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**THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 THREAT ON WARM AND  
COMPETENT POLITICAL LEADER PREFERENCES:  
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PREFERENCES OF LEFT-  
AND RIGHT-ORIENTED PEOPLE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 THREAT ON WARM AND COMPETENT POLITICAL LEADER PREFERENCES: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PREFERENCES OF LEFT- AND RIGHT-ORIENTED PEOPLE**

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Unexpected and threatening situations that remind people of their mortality and lead to an increase in existential concerns such as terrorist attacks, infectious diseases, or an experimentally manipulated threat perception have been found to be effective on various social and political attitudes and behaviors. Several studies showed that such situations also have an effect on political leader preferences, mediated by perceived personality characteristics of political leaders. Moreover, political leader preferences of people with different political orientations may differ depending on the perceived personality characteristics of political leaders. The current research has two main aims: (1) To investigate how the existential concerns due to COVID-19 affects political candidate preferences based on the personality characteristics of candidates (whether warm or competent); (2) To investigate whether political orientation predicts the difference between voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates. An experimental study with 687 Turkish participants was conducted. Participants were randomly assigned to mortality salience condition or control condition, and political candidate characteristics were manipulated as one of the candidates has warm-related characteristics and the other has competent-related characteristics. It was found that COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation had no effect on political candidate preferences, while the personality of political candidate had a significant effect on the political candidate preferences. Specifically, results showed that political candidate

that has competent-related personality characteristics was more likely to be preferred by participants. Also, it was found that political orientation did not predict the difference between the voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates, and this finding was discussed in light of the worldview defense hypothesis of Terror Management Theory and conservative shift hypothesis. It was shown that both of the left-oriented and right-oriented participants were more likely to prefer the political candidate who had competent-related personality characteristics, compared to the political candidate with warm-related characteristics. The possible explanations of these findings, limitations of the present study and suggestions for future studies were discussed.

**Keywords:** terror management theory, COVID-19, existential concerns, political leader preference, stereotype content model, warmth, competence

## ÖZ

# COVID-19 TEHDİDİNİN SİYASİ LİDER TERCİHLERİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ: SAĞ YÖNELİMLİ VE SOL YÖNELİMLİ KİŞİLERİN TERCİHLERİ ARASINDAKİ FARKLILIKLAR

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İnsanlara ölümlü olduklarını hatırlatan, beklenmedik ve varoluşsal kaygılarını arttıran olaylar, örneğin terörist saldırıları, bulaşıcı hastalıklar ya da deneysel olarak manipüle edilmiş tehdit algısı, birçok sosyal, siyasi tutum ve davranış üzerinde etkili bulunmuştur. Birçok araştırma bu tarz olayların kişilerin siyasi lider tercihleri üzerinde de, özellikle siyasi liderlerin algılanan kişilik özelliklerine bağlı olarak, etkisi olduğunu göstermektedir. Dahası, farklı siyasi yönelimleri olan kişilerin siyasi lider tercihleri de siyasi liderlerin algılanan kişilik özelliklerine bağlı olarak farklılık gösterebilmektedir. Bu araştırmanın iki ana amacı vardır: (1) COVID-19 nedeniyle insanların artan varoluşsal endişelerinin, siyasi lider tercihleri üzerinde, siyasi liderlerin sahip oldukları kişilik özelliklerine (sevecenlik ve yetkinlik) bağlı olarak, bir etkiye sahip olup olmayacağını araştırmak; (2) Kişilerin sevecen ve yetkin lider tercihleri arasındaki farkın siyasi yönelim tarafından yordanıp yordanmayacağını araştırmak. Bu amaçlara yönelik olarak, 687 Türk katılımcı ile deneysel bir çalışma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılar rastgele ölüm belirginliği ya da kontrol koşullarına atanmış ve iki varsayımsal siyasi liderin biri sevecenlik boyutuyla ilgili kişilik özelliklerine, diğeri yetkinlik boyutuyla ilgili kişilik özelliklerine sahip olacak şekilde manipüle edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, siyasi lider tercihleri üzerinde COVID-19 ile ilgili ölüm belirginliği manipülasyonunun bir etkisinin olmadığını göstermiştir. Ancak, siyasi liderin yetkin ya da sevecen olmasının siyasi lider tercihleri üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisi bulunmuş, yetkinlik boyutuyla ilgili kişilik özelliklerine sahip siyasi liderin, sevecenlik boyutuyla ilgili kişilik özelliklerine sahip olana kıyasla daha fazla tercih edildiği görülmüştür. Ayrıca, siyasi yönelim göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, yetkin ve sevecen siyasi lider tercihleri arasındaki farkın kişilerin siyasi yönelimleri

tarafından yordanmadığı bulunmuştur ve bu bulgu dünya görüşünü savunma (*worldview defense*) ve muhafazakarlığa kayma (*conservative shift*) hipotezleri göz önünde bulundurularak tartışılmıştır. Bu bulguya göre hem sağ yönelimli hem sol yönelimli kişilerin yetkin kişilik özelliklerine sahip lideri sevecenlik boyutuyla ilgili kişilik özelliklerine sahip olana kıyasla daha fazla tercih ettiğini söylemek mümkündür. Bu bulguların olası açıklamaları, çalışmanın sınırlılıkları ve gelecek çalışmalara öneriler tartışılmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** dehşet yönetimi kuramı, COVID-19, varoluşsal kaygılar, siyasi lider tercihi, kalıpyargı içeriği modeli, sevecenlik, yetkinlik



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Tuđçenaz Elcil  
İzmir, 2021

## TEXT OF OATH

I declare and honestly confirm that my study, titled “THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 THREAT ON WARM AND COMPETENT POLITICAL LEADER PREFERENCES: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PREFERENCES OF LEFT- AND RIGHT-ORIENTED PEOPLE” and presented as a Master’s Thesis, has been written without applying to any assistance inconsistent with scientific ethics and traditions. I declare, to the best of my knowledge and belief, that all content and ideas drawn directly or indirectly from external sources are indicated in the text and listed in the list of references.

Tuğçenaz Elcil

June 2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ÖZ	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
TEXT OF OATH	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2. 1. Terror Management Theory	4
2.1.1. Mortality Salience Hypothesis of Terror Management Theory	5
2.1.2. Worldview Defense Hypothesis of Terror Management Theory	7
2.1.3. Terror Management Theory and Politics	8
2.2. Conservatism and Liberalism	10
2.2.1. Conservative Shift	12
2.3. Effects of Existential Threats on Political Leader Preferences	15
2.3.1. COVID-19 as a Threatening Situation	18
2.4. Two Fundamental Dimension of Social Cognition: Warmth and Competence	19
2.4.1. Warmth and Competence on Political Candidate Perception	23
2.5. Overview of The Current Study	26
2.5.1. Aims and Research Questions of The Current Study	26
2.5.2. Hypotheses of The Current Study	27
CHAPTER 3 METHOD	30
3.1. Participants	30
3.2. Materials	31
3.2.1. Mortality Salience Condition and Control Condition Texts	31



3.2.2. PANAS (Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale)	31
3.2.3. Warmth and Competence Manipulation of Two Hypothetical Political Candidates	32
3.2.4. Manipulation Check	33
3.2.5. Demographic Information Form	33
3.2.6. Political Orientation	33
3.3. Procedure	33
3.3.1. Statistical Procedure	34
CHAPTER 4 RESULT	36
4.1. Descriptive Statistics	36
4.2. Primary Analyses	36
4.2.1. Normality of Distribution	36
4.2.2. Test of Homogeneity of Variance	37
4.2.3. Manipulation Check	38
4.3. Main Analyses	39
4.3.1. The Effect of Personality Characteristics of Political Candidate on Voting Intention	39
4.3.2. The Effect of Mortality Salience on Voting Intention	41
4.3.3. The Interaction Effect of Group Condition and Political Candidate Personality	41
4.3.4. Linear Mixed Model Analysis: Differences Between Left-Oriented and Right-Oriented Participants	43
4.4. Summary of the Findings	45
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION	47
5.1. Possible Explanations of the Findings	47
5.2. Contributions of the Study	54
5.3. Potential Limitations and Future Suggestions	55
REFERENCES	58
APPENDICES	75
APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form	75
APPENDIX B: Mortality Salience Condition and Control Condition Texts	76

APPENDIX C: Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale	77
APPENDIX D: Warmth-Competence Manipulation of Two Hypothetical Political Candidates	78
APPENDIX E: Manipulation Check	80
APPENDIX F: Demographic Information Form	82
APPENDIX G: Supplementary Analyses	83
APPENDIX H: Exploratory Analyses	84



## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 4.1.</b> Perceived Warmth and Competence Scores for Political Candidates	38
<b>Figure 4.2.</b> Voting Intention for Warm and Competent Political Candidates	40
<b>Figure 4.3.</b> Voting Intention for Warm and Competent Political Candidates Across Group Conditions	42



## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 4.1.</b> Descriptive Statistics for Variables	36
<b>Table 4.2.</b> Test of Homogeneity of Variance	37
<b>Table 4.3.</b> Results of the Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance	39
<b>Table 4.4.</b> Results of the Bayesian Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance	40
<b>Table 4.5.</b> Results of the Linear Mixed Model Analysis	44



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease

MS: Mortality Salience

SCM: Stereotype Content Model

TMT: Terror Management Theory



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Life consists of various unexpected and threatening situations happening around us. Some of these situations remind us that human beings are inevitably mortal living organisms and death will come eventually. Being aware that life will end for us one day may lead to existential concerns, especially in times when thoughts related to death are much more salient due to some external threats. In order to cope with these existential concerns, people attach even more firmly to their values and cultural worldviews that enable them to make sense of life, and try to convince themselves or remind themselves that they are a valuable member of a meaningful world (Greenberg et al., 1986; Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski, 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999).

Essentially, even if people are not aware of these death-related thoughts or actively think about death, existential concerns triggered by various unexpected and threatening situations in the world have an influence on many of our attitudes and behaviors, according to the Terror Management Theory (TMT; Greenberg et al., 1986). For instance, when people see the pictures of the ruined buildings due to terrorist attacks (Vail et al., 2012), when they walk by a funeral home (Jonas et al., 2002), or when they read an article on the internet about a newly emerging deadly virus called COVID-19 and its effects on human life, death-related thoughts may be activated and it may affect the subsequent reactions, behaviors and attitudes of people (Burke et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2010). For instance, existential concerns can make people react more harshly to a situation that is inconsistent with their values and cultural worldviews (McGregor et al., 1998; Rosenblatt et al., 1989), or, as another example, can make them more willing to make a donation to the charity reflecting their worldview that he/she saw right after passing a funeral home (Jonas et al., 2002). And the driving force behind these behaviors is, generally, the same: Motivation to feel as a valuable member of a meaningful world (Greenberg et al., 1986; Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski, 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999).

Some of the past studies showed that threatening, risky and unpredictable situations that trigger existential concerns in people, such as terrorism attacks, deadly diseases like Ebola, or even experimental manipulations that remind people of their

death, have an effect on various reactions of people as a response to that threatening situation (Beall et al., 2016; Burke et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2010; Chatard et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al., 1992; McGregor et al., 1998; Pyszczynski et al., 2006; Rosenblatt et al., 1989; Trémolière et al., 2012). According to the TMT (Greenberg et al., 1986), these kinds of threatening situations that remind people of their death would make them firmly attached to their cultural worldviews to relieve themselves from existential concerns by making them believe that they are a valuable member of the world with valuable and validated worldviews (Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski, 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999).

Moreover, past findings revealed that real-life or experimentally manipulated threats reminding people that there is an inevitable end of life at some point have an influence on political leader preferences of people. It has been shown that, in these times, generally, people become more inclined to prefer a political leader that meets their needs, perceived as qualified to manage the threats and seems to be able to fulfill people's need for feeling secure (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019; Albertson & Gadarian, 2016; Beall et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2005; Gillart & Hart, 2010; Landau et al., 2004; Vail III et al., 2009). On the other hand, within the context of the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 1999; Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske, 2018), perception of others is based on how we perceived the intention of others (warmth) and whether others have enough capacity to fulfill these intentions (competence). Therefore, past studies found that political leader preferences are also affected by perceptions of warmth and competence of political leaders, even, warmth- and competence-related characteristics were found as the two most important dimensions that shape the personality impressions of political candidates (Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997; Funk, 1999; Markus, 1982; Miller et al., 1986; Wojciszke & Klusek, 1996).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a threatening situation that may lead to increase in existential concerns because these COVID-19 times people pass through are highly unpredictable with full of threats and death-related concerns. Therefore, one of the aims of the current study was to investigate the effects of COVID-19 threat on people's voting intentions toward two hypothetical political candidates with different personality characteristics (warm versus competent). The second aim of the study was to investigate how the political leader preferences (warm vs. competent) might change depending on the political orientation of people (left-oriented vs. right-oriented). Past

studies showed that, in their reactions to threat, politically left-oriented and right-oriented people might differ from each other on their endorsement of some social and political attitudes (Castano et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al., 1992; Pyszczynski et al., 2006) and whether they give more importance to warmth or competence of political leaders (Costa & Ferreira da Silva, 2015; Laustsen, 2016). Therefore, whether the warm and competent political candidate preferences of left-oriented and right-oriented people differ from each other, and the effect of mortality salience manipulation on warm and competent political candidate preferences of left-oriented and right-oriented people were investigated, by conducting an experimental study.





## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2. 1. Terror Management Theory

The theory of terror management (Greenberg et al., 1986) was initially inspired by the writings of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, and his books “The Birth and Death of Meaning” and “The Denial of Death” that were written in 1971 and 1973 (Pyszczynski, 2004). In its simplest definition, TMT is related to people's need to manage the awareness of mortality and vulnerability against the terror of the inevitable death, thanks to some defense mechanisms.

From the evolutionary point of view, highly developed cognitive abilities of humans led them to be aware of their own mortality and ultimate death, compared to other living beings, and this awareness causes death anxiety because of a survival instinct of people (Greenberg & Kosloff, 2008; Pyszczynski, 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999). Therefore, people needed to generate solutions to cope with the anxiety that awareness of being mortal caused. TMT postulates that there are two psychological structures, *cultural worldviews* and *self-esteem*, and these two psychological structures give people a solution to cope with existential concerns, and it was named as *dual component anxiety-buffer* (Greenberg et al., 2000; Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al., 1992; Pyszczynski, 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999; Rosenblatt et al., 1989). In more detail, having an accepted cultural worldviews and enhanced self-esteem stemming from having an accepted worldviews and values makes people feel that they are a valuable member of a meaningful and predictable world, and consequently, it provides a sense of security that causes to decrease existential concerns (Greenberg et al., 1986; Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski, 2004).

Believing that one is a valuable part of a meaningful world mainly depends on a consensual approval of their worldview with other people, it makes people believe that their cultural worldviews are accepted, and consequently, their self-esteem

increases. However, if people faced with a situation that threatens their cultural worldview, then, it creates existential concerns, and to soften these existential concerns people become firmly attached to their cultural worldviews and more inclined to defend their own cultural worldviews (Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski, 2004).

