



## Dimensions of social dominance and their associations with environmentalism<sup>☆</sup>



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### ABSTRACT

Individual differences in the preference for group-based hierarchy and inequality, as indexed by social dominance orientation (SDO), have been shown to predict environment-relevant variables. To date the literature examining the SDO–environmentalism link has used the traditional unidimensional conceptualisation of SDO. This article reports three studies using the new measurement and conceptualisation of SDO that involves the SDO<sub>7</sub> scale and the sub-dimensions of intergroup dominance (SDO-D) and intergroup anti-egalitarianism (SDO-E). SDO-D entails support for group-based dominance achieved via overt oppression and aggressive intergroup behaviour, and SDO-E entails support for group-based inequality subtly achieved via unequal distribution of resources. Our results show anti-egalitarianism to be the main SDO sub-dimension related to environmentalism. While SDO-D is either a weaker or non-significant predictor, individuals with high levels of SDO-E were less willing to make personal sacrifices for the environment, value environmental protection and endorse climate change beliefs. Interestingly, neither facet of SDO predicted change in environmentalism over a five-month period; but climate change denial predicted change in SDO-E while pro-environmental attitudes predicted change in SDO-D over time.

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### 1. Introduction

Social dominance theory is a prominent intergroup relations theory that focuses on individuals' attitudes about inequality between social groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Social dominance orientation (SDO) is a measure of this attitudinal support for inequality and hierarchical relations between groups in society. SDO is a powerful predictor of intergroup attitudes and behaviours, including prejudice against derogated social groups (e.g., unemployed people, psychiatric patients; Cantal, Milfont, Wilson, & Gouveia, 2015) and beliefs and policies supporting greater levels of group-based inequalities (e.g., political conservatism, internal attributions for poverty, opposition to social welfare and affirmative action; Kteily, Ho, & Sidanius, 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Beyond its explanatory power of a wide array of variables relevant to intergroup relations, an increasing number of recent studies have demonstrated the importance of SDO in understanding human–nature interactions. These studies show that individual levels of SDO not only

predict intergroup attitudes and behaviours but also attitudes and behaviours directed towards the natural environment. In particular, research has shown that individuals high in SDO are less likely to value preserving nature (Milfont, Richter, Sibley, Wilson, & Fischer, 2013) and less likely to believe that humans should live harmoniously with nature (Jackson, Bitacola, Janes, & Esses, 2013). High-SDO individuals are also more likely to deny the reality of climate change and its human causes (Häkkinen & Akrami, 2014; Jylhä & Akrami, 2015; Milfont et al., 2013, Study 4), and to be more supportive of environmental exploitation when this benefits their in-group (Milfont & Sibley, 2014). Research has also shown SDO to predict other environment-relevant variables such as meat consumption (Allen, Wilson, Ng & Dunne, 2000) and exploitation of animals (Dhont & Hodson, 2014).

Besides its relationship with environment-relevant attitudes and behaviours, research has shown that SDO helps explain well-established findings in the environmental psychology literature. While political affiliation is one of the strongest predictors of climate change denial (Hornsey, Harris, Bain & Fielding, 2016), SDO mediates the influence of political orientation on denial (Jylhä, Cantal, Akrami, & Milfont, 2016), suggesting that support for group-based inequality might partially explain conservatives' opposition to climate change. Moreover, SDO mediates the well-known gender difference in environmentalism, indicating that men tend to be less concerned about environmental problems because men generally have higher levels of SDO (Milfont & Sibley, 2016).

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These recent studies have demonstrated the critical role SDO plays, not only in understanding human–human interactions, but also in understanding human–nature interactions, and in particular human-based hierarchical views towards the natural environment. However, studies examining the predictive role of SDO on environment-relevant variables have so far examined SDO as a unidimensional construct. A recent advancement of social dominance theory is the separation of SDO into two specific sub-dimensions: support for intergroup dominance (SDO-D) and support for intergroup anti-egalitarianism (SDO-E). In the current article, we contribute to this literature by examining the extent to which the sub-dimensions of SDO differentially predict measures of environmentalism.

### 1.1. SDO sub-dimensions and environmentalism

SDO research has recently argued for the theoretically important and empirically sound separation of SDO into the distinct sub-dimensions of SDO-D and SDO-E (e.g., Bergh, Sidanius, & Sibley, 2015; Ho et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2015; Jost & Thompson, 2000). In the context of intergroup relations, SDO-D relates to overt racism and aggression towards other groups in which dominant groups actively oppress subordinate groups. In contrast, SDO-E is associated with beliefs that legitimize this inequality and more passive resistance of policies that aim to redistribute social power. As detailed by Ho et al. (2015), “Whereas individuals high on SDO-D prefer dominance hierarchies where high power groups oppress and subjugate low power groups, and are willing to achieve this form of inequality by use of very aggressive measures, individuals high on SDO-E prefer hierarchies where resources are inequitably distributed, and which can be defended by anti-egalitarian ideologies.” (p. 1022).

