in Manchester (on May 22, 22 people were killed and 59 injured in a suicide bombing at the Manchester Arena) and on London Bridge (June 3, seven people died and 48 were injured) in the second half of the campaign. We show that the seemingly competing theories of the relationship between authoritarian predispositions and threat are both valid. On the one hand, libertarians express more conservative attitudes in response to a terrorist attack. This echoes the findings of Hetherington and Suhay (2011, p. 548), who argue that the physical threat from terrorism is what is most salient to individuals. On the other hand, perceptions of *normative* threat, characterized by dissatisfaction with established authority or perceptions of societal divisions and "belief diversity," change most among authoritarians after a terrorist attack, and perceptions of normative threat also activate their authoritarian predispositions, in echoes of Feldman's (2003) and Stenner's (2005) claims (see also Feldman & Stenner, 1997). Thus, whose attitudes change will depend on whether, and to what extent, there are shifts in perceptions of normative or physical threat.

Previous Research

Previous research has examined terrorism's impact on attitudinal and behavioral norms in several democracies, finding that it increases turnout in elections, increases right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), and leads to a general conservative shift in vote preferences (e.g., Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006; Linden et al., 2018), as well as intensifying hostility toward outgroups (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006), reducing support for liberal approaches in specific policy areas such as immigration and civil liberties (Finseraas et al., 2011; Vasilopoulos et al., 2018), and increasing backing for torture (Linden et al., 2018). Similarly, in various other political contexts terrorist threat has been shown to render individuals: hostile toward immigrants (Huysmans, 2006; Kalkan et al., 2009); narrower and more exclusive in national identities (Schildkraut, 2002); in favor of stricter border controls (Kam & Kinder, 2007; Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009); more willing to trade off civil liberties for security (Davis & Silver, 2004; Huddy et al., 2005); and broadly more conservative in attitudes (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2017; Lavine et al., 2002). The mechanisms that underpin such outcomes are, however, unclear. This is in part because of inconsistent theorizing and findings about the impact of threat on the expression of authoritarian preferences.

Authoritarianism and Threat

Three theories advance different mechanisms for how authoritarianism and threats influence attitudes, each of which has different implications for which individuals respond to threat with a

²In addition, shortly before the announcement of the election, on March 22, an attack occurred near the Houses of Parliament involving a vehicle being driven into pedestrians and the stabbing of a policeman.

conservative shift in preferences. First, in Altemeyer's (1996) account of the authoritarian personality, authoritarian attitudes are socially learned, with authoritarians chronically threatened by social nonconformity that is not sanctioned by legitimate authority. Different contexts will affect the extent to which authoritarian attitudes are socially learned, for example, 1930s Germany versus 1980s Germany, and levels of authoritarianism will rise when there are "violent societal threats" (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 92), but authoritarianism itself is a constant influence on the expression of views and attitudes such as right-wing leader and policy preferences: Individual-level variation in perceptions of threat does not moderate that relationship.

Second, Feldman and Stenner (Feldman, 2003; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 2005) regard authoritarianism as a predisposition rather than a personality trait and as a desire for social cohesion that is activated, not increased, by perceptions of heightened "normative threat." Normative threat is elevated by dissatisfaction with major parties and major party leaders, violations of established societal norms, or signals of social dissensus such as diversity in public opinion (see also Marcus et al., 1995; Roccato et al., 2014). Authoritarians favor restrictive and conservative policies when perceiving greater normative threat, while libertarians favor difference and diversity and their attitudes either become more tolerant and liberal or do not change, that is, the gap between authoritarians and libertarians grows because threat increases the expression of conservative preferences only among individuals who score high on authoritarianism (e.g., Stenner, 2005, p. 67; see also, Castano et al., 2011).

Third, Hetherington and coauthors (Hetherington & Suhay, 2011; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, 2018) contend that the direction of the influence of authoritarianism under increased threat, such as from terrorism, is the opposite. When threat is low, differences between authoritarians and libertarians manifest themselves in attitudes like more conservative policy preferences because of authoritarians' constant watchfulness and desire for social structures that ameliorate potential dangers. But with elevated threat libertarians also begin to hold relatively conservative preferences, while authoritarians change little if at all because threat is already built into their worldview. As a result, the gap between authoritarians and libertarians is reduced because threat increases conservative expression only for libertarians.

There have been efforts to account for these different mechanisms, but none is satisfactory. They include critiques of RWA as a flawed conceptualization and measure of authoritarianism (e.g., Feldman, 2013; Stenner, 2005), differences in dependent and independent variables (e.g., Roccato et al., 2014, p. 22, fn 4), the limitations of survey data (Claassen & McLaren, 2021, p. 678), problems with conceptualizations of "threat" (e.g., Feldman, 2013, p. 57; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, p. 116), and differences in responses to emotions (Vasilopoulos et al., 2018). But none fully tests their claims. A more satisfactory way forward, which we test here, is to examine Hetherington & Suhay's (2011) claim that, "physical threats, not just normative ones, are relevant to authoritarianism" (p. 548). In order to do so, we begin by theorizing how physical threat and normative threat could have heterogeneous effects on the preferences of authoritarians and libertarians.

Theory and Hypotheses

Table 1 begins by presenting three possible scenarios based on perceptions of distinct combinations of physical threat and normative threat following a terrorist attack, with the status quo

³Stenner (2005) argues that authoritarian preferences need not always be right wing; however, most studies, including Hetherington and Weiler's (2009, 2018), find a correlation with right-wing and conservative preferences (see Jost et al., 2017).

⁴These debates focus on issues such as the conflation of threats to personal autonomy and threats to authority rather than on categorizations of threat such as realistic/symbolic or material/cultural because these categories do not directly map onto the distinctions relevant to authoritarianism; e.g., libertarian concerns about autonomy may cut across such distinctions as material/cultural threats. For example, with respect to areas such as immigration, "immigrants pose a clear threat to the order that authoritarians crave, above and beyond the threats of criminal activity, resource-based threats and threats to important symbols of Britishness" (McLaren and Johnson 2007, p. 724).