What is the motivation behind getting even more firmly attached to our cultural worldviews when facing a situation that creates existential anxiety in us? Cohen and Solomon (2011, p. 316) defined cultural worldview as a “humanly constructed conceptions of reality shared by individuals in a group”. This shared meaning system provides people a sense of immortality in two ways: Literally and symbolically. Literal immortality is about some spiritual and religious beliefs that death of the physical body is not the ultimate end of self, existence of the self in some other form will continue to survive, for instance, the soul will survive in another life, or in some other form (Greenberg & Kosloff, 2008; Pyszczynski, 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999; Pyszczynski et al., 2020). On the other hand, symbolic immortality is about the sense that even if someone physically dies, part of the self will continue to exist as a part of something more powerful, such as family, social groups, or accomplishments in life (Pyszczynski, 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999; Pyszczynski et al., 2020). Therefore, having a validated and shared cultural worldview gives people a feeling of literal or symbolic immortality, according to the TMT. With this regard, considering the content of the present study, it can be said that being a part of any political ideology and adopting particular political attitudes and beliefs as a part of worldview can give people a sense of symbolic immortality. Therefore, it can be said that facing any threatening situation that causes the emerge of death-related thoughts would shape some political attitudes and behaviors of people, as a defense mechanism to cope with existential concerns.

### **2.1.1. Mortality Salience Hypothesis of Terror Management Theory**

According to the mortality salience hypothesis of TMT, if people are reminded of their mortality, it leads to increase the accessibility of death-related thoughts that are activated out of focal awareness of people (Pyszczynski et al., 1999), and it non-consciously causes an increased need for worldview and self-esteem defenses of people to manage death anxiety (Pyszczynski, 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999). The dual process theory (Pyszczynski et al., 1999) named this process as a “distal defense”, because defenses of worldview and self-esteem do not appear logically related to

existential anxiety at first glance and such defenses arise out of focal awareness. On the other hand, “proximal defenses” were defined as attempts to annihilate death anxiety on a conscious level by using some kind of logical strategies such as denial and suppression (Pyszczynski et al., 1999). Therefore, in many studies that investigated the effects of mortality salience on attitudes and behaviors, delay tasks were used after mortality salience manipulations, since the distal defenses occur when death-related thoughts are accessible but people do not consciously aware of them (Arndt et al., 1997; Burke et al., 2010; Greenberg et al., 2000; Greenberg et al., 1994; Pyszczynski et al., 1999). For instance, Greenberg et al. (1994) showed that participants in the mortality salience condition statistically significantly showed more worldview defenses compared to the control condition, if they were given a delay task after the manipulation. However, if participants were given a word search puzzle including death-related words after the mortality salience manipulation in order to keep death thoughts in focal awareness, worldview defense of people was not found as statistically significantly different from people in the control condition (Study 2). Also, accessibility of death thoughts measured by asking participants to fill the blanks in the word fragmentation task that words can be completed either as a neutral word or a death-related word (e.g. as coffee or coffin), and it was shown that participants had more accessibility of death thoughts if they were given a delay task after mortality salience manipulation (Greenberg et al., 1994, Study 4).

The main logic behind the mortality salience manipulation is that, if cultural worldviews and self-esteem serve a death anxiety-buffering function, reminding people of death should cause people to defend their cultural worldviews and need to feel as a meaningful part of the world (Greenberg et al., 1986; Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski, 2004). According to meta-analyses, the most used mortality salience manipulation was standard death-related questions that ask participants to write what will happen if they physically die and what kinds of feelings and thoughts show up when thinking of their own death (Burke et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2010). Additionally, other mostly used mortality salience manipulations were using death-related surveys, asking participants to watch death-related videos or showing them death-related photos, reading them essays about 9/11 attacks, or interviewing them in front of cemetery or funerals (Burke et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2010). For the control condition group, similar versions of mortality salience conditions have been used, but contents

were not related to death, were related to negative (e.g. dental pain) or neutral situations (e.g. watching television) (Burke et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2010).

Many research and meta-analyses have been done in the last thirty year in order to understand attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of death-related concerns emerged as a result of mortality salience manipulations (Burke et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2010; Chatard et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al., 1992; McGregor et al., 1998; Pyszczynski et al., 2006; Rosenblatt et al., 1989; Trémolière et al., 2012). A meta-analysis including 164 articles with 277 experiments in total showed that the mortality salience effect was found on many dependent variables, but the magnitude of the effect was greater for attitudes toward other people rather than other dependent variables related to social and political attitudes, behaviors, and cognition (Burke et al., 2010).

### **2.1.2. Worldview Defense Hypothesis of Terror Management Theory**

As several studies showed, reminding people of their mortality leads participants to become motivated to defend their cultural worldviews and also evaluate others and other situations by taking their own cultural worldviews as a criterion, which was called as a worldview defense hypothesis of TMT (Greenberg et al., 1989, Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al., 1992; Pyszczynski et al., 1999).

For instance, mortality salience manipulations caused people to criticize others who have different worldviews from them more, compared to people in control conditions because after the mortality salience manipulation, people who have different worldviews were perceived as threatening factor to one's meaningful world (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Specifically, it was shown that mortality salience manipulation caused people to have more desire to punish others who violated their worldviews while having a desire to reward people who had similar worldviews with them (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). In other studies, it was found that mortality salience manipulation resulted in being more aggressive toward someone that have dissimilar political views (McGregor et al., 1998), and an increase in people's support for policies of one's own nation's government and army (Chatard et al., 2011), also it was shown that mortality salience affected people's moral judgments (Trémolière et al., 2012). In the group level, mortality salience also led people to have more positive interpersonal judgments for in-group members, while having more negative interpersonal judgments for out-group members (Greenberg et al., 1990).

### **2.1.3. Terror Management Theory and Politics**

Besides the effects of existential concerns on various attitudes and behaviors, recent studies also examined the effects of existential concerns on political attitudes and decisions (Burke et al., 2013; Castano et al., 2011; Chatard et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 2005; Cohen & Solomon, 2011; Cohen et al., 2004; Greenberg & Kosloff, 2008; Greenberg et al., 1990; Kosloff et al., 2010; Pyszczynski et al., 2006). From the view of TMT, political ideologies of people, as a part of their worldviews, serves a function of buffering people's anxiety arising from being aware of their mortality, because political ideologies are meaning systems that provide people a structure and a framework that shapes their attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors (Burke et al., 2013). Concordantly, many studies were conducted within the context of the TMT in order to investigate the effect of existential concerns on political attitudes (Castano et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski et al., 2006), and political leadership preferences and voting behaviors of people (Burke et al., 2013; Cohen et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2005; Greenberg & Kosloff, 2008; Kosloff et al., 2010). Moreover, in some of these studies, it has been shown that mortality salience manipulation has different effects on political attitudes of left-oriented (liberal) and right-oriented (conservative) people (Castano et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al. 1992; Pyszczynski et al., 2006)

It is meaningful to say that the effect of mortality salience manipulation on political attitudes might be different for left-oriented and right-oriented people, due to differences in their worldviews (Duckitt, 2001; Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2003b). For instance, Pyszczynski et al. (2006) showed that existential anxiety through manipulation of mortality salience increased the endorsement of offensive attitudes of people toward other countries that conflict with their own country, and this effect of mortality salience manipulation was different for liberals and conservatives. In their study, both Iranian and American participants in the mortality salience condition had more positive evaluations toward "other people" who supported extreme reactions against the other country due to the international conflicts between these countries. According to the researchers, a tendency to agree on violent political reactions toward others as a result of mortality salience was also rooted in perceptions of having a heroic duty of fighting "evil" for the sake of freedom (for Americans) or

for the sake of God (for Iranians), which are related to people's cultural worldviews. However, in Pyszczynski et al.'s (2006) second study it was found that conservative Americans in the mortality salience conditions (classical mortality salience and 9/11-related mortality salience) tended to have increased support for extreme reactions, however, such an effect was not found for liberal Americans. In the control condition, political orientation did not have any effect on support for extreme reactions (Pyszczynski et al., 2006).

These results are compatible with the findings of Greenberg et al. (1992), which indicated that being tolerant toward others seems to be a highly important value for liberals. In more detail, Greenberg et al. (1992) showed that liberal and conservative people had different responses to mortality salience manipulation. In the control condition, both liberals and conservatives evaluated the person who has politically similar attitudes more positively while evaluated less positively the person with dissimilar attitudes. However, mortality salience manipulation led conservatives to evaluate more positively the person with politically similar attitudes while less positively the person with politically different attitudes, but the same effect was not found for liberals. The reason behind that would be that liberals initially value being tolerant toward the differences because liberals evaluated the person who has politically dissimilar attitudes in a more positive way in the mortality salience condition, compared to the control condition (Greenberg et al. 1992). Other research also found consistent findings, American liberals in the MS condition tended to be more tolerant toward the author of the anti-American essay than American liberals in the control condition did (Castano et al., 2011, Study 5).

Another study showed that high authoritarians (as an indicator of a high level of conservatism) in the mortality salience condition disliked the targets that have dissimilar attitudes on some social issues such as the role of women in society, discipline of children and sports more than high authoritarians in the control condition. However, such an effect of mortality salience was not found for low authoritarian (as an indicator of low level of conservatism) participants (Greenberg et al., 1990). All of these findings indicate that as a response to mortality salience manipulation, reactions of liberals and conservatives on some political and social issues would be different from reactions of each other.

However, there were also inconsistent findings on this issue. For instance, McGregor et al. (1998) showed that both liberal and conservative participants in the

mortality salience condition were willing to show aggression to people that threatened their worldviews by writing anti-liberal (for liberal participants) and anti-conservative (for conservative participants) essays (Study 1). This result supported their hypothesis that both liberal and conservative participants in the mortality salience condition would show more aggression toward political worldview-threatening targets than the participants in the control conditions. Besides the conservatives, also liberals showed more aggression toward worldview-threatening targets than liberals in the control conditions, which seems in line with the conservative shift hypothesis (Jost et al., 2003a).

As a general, it can be said that both liberals and conservatives are motivated to defend their worldviews and to be polarized as a response to existential concerns, in line with the worldview defense hypothesis of TMT. However, on the other hand, in some situations, mortality salience manipulations and threatening situations in real-world (such as terrorism attacks) can result in a general shifting in attitudes of people towards the conservative side, as seen in the results of McGregor et al. (1998) above. This situation was called as a “conservative shift” (Jost et al., 2003a). Conservative shift will be mentioned in more detail below, but before that, it might be better to mention some of the main differences between conservatives and liberals.

## **2.2. Conservatism and Liberalism**

Ideological attitudes and beliefs are not merely be formed as a result of logical and rational processes, there are also personality-related and motivational tendencies that contribute to the formation of ideological belief systems (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009; Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2003b; Wilson, 2013). Therefore, there were many studies investigated the distinctions between liberals and conservatives on some issues such as their personality characteristics, socio-cognitive motivations, and the way that they see the world (Duckitt, 2001; Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2003b; Wilson, 2013).

The main distinction between being liberal and being conservative was based upon two dimensions: Acceptance vs. rejection of inequality and resistance vs. acceptance of change (Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2003b). Conservatism was found as related to acceptance of inequality and resisting to change (Jost et al., 2003b), seeing the world as a dangerous place which is consisted of bad people (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt et al., 2002; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009; van Leeuwen & Park,

2009), being sensitive to fear of death (Jost et al., 2003a) and also to negative stimuli (Carraro et al., 2011), less imaginative and less broad-minded (Feather, 1979), having higher scores on consciousness (Carney et al., 2008; Gosling et al., 2003) and giving importance for order and compliance to authority and social norms (Hirsh et al., 2010).

On the other hand, liberalism was found as associated with seeing the world as a more secure place (Duckitt, 2001), being more sympathetic to others, their emotions, well-being and problems (Hirsh et al., 2010), more open to new experiences (Carney et al., 2008; Gosling et al., 2003) and more sensation seekers (Levin & Schalmo, 1974), compared to right-oriented people. Additionally, moral values that conservatives and liberals give importance more are also different. Specifically, liberals were found as more likely to endorse moral values related to caring, protecting vulnerable ones, and giving more importance to fairness than conservatives, while conservatives were found as more likely to endorse moral values related to being loyal to one's ingroup, respecting hierarchy, and protecting the sanctity of the body, compared to liberals (Graham et al., 2013; Graham et al., 2009). A study with a nationwide representative sample from Turkey showed a considerable compatible political profile of Turkish citizens to what studies that indicated above found: By measuring the political orientation using a self-placement on a left-right political ideology scale, Çarkoğlu (2007) indicated that left-oriented people tended to be more supportive for progressive changes, to have more tolerance and more democratic values and to be less religious, while, right-oriented people tended to protect the status quo, to be more authoritarian and more religious and have a low level of tolerance. However, even though the political profiles of left-oriented and right-oriented people seem different, boundaries and the polarization between left- and right-wing in Turkey were found as not as clear as those in the European and American political spectrum (Öniş, 2007; Yılmaz et al., 2016).

As indicated in previous studies (Jost et al., 2003a; Wilson, 2013), conservatism is related to motivation to manage uncertainties and threats, in order to feel safe in a predictable world. Therefore, it can be said that being conservative provides a defensive function toward threatening situations and uncertainties. In line with these, Jost et al. (2003a) asserted the motivated social-cognition model of conservatism by doing a comprehensive meta-analysis of nearly 50 years of relevant literature and introduced the main differences between conservatives and liberals by presenting a broadly integrative framework.



The motivated social-cognitive model of conservatism of Jost et al. (2003a) indicated that conservatism has a psychological basis associated with various variables related to epistemic needs (e.g. need for cognitive closure, dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty of avoidance, need for order and structure and cognitive complexity), existential needs (e.g. threats to self-esteem, terror management, fear, aggression) and socio-political variables (e.g. social dominance, system justification) that all serve a function to manage and reduce threats, fears and uncertainties. In order to investigate the link between conservatism (vs. liberalism) and various psychological variables and to provide an integrative framework on the issue of socio-cognitive underpinnings of conservatism, Jost et al. (2003a) presented a meta-analysis with 88 samples from 12 different countries and 22.818 cases in total. According to the findings, conservatives generally were found as having higher scores on dogmatism, uncertainty avoidance, intolerance of ambiguity, less open to new experiences, have less cognitive inflexibility, have more needs for structure, order and cognitive closure, more defensive to self-related and system-related threats, motivated by fears and aggression and have more fear of death and fear of loss than liberals and moderate people (Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2003b; Jost et al., 2017).

### **2.2.1. Conservetive Shift**

From the integrative viewpoint of both TMT and conservatism as a motivated social cognition model, threatening, and unpredictable environments and situations might lead people to exhibit more conservative-related attitudes and behaviors because conservatism serves a function as a defense mechanism to manage threats and uncertainties, which is the main idea behind the conservatism shift (Beall et al., 2016; Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Brouard et al., 2018; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006; Jost et al., 2003a; Nail & McGregor, 2009; Schüller, 2015; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011). Especially a majority of the past studies investigated the conservative shift after terrorist attacks in different countries (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Brouard et al., 2018; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006; Schüller, 2015; Nail & McGregor, 2009). Nevertheless, generally, it can be said that both real-world threats and threats manipulated in a laboratory were found as resulted in the conservative shift.

