ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Considered effective? How policy evaluations and threat perceptions affect support for surveillance in the context of terrorism

Eva-Maria Trüdinger[1] | Conrad Ziller[2]

[1]Institute for Social Sciences, University of Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

[2]Department of Political Science, University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg, Germany

Correspondence
Eva-Maria Trüdinger, Institute for Social Sciences, University of Stuttgart, Breitscheidstrasse 2, 70174 Stuttgart, Germany.
Email: eva-maria.truedinger@sowi.uni-stuttgart.de

Abstract

Surveillance policies aimed at combating terrorism and improving public security can also lead to constraints on civil liberties. In view of this trade-off between the potential benefits and risks of surveillance, it is particularly important to study how effectiveness considerations shape public support for surveillance. We argue that effectiveness perceptions enhance policy support, but that the manner in which citizens view policy effectiveness depends on their perceptions of threats related to terrorism and to violations of civil liberties. Using data from a factorial survey experiment in Germany, we show that policy effectiveness is the most relevant predictor of citizens' support for different surveillance measures. Moreover, we find evidence that depending on the scope of surveillance, respondents perceiving threats to their liberty rely much less heavily on policy effectiveness as a criterion for evaluating policies, compared to those whose threat perception is low.

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Jenkins-Smith, Hank C., and Kerry G. Herron. 2009. "Rock and a Hard Place: Public Willingness to Trade Civil Rights and Liberties for Greater Security." *Politics & Policy* 37(5): 1095–129. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2009.00215.x/abstract.

Questions relating to public support for state surveillance are vital nowadays. New forms of surveillance have been introduced in many countries in the wake of terrorist incidents (see, e.g., Epifanio, 2011), and the technological possibilities for this have increased considerably in recent years. Surveillance measures are also used in various countries to combat the COVID-19 pandemic (French & Monahan, 2020). At the same time, surveillance policies aimed at combating terrorism and improving public security can infringe upon privacy rights and even reduce citizens' expression of opinion and their exchange of political views (Eck et al., 2021). Given that such policies may lead to constraints on civil liberties, there is a lot at stake. This trade-off between security and liberty makes it particularly important that citizens perceive the policies under consideration as being effective in support of such measures. Moreover, effectiveness in the context of counterterrorist surveillance measures is a complex matter. First, its relevance is far from being unambiguous, as preventive measures typically lead to hard-to-observe outcomes which may disguise policy effectiveness. Second, public and political discourses in the policy area of law and order are highly symbolic, which heightens the role of factors other than effectiveness for citizens' policy support (Wenzelburger & Staff, 2016).

This study addresses this ambiguity and investigates how effectiveness considerations regarding counterterrorist surveillance policies affect citizens' policy support. Specifically, we argue that individual sensitivity to various threats critically conditions the extent to which policy effectiveness translates into policy support. In doing so, we focus on "security threat," which refers to heightened alertness toward situations undermining personal and public safety (Schwartz, 1992). We know from previous research that perceptions of security threats can boost support for counterterrorism policies (see, e.g., Davis & Silver, 2004; Huddy et al., 2005; Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009). This can have far-reaching consequences for the balance between liberty and security in our societies, skewing the trade-off toward the latter (Stevens & Vaughan-Williams, 2016, p. 149). However, people might also feel threatened by extensive domestic security policies and perceive their personal freedoms to be at risk (i.e., "liberty threat"). As we know little about the consequences of perceived liberty threat (cf. Best et al., 2012; Trüdinger, 2019) for the support for different surveillance measures, we equally focus on this kind of threat.

Moving beyond prior studies, we incorporate both security threat and liberty threat, as they potentially condition the magnitude of how effectiveness considerations translate into support for surveillance. The expectation that perceived threat might trigger the relevance of policy evaluations is rooted in studies on the political psychology of affective and cognitive responses to threat. Whether threat perceptions lead to an amplification or mitigation of the effects of performance-based considerations hinges on the underlying mechanism. Specifically, the theory of Affective Intelligence posits that a perceived threat induces people to seek information, which should, in turn, heighten the relevance of citizens' effectiveness considerations for policy support (Joslyn & Haider-Markel, 2018; Marcus et al., 2000; Merolla & Zechmeister, 2018). In contrast, works on motivating closed-mindedness suggest that threats reduce individuals' cognitive capacity, which should, in turn, make effectiveness considerations less relevant as a source of policy support (Davis, 2007; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011).

To test these competing hypotheses, we use a factorial survey experiment embedded in an online survey conducted in Germany. The experiment portrays different conditions for the implementation of surveillance measures in order to prevent a terrorist attack. It allows us to examine the influence of perceived policy effectiveness on support for three different forms of state surveillance but also to study various further characteristics of the implementation context, such as the potential magnitude and the target of the attacks. Such an experimental design offers the opportunity to contrast the relative importance of effectiveness with these other factors that have been shown to impact support for

counterterrorism policies in previous studies (see, e.g., Brooks & Manza, 2013). Varying the scope of the surveillance measures tells us something about whether or not the relevance of policy effectiveness and the moderating role of threat perceptions differ with regard to the extent to which surveillance measures encroach on civil liberties.

We find that policy effectiveness is the strongest predictor of surveillance policy support that outperforms other relevant determinants. At the same time, perceived threat mitigates the predictive capacity of policy effectiveness when it comes to perceptions of threat to liberty and support for extensive monitoring activities. All-in-all, this study sheds light on relevant boundary conditions of citizens' support for publicly debated policy measures. It particularly advances research on policy support in highlighting the distinct effects of two kinds of perceived threats and the relevance of comparing support for different forms of surveillance measures. Before presenting the results of the study, we first provide a theoretical discussion of the influence of citizens' effectiveness considerations on support for surveillance and of the moderating role of two types of perceived threats.