Table 1. Four Scenarios: Who Becomes More Conservative—Libertarians or Authoritarians—When threatened?

	Normative Threat					
Physical Threat	No Change	Increase				
No change	Scenario 1	Scenario 4				
	Neither	Authoritarians				
	(e.g., Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; Stenner, 2005)	(e.g., Claassen & McLaren, 2021; Stenner, 2005)				
Increase	Scenario 2	Scenario 3				
	Libertarians	Authoritarians and Libertarians				
	(e.g., Hetherington & Weiler, 2009)					

represented by Scenario 1. First, what happens to perceptions of terrorist threat after a terrorist attack and with what effects? Some previous research suggests that although perceptions of terrorist threat are likely to change most for those higher in authoritarian predispositions (e.g., Butler, 2013), it is libertarians who are most likely to *respond* to those changes in perceptions of terrorist threat with a conservative shift in preferences (Hetherington & Suhay, 2011).

Second, what of normative threat? Stenner (2005, p. 69) suggests that under normal conditions authoritarians are less likely to perceive high normative threat—but that they are also hypersensitive to changes with implications for the threat. Similarly, Feldman and Stenner (1997) argue that "political threats are especially salient to authoritarians" (p. 765). What does this imply for normative threat after a terrorist attack? It suggests that whether or not a terrorist attack undermines the established norms that authoritarians care most about will depend on the extent to which it signals a failure of authority or evokes fear of societal dissensus. This in turn may be influenced by the unity of elite and public response. Thus, a terrorist act like 9/11 could raise perceptions of terrorist threat but leave unchanged or *diminish* perceptions of normative threat among authoritarians due to the signals of unity and social consensus that followed: Republicans and Democrats united to sing "God Bless America" on the steps of the Capitol, George W. Bush's approval rating rose to historic highs, and trust in government increased to levels unseen in decades. In these ways, terrorist attacks could contribute to heightened physical threat but leave unchanged or reduce normative threat. We would then see libertarians expressing more right-wing preferences while authoritarians' attitudes are unaffected. This is Scenario 2 in Table 1.

In contrast to the United States after 9/11, in the United Kingdom in 2017 the terrorist attacks at Manchester and London Bridge were followed by a *lack* of national unity. There was no parallel in the United Kingdom to the U.S. Congress' show of unity; instead, opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn used the attacks as an opportunity to highlight party differences, linking the attacks with misguided British foreign policy and cuts to police funding. The British press in turn condemned Corbyn for his past relationships with organizations like the Irish Republican Army (IRA) (Shipman, 2017). Thus, the attacks in the United Kingdom in 2017 could have contributed to heightened physical threat *and* to heightened normative threat among authoritarians, especially if they are chronically sensitive to failed political leadership and discord (Stenner, 2005). Under this scenario, libertarians respond to the change in terrorist threat with more conservative preferences, as theorized by Hetherington and Suhay (2011); but at the same time higher authoritarians respond to heightened normative threat with stronger expressions of their authoritarian predispositions, as theorized by Feldman and Stenner (1997). This is Scenario 3 of Table 1.

Finally, Scenario 4 of Table 1, in which normative threat is elevated and physical threat is at normal levels could represent the longer-term impact of a terrorist attack as the direct threat decreases. Hetherington and Weiler's (2009, pp. 116–119) critique of previous experimental work on

authoritarianism implies that they view it as only examining scenarios such as Scenario 4, in which normative threat levels are raised while physical threat is at normal levels and unchanging.

In this article, given that our focus is on the Manchester bombing and the 2017 election in the United Kingdom, we are limited to hypothesis testing in the context of Scenario 3—elevated physical and normative threat. If our hypotheses are supported, however, the findings have implications for existing research on the relationship between terrorist attacks and perceptions of threat under scenarios such as $9/11^5$ —and for the need to be far more sensitive to the threats being manipulated in experiments or to the contexts in which the research is taking place in observational research.

We test four hypotheses pertaining to which kinds of individuals express more conservative preferences under changing conditions of threat and why. First, given authoritarian sensitivity to danger (Altemeyer, 1996; Linden et al., 2018; Stenner, 2005), we expect greater change in higher authoritarians' perceptions of the threat from terrorism after an attack (even though this is not the kind of threat that we argue ultimately affects their attitudes). We therefore begin by testing the hypothesis that:

H1: Perceptions of terrorist threat increase for everybody, but increase most among authoritarians, after a terrorist attack.

Hypothesis 1 indicates that authoritarian predispositions moderate the impact of a terrorist attack on perceptions of terrorism as a threat.

Second, we examine the hypothesis that under conditions such as in the United Kingdom in 2017, when failure to prevent an attack is accompanied by elite disunity, terrorist threat heightens distance from established parties and leaders, particularly among authoritarians, who are most sensitive to changes with implications for normative threat. This leads us to test:

H2: Heightened terrorist threat raises the normative threat levels of authoritarians more than libertarians.

Hypothesis 2 implies that authoritarian predispositions also moderate the (mediating) effects of terrorist threat on perceptions of normative threat.

The third hypothesis we examine is a straightforward expression of the Hetherington and Weiler (2009) and Hetherington and Suhay (2011) accounts of how authoritarian predispositions interact with perceptions of threat to affect preferences:

H3: Perceptions of greater terrorist threat elicit expressions of more conservative preferences among libertarians; they do not affect the preferences of authoritarians.

Hypothesis 3 postulates a negative interaction between perceptions of terrorist threat and authoritarian predispositions, implying that the preferences of libertarians are closer to those of authoritarians. But we also test:

H4: Along with any effects of terrorist threat, greater normative threat activates authoritarian predispositions, with authoritarians expressing more conservative preferences while libertarian attitudes are either reinforced or unaffected.

