

Unraveling the Relationship Between Threat from Escalation and Public Support for Peace in Cyprus

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Threat and Policy Preference During Conflicts

- People living in conflict zones live in constant concern that the conflict will escalate.
- How does this concern shape public support for conflict-related policies?
Two competing rationales seem plausible:
 - The higher the perceived threat, the *higher* the support for dovish policies.
 - The higher the perceived threat, the *lower* the support for dovish policies.
- Studies show mixed results about the consequences of threat during conflict.

(Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Gordon & Arian, 2001; Huddy et al., 2002; 2005, 2007)

Threat Perceptions

Most work on threat from violence examines peoples' perceptions of the *likelihood* of future violence.

However, people might also consider the *severity* of future violence.

Work on risk assessment (e.g., Slovic & Peters 2006) shows that people indeed take these two factors into account.

Threat Amidst Violent Conflict

The Question:

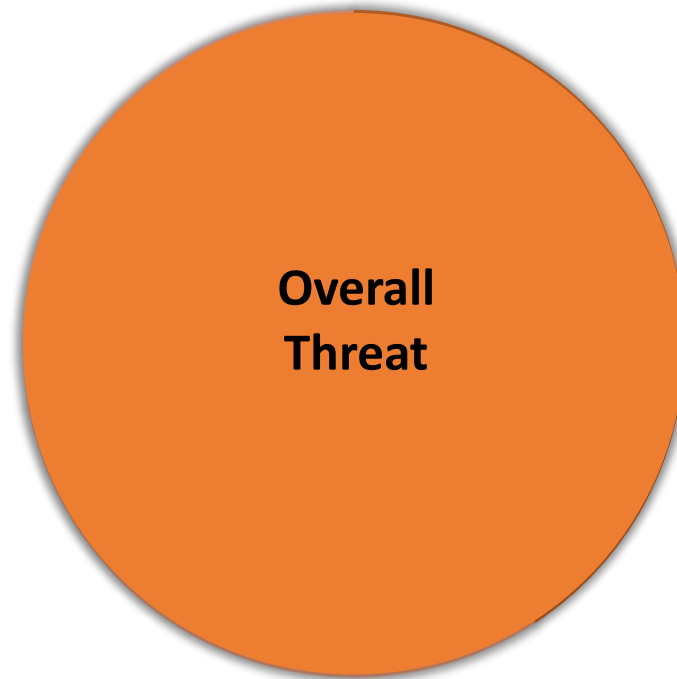
How do the two components of threat relate to policy preference during conflict?

Our Hypothesis:

The higher the perceived *severity* of escalation, the more people will be eager to hasten peace and consequently *the more* they will support dovish policies.

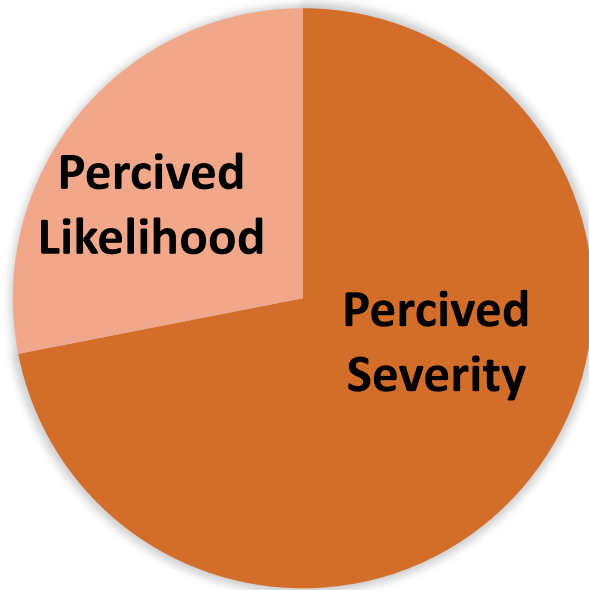
At the same time, the higher the perceived *likelihood* of escalation, the less people will believe peace is possible and consequently, *the less* they will support dovish policies.

