

## **What Lies Beneath: Dogmatism, Intolerance, and Political Self-Identification**

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**ABSTRACT** - How strongly do the traits of dogmatism and intolerance predict political self-identification? A predominantly Caucasian sample of 137 adults (81 women, 56 men) completed the DOG Scale (Altemeyer, 1996), the Omnibus Civil Liberties Scale (McClosky & Brill, 1983), and measures of political ideology and social desirability. Conservatives were significantly more dogmatic than were liberals and moderates; all three groups differed in tolerance, with liberals being the most tolerant and conservatives the least. Dogmatism and intolerance were significant predictors of political ideological membership, accurately categorizing 82% of liberals and conservatives and explaining between 47.8% and 64.5% of the variance in ideological membership. These data support the view of political ideology as a motivated choice and provide a simplified method for understanding political self-identification.

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Jost and colleagues have published a series of articles revisiting the notion of political ideology as a psychologically motivated construct (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). These researchers assert that ideology, particularly one's self-placement along the liberalism-conservatism dimension, is driven by psychological characteristics and motivations, rather than by political sophistication and philosophical decisions, as advocated by researchers in previous decades (see Jost et al., 2008 for a discussion of the dichotomy between the two stances). This article provides data to support Jost et al.'s position and offers a simplified method for understanding an individual's self-identification as a liberal or a conservative.

Political ideology is most frequently measured along a single dimension, with liberalism and conservatism at its left and right endpoints, respectively. According to Jost, liberalism and conservatism can be distinguished by an individual's attitude toward (1) social change and (2) equality among people (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003b). Conservatives tend to favor a preservation of the status quo and to resist new ideas, whereas liberals are more likely to seek change and to accept new ideas. Additionally, conservatives have been shown to prefer a hierarchical organization of society, scoring high on measures of social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) and right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1998), whereas liberals have been shown to support equal-rights policies and legislation, such as gay rights and subsidized healthcare (Christiansen & Lavine, 1997; Tygart, 2000).

Investigations of implicit preferences uphold this liberal-conservative pattern (Jost et al., 2008).

Early researchers (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; McClosky, 1958) suggested that these differences in liberal and conservative ideology were rooted in personality differences, and research, particularly in the last decade, has borne out these suppositions. Carney and colleagues (2008) released a set of studies demonstrating individual differences in liberal and conservative participants at self-report, non-verbal, and behavioral levels. They consistently found, in previous research and in their own comprehensive investigations, that liberals were more likely to score higher in personality characteristics associated with the Big Five's Openness to Experience, while conservatives displayed more characteristics associated with Conscientiousness. Jost et al. (2008) showed that these personality differences even carry through to mundane personal preferences and activities. When compared to conservatives, liberals were more likely to be favorable toward such non-traditional activities as eating international foods, getting tattoos, and seeing foreign films, while conservatives were more likely than liberals to favor mainstream activities like getting married, engaging in prayer, and reading the newspaper. Such personality differences have been shown to be stable from early childhood (Block & Block, 2006) and even to be heritable to some degree (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005).

Because of these evident personality differences between liberals and conservatives, Jost and colleagues (Jost et al., 2009; Jost et al., 2003b; Jost et al., 2008) have theorized that political ideology may be an individual's unconscious choice, motivated by psychological drives and needs and by various situational factors. In a comprehensive meta-analysis, they found increased conservatism to be associated with personality characteristics like authoritarianism and mental rigidity, as well as with epistemic and existential needs like a need for closure and a fear of threat, among others. They have also suggested that contextual factors can influence an individual's shift in ideology, causing one to become more conservative or more liberal (Jost et al., 2008). For example, after the attacks of September 11th and the resulting increase in mortality salience, many survivors reported becoming more conservative than they previously had been (Bonnano & Jost, 2006).

