Distinguishing between Worldview Conflict and Shared Alliances: Commentary on Pinsof, Sears, and Haselton

Mark J. Brandt (ORCID: 0000-0002-7185-7031)
Abigail Cassario (ORCID: 0000-0003-3971-7087)
Department of Psychology
Michigan State University

Please address correspondence to Mark Brandt, brandt15@msu.edu

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Alliance theory (this issue) posits that the contents of people's political belief systems is determined by their group alliances in the political system. This approach builds on a long tradition in political psychology that emphasizes the role of group attitudes for structuring belief systems (Converse, 1964 to Conover & Feldman, 1981 to Elder & O'Brian, 2022). It minimizes, if not dismisses, the role of moral principles in determining belief system content and yet can be used to explain some of the apparently illogical sets of attitudes that are packaged into different belief systems. We discuss how alliance theory and the worldview conflict hypothesis (Brandt & Crawford, 2020) make similar predictions and yet posit different mechanisms for political animosity. We then explore how alliances and worldviews can explain the size and direction of the partisanship-animosity relationship in the 2016 American National Election Survey.

Belief systems are connections of political attitudes and identities (Brandt & Sleegers, 2021; Converse, 1964; Gerring, 1997). A core question is where do these connections come from? The data seems to suggest that the answer to this revolves around people's group identities and other related group-based attitudes. While citizens vary in the extent to which identities vs. principles structure their belief systems, Converse (1964), and others since (Boutyline & Vaisey, 2017; Brandt et al., 2019; Elder & O'Brian, 2022; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017), have shown that the plurality of individuals structure their belief systems in terms of group-based attitudes and identities. People working in this paradigm have often left the precise psychological mechanisms underlying empirical

findings underexplored. Alliance theory does an admirable job addressing this shortcoming in the literature by proposing a rich set of mechanisms that can underpin the formation of alliances and their expression in political attitudes. This theory can explain the importance of identity-based components to belief systems (Brandt et al., 2019; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017; Converse, 1964), voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1960), and ideological identification (Conover & Feldman, 1981). Moreover, their theory shows how public opinion can change dramatically, without co-occurring large-scale changes in underlying values and moral principles. Alliance theory is a useful contribution to the conversation on belief systems and ideology in the social sciences.

Alliance Theory and the Worldview Conflict Hypothesis

Alliance theory distinguishes itself from intolerance theory, egalitarianism theory, and authoritarianism theory, as well as the more general idea that people structure their political beliefs and alliances with values. To distinguish alliance theory from other approaches, the authors draw on research emanating from the worldview conflict hypothesis to support their theory. For example, the finding that both liberals and conservatives think that defacing the property of ideological rivals is justified (Wetherell et al., 2013) is used as an example of perpetrator biases. The finding that liberals and conservatives both express animosity towards political rivals (Brandt, 2017; Crawford et al., 2015; Wetherell et al., 2013) is used to counter predictions by intolerance theory. Likewise, the finding that liberals and conservatives both support restricting the speech of their political opponents (Crawford, 2014; Crawford & Pilanski, 2014; Wetherell et al., 2013) is used to distinguish alliance theory from authoritarianism theory. Similarly, the perceived ideological beliefs of groups (Brandt, 2017) is used to map out the alliance structure of US American politics, as well as bolster the argument against egalitarianism theory. The extent the basic findings (e.g., dislike of political rivals) and methods (e.g., perceived ideology) underpinning the worldview conflict hypothesis are used to support alliance theory would suggest that the two approaches are highly similar.

