

conservatives. We suggest that their account is both too general and too specific. Too general because many of the variables invoked by Hibbing et al. show clearer associations with social than with economic conservatism, sometimes showing no association at all with the latter. And too specific because attitudes outside of the political domain show clear connections to many of the variables cited by Hibbing et al.: Attitudes concerning religion and the structure of family and society show highly comparable results to those observed for social conservatism. Accordingly, negativity bias may be best construed as a predictor not of political opinions specifically but of general attitudes toward change across a range of domains. This conclusion is buttressed by a recent behavioral genetic study which found that, in a sample of twins reared apart, attitudes in the political, social, and religious spheres (the Traditional Moral Values Triad; TMVT; Bouchard 2009) were best construed as superficially different representations of a single underlying trait, reflecting traditionalism (Ludeke et al. 2013). The TMVT hypothesis is supported to the extent that the development of attitudes in all three domains can be accounted for by the same mechanisms.

The importance of distinguishing between attitudes toward change (reflected in social conservatism) and attitudes toward equality (reflected in economic conservatism) has been demonstrated elsewhere (e.g., Jost et al. 2009). Here we highlight how the predictors cited by Hibbing et al. show importantly different connections to these two dimensions, and how findings for the social dimension typically apply to all traits in the TMVT.

The Big Five personality model provides some of the most frequently used predictors of attitude constructs. Although general political conservatism is associated with both low Openness/Intellect and high Conscientiousness (Sibley et al. 2012), studies that distinguish between social and economic dimensions report that Openness/Intellect and Conscientiousness are primarily associated with social conservatism, whereas economic conservatism is primarily associated with low Agreeableness (Carney et al. 2008; Hirsh et al. 2010; Van Hiel & Mervielde 2004). This pattern is particularly clear in studies that used social attitude measures related to social and economic conservatism: meta-analysis indicated that Openness/Intellect and Conscientiousness are more strongly associated with Altemeyer's (1996) Right-Wing Authoritarianism (assessing attitudes toward change) than with Pratto et al.'s (1994) Social Dominance Orientation (SDO, assessing attitudes toward equality); SDO was primarily correlated with Agreeableness and more modestly with Openness/Intellect (Sibley & Duckitt 2008). Consistent with the TMVT model, meta-analysis demonstrated correlations of religious fundamentalism with Conscientiousness and Openness/Intellect similar to those associated with social conservatism (Saroglou 2010).

In their values, social conservatives diverge from economic conservatives but converge with authoritarians and religious individuals. Duriez et al. (2002) reported that, although both social and economic conservatism were associated with a tendency to favor the self-enhancing cluster of Schwartz's Values Scale (1992), only social conservatism was associated with a preference for conservation values; this preference for conservation values is, however, common to both authoritarians and religious individuals (Feather 2005; Saroglou et al. 2004).

Similarly, disgust sensitivity appears to be more correlated with social conservatism than economic conservatism and is also correlated with religiousness and authoritarianism (e.g., Haidt et al. 1994; Hodson & Costello 2007; Inbar et al. 2012b; Terrizzi et al. 2010). Because evolutionary accounts of disgust have posited that the emotion evolved to prevent infection, countries with elevated infection risk (higher parasite loads) might be expected to exhibit corresponding attitude differences; Hibbing et al. note precisely this effect for conservative religious and social beliefs (Fincher & Thornhill 2012), and a recent study (Murray et al. 2013) observed a comparable association between parasite load and cross-national differences in authoritarian attitudes. Even humor preferences are informative: both

conservatism and religiousness appear to be negatively correlated with enjoyment of "sick" humor (which includes jokes with morbid, gruesome, or sadistic content; Saroglou & Anciaux 2004, Wilson & Patterson 1969). In Hibbing et al.'s framework, this might indicate that elevated sensitivity among conservatives and religious individuals to the aversive imagery in such jokes interferes with their ability to find humor in them.

