

**Empathy and Behavioral Intentions Toward Ukrainian Refugees: The Role of Exposure  
to War Information as well as Political Ideology Among Irish Adults**

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## Abstract

Ever since the eruption of the war between Russia and Ukraine, the perception of Ukrainian refugees has been a highly relevant topic. The present thesis aims to investigate how people's empathy (Dependent variable) and behavioral intentions (Dependent variable) change after exposure (Independent variable) to videos portraying stories of the war. Additionally, we investigated how political (Independent variable) ideology influences empathy and behavioral intentions. An interaction between the two independent variables on the dependent variables was also explored. Our experiment was conducted among Irish adults (N=225). We asked participants to either watch a video including personal stories of refugees from the Ukrainian war or a video about the best museums in the world. Afterward, the participants filled out scales to measure their level of empathy and behavioral intentions. The findings revealed that participants exposed to the war information condition exhibited higher levels of empathy. Results also showed that participants endorsing a right-wing ideology exhibit less empathy toward Ukrainian refugees (compared to those who exhibit a left-wing ideology). However, the interaction effect between political ideology and experimental manipulation on empathy and behavioral intentions did not yield statistical significance, suggesting no difference in empathy and behavioral intentions between the war information condition (vs. control condition) among participants who endorse a right- compared to left-wing ideology. The current thesis discusses the theoretical and practical implications of these findings for intergroup relations.

*Keywords:* Ukrainian refugees, perception, empathy, behavioral intentions, political orientation, information exposure

## **Empathy and Behavioral Intentions Toward Ukrainian Refugees: The Role of Exposure to War Information as well as Political Ideology Among Irish Adults**

The war between Russia and Ukraine, which erupted in February 2022, unfolded a relentless and ongoing confrontation between those two countries. This conflict is rooted in historical and political disputes that originated in the Soviet era and the following independence declaration of Ukraine from the Soviet Union (Kent et al., 2016). The ongoing war creates multiple repercussions, one of the most notable consequences being the displacement of Ukrainian citizens who are now forced to seek refuge in various parts of the world, turning this crisis into a global concern. As described by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refugees are “people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” (UNHCR., 2022). As of January 2023, five million people have fled Ukraine (Valsecci et al., 2023) however, the reception and perception of Ukrainian refugees by the host population vary significantly, concerning empathy and behavioral intentions. Thus, a thorough investigation of this phenomenon is essential.

The present thesis aims to investigate the main effect of how people’s exposure to stories of the Russo-Ukrainian war impacts their attribution of empathy and behavioral intentions expecting that people who are exposed to the war stories will exhibit greater empathy and behavioral intentions than participants who will be exposed to the control condition (Hypothesis 1). Additionally, we will examine the link between political orientation, empathy, and behavioral intentions, expecting participants who endorse a right-wing ideology to show lower levels of empathy and behavioral intentions compared to those who exhibit a rather left-wing ideology (Hypothesis 2). Last, we will examine the interplay between war information exposure and political ideology on empathy and behavioral intentions. Specifically, we expect that participants who endorse the right-wing ideology (vs.

those who endorse the left-wing ideology) will exhibit greater empathy and behavioral intentions increase in the war story condition (vs. the control condition) (Hypothesis 3).

## **Empathy**

Empathy is a very intricate phenomenon characterized by its complexity, making it complicated to agree on a common definition. Carl Rogers was among the first to define Empathy in 1959. He defined it as “the perception of the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the “as if” condition” (Briciu et al., 2020, p.3). However, as not all definitions of empathy can be taken into account for this study, we will focus on the definition made by Briciu et al. (2020). Empathy, as articulated by Briciu et al. (2020), is not merely an emotion but a profound intersubjective skill that allows individuals to access the world of others thus fostering our sense of human interconnectedness.

In the context of our research, a crucial objective is to investigate the role of empathy in intergroup relations and show the advantageous outcomes that are associated with higher traits of empathy, particularly when assessing acceptance of refugees. However, the intricate nature of empathy necessitates an exploration of various factors that have an impact on intergroup attitudes (Dovidio et al., 2010). Previously conducted studies emphasized the vital role of empathy when shaping intergroup relations by mitigating stereotypes and social prejudice, fostering an encouraged perspective that views refugees as individuals with their unique stories and challenges rather than a homogenous group (Dovidio et al., 2010). Last, previous studies intricated that empathy serves as a preventive mechanism against conflicts between refugees and the host community due to electing recognition which can lead to a more harmonious environment (Klimecki et al., 2019). Notably, empathy emerged as a pivotal factor in diverse circumstances such as perspective taking due to facilitating an

enhanced connection toward refugees as well as helping to understand experiences, challenges, and emotions (Klimecki et al., 2019). Consequently, it is a commonly used measure when testing individuals' perceptions toward refugees.

Heightened levels of empathy toward Ukrainian refugees compared to other refugee groups can be attributed to common ethnicity and the symbolic threat posed by Russia (De Conick, 2022). Furthermore, Ramji-Nogales (2022) argued that Europeans exhibit heightened levels of empathy toward Ukrainian refugees, a phenomenon caused by the lack of an international consensus regarding collective responsibility for hosting refugees. Consequently, the absence of a common agreement on hosting responsibilities may instill both individuals but also countries with a greater sense of moral duty as well as heightened levels of humanitarian responsibility, culminating in greater levels of empathy.

### **Behavioral Intentions**

Behavioral intentions can occur through various means and can be defined as a desire to engage in a certain behavior (Auzoult et al., 2015) as well as a person's self-forecast of future actions (Warshaw et al., 1985). Understanding the concept of behavioral intentions is beneficial to assess its influence on perception toward refugees and understanding the broader implications within the framework of intergroup relations, as well as the acceptance of refugees within the host country. Furthermore, behavioral intentions serve as a metric to evaluate the willingness of individuals and communities to offer humanitarian assistance. This can provide valuable insight into practical forms of support, such as donations for example (Dalman et al., 2021).

According to Azjen and Fishbein (1980), the theory of planned behavior (TPB) serves as a valuable framework to predict individuals' intentions to engage in specific behaviors. According to the TPB, behavioral intentions are affected by attitudes toward the respective behavior. Given the positive sentiments toward Ukrainian refugees (De Conick, 2022), as

well as heightened levels of empathy, individuals are likely to show positive attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees. Consequently, according to the TPB, this positive attitude is linked to increased levels of positive behavioral intentions toward Ukrainian refugees.

