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# Ideology

## Its Resurgence in Social, Personality, and Political Psychology

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**ABSTRACT**—*We trace the rise, fall, and resurgence of political ideology as a topic of research in social, personality, and political psychology. For over 200 years, political belief systems have been classified usefully according to a single left–right (or liberal–conservative) dimension that, we believe, possesses two core aspects: (a) advocating versus resisting social change and (b) rejecting versus accepting inequality. There have been many skeptics of the notion that most people are ideologically inclined, but recent psychological evidence suggests that left–right differences are pronounced in many life domains. Implicit as well as explicit preferences for tradition, conformity, order, stability, traditional values, and hierarchy—versus those for progress, rebelliousness, chaos, flexibility, feminism, and equality—are associated with conservatism and liberalism, respectively. Conservatives score consistently higher than liberals on measures of system justification. Furthermore, there are personality and lifestyle differences between liberals and conservatives as well as situational variables that induce either liberal or conservative shifts in political opinions. Our thesis is that ideological belief systems may be structured according to a left–right dimension for largely psychological reasons linked to variability in the needs to reduce uncertainty and threat.*

CONSERVATIVE, *n.* A statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.

(Bierce, 1911, pp. 54–55)

Ideology, it has been said, is like halitosis—it is something the other person has (Eagleton, 1991). Many of us believe that our adversaries are obviously afflicted with ideological bias, but we

find it difficult to see our own moral and political convictions as springing from anything other than good reason and sound evidence. Even those who acknowledge that they hold political or religious beliefs that might be deemed ideological may be reluctant to embrace a psychological explanation for the roots of those beliefs. This difficulty confronted William James (1902) when he took on *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and found it prudent to offer this warning:

When I handle [religious phenomena] biologically and psychologically as if they were mere curious facts of individual history, some of you may think it a degradation of so sublime a subject, and may even suspect me, until my purpose gets more fully expressed, of deliberately seeking to discredit the religious side of life. Such a result is of course absolutely alien to my intention.

(pp. 14–15)

More than a century later, the scientific study of political and religious ideologies is no less controversial (or promising) than it was in the time of William James. Some people object to this field of study on principle, perhaps because they assume that psychologists focus on what is pathological (e.g., Will, 2003; but see Jost, 2006).

In this article, we trace the rise, fall, and resurgence of ideology as a legitimate topic of social-scientific investigation. After briefly recounting the historical origins of the concept of ideology, we propose that social and political attitudes may be structured according to a left–right dimension for primarily psychological (rather than logical or philosophical) reasons. Next, we review recent research on personality and individual differences, including implicit and explicit value preferences and dispositional tendencies that underlie specific ideological convictions. We then consider situational variables that induce either conservative shift or liberal shift in political opinions (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a, 2003b), and we conclude by discussing the psychological foundations of left–right differences more generally.

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY

The concept of ideology originated in the late 18th century and was first used by Antoine Destutt de Tracy, a French Enlightenment philosopher, to capture the *science of ideas*, a discipline that we would now call the sociology of knowledge. The term was later adopted by Marx and Engels and used in two different senses, both of which are still familiar: (a) a value-neutral sense, in which ideology refers to any abstract, internally coherent system of belief or meaning, and (b) a more critical sense in which the term captures propagandistic belief systems that are typically misleading and systematically distorted.<sup>1</sup> According to the first conception, which has pervaded the social and behavioral sciences since the early 1960s, ideological belief systems are characterized by stability, consistency, logic, and political sophistication (Allport, 1962; Converse, 1964; Gerring, 1997). In the second, more Marxist conception, ideology need not possess any of these features; instead, it has a motivational flavor that reflects a basic orientation for or against the existing social system (Elster, 1982). Specifically, ideology is seen either as a system-serving illusion—"the way a system . . . or even a whole society . . . rationalizes itself" (Knight, 2006, p. 619)—or, conversely, as the inspirational basis for revolutionary activity.

The first conception of ideology as a "relatively benign 'organizing device'" (Knight, 2006, p. 622) appears to have led, at least temporarily, to a dead end in social-scientific scholarship. By equating ideology with political sophistication, researchers were obliged to interpret evidence of attitudinal and behavioral inconsistency as indicating that most citizens lack ideological capacity and conviction (Bishop, 2005; Converse, 1964; McGuire, 1985/1999). Jost (2006) argued that this conclusion was too extreme and that people generally do think, feel, and behave in ideologically meaningful ways, even if they are not perfectly articulate about their ideological proclivities. This fits with Mills's (1960/1968) observation that, "any political reflection that is of possible political significance is *ideological*: in its terms policies, institutions, men of power are criticized or approved" (p. 130).

