Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 59 (2015) 90–95

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jesp

Running for your life, in context: Are rightists always less likely to consider fleeing their country when fearing future events?

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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examine how context and ideology moderate fear's effect on flight intentions.
- Context, ideology and fear interactively affect willingness to consider flight.
- When ideology is irrelevant, fear increases only rightists' flight intentions.
- In ideologically-relevant contexts, fear increases only leftists' flight intentions.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 8 November 2014
Revised 3 April 2015
Available online 11 April 2015

Keywords:
Fear
Ideology
Context
Flight

ABSTRACT

Fear is a powerful motivator for the classic fight or flight response. Under extreme social and political circumstances, fear may lead people to emigrate from their land to protect themselves and their families. While ideology is related to differences in behavioral fear reactivity, little is known about how it moderates the effect of fear on flight intentions. In a large experimental study ($N = 243$), we examined our hypothesis that this moderating effect is context-dependent, such that the context's relation to the ideology determines its influence. In ideologically-irrelevant contexts, because rightists (versus leftists) are assumed to be more behaviorally reactive to fear, their willingness to consider flight should be more affected. In ideologically-relevant intergroup contexts, however, rightist ideology provides clear reaction guidelines ruling out flight, and therefore fear should have a weaker effect on rightists' (versus leftists') flight tendencies. Our findings supported these predictions, and their significance is discussed.

Fear, a discrete aversive emotion, arises when an individual perceives a threat or danger towards himself or herself or his or her ingroup (Gray, 1987; Öhman, 1993; Rachman, 1978). This emotion has long been recognized for its importance in political and other social contexts. Classically, fear has been conceptualized as motivating "fight or flight" (see Cannon, 1932), meaning the tendency to either confront the fear-eliciting agent or escape from it. Of these two routes, fear very often leads individuals to the latter, motivating highly avoidant behavior (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989), an extreme form of which may be physical migration to another country. Nonetheless, in many contexts, such as intergroup conflicts, leaving a country may stand at odds with one's ingroup attachment and ideological convictions. In this paper, we are interested in examining when fear of an impending threat to society may lead people to consider fleeing. We argue that the effect of fear on flight intentions is ideology- and context-dependent, such that political stance may have a different impact on the outcomes of fear in ideologically-irrelevant versus ideologically-relevant contexts. We elaborate on this proposed difference below.

Fear, collective fear, and flight reactions

Associated with appraisals of high perceived threat coupled with low strength and control over the situation (Roseman, 1984), fear comprises physiological and psychological reactions aimed at increasing survival capabilities in dangerous situations. Behaviorally, it may lead to different, even contradictory, action tendencies—often termed "fight or flight." This means that while fear may motivate confrontation with fear-inducing stimuli, it is frequently associated with avoidant action tendencies (see Frijda et al., 1989). In fact, when individuals have little ability to alter the fear-eliciting situation through a "fight" reaction, "flight" may become the dominant behavior.

One context in which individuals may not be able to deal with fear-eliciting events by individually confronting them is the collective

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.04.001
0022-1031/

context, in which events are often beyond the personal control of individuals. Studies show that in such contexts, experiences of threat and fear lead to increased support for risk-aversive and defensive political policies (e.g., Halperin, 2011; Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003), decreased support for confrontational policies (e.g., Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005; Skitka, Bauman, Aramovich, & Morgan, 2006), and increased motivation to avoid a threatening outgroup (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Skitka et al., 2006). Furthermore, studies have shown that threats to the group lead to greater personal avoidance tendencies, with people reporting cancelling travel plans and avoiding mass transportation in light of fear (e.g., Huddy, Feldman, Capelos, & Provost, 2002).

As stated above, because of limited individual influence over many collectively-relevant threats, one readily available option for personal action in such situations may be fleeing the area in which the threat is present. In collective contexts in which threats are continuously or repeatedly present, flight may involve drastic measures and great costs—because to avoid the threatening context altogether the individual would have to physically leave the area inhabited by the group, which is often a region of political significance such as a state. In certain contexts, such as in the midst of intergroup conflicts, physical flight may be viewed as socially illegitimate, exposing the individual to social criticism for not facing the threat together with fellow group members. Indeed, individuals fleeing their countries in the wake of political conflict are often regarded as traitors, or given derogatory descriptions such as the one coined by former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin to describe Jews moving away from Israel during the turbulent 1970s: "fall-outs of weaklings" (Israeli Broadcasting Authority, 1976).

