

Fueling Hate: The Power of Threatened Identity

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PSB3E-BT15: Bachelor Thesis

Group 11

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October, 2025

Abstract

Political polarisation has become a defining feature of contemporary democratic societies, eroding social cohesion and hindering constructive dialogue. While prior research has examined ideological differences in values, less is known about how the personal importance of identity interacts with political orientation to shape extreme emotional responses such as hate. This paper examined whether identity centrality predicts hate responses to perceived threats to a personally meaningful identity and whether political orientation moderates this relationship. U.S.-based participants recruited via Prolific completed measures of identity centrality, political orientation, and hate. Multiple regression analyses tested these associations. Results showed that higher identity centrality was associated with stronger hate responses, though this effect approached significance. Political orientation alone did not predict hate but moderated the relationship between centrality and hate. Among left-leaning participants, greater identity centrality was associated with stronger hate, whereas this association was weak and nonsignificant among right-leaning participants. These findings suggest that identity salience plays a central role in the emotional dynamics of political disagreement.

Keywords: political orientation; identity centrality; identity threat; hate

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Introduction

Political polarisation has become a defining feature of contemporary democratic societies, eroding trust, weakening social cohesion, and making constructive dialogue increasingly difficult (Finkel et al., 2020). While some of this division reflects cognitive polarisation, or disagreement over policies and ideological positions (Boxell, Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2020), research increasingly points to a deeper psychological divide. Affective polarisation refers to negative emotional reactions toward political outgroups, including dislike, distrust, and hostility (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Lelkes, 2021). This shift reflects a move from disagreement over issues to antagonism between identities.

Affective polarisation intensifies when political affiliations become personally meaningful. When individuals view a political identity as central to who they are, conflicting viewpoints may feel like threats to the self, rather than mere differences of opinion (Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015). Such identity-relevant threats can evoke emotional responses that exceed irritation or frustration. Hate, defined as a combination of anger, disgust, and contempt (Sternberg, 2003; Zeki & Romaya, 2008), represents one of the most intense outcomes of affective polarisation. Hate is important to examine because it is associated with out-group dehumanisation, partisan discrimination, and support for intergroup hostility (Bruneau et al., 2018; Kalmoe & Mason, 2022).

However, individuals differ in how central particular identities are to their self-concept. Identity centrality refers to the extent to which an identity forms a core part of the self and guides how individuals interpret social experiences (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Smith & Mackie, 2007). When an identity is highly central, threats to it are experienced as personal attacks, eliciting stronger defensive and emotional responses (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). This

suggests that identity centrality may help explain why some individuals respond to identity-relevant threats with hate, while others do not.

At the same time, the ideological framework through which individuals interpret identity threats may also shape emotional reactions. Political orientation reflects broader moral and value commitments (Haidt, 2012) and influences which types of issues are perceived as meaningful or threatening (Napier & Jost, 2008; Federico & Malka, 2018). Thus, the emotional consequences of identity threats may depend not only on how central an identity is, but also on the ideological lens through which the threat is evaluated.

Together, these perspectives suggest that hate in political contexts may arise from the interaction between the personal importance of an identity and the political orientation that shapes its meaning. This forms the rationale for examining whether identity centrality predicts hate responses and whether this relationship differs across the ideological spectrum.

Literature Review

Political Orientation and Ideological Values

Political orientation reflects a broad ideological framework that shapes how individuals believe society should be organised and governed (Haidt, 2012; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). While it is often correlated with partisanship, political orientation is conceptually distinct. Rather than indicating loyalty to a party, it describes the underlying values and moral priorities that guide political judgment and interpretation of social issues (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012).

Research informed by Moral Foundations Theory provides a structured account of these ideological differences (Haidt, 2012; Graham et al., 2013). Conservatives tend to place greater emphasis on values associated with tradition, respect for authority, and group cohesion, whereas

liberals typically prioritise values related to fairness, equality, and protection from harm. These value orientations influence which social issues are considered morally significant and how individuals evaluate actions, norms, and policies.

