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Threat by association

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Chapter 5

Bad news spreads quickly, good news stays remote?

The carry-over potential of negative and positive news about distant situations

This chapter is based on Bouman, T., Van Zomeren, M., & Otten, S. (manuscript in preparation for submission). Bad news spreads quickly, good news stays remote? The carry-over potential of negative and positive news about distant situations.

From the moment the Tunisian Mohammed Bouaziz set fire to himself in December 2010, the Tunisian and Arab uprisings caught fire as well. The flames were noted not just in the Arab region (e.g., mass protests and civil wars forcing authoritarian regimes to step down; International Crisis Group, 2011a), but also in the broader world where the Arab uprisings became an ongoing topic of interest and concern. Indeed, global mass media coverage affected how global observers perceived the — for them ‘distant’ — Arab region (Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011). Moreover, for these global observers, such distant events are not without ‘local’ consequences. For instance, Bouman and colleagues (2014, 2015a; 2015b) found that media portrayals of distant situations as threatening can *carry over* into local intolerance, which means that global observers’ attitudes toward local outgroups (e.g., attitudes of native Dutch toward Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens) become more negative when those outgroups are psychologically associated with the distant outgroup perceived as threatening (e.g., Muslim Brotherhood). To put it simply, these earlier findings suggest that bad news spreads quickly.

What is relatively unknown, however, is whether such carry-over effects also occur for ‘good news’. That is, can positive information about distant outgroups foster tolerance toward associated local groups? Indeed, carry-over effects have been mainly studied and identified in situations which are perceived as negative and threatening (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Sassenberg et al., 2007). For instance, the global media often portrayed the Arab uprisings as violent and a breeding ground for radicalization and terrorism (e.g., Hider, 2011; Van Den Dool, 2011); inducing negative reactions toward the Arab region (Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011) and — through carry-over effects — intolerance toward local minority groups (Bouman et al., 2014). This leaves us with a rather pessimistic message, suggesting that distant events typically *negatively* affect global and local intergroup relationships. Yet, there are of course also positive portrayals of distant situations in the media; for instance, many media outlets referred to the Arab uprisings as the ‘Arab Spring’ or ‘Arab Awakening’ (e.g., Cottle, 2011; Telhamy & Kull, 2011), which had a positive and hopeful

connotation to it. However, not much is known about the effect of such positive media portrayals. The aim of this paper is therefore to explore and compare the carry-over potential of both negative and positive media portrayals of distant intergroup events. The key research question we ask is whether the carry-over effects identified in the literature regarding distant ‘bad news’ (e.g., Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b) will also apply to distant ‘good news’.

More technically, we ask whether positive media portrayals of distant situations (e.g., Arab Spring or Arab Awakening) induce *positive carry-over effects*, and directly compare these with negative carry-over effects. We believe that two alternative predictions are possible and plausible. Firstly, the same processes as were found for negative carry-over effects (e.g., Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b) might also apply to positive information, resulting in similar, but positive, carry-over effects. Alternatively — and in our view more likely — based on earlier research on a positive-negative asymmetry in information processing (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), one could predict weaker carry-over effects for positive information, which is, amongst others, considered less diagnostic than negative information.

We report two experimental studies testing these predictions: Study 5.1 employs the, for our participants, distant context of the Syrian civil war, and Study 5.2 uses the Egyptian uprisings to this end. But before turning to these studies, we first discuss the social psychology of carry-over effects of distant threats and then apply this theoretical and empirical evidence to distant ‘good news’.

Carry-over effects of distant ‘bad news’

People experience intergroup threats when they *subjectively* perceive that an outgroup poses a threat to the ingroup (e.g., Semyonov et al., 2004; Stephan et al., 1999, 2009). These threats can be experienced at the personal and at the group level, and can be symbolic or realistic (e.g., Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan et al., 2009).

Symbolic threats concern perceived threats to the ingroup's worldview, religion, and (moral) values. For instance, Islamist ideologies within the Egyptian uprisings could be perceived as symbolically threatening by Christian or non-religious people because of differences in religious convictions (e.g., Bouman et al., 2014). *Realistic threats* concern perceived threats to the ingroup's possessions, resources, safety, or power. For instance, Western people might fear the Egyptian uprisings because of potential economic outcomes (e.g., oil prices), safety issues, or a loss of political power (e.g., Bouman et al., 2014).

Research on intergroup threats originally focused on local threats (e.g., from immigrants; Stephan et al., 2005, 1999) and how these threats directly affect individuals' feelings toward the outgroup perceived as threatening (for a meta-analysis see Riek et al., 2006). However, other research indicated that these threats can also *carry over* and affect perceptions of other outgroups than the one originally posing the threat. For instance, Sassenberg and colleagues (2007) indicated that personal experiences of competition with an outgroup member (i.e., realistic threats) can activate a 'competitive mindset'; this mindset makes people prone to react negatively toward other potential competitors as well, and thus causes carry-over effects. In addition, and specifically relevant to our topic of interest, Bouman and colleagues (2014, 2015a) demonstrated that carry-over effects can also occur when people are confronted indirectly with threats through media coverage of distant situations (e.g., about the Egyptian uprisings).

