



Political Neuroscience Theory for Explaining National Cohesion Under Conditions of Threat: A Comparative Study of the 12-Day Iran–Israel War

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research Article history: Received: 2025-09-30 Received in revised form: 2025-10-10 Accepted : 2026-02-24 Available online: 2026-07-25 Keywords: Political neuroscience, National cohesion, Threat perception, Social identity theory, Terror management.	Objective: The present study explains the relationship between external threat and the durability of national cohesion in two societies involved in the 12-day Iran–Israel war. It presents the theoretical model of the "Cohesion Strategy," inspired by principles of political neuroscience, to demonstrate how threat perception activates neural-cognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive mechanisms, ultimately producing sustained normative cohesion. Research Method: The study was conducted using a descriptive–analytical method based on library sources and supplemented by secondary analysis of publicly available media data from Iran and Israel during the period 13 June to 24 June 2025 (23 Khordad-3 Tir 1404). Data were coded across four clusters, threat, reassurance, social-identity, and institutional-discursive factors, and a Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) was calculated to evaluate the three-stage model of "Shock-stabilization-normalization." Results: Findings indicate that the durability of national cohesion depends on aligning threat messages with signals of reassurance and effectiveness, an inclusive narrative of "We," and transparent institutional discourse. In Iran, coordination across these three levels led to a transition from temporary emotional cohesion to more durable normative cohesion. In Israel, by contrast, cohesion remained more short-term and critical in character. The Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) showed that a higher ratio of reassurance messages to identity narratives, relative to threat, increases the likelihood of sustained cohesion. Conclusion: The research emphasizes that the coordinated timing of messages and interactions among neural-cognitive, social-identity, and institutional levels is central to achieving stable national cohesion. The findings offer practical guidance for crisis communication design, spokesperson architecture, and continuous monitoring of cohesion indicators, and suggest that simultaneous measurement of threat and reassurance messages, combined with identity narratives and institutional transparency, may help prevent the breakdown of cohesion and strengthen it.

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Introduction

During security crises, societies often experience a short-term surge in public support and social convergence; however, the central question is how this emotional surge can be transformed into durable, normative cohesion and protected from erosion once the crisis subsides. To address this question, this article formulates the "Theory of Cohesion Strategy in Political Neuroscience," a framework explaining that threat perception leads to sustained cohesion only when three levels operate in concert:

1. At the neural-cognitive level, the combination of warning plus reassurance and efficacy transforms initial arousal into purposeful action;
2. At the social-identity level, an inclusive narrative of "We" together with low-cost rituals and symbols translates emotional alignment into norms of legitimate compliance;
3. At the institutional-discursive level, transparent and appropriately timed communication stabilizes public trust. This process unfolds across three phases: "Shock, stabilization, and normalization." The article pursues two objectives: "First, to provide a theoretical explanation of this three-level mechanism within a measurable, time-sensitive framework; and second, to propose a measurement protocol for future empirical testing. In the current version, quantitative content analysis is conducted in an exploratory manner, and its results are reported in the findings section; however, neuroscience-based empirical testing is reserved for future studies."

In other words, the present research is a conceptual study and employs no direct neuroscience-based data. Any references to neural mechanisms are made only at the level of theoretical correspondence with existing findings.

The central research question is formulated as follows: "During the 12-day war, what combination and timing of threat and reassurance messages, together with what quality of identity narrative and institutional discourse, increase the likelihood of transitioning from temporary emotional cohesion to durable normative cohesion?"

Methodologically, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach based on library sources and is supplemented by secondary analysis of publicly available media data collected during the period 13-24 June 2025 (23 Khordad-3 Tir 1404) in the two societies of Iran and Israel.

Finally, the article clearly presents its policy implications, risk communication design, spokesperson architecture, and symbols of unity, along with the structure of the remaining sections: "Literature review,

theoretical framework, method and protocol, explanatory evidence, policy implications, limitations, and conclusion."

1. Literature Review

Research on national cohesion under conditions of threat has a long history in the literature of political science and social psychology. Each approach has explained part of the phenomenon, but most have lacked cross-level integration and connection to findings from political neuroscience.

1.1. The "Rally around the Flag" Effect

The concept of the "Rally around the flag" effect was first systematically introduced by Mueller, who described the temporary increase in public approval and support for the government following international crises (Mueller, 1970).

Subsequent studies demonstrated that this effect is generally short-lived and tends to fade as the perceived threat declines (Baum, 2002: 267). Nevertheless, this body of literature has paid relatively limited attention to the psychological and neural processes underlying the formation of this effect.

1.2. Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory explains how external threat accentuates the boundaries between "Us" and "Others" and increases in-group cohesion (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 14). Studies by Huddy have shown that during security crises, when governments are able to provide a unified narrative and shared symbols, political loyalty and collective participation are strengthened (Huddy, 2015).

Although this approach clarifies the identity dimension of cohesion, it pays comparatively less attention to the neural-cognitive layer and the role of institutional framing.