For instance, in the study of Nail and McGregor (2009), data were collected at two different times, before 9/11 and after the 9/11 attacks, and participants were asked their self-reported political orientation and opinions about political attitudes on eight

different issues. Results revealed that, after the 9/11 terrorism threat, besides the general inclination in political attitudes toward the conservative-side, the conservative shift was also supported for liberals. Against the possible criticism that political attitudes of conservatives' were maybe more rational and logical as a response to the threatening situation, for example, increasing support for militarism as a response to terrorism attack, Nail and McGregor (2009) examined the conservative shift by choosing conceptually different issues for threat manipulation and for measurement of the conservative shift in their other study. After the manipulation of the injustice threat, it was found that liberals showed more in-group favoritism than conservatives. However, in the control condition, liberals showed significantly less in-group favoritism than conservatives. Also, researchers found that, as a response to mortality salience manipulation, liberals tended to shift their opinions and attitudes toward more conservatism-side (Nail & McGregor, 2009). In the same vein, Bonanno and Jost (2006) found that among survivors of the 9/11 terrorist attack, there were three times more people who reported shifting their political orientation toward conservatism than those who reported shifting to liberalism. Support for the conservative shift also found after the terrorism attack in Madrid: Researchers found that prejudice toward out-groups, authoritarianism, and endorsement for more conservatism-related social issues increased after the terrorist attack, while endorsement of more liberalism-related social issues decreased (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006). Also, it was found that after the threat of 9/11, liberals' support intensity for their political party decreased, while the support intensity of conservatives increased (Schüller, 2015).

On the other hand, inconsistent with the findings of Nail and McGregor (2009), it was found that the conservative shift was observed for the issues that concern closely to the threatening situation only, not for general political attitudes (Brouard et al., 2018). In more detail, researchers examined the impact of successive terrorism attacks in France on political attitudes related to security, morality, socio-economic and immigration related issues. Overall, the conservative shift found only on the attitudes related to the threatening situation: Security-related attitudes. In the post-threat period, left-oriented participants reported greater agreement only on the security-related issues as right-oriented participants did (Brouard et al., 2018).

As another example, Thórisdóttir and Jost (2011) showed that, after the high (versus low) threat manipulation of asking participants to write 12 threatening memories of them (versus asking for writing only three threatening memories),

participants in the high threat condition scored higher on closed-mindedness and perceived world as a dangerous place more than participants in the low threat condition (Study 1). In their second study, by using a different kind of threat manipulation, it was found that participants in the high threat condition placed themselves on a more the conservative-side of the left-right self-placement ideology scale, and this relationship was mediated by closed-mindedness (Study 2). Also, it was shown that participants in the high threat condition reported more endorsement of conservative issues (Study 4). Therefore, it can be said that since conservatives are more inclined to manage threats and fears (Jost et al., 2003), their “solutions” to face with threatening situations would seem better to people than “solutions” of liberals. Hence, people might tend to resemble conservatives in terms of their attitudes and their socio-cognitive motivations such as being more moderate towards the social and political attitudes associated with the right-wing, or becoming more closed-minded after threatening situations.

Moreover, past findings indicated that disease-related threats also can result in conservative-shift. For instance, in times of Ebola, Beall and colleagues (2016) found a general increase in the people’s support for conservative political candidates. However, in the subsequent study, this relationship mainly found in states that people support Republican candidates mostly. In contrast, in the states that people favored the Democratic candidates, support for Democratic candidates increased (Beall et al., 2016). This result reveals that, despite the general increased support for conservative candidates, which is in line with the conservative shift, people also may be motivated to stick to their own preferences in times of disease threats, which is in line with the worldview defense hypothesis of TMT.

Regarding all of the mentioned studies above, findings supporting conservative shift are not consistent with the worldview defense hypothesis of TMT. From the perspective of the worldview defense hypothesis of TMT, it would be expected that if mortality is salient, liberals and conservatives should defend their own worldviews and therefore there might be polarization in the attitudes of these two different politically oriented groups. On the other hand, according to the literature of conservative shift, reminding people of a threatening situation should lead people to shift their attitudes and opinions toward a more conservative-like way. To give a better understanding of this issue of inconsistency between the worldview defense hypothesis of TMT and the conservative shift hypothesis, meta-analyses studies were done. Jost et al., (2017)

investigated the relationships between existential anxiety-related variables such as fear of death, mortality salience, subjective (e.g. dangerous world belief) and objective (e.g. terrorism attacks) perceptions of threat and political ideology. Results showed that these variables, except the fear of death, were generally reliable predictors of political conservatism (vs. liberalism). Therefore, it was concluded that the conservative-shift hypothesis was a strong hypothesis due to the defensive function of conservatism as a response to mortality salience and other forms of threats (Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2003b). Another meta-analysis, Burke et al. (2013) investigated the effect of mortality salience manipulation on political attitudes and leader preferences and tested these two theories based on their effect sizes. Results revealed that the worldview defense hypothesis of TMT had a medium effect size (.35) while the conservative shift hypothesis had a small to medium effect size (.22), however, both effect sizes were found as statistically equivalent. Researchers discussed possible explanations for these inconsistencies between the two hypotheses, such as methodological differences between studies, the use of different measurement tools for political ideology (Jost et al., 2017), possible moderator variables and socio-political context at the time of study was conducted (Burke et al., 2013).

### **2.3. Effects of Existential Threats on Political Leader Preferences**

Besides the effects of existential threats on political attitudes related to different social, political and economic issues, political leader preferences also can be affected by existential threats. The past findings indicated that there was an effect of existential threats on both real and hypothetical political leader preferences and voting intentions toward them (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019; Beall et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2004; Gillart & Hart, 2010; Landau et al., 2004; Vail III et al., 2009).

For example, after the 9/11 attacks, Landau et al. (2004) randomly assigned their participants to MS or control condition, and then they asked their participants to read about an essay that was written by someone supporting President George W. Bush and his policies against terrorism. As an outcome variable, participants were asked about their support for President Bush. Results showed that participants in the MS condition and 9/11 salience condition (Study 3) indicated their support for President Bush more than those in the control condition, regardless of the political orientation (Study 3). In study 4, they investigated the effect of MS (both classic MS and 9/11

salience conditions) on support and voting intention for either President Bush or Senator John Kerry. Findings showed that participants were more willing to support and vote for President Bush in the MS conditions, however, they were more willing to support and vote for John Kerry in the control condition. According to the researchers, one of the possible explanation of why did MS manipulation elicit increased support for Bush would be that perception of Bush as a leader that has the ability to provide protection and security against the terrorism threat due to his security-related policies, which is in line with the conservative shift hypothesis that was mentioned above. Similar to Landau et al. (2004), Cohen et al. (2005) investigated the effect of MS on voting intentions for the U.S presidential election in 2004. They found consistent findings with Landau et al., (2004); participants' voting intentions for Bush highly increased in the mortality salience condition, while participants tended to vote for Kerry in the control condition. Also, a study from Turkey showed consistent findings: Aytaç and Çarkoğlu (2019) investigated changes in people's voting decisions between the two elections, from June 2015 to November 2015, which is a 5 month period that security-related threats highly increased due to successive terrorist attacks in Turkey in that period. Before this period, people defined the biggest problem of Turkey as economic problems, however, after this 5 month period, people defined the biggest problem that needed to be solved as terrorism-related security concerns. Therefore, in this inter-election period, people tended to switch their votes toward the political party that voters perceived as high on competence to manage these terrorism-related security concerns, which was a right-wing party (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019).

Also, it was shown that not only terrorism-related concerns but also threats of infectious diseases had a role in voting preferences (Beall et al., 2016). Specifically, the research investigated the changes in voting preferences from pre-election surveys comparing the data right before and after Ebola. Findings showed that voting preferences for conservative candidates greatly increased in the initial times of Ebola, compared to the week before the Ebola period, which is in line with the conservative shift (Beall et al., 2016).

The effects of threats on political leader preferences also are affected by the social context. Gillart and Hart (2010) found that security prime (reminding people of their attachment figures) had a buffering effect on the mortality salience effects and decreased the preference for strong and charismatic political candidates, compared to control conditions. Also, the research found that if compassion-related values were

made salient after the mortality salience condition, participants were more likely to prefer the leader that was perceived as more compassionate, who was Barack Obama, rather than John McCain. But, McCain preferred more after the mortality salience condition without saliency of compassion-related values (Vail III et al., 2009). Therefore, it can be said that effects of threats on political leader preferences also depend on salient values in social context, for instance, if empathy and egalitarian related values such as compassion were salient, then, people would be more likely to prefer a political leader who is compatible to that social context. However, if there is a chaotic social context where people have serious problems needed to be managed, it would increase the need for a political leader who is perceived as having a competence to cope with these problems.

Besides the mortality salience effect on preferences for political leaders, past studies also investigated the mortality salience effect on hypothetical political leaders. Cohen et al. (2004) demonstrated that mortality salience had an effect on evaluations and voting intentions for hypothetical political candidates that each of them varied in their leadership style. Results showed that in the control condition, a leader with a charismatic leadership style was preferred less than the other two equally preferred leadership styles (relationship-oriented and task-oriented). However, in the mortality salience condition, voting intention to the charismatic leader increased compared to the control condition, while preference for the relationship-oriented leader decreased and preference for task-oriented leader stayed stable among both mortality salience and control condition (Cohen et al., 2004).

As in addition to the leadership styles, personality-related impressions of political candidates were also found as having a role in voting preferences, which will be mentioned in next sections in more detail. However, according to the study of Little and colleagues (2007) these preferences might differ depending on whether it is a time of peace or threat. Specifically, it was found that political candidates who had masculine, dominant face shapes tended to be preferred in times of threat, in contrast, political candidates who had feminine face shapes were tended to be preferred in times of peace. According to all of these findings, it can be said that people are willing to choose a political leader who seems to be qualified to manage problems and meets the need for safety (Albertson & Gadarian, 2016). In general, past studies showed that in times of threat, charismatic, dominant leaders give people the sense of security and protection that satisfy their needs when facing existential threats, and therefore a

preference for these candidates increases while preference for more relationship-oriented and feminine leaders decreases.

### **2.3.1. COVID-19 as a Threatening Situation**

In the present study, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic as a threatening situation reminding people of their mortality and leads to feelings of existential concerns was examined, which is also an issue that has many impacts on people's living. Although the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be more of a health-threatening situation, additionally, it has become a threatening situation affecting order and functioning in a very large area of life. In addition to its threatening impacts on health, it is possible to talk about the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the whole system, economy, welfare, and psychology of people in general. In terms of psychological effects, studies found that people had a high level of feeling of uncertainty (Çıtak & Pekdemir, 2020), stress, anxiety and depression symptoms (Huang & Zhao, 2020; Satici et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020) and also a positive relationship was found between perceived COVID-19 threat and death anxiety (Kavaklı et al., 2020), while low levels of life satisfaction (Satici et al., 2020; Ammar et al., 2020) and well-being (Özmen et al., 2021) were indicated in times of COVID-19 pandemic.

From the perspective of the TMT, Pyszczynski and colleagues (2020) indicated that proximal defenses, such as denying the risks of the COVID-19 or giving up smoking and distal defenses such as defending own cultural worldviews and increasing self-esteem, could be activated in order to cope with the death-related concerns due to COVID-19. Especially, managing faith in cultural worldviews can become highly important to make people feel that the world is still a meaningful place with an order because the order of the world that people are accustomed to it suddenly changed due to a COVID-19 and turned into a complex and unpredictable world. In addition to that, due to strict precautions, such as lockdown, social distancing, and isolation, people remained far away from their jobs, schools, family members, friends, social relationships that have a role in their cultural meaning system. Therefore, in order to find "meaning" again to cope with existential concerns, investing faith in their worldviews and enhancing self-esteem can be important during this time (Pyszczynski et al., 2020).

Also, the COVID-19 pandemic would have an impact on the social and political spheres (Amat et al., 2020; Antonakis, 2020; Warshaw et al., 2020). In this threatening time, as Antonakis (2020) indicated in his article, leaders and their effective leadership skills about the management of the COVID-19 pandemic would be very important in order to find a solution for problems and managing the crisis, creating a social impact on citizens about contributing to the process in a beneficial way. But, in such a period, what kind of political leader do citizens want to see in order to cope with all these negativities and in order to think that they live in a meaningful and predictable world? What kinds of personality characteristics of a political candidate might make people more inclined to vote for that political candidate?

In line with the past studies found that mortality salience has an effect on political attitudes and political candidate preferences (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019; Beall et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2004; Gillart & Hart, 2010; Landau et al., 2004; Vail III et al., 2009), the current study investigated how existential concern due to COVID-19 pandemic would have an effect on the preference of political leaders that have different personality characteristics: One is high on warmth and the other is high on competence. Also, how these preferences would change depending on the political orientation of people was examined, because there might be differences in their preferences due to different worldviews of liberals and conservatives.

In the current study, characteristics of hypothetical political candidates were framed based on the two dimensions: Warmth and competence. Because, past studies found that warmth and competence were two main dimensions that affect the social perception of people (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2007), and specifically, these two dimensions were found as having a role on political candidate preferences (Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997; Funk, 1999; Markus, 1982; Miller et al., 1986; Wojciszke & Klusek, 1996). Before moving the past findings of the effect of warmth and competence on the political candidate preferences, it is needed to explain why these two dimensions were used in more detail.

#### **2.4. Two Fundamental Dimension of Social Cognition: Warmth and Competence**

Firstly, it would be better to present answers to fundamental questions that social psychologists have been interested in for a long time, such as “How do we perceive others?” and “Are there any generalized and common dimensions that contain



the perceived traits of others during the social perception process?” The dimensions of social perception are an important and highly studied issue in psychology literature because perceptions of others guide our social world, specifically, subsequent attitudes, feelings, and behaviors toward others. After many findings about the important determinants of social perception, warmth and competence were accepted as universal dimensions of social perception (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2007).

The antecedents of these two dimensions can be seen in several past studies. According to Asch (1946), being warm or cold was a “central quality” that had a strong effect on the general impression of others. Specifically, participants were given information about traits of the “competent” target that was intelligent, skillful, hardworking, determined, practical, cautious, and also warm or cold, based on the experimental condition. Then participants were asked to write a brief description of the target based on their first impressions. Researchers found that general descriptions were changed around whether the target is warm or cold. For example, a warm target was described by participants as more positive and as being right, sincere, and having a desire to accomplish their work, while a cold person was described as unsympathetic, ambitious, and talented. Generally, the target's trait checklist that was filled by participants showed that being warm or cold resulted in changes in the total impression about the target. Also, in 1950, Kelley (1950) found consistent findings with Asch (1946): The warm target was rated as more good natured, thoughtful, social, humorous, informal and humanist than the cold target. Rosenberg et al. (1968), also, asked their participants to classify a list of 64 traits based on their observations of these traits together in people around them. Then, the multidimensional scaling method was used to form clusters of traits and found that traits were classified mostly among two dimensions: Intellectual abilities and social abilities, which are akin to competence and warmth, respectively.

In line with these studies, more recently, warmth and competence dimensions were indicated as two dimensions of social perception (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2007). The warmth dimension contained traits related to being friendly, trustworthy and moral, while the competent dimension contained traits such as being efficient, skillful, and hardworking (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007). Based on an evolutionary perspective, when social animals meet each other, they want to know the intention of each other, whether a friend or an enemy, which is related to the warmth dimension, and whether the other has a capacity to reach those intentions and goals,

which is related to the competence dimension (Fiske et al., 2007). Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 1999) suggested that impressions of others are formed along these two dimensions, and perceptions of warmth or competence of someone or some groups affect our feelings and behavioral intentions toward them (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske, 2015; Fiske, 2018).