Examining behavioral intentions contributes to further insights into its potential effects on social cohesion. Therefore, positive intentions signify a stronger willingness to build connections with refugees, thereby fostering a more harmonious society (Yitmen et al., 2020). Through a nuanced understanding increased acceptance and interventions to promote understanding can be fostered. As later explained, an integral facet of this thesis is political ideology and its correlation with behavioral intentions. Here one could argue that insights into behavioral intentions offer valuable inputs for governments or organizations working with refugees, enabling the development of policies and programs designed to promote effective integration (Yitmen et al., 2018).

### **Experimental manipulation**

Following the investigation of empathy and behavioral intentions, it is now vital to explore the experimental manipulation. As suggested by Briciu et al. (2020) in their paper by being exposed to stories over the screen we experience a cinematic identification. Thus, we are perceivers but also participants in how the protagonists experience the world leading to us not only seeing the character but simultaneously feeling with them as we see through their eyes, consequently resulting in enhanced levels of empathy and behavioral intentions. This phenomenon can also be labeled as indirect exposure (White et al., 2020).

One aim of this study, among others, is to investigate whether war information exposure will encourage people to enhance their behavioral intentions in favor of refugees as well as experiencing increased levels of empathy. Numerous studies indicate that exposure to narratives of war stories has the potential to positively impact behavioral intentions and empathy. Lee and Jeong (2017) highlighted the significant influence of narrative engagement

on individuals' thoughts and actions. Previous studies have found that when individuals encounter specific stories, their attitudes and intentions can be influenced, often through personal identification with the storyteller (DeLaughter et al., 2021). Overall, according to Oliver et al. (2012), narrative-formatted stories tend to evoke more compassion toward individuals and foster more favorable attitudes toward the portrayed group, ultimately resulting in higher positive behavioral intentions.

Similar results are expected when testing the effect between empathy and information exposure. The narrative of war stories is frequently imbued with intense emotions that are likely to elicit empathetic responses (Crilley et al., 2020), a phenomenon that is likely not to be observed in the control condition. Moreover, the inherent real-world relevance of war stories, often based on actual events, amplifies the potential for heightened empathetic response (Crilley et al., 2020). Notably, these narratives frequently portray life-and-death situations grappling with loss and confrontations of moral dilemmas, fostering a higher identification from the viewers' side which in turn might lead to higher levels of empathy especially among older people (Katzorreck et al., 2018).

Therefore, we hypothesized our first main effect stating that participants who are exposed to war stories (compared to the control condition) will exhibit greater empathy and behavioral intentions toward Ukrainian refugees (H1).

### **The Role of Political Orientation**

The refugee crisis throughout the last years has led to increased political attention toward this topic and in times when the world is "witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record" (UNHCR, 2019; Knappert et al., 2021, p.424) it is of more importance than ever to research how political ideology affects characteristics such as empathy and behavioral intentions. Previous studies have identified a negative correlation



between political ideology and both empathy and behavioral intentions (Cowling et al., 2019). Consequently, we have chosen to investigate political ideology within this context.

Studies suggest that individuals who adhere to the right-wing ideology desire stability and conformity (Borinca et al., 2022), subsequently resulting in reduced levels of empathy and diminished behavioral intentions toward refugees. This phenomenon can also be explained by the theory “rigidity of the right” by Van Proojien et al. (2017), which states that there is an ideological asymmetry between individuals who endorse a right-wing ideology compared to those who endorse a left-wing ideology. Those individuals who endorse a right-wing ideology exhibit a heightened concern for the preservation of cultural traditions, resulting in reduced levels of tolerance toward minority groups as well as advocating for restrictive refugee policies (Van Proojien et al., 2017). In contrast, those who endorse a left-wing ideology often exhibit higher concern for values such as change and diversity. This information leads to the formulation of our second main effect which indicates that participants who endorse a right-wing ideology (vs. those who endorse a left-wing ideology), display less empathy and behavioral intentions toward Ukrainian refugees (H2).

Second, it is important to inspect the role of political ideology as a moderator. Knappert et al. (2020) introduced the concept of the “ceiling effect”. According to this phenomenon, left-wing individuals already possess a favorable attitude toward refugees. Thus, the war information condition may have limited potential for inducing further change. Consequently, it is expected that exposure to refugee stories will have a pronounced impact on right-wing individuals, given their lower base level of empathy toward refugees. Based on this information we examined the interplay of political ideology and exposure on empathy and behavioral intentions and expect participants who endorse the right-wing ideology (vs. those who endorse a left-wing ideology) to exhibit greater empathy and behavioral intentions after being exposed to the war stories (compared to the control condition) (H3).

## **The context of the study**

The present study will be among the first to examine refugee tolerances among Irish participants. Due to European law, Ireland is required to provide housing for refugees (Leckie et al., 2003), resulting in an exceptionally competitive housing market. This situation may contribute to reduced levels of empathy and a decline in welcoming attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees. Furthermore, it is crucial to examine politicians' attitudes toward refugees and further understand their ideology, particularly as the topic of immigration and refugees is more important than ever these days. Getting a better understanding of how ideologies influence empathy and behavioral intentions might contribute to bridging divides among people or address the consequences of such divides. Moreover, by studying different societal views with individuals from different ideological backgrounds we receive a better comprehending of their perception of the refugee crisis. Additionally, our study is among the first to have an experimental manipulation that consists of exposing participants to war stories through a video, as opposed to simply showing quotes or stories without pictures. Moreover, an aspect that has received limited attention in prior research is the unique response of observers toward Ukrainian refugees. Nonetheless, this study also has implications beyond the specific context of Ukrainian refugees and can provide further insights into the general factors that influence empathy toward any group of refugees or immigrants. Furthermore, understanding empathy can contribute to knowledge of human psychology by inspecting factors that influence empathy, emotional responses, and perspective-taking. Last, this study can reveal broader insights into intergroup relations, prejudice, and discrimination, and identify factors that influence attitudes toward marginalized and fragile groups.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Design**