Ideology and conflict-related ideology in collective contexts

Because of the benefits and costs associated with fleeing, individuals may differ in their willingness to consider this option. Differences in flight intentions may stem from factors such as trait anxiety, personal connections abroad, socio-economic status, and more. In socio-political contexts, one such differentiating factor is political ideology: a stable "interrelated set of attitudes, values, and beliefs with cognitive, affective, and motivational properties" (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009, p. 315). According to recent research, ideologies relate to both the contents of beliefs and the needs underlying them, with people tending to adopt ideologies that fulfill their own dominant needs (Jost et al., 2009).

In violent intergroup contexts, ideological belief systems relating to the conflict receive widespread support (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2013; Cohrs, 2012), as rightist ideology is generally associated with greater intergroup bias (Altemeyer, 1996). Rightist, conflict-supporting ideology in these contexts takes on specific contents, leading to greater adherence to certain societal beliefs, including beliefs regarding patriotism, security, and unity. Specifically, societal beliefs about patriotism focus on loyalty and sacrifice for the collective; beliefs about security emphasize the importance of personal and national survival and modes of achieving it; and beliefs about unity emphasize the importance of facing the opponent as a cohesive unit (Bar-Tal, 2013). These beliefs may limit individual willingness to consider flight, and may also shape responses to the experience of fear described above.

Extensive research has indicated that these context-specific ideological beliefs influence not only the attitudes (Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Halperin, & Zafran, 2012), but also the behaviors (e.g., information seeking, see Porat, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2013) of individuals in societies involved in intractable conflicts. Although research has not directly examined the ideology–flight relationship (but see recent work on migration to ideologically-similar communities, Motyl, Iyer, Oishi, Trawalter, & Nosek, 2014), there are indications in the literature that the beliefs of individuals are a key motivation behind the decision not to leave one's home in perilous times (e.g., Gidron, Peleg, Jaffe, & Shenhar, 2010).

The interactive effect of fear and ideology on willingness to consider flight

While it is clear that fear and ideology play important roles in collective contexts, little is known about their interactive influence. Could rightists and leftists be differentially motivated by fear? Could their willingness to consider fleeing be more or less influenced by their heightened experience of fear? Our goal in the present research was to examine these as-of-yet unexamined questions. Nonetheless, the literature contains several clues that lead to seemingly conflicting predictions, especially when examining fear in intergroup contexts.

On one hand, recent accounts of ideology indicate that rightists and leftists differ from one another in fear reactivity, such that rightists have an over-activated fear response (e.g., Block & Block, 2006; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a,b; Kanai, Feilden, Firth, & Rees, 2011; Oxley et al., 2008), and that these differences explain many right–left motivational differences (see Jost & Amodio, 2012; Jost et al., 2009). Importantly, brain research has also demonstrated right–left differences specifically relevant to avoidance tendencies, with the processing of "conservative" statements associated with greater activity in brain regions associated with withdrawal motivations (Zamboni, Gozzi, Krueger, Duhamel, Sirigu, & Grafman, 2009). A review of the empirical literature has recently suggested that rightists have greater negativity bias in general, and their greater attention to negative occurrences leads them to take more steps to avoid such occurrences (Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2014). These findings indicate that rightists may be more behaviorally reactive to fear-inducing stimuli in several ways, and such greater reactivity may lead to the prediction that fear would have a greater impact on rightists' (compared to leftists') willingness to consider flight.

On the other hand, the specific contents of rightist ideology in certain contexts may lead to a competing prediction, that fearful rightists would be less motivated than fearful leftists to consider flight. As stated earlier, rightist ideology is associated with patriotism (Bar-Tal, 2013), and specifically blind patriotism (Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999), and such patriotism promotes self-sacrifice, the opposite of physical flight from danger, especially in intergroup conflict situations. These beliefs should be most powerful with regard to patriotism-relevant units—namely, one's land and nation—and leaving these may be particularly at odds with patriotic beliefs. Right-wing beliefs in conflict situations are also associated with beliefs regarding security—and the modes of achieving it through confrontation—and unity—and its importance in facing the threatening outgroup (Bar-Tal, 2013). These firm beliefs should limit rightists' willingness to consider fleeing, even when experiencing fear. Additionally, the literature suggests that rightist ideology is associated with over-active fear responses and needs for certainty and security precisely because it functions to reduce fear and answer these needs (Jost et al., 2009). It follows that rightist ideology, in answering these needs, regulates the effects of fear by providing clear guidelines on how to react to ideologically-relevant threats—a notion supported by findings on ideological differences in the impact of emotions on policy support (Pliskin, Bar-Tal, Sheppes, & Halperin, 2014). These factors support a prediction that rightists' (compared to leftists') willingness to consider flight would be less affected by fear, at least in ideologically relevant intergroup contexts.

