

**Post-print: ‘Only my Truth Can Save Us All’: Impact of Socioeconomic Threat and its Emotional Appraisals on Monopoly on Truth and Political Extremism.**

‘Sólo mi Verdad Puede Salvarnos’: Impacto de la Amenaza Socioeconómica y su Evaluación Emocional sobre el Monopolio de la Verdad y el Extremismo Político.

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Political extremism is one of the main threats to democratic societies and it has been related to socioeconomic threats like COVID-19. We argue that socioeconomic threat perceptions increase Monopoly on Truth (MoT), a tendency to conceive personal values as undeniable truths worthy to be imposed. MoT will then prompt extremist intentions to rise. **Method:** These hypotheses were tested in two experimental designs ( $N = 274$  &  $484$ ). Study 1 manipulated socioeconomic threat, while Study 2 added a manipulation of the emotional appraisal of that threat. **Results:** In Study 1, MoT scores were significantly different and higher in the high-threat condition. In Study 2 it was observed that threat levels did not cause statistically significant differences when emotional appraisal of such threat was manipulated, with anger causing MoT to increase. Study 2 also showed that MoT works as an antecedent of extremist intentions. **Conclusions:** Socioeconomic threats and their emotional appraisals cause MoT and, indirectly, extremism to rise. Beyond deepening our understanding of the causes of MoT, the current findings highlight the implications of different narratives framing socioeconomic crises, that may become a facilitating factor of extremism.

*Keywords:* COVID-19, emotion, political extremism, socioeconomic threat

### **Resumen**

**Antecedentes:** El extremismo político constituye una de las principales amenazas para las sociedades democráticas, y se ha relacionado con amenazas socioeconómicas como la COVID-19. Argumentamos que las percepciones de amenaza incrementan el Monopolio de la Verdad (MdV), una concepción de los valores personales como verdades innegables dignas de imponerse. El MdV provocaría además un aumento de las intenciones extremistas. **Método:** Se realizaron dos estudios experimentales ( $N = 274, 484$ ). En el Estudio 1 se manipuló la amenaza socioeconómica. El Estudio 2 añadió una manipulación de la evaluación emocional de dicha amenaza. **Resultados:** En el Estudio 1, las puntuaciones de MdV difirieron de forma estadísticamente significativa, siendo más altas en la condición de alta amenaza. En el Estudio 2 se observó que los niveles de amenaza no causaron diferencias estadísticamente significativas en MdV al manipular la evaluación emocional. La ira sí causó diferencias estadísticamente significativas en MdV. El Estudio 2 mostró que el MdV funciona como antecedente de intenciones extremistas. **Conclusiones:** Las amenazas socioeconómicas y su evaluación emocional provocan un aumento del MdV e, indirectamente, del extremismo. Además, nuestros hallazgos destacan la relevancia de las diferentes narrativas que enmarcan las amenazas, las cuales pueden llegar a fomentar el extremismo.

*Keywords:* amenaza socioeconómica; COVID-19, emoción, extremismo político

Events like the storming of the US Capitol by far-right groups (BBC, 2021) or the more recent raid on the Brazilian Congress (Sullivan, 2023) warn us that the dangers of extremism keep growing. Extremism is one of the biggest threats that open and democratic societies must face. For extremists, the success of the ingroup does not depend on persuasion, it is rather associated with imposition over the rest of the groups who, if needed, will be subjugated (Berger, 2017). This zero-sum mentality is what makes extremism linked with violence, which extremist groups will tend to exert as long as the political opportunity structure allows it (Bötticher, 2017). To fight this threat, it is paramount to continue investigating what motivates people to get involved in extremist efforts. In this line, the view of own beliefs as an absolute matter (e.g., unequivocally right and/or better) can be considered one of the main defining features of extremism (Berger, 2017; Bötticher, 2017; Jabardo, 1998; Ramos-Álvarez et al., 2022; van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019). This research aims to examine what causes this shift in the assessment of personal ideas as consummated truths.

Even though extremism is a constant in society, its overall levels tend to fluctuate. Usually, spikes in the rates of extremist support and actions are associated with sudden socioeconomic threats (Hogg et al., 2013; Klapsis, 2014). Extremist options gained momentum just after the economic crisis of 2008, an already troubling situation of extremist growth that only got worse after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Cheah et al., 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Ramachandran, 2020; van Gent et al., 2013). A recent report by the International Monetary Fund forecasts a rise in the incidence of political violence as a consequence of the pandemic in the upcoming years (Barrett & Chen, 2021). As things stand, evidence points towards an association between periods of socioeconomic turmoil and extremist tendencies, yet cause-effect relations are yet to be confirmed due to the lack of

experimental evidence. The scarcity of experiments in this vein may be due to the difficulty to manipulate perceptions of socioeconomic threat under normal circumstances.