Using these data, Jost and colleagues concluded that political ideologies are adopted because they satisfy many social-cognitive motives. They stated, "...adherence to principles and syllogistic reasoning do not occur in a motivational vacuum but rather in the context of a variety of virtually inescapable personal and social motivations that are not necessarily consciously accessible" (Jost et al., 2003b, p. 340). The creation and expression of one's political beliefs and attitudes are thus influenced by a host of psychological needs and drives. Although studying the myriad personality and situational factors that influence one's ideology is important from a scientific standpoint, active politicians may find it difficult to take all of these variables into account when attempting conflict resolution with a political opponent. Thus, this study sought to simplify the motivational field by showing the predictive power of just a few psychological constructs.

One personality trait that consistently shows an association with political ideology is dogmatism. Dogmatism, as defined by Altemeyer (1996), is "relatively unchangeable,

unjustified certainty” (p. 201), high rates of which have been found to correlate with conservatism (see Jost et al., 2003b for a meta-analytic review). Dogmatic individuals believe their ways of thinking are right and that they know the objective truth. This often means that they will dismiss evidence that does not fit with their belief models because they have accepted their beliefs as incontrovertible facts.

Dogmatism has most often been measured using Rokeach’s (1960) Dogmatism (D) Scale, designed by Rokeach to be ideologically neutral and to measure what he termed “the closed mind.” However, the D Scale has been criticized for its lack of construct validity. One of its more serious flaws lies in its unidirectional wording, putting its data at risk for acquiescence bias (Altemeyer, 1996). Palmer and Kalin (1991) criticized the scale for assuming homogeneity of belief in how its questions were worded, as if one’s answers could be right or wrong. Rokeach himself decided that the D Scale lacked predictive validity when participants found to be very closed-minded did not also score highly on scales measuring opinionation (Altemeyer, 1996). Furthermore, Altemeyer presented evidence showing that the D Scale is not free from ideological content, as was purported by Rokeach.

In light of such problematic measurement, Altemeyer created a new scale to assess dogmatism, one that would break away from the D Scale’s links to authoritarianism. The DOG Scale (Altemeyer, 1996) addressed the weaknesses in previous dogmatism measures by including both pro-trait and con-trait items and by removing the ideological content from the scale. Recent research found the DOG Scale to be unidimensional, internally consistent, and construct valid, showing the expected convergent and discriminant validity (Crowson, 2009; Crowson, DeBacker, & Davis, 2008). In the course of assessing the DOG Scale’s validity, Crowson et al. reported a significant correlation between dogmatism and self-rated conservatism, but neither this study nor any other has accounted for the possible effects of social desirability. One aim of the current study is to address this oversight.

As defined, dogmatic people believe very strongly in the truth and rightness of their own beliefs; as such, these individuals may be less tolerant of those who present contradictory opinions or behaviors. Intolerance of this sort has been defined as “the state of being unwilling or unable to endure or accept the beliefs, perspectives, or practices of others. It also involves a lack of recognition and respect for the fundamental rights and choices of others” (Guindon, Green, & Hanna, 2003, p. 168). Intolerance of others frequently leads to oppression of those rights. Intolerance of opposing viewpoints may underlie a great deal of general out-group prejudice (Guindon et al., 2003; Whitley & Lee, 2000).

Conservatives, as compared to liberals, express strong preferences for higher-status social groups, as research on social dominance theory (Pratto et al., 1994) and implicit attitudes (Nosek et al., 2007) has shown. Beyond simple preferences, prejudice, especially toward minorities, seems to be expressed more often by the political right than by the political left (Rubinstein, 1995). Similarly, conservatives are more likely to carry negative attitudes about gay men and lesbians and about gay marriage and civil unions (Rowatt, LaBouff, Johnson, Froese, & Tsang, 2009). Furthermore, some research has already shown a link between conservatism and intolerance of others’ rights and choices. For example, Crowson (2004) found less support among conservatives for non-traditional

personal decisions such as abortion and atheism, and McFarland and Mathews (2005) reported that conservatism was positively correlated with the restriction of human rights.

The current study takes intolerance research one step further: Given a construct valid measure of tolerance of others' rights and choices, will conservatives show increased intolerance as compared to liberals and moderates? Finally, aside from simply establishing further evidence of personality correlates of political ideology, we also sought to assess the predictive power these characteristics carry in distinguishing liberals from conservatives. Given participants' dogmatism and tolerance scores, could we accurately place them into ideological groups?