The present research

The relevant literatures therefore lead to two seemingly contradictory predictions. Nonetheless, we argue that the contradiction can be settled by acknowledging the moderating role context plays in the relationship among ideology, fear and the willingness to consider flight. In other words, along the lines of research demonstrating that right–left differences in threat sensitivity, risk-aversion, and negativity bias are domain specific (Choma, Hanoch, Hodson, & Gummerum, 2014; Federico, Johnston, & Lavine, 2014), we believe that both predictions

arising from the literature have merit, but the differential effects of fear on rightists and leftists are *context-dependent*.

As the literature indicates, rightists have a comparatively over-activated fear response, and such higher reactivity may go unchecked in the absence of clear reaction guidelines. Thus, in contexts unrelated to ideological beliefs, we hypothesize fear will have a greater impact on the willingness of rightists (versus leftists) to consider flight. On the other hand, when fear arises from ideologically-relevant developments relating to an adversarial outgroup, rightist ideology may provide clearer guidelines on how to behaviorally react. Thus, in such ideologically-relevant contexts, we hypothesize that rightists' willingness to consider flight will be less fear-driven than that of leftists.

To examine these hypotheses, we conducted a large experimental study examining the interactive effects of ideology and fear on willingness to consider flight in two different contexts. We predicted that context would moderate the interactive effect of induced fear and ideology, such that in an ideologically-irrelevant context, rightists' (compared to leftists') willingness to consider flight would be more affected by fear, but in an ideologically-relevant intergroup context, rightists' (compared to leftists') willingness to consider flight would be less affected by fear.

Method

Participants

A sample of 243 Jewish Israelis (170 females; ages 18–87, $M = 33.83$, $SD = 14.9$), drawn from the general population and the student body at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, voluntarily participated in an online study. We determined the sample size based on the 3-way interaction design, striving to have 30 participants in each "cell" (functionally treating the ideology variable as dichotomous rather than continuous). Of this initial sample, we excluded two participants who did not reside in Israel and seven who had unreasonable questionnaire-completion times (over 1 h),[1] yielding a final sample of 234 participants (163 female; ages 18–87, $M = 33.74$, $SD = 14.87$). Politically, the sample was relatively balanced, with 37.61% of participants identifying as moderately to extremely rightist, 32.05% as centrist, and 30.34% as moderately to extremely leftist.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (context: ideologically-irrelevant or ideologically-relevant) × 2 (fear-inducing or secure) between-subjects design and filled out an online questionnaire. The questionnaire began with a contrived report from a leading Israeli news website (see Supplementary material for the full texts of the four versions of this report) on either an approaching epidemic (an ideologically-irrelevant threat) or an approaching Palestinian revolt ("Intifada," i.e., an ideologically-relevant threat from an adversarial outgroup).

Following the long tradition of appraisal theorists of emotions (e.g., Roseman, 1984; Scherer, 1999; and see Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013, for a special section on appraisal theories), we manipulated fear by manipulating the appraisals associated with it: the presence of a highly probable threat and low coping abilities with this threat. Manipulating emotions by manipulating their core appraisal themes is a common practice in research on emotions, both in general (e.g., Aue, Flykt, & Scherer, 2007; Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Roseman & Evdokas, 2004; Russell & McAuley, 1986; Smith, 1989; Smith & Lazarus, 1993; van Reekum et al., 2004; and the comprehensive review by Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001) and in political, group-relevant contexts (e.g., Goldenberg, Saguy, & Halperin, 2014; Halperin, 2008; Halperin, Russell, Dweck, & Gross, 2011; Pliskin et al., 2014). Thus, in the secure condition, Israeli officials are quoted assuring that Israel has the capability to significantly mitigate the approaching threat's impact and the tools to deal with its ramifications, stressing that there is little room for worry. In the fear-inducing condition, however, these officials state that Israel will be unable to prevent the threat and lacks the tools to deal with its ramifications effectively, stressing that the blow may be extremely severe. Anticipating possible right–left differences in levels of fear, we worded the fear condition so as to guarantee that the content was strong enough to raise fear across the ideological spectrum. The text was followed by manipulation checks for levels of fear and items measuring willingness to consider flight from Israel[2] in light of the approaching threat.