In the present research, carried out in the second half of the year 2020, we profited from the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic to manipulate levels of socioeconomic threat to examine whether this causes Monopoly on Truth (MoT; *Dono et al., 2018*), a tendency to overvalue personal beliefs previously been associated to extremism (*Dono et al., 2018, 2022*). At the time the experiments were carried out, no vaccine was available, which allowed us to manipulate the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Across two studies, it will be examined how socioeconomic threat and the emotions it evokes influence MoT, while the second will add extremist intentions as a dependent variable, to examine whether MoT can mediate the effects between threat and its emotional appraisal and extremism.

MoT is a construct that derives from the research tradition of considering an absolute worldview as a key factor in understanding extremism. Dogmatism (*Rokeach, 1956*), strong certainty about ideas (*Sabucedo, 1985*) and cognitive rigidity (*Zmigrod, 2020*) have all been associated with extremism. MoT consists in perceiving one's personal values, beliefs and ideas as objectively better and more beneficial, not only personally but for the whole of society, this last aspect conveying the impression that imposition is righteous (*Dono et al., 2018*). It has been found to be associated with political polarization, intolerance, rejection of disagreeing others and intention to engage in illegal and violent political collective actions across different sociocultural settings (*Dono et al., 2018, 2022*). Hence, we propose that knowing what factors contribute to MoT and to what extent it influences extremism will help to understand the dynamics of this political behaviour.

There are several reasons why we chose MoT as the focus of this research. First and foremost, beyond considering own ideas as objectively better, MoT provides not only a legitimization of the tendency to force others to comply with personal and group ideals but also a motivational drive to act in an extremist fashion. This motivation is a form of ‘misjudged goodwill’, as people high in MoT tend to see their actions as beneficial for society as a whole and thus not only legitimize their actions but consider them to be righteous (Dono et al., 2018). Therefore, executing extremist actions will not only be condoned, it would imply doing a good deed, improving people’s self-image both at the personal and group level, thus satisfying a fundamental psychological need (Jordan et al., 2015; Tajfel et al., 1979).

Another advantage of MoT is that it has been observed to manifest across the political spectrum (Dono et al., 2018) while other antecedents of extremism tend to contain ideological content (i.e. dogmatism; Rokeach, 1956). Throughout history, extremist movements and even tyrannies have been built in similarly ‘utopian’ fashion over radically different ideas. We argue that the study of MoT would help us understand how people shift into a craving to impose their beliefs, regardless of what these beliefs are. Finally, MoT is anticipated to change depending on contextual factors (Dono et al., 2018). Other constructs like dogmatism (Rokeach, 1956) or cognitive rigidity (Zmigrod, 2020) tend to be less influenceable by the environment and thus less explanatory of the observation that contextual factors are related to surges of extremism (van Gent et al., 2013). Concerning this association, we argue that MoT can increase due to socioeconomic threats and their interpretation, and that MoT will then work as a mediator for extremist intentions.

As for this link between socioeconomic conditions and MoT, we argue that several insights from the literature support the argument that MoT will rise when in the event of socioeconomic threats. Research has shown that threatening social situations tend to increase

perceptions of injustice (Gurr, 1970), the belief that the world is a dangerous place (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003), that society is morally deteriorating and politicians are corrupt (Teymoori et al., 2017), and that the political system does not work (Ervasti et al., 2019). We argue that these effects positively impact MoT, rendering it more probable under socioeconomic crises. First, social threats have been associated with increased cognitive rigidity, a phenomenon labelled threat-rigidity (Staw et al., 1981), which would be related to the overvaluation of personal values. Moreover, the perceptions of moral decay, corruption and lack of trust should be perceived as an attack on personal moral values, that in turn will prompt people to reaffirm their group identities and values (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1998; Skitka, 2002) while the perception of urgency should exacerbate even further the feelings of moral obligation that already would be present for people high in MoT due to the perception that they know what is better for everybody in society. Finally, the feelings of deprivation and injustice should elicit the emotion of anger, which has been associated with a tendency of reaffirming pre-existing beliefs (Marcus et al., 2019).

However, it is precisely the consideration of emotions that renders a more complex picture of this mechanism, as different emotional reactions to threats may influence MoT in opposite directions. Threats tend to simultaneously evoke two distinct negative emotions that each entail different consequences: fear and anger (MacKuen et al., 2010). Of those two emotions, one should be the main appraisal as a function of the characteristics of the threat itself. According to Marcus et al. (2019), a highly uncertain scenario generates more fear, while perceiving the threat to be caused by a normative violation promotes feelings of anger. Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT; Marcus et al., 2000) indicates that fear and anger are distinct negative emotions, with different functionality. Fear is thought to trigger an epistemic search for novel answers to resolve the uncertain situation; while anger drives people to hold onto their previous beliefs and quickly take action to confront the threat (Huddy et al., 2007).