The following specific hypotheses were examined: 1) Individuals showing increased dogmatism and increased intolerance of others' rights and choices will be more likely to identify with a conservative political ideology; 2) Individuals' tolerance and dogmatism scores will predict their self-identification as liberals or conservatives.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The sample consisted of 137 (81 female, 56 male) undergraduate students from a private university in an East Coast urban center of the United States. Most students participated in the research in partial fulfillment of an introductory psychology course requirement; a few students completed the study for extra credit for other psychology courses. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years ( $M = 19.7$  years,  $SD = 1.6$ ) and were predominantly Caucasian (81% Caucasian, 4% African American, 5% Asian American, 4% Hispanic American, 1% Arab American, 5% of Mixed Ethnicity). Although 191 participants were originally recruited for this study, a subset of 137 participants was created so as to ensure adequate representation in each ideological category. Once final data collection was complete, appropriate cell sizes were determined, and the first set of collected data in each category was used.

### ***Procedures***

Participants completed a packet of measures that took approximately 1 hour to complete. Upon arrival, participants were greeted and given a short summary of the task at hand. They were also asked to read each questionnaire carefully and to ask questions if they did not understand an item.

### ***Measures***

*Demographic data.* Participants provided personal information such as gender, age, race, year in college, and personal political ideology on a Basic Facts Questionnaire.

*Political ideology.* We assessed political ideology via a self-report item on the Basic Facts Questionnaire, described above. This item asked participants to "rate yourself on the following continuum," offering a 7-point Likert scale whose anchors were *Very Liberal* (1), *Liberal* (2), *Moderate-Liberal* (3), *Moderate* (4), *Moderate-Conservative* (5), *Conservative* (6), *Very Conservative* (7). Knight (1999) reported on the prevalence of these so-called "direct" measures of liberalism-conservatism in modern political and psychological research. She found that researchers tended to disagree on the precise definitions of liberalism and conservatism, and so a self-report measure of ideology was

increasingly used in place of a multi-item scale. She reported that this direct method of measuring personal political ideology shows significant correlations with expected behavioral variables, such as voting, and has now become a reliable method of validating other indirect scales of liberalism-conservatism. This method was recently revisited and supported by Jost (2006).

*Social attitudes.* An additional measure of liberalism-conservatism was included for further evidential support of the participants' political ideology. The Social Attitudes Statement Scale (SA-II; Kerlinger, 1984) presents 26 statements corresponding to social attitudes held in religious, political, social, academic, and economic domains and asks participants to indicate agreement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *Agree very strongly* (+3) to *Disagree very strongly* (-3). Half of the items are attitudinal statements that are worded in the liberal direction (e.g., "Both public and private universities and colleges should get generous aid from both state and federal governments."), while the other half are worded in the conservative direction (e.g., "Individuals with the ability and foresight to earn and accumulate wealth should have the right to enjoy that wealth without government interference and regulations."). After reverse coding, total scores can range from -78 (extremely liberal) to +78 (extremely conservative). Cronbach's alpha for this study was .79.

*Dogmatism.* As described earlier, Altemeyer (1996) criticized the validity of Rokeach's D Scale for capturing levels of dogmatic thinking, and he published the DOG Scale as an alternative. The DOG Scale is a self-report measure consisting of 20 items, 10 pro-trait and 10 con-trait. Participants are asked to rate their agreement with these 20 statements on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Examples of these statements are: "There are no discoveries or facts that could possibly make me change my mind about the things that matter most in life," and "Twenty years from now, some of my opinions about the important things in life will probably have changed." Participants' responses are reverse-coded as needed and converted to a 1 to 9 score, where 1 represents the least dogmatic response and 9 represents the most dogmatic response. Ratings are summed across all responses to produce a final dogmatism score. Altemeyer (2002) reported inter-item correlations as approximately .30 (as compared to the D Scale's interitem correlations of .10) and its alpha coefficient as approximately .90. The present study found high internal consistency for the DOG Scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

*Social desirability.* Because measurements of dogmatism, tolerance, and ideology may be vulnerable to social desirability effects, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale was included in data collection packets (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). This scale is comprised of 33 items, approximately half of which are reverse-coded, that describe rare but socially desirable traits and common but socially undesirable traits. Participants indicate whether each item "is true or false as it pertains to you." They receive a summed score that ranges from 0 to 33, where 33 represents a set of responses that reflect the most social desirability. Internal consistency of the measure was adequate,  $\alpha = .74$ .