⁵We present analysis and discussion of the ANES 2000–2004 panel in Table S41 in the online supporting information, with results that are consistent with our theory and with Scenario 2.

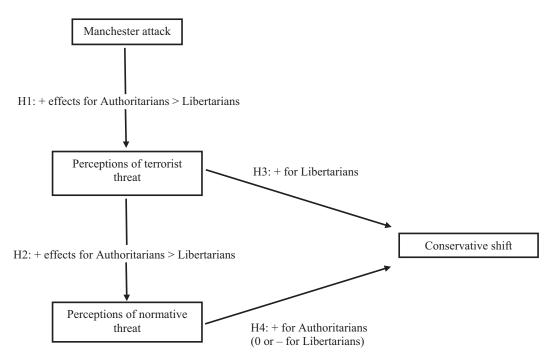


Figure 1. Theorized relationships and hypotheses.

This hypothesis examines the Feldman and Stenner theory (Feldman, 2003; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 2005). It implies a positive interaction between perceptions of normative threat and authoritarianism, indicating that the attitudes of authoritarians and libertarians diverge rather than becoming closer. Figure 1 illustrates the theory outlined and the relationships pertaining to Hypotheses 1 through 4.6

In addition to the lack of evidence on the association between terrorist threat and normative threat, previous research leaves open whether any change in threat after a terrorist attack strengthens, weakens, or leaves unchanged the *relationship* between normative and terrorist threat and authoritarian predispositions, as opposed to simply elevating perceptions of normative or terrorist threat. While neither Hypothesis 3 nor Hypothesis 4 postulates such an interaction, we test that assumption below.

Data

The ideal setting in which to test the hypotheses is a context in which terrorist threat is likely to be high and to have changed: We use a quasi-experiment contained in the British Election Study (BES) panel (Fieldhouse et al., 2017) to examine perceptions of threats and their effects on authoritarians and libertarians before and after the Manchester bombing on May 22, 2017. Fieldwork for Wave 12 of the BES started on May 5, 2017 and ended on June 7, 2017, the day before polling. The survey used a daily rolling cross-section approach in which a different random subsample (of roughly 1,000) of the panel was interviewed each day of the campaign. Of 34,464 interviews, 16,411 (48%) took place after the attack on

⁶It excludes the control variables and other paths we examine in robustness checks, such as a direct relationship between the Manchester attack and a conservative shift.

May 22. We would ideally look at within-subject change, but the survey design only permits comparison between subjects interviewed before or after the "treatment" of the Manchester bombing. Nevertheless, it offers the advantage of external validity provided by a context in which a terror attack had taken place.⁷

We use the BES data initially to look at the impact of the Manchester attack on perceptions of terrorist and normative threat (Hypotheses 1 and 2).

Terrorist Threat

We operationalize terrorist threat as identifying terrorism as the most important issue facing the country; that is, we assume that identifying rather than not identifying terrorism as the most important issue captures variation in physical threat. This is consistent with Huddy et al. (2002) who argue, "there is something personally disturbing, immediate, vivid, and frightening about the threat of terrorism. It raises the spectre of one's mortality, and elicits pervasive feelings of insecurity and fear of *physical* harm" (p. 487, our italics).

We check the validity of the measure in two ways. First, we examine the relationship between a respondent's distance from Manchester, or London if interviewed after the June 3 attack, and identifying terrorism as the most important issue in Table S1 in the online supporting information. Proximity to Manchester and London made no difference before the attacks but was associated with a greater likelihood to identity terrorism as the most important issue after. Second, in Tables S2–S4, we use survey data from ICM to compare the most important issue measure with a question asking "How concerned are you personally about you or a family member being the victim of a future terrorist attack in Britain?" This shows a significant association: In the postelection survey, the probability of a respondent identifying terrorism as the most important issue if they answered "not at all concerned" to this question was close to zero, whereas it was up to 16 times greater for a respondent who was "very concerned" about the personal threat of terrorism. These two checks indicate that the measure is a reasonable indicator of perceptions of physical threat.⁸

Perceptions of terrorist threat were substantially different after the Manchester bombing: Prior to Manchester, 40% of respondents named some aspect of the EU or Brexit as the most important issue facing the country; 12% answered terrorism, security, or the securitized issue of immigration (Huysmans, 2006), e.g., "the Islamification of Europe," or "we need to close the borders." After the Manchester bombing, the proportion of respondents identifying Europe as the most important issue fell to 26%, while 33% named terrorism or related issues, an increase of almost 300%. As these are changes between subjects, we cannot be entirely certain that this increase was a consequence of Manchester. But analysis in Table S5 in the online supporting information shows the pre- and postsamples are balanced on a range of observable variables, in addition to the evidence that proximity to Manchester (or London) was associated with the probability of identifying terrorism as the most important issue only after the bombing.

Normative Threat

Stenner (2005) describes normative threat as emanating from "political leaders proving unworthy of our trust" (p. 12) and Stenner and Haidt (2018) as "disrespect for leaders and

⁷We also replicate our findings with additional survey data gathered by ICM immediately after the Manchester bombing—see below.

⁸This interpretation of the question is also consistent with Dolan and Ilderton's (2017) claim (quoting Baumgartner and Jones) that, "At the individual level, salience can be understood as a kind of relevance: 'people translate 'situations' into 'problems' when they think the situation is relevant to their wellbeing'" (p. 247).

 $^{^9}$ As further evidence, we compared BES Wave 11 and Wave 12 panel responses on the most important issue. Respondents were significantly more likely to change their answer from Brexit to terrorism (p < .001) or immigration (p < .001) than from terrorism or immigration to Brexit after the Manchester bombing than before.

institutions, authorities unworthy of respect, and lack of conformity or consensus in group norms and beliefs" (p. 186). Stenner (2005) uses "the (average of the absolute) distances between respondents' placements of themselves and each of the major political parties and leaders on the standard liberal-conservative ideology scale" (p. 40) as a proxy for the extent to which established authorities are worthy of respect and trust. We employ her index, using the absolute differences between the respondent and their placements of the two major parties in the United Kingdom, Conservative and Labour, and their leaders Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn on an 11-point left-right scale (Cronbach's alpha = .90).

