An Ideological House of Mirrors: Political Stereotypes as Exaggerations of Motivated Social Cognition Differences

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Abstract:

Previous research on political stereotypes has focused on the perceived moral values or political attitudes of conservatives and liberals. The current studies examined whether laypeople hold stereotypes about the psychological traits of Republicans and Democrats, and whether those stereotypes represent exaggerations of actual political differences. Participants completed measures of epistemic (Study 1), existential (Study 2), and ideological (Study 2) motives. Participants also completed these measures based on how they thought the average Republican and average Democrat would respond. Consistent with previous research, Republicans scored higher on these measures of motivated social cognition than Democrats. Critically, political stereotypes about Democrats and Republicans mirrored, but exaggerated, the actual differences. Despite an overall tendency of participants to engage in stereotype exaggeration, Democrats engaged in greater stereotype exaggeration compared to Republicans, and partisans (individuals who strongly identified with either party) engaged in greater stereotype exaggeration compared to more moderate party members.

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**Keywords:** politics, stereotypes, individual differences, motivated social cognition
Increasing ideological polarization (Bishop, 2008; Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2013) and the ongoing “culture wars” (Hunter, 1991) in the United States highlights the need to understand the differences and potential sources of conflict between conservatives and liberals. A majority of the previous research in political psychology has focused on what makes conservatives and liberals psychologically different. For example, Moral Foundations Theory has demonstrated that liberals focus more on the moral values of care and fairness, while conservatives focus more on the moral values of loyalty, authority, and purity (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Summarizing decades of research, Jost and colleagues (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a) demonstrated that conservatives have greater motivations to achieve and maintain certainty, manage threats, preserve hierarchies and group boundaries, and justify the status quo. This framework has been referred to as the “conservatism as motivated social cognition” or “rigidity-of-the-right” hypothesis (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost, Napier, Thorsdottir, Gosling, Palfai, & Ostafin, 2007).

While knowing the actual differences between conservatives and liberals is undoubtedly important for understanding conflicts between these two groups, social psychologists would be quick to point out that perceived differences between conservatives and liberals might be equally important. Put differently, individuals might have stereotypes about conservatives and liberals and these stereotypes might also serve as a source of conflict. Previous research on stereotypes has highlighted the role that perceptions of in-group and out-group members have on intergroup evaluations and interactions (e.g., Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; McConnell & Leibold, 2001). However, it is only in the last two decades that psychologists have begun to examine the stereotypes that individuals across the political spectrum have about
conservatives and liberals (Chambers, Baron, & Inman, 2006; Chambers & Melnyk, 2006; Graham, Nosek, & Haidt, 2012; Judd & Park, 1993; Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995).

The current studies were designed to test whether stereotypes exist regarding the psychological traits of Republicans and Democrats, and whether there are moderators of these stereotypes. To accomplish this we utilized an in-group-out-group design, in which participants respond to items as themselves and as an “average” or “typical” member of the in-group and out-group (see Judd & Park, 1993). We used this design to measure the extent to which individuals believe Republicans and Democrats possess traits associated with each set of social-cognitive motives from the “conservatism as motivated social cognition” framework (Jost et al., 2003a; 2009): epistemic motives (Study 1), existential motives (Study 2), and ideological motives (Study 2). We hypothesized that political stereotypes would manifest as exaggerations of actual group differences, as opposed to inaccurate beliefs regarding group differences (see Jussim, Harber, Crawford, Cain, & Cohen, 2005; McCauley, 1995). The study design also allowed us to test whether political stereotypes are moderated by political party affiliation and political extremity. For reasons we will discuss below, it was plausible that these variables would moderate stereotype exaggeration.

