

Liberal-Conservative Differences on Moral Foundations and Social/Political Values

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Political conservatives and liberals differ not only in their support of different policies and programs; they also differ in their values, values which can underlie endorsement of those policies and programs (Morgan, Mullen, & Skitka, 2010).

More broadly, Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) provide evidence that political conservatives and liberals emphasize different intuition-based moral foundations which subsequently lead to different views and positions on issues. The purpose of the present study was to examine the degree to which liberals and conservatives differ on several core political/social values—liberty/equality, justice/compassion, and environment/ personal responsibility—and how those differences relate to the moral foundations proposed by Graham et al.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data were collected online with Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants, aged 21 and over and located in the U.S., were offered \$0.50 for completion of the survey. Seventy-five participants who did not pass a lie scale were removed from analysis, as were 11 non-American citizens. The final sample consisted of 390 women and 238 men ($\bar{X}_{age} = 33.75$).

Subjects completed the Mehrabian (1996) conservatism-liberalism scale, responding on a -4 (*very strong disagreement*) to 4 (*very strong agreement*) scale to 7 items, such as “I am politically more liberal than conservative.” “Liberals” were defined as individuals with an average scale score ≤ -1 ($n=267$), “conservatives” as those with an average ≥ 1 ($n=157$), and “moderates” as those between -1 and 1 ($n=204$).

Subjects also completed a three-item measure of social-political values. Each item, answered on a 1-6 scale, asked subjects to indicate their preference between two political values when those values were in conflict (see Table 2 for the item wording).

Finally, subjects completed the 30-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2011), which assesses moral concerns for each of five moral foundations using a 0 (not at all relevant/strongly disagree) to 6 (extremely relevant/ strongly agree) scale.

Results

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) conducted on the 5 moral foundations using political orientation as a grouping variable were all statistically significant (care: $F(2, 625)=13.9, p < .001, \eta^2=.043$; fairness: $F(2, 625)=25.8, p < .001, \eta^2=.076$; in-group: $F(2, 625)=47.0, p < .001, \eta^2=.131$; authority: $F(2, 625)=83.7, p < .001, \eta^2=.211$; and purity: $F(2, 625)=76.4, p < .001, \eta^2=.196$).

Tukey HSD post hoc tests revealed that liberals had higher care scores than conservatives and moderates (see Fig. 1). All three groups significantly differed from each other on the fairness, in-group, authority, and purity foundations—liberals were highest on fairness and conservatives were highest on in-group, authority, and purity.

An ANOVA on the liberty/equality item was significant ($F(2, 625)=26.2, p < .001, \eta^2=.077$). A Tukey HSD post hoc test revealed that conservatives and moderates had a greater preference for liberty, while liberals emphasized equality (see Figure 2).

An ANOVA on the compassion/justice item was also significant ($F(2, 625)=20.7, p < .001, \eta^2=.062$). A post hoc test revealed that, as with liberty/equality, there was not a significant difference between conservatives and moderates, both of whom indicated a greater preference for justice than did liberals, who emphasized compassion.

Finally, an ANOVA examining views on the cause of individuals' behaviors—environment vs. person—was significant $F(2, 625)=31.3, p <.001, \eta^2=.058$). A Tukey HSD revealed that liberals were most inclined to indicate the environment as the cause of behavior, while conservatives emphasized personal responsibility. Moderates were in between, significantly different from both liberals and conservatives.

Pearson correlation coefficients between the moral foundations and the social-political values were all significant (see Table 1). Liberty and personal responsibility were positively correlated with the “conservative” foundations—in-group, authority, purity—while compassion was positively correlated with the “liberal” foundations—care and fairness.

Discussion

Consistent with Graham et al (2009), we found that liberals and conservatives differ with respect to moral foundations, with the strongest effects occurring on the three dimensions where conservatives are higher than liberals (in-group, authority, and purity). Conservatives and liberals also differ on three values that may underlie more specific social/ political beliefs. Relative to liberals, conservatives emphasize liberty, justice, and a view of people as responsible for their behaviors, while liberals emphasize equality, compassion, and a view of the person as shaped by the situation.

We also found that the social/political beliefs are related to moral foundations in predictable ways—liberty and personal responsibility are positively correlated with the in-group, authority, and purity foundations, while compassion is associated with care and fairness.

These results suggest that values widely held as desirable—justice, compassion, equality, liberty—are values prized at least somewhat differently by people of different political orientations, and that those differences are underlain by differences in moral foundations.

