
Threat and the Group Attribution Error: When Threat Elicits Judgments of Extremity and Homogeneity

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In two studies, the authors investigated the impact of threat on the perception of extremity and homogeneity among the members of a group. They relied on the Group Attribution Error paradigm and asked participants to estimate the attitudes in a group of voters. Depending on the condition, the decision rules were such that the proposition allegedly passed or failed. The degree of threat of the group was varied by informing participants that the group represented a small (4%) or substantial (40%) proportion of the population living in the area. Consistent with the Group Attribution Error literature, the outcome of the vote influenced participants' inferences about the extremity of the voters' attitude. More positive (negative) attitudes were inferred in the case of a positive (negative) outcome of the vote. This effect was qualified by the level of threat. Participants inferred relatively more extreme and more homogeneous attitudes among the members of a threatening group.

Although stereotypes may be defined in many different ways, most social psychologists agree that the stereotyping process tends to result in homogeneous and extreme representations of groups (for reviews, see Fiske, 1998; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1994; Mackie & Smith, 1998; Macrae, Stangor, & Hewstone, 1996; Park & Judd, 1990; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Whetherell, 1987). In this article, we address the role played by threat in the

emergence of this pervasive tendency. Specifically, we hypothesized that people would infer more extremity and similarity among members of threatening than nonthreatening outgroups.

Although threat is a frequent component of group relations, this factor has remained largely unexplored in the intergroup relations literature. There are two notable exceptions. A first stream of research addressed the influence of stereotype threat on people's behavior. Indeed, a great many studies have now demonstrated that group members perform worse at a task when observers are known to entertain expectations that the group as a whole will do poorly at this task. Presumably, the knowledge of stereotypic expectations coupled with the fear to confirm the stereotype comes in the way of trying to succeed at the task. As a consequence, performance deteriorates (see Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, & Steele, 1999; Croizet & Claire, 1998; Leyens, Désert, Croizet, & Darcis, in press; Spencer, Steele, &

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Quinn, 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999). A second line of investigation focused on the impact of identity threat on impressions formed about the ingroup. Specifically, Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears (1995) suggested that people can boost their social identity by particularizing negative information that is conveyed about their group. This strategy, which is an alternative to the outgroup derogation, is likely to be used by members weakly identified to their group and results in a higher perceived heterogeneity of the ingroup. In contrast, highly identified group members confronted with identity threat prefer to close ranks. They see the group as very homogeneous.

In the two lines of research presented above, participants experienced threat because negative information was conveyed about their group. In many situations, however, threat may arise for reasons not directly related to identity concerns. For instance, people may experience threat when a hostile outgroup is gaining power over them. In this case, threat will result from the outgroup's potential to control or arm the ingroup. Surprisingly enough, almost no research has been devoted to the question of how the last type of threat (i.e., threat resulting from a loss of control of the ingroup relative to the outgroup) may influence the impressions formed about the outgroup. We know, however, from the recent literature on intergroup relations that hostile (Rothgerber, 1997) and competing (Brewer, Weber, & Carini, 1995, Study 2) outgroups are likely to elicit impressions of stronger extremity and homogeneity. In our view, these findings suggest that the mere anticipation of dependence vis-à-vis a hostile outgroup (situations of threat) may lead to similar consequences.

Situations that elicit threat without (or prior to) the actual experience of hostility are pretty common in social life. The political scene offers numerous illustrations of situations where people feel threatened by such anticipation of hostility or prejudice from an outgroup. For instance, the recent decision of an Austrian conservative party to form a government comprising extreme-right political figures gave rise to very strong reactions in the rest of the European Community. In the following studies, we hypothesized that the experience of threat would result in effects similar to those elicited by the actual experience of hostility. Thus, we predicted more extreme and homogeneous impressions to be formed about threatening than nonthreatening outgroups.

