UNCERTAINTY AND SUPPORT FOR EXTREMIST GOVERNMENTS

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Abstract

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Extremist governments and regimes have risen to power throughout history and the 2016 U.S. presidential election of Donald Trump raised concerns amongst scholars and politicians that the U.S. government is trending in this direction. Arguably questionable actions conducted by the Trump administration, such as the "Muslim Ban" or the inhumane treatment of migrants at the U.S. border, can be considered extremist in nature and at minimum they mimic the actions of extremist governments. What drives a populace to support extremist governments, particularly a populace raised in democracy? Previous literature and research suggests that under conditions of uncertainty, people are motivated to reduce that uncertainty, often by identifying with a group. Groups that offer members a blueprint on how to think, behave, and feel are particularly attractive for uncertainty reduction. Extremist groups also embody these traits and may thus exploit conditions of uncertainty to gain support. Therefore, people, when experiencing uncertainty, should be motivated to support an extremist government. The current experiment gathered ($N = 169$) responses in an online setting, and manipulated participants' uncertainty to examine support for extremist and democratic governments. Results found that under conditions of high uncertainty, people did not display more

support of an extremist government in comparison to a democratic government. However, post-hoc analyses find that self-reported uncertainty positively predicted support for an extremist government. Thus, the results of this research may have important implications for research on uncertainty-identity theory and uncertainty's influence on support for extremism.

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Introduction

In recent history, there have been various cases of fascist states, military regimes, and dictatorships rising to power. Starting in the 1930's, a notable rise in fascism has been extending throughout Europe and Asia. In countries such as Spain, an unstable government, rampant poverty, and unequal power distribution that detrimentally affected the working class became the catalyst that political historians deem responsible for the rise and establishment of nationalistic (i.e., fascist) movements (Schatz, 2001). In a similar manner, Argentina, Greece, and Chile experienced severe poverty due to poorly structured markets, large disparities of wealth, and underrepresentation of the working and middle class in politics. This led to military coups and military dictatorships during the 1970's that aimed to "preserve the nation" (Mouzelis, 1986). The sociopolitical events and ideologies of the 1900's continue into the 21st century, with a concerning rise of support and interest in right-wing populism and related ideologies in the United States (Mitrovica, 2017; Stan, 2018). The rise in support for extremist ideologies also coincides with recent findings that more than 25% of Americans would support a military dictatorship (Brait, 2015; Feierherd et al., 2018). These findings become more so troublesome with the presidency of Donald Trump, which has been criticized for not equivocally denouncing white supremacist ideologies (DeVega, 2019). In addition, the United States is currently experiencing some of the same issues that Argentina and Chile experienced in the 1970's, such as severe poverty, a large wealth gap, and underrepresentation of the working and middle class in politics (Carnes, 2018; Horowitz

et al., 2020; PovertyUSA, 2018). This thus raises a concern amongst politicians and

scholars that the rise of fascism could be on the horizon for the United States (Kroes,

2017; Taub, 2016; Wise, 2019).

Motadel (2017) argues that whereas the United States never was excluded from

the influence of fascist or totalitarian ideology, there is now a notable increase in support

for these ideologies and their supporting rhetoric in the United States. Indeed, there is a

surge in support for ideologies and rhetoric containing xenophobia, transphobia, and

islamophobia in the years leading up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, continuing to

the present day (ADL, 2017; Keneally, 2017; Norris, 2016;). Much of the Trump

administration's rhetoric embraces (albeit often tacitly) support for white supremacy

(Coates, 2018; Montanaro, 2019), which has emboldened contemporary right-wing hate

and extremist groups such as the KKK, the Proud Boys, and the Atomwaffen Division

(BBC, 2017; Ford, 2017). Through the use of coded language (so-called 'dog whistles')

and biased policies, the Trump administration affirms the grievances that these extremist

groups purport to have and the subsequent behaviors they then support. This is evident in

the implementation of travel bans against predominantly Muslim countries (Vogue,

2017), increases in arrests against Latino immigrants (Torbati, 2017), and attacks on the

rights of LGBT individuals (Gessen, 2017). In Trump's first term, there was a steady rise

in xenophobia, racism, and violence witnessed in increased detention camps for

immigrants of color, proposed mass deportations, increases in hate crimes, and mass

shootings targeting immigrants of color (Goodman & Moynihan, 2019; Hesson &

Forgey, 2019; Serwer, 2019; Wall Street Journal, 2019). Carefully considering Russia,

Iran, and North Korea, some could argue that the United States is currently enacting policies and engaging in action (see above for examples) that can be considered "extreme" (Dickerson, 2019; Rhodan, 2018). However, it is important to note, by comparison and some operational definitions, that the United States may not be considered "extremist".

Whereas there are various forms of governing styles, some, such as dictatorships or totalitarian governments, stand out from other forms of government such as the United States' representative democracy. Totalitarian governments, authoritarian governments, fascist states, communist states, dictatorships, and so on, all oppress their citizens, strip them of their rights, and restrict power to those within the already established governing body (Britannica, 2018). However, there is not one term that encompasses all of these governments. The extremity of governments' restriction of and control over their people falls along a spectrum, with some trending toward the "extremely" oppressive side of the spectrum. Given the similarities that these governing styles share, this research will categorize them under the umbrella term of an "extremist" government. Thus, an extremist government is a form of government in which the citizens have limited rights and are oppressed through means of fear and violence. This is why the governments of Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela may share the label of "extremist", while the United States can be considered a democracy. What would cause people living in democracies, such as the United States, to support the ideas and ideals that extremist governments enforce?

The 1900's saw the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany that resulted in the Holocaust as well as the rise of communism in Russia, which lead to the starvation, oppression, and death of tens of millions of people (Alexopoulos, 2017). In contemporary times, regimes found in countries such as North Korea, Syria, and Turkey, continue to oppress and violate human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2018a, 2018b). It thus comes as a surprise that in a representative democracy (i.e., the United States), more than 25% of Americans have reported support for a military coup, a percentage that remains stable over the last 10 years (Brait, 2015; Feierherd et al., 2018). What motivates citizens to willingly support an extremist government in spite of the severe outcomes present in history? Currently, there is no literature that addresses this issue. However, previous research suggests that self-uncertainty can motivate individuals to identify with extremist groups (Hogg et al., 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine the influence of self-uncertainty on support for extremist governments. To understand the influence of uncertainty, research must first understand the role that people's social identities (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) play when they experience unrest and uncertainty (e.g., Hogg & Adelman, 2013) which may provide a pathway to explaining why individuals would support an extremist government.

Literature Review

Social Identity Theory

To understand why a society would support an extremist government, it is crucial to attempt to understand the individual in the context of the social world. For instance, the individual self may differ from the self in a group context. In an individual setting, one person does not view themselves in the exact manner that another person views themselves. That is, the focus in an individual context is "I". In an interpersonal context, in which two people are together, the focus in the dyad is "you and I", where personality characteristics differ between the two, creating and maintaining a separation of identities. It is only when three or more individuals coalesce that individuals can create the cognitive structures for a group. This allows individuals to evaluate themselves and identify with one another in such a way to create a context of "us" (Hogg, 2007). This is the premise of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which examines the individual in the contexts of groups, specifically, how people's self-conceptions are transformed in the context of a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

When people come together and identify as a group, they share a common identity. This shared sense of identity is created by group members perceiving themselves in terms of a set of attributes that define the group, while also differentiating their group from other groups. This set of attributes that defines the group, and that are shared with other members of the group, creates an inclusive social category – a social identity (see Hogg et al., 2007). These attributes differ from the personal and distinct attributes of one's personal identity, as they are only conceived in the context of the group (Hogg et

al., 2007). To create the attributes that define the group, all members of the group (i.e.,

ingroup) compare and contrast the group against other relevant but dissimilar groups (i.e.,

outgroups; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This results in distinctions and differences that

distinguish the ingroup from other groups (Turner, 1975).

