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Right-Wing Authoritarian and Explicit Prejudice Attitude Responses to the Paris Terror Attacks: A Within-Subjects Analysis

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ABSTRACT

When a terror attack occurs people appear to be prepared, in the short term, to be more accepting of authoritarian sanctions against outgroup members, particularly if sanctions are targeted against members of the outgroup perceived as responsible for the attack. The current study examined forty-two British participants' scores on measures of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and explicit prejudice (EP) before, within thirty-six hours of, and one year after the November 2015 Paris terror attacks. As higher scores on RWA measures have been linked to considering the world as dangerous and threatening, and desiring that authority control and punish transgressors of societal norms, and higher EP scores have been linked to negative perceptions of outgroups, we hypothesized that participants' scores on both measures would increase immediately after the terror attack. Analyses showed small but significant increases in RWA and EP scores immediately after the attacks, particularly for those initially scoring lower on these measures, but scores on both measures had returned to baseline levels oneyear later. These findings from a within-subjects sample support recent between-subjects research suggesting that RWA and EP attitudes are impacted in the short term by reported terrorist attacks.

KEYWORDS

Authoritarianism; prejudice; attitudes; terrorism; Reactive Liberals

Introduction

While terror attacks by individuals or groups to promote causes or instill fear have occurred throughout history, the immediacy of contemporary media in the twenty-first century (e.g., social media, twenty-four hour rolling news channels) has the ability to thrust this terrorism, wherever it may be occurring in the world, into the lives of those unaffected directly by the attacks. These attacks may potentially influence attitudes toward groups perceived to be linked to the perpetrators of the attack, particularly if the group is already stigmatized within society.¹ The current study sought to examine attitude changes occurring directly after the November 2015 Paris, France terror attacks in participants from a neighboring country (the United Kingdom) on two scales previously linked to psychological ideological trait perceptions of outgroups; explicit prejudice (EP) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA).² By measuring participant responses on these scales within thirty-six hours of the attacks and comparing with their responses six weeks prior we were able to analyze the potential influence these attacks may have had on attitudes, finding small but significant increases in EP and RWA scores immediately after the attacks, particularly for those who had scored lower on the measures prior to the attack. As the majority of previous research in this area has been carried out with different participants before and after terrorist attacks have taken place (between-subjects analysis) the current findings provide further evidence relating to the influence of such terror attacks on attitudes, and provide one of the first

measures of within-subjects analysis on the topic area directly relating to immediate attitudinal shift following a terror attack.

Terrorist attacks, media, and attitudes

When faced with a potential threat, or reminders of threats, people display attitudes and behaviors that are designed to psychologically protect them. Uncertainty-identity theory suggests that at times of uncertainty individuals will identify with groups that provide a level of entitative identity, giving stability to their social surroundings.³ Under threatening circumstances people may resort to attitudes that provide cognitively rigid thinking and, in times of threat, show support for policies and leaders that endorse more authoritarian measures.⁴ Therefore, it is important for us to understand how people react when faced with a reported terrorist attack that threatens them not just in terms of geographical proximity but is also perceived as a threat to their values and cultural identity. The past several years have provided Western Europe and the United States of America with the opportunity to examine the impact of Islamic terror attacks on these attitudes given the increased number of high-profile attacks carried out within them (e.g., the 9/11 attacks in the U.S.A.; the 7/7 attacks in the U.K.; and the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France),⁵ and the November 2015 Paris terror attacks provided the catalyst for the current study.

