Fear-triggering Effects of Terrorism Threats:

Cross-country Comparison in a Terrorism News Scenario Experiment

Abstract

Terrorist attacks can instigate widespread and long-lasting fear. Mass media can enforce fear by framing the events and affecting their perceptions. We implemented a news experiment to investigate the fear-triggering effects of different types of terrorist threats. We manipulated the type of terrorist group in three scenarios: a homegrown Islamist group, a foreign Islamist group, and a domestic far-right group. The fourth group served as the control group. The data were collected in early 2017 from Finland ($N = 2,024$), Norway ($N = 2,063$), Spain ($N = 2,000$), France ($N = 2,003$), and the United States ($N = 2,039$). The results showed that in Finland and France, fear was higher in groups primed with jihadist scenarios. Ethnic intolerance was associated with fear related to jihadist news across all of the countries. Institutional trust was positively associated with fear, whereas interpersonal trust was negatively associated when significant. Moreover, highly neurotic individuals were likely to fear more across the cultural context or threat type. The results support previous studies on two cross-culturally merging dimensions of personality and emotions; neuroticism, and negative affect.

Keywords: terrorism, fear, ethnic intolerance, personality, neuroticism, generalized trust, institutional trust

Introduction

Immigration has become a pressing political issue as Western societies are becoming more ethnically diverse (Jacobs et al., 2017). The sudden increase in asylum seekers in Europe from 2015 gave rise to negative feelings towards newcomers among native citizens (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010). Previous research has indicated a link between prejudice and fear of crime (Jacobs et al., 2017; Willmott et al., 2018; Willmott & Ioannou, 2017). Mass media may further contribute to the link by offering a criminal threat frame for immigration (Fryberg et al., 2012). In particular, foreign-born Muslims are increasingly seen as a national security threat, with an emphasis on their otherness, whereas domestic terrorism is often considered a small-scale threat attributable to mentally ill actors (Powell, 2011). The environment of a series of terrorist attacks, a high influx of refugees, and the right-wing anti-immigration rhetoric in 2017 provided a powerful base for our experimental manipulation (Crandall, Miller, & White, 2018).

In this study, we conducted a news experiment to study fear reactions in five countries. Our focus is on the social-psychological determinants of fear, and we grounded our study upon prejudice, personality, and trust research.

1.1 Socio-cultural basis of Muslim stereotypes

Terrorist attacks are rare events that only a few people have personally experienced. When the public's direct contact with the incident decreases, the power of the media as an attitude influencer increases (Bonanno et al., 2010; Wanta & Hu, 1993). Media reports about political events are rarely neutral, hence setting the tone of certain events (Gadarian, 2010). Public discourse on topics continues on online forums (Kearns, Betus, & Lemieux, 2019), and social media is extensively used in relation to the terrorist attack (Enjolras, Gadarian, & Steen-Johnsen, 2019; Oksanen et al., 2018). According to recent studies, social media sites

such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter can distort people's worldviews and increase their distress even more than traditional media can (Goodwin et al., 2015).

Topics with widespread coverage are perceived as more important. Kearns et al. (2019) demonstrated the religion of a terrorist attack's perpetrator is a robust predictor of the news coverage. Muslim terrorists have received 357% more coverage than other terrorists, from among all of the attacks in the United States between 2006 and 2015. The distortion of reality may explain why another type of terrorism, specifically far-right threats, is downplayed (Hawi, Osborne, Bulbulia, & Sibley 2019; Kearns et al., 2019). Arabs and Muslims are typically associated with violence and terrorism in the media (Lajevardi & Oskooii, 2018; Sides & Gross, 2013). Stereotypical characters are particularly prevalent in video games, in which Muslims are usually depicted in a very one-sided way, as wearing turbans and explosive belts while driving a car loaded with bombs. These stereotypes became more common after 9/11 (Saleem & Anderson, 2013). We expect that in the case of exposure to a terrorist threat, scenarios attributed to ISIS will trigger more fear in newsreaders.

