

Is Political Intolerance Grounded in Emotions?

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Abstract

While political scientists have shown strong and renewed interest in the role of emotions in politics, questions remain about the connections between emotions and political intolerance. Some conventional political thought argues that, because the less sophisticated rely upon emotions in making judgments, they are less likely to be willing to tolerate their political enemies. Sophisticates, by contrast, rely on reason, and are therefore more tolerant. In this paper, we challenge that hypothesis using a large representative sample of the American population. We find that emotions are significantly related to political intolerance, but only weakly so. Moreover, the effects of emotion on intolerance are not consistently stronger among the unsophisticated. Less sophisticated Americans are more intolerant, but not because they rely upon their emotions more. We conclude this paper by comparing our findings to research in other contexts, and with speculation about how the nature of the cleavage structure in society – and hence the nature of threat perceptions – might influence the role emotions play in the production of political intolerance.

Keywords: political tolerance, emotion, political sophistication

Populist, authoritarian, and/or xenophobic political movements are on the rise in the world's developed liberal democracies. In 2016 alone, the United States elected Donald Trump as president, the United Kingdom voted to “Brexit” the European Union, and German support for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) surged in state elections. One of the hallmarks of these movements is their crass majoritarianism, sometimes associated with a call for minority and dissident voices to be silenced either by the state or by supporters of these movements. Thus, it would appear that political tolerance, always the most elusive of democratic values, is once again under threat in many developed liberal democracies.

A great deal of research has attempted to understand why some citizens extend civil rights to groups they dislike, while others do not (see Gibson, 2006, and Sullivan and Hendriks, 2009). One analytical approach focuses on the role of emotions in activating political intolerance. Scholars have hypothesized that intolerance is driven by negative, almost instinctive, emotional reactions to threatening outgroups. Conversely, tolerance is thought to be largely driven by considered reason, as via a “sober second thought.” For instance, Halperin, Canetti-Nisim and Hirsch-Hoefler (2009) report that hatred is a particularly powerful determinant of intolerance—perhaps *the most* powerful, they argue. Moreover, hatred does not create intolerance among all citizens; rather, it is those who are politically unsophisticated who seem to be most influenced by this sort of emotional engagement with their political opponents. Various elitist theories of politics posit that because ordinary people typically rely upon their emotions in making political judgments, political intolerance often results. Elites, on the other hand, eschew

emotional reactions to their opponents; because they rely on reason, tolerance often results.

Political psychology scholars (e.g., Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen, 2000) are not so certain that a bright-line distinction can be made between emotion and reason, but that has not stopped the search for emotional determinants of mass political intolerance. On its face, the contemporary politics of populism might be understood by this theory.

Our purpose in this paper is to reconsider the role played by emotions in tolerance judgments. Using a large representative sample of the American public, the first part of our analysis focuses on the emotional determinants of political tolerance, using three measures of emotional engagement with political outgroups: hatred, anger, and fear. We then turn to the moderating role of political sophistication, under the hypothesis that those with little sophistication are more likely to rely upon emotions than those of greater sophistication. Contrary to some extant research, we find that emotions play only a limited role in producing political intolerance. More important than emotions are conventional predictors of intolerance, such as threat perceptions. In addition, our analysis reveals few differences between the more and less sophisticated in the importance of emotional engagements. Our findings underscore the need for additional research to reconcile some fairly fundamental discrepancies in whether, how, and when emotions structure political intolerance. We conclude the paper by drawing out the implications of our findings for contemporary debates about populism, suggesting that realistic grievances and inter-group conflict may play a more significant role in populist politics than is ordinarily thought.

Emotion-Based Theories of Political Intolerance

Some scholars argue that emotional reactions to groups are an important potential explanation for variation in intolerance. We agree: At the most basic level, tolerance requires antipathy toward the object of the tolerance; one cannot “put up with” that which one does not reject and dislike. Moreover, emotions always seem to play a particularly important role when individuals engage in intergroup evaluations (Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000), as is most certainly the case for the decision on whether to put up with one’s political enemies.

However, with a few important exceptions (e.g., Kuklinski, Riggall, Ottati, Schwarz, and Wyer, 1991; Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, and Stevens, 2005; Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, and Wood, 1995; Skitka, Bauman, and Mullen, 2004), the large political tolerance literature has given short shrift to emotions as a potential explanation. Even then, the studies that do test the effects of emotions tend to focus on anger and fear alone.

Any important exception to this can be found in the research of Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, and Hirsch-Hoefler (2009). Their contribution is to simultaneously test the impact of hatred, as well as those of anger and fear, on political intolerance. These scholars do not see hatred as simply another potential correlate of intolerance. Instead, they ascribe an elemental role to hatred: For them, “hatred is key to the understanding of political intolerance” (2009, p. 97). These authors go on to argue that anger and fear should show much weaker effects on intolerance, and indeed, perhaps no significant direct effects at all. Using Israeli survey data, they find support for this hypothesis.

The Moderating Effect of Political Sophistication

Scholars also hypothesize that political sophistication moderates the relationship between emotions and intolerance. In particular, they argue that sophistication reduces the effects of emotions such that sophisticated individuals will be less likely to use emotions in their attitude-formation and decision-making processes. This hypothesis, of course, resembles the views of the framers of the American Constitution, who thought that the masses often made political judgments on the basis of their “passions.” Research such as that by Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, and Hirsch-Hoefler (2009) shows that emotions are positively associated with intolerance among unsophisticated respondents, but that they have no significant effect among sophisticated respondents.

Hypotheses Linking Emotions to Intolerance

Fear

Although some argue that fear should have only an indirect, mediated effect on political intolerance, we instead expect to observe a direct, positive effect of fear. Although fear is typically associated with behavioral withdrawal rather than with confrontation (Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure, 1989), tolerance judgments expressed during survey interviews are not themselves behaviors. Instead, they are attitudes regarding the extension or withdrawal of permission for a disliked group to engage in political activities. Thus, we conjecture that the tendency for fear to lead to avoidant *behavior* does not in fact imply that this emotion will have only indirect and weak effects on downstream tolerance *attitudes*.