In each study, we wanted to answer five research questions related to political stereotypes. First, do stereotypes exist regarding the psychological traits of Republicans and Democrats? Second, do these stereotypes reflect actual directional differences on these psychological traits? Third, are these stereotypes exaggerations of actual group differences? Fourth, are there ideological group differences in the expression of political stereotypes? The “rigidity-of-the-right” account might predict that the psychological traits that differentiate conservatives and liberals are precisely the ones that could cause conservatives to exhibit more
exaggerated stereotypes than liberals. Because conservatives tend to view things more rigidly and favor certainty more than liberals, conservatives might also be more likely to exaggerate differences between conservatives and liberals to enhance feelings of certainty. Work on general prejudice (e.g., Sears & Henry, 2003; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996; Whitley, 1999) and perceptions of differences in political beliefs (Judd & Park, 1993. Robinson et al., 1995) provides additional empirical support for the hypothesis that conservatives might demonstrate increased stereotype exaggeration compared to liberals (although see Chambers et al., 2013, for an alternate explanation of the prejudice results). Fifth, does extremity of political affiliation increase political stereotype exaggeration? The rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis has received more attention in the literature, but some researchers maintain that political extremity, not group membership, results in increased cognitive rigidity (see Greenberg & Jonas, 2003; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003b, for a debate between the two perspectives). Despite the limited amount of research on political stereotypes, some of the research on perceptions of political attitudes differences (Chambers et al., 2006; Chambers & Melnyk, 2006) provides support for the hypothesis that partisans of both parties will demonstrate increased stereotype exaggeration compared to more moderate party members.

**Study 1: Epistemic Motives**

The first study was designed to test whether individuals perceive differences in the extent to which Republicans and Democrats are motivated to reduce uncertainty. The specific measure of epistemic motives to reduce uncertainty used in Study 1 was need for cognitive closure (NFCC), the desire to quickly achieve and maintain certainty (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Previous research has demonstrated that conservatives tend to be higher in NFCC than liberals (see Jost et al., 2003a).
Method

Consistent with the recommendations of Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn (2012), we report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study.

Participants. Participants were U.S. residents recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (www.mturk.com). The sample of Study 1 (N = 204) was 52% female, had a median age of 38 (range 19-72), and 80.9% identified as White. 35.3% of the participants identified as Democrat, 22.5% Republican, and 42.1% Independent/Other party, which parallel political identifications at the national level (see Discussion).

Procedure and design. Participants began the study by completing an instructional manipulation check (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). Participants were given up to three opportunities to pass the manipulation check. 82.8% of the participants passed the initial check, with 4.9% failing all three checks. The results did not differ based on the inclusion/exclusion of participants who failed the first manipulation check, so all participants were included in the reported analyses.

Study 1 utilized an in-group-out-group design where participants completed the NFCC Scale as themselves (personal), as the “average Republican”, and as the “average Democrat”. When responding as a Republican (Democrat), the following instructions were presented on the top of the screen (bold and italics in the original): “Indicate how much you think the average Republican (Democrat) would agree with each of the following items.” Participants completed all items on the scale from a given viewpoint before moving on to the next viewpoint. The viewpoint order was counterbalanced across participants. There were no significant order effects (ps > .18), so order will not be discussed further. After completing the NFCC Scale, participants...
provided demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, political ideology, party affiliation, and religiosity) and completed items to measure perceptions of the Democratic and Republican Parties, as well as the Tea Party Movement. Participants concluded the study by indicating what they thought the purpose of the study was and were debriefed.

**Measures**

*Need for cognitive closure.* NFCC was measured using the NFCC Scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) in which participants made responses using a scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (6).

*Political party affiliation and extremity.* Participants completed two items used to measure political party affiliation in the American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org), which first measures whether the individual identifies as a Democrat, Independent/Other party, or Republican and then measures the strength (strong or not very strong) of their affiliation (for self-identified Democrats and Republicans) or whether they lean towards the Republican Party, Democratic Party, or neither party (for self-identified Independents/Other). The responses to these two items allow the creation of a 7-point measure of political party affiliation from “Strong Democrat” (-3) to “Strong Republican” (3), with Independent (0) as the midpoint. Political extremity was calculated by taking the absolute value of the political party affiliation item. Consequently, larger numbers represent more extreme political party affiliation (range is 0 to 3).

*Perceptions of political groups.* Participants indicated the perceived political ideology (7-point verbal scale ranging from *Extremely liberal* to *Extremely conservative*), need to compromise (5-point verbal scale ranging from *Compromise much less* to *Compromise much more*), and likeability (7-point verbal scale ranging from *Dislike Extremely* to *Like Extremely*) of
each political group (Democrats, Republicans, and Tea Party Movement). Participants also estimated the percentages of Congress that are Democratic and Republican and the percentage of conservatives in the U.S. and Congress who are members of the Tea Party Movement. The results of the need-to-compromise measure are included in the Discussion.

