Political identity, preference, and persuasion

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ABSTRACT
The current research examines how political identity shapes preferences for objects and messages that highlight either equality or hierarchy. We find that liberals show a greater preference for an object associated with less as opposed to more hierarchy, whereas conservatives do not exhibit such a preference (Study 1). We also find that liberals are more persuaded by persuasive appeals that endorse equality rather than hierarchy, whereas conservatives are less sensitive to this distinction (Study 2). Finally, we identify the moderating role of political identity salience: When one’s political identity is made salient, liberals show an increased preference for messages highlighting equality, whereas conservatives become more persuaded by messages highlighting hierarchy (Study 3).

The influence of political identity on judgment and behavior has been a topic of increasing importance in numerous domains of psychological research. It is now known that political identity is reflected in individuals’ core values and motives and, thus, that it can play a role in guiding people’s preferences and behaviors (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a; Jost et al., 2007). Indeed, recent work suggests that political identity can influence individuals’ preferences and choices in contexts that have little or nothing to do with politics per se, such as preferences for novel experiences over traditional life events (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008), brand choices (Kwan, Chiu, & Leung, 2014), product choices (Fernandes & Mandel, 2014), and charitable giving (Winterich, Zhang, & Mittal, 2012). The current research takes a step in this direction and examines how liberals and conservatives differ with respect to their preferences for objects or messages that highlight equality versus hierarchy, a theme theoretically linked to political identity.

Hierarchy is prevalent in social life (Van Berkel, Crandall, Eidelman, & Blanchar, 2015). Indeed, status and hierarchy are dominant features of most societies (Ridgeway, 2001) and hierarchy is thought by some to be an inevitable catalyst for coordinating human effort (Mazur, 2005). Others view hierarchy as a lingering byproduct of a more inequitable past and seek to eliminate it from contemporary society (Boehm, 1999). Individuals also frequently encounter hierarchy in their daily lives. For instance, companies offer extended benefits to preferred individuals and websites give special
access to important members. Given the prevalence and importance of hierarchy and the fact that views toward hierarchy fundamentally differ as a function of political identity, the current research examines how appeals to hierarchy versus equality can affect preference and persuasion in contexts that have little or nothing to do with political content per se.

Political identity and values

Political identity represents one’s beliefs about how a political system should work (Grove, Remy, & Zeigler, 1974), and is linked to differences in values (Winterich et al., 2012). Most germane to the current concerns, political identity can lead individuals to internalize a set of general attitudes regarding equality versus hierarchy (Jost et al., 2008). Hierarchy values and political conservatism are often closely associated (Jost et al., 2003), and a preference for the preservation of traditional structures within society is one of conservatism’s key dimensions (Wilson, 1973). Indeed, Jost et al. (2008) argued that rejecting versus accepting social hierarchy is a core value distinction between liberals and conservatives, respectively (see also Jost et al., 2003a).

For instance, previous research has shown that, compared to conservatives, liberals are more sensitive to violations of principles of equity and display a stronger aversion to hierarchies (Ho et al., 2012; Jost et al., 2008; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Moral foundations theory (e.g. Haidt & Joseph, 2004) suggests that conservatives may find value in hierarchy as a means of respecting authority, whereas liberals disavow hierarchy because those with low status in the hierarchy are more likely to be harmed and treated unfairly (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2011; Haidt, 2008; Kugler, Jost, & Noorbaloochi, 2014; McAdams et al., 2008). Thus, liberals are more likely than conservatives to disapprove of hierarchical systems in social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements (Jost et al., 2008). Accordingly, Jost et al. (2008) found that liberals tend to support remedies for social injustices based on inequality.

Attitudes and behaviors can vary as a function of values (e.g. Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Crandall, Eidelman, Skitka, & Morgan, 2009; Maio & Olson, 1995; Schwartz, 1994). In addition, a substantial literature suggesting that a match (as opposed to mismatch) between individuals’ psychological orientations and the frame or content of a persuasive message can result in greater persuasion (e.g. Cavazza, Graziani, Serpe, & Rubichi, 2010; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Feinberg & Willer, 2015; Mayer & Tormala, 2010; Wheeler, Petty, & Bizer, 2005). For example, Mayer and Tormala (2010) found that people were more persuaded by the exact same arguments when the frames of those arguments (i.e. thoughts vs. feelings) matched rather than mismatched recipients’ processing orientations (i.e. cognitive vs. affective). Feinberg and Willer (2015) found that people became more persuasive when they were reminded to couch their arguments in terms of values that aligned with the political orientation of their target audience.

