

Research Repository

Generating Collective Social Safety in Times of Political Change: The Motivating Effects of Inexplicable Behavior

Accepted for publication in Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

Research Repository link: <https://repository.essex.ac.uk/43652/>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite this paper.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672261468878>

Generating Collective Social Safety in Times of Political Change:
The Motivating Effects of Inexplicable Behavior

Sandra L. Murray

University at Buffalo

Veronica M. Lamarche

University of Essex

Gabriela S. Pascuzzi

University at Buffalo

Corey Allred

University at Buffalo

Mark D. Seery

University at Buffalo

James K. McNulty

Florida State University

Key words: Trust, elections, uncertainty, motivated reasoning, social connection

Word Count: 10,184

Abstract

A model of the generation of collective safety in social connection is proposed. This model posits that *not* being able to make sense of the behavior of others functions as an alert that motivates people who feel more vulnerable to the actions of societal collectives to find compensatory reason to trust in others. In two separate studies, participants in the United Kingdom and participants in the United States completed surveys the day before, and after, the 2024 general/federal elections. Preregistered moderated mediation analyses revealed that when family/friends behaved more (vs. less) inexplicably, participants who felt more (vs. less) vulnerable to the political party in power trusted sociopolitical relationships more rather than less. Such compensatory affirmations predicted renewed trust in personal relationships and strengthened feelings of connection post-election, suggesting that inexplicable behavior can motivate vulnerable people to generate the safety they need to see during societal transitions.

To adapt a U.S. President’s turn of phrase, “elections have [uncertain] consequences.” Elections empower the prevailing party to enact policies that can shape the lives of individual constituents for better or worse. Elections can thus elicit personal angst and uncertainty (Blanton et al., 2012; Block et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2023) because people often question whether politicians, government bodies, and opposing partisans will act in their best interest (Finkel et al., 2020; Pew Research Center, 2024). However, people also experience elections within the context of close relationships—with romantic partners, children, friends, and extended family—which themselves can be a source of uncertainty. Given the fundamental human need to feel safe in social connection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the model proposed here suggests that struggling to understand the motivations of close others at such times can motivate people to compensate and trust even opposing partisans, political leaders, and governments more rather than less. Using two preregistered studies, this paper tests this hypothesis using the 2024 elections in the United Kingdom, with a conservative incumbent and liberal challenger, and the United States, with a liberal incumbent and conservative challenger, as comparisons.

Social Safety Generation: No Relationship is an Island

Social connection affords the potential for others to benefit and harm the self (Columbus et al., 2021; Holt-Lundstadt, 2018; Murray et al., 2006; Murray & Pascuzzi, 2024). For instance, a romantic partner could be supportive or critical in response to a setback, a friend could answer or ghost texts, a local school board could support or undermine vaccination, and government could contain or worsen an employment crisis. Recognizing this duality, Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that people are fundamentally motivated to feel safe in social connection—that is, to feel surrounded by trustworthy (i.e., caring and cooperative) rather than untrustworthy (i.e., hurtful and exploitative) social ties (Murray, McNulty et al., 2023; Slavich, 2020).

Although personal relationships with romantic partners, friends and families play a crucial role in fulfilling and frustrating the need to feel safe (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023; Murray, McNulty et al., 2023), such relationships are nested within and encircled by progressively more distal sets of relationships shared by individuals living in the same neighborhood or school district, city, state, or country (Slavich, 2020). These more distal relationships also play an important role in fulfilling and frustrating the need to feel safe (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023), partly by shaping how romantic partners treat one another and how readily families can meet their needs (Batra et al., 2023; DeVerna et al., 2025). For instance, romantic partners with similar (vs. dissimilar) views of the political world are happier with each other (Gordon et al., 2025); romantic partners exposed to more (vs. less) racial discrimination better support one another (Clavél et al., 2017); and families benefiting from child-friendly (vs. unfriendly) government policies experience less daily stress (Batra et al., 2023). In fact, speaking to the importance of distal relationships for felt safety, people will even vote opposing partisans into presidential office when it serves their relational needs (Gabriel et al., 2018).

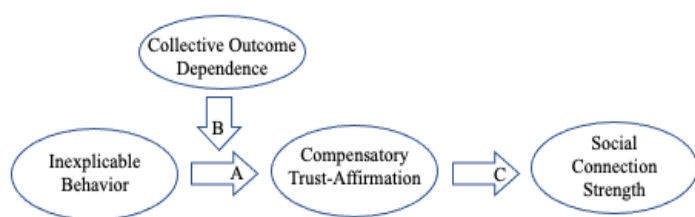


Figure 1. The Collective Social-Safety Generation Model

The model of the Collective Social Safety Generation (CSSG) presented in Figure 1 builds from the nested or interdependent nature of human social connections to explain

when and how uncertainty about others can paradoxically strengthen social connections.

Broadly, this model assumes that people who recognize (vs. discount) how much they depend on more distal social relationships for protection will be better psychologically equipped to perceive stronger social ties during uncertain and societally turbulent times. Consistent with this logic,

political scientists and sociologists view trust in personal relationships, community relationships, and political governance as interconnected sentiments that work together to signal risk and opportunity in social connection (Bargsted et al., 2021; Lamarche, 2020; Newton & Zmerli, 2011; Newton et al., 2017). Similarly in line with this logic, evolutionary and interdependence theorists argue that psycho-behavioral threat defense systems work together to signal risk and opportunity across closer and more distal social connections (Kenrick et al., 2010). For instance, the risk-regulation and behavioral immune systems respectively protect against being rejected (Murray et al., 2006) or physically infected by others (Miller & Maner, 2012; Troisi et al., 2022).

Path A in the CSSG model captures the social safety system. This threat-defense system protects against the epistemic anxieties that arise from *not* being able to make sense of others' motivation or behavior (Murray, Lamarche et al., 2021; Murray, Seery et al., 2021; Murray, McNulty et al. 2023). To feel safe in social connection (i.e., surrounded by trustworthy social ties), people need to believe that others will behave in ways that are sensible, understandable, and foreseeable (Kelley, 1979; Murray, Lamarche et al., 2021). However, people naively assume that others share the “singular” reality they perceive (Epley et al., 2022; Peetz et al., 2022), which leaves them vulnerable to being perplexed or surprised when others behave in ways that do not make sense in light of presumed values (e.g., “I thought my spouse was just as conservative as me”), historic expectations (e.g., “My friend always supported progressive causes”), and/or normative beliefs (e.g., “Presidents should uphold the law”).

The social safety system assumes that not being able to make sense of behavior functions as an epistemic alarm that simultaneously (a) alerts people to the possibility that (inexplicably behaving) individuals, groups, or institutions that they depend on might not be entirely trustworthy and (b) motivates them to take compensatory mental steps to replenish their trust in

others. Importantly, this model (represented by Path A) assumes that people replenish their trust in others by turning to relationships that *differ* in distance from the relationship that exhibited inexplicable behavior—a presumably perceptually easier task than trying to convince themselves that inexplicably behaving relationships are actually trustworthy. Consistent with this logic, people compensate for uncertainty in one domain by exaggerating the associations they expect and want to see on unrelated domain (Heine et al., 2006; Jonas et al., 2014; Kunda, 1990; Peetz et al., 2022). Likewise, people compensate for social rejection by actively cultivating new friendships rather than trying to reconnect with individuals who just rejected them (Maner et al., 2007; Richman & Leary, 2009; Williams et al., 2000).

Path A thus conveys two sets of interconnected assumptions. First, a romantic partner's inexplicable behavior should put the motivations of family members and friends (i.e., similarly close relationships) in question because experiences depending on a spouse are behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally associated with experiences depending on other family members (Holt-Lundstadt, 2018; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). Therefore, the inexplicable behavior of a romantic partner, family member, or friend should motivate people to affirm greater trust in the more *distal* relationships that surround them, such as those with fellow community members, local governments, or political leaders because such relationships should be further removed from, and thus less perceptually constrained by, a romantic partner's inexplicable behavior. Second, for similar reasons, a government leader's inexplicable behavior should also put the motivations of one's fellow neighborhood, city, or country members into question (i.e., similarly distal relationships) because experiences depending on government are behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally associated with experiences depending on community members (Hudson, 2006; Mayseless & Popper, 2007, 2019). Therefore, the inexplicable behavior of such sociopolitical

entities should motivate people to affirm greater trust in more proximal personal relationships, such as those with romantic partners, children, or friends (Murray, Lamarche et al., 2021).

Paths B and C are unique to the CSSG model. They together delineate how perceiving one's outcomes as more (vs. less) dependent on social collectives can magnify (vs. attenuate) the downstream effects of inexplicable behavior. Regarding Path B, relationships with close others typically involve mutual or symmetric dependence, an equal balance of power that helps ensure that each party in the relationship is motivated to behave cooperatively or communally (Clark & Grote, 1998; Columbus et al., 2021). However, relationships with social collectives typically involve asymmetric dependence (Columbus et al., 2021; Kelley, 1979). In other words, distal relationships (e.g., neighborhoods, school boards, governments, political parties, fellow voters and citizens) have greater power to impact the welfare of the individual perceiver (and their personal relationships) than the actions of any individual perceiver have to impact the welfare of any specific distal relationship. For this reason, Path B hypothesizes that inexplicable behavior is more threatening and more likely to motivate compensatory trust affirmations when perceivers recognize (vs. discount) just how much their own personal safety and security depend on the actions of the more distal social collectives or relationships that surround them.