At 9:16 pm on Friday November 13, 2015 reports started to emerge from Paris of suspected terrorist attacks taking place. In total these coordinated attacks across the French capital resulted in the deaths of 130 people and injuries to a further 368, all in the space of just over three hours. Almost from the start of the attacks information and images were broadcast via news channels and social media; use of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, in addition to mainstream news media (which also used footage and images obtained from social media) ensured that wide coverage of the attack was transmitted across the globe, both “live” and in the immediate aftermath. Reports during the attacks immediately suggested that they were being carried out by Islamic extremists, following a pattern of coordinated multiple-terrorist attacks that have been witnessed in previous instances (e.g., London 2005; Mumbai 2008). The majority of attacks by groups such as Islamic State have been targeted against fellow Muslims in Middle Eastern countries⁶; however, recent research on terrorism reporting in the United States suggests a disproportionately high media coverage of attacks by Muslim perpetrators, particularly when the attacks take place in Western countries.⁷ While links to organizations and motives of the terrorists may vary across these attacks, the perception of Islamic extremism as being dangerous to Western society can become a unifying ideological driver in people’s thinking of their own safety when faced with this threat from “others.”⁸ For example, in a study of a large New Zealand sample population, it was found that greater exposure to the news was associated with more negativity toward Muslims regardless of participant political orientation, suggesting that negative media portrayals may have a widespread impact.⁹ Therefore, an attack such as that carried out in Paris would undoubtedly attract a high level of media attention,¹⁰ and this could make people consider their own safety and security even though they were not directly involved in the attack itself. Research carried out after the 7/7 London bombings found that people were likely to accept increased security even when it resulted in a reduction in civil liberties, at least in the short term.¹¹

To understand why people may think and behave differently in the aftermath of a terrorist attack it is necessary to consider the potential theories that underpin the psychological research on the topic, and this paper will focus upon two of the most prominent theories in the psychological literature on intergroup attitudes, whose measures have also been utilized in several of the studies into the psychological impact of terrorist attacks; *prejudice* and *right-wing authoritarianism*.

Explicit prejudice and right-wing authoritarianism

Stereotyping has been defined as “beliefs about the attributes typically possessed by members of a social group”¹² and the stereotypes that we hold about a group of people may influence our subsequent judgment of individuals’ behaviors and how they relate to the group. Personal beliefs

that have been formulated by a person's own experiences and their exposure to prevailing cultural attitudes can influence these judgments. These stereotypes will then influence the pre-judgments (prejudices) that we make about other people. These prejudices may be implicit (beyond conscious awareness) or explicit (available to conscious awareness).¹³ While still an area of contention in the literature, it appears that these prejudice attitudes are somewhat malleable, with changes in a cultural or environmental context making them susceptible to change, at least in the short term.¹⁴

Alongside prejudice, examination of how ideological beliefs such as right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) may be influenced by terrorist attacks have also been a focus of recent research. Examination of how individuals may respond to threat and uncertainty in society has been well documented since initial concepts of the "authoritarian personality" and "fascism scale" in the 1950s.¹⁵ While the notion of personality as an explanation for authoritarianism has now largely disappeared from contemporary research there is still a need to understand why people make the judgments that they do in threatening times. Therefore, research into the authoritarian personality and subsequent development of the RWA typology moved away from explanations of personality and toward a concept of "attitudinal clusters."¹⁶ These three clusters are: *Authoritarian submission* to authorities perceived to be legitimate; *Authoritarian aggression*, directed toward people or out-groups and perceived to be sanctioned by the authority; and *Conventionalism*, a high adherence to those social conventions perceived to be endorsed by society and authority, with people who score higher on these attitude measures more likely to endorse punitive sanctions against transgressors. A reformulation of the clusters and adaptation to incorporate social dominance orientation¹⁷ has enabled a dual-process model to be created that appears to capture separate elements of right-wing political and ideological attitudes.¹⁸ According to Duckitt and Fisher, these attitudes underpin people's "... evaluative beliefs about the nature, structure, and organization of society and about individuals' proper roles, conduct, and place within and in relation to society and other important social groups."¹⁹