The worldview conflict hypothesis predicts that "people will express prejudice toward individuals and groups perceived to hold conflicting attitudes and values" (Brandt & Crawford, 2020, p. 7, see also Crawford & Brandt, 2020). Research testing this hypothesis has found that both liberals and conservatives express animosity towards groups with different ideological values (Crawford, 2014; Crawford et al., 2017; Wetherell et al., 2013), that social dominators express animosity towards hierarchy-attenuating groups and social egalitarians express animosity towards hierarchy-enhancing groups (Crawford et al., 2015), that religious fundamentalists and dogmatic disbelievers express animosity towards groups with different religious values (Brandt & Van Tongeren, 2017), that people with high levels of openness to experience express animosity towards groups perceived as more conventional (Brandt et al., 2015), and that both high and low levels of disgust sensitivity predict animosity depending on whether or not a group is perceived as upholding traditional sexual morality (Crawford et al., 2014). The worldview conflict hypothesis makes it a point to examine how different worldviews, personality traits, and values are associated with group-based animosity across a wide range of groups (Brandt & Crawford, 2019), which means it serves to integrate and make connections between work on more specific forms group-based animosity (e.g., affective polarization, anti-gay prejudice, xenophobia; Bergh & Brandt, 2022; Brandt & Crawford, 2020). Moreover, the approach has been used to make accurate predictions about the size and direction of the ideology-animosity (Brandt, 2017) as well as the partisanship-animosity (Brandt & Crawford, 2020) association across a wide range of target groups.

Alliance theory and the worldview conflict hypothesis share a number of similarities. For example, both draw on evolutionary reasoning about coalition membership (Brandt & Crawford, 2020, p. 9), both use perceived ideology of a group to measure how similar a group is thought to be (Brandt & Crawford, 2020, p. 9; see also Brandt, 2017), and both see value in studying how political identities are related to group perceptions across a range of different groups (Brandt & Crawford,

2020, p. 11; see also Brandt & Crawford, 2019). It makes sense that the authors would use findings from the worldview conflict approach to support their theorical position.

At the same time, alliance theory and the worldview conflict hypothesis have differences that are not explored nor discussed by the authors. Alliance theory puts a premium on shared group membership and shared coalition membership as the key organizing principle of politics. The approach purposefully and explicitly downplays, if not outright dismisses, the role of values and shared values for organizing politics. The worldview conflict hypothesis, however, puts a premium on shared values and worldviews. The worldview conflict prediction refers to groups "perceived to hold conflicting attitudes and values" (Brandt & Crawford, 2020, p. 7). That is, the hypothesized mechanism of the worldview conflict hypothesis is different from that proposed by alliance theory.

Groups and Alliances vs. Attitudes and Values

Whether group-based animosity is caused by different group memberships or different attitudes and values is a persistent question (e.g., Rokeach, 1960). Although the worldview conflict hypothesis predicts that the association between ideology and animosity is because of dissimilar attitudes and values, nearly all of the evidence for this mechanism can be reinterpreted. Consider the finding that perceived value violations statistically accounts for the ideology-animosity association (e.g., Wetherell et al., 2013). This could be because differences in values cause animosity and group membership is just a proxy for this, consistent with the worldview conflict hypothesis. However, this inference is not a clean one. Instead, it is could also be possible that perceived value differences are post-hoc justifications for not sharing a political allegiance, like the alliance theory would predict. This inferential challenge is also present in work that suggests that group identities and membership are key for understanding animosity (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2012). Finding that differences in group membership result in animosity might not indicate the key role of group membership, but rather be highlighting that group membership signals differing attitudes and values (Orr & Huber, 2020).

One way to think about this problem is with simplified direct acyclic graphs (DAGs) of the potential causal relationships between rival political alliances, dissimilar attitudes and values, and group-based animosity.

Figure 1A contains the moral principles model. This model is based on the idea – that the authors reject – that people sort into political alliances based on similar and dissimilar values. These attitudes and values structure our alliances, which in turn structure our expressions of animosity.

Figure 1B contains alliance theory, a simplified representation of the authors' model. This model is based on the idea that people form political alliances and rivalries and then adopt values that justify those alliances. However, the cause of animosity is a rival alliance. According to this model, rival alliances are a confounder of any association between dissimilar values and animosity.

Figure 1C contains the worldview conflict hypothesis. This model is based on the idea that dissimilar attitudes and values is the proximal cause of animosity. According to this model, dissimilar values are a confounder of any association between rival alliances and animosity.

