Testing an Integrated Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism

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Testing an Integrated Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism

by

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ABSTRACT

The Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism proposes parallel motivational pathways by which similar personality features could predispose liberals and conservatives to different forms of authoritarianism. Specifically, the model posits that cognitive rigidity serves as a shared dispositional ‘diathesis’ of right- and left-wing authoritarianism ‘activated’ by distinct threats. For cognitively rigid conservatives, threats of change (i.e., threats to cohesion/conventions, cultural shifts) were expected to enhance the embrace of RWA; while for cognitively rigid liberals, threats to change (i.e., oppression, inequities, barriers to social progress) were predicted to promote LWA. Two studies examined this premise. In Study One, American citizens (N=256) of different political backgrounds reported qualitatively distinct threats and differently ranked a series of threats. Thematic content analysis revealed that for liberals (n=124), concerns about climate change, MAGA, inequality, poverty, and prejudice were preeminent, whereas for conservatives (n=70), issues like immigration, crime, war, terrorism, and perceived cultural decline were front of mind. Conservatives and liberals consistently, but not exclusively, framed their responses in terms of threats of and to change. Moderates (n=62) were particularly concerned about social and political division; overall, however, moderates’ responses and threat rankings paralleled conservatives’. Respondents were uniformly threatened by economic issues and their political opponents, the latter of whom were the top-ranked threats across ideological groups (for liberals, MAGA; for conservatives and moderates, the Woke Mob). Study Two tested the DDT model in a combined sample (N=465) of American undergraduates (n=206) and laypeople (n=259) using an experimental manipulation of threat of and to change. Hypotheses were partially supported, but there was little support for the DDT framework as a whole. Cognitive rigidity and threats of and to change predicted greater
endorsement of authoritarian responses. However, these effects were not particular to conservatives or liberals. Moreover, a two-way interaction between cognitive rigidity and political ideology suggested that high cognitive rigidity enhanced authoritarianism among liberals, but not conservatives. Implications for the theoretical landscape are discussed, and directions proposed for future research.

Keywords: Cognitive rigidity, left-wing authoritarianism, right-wing authoritarianism, threat, political ideology
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PREFACE

In the psychological and political sciences, authoritarianism is a topic on which the door refuses to close, despite being studied by generations of academics. This state of affairs reflects not just the stubborn preoccupation of scholars, but, to borrow Bob Altemeyer’s (1996) phrase, the persistent ‘specter’ of authoritarianism that hangs over American society and the globe. At a time when widening ideological fault lines within our culture forecast potential upheaval, and amid metastasizing global conflict, understanding authoritarianism remains as critical a task today as ever. In acknowledgement of the many giants who have explored the topic before me, this project cannot claim to present a satisfactorily extensive, much less complete, account of authoritarianism. That said, I hope my work will make a modest contribution to the literature at a time when the threat of authoritarianism seems more urgent than ever across not only the American political spectrum, but the world at large.

In Ukraine, where Putin’s decade-long revanchist war has squandered countless lives since the Crimean incursion of February 2014, and even more since Russia’s full-fledged invasion on February 24, 2022. In Myanmar, where the People’s Defense Force and other rebel groups wage an ongoing insurgency against the military junta that seized power in a 2021 coup d’état. In Sudan, where an active civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has displaced millions amid alleged ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the RSF against the Masalit people. In the Maghreb region, where an al-Qaeda-led Islamic insurgency aims to topple the governments of several North African states. In Nagorno-Karabakh, where an Azerbaijani blitzkrieg has spawned a mass exodus and prompted fears of ethnic cleansing against the local Armenian population. And in Gaza, where Hamas’s October 7, 2023 terrorist attack on an Israeli kibbutz slaughtered upwards of 1,200 innocent civilians, and
the Israeli Defense Force’s policy of disproportionate retaliation has killed even more. As an illustration of the consequences of unchecked ideological extremity, there are few starker. Meanwhile, at home, protests over the latter conflict threaten to boil over into civil unrest.

How do populations reach this level of ideological entropy, that critical mass at which intolerance and violence against outgroups becomes possible and even likely? What motivations wind the individual cogs in the machines of war, and what psychological predispositions prime their pistons? The current work cannot address the former question, and can offer only clues towards the latter. Nonetheless, the theoretical framework tested here represents a small step towards a more integrative understanding of authoritarian ideologies and the factors that give rise to them on both sides of the proverbial aisle. In what follows, I first present a review of the pertinent literature, canvassing evidence from the Rigidity-of-the-Right/Extremes and Authoritarian (A)symmetry debates that served as the basis for the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism (DDT). The DDT proposes that cognitive rigidity acts as dispositional ‘diathesis’ of right- and left-wing authoritarianism enhanced by, for cognitively rigid conservatives, threats of change, and for cognitively rigid liberals, barriers to social progress, or threats to progress. I report results from two studies that tested these predictions.
Historical Overview and Introduction to Authoritarianism

When Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) set out in the wake of World War II to define what they termed the “authoritarian personality,” the specter of right-wing fascism loomed large over their research. With the horrors of the Holocaust and the war fresh in mind, it is little surprise that Adorno’s work and other seminal scholarship on the topic (Fromm, 1941; Maslow, 1943) established a right-wing focus that informed the psychological and political sciences in the subsequent decades. Authoritarianism has since become one of the most extensively studied constructs across these disciplines. Broadly defined, authoritarian ideologies demand behavioral and ideological uniformity from their followers, employ punitive tactics to enforce norms and punish dissenters, and endorse the use of coercion (even violence) to impose their beliefs upon others (Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022; Duckitt, 2022). Authoritarians in turn tend to be submissive to the established authorities of their ingroup, display inflated concerns with traditions and social conventions, and aggress against ideological opponents and nonconformers (Altemeyer, 1996, 1998; Feldman, 2003; Jost, 2017; Stenner, 2005, 2009). Authoritarianism is a major predictor of prejudice and political intolerance (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996, 1998, 2007; Feldman, 2003; Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2003a; van Hiel et al., 2004); thus, elucidating the processes and mechanisms by which individuals embrace authoritarian ideologies represents an important task for political psychologists.

From the paradigm’s nascency to its resurgence at the turn of the 21st century, the bulk of authoritarianism research has been devoted to right-wing authoritarianism (RWA)—not without reason. This right-wing emphasis has informed scale construction, theory-building, and research methodology throughout the intervening decades. Yet even as scholars laid the foundations of a research tradition that would continue into the following century, global democracies struggled
to coexist with a left-wing ideology run rampant on the world stage. Contemporaneous leftist trends of Stalinism in Russia and the subsequent global, often violent spread of communism made clear that authoritarian submission, aggression, outgroup derogation, and political intolerance are not exclusive to right-wing ideological contexts. The decades-long, often turbulent geopolitical shuffle that followed gave rise to the Cold War and brought about a new world order replete with leftist revolutionaries and banana republics. And as (nominally) left-wing regimes in Pol Pot’s Cambodia, Castro’s Cuba, Mao Zedong’s China and, more recently, Kim’s North Korea, the People’s Republic of China, and Putin’s Russia continue to evidence, authoritarian systems can arise from historically left- as well as right-wing political traditions. Nearly a century after research on the topic began, a very different world order emerges—and with it, familiar specters of global conflict and authoritarianism. With temperatures rising in this New Cold War, it behooves us now more than ever as scholars and citizens to reexamine the sources of intolerance and prejudice within our own populations. While the characteristics of historical movements cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the contemporary political sphere, the psychological processes that motivated their constituents remain as relevant today as ever.

Clearly, not all authoritarians subscribe to the same ideological premises. Whereas the lion’s share of initial research on the topic was devoted to authoritarianism on the political right, other scholars called attention to what they viewed as similar predilections on the left. While a few scholars have long entertained the possibility of left-wing authoritarianism (LWA; e.g., Eysenck, 1954; Shils, 1954), these claims were frequently dismissed in earlier research (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Stone, 1980). More recently, however, burgeoning scholarship on LWA has returned compelling evidence of authoritarianism among liberals and revealed certain parallels with personality correlates predictive of RWA (Conway et al., 2018; Conway et al., 2023;
Costello et al., 2022; Costello & Patrick, 2023). In the following sections, I first define right- and left-wing authoritarianism in the context of essential literature on each. I then discuss how shifts in the conceptualization of authoritarianism permitted methodological and theoretical advancements that have not only brought RWA into clearer focus, but appear to have revealed LWA as a troubling reality.

**Right-Wing Authoritarianism**

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) is a belief system that emphasizes deference to established authorities, strict adherence to traditional values and ways of life, and aggression towards dissenting viewpoints and nonconformers (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996, 1998; Duckitt, 2022, Duckitt et al., 2010). RWAs tend to be cognitively rigid, politically conservative, submissive to right-wing authorities, reverent of traditions and conventions, and intolerant of and punitive towards perceived violators of group conventions and outgroups, especially disadvantaged outgroups (e.g., Feldman, 2003; Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2003a; van Hiel et al., 2004). RWA is thus a robust predictor of various forms of prejudice and intolerance towards different targets. Among the most influential modern scholarship on RWA comes from Bob Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996, 1998, 2007), whose development of the RWA Scale and its tripartite conceptualization has informed vast swathes of the authoritarianism literature. In line with his predecessors (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950), Altemeyer viewed RWA as a relatively stable personality dimension with three components: aggression, submission, and conventionalism. Authoritarian Aggression reflects the tendency to derogate outgroups, punish dissenters, and aggress on the behalf of established authorities. Authoritarian Submission captures the tendency to defer to and prefer strong leadership and power structures. Conventionalism describes heightened concerns with the preservation of traditions and old ways of life.
Altemeyer and his successors also identified what they considered an adjacent but distinct form of RWA, Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), defined as inflated concerns with group dominance and hierarchy (Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2010, 2017; Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Although conceptually related to RWA, extensive prior work has evidenced only modest correlations between the two constructs (e.g., Hodson et al., 2017; Roccato & Ricolfi, 2005; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008), and other research indicates that SDO reflects a separate motivational pathway from RWA with distinct antecedents and consequences (e.g., Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2010, 2017; Sibley & Duckitt, 2010, 2013). One distinction of particular relevance to the current work is SDO’s marginal relationship with cognitive rigidity compared to RWA (van Hiel et al., 2004; Duckitt, 2022), hence its exclusion from the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model tested here.

More recently, Duckitt and colleagues (2010) developed the Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism Scale (ACT Scale), a measure of RWA which parallels the tripartite structure favored by Altemeyer (1981, 1996) but reflects an updated view of RWA as an ideological, as opposed to dispositional, dimension. The broader implications of this distinction, which reframes authoritarianism as a consequence of motivated cognition rather than a stable trait and in essence permits the existence of different strains of authoritarianism with distinct ideological bases, are elaborated upon in a later section. With respect to RWA, the ideological conceptualization exemplified by the ACT Scale replaces Altemeyer’s personality dimensions with three attitudinal clusters: authoritarianism, conservatism, and traditionalism. Within this multidimensional conceptualization, Authoritarianism describes an affinity for punitive measures and coercive social control, and is most similar to the aggression component of Altemeyer’s framework. Conservatism reflects the desire to maintain order, preserve social
cohesion, and uphold the existing status quo, akin to authoritarian submission. Finally, traditionalism represents the embrace of old-fashioned lifestyles, morals, and norms and rejection of lifestyles that deviate therefrom, and parallels conventionalism. In short, the authors of the ACT Scale regard these dimensions as interrelated beliefs and motivational goals united by the desire to place cohesion and collective security before individual liberties. The motivational component of this framework bears particular relevance to the current hypotheses, as will be revisited later on. Both the ACT Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010) and the ideological conceptualization of authoritarianism favored by its authors are adopted here. The latter in particular represents an important paradigm shift that has coincided with and contributed to the revitalization of research into authoritarianism on the political left.

**Left-Wing Authoritarianism: The Loch Ness Monster of Political Psychology**

Left-Wing Authoritarianism (LWA) has almost as long a history in political psychology as its right-wing counterpart, although it has proven much more contentious. Long-proposed even by Adorno’s contemporaries (Eysenck, 1954; Shils, 1954), the concept was oft-discounted, even garnering the dismissive moniker the *Loch Ness Monster* of political science (Stone, 1980). True to its name, if not its mythic status, this political Loch Ness Monster eluded detection for decades, as initial efforts at scale development failed to establish valid evidence of LWA (Altemeyer, 1998). These attempts were arguably hamstrung by several key methodological issues, which are discussed in the following section. Nonetheless, Altemeyer’s (1998) non-findings reinforced the discipline’s skepticism and informed the argument that authoritarianism is asymmetrically prevalent among political conservatives (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a). But in both cases, these conclusions appear to have been premature. In particular, the aforementioned shift in the literature from a dispositional to an ideological conceptualization of authoritarianism has
renewed interest in the prevalence and predictors of authoritarianism among left-wingers, prompting the construction and validation of several novel measures of LWA. Evidence from this growing literature depicts LWA as an ideology characterized by anti-hierarchical aggression towards established institutions and the status quo, vehement rejection of societal conventions and traditions, and support for top-down censorship of opposing viewpoints. Whereas RWAs tend to perceive the world as a threatening and uncertain place against which the best defense is strong authorities, LWAs tend to view the world as yoked by oppressive systems that must be dismantled at all costs. This has led contemporary scholars to describe LWA as a revolutionary strain of *radical egalitarianism* (Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022).

Two research groups have been particularly integral to modern efforts to define and measure LWA. First, Conway, Houck, Gornick, and Repke (2018) developed the LWA Scale, devised using the items of Altemeyer’s (1996) RWA Scale as a basis. Some scholars have criticized this psychometric approach on the grounds that developing items using parallel-but-opposing wordings of extant scales may artificially inflate similarities between RWAs and LWAs (e.g., Costello et al., 2022; Nilsson & Jost, 2020). Given that Altemeyer’s early, unsuccessful attempts at measuring LWA followed from a similar approach, this raises the question of whether this scale meaningfully address criticisms of earlier LWA scales. Setting aside these criticisms momentarily, Conway and colleagues’ initial and later work (e.g., Conway & McFarland, 2019; Conway et al., 2021; Conway et al., 2023) offers compelling contemporary evidence for LWA and in favor of the so-called Authoritarian Symmetry perspective, which will be expanded upon later.

Independently, Costello and colleagues (2022) constructed and validated an LWA Index comprising three distinct-but-related dimensions of Anti-Hierarchical Aggression, Anti-
Conventionalism, and Top-Down Censorship. Like RWA, LWA is conceptualized in this research as having a tripartite structure comprising three attitudinal or ideological dimensions. Although the terms Conway’s and Costello’s research groups use to describe these subdimensions differ slightly, they capture similar ideas. Here, I adopt Costello and colleagues’ (2022) terminology to be consistent with my use of their LWA Index: anti-hierarchical aggression, anti-conventionalism, and top-down censorship. Anti-Hierarchical Aggression reflects a desire to topple established hierarchies and power structures, as well as to punish perceived oppressors. Anti-Conventionalism represents moral absolutism towards progressive values and the rejection of traditions and old-fashioned values as inherently regressive. Finally, Top-Down Censorship is the endorsement of liberal authorities muzzling ideological opponents (i.e., conservatives) by limiting their platforms and ability to communicate messages. Sample items include: for Anti-Hierarchical Aggression, “The rich should be stripped of their belongings and status” and “When the tables are turned on the oppressors at the top of society, I will enjoy watching them suffer the violence that they have inflicted on so many others”; for Anti-Conventionalism, “The ‘old-fashioned ways’ and ‘old-fashioned values’ need to be abolished” and “Radical and progressive moral values can save our society”; and for Top-Down Censorship, “When we spend all of our time protecting the right to "free speech" we're protecting the rights of sexists, racists, and homophobes at the cost of marginalized people” and “Fox News, right-wing talk radio, and other conservative media outlets should be prohibited from broadcasting their hateful views.” Thus, LWA appears to capture revolutionary sentiment with the motivational goal of bringing about a more just and equitable society by imposing progressive values on the population through various coercive means.
That these aims, if not methods, appear diametrically opposed to those of RWA speaks both to the distinct motivations at the heart of liberalism and conservatism and the consequential theoretical implications of adopting an ideological versus dispositional view of authoritarianism. That is, authoritarians must subscribe to a belief system in order to submit to its authorities, aggress against its opponents, and seek to impose its views upon others—but this ideology need not be right-wing. Consistent with this premise, Conway’s and Costello’s work has begun to clarify the nature and predictors of LWA and establish a nomological network of related constructs that shares certain features with RWA, namely dispositional markers of cognitive rigidity (Conway et al., 2018; Conway et al., 2023; Costello et al., 2022; Costello & Patrick, 2023). I discuss this later on. In the next section, I consider how the conceptual evolution of authoritarianism has contributed to methodological and theoretical advancements that inform the current research.

**Shifting Conceptualizations of Authoritarianism Carry Theoretical Implications**

The shift from viewing authoritarianism as a stable aspect of personality to an ideological construct carries important implications for the discipline, namely improvements in the measurement of both RWA and LWA. Despite purporting to measure a dimension of personality, earlier RWA scales tended to be inflected with conservative ideological content (e.g., Duckitt et al., 2010; Duckitt & Sibley, 2017), leading scholars to chronically conflate authoritarianism with political conservatism. Although the notion of authoritarianism as an asymmetrically right-wing personality dimension did not go unchallenged even by contemporaneous scholars (e.g., Eysenck, 1954; Shils, 1954), this dispositional conceptualization and focus on the political right have dominated the authoritarianism literature for most of its history. The more recent acknowledgment that authoritarianism inherently contains ideological
content represents an important advancement that has broadened the horizons of authoritarianism research to include both left- and right-wing forms. In what follows, I summarize the disciplinary shifts that reconceptualized authoritarianism from an innate personality trait to an ideological dimension that individuals likely adopt via a process of motivated social cognition (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2017; Jost, 2009; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2017a; Jost et al., 2017b; van Hiel et al., 2010). These reflect roughly three phases of research distinguished by differing conceptualizations and measurement approaches, briefly outlined here (but see Duckitt, 2009, for a comprehensive review).

The Authoritarian Personality

The earliest psychological accounts of authoritarianism predate the end of the Second World War and were heavily influenced by Freudian psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Fromm, 1941; Maslow, 1943). However, the first formal attempts to operationalize and measure authoritarianism were introduced by Adorno and colleagues (1950), who outlined nine “syndromes” of the so-called authoritarian personality and devised the first formalized measure of authoritarianism, the F-Scale (Fascism Scale), to assess them. Described thus, authoritarians are by disposition Conventional, Submissive to authority, Aggressive towards violators of conventions, Anti-intraceptive (i.e., dislike free-thinkers), prone to Superstition and Stereotyping, overly concerned with Power and Toughness, Destructive and Cynical (i.e., hostile towards others), Projective (i.e., perceive the world as dangerous), fixated on Sex, and, due to its right-wing focus, essentially conservative in nature.

From Adorno et al.’s (1950) first attempts at measuring the authoritarian personality with the F-Scale, various scholars have followed suit in describing a relatively stable personality dimension characterized by submissiveness to established authorities, aggressive intolerance of
outsiders and dissenting viewpoints, and strict adherence to tradition and conventions. For instance, Allport (1954) referred to authoritarianism as individual differences in generalized prejudice, which he viewed as the primary obstacle to intergroup harmony. Similarly, Rokeach (1960) introduced the concept of dogmatism, or unjustified rigidity of beliefs, as a personality trait believed to underlie and explain individual differences in authoritarianism writ large. Although dogmatism is distinct from authoritarianism, the construct has had a profound impact on the authoritarianism literature and is considered a central marker of cognitive rigidity, as is discussed shortly. Wilson’s (1973) C-Scale, a measure of conservatism as generalized sensitivity to threats (which the author conflated with authoritarianism), has likewise fallen by the wayside as a measure of authoritarianism, although the conflation of conservatism with authoritarianism persists in other commonly-used measures and the Authoritarian Asymmetry hypothesis elaborated on in a subsequent section.

After this initial flurry of investigation, which characterized authoritarianism as a right-wing personality dimension, the construct lay dormant in the literature until it was revived largely by Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996, 1998), whose tripartite conceptualization of RWA quickly became the dominant account of authoritarianism on the political right. Altemeyer reduced the nine authoritarian syndromes measured by the F-Scale (Adorno et al., 1950) to three interrelated factors he labelled Authoritarian Submission, Authoritarian Aggression, and Conventionalism. To measure these subdimensions, which he considered three interrelated aspects of an essentially unidimensional personality construct, Altemeyer (1996) devised the RWA Scale, sample items for which include: for Submission, “The established authorities generally turn out to be right about things, while the radicals and protestors are usually just “loud mouths” showing off their ignorance”; for Aggression, “Our country will be destroyed someday
if we do not smash the perversions eating away at our moral fiber and traditional beliefs”; and for Conventionalism, “The ‘old-fashioned ways’ and ‘old-fashioned values’ still show the best way to live.” Although not without detractors due to the double- and even triple-barreled wordings and cross-loadings of many of its items (e.g., Dunwoody & Funke, 2016; Funke, 2005), the RWA Scale continues to see widespread use even among researchers who favor an ideological versus a dispositional treatment of authoritarianism (but see Duckitt et al., 2010, for a different approach). However, Altemeyer’s scale, like its predecessors, has been criticized for containing overtly right-wing ideological content, leading to questions of its ability to capture variance in authoritarianism across the political spectrum (e.g., Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022) and whether it truly constitutes a measure of personality (e.g., Duckitt et al., 2010). Moreover, the conceptual structure and item wordings of the RWA Scale have informed attempts at measuring left-wing authoritarianism over the years, for better and worse.

In particular, Altemeyer’s (1996) initial failure to validate a LWA Scale constructed from parallel wordings of his RWA Scale items effectively closed the door on the construct. Practically no participants scored above the scale midpoint, leading Altemeyer (1998) to conclude, in line with Stone’s (1980) Loch Ness Monster argument, that left-wing authoritarians must be “scarce as hen’s teeth” (p. 71). This assumption of Authoritarian Asymmetry went essentially unchallenged for over a decade. However, LWA research has seen something of a renaissance in the past decade, owing in part to shifts in the authoritarianism literature towards an ideological conceptualization.

**Authoritarian Parenting Values**

In answer to criticisms that earlier authoritarianism measures were contaminated with conservative content, Feldman and Stenner (1997) used child-rearing values items from the
American National Election Surveys (ANES) as a proxy of general authoritarianism, which they considered a personality trait. These items ask participants to select which of four pairs of qualities they consider more desirable in children: independence or respect for elders; self-reliance or obedience; curiosity or good manners; considerate or well-behaved, with the latter responses reflecting greater authoritarianism. This approach has been adopted and expanded upon elsewhere (e.g., Duriez et al., 2007; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; Stenner, 2005), although not without criticism. For example, although Duckitt (2001) reported a positive association between strict (versus permissive) parenting and RWA, he has argued more recently that the use of child-rearing values as a measure of authoritarianism may inadvertently capture more traditional, socially conservative versus liberal parenting values (Duckitt, 2022). Thus, although authoritarian parenting values have been treated as a proxy of authoritarian personality, measures based on this concept may still be inflected with conservative ideological content. Indeed, this criticism has been applied to much earlier research that purported to measure an authoritarian personality with items containing ideological and attitudinal content (Duckitt & Sibley, 2017). To be clear, these scholars did not contend that earlier authoritarianism measures were assessing something other than authoritarian attitudes, but that they were misguidedly construing the construct as a dimension of personality rather than ideology and inadvertently constraining the scope to its right-wing forms. A challenge in more recent work, then, has been to determine whether and to what extent authoritarianism can be separated from political ideology.

Authoritarianism as an Ideological Dimension

One important step towards resolving this issue was the acknowledgment that authoritarianism is necessarily conflated with ideological content. In other words, that authoritarian individuals must subscribe to a political belief system in order to submit to its
authorities, aggress on its behalf, and abide by its conventions (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2010, 2017). This advancement has prompted a wave of research that conceptualizes and measures authoritarianism as a dimension of political ideology comprising ideological and attitudinal content and personal values. That is, authoritarians harbor uncompromising beliefs and a desire to impose their beliefs on others, which may be premised on distinct values and attitudes associated with liberalism or conservativism. This reconceptualization has wide-ranging implications for how authoritarianism is operationalized in research design and theory-building. Whereas dispositional variables are thought to underlie the appeal of different ideologies, for instance (e.g., to the extent that they are perceived to satisfy individuals’ varied psychological needs), the embrace of specific ideological and attitudinal positions likely results from a process of motivated social cognition shaped by numerous dispositional, motivational, and sociocultural variables (Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2017a; Jost et al., 2017b; van Hiel et al., 2010).

For example, John Duckitt and his colleagues (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2010, 2017), proposed a Dual-Process Motivational Model (DPM) that predicts different motivational pathways for RWA and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) mediated by different worldviews and perceived threats to certainty and security. These mechanisms include, for RWA, belief in a dangerous world and threats to social conformity; and for SDO, perceiving the world as a ruthless, competitive jungle (i.e., social Darwinism) and threats to existing hierarchies (i.e., hierarchy attenuation). Whereas Altemeyer maintained that RWA and SDO were personality constructs, the authors of the Dual-Process Model treated RWA as ideological rather than dispositional, and thus as a response to rather than a moderator of perceived threat and environmental stressors. Based on this ideological premise of authoritarianism, Duckitt and colleagues (2010) also developed the Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism (ACT)
Scale adopted in the current research. Sample items include: for Authoritarianism, “The way things are going in this country, it’s going to take a lot of ‘strong medicine’ to straighten out the troublemakers, criminals, and perverts”; Conservatism, “Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn”; and Traditionalism, “The ‘old-fashioned ways’ and ‘old-fashioned values’ still show the best way to live.” The ACT Scale made marked psychometric improvements upon its predecessors, namely by avoiding the double-barreled items common to those scales. Importantly, Duckitt’s work on the Dual-Process Model and ACT Scale reframed the focal constructs as consequences rather than causes of perceived threats. In doing so, it highlights an opportunity to identify the motivational pathways by which leftists and rightists could potentially embrace authoritarian positions in response to certain types of threats, as is explored in the current work.

The transition from a dispositional to an ideological conceptualization of authoritarianism also permitted the aforementioned strides in the measurement of LWA (e.g., Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022). For instance, Costello and colleagues’ (2022) LWA Index parallels the tripartite structure of RWA favored by Altemeyer (1996, 1998) but adopts the ideological conceptualization of authoritarianism favored in Duckitt’s work. Likewise, Conway’s et al. (2018) LWA Scale, despite its aforementioned criticisms, aims to capture the desire to impose ideologically left-wing attitudes and beliefs on people, as would be expected from a measure of authoritarianism. These recent efforts to measure and identify the correlates of LWA have offered convincing evidence of its existence and reinvigorated important disciplinary debates over psychological differences between liberals and conservatives. Arguably, this constitutes a whole new phase of authoritarianism research to which the present project makes a modest contribution. Specifically, Study Two expands upon prior work by including ideologically-
premised inventories of LWA and RWA as well as a newly-devised authoritarian response measure to examine not only the viewpoints subscribed to by authoritarians on the left and right, but also how these inform behavioral intentions. But how do people come by the views that position them to adopt authoritarian ideologies, and what predisposes them to these positions? To answer these questions, I next review evidence for two relevant debates in political psychology: the *Rigidity-of-the-Right/Extremes* and *Authoritarian (A)Symmetry* debates over the prevalence of cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism across the political spectrum.
Emergent Parallels: The Rigidity-of-the-Right/Extremes and Authoritarian (A)Symmetry Debates

In this chapter, I review scholarship surrounding two adjacent but distinct disciplinary debates central to the current theoretical framework. I begin by briefly defining and describing the origins of the bipolar liberal-conservative political continuum that dominates the political discourse and psychological literature. Next, I examine evidence for the competing Rigidity-of-the-Right/Extremes hypotheses, which concern whether cognitive rigidity is endemic to political conservatives or characterizes both extremes of the political spectrum. I then review evidence related to the Authoritarian (A)Symmetry debate over whether authoritarianism is exclusive to the political right or appears across the aisle. In doing so, I explore how personality informs the processes of motivated social cognition that lead people to embrace different belief systems, including poisonous ideologies like authoritarianism.