      1.1.1   Threats, emotions, and prejudice. Allport (1954) initially defined prejudice as a global negative feeling toward outgroups. More recently, this view has been challenged for being unable to explain nuances of negative emotions (e.g., anger, fear, disgust, pity, guilt) toward social groups and thus masking the prejudice–behavior link. In a sociofunctional model of prejudice, Cottrel and Neuberg (2005) argued that prejudice should be defined as a set of functional emotions elicited by specific threats and that these emotions determine behavior toward an out-group. The model proposes specific threat–emotion–behavior patterns that have replicated in several studies. For example, Johnston and Glasford (2014) found out that active feminists elicited a reactions of anger among a group of participants and reactions were associated with active harm intentions (e.g., attack, harassment), whereas sexual minorities elicited disgust (contamination threat) and passive

harm (e.g., avoidance, exclusion) and Mexicans triggered fear (to physical safety threat) and motivated intentions to flee. Fear is the first emotional reaction when an out-group is perceived as a potential threat to the in-group' physical safety and motivates escape behavior (Cottrel & Neuberg, 2002; Kamans, Otten, & Gordijn, 2011). Yet, fear is also possible as a secondary reaction (primary anger) in situations when an out-group is perceived as threatening the in-group's economic resources, values, or health (e.g., immigrants threatening the jobs of native citizens).

Based on the logic of the proposed theoretical model and the socio-cultural basis of stereotypes, we presume that we presume that the ISIS associated with safety–fear profile may have created transnational stereotypes that have made the link between ethnic intolerance and fear similar in all countries.

1.2 Trait Neuroticism and Fear

The five-factor model (FFM) has been a widely recognized construct of personality traits. Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that the five basic personality dimensions are quite stable over the lifespan and observable in behavior, yet cultural variations may exist in how people express them. Thus the cross-cultural differences may be accounted for response styles or self-presentational strategies rather than differences in personality traits (Allik & McCrae, 2004). With a few exceptions (e.g. Botswana and Nigeria) and despite the varieties in language, history, religion, and culture, cross-cultural studies suggest that personality traits are fundamental features of human nature (Mccrae & Terracciano, 2005). The main dimensions—neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness (O), agreeableness (A), and conscientiousness (C)—emerge from traits that are analyzed with a personality inventory instrument (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992) or shorter versions, such as the Big Five Inventory (BFI; Soto & John, 2009).

Big five personality traits converge to many psychological phenomena but are particularly relevant to emotions. In a similar way that personality traits form a unified structure, also affective states form two dominant dimensions of negative and positive affect (Haslam, 2007) that have been discovered across cultures (Watson & Clark, 1984). Positive refers to emotions and moods such as joy, happiness and enthusiasm, whereas negative states involve such as fearfulness, anxiety, sadness and contempt (Haslam, 2007). Neuroticism is associated with proneness to experience negative emotions whereas, extraversion positive states (Haslam, 2007).

Over 30 years of extensive analysis attest sufficient evidence of the validity and robustness of the two dimensions of E and N (Meyer & Shack, 1989). Neuroticism is a pervasive disposition that predisposes a person to negative mood, fear, anxiety, and a tendency to see threats in the unknown (del Barrio et al., 1997; Jach & Smillie, 2019; McCrae & Costa, 2006). In general, highly neurotic individuals interpret situations negatively compared to the less neurotic (Cimbolic Gunthert, Cohen, & Armeli, 1999). In emotion-arousing tasks, neuroticism increases amygdala activation in the brain area associated with fear reactions (Haas et al., 2007). We expect that trait neuroticism is linked to higher fear upon exposure to threat-stimulating news, and we expect this effect to be valid across the studied countries since the sample consists of Western nations that have shown similarities in personality profiles.

