

# Terror threats and civil liberties: when do citizens accept infringements of civil liberties?

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## Abstract

Threats from subversive or threatening enemies are sometimes invoked by governments to justify infringements of civil liberties. The present article is concerned with the factors likely to affect citizen acceptance of such infringements as legitimate and necessary. A survey was conducted to evaluate the disposition of respondents to the relative prioritisation of security over civil liberties. The results indicate that even in a rather secure setting, where threats from terror can be considered relatively distant, citizens have a disposition towards prioritising security, although this depends on the degree of anxiety, political trust and general social trust. Anxiety leads to greater willingness to accept infringements, as does trust in government while general social trust leads to smaller receptiveness in this respect.

**Keywords:** Civil liberties; trust; anxiety; terrorism; Iceland

## Introduction

Under which conditions are people likely to accept infringements of civil rights and liberties? The issue has gained considerable prominence during the COVID-19 crisis putting the difficult choice of weighing rights against other social outcomes in focus.



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But the issue is not a new one. Threats of all kinds, from epidemics to war and terror have always been used by governments to impose stricter controls on citizens. The question is how far and under which conditions citizens are willing to accept infringements on their civil liberties. To a certain degree, infringements may be accepted by citizens as necessary and reasonable. However, at some point the government response to threats of terror may become a threat in its own right, infringing on civil liberties, personal freedom and the viability of democracy. The question of how far, when, or why citizens will accept such infringements is therefore of crucial importance to the liberal democratic order. Are citizens easily persuaded or stubbornly resistant to infringements of civil liberties in the face of imminent danger?

The present paper is concerned with the factors which affect one's general disposition to accept measures infringing upon civil liberties in order to protect important values. These measures can include the wiretapping of phone calls, monitoring of emails, and stop-and-search tactics employed by police officers on the street. We consider which factors influence dispositions among the public to prioritize security over civil liberties. Threat perceptions are likely to contribute to citizen acceptance of infringements. Under severe threat, people are likely to consider infringements more positively than in cases of relatively minor or peripheral danger. Anxiety seems likely to encourage acceptance of infringements, if they are perceived as creating a stronger feeling of security. This may especially be the case if the government enjoys the trust of its citizens. A trusted government will be perceived as less likely to abuse extraordinary powers and more likely to achieve effective results in the fight against terrorism. Another trust-related factor which may affect acceptance of infringements relates to general social trust, i.e. trust in other people. Anti-terrorism measures are meant to protect people from others in society. Citizens who perceive each other as trustworthy are potentially less likely to accept such measures as necessary. High levels of social trust may thus lead to smaller tolerance of government controls. The present paper is concerned with the effects of terrorism on public attitudes towards infringements of civil liberties. The research is set in a country with no direct experience of terrorism, i.e. Iceland. Despite harsh nature and the occasional epidemic, Iceland was considered, according to the Global Peace Index, the safest place on earth in 2020 for the 12th year running (Global Peace Index, 2020). Not only is there no experience of terrorist acts in Iceland; the country has no military forces, a mostly unarmed police force and a long history of non-violent politics, despite some frictions following the economic crash of 2008. The last deaths from political violence in Iceland occurred in the sixteenth century.

Iceland may thus be considered a least likely scenario for acceptance of infringements to curb terroristic threat. To most Icelanders the threat from terrorism is likely to seem distant. This puts the anxiety thesis to a severe test since it may require quite a leap of imagination for many Icelanders to consider harsh response to situations of terror. Our research is intended to show if - even in this relatively peaceful corner of the world - the suggestion of terror may increase acceptance of infringements.

Our research starts with an overview of civil liberties and terrorism in an Icelandic context and an exploration of some of the theoretical literature for clues as to which factors are likely to affect people's acceptance of infringements of civil liberties in the face of terror. This is followed by a description of the variables used, and a statistical analysis using dispositions towards prioritising security over civil liberties as the dependent variable.<sup>1</sup> We hypothesize that high levels of anxiety and political trust will increase the odds of Icelanders having a disposition that prioritises security whereas high social trust has the opposite effect. The findings are in line with our expectations.

## 1. Iceland, civil liberties and terrorism

In a global comparison, civil liberties are well protected in Iceland. The country often ranks around the top in global comparisons of democracy and protection of civil liberties, e.g. ranking second in 2020 on the Democracy Index after Norway (Economists Intelligence Unit 2020). Considering this, civil liberties were surprisingly ill protected by Iceland's legal system and the country failed to meet many of its obligations in international conventions on civil liberties, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, until well into the 1990's, after which various reforms and a revision of the constitution mended most of the issues. During that time, attitudes towards the protection and promotion of civil liberties in Iceland were viewed as a non-issue, as the prevailing view was that violations of civil liberties simply did not happen in Iceland (Heinreksdóttir 2004). With increased awareness, views have shifted on the subject and the last three decades have seen the rise of many organisations that specifically campaign for the promotion of civil and human rights in the country. Furthermore, in the wake of the attacks on 9/11 and despite overwhelming support for the U.S.'s war on terror, political elites in Iceland expressed frequent reservations of anti-terrorism measures that were seen as going too far in breaching civil liberties (Salton 2002). The question remains if the Icelanders' attachment to civil liberties is as might be expected given the high rank Iceland attains in international comparisons of democracies. Given a binary choice between civil liberties and security, perhaps many would prioritise security, especially during a crisis.

Fimreite and colleagues (2013) point out that in Norway support for anti-terrorism measures that breach civil liberties was high compared to other nations, before the attack in Utøya in 2011 when the country had little direct experience of terrorism. They however found that right after the attacks, support for anti-terror measures fell, possibly due to calls by leaders that Norway should react to the attacks not with oppression but with more democracy. In the years after the attack, support for anti-terror measures rose back to previous levels. Iceland is geographically close to Norway. The countries have strong relations, are linguistically and culturally similar, and even share many institutional arrangements. There are however stark differences between the two countries in terms of security. Norway has a relatively large conscription-based army, and elaborate intelligence and security services; Iceland is without all three. Fimreite et al. (2013) con-

clude that the effects of the attack on Norway were in part guided by its political elite's response, its institutional framework, and the specificities of the attack itself. Still, it is possible that a similar incident would have a similar effect in Iceland and only temporarily disrupt dispositions towards the importance of security and civil liberties.

## 2. Disposition towards security and civil liberties

In examining respondents' relative attachments to civil liberties and security, the relationship was conceptualised in terms of priorities and dispositions. Disposition can be thought of as the values and norms on which individuals, to a large extent, rely on in their daily lives to make decisions and go about their day. Marcus et al.'s (2005) theory of affective intelligence demonstrates this view well: "For typical events (i.e., recurring events), individuals rely on the disposition system – on learned repertoires – to accomplish their goals" (pp. 950). However, when faced with unfamiliar or threatening circumstances the 'surveillance system' takes over to steer a new course, individuals become anxious, and contemporaneous information is prioritised over prior knowledge (Marcus et al. 2005).

Civil liberties are a crucial foundation and a necessary condition for the functioning of liberal democracy. However, Davis and Silver (2004) caution that when thinking about civil liberties, they should be thought of not as an attitude in and of itself, but rather as "contingent on the relevance of other important values" (p. 29). In other words, a deep-seated commitment to civil liberties is still conditional on its relation to other values. Davis and Silver (2004) suggest that "when they feel threatened, people who previously protected civil liberties and personal freedom may compromise on these values for greater security" (p. 38). Given the right circumstances individuals are often ready to secede some of their civil liberties in favour of other values or goods of greater importance, a well-worn example being security. Furthermore, despite the normative commitment of democratic societies to civil liberties as innate and inalienable, empirically they can be viewed as simply part of a matrix of competing values. In sum, disposition regarding civil liberties is neither the valuing of security nor the valuing of civil liberties on its own, but the disposition of individuals with regard to how they prioritise the values of civil liberties or security in relation to one another.

Terrorism, according to Wilkinson (2004) is directed at a wider audience than its immediate victims. It is meant to cause "a climate of extreme fear" (pp. 4). While not uncontested, Wilkinson's definition directs attention to a fundamental aspect of terrorism: its production of fear, insecurity, and anxiety (the term itself strongly suggests this feature). As mentioned above, much research points to the role of anxiety and other affective responses in changing the role of general dispositions in decision making, making individuals more available to contemporaneous information (Marcus et al. 2005; Albertson & Gadarian 2015). Given this, terrorism related anxiety seems to be a clear vehicle through which dispositions can be neutralised and political judgments influenced.

The capacity of the threat of terrorism to affect dispositions towards civil liberties and security in such a way in Iceland is not known, given the country's lack of experi-

ence of terroristic acts. It might be that in a small and trusting society like Iceland the perception that protection of civil liberties is paramount in order to protect society from an overreaching state is not very strong to begin with (Rykkje et al. 2011). According to Davis and Silver (2004) groups that have not had a reason to prioritise civil liberties tend to see them as less absolute, a category that might fit Icelanders well (Heinreksdóttir 2004; Salton 2002).

### 3. Effects of anxiety

As mentioned above, the concept of general disposition reflects people's learned repertoires for recurring decisions to be made, affecting their behaviour. Anxiety can be defined as a precursor to fear (Aly & Green 2010). Anxiety is known to alter cognition and can lead to severe behavioural changes focussed on minimizing threat and optimizing the feeling of safety (Maugen, Papa, & Litz 2008; Maner & Schmidt 2006; Maner et al. 2007; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal 2006). Anxious individuals tend to employ risk-averse decision making across a broad range of contexts, which is due to a general tendency to attribute negative outcomes to perceived risks. Anxiety can also be related to greater support for protective measures focussed on the source of a threat, even though the actual risks are relatively small. This is laid out neatly in a study by Lee and DeHart (2007), where the arousal of fear and anxiety of a suspected serial killer led members of the affected community to show support for various protective measures, even though the actual risk of being victimized was relatively low. An interesting parallel can be observed with regard to safeguarding the broader society against a variety of threats, where personal risk is likely to be relatively low, but the perceived societal impact is high (Slone 2000; Powell 2011; Goodwin & Gaines 2009; Wolfendale 2007). It is to be expected, then, that anxiety induced by factors that pose a threat and potentially have a significant effect on society, such as terrorism, will be of considerable explanatory value with regard to support for governmental measures to safeguard society.

There is ample evidence suggesting that anxiety has a significant effect on perceptions of threatening circumstances, such as terrorism or natural disaster, and related policy implications (Aly & Green 2010; Clayton 2020; Davis & Silver 2003,2004; Furedi 2008; Huddy, Feldman, & Weber 2007). In a study by Albertson & Gadarian (2015), the authors conducted an experiment in which they excited anxiety from a newscast about terrorism in some respondents and compared this to a control group. The terrorism newscast increased anxiety significantly, and respondents reporting high anxiety were much more likely to support sacrificing civil liberties in favour of protective governmental policy, as well as in favour of military intervention. Interestingly, similar to results from Lee and DeHart (2007), Albertson and Gadarian show that high levels of anxiety in the control group did not lead to support for policies infringing upon civil liberties. The different responses between the groups shows that respondents only supported these policies if the researcher were directly targeting the source of their anxiety.

Individuals who feel particularly anxious and threatened tend to be more accepting of government policy infringing upon civil liberties in order to increase personal

security (Davis & Silver 2003). In a follow up study (Davis & Silver 2004), evidence was found that high levels of trust in government institutions mediates this relationship; as acceptance of infringements was much greater for those with higher anxiety levels regarding a possible future terror attack and high trust in government. Other studies found similar effects, be it with nuances in the support for specific policies. Albertson & Gadarian (2015) put forth the argument that in order to cope with anxiety due to factors beyond their control, individuals “trust expert political actors to protect them from threat” (p.11). Furthermore, the tendency of anxious individuals to accept measures infringing on civil liberties can be explained by the fact that anxious individuals tend to avoid risk in general, especially when they deem the negative outcomes of the perceived risk to be particularly negative and very likely to happen (Eisenberg, Baron, & Seligman 1998; Maner et al. 2007).

In the present study, we expect to find a similar relationship. We expect that general anxiety has a significant effect on respondents’ general disposition to accept measures infringing upon civil liberties. The potency of the threat of terrorism is expected to influence how far anxiety will predict general disposition to accept infringement measures to confine the threat of terrorism. As mentioned earlier, Iceland has been deemed the safest country in the world multiple times, with extremely little experience of threats on a societal level. Possibly, this relationship between anxiety and disposition towards prioritising security, may be more marginal than in other research.

#### 4. Trust

Trust is a valued property of states and societies (Putnam 1991; Fukuyama 1995). Trust in government may improve government efficiency and legitimacy, and trust in other people facilitates cooperation and raises the level of social capital. There are different types of trust, however, and they may have different effects. General trust, according to Uslaner (2000) is “the belief that most people can be trusted, even if you do not know them personally, and even if they are not like you socially.” As Newton (2007) points out, however, there is an important conceptual distinction between such social trust and political or institutional trust. “People may trust those around them and not their political leaders, and although there may be a general association between social and political trust, as social capital theory suggests, this is an empirical question” (p. 343). Political trust is usually associated with trust in the major institutions of government such as parliament, government, political parties, justice system, civil service and police (cf. Newton & Zmerli 2011, 179).

Trust in government is likely to facilitate acceptance of infringements of civil rights. A high level of trust in the authorities is likely to make people confident that extraordinary measures will not be abused and that they will achieve the desired objectives. Conversely, lower trust in government makes people less willing to trade off civil liberties for security (Davis & Silver 2004). In a sheltered and peaceful country, such as Iceland, relatively high levels of support for such infringement measures can be expected, since people may think they will not really be put to use. Thus, Rykkja et al., writing on the

eve of the Breivik attack, report that “Norwegian citizens have rather positive attitudes towards the use of strong measures in the fight against terror... This apparent lack of scepticism may reflect a general belief that major terror attacks will not strike this relatively peaceful corner of the world” (2011, 230).

They find, however, that the effects of trust vary according to the type of trust involved. Thus, general social trust is associated with scepticism towards infringement measures, whereas belief in the efficacy of government facilitates support. These effects might however not be universal for all groups in society. Davis and Silver (2004) found variations between racial groups in the effect of social trust on attitudes towards trading security for civil liberties. How social trust affects attitudes towards civil liberties and security is contingent on context. The effects of trust may vary according to policy area as well. Hetherington and Husser (2012) suggest that priming (changes in standards of evaluation) is “central to understanding what parts of government people will be considering when they are asked to answer questions about the government as a whole” (p. 313). Thus, we need to be sensitive to the context in which evaluations of trust are supposed to influence attitudes to public policy. In the Icelandic case, trust in politics and politicians has dropped to some extent following the economic crash of 2008, from among the highest in Europe to a more average level (Vilhjálmsdóttir 2020). Trust, however, has developed in different directions for different parts of the public sector. Most importantly, in the present context trust in the police remains very high by international standards, which should contribute to greater acceptance of strong anti-terrorist measures.

Another important fact in Vilhjálmsdóttir’s research is the importance of political orientation for trust in government. Holmberg (1999) suggests that we tend to trust those we agree with - which is sometimes called the “home team” hypothesis (see also Anderson et al. 2005). In the Icelandic case, it appears that supporters of parties in government are more likely to have confidence in politicians than others (Vilhjálmsdóttir 2020). Furthermore, political trust, specifically trust in institutions that deal with security, is higher among individuals that place themselves to the right of the political spectrum (Hooghe 2017). Thus, we can expect people who are on the right of the political spectrum or who feel close to government politically and support parties that are well represented in the cabinet to have a disposition towards prioritising security over civil liberties in the face of terror to a greater extent than others.

## 5. Hypotheses

**H1:** The greater the anxiety about a terroristic attack, the more disposed individuals are to prioritize security over civil liberties.

**H2:** The higher the trust in political institutions, the more disposed individuals are to prioritize security over civil liberties.

**H3:** High levels of social trust decrease the likelihood of respondents prioritising security over civil liberties.

We expect that, despite the lack of direct experience of a terrorist threat, Icelanders' dispositions towards prioritising security over civil liberties will be primarily related to their perception of the threat posed by terrorism. An increased sense of threat perception increases the likelihood of prioritising security over civil liberties. Additionally, we expect that trust will have a significant effect on acceptance of measures prioritizing security over civil liberties. The trust dimension is twofold. On the one hand relating to trust in government institutions, and on the other trust in fellow citizens. In line with Davis and Silver (2004), we expect that higher political trust increases the probability of respondents prioritising security over civil liberties. We expect that high political trust has this effect because respondents are confident that the authorities will use increased powers sensibly. Meanwhile, we expect that high social trust decreases participants' willingness to prioritise security over civil liberties in line with trends in neighbouring Norway (Rykkja et al. 2011).

## 6. Method

The data in this study comes from an international research project focusing on the resilience of democracy in the Nordic countries. For the purposes of this study we only use the Icelandic data, which was collected through an internet survey in November 2019 by the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland. The survey was completed by 3360 Icelandic residents between the ages of 18 and 93, with a mean age of 46 years. 50.4% were male, 49.6% female. 63.9% live in the capital area, and the rest of the respondents live in rural areas. The data was weighted so the sample would accurately represent the population by gender, age, residence and education. For the purpose of this study, we only used a sample of 2585 of those respondents surveyed as we excluded the 715 respondents who gave the answer 'neither nor' to the dependent variable, which was not included when recoding the variable for the purpose of conducting a binomial regression.

The analysis explores the predictive value of threat perception from terrorism and different dimensions of trust on the likelihood of Icelanders prioritising security over civil liberties. The data analysis is composed of five binomial logistic regression models where the first two contain control variables and the others add step by step the remaining independent variables. The first model includes background variables such as age, gender and other socio-economic factors. The second model adds the other control variables, right-left self-placement and a measure for support for incumbent political parties. Measures for threat perception, institutional trust and societal trust are then added step by step respectively to the final three models. As the dependent variable is on a Likert scale it has been recoded to fit a binomial logistic regression, the details of which are found in the following section. The exact wording of all the questions and the response options used for this study can be found in an appendix.



### 6.1 Dependent variable

**General disposition.** General disposition is used as the dependent variable. This item measures the general disposition of the respondents to accept infringements of civil liberties in order to safeguard society. The item in the questionnaire asked to what extent respondents agreed that the safeguarding of society should come at the expense of civil liberties and the exact wording can be seen in the appendix. Before answering this question, respondents were asked a series of questions on whether or not they agreed that use of certain specific tactics by authorities to safeguard society were legitimate. These tactics included the wiretapping of phone calls, holding individuals in unlimited custody, the use of stop-and-search tactics by police officers, the monitoring of emails, the bugging of rooms and houses, closing of certain parts of the city when threat levels rise, and letting armed police or the army patrol the streets. In answering the question if respondents would agree with infringements, it is very likely that respondents were primed to think of the specific infringements mentioned in the earlier questions.

**Table 1:** Frequency Distribution of General Disposition

General Disposition			
Item score	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Strongly Disagree 1</i>	357	10.8	10.8
<i>Disagree 2</i>	457	13.8	24.7
<i>Somewhat disagree 3</i>	567	17.2	41.9
<i>Neither nor 4</i>	715	21.7	63.5
<i>Somewhat agree 5</i>	748	22.7	86.2
<i>Agree 6</i>	297	9.0	95.2
<i>Strongly Agree 7</i>	159	4.8	100
<i>Total</i>	3301		

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the dependent variable “General Disposition to Accept Infringing Measures”. The item is measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The distribution is fairly normal.

Table 1 shows frequencies and percentages of the different responses to the question of prioritising security over civil liberties, the dependent variable. Low numeric values, from 1 to 3, represent disagreement to security coming at the expense of civil liberties and high values, from 5 to 7, agreeing that security comes at the expense of civil liberties. These two categories of values are added together in the construction of the two categories used for the binominal logistic regression, so that 1,381 respondents fall in the disagree category and 1,204 into the agree category. 715 respondents answering ‘neither nor’ in the original questionnaire item were not included in the binominal measure. The two categories are roughly equal in size, but the odds ratio of a randomly selected participants agreeing that security comes at the expense of civil liberties is 0.87.

## 6.2 Independent variable

### Anxiety

**Threat from terrorism.** This item measures respondents' perceptions of how significant they judge the threat of terrorism to be. The respondents were randomly divided into six groups with each asked a slightly different question. They were asked if they judged terrorism to be a threat to either; Europe, Iceland, or themselves. Furthermore, half were asked if terrorism was a threat today and half if terrorism would be a threat in the future. They then gave their response on a five-point Likert scale. The variable was recoded so higher scores represent more serious perceptions of threat. Combining the results from all six questions service to bring us a well-rounded measure of the level of anxiety due to terrorism both in Iceland and the abroad, since, as previously mentioned, heightened anxiety due to terrorism in neighbouring countries can have an effect on perceptions of domestic threat level.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	N
<i>General Disposition</i>	3,78	1,63	1	7	3301
<i>Threat Exp. Terror</i>	2,74	1,23	1	5	3339
<i>Instit. Trust</i>	3,39	1,21	1	7	3205
<i>Social Trust</i>	6,12	2,06	0	10	3208
<i>Home Team</i>	0,45	0,49	0	1	3072
<i>Age</i>	46,02	17,69	18	93	3360
<i>Male</i>	0,50	0,50	0	1	3360
<i>Capital</i>	0,64	0,48	0	1	3357
<i>Educ. Secondary</i>	0,35	0,48	0	1	3165
<i>Educ. University</i>	0,36	0,48	0	1	3165
<i>Income</i>	4,48	2,48	1	12	2792
<i>Left-right self- placement</i>	4,80	2,20	0	10	3101

Table 2 shows means, standard deviations, score range and total number of respondents who answered the questionnaire items. The first variable is the dependent 'General Disposition' and is measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Following are the independent variables the first of which is threat experienced from terrorism measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Next are the two measures used for trust. Institutional Trust and Social Trust, both measured on Likert scales with different ranges. Home Team represents whether or not the party respondents voted for has held office since 2013 in a binary variable. Last are the background variables, with age measured in years, income as monthly household income in twelve categories and left-right political self-placement on a ten-point scale where 0 is furthest left and 10 is furthest right. Almost all questionnaire items have over 3100 respondents, with the exception being income with a sample size of 2792. This is a considerable sample size, close to 1% of the inhabitants of Iceland.

### Trust

**Institutional Trust.** The two measurements for trust, social and institutional trust, each comprise of several different items. Institutional trust is comprised of trust measure-

ments of the parliament, judiciary, police, politicians, and political parties. The five items formed a dimension that explained 65% of the variance, with factor loadings between .571 and .89 (KMO .793\*\* N = 3139). Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,86$ .

**Social Trust.** The social trust dimension is comprised of measures of perceived trustworthiness and altruism of other civilians. This factor consisted of three items which explained 73% variance. The factor loadings fell between .815 and .888 (KMO .679\*\*, N= 3165). We expect that respondents with high institutional trust scores would be more accepting of infringing methods, while respondents with high scores on interpersonal trust will be less accepting of these measures. Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,81$ .

### Political factors

**Home-Team.** This is a measure used to ascertain whether supporters of parties in government, the home-team, are more likely to give authorities leeway in the use of controversial anti-terror tactics. In particular, we are interested in the medium-term effect of what such a support can have on attitudes to authorities as opposed to the immediate effect of who is in power right now (Anderson et al, 2005). The measure is constructed by assigning participants who answered the question 'if elections were held today which party would you vote for?' to two distinct groups, with the value 1 being assigned to supporters of the parties in the current government. Support for different parties was given a value of 0.

### Demographics

**Demographics.** Aside from the main items, demographic variables are also included in the model, such as age, income, education, residential area, and left-right self-placement on the political scale as control variables. Left-right self-placement is measured on an 11-point scale (0-10), indicating the degree to which respondents leaned towards the left or the right on the political spectrum, where '0' is left and '10' is right. Age is measured in years. Income is a representation of monthly household income measured in Icelandic krónur, divided over twelve categories ranging from two hundred thousand and below to over 1,7 million (respectively roughly 1200 to 10400 Euros). Residential area is dummy coded with 'Capital Area' as 1. A value of 0 indicated respondents lived elsewhere in Iceland. Education was measured in groups of highest attained educational level. The variable is divided in the two dummy variables representing secondary education and university education, with primary education as the reference category.

**Table 3:** Binominal logistic regression model

	<i>Model I</i>			<i>Model II</i>			<i>Model III</i>		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B), 95% CI</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B), 95% CI</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B), 95% CI</i>
Age	<b>0.011**</b>	0.00	1.01(1.01/1.02)	<b>0.012**</b>	0.00	1.01(1.01/1.02)	<b>0.008**</b>	0.003	1.01(1.00/1.01)
Male	<b>-0.321**</b>	0.09	0.73(.61/.87)	<b>-0.354**</b>	0.09	0.70(.58/.84)	<b>-0.23*</b>	0.098	0.79(.66/.96)
Capital Area	<b>-0.244**</b>	0.09	0.78(.66/.94)	<b>-0.203*</b>	0.09	0.82(.68/.98)	-0.182	0.097	0.83(.69/1.01)
Educ. Secondary	0.067	0.11	1.07(.86/1.33)	0.065	0.11	1.07(.85/1.33)	0.123	0.117	1.13(.90/1.42)
Educ. Uni	-0.161	0.12	0.85(.68/1.07)	-0.099	0.12	0.91(.71/1.15)	0.051	0.126	1.05(.82/1.35)
Income	0.028	0.02	1.03(.99/1.07)	0.008	0.02	1.01(.97/1.05)	0.014	0.021	1.01(.97/1.06)
<i>Political factors</i>									
Political Orientation				<b>0.094**</b>	0.02	1.10(1.05/1.15)	<b>0.073**</b>	0.022	1.08(1.03/1.12)
Home team				<b>0.209*</b>	0.10	1.23(1.01/1.50)	<b>0.21*</b>	0.104	1.23(1.01/1.51)
<i>Terror</i>									
Exp. Threat from terror							<b>0.423**</b>	0.039	1.53(1.41/1.65)
<i>Trust</i>									
Instit. Trust									
Social Trust									
Constant	-0.416	0.16	0.66	-0.906	0.184	0.40	-1.966	0.215	0.14
Hosmer-Lemeshow	16.204			20.297			20.921		
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	(p = .04)			(p = .009)			(p = .007)		
	0.025			0.045			0.12		

\* =  $p < .05$

\*\* =  $p < .01$

Dependent: General Disposition

	<i>Model IV</i>			<i>Model V</i>		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B), 95% CI</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B), 95% CI</i>
Age	<b>0.008**</b>	0.003	1.01(1.00/1.01)	<b>0.011**</b>	0.003	1.01(1.01/1.02)
Male	<b>-0.201*</b>	0.099	0.82(.67/.99)	<b>-0.210*</b>	0.100	0.81(.67/.99)
Capital Area	-0.178	0.098	0.84(.69/1.01)	-0.191	0.099	0.83(.68/1.00)
Educ. Secondary	0.097	0.118	1.10(.87/1.39)	0.140	0.120	1.15(.91/1.45)
Educ. Uni	0.029	0.129	0.97(.75/1.25)	0.068	0.131	1.07(.83/1.38)
Income	0.007	0.021	1.01(.97/1.05)	0.011	0.021	1.01(.97/1.05)
<i>Political factors</i>						
Political Orientation	<b>0.056*</b>	0.022	1.06(1.01/1.11)	<b>0.052*</b>	0.022	1.05(1.01/1.10)
Home team	0.034	0.111	1.03(0.83/1.29)	0.041	0.111	1.04(0.84/1.30)
<i>Terror</i>						
Exp. Threat from terror	<b>0.428**</b>	0.039	1.53(1.42/1.66)	<b>0.414**</b>	0.039	1.51(1.40/1.63)
<i>Trust</i>						
Instit. Trust	<b>0.199**</b>	0.043	1.22(1.12/1.33)	<b>0.243**</b>	0.045	1.28(1.17/1.39)
Social Trust				<b>-0.101**</b>	0.025	0.90(.86/.95)
Constant	-2.452	0.242	0.086	-2.117	0.261	0.120
Hosmer-Lemeshow	15.378			9.055		
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	(p = .052)			(p = .338)		
	0.132			0.144		

\* =  $p < .05$

\*\* =  $p < .01$

Dependent: General Disposition

## 7. Analysis

Table 3 contains our binominal logistic regression models using general disposition as the dependent variable.

The first model includes the background control variables and of the six included, half are significant at  $p < .01$  while the others are not. The significant variables are age, gender and residency. A one-year increase in age increases the odds of valuing security over civil liberties by 1%. Compared to women, men are only 73% as likely as women to accept infringements on civil liberties. Compared to those living in the countryside, those residing in the capital area are 22% less likely to accept infringements. The overall ‘fit’ of the first model is relatively low, with a Nagelkerke  $R^2$  of .003, and a significant Hosmer-Lemeshow test.

The second model introduces both the self-placement on the right-left political scale and the home team variable, which are respectively significant at the  $p < .01$  and  $p < .05$  levels. The model itself has a slightly higher Nagelkerke  $R^2$  than the first model, with a value of 0.045. As might be expected, self-placing to the right of the political spectrum increases the odds ratio of prioritising security. For a one-point increase towards a ‘rightist’ political orientation on the scale, the odds of agreeing with infringing measures increases by 10%. As expected, supporting parties that are in government increases the odds that respondents prioritise security over civil liberties and thus agree with infringing measures. Supporting a party that has been part of the government increases the odds to accept infringements of civil liberties with 23%. Controlling for both the political scale and the home team variable has little effect on the relationships of gender, age, or residing in the capital area. Again, the fit of the model is relatively low.

The third model introduces the measure for perceived threat from terrorism. The variable is significant at  $p < .01$ , and high perceived threat from terror has a considerable effect on the odds of respondents prioritising security over civil liberties. A one-point increase on the threat perception scale equals a 53% increase in willingness to accept infringing measures. The introduction of threat perception in the model increases Nagelkerke  $R^2$  of the model to 0.12. The significance of the gender variable when controlling for threat perception decreases to  $p < .05$ , and residency in the capital area loses its significance.

The final two models introduce the two variables on trust. Firstly, the fourth model includes the variable on institutional trust, which is significant at  $p < .01$ . As expected, a higher level of trust in institutions significantly increased the chances respondents would accept infringements. A one-point increase on the institutional trust scale increases the odds of respondents prioritising security over civil liberties by 22%. The inclusion of the variable causes a decrease in significance in the political scale and hometeam variables. While placement on the political scale remains significant at the  $p < .05$  level, the hometeam variable loses significance completely. The model has a higher Nagelkerke  $R^2$  than the previous models with an  $R^2$  of 0.132, and a non-significant Hosmer-Lemeshow chi-square.

The final model incorporates a measure of trust in fellow members of society. Social

trust significantly predicts a rejection of infringing measures, with  $p < .01$ . In line with the third hypothesis, social trust significantly decreases the odds of respondents prioritising security over civil liberties, with respondents that score one point higher than others on the social trust scale are only 90% as likely to accept infringements. Considering the 11-point scale of the variable, this is a relatively large effect. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  of the model is increased to 0.144, slightly higher than the  $R^2$  of the previous model. The inclusion of social trust does not negatively affect the significance of other variables. However, the effect that institutional trust has on the infringement acceptance increases slightly with 2 percentage points.

## 8. Analysis

### 8.1 Anxiety increases support for measures seen to alleviate its cause

In line with our first hypothesis, terrorism related anxiety influences the odds of respondents' general disposition towards civil liberties and security as evident by the variable's significance in the third, fourth and fifth models. An Icelander that feels that a threat is posed by terrorism and is anxious of it, is considerably more likely to prioritise security over civil liberties. A one-point increase on the variable's five-point Likert scale increases the odds of a respondent prioritising security over civil liberties by 51% when controlling for other independent variables in our research. While large, this effect is not surprising and in line with our expectation and previous research on the subject that individuals who are anxious about an issue seek out a redress for the cause of their anxiety (Davis & Silver 2003; Albertson & Gadarian 2015; Lee & DeHart 2007). Icelanders that view terrorism as a threat seek to address it by prioritising security over civil liberties.

Despite Iceland's peaceful milieu and the relative absence of security threats, our research suggests that the anxiety thesis holds. Whether this is due to fear of terrorism directed at Iceland itself or if the anxiety stems from fears of attacks in neighbouring countries cannot be disentangled by our study, so caution is warranted when interpreting these results. Although we have no direct evidence of a change in perceptions among the population at large, terrorist attacks in neighbouring countries have influenced the country's domestic politics at least in the context of the attacks on September the 11, as in other countries (Heinreksdóttir 2004; Salton 2002; Fimreite et al. 2013).

### 8.2 Trusting institutions and prioritising security

Political trust is a factor in explaining Icelanders' disposition towards the relative importance of security and civil liberties. As expected, high trust in government institutions increases the odds of Icelanders prioritising security over civil liberties. The variable is significant in both the fourth and the fifth model. Possibly this is because of a perception that the use of state power will be just and fair which may not be surprising in a small society like Iceland, where abuse of state power has been seen as rare (Heinreksdóttir 2004). Furthermore, it is in line with other research on the impact of trust towards attitudes on state power and the infringement of civil liberties (Albertson & Gadarian 2015; Davis & Silver 2003; Rykkje et al. 2011).

Interestingly, the introduction of political trust in the fourth model renders the home team variable insignificant. Therefore, it might be that general trust in (political) institutions is more important to the respondents than trust in specific political parties. This is perhaps not surprising, since both factors are closely related. Being on the winning side of politics generally increases political trust (Anderson et al. 2005; Hooghe 2017). That the variable loses its significance in the fourth model seems to suggest that its influence on the dependent one is limited to the effect on political trust and does not go beyond that.

### 8.3 Trusting neighbours

Social trust is significant in the fifth model and lowers the odds of respondents having a disposition that prioritises security over civil liberties, in line with our third hypothesis. The effect on the odds ratios is relatively low compared to the effect for institutional trust or threat perception. A reason for this effect might be that a high degree of trust in fellow citizens means that Icelanders see less of a need for increased security, in line with Rykkja et al.'s hypothesis about similar trends in Norway (2011). The lower effect that social trust has on the odds ratio of the dependent is perhaps to be expected given that the nature of the relationship between the two seems to be very contextual and hard to predict (Rykkja et al. 2011; Davis & Silver 2004).

## 9. Conclusion and discussion

Terrorism aims to spread fear and play upon feelings of insecurity among the general public, usually far out of proportion to actual individual risks. Terrorism may encourage support for infringements of civil liberties, especially among groups that experience high anxiety in the face of terror. Similarly, people with greater trust in politics are more likely than others to accept infringements. Possibly this is because they trust political and state actors to act responsibly with enhanced powers. General social trust, on the other hand, has a tendency to reduce willingness to accept infringements of civil liberties, at least in the Icelandic context. Presumably, social trust induces greater willingness to rely on society centred approaches to external threat over heavy-handed government response. Alternatively, individuals that have high levels of social trust might be less inclined to feel that a significant threat is posed to them by their fellow citizens. From this, we conclude that in evaluating if authorities should be given leeway in the use of measures that infringe on citizens' rights to protect them from harm, trust in those authorities and perception of the threat are highly important. Though how applicable these factors are to other forms of threats, such as significant compromises to health, climate change, and natural disasters, requires further research.

The relatively low  $R^2$  of our models suggests that there are additional variables that might explain the variance of our dependent variable. Considering previous research, there are several factors that might have helped us explain the variance of the dependent, but which were not included in the dataset. For example, a measure of participants' tolerance or dogmatism could be of importance (Davis & Silver 2004). Dogmatic, close-

minded individuals are quicker to choose security over civil liberties. Dogmatic individuals tend to have a closed, conservative belief system, which is linked to fearfulness, intolerance, and trust in authorities. In their article, Davis and Silver show that dogmatism is significantly related to preferring security over civil liberties. Secondly, it might be possible that the left-right scale might not reflect on issues such as security in Iceland. The issue of governments infringing on civil liberties might be less politicised than in other countries, and participants might place themselves on the left-right divide mainly with regards to their preference on economic policy (Önnudóttir & Harðarson 2018).

Iceland, so far, has escaped direct threats from terrorism. Asking people for their response to threats of terror is therefore very much based on hypothetical questions. The response, however, has similarities to the one obtained in Norway on the eve of the Breivik attack in 2011 (Rykkja et al. 2011). It seems likely that if terrorism strikes in Iceland, relatively high levels of social trust could mitigate the public response while trust in government - even if lower than the pre-2008 level - may provide governments with the scope of manoeuvre to act decisively. Every event of this nature, however, has its unique characteristics which makes it difficult to predict the outcome, as is evident from the different responses in the wake of mayor terrorist attacks in Norway and the United States (Fimreite et al. 2013).

The results of this paper have significant value for a number of reasons. First, this type of research is the first of its kind in Iceland, and therefore has value in exploring Icelanders' dispositions when it comes to governmental infringements and experienced anxiety and trust. Secondly, the relationship between trust and anxiety and the acceptance of government policy infringing on civil liberties has been shown before, and thus our results are perhaps unsurprising. However, the multitude of research includes settings where a societal threat, often of a terroristic nature, has happened in the past or has a certain perceived likelihood of happening in the future. In other words, the threat to those societies is almost always less hypothetical than in our research. Our research indicates, however, that even a latent experience of threat influences individuals' acceptance of privacy and liberty infringements by their government. Iceland is deemed one of the safest countries on our planet. Yet even in this setting, the balance between trust in both government and fellow citizens and anxiety about the possibility of a terroristic threat has an effect on dispositions towards government policy that is at the least intrusive and at the most constraining citizen's life.

## Endnote

- 1 The dataset was obtained in a survey conducted in Iceland which forms a part of a research collaboration between researchers in Reykjavík, Iceland, Bergen, Norway and Gothenburg, Sweden under the heading; *The challenge from terrorism in the Nordic countries: An analysis of citizens' reactions, policy responses and legitimacy*. The project is part of a broader project funded by Nordforsk, aiming to address the question to what degree democratic states are resilient against the challenge of terrorism. The authors are grateful to Margrét Valdimarsdóttir for valuable advice and assistance with the statistical analysis.



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## Appendix

### **General disposition**

**Question:** “To what extent do you agree that the safeguarding of society’s security should be at the expense of individuals’ freedom (such as protection of privacy and the right to privacy)?”

**Answer options:**

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Agree somewhat
4. Neither agree nor disagree
5. Disagree somewhat
6. Disagree
7. Strongly disagree

### **Threat from terrorism**

**Question:** Overall, how serious a threat do you perceive terrorism to be for [you personally /Iceland/ Europe] [today/in the future]?

**Answer option:**

1. Very serious
2. Serious
3. Somewhat serious
4. Not very serious
5. Not a threat

### **Institutional Trust**

**Question:** How much or how little do you trust the following institution or person? Answer by selecting a number from 1 to 7 where 1 means you completely lack trust and 7 that you trust it completely.

- Parliament
- Judiciary
- Police
- Politicians
- Political parties

**Answer option:**

1. Lack trust completely
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
7. Trust completely

**Social Trust**

**Question:** Do you think people are generally trustworthy or can you never be too careful with people? Answer by selecting a number from 0 to 10 where 0 is you can never be too careful with people and 10 is people are generally trustworthy.

**Answer option:**

1. You can never be too careful with people
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
11. People are generally trustworthy

**Question:** Do you think that most people would use you given the chance or that most people would treat you fairly? Answer by selecting a number from 0 to 10 where 0 is most people would use you given the chance and 10 is most people would treat you fairly.

**Answer option:**

1. Most people would use you given the chance
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
11. Most people would treat you fairly

**Question:** Do you think most people try to help most of the time or that they mostly think of themselves? Answer by selection a number from 0-10 where 0 is people mostly think of themselves and 10 is most people try to help most of the time.

**Answer option:**

1. People mostly think of themselves
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
11. Most people try to help most of the time

**Political variables**

**Question:** In politics there is often talk of a left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is furthest to the left and 10 is furthest to the right?

**Answer option:**

1. Left
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
11. Right

**Question:** If elections were held today which political party are you most likely to vote for?

**Answer option:**

1. XA Bright Future
2. XB Progressive Party
3. XC Reform Party
4. XD Independence Party
5. XE Icelandic National Front
6. XF Peoples Party
7. XH Humanist Party
8. XP Pirate Party
9. XR Socialist Party
10. XS Social Democratic Alliance
11. XV Left Green
12. XM Centre Party
13. Another Party
14. Empty ballot