Extending these findings to the domain of equality versus hierarchy, we hypothesize that liberals will be more attracted to objects linked to equality rather than hierarchy, and will be more persuaded by a message that describes an object with equality-related words (e.g. equal, fair) rather than hierarchy-related words (e.g. unequal, exclusive), because equality messages are more consistent with their underlying values. Our predictions regarding conservatives are more complicated. On one
hand, conservatives may be more attracted to objects linked to hierarchy rather than equality, and may be more persuaded by a message that describes an object with hierarchy-related words rather than equality-related words for the same reason as liberals. On the other hand, conservatives may be less sensitive to this distinction because, despite having a more favorable disposition toward hierarchy, on average, they have learned to suppress this preference (Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000; Van Berkel et al., 2015). Hence, conservatives may not actively prefer objects described in hierarchical terms, but rather discriminate less between equality and hierarchy messages and objects.

Political identity salience

In the media, workplace, and daily social interactions, political cues abound. Thus, the salience of one’s political identity can be increased when one least expects it. We suggest that the salience of one’s political identity will strengthen the disparity between liberals and conservatives by further accentuating the importance of underlying values associated with one’s political identity. We draw on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) in making this prediction. Social identities are defined as social categories such as ethnicity or gender that define the self for an individual (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Social identity salience is the activation of the conceptual structure of social identity in one’s self-concept through spontaneous self-categorization in response to social contexts and stimulus cues (Reed, 2002). A salient social identity leads group members to define themselves using their social group to a greater extent (e.g. Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Rijswijk, Haslam, & Ellemers, 2006). In doing so, individuals describe themselves interchangeably with other group members (Haslam et al., 1999) and adopt attitudes and behaviors that are more stereotypical of their group (Turner, 1987). One implication is that individuals who possess a particular social identity will judge events or objects that are congruent with that identity more favorably, especially when the identity is salient (Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012; Reed, 2002; Reed, Lange, Ketchie, & Clapp, 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Indeed, self-categorization theory suggests that a salient social identity leads one’s behavior to shift more towards the norms associated with that identity (e.g. Callero, 1985; Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). This perspective has been extended to the political domain (see Huddy, 2001). Previous research has found that the salience of political identity affects judgments of political ingroup and outgroup members (Kelly, 1989; Morton, Postmes, & Jetten, 2007). For instance, Morton et al. (2007) demonstrated that those high (vs. low) in political identity more strongly supported a normative candidate over a deviant candidate. In Cohen’s (2003) research, highly identified Democrats and Republicans were more likely to support a welfare policy that was endorsed by the majority of members in their party.

Based on this perspective, we posit that individuals’ preference for objects and messages that align with their values will be particularly likely to emerge when their political identity becomes salient. Specifically, we predict that the matching effect will be amplified under conditions of political identity salience.
Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 is to provide an initial test of our hypotheses in a choice context. Importantly, this study presents an exploratory analysis regarding the predictions of conservatives’ responses to equality versus hierarchy. Study 1 tests this relationship in a context in which inequality is frequently observed – namely, airline loyalty programs (i.e. frequent flyer programs). It is well known that airlines provide individuals with unequal treatment as a function of their status within the airline’s frequent flyer program. One way that such programs can be distinguished relates to the levels of hierarchy within the program: More egalitarian programs would have flatter structures (i.e. fewer levels) whereas more hierarchical programs would draw more distinctions between members according to their status within the program (i.e. more levels). Thus, we hypothesized that liberals would prefer a loyalty program with fewer rather than more levels, whereas conservatives would either prefer one with more rather than fewer levels or show no preference.

Material and methods

Two hundred forty participants (38.8% males, M_age = 41.40) from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk participated in the study in exchange for $1. As noted, to manipulate relative equality versus hierarchy, we varied the type of frequent flyer program participants evaluated. Program type was manipulated within-participants such that participants evaluated a loyalty program with five tiers (relatively more equality) against a loyalty program with eight tiers (relatively more hierarchy). Participants were asked to imagine that they were interested in signing up for a frequent flyer program and were given the following instructions: ‘As you know, each airline offers different frequent flyer programs by varying the number of tiers. Please see below for examples of two different frequent flyer programs. Airlines are interested in finding the optimal number of tiers so that they can attract more customers.’ After receiving the instructions, participants were shown a table that provided information regarding two different frequent flyer programs (see Appendix A). The airlines were referred to as Airline A (option with five tiers) and Airline B (option with eight tiers) to induce participants to focus on the information given and remove potential brand effects, and participants were told that airline names would be disclosed at the conclusion of the study. After viewing the table, participants indicated their likelihood of signing up for the frequent flyer program offered by Airline A (M = 6.13, SD = 2.10) and Airline B (M = 5.35, SD = 2.29) on consecutive 9-point scales (1 = not at all likely, 9 = very likely).