1.3   Trust

Social trust functions as a glue that binds people together in their social communities (Uslaner, 2000) and contributes to cooperation, harmony, and general well-being (Delhey & Newton, 2003). Robert Putnam argues that trust in people one knows can increase the trust in people one does not know (Uslaner, 2000). Generalized trust can be defined as a trust that other people are generally well motivated (Uslaner, 2000). Trust can be expected to protect

against fear through cognitive reappraisal processes (Enjolras et al., 2019; Ochsner & Gross, 2005). Trustful individuals might reappraise threatening events less aggressively than less trusting individuals do, due to having more positive expectations of other people. Such a prophylactic effect of trust on fear has been demonstrated among citizens in Norway, Spain, and France—that is, in both high and low-trust societies (Enjolras et al., 2019).

Institutional trust indicates how citizens evaluate state institutions that protect society from aversive events (Oksanen et al., 2015). State institutions elicit a feeling of security, at least in democratic societies (Kääriäinen & Lehtonen, 2006). Although having a different basis, institutional trust and generalized trust are both important parts of social capital (Kääriäinen & Lehtonen, 2006; Newton, 2001) that create societal resilience (Bonanno, 2004). Societal resilience is a process linking adaptive capacities to help communities overcome a disruptive event and maintain normal functioning (Bonanno, 2004). Therefore, a high level of trust may have a protective effect on societal resilience and cohesion, such as after terror attacks. Based on the previous literature, we expect that the effect of trust on fear is universal, meaning that people who trust more in other people and state institutions will report less fear, but the effects' strength may still differ depending on the context. The prophylactic effect of generalized trust should be stronger in Finland and Norway, countries with higher levels of social and institutional trust, compared to in Spain, France, and the United States.

Based on previous fear-of-crime studies, we also expected that females fear more than males (Huddy et al., 2005; Nellis, 2009). Also, many studies show that older people tend to fear more than younger people (Boscarino, Figley, & Adams 2003; May et al., 2011). In addition, lower education has been associated with a higher level of fear (Huddy et al., 2005).

1.4. This Study

We studied the fear-triggering effect of terrorism news in five OECD countries: France, Spain, Finland, Norway, and the United States. The starting point was that terrorism can arouse fear in people and that media accounts may enforce such a fear. The purpose was to study the determinants of the fear derived from personality and social psychology research literature linked to different types of terrorist threats; Islamist-terrorism and right-wing. Providing an unequivocal definition of the concept of right-wing extremism is difficult and not the objective of the current study. However, the majority of scholars agree that it is ideologally right-wing (Carter, 2018), and includes nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democracy, and a wish for a strong state (Mudde, 1995).

Since the early 2000s, all of these countries have witnessed several high-profile terrorist attacks or mass killings (Lankford, 2016; Sandberg et al., 2014), but their societies and historical backgrounds are different. Norway and Finland both represent high-trust societies in comparison; approximately half of their populations think that others can be trusted. In the United States, Spain, and France, about 20% to 30% of individuals trust others (Delhey & Newton, 2005).

In Norway, the repetition of attacks has not been the most significant threat, as Utoya in 2011 may have been perceived as an exceptional tragedy committed by an isolated actor (Enjolras et al., 2019). In Finland, there have been several small-scale, ideologically motivated attacks, such as the Jokela 2007 and Kauhajoki 2008 school shootings, which differ from homicides (Räsänen, Hawdon, Näsi, & Oksanen, 2014) yet have not been considered terrorism (Malkki & Sallamaa, 2019). This study was conducted before the Turku attack, which has been officially labeled as the first terrorist act in Finland. Spain has been confronted both far-right and Islamist attacks (Ravndal, 2018), whereas France has experienced mainly radical Islamist terrorism (GTD, 2019) and the United States mainly far-right terrorism (Hewitt, 2003).

The hypotheses were:

H1: In the case of exposure to a terrorist threat, scenarios attributed to ISIS would trigger more fear, and the effect would be transnational.

H2: Muslim perpetrators of ISIS-groups being associated with a safety-threat profile may have created transnational stereotypes that have made the link between ethnic intolerance and fear similar in all countries.

H3: When exposed to threat stimulating news, trait neuroticism is associated with higher fear, and this effect is valid across national samples since the link is not context-dependent.