Indeed, several existing studies show that fear (or an analogue, like anxiety) does in fact have a direct, positive effect on intolerance. Skitka et al. (2004) find that fear has a positive correlation with intolerance, while Marcus et al. (1995) similarly demonstrate that normatively threatening experimental vignettes increase anxiety and also intolerance. Other research identifies the mechanism that may be at work: Fear begets intolerance because it increases both rumination (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen, 2000; Mogg, Mathews, Bird, and Macgregor-Morris, 1990) and risk aversion (Lerner and Keltner, 2001; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassesse, 2007). Together, these findings suggest that fearful individuals use a more careful, deliberative approach when making tolerance judgments. And as Kuklinski et al. (1991) show (but see Theiss-Morse, Marcus, and Sullivan, 1993), deliberation can produce greater levels of intolerance than does purely affective reactions to disliked groups. As such, we hypothesize that fear will have a direct, positive effect on intolerance.

Anger

Anger produces a confrontational and aggressive mindset (Averill, 1983). In intergroup settings, this mindset can result in an increased desire to act aggressively against the outgroup (Claassen, 2016; Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000), as well as in a reduced desire to reconcile (Tam et al., 2007). As an emotion of approach, anger spurs individuals to take action against the target of their emotions. While this action may include behavioral aggression, it may also include support for another party taking punitive action against the target group (Lerner, Goldberg, and Tetlock, 1998). For example, Huddy et al. (2007) find that Americans who were angry at Saddam Hussein

and “terrorists” showed greater support for the Iraq War. It therefore seems likely that individuals who are angry at a group would also favor the government restricting that group’s civil liberties—that is, they would show greater intolerance toward the group. Furthermore, Skitka et al. (2004) find anger to be one of the stronger correlates of intolerance, after perceived threat, outgroup derogation, and fear. As such, we hypothesize that anger will have a positive and direct effect on intolerance.

Hatred

We hypothesize that hatred of a group is likely to be associated with heightened intolerance toward that group. Hatred has this effect because it is an emotion associated with an enduring belief that a group is malicious (Halperin, 2008), and as such, hatred results in individuals favoring the denial of civil and political rights to the group in question. We similarly hypothesize that hatred will have a positive, direct effect on intolerance.

Political Sophistication

Researchers have hypothesized that “the less sophisticated make more frequent use of their emotions in establishing their political views about issues, groups, and leaders” (Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, and Hirsch-Hoefler 2009, p. 99). For instance, some existing research (Rahn, 2000; Zinni, Mattei, and Rhodebeck, 1997) shows that emotion has a stronger effect on public opinion among the unsophisticated. The researchers interpret this as an extension of the well-established sophistication-interaction hypothesis (Delli-Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Sniderman,

Brody, and Tetlock, 1991), which posits that core beliefs and values have a stronger effect on public opinion among the sophisticated. Indeed, in a similar fashion, scholars have long believed that tolerance is mainly a product of reason, with intolerance following when passions dominate (Theiss-Morse, Marcus, and Sullivan, 1993). To the extent that reason is the province of the sophisticated, this claim supports the hypothesis that sophistication will dampen the effects of emotions on intolerance.

Yet other research suggests that sophistication may in fact *increase* emotional linkages with intolerance. Rudolph, Gangl, and Stevens (2000) show that emotional engagement only produces political involvement when political efficacy, a correlate of sophistication, is high. And Lodge and Taber (2005) find that sophisticated subjects are more likely to respond emotionally to various political actors and groups because they have larger, and more connected, stores of political information. Hence, there are reasons to believe that the link between emotions and political attitudes and behaviors is especially strong for sophisticated individuals.

The results of Rudolph, Gangl, and Stevens (2000) and Lodge and Taber (2005) also suggest that sophistication may play a more complex role with respect to the emotion-intolerance link. Indeed, the findings of Halperin, Canetti-Nisim and Hirsch-Hoefler (2009) point toward this complexity: Although they find that sophistication decreases the effects of hatred on intolerance, they find, instead, that it flips the direction of the effect of anger, with anger having a negative effect on intolerance among the unsophisticated and a positive effect among the sophisticated.

Given this contradictory and confusing literature, we aim to retest this sophistication-moderation hypothesis using our data. We find the argument that sophistication dampens the

effects of emotion on intolerance to be more conventional, so we hypothesize that sophistication will reduce the effects of all three negative emotions on intolerance. We expect, in other words, to observe negative interaction terms between sophistication on the one hand, and anger, hatred, and fear, on the other.

Data and Measures

Data

The data upon which we rely for this analysis are known as the Freedom and Tolerance Surveys (FATS). These surveys, conducted from 2007 through 2011, use a generally constant methodology, the same survey firm, and a largely invariant survey instrument, and the interviews were conducted on the telephone (with cell phone subsamples added in the 2010 and 2011 surveys). The samples were randomly selected from the population of phone owners 18 years old and older (for further details see Online Appendix A). Because earlier analyses of these data have shown no significant change within the time period of the surveys (“previous work by the authors”), we collapse them into a single database of approximately 4,000 respondents.

Dependent Variable: Political Intolerance

The Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus least-liked approach to measuring political intolerance begins by querying the respondents about their feelings toward a varied list of groups selected by the researcher, but supplemented by the respondents’ own nominations of other groups. Table 1 reports the descriptive results from the FATS data.

[PLACE TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

According to these data, the Ku Klux Klan is the most disliked of these groups, with more than two-thirds of the respondents naming members of the Klan as their most or third-most (explained below) disliked. Still, other groups are also highly disliked: A majority of Americans feel very coldly toward militarists, atheists, radical Muslims, and U.S. communists. Only a single group—conservatives—attracts a mean feeling thermometer score that is warmer than the midpoint on the 101-point scale.