These carry-over effects of threats elicited by distant outgroups seem to rely on a psychological *association* between the distant situation and the local outgroups. This association can be *group-based* (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a); that is, carry-over effects occur because the distant and local outgroups are perceived as culturally related to each other. For instance, perceived symbolic threats from the possible accession of Turkey to the EU made Dutch observers more negative toward culturally related local outgroups Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens, but not toward the unrelated Polish-Dutch citizens (Bouman et al., 2014). Alternatively, distant threats might carry

over via a *threat-based* association: The distant threat might alert observers about (potential) local threats and thereby result in local intolerance. For instance, perceived economic threats from Greece alerted Dutch participants about potential local competitors (e.g., Polish-Dutch citizens), resulting in more negative feelings toward Polish-Dutch citizens (Bouman et al., 2015a). Other research (Bouman et al., 2015b) suggested that these associations are often based on a perceived *superordinate outgroup* (e.g., for Christians, Muslims) in which the distant (e.g., Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood) and local outgroups (e.g., Turkish-Dutch citizens) are both included, and that the activation of this superordinate outgroup determines whether carry-over effects occur (e.g., perceived threats from the distant Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood to influence prejudice toward local Turkish-Dutch citizens).

Carry-over effects of distant ‘good news’?

In contrast to carry-over effects of intergroup threats, and thus ‘bad news’, little is known about whether distant ‘good news’ can induce similar carry-over effects and thus make global observers *more tolerant* toward local outgroups. Importantly however, such positive views are also presented within the media (e.g., Cottle, 2011; Harlow & Johnson, 2011). For example, many people referred to the Arab uprisings as the ‘Arab Spring’ or ‘Arab Awakening’, symbolizing a movement toward improvements, democracy, and freedom (e.g., Cottle, 2011; De Beer, 2011; Telhamy & Kull, 2011). Accordingly, are observers equally likely to generalize distant ‘good news’ within a superordinate outgroup as distant ‘bad news’ (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b), and thereby increase local *tolerance*?

This may indeed be the case as some of the previously described processes underlying negative carry-over effects might apply to distant ‘good news’ as well. In particular, when observers become more positive toward a distant outgroup which is positively portrayed in the media, this positivity might also be attributed to similarly perceived local outgroups (i.e., a group-based association; Bouman et al., 2015a).

Indeed, previous research on secondary transfer effects of intergroup contact suggests that positive contact with one outgroup might also improve feelings toward other outgroups (Lolliot et al., 2012; Pettigrew, 1998, 2009; Tausch et al., 2010). However, these effects may be restricted to situations in which the contact was more direct than the media portrayals we focus on (B. A. Lee, Farrell, & Link, 2004). Accordingly, although research on intergroup contact suggests that distant ‘good news’ could — similar to distant ‘bad news’ — carry over via a group-based association, it also suggests that these carry-over effects are less probable within the context we focus on.

The potential restriction of indirect contact through media coverage may specifically apply to ‘good news’ (B. A. Lee et al., 2004) as multiple studies have indicated that ‘bad news’ presented in the media *does* carry over (e.g., Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Such difference between effects of positive and negative media messages is in line with earlier research on the *positive-negative asymmetry* in information processing (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), which suggests that negative information is more diagnostic than positive information. For this reason, in comparison to positive information, negative information seizes more attention (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Trussler & Soroka, 2014), is more easily recalled (e.g., Skowronski & Carlston, 1987), increases the salience of in- and outgroup group memberships (e.g., Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010), is generalized more strongly (e.g., Fazio, Eiser, & Shook, 2004), and translates more quickly into stable stereotypes (e.g., Barlow et al., 2012). This positive-negative asymmetry seems quite fundamental and is found within different contexts, varying from the influence of online news on political attitudes and voting behavior (Faraon, Stenberg, & Kaipainen, 2014) to judgments of objects within computer games (e.g., Fazio et al., 2004). Accordingly, in the current paper we test whether there is a similar positive-negative asymmetry for carry-over effects of distant ‘good’ and ‘bad’ news; that is, whether distant ‘bad news’ makes observers *more* intolerant than that distant ‘good news’ makes observers tolerant?

Overview of our studies.

We test in two experimental studies, referring to different ongoing conflict situations, whether (a) distant ‘good news’ can carry over into local tolerance and (b) distant ‘bad news’ has a stronger carry-over potential than distant ‘good news’. In Study 5.1, we focus on the Syrian civil war, which was at the time of Study 5.1 (February and March 2014) for many Dutch citizens a relatively isolated conflict between the Syrian government (i.e., Assad) and the Syrian National Coalition (a quite diverse coalition of anti-Assad rebel groups). In Study 5.2, we focus on another context — the Egyptian uprisings (end of 2012)¹ — which was generally perceived to have a more global influence on for instance international politics and the worldwide position of the Islam (e.g., De Beer, 2011).