Thus, an appraisal of a threatening situation as frightening should induce a reduction of MoT, while feelings of anger should heighten it. However, the role of fear in motivating an epistemic search has become an object of academic debate (see Jost, 2019; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019a, 2019b). Hopefully, our research can indirectly shed light on this riveting question.

To determine threat and related emotional appraisals cause MoT to increase, and to examine if the latter can work as an antecedent of extremism, two experimental studies were performed. These experimental studies relied on manipulating threat and emotional appraisal through presenting different *framings* of the COVID-19 pandemic and the threat it posed, building upon a rich tradition of experiments using this methodology withing Political Psychology (i.e. Brader et al., 2008; Clifford, 2019; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; McLeod et al., 2022; Sabucedo et al., 2017; Widmann, 2021).

In Study 1, the main objective was to assess whether the manipulation of the perceived intensity of the threat would influence MoT levels. In this line, the main hypothesis in Study 1 is that participants in the high threat condition show higher MoT levels (H1). Study 2 tries to extend these findings by adding a second manipulation of the emotional appraisal of the socioeconomic threat. Aside from replicating H1, Study 2 tests two additional hypothesis: that participants in the anger condition show higher levels of MoT compared to those in the hope and fear conditions (H2) and that participants in the fear condition show lower MoT levels than those in the hope and anger conditions (H3). Additionally, a secondary goal of Study 2 is to examine whether MoT acts as a mediator between the experimental conditions and political extremism. This mediational analysis was conceived as explorative, although we expect MoT to be a relevant mediator between each experimental conditions and political extremism.

Both experiments were performed in the second half of the year 2020 when vaccines were still unavailable and thus the uncertainty about an improvement in the situation was high. The chance to experimentally manipulate the intensity and the emotional appraisal of a real socioeconomic threat like the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes, we believe, a strength of this study due to the increased ecological validity. In our research, both threat level and emotional appraisal were manipulated through cues that could be present in the real world, namely reports from two very recognizable and prestigious organizations. Therefore, not only the setting of the experiment but also the demand characteristics would be present in the real world, which constitutes an assertion of the ecological validity of this research (Kihlstrom, 2021). All data, syntax and materials used in this research are publicly accessible at [https://osf.io/uw6ye/?view\\_only=2c1ac76c7d58477ba6e0396c8489876d](https://osf.io/uw6ye/?view_only=2c1ac76c7d58477ba6e0396c8489876d).

## **STUDY 1.**

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Using GPower software (v 3.1.9.4), a power analysis was conducted to calculate the ideal sample needed for this study (Faul et al., 2009). The sample was calculated for an ANCOVA test (fixed effects, omnibus, one-way) for two groups and one covariable. The expected effect size was arbitrarily set to a medium-to-low  $f = .18$  as there was an absence of relevant literature indicating expected effect sizes. The power was set to the .80 standard for two groups with 1 degree of freedom. The resulting optimal sample size was 245 participants. Data were collected from the general population of Spain via a Qualtrics panel, ensuring a representative distribution in terms of age and gender. Those who responded too quickly to pay attention to the manipulations, completing the questionnaire in less than half the median time of completion of a pilot launch, were automatically screened out without control from the researchers. The final sample size was  $N = 274$  ( $M_{age} = 40.2$ ,  $SD = 12.1$ ; 52.6% women).

## Instruments

*MoT* was measured using a six-item (7-point Likert scaled) reduced version of the original scale (Dono et al., 2018; e.g. '*What I defend is what is objectively more convenient for the people*'). Since this scale is two-dimensional, reliability was assessed for the whole scale ( $\alpha = .80$ ), as well as both the cognitive ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and behavioural ( $\alpha = .80$ ) subscales.

*Ideological self-placement* was measured with a single, ideological self-placement item where people had to indicate on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 whether they categorized themselves as left-winged or right-winged, with 0 being *far-left* and 10 *far-right*.

Finally, to identify whether the manipulation had been successful, six 7-point Likert-scaled items were used to assess the perceived *threat level*. The items assessed the degree of threat the pandemic posed to the health and economy of the participants, their loved ones, and their country ( $\alpha = .89$ ; e.g. [*The pandemic*] *is a major threat to public health/economy in my country*).

