

# Does Local Information Motivate Climate Support? Value and Political Identity as Moderators

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## INTRODUCTION

• One of the widely believed reasons for low public engagement in climate action is that people perceive climate impacts as psychologically distant.

### Psychological Distance:

One's perceived distance to an event in terms of space, time, relevance to self, and uncertainty

• Individuals with high **self-transcendence** values, as opposed to high **self-enhancement** values, are more likely to perform pro-environmental behaviors and support climate policies (Bergquist et al., 2021).

**Self-Enhancement:**  
authority, influence, wealth

**Self-Transcendence:**  
equality, social justice, unity with nature

• Communicating local impacts of climate change does **not** always motivate action and may backfire for individuals with high **self-enhancement** values (Schoenefeld & McCauley, 2016).

## METHODS

• **Participants:** 472 adults living in Texas

### Climate impact information

Control IPCC climate impact description  
Proximal IPCC climate impact description + Hurricane Imelda in **Texas**  
Distant IPCC climate impact description + Cyclone Idai in **Africa**

### Psychological distance

**Spatial** – e.g. “Serious effects of climate change will mostly occur in areas far away from here.”

**Social** – e.g. “I don’t see myself as someone who will be affected by climate change.”

### Climate engagement

**Risk perception** – e.g. “How serious are the current impacts of climate change?”

**Personal behavioral intention** – e.g. “In the next six months, how likely will you walk to the shops for 15 minutes, rather than driving there for 3 minutes?”

**Climate policy support** – e.g. “Increasing government funding for renewable energy companies.”

## HYPOTHESES

- H1** Psychological distance: control > distal > proximal  
**H2** Climate engagement will positively correlate with **self-transcendence** regardless of information conditions.  
**H3** There will be an interaction between information and **self-enhancement**: Stronger **self-enhancement** will correlate with lower climate engagement in the proximal condition

## RESULTS

### Confirmatory

**H1:** Control, proximal, or distal information had no effect on psychological distance (Figure 1).

**H2:** **Self-transcendence** positively predicted risk perception,  $b = 1.17, p < .001$ , behavioral intention,  $b = .22, p < .001$ , and policy support,  $b = .53, p < .001$ .

**H3:** Climate information did not interact with **self-enhancement**.

### Exploratory

We split our sample into three sub-samples by political identity: conservative, neutral, and liberal.

In the conservative sample, distal information increased policy support for more **self-enhancing** individuals,  $b = .40, p < .05, R^2 = .29, F(8, 157) = 8.16$ .

In the liberal sample, distal information decreased policy support for more **self-enhancing** individuals,  $b = -.24, p < .05, R^2 = .23, F(8, 115) = 4.27$ .

Table 1  
The effect of climate information and values on climate policy support in the conservative sample ( $N = 166$ ).

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
(Intercept)	1.39**	.49	
Self-transcendence	.40***	.16	.38
Self-enhancement	-.13	.17	-.14
Distal	-.86	.69	-.35
Proximal	-.68	.68	-.28
Self-transcendence × Distal	.06	.20	.09
Self-transcendence × Proximal	.17	.21	.26
Self-enhancement × Distal	.40*	.20	.52
Self-enhancement × Proximal	.14	.21	.19
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.30***		
<i>F</i>	8.16***		