To our knowledge, no research to date has broadened the two-dimensional SDO approach in relation to environmentalism. However, there is reason to think that the dimensions may relate differently to environmental attitudes. Although measurement of SDO was developed to probe attitudes towards intergroup relations, SDO generalizes to non-human relationships, specifically the relationship between humans and the natural environment (Milfont et al., 2013). Either aspect of SDO could feasibly drive this association. For example, lower concern for the environment might be related to SDO-D because of a preference for human dominance over nature, or be related to SDO-E because of a preference for the hierarchical distribution of natural resources.

Indeed, recent theorising regarding the distinction between the SDO sub-dimensions and past research on the SDO–environmentalism link allows us to make preliminary predictions on the differential associations between the SDO sub-dimensions and environment-relevant variables. Relative to SDO-E, SDO-D is a stronger predictor of intergroup dominance and support for aggressive and violent attitudes towards low status groups. Previous findings and theoretical argumentations suggest that SDO-D would be the stronger predictor of environment-relevant variables for at least three reasons. First, the dominance label describing SDO-D could be linked to the “dominant social paradigm” expressing the view that the natural world was created for the benefit of humankind (Pirages & Ehrlich, 1974). Likewise, the intergroup dominance indexed by SDO-D could be translated into human dominance over nature (see Milfont et al., 2013). Finally, the oppressive aspect of SDO-D could emerge in environment-relevant preferences and decision making. For example, Jackson et al. (2013, Study 4) found that when given the choice, high-SDO individuals prefer to direct environmental hazards associated with a manufacturing plant to countries with low economic standing, even though the resources from the plant benefit their own social group. Consistent with a dominance view of SDO, hierarchy is achieved in this context through oppressing a group of lower power and status.

Notwithstanding these perspectives linking environmentalism more strongly with SDO-D, we would tentatively argue that the combined empirical evidence and recent theoretical development suggest that SDO-E is in fact the stronger predictor of environment-relevant

variables. Notably, SDO-E is a stronger predictor than SDO-D of support for the unequal distribution of resources and opposition to policies that promote greater equality (Ho et al., 2015). This support for unequal distribution of resources indexed by SDO-E has been observed in the context of environmental research. Milfont and Sibley's (2014) hierarchy enhancing hypothesis of environmental exploitation correctly predicted that SDO relates to environmental exploitation when this leads to a widening of the gap between high- and low-status social groups. Indeed, they showed that SDO predicts support for a mining operation only when the operation results in increased social inequality, thus allocating the high-status group a disproportionate amount of natural resources. Jackson et al. (2013, Study 2) similarly found that SDO predicts exploitation only when one's own country benefits. Hence, both of these studies allude to a more anti-egalitarian take on the SDO–environmentalism link, where hierarchy is maintained through unequal resource distribution.

This conclusion that SDO-E is the main predictor of environment-relevant variables is also consistent with other findings relating the SDO sub-dimensions and individual differences. Compared to SDO-D, SDO-E had overall stronger negative associations with political conservatism, empathic concerns and harm/care and fairness/reciprocity dimensions of morality (Ho et al., 2015). Previous research has shown that political conservatism is one main negative predictor of climate change denial (Hornsey et al., 2016; Milfont, Milojev, Greaves, & Sibley, 2015), and both empathic orientations (Milfont & Sibley, 2016) and moral concerns related to harm and care (Feinberg & Willer, 2013) are positively associated with pro-environmental attitudes. These patterns of associations lead to an expectation that SDO-E is negatively associated and a stronger predictor of environment-relevant variables compared to SDO-D.

### 1.2. The present study

Recent findings demonstrate the usefulness of the distinct components of SDO in predicting intergroup attitudes and behaviour. We extend this literature into the environmental domain. Our main goal was to examine whether the SDO sub-dimensions differentially relate to environment-relevant variables. Using SDO-D and SDO-E will help tease out the main distinct aspects of SDO related to environmentalism by showing which of the sub-dimensions is the main driver of environmental exploitation. Based on previous findings, we expect that the SDO–environmentalism link will be mainly driven by SDO-E rather than SDO-D, which would suggest an anti-egalitarianism motive rather than a simple dominance motive towards the natural environment.

In addition to establishing which SDO sub-dimension is more strongly associated with environment-relevant variables, a secondary goal of our study is to provide further evidence of the psychometric properties of the new SDO<sub>7</sub> measure in a distinct national and socio-political context (cf. Ho et al., 2015, p. 1024). This measure addresses methodological issues of the SDO<sub>6</sub> scale by providing balanced measures of SDO-D and SDO-E (Ho et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2015).

We report three studies examining our research goals, first examining the factor structure of SDO and then its association with environment-relevant variables. In Study 1, we use items from the SDO<sub>6</sub> to test our prediction that the two-factor model provides a better fit to the data than the conventional unidimensional model of SDO. We then use the SDO<sub>7</sub> in Studies 2 and 3 to replicate the findings reported by Ho et al. (2015) that a four-factor model—with two substantive factors (SDO-D and SDO-E) and two method factors (pro-trait and con-trait)—provides better fit to the data when compared to alternative models.

For the concurrent associations between SDO dimensions and environmentalism in Studies 1 to 3, we expect SDO-E to be more strongly related to environment-relevant variables than SDO-D. Study 3 also tests the longitudinal associations between the SDO sub-dimensions and environmentalism. Given that SDO is thought to be relatively stable and a

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