Repeated Expression of One’s Political Ideology Can Polarize Attitudes

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Political Ideology

• A belief system that provide people with perspective on political issues.
Political Ideology

• Related to various attitudes
  – Can be part of attitude system
  – Informs attitudes toward policies

Abortion
Immigration
Capital punishment
Tea Party
Affirmative action
Human-made climate change
Political Ideology

• Accessibility of concepts may be most basic form of inter-attitudinal structure.

• An attitude connected to a belief system such as ideology may influence properties of the attitude, which then affects the strength of the attitude
  – i.e., extent to which the attitude persists, resists change, and influences behavior (Petty & Krosnick, 1995).
Accessibility

• Repeated expression of one’s political ideology may increase the accessibility of the ideology.

• Increased accessibility may affect the strength-related properties of attitudes related to the ideology
  – E.g., more polarized (extreme) attitudes
Gun control laws

Figure 6: Percentage point difference between Democrat and Republican responses.
Present Research

- The role of accessibility of an individual’s political ideology may polarize an attitude associated with their political ideology (i.e., gun control laws).
Method

• Participants
  – 120 ISU students
    • 89 male, 31 female
    • $M_{age} = 18.9$ ($SD_{age} = 1.24$)

• Design
  – Between-participants
    • Single vs. repeated expression of political ideology
Method

• Overview of Procedures
  – 1. Report political ideology
  – 2. Repeated expression manipulation
  – 3. Report initial opinion toward gun control laws
  – 4. Write about opinion
  – 5. Report opinion again
  – 6. Report basis of thoughts
Method

• Procedure
  – 1. Report political ideology
  – “Politically speaking, how liberal or conservative are you in general?”
    • 1 = Very liberal; 12 = Very conservative
Method

• Procedure
  – 2. Repeated expression manipulation
    • 2 conditions
Method

• Procedure
  – 2. Repeated expression manipulation
    • Single expression (on 2-pt. scale):
      – “What is your overall evaluation of your political ideology?”
      – Negative/Positive
Method

• Procedure
  – 2. Repeated expression manipulation
    • Repeated expression (on 2-pt. scale):
      – Dislike/Like
      – Worthless/Valuable
      – Undesirable/Desirable
      – Useless/Useful
      – Bad/good
      – Harmful/Beneficial
      – Foolish/Wise
      – Negative/Positive
Method

• Procedure
  – 2. Repeated expression manipulation
    • Repeated expression (on 2-pt. scale):
      – Also measure how quickly participants responded to the Negative/Positive item
Method

• Procedure
  – 3. Report initial opinion (9-point scale)
    • “What is your opinion of gun control laws?”
    • 1 = against; 9 = in favor
Method

• Procedure
  – 4. Write thoughts about opinion
    • Could write up to 4 thoughts
  – Sample thoughts:
    • Not everyone should be allowed guns for the safety of others
    • I think that guns allow people to protect themselves from danger.
Method

• Procedure
  – 5. Report opinion again (9-point scale)
    • “What is your opinion of gun control laws?”
    • 1 = bad; 9 = good

  – Polarization = Time2 opinion – Time1 opinion
    • + = greater polarization
Method

• Procedure
  – 6. Report thought basis (9-point scale):
    • How much did you use your political ideology to form your thoughts?
    • 1 = Did not use at all; 9 = Used very much
Results

- **Descriptive Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political ideology</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 Gun control laws</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought fav</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Results

• Relative to participants in the single expression condition, participants in the repeated expression will report:
  – More polarized attitude
  – More accessible evaluation of their ideology
  – Political ideology as basis for thoughts related to attitude
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Single ( n = 56 )</th>
<th>Repeated ( n = 64 )</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polar</td>
<td>-.02 (.86)</td>
<td>.42 (.73)</td>
<td>-2.92</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>6.25 (2.25)</td>
<td>2.45 (1.02)</td>
<td>12.17</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis</td>
<td>5.31 (2.25)</td>
<td>6.2 (1.87)</td>
<td>-2.37</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: standard deviations in parentheses
Results

• Accessibility effects not moderated by ideology:
  – polarization \((p = .5)\)
  – Accessibility \((p = .18)\)
  – Basis \((p = .82)\)
Discussion

• As expected, participants in the repeated expression condition
  a) had more polarized attitudes toward gun control laws
  b) reported that their thoughts reflected their political ideology more than in the single expression condition.
Future Directions

• Examine how accessibility of ideology might lead to increased strength of related attitudes (e.g., gun control laws)
  – E.g., increased resistance, persistence, etc.

• Examine how non-political topics (e.g., spiders) are affected by repeated expression of ideology
Thank you

Questions?