POLICY EFFECTIVENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF COUNTERTERRORIST SURVEILLANCE

Domestic security measures, and surveillance policies in this domain, aim to achieve or maintain public order and security. State surveillance comprises any one-sided systematic, routine monitoring of individuals or groups for a given purpose (see, e.g., Lyon, 2014, p. 2). One can therefore argue that effectiveness considerations are particularly important for those being monitored, as the costs in terms of losses in privacy and personal freedom might be substantial (Trüdinger & Steckermeier, 2017). The provision of public security by governments, at the same time, represents a valence issue (Stokes, 1963). This means that, by and large, citizens agree on the specific policy goal, whereas the means to reach these goals are more highly contested. Public support for these specific policies may vary and depend upon a range of motives (Ziller & Helbling, 2021). Given the potential for infringements of civil liberties, individuals can be expected to assess the implementation of counterterrorist surveillance measures while taking costs and benefits into account. The relevance of cost–benefit calculations for political support has been emphasized in early contributions on the importance of citizens' perceptions of the output and outcomes of a policy (see, e.g., Sears et al., 1980).

Policies that are effective in solving problems are more likely to benefit citizens. Thus, we expect that support for a policy should be greater if it is perceived as solving the problems that it was designed to tackle—compared to if the policy is considered to be ineffective (Huber et al., 2020, p. 652). In other words, assessments as to whether government measures will achieve the envisaged objectives should be an important factor for citizens' policy support (although we stress below that individuals may view policy consequences from different angles and this, in turn, influences the emphasis they place on policy effectiveness).

That said, expecting performance-based evaluations to be critical for the creation of citizens' policy support is only one side of the coin. Public and political discourse related to counterterrorist measures is highly symbolically charged (Garrett, 2020; Wenzelburger & Staff, 2016). This becomes apparent in cases where government officials implement law-and-order policies primarily to appease constituents, regardless of their actual effectiveness. Prominent examples in this regard are the Trump travel bans placing restrictions on travelers from several Muslim countries, or the construction of the U.S.-Mexico cross-border wall under the Trump administration (Clapton, 2021). In a related vein, works on policy feedback (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Pierson, 1993) stipulate that individuals' policy support is guided not only by rational cost–benefit calculations but also by interpretive or symbolic effects which refer to the perception that the government is responsive and cares about citizens' needs. Another stance challenging the assumption that counterterrorist surveillance measures (even effective ones) univocally lead to greater policy support stems from literature that critically examines unintended consequences of state surveillance (see, e.g., Lyon, 2007; Vlcek, 2007). This literature

shows, for example, that racial profiling has intensified and may lead to discriminatory police behavior toward specific groups (Abbas, 2019; Selod, 2018). Although we agree that symbolic policies or unintended consequences may dampen how effectiveness translates into policy support for some individuals, we nevertheless formulate the following general hypothesis as a default expectation:

Hypothesis 1   *If a measure of state surveillance is considered effective (ineffective), it receives stronger (weaker) support on average than it does in the absence of such a positive assessment.*

Beyond the role of policy effectiveness, various other aspects of the implementation context of a counterterrorist policy (e.g., Is there a specific threat of a terrorist attack? Which group carries out the attack?) can be expected to impact policy support as well. We expect these factors to operate independently from effectiveness—which is the central focus of this study. In order to assess the role of policy effectiveness in relation to other factors, we include them in the survey experiment and in subsequent empirical analyses.[1]

PERCEPTIONS OF THREAT AS MODERATORS OF SURVEILLANCE POLICY SUPPORT

Moving beyond general expectations, we focus on individual-level perceptions of threats that potentially trigger whether people base their policy support on effectiveness-led considerations rather than on symbolic grounds that are likely to be charged by people's feelings and identities. Previous work has shown that perceptions of threats from terrorism, immigration, etc.—and emotions such as anger and fear related to these threats[2]—can evoke strong reactions among citizens when it comes to political support and voting behavior (see, e.g., Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009; Stevens & Vaughan-Williams, 2016; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). In particular, studies on the role of threat in times of terrorism demonstrate that a perceived threat to security can directly increase support for counterterrorist policies and restrictions on civil liberties (see, e.g., Davis & Silver, 2004; Dietrich & Crabtree, 2019; Huddy et al., 2005; Valentino et al., 2020). Moreover, there is empirical evidence from research on policy support during the COVID-19 pandemic that perceived threat (related to the pandemic) can foster acceptance of state surveillance (see, e.g., Wnuk et al., 2020).

Perceptions of threat, however, also operate in conjunction with basic individual dispositions such as authoritarianism in their influence on policy support. Different kinds of interaction between perceived threat and authoritarianism are possible, depending on situational factors, triggered emotions, and the nature of the threat. While some researchers argue that authoritarians might adhere more closely to authoritarian policies in light of a threat, others posit that nonauthoritarians or liberals might be more likely to react to a threatening stimulus by shifting their preferences to more restrictive or more aggressive policies (see, e.g., Stevens & Banducci, 2022; Vasilopoulos et al., 2018, with more information on this theoretical and empirical puzzle). In addition to authoritarian dispositions, there is evidence of an interaction between political trust and perceived threats when it comes to support for restrictions on civil liberties in the context of terrorism (Davis & Silver, 2004), and pandemic threats when citizens experience fear related to COVID-19 (Vasilopoulos et al., 2022). In sum, this literature shows that perceived threat can strongly affect the way people reason about particular policies.

Apart from its interaction with authoritarianism or political trust, we know little about how threat operates as a boundary condition for how policy features, and their evaluations by the public, impact

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[1]Since these factors are not the main focus of this study, we do not formulate explicit hypotheses in the theory section but state our expectations regarding the direction of their effects in the Data and Methods section.