Consistent with this logic, people generally seem to be more vigilant to being harmed by others when their outcomes feel more dependent on the actions (or inactions) of others than vice versa (Murray & Lamarche, 2023; Murray & Pascuzzi, 2024). For instance, in an initial set of studies on the social-safety system (Murray, Lamarche et al., 2021), inexplicable behavior provoked stronger compensatory affirmations of trust when people felt more vulnerable to their romantic partner. Specifically, people who were less trusting of their romantic partner affirmed greater trust in their family on days after the sociopolitical world behaved more (vs. less)

inexplicably. In addition, people who were less trusting also affirmed greater trust in the Trump-led government on days after family members behaved more (vs. less) inexplicably—and this compensatory tendency was even stronger when dependence on the government was more situationally salient (see also, Murray, McNulty et al., 2023). In a later set of studies, not being able to make sense of public opinion about the President motivated people to turn to their families for safety when people were more objectively dependent on fellow community members to protect their personal health (i.e., rising COVID-19 cases), but not when they were less dependent (i.e., falling COVID-19 cases; Murray, Seery et al., 2021).

Path C in turn posits that compensatory trust affirmations afford perceivers the needed psychological assurance to protect and strengthen connection to their immediate and broader social world (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023; Murray & Pascuzzi, 2024). In the CSSG model, such affirmations function as inoculations or small doses of safety that can readily transfer from one person, group, or institution to another. Illustrating such transferability, trust in personal relationships promotes greater trust in the broader social world, even extending to trust in much maligned governments (Lamarche, 2020; Newton & Zmerli, 2011; Newton et al., 2017).

In sum, the CSSG model contends that perceivers who recognize (vs. discount) the realities of collective dependence will be better psychologically equipped to sustain and strengthen social connections in the face of uncertainty. Specifically, for people who feel more dependent on social groups or collectives, inexplicable behavior should motivate compensatory trust affirmations that promote increased social connection. But, for people who feel less dependent, inexplicable behavior should have less of a protective effect precisely because discounting dependence reduces the safety-threat posed by inexplicable behavior.

Overview and Hypotheses

Prior research on the social safety system ascribed romantic relationships (specifically trust in a romantic partner) a central role in regulating how people manage the safety-threat posed by inexplicable behavior (Murray et al., 2021; Murray, McNulty et al., 2023). Relative to the majority of the more proximal and distal relationships people share with others, romantic relationships are unusually symmetric in their structure (Slavich, 2020). Existing research thus offers little insight into the role that asymmetrical relationships may play in social safety regulation. The CSSG redresses these limitations by focusing on how feelings of dependence on social collectives can motivate compensatory affirmations of trust and thereby strengthen feelings of social connection inside and outside of romantic relationships.

Because elections are likely to make dependence on the actions of societal groups or collectives, such as the political power in power, more salient, they provide an apt context for a first test of the CSSG model. We asked participants in the United Kingdom and United States to complete self-report surveys the day before, and the day after, their respective 2024 general (U.K.) and federal (U.S.) elections. This pre-election/post-election between-countries design had two primary strengths. It allowed us to establish the temporal precedence of compensatory trust-affirmations (assessed pre-election) on social connection strength (assessed post-election). It also allowed us to establish the generality of preregistered moderated-mediation hypothesis tests across two different countries with different political systems and prevailing political parties.

Personal and sociopolitical relationships respectively include a breadth of specific relationships, spanning romantic partners, children, friends, and extended family in the case of personal relationships and neighborhood acquaintances, community groups, fellow citizens, political leaders, government bodies, and countries in the case of sociopolitical relationships

(Murray, Lamarche et al., 2021; Newton et al., 2017; Slavich, 2020). Therefore, in measuring inexplicable behavior and trust in each domain, we purposefully sampled a diversity of specific personal and sociopolitical relationships. We indexed the *pre-election* safety alarm—*inexplicable behavior*—through self-reported difficulty making sense of behavior in one’s closer personal relationships (e.g., romantic partner, child, friend) and one’s more distal sociopolitical relationships (e.g., local council, fellow community members, political leaders). As an additional measure of *pre-election* inexplicable *sociopolitical* behavior, we also assessed whether participants predicted relatively even (i.e., 50/50) odds of either party winning the election as opposed to believing one party was the odds-on favorite to win. We indexed the compensatory defense—*trust affirmations*—through trust in specific personal relationship targets (e.g., friends) and sociopolitical relationship targets (e.g., local council, federal government).

We indexed the amplifier/moderator of trust-affirming responses to inexplicable behavior—*collective outcome dependence*—through a new measure capturing vulnerability to the electoral process itself, as captured through perceptions that one’s financial security, physical security, and personal happiness, etcetera, depended on the political party in power. We indexed changes in the outcome—*social connection* strength—through existing measures capturing: (1) satisfaction and commitment in one’s romantic relationship in particular and (2) generalized feelings of social satisfaction (versus loneliness) across the breadth of one’s social connections.

In sum, the CSSG models advances novel moderated threat, moderated compensation, and moderated mediation hypotheses. When people felt more dependent on the party in power, we expected: (1) more inexplicable behavior in their personal relationships to predict decreased trust in personal relationships (threat) and increased trust in sociopolitical relationships (compensation); (2) more inexplicable behavior in surrounding sociopolitical relationships to

predict decreased trust in sociopolitical relationships (threat) and increased trust in personal relationships (compensation); and (3) engaging in compensatory trust affirmations to predict increased social connection strength as captured through social belonging post-election (mediation). However, when people felt less dependent on the party in power, we expected these interconnected effects of inexplicable behavior to be attenuated.

Method

The Supplementary Online Materials (SOM) describe unutilized measures. In late May 2024, the U.K. Prime Minister unexpectedly announced that a snap general election would occur in 6 weeks. Consequently, we had only a short time to create and field the U.K. study and preregistered the hypotheses/analyses for the U.K. snap election after data collection was completed: https://osf.io/uc7kf/overview?view_only=cfbda6246ba0489287cac35ecb7887a4.

The U.S. election followed its expected timeline, and so we were able to preregister the design/hypotheses/analyses for the U.S. study before data were collected:

https://osf.io/jeuyf/overview?view_only=2f69d8025aa1414594c34701368e8ce2. Because the U.K. study was completed before we identified funding for the U.S. study, only the U.S. preregistration notes our intention to combine samples. The text flags any deviations from preregistered measure composition and analyses. The data are on OSF:

https://osf.io/sfr8c/overview?view_only=3e4c86efea0d451c81e668d28ea47620.

Participants

Based on research funds available to each lead investigator, participants ($N_{UK}=754$; $N_{US}=475$) were recruited through Prolific Academic to complete pre- and post-election surveys for payment. Retained participants ($N_{UK}=735$; $N_{US}=465$) had to be in committed romantic relationships, eligible to vote, and promise to provide their best answers on an integrity check.

By design, they were evenly split on income (i.e., above/below the median household income; ~£40,000 in the U.K. and ~\$81,000 in the U.S.); U.S. participants were also evenly split between swing and non-swing states. Participants (492 males, 694 females, 13 unspecified) averaged 41.1 ($SD=12.4$) years old; relationships averaged 18.7 years ($SD=11.6$). Most U.K. participants (90%) identified their ethnicity as English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British. U.S. participants identified their racial identity as White (77%), Asian (3%), Black (9.5%), Latino/Latina (5%), Indigenous (1%), Middle Eastern (<1%), and mixed/other (4%). At least 93% completed the post-election surveys ($N_{UK}=685$; $N_{US}=437$).

Procedure

Participants received a Qualtrics link to the survey at 9 A.M. local time on the day before the 2024 election (U.K. July 3rd/U.S. November 4th) and after the election (July 5th/November 6th). While the pre-election survey closed as soon as we met the requisite sample on the day before the election, the post-election survey remained open for 48 hours to maximize retention. The large majority of participants completed the survey within 24 hours of receipt. The longer pre- and shorter post-election surveys are included in the SOM. Of note, the U.K. and U.S. surveys used terminology appropriate to each country (e.g., local council in the U.K. vs. state in the U.S.). Inexplicable behavior and trust measures were counterbalanced in order.

Measures for Capturing Compensatory Trust-Affirmation Pre-Election

Inexplicable behavior in personal relationships. Participants separately reported whether it had recently been hard for them to make sense of the behavior of their (a) “romantic partner”, (b) “children”, and (c) “friends”; U.S. participants also rated (d) “extended family, (i.e., parents, siblings, cousins)”, 1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree* (or *not applicable*). We

averaged the items, such that higher scores captured greater inexplicability.¹

Inexplicable behavior in sociopolitical relationships. We measured inexplicable behavior in sociopolitical relationships in two ways. First, participants separately reported whether it had recently been hard for them to make sense of the behavior of their (a) “neighbors/people in my community”, (b) “fellow citizens”, (c) “government”; (d) “national events”, (e) “world events”, and (f) the competing candidates (i.e., Sunak and Starmer in the U.K.; Harris and Trump in the U.S.), 1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree* (or *not applicable*). We averaged these items, such that higher scores captured greater inexplicability. In addition, participants also rated the chance of each candidate winning the election (0-100%); we calculated the absolute value of the difference between Sunak/Starmer (U.K.) and Harris/Trump (U.S.) ratings, z-scored this absolute difference, and then reversed it (multiplied by -1). Higher scores captured greater inexplicability—that is, closer to even odds of either candidate winning.