The perceived warmth and competence of targets has a role on the subsequent emotions and behavioral intentions toward them. Cuddy et al. (2007) found that emotions such as pity, contempt, envy and admiration, and behavioral tendencies toward the target such as helping, protecting, or neglecting can emerge based on perceptions of warmth and competence of the target. To give an example within the context of Stereotype Content Model, some groups of people, such as elderly people, housewives, or disabled people, were tended to be stereotyped as low in competence but highly warm, while some other groups, such as Asians, business women or rich people, were tended to be stereotyped as highly competent but cold, or some groups were tended to be perceived low in both competence and warmth such as poor, homeless people, and some groups were tended to be perceived as high in both competence and warm such as people from the middle class (Fiske, 1999). As can be seen in these examples, social structure, also, shapes how competent or warm we perceive others. For instance, research showed that high-status (vs. low status) people were tended to be perceived as high on competence, while cooperative (vs. competitive) people were tended to be perceived as high on warmth (Durante et al., 2017; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007). The motivation behind perceiving high-status people as more competent than low status one would be related to system justification needs of people (System Justification Theory; Jost & Banaji, 1994), in more detail, perceiving high status people as more competent would serve a function to justify the inequalities between social groups due to needs of protecting the system and also perceiving the system as fair (Durante et al., 2017; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007).

On the other hand, SCM is not the only one that highlighted these two dimensions. SCM is a more social psychology-related version of these dimensions, additionally to them, personality psychologists also interested in this topic. Concordantly, besides the Stereotype Content Model, highly similar versions of these two fundamental dimensions also were found in other studies that investigated self and other's perception (see review Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). Despite the different labels

such as warmth and competence (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2007), morality and competence (Wojciszke et al., 1998), and communion and agency (Abele & Brack, 2013; Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Wojciszke, 2014), the main idea seems to be common (Fiske, 2018): These two dimensions that one is related to friendliness, trustworthiness and morality, and the other is related to assertiveness, capability and agency underly perceptions of self, others and social groups.

Studies of SCM mostly examined these two dimensions in group level while there were studies that also investigated the effect of these two dimensions in person level. Generally, in person level, communion-related traits were found to be more desirable than agency-related traits (Abele & Brack, 2013; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). However, in some situations these dimensions might have different priorities according to whether the perceiver is an actor or observer (see review Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). Research showed that competence-related traits were perceived as more advantageous to have for self, while morality-related traits were perceived as more important to have for others (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Wojciszke et al., 1998). Additionally, which one of the agency and communion will be more desired also can differ based on a relationship between perceiver and target. People considered the agency-related features more important to a good friend than for an acquaintance (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). If there is a dependent relationship and common goals between one and other, participants preferred more agency-related traits for other; and as the relationship becomes independent, they preferred more communion-related traits for others. Also, preference for the agency or communion-related features can be changed based on goals; if people have improvement-related goals, then they tend to prefer agency-related traits for others, however, if people have welfare-related goals, then, communion traits of others become more important for them (Abele & Brack, 2013). Therefore, it can be said that preference of warmth- and competence-related traits for others is highly dependent on a situation. Within the context of the present study, competent or warm political candidate preference of voters may differ depending on the goals and needs of voters.

As a general summary, Susan Fiske, in her review article published in 2018, indicated that the warmth dimension has two subdimensions as trustworthiness and sociability; competence dimension has two subdimensions as capability and agency (Fiske, 2018). These two fundamental dimensions of social perception were supported in many studies, both correlational and experimental, and support was found both in

individual and group level (Abele & Brack, 2013; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske, 2015; Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske, 1999; Wojciszke et al., 1998).

#### **2.4.1. Warmth and Competence on Political Candidate Perception**

Besides other important determinants such as political affiliation of voter and evaluation of political issues, political candidate preferences and voting intentions were found as affected by the personality of political candidates (Bean & Mughan, 1989; Costa & Ferreira da Silva, 2015; Garzia, 2013; Kinder et al., 1980; Todorov et al., 2015; Vitriol et al., 2018). Especially thanks to the effects of the media, the effects of political candidates' personality has become an important determinant of voting decision of voters (Bean & Mughan, 1989, p. 1175).

For many years, some traits of political leaders were found as having an important role on voters' political leader preferences (Bean & Mughan, 1989; Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997; Funk, 1999; Kinder et al., 1980; Markus, 1982; Miller et al., 1986). Miller et al. (1986) indicated that people tended to evaluate political candidates based on their pre-existing schemas and knowledge about how ideal president would be. Also, Kinder (1980) investigated personality characteristics that people thought as important for an ideal president and found that people had an ideal president prototype based on these two groups of characteristics, warmth and competence. In relation to that, it can be said that assessment of whether political figures have or have not competent-related and warmth-related characteristics have a role on political leader preferences (Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997; Funk, 1999; Markus, 1982; Miller et al., 1986; Wojciszke & Klusek, 1996). Warmth-related traits emphasize sociability, trustworthiness and morality of a political leader, while competence-related traits emphasize assertiveness of a political leader and ability to do her/his duties efficiently. Even though both of these characteristics seem to be highly important for an impression of political figures, the question that do people tend to prefer a moral and honest leader with good social relations or a competent and ambitious leader with a high perceived ability has been investigated in many studies (Castelli et al., 2009; Costa & Ferreira da Silva, 2015; Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997; Laustsen, 2016; Laustsen & Bor, 2017; Miller et al., 1986).

Miller et al. (1986) investigated open-ended comments of voters about political candidates from the ANES (American National Election Studies) data between 1952-

1984 and found that competence (e.g. intelligence, experience in politics and ability) of candidate was more important for the voters, than integrity (e.g. trustworthiness, honest, sincere) and reliability (e.g. hardworking, strong, decisive) traits. This result showed that, over the years, voters most likely to mentioned about competency of candidates such as their knowledge level, experience in politics, competency to manage problems, and perceived potential performance of them. Also, it was found that participants tended to rate more positively to the hypothetical political candidate with competence-related traits than the one that has warm-related traits (Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997). In more detail, Funk (1997) found that participants with more political knowledge rated competent political candidate more favorably than warm political candidate, compared to participants with a low level of political knowledge. The overall evaluation ratings for competent and warm political candidates did not differ among participants who have low political knowledge. However, both groups of participants agreed on the importance of competence-related traits more than warm-related traits of a political figure (Funk, 1997). In another study, participants were asked to rate two competing political candidates on competence and sociability by looking at their face photos and indicated that political candidates high in competence and also high in sociability would have a great chance to win the election. However, according to the actual results of the election, political candidates that perceived as high in competence were actual winners, while political candidates that perceived as high in sociability were the ones that got the lower chances of winning the election (Castelli et al., 2009). Moreover, besides explicit warmth and competence evaluations of the candidates, implicit evaluations also were found as significantly associated with to vote preferences of people (Vitriol et al., 2018). Particularly, implicit competence evaluations were found as a stronger predictor of political candidate preferences (Vitriol et al., 2018).

Besides the studies that found that competence-related traits generally outweigh on people's political candidate preferences than warmth-related traits, there were also studies that found that warmth-related traits of political candidates were more important for voters (Costa & Ferreira da Silva, 2015; Laustsen & Bor, 2017; Laustsen, 2016). Some studies that investigated political candidate preferences also revealed consistent findings of that warmth supremacy. For instance, Laustsen and Bor (2017) investigated whether a warm or competent leader would be preferred by analyzing the ANES data that were collected between 1984-2008 and also by doing an

experimental study with a U.K. sample. In the ANES data, people were asked to rate two competing political candidates on some characteristics and also were asked to indicate how they feel about political candidates on a feeling thermometer (0-100) and their vote preference. Competence of political candidates was measured by average scores on “knowledge” and “intelligence” dimensions, warmth scores were composed of average scores on “compassion” and “cares about people like you” dimensions. Additionally, party identification of people was controlled in order to control the possibility that voters would more positively evaluate their own party’s candidates. Findings showed that all characteristics significantly predicted the overall positive evaluations of the candidates by feeling thermometer, however, warmth had a stronger effect on the overall evaluation than competence. In terms of vote preferences, warmth is also found as a stronger predictor of vote preferences than competence. Moreover, by taking party identification into consideration, it was found that warmth had a stronger influence than competence on voting preference and general evaluations of both Republicans and Democrats (Laustsen & Bor, 2017).

In the experimental study of Laustsen and Bor (2017), with the sample from the United Kingdom, two competing hypothetical political candidates were manipulated on either being competent or warm. Warmth, again, was found as having a stronger effect on overall evaluation and voting preference than competence. Consistent findings were also found in election studies data from America and experimental study with a Denmark sample (Laustsen, 2016). Laustsen (2016) found that based on the ANES data between 1984-2008, besides the general warmth supremacy, liberals tended to prefer warmth than strong leadership, in contrast, conservatives were more inclined to prefer strong leadership (power) more than warmth. Furthermore, Costa & Ferreira da Silva (2015) analyzed post-election data from seven European countries. It was found that, generally, warmth-related traits had more effect on voting behavior, than competence-related traits. Between the conservatives and liberals, both competence and warmth evaluations were important determinants of voting behavior for liberals, however, only warmth-related traits had predictive power for voting behaviors of conservatives (Costa & Ferreira da Silva, 2015). This result shows that warm and competent political candidate preferences also might change depending on the political orientation of people, a possible explanation of this difference would be different worldviews of politically different people, as I mentioned in more detail in the previous sections.

In line with these past findings, it can be said that there were mixed findings on which one of the two dimensions had more influence on political candidate evaluation and voting decision of people. What if there is also an unexpected and threatening situation that had to be faced? How would people's political leader preferences be affected by this kind of a threatening situation? Which one of these two dimensions, warmth or competence, would be preferred more for a political leader? To address the answers to these questions, the current study investigated the effects of COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation on the warm and competent political candidate preferences. Additionally, the present study tried to give an answer to the question that how the effect of COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation on the warm and competent political leader preferences would change among left-oriented and right-oriented people.

## **2.5. Overview of The Current Study**

### **2.5.1. Aims and Research Questions of The Current Study**

One of the aims of the present study is to investigate the effect of the COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation on political candidate preferences (warmth vs. competence) of people. The second aim is to investigate whether the political orientation of people predicts the differences between voting preferences toward warm and competent political candidates. Therefore, two research questions of the study were:

*Research Question 1:* How would people's political leader preferences be affected by the COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation? Which one of these two hypothetical political candidates, one has warmth-related traits and the other has competence-related traits, would be preferred more, compared to the control condition?

*Research Question 2:* How the effect of COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation on the warm and competent political candidate preferences, if any, would change among left-oriented and right-oriented people, compared to the control condition?

### 2.5.2. Hypotheses of The Current Study

In order to be able to give an answer to the research questions, the hypotheses below were generated. All of these hypotheses were preregistered in Open Science Framework before starting to the data collection process, so, they can also be seen via this link: <https://osf.io/acsvn>.

Besides the mixed findings on whether warmth- or competent-related characteristics of political leaders are more important for people, studies investigated the effect of threats on the preferences of political candidates showed that generally people inclined to prefer political candidates that seem to have qualification to manage threats and problems (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019; Albertson & Gadarian, 2016; Cohen et al., 2005; Landau et al., 2004; Little et al., 2007). Within the context of the current study, since the COVID-19 pandemic is a highly threatening situation that needed to be managed effectively, after reminding people the COVID-19 pandemic and its death threat for people by mortality salience manipulation, it is expected that competent political candidate would be inclined to be preferred more rather than the political candidate with warmth-related characteristics. Therefore, hypothesis 1 of the current study was:

*Hypothesis 1.* Participants in the COVID-19 related mortality salience condition would be more likely to vote for the competent political candidate (vs. the warm candidate) compared to participants in the control condition.

In addition to that, due to mixed findings in the literature about which one of the warmth and competence dimensions people put more emphasis on political candidate preferences, which one of the two hypothetical political candidates (warm versus competence) would be voted more in the control condition will be examined as exploratory.

*Hypothesis 2.* In the COVID-19 related mortality salience condition, whether political orientation predicts the difference between voting intentions toward two hypothetical political candidates (warm versus competence) and which one of the political candidates would be selected more by people with different political ideologies will be tested based on two hypotheses: Worldview defense hypothesis of TMT (Greenberg et al., 1989, Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al., 1992;



Pyszczynski et al., 1999) and conservative shift hypothesis (Bonanno & Jost, 2006, Jost et al., 2003a; Nail & McGregor, 2009; Schüller, 2015).

According to the worldview defense hypothesis, the existential threat due to COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation would cause a political polarization; both left- and right-oriented participants would be inclined to defend their worldviews, therefore there might be differences on warm or competent political candidate preferences. For example, after the mortality salience manipulation, right-oriented participants can prefer the competent leader more likely than left-oriented participants due to their tendency to see the world as a threatening world and desire to manage threats (Duckitt, 2001; Jost et al., 2003a). The competent leader would give people a feeling that being more sufficient to protect people from the effects of threatening situations by managing the situation well thanks to his/her task-oriented characteristics compared to the warm political candidate that has strong social and moral characteristics. On the other hand, left-oriented people see the world as a more secure place, compared to right-oriented people (Duckitt, 2001), and since there were studies indicated that being tolerant and compassionate seem to be more important values for left-oriented people (Castano et al., 2011; Greenberg et al. 1992), mortality salience manipulation may cause to be more attached to these values, therefore, the political candidate that has strong social and moral characteristics may seem to left-oriented people as more preferable. On the other side, according to the conservative shift hypothesis, existential concerns may lead participants to shift their political orientation toward being more conservative-like, because conservatism serves a psychological function to avoid uncertainty, fear and threats (Jost et al., 2003a). Therefore, due to the effect of mortality salience manipulation, there might be no significant difference between left-oriented and right-oriented participants, generally, they would be more inclined to choose the competent political candidate, for the same reasons that I mentioned for Hypothesis 1.

On the other hand, it was expected that the difference in two hypothetical political candidate preferences between right-oriented and left-oriented participants would not be statistically significant in the control condition because prior findings showed that the difference between right-wing and left-wing in Turkey was not clear as the left and right (or liberal and conservative) distinction in, for example, Europe and America (Öniş, 2007; Yılmaz et al., 2016). Thus, hypothesis 3 was:

*Hypothesis 3.* In the control condition, the political orientation would not predict the difference between voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates.

In addition to that hypothesis, which candidate (competent vs. warm) would be more likely to preferred by left-oriented and right-oriented people in the control condition will be investigated as exploratory.

In order to test these hypotheses, an experimental study was done to investigate the effect of COVID-19-related mortality salience manipulation on warm or competent political candidate preferences and also to investigate whether political orientation predicts the difference between warm and competent political candidate preferences among two group conditions. All of the research questions, hypotheses, materials to be used, and planned data analyses were preregistered before starting to data collection process (<https://osf.io/acsvn>).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### 3.1. Participants

Firstly, I conducted a priori power analysis by using G\*Power software program (Faul et al., 2007). Analysis was done by selecting effect size of  $f = .25$ , alpha of .05 and power of .80. According to the power analysis, at least 82 participants required to get a medium effect with a 80% statistical power for the repeated measures analysis of variance with two independent variables of group condition, which is a between-subjects variable, and characteristics of political candidates, which is within-subjects variable (For hypothesis 1). However, it was aimed to collect data from at least 500 people to increase confidence in the results.