1.3. Terror Management Theory

Terror Management Theory, first proposed by Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986), emphasizes the role of mortality awareness in strengthening commitment to cultural values and social norms. It explains that under conditions of external threat, social convergence and support for national institutions tend to increase (Pyszczynski et al., 2004: 840).

This theory explains the motivational dimension of cohesion; however, its connection to political structures and communication strategies still requires further development.

1.4. Political Neuroscience and Threat Perception

Research in political neuroscience has shown that threat processing in structures such as the amygdala and the "Bed Nucleus of the Stria Terminalis" (BNST) is associated with security-oriented and political tendencies (Pedersen et al., 2017: 778).

Findings by Leong et al. further suggest that neural responses to political and threat-related stimuli may predict political orientations (Leong et al., 2020).

This perspective illuminates the neural layer of the phenomenon; however, its connection to national cohesion and macro-level policymaking has received less attention.

1.5. Securitization

Securitization Theory, developed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), explains how an issue enters the sphere of security policy when it is framed as an existential threat. When accompanied by practical and symbolic measures, such framing may produce either temporary or long-term societal convergence (Balzacq, 2011: 9).

This approach focuses primarily on the discursive and institutional level and requires integration with neural–cognitive insights to achieve a more complete explanation.

1.6. Recent Studies

Building on these developments, the study of national cohesion in recent decades has entered a new stage in which, alongside classical political science approaches, findings from cognitive neuroscience are increasingly incorporated. Contemporary research seeks to explain neural, cognitive, emotional, and institutional mechanisms within an integrated framework.

Landau and Wells (2024) argue that theories of international relations should incorporate neuroscientific findings on threat processing and demonstrate how individual-level threat perception shapes broader security decisions.

Similarly, Panish (2024) examined the relationship among anxiety, threat sensitivity, and political orientation from a neuroscientific perspective and showed that under conditions of threat, political tendencies become associated with specific connectivity patterns within brain networks.

On the other hand, Harel (2025) examined the concept of "In-group affective polarization" under conditions of threat and showed that external threat can increase emotional convergence among group members, thereby strengthening collective identity and, consequently, national cohesion.

Likewise, Rezakalivari (2022 AD/1401 SH), using a grounded theory approach, proposed a paradigmatic model of ethnic-cultural empathy in social networks, demonstrating how communication platforms can reinforce identity convergence. Although this study focused on virtual environments, its concepts are potentially transferable to conditions of national threat.

In the field of domestic security, Eyvazi and Ghasemi (2023 AD/1402 SH) examined strategies to address threats stemming from social polarization. Emphasizing the role of policymaking and institutional intervention, their research showed that communication management and the creation of shared frameworks can prevent the erosion of national cohesion and may even strengthen it during times of crisis.

The existing literature addresses different pieces of the puzzle of national cohesion under conditions of threat. The rally effect focuses on short-term behavioral responses; Social Identity Theory addresses the identity dimension; Terror Management Theory explains the motivational dimension; political neuroscience explores the underlying neural dimension; and security framing (securitization) emphasizes the discursive and institutional dimensions.

It may also be argued that recent studies, both international and domestic, have explained scattered elements of national cohesion under conditions of threat. However, none of these approaches has simultaneously integrated the neural–cognitive, social–identity, and communicative-institutional levels into a unified and time-sensitive model.

Despite extensive theoretical evidence and neuroscience reviews, no study has yet directly linked neuroscience-based data to national cohesion. Therefore, the present research considers only the theoretical compatibility of these domains.

This gap highlights the need to propose a "Political Neuroscience Theory for Explaining National Cohesion under Conditions of Threat."

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on the central hypothesis that national cohesion under conditions of threat is the outcome of a dynamic, multi-level process emerging from interaction among three levels: "Neural-cognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive."

These three levels influence one another not only sequentially but also reciprocally and simultaneously, ultimately contributing to the formation, strengthening or erosion of national cohesion.

The explanations presented below are offered at the theoretical and conceptual level and are grounded in consistency with findings from neuroscience, social psychology, and securitization theory.

No direct neural or physiological data were collected in this study, and all neuroscience-related references are included solely as theoretical correspondences.

2.1. Neural-Cognitive Level: Biological and Neural Mechanisms of Threat Perception

2.1.1. Brain Structures and Threat Processing

Research in political neuroscience indicates that threat perception is initially processed within the limbic system, particularly the amygdala. The amygdala plays a central role in identifying threatening stimuli and initiating emotional responses, especially fear and anger (Pedersen et al., 2017: 778).

The bed nucleus of the Stria Terminalis (BNST) is likewise associated with the processing of ambiguous or prolonged threats, a condition that corresponds to extended crises such as multi-day wars (Avery et al., 2016: 127-128).

Recent reviews further suggest that interactions among the amygdala, BNST, and prefrontal cortex play an essential role in evaluating ambiguous and persistent threats and contribute significantly to the formation of social biases (Pessoa, 2013: 45; Mobbs et al., 2020: 145).