Trust in personal relationships. Participants rated how much trust they currently had in their (a) “romantic partner”, (b) “children”, (c) “friends”, and (d) “broader/extended family (i.e., parents, siblings, cousins)”, 1=*no trust at all*, 7=*complete trust* (or *not applicable*). We averaged

¹ We created the items for inexplicable behavior in personal and sociopolitical relationships and trust in personal relationships and governance, adapting items from prior research (Murray, Lamarche et al., 2021) and adding items specific to the national electoral context. Confirmatory factor analyses of the inexplicable behavior and trust items revealed two reasonably distinct factors corresponding to personal and sociopolitical relationships (see SOM).

the items such that higher scores captured greater trust in personal relationships.²

Trust in current governance. U.K. participants rated how much trust they currently had in their: (a) “local council”, (b) “government”, and (c) “Rishi Sunak”, the Prime Minister candidate from the incumbent party. U.S. participants rated how much trust they currently had in their: (a) “state government”, (b) “federal government”, and (c) “Kamala Harris”, the Presidential candidate from the incumbent party, 1=*no trust at all*, 7=*complete trust*. We averaged the items such that higher scores captured greater trust in governance.³

Trust in community. We measured trust in community in two ways. Participants rated how much trust they currently had in “neighbors and people in your community,” 1=*no trust at all*, 7=*complete trust*. Also, participants rated how they would feel “having a conversation with the average person in my country” in response to 8 shared reality items which we averaged (e.g., “we would think of things at the exact same time”, “we would share the same thoughts and feelings about things”), 1=*completely disagree*, 7=*completely agree* (Rossignac-Milon et al., 2021). We indexed community trust by z-scoring and averaging these scales, as preregistered.

² As Table 1 reveals, the internal consistency of the trust in personal relationships scale was lower in the U.K. than U.S. sample because the trust in romantic partner item had a low item-total correlation in the U.K. but not the U.S. sample. We retained trust in the romantic partner in this scale given its centrality to the personal relationship domain (Murray & Pascuzzi, 2024).

³ Although we preregistered that we would examine trust in candidates separately, we included trust in the current government leader (i.e., Sunak in the U.K.; Harris in the U.S.) in the measure of trust in governance because leaders are central to government and people often struggle to disentangle “leaders” from the “institutions” they lead (Shino et al., 2025).

Pre-Election Moderators

Dependence on the government. All participants rated how much their “financial security”, “job security”, “food security”, “cost of living”, “physical security”, “personal happiness”, and “relationship happiness” depend on which party is in power, 0=*does not depend on the party in power at all*, 7=*completely depends on the party in power*.⁴

Political orientation. Participants reported their political orientation on a single bipolar item, 1=*extremely left-wing*, 9=*extremely right-wing*.

Pre- and Post-Election Outcome Measures Indexing Social Connection Strength

Romantic relationship quality. Participants separately reported how “satisfied” and “committed” they were in their romantic relationship, 1=*not at all*, 7=*extremely*, which we combined to index romantic relationship quality pre- and post-election.

Social belonging. U.K. participants reported feelings of social satisfaction in the past week on the six-item social satisfaction scale (e.g., “I felt a sense of contact with people who care for me, and whom I care for”, “I had disagreements or conflicts with people I usually get

⁴ We also preregistered a further possible measure of dependence on the government. We asked participants to rate how much they expected their own, and the average person’s, life to change (for better or worse) following the election. The U.K. questions did not specify a winning party because Labour was widely expected to win the election (and did win 63% of parliamentary seats). The U.S. questions specified a winning candidate (i.e., Trump vs. Harris) because the election was expected to be close. Given the difference in referents across samples, and the fact that responses to the U.S. items turned out to be highly positively correlated (i.e., confounded) with personal preferences for/against Harris/Trump, we decided against using this measure.

along with”, 1=*not at all true*, 9=*very true*; Sheldon et al., 2011) and feelings of loneliness on the eight-item UCLA loneliness scale (e.g., “I felt left out”, “I lack companionship”, 0=*never*, 4=*always*; Hays & DiMatteo, 1987). In the U.K. sample, we z-scored and averaged these separate scales, reversing loneliness such that higher scores capturing greater social belonging. Rather than completing two separate scales, U.S. participants completed a single 11-item social satisfaction scale that included six items from the social satisfaction scale and five items from the UCLA loneliness scale, all in reference to the past two days; items were averaged such that higher scores captured greater social belonging. (We consolidated items from two scales to one in the U.S. study to reduce item redundancy and focus participants on recent feelings.)

Results

We based the N for each study on the budget available to the lead investigator. As noted in the U.S. preregistration, we z-scored the measures within sample and combined samples to afford exploratory tests of moderation by sample/country and political orientation. The combined sample ($N=1200$) of participants should have provided ~97-100% power to detect small to medium effect sizes ($f^2=.02-.15$) in regression and correlational analyses (including moderation). Power for the full indirect effect (Model 7 in Hayes, 2013) was estimated using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2007) by calculating power separately for the A path ($X \times W$ predicting M) and B path (M predicting Y) and taking their product (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). Using a conservative small effect size ($f^2 = .02$) and $\alpha = .05$ for both paths, power for each path was $>.99$, yielding an estimated power of $>.99$ for the indirect effect. The minimum sample size required to achieve power = .80 was $N = 550$, indicating the current sample exceeded recommended thresholds. (The N s vary slightly across analyses because participants could choose not to answer questions.)

Each study preregistration presented an iterative set of hypotheses/analyses relevant to the current manuscript following the classical approach to understanding associations between factors in a mediation model (Baron & Kenny, 1986). However, since each subsequent hypothesis test follows from the previous, we focus on the tests of moderation (see Hypotheses 3b/3d in the U.S. preregistration) and moderated mediation (see Hypotheses 4a/4b in the U.S. preregistration) as main effects are not considered reliable when there is a significant higher order interaction (Aiken & West, 1991; Lorah, 2020) and because indirect effects in mediation models recommend focusing on single integrated models (Hayes, 2013). Each preregistration also described variables, such as childhood and adult instability, objective social instability, future uncertainty, environmental safety, and political engagement, that are intended for independent projects designed to test distinct hypotheses (see SOM).

To minimize the number of analyses, and establish the generality of the effects, we created composite indices of the sociopolitical variables. First, to broadly capture the different ways in which the sociopolitical world could behave unexpectedly pre-election, we created a formative index of inexplicable sociopolitical behavior by averaging (*z*-scored) measures of self-reported difficulty making sense of sociopolitical behavior pre-election and perceptions that the outcome would be a toss-up. Second, to create a broad index of trust in sociopolitical relationships, we computed a composite index of trust in sociopolitical relationships pre-election by averaging the *z*-scored trust in governance and trust in community measures. Importantly, the findings replicated across the components of these indices, as we will note.⁵

⁵ In a reflective measurement model, the construct (e.g., self-esteem) causes the indicators (e.g., responses to self-esteem items). Therefore, indicators are expected to inter-correlate (i.e., people

Table 1 reports the pre-election internal consistencies and descriptive information (raw scores) for the individual scales. Table 2 reports the intercorrelations among the focal pre-election analyzed measures. We first present the simple moderation models predicting compensatory affirmations of trust (a) pre-election and (b) from pre- to post-election. Then we present the full moderated mediation models that follow from the simple moderation models.

The CSSG model is predicated on the contrasting logic that the stronger (vs. weaker) alarm signal sent by inexplicable behavior should threaten trust in that *same* relationship domain and heighten trust in the *alternate* relationship domain for people who feel more dependent on

who score high on one indicator should also score high on all the other indicators). In a formative measurement model (Diamantopoulos et al., 2008; Edwards & Bagozzi, 2000), the indicators instead define the construct. Therefore, people that score relatively high on one indicator are not necessarily expected to score high on the others because any one indicator is sufficient to index the construct (e.g., as is the case for indicators of socioeconomic status). Applied to the index of inexplicable sociopolitical behavior, this means that participants could score higher on inexplicability if they reported they had greater difficulty making sense of the sociopolitical world or if they perceived the election as a toss-up, or both. Similarly, participants could score higher on trust in the sociopolitical world if they scored higher on trust in the community or if they scored higher on community like-mindedness, or both. Consistent with the logic of a formative index, the pre-election measures of inexplicable sociopolitical behavior (i.e., difficulty making sense of the behavior of the sociopolitical world and perceptions of the election as a toss-up) were not significantly correlated, $r(1195)=-.042, p=.145$. The pre-election measures of trust in governance and community were significantly positively correlated, $r(1194)=.30, p<.001$.

the political party in power. Therefore, to capture the potentially contrasting effects, we conducted two separate sets of simultaneous regression analyses respectively predicting trust in sociopolitical relationships and trust in personal relationships. We discuss each in turn.