Crucially, political orientation does not simply reflect what people believe, but how they evaluate the meaning and relevance of identity-related information. When identity-relevant issues arise, ideological values shape whether these issues are interpreted as morally important, socially consequential, or personally meaningful (Napier & Jost, 2008; Federico & Malka, 2018). In this way, political orientation provides a contextual lens through which identity threats are understood and emotionally processed.

Thus, political orientation is relevant not because it predicts emotional intensity in and of itself, but because it shapes the significance assigned to the identity being threatened. This establishes the theoretical basis for examining whether political orientation modifies the extent to which identity centrality predicts hate responses in politically charged contexts.

Political Orientation and Value-Based Identities

Political orientation does not only reflect ideological beliefs; it also shapes which identities individuals consider personally meaningful. For some people, political values become deeply tied to the self, such that disagreement about these values is experienced as a challenge to one's identity rather than a difference in perspective (Smith & Mackie, 2007). When political beliefs are integrated into the self-concept, identity-relevant issues are interpreted as personally significant, which can amplify emotional reactions to perceived threats.

However, individuals differ in the extent to which political values become identity-defining. Some liberals and conservatives treat political beliefs as core aspects of who they are,

whereas others view them as peripheral preferences. This variation helps explain why individuals with the same political orientation do not necessarily respond in the same way to identity threats. Previous work shows that when political values are central, conflicting viewpoints are more likely to be interpreted as hostile or morally threatening (Napier & Jost, 2008). Conversely, when political values are less central, ideological disagreement is more likely to be perceived as non-personal and less emotionally consequential.

This perspective highlights that political orientation alone does not determine emotional responses. Instead, the emotional impact of political conflict depends on whether political values are incorporated into one's identity. This establishes a conceptual bridge to the role of identity centrality in shaping emotional reactions to identity-relevant threats.

Identity Threats and Emotional Responses

Identity threats occur when an individual perceives that an important aspect of their self-concept is challenged, dismissed, or devalued (Smith & Mackie, 2007). Such threats may involve demographic, preference-based, or value-based identities, and can arise in everyday social interactions or broader political contexts. The intensity of the emotional response depends on how central the threatened identity is to the self.

When a central identity is threatened, the situation is interpreted as personally significant, which increases the likelihood of strong adverse emotional reactions (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Threats to valued identities can evoke anger in response to perceived injustice, disgust toward perceived moral violation, and contempt toward the threatening outgroup (Sternberg, 2003). These emotional components are especially likely to co-occur when the threat is experienced as meaningful and self-relevant.

Importantly, not all identity threats produce the same emotional intensity. Individuals whose identities are less central are more likely to interpret challenges as disagreements rather than as personal attacks, leading to weaker emotional reactions (Roccas et al., 2008). This distinction reinforces the idea that identity centrality is a key determinant of emotional responses to identity-relevant conflict, providing a theoretical basis for examining its role in predicting hate.

Affective Polarisation and Hate

Affective polarisation refers to negative emotional reactions toward political outgroups, including distrust, dislike, and hostility (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Lelkes, 2021). While cognitive polarisation concerns differences in policy preferences, affective polarisation reflects how individuals feel about those on the opposing side. These emotional reactions can intensify when political identities are personally meaningful and perceived as threatened.

One of the most extreme outcomes of affective polarisation is hate, conceptualised as the co-occurrence of anger, disgust, and contempt (Sternberg, 2003; Zeki & Romaya, 2008). Hate is academically and socially significant because it is associated with outgroup dehumanisation, moral exclusion, and support for hostile or aggressive responses toward the opposing side (Bruneau et al., 2018; Kalmoe & Mason, 2022).

This suggests that hate is not produced simply by ideological disagreement, but may arise when identity-relevant conflict intersects with ideological meaning. Understanding when and for whom identity threats elicit hate is, therefore, key to explaining emotional escalation in political contexts.

Identity Centrality as a Predictor

Identity centrality refers to the extent to which a particular identity forms a core part of the self and guides how individuals interpret the social world (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Smith & Mackie, 2007). When an identity is highly central, it is chronically accessible, emotionally meaningful, and used as a primary reference point in evaluating social situations (Stryker & Burke, 2000). As a result, threats involving central identities are experienced not merely as external disagreement but as direct challenges to the self.