Threat and the Group Attribution Error

The Group Attribution Error paradigm (GAE) (see Allison, Beggan, Midgley, & Wallace, 1995; Allison, Mackie, & Messick, 1996; Allison & Messick, 1985; Allison, Worth, & King, 1990; Worth, Allison, & Messick,

1987) offers a very useful tool for addressing the above predictions. Indeed, this paradigm involves both a political scenario and judgments about group members. In typical GAE studies, participants are informed that a given percentage of group members (e.g., 57%) supported a proposition on the occasion of a ballot. Depending on conditions, the voting rules were allegedly such that the proposition passed or failed (e.g., 50% vs. 67% of support was necessary for the vote to pass). Then, participants are asked to estimate the attitude of a typical member of the group. Generally, this judgment turns out to be influenced by the outcome of the vote: The typical group member is rated as more favorable to the proposition when the proposition passed than when it failed. The difference between the judgments collected in the two conditions is clear evidence for the presence of a bias. Indeed, participants' judgment should exclusively rely on the support information, which, of course, is the same in both conditions.

The GAE paradigm is very well suited to address our questions. For one thing, the GAE directly reflects the extremity of participants' inferences about the group because this effect amounts to the difference of attitude ratings between the positive and the negative outcome conditions. In addition, the implementation of additional measures of homogeneity and similarity is extremely easy. According to our hypothesis, threat leads to more extreme and more homogeneous impressions of outgroup members. If this is the case, then both the GAE and estimates of the voters' consensus on the proposition should be stronger when a threatening rather than a nonthreatening group is being judged. These predictions were tested in the present studies, where we conducted the classical GAE paradigm (information that a proposition either passed or failed depending on specific decision rules) with two notable modifications.

A first modification concerned the manipulation of threat. The instructions always mentioned a group of voters that held values opposing those of our experimental population (i.e., extreme-right supporters). Depending on the condition, this group had either substantial or minimal power in the target community. We expected threat to be experienced more in the former than in the latter condition. A second modification was the inclusion of homogeneity measures. Not only were participants asked to estimate the attitude of a typical member of the group (i.e., the extremity measure) but they were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought the voters shared a same attitude on the proposition (i.e., the homogeneity measure). We predicted that both indicators would be sensitive to our threat manipulation so that a higher GAE and stronger similarity would be observed under the high- than the low-threat condition.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and design. The study consisted of 81 undergraduate students at the Catholic University of Louvain at Louvain-la-Neuve who took part in the study in return for partial credit to a psychological course. They were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions that resulted from a 2 (threat: threatening vs. nonthreatening group) × 2 (outcome of the vote: passed vs. failed) between-participants design. The experimental sessions were run on an individual basis.

Procedure. On their arrival at the laboratory, participants were greeted by the experimenter and told that they would take part in a study on “social memory.” Participants then received a written text that related a bogus story in which the members of a local section of a well-known French extreme-right political party (the Front National [FN]) had voted on a proposition. Depending on the condition, the decision rules were such that the proposition either failed or passed. Also, the local section was presented either as a threatening or as a nonthreatening group. After they read the story, participants completed a questionnaire comprising the dependent variables. Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

The bogus story informed participants about a ballot that allegedly took place in a small French town called Alisseau. By using a fake name and further informing participants that Alisseau was a small town, we wanted to avoid participants’ making any precise estimate regarding the percentage of FN supporters in this community. The story reported that the city council of Alisseau had to make a decision on how to invest the financial surplus of the city. Because the local FN had a number of representatives on this council, the members of the FN local section had to decide which proposition they wanted their representatives to support at the council. Specifically, the FN supporters allegedly had to decide whether they wanted their representatives to support the proposition of using the financial surplus to set up night security patrols in Alisseau.¹ The text mentioned that in the case of a rejection, the voters would have to take a stand on a second proposition; namely, use the financial surplus to support a pro-FN publisher currently facing a difficult economic position.

Independent variables. The outcome of the vote was manipulated after Allison and Messick (1985). All participants were told that 57% of the group members had supported the installation of security patrols. Depending on the condition, however, either 50% or 67% of support was necessary for the vote to pass. To increase the strength of this manipulation, we explicitly

stated that the vote passed or failed in these conditions (see Allison et al., 1990).