There are signs that, after a long hiatus, research interest in the second, more critical conception of ideology as a motivated, system-serving belief system is making a comeback. Theories of system justification and social dominance, for example, both address "the manner in which consensually endorsed system-justifying ideologies (or legitimizing myths) contribute to the stability of oppressive and hierarchically organized social relations among groups" (Jost & Sidanius, 2004, p. 11). This focus reestablishes contact with critical Marxian and feminist traditions in which ideology is yoked to specific social systems, either as an affirmation of the societal status quo (e.g., a conservative or reactionary ideology) or in opposition to it (a progressive or

revolutionary ideology; see also Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Eagleton, 1991; Elster, 1982; MacKinnon, 1989). Historically, these two political stances have been associated with the right and the left, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

The possibility that we explore in this article is that ideological belief systems such as liberalism and conservatism acquire coherence and structure from psychological needs, motives, and constraints that vary both situationally and dispositionally. Such an account is probably less restrictive than the Marxian conception of ideology as false consciousness, but it does suggest that belief systems should be understood as social and psychological products, rather than as purely logical or philosophical forms (see also Tomkins, 1963). We first discuss some of the manifest differences in ideological content between left and right, and then elaborate on the psychological bases for those differences.

## THE LEFT–RIGHT DISTINCTION: CORE DIMENSIONS

The political use of the left–right spatial metaphor originates with the seating arrangements of the French Legislative Assembly at the time of the 1789 revolution. The Feuillants, who supported the ancient regime, sat on the right side of the chamber, whereas the Montagnards, who opposed the regime, sat on the left (e.g., Bobbio, 1996; Laponce, 1981). Subsequently, the *right-wing* label has come to represent political views that are conservative, supportive of the status quo, and hierarchical in nature, whereas *left-wing* views connote progressive social change and egalitarian ideals. In previous centuries, conservatives were strenuous defenders of the church and the crown, whereas liberals, progressives, and radicals challenged the supremacy of those institutions. Today, conservatives still venerate religious traditions and authorities more than progressives do, and they also hold more favorable attitudes toward economic elites and the capitalist system in general (Jost, 2006; Jost, Blount, Pfeffer, & Hunyady, 2003).<sup>3</sup>

Definitions of the two poles were offered by Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton, and Linz (1954/1962) in the *Handbook of Social Psychology*:

By left we shall mean advocating social change in the direction of greater equality—political, economic or social; by right we shall

<sup>2</sup>According to classical Marxist theory, ideological orientations are derived from social-class positions in a manner that is consistent with self-interest. This assumption, however, has not held up well in terms of the empirical evidence. Working-class conservatism and upper-class liberalism are both common phenomena that are better explained by an uncertainty-threat model of political ideology than by a class-based analysis (Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003b).

<sup>3</sup>We do not mean to suggest that a single (bipolar) left–right or liberal–conservative dimension is the only sensible way of drawing ideological distinctions or that every political or religious belief can be located on this continuum. The fact is that the single dimension works remarkably well in predicting other thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Jost, 2006; Knight, 1999), but this does not mean that a multidimensional analysis of ideology would be unproductive.

<sup>1</sup>The second usage is more restrictive than the first in that it excludes, for instance, scientific beliefs from being considered ideological.

TABLE 1

*Implicit and Explicit Attitudes: Means and Simultaneous Prediction of Political Orientation for Five Value Comparisons*

Value comparison	N	Implicit attitude			Explicit attitude			Simultaneous regression predicting political orientation		
		M	SD	ES (d)	M	SD	ES (d)	Implicit ( $\beta$ )	Explicit ( $\beta$ )	R <sup>2</sup>
Order–chaos	1,629	0.70	0.44	1.60	1.74	1.41	1.23	.124	.131	4.5%
Conforming–rebellious	1,411	0.51	0.51	1.00	−0.10	1.70	−0.06	.093	.322	13.5%
Stable–flexible	1,348	0.01	0.51	0.02	−0.74	1.69	−0.44	.190	.131	6.9%
Tradition–progress	1,592	−0.24	0.48	−0.50	−0.72	1.69	−0.43	.115	.234	9.1%
Traditional values–feminism	1,403	−0.28	0.51	−0.55	−0.75	1.98	−0.38	.228	.509	46.0%

**Note.** Positive means for IAT and self-report indicate a preference for the first concept compared to the second. Simultaneous regressions include both implicit and explicit attitudes predicting self-reported political orientation. All beta weights for simultaneous regressions were significant ( $ps < .01$ ).

Implicit = Implicit Association Test (IAT); Explicit = 7-point self-reported preference item from 1 (*strongly prefer A to B*) to 7 (*strongly prefer B to A*); ES = Effect size of Cohen's  $d$  reflecting discrepancy from no preference.

mean supporting a traditional more or less hierarchical social order, and opposing change toward equality. (p. 1135)

Remarkably, this description is as apt today as it was over 50 years ago. It corresponds closely to the two core dimensions of the left–right (or liberal–conservative) distinction proposed by Jost, Glaser, et al. (2003a, 2003b), namely (a) advocating versus resisting social change and (b) accepting versus rejecting inequality.