These three DAGs are simplified. They do not contain more distal causes (e.g., the motivations to form alliances), other possible confounders (e.g., shared socioeconomic status), or possible feedback loops (e.g., between animosity and dissimilar values). However, even these simplified representations can help conceptually distinguish between these models. Much of the existing data, however, simply cannot distinguish between these different hypotheses (see similar discussions in Brandt & Crawford, 2020; Dias & Lelkes, 2022; Orr & Huber, 2020). Future basic research will be necessary to see which model is most supported.

The Current Study

We are not able to test the causal models outlined here. However, we wanted to present some initial data that might help us understand where the worldview conflict hypothesis and alliance theory make different predictions.

One case where the worldview conflict hypothesis makes an *inaccurate* prediction is when the target group is Muslims. Conservatives and Republicans express more animosity and hate towards Muslims than do liberals and Democrats (e.g., Bergh & Brandt, 2022; Brandt, 2017; Brandt & Crawford, 2020; Lajevardi & Abrajano, 2019). At the same time, people perceive Muslims to be relatively conservative (Brandt, 2017; Koch et al., 2016). Thus, when models make predictions about whether liberals or conservatives (or Democrats and Republicans) will express more animosity, the model gets it wrong (by a lot) for Muslims (for ideological identification results see Brandt, 2017; for partisanship results see Brandt & Crawford, 2020). For example, the model predicts that the partisanship-animosity association for Muslims will be the same as what we observe for the partisanship-animosity association for rich people and the police (Brandt & Crawford, 2020). Instead, the partisanship-animosity association for Muslims is about the same size as what we observe for the partisanship-animosity association for labor unions and illegal immigrants.

One explanation for this anomalous and inaccurate prediction comes from alliance theory. Although Muslims as a group are perceived to be relatively conservative (Brandt, 2017; Koch et al., 2016), in the United States they typically vote for Democrats (the less conservative party in the United States; Pew Research Center, 2017). Voting for the same party is a clear indicator of shared allegiance. It is a behavioral indicator of which team a group supports and goes beyond mere cheap talk about a group's values. This shared allegiance, rather than perceived ideological beliefs, may best account for the association between ideology/partisanship and animosity. Notably, the authors use the perceived ideology of the target group as an indicator of shared alliance. However, perceived ideology is typically thought to measure the presumed beliefs and values of a group and is often correlated with other, less political, measures of values (e.g., the conventionalism of a group, Brandt, 2017). This would suggest that perceived ideology is capturing potential worldviews of a group (see also Koch et al., 2016), whereas voting for the same party is unambiguous alliance-relevant behavior.

Perceived ideology and voting behavior are likely associated and signal one another. Our argument here is that voting behavior is relatively more reflective of shared allegiances and perceived ideology is relatively more reflective of people's worldviews and attitudes.

To test whether perceived ideology (i.e., worldviews) or voting behavior (i.e., alliances) best explain the relationship between partisanship and group-based animosity, we analyze nationally representative survey data from the United States collected around the 2016 presidential election. These data contain a measure of respondent's partisanship and feeling thermometer ratings towards a variety of groups, as well as the data necessary (except where noted) to calculate the proportion of a group's two-party vote share that went to former president Trump. We ask whether the perceived ideology or vote choice of a group best explains the size and direction of the partisanship-animosity association. We describe our method in more detail below. All data and code is available here: https://osf.io/hfxsb/

Method

Data

We use the 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES, 2019) Time Series Study (M_{age} = 49.58, SD_{age} = 17.58, 2783 men, 2985 women). The survey consists of eligible voters in the United States and uses a combination of face to face and online survey questionnaires. All analyses with ANES data reported here use all available cases in the dataset that have completed our measures of interest.

