**Abstract**

Support for presidential candidate Donald Trump increased in the aftermath of several terrorist attacks in 2015 (Cohen, Solomon, & Kaplin, 2017) similar to Americans’ greater enthusiasm for President George W. Bush after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. According to terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1995), people are prone to embrace charismatic politicians in times of historical upheaval to mitigate existential terror. Consistent with this view, previous research has demonstrated that reminders of death (relative to an aversive control condition) increased support for a charismatic leader in a hypothetical gubernatorial election, support for President Bush and his policies in Iraq prior to the 2004 presidential election and support for Donald Trump and his anti-immigrant policies in 2016. The present study (conducted fully on-line) hypothesized and found that a death reminder significantly increased support for President Donald Trump and reduced support for Presidential Candidate Joe Biden (p<.01). These findings suggest that electoral outcomes and public policy can be affected when existential concerns are aroused.

**Method**

Two hundred and eight students at the College of Staten Island were randomly assigned to either a mortality salience (MS) manipulation or pain (control) condition in which they responded to 2 parallel questions about the thoughts of their own death or thoughts about being in intense pain. They then read a vignette about President Donald Trump or Presidential Candidate Joe Biden and responded to 5 questions in support of them on a 5-point likert scale.

Participants were asked questions such as:
- To what extent do you endorse this statement? 
- If you vote in the upcoming Presidential election, how likely is it you will vote for President Donald Trump (alternatively Presidential Candidate Joe Biden)?
- Who will you vote for in the upcoming election?

Participants took the survey virtually through a link on Sona-Systems, an online survey-taking platform which grants research credits to undergraduate students in an introductory psychology course. The link led to a survey created on SurveyMonkey, an online survey-making platform. Surveys were automatically randomized by SurveyMonkey.

**Results**

Support for presidential candidate Donald Trump increased in the aftermath of several terrorist attacks in 2015 (Cohen, Solomon, & Kaplin, 2017) similar to Americans’ greater enthusiasm for President George W. Bush after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. According to terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1995), people are prone to embrace charismatic politicians in times of historical upheaval to mitigate existential terror. Consistent with this view, previous research has demonstrated that reminders of death (relative to an aversive control condition) increased support for a charismatic leader in a hypothetical gubernatorial election, support for President Bush and his policies in Iraq prior to the 2004 presidential election and support for Donald Trump and his anti-immigrant policies in 2016. The present study (conducted fully on-line) hypothesized and found that a death reminder significantly increased support for President Donald Trump and reduced support for Presidential Candidate Joe Biden (p<.01). These findings suggest that electoral outcomes and public policy can be affected when existential concerns are aroused.

**Discussion**

This study exemplified that by manipulating thoughts of death individuals are more likely to support one candidate over another. In this particular instance President Trump’s popularity increased as mortality salience increased. This suggest that the more afraid of death that people are the more likely they were to vote for President Trump. Similar findings have shown that President George Bush’s popularity rose greatly after the September 11 2001 terrorist attack on the world trade center (Cohen et. al., 2017). As death salience increased so did President George Bush’s popularity similar to Trump. Research has shown that in unprecedented and frightening times charismatic politicians are often voted into power (Cohen et al. 2004). When an individual begins to have concerns about their mortality, they are more likely engage in a threat focused defense in order to alleviate their concerns regarding mortality (Landau et al. 2005). The fear of death is a primal fear that the human species has had since its conception. The fear of death affects our political behavior; it affects our votes on policy and the leaders we put in power.

**Conclusion**

This study uncovered that the public is more likely to vote for candidate President Trump when death salience was increased. These discoveries are steady with our hypothesis, that contemplations of one’s own passing and support of candidate Donald Trump are positively correlated. Support for candidate President Trump goes up after a mortality salience is increased through manipulation while, support for Biden goes down after a mortality salience is increased through manipulation. These findings suggest that electoral outcomes and public policy can be affected when existential concerns are aroused. As potential voters we must be careful to mediate our fear of mortality. If we do not, we can be more readily swayed to vote for a candidate or policy that we may not ordinarily agree with. This is due avoidance of death become an individual’s primary objective when mortality increases past a critical point. The fear of death can be a very convincing argument. We must also take into consideration the condition of the United States of America before, during, and after the election these elections as well as people prior political leanings.

**Selected References**