The data were collected from Turkish people over the age of 18 and also having voting experience in at least one local and/or general election, which are the criteria that were reported in the preregistration form (<https://osf.io/acsvn>). All data were collected online via using the Psytoolkit software (Stoet, 2010; Stoet, 2017). 1181 people in total approved to participate in the study, however, 698 of them completed the survey. Out of these 698 people, 7 of them were excluded because they did not meet the requirement of voting experience in at least one local and/or general election; and 4 of them were excluded because they were younger than the age of 18. The final sample consisted of 687 Turkish participants over the age of 18 and those who have ever voted in local and/or general elections. 444 of the participants were female, 241 of them were male and 3 of them identified their gender as other. The age range of the participants was 19 to 75 ( $M = 33.7$ ,  $SD = 11.9$ ).

Before answering questions in the study, participants were given the informed consent form and were informed that participation is on a voluntary basis, no personal identification information is required and if they feel uncomfortable for any reason they can stop answering the survey at any time (see Appendix A). All of the participants approved to participate in the study. At the end of the survey, participants

were not be paid for their participation, but if they completed the survey until the last question, they got a chance to participate in three gift-card draw.

## **3.2. Materials**

### **3.2.1. Mortality Salience Condition and Control Condition Texts**

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: COVID-19 related mortality salience condition and COVID-19 related control condition. Both of the texts that were given to participants were related to the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the intention of reducing any other third effect as much as possible and to see the mortality salience effect more clearly while holding other differences as constant.

In the COVID-19 related mortality salience condition, participants were asked to read the text that made them think about a hypothetical scenario that he/she got a COVID-19 in a period that number of COVID-19 cases and deaths are at their highest point and hospital capacities are nearly full, and he/she has severe symptoms, treated in hospital. The aim was to make them think about their own death due to COVID-19. Then, participants were asked to answer the question about their subsequent feelings and thoughts that this situation aroused in him/her.

On the other hand, a text with a more positive COVID-19 case scenario was provided to the participants in the control condition. Participants were asked to read the text stating that he/she got the COVID-19 virus but had no risk of death and recovered quickly. Then, they were asked to answer the question about their subsequent feelings and thoughts that this situation aroused in him/her. Mortality salience condition and control condition texts can be seen in Appendix B.

### **3.2.2. PANAS (Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale)**

According to the TMT literature, distal defenses as a response to the mortality salience manipulation emerged if there was a delay task after the mortality salience manipulation and before the dependent variable that measures distal defenses (Arndt et al., 1997; Burke et al., 2010; Greenberg et al., 1994; Greenberg et al., 2000; Pyszczynski et al., 1999). Therefore, the Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988; Gençöz, 2000) was used in the current study as a delay task. The scale was given to the participants right after mortality salience manipulation (or control condition), before asking them to indicate their voting intentions toward

two hypothetical political candidates. The scale was initially developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) and then Gençöz (2000) adapted the scale to Turkish (see Appendix C). The PANAS scale is used to investigate the positive and negative moods of people by using 20 items: 10 for positive moods and 10 for negative moods. To indicate answers, 5-Likert scale (1: *Very slightly or Not at all*, 5: *Very much*) was used. The validity (test-retest validity was .47 for both positive and negative mood) and the reliability values (Cronbach Alpha = .88 for positive mood subscale, Cronbach Alpha = .85 for negative mood subscale) of the original scale (Watson et al., 1988) was good. Turkish version of the scale also has good reliability (Cronbach Alpha = .86 for positive mood subscale, Cronbach Alpha = .83 for negative mood subscale) and validity values (test-retest validity for positive mood subscale was .40, for negative mood subscale it was .54). Additionally, for the sample of the current study, reliability analysis was done and it showed that the internal consistency of the scale was good: Cronbach Alpha = .89 for positive mood subscale and Cronbach Alpha = .86 for negative mood subscale.

### **3.2.3. Warmth and Competence Manipulation of Two Hypothetical Political Candidates**

The warm-related and competence-related personality characteristics used in this study were applied based on Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 1999) and were taken from Fiske (2018): Warm-related personality traits were *warm, trustworthy, friendly, honest, likeable* and *sincere*; competence-related personality traits were *competent, intelligent, skilled, efficient, assertive* and *confident*. These personality characteristics were translated to Turkish with the help of an expert in the field of social psychology. In order to avoid any possible order effect that may arise due to the presentation order of personality characteristics, word clouds were used to present personality traits of political candidates: One word cloud for the competent political candidate and one word cloud for the warm political candidate. These two hypothetical political candidates were named as Candidate X and Candidate Y. One of the word clouds included the warm-related traits only which was introduced as personality traits of one of the candidates and the other word cloud included the competent-related traits and it was introduced as personality characteristic of the other candidate. The order in which word clouds were presented to the participants was random, some participants showed the warm

political candidate first and competent political candidate second, and vice versa. The word clouds can be seen in Appendix D.

#### **3.2.4. Manipulation Check**

Manipulation checks were used to ensure that participants perceived the political candidate that has competent personality traits as competent and the political candidate that has warm personality traits as warm. Participants were given the same two word clouds again and asked to evaluate two candidates on both competence and warmth, by using a 7 likert scale (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Completely*). Manipulation check questions can be seen in Appendix E.

#### **3.2.5. Demographic Information Form**

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to fill the demographic questionnaire which includes questions of gender (*female, male, other*), birth year and whether they have ever voted in local and/or general elections. The demographic information form can be seen in Appendix F.

#### **3.2.6. Political Orientation**

Political orientation was measured by using 1 (*extremely left*) to 7 (*extremely right*) self-placement political ideology question. Political orientation question was asked at the end of the survey, in the demographic information form (See Appendix F).

### **3.3. Procedure**

Prior to the data collection process, hypotheses, study design and analysis to be made were decided and preregistered on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/acsvn>). The study was conducted via an online survey by the Psytoolkit software (Stoet, 2010; Stoet, 2017). The data collection process started on December 8, 2020 and continued until January 1, 2021. The link of the study was distributed through social media tools. After reading the consent form and accepting to participate in the study, firstly, participants were randomly assigned to either the COVID-19 related mortality salience condition or the COVID-19 related control condition. In both conditions, participants were asked to read the condition-specific text and answer the relevant questions as detailed as possible. Then, participants were asked to fill the

Turkish version of the PANAS (Gençöz, 2000), as a delay task. After that, participants were informed that they will be shown two word clouds which includes the personality characteristics of the two political candidates, and they were asked to think about that these two political candidates are competing for the presidential election of a political party that they support. For this part, a cover story was created about how the word clouds were formed. Participants were told that prior to this study, 100 people had been asked about the personality characteristics that best describe these two political candidates, and word clouds were created based on the answers of these people. Each word cloud was specific to one political candidate. One of the word clouds belonged to the warm political candidate and the other word cloud belonged to the competent political candidate. Warm-related and competence-related personality characteristics were determined based on the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 1999). After examining the personality characteristics of warm and competent political candidates, participants were asked to indicate their voting intentions toward both warm and competent political candidates on a 7 likert scale (1 = *I definitely would not vote for that candidate*, 7 = *I definitely would vote for that candidate*). On the next page, they were asked to indicate their perceived competence and warmth toward the two political candidates by using a 7 likert scale (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Completely*), as a manipulation check. Then, participants stated their gender (*female, male, other*), birth year, political orientation (1: *extremely left*, 7: *extremely right*) and whether they have ever voted in local and/or general elections (*Yes / No*). Lastly, participants were informed about the Amazon gift card draw and they were asked to write their email addresses, if they want, in order to reach them if they win the gift card.

### **3.3.1. Statistical Procedure**

The present study had a 2x2 mixed design. Therefore, repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted by using IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 25). Analysis was conducted with between-subjects variable of group condition (*MS condition / Control condition*), within-subjects variable of political candidate personality (*Warm / Competent*) and the outcome variable of voting intention. This analysis was conducted in order to investigate the effects of mortality salience manipulation and personality characteristics of political candidates on voting

intentions (Hypothesis 1). Also, Bayesian repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted by JASP software (Version 0.14.1).

In order to investigate whether the political orientation predicts the difference between participants' voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates in the mortality salience condition and control condition (Hypothesis 2 and 3), linear mixed model analysis by using the Jamovi software's (Version 1.2.24.0) "gamlj" module was conducted. Before conducting the linear mixed model analysis, repeated measures data were restructured by IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25) to make data suitable to do linear mixed analysis. The data were clustered based on a participants' ID. Basically, besides fixed effects, random effects also were taking an account while conducting a linear mixed model analysis, and data were analysed based on each individual clusters. The variables entered in the linear model analysis were group condition (*MS condition / Control condition*) and political candidate personality (*Warm / Competent*) as a factor, political orientation as a covariate and voting intention as a dependent variable.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULT

#### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Before the main analyses, mean scores, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values for the variables of age and political orientation were calculated to understand the sample of the current study better. Table 4.1 shows that the mean age was 33.71 ( $SD = 11.94$ ) with an age range of 19 to 75. The mean political orientation of the participants was 3.57 ( $SD = 1.37$ ). It indicates that the sample of the current study was slightly left-wing oriented.

In total, there were 687 participants; 336 of them (48.9%) were randomly assigned to the mortality salience condition, while 351 of them (51.1%) were randomly assigned to the control condition.

**Table 4.1.** Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
Age	33.71	11.94	19	75
Political Orientation	3.57	1.37	1	7

Note.  $N = 687$ .

#### 4.2. Primary Analyses

##### 4.2.1. Normality of Distribution

It was checked whether the data met the normality of distribution and homogeneity of variances assumptions. Firstly the data were split according to the

group condition, then normality distribution was checked using IBM SPSS software (Version 25).

For the mortality salience condition, the voting intentions for warm political candidate was not normally distributed with Kolmogorov-Smirnov(336) = .198 ,  $p < .001$  with a skewness of -.647 ( $SD = .133$ ) and kurtosis of .016 ( $SD = .265$ ). The voting intentions for competent political candidate was not normally distributed with Kolmogorov-Smirnov(336) = .229,  $p < .001$  with a skewness of -1.247 ( $SD = .133$ ) and kurtosis of 1.327 ( $SD = .265$ ).

For the control group, the voting intentions for warm political candidate was not normally distributed with Kolmogorov-Smirnov(351) = .190 ,  $p < .001$  with a skewness of -.620 ( $SD = .130$ ) and kurtosis of -0.362 ( $SD = .260$ ). The voting intentions for competent political candidate was not normally distributed with Kolmogorov-Smirnov(351) = .242,  $p < .001$  with a skewness of -1.320 ( $SD = .130$ ) and kurtosis of 2.243 ( $SD = .260$ ).

#### 4.2.2. Test of Homogeneity of Variance

According to the Test of Homogeneity of Variance, voting intention for warm candidate met the assumption of homogeneity ( $F(1,685) = 3.371, p = .067$ ), however, voting intention for competent candidate did not meet the assumption of homogeneity of variances ( $F(1,685) = 9.267, p = .002$ ). It can be seen in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2.** Test of Homogeneity of Variance

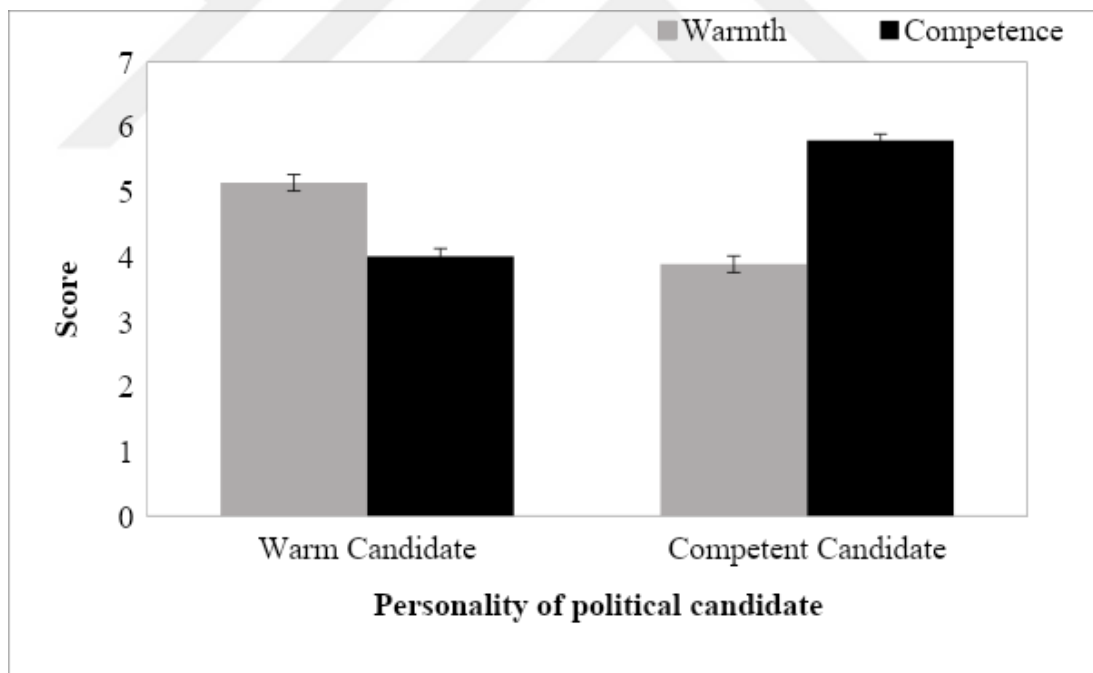
Variable	<i>Levene Statistics</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Voting Intention				
Warm	3.371	1	685	.067
Competent	9.257	1	685	.002

Since the data were not normally distributed and met the homogeneity of variances assumption only partially, the logarithmic and square root transformations were done, however, it was not enough to fix these issues. Therefore, it was thought that using the original data would be the best option. While presenting the main

analyses, the results also will be supported with appropriate non-parametric tests and Bayesian statistics.

#### 4.2.3. Manipulation Check

In order to control whether the personality manipulation of the two hypothetical political candidates was worked, paired samples t-test analyses were done (see Figure 4.1). For the warmth manipulation, paired samples t-test revealed that the political candidate with warmth-related personality was perceived warmer than the political candidate with competent-related personality,  $t(686) = 13.644$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .521$ , 95 % CI [.441, .600]. For the competence manipulation, the political candidate with competence-related personality was perceived more competent than the political candidate with warmth-related personality,  $t(686) = -24.343$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -.929$ , 95 % CI [-1.018, -.839]. These findings confirmed that personality manipulation of the two hypothetical political candidates was worked.



Note. Error bars showed  $\pm 2$  SEs.

**Figure 4.1.** Perceived Warmth and Competence Scores for Political Candidates

Figure 4.1 shows the mean perceived warmth and competence scores for warm and competent political candidates as a manipulation check. It can be seen that warm

political candidate had higher warmth score ( $M = 5.13, SE = .06$ ) than competent candidate ( $M = 3.88, SE = .06$ ), while competent political candidate had higher competent score ( $M = 5.78, SE = .05$ ) than warm candidate ( $M = 4.00, SE = .06$ ).