[2]While perceptions of threat often trigger fears among citizens (and this pattern is also reflected by our measure of perceived threat), some people might also react to particular threats with anger (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). Although this distinction is beyond the scope of our study, we would like to highlight at this point that perceptions of threat can have different emotional consequences.

policy support.[3] In particular, the role of other threats such as perceived threats to individual liberties has rarely been studied so far. This is surprising, as previous work on surveillance has shown that people are highly likely to feel concerned about government surveillance and that defending liberty against an intrusive government is relevant to many citizens when evaluating counterterrorism policies (Best et al., 2012, p. 610). In other words: Perceived threats regarding privacy can reduce the acceptance of surveillance measures (Dinev et al., 2008). Moving beyond that, we argue that the impact of citizens' effectiveness considerations is moderated by perceptions of threat to security and to liberty. In doing so, we focus not only on security threats but also on liberty threats related to potential violations of individual rights (e.g., fears of infringements on privacy), and to what extent it operates as a boundary condition for how policy effectiveness translates into surveillance policy support.

To specify underlying mechanisms, we discuss the effects of threats and perceived effectiveness on support for surveillance policies in a broader theoretical framework of information processing, considering the moderating role of perceptions of threat to security and to liberty. We argue that the presence of threat influences individual information seeking and decision making (see, e.g., Wagner & Morisi, 2019). According to the theory of affective intelligence (AIT; Marcus et al., 2000), emotions—be they positive (e.g., enthusiasm) or negative (e.g., anger)—are critical for guiding individuals' information processing. While positive emotions trigger the disposition system and amplify existing habits, negative emotions activate the so-called surveillance system, which fosters individuals to rely less heavily on existing behaviors and to be more alert to new information. Perceptions of threat fall into the category of reactions that may stimulate individual information processing and shift people's attention toward new information (Joslyn & Haider-Markel, 2018; Marcus et al., 2000; Merolla & Zechmeister, 2018). The underlying rationale here is that individuals aim to use new information to deal with the source of the threat. This may mean that, in the face of a terrorist threat, effectiveness considerations should become more important for policy support. From this perspective, high perceptions of threat (whether this refers to security or liberty) should—according to the AIT framework—additionally trigger people's alertness to policy effectiveness as crucial additional information when assessing a policy.

On the other hand, it can be argued that threat (similar to cognitive overload) diminishes individuals' cognitive processing capacity. A reduction in information seeking under stress and cognitive load has been demonstrated for situational factors (e.g., loud noises), negative feedback on tasks, as well as emotional factors such as fear (Kruglanski, 2004; Roets et al., 2008). Apart from this, avoidance of new information may also constitute a motivated strategy to regain a subjective sense of control and certainty when facing a threat. This argument is also central to works on motivated closed-mindedness according to which perceptions of threat reduce individuals' cognitive capacity and motivation to seek out new information (see e.g., Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011). Thus, in case of threats, individuals do not consider the full range of options available on an issue or shift their attention toward information that appears to increase certainty and control (Gadarian & Albertson, 2014). In other words, threats can create a mental state of emergency among individuals, where the search for a way out of the threat overrides other considerations and impairs the cognitive processing of new information. Following these arguments, we expect considerations of the effectiveness of security policies to become less important when it comes to support for surveillance in situations where people perceive threats to their security or to their liberties. We put forward the following competing hypotheses, based on the perspectives of affective intelligence versus motivated closed-mindedness:

Hypothesis 2a *The positive effect of policy effectiveness on policy support is amplified under perceptions of threat (whether related to terrorism or to encroachment on civil liberties).*

Hypothesis 2b *The positive effect of policy effectiveness on policy support is mitigated under perceptions of threat (whether related to terrorism or to encroachment on civil liberties).*

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[3]Only two studies from the United States point to the importance of an interplay between perceived policy effectiveness and terror threat for counterterrorism policy support (Garcia & Geva, 2016; Krueger et al., 2020).

DATA AND METHODS

Data

To test these hypotheses, we conducted a factorial survey experiment that was embedded in an online survey about attitudes toward civil liberties. The survey was designed in the context of a research project entitled "Conditional support for civil liberties and preferences for domestic security policies among citizens in Germany." The project was directed by the first author of this study and funded by the German Research Foundation. The survey was managed by forsa and was fielded in Germany from May 2 to June 5, 2016. This period was marked by the aftermath of the 2015 terrorist attacks by radical Islamists in Paris and in other cities, and the risk of further attacks in Europe was considered high. The threat of right-wing extremism was also salient among citizens through reports from the years-long trial of members of the terrorist group NSU. State surveillance had equally become a topic of public discussion shortly before the survey was fielded: The Federal Constitutional Court found many parts of the German Federal Criminal Police Office Act (*Bundeskriminalamtgesetz*) of 2009 (containing new provisions on surveillance) to be unconstitutional. The Court established strict conditions for state surveillance in order to ensure the protection of privacy.

The sample for this survey was drawn from an online panel actively recruited by telephone (Link Internet Panel) and was representative of persons aged 14–69 who use the Internet for private purposes at least once a week. The panel was stratified by age, gender, and region, and a random sample of adult target persons was drawn from it. Potential respondents were incentivized with vouchers in order to increase their willingness to participate. The following analyses are based on answers from 774 respondents.

The experiment

Three outcome measures were used to map support for different forms of government surveillance based on the following question wording (descriptive information and the exact question wording for the variables used in this study can be found in Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix): "To what extent would you agree to the following measures: Monitoring of telephone calls and online activities of (a) suspects with a warrant, (b) suspects without a warrant, and (c) as many citizens as possible without a warrant." Responses were recorded on an 11-point scale ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree." These three measures differ in the extent to which existing laws and civil liberties are violated by political authorities (the second proposal might be in accordance with the law, but the third is not). We thus consider that surveillance measures can vary in their severity. These differences might also affect people's attitudes toward surveillance, and the reasons why people support or reject these measures. And indeed, the mean support for surveillance of suspects with a warrant is high (8.59 on a scale from 0 to 10), while surveillance of suspects without a warrant receives much less support (5.15), and surveillance of as many citizens as possible is strongly rejected (2.0).

