

## **Introduction to the Special Issue, Psychological Perspectives on Threats to Democracy**

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The 20th century was characterized by a great ideological struggle among three primary contenders vying for power: fascism, communism, and (free-market) democracy. By the end of the Second World War, fascism had been defeated. During the next four and a half decades, the struggle between communism and democracy was fought in the Cold War, ending in 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This momentous event, epitomized by the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, took many around the world by surprise. The rapid collapse of the USSR was seen as heralding a new age in which a single superpower representing democracy and the spirit of free-market capitalism stood unopposed. Fears at the beginning of the 21st century (and millennium) focused more on whether computer systems would fail worldwide—remember Y2K—than on whether new forms of totalitarianism would rise to challenge the 20th-century victors.

On September 11, 2001, however, the United States faced an unprecedented terrorist attack that has profoundly altered the course of history and opened up new and complex challenges for the preservation and promotion of democracies worldwide. Initially, the 9/11 attacks made many people think about threats to democracy that stemmed from terrorist organizations—notably al Qaeda—which sought global reach. 9/11 demonstrated that a terrorist organization “headquartered” in

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a developing nation (Afghanistan) could effectively strike simultaneously at the financial and military centers of the world's sole superpower.

As governmental efforts to prevent future attacks progressed, many people in countries around the world began to question whether counter-terrorism itself posed a threat to the spirit of democracy. Some of the new laws and policies placed restrictions on civil liberties that many believed undermined the principles of democracy to which states should aspire. Other practices seemed to flaunt disrespect for international humanitarian laws, which many also viewed as central to the definition of what makes a nation democratic. Within the United States itself, there was much disagreement regarding the Bush Administration's handling of the so-called "War on Terror" and whether the United States should have launched a preemptive war against Saddam Hussein's dictatorship in Iraq. Outside the United States, anti-American sentiment was fueled in part by the unpopularity of the war and increasing evidence of the willingness of the United States to "go it alone" in the face of opposition from its past allies. More generally, questions concerning how far a state should go in efforts to protect national and personal security were at the forefront of much of the ongoing debate, both scholarly and otherwise.

The idea for this special issue took shape against this turbulent socio-political backdrop. The notions of government and democracy are not a central tenet of psychology, although psychologists have much to say about social organization. The aim of this issue was to bring together a collection of articles that examined the idea of "threat to democracy" from various psychological perspectives, and from before and after 9/11. The issue comprises five articles that spotlight a diversity of substantive issues and that address those issues with a plurality of theoretical perspectives and methods.

In the first article, Mandel frames the threat of Islamist global terrorism in terms of totalitarianism and its attendant psychology of totalism. He then examines how literature on judgment and decision making under uncertainty may shed light on how policy makers perceive and respond to threat and how, in the process of doing so, they may inadvertently create threats to the very democratic institutions they seek to protect. The second article by Matthew and Shambaugh examines how democracies balance national security and civil liberties objectives as a function of time from a crisis. They present polling evidence in support of a "pendulum effect" in which the public initially supports security-enhancing measures that may restrict individual rights but in which the public also increasingly applies countervailing pressures on policy makers to reinstate those rights as time moves on. In the third article, Dhami reminds us that chronic threats to democracy have existed long before the recent terror-related events. She tracks international policies on prisoner disenfranchisement and explores the negative ramifications that such policies may have on the democratic ideals of equality and justice. In the fourth article, Papastamou, Prodromitis, and Iatridis examine Greek respondents' beliefs about terrorism and state responses to terrorism. They find that beliefs

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about terrorism and power, institutional anti-terrorist measures, and human rights of terror suspects were linked to political affiliation. The final article by Cohrs, Kielmann, Maes, and Moschner investigates the time-lagged effect of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) on support for restriction of civil liberties and surveillance measures. People high on RWA were more supportive of restriction of civil liberties, and threat from terrorism also increased their support for surveillance measures.

We hope that this collection of articles will inform readers about some of the key psychological issues underlying threats to democracy and that this special issue will spur further research that examines the psychological bases of threat in the context of politics, law, and beyond.

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(U) This document presents the Introduction to a special issue of the journal *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* entitled "Psychological Perspectives on Threats to Democracy." The issue was guest edited by Dr. David R. Mandel (Defence Research and Development Canada) and Dr. Mandeep K. Dhami (University of Cambridge). The aim of the special issue was to bring together a collection of articles that examined the idea of "threats to democracy" from various psychological perspectives, and from before and after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The issue is comprised of five articles that spotlight a diversity of substantive issues and that address those issues with a plurality of theoretical perspectives and methods. This document briefly sketches the nature of each of these five contributions.

(U) Ce document est une introduction à une édition spéciale de la revue *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, intitulée *Psychological Perspectives on Threats to Democracy* et publiée sous la direction invitée de M. David R. Mandel (Recherche et développement pour la défense Canada) et Mme Mandeep K. Dhami (University of Cambridge). Cette édition spéciale réunit une série d'articles portant sur les « menaces à la démocratie » selon diverses perspectives psychologiques, et cela avant et après les attaques terroristes du 11 septembre 2001. Elle comporte cinq articles qui mettent en lumière diverses questions de fond et les abordent selon plusieurs perspectives et méthodes théoriques. Le présent document donne un bref aperçu de la nature de chacune de ces cinq contributions.

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