Although some ideological differences are historically and culturally specific, these core dimensions are relatively stable and enduring, and they provide structure to ideological thinking. Resistance to change and acceptance of inequality have been intertwined since the Middle Ages, as Western societies have moved incrementally toward greater equality. Thus, progress has meant increased egalitarianism, whereas resistance to change has generally been associated with maintenance of traditional, more hierarchical forms of social organization.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, ideology brings these two dimensions together into a causal narrative or theory that guides political action: Either one advocates for social change to bring about increased egalitarianism, or one justifies existing forms of inequality in order to maintain the status quo.<sup>5</sup>

### LEFT–RIGHT DIFFERENCES IN IMPLICIT PREFERENCES

There is substantial evidence that liberals and conservatives differ in their explicit attitudes concerning the importance of tradition and order versus social change (Conover & Feldman, 1981; Kerlinger, 1984; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Recently, we have found that these differences emerge even in implicit or

automatic associations. This finding is important because it suggests either that left–right proclivities stem from basic, underlying preferences that are apolitical in nature or, alternatively, that the adoption of specific ideologies leads people to internalize a host of extremely general attitudes concerning stability versus change and hierarchy versus equality. In either case, examining the structure of implicit attitudes suggests a new way of investigating ideological constraint. In five related studies ( $N$ s ranged from 1,348 to 1,629), we assessed implicit preferences using the Implicit Association Test (IAT; for a review, see Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2006). Participants were recruited and randomly assigned to studies through the research site for Project Implicit (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/>), where they reported their political orientation on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly liberal*) to 7 (*strongly conservative*).

We examined respondents' implicit and explicit preferences for values such as tradition versus progress, conformity versus rebelliousness, order versus chaos, stability versus flexibility, and traditional values versus feminism (see Table 1). As illustrated in Figure 1, participants on average showed strong implicit preferences for order over chaos (Cohen's  $d = 1.60$ ) and for conforming over rebellious ( $d = 1.00$ ), but the magnitude of these preferences increased with participants' degree of self-reported conservatism:  $r(1480) = .17$  and  $r(1216) = .21$ , respectively.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, liberals tended to show implicit preferences for flexibility over stability and progress over tradition, whereas conservatives tended to show weaker or opposite preferences. Again, we observed linear effects,  $r(1164) = .23$  and  $r(1458) = .22$ , respectively, with strong liberals exhibiting the most robust preferences for flexibility and progress ( $ds = -0.20, -0.77$ ) and strong conservatives showing the most robust preferences for stability and tradition ( $ds = 0.33, 0.17$ ).

The largest difference between liberals and conservatives emerged for the comparison that included both of the core dimensions (resistance to change and acceptance of inequality),

<sup>4</sup>There are some exceptions—presumably including former Communist states—to the notion that resistance to change is generally associated with acceptance rather than rejection of inequality (see Greenberg & Jonas, 2003; Thorisdottir, Jost, Liviatan, & Shrout, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>It is speculative but potentially interesting to note that the motivational sequence concerning the desire for change/stability and equality/inequality may be reversed for leftists and rightists.

<sup>6</sup>All statistical differences reported in this section are reliable at  $p < .001$ .

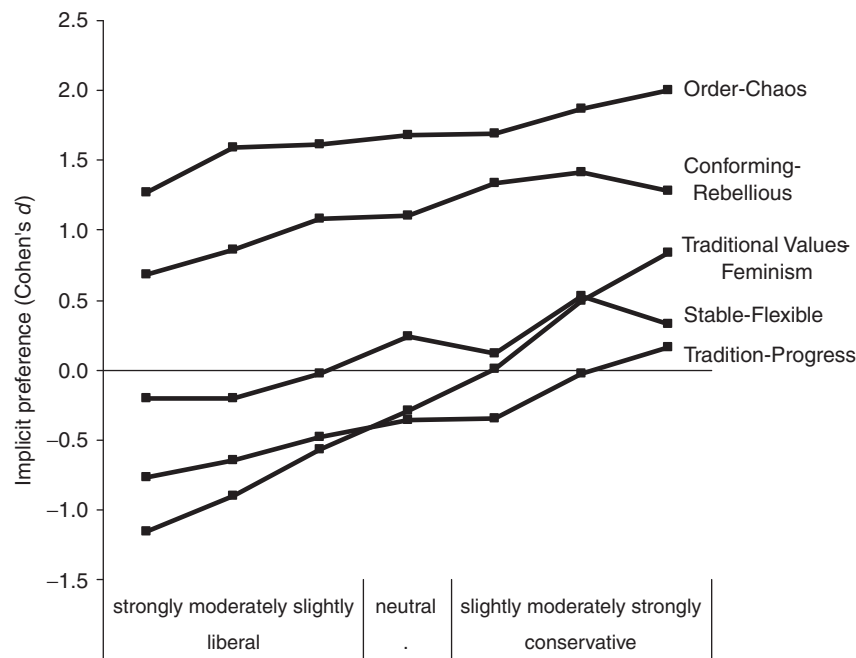


Fig. 1. Implicit preferences for five values pertaining to tradition versus change by self-reported political orientation.