H4: People who trust more in other people and in state institutions will report less fear, but the magnitude of the effects may still differ by context. Thus, the impacts of generalized trust and institutional trust should be stronger in Finland and Norway, countries with higher levels of trust, compared to in Spain, France, and the United States.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Representative surveys were collected in early January 2017 from Finland ($N = $ 2,024), Norway ($N = $ 2,063), Spain ($N = $ 2,000), France ($N = $ 2,003), and the United States ($N = $ 2,039). The samples were drawn from existing Web panels operated by TNS Kantar (Finland and Norway) and Lightspeed (Spain, the United States, and France).

The participants were aged 16 to 93 ($M_{FIN} = 49.64$, $SD_{FIN} = 17.06$; $M_{NOR} = 46.68$, $SD_{NOR} = 17.03$; $M_{SPA} = 47.51$, $SD_{SPA} = 14.78$; $M_{FRA} = 47.74$, $SD_{FRA} = 15.79$; $M_{U.S.} = 46.15$, $SD_{U.S.} = 17.51$), and roughly 50% of the respondents were female (57.2%$_{FIN}$; 48.47%$_{NOR}$; 51.3% $_{SPA}$; 51.5% $_{FR}$; 50.8%$_{U.S.}$). The samples were weighted by age, sex, and region to meet the official population statistics. Participants' informed consent was requested, and they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point in the research.

2.2. Experiment

The respondents were randomly divided into four groups. Each group read an identical press release about national security police discovering documents from laptops indicating plans for massive terrorist attacks against public targets in the country's capital city. The stories differed only by the type of the perpetrator: (a) an Islamist group of individuals who grew up in the country but are the sons of immigrants from Iraq; (b) an Islamist group of young men who had just recently emigrated from Iraq; and (c) a right-wing extremist group. We provided country-basis examples of right-wing groups: Basque suspect from ETA in Spain, SVL (The Finnish Resistance Movement) in Finland, Right-Wing Extremist groups in Eastern Norway, American Patriot party anti-government Militia in the US and Right-wing extremist groups in France. The control group read a neutral story about the finding of an ancient Olmec stone slab in Mexico.

2.3. Measures

For the survey instrument, the participants first answered the questionnaire portion. The survey experiment was placed at the bottom of the survey, to avoid posttreatment bias. In the experiment, each participant first read one of the four randomly assigned news stories and was asked, "How does what you have just read make you feel?" The participants were asked to report their emotional reactions on a 7-point Likert scale. The outcome variable of fear was measured with three items—fearful, scared, and anxious feelings—according to the emotional response battery by Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2017). The interitem reliability of the three questions was good (α_{FIN} = .96; α_{SPA} = .95; α_{NOR} = .96; α_{FRA} = .91; $\alpha_{U.S.}$ = .95).

The independent variable of ethnic intolerance was measured with five questions: (a) There are too many immigrants in [the country]; (b) Islam is a threat to the West; (c)

French/Spanish/Finnish/Norwegian/American natives should have priority in employment compared to foreigners; (d) Immigration is a source of cultural enrichment; and (e) Children born in the [country] to immigrant parents are as French/Spanish/Norwegian/ Finnish/ American as anyone else. The answer options were 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree a little*, 3 = *agree a little*, and 4 = *strongly agree*. The five questions had good interitem reliability (α_{FIN} = 88; α_{SPA} = .81; α_{NOR} =.86; α_{FRA} = 87; $\alpha_{U.S.}$ =.82).

The second independent variable of neuroticism was measured with two items, as part of the 10-item version (BFI-10) of the Big Five: (a) "How well do the following statements describe your personality?" and (b) "I see myself as someone who . . . " Neuroticism consisted of two items: (a) " . . . is relaxed, handles stress well" and the opposite pole (b) "gets nervous easily." The internal reliability was satisfactory (α_{FIN} = .56; α_{SPA} = .59; α_{NOR} = .62; α_{FRA} = .55; $\alpha_{U.S.}$ = .56).