In Section 2 of the online supporting information, we assess the construct validity of this index. We show that increased normative threat on the measure is associated with perceptions that policy performance is both worsening and would be little different if the opposition party was in power, as well as with dissatisfaction with democracy in the United Kingdom, indicating that it captures a lack of respect and trust in the prospective parties of government and their leaders quite well. It is also barely correlated with the measure of terrorist threat (.03). In addition, Section 6 of the online supporting information replicates the analysis with other possible indicators of normative threat, including: affect toward the major parties and leaders; policy distance; an index of cognitive and affective distance from the parties, their leaders, and their policies; distance on immigration policy only; and dissatisfaction with U.K. democracy. None evinces a different pattern of results.

Authoritarianism

Subsamples of respondents in the BES were asked the standard four questions that indicate authoritarian predispositions (Feldman, 2003) by gauging preferences for children to be obedient, respect elders, have good manners, and be well-behaved over alternatives such as independence, in Waves 7 (April–May 2016), 10 (November–December 2016), and 11 (April–May 2017) of the panel. We recoded them on a 0 (*libertarian* or *least authoritarian*) to 1 (*most authoritarian*) scale (see Table S42 in the online supporting information for operationalization of variables). The data show that authoritarianism is stable over time, particularly given measurement error, with correlations of .74 to .76 between the three waves and mean scores that barely change of .43, .44, and .45. We use the Wave 10 measure (Cronbach's alpha = .68), both because it allows us to look at a wider range of dependent variables and because the interviews took place before the attack at Westminster Bridge in March 2017; we therefore avoid preinterview effects of a recent terrorist attack on authoritarianism.¹⁰ The number of respondents who answered the Wave 10 authoritarianism questions and the Wave 12 survey questions used to construct the normative threat index described below was 4,136, 48% after the Manchester attack.

To test Hypotheses 3 and 4, we turn to the relationships between perceptions of terrorist and normative threat, authoritarian predispositions, and seven dependent variables.

Dependent Variables

Our dependent variables are designed to gauge a broad range of preferences examined in previous research on authoritarianism. They get at many of the same kinds of preferences as Hetherington and Weiler (2009), for example, toward immigration and the desire for strength in foreign policy, while also going beyond them as Roccato et al. (2014) recommend. The logic of these tests is not that there is necessarily a direct link with terrorist threat but that a terrorist attack may reconfigure policy

¹⁰The substantive implications of the models do not change if we use the Wave 7 or Wave 11 measures of authoritarianism (see Section 7 of the online supporting information).

priorities or strengthen ingroup identity and outgroup hostility, resulting in a broad conservative shift whose ripples impact widely.

The dependent variables, question wordings, what they are intended to capture, and examples of previous research on their relationships with authoritarianism are:

Dependent Variable	Conservative Shift	Examples of Previous Research
1. Left-right ideology "Where would you place yourself on the following scale?" 0 = left, 10 = right	More right-wing	Bizumic and Duckitt (2018); Hetherington and Weiler (2009); Lavine et al. (2002)
2. Support for a right-wing over a left-wing leader "Who would make the best Prime Minister?"	More support for right-wing leader	Bizumic and Duckitt (2018); Ludeke et al. (2018)
3. Identifying as British rather than European "Where would you place yourself on these scales?" 1 = not at all, 7 = very strongly Difference in answers to "Britishness" and "Europeanness"	Narrowing of group identities such as nationalism	Asbrock and Fritsche (2013); Bizumic and Duckitt (2018)
 4. Prioritize controlling immigration over access to EU single market "As Britain negotiates its future relationship with the EU, is it more important for the UK government to protect Britain's access to the single market or to gain full control of immigration?" 0 = access to single market, 10 = control immigration 	Support for anti-immigration measures	Claassen and McLaren (2021); Dunwoody and McFarland (2018)
5. Disagree government should fund more public housing "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The government should fund the building of new council housing" 1 = strong disagree, 5 = strongly agree	Support for restricting benefits and rights to disadvantaged groups	Moghaddam and Vuksanovic (1990); Rickert (1998)
6. Gone too far in protecting environment "Do you think that each of these has gone too far or not far enough? Measures to protect the environment" 1 = not gone nearly far enough, 5 = gone much too far	Unsympathetic to environmentalism	Peterson et al. (1993); Stevens and Vaughan- Williams (2017)
7. Support for policy of keeping nuclear submarines "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Britain should keep its submarines with nuclear weapons" 1 = strong disagree, 5 = strongly agree	Favor military strength/ spending	Altemeyer (1996); Feldman and Stenner (1997); Hetherington and Suhay (2011)

In order to ease comparison, all the dependent variables are rescaled from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the most conservative response.

We would ideally examine additional indicators of (in)tolerance and authoritarian values but questions about punitiveness, equal opportunities for ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians were asked either in BES Wave 12 only of respondents new to the wave or in Wave 13 (i.e., after the Manchester bombing). Acknowledging these limits, we present analysis of their relationships with perceptions of terrorist and normative threat in Table S40 in the online supporting information with similar results to those we show here.