We use a factorial survey to experimentally vary several dimensions of a scenario in which respondents evaluate the surveillance measures illustrated above. This method is used to provide individuals with information on the context in which government surveillance is evaluated. This is important because the relevance of context in decisions about civil liberties and domestic security has been shown repeatedly (see, e.g., Davis, 2007; Sniderman et al., 1996). This design also allows us to study the relevance of policy effectiveness relative to other dimensions of the implementation context (e.g., the magnitude or the target of the attack). The various vignettes that describe a hypothetical situation can therefore include different dimensions, reflecting theoretically relevant factors for supporting surveillance. In our case, six dimensions were varied within the vignettes in a $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 2 \times 2$ design. Table 1 gives an overview of the dimensions and levels of the vignette module.

Our attention focuses on the vignette dimension concerning the effectiveness of the proposed surveillance measures in preventing attacks. We argue that this perceived effectiveness is a key criterion for evaluating the policy in question, given that reducing or eliminating terrorism and crime are major goals of domestic security policies. Further vignette dimensions include conditions that might also affect individual evaluations of surveillance measures: We control for different groups of terrorists, as representations of threat can differ between groups, and these representations have been shown to affect individual support for antiterrorism measures (see, e.g., Christensen & Aars, 2021). We also include the time frame of a potential attack, as reasoning on surveillance might depend on whether there is an imminent danger or if there is time to consider alternative avenues for averting danger. The nature and effects of potential incidents are equally considered: If an attack has serious consequences, individuals are supposed to be more likely to support measures to counter such an attack (see, e.g., Garcia & Geva, 2016), even if it is not certain that such measures can prevent an attack. Finally, we include various targets of a potential attack, as there is evidence that citizens are more responsive to terrorist attacks when the latter are directed against civilians than when they target other groups (see, e.g., Balcells & Torrats-Espinosa, 2018).

The following example vignette illustrates how the different dimensions and levels were presented in the survey:

> Evidence suggests that **terrorists from the extreme right** are planning to carry out **armed raids** against **citizens in the coming months**. This could result in **injuries**. To what extent would you agree to the following measures, provided that it is **relatively certain** that they will prevent the attacks?

As our design entails 324 possible combinations of dimension levels, a D-efficient sample of 108 vignettes was generated from the vignette universe. D-efficient vignette samples are optimized with respect to two characteristics of an experimental design, namely independence and balance (for details, see Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010; Dülmer, 2007; Kuhfeld, 1997). The vignette sample reached a D-efficiency of 99.91 (Kuhfeld, 1997). It was split into 36 decks consisting of three vignettes each. Vignette decks were randomly assigned to respondents, and the selected vignettes were presented in random order. As each of the 774 respondents viewed three vignettes and answered three questions on support for government surveillance after each of the three vignettes, the following models are based on 2,322 observations.

Variables

Individuals' perceptions of threats of terrorism and of violations of personal liberties were measured using answers to the question of whether respondents feared several kinds of threats (see Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix for descriptive information and question wording of the variables employed in this study). The measure of terrorism-related security threat is based on the following two questions:

TABLE 1   The vignette module on surveillance to prevent terrorist attacks

Dimension	Levels
Policy effectiveness: prevention of attacks	Relatively certain/relatively uncertain
Terrorist	Extreme left/extreme right/Islamist
Timeframe	Within the next few days/in the coming months
Incidents	Armed raids/attacks involving hostage-taking/a series of bombings
Targets	Citizens/politicians/banks
Effects	Many casualties/several injured persons

Are you afraid of becoming a victim of a terrorist attack? Are you afraid of terrorist attacks happening in Germany? Responses measured on a 7-point scale from "not afraid at all" to "extremely afraid" were combined to form an additive index of threat to security (Cronbach's α = .89). To measure one's perceptions of threat to liberty, an additive index was used combining survey participants' answers to the following questions: Are you afraid of your freedom being restricted by security laws? Are you afraid of your privacy being infringed by government surveillance? The responses were again measured on a 7-point scale ranging from "not afraid at all" to "extremely afraid" (Cronbach's α = .91). The two indices of threat are virtually uncorrelated (Pearson's r = −.01).

We also control for sociodemographic factors in our models, namely age, gender, education, and East Germany. Regarding age, evidence favors an expectation that older people are more likely to support various antiterrorism measures (see, e.g., Davis, 2007). While recent evidence is mixed, earlier studies state that women are less committed to civil liberties than men are (see, e.g., Nunn et al., 1978). These studies, therefore, suggest that women are more supportive of strict surveillance measures. Previous studies point to a negative relationship between education and policies challenging civil liberties (see, e.g., Mondak & Hurwitz, 2012, p. 208), but education might also influence individual reasoning on surveillance. Some East German citizens experienced extensive surveillance practices in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). They might therefore be more sensitive to threats to liberty (see, e.g., Svenonius & Björklund, 2018).

RESULTS

In the first step, we examine the role of policy effectiveness along with further vignette dimensions. The corresponding multilevel regression results are presented in Figure 1 and show standardized coefficient estimates. Priming high policy effectiveness (compared to low policy effectiveness) increases support for state surveillance by .31, up to .64 standard deviations—depending on which outcome is considered. Compared to surveillance of suspects with a warrant, high policy effectiveness appears to be particularly relevant for forms of surveillance without a warrant. The effect size of this vignette dimension is substantial and is highest compared with the other vignette dimensions.

With reference to the terrorist group, respondents approve of surveillance measures to a higher degree if right-wing extremists or Islamists (rather than left-wing extremists) are the groups under consideration. This effect is statistically significant for targeted surveillance as an outcome and confirms existing findings on the role of group-related threats in support of counterterrorism policies (see, e.g., Christensen & Aars, 2021). Support for state surveillance is further increased if multiple deaths can be expected to result from the terrorist attack (compared with injured victims) and if citizens (as opposed to politicians) are the targets of the attack. In contrast, the mode of the attack, as well as the time frame of an attack, has no systematic impact on citizens' policy support across outcomes. These causal effects from the survey experiment do not differ if one includes pretreatment covariates (the following variables were included: gender, education, age, and region; see Table A3 in the Appendix). This suggests that random measurement error is not relevant to the results presented.

