

**New evidence on an enduring question:****The role of political ideology and extremism in dogmatic thinking**

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For nearly a century, researchers have debated how people across the political spectrum differ in their psychological profiles (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950; Baron & Jost, 2019; Ditto et al., 2019). In other words, are there particular constellations of psychological traits that correlate with—or perhaps even drive—particular sets of political beliefs? Among the most enduring and hotly contested questions concerns how a person’s political beliefs correspond to their degree of dogmatic thinking. In particular, past and contemporary debates have focused on whether the conservatism of a person’s political beliefs (i.e., the “direction” of their ideology, from conservative/right to liberal/left) or the extremity of their beliefs (from moderate to extreme) are linked to dogmatic thinking styles. These questions continue to be the subject of much research within psychology, political science, and related fields. To date, however, there has been little theoretical integration across findings, and the debate about whether and how political beliefs relate to dogmatism has largely reached an impasse. Here, we review contemporary research that speaks to how political conservatism and extremity relate to dogmatism. To help advance this longstanding debate, we organize our review to highlight when conservatism versus extremity might be more likely to relate to dogmatic thinking.

## **Dogmatism, Political Conservatism, and Extremism**

Rokeach (1954) originally defined dogmatism as “(a) a relatively closed cognitive organization of beliefs and disbeliefs about reality, (b) organized around a central set of beliefs about absolute authority which, in turn, (c) provides a framework for patterns of intolerance and qualified tolerance towards others” (p. 195). Rokeach’s attempt to comprehensively capture the construct of dogmatism was laudable. However, his theorizing included various constructs that were empirically and conceptually distinguished from dogmatism over time (e.g., authoritarianism; Vacchiano et al., 1969), and some researchers viewed his purportedly content-free measure of dogmatism as tacitly possessing ideological content (Parrott & Brown, 1972). Subsequent definitions and measurements have become more refined as researchers continued to examine the origins and consequences of dogmatic thinking.

Drawing from more recent work, we define dogmatism as a tendency to hold one’s beliefs and principles as objectively correct, without consideration of the evidence or the opinions of others. This definition is consistent with other theoretical accounts in the literature (e.g., Schulz et al., 2020; Toner et al., 2013; Zmigrod, in press), as well as with modern measures that capture a more general and truly content-free tendency toward dogmatic thinking, including Altemeyer’s (2002) Dogmatism scale (e.g., “If you are ‘open-minded’ about the most important things in life, you will probably reach the wrong conclusions”) and measures of dogmatic intolerance (e.g., “How I feel about issues is the truth”; van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2017).

As with dogmatism, conceptualizations of political ideology have been refined over time. Currently, many scholars conceptualize political ideology as a single dimension ranging from liberal/left to conservative/right (Jost et al., 2009; Stern, 2022). Conservatives and those on the right are motivated to preserve tradition and hierarchical social order, which often leads them to

defend the “status quo” or current state of affairs. In contrast, liberals and those on the left are motivated to support novel changes to society and promote a more equal social system, which often leads them to challenge the current state of affairs (ibid.).

Two prominent models have attempted to explain the relation between political ideology and dogmatic thought. First, the “rigidity of the right” model argues that more conservative (versus liberal) individuals tend to possess a distinct constellation of goals, motivations, and cognitive processing styles focused on achieving certainty and closure. To the degree that these motivations prompt dogmatic thinking styles, conservatism is expected to relate to greater dogmatism (Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2018). The second prominent perspective is the “rigidity of the extremes” model, which proposes that people with more extreme political beliefs display greater dogmatic thinking than those with more moderate views, regardless of the content of the ideology (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003; van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2017; Zmigrod, in press). In other words, this model argues that both extreme liberals and extreme conservatives express greater dogmatism than individuals who hold more moderate beliefs (e.g., centrists and those who are liberal- or conservative-leaning).

Although these models have often been pitted against one another (e.g., Greenberg & Jonas, 2003; Jost et al., 2003b), they are not inherently incompatible. Rather, there are at least three ways in which the apparent conflict between these models can be reconciled. First, it is possible that one model is simply “right” and one is “wrong,” in the sense that one explains the actual relation between political beliefs and dogmatism while the other does not. Second, both conservatism and extremity could independently relate to dogmatism, such that conservatives are more dogmatic than liberals while, simultaneously, extremists are more dogmatic than moderates. Third, it is possible that each model is correct *under certain conditions*, such that in

some situations political conservatism is more closely associated with dogmatism, while in others extremity is more relevant. In the current review, we attempt to assess the relative likelihood of these three different possibilities.