Analysis

Hypotheses 1 and 2 imply that authoritarian predispositions moderate both the influence of the Manchester bombing on perceptions of terrorist threat and the mediating influence of those perceptions of terrorist threat on normative threat. We focus here on the substantive implications

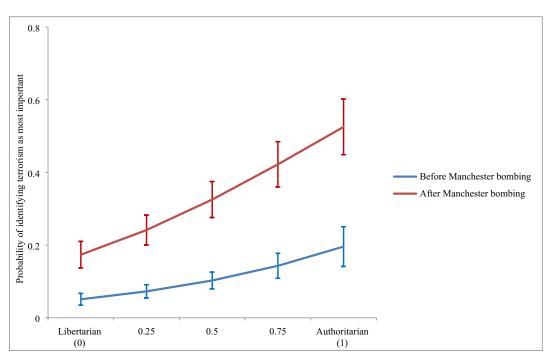


Figure 2. Probability of identifying terrorism as most important issue before and after Manchester bombing. Point estimates (and standard errors) are based on model in Table S12 in the online supporting information. *Source*: BES Waves 10 and 12.

of the moderated-mediator model (Hayes, 2013), showing the structural equation model estimates, summary statistics, and marginal effects that inform them in Section 3 of the online supporting information (Tables S10–S18). Figure 2 presents the probability of identifying terrorism as the most important issue before and after the Manchester bombing (all models include control variables that previous research on authoritarianism indicates are also likely to be factors in perceptions of threat: sex, age, education, and party identification; e.g., Hetherington & Suhay, 2011). Figure 2 shows that authoritarians were already more likely than libertarians to identify terrorism as the most important issue facing the country before the Manchester bombing. This gap more than doubled after the Manchester bombing, with the difference in the marginal effects of authoritarian predispositions statistically significant at p < .01 (see Tables S13 and S14). Thus, in support of Hypothesis 1, although perceptions of terrorist threat increased for everyone, the impact of the Manchester bombing was greatest for respondents at the higher end of the authoritarian continuum.

Did the Manchester bombing, which was followed by elite disunity, also elevate normative threat, and if so for whom? The analysis (Table S15 in the online supporting information) confirms Stenner's (2005) contention that under normal conditions, before the Manchester bombing, authoritarians are no more normatively threatened than are libertarians; indeed the relationship is somewhat negative. But the Manchester attack raised normative threat for those higher in authoritarianism, in line with Hypothesis 2, via elevated perceptions of terrorist threat (see Table S12). This is illustrated in Table 2, which presents the indirect effects of the Manchester bombing, showing a significant impact on normative threat only among those higher in authoritarianism;

¹¹Cohrs and Ibler (2009) also posit a moderated-mediator model but among the differences is that they do not theorize that distinct types of threat have different relationships with authoritarianism.

Table 2. Conditional Indirect Effects of the Manchester Bombing on Normative Threat^a

	Authoritarianism (0-	Authoritarianism (0–1 scale)							
	0	.25	.5	.75	1				
Conditional marginal	016 (040, .007)	004 (021, .012)	.009 (005, .023)	.022* (.004, .040)	.036* (.009, .064)				
effect	, , ,	, , ,	, , ,	, , ,	, , ,				

^aWe follow Hayes' (2013) recommendation by also estimating bootstrapped confidence intervals in Table S16 in the online supporting information; they are almost identical. *p < .05.

moreover, the effects are quite large, representing about one-third of a standard deviation. ¹² In sum, the impact of Manchester was to raise perceptions of terrorist threat across the authoritarian continuum, which was accompanied by an increase in perceptions of normative threat among higher authoritarians.

We now turn to Hypotheses 3 and 4, which concern the moderating effects of terrorist and normative threats on the relationships between authoritarian predispositions and right-wing attitudes and preferences. Table 3 presents these model estimates. As before, we control for sex, age, education level, and party identification. A negative interaction between terrorist threat and authoritarianism would confirm Hypothesis 3, that libertarians express more conservative preferences when threatened by terrorism (i.e., the hypothesized Hetherington and Weiler (2009) interaction—highlighted in light gray). A positive interaction between normative threat and authoritarianism would confirm Hypothesis 4, implying that authoritarian predispositions are activated by heightened normative threat and that it is authoritarians who become more likely to express such preferences (i.e., the hypothesized Feldman and Stenner interaction—highlighted in darker gray).

Table 3 illustrates clearly that both interactive relationships are present. On the one hand, the negative interactions in light gray show the expression of more conservative preferences as a result of libertarian perceptions of terrorist threat, diminishing the differences between authoritarians and libertarians as observed by Hetherington and Weiler (2009). But in dark gray, the positive interactions also indicate higher authoritarian predispositions associated with more conservative preferences when perceiving increased normative threat, widening the differences with libertarians, consistent with Stenner and Feldman (Feldman, 2003; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 2005). Of the 14 interactions, 11 are statistically significant (at p < .005).

Figure 3 illustrates the implications of the analysis in Table 3 for authoritarians and libertarians given variation in terrorist and normative threat from low (one standard deviation below mean level of threat) to high (one standard deviation above mean level of threat) (see Table S22 in the online supporting information for confidence intervals). A positive bar in Figure 3 signifies movement toward more conservative preferences given a shift from low to high threat, while a negative bar signifies movement in the opposite direction. The chart on the left of Figure 3 shows movement in preferences given heightened terrorist threat, and the chart on the right movement in preferences given heightened normative threat. The table below Figure 3 displays the point estimates and their implications for the differences in preferences between libertarians and authoritarians.

¹²The estimates also show direct effects of terrorist threat; i.e., before the Manchester bombing there was a positive relationship between identifying terrorist threat as the most important issue and normative threat (see Table S18 in the online supporting information).

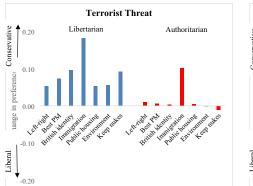
 $^{^{13}}$ We adopt a p < .005 threshold in Table 3 and in some of the tables located in the online supporting information because of multiple tests of interactions. This stricter threshold reduces the probability of making a Type 1 error.