Partisanship-Animosity Association

To estimate the partisanship-animosity association, we regressed partisanship on animosity for each group and saved the unstandardized slopes. Respondent partisanship ranged from 1 (Strong Democrat) to 7 (Strong Republican). Group-based animosity was measured with feeling thermometers towards the 16 groups included in the survey that are eligible to vote in US

presidential elections and for whom we could estimate voting behavior. Namely, we examined animosity towards Muslims, Poor People, Feminists, Liberals, Black people, Gay Men and Lesbians, Police, Union Members, Hispanic people, Conservatives, White people, Jewish people, Asian Americans, Christians, Christian Fundamentalists, and Rich People.[1] The one item measure we used to capture political animosity ranged from (0) (Unfavorable and very cold) to 100 (Very warm and favorable). We reverse scored this measure such that higher scores indicated more animosity. This measure has been shown to correlate with measures of prejudice and intolerance (Brandt et al., 2015; Crawford, 2014) and is commonly used to capture group-based attitudes in political psychology (e.g., Correll et al, 2010; Gidron et al., 2022; Mason, 2018).

Voting Behavior

To measure voting behavior as our indicator of shared alliance, we estimated the proportion of each group's two-party vote-share that went to former president Donald Trump. To do this, we took a question which asked, "Who did you vote for?" and provided respondents with the options of Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Gary Johnson, Jill Stein, and Other. For each group (with the exception of Muslims, and Police, whom we discuss below), we first identified people in the ANES who were part of the group, then we divided the number of respondents in the group who voted for Donald Trump by the number of respondents who voted for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. This yielded the proportion of the two-party vote share among group members that went to Donald Trump, thus capturing the extent to which the group allies itself with Republicans rather than Democrats. For both Muslims and the police, we were not able to make reliable estimates from the available ANES data and so drew on other sources for these estimates (Griffith, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2017).

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[1] There are measures of animosity towards other groups in the ANES for which we could not find voting data and therefore exclude from our analyses.

Perceived Ideology

Each groups' perceived ideology was obtained from previously published estimates (Brandt, 2017). In this study, Mechanical Turk participants (N = 432) were randomly assigned to complete ratings of either group ideology, conventionality, status, or choice. We focus on group ideology here. For each group, participants were told "You will indicate the perceived political ideology of each of the groups below. For reach group indicate whether you think the group is typically a liberal or conservative group." The groups were then rated on a scale ranging from 0 (very liberal) to 100 (very conservative). We rescale this measure to range from 0 to 1. The ICC of the group ideology rating was .99 indicating a high degree of consensus on perceived group ideology (see also Koch et al., 2020). Past work has found perceived group ideology to be highly correlated with the perceived conventionalism of the group (r = .85; Brandt, 2017)

Results

Before testing the key idea, we first examine the correlation between perceived ideology and vote choice. We find that these constructs are positively associated, but the relationship is not perfect (Figure 2). In particular, rich people, Asian Americans, Jewish people, and Muslims are all perceived to be a on the conservative side of the scale, but also tended to vote for Democrats more than Republicans in 2016. This suggests that worldviews and alliance-supporting behavior are not identical.

First, we tested the worldview conflict idea that the partisanship-animosity association will be predicted by the perceived ideology of the target group. We regressed the partisanship-animosity association for each group on the perceived ideology of each group. The data are plotted in Figure 3 (left panel). Perceived ideology was strongly negatively correlated with the size and direction of the partisanship-animosity association. As expected, Democrats disliked conservative groups more than Republicans (bottom-right quadrant) and Republicans disliked liberal groups more than Democrats

(upper-left quadrant). Notably, replicating past work using similar models and data, perceived ideology does a poor job predicting the partisanship-animosity association for Muslims.

Next, we tested the alliance theory idea that the partisanship-animosity association will be predicted by the alliance of the target group. We regressed the partisanship-animosity association for each group on the proportion of the two-party vote share going to the Republican candidate in that group. Voting behavior was strongly negatively correlated with the size and direction of the partisanship-animosity association. As expected, Democrats disliked Republican-voting groups more than Republicans (bottom-right quadrant) and Republicans disliked Democratic-voting groups more than Democrats (upper-left quadrant).