A large body of research has amassed over the last 70+ years that relates to the debate between the “rigidity of the right” and “rigidity of the extremes” models. The intensity and longevity of this debate is perhaps rooted in the wide-ranging implications of these questions for understanding political cognition and behavior. Uncovering systematic differences in dogmatism between individuals of differing ideologies would have implications for effective messaging, persuasion, communication, and, ultimately, bridging the gap between individuals of opposing ideologies.

Research examining the association between political beliefs and dogmatic thinking has observed conflicting patterns of results that suggests that both the “rigidity of the right” and “rigidity of the extremes” models may currently be incomplete. Specifically, some scholars have documented an effect of conservatism but not extremity (Toner et al., 2013), while others have observed effects of extremity but not conservatism (van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2017). Still others have found that both conservatism *and* extremity are related to greater dogmatism (Harris & van Bavel, 2021). Thus far, however, there is no compelling theoretical framework that accounts for these conflicting findings. Despite decades of debate, research has yet to clarify whether—or, perhaps, under what conditions—the “rigidity of the right” and “rigidity of the extremes” models might be more or less correct.

### **Dogmatic Thinking in Political and Non-Political Domains**

In the present chapter, we aim to shed new light on the classic debate regarding the relation between political beliefs and dogmatism through reviewing and integrating recent

evidence concerning when dogmatic thinking is (and is not) related to both political conservatism and ideological extremism. Drawing from current evidence, we suggest a possible means of reconciling the mixed findings of past work. We argue that the degree to which a domain activates an individual's political beliefs and identity may be a critical factor in determining whether political conservatism or ideological extremity will be more closely linked to dogmatism.

We propose that in “ideologically neutral” contexts—that is, in situations where judgments are perceived as being unrelated to political identities—political conservatism will be most closely related to dogmatism. We derive this prediction by integrating several lines of past work. First, epistemic motivations to achieve cognitive closure, structure, and certainty in everyday life play a key role in human decision-making processes and dogmatic thinking (Kruglanski, 2013; Mayseless & Kruglanski, 1987). Such epistemic motivations are likely to be privileged in one's goal hierarchy unless overridden by countervailing goals (*ibid.*). Further, political conservatism is associated with stronger motivations to achieve closure and certainty (Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2018). In light of these findings, we speculate that conservatism is most readily associated with greater dogmatism in non-political or ideologically neutral contexts.

When political identities are activated, however, the defense of one's closely held beliefs about the political world might take priority over epistemic goals about reaching closure (Huddy, 2001; van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). As a result, ideological extremity may be more likely to predict dogmatism in political domains. For example, liberals and conservatives appear motivated to defend their *political* views to a comparable magnitude (Brandt & Crawford, 2020). Similarly, needs for certainty appear to be *unrelated* to motivated reasoning about political topics (Guay & Johnston, *in press*). Insofar as ideological extremity reflects a commitment to one's

political beliefs, we anticipate that extremity—among both liberals and conservatives—will predict greater dogmatism in domains where political beliefs are salient, particularly when judgments are viewed as affirming or communicating one’s political identity.

In this review we have taken four important steps to best advance the longstanding debate about dogmatism. First, based on recent critiques regarding the use of self-report measures to assess ideological differences (e.g., possible content overlap between “political” and “non-political” measures, ideological differences in self-presentation strategies; Kahan, 2012; Malka et al., 2017; van Hiel et al., 2016), we avoid self-report measures of dogmatism in favor of more indirect and behavioral indicators of dogmatic thinking—in particular, cognitive rigidity and judgment confidence. Second, we focus specifically on political ideology rather than related constructs such as authoritarianism, partisanship, nationalism, and religiosity, to ensure that the reviewed findings speak most directly to the conservatism-extremity debate. (We note, however, that these related constructs may be associated with dogmatism as well; Zmigrod, 2020.) Third, we focus on contemporary and emerging research to capitalize on methodological advances and circumvent commonly criticized weaknesses of some older research (e.g., small sample sizes). Fourth, we separately examine the evidence for dogmatic thinking in both non-political and political domains to test the potential validity of our proposal that the importance of political conservatism and ideological extremity may depend on the relevance of one’s political identity to the judgment domain at hand. In so doing, we aim to advance the classic debate regarding how both conservatism and ideological extremity relate to dogmatic thinking.