To ensure that this manipulation was suited for our aims, we conducted a pilot study examining whether the scenarios differed in their perceived ideological relevance, raised similar levels of fear, and targeted fear specifically. Drawn from an online panel, 140 participants (70 female; ages 19–81, $M = 37.78$, $SD = 14.06$; with eight excluded for failing to follow instructions)[3] were randomly assigned to read one of the four texts and responded to measures of perceived ideological relevance (4-item measure, e.g., "people on the political left and right will tend to respond differently to the report presented," Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.7$), fear in response to the threat (5-item measure, e.g., "fear of the events' ramifications for Israeli society," Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$), and other discrete negative emotions in response to the threat (sadness, disgust, and despair, each measured using one item). We ran a series of 3-way interaction analyses (fear manipulation × context × ideology) employing Hayes' (2013) PROCESS regression procedure (model 3),[4] controlling for age, sex, whether participants had family abroad, and personal history living abroad (variables that were also controlled for in all analyses reported in our main study below).

The first analysis confirmed that the epidemic scenario was perceived as less ideologically-relevant than the Palestinian uprising scenario, $B = 1.36$, $SE = .18$, $t = 7.55$, $p < .0001$, [CI] = [1, 1.72], as we had intended. This difference was moderated by neither the fear manipulation nor individual ideology, but we found a main effect for the fear manipulation, with the fear-inducing conditions seen as less ideologically-relevant than the secure conditions, $B = -.47$, $SE = .18$, $t = -2.64$, $p < .01$, [CI] = [−.82, −.12]. A separate analysis revealed that the fear-inducing condition succeeded in raising more fear than the secure condition, $B = .55$, $SE = .23$, $t = 2.36$, $p = .02$, [CI] = [0.09, 1], a difference also moderated by neither context nor ideology. It also confirmed that the epidemic and uprising scenarios did not significantly differ in the levels of fear they induced, $B = .25$, $SE = .23$, $t = 1.07$, $p = .29$, [CI] = [−0.21, 0.71]. Finally, as we had intended, the fear manipulation did not significantly influence any of the other emotions measured (although its effect on despair was marginally significant, $p = .096$, [CI] = [−0.08, 0.1]). Importantly, all of the above findings were maintained when excluding all control variables (with the exception of the analysis for despair, which became fully non-significant).

Measures

Participants responded to the following measures (see Supplementary material for full details of all measures, as well as means, standard deviations, and correlations among them, Tables S3 and S4):

[1] We also ran all the reported analyses without excluding these subjects. These analyses revealed identical trends and are reported in full in the Supplementary material.

[2] We focused on flight from the *country* as it is the unit of greatest patriotic significance, thus ensuring the action would have negative implications, in addition to the security it may provide.

[3] See Supplementary material for full details of the sample and methodology, as well as the means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables (Table S1) and the manipulation check means (Table S2).

[4] In these analyses and in all regression analyses reported below, dichotomous variables were first coded as 0 and 1, and then all variables were centered using the PROCESS macro (see Hayes, 2013).

To ensure the manipulation induced fear of the expected events, participants responded to a two-item manipulation check (similarly-worded across scenarios, e.g., "Fear of the [threat]'s outbreak," $r = .57$), as well as one of two context-specific manipulation checks. In the ideologically-irrelevant scenario, participants indicated to what extent they feared various personal and societal consequences of the epidemic (computed by averaging responses to six items, e.g., "fear of immune system damage," Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$). In the ideologically-relevant scenario, they indicated to what extent they feared the expected rocket fire and for the security of themselves and their families (computed by averaging both responses, $r = .67$). All items were rated on a scale of 1 – *not at all* to 6 – *very much so*.