## Procedure

Owing to the relevance of the COVID-19 outbreak (Ramachandran, 2020), the threat was manipulated by providing different accounts of the anticipated socioeconomic and health impact of the pandemic. Participants were unaware of the true goals of the research and were told that the questionnaire gauged their opinions on the management of the pandemic. Then, they were randomly assigned to one of two conditions of the threat level manipulation. For this manipulation, participants were informed that they would read an assessment of the economic consequences of the pandemic, prepared by the chair of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva. The high-threat condition presented the current economic crisis as one of the worst in history, while the low-threat condition provided a more optimistic assessment (see materials in the link provided). At the end of the procedure, participants were

debriefed and informed of the fabricated nature of the experimental manipulations they were subject to. The present study was approved by the Bioethical Committee of the University of [BLINDED].

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS (v.28) software. The main analyses performed were mean comparisons (t-test) and analysis of variance (ANCOVA).

### **Results**

As a manipulation check, an independent samples t-test on threat perception about health and economy was primed in the manipulation, using the experimental condition as the grouping variable. The results show a statistically significant difference, with people in the high-threat condition showing higher levels of perceived threat ( $M = 5.81, SD = 1.14$ ) compared to those in the low-threat condition ( $M = 5.45, SD = 1.23$ ),  $t(272) = 2.47, p = .01, d = .29$ .

Regarding the effect of the experimental condition on MoT, we performed a unifactorial ANCOVA to control for the potential effect of ideology. Supporting our main hypothesis, results showed a statistically significant main effect of the threat condition with participants scoring higher ( $M = 4.31, SD = 1.16$ ) in the high-threat than in the low-threat condition ( $M = 3.96, SD = 1.14$ ),  $F(1,272) = 6.14, p = .01, \eta^2p = .022$ .

### **Discussion**

The main goal of this first study was to experimentally investigate whether higher levels of socioeconomic threat can cause MoT. The results support our hypothesis as the degree of threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on MoT, the latter being higher for people in the high-threat condition. Moreover, this cause-effect mechanism was

observed even when controlling for the ideology of participants, evidencing that socioeconomic threats cause higher levels of MoT independently of the specific ideology of participants. As mentioned in the introduction this is, to the best of our knowledge, the first study that experimentally tests the relationship between socioeconomic threat and MoT contributing to the literature by providing evidence of the causal direction of this association.

However, this design does not provide a means to test the AIT-derived hypothesis that anger, and fear have opposite impacts on MoT. The effect of a threat on MoT itself, while statistically significant when its emotional appraisal is uncontrolled, could be irrelevant depending on the latter. Testing the effect of threat-induced fear and anger on MoT is the primary purpose of the following study. Moreover, Study 2 will also include a measure of extremism, to examine whether there is support for a mediational process in which threat (or its emotional appraisal) causes extremism via MoT.

## **STUDY 2**

Our second study sought to extend the findings from the first study by examining the possibility that the different emotional appraisals of threat (i.e., fear and anger) have different effects on MoT and by testing whether MoT worked as an antecedent of extremism. As it was anticipated that fear and anger would have opposite effects, a ‘hope’ condition was included in the emotional appraisal manipulation to serve as a baseline for comparison. The study builds on the real threat of the COVID pandemic, and the fact that the threat was occurring at the time of experimentation discouraged the inclusion of a neutral emotional condition. Considering the threat was very notable at the time of experimentation and that threat usually elicits both fear and anger (MacKuen et al., 2010) not manipulating the emotional appraisal will most likely mean that people will autonomously react with either fear or anger as their main appraisal, ultimately losing rather than gaining experimental control. The choice of

hope as the control condition was motivated by studies that linked it with both reliance on past habits (Marcus et al., 2019) and conciliatory intergroup attitudes (Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen-Chen et al., 2019). Thus, while hope may increase reliance on past habits, it should discourage the assumption and imposition of a single truth. Combining these two circumstances, we argue it is an appraisal that should cause a neutral effect on MoT. As in Study 1, participants were unaware of the true goals of the research and were debriefed about the experimental procedure after their participation ended.

## Method

### Participants

Once again, a power analysis was performed using GPower 3.1 version (Faul et al., 2009) to calculate an ideal sample size for an ANOVA analysis (fixed effects, special, main effects and interactions). The expected effect size was set based on the effect of the manipulation of MoT in Study 1 ( $f = .15$ ) and power was set to .80. The experimental design was a 2 (low threat, high threat) x 3 (angry appraisal, fearful appraisal, enthusiastic appraisal); therefore, there were six groups, and the numerator degrees of freedom was two. With this input, the software calculated an ideal sample of  $N = 432$ . Again, the aim was to recruit a group of participants larger than the ideal sample size in anticipation of potential missing responses or deficient data. Participants were recruited through a Qualtrics panel. Once again, those completing the questionnaire in less than half the median time of completion of a pilot were automatically screened out. The sampling procedure resulted in a final sample of 484 Spanish participants ( $M_{age} = 41.4$ ,  $SE = 11.9$ ; 49.6% women).