By evaluating and comparing similarities and differences between groups, group

members may enhance the self-esteem of both themselves and their ingroup by elevating

the status of their own group over other groups (Turner, 1975). Moreover, through this

process, the individual member gains a reason for belonging to the group in the first

place, as well as important knowledge on how (or how not) to think, feel, and behave

(Hogg & Williams, 2000). Thus, the bonds that connect individuals to their respective

groups are affective, informational, and evaluative. These bonds also are responsible for

creating cohesion and allegiance to the ingroup, which helps create a sense of a collective

that is strengthened through intergroup comparisons. The role of intergroup comparisons

is defined by the meta-contrast principle (Hogg, 2007; Tajfel, 1979; Turner, 1985), which

details that groups aim to minimize the differences amongst ingroup members while

maximizing differences between the ingroup and relevant outgroups.

Historically, governments can create and provide a social identity for their

citizens to bolster self-esteem and create a sense of unity. For example, apartheid was a

system of racial segregation and discrimination implemented in South Africa. Race and

ethnicity played a major role in access to social events, public facilities, opportunities for

housing, and even employment (Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002). The ethnicity and race

of South African citizens constituted much of their social identity, as it dictated how they

treated others of different ethnicities and races, as well as how to think, feel, and behave. After the fall of apartheid in South Africa in the early 1990's, a need for identity reformation rose among South Africans.

The ruling South African government, the African National Congress (ANC), attempted to unify the nation post-apartheid through the linkage of one's social identity to the South African state. To accomplish this, the government created and used political symbols such as a new national anthem and national flag to create symbols by which South Africans could identify with. National holidays were created in order to instill an identity that corresponded with the nation (Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002), bolstering self-esteem by creating a pride sense of belonging to a collective. This also creates bonds that serve as an emotional and evaluative connection to the state. Thus, the South African government set out to create an identity all South Africans could adopt. Yet, while social identity theory explains the importance and purpose of group membership(s) in one's life, it does not explain the process by which people join and are (cognitively) influenced by groups. The psychological processes through which people psychologically join groups, and thus act in accordance with their group membership, is outlined by self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985).

Self-Categorization Theory

Self-categorization theory (SCT) – *the social identity theory of the group* – explains the processes through which an individual comes to identify with a group and adopt the group as part of the self-concept (Turner, 1985). In addition, SCT also examines how individuals may view members of other groups (Turner, 1985). SCT posits

that in the social world, people view themselves and others in terms of the attributes that define their group or differentiate the ingroup from other relevant groups. Groups are psychologically defined by prototypes, a set of attributes that define the group to which one belongs (i.e., ingroup) while also differentiating it from other relevant groups (i.e., outgroups; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1985). Adhering to the prototype occurs through the process of depersonalization, in which people view themselves not as an individual but as the embodiment of the traits that encompass their ingroup (Turner, 1985). These traits personify the group and provide a cognitive representation of what it means to belong to the group. When one adheres to the ingroup prototype, they gain information about how to behave, feel, and think in accordance with the ingroup. Additionally, by adhering to the ingroup prototype, people begin to categorize themselves and others into groups based on perceived prototypes. By doing so, the difference among group members is minimized while differences between the ingroup and members of a relevant outgroup is maximized. This process details how group contexts tell people who they are and are not, which further helps to create a distinct social identity. However, knowledge of the ingroup prototype is not enough to influence or shape behavior alone. The influence of these group prototypes is dependent on the importance of the group membership in a social context (Hogg, 2007).

In social contexts, people examine the attributes of others in an attempt to categorize others into relevant groups. It is then that the ingroup prototype influences the behavior of the individual (Hogg, 2001; Hogg, 2007; Turner, 1985). When one categorizes themselves into a group, there is a shift in the way that they perceive

themselves as well as others. The individual's personality characteristics that embody

one's personal identity are discarded in favor of characteristics that reflect the group.

These characteristics make up the social identity, which provides a blueprint about how

to behave while creating a distinction between group members and other groups. It is

here that these identities influence and shape the behavior of individuals in certain social

contexts.

Historical examples of the process of self-categorization also provide insight into

extremist governments. For example, from the 1920's to the 1940's, the Nazi Party rose

to power in Germany. The aim of the Nazi Party was to unite Germany into a country for

Germans populated by Germans, and erase the reparations forced on them by the Treaty

of Versailles from the previous World War. To unite the German people under a common

identity, the Nazi Party sought to create a prototype by which citizens should abide. This

prototype included beliefs and behaviors such as: the belief that the Aryan people were

the "superior" race while other people of different races were sub-human, the belief that

Germany was under attack and in danger from communists and Jewish people, the belief

that the Jewish race was undermining Germany and its people and should thus be

destroyed, and the belief that the Jewish populations in Germany should be exterminated

(BBC, 2017; Brustein, 1996). These beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes are reflective of the

Nazi prototype, and this is the prototype that citizens in Nazi Germany attempted to

embody (Bentwich, 1933). Although self-categorization theory clearly outlines the

process by which individuals categorize themselves and others into groups, the

motivation behind individuals adopting and embodying a social identity is not abundantly

clear. One important drive (and pertinent to this thesis) that compels individuals to identify with a group is outlined by uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2007).

Uncertainty-Identity Theory

Stemming from the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1985) uncertainty-identity theory (UIT; Hogg, 2007) provides one explanation for the motivation behind an individual's self-categorization into a group and subsequent identification with that group. UIT posits that when people experience aversive uncertainty (i.e., uncertainty that produces a negative drive state) they are motivated to reduce that uncertainty. This motivation is even more urgent when the individual is uncertain about attributes that directly relate to their self-concept – that is, self-uncertainty is aversive to the extent that the content of the uncertainty is pertinent to the self. This is primarily due to people wanting to feel certain about who they are, what they think, and where they are going in life. Though there are numerous ways to reduce uncertainty, one effective method to reduce uncertainty is by joining a group (i.e., self-categorization; Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Reid & Hogg, 2005). By categorizing oneself into a group, one is provided with a prototype that lays out how the individual should behave, feel, and think. Additionally, by categorizing oneself into a group, the individual thus shares a collective identity with other individuals, which cements their worldviews and perceptions of the self, effectively reducing uncertainty.

How effective a group is at reducing uncertainty depends on the entitativity of the group itself. Entitativity is the marker of a group's boundaries, internal structure, goals, and social interaction amongst members (Campbell, 1960; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996).

Different degrees of entitativity can be found amongst groups, each with their own corresponding benefits. For example, groups that are higher in entitativity are more efficient at reducing uncertainty (Hogg, 2009; Yzerbyt et al., 2013) due to clear cut prototypes that provide worldview validation for members, while also providing security through predictable behaviors to which all members must adhere (Hogg et al., 2010; Hogg et al., 2007). In general, the more uncertainty that people experience, the higher their desire to reduce that uncertainty, which suggests that people are more likely to join and identify with a group when they experience elevated uncertainty (Grant & Hogg, 2012; Jetten et al., 2004). However, highly entitative groups may have drawbacks and can lead to group members being blocked off from opposing opinions and information that conflicts with group held beliefs (Altemeyer, 2003; Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Kruglanski et al., 2006; Orehek et al., 2010). This happens as a result of group members rejecting opposing and outside information in favor of information from other group members or leaders (Hogg, 2001; Mccauley, 1989). This echo chamber can lead to invalidating opposing information and accepting fundamentalist belief systems (Hogg, 2003; Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Hogg et al., 2007).