The third independent variable of generalized trust was measured with one question that is widely used in social sciences: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?" Generalized trust and institutional trust were both measured with the same scale, ranging from 1 = *do not trust at all* to 7 = *trust completely*.

The fourth independent variable of institutional trust was measured with the question "Various organizations and institutions are listed below. How much trust do you have in each of these?" Ten options were given: the police, courts, government, Congress or Parliament, mass media, the military, politicians, the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and national intelligence agencies (e.g., the FBI and CIA in the United States). The internal reliability was good (α_{FIN} = .90; α_{SPA} = .92; α_{NOR} = .91; α_{FRA} = .91; $\alpha_{U.S.}$ = .91).

The sociodemographic control variables included gender (1 = *female*, 2 = *male*), age as a continuous variable, and education. Education was dummy coded to indicate whether participants had accomplished a university degree (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*).

1.4 Statistical techniques

Before the analyses, Treatment Groups 1 and 2 (jihadist news) were collapsed since the aim was to compare the fear level when exposed to an out-group threat (an Iraqi actor) versus an in-group threat (a domestic actor). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test showed that none of the groups were normally distributed. However, our samples were large (Ns > 2,000), and the group sizes were also relatively equal. We report parametric one-way ANOVA and t-test results. We used Dunnett's T3 pairwise comparison in cases of unequal variances (FIN = 5.053, p = .006; United States = 12.36, p = .000; ES = 19.810, p = .000; and FRA = 34.24, p = .000) and Bonferroni pairwise comparison when equal variances were assumed (NOR = .334, p = .716).

Furthermore, to analyze the predictors of fear in the experimental groups, we ran linear regressions separately for each country. Weight was used in all of the analyses to balance the data by age and gender. Due to the heteroscedasticity of the residuals, we analyzed the data with Huber–White robust standard errors. Multicollinearity was not detected.

2 Results

Experimental groups differed in fear reactions from the control group in all countries (p = .000). Pairwise indicated statistically significant differences between the treatment groups only in Finland (p = .029) and France (p = .009). The difference was not significant in the United States (p = .338), Norway (p = .830), or Spain (p = .078).

Table 2 presents the results of the ISIS models. The models were statistically significant in Norway, ($F = 33.34$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .19$), Finland ($F = 23.41$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .14$), Spain ($F = 26.74$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .16$), France ($F = 19.43$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .12$), and the United States ($F = 21.56$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .13$).

Table 3 presents the far-right models. The final models were statistically significant in Norway ($F = 13.74$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .16$), Finland ($F = 13.21$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .15$), Spain ($F = 14.43$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .17$), France ($F = 14.06$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .15$) and the United States ($F = 13.66$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .16$).

Ethnic intolerance was associated with fear in all of the countries and groups except in the far-right group in Norway. In France, ethnic intolerance explained a substantial amount of variance in fear ($\beta = .291$, $p < .001$). Also, neuroticism was significantly associated with fear in both groups and in all countries. In other words, a person prone to having a negative mood is likely to fear more.

In general, the association between interpersonal trust and fear was negative when significant, with one exception being the United States, where the association between trust and fear was positive in the far-right group ($\beta = .104$, $p < .05$). In Finland, interpersonal trust was significantly and negatively associated with fear regardless of the threat type (ISIS $\beta = -.104$, $p < .001$; far-right $\beta = -.134$, $p < .01$). In other words, people who trust more other people expressed lower fear in response to exposure to a terrorist threat.

The association between institutional trust and fear was positive and significant in all of the countries and treatment groups except in Norway, although the direction of the association was also positive in Norway. In the United States, institutional trust alone explained a significant proportion of variance of fear in the ISIS group ($\beta = .221$, $p < .001$). People who trust state institutions more expressed more fear of ISIS news.

Female gender predicted fear in all of the countries. Education was not a significant predictor of fear in any of the countries. Moreover, age was only significantly and positively related to fear in Norway and in the United States, in the groups primed with the jihadist terrorist threat.