Participants in the current study were required to meet two key criteria: residency in Ireland and a minimum age of 18 years. The initial sample comprised a total of 248 participants of which 23 were removed due to not having an Irish nationality. The final sample consisted of 225 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 38.50$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.95$ ), with 151 identifying as women, 70 as male, 3 as non-binary, and one person preferred not to self-identify. The respondents were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: exposure to war information ( $n = 102$ ) versus exposure to information about the best art galleries in the world ( $n = 123$ ). The study employed a quasi-experimental design, incorporating political ideology as a continuous independent variable, which was then standardized below and above ( $\pm 1$  SD) the mean. Additionally, it included the experimental variable of war information with two conditions (war information exposure vs. control condition).<sup>1</sup>

## **Procedure**

Upon submission and approval of the questionnaire by the ethics committee of the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) participants were invited to complete a questionnaire created on Qualtrics (Appendix B). The questionnaire concerned the effects of intergroup relations in the context of Ukrainian refugees and were compensated \$1.20 upon completing the questionnaire. Initially, participants were given a brief overview of the study and asked for their consent. In the beginning, participants were instructed to provide information about their age, gender, ethnic identity, and political orientation, contributing to the completion of the first section of the questionnaire aimed at measuring political orientation. Subsequently, participants were randomly exposed to either a video depicting stories of Ukrainian refugees or a control condition featuring the best art galleries in the world (Appendix B). Following

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<sup>1</sup> We also assessed superordinate identity, collective narcissism, and perceived threat as independent variables, but these measures are beyond the scope of this thesis and will be elaborated in other students' theses.

this exposure, participants provided ratings on a scale measuring empathy and behavioral intentions. Lastly, the respondents were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

## **Independent Variables and Experimental Manipulation**

### ***Political Ideology***

Political Ideology was measured through three 7-point scale items, based on a left-right continuum. Participants were asked how they would rate their political, social, and economic views from 1 = "Very left" to 7 = "Very right.". The mean of each item was computed. For each participant, the answers on political, social, and economic views were combined and averaged out, indicating the overall political view of that participant ( $\alpha = .90$ ,  $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ).

### ***The experimental manipulation (War stories vs control)***

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. Both groups watched a video with the same musical background. For the experimental condition, the video was 1 minute and 50 seconds long and for the control condition, it was 2 minutes long. In the first condition participants ( $n = 102$ ) were exposed to war information. The video showed ten personal war stories from Ukrainians with corresponding pictures of that person. Examples of the stories are: "One feeling is I need to send my family to safety and then everything will be all right. We will win for sure. We will save our country", or "We hoped that it wasn't them until the DNA examination; also, many scenes indicated that it was true. Pain, despair, emptiness – these are wounds, wounds that will never heal".

Participants in the second condition ( $n = 123$ ), which is the control condition, were shown a video about the best art galleries worldwide. The video showed ten art galleries (The Louvre, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Vatican Museum, El Prado Museum, the

Hermitage Museum, the Tate Modern, the Uffizi Gallery, The National Gallery, The Modern Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago) and mentioned the location, recommended duration, and highlights of the gallery. To strengthen the effect of our manipulation, we asked participants to write three things for the stories they were assigned “Please write three things about the video you just watched”.

## **2.4 Dependent Variables**

### ***Empathy***

Empathy toward Ukrainian refugees was measured using 8 items adapted from Davis, 1983. These items can be categorized into two dimensions: empathetic concern, such as the following: “I feel compassion for Ukrainian refugees” and empathetic perspective taking, such as: “I could imagine being in the situation of Ukrainian refugees”. The response format was a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Absolutely*). The responses were computed into an average score of empathy toward Ukrainian refugees ( $\alpha = .86$ ,  $M = 5.15$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ).

### ***Behavioral Intention***

Participants’ positive behavioral intention concerning Ukrainian refugees was measured using items adapted from Pinto et al. (2020). The scale included items such as “I would help a refugee if she/he asks me to.” and “I would participate in a march in favor of the refugees’ integration in Europe.” The response format was a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Absolutely*) The responses were computed into an average score of behavioral intention toward Ukrainian refugees ( $\alpha = .89$ ,  $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ).

## **Results**

### **Assumption check**

When examining empathy, as shown in Figure 1 of Appendix A, an approximately normal distribution can be observed, supported by a Skewness Score of  $-.48$  and a Kurtosis value of  $-.11$ . Both scores lie within the range of  $0$  and  $.5$ , indicating that the assumption of normality is not violated. However, inspecting the histogram for behavioral intentions (Figure 2, Appendix A) reveals that this graph is slightly left-skewed resulting in a skewness score of  $-.53$  and a Kurtosis score of  $-.11$ . According to Trafimow et al. (2019) a larger sample size contributes to the validation of normality.

Furthermore, the presence of outliers was investigated using Boxplots. For all boxplots, we compared the war information condition with the control condition. Figure 7 in Appendix A shows that there are no outliers present when testing for political orientation. However, when testing for Empathy (Figure 8, Appendix A), two outliers could be observed yet all these outliers had a cook's distance below one which indicates that they are non-influential outliers. A comparable observation was found when testing for behavioral intentions, one outlier was evident, yet this outlier had a cook's distance of below one, indicating that it is also non-influential.

Additionally, we looked at linearity which can be observed in Figures 3 and 4 in Appendix A. In both cases, we checked political orientation, in relation to empathy/behavioral intentions. Both outputs show a fairly linear line with all observations lying on or very close to the line, indicating that the assumption of linearity is not violated in both cases.

Homoscedasticity was identified through a visual inspection using a scatterplot (Figures 5&6, Appendix A). The data appears to meet the criteria, thus ruling out heteroscedasticity (Ernst et al., 2017).

Last, multicollinearity was examined (Figure 10, Appendix A). Multicollinearity illustrates the correlation between independent variables. In this context, the variance

inflation factor (VIF) is 1.29, significantly lower than the threshold of 5, suggesting a low degree of multicollinearity.

## Main analysis

**Table 1**

*Correlations among continuous measures*

		Empathy	Behavioral intentions	Political ideology
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	--		
Behavioral intentions	Pearson Correlation	.728**	--	
Political ideology	Pearson Correlation	-.353**	-.448**	--

\*\* . The correlation is significant at both the 0.01 level and 0.05 levels (2-tailed).

To test our hypotheses, all dependent variables were submitted to a full-factorial ANCOVA in which the experimental manipulation (war information condition = -1, control condition = +1) and political ideology (standardized scores), and their interactions were considered as independent variables. For both analyses, we defined a model testing all the main effects as well as the interaction effect. To get better results we ran an ANCOVA using SPSS and Jamovi.