Under conditions of uncertainty, people will strive to identify with and support groups that are highly entitative and maintain clear cut prototypes (Grant & Hogg, 2012; Hogg, 2009; Jetten et al., 2004; Yzerbyt et al., 2013). Previous research and theorizing suggests that under these conditions, leaders who are not prototypical of the group can arise and garner support (Abrams et al., 2008; Gaffney et al., 2018; Rast et al., 2012). In times of crisis or emergencies, research suggests that people prefer leaders who are

different and can provide change, in comparison to leaders that are representative of the

populace (Halevy et al., 2011). Ultimately, the preference for prototypical (vs. non-

prototypical) leaders is diminished when people experience uncertainty, and may

ultimately lead individuals to support for autocratic (i.e., "extremist") leaders (Rast et al.,

2012). Autocratic leaders can be appealing under conditions of uncertainty as they can

provide clear cut prototypes for group members (Hogg, 2014; Rast et al., 2012). Due to

this, some groups and leaders with authoritarian traits and beliefs can push an extremist

agenda that can be highly appealing (Hogg & Adelman, 2013). Under conditions of

uncertainty, groups that are highly entitative and maintain autocratic leadership and

authoritarian structures can push individuals towards radicalization and extremism.

Previous research has found that clearer group prototypes can be found in groups that are

more (relative to less) entitative (Hogg, 2007; Yzerbyt et al., 2013). This results in people

seeking out highly entitative groups as their uncertainty increases (Hogg et al., 2007).

However, this can be problematic, as extremist groups also have clearly defined

prototypes, boundaries, and structures, akin to highly entitative groups. It can thus be

seen here that the road to extremism can begin with sentiments of uncertainty.

Uncertainty and Extremism

According to Kruglanski et al. (2017), extremism is the willful deviation from the

norm(s) of conduct in a given context. Extremist groups can be considered highly

entitative groups, that have (historically) been able to influence people into joining and/or

supporting their ideology (Hogg, 2014; Kruglanski et al., 2006). In particular, the United

States has witnessed a surge of extremist groups in the form of neo-Nazi and white

supremacy groups such as Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys (McGowan, 2014; Southern

Poverty Law Center, 2020; Tenold, 2019). These groups (and others) are responsible for

acts of violence such as attacking protestors and threatening the lives of journalists

(Moynihan, 2019; Wilson, 2020). These are just two examples of countless violence that

can be linked to extremist groups based in the United States. As the United States

continues to see hate crimes and extremist violence rise (Allam, 2020; Hassan, 2019), one

may wonder what would motivate an individual to support extremist groups that commit

such horrible acts.

Kruglanski et al. (2017) posit that extremism is a response to neglected or ignored

social needs (e.g., the need for power, respect, or certainty) and that engagement in

extremism rises from the realization that there is an opportunity, through extremism, to

satiate that need. Addressing one's neglected needs thus becomes one's priority,

overshadowing other needs, which can lead to extremist acts to gain attention or change

one's own or group's standing. Kruglanski et al. (2017) note that neglected needs are a

driving force behind extremism such as in the case of school shooters, where a

(neglected) need for respect may lead individuals to believe that engaging in extreme

violence will bring forth respect. Thus, the process by which perpetrators contemplate

and potentially engage in a violent form of extremism begins with a motivational desire

to achieve balance amongst their social needs.

A different but relevant perspective from Kruglanski comes in the form of need

for cognitive closure (NFCC; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Webster & Kruglanski,

1998). Kruglanski argues that NFCC motivates individuals to seek out others (i.e.,

groups) with similar worldviews to cement the reality these individuals seek (Kruglanski et al., 1997; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Individuals experiencing doubt are motivated to restore a sense of confidence, thus sparking a need for cognitive closure. Extremist groups can instill a sense of confidence and belonging while offering a pathway to rectifying previous injustices through extremism. Previous research supports this notion, having found that in the case of extremism, NFCC mediates the process of joining and supporting extremism groups (Webber et al., 2017).

Building off of these theoretical frameworks, Kruglanski posited the quest for significance model of radicalization (QFS; Kruglanski et al., 2014), which states that after a blow to one's social or personal stability, extremism and extremist behavior may become an effective way to reduce doubt and restore certainty (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Kruglanski et al., 2017; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011). Webber et al. (2017) provides support for NFCC and QFS by examining members from extremist groups in Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Webber et al. (2017) found that when members of an extremist group experienced a blow to their social or personal stability, it prompted their need for cognitive closure. This need for cognitive closure made extremist groups and their ideologies appear more appealing due to their self-concept affirming and self-significance promising rhetoric. As such, these extremist members joined and supported extremist groups in order to reduce uncertainty and as a result, restored a sense of significance.

Kay et al. (2009) offer a similar perspective with compensatory control theory. Compensatory control theory (CCT) posits that people defensively embrace ideologies that emphasize control to alleviate the anxiety that arises from instability they experience.

CCT proposes that when people are deprived of personal control (e.g., no control over the economy), they seek out external sources of control such as social and political ideologies and accompanying socially recognized organizations. These organizations can provide people with a sense of security, which can provide a sense of control over their surrounding environment, reducing their uncertainty and anxiety. While the need for external control varies among people, those that seek the most control will seek out, support, and join high control-affirming groups, which is where the roots of extremism begins.

According to Kay et al. (2009), extremist ideologies provide a sense of personal control that can reduce the anxiety of those who have a lowered sense of personal control. It should come as no surprise that extremist ideologies are most likely to be adopted by those who live in sociocultural contexts where there is a limited belief in personal control. Thus, when people feel that their personal control is threatened and are socially restricted, they may channel their desire to control into one single outlet (i.e., extremism) (Kay & Eibach, 2013). For example, one method of maintaining a sense of personal control is the endorsement of external sources of control such as belief and trust in religious or governmental institutions (Kay et al., 2008; Kay et al., 2010). Kay et al. (2009) previously conducted research on right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), a collection of personality traits including obedience to authority, hostility to outsiders, and conformity. These researchers found that people may adopt traits of high RWA such as compliance to authority figures, because they are an effective method for managing and reducing the stress brought forth by the disorder and chaos of the world.

For most people, knowing how to behave and how to think brings certainty of who one is in the world (Hogg, 2007; Hogg & Williams, 2000). Unfortunately, world events over the last century may have led to an increase in uncertainty. Events spanning from the Vietnam War to the Iraq War, continuous terrorist attacks across the globe, and the rise of extremist groups such as Al-Queada, ISIS, and the Atomwaffen Division, are contributing factors towards fostering uncertainty among people. Although the realities of uncertainty are not new to many societies and Nations (e.g., Afghanistan, Sri Lanka), constant states of uncertainty might be new for people who have traditionally held privilege within stable Western societies (e.g., middle- and upper-class people in the U.S.). At the current writing of this thesis, the world is engulfed in global pandemic, which has plunged many such people into the unchartered territory of societal uncertainty and further exacerbated the uncertainties that many groups experience. When uncertainty is highly self-relevant or consistent, the motivation to reduce the uncertainty is strong. The drive for uncertainty reduction may lead individuals to seek out affirmations of one's worldviews, attitudes, etc. This affirmation can be provided and sustained by groups which validates people's behaviors and beliefs when they categorize themselves into a group with rigid structures (Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Reid & Hogg, 2005).

Research indeed supports that people who are high in uncertainty are attracted to extremist groups (Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Hogg & Adelman, 2013). Membership in such groups provides an ideology that offers structure and the control individuals crave over their lives. Further experimental research shows that people are more supportive ingroup extremist factions when they experience high relative to low uncertainty

(Gaffney et al., 2014). Ultimately, the desire to reduce uncertainty or instill a sense of control when living in a chaotic environment can potentially explain the rise of extremist groups. Extremist groups are highly cohesive; they provide a clear prototype of how to think, feel, and behave by maintaining exclusionary ideologies, closed boundaries, fundamentalist belief systems, and rigid structure. Regardless of their negative traits, in a world filled with uncertainty and disorder, groups such as these are highly desirable as they provide control, order, and a sense of comfort. Governments, at the national level, should also have this ability. As mentioned earlier, various countries throughout history have experienced economic instability, rampant poverty, government corruption, and so on. This historical and empirical evidence suggests that under conditions of uncertainty, people may be motivated to support an extremist government if it means attaining a sense of control and order in their personal lives.

