

In the Heat of Moral Decisions - Do we act when Climate Change becomes a Moral Issue?

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Abstract

- Climate change is one of the greatest global challenges of our time. Yet, many people (especially those not directly affected by its consequences)—still struggle to perceive its urgency
- Previous research suggests that climate change may motivate action **not only through fear or threat**, but also when it is recognized as a moral issue involving responsibility
- The present study investigated whether climate threat exposure affects moral distress, moral courage, and moral progress and whether moral recognition shapes these relationships
- Our main question is:
→ Climate change is mostly framed as an environmental crisis, but what happens when people perceive it as a moral issue?

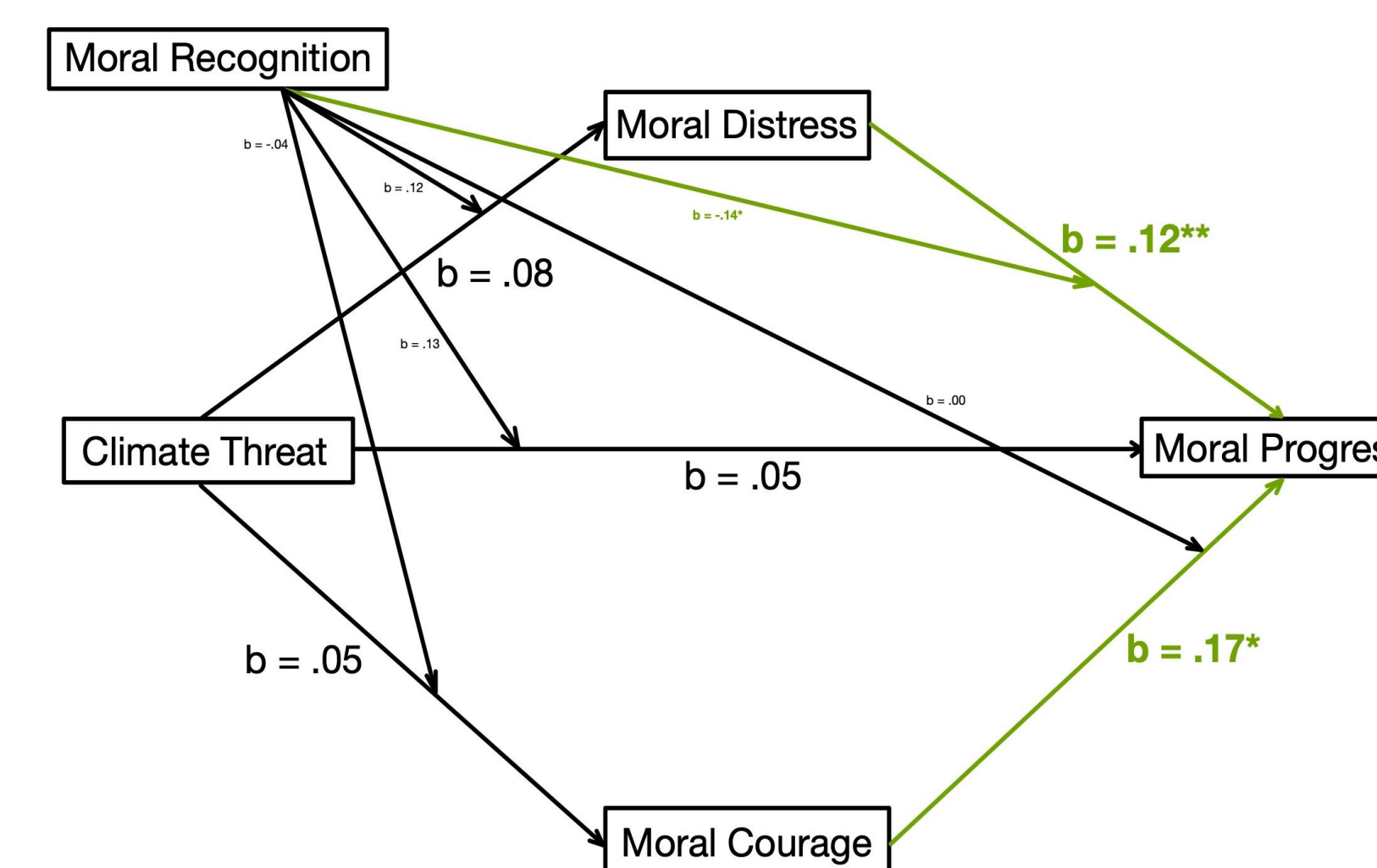
Methods and Materials

- Participants:** Final sample of $N = 205$ (162 women, 43 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 25.96$, $SD = 10.03$, Range= 18-70)
- Design:** Randomized between-subjects experiment comparing a Climate Threat Prime ($n = 101$) and a Control Condition ($n = 104$).
- Procedure:**