The instructions always mentioned the members of the FN local section of Alisseau as the group of voters. The FN is a famous extreme-right political group that holds values clearly opposed to those shared by our student population. In the high-threat (low-threat) condition, we mentioned that this party was supported by 40% (4%) of the community where the vote took place and that, as a consequence, the vote outcome would probably (not) affect the future of the community as a whole.²

Dependent variables. The first two questions checked for the success of our threat manipulation. The first item was, “To what extent do you consider the Front National to be a threatening political force in Alisseau?” Participants answered on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all threatening*) to 9 (*totally threatening*). The second item was, “To what extent would you be reluctant to live in a town like Alisseau?” Answers were provided on a scale from 1 (*not at all reluctant*) to 9 (*totally reluctant*). The third question concerned the consensus of the FN supporters toward the following proposition: “To what extent do you think the Alisseau FN members support a common position on how to use the financial surplus of the Municipality?” The scale ranged from 1 (*not at all common*) to 9 (*totally common*). The fourth question dealt with the extremity measure and was as follows: “What do you think is the attitude of a typical Alisseau FN member regarding the proposition to use the financial surplus of the city budget to set up security patrols?” Participants answered on a scale ranging from 1 (*very unfavorable to this proposition*) to 9 (*very favorable to this proposition*).

We also checked that participants correctly read the instructions by asking them to recall the percentage of FN members in Alisseau, the percentage of votes that supported the security patrol proposition, the percentage of votes required for the vote to pass, and the vote outcome (passed/failed). These questions were answered at the end of the experiment and on a separate sheet of paper. Because we presented the study as dealing with social memory, participants generally did a good job at reporting the instructions. Still, 7 participants were removed from the analyses because they provided a wrong answer to at least one of the above questions.³

Results

Manipulation checks of threat. Because the answers on the two threat questions were highly correlated ($r = .87$, $p < .0001$), we computed a threat index by averaging the scores obtained on these two scales. This index fully confirmed the success of our manipulation. As expected, threat scores were much higher in the high-threat ($M = 6.78$) than in the low-threat ($M = 3.03$) condition, $F(1, 63) = 69.98$, $p < .0001$. A main effect of the outcome

of the vote also emerged, with higher threat scores when the vote passed ($M = 5.48$) than when it failed ($M = 4.32$), $F(1, 63) = 6.65$, $p < .05$.⁴

Inferences of attitude extremity. Two results were obtained on the attitude extremity scores. First, we found a main effect of the outcome factor, $F(1, 63) = 9.71$, $p < .005$. Specifically, participants thought that the members of the local section of the FN had a more positive attitude toward the vote proposition when the proposition passed ($M = 6.70$) than when it failed ($M = 5.63$). This result replicates previous evidence for the GAE.

Second, and more important, we obtained the predicted Threat Outcome interaction, $F(1, 63) = 6.46$, $p < .05$. Whereas the outcome of the vote did not influence participants' inferences under the low-threat conditions ($M_s = 6.12$ and 5.93 for the passed and failed conditions, respectively), $t(30) < 1$, *ns*, there was a highly significant impact of the outcome of the vote under conditions of high threat ($M_s = 7.18$ and 5.34 for the passed and failed conditions, respectively), $t(30) = 4.22$, $p < .001$. Thus, as predicted, participants' inferences were more extreme, and the GAE was greater, in the case of a threatening group.

Inferences of consensus. We predicted that our participants would perceive more consensus among the group members in the high-threat than in the low-threat conditions. This prediction was clearly supported. Judgments indicated that higher consensus regarding the way to spend the financial surplus was inferred when the group was threatening ($M = 5.4$) than when it was not ($M = 4.4$), $F(1, 63) = 4.65$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 clearly support our predictions. First, the presence of threat clearly increased the amplitude of the GAE among participants. Second, participants inferred more consensus among group members in the presence of threat. In other words, threat did not only result in more extreme (and clearly unwarranted) inferences about a typical group member's attitude but also in the perception of a greater similarity among the group members as far as their position about the proposition is concerned.