Next, participants answered a question regarding their political identity. Political identity (M = 5.14, SD = 3.03) was measured on a scale ranging from 1 (extremely liberal) to 11 (extremely conservative) (adopted from Jost et al., 2007, Study 2). Finally, participants provided demographic information and were debriefed regarding the real brand names of the two frequent flyer programs. Suspicion probes indicated that no participants identified the brand names of the frequent flyer programs or recognized the purpose of the study.

Results and discussion

First, we ran a repeated measures multiple regression, treating mean-centered political identity as the between-participants factor and program type as the within-participants
factor (i.e. likelihood of signing up for Airline A [relative equality], likelihood of signing up for Airline B [relative hierarchy]). This analysis yielded a significant effect of program type, $F (1, 238) = 15.88, p < .001$, suggesting that in general participants showed a greater preference for Airline A (relative equality). There also was an interaction between political identity and program type, $F (1, 238) = 7.10, p = .008$, suggesting that political identity moderated the effect of program type on the likelihood of joining.

In addition, we created a difference score between the two likelihood ratings (likelihood of signing up for Airline A – likelihood of signing up for Airline B) and ran a regression with political identity as the independent variable and difference scores as the dependent variable. On this index, higher scores indicate a greater preference for Airline A (relative equality) over Airline B (relative hierarchy), lower scores indicate less differentiation between hierarchy and equality options, and negative scores indicate a preference for the hierarchical option. The results revealed a significant negative relation, $b = -.17, SE = .07, t = -2.67, p = .008$, suggesting that conservatives exhibited less differentiation, as shown in Figure 1.

Additionally, we reran the analyses controlling for demographic characteristics such as age and gender that may be associated with the inclination for equality versus hierarchy to isolate the unique effects of political identity on preferences. All of these results were replicated when demographic characteristics were included as covariates in the analyses. This result was also true in Studies 2 and 3 and is not discussed further.

As predicted, liberals were sensitive to the difference between loyalty programs as a function of their degree of equality or hierarchy. Conservatives, however, were insensitive to differences in equality versus hierarchy. Interestingly, although previous research suggests that conservatives are more likely to accept hierarchy than liberals, it is not clear whether conservatives would explicitly prefer objects that endorse hierarchy over equality in their daily life. Hierarchical systems at the individual and group levels are the default (Boehm, 1999; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009), but many societies value egalitarianism and have adopted resource and power distribution as stated societal ideals (e.g. Hirschman, 1991; Lipset & Raab, 1978; Nosek et al., 2009). Thus, individuals (e.g. conservatives) may learn or seek to suppress attitudes explicitly favoring hierarchy over equality (Sears et al., 2000; Van Berkel et al., 2015). Based on these arguments, we can interpret our findings such

![Figure 1. Likelihood of joining as a function of political identity in Study 1.](image)
that conservatives might be less likely to discriminate between equality and hierarchy than their liberal counterparts, but not necessarily that they would explicitly prefer hierarchy to equality. As a counterpoint to this argument, it could be that their indifference in Study 1 stemmed from the fact that both loyalty programs were relatively hierarchical (e.g., five vs. eight tiers). Perhaps conservatives’ preferences would be stronger in instances in which the choice context included a true egalitarian option. Thus, in the next study, we examine whether these values can shape the impact of persuasive messages, and we consider how conservatives respond to messages referencing true equality. Furthermore, the manipulation in Study 1 might seem to vary the number of ranks in a hierarchy, rather than the gap between the highest and lowest ranks. By presenting a clearer manipulation of hierarchy, we attempt to resolve this potential ambiguity in Study 2.

Study 2

In Study 2, we extend our analysis to a persuasion context. More specifically, we investigate the persuasiveness of messages referencing equality or hierarchy among liberal and conservative recipients. In addition, we attempt to replicate the findings in Study 1 in which conservatives did not show a preference for hierarchy over equality. We posit that liberals will be more persuaded by a message containing equality- rather than hierarchy-related words, whereas conservatives will be less sensitive to these differences.