### 4.3. Main Analyses

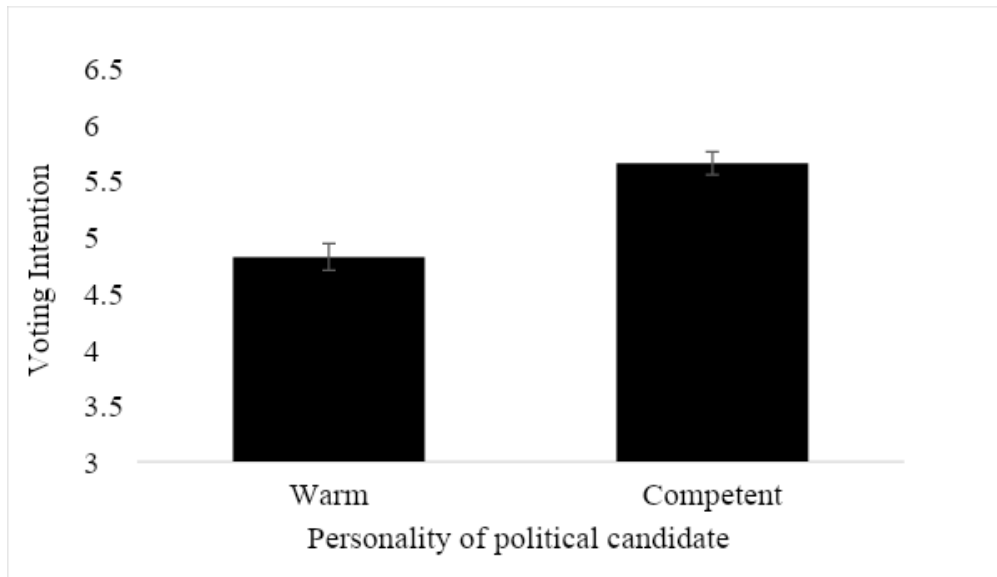
#### 4.3.1. The Effect of Personality Characteristics of Political Candidate on Voting Intention

In order to examine the effects of group condition and personality of a political candidate on voting intention, two-way repeated measures analysis of variance with a between-subjects variable of group condition (*MS condition / Control condition*) and within-subjects variable of the personality of political candidate (*Warm / Competent*) was conducted. Personality of political candidate was found as having a strong main effect on voting intention,  $F(1,685) = 104.958, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .133$  (See Table 4.3). This finding indicates that generally competent political candidate ( $M = 5.65, SE = .05$ ) was statistically significantly more voted than warm political candidate ( $M = 4.82, SE = .06$ ) (See Figure 4.2).

**Table 4.3.** Results of the Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance

Source	SS	df	Mean Square	F	p	$\eta_p^2$
<i>Within-Subjects Effects</i>						
PPC	235.540	1	235.540	104.958	.000	.133
PPC * GC	5.968	1	5.968	2.659	.103	.004
Error(PPC)	1537.239	685	2.244			
<i>Between-Subjects Effects</i>						
Intercept	37626.105	1	37626.105	19457.799	.000	.966
GC	1.965	1	1.965	1.016	.314	.001
Error	1324.604	685	1.934			

*Note.* PPC = Personality of Political Candidate, GC = Group Condition



Note. Error bars showed  $\pm 2$  SEs.

**Figure 4.2.** Voting Intention for Warm and Competent Political Candidates

Additionally, Bayesian repeated measures analysis of variance was done by JASP software (Version 0.14.1.0). Output was consistent with the finding that the personality of a political candidate has an effect on voting intention. According to the Bayesian repeated measures analysis, the observed data was more than three times more likely under the alternative hypothesis than the null hypothesis, indicating weak to moderate support for the alternative hypothesis ( $BF_{10} = 3.790e+23$ ) (See Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4.** Results of the Bayesian Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance Model Comparison

Models	P(M)	P(M data)	$BF_M$	$BF_{10}$	error %
Null model	.200	2.331e-24	9.323e-24	1.000	
PPC	.200	.883	30.262	3.790e+23	1.168
PPC + GC	.200	.086	.375	3.677e+22	2.388
PPC + GC + PPC*GC	.200	.031	.128	1.332e+22	2.111
GC	.200	2.213e-25	8.850e-25	.095	1.546

Note. PPC = Personality of Political Candidate, GC = Group Condition

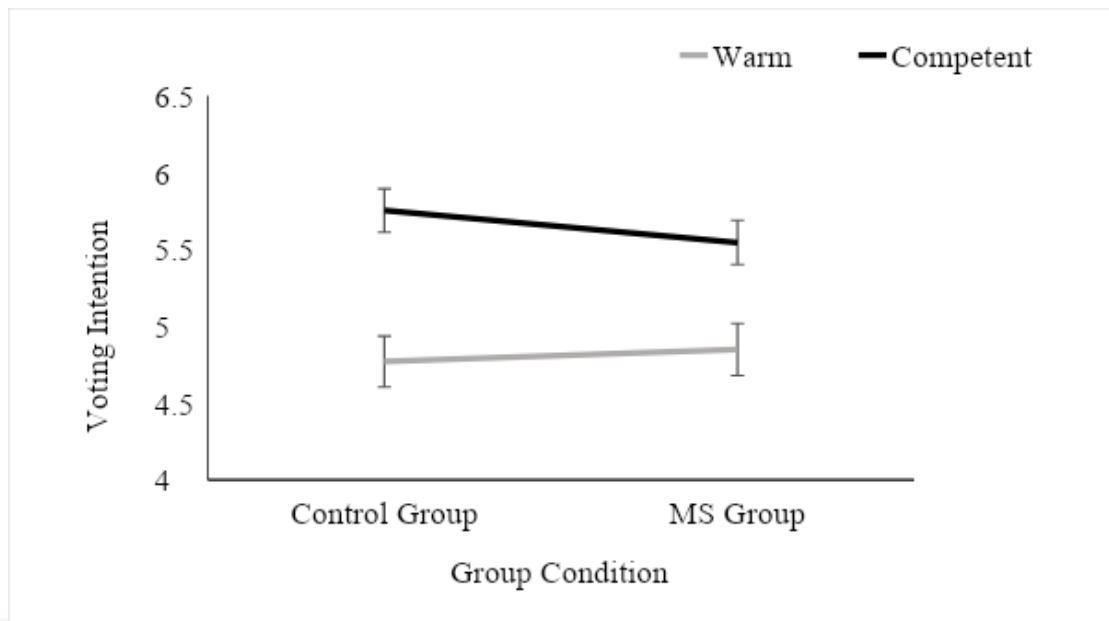
### **4.3.2. The Effect of Mortality Salience on Voting Intention**

Two-way repeated measures analysis of variance with a between-subjects variable of group condition and within-subjects variable of the personality of political candidate indicated that the main effect of group condition on voting intention was not statistically significant,  $F(1,685) = 1.016$ ,  $p = .314$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .001$  (See Table 4.3).

Bayesian repeated measures analysis of variance also showed that the observed data was 11 times more likely to occur under null hypothesis than an alternative hypothesis, indicating moderate support for null hypothesis ( $BF_{10} = .095$ ) (See Table 4.4). These findings indicate that mortality salience manipulation had no significant effect on the voting intention of participants.

### **4.3.3. The Interaction Effect of Group Condition and Political Candidate Personality**

As a result of the two-way repeated measures analysis of variance, it was shown that the interaction effect of group condition and political candidate personality on voting intention was not statistically significant,  $F(1,685) = 2.659$ ,  $p = .103$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$  (See Table 4.3). This finding indicates that the voting intentions toward warm and competent political candidates were not statistically significantly different among mortality salience condition and control condition (see Figure 4.3).



Note. Error bars showed  $\pm 2$  SEs.

**Figure 4.3.** Voting Intention for Warm and Competent Political Candidates Across Group Conditions

Figure 4.3 shows the mean voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates across the control group and mortality salience group. It can be seen that, competent candidate was voted slightly higher in control condition ( $M = 5.75$ ,  $SE = .07$ ) than MS condition ( $M = 5.54$ ,  $SE = .07$ ), while, warm candidate was voted slightly higher in MS condition ( $M = 4.85$ ,  $SE = .09$ ) than control condition ( $M = 4.77$ ,  $SE = .08$ ). However, these differences in voting intentions between the two group conditions were not statistically significant, because there was no interaction effect of group condition and political candidate personality on voting intention.

Additionally, since the data were not normally distributed, A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test and Welch's t-test were conducted as a supplementary analysis, in order to control the violation of assumptions. Also, one-way MANOVA was conducted to be sure that mortality salience manipulation did not result in any negative affect in participants. All of these analyses can be seen in Appendix G.

#### 4.3.4. Linear Mixed Model Analysis: Differences Between Left-Oriented and Right-Oriented Participants

As a second step, linear mixed model analysis was done by Jamovi software (Version 1.2.24.0) to examine whether the political orientation predicts the differences between voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates (See Table 4.5). Consistent with the findings of two-way repeated measures analysis of variance presented above, the political candidate with competent-related personality was significantly voted more than the political candidate with warm-related personality,  $b = .828$ ,  $SE = .078$ , 95 % CI [.676, .981],  $t(1366) = 10.616$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, the fixed effects explained a small proportion of the variance,  $R_m^2 = .081$ .

On the other hand, MS manipulation was not a significant predictor of voting intention,  $b = .076$ ,  $SE = .078$ , 95 % CI [-.077, .229],  $t(1366) = .970$ ,  $p = .332$ , and there was no interaction of group condition and political candidate personality on voting intention,  $b = .265$ ,  $SE = .156$ , 95 % CI [-.041, .571],  $t(1366) = 1.696$ ,  $p = .090$ , indicating that the voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates did not differ among mortality salience condition and control condition.

Political orientation was not a significant predictor of voting intention,  $b = .004$ ,  $SE = .029$ , 95% CI [-.053, .059],  $t(1366) = .121$ ,  $p = .904$ , and did not predict the difference between voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates,  $b = .094$ ,  $SE = .057$ , 95% CI [-.018, .206],  $t(1366) = 1.643$ ,  $p = .101$ . It indicates that participants preferred to vote more for the competent political candidate, regardless of their political orientation.

Three way interaction of group condition, political orientation and warm personality was not statistically significant,  $b = .008$ ,  $SE = .081$ , 95 % CI [-.166, .151],  $t(1366) = -.096$ ,  $p = .924$ .

Three way interaction of group condition, political orientation and competent personality was not statistically significant,  $b = .042$ ,  $SE = .081$ , 95 % CI [-.116, .200],  $t(1366) = .521$ ,  $p = .603$ .



**Table 4.5.** Results of the Linear Mixed Model Analysis

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% Confidence Interval		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper			
Intercept	5.234	.039	5.158	5.311	1366	134.162	< .001
GC (Control vs. MS)	.076	.078	-.077	.229	1366	.970	.332
PO	.004	.029	-.053	.059	1366	.121	.904
PPC (Competent vs. Warm)	.828	.078	.676	.981	1366	10.616	< .001
GC * PPC	.265	.156	-.041	.571	1366	1.696	.090
PO * PPC	.094	.057	-.018	.206	1366	1.643	.101
GC * PO * Warmth Candidate	-.008	.081	-.166	.151	1366	-.096	.924
GC * PO * Competent Candidate	.042	.081	-.116	.200	1366	.521	.603

*Note.* PPC = Personality of Political Candidate, GC = Group Condition, PO = Political Orientation

As a exploratory analysis, in order to control the possibility that the manipulation was not as effective as expected in people who answered the questions related to their thoughts and feelings after reading the texts of MS or control conditions very briefly (by using 5 and less than 5 words), the data of people that gave answers with 5 and less than 5 words excluded and the two-way analysis of variance and linear mixed model analyses were done again (N = 602). Generally, the findings of these analyses were found in line with the presented findings above. In more detail, statistics of the analyses can be seen in Appendix H.

#### **4.4. Summary of the Findings**

Analyses were conducted to investigate the effect of mortality salience manipulation related to the COVID-19 on voting intentions of participants toward two hypothetical political candidates, and whether political orientation predicts the difference between voting intentions toward these two hypothetical political candidates. It was found that there was no significant effect of mortality salience manipulation on voting intention of participants, and there was no significant interaction effect of group condition and political candidate personality on voting intention. However, the main effect of political candidate personality was found, which indicates that regardless of the group condition, competent political candidate was statistically significantly voted more than warm political candidate. These findings showed that Hypothesis 1 was not supported: Political candidate preferences were not affected by mortality salience manipulation. However, it was found that competent political candidate was preferred more, in general. Also, which one of the two hypothetical candidates (warm vs. competent) would be voted more in the control condition was examined as exploratory, and findings showed that, competent political candidate was statistically significantly voted more than warm political candidate in both mortality salience condition and control condition.

Corresponding to the Hypothesis 2, it was found that political orientation did not predict the difference between voting intentions toward the warm and competent political candidates in the mortality salience condition. Participants preferred to vote more for the competent political candidate, regardless of their political orientation. These findings will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Additionally, this finding showed that Hypothesis 3 was supported, which indicated that the political

orientation would not predict the difference between voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates in the control condition.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

In the current study, it was aimed to investigate whether existential concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic affect political candidate preferences of people and whether these preferences differ among left-oriented and right-oriented people. In more detail, the effect of mortality salience manipulation related to the COVID-19 pandemic on voting preferences of participants toward two hypothetical political candidates whose personality characteristics were manipulated as either being warm or competent was investigated. Additionally, it was aimed to answer the question that whether political orientation predicts the difference between voting preferences toward warm and competent political candidates. In order to be able to give an answer to these questions, a study with an experimental design was conducted in which COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation was implemented to the half of the participants, while the other half was in the COVID-19 related control condition. Also, the personality of the political candidates was manipulated based on what SCM (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 1999) refers to as two main dimensions of social perception, warm-related and competence-related characteristics and also based on past studies found that warmth and competence perceptions of political leaders are important for voting decisions of people (Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997; Funk, 1999; Markus, 1982; Miller et al., 1986; Wojciszke & Klusek, 1996).

In the next sections, possible explanations for the findings, contributions of the study, limitations, and further suggestions for future work were presented.

#### **5.1. Possible Explanations of the Findings**

In hypothesis 1, it was expected to find that in the COVID-19-related mortality salience condition, the political candidate with competent-related personality characteristics would more likely be voted than the warm political candidate. Considering past studies, political candidate that is more competent, dominant, charismatic and seems to better manage the problems in the agenda and made people feel safe was more likely to be preferred in times of threat (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019; Albertson & Gadarian, 2016; Cohen et al., 2005; Gillart & Hart, 2010; Landau et al.,

2004; Little et al., 2007). Accordingly, it would be expected that after the mortality salience manipulation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, people would be expected to give more importance to be administered by a political candidate who can manage the threat and provide security. Because according to the TMT, after mortality salience manipulation, people face with existential concerns and to soften these concerns they become more attached to their cultural worldviews and they want to feel that they are a valuable member of a meaningful and predictable world (Greenberg et al., 1986; Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski, 2004). Therefore, after COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation, a political candidate who is known for being competent and efficient would more likely to be perceived as someone who can manage the difficult COVID-19 process better and satisfying people's needs thanks to his/her task-relevant skills, than a political candidate who is known for being warm and honest.