The Structure of Threat Perceptions



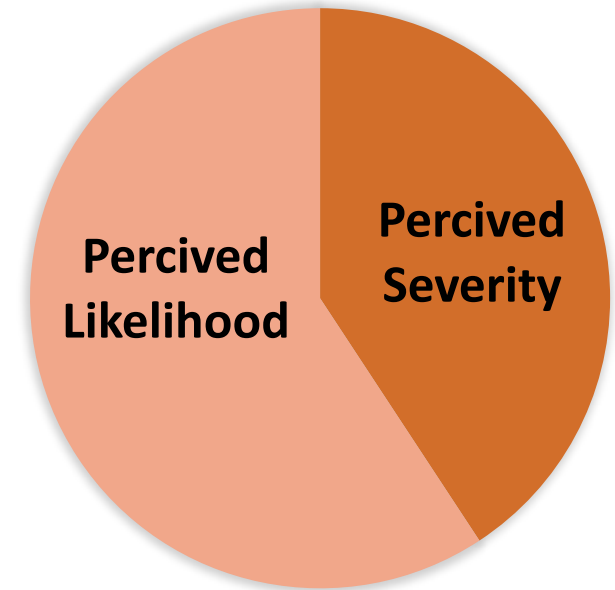
We postulated that individuals' structure of threat perceptions will be associated with their policy preference

THREAT PERCEPTIONS OF PERSON 1



More supportive of dovish policies

THREAT PERCEPTIONS OF PERSON 2



Less supportive of dovish policies

The Study: More than 1000 Turkish and Greek Cypriots were surveyed about their threats from conflict escalation (likelihood/severity) and their support for dovish policies (willingness to compromise/support for peacebuilding).

Results

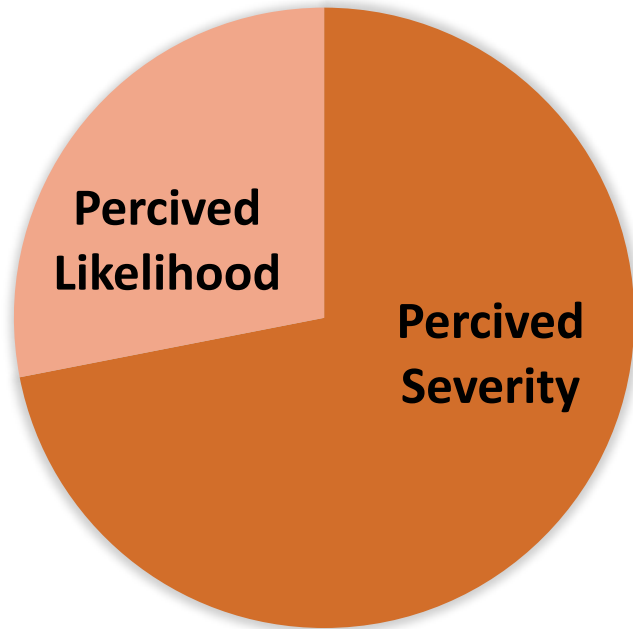
Does the structure of threat predict support for dovish policies?

Yes!

The more Cypriots' threat from escalation stemmed from the perceived severity of escalation rather than its likelihood, the higher their support for dovish policies ($\beta = 0.1, p = 0.03$).

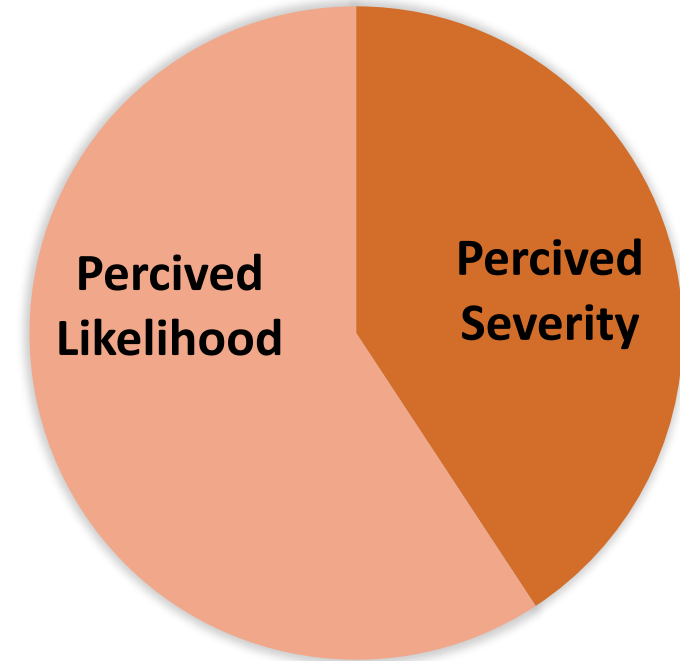
This trend replicated in each national sample.