Material and methods

Two hundred sixty-one respondents (52.5% males, \(M_{\text{age}} = 32.86\)) from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk participated in the study for \$1. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two message conditions in which they were shown an ad for an airline emphasizing either equality or hierarchy (see Appendix B). In the hierarchy condition, participants received the following message: ‘Not all seats are created equal! 3 classes of service.’ In the equality condition, the message read: ‘All seats are created equal! 1 class of service for all seats.’ Whereas most airlines do not offer a single class of service as we manipulated, we did so in order to provide a clean manipulation of hierarchy. Following the message, participants were asked to report their behavioral intentions on three items (adapted from Keller, 2006), \(M = 4.74, SD = 1.76\); \(\alpha = .91\), anchored at ‘not at all likely (1),’ and ‘very likely (9).’ The items read: ‘I intend to use this product/service;’ ‘I intend to buy this product/service;’ ‘I intend to get more information on the advantages of this product/service.’ Next, participants’ political identity was measured with the same scale used in Study 1 (\(M = 4.74, SD = 2.78\)). The message content did not affect participants’ responses to the political identity item, \(M_{\text{equality}} = 5.01, SD = 3.01, M_{\text{hierarchy}} = 4.47, SD = 2.51\); \(F(1, 259) = 2.50, p = .12\). Finally, participants provided demographic information and were thanked and debriefed.

Results and discussion

Following the recommendations of Aiken, West, and Reno (1991), we ran a regression analysis with behavioral intentions as the dependent variable and mean-centered political identity, message content (0 = equality, 1 = hierarchy), and their interaction
as predictors. This analysis revealed a marginally significant effect of message content, such that participants reported more favorable behavioral intentions in the equality rather than hierarchy conditions, $b = -0.37, SE = .22, t = -1.71, p = .09$, and a nonsignificant effect of political identity, $b = -0.05, SE = .05, t = -1.00, p = .32$. Most importantly, as shown in Figure 2, we found a significant interaction, $b = .16, SE = .08, t = 2.02, p = .04$. Simple slope analyses revealed that compared to liberals, conservatives had marginally more favorable behavioral intentions toward the messages referencing hierarchy, $b = .11, SE = .06, t = 1.79, p = .07$, but did not show any differences toward the messages referencing equality, $b = -0.05, SE = .05, t = -1.00, p = .32$. From a different perspective, the spotlight analysis revealed that liberals ($-1$ SD; lower than 1.96) displayed more favorable behavioral intentions when the message emphasized equality rather than hierarchy, $b = -0.81, SE = .31, t = -2.66, p = .008$. Interestingly, as in Study 1, conservatives ($+1$ SD; higher than 7.52) showed no difference across conditions, $b = .07, SE = .31, t = .24, p = .81$.

The results from Study 2 conceptually replicated those from Study 1, such that a match between the political identity and message content led to greater persuasion. Specifically, liberals showed more favorable intentions when they received an equality rather than hierarchy message, whereas conservatives showed no difference across conditions. Indeed, the results suggest a stronger association between liberals and preference for equality as compared to the link between conservatives and preference for hierarchy. Viewed differently, although conservatives did not significantly prefer a hierarchical message over an equality message, they appear to be more tolerant of hierarchy than are liberals, replicating the patterns shown in Study 1. Study 2 reveals that this difference has implications for persuasion.

**Study 3**

In Study 3, we assess moderation by identity salience. That is, we examine whether the effects observed in Study 2 are amplified under conditions in which one’s political identity is made especially salient. In this study, we primed the salience of political identity by making one’s party identification salient. We measured partisanship of

![Figure 2](image-url). Behavioral intentions as a function of political identity and message content in Study 2.
voting instead of political identity in this study for two reasons: (1) to establish that the predicted results are not contingent upon our use of a particular political identity scale, and (2) because the manipulation of political identity salience that we used in this study is more related to one’s party preference than to how one evaluates one’s general political orientation.

**Material and methods**

One hundred sixty-seven undergraduate students (67.1% males, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.49$) at a large U. S. University participated in the study for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (identity-salience: salient vs. control) × 2 (message content: equality vs. hierarchy) between-participants design.

At the outset of the study, participants were randomly assigned to either a control condition in which political identity was not made salient or an experimental condition in which political identity was made salient. To do so, we manipulated the salience of party identification. This manipulation was adapted from previous literature (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). In the control condition, participants were asked questions unrelated to party identification such as ‘Please list five reasons for and/or against subscribing to cable. Don’t think too hard about these; just tell us whatever comes to mind first.’ Participants in the salient condition answered questions related to their party identification such as ‘Please list five words/brief phrases that you associate with the political party that you support. Don’t think too hard about these; just tell us whatever comes to mind.’