namely, traditional values versus feminism,  $r(1216) = .55$ . Whereas conservatives—especially strong conservatives ( $d = 0.84$ )—implicitly favored traditional values, liberals—especially strong liberals ( $d = -1.16$ )—implicitly favored feminism. In all five studies, both implicit and explicit preferences uniquely predicted political orientation in a simultaneous regression (see Table 1). That is, implicit preferences accounted for significant variance in political orientation even after partialing the variance in political orientation accounted for by explicit, self-reported preferences.

Prior evidence indicates that liberals place a higher value on achieving social and economic equality through policies such as affirmative action, welfare, social security, and equal-rights legislation (Bobbio, 1996; Kerlinger, 1984; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). At an implicit level, too, liberals hold significantly more egalitarian attitudes than do conservatives (Cunningham, Nezlek, & Banaji, 2004; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Nosek et al., 2007).

Data based on many thousands of Project Implicit respondents show that although people generally have implicit preferences for higher status groups over lower status groups, such as straight over gay, white over black, light skin over dark skin, and “others” over Arabs, liberals show more egalitarian preferences than conservatives do (see Fig. 2). A review by Nosek et al. (2007) of large datasets ( $N$ s ranging from 28,816 to 732,881) concluded that conservatives possess consistently stronger implicit and explicit preferences than do liberals for each of these higher status groups ( $\eta^2$  range = .006–.126).

The fact that political orientation (measured with a single self-report item) correlates with a variety of implicit and explicit preferences suggests that respondents’ cognitive systems are

more ideologically structured (or constrained) than previous generations of sociologists and political scientists have assumed (see Jost, 2006). That is, ideological differences between liberals (or leftists) and conservatives (or rightists) are psychologically (as well as politically) meaningful. The data on implicit preferences provide new evidence that trade-offs concerning tradition versus social change and equality versus inequality are at the heart of ideological differences between the left and the right (Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003a, 2003b). As Ambrose Bierce (1911, pp. 54–55) noted in the epigram cited earlier, conservatives are “enamored of existing evils,” whereas liberals are more eager to “replace them with others.”

### POLITICAL CONSERVATISM AS A SYSTEM-JUSTIFYING IDEOLOGY

To the extent that political conservatives are motivated, at least in part, by the desire to maintain the societal status quo, resist activist attempts to change it, and rationalize existing social and economic inequality in society, they should exhibit stronger system-justification tendencies in general (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). The point is not that liberals and moderates lack the system-justification motive—they, too, prefer to think favorably about their nation and most of its institutions (e.g., marriage, the nuclear family, government, industry, and capitalism; see also Jost & Hunyady, 2005, p. 264).<sup>7</sup> Even strong liberals show implicit preferences for order over chaos and for conformity over

<sup>7</sup>Revolutionary leftists, on the other hand, may engage only in justification of an alternative (utopian) society and not the existing regime. Right-wing extremists may also criticize the current state of affairs, but their ideological stake

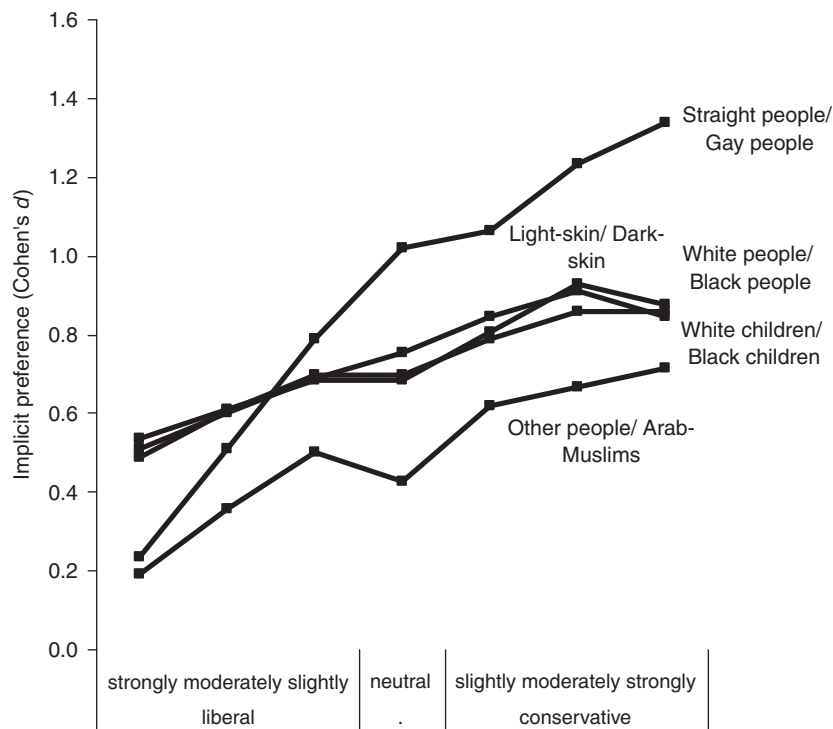


Fig. 2. Implicit preferences for five social-group contrasts by self-reported political orientation.

rebelliousness (see Fig. 1). However, all other things being equal, people who are drawn to conservative (vs. liberal) ideologies would be expected to endorse system-justifying attitudes more enthusiastically.