Overview of the Current Research

Based on the previous evidence, there is support for the idea that uncertainty can push people to join groups and follow leaders that are extreme (Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Rast et al., 2012). As the aforementioned research suggests, uncertainty can push individuals to identify with and support extremist groups, which may hold true for uncertainty and extremist governments. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the influence of self-uncertainty on support for extremist governments. This thesis proposes that when Americans (who live in a democratic society) will be more supportive of an extremist government under conditions of high relative to low uncertainty. To address the research questions, participants were primed with high or low uncertainty (between

groups independent variable) and then all participants read a description of both an

extremist and a democratic government (within subjects).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Under conditions of low uncertainty (relative to high uncertainty), participants will demonstrate more favorable attitudes toward a democratic government (as opposed to an extremist government). Under conditions of high uncertainty (relative to low uncertainty), participants will demonstrate more supportive attitudes toward an extremist government. Whereas I predict that overall, people will be more supportive of a democratic government, I predict that this preference will weaken under conditions of uncertainty.

Planned Data Analysis for Hypothesis 1

For Hypothesis 1, I planned to run a mixed model analysis of variance to examine differences between participants in the low and high uncertainty conditions, in regards to their support for the democratic and extremist government.

Hypothesis 2

Under conditions of high uncertainty, participants will perceive an extremist government as more legitimate than do participants in the low uncertainty condition. In turn, legitimacy will positively predict supportive attitudes toward the extremist government. I do not predict this mediating relationship for a democratic government.

Planned Data Analysis for Hypothesis 2

For Hypothesis 2, I planned to first run an independent samples *t*-test to examine if there was a statistically significant difference between participants in the low and high uncertainty conditions, in regards to the legitimacy of the extremist government. If there

was a statistically significant difference between the two conditions, I would then run a

mediation analysis in SPSS using Haye's PROCESS with 5,000 bootstrapped iterations.

This would be conducted to determine if uncertainty would predict perceptions of

legitimacy, and in turn, if legitimacy would predict supportive attitudes for an extremist

government.

Hypothesis 3

Under conditions of high uncertainty, participants will perceive more political

voice from an extremist government than those in the low uncertainty condition. In turn,

political voice will positively predict supportive attitudes toward the extremist

government. I do not predict this mediating relationship for a democratic government.

Planned Data Analysis for Hypothesis 3

For Hypothesis 3, I planned to first run an independent samples *t*-test to examine

if there was a statistically significant difference between participants in the low and high

uncertainty conditions, in regards to the perceived political voice of the extremist

government. If there was a statistically significant difference between the two conditions,

I would then run a mediation analysis in SPSS using Haye's PROCESS with 5,000

bootstrapped iterations. This would be conducted in order to determine if uncertainty

would predict political voice, and in turn, if political voice would predict supportive

attitudes for an extremist government.

Method

Design

The current experiment is a two-factor mixed-model experimental design. The first factor is a between-groups variable: self-uncertainty, which will consist of two levels: high vs. low. The second factor is a within-groups variable: government type, which consists of two levels: extremist government and democratic government. The primary dependent variable is support for each government type. This design will incorporate a between-groups aspect, by making comparisons of the dependent and mediating measures, based on differences in the low and high uncertainty conditions. This design also incorporates a within-groups aspect, as participants are exposed to both levels of the within-groups variable, and as a result, completed all dependent and mediating measures for each government type.

Participants

A statistical power analysis suggests that a sample pool of approximately 200 total participants was necessary to obtain adequate statistical power (.80) and a moderate effect size (0.5). In total, 302 participants responded to this survey on Amazon MTurk. To qualify for participation in the survey, participants needed to be 18 years of age or older. Participants also needed to have been born in the United States, while also maintaining residency and citizenship in the United States. Responses were removed if they failed to meet the following criteria: if participants did not agree to the informed consent or if they did not complete the survey. One hundred thirty-three participant responses (44%) of the original sample pool were removed due to non-completion of the

survey (i.e., abandoning the survey), with 18 of these responses removed due to answers

to the citizenship and residency questions. After removing participants based upon the

criteria above, the final sample size was 169, approximately 56% of the initial sample

size.

Final Sample Participants

Participants reported their demographic information including age, education,

socioeconomic status, gender, race/ethnicity, and political party affiliation. The sample of

participants was 68.6% White, 57.4% held a B.A., 33% had an annual income of $45,000

to $75,000, 62.7% identified as male, 44.4% identified as Republican, 37.3% identified

as Democrat, and 17.8% identified as Independent. The average age of the participant

was 37, with a range of 25 to 49.

Procedure

Participants accessed Amazon Mechanical Turk (an online data collection tool in

which participants sign up as "workers" to complete surveys for compensation) from a

location of their choosing. After clicking on the available link, participants were taken to

the study's page hosted on the survey platform Qualtrics. The first page presented

participants with an informed consent, which described the nature of the study's

procedure, the length of the study (15 – 20 minutes), potential risks and benefits, and a

voluntary agreement to participate in the study. If participants agreed to participate in the

study, they were then asked a series of questions regarding they were born in the United

States and maintained residency and citizenship in the United States. If they answered yes

to all three questions, participants were then evenly and randomly assigned to one of two

conditions, high or low uncertainty (see self-uncertainty prime below).

After the uncertainty priming procedure concluded, participants were presented

with counterbalanced descriptions of both of the governments (i.e., extremist and

democratic). After reading a description of the first government, participants responded

to items measuring attitudes and beliefs about the relevant government. Afterwards,

participants read a description of the second government. After reading the second

description, participants responded to items measuring attitudes and beliefs regarding the

relevant government. Participants then completed other measures which were not

relevant to the focus of this research. Participants then provided demographic

information. After providing demographic information, the participants were informed

that the survey is complete. Participants were then debriefed about the true nature of the

work. Participants were thanked for their time, and then rewarded $0.50 for their

participation in the study.

Self-Uncertainty Prime

Participants completed either a high or a low self-uncertainty prime adapted from

the uncertainty-identity literature (e.g., Gaffney et al., 2014; Grant & Hogg, 2012; Hogg

et al., 2007). The uncertainty prime required participants to provide 3 items that made

them uncertain or certain. See Appendix A for further details.

Government Descriptions

Participants were randomly presented with one of two descriptions of governments: an extreme government and a democratic government. See Appendix B for further details on these descriptions.

Measures

Legitimacy of the Extremist Government. Participants responded to 4-items measuring legitimacy, adapted from van der Toorn et al., (2011). Example items include *this government is fair* and *this government is legitimate*. Participants responded to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). It was a reliable scale (α= .95). See Appendix C for the full scale.

Legitimacy of the Democratic Government. Participants responded to 4-items measuring legitimacy, adapted from van der Toorn et al. (2011). Example items include *this government is fair* and *this government is legitimate*. Participants responded to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). It was a reliable scale (α= .81). See Appendix C for the full scale.

Perceived Political Voice of the Extremist Government. Participants responded to 5-items adapted from Sani and Todman (2002) as well as Sani (2005). Example items include *This form of government makes me feel like a full and equal American* and *This form of government makes me feel as a legitimate American.* Participants responded to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). It was a reliable scale (α = .94). See Appendix D for the full scale.

Perceived Political Voice of the Democratic Government. Participants responded to 5-items adapted from Sani and Todman (2002) as well as Sani (2005). Example items include *This form of government makes me feel like a full and equal American* and *This form of government makes me feel as a legitimate American.* Participants responded to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). It was a reliable scale ($\alpha = .85$). See Appendix D for the full scale.

Supportive Attitudes Toward the Extremist Government. Participants reported attitudes towards both aforementioned governments using a 12-item semantic differential. Example items ends include *strong or weak* and *decisive or indecisive*. Participants responded to each semantic differential on a 7-point scale. It was a reliable scale ($\alpha = .81$). See Appendix E for the full semantic differential.