Both models have a similarly strong negative association between the group characteristic and the partisanship-animosity association (r's of -.84 and -.81). This might suggest that both models do equally well and are indistinguishable. We don't think that is the case. Despite the near identical overall model performance, the groups that are best and least well explained by the models are different (i.e., the residuals for each group differ across the models). That is, another way we can use these data is to go beyond the overall model performance and dig down into where the model does its best and its worst.

The residuals for each group in each model are plotted in Figure 4A. Whereas the ideology model misses big for both Muslims and poor people, the vote choice model misses big for feminists, liberals, rich people, labor unions, and Black people. The difference in residuals between the two models is plotted in Figure 4B. The ideology model made better predictions for 5 of the groups and the vote choice model made better predictions for 9 of the groups (conservatives and the police had very similar residuals in both models). In other words, the models have a similar overall performance (large, negative correlations), but differ in which groups the model performs best.

Each model had strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps differences in worldviews (i.e., ideology) and alliances (i.e., vote choice) are both relevant? To test this idea, we regressed the partisanship-animosity relationship on ideology and vote choice simultaneously. Both ideology (b = -7.07, SE = 2.46, p = .01) and vote choice (b = -4.66, SE = 2.13, p = .05) were negative and significant predictors of the partisanship-animosity relationship.

Discussion

Alliance theory and the worldview conflict hypothesis make similar predictions. Although the precise scope of the two approaches is different, when it comes to understanding how politics is related to group-based animosity, both make similar predictions and draw on the same set of empirical findings. Nonetheless, both approaches make these similar predictions for different reasons (Figure 1). We conducted a preliminary test of the two approaches, examining whether perceived group ideology (a proxy used for worldviews) or a group's two-party vote choice (a behavioral indicator for shared alliance) predicted the size and direction of the partisanship-animosity association. There are three key findings that should help refine both alliance theory and the worldview conflict hypothesis.

First, the perceived ideology of the group and it's two-party vote choice are correlated, yet distinct (Figure 2). This shows that perceived ideology is more than just a re-expression of a groups' partisanship or vote choice. Similarly, it shows that groups may be part of a political alliance without necessarily being perceived as sharing a similar worldview.

Second, the perceived ideology of the group and it's two-party vote choice are correlated with the size and direction of the partisanship-animosity association (Figure 3). This replicates past work on perceived ideology from the worldview conflict perspective (e.g., Brandt, 2017; Brandt & Crawford, 2020; see also Koch et al., 2020). It also shows that groups' alliance-relevant behaviors are correlated with the partisanship-animosity association. The size of the correlations for perceived

ideology and vote choice were very similar, suggesting that overall, both worldviews and shared alliances do a good job explaining the partisanship-animosity association.

Third, perceived ideology and vote choice are unique correlates of the partisanship-animosity association. For example, the two models make different types of errors. Whereas the ideological model misses big for Muslims and poor people, the vote choice model misses big for feminists, liberals, and rich people. This suggests that each model has different strengths and weaknesses. Consistent with this, when we include both perceived ideology and vote choice in the same model, both are significant negative correlates of the partisanship-animosity relationship. This is notable because vote choice is explicitly about a shared partisan alliance, whereas perceived ideology is more conceptually distal. Nonetheless, both ideology and vote choice are significant correlates. This suggests that to understand the partisanship-animosity association across a wide range of target groups, it is necessary to know about both worldviews and alliances.

Limitations

We take advantage of an existing nationally representative survey dataset to explore and highlight different predictions generated by the worldview conflict hypothesis and alliance theory. Notably, this is not a complete test of these ideas. The nature of our correlational evidence does not allow us to rule out the possibility that respondents were inferring a group's political alliances from their ideology or their ideology from their political alliances. The imperfect relationship between the two (e.g., Figure 2) and their independent associations show that they are not identical, however, follow up investigations are necessary. Perhaps experimental paradigms can be used to test the direct causal influence of these constructs on intergroup attitudes. Recent work by Bai (in press) is a possible template. In an experimental paradigm, they find that support for political candidates is typically driven by shared ideology (e.g., attitudes), rather than shared party identity. Manipulating alliance information independently of values, attitudes, social status, and other possible predictors

will be necessary to distinguish between the worldview conflict hypothesis, alliance theory, and other relevant perspectives.