We examined this hypothesis with data from six samples of introductory psychology students at New York University ( $N = 2,539$ ). All samples completed Jost and Thompson's (2000) economic system-justification scale (17 items, including "Economic positions are legitimate reflections of people's achievements"); Jost, Blount, et al.'s (2003) fair-market ideology scale (6 items, including "Common or 'normal' business practices must be fair, or they would not survive"); and 7 items taken from Kluegel and Smith's (1986) opposition-to-equality scale (e.g.,

"Incomes should *not* be made more equal since that would keep people from dreaming of someday becoming a real success"). Three of the six samples also completed Kay and Jost's (2003) general or diffuse system-justification scale (8 items, including "In general, the American political system operates as it should"). Participants also reported their political orientation on a scale ranging from  $-5$  (*extremely liberal*) to  $+5$  (*extremely conservative*).

Our results, summarized in Table 2, supported the theoretical expectation that political conservatism would be significantly and positively associated with all forms of system justification. The strongest correlations were obtained for Kay and Jost's (2003) general system-justification scale, with  $r$ s ranging from

TABLE 2

Correlations Between Political Orientation and Four Measures of System Justification in Six Samples

Measure of system justification	Spring 2004	Fall 2004	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Spring 2006	Fall 2006
Economic system justification (Jost & Thompson, 2000)	.40*** ( $n = 340$ )	.41*** ( $n = 501$ )	.32*** ( $n = 382$ )	.42*** ( $n = 419$ )	.47*** ( $n = 407$ )	.36*** ( $n = 490$ )
Fair market ideology (Jost, Blount, et al., 2003)	.40*** ( $n = 338$ )	.40*** ( $n = 495$ )	.36*** ( $n = 380$ )	.37*** ( $n = 414$ )	.42*** ( $n = 401$ )	.32*** ( $n = 480$ )
Opposition to equality (Kluegel & Smith, 1986)	.30*** ( $n = 340$ )	.35*** ( $n = 501$ )	.36*** ( $n = 382$ )	.36*** ( $n = 417$ )	.42*** ( $n = 401$ )	.35*** ( $n = 489$ )
General system justification (Kay & Jost, 2003)	n/a	n/a	n/a	.46*** ( $n = 419$ )	.43*** ( $n = 407$ )	.42*** ( $n = 490$ )

Note. Entries are zero-order correlation coefficients (with  $n$ s in parentheses); n/a = not administered.

\*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).



.42 to .46, and for Jost and Thompson's (2000) economic system-justification scale, with  $r$ s ranging from .32 to .47. Correlations between political orientation and scores on the other two measures were also reliable, with  $r$ s ranging from .32 to .42 on the fair-market ideology scale and from .30 to .42 on the opposition-to-equality items ( $p$ s < .001 in all cases). Taken as a whole, this evidence confirms that system-justifying attitudes are more strongly held by conservatives than liberals and that, in this context, the acceptance of inequality is indeed a hallmark of conservatism (see also Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Blount, et al., 2003; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003b; Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

### PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES UNDERLYING POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Why would some people show stronger implicit and explicit preferences for social change, egalitarianism, and system criticism, whereas others prefer tradition, hierarchy, and system justification? One answer comes from personality psychology (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005; Block & Block, 2006). Drawing on decades of theory and research since the pioneering work of Adorno et al. (1950) and Tomkins (1963), Carney, Jost, and Gosling (in press) concluded that a number of general traits and values are related to political orientation. Liberals, at least in North America and Western Europe, are generally more open-minded in their pursuit of creativity, novelty, and diversity, whereas conservatives' lives are more orderly, conventional, and neat (Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003a, 2003b; Thorisdottir et al., 2007). These differences can be summarized succinctly using two of the Big Five personality dimensions, namely Openness to Experience, which is higher among liberals, and Conscientiousness, which is higher among conservatives (Jost, 2006). In addition to differences on self-report personality inventories, we have found that differences between liberals and conservatives emerge on a wide range of more subtle attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, lending further support to the notion that ideology is an important constraining or liberating factor in people's everyday lives.