At first sight, the absence of GAE found in the low-threat condition may appear surprising. Indeed, borrowing from the literature on attitude change (Chaiken, Lieberman, & Eagly, 1989), Allison and colleagues (1990) predicted and reported a strong GAE in situations of low personal relevance and an absence of GAE in situations of high personal relevance. The apparent reversal of trend obtained in the present study (the high-threat conditions were probably more relevant than the low-threat conditions) does, however, make

TABLE 1: Mean Inferences of Support for the Vote Proposition as a Function of Vote Outcome and Level of Threat

Level of Threat	Vote Outcome					
	Passed			Failed		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Low	6.12 ^a	1.57	16	5.93	1.12	16
High	7.18	1.16	16	5.34	1.30	16

a. The scale ranges from 1 (*very unfavorable to the vote proposition*) to 9 (*very favorable to the vote proposition*).

sense if one considers the distinction proposed by Johnson and Eagly (1989, 1990) between outcome-relevant and value-relevant involvement. On the basis of a meta-analysis, these authors proposed that biased information processing may decrease in situations of high outcome-relevant involvement (situations where people's concerns to attain desirable outcomes are at stake) but increase in situations of high value-relevant involvement (situations where people's enduring values are at stake). Whereas the personal-relevance factor manipulated by Allison and colleagues (1990) was clearly related to an outcome-relevant type of involvement, we think the present manipulation of threat was rather concerned with participants' values. As a matter of fact, we purposely chose an outgroup whose values would clash with those of our experimental population. Although speculative, the present analysis is consistent with Johnson and Eagly's (1989, 1990) line of reasoning and with more recent views about the impact of motivated reasoning on stereotyping (see, for instance, Kunda & Sinclair, 1999; Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadronek, 1992, 1994).

An intriguing feature of the findings of Study 1 concerns the fact that our participants perceived a substantial level of consensus among members of the threatening group even when they learned that the proposition failed. This fact is noteworthy because, contrary to what happened for the focal proposition, our participants received no information at all about the support for the alternative proposition. This pattern suggests that perceivers are quite willing to infer the presence of consensus without much information simply because they want to see the group as a unified whole. A related question is whether perceivers confronted with a threatening group see the group as being more homogeneous only on the dimension strictly related to the topic of the vote. Alternatively, it may be the case that the group is perceived to be more homogeneous at a very general level. We designed Study 2 to address these issues.

STUDY 2

Study 2 introduces some notable changes to the procedure used in Study 1. First, we aimed at collecting

more information on the impact of threat on the perceived homogeneity and extremity of the group. Thus, participants were asked for extremity and homogeneity judgments on more specific dimensions about the Alisseau FN members. This allowed investigating whether threat would affect the perceived extremity and homogeneity of the group only on questions directly related to the vote situation or if threat also would affect judgments of the group on dimensions not directly concerned by the scenario. We predicted that the last proposition would hold true.

A second modification concerned the extremity question. This time, we had participants estimating the extent to which a typical FN member would favor the vote proposition over the alternative one; that is, the alternative proposition that was mentioned in the text but on which no support information was provided. Given that the support information was provided only on the vote proposition (and given that this information suggested a fairly high level of support to the vote proposition: 57%), the best estimation participants can make is to consider that FN members would support this proposition irrespective of the fact that the vote eventually passed or failed. In light of our earlier findings, we predicted that participants in the threat and rejection condition would consider the FN members as being more favorable to the alternative proposition than to the focal one despite the total lack of support information.

Two reasons led us to make this prediction. First, stakes for consensus are more important in the high than in the low-threat conditions. Indeed, only in the high-threat conditions could the vote influence the future of the community. As a consequence, participants in the high-threat conditions may infer that it is in the very interest of the FN supporters to reach a consensus on the alternative proposition. Second, because the rejection outcome renders salient the divergence of opinions among the FN members, threatened participants may experience this state of affairs as being inconsistent with their view of a homogeneous group. In our opinion, threatened participants in the rejection condition may therefore want to restore consistency by inferring that the FN members actually supported the alternative proposition over the focal one. Indeed, such an inference implies that a new consensus will easily be reached on the occasion of a vote on the alternative proposition.