Additionally, the influence of effectiveness considerations on support for surveillance does not depend on different conditions of policy implementation represented by other vignette dimensions, as we do not find any moderation of effectiveness by further vignette characteristics.[4] All-in-all, the findings provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1, namely that policy effectiveness constitutes an influential determinant of policy support.

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[4]We also tested whether policy effectiveness is moderated by whether respondents live in East versus West Germany and did not find a statistically significant moderation. While this is beyond the scope of the current project, it shows that potential exposure to greater state surveillance in the past (i.e., growing up in East Germany) does not condition how policy effectiveness relates to policy support.
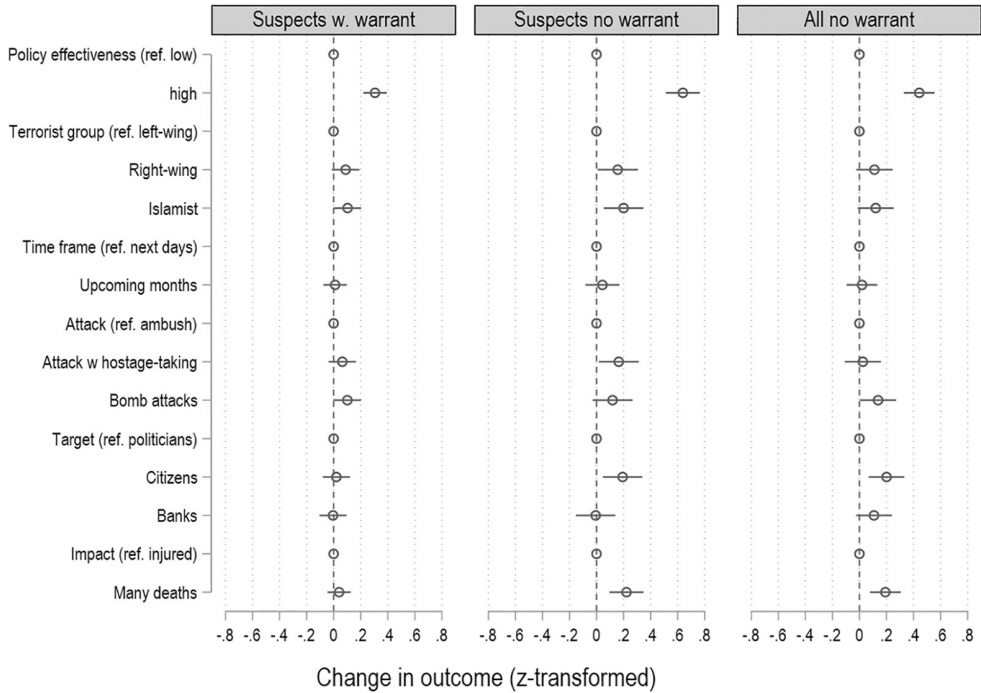
FIGURE 1 Effects of vignette dimensions on support for surveillance measures. Models A1–A3. Full regression estimates appear in Table A3 in the Appendix. Dots represent point estimates; bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

In the next step, we interact the effectiveness variable with indicators of threats (perceived security threats and perceived threats from violations of personal liberties). The corresponding regression results are presented in Table 2.

For security threats, we find no statistically significant interaction with policy effectiveness. Threat to liberty, however, operates as a relevant boundary condition when dragnet surveillance (many citizens without a warrant) is the outcome variable. We find a negative, statistically significant interaction term, suggesting that the more individuals perceive threats regarding their liberties, the less policy effectiveness influences their support for surveillance.

A marginal effects plot depicting this interactive relationship is presented in Figure 2. It shows that people with low levels of perceived threats to their liberty rely heavily on considerations of policy effectiveness as a heuristic of their policy support, whereas the effect of policy effectiveness decreases in magnitude as people feel more threatened by violations of personal liberties. For those with high levels of threat, policy effectiveness is no longer a statistically significant predictor of their degree of policy support. This finding provides support for Hypothesis 2b (at least for dragnet surveillance as an outcome variable), according to which perceptions of threat impair the cognitive processing of political information in the context of preference formation.

To examine the extent to which people who have a high threat perception regarding civil liberties are receptive to further characteristics of counterterrorism policy implementation (i.e., vignette characteristics), we compare the groups of respondents who express high versus low liberty threat (median split) and present the results in Figure 3.[5] Apart from the effect difference for policy effectiveness, we find higher, statistically significant effects for the type, target, and impact of the attack in the

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[5]Note that the coefficients of policy effectiveness presented are less extreme here compared with the marginal effects plot. The reason is that the marginal effects plot shows effects depending on the full range of the moderator variable, whereas the coefficient plot (Figure 3) shows two values of the moderator (high vs. low as median split)—and thus a more generalized (and thus less fine-grained) representation of the interaction effect.

low-threat group, while these effects are smaller, and statistically nonsignificant, in the high-threat group. This suggests that people who are relatively unconcerned about experiencing encroachments on their liberties are more likely to consider further vignette characteristics when forming opinions on support for surveillance policy. In contrast, people with high levels of perceived threats to their liberty rely less heavily on considerations relating to the context of policy implementation when forming their opinions on surveillance policies. This finding on the moderating role of threat is in line with previous works on reduced information-seeking and processing regarding alternatives and contextual factors when decisions are made in the presence of a threat (Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to evaluate the role of policy effectiveness in the topical area of state surveillance. Extending the focus of previous studies on counterterrorism or surveillance policy support (see, e.g., Davis & Silver, 2004; Huddy et al., 2005; Ziller & Helbling, 2021), we investigated how the impact of policy effectiveness varies across respondents. We argued that people's perceptions of threat condition how effectiveness considerations relate to policy support.