Results and Discussion

To better communicate how the results of the current study answer each of the five research questions, each question will be restated followed by the relevant results.

1) Do stereotypes regarding political psychological differences exist?

Yes. Participants perceived Republicans to be higher in NFCC ($M = 4.47, SD = 0.60$) than Democrats ($M = 3.58, SD = 0.58$), $t(203) = 14.26, p < .001, d = 1.00$.

2) Do these stereotypes reflect actual differences?

Yes. Republicans reported being more motivated by NFCC ($M = 4.09, SD = 0.45$) than Democrats ($M = 3.62, SD = 0.45$), $t(116) = 5.44 p < .001, d = 1.04$ (see grey line in Figure 1).

3) Are these stereotypes exaggerations of actual group differences?

Yes. For each participant, we calculated a perceived-spread score by subtracting the participant’s mean NFCC response as the “average Democrat” from the participant’s mean NFCC response as the “average Republican.” A one-sample t-test revealed that these perceived-spread scores ($M = 0.89$) tended to be higher than the test value of 0.48, which was the mean for the actual spread (i.e., the actual difference in NFCC scores between Republicans and Democrats), $t(203) = 6.58, p < .001, d = .47$ (see Figure 2).

It is noteworthy that Democrats and Republicans are not misperceived to the same degree. For each participant, we calculated an exaggeration-about-Democrats score by subtracting the actual NFCC mean of Democrats in the sample from the participant’s mean
response on the NFCC Scale as the “average Democrat.” Positive (negative) scores represent the extent to which the participant overestimated (underestimated) Democrats’ NFCC. The average of these exaggeration scores was not significantly different from zero ($M = -0.04$, $SD = 0.58$), $t(203) = -1.07$, $p = .29$, $d = .07$. We also calculated an analogous exaggeration-about-Republicans score. The average exaggeration-about-Republicans score was positive ($M = 0.37$, $SD = 0.60$), significantly different from zero, $t(203) = 8.74$ $p < .001$, $d = .62$, and significantly larger than the exaggeration-about-Democrats score, $t(203) = 6.58$, $p < .001$, $d = .62$. In short, the stereotype exaggeration of the differences between Republicans and Democrats was a result of participants overestimating the extent to which Republicans are motivated by NFCC.

4) Does party affiliation moderate the expression of stereotype exaggeration?

Yes. Party affiliation was significantly correlated with the perceived-spread score, $r(202) = -0.20$, $p = .005$, meaning that increased Democratic Party affiliation was associated with increased exaggeration of the perceived differences between Republicans and Democrats. This increased exaggeration among Democrats can be seen in Figure 1 in the larger slope of the line for Democratic participants responding as the “average Republican” and “average Democrat” (blue dashed-line) compared to the slopes of the lines for Republican participants (red dotted-line) and the actual NFCC means of Republicans and Democrats (grey solid-line).

5) Does extremity of party affiliation lead to increased exaggeration?

Yes. Political extremity was marginally correlated with the perceived-spread score, $r(202) = 0.12$, $p = .08$, meaning that increased identification with one’s political party was associated with increased exaggeration of the perceived differences between Republicans and Democrats. This increased exaggeration among partisans is evident in the increased slope of the line for partisan respondents compared to moderate respondents in Figure 3. A regression
analysis for the perceived-spread score that included both party affiliation and extremity revealed no significant interaction between party affiliation and extremity, $\beta = -0.10$, $t(203) = -0.56$, $p = .57$.

**Study 2: Existential and Ideological Motives**

Study 1 provided the first evidence, to our knowledge, that laypeople have stereotypes regarding the psychological traits of conservatives and liberals. In Study 2, we tested whether individuals also have political stereotypes regarding existential motives to manage threats and ideological motives to prefer hierarchies and support the status quo. The specific individual difference scale used to measure existential motives was Belief in a Dangerous World (BDW), which, as the name implies, measures how dangerous and threatening the individual perceives the world to be (Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002). The specific individual difference scales used to measure ideological motives were Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), which measures an individual’s opposition to equality and/or preference for hierarchy (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), and System Justification (SJ), which measures individual preferences for existing social structures (Kay & Jost, 2003).