While some scholars have focused primarily on asking their respondents tolerance questions about their most disliked group, others have expanded their questioning by asking about other highly disliked groups (e.g., Gibson and Gouws, 2003). In the case of the FATS surveys, the respondents were randomly assigned to be asked the tolerance questions about their most disliked group or their third-most disliked group. The logic of this approach is that greater variability is introduced by asking about less extreme but still highly disliked groups, even if this requires that the status of the group be controlled in subsequent analyses.

In FATS, the respondents were then asked about whether these groups ought to be allowed to give speeches, run candidates for public office, and hold public demonstrations. Since speaking, seeking public office, and demonstrating are all rights that democracies must allow for all political points-of-view (e.g., Dahl, 1971), these are all valid measures of political tolerance. Table 2 reports the respondents' replies.

[PLACE TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The American people are more or less evenly divided on whether these highly disliked

groups ought to be afforded their civil liberties. This division is closest when it comes to tolerance of the most disliked group—for instance, 49.4% would allow a speech by the group, while 43.1% would not. For the other highly disliked group, tolerance is more often reported than intolerance, although about one-third of the respondents would not tolerate any of the activities by this group (data not shown). As is often the case, limited variability in tolerance exists across the three civil liberties activities.

We created a combined index of intolerance from these three indicators. The item-set has strong psychometric properties, with relatively high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .75), fairly strong unidimensionality (the eigenvalue of the second factor extracted in a Common Factor Analysis = .64), and roughly equal validity of the indicators (as shown by the approximately equivalent factor loadings of the items on the first unrotated factor). Because a simple summated index is very strongly correlated with the factor score from the first unrotated factor, it will serve as the dependent variable for our analysis. We scored this index (and all other variables in this analysis) to range from 0 to 1.

Independent Variables

Following convention (e.g., Gibson, 2006; Erisen and Kentmen-Cin, 2017) and earlier analyses of these data (“previous work by the authors”), we have created indices of three subdimensions of threat perceptions: sociotropic threat, egocentric threat, and perceptions of group power.

Sociotropic threat was measured by two items, one asking whether the group is “not dangerous to society” versus “dangerous to society,” and the other asking the respondents to rate the group

as “not dangerous to the normal lives of people” versus “dangerous to the normal lives of people.” Egocentric threat perceptions were also measured by two items: whether the group would or would not “reduce your personal political freedom,” and whether the group would or would not “if they gained power, affect your personal security.” Finally, group power was measured with three questions: whether the group is “likely to gain a lot of power in the United States” versus unlikely to do so; whether the group is “unlikely to affect how well my family and I live” versus likely to do so; and whether the group is “powerful” or not. The measures are positively intercorrelated (if one type of threat is perceived, the other types are also likely to be perceived), but not very strongly (with the bivariate correlations ranging from .25 to .32). Across all groups, intolerance is correlated with sociotropic threat at .26, with egocentric threat at .16, and with perceived group power at .03. In a multivariate equation, all three threat predictors are significantly related to intolerance, although, as seen in earlier research, sociotropic threat perceptions are by far the strongest predictors. Together, the three threat measures explain 8% of the variance in political intolerance.

The analysis of (“previous work by the authors”) provides a basic model of the predictors of tolerance that we find useful.¹ However, we add a few additional variables to that equation in order to more fully incorporate group attributes into our analysis.

Other Perceived Attributes of the Group: Following Petersen et al. (2011), respondents were also asked a separate question about their perceptions of the degree of commitment of their highly disliked group to democratic values and norms. The groups vary significantly ($p < .001$;

¹ See Online Appendix B for a discussion of our measurement of these various concepts.

eta² = .05) in their perceived commitment to democracy, with members of the Ku Klux Klan judged to be the least democratic. Perhaps a little surprisingly, 7 of the 11 groups have mean scores near the midpoint of the 0-to-1 scale (between .45 and .55). Most respondents are willing to tar their disliked group with the brush of anti-democraticness.²

Knowing a Group Member: Many of the groups selected as among the most disliked are not particularly well-known to the American people. For instance, only 17.4% of the respondents reported that they actually know a member of their disliked group; the remainder did not. The groups differ significantly in the frequency of being known to our respondents (eta² = .18, $p < .001$). Virtually no one knew a communist or a militarist (a person advocating doing away with the government and letting the military run the country), but a large proportion reported knowing a liberal.

Group Fixed Effects: Because we are far from certain that all relevant attributes of the groups named as the least-liked or as another highly disliked group are captured in the variables included in our model, we also incorporate fixed effects for each of the groups in the analysis as (“previous work by the authors”) suggest.

Emotional Engagement with the Group

We asked the respondents to rate their most disliked group or their third-most disliked group in terms of three emotions: anger, hatred, and fear. The responses were collected on a scale ranging

² We are entirely agnostic as to whether these groups are in fact anti-democratic. The variable we employ in our analysis is simply the respondents’ perceptions of this attribute.

from 0 to 10 (which was then converted for our analysis to range from 0 to 1). According to the mean scores, the respondents expressed more anger toward the groups than either fear or hatred, and more hatred than fear. Nearly 30% (29.7%) of the respondents selected the most extreme response category for anger, while 18.1% and 15.3% scored at the extremes for fear and hatred, respectively. Conversely, in terms of the lowest points on the emotional engagement score, the percentages are 24.1, 16.8, and 12.2, for fear, hatred, and anger, respectively.

We draw two conclusions from these data. First, considerable variability exists among the respondents in their degrees of emotional engagement with the group they selected as highly disliked. Second, anger toward the group is more common than fear and especially more common than hatred.

The ratings on the three aspects of emotion are moderately intercorrelated, with an average of the Pearson correlation coefficients of .41. However, anger and hatred are somewhat more strongly related ($r = .56$), and fear and hatred are somewhat more weakly related ($r = .33$). From these correlations, we conclude that emotions are interconnected but far from redundant.