Table 1. Descriptive Information by Sample/Country

Variable	United Kingdom (U.K.)			United States (U.S.)		
	α	Mean	<i>SD</i>	α	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Inexplicable personal behavior	.74	1.94	1.25	.89	2.28	1.56
Inexplicable sociopolitical behavior	.80	4.38	1.18	.76	4.12	1.31
Election toss-up (0=even odds)	--	57.46	29.21	--	27.8	28.9
Trust in personal relationships	.47	5.60	0.81	.72	5.84	1.00
Trust in current governance	.71	6.67	2.39	.78	3.42	1.57
Trust in neighbors (single item)	--	5.56	1.19	--	4.29	1.56
Community like-mindedness	.92	3.54	1.09	.89	3.63	1.12
Dependence on party in power	.84	3.70	1.89	.85	4.05	1.31
Political orientation (single item)	--	4.21	1.61	--	4.51	2.21
Social satisfaction	.80	7.02	1.54	.92	7.11	1.68
Loneliness	.87	3.83	1.32	--	--	--
Relationship quality	.77	6.30	0.97	.69	6.23	0.94

Table 2. Pre-election intercorrelations among the primary analyzed variables by sample/country, with U.K. below the diagonal and U.S. above the diagonal.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Inexplicable personal behavior	--	.238 <i>p</i> <.001	-.365 <i>p</i> <.001	.204 <i>p</i> <.001	.237 <i>p</i> <.001	-.312 <i>p</i> <.001	-.595 <i>p</i> <.001	.033 <i>p</i> =.478
2. Inexplicable sociopolitical behavior composite	.205 <i>p</i> <.001	--	-.136 <i>p</i> =.003	-.100 <i>p</i> =.031	-.085 <i>p</i> =.067	-.156 <i>p</i> <.001	-.198 <i>p</i> <.001	-.042 <i>p</i> =.365
3. Trust in personal relationships	-.316 <i>p</i> =.001	-.120 <i>p</i> =.001	--	.381 <i>p</i> <.001	.071 <i>p</i> =.125	.440 <i>p</i> <.001	.552 <i>p</i> <.001	.057 <i>p</i> =.224
4. Trust in sociopolitical relationships composite	-.030 <i>p</i> =.413	-.023 <i>p</i> =.532	.425 <i>p</i> <.001	--	.194 <i>p</i> <.001	.072 <i>p</i> =.123	.126 <i>p</i> =.007	-.079 <i>p</i> =.088
5. Dependence on political party in power	.152 <i>p</i> <.001	.125 <i>p</i> <.001	-.030 <i>p</i> =.416	.072 <i>p</i> =.050	--	-.008 <i>p</i> =.870	-.136 <i>p</i> =.004	.112 <i>p</i> =.016
6. Romantic relationship quality	-.382 <i>p</i> <.001	-.062 <i>p</i> =.092	.338 <i>p</i> <.001	.031 <i>p</i> =.395	-.025 <i>p</i> =.491	--	.490	.076 <i>p</i> =.103
7. Social belonging	-.528 <i>p</i> <.001	-.176 <i>p</i> <.001	.429 <i>p</i> <.001	.282 <i>p</i> <.001	-.116 <i>p</i> =.002	.420 <i>p</i> <.001	--	.021 <i>p</i> =.649
8. Political orientation	-.043 <i>p</i> =.249	.043 <i>p</i> =.250	.059 <i>p</i> =.108	.133 <i>p</i> <.001	-.066 <i>p</i> =.073	.026 <i>p</i> =.479	.076 <i>p</i> =.039	--

Simple Moderation Models Predicting Trust in Sociopolitical Relationship

We predicted trust in sociopolitical relationships, pre-election and post-election, from the centered main effects of pre-election inexplicable behavior in each relationship domain, the centered main effects of pre-election dependence on the political party in power, and the 2-way interactions between dependence on the political party in power and pre-election inexplicable behavior in each relationship domain. In this analysis, the simple slopes for inexplicable sociopolitical relationship behavior capture its effects on trust in sociopolitical relationships, and thus, more negative slopes capture the hypothesized “threat” effect. In contrast, the simple slopes

for inexplicable personal relationship behavior capture its effect on trust in sociopolitical relationships, and thus, more positive slopes capture the hypothesized “compensation” effect.

These analyses also included preregistered controls. Specifically, in the pre-election/cross-sectional and post-election/lagged analyses, we controlled for knowledge of the election results (to control for political engagement). In predicting post-election changes in sociopolitical trust, we controlled for pre-election sociopolitical trust. The top half of Table 3 contains the results for the cross-sectional, pre-election moderation tests; the bottom half, the lagged moderation tests. We discuss the (1) threat and (2) compensatory affirmation effects (bolded) predicting trust in sociopolitical relationships in turn.⁶

⁶ In the preregistrations, we planned to conduct *separate* regression analyses respectively predicting trust in sociopolitical relationships from inexplicable behavior in personal relationships and inexplicable behavior in sociopolitical relationships. However, preliminary analyses revealed that the indices of inexplicable personal and sociopolitical relationship behavior were significantly positively correlated (see Table 2). Therefore, we decided to contrast their unique effects within the same regression analysis to ensure that any observed “threat” and “compensation” effects were specific to the predicted index of inexplicable behavior. The findings from the preregistered analyses were essentially parallel (see SOM).

Table 3. Moderation model predicting sociopolitical trust.

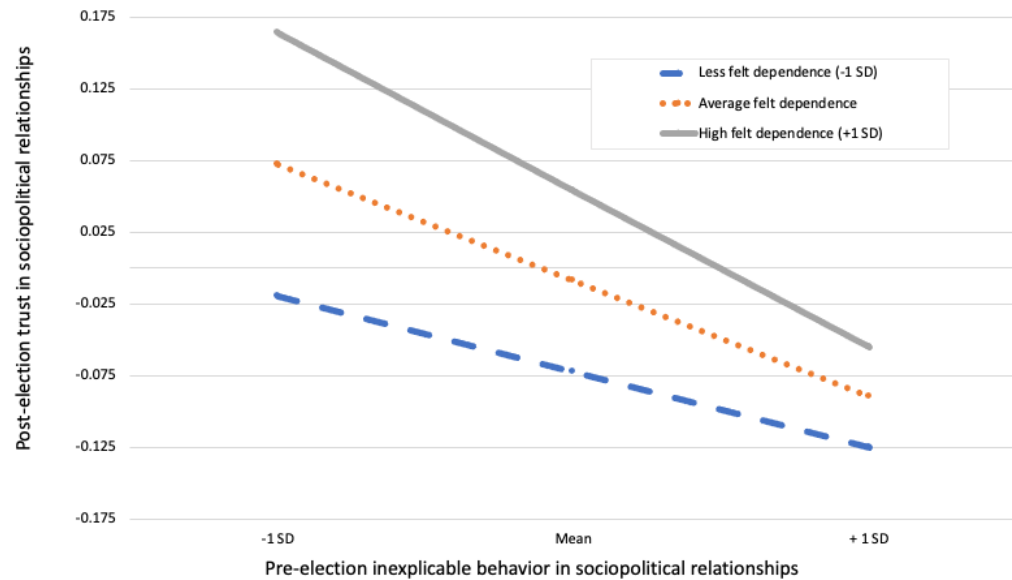
Effects	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI	η_p^2
Pre-election sociopolitical trust						
Constant	.216	.102	2.11	.035	.015, .417	--
T1 inexplicable personal	-.007	.023	-0.29	.771	-.052, .038	.000
T1 inexplicable sociopolitical	-.071	.031	-2.30	.021	-.131, -.011	.005
T1 dependence	.086	.018	4.68	<.001	.050, .122	.019
T1 inexplicable personal X dependence	.129	.021	6.11	<.001	.088, .171	.032
T1 inexplicable sociopolitical X Dependence	.021	.028	0.77	.444	-.033, .076	.001
Knowledge of election results	-.237	.104	-2.28	.023	-.440, -.033	.005
Post-election sociopolitical trust						
Constant	-.009	.088	-0.11	.915	-.183, .164	--
T1 inexplicable personal	-.002	.020	-0.11	.913	-.014, .037	.000
T1 inexplicable sociopolitical	-.137	.027	-5.15	<.001	-.190, -.085	.023
T1 dependence	.063	.016	3.95	<.001	.032, .095	.014
T1 inexplicable personal X dependence	.057	.019	3.08	.002	.021, .094	.008
T1 inexplicable sociopolitical X dependence	-.048	.024	-2.01	.045	-.095, -.001	.004
T1 sociopolitical trust	.571	.026	22.1	<.001	.521, .622	.306
Knowledge of election results	.001	.090	0.01	.994	-.175, .177	.000

Hypothesized threat effects. The main effect of inexplicable sociopolitical behavior was significantly negative in predicting pre-election sociopolitical trust, but its interaction with felt dependence on the party in power was not significant. Pre-election, participants who reported more inexplicable behavior in sociopolitical relationships also reported significantly less trust in these same relationships. However, as expected, the interaction between pre-election inexplicable sociopolitical behavior and dependence on the political party in power was significantly negative in predicting changes in sociopolitical trust from pre- to post-election.

Figure 2 presents the predicted scores. When participants felt more dependent on the party in

power, experiencing more inexplicable sociopolitical behavior pre-election predicted significantly decreased trust in sociopolitical entities post-election, $b = -.186$, $SE = .036$, $t = -5.20$, $p < .001$, $95\%CI(-.256, -.116)$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$. When participants felt less dependent, experiencing more inexplicable sociopolitical behavior pre-election had a less pronounced, but still significant, negative effect on later trust, $b = -.089$, $SE = .036$, $t = -2.48$, $p = .013$, $95\%CI(-.160, -.019)$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$.

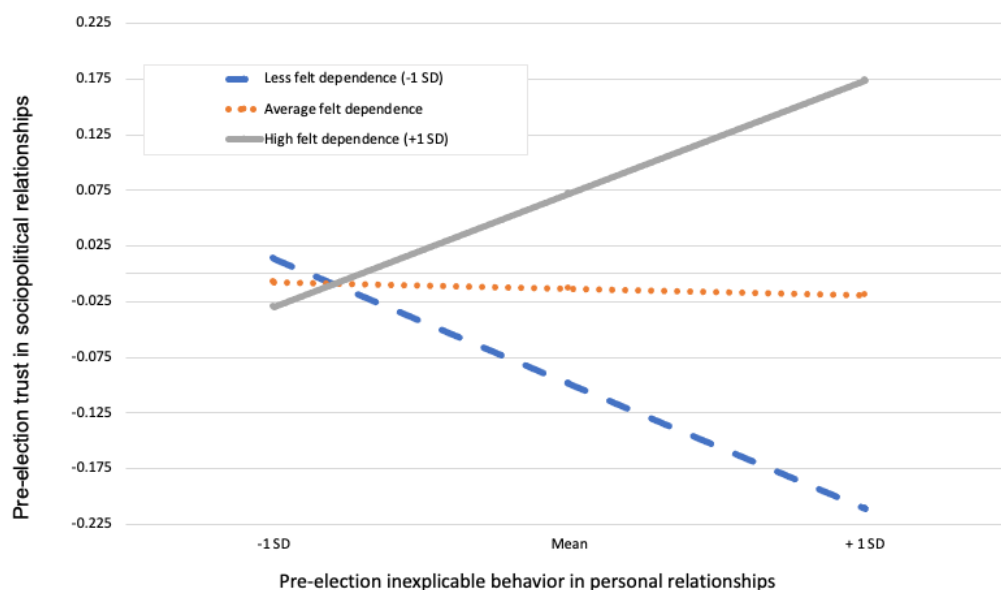
Figure 2. Predicting post-election trust in sociopolitical relationships from pre-election inexplicable behavior in sociopolitical relationships and dependence on the party in power.