3   Discussion

In this cross-country study, we examined through a media experiment how people reacted to different types of terrorism news in different cultural contexts and what factors explain the fear. The most notable result, yet in line with the expectations, was that neuroticism had the most general effect on fear across scenarios and countries. Neuroticism increased the likelihood of fear more when the participants were exposed to threat-inducing material. Previous studies have demonstrated that neuroticism is correlated with brain reactivity to negative stimuli, whereas extraversion is correlated with positive stimuli (Reuter et al. 2004). Highly neurotic individuals tend to react strongly to fear stimuli due to higher activation in the amygdala (Stein et al. 2007) and are unable to turn their attention away, which functions as a protective mechanism for less neurotic individuals (Haas et al., 2007). Rumination of feelings further increases one's fear (Gross, 2008). Neuroticism thus serves as a temperamental risk factor that predisposes individuals to anxiety (e.g., panic disorder) and depressive disorders (Stein et al., 2007). These results support previous studies on the association of negative affect and neuroticism.

Based on the literature on the media framing of Muslim terrorists, we expected that ISIS news would trigger more fear across countries. However, the hypothesis was only partially supported, showing that higher fear levels were only reported in Finland and France. Since the data were collected before the Turku attack in Finland, we do not know how this would have affected the fear level, but it can be assumed that fear of the jihadist type of

terrorism has increased following the attack. Overall, immigrants—especially Arabs and Somalis—have been confronted with negative and hostile attitudes in Finland (Jasinskaja et al., 2009). The results in France also make sense, considering the extensive immigration but low to moderate right-wing terrorism (Ravndal, 2018).

The differences were not significant in Spain, Norway, or the United States. One reason for this might be the normative motivation to control prejudices, which can lead to downplaying the fear level (Nugier et al., 2016). This seems to be the case, especially in post-2011 Norway, when cherishing the culture of peacefulness and fearfulness is valued (Steen-Johnsen & Winsvold, 2018). A similar tendency for emotion regulation has been reported in cross-cultural studies on personality differences (Matsumoto, 2006). However, the discrepancy may be accounted for the cultural difference in response style, which in turn may be explained by values. Sagiv and Roccas (2002) have discovered a link between values and traits according to which openness and extraversion are more valued in some Western societies. Interestingly, despite the contrasting findings of the current study, anti-Muslim sentiments have increased following terrorist attacks in Spain and in the United States (Doosje et al., 2010; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006).

In line with our expectations, the effect of ethnic intolerance on fear was general in the ISIS-threat scenarios. Future research should delve deeper into possible mediators behind the connection between ethnic intolerance and fear. This association may be moderated by prior negative experiences with Muslims, especially when exposed to a news story that explicitly links Islam to terrorism, whereas positive previous experiences may mitigate the effects of safety-threat profile on fear (see von Sikorski, Schmuck, Matthes, & Binder, 2017). Also, one possible moderator is a tendency toward chronic worries about safety issues in case of exposure to a fear-inducing threat group (see Cook, Li, Newell, Cottrell, & Neel, 2018).

The results partially supported the expectation that trustful individuals are more likely to express lower levels of fear compared to less trusting individuals when exposed to a terrorist threat. The association was positive when significant, except in the United States' far-right group. In Finland and Norway, people trust other social actors and institutions more on average, as compared to people in other countries. However, although interpersonal trust was highest in Norway, Finland was the only country where interpersonal trust functioned as a buffer against fear in all scenarios. The results thus indicate that generalized social trust does not necessarily have a more substantial effect in high-trust contexts. Interpersonal trust seems to serve as a prophylactic in some cases and countries but not in others. It thus confirms findings from earlier studies that social trust may have an effect, but there are strong indications that it depends on case and culture. Also, Newton (2001) has argued that different people may express social and political trust for different reasons.