2.1.2. The Role of Brain Networks and Hormones

Beyond the amygdala and the bed nucleus of the Stria Terminalis, the salience network, centered on the insula and anterior cingulate cortex, is activated to identify and prioritize threatening stimuli (Seeley et al., 2007: 2351).

Activation of this network, in interaction with hormonal systems such as the release of cortisol and adrenaline, strengthens immediate behavioral and cognitive responses and facilitates the alignment of attention with security-related messages (Hermans et al., 2014: 305-306).

In real crisis environments, these same processes may increase attention to official warning or reassurance messages and strengthen psychological readiness for social convergence.

The references above are included solely to demonstrate theoretical consistency with findings in neuroscience and do not constitute empirical inference within the present framework.

Recent reviews have further shown that threat perception not only triggers physiological responses but also reconfigures attentional patterns and cognitive bias,

which may align collective attention with official warning and reassurance messages (Pessoa, 2022).

Accordingly, although the present study does not employ neural data, the theoretical consistency between these mechanisms and collective behavior under crisis conditions provides the foundation for the proposed model.

2.1.3. Connection to Political Behavior

Panisch's (2024) study suggests that greater threat sensitivity is associated with stronger preferences for conservative and security-oriented policies.

Within the framework of the 12-day war, it may be theoretically argued that repeated stimulation of neural-emotional pathways through images, news coverage, and media messaging could increase tendencies toward political unity and support for defensive decisions at the collective level.

In other words, neural-cognitive arousal at the individual level may, through social and institutional mechanisms, be translated into political cohesion at the national level. However, this relationship is presented only as a theoretical correspondence and requires empirical testing in future research.

2.2. Social-Identity Level: Redefining the Boundaries of "Us" and "Others"

2.2.1. Activation of Group Identity

According to Social Identity Theory, external threats make the boundaries between "Us" and "Others" more salient and increase in-group cohesion (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 14).

This process may operate simultaneously with the neural mechanisms described in the previous section. In other words, emotional arousal generated by threat can intensify activation of national identity and increase normative alignment and collective conformity (Huddy, 2015).

2.2.2. Emotional Convergence and Social Cohesion

Harrell's research (2025) has shown that external threat produces intragroup emotional polarization; that is, members become more aligned at the emotional level, and this affective convergence provides the basis for strengthening collective identity and, consequently, national cohesion. In the short term, intense crises such as the 12-day war, this phenomenon can explain why society experiences widespread emotional convergence in a very short period.

2.2.3. The Role of Narratives and Symbols

Alongside the activation of collective emotions, shared narratives and symbols, from the flag and national heroes to commemorative rituals, play a central role in institutionalizing the identity of "We." The present framework suggests that the effectiveness of symbols reaches its maximum when accompanied by the emotional arousal generated by threat; otherwise, symbolic messages will lack a convergent effect. Consequently, the simultaneity of neurocognitive arousal and narrative-symbolic identity formation is the key to transforming temporary shared feeling into enduring social cohesion.

2.3. The Institutional-Discursive Level: Securitization and Cohesion Policy

2.3.1. The Process of Securitization

According to securitization theory, political elites transfer an issue into the sphere of national security by declaring it an existential threat (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Balzacq emphasizes that the success of this process requires linking effective messaging with practical action so that public support may be secured and the legitimacy of compliance may emerge (Balzacq, 2011: 9). From the perspective of this research, the quality of the speech act, including sender consistency, transparency about "What we know/do not know," and a clear cost-benefit ratio, together with timing coordinated with the audience's emotional-cognitive rhythm, constitutes the condition for converting temporary emotional cohesion into durable normative cohesion.

2.3.2. Alignment with the Neuro-Social Level

In the proposed model, institutional messaging must align with society's lived experience and emotional-cognitive perceptions. If people do not experience a threat at the neurocognitive level, or if collective identity is not activated, the government's security messages will have less effect.

2.3.3. Examples from the 12-Day War

During the 12-day war, both sides, Iran and Israel, used security discourse to mobilize public opinion. In Iran, emphasis on "Legitimate defense" and "National steadfastness" was accompanied by religious-national symbols, while in Israel; the emphasis was placed on "Existential threat" and the "Right to self-defense." Although these two patterns differ in content, within the present theoretical framework both are

instances of securitizing speech acts that, in connection with collective emotions, can generate either temporary or lasting cohesion.

2.4. The Synergy of the Three Levels and the Time-Bound Process of Cohesion

In this version, the three-level model is formulated conceptually, and an initial test is presented through exploratory quantitative content analysis; more advanced causal tests are left to future research.

2.4.1. The Three-Stage Model

The model proposed in this study describes national cohesion under conditions of threat as a time-bound process consisting of three stages:

- A) Rapid reaction stage: Neurocognitive activation and the creation of shared emotional arousal;
- B) Convergence stage: Activation of national and social identity on the basis of emotional stimulation;
- C) Stabilization stage: Institutional framing and discursive messaging for preserving and institutionalizing cohesion.