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

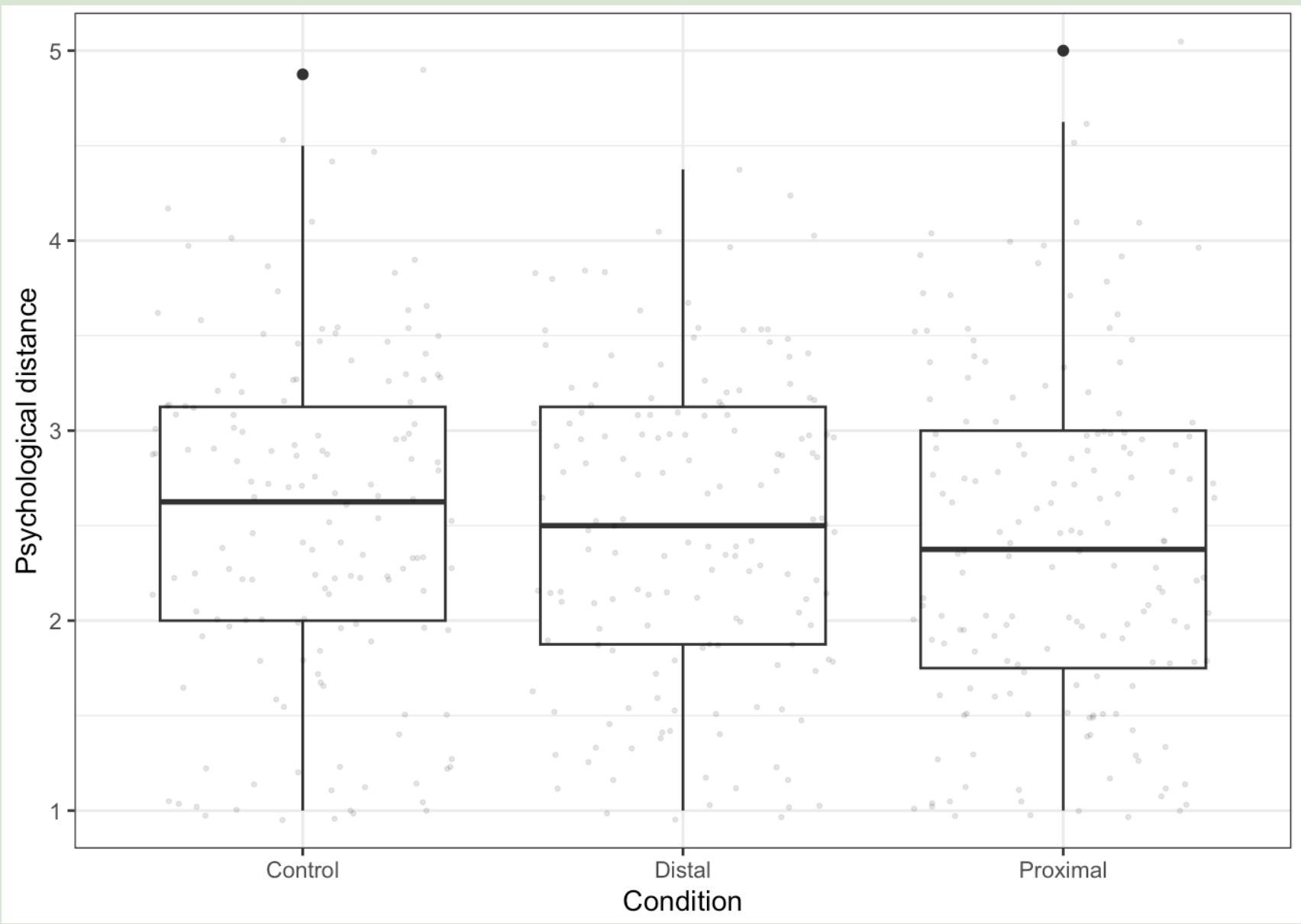


Figure 1. Psychological distance of climate change in the control, distal, and proximal conditions.