The findings of the current study did not support the hypothesis 1. First of all, in line with the past studies found that the personality of the political candidate had an effect on the voting preferences of people (Bean & Mughan, 1989; Costa & Ferreira da Silva, 2015; Garzia, 2013; Kinder et al., 1980; Todorov et al., 2015; Vitriol et al., 2018), strong effect of the personality of the political candidate on voting preferences was found in the current study. Findings showed that, regardless of the group condition, the competent political candidate was statistically significantly voted more than warm political candidate which is a consistent finding with past studies found that competent political candidate, hypothetical or real, preferred more than warm political candidate (Castelli et al., 2009; Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997; Miller, 1986; Vitriol et al., 2018). However, considering the findings of the current study, it can not be said that preference for the competent political candidate was affected by mortality salience manipulation, compared to the control condition. The effect of COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation on voting intentions and also the interaction effect of group condition and personality characteristics of political candidate were not found, which shows that warm and competent political candidate preferences did not statistically significantly change depending on whether the participants assigned to the mortality salience group or control group. As one of the possible explanations to lack of mortality salience manipulation effect, COVID-19 related mortality salience manipulation, compared to control condition, might not be as effective as the past studies found classical mortality salience manipulation had an effect compared to

control condition, because out of the mortality salience manipulation in the current study, the COVID-19 pandemic already may have an effect on all of the people due to chaotic and unpredictable social context in this threatening period. Therefore, whether or not there is a mortality salience manipulation of COVID-19, all people might already perceive high levels of death risk and facing with existential concerns, which possibly shapes their attitudes and behaviors. It is also meaningful because there were studies that investigated attitudes and behaviors of people on various social and political issues during the threatening, unpredictable and risky times such as after terrorist attacks and when there was a spreading infectious disease, and compared it to data collected before these threatening times, and found that there were attitudinal and behavioral changes during these times (Beall et al., 2016; Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Brouard et al., 2018; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006; Nail & McGregor, 2009; Schüller, 2015). Hence, preferring the competent political candidate more might be resulted from being in a threatening social context already due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, in the current study, the control condition was also related to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to understand the effect of existential anxiety caused by COVID-19 clearly by comparing the riskiest scenario of MS manipulation to the least risky scenario of the control condition. However, in the control condition, although it was a scenario with no risks, reminding COVID-19 to the participants in the control group might have triggered some existential anxiety, which could annihilate the chance to found the effect of mortality salience manipulation. Nevertheless, even in this situation, a difference between MS and control conditions could be expected due to intense and detailed manipulation applied in the MS condition.

Besides these possible explanations, the reason for not finding the MS effect on voting intentions may not be related to any methodological limitation of the current study. In fact, some of the most recent replication studies about the TMT could not replicate the mortality salience effect (Klein et al., 2019; Sætrevik & Sjøstad, 2019). 37 researchers from the Many Labs 4 Project intended to replicate the mortality salience effect with 2,220 participants in total, by replicating the one of earliest studies of TMT that was conducted by Greenberg et al. (1994). It was shown that the mortality salience effect was not replicated, even in the original author-advised versions of the replication (Klein et al., 2019). Also, another study with a non-Western sample did not find any effects of mortality salience on the worldview defense of Singaporeans, by

conducting their study both as online and in laboratory (Chew & Yap, 2021). However, some of the original authors of the TMT re-analyzed the data of Klein et al. (2019) by excluding the samples that have less than 40 participants (per condition) and found the MS effect. They indicated as a reason for failing to find any MS effect in the study of Klein et al. (2019) that some conditions needed to be followed in the replication study were not fully followed, such as some exclusion criteria (Chatard et al., 2020). In light of these studies, the replicability of the MS effect is also unclear, which might be the reason why the mortality salience manipulation did not have any effect on voting preferences in the current study. Additionally, one of the authors of the original study of TMT (Greenberg et al., 1994) indicated as a possible explanation of this replication failure of Klein et al. (2019) that social context in America in the time of data collection (after Donald Trump was chosen as a president), which was already threatening for worldviews of people, therefore it might negatively influence the possibility to find mortality salience effect (Klein et al., 2019). This claim was also in line with the past finding that the effect of mortality salience depends on the salient values in the social context (Vail III et al., 2009). Accordingly, since all of the people are already in an unpredictable and threatening social context due to COVID-19, the effect of the mortality salience manipulation may not have been as efficient as expected compared to the control condition.

On the other hand, the reason why the mortality salience manipulation had no effect on voting preferences in the current study might be due to some cultural differences. Generally, the vast majority of studies in the field of psychology were done in Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich et al., 2010), and it seems to be the case for TMT studies as well, according to the meta-analysis studies on TMT (Burke et al., 2010). However, Henrich and colleagues (2010) showed that some psychological phenomena that are considered as universal among people show differences between people who live in WEIRD and non-WEIRD countries. Therefore, mortality salience effect on worldview defenses of people might be different for people who live in non-WEIRD societies, for example, they may be using some other defense mechanisms toward existential concerns or their perception of death might be different from people who live in WEIRD societies. For instance, since the vast majority of the past studies were done in Western societies, Yen and Cheng (2010) aimed to investigate the mortality salience effect on worldview defense in the non-Western society: Taiwan. In their research, two experimental

studies and a meta-analysis of 24 studies from non-Western countries (mainly East Asian countries) were conducted, and researchers did not find mortality salience effect in any of these studies. Also, the study that was conducted in Singapore, which is a non-WEIRD culture, showed that there was no effect of mortality salience on the worldview defense of Singaporeans (Chew & Yap, 2021). As another example for the possible cultural differences in the mortality salience effect, studies that were done with a sample from Costa-Rica, which is a collectivistic culture, revealed that there were no significant differences in worldview defenses between participants in the mortality salience condition and control condition (Navarrete, 2005; Navarrete et al., 2004).

In light of these, the issue of generalizability of mortality salience effect among different cultures was not very clear and more studies were needed to investigate and draw the boundaries for the generalizability of TMT from the viewpoint of cross-cultural psychology. Therefore, this might be the other possible reason why there was no effect of mortality salience manipulation in the current study that was conducted in Turkey, which is a non-WEIRD and collectivistic country (Hofstede Insights, n.d.).

Also, which one of the two hypothetical political candidates would be voted more in the control condition was examined as exploratory, findings of the current study showed that competent political candidate was tended to be voted more than the warm political candidate in the control condition. As general, past studies revealed mixed findings on the issue that which one of the warm or competent related characteristics of political figure is more important for voting decisions of people. The competence supremacy found in the current study is in line with the past findings found that competence of political candidate is more important for voters (Castelli et al., 2009; Funk, 1996; Funk, 1997; Miller, 1986; Vitriol et al., 2018). On the other hand, this finding of the current study was inconsistent with some of the past findings found that warmth-related characteristics are more important on voting decisions of people rather than competence-related characteristics (Costa & Ferreira da Silva, 2015; Laustsen, 2016; Laustsen & Bor, 2017). These inconsistencies might be related to differences in a social and political context and salient values in the society during data collection processes because these issues might have an influence on political candidate preferences about which personality characteristics (warmth-related versus competence-related) would be more appropriate to manage a process in a particular time.



The finding of the current study which was people preferred the competent political candidate more in both control condition and mortality salience condition during COVID-19 times seems meaningful, since the task-relevant qualities of the political figures might expected to be prominent in this period. Also, this finding is in line with the studies of Abele and Wojciszke (2007) and Abele and Brack (2013) which showed that preference of competence-related and warmth-related characteristics depended on goals of and the relationship between people, if two people have a dependent relationship, which means that goals needed to be fulfilled and needs to be met depends on each other, then, competence-related characteristics became more important. Therefore, Turkish people in the current study might give more importance to competence-related characteristics of a political figure due to their goals and needs in order to get over the COVID-19 pandemic with the least possible damage. Moreover, considering the past finding showed that people with high status were more likely to be perceived as high in competence due to need for seeing the system as fair (Durante et al., 2017; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007), in the current study, people may also have been more likely to prefer the competent political candidate as a result of need for see system as fair. Also, in line with the findings of Miller (1986) and Kinder (1980), about people tended to evaluate political candidates based on their pre-existing schemas and beliefs about how ideal president would be, this finding might show that a competent political candidate seems to better suited to existing schemas of Turkish people about how ideal political leader should be.

Past studies also have been shown that in threatening times that death-related concerns are salient such as after terrorism attacks, or when people face with contagious diseases, or after experimentally manipulating threat perception of people such as mortality salience manipulations of TMT, reflections of these threats on attitudes and behaviors of politically left-oriented and right-oriented people differs. In the current study, as stated in the hypothesis 2, how political orientation would predict the difference between voting preferences toward two hypothetical political candidates and which political candidate would be preferred more by left-oriented and right-oriented people in the MS condition was aimed to be investigated and discussed based on two hypotheses: worldview defense hypothesis of TMT (Greenberg et al., 1989, Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al., 1992; Pyszczynski et al., 1999) and conservative shift hypothesis (Bonanno & Jost, 2006, Jost et al., 2003a; Nail & McGregor, 2009; Schüller, 2015). Findings of the current study showed that, political

orientation did not predict the difference between voting intentions toward the warm and competent political candidate. It was shown that both left-oriented and right-oriented people were more inclined to prefer the competent political candidate, than the warm political candidate which is a finding that did not compatible with the worldview defense hypothesis, and also was not consistent with the conservative shift hypothesis because there was no mortality salience effect on the warm versus competent political candidate preferences. Although, this finding of the current study seems to be in line with the past studies found that, out of mortality salience manipulation, in unpredictable and threatening times, people's political orientation shifted toward more conservative-side to take advantage of defense mechanisms of conservatism (Brouard et al., 2018; Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006; Jost et al., 2003a; Nail & McGregor, 2009). However, in order to make a clear conclusion that the results of the current study support conservative shift, having a significant mortality salience manipulation effect, and also collecting data at two different times, such as before the pandemic and after the pandemic, and investigating the change in political candidate preferences of people would reveal more confident results.

Also, political orientation did not predict the difference between voting intentions toward the warm and competent political candidate in the control condition, as expected in the hypothesis 3. The lack of significant difference between voting intentions of left-oriented and right-oriented people would be related to the issue that the distinction between left-oriented and right-oriented political parties in Turkey is ambiguous (Öniş, 2007; Yılmaz et al., 2016). In more detail, many of the studies that were mentioned in the introduction part were done in the social context that has clearer distinctions between left-oriented and right-oriented political parties, however, the classification of political spectrum in Turkey was not very clear (Öniş, 2007; Yılmaz et al., 2016). Considering Turkish sample, for instance, people who defined themselves as left-oriented because of a political party that he/she supports may not necessarily indicate that these people have left-oriented attitudes predominantly, compared to right-oriented people. Therefore, since there was also no mortality salience manipulation effect that could reveal the difference between people with different political orientations, a possible reason for finding no difference between people who defined themselves as left-oriented and right-oriented on their political candidate preferences might be due to lack of clear distinction between left-oriented and right-

oriented people in Turkey. Besides all these possible explanations, this finding may just indicate that left-oriented and right-oriented people agree with each other on their preferences of a competent political candidate more than a warm political candidate in times of COVID-19.

## **5.2. Contributions of the Study**

The current thesis has several scientific contributions to the social psychology literature. Firstly, according to the best of my knowledge, the current study is the first that investigated the effect of existential concerns caused by COVID-19 on hypothetical political candidate preferences based on their personality characteristics. This thesis contributed to the literature because it gives an idea about the possible effects of psychological needs of people in threatening COVID-19 times on political figure preferences of them. Also, there were past studies that investigated which of the two dimensions, warmth and competence, is more important for voting intentions, however, to best of my knowledge, the current study was the first to investigate the effect of mortality salience manipulation on warm or competent political candidate preferences. Even if the significant COVID-19 related mortality salience effect was not found, the current study was done in the times of COVID-19 and it can provide an idea to investigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on political processes for future studies.

Secondly, except for a few exceptions, the vast majority of past studies investigated which one of the warmth-related or competence-related characteristics of political candidates would be preferred more by voters were examined by analyzing the election data of past years. Therefore, personality characteristics clustered under the competence or warmth dimensions depended on the questions asked in the past national election surveys. However, in the current study, whether warmth or competence of political candidates would be preferred more by voters examined by conducting an experimental study, in which personality characteristics of political candidates were experimentally manipulated according to the theoretical foundations of Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 1999). Hence, as a second strength of the present study, due to the minority of experimental studies on that issue, the present study using experimental design can be expected to contribute to the literature.

Thirdly, findings of the current study may provide a beneficial insight for election campaigns of political parties and image management processes of political candidates for the forthcoming elections, because findings showed that personality characteristics of political candidates has a significant effect on voting intention of Turkish voters. For instance, according to the findings of the current study, knowing that Turkish voters give more importance for competent-related characteristics of a political figure compared to warm-related characteristics might be useful for the preparatory phase of political figures for forthcoming elections.

Also, according to the study (Arnett, 2008), the vast majority of studies in the field of psychology were conducted in Western countries with a sample consisted of university students. In the present thesis, data were not restricted to university students, they were collected from people with a high age range (19 to 75), therefore, it can be said that the sample of the current study was quite inclusive, compared to studies with university students sample.

Lastly, since there were some studies showed that the mortality salience effect was not replicated in non-Western (Chew & Yap, 2021; Yen & Cheng, 2010) and collectivistic countries (Navarrete, 2005; Navarrete et al., 2004), and even was not replicated generally (Klein et al., 2019; Sætrevik & Sjøstad, 2019), more studies are needed on the issue of generalizability of mortality salience effect among different cultures. Since the current study was done in Turkey, which is a non-WEIRD and a collectivistic culture, the findings of the current study might be beneficial for future studies that aim to provide a better understanding on the issue of generalizability of TMT.

### **5.3. Potential Limitations and Future Suggestions**

Besides the strengths of the present thesis, it also has some limitations. First, in the current study, the mortality salience effect on voting intentions was not found. This may have several possible explanations as mentioned already. One possible explanation of that would be related to some cultural differences. The mortality salience manipulation may not be as effective as expected on Turkish people due to some cultural differences, in line with some past studies that showed that mortality salience manipulation did not have an effect on people from many Asian countries (Chew & Yap, 2021; Yen & Cheng, 2010). Therefore, as a future direction, this issue should be investigated to understand better the cultural restrictions of TMT.

As a limitation of the current study, there was no manipulation check for the mortality salience manipulation, however using a manipulation check would be a good idea to understand better if the mortality salience manipulation is working or not.

As another possible explanation for the lack of mortality salience effect, mentioning about COVID-19 in both mortality salience condition and control condition may lead to some problems, which also might be a limitation of the current thesis. In addition to the mortality salience condition, mentioning COVID-19 on control condition as well, even with the least risky scenario, may have triggered existential concerns in the control condition as expected to trigger in the mortality salience condition. Therefore, in addition to these conditions, applying a classical control condition would be useful to clarify this issue. Future studies that will be carried out during the COVID-19 period and considering investigating the mortality salience effect may take this issue into account.

As another limitation of the current study, since past findings revealed that the distinction between left-wing and right-wing political parties was not very clear in Turkey, in order to understand the political orientations of people better, using additional tools to measure political orientation, such as tools that measure political orientation based on people's socio-cognitive motivations or social and/or political attitudes, could reveal different findings. Therefore, it would be better if future studies can develop/use additional tools to self-placement right/left-orientation measurement to investigate the differences in voting intentions of left-oriented and right-oriented Turkish people.