### *Empathy*

Upon examining the relationship between empathy and exposure (H1), the following results were obtained:  $F(1,221) = 8.63$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta^2 p = .04$ , indicating the significance of this predictor, thus supporting our first hypothesis. Therefore, individuals who are exposed to war stories are likely to demonstrate higher levels of empathy ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) compared to those who are exposed to the control condition ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ).

Second, we will examine the impact of endorsing a right-wing ideology on empathy (H2). The results are as follows:  $F(1,221) = 34.43, p < .001, \eta^2p = .14$ . These findings indicate a negative association between empathy and political ideology ( $\beta = -.36$ ) and therefore support our second hypothesis.

Last, the outcomes of the interaction hypothesis (H3) will be reported. For this the following results for empathy were obtained:  $F(1,221) = .82, p = .365, \eta^2p = .004$ , indicating that this predictor is not significant resulting in the conclusion that there is no difference in empathy in the war information condition (vs. control condition) between participants who endorse a right-wing ideology and those who endorse a left-wing ideology.

**Table 2**

*Test of Between-Subject effects*

Dependent variable: Empathy

	SS	df	F	p	$\eta^2p$
Model	48.490	3	14.039	< .001	0.160
Experimental variable	9.932	1	8.627	0.004	0.038
Z Political Ideology	39.634	1	34.425	< .001	0.135
Experimental variable * Z Political Ideology	0.948	1	0.824	0.365	0.004
Residuals	254.441	221			
Total	302.931	224			

**Table 3**



*Dependent Variable: Empathy*

Exposure	Std.		N
	Mean	Deviation	
war	5,3640	1,18443	102
control	4,9654	1,11761	123
Total	5,1461	1,16291	225

***Behavioral Intentions***

Furthermore, the analysis between exposure and behavioral intentions (H1) led to the following results:  $F(1,221) = 10.98, p < .001, \eta^2p = .05$  indicating a significant result, supporting our first main effect (H1). This implies that participants who were exposed to the war stories showed higher levels of behavioral intentions ( $M = 5.17, SD = 1.52$ ) compared to those exposed to the control condition ( $M = 4.62, SD = 1.44$ ).

When examining the relationship between endorsing a right-wing ideology and behavioral intentions (H2) the following results were observed:  $F(1,221) = 57.60, p < .001, \eta^2p = .21$  suggesting a negative association, thus people who endorse a right-wing ideology will exhibit lower behavioral intentions ( $\beta = -.70$ ). These findings align with our second hypothesis.

Last, the outcomes for the interaction hypothesis (H3) are as follows:  $F(1,221) = .07, p = .791, \eta^2p = .00$ . Our results did not reach statistical significance leading to the conclusion that there is no difference in behavioral intentions in the war information condition (vs. control condition) between participants who endorse a right-wing ideology and those who endorse a left-wing ideology.

**Table 4***Dependent Variable: Behavioral Intention*

Exposure	Std.		N
	Mean	Deviation	
war	5,1725	1,52342	102
control	4,6228	1,44907	123
Total	4,8720	1,50510	225

**Table 5***Test of Between-Subject effects*

Dependent variable: Behavioral Intention

	SS	df	F	p	$\eta^2p$
Model	121.243	3	23.1273	<.001	0.239
Experimental variable	19.190	1	10.9817	<.001	0.047
Z Political Ideology	100.662	1	57.6044	<.001	0.207
Experimental variable* Z Political Ideology	0.123	1	0.0702	0.791	0.000
Residuals	386.191	221			
Total	507.434	224			

**Discussion**

In this thesis, we investigated the impact of information exposure and political ideology on empathy and behavioral intentions. Specifically, we formulated the following three hypotheses. Our first main effect states that people who are exposed to war stories of Ukrainian refugees will show heightened levels of empathy compared to those exposed to a control condition (H1). Our second main effect indicates that participants who endorse a right-wing ideology display less empathy and behavioral intentions than those who endorse a left-wing ideology (H2). Last, our interaction hypothesis indicates that people who endorse a

right-wing ideology (vs. those who endorse a left-wing ideology) will exhibit a greater empathy and behavioral intentions increase in the war story condition (vs. the control condition) (H3).

### **Interpretation of Results**

Considering the findings of this thesis, we identified a relation between information exposure and both empathy and behavioral intentions (H1). These findings align with the results of previous studies such as the study conducted by Lee and Jong (2017), which similarly concluded that behavioral intentions and empathy are indeed affected by information exposure. Furthermore, our investigation on how political ideology impacts empathy and behavioral intentions (H2) found further support for the theory of “rigidity of the right” (Van Proojien et al., 2017). This theory suggests that people who endorse a right-wing ideology exhibit a heightened concern for the preservation of cultural traditions. Additionally, they advocate for more restrictive refugee policies which results in reduced levels of tolerance toward minority groups (Van Proojien et al., 2017). Our results align with their theory, supporting the hypothesis that individuals who endorse a right-wing ideology display less empathy toward refugees (compared to those who endorse a left-wing ideology).

However, as mentioned before, our interaction effect did not yield statistical significance. This implies that political ideology independently influences empathy and behavioral intentions yet this impact cannot be observed when combined with information exposure (H3). Interestingly, these results are contradictory to the findings of Knappert et al. (2020) who in their paper introduced the phenomenon of the ceiling effect. In our study people who endorse a right-wing ideology did not exhibit a significant difference in empathy and behavioral intentions (compared with those who endorse a left-wing ideology) after exposure to the war information condition. This deviates from the ceiling effect according to which people who endorse the right-wing ideology (compared to those who endorse a left-

wing ideology) should have shown a greater degree of change in empathy and behavioral intentions following exposure to information about the war. Several confounding factors related to empathy and behavioral intentions may account for the difference between the results of our thesis and previously conducted studies. Particularly concerning the interaction effect, one could argue that those endorsing a right-wing ideology, might have heightened levels of empathy due to confounding variables.