2.4.2. The Durability or Decline of Cohesion

The durability of cohesion depends on the degree of positive interaction among these three levels. If, after the rapid reaction stage, collective identity is not activated or institutional messaging is ineffective, cohesion quickly subsides, much like the rally 'round the flag phenomenon. However, if these levels are coordinated, cohesion may continue for some time even after the threat has receded.

Therefore, the theoretical framework proposed in this study is essentially a conceptual integration of the neurocognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive levels, with the potential for empirical testing in future studies.

3. Research Methodology and the Proposed Measurement Protocol

3.1. Aim and Rationale

The logic of the method derives from the three theoretical levels: "At the neurocognitive level, threat perception aligns arousal and attention; at the social-identity level, this arousal is transformed into convergence and in-group norms; and at the institutional-discursive level, it becomes durable cohesion through credible discourse and clear guidance." Since the aim of this version is to present a theoretical and testable protocol for future studies, no neuro-based data were collected.

Nevertheless, a quantitative content analysis of media data within the period under study was conducted on an exploratory basis, and the proposed indicators were calculated.

3.2. Scope, Time Frame, and Unit of Analysis

The field of study covers Iran and Israel from 23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404, including the shock, stabilization, and normalization phases. The unit of analysis is defined as a "News item/commentary/post," using a fixed definition across all sources, either the headline and lead or the full text, so that comparisons remain homogeneous.

3.3. Data Sources and Collection

The sources include Iranian domestic media, such as the newspapers Iran, Keyhan, and Jomhuri-ye Eslami, and the news agencies IRNA, ISNA, Fars, Mehr, and Mizan; Persian-language media critical of the Iranian government, such as BBC Persian, Iran International, and Manoto; as well as official Israeli sources and mainstream Israeli media, including the official websites of the Government of Israel ([GOV.IL](http://gov.il)) and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), newspapers such as The Times of Israel, Ynet, Haaretz, and i24NEWS, and their official social media accounts.

For each item, the title, media outlet, Persian/Gregorian date, format, link, and a one-line summary are recorded to ensure the information remains easily traceable. The inclusion criterion covered all items related to the 12-day war and national cohesion within the period under study. Materials were retrieved using keywords such as "12-day war," "Attack," "Ceasefire," "National cohesion," and related terms in the digital archives of media outlets. Duplicate or irrelevant items were removed, ensuring the final sample contained only crisis-related content.

3.4. Coding and Measures

The content analysis is conducted in a directed manner, and each item is coded for the presence or absence of a reference and its intensity across four clusters.

- Threat indicators include attack, siren, casualties, and "Existential Threat."
- Reassurance/efficacy indicators include successful interception, crisis control, service resilience, phased reopening, and a "Clear Next Step."
- Social-identity indicators include the "We" narrative, appreciation of service providers, rituals and symbols of unity, and calls for mutual assistance.

- Institutional-discursive indicators include the legal/existential naming of the threat, specific behavioral instructions, and periodic reports on progress or cost-benefit outcomes.

For each item, the presence or intensity of reference to each cluster is coded using a three-point scale: 0 = absent, 1 = implicit reference, 2 = explicit reference. A detailed coding manual (codebook), including definitions, clear examples, and borderline cases, is provided below in order to enhance replicability.

3.5. Expected Descriptive Outputs

At the end of each day of the study period, the share of reassurance/efficacy messages among total relevant coverage is reported to observe the presence of calming messages alongside warnings. The balance between threat and reassurance coverage is described in simple percentage terms to make shifts in the narrative direction clear. The frequency of symbols and rituals of unity, as well as the volume of official instructions, is also recorded to map the phases of shock, stabilization, and normalization.

3.6. Analytical Strategy

At the descriptive level, the daily trend in the "Threat/Reassurance" balance and the narrative's identity-institutional indicators are traced to clarify the three-phase transition. At the comparative level, differences in the calibration of messages and in the quality of institutional discourse between Iran and Israel are explained so that their effect on the durability or decline of cohesion can be interpreted (Balzacq, 2011: 79; Stritzel, 2014:17; Huddy, 2015: 530).

3.7. Reliability and Bias Control

In this study, 32% of the sample was randomly recoded. Cohen's kappa coefficient for the four main clusters was 0.81, indicating a high level of agreement among coders. In addition, the list of terms is compiled with an emphasis on specific, unambiguous terminology to reduce the likelihood of divergent interpretations. For each key claim, data triangulation is conducted using one official source and one comparable media source to reduce reliance on a single channel.

3.8. Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) and the Half-Life of Cohesion

To aggregate the data, a Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) is defined in order to measure, for each day, the relationship between threat and reassurance messages and the degree of presence of social and institutional indicators.

The proposed formula is as follows:

$$CCI = 0.4 \times (E/S) + 0.3 \times H + 0.3 \times I$$

where:

- (E/S) = the ratio of reassurance messages to threat messages,
- (H) = the index of symbols and unity narratives,
- (I) = the index of clear institutional messages.

The values of the variables are normalized on a 0 to 1 scale. The daily CCI is then calculated, and its temporal trend is plotted. The initial peak point, that is, the maximum CCI, is taken as the 100% cohesion level.