**PERCEIVED SEVERITY >
PERCEIVED LIKELIHOOD**



More supportive of dovish policies

**PERCEIVED SEVERITY <
PERCEIVED LIKELIHOOD**

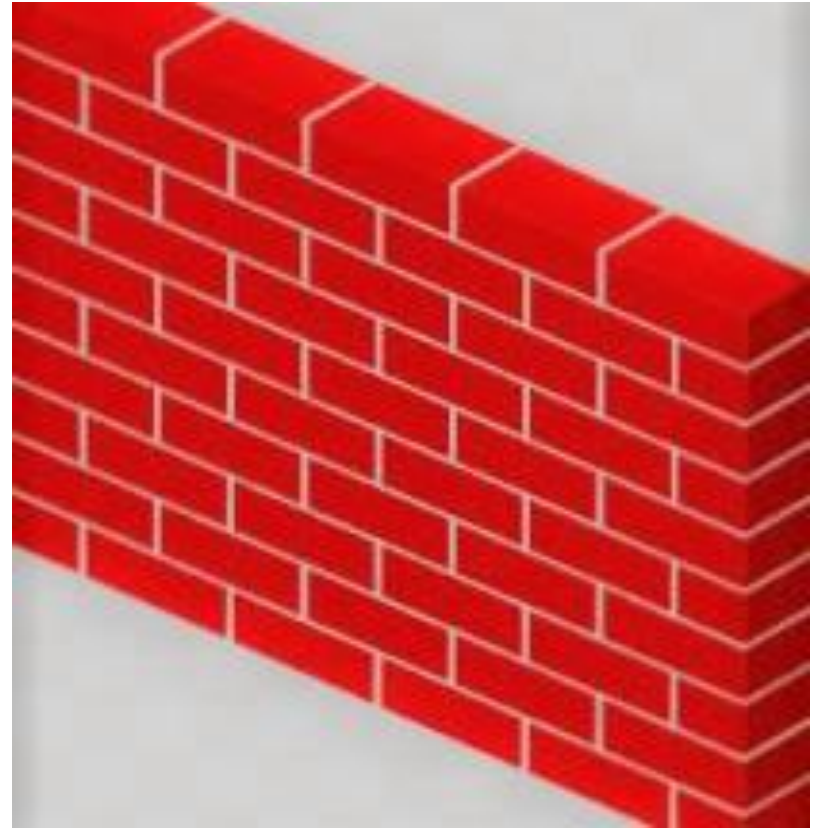
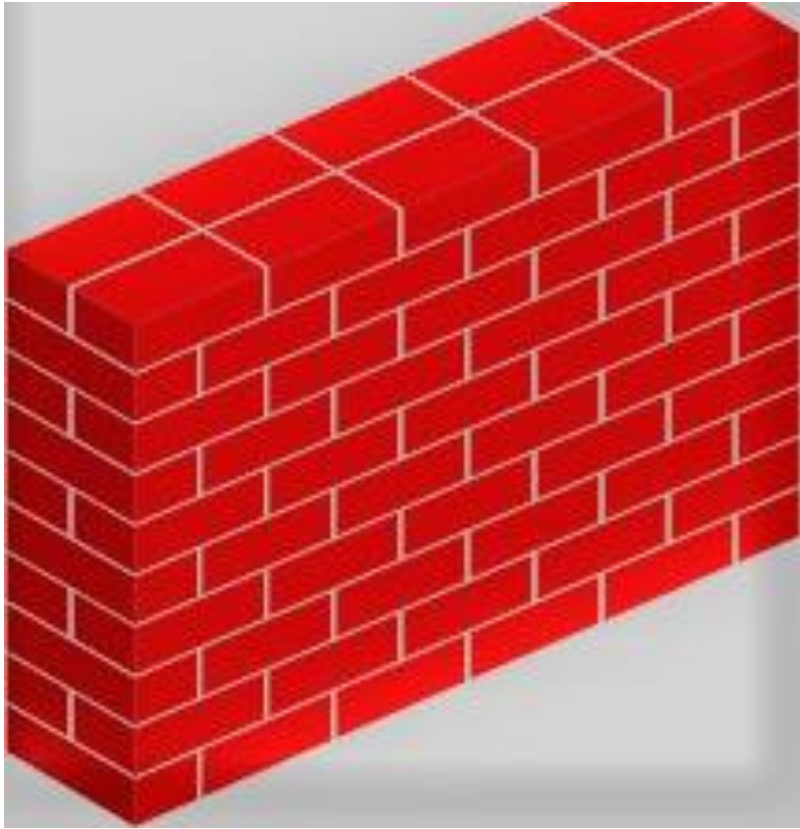


Less supportive of dovish policies

Conclusions

- People whose threats stem more from the severity of violence rather than its likelihood will tend to support dovish policies compared with those whose threat structure is reverse.
- This was shown across the two societies and, in fact, replicated our findings from Israel-Palestine. In all, our theory holds in four societies living in very different conflict contexts ($N = 1,885$).
- Future work should examine the impact of the structure of threat in other political contexts.

Questions?



Threat is based on perceived **likelihood** of harm



Threat is based on perceived **severity** of harm