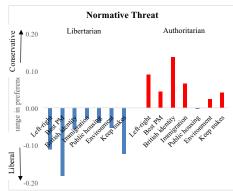
Table 3. Effects of Authoritarianism, Terrorist Threat, and Normative Threat on Attitudes and Policy Preferences

	Right-Wing Shift		Identity	Policy Preferences	Sć		
	Left-Right Ideology	May Best PM	Identity as British More Than European	Prioritize Controlling Immigration	Govt. Should Not Fund Public Housing	Environmental Measures Gone Too Far	Keep Subs with Nuclear Weapons
Terrorism most important issue	.089 (.013)**	.659 (.205)*	.161 (.040)**	.303 (.023)**	.087 (.017)**	.094 (.019)**	.154 (.022)**
Authoritarianism	193 (.029)**	307 (.447)	145 (.097)	.159 (.052)*	.034 (.038)	.039 (.041)	048 (.049)
Normative threat	486 (.039)**	-4.454 (.650)**	252 (.125)#	123(.070)	177 (.051)*	232 (.055)**	541 (.066)**
Terrorism × Authoritarianism	072 (.022)*	615 (.351)	156 (.073)#	133 (.039)*	080 (.028)*	096 (.031)*	172 (.037)**
Normative	.877 (.072)**	5.228 (1.159)**	.844 (.250)*	.408 (.130)*	.167 (.094)	.334 (.103)*	.721 (.122)**
threat × Authoritarianism							
и	3,911	3,911	492	3,726	3,824	3,727	3,738
Adjusted R^2 /Pseudo R^2	.55	.38	.29	.35	.14	.17	.27

Note. Linear regression estimates, except May best PM where estimates are logit estimates, from structural equation model. Models control for respondent sex, age, education level, and party identification. The smaller sample size for Identity as British more than European is because this question was asked of a subsample of the BES. **p < .001; *p < .005; *p < .05.

Source: British Election Study Waves 10 and 12.





Point Estimates and Differences							
	Left-right	May best PM	British identity	Immigration	Public housing	Environment	Keep nukes
Libertarian, high terrorist threat	.45	.28	.60	.40	.24	.28	.51
Libertarian, low terrorist threat	.39	.21	.50	.22	.19	.23	.42
Difference (from low to high)	.05	.07	.10	.18	.05	.05	.09
Authoritarian, high terrorist threat	.54	.58	.68	.63	.29	.39	.63
Authoritarian, low terrorist threat	.53	.57	.67	.53	.29	.39	.64
Difference (from low to high)	.01	.00	.01	.10	.00	.00	01
Libertarian, high normative threat	.36	.15	.51	.27	.19	.22	.39
Libertarian, low normative threat	.47	.34	.56	.30	.23	.27	.51
Difference (from low to high)	11	19	05	03	04	05	12
Authoritarian, high normative threat	.58	.60	.74	.60	.29	.40	.66
Authoritarian, low normative threat	.49	.56	.61	.53	.29	.38	.61
Difference (from low to high)	.09	.04	.13	.07	.00	.02	.05

Figure 3. Terrorist threat, normative threat, and the preferences of authoritarians and libertarians.

Terrorist threat in Figure 3 shows that in terms of self-placement on a left-right scale, when perceiving higher terrorist threat libertarians shift to the right by more than .05 on the 1-point scale while authoritarians barely shift at all. ¹⁴ Indeed, under this scenario Figure 3 shows similar shifts for the other six dependent variables. For example, libertarians move .10 points toward the British rather than European end of the identity scale when terrorist threat is high—about half a standard deviation—while authoritarians' identity as British is not associated with terrorist threat. Even with regard to prioritizing restricting immigration over access to the single market for Brexit, which is the only issue on which terrorist threat also moves authoritarians, by about .10 points, the impact on libertarians is almost twice as large. Thus, as in Hetherington and Weiler's (2009) research, it is libertarians who become more like authoritarians when perceiving enhanced terrorist threat, even though authoritarians are both more likely to identify terrorism as a salient threat and more likely to have changed in this perception after the Manchester bombing.

In response to the question posed in previous research about the relationship between authoritarian predispositions and threat—which individuals undergo a conservative shift—this evidence suggests very clearly that it is libertarians. By increasing perceptions of terrorism as the most important issue by 300%, the Manchester bombing closed the gaps between libertarians and authoritarians. However, the chart in Figure 3 depicting the impact of increased normative threat shows that it has opposite effects. Perceptions of greater normative threat are associated with more conservative preferences for authoritarians, while libertarians embrace more liberal preferences under these conditions. For example, given low normative threat authoritarians and libertarians are similarly likely to identify more strongly as British (1) rather than European (0)—.61 compared to .56. With perceptions of high normative threat, authoritarians move from .61 to .74 on the scale, while libertarians

¹⁴This is with values set at their mean or mode: a woman, about 55 years old, with an undergraduate level of education, who identifies with one of the minor parties.

shift from .56 to .51, meaning that the difference between authoritarians and libertarians increases by .18 points. For immigration, authoritarians move towards prioritizing stricter immigration over access to the EU single market—from .53 to .60 on the scale—while libertarians move from .30 to .27. In terms of left-right ideology, authoritarians move further to the right—from .49 to .58—while in this case libertarians move marginally more to the left—from .47 to .36 on the scale. Thus, the difference between authoritarians and libertarians increases by .20 points when normative threat increases, but this is as much or more about libertarians moving to the left as it is about authoritarians moving to the right.

The other four examples in Figure 3 also show authoritarians and libertarians moving in different directions with increased normative threat. As with left-right ideology, however, these differences are more a result of libertarians moving away from authoritarian sentiment. For example, the increasing gap in seeing Theresa May as the best prime minister is the consequence of a .18-point decrease in support for May among libertarians while authoritarian support increases by .04. The relationships with the other three policy preferences are smaller overall in Figure 3 but also show a conservative shift among authoritarians in the face of greater normative threat for two of the three—the exception being for government funding of public housing, which does not change—and a larger liberal shift among libertarians in all three cases. (We tested whether the decreases in differences with terrorist threat and the increases in differences with normative threat shown in Figure 3, are statistically significant. They are at p < .005 for 7 of the 14 tests and at p < .05 for 4. The highest p-value is .15.)