Variables related to cognitive function follow the same pattern. Cognitive style measures such as Need for Closure and Need for Cognition correlate moderately with measures of social conservatism, authoritarianism, and religiousness, though they appear to be only modestly or even not at all associated with economic conservatism and SDO (Crowson 2009; Hunsberger et al. 1996; Saroglou 2002; Van Hiel et al. 2004). Intelligence and education are negatively correlated with political conservatism, authoritarianism, and conventional religiousness (Lewis et al. 2011; Van Hiel et al. 2010), whereas the relation of education and intelligence to economic conservatism and SDO appears to be smaller than that observed for the TMVT traits, and possibly even inverted (Heaven et al. 2011; Johnson & Tamney 2001; Kimmelmeier 2008).

Studies of the physiological and neurological correlates of attitude differences represent a recent but expanding addition to this literature. Consistent with the TMVT account, Hibbing et al. note that the same pattern of neural activity exhibited by conservatives during a task requiring response inhibition was observed among highly religious individuals (Amodio et al. 2007; Inzlicht et al. 2009). (Significantly, the results of these studies seem to be in conflict with the "negativity bias" hypothesis, as the pattern of neural activity exhibited by conservatives and the highly religious is typically interpreted as an indication of reduced sensitivity to negative information; Shackman et al. 2011.)

Although Hibbing et al. have provided a novel and compelling integration of a broad literature, we suggest their proposed mechanism is better suited to account for differences in the trait identified by the TMVT than for political conservatism broadly construed. Future empirical work exploring the origins of political attitude differences could employ a broader range of outcome measures (differentiating between social and economic conservatism, and assessing religiousness, authoritarianism, and traditionalism) to assess this possibility.

How encompassing is the effect of negativity bias on political conservatism?

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Abstract: We argue that the political effects of negativity bias are narrower than Hibbing et al. suggest. Negativity bias reliably predicts social, but not economic, conservatism, and its political effects often vary across levels of political engagement. Thus the role of negativity bias in broad ideological conflict depends on the strategic packaging of economic and social attitudes by political elites.

Hibbing et al. provide a masterful review of the literatures documenting psychological, behavioral, and physiological differences between liberals and conservatives. Moreover, they propose an elegant thesis to account for these literatures' main findings: that conservatives are more attuned and responsive to aversive stimuli than are liberals, and individual differences in dispositional negativity bias account for differences in

conservative versus liberal political attitudes. We comment here on three key aspects of this thesis: the structure of political attitudes, the relations of negativity bias (as broadly conceptualized by Hibbing et al.) with social and economic political attitudes, and contextual moderators of the links between negativity bias and political attitudes. These considerations, we argue, suggest that dispositional influences on political attitudes, and therefore political conflicts, are narrower than the authors describe.

The authors define political conservatism versus liberalism as a single broad dimension, reflecting an “ancient and universal” political division pitting preferences for “stability and order” against those for “progress and innovation” (sect. 1, para. 1). The former side of this division is said to correspond with a “great many of the typical tenets of political conservatism,” including not only sociocultural preferences (such as support for restrictive immigration policies, harsh treatment of criminals, and social and moral traditionalism) but also economic preferences (such as opposition to government economic intervention and welfare programs) (sect. 6, para. 7).

However, individuals do not consistently organize their political attitudes along a broad conservative–liberal dimension (e.g., Treier & Hillygus 2009). Rather, individuals with a high degree of political engagement—those who are most interested in and informed about political discourse—typically structure their political attitudes along a single dimension, but individuals who are less engaged typically do not (e.g., Zaller 1992). These findings present a challenge to any claim that a psychological disposition directly or organically leads individuals to adopt broad coherent packages of liberal or conservative attitudes. Such claims must contend with the fact that political attitudes do not organically cohere into particular packages; instead, the emergence of an overarching liberal-conservative dimension appears contingent upon exposure to political discourse, which itself emerges from the strategic actions of political elites.

