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## THE IMPACT OF POLICY CHANGE THREAT ON FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTEREST GROUPS<sup>1</sup>

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Citizen activism in democratic societies can guide government policy-making in numerous ways. People can work to help elect candidates with whom they agree on policy issues (Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). They can support interest groups that lobby legislators on particular issues (Cigler & Loomis, 1995; Hansen, 1991). In the extreme, they can join together and catalyze social movements to demand more radical social change (Smelser, 1962; Tarrow, 1998).

Why do citizens choose to join particular groups in order to try to influence government in particular ways? Underlying research on this question is the notion that people who share a common interest have an incentive to work with one another to pursue and/or protect that interest. However, many people who share common interests with one another do not collaborate as activists. Therefore, driven by Olson's (1965) landmark work, scholars have sought to identify the costs and benefits of participating, presuming that action occurs only when the latter outweigh the former (e.g., Salisbury, 1969). The benefits that have received the most attention include selective incentives, solidary and purposive rewards, beliefs about a group's ability to succeed, and the individual's access to necessary resources (e.g., Finkel, Muller, & Opp, 1989; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Olson, 1965).

We put the spotlight on another potential motivator of activism: perceiving a threat of a change in public policy that an individual would consider undesirable. We use data from three representative sample surveys (two with experiments built in) to test the hypothesis that the threat of an undesirable policy change will

motivate one form of issue-focused activism aimed at influencing government action: making financial contributions to interest groups working to prevent the policy change. We also explore the conditions under which this sort of threat is most likely to inspire this sort of activism.

### **Documented Determinants of Issue-Focused Activism**

Among citizens who share the desire to see a particular public policy enacted, the most effort would presumably come from staff members of interest groups devoted to lobbying elected representatives. Somewhat less effort would be expected from members of the “active public,” people who voluntarily give their time and money to groups, attend rallies, and write letters. Other citizens may be called “passive sympathizers,” people supportive of groups’ efforts but who do nothing to help.

We focus on the factors that determine whether a person will be among the active public or the passive sympathizers at any given moment in time. Prior research on activism points to a number of important determining factors, some of which are attributes of the individual. For example, people with more requisite resources (e.g., free time and disposable income) are less taxed by participation (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2002; Verba et al., 1995; see Leighley, 1995, for a review of the socioeconomic status model). Highly educated people are better equipped with civic skills, which presumably confer a sense of confidence that their efforts can make a difference (Verba et al., 1995; see also Gore & Rotter, 1963; Klandermans, 1983). People who care deeply about a particular policy issue or who link their own identities to a group affected by the issue are most likely to participate (Finkel & Opp, 1991; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Morris & Mueller, 1992).

The behavior of interest group coordinators also helps determine when people will be politically active. For example, people are much more likely to participate when they have been invited to do so than when they must invest the effort to locate a group to join and devise a strategy for doing so (Gamson, 1975; Walker, 1991). Groups can offer selective incentives, tangible rewards (e.g., discounted goods or services) that only active members can receive (Gamson, 1975; Olson, 1965; Salisbury, 1969). Groups can also take steps to demonstrate their effectiveness in influencing policy (Moe, 1980; Opp, 1986; Roseneau, 1974) and to convince people that their participation will enhance the group’s chances of success (Muller, Dietz, & Finkel, 1991).

Changes in real-world conditions can inspire activism as well. As Truman (1951) outlined, societies evolve into comfortable states of equilibrium that are punctuated by occasional disturbances. When a disturbance causes a decline in people’s quality of life, they are motivated to rectify the situation, at times through political activism. Thus, an important motivator is the sense of dissatisfaction with undesirable current life circumstances and the concomitant desire to change them (Gamson, 1975; Gurr, 1970; Loomis & Cigler, 1995).

This theme is especially prominent in the social movements literature. The French Revolution, the Civil Rights movement, and other such movements (and perhaps the recent Tea Party Movement) emerged in response to dissatisfaction with governmental policies or social structures that appeared to treat people unfairly (e.g., Smelser, 1962). As Smelser (1995, p. 409) put it, “All social movements begin with some feeling of discontent with the existing social order—with things the way they are.” Likewise, interest groups have often formed to oppose newly created government programs that disadvantaged the group or to oppose other citizen groups that took actions with which the group disagreed (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Loomis & Cigler, 1995; Walker, 1991), and Hansen (1985) demonstrated that when people suffered serious economic hardships, they were especially likely to join groups that could help alleviate the hardships.

### Threat

Less prominent, but nonetheless present in this literature, is the somewhat different notion that *satisfaction* with current circumstances and the desire to defend them can also motivate activism. Various scholars have argued that when people face threats of undesirable economic, social, or political changes in the future, they are especially likely to join others to protect the status quo (Gusfield, 1963; Hansen, 1985; Loomis & Cigler, 1995). People may also be motivated by the threat of undesirable future policy change even if they are not especially happy with the current circumstances. As such, it may not be necessary for life circumstances to take a turn for the worse before people will become active. The *appearance* that things may become worse in the future may be effectively motivating as well, regardless of satisfaction with the status quo.

When it comes to democratic politics, citizens can experience various types of threats. Our focus here is on what we call “policy change threat”—a citizen’s perception that a politically powerful individual or individuals are mobilizing to change public policy in a way that the citizen opposes. Perceptions of policy change threat may come about whenever a person surveys the political landscape and becomes aware that an agent or agents are taking such steps. For example, a newly elected President may express a commitment to changing an existing law or passing a new one. An election can shift the leadership of the Congress from one political party to the other, thereby giving special legislative power to a group that places priority on changing a law or passing a new one. Or powerful social groups outside of government can initiate public efforts to change laws. By their actions, these agents threaten losses to citizens who disagree with the proposed change. The Tea Party Movement might be an instance of citizens mobilizing to prevent undesirable changes in the status quo.

Two aspects of this definition of policy change threat are especially important. First, it is the onset or emergence of efforts to *change* public policy that are

perceived as threatening. Although some conceptualizations of threat have presumed that an undesirable *current* situation can be threatening (e.g., Hansen, 1985), we view threat instead as a future-oriented perception of possibility.<sup>2</sup> A second key aspect of this hypothesis focuses on agent effort: policy change threat exists only if people perceive that a group or individual is working *hard* to enact an undesired change in public policy.

The notion that threat motivates action is compelling from many perspectives. For example, Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) describes how the threat of a loss is especially motivating, even more so than the possibility of a gain. And much psychological research has shown that fear of a loss powerfully inspires behavior to avert the loss (Leventhal, 1970; Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987; Rothman & Salovey, 1997).

In a similar fashion, threat of a loss seems likely to inspire citizen activism to prevent the loss, a notion that various scholars have entertained. For example, Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) have argued that perceiving a political candidate as threatening inspires citizens to engage in electoral activism. Likewise, King and Walker (1991, 93) argued that “when persons face a threat to their livelihood or to rights they already enjoy, they are more likely to engage in collective actions to protect these gains ...” (see also Diamond, 1995; Loomis & Cigler, 1995; Walker, 1991). This notion has also been suggested in a number of historical analyses of social movements (e.g., Moen, 1992) and appears to be endorsed by interest group fundraisers, whose direct mail solicitations routinely point out threats of undesirable policy changes to motivate people to join their organizations (Godwin, 1988; Mitchell, 1979).