### Instruments

Both *monopoly on truth* and *ideological self-placement* were measured using the same scales as in the previous study. For this sample, Cronbach's alpha index of the MoT scale was

$\alpha = .75$ . The cognitive subscale reliability was  $\alpha = .85$  and  $\alpha = .73$  for the behavioural subscale. *Threat perception* was also assessed using the same items as in the previous study ( $\alpha = .86$ ). *Extremist intentions* were measured using the Spanish version of the 7-point Likert scaled Radicalism Intention Scale (RIS; Trujillo et al., 2016) that achieved good reliability  $\alpha = .81$  (e.g. "*I would continue to support an organization that fights for my group's political and legal rights even if the organization sometimes resorts to violence*").

## **Procedure**

As in Study 1, we obtained approval to conduct this study by the Bioethical Committee of the University of [BLINDED]. Once again, participants were unaware of the real processes that were the object of study in this research. Participants were initially informed that they were to be presented with an opinion piece written by experts on the COVID-19 pandemic and that they would be asked to reflect on the text, focusing on how the pieces had influenced their views on the current context and the emotions they had felt while reading. As the goal was to affect both the threat level and the emotional appraisal of the threat, the information framing the emotional appraisal always appeared first, followed by the framing of the intensity of the threat. Otherwise, the threat manipulation could spontaneously produce a specific emotional appraisal. The manipulation was text-based, consisting of the (forged) opinions of two relevant, credible sources considered experts in the COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences. The intensity of the threat was manipulated using the same procedure as in Study 1.

The manipulation of emotions was achieved by relying on the theoretical basis of the AIT. The AIT establishes that, while threats tend to evoke both anger and fear, one of the two emotions will dominate the appraisal process. If the information received about the threat focuses on uncertainty about the future, people will feel more fear than anger. Conversely, if

the threat is constructed around a report of norm violations, anger will be greater than fear (Marcus et al., 2019). All the texts presented were supposedly written by Hans Kluge, the regional director for Europe at the World Health Organization, using a narrative that would elicit anger, fear or hope based on AIT's premises (see materials in the link provided). Participants were randomly assigned by the Qualtrics software to one of the appraisal and threat conditions. After the completion of the questionnaire, the participants were informed of the fabricated nature of the opinion pieces in a debriefing statement.

In Study 2, the efficacy of the manipulation of the emotional appraisal was tested in advance in a pilot study, following the procedure used by Webber et al. (2018). The pilot study was performed with 160 participants, who were randomly assigned to the different conditions and asked which emotions were evoked by the text that they had read. Fear was assessed using the items *fear*, *scare*, and *anxiety* ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The emotion of anger was measured by participants assessing the degree of felt *anger*, *rage*, and *annoyance* ( $\alpha = .93$ ). Finally, hope was measured by the items *hope* and *optimism* ( $\alpha = .95$ ). The effect of the manipulation was statistically significant in all three cases, and the mean differences indicated the expected effects (see Table 1 for posthoc comparisons).

[Table 1 here]

The manipulation of threat perception was assumed to be effective, as it had been previously checked for Study 1 and used in the same population. However, since the manipulation of the intensity of the threat came after that of emotional appraisal in all cases it was still tested to reassure that its effect remained. A one-way ANOVA supported the efficacy of the threat manipulation, as those in the high-threat condition indeed reported higher threat perceptions,  $F(1,482) = 18.1, p < .001, \eta^2p = .036$ .

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was performed using the same software and techniques as in Study 1, in addition, a mediational model was analysed using Model 4 of the macro PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2022) with 10,000 bootstrapped samples.

### **Results**

A two-way ANCOVA was performed, factoring the two experimental conditions (threat and emotional appraisal of the threat) on MoT and once again controlling for ideology. The results show a statistically significant main effect of the emotional appraisal condition,  $F(2,477) = 6.33, p = .002, \eta^2p = .026$ , but not of the threat condition or the interaction (see Table 2 for full results).

[Table 2 here]

Moreover, post hoc analyses were run for the emotional appraisal condition (see Table 3 for results). The data shows no statistically significant differences when comparing the fear and hope conditions. On the other hand, MoT levels were higher for the anger condition than for either the hope or fear conditions (see Figure 1).

[Table 3 here]

[Figure 1 here]

Lastly, a mediational model was tested. For this analysis, as the threat-level condition did not produce a statistically significant main effect once the emotional appraisal was manipulated, only the emotional condition was used. The mediation was tested using 10,000 bootstrapped samples, with the hope appraisal condition as the baseline for comparison and ideology as a covariate. The results showed a statistically significant indirect effect in the hope-anger comparison condition ( $B = .17, SE = .07, 95\% BCI [.03, .32]$ ) but not for the hope-fear comparison (see Table 4 for full results, Figure 2 for a diagram of the mediation). Thus, it seems that when anger is the dominant emotional appraisal of a threat, this causes MoT to increase, which ultimately induces an increase in extremism.