### **Cognitive Rigidity**

In earlier research, few studies used behavioral tasks to assess cognitive rigidity. For example, Van Hiel et al. (2010) identified only three studies examining the association between

conservatism and rigidity on behavioral tasks. More recently, however, there has been a sharp increase in research using behavioral tasks that directly gauge cognitive rigidity. To our knowledge, there has not yet been a review of this more recent work in relation to the debate between the “rigidity of the right” and “rigidity of the extremes” models.

### *Cognitive rigidity in non-political domains*

Amodio and colleagues (2007) conducted one of the first modern studies examining whether conservatism would be associated with cognitive rigidity on a non-political behavioral task. In the study, participants completed a non-political “Go/No-Go” Task in which they were instructed to enter a “Go” response (press a key on a keyboard) when presented with one stimulus (a letter of the alphabet) and to withhold from responding when presented with a different stimulus (a different letter). Eighty percent of trials required a Go response, meaning that correctly withholding a response on No-Go trials required updating a dominant response pattern. Conservatism was associated with lower accuracy on trials that necessitated withholding a response, suggesting that more conservative participants exhibited less flexibility in updating the habitual response.

In recent work, Zmigrod et al. (2018) assessed cognitive flexibility using two tasks: the Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST), which measures whether people update in response to novel task rules and reward contingencies, and the Remote Association Test (RAT), which captures the degree to which people generate conceptual associations among words. Success on both of these tasks is viewed as reflecting greater cognitive flexibility. The authors observed that conservatism was associated with worse performance on both tasks, providing additional evidence that greater conservatism may be linked to lower cognitive flexibility.

Importantly, Amodio et al. (2007) proposed that ideological differences in cognitive flexibility would not lead to better performance on *all* behavioral tasks among liberals. Rather, they speculated that conservatism would be associated with enhanced performance on tasks requiring a more rigid or fixed response style. Recent findings support this idea. In one study by Buechner et al. (2021), participants were presented with a  $10 \times 20$  number grid and asked to count the frequency with which an even number came directly after an odd number in a row. Participants were asked to only focus on rows that possessed a label from a specific category (e.g., animals), and each row in the grid was labeled with examples from a category (e.g., horse). Participants then completed the task two times. The second time they completed the task they were told to focus either on rows with the same category examples as in the first trial (e.g., staying with animals) or to use new category examples (e.g., switching from animals to countries). Conservatism was associated with greater accuracy when focusing on the same category across trials (a rigid behavioral style) but was associated with less accuracy when participants were required to update the category on which they focused (a flexible behavior style).

Greater cognitive rigidity among more conservative individuals also manifests in stronger reliance on intuitive thought processes, which consists of using automatic responses to form judgments. This process contrasts with analytic thought, which occurs when people reflect on and subsequently override their initial responses (Pennycook et al., 2014). For example, on average, conservatism is linked to greater intuitive responses on the Cognitive Reflection Task (CRT; Jost et al., 2018). This CRT includes questions in which the intuitive judgement results in an incorrect answer, and reflective or analytic thought is needed to achieve the correct response. For instance, the question “In a lake, there is a patch of lily pads. Every day, the patch doubles in



size. If it takes 48 days for the patch to cover the entire lake, how long would it take for the patch to cover half of the lake?” has an intuitive response of twenty-four days, but the correct response achieved through analytic reasoning is forty-seven days.

Most previous research examining the relation between political beliefs and rigidity has drawn from theoretical models to generate predictions and select appropriate methodology for testing those predictions. Diverging from this style, Zmigrod et al. (2021) used a data-driven approach to model variation in ideological differences across cognitive tasks. Specifically, they had participants complete a battery of cognitive tasks that were compiled in previous research for purposes other than examining ideology (e.g., analyzing self-regulation). Thus, the specific tasks chosen were not influenced by the researchers’ beliefs about which tasks might support different predictions. Consistent with the previously reviewed findings, the authors observed that conservatism was associated with “reduced strategic information processing,” which indexed lower flexibility in working memory capacity and planning. Interestingly, Zmigrod and colleagues also found that conservatism was associated with greater caution in perceptual decision-making tasks, which reflected the amount of information that people acquired before providing a final response. The authors speculated that conservatives’ stronger desire for certainty may have prompted this greater caution.