### Existing Evidence

Indirect evidence that policy change threat may inspire activism comes from studies documenting other political consequences of threat. Threat plays an important role in inspiring the “rally-round-the-flag” effect (Brody, 1991; Mueller, 1973, 1994). And threats increase authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1996; Doty, Peterson, & Winter, 1991; Rokeach, 1960), intolerance (Marcus et al., 1995), ethnocentrism (Feldman & Stenner, 1997), and support for energetic, active, and determined presidential candidates (McCann, 1997).

Coming a bit closer to the phenomenon of interest here, Gusfield (1963) documented how the temperance movement emerged because the Protestant middle-class perceived lower-class urban immigrants to have compromised the moral character of society and threatened to do so further. The threat of nuclear war inspired political activism among people who perceived that threat most powerfully (Fiske, Pratto, & Pavelchak, 1983; Tyler & McGraw, 1983). Environmental activism has been inspired partly by the perception that the quality of the environment was threatened and was likely to decline in the

future (McKenzie-Mohr et al., 1995). Feeling anxious about the candidates in an election leads to increased political participation (Brader, 2006; Marcus et al., 2000), and post 9/11 policy threat resulted in greater political participation among some Arab Americans (Cho, Gimpel, & Wu, 2006).

Other evidence suggesting the impact of policy change threat on activism involves trends over time in public support for environmental lobbying groups. Controlling for many factors (including aspects of interest group behavior) and correcting for inflation, financial contributions to such groups were higher during the Reagan and Bush administrations than during the Carter administration or during the first two years of the Clinton administration (Lowry, 1997; Richer, 1995). And membership in the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society grew much less rapidly during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations than during the Nixon and Ford administrations (Mitchell, 1979). Higher levels of activism during Republican administrations may have reflected environmentalists' perceptions of greater threat of undesirable policy change at those times.

However, these trends are consistent with two alternate interpretations. First, it is possible that support grew during Republican administrations not because of the threats they posed but rather in response to damage that environmentalists might have perceived these administrations to have done already (Bosso, 1997; Mitchell, 1990). This would then be activism in response to dissatisfaction with current life conditions (e.g., Hansen, 1985).

Alternatively, it is possible that opportunities for desirable policy change posed by the arrival of Democratic presidents may actually have inhibited activism and inspired passivity instead. When people see a powerful individual or group advocating a policy change they favor, this could conceivably be viewed as offering an *opportunity* to join with him, her, or them to bring about such desirable changes.<sup>3</sup> Without such powerful advocates, social movements and interest groups stand little chance of success. But ordinary citizens may presume that their own efforts on behalf of the same cause are no longer needed when a powerful ally joins the fight.

This potential inhibiting effect of what we call "policy change opportunity" would be consistent with the well-documented "social loafing effect" described by Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1981): people devote less effort to pursuing a desired common goal when they believe others are working with them toward the same goal (e.g., Ingham et al., 1974; Sweeney, 1973). This is very much like the free-rider phenomenon identified by Olson (1965): when people believe that they will be able to reap the benefits of others' efforts without having to work toward the goal themselves, they will likely slack off and let others do the work for them. So if a person believes that others are working to change a public policy in a desired direction, he or she may decide to allocate his or her limited resources elsewhere, knowing that if the policy is indeed changed, he or she would benefit from it just as much as those who worked toward that end.

Because perceived policy change opportunities created by the appearance of a powerful ally may inhibit activism, aggregate-level time series analyses (e.g., Lowry, 1997; Mitchell, 1979; Richer, 1995) cannot provide clear evidence of the psychological mechanisms at work. That is, higher levels of environmental activism during Republican administrations could reflect the motivating effect of policy change threat then, or the stultifying effect of policy change opportunity during Democratic administrations. Clear insight can only come from quantitative studies of individual citizens, testing the impact of perceived policy change threat on activism and identifying the conditions under which such an effect is most likely to occur, while simultaneously controlling for the impact of perceived policy change opportunities and dissatisfaction with current conditions. The three studies described here did so, focusing on monetary contributions to political organizations.<sup>4</sup>

### **Moderators of the Effect of Policy Change Threat on Financial Contributions**

In exploring the conditions under which policy change threat is most likely to inspire this form of activism, we focused on two potential moderators: income and attitude importance.

#### ***Income***

No matter how much people may want to become politically active, whether or not they actually do is determined in part by whether they have the resources necessary to do so (e.g., Rosenstone & Hansen, 2002; Verba et al., 1995). Those who want to volunteer their time to help an interest group will not be able to do so if they are single parents who work 60 hours a week, and those who want to make a financial contribution to an interest group will not be able to do so if they barely make enough money to cover their basic living costs. Therefore, the effects of threat on political activism may be moderated by the amount of necessary resources people have at their disposal.

Income seems likely to be the primary necessary resource for financial contributions to interest groups. Past research offers some support for this notion—one predictor of whether people make financial contributions to a political organization is how much disposable income they have (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2002; Verba et al., 1995). However, past studies have not tested the hypothesis examined here: that resource availability *moderates* the impact of perceptions of the political context (in this case, policy change threat) on contributions.

### ***Importance***

A second potential moderator is issue public membership. Converse (1964) coined the term “issue publics” to refer to small segments of society, each composed of people who care deeply about a single issue, while most members of the polity attach far less significance to it (see Krosnick, 1990). For issue public members, an undesirable policy change would presumably be personally devastating. The deeply committed feminist who has spent her adult life advocating legalized abortion would find the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* disastrous. But to another citizen whose political passions focus on gun control instead, a change in abortion laws, though perhaps undesirable, would not be nearly as personally significant. Therefore, the threat of an undesirable policy change regarding abortion seems more likely to activate the former individual than the latter.

One might imagine that personal importance would be so powerful a motivator of activism in itself that everyone who attaches great significance to an issue would be perpetually active, regardless of whether threats are present or not. But this turns out not to be so: many people who view an issue as extremely personally important do not always engage in relevant political activism (Gilbert, 1988; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Roseneau, 1974). Nonetheless, these people may be the most readily mobilizable among the passive sympathizers when a credible threat does appear. Therefore, we tested whether policy change threat has a stronger impact on financial contributions to interest groups among people for whom the issue is more personally important.

## **Mediators of the Effect of Policy Change Threat on Financial Contributions**

### ***Importance***

Nadeau, Niemi, and Amato (1995) suggested another possible effect of policy change threat involving issue importance. They reported evidence that they interpreted as showing that threat of an undesirable policy change increased the personal importance that people attached to an issue. This raises the possibility that importance may *mediate* the effect of threat we observed. That is, threat may increase importance, which in turn may inspire activism.