At this point, it is important to recognize that the term "right-wing authoritarianism" may be somewhat of a misnomer. It has been suggested that RWA may apply to all group members who feel that their group is under threat and not just those with already conservative (right-wing) views.²⁰ Indeed, it has been argued that supporters of left-wing ideologies such as Maoism and Stalinism possess many of the same attitudes regarding authoritarianism and that RWA should be thought of as an attitude toward authority rather than a specific type of authority.²¹ This suggests that authoritarianism is a general psychological mechanism that can be applied to all people within a group. It may be that threatening circumstances lead many people to embrace more conservative, authoritarian attitudes, using simple but rigid cognitive solutions to deal with the threat. Findings after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S.A. indicated that death anxiety and desire for preservation of familiar existing social institutions ("system threat") were strong predictors of political conservatism.²² Similarly, priming people with mortality salience appears to increase conservative support.²³ Therefore, it is also likely that the dimensions of ideological attitudes may also be flexible and influenced by social context. This would suggest that world events, particularly when salient and potentially threatening to the individual, may influence people on these dimensions. In the case of RWA, the dual-process model suggests that motivation for social cohesion and collective security are important to people, with those who score high on RWA appearing to have distinct social schemas of the world as a dangerous and threatening place.²⁴

Post terror-attack measures

Due to the unpredictable and unique nature of each terrorist attack, it is difficult for any researcher to plan a coherent research methodology to fully explore the psychological mechanisms that are activated by such an event. Those that have been carried out directly around such an attack have often been fortuitous in their timing, with data collection for related research studies taking place across a period of time when such an attack occurs. For example, this enabled between-group comparisons of explicit prejudice to be carried out around the time of the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by an Islamic extremist, showing higher prejudice reported by participants examined after the murder.²⁵ Using

a similar methodology, measures of prejudice and social dominance orientation (SDO) around the time of the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris in 2015 also found that prejudice increased after the attack but that this was not the case for measures of SDO.²⁶ Examination of cultural worldviews also found increases in prejudice toward Muslims after the Charlie Hebdo attack.²⁷ Others types of study have systematically utilized waves of data produced by social surveys,²⁸ or controlled for time after the attack, with similar findings relating to increases in explicit prejudice.²⁹ Each of these studies has provided a valuable insight into psychological processes underlying attitudes that may be affected by a terrorist attack. In particular, a study of over 2,000 people six weeks before and one month after the 2005 London bombings, examining moral foundations of prejudice and political orientation, identified not only an increase in prejudice toward Muslims after the attack, but also that this increase was larger for those with a liberal political orientation than for those with a conservative orientation.³⁰ These findings are in keeping with the *Reactive Liberals Hypothesis* which suggests that conservatives constantly feel threatened by the world and so are less likely to respond to specific events with a sizable shift in attitudes; however, those who are more liberal before the event are more likely to respond with increased prejudice, closing the gap between liberals and conservatives in their prejudicial attitudes immediately after the event.³¹ This would appear to be at odds with the traditional threat literature that suggests that those who are already high in authoritarianism are more likely to respond to threats than those who are low.³² However, a recent meta-analysis of 134 samples from sixteen countries found a significant association between threatening events such as terrorist attacks and a move toward conservatism.³³ Therefore, the ability to explore the psychological constructs that underpin such shifts in attitude are an important element of understanding people's responses to terror attacks.

Current study

If people feel a general sense of threat from the information that they are receiving in the immediate aftermath of an attack it is likely that overall RWA scores will increase. As those who score lower on the RWA scale are likely to be of a more liberal world view we would also expect that, in line with the Reactive Liberals Hypothesis, these changes would largely occur within those scoring lower on the RWA scale than from those higher on the scale, as those who are higher already see the world as dangerous and so the terror attack merely vindicates their attitudes rather than exacerbates them.

Our measure of explicit prejudice for the current study was not specifically targeted at Muslims, focusing more upon race and general immigration. While two of the previous studies in this area of research specifically examined prejudice toward Muslims,³⁴ two other studies explored a more global outgroup prejudice under a terror management theory.³⁵ In all studies it was found that there was an increase in prejudice and, where measured, that prejudice reverted to initial levels over time, suggesting that explicit prejudice is somewhat malleable and subject to change dependent upon situational factors.