We find less variation in emotional engagement across the various groups named as highly disliked than what we might have expected. The differences in means for each emotional term are in fact statistically significant across the groups, but the η^2 statistics range from .037 to .042, indicating that only a relatively small amount of variance is associated with the identity of the group selected. For example, the group hated the most overall is pro-abortion activists (those who would allow all abortions), with a mean of .61, and the group hated the least is gay rights activists (mean = .34). Most groups have a mean hatred score of around .45. Furthermore, while

the differences in emotional engagement for the groups named as most disliked and third-most disliked are all statistically significant, the η^2 's indicate that these differences are trivial (the coefficients range from .007 to .014). We nevertheless include the control for the ranking of the group in all of our analyses. Finally, we note that there are only even more trivial differences in emotional engagement that are associated with whether the respondent actually knows a member of the group he or she selected as highly disliked.

Analysis

Table 3 reports our baseline analysis of the predictors of intolerance. The first conclusion we draw from the model in the table is that it accounts for a considerable amount of the variance in levels of intolerance—approaching one-half. Significant individual predictors of intolerance are political sophistication, dogmatism, a preference for order over liberty, sociotropic threat perceptions, and level of education. The other aspects of threat perceptions have little if any influence on intolerance (and some of the observed signs are not even in the hypothesized direction). While the equation reveals quite a number of highly significant predictors of tolerance, few of the relationships are of any magnitude. For instance, knowing members of the disliked group only slightly decreases intolerance, while perceiving the group to be undemocratic just marginally increases intolerance.

[PLACE TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

We also note that whether the group is most disliked or is another highly disliked group has some slight connection to intolerance, even in this fairly comprehensive model. Lastly, we

observe that adding the group dummy variables to the base model raises the explained variance by 5 percentage points, which is, of course, a highly significant increase (data not shown). This indicates that there are still group-specific components of intolerance that are not captured by this reasonably well-specified model.³

Finally, we observe a quite substantial relationship between political sophistication and political intolerance, with the more sophisticated expressing significantly less intolerance. This is, of course, a direct effect of sophistication, which is different from the interactive hypothesis suggesting that the less sophisticated rely more on emotions in developing their response to their disliked political enemies.

Do Anger, Fear, and Hatred Stoke Intolerance?

Each of the three emotional reactions has a significant positive connection to levels of intolerance, as we hypothesized. However, all of these coefficients, while significant, are fairly small (although we do acknowledge that the equation presents a reasonably comprehensive

³ Removing the group fixed effects from Table 3 produces only very minor changes to the findings. Fear loses its statistical significance, but the regression coefficient is almost the same. The effect of group power becomes slightly greater and is statistically significant, while the effect of sociotropic threat increases slightly. Generally, however, the inclusion or exclusion of the group fixed effects in Table 3 has practically no substantive implications.

model of political intolerance).⁴ In addition, contrary to the findings of some earlier research, in our analysis hatred does not have a stronger effect on intolerance than does anger or fear. If anything, our results suggest that, among Americans, anger is the most important emotional pathway to intolerance.⁵

Moreover, although we find that all three emotions play some role in shaping intolerance judgments, all the emotions are weaker predictors than the classic wellsprings of intolerance such as sociotropic threats and dogmatic orientations. Even anger, the strongest emotional correlate of intolerance in our data, has a significantly weaker effect (in absolute value terms) than dogmatism, support for order over liberty, and sophistication (for all comparisons, $p < .001$). The coefficients of hatred and fear are additionally weaker than the coefficients of sociotropic threat and education (for fear, $p < .001$ for both variables; for hatred, $p = .001$ when compared with sociotropic threat and $p = .004$ when compared with education). Thus, regarding the relative importance of the emotions, our findings show that emotions make a significant, but small,

⁴ Although anger and hatred are moderately correlated ($r = .56$), the equation reported in Table 3 does not suffer from issues of multicollinearity. The variance inflation factors (VIF) are below 3 across all predictors.

⁵ We conducted tests of the null hypothesis that the coefficients do not differ for each of the three pairs of emotion coefficients. We found that the effect of anger is significantly different from that of fear ($p = .015$) but not from that of hatred ($p = .190$). The coefficients for hatred and fear do not differ ($p = .394$). We conclude from this that anger has a stronger effect on intolerance than fear, but not necessarily stronger than the effect of hatred.

contribution to explaining political intolerance.

The Moderating Effects of Political Sophistication

We use a measure of political knowledge as our indicator of political sophistication. In Table 4, we report an analysis that incorporates the interactions of sophistication and the three emotions within a single integrated equation. Because our basic model of political intolerance (shown in Table 3, above) is quite comprehensive, we only report in Table 4 the results of the equation that pertain to the interactions. However, these coefficients are drawn from the full equations (results of which are available upon request from the authors).

[PLACE TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Our first important finding is that sophistication has no significant interaction with hatred. Moreover, although we are reluctant to treat our insignificant interactive coefficient as distinguishable from zero, the sign of the coefficient points toward sophistication actually *increasing* the effects of hatred on intolerance. This finding runs contrary to that of earlier research.⁶

Our data also reveal that anger and sophistication have a negative and significant interaction effect. As the marginal effects plot in Figure 1 shows, anger, as hypothesized,

⁶ When sophistication is 0 (indicating the least sophisticated), the estimated coefficient for hatred is .02. When sophistication is at its highest point (1), the coefficient is .08 (.02 + .06). We reiterate, however, that the proper inference from the hypothesis test is that the slope of the interaction term is not distinguishable from zero.

increases intolerance only among those with low levels of sophistication. Once sophistication reaches a level of about .33 on the 0-to-1 scale, the effects of anger are no longer significant. Our data therefore indicate that anger is significantly related to intolerance for about 28% of the sample (those with relatively low sophistication), and is not related to intolerance for the roughly 72% of the sample that is somewhat or more sophisticated.

[PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Finally, the emotion of fear. Our data indicate no significant fear-sophistication interaction. For neither the less sophisticated nor the more sophisticated does fear contribute much to political intolerance.

