



## The ideologically objectionable premise model: Predicting biased political judgments on the left and right

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### ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the ideologically objectionable premise model (IOPM), which predicts that biased political judgments will emerge on both the political left and right, but only when the premise of a judgment is not ideologically objectionable to the perceiver. The IOPM generates three hypothesized patterns of bias: biases among both those on the left and right, bias only among those on the right, and bias only among those on the left. These hypotheses were tested within the context of the dual process motivational model of ideological attitudes (DPM; Duckitt, 2001), which posits that right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) are related but distinct ideological attitudes. Across two studies, all three IOPM hypotheses were tested and supported on the RWA ideological attitude dimension, and two of the three IOPM hypotheses were tested and supported on the SDO dimension. These findings indicate that the context of the judgment is an important determinant of whether biases emerge in political judgment.

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### Introduction

Despite our best efforts to remain objective observers of our social worlds, prior attitudes and beliefs frequently color our social perception and judgment (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Edwards & Smith, 1996; Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; Kunda, 1987; 1990). Political attitudes are an especially potent source of motivated reasoning, and have been shown to bias judgments on the state of the economy, same-sex relationships, affirmative action, the death penalty, and gun control, among other issues (Bartels, 2002; Crawford, Jussim, Cain, & Cohen, *in press*; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985).

A particularly illustrative example of how political beliefs bias judgment is provided by Altemeyer's (1988, 1996, 1998) research on the relationship between right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and double standards in political judgment. Altemeyer (1996) conceived of RWA as the covariation of three attitudinal clusters: submission to established authorities, aggression against those who challenge such authorities, and adherence to social conventions. In a series of studies, Altemeyer (1988, 1996, 1998) found that those high in RWA committed double standards in political judgments, whereas those low in RWA did not. For example, in a hypothetical scenario in which Christian or Muslim school prayer (varied between subjects) becomes mandatory in secular public schools, those high in RWA more strongly favored mandatory Christian school prayer over

Muslim school prayer. Those low in RWA committed no such bias (Altemeyer, 1996). Altemeyer attempted but failed to capture double standards among those low in RWA, even on issues he reasoned would be attitudinally important to them (e.g., environmentalism, affirmative action; Altemeyer, 1996, p. 120–121). His interpretation of these findings, which has been echoed by others (Perkins & Bourgeois, 2006; Peterson, Duncan, & Pang, 2002), offers a dispositional explanation for the association between RWA and double standards in political judgment:

“Since High RWAs compartmentalize their thinking a lot, we can expect them to have lots of double standards” (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 115).

“[High RWAs] do appear to have more than their share [of double standards], on quite a variety of topics. *I think we can call it a feature of their thinking...* Lows [RWAs] in turn show more interconnectedness, consistency, and fairness” (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 122, emphasis added).

This interpretation is consistent with the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a), which posits a positive linear relationship between political conservatism and cognitive rigidity. The contention of the model presented in this paper, however, is that the content of political attitudes is not the primary determinant of biases in political judgment; rather, the context of the judgment determines whether biases will emerge on either the political right or left.

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### The ideologically objectionable premise model

The purpose of these studies was to test a model that predicts when double standards in political judgment will or will not emerge among those on the political right and left. To this end, this paper introduces the ideologically objectionable premise model (IOPM). The IOPM assumes that ideological attitudes bias political judgments, regardless of their specific content. This assumption is consistent with theory and research on motivated reasoning in general (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; Kunda, 1987; 1990), and specific evidence that biased judgments occur across the political spectrum (Bartels, 2002; Crawford et al., in press; Lord et al., 1979; Taber & Lodge, 2006). However, the IOPM suggests that whether such biases emerge depends on whether or not the judgment premise is *ideologically objectionable* to the perceiver. A judgment premise is ideologically objectionable if the very conditions of the judgment are objectionable to or inconsistent with the perceiver's ideological attitudes. If the perceiver has rejected the conditions of the judgment outright, little else about the judgment will matter, short-circuiting the application of a double standard. However, if the judgment premise is *ideologically acceptable*, additional aspects of the judgment will influence the decision, allowing biased double standards to emerge.

When ideological attitudes are considered along a one-dimensional, left–right continuum, the IOPM generates three hypotheses:

- (1) *Symmetrical biases hypothesis*: When the judgment premise is acceptable to those on both the left and right, double standards will emerge among those on both the left and right.
- (2) *Asymmetrical right bias hypothesis*: When the judgment premise is objectionable to those on the left but not on the right, a double standard will emerge only among those on the right.
- (3) *Asymmetrical left bias hypothesis*: When the judgment premise is objectionable to those on the right but not on the left, a double standard will emerge only among those on the left.

