

Politicians can use fear to manipulate the public

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A new study in the *American Journal of Political Science* explores how and when politicians can use fear to manipulate the public into supporting policies they might otherwise oppose. Politicians' use of fear is more likely with regard to topics that are abstract and difficult for citizens (and/or the media) to observe.

Arthur Lupia and Jesse O. Menning examined how select attributes of fear affect a politician's ability to scare citizens into supporting policies that they would otherwise reject. They argue that politicians' use of fear will depend on critical aspects of mass psychology.

For example, manipulation is more likely when the public doesn't understand an issue or is unlikely to be able to overcome the fear created by politicians. By contrast, the easier it is for citizens to observe that the politician has made false statements, the less likely it is that politicians will attempt to use fear at all.

"A greater understanding of when fear can and cannot be used to scare citizens into supporting bad policies can help journalists and scholars more effectively interpret important historical events," the authors note. "It can help them think about whether, and to what extent, elite manipulation of citizen emotions contributed to initial public support for these kinds of government actions."

More information: This study is published in the *American Journal of Political Science*.

Source: Wiley

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