There is little evidence, however, for an association between ideological extremity and cognitive flexibility on non-political behavioral tasks. Few published papers report such associations, and those that do provide limited or mixed support for such a connection. Buechner et al. (2021) found that extremity was not related to cognitive flexibility across a variety of behavioral tasks (e.g., the task requiring rigid or flexible styles described earlier). At apparent odds with Buechner and colleagues’ findings, Zmigrod et al. (2020) observed a consistent

quadratic (but not linear) relation between strength of partisanship (i.e., the degree to which people felt identity fusion with the Republican relative to Democratic party) and rigidity on several behavioral tasks, suggesting that the strength with which one identifies with their preferred political party may be associated with greater rigidity. It is worth considering, however, that there may be an important distinction between partisanship strength and political ideology: Political ideology reflects the content of people's beliefs (e.g., how they believe society should be structured), whereas partisanship strength captures group identification processes (Iyengar et al., 2019; van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). Thus, while Zmigrod et al.'s (2020) findings indicate that people who express strong commitment to a *political party* display greater cognitive rigidity (see also Lammers et al., 2017), they do not necessarily speak to the debate about how *political beliefs* are related to dogmatism. Nevertheless, research should continue to explore this possibility in more systematic ways.

### ***Cognitive rigidity in political domains***

The work reviewed above demonstrates that in non-political domains, political ideology—and not political extremity—appears to be the best predictor of cognitive rigidity. However, in politically relevant domains, rigidity and closed-mindedness appear to emerge regardless of the content of people's political beliefs. For example, in one study Frimer et al. (2017) informed participants that they had been entered into a drawing where they could receive a bonus payment (\$10), and that they would subsequently be presented with statements that *challenge* their views on same-sex marriage. Participants were also given the choice of reading statements that *support* their views on same-sex marriage, but the possible drawing prize would be reduced (to \$7). A majority (63%) of participants opted to view statements supporting their views despite the reduced financial outcome on the drawing, and the rate of choosing this

outcome did not significantly differ between people holding liberal and conservative views.

Relatedly, Ditto et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 51 studies examining whether people were more likely to evaluate information in a more positive manner when it supports (versus challenges) their political beliefs. They found that liberals and conservatives displayed this bias at a comparable magnitude.

Some findings also indicate that rigidity in political domains is stronger among people with more extreme political views. For example, Zwicker et al. (2020) observed that people with more extreme political views self-reported more stability in their political opinions (e.g., scoring lower on items such as “My opinions about political issues have changed in the last few years”), but there was not a consistent effect of conservatism on stability. Further, they also found that extremists displayed greater objective stability in their political ideology over the course of approximately six weeks. These findings suggest that the extremity of one’s political views might be a key factor for understanding rigidity in political domains. Intriguingly, however, Frimer et al. (2017) also noted that the extremity of people’s political views did *not* significantly predict whether they chose to see attitude-consistent information about same-sex marriage, suggesting that there may be further nuance remaining to identify in the relation between extremity and rigidity in the political domain.

### ***Cognitive rigidity summary***

The degree to which a task possesses politically relevant content appears to impact whether political conservatism or ideological extremity more closely corresponds to greater cognitive rigidity. On non-political tasks, cognitive rigidity is more pronounced among politically conservative (versus liberal) individuals. Conversely, there is little evidence to suggest that flexibility on these types of politically neutral tasks varies based on the extremity of a

person's political ideology. In contrast, rigidity on highly charged political topics appears to emerge at a similar magnitude across the political spectrum, and in many instances seems to most readily manifest among people with more extreme (versus moderate) political views.

