Despite being extensively studied over the past 15 years, the relationship between threat sensitivity and political ideology remains unclear. Initially, support emerged for a linear trend between increased threat sensitivity and conservative ideology [1]. Yet this body of evidence—which showed that individuals who evince larger physiological responses to an array of negative stimuli (e.g., maggots, wounded humans, spider on another human’s face) tend to support conservative policies—has failed to consistently replicate [2], possibly due to the myriad ways in which people have defined and measured “threat sensitivity.” In the current proposal, we aim to advance the study of threat sensitivity in political psychology in two ways: (1) by forwarding a unifyingand easily implementable operationalization of threat sensitivity, and (2) by determining whether important facets of our political lives are associated with threat sensitivity. Due to their centrality in determining/driving political interactions and outcomes, we focus specifically on affective polarization, anti-democratic sentiments, and political violence.

**What do we mean by threat sensitivity?** One reason why the threat sensitivity-conservatism link fails to replicate likely concerns how prior work operationalized threat sensitivity. Early work assessing this relationship indexed “threat sensitivity” as autonomic nervous system activity (i.e., skin conductance) in response to a broad array of negative stimuli. Arguably, none of the utilized stimuli resembled immediate physical threats to the participant. Indeed, work has shown that maggots and human conspecifics under duress are instead disgust evoking, and more broadly “negative” in valence, but do not pose *immediate* *physical threats* to the perceiver [3]*.* Critically, perceptions of immediate threats to physical harm (e.g., predators in attacking position, guns aimed toward the perceiver) are prioritized over other forms of negative stimuli (e.g., maggots, feces, mutilated humans) and manifest in distinct bodily and behavioral responses [3]. Although some have *argued for* operational distinctions between physical threat and other forms of negativity such as disgust (e.g., [4]), this approach has yet to be empirically realized (e.g., [2]). **We aim to unconfound physical threat and other forms of negativity and put forth a unifying operationalization and measurement of threat sensitivity by utilizing a novel self-report scale.** Our scale is projective in nature—participants rate their perceived likelihood of being physically harmed in a range of potentially but not inherently threatening contexts (see the Design Summary).

**How does threat sensitivity affect our political lives?**Danger perceptions lead to adaptive responses tailored to minimize harm. Defensive responses typically involve psychological or behavioral escape, immobility, or aggression [5]. In the current work we hypothesize that increased threat sensitivity disposes individuals to over- or misperceive danger and respond with defensively aggressive attitudes or behaviors. **Regarding our political lives, we conceive of certain democratically maladaptive political attitudes—namely, affective polarization, support for anti-democratic sentiments, and political violence—as *instantiations of defensive aggression*.** Our preliminary work (N = 303 undergraduates) supports this supposition. Even when controlling for ideological polarization, our threat sensitivity scale predicts affective polarization, support for anti-democratic ingroup policies and politicians, andmarginally predicts support for political violence. Meaning, regardless of direction or extremity of political orientation, partisans who are threat sensitive are more likely to be affectively polarized and express support for anti-democratic norms and political violence.

 **The Current Proposal.**We aim to assess if these important and insightful relationships hold among a U.S. representative sample. We recognize that our preliminary work is limited in both sample size and demographic makeup. Evidence from a generalizable sample will speak directly to the contentious relationship between threat sensitivity and political attitudes by offering a more nuanced view of threat and its politically relevant correlates, one rooted in theory on physical threat and defensive responding. Moreover, this work is highly generative, paving the way for research on specific danger (mis)perceptions that give rise to defensive aggression (e.g., perceptions of counter-partisans or their ideologies as dangerous to the self) and interventions aimed at modulating these perceptions.