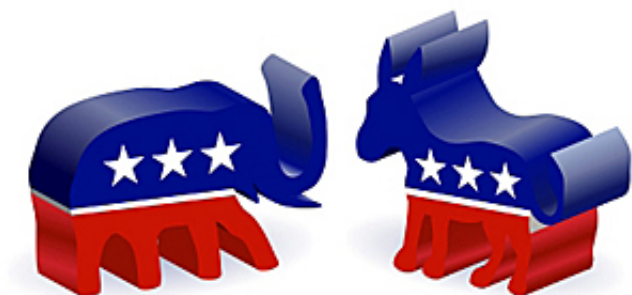


New report finds Conservatives demonstrate more self control than Liberals

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Credit: Freedigitalphotos.net

Findings from three separate studies link a person's political ideology and their self-control performance, with conservatives demonstrating greater self-control than liberals. The research led by Joshua John Clarkson, a University of Cincinnati assistant professor of marketing, is published in this week's early edition of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.

Two studies in the report involved tasks that were conducted among undergraduates at two Midwestern universities over the past year. The third study involved 135 people across the U.S. taking part in a survey through Amazon Mechanical Turk service. In each study, Clarkson says participants who identified as politically conservative consistently showed greater attention regulation and task persistence—hallmark

indicators of self-control—and that these effects were independent of participants' gender, race, age, education or income.

Study 1

At one Midwestern university, 147 undergraduates completed a modified Stroop task. Sitting in front of a computer screen, they were presented with a word that represented a color (red, blue, green, yellow), with the words presented on an incongruent background. For example, the word 'yellow' would appear on a blue background. The researchers examined how quickly participants would respond with the word, controlling for correctness. "We found that those who identified as conservative were as correct as liberals, but they were performing the tasks faster. This finding suggests that conservatives might be better able to fixate their attention on a task," says Clarkson.

Study 2

At a separate Midwestern university, 176 undergraduates performed the same Stroop task. Again, researchers found that as political conservatism increased, there was a faster response time as well as an increase in the belief of freewill. "Both conservatives and liberals reported that they wanted to perform well, but again, conservatives were responding faster, and this faster response stemmed from their stronger belief in freewill. That is, conservatives' belief in their responsibility for their outcome contributed to their faster responding," says Clarkson.

Study 3

Using Amazon Mechanical Turk, 135 Americans participated in several seven-letter anagram self-control tasks. For each anagram, they were asked—under a set of rules (e.g., words had to have at least three

letters)—to create as many English words as they could with the letters. Importantly, participants were told they could decide when they wanted to end the task. The researchers found that the conservatives spent more time on the task than the liberals.

However, the findings showed that conservatives outperformed liberals only when participants believed freewill has a beneficial impact on self-control. When participants believed freewill could undermine self-control, liberals outperformed conservatives.

"This finding is especially interesting because research to this point has focused only on the positive outcomes of believing in freewill," says Clarkson. "However, one could imagine a host of situations where knowing you are responsible for your actions could lead to frustration, anxiety and other negative emotions that could impair self-control. In these contexts, these findings would suggest [liberals](#) will demonstrate greater self-control."

Clarkson explains how the research offers clear insight into the psyche of consumers. "When marketers consider self-control, we tend to think of sticking to a diet or exercise regimen, not wandering off your grocery list or avoiding impulsive purchases. All of these behaviors exhibit elements of attention regulation and persistence. Ultimately, however, it all comes down to believing whether or not you can control your own behavior, and what we're finding is that conservatives are more likely to believe they can control their own behavior."

Results of the study were reported in *PNAS* under the title, "The [self-control](#) consequences of political ideology."

More information: The self-control consequences of political ideology, by Joshua John Clarkson et al.

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Provided by University of Cincinnati

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