**Method**

**Participants.** Participants were U.S. residents recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. The sample of Study 2 ($N = 219$) was 51% female, had a median age of 35 (range 18-72), and 77.9% identified as White. 35.6% of the participants identified as Democrat, 15.1% Republican, 44.7% Independent/Other party, and 4.6% did not respond to the party affiliation item.

**Procedure and design.** The procedure and design of Study 2 was identical to that used in Study 1 with one exception: Instead of NFCC, participants completed the BDW, SDO, and SJ
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scales. Participants completed all three scales from a given viewpoint before moving on to the next viewpoint. There were no significant order effects ($ps > .65$), so order will not be discussed further.

**Results and Discussion**

The measures in Study 2 were calculated via the same methods as Study 1.

1) **Do stereotypes regarding political psychological differences exist?**

   Yes. Participants perceived Republicans to be higher than Democrats on all three traits (BDW, $t(208) = 12.75, p < .001, d = .88$; SDO, $t(208) = 20.14, p < .001, d = 1.39$; and SJ, $t(208) = 9.16, p < .001, d = .63$).

2) **Do these stereotypes reflect actual differences?**

   Yes. Republicans reported higher BDW, $t(109) = 5.32, p < .001, d = 1.09$; SDO, $t(109) = 7.52, p < .001, d = 1.37$; and SJ, $t(109) = 2.52, p = .01, d = .53$, compared to Democrats (see Figure 1).

3) **Are these stereotypes exaggerations of actual group differences?**

   Yes. One-sample t-tests revealed that the perceived-spread between Republicans and Democrats were larger than the actual spread between Republicans and Democrats on all three traits (BDW, $t(208) = 2.49, p = .01, d = .17$; SDO, $t(208) = 8.83, p < .001, d = .61$; and SJ, $t(208) = 3.49, p = .001, d = .24$; see Figure 2).

As in Study 1, there were differences in the extent to which Democrats and Republicans are misperceived. The average of the exaggeration-about-Republican scores were significantly larger than the exaggeration-about-Democrat scores for BDW ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.25, SD = 1.52$), $t(208) = 2.37, p = .02$, SDO ($M_{\text{diff}} = 1.22, SD = 2.00$), $t(208) = 8.82, p < .001$, and SJ ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.51, SD = 2.11$), $t(208) = 3.48, p = .001$. In short, the stereotype exaggeration of the differences between
Republicans and Democrats was primarily the result of participants overestimating the extent to which Republicans possess BDW, SDO, and SJ.

4) Does party affiliation moderate the expression of stereotype exaggeration?

Yes. Political party affiliation was significantly correlated with the perceived-spread scores for BDW, \( r(208) = -0.31, p < .001 \), and SDO, \( r(208) = -0.41, p < .001 \), but not SJ, \( r(208) = -0.01, p = .89 \), meaning increased Democratic Party affiliation was associated with increased exaggeration of the perceived differences between Republicans and Democrats on BDW and SDO. This increased exaggeration among Democrats can be seen in Figure 1 in the larger slope of the line for Democratic participants responding as the “average Republican” and “average Democrat” compared to the slopes of the lines for Republican participants and the actual means of Republicans and Democrats.

5) Does extremity of party affiliation lead to increased exaggeration?

Yes. Political extremity was significantly correlated with the perceived-spread scores for BDW, \( r(208) = 0.15, p = .03 \), and SDO, \( r(208) = 0.14, p = .05 \), but not SJ, \( r(208) = -0.05, p = .50 \), meaning increased affiliation with one’s political party was associated with increased exaggeration of the perceived differences between Republicans and Democrats on BDW and SDO. This increased exaggeration among partisans is evident in the increased slope of the line for partisan respondents compared to moderate respondents in Figure 3. Regression analyses for the perceived-spread scores for each trait that included both party affiliation and extremity revealed no significant interactions between party affiliation and extremity (BDW: \( \beta = -0.10, t(208) = -0.52, p = .61 \); SDO: \( \beta = 0.10, t(208) = 0.53, p = .60 \); SJ: \( \beta = 0.21, t(208) = 1.07, p = .29 \)).