Compensation effects. In contrast to the threat effects, when testing our key prediction regarding cross-domain compensatory affirmation, the interaction between inexplicable personal relationship behavior and dependence on the political party in power was significantly positive in predicting both trust in sociopolitical relationships pre-election and changes in sociopolitical trust from pre- to post-election. Figure 3 presents the predicted scores pre-election.

As expected, when participants felt more dependent on the political party in power (+1SD), experiencing more inexplicable personal relationship behavior predicted compensatory affirmations of trust in sociopolitical relationships. That is, for participants who felt more dependent, the simple effect of inexplicable personal relationship behavior was positive and significant in the pre-election/cross-sectional analyses, $b=.123$, $SE=.027$, $t=4.47$, $p<.001$, $95\%CI(.069,.176)$, $\eta_p^2=.018$, and lagged analyses, $b=.055$, $SE=.024$, $t=2.31$, $p=.021$, $95\%CI(.008,.102)$, $\eta_p^2=.005$. In contrast, when participants felt less dependent (-1SD), experiencing more difficulty making sense of behavior in personal relationships predicted decreased trust in sociopolitical relationships, in the pre-election cross-sectional analyses, $b=-.136$, $SE=.035$, $t=-3.93$, $p<.001$, $95\%CI(-.204,-.068)$, $\eta_p^2=.014$, and lagged analyses, $b=-.059$, $SE=.030$, $t=-1.97$, $p=.049$, $95\%CI(-.119,.000)$, $\eta_p^2=.004$. Generally parallel effects emerged for the components of the sociopolitical trust index—trust in governance and trust in community in both the pre-election and lagged analyses (see SOM).

Figure 3. Predicting pre-election trust in sociopolitical relationships from pre-election inexplicable behavior in personal relationships and dependence on the party in power.



Simple Moderation Models Predicting Trust in Personal Relationships

We predicted trust in personal relationships, pre-election and post-election, from the same variables listed in Table 3, except the lagged analyses controlled for pre-election trust in personal relationships. In this analysis, the simple slopes for inexplicable personal relationship behavior capture its effect on trust in personal relationships, and thus, more negative slopes capture the hypothesized “threat” effect. In contrast, the simple slopes for inexplicable sociopolitical relationship behavior capture its effect on trust in personal relationships, and, thus more positive slopes capture the hypothesized “compensation” effect. The top half of Table 4 contains the pre-election/cross-sectional moderation tests; the bottom half, the lagged moderation

tests. We discuss the (1) threat and (2) compensation effects predicting trust in personal relationships (bolded) in turn.

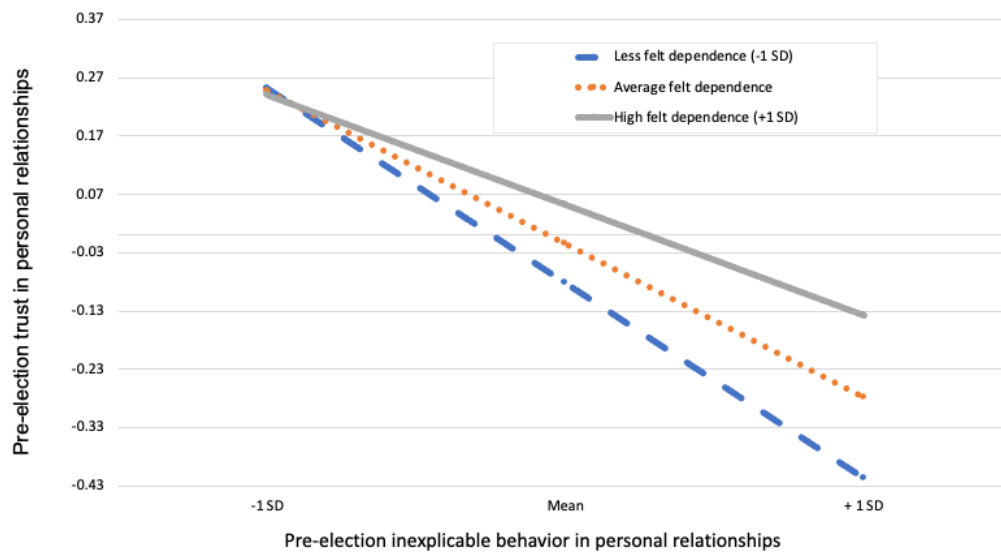
Table 4. Moderation model predicting trust in personal relationships.

Effects	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI	η_p^2
Pre-election personal trust						
Constant	.056	.111	0.50	.614	-.162, .275	--
T1 inexplicable personal	-.315	.025	-12.6	<.001	-.339, -.244	.125
T1 inexplicable sociopolitical	-.048	.034	-1.44	.151	-.114, .018	.002
T1 dependence	.067	.020	3.36	<.001	.028, .106	.010
T1 inexplicable personal X dependence	.087	.023	3.78	<.001	.042, .132	.013
T1 inexplicable sociopolitical X dependence	.025	.030	0.82	.414	-.035, .084	.001
Knowledge of election results	-.074	.113	-0.66	.513	-.296, .148	.000
Post-election personal trust						
Constant	-.149	.085	-1.74	.082	-.316, .019	--
T1 inexplicable personal	-.107	.021	-5.20	<.001	-.147, -.066	.024
T1 inexplicable sociopolitical	.000	.026	0.02	.988	-.050, .051	.000
T1 dependence	.034	.015	2.20	.028	.004, .064	.004
T1 inexplicable personal X dependence	.067	.018	3.76	<.001	.032, .102	.013
T1 inexplicable sociopolitical X dependence	-.038	.023	-1.62	.106	-.147, -.066	.002
T1 personal trust	.693	.023	30.1	<.001	.647, .738	.450
Knowledge of election results	.141	.087	1.63	.104	-.029, .311	.002

Hypothesized threat effects. As we expected, participants who experienced more inexplicable personal relationship behavior generally reported less trust in personal relationships, both pre- and post-election. However, unexpectedly, the interaction between pre-election inexplicable personal behavior and dependence on the party in power was significantly positive rather than negative in predicting trust in personal relationships pre-election and in predicting

changes in trust in personal relationships from pre- to post-election. Figure 4 presents the predicted scores for pre-election perceptions.

Figure 4. Predicting pre-election trust in personal relationships from pre-election inexplicable behavior in personal relationships and dependence on the party in power.



As Figure 4 reveals, participants who felt more dependent on the political party in power seemed better protected against inexplicable personal relationship behavior than participants who felt less dependent on the political party in power. That is, for participants who felt less dependent on the party in power ($-1SD$), experiencing more inexplicable personal behavior predicted significantly decreased trust in personal relationships, pre-election, $b=-.403$, $SE=.038$, $t=-10.67$, $p<.001$, $95\%CI(-.477,-.329)$, $\eta_p^2=.093$, and post-election, $b=-.174$, $SE=.030$, $t=-5.70$, $p<.001$, $95\%CI(-.233,-.114)$, $\eta_p^2=.029$. However, when participants were more dependent

(+1SD), experiencing more inexplicable personal relationship behavior still predicted significantly decreased trust in personal relationships, but this effect was comparatively attenuated pre-election, $b = -.228$, $SE = .030$, $t = -7.64$, $p < .001$, $95\%CI(-.287, -.170)$, $\eta_p^2 = .050$. It was marginal post-election, $b = -.040$, $SE = .023$, $t = -1.70$, $p = .090$, $95\%CI(-.086, .006)$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$.

Hypothesized compensation effects. Unexpectedly, neither interaction between inexplicable sociopolitical relationship behavior and felt dependence on the party in power was significant. This remained the case when we reconducted the analyses for the components of the inexplicable sociopolitical behavior composite (see SOM).

Simple Moderation Models: Generality and Alternate Explanations

Although the CGSS model expects threat and compensation effects to generalize across political contexts, the reported moderation analyses did not test this generality assumption. We conducted two further sets of moderation analyses that also included the main and moderating effects of either country—U.K. (parliamentary system; conservative incumbent and liberal challenger) and U.S. (representative democracy; Democratic incumbent and Republican challenger) or personal political orientation (i.e., extremely left- to extremely right-wing). Neither sample nor political orientation consistently moderated the effect (see SOM).