Upon close inspection, the measure of personal importance Nadeau et al. (1995) used appears not to have tapped personal importance of the issue but instead tapped support for public debate on the issue and a personal inclination toward activism on the issue. Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “I think that all the debates about French in Quebec are useless,” and they were asked, “How do you react in general when, in convenience stores, restaurants, and shops, you are served only

in English?” and answered “Indifferent, prefer but won’t insist, or prefer and insist.” Because Nadeau et al.’s (1995) study did not offer a direct test of whether threat increases importance, we tested this mediational hypothesis directly.

### ***Anxiety***

Marcus et al. (2000) suggested another possible mediator of our threat effects: anxiety. People who report higher levels of anxiety about presidential candidates (which Marcus and colleagues called “threat”) are more likely to vote and contribute money to political candidates (Marcus et al., 2000), presumably because anxiety causes electoral activism (see also Brader, 2006). Perhaps policy change threat causes anxiety about an issue, which then inspires issue-focused activism. We tested the notion that threat causes an increase in financial contributions through its impact on anxiety.

### **This Investigation**

The three studies described in the following text are either measured or experimentally manipulated perceived policy change threat, perceived policy change opportunity, and dissatisfaction, and assessed their impact on financial activism with regard to a specific issue (the environment, gun control, and abortion respectively). The studies tested five hypotheses: (1) threat will increase the amount of money respondents have contributed, or are willing to contribute; (2) the effect of threat will be larger among respondents with more income; (3) the effect of threat will be larger among respondents for whom the issue is more important, (4) the effect of threat on activism is mediated by importance, and (5) the effect of threat on activism is mediated by anxiety.

### ***Description of Studies***

The methodologies of the three studies are described briefly below and in more detail in the Appendix. Study 1 was correlational, using data from a representative survey sample to examine the relations of policy change threat, policy change opportunity, and dissatisfaction to financial contributions to environmental organizations. Studies 2 and 3 implemented experimental manipulations in representative sample surveys to examine the causal impact of policy change threat, policy change opportunity, and dissatisfaction on financial contributions to groups working for or against increased gun control laws or abortion laws. The third study also permitted testing the two mediational hypotheses regarding importance and anxiety.



### ***Study 1: Survey on Environmental Activism***

The first investigation used data from a survey asking people about their attitudes and perceptions regarding the environment and financial contributions to organizations advocating environmental protection. Computer-assisted telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of adult residents of Ohio by the Ohio State University Polimetrics Laboratory. The sample of households with landline telephones was generated by random digit dialing, and the adult member of each contacted household who had the next birthday was selected to be interviewed (Salmon & Nichols, 1983). Completed interviews were obtained from 758 individuals; the cooperation rate for the survey was 57%. Interviewing began in December, 1995 and ended in January, 1996. One-third of the respondents ( $N = 221$ ) were selected at random to receive the questions designed to test our hypotheses.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Study 2: Survey Experiment on Gun Control Activism***

Study 2 used an experimental design to provide stronger evidence of causality. This study sought to simulate the process of learning about changes in the political world in an experiment embedded in a representative sample survey. People can become aware of policy change threats or opportunities through conversations with friends or relatives, through the news media, or through information provided by politicians or interest groups. Study 2 attempted to simulate this sort of information acquisition, taking cue from past experiments that manipulated the content of information received to mirror real world learning (e.g., Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Nelson & Kinder, 1988). Thus, Study 2 provided different respondents with different information about impending changes in policy to see the effects of the information on inclination toward activism.

The manipulations were designed to alter perceptions of policy change threat and opportunity with regard to gun control. Respondents were randomly assigned to receive information about one of various different legislative initiatives that were being pursued in Congress at the time the data were collected. Some respondents were told about Congressional efforts to *increase* restrictions on gun access, and other respondents were told about Congressional efforts to *decrease* restrictions. A third group was not told anything about gun control legislative efforts. We tested the effects of policy change threat and policy change opportunity on willingness to contribute money to pro- or anti-gun control organizations by comparing these groups to one another.

Therefore, Study 2 complemented Study 1 by assessing the robustness of the effect of policy change threat for a different issue (gun control) and by examining activism on both sides of the gun control controversy—pro-gun

control and anti-gun control, rather than on only one side of an issue (pro-environmental protection).

This survey experiment was conducted by Knowledge Networks (now GfK), who assembled a representative sample of American households via random digit dialing telephone interviews. Panel members completed a short survey each week in exchange for being given free WebTV equipment and free internet access. For this study, a random sample of 2,763 panel participants was drawn and were sent an email notification inviting them to complete the survey; 2,164 people completed it via the internet between January 3 and January 24, 2003 (completion rate = 78%; response rate 2 = 11.53%; see Callegaro & DiSogra, 2008).

### **Study 3: Survey Experiment on Abortion Activism**

Study 3 was a survey experiment similar to Study 2, this time focused on abortion. As with Study 2, Study 3 implemented manipulations to alter perceptions of policy change threat and opportunity. Respondents were randomly assigned to be given information about one of various different legislative initiatives currently being pursued. Some respondents were told about efforts being made in Congress to *increase* restrictions on abortion, and other respondents were told about efforts in Congress being made to *decrease* restrictions. Some respondents were told that Congress members were working hard to accomplish the legislative changes we described, and other respondents were not told the agents were working hard. A final group of respondents was not told anything about current legislative efforts.

This study combined data from two surveys done via computer-assisted telephone interviewing by the Center for Survey Research at the Ohio State University. The first involved adult residents of the United States (N = 300). A representative sample of private households was generated by random digit dialing, and the first adult member of each contacted household who was willing to participate was interviewed. Interviewing was conducted between August 4 and 19, 1999. The cooperation rate for the survey was 39%. The second survey involved a sample of adult residents of Franklin County, Ohio (N = 217). Telephone numbers were also generated by random digit dialing, and the first adult member of each contacted household who was willing to participate was interviewed. Interviewing was conducted between August 19 and 30, 1999. The cooperation rate for the survey was 49%.<sup>6</sup>

In both surveys, respondents were first asked to report their attitudes on the issue of abortion and to describe how important the issue was to them personally. After answering a series of questions about other political topics, respondents were then given information aimed at instigating perceptions of policy change threat or policy change opportunity or were given no information. Then, respondents reported how much money they would be willing to contribute

to an organization with which they agreed and that was concerned with the issue of abortion. They reported how anxious and worried they were when they thought about abortion laws in this country (on 5-point scales ranging from not at all anxious/worried to extremely anxious/worried); these reports were averaged to yield a single index of anxiety. Finally, respondents reported their demographics and political ideology, as well as how personally important the issue of abortion was to them, and interviewers recorded respondents' gender. Thus, in Study 3, respondents were asked to report the personal importance of the issue of abortion both before *and* after the manipulation was implemented.

## Results

Mean reported contribution amounts conformed to our hypotheses about the effects of threat, income, and importance. Table 7.1 displays the mean reported contributions (for Study 1) and mean amounts of money that respondents said they were willing to contribute (for Studies 2 and 3) in U.S. dollars. The first column in each panel shows the mean contributions for the full sample of respondents divided into two groups, people who perceived (in Study 1) or were assigned to perceive (in Studies 2 and 3) little policy change threat (row 1) and people who perceived high policy change threat (row 2).<sup>7</sup> The third row in each panel shows the effect of threat: the difference between the low threat and the high threat means.