Political Ideology as a Bipolar Spectrum

In the lay discourse and political sciences, as in the present work, political ideology is typically conceptualized as a bipolar spectrum with liberalism on the left and conservatism on the right. This distinction dates to the French Revolution, when left- and right-wing served as literal descriptions of seating arrangements in the French National Assembly: anti-monarchy revolutionaries to the king’s left, and supporters of the monarchy to his right (McPhee, 2001). However, the ideological schism between liberalism and conservatism predates this terminology, as similar divisions have characterized political systems since the height of the Roman empire (Bobbio, 1996). Thus, left- and right-wingers as proponents of and resisters to change has a lengthy history. In contemporary politics, the left and right have come to represent the two poles of an ideological continuum that places liberalism, described as a preference for personal
autonomy (i.e. liberties), equality, and openness to change, on the left, and conservatism, described as a preference for conformity, hierarchy, and traditionalism, on the right (Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Johnston et al., 2017; Jost, 2009; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012).

Likewise, the most common Likert-style measures of political ideology anchor liberalism at the lower end and conservativism at the upper end, a practice maintained here. While the left-liberal/right-conservative continuum remains the preeminent framework in political science and psychology, distinguishing further dimensions of political ideology has also proven fruitful, including with respect to cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism. Many scholars have proposed that political ideology comprises various distinct attitudes related to different issue domains, including symbolic, economic, and social dimensions of ideology (e.g., Duckitt, 2001; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Jost et al., 2003a; van Hiel et al., 2004). Thus, to provide but one example, an individual could identify as liberal and espouse liberal social stances while harboring economically conservative attitudes. In turn, these preferences are understood to be determined by a process of motivated social cognition informed by aspects of personality, individual needs, and the demands of the environment.

**Political Ideology as Motivated Social Cognition**

People tend to be attracted to belief systems insomuch as they are perceived to satisfy core psychological needs for certainty (i.e., epistemic needs) and security (i.e., existential needs), which differ between individuals (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2017; Johnston et al., 2017; Jost, 2009, 2017; Jost et al., 2003a). Ideology is therefore considered a form of motivated cognition that serves both psychological and social functions for the individual. Political ideology represents a particularly important—and potent—strain of motivated social cognition due to its implications for the institutions that govern modern society. Yet political views are not
constructed from the ground up. Political psychologists have identified various *elective affinities*, or characteristics that predispose people to favor certain ideological positions (Jost, 2009; Jost et al., 2003a). This has fostered substantial debate over the psychological qualities and personality traits considered essential by some scholars to conservatives or liberals.

One particular point of controversy concerns psychological differences between left- and right-wingers in cognitive rigidity, or inflexible thinking styles. Whereas some scholars have argued that cognitive rigidity is part and parcel to political conservatism (e.g., Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2017a; Tetlock, 1984), reflecting a *Rigidity-of-the-Right Hypothesis* (RRH), more recent evidence points to rigidity among the far-right *and* far-left (e.g. Zmigrod, 2020; Zmigrod et al., 2020). This *Rigidity-of-the-Extremes Hypothesis* (REH) and the adjacent *Authoritarian (A)Symmetry* debate over the preponderance of authoritarianism on the right served as the basis for the model tested in the present studies. Indeed, the two debates share many parallels, which I elaborate upon later. In the next sections, I canvass evidence for and against the RRH and REH perspectives, with particular attention to how methodological limitations in earlier work may have led to overstated confidence in the former. From there, I segue into a review of the Authoritarian (A)Symmetry perspectives, and highlight how both literatures have benefited from methodological advancements that are embraced in the current work.

**The Rigidity-of-the-Right/Extremes Debate**

Cognitive rigidity is a dispositional tendency towards inflexible thinking styles characterized by strong preferences for clear-cut explanations and structure, aversion to ambiguity, and unwillingness to update or revise one’s beliefs to accommodate novel information. A bevy of personality traits have been treated as markers of cognitive rigidity, all of
which predict political conservatism and many of which have been variously conflated with RWA and conservatism, leading to some conceptual ambiguity. These include intolerance of ambiguity and preference for clear-cut answers (e.g., Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949; van Hiel et al., 2010; van Hiel et al., 2016), high needs for structure, closure, certainty, and low need for cognition (e.g., Chirumbolo, 2002; Chirumbolo et al., 2004; Federico et al., 2005; Federico & Goren, 2009; Jost et al., 2013; Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski et al., 2006; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; van Hiel et al., 2004), unjustified belief certainty and resistance to updating prior beliefs (i.e., dogmatism; e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; Rokeach, 1948, 1954, 1960), low complexity of thought (e.g., van Hiel & Mervielde, 2003), and low integrative complexity, or the tendency to cognitively elaborate on one’s own views and competing viewpoints (e.g., Houck & Conway, 2019). Although the present work makes no claim to resolve this issue, my operationalization of cognitive rigidity draws upon its most widely-validated and robust predictors across decades of research: dogmatism and the need for cognitive closure. Cognitive rigidity has been characterized as the fundamental elective affinity for conservatism (Jost, 2009; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2009; Tetlock, 1984), although this RRH has not gone unchallenged. In particular, some scholars have criticized past work’s disproportionate focus on conservative ideological content, which may have contributed to premature conclusions about cognitive rigidity as an essentially conservative disposition (e.g., Costello et al., 2023; Malka et al., 2017; van Hiel et al., 2010, 2016). By contrast, more recent scholarship that has included issue content and stimuli relevant to liberals tends to evidence the competing REH (e.g., Zmigrod, 2020; Zmigrod et al., 2019, 2020).

The Case for Rigidity-of-the-Right
The Rigidity-of-the-Right Hypothesis (RRH; Jost et al., 2003a; Tetlock, 1984) posits that the chief difference between right- and left-wingers is a dispositional tendency towards cognitive rigidity, and is the predominant psychological account of political conservatism. Various pieces of evidence, including several influential meta-analyses, support this perspective. For example, Jost and colleagues’ (2003a) widely-cited meta-analysis found evidence across 88 studies run in 12 countries ($N=22,818$) that political conservatism reflects higher epistemic and existential needs for certainty and security. Conservatism correlated with higher intolerance of ambiguity and needs for structure, order, and cognitive closure, and lower tolerance of uncertainty, openness to experience, and integrative complexity. Relatedly, and of particular relevance to the current model, conservatism was associated with heightened sensitivity to threat and loss, concerns about societal instability, and death anxiety. Later work from Jost and his colleagues elaborated on the relationship between cognitive rigidity, conservatism, and threat by revealing that uncertainty avoidance and heightened motivations to mitigate personal and societal threats predict conservatism, but not ideological extremity more broadly (Jost, 2006, 2009; Jost et al., 2007).

Likewise consistent with the RRH, Choma and colleagues (2012) evidenced distinct liberalism and conservatism factors of political ideology that uniquely predicted higher creativity, inclusivity, and lower intolerance of ambiguity, and higher dogmatism, respectively in a sample of Canadian undergraduates. More recently, Houck and Conway’s (2019) meta-analysis of 35 studies, which included political statements from both public officials and private citizens, evidenced lower integrative complexity among conservatives than liberals. However, this effect may have been skewed by the inclusion of strong, simplistic rhetoric favored by politicians (e.g., Federico, 2021). Ganzach and Schul (2021) found evidence of a quadratic relationship between
political ideology and cognitive rigidity such that belief extremity predicted higher unjustified belief certainty (i.e., dogmatism) for both far-left liberals and far-right conservatives. In light of larger effect sizes for the relationship between conservatism and dogmatism and the authors’ corollary finding that conservatives (versus liberals) were more intolerant of ideological opponents, however, they interpreted these mixed results as favoring the RRH.

In response to commentary by Greenberg and Jonas (2003), Jost et al. (2003b) allowed that the preponderance of cognitive rigidity on the political right does not preclude its existence on the far left. Nonetheless, later meta-analyses by Jost (2017) and his colleagues (Jost et al., 2017b) largely corroborated their original position, offering further support for the RRH. Similarly, a multinational meta-analysis (N=12,714) by van Hiel and colleagues (2016), who revisited prior meta-analyses by Jost et al. (2003a) and van Hiel et al. (2010), revealed a positive correlation between cognitive rigidity and political conservatism. As a notable caveat, however, the authors also found evidence of method effects whereby self-report measures of cognitive rigidity returned larger effect sizes than behavioral measures. Other scholars have levelled related methodological criticisms at earlier work. For instance, Malka and colleagues (2017) identified three key issues with the paradigm that established the bulk of evidence for the RRH. These included conceptual ambiguity arising from overlap between measures of cognitive rigidity and conservative ideological content, a constrained focus on a bipolar conceptualization of liberalism-conservatism as opposed to other dimensions of ideology, and a failure to address the influence of political engagement and expertise on these processes. The first of these criticisms is particularly important to understanding how the cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism literatures intersect, and why, despite clear overlap, their relationship has received inconsistent and incomplete attention in empirical work.
Cognitive rigidity’s inconsistent operationalization shares noteworthy parallels with the conceptual treatment of authoritarianism across the historical literature. Indeed, the two constructs have been alternately conflated (e.g., Rokeach, 1954, 1960) and treated as dimensions of conservative ideology (van Hiel et al., 2010, 2016; Wilson, 1973). Moreover, cognitive rigidity has been used as an indicator of cognitive simplicity in some research (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a) and conflated with threat sensitivity elsewhere (Jost 2006, 2009). Further illustrating how discrepant operationalizations and method effects may have played an outsized role in cementing the RRH, Costello and colleagues (2023) found inconsistent links between cognitive rigidity and conservatism in a vast meta-analysis of 173 studies (N=187,612). Thus, although conservatives tend to be asymmetrically cognitively rigid, the appearance of cognitive rigidity as an exclusively right-wing personality feature may have been inflated by methodological artifacts.

Illustrating this right-wing emphasis, whereas many scholars have examined the relationship between cognitive rigidity and RWA, its link with LWA has been less extensively explored. The current work thus builds upon a nascent literature which, together with evidence linking cognitive rigidity to RWA, inspired the central premise of the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model: that cognitive rigidity serves as a dispositional diathesis of both right- and left-wing forms of authoritarianism. By contrast, several pieces of older work pointed to a mediation effect whereby need for closure, a central marker of cognitive rigidity, predicted political conservatism and prejudice via RWA (Chirumbolo, 2002; van Hiel et al., 2004). Although this differs from the model proposed and tested here, which views authoritarianism as an ideological stance informed by an interaction between cognitive rigidity, liberalism/conservatism, and threat (i.e., a moderation effect), it aligns with the general premise that cognitive rigidity predisposes people to favor authoritarian ideologies. More recently, Choma and Hanoch (2017) found that lower
cognitive ability predicted RWA and support for Donald Trump’s first presidential bid, but was unrelated to partisan identity in a sample of American adults. Path modeling revealed that whereas lower cognitive ability, which has been treated as a marker of cognitive rigidity in prior work, predicted higher RWA and in turn Trump support, higher cognitive ability indirectly predicted voting intentions towards Hillary Clinton via lower endorsement of RWA. Lastly, Franks and Hesami (2021) found that Trump supporters exhibited asymmetrical biases towards statements and positions attributed to Donald Trump compared to those who rated Trump unfavorably. By contrast, participants who rated Trump less positively did not exhibit parallel negative biases. Thus, evidence for the RRH is not exclusive to older research, and cannot be attributed to the aforementioned methodological artifacts alone. To be clear, and again paralleling the debate over authoritarian asymmetry, cognitive rigidity remains overall more predictive of conservatism and prevalent among right-wingers. Yet recent work that has included liberal issues and ideological content makes a compelling case for cognitive rigidity at both poles of the political spectrum.

**The Case for Rigidity-of-the-Extremes**

Even certain pioneers of political psychology questioned whether conservatives were uniquely cognitively rigid, per the RRH, or whether this might be the case at both extremes of the political continuum (Eysenck, 1954; Shils, 1954), a competing perspective now known as the Rigidity-of-the-Extremes Hypothesis (REH; Zmigrod, 2020; Zmigrod et al., 2020). Like arguments from some of the same scholars that left-wingers could also be authoritarian, however, these largely fell into disfavor. Also like the authoritarianism literature, when this area of political psychology was revitalized at the turn of the 21st Century, seemingly conclusive findings like those previously mentioned (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a) cemented the RRH perspective.
Again, however, methodological constraints and conceptual ambiguity likely played a role in shaping these premature conclusions (e.g., Costello et al., 2023; Malka et al., 2017; van Hiel et al., 2016). Contemporary work that has attempted to address these issues has begun to clarify the nature and boundary conditions of liberal rigidity, and produced compelling evidence in support of the REH.

Leor Zmigrod and her colleagues’ work represents among the strongest evidence to date for the REH. In step with other scholars’ methodological and conceptual criticisms of this area of the literature (e.g., Malka et al., 2017; van Hiel et al., 2010, 2016), Zmigrod asserted that apparent asymmetries in cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism were likely inflated by an overemphasis on conservative issues and ideological content, to the neglect of liberalism (e.g., Zmigrod, 2020; Zmigrod et al., 2019). Across a series of studies with an expanded methodological emphasis on right- and left-wing issues and ideological content, her work demonstrated that extreme partisans display lower cognitive flexibility and higher rigidity across both self-report and behavioral measures (Zmigrod et al., 2019, 2020). Moreover, cognitively rigid individuals across two US (n=743) and UK (n=304) samples expressed greater willingness to fight for and endorse the use of violence to defend their national ingroup, irrespective of political ideology; consequently, they were more willing to self-sacrifice in a subsequent trolley dilemma (Zmigrod et al., 2019). This effect was fully mediated in the US (but not UK) sample by ideological attachment to one’s national identity, which was higher among cognitively rigid individuals. These results have been replicated both by Zmigrod (2022b) and a separate research group (Schumann et al., 2021). In a recent review, Zmigrod and Goldenberg (2021) presented evidence that an interaction between high cognitive rigidity and high sensation-seeking enhances support for political violence and extreme collective action. Finally, in an exhaustive study
featuring 37 cognitive tasks, Zmigrod and colleagues (2021) explored the relationships of various psychological and personality variables to different aspects of ideology. Of particular relevance to the current work, behavioral measures of cognitive inflexibility predicted higher conservatism, dogmatism, authoritarian parenting values (a purported, albeit imperfect, measure of ‘general’ authoritarianism, as will be discussed momentarily), and heightened risk perceptions and aversion, particularly in the social domain. In this paper and elsewhere, Zmigrod (2020, 2022a) and her coauthors joined other scholars (e.g., Osborne et al., 2023) in calling for comprehensive predictive models, like the DDT framework tested in the current studies, to help clarify the relationships between psychological variables and ideology.

As well as evidence of dispositional rigidity among far-left liberals, left- and right-wingers appear to be similarly prone to biased reasoning and motivated information processing towards information that challenges their ideological position (Brandt et al., 2014; Chambers et al., 2013; Crawford & Pilanski, 2014a/b; Guay & Johnston, 2022; Wetherell et al., 2013). For example, Frimer and colleagues (2017) found that presenting liberals and conservatives with opposing viewpoints prompted parallel processes of motivated cognition, namely an aversion towards further exposure to the opposition’s viewpoints. These findings conflict with some earlier work which has suggested that conservatives are more motivated to avoid dissonance-arousing information that contradicts their existing beliefs (Nam et al., 2013). Elsewhere, Frimer et al. (2014) found that both liberals and conservatives were more obedient to authority figures whose views corresponded to their own. Likewise, Ditto and colleagues (2019) found that liberals and conservatives were similarly biased in favor of politically congenial information in an extensive meta-analysis of 51 studies (N=18,815). Similarly, in two recent studies with Swedish samples (N=150, N=986), Nilsson and colleagues (2024) found that although social
conservatives were more susceptible to ‘pseudo-profound bullshit,’ both the far-left and far-right were susceptible to ideologically congenial bullshit. Other scholars have posited that cognitive rigidity is both dispositional and domain-specific, and could therefore be associated with leftist and/or rightist political stances across different ideological/issue domains (e.g., social and economic) and cultural contexts (Federico & Malka, 2021; Hadarics, 2017).

Additionally, individuals at both extremes of the political spectrum tend to hold their beliefs less flexibly and evaluate them as vastly superior to other viewpoints. This so-called belief superiority, while not a direct marker of cognitive rigidity, nonetheless reflects the logical conclusion of cognitively rigid individuals regarding the quality of their rigidly held, revision-resistant beliefs. Toner and colleagues (2013), for example, found that both far-left and far-right individuals reported higher belief superiority regarding issues that corresponded to their political stance. These findings with regards to heightened belief superiority have since replicated elsewhere, although in both studies dogmatism was higher overall among conservatives than liberals (Harris & van Bavel, 2021). Recently, Costello and Bowes (2023) found mixed evidence for the REH in a large American sample \((N=2,889)\). Whereas absolute belief certainty, which the authors characterized as an extreme form of dogmatism, showed a quadratic relationship with political ideology, domain-general dogmatism was higher overall among conservatives than liberals. This lopsided distribution illustrates that while cognitive rigidity remains an elective affinity primarily for conservatism, it is not exclusive to conservatives. Other evidence also points to a U-shaped relationship between dogmatism and political ideology, suggesting that both extremes are more dogmatic, intolerant of dissenting viewpoints, and cognitively and rhetorically simplistic in how they frame political issues (Brandt et al., 2015; Lammers et al., 2017; van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2017, 2019; van Prooijen et al., 2015a).
Finally, integrative complexity, which describes the tendency to elaborate on one’s own position as well as competing viewpoints when considering an issue or argument, has shown inconsistent relations with political ideology. Low integrative complexity has been treated as a marker of cognitive rigidity in various studies; although it has been associated with conservatism in the majority of these (see Houck & Conway, 2019), it has been linked to liberalism in others (Cassel et al., 2007; Conway et al., 2012; Tetlock & Boettger, 1989; van Hiel and Mervielde, 2003). Furthermore, as Houck and Conway (2019) noted in a recent meta-analysis, evidence of low integrative complexity on both sides of the political spectrum may be inflated by the inclusion of public officials’ statements, who tend to employ more simplistic rhetoric as a communication strategy. Elsewhere, Conway and colleagues (2016) found no overall differences in the integrative complexity of written statements by liberal and conservative American undergraduates (N=2,732) and talking points sampled from the 2004 presidential campaigns of Democratic candidate John Kerry and Republican incumbent George W. Bush. However, they found evidence of an issue-domain by political ideology interaction whereby liberals and conservatives displayed higher integrative complexity on different topics. For liberal undergraduates, these included: alcohol, Biblical truth, censorship, and sexual compatibility before marriage; and for Kerry: abortion, economic issues, education, Iraq, and non-Iraq foreign policy. Conservative undergraduates, meanwhile, displayed higher integrative complexity regarding abolishing the death penalty, George W. Bush, refugees, and socialism, while Bush’s integrative complexity was higher in regard to affirmative action, healthcare, religion, stem cells, and terrorism/homeland security. Similarly, although a measure of domain-general dogmatism predicted higher conservatism across the entire sample, a more granular analysis suggested that liberals were more dogmatic about certain issue domains; namely, environmentalism.
To summarize, while considerable early and, to a lesser extent, contemporary evidence supports the RRH, more recent research that has incorporated liberal ideological content offers qualified evidence of cognitive rigidity at both extremes of the political spectrum. The debate over cognitive rigidity parallels in many respects discourse over the question of Authoritarian (A)Symmetry. In the next section, I review literature for both perspectives and point to how these two longstanding debates intersect.

The Authoritarian (A)Symmetry Debate

The Case for Authoritarian Asymmetry

Like cognitive rigidity, authoritarianism has been variously conceptualized and frequently conflated with conservatism since the advent of research on the topic. Early theories and measures of the construct, such as Adorno and colleagues’ (1950) F-Scale, tended to view authoritarianism as a dimension of personality reflecting either conservatism (Wilson, 1973) or dogmatism (Rokeach, 1954, 1960), which cemented a right-wing focus. Altemeyer’s (1981, 1988, 1996, 1998, 2007) later work on the RWA Scale maintained this focus, but provided several important updates to a literature that had fallen out of vogue in the preceding decades. This renewed research established the preeminent measure and tripartite conceptualization of RWA, which Altemeyer defined as comprising authoritarian aggression, submission, and conventionalism, and began to clarify the typical psychological profile of RWAs. Specifically, Altemeyer found that RWAs tend to be male, politically conservative, religious, self-righteous, fearful of the world, and intolerant of social and ideological outgroups. Altemeyer also distinguished RWA from dogmatism, for which he constructed the separate DOG Scale (Altemeyer, 1996) used in the current research. Interestingly, although Altemeyer maintained that RWA was a dispositional construct, the distinction between dogmatism, which could apply
to any number of ideological premises, and RWA, which contains inherently right-wing ideological content, speaks to the potential for authoritarianism on the political left. Nonetheless, Altemeyer’s unsuccessful attempts at developing a parallel LWA Scale led him to conclude in favor of authoritarian asymmetry.

As previously discussed, various scholars have criticized both the RWA Scale (e.g., Duckitt et al., 2010; Dunwoody & Funke, 2016; Funke, 2005) and Altemeyer’s psychometric approach to constructing his LWA Scale from parallel-but-opposing items (e.g., Costello et al., 2022). Illustrating the veracity of these critiques, in Altemeyer’s (1996) work, LWA and RWA were modestly positively intercorrelated, and a small subset of the sample, whom Altemeyer labeled Wild Card Authoritarians, scored high on both RWA and LWA. Thus, the inflection of conservative ideological content in the original scale appears to have rubbed off, so to speak, on the LWA version of the scale (a criticism which has also been levied at some modern LWA scales; e.g., Conway et al., 2018). Yet the advent of purportedly ideologically neutral authoritarianism measures, such as Feldman and Stenner’s (1997) authoritarian parenting values (e.g., Duriez et al., 2007; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; Stenner, 2005), was an imperfect remedy that did little to shift assumptions of authoritarian asymmetry. In particular, as other scholars have noted (Duckitt, 2001, 2022; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2010, 2017), these scales tended to be short and inflected with conservative ideological content due to their emphasis on more traditional, conservative parenting values like manners and respect for elders. Accordingly, contemporary measures like the Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010) used in the current research have adopted an ideological conceptualization of RWA that permits the existence of other forms of authoritarian ideologies. This advancement served as an impetus for developing the DDT framework tested here, which proposes diverging processes.
of motivated social cognition by which cognitively rigid individuals of different political persuasions may embrace corresponding versions of authoritarianism.

Prior research generally supports the relationships between RWA, cognitive rigidity, and threat put forth in the DDT model. Indeed, Jost and colleagues (2003a) proposed that cognitively rigid individuals tend to be more sensitive to uncertainty (and exclusively conservative, in the authors’ estimation), and are thus likely to find authoritarianism’s uncompromising positions appealing in the face of perceived threats. In line with the RRH, however, they characterized this as an essentially right-wing phenomenon. Recently, Nilsson and Jost (2020) reasserted this authoritarian asymmetry argument. Although they acknowledged recent advancements in the measurement and construct validation of LWA, the authors maintained here and elsewhere (Jost, 2017) that RWA remains far more prevalent and thus represents a more pressing challenge for the discipline and society. Consistent with this view, but also with certain methodological practices that may have artificially constrained the focus of prior work to right-wing rigidity and authoritarianism, some recent research bolsters the authoritarian asymmetry hypothesis. Berggren and colleagues (2019), for example, found that belief rigidity, measured with the closed-mindedness subscale of the Need for Closure Scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), uniquely predicted RWA over and above need for cognition and intolerance of ambiguity. Similarly, a large-scale meta-analysis (N=84,017) by Onraet and colleagues (2015) revealed associations between lower cognitive ability and higher RWA and dogmatism, which they treated as an aspect of right-wing ideology rather than cognitive rigidity. In addition to this conceptual discrepancy, however, these studies did not include a measure of LWA.

Finally, even some research that has evidenced LWA points to limited parallels with RWA. Fasce and Avendaño (2020), for example, revealed divergent relations between RWA and
LWA with political ideology, social axioms, and religiosity in two large Spanish samples 
\(N=2,199\). Negative correlations between LWA and conservatism, religiosity, and the social 
axiom *reward for application* (which reflects a preference for a meritocratic society) were 
particularly pronounced \((r=-.50\) to \(-.59)\), leading the authors to conclude that LWA represents a 
form of reactance or backlash to RWA. Whether these findings can be considered sound 
evidence against authoritarian symmetry is questionable, however. Importantly, differences with 
respect to political ideology and social values are to be expected when an ideological 
conceptualization of authoritarianism is adopted. I next consider how this updated theoretical 
treatment has paved the way for proponents of the authoritarian symmetry hypothesis, and how 
this informs the current theoretical framework.

**The Case for Authoritarian Symmetry**

Problematically, given the discussed psychometric criticisms of early authoritarianism 
scales, the elusiveness of a valid measure of LWA has been upheld as evidence of authoritarian 
asymmetry (Costello et al., 2022). As discussed, early LWA scales derived from opposing 
wordings of existing RWA scale items were either endorsed by few respondents or correlated 
positively with RWA (Altemeyer, 1996). Likewise misleadingly, scholars have cited the sheer 
variety of authoritarianism measures that reliably correlate with conservatism (Nilsson & Jost, 
2020) as support for authoritarian asymmetry, despite the conservative bent of many of these 
instruments. Attempts to rectify this lack of valid measurement have provided compelling 
evidence not only for the existence of LWA, but of a common core of psychological 
characteristics that underlie both LWA and RWA, per the Authoritarian Symmetry hypothesis 
(Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022; Crawford, 2012; Suedfeld et al., 1994). In particular, 
cognitive rigidity markers appear to occupy a central role in this nomological network, which
informs the DDT’s prediction that cognitive rigidity acts as a dispositional diathesis of authoritarianism on the left and right.

The two aforementioned research groups responsible for advancing the measurement of LWA in recent years have also found evidence linking cognitive rigidity to both LWA and RWA. For example, Conway and colleagues (2018) developed and validated their LWA Scale across two samples of American undergraduates and MTurk respondents ($N=773$), who responded to either the novel scale or the RWA Scale (Altemeyer, 1996) as well as measures of dogmatism, attitude strength, and prejudice. In line with the DDT and Authoritarian Symmetry hypothesis, dogmatism was robustly positively correlated with both forms of authoritarianism across samples, albeit more strongly with RWA ($r=.66, .79$ in samples one and two, respectively) than LWA ($r=.38, .41$). LWA and RWA were also similarly related to prejudice and showed strong diverging relations with political ideology, whereas only LWA predicted attitude strength towards corresponding (i.e., liberal) viewpoints. Other work with the LWA Scale from the same researchers has returned similar results. For example, Conway, Zubrod and colleagues (2023) found evidence of both LWA and RWA among large samples of MTurkers ($n=8,769$) and American undergraduates ($n=178$), as well as parallels with cognitive rigidity. Across 12 studies, LWA and RWA were associated with higher dogmatism and attitude strength in regression analyses. Interestingly, LWA emerged as a more robust predictor than RWA of prejudice, particularly towards Blacks and Jews. Relatedly, Conway and others have shown elsewhere (Conway et al., 2021; Conway & McFarland, 2019) that LWA and RWA similarly predicted voting preferences and attitude strength towards corresponding political figures and positions (but see Dusso, 2017). However, Conway and colleagues’ (2018) LWA Scale has garnered some of the same psychometric criticisms as its predecessors; namely that the authors used the RWA
Scale (Altemeyer, 1996) as a basis (Costello et al., 2022; Nilsson & Jost, 2020). Its critics caution that this and other methodological decisions, such as the use of opposing versions of cognitive rigidity and prejudice that correspond to liberalism and conservatism respectively, may artificially inflate seeming parallels between RWAs and LWAs.