While much previous research on political conservatism and right-wing authoritarianism has focused upon priming and scenarios, or survivors of terror attacks some time after the event,³⁶ there had been little research prior to the 2015 Paris terror attacks examining RWA attitudes in the immediate aftermath of an event that potentially exacerbates people's perceptions of the world as a threatening place. This has started to change, with a number of research studies providing data regarding attitudes relating to prejudice, RWA and SDO.³⁷ However, no data appears to exist showing the direct effect on a within-subjects population that examines the immediate impact upon people's attitudes at the time of the event compared to their attitudes shortly before. Due to research that we were carrying out into prejudice type and political ideology, we found ourselves in a position to compare RWA and EP data pre and post the terror attacks that took place in Paris in November 2015. Given the scale of the attack and the immediate media coverage that it received, both in mainstream and social media, we predicted that this would increase people's overall RWA scores as they considered the world

to be a more dangerous place. Similarly, given the findings from other studies regarding prejudice and terrorism, including terrorism-related news, we predicted that explicit prejudice levels would also increase immediately after terrorist attacks.

H1: There will be an increase in Explicit Prejudice (EP) scores immediately post-attack

H2: There will be an increase in Right-Wing Authoritarian (RWA) scores immediately post-attack

H3: The increase in RWA scores will largely be found in those initially scoring low on RWA

Method

Participants

Measurements of EP and RWA levels had initially been collected from British undergraduate psychology students participating in an unrelated study for course credit taking place in October 2015. The 109 participants in that study who had completed measures of EP and RWA were invited via e-mail to take part in a further study twelve hours after the Paris terror attack and forty-two participants did so (female = 32, male = 10; $M_{age} = 26.38$). No reward was offered for taking part in this study. The forty-two participants who had completed the measures at Times One and Two then took part in a related study, again measuring EP and RWA, in October 2016 (Time Three) with course credit offered for participation.³⁸

Design

Analyses were carried out using within-subjects Analysis of Variance, with time of measurement (Time One: six weeks before attack; Time Two: immediately after attack; Time Three: one year after attack) as the independent variable. Analysis was carried out separately on the dependent variables of participant RWA and EP scores.

Materials

At all time-points participants completed a measurement of explicit prejudice³⁹ and a short version of the right-wing authoritarian questionnaire.⁴⁰ The adapted version of the EP questionnaire was a fifteen-item measure with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). Higher scores indicated higher prejudice levels. Some questions were reverse scored to prevent participants from developing a response set. Questions included “There are too few Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) MPs and measures should be taken to address this,” and “Those immigrants who do not have immigration documents should be sent back to their countries” (reverse scored). The RWA questionnaire was a fifteen-item measure with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated higher levels of authoritarianism, with some questions reverse scored. Questions included “There are many radical, immoral people trying to ruin things; society ought to stop them,” and “Situations in today’s society would be improved if trouble-makers were treated with reason and humanity” (reverse scored). Cronbach’s alpha for questionnaires across the study was .79 for RWA and .86 for EP, suggesting good levels of internal consistency. At Times One and Three (October 2015 and October 2016) participants also completed an Implicit Association Test as a measure of implicit prejudice in a laboratory setting after completing the questionnaires.⁴¹

Procedure

At Time One participants were asked to complete online questionnaire measures of EP and RWA as part of a study into implicit and explicit prejudice. Data collection was carried out during two weeks at the beginning of October 2015 with consent and debrief explaining that we were examining the interaction between implicit and explicit prejudice and associated attitude measures, including RWA. All data collected were stored against participant unique identification numbers.

At 9:16 pm on Saturday November 14, 2015 (exactly twelve hours after the Paris attacks started to be reported) an e-mail was sent to all participants who had taken part in the study at Time One inviting them to take part in an online attitudes and beliefs study (e-mail invitations are a standard operating procedure of the School of Psychology and so this did not differ from normal practice for this study). Participants accessed the study through the university online experiment management system and completed both questionnaires (implicit measurement of prejudice was not carried out).⁴²

The study remained open to participants until 9:16 pm on Sunday November 15 (forty-eight hours after the attacks) to ensure immediacy of attitude was controlled for. A question was then sent to all participants via e-mail asking if they had been aware of the Paris attacks at the time of completing the questionnaires (all indicated that they had been). A debrief was then released explaining the nature of the Time Two study. At Time Three, during the final two weeks of October 2016, online RWA and EP questionnaires were completed as part of a study examining media influence and prejudice. To ensure equivalence with Time One and Time Two data collection RWA and EP questionnaires were completed before all other tasks. Finally, unique identification numbers were used to match participant responses across all three time points.