### **Confidence**

Confidence refers to the degree to which people believe that their judgments, decisions, beliefs, and attitudes are objectively correct (Dunning, 2012; Wagner, Briñol, & Petty, 2012). Thinking that one's beliefs and attitudes are accurate is an indicator of dogmatic thinking (Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 1980), and has been broadly linked to a range of important psychological outcomes, including goal pursuit (Higgins, 2019), persuasion (Briñol & Petty, in press), and confirmation bias (Rollwage et al., 2020). Thus, determining whether and how political beliefs may systematically relate to confidence stands as a critical question. In this section, we review findings concerning the degree to which conservatism and ideological extremity relate to confidence.

#### ***Confidence in non-political domains***

Several lines of work have examined the relation between political ideology and confidence in non-political domains. On the whole, this work tends to suggest that political conservatism—and not ideological extremity—is associated with greater confidence. For example, we (Ruisch & Stern, 2021) systematically examined the degree to which conservatism and ideological extremity were associated with confidence on various non-political tasks. In one study participants viewed images showing constellations of dots that varied in number. Participants entered their judgment of how many dots they believed appeared on the screen, and then indicated confidence in their judgment. Overall, conservatism was associated with greater judgment confidence, and this relationship remained when adjusting for accuracy on the task.

Thus, conservatives were not simply more confident because of ideological differences in accuracy.

We observed a similar relationship between conservatism and confidence in several additional studies, which examined both memory recall (e.g., determining what color was missing from an array of color squares) and judgments made in the moment (e.g., distance estimates to visible landmarks). Point estimates for the conservatism-confidence association and extremity-confidence association across studies are shown in Figure 1. A within-paper meta-analysis indicated that the average conservatism-confidence association was positive and moderate in magnitude ( $\beta = .20$ ) both at zero-order and when adjusting for extremity. In contrast, there was no positive association between extremity and confidence. After adjusting for conservatism, the average extremity-confidence association was  $\beta = -.0003$ , and the average zero-order association was *negative* ( $\beta = -.06$ ), such that extremists exhibited lower confidence than moderates.

Examining the psychological processes underlying these liberal-conservative confidence differences, we found that these effects appear to stem from differences in how liberals and conservatives deliberate and make decisions. Specifically, we found that conservatives (versus liberals) exhibited a lower motivation to deliberate, which manifested as a tendency to consider a smaller range of possible response options before making a final judgment. These differences in deliberation statistically accounted for part of the relation between conservatism and confidence.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Related research converges on the conclusion that conservatism might also be linked to unjustified confidence on non-political tasks. Rollwage et al. (2018) assessed confidence in visual perceptions judgments (which of two patches contained a greater number of flickering dots). Findings indicated that conservatism was associated with a bias toward overconfidence in judgments—in other words, their confidence surpassed what would be expected based on the objective accuracy of their judgments.

Interestingly, some research provides evidence that appears to diverge from the idea that conservatives are more confident on non-political tasks. For example, Newman and Sargent (2021) examined the degree to which people held ambivalent (i.e., a mix of positive and negative) attitudes toward a range of non-political topics (e.g., ice-cream, movies, storms). The authors assessed attitudinal ambivalence in three ways: (1) A five-item measure capturing subjective ratings of how “mixed” people’s feelings and beliefs were about an issue, (2) a single item from this measure gauging whether people’s feelings about an issue were on “one side” or “mixed”, and (3) an “objective” ambivalence score calculated with the formula  $(\text{positive feelings} + \text{negative feelings})/2 - |\text{positive feelings} - \text{negative feelings}|$ . They observed that, overall, greater conservatism was significantly linked to higher levels of attitudinal ambivalence on the subjective assessments and marginally associated with higher ambivalence on the objective measure.

These findings could be interpreted as suggesting that conservatism was associated with lower attitude confidence. One possible explanation for the divergent pattern of results may be that the previously reviewed studies by Ruisch and Stern (2021) and Rollwage et al. (2018) used tasks that were novel or less likely to be frequently encountered in daily life. In contrast, Newman and Sargent (2021) examined attitudes toward objects and issues that people were

likely to have frequently considered, meaning that people had been able to form their attitudes over long periods of time. People who report a stronger motivation to deliberate express greater confidence in attitudes toward non-novel topics (DeMarre et al., 2020). Thus, one speculative possibility is that liberals—who report a stronger dispositional motivation to engage in deliberative thought (e.g., Stern & Axt, 2021)—may simply be more likely than conservatives to continually reflect on their attitudes over time, and therefore eventually come to form greater certainty in these attitudes. Another possibility to explain the different patterns of findings is that confidence and ambivalence represent distinct constructs (Connor & Sparks, 2002). A person could be confident that they have both positive and negative feelings toward a topic, or could feel positively toward a topic while also being uncertain about that judgment. Future research could test these possibilities.