Separately, in an effort to address the psychometric shortcomings of prior LWA measures, Costello and colleagues (2022) devised and validated their LWA Index across six samples ($N=7,258$). Taking an iterative and data-driven approach to scale development, the authors devised 39 items comprising three interrelated subdimensions of anti-hierarchical aggression, anti-conventionalism, and top-down censorship. Thus, although not derived from existing RWA scales, the LWA Index parallels Altemeyer’s (1996, 1998) aggression, submission, and conventionalism and Duckitt et al.’s (2010) authoritarianism-conservatism-traditionalism in its tripartite structure and the content of its subcategories. Likewise, efforts by the authors of the LWA Index to establish a nomological network around LWA revealed striking symmetries with RWA on a core constellation of cognitive rigidity markers: high need for cognitive closure, which robustly predicted LWA and RWA, dogmatism, which correlated with LWA and SDO in one study and LWA and RWA in another, and low cognitive ability, which predicted both LWA and RWA. However, these variables tended to be more strongly related to RWA than LWA, which is again consistent with the lopsided symmetry between right- and left-wingers evidenced in the cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism literatures.

Other work using the LWA Index has elaborated on the dispositional parallels between LWAs and RWAs. In line with the dispositional diathesis component of the DDT, for example, Costello and Patrick (2023) found a positive correlation between dogmatism and LWA across several abbreviated versions of the LWA index, one of which is used in Study One of this paper.
Moreover, LWA was associated with lower intellectual humility, an evaluative component (i.e., meta-cognition) of belief reflecting the perceived infallibility of one’s beliefs, akin to belief superiority and absolute certainty. Following a similar approach to Costello and Patrick, Avendaño and colleagues (2022) demonstrated the convergent and discriminant validity of a Spanish-language version of the LWA Index with a variety of psychological variables across three Spanish samples (N=2,586). Although the authors did not assess cognitive rigidity, LWA was associated with various predictors of conservatism. Using latent profile analysis, Bird and colleagues (2022) found in an American sample (N=527) that while Democrats predictably tended to score higher on LWA and Republicans on RWA, a smaller portion of both groups scored high on both LWA and RWA. While the authors of this study also did not measure cognitive rigidity variables, they found that these so-called dark authoritarians—wild card authoritarians, to again borrow Altemeyer’s (1996) term—also scored high on the Dark Triad traits psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism, pointing to another potential symmetry between LWAs and RWAs.

The picture of LWA that emerges from work with the LWA Index (Costello et al., 2022) and LWA Scale (Conway et al., 2018), notwithstanding valid criticisms of the latter, is of a virulent form of radical progressivism that promotes the use of coercive (even violent) means and censorship to accomplish its aims and impose its views on others. Thus, like RWA, LWA appears to reflect a fundamentally antidemocratic appetite for bringing about ideological uniformity by muzzling or castigating dissenters. Indeed, censorship may represent an overlooked aspect of RWA, as anecdotally evidenced by conservative book bans, politically-motivated alterations to school curriculums, and efforts to deconstruct Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Somewhat ironically, certain pundits, including voices within
academia (e.g., Brint & Frey, 2023), have depicted DEI efforts as a type of progressive litmus
test akin to censorship even as they attempt to quash and replace them with more politically
palatable programs. Arguably, the far-right’s (not wholly baseless) characterization of the media
as a by-and-large liberal bloc, and their attempts to discredit it as such, could also be viewed as a
form of grassroots censorship.

Other attempts to measure LWA, although afflicted with some of the same
methodological problems, also speak to parallels with RWA. Van Hiel and colleagues (2006), for
example, found few LWAs among average Belgian citizens (N=541) using a newly-devised
LWA measure, although political activists scored high. Additionally, whereas LWA shared a
modest positive correlation with RWA for ordinary citizens (r=.22), among activists it was
strongly inversely correlated with RWA (r=-.45). The latter finding could be construed as
evidence of LWA as a form of ideological backlash, as Fasce and Avendaño (2020) argued in
regard to a similar finding in their work, or as evidence of the revolutionary sentiment inherent to
LWA as conceptualized in other research (e.g., Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022).
Finally, multinational research has discovered evidence of authoritarianism in historically left-
wing sociocultural contexts (e.g., De Regt et al., 2011), although the use of dubiously neutral
measures like authoritarian parenting values makes these findings difficult to interpret.

To summarize, LWA and RWA are similarly linked to cognitive rigidity and share as a
basic premise the desire to bring about behavioral and ideological uniformity and destroy or
delegitimize their ideological opponents. There the symmetries may end, however, as LWA and
RWA appear to arise from distinct processes of motivated social cognition and lead to
intolerance towards different targets. This divergence is the focus of the DDT framework laid out
in greater detail in the following section and tested across Studies One and Two. Ironically,
parallel methodological issues across these two literatures, namely a disproportionate emphasis on conservative ideology and issues, appear to have obscured meaningful parallels between left- and right-wingers. When liberal and conservative content are considered, evidence of far-left rigidity and LWA emerges. Yet despite clear conceptual overlap between these two debates, how these theories intersect has yet to be directly investigated. In the following chapter, I synthesize the REH and Authoritarian Symmetry perspectives to explain the predictions of the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism tested here.
Towards an Integrative Framework: The Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism

The current research aims to address a gap in the literature by empirically testing the first integrative model of left- and right-wing authoritarianism, the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism (DDT). Borrowing clinical terminology in reference to the quasi-clinical language with which Adorno and colleagues (1950) first described their authoritarian syndromes, the DDT proposes that cognitive rigidity acts as a shared dispositional diathesis of both right- and left-wing authoritarianism, enhanced by distinct threats; for RWAs, threats of change (i.e., norm-violating and cohesion-reducing societal shifts), and for LWAs, threats to change (i.e., barriers to social progress and sources of inequality/oppression). Thus, the DDT integrates evidence from the adjacent but hitherto separate disciplinary debates over cognitive rigidity and authoritarian (a)symmetry to present an account, in line with the REH and authoritarian symmetry perspectives, of parallel motivational pathways by which liberals and conservatives could become authoritarian.

Cognitive Rigidity as a Dispositional Diathesis of Authoritarianism

To reiterate, recent evidence in favor of the REH suggests that although cognitive rigidity is primarily an elective affinity for conservatism, it also exists on the far-left. Likewise, evidence of authoritarian symmetry suggests that while RWA is more prevalent overall than LWA, both exist and are predicted by shared personality features, in particular markers of cognitive rigidity. This informs the DDT’s central prediction that cognitive rigidity represents a common dispositional *diathesis* or susceptibility factor for both RWA and LWA. As discussed, a litany of variables have been treated as markers of cognitive rigidity in prior work, which has led to some conceptual ambiguity. While the majority of these predict RWA and, albeit less robustly, LWA,
the current studies focused on two central aspects of cognitive rigidity that are among the most extensively studied and which have been shown in prior studies to strongly predict both RWA and LWA (e.g., Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022): dogmatism and the need for cognitive closure (NFC). While I stop short of arguing that dogmatism and NFC are the essential markers of cognitive rigidity, there are several theoretical and practical reasons for focusing on these variables. I speak more specifically to how these considerations informed the current methodology in the introduction to Study Two.

Dogmatism is unjustified belief certainty, or the tendency to hold one’s views as correct and incontestable, contrary evidence notwithstanding (Altemeyer, 1996). Dogmatic individuals are extremely assured of their beliefs and highly resistant to revising existing positions, which may increase the appeal of authoritarianism’s ideological absolutism. The relationship between dogmatism and the preference for ideological uniformity promised by authoritarianism has been extensively evidenced, but is less than clear-cut. For example, Rokeach (1954, 1960) initially conflated authoritarianism with dogmatism. Although the two constructs are now considered distinct, both older and contemporary evidence link dogmatism to higher levels of RWA (Altemeyer, 1996; Ganzach & Schul, 2021; Onraet et al., 2015) and LWA (Conway et al., 2018; Conway et al., 2022; Costello et al., 2022; Costello & Patrick, 2023). Yet not every dogmatic individual necessarily harbors the authoritarian desire to impose their views on others. This outcome becomes more likely, however, when dogmatic individuals perceive threats to their rigidly-held worldviews. In the political realm, these threats may be embodied by certain issues and ideological opponents whose policies contradict one’s values, as are explored in the current studies.
Need for cognitive closure (NFC; Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski et al., 2006; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Roets & van Hiel, 2011; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), meanwhile, reflects a preference for simple, clear-cut answers and the tendency to reach conclusions quickly. Individuals high in NFC dislike ambiguity and may be reluctant to reopen the case, so to speak, to accommodate novel information once they reach a conclusion. Like dogmatism, NFC robustly predicts both RWA (e.g., Berggren et al., 2019; Chirumbolo, 2002; van Hiel et al., 2004) and LWA (e.g., Costello et al., 2022). Relatedly, high NFC has also been linked to greater reliance on heuristics, or mental shortcuts (Morosoli et al., 2022), of which political identity is an important example. While ideologies like authoritarianism are thought to arise from processes of motivated social cognition, not all political thinking is equally complex, and not every individual equally motivated to think about issues complexly (Brandt et al., 2019). Rather, some work has found that many, if not most, citizens lack a coherent, cohesive political ideology (Kalmoe, 2020; but see also Azevedo et al., 2019). Instead, many people may think about politics via a largely top-down process in which they use their partisan identity as a guidepost that informs what issues, positions—and critically, threats—are salient to them, as is discussed further in the following sections.

To reiterate, cognitively rigid individuals tend to be unreasonably assured of their beliefs, unwilling to revise their original positions in light of novel information, and may be more prone to relying upon heuristics, including political or partisan identity, when making judgments or decisions. Consequently, cognitively rigid individuals, by virtue of their inflexible thinking style and heightened needs for structure and clear-cut answers, are predisposed to favor uncompromising political ideologies and hardline policies because they are unambiguous and unyielding. Adopting extreme positions thus appears to be a likely consequence of cognitive
rigidity. However, cognitive rigidity is not synonymous with belief extremity, and as evidence
for the REH demonstrates, individuals can hold rigid political beliefs on either end of the
spectrum. In turn, they may be inclined to embrace still more uncompromising ideologies when
their beliefs are challenged. These processes of motivated cognition are the focus of the DDT
framework, which posits that cognitive rigidity predisposes people to different forms of
authoritarianism in response to distinct threats. But what determines the types of threats to which
people are sensitive, and the strain of authoritarianism they are likely to embrace in response?
Specifically, the DDT predicts that an interaction between cognitive rigidity and political identity
(e.g., liberal, conservative) increases the salience of different threats, which enhances the appeal
of the authoritarian ideology that better corresponds to their beliefs.

**Threat as a Motivator of Ideology**

If cognitively rigid individuals are predisposed towards inflexible ideological positions,
they may also be more sensitive to perceived threats to their rigidly-held beliefs. When these
worldviews are challenged, cognitively rigid partisans on both sides of the aisle may embrace the
authoritarian ideology that corresponds to their existing political beliefs. Indeed, as Osborne and
colleagues (2023) argued in a recent review, authoritarianism reflects a general preference for
group conformity at the expense of personal autonomy, which motivates devotees to punish
violators of their group’s norms and values. Although distinguished by their ideological
premises, LWA and RWA share as core features the promise of and demand for ideological
uniformity, which are likely to appeal all the more to cognitively rigid liberals and conservatives
when their respective beliefs are threatened. These diverging Threat-to-Authoritarianism
pathways, and in particular the Threat-to-LWA pathway, are a key contribution of the Dual
Diathesis-Threat (DDT) Model tested here.
The idea that threat motivates individuals to embrace highly structured belief systems is hardly novel. Various psychological theories predict that people derive a sense of order and certainty from belief systems, a function of ideology which becomes especially important in the face of threats. For example, Compensatory Control Theory (Kay et al., 2008) suggests that people embrace overarching philosophies (e.g., religious and political beliefs) as a compensatory mechanism to restore thwarted control. Similarly, Terror Management Theory, (Greenberg et al., 1986; Greenberg et al., 1990), Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg, 2018), and System-Justification Theory (Jost et al., 2013) variously propose that individuals tend to rely upon and reinforce their worldviews as a source of order and certainty when threatened. Critically, these theories are not exclusive to conservatism, or even to political ideology. Thus, their predictions should apply across the political spectrum.

Other theories speak more specifically to the motivated cognitions associated with conservatism and RWA. Even seminal scholarship on the topic identified threat as a central motivator of authoritarianism (e.g., Fromm, 1941). Rokeach (1960), for example, viewed threat as the root cause of intolerance and dogmatism, and Wilson (1973) proposed that conservatism arose out of feelings of uncertainty. In a trend emblematic of the conceptual ambiguity surrounding this extensive literature, both scholars conflated their focal constructs with RWA. Consistent with this premise, Jost and colleagues (2003a, 2017b) found evidence of a conservative shift when individuals were primed with threats of terrorism, an existential threat. Elsewhere, Jost (2006, 2009) and his colleagues (Jost et al., 2007) proposed that conservatism is motivated by uncertainty avoidance and the desire to manage personal and system-level threats. Indeed, the Negativity Bias Hypothesis (Hibbing et al., 2014) suggests that compared to liberals, conservatives attend more closely and react more strongly to negative stimuli, which predisposes
them to prefer conservatism’s emphasis on safety and security. Similar to the Threat-to-RWA pathway outlined by the DDT, the Interactionist Model of Authoritarianism (Feldman, 2003; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 2005) proposes that an interaction between authoritarian predispositions (measured using the authors’ authoritarian parenting values scale) and societal threat drive prejudice towards minority groups. Finally, Duckitt and colleagues’ Dual-Process Motivational Model of Ideology and Prejudice (DPM; Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2017) outlines diverging motivational pathways for RWA and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) driven by distinct threats made chronically salient by certain worldviews. The DPM shares much in common with the DDT’s Threat-to-RWA pathway, but differs in important respects, as elaborated upon in the following section.

Whereas the threats salient to conservatives and RWAs have been the focus of extensive research, far less work has examined the threats to which liberals are sensitive. Given the established relationship between conservatism, threat, and RWA, then, elucidating the threats that may induce liberals to embrace LWA represents an important and largely unexplored frontier of the authoritarianism literature towards which the present work makes significant strides.

**Distinct Threats Activate Authoritarian Predispositions on the Right and Left**

In a recent chapter by Lambert and colleagues (2019), the authors proposed an ideological affordance framework whereby people are likely to shift towards the ideological stance (liberal or conservative) that appears better functionally suited to the issue or challenge at hand. Moreover, liberals and conservatives tend to be concerned about and consider their group uniquely suited to address different issues; in other words, to claim issue ownership (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Seeberg, 2017). Because different political ideologies increase the salience of
distinct values and beliefs, these effects may occur independently of one another such that certain issues are perceived as threatening—and therefore requiring ideological affordances—by one side but not the other. This is exemplified by the aforementioned conservative shift whereby people endorsed more conservative positions when threats to security and certainty were made salient (Jost et al., 2003a, 2017), an effect which was less pronounced among liberals. Yet Lambert and colleagues (2019) also cited a need for further exploration of the different threats that motivate liberals and conservatives, which the present studies contribute to. Additionally, there has been a broader call to diversify the types of threats examined in social and political psychology. Despite its various conceptualizations (expanded on in the following chapter) and the breadth of potentially threatening stimuli and issues that could be used in research, the bulk of prior work has tended to focus on threats of terrorism (e.g., Eadeh & Chang, 2020; Jost et al., 2017b; Lambert et al., 2019), an existential threat generally associated with conservatism. A strength of the current work, then, is its investigation and inclusion of threats that resonate with liberals as well as conservatives.

Different political ideologies encapsulate distinct values and worldviews, which offer initial clues about the types of threats to which liberals and conservatives are likely sensitive. These informed the diverging threat-to-authoritarianism pathways of the DDT. Whereas conservatism is defined by its emphasis on the preservation or ‘conservation’ of traditional ideals and social conventions, for instance, liberalism emphasizes individual autonomy, openness, and the personal liberty to live as one chooses (Graham et al., 2009, 2013). Thus, the preservation of norms and traditions is inherent to conservatism, much as the forward momentum implied by progressivism and encapsulated by liberalism bespeaks a desire for change. Indeed, even the etymology of the left-liberal, right-conservative distinction reflects this desire for versus
resistance to change, as noted earlier. The current work therefore focuses on two particular types of threat that are likely to be salient to conservatives and liberals, respectively: threats of change, and barriers to social progress (i.e., threats to change).

Yet people may devote far less deliberate thought to political matters than a concerned citizen or political operative might hope. As previously mentioned, partisan and political identity, or identification with a particular political party or ideology, represents a heuristic that people rely upon when considering political issues (Kalmoe, 2020). In particular, partisanship contains information about the core values associated with labels of ‘Democrat’ and ‘Republican’ or ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative,’ which informs the issues these voters tend to identify with. In line with this, Brandt and colleagues (2019) found that symbolic aspects of political belief systems (i.e. identification with liberalism/conservatism) were more predictive of voting patterns and behavioral intentions than operational aspects (i.e., policy positions). Thus, people often use political identity as a cognitive shortcut, and many likely engage with politics via a largely top-down process whereby the label they identify with informs their ideological positions and the issue content that resonates with them. Again, cognitively rigid individuals may be particularly prone to relying upon these heuristics due to their high need for cognitive closure and tendency towards dogmatism. Likewise, they may react more strongly when the values and ascribed positions associated with their adopted label come under threat. The DDT model reflects this idea by predicting that political identity (dichotomized as conservative or liberal) interacts with cognitive rigidity to inform the types of threats individuals are likely to be sensitive to, and by extension the form of authoritarianism they are likely to embrace when presented with such threats. In particular, the DDT framework predicts that whereas threats of
change enhance the appeal of RWA for cognitively rigid conservatives, threats or barriers to change predict LWA among cognitively rigid liberals.

**Threats of Change Drive RWA**

The DDT model proposes that cognitively rigid conservatives embrace RWA in response to perceived threats to conformity, conventions, and the status quo, which I refer to as threats of change. Various lines of evidence support this prediction, beginning with the values associated with conservatism. Conservatism emphasizes the preservation of traditions and protection of social conventions, which may make it particularly well-suited to functions of uncertainty reduction and threat management (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a; Jugert & Duckitt, 2009); an example of its ideological affordances (Lambert et al., 2019). In turn, conservatives are generally resistant to social change, tolerant of inequality (Jost et al., 2008; Jost et al., 2013), and display stronger motivations to conform and follow traditions, establish and maintain homogenous, like-minded social networks, attend to social cues from ingroup members, and be biased towards perceiving group consensus (Jost et al., 2018). In brief, conservatives are highly motivated to perceive and preserve group cohesion. RWA is likewise predicted by personality traits that reflect a tendency towards social conformity, including low openness to experience and high conscientiousness (Carney et al., 2008; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). Elsewhere, low openness has been associated with cognitive rigidity and bias towards threat-relevant cues (Perry & Sibley, 2013). Thus, conservatives—and by extension RWAs—display heightened concerns with conformity and conventions, and are likely sensitive to the prospect of change that threatens to upend these.

Conservatives also appear to be more sensitive than liberals to threats overall. Hibbing and colleagues (2014), for example, found in favor of their Negativity Bias Hypothesis that
conservatives exhibited stronger physiological reactions and devoted more cognitive resources to negative stimuli. Likewise, Jost and colleagues’ (2017b) multinational meta-analysis (N=369,525) revealed positive relations between conservatism, threat perceptions, and mortality salience, a form of existential threat. There and elsewhere (Jost et al., 2003a), the authors evidenced a conservative shift such that priming participants with threats (typically of terrorism) increased endorsement of conservatism. This effect has been corroborated in other studies featuring various existential threats and correlates of conservatism, including in-group favoritism (Burke et al., 2013; Crawford, 2017; Nail & McGregor, 2009; Nail et al., 2009). Relatedly, threats implied by poor socioeconomic conditions predicted heightened conservatism in multinational samples (Onraet et al., 2013), and sociocultural and national security concerns predicted more conservative voting patterns and policy positions during U.S. election years (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Cizmar et al., 2014; Janoff-Bulman & Sheikh, 2006). Beall and colleagues (2016) found similarly that the salience of an Ebola outbreak, an existential threat, predicted more conservative voting intentions in the 2014 U.S. federal elections, although this effect was constrained to states in which Republicans were the normative party. Other work has shown that perceived threat of infectious diseases increased conformist attitudes and behavior (Murray & Schaller, 2012). In a striking finding, Osmundsen and Petersen (2020) found that uncertainty and anxiety-related symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder predicted right-wing ideology and were briefly and modestly reduced by reassurances in the form of Republican policy messages in a sizable American sample (N=9,195). Somewhat qualifying these findings, studies that have used behavioral and physiological as opposed to self-report measures of cognitive rigidity and threat responses tend to find less robust relations between cognitive rigidity, threat sensitivity, and conservatism (Bakker et al., 2020; Federico, 2021; Osmundsen et
al., 2022; Smith & Warren, 2020; van Hiel et al., 2016). Moreover, in one study with a German sample (N=225), liberals and conservatives displayed similar levels of threat sensitivity and risk aversion, but in different domains (Fiagbenu et al., 2019).

Likewise, the relationship between threat and RWA has been extensively theorized and empirically established (e.g., Asbrock & Fritsche, 2013; Fischer et al., 2010; Fritsche et al., 2012). For example, Duckitt and colleagues’ Dual-Process Motivational Model (Duckitt, 2001, 2009, 2013, 2022; Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013; Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Duckitt et al., 2010; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2010, 2017), outlines the motivational processes by which RWA and SDO arise from threats made chronically salient by distinct worldviews: for RWAs, belief in a dangerous world increases concerns over threats to order, security, and the status quo; for SDOs, viewing the world as a ruthless, competitive jungle heightens concerns over threats to group dominance and established hierarchies. The DPM framework has been largely supported in various studies and a large-scale meta-analysis (Perry et al., 2013). Choma and Hanoch (2017), for instance, found that RWA predicted lower voting intentions towards Hillary Clinton and greater support for Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, which the authors attributed to the latter’s rhetorical emphasis on social threats. Demonstrating the domain specificity of threat perceptions, Choma and colleagues (2014) found that whereas conservatives reported higher risk perceptions and aversion towards social norm violations (ethical, social, recreational) and less risk aversion in the economic domain, liberals were less risk-averse in social domains. In another study, Choma and Hodson (2017) evidenced an association between RWA and heightened risk perceptions in ethical and social domains in an American sample (n=104), and higher sensitivity to personal (but not collective) threats in a Canadian student sample (n=245). Contrary to the predictions of the DDT, the authors found a bidirectional
relationship between RWA and perceived threat. The threat of change-to-RWA pathway of the DDT model is similar in many ways to Duckitt’s (2001) DPM, although the two theories are distinct in several notable respects. First, the DDT extends its predictions beyond RWA to the motivational processes and predictors of LWA, making it the first attempt at a comprehensive model of right- and left-wing authoritarianism. Second, whereas the DPM proposes that dangerous worldviews mediate the link between social threat and RWA, the DDT posits a differential moderation effect whereby an interaction between dispositional diatheses and threats to and of change increases left- and right-wingers’ susceptibility to LWA and RWA respectively.

In particular, RWAs appear to be motivated by both epistemic (i.e., meaning-based) and existential (safety and security-related) threats of change that violate the existing social order and associated norms, reduce group cohesion, and present a danger to the status quo (e.g., Choma & Hodson, 2017; Duckitt & Sibley, 2017; Jost et al., 2013; Jugert & Duckitt, 2009; Kreindler, 2005). These concerns shape the targets of their intolerance in sometimes unpredictable ways. For example, Bilewicz and colleagues (2015) found, somewhat paradoxically, that RWA predicted both greater prejudice and greater support for hate-speech prohibition in two Polish samples (N=1,660), which they interpreted as evidence that hate-speech represents a social norm violation. In other work with Polish citizens (N=3,439), Winiewski and Bulska (2020) found that RWA predicted support for passive forms of collective violence aimed at forcing outgroup members to assimilate to the dominant culture. Interactions between threat and ideology were not examined, although the authors’ finding that symbolic and safety threats predicted increased support for direct confrontation with outgroups is broadly consistent with the DDT. Whether these findings would replicate in American samples is an interesting question for future research.
Duckitt, in his work to develop the ACT Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010) made even more specific predictions about the types of threats that drive different RWA attitudes. He viewed Authoritarianism as driven by threats to collective security and safety (i.e., existential threats), Conservatism as motivated by threats to social cohesion, and Traditionalism as a response to societal shifts that threaten to disrupt, undermine, or replace old-fashioned values and ways of life. Consistent with these predictions, Duckitt and Bizumic (2013) found support for the ACT Scale’s multidimensional operationalization of RWA across two samples of undergraduates from New Zealand ($n=326$) and Serbia ($n=404$), along with evidence that ACT-Authoritarianism and Conservatism predicted prejudice towards groups depicted as dangerous (e.g., criminals, terrorists) and dissident (e.g., protestors), respectively, in a second New Zealander sample ($n=212$).

Two studies by Crawford and Pilanski (2014a/b) further illustrate the relationship between RWA and threats to conformity and social cohesion. First, the authors found that perceived threat from ideological opponents fully mediated the relationship between political ideology and intolerance towards the opposition in an American MTurk sample ($N=160$). In a follow-up study with two samples of American college students ($n=80$) and MTurk workers ($n=132$), RWA uniquely predicted intolerance towards cohesion-reducing targets and, albeit less robustly, hierarchy-attenuating targets. Finally, RWA uniquely predicted intolerance towards a hypothetical immigrant rights group when the group was depicted as norm-threatening, but not hierarchy-attenuating, in a separate MTurk sample ($n=132$). Expanding upon these findings, Crawford and colleagues (2015) found evidence for a balanced ideological antipathy model in which RWA predicted greater intolerance towards ideologically-opposed activist groups framed as tradition-threatening (gay rights, pro-choice, and advocates for secular governance) and lower
intolerance towards tradition-reaffirming groups (anti-gay activists, pro-life, and advocates for religious rights). These findings align with the DDT’s threat of change-to-RWA pathway. Elsewhere, Crawford (2017) has questioned the account of conservatives as uniquely threat-sensitive (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a), and proposed that meaning-based threats prompt parallel motivational processes in left- and right-wingers, as the DDT posits.

Experimental research has also identified social threats as a causal mechanism of RWA. Duckitt and Fisher (2003), for example, found that priming New Zealand undergraduates (N=280) with socially threatening (but not security threatening or neutral) future scenarios increased RWA (measured with the RWA Scale; Altemeyer, 1996) and belief in a dangerous world. This aligns with Duckitt and colleagues’ (2010) later assertion that authoritarianism is an ideological rather than dispositional construct, as personality traits should remain relatively stable. Also consistent with this view, Winter and colleagues (2023; see also Winter, 2023) found that the threat of domestic terrorism increased RWA submission and conventionalism, but not aggression, using the ACT Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010). Moreover, the threat of COVID-19 was associated with increased RWA submission regardless of political ideology. Likewise, Fritsche and colleagues (2012) showed that the threat of climate change increased generalized authoritarianism and derogation of socially threatening outgroups across three studies of British (n=155) and German citizens (n=151). These findings differ somewhat from the DDT, which predicts that threat moderates the relationship between cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism, but are consistent with the ideological versus dispositional premise adopted in the current framework.

Existential threats, namely terrorism, have also been linked to increases in RWA, lending further credence to the conceptualization of authoritarianism as an ideological dimension.
adopted via processes of motivated social cognition. In the post-9/11 landscape, research on the psychological impact of threats of terrorism proliferated, coming to represent its own niche paradigm within political psychology and the authoritarianism literature. Nagoshi and colleagues (2007), for example, found in a between-subjects design that American undergraduates ($N=194$) who responded to a measure of RWA in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 scored significantly higher than a separate group who responded to the same measures pre-9/11. Empirical research likewise points to a relationship between the existential threat of terrorism and RWA. For instance, across several studies by Fischer and colleagues, terrorist threats increased desire for social order, punitiveness towards criminals, and endorsement of authoritarian parenting values (Fischer et al., 2007; Fischer et al., 2010). Using a German-language RWA scale (RWA3D Scale, Funke, 2005), Asbrock and Fritsche (2013) found that terrorist threats framed as personal (but not collective) increased endorsement of RWA, support for authoritarian policies (e.g., torture), and ingroup bias. In subsequent analyses, RWA fully mediated the links between personal threat and support for authoritarian policies, and personal threat and ingroup bias. Elsewhere, and in line with the DDT’s threat of change-to-RWA pathway, Asbrock and colleagues (2010) found in a longitudinal study that RWA predicted increased prejudice over time towards groups described as dissident and dangerous, but not derogated groups. Finally, across two samples of MTurk and ANES respondents ($N=6,047$), Brandt & van Tongeren (2017) found that perceived threat mediated the relationship between religious fundamentalism, a particularly dogmatic form of religious belief, and prejudice towards ideological outgroups.