Supportive Attitudes Toward the Democratic Government. Participants reported attitudes towards both aforementioned governments using a 12-item semantic differential. Example items include *strong or weak* and *decisive or indecisive*. Participants responded to each semantic differential on a 7-point scale. It was a reliable scale ($\alpha = .85$). See Appendix E for the full semantic differential.

Self-Uncertainty. Participants reported feelings of self-uncertainty using a 12-item self-uncertainty scale from Hohman and Hogg (2015). This was scale was included in this survey for exploratory analyses not relevant to the main Hypotheses. Example items include *my beliefs about myself often conflict with one another* or *on one day I might have one opinion of myself and on another day, I might have a different opinion*.

Participants responded to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert scale. It was a reliable scale ($\alpha = .91$). See Appendix F for full scale.

Conservatism. Participants reported levels of conservatism using a 3-item conservatism measure. This was scale was included in this survey for exploratory analyses not relevant to the main Hypotheses. Example items include *how liberal or conservative are you on social issues?* and *how liberal or conservative are you on economic issues?* Participants responded to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). It was a reliable scale ($\alpha = .91$). See Appendix G for the full scale.

Need for Closure. Participants reported their feelings regarding need for closure using a 15-item measure of need for closure from Roets and Van Hiel (2011). This was scale was included in this survey for exploratory analyses not relevant to the main Hypotheses. Example items include *I don't like situations that are uncertain* and *I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.* Participants responded to each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). It was a reliable scale ($\alpha = .91$). See Appendix H for the full scale.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism. Participant's responded to right wing authoritarianism using 12 items adopted and modified from Duckitt et al.'s (2010) scale. This was scale was included in this survey for exploratory analyses not relevant to the main Hypotheses. Example items include *what our country needs more is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity* and *our country will be great if we show respect*

for authority and obey our leaders. Participants responded to each statement on a 7-point

Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert scale. It was a

reliable scale (α = .82). See Appendix I for the full scale.

      Patriotism and Nationalism. Participants reported their feelings regarding the

United States and patriotism using a 21 measure of patriotism and nationalism from

Sidanius et al., 1997. This was scale was included in this survey for exploratory analyses

not relevant to the main Hypotheses. Example items include *the more the United States*

actively influences other countries, the better off these countries will be and to maintain

our country's superiority and *war is sometimes necessary.* Participants responded to each

statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly*

agree) Likert scale. It is a reliable scale (α = .85). See Appendix J for the full scale.

      Demographics. Finally, participants reported their age, gender, ethnicity and

race, annual income, level of education, and political affiliation. See Appendix K for the

full set of questions.

Results

Data Assumptions and Cleaning

Support for Extremist Government

I examined normality visually using a histogram and Q-Q Plot, and examining normality statistically by comparing the skew/kurtosis statistic to standard error in SPSS (Aberson, 2019). The skew to standard error ratio was 0.14:0.19, which is under the maximum 3.00:1.00 ratio. The kurtosis to standard error ratio was 0.57:0.37, which is under the maximum 3.00:1.00 ratio. This indicated that the support for extremist government variable is normally distributed. Examination of residuals revealed the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. This shows that the support for extremist government variable is able to meet all assumptions for Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, and Hypothesis 3.

Support for Democratic Government

I examined normality visually using a histogram and Q-Q Plot, and examining normality statistically by comparing the skew/kurtosis statistic to standard error in SPSS (Aberson, 2019). The ratio regarding the skew statistic to standard error was 0.14:0.19, which is under the maximum 3.00:1.00 ratio. The ratio regarding the kurtosis statistic to standard error was -0.55:0.37, which is under than the maximum 3.00:1.00 ratio. This indicated that the support for democratic government variable is normally distributed. Examination of residuals revealed the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. This shows that the support for the democratic government variable is able to meet all assumptions for Hypothesis 1.

Legitimacy of the Extremist Government

I examined normality visually using a histogram and Q-Q Plot, and examining normality statistically by comparing the skew/kurtosis statistic to standard error in SPSS (Aberson, 2019). The ratio regarding the skew statistic to standard error was -0.47:0.19, which is under the maximum 3.00:1.00 ratio. The ratio regarding the kurtosis statistic to standard error was -1.01:0.37, which is under the maximum 3.00:1.00 ratio. Examination of residuals revealed the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. This shows that the legitimacy variable is able to meet all assumptions for Hypothesis 2.

Political Voice of the Extremist Government

I examined normality visually using a histogram and Q-Q Plot, and examining normality statistically by comparing the skew/kurtosis statistic to standard error in SPSS (Aberson, 2019). The ratio regarding the skew statistic to standard error was -0.47:0.19, which was less than the maximum 3.00:1.00 ratio. The ratio regarding the kurtosis statistic to standard error was -1.07:0.37, which was also less than the maximum 3.00:1.00 ratio. Examination of residuals revealed the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. This shows that the political voice variable is able to meet all assumptions for Hypothesis 3.

Manipulation Check

Before beginning data analysis, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if the uncertainty prime was successful. This was done by comparing the mean scores of the self-uncertainty measure between participants in the high ($n = 86$) and low ($n = 83$) uncertainty conditions. There was not a significant difference in the scores for

participants in the high ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.24$) or low ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.30$) uncertainty

conditions; $F(1, 167) = 0.045$, $p = .83$. Results of Levene's test also showed that the

assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, $F(1, 167) = 0.16$, $p = .83$. These results

suggest that the uncertainty prime may not have been successful in current context.

Hypothesis 1

      I conducted a mixed model analysis of variance to assess the effect of uncertainty

on support for governments. This consisted of examining for potential differences

between participants in the high ($n = 86$) and low ($n = 83$) uncertainty conditions, in

regards to support for a democratic and extremist government. This also consisted of

examining for any main effects for uncertainty and government, and any interaction

between the two. Results indicated that there is no main effect for uncertainty, $F(1, 167)$

$= 0.11$, $p = .74$, $\eta^2 = .001$. Results indicated a significant main effect for support attitudes

towards government. Participants in the low ($M = 4.40$, $SD =1.04$) and high uncertainty

condition ($M = 4.44$, $SD =1.06$) viewed the democratic government more favorably than

they viewed the extremist government in the low ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.05$) and high ($M =$

3.59, $SD = 1.15$) uncertainty conditions, $F(1, 167) = 50.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .232$. Results

indicated that there was no interaction between uncertainty and support for government,

$F(1, 167) = 0.182$, $p = .67$, $\eta^2 = .001$. Ultimately, these findings do not provide support

for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2

      I first conducted an independent samples t-test in SPSS to determine if there was

an effect of uncertainty on perceptions of legitimacy. This consisted of examining for any

potential differences between participants in the high ($n = 86$) and low ($n = 83$)

uncertainty conditions, in regards to perceived legitimacy of the extremist government.

There was no statistically significant difference for perceptions of legitimacy for an

extremist government based upon conditions of uncertainty. Participants in the low

uncertainty condition perceived the legitimacy of the extremist government ($M = 4.03$,

$SD = 1.82$) similarly to participants in the high uncertainty condition ($M = 4.31$, SD

$= 1.83$); $t(167) = 0.99$, $p = .32$, $d = 0.02$. Results of Levene's test also showed that the

assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, $F(1, 167) = 0.99$, $p = .32$. Given that

there was no effect of the independent variable (i.e., Uncertainty) onto the proposed

mediator (i.e., Legitimacy), there was no purpose in further examining Hypothesis 2.