In terms of alternate explanations, trust in sociopolitical and trust in personal relationships were significantly positively correlated pre-election (see Table 2), raising the possibility that the effects predicting sociopolitical trust might simply reflect personal trust (or vice versa). Therefore, we reconducted the analyses predicting sociopolitical trust while also controlling for pre-election trust in personal relationships. The negative threat effect of pre-election unexpected sociopolitical behavior predicting threat in that same domain was still negative, but marginal, $b = -.051$, $SE = .028$, $t = -1.85$, $p = .065$, $95\%CI(-.106, .003)$. However, the

observed “threat” interaction predicting changes in sociopolitical trust was still significantly negative, $b = -.048$, $SE = .024$, $t = -2.02$, $p = .044$, $95\%CI(-.095, -.001)$ and the observed “compensation” interactions were still significantly positive, pre-election, $b = .085$, $SE = .020$, $t = 4.20$, $p < .001$, $95\%CI(.045, .125)$ and post-election, $b = .064$, $SE = .019$, $t = 3.32$, $p < .001$, $95\%CI(.026, .102)$. We also reconducted the analyses predicting personal trust controlling for pre-election trust in sociopolitical relationships. The threat” interactions predicting personal trust were still positively significant pre-election, $b = .088$, $SE = .023$, $t = 3.81$, $p < .001$, $95\%CI(.042, .133)$ and post-election, $b = .066$, $SE = .018$, $t = 3.73$, $p < .001$, $95\%CI(.032, .101)$.

Interim summary. On the upside, the hypothesized moderated threat and moderated compensation effects emerged in predicting trust in sociopolitical relationships. For participants who felt more dependent on the political party in party in power, experiencing more inexplicable sociopolitical relationship behavior predicted significantly decreased trust in sociopolitical relationships pre-election and post-election (threat). In contrast, experiencing more inexplicable personal relationship behavior predicted significantly increased trust in sociopolitical relationships pre-election and post-election (compensation). However, for participants who felt less dependent on the political party in power, greater inexplicable sociopolitical and personal relationship behavior predicted significantly decreased trust in sociopolitical relationships, pre-election and post-election. Parallel effects emerged when we examined the components of the sociopolitical trust composite—trust in governance and trust in community (see SOM).

On the downside, the hypothesized threat and compensation effects did not emerge in predicting trust in personal relationships. Instead, rather than being more readily threatened, participants who felt more dependent on the party in power seemed better protected against inexplicable behavior in their personal relationships than participants who felt less dependent on

the political party in power. In hindsight, the CSSG model may actually anticipate such an effect. If trust affirmations function as small doses of safety that can spread from one relationship domain to another, as hypothesized, then affirming the trustworthiness of sociopolitical relationships in response to inexplicable personal relationship behavior could help vulnerable people renew trust in their personal relationships—in addition to strengthening their feelings of social connection. Consistent with this logic, political scientists believe social and political trust can reinforce and strengthen one another (Zmerli & Newton, 2017). Therefore, in the forthcoming moderated mediation models, we included post-election trust in personal relationship as a further outcome, in addition to the outcomes we had preregistered as indicators of social connection strength (i.e., romantic relationship quality and social belongingness).

Moderated Mediation Models

The moderated mediation predictions in the CSSG model corresponds to Model 7 in Hayes (2013) Process macro in SPSS. Because we did not find any significant effects for personal trust affirmations in the simple moderation models (Table 4), we only estimated moderated mediation models that included sociopolitical trust affirmations as the mediator. These models predicted the *mediator* (*M*)—trust in sociopolitical relationships pre-election—from pre-election inexplicable personal relationship behavior (*X*), felt dependence on the party in power (the hypothesized moderator; *W*), the 2-way interaction between inexplicable personal relationship behavior and felt dependence, and two control variables (i.e., the pre-election value of the outcome and knowledge of the election results). These models in turn predicted the *outcomes*—pre- to post-election changes in (a) trust in personal relationships, (b) romantic relationship quality, and (c) social belonging—from the mediator (*M*), pre-election trust in sociopolitical relationships, inexplicable personal relationship behavior, the pre-election value of

the outcome, and knowledge of the election results (using 5000 bootstrap samples). Conditional effects are presented at the 16th and 84th percentiles, as per Process model defaults.^{7,8}

Tables 5-7 respectively present the full moderated mediation model predicting changes in trust in personal relationships, romantic relationship quality, and social belonging. As in the moderation analyses, the interaction between inexplicable personal relationship behavior and felt dependence on the party in power was significantly positive in predicting pre-election trust in sociopolitical relationships in each model. The only difference in the test of this interaction effect across models is the particular pre-election outcome (i.e., trust in personal relationships, romantic relationship quality, or social belonging) that is controlled in testing the interaction. To minimize redundancy, we present conditional effects for the model with pre-election trust in personal relationships controlled. For participants who felt more dependent on the political party in power, experiencing more pre-election inexplicable personal relationship behavior predicted significantly greater trust in sociopolitical relationships (Path A), $b=.2050$, $SE=.0246$, $t=8.34$, $p=.0000$, $95\%CI(.1567,.2532)$. However, the simple effect of inexplicable personal relationship behavior was not significant for participants who felt less dependent, $b=.0091$, $SE=.0338$, $t=0.27$, $p=.7891$, $95\%CI(-.0573,.0754)$. (For participants high on dependence, the simple effects of inexplicable personal relationship behavior predicting pre-election trust in sociopolitical relationships were also significantly positive in the models that respectively controlled for pre-

⁷ We did not control for days elapsed between pre- and post-election surveys, as preregistered, because the vast majority completed the post-election survey the day after the election.

⁸ In further analyses, we used Hayes Process Model 11 to test whether the reported moderated mediation effects varied by country or political orientation (all NS, see SOM).

election romantic relationship quality and social belonging; the simple effect for participants low on dependence was also not significant controlling for pre-election social belonging, but it was significantly negative controlling for pre-election romantic relationship quality).

Also, supporting Path B, participants who were more likely to affirm the trustworthiness of sociopolitical relationships pre-election evidenced greater social connection strength post-election. That is, participants who reported greater trust in sociopolitical relationships pre-election reported significantly renewed or increased trust in personal relationships from pre-election to post-election (Table 5), $b=.1345$, $SE=.0272$, $t=4.94$, $p=.0000$, $95\%CI(.0811, .1879)$; marginally improved reports of romantic relationship quality (Table 6), $b=.0468$, $SE=.0256$, $t=1.83$, $p=.0681$, $95\%CI(-.0035, .0970)$, and significantly increased feelings of social belonging post-election (Table 7), $b=.0610$, $SE=.0232$, $t=2.63$, $p=.0087$, $95\%CI(.0155, .1065)$.

Supporting the logic of the CSSG model, the index of moderated mediation was significant in predicting changes in trust in personal relationships, $index=.0129$, $SE=.0043$, $95\%CI(.0054, .0221)$, and social belonging, $index=.0067$, $SE=.0031$, $95\%CI(.0013, .0134)$. However, the index of moderated mediation was only marginal in predicting changes in romantic relationship quality, $index=.0060$, $SE=.0035$, $90\%CI(.0006, .0120)$. We found generally parallel effects when we separately examined compensatory affirmations of trust in governance and trust in community as the mediator rather than the composite index of these variables (see SOM).

In addition, the conditional indirect effects (ab) supported the hypotheses. When participants felt highly dependent on the party in power, experiencing more inexplicable behavior in their personal relationships (X) predicted significantly affirmed trust in sociopolitical relationships pre-election (M), which in turn, predicted significantly increased trust in personal relationships post-election, $ab=.0276$, $SE=.0080$, $95\%CI(.0129, .0446)$, marginally improved

reports of romantic relationship quality, $ab=.0056$, $SE=.0035$, $90\%CI(.0005,.0116)$, and significantly increased social belonging post-election, $ab=.0132$, $SE=.0059$, $95\%CI(.0026,.0258)$. However, when participants felt less dependent on the party in power, the corresponding indirect effect was not significant in predicting changes in trust in personal relationships, $ab=.0012$, $SE=.0051$, $95\%(-.0083,.0116)$, marginally negative in predicting decreased romantic relationship quality, $ab=-.0067$, $SE=.0042$, $90\%CI(-.0141,-.0006)$, and not significant in predicting changes in social belonging, $ab=-.0006$, $SE=.0027$, $95\%CI(-.0060,.0052)$.

Table 5. Moderated mediation model predicting changes in trust in personal relationships.

Effects	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI
Path A, Predicting trust in sociopolitical relationships					
Constant	.2025	.0922	2.20	.0283	.0215, .3834
T1 inexplicable personal	.1119	.0219	5.11	.0000	.0690, .1549
T1 dependence on government	.0579	.0166	3.50	.0005	.0254, .0904
T1 inexplicable personal X dependence on government	.0959	.0191	5.01	.0000	.0583, .1335
Knowledge of election results	-.2176	.0935	-2.33	.0202	-.4011, -.0341
T1 trust in personal relationships	.4010	.0249	16.1	.0000	.3522, .4497
Path B, Predicting post-election trust in personal relationships					
Constant	-.1645	.0848	-1.94	.0527	-.3309, .0019
T1 sociopolitical trust	.1345	.0272	4.94	.0000	.0811, .1879
T1 inexplicable personal	-.1017	.0195	-5.22	.0000	-.1399, -.0635
T1 trust in personal relationships	.6483	.0254	25.5	.0000	.5985, .6981
Knowledge of election results	.1659	.0861	1.93	.0543	-.0031, .3349

Table 6. Moderated mediation model predicting changes in romantic relationship quality.

Effects	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI
Path A, Predicting trust in sociopolitical relationships					
Constant	.2323	.1024	2.27	.0235	.0314, .4331
T1 inexplicable personal	-.0054	.0244	-0.22	.8253	-.0532, .0425
T1 dependence on government	.0824	.0183	4.50	.0000	.0465, .1183
T1 inexplicable personal X dependence on government	.1293	.0212	6.11	.0000	.0878, .1709
Knowledge of election results	-.2538	.1038	-2.44	.0147	-.4575, -.0501
T1 romantic relationship quality	.0277	.0215	1.29	.1987	-.0146, .0699
Path B, Predicting post-election romantic relationship quality					
Constant	-.0010	.0893	-0.01	.9908	-.1762, .1741
T1 sociopolitical trust	.0468	.0256	1.83	.0681	-.0035, .0970
T1 inexplicable personal	-.1132	.0202	-5.59	.0000	-.1529, -.0735
T1 romantic relationship quality	.8024	.0187	42.8	.0000	.7656, .8391
Knowledge of election results	-.0115	.0907	-0.13	.8994	-.1894, .1665

Table 7. Moderated mediation model predicting changes in social belonging.