References

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Table 1
Zero-Order Correlations Between Moral Foundations and Social/Political Values

	Care	Fairness	In-Group	Authority	Purity
<u>Liberty</u>	-.22***	-.36***	.12**	.18***	.17***
<u>Compassion</u>	.27***	.12*	-.15**	-.32***	-.16***
<u>Personal Responsibility</u>	-.15**	-.16**	.18***	.26***	.24***

Note: All correlation coefficients corrected for unreliability of measures

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2.
Items on the Political Values Questionnaire

Liberty and Equality

Equality and liberty are valued in our society. Sometimes, however, these two values conflict with each other. At one extreme, for example, if everyone was forced to be totally equal to everyone else in every way—the size and type of house, the size of car, the amount and style of clothing, the amount and type of food consumed—there would be no choice, no liberty. At the other extreme, with total liberty comes inequality: some will choose jobs that pay more than jobs others have, and people with greater ability, skill, and motivation will be able to acquire more money and material possessions than those with less ability and skill—some of whom may be reduced to living in poverty. Since equality and liberty, both prized and valued, sometimes conflict, sometimes a choice must be made for one of these values at the expense of the other.

In general, when such a choice between *equality* and *liberty* must be made, which do you think should be chosen? Please use the following scale to indicate your preference.

Justice and Compassion

Two other qualities valued in our society are *justice* and *compassion*. We often seek justice in our communities when someone violates a law or some other rule or norm, while at other times we respond with compassion to such violations. Justice and compassion do not always conflict with each other, but there are times when those who seek justice in a particular situation are in opposition to those who seek a more compassionate response.

In general, when such a conflict between *compassion* and *justice* occurs, which do you think governments should choose? Please use the following scale to indicate your preference.

Personal Responsibility and Environment/Situation

When people break the law or do other things that get them in trouble, there are a variety of things that can be said to cause those behaviors. Some of those causes relate to *personal responsibility*—that is, the person is the one responsible for choosing to do those wrong things. Other times, though, we are aware of circumstances in a person's life that can lead him or her to do things he or she would not otherwise do—that is, the person's *environment or situation* can lead the person to do those things. Many behaviors we see in others are probably a combination of personal responsibility and the environment or situation, but sometimes we have to make choices about which type of cause—personal responsibility or environment/situation—is the greater cause.

In general, when you look at someone else's behavior and you have to make a choice between *personal responsibility* and *environment/situation* as the cause of that behavior, which type of cause are you more likely to make? Please use the following scale to indicate your preference.