As expected, increasing threat was associated with more financial contributions in every study. Also as expected, the difference between the high and low threat groups was larger among the high income respondents (greater than US\$75,000) than among the low income respondents (less than or equal to US\$75,000). Likewise, the difference between the high and low threat groups was larger among the high importance respondents (those for whom the issue was extremely important) than among the low importance respondents (all others). Thus, all three studies' observed data conform to our predictions.

### ***Hypothesis 1: The Effect of Threat on Financial Contributions***

For each of the three studies, we conducted OLS regressions predicting contributions (past or future, depending on the study) using policy change threat, policy change opportunity, dissatisfaction, agent preferences (for Study 1 only), education, gender, race, age, and the liberal [Democrat] and conservative [Republican] dummy variables. As the first column of Table 7.2 shows, as expected, policy change threat was positively associated with contributions in Studies 1 and 2. In other words, people who were thought that politicians were trying to weaken environmental laws reported contributing more money to environmental groups than those who did not perceive such policy change

**TABLE 7.1** Average Amounts People Said They Did Contribute or Would Contribute in U.S. dollars

<i>Policy Change Threat</i>	<i>All Respondents</i>	<i>High Income Respondents</i>	<i>Low Income Respondents</i>	<i>High Importance Respondents</i>	<i>Low Importance Respondents</i>
<u>Study 1</u>					
Low Threat	\$10.40	\$7.31	\$10.27	\$20.29	\$8.35
High Threat	\$13.78	\$16.00	\$12.72	\$17.89	\$8.32
Difference	\$3.38	\$8.69	\$2.45	\$17.60	-\$0.03
<u>Study 2</u>					
Low Threat	\$17.76	\$24.17	\$16.28	\$27.83	\$15.92
High Threat	\$22.69	\$35.22	\$20.43	\$41.14	\$19.50
Difference	\$4.93	\$11.05	\$4.15	\$13.31	\$3.58
<u>Study 3</u>					
Low Threat	\$55.68	\$49.44	\$56.79	\$47.33	\$58.49
High Threat	\$96.81	\$125.17	\$90.00	\$132.36	\$77.25
Difference	\$41.13	\$75.73	\$33.21	\$85.03	\$18.76

**TABLE 7.2** Main Effect of Threat and Opportunity on Financial Contributions

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Study 1</i>	<i>Study 2</i>	<i>Study 3</i>
Policy Change Threat	.22* (.08)	.02+ (.01)	.00 (.02)
Policy Change Opportunity	-.05 (.09)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.03)
Dissatisfaction	.06* (.03)	.01 (.01)	.06*** (.02)
Agent Preferences	.15 (.10)		
Education	.04 (.03)	.02* (.01)	-.05 (.02)
Male	.03 (.02)	.02*** (.01)	.02 (.02)
Caucasian	-.04 (.03)	.02*** (.01)	.01 (.02)
Age	.05 (.05)	.01 (.01)	-.16*** (.04)
Liberal/Democrat	.01 (.03)	-.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)
Conservative/ Republican	.04+ (.02)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)
Constant	-.18* (.08)	.01 (.01)	.12*** (.03)
R <sup>2</sup>	.09	.02	.11
N	220	2052	335

threats. And people for whom gun control policy change threats (either pro- or anti-, depending on their prior attitudes) were made salient expressed a greater willingness to contribute money to like-minded interest groups than those for whom policy change threats were not made salient. There was no main effect of policy change threat in Study 3.

The effect of policy change opportunity was not significant in any of the three studies. As expected, dissatisfaction was associated with larger contributions in Studies 1 and 3 (but not in Study 2). That is, people who wanted environmental protection laws strengthened contributed more money to environmental groups than people who were satisfied with the status quo or wanted these laws weakened (Study 1). And people who were dissatisfied with current abortion

laws expressed greater willingness to contribute money to like-minded interest groups in the near future than those who were satisfied with current abortion laws (Study 3).

***Hypotheses 2 and 3: Is the Effect of Threat on Financial Contributions Moderated by Income or Importance?***

To test whether income or importance moderated the effect of policy change threat on contributions, we added interactions between income/importance and policy change threat, policy change opportunity, and dissatisfaction (as well as the main effects of income and importance) to all three OLS regressions reported in Table 7.2 (for Study 3 we used the pre-manipulation measure of importance).

The policy change opportunity x income interaction was not statistically significant in any of the studies, and the dissatisfaction x income interaction was marginally statistically significant in Study 3. Consistent with expectations, the interaction between policy change threat and income was positive and statistically or marginally statistically significant in all three studies (see Row 6 of Table 7.3). To illustrate the shape of the policy change threat x income interactions, we regressed contributions on policy change threat, policy change opportunity, dissatisfaction, and the control variables separately for respondents in the low, moderate, and high income categories for each of the three studies.

**TABLE 7.3** Is the Effect of Threat on Financial Contributions Moderated by Income or Importance?

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Study 1</i>	<i>Study 2</i>	<i>Study 3</i>
Policy Change Threat	-.22 (.13)	.01 (.01)	-.09* (.04)
Policy Change Opportunity	-.19 (.19)	-.01 (.01)	-.06 (.06)
Dissatisfaction	.03 (.05)	.01+ (.01)	.02 (.04)
Income	-.05 (.05)	.01 (.02)	-.06 (.04)
Importance	-.06 (.06)	.03* (.02)	.04 (.04)
Policy Change Threat × Income	.27* (.12)	.03+ (.02)	.13* (.05)

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Study 1</i>	<i>Study 2</i>	<i>Study 3</i>
Policy Change Opportunity × Income	-.01 (.18)	.01 (.02)	.07 (.08)
Dissatisfaction × Income	-.01 (.06)	-.01 (.02)	.08+ (.05)
Policy Change Threat × Importance	.61*** (.18)	.02 (.01)	.09+ (.06)
Policy Change Opportunity × Importance	.26 (.27)	.01 (.02)	.06 (.08)
Dissatisfaction × Importance	.03 (.08)	-.02 (.02)	-.04 (.06)
Agent Preferences	.18+ (.11)		
Education	.07+ (.03)	.02* (.01)	-.06+ (.03)
Male	.03 (.02)	.02*** (.01)	.03 (.02)
Caucasian	-.05 (.03)	.02*** (.01)	.02 (.03)
Age	.05 (.05)	-.01 (.01)	-.16*** (.04)
Liberal/Democrat	.03 (.03)	-.01 (.01)	.02 (.03)
Conservative/Republican	.05* (.02)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)
Constant	-.18* (.08)	.01 (.01)	.12*** (.03)
R <sup>2</sup>	.09	.02	.11
N	220	2052	335

Note: Standard errors appear in parentheses below OLS unstandardized regression coefficients.