*Tolerance.* The Omnibus Civil Liberties Scale (OCLS; McClosky & Brill, 1983) was used as a measure of tolerance of others' rights and choices. This scale is comprised of 69 items in a forced-choice format, asking participants to choose between a civil libertarian and an anti-civil libertarian response for each item. The items make up nine subscales—Free Speech, Free Press, Symbolic Speech, Freedom of Assembly, Academic Freedom,

Freedom of Religion, Due Process, Privacy, and Lifestyle—and offer a wide variety of themes, outgroups, and rights on which to respond (e.g., “Censoring obscene books: a) is necessary to protect community standards, or b) is an old-fashioned idea that no longer makes sense”). Civil libertarian responses receive a score of 0, while anti-civil libertarian responses are scored as 1, creating a possible range of 0 (tolerant) to 69 (intolerant). Cronbach’s alpha for the OCLS in this study was .90.

## Results

### *Preliminary Analyses*

Participants’ self-report of political ideology covered the entire range from *Very Liberal* to *Very Conservative*, with the modal ideological rating at 5 (*Moderate*). Political ideology was treated as a continuous variable in all correlational analyses, in accordance with previous research (Carney et al., 2008). The mean dogmatism score was 73.8 ( $SD = 23.4$ ), with scores ranging from 29 – 151; tolerance scores ranged from 2 – 57 ( $M = 30.1$ ;  $SD = 11.1$ ). Independent samples *t* tests indicated there were no significant gender differences for any of the test variables, but age was significantly correlated with political ideology such that older participants were more likely to self-identify as conservative ( $r = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, age was entered as a covariate in analyses involving self-reported political ideology. Social desirability was significantly correlated with dogmatism ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and it was treated as a covariate in all analyses involving dogmatism scores.

For analyses of group differences, self-reported political ideology was divided into three groups: liberals ( $n = 40$ ), ratings of 1 or 2; moderates ( $n = 69$ ), ratings of 3, 4, or 5; and conservatives ( $n = 28$ ), ratings of 6 or 7. An Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), with age entered as a covariate, showed significant differences in social attitudes, as measured by the Social Attitudes Scale, among the groups,  $F(2, 130) = 29.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .31$ . Adjusted mean social attitudes scores, using a Bonferroni correction, showed that those who self-identified as a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative indeed held the expected social attitudes. The cell sizes of these groups approximate that which is found in the general American population (National Opinion Research Center, 2009).

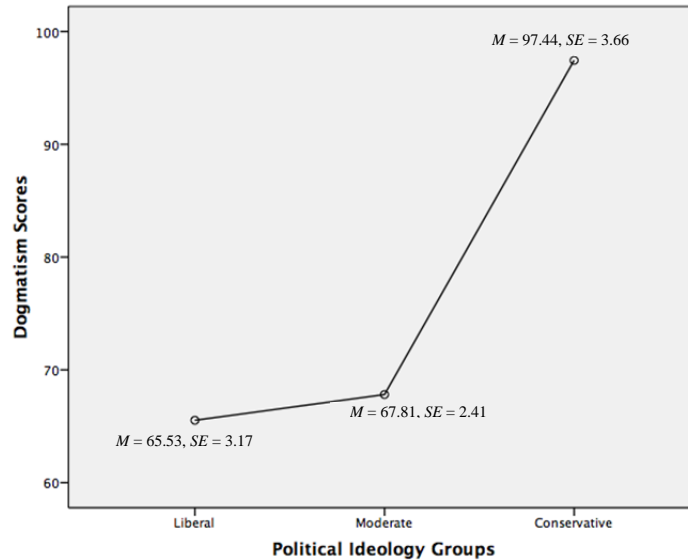
### *Hypothesis 1: Dogmatism, Tolerance, and Political Ideology*

