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Your Lay Beliefs About Your Personality Predict Your Political Ideology

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The current research proposes that an individual's implicit self-theory affects his/her political ideology. We show that entity theorists feel greater personal control over their environment, thereby supporting conservatism. On the contrary, incremental theorists feel lower personal control, thereby supporting liberalism.

[to cite]:

JaeHwan Kwon, Claire Heeryung Kim, Dhananjay Nayakankuppam, and Adam Duhachek (2017) , "Your Lay Beliefs About Your Personality Predict Your Political Ideology", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 45, eds. Ayelet Gneezy, Vladas Griskevicius, and Patti Williams, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 727-728.

[url]:

<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1023745/volumes/v45/NA-45>

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Ideology is a subject of enormous interest with theoretical, practical and policy implications. The traditional conceptualization since the French Revolution was of political ideology lying along a single left-right dimension (derived from which side of the French Assembly Hall supporters and opponents of the status quo sat). This formulation usually contains two inter-related aspects: 1) advocating versus resisting social change and 2) rejecting versus accepting inequality (Bobbio 1996; Burek 1987; Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009). Numerous studies demonstrate a stubborn and reliable negative correlation between liberalism and conservatism (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway 2003b; Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Weber and Federico 2007; Whitley 1999).

In the current research, we provide empirical evidence that an epistemic motivation (i.e., implicit self-theory) contributes to political ideology. This is of interest because theorists have made conflicting predictions. One account based on personal control suggests that some individuals endorse conservatism because they perceive the world and individuals as fixed and unvarying (i.e., entity theorists) and this belief can increase a sense of personal control which has been shown to reduce support of big government (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, and Laurin 2008). Another possible account based on threat sensitivity, however, predicts exactly the opposite: it suggests that individuals who view the world as constantly changing (i.e., incremental theorists) will be more sensitive to changes because they view the world as consistently changing and changes are uncertain and uncertainty is threatening, which will lead them to support conservatism (Jost, Federico, and Napier 2008). These two arguments thus make opposite predictions regarding the relationship between political ideology and implicit self theories. The current research addresses this ambiguity directly.

In Experiment 1, we attempted to provide initial evidence of the association between implicit self-theory and political ideology. Participants' political ideology was measured by asking their overall political orientation, social and cultural orientation, and economic orientation using established scales (Carney, Jost, Gosling, and Potter 2008). Next, each participant's implicit self-theory was assessed using the Implicit Person Theories Measure (Levy, Stroessner, and Dweck 1998). Finally, they provided demographic information such as age, gender, race, having a child or not, and household income (HHI). We regressed political ideology on implicit self-theory after controlling for age, gender, HHI, education, race, and children variables. We found that the impact of implicit self-theory on political ideology was significant, even after the effects of demographic variables were controlled, suggesting that entity (incremental) theory is associated with conservatism (liberalism) and supporting the personal control account.

In Experiment 2, we examine the causal relationship between implicit self-theory and political ideology via the theorized underlying mechanism of personal control. Participants were randomly assigned to a single-factor (implicit self-theory: entity vs. incremental) between-participants design. First, participants were primed with implicit self-theory by reading a "mock" scientific article presenting views consistent with either entity theory or incremental theory, depending on experimental conditions. Then, they indicated their

personal control and political ideology using the same items used in Experiment 1. A one-way ANOVA on political orientation revealed that entity theorists indicated greater conservative orientations than incremental theorists. In addition, a test of mediation with 1,000 bootstrapped samples revealed that personal control mediated the effect of implicit self-theory on political orientation. These findings support the theorizing that entity theorists who perceive greater stability in the world, thus perceive greater personal control, ultimately leading to inflated conservatism.

In Experiment 3, we manipulated personal control. Upon arrival, participants were randomly assigned in a 2 (implicit self-theory: entity vs. incremental) X 3 (personal control (PC): high vs. low vs. control condition) between-participants design. After being primed with one of the implicit self-theory orientations, participants were asked to write a short essay about different topics to alter their levels of personal control (Cutright, Bettman, and Fitzsimons 2013). After then, participants indicated their political ideology using the measure from Experiment 2. A 2 X 3 ANOVA on political ideology yielded a significant interaction effect between implicit self-theory and personal control (PC hereafter), along with the main effects of implicit self-theory and of personal control. Planned analysis showed that the control PC conditions replicated the results of Experiment 2. Among entity theorists, only those in the low PC condition differed from the control PC condition in terms of their political ideology: the entity-low PC condition was significantly different from the entity-high PC condition and from the entity-control PC condition, but the entity-high PC and the entity-control PC conditions did not differ in their political ideology, suggesting that the "default" PC for entity theorists is a high level of control. In contrast, among incremental theorists only the high PC condition resulted in a difference in ideology from the control PC condition, suggesting the "default" for incremental theorists is a lower level of personal control.

In Experiment 4, we attempted to show how the documented effect of implicit self-theories on political ideology could be utilized in a political campaign. We constructed four different versions of print advertisements for a political candidate differing on a 2 (advertising copy: entity vs. incremental) X 2 (political party of the candidate: Republican vs. Democratic) between-participants factors. Participants were randomly given only one version of the four print ads and asked participants to indicate their attitudes toward the candidate, attitude certainty (capturing how certain they were about their attitudes), as well as their intention to vote for the candidate. As predicted, we found a significant interaction effect between the advertising copy and the political party of a candidate on attitude, on attitude certainty and on the intention to vote for the candidate, suggesting that fit between ad messages and political affiliation of the candidate increases persuasion.

The current research provides empirical evidence that an individual's implicit self-theory orientation influence his/her perception about personal control, which, in turn, decides his/her political ideology.

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