#### Everyday Preferences and Personal Activities

On the assumption that political differences are more than "skin deep," we investigated the relationship between ideology and personal preferences and activities in two large samples ( $N$ s = 609 and 762) of undergraduates at the University of Texas. Data were collected in 2000 and 2004 as part of a broader study of lifestyle activities, preferences, attitudes, and values.<sup>8</sup> Partici-

in "preservationism" often means that the changes they favor are reactionary or retrograde in nature (Lipset & Raab, 1978).

<sup>8</sup>We thank Kate Niederhoffer and James Pennebaker for making these data available. Because the broader study was unrelated to political orientation, the vast majority of items were irrelevant to the current analyses, making significance adjustments (e.g., by Bonferroni) overly conservative. The correlations in Tables 3 and 4 were selected on theoretical grounds, but it should be borne in

pants responded to three items that were used to determine political orientation, including a liberal-conservative self-placement item and two separate items tapping attitudes toward Democrats (reverse-scored) and Republicans (cf. Knight, 1999). The three items formed highly reliable composites ( $\alpha$ s = .84 and .91 in 2000 and 2004, respectively).

In examining the everyday preferences and personal activities of liberals and conservatives, we focused on attitudinal stimuli that were most related to dimensions of openness and conscientiousness, such as artistic and creative endeavors and conventional adherence to social norms, as well as traditionalism versus resistance to change, acceptance of inequality, and system justification (Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003a, 2003b). The results,

**TABLE 3**

*Self-Reported Lifestyle Correlates of Political Orientation in 2000 and 2004*

Variables	Correlation with liberalism-conservatism	
	2000 ( $N = 609$ )	2004 ( $N = 762$ )
Openness, tolerance, and sensation-seeking		
Liberals are more favorable toward . . .		
Atheists	-.22***	n/a
Poetry	-.17***	n/a
Asian food	-.15***	n/a
Jazz	-.14***	n/a
Street people	-.12**	n/a
Libertarians	n/a	-.33***
Tattoos	n/a	-.21***
Foreign films	n/a	-.17***
Erotica	n/a	-.15***
Big cities	n/a	-.11**
Recreational drugs	n/a	-.10**
Sex	n/a	-.09*
Foreign travel	n/a	-.08*
Conventionalism, traditionalism, and adherence to social norms		
Conservatives are more favorable toward . . .		
Fraternities/sororities	.27***	.27***
Religious people	.24***	n/a
Sport utility vehicles	.23***	.33***
Christians	.22***	n/a
High school	.17***	n/a
Fishing	.17***	n/a
Alcohol	.15***	n/a
The idea of getting married	.14***	n/a
Their childhood	.14***	.13***
Watching television	.13**	.09*
The idea of having children	.10*	n/a
Prayer	n/a	.41***
Newspaper subscriptions	n/a	.17***
Their father	n/a	.16***
Sports	n/a	.16***
Brand logos	n/a	.13***

**Note.** Entries are zero-order correlation coefficients; n/a = not administered. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

**TABLE 4**  
*Self-Reported Attitudinal Correlates of Political Orientation in 2000 and 2004*

Variables	Correlation with liberalism–conservatism	
	2000 ( <i>N</i> = 609)	2004 ( <i>N</i> = 762)
Social change and egalitarianism		
Liberals are more favorable toward . . .		
Remedying social injustices	-.18***	n/a
Gay unions	n/a	-.48***
Welfare	n/a	-.38***
Universal health care	n/a	-.34***
Feminists	n/a	-.30***
Environmentalists	n/a	-.30***
Vegetarians	n/a	-.25***
Affirmative action	n/a	-.23***
System justification		
Conservatives are more favorable toward . . .		
Big corporations	.29***	.33***
The idea of women staying at home	.26***	n/a
The rich	.20***	n/a
Marriage	.18***	n/a
God	.17***	n/a
Politicians	.11**	n/a
Government	.10*	.34***
Police	.08*	.17***
Military	n/a	.41***
The state they live in	n/a	.38***
Most Americans	n/a	.26***
The U.S. flag	n/a	.23***

**Note.** Entries are zero-order correlation coefficients; n/a = not administered.  
 \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

summarized in Tables 3 and 4, indicate that political orientation significantly constrained attitudes toward other variables. For instance, liberalism was associated with an appreciation of novel and different experiences (including foreign food, film, and travel) and reflective forms of artistic expression (poetry and jazz). Liberals were also more favorably disposed toward libertarians, atheists, street people, countercultural forms of physical expression (e.g., tattoos), and pleasure-seeking (e.g., sex, erotica, and recreational drugs).

Conservative preferences were somewhat more conventional, especially given the context of Texan student life. They held more favorable attitudes toward fraternities and sororities as well as the ideas of getting married and having children (see Table 3). In general, conservatives opted for more mainstream activities (including sports, fishing, reading the newspaper, and watching television) and expressed more approval of their fa-

thers. Conservatism was also associated with increased commitment to religious traditions such as prayer.