Our first hypothesis was supported. After partialing out social desirability and age, dogmatism scores were moderately correlated with self-reported political ideology,  $r(130) = .45$ ,  $p < .001$ . Increased dogmatism was associated with increased conservatism. Increased intolerance was also associated with increased conservatism,  $r(130) = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ , following a Pearson correlation calculation with age partialled out. Additionally, we found that increased dogmatism was associated with increased intolerance after controlling for social desirability,  $r(133) = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Further analyses confirmed significant group differences in expressions of dogmatism and tolerance among the political groups. An ANCOVA, with social desirability and age entered as covariates, was significant,  $F(2, 130) = 27.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .30$ , and estimated marginal means with a Bonferroni correction showed that conservatives were significantly more dogmatic than were moderates or liberals (see Figure 1). A similar set of analyses, this time with only age entered as a covariate, showed significant ideological

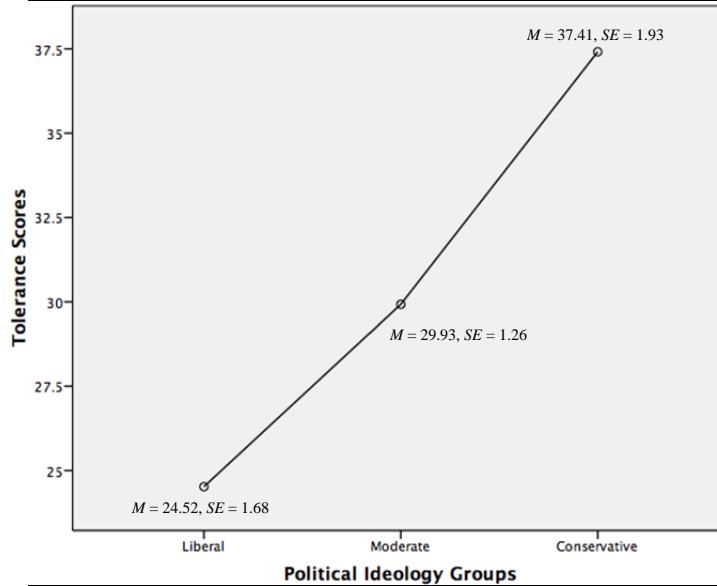
differences in the expression of tolerance,  $F(2, 130) = 12.64, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .16$ . A Bonferroni correction showed differences in tolerance of others' rights and choices across all three groups: Liberals were significantly more tolerant than were moderates, who were significantly more tolerant than were conservatives (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1**  
***Political Ideology Group Differences in Dogmatism***



*Note.* Dogmatism scores ranged from 29 – 151; higher scores indicate more dogmatism.

**Figure 2**  
***Political Ideology Group Differences in Tolerance***



*Note.* Tolerance scores ranged from 2 – 57; higher scores indicate more intolerance.

***Hypothesis 2: Using Dogmatism and Intolerance to Predict Ideology***

Hypothesis 2 stated that dogmatism and intolerance scores could be used to predict an individual's membership in liberal or conservative categories. A logistic regression was performed to test this hypothesis, using political ideology groups (liberals and conservatives only, yielding 67 cases) as the dependent variable. Data screening required the elimination of one outlier. The full model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 42.93$ ,  $p < .001$ , and accounted for between 47.8% and 64.5% of the variance in the categorization of liberals and conservatives. Overall, the model correctly predicted ideology membership 81.8% of the time, accurately classifying 84.6% of liberals and 77.8% of conservatives (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
***Regression Coefficients***

	<i>B</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Odds Ratio
Dogmatism	.069	11.414	1	.001	1.072
Intolerance	.151	10.616	1	.001	1.164
Constant	-10.662	16.918	1	.000	.000

**Discussion**

Stone (1980) said, "...a more sophisticated view of the relationship of character to ideology must be developed if our understanding [of authoritarians and dogmatic people] is to advance" (p. 14). This study has identified two personality variables that are associated with the expression of ideology; such insight may enhance our understanding of that relationship.