Thus, in sum, all of our moderation tests reveal very different results from those found by earlier researchers. At conventional levels of statistical significance, others generally find hatred, but not anger (and probably not fear), to have a significant interaction with sophistication; we find anger, but neither hatred nor fear, to have significant interactions. Our marginal effects analysis reveals that anger increases intolerance when sophistication is quite low, and even at moderate levels of sophistication do the effects of anger dissipate.⁷

⁷ A caveat to these moderation results is the potential multicollinearity that could arise due to the correlation between the constitutive and the interaction terms in the regression model. The VIFs for the interaction terms of sophistication and anger (11.0), fear (6.2), and hatred (9.4) are particularly noticeable. Rescaling to zero and/or standardizing predictors are common techniques for dealing with *non-essential* multicollinearity that occurs merely due to the scaling

Discussion and Concluding Comments

Our analysis leads to the conclusion that the conventional hypothesis that the less sophisticated rely on emotions in making political judgments while the sophisticated rely on reason is much too simplistic to warrant much further consideration. Most likely, all political judgments reflect both emotion and reason (assuming one accepts any sort of distinction between emotion and reason). Classical motivated reasoning, for instance, often begins with affective engagement with stimuli with very little if any grounding in reason (e.g., the attractiveness of people). According to the theory, this initial stage of information-processing structures, if not dominates, subsequent conscious reasoning. And the simple hypothesis that “to know them is to love them” has been shown to be way too simple, inasmuch as, in some societies, to know more about one’s political enemies is to understand how profound their threat actually is.⁸ Intolerance can arise from simple emotional appraisals, but it can also arise from considered thought. The politically less sophisticated hold no monopoly over the use of emotion in producing political intolerance.

or nonzero mean of predictor variables, which is often the case in continuous-by-continuous interaction models (Marquandt, 1980; Shieh, 2010). If we mean-center and standardize our variables, all VIFs fall below 3. The interactions between the standardized versions of anger, fear, hatred, and sophistication yields identical results as above (results not shown). Hence, we have confidence in the conclusion that the effect of anger is to some degree moderated by sophistication, but the estimates of fear and hatred are not.

⁸ See for instance Sullivan et al. (1993), and Wang and Chen (2008).

We are impressed at how much our results diverge from some published findings on the role of emotions, especially hatred, in creating intolerance. In particular, Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, and Hirsch-Hoefler (2009) report a strong relationship between group hatred and intolerance in Israel. Their standardized estimated effect of hatred on intolerance is .30 during wartime in Israel, .11 during relatively restive times in Israel, and we report a coefficient of .06 in the U.S. Whereas they conclude that group hatred is a dominant and strong source of intolerance, we conclude that emotions in general play a small role in the production of intolerance, and that there is nothing particularly commanding about hatred.

Although we are reluctant to make much out of two data points, it seems possible that the difference in these findings is associated with the different nature of group antipathy in the two societies. One of the many inconvenient truths about politics – including the politics of intolerance – is that context matters (see Gibson and Gouws 2003).

But what is it about contexts that is so important for levels of political intolerance? We suggest two possibilities. First, differing political contexts may influence the types of groups that are identified as among the most disliked in different societies. As we have noted, the group disliked the most in our data is those who would allow all abortions. In the Israeli analysis, Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCIs) play a very prominent role as targets of intolerance. Without downplaying the importance of the abortion issue for many people, the type of political conflict in which the pro- and anti-abortion sides engage in the U.S. seems quite different from the conflicts between the Jewish majority in Israel and the Palestinian citizens of Israel. The Israeli findings are, we suspect, strongly influenced by the fact that the main target of their survey

questions is a group evoking such strong and widespread condemnation from Jewish Israelis.

A second way in which contexts can affect the basic intolerance model is through threat perceptions. In neither their analysis nor the analysis we have presented here have threat perceptions been the center of theoretical attention. However, just as the nature of the cleavage structure in society can affect emotional engagement, so too can it affect the type of threat perceptions that dominate. Given the strong relationship between threat perceptions and intolerance, the nature of the threat in any given society (not just the level of threat) will significantly determine the level of intolerance in that society. The nature of the threat, unfortunately, most likely varies across polities.

Finally, we would not be surprised to find that emotions and threat perceptions interact differently within different contexts. Where threat is high and persistent, perhaps the emotions relevant for intolerance gravitate from dislike to anger and then to hatred. Where threat is less overwhelming, and especially where political cleavages cross-cut and therefore are not persistent, perhaps hatred of one's political enemies does not evolve so readily. Ideological and partisan polarization may be sufficient to generate fear of and anger at one's political opponents; hatred may only be widespread when enduring existential threats are perceived. Indeed, we can even imagine that, in many societies, political intolerance can result from the rational calculations associated with realistic group conflict. In a cross-national context, perhaps the nature and level of threat perceptions determine which emotions get activated in the service of political intolerance.

The study of political intolerance shows signs of becoming a great deal more invigorated

than in the past, partly owing to theoretical advances and partly owing to the growing menace of political intolerance in many parts of the world. But the etiology of intolerance is complicated—indeed, many of the enigmas Gibson identified in 2006 remain unsolved today. And if we are correct about the role that national cleavage structures and the intensity of political conflict play in producing intolerance, more complicated models still are required. We think it would be a mistake to assume that intolerance is only generated by emotional engagement with one's political foes, and that only the unsophisticated rely on emotions in making political judgments. Unfortunately, it seems that social scientists who hope to eradicate or control political intolerance still have a large research agenda on their hands.