On the other hand, according to the Issue Ownership Model, political parties have an ownership on some issues, and people tend to vote for the political parties that seem to have an interest in and capacity to manage a particular issue more than other political parties (Lefevre, Tresch & Walgrave, 2015; Lachat, 2014). Therefore, from the viewpoint of this model, investigating people's opinions about which one of the warm or competent political candidate would be seen as a more suitable political candidate that might have a better solutions to manage the COVID-19 pandemic would be a good idea for future studies as a next step.

As another future suggestion, the current thesis was conducted in a highly threatening social context due to the risks of COVID-19. Considering this, preferring competent political candidate more than a warm political candidate is meaningful because in the COVID-19 period there are important tasks expected to be fulfilled by

political leaders such as taking precautions, ensuring compliance with restrictions, ensuring the functioning of health systems, and managing vaccination processes, so, preferring a more competent, effective leader with strong task-related skills seems meaningful. But, for instance, in a more predictable social context in which there is no threatening situation that affects all of the areas of life and causes death risk, people may be more likely to choose a warm, trustworthy leader with strong social skills and moral values. Therefore, after the pandemic is over, or at least is taken under control thanks to spreading of the vaccine, and consequently, when people are in a better situation related to economic and social issues and the social context become relatively more predictable, replicating the current study to understand whether people will be more inclined to choose competent political candidate again or more inclined to prefer warm political candidate might be a good idea for future studies.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form

Sayın katılımcı,

Bu araştırma, Yaşar Üniversitesi Genel Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans tezi kapsamında Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Sinan Alper danışmanlığında Psikolog Tuğçenaz Elcil tarafından yürütülmektedir. Çalışma için bugüne dek yerel ve/veya genel seçimlerde en az bir kez oy kullanmış katılımcılara ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı kişilerin oy verme davranışlarını araştırmaktır. Araştırmaya katılım gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır. Ankette sizden hiçbir kişisel kimlik bilgisi istenmemektedir. Sizden bu anketteki soruları sizi en iyi ifade edecek şekilde cevaplamanız istenmektedir, soruların doğru ya da yanlış cevapları yoktur. Cevaplarınız gizli tutulacak ve yalnızca bilimsel amaçlar dahilinde kullanılacaktır. Ankette katılımcıları rahatsız edebilecek sorular bulunmamaktadır. Ancak herhangi bir sebeple kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz, çalışmayı dilediğiniz an bırakabilirsiniz.

Bu çalışmaya katılmanız karşılığında 3 kişiye verilecek olan 3 adet 100 TL değerinde Amazon Hediye Kartı ([www.amazon.com.tr](http://www.amazon.com.tr)) hediye çekilişine katılmış olacaksınız.

Katkınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederim.

Araştırma hakkında daha detaylı bilgi almak isterseniz Tuğçenaz Elcil ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz.

Gönüllü katılımınızı belirtmek için lütfen aşağıda bulunan bilgilendirilmiş onam formunu onaylayınız.

Açıklamayı okudum, anladım. Araştırmaya gönüllü olarak katılmayı kabul ediyorum.



## **APPENDIX B: Mortality Salience Condition and Control Condition**

### **Texts**

#### **Mortality Salience Condition:**

Günlük vaka ve vefat sayılarının en yüksek noktaya ulaştığı, hastane kapasitelerinin neredeyse dolduğu bir dönemde olduğunuzu düşünün. Bu dönemde, Koronavirüs hastalığına yakalandığınızı ve hastalığı boğaz ağrısı, kuru öksürük, güçlü nefes darlığı, yüksek ateş gibi ağır belirtilerle geçirdiğinizi, bu yüzden hastanede yoğun bakımda tedavi gördüğünüzü ve ölüm tehlikesi altında olduğunuzu düşünün.

**Neler düşündünüz? Nasıl hissederdiniz? Lütfen aşağıdaki boş kutuya olabildiğince detaylı bir şekilde yazınız.**

#### **Control Condition:**

Günlük vaka ve vefat sayılarının en düşük noktaya indiği, hastanelerin en boş olduğu bir dönemde olduğunuzu düşünün. Koronavirüs hastalığına yakalandığınızı ancak oldukça hafif belirtilerinizin olduğunu, boğaz ağrısı, kuru öksürük, güçlü nefes darlığı, yüksek ateş gibi belirtilerin hiçbirini göstermediğinizi, bu yüzden evde tedavi gördüğünüzü, çok hızlı bir şekilde iyileştığınızı ve ölüm tehlikeniz olmadığını düşünün.

**Neler düşündünüz? Nasıl hissederdiniz? Lütfen aşağıdaki boş kutuya olabildiğince detaylı bir şekilde yazınız.**

## APPENDIX C: Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale

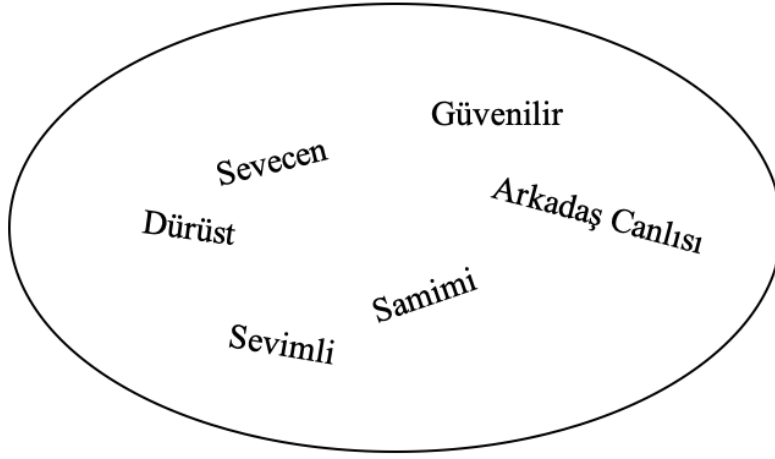
Bu ölçek farklı duyguları tanımlayan birtakım sözcükler içermektedir. Son iki hafta nasıl hissettiğinizi düşünüp her maddeyi okuyun. Uygun cevabı her maddenin yanında ayrılan yere işaretleyin. Cevaplarınızı verirken aşağıdaki puanları kullanın.

1. Çok az veya hiç
2. Biraz
3. Ortalama
4. Oldukça
5. Çok fazla

	1	2	3	4	5
İlgili					
Sıkıntılı					
Heyecanlı					
Mutsuz					
Güçlü					
Suçlu					
Ürkmüş					
Düşmanca					
Hevesli					
Gururlu					
Asabi					
Uyanık (dikkati açık)					
Ütanmış					
İlhamlı (yaratıcı düşüncelerle dolu)					
Sinirli					
Kararlı					
Dikkatli					
Tedirgin					
Aktif					
Korkmuş					

## APPENDIX D: Warmth-Competence Manipulation of Two Hypothetical Political Candidates

Desteklediğiniz siyasi partinin başkanlık seçimi için oy vereceğinizi düşünün. “Aday X” ve “Aday Y” olmak üzere iki tane aday var. Daha önce 100 kişiye bu iki adayın kişiliklerini en iyi tanımlayan sıfatların neler olduğu soruldu ve en çok söylenen sıfatlar aşağıda her iki aday için ayrı ayrı olacak şekilde derlendi. Sizden, adayları en iyi tanımlayan sıfatları göz önünde bulundurarak iki aday için de ayrı ayrı değerlendirme yapmanız beklenmektedir.



Yukarıda Aday X'i en iyi tanımlayan sıfatları göreceksiniz. Bu adaya oy verip vermeme isteğinizi 1 ile 7 arasında bir değerle belirtiniz.

- 1: Kesinlikle vermezdim
- 2: Vermezdim
- 3: Belki vermezdim
- 4: Kararsızım
- 5: Belki verirdim
- 6: Verirdim
- 7: Kesinlikle verirdim

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Cevabınız:							

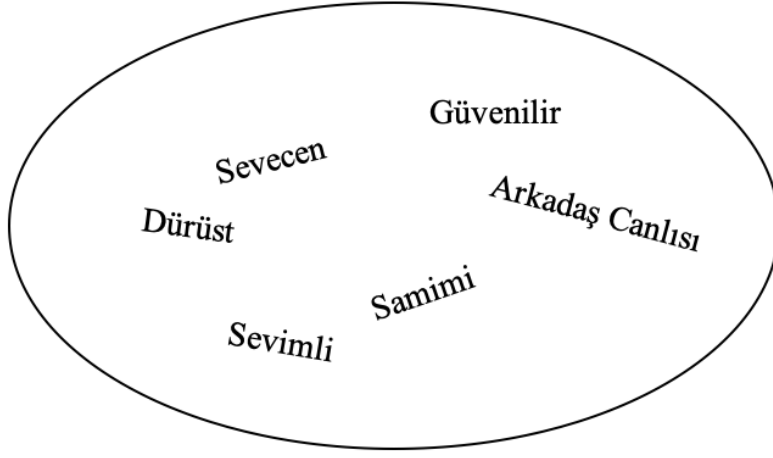


Yukarıda Aday Y'yi en iyi tanımlayan sıfatları göreceksiniz. Bu adaya oy verip vermeme isteğinizi 1 ile 7 arasında bir değerle belirtiniz.

- 1: Kesinlikle vermezdim
- 2: Vermezdim
- 3: Belki vermezdim
- 4: Kararsızım
- 5: Belki verirdim
- 6: Verirdim
- 7: Kesinlikle verirdim

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Cevabınız:							

## APPENDIX E: Manipulation Check



Genel olarak bu adayı ne kadar yetkin buldunuz? 1 (Hiç)'den 7(Tamamen)'ye kadar bir değerle belirtiniz.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Yetkinlik							

Genel olarak bu adayı ne kadar sevecen buldunuz? 1 (Hiç)'den 7(Tamamen)'ye kadar bir değerle belirtiniz.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sevecenlik							



Genel olarak bu adayı ne kadar yetkin buldunuz? 1 (Hiç)'den 7(Tamamen)'ye kadar bir değerle belirtiniz.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Yetkinlik							

Genel olarak bu adayı ne kadar sevecen buldunuz? 1 (Hiç)'den 7(Tamamen)'ye kadar bir deęerle belirtiniz.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sevecenlik							



## APPENDIX F: Demographic Information Form

Cinsiyetinizi belirtiniz.

- Erkek
- Kadın
- Diğer

Doğum yılınızı belirtiniz. (Örn. 1988)

Daha önce herhangi bir yerel ve/veya genel seçimde oy kullandınız mı?

- Evet, kullandım
- Hayır, kullanmadım

Kendinizi ne kadar solcu ya da sağcı tanımlıyorsunuz? 1 (Aşırı solcu)'den 7 (Aşırı sağcı)'ye kadar siyasi yöneliminizi en iyi ifade eden değeri işaretleyiniz.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Siyasi Yöneliminiz:							

Katkılarınız için teşekkür ederim. Çekilişe katılmak için lütfen e-mail adresinizi yazınız. Araştırmanın sonunda çekilişi kazanan 3 kişiyle 100 TL değerindeki Amazon hediye kartı için e-mail üzerinden iletişime geçilecek, bu yüzden yazdığınız mail adresinin doğru olduğundan emin olun. Çekilişe katılmak istemiyorsanız burayı boş bırakabilirsiniz.

Çekilişe katılmaya hak kazanmak için tüm soruları cevaplamış olmanız gerekmektedir. Herkesin yalnızca bir kez çekilişe katılma hakkı vardır.

E-mail Adresiniz:

## **APPENDIX G: Supplementary Analyses**

### **A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test**

Since the data did not meet the assumption of normal distribution, the findings of the parametric test also were controlled by appropriate non-parametric tests. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test showed that the competent political candidate was statistically significantly more intended to be voted than warm political candidate,  $Z = 35441, p < .001$ .

### **Welch's t-test**

Since the voting intention for warm candidate met the assumption of homogeneity, however, voting intention for competent candidate did not meet the assumption of homogeneity of variances, Welch's t-test was carried out in order to control this. The results of the analysis showed that, competent political candidate was voted statistically significantly more in the control condition ( $M = 5.75, SD = 1.21$ ) compared to mortality salience condition ( $M = 5.54, SD = 1.43$ ), but the effect size was small,  $t(655) = -2.05, p = .041$ , Cohen's  $d = -.156$ . Voting intention for a warm political candidate, however, did not statistically significantly differ between mortality salience condition and control condition,  $t(684) = 0.474, p = .636$ , Cohen's  $d = .036$ .

### **One-Way MANOVA**

Using Pillai's trace, there was not a significant effect of group condition (*MS / Control*) on positive and negative affects of people  $V = .004, F(2,684) = 1.207, p = .300$ . Also, separate univariate ANOVAs showed that there was not a significant effect of group condition (*MS / Control*) on positive affect,  $F(1,685) = .007, p = .936$  and negative effect,  $F(1,685) = 2.080, p = .150$ .



## **APPENDIX H: Exploratory Analyses**

As an exploratory analysis, in order to control the possibility that the manipulation was not as effective as expected in people who answered the questions related to their thoughts and feelings after reading the texts of MS or control conditions very briefly (by using 5 and less than 5 words), the data of people that gave answers with 5 and less than 5 words excluded and the two-way analysis of variance and linear mixed model analyses were done again (N = 602).

### **Two-way Analysis of Variance**

Personality of political candidate was found as having a strong main effect on voting intention,  $F(1,600) = 94.836$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .136$ . It indicates that generally competent political candidate ( $M = 5.65$ ,  $SE = .05$ ) was statistically significantly more voted than warm political candidate ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SE = .06$ ).

The main effect of group condition on voting intention was not statistically significant,  $F(1,600) = 1.009$ ,  $p = .316$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .002$ . Also, the interaction effect of political candidate personality and group condition on a voting intention was not statistically significant,  $F(1,600) = 3.211$ ,  $p = .074$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .005$ . This finding shows that the voting intention toward warm and competent political candidate was not statistically significantly different among mortality salience condition and control condition.

### **Linear Mixed Model Analysis: Political Orientation**

Based on the findings of linear mixed model analysis, personality of political candidate was a significant predictor of voting intention,  $b = .832$ ,  $SE = .083$ , 95 % CI [.670, .994],  $t(1196) = 10.063$ ,  $p < .001$  and the fixed effects explained small proportion of the variance,  $R_m^2 = .082$ . It was shown that, political candidate with a competent-related personality was statistically significantly voted more than the political candidate with a warm-related personality.

On the other hand, MS manipulation was not a significant predictor of voting intention,  $b = .080$ ,  $SE = .083$ , 95 % CI [-.082, .242],  $t(1196) = .969$ ,  $p = .333$ , and there was no interaction of group condition and political candidate personality on voting intention,  $b = .311$ ,  $SE = .165$ , 95 % CI [-.013, .635],  $t(1196) = 1.879$ ,  $p = .060$ ,

indicating that the voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates did not differ among mortality salience condition and control condition.

Political orientation was not a significant predictor of voting intention,  $b = -1.50e-5$ ,  $SE = .031$  95 % CI [-.060, .060],  $t(1196) = -4.87e-4$ ,  $p = 1.000$ , and did not predict the difference between voting intentions for warm and competent political candidates,  $b = .085$ ,  $SE = .062$ , 95 % CI [-.036, .206],  $t(1196) = 1.380$ ,  $p = .168$ . It indicates that participants voted more for the competent political leader, regardless of their political orientation.