General Discussion
The current studies were designed to answer five questions regarding the existence of political stereotypes for psychological differences between conservatives and liberals. The answers to the first two questions (Do psychological political stereotypes exist? Do they reflect actual differences?) are a resounding “Yes.” For all four of the individual difference measures – Need for Cognitive Closure, Belief in a Dangerous World, Social Dominance Orientation, and System Justification – individuals gave higher responses when responding as the “average Republican” than when responding as the “average Democrat.” These stereotypes reflect the direction of actual differences, with Republicans in the sample actually having higher mean responses on these scales compared to Democrats in the sample, results consistent with numerous other studies (see Jost et al., 2003a). However, the perceived differences between Republicans and Democrats on these trait measures were significantly larger than the actual differences, answering the third question of whether these psychological political stereotypes represent exaggerations of actual group differences. These exaggerations of group differences were driven by the fact that for all four traits, participants exhibited greater exaggeration when responding as the “average Republican” and less exaggeration when responding as the “average Democrat”.

We interpret the above results to reflect the fact that stereotypes are susceptible to both motivational and cognitive sources of bias. Factors, such as social identity concerns (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979), should motivate Democrats and partisans to differentiate Democrats from Republicans on “conservative” traits, which may be a source of the larger stereotype exaggeration about Republicans that was observed in the current studies. On a related note, one possible source of cognitive bias may be that the traits used in the current studies are more associated with conservatives. In other words, individuals may exhibit greater stereotype
exaggeration for the group that is associated with “high” levels of the trait. For example, while the stereotype exists that Blacks are “aggressive” (e.g., Devine, 1989), the complementary stereotype that Whites are “passive” does not exist. In the same way, because conservatives are higher on a trait like SDO, individuals may have stronger stereotypes about conservatives regarding this trait than they do for liberals. It may be the case that measuring political stereotypes regarding traits that are more strongly associated with liberalism (e.g., openness to new experience; Jost et al., 2003a) may lead to increased exaggeration of Democrats relative to Republicans.

Another possible source of cognitive bias may be that individuals, especially Democrats and Independents, perceive the Republican Party as being more extreme than the Democratic Party, potentially due to the greater presence of extreme Republicans in the media since the emergence of the Tea Party and their role in the Republican take-over of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010. Media research on public perceptions provides support for this hypothesis. As recently as 2010, a greater percentage of individuals perceived the Democratic Party as “too extreme” relative to the percentage of people who said the same about the Republican Party, but since the emergence of the Tea Party people are now more likely to view the Republican Party as “too extreme” (CNN, 2012; Pew Research, 2010). Consequently, “extreme” may be more associated with schemas about Republicans than schemas about Democrats.

Consistent with this hypothesis, the perceived need of the Republican Party to compromise ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.26$) was directionally, but not significantly, larger than the perceived need of the Democratic Party to compromise ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.20$) in Study 1, $t(203) = 1.51$, $p = .13$, and the perceived need of the Republican Party to compromise ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.21$)
1.18) was significantly larger than the perceived need of the Democratic Party to compromise ($M = 3.28, SD = 1.24$) in Study 2, $t(208) = 5.25, p < .001$. This effect was moderated by political affiliation in both studies ($F(1,202) = 141.58, p < .001$ and $F(1,207) = 97.62, p < .001$, for Studies 1 and 2, respectively). Predictably, self-identified Republicans and Democrats thought that the opposing party needed to compromise more than their own party. Interestingly, participants who identified as Independents or members of another third party, who represented a majority of the sample, viewed the Republican Party as needing to compromise more ($M = 3.99, SD = 1.00$ and $M = 3.90, SD = 1.08$, for Studies 1 and 2, respectively) than the Democratic Party ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.08$ and $M = 3.27, SD = 1.18$, for Studies 1 and 2, respectively), $t(85) = 1.96, p = .054$ (Study 1) and $t(97) = 3.49, p = .001$ (Study 2).