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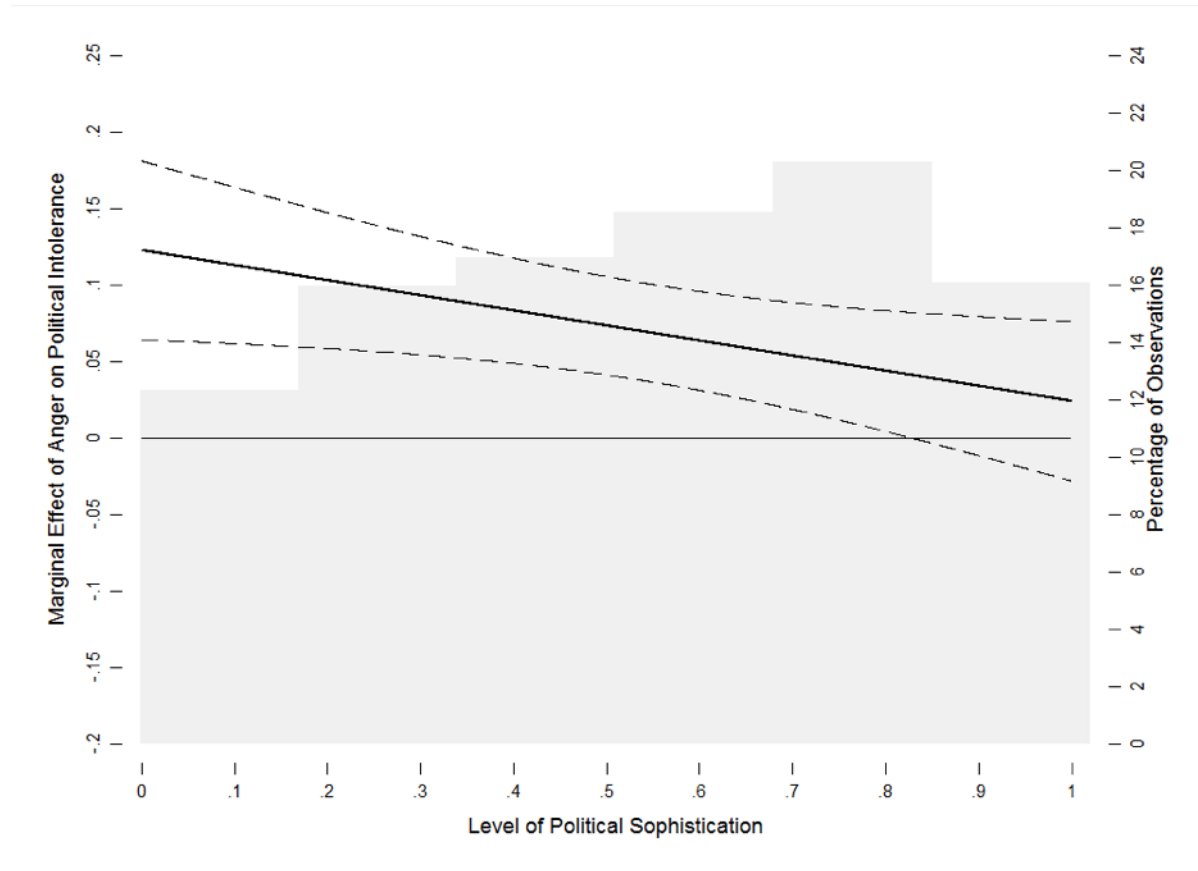
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Figure 1. The Marginal Effect of Anger on Political Intolerance Across Degrees of Political Sophistication



Notes:

The confidence bands represent 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1. The Distribution of Group Affect, FATS 2007-2011

Group	Group Affect (Feeling Thermometer)				% Most Disliked	% Among Three Most Disliked
	% Disliked Very Much ^a	Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>N</i>		
Conservatives	7.0	53.8	22.9	4,084	.5	2.0
Christian fundamentalists	12.8	48.5	26.1	4,086	1.5	7.2
Liberals	11.3	48.3	23.6	4,088	.8	3.9
Gay rights activists	22.9	45.3	30.6	4,079	1.9	9.4
Anti-abortion activists	35.1	37.1	33.2	4,083	1.6	14.6
Pro-abortion activists	39.2	30.9	33.3	3,993	6.2	19.4
Communists	50.4	26.1	24.7	4,086	4.8	25.9
Radical Muslims	56.0	20.3	23.7	4,068	14.2	39.5
Atheists	64.9	16.9	24.7	3,690 ^b	10.6	36.8
Militarists	77.7	10.6	20.1	4,092	15.1	42.8
Members of the Ku Klux Klan	84.1	7.5	17.0	4,089	35.8	69.5

Notes:

^a “Disliked Very Much” is defined as affect thermometer scores of 10 degrees or lower toward the group. Percentages are computed from the valid responses, which include “don’t know” responses, but exclude refusals to answer. The number of observations for the least-liked questions is 4,066. Groups are sorted in order of decreasing mean affect.

^b The survey design in 2008 included a split-ballot structure on the question about atheists, resulting in only one-half of the sample in 2008 receiving the same wording question as in the surveys of 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2011. To ensure consistency in this measure, we exclude respondents who received a different wording of the question in 2008.

Source: Freedom and Tolerance Surveys, 2007-2011.

Table 2. Political Tolerance, Least-Liked Groups, 2007-2011

	Political Tolerance			Mean	Std. Dev.	N
	Percentage					
	Intolerant	Undecided	Tolerant			
<i>Most Disliked Group</i>						
Allow Speech	43.1	7.5	49.4	3.0	1.4	2,073
Not Ban From Running for Office	44.2	7.9	47.8	2.9	1.4	2,067
Allow Rallies	47.2	9.7	43.1	2.8	1.3	2,067
Tolerance Index	–	–	–	2.9	1.1	2,069
<i>Another Highly Disliked Group</i>						
Allow Speech	30.1	11.1	58.8	3.3	1.3	2,058
Not Ban From Running for Office	35.9	11.6	52.5	3.2	1.4	2,057
Allow Rallies	37.0	11.5	51.5	3.1	1.3	2,058
Tolerance Index	–	–	–	3.2	1.1	2,059
Notes: The percentages are calculated on the basis of collapsing the five-point Likert response set (e.g., “strongly support” and “support” responses are combined). The means and standard deviations are calculated on the uncollapsed distributions. Higher mean scores indicate more political tolerance. Note that the respondents were randomly assigned to be asked the tolerance questions on either their most disliked group or another highly disliked group.						

