

More similar than they think: Liberals and conservatives exaggerate perceived moral views

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Moral stereotypes about "typical" liberals and conservatives held by both groups are generally correct, but exaggerated both for their own group and the other, according to new research published December 12 in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* by Jesse Graham at the University of Southern California and his colleagues at the University of Virginia and New York University.

The researchers asked 2,212 U.S participants to answer questions about moral beliefs either with their own views, or with their idea of a typical liberal or conservative person's answers. They found that liberals endorsed individualistic moral concerns of compassion and fairness more than conservatives, and conservatives endorsed group-focused concerns such as loyalty and respect for authority. Across the political spectrum, participants' responses correctly reflected the moral endorsements of "typical" liberals and conservatives, but increased the extremity of the views. The authors found that these perceived stereotypes exaggerated the moral ideologies of both the respondent's own group as well as that of the other group, and that liberals were least accurate about the views held by both groups.

Graham explains, "Rather than finding that liberals think conservatives are immoral, and conservatives think the same about liberals, we found that all three groups shared exaggerated moral stereotypes about partisans on either side. These moral [stereotypes](#) were basically that

liberals don't care at all about loyalty, authority, and sanctity, and that conservatives don't care at all about compassion, fairness, and equality. The findings suggest that liberals and conservatives, while differing systematically in their moral worldviews, are actually more similar in their [moral judgments](#) than anyone thinks."

More information: Graham J, Nosek BA, Haidt J (2012) The Moral Stereotypes of Liberals and Conservatives: Exaggeration of Differences across the Political Spectrum. *PLoS ONE* 7(12): e50092.
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