After this task, participants were randomly assigned to an equality or a hierarchy message condition. This manipulation was identical to that employed in Study 2. Following the message, participants were asked to report behavioral intentions on the same three items as in Study 2 ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.61$, $\alpha = .92$). Next, partisanship of voting was measured with a single item (‘In general, who do you usually vote for in national elections?’ $1 =$ almost always the democrat, $7 =$ almost always the republican; $M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.71$; Kugler et al., 2014). The message content did not affect participants’ responses to the partisanship of voting item, $M_{\text{hierarchy}} = 4.01$, $SD = 1.77$, $M_{\text{equality}} = 3.95$, $SD = 1.67$; $F (1, 165) = .05$, $p = .82$. Finally, participants provided demographic information and were thanked and debriefed.

**Results and discussion**

We regressed intentions on identity-salience (0 = control, 1 = salient), message content (0 = equality, 1 = hierarchy), mean-centered partisanship of voting, and all possible interactions among these variables (Hayes 2013; Process Model 3, Bootstrap Samples = 5,000). This analysis revealed that participants reported significantly more favorable intentions in the equality (vs. hierarchy) condition, $b = -.88$, $SE = .33$, $t = -2.66$, $p = .009$, and marginally significantly less favorable intentions in the salient (vs. not salient) condition, $b = -.61$, $SE = .32$, $t = -1.88$, $p = .06$. Partisanship, however, did not predict intentions at the main effect level, $b = -.16$, $SE = .15$, $t = -1.09$, $p = .28$. Importantly, we found a marginally significant interaction between partisanship and message content, $b = .38$, $SE = .20$, $t = 1.93$, $p = .05$. In addition, we found a marginally significant three-way interaction, $b = .47$, $SE = .27$, $t = 1.71$, $p = .09$ (all other
interactions were nonsignificant, $ps > .3)$. The three-way interaction revealed that the interaction between partisanship and message framing was greater in the identity salient, $b = .85, SE = .19, t = 4.40, p < .001$, rather than control, $b = .38, SE = .20, t = 1.93, p = .05$, condition.

We next examined the results separately in the control and identity salient conditions. In the control condition, spotlight analyses revealed that liberals ($-1$ SD; lower than 1.96) had more favorable intentions in the equality (vs. hierarchy) condition, $b = -1.64, SE = .46, t = -3.59, p < .001$. Again, conservatives (+1 SD; higher than 5.32), showed no difference, $b = -.37, SE = .46, t = -.81, p = .42$. This pattern replicated the findings from Study 2. In the identity salient condition, liberals ($-1$ SD; lower than 2.63) again exhibited more favorable intentions in the equality (vs. hierarchy) condition, $b = -1.93, SE = .46, t = -4.17, p < .001$. Interestingly, though, conservatives (+1 SD; higher than 6.01) now showed marginally more favorable intentions in the hierarchy (vs. equality) condition, $b = .93, SE = .46, t = 2.02, p = .05$, consistent with the notion that making conservative identity salient can induce a preference for hierarchy over equality, perhaps in line with the value of respecting authority (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Ho et al., 2012; Jost et al., 2008; Rai & Fiske, 2011).

We also decomposed the three-way interaction in terms of the equality and hierarchy conditions. In the equality condition, identity salience (relative to control) had a negative effect on intentions among conservatives (+1 SD; higher than 5.62), $b = -.93, SE = .43, t = -2.16, p = .03$, but no effect among liberals ($-1$ SD; lower than 2.28), $b = -.29, SE = .42, t = -.68, p = .50$. This finding is consistent with the idea that conservatives’ respect for authority, and thus hierarchy, can foster a distaste for equality when their conservative identity is salient. In the hierarchy condition, there was a marginally significant negative effect of salience among liberals ($-1$ SD; lower than 2.24), $b = -1.01, SE = .52, t = -1.94, p = .06$, but no effect among conservatives (+1 SD; higher than 5.78), $b = -.03, SE = .51, t = -.05, p = .96$. This result suggests that liberals’ aversion to hierarchy is amplified when their identity is made salient.

