

# Right or left, Americans value hard work to achieve success

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Conservatives and liberals may agree on at least one thing: the importance of working hard in order to succeed.

Liberals and Democrats are far more inclined than conservatives and Republicans to believe in the importance of equity—the notion that some groups may need different opportunities to succeed based on their starting point, so that all groups have the same levels of success.

But when it comes to proportionality—the idea that effort determines success—the researchers found a much smaller political divide. The paper, "All Things Being Equal: Distinguishing Proportionality and Equity in Moral Reasoning," was published in *Social Psychological and Personality Sciences*. The paper's senior author is Jeff Niederdeppe, associate professor of communication.

"This speaks to why we see so much value in American society placed on picking yourself up by your bootstraps to overcome any obstacle," said first author Christofer Skurka. "Notions of meritocracy and what is sometimes called the

'Protestant work ethic' are really interwoven into the American fabric, almost regardless of a person's [political orientation](#)."

In the study, around 3,000 participants from the United States filled out a 42-item questionnaire. They rated the extent to which they believe different circumstances impact their [moral judgments](#) ("Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority") and rated the relevance of statements such as, "Respect for authority is something all children need to learn." Participants reported their [political views](#) and party affiliations, as well as their gender, age, education, race and ethnicity.

The researchers found that people on the political left care much more about equity than those on the right, explaining why liberals are more likely to support policies such as affirmative action and public assistance, which aim to correct imbalances.

The study also found that while conservatives generally care more about proportionality than liberals do, liberals also value it highly. Understanding what contributes to concepts of fairness can help policymakers frame conversations in terms that will resonate across [different groups](#).

"There's quite a bit of political polarization that we see around public policy, and we often see political partisans talking past each other," Skurka said. "So, by understanding the different moral foundations on which these partisans base their moral judgments, we can better understand why they support certain kinds of initiatives and not others, and how we might be able to rally support for different initiatives."

Provided by Cornell University

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