3.9. Validation and Robustness Tests

Given the theoretical nature of this study and to provide a basis for robustness testing in future empirical research, several proposed tests are envisaged. The iterative exclusion of high-output media outlets is recommended to assess the extent to which the results depend on a limited number of prolific sources. A sensitivity test may also be conducted by removing ambiguous terms and retaining only explicit, stringent ones. An event study of the announcements of warnings, reassurance messages, ceasefires, and reopenings is recommended to observe shifts in patterns. It is likewise suggested that a "Baseline week without events" be included in equal time periods before and after the war in order to distinguish the event effect from the broader trend.

3.10. Content Analysis Protocol and Index Calculation

Relying on the three-point coding design, (0 = absent, 1 = implicit, 2 = explicit), for the four clusters of threat/reassurance/identity/institutional, the data were recorded at the level of the media item and aggregated for each day and for each country. In accordance with the research design, the analytical time frame extends from 23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404 (13-24 June 2025) in Iran and Israel, covering the three phases of shock, stabilization, and normalization.

At the day/country level, the following variables were calculated:

1. (E/S) = the ratio of the total reassurance messages to the total threat messages;
2. (H) = the mean score of the social-identity cluster;
3. (I) = the mean score of the institutional-discursive cluster.

For day-to-day comparison, all indices were normalized to a 0-1 scale. The Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) was then defined on the basis of theoretical weights:

$$CCI = 0.4(E/S) + 0.3H + 0.3I$$

In addition to the daily calculations, time-series charts were plotted, along with event markers, such as the outbreak of conflict, the announcement of a ceasefire, and key statements, to display the three-phase trend and major turning points. The logic of this visualization is consistent with the study's analytical strategy, which daily tracks trends in "Threat/Reassurance" and identity-institutional indicators.

The statistical testing includes cross-country difference tests based on frequencies, specifically, the chi-square test (X^2) for the presence/absence of each cluster.

3.11. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Data collection was conducted exclusively from publicly available sources and official accounts in order to respect privacy. Because of their media-based nature, the measures should be regarded as proxy indicators and interpreted with caution. For more precise causal testing, it is recommended that future studies incorporate a short-term wave survey and a small-scale experimental design (Hermans et al., 2014: 306; Avery et al., 2016: 127; Huddy, 2015: 522).

4. Research Findings

The findings of the present study are based on a secondary analysis of media data from Iran and Israel from 23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404 (13-24 June 2025). The data were extracted from news reports, commentaries, and official statements and coded into four main clusters: threat, reassurance, social identity, and institutional-discursive.

Although this study is conceptual in nature, this version includes an exploratory quantitative content analysis and simple statistical tests to preliminarily assess the indicators.

4.1. The Neurocognitive Level

The temporal analysis showed that in the early days of the crisis, the frequency of threat messages was dominant in both countries. This pattern is consistent with the "Shock" stage in the proposed three-level model, a stage in which messaging is primarily focused on communicating danger and emergency conditions. Subsequently, as the intensity of the threat declined, reassurance/efficacy messages began to appear alongside threat messages, indicating a transition to the "Stabilization" stage. This

shift in the ratio of messages suggests that communication moved from warning alone to warning combined with efficacy.

4.2. The Social-Identity Level

In the middle phase of the crisis, a relative increase in identity narratives and emphasis on the collective "We" was observed in both countries. This pattern indicates activation of the social-identity level within the proposed model. The coexistence of threat messages and identity elements shows that crisis management relied not only on communicating danger but also on reproducing narratives of collective solidarity. The difference between the two countries was observable more in the timing and intensity of these narratives than in their basic presence.

4.3. The Institutional-Discursive Level

The examination of institutional messages showed that behavioral instructions and official reports continued throughout the crisis. This pattern aligns with the institutional level of the three-level model and indicates that message management during the crisis was not limited to representing the threat but also included behavioral guidance and institutional framing. The continuity of this type of messaging, especially in the final days of the crisis, may be regarded as a sign of transition to the "Normalization" stage.

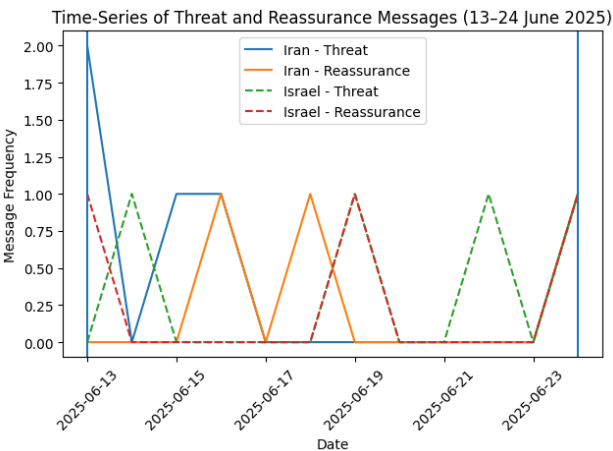
4.4. Condensed Temporal Analysis of Message Distribution

In order to illustrate the phasing of the crisis and to operationalize the three-stage model of "Shock-stabilization-normalization," the distribution of "Threat" and "Reassurance/Efficacy" messages during the period from 13 to 24 June 2025 (23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404) was examined in aggregate form.