Other work suggests that threats may moderate, rather than mediate, the proposed link between cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism. In line with the DDT model, this evidence implies that when strongly-held beliefs about how the world should be are threatened, the appeal
of authoritarianism increases. For example, although they did not measure cognitive rigidity and treated authoritarianism as a dispositional construct, several studies have shown that perceived threat, including the threat of diversity, enhanced the link between authoritarianism and prejudice towards various groups (Cohrs & Ibler, 2009; Velez & Lavine, 2017). Still other studies have evidenced a bidirectional relationship between personality, worldviews, and threat perceptions (Bakker et al., 2020, Sibley & Duckitt, 2013; Sibley et al., 2007). In a longitudinal study with a nationally representative American sample \(N=800\), for example, Onraet and colleagues (2014) found that while external threats (i.e., threats related to and emanating from society) increased RWA over time, high RWA simultaneously predicted higher subjective threat perceptions over time. Finally, some older work suggests that RWA increases threat perceptions. McFarland (2005), for instance, found that RWA predicted greater support for the war in Iraq among American college students \(N=467\) by enhancing the perceived threat that Iraq posed to the country.

Taken together, this extensive body of evidence suggests that RWA may be motivated by epistemic threats to conformity and social cohesion, or Threats of Change in the parlance of the DDT. However, there is a need to clarify why people find the disparate threat types explored in prior work concerning, and what themes, if any, connect or distinguish these rationales. Many existential threats, for example, pose a threat not only to individual survival, but to the social order more broadly, and could thus be construed as threats of change. To elaborate on the motivations surrounding these issues, Study One qualitatively examined the types of threats that concern people about as well as the rationales they associate with them.

*Threats to Change Drive LWA*
Whereas RWA appears likely to be motivated by threats of change, the DDT posits that LWA constitutes a drastic response to barriers to social progress and issues perceived as necessitating change; in other words, threats to change. Although little work has examined the threats salient to liberals, the values and worldviews associated with liberalism offer clues about the issues to which left-wingers are likely sensitive. Liberalism emphasizes values of egalitarianism, openness to change, and respect for personal autonomy (Graham et al., 2009, 2013). Compared to conservatives, liberals tend to be more concerned with moral foundations related to individual liberties than maintaining group cohesion (Haidt & Graham, 2007), and score higher on universalism, or compassion for friends and the broader world, and lower on parochialism, which reflects heightened concerns for one’s family and nation (Waytz et al., 2019). Relatedly, Janoff-Bulman (2009) argued that liberals are motivated by a desire to reconcile disparities and provide for group members’ welfare; thus, they tend to be more concerned with social justice issues. Conversely, the authors asserted that conservatives are motivated more by an avoidant desire to defend their ingroup and its customs from harm, which promotes efforts to establish prohibitive and protective measures. Whereas conservatives tend to resist change and be relatively tolerant of inequality, liberals typically advocate for change and abhor inequality (Jost et al., 2008). Indeed, the label of progressive, applied most often to the far-left, captures the will to change society as aptly as the term conservative evokes a desire to maintain the status quo. Given that these motivations appear diametrically at odds with one another, it is unsurprising that many view politics as a zero-sum game.

Provided liberalism’s compassionate premise and emphasis on peoples’ right to live as they wish, liberals are likely to be sensitive to perceived inequality and injustice. Yet considerably less work has examined threats to left-wingers than right-wingers (Duckitt, 2022),
an oversight which applies also to the cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism literatures and may have contributed to the conclusion that conservatives are uniquely threat-sensitive (e.g., Clifton, 2020). As in those literatures, what few studies have incorporated liberal threat content point to a parallel motivational process by which sources of inequality, injustice, and barriers to social progress, or threats to change, may enhance the appeal of LWA among cognitively rigid liberals. This threat to change-to-LWA pathway represents the DDT’s most significant theoretical development, as well as its least researched. As Kay and colleagues (2023) recently noted, whereas the processes of motivated social cognition associated with anti-egalitarianism have received considerable attention, the types of motivated reasoning to which egalitarians are prone has gone unexplored. In particular, these may take the form of benevolent biases, such as a tendency to overestimate the extent of inequality and oppression. In turn, this may motivate cognitively rigid liberals to embrace the radical egalitarianism and revolutionary sentiment that characterizes LWA.

Consistent with this prediction, various lines of evidence suggest that liberals harbor heightened concerns over inequality. Kteily and colleagues (2017), for example, found that egalitarians reported inflated perceptions of power differentials in a hypothetical organization, whereas anti-egalitarians underestimated power differentials. Elsewhere, Lucas and Kteily (2018) found that egalitarians perceived an adverse event as more harmful when described as occurring to a disadvantaged group, and less harmful when it occurred to an advantaged group; for anti-egalitarians, the pattern was the opposite. Across five studies (N=8,779), Waldfogel and colleagues (2021) found that individuals who scored high on egalitarianism were more likely to spontaneously mention, be sensitive to indicators of, and report inflated perceptions of inequality on the behalf of low-status groups (e.g., women) in hypothetical scenarios. Finally, Martin and
North (2021) found across nine studies ($N=3,277$) that egalitarianism predicted lower racism and sexism, but greater ageism. Mediation analysis suggested that egalitarians’ prejudice towards the elderly was motivated by the perception that older people consume resources and opportunities that could otherwise be allocated to disadvantaged groups. In other words, egalitarianism, a central tenet of liberalism, appears to increase the salience of inequality and other barriers to social progress. As such, cognitively rigid liberals should be particularly sensitive to threats from the status quo, oppressive systems, and various forms of discrimination and inequality that impede positive change and prevent social justice. They should therefore be more likely to endorse LWA when primed with these threats to change.

Other work suggests that threats evoke parallel motivational processes in liberals and conservatives. Several studies by van Prooijen, Krouwel and others found that perceived threat from political rivals predicted left- and right-wing ideological extremity, and that individuals on both the far-left and far-right were more inclined to derogate outgroups and evaluate opposing beliefs as inferior than moderates (van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2017, 2019; van Prooijen et al., 2015a). Taken together, these findings align with other scholars’ contention that threat sensitivity depends upon the nature of the threat in question, and is not exclusive to conservatives (e.g., Crawford, 2017; Proulx & Brandt, 2017). They also carry clear implications for authoritarianism, although whether LWA and RWA can be conflated with extremity of political beliefs remains a point of contention (Conway et al., 2021). While extreme political stances are typical of authoritarians, not every person who places themselves on the far poles of the political continuum necessarily aggresses towards ideological outgroups, much less seeks to impose their views on others. Nonetheless, hardline policies and the politicians whose agendas promote them may have these aims. Endorsing these and embracing authoritarianism may be a more likely
outcome for cognitively rigid individuals on both ends of the political spectrum when primed with threats to their worldviews.

Cross-cultural research also supports this prediction. For instance, Benjamin and colleagues (2022) found empirical and correlational evidence that liberals were more distressed than conservatives by conditions of declining democracy in a multinational sample of over 66,000 World Values Survey respondents and laboratory participants. This effect dropped out when liberal administrations held power, however, suggesting that liberals are threatened by their ideological and political opponents taking power and perhaps undermining their egalitarian vision for society. Relatedly, Stollberg and colleagues (2017) found that threats to personal control increased support for liberal ingroup norms of anti-right-wing activism and organizational change across four samples of German citizens and students (N=478). In another extensive multinational study comprising citizens of 54 societies (N=161,411), Brandt and Henry (2012) found that women scored higher than men on authoritarian parenting values, an effect which was enhanced by gender inequality in individualistic societies. Although measures of authoritarian parenting values are inflected with conservative content, as discussed, the authors’ overall pattern of findings suggested that threat of stigma predicted greater endorsement of authoritarian attitudes. More recently, Conway and colleagues (2020) proposed that whereas liberals are generally motivated to reduce disparities between groups (i.e., equalitarianism), a subset of so-called tribal equalitarians may somewhat paradoxically champion equality while also believing their group uniquely equipped to bring it about (see also, Clark & Winegard, 2020). The authors argued that equalitarianism may suppress LWA in Western contexts, hence its elusiveness in earlier work. However, tribal equalitarianism also appears to reflect a rigid
stance towards threats of inequality, which could enhance the appeal of LWA when relevant threats are made salient.

Although scant empirical work has examined the effects of threat on LWA, various lines of evidence suggest that social injustices and barriers to progress are highly salient to liberals. Kahn and colleagues (2022), for example, found that whereas conservative concerns centered on collective threats of \textit{commission}, or malfeasance from bad actors (e.g., terrorists, extremists, religious zealots), liberals tended to focus on threats of \textit{omission}, or failures to enact needed reforms to address social ills (e.g., poverty, pollution, climate change). The authors attributed this to liberals’ and conservatives’ opposing motivations to remedy versus reinforce the status quo respectively. Furthermore, in developing their LWA Index, Costello and colleagues (2022) found that LWA uniquely predicted support for and engagement in political violence during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. In a separate study from the same paper, the authors found that priming liberals and conservatives with politically antagonizing Facebook posts increased aggression towards their ideological opponents in an adapted Tangram Help/Hurt task (Saleem et al., 2015). Illustrating the domain specificity of threat perceptions and responses, Eadeh and Chang (2020) showed that threat prompts regarding issues over which liberals typically claim ownership (e.g., healthcare access, pollution, corporate misconduct) increased support for relevant liberal attitudes and policies and decreased support for social conservatism.

Finally, some work has linked existential threats and dangerous world beliefs to LWA. Manson (2020), for instance, found that LWA (but not RWA) predicted endorsement of authoritarian policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, an existential threat. Likewise, a battery of twelve studies by Conway and colleagues (2023) found that LWA was positively related to dangerous world beliefs, perceived COVID-19 threat, and perceived threat from Donald Trump’s
presidential candidacy. Departing from the predictions of the DDT model, which views threat as a moderator of the relationship between cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism, perceived threat from Donald Trump mediated the link between LWA and voting intentions. In another study from the same paper, the authors found a relationship between LWA and more restrictive communication norms (i.e., political correctness), and in yet another that ecological stress modestly predicted both LWA and RWA. Costello and colleagues (2022) also evidenced an association between LWA and belief in a dangerous world. Thus, what little work has examined these constructs on the left generally aligns with the DDT’s prediction that LWA arises from a parallel motivational process to RWA, driven in particular by social injustices, inequality, and barriers to progress, or threats to change.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In summary, the current research builds upon nearly a century of work which has revealed that while cognitive rigidity and authoritarianism are more prevalent among conservatives, they are not altogether absent among liberals. Yet the motivational processes that underpin authoritarianism among right-wingers, and even more so among left-wingers, require further clarification. To that end, I tested a novel theoretical framework, the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism, which represents the first integrative model of authoritarian ideologies across the political continuum. To reiterate, the current research addresses the following questions and tests the following hypotheses:

**R1.** What types of threats do left- and right-wingers consider credible, urgent (i.e., timely), and threatening to society, and why do these threats resonate with these individuals? What thematic similarities and differences emerge between them?
**H1.** Based on the different values and worldviews made chronically salient by liberalism and conservatism, in Study One, left- and right-wingers were expected to report qualitatively different concerns about the threats facing society. Moreover, liberal and conservative respondents were expected to differently rank a list of threats identified from prior work (Eadeh & Chang, 2020; Kahn et al., 2022). Specifically, whereas conservative responses were expected to emphasize issues that convey threats of change to established conventions and group cohesion (e.g., immigration, terrorism, crime, the Woke Mob, war), liberals were expected to cite issues that present barriers to social progress (e.g., poverty, inequality, racism, MAGA, religion, climate crisis). Likewise, rationales for the threats identified were expected to reflect concerns with, for conservatives, loss of societal cohesion, traditional values and ways of life, and for liberals, sources of inequality, injustice, and oppression.

**R2.** Does cognitive rigidity similarly predict LWA and RWA?

**H2.** Based on the uncompromising features of authoritarian ideologies and prior evidence that cognitive rigidity positively correlates with both LWA and RWA, as well as belief extremity on the left and right, cognitive rigidity was expected to positively predict both LWA and RWA in Study Two. More specifically, both a Cognitive Rigidity index and constituent dispositional markers (dogmatism and need for cognitive closure) were expected to positively predict LWA and RWA.

**R3.** Does threat type moderate the predicted relationship between liberal/conservative cognitive rigidity and LWA/RWA?

**H3.** Threat type was expected to interact with cognitive rigidity and political identity (liberal, conservative) such that different manners of threat elicit RWA and LWA from more
cognitively rigid conservatives and liberals. Specifically, threats of change were expected to enhance the relationship between cognitive rigidity and RWA for conservatives (H3a), and threats to change were expected to enhance the relationship between cognitive rigidity and LWA for liberals (H3b).

Additional Research Questions

R4. Do lay and student populations differ in the extent and prevalence of cognitive rigidity, authoritarianism, and threat sensitivity?

Universities are often characterized by the media as inherently left-leaning, and recent nationwide trends in campus activism would appear to anecdotally support this (Friedersdorf, 2023; Harper, 2023). Consistent with this premise, undergraduate samples tend to be more politically liberal than community samples, although some scholars assert that concerns over undergraduate convenience sampling (i.e., the college sophomore problem) for political science are exaggerated (e.g., Krupnikov et al., 2021). Yet while higher education is liberal in principle, whether this translates to a higher prevalence of far-left political views—and perhaps LWA—among undergraduates is unclear. Thus, in addition to testing the pathways of the DDT, the proposed research explored how these motivational processes play out across student and lay samples.

These questions and hypotheses were examined across two mixed-methods studies.
Study One

A central premise of the Dual Diathesis-Threat model is that liberals and conservatives are sensitive to distinct threats, which may prompt cognitively rigid individuals to embrace different forms of authoritarian ideologies. Although considerable theoretical work has explored the threats that are chronically salient, to borrow Duckitt’s (2001) verbiage, to conservatives, empirical research has tended to center on existential threats, in particular the threat of terrorism (Crawford, 207; Eadeh & Chang, 2020; Jost et al., 2017a; Lambert et al., 2019). Still less work has examined the threats to which liberals are sensitive, a focus for which there has been a recent call (e.g., Duckitt, 2022; Lambert et al., 2019). In answer to this call, in Study One I employed thematic analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017) to qualitatively examine the types of threats salient to American citizens and the motivations that informed their concerns. In particular, I was interested in what threats liberals, moderates, and conservatives perceived to the nation and what manner of rationales they cited for these threats, as well as how they ranked a series of threats identified in prior research (Kahn et al., 2022). Moreover, I examined differences in threat content, rationales, and rankings between authoritarians and non-authoritarians on the left and right.

As well as expanding upon research into subjective threats across the political spectrum, Study One was intended to lay the theoretical groundwork for subsequent empirical tests of the DDT framework. While participants were expected to report a breadth of perceived threats, I predicted that two broad themes would emerge from their associated rationales: threats of change, defined as disruptions of social cohesion, loss of traditions, and cultural shifts, and threats to change, including various sources of inequality, oppression, and barriers to social progress. Moreover, I predicted that these themes would correspond to the liberal and
conservative contingents of the sample, respectively. This focus was informed by the ideological content of liberalism and conservatism and the norms and values held dear by their respective adherents, as previously discussed. However, it is one of numerous ways of conceptualizing threat. Prior work has established other taxonomies, including, to name a few, existential and epistemic threats, personal and collective threats, social and economic threats, and various others. While these categories were expected to feature in responses to open-ended items, rationales that framed threats in terms of concerns over societal and/or cultural change (i.e., threats of change) or inequality, injustice, and barriers to social progress (i.e., threats to change) were of particular interest. Nonetheless, in acknowledgment of their theoretical contributions and likely appearance in the qualitative data, I next present a brief overview of prominent alternative conceptualizations to better situate the current studies within the extant literature.

**Threats Take Many Forms**

Numerous scholars have proposed multidimensional conceptualizations of threat. To begin with the broadest categorical distinctions, these include personal threats to the individual versus collective threats to one’s ingroup, nation, or society (e.g., Huddy & Feldman, 2011). In turn, collective threats may be local, that is, presenting a danger to one’s immediate community, or global, to humanity and the world at large (Kahn et al., 2022). Threats—to the individual or collective, local or global—may also be existential in nature (i.e., endangering safety, security, and ultimately survival), or epistemic (related to violations of meaning, the nature of reality, and ideas about how the world “should be”) (Jost et al., 2017a). At the societal level, some scholars have similarly distinguished threats to security, which endanger a population’s physical safety, from threats to stability, which erode group cohesion and the social fabric (e.g., Hetherington & Weiler, 2009). Although inexhaustive, this list illustrates the breadth of terms that scholars have
used to categorize threats. Moreover, these distinctions, far from being purely semantic, carry important implications for the processes of motivated cognition that different manners of threats are likely to evoke. While a full review of these is beyond the scope of the present study, I draw attention to those with the greatest relevance to the DDT model.

Within political psychology, ideology and threats have been further distinguished along social and economic lines (Choma et al., 2014; Choma & Hodson, 2017). Whereas threats in the social domain concern the cultural climate and well-being of society and its members, economic threats concern market conditions, financial stability, and fiscal malaise. The domain-specificity of these threats with respect to liberalism and conservatism has been explored in some prior work (e.g., Choma et al., 2014; Choma & Hodson, 2017; Eadeh & Chang, 2020; Federico & Malka, 2021). Taken together, this research suggests that compared to liberals, conservatives are more sensitive to threats that violate social and ethical norms and thus reduce group cohesion. Although these findings characterize liberals as less risk-averse and threat-sensitive in this regard, social issues appear to elicit stronger reactions than economic issues in individuals across the political spectrum. This could be due to the relative complexity of economic issues, which may reduce people’s motivation to think about and react strongly to them (Crawford et al., 2017). In other words, economic issues may have a higher cognitive barrier to entry. By contrast, social issues tend to have more immediate relevance to personal values and epistemic beliefs about the nature of reality, and may thus elicit strong, gut check reactions (e.g., Feinberg et al., 2014). That is, certain issues may be highly motivating to individuals if they are perceived to violate closely-held beliefs about the nature of reality and how the world should be. Anecdotally, this dynamic is evident in the types of issues around which ‘culture wars’ tend to be fought (e.g., abortion, gay rights, gender ideology). In cognitively rigid individuals, threats to one’s values
and worldviews may provoke authoritarian responses. Social issues and the epistemic positions associated with them were therefore a central focus of the current investigation, as I expected these to best embody the threats of and to change spoken to by the DDT model. Conversely, I anticipated less mention of economic threats overall. Moreover, I expected respondents’ rationales related to social threats to contain epistemic concerns illustrative of the threat types featured in the DDT framework.

Prior work also suggests that authoritarianism is primarily related to collective, society-level threats. For example, Russo and colleagues (2020) found in an Italian sample that societal threat, authoritarianism (measured with the ACT Scale, Duckitt et al., 2010), and an interaction between ACT-Conservatism and societal threat, but not ACT-Traditionalism, predicted higher endorsement of antidemocratic political norms. Likewise, Feldman (2003) proposed that a preference for social conformity interacts with perceived threats to social cohesion and conformity to elicit authoritarian responses. This is quite similar to the premise of the Threat of Change-to-RWA pathway of the current model, although it captures only one side of the coin, so to speak. Indeed, Feldman (2013) has since argued that social scientists should acknowledge that threats take diverse forms and may be differently interpreted by people with different ideological alignments. The same issue, for example, may be viewed as threatening for vastly disparate reasons, which are likely informed by the individual’s preexisting ideological stance. More recently, Kahn and colleagues (2022) distinguished further dimensions of collective threats that appear to differently motivate liberals and conservatives, and which are relevant to the current framework. Across five studies (N=24,341), conservatives displayed greater concerns over local (versus global) threats and what the authors termed threats of commission, or threats from bad actors, such as terrorism, war, immigration, and crime. Conversely, liberals were more concerned
with global threats and threats of omission, or issues implying a need to act to remedy a problem, such as climate change and poverty, as well as racism, a commission-based threat. The authors ascribed these patterns of findings to concerns about physical safety and security for conservatives, and social justice concerns and a desire for retributive justice for liberals. Although they did not examine authoritarianism, the latter finding in particular aligns with the DDT framework’s Threat to Change-to-LWA pathway.

The current work aimed to establish yet another threat dimension: that of threats of change versus threats to change. Given the expansive multidimensional treatments of threat that already exist, what warrants the present focus over other categorical distinctions of threat type? In other words, why heap more terms onto the conceptual slush pile? Authoritarian ideologies, although distinguished by their ideological premises and the targets of their prejudice, reflect a common core of essentially antidemocratic stances. Likewise, cognitive rigidity appears to occupy a central role as a dispositional diathesis of authoritarianism. To better understand how these parallels are informed—and perhaps distinguished—by threat perceptions, I hoped to capture a core motivational distinction between liberals and conservatives deriving from their philosophies’ respective desire for social progress and resistance to cultural change. Open-ended items in the current study therefore targeted collective, societal-level threats to the United States. The reasons for this focus are twofold. First, given the political bent of the present research, it made sense to focus on threats to the nation for purposes of ecological validity. Political beliefs have a direct bearing on the institutions that control society, and which possess the power to enact change and/or encode traditions to law. Moreover, as stated previously, identification as liberal or conservative provides people with a top-down heuristic (Kalmoe, 2020) that directs their attention towards—and shapes their responses to—the issues over which their ideological
camp claims ownership (Brandt et al., 2019; Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Seeberg, 2017). To the extent that individuals consider such affordances, issue ownership appears to reflect the perception that one’s group is better equipped to collectively address these problems at the system level (Lambert et al., 2019). While individual, and certainly existential, threats may also bring drastic change (e.g., from whole to injured, living to dead), collective threats were of particular interest due to their implications for the state of society.

**Hypothesis 1: Liberals and Conservatives are Concerned about Different Threats**

As discussed, the core values associated with conservatism and liberalism are traditionalism and egalitarianism, respectively (Carney et al., 2008; Jost et al., 2003; Kalmoe, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2012). Whereas conservatives tend to be concerned with preserving or ‘conserving’ traditional lifestyles and the status quo, liberals display heightened concerns with equality and social progress. Accordingly, conservatives should be more threatened by the prospect of change, including reduced social cohesion and the loss of traditional values and lifestyles. By contrast, liberals should be sensitive to perceived barriers to progress and sources of inequality and injustice. The types of threats and rationales conservatives and liberals cited were expected to reflect the salience of these distinct worldviews. More specifically, I predicted that conservative respondents would mention epistemic concerns about what it means to be American alongside mention of radical progressivism (e.g., the Woke Mob, plus associated concepts/movements like Critical Race Theory, gay rights, Black Lives Matter) and immigration, in addition to existential threats like terrorism and violent crime. Although varied in content, these issues connote changing ways of thinking, political trends, and shifts in the cultural and demographic makeup of the nation and votership, as well as the erosion of traditions and principles that conservatives hold dear. Consequently, the rationales of respondents who cited
this manner of threat were expected to emphasize the threat of change in terms conveying loss, a sense of cultural decline, and resistance thereto.

Liberals, meanwhile, were expected to mention issues like recent Supreme Court rulings to rescind affirmative action and restrict abortion access, and perhaps extrapolate these concerns to what a Republican-stacked court might do in the future. Other issues that seemed likely to feature prominently in liberals’ responses included poverty and income inequality, healthcare disparities, racism, MAGA and far-right extremism, hate crimes, and hate speech. Again, while various, these threats were expected to be united by a common thread of concerns over social injustice, equality, and barriers to progress which, if present, would emerge in the rationales that liberal respondents provided (e.g., with references to inequality, limiting freedoms, bigotry, etc.). Additionally, existential threats that liberals seemed likely to cite included climate change and environmental damage, gun violence and mass shootings, and infectious diseases, of which liberals arguably took ownership during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are more difficult to categorize as threats to change, although it bears noting that many ‘pet’ liberal existential issues are spoken of in the media in terms of their disproportionate impact on underprivileged communities. Whether that would be the case in the current sample was unclear, however.

Given the polarization of American politics, for both liberal and conservative respondents, political opponents and associated causes seemed likely to feature as threats. This was especially true in the current study, as data were collected during a U.S. presidential election year. Indeed, it seemed possible that those who cited their political opponents as threats could have more authoritarian leanings. A corollary question, largely overlooked in prior research, concerned what threats and rationales self-described moderates would generate. Would they, for instance, be less likely to cite political opponents as threats, or perhaps view both sides as a
threat? While I did not tender specific predictions in this regard, I examined moderates’ responses in addition to liberals’ and conservatives’. Finally, I was interested to see to what extent the prospect of war (e.g., outbreak of WWIII, nuclear war) would factor into participants’ responses given growing regional instability in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. As an existential threat, war has been associated with conservatism in past work (e.g., Kahn et al., 2022). In light of the tenuous geopolitical climate, however, conflict and the specter of nuclear weapons seemed likely to loom large in respondents’ minds regardless of political ideology.

Conspiracy Theories and the ‘Fringe’

Another question regarded whether authoritarian individuals perceive similar but more extreme versions of threats common to non-authoritarian liberals and conservative, or different threats altogether. In some cases, for example, threat perceptions may be informed by conspiracy beliefs with little footing in reality (e.g., Q-Anon, ‘Pizza-gate,’ Jewish space lasers). These may include elements of fears about change (e.g., that a cabal of pedophilic elites has infiltrated the government and await their moment to seize control), but would be harder to categorize as such. To the extent that these conspiracies cropped up, I was interested in whether they would track with belief extremity on the political ideology items and short-form authoritarianism scales, as conspiracy beliefs tend to be more common on the political fringes (van Prooijen et al., 2015b). Still other threats, like immigration, seemed likely to be mentioned by both authoritarians and non-authoritarians, but with different rationales that could reflect different levels of conspiracist ideation. For example, the so-called Great Replacement narrative trumpeted by right-wing pundits implies an orchestrated effort to replace White, Christian voter demographics with racial minorities; this idea is more conspiratorial than the more conventional notion that illegal immigration could be problematic.
The fanaticism with which conspiracy theorists hold their beliefs shares parallels with authoritarianism, and indeed, some research suggests that ideological extremity and cognitive rigidity predict conspiracy beliefs (e.g., van Prooijen et al., 2015b). It seemed likely that these so-called ‘true believers’ would be similarly dogmatic and extreme in their political attitudes, and perhaps score highly on RWA or LWA. By contrast, some scholars have found asymmetries indicating that conservatives are more prone to conspiracy beliefs and conspiratorial thinking. For example, van der Linden and colleagues (2021) found higher conspiracy beliefs and worldviews among conservatives (versus liberals) across large samples of American adults (N=5,049). Moreover, these differences extended to extreme partisans, such that far-right individuals demonstrated markedly higher conspiracism than those on the far-left. Relatedly, a recent review found that conservatives were more susceptible than liberals to ‘fake news’ (Baptista & Gradim, 2022).

After answering open-ended items that asked them to generate three threats and rationales, respondents’ ranked a list of prominent threats (see Methods section) identified in prior work (Kahn et al., 2022). Again, I anticipated that conservative and liberal respondents’ respective beliefs would increase the salience of different threats, and thus elicit distinct patterns of rankings. In particular, I expected that conservatives would highly rank threats conveying disruption and change (i.e., threats of change), whereas liberals would rank threats with implications for equality and social justice (i.e., threats to change) higher. Specifically, I predicted that the following threats would be ranked higher by conservatives:

a. Terrorism, which represents a destabilizing influence on society and thus a threat of change.
b. Immigration, due to its implications for shifting demographics and the loss of majority status (i.e., the great replacement narrative), which may be perceived as a threat to social cohesion.

c. Crime, which is frequently construed as a sign of moral decline and societal degradation, as well as a threat to stability.

d. The Woke Mob, construed by conservatives as a virulent form of radical progressivism that threatens traditional American values.