We also included single items assessing other emotions, to determine the specificity of the manipulation's effect (see Supplementary material for details on these items and all relevant analyses, which indicated that these emotions could not adequately explain our findings).

Willingness to consider flight in light of the expected events was rated on a six-item scale assessing willingness directly (e.g., "Given the opportunity, to what extent would you consider relocating to another country in light of the expected developments?") and indirectly (e.g., "To what extent do you understand people who decide to leave the country at times of [epidemic outbreaks/direct violence]"). We included both types of items to overcome possible demand characteristics in place because immigration constitutes a societal taboo in Israel. Participants responded on the same scale as above, and responses were averaged to create a single score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

The questionnaire included several demographic questions, counterbalanced to appear either before the manipulation or after the dependent variable. They reported their gender, age, relative income, and political ideology (measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 – *extreme right* to 7 – *extreme left*). Participants also indicated where they reside, if they ever lived outside Israel, and if they have family residing abroad—variables that may be related to the willingness to consider flight.

Results

The manipulation's effect on fear and other emotions

To ensure our manipulation raised levels of fear across scenarios and ideological positions, we conducted an analysis employing PROCESS Model 3, signifying the fear manipulation as an independent variable, ideology as the primary moderator, and the scenario as the secondary moderator, $R^2 = .19$, $F_{(11,221)} = 4.73$, $p < .0001$. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for the fear manipulation: $B = .64$, $SE = .16$, $t = 3.97$, $p = .0001$, [CI] = [0.32, .95], indicating that overall, participants experienced more fear in the fear-inducing conditions ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.35$) than in the secure conditions ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.17$), thus replicating our pilot study findings regarding the manipulation. This effect was moderated by neither the scenario nor participants' ideology, and levels of fear did not significantly differ between the two scenarios, $B = -.09$, $SE = .16$, $t = -.56$, $p = .58$, [CI] = [−0.41, 0.23].

We then ran two separate moderation analyses employing PROCESS Model 1 to examine whether, in each scenario (ideologically-irrelevant scenario: $R^2 = .21$, $F_{(7,103)} = 3.88$, $p < .001$; ideologically-relevant scenario, $R^2 = .23$, $F_{(7,114)} = 4.85$, $p = .0001$), the manipulation raised levels of context-specific fears. The analyses revealed the manipulation significantly increased context-specific fears in both scenarios (ideologically-irrelevant: $B = .82$, $SE = .24$, $t = 3.33$, $p = .001$, [CI] = [0.33, 1.31]; ideologically-relevant: $B = .54$, $SE = .23$, $t = 2.31$, $p = .02$, [CI] = [0.08, 1]). As intended, neither effect was moderated by ideology.

Fear, ideology and the willingness to consider flight in politically-irrelevant and relevant contexts

Next, we examined our hypothesis that ideology would moderate the manipulation's effect on willingness to consider flight, but that the nature of this moderating effect would be context-dependent. To this end, we employed the 3-way interaction procedure described above, $R^2 = .28$, $F_{(11,217)} = 7.76$, $p < .0001$. In addition to finding a main effect for the fear manipulation on willingness to consider flight ($B = .45$, $SE = .14$, $t = 3.16$, $p < .005$, [CI] = [0.17, 0.73]), we found the expected 3-way interaction, such that the scenario significantly moderated the interactive effect ideology and the fear manipulation had on this willingness ($B_{\text{interaction}} = -.7$, $SE = .23$, $t = -3.04$, $p < .005$, [CI] = [−1.16, −0.25]; see Fig. 1). The interaction term remained significant when controlling for the questionnaire's counterbalanced order and also when removing all controls ($B_{\text{interaction}} = -.55$, $SE = .25$, $t = -2.23$, $p = .03$, [CI] = [−1.04, −0.06]).