Research shows that identity centrality intensifies emotional responses to identity-relevant threats. When individuals perceive a threat to an identity that is important to their self-concept, they report stronger negative emotional reactions, including anger, contempt, and hostility (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). This occurs because central identities are tied to self-esteem and psychological security; defending the identity also means defending the self associated with it (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Roccas et al., 2008).

This framework suggests that identity centrality should predict hate responses to perceived identity threats. When an identity is central, challenges to it are more likely to be interpreted as personally meaningful and morally significant, activating the components of hate—anger, disgust, and contempt (Sternberg, 2003). Thus, central identities are expected to produce more intense emotional reactions when threatened.

Research Gap, Question, and Hypotheses

Despite growing research on affective polarisation, less is known about how individual differences shape emotional responses to identity-relevant conflict. Prior work has focused mainly on differences between ideological groups (e.g., liberals vs. conservatives), often treating them as internally homogeneous. This leaves open the question of why some individuals

experience strong hate responses when their political identity is threatened, while others with the same political orientation react less intensely.

This paper addresses this gap by examining how identity centrality and political orientation jointly shape hate responses to perceived identity threats. Specifically, it asks: To what extent does identity centrality predict hate responses to perceived identity threats, and does political orientation moderate this relationship?

Guided by social identity theory, which proposes that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group memberships and therefore defend central identities more strongly when they are challenged (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and by research on identity threat sensitivity (Jost et al., 2003), the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1. Higher identity centrality will be associated with higher hate responses.

Hypothesis 2. Political orientation will moderate the relationship between identity centrality and hate responses.

Methods

Participants

This study used data from a larger research project that initially recruited 608 U.S.-based adults through Prolific. During data collection for the larger project, one experimental condition (the no-threat control) was removed because of a persistent imbalance in cell size, rendering it unsuitable for analysis. Recruitment continued to ensure an adequate sample size across the remaining conditions.

For the present analyses, participants were excluded if they withdrew consent ($n = 4$), failed an attention check ($n = 14$), or provided duplicate responses ($n = 4$). This resulted in a final analytical sample of 497 participants, which was used for all analyses in this thesis.

Of these participants, 250 identified as female (50.3%), 244 as male (49.1%), and 3 as another gender (0.6%). Ages ranged from 18 to 81 ($M = 39.25$, $SD = 13.56$). The sample was pre-screened to achieve variation in political orientation ($M = -0.170$, on a scale ranging from $-1 =$ very liberal to $+1 =$ very conservative).

Design and Power Analysis

The data analysed in this thesis were drawn from a larger experimental project that employed a 3 (identity domain: demographics, preferences, values) $\times 2$ (threat type: categorisation vs. distinctiveness) between-subjects design. However, the present thesis does not examine the experimental manipulation conditions. Instead, it focuses on the correlational relationships between identity centrality, political orientation, and hate responses. Accordingly, the analyses conducted here are cross-sectional and correlational.

An a priori power analysis for the larger project indicated that a minimum sample size of $N = 330$ was required to detect a medium effect size ($f = 0.25$) with $\alpha = .05$ and 90% power. Recruitment was increased during data collection to improve balance across experimental conditions, resulting in an initial sample of 608 participants. Following exclusions and removal of the no-threat control condition in the broader dataset, the final analytical sample for the present thesis consisted of 497 U.S.-based participants.

Measures

Hate Responses

Hate responses were measured using a modified version of the Passionate Hate Scale (Zeki & Romaya, 2008), which assesses the emotional components of hate: anger, disgust, and contempt. The scale consisted of 13 items: 4 for each emotional component and one attention-check item. Example items included anger (e.g., “I cannot control my anger towards this kind of person”), disgust (e.g., “This kind of person is really distrusting”), and contempt (e.g., “The world would be a better place without this kind of person”). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). One item per subscale was reverse-coded, and the attention-check item was excluded from scoring. A composite hate score was calculated by averaging the 12 substantive items, with higher scores indicating stronger hate responses. Internal consistency in the present sample was excellent ($\alpha = .94$).

Identity Centrality

Identity centrality was measured using a profile-based prioritisation task as part of a larger research project conducted at the University of Groningen that investigated responses to identity-based threats. Participants were presented with identity facets spanning three domains: demographic (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age), preference-based (e.g., hobbies, lifestyle interests), and value-based (e.g., political views, social causes).