Effects	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI
Path A, Predicting trust in sociopolitical relationships					
Constant	.2515	.0987	2.55	.0110	.0578, .4452
T1 inexplicable personal	.1088	.0257	4.23	.0000	.0583, .1593
T1 dependence on government	.0846	.0176	4.80	.0000	.0500, .1192
T1 inexplicable personal X dependence on government	.1107	.0205	5.40	.0000	.0705, .1508
Knowledge of election results	-.2064	.1002	-2.06	.0397	-.4030, -.0098
T1 social belonging	.2086	.0226	9.24	.0000	.1643, .2530
Path B, Predicting post-election social belonging					
Constant	-.0588	.0778	-0.76	.4503	-.2115, .0940
T1 sociopolitical trust	.0610	.0232	2.63	.0087	.0155, .1065
T1 inexplicable personal	-.0867	.0197	-4.40	.0000	-.1253, -.0480
T1 social belonging	.8127	.0184	44.1	.0000	.7765, .8488
Knowledge of election results	.0228	.0791	0.29	.7734	-.1323, .1779

In sum, the findings thus far are consistent with the hypothesis that inexplicable personal relationship behavior motivated participants who felt more dependent on the political party in power to mentally generate the safety they needed. For participants who felt more dependent on the party in power, having greater difficulty explaining the behavior of their romantic partner, family, or friends prior to the election uniquely predicted significantly increased pre-election trust in sociopolitical relationships, a compensatory affirmation of trust, which in turn predicted renewed post-election trust in personal relationships and strengthened social connection.

However, no such indirect effects emerged for those who felt less dependent.

Moderated Mediation Models: Generality and Alternate Explanations

We conducted two further sets of moderation mediation models that also included the main and moderating effects of either country (Model 11 in Hayes, 2013)—U.K. (parliamentary

system; conservative incumbent and liberal challenger) and U.S. (representative democracy; Democratic incumbent and Republican challenger) or personal political orientation (i.e., extremely left- to right-wing). Neither sample nor political orientation significantly moderated the reported moderated mediation effects (see SOM), speaking to the generality of the effects.

The moderated mediation models are also open to alternate explanations. First, because inexplicable personal relationship behavior and trust in sociopolitical relationships were both assessed pre-election (as compensation should be relatively immediate), this analysis could not establish temporal precedence. Therefore, as a supplement to the preregistered models, we also estimated models utilizing post-election trust in sociopolitical relationships as the mediator (controlling for pre-election trust in sociopolitical relationships). In other words, we examined delayed changes in sociopolitical trust as the mediator rather than immediate changes. These analyses reinforced the conclusions of the original analyses (see SOM).

Second, the hypothesized position of the mediator and outcome in the CSSG model might be reversed. That is, greater pre-election feelings of trust in personal relationships (or romantic relationship quality, or social belonging) might foster greater trust in sociopolitical relationships post-election rather than vice versa. Therefore, we estimated further models with pre-election trust in personal relationships (or romantic relationship quality or social belonging) as the mediator (M) and post-election trust in sociopolitical relationships as the outcome (Y). Importantly, the index of moderated mediation for each of these reversed mediation models was not significant (with *95%CI* or *90%CI*) predicting changes in trust in personal relationships, changes in romantic relationship quality, or changes in social belonging (see SOM).

And finally, reports of inexplicable personal and sociopolitical relationship behavior were significantly positively correlated pre-election. Therefore, the apparent benefits of affirming trust

in sociopolitical relationships in the face of inexplicable personal relationship behavior could reflect the benefits of preserving trust in sociopolitical relationships in the face of inexplicable behavior in the sociopolitical domain. To examine this possibility, we reran two further sets of moderated mediation models. The first used pre-election sociopolitical trust as the mediator and the second used changes in sociopolitical trust as the mediator, with two additional covariates: inexplicable sociopolitical behavior and its interaction with felt dependence on the party in power. Analyses with these additions yielded the same pattern of findings, suggesting that observed effects are indeed specific to inexplicable personal relationship behavior (see SOM).

General Discussion

The present findings suggest that people who recognize (vs. discount) how much they depend on more distal social relationships for protection may be better psychologically equipped to perceive stronger social ties during uncertain and societally turbulent times. When people perceived their outcomes to be more dependent on the political party holding power, experiencing greater (vs. less) pre-election difficulty making sense of behavior in personal relationships predicted compensating and affirming the trustworthiness of the sociopolitical relationships that surrounded them (Path A). Affirming the trustworthiness of sociopolitical relationships in turn predicted significantly renewed trust in personal relationships post-election and significantly increased feelings of social belonging post-election (Path B). Also, affirming trust in sociopolitical relationships significantly mediated the association between inexplicable personal relationship behavior pre-election and increases in trust in personal relationships and in social belonging post-election (Indirect effect AB). A parallel marginal indirect effect also emerged predicting changes in romantic relationship quality. In contrast, when people perceived

their personal outcomes to be less dependent on the party in power, pre-election difficulties making sense of the behavior in personal relationships did not predict such a protective effect.

The initial research on the social-safety system ascribed romantic relationships (typically symmetric in structure) a central role in regulating how people manage the safety-threat posed by inexplicable behavior (Murray et al., 2021; Murray, McNulty et al., 2023). It was also all conducted under the first Trump administration. Redressing these limitations, the present research on the CSSG model is the first to examine the role that asymmetric relationships play in regulating social safety generation. It is also the first to suggest that the hypothesized safety-affirming effects of inexplicable behavior generalize beyond the (then) political irregularity of first Trump administration. Indeed, the hypothesized social safety generating effects of inexplicable behavior generalized across political systems (i.e., parliamentary vs. presidential), opposite political transitions (i.e., right- to left-wing government in the U.K. and left- to right-wing government in the U.S.), and personal partisanship. Importantly, neither country (U.K. vs. U.S.), nor personal political orientation (on a self-reported extremely left to extremely right continuum), significantly moderated the observed moderated mediation effects (see SOM).

However, the basic logic of the CSSG model does anticipate conditions where the motivating effects of inexplicable behavior could be amplified or attenuated for people who recognize their dependence on the collective social world. We examined one such further contextual moderator—namely, whether the social world disconfirmed (vs. confirmed) one's political views. We indexed such disconfirmation through (a) being politically misaligned with one's family and friends (in the U.S. sample) and (b) ending up on the losing (vs. winning) side of the election (in both samples). People generally report greater comfort depending on others when they live in communities that share (vs. oppose) their political preferences (Chopik &

Motyl, 2016). Living in a collective social world that disconfirmed one's political views should make it harder to believe that the party in power is likely to protect one's interests—making feeling dependent on it all the more anxiety provoking. According to CSSG model, such a mindset should make engaging in compensatory affirmations of sociopolitical trust all the more important for strengthening feelings of social connection in the face of uncertainty. Significant evidence consistent with this logic emerged for two moderated mediation models. The positive and protective indirect effect from pre-election inexplicable personal relationship behavior (X) to increased pre-election trust in sociopolitical relationships (M) to strengthened social connections post-election (Y) tended to be strongest when people recognized their dependence on political parties, but inhabited communities that disconfirmed their political realities (see SOM).

The present findings have limitations. First, the effects were small, which is not surprising given the complexity of human behavior (Götz et al., 2021) and the stability of perceptions across the short time lag separating pre-election from post-election reports. Second, while the indirect effects for sociopolitical trust affirmations were significant for two of the three indicators of social connection strength—trust in personal relationships and feelings of social belonging—they only approached significance for romantic relationship quality.

Third, and most important, we found significant “threat” effects involving inexplicable sociopolitical behavior, but no compensatory effects. That is, experiencing more inexplicable sociopolitical behavior pre-election predicted significantly decreased trust in sociopolitical relationships pre-election. For participants who felt more dependent on the political party in power, experiencing more inexplicable sociopolitical behavior pre-election also predicted post-election decreases in sociopolitical trust. However, we did not find any evidence that inexplicable sociopolitical behavior also motivated compensatory affirmations of trust in

personal relationships, as we hypothesized given prior research (Murray, McNulty et al., 2023; Murray, Lamarche et al., 2021; Murray, Seery et al., 2021). Why would this be the case?

Perhaps we might have found compensatory responses to inexplicable sociopolitical relationship behavior had we directly assessed relational outcome dependence. Recognizing (vs. discounting) the power that family and friends have over one's personal outcomes could make inexplicable behavior in these same personal relationships more threatening. It might also make people more likely to turn to sociopolitical relationships as a primary source of safety and security. If that is the case, recognizing one's greater (vs. lesser) vulnerability to family and friends could make it even more important to protect one's trust in more distal relationships. Therefore, people who feel *more* (vs. less) dependent on personal relationships may be especially motivated to compensate for inexplicable behavior in sociopolitical relationships. Unfortunately, we did not administer a direct measure of relational outcome dependence that paralleled the measure of collective outcome dependence, a regrettable oversight on our part. Therefore, fully mapping out the social-safety-generating effects of felt dependence on different types of social collectives remains an important task for further research.

Conclusion

In elections, and in social life, people do not always behave, and events do not always unfold, in ways that make sense in light of one's expectations. Such occasions nevertheless can motivate people who feel more vulnerable to others to find (compensatory) reason to connect. Indeed, the present findings suggest that *not* being able to make sense of the behavior of close others motivates people who feel more vulnerable to the actions of the political party in power to generate evidence of the safety they need to see in their social worlds.