Conversely, I predicted that liberals would rank the following threats higher:

a. Poverty, a symptom of economic inequality and barrier to upwards social mobility.

b. Inequality, for self-evident reasons.

c. Racism, a form of oppression that reflects non-egalitarian attitudes.

d. MAGA, a coalition of politicians and voters fronted by a leader with authoritarian impulses and regressive policy stances.

e. Religion, viewed by some as a source of intolerance and archaic principles.

f. Climate crisis, which represents a threat of omission (Kahn et al., 2022) resulting from a failure to adequately address environmental damage and pollution.

Threats that I expected respondents across the political spectrum to rank highly included:

a. Nuclear weapons

b. War, and possibly the

c. Climate crisis.

The latter represent existential threats, which tend to be more salient to conservatives overall (e.g., Jost et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the climate tends to be an issue over which liberals
claim ownership (e.g., Kahn et al., 2022), and these other issues concern all of humanity. The rationales provided by those who cited these issues as their top-ranked threats were therefore of particular interest, as they seemed likely candidates for directly comparing liberal and conservative motivations.

Study One was conducted online via a Qualtrics survey with a lay sample recruited on CloudResearch. After responding to open-ended items and ranking a list of threats, participants provided demographic information and completed brief measures of political ideology and left- and right-wing authoritarianism, which were used to categorically explore the threats spoken to by self-described liberals, moderates, and conservatives, and authoritarians versus non-authoritarians.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were N=256 American adults (128 female, 124 male, 4 non-binary) ranging in age from 18 to 76 (M=44.49, SD=15.61). All participants were recruited from CloudResearch’s Connect population, which allows users to approximate U.S. census demographics on a variety of parameters for improved generalizability, in exchange for $3.75. Participants completed the study from their personal devices via the Qualtrics survey platform. The sample was 68% White, 14% Black, 13% Latino, 4% Asian, and 1% Middle Eastern; less than 1% of participants indicated that they were multiracial. Participants were well-educated, with 89% reporting at least some college, and slightly politically liberal (M=3.65, SD=1.72 on a 7-point scale ranging from Extremely liberal to Extremely conservative). In response to a forced-choice item regarding political ideology, 48% of respondents self-identified as liberals (n=124),
27% as conservatives \((n=70)\), and 24% as moderates \((n=62)\). Five participants, all of whom were self-described liberals, reported affiliation with activist groups; of these, two volunteered with the Democratic National Committee, three with liberal voter mobilization campaigns (MoveOn, Vote Blue, Vote Save America), and one as part of an unspecified campaign against racism.

Twenty-four respondents who took less than 2 minutes to complete the study, answered less than two-thirds of the items, or stated that they were not 18 years of age, U.S. citizens, or non-English speakers were filtered out by CloudResearch’s quality control system. Additionally, four participants who responded ‘no’ to an item asking whether their responses should be used were excluded. Data collection was discontinued at 260 participants based on a principle of information saturation and correlational stability as opposed to statistical power analysis, following methodological recommendations for qualitative and quantitative research (e.g., Malterud et al., 2016; Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Preregistration information for this study can be found at: aspredicted.org/5HP_TGR. Supplementary materials and data can be found at: osf.io/rpucd/?view_only=464eeeb6b0942728b1639d7b6667724.

**Analytic Approach**

A qualitative approach was employed per recommendations for best practice in analyzing open-ended data (Willig & Rogers, 2017). More specifically, I performed a thematic content analysis on participants’ responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows for the extraction of patterns of meaning or themes from open-ended data, and is particularly useful for exploring subjective experiences and beliefs (Terry et al., 2017, in Willig & Rogers, 2017), like those related to perceived threats. Furthermore, it can be a useful tool for both deductive (i.e., theory-driven) and inductive (i.e., data-driven) investigations of textual data. The current study took an essentially deductive approach in the sense that the predicted distinction between threats
of and to change was based on prior evidence and theory. However, it also included inductive elements, as all coders besides the author analyzed the data and generated initial descriptive codes that informed subsequent rounds of analysis with no knowledge of the author’s \textit{a priori} hypotheses. Additionally, Lexos (Kleinman et al., 2019), an open-access lexicographical software, was used for data visualization purposes.

\textbf{Content Coding and Thematic Analysis.} Open-ended responses in Study One were content-coded and thematically analyzed across three rounds of coding. To facilitate later analyses and comparisons between individuals with different ideological backgrounds, each respondent was assigned a unique alphanumeric identifier (e.g., A1, A2, A3…Z8). In the initial round, the author and three research assistants (blind to hypotheses) independently reviewed the data and generated descriptive codes based on threat content (i.e., semantic content, the \textit{what}) and rationales (i.e., latent content, the \textit{why}) respondents provided for each cited threat. The coders then compared notes and came to a consensus around codes, as well as discussed possible emergent themes and subthemes. In order to reduce the potential for bias, for this and subsequent rounds of analysis research assistants were not made aware of respondents’ identification as liberal, moderate, or conservative.

Next, the lead author developed a coding scheme from the descriptive codes identified in the first round, with which coders performed a second round of independent analysis. In this round, raters color-coded transcripts of compiled responses from the whole sample, working line by line to identify examples of the concepts captured by descriptive codes and assign them the corresponding font color from the coding key. Coded and uncoded transcripts are available at https://osf.io/rpucd/?view_only=464eeeab6b0942728b1639d7b6667724. Specifically, coders were instructed to code the three threats and rationales each respondent generated, their response
to a follow-up question asking which of these three they considered the most urgent threat, as well as the rationale provided for their top-ranked threat from a subsequent threat ranking task. While each respondents’ top-ranked threat was also included in the transcript for reference, these were not counted in final coding for thematic analysis as they were selected from a predetermined list. A separate analysis of the threat rankings, including comparisons across liberals, moderates, and conservatives and authoritarians and non-authoritarians, was also performed.

Finally, the coders reconvened to compare coded transcripts, discuss their findings, and identify responses illustrative of the important themes and subthemes that emerged from both the threat content and rationales provided. Intercoder reliability was estimated by calculating Krippendorff’s alpha, a coefficient of agreement derived by dividing the number of points of agreement by the number of data points. In the preregistered plan, agreement was to be deemed acceptable if alpha coefficients ≥.80 on 95% or more of the codes (i.e., categories), a threshold established in prior work (Miles & Huberman, 1994; O’Connor & Joffe, 2020). Where disagreements arose, coders discussed and reconciled by consensus. Additionally, responses to political ideology and authoritarianism items were used to compare and contrast the types of threats generated by liberals, moderates, and conservatives, and by authoritarians and non-authoritarians. To facilitate these comparisons, frequency of mention of different threats was used as an imperfect metric to approximate their salience in the sample. Multiple mentions of the same issue by a single participant were counted only once to avoid artificially inflating their prominence in the broader sample. However, the implications of this response pattern, which was not uncommon, are considered further in the results and discussion sections.

**Measures**
Demographics. Participants reported their age, gender, race, ethnicity, education level, and income bracket. In addition to demographic items, participants responded to the following question, which was used in exploratory analyses to examine whether activist status was related to authoritarianism and/or the types of threats and rationales respondents cited: Are you a member of any political activism groups? If so, which?

Political Self-Identification/Party Affiliation. A single item asked participants to indicate their political party: Which political party do you identify with?

Political Ideology. Participants indicated how liberal/conservative they were across three items (1=Extremely liberal to 7=Extremely conservative) asking about symbolic, social and economic political views, respectively: “How would you describe your political views overall/in terms of social issues/economic issues?”

Forced-Choice Political Ideology. To facilitate comparisons between participants with different political ideologies, respondents were asked: “If you had to choose, which would you say best describes your political views: liberal/moderate/conservative?”

Open-ended Threat Items. Prior to demographic and political ideology items, respondents answered open-ended questions about personally salient concerns and threats. Participants were first presented with the following definition of threat: We are interested in learning about the threats that are on peoples’ minds. Threats come in many different forms, but often include things with the potential to cause distress (fear, anger, sadness) or harm to individuals, communities, institutions, and/or society as a whole.

Participants then provided written responses to the following open-ended questions:

1. In your view, what are the three greatest threats facing our nation as a whole?
a. Why do you consider this a threat? In other words, for what reasons do these issues concern you?

2. Of the threats you listed, which do you consider most urgent, dangerous, and concerning, and why?

**Threat Rankings.** Following these open-ended items, participants were asked to rank a list of twelve threats from 1=most to 12=least threatening. The final list of threats was selected based both on their prominence in earlier studies with comparable samples (Kahn et al., 2022) as well as their theoretical relevance. They were thus not only likely to be salient to respondents, but informative to how people across the political continuum construe threat. These included:

- a. Terrorism
- b. Climate crisis
- c. War
- d. Poverty
- e. Inequality
- f. Immigration
- g. Racism
- h. Crime
- i. Nuclear weapons
- j. Religion
- k. Political Extremism
  - a. MAGA
  - b. The Woke Mob
Additionally, for their top-rated threat, participants responded to the following open-ended item: Why do you consider this a threat? In other words, for what reasons does this issue concern you?

**Authoritarianism.** Two short-form versions of established right- and left-wing authoritarianism scales were included to examine whether threats salient to authoritarians qualitatively differed from those of non-authoritarians. The full scales can be found in Appendices A and B.

*Right-Wing Authoritarianism.* Participants responded to an 18-item (1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree) short-form version of the Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism Scale (ACT Scale; Duckitt et al., 2010), which assesses three dimensions of RWA. In prior work, the short-form ACT Scale and its subscales have shown high reliability, Cronbach’s α ranging from .76 to .91 (Manson, 2020). In the current sample, the scale demonstrated high reliability overall, α=.95, as did its subscales Authoritarianism (α=.88), Conservatism (α=.89), and Traditionalism (α=.90).

*Left-Wing Authoritarianism.* An abbreviated, 13-item version (1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree) of the LWA Index (LWA-13; Costello & Patrick, 2023) assessed LWA attitudes. The LWA-13 and its subscales Anti-Hierarchical Aggression, Anti-Conventionalism, and Top-Down Censorship have demonstrated adequate reliability in prior work, α ranging from .65 to .84 (Costello & Patrick, 2023). Its reliability in the current study was likewise good, α=.85.

**Results**

*Descriptive Statistics*
All quantitative analyses for this study were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28.0 (IBM Corp., 2021). Table 1 displays descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the continuous variables of interest (political ideology, RWA, LWA). The sample was slightly liberal, with means falling below the midpoint on overall political views ($M=3.65$, $SD=1.72$) and in terms of symbolic ($M=3.60$, $SD=1.80$), social ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.84$), and economic issues ($M=3.88$, $SD=1.76$). However, this trend was less pronounced than might have been expected given the preponderance of liberals in the sample. Moreover, sample means for both RWA ($M=3.67$, $SD=1.33$) and LWA ($M=42.61$, $SD=14.41$) fell slightly below their respective midpoints. Nonetheless, numerous individuals’ scores qualified them as RWAs ($n=40$) or LWAs ($n=42$), which I defined as scoring at least one standard deviation above the sample mean on either authoritarianism scale. A small subset of the sample ($n=3$) scored highly on both forms of authoritarianism, although these wild card authoritarians, to borrow Altemeyer’s (1996) term for such individuals, were rare. Consistent with the lopsided symmetry identified in prior work, although there were a number of authoritarians on both sides of the political spectrum, the proportion of authoritarians to non-authoritarians was higher among self-described conservatives (57%) than liberals (34%). In an unexpected finding, nine respondents scored high on the opposing version of authoritarianism from their espoused ideology, and a further eight self-described moderates were also counted among the authoritarians.

Age correlated positively with conservatism ($r=.22$, $p<.001$), ACT-Authoritarianism ($r=.17$, $p=.008$), and omnibus ACT scores ($r=.13$, $p=.042$), and was strongly negatively correlated with LWA ($r=-.52$, $p<.001$). Symbolic, social, and economic political views were highly intercorrelated ($r$s ranged from .81 to .98), and a composite political ideology score computed by taking their means (with higher scores indicating greater conservatism) was
strongly associated with higher RWA ($r=.70$, $p<.001$) and lower LWA ($r=-.53$, $p<.001$). As in prior work, RWA and LWA were negatively intercorrelated ($r=-.38$, $p<.001$).

Table 1

*Study 1: Means, Standard Deviation, and Correlations Among Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>44.49 (15.61)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Political Views</td>
<td>3.65 (1.72)</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. LWA</td>
<td>42.61 (14.41)</td>
<td>-.52***</td>
<td>-.53***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RWA (ACT)</td>
<td>3.67 (1.33)</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.70***</td>
<td>-.38***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ACT-Auth</td>
<td>4.10 (1.40)</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.63***</td>
<td>-.39***</td>
<td>.89***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ACT-Cons</td>
<td>3.49 (1.43)</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.58***</td>
<td>-.31***</td>
<td>.91***</td>
<td>.74***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ACT-Trad</td>
<td>3.41 (1.57)</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.68***</td>
<td>-.34***</td>
<td>.91***</td>
<td>.70***</td>
<td>.74***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Quantitative Analyses. A series of one-way ANOVAs were performed to examine whether political views were consistent with respondents’ identification as liberal ($n=124$), moderate ($n=62$), or conservative ($n=70$) and whether levels of LWA and RWA differed between these groups. Scores on continuous measures of ideology were largely consistent with participants’ categorical identification on the forced-choice versus Likert-style items. Indeed, a one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in political ideology between groups, $F(2,253)=599.89$, $p<.001$. Liberals ($M=2.18$, $SD=.76$) were significantly less politically conservative than conservatives ($M=5.86$, $SD=.74$) and moderates ($M=4.10$, $SD=.60$). Likewise, moderates were significantly less conservative than conservatives ($p<.001$). Moreover,
participants’ political party tended to be categorically consistent with their response to the
forced-choice political ideology item (Democrat $n=121$, Republican $n=63$, Independent $n=56$).

With respect to authoritarianism, significant group differences emerged across both
forms. Predictably, LWA scores differed significantly between groups, $F(2, 253)=38.81, p<.001$.
LWA was significantly higher among liberals ($M=49.53, SD=12.60$) than conservatives
($M=33.63, SD=13.10$) and moderates ($M=38.92, SD=12.26$). In turn, moderates scored
marginally higher on LWA than conservatives ($p=.045$). Likewise, RWA scores differed
significantly between groups, $F(2, 253)=86.56, p<.001$. RWA was significantly higher among
conservatives ($M=4.82, SD=.83$) than liberals ($M=2.85, SD=1.19$) and moderates ($M=3.99,
$SD=.87$), and lower among liberals than moderates ($p<.001$).

**Hypothesis 1: Liberals and Conservatives are Concerned about Different Threats**

**Thematic Analysis.** Responses to the open-ended questions were inductively content-
coded and assorted into categories by four independent raters, who then compared and came to
consensus around descriptive codes, themes, and subthemes. An initial round of data
familiarization and independent analysis culminated in a total of 28 descriptive codes. However,
several of these suffered from conceptual ambiguity and overlap, pointing to a need to further
refine the coding frame. Some categories were mentioned by a slim minority (<5%) of
respondents, for example, or almost exclusively in connection with a more prominent theme.
Where appropriate, the former were collapsed into conceptually related categories to improve
intercoder reliability, and the latter were deemed subthemes. For example, in an initial round of
analysis discrepancies arose between coders as a result of overlap between specific fears of crime
due to uncontrolled immigration and broader references to crime. While responses in the former
category could accurately be described as pertaining to crime, they were more appropriately
coded as examples of the ‘safety and security’ subtheme of immigration. This and similar issues (e.g., overlap between economic threats and the ‘resource depletion’ subtheme of immigration) were resolved through discussion and further clarification of the coding manual. A second round of independent coding was then performed based on the revised coding frame.

In total, respondents provided 1,280 textual data points across the three open-ended threat items, a follow-up item asking which of their three spontaneously generated threats they considered most urgent, and rationales for their top-ranked threat. However, as this question format encouraged participants to devote multiple lines—and in some cases every line—of their response to the same or related threats, each threat category was counted a single time per respondent not to misrepresent its prominence in the broader sample. Each respondent’s data was transcribed as a block of text with a single line separating each item response, culminating in a transcript with 256 cases with alphanumeric identifiers. Coders were instructed to code the entire transcript and to treat sentence clauses as response units for compound responses.¹ To determine intercoder agreement, I calculated Krippendorff’s alpha, an agreement coefficient for multiple raters, using Hayes and Krippendorff’s (2007) KALPHA macro for SPSS. Table 2 displays the final list of 24 themes and subthemes, along with agreement statistics and frequencies of mention across the sample. Intercoder agreement was generally acceptable, with Krippendorff’s alpha, ranging from .64 to .99 for all categories, indicating a substantial level of agreement. Table 2 displays Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients for each category. Overall, agreement coefficients averaged .86 across all codes, and exceeded 80% agreement on 75% of categories. Although this did not meet the preregistered threshold of 80% agreement for 95% of categories advised in prior

¹ One coder initially misinterpreted these instructions, leading to over-coding on the basis of one- or two-word phrases. This issue was improved, if not wholly resolved, by reviewing the coding instructions.
work (Miles & Huberman, 1994; O’Connor & Joffe, 2020), all codes but one exceeded the less conservative minimum threshold ($\alpha \geq .67$) proposed by Krippendorff (2004). Thus, I opted to proceed. Where disagreements about how to code a particular case arose, they were resolved through discussion and consensus among the raters.

Table 2

Themes, Subthemes, Frequencies and Intercoder Agreement Statistics ($N=256$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Subthemes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Krippendorff’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate Change</td>
<td>83 (32%)</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>80 (31%)</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>58 (23%)</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear War/Weapons</td>
<td>29 (11%)</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>50 (20%)</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberattacks &amp; AI</td>
<td>24 (9%)</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political &amp; Ideological Opponents</td>
<td>83 (32%)</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponents as Fascists</td>
<td>14 (6%)</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration &amp; Border Control</td>
<td>68 (27%)</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Depletion</td>
<td>37 (15%)</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety &amp; Security</td>
<td>35 (14%)</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Culture</td>
<td>14 (6%)</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Dysfunction</td>
<td>58 (23%)</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarization &amp; Division</td>
<td>47 (18%)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat Category</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Extremism</td>
<td>14 (6%)</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Entities &amp; Influence</td>
<td>35 (14%)</td>
<td>.94*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinformation &amp; Misinformation</td>
<td>14 (6%)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy &amp; Inflation</td>
<td>96 (38%)</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>48 (19%)</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Rights &amp; Freedoms</td>
<td>35 (15%)</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>33 (13%)</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice &amp; Discrimination</td>
<td>31 (12%)</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health &amp; Healthcare</td>
<td>30 (12%)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral &amp; Ideological Decay</td>
<td>36 (14%)</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* One coder acknowledged that they forgot to code for foreign entities, which they instead coded as political opponents (this also contributed to that category’s relatively low alpha). When this coder was excluded from calculations for this category, α=.94.

**Threat Content and Rationales**

In the following sections, I report emergent themes and subthemes and draw attention to differences in threat content and rationales provided by liberals, conservatives, and moderates and authoritarians and non-authoritarians. I report these across five content categories organized in approximate order of how frequently respondents cited them: *existential threats, political threats, economic threats, threats to equality and social justice, and perceptions of societal decay and decline.* For each category, I provide a definition, discuss the themes and subthemes that comprised it, and present examples from the data that illustrate those themes. Additionally, I compared to what extent and in what manner these threats were discussed across adherents of
different political ideologies. The final list of themes and subthemes, along with exemplars for each, are reported in Table 3.

Overall, open-ended responses offered mixed evidence for the DDT’s central premise and Hypothesis 1. As predicted, liberals and conservatives tended to cite different threats and rationales for the threats they generated, albeit not exclusively. Whereas liberals commonly reported threats that fell under the political, economic, and injustice and inequality categories, conservatives tended to focus on existential threats, a different array of political threats, and perceptions of societal degradation. Although numerous themes emerged that diverged from predictions and the proposed threat of/to change framework, namely the preponderance of existential and economic concerns across the sample, liberal and conservative rationales often coalesced around themes of change and barriers to progress. In particular, whereas conservatives and RWAs routinely connected fears of cultural shifts and perceived decline to various threats, liberals almost never framed their responses in these terms. Conversely, liberal and LWA respondents displayed unique concerns over inequality, human rights, and personal liberties, and regularly framed their responses in terms of their implications for social justice. As sampled responses for each theme demonstrate, however, neither liberals nor conservatives spoke uniformly in terms of threats of and to change.

In addition to the themes and subthemes elaborated on in subsequent sections, several response patterns emerged that were potentially revealing. For example, numerous respondents devoted multiple lines to the same or closely related threats, suggesting that these were foremost in their mind and perhaps took precedence over other issues. Unsurprisingly, in many cases these individuals went on to rank the same or most similar threat from the provided list as their number one concern. That these respondents were either unwilling or unable to move past these
particular threats could be interpreted as evidence of their salience. However, this observation should be interpreted with caution, as this response pattern could also indicate low-effort responding. Another possibility is that these individuals were generally unthreatened, and so struggled to identify more than one threat. Nonetheless, several respondents who fit this trend cited the interconnectedness of various issues as a rationale for their singular focus, and others characterized their pet issue as the root of many, if not all, other ills facing the country. In other words, this pattern cannot be attributed to a lack of imagination alone. Another distinct pattern was the tendency for some participants to first cite epistemic threats in response to the open-ended items, but then endorse existential threats as top threats on the ranking item. This suggests that although meaning-based or ideological threats were preeminent in their minds, they tended to discount these issues when presented with existential threats. The rationales respondents provided for their top-ranked threats were illuminating in this regard. Put blithely, these respondents considered survival a basic prerequisite for meeting the epistemic need for certainty spoken to by their other responses—a not unreasonable conclusion. Figure 1 provides a visualization of the most frequently occurring terms in the transcript, articles (e.g., am, are, the, if, it, etc.) excluded. Figures 2, 3, and 4 depict similar visualizations decomposed into liberals, conservatives, and moderates. Bolded and enlarged words reflect greater frequency of mention. Graphics were produced using Lexos (Kleinman et al., 2019), an open-access lexicographical software. While these should not be taken as formal analyses, they may serve as helpful visual aids for the themes and subthemes discussed in what follows.

Figure 1

*Word Cloud Depicting Frequently Mentioned Terms, Sample Wide (N=256)*
Figure 2

Word Cloud Depicting Terms Used most Frequently by Liberals (n=124)

Figure 3

Word Cloud Depicting Terms Used most Frequently by Conservatives (n=70)
Figure 4

Word Cloud Depicting Terms Used most Frequently by Moderates (n=62)
Table 3

*Themes, Subthemes, Exemplars, and Frequencies (Percentages) by Liberals (n=124), Conservatives (n=70), and Moderates (n=62)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Subtheme</th>
<th>Exemplars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Climate Change</td>
<td>“Climate change worsens pre-existing social inequalities and discrepancies, disproportionately impacting marginalized communities such as low-income populations, indigenous groups, and inhabitants of developing nations.” (O5, Liberal, LWA/RWA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal $n=58$ (47%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative $n=7$ (10%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate $n=19$ (31%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $n=83$ (32%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Crime</td>
<td>“I personally live in what used to be a very safe community, but which is now overrun with thefts and assaults.” (J9, Moderate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal $n=29$ (23%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative $n=28$ (40%)</td>
<td>“Murder because there are so many crimes committed, like abortion, the murder of babies.” (C3, Conservative, RWA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate $n=23$ (37%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $n=80$ (31%)</td>
<td>“Mass shooters, because I think everyone has a right to feel safe at all times and that's impossible with the rise of mass shootings.” (I2, Liberal, LWA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal $n=29$ (23%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conservative $n=15$ (21%) “War has the potential to affect everyone across the world, leading to mistrust and broken relations between countries and allied nations. Also, presents the possibility to incite the use of nuclear weapons that can destroy everything at any time.” (F3, Liberal)

Moderate $n=14$ (23%)

Total $n=58$ (23%)

1.3a Nuclear War/Weapons “As long as there are nuclear weapons and one of those countries have an unstable society, there is a threat of nuclear war.” (K10, Moderate)

Liberal $n=11$ (9%)

Conservative $n=11$ (16%) “Nuclear Weapons: In the wrong hands this could lead to the end of life as we know it.” (N9, Conservative, RWA)

Moderate $n=7$ (11%)

Total $n=29$ (11%)

1.4 Terrorism “Terrorism: It has the ability to cause fear, harm innocent people, and disrupt societies.”

Liberal $n=21$ (17%) (N6, Conservative)

Conservative $n=17$ (24%) “Terrorism: Our way of life is threatened.” (F9, Moderate, RWA)

Moderate $n=12$ (19%) “Right-wing terrorism will use violence against targets to kill political enemies, terrify those who are not White and Christian, and make it a dangerous place to live.” (H2, Liberal, LWA)

Total $n=50$ (20%)

1.4a Cyberattacks & AI “Cyberterrorism…a major grid takedown would very possibly result in societal collapse.”