The association between institutional trust and fear was significant, but the direction was opposite from expected. Institutional trust was positively associated with higher fear in all countries, except in Norway. In Norway, overall trust in state institutions is highest in the world (Wollebæk, 2011); thus, trust may not be connected to personal ideologies. Other than in Norway, the association between institutional trust and fear may be mediated by personal values. Previous fear-of-crime literature indicates the link between conservation values and fear of crime (Barni, Vieno, Roccato, & Russo, 2016; Russo & Rocato, 2009). Based on this, it can be assumed that people favoring conservation values, security, conformity, and tradition identify more with their in-group, have more trust in state institutions as protectors and information providers, and may express more fear toward out-groups, especially perceived criminals. However, personal values were not measured in this study, so the presumed connection remains unclear. Nevertheless, this obviously deserves follow-up studies.

In line with the hypothesis derived from the fear-of-crime literature, women reported more fear than men in all of the studied countries (Huddy et al., 2005; Nellis, 2009). This sex difference has been traditionally explained by women's fear of becoming a victim of a sexual assault (Nellis, 2009). However, in the case of the terrorist threat as random events, women's fear might be explained by altruistic fear for their children and spouses, as opposed to personal fear of targeted sexual crimes (Warr & Ellison, 2000). In this study, altruistic fear and personal fear were not specified in the response scale; hence, it was not possible to shed light on this argument. It would be highly recommended to do so in future studies.

4.1. Limitations

The limitations of this study include the self-reported fear level, which is susceptible to errors and socially desirable answering. The same limitation applies to ethnic intolerance, which is vulnerable to socially desirable answering. However, laboratory measurements of emotions or prejudice (e.g. Implicit association test) would have limitations as well (Brown, 2010). It has to be also noted, that the results are based on a survey experiment and do not report reactions to real cases of terrorism. Moreover, we were forced to use short scales, given the scope of the research and limitations in allotted interview time. However, similar or identical validated measures have been widely used in previous studies. Additionally, future studies should continue investigating different forms of terrorism. The strength of the study are representative samples that enabled us to replicate the results on personality traits in several countries.

5. Conclusion

Terrorists aim to cause uncertainty, disruption, and widespread fear. In times of uncertainty, people tend to seek support from their in-group and discriminate against minorities identified with terrorist attacks Perceived or fear of discrimination can disrupt

integration and lead to self-segregation due to the residential mobility of immigrants. The current study provides new information about specific social groups that are more susceptible to fear when reading news about terrorism threats. The experimental design of the study showed that the terrorist threat was able to elicit fear reactions in the newsreaders. Moreover, our regression analysis showed that ethnic intolerance is associated to the fear in all of the countries.

Personality traits—such as neuroticism is considered to be a biological basic tendency (McCrae & Costa, 1999)—whereas attitudes and stereotypes are a culturally-influenced adaptation that is, fortunately, appt to change (Brown, 2010). This study indicates the importance of interventions to maintain intergroup harmony and facilitate coping with fear. Studies based on the sociofunctional model of prejudice show promising results in reducing prejudice through positive intergroup contacts, which can reduce the psychological anxiety associated with fear (Johnston & Glasford, 2014).

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Outcome Variable and Independent Variables

	FI			ES			NO			FRA			USA		
	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*
Fear	.96	3.63	1.6	.95	3.97	1.66	.96	3.49	1.58	.91	4.02	1.49	.95	3.86	1.63
Ethnic intolerance	.88	2.63	0.88	.81	2.56	0.81	.86	2.27	0.86	.87	2.71	0.86	.82	2.46	0.85
Neuroticism	.56	2.89	1.02	.59	3.15	1.01	.62	2.77	1.05	.55	3.24	0.99	.56	2.97	1.07
Generalized trust		4.69	1.49		4.22	1.4		4.81	1.37		3.37	1.47		4.08	1.52
Institutional trust	.9	4.25	1.42	.92	3.54	1.3	.91	4.49	1.08	.91	3.64	1.17	.91	3.86	1.24
		n	%		*n*	%		*n*	%		*n*	%		*n*	%
Gender (female)		1,157	57.2		1,026	51.3		1,020	49.4		1033	51.5		1,036	50.8
Age		49.64	17.06		47.51	14.78		46.68	17.03		47.74	15.79		46.15	17.51
Education (university degree)		202	10		226	11.6		286	14.1		227	11.6		249	12.4