References

- Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(6), 1173–1182.
- Batra, A., Jackson, K., & Hamad, R. (2023). Effects of the 2021 expanded child tax credit on adults' mental health: A quasi-experimental study. *Health Affairs*, 42(1), 74-82.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529.
- Bargsted, M., Ortiz, C., Cáceres, I., & Somma, N. M. (2023). Social and political trust in a low trust society. *Political Behavior*, 45(4), 1401-1420.
- Blanton, H., Strauts, E., & Perez, M. (2012). Partisan identification as a predictor of cortisol response to election news. *Political Communication*, 29, 447-460.
- Block, K., Aday, A., Hall, W. M., & Schmader, T. (2022). Making America great for whom? How Trump's Presidency affected fit and national identity among targets of bias. *Self and Identity*, 22(3), 435–469.
- Chopik, W. J., & Motyl, M. (2016). Ideological fit enhances interpersonal orientations. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7(8), 759–768.
- Clark, M. S., & Grote, N. K. (1998). Why Aren't Indices of Relationship Costs Always Negatively Related to Indices of Relationship Quality? *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 2(1), 2-17.

- Clavél, F. D., Cutrona, C. E., & Russell, D. W. (2017). United and divided by stress: How stressors differentially influence social support in African American couples over time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 43(7), 1050–1064.
- Columbus, S., Molho, C., Righetti, F., & Balliet, D. (2021). Interdependence and cooperation in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 120(3), 626-650.
- DeVerna, M.R., Pierri, F., Ahn, YY., Fortunato, S., Flammini, A., & Menczer, F. (2025). Modeling the amplification of epidemic spread by individuals exposed to misinformation on social media. *npj Complex*, 2(11). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44260-025-00038-y>
- Diamantopoulos, A., Riefler, P., & Roth, K. P. (2008). Advancing formative measurement models. *Journal of Business Research*, 61, 1203-1218.
- Edwards, J. R., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2000). On the nature and direction of the relationship between constructs and measures. *Psychological Methods*, 5, 155- 174.
- Epley, N., Kardas, M., Zhao, X., Atir, S., & Schroeder, J. (2022). Undersociality: Miscalibrated social cognition can inhibit social connection. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 26(5):406-418.
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A.-G. (2009). Statistical power analyses using G*Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses. *Behavior Research Methods*, 41(4), 1149-1160.
- Finkel, E.K., Bail, C.A., Cikara, M., Ditto, P.H., Iyengar, S., Klar, S., Mason, L., McGrath, M.C., Nyhan, B., Rand, D.G., Skitka, L.J., Tucker, J.A., Van Bavel, J.J., Wang, C.S., Druckman, J.N. (2020). Political sectarianism in America. *Science*, 370, 533-536.

- Fraley, R. C., Niedenthal, P. M., Marks, M. J., Brumbaugh, C. C., & Vicary, A. (2006). Adult attachment and the perception of emotional expressions: Probing the hyperactivating strategies underlying anxious attachment. *Journal of Personality*, 74, 1163-1190.
- Fritz, M. S., & MacKinnon, D. P. (2007). Required sample size to detect the mediated effect. *Psychological Science*, 18(3), 233–239.
- Ford, B. Q., Feinberg, M., Lassetter, B., Thai, S., & Gatchpazian, A. (2023). The political is personal: The costs of daily politics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 125(1), 1–28.
- Gabriel, S., Paravati, E., Green, M. C., & Flomsbee, J. (2018). From apprentice to president: The role of parasocial connection in the election of Donald Trump. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9(3), 299-307.
- Gordon, A. M., Luciani, M., & From, A. (2025). I love you but I hate your politics: The role of political dissimilarity in romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 129(4), 692–713.
- Götz, F. M., Gosling, S. D., & Rentfrow, P. J. (2021). Small effects: The indispensable foundation for a cumulative psychological science. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. doi:10.1177/1745691620984483
- Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. The Guilford Press.
- Hays, R. D., & DiMatteo, M. R. (1987). A short-form measure of loneliness. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 51, 69-81.
- Heine, S. J., Proulx, T., & Vohs, V. (2006). The meaning maintenance model: On the coherence of social motivations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10, 88-110.

- Holt-Lunstad, J. (2018). Why social relationships are important for physical health: A systems approach to understanding and modifying risk and protection. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 69, 437-458.
- Hudson, J. (2006). Institutional trust and subjective well-being across the EU. *KYKLOS*, 59, 43-62.
- Jonas, E., McGregor, I., Klackl, J., Agroskin, D., Fritsche, I., Holbrook, C., Nash, K., Proulx, T., & Quirin, M. (2014). Threat and defense: From anxiety to approach. In J. M. Olson & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 219-286). Elsevier.
- Kelley, H. H. (1979). *Personal relationships: their structures and processes*. United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Kenrick, D. T., Griskevicius, V., Neuberg, S. L., & Schaller, M. (2010). Renovating the pyramid of needs: Contemporary extensions built upon ancient foundations. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(3), 292–314.
- Kunda Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(3): 480-98.
- Lamarche, V. M. (2020). Socially connected and COVID-19 prepared: The influence of socio-relational safety on perceived importance of COVID-19 precautions and trust in government responses. *Social Psychological Bulletin*, 15(4), 1–25.
- Lorah, J. A. (2020). Interpretation of main effects in the presence of non-significant interaction effects. *The Quantitative Methods for Psychology*, 16(1), 33-45.
- Maner, J. K., DeWall, C. N., Baumeister, R. F., Schaller, M. (2007). Does social exclusion motivate interpersonal reconnection? Resolving the “porcupine problem.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92, 42-55.

- Mayseless, O., & Popper, M. (2007). Reliance on leaders and social institutions: An attachment perspective. *Attachment and Human Development, 9*(1):73-93.
- Mayseless, O., & Popper, M. (2019). Attachment and leadership: Review and new insights. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 25*, 157–161.
- Miller, S., L., & Maner, J. K. (2012). Over-perceiving disease cues: The basic cognition of the behavioral immune system. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*, 1198-1213.
- Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., & Collins, N. L. (2006). Optimizing assurance: The risk regulation system in relationships. *Psychological Bulletin, 132*, 641-666.
- Murray, S. L., & Lamarche, V. (2023). Beyond dyadic interdependence: Relationships in an uncertain social world. In J. Forgas, W. D. Crano, & K. Fiedler (Eds), *The psychology of insecurity: Seeking certainty where none can be had*. NY: Routledge.
- Murray, S. L., Lamarche, V., Seery, M.D., Jung, H. Y., Griffin, D. W., & Brinkman, C. (2021). The social-safety system: Fortifying relationships in the face of the unforeseeable. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 120*, 99-130.
- Murray, S. L., McNulty, J., Xia, J., Lamarche, V., Seery, M. D., Ward, D., Griffin, D. W., Hicks, L, Jung, H. Y. (2023). Pursuing safety in social connection regulates the risk-regulation, social-safety, and behavioral-immune systems. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 125*(3), 519–547.
- Murray, S. L., & Pascuzzi, G. (2024). Pursuing safety in social connection: A flexibly fluid perspective on risk-regulation in relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology, 75*, 379-404.

- Murray, S. L., Seery, M. D., Lamarche, V., Jung, H. Y., Saltsman, T. L., Griffin, D. W., Dubois, D., Xia, J., Ward, D. E., & McNulty, J. (2021). Looking for safety in all the right places: When threatening political reality strengthens family relationship bonds. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 12, 1193-1202.
- Newton, K., & Zmerli, S. (2011). Three forms of trust and their association. *European Political Science Review*, 3(2), 169-200.
- Newton, K., Stolle, D., & Zmerli, S. (2018). Political trust. In E. M. Uslamer (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, 37, 37-56.
- Peetz, J., Shimizu, J., & Royle, C. (2022). Projecting current feelings into the past and future: Better current relationship quality reduces negative retrospective bias and increases positive forecasting bias. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 39(8):026540752210842
- Pew Research Center (2024). Public trust in government, 1958-2024.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/06/24/public-trust-in-government-1958-2024/>
- Richman, L. S., & Leary, M. R. (2009). Reactions to discrimination, stigmatization, ostracism, and other forms of interpersonal rejection: A multi-motive model. *Psychological Review*, 116, 365-383.
- Rossignac-Milon, M., Bolger, N., Zee, K. S., Boothby, E. J., & Higgins, E. T. (2021). Merged minds: Generalized shared reality in dyadic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 120(4), 882.
- Sheldon, K. M., Abad, N., & Hinsch, C. (2011). A two-process view of Facebook use and relatedness need-satisfaction: Disconnection drives use, and connection rewards it. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100, 766-775.

- Shino, E., Wagner, R. L., Binder, M., & Lerner, A. (2025). The power of the leader: Party approval and institutional trust. *Party Politics*, 13540688251322108.
- Slavich, G.M. (2020). Social safety theory: A biologically based evolutionary perspective on life stress, health, and behavior. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 16, 265-295.
- Troisi, A., Di Cave, D., Carola, V., & Nanni, R. C. (2022). The behavioral immune system in action: Psychological correlates of pathogen disgust sensitivity in healthcare professionals working in a COVID-19 hospital. *Physiology and Behavior*, 251:113821.
- Williams, K. D., Cheung, C.K., & Choi, W. (2000). Cyber-ostracism: Effects of being ignored over the Internet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 748-762.
- Zmerli, S., & Newton, K. (2017). Objects of political and social trust: Scales and hierarchies. In S. Zmerli and T.W.G. van der Meer (Eds), *Handbook on political trust* (pp. 104-124). Elgaronline.