Additional analyses further supported the idea that differential trait exaggerations about Republicans and Democrats are linked to differential perceptions of the extent that each party needs to compromise. Using within-subject mediation analyses suggested by Judd, Kenny, and McClelland (2001), we examined whether the extent to which individuals viewed Republicans as needing to compromise more relative to Democrats (computed as a difference score per participant) predicted the extent to which they exaggerated the possession of traits by Republicans relative to the possession of those traits by Democrats (also computed as a difference score per participant per trait). For three of the four traits included in our studies, the difference scores regarding the need-to-compromise measures predicted difference scores regarding trait exaggerations: NFCC, $\beta = 0.21, t(203) = 3.05, p = .003$, BDW, $\beta = 0.36, t(207) = 5.60, p < .001$, and SDO, $\beta = 0.21, t(207) = 6.41, p < .001$, but not SJ, $\beta = 0.21, t(207) = -0.68, p = .49$. Assuming perceptions of the need for a party to compromise is a proxy for perceived party extremity, these results suggest that the increased exaggeration about Republicans on key
traits relative to the exaggeration about Democrats is at least partially a consequence of participants perceiving the Republican Party as more extreme than the Democratic Party. There may be other mediators as well, however. In fact, similar analyses involving liking of the two political parties produced similar results (for these analyses and related analyses on perceived ideological extremity, see Supplementary Materials found at http://spps.sagepub.com/supplemental).

Returning to our enumerated research questions, the fourth and fifth research questions asked whether the expression of political stereotypes might be moderated by political affiliation or extremity. The results of the current studies suggest that Democrats and partisans of both political parties were more likely to express stronger political stereotypes for most of the traits. It is not too surprising that Democrats might stereotype Republicans, but the results also suggest that partisan Republicans have stronger stereotypes about Republicans as well. The willingness of partisan Republicans to stereotype fellow Republicans may depend on the flexibility a trait can be interpreted. For example, while liberals may view a need to achieve and maintain certainty as being overly rigid and narrow-minded, conservatives may view it as simply being principled or willing to “make the tough decisions” efficiently, which may make partisans from both parties more willing to stress differences on this trait. Regardless of the cause, the results of the current studies suggest that future research should examine both political extremity and affiliation when examining potential moderation of political stereotype effects.

One limitation of the current study was that the sample was not a nationally representative sample. That being said, the political distribution of our studies were roughly equal to those at the national-level. According to the most recent Gallup Poll (Gallup, 2014), 31% of Americans identify as Democrats (35.3% in Study 1, 35.6% in Study 2), 25% identify as
Republican (22.5% in Study 1, 15.1% in Study 2), and 42% identify as Independents/Other (42.1% in Study 1, 44.7% in Study 2). Additionally, we were able to compare the mean system justification responses in Study 2 to responses in a nationally representative sample (with the exception of income) available on Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS; http://tessexperiments.org/) that contained the full SJ scale (Wakslak & Jost, 2005). The mean SJ responses for Republicans ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.22$) and Democrats ($M = 4.45, SD = 1.36$) in the TESS sample were nearly identical to the personal mean SJ response for Republicans ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.51$) and Democrats ($M = 4.39, SD = 1.62$) in Study 2. While this comparison is far from definitive, it does increase our confidence in the results of the current studies. However, replicating our results with a nationally representative sample would still be ideal in future research.

While political stereotypes have now been documented, it is unclear the extent to which political stereotypes influence evaluations and behavior. Unlike traditional stereotypes, political stereotypes and prejudice may be more socially acceptable to express, at least in politically homogenous environments (see Inbar & Lammers, 2012, for how this is manifest in social and personality psychology). If individuals feel like their political stereotypes are valid and feel no need to inhibit the expression of these stereotypes, individuals might be more likely to act on these stereotypes. Additionally, acting on stereotypes could lead to the creation of self-fulfilling prophesies (e.g., Snyder and Swann, 1978). For example, a Democrat, assuming his Republican co-worker is close-minded, might more actively advocate his position, leading his coworker to become more defensive and further entrenched in her position. Future research should examine the impact of political stereotypes on evaluations of political out-group members and utilize interaction paradigms that have been used in examining traditional forms of stereotypes, such as
racial stereotypes, to assess the extent to which political stereotypes influence behavior towards political out-group members.