Table 3. A Fully Specified Model of Political Intolerance

Type of Predictor/Indicator	r	b	s.e.	β
Anger toward the group	.22	.08***	.01	.09
Fear of the group	.16	.03**	.01	.04
Hatred of the group	.19	.05***	.01	.06
Group is most (versus 3 rd -most) disliked	.13	.04***	.01	.06
Sociotropic threat	.26	.11***	.02	.12
Egocentric threat	.03	.03	.01	.03
Group power	.17	-.01	.02	-.01
Perception that group is undemocratic	.06	.04***	.01	.05
Knows group member	-.15	-.05***	.01	-.06
Order preferred to liberty	.37	.19***	.02	.15
Support for the rule of law	-.21	-.06*	.02	-.04
Dogmatism	.38	.21***	.02	.17
Political sophistication	-.37	-.17***	.01	-.20
Ideological identity (liberal = high)	-.10	-.02	.02	-.02
Partisan identity (Democrat = high)	.04	.02	.01	.02
Religious attendance	.09	.02	.01	.02
Born-again	.16	.01	.01	.02
Female	-.16	-.03***	.01	-.06
Level of education	-.30	-.10***	.01	-.11
Owens home	-.08	.02	.01	.03
Age	.03	.04*	.02	.03
Black	.11	.04***	.01	.05
Hispanic	.10	.04***	.01	.04
Group dummy variables		Yes		
Intercept		.67***	.03	

Standard Deviation – Dependent Variable	.28
Standard Error of Estimate	.21
R ²	.42***
N	3,748
Notes: See Online Appendix C for information on the distributions of each of these variables.	
Unstandardized regression coefficients and R ² : *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$	

Table 4. The Moderating Effects of Emotions and Political Sophistication on Intolerance

Type of Predictor/Indicator	b	s.e.	β
Anger toward the group	.12 ^{***}	.02	.15
Fear of the group	-.00	.02	-.00
Hatred of the group	.02	.02	.02
Political Sophistication	-.16 ^{***}	.03	-.19
Anger \times Sophistication	-.10 [*]	.04	-.10
Fear \times Sophistication	.06	.03	.06
Hatred \times Sophistication	.06	.04	.05
Intercept	.33 ^{***}	.03	
Standard Deviation – Dependent Variable	.28		
Standard Error of Estimate	.21		
R^2	.43 ^{***}		
N	3,748		

Notes:

These results are from supplementing the equation reported in Table 3 (above) with interaction terms for each of the three emotions interacted with political sophistication. The coefficients reported here pertain only to the emotions, political sophistication, and their interactions.

Unstandardized regression coefficients and R^2 : *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Online Appendix A: Survey Details, Freedom and Tolerance Surveys

All of these surveys were conducted by SRBI (SRBI/Abt). In 2007, 2008, and 2009, we used a standard random digit dial (RDD) design; in 2010 and 2011, the RDD sample was supplemented with a cellphone subsample.

2007 – 2009

These surveys are based on a nationally representative RDD sample. Conducted by Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas Inc. (SRBI), Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing was used. The initial questionnaires were subjected to a formal test, and, on the basis of the results of the pretests, were significantly revised. Within households, the respondents were selected randomly. The final data sets were subjected to some relatively minor post-stratification and were also weighted to accommodate variability in the respondents' household sizes.

In 2007, the interviews averaged around 25 minutes in length. The AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.8% and the AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 29.5% (see AAPOR 2004), which is about the average of telephone surveys these days (Holbrook, Krosnick, & Pfent, 2007).

In 2008, the interviews averaged about 30 minutes in length. The AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.6% and the AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.5%.

In 2009, the interviews averaged around 37 minutes in length. The AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.6% and the AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.5%.

2010 – 2011

The 2010 and 2011 surveys used a research design that combines a standard RDD subsample with a cellphone-only subsample. Samples were drawn from both the landline and cellphone national random digit dial (RDD) frames. Persons with residential landlines were not screened out of the cellphone sample. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC, according to SRBI/Abt specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were drawn with equal probabilities from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained one or more residential directory listings. The cellphone sample was drawn through a systematic sampling of 1,000 blocks dedicated to cellular service according to the Telcordia database. For the landline portion of the sample, the respondents were selected randomly within household.

In 2010, the interviews averaged around 28 minutes in length. The overall AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 47.6% and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.9%. For the RDD stratum, the AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 49.1% and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.9%. The rates within the cellphone stratum are slightly lower: the AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 41.6% and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 26.6%.

In 2011, the interviews averaged around 28 minutes in length. The overall AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.7% and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 29.6%. For the RDD stratum, the AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.3% and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.3%. The rates within the cellphone stratum are similar: The AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 45.5% and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 27.0%.

Online Appendix B: Question Wordings for Major Measures Used in the Analysis

The constructs and the question wordings of their operationalizations are reported below.

Sociotropic Threat

A scale is computed by summing the responses to each of the following items:

Here are some terms that can be used to describe various political groups. Taking them one at a time, please tell me how you feel about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]. The first pair of terms is "not dangerous to society" versus "dangerous to society." On a scale of 0-10 where zero means "not dangerous to society" and 10 means "dangerous to society" and using any number in between, how do you feel about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

The next pair of terms is "Dangerous to the normal lives of people" versus "Not dangerous to the normal lives of people." On a scale of 0-10 where zero means "Not dangerous to the normal lives of people" and 10 means "Dangerous to the normal lives of people" and using any number in between, how do you feel about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

Egocentric Threat

A scale is computed by summing the responses to each of the following items:

Let's suppose, for a minute, that [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP] came to power in the United States. Using the scale where "0" means the group would NOT reduce your personal political freedom at all, to "10"—the group would greatly reduce your personal political freedom—and using any number between zero and 10, where would you place [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

Considering your own personal security, using a scale where "0" means the group would NOT reduce your personal security at all and "10" means the group would greatly reduce your personal security and using any number between zero and 10, to what extent would [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP], if they gained power, affect your personal security?