Table 1. Aggregate Frequency of Threat and Reassurance Messages

Country	Threat	Reassurance/Efficacy	E/S Ratio
Iran	5	3	0.60
Israel	4	3	0.75

The E/S ratio (reassurance-to-threat) was calculated as an indicator of message calibration. Higher ratios indicate a greater coexistence of warning messages with signals of efficacy. To display the temporal trend, the daily frequency of threat and reassurance messages in each country was plotted as a time series.



The temporal pattern shows that in both countries, the initial days were marked by the dominance of threat messages (shock phase). Subsequently, reassurance/efficacy messages appeared alongside threat messages (stabilization phase). As the cycle approached its end, the share of reassurance messages increased, and a relative balance was established (transition to normalization). Nevertheless, the relative persistence of threat messaging in Israel was more noticeable in the final days. This condensed temporal analysis shows that the proposed three-phase model is empirically observable and that the ratio of reassurance to threat messages can serve as a simple indicator for assessing media calibration in a crisis.

4.5. Test of Differences in Message Ratios (X²)

To examine differences in the pattern of message calibration between Iran and Israel, the aggregate frequencies of "Threat" and "Reassurance/efficacy" messages across the entire period from 13 to 24 June 2025 were compared in the form of a 2×2 contingency table.

Table 2. Contingency Table of Threat and Reassurance Messages

Country	Threat	Reassurance	Total
Iran	5	3	8
Israel	4	3	7
Total	9	6	15

The chi-square test showed that the difference in the ratio of reassurance to threat messages between the two countries was not statistically significant:

$$\chi^2 (1, N = 15) = 0.02, p = 0.88$$

The effect size (Phi) was 0.04, indicating a very small difference.

Although no statistically significant difference was observed, the temporal analysis in the previous section showed that the main difference lies not in the total volume of messages but in the timing and phasing of message calibration. This finding points to the importance of the temporal distribution pattern alongside aggregate comparisons.

4.6. Composite Cohesion Index (CCI)

To operationalize media cohesion, the Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) was defined on the basis of three components: the reassurance-to-threat ratio (E/S), the social-identity cluster (H), and the institutional-instructional cluster (I). After normalizing the components to a 0-1 range, the index was calculated as follows:

$$CCI = 0.4 (E/S) + 0.3H + 0.3I$$

To evaluate the internal convergence of the components, Pearson correlations among the dimensions were calculated; all were positive and ranged from 0.29 to 0.41. This indicates that the components moved in the same direction within a single construct.

The internal reliability of the index was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.78, indicating acceptable internal consistency in this sample. On this basis, aggregating the three components into the CCI is conceptually and statistically defensible.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This section, relying on descriptive media data from 13 to 24 June 2025 (23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404), provides explanatory examples across three levels: "Neurocognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive." In this version, in addition to theoretical explanation, exploratory quantitative content analysis and simple statistical tests have been implemented.

5.1. Three-Level Integration of Findings: From Observation to Conceptualization

The analysis of media data from both countries showed that in crisis phases, threat perception begins with a sudden surge in warning messages and the synchronization of emotional signals.

In the stabilization phase, reassurance messages and narratives of unity in Iran, and messages of operational coordination in Israel, provided the ground for the readjustment of cognitive arousal and emotional alignment. This phenomenon can be

theoretically interpreted as a "Feedback interaction between threat circuits and prefrontal cortex regions," which guides collective behavior toward cooperation by reducing ambiguity (Mobbs et al., 2020; Pessoa, 2022).

However, in the normalization stage, clear differences emerged between the two societies: "In Iran, the continuity of the unity narrative and the stability of institutional discourse led to the stabilization of trust; whereas in Israel, the repeated quantification of threat and the highlighting of executive failures caused a shift in cohesion from emotional to critical. This difference can be explained by the variation in the "Synchronization between the neurocognitive and institutional-discursive levels."

Overall, the findings confirm that the balance between threat and reassurance messages, the synchronization of identity narratives, and the stability of institutional discourse are the three pillars constructing the durability of cohesion, though this relationship is interpreted at a theoretical rather than a purely empirical level.

5.2. Theoretical Explanation: The Shock-Stabilization-Normalization Cycle

A) Shock Phase: Initial Arousal Regulation

In the first phase, the society enters a state of simultaneous arousal: "Warning messages, images of violence, and immediate threat data stimulate neural systems involved in the perception of danger."

If reassurance messages are absent at this stage, the ambiguous threat perception becomes chronically stabilized. In contrast, the coexistence of threat and reassurance messages in the very initial phase reduces collective anxiety by readjusting salience circuits (Pessoa, 2022).

In Iran, the relative presence of reassurance signals from the third day of the crisis led to a faster transition from shock to stabilization. In Israel, the lack of reassurance signals and the continuous quantification of danger led to a longer arousal phase.