Finally, this study also aimed at controlling for one possible alternative account of the parallel influence of threat on consensus and extremity measures as revealed in Study 1. Indeed, the possibility exists that participants simply inferred one judgment from the other. For instance, participants may have believed that consensual

attitudes are held with higher certainty (and, therefore, higher extremity) than nonconsensual ones. Because the consensus question was answered right before the extremity question in Study 1, one may argue that participants simply built on their consensus ratings to come up with their extremity estimation. To control for this alternative account of our extremity results, the main homogeneity and attitude extremity questions were answered at different points in the present experiment. Specifically, participants first completed a new series of homogeneity and extremity measures. Only then did they receive the outcome information and answer the main extremity measure. One should note here that this new procedure allowed us to increase the inconsistency experienced by participants in the high-threat and rejection condition. Indeed, those participants who evaluated the group as highly homogeneous were then exposed to the rejection information. This should make salient the diversity of opinions among the FN supporters. As discussed above, such a situation may lead these participants to try reducing the inconsistency by overestimating the FN members' support for the alternative proposition.

Method

Participants and design. Participants were 83 undergraduate students at the Catholic University of Louvain at Louvain-la-Neuve who took part in the experiment in return for partial course credit. As in Study 1, they were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions resulting in a 2 (threat: threatening vs. nonthreatening group) \times 2 (outcome of the vote: passed vs. failed) between-participants design. The experimental sessions were run on an individual basis.

Procedure. The procedure of Study 2 closely paralleled that of Study 1, with a few modifications. The extremity and homogeneity measures were not only more numerous but also more clearly dissociated from the main attitude extremity question. Specifically, after participants had gone through the first part of the text concerning the vote situation, they answered the threat questions and the new series of homogeneity and extremity measures. Only then did participants receive the second part of the text with information about the support for the vote proposition along with explicit information about the vote outcome. Finally, participants answered the attitude extremity measure and, on a separate sheet, the recall questions. Thus, in this second study, participants were not informed about the percentage of people agreeing with the proposition at the time they answered the homogeneity measures. In addition, we also changed the nature of the alternative proposition. Whereas the focal proposition again concerned security

patrol, the alternative proposition now dealt with the idea of using the financial surplus to launch a propaganda campaign in the secondary school of the area.⁵

Independent variables. Threat and outcome of the vote were manipulated as in Study 1.

Dependent measures. The first two questions were similar to the ones used in Study 1 and evaluated threat. The third question, which concerned the consensus on the way to use the financial surplus, was slightly adapted to better address our hypothesis. Specifically, the item read, "To what extent do you think the Alisseau FN members support, or will support in the near future, a common position on how to use the financial surplus of the community?" Participants answered on a scale ranging from 1 (*not very common*) to 9 (*very common*). The fourth question was a general measure of homogeneity: "To what extent do you think the Alisseau FN members are different from each other?" The scale ranged from 1 (*not very different*) to 9 (*very different*). Then, participants reported the extent to which they considered the Alisseau FN members as distinct from French people in general on a scale ranging from 1 (*not very distinct*) to 9 (*very distinct*). Finally, participants evaluated the extent to which they considered the Alisseau FN members to be extremists on a scale ranging from 1 (*fascists*) to 9 (*extreme right*).

Next, participants answered the new extremity and homogeneity measures. First, they were asked to report the percentage of Alisseau FN members that they considered to be (1) intolerant, (2) hypocritical, (3) stupid, (4) moderate, (5) patriotic, (6) conceited, (7) aggressive, and (8) respectful of order.⁶ We then collected information on these dimensions in terms of extremity and variability. A continuous scale was associated with each of these traits. Participants were asked to put three slashes on each scale to indicate the level of the trait they thought corresponded to the typical, the less extreme, and the most extreme member of the Alisseau FN local section.