Therefore, these findings do not provide support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3

I first conducted an independent samples t-test in SPSS to determine if there was

an effect of uncertainty on perceptions of political voice. This consisted of examining for

any potential differences between participants in the high ($n = 86$) and low ($n = 83$)

uncertainty conditions, in regards to perceived political voice of the extremist

government. There was no statistically significant difference for perceptions of voice for

an extremist government based on uncertainty. Participants in the low uncertainty

condition evaluated the extremist government ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.86$) similarly to

participants in the high uncertainty condition ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.82$); $t(167) = -0.06$, $p =$

$.95$, $d = 0.01$. Results of Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of

variance was met, $F(1, 167) = -0.06$, $p = .60$. Given that there was no effect of the

independent variable *(*i.e., Uncertainty) onto the proposed mediator (i.e., Political Voice), there was no purpose in further examining Hypothesis 3. Therefore, these findings do not provide support for Hypothesis 3.

Exploratory Analyses

The manipulation of uncertainty in this study was unsuccessful. Results (as seen in the manipulation check) showed that participants reported similar levels of uncertainty regardless of their prescribed condition. However, given that data were collected in a time of elevated uncertainty that Americans have not experienced in recent history (data were collected in late March – April of 2020, when the covid-19 pandemic hit the U.S. and several states issued shelter in place orders), it is possible that while the uncertainty manipulation failed to capture meaningful differences between prime conditions, because Americans simply felt "uncertain". In fact, the mean of the measured uncertainty variable indicated that on average, participants reported a score of 3.7, which was above the mid-point on the 1-7 Likert scale. This indicates that participants may have experienced uncertainty, but not as a result of the prime. As a result, the self-reported self-uncertainty measure could more accurately display variability in participants' uncertainty, as participants are able to directly report their feelings and attitudes regarding uncertainty. The following analyses thus explores potential relationships between uncertainty (using the self-report scale), support for government(s), and other possible mediating factors that could carry influence.

Exploratory Analysis 1

I conducted a mediation analysis to determine the effect of legitimacy on the

relationship between self-uncertainty and support for an extremist government using

Hayes's PROCESS model in SPSS with 5,000 bootstrapped iterations. To conduct this

mediation analysis, I used the self-uncertainty measure as the predictor variable. In step 1

of the mediation model, self-uncertainty positively predicated support for an extremist

government, ignoring the mediator, $b = 0.20$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.33]. In Step 2, self-

uncertainty positively predicted the mediator (legitimacy), $b = 0.62$, 95% CI [0.43, 0.82].

In Step 3 the mediator (legitimacy) positively predicted support for an extremist

government, $b = 0.39$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.47]. Step 4 of the meditation showed that,

controlling for the mediator (legitimacy), uncertainty was not a significant predictor of

support for an extremist government, $b = -0.04$, 95% CI [-0.16, 0.07]. The indirect effect

of the mediator (legitimacy), was significant, $b = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.32]. In this

analysis, perceptions of legitimacy fully mediate the relationship between self-uncertainty

and supportive attitudes toward an extremist government. In other words, uncertainty

may open people to viewing an extremist government as legitimate, which then predicts

support for that government.

Exploratory Analysis 2

I conducted a mediation analysis to determine the effect of perceptions of political

voice on the relationship between self-uncertainty and support for an extremist

government using Haye's Process in SPSS with 5,000 bootstrapped iterations. To

conduct this mediation analysis, I used the self-uncertainty measure as the predictor

variable. In step 1 of the mediation model, self-uncertainty positively predicted support for an extremist government, ignoring the mediator, $b = 0.20$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.33]. In step 2, self-uncertainty positively predicted the mediator (voice), $b = 0.71$, 95% CI [0.52, 0.90]. In step 3, the mediator (voice) positively predicted support for an extremist government, $b = 0.36$, 95% CI [0.28, 0.45]. Step 4 of the meditation showed that, controlling for the mediator (voice), self-uncertainty was not a significant predictor of support for an extremist government, $b = -0.05$, 95% CI [-0.17, 0.07]. The indirect effect of the mediator (voice) was significant, $b = 0.26$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.31]. In this model, perceived political voice fully mediates the relationship between self-uncertainty and supportive attitudes toward an extremist government. In other words, as uncertainty increases, so do perceptions that people's voices make a difference in an extremist government, which then predicts increased support for the extremist government.

Discussion

According to uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2007), individuals, when experiencing feelings of uncertainty, are motivated to reduce it. People may thus reduce uncertainty through self-categorization. Groups which clarify their prototype and strictly define their group's boundaries (e.g., Hogg et al., 2010) are attractive when people experience uncertainty. It is also these traits that define extremist groups, which may explain why individuals are often more willing to support an extremist group when they feel uncertain, rather than when they are less uncertain (Hogg, 2009). The current research attempted to take this finding one step further, by attempting to recognize extremist governments as a viable option for uncertainty reduction and provide some explanation for why some democratic nations slip into autocracies.

To examine my research Hypotheses, I implemented a mixed factorial design in which self-uncertainty was primed. The main dependent variable in this study was support for an extremist and democratic government. Overall, the experimental prime displayed no statistical difference between participants in the high and low uncertainty condition. It was also hypothesized that uncertainty would predict perceptions of political voice and legitimacy, which in turn would predict supportive attitudes for an extremist government, but the prime did not capture this. Participants in the high and low uncertainty conditions reported similar scores in regards to perceptions of legitimacy and voice from the extremist government. As a result, the hypothesized mediations were not significant. It could be argued that the failure of the hypothesized mediations can be attributed to a lack of self-categorization into the extremist government. Essentially, the

characteristics (i.e., perceived legitimacy and political voice) of the extremist government

were not clear-cut, and did not assist in reducing participant's sentiments of uncertainty,

which in turn hindered support for the extremist government. Previous research (Hogg,

2009; Hogg et al., 2007; Hogg et al., 2010; Yzerbyt et al., 2013) has found that

participants identify more strongly with a group when participants are uncertain and the

groups characteristics (i.e., entitativity) is high. Furthermore, the characteristics of the

group (i.e., entitativity) assist in the reduction of uncertainty by providing people with a

manner in which to categorize themselves into the group and an affirmation of their

worldview(s) (Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Reid & Hogg, 2005). Looking at the current data,

it could be argued that participants were unable to find an affirmation of their beliefs and

attitudes through the extremist government, rendering the intended uncertainty reducing

effect(s) of group characteristics (i.e., legitimacy and political voice) as non-effective,

potentially explaining the lack of support for an extremist government.

However, the results of the exploratory analyses hold fruitful and promising

implications for future research, and also warrant replication in an experimental

paradigm. The exploratory analysis attempted to examine if self-uncertainty would

positively predict perceptions of legitimacy and political voice, and if so, if legitimacy

and political voice in turn positively predict supportive attitudes for an extremist

government. This essentially replicates Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 with a different

measurement of uncertainty - a measurement of uncertainty that reflects more variability

in participant's attitudes that the mean scores found in the uncertainty condition(s).

Therefore, by using the self-uncertainty variable in-lieu of the uncertainty conditions, I

am able to re-examine Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 with a variable that may more reflect how self-uncertainty predicts support for an extremist government. Results from the exploratory analysis show that self-uncertainty positively predicts perceptions of legitimacy and political, and in turn, perceptions of legitimacy and political voice positively predict supportive attitudes for an extremist government. This shows that as self-uncertainty increases, so does support for an extremist government. In addition, the proposed mediating variables legitimacy and political voice do appear to mediate the aforementioned relationship. This suggests that the relationship between self-uncertainty and support for an extremist government may be reliant upon these mediating factors. The results of the exploratory analyses are significant and provide interesting implications for existing theory and research, which are discussed further down below.

Limitations

Upon examination of the data, it is evident that the uncertainty manipulation was unsuccessful. To manipulate uncertainty, participants were randomly placed into one of two conditions: low or high uncertainty. In order to invoke sentiments of low or high uncertainty, participants were asked to list three items that made them feel uncertainty or certain, depending on the condition the participant was in. The purpose of this activity is to motivate the individual to ruminate on items that make them uncertainty or certain about their life, their career goals, their purpose, etc., which in turn invokes the intended feelings of high or low uncertainty. While previous usage of this uncertainty prime has been successful (see Grant & Hogg, 2012), I can speculate on a few reasons as to why the manipulation of uncertainty failed.