Conclusion

Alliance theory adds psychological heft to group-centric theories of belief system content and structure. We poke at this idea by comparing alliance theory with the worldview conflict hypothesis. Alliance theory predicts that political alliances between groups should structure intergroup animosity. In contrast, the worldview conflict hypothesis predicts that dissimilar worldviews between groups should do so. Our analyses provide support for the predictions of both theories. Notably, alliance theory helps explain worldview conflicts' big missed prediction (Muslims, see Brandt, 2017; Brandt & Crawford, 2020). At the same time, the worldview conflict hypothesis helps explain alliance theory's big missed predictions (e.g., feminists and rich people). This suggests that group-centric theories of belief systems, like alliance theory, are useful, but also may be overlooking instances where worldviews also matter. We look forward to the next generation of belief system research that further tests when and how groups and worldviews matter for belief systems and intergroup attitudes.

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Figure 1. *Three potential Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs) of the associations between rival political alliances, dissimilar attitudes and values, and group-based animosity.*
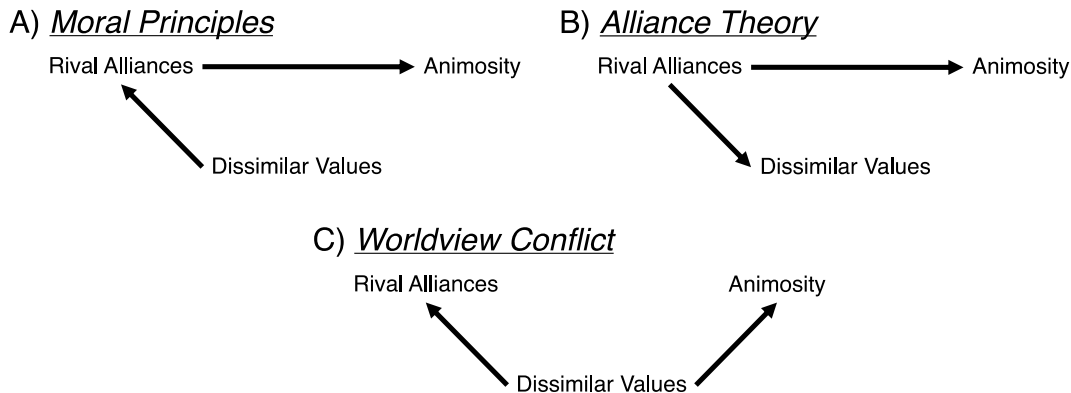