First, the majority of our participants were women ( $n = 151$ ). Studies have indicated that women in general exhibit higher levels of empathy and endorse a rather diverse thinking (Chapman et al., 2006). Consequently, they might already possess a higher baseline of empathy even those endorsing the right-wing ideology. This could potentially contribute to the limited change in empathy following the information exposure. Furthermore, considering the geographical context, Ukraine is a part of Europe and therefore participants might feel a sense of closeness toward Ukrainian refugees despite endorsing a rather right-wing ideology. Several studies found evidence that Ukrainian refugees are often perceived differently than refugees from outside of Europe (De Conick, 2022) possibly due to a shared European Identity. This shared European Identity could foster empathy and behavioral intentions, even among more conservative people (Heinemann et al., 2020). The perception of Ukrainian refugees as legitimate refugees may contribute to this perspective (Van Prooijen et al. 2017). Additionally, the geographical proximity of Ukraine, similar ethnicity, and a symbolic threat of Russia might contribute to heightened levels of empathy (De Conick, 2022) outweighing political orientation. Furthermore, the influence of social desirability among participants should be considered. Participants may feel obliged to show empathy and behavioral intentions toward Ukrainian refugees, as failing to do so could be seen as socially inappropriate considering the current circumstances (Kämpfe et al., 2009). Last, another confounding variable that should be further examined is the possible first-hand migration

experienced by the participants themselves. Such experiences may contribute to heightened levels of empathy and behavioral intentions (Laura Vazquez Maggio & Westcott, 2014).

### **Implications**

Our thesis contributes to previous studies in several ways. First, our thesis exceeds the previous knowledge of empathy and behavioral intentions. Significant results for our first main effect (H1) found further evidence for increased empathy due to exposure to war information. This aligns with previous research implying that personal stories increase empathy and behavioral intentions (Johnson, 2012). Investigating empathy and behavioral intentions is crucial for gaining a deeper insight into social relationships. Furthermore, this research sheds light on the pivotal role of empathy in the context of crisis response and humanitarian aid. Research can be used to develop strategies for enhancing empathy among individuals and communities.

Our study uniquely distinguishes itself by further examining the role of political ideology as a potential moderator (H3) leading to novel results in this field of research. This is particularly important as research on this topic leads to a further understanding of collective political ideology and, therefore, helps to understand people's beliefs and values. Furthermore, research on political ideology is important due to its impact on social cohesion and identity (Zografova, 2013). By unraveling how political ideology contributes to the formation of social groups, further steps toward social harmony can be taken.

Last, the present thesis provides unique insights into the perception of refugees among the Irish population. While the majority of studies are conducted in the United States (Vetter, 2003) there is a scarcity of studies targeting Irish people, and very few aim to comprehend their empathy and behavioral intention toward refugees. Recent events, such as the riot against refugees on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2023 (*'remember who we are': Riots, race, and*

*the end of the 'Irish welcome'* 2023) shed light on the progressively critical situation concerning refugees in Ireland and show the increasing prominence of right-wing ideologies in Ireland. The results of our main effect between political orientation and information exposure on both empathy and behavioral intentions (H2) further underline this phenomenon. Given the housing crisis in Ireland, Irish residents may feel more threatened by incoming refugees. Therefore, by researching the perception toward Ukrainian refugees in Ireland our study contributed to novel insights.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This thesis presents multiple strengths. First, it addresses a highly current and prevalent topic: the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, as well as the perception toward Ukrainian refugees. Through the conduction of this thesis, new information regarding the perception toward Ukrainian refugees among the Irish population was found.

Furthermore, previous events, such as the riot mentioned earlier, increase the practical relevance of this topic. Additionally, few studies have delved into exposing individuals to war stories, specifically narratives recounted by those directly experiencing the war. By the use of videos and stories based on real experiences the validity of our study increased.

Furthermore, most of our findings are predominantly in line with previous research.

Regarding the collection of data, we adhered solely to standardized measurements, ensuring a methodologically rigorous approach.

Although we obtained several new insights, the present research also faced several limitations. First, the sample size of our study was lower than originally hoped for, comprising 225 participants instead of the intended 300. A smaller sample size diminishes the study's validity (Button et al., 2013) and a larger sample size is recommended for further studies. Furthermore, the questionnaire lacked attention check questions for the multiple-choice section, which could have ensured participants' attentiveness. Despite asking

participants to briefly describe what they had seen in the videos, an attention check within the multiple-choice questions could have been advantageous. Moreover, due to individuals without Irish citizenship completing the questionnaire, the dropout rate was 23 people, further reducing the sample size. To avoid this complication a less homogenous sample should be chosen. The homogeneity of the sample, limited to Irish individuals, poses a potential limitation, as perception toward refugees might differ across diverse cultural and geographical contexts. The predominance of female participants women ( $n=151$ ) further contributed to a lack of diversity. Furthermore, our study revealed correlational evidence. However, correlational evidence does not always imply causal evidence which is why conducting a longitudinal study is recommended to confirm the validity of our results. Last, it is essential to approach our findings with caution and refrain from generalizing them, given the homogeneity of the sample and the presence of unique factors in Ireland, such as being considered among the wealthier countries within Europe (Powell, 2007).

### **Suggestion for further research**

For further research, we suggest testing for the above-named alternative explanations. Several areas of the present research could be further investigated. First, a follow-up study is recommended as it can assess for potential change in the results over time. Several studies have found evidence that empathy and behavioral intentions toward Ukrainian refugees already decreased with the ongoing war (Karakiewicz-Krawczyk et al., 2022). Therefore, longitudinal studies are of high importance to investigate this phenomenon further. Exploring numerous factors, such as the duration of the war and its impact on empathy, can provide valuable insights. Furthermore, it is recommended to investigate the influence of social media on the perception of both war and refugees. Social media has the potential to influence people's emotional response to the war and its narratives (Aday, 2010), making it beneficial

to inspect. This prompts the consideration of other potential influential factors, such as educational background, which could affect empathy and behavioral intentions.

Furthermore, it is recommended to include questions about interpersonal contact with refugees in the questionnaire as this allows to test its impact on perception toward refugees. Comparing the baseline rates of empathy of Irish individuals with those of other European citizens could provide further context of how unique the observed levels of empathy among Irish individuals are and if they are also applicable to other countries. Last, it is recommended to replicate the study by expanding the sample to include refugees outside of Europe. This can provide further insights into the generalizability of our findings to a broader context beyond European refugees.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the present thesis provides further insights into the field of intergroup relations. Our results indicate that people experience higher empathy and behavioral intentions when exposed to information about the war (H1). Additionally, the thesis shows that people who endorse a right-wing ideology exhibit lower levels of empathy and behavioral intentions (H2). However, our hypothesized interaction effect (H3) did not reach statistical significance. Limitations of our study mostly regard the homogeneity of the sample, possibly not inspected confounding variables, and the absence of a longitudinal study design. For further research, we suggest inspecting the impact of possible confounding variables such as interpersonal contact with refugees as well as educational background or social media use. Furthermore, we suggest replicating this study with refugees unrelated to the Russo-Ukrainian war to achieve a more comprehensive and general understanding of the perception toward refugees in an interpersonal context.