One possible explanation for the unsuccessful manipulation can be attributed to the fact that the survey was published for data collection in the United States during the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic. People lost their jobs, students were sent home from school, and travel bans were enforced immediately. It is very likely that this played a significant role in the uncertainty prime not priming uncertainty. Whereas previous usage of the uncertainty manipulation may have involved utilizing participants who entered the survey with a stable or neutral baseline, this may not be the case for this research. It is probable that many who entered the survey were experiencing higher than usual amounts of uncertainty COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, my attempts to manipulate uncertainty were not fruitful as participants may have already been uncertain to begin with.

Another explanation for the lack of uncertainty reduction (and for the lack of a main effect for uncertainty) may be attributed to the last four years of the Trump administration. It could be argued that exposure to the last four years of the Trump administration has provided a first-hand experience of what an extremist government looks like. The Trump administration has dealt with issues of corruption, accusations of human rights violations, and accusations of subverting American democracy, over the last four years. The exhibition of this government to the American people, accompanied by appointed traits of corruption and prejudice, may have influenced participant's perceptions of government and extremism. Therefore, when participants read the general description of an extremist government, they may have been less likely to support an extremist government, regardless of their prescribed uncertainty condition, due to their working definition of an extremist government (i.e., Trump administration) at the

forefront of their thinking. This may be evident in the strong support for the democratic government over extremist government, regardless of uncertainty condition(s), as well as the finding of a main effect for government.

Implications

As found in the exploratory analyses, perceptions of legitimacy and perceptions of political voice mediated the relationship between self-uncertainty and supportive attitudes for an extremist government. The result of these exploratory analyses may provide supportive evidence for uncertainty identity theory, extremism, and for the process of self-categorization. First and foremost, the notion of self-uncertainty predicting support for an extremist government extends existing literature on uncertainty-identity theory and its relationship to extremism. Previous research has found that participants, under conditions of high manipulated uncertainty, are more likely to identify with and support an extremist group (Hogg, 2003, 2009, 2014). This implies that extremist groups are a viable option for uncertainty reduction, when experiencing high levels of uncertainty. While there is no current research that examines if political systems (i.e., governments) are also a viable option for uncertainty reduction, the results of the exploratory analyses may be a starting point for further experimental research.

In addition, it is also worth considering the implications of the mediating effects of legitimacy and perceived political voice. Current literature states that when individuals are experiencing uncertainty, they are motivated to reduce that uncertainty (Hogg, 2007). One of the most efficient ways to do so is through categorizing oneself into a group (Hogg, 2003; 2009). However, the effectiveness of uncertainty reduction varies by group

– subjective to the traits and components of the group, such as the entitativity of the

group or the prototype of the group (Hogg et al., 2007). The current data provides

evidence to suggest that external factors, such as the perceptions of legitimacy, plays a

significant role in the process of self-categorization. Results from the exploratory

analyses suggest that perceptions of legitimacy and political voice may be why support

for an extremist government increases alongside individual's feelings of uncertainty. It

can be implied that perhaps individuals, under conditions of uncertainty, see extremist

groups as a viable option for uncertainty reduction due to the societal perceptions of the

group. That is, how others see the group (e.g., "This government speaks for all

Americans") may influence how one perceives an extremist group, which in turn

influences how one selects groups for the process of self-categorization. The implications

of these results thus provide a significant starting point for future research to explore the

influence of external (and societal) factors on the process of self-categorization that is

motivated by uncertainty.

Before considering future research, it must be discussed if the results of this

research are generalizable to the general American population. Taking into consideration

participant demographics, there are disparities between participants on the basis of ethnic

and racial identities that are not reflective of the broader American population. For

example, a majority (68%) of the participants in this study identified as White, while only

7% of participants identified as Latino and only 0.6% identified as bi/mixed racial. I also

failed to gather any responses from those who may have identified as Middle Eastern or

Native American. Therefore, I don't believe that these findings can be generalized to the

broader population since there is a lack of ethnic and racial representation for various

minority and marginalized communities.

At the same time, the results of the exploratory analyses may be generalizable to

the general population given the current sociopolitical climate in the United States. As it

stands, the United States is in the midst of a dealing with a presidential administration

that is engaging in practices considered extreme by scholars and experts (Dickerson,

2019; Rhodan, 2018). To better understand what would compel Americans to support a

government, the current research sought to create a restrictive sample pool. The

qualifications for participating in this research (i.e., citizenship and residency in the U.S.)

was intended to mitigate the potential bias of participants with first-hand knowledge and

experience of an extremist government from an outside country. The qualifications to

participate in the research study was also intended to better understand how Americans

(who are living in representative democracy) would react to an extremist government

under differing conditions of uncertainty. Given this, it could be argued that the findings

of the exploratory analyses may be generalizable to the broader population, as the sample

purely consists of American citizens. However, there are definitive demographic factors

that may hinder this speculation. Therefore, given the small sample size and the

homogenous participant pool, the results of this research may not be easily generalized to

the general population. Future research may want to revisit and revise some of these

factors (e.g., small sample, participant diversity) in order to increase generalizability.

Future Directions

Future research is necessary to further understand the effect of government(s) on uncertainty reduction. In my exploratory analyses, I found evidence that support for extremist governments increases as feelings of uncertainty increase. However, the current research uses two generalized examples of government (i.e., extremist vs. democratic), which is not reflective of the political landscape present in the United States or across the Western world. Individuals who participate in the sociopolitical arena are provided a variety of different groups to affiliate themselves with politically. Therefore, future research may want to expand on the types of government presented to participants. Presenting differing examples of governments such as an Authoritarian state, a Socialist state, or a Theocracy, would be worth examining. This is due to the possibility that the potential for uncertainty reduction may be subjective to the form of government available, as indicated by the main effect for government found in Hypothesis 1. Examining the support for and identification with different forms of government may also further highlight factors that influence the motivation behind uncertainty reduction.

Although the current research could be applicable to the general (online) American population, it surely isn't reflective of people's feelings across the world. The variance in perceptions of government between countries and cultures is vast and significant. For instance, what may be considered an extremist government in the United States (e.g., socialist) may be considered a moderate government in Europe. In comparison, what may be considered a right-leaning government in the United States may be considered a far-right government in Europe. Any potential differences in

perception could be the result of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Therefore, there is a need for future research to consider broadening sample pools to

include populations from different countries such as Europe or Latin America. The

historical background of these areas is worth examining in an experimental paradigm

given the history of socioeconomic and/or political instability in countries throughout

Latin American (e.g., Chile, Argentina, Nicaragua) and Europe (e.g., Russia, France,

Germany). Furthermore, given that the field of Social Psychology studies how the

individual interacts with the social world, it is also important to take into account that the

environment and upbringing of an individual is not homogenous. Differences in

upbringing, environment, exposure to differing political systems, war, socioeconomic

instability, etc., can have an influence on the individual, and thus influence support for

and perceptions of government. Thus, the utilization of different sample pools with

culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds may hold interesting implications for

uncertainty-identity research and may provide findings that are generalizable to the

greater population.