According to the IOPM, then, the kind of double standard observed by Altemeyer (1996; 1998), in which biases emerged only among those on the right (i.e., high in RWA), is just one of a number of patterns of bias that can emerge in political judgment. Furthermore, these double standards are predicted not solely by the ideological attitudes of the perceiver, but rather by the interaction between these ideological attitudes and the judgment context.

Although the role of premise objectionableness in social judgment has not yet been explored in the extant literature, some recent evidence suggests that the context in which political judgments are made alters how ideological attitudes affect those judgments. For example, Morgan, Mullen, and Skitka (2010) found that the ideattribution effect, by which conservatives and liberals are more likely to make dispositional vs. situational behavioral attributions, respectively (Skitka, Mullen, Griffin, Hutchinson, & Chamberlin, 2002), can be reversed when attributional conclusions are inconsistent with the ideological values made salient by the judgment context. Similarly, liberals deviate from their preferred moral principles (e.g., consequentialism) when those principles conflict with ideological motives made salient by the judgment context (Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Ditto, 2009).

### Testing the predictions of the IOPM

The tests of the IOPM in this paper are modeled on Altemeyer's double standards studies, as they offer a clear paradigm for examining biased political judgment. Although most of his research described double standards associated with RWA, Altemeyer (1998) also examined whether double standards were linked to social dominance orientation (SDO), which Sidanius and Pratto (1999, p. 61) characterize as the “general support for the domination of certain socially constructed groups

over other socially constructed groups”. Altemeyer (1998) found no relationship between SDO and double standards, bolstering his argument that right-wing authoritarianism uniquely predicts such internal inconsistencies of judgment. Given Altemeyer's inclusion of both RWA and SDO as predictors of double standards in political judgment, in this paper, the IOPM is tested within the context of the dual process motivational model of ideological and social attitudes (DPM; Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010a), which posits that RWA and SDO represent two related but distinct dimensions of ideological attitudes.

According to the DPM, RWA expresses “beliefs in coercive social control, in obedience and respect for existing authorities, and in conforming to traditional moral and religious norms and values” (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010a, pp. 1863–1864), whereas SDO expresses dispositional tough-mindedness and motives to maintain or enhance intergroup dominance and superiority (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010a; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Consequently, these two ideological motives differentially predict sociopolitical and intergroup attitudes. RWA more strongly predicts attitudes on socio-cultural issues, whereas SDO more strongly predicts attitudes on economic and status hierarchy-related issues (Altemeyer, 1996; Haley & Sidanius, 2006; Van Hiel, Pandelaere, & Duriez, 2004). Furthermore, RWA more strongly predicts attitudes toward groups perceived as socially normative or deviant, whereas SDO more strongly predicts attitudes toward groups perceived as socially dominant or subordinate (Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007).

According to the differential moderation hypothesis derived from the DPM (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010a, 2010b), the effects of RWA and SDO on sociopolitical judgment should be differentially moderated by the salience of these concerns. Thus, if a scenario judgment is related to concerns over coercion, obedience and respect for authority, or traditionalism, RWA should more strongly predict this judgment. However, if a scenario judgment is related to tough-mindedness or concerns over intergroup dominance, intergroup superiority, or hierarchical social arrangements, SDO should more strongly predict this judgment. Those low in RWA should be driven by the *opposite* motives of those high in RWA; thus, they should be more likely than those high in RWA to support socially deviant, non-normative individuals or groups, defy or question authority and other coercive forces, oppose restrictions on individual liberty, and support liberal or progressive social policies (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006, pp. 110 and 113). Those low in SDO should be motivated to attenuate intergroup dominance and status differences, whereas those high in SDO should be motivated to maintain or enhance intergroup dominance and status differences (Pratto & Cathey, 2002; Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Altemeyer's (1996) mandatory school prayer scenario can be used to illustrate the IOPM's predictions regarding RWA. Recall that those high in RWA held a double standard, favoring Christian over Muslim mandatory school prayer, whereas those low in RWA did not, equally opposing both forms of mandatory school prayer. Altemeyer (1996, 1998) offered a dispositional account for this result, suggesting that right-wing authoritarians are predisposed to making such biased judgments. However, consider this finding from the perspective of the IOPM. Mandatory school prayer in public schools, the judgment premise, forces adherence to religious and governmental authority, promotes conformity to the society's traditional social norms, and negates individual liberty. Thus, this premise should be objectionable to those low in RWA, making the religion of the target irrelevant to the judgment, and short-circuiting the application of a double standard. However, the coerced adherence to religious norms and values fits the very definition of right-wing authoritarianism, and should therefore be acceptable to those high in RWA. Double standards in favor of Christians should then emerge. Thus, like Altemeyer, the IOPM predicts that double standards will emerge among those high but not low in RWA in this scenario. However, in contrast to a dispositional explanation, the IOPM posits that the objectionableness of the

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