To disentangle this interaction, we first looked at the conditional effect of the ideology × fear-manipulation interaction at the two values of the scenario moderator. Both interactions were significant but in opposite directions (ideologically-irrelevant: $B_{\text{interaction}} = -.39$, $SE = .18$, $t = -2.17$, $p = .03$, [CI] = [−0.74, −.04]; ideologically-relevant: $B_{\text{interaction}} = .32$, $SE = .14$, $t = 2.19$, $p = .03$, [CI] = [0.03, 0.6]). In the ideologically-irrelevant scenario, the manipulation affected willingness to consider flight only among those one standard deviation below the mean of ideology, hereafter termed rightists ($B = 1.04$, $SE = .32$, $t = 3.3$, $p = .001$, [CI] = [0.42, 1.66]), surprisingly having no influence over those one standard deviation above the mean, hereafter termed leftists ($B = .04$, $SE = .31$, $t = .15$, $p = .88$, [CI] = [−0.56, 0.65]). In the ideologically-relevant scenario, however, the manipulation had no significant effect on rightists ($B = -.04$, $SE = .26$, $t = -.14$, $p = .89$, [CI] = [−0.56, 0.48]), but it significantly increased willingness to consider flight among leftists ($B = .78$, $SE = .27$, $t = 2.84$, $p = .005$, [CI] = [0.24, 1.32]). The analysis thus confirmed our predictions.

Discussion

Understanding the effects of fear in political contexts is of major theoretical importance. The literature on fear has for years demonstrated its potency in affecting withdrawal tendencies from frightening situations, but has rarely addressed various factors that may moderate fear's impact—among them long-standing ideological beliefs and unique contextual attributes. Similarly, the literature on ideology has contributed to our understanding of interpersonal differences in fear reactivity, but has not clearly examined how such differences may be related to differing outcomes in the face of fear.

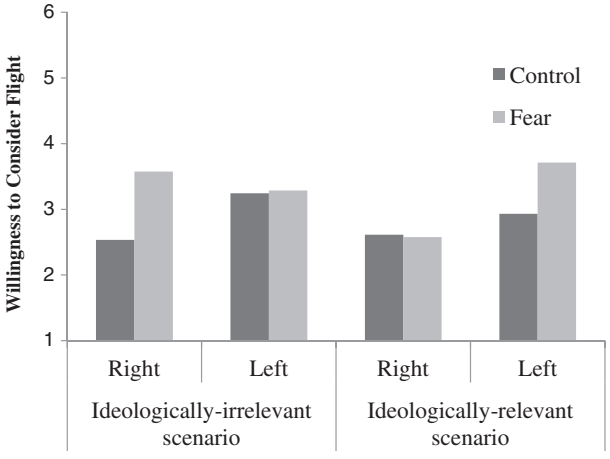

Fig. 1. The interactive influence of ideology and the fear manipulation on willingess to consider flight, as moderated by the scenario employed.

In this study, we endeavored to examine the interactive influence of ideology and fear on one extreme form of withdrawal intention: physically leaving one's country. To settle the seemingly-contradictory predictions stemming from the literature, we hypothesized that context would moderate the outcomes of this interaction. Specifically, in ideologically-irrelevant contexts, fear would have a greater impact on rightists' (versus leftists') willingness to consider flight because of their greater behavioral reactivity to fear-inducing experiences. In ideologically-relevant contexts characterized by a focal intergroup conflict, however, rightist ideology provides clear guidelines for an appropriate reaction, and therefore rightists (versus leftists) would be less moved by their fear to consider flight.

To examine this hypothesis, we manipulated both fear levels and the type of context. We found that ideology moderated the effect of fear on flight intentions in two very different ways, depending on the fear-inducing context. Inducing fear of an approaching epidemic (an ideologically-irrelevant threat) among Jewish Israelis led to increased willingness to consider flight only among rightists, but inducing fear of a Palestinian uprising (an ideologically-relevant threat from an adversarial outgroup) among this population led to increased willingness to consider flight only among leftists. The findings thus provided support for our hypothesis that context shapes the interactive influence of fear and ideology on flight intentions.

Theoretical implications

These findings may contribute to our understanding of how behavior intentions are shaped by two very important constructs—ideology and emotions—thus contributing to both relevant bodies of literature. First, they illuminate differences stemming from political ideology, providing greater insight into right–left differences in affective processes. Specifically, by placing the spotlight on fear's outcomes, this study indicates that rightists and leftists may differ not only in their reactivity to fear-inducing stimuli, but also in their readiness to act in fear's wake. In doing so, we extend our recent findings (Pliskin et al., 2014) that the impact of various emotions, including fear, on policy support is moderated by ideology. In the present examination, we learn that this is true for behavior intentions as well, but we also learn that the direction of this interactive effect is context-dependent, with the context's relation to ideological beliefs playing a crucial role. Consequently, these findings join previous work arguing that contextual factors must be taken into account when considering ideological differences in psychological reactions to threatening or otherwise negative situations (e.g., Choma et al., 2014; Federico et al., 2014).