+  $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

With regard to Study 1, the effect of threat was not significant among low or moderate income respondents ( $b = -.03$ , n.s. and  $b = .18$ , n.s., respectively), but it was significant and positive among high income respondents ( $b = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ), confirming the hypothesis that threat only motivated financial contributions among people who had the requisite financial resources. With regard to Study 2, the effect of threat was also not significant among low or moderate income respondents, ( $b = .01$ , n.s. and  $b = .01$ , n.s., respectively). Among high income respondents, the impact of threat was positive and marginally significant ( $b = .04$ ,  $p < .09$ ), consistent with our hypothesis. Similar results obtain for Study 3—no effect of threat on willingness to contribute among low or moderate income respondents ( $b = -.06$ , n.s., and  $b = .00$ , n.s.), but a positive, significant effect among high income respondents ( $b = .07$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Columns 9, 10, and 11 of Table 7.3 show the results of the importance interactions. As expected, the policy change threat  $\times$  importance interaction was positive and statistically significant or marginally significant in two of the three studies (1 and 3); it was not statistically significant in Study 2. None of the importance interactions with policy change opportunity or dissatisfaction were statistically significant.

To illustrate the shape of the (policy change threat  $\times$  importance) interactions in Studies 1 and 3, we regressed contributions on policy change threat, policy change opportunity, dissatisfaction, and the control variables separately for respondents in the low, moderate, and high importance categories. With regard to Study 1, the effect of threat was not significant among low and moderate importance respondents ( $b = .00$ , n.s., and  $b = .07$ , n.s., respectively), but it was positive and significant among high importance respondents ( $b = .66$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, policy change threat motivated contributions among people who cared a great deal about the issue of the environment, but not among people who cared less about it. With regard to Study 3, the effect of threat was not significant among low and moderate importance respondents ( $b = .00$ , n.s., and  $b = -.06$ , n.s., respectively), but it was positive and significant among respondents high in importance ( $b = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). As with Study 1, policy change threat motivated an increased willingness to contribute to like-minded abortion interest groups among respondents for whom the issue was highly personally important, but not among respondents for whom the issue was less personally important.<sup>8</sup>

#### ***Hypotheses 4 and 5: Is the Effect of Threat on Financial Contributions Mediated by Importance or Anxiety?***

Study 3 allowed us to test whether importance mediates the impact of threat on contributions. We examined whether policy change threat caused an increase in personal importance by regressing the post-manipulation importance measure on pre-manipulation importance, policy change threat, policy change opportunity,



dissatisfaction, ideology, and the demographic control variables. Contrary to the mediational hypothesis, increased threat did not yield increased personal importance ( $b = .03$ , n.s.). This suggests that importance could not be a mediator of the effect of threat on activism, reinforcing our confidence that importance moderates threat's impact. In other words, threat does not appear to affect activism by increasing the amount of importance a person attaches to the issue. Rather, threat instigates activism *among people for whom the issue is already important*.

We also used Study 3's data to test whether anxiety mediated the threat effect on contributions. Specifically, we regressed anxiety on policy change threat, policy change opportunity, dissatisfaction, ideology, and the demographic control variables. Dissatisfaction was a significant positive predictor of anxiety ( $b = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that people who were less satisfied with current policy were more likely to be worried when thinking about the issue. Also, policy change opportunity was a significant negative predictor ( $b = -.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ), meaning that seeing opportunity for desirable policy change was associated with less worrying. But policy change threat had no impact on anxiety ( $b = .02$ , n.s.). This disconfirms the hypothesis that threat inspires activism by enhancing anxiety.<sup>9</sup>

One might argue that policy change threat, policy change opportunity, and dissatisfaction might affect anxiety especially powerfully among people who attached great importance to the issue, so we tested these interactions. Whereas the (dissatisfaction  $\times$  importance) interaction was positive and significant (indicating that dissatisfaction was a stronger predictor of anxiety among people for whom abortion was personally important,  $b = .13$ ,  $p < .05$ ), the (policy change threat  $\times$  importance) and (policy change opportunity  $\times$  importance) interactions were not significant ( $b = .03$ , n.s., and  $b = .06$ , n.s., respectively). Thus, the impact of policy change threat on activism seems to be the result of "cold" cognition (meaning unemotional mental calculations) rather than "hot" cognition (Abelson, 1963; Lodge & Taber, 2013), at least with regard to anxiety.

## DISCUSSION

### *Threat of Undesirable Policy Changes*

These studies suggest that policy change threat inspires financial contributions to interest groups. We can have particular confidence in this conclusion because of the methodological triangulation employed in the present array of studies. Positive effects of policy change threat appeared in three representative sample surveys of adults—using both correlational and experimental designs. In addition, the effect of policy change threat was observed for three issues, environmental protection, gun control, and abortion, and with various different sorts of measures. The appearance of the effect across studies points to its robustness.

Our results are the first to confirm an implication of Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) noted by Hansen (1985)—that policy change threat should be more motivating than policy change opportunity. In addition, the evidence reported here documents *when* policy change threat instigates activism. In doing so, this work links research on the conditions under which activism occurs to research on the core psychological motivators of activism. The impact of policy change threat turned out to be regulated both by the availability of financial resources and the personal importance of the issue. Therefore, this research contributes to the broader political participation literature by showing how attributes of an individual (his or her ability and motivation to become active) interact with attributes of the political context (perceptions of threat) to influence activism.

Whereas past research has blurred the distinction between threat and dissatisfaction (Hansen, 1985), the current research attests to the value of distinguishing between these variables. We observed individual-level evidence that dissatisfaction with the status quo *and* the threat of future undesirable policy change can both instigate activism. Because these variables are closely related conceptually and empirically, our findings suggest that future studies should be distinguish their effects and their overlap.

Although past research has presumed that issue-focused activism is primarily aimed at *inducing* social change in response to undesirable conditions, the evidence presented here shows that activism can also be aimed at *preventing* social change. And according to Ornstein and Elder (1978), taking action to undermine policy change threats is a sensible strategy. In their words, “in a political system geared toward slow change and with numerous decision points and checks and balances, a group’s likelihood of success is enhanced if it focuses on blocking rather than initiating action” (Ornstein & Elder, 1978, p. 58). In this light, the evidence reported here documents a tendency of human nature that may be quite practical.

### ***Income***

The demonstration here of a moderating effect of income also adds to the literature on activism. A great deal of research on participation has examined the effect of income, viewed as an indicator of the cost of participation. For example, Verba et al. (1995) showed that people with more money were more likely to make financial contributions to lobbying organizations. This sort of result suggests that the more income people have, the more they will contribute to all groups—period. Although scholars have at times implied that resource variables should interact with other variables that motivate activism, this notion had yet to be tested directly. Our findings suggest that, not surprisingly, people who have a lot of money do not contribute indiscriminately—they choose where to allocate their resources, and it appears that policy change threat guides those choices, at least in part.

### **Importance**

Policy change threat helps to explain when and why attitude importance is translated into activism. Although people who attach more personal importance to an issue are more likely to become active, many more people attach tremendous importance to an issue than act (e.g., Gilbert, 1988; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995). The potential benefits of action are presumably quite high for people for whom an issue is important, but these benefits are apparently not sufficiently substantial to motivate the majority of these people to act at all times. Therefore, research that examines the effect of importance on political participation (Gilbert, 1988; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Verba et al., 1995) may not capture the full effect of the variable.