Table 2

Expressed Fear in Exposure-to-ISIS Scenario (Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Standardized Coefficients)

	Finland			Spain			France			Norway			USA		
	B	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β
Ethnic intolerance	0.295	0.051	**.195*****	0.386	0.052	**0.246*****	0.391	0.045	**.291*****	0.245	0.051	**.166*****	0.399	0.050	**.250*****
Neuroticism	0.114	0.039	**.088****	0.199	0.043	**0.157*****	0.142	0.038	**.119*****	0.169	0.040	**.142*****	0.153	0.042	**.123*****
Generalized trust	−0.096	0.033	**−.104****	−0.007	0.031	−.007	−0.050	0.029	−.062	−0.066	0.034	**−.070***	−0.028	0.030	−.0314
Institutional trust	0.146	0.044	**.122*****	0.104	0.035	**.103****	0.086	0.036	**.084***	0.052	0.040	0.044	0.247	0.039	**.221*****
Gender[a]	−0.788	0.078	**−.297*****	−0.573	0.083	**−.224*****	−0.222	0.069	**−.094****	0.752	0.080	**-.296*****	−0.338	0.079	**−.124*****
Age	0.001	0.002	0.015	-0.005	0.003	−.052	0.002	0.002	0.031	0.014	0.003	**.191*****	0.005	0.002	**.066***
Education[b]	0.097	0.112	0.022	−0.070	0.145	−.017	−0.096	0.100	−0.026	−0.166	0.125	−.046	−0.167	0.117	−.041
Constant	3.998***	0.311		3.734***	0.316		3.083***	0.287		1.375***	0.309		2.403***	0.305	
N		1,050			974			983			1,024			1,046	
R²		0.14			0.16			0.12			0.19			0.13	

Note. Bolded values were significant at *** *p* < .001; ** *p* < .01; * *p* < .05. [a] Female = 1. [b] University degree.

Table 3

Expressed fear in exposure to far-right scenario (regression coefficients. standard error. standardized coefficients)

	Finland			Spain			France			Norway			USA		
	B	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β
Ethnic intolerance	0.315	0.083	**.181***	0.467	0.083	**.268***	0.232	0.065	**.162***	0.037	0.087	0.023	0.441	0.071	**.282***
Neuroticism	0.235	0.072	**.153***	0.204	0.065	**.151**	0.245	0.057	**.196***	0.204	0.062	**.163***	0.200	0.059	**.162***
Generalized trust	−0.137	0.053	**−.133**	−0.150	0.061	**−.153**	−0.057	0.040	−.068	−0.057	0.050	−.062	0.087	0.041	**.103***
Institutional trust	0.214	0.068	**.159**	0.227	0.056	**.201***	0.158	0.050	**.154***	0.018	0.060	0.015	0.144	0.057	**.138**
Gender[a]	−0.838	0.124	**−.281***	−0.266	0.129	**−.094***	−0.551	0.101	**−.223***	0.846	0.114	**-.333***	−0.437	0.115	**−.166***
Age	−0.001	0.004	−.007	−0.003	0.004	−0.034	0.002	0.003	0.031	0.001	0.003	0.018	−0.001	0.003	−0.015
Education[b]	0.000	0.235	0.000	−0.044	0.182	−0.010	−0.178	0.126	−.044	0.014	0.193	0.004	0.018	0.151	0.004
Constant	3.521***	0.559		3.181***	0.586		3.266***	0.374		2.181***	0.494		2.281***	0.419	
N		504			495			529			517			504	
R²		0.15			0.17			0.15			0.16			0.16	

Bolded values were significant at *** *p* < .001; ** *p* < .01; * *p* < .05.

[a] Female = 1. [b] University degree.