Study 5.1

Study 5.1 provided a first test of the occurrence of positive and negative carry-over effects in the context of the Syrian civil war. At the time of Study 5.1, two fighting groups were generally differentiated within the Syrian war: (a) the Assad government, which was in power at the start of the civil war, and (b) the Syrian National Coalition (or the “rebels”). Although the Syrian National Coalition was united around the shared goal to depose Assad, the group itself was quite diverse and fought separately for a long time (International Crisis Group, 2011b). Accordingly, within the media and general discourse, the impression of the Syrian National Coalition and its ideals varied between a (democratic) freedom movement and a fundamentalist Islamic movement (NOS, 2011). Within Study 5.1 we used this ambiguity by manipulating how the Syrian National Coalition was portrayed (i.e.,

¹ The numbering of the studies follows the goal to provide a well-accessible structure, rather than their chronological sequence. The data of Study 5.2 (end of 2012) was collected before the data of Study 5.1 (early 2014).

negatively/threatening versus *positively*; and a *mixed* control condition), testing whether these portrayals affected Dutch observers' impression of the rebels and, through carry-over effects, their impression of local Dutch minority groups (i.e., Turkish-, Moroccan-, and Polish-Dutch citizens).

Method

Participants and design. Fifty-seven native Dutch undergraduate university students participated in an online study entitled “Civil war in Syria: Who are those rebels?” for partial fulfillment of course requirements. Participants were divided over three experimental conditions: The *negative* (i.e., threat; $n = 19$), the *positive* ($n = 17$), and the mixed condition which mainly functioned as a control condition ($n = 21$). All participants first filled-out a questionnaire on the Syrian civil war (including the experimental manipulation). Thereafter, they were directed to the second, allegedly unrelated, questionnaire about the local Dutch minority groups Turkish-, Moroccan-, and Polish-Dutch citizens (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a).

Materials and measures. Below we will first describe the questionnaire on the Syrian civil war and the distant situation presented in the news report. Afterwards, we will describe the questionnaire about the local minority groups, which included our main dependent variables.

The Syrian civil war. This first questionnaire focused on the Syrian civil war. It contained our experimental manipulation and measured initial knowledge on Syria (measured before the manipulation), feelings toward the Syrian rebels, perceived similarities between the rebels and other Arabs, perceived global threats from the Syrian uprisings, perceived symbolic threats from the rebels, and outcomes of the

uprisings², which are all at the distant level. Unless stated otherwise, the items were measured on a 7-point scale (1 *completely not* and 7 *completely*).

Manipulation. The manipulation informed participants about the ongoing situation in Syria. In all conditions, the information was presented as daily impressions of a news correspondent visiting the Syrian city Deir el-Zour; a city which was according to the report just conquered by the rebels. From a Western perspective, the report either framed the Syrian situation as negative/threatening (i.e., Syria was presented as becoming radicalized by fanatic Muslims), positive (i.e., Syria was presented as becoming more Western and democratic), or ‘mixed’ news (i.e., control condition, Syria was presented as valuing both Islamic and democratic ideals).

Specifically, in the *negative [mixed, positive]* news condition, the correspondent presented Deir el-Zour as “a relatively *Arabic [Arabic, Western]* city where crowds gather around the just rebuild *Mosques [Mosques, Market place]*. Moreover, the people on the street wear mainly *religious dresses [white dresses, casual clothing]*”. In addition, the correspondent’s impression of the rebels was presented and stated that “it was relatively *hard [easy, easy]* to get in contact with the rebels who mainly endorse *Islamic [liberal, Western]* ideologies. These ideologies are the main motives behind the uprisings against the totalitarian government of Assad. The rebels strive for *an Islamic republic of Syria in which the Islamic norms and values are the standard [a democracy in which both Islamic and liberal norms are important, a democracy with Western norms and values]*. According to one of the rebels: “*The Islam is the basis for Syria and the Sharia is our law, we do not want to be bothered by the demons from the West*” [*“The Islam is important for Syrians, but democracy should be the foundation in which men and women should be treated as equals”, “We are inspired by the Western society, democracy should be self-evident and men and women should be treated as equals”*].

² We also included two items measuring perceived outcomes of the uprisings. The first measuring the expected duration of the conflict and the second measuring who was expected to win the civil war. Because we did not have specific expectations about these measures and because the outcomes did not differ between conditions, we choose to exclude these items from further analyses.

Comprehension check. Directly after the presentation of the newspaper article, participants were asked to indicate what they thought was the most important message of the newspaper article and were asked to give their opinion on the current situation in Syria. We included this measure to check whether participants had accurately read the article. Most answers were in line with the manipulation; however, two participants in the positive experimental condition stated that this was how the rebels like to present themselves in Western media, but that in reality the rebels are much more diverse and often fundamentalist. Because these are realistic concerns in the current context, we saw no reason to remove these participants from the analyses.

Initial knowledge about Syria. To control for initial knowledge about the distant situation, four items asked how much the participant already knew about the Syrian situation (1 *nothing* and 5 *a little* and 10 *a lot*). The four items were “How much do you know about Syria?”, “... the civil war/conflicts?”, “... the ruling government (Assad)?”, and “... the rebels?”. Because the items were strongly related ($\alpha = .91$), we used the mean of the four items in further analyses ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.67$). Initial knowledge did not affect any of the relationships between the manipulation and the outcome variables; therefore, we did not include this measure in the analyses presented in the results section.