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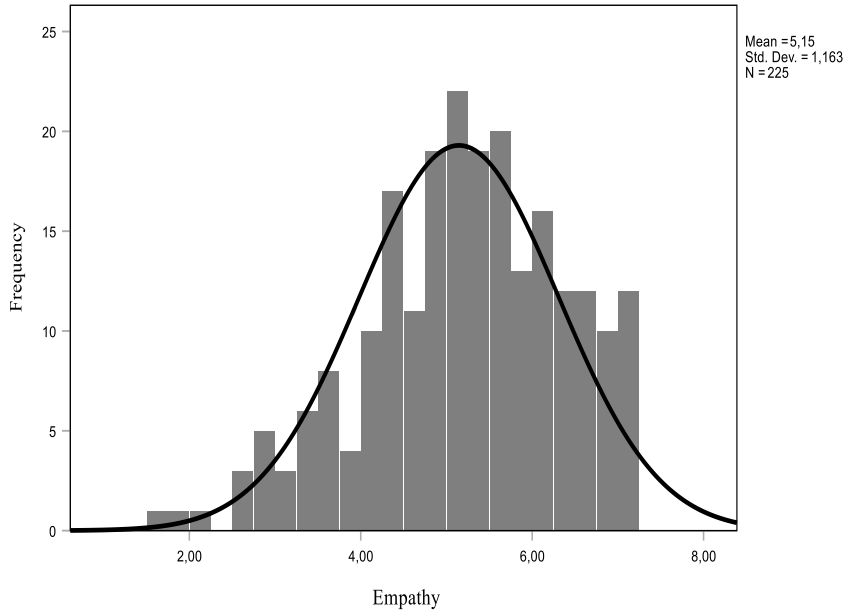
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## Appendix A