Within each domain, participants selected the facet they identified with most strongly. Then they rated how central this facet was to their self-concept on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all central*, 7 = *extremely central*).

For the present thesis, identity centrality was operationalised as the mean of the three centrality ratings, with higher scores indicating a greater integration of personally meaningful identities into the self-concept. Because this measure involves self-selected facets rather than

multiple items assessing the same construct, internal consistency (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) is not applicable.

Political Orientation

Political orientation was measured using a single-item continuous slider ranging from -1 (very liberal) through 0 (moderate) to $+1$ (very conservative). Participants indicated their position by moving the slider to the point that best reflected their political views. The resulting score captured both direction (negative = liberal, positive = conservative) and strength (absolute distance from zero) of political orientation. This variable was treated as a continuous predictor in the analyses to test its main effect and moderating role in the relationship between identity centrality and hate responses.

Because this measure relies on self-reported ideological placement, scores may not perfectly reflect participants' long-term or deeply held political identity.

Procedure

Data were collected online via Qualtrics using a pre-screened sample of U.S.-based participants recruited through Prolific. After providing informed consent, participants first completed a profile task in which they selected and described personally meaningful identity facets (e.g., political orientation, gender, hobbies, social values). This task formed part of the broader project's experimental design, which included threat manipulation; however, the present thesis does not analyse or utilise the threat manipulation or related feedback.

After completing the profile task, participants completed the three measures used in this thesis: identity centrality, political orientation, and hate responses. An attention-check item was

included to ensure data quality. On average, participation took approximately 18 minutes. The study received ethical approval from the University of Groningen's Ethics Committee.

Analytical Strategy

All analyses were conducted in Jamovi (version 2.6.44). Prior to hypothesis testing, the dataset was screened for missing values, outliers, and violations of regression assumptions. Normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals were examined visually and statistically, with no substantial deviations detected. Zero-order correlations indicated that identity centrality and political orientation were not strongly correlated, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern.

To test H1, a multiple regression model was conducted with identity centrality entered as the predictor and hate responses as the outcome variable. To test H2, a second regression model was conducted that included an interaction term (identity centrality $\times$ political orientation) to examine whether political orientation moderated the relationship between identity centrality and hate responses.

Where the interaction was significant, simple slopes analyses were conducted at low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of political orientation. Estimated marginal means plots were generated to illustrate the interaction. The alpha level for all analyses was set to .05.

Results

Preliminary assumption checks indicated that the data met the assumptions of independence, homoscedasticity, linearity, and normality, and no extreme outliers were identified. All continuous predictors were mean-centred to facilitate the interpretation of interaction effects.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations for Main Study Variables (N = 497)*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Identity centrality	6.12	0.69	—		
2. Political orientation	0.18	0.68	0.02	—	
3. Hate responses	3.91	1.18	0.07	-0.04	—

Note. Political orientation was coded from -1 (very liberal) to +1 (very conservative). N = 497.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for the main study variables. On average, participants reported relatively high identity centrality ($M = 6.12$, $SD = 0.69$), indicating that most considered their chosen identity facets as personally important. Hate responses showed moderate variability ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.18$), suggesting meaningful individual differences in negative reactions to identity threats. Political orientation scores ($M = 0.18$, $SD = 0.68$) were close to the midpoint of the scale, reflecting a relatively balanced sample of liberals and conservatives.

Correlation analyses revealed no significant bivariate associations among identity centrality, political orientation, and hate responses (all $ps > .10$). This means that neither political orientation nor identity centrality alone showed a strong linear relationship with hate at the zero-order level. These weak correlations are important because they suggest that main effects may not

emerge unless tested within a model that accounts for interaction effects. Thus, the descriptives set the stage for evaluating the hypotheses: whether identity centrality predicts hate responses (H1) and whether political orientation moderates this relationship (H2).