[Table 4 here]

[Figure 2 here]

## **Discussion**

The purpose of Study 2 was twofold: to test whether the association between higher levels of threat and MoT was affected by the emotional appraisal of said threat and to examine MoT as a predictor of extremist intentions. Results do not replicate the main effect of threat intensity found in Study 1 (H1). However, in line with AIT (Marcus et al., 2000), anger was expected to increase MoT and fear to reduce it. To test this hypothesis, the effects of both emotional appraisals on MoT were compared with those of a positive emotional appraisal (specifically, a hopeful appraisal). The results partially support the hypothesis, as MoT increased in the anger condition. However, the levels of MoT did not differ for the fear and hope conditions. Thus, this result neither disproves nor supports the anticipated effect of fear as motivating an epistemic search (Huddy et al., 2007). Future research efforts should test the effects of a fearful appraisal on MoT, compared to other baseline conditions. Moreover, the two-way ANOVA showed that once the emotional appraisal of the threat was

manipulated the threat intensity did not affect MoT. Neither was found an interaction effect between the two conditions suggesting that the emotional manipulation overrode the threat manipulation. Thus, it is suggested that emotional processing of the threatening situation and not the perceived severity of the situation itself is what most directly affects MoT. Finally, a mediational analysis supports our assumption that MoT works as a mediator variable between the emotional appraisal of the threat and political extremism.

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Through these two experimental studies, we have provided experimental evidence that socioeconomic threat causes MoT to increase. Moreover, these studies evidence the importance of the emotional appraisal of such threats, showing that MoT is heightened when situations of socioeconomic threat are appraised as anger-evoking events to the point of rendering the severity of the threat unpredictable. Crucially, the results hereby provided also confirm MoT as an antecedent of extremism, dovetailing previous results in that direction (Dono et al., 2018, 2022) as it worked as a mediator between emotional appraisal and extremism in Study 2.

We believe this research provides important contributions to the literature on political action. The primary insight of this work is the evidence that experimentally manipulated socioeconomic threat severity and its emotional appraisal cause MoT to increase, and in the last case, indirectly, extremism intentions to also rise. Although the effect sizes found were modest, this research provides the first piece of experimental evidence that a real threat can cause absolutistic views to increase, opening a path to explaining extremism and violence as a product of a ‘misjudged good action’. Furthermore, the analyses have been performed while controlling for the ideological orientation of participants, thus showing that socioeconomic threat and its emotional appraisal can cause MoT to rise across the ideological continuum.

Moreover, these findings have been made after an ecologically valid manipulation of the different experimental conditions framed on the COVID-19 pandemic all while it was happening, something that we consider both a strength and an innovation of the present work. Experimental studies on extremism are scarce altogether, due to the difficulty of manipulating predictive factors in regular conditions and those limited experimental studies in the literature have relied on imagined versions of future societies (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Jugert & Duckitt, 2009).

Our research has also investigated the importance of the interpretation of threats for extremism, especially its emotional appraisal which manipulation we argue nullifies the effects associated to the manipulation of threat levels, implying that the different emotions (more specifically anger) are the main drive of MoT. As a framework for hypothesizing the effects of emotional appraisal, we used Marcus et al. (2019) AIT which suggests that anger would generate a tendency to reaffirm personal beliefs while fear should prompt people to seek alternative worldviews. Our study partially supports Marcus et al.'s findings by showing how anger, but not fear cause MoT to increase. This suggests that more research should determine the effects of fear on MoT and adherence to personal beliefs in general.

Despite these contributions, some limitations of our study should be addressed. First, both studies were performed with a sample taken from the general population of Spain, caution is thus required when generalizing the findings to other cultures. Additionally, it would have been of great interest to run similar tests with activist samples, who are more prone to extremism than the general population (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009). A comparison of the effects of the manipulations on extremists would be particularly welcome, as this could suggest potential paths to reducing MoT and consequently decreasing extremist attitudes. Finally, the mediation analysis of Study 2 was performed without a direct

manipulation of MoT. Such manipulation would be the ideal method to assess the full extent of the causal chain (Bullock et al., 2008). However, no direct manipulation of this construct has yet been devised. Nevertheless, following this research agenda represents a compelling perspective for the future.