B) Stabilization Phase: Synchronization of Emotions and Identity

At this stage, initial arousal is rearranged within the framework of collective narratives and symbols of unity. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 14) and recent research in social neuroscience (Harrell, 2025: 500) show that external threats activate empathy circuits and emotional resonance, thereby strengthening the perception of "Us."

Would you like to proceed with translating the remaining parts of the Stabilization Phase or the Normalization Phase?

In Iran, religious and national narratives of resistance, together with emphasis on "National will" and "Resilience," transformed feelings of fear into feelings of pride and efficacy. In Israel, unity formed around the home front, but the absence of an integrated national narrative left this cohesion temporary.

Theoretically, when the neurocognitive and social-identity levels operate simultaneously, the likelihood of transition from emotional cohesion to normative cohesion increases; otherwise, cohesion will remain fragile and short-lived.

C) Normalization Phase: Reconstruction of Meaning and Institutional Trust

In the final stage, society needs to redefine the experience of threat and return it to the level of rational discourse. From the perspective of securitization theory, this stage is equivalent to the "Deactivation of the state of exception." (Buzan et al., 1998)

In Iran, official discourse, with the stability of its senders (the Leadership, the government, and national media) and the renewed emphasis on the legitimacy of defense, smoothed the path for the reconstruction of meaning. In Israel, the rapid shift in media focus toward criticism of government performance indicated an early return to ordinary discourse and the breakdown of crisis consensus.

From a theoretical perspective, the more the period of normalization is accompanied by institutional transparency and accountability, the more durable public trust becomes.

5.3. Proposed Explanatory Model: The Synchronization Cycle of Cohesion

Based on the descriptive findings and theoretical arguments, the following cycle may be proposed as the explanatory model of the theory of cohesion in political neuroscience:

- Threat perception (neurocognitive level): Activation of threat circuits → increased shared attention and anxiety;
- Readjustment of perception (reassurance messages): Coexistence of threat and reassurance → reduction of ambiguity and regulation of anxiety;
- Emotional resonance (social-identity level): Shared narrative and symbols of unity → strengthening the sense of "We";
- Institutionalization of cohesion (institutional-discursive level): Transparent official discourse and stability of message senders → trust and legitimate compliance;

- Reconstruction of meaning (normalization stage): Summarizing achievements/costs and constructing a collective memory narrative → continuity of normative cohesion

Theoretically, the above cycle can provide a basis for developing predictive models in future research; for example, examining the effect of the reassurance-to-threat ratio on the durability of cohesion (CCI) or assessing the relationships between symbolic indicators and institutional trust.

5.4. Final Comparative Analysis: Differences in the Paths of Cohesion Durability

A) Iran

In Iran, the three theoretical levels were activated almost simultaneously and in the same direction:

Neurocognitive arousal in the initial phase was quickly moderated by reassurance messages and a narrative of unity; at the social level, religious-national symbols generated a sense of shared identification; and at the institutional level, clear security discourse and stability in the source of messages reduced ambiguity. As a result, the media evidence shows that the messaging pattern in Iran was more closely aligned with the theoretical indicators of transition from emotional cohesion to normative cohesion.

B) Israel

In Israel, the first stage (arousal) was longer, and the third stage (normalization) was shorter. The focus on quantitative data and the lack of an inclusive narrative prevented the continuation of the sense of unity. At the institutional level, frequent changes in spokespersons and the rapid rise of political criticism slowed the pace of trust stabilization. As a result, cohesion remained defensive and short-term and, in the post-crisis phase, became critical cohesion.

These differences show that the temporal coordination of the three theoretical levels (neural, social, and institutional) is a key factor in the durability of cohesion. In other words, if governments and the media can recognize the emotional rhythm of society and harmonize their messages with it, the likelihood of sustained cohesion increases significantly.

Explanatory Conclusion

The observed difference between Iran and Israel, rather than being a sign of two completely conflicting logics, reflects a different calibration of the three levels: "The

combination of "Threat plus reassurance and the unity narrative" in Iran strengthened the context for transforming emotional surges into normative trust." In Israel, "Behavioral normalization plus the quantification of threat" built a powerful cohesion during the combat phase; however, after the war, with the activation of the accountability circuit, it shifted into a phase of critical cohesion. This explanation is consistent with neuro-based assumptions regarding the role of the BNST in chronic threats and with the predictions of Social Identity Theory regarding the post-crisis phase (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 14).

6. Policy Implications and Intervention Design Based on the "Strategic Theory of Cohesion in Political Neuroscience"

6.1. Strategic Principles

- Alongside every warning message, objective examples of reassurance and efficacy must be provided to regulate arousal and curb emotional exhaustion.
- The official narrative should rely on an inclusive "We" and low-cost rituals of solidarity to strengthen in-group boundaries and diminish micro-fissures.
- A limited number of credible and consistent spokespersons should be selected to maintain source stability and ensure the consistency of institutional discourse.
- The timing of messages must be harmonized with the audience's emotional rhythm: shock should be paired with "The next action," stabilization with a unified narrative, and normalization with transparent summation.