These results both confirm the notion that authoritarian predispositions are activated by higher normative threat and Stenner's (2005) findings that libertarians often become more liberal in their preferences in the face of normative threat (e.g., her figure 6.6 on p. 182): Unlike authoritarians, who are simply unmoved by terrorist threat, libertarian embrace of difference means that they frequently respond with greater liberalism given perceptions of higher normative threat. In sum, both Hypotheses 3 and 4 are supported: The processes postulated by Feldman and Stenner (1997) and by Hetherington and Weiler (2009) and Hetherington and Suhay (2011) took place simultaneously.

We gain further perspective on the impact of the Manchester bombing by looking at the net impact of changing perceptions of terrorist and normative threat. Using the model estimates shown in Figure 2, Tables 2 and 3 suggests small overall effects in which both libertarians and authoritarians became somewhat more conservative in their preferences—in keeping with both perspectives on the effects of threat—but with the greater movement tending to be from individuals at the libertarian end of the continuum. For example, libertarians are 1.6 points more likely, and authoritarians 0.5 points more likely, to regard Theresa May as the best prime minister when we estimate the net impact of both terrorist and normative threat; libertarians' identity as British rather than European increases by about 2.1 points compared to 0.7 points for authoritarians. The exception to this pattern is for prioritizing restricting immigration, where authoritarians move 5.9 points further in favor of restrictions compared to 3.7 points for libertarians. Had we focused only on terrorist threat or only on normative threat, as previous research has done, we would have drawn a different, and misleading, set of inferences about expression of more conservative preferences among either libertarians or authoritarians but not among both.

Our findings are robust against a number of additional checks. For example, we reestimated the models with multiple imputation of missing values for normative threat, as well as the several alternative indicators of normative threat previously mentioned, in Section 6 of the online supporting information. In addition, using the ICM data to examine similar dependent variables capturing conservative policy preferences, we replicate the pattern of findings in Tables S3 and S4.

We also examined the possibility that the Manchester bombing *changed* the moderating effects of terrorist or normative threat and authoritarianism on conservative preferences, that is,

three-way interactions (see Tables S20 and S21 in the online supporting information). ¹⁵ Previous research has been silent on the issue of whether shocks such as terror attacks strengthen relationships between perceptions of threat, authoritarian predispositions, and a conservative shift, partly perhaps because they have not explored the relationship between such shocks and normative threat. Our analysis employing three-way interactions indicates that the Manchester bombing did not have this moderating effect; that is, its impact was via changes in perceptions of threats rather than any additional strengthening of the relationship between perceptions of threat and authoritarian predispositions.

Conclusion

In an age of terrorism, mass flows of migrants, global pandemics, populism, and democratic backsliding, questions of which individuals respond to threats with a conservative shift in preferences are more pressing than ever. Existing research has produced divergent findings on this question that have been interpreted as mutually exclusive dynamics. Stenner (2005) argues that authoritarians are most likely to respond with preferences such as "the kind of intolerance that seems to 'come out of nowhere'" (p. 136); Hetherington and Suhay (2011) and Hetherington and Weiler (2018) argue that because "virtually everyone becomes less invested in democratic ideals when deeply frightened" (p. xxi), we need to focus on libertarians following events such as 9/11 or the Manchester bombing.

None of the subsequent efforts at reconciliation of these two perspectives has accomplished the task satisfactorily because none has theorized or examined physical threat in tandem with normative threat. We have shown that competing theories of whose preferences are affected by threat are *not* mutually exclusive or necessarily contradictory. Specifically, authoritarians *and* libertarians undergo what previous research has defined as a conservative shift in preferences given changes in perceptions of normative (authoritarians) or physical (libertarians) threat.

Libertarians react to physical threats such as a terrorist attack with a conservative shift that narrows the differences with authoritarians. This is despite the fact that authoritarians are more likely to identify terrorism as a threat and that their perceptions of terrorist threat increase most after an attack. But with perceptions of increased terrorist threat following the Manchester attack, authoritarians' perceptions of normative threat also increased, with consequences for the activation of their authoritarian predispositions: Authoritarians became more conservative in their preferences while libertarians became more liberal, widening the differences between them. Overall, however, we showed that in the context of the 2017 U.K. election and the Manchester bombing the tendency for the differences between authoritarians and libertarians to narrow rather than widen was stronger.

These results have implications for several additional lines of inquiry. The contrasts we have drawn between the United States after 9/11 and the United Kingdom in 2017 indicate the importance of variation in the appearance of national unity in the context of threats such as terrorist attacks. Such national (dis)unity seems to influence perceptions of normative threat. While our analysis confirms Stenner's (2005) claim that authoritarians are particularly sensitive to changes that affect normative threat, we have argued using the example of 9/11 that a terrorist attack need not always lead to

¹⁵The Manchester bombing could still have had general effects on the baseline levels of the seven dependent variables, however. The addition of a dummy variable to the models indicates that after Manchester respondents were less likely to regard Theresa May as the best choice for prime minister (p < .05), less likely to prioritize controlling immigration (p < .10), and less likely to be against government funding of public housing (p < .10) (see Table S19 in the online supporting information). But accounting for these barely affects the interactions shown in Table 3.

¹⁶It could also be that elite frames and actions contribute to the priming of physical or normative threats (Lahav and Courtemanche 2012), with different consequences for authoritarians and libertarians, e.g., George W. Bush's immediate responses to 9/11, such as in Afghanistan, may have reassured authoritarians. But our argument would be that the elite consensus was more important and that such "authoritarian" leader responses in the absence of unity would not on their own be reassuring to authoritarians.

increased normative threat among authoritarians if it is accompanied by national unity and a rally-round-the flag. Such consensus may be more likely with out-of-the-ordinary attacks involving larger-scale loss of life than Manchester, such as 9/11, 7/7 in the United Kingdom, and the Bataclan massacre in Paris, or outside a campaign context.