Some findings have also been interpreted as suggesting that extremists may be more confident on certain non-political tasks. Brandt et al. (2015) found that people with more extreme (versus moderate) political views were less likely to rely on experimenter-provided values when making estimates in an anchoring task. Although the authors describe this effect as reflecting greater confidence among the extremes, they also report several findings that seem to challenge this interpretation. First, the authors observed that attitudinal extremity was marginally associated with *lower* certainty in answers to the experimenter-generated anchoring items. Second, lesser reliance on an experimentally generated anchor is likely to capture reactance to external influence, rather than confidence. Specifically, the authors note that “the effects may have been driven by extremists being more likely than moderates to reject outside information rather than by extremists overvaluing their own opinions more than moderates.” (p. 200). Third, greater reliance on self-generated anchors and certainty of answers derived from self-generated

anchors—more direct assessments of confidence—were unrelated to extremity. Thus, these findings do not appear to support an association between extremity and confidence per se, but may instead reflect other processes—for example, that people with more extreme (versus moderate) views are more reactive on non-political tasks.

### *Confidence in political domains*

Several studies have captured confidence in political domains using relatively indirect measures. For example, participants in one study (Toner et al., 2013) reported their attitudes toward nine contentious political topics (e.g., abortion, affirmative action) and the degree to which they believed that those attitudes were more correct than those that others hold (i.e., “belief superiority”). The authors found a quadratic relation between political ideology and political belief superiority, such that people with more extreme (versus moderate) beliefs expressed greater superiority in their beliefs. Conversely, there was no consistent relation between conservatism and belief superiority. Subsequent research has consistently replicated the association between extremity of political views and greater political belief superiority (Brandt et al., 2015; Harris & van Bavel, 2021; Schulz et al., 2020).

Similarly, some research suggests that people who hold more extreme political views are also more confident in their comprehension of issues than is justifiable (Fernbach et al., 2013). In other words, they might be overconfident, in the sense that they overestimate how objectively accurate their judgments and decisions are. For example, in one study van Prooijen et al. (2018) asked Dutch participants whether they believed that statements about the 2016 European Union refugee crisis were true or false (e.g., “In the first two months of 2016, 4318 people sought asylum in the Netherlands”) and how certain they were in their answers. The authors observed that people who held more extreme (versus moderate) political beliefs reported greater certainty



in their beliefs—even after accounting for objective factual knowledge about the crisis, indicating that stronger certainty among the extremes was not attributable to superior knowledge. Conversely, no association was observed between conservatism and certainty in these political judgments.

Relatedly, Costello and Bowes (in press) examined how political ideology was associated with *absolute certainty* of one's political beliefs, which constitutes views that people hold absent of any uncertainty. The authors argued that absolute certainty “reflects a category error” and “is equally irrational for all beliefs” (Footnote 2). Participants indicated how certain they were that their political beliefs were correct on a 0-100% scale, and individuals who reported 100% were coded as having “absolute certainty” about their views. Findings indicated a quadratic relation between political ideology and absolutely certainty, such that there was a higher probability of reporting absolute certainty in one's political views among people who held more extreme (versus moderate) beliefs. Conservatism was not associated with the likelihood of holding absolute certainty about political beliefs.

### ***Confidence summary***

The reviewed findings suggest that both conservatism and extremity may relate to confidence, but that these relations are context dependent. In particular, the presence of politically relevant content in a task appears to shape whether political conservatism or extremity most closely corresponds to confidence. Conservatism is linked to greater judgment confidence on tasks that are devoid of political content (e.g., estimating numbers of dots), although there is some initial evidence suggesting that the relation between conservatism and stronger confidence might reverse for frequently considered non-political topics toward which people have formed attitudes over time. Conversely, the evidence regarding whether extremity relates to confidence

on non-political tasks is less clear. On contentiously debated political topics, however, extremity—but not conservatism—corresponds to greater confidence, manifesting as a greater perceived superiority of one’s views and greater (unjustified) certainty that those views are correct.