Liberal $n=15$ (12%) (M1, Liberal)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political &amp; Ideological Opps</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative n=6 (9%)</td>
<td>&quot;Cyberattacks: Stock market trading is mostly done with AI, a flash crash can be induced with the newest technology, crippling our economy and reducing our ability to defend ourselves and others.&quot; (D3, Conservative)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate n=3 (5%)</td>
<td>&quot;MAGA seems to be a hate group that would be glad to strip the US of any positive changes and would be excited to oppress minorities and elect an authoritarian leader.&quot; (J2, Liberal, LWA)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total n=24 (9%)</td>
<td>&quot;Wokeness: destroying the wholesome values and morals with phobic thinking and imposing their thinking on the rest of the people in the country as to what their bent ideals are.&quot; (L9, Conservative)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal n=58 (47%)</td>
<td>Conservative n=15 (21%) Liberal, LWA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate n=10 (16%)</td>
<td>&quot;Fascism: This is a threat to the safety of minorities and people who do not support a right wing agenda. It could lead to violence and other disruptions. It also can lead to a loss of rights as we have already seen women and LGTB+ people come into the crosshairs.&quot; (V10, Liberal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n=83 (32%)</td>
<td>Moderate n=0 (0%) (V10, Liberal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n=14 (6%)</td>
<td>&quot;&quot;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

90
2.2a Polarization & Division  
“Polarization: The country has become entrenched in mindsets that pit them against their fellow citizens in a volatile and potentially dangerous way…. Polarization is the most urgent because it could erupt into violence.” (L5, Moderate)

Liberal $n=25$ (20%)  
Conservative $n=8$ (11%)  
Moderate $n=14$ (23%)  
Total $n=47$ (18%)

2.2b Ideological Extremism  
“Extremists have power now instead of being shut down for their stupidity. For example, in certain states anyone can ban any book for any reason. This is a way their keep their children from being exposed to other ideas that may cause the new generation to stray from their ideals.” (V3, Liberal)

Liberal $n=9$ (7%)  
Conservative $n=3$ (4%)  
Moderate $n=2$ (3%)  
Total $n=14$ (6%)

2.2c Government Dysfunction  
“The government does nothing for their citizens. Instead, working against their best interests.” (L8, Conservative)

Liberal $n=26$ (21%)  
Conservative $n=21$ (30%)  
Moderate $n=11$ (18%)  
Total $n=58$ (23%)

“We make no progress on important issues due to partisan conflict.” (P1, Liberal, LWA)

“Both parties have become a joke - the inability of our government to do their job directly affects the people living here, when they're bickering amongst each other in a reality television standoff.” (T6, Moderate)
2.3 Immigration & Border Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Liberal n=8 (6%)</th>
<th>Conservative n=39 (56%)</th>
<th>Moderate n=21 (34%)</th>
<th>Total n=68 (27%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

“Millions of illegals pouring across our borders, also drugs and human trafficking flooding our country: The country cannot take the millions flooding into our country costing billions in support and services which is bankrupting state governments and businesses not to mention the damage of deaths caused by the flood of Fentanyl and the destruction of our way of life by people who don't understand the principles upon which this country was founded.” (G8, Conservative)

2.3a Loss of Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Liberal n=0 (0%)</th>
<th>Conservative n=12 (17%)</th>
<th>Moderate n=2 (3%)</th>
<th>Total n=14 (6%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

“Illegal immigration is at the root of all my worries. Our way of life is degrading by criminal activity, including cartel activity, illegal drugs, homelessness, etc.” (O1, Moderate)

2.3b Safety & Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Liberal n=3 (2%)</th>
<th>Conservative n=22 (31%)</th>
<th>Moderate n=10 (16%)</th>
<th>Total n=35 (14%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

“Immigration: It will redo the fabric of American life, result in anarchy, and precipitate the dissolution of the United States government.” (K2, Conservative)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.3c Resource Depletion</th>
<th>“Immigration due to the criminal element and the loss of resources Americans need…immigration is infecting the country with an unwanted element.” (I7, Conservative, RWA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal ( n=3 ) (2%)</td>
<td>Liberal ( n=3 ) (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative ( n=23 ) (33%)</td>
<td>Conservative ( n=23 ) (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate ( n=11 ) (18%)</td>
<td>Moderate ( n=11 ) (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ( n=37 ) (15%)</td>
<td>Total ( n=37 ) (15%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4 Foreign Entities & Influence  
“If a hostile, foreign nation influences our elections, it can put leaders in place who will not look out for the best interests of the American people…one bad actor in a high position of power can undermine the safety and strength of our nation.” (R1, Moderate)

| Liberal \( n=18 \) (15%) | Liberal \( n=18 \) (15%)                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Conservative \( n=12 \) (17%) | Conservative \( n=12 \) (17%)                                                                                                                                                           |
| Moderate \( n=6 \) (10%) | Moderate \( n=6 \) (10%)                                                                                                                                                               |
| Total \( n=36 \) (14%) | Total \( n=36 \) (14%)                                                                                                                                                                 |

2.5 Disinfo & Misinfo  
“Misinformation: Hard to progress with a population that poorly understands issues throughout the country if a portion of the population is being fed lies.” (W8, Liberal)

| Liberal \( n=10 \) (8%) | Liberal \( n=10 \) (8%)                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Conservative \( n=2 \) (3%) | Conservative \( n=2 \) (3%)                                                                                                                                                             |
| Moderate \( n=2 \) (3%) | Moderate \( n=2 \) (3%)                                                                                                                                                                |
| Total \( n=14 \) (6%) | Total \( n=14 \) (6%)                                                                                                                                                                 |
3.1 Economy & Inflation

“The U.S. economy is continuously going downhill with less and less money going to the people. More people are having trouble finding a job and making a living wage.” (Q6, Liberal $n=35$ (28%) Moderate, RWA)

Conservative $n=30$ (43%) Moderate $n=31$ (50%) “The country is becoming a place I no longer recognize. People considered rich are unable to afford living.” (V6, Conservative)

Total $n=96$ (38%)

3.2 Poverty

“Poverty prevents us from moving forward with our lives and this can affect those around us, including our children. As a society, we need to work towards alleviating poverty as much as possible.” (H7, Liberal)

Liberal $n=21$ (17%) Conservative $n=11$ (16%) Moderate $n=16$ (26%) “Poverty leads to crime which destabilizes the community. Poor people try to migrate somewhere better, this leads to undocumented immigration. And the dominos fall down the list. The only way for everyone to be included, counted, stabilized is to work to eliminate poverty and provide education.” (M3, Conservative)

Total $n=48$ (19%)

4.1 Loss of Rights & Freedoms

“Loss of civil rights: abortion is now illegal, it might become illegal to exist as a transgender person. Civil rights loss is the most concerning to me because it means I could be legislated out of existence as I am today.” (S1, Liberal, LWA)

Liberal $n=26$ (21%) Conservative $n=7$ (10%) Moderate $n=2$ (3%)
“Rescinding of rights because every day it seems new laws and bills are passed that backtrack on the progress America has made over the past.” (S10, Liberal)

4.2 Prejudice & Discrimination

“We have regressed back to 1930-50s levels of racism, Nazis are back and need to be culled.” (D10, Liberal, LWA)

“Discrimination because it violates the basic human rights and dignity of people who are treated unfairly or differently based on their characteristics, such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation.” (M9, Liberal)

4.3 Inequality

“The widening gap of inequality and poverty is a growing concern. The country has people becoming insanely wealthy while more and more people are ending up homeless. Without social support they will band together and push back on the governance that is failing them. This fracture will could lead to a larger conflict inside the country.” (V1, Liberal)

“Inequality concerns me because people deserve equal opportunities for jobs and educations. We all need access to healthcare and housing.” (Z2, Liberal)
4.4 Public Health & Healthcare

“Mental health is one of the biggest threats because a lot of people don't have access to the care they need. The recent surge in mass shootings and homeless are results from mental health issues.” (H1, Moderate, RWA)

Conservative $n=5$ (7%) Moderate $n=10$ (16%) Total $n=30$ (12%)

5.1 Moral & Ideological Decay

“Loss of Christianity and morals: we are lost without the moral code we have become great on.” (I3, Conservative, RWA)

Conservative $n=15$ (21%) Moderate $n=7$ (11%) Total $n=36$ (14%)

“Family collapse – without functional, moral families, we cannot have good citizens coming forward.” (S7, Conservative)
Content Category 1: Existential Threats

Existential threats to safety, security, and survival were among the most commonly cited across the sample. Responses in this content category comprised concerns about climate change and damage to the environment, the prospect of war and nuclear war, crime, terrorism, and cyberattacks. Making plain the existential fears at the heart of these threats, rationales in this category tended to center on the potential for death and destruction. Despite this predominant focus, many responses also spoke to the drastic changes such threats would impose, and others to the likelihood that their effects would be disproportionately harmful to disadvantaged communities. Thus, even where participants cited existential threats, they often framed them in terms of their implications for societal cohesion (i.e., threat of change) and equality (i.e., threat to progress), which sometimes, but not always, corresponded to political ideology as predicted. I draw attention to these premises while acknowledging that existential dread appeared to primarily underlie this threat category.

Theme 1.1: Climate change causes widespread death and destruction.

Climate change (i.e., climate crisis, global warming) was the single most frequently cited threat across the sample, mentioned by 32% \((n=83)\) of respondents. On the whole, rationales made clear that respondents considered this an existential threat capable of causing widespread death and destruction. Indeed, many respondents offered some form of “it is destroying the world” (A9, Liberal) or, more colorfully (and in all caps, in original form), “the planet is crumbling around us” (B9, Liberal, LWA) by way of rationale for this threat. Respondent D8 (Moderate, RWA) wrote that “climate change is the most dangerous because it can lead to loss of lives,” and respondent F8 (Liberal, LWA) cited the “death of millions” as a rationale. Moreover, although the open-ended items asked specifically about threats to the United States, many
respondents noted that the climate crisis is a global issue that affects all of humanity. Numerous respondents used the term ‘global warming,’ for example, and respondent F5 (Liberal, LWA) stated that climate change “can affect everybody no matter where they live…it’s not a singular country’s issue, it’s a world issue.” Likewise, respondent U1 (Liberal) wrote that if climate change “is not fixed, the entire world is in jeopardy,” and respondent P10 (Liberal, LWA) characterized it as a “threat to the entire planet and a possible extinction event.”

In a similar vein, people also cited generative concerns about what climate change might mean for future generations. For example, respondent E6 (Moderate) considered global warming the most urgent threat “by far because of the effects it has on us and the world, including…future generations.” Similarly, another participant cited the “impact on young people who deserve better” (T4, Liberal), and respondent O9 (Moderate, LWA) wrote that “it will impact the future generation.” Interestingly, several respondents extrapolated the effects of climate change to other potential threats, some of which were related to equality and scarcity of resources. For example, respondent L3 (Liberal) argued that “climate issues…underlie other problems: mass migrations, wars over natural global resources, poverty due to loss of crops and homes, etc.” Respondent R1 (Moderate) likewise predicted a “serious impact on our nation, making natural disasters more common…parts of our country uninhabitable, and reducing our ability to farm crops and raise livestock” and expressed worries that “the effects will be irreversible.”

With respect to threats of change and barriers to progress, both emerged from responses, although these did not always track with liberalism and conservatism as predicted. For instance, as a rationale for the threat of climate change, respondent G7 (Liberal) simply wrote “change.” More verbosely, respondent R8 (Liberal, LWA) wrote, “if we do not do something drastic now, we might never be able to go back to the way things were.” Although the manner of change
spoken to by the term *climate change* is somewhat different from the cultural shifts and threats to social cohesion described as threats *of* change in the DDT framework, respondents also acknowledged that ecological disaster could impart such changes. Respondent H2 (Liberal, LWA), for example, asserted that “climate change affects every facet of human life on Earth, from food growth, to housing, to health” and pointed to its “vast implications across every part of life in every part of the world.” Making direct reference to its implications for order and social cohesion, respondent A8 (Liberal) expressed concerns that “if climate change radically alters the climate and geography, stability won't be possible” and forecasted “shortages of essentials and a breakdown of society if our norms and needs are suddenly thrown into disarray.” However, references to threats *of* change in this category were made more often by liberals than conservatives, who tended to mention climate change far less often overall.

Climate change was also described as a source of inequality and suffering, in line with the threats *to* change and barriers to progress described by the DDT as motivators of LWA. For example, respondent O5 (Liberal, *wild card authoritarian*) wrote, “climate change worsens pre-existing social inequalities and discrepancies, disproportionately impacting marginalized communities such as low-income populations, indigenous groups, and inhabitants of developing nations.” Relatedly, respondent H2’s (Liberal, LWA) reference to “food growth,” “housing,” and “health” could be interpreted as connecting to more equitable resource distribution, a theme that also emerged in reference to other threat types. Other respondents attributed the climate crisis to a mix of complacency and malfeasance from privileged elites, such as respondent P7 (Moderate, LWA), who wrote, “no one cares nor wants to help fix our planet that rich people are constantly ruining.” That these respondents scored high on LWA (and one on both LWA and RWA), also generally aligns with the predictions of the DDT’s threat *to* change-to-LWA pathway.
Because climate change and the environment tend to be issues over which liberals claim ownership (e.g., Kahn et al., 2022; Seeberg, 2017), it was little surprise that this threat resonated with liberals ($n=58$), as is evident from the sampled responses. However, the theme was not exclusive to left-wingers, as moderates ($n=19$) and a few conservatives ($n=7$) also cited the climate crisis as a concern. As such, it was a potentially content-rich theme for examining the different motivations of liberals and conservatives. I have already sampled a number of liberal and LWA responses, as well as several self-described moderates who scored high on LWA. These moderates’ and non-authoritarian moderates’ responses seemed to evince generativity concerns, although whether this pattern was consistent enough to mark it a theme specific to moderates is questionable. Other moderates, like respondent H3 (Moderate), spoke to the personal (versus collective or global) impact of climate change: “it affects me in my daily life such that it causes actual discomfort and has caused me economic damages.” Another moderate, respondent G4, bemoaned people’s complacency about the issue, stating that “no matter how hard people have spoken up about the climate and its deteriorating conditions, no one is really listening.” Far fewer conservatives mentioned the climate crisis. Those who did tended to emphasize the implications of climate change for severe weather patterns and natural disasters alongside existential concerns. For example, respondent L1 (Conservative) cited “rising temperatures, extreme weather, and pollution” as threats to “human health, ecosystems, and infrastructure.” By contrast, respondent Y1 (Conservative) took a different tack: “the government isn’t doing much to help matters.” In other words, conservative rationales for this threat did not vastly differ from those of many liberals in the sample except in terms of their comparative rarity.
With respect to LWAs and RWAs, climate change was more commonly mentioned by LWAs ($n=24$) than RWAs ($n=11$). Several responses typical of LWAs are referenced above. Additionally, other LWAs characterized climate change as a dire existential threat that could, for example, “kill most living things on Earth if allowed to continue” (N5, Liberal, LWA).

Somewhat less fatalistically, respondent I9 (Liberal, LWA) stated that it “takes a heavy toll on the population, economically and physically.” Overall, LWAs did not appear to be more or less likely to cite climate change as a threat than non-authoritarian liberals. Where they did, however, their responses tended to be most emblematic of the threats to change and barriers to progress identified by the DDT model. Few RWAs cited climate change as a threat, several of whom were moderates and liberals. Of those that did, F9 (Moderate, RWA) stated that climate change “may cause massive flooding and erosion.” Respondent H6 (Conservative, RWA) wrote that “climate change is very real and needs to be addressed” and expressed concerns about the “outdoors…wilting away and unhealthy for all.” Displaying the conservative ideal of preservation, respondent Y10 (Conservative, RWA) stated that “climate change needs to be worked on to preserve the Earth and enable us to keep enjoying the gifts it gives.” Interestingly, two liberals respondents who scored high on RWA also referenced climate change. Respondent N7 (Liberal, RWA) described climate change as “the largest, most pervasive threat to the natural environment and societies that the world has ever experienced” and asserted that it “directly contributes to humanitarian emergencies.” Likewise, respondent N10 (Liberal, RWA) wrote, “climate change…poses a risk to ecosystems and [the] overall well-being of people and the planet.” If there was a subtheme connecting RWAs’ responses (and differentiating them from LWAs), it would be their greater emphasis on nature. This could be interpreted as a reflection of
their enhanced conservation motivation and aversion towards change, although as these
extamples illustrate, they also spoke to the human impact of the climate crisis.

**Theme 1.2 Crime presents a threat to safety, security, and property.**

Respondents identified various forms of crime as threats to safety, security, and their
livelihoods. These responses fell into two subcategories: general crime and its causes, namely
desperation, and gun violence and mass shootings, the latter two of which appeared frequently
enough in connection to one another to warrant their own separate subtheme. Across these
subthemes, concerns over safety and security reigned supreme, and were in some cases severe.
Indeed, several respondents made statements to the effect of “I feel it's not safe to go anywhere”
(C7, Moderate). Capturing the broader sentiments of the sample, respondent Y10 (Conservative,
RWA) wrote that an “increase in crime…has led to tragic events like loss of life and property,
making the nation unsafe and putting fear in the lives of the citizens.” Overall, crime was
mentioned by 31% of the sample (n=80), most often by conservatives (n=28) and moderates
(n=23), although numerous liberals (n=29) referred to it as well. Proportionally, conservatives
and moderates were particularly concerned about this issue.

**Subtheme 1.2a: Crime as a symptom of desperation.** Many respondents acknowledged
that desperate times breed desperate acts, although they differed in the extent to which they
attributed blame to the bad actors. Respondent C9 (Moderate), for example, wrote that “people
who have no criminal records are doing crimes out of desperation” and conceded “I understand
it, though I don’t like it.” By contrast, respondent C8 (Moderate) expressed concerns on the
behalf of “hard-working people living in fear for safety of self and property.” Likewise, J9
(Moderate) described crime as a “threat to law-abiding citizens’ safety, property, and…lives.”
For those who elaborated on its societal origins, rationales tended to attribute crime to
desperation born of harsh economic conditions and, overwhelmingly for conservatives, immigration. I revisit both connections in greater detail in later sections. In general, liberal and conservative values appeared to color many responses in this category. One respondent (C3, Conservative, RWA), for instance, attributed crime to “so many [people] in the world desperate to survive” but went on to provide examples reflecting traditional pro-life stances rather than acts of desperation: “murder because there are so many crimes committed, like abortion, the murder of babies.” Others spoke to threats of change, like respondent M3 (Conservative), who argued that crime “destabilizes the community,” and connected it to the issue of poverty. Participants also reported anecdotal accounts of worsening crime rates, for example: “I personally live in what used to be a very safe community, but which is now overrun with thefts and assaults” (J9, Moderate; emphasis mine). In this regard, these responses were related to the threats of change highlighted by the DDT framework. Other responses, particularly those related to immigration, were even more demonstrative of this trend, while still others (e.g., poverty and inequality) drew connections to threats to change, as I discuss later.

**Subtheme 1.2b: Gun violence and mass shootings.** Gun violence, and in particular mass shootings, featured commonly in responses across the sample. These two issues were often mentioned in conjunction with one another. Respondent E9 (Moderate), for example, cited gun violence as a threat and wrote that “children…should not have to fear” being “killed at church, school, or just out having fun.” Mirroring this sentiment, respondent I2 (Liberal, LWA) wrote that “everyone has a right to feel safe…that’s impossible with the rise of mass shootings.” Elsewhere, references to mass shootings tended to fall along partisan lines, with liberals often, but not always, attributing these tragedies to access to guns and conservatives to mental health issues. For example, respondent K1 (Conservative, RWA) blamed mass shootings on “people
with mental illnesses who cannot get the mental help they need.” Likewise, C8 (Moderate) wrote that “the laws on the books are not implemented” nor “severe enough to stop shootings” and argued that “more laws won’t help the mental health aspect.” By contrast, respondent T3 (Liberal) wrote as a rationale for the threat of gun violence that the U.S. “has more mass shootings than anywhere on Earth.” Similarly, respondent V3 (Liberal) attributed mass shootings to firearm access and lax gun laws, writing, “it’s pathetic that our nation allows this instead of instituting harsh gun control laws.” These concerns were not exclusive to liberals, however; for example, respondent B4 (Moderate) cited a “lack of gun control” as the source of “gun violence [that] endangers our children.”

**Theme 1.3: War and the specter of nuclear annihilation.**

War was the third most frequently mentioned (n=58) existential threat, rationales for which tended to center on one of two subthemes or contain elements of both: the sense that America entering a war would spark World War III, and the fear of nuclear escalation, often due to the former. Like climate change, most references to war—nuclear and otherwise—made plain that respondents considered it an existential threat. Again, however, threats of change and, to a lesser extent, barriers to progress were present in the sample’s responses.

**Subtheme 1.3a: War leading to the outbreak of World War III.** Mentions of war frequently centered on the assumption that America’s next conflict would amount to World War III. Numerous respondents connected this fear to credible concerns over the fractious geopolitical climate and simultaneous ongoing conflicts. They spoke plainly to the dire existential consequences such a conflict might have. Respondent A1 (Liberal, LWA), for example, wrote that “increasing tensions between different countries could kill millions,” and C6 (Moderate) cited the “threat of world-wide destruction.” Similarly, A5 (Liberal) pointed out that
modern warfare “can absolutely devastate a population.” Respondents also cited a number of potential belligerents, the most frequently mentioned of which were Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and a potential anti-NATO coalition of the same. For example, respondent D1 (Moderate) described war as “expensive in cost and lives” but suggested that “between Russia and the Middle East, we have many conflicts we may need to join for the good of the globe that would be hard on the country” (emphasis mine). In addition to acknowledging the global and local consequences of war, this response conveys a sense of duty on America’s behalf to join an eventual conflict. Likewise, respondent A1 (Liberal) referred to “the conflicts in Israel and looming threat of Russia” and stated that “war would be disastrous for the whole planet,” while O7 (Liberal, LWA) wrote, “Russia, China, and Iran continue to be aggressive.” Citing the same belligerents, respondent O6 (Liberal) expressed concerns over “Russia, China, North Korea and some Middle Eastern countries” and stated that “war is a terrible thing that has the potential to destabilize our society.” Additionally, they wrote that “included in this is the threat of a civil war or insurrection ignited by political division.”

As the previous example demonstrates, threats of change were evident in respondents’ rationales, although these tended to emerge from liberal as well as conservative responses. Several respondents (L6, M6, O6) cited the threat of Civil War, a response which I revisit in greater detail in reference to social and political division, the premise to which it was consistently connected. These individuals, all liberals, were clearly concerned about social cohesion, a threat of change. Relatedly, respondent T5 (Conservative, RWA) cited war’s “many impacts on a nation” and potential to “cause us to feel uncertain [about] our country’s future.” Along similar lines, respondent Y3 (Moderate) viewed the “crumbling of the USA” as a potential outcome of war. Compared to climate change and other threats, responses connecting war to
premises of social justice and progress were rare. Respondent D9 (Moderate, LWA), for instance, cited the “collateral damage to citizens,” and respondent G1 (Liberal, RWA) described war’s “devastating consequences…for innocent civilians caught in the crossfire,” although these could refer to various forms of wartime hardship. In a similar vein, respondent D1’s (Moderate) suggestion that going to war could be for the greater good of the world appears to imply concerns over social justice. Proportionally, liberals (n=29; 23%), moderates (n=14; 23%), and conservatives (n=15; 21%) cited war as a threat at similar rates. Likewise, LWAs (n=8; 19% of LWAs) and RWAs (n=9; 22% of RWAs) who mentioned the issue tended to discuss the threat of war at similar frequencies and in similar terms to one another and their non-authoritarian counterparts.

Subtheme 1.3b: The next war could be a nuclear war. Numerous respondents cited the threat of nuclear war (n=29), which they appeared to view as the natural consequence of America’s next armed conflict. Respondent F3 (Liberal), for instance, connected the two concepts as follows: “War has the potential to affect everyone across the world, leading to mistrust and broken relations between countries and allied nations,” which could “incite the use of nuclear weapons that can destroy everything at any time.” Likewise, respondent D3 (Conservative) feared that war would “lead to nuclear weapons being used,” but argued that a “nuclear weapon…doesn’t mean much without a reason to use it.” Other participants expressed similar concerns about access to nuclear weapons, although they too placed the onus on those who might use them. For example, respondent T9 (Conservative, RWA) wrote that nuclear weapons “in the wrong hands…could end all of humanity and the world,” and C7 (Moderate) that “many countries are unstable and do not think twice about engaging in nuclear war.” Various respondents cited nuclear brinksmanship from foreign nations, most common of which
were again Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. Respondent J8 (Liberal), for instance, wrote of nuclear war: “it concerns me because people that are in power in other countries are scary” and “don’t like America,” namely “Russia and North Korea’s…crazy leaders who can push a button at any time.” Nuclear powers were also a concern for respondent H9 (Conservative), who specifically cited “Russian or Iranian nuclear bombings.” Closer to home, respondent T10 (Moderate) referenced “crazies at the helm with the codes for nukes in various countries, including the USA.”

Again, people’s motivations for viewing nuclear war as a threat were grounded in existential concerns about the potential for mass casualties and destruction. Like other forms of war, however, some respondents described nuclear warfare as an agent of catastrophic change or, in other cases, a symptom of instability. Respondent K10 (Moderate), for example, wrote that “as long as there are nuclear weapons and…countries have an unstable society, there is a threat of nuclear war.” Relatedly, respondent K4 (Moderate) described the potential outbreak of nuclear war as “the single biggest thing that could destroy the country,” citing “catastrophic” casualties and fears of “the entire world being forever changed.” In addition to framing the issue as a global threat, this moderate’s response explicitly references the threat of change. Likewise, N9 (Conservative, RWA) described the nuclear threat as “the end of life as we know it.” References to threats to progress were surpassingly few, perhaps reflecting the implied conclusion across various responses, that “an extinction level event for everyone” (D3, Conservative) would render such issues a moot point. Compared to the broader issue of war, mentions of nuclear war were fewer across ideological groups, cited by 16% of conservatives (n=11), 11% of moderates (n=7), and 9% of liberals (n=11). RWAs (n=3) and LWAs (n=5) did not appear to be more preoccupied
with this issue than their non-authoritarian counterparts, or to reference nuclear war and weapons in noticeably different terms.

**Theme 1.4: Terrorism as a source of death and disruption.**

Approximately twenty percent of respondents \( n=50 \) cited terrorism as a threat, rationales for which frequently, but not uniformly, centered on existential fears of death and destruction. These responses referred chiefly to terrorism originating from abroad, although some respondents cited domestic terrorism; others did not specify the form of terrorism about which they were concerned. Terrorist threats were a common topic among conservatives \( n=17; 24\% \), although they also resonated with moderates \( n=12; 19\% \) and liberals \( n=21; 17\% \).

Across groups, participants cited the destructive and disruptive influence of terrorism on society. For example, respondent D7 (Liberal, RWA) wrote of terrorism: “it can lead to people being killed and jeopardizing our peace and security.” Likewise, M10 (Liberal) stated that “innocent people may suffer gruesome deaths…to make some kind of statement.” Conservative respondents frequently described immigration as a way for potential terrorists to enter the country, which I discuss further in the section devoted to immigration. By contrast, liberals were far less inclined to connect these two issues.

Both threats of change and threats to change emerged from responses across this category. For example, respondent F9 (Moderate, RWA) asserted that “our way of life is threatened” by terrorism. Similarly, respondent I4 (Moderate) described terrorism as a “threat to the security of our country” and asserted that “we will never feel as secure as we did prior to that day [9/11].” Others cited terrorism’s “ability to cause fear, harm innocent people, and disrupt societies” (N6, Conservative). Interestingly, domestic terror was most frequently cited by liberals and LWAs, whose rationales often connected to what the DDT model describes as threats to
change. For example, respondent H2 (Liberal, LWA) cited “right-wing terrorism” as a source of “violence…to kill political enemies” and intolerance towards “those who are not White and Christian,” a clear threat to equality and social justice. Likewise, respondent F7 (Liberal) wrote that “terrorism is a threat from the extreme right-wing in this country.” Respondent P5 (Liberal, LWA), meanwhile, explicitly connected domestic terror with “fascism and white supremacy,” and P10 (Liberal, LWA) asserted that “white supremacists are responsible for most terrorism.” Finally, respondent W4 (Liberal) attributed “domestic terrorism” to what they called the “racial divide.” A few conservatives also mentioned domestic terrorism, like respondent J7 (Conservative), who wrote that “domestic terrorists might try to kill Americans or disrupt essentials like electricity and water.” By contrast, respondent O5 (Liberal, wild card authoritarian), one of few respondents who scored high on both measures of authoritarianism, expressed broader “fears of terrorism and extremist ideologies leading to violence and instability.” Terrorism was cited by a number of RWAs (n=10) and, to a lesser extent, LWAs (n=7). The former’s responses were largely indistinct from their non-authoritarian counterparts. However, as the sampled responses illustrate, there was some evidence that LWAs were particularly concerned about domestic terrorism from their ideological opponents.

Subtheme 1.4a: Cyberattacks and electronic warfare as new forms of terrorism.

Lastly, participants (n=24) across ideological groups referred to cyberattacks as a new strain of terrorism that could originate from foreign or domestic bad actors. This was an unanticipated subtheme, but tended to center around the potential disruption to infrastructure and daily life that would result from a cyberattack. For example, respondent H6 (Conservative, RWA) expressed concerns that a cyberattack would lead to “the loss of internet,” as a result of which “the world would stop.” By contrast, respondent B3 (Liberal, LWA) characterized cyberattacks as a “new
form of warfare” rather than terrorism, but agreed that such an attack could “cause chaos and really harm…people.” Threats of change were evident throughout these responses, although not exclusive to conservatives. In particular, respondents cited the ability of such attacks to “compromise personal information and disrupt critical systems” (A10, Moderate). Relatedly, respondent D3 (Conservative) envisioned cyberattacks “crippling our economy and reducing our ability to defend ourselves and others.” Along similar lines, respondent J8 (Liberal) wrote that in the event of a power “grid attack…nothing would function as usual.” Likewise, M1 (Liberal) characterized “cyberterrorism” as a “dire concern that transcends politics” which “would very possibly result in societal collapse.” Finally, in reference to the related issue of artificial intelligence, respondent Y6 (Liberal) made one of few oblique references to progress in this category by asserting that although “AI poses…a threat of abuse by nefarious actors…failing to develop AI has massive costs due to its potential to accelerate medical research and improve quality of life.” LWAs \( n=5 \) and RWAs \( n=4 \) did not mention this issue at different rates to non-authoritarians.