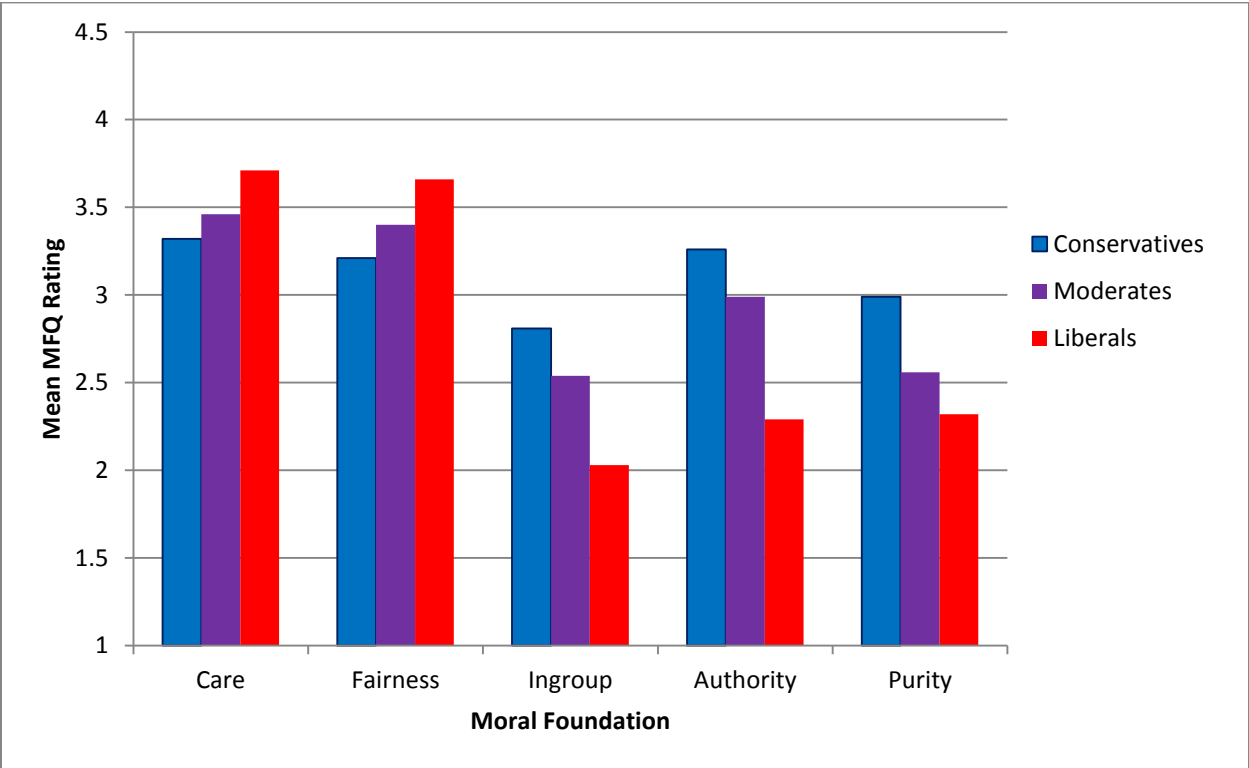


Figure 1. Average ratings for liberals, conservatives, and moderates for the 5 moral foundations

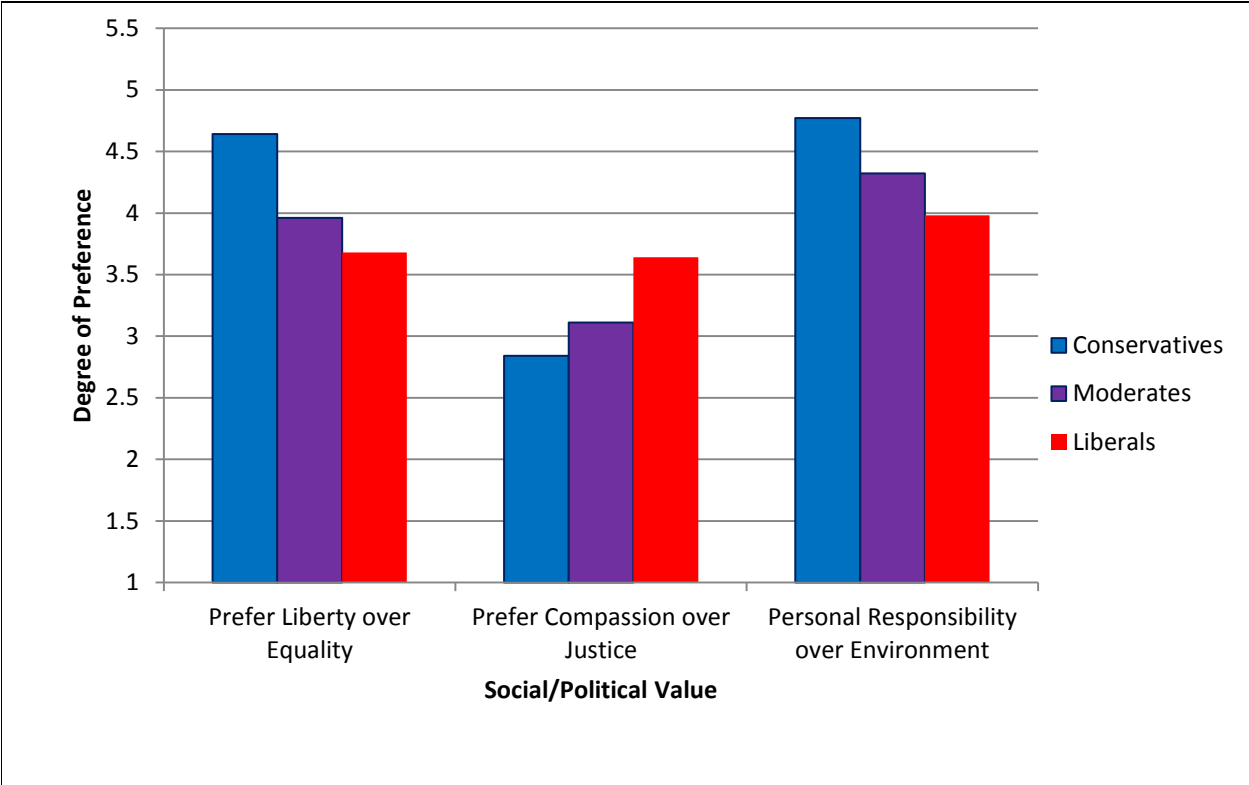


Figure 2. Preferences of liberals, moderates, and conservatives for liberty vs. equality, compassion vs. justice, and personal responsibility vs. environment as cause of behavior.