Perception of threat from the Syrian civil war. Because our negative news manipulation contained potential symbolic threats (e.g., Islamic radicalization) and our positive news manipulation potentially removed symbolic threats (i.e., Syrians and the Dutch observers get more like-minded), we measured whether our manipulation affected perceived threats at two levels of analysis. Firstly, we measured perceived symbolic threats from the rebels with four items: “To what extent are you threatened by the rebels’ ideologies?”, “... worldview (e.g., religion and culture)?”, “To what extent do you believe the Syrian rebels have the same norms and values as you?” [reverse coded], and “... the same moral convictions as you?” [reverse coded], $\alpha = .69$, $M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.99$ (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a).

Global threats from Syrian civil war. Secondly, two items measured the extent to which participants perceived the situation in Syria as having a more global influence: “To what extent do you perceive the situation in Syria as threatening?” and “To what extent do you think world safety is influenced by the civil war in Syria?” ($r = .58$, $M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.31$). We included these items to see whether participants considered the Syrian civil war as a distant and isolated conflict or as a conflict with a more global influence as we believe the latter is more likely to induce carry-over effects (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a).

Feelings toward the rebels. To test whether feelings toward the distant outgroup mentioned in the news report were affected by our manipulation (Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011), we measured participants’ feelings toward the rebels on a 100-point thermometer scale (1 *negative* or *cold* and 100 *positive* or *warm*). The mean was computed and used for further analyses ($r = .70$, $M = 47.21$, $SD = 21.74$).

Similarities between the rebels and other Arabs. To see whether the scene presented in our news report was considered typical for the overall Arab region, three items measured how much similarities participants perceived between the Syrian rebels and other people living in the Arab world: “The rebels in Syria are prototypical for Arabs”, “The ideals of the Syrian rebels are similar to the ideals of other Arabs”, and “The convictions of the Syrian rebels are similar to the convictions of other Arabs” ($\alpha = .78$, $M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.04$).

Measures about local groups. The second questionnaire comprised of measures of feelings toward local outgroups Turkish-, Moroccan-, and Polish-Dutch citizens, which are all potential targets of carry-over effects. In the Netherlands, Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens are generally perceived as culturally related to the Arab world (e.g., Bouman et al., 2014), whereas Polish-Dutch citizens are typically not associated with the Arab world. Accordingly, the inclusion of these local minority groups allowed us to test, whether carry-over effects only occur toward local outgroups which are (culturally) related to the distant outgroup (i.e., Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens; e.g., Bouman et al., 2014) or toward local outgroups in

general (i.e., also toward Polish-Dutch citizens). In addition, this questionnaire contained measures of perceived similarities between Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens and the Syrian rebels³.

Feelings toward local outgroups. We used two feeling thermometers (1 *negative* or *cold* and 100 *positive* or *warm*) to measure feelings toward Turkish-Dutch citizens, $r = .80$, $M = 58.04$, $SD = 20.72$; Polish-Dutch citizens, $r = .94$, $M = 49.34$, $SD = 24.13$; and Moroccan-Dutch citizens, $r = .90$, $M = 46.45$, $SD = 25.26$.

Results and discussion

Firstly, we tested with a MANOVA whether there were mean-level differences between the experimental conditions on participants' perceptions of the distant Syrian situation. The multivariate effect was indeed significant, $F(8, 104) = 4.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .24$. Follow-up ANOVAs indicated significant differences in *feelings toward the rebels*, $F(2, 54) = 12.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .31$, *perceived symbolic threats from the rebels*, $F(2, 54) = 12.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .31$, and *similarities between the rebels and other Arabs* ($F(2, 54) = 3.62$, $p = .034$, $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .12$). The effects of the manipulation on *perceived global threat* approached, but did not reach conventional levels of significance, $F(2, 54) = 2.56$, $p = .086$, $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .09$. As intended, post-hoc analyses (see Table 5.1 superscripts) indicated that participants in the *negative condition* were most negative toward the rebels, and perceived the most symbolic threats from the rebels; on those measures, the *mixed* and *positive* condition scored similar to each other. Moreover, participants in the *positive condition* perceived the fewest similarities between the rebels and other Arabs.

³ These items on similarities between distant and local outgroups were included for exploratory purposes. However, to keep the current paper concise and focused, we choose to exclude these items from the analyses.

Table 5.1

Means on the dependent measures for each experimental condition (threat, positive, and mixed). Different superscripts indicate statistically significant differences between the different conditions.

	Threat		Positive		Mixed	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Distant measures						
Feelings rebels	30.47 ^a	18.66	58.06 ^b	19.78	53.57 ^b	16.98
Symbolic threat rebels	5.18 ^a	0.98	3.93 ^b	0.82	4.12 ^b	0.69
Global threat	3.45 ^a	1.36	3.97 ^{ab}	1.24	4.36 ^b	1.21
Similar to other Arabs	4.53 ^a	1.19	3.71 ^b	0.81	4.43 ^a	0.93
Local Measures						
Turkish-Dutch	61.26	21.88	52.74	19.24	59.43	20.94
Polish-Dutch	47.48	25.41	42.97	22.98	47.48	25.41
Moroccan-Dutch	46.29	24.72	42.06	23.78	46.29	24.72