**Content Category 2: Political Threats**

Unsurprisingly given the focus on threats to the nation, and even less so considering that this study was run during a U.S. presidential election year, ideological and political opponents were commonly mentioned across the sample. I operationalize this threat category broadly as comprising issues and entities that negatively impact the governance and institutional integrity of the country. However, the specific adversaries individuals cited varied depending upon their ideological ingroup and existing political views. Thus, rationales for this category were particularly illuminating with respect to the concerns that motivate left- and right-wingers. Moreover, because politics have a direct bearing on the state of society, the premises to which
respondents connected their political and ideological opponents provided a valuable proxy for the threats of and to change predicted by the DDT framework. Although various in nature, as the sampled responses evidence, themes in this category comprised perceived threats from domestic political opponents (i.e., U.S. partisan politics), social division and political dysfunction, immigration and border control, foreign influence on domestic politics, and misinformation and disinformation.

**Theme 2.1: Political opponents damaging the country.**

Almost a third of respondents (n=83) cited domestic political figures, groups, and ideological movements as threats to the nation. Although various, they tended to be united by the perception that empowering these entities would damage the fabric—moral, political, religious, or otherwise—of America. Furthermore, when respondents were broken down by political ideology and authoritarianism, rationales provided for these entities tended to show a clear divide between fears of change and barriers to progress. To highlight this distinction, I separately discuss subthemes that emerged in regard to opponents cited primarily by liberals (e.g., conservatives, Donald Trump, MAGA, and Christian nationalism), and conservatives (e.g., liberals, Joe Biden, the Woke Mob, and socialism). Additionally, I draw attention to liberals’ tendency to use the term fascist as a catch-all pejorative for their political opponents. As predicted, both MAGA and the Woke Mob featured prominently in participant responses and rankings, tending to fall along partisan lines. Indeed, MAGA was among the most frequently mentioned and highest-ranked threats by liberals across the open-ended and threat ranking items. By comparison, fewer participants cited the Woke Mob as a threat in response to the open-ended items, although this in part reflects the overrepresentation of liberals in the sample (by contrast, it was ranked highly across the sample). Proportionally, liberals (n=58; 47%) cited political
opponents as threats far more frequently than conservatives (n=15; 21%) and moderates (n=10; 16%). Likewise, LWAs (n=13) cited their political opponents at higher rates than RWAs (n=5). While I made no predictions about how moderates would evaluate their political opponents, I make note of patterns where they emerged.

Subtheme 2.1a: MAGA, Donald Trump, and conservatives as threats to progress.
Liberals and, to a lesser extent, moderates commonly cited former president Donald Trump, MAGA, and conservatives as threats. Concerns over progress and social justice, or threats to change, were particularly prominent in both the content and rationales for this category. In line with predictions, liberal respondents and LWAs tended to characterize their conservative and far-right political opponents as worsening inequality or seeking to regress society to a less enlightened and egalitarian state. Respondent B5 (Liberal, LWA), for example, expressed concerns that “Donald Trump and MAGA…will make the lives of every marginalized group in the country much worse.” Likewise, participant J2 (Liberal, LWA) stated that “MAGA seems to be a hate group that would be glad to strip the US of any positive changes and…excited to oppress minorities” (emphasis mine). Other respondents argued that “Trump and the far-right…bring the country back with their backwards ideology that encourages hate” (O7, Liberal, LWA), and described Trump’s politics as regressive; to provide a colorful example: “1300-century thinking with nukes” (F10, Liberal). Similarly, respondent W4 (Liberal) charged “MAGA politicians and followers” with “moving to dehumanize any and all who oppose their ridiculous and obtuse ideals.” Finally, respondent G2 (Liberal) stated that MAGA “have their own intolerant ideas about what makes America great” that “are throwbacks to the 1950s…and threaten freedoms in this country.” Three moderates also cited Trump as a threat. Of these, one described “trust in Donald Trump” as a wedge “splitting the Republican party in half” (L7),
another accused “Trump and his merry band of…cultists” of “actively advocat[ing] for the death of American democracy” (E2), and a third used language unsuitable for a scientific report (T8).

Loss of rights and democratic freedoms was another motif frequently connected with liberals’ responses in this category. For example, respondent Z7 (Liberal) expressed concern that “it will be hard to take back our freedoms” should the MAGA movement come into power. Another asserted that the MAGA faithful “would gladly sign away all their rights just to see others suffer” (Q4, Liberal). Similarly, respondent Q9 (Liberal, LWA) attributed the rise of MAGA to “multiple factors of our society not functioning properly,” namely “willful ignorance, racism, bigotry, fear-mongering, and anti-democratic values.” Along the same lines, respondent T4 (Liberal) described the MAGA movement as “a gutting of democracy.” Liberals tended to mention MAGA and Donald Trump together, although some viewed MAGA as a threat that would outlast its figurehead, like respondent J3 (Liberal), who wrote “when Trump is finally gone, his cult will remain.” This was far from the only respondent to characterize MAGA as a cult of personality with Trump at its center. For example, respondent J10 (Liberal) wrote of Trump: “he is the head of a cult of personality…a would-be dictator and an immoral and unethical sociopath.” These responses, which were typical of LWAs and left-wingers, make plain that the left perceives their far-right political opponents as a source of oppression as well as a pressing threat to the country’s institutional integrity.

Liberals levelled similar criticisms at conservatives writ large, as well as other right-wing movements. For instance, respondent D10 (Liberal, LWA) characterized conservatives as “thick-skulled” for “preventing change as always.” Respondent R8 (Liberal, LWA) wrote: “the Republican Party represents an existential threat to our democracy” that “threatens to destroy the faith people have in our elections as well as making America a country with less freedom.”
Likewise, respondent T3 (Liberal) accused Republicans of trying “to get rid of our democracy.” Various left-wingers also cited Christian nationalists as a threat, such as C1 (Liberal, LWA), who accused them of “trying to force their ideology onto everyone.” Similarly, several liberals (e.g., E5) expressed concerns over Christian nationalists “turning our country into a Christian theocracy” (L2, Liberal). Finally, respondent F6 (Liberal, LWA) wrote that Christian nationalists “want a country that is solely for them and…want people who disagree or who live a different life to die.” In some cases, liberal opprobrium extended to religion more broadly. Here too, threats to change clearly factored into rationales. “Religion concerns me,” wrote respondent P4 (Liberal), “because as religious people have come into power, the rights of the average person are being taken away.” The same respondent went on to specify that they viewed this issue as “negatively impacting minorities.” Likewise, respondent I1 (Liberal) wrote “Church influence in government is suppressing human rights.” Although religious beliefs are hardly exclusive to right-wingers, liberal respondents often framed the issue as such. Some drew explicit connections between these ideologies, for example: “MAGA and religious elected officials are…allowing religion to influence or strip away the rights of citizens” (S2, Liberal). Similarly, respondent Y6 (Liberal) asserted that religion “is being used to roll back Americans’ civil rights and bodily autonomy,” and V3 (Liberal) wrote “religion has been so bastardized and cherry-picked that most women’s and minorities’ lives are far more miserable than they need to be because of [religious] rules and misconceptions.” Thus, left-wingers tended to characterize their right-wing opponents as a bloc responsible for various forms of oppression and inequality. Additionally, a considerable portion of LWAs (31%) cited political opponents as threats, and often framed their rationales in terms of threats to change when they did so.
Subtheme 2.1b: The Woke Mob, Joe Biden, and liberals as threats of change.

Although liberals mentioned their political opponents as threats more commonly than conservatives, left-wing political figures and movements did feature in responses from right-wingers and, to a lesser extent, moderates. Where these appeared, the threat of change and loss of social cohesion emerged as a prominent subtheme in rationales. Respondent L9 (Conservative), for example, charged “wokeness” with “destroying the wholesome values and morals” of the nation and “imposing their thinking on the rest of the people in the country.” Likewise, respondent W3 (Moderate) wrote that “American values are being torn down” by the “Woke Agenda.” Similarly, participant W6 (Conservative, RWA) wrote that the Woke Mob “is trying to change American tradition and culture,” and A6 (Conservative) accused the same of “making as (sic) soft.” Finally, respondent H10 (Conservative) expressed concerns about the Woke Mob “promoting falsehoods on gender, equality, racism” and wrote that “every social aspect of this country is being attacked.” Thus, concerns about left-wing ideological opponents often centered on the threat of cultural changes and loss of traditional values and morals, consistent with predictions.

Institutional change and the destruction of democracy also featured prominently in conservative responses regarding their political opponents. Respondent I5 (Conservative), for instance, asserted that “liberals” are “trying to change our government,” and L8 (Conservative) wrote that “the government is working, using brute force, to usher in communism” while elsewhere describing ‘Woke’ as “just another term for communism.” Other conservatives also expressed fears about a perceived shift towards socialism or communism, like respondent K9 (Conservative, RWA), who wrote “these ideals are dangerous and are infecting our young people.” Relatedly, respondent T9 (Conservative, RWA) cited “undoing democracy” as a threat
and provided the following rationale: “our current elected officials want more of a uni-party system or socialism.” In a similar vein, respondent P6 (Conservative, RWA) wrote that “every single policy they [Democrats] come up with makes life worse for everyone,” and R10 (Conservative) decried what they deemed “politically motivated policies with no regard [for] hard-working moderate Americans.” Although these responses focused more on the institutions and ideologies that control governance than changes to the social fabric of the nation, they nonetheless evince threats of change. Moreover, they overlap with a theme I revisit later, that of blaming political opponents for government dysfunction.

Interestingly, whereas liberals frequently cited Donald Trump as a threat to democratic freedoms and rights, conservatives tended to namecheck President Joe Biden less often than his party and ideological camp. Left-wing respondents’ disproportionate focus on an opposing figurehead gels with their previously mentioned characterization of MAGA as a cult of personality centered around Trump. That said, a few conservatives accused Biden of “trying to destroy this country” (A7, Conservative), and another blamed him for what they called the “degradation of culture” (U8, Conservative). Only one moderate, respondent C4, referred to Biden, compared to three moderates who characterized Trump as a threat. They wrote as a rationale for the threat of war: “Biden is not a strong leader.” Finally, one moderate’s (L5) response spoke to both sides: “I think MAGA represents the id side of our polarization, most prepared to tear down our system of liberal democracy in response to perceived threats. I think the so-called "woke" institutions also contribute to this illiberal mindset about absolutes vs. incremental progress toward goals” (emphasis mine).

RWAs (n=5; 12%) did not cite their political opponents as threats more frequently than non-authoritarian conservatives. Moreover, their rationales did not appear to qualitatively differ
from those of non-authoritarian right-wingers who cited the same threats. That is, although threats of change were salient to right-wingers, they were not necessarily more evident in the responses of RWAs. A similar pattern emerged for several other themes in this content category.

**Subtheme 2.1c: Political opponents as fascists.** Numerous respondents \( (n=14) \), all but one of them liberals \( (n=13) \) and half of them LWAs \( (n=7) \), accused their political opponents of fascism. Yet even within these categories there were discrepancies in how they used the term. This suggests first that people are unclear on the definition of fascism; second, that it has become a catch-all for ideological opponents in our polarized political theater. Again in line with the predictions of the DDT framework, liberal responses in this subtheme tended to evoke threats to change. In particular, various left-wingers connected accusations of fascism with issues of inequality and intolerance. For instance, respondent C10 (Liberal, LWA) cited fascism as their most urgent threat due to its potential to “cause a rise in social issues such as poverty and poor living conditions for the masses.” Moreover, respondent V10 (Liberal) described fascism as “a threat to the safety of minorities and people who do not support a right-wing agenda” which could “lead to a loss of rights, as we have already seen women and LGBT+ people come into the crosshairs.” Similarly, respondent M1 (Liberal) identified “right-wing Christo-fascists under Trump and his ilk” as their “most urgent” threat, while I10 (Liberal) cited “creeping fascism from the Republican party,” and A9 (Liberal) charged “anti-democracy” forces with “trying to turn the country fascist.” Likewise, Q9 (Liberal, LWA) expressed concerns that “the far-right members of our political spectrum wish for a fascist ruler.” Others made clear who they feared this dictator might be, like respondent D6 (Liberal), who wrote: “Trump wants to subvert democracy and enable a fascist dictatorship” and elsewhere that “the MAGA mob is trying to make America a white-first fascist state.” Again, these respondents tended to conflate MAGA
with Donald Trump and, to a lesser extent, Christian nationalism. Respondent F6 (Liberal, LWA), for example, attributed a “fascist agenda” to “Christian nationalists” and “wealthy conservatives.” Halving the difference, respondent B5 (Liberal, LWA) argued that “the Republican party is on a full descent to fascism and the Democrats aren't too far behind.” This response also displays the anti-hierarchical aggression component of LWA, which captures the sentiment that if the institution is rotten, the whole system may need to be discarded.

By contrast, no moderates and only one conservative cited fascism as a threat. Nonetheless, that individual’s response evidenced a focus on threats of change. Respondent K2 (Conservative) offered a definition of what they termed “liberal fascism,” as follows: “the synthesis of progressive and nationalist military policies under a powerful central state constitutes authentic fascism.” They went on to connect this with illegal immigration, which they characterized as “the lynchpin progressive fascism will use to grab power.”

**Theme 2.2: Political Division and Dysfunction**

In addition to political opponents, many respondents described the current state of social and political division in the U.S. as a threat in itself. This was unanticipated, and raised further questions. Namely, would self-described moderates be more likely to indicate distress over political polarization than partisans, and by extension, left- and right-wing authoritarians? Although some respondents attributed these fractious conditions to their political opponents, this was not always the case. In general, responses connected this theme to three related premises: polarization and social division, the government failing to serve the people’s best interests, and ideological extremism.
**Subtheme 2.2a: Polarization and social division undermine society.** Various respondents were concerned by the acrimoniousness of our national dialogue and the perception of ideological lines being drawn in the sand. For example, respondent L5 (Moderate) wrote “the country has become entrenched in mindsets that pit them against their fellow citizens.” Likewise, respondent H1 (Moderate, RWA) asserted that “political division is separating people and causing a rift in American society.” Another respondent even went so far as to evoke the threat of “civil war,” writing as a rationale, “it looks like the divide along our political lines is much more wider (sic) than it seems on the surface” (O6, Liberal). Both threats of change and barriers to progress were evident in these responses as well. Whereas respondent H4 (Conservative) wrote that “social and political polarization…undermines social cohesion,” for instance, they also cited its deleterious impacts on “democratic governance and collective problem-solving.” Additionally, respondent F4 (Moderate) cited the “political divide” as a threat to the nation’s “ability to move forward.” Relatedly, another respondent characterized the “political divide” as people “becoming less tolerant of others’ views, making the nation as a whole irritable” (J6, Liberal). As well as evoking threats to change, this is an apt description of how cognitive rigidity influences the political discourse. In terms of mention across ideological groups, this subtheme was one of few that emerged particularly strongly from the responses of moderates (n=14; 23%) and liberals (n=25; 20%), compared to conservatives (n=8, 11%). This was an interesting and unexpected finding. Indeed, it seems possible that respondents for whom political polarization was a salient threat may have been motivated to self-identify as moderate on the forced-choice item, hence its prevalence in this category. I revisit this possibility in the discussion. Additionally, and somewhat ironically given their polarized stances, a number of LWAs (n=6)
Subtheme 2.2b: Ideological extremism fosters division and foments violence. In addition to citing the polarized political climate and consequent systemic dysfunction, respondents spoke to fears of ideological extremism sowing further discord and even violence. In some cases these concerns overlapped with mentions of domestic terrorism, and in others partisans cited their ideological opponents as fonts of extremism. Like other threats related to political opponents, liberals \( (n=9) \) tended to mention this more frequently, whereas fewer moderates \( (n=2) \) and conservatives \( (n=3) \) spoke to it. Neither LWAs nor RWAs cited ideological extremism as a threat.

Respondent B7 (Liberal), for example, attributed the threat of “radicalization” to “lies from politicians” that have “created an alternate reality that has resulted in violence and threats.” Other liberals were more explicit about who they held responsible, like W10 (Liberal), who described “conservative extremism” as “anti-everything,” and W4 (Liberal), who connected “right-wing extremism” with fears of “governmental collapse.” Some respondents extended this to fears of political violence, like respondent R2 (Moderate), who wrote: “more people are ok with violence to get their way when their political choices are not elected.” Likewise, respondent I1 (Liberal) characterized “right-wing extremists” as prone to “irrational violent actions.” Others feared the political climate becoming too conducive, even hospitable, to extremism. Respondent V3 (Liberal), for instance, argued that “extremists have power now instead of being shut down for their stupidity” and offered the example of book bans, which they deemed a stratagem to “keep their children from being exposed to other ideas that may cause the new generation to stray from their ideals.” This response also makes an astute reference to the threats of change that
appear to motivate conservatives. Similarly, respondent J6 (Liberal) wrote that “people with extreme political views are gaining further recognition and…reach” and connected this to “political disruption,” a threat of change. Likewise, one conservative respondent (N6) made direct reference to both threats of change and existential threats, citing “domestic extremism” as damaging to “political stability…and national security.” By contrast, respondent I2 (Liberal, LWA) connected the issue with firsthand experiences of racism, writing “I am a minority and have witnessed this growth in people being racist online,” which they attributed to the “growth in…extremist groups all over the country.” Finally, respondent W2 (Liberal) expressed concern that “especially within younger generations, extremism is on the rise, both on the right and left” and accused both parties of “demonizing the other side.” Further connecting this to the theme of social division and dysfunction, the same respondent wrote “it’s difficult to actually create solutions for the problems in our country if people would rather focus on arguing and identity politics.” This response also suggests frustration with a lack of progress, a threat to change.

Subtheme 2.2c: Dysfunctional government fails to serve the people’s interests.

Respondents across ideological groups frequently connected bitter divisions within our society to the premise of government dysfunction. Proportionally, this subtheme emerged most strongly from conservative rationales (n=21; 30%), although liberals (n=26; 21%) and moderates (n=11, 18%) also expressed skepticism towards and disdain for the government. In particular, these respondents expressed frustrations with what they viewed as the government’s failure to serve the best interests of its citizenry. For example, respondent T6 (Moderate) wrote that “both parties have become a joke—the inability of our government to do their job directly affects the people living here, when they’re bickering amongst each other.” Respondent P1 (Liberal, LWA), moreover, wrote, “we make no progress on important issues due to partisan conflict” (emphasis
mine). Indeed, respondents frequently attributed legislative gridlock to partisan infighting. Respondent T1 (Liberal, LWA), for instance, wrote “people in the U.S. are becoming more and more divided, making it difficult to pass necessary partisan bills in the government.” Likewise, respondent D8 (Moderate, RWA) suggested that “polarization can lead to gridlock and dysfunction in government, hinder bipartisan cooperation on key issues, and erode public trust in democratic institutions.” Finally, respondent L8 (Conservative) argued that “the government does nothing for their citizens, instead working against their best interests.”

Furthermore, respondents cited specific examples of government entities and institutions that they viewed as acting against the interests of the people. As anticipated, for liberals, many of these responses centered on recent Supreme Court decisions. For instance, respondent A3 (Liberal, LWA) asserted that “the Supreme Court…keep passing laws that a large majority of people don’t agree with.” This is technically a mischaracterization of the institution’s function as a governing body, but it was not an uncommon sentiment, nor wholly incorrect. Other liberals criticized the Supreme Court for “not representing the majority of Americans” (L4, Liberal) and described it as an “extension of the right-wing anti-democratic party” (J3, Liberal). Several referred specifically to recent decisions that limit women’s “right to bodily autonomy” (U7, Liberal), like respondent K6 (Liberal), who wrote, “the Supreme Court has taken away our freedom…to abortion and a number of other freedoms.” These were far from the only references to the loss of rights and personal liberties, mentions of which were common enough across the sample to warrant their own separate theme. By contrast, respondent I10 (Liberal) spoke to the threat of change, writing “organizations like the Supreme Court are becoming politicized and moving away from the constitutional principles that underlie our government.” Taking a different tack, respondent Y6 (Liberal) wrote, “legislation often does not reflect public opinion
and even endangers Americans for the benefit of large corporations.” Thus, there were elements of threats of as well as threats to change in these responses, the latter of which appeared primarily in responses provided by liberals. Interestingly, although LWA reflects a dislike of extant power structures, similar proportions of LWAs (n=7) and RWAs (n=7) cited government dysfunction as a threat. Given that the incumbent administration is left-wing, however, this is unsurprising.

**Theme 2.3: (Illegal) Immigration and Border Control**

Overall, the sample reported considerable concerns over issues of immigration and border control. Indeed, after climate change, crime, and war, three existential threats, immigration was the fourth most widely cited threat across the sample (n=68; 27%). Predictably, this was one of, if not the central issue for conservatives (n=39; 56%), over half of whom mentioned it. However, moderates (n=21; 34%) also commonly cited immigration as a threat, as well as a few liberals (n=8; 6%). As such, this issue was fertile ground for examining the motivations of these different groups and of authoritarians. While most responses in this category referred to illegal immigration, other respondents did not specify or indicated that they considered immigration a threat writ large. Others were less coy, and an unfortunate number were borderline (no pun intended) or outright racist. By contrast, some participants were careful to specify that they considered illegal, but not legal, immigration a threat, perhaps in acknowledgement of America’s history as an immigrant nation. In almost all cases, however, these concerns coalesced around three sub-themes: loss of/change to culture, safety and security, and resource depletion. To provide a single response emblematic of several of these elements, respondent X5 (Conservative) wrote: “without proper controls over immigration processes, immigrants drain our social services budgets, alter our culture by not assimilating, vote according to who will give them handouts
rather than uphold American values, and hold allegiance to their home countries rather than the United States.”

**Subtheme 2.3a: (Illegal) immigration brings cultural changes and “loss” of culture.**

In a striking demonstration of sensitivity to threats of change, a nonnegligible number of participants spoke specifically—and venomously—to what they perceived as the threat posed by immigration to American culture and demographics ($n=14$). In line with the predictions of the DDT, these respondents were overwhelmingly conservative ($n=12$), although two moderates also offered rationales to this effect. These responses were consistently inflected with anti-immigrant prejudice. For example, participant K2 (Conservative) wrote that illegal immigration would “redo the fabric of American life, result in anarchy, and precipitate the dissolution of the United States government,” as well as “erod[e] the existing power structure” and “inflam[e] irreconcilable factions that will eventually destroy representative government.” Similarly, respondent B8 (Moderate, RWA) accused immigrants of “changing our culture,” and B10 (Conservative) wrote of “being overrun by illegal immigrants” as a “threat to our way of life.” Conservatives also commonly expressed fears about cultural “degradation” (U8, Conservative) and assertions that immigration “erodes” (X5, Conservative) or “tak[es] away from American history and culture” (W6, Conservative, RWA). Likewise, respondent G8 (Conservative) characterized illegal immigration as the “destruction of our way of life by people who don’t understand the principles upon which this country was founded.” Finally, respondent O1 (Moderate) wrote that “illegal immigration is at the root of all my worries,” adding, “our way of life is degrading.” Conservative respondents’ repeated references to a lost way of life are particularly illustrative of the threats of change described by the DDT model. Less subtly, respondent S8 (Conservative) described immigration as “flooding the country with non-White
people,” which “dilutes power from Whites and changes the culture for the worse.” Troublingly, many participants spoke to this issue in similarly offensive terms, but terms which nonetheless reflect prominent conservative narratives around immigration. Descriptors like “invasion” (e.g., A7, Conservative; J4, Conservative; N9, Conservative, RWA) and “invaders” (e.g., L10, Moderate; P6, Conservative, RWA; T2, Moderate), “overrun” (e.g., B10, Conservative; S6, Conservative), “flooding,” (G8, Conservative; S8, Conservative), and even “infecting” (I7, Conservative, RWA) were common. Conservatives and RWAs used this verbiage most frequently, as did a few moderates.

Rationales for the perceived threat of immigration ranged from conspiracist, like the Great Replacement narrative, which characterizes humane immigration policies as a plot to manipulate voter demographics (e.g., Obaidi et al., 2022), to more grounded concerns over safety, security, and resources. For example, respondent V7 (Moderate) cited fears of “uncontrolled and unknown” illegal immigration “being used as a political weapon to bring people in to affect future elections.” Similarly, respondent X5 (Conservative) wrote “illegal immigrants…are not loyal to our country and are used to infiltrate institutions and skew election outcomes.” Finally, respondent G8 (Conservative) cited concerns that of the “millions pouring over the border…some are sent in by foreign countries to be activated when called upon.” These insinuations of foreign influence could be characterized as threats of change, although they were also connected to the existential concerns discussed next. By contrast, respondent O8 (Moderate) suggested that “people who hold the same values as white supremacists are being allowed to cross the border illegally.” This was a unique perspective, however, and responses that attributed intentionality or orchestration to immigration patterns were rare on the whole. Interestingly, they
did not appear to be more prominent among RWAs ($n=5$) than non-authoritarian conservatives and indeed, several moderates.

**Subtheme 2.3b: Immigrants as a threat to safety and security.** In addition to what they perceived as threats of cultural change, respondents ($n=37$) often cited concerns about stability and security in reference to immigration. Many of these responses centered on perceptions of illegal immigration as a source of various forms of crime, although others cited concerns about diseases. Given the well-established literature linking conservatism and RWA to safety and security threats, it is unsurprising that right-wingers ($n=22$) comprised the bulk of respondents in this subtheme, although numerous moderates ($n=10$) and far fewer liberals ($n=3$) expressed similar sentiments. For example, respondent A7 (Conservative) described illegal immigration as “an invasion by unknown parties” and stated, “we don’t know who or what we are letting overrun our borders,” then offered the following prediction: “a vast array of criminals.” Similarly, respondent B10 (Conservative) cited “open borders” as a threat along with the following reasoning: “we don’t know who is coming into our country, what their motives are, what diseases they carry.” Likewise, respondent E10 (Conservative, RWA) expressed trepidation about “letting threats to our country in without checking them out,” and numerous respondents cited related concerns over a lack of “vetting” (e.g., B10, Conservative; E8, Moderate; I3, Conservative, RWA; L10, Moderate; S6, Conservative). The sense of uncertainty conveyed by these responses also gels with the established picture of conservatives as sensitive to the fear of the unknown, although some moderates cited this as well. Interestingly, two liberal respondents, J8 and Z1, also cited unvetted immigrants as a threat. In particular, J8 (Liberal) wrote, “a lot are criminals in their countries, and they rob people, and kill people, and they can attack us from
inside of our own country.” Thus, while most respondents that connected safety and security concerns to immigration were conservative and moderate, some liberals held similar views.

Many respondents were more specific about the types of crime they feared, like F2 (Moderate), who wrote that illegal immigration “brings in drugs, gangs, criminals, human traffickers, and potential terrorists.” Likewise, respondent I3 (Conservative, RWA) speculated that “illegal aliens” would “kill, rape, and steal and destroy America,” while I5 (Conservative) forecasted “higher rates of horrific crime (drug smuggling, human trafficking, increased human death), and increased risk of terrorism.” Indeed, numerous respondents connected this issue with terrorism and the previously mentioned paranoia that some immigrants could be foreign agents. Respondent N2 (Conservative), for instance, alternately characterized “immigration” as “a war within” and “terrorism within,” while elsewhere citing fears of “drugs and violence coming to our borders.” Similarly, respondent M5 (Conservative, RWA) connected the threat of “terrorism” to “access to the U.S. via open borders,” and S3 (Conservative) asserted that “no nation can survive with open borders.” In the same vein, respondent W3 (Moderate) wrote that “open borders bring crime, fentanyl,” and “millions of military age men.” Another interesting, related pattern that emerged from this subset of responses was the tendency for security-conscious respondents to refer to the border in a more literal sense and to cite “border control” (e.g., B6, Conservative; B10, Conservative; F2, Moderate), a term that evokes national security and defense. By contrast, others framed related concerns around immigration and illegal immigration, but did not mention our nation’s borders or the strategic importance of “securing” them, as these respondents did (e.g., O1, Moderate; S3, Conservative; T2, Moderate). This pattern raises the question of whether our nation’s borders might be more of an abstraction than a
reality in some people’s minds, and how this might affect their policy positions. However, no such conclusions can be drawn from the current data.