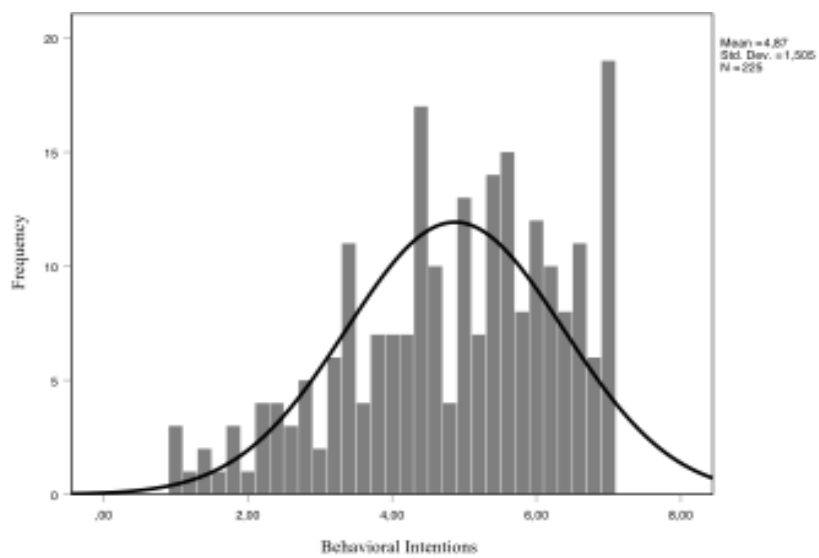
**Figure 1**

*Histogram Frequencies of Empathy*



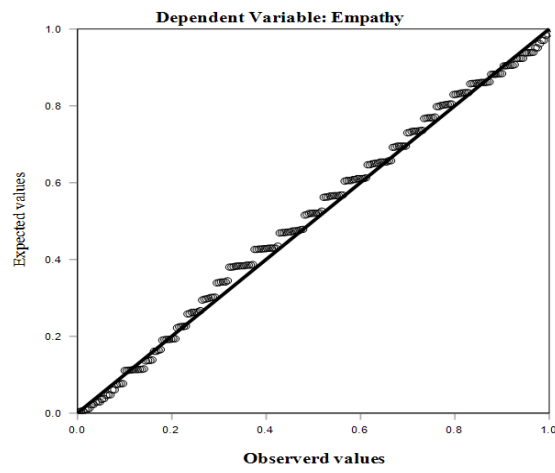
**Figure 2**

*Histogram Frequencies of Behavioral Intention*

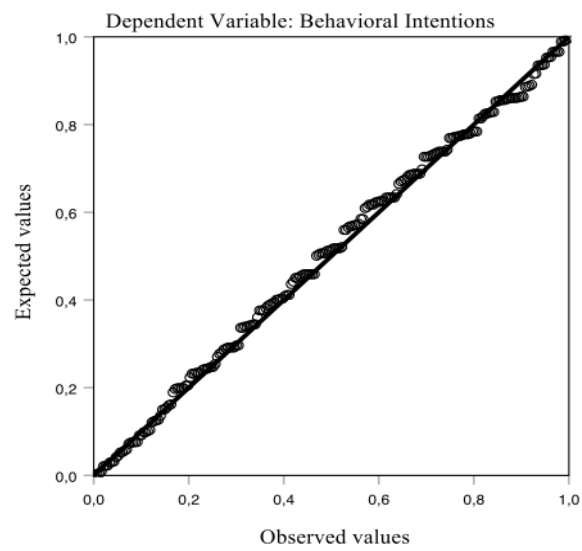


**Figure 3**

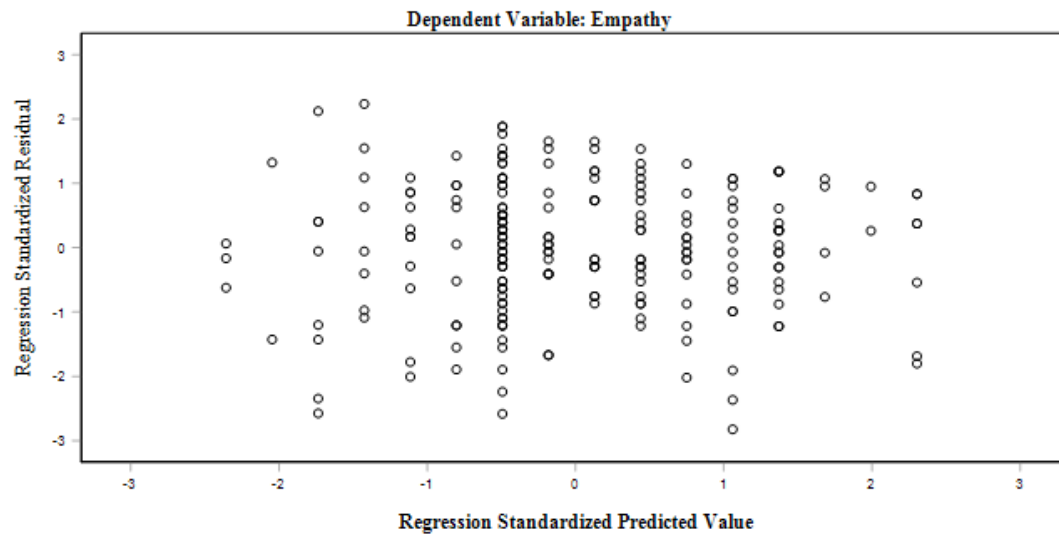
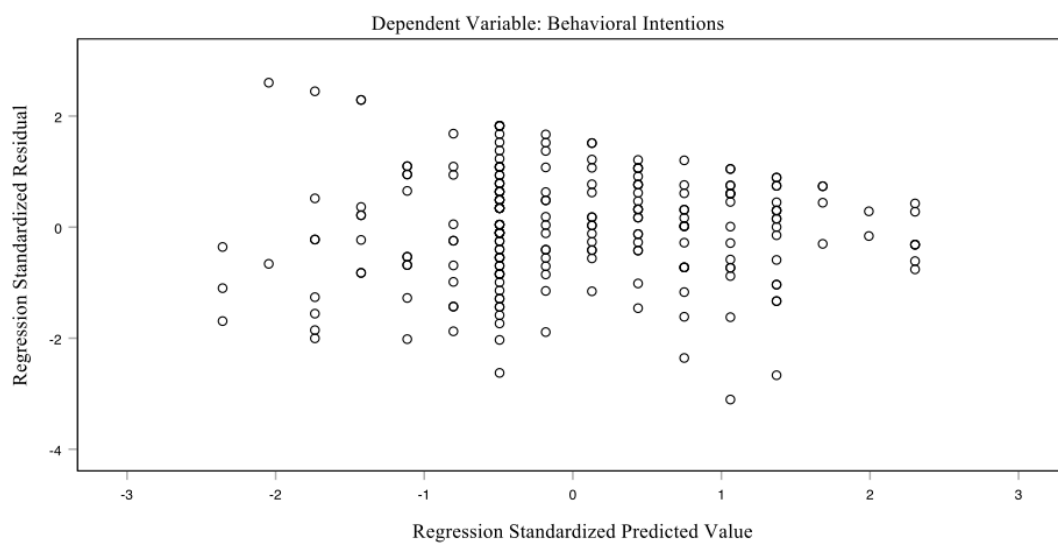
*Linearity plot for empathy*

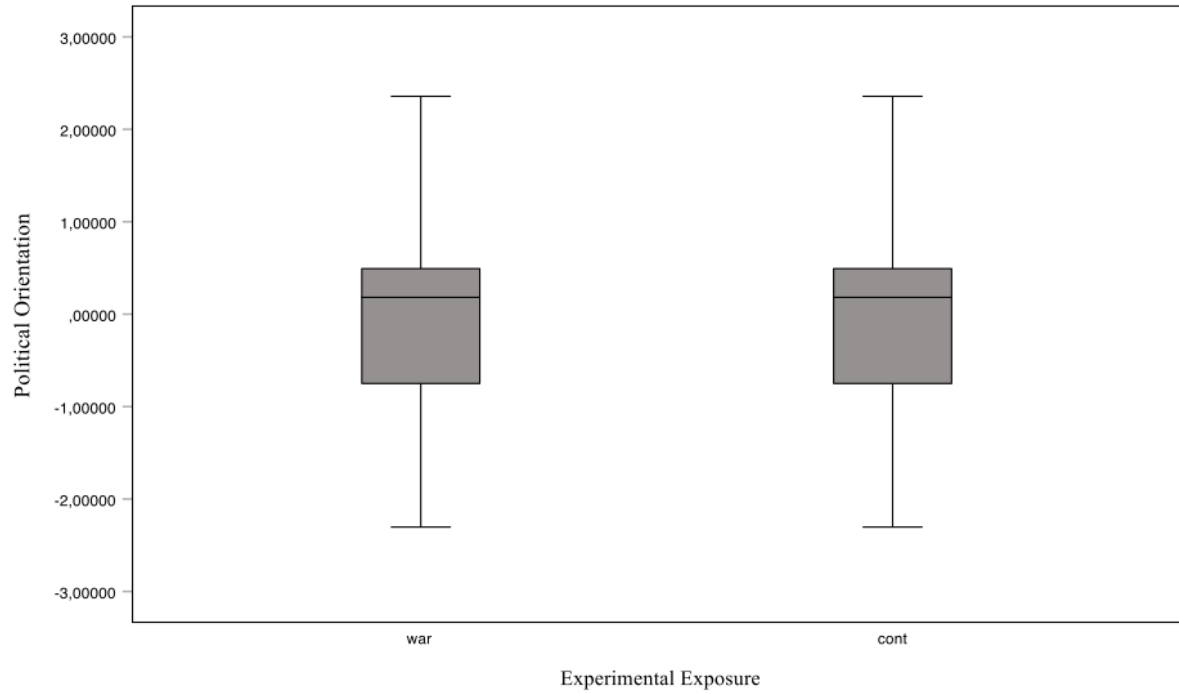
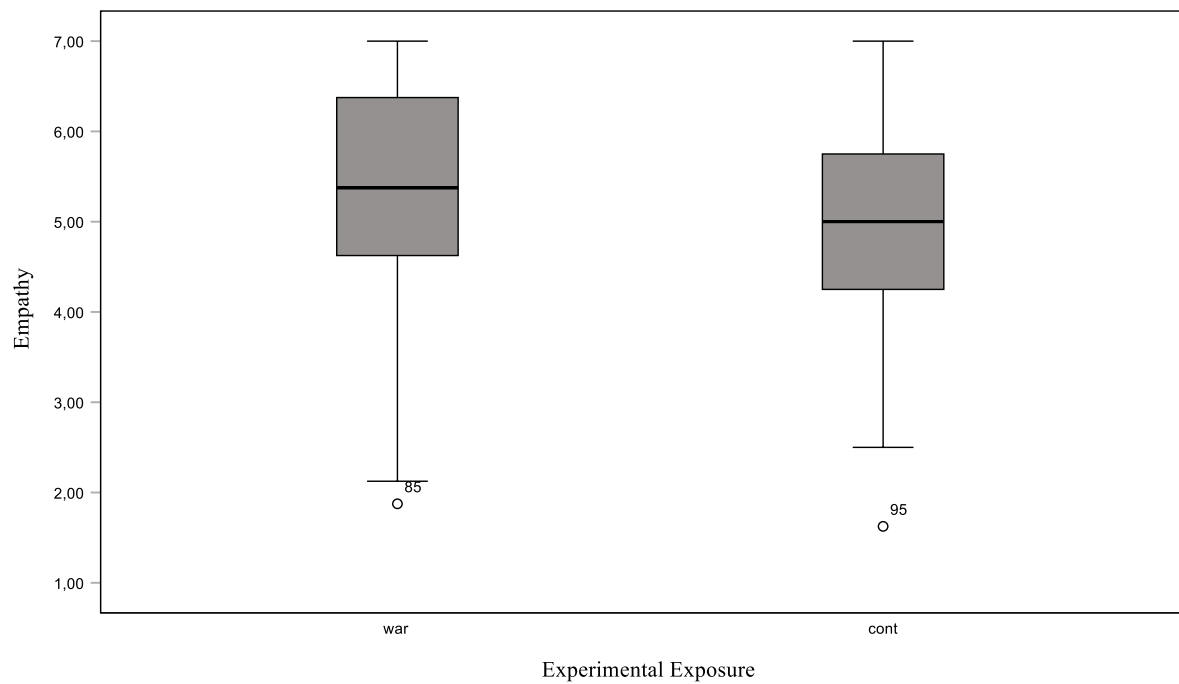
**Figure 4**