Results

RWA response data from the forty-two participants were analyzed using within-subjects analysis of variance for Time One (October 2015), Time Two (within forty-eight hours of Paris attack) and Time Three (October 2016). Analysis showed a significant effect of time, $F(2, 82) = 3.34, p = .04$, with mean RWA scores of 51.62 ($SD = 8.91$) at Time One, 55.62 ($SD = 8.39$) at Time Two, and 52.00 ($SD = 10.38$) at Time Three (see Figure 1). There was a significant quadratic trend, $F(1, 41) = 10.05, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .2$, over the mean values for each level. RWA scores at Time Two were significantly higher than Time One ($p = .02$) and Time Three ($p = .01$), with no difference between Times One and Three ($p = .85$).

Participant EP responses at the same time points as for RWA were analyzed using within-subjects analysis of variance. This showed a significant effect of time, $F(2, 82) = 3.45, p = .02$, with mean EP scores of 47.45 ($SD = 12.78$) at Time One, 53.00 ($SD = 14.17$) at Time Two, and 47.17 ($SD = 11.88$) at Time Three (see Figure 1). There was a significant quadratic trend, $F(1, 41) = 7.39, p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .15$, over the mean values for each level. EP scores at Time Two were significantly higher than Time One ($p = .04$) and Time Three ($p = .02$), with no significant difference between Times One and Three ($p = .91$). As can be seen in Figure 1, this shows that both EP and RWA were significantly higher immediately after the terrorist attack.

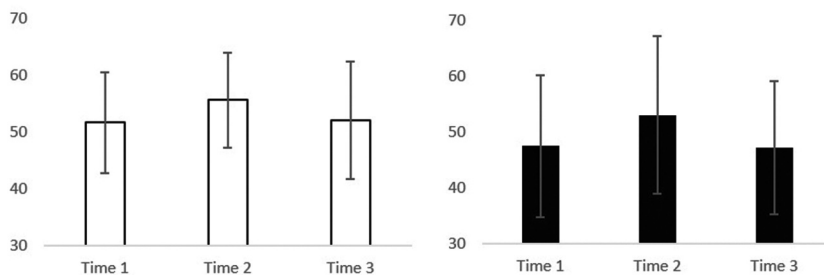


Figure 1. RWA (left) and EP (right) mean scores as a function of time.

To calculate differences between low and high EP and RWA participants at Time One a dichotomous split was performed on the data. Low scores on EP were forty-eight and below (lowest score = 21) while scores of 49 and above were categorized as high EP (highest score = 74). For RWA the split was performed at scores of 51 and below leading to a low RWA categorization (lowest score = 29) with high RWA categorization for scores of 52 and above (highest score = 68). The difference between Time One and Time Two scores was calculated for each participant and independent-samples t-tests performed between low and high groups for each (M_{diff}). For EP, the Low group ($M_{diff} = 14.71$, $SD = 15.02$) showed significantly greater movement than the High group ($M_{diff} = -3.62$, $SD = 13.45$), $t(40) = 4.17$, $p = .001$, while for RWA the Low group ($M_{diff} = 11.10$, $SD = 8.98$) also showed significantly greater movement than the High group ($M_{diff} = -2.45$, $SD = 8.40$). These findings suggest that the significant differences at Time Two from Times One and Three were driven by a greater increase in scores of those low on the measures than those scoring high on the measures at Time One.

Discussion

The findings from the current study show that in the immediate aftermath of a terror attack (within 48 hours) people's right-wing authoritarian (RWA) and explicit prejudice (EP) responses significantly increase from their pre-attack levels. However, these responses are not dramatic and appear to be driven by low scorers on these measures increasing their prejudice and RWA responses in the immediate aftermath, before reverting to their pre-attack levels later. This suggests that these attitudes are temporarily exacerbated rather than fixedly increased by such an attack. The findings are in keeping with the previous, between-subjects literature, but provide an important within-subjects validation of such findings as well as additional data regarding the Reactive Liberals Hypothesis (RLH).