By identifying the impact of political context, the present research shows how perceptions of threat can help to differentiate people who care deeply about an issue and are politically active from those who care deeply but remain passive. Threat may change the cost/benefit calculus by making the potential for the loss of something valued more salient or costly, thus causing people to be more willing to make the sacrifices entailed by activism.

### **Coda**

Our research illustrates the value of psychological analysis of political actors for the enterprise of political science. To some scholars, it is enough to link time-series evidence on the ebbs and flows of interest group membership to broad political changes that are presumed to be threatening or reassuring (e.g., Richer, 1995) or to content-analyze fundraising letters and assume that interest groups use certain appeals most often because they effectively resonate with potential members (e.g., Godwin, 1988). From this perspective, the consequences of changes in the political context are revealed at the macro level of analysis, not the micro level.

Although we have learned a lot from the macro-level approach, much can be learned from the micro level as well. Peering into the minds of citizens has led to a refined picture of the motivators of political activism. Our evidence illustrates the consequences of people's perceptions and thereby documents processes about which macro-level analyses can only speculate. Therefore, macro and micro approaches to the same problem can complement one another, and we look forward to more such concerted scholarly efforts.

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## Appendix: Measures and Variable Coding

### Study 1: Environmental Activism

#### *Policy Change Threat and Opportunity*

Perceptions of policy change threat and opportunity are presumably derived from a series of ingredient beliefs and attitudes: (1) a person's support of or opposition to a current policy; (2) perceptions of whether powerful political agents are trying to change the policy; (3) perceptions of the types of changes being advocated by agents who are believed to be pursuing change; and (4) perceptions of the amount of effort these agents are devoting to bringing about such change. To maximize measurement precision, we asked respondents to

report each of these ingredient attitudes and perceptions separately.<sup>10</sup> Responses were then combined into measures of policy change threat and policy change opportunity for each respondent.

Specifically, respondents were asked whether they wanted to see environmental protection laws strengthened, kept the same, or weakened. Respondents were also asked whether they perceived that President Bill Clinton, the U.S. Congress, and U.S. businesses wanted environmental protection laws to be stronger, kept as the same, or weakened, and respondents who said they thought a political agent wanted to make environmental laws stronger or less strong were asked: "How hard do you think [President Clinton/the U.S. Congress/U.S. businesses] will try to make environmental laws [stronger/less strong]? Very hard, somewhat hard, not too hard, or not hard at all?"

Using these measures, two variables were created for each agent to describe the extent of policy change threat and opportunity perceived by each respondent. Because only pro-environmental activism was assessed, the only sort of policy change threat that could inspire it would come from an agent who was perceived to want environmental laws weakened. And the only policy change opportunities that would inspire such activism would come from agents who were perceived to want to strengthen those laws. Therefore, the 18 respondents who said they wanted to see environmental laws weakened were excluded from the analyses.<sup>11</sup>

The overall measure of policy change threat was therefore built as follows. Among respondents who wanted environmental protection laws to remain as they were or be strengthened and thought a political agent wanted to weaken those laws, people who said the agent would try "very hard" were coded 1, and people who said the agent would try "somewhat hard," "not too hard," or "not hard at all" were coded .5. Respondents who wanted environmental protection laws to be weakened were coded 0, because they could not perceive a policy change threat from an agent in a way that would inspire pro-environmental activism. Respondents who wanted environmental laws to remain as they were or be strengthened and thought a political agent wanted those laws kept as they were or strengthened were also coded 0. The mean computed across the three agents was treated as the overall index of policy change threat.<sup>12</sup> Forty-six percent of the sample perceived at least some policy change threat.

To create an overall measure of policy change opportunity, we followed the same sort of procedure. Among respondents who could experience opportunity (because they wanted environmental protection laws to be strengthened and thought a political agent also wanted to strengthen those laws), people who said the agent would try "very hard" were coded 1, and people who said the agent would try "somewhat hard," "not too hard," or "not hard at all" were coded .5. Respondents who wanted environmental laws to remain as they were or weakened were coded 0, because they could not perceive a policy change opportunity from an agent in a way that would inspire pro-environmental activism. Respondents who wanted environmental laws strengthened and thought political agents wanted those laws



kept as they were or weakened were also coded 0. The mean computed across the three agents was treated as the overall index of policy change opportunity.<sup>13</sup> Thirty-nine percent of the sample perceived at least some policy change opportunity.

- **Dissatisfaction with current policy.** Respondents who said they wanted to see environmental protection laws kept as they were or weakened were coded 0 on “dissatisfaction,” and respondents who said they wanted to see these laws strengthened were coded 1, because these were the only people whose dissatisfaction could cause pro-environmental activism.
- **Importance.** Respondents were asked “How serious of a problem do you think the state of the environment is likely to be in the future?” Importance was coded 0 for respondents who said “no problem” or “slightly serious,” .5 for respondents who said “pretty serious” or “very serious,” and 1 for respondents who said “extremely serious.”<sup>14</sup>
- **Income.** Respondents were asked to report their family’s total income before taxes. People with incomes less than US\$30,001 were coded 0, people with incomes between US\$30,001 and US\$50,000 were coded .5, and people with incomes of US\$50,001 or more were coded 1.
- **Activism.** Respondents reported the amount of money they had contributed to an environmental organization since January 1, 1995, that is, during approximately the one year prior to their interviews. Eighty-one percent of respondents said they had made no contributions during this period, and the remaining 19% of respondents contributed amounts ranging as high as US\$300.<sup>15</sup> The mean contribution amount was US\$12, and the standard deviation was US\$45. The contribution variable was rescaled to range from 0 (meaning US\$0) to 1 (meaning US\$300).
- **Ideology.** Two dummy variables were created to represent ideology, one coded 1 for people who said they were liberals and 0 for everyone else. The other dummy variable was coded 1 for people who said they were conservatives and 0 for everyone else.
- **Other demographics.** Education was coded 0 for people with less than a high school education, .5 for high school graduates, and 1 for people with at least some college education. Gender was coded 0 females and 1 for males, and race was coded 0 for whites and 1 for non-whites. Age was rescaled to range from 0 to 1, with 0 representing the youngest age (18) and 1 representing the oldest age (86).

## Study 2: Gun Control Activism

### *Manipulation*

One-third of the respondents, chosen randomly, were given no information about gun control legislation and therefore served as the experiment’s control

group. The remaining two-thirds of the respondents were given legislation information, beginning with the following introduction:

Members of the U.S. Congress often introduce bills to change existing laws or create new laws. We are interested in what you know about Congress members' activities these days with regard to gun control. Please read this brief description of what members of Congress are doing on gun control laws and then answer the questions that follow.

After clicking the "continue" button on the computer screen, respondents read one of two statements (determined randomly):<sup>16</sup>

- **Decrease restrictions.** "Many members of the U.S. Congress are currently working hard to pass two laws. One law would make it legal for people convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence to buy a handgun. The other law would make it legal for people to buy, sell, or possess a semiautomatic weapon."
- **Increase restrictions.** "Many members of the U.S. Congress are currently working hard to pass two laws. One law would make it illegal to sell or possess a 50-caliber rifle, which is a type of rifle originally built to be used in the military. The other law would make it illegal for a person to buy more than one handgun during a 30-day period."