Our data showed that dogmatism and tolerance are significant predictors of political ideological stance. As reported in several previous studies of dogmatism and ideology (Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987; Crowson et al., 2008; Eckhardt, 1991; Jost et al., 2003b), we observed greater dogmatism among participants who self-identified as conservatives than among those who identified as moderates or liberals. However, comparison with earlier studies may be difficult given the demonstrated lack of construct validity of the often-used D Scale (Rokeach, 1960). Moreover, although Crowson and colleagues (2008) used the more valid DOG Scale (Altemeyer, 1996) to assess the relationship between dogmatism and conservatism, the potential moderating effects of social desirability were not measured. The present study confirms the dogmatism-conservatism link using a construct valid scale and taking the effects of social desirability into account.

This study also showed that intolerance of others' rights and choices increased as participants' conservatism increased. In fact, each of the political groups (i.e., liberals, moderates, and conservatives) expressed significantly different amounts of intolerance, with liberals being the most tolerant and conservatives being the least. Such a link was expected, given previously demonstrated links between conservatism and negative attitudes towards outgroups (Pratto et al., 1994; Rowatt et al., 2009; Rubinstein, 1995), distaste for the nontraditional (Crowson, 2004; Nosek et al., 2007), and support for the restriction of human rights (McFarland & Mathews, 2005), yet the direct relationship was

rarely examined. The tolerance measure used in this study specifically assessed tolerance of others' rights and choices, using over 65 items to investigate attitudes from a number of contexts, thus demonstrating the direct relationship between increasing intolerance and increasing conservatism.

Furthermore, our results additionally confirm the expected relationship between dogmatism and intolerance. Our data support the notion that those who will not compromise their own views, despite contradictory evidence, will also be the ones to be intolerant of others' rights to hold their own, perhaps contradictory, views.

As a whole, our findings uphold Jost's (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a; Jost et al., 2003b; Jost et al., 2008) claim that political ideology is a psychologically driven construct. As discussed above, Jost and colleagues have defined conservatism by a fundamental resistance to change and to reducing social inequality; dogmatism and intolerance are both methods of resisting changes to beliefs one holds sacred. Beyond this simple definition, however, Jost posits that personality variables, such as the tendencies to be dogmatic and intolerant, and situational variables may together motivate an individual to choose a political ideology that best satisfies his or her psychological needs and drives. Our findings support this conceptualization. Dogmatism and intolerance were important enough psychological constructs to explain between 47.8% and 64.5% of the variance in one's self-identification as a liberal or a conservative; the ensuing regression model correctly classified 82% of all liberals and conservatives.

### ***Limitations and Future Directions***

The generalizability of this study is limited by our exclusive use of undergraduate students as participants. It was a challenge to find participants who self-identified as conservatives among this population, and the problem was perhaps compounded by the prevailing liberal sentiments of the surrounding city. The young age of our participants is also a limitation, as it may be that older participants may be more firmly decided in their political ideological choice. It is possible that the self-professed conservatives in our study were somewhat different from a conservative sample drawn from a more balanced and older population.

Jost has discussed numerous variables that may be linked to one's motivation to choose conservatism as a political ideological stance, such as an intolerance of ambiguity or uncertainty, fear of threat or loss, and even situational variables like increasing mortality salience (Jost et al., 2003b). Future research may be able to improve the predictive validity of the model presented here by including more of these underlying personality and situational variables. External validity may also be increased by surveying a community sample with a greater age range.

### ***Conclusion***

Nonetheless, our results are striking given the simplicity with which we were able to predict political group self-identification. While any psychologically driven construct is going to be influenced by a multiplicity of personality and situational factors, the parsimony afforded by simplifying the cloud to dogmatism and intolerance scores is important. If, as Stone (1980) stated, our goal is to understand ideology and character, then dogmatism and intolerance, as representatives of one's desire to maintain the status

quo, are valuable windows to understanding one's political ideology. These constructs have a particularly powerful application to modern politics and can be used to gain an understanding of the psychological motivations driving a political stance. Given the acerbic partisanship that characterizes politics today, such an understanding may help political opponents better understand each other and, perhaps, to better approach compromise.

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#### Author Note

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This article is based on data collected for the first author's Master's thesis.

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