The findings presented here also have practical implications. The results that we obtained showed that the narratives around socioeconomic threats can influence the emotional appraisal of it, causing dire effects such as increasing MoT and -indirectly- extremism. Thus, we believe it is the responsibility of political actors and media to avoid those narratives that focus on normative violations to prevent the deleterious effects associated with them. This knowledge is especially relevant as we related it to the COVID-19 pandemic, which constituted a high-impact, global-level socioeconomic threat. However, many governments resorted to war metaphors in their discourse to the public on COVID-19, emphasising obedience and discipline and making people more attentive to potential violations of their fellow citizens (Sabucedo et al., 2020). Besides, media outlets not only reported this kind of framing by the governments, but they themselves focused on reporting individual violations of the different norms applied by governments to deal with the pandemic (Gorospe, 2020). In light of our results, these narratives around the pandemic may likely have contributed to the surge of extremism we are currently witnessing. Beyond COVID-19, this knowledge about the consequences of different framings in the narrative of global problematics should also be of great importance in the future when discussing events like other potential pandemics or the great challenge of our time, the climate crisis.

Conceiving personal beliefs and values as the best option for all people in society as described by MoT represents a novel psychosocial path towards political extremism. If generalized, this process brings forth a more intolerant society and one more prone to

authoritarianism and violence. To reduce MoT, socioeconomic crises should be framed by political actors and media by using more positive and solidarity-promoting discourse, rather than enhancing confrontation and glorifying obedience. Ultimately, the best option for preventing the kind of 'righteous' extremism here described may be stressing the importance of freedom and tolerance as inalienable values and highlighting the subjective nature of personal beliefs.

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## Tables

**Table 1**

*ANOVA Post-hoc Comparisons for Pilot Study*

Dependent variable	Exp. Cond. (I)	Exp. Cond. (II)	Mean difference (I-II)	SE	<i>p</i> <sub>tukey</sub>
Anger	Hope	Fear	-1.05	.30	.002
		Anger	-3.78	.28	<.001
	Fear	Anger	-2.73	.30	<.001
Fear	Hope	Fear	-2.61	.31	<.001
		Anger	-1.69	.28	<.001
	Fear	Anger	.91	.30	.009
Hope	Hope	Fear	2.60	.28	<.001
		Anger	3.90	.26	<.001
	Fear	Anger	1.29	.28	<.001

**Table 2***ANCOVA Results, MoT by Threat, Emotional Appraisal and Ideology*

Condition	Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2p$
Threat level	0.18	1	0.18	0.16	.688	<.001
Emotional appraisal	14.54	2	7.27	6.33	.002	.026
Ideology	<0.01	1	<0.01	<0.01	.961	<.001
Threat level * Emotional appraisal	0.02	2	0.01	0.01	.990	<.001
Residuals	547.89	477	1.14			

**Table 3***MoT Post Hoc Comparisons – Emotional Appraisal Condition*

Comparison		Mean difference	SE	df	t	p <sub>Tukey</sub>
Emotion 1	Emotion 2					
Hope	- Fear	0.11	0.12	477	0.98	.586
	- Anger	-0.29	0.11	477	-2.47	.036
Fear	- Anger	-0.41	0.12	477	-3.44	.002

