

Differences of liberal and conservative views on social and economic issues



Political intolerance: Liberals and conservatives on social and economic issues.**Abstract:**

In recent studies liberals and conservatives have been shown to express equal amounts of intolerance towards groups with dissimilar ideologies (Brandt et al., 2014; Crawford et al., 2017). This goes against decades of studies that show that conservatives express higher levels of intolerance compared to liberals (Sibley and Duckitt, 2008). This study explores reasons why recent studies have adopted a better methodology and issues with the vast sum of previous studies. We test participant's intolerance towards groups that have political ideologies both similar and dissimilar to their own. The results show mixed evidence both supporting and not supporting the intolerance equality claim. We look at reasons why this could be the case and present an improvement for future studies.

Introduction:

Conservative political ideologies has for decades been linked to higher levels of intolerance and prejudice compared to opposing liberal political ideologies (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). This has created the idea that liberals are also therefore more tolerant and express less prejudice. This has resulted in what looks like a 'prejudice gap' between the two ideologies (Farwell & Weiner, 2000). Recently these finding have been brought into question. New studies support that both conservative and liberal ideologies are equal in intolerance and prejudice, thus disproving the prejudice gap, towards views that don't match their own. This study explores the relationship between an individual's political ideology and their intolerance towards an out-group.

Intolerance and prejudice are closely related. Intolerance is the unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behaviour that differ from one's own. Prejudice is a preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

One issue with previous studies is that they focused around minority groups such as African Americans, homosexuals and immigrants (Sears & Henry, 2003; (Terrizzi, Shook, & Ventis, 2010; Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997). These minority groups tend to have a bias towards liberal political ideologies. This is crucial in recognising as it shows that these types of studies focus on tolerance demonstrated by liberals and conservatives towards mostly liberal groups.

The current research that has demonstrated that liberals and conservatives show equal amounts of intolerance have done so by exploring the tolerance of conservatives and liberals towards both liberal and conservative groups. It was found that liberals and conservatives express negative prejudices towards groups whose values are different from their own (Morgan, Mullen, & Skitka, 2010). In addition people who had conservative or liberal views even tended to prefer to distance themselves from others who did not share similar views (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005).

One study that explored this concept developed the ideological conflict hypothesis (ICH) (Brandt et al., 2014). The ICH proposes that people of different political views are willing to express intolerance and prejudice towards political ideologies that are not similar to their own. The ICH proposes that conservatives and liberals engage in tactics such as motivated information processing and defence against worldview-violating groups to defend their ideologies.

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Motivated information processing is when an individual is selective about information they process. Individuals will take in information that supports their worldview while filtering out and ignoring information that conflict with their worldviews, (Kunda, 1990). Research has shown that both liberals and conservatives engage in motivated information processing when presented with an opposing political ideology (Bartels, 2002; Crawford, Jussim, Cain, & Cohen, 2013).

Defence against worldview-violating groups is the need to maintain a constant worldview. This wanting of a constant worldview leads to increased intolerance towards groups whose ideologies are dissimilar to the individuals (Chambers & Melnyk, 2006). Studies have shown that both conservatives and liberals share the same level of intensity in regards to their ideologies (Skitka & Bauman, 2008).

Building on from ICH one study proposed a theory of multi-dimensional ideological conflict (Crawford et al., 2017). Previous research in this area tends to treat political ideologies as a single dimension; a subject is either liberal or conservative (Jost et al., 2003) meaning the concept of ideological conflict only had one dimension to it. However this not the case, as there is growing evidence to support that there is more then one dimension to an individuals political ideologies (Crawford et al., 2017); that is a person may have a conservative view in one area and a liberal view in another, each view is a dimension. Collectively these dimensions create the persons worldview and ideology, however they are not longer belonging to just one group, conservative or liberal.

This study looked at social and economic ideologies. Social ideology tends to refer to issues regarding personal freedoms (abortion, same-sex marriage etc) with conservatives tending to favour greater restriction and liberals favouring fewer restrictions in these areas. Economic ideology tends to refer to matters evolving the economy, with conservatives favouring less government regulations and liberals favouring greater government regulation. This study found two interesting patterns; the first is that it found support for ICH. That is both conservatives and liberals showed equal levels of intolerance towards views that were dissimilar to their own. The second finding was that liberals and conservatives, while still showing equal levels of intolerance, reported to have higher levels of conflict towards social ideologies compared to economic ideologies. Evidence supporting this notion suggest that a persons position on social issues more strongly labels them as a liberal or conservative compared to their views of economic issues (Feldman & Johnston, 2013), allowing for a greater intensity of conflict to arise when presented with dissimilar social ideologies compared to economic ideologies.