The messy structure of political attitudes raises a second issue: whether negativity bias relates differently with different kinds of political attitudes. Hibbing et al. mention the claim that negativity bias influences economic attitudes less strongly than it does social attitudes (sect. 6.2, para. 3). They are right to do so, as a great deal of evidence is consistent with this view. For example, Smith et al. (2011) found that physiologically assessed disgust sensitivity predicted conservative positions on certain sexuality-related issues but not on a single economic issue: welfare spending, tax cuts, free trade, or small government (p. 4, see also Inbar et al. 2009a, pp. 720–21 and footnote 2). Oxley et al. (2008) found that physiologically assessed threat sensitivity predicted conservative position on a composite of sociocultural attitudes (e.g., the death penalty, gay marriage, abortion rights), but not a composite of economic attitudes, concluding that “physiological responses to threat are connected to socially protective policy positions but not to economic policy positions” (Supporting Online Material, p. 7). Self-report measures pertaining to negativity bias reliably predict conservative social attitudes but do not reliably predict conservative economic attitudes (Carney et al. 2008; Crowson 2009; Duckitt & Sibley 2009; Feldman & Johnston 2014; Johnston 2013; Johnson & Tamney 2001; Stenner 2005; Van Hiel & Merielde 2004). To be sure, there are well-conducted studies showing some common dispositional correlates of economic and social attitudes (e.g., Gerber et al. 2010). However, the overall pattern of findings indicates that dispositional negativity bias reliably predicts social conservatism but does not reliably predict economic conservatism. Both social and economic positions are central aspects of right vs. left ideology, as well as frequent sources of political conflict. The available evidence indicates that conflicts about sociocultural issues—but not those about economic issues—may be organically rooted in individual differences in negativity bias.

This brings us to a third and final issue: the moderating effects of contextual variables. Hibbing et al. acknowledge that cultural and historical factors can influence links between negativity bias

and political attitudes (sect. 3, para. 9). Another key contextual variable is exposure to political discourse. For example, one study found that high need for cognitive closure predicted more liberal (i.e., pro-government intervention) economic attitudes in both community and student samples, but predicted more conservative (i.e., anti-government intervention) economic attitudes in a sample of political activists; meanwhile, high need for closure predicted more-conservative sociocultural attitudes in all three samples (Golec 2002). What might explain this pattern of results? We propose that individuals high in negativity bias are organically drawn toward conservative sociocultural attitudes. If such individuals become politically engaged (as in the case of activists), then they are frequently exposed to political discourse indicating that conservative sociocultural attitudes should be packaged with conservative economic attitudes, which they ultimately come to adopt. This study and others like it (e.g., Malka & Soto 2011) suggest that some dispositional effects on political attitudes are not organic, but rather are contingent upon exposure to discursive messages about the packaging of political attitudes.

Taken together, the findings reviewed in this commentary support several conclusions about the relations between dispositional negativity bias and political attitudes. As proposed by Hibbing et al., individuals high in negativity bias do appear to be organically drawn toward conservative social attitudes such as restrictive immigration policies, harsh treatment of criminals, and social and moral traditionalism. However, such individuals do not appear to be organically drawn toward conservative economic attitudes. Instead, the effects of negativity bias on economic attitudes are contingent upon contextual factors such as culture and exposure to political discourse. More generally, the bottom-up structuring of sociocultural and economic attitudes compelled by dispositional influences might differ from, and even compete with, the top-down attitude structuring promoted by political discourse (e.g., Hatemi et al. 2012). Conservative economic and sociocultural preferences do not seem to be bound together through the bottom-up influence of negativity bias.

Political ideology is contextually variable and flexible rather than fixed

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Abstract: Hibbing et al. argue that the liberal–conservative continuum is (a) universal and (b) grounded in psychological differences in sensitivity to negative stimuli. Our commentary argues that both claims overlook the importance of context. We review evidence that the liberal–conservative continuum is far from universal and that ideological differences are contextually flexible rather than fixed.

Hibbing et al. make two overarching claims: (a) the liberal–conservative continuum is an “ancient and universal” lens that people use to make sense of their social world (sect. 1, para. 1), and (b) the psychological explanation for the liberal–conservative continuum is that liberals are less sensitive and responsive to negative stimuli than conservatives. These claims are consistent with a scientific commitment to parsimony and alluring in their simplicity. Both of these claims, however, ignore a foundational psychological principle: Context matters. This commentary will address a