The overall increase in RWA scores suggests that identification with the ingroup may lead to an overall increase in acceptance of more authoritarian views in accordance with the existing literature.⁴³ However, in contrast to research carried out after the 7/7 London bombings, this increase appears to be rapid, whereas the previous findings suggested a lag of at least a week between the attack and increased acceptance of more authoritarian security measures.⁴⁴ Whether it be due to differences in measurement of acceptance of authority, or differences in the immediacy and increased usage of social media to follow news during the Paris attack is difficult to say, but this is an area of the research that requires closer scrutiny. Our findings do not show an increase of RWA scores by those at the top end of the scale, but instead appear to show an increase by participants who initially scored low to moderate on the RWA scale at Time One. It may be that those higher in RWA attitudes pre-attack feel justified in their responses, negating a need for a greater authoritarian stance than they already hold, while those who score lower are more affected cognitively by the attack and so feel a need for a more authoritarian response, given that their initial low-authoritarian stance is faced with a real-world situation that they may consider incongruent with their current attitude. This provides support for the RLH which suggests that after such a traumatic event those with more liberal tendencies will show a greater reaction while those with more conservative views will react less as they feel vindicated by the events, thus closing the gap between the two types in terms of responses.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, it was not possible to measure specific political allegiances during data collection for this study due to the ethical constraints of not being able to include additional variables to those measured in October 2015 and so it is not possible for us to do more than speculate regarding this with the data that we have in relation to the RLH, but this interpretation does appear to be plausible; however, the mechanisms underlying the decision-making process would need to be examined in far greater detail than could be afforded by the findings here.

Similarly, the overall increase in EP scores, particularly given that the measurement questionnaire was not designed specifically to measure anti-Muslim prejudice, suggests that the assertion that overall prejudice toward outgroups as a way of defending against threatening events, found in several research studies examining other terror attacks, may be correct.⁴⁶ It must be recognized that it is not possible to exclude participants' interpretation of the questions as relating specifically to Muslims, which would provide support

to a social identity theory explanation of the findings, as a manipulation of this questionnaire was not possible given the context of the study. It does appear, however, that the similarities between RWA and EP regarding the shift being from those in the lower end of the scores may add an additional element to the prejudice literature of being able to draw further upon the RLH. It is not the case on either measure that those high on them had nowhere to go; there was no ceiling effect at Time One and so the opportunity for those high on these measures to go even higher was available but not taken.

While the overall findings show a significant increase in both RWA and EP scores immediately after the Paris terror attacks, the size of the increase is of interest. One might expect that both prejudice and authoritarianism would increase dramatically, particularly for those high on these scores to begin with. However, the increases, while significant, are not extreme and are similar to a number of the between-subjects studies carried out around similar attacks.⁴⁷ The finding that overall RWA and EP levels returned to baseline level at Time Three suggests that these attitudes are not sustained. While the timeframe between our immediate post-event measure (Time Two) and Time Three is ten months, raising an obvious question of when in that timeframe attitudes start to revert to baseline, the findings do at least provide evidence that the immediate attitudes displayed in the aftermath of an attack should not necessarily be taken as a true reflection of people's long-standing future attitudes. This potentially raises issues regarding between-subjects studies carried out after the event, as attitude change may dissipate soon after the event.⁴⁸