Empirical results from a factorial survey experiment conducted in Germany showed that policy effectiveness is critical for citizens' support for different forms of surveillance and that threat perceptions partially moderate citizens' responses to policy effectiveness. The relevance of effectiveness considerations is an important finding, as it shows that the question of whether a policy can indeed solve the problem that it is designed to solve matters to citizens' support for contentious issues. Furthermore, it illustrates how important it is for policy makers to better communicate the aims and the rationale behind specific policies, particularly if they are designed to prevent safety hazards.

As in many other countries, security threats, in combination with new technological opportunities, have led to an expansion of government surveillance measures in Germany over the past two decades—with a tendency to place greater emphasis on the prevention of (terrorist) crimes. The German case, with several right-wing extremist terrorist acts in recent years (and thus an increased severity of this threat since the time of our survey), and the radicalization of protests against antipandemic policies, particularly, illustrates how necessary it is to discuss the effectiveness of such policies and to point to the need for appropriate forms of government monitoring. Moreover, Germany constitutes a highly instructive case for the study of surveillance support: Related to negative experiences with surveillance in Nazi Germany and the GDR, there is a strong tradition of skepticism regarding data collection and government monitoring, and citizens are expected to react sensitively to policy changes in this area (Deflem et al., 2018).

Our results further showed that people who perceive a threat to their personal liberties take information about policy effectiveness into account to a lesser degree when forming their policy preferences than do people who are less concerned by these threats. This finding provides empirical support for a model of motivated closed-mindedness, according to which threats and related negative emotions impede information processing (Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011). An alternative (yet related) explanation is that a threat to liberty may not only reduce an individual's capacity for information processing but also impedes their motivation to take information about policy effectiveness into account. Regardless of the underlying mechanism, a threat to liberty operates as a systematic boundary condition by reducing the relevance of effectiveness and several further dimensions of the policy implementation context. This is particularly the case with regard to dragnet surveillance, which constitutes an intrusive form of state surveillance and a strong case for the violation of civil liberties.

Looking at threat related to security, we find—analogously to a threat to liberty—negative interactions with policy effectiveness, which nevertheless were not statistically significant. A possible reason for this is that people who perceive high levels of threats from terrorism are generally more supportive of surveillance measures in order to diminish terrorism as the source of threat, notwithstanding whether the enacted measures are more or less effective.

TABLE 2 Interaction effects with respondents' perceptions of threat as moderators

	(M1)	(M2)	(M3)
	Surveillance of suspects (with a warrant)	Surveillance of suspects (without a warrant)	Surveillance of as many as possible (without a warrant)
Policy effectiveness: high	.516**	.957**	.728**
	(.152)	(.221)	(.199)
Security threats	.049	.758**	.550**
	(.059)	(.077)	(.065)
Policy effectiveness: high × security threats	**−.040**	**−.034**	**.035**
	(.032)	**(.046)**	**(.042)**
Liberty threats	−.183**	−.874**	−.379**
	(.051)	(.067)	(.056)
Policy effectiveness: high × liberty threats	**−.021**	**−.059**	**−.119****
	(.028)	**(.040)**	**(.036)**
Terrorist group (ref. left-wing)			
Right-wing	.086	.144	.093
	(.052)	(.076)	(.068)
Islamist	.104*	.195**	.110
	(.051)	(.075)	(.067)
Time frame (ref. next days)			
Upcoming months	.009	.046	.016
	(.044)	(.064)	(.058)
Attack (ref. ambush)			
Attack w. hostage-taking	.067	.168*	.029
	(.052)	(.075)	(.068)
Bomb attacks	.101	.121	.144*
	(.052)	(.075)	(.068)
Target (ref. politicians)			
Citizens	.021	.195**	.205**
	(.051)	(.074)	(.067)
Banks	−.003	−.005	.107
	(.051)	(.074)	(.067)
Impact (ref. injured)			
Many deaths	.037	.222**	.193**
	(.044)	(.064)	(.058)
Female	−.208	.438*	.358*
	.159)	(.207)	(.171)
Education (ref. low)			
Medium	.453	.855	.530
	(.428)	(.557)	(.461)
High	.905*	.389	.173
	(.416)	(.542)	(.448)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	(M1)	(M2)	(M3)
	Surveillance of suspects (with a warrant)	Surveillance of suspects (without a warrant)	Surveillance of as many as possible (without a warrant)
Age in years	.018**	−.004	−.015*
	(.006)	(.008)	(.007)
East Germany	−.034	.415	.482*
	(.211)	(.274)	(.227)
Constant	7.329**	4.209**	.965
	(.609)	(.795)	(.660)
Random effects (variance)			
Random intercept	2.044**	2.631**	2.157**
	(.056)	(.074)	(.062)
Residual	1.004	1.464**	1.319**
	(.018)	(.026)	(.024)
N	2322	2322	2322