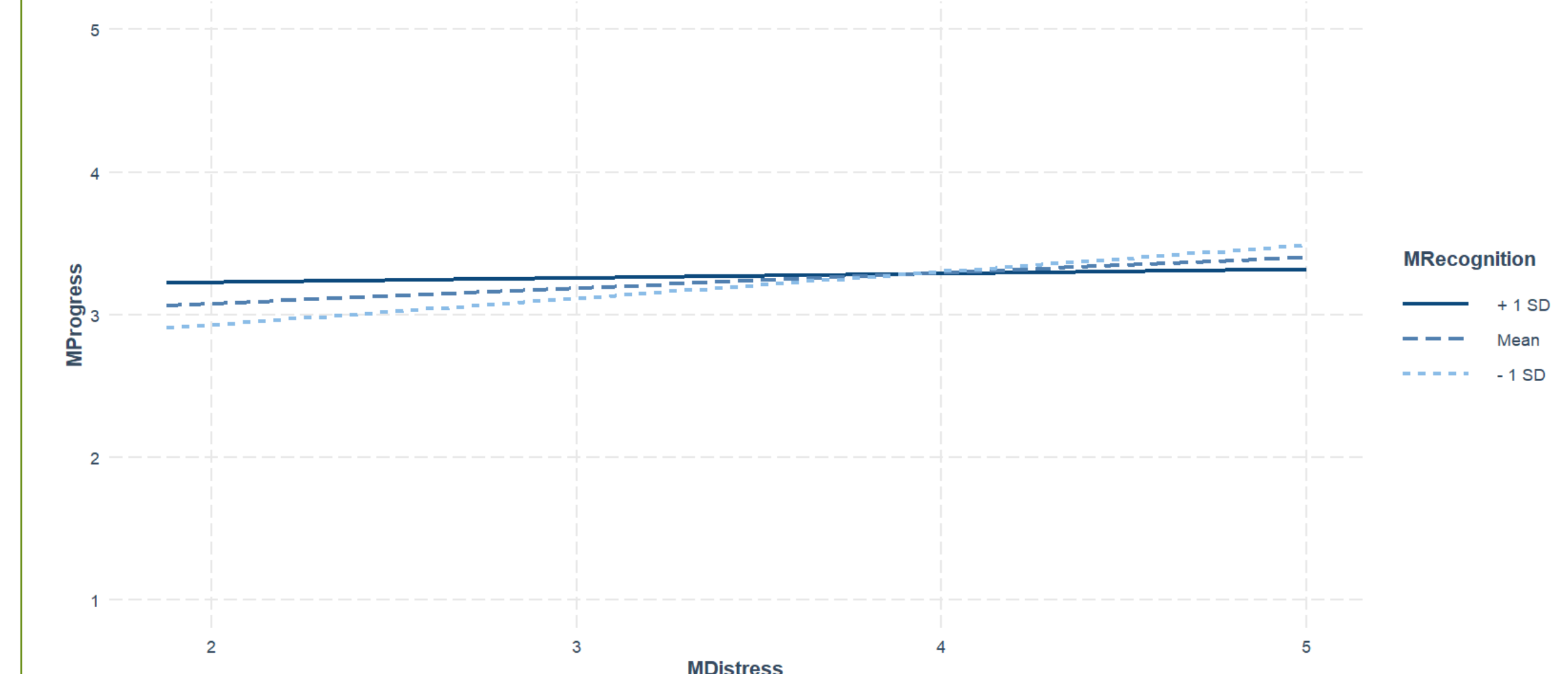
- Measures:** All constructs were assessed using multi-item self-report scales on 5-point Likert scales
- Analysis:** Hypotheses were tested using regression-based PROCESS models in R (bruceR), controlling for age and gender. Mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation effects were estimated using 1,000 bootstrap samples

Model



- Moral distress and moral courage were tested as mediators of the relationship between climate threat and moral progress
- Moral recognition was tested as a moderator of the relationships between climate threat, moral distress, moral courage, and moral progress
- Values represent unstandardized regression coefficients (b)
- $p < .05^*$, $*p < .01$

Interaction effect on H9



- High moral recognition may reduce the need for moral distress to perceive moral progress