Unexpectedly, participants in the negative condition felt the fewest global threats (see Table 5.1). Although in this specific condition symbolic threats from the rebels were presented and perceived, this specific information was seemingly not seen as having an impact on the rest of the world. That is, participants perceived the ideologies of the rebels as threatening, but saw the rebels to only influence the Syrian situation. This corresponds with the public opinion about the Syrian civil war, in which most countries actively distanced themselves from the conflict (Pew Research Center, 2013). Importantly, such isolation of the Syrian situation is also likely to obstruct the occurrence of carry-over effects (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a), which was indeed reflected by the lack of mean-level effects of the manipulation at the local level, multivariate $F(6, 106) = 0.82, p = .56, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .04$ (see also Table 5.1). Accordingly, at

the mean-level⁴ we did not find support for our carry-over hypotheses as neither negative nor positive information about the Syrian civil war influenced Dutch observers' perceptions of local Dutch outgroups.

In sum, Study 5.1 indicated that our manipulation successfully altered the perception of the distant situation. As expected, the presentation of *negative* information about Syrian rebels made observers perceive more symbolic threats from the rebels and become more negative toward the rebels. Also as expected, the presentation of *positive* information made observers slightly positive about the rebels but also detached the rebels from the Arab region, suggesting a lower carry-over potential (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a). Despite these promising results at the distant level, however, we did not find support for carry-over effects.

This lack of carry-over effects could possibly be explained by the surprising finding that participants in the negative condition perceived the fewest global threats from the Syrian situation. Most likely, the specificity of the information in the negative condition might have further strengthened the public perception that the Syrian civil war is an isolated conflict (Pew Research Center, 2013). Accordingly, although participants acknowledged that they perceived the ideologies of the rebels as threatening, they were not afraid that these ideologies would have an impact outside the Syrian conflict. Previous research has suggested that this more global impact, in which the distant situation is also perceived to threaten the ingroup, is necessary to cause carry-over effects (e.g., Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a). For that reason, the situation of Study 5.1 might have limited the news report's carry-over potential. Study 5.2 differed in this respect, as it focused on the Egypt uprisings which were generally considered to have a (large) global impact on protests in the Arab region, global politics, and the worldwide perception of Muslims and Arabs (e.g., De Beer, 2011).

⁴ Although we did not find mean-level effects, we found that in the threat condition perceived global threats were negatively related to feelings toward Moroccan- ($r = -.48, p = .035$), Polish- ($r = -.46, p = .046$), and to a lesser extent, Turkish-Dutch citizens ($r = -.31, p = .204$). This relationship was non-existing in the other two experimental conditions ($-.05 < r_s < .22, ns$).

Study 5.2

Study 5.2 focuses on two potential outcomes of the Egyptian uprisings that were often presented within Western media outlets: the anti-Western “Islamization” view (symbolic threat, *negative condition*) versus the pro-Western democratic view (opportunity, *positive condition*). We expect both media portrayals to influence Dutch observers’ perception of the Egyptian situation (e.g., Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011), and negative information to exert a stronger influence on local intergroup relationships than positive information. More specifically, we hypothesize that learning about *negative threats* from the Egyptian uprisings makes Dutch observers more *intolerant* toward local minority groups that are associated with the Arab region (i.e., Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens; e.g., Bouman et al., 2014), but not toward local minority groups unrelated to the Arab region (i.e., Polish-Dutch citizens). When the uprisings are portrayed as a *positive opportunity*, we test two alternative hypotheses suggesting either comparable or weaker evidence for positive carry-over effects compared to negative carry-over effects.

Method

Participants and design. Eighty-nine native Dutch undergraduate university students participated in the online study entitled “Egypt after the revolution” for partial fulfilment of course requirements. Participants were divided over four groups: The negative information ($n = 18$), the positive information ($n = 20$), the distant measures baseline ($n = 29$), and the local measures baseline ($n = 22$) groups. Participants in the negative and positive information groups completed two subsequent questionnaires, the first was about the Egypt uprisings (containing the experimental manipulation) and the second was about local minority groups. To

prevent carry-over effects from occurring in our baseline condition⁵, we choose to use two separate baseline groups: one for the distant and one for the local measures. Participants in the distant measures baseline group only received the questionnaire about the Egypt uprisings without the experimental manipulation; answers within this group functioned as the neutral comparison standard for the distant measures. Participants in the local measures baseline group received only the questionnaire about the local minority groups; answers in this group functioned as the neutral comparison standard for the local measures.

Materials and measures. As stated above, our study comprised of two allegedly unrelated questionnaires; the first about the Egypt uprisings, the second about the Dutch local minority groups Moroccan-, Turkish-, and Polish-Dutch citizens. We will discuss the measures of both questionnaires in further detail below.

The Egypt uprisings. This questionnaire (included in the two experimental conditions and the local attitudes baseline group; $n = 67$) solely focused on the distant situation and comprised of the experimental manipulation and -checks, perceived threats from the rebels, and expected outcomes of the uprisings. Moreover, this questionnaire contained measures regarding Egypt's typicality for the Middle-Eastern region.