6.2. Risk Communication Design in Three Phases

A) Shock

- Initial messages should be short, precise, and actionable to transform inaction into purposeful behavior.
- Exaggeration and temporal ambiguity must be avoided to prevent chronic vague threats and to stop the intensification of anticipatory anxiety.

B) Stabilization

- A narrative of "Efficacy and solidarity" should be formulated to translate shared feelings into a norm of compliance.
- Simple, trackable instructions should be published alongside periodic reports to strengthen civil discipline.

C) Normalization

- Achievements and costs must be summarized honestly to convert emotional support into institutional trust.
- The roadmap for normalizing the national environment should be announced in stages to increase perceptual predictability and sustain cohesion.

6.3. Institutional Architecture of Message and Decision

- A joint communication command center with a coherent message calendar should be established to reduce timing discrepancies and informational contradictions.
- Spokesperson roles should be differentiated into security-operational, public services, and media coordination to reduce the audience's cognitive load and strengthen trust.
- Short and regular windows of accountability should be planned to limit the field for rumors and stabilize informational authority.

6.4. Symbols and Unity Rituals

- Non-political appreciation of service groups should be institutionalized to strengthen shared symbols and stabilize a sense of belonging.
- Short, real-life narratives with verifiable data should be published so that storytelling relies on shared experience and sustains emotional resonance.

6.5. Media and Social Network Management

- A roadmap for responding to rumors with ready-made "One-liner" responses should be developed to reduce the cost of misinformation and resolve communication ambiguity.
- The ratio of messages within the 24-hour cycle must be calibrated so that, alongside every piece of threat news, a piece of reassuring news and an example of unity are also published, guiding the emotional path toward cooperation.

6.6. Ethics and Rights in Crisis Communication

- The principle of minimum truthfulness should be observed so that "What we know/what we do not know" is stated transparently and institutional trust is not eroded.

- The privacy of ordinary individuals should be respected so that narratives rely on collective and institutional data, and the legitimacy of discourse is preserved.
- Trans-factional symbols of unity should be chosen so that the internal boundary of "Us/Them" does not emerge and internal cohesion is not undermined.

6.7. Monitoring and Recalibration

- The portfolio of messages, identity, and institutions should be monitored regularly so that any decline in the share of reassurance or compliance is detected in time and message calibration can be readjusted.
- Action thresholds should be predetermined so that necessary changes to the narrative and instructions can be implemented without delay and the path from stabilization to normalization does not deviate.

6.8. Risk Scenarios and Boundary Conditions

- Under ambiguous and prolonged threat, verifiable reassurance messages and phased time horizons should be increased to reduce ambiguity and strengthen perceived efficacy.
- In cases of sudden escalation or multiple concurrent events, communication should be conducted only through anchor spokespersons to prevent message interference and preserve audience absorption capacity.
- Under conditions of narrative polarization, political labeling should be avoided, and the focus on shared civic duties should be maintained to strengthen critical cohesion.

6.9. Executive Summary

- Alongside every warning, the government should provide a verifiable sign of reassurance, strengthen the "We" narrative through inclusive rituals, maintain consistent spokespersons, and publish transparent, periodic reports so that institutional trust stabilizes and cohesion becomes sustainable.
- A daily monitoring system should be established, and whenever declines in indicators are observed, the composition of messages and instructions should be recalibrated to prevent the gradual erosion of cohesion.

Conclusion

The "Strategic Theory of Cohesion in Political Neuroscience" sought to establish a clear and measurable link among the neurocognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive levels, and to show how societies can move beyond the short-term surge of support in the shock phase and, through the calibrated coexistence of warning with signals of reassurance/efficacy, through an inclusive "We" narrative, and through transparent and accountable institutional discourse, achieve durable normative cohesion. The comparative study of the 12-day war between Iran and Israel, as a conceptual testing framework, showed that different calibrations of these three levels can lead to distinct patterns in the durability and configuration of cohesion and, through this, offer concrete policy implications for the design of crisis communication, the timing of messages, and the institutional architecture of spokespersonship.

The main added value of this research lies in its temporalization of the path from shock to stabilization to normalization and in its definition of operational, monitorable indicators. This feature makes it especially useful for policymaking under threat, because policymakers can, by monitoring the balance of threat versus reassurance messages, signs of shared identity, and indicators of compliance/institutional trust, identify in a timely manner the points at which narratives and instructions should be recalibrated and thereby prevents the gradual erosion of cohesion. At the same time, the emphasis on the theoretical/protocol-based nature of this version makes clear that the next step should be the empirical implementation of the protocol on multi-source and time-sensitive data, so that the assumed causal links may be tested more precisely and the predictive capacity of the theory assessed across different environments. Through this gradual path, the theory can contribute to both the growth of the scholarly literature and the improvement in the quality of crisis communication governance, while recalibrating the relationship between threat and reassurance in favor of the durability of national cohesion.

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