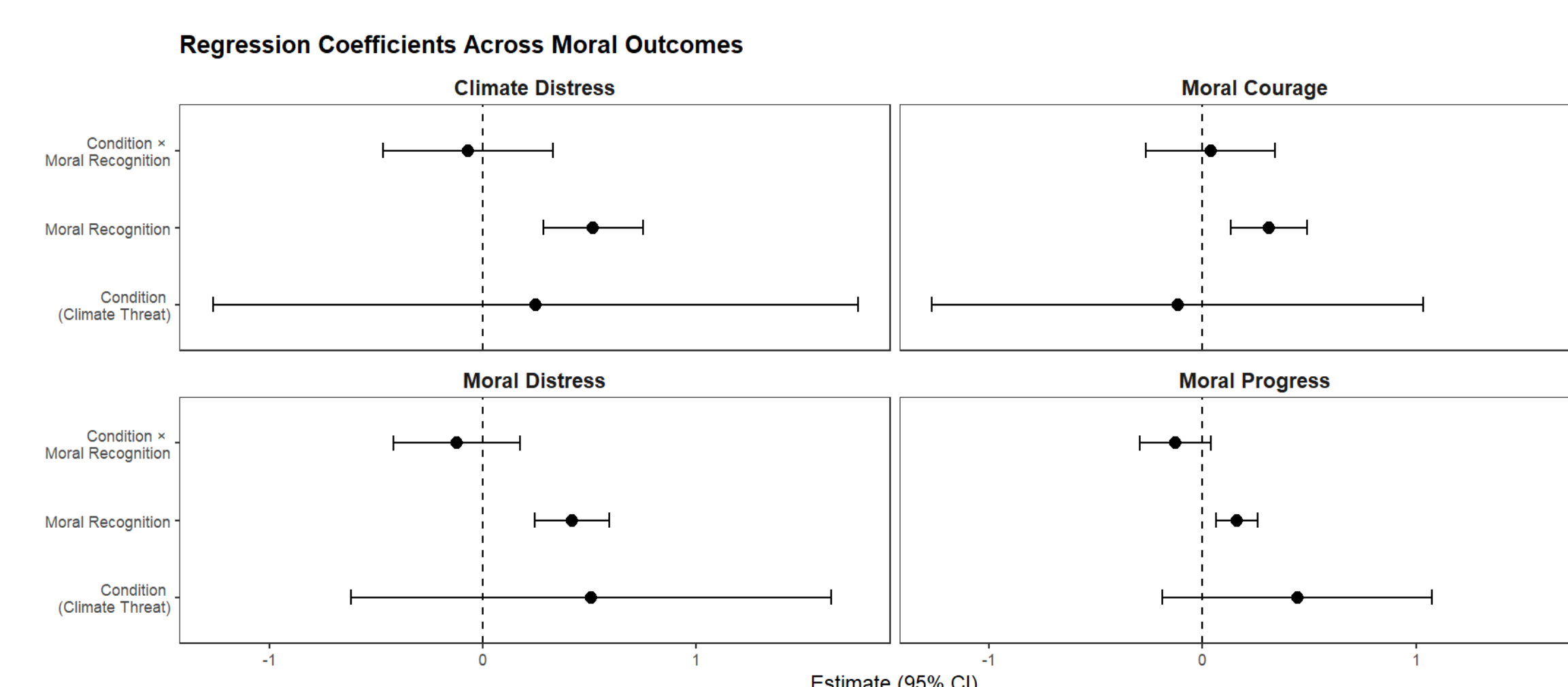
Summary

- Climate threat information alone was not enough to change moral responses
- Moral recognition played a complex role, suggesting that how people interpret climate change morally may be more important than simple exposure to threat information
- Higher levels of moral distress and moral courage were associated with higher perceptions of moral progress
- Younger participants reported higher levels of climate distress, moral recognition, and moral progress

Future Directions

- Use stronger and more emotionally engaging climate threat manipulations
- Examine more diverse and representative samples, particularly across age groups and political orientations
- Investigate how moral recognition can be fostered to promote climate engagement and action
- How can moral recognition be strengthened?

Results



- Moral recognition was positively associated with several moral responses but did not moderate the effects of climate threat exposure

References

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→ Viewing climate change as a moral issue may be more important than simply viewing it as a threat

→ Moral recognition may play a more important role than threat exposure in shaping climate-related moral responses

→ Moral distress and moral courage—not climate threat exposure—were associated with moral progress