A) *Moral Principles*

Rival Alliances ⟶ Animosity

Dissimilar Values

B) *Alliance Theory*

Rival Alliances ⟶ Animosity

Dissimilar Values

C) *Worldview Conflict*

Rival Alliances   Animosity

Dissimilar Values

Figure 2. Scatterplot of the association between groups' perceived ideology and their two-party vote choice. Shaded area is the 95% confidence interval. Higher scores on perceived ideology indicate more conservative ideology, whereas lower scores indicate more liberal ideology.
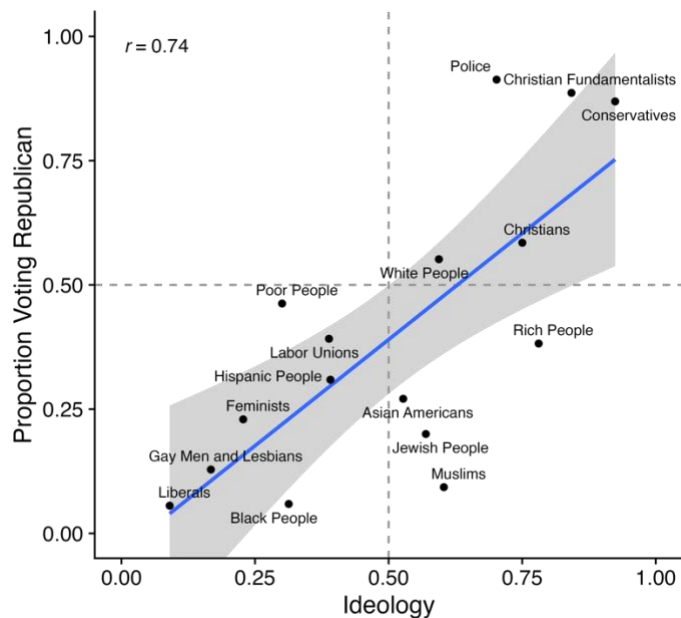
Figure 3. Scatterplot of the association between groups' perceived ideology or two-party vote choice and the partisanship-animosity association. Shaded area is the 95% confidence interval. Higher scores on perceived ideology indicate more conservative ideology, whereas lower scores indicate more liberal ideology.
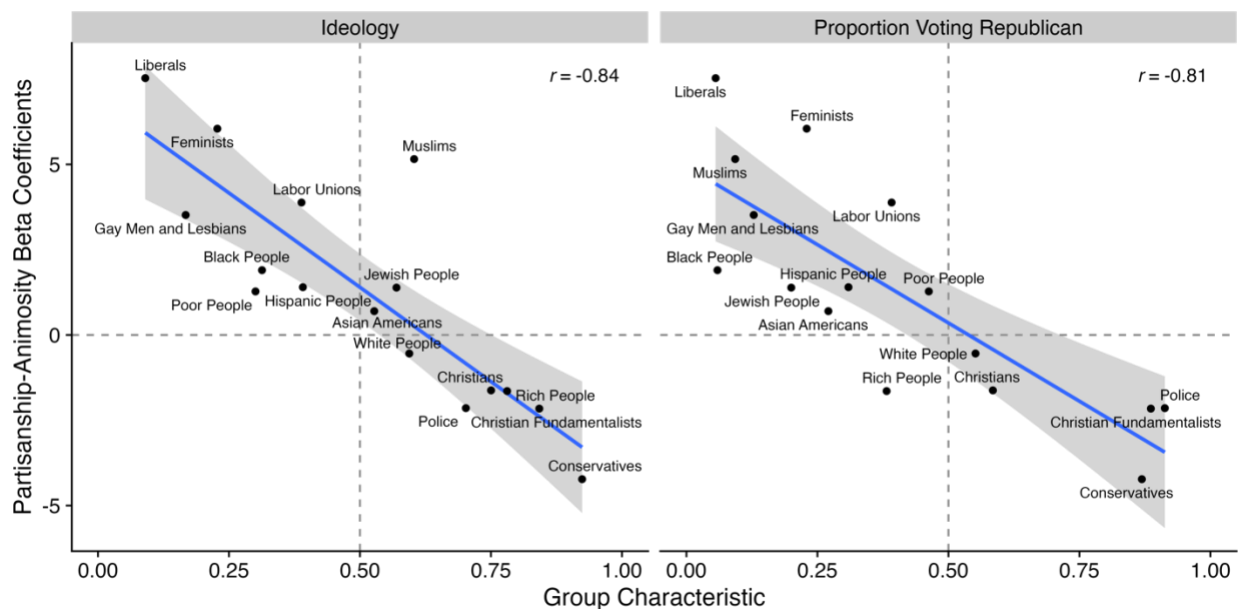

Figure 4. Residual plots. (A) The absolute value of the residuals for each group from the perceived ideology model (left panel) and the two-party vote choice model (right panel). Dashed vertical line is 1 SD of the absolute value of the partisanship-animosity coefficients, indicating a larger residual relative to the observed range of the data.