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Bold entries refer to theoretically relevant coefficient estimates.
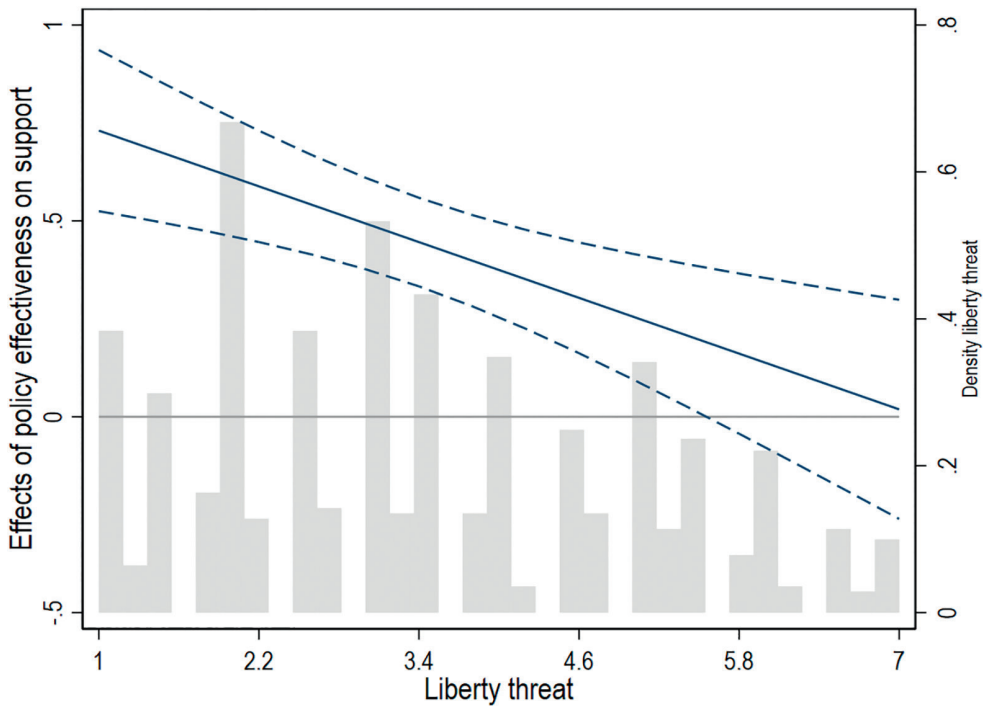*$p<.05$.
**$p<.01$.

FIGURE 2 Interaction policy effectiveness × threat to liberty. Dashed lines reflect 95% confidence intervals. Gray bars represent the density of observations. The underlying interaction effect is based on results from Model A3.
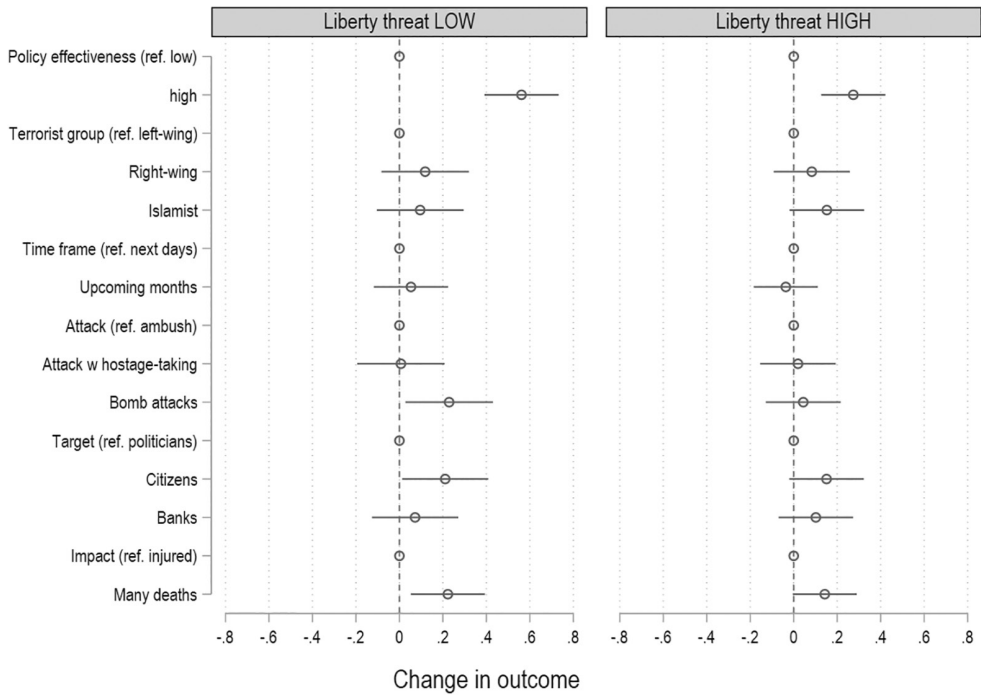
FIGURE 3 Effects of vignette dimensions for respondents with high and low levels of threat to liberty. Dots represent point estimates; bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Control variables are included (but not shown).

Our results corroborate recent studies indicating that different types of threat perceptions can have different effects on policy evaluations (see, e.g., Brandt et al., 2021). This study also has several limitations. First, this analysis focuses on two types of threats in the context of terrorism. Given the current international conflicts, it is important to consider other conditions of threat when researching support for domestic security policies. Second, we only use one possible measurement of policy effectiveness, and further experimental designs should examine alternative wordings or scenarios. Third, we need to further investigate whether or not evaluations of other characteristics of the policy implementation context (e.g., short-term versus long-term consequences, the choice between mutually exclusive policy measures) affect support for contentious policies. Fourth, although our results are in line with arguments related to motivated closed-mindedness, we cannot rule out the possibility that this mechanism does not apply to specific groups of people. Hence, future research should examine the extent to which personality traits (e.g., openness to new experiences) might further condition the relationships on which we focused in our study.

In terms of practical relevance, threats such as terrorist attacks typically evoke immediate political action on the part of governments. At the same time, accountable governments are expected to enact policies that are effective in addressing the societal problem under consideration. According to our results, threats can prevent citizens from taking policy performance into account. This would lead to a lack of responsiveness on the part of citizens, which in the long run might undermine political support based on policy feedback processes as a critical feature of democratic functioning (Pierson, 1993).

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ORCID

Eva-Maria Trüdinger https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3134-9347
Conrad Ziller https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2282-636X

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Eva-Maria Trüdinger is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Department of Political Theory and Empirical Democracy Research at the University of Stuttgart. Her research interests include attitudes toward policies and democratic processes, political behavior, and questions on trust and identity. She has recently published in *West European Politics*, *Political Research Quarterly*, and *Social Science Quarterly*, among others.