This study also contributes to our understanding of fear and other emotions, as it challenges the common notion that emotions always lead to the behavioral intentions associated with them (e.g., Lerner et al., 2003). We identified at least two factors that may determine to what extent emotions lead to action tendencies: long-term individual factors such as ideology, and external factors such as context. These both play an undeniable role in shaping the end result of emotional processes—with certain orientations more conducive to behavioral outcomes than others under different circumstances (see Halperin & Pliskin, 2015, for a full discussion of the importance of acknowledging context when studying emotional processes).

These findings also shed new light on the specific role of fear in political contexts. Thus far, fear has usually been examined for its role in increasing or decreasing support for conciliatory (Halperin, 2011; Lerner et al., 2003; Sabucedo, Duran, Alzate, & Rodríguez, 2011) or aggressive (see Bar-Tal, 2013; Skitka et al., 2006) policies, or for its role in motivating simple everyday personal actions (Huddy et al., 2002). Nonetheless, physical departure might also be a relevant means of safeguarding oneself in the face of threatening situations, albeit an extreme and costly one. We find in these studies that even in contexts characterized by high identification and attachment, and in which the social costs of physical escape are particularly high, fear may increase people's willingness to consider leaving their country. Such an understanding may be important to the wider understanding of psychological processes underlying human migration.

Limitations and future directions

The findings of the present research reveal the importance of acknowledging different types of context, but they fall short of empirically illuminating the process by which the varying ideological weight of the context influences the outcomes of rightists' and leftists' emotions. The findings were in accordance with our hypotheses, and thus point to a potential role for rightist ideology as a coping mechanism in the face of certain ideologically-relevant fears—a role that is absent in the face of ideologically-irrelevant fears. Nonetheless, there may be other explanations for the difference between the two scenarios, such as the presence or absence of a target for blame attribution, differences in the contexts' relation to varying moral foundations (see Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), differences in appraisals of the threat and/or challenge posed by the situation (see Blascovich & Mendes, 2000), and differences stemming from varying perceptions of control. An empirical examination of the processes involved in these differences is necessary to gain a fuller understanding of the role of context, ideology, and emotion in affecting individual action tendencies. Because threat was a central element in our manipulation, future research focusing on ideological differences in the relationship between different types of threat and flight intentions may be especially valuable.

An additional central limitation of the present research is its conceptual focus on the right edge of the ideological spectrum, providing right-focused hypotheses while acknowledging the left strictly for comparative purposes. This stems from a similar focus on rightists in much of the relevant psychological literature (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a), but it creates a gap in our understanding of ideology as (at-least) a bi-directional construct. Indeed, our finding that fear of an ideologically-irrelevant threat increased rightists' but not leftists' willingness to consider flight was partially perplexing because of this reduced theoretical focus on the psychology of leftist ideology, indicating another process may be at play in leftists' reactions to fear. In line with recent empirical examinations focusing on the left end of the spectrum (Choma, Hafer, Dywan, Segalowitz, & Busseri, 2012; van der Toorn, Napier, & Dovidio, 2014), further research is required to illuminate the psychological processes motivating ideological leftists.

Finally, while it reveals substantial differences between two different fear-inducing contexts, the two contexts employed can only begin to cover the wide range or real-world types of fear-inducing situations. Other fear-inducing situations exist that may be related or unrelated to ideology and intergroup conflict in different ways. The many possible differences in situational features indicate great potential for added knowledge in examining other types of fear-inducing contexts in the future.

In summary, the present research sheds light on several phenomena important for the understanding of social and political processes related to migration. First, it examines an action tendency of great political significance—migration in the face of threat. Second, it places fear, a highly influential emotion, in context, examining how fear induced by different types of threat may lead to different outcomes for different people. Finally, it acknowledges and sheds light on the role of ideology as a moderating factor for the outcomes of emotional processes, showing that its function, like that of fear, is highly context-dependent.

Acknowledgments

This study was partially funded by a European Research Council grant [335607] to the third author. The authors would like to thank Lital Diamond and Rachel Marsha for their help in the process of conducting this research.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.04.001.

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