Conclusion

The current data from this research provides support for uncertainty-identity

theory (Hogg, 2007) and its implication for identification with and support for extremist

groups. Despite a lack of supportive evidence for all three Hypotheses, exploratory

analyses demonstrate that self-uncertainty predicts supportive attitudes for an extremist

government. It also suggests that perceptions of legitimacy and political voice may be

responsible for the aforementioned relationship. These results imply that the motivation

to reduce the negative and aversive state of uncertainty may not only motivate individuals to join or support fringe extremist groups, but to also join and support overarching governmental organizations that maintain a significant role in an individual's day-to day-life. Furthermore, it is also implied that the desire to join or support extremist governments may rely on the perceived external (i.e., societal) traits of said government. It seems that how others in the social world perceive and rate viable options for uncertainty reduction influence the decision to categorize (or not) oneself into certain groups. This is significant, considering the power and control that governments hold and maintain are overarching and ever more so encompassing, perhaps displaying the extent to which uncertainty reduction is sought after. Ultimately, these findings may be a reflection of the current sociopolitical climate, reflecting an individual's desire for stability, recognition, and comfort in an increasingly uncertain time.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Self-uncertainty prime

Gaffney et al., 2014; Grant & Hogg, 2012; Hogg et al., 2007

1. In the high self-uncertainty condition, participants will complete the following instructions: "*Please take a few moments to think about yourself, your future, and where you are going think about the things that make you feel deeply uncertain and then list and describe 3 things that make you feel uncertain and or confused about who you are.*"

or

2. In the low self-uncertainty condition, participants will be required to read a similar statement, "*Please take a few moments to think about yourself, your future, and where you are going think about the things that make you feel very confident and then list and describe 3 things that make you feel confident and or clear about who you are.*"

Appendix B

Government Prompts

Prompt – Extremist Government

Under this government, **all citizens are considered equal**. All citizens are expected to contribute towards the betterment of society. **No citizen will have to worry about their healthcare, employment, or status.** The only worry for citizens is ensuring the security and advancement of the country. In order to maintain the security and stability of the country, personal, political, and/or religious ideologies will be strictly monitored and controlled. **Anything that threatens the continuity or stability of the country will be prohibited.** This means that expression of personal and political ideologies is strictly controlled. In this government, there is no electoral decision-making process. Political power lies only in the hands of the government. This means **the government can act quickly** due to no opposition or compromise, **while maintaining the stability and direction of the country.**

Prompt – Democratic Government

Under this government, political power is achieved and dispersed through a re-occurring decision-making process. **All citizens have a say in a decision-making process** and can be as involved in the process as they want. At times, decisions that are made may oppose the political and personal beliefs of some. The decision-making process itself may be costly and sluggish, costing upwards of millions of dollars with each proposed action taking 6 months to a year before being considered. However, this is the result of political decisions that reflect the interests of the **majority** of

citizens and their elected representatives. This cost ultimately ensures **citizens are given consistent, peaceful, and fair results in leadership, political, and social change.** Citizens choose officials who will represent them and their interests, allowing citizens to have the choice to search for and display their opinions, beliefs, and information as it suits them, **without fear of persecution or retaliation.**

Appendix C

Legitimacy

Van der Toorn et al. (2011)

1. This government is fair.

2. This government is legitimate.

3. I accept this government.

4. I approve of this government.

Appendix D

Voice

Sani (2005)

1. This form of government makes me feel like a full and equal American.

2. This form of government makes me government allows me to have a say in American politics.

3. This form of government makes me government gives me a voice in America.

4. This form of government makes me government gives everyone in America a voice in politics.

5. This form of government makes me government makes me feel as a legitimate American.

Appendix E

Supportive Attitudes towards Extremist/Democratic Government

Rate the aforementioned government on each of the following dimensions:

Strong	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Weak
Decisive	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Indecisive
Bad	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Good
Helpful	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Unhelpful
Active	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Passive
Unreliable	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Reliable
Accessible	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Inaccessible
Unsympathetic	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Caring
Strict	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Lenient
Relaxed	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Tense
Submissive	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Dominant
Warm	____:____:____:____:____:____:____	Cold

Appendix F

Conservatism

1. How liberal or conservative are you on social issues?

2. How liberal or conservative are you on economic issues?

3. In general, how liberal or conservative are you?

Appendix G

Self-Uncertainty

Hohman and Hogg (2015).

1. My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another.

2. On one day, I might have one opinion of myself and on another day, I might have a different opinion.

3. I wonder about what kind of person I really am.

4. I feel that I am not really the person that I appear to be.

5. When I think about the kind of person I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I was really like.

6. I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my personality.

7. I think I know other people better than I know myself.

8. My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently.

9. If I were asked to describe my personality, my description might end up being different from one day to another.

10. Even if I wanted to, I don't think I would tell someone what I'm really like.

11. In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am.

12. It is often hard for me to make up my mind about things because I don't really know what I want.

Appendix H

Need for Cognitive Closure

Roets and Van Hoel (2011)

1. I don't like situations that are uncertain.

2. I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.

3. I find that a well-ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.

4. I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life.

5. I feel irritated when on person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.

6. I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.

7. When I have made a decision, I feel relieved.

8. When I am confronted with a problem, I'm dying to reach a solution very quickly.

9. I would quickly become impatient and irritated if I would not find a solution to a problem immediately.

10. I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.

11. I dislike it when a person's statement could mean many different things.

12. I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.

13. I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.

14. I do not usually consult many different opinions before forming my own view.

15. I dislike unpredictable situations.

Appendix I

Right Wing Authoritarianism

Duckitt et al. (2010)

Authoritarianism Aggression

1. Strong, tough government will harm not help our country (R).

2. Being kind to bums or criminals will only encourage them to take advantage of your weakness, so it's best to use a firm, tough hand when dealing with them.

3. Our society does NOT need tougher government and stricter laws (R).

4. Facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers if we are going to preserve law and order.

Authoritarian Traditionalism

1. The "old-fashioned ways" and "old-fashioned values" are still the best way to live.

2. This country will flourish if young people stop experimenting with drugs, alcohol, and sex, and pay more attention to family values.

3. Traditional values, customs, and morality have a lot wrong with them (R).

4. It is important that we preserve our traditional values and moral standards.

Authoritarian Submission

1. It's great that many young people today are prepared to defy authority (R).

2. What our country needs more is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity.

3. Our country will be great if we show respect for authority and obey our leaders.

4. People should be ready to protest against and challenge laws they don't agree
   with (R).

Appendix J

Patriotism and Nationalism

Sidanius et al. (1997)

1. The more the United States actively influences other countries, the better off these countries will be.

2. To maintain our country's superiority, war is sometimes necessary.

3. For the most part, America is no more superior than any other industrialized country in the world.

4. To maintain our country's economic superiority, aggressive economic policies are sometimes necessary.

5. The USA should not dominate other countries.

6. In general, Americans are wonderful people.

7. I feel very warmly towards my countrymen.

8. I do not care for most other Americans.

9. Most other Americans are not worth caring about.

10. Every time I hear the national anthem, I feel strongly moved.

11. I find the sight of the American flag very moving.

12. The American flag should not be treated as a sacred object.

13. The symbols of the United States (e.g., the flag, Washington monument) do not move me one way or the other.

14. I would really not want to move to another country.

15. I have warm feelings for the place where I grew up.

16. I feel no differently about the place I grew up than any other place.

17. I would be willing to leave the United States for good.

18. I have great love for my country.

19. I am proud to be an American.

20. There is nothing particularly wonderful about American culture.

21. I don't feel much affection for the United States.

Appendix K

Demographics

1. What is your age?

2. What is your highest level of education?

    a. Less than High School

    b. High School Diploma

    c. Bachelor's Degree

    d. Master's Degree

    e. Doctorate Degree

3. What is your income bracket?

    a. Less than $20,000

    b. $20,000 - $44,999

    c. $45,000 – $74,999

    d. $75,000 - $99,999

    e. $100,000 - $139,999

    f. $140,000 - $199,999

    g. More than $200,000

4. What is your self-identified gender?

    a. Male

    b. Female

    c. Non-binary

    d. Other

5. What is your race/ethnicity?

    a. White

    b. Black or African American

    c. American Indian or Alaska Native

    d. Asian

    e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

    f. Latino/Hispanic

    g. Biracial or Multiracial

    h. Other

6. What is your political party affiliation?

    a. Democrat

    b. Republican

    c. Independent

    d. Green

    e. Other