

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Fatal Attraction: Fear of Death and Political Preferences

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**3:00 PM**

**Martin Colloquium Center  
4127 Sennott Square**

*So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear  
is fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror...*

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1933

When George W. Bush won the 2004 Presidential election by a substantial margin of the popular vote, pollsters, pundits, and Republican Party officials agreed that Americans voted for Bush because he shared their moral and traditional values and were comfortable with Bush's approach to the war on terror. Others have, however, argued that President Bush prevailed, at least in part, because of non-conscious fears aroused by the events of September 11, 2001 and sustained by the Bush administration's claim that Americans' lives would literally be endangered by the election of Senator John Kerry. Indeed, Kerry himself, reflecting on the election on January 30, 2005 stated: "...the attacks of Sept. 11 were the "central deciding thing" in his contest with President Bush and that the release of an Osama bin Laden videotape the weekend before Election Day had effectively erased any hope he had of victory." In support of this assertion, I will present research demonstrating that subtle reminders of death or the events of 9/11 increased Americans' support for President Bush and his policies in Iraq, and more recent studies documenting the psychological commonalities between conservative Americans and Islamic fundamentalists. The implications of these findings for democratic political institutions, the 2008 presidential elections, and constructive approaches to the "war on terrorism" will be considered.

Reception to follow in Room 4125 Sennott Square