### *Measures*

- **Gun control attitude.** Before reading the manipulation information, respondents reported whether they thought laws concerning gun control should be changed so it would be easier for people to obtain guns, more difficult for people to obtain guns, or kept as they were.
- **Policy change threat and opportunity.** Whether the policy descriptions some respondents heard should have instigated perceptions of policy change threat or opportunity depended on whether the respondents favored or opposed the policies described. Disliking the policies and thinking that members of Congress were working to get them passed would be threatening. Therefore, respondents in the "increase restrictions" group who wanted it to be easier to obtain guns or who wanted gun laws to be kept as they were were coded 1 on the threat variable. Respondents in the "decrease restrictions" group who wanted it to be more difficult to obtain guns or who wanted gun laws to be kept as they were were also coded 1 on the threat variable. All other respondents were coded 0 on this variable. Forty-five percent (N = 973) of respondents experienced some threat, and 55% (N = 1187) did not.

The policy change opportunity variable was coded 1 for respondents in the “decrease restrictions” group who wanted it to be easier to obtain guns and for respondents in the “increase restrictions” group who wanted it to be more difficult to obtain guns. All other respondents were coded 0 on this variable.<sup>17</sup> Twenty-one percent (N = 464) of respondents experienced some opportunity, and 78% (N = 1696) did not.

- **Dissatisfaction.** Respondents who said that gun control laws should be kept as they were were coded 0 on the dissatisfaction variable, and respondents who wanted it to be easier or more difficult for people to obtain guns were coded 1. Sixty-two percent (N = 1346) of respondents were dissatisfied with the status quo, and 38% (N = 814) were not.
- **Income.** Respondents with total household incomes for the previous twelve months of US\$85,000 or more were coded 1 on income, and everyone else was coded 0.
- **Importance.** Before reading the manipulation, respondents were asked how important the issue of gun control was to them personally. Importance was coded 1 for respondents who said “extremely important” and 0 for respondents who said “very important,” “somewhat important,” “slightly important,” or “not at all important.”
- **Willingness to contribute.** Respondents were asked how willing they would be to give money to an organization that they agreed with and that was concerned with the issue of gun control—not at all willing, slightly willing, somewhat willing, very willing, or extremely willing. If they said they were at least slightly willing to contribute money (43% of the sample), they were asked how much money they would be willing to contribute within the next year. Respondents who said they were not at all willing to contribute money (57% of the sample) were coded 0. The remaining respondents’ projected contribution amounts ranged as high as US\$500, with a mean of US\$20 and a standard deviation of US\$52.<sup>18</sup>
- **Party identification.** Measures of political ideology were not available in this study, so party identification was used instead. Two dummy variables were created to represent party identification, one coded 1 for people who said they were *Democrats* and 0 for everyone else. The other dummy variable was coded 1 for people who said they were *Republicans* and 0 for everyone else.
- **Other demographics.** Education, gender, race, and age were coded as in Study 1.

### Study 3: Abortion Activism

#### *Manipulation*

One-fifth of the respondents, chosen randomly, were given no information about abortion legislation and therefore served as the experiment's control group. The remaining four-fifths of the respondents were given legislation information, beginning with the following introduction:

Now, I'd like to switch to a different issue. Members of the U.S. Congress often introduce bills to change existing laws or create new laws. We are interested in what you know about Congress members' activities these days with regard to the issue of abortion. I'm going to read you a statement that briefly describes what members of Congress are currently doing about specific pieces of abortion legislation and ask you some questions about it.

These respondents then heard one of the following four statements (determined randomly):

- **Increase restrictions, high effort.** "Many members of the U.S. Congress favor enacting the following two laws. One would ban all abortions, except when there is a threat to a woman's life caused by the pregnancy, and the other would prevent women in the U.S. military from being able to use their own money to pay for abortion services abroad. And many members of Congress are currently working hard to pass these two laws."
- **Increase restrictions, low effort.** "Many members of the U.S. Congress favor enacting the following two laws. One would ban all abortions, except when there is a threat to a woman's life caused by the pregnancy, and the other would prevent women in the U.S. military from being able to use their own money to pay for abortion services abroad. However, none of the members of Congress are currently working to get either of these laws passed."
- **Decrease restrictions, high effort.** "Many members of the U.S. Congress favor enacting the following two laws. One would allow women to obtain an abortion without mandatory waiting periods, and the other would allow women on Medicaid and federal employees to receive health insurance coverage for abortion services. And many members of Congress are currently working hard to pass these two laws."
- **Decrease restrictions, low effort.** "Many members of the U.S. Congress favor enacting the following two laws. One would allow women to obtain an abortion without mandatory waiting periods, and the other would allow women on Medicaid and federal employees to receive health insurance

coverage for abortion services. However, none of the members of Congress are currently working to get either of these laws passed.”

### *Measures*

- **Abortion attitude.** Respondents were asked whether they thought laws concerning abortion should be changed so it would be easier for women to obtain an abortion, changed so it would be harder for women to obtain an abortion, or kept as they were.
- **Policy change threat and opportunity.** Whether the policy descriptions some respondents heard should have instigated perceptions of policy change threat or opportunity depended upon whether the respondents favored or opposed the policies described. Disagreeing with the policies and thinking that Congress members were working hard to get them passed would be threatening. Therefore, respondents in the increase restrictions, high effort condition who wanted it to be easier to obtain an abortion were coded 1 on the threat variable. Respondents in the decrease restrictions, high effort condition who wanted it to be more difficult to obtain an abortion were coded 1 on the threat variable. Respondents in the increase restrictions, high effort and decrease restrictions, high effort conditions who wanted abortion laws kept as they were were also coded 1 on the policy change threat variable. All other respondents were coded 0 on this variable.

The policy change opportunity variable was coded 1 for respondents in the decrease restrictions, high effort condition who wanted it to be easier to obtain an abortion and for respondents in the increase restrictions, high effort condition who wanted it to be more difficult for women to obtain an abortion. All other respondents were coded 0 on this variable.

- **Dissatisfaction.** Respondents who said that abortion laws should be kept as they were coded 0 on the dissatisfaction variable, and respondents who wanted it to be easier or harder for women to obtain an abortion were coded 1.
- **Importance.** Respondents were asked how important the issue of abortion was to them personally. Importance was coded 0 for respondents who said “not at all important” or “slightly important,” .5 for respondents who said “somewhat important” or “very important,” and 1 for respondents who said “extremely important.”
- **Income.** Respondents reported their total household income before taxes for 1998. If they refused to answer this question, they were asked whether their income was more than US\$10,000, more than US\$20,000, more than US\$30,000, more than US\$40,000, more than US\$50,000, more than US\$60,000, more than US\$75,000, more than US\$100,000, or more than US\$150,000. People with incomes less than US\$30,001 were coded 0,

people with incomes between US\$30,001 and US\$50,000 were coded .5, and people with incomes of US\$50,001 or more were coded 1.