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 2

Multiple Regression Predicting Hate Responses from Identity Centrality and Political Orientation

Predictor	B	SE B	t	p
Intercept	3.91	0.05	74.78	< .001
Identity centrality (z)	0.09	0.05	1.70	.090
Political orientation (z)	-0.03	0.05	-0.63	.532
IC × PO	-0.11	0.06	-1.92	.055

Note. Note. Dependent variable = hate responses. Identity centrality and Political orientation are z-standardised; the interaction term reflects IC × PO.

Table 2 presents the multiple regression analysis used to test H1 and H2. The model accounted for a small proportion of variance in hate responses ($R^2 = .014$), meaning the model explains 1.4% of the variance in hate responses.. Identity centrality showed a positive but non-significant association with hate ($B = 0.09$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 1.70$, $p = .090$), indicating only a weak tendency for individuals who viewed their identities as more central to report stronger hate responses. Thus, H1 was not supported.

Political orientation was also unrelated to hate ($B = -0.03$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -0.63$, $p = .532$), suggesting no meaningful difference in baseline levels of hate across the ideological spectrum.

The interaction between identity centrality and political orientation approached significance ($B = -0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = -1.92$, $p = .055$). This pattern suggests a potential moderation effect: identity centrality may relate more strongly to hate among liberals than among conservatives. However, because the interaction did not meet the conventional $\alpha = .05$ threshold, this trend should be interpreted cautiously. To further probe this pattern, simple slopes analyses were conducted (see Table 3).

Simple Slopes Analysis

Table 3

Simple Slopes of Identity Centrality Predicting Hate at Low, Mean, and High Levels of Political Orientation

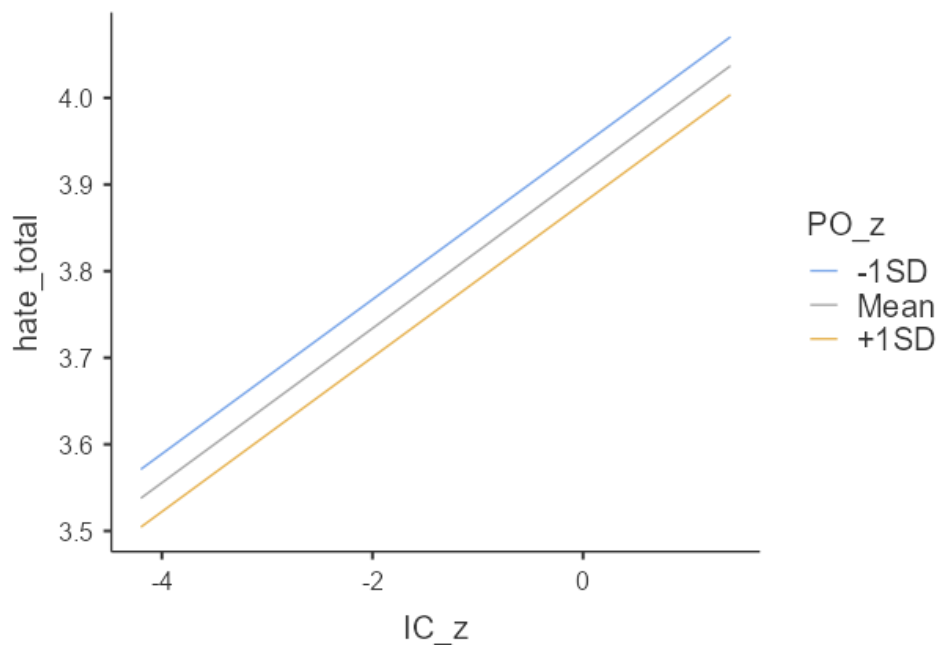
Political Orientation	B	SE B	t	p
-1 SD (liberal)	0.20	0.08	2.50	.013
Mean (0)	0.09	0.05	1.70	.090
+1 SD (conservative)	-0.02	0.07	-0.24	.815

Note. Simple slopes estimated at -1 SD, mean, and +1 SD of political orientation (z).

To explore the marginal interaction, simple slopes analyses were conducted at low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of political orientation (see Table 3). Among liberals (-1 SD), identity centrality significantly predicted hate responses ($B = 0.20$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 2.50$, $p = .013$), indicating that when liberal participants perceived an identity as highly central to their sense of self, they reported stronger hate responses. At the mean level of political orientation, the association was positive but non-significant ($B = 0.90$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 1.70$, $p = .090$). Among conservatives ($+1$ SD), the relationship was negligible and non-significant ($B = -0.08$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -0.24$, $p = .815$).