Manipulation. Participants were informed about the current situation in Egypt by a bogus newspaper article which presented either the *negative information* or the *positive information* condition. In the *negative information condition* [*positive information condition*], the article stated that — as a result of the uprisings — “the norms and values between the Middle-East and the Western world have become increasingly *different* [*similar*]. For instance, in a recent poll, Egyptians *placed strong emphasis* [*did not place any emphasis on*] the role of the Sharia and favored *anti-Western* [*pro-Western*] norms and values. Moreover, there was *almost no* [*much*] attention for the equal rights of men and women and the basic human rights. In addition, most of the Egyptians indicated

⁵ We choose to use baselines instead of the “mixed” control condition of Study 5.1 as we believe these baselines better reflect the neutral/uninformed observer.

that they support the *conservative, strongly religious, and anti-Western Muslim brotherhood [progressive, unreligious, and pro-Western April 6 movement]*. We did not present this manipulation (and comprehension checks; see below) in the baseline conditions.

Comprehension check. Directly after the presentation of the newspaper article, participants in the negative and positive conditions ($n = 38$) were asked to indicate what they thought was the most important message of the newspaper article and were asked to give their opinion on the current situation in Egypt. In this way, we could check whether participants had accurately read the article. All answers were in line with the manipulation.

Distant intergroup threats. To inspect whether our manipulation affected perceived threats from the distant situation, both symbolic and realistic threats from the Egypt rebellions were measured with three items on a 7-point scale (1 *not at all* and 7 *completely*; Bouman et al., 2014). The symbolic items were: “Egyptian norms and values pose a global threat”, “Egyptian beliefs pose a global threat”, and “Due to the changes in Egypt, the Islam will spread over the world”; $\alpha = .76$, $M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.07$. Realistic items were: “The Egyptian economy poses a global threat”, “Political violence in Egypt poses a global threat”, and “The situation in Egypt influences the Dutch economy more than desired”; $\alpha = .70$, $M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.99$.

Outcomes of the rebellions. On a 7-point scale (1 *not positive at all* and 7 *completely positive*), three items assessed how participants perceived the influence of the rebellion on three societal levels: “I expect that the revolution has a positive influence on Egypt”, $M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.31$; “... the Middle-East”, $M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.28$; “... the world”, $M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.43$. The first item was included to measure whether the information successfully altered participants’ perception of the Egyptian situation (e.g., Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011), the other two items were included to see whether the Egyptian uprisings were perceived as having a more global influence (see also Study 5.1).

Similarity with the Middle-East. Six items were included to measure the extent to which participants perceived Egypt as similar to other Middle-Eastern nations on a 7-

point scale (1 *not at all* and 7 *completely*). The items were: “Egypt is very similar to other Middle-Eastern nations”, “Egypt is prototypical for the Middle-East”, “Egypt and other Middle-Eastern nations have a lot in common”, “When I think of the Middle-East, I think of Egypt”, “Egypt differs a lot from other Middle-Eastern nations” (reverse coded), and “Egypt is a good illustration for current developments within the Middle-East”. The mean score was calculated and used in further analyses, $\alpha = .84$, $M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.86$.

Measures about local groups. The second questionnaire (included in the two experimental conditions and the local attitudes baseline group; $n = 60$) comprised of measures of feelings toward local outgroups Turkish-, Moroccan-, and Polish-Dutch citizens. Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens are generally perceived as culturally related to Egypt and the Middle-East (Bouman et al., 2014), whereas Polish-Dutch citizens are typically not associated with people living in Egypt. Accordingly, the inclusion of these local minority groups allowed us to explore whether carry-over effects only occur toward local outgroups which are (culturally) related to the distant outgroup (i.e., Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens) or toward local outgroups in general (i.e., also toward Polish-Dutch citizens). In addition, this questionnaire contained exploratory measures of similarities between local minority groups, the ingroup (native Dutch), the distant Egyptian rebels, and the Middle-East⁶.

Feeling thermometers. For each minority group, three different thermometers were included in the questionnaire on which participants had to indicate their feelings toward each minority group. The thermometer ranged from 0 (*not nice at all, very cold, and very negative*) to 100 (*very nice, very warm, and very positive*; e.g., Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a) and the mean score on the three items was computed for Moroccan-Dutch citizens, $\alpha = .94$, $M = 55.12$, $SD = 20.40$; Turkish-Dutch citizens, $\alpha = .95$, $M = 59.21$, $SD = 18.96$; and Polish-Dutch citizens, $\alpha = .95$, $M = 56.51$, $SD = 20.05$.

⁶ These measures were exploratory and were only included in the positive and negative information conditions (and not the control condition). Therefore, we decided to exclude these measures in the remainder of this paper to keep the paper concise and focused.

Results and discussion

Analyses (distant level). We tested with a MANOVA whether the expected outcomes of the rebellions for Egypt, the Middle-East, and the world differed between conditions⁷; indeed, the multivariate effect was significant, $F(6, 126) = 2.97, p = .009, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .12$. Follow-up univariate analyses indicated significant differences between the conditions on expected outcomes for Egypt, $F(2, 64) = 6.05, p = .004, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .16$, and the world, $F(2, 64) = 4.57, p = .014, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .13$, but not for the Middle-East, $F(2, 64) = 1.14, p = .325, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .03$. More specifically, as indicated by the superscripts in Table 5.2, participants in the positive information condition were significantly more positive about the outcomes of the rebellions for Egypt than participants in the other two conditions. Moreover, they also perceived more positive outcomes for the world than participants in the threat condition. A similar, yet unreliable, trend was visible for outcomes of the rebellions on the Middle-East. Notably, the threat and baseline conditions did not significantly differ from each other.

Carry-over effects: Feelings toward local outgroups. As depicted in Table 5.2, the means for feelings toward Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens followed the pattern we expected. That is, participants in the condition where threats from the Egyptian rebellions were presented were more negative about these local outgroups than in the conditions where positive or no information (i.e., local baseline) was presented. Indeed, a MANOVA in which we contrasted the threat condition to the other two conditions confirmed this multivariate pattern for feelings toward Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch citizens, $F(2, 56) = 3.27, p = .045, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .11$.

⁷ In addition to these analyses which were directly related to our hypotheses, we also performed exploratory analyses on the remaining measures at the distant level: perceived similarities of Egypt with the Middle-East, and perceived symbolic and realistic threat. However, on none of these measures the conditions differed reliably from each other, $F_s(2, 64) < 1.34$ (see also Table 5.2).

Follow-up univariate analyses indicated the statistical significance of this effect for Turkish-Dutch citizens, $M_{\text{difference}} = -12.74$, $F(1, 57) = 6.15$, $p = .016$, 95%CI [-23.03, -2.45], $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .10$; and indicated a similar, yet unreliable, trend for Moroccan-Dutch citizens, $M_{\text{difference}} = -8.81$, $F(1, 57) = 2.36$, $p = .130$, 95%CI [-20.29, -2.67], $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .04$. Analyses regarding participants' feelings toward Polish-Dutch citizens indicated that the threat condition did barely differ from the other conditions, $M_{\text{difference}} = -4.41$, $F(1, 57) = 0.60$, $p = .444$, 95%CI [-15.85, 7.03], $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .01$. Also in line with our expectations, no significant differences were observed between the opportunity condition and the baseline condition, multivariate $F(3, 55) = 0.60$. Accordingly, these outcomes are in line with our hypothesis that mainly *negative* (rather than positive) information carries over toward local outgroups *associated* with the distant outgroup held responsible for the threat (rather than toward local outgroups in general).

Table 5.2

Means and standard deviations for the two experimental conditions and the two baseline conditions (i.e., one for the distant measures and one for the local measures).

	Threat		Opportunity		Distant Baseline		Local Baseline	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Distant measures								
Similarities M-E	3.85	0.91	3.91	0.65	3.91	0.98	—	—
Symbolic threat	3.43	0.98	2.87	1.01	3.06	1.15	—	—
Realistic threat	3.13	0.92	3.30	1.18	2.95	0.88	—	—
Outcomes Egypt	4.00 ^a	1.28	5.35 ^b	0.75	4.48 ^a	1.43	—	—
Outcomes M-E	4.00	1.41	4.60	1.05	4.17	1.34	—	—
Outcomes world	3.33 ^a	1.46	4.65 ^b	1.23	3.86 ^{ab}	1.38	—	—
Local Feelings								
Turkish-Dutch c.	50.37 ^a	17.76	65.53 ^b	18.36	—	—	60.68 ^b	18.49
Moroccan-Dutch c.	48.96	20.30	57.98	19.44	—	—	57.56	21.14
Polish-Dutch c.	53.46	16.41	58.98	22.07	—	—	56.76	21.38

Note. M-E = Middle-East

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Discussion. Study 5.2 indicated, in line with Study 5.1, that both negative and positive information affect observers' perceptions of the distant situation itself. Importantly, however, Study 5.2 revealed that mainly negative information from the distant situation carries over and affects feelings toward culturally associated local outgroups (i.e., local intolerance). These findings are in line with our hypothesis that distant 'bad news' is more likely to carry over into local intolerance than 'good news' is likely to carry over into local tolerance.

We note, however, that we did not find effects on the measures of perceived threat, which we used to check the effectiveness of the manipulation (see Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a). The lack of effects on perceived threat might be due to the different focus of our experimental manipulation (which discussed the rebels in the Egypt uprisings) and the perceived threat measures (which considered threats from Egypt as a whole). Possibly, participants attributed their feelings of threat about the Egyptian situation to the rebels in the symbolic threat condition and to the regime in the symbolic opportunity condition. Alternatively, the manipulation might have made the threat salient but did not alter participants' perception of the distant situation (Bouman et al., 2015a).

General Discussion

In line with our predictions, the results of our studies indicate a positive-negative asymmetry for carry-over effects of distant information. More specifically, whereas positive *and* negative news about a distant situation seems to have a similar effect on perceptions of the distant situation (Study 5.1 and 5.2; see also Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011), negative news carries over more powerfully than positive news and thus seems to have a larger impact on local intergroup relationships (Study 5.2). These carry-over effects of negative news about a distant outgroup seem to particularly occur when the distant situation is perceived as exerting a global influence (e.g., on the Arab or whole world, Study 5.2) rather than only influencing the distant region itself (e.g.,

only on Syria, Study 5.1). Thus, when observers are confronted with negative news about a distant situation (e.g., the radicalization of Egypt), and they believe that these developments will have a global impact (e.g., on the Arab region or the world), they are likely to become more intolerant toward local outgroups (e.g., Moroccan-Dutch citizens).

These findings have novel theoretical implications. Firstly, our results add new insights to, and replicate, earlier findings from the literature on carry-over effects (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Sassenberg et al., 2007) by suggesting that carry-over effects are situation depended. That is, the strength of carry-over effects seems to be contingent on the valence and generalizability of the information. The finding that negative information about a distant outgroup in a news report carries over and makes observers more intolerant toward local outgroups (Study 5.2) is in line with earlier findings on carry-over effects of *intergroup threats* (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Sassenberg et al., 2007). The observation that positive news about a distant situation has only a limited influence on local intergroup relations adds new insights to the current literature on carry-over effects. This finding is in line with previous research on intergroup contact (Lolliot et al., 2012; Pettigrew, 1998, 2009; Tausch et al., 2010), which suggested that more intensive and direct forms of contact (e.g., face-to-face contact or direct observations) are needed for positive information to positively influence intergroup relations (B. A. Lee et al., 2004). Thereby, our research connects literature on carry-over effects of *intergroup threat* (Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Sassenberg et al., 2007) to literature on secondary transfer effects of *intergroup contact* (Lolliot et al., 2012; Pettigrew, 1998, 2009; Tausch et al., 2010), which might provide interesting avenues for future research.

Secondly, the diverging findings for positive and negative information about a distant outgroup provide further support for the commonly found *positive-negative asymmetries* in information processing (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989) and indicate its applicability in a new line of research on carry-over effects. However, whereas a positive-negative asymmetry

clearly applies to carry-over effects in our research, no such asymmetry was present for reactions toward the distant situation itself. That is, positive and negative information about a distant situation seems equally effective in changing observers' perception of this distant situation (see also Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011). We believe that this difference could be explained by the remoteness of the target group. Whereas the contact literature mainly focused on groups that are likely to be encountered (e.g., homeless people; B. A. Lee et al., 2004), we focus on distant outgroups that are unlikely to be ever met in person (e.g., Egyptian rebels for Dutch observers). Possibly, this distance and unfamiliarity makes it easier for observers to change observers' perception of this outgroup. Clearly however, further research is needed to test this suggestion.

Lastly, our findings might be valuable for media and communication studies as they indicate that media portrayals of distant situations are likely to not only influence observers' perception of the discussed situation itself (for similar findings see Cottle, 2011; Ghannam, 2011), but also local intergroup relations (see also: Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a). Most importantly, we effectively showed that negative information about a distant situation that is portrayed as a global issue with a global impact is likely to negatively influence how people perceive the world around them and to induce intolerance at the local level. This impact of the media on individuals' perceptions stresses the importance of, and might contribute to, the current debate on the media's responsibilities in informing people (Broersma, 2010; Davies, 2008; Luyendijk, 2010).

Applying this to practice, we believe that media outlets should at least be aware of their influence on public perception and, in our opinion, try to prevent carry-over effects from occurring. The findings of Study 5.1 suggest that one way by which this could be achieved is by keeping the distant situation remote. That is, instead of focusing on the global impact of the situation, media outlets could accentuate the remoteness of the situation and discuss its outcomes for the directly involved groups (e.g., Syrians). Moreover, providing specific (instead of more general) information

about the distant situation might also limit the information's carry-over potential (see also Bouman et al., 2014, 2015a), possibly because this hinders the creation of a superordinate outgroup (Bouman et al., 2015b). Of course, in a globalizing world these suggestions may not always be realistic or desirable, but at least an awareness and deeper understanding of carry-over effects might be valuable to journalists, politicians and other public spokespersons.

Besides the study-specific limitations which were already discussed in the corresponding discussion sections, there are at least two more general limitations which could be addressed in future research. Firstly, in our studies we looked at local outgroups which are generally neutrally or negatively perceived by the native Dutch majority (Van Osch & Breugelmans, 2012). It would be interesting to see whether positive and negative information about a distant situation carries over similarly to more positively perceived local outgroups, such as for example, Indonesian-Dutch citizens (Bouman et al., 2015b), or whether perceptions of these positively perceived local outgroups are more receptive to positive generalizations. Secondly, in contrast to the positive information we presented to our participants, other types of positive information might cause more powerful carry-over effects. For instance, positive information that confirms a (positive) stereotype about a superordinate outgroup (e.g., Arab people being hospitable) might carry over more easily than positive information that disconfirms a (negative) stereotype (e.g., Arab people preferring religion and government to be separated).

Conclusion

In sum, in two experimental studies we showed the potential impact of media portrayals of distant situations (e.g., for Dutch citizens, the Egyptian uprisings) on public opinion. We found that both positive and negative information influences how the portrayed distant outgroup (e.g., Egyptians) is perceived: Positive information makes observers more positive and negative information makes observers more

negative toward the distant outgroup. Importantly however, and central to the current paper, we found a positive-negative asymmetry for carry-over effects of distant information. That is, negative information about a distant situation has a much stronger influence on local intergroup relations (e.g., between native Dutch and Turkish-Dutch citizens) than positive information. Hence, whereas ‘bad news’ spreads quickly, ‘good news’ remains remote.