**Conclusion**

The current studies reveal that lay people hold political stereotypes—exaggerations of actual group differences—regarding psychological differences between members of the two major U.S. political parties. Specifically, these stereotypes seemed to be driven by an overestimation of the extent to which Republicans possess traits linked to epistemic, existential, and ideological motives. While Democrats seem to have especially exaggerated perceptions of Republicans, there was also evidence that partisans from both ends of the political spectrum exhibited greater stereotype exaggeration. Drawing attention to and continuing to study this unique form of stereotyping could help in the development of effective means of reducing some of the partisanship that is leading to political ineffectiveness in government and ease some of the animosity among average citizens for members of political out-groups.
Authorship

A.M. Scherer developed the study concept. A.M. Scherer and P.D. Windschitl contributed to the design of Study 1. All authors contributed to the design of Study 2. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation were performed by A.M. Scherer. A.M. Scherer drafted the paper. P.D. Windschitl and J. Graham provided critical revisions. All authors approved the final version of the paper for submission.
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Footnotes

1 The number of participants for each Mechanical Turk HIT was set at 200. This sample size was determined based on two earlier, unpublished studies and to ensure the inclusion of an adequate number (at least 25) of Republicans and partisans. Final sample sizes exceeded 200 due to individuals completing the study without seeking compensation or not entering the confirmation code prior to the HIT closing.

2 Political scientists often include Independents who report “leaning” Republican or Democrat as members of those parties (e.g., Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). Our results remain unchanged when “leaners” are included. For a more natural reading of the terms, “Republicans” and “Democrats” refer only to individuals who identified as Republicans and Democrats on the categorical political affiliation item.
Figure 1. Trait Ratings by Viewpoint and Party Affiliation.

Note. The colored lines represent the mean responses for when Democrats (blue dashed-line) and Republicans (red dotted-line) answered as the “average Democrat” or “average Republican.” Responses for Independents/Other are not included for ease of presentation. Party affiliation of raters based on the categorical party affiliation item. Grey lines are included to show the location of actual group means. Specifically, the left end of the line reflects the mean of Democrats’ actual scores and the right end of the line reflects the mean of Republicans’ actual scores.
Figure 2. Comparisons of political stereotypes to actual Republican-Democrat differences in trait endorsement.

Note. Dark grey bars represent differences between the actual scale means for Republicans and Democrats in our samples. Lighter grey bars represent differences in stereotypes of Republicans and Democrats. Error bars represent standard error. Positive values indicate higher responses for Republicans.
Figure 3. Trait Ratings by Viewpoint and Extremity.

Note. Solid grey lines represent actual group means for Democrats and Republicans, and dotted lines represent the mean responses indicated for moderates (black dashed-line; extremity score of 0) and partisans (grey dashed-line; extremity score of 3) answering as the “average Democrat (Republican).” Error bars represent standard errors.
In addition to the perceived need of the two parties to compromise, the perceived ideological extremity and liking of the two parties were also predictive of trait exaggerations about Republicans relative to Democrats. We report analyses for these variables below.

Regarding the perceived ideology measure, participants perceived the Republican Party as being ideologically conservative (Study 1: $M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.15$, $t(203) = 22.60$, $p < .001$; Study 2: $M = 1.91$, $SD = 1.26$, $t(208) = 22.02$, $p < .001$) and the Democratic Party as being ideologically liberal (Study 1: $M = -1.49$, $SD = 1.29$, $t(203) = 16.52$, $p < .001$; Study 2: $M = -1.53$, $SD = 1.15$, $t(207) = -19.23$, $p < .001$). To compare the perceived ideological extremity of the two parties, the responses to the ideology measure for the Democratic Party were reverse-coded so that higher values indicated greater perceived ideological extremity. This scoring should be considered with significant caution, as we have no way of knowing whether being 2-points liberal, for example, is necessarily equally extreme as being 2-points conservative. As predicted, the Republican Party was viewed by participants as being more ideologically extreme than the Democratic Party in both Study 1 ($M_{diff} = 0.33$, $SD = 1.51$, $t(203) = 3.16$, $p = .002$, and Study 2 ($M_{diff} = 0.38$, $SD = 1.56$, $t(207) = 3.46$, $p = .001$). Also of interest is that there was no significant difference in the perceived ideological extremity of the Republican Party relative to the Tea Party (Study 1: $M_{diff} = 0.03$, $SD = 1.54$, $t(203) = 0.23$, $p = .82$; Study 2: $M_{diff} = 0.06$, $SD = 1.61$, $t(207) = 0.52$, $p = .61$), consistent with the hypothesis that participants may view the Republican Party as being more extreme than the Democratic Party due to the emergence of the Tea Party Movement. Using within-subject mediation analyses suggested by Judd, Kenny, and McClelland (2001), we examined whether the extent to which individuals perceived Republicans as being more ideologically extreme relative to Democrats (computed as a difference score per participant) predicted the extent to which they exaggerated the possession of traits by
Republicans relative to the possession of those traits by Democrats (also computed as a difference score per participant per trait). For three of the four traits included in our studies, the difference scores regarding ideological extremity predicted difference scores regarding trait exaggerations: NFCC, $\beta = 0.19$, $t(203) = 2.85$, $p = .003$, BDW, $\beta = 0.20$, $t(207) = 2.95$, $p = .004$, and SDO, $\beta = 0.17$, $t(207) = 2.57$, $p = .01$, but not SJ, $\beta = -0.09$, $t(207) = -1.36$, $p = .17$.