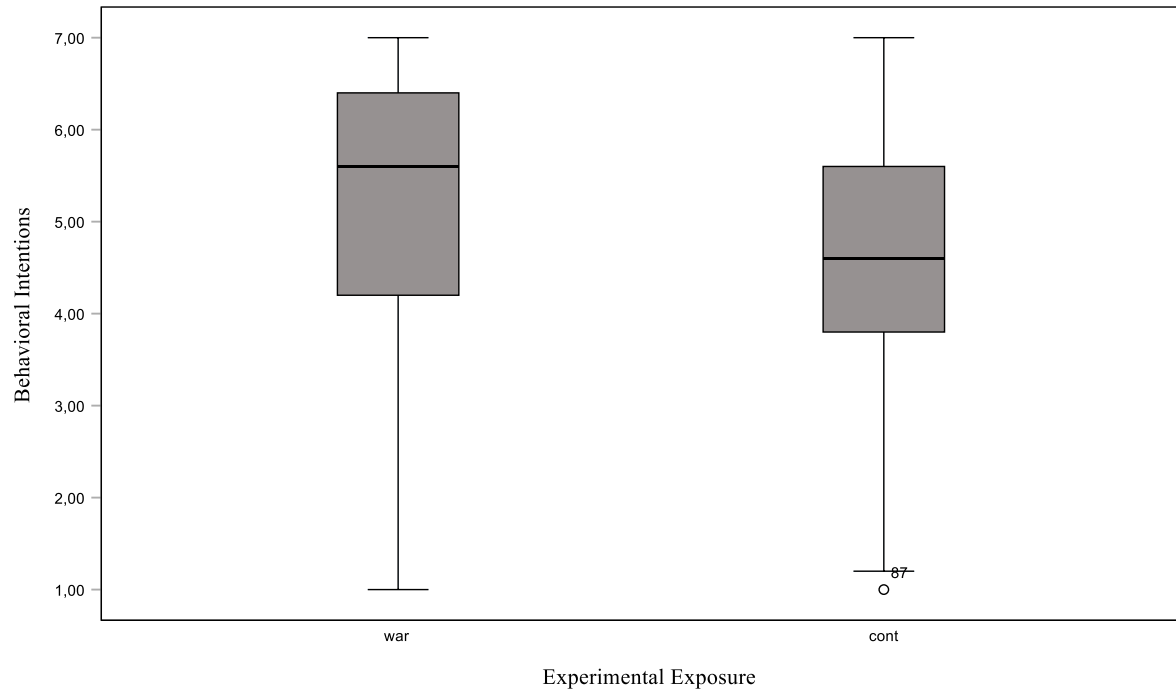
*Linearity plot for Behavioural Intentions*





**Figure 5***Scatterplot for Empathy***Figure 6***Scatterplot Behavioural Intentions*

**Figure 7***Boxplot political orientation***Figure 8***Boxplot Empathy*

**Figure 9***Boxplot Behavioural Intentions***Figure 10***VIF Table**Coefficients*

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Zscore(Pol_ideo_3it)	.771	1.298

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a. Dependent Variable: Empathy\_8it





### *Political Orientation*

Please answer the following question about your political/social views from 1 = "Very left" to 7 = "Very right."

	Very left	-	-	-	-	-	Very right
How would you rate your political views?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How would you rate your social views?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How would you rate your economic views?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### **Link to the videos that were used in the questionnaire**

#### *War Information condition*

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-mpBarKSpKVkTxJsPB4HvU9K\\_hwFXPwo/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-mpBarKSpKVkTxJsPB4HvU9K_hwFXPwo/view?usp=share_link)

#### *Control condition*

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/18N2nw-TGuAzGpyp6BbPOz-r1AVAjKvw6/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/18N2nw-TGuAzGpyp6BbPOz-r1AVAjKvw6/view?usp=share_link)

**Table 2***Dependent Variable: Empathy*

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Exposure	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
war	5,3640	1,18443	102
control	4,9654	1,11761	123
Total	5,1461	1,16291	225

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