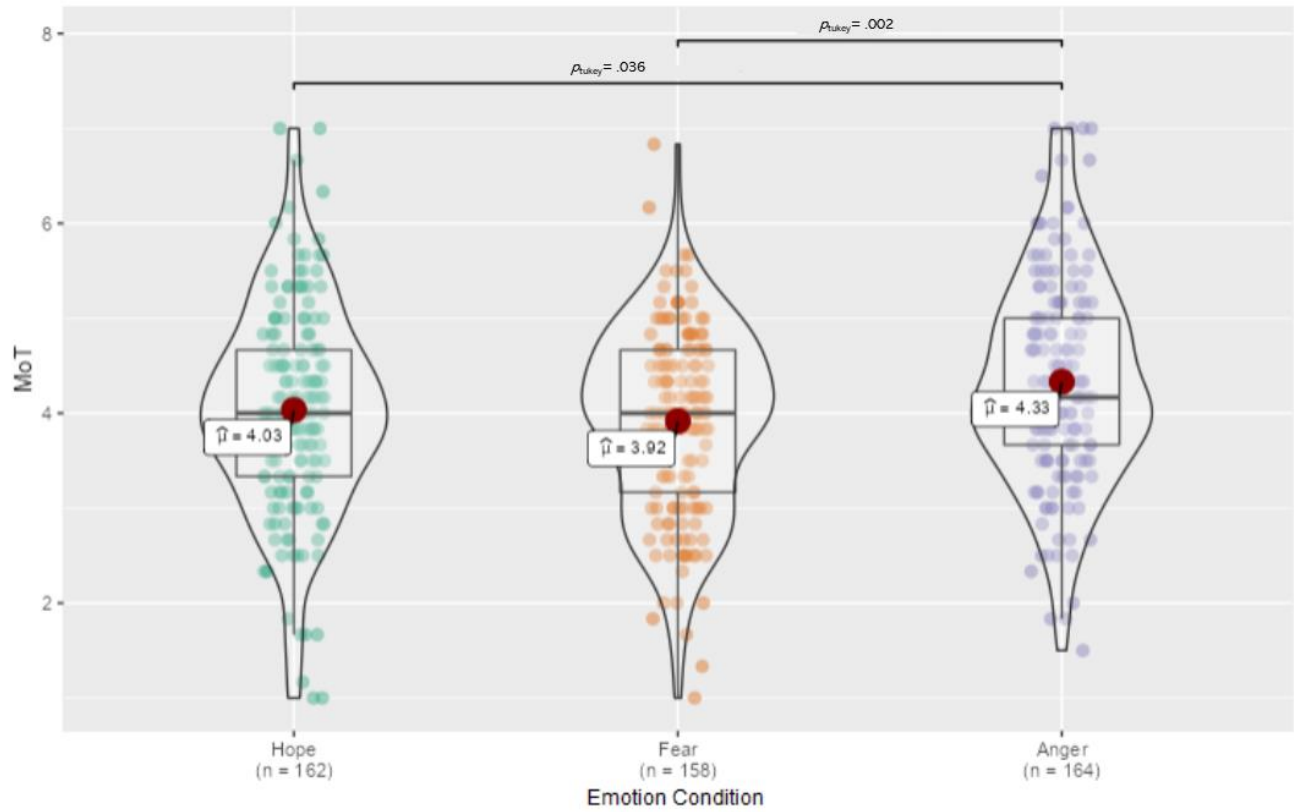
**Table 4***Mediational Analysis. Indirect and Total Effects*

Type	Effect	Estimate	BSE	95% B.C.I.	
				Lower	Upper
Indirect	Hope-Fear⇒ MoT⇒ Extremism	-0.06	0.06	-0.20	0.06
	Hope- Anger⇒ MoT⇒ Extremism	0.17	0.07	0.03	0.32
Component	Hope-Fear ⇒ MoT	-0.11	0.11	-0.34	0.11
	MoT ⇒ Extremism	0.58	0.05	0.47	0.69
	Hope- Anger ⇒ MoT	0.29	0.12	0.05	0.53
Direct	Hope-Fear ⇒ Extremism	0.09	0.13	-0.16	0.35
	Hope-Anger ⇒ Extremism	-0.04	0.13	-0.31	0.22
Total	Hope-Fear ⇒ Extremism	0.03	0.14	-0.25	0.31
	Hope-Anger ⇒ Extremism	0.12	0.15	-0.17	0.43

## Figures

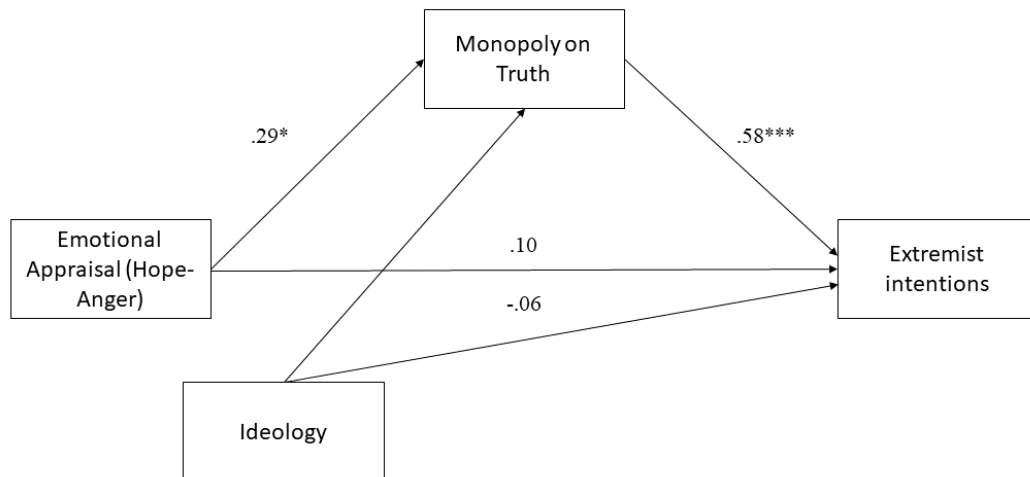
**Figure 1**

*Mean Scores of MoT by Emotional Appraisal Condition*



**Figure 2**

*Mediational Analysis of the Effect of Anger Appraisal on Extremist Intentions via Monopoly on Truth.*



*Note.* Ideology is used as a covariate in this mediational analysis.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$