As the sampled responses illustrate, this subtheme tended to reflect primarily existential concerns, which were more salient to conservatives, and to a lesser extent moderates, than liberals. No LWAs mentioned this threat. Interestingly, although numerous RWAs (n=9) cited this threat, the language in their rationales did not noticeably differ from that of non-authoritarian conservatives and indeed, some moderates. Furthermore, this subtheme tended to be mentioned in conjunction with concerns over immigrants competing for resources, another threat with existential implications. For instance, speaking directly to both of these subthemes, respondent I7 (Conservative, RWA) cited immigration as their most urgent threat “due to the criminal element and the loss of resources Americans need.”

**Subtheme 2.3c: Immigrants as competition for resources and burdens on the system.** Hand in hand with safety and security concerns, many respondents viewed immigrants as placing an undue burden on vital resources and the social safety net. For example, respondent M4 (Moderate) described a “huge increase in violent crime in my city…due to illegal immigrants” and accused the same of “draining our resources.” Others used similar terms to characterize immigrants as a “drain” on “public resources” (e.g., E8, Moderate; P6, Conservative, RWA; X5, Conservative). Likewise, respondent K5 (Conservative, RWA) asserted that “too many immigrants are putting a strain on the cities and the local governments.” For many right-wing and moderate respondents, a sense of unfairness appeared to underlie this assertion. Respondent H1 (Moderate, RWA), for example, cited the “migrant crisis” and wrote that “resources are being spent prioritizing non-citizens rather than helping America’s own citizens.” Furthermore, respondent I3 (Conservative, RWA) wrote, “they are using resources our
own citizens desperately need,” and I5 (Conservative) cited “burdensome expenses that U.S. citizens are forced to fund.” Incidentally, both of these respondents also described illegal immigrants as a threat to national security.

Perhaps further inflaming perceptions of immigrants as competitors for resources, many conservatives and moderates expressed the view that providing support for undocumented illegal immigrants costs the American taxpayer. A sense of injustice was prominent in these responses as well. Respondent K1 (Conservative, RWA), for instance, argued that immigrants “are receiving government benefits that they are not entitled to because they didn’t contribute.” Respondent C8 (Moderate) offered similar sentiments: “we need to support our own rather than taking in more.” Likewise, respondent C4 (Moderate) was worried about “immigrants promised jobs” and “taking food stamps from Americans,” while R5 (Moderate, RWA) wrote that “illegal immigrants take jobs and benefits.” Respondent G8 (Conservative) charged “illegals” with “costing billions in support and services” and “bankrupting state governments and businesses.” Interestingly, one liberal respondent (K7) expressed similar concerns over “our tax dollars…going to fund immigrant’s lifestyle.” This subtheme was particularly evident from conservative \( n=23 \) and, more specifically, RWA \( n=12 \) responses. As the sampled quotes illustrate, however, some moderates \( n=11 \), including some moderates who scored high on RWA, cited similar concerns. By contrast, few liberals \( n=3 \) and no LWAs cited immigration as a drain on resources.

**Theme 2.4: Foreign Influence on Domestic Politics**

In addition to domestic ideological and political opponents and the sociocultural impact of foreigners entering the country via immigration, some respondents \( n=36 \) cited geopolitical threats from various foreign adversaries of the United States. Specifically, a theme emerged
related to malign state actors and fears of disruptive foreign influence on U.S. politics and society. Conservatives (n=12; 17%) and liberals (n=18; 15%) mentioned this issue at similar rates, as did a few moderates (n=6; 10%). Interestingly LWAs (n=8) and RWAs (n=7) cited it comparably often. I have already discussed several notable examples of states cited as potential belligerents in a future war or nuclear war. Other respondents expressed concerns about foreign entities meddling in American affairs, often naming the same bad actors. For example, respondent Q6 (Moderate, RWA) wrote “it is clear and evident that there are threats emerging across the world that would have interests in taking down America,” specifically “Russia and China continuing to grow in power.” Others connected this to other political threats, like dysfunctional governance and institutional integrity. Respondent R1 (Moderate), for instance, wrote “if a hostile, foreign nation influences our elections, it can put leaders in place who will not look out for the best interests of the American people.” Disinformation and misinformation, two forms of false information that respondents tended to conflate, also featured in these responses as a means by which foreign states might attempt to influence domestic politics. For example, F5 (Liberal, LWA) wrote “I consider foreign influence on politics a threat because it can spread misinformation about politics and doesn't protect our democracy.” Although this respondent and others used the term “misinformation” to refer to this issue, the implication of intentionality suggests disinformation. By contrast, other respondents attributed disinformation to domestic bad actors, usually their political opponents.

**Theme 2.5: Disruptive Influence of Misinformation and Disinformation**

Whereas respondents of various ideological backgrounds cited foreign influence as a threat, those who referred to misinformation and disinformation from domestic sources tended to be liberal (n=10), although a few moderates (n=2) and conservatives (n=2) also cited this threat.
No RWAs mentioned it, and LWAs ($n=2$) did not appear to be particularly likely to cite it. Interestingly, the theme that emerged from these responses could be construed as reflecting a liberal threat of change, as these respondents’ concerns centered on the erosion of truth and resulting disruption. Respondent A8 (Liberal), for example, considered “disinformation…the most dangerous because it erodes the foundation of truth” and attributed it to “bad actors like selfish politicians and…the wealthy.” Likewise, respondent Q1 (Liberal) stated that “a large segment of the population believes things that are not true” and blamed “people sowing disinformation for personal and political gain.” In a similar vein, although citing different bad actors, respondent J5 (Conservative) wrote “you don’t know what’s true and what’s not anymore coming from mainstream media or social media.” Finally, respondent M4 (Moderate) placed the onus on consumers of information, asserting that “most people in the country do not have the intelligence nor the critical thinking skills to understand the difference between truth and fiction” and “tend to believe what suits their interests.”

Others attributed the rift in our society to this issue. For example, B7 (Liberal) wrote that “disinformation for others’ political gain has divided the country,” and P9 (Liberal, LWA) connected “political disinformation” to “bias and deceitful reporting creating anger culture.” Similarly, respondent K10 (Moderate) asserted that “the proliferation of misinformation…influences our Congress and causes civil strife.” Likewise, M1 (Liberal) described misinformation as “leading to [an] irrevocable split in our society” and went on to assert that a “large percent of our country does not operate on facts, but on ‘alternative facts.’” Finally, respondent W8 (Liberal) described “misinformation” as a threat to change as follows: “hard to progress…if a portion of the population is being fed lies.”

**Content Category 3: Economic Threats**
Economic issues featured more prominently than anticipated in responses across the sample. While economic concerns are obviously important to the nation and state of society, there was reason to suspect that people might be less inclined to mention such issues due to their greater complexity relative to social issues and existential threats. However, this prediction did not account for the preeminence of the economy as an issue for voters during an election year, and overlooked how readily apparent and consequential rising costs are to consumers. These conditions may have increased its salience, in addition to the open-ended items’ focus on collective threats to the nation. Most responses in this category referred to the threat of hardship brought on by poor economic conditions, although respondents connected this to different premises. In particular, people tended to refer to broader conditions of economic instability and insecurity brought on by inflation, as well as the individual hardships of poverty. The latter category overlapped with concerns about material inequality, and offered valuable insight into how liberals in particular conceptualize threats to equality and social justice.

**Theme 3.1: Inflation as a source of insecurity and symptom of economic instability.**

Poor economic conditions, especially inflation and rising costs of living, were the most commonly cited threats across the sample (n=96; 38%). This theme emerged from moderate (n=31; 50%) as well as conservative (n=30; 41%) and liberal (n=35; 28%) responses, sometimes to surprising effect. It was also a salient issue for RWAs (n=19; 46%) and LWAs (n=16; 38%). Overall, most responses to pertaining to inflation centered on practical considerations about living expenses and people’s ability to provide for themselves and their families. For example, respondent C6 (Moderate) cited the “fear of not being able to support family,” and D1 (Moderate) wrote that “economic inflation” affects “not just the ability to buy homes, but the ability to buy food and support the economy.” Likewise, respondent T8 (Moderate) stated that
“people are suffering and struggling to pay for food and household items.” Echoing these concerns, respondent G5 (Liberal) asserted that “people in general don't make enough money in this country and the cost of consumer goods is increasing everyday” and cited the “need to keep that in check so people can actually live a decent life and not have to worry about not being able to get the goods they need.” Another participant, respondent P3 (Conservative, wild card authoritarian), expressed concerns that people “will not be able to live and afford a happy and peaceful life.” Similarly, respondent T5 (Conservative, RWA) viewed the issue as likely to be “felt across the board among all individuals” and predicted that “it would continue to cause stress in families.” Finally, respondent Q6 (Moderate, RWA) forecasted “economic failure” in the following terms: “the U.S. economy is continuously going downhill with less and less money going to the people. More people are having trouble finding a job and making a living wage.”

While material considerations were preeminent, multiple liberal and conservative participants also couched their responses in terms of impediments to progress and the prospect of change, respectively. For example, participant V1 (Liberal) expressed fears about “less and less social mobility” due to economic instability, while respondent S10 (Liberal) wrote, “the more economic turmoil, the more wage gaps and class divides.” Likewise, L1 (Conservative, RWA) wrote that “rising wealth concentration, stagnant wages, and disparities in education and healthcare exacerbate social and economic inequalities.” Contrary to predictions, this was a rare case in which an authoritarian conservative cited a threat to change. By contrast, other responses evoked the threat of change, although these respondents were not uniformly conservative. Respondent V6 (Conservative), for instance, wrote of inflation: “The country is becoming a place I no longer recognize. People considered rich are unable to afford living.” Interestingly, two liberal RWAs, a rarity among the sample, spoke to the issue in similar terms. Specifically,
respondent D7 (Liberal, RWA), wrote that a poor economy “can lead to more poverty and instability and make people suffer,” while respondent G1 (Liberal, RWA) described “economic challenges” as exerting a “negative impact on a country’s stability.” Finally, respondent Z3 (Moderate) asserted that “the true middle class has been gutted and they were the backbone of the country,” appearing to evince the threat of change. The same respondent went on to state, “we are now divided mainly into poor/working poor and wealthy groups.”

**Theme 3.2: Poverty brings hardship and desperation.**

Adjacent to but distinct from inflation and unfavorable economic conditions, numerous respondents \((n=48)\) cited the threat of poverty as a source of hardship and desperation. Some respondents viewed this as a symptom of economic instability, but many spoke separately to their subjective experiences of poverty and its downstream effects on society. Like the previous category, this was proportionally a common theme of moderate responses \((n=16; 26\%)\), although liberals \((n=21; 17\%)\) and conservatives \((n=11; 16\%)\) mentioned it as well. Moreover, authoritarians on both sides of the political spectrum also cited this threat at similar frequencies, including 21% of LWAs \((n=9)\) and 20% of RWAs \((n=8)\).

Some participants, several of whom were authoritarian, characterized poverty as an existential threat. Respondent Q8 (Moderate, LWA), for example, offered this dire prediction: “as the poor get poorer and can no longer afford food or housing, people will die, either from starvation, dehydration, hypothermia, etc.” Others spoke to poverty’s personal impact, such as respondent P2 (Moderate): “my family is close to being in poverty and if nothing changes in this country, it will continue to be a direct issue for my family.” Also appearing to speak from personal experience, respondent C4 (Moderate) expressed frustration that “the harder you work the more you are paying for everything so even raises don’t matter.” Others viewed poverty as
the root of other problems, like respondent O4 (Conservative, RWA), who wrote that it “creates more homelessness, trauma, mental illness, low morals, and/or addiction.” By contrast, respondent P1 (Liberal, LWA) described poverty as causing the “destruction of the lower and working class” and connected this with predictions of “a disruption to global supply chains as basic goods aren’t produced.” References to disruption also evoke the threat of change.

Again, responses also dealt with threats of change and barriers to progress, often—but not always, as the previous example illustrates—expressed by members of the predicted ideological group. Respondent H7 (Liberal), for example, wrote “poverty prevents us from moving forward with our lives and this can affect those around us, including our children.” Liberal rationales for the threat of poverty also often conveyed a sense of injustice and inequality, threats to change that are the specific focus of the next section. To provide an example, respondent B7 (Liberal) wrote, “the top 1% holds the majority of the wealth and influences politics to keep it that way while the majority of the country lives paycheck to paycheck.” Respondent N8 (Moderate), meanwhile, expressed concerns over poverty “causing some to do crime” and added that it “leads to inequality.” Indeed, poverty and crime were frequently connected by respondents. For example, respondent M3 (Conservative) wrote, “poverty leads to crime which destabilizes the community.” Likewise, respondent K4 (Moderate) suggested that “economic collapse” would “lead to greater poverty…which will then contribute to higher crime rates and increasing lawlessness.” Along similar lines, others cited “desperation” (e.g., C9, Moderate; I2, Liberal, LWA) as a symptom of poverty. Finally, respondent V9 (Moderate) described poverty as a self-perpetuating problem with broader implications: “if there's too many poor people that (sic) can't make it financially then they will need to depend on government programs and there could be more homelessness.”
Content Category 4: Threats to Equality and Social Justice

As the previous categories demonstrate, respondents frequently framed their rationales for various threats in terms of their implications for social justice and equality. In other cases, conditions of inequality and social injustice were themselves regarded as a threat. These responses provided the clearest exemplars of the barriers to equality and social progress, or threats to change, that the DDT model proposes as motivation for LWA’s radical egalitarianism. This category comprised themes of loss of rights and erosion of personal freedoms, prejudice and discrimination, different forms of inequality, and lack of access to adequate health care.

Theme 4.1: Loss of Rights and Eroding Freedoms

Numerous participants \((n=35)\), most of whom were liberals \((n=26)\), framed their responses in terms of the loss of rights and personal liberties. Like the previous theme, this aligns with central values of liberalism, namely autonomy, and is generally consistent with the threat to change component of the DDT. That said, several conservatives \((n=7)\) and two moderates also referenced the threat of eroding rights and freedoms. Several LWAs \((n=5)\) and RWAs \((n=3)\) also cited this issue. As with discrimination, liberals often attributed declining freedoms to their right-wing political opponents. Respondent D10 (Liberal, LWA), for instance, cited “Republican policies that have erased so many rights from U.S. citizens” and added “Democrats do nothing to prevent it.” This response also conveys a sense that the entire system is flawed, in line with the anti-hierarchical sentiment of LWAs. Others were more roundabout, although they expressed similar sentiments. Respondent B9 (Liberal, LWA) cited simply the “reversal of human rights” as a threat, while F7 (Liberal) connected “fascism/totalitarianism” with “laws being proposed and passed to limit rights.” Similarly, respondent S10 (Liberal) cited as their most urgent threat the “rescinding of rights, because every day it seems new laws and bills are passed that
backtrack on the progress America has made over the past” (emphasis mine). Reproductive rights, an issue rendered all the more salient since the conservative Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade in June 2022, were a point of particular concern. For example, respondent J9 (Moderate) wrote, “laws that prohibit women from having body (sic) autonomy are threats to women's health and take away choices that should not be made by others.” Respondent S1 (Liberal, LWA) expressed similar concerns: “abortion is now illegal, it might become illegal to exist as a transgender person” and went on to reiterate “civil rights loss is the most concerning to me because it means I could be legislated out of existence as I am today.” Likewise, respondent Y8 (Liberal) cited the “loss of abortion rights for women, loss of LGBTQ+ rights, etc.” and added “we have lost rights that we have already gotten…it’s very scary to think about whatever rights we have [being] taken away.” These explicit and implicit references to societal regression, which were a common thread in liberals’ responses, illustrate the salience of threats to change.

When conservative participants expressed concerns over the loss of rights, they also tended to cite their political opponents. For example, respondent T9 (Conservative, RWA) devoted several lines to concerns about “freedom” and “taking away our constitutional rights” and provided the following rationale: “because they are wanting to take away our rights to control us as citizens.” Respondent L8 (Conservative) was more specific, citing what they perceived as “the government” attempting to “strip Americans of all their rights.” Likewise, respondent M3 (Conservative) cited “dismantling of the U.S. Constitution” and wrote, “the country is founded on the laws outlined in the Constitution.” Although responses to this effect were rare overall, it is interesting that multiple conservatives referred specifically to rights laid out in one of the nation’s founding historical documents. By contrast, liberals, when they
specified, tended to focus their fears on the loss of rights won (or at least codified) in more recent history (e.g., abortion, gay rights).

**Theme 4.2: Prejudice, Intolerance, and Discrimination**

Respondents identified various forms of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination as clear barriers to progress, equality, and social justice. Thus, this theme was among the most emblematic of the threats to change described by the DDT model. As predicted, it tended to be the primary domain of liberals ($n=21$), although some moderates ($n=5$) and conservatives ($n=5$) cited similar concerns. To clarify, this theme comprised respondents who cited prejudice and discrimination as threats rather than expressing prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes, although the latter were also present in the sample to a troubling degree. I have already noted several such bigoted responses related to immigration, and see no reason to reprint further ugliness. Nonetheless, I consider the implications of their prevalence among liberal and conservative, and authoritarian and non-authoritarians, in the discussion.

Many respondents spoke to this theme in stark terms, often pinning the blame on their ideological opponents. For example, respondent D10 (Liberal, LWA) wrote, “we have regressed back to 1930-50s levels of racism, Nazis are back and need to be culled.” Similarly, respondent P5 (Liberal, LWA) asserted that “racism is being used to divide the country by the conservative side and openly making people mistrustful of anyone who isn’t White or subservient to White people.” Respondent P10 (Liberal, LWA), meanwhile, described “White supremacy” as a “growing problem,” which they attributed to “mainstream Republican politicians supporting this type of ideology.” Respondent A5 (Liberal) likewise blamed right-wingers: “the rise of conservatism has led to more hostility between people…and also has led to violence towards minority groups.” Several respondents referred specifically to anti-Black racism, like
respondents O8 (Moderate), who referred to an “evil and unjust system built on the backs of aboriginal Black people in the United States,” and S1 (Liberal, LWA), who wrote “racism is still a huge issue, and cops killing Black people has not slowed down.” By contrast, respondent B4 (Moderate) spoke more generally to a “lack of inclusion and acceptance,” which they feared would ultimately lead to “violence against others.” Respondent D2 (Liberal) described racism as “harmful to some people’s way of life,” while G3 (Moderate) wrote that “discrimination on minorities” causes “America as a country to be split based on the color of skin.” As the sampled responses illustrate, several moderates spoke to this theme. Nonetheless, in line with predictions, the vast majority of responses that conveyed this threat were from liberals, several of them LWAs. Indeed, whereas RWAs (n=2) rarely cited this threat, LWAs (n=11) did so relatively commonly. Some, but not all, of the latter displayed a degree of authoritarian aggression, such as D10’s assertion that “Nazis…need to be culled.”

Other respondents spoke to intolerance on the basis of other protected characteristics. For example, respondent Q9 (Liberal, LWA) cited “a huge gap in respect and treatment of people who are different on the political spectrum, as well as gender, race, and sexuality.” Speaking both to this theme and the following theme, respondent M9 (Liberal) wrote that discrimination “violates the basic human rights and dignity of people who are treated unfairly or differently based on their characteristics, such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation.” Finally, whereas the bulk of participants who mentioned prejudice and discrimination were concerned about prejudice towards racial and sexual minorities, two conservatives (S8, X3) cited “anti-White” discrimination. Neither of these respondents were authoritarian. Thus, whereas liberals and some moderates referred to this issue as a threat to equality and social justice, what few conservatives cited the issue appeared to share concerns over hierarchy and the status of the majority.
Theme 4.3: Inequality

Different forms of material inequality, including uneven wealth distribution and disparate access to basic commodities and opportunities, were common threads across the sample’s responses \((n=33)\). In particular, two subthemes emerged related to inequality: that of wage gaps and poor wealth distribution as nigh-insurmountable obstacles, and lack of access to affordable housing, education, and other basic needs. While these responses often overlapped with concerns about economic conditions and poverty, the issue of uneven distribution of wealth emerged as a distinct form of inequality cited broadly across the sample. Likewise, access to basic necessities, affordable housing, and related issues like homelessness appeared to occupy a separate conceptual niche from poverty at large. Both subthemes were evident in liberals’ \((n=19)\) responses, while several moderates \((n=9)\) and a few conservatives \((n=5)\) also spoke to these issues, as did some LWAs \((n=7)\), and fewer RWAs \((n=4)\). Capturing both subthemes, respondent O2 (Moderate) defined the issue as follows: “I consider inequality to represent the divide that exists between classes of people in terms of access to money, resources, and basic necessities.” Other respondents referred to inequality in more general terms, and several respondents cited inequality as the root of all evils. For example, respondent N1 (Moderate) asserted “if there is still inequality existing, then people will not be able to live in peace and harmony,” and D4 (Liberal) wrote “inequality is in \((sic)\) some degree a factor in all the other threats.” Connecting inequality with human rights, respondent N7, a rare liberal RWA, wrote that inequality “jeopardizes the realization of all forms of rights everywhere.”

Subtheme 4.3a: Uneven distribution of wealth as a barrier to equality. Uneven wealth distribution was a commonly cited issue, particularly by liberals. By comparison, fewer moderates and conservatives mentioned it. Many respondents characterized this as a worsening
issue. For example, respondent P4 (Liberal) wrote that the “rich are becoming richer and poor are becoming poorer,” while T1 (Liberal, LWA) wrote, “inequality in the U.S. is getting worse and worse, and the divisions between wealthy and poor people are getting more and more severe.” Likewise, respondent V1 (Liberal) stated, “the widening gap of inequality and poverty is a growing concern” and cited “people becoming insanely wealthy while more and more people are ending up homeless.” Also referencing a lack of progress and even regression, respondent W8 (Liberal) observed that “wealth distribution is trending backwards,” which they attributed to “a small portion of the country…holding the entire nation back by not paying their fair share.” They went on to accuse “those in power in our nation” of “taking lobbyists’ money instead of working as a servant for the people.”

Others similarly framed the issue as subverting representative governance. For instance, respondent W2 (Liberal) asserted: “the working class have no true input on democracy when compared to the wills of rich donors and large corporations…leading many to lose faith in capitalism and democracy, the very principles on which this country was formed.” The latter portion of this response could also be interpreted as an example of a liberal citing the threat of change. Likewise, respondent M9 (Liberal) wrote that inequality “can undermine social cohesion and lead to political polarization, as people feel less connected and more resentful of each other.” Finally, respondent Z3 (Moderate) diagnosed the issue thus: “when the majority of a countries (sic) citizens are in the poor and working poor category and the majority of the wealth is concentrated in a small number of people then that country is heading downhill to its death.” Offering mixed support for predictions, whereas liberal respondents often framed this issue as a threat to progress and an equitable society, others referenced threats of change, and still others extrapolated to existential concerns.
Subtheme 4.3b: Lack of access and opportunity. Disparities in access to housing, education, and opportunity were another common thread in rationales related to inequality. Most, but not all, of these responses came from liberals. For example, respondent Z2 (Liberal) wrote, “Inequality concerns me because people deserve equal opportunities for jobs and education. We all need access to healthcare and housing.” Respondent Q9 (Liberal, LWA) similarly cited “income inequality, cost of education, cost of healthcare, housing crisis, etc.” as interconnected problems, which they attributed to “economic issues.” By contrast, respondent G10 (Liberal) connected this and other issues with climate change, writing “if we don’t contain global warming...increased food insecurity, loss of homes, and...problems like inequality, war, crime will more than likely increase as more and more humans compete for life’s necessities.” These liberals’ responses contained elements of threats to change, although they were also inflected existential concerns. Finally, connecting the issue to poverty, respondent L1 (Conservative, RWA) wrote, “poverty deprives individuals of basic necessities and opportunities.”

Theme 4.4: Public Health and Healthcare

Related to issues of access and equality, numerous liberals (n=15), moderates (n=10) and, to a lesser extent, conservatives (n=5) described threats to public health and the adjacent topic of healthcare. Several LWAs (n=4) also cited these issues. Respondent I9 (Liberal, LWA), for example, stated, “many avoid or postpone life saving measures due to not having access to affordable healthcare.” Likewise, respondent P8 (Liberal) wrote that due to a lack of “affordable healthcare, many Americans cannot afford any health issues.” Respondent T3 (Liberal) also cited “lack of healthcare,” writing, “we have the worst healthcare coverage for our citizens than any other first world country, and it doesn’t have to be that way.” Moderates referred to the issue in similar terms. For example, respondent N8 (Moderate) also expressed concerns about access to
healthcare, namely that “people can’t qualify…it’s expensive,” while R2 (Moderate) wrote, “people lack adequate and reasonable healthcare.” Others cited downstream effects, like respondent B2 (Moderate), who wrote, “healthcare is the most urgent because people cannot live healthily or work if they are ill.” What few conservatives and RWAs ($n=2$) mentioned this issue tended to speak to it in terms of mental illness, often in conjunction with fears about mass shootings. For instance, respondent K1 (Conservative, RWA) cited “mass shootings caused by people with mental illnesses who cannot get the mental help they need.” Likewise, respondent H1 (Moderate, RWA) wrote, “mental health is one of the biggest threats because a lot of people don’t have access to the care they need” and attributed “the recent surge in mass shootings and homeless” to “mental health issues.” Finally, one liberal respondent (W7) cited the widespread impact of mental illness, writing, “mental illness is a severely underfunded and undertreated area that leads to increased problems in the economy, crime, drugs, stress and puts lots of stress on the healthcare system” and adding, “with improved mental health care comes happier and more productive citizens.” Perhaps encouragingly, respondents of various ideological backgrounds were united in expressing a need for change around this issue, including authoritarians on both sides of the aisle.

**Content Category 5: Erosion of Morals and Values**

While each category discussed thus far has been inflected with respondents’ values and morals, many participants espoused specific concerns about the moral fiber and values of the nation and its citizens. The terms they used to describe these varied widely, but reflected a common theme of perceived decay or decline in the nation’s moral character and values. As such, this category was particularly demonstrative of the threats of change linked to conservatism and RWA in the DDT model. However, this was also the category for which intercoder
agreement was lowest (Krippendorff’s $\alpha=.64$), perhaps because respondents spoke to this issue in discrepant terms based on their personal values. Thus, conclusions from this category should be interpreted with caution.

**Theme 5.1: Ideological and Moral Decay**

Numerous respondents ($n=36$) described a perceived degradation of the nation’s ideological and moral fiber. Consistent with predictions, conservatives ($n=15; 21\%$) cited this manner of threat at the highest rates, along with some liberals ($n=14; 11\%$) and fewer moderates ($n=7; 11\%$). Moreover, RWAs tended to cite threats related to this issue ($n=6$), whereas only two LWAs mentioned it. For several respondents, this issue was clearly connected to their religious views. For example, respondent Q6 (Moderate, RWA) expressed concerns that “the more unethical America gets the more threat there is that its own people will rebel and that God will destroy them.” Likewise, respondent I3 (Conservative, RWA) cited as a threat the “loss of Christianity and morals” and stated, “we are lost without the moral code we have become great on.” Finally, respondent C3 (Conservative, RWA) considered “envy” and “greed” threats, writing of the former that “it leads to evil doing” and of the latter, “it leads to more sin.” That all three of these respondents were RWAs aligns with prior research linking religiosity to authoritarianism. Others couched their concerns in more secular terms of ethics, civics, or morals. Respondent S7 (Conservative), for instance, bemoaned what they termed “family collapse,” and wrote, “without functional, moral families, we cannot have good citizens.” Respondent T10 (Moderate) was blunter, writing, “the moral decay of society has caused a few generations of weak people and is a threat to the future of society.” Respondent M3 (Conservative) asserted, “the youth in this country are not being taught enough civics to understand that the Constitution is our founding document,” and cited this as their most urgent
issue, adding that “reintroducing a strong civics curriculum to our schools is key.” By contrast, they felt that “it is a parent’s job and a society’s job to indoctrinate our youth regarding sexuality, not the government school system.” This response also provides another example of conservatives referencing the Constitution, in line with their emphasis on traditionalism and historical precedent.

Few liberals spoke to this issue. One liberal, