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Review

Expressions of political practice: Collective angst moderates politicized collective identity to predict support for political protest (peaceful or violent) among diaspora group members

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ABSTRACT

In two studies, we examined an ethnic group (Tamil or Somali) at a key point in their history - when violent conflict rages in their homeland that will determine its future. Herein, we focus on the type of political protest supported by diaspora community members (people that play a strategic role in shaping the trajectory of their homeland). Specifically, we test the idea that a politicized collective identity (PCI) will lead to support for political protest to advance ingroup interests at home, but that collective angst (i.e., concern for the ingroup's future vitality) will determine its form. In Study 1, as predicted, Somali Canadians expressed support for the violent political protest of al-Shabaab (a terrorist organization linked to al-Qaeda) only when they possessed a PCI and felt collective angst about Islam. Study 2 replicated the interaction between PCI and collective angst among Tamil Canadians on support for violent political protest. Importantly, we also showed that PCI predicted support for peaceful political protest when collective angst was low. Implications for the politics and collective action supported by diaspora communities are discussed.

Contents

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> "Armed struggle is the highest expression of political practice."
> Anton Balasingham of the Tamil Tigers (1983; speaking for the Tamil Tigers)

Throughout history, socio-political conflict has led to the mass displacement and dispersal of ethnic communities to other regions of the world. These uprooted communities form a *diaspora* who often relocated out of necessity as opposed to desire. Carrying the trauma of the past, diaspora communities remain resilient by developing a strong positive collective identity (see Phinney, 1990). Importantly, this collective identity predicts solidarity with those who were left behind (Demmers, 2002)—a solidarity that might manifest itself as support for political protest to advance ingroup interests back home, and can produce ethnic diversity in the identity space of the new host nation (Fisher Onar, Liu, & Woodward, 2014). Indeed, through the emergence of online neighborhoods (see Appadurai, 1995) and transnational communities (Danforth, 1995), contemporary diaspora populations have become pivotal supporters of armed struggles in their homeland (see Davis & Moore, 1997). For example, some Irish Americans voiced support for the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland and some Croat Germans helped support the violent collapse of Yugoslavia. In Canada, there are Somali Canadians who are vocal supporters of al-Shabaab in Somalia (a terrorist organization linked to al-Qaeda) and there are Tamil Canadians who actively support the Tamil Tigers (a separatist militant organization) in Sri Lanka. What leads contemporary group members generally, and members of diaspora communities more specifically, to back those who commit grave acts of violent political protest in their name? Unfortunately, the extant social psychological literature is relatively silent on factors that predict engagement in violent protest, to say nothing of its support among diaspora communities.

Diaspora communities are an important (and typically overlooked) cog in the historical trajectory of their homeland, especially at critical historical junctures that involve intergroup conflict. This is because historical representations of the conflict anchor their intergroup attitudes (see Liu, Sibley, & Huang, 2014b) and provide a temporal lens through which the intergroup context is assessed (see Kus, Liu, & Ward, 2013). Moreover, these representations are used to legitimize questionable actions against an outgroup in order to influence the social and political structure (Bar-Tal, 1990; Bar-Tal, 2007; Sibley & Liu, 2012). Indeed, diaspora communities often apply their historical representation to legitimize the remittances provided, which helps perpetuate the intergroup conflict. They influence the balance of power in the local context (Fisher Onar et al., 2014). Such communities are also essential for establishing third party allies—not to mention being a source of fresh recruits for armed struggle. From both a theoretical and practical standpoint, insight into why diaspora communities involve themselves in the political affairs of their erstwhile homeland is of import.

To this end, we examine the politics of two diaspora communities in Canada, Somalis and Tamils, as it pertains to the ongoing intra-state conflict in their homeland. Importantly, we acknowledge that the ways in which these diaspora community members attempt to advance ingroup interests at this critical stage in their historical trajectory (Liu, Fisher-Onar, & Woodward, 2014a) is not one-dimensional. Whereas some group members prefer support for peaceful protest and political dialogue to achieve ingroup goals, other group members believe that only violence can lead to the desired political change.

Herein, we start our examination of diaspora community members' support for protest taken in their homeland with the supposition that historical representations of intergroup relations are critical in the process of politicizing their collective identity (see Liu & Hilton, 2005; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Specifically, when relations with an adversary group is historically situated in an ongoing struggle for power, group members will become motivated to support action that will