How ideological migration geographically segregates groups

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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examine how people segregate themselves by ideology.
- When liberals live in conservative areas, they migrate to more liberal areas.
- When conservatives live in liberal areas, they migrate to more conservative areas.
- These effects are mediated by sense of belonging in one's community.

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ABSTRACT

Here, we advance the ideological migration hypothesis — individuals choose to live in communities with ideologies similar to their own to satisfy their need to belong. In Study 1, incongruity between personal and community ideology predicted greater residential mobility and attraction to more ideologically-congruent communities. In Study 2, participants who perceived their ideology to be at odds with their community's displayed a decreased sense of belonging and an increased desire to migrate. In Studies 3 and 4, participants induced to view their current community as growing more incongruent with their own ideology expressed a decreased sense of belonging and an increased desire to migrate. Ideological migration may contribute to the rise in cultural, moral, and ideological segregation and polarization of the American electorate.

Introduction

People tend to live in communities with others who have similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, who have similar lifestyles and personalities, and who adhere to similar political and religious creeds (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Rentfrow, Gosling, & Potter, 2008). Recently, clustering along political lines has gained media attention as this geographic separation has led to a clear inability to find national consensus on big issues (Avlon, 2010; Greenblatt, 2012). This ideological clustering is a recent phenomenon of the past few decades (Abramowitz, 2012; Bishop, 2008), and given what psychologists know about the effects of segregation (e.g., Deutscher, 1948), this geographical division along ideological lines is a likely contributing factor to the partisanship and rancor that is currently paralyzing the United States' government (Burr, 2013). How these homogeneous communities emerge is unclear. The present paper suggests that this de facto segregation might emerge as people strive to satisfy basic psychological needs.

One possible explanation for the emergence of these homogeneous enclaves is that people are "born into it". This is easy to understand with racial composition; racial enclaves can emerge via reproduction across generations. It is also conceivable with personality and ideology. Personalities and ideologies are shaped by the cultures – macro and micro – that people inhabit (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Each of these possibilities proposes that environments affect their inhabitants. But, the reverse causation may also occur. People may also change their environments. People with certain racial identities, personalities, and ideologies may feel like their needs are not being met in one residence, so they could choose to change residences to better satisfy these needs. For example, following social rejection and institutional persecution, the Pilgrims sailed the Mayflower across the Atlantic Ocean in pursuit of a home where they felt that their religious values would be accepted (Philbreck, 2007). This extreme example illustrates the idea that people may leave places where they feel incapable of satisfying basic psychological needs, like the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This may also help explain why people in certain occupations are migrating to communities where many of the residents have similar occupations (Florida, 2008) and people with certain personality traits are migrating to communities where many residents have similar traits (Rentfrow et al., 2008). Consistent with the idea of ideological migration, we

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are increasingly seeing communities segregated by ideology as well (Abramowitz, 2012; Bishop, 2008).

In the present article, we provide evidence that perceptions of fitting in with the ideological composition of one's community may motivate both moving away from those that are incongruent and moving toward those that are congruent with one's ideological orientation. The long-term consequence is the gradual *construction* of segregated and polarized ideological enclaves via migration, rather than this occurring exclusively via reproduction and cultural indoctrination.

Migration

Roughly half of the population changed their residence between 1995 and 2000 (Schmitt, 2001) and an estimated 40–50 million Americans move each year (Florida, 2008). Understanding how people make these residential migration decisions is complex (Greenwood, 1985; Oishi, 2010). Employment, family, finances, personality, and temperament all influence migration (Jokela, 2008; Jokela, Elovainio, Kivimäki, & Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2008; Winstanley, Thorns, & Perkins, 2003). People likely make these decisions in ways that help them pursue their goals. For example, experts in particular occupations tend to move to communities seeking such specialists (Florida, 2004), and extroverts may move to communities with more socially-stimulating environments (Furnham, 1982). In these cases, the migrants may be assuming that the residents living in their destination communities are similar to them in some important ways, as people generally are attracted to similar others (Byrne, 1971). Certain types of similarity may be more attractive than others. For example, moral value similarity is important in selecting friends (Haidt, Rosenberg, & Hom, 2003), teammates in the workplace (Guillaume, Brodbeck, & Riketta, 2012), and neighbors (Putnam, 2007). So, one influence on migration may be the desire to seek environments where there are more similar others on specific important characteristics such as lifestyle, values, and political ideology (Byrne, Clore, & Smeaton, 1986; Karylowski, 1976; Werner & Parmelee, 1979).