After participants were informed about the outcome of the vote, they answered the attitude extremity measure. The question read as follows: "What attitude do you think a typical Alisseau FN member would most likely share on the way to use the financial excess of the Municipality?" This was followed by a scale ranging from 1 (*favorable to the propaganda proposition*) to 9 (*favorable to the security patrols*). Participants also were asked to recall the instructions. The questions were similar to those used in Study 1 and were answered after the attitude extremity question and on a different sheet of paper. Nine participants were removed from the analyses because they failed to correctly answer at least one of the recall questions.

Results

Manipulation checks of threat. As in Study 1, the answers on the two threat scales were highly correlated ($r = .66$, $p < .0001$). We therefore averaged the two scores to come up with a global threat index that confirmed the success of our manipulation of threat, $F(1, 63) = 70.44$, $p < .0001$. As expected, the group was considered as much more threatening in the high-threat ($M = 7.96$) than in the low-threat condition ($M = 4.80$).⁷

Judgment of consensus. As predicted, participants thought that there was more consensus about the way to use the financial surplus in the high-threat ($M = 6.29$) than in the low-threat ($M = 4.72$) condition, $F(1, 63) = 9.96$, $p < .005$.

Judgment of similarity of the FN members. The fourth question consisted of a general measure of the perceived similarity among the Alisseau FN members. The scores on this scale were significantly affected by the level of threat, $F(1, 63) = 11.16$, $p < .005$, and echoed the results obtained for the consensus question. Specifically, the members of the Alisseau FN local section were considered as less different from each other when the group was threatening ($M = 3.03$) than when it was not ($M = 4.45$).

Distinctiveness of the FN members. No result emerged for this variable.

Other extremity and homogeneity measures. None of the new measures included in this second study was affected by our manipulations. We will come back to this point in the Discussion section.

Attitude extremity. The predicted interaction between the outcome of the vote and the level of threat came out significant, $F(1, 63) = 4.25$, $p < .05$. As can be seen in Table 2, participants in the low-threat condition were not affected by the outcome of the vote. In sharp contrast, high-threat participants judged the typical FN member as favorable to the vote proposition when that proposition passed ($M = 5.93$) but favorable to the alternative proposition when it failed ($M = 4.27$). Of importance, these two means were significantly different from each other, $t(29) = 2.40$, $p < .05$. In line with our prediction, participants in the high-threat-rejection condition inferred that the voters actually favored the alternative proposition over the focal one. This judgment was made in spite of the total lack of information about voters' actual support for the alternative proposition.

Discussion

Study 2 confirms the role of threat on both homogeneity and extremity judgments. This study also provides new insights regarding the scope of the influence of threat on participants' inferences. A first notable finding

TABLE 2: Mean Inferences of Support for the Propositions as a Function of Vote Outcome and Level of Threat

Level of Threat	Vote Outcome					
	Passed			Failed		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Low	4.81 ^a	1.86	16	5.11	1.93	17
High	5.93	1.43	16	4.27	2.34	15

a. The scale ranges from 1 (*favorable to the propaganda proposition*) to 9 (*favorable to the security patrols proposition*).

is that threat—in the case of a vote failure—led participants to consider that the voters were more supportive to the alternative proposition than to the focal one. This inference emerged in spite of the total lack of information on the group members' support for the alternative proposition and in spite of the clear evidence that the focal proposition had been supported by a fairly high percentage of group members.

One explanation of this finding is that participants confronted with a threatening group expected to find a high level of consensus among the group members. Because the failure information rendered highly salient the variability of attitudes among the group members, participants likely faced a discrepancy between their expectation and the actual outcome of the vote. Inferring that the FN voters actually preferred the alternative proposition to the focal one allowed these participants to solve the inconsistency. Indeed, such a strong inference suggests that participants expected a consensus to emerge on the occasion of a forthcoming vote.