Recent studies are pointing towards two new developments in the understanding of political ideological conflict. The first is that individuals that are conservative or liberal will express equal levels of intolerance towards groups or ideas dissimilar to their own (Brandt et al., 2014). The second is that individuals can have both conservative and liberal views at the same time, but belonging to different dimensions (Crawford et al., 2017), such as social or economic. In addition to this the level of intolerance/conflict expressed is higher for social issues compared to economic.

This leads to this studies hypothesis, it is expected that the results will support ICH, that being that both liberal and conservative participants will show equal levels of intolerance towards groups with dissimilar political ideologies. Additionally it is expected to see higher levels of intolerance/conflict in the social dimension then the economic dimension.

Discussion:

In this study we explored the intolerance levels of participants who held conservative/liberal views towards groups of both similar and dissimilar views on social and economic issues. The results both supported and did not support our hypotheses. In the social domain test we found evidence in favour of our hypothesis, however in the economic domain we found evidence that contradicted our initial hypotheses.

In the social domain, our findings supported our first hypothesis; participants were found to show equal levels of intolerance towards social ideologies that were dissimilar to them. This supports the ideological conflict hypothesis (Brandt et al., 2014). As the ICH states, the possible reasons for the results found in this study is due to motivated information processing (Kunda, 1990) and defence against worldview-violating groups (Chambers & Melnyk, 2006; Skitka & Bauman, 2008). This states that when liberals or conservative form ideas on a group with political ideologies not similar to their own, they are likely to form ideas that confirm their current ideology, this typically leads to the individual forming negative views towards groups of dissimilar ideologies. This is appropriate as this study presented randomly assigned participants to an out-group with randomly assigned political ideologies, meaning that participants would either be paired to an out-group that had <https://assignbuster.com/differences-of-liberal-and-conservative-views-on-social-and-economic-issues/>

similar or dissimilar political views. Additionally to this finding, it was noted participants showed higher levels of tolerance towards groups who shared similar political ideology. This provides additional evidence in favour of the ICH, as it is expected that when a participant is presented with a similar view to their own, they should express less intolerance.

The question this brings up however is why our findings matched ICH and not the vastly large collection of studies that found conservatives to be more intolerant (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). This is explained through the methodology of this experiment. Unlike the majority of studies conducted in the meta-analysis (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008), this studied looked at the intolerance towards groups that held both liberal and conservative views. Previous studies tended to only look at the intolerance towards groups who are easily associated with liberal views (Sears & Henry, 2003; (Terrizzi, Shook, & Ventis, 2010; Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997). This experiments methodology closely matched (Brandt et al., 2014) which provides reasoning behind why the results ended up supporting ICH over the vast majority of studies conducted. However due to the large volume of studies against our hypothesis, it's important to properly address this. A large proportion of social and political psychologists identify as a liberal with mostly liberal values (Inbar & Lammers, 2012). As ICH would predict, these liberal researchers could be experiencing motivated information processing and defence against worldview-violating groups. One study found that liberal psychologists tended to investigate topics that are of greater importance to liberal ideology (Mullen, Bauman, & Skitka, 2003). So while not discrediting these previous studies, there is evidence supporting a bias within them. This

provides further evidence to why our study did not reproduce their results as well as why it is okay that it didn't.

In the economic domain, our findings did not support our first hypothesis, and gave weak evidence towards our second hypothesis. The first hypothesis that this goes against is that both liberals and conservatives will express equal levels of intolerance. Our findings show that conservatives have a much greater intolerance towards groups with dissimilar economic ideologies. The second hypothesis was that social domains would show a higher level of conflict compared to the economic domain. While this remains true for liberal participants and conservatives presented with a conservative out-group. Conservatives presented with an economically liberal out-group demonstrated a much higher level of intolerance, which goes against our second hypothesis. This could be explained if there was a skew in our sample size, this being more liberals than conservatives or vice versa. This leads to one possible error in this study, a sample bias. The target group in this experiment was university students with an average age of around 21-22. One Australian poll found that for the ages of 18-24 and 25-34, political groups with liberal ideologies (e. g. labour party and the greens) dominated over the conservative Australian liberal party (Roy Morgan, 2017). This brings up one issue with the experiment conducted, that is that we did not take into account the number of liberals compared to conservatives and thus over-looked the possibility for a sample skew. If there was a skew in the political identities of participants (favouring liberals) one reason for higher intolerance could be explained according to political conformity (Cohen, 2003). In an age group with a majority of liberal minded individuals, an

individual needs to have strong belief in their ideologies to not conform politically to the majority. So if there was a skew and the people who identified as conservative had strong conservative ideologies, this would exemplify why results showed conservatives more intolerant in economic domains. Further research is needed where the sample size is correctly identified and taken into account.

In conclusion this study found evidence that both supported and did not support our hypotheses. Over the social domain we see evidence of ICH however this is not seen in the economic domain. This could be due to a sample bias that was not taken into account by researchers. Future studies, which control and take into account any sample biases, are needed.

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