### **General Summary and Future Directions**

In this chapter we reviewed recent studies examining the role of political conservatism and ideological extremity in dogmatic thinking. This recent work, which overcomes many of the critiques levied at older research on the subject (e.g., small sample sizes, tacitly political content in measures of dogmatism) appears to provide a relative consistent picture of how political beliefs relate to dogmatism. We partially confirmed classic perspectives, finding that those on the political right (vs. left) often do exhibit more dogmatic traits. Importantly, however, we also identified certain circumstances under which the *extremity* of a person’s ideology—i.e., how strongly liberal or conservative they are—might be an equally (or perhaps even more) potent predictor of dogmatism.

The diversity of approaches that recent research has employed allowed us to provide a preliminary examination of whether the existence of political content in a judgment domain propels ideological extremity to be a stronger driver of dogmatism, whereas the absence of political content results in conservatism playing a more impactful role. Consistent with our proposed ideas, the preponderance of current evidence suggests that the “rigidity of the right” model might best explain how people’s political beliefs predict dogmatic thinking on non-political tasks, whereas dogmatism in political domains might better be accounted for by the “rigidity of the extremes” perspective.

Despite these supportive initial findings, however, further research is needed to fully elucidate the nature of the relation between political beliefs and dogmatism. In particular, researchers may wish to take a more systematic approach to testing our predictions regarding the influence of political content. That is, although the current literature appears to provide initial support for our predictions, the political and non-political tasks reviewed in this chapter differed in a number of ways that make direct comparison difficult. Ideally, future work would hold the type of task as constant as possible, while manipulating the presence versus absence of political content (e.g., using a fixed set of stimuli and randomizing whether those stimuli are said to hold political relevance).

Similarly, future work may wish to disentangle whether the greater dogmatism exhibited by extremists in political domains is motivational in nature (e.g., extremists feeling more compelled than moderates to affirm their political identities) or whether it stems from other processes (e.g., extremists having more frequently rehearsed their political judgments). To test this question, researchers might employ tools such as self-affirmation manipulations to assuage identity-related motivations and examine whether this undercuts extremists' greater political dogmatism. Examining the processes underlying these effects will also contribute to a better understanding of precisely what type of political content is necessary to elicit greater dogmatism among ideological extremists.

Other remaining questions include the degree to which the effects reviewed above are specific to certain dimensions of political ideology (e.g., social versus economic conservatism) versus applying to liberalism-conservatism writ large. For example, past work suggests that greater reliance on intuitive thought is more closely related to social than economic conservatism (Talhelm et al., 2015; Talhelm, 2018; Yilmaz & Saribay, 2017; Yilmaz et al., 2020). Similarly,

Zmigrod et al. (2020) found that social conservatism was more consistently associated with rigid thinking styles than was economic conservatism. Further consideration of whether and when political ideology is better modeled in a multidimensional manner, and the implications of this conceptualization for understanding dogmatic thinking, could be generative for future research.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this brief review, we provided a concise overview of the latest research on the longstanding question of how political conservatism and ideological extremity relate to dogmatism. This work has bridged numerous areas of psychology—for example, judgment and decision making, attitudes, and cognitive psychology—and has incorporated an array of methodological tools and paradigms to provide novel insight into this long-intransigent debate. Despite the variety of approaches, this work appears to present a relatively consistent pattern of results. In short, both the “rigidity of the right” and “rigidity of the extremes” models hold some truth—although the predictive power of each model appears to differ as a function of the specific conditions of the judgment at hand. In non-political domains, conservatism appears to be associated with greater dogmatism: Conservatives exhibit greater cognitive rigidity and judgment confidence than do their more liberal counterparts. However, in the political domain, ideological extremity appears to be the more potent predictor of dogmatism: more extreme individuals show greater rigidity of thought and confidence in their political judgments and attitudes than moderates. To be sure, many questions remain, and there is certain to be additional nuance to this general political-versus-non-political divide that future research will need to elucidate. Nevertheless, our hope and intention is that this proposed framework may take us one step closer to settling this debate that has held fast for the last 70+ years.

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