Another interesting finding is that threat did not influence participants' judgment of the group on personality traits that we thought were typical of extreme-right supporters. Two possibilities may account for this unexpected absence of results. First, it is possible that these traits were not sufficiently associated with members of an extreme-right political party. We doubt the validity of this account. Indeed, although selected on a priori grounds, attributes such as aggression and intolerance are clearly associated with extreme-right supporters. A second and more plausible account is that participants were simply reluctant to make dispositional judgments about the specific Alisseau FN supporters. It is important to note that we took precautions to ensure that participants would not have any previous knowledge about these group members. Given that our instructions made it very clear that we were asking for judgments about the members of the local FN section (*Alisseau* was underlined in all the questions) rather than on FN supporters in general, participants may have felt uncomfortable about inferring characteristics not directly related to the information that they had received. For one thing,

participants may have had a hard time singling out characteristics that were specific to the local FN members as opposed to FN members in general. Conversationally, our emphasis on Alisseau went a long way to imply that such a judgment was indeed required (Grice, 1975). Second, and in line with social judgment theory, participants may have deemed socially unwarranted any judgment that went beyond the information mentioned in the materials (Corneille, Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Walther, 1999; Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Corneille, 1996; Leyens et al., 1992, 1994; Yzerbyt, Dardenne, & Leyens, 1998; Yzerbyt, Leyens, & Corneille, 1998; Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, & Rocher, 1994).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In one of the first studies conducted on the GAE, Allison and Messick (1985, Experiment 2) informed participants that a country leader had decided to establish diplomatic relations (positive attitude) or to sever ties (negative attitude) with a foreign country (Berelone). Depending on the condition, the leader allegedly was the president of the United States, the prime minister of the Netherlands, or the president of the Soviet Union. The participants' task was to infer the attitude of a typical (American/Dutch/Soviet) citizen toward the foreign country. As predicted, more positive inferences were made when the country leader's decision was positive than when it was negative (although the citizens may have had a different attitude than their leader). Interestingly, the GAE turned out to be much stronger in the scenario involving the Soviet Union.

To account for this result, Allison and Messick (1985) suggested that participants expected more correspondent attitudes between a Soviet leader and Soviet citizens than between an American leader and American citizens. A follow-up study, however, did not lend support for this conjecture. Given that contradiction, the authors suggested that participants might have expected more homogeneity among outgroup Soviets than among ingroup Americans. This interpretation is quite plausible but could not be entirely attributed to the ingroup/outgroup status. Indeed, Dutch and Soviets were both outgroups for the participants, and the GAE was clearly greater in the latter case. What, then, explains the emergence of polarized attitudes ratings in the Soviet scenario? Our interpretation of this result is that the Soviets represented a threatening group at the time of the study and thus triggered expectations of extremity and homogeneity.

As noted in the Introduction, stereotyping often has been considered as a form of accentuation. Whatever the specific content of the stereotype, stereotyping leads to exacerbation of both the perceived extremity and similarity of outgroup members. So far, accentuation pro-

cesses have been addressed either from a cognitive perspective (e.g., Corneille & Judd, 1999; Eiser & Stroebe, 1972; Goldstone, 1994; Krueger & Clement, 1994; Livingston, Andrews, & Harnad, 1998; McGarty & Penny, 1988; Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963) or have been linked to the group members' desire to maintain the positivity of their social identity (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). What the present results suggest is that group interdependence also may play a role in this process (see Corneille & Yzerbyt, 2000). Specifically, the studies reported here suggest that accentuation effects are enhanced as ingroup members anticipate a higher dependence on potentially harmful outgroups. But how could this tendency be accounted for?