- **Activism.** Respondents were asked how willing they would be to give money to an organization that they agreed with and that was concerned with the issue of abortion—not at all willing, slightly willing, somewhat willing, very willing, or extremely willing. If they said they were at least slightly willing to contribute money (52% of the sample), they were asked how much money they would be willing to contribute within the next year. Respondents who said they were not at all willing to contribute money (48% of the sample) were coded 0. The remaining respondents' projected contribution amounts ranged as high as US\$520, with a mean of US\$39 and a standard deviation of US\$81.<sup>19</sup> The amount was rescaled to range from 0 (meaning US\$0) to 1 (meaning US\$520).
- **Ideology.** Ideology was measured and coded as in Study 1.
- **Other demographics.** Education, gender, race, and age were measured and coded as in Studies 1 and 2.

## Notes

- 1 We thank Robert Unsworth, Sarah Malloy, Mark Hansen, Sidney Verba, Morris Fiorina, Catherine Heaney, Russell Hardin, Robert Mitchell, Robert Mendelson, Daniel Kahneman, David Schkade, Karen Stenner, Kathleen Carr, Anne Smith, Paul Beck, Richard Timpone, Dean Lacy, Marilyn Brewer, Robert Arkin, Roger Tourangeau, Nora Cate Schaeffer, Seymour Sudman, Simon Jackman, John Bullock, Laura Lowe, and the members of the Ohio State University Political Psychology Interest Group for their help and advice during the course of this project. This paper is based on the first author's Ph.D. dissertation and was written partly while the second author was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation, SBR-9022192). Financial support for Study 1 was provided by a grant from the Electric Power Research Institute to Industrial Economics, Inc. Correspondence regarding this chapter should be addressed to Joanne M. Miller at [jomiller@umn.edu](mailto:jomiller@umn.edu).
- 2 Hansen (1985) described evidence he said shows that threat instigates activism. But in fact, he documented effects of undesirable changes that had already occurred, not prospects of undesirable future changes. Consequently, despite the terminology to the contrary, this evidence documents how dissatisfaction with the present influences participation aimed at changing the current state of affairs.
- 3 The activism literature has traditionally viewed "opportunity" as being created by any changes in social or life circumstances that genuinely enhance the likelihood of a group succeeding in causing political change (McAdam, 1985). We use the term more specifically, to refer to the emergence of a powerful ally who offers a new opportunity for collaborative efforts and enhances the apparent probability of success in instigating desirable political change.
- 4 In a field experiment in which people received a letter from an interest group soliciting donations and signed postcards to be mailed to the President, Miller and Krosnick (2004) found that policy change threat was a significant predictor of financial contributions, whereas policy change opportunity significantly predicted

postcard returns. However, given the constraints of field experiments, the study focused only on one side of one issue (pro-choice) and could not control for alternative explanations or explore the conditions under which the effects were most likely to obtain.

- 5 With a few exceptions, the subsample's demographic characteristics closely matched those of all adults in the state, as ascertained via the March 1994 Current Population Survey. People over age 60 were under-represented (comprising 22% of the population but 13% of our sample), as were people with less than a high school education (comprising 18% of the population but 7% of our sample). People who had obtained a Bachelor's degree or more education were over-represented (comprising 19% of the population but 31% of our sample).
- 6 Refusal conversions were not attempted for the two surveys that comprise Study 3, which partly accounts for the lower cooperation rates.
- 7 Respondents who received a score of 1 on the continuous threat variable in Study 1 were categorized as "high threat," and all others were coded as "low threat" for this analysis.
- 8 The dependent variable in our analyses is visibly skewed in all three datasets, with a very large number of zeros, and the OLS residuals are quite skewed as well. Moreover, although the dependent variable takes on many possible values, a sizeable percentage of the observations take on a smaller set of "round" numbers. Therefore, we conducted robustness checks on our tests of hypotheses 1-3 by replicating the OLS regressions again with bootstrap standard errors in place of their normal-theory counterparts. The bootstrap (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993) provides a non-parametric method for estimating standard errors and performing hypothesis tests that makes no distributional assumptions, and treats the independent variables as random (Freedman 1981; Efron and Tibshirani, 1993). We used 10,000 bootstrap Monte Carlo-based samples, a number sufficiently large to eliminate virtually any variance in the estimates of the standard error. We relied upon the bootstrap for estimates of the standard errors as well as hypothesis tests. The results of the bootstrap analyses are consistent with the parametric tests reported here (results available from the authors.)
- 9 Anxiety was positively related to willingness to contribute ( $b = .10$ ,  $se = .04$ ), controlling for threat, opportunity, and dissatisfaction.
- 10 We took this approach because psychological research suggests direct reports of such complex beliefs will be less valid than respondents' reports of components of such judgments (e.g., Armstrong, Denniston, & Gordon, 1975).
- 11 Including these respondents does not change the results we report.
- 12 Analyses comparable to those reported here but assessing the impact of threat from the three agents separately yielded results consistent with the more parsimonious approach of combining across the three agents.
- 13 As with threat, analyses comparable to those reported here but assessing the impact of policy change opportunity from the three agents separately yielded results consistent with those reported here.
- 14 We would normally have preferred that respondents be asked directly how important the issue was to them personally. But because we sought to predict pro-environmental activism, and the importance of people's pro-environmental attitudes is likely to be determined principally by perceptions of environmental problem seriousness (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995), this seemed like an acceptable proxy measure.
- 15 One respondent who reported having contributed US\$7,000 was dropped from our analyses to prevent distortion due to this outlying value. The finding that 19% of Ohioans reported having contributed to an environmental group during the prior year is quite in line with other survey results documenting this sort of percentage

for the nation as a whole. A 1997 national survey done by the Gallup Organization for the National Center for Charitable Donations found that 12% of American households had contributed to an environmental organization during the prior year. And a 1996 national survey done by Belden and Russonello for the Consultative Group on Biological Diversity found this figure to be 13%.

- 16 Both statements described legislation that had been introduced in Congress at the time of the survey.
- 17 In order to determine whether the manipulations had the desired effects, respondents were asked two manipulation check questions at the end of the survey, the order of which was randomly determined for each respondent. One question asked respondents how many members of Congress they thought were working hard to get laws passed that would make it *easier* for people to obtain guns in this country (coded such that 0 = none, .25 = a few, .50 = some, .75 = many, and 1 = most). The mean response offered by people in the “increase restrictions” group was significantly higher than the mean response among all other respondents ( $t(2153) = 3.10, p < .01$ ). Another question asked respondents how many members of Congress they thought were working hard to get laws passed that would make it *more difficult* for people to obtain guns in this country (coded the same). The mean response offered by people in the “decrease restrictions” group was significantly higher than the mean response among all other respondents ( $t(2152) = 6.90, p < .001$ ).
- 18 Sixteen respondents said they would contribute between US\$1000 and US\$9000; these outliers (.6% of the sample) were dropped from the analyses.
- 19 One respondent said he would be willing to contribute US\$800, five said they would contribute US\$1000, and one said she would contribute US\$4000; these individuals were dropped from the analyses to prevent distortion due to outlying values.