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### The Shift to the Left Effect: An Investigation of Threat-Induced Shifts in Political Attitudes

Katharine Chang

*Washington University in St. Louis*

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# THE SHIFT TO THE LEFT EFFECT: AN INVESTIGATION OF THREAT-INDUCED SHIFTS IN POLITICAL ATTITUDES

*Katharine Chang*

*Mentor: Alan J. Lambert*

Psychologists have long recognized that threatening stimuli can exert a powerful influence on attitude and behavior. Virtually all research in this area has shown that threat induces a "shift to the right effect," or a tendency to endorse conservative beliefs and perspectives. This raises an interesting and important question: are there conditions under which threat can reliably induce people to endorse liberal perspectives? The overall goal of this research was to provide evidence for this possibility, and to elucidate the affective mechanisms by which it occurs.

The current thesis will examine these "shift to the left" effects using attitudes surrounding environmental protections. Participants were exposed to three conditions: a story of a child dying due to air pollution, a story of childhood illness caused by water pollution, and a control condition.

Participants in the experimental conditions were more likely to endorse liberal proenvironmental attitudes and less likely to endorse conservative healthcare attitudes relative to a control. Participants were significantly angered, saddened, and made fearful by the two experimental conditions. These findings demonstrate unique evidence that threats can significantly shift political attitudes to the left, and that negative affect plays a significant mediatory role between threat and shifts in attitude.