It is this immediacy of responses to terrorist attacks that was the driving force behind carrying out this research study and, in our opinion, this also needs to be taken into account when considering potential political decisions that may be made as a result of terror attacks. In the immediate aftermath of such an attack, there may be pressure on a government to "do something" in response. Therefore, we argue that it is important for those in positions of authority to recognize that policies and decisions that may impact upon outgroups are not rushed into place immediately after such an attack, even if there appears to be public support for such a move. It may be that the attitudes people hold at that time are not necessarily as prejudiced or authoritarian as those they held before, or will hold a short time later. If anything, our findings suggest that it is even more incumbent for an authority to exercise careful consideration of their actions immediately after an attack than at any other time as there is the potential for people to be more susceptible to authoritarian change, whether appropriate or not, immediately following such an event. For example, emergency legislation relating to social media in Australia after the 2019 Christchurch terror attack and U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson announcing changes to prisoner early release legislation within days of a terror attack in Streatham, London in November 2019 were greeted with immediate widespread public support, despite concerns being raised from professionals and legislators regarding potential problems and a failure to adequately scrutinize consequences of this legislation.⁴⁹

The current study was, by necessity, limited in scope. Due to the immediacy of the situation, we had to work within a practical and ethical framework of measures with a limited pool of participants from the original (Time One) study. Therefore, measures such as political and religious affiliation data could not be collected, nor could we ask specific questions related to attitudes on terrorism or Islam. The political measures in particular would have been highly useful in being able to measure more specifically the RLH.⁵⁰ As we had not been measuring SDO in the Time One study there was no opportunity to measure this, although SDO has consistently failed to show any effect in the studies that have been carried out examining the effects of terrorism on it.⁵¹ Similarly, our prejudice measure was also, by necessity, limited. Measures of implicit prejudice had been carried out in a laboratory setting at Time One but we were unable to set up online implicit measures in such a short timescale for Time Two. The ability to explore explicit and implicit measures through a two-dimensional model would have been informative.⁵²

An additional limitation is the apparent focus upon purely "Islamic" terrorism in the research literature covered and in our own study. This has been largely due to the focus of this research being on contemporary European terrorism, with the most high-profile attacks in the last ten years being carried out predominantly by Islamic terrorists; for a comparable non-Islamic terror attack in Europe, we would have to go back to the 2011 attack by Anders Breivik.⁵³ In the U.S.A., this terror profile is

extremely different, with the majority of terror attacks being carried out by non-Islamist, white terrorists.⁵⁴ It would, therefore, be highly informative in future research to examine whether terror attacks carried out by non-Islamist terrorists have the same affect upon people's attitudes or whether they differ, on participants in the U.S.A. and also in Europe.

Finally, we fully recognize the limited conclusions that can be drawn from a sample of forty-two people; however, given the small sample of potential participants with which it was possible to carry out this research and the within-subjects longitudinal nature of the data collected, we feel that this limitation is outweighed by the information gained for this one study. While larger analyses of between-subjects data have been carried out since the Paris attacks, the immediacy and within-subjects element of the current study provides additional data on authoritarian and prejudice attitudes, and now is a time for us to draw upon all of the data that we can; as Romano et al. have stated in their recent paper, "As researchers attempt to understand terrorism, even basic assumptions should not be taken for granted. Qualitative literature on the 'new terrorism' needs the support of quantitative data to ensure that common perceptions are grounded in fact."⁵⁵

In conclusion, the findings from this paper suggest that right-wing authoritarianism and explicit prejudice, two psychological constructs that play an important role in how we perceive and judge groups and individual members of those groups in society, are increased significantly in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack. While these increases are not extreme they may be enough to make people more accepting of authoritarian responses that control groups and behaviors seen as contributing to potential terror acts in the future. Our data also suggest that it is those who may possess more liberal views that could be more affected after an attack, leading to them scoring higher on measures of right-wing authoritarianism. However, in all cases these attitudes appear to be temporary and dissipate to pre-attack levels over time. While the current research was fortuitous in its timing through being able to measure these constructs pre and post the Paris attacks, the within-subjects nature of this research hopefully provides additional insight into the indirect effects of terror attacks on members of society. It may appear somewhat distasteful and ethically challenging to suggest that data should be collected from participants on measures relating to prejudice, right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance, and other potential attitude constructs in order for researchers to gain data from these participants immediately after terror attacks in the future; however, as long as studies are designed and carried out appropriately, the information gathered could prove highly beneficial in helping to understand the impact of terrorist attacks on individuals and groups across different countries and societies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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