Thus, the tendency for identity centrality to predict heightened hate responses appeared only among liberals. However, because the overall interaction in the regression model did not reach significance ($p = .055$), this pattern should be interpreted with caution, and H2 was not supported.

Figure 1



Note. The lines are approximately parallel, indicating that the relationship between identity centrality and hate responses did not vary meaningfully across levels of political orientation.

Figure 1 shows the simple slopes of identity centrality predicting hate responses at low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of political orientation. The lines in the figure are essentially parallel and closely overlapping, indicating little visual evidence of a moderation effect. Although the simple slopes analysis suggested that identity centrality predicted hate responses among more liberal participants (-1 SD), the plotted pattern did not show this effect, and the slopes for moderate and conservative participants were near zero.

Consistent with this visual pattern, the interaction between identity centrality and political orientation in the regression model did not reach conventional significance ($p = .055$). Therefore, this pattern should be interpreted as exploratory, and H2 was not supported.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

This thesis investigated whether the personal importance of an identity predicts hate responses when that identity is threatened, and whether this relationship differs across levels of political orientation. The findings did not support the prediction that individuals with more central identities would reliably express stronger hate in response to a threat. Likewise, political orientation alone was not associated with differences in hate reactions.

However, there was an indication that the role of identity centrality may vary across ideological contexts. The association between identity centrality and hate was evident only among more liberal participants, while this pattern was weak or absent among moderates and

conservatives. This suggests that the emotional impact of identity threats may depend not only on how central an identity is to the self, but also on the broader interpretative frameworks through which individuals understand and evaluate identity-relevant experiences.

Interpretation of Results

The findings suggest that the emotional impact of identity threats depends on how individuals understand and relate to their identities. Although identity centrality did not consistently predict hate responses across the full sample, the pattern observed among more liberal participants indicates that identity threats may carry greater emotional weight when identity is experienced as personally meaningful and self-defining. Liberal individuals are often more likely to construct identity in expressive terms, reflecting personal values, commitments, and moral orientations, such that threats to these identities are experienced as threats to the self (Jost et al., 2003; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). In this context, hate responses may emerge as a defensive reaction aimed at protecting or reaffirming a valued aspect of identity (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999).

In contrast, identity centrality did not appear to shape hate responses among moderate or conservative participants. One possibility is that, for these individuals, identity may function less as a domain of personal self-expression and more as a reflection of social norms, group membership, or stability within familiar social structures (Haidt, 2012; Jost et al., 2007). If so, identity threats may be interpreted less self-referentially, thereby eliciting weaker emotional backlash. This pattern aligns with research suggesting ideological differences in how the self is constructed and protected, particularly with respect to the moral significance of identity-relevant experiences (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Napier & Jost, 2008).

Taken together, these findings indicate that identity-based hate responses cannot be understood solely by examining how important an identity is to the self. Instead, the meaning frameworks through which identity is interpreted—such as those tied to political ideology—shape whether identity threats are experienced as personally injurious and emotionally provocative.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The present findings contribute to ongoing discussions about how identity processes shape emotional responses to threat. While identity centrality did not consistently predict hate across the whole sample, the pattern observed among liberal participants suggests that the emotional consequences of identity threats depend on how identities are psychologically constructed and experienced. This highlights the importance of considering not only how central an identity is, but also how it is understood and integrated into one's sense of self. The results therefore support theoretical perspectives that emphasise the role of identity-meaning frameworks in shaping emotional and defensive reactions to threat.