Turning to the liking of the two political parties, the Democratic Party was, on average, neither liked nor disliked (midpoint = 4) by participants in both Study 1 ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.72$), $t(203) = -0.53$, $p = .60$, and Study 2 ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.74$), $t(207) = 1.20$, $p = .23$, while the Republican Party was significantly disliked by participants in both Study 1 ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.67$), $t(203) = -6.06$, $p < .001$, and Study 2 ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.73$), $t(207) = -7.48$, $p < .001$. The difference in liking of the Republican and Democratic Parties was significant in both Study 1, $t(203) = -3.31$, $p = .001$, and Study 2, $t(207) = -5.17$, $p < .001$. Once again we used within-subject mediation analyses to examine whether the extent to which individuals liked (or disliked) the Republican Party relative to the Democratic Party predicted the extent to which they exaggerated the possession of traits by Republicans relative to the possession of those traits by Democrats. For three of the four traits included in our studies, the difference scores regarding liking predicted difference scores regarding trait exaggerations: NFCC, $\beta = -0.20$, $t(203) = -2.88$, $p = .004$, BDW, $\beta = -0.34$, $t(207) = -5.39$, $p < .001$, and SDO, $\beta = -0.41$, $t(207) = -6.54$, $p < .001$, but not SJ, $\beta = -0.03$, $t(207) = -0.43$, $p = .167$.

These within-subject mediation analyses suggest that the increased exaggeration about Republicans for NFCC, BDW, and SDO relative to the exaggeration about Democrats on these measures might be a consequence, at least partially, of participants perceiving the Republican Party as more extreme and less likeable than the Democratic Party.
To examine the extent to which perceived need to compromise, ideological extremity, and liking independently predict the difference scores regarding trait exaggeration for the four traits, separate regressions were run regressing the differences in the three potential mediators on the difference scores regarding trait exaggeration for each trait. Before describing the results of these regressions, it is worth noting that the correlations between the difference scores in need to compromise (n), perceived ideological extremity (i), and liking (l) were moderate to large in Study 1 (r_{ni}(204) = .47, p < .001, r_{nl}(204) = .39, p < .001) and Study 2 (r_{ni}(208) = .38, p < .001, r_{nl}(208) = .66, p < .001, r_{il}(208) = .41, p < .001).

Controlling for the variance from the other two difference scores, the difference scores regarding need to compromise independently predicted difference scores regarding trait exaggerations for BDW, β = 0.25, t(207) = 2.84, p = .005, and SDO, β = 0.22, t(207) = 2.63, p = .009, but failed to independently predict difference scores regarding trait exaggerations for NFCC, β = 0.13, t(203) = 1.35, p = .18, and SJ, β = -0.11, t(207) = -1.19, p = .24. Controlling for the variance from the other two difference scores, the difference scores regarding perceived ideological extremity failed to independently predict difference scores regarding trait exaggerations for any of the four traits (BDW, β = 0.06, t(207) = 0.88, p = .38, and SDO, β = 0.01, t(207) = 0.09, p = .93, NFCC, β = 0.06, t(203) = 0.73, p = .47, and SJ, β = -0.09, t(207) = -1.23, p = .22. To summarize, differences in perceived need to compromise and liking of the two political parties independently predicted
differences in trait exaggeration for BDW and SDO, while differences in perceived extremity failed to independently predict differences for any of the traits.