Group Power

A scale is computed by summing the responses to each of the following items:

On a scale of 0-10 where zero means "Unlikely to gain a lot of power in the United States" and 10 means "Likely to gain a lot of power in the United States" and using any number in between, how do you feel about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

On a scale of 0-10 where zero means "Unlikely to affect how well my family and I live" and 10 means "Likely to affect how well my family and I live" and using any number in between, how do you feel about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

On a scale of 0-10 where zero means "Not powerful" and 10 means "powerful" and using any number in between, how do you feel about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

Perception that group is undemocratic

On a scale of 0-10 where zero means "Not willing to follow the rules of democracy" and 10 means "Willing to follow the rules of democracy" and using any number in between, how do you feel about [GROUP X]?

Anger toward the group

On a scale of 0-10 where zero means "Couldn't care less" and 10 means "Angry" and using any number in between, how do you feel about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

Hatred toward the group

On a scale of 0-10 where zero means "Couldn't care less" and 10 means "Hatred" and using any number in between, how do you feel about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

Fear toward the group

To what degree do [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP] make you afraid versus not afraid? Using a scale where "0" means the group makes you NOT afraid and

“10” means the group makes you afraid and using any number between zero and 10, to what degree do you think [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP] make you afraid?

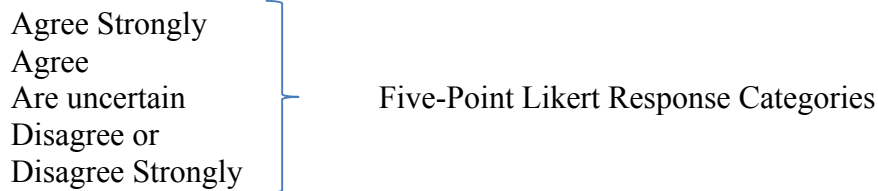
Knows group member

Do you personally know any [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP MEMBER], even one? Yes (1) / No (0)

Liberty preferred to order

A scale is computed by summing the responses to each of the following items:

Society shouldn't have to put up with those who have political ideas that are extremely different from the majority's.



It is better to live in an orderly society than to allow people so much freedom that they can become disruptive.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

Free speech is just not worth it if it means that we have to put up with the danger to society of extremist political views.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

Support for the Rule of Law

A scale is computed by summing the responses to each of the following items:

It is not necessary to obey a law you consider unjust.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

Sometimes it might be better to ignore the law and solve problems immediately rather than wait for a legal solution.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

The government should have some ability to bend the law in order to solve pressing social and political problems.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that I did not vote for.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

When it comes right down to it, law is not all that important; what's important is that our government solve society's problems and make us all better off.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

Political Intolerance

A scale is computed by summing the responses to each of the following items:

To what extent do you agree strongly, agree, are uncertain, disagree, or disagree strongly with the following statements about [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP]?

a. [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP] should be allowed to make a speech in our community. Do you...

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

b. [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP] should be banned from running for public office. Do you...

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

c. [LEAST-LIKED GROUP/OTHER HIGHLY DISLIKED GROUP] should be allowed to hold public rallies and demonstrations in our community. Do you...

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

Dogmatism

A scale is computed by summing the responses to each of the following items:

There are two kinds of people in this world: those who are for the truth and those who are against it.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

To compromise with our political opponents is dangerous because it usually leads to the betrayal of our own side.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

A group which tolerates too many differences of opinion among its own members cannot exist for long.

Five-Point Likert Response Categories

Political Sophistication

A political knowledge scale is computed by summing the correct responses to each of the following five items:

Item 1: Some judges in the U.S. are elected; others are appointed to the bench. Do you happen to know if the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court are elected or appointed to the bench?

- 1 Elected
- 2 Appointed to the Bench (Correct)

Some judges in the U.S. serve for a set number of years; others serve a life term. Do you happen to know whether the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court serve for a set number of years or whether they serve a life term?

- 1 Set Number of Years

- 2 Life Term (Correct)

Do you happen to know who has the last say when there is a conflict over the meaning of the Constitution—the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. Congress, or the President?

- 1 U.S. Supreme Court (Correct)
2 U.S. Congress
3 President

As you know, the U.S. Supreme Court issues written opinions along with its decisions in most major cases it decides. I wonder if you know about how many decisions with opinions the Court issues each year. Would you say it is...

- 1 Less than one hundred decisions with opinions each year (Correct)
2 Around five hundred decisions with opinions
3 A thousand decisions with opinions or more per year

When the U.S. Supreme Court decides a case, would you say that...

- 1 The decision can be appealed to another court
2 Congress can review the decision to see if it should become the law of the land
3 The decision is final and cannot be further reviewed (Correct)

Online Appendix C: Distributional Statistics

Appendix C: Distributional Statistics for Major Variables in the Analysis			
	Variables		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range
Group is most (versus 3 rd -most) disliked	.50	.50	0 —> 1
Sociotropic Threat	.71	.29	0 —> 1
Egocentric Threat	.69	.30	0 —> 1
Group Power	.43	.27	0 —> 1
Perception that group is undemocratic	.60	.34	0 —> 1
Anger toward the group	.63	.34	0 —> 1
Fear toward the group	.47	.37	0 —> 1
Hatred toward the group	.51	.32	0 —> 1
Knows group member	.17	.38	0 —> 1
Liberty preferred to order	.60	.22	0 —> 1
Support for the rule of law	.68	.17	0 —> 1
Dogmatism	.48	.22	0 —> 1
Political knowledge	.53	.33	0 —> 1
Ideological identity (liberal = high)	.43	.28	0 —> 1
Partisan identity (Democrat = high)	.55	.34	0 —> 1
Religious attendance	.45	.28	0 —> 1
Born-again	.37	.48	0 —> 1
Female	.48	.50	0 —> 1
Level of education	.51	.30	0 —> 1

Owens home	.71	.46	0 —> 1
Age	.36	.22	0 —> 1
Black	.12	.33	0 —> 1
Hispanic	.11	.32	0 —> 1

Note: N = 3,748.