Conrad Ziller works as an Assistant Professor (*Akademischer Rat*) in the Department of Political Science at the University of Duisburg-Essen. His research interests focus on the role of immigration in politics and society, immigrant integration, policy effects on citizens, and quantitative methods. His work has been published in *The Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *European Journal of Political Research*, and *Social Forces*, among others.

APPENDIX A

TABLE A1 Descriptive information on variables

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Proportion	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Surveillance of suspects (w. warrant)	2322	8.588		2.324	0	10
Surveillance of suspects (w/o. warrant)	2322	5.154		3.571	0	10
Surveillance of as many as possible	2322	1.996		2.797	0	10
Policy effectiveness (ref. low)	2322		50.0%	.5	0	1
High	2322		50.0%	.5	0	1
Terrorist group (ref. left-wing)	2322		33.3%	.472	0	1
Right-wing	2322		33.3%	.472	0	1
Islamist	2322		33.3%	.472	0	1
Time frame (ref. next days)	2322		49.9%	.5	0	1
Upcoming months	2322		50.1%	.5	0	1
Attack (ref. ambush)	2322		33.3%	.472	0	1
Attack w. hostage-taking	2322		33.4%	.472	0	1
Bomb attacks	2322		33.3%	.471	0	1
Target (ref. politicians)	2322		33.3%	.472	0	1
Citizens	2322		33.3%	.472	0	1
Banks	2322		33.3%	.472	0	1
Impact (ref. injured)	2322		49.9%	.5	0	1
Many deaths	2322		50.1%	.5	0	1
Liberty threat	2322	3.409		1.59	1	7
Security threat	2322	3.437		1.388	1	7
Female	2322		48.8%	.5	0	1
Education (ref. low)	2322		3.7%	.19	0	1
Medium	2322		25.5%	.436	0	1
High	2322		70.8%	.455	0	1
Age in years	2322	43.238		13.251	20	74
East Germany	2322		16.0%	.367	0	1

T A B L E A 2   Question wording

*Support for surveillance measures: three outcome variables (OV)

The following policy proposals were presented to the respondents after each vignette. Each respondent was shown three vignettes. To what extent would you agree to the following measures?

a: Surveillance of suspects with a warrant

Monitoring of telephone calls and online activities of suspects with a warrant.

<1> completely disagree to <11> completely agree

b: Surveillance of suspects without a warrant

Monitoring of telephone calls and online activities of suspects without a warrant.

<1> completely disagree to <11> completely agree

c: Surveillance of as many as possible (without a warrant)

Monitoring of telephone calls and online activities of as many citizens as possible without a warrant.

<1> completely disagree to <11> completely agree

*Threat to liberty

Are you afraid of…

…your freedom being restricted by security laws?

…your privacy being infringed by government surveillance?

<1> not afraid at all to <7> extremely afraid

*Threat to security

Are you afraid of…

…becoming a victim of a terrorist attack? …terrorist attacks happening in Germany?

<1> not afraid at all to <7> extremely afraid

*Sociodemographic controls

Female

Please tell us what gender you are. Male, female

Education

What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed?

Finished school without school leaving certificate; lowest formal qualification of Germany's tripartite secondary school system, after 8 or 9 years of schooling ➜ low level of education

Intermediary secondary qualification, after 10 years of schooling ➜ medium level of education

Certificate fulfilling entrance requirements to study at a university of applied science; higher qualification, entitling holders to study at a university ➜ high level of education

Another school leaving certificate, namely: ___ (recoded if possible); still at school ➜ missing

Age in years

In which year were you born?

East Germany

In which *Land* do you live? East German *Länder* (1), West German *Länder* and Berlin (0)

T A B L E A 3   Results from multilevel regressions (main models without interactions, cf. Figure 1)

	(A1)	(A2)	(A3)
	Surveillance of suspects (with a warrant)	**Surveillance of suspects (without a warrant)**	**Surveillance of as many as possible (without a warrant)**
Policy effectiveness (ref. low)			
High	.305**	.639**	.442**
	(.044)	(.064)	(.058)
Terrorist group (ref. left-wing)			
Right-wing	.089	.157*	.111
	(.052)	(.076)	(.068)
Islamist	.103*	.200**	.120

(Continues)

TABLE A3 (Continued)

	(A1)	(A2)	(A3)
	Surveillance of suspects (with a warrant)	**Surveillance of suspects (without a warrant)**	**Surveillance of as many as possible (without a warrant)**
	(.051)	(.075)	(.068)
Time frame (ref. next days)			
Coming months	.011	.044	.019
	(.044)	(.064)	(.058)
Attack (ref. ambush)			
Attack w. hostage-taking	.064	.165*	.025
	(.052)	(.075)	(.068)
Bombings	.101	.119	.138*
	(.052)	(.075)	(.068)
Target (ref. politicians)			
Citizens	.020	.193**	.200**
	(.051)	(.074)	(.067)
Banks	−.005	−.007	.107
	(.051)	(.074)	(.067)
Impact (ref. injured)			
Many deaths	.040	.222**	.191**
	(.044)	(.064)	(.058)
Female	−.088	1.334**	.907**
	(.155)	(.234)	(.180)
Education (ref. low)			
Medium	.495	.940	.531
	(.432)	(.654)	(.504)
High	.906*	.016	−.141
	(.419)	(.634)	(.488)
Age in years	.020**	.004	−.012
	(.006)	(.009)	(.007)
East Germany	−.039	.476	.536*
	(.213)	(.322)	(.248)
Constant	6.686**	3.273**	1.383*
	(.525)	(.794)	(.613)
Random intercept respondent			
	2.066**	3.133**	2.381**
	(.057)	(.086)	(.067)
Residual			
	1.005	1.465**	1.323**
	(.018)	(.026)	(.024)
Observations	2322	2322	2322

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

*$p<.05$.

**$p<.01$.