Consistent with a system-justification analysis of liberal-conservative differences, liberals were significantly more likely to endorse counterfactual egalitarian policies (e.g., gay unions, universal health care), to hold favorable attitudes about anti-system activist groups (e.g., feminists, environmentalists), and to be concerned about social injustice. Conservatives, by contrast, were more enthusiastic about rich people and the idea of women staying at home. As expected, conservatives were more approving than liberals of a wide range of institutions, authorities, and symbols that are associated with the preservation of the status quo, including the military, police, government, politicians, big corporations, and the U.S. flag (see Table 4). These findings provide further evidence of the connection between political conservatism and system justification (see also Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003b; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Although these findings are consistent with previous research and theory, they should be interpreted cautiously due to the post hoc (albeit theoretically driven) selection of variables from data sets that were not originally designed to examine political ideology.

### Needs to Manage Uncertainty and Threat

The possibility that ideological preferences are derived partly from the psychological needs of individuals and groups has been neglected by social scientists for decades, apparently because they have discounted the possibility that individuals have genuine ideological preferences and constraints (Jost, 2006). We argue that ideological differences between right and left may emerge, at least in part, for psychological reasons. Stability and hierarchy inherently provide reassurance and structure. Social change and equality, on the other hand, imply greater chaos and unpredictability—especially with respect to large social systems but also to small social systems such as families.

Adopting a meta-analytic approach using data from 12 different countries, Jost, Glaser, et al. (2003a, 2003b) found that several epistemic needs or motives to reduce uncertainty were associated with political orientation. Intolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty avoidance, and needs for order, structure, and closure were all positively associated with conservatism (or negatively associated with liberalism). Openness to new experiences and integrative complexity were negatively associated with conservatism (positively associated with liberalism). Existential motives pertaining to the management of threat also predicted political orientation. The two largest effect sizes were observed for death anxiety (weighted mean  $r = .50$ ) and system threat (weighted mean  $r = .47$ ), both of which were positively associated with conservatism. Fear of threat and loss was also positively associated with conservatism, and self-esteem was weakly and negatively associated with conservatism.

Although informative, this meta-analytic approach had several limitations. Uncertainty and threat variables were not

mind that they are potentially subject to Type I error. Complete correlation tables are presented in an online appendix (<http://briannosek.com/jng2008>).



present in the same data sets, so it was not possible to determine whether they contributed independently to political orientation. In addition, reliance on how the results of previously published studies had been reported made it difficult to eliminate an alternative hypothesis suggested by Greenberg and Jonas (2003), namely that heightened needs to manage uncertainty and threat would be associated with becoming more ideologically extreme in either direction, left or right. Finally, some of the dependent variables included in the meta-analysis (such as right-wing authoritarianism and social-dominance orientation) encompass authoritarian characteristics that may be separable from conservatism (Crowson, Thoma, & Hestevold, 2005), at least in principle if not in practice, given that conservatism and authoritarianism are highly intercorrelated (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Bonanno & Jost, 2006).

These limitations were addressed in three studies conducted by Jost et al. (2007). Specifically, they administered items measuring uncertainty avoidance (e.g., intolerance of ambiguity, openness, and need for order) and threat management (e.g., perceptions of a dangerous world, system threat, and death anxiety) and created second-order latent variables based on multiple scale indicators for each psychological variable. The authors then investigated the simultaneous, unique effects of uncertainty avoidance and threat management on both political orientation and political extremity. The results were consistent across samples drawn from Texas, Massachusetts, and New York, despite geographical and other differences. Uncertainty avoidance and threat management each contributed positively and independently to conservatism (vs. liberalism), accounting for 28%–38% of the statistical variance in political orientation. Furthermore, there was no evidence that heightened epistemic or existential needs were associated with increased ideological extremity. Rather, uncertainty avoidance was associated with holding centrist (as well as conservative) views, and threat management was unrelated to ideological extremity.

### PREDICTORS OF CONSERVATIVE SHIFT

Not all psychological predictors of political ideology are dispositional in nature (Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003a, 2003b). Events such as 9/11 heighten epistemic and existential needs to manage uncertainty and threat and can produce a general “conservative shift” (see Bishop, 2005, pp. 91–114; Jones, 2003). Psychological studies confirm what many recent observers of American public opinion have noticed, namely, that threats to the system and to one’s own mortality increase the appeal of conservative leaders and opinions compared with liberal leaders and opinions. Reminders of 9/11 and mortality salience caused even liberal college students to show increased support for President George W. Bush and his conservative policies and decreased support for liberal alternatives (Cohen, Ogilvie, Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2005; Jost, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2004; Landau et al., 2004; Willer, 2004). Similarly, increasing the

salience of terrorism led people in Germany to endorse more conservative, system-justifying attitudes ( $d = 0.47$ ; Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007). These findings are consistent with those of a Spanish study conducted before and after the 2004 Madrid terrorist attack (Echebarria & Fernández, 2006).