A complementary possibility is that people move away from communities based on feeling repulsed by the preponderance of dissimilar others (Rosenbaum, 1986). People may migrate when they feel they do not belong in their current community. In some cases, people may find the ideology of their current community disgusting, ideologically-objectionable, or threatening, eliciting unpleasant existential anxiety (Crawford, 2012; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Motyl, in press; Motyl, Vail, & Pyszczynski, 2009; Schimel, Hayes, Williams, & Jahrig, 2007). When coping with these aversive states, people's natural reaction involves trying to reduce the aversive state. When evaluating residential options, people may be especially inclined to move away from communities with ideologies that are incongruent with their own.

It is natural for people to desire communities where they share a worldview with their neighbors, allowing for a shared understanding of social life and binding people together into sacred groups that may help them to feel like something greater than a single mortal being (Motyl et al., 2011; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997; Vail, Arndt, Motyl, & Pyszczynski, 2012). When people perceive a lack of belonging, they exhibit impaired academic and athletic performance, mental and physical health, and reduced civic and political participation (Anderson, 2009; Leary, 2009; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2010; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Ideological symbols may induce a sense of belonging for adherents of a given ideology. For example, in the presence of Christian symbols, non-Christians exhibit reduced subjective well-being. This reduction in subjective well-being was mediated by the sense that they did not belong in that setting (Schmitt, Davies, Hung, & Wright, 2010). This lack of fit is undesirable for many, but fortunately, some people have a means to resolve a lack of ideological fit between person and community; they can pack up and move.

In sum, perceived similarity with communities may lead people to migrate away from dissimilar communities and toward similar communities. In the current research, we propose the ideological migration hypothesis — individuals that have the flexibility to do so will tend to choose communities with ideological worldviews similar to their own in order to satisfy their need to belong. From this hypothesis, we develop three key predictions: (a) misfit between the person's and the community's ideological worldviews will engender increased migration; (b) fit between the person's and prospective community's ideological worldviews will influence where people choose to migrate; and, (c) this migration motivation will be driven by people's need to belong.

Ideology and migration

Community-level data provide preliminary support that people are migrating away from ideologically misfit communities and toward ideologically fit ones. For example, communities are growing more morally and politically homogeneous (Bishop, 2008; Bishop & Cushing, 2008). These aggregate-level data, though, do not clarify the psychological processes contributing to migration. The correlational, aggregate community data do not, for example, address the possibility that the moral values of the majority group in a given community are gradually adopted by the minority group through social influence (Asch, 1956; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Festinger, 1963; Harton & Bullock, 2007; Latane, 1981; Sinclair, Lowery, Hardin, & Colangelo, 2005).

While social influence may have an impact on worldviews, we believe that some part of the explanation for the correlation is that people perceive an ideological misfit with their own community and select new communities that are a better ideological fit. How people identify the ideological matrix of a community is unclear. Historically, people have not been particularly knowledgeable about the moral and political values of their communities (Converse, 1964; Carpini & Keeter, 1996), but this may be changing as Americans seem to be growing increasingly ideological (Jost, 2006). Discerning between ideological communities may have grown easier over recent decades, as ideological identities have become more expansive to include not only political party membership, but also beliefs about human nature, attitudes, religious denomination, and personality (Abramowitz, 2012; Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Zimbardo, 1996; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Tompkins, 1965). Drawing on contemporary and historical political theories (e.g., Burke, 1790/2003, Mill, 1859/2003; Sowell, 2007), ideological orientation can be viewed as a simple, proxy indicator of many variables, including a person's broader non-political worldview. Ideology predicts variation in moral foundations, and these foundations predict partisan identification, political attitudes, policy preferences, and voting behavior (Graham et al., 2011; Inbar, Pizarro, Iyer, & Haidt, 2012; Iyer, Graham, Koleva, Ditto, & Haidt, 2010; Koleva, Graham, Ditto, Iyer, & Haidt, 2012). People with liberal ideologies prioritize individualism and protecting individuals from injustice. In contrast, people with conservative ideologies prioritize group cohesion and orthodoxy. Perhaps liberal and conservative communities have physical characteristics that convey different ideological identities.

At the individual level, for example, people with liberal and conservative ideologies construct their bedrooms and offices by displaying different types of decorations and organizing their possessions in distinct ways (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008). It is unlikely that people have the capability to decorate and organize their broader community in this way, but community characteristics may vary according to the dominant ideology of that community. Communities with liberal ideologies do tend to have more organic food markets, bicycle trails, and a greater proportion of hybrid automobiles on the road (Chinni & Gimpel, 2010). In contrast, communities with conservative ideologies do tend to have more "big box" stores, a higher gun store-to-bookstore ratio, and a greater proportion of sport utility vehicles on the road. It is possible that these characteristics enable people to discern the ideological leanings of communities.