A further line of contextual variation suggested by our analysis pertains to country-level authoritarianism and how party competition along the authoritarian dimension conditions relationships. Average levels of authoritarianism vary across countries (e.g., Brandt & Henry, 2012; Inglehart & Norris, 2019; Malka et al., 2022; Singh & Dunn, 2013; Stenner, 2005), indicating that when there is societal or elite dissensus net change from normative rather than terrorist or other threats could be greater where authoritarianism is higher. In addition, the example of the United States shows how authoritarianism can map onto major party competition (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, 2018), pointing to potential variation in how partisanship could exacerbate or inhibit the effects we have shown.

Our results also indicate the need to examine how long changes in perceptions of threats endure. Table 1 suggests that expressions of more authoritarian attitudes and preferences are likely among libertarians given terrorist or other personal or physical threats. But changes will be confined to the period of elevated threat. At the same time, increases in expressions of authoritarian attitudes among those with authoritarian predispositions are likely to result from threats that are accompanied by elite rhetoric (e.g., from populist leaders) signifying a failure of established authority and break down in social order and consensus. Such perceptions may last longer.

These lines of inquiry also require different research designs to the cross-sectional quasi-experimental data analyzed here. A pre–post "shock" panel survey, particularly with multiple waves after a shock such as a terrorist attack, would permit within-subject tests of our hypotheses and findings, including that an attack increases perceptions of threats but does not also strengthen the relationship between perceptions of threats and authoritarian predispositions. Moreover, a longitudinal panel could shed light on the questions we have posed about the duration of distinct threats. Beyond surveys, a pre–post experimental design could manipulate perceptions of physical and normative threat to examine the validity of the relationships we have found.

Finally, our research also has broader implications for the kinds of messages that might mitigate conservative shifts in attitudes and preferences that can result in intolerance and restrictive policy preferences. Libertarian fear implies that lessening libertarians' sense of immediate threat would be the most effective message, for example, with counterterrorism measures or by stressing the low probability of being killed in a terrorist attack compared to everyday activities such as driving a car. At the same time, authoritarian sensitivity to normative threat demands a stress on national unity, areas of elite consensus, and the effectiveness of responses from legitimate authority. Both types of messages may be necessary simultaneously.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

- **Table S1**. The Relationship between Distance from the Terror Attacks in Manchester (May 22nd) and London (June 3rd) and Identifying Terrorism as the Most Important Issue
- **Table S2**. The Positive Relationship between Personal Concern about Terrorism and Probability of Identifying Terrorism as the Most Important Issue: ICM Survey
- **Table S3.** Effects of Authoritarianism, Terrorist Threat, and Normative Threat on Attitudes and Policy Preferences: ICM Survey
- **Table S4.** Comparing Model Estimates Using "Most Important Issue" Measures of Terrorist Threat
- **Table S5.** Checks for Equivalence of Samples Before and After Manchester Bombing in the BES

Table S6. Relationships Between Dissatisfaction with UK Democracy and Normative Threat

Table S7. Relationships Between Negative Perceptions of Party Performance and Normative Threat

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Table S9. Effects of Authoritarianism, Terrorist Threat, and Normative Threat on Attitudes and Policy Preferences for Respondents at the Ideological Extremes (0–2, 8–10)

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Table S14. Marginal effects, with 95% confidence intervals, of authoritarianism on probability of identifying terrorism as the most important issue before and after Manchester bombing

Table S15. Average Normative Threat by Level of Authoritarianism and Perceptions of Terrorist Threat

Table S16. Conditional indirect marginal effects of Manchester bombing via terrorist threat on normative threat at different levels of authoritarianism with bootstrapped confidence intervals (based on 5000 replications)

Table S17. Marginal effects, with 95% confidence intervals, of authoritarianism on level of normative threat if terrorism is/is not most important issue

Table S18. Marginal effects, with 95% confidence intervals, of authoritarianism on level of normative threat if terrorism is/is not most important issue before and after Manchester bombing

Table S19. Tests of Baseline Effects of Manchester Bombing

Table S20. Tests for Two- and Three-Way Interactions between Manchester and Threats on Normative Threat

Table S21. Tests for Two- and Three-Way Interactions with Terrorist Threat and Normative Threat

Table S22. Point Estimates Used in Figure 3, With 95% Confidence Intervals

Table S23. With Multiple Imputation for Missing Values of Normative Threat

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Table S25. Conditional Effects of Manchester Bombing Using Alternative Indicators of Normative Threat

Table S26. With Normative Threat as Average Absolute Distance from Major Parties

Table S27. With Normative Threat as Average Absolute Distance from Major Party Leaders

Table S28. With Normative Threat as Average Negative Affect Toward Major Parties and Leaders

Table S29. With Normative Threat as Average Policy Distance on Redistribution and EU Integration

Table S30. With Normative Threat as Policy Distance on Immigration

Table S31. With Normative Threat as index of equally weighted ideological distance from major party leaders, major parties, policy distance on redistribution and EU, affective distance from major party leaders and major parties

Table S32. With Normative Threat as policy distance from major parties on national security (Wave 11)

Table S33. With Normative Threat as dissatisfaction with UK democracy (Wave 11)

Table S34. Perceptions of Terrorism as the Most Important Problem Facing the Country Before and After the Manchester Bombing (using Wave 7 and Wave 11 authoritarianism)

Table S35. Marginal effects, with 95% confidence intervals, of Manchester on probability of

identifying terrorism as the most important issue at different levels of authoritarianism

Table S36. Marginal effects, with 95% confidence intervals, of authoritarianism on probability of identifying terrorism as the most important issue before and after Manchester bombing

Table S37. Conditional Effects of Manchester Bombing on Normative Threat with Authoritarianism Measured in Different Waves of BES

Table S38. Effects of Authoritarianism, Terrorist Threat, and Normative Threat on Attitudes and Policy Preferences Using Wave 7 authoritarianism

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Table S40. Robustness Checks with Tolerance/Punitiveness as Dependent Variables

Table S41. Exploring ANES 2000-2002-2004 Panel Data

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