A longitudinal study by Bonanno and Jost (2006) found that 38% of people who were in or near the World Trade Center on 9/11 reported becoming “more conservative” in the 18 months following the attacks, which was triple the number who reported becoming more liberal. Even people who voted for Democrat Al Gore for president in 2000 were more likely to report conservative (40%) than liberal (12%) shifts. Bonanno and Jost found that survivors’ symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression were positively associated with self-reported conservatism and the likelihood of becoming more conservative in response to the attacks. Threats to the status quo need not be as direct as a terrorist attack or as threatening to one’s mortality in order to precipitate conservative shift. Rapid social change and the fear of social decline (“things are going to hell in a hand basket”) have also been found to make people more conservative (Eibach, 2005). As Huntington famously noted, “When the foundations of society are threatened, the conservative ideology reminds men of the necessity of some institutions and desirability of the existing ones” (1957, pp. 460–461).

### PREDICTORS OF LIBERAL SHIFT

Less research sheds light on situational factors that contribute to liberal shifts, but some evidence suggests that experiences such as education and travel—which presumably make uncertainty less aversive and the unknown less threatening—increase one’s affinity for progressive, egalitarian ideas (Bobo & Licari, 1989; Leonard, 1964; Lipset, 1982). As mentioned above, liberalism is correlated with an affinity for new and different experiences, including foreign travel and culture (see Table 3). Similarly, Carney et al. (in press) found that the bedrooms of liberals are more likely than the bedrooms of conservatives to contain travel tickets, books on travel, and international maps. Future research would do well to identify specific causal mechanisms (e.g., increased familiarity with the experience of uncertainty) that explain the nature of the associations among education, travel, and liberalism.

There is also some informal evidence that holding an occupation that requires one to understand and appreciate multiple, potentially conflicting arguments or sources of evidence increases the likelihood of liberal shift. For instance, Lipset (1982) studied the political opinions of experienced academics and found that strong liberal sympathies prevailed. A more dramatic example comes from studies of Supreme Court nominees over the past 50 years, who have moved disproportionately from conservative to more moderate and even liberal stances after becoming high-court justices. The explanation offered by Hanson and Benforado (2006) is that “The job of judging, unlike

most occupations, strongly encourages individuals to see sides of an issue that are otherwise easily ignored. And the information that emerges may help explain why juridical drift is so often leftward.” This account is consistent with our cognitive-motivational analysis of ideological differences (Jost, 2006; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003a, 2003b; Jost et al., 2007).

### IDEOLOGY IS DEAD, LONG LIVE IDEOLOGY

For more than a generation, social scientists have been skeptical that ideology is an important force in people’s lives. That skepticism may finally be coming to an end (Jost, 2006; Knight, 2006). Increasing political polarization in the U.S. between (conservative) “red” states and (liberal) “blue” states provides vivid evidence that ideology exists and matters (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2005; Shapiro & Bloch-Elkon, 2006). Furthermore, ideological self-placement on a liberalism–conservatism scale explains an astonishing 85% of the statistical variance in Democratic versus Republican voting intentions in presidential elections between 1972 and 2004 (Jost, 2006).<sup>9</sup> These findings, among others, demonstrate the power of ideology—even when measured with a single self-placement item—to predict the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals.

In this article and elsewhere (Carney et al., in press; Jost, 2006; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003a, 2003b; Thorisdottir et al., 2007), we have provided evidence that meaningful differences between the left and right do exist, especially with regard to core dimensions pertaining to stability versus change and equality versus inequality. As Bobbio (1996) noted:

‘[L]eft’ and ‘right’ are not just ideologies . . . they indicate opposing programs in relation to many problems whose solution is part of everyday political activity. These contrasts concern not only ideas, but also interests and judgments on which direction society should be moving in; they exist in all societies, and it is not apparent how they could disappear. (p. 3)

A recent flurry of studies in social, personality, and political psychology suggests that, as Tomkins (1963) argued years ago, these general ideological proclivities are rooted in basic antinomies of human nature, such as underlying needs for stability versus change, order versus complexity, familiarity versus novelty, and conformity versus creativity.

The psychological approach to the study of ideology complements historical and philosophical analyses of liberalism and conservatism as social and intellectual movements. It also builds on the work of political scientists, who have for decades stressed stability, constraint, and political sophistication as

defining characteristics of ideology. Knight (2006, p. 625) posed two major questions concerning ideology: “Is it a benign influence on democratic politics? And how far does it really penetrate into the public at large?” By returning to the key notions that ideological belief systems reflect motivational (as well as cognitive) concerns and basic orientations toward existing (and alternative) social systems, psychologists have contributed a wealth of data that should be of substantial use in answering these questions and others concerning the role of ideology in human lives.

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<sup>9</sup>One indicator of the resurgence of ideology in American politics is the fact that the correlation between ideological self-placement and political partisanship (e.g., Democratic vs. Republican) has been steadily increasing since 1972, with recent estimates of the correlation exceeding .60 (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2005).

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