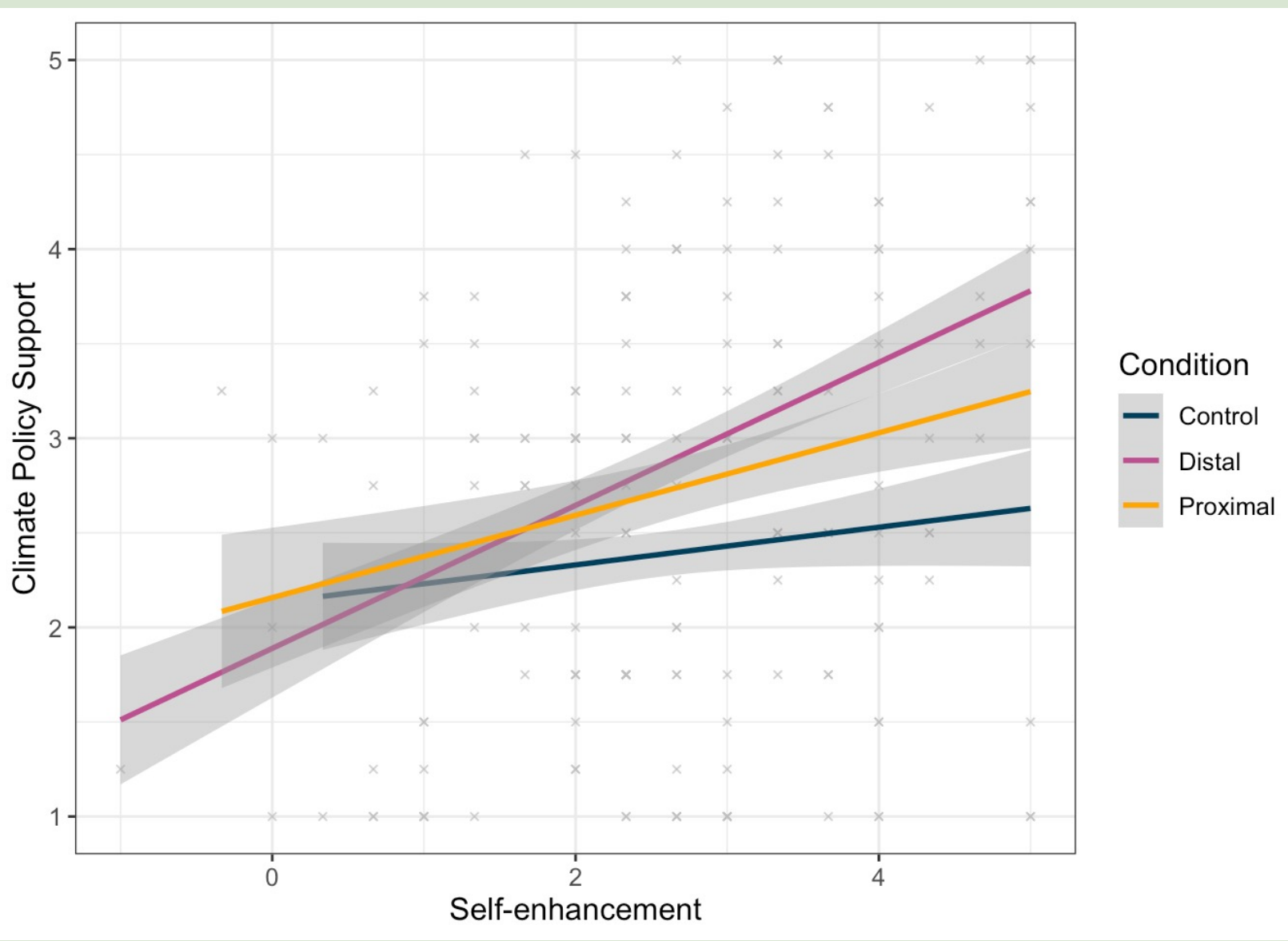


Figure 2. Relationships between **self-enhancement** and climate policy support across conditions for the conservative sample and liberal sample.

## DISCUSSION

### Stability of Psychological Distance

- Ceiling effect: participants had low psychological distance overall ( $M = 2.47, SD = 0.87, 74.4\%$  under 3 out of 5)
- Nearly half (44.7%) of participants had personally experienced a hurricane
- At a time and place where many people had been personally influenced by climate disasters, a short passage was simply not powerful enough to bring perceptions of climate impacts closer than it already was

### Moderation of Political Identity

- Interactions between **self-enhancement** and proximity of information were not detected in a politically heterogeneous sample, but were revealed in politically homogeneous ones

### Reactance to Proximal Information

- Distal information produced highest policy support for conservative, **self-enhancing** individuals: confirms literature on backlash in environmental support when proximal information is presented to groups associated with lower pro-environmental attitudes (Schoenefeld & McCauley, 2016; Roh et al., 2015; Duan et al., 2021)

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