Research suggests that accentuation of homogeneity may facilitate discrimination and retaliation toward groups (Brewer et al., 1995; Rothgerber, 1997; Vanbeselaere, 1991; Wilder, 1978, 1986). Admittedly, one may more readily accept an air-strike action directed toward the enemy than the bombing of specific individuals. However, such a functional perspective may not be the whole story. Indeed, one may argue that the mere interdependence between groups suffices to elicit accentuation effects. The idea here is that groups would be perceived as more entitative as they are perceived as being more active. Social researchers are familiar with the idea that common fate is a powerful factor in the creation of groups (Sherif, 1966; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sheriff, 1961; see also Campbell, 1958). This proposition has been generally considered from the perspective of the ingroup: More cohesion occurs when group members behave toward the resolution of a common project (Festinger, 1950). It is worth examining the consequences of this proposition when outgroups are being considered. Indeed, if a common project really elicits cohesion among group members, people may reasonably expect more consensus among groups that they think are socially active. And, if higher dependence on an outgroup (or its mere anticipation) renders salient the outgroup's activity, the above process may reasonably explain why higher perceived consensus occurs in situations of higher dependence. A similar reasoning readily applies to the perceived extremity of the outgroup. Indeed, as a group is perceived in terms of its potential to fulfill a goal, its prototype is likely to shift from its average to its ideal member (see Barsalou, 1985). Note that this line of reasoning tends to suggest that interdependence (or its anticipation) *per se* may suffice to elicit accentuation (see Brewer et al., 1995; but see also Guinote & Fiske, 2000; Rothgerber, 1997, Study 1).

As we see them, the present results speak to a number of social and political issues. Indeed, the studies reported here suggest that groups will be perceived as both more extreme and more homogeneous as they

become more threatening. In many European countries, extreme-right political parties have gained importance during the last two decades. The level of success has been such that some of these parties now represent significant forces on the political scene. For years, the political debate has dealt with the question of whether one should try to better understand what supporters of extreme-right parties are or whether one should stigmatize them. As extreme-right parties became stronger and started posing a serious threat to established democratic values, an increasing number of people rallied the stigmatization camp. In France, political journalists refused to have FN representatives in their debates. In Belgium, the parliament voted a proposition that ruled illegal the publication of xenophobic or racist opinions. We think these changes are quite representative of the issue raised in the present studies. As groups become more threatening, they start eliciting more homogeneous and more extreme impressions. One may hardly question the fact that these processes may help justify controversial decisions about these groups. Censorship, for instance, may be deemed more acceptable when applying to neo-Nazi supporters than to the guy next door. By increasing the legitimacy of such decisions, the perception of homogeneity may facilitate social action. Whether such strategies eventually prove useful for controlling these threatening groups is yet another question, one that surely deserves closer scrutiny.

NOTES

1. Although not exceptional in the United States, private security patrols are not part of the everyday landscape in Europe. We made sure that the patrol proposition was consistent with the Front National (FN) by mentioning specific details in the instructions. For instance, it was said that the FN wanted to have armed veterans conduct the patrols and to allow them to check identity documents upon encountering suspect behaviors.

2. Participants received no information about the absolute group size. Also, information about the vote support was held constant in all conditions. Still, one may argue that the support is psychologically higher in the high- than in the low-threat condition (57% of 40% vs. 57% of 4%). This psychological confound is inevitable in democratic vote situations where the power of political groups is a function of the support they receive in the population. It remains that we see no reason for the absolute size of a group to affect in and of itself the perceived consensus existing among its members or why it would affect the magnitude of threat (think of a small vs. large group of stamp collectors).

3. The wrong answers mainly occurred in recalling the percentage of people supporting the FN in the Alisseau community, which was a check for our threat manipulation.

4. We think this occurred because the alternative proposition was slightly less threatening than the vote proposition (see Study 2).

5. We suspected that participants tended to deem the proposition on security patrols as more threatening than the proposition on financial support for the pro-FN publisher (see Study 1). This is what motivated the replacement of the latter proposition by a more threatening one in the present study (propaganda).

6. These traits were selected on a priori grounds. Traits 5 and 8 were considered as consistent positive, Traits 1 and 7 as consistent negative,

and the remaining traits as irrelevant for characterizing extreme-right supporters.

7. The general increase in the level of threat, compared to Study 1, supports the idea that we used a more threatening alternative proposition in the present study.

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