Practically, the findings point to the potential value of operational variability in how individuals respond to identity-relevant conflict. Hate responses are not simply a function of “being threatened,” but appear more likely when the threatened identity carries strong personal significance and moral weight. This suggests that interventions aimed at reducing hostile or defensive reactions may benefit from focusing on how identity is framed and communicated, rather than on downplaying the threat itself. For example, in contexts such as political discussion, online disagreement, or social group conflict, strategies that encourage individuals to articulate identity positions in less self-defining or absolutist terms may help to reduce the intensity of emotional backlash.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this thesis is that it examined hate responses in the context of personally meaningful identities, allowing for a nuanced understanding of when identity threats evoke strong emotional reactions. By operationalising identity centrality through self-selected identity facets, the study captured the subjective relevance of identity, rather than relying on pre-assigned group labels. This approach provides insight into the variability in identity meaning across individuals and ideological contexts. Additionally, the use of simple slopes analysis allowed for a more refined interpretation of the potential moderating role of political orientation, rather than assuming uniform effects across the sample.

However, several limitations should be considered. The interaction between identity centrality and political orientation did not reach conventional statistical significance, meaning the observed pattern should be interpreted cautiously. It is possible that the identities participants selected differed systematically across ideological groups, which may have influenced how they experienced identity threat. Furthermore, the study relied on self-report measures, which may be sensitive to social desirability or self-presentation concerns, particularly in the context of hate. Finally, the cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about causality, as identity centrality and ideological interpretation may shape one another over time.

Overall, these limitations do not undermine the value of the findings but highlight the importance of examining identity meaning, ideological context, and emotional reactivity together. They also point to productive directions for future research.

Future Research

Future research could more directly examine how individuals construct and interpret their central identities across ideological contexts. Since the present pattern appeared primarily among liberal participants, it would be helpful to explore the types of identities individuals prioritise as central, and how these identities carry different forms of personal or moral meaning. Qualitative or mixed-method approaches may help to clarify how identity significance is articulated and emotionally defended. Additionally, experimental designs that manipulate identity framing or identity threat may offer stronger evidence about the causal processes linking personal identity meaning to emotional reactivity. Such research would deepen understanding of when and for whom identity threats elicit strong negative responses, and how these dynamics operate within broader ideological and social contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined how the personal importance of identity relates to emotional responses when that identity is threatened, and whether this relationship varies across political orientation. While identity centrality did not consistently predict hate responses across the full sample, the pattern observed among liberal participants suggests that the emotional impact of identity threats depends on how identities are understood and integrated into the self. These findings underscore the importance of considering the meaning of identity, rather than its centrality alone, when examining reactions to threat. By highlighting the role of ideological context in shaping identity-based emotional responses, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how individuals experience and defend valued aspects of the self. In doing so, it points toward the need for continued research on how identity, ideology, and emotional expression interact within social and political conflict.

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Appendix

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2024) and Grammarly Premium to support the drafting of this thesis.

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT to generate background materials, refine language, and provide structural guidance. Grammarly Premium was also used for language refinement and structural guidance. Additionally, I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT to generate materials that were included in my work in a modified form, such as: Feldman, S., & Stenner, K. (1997) - Perceived threat and authoritarianism; Jost, J. T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A. W., & Sulloway, F. J. (2003) - Political conservatism as motivated social cognition; Stryker, S., & Serpe, R. T. (1994). Identity salience and psychological centrality -Equivalent, overlapping, or complementary concepts?; Leikes, Y. (2021) - Affective polarization and its measurement.

The following prompts were input into ChatGPT:

- *“Can you revise this paragraph to improve flow and remove redundant language?”*
- *“Revise this paragraph to eliminate repetition while keeping key information intact.”*
- *“Make this section flow better between paragraphs.”*
- *“Suggest relevant sources for X section”* (all of the used articles mentioned above were checked properly and read)
- *“Rephrase this title to make it sound more captivating”*
- *“What would be the best way to do X in Jamovi”*

The output obtained was:

- Relevant sources (as aforementioned, all of the used articles mentioned above were correctly checked and read)
- Drafted and reworded sections of text (mainly reworded paragraphs for better flow and clarity)
- Suggested titles and improved section transitions
- Suggested various methods for statistical analysis

The use of Grammarly:

- Used to check grammar in the entire text and refine sentences

I changed the output in the following ways:

- All AI-generated content was critically reviewed, fact-checked, and rewritten as needed to align with my research findings, academic tone, and methodological context.
- I edited the wording, adjusted the structure, and manually integrated academic references to ensure accuracy and originality.
- Any statistical interpretations were verified using my results and judgment.