In sum, the results of Study 3 replicate and extend the findings from Study 2 whereby a match between the partisanship and message content led to greater persuasion. Here, we found that the effect becomes even stronger when one’s political identity is salient. Furthermore, unlike Studies 1 and 2, in which conservatives showed no general preference for equality or hierarchy, Study 3 revealed that making political identity salient resulted in an outright preference for hierarchy among conservatives. One interesting result from Study 3 is that identity salience did not enhance people’s reactions to the message that was consistent with their partisanship of voting, but rather undermined their reactions to the message that was inconsistent with that partisanship. That is, salience appeared to amplify liberals’ and conservatives’ aversion to hierarchy and equality, respectively. Although we did not explicitly predict this outcome, it suggests that polarized political identities may breed stronger resistance to opposing messages rather than greater preferences for supportive messages. Lastly, these results show that our findings are robust using different measures related to identity.
General discussion

This research explores the implications of political identity for preference and persuasion. We found that political identity can shape preference for options with relatively greater equality or hierarchy, and that it can moderate people’s responses to persuasive messages framed in terms of equality versus hierarchy. Our studies thus underscore the importance of considering political identity in research on persuasion and decision making more generally, and offer an initial step toward understanding what the role of political identity might be in these contexts.

The current research contributes to the existing literature on the effect of political identity on behavior by identifying a key value – preference for equality over hierarchy – that shapes individuals’ preferences and responses to persuasive messages. Past research has shown that political identity can be an important determinant of persuasive outcomes. For example, Nelson and Garst (2005) found that individuals were more persuaded by messages whose sources shared the same political orientation. More recently, Feinberg and Willer (2015) demonstrated that matching messages to the political values of message recipients enhances persuasion. In the marketing literature, Winterich et al. (2012) demonstrated that when the moral foundations of a charity, expressed in the charity’s management processes or mission, match with a donor’s political identity, donation increases. Kidwell, Farmer, and Hardesty (2013) found that a match between moral foundations embedded in individuals’ political identity and the persuasive appeals they receive promoted recycling behaviors in response to those appeals. However, scant research has looked at how specific political values – for example, preference for equality versus hierarchy – influences preference formation and persuasive outcomes. Thus, the present research enriches the literature on political identity, preference, and persuasion by identifying new values that can play an important role in these domains.

Furthermore, the current studies add nuance to this literature in finding that conservative individuals do not explicitly prefer options that endorse hierarchy or messages described in hierarchy terms. This constitutes a departure from previous research, which has shown that conservatives are prone to prefer hierarchy over equality (e.g. Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2008; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001; Wilson, 1973). It could be that conservatives’ seeming indifference to equality versus hierarchy reflects a combination of their older, more implicit favorable attitudes toward hierarchy and their newly learned responses that are intended to be more egalitarian in nature (Petty, Tormala, Briñol, & Jarvis, 2006; see also Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). Alternatively, perhaps liberals (compared to conservatives) were processing the information presented in the stimuli in a more systematic fashion or were more involved with the message, thereby showing greater sensitivity to the framing manipulations. We did not empirically test these possibilities in the current studies, but it warrants attention in future work.

Additionally, this research suggests that political identity may be more sensitive to value-inconsistent messages. Indeed, under identity salience conditions in Study 3, we observed a relatively stronger aversion to values associated with the opposing identity rather than preference for values associated with one’s own identity. Consistent with this finding, some previous literature suggests that social identity
salience can promote aversion rather than preference (Benjamin, Choi, & Strickland, 2010). For instance, Asian-American identity is presumed to involve a norm for risk aversion. Benjamin, James, and Strickland (2010) found that when Asian identity was made salient (vs. not salient), Asian-Americans showed stronger aversion to risk but did not show a stronger preference for safe options. Other work seems to demonstrate that the salience of political identity increases preference for value-consistent options while not affecting preference for value-inconsistent options (e.g. Morton et al., 2007). Thus, there is some inconsistency in the literature around this issue. Although not central to the current concerns, these asymmetries would be worth exploring more deeply in future work.

Finally, although we demonstrate these findings across multiple measures of identity, future research is needed to identify both similarities and differences in effects relating to distinct measures of political identity. For instance, previous research has shown that political identity and related constructs like Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) are often strongly correlated (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996), although this may not always be the case. Future research examining how activation of varying forms and sources of political identity impact judgment and behavior would expand our understanding of potentially unique roles of political ideology, partisanship, and their core psychological foundations (such as SDO and authoritarianism) in shaping people’s responses to persuasive messages.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


Appendix A  Frequent Flyer Programs in Study 1

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<th>Membership tiers</th>
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<td>Over 50,000</td>
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Appendix B. Messages Used in Studies 2–3.

All seats are created equal!
1 Class of Service for All Seats

Enjoy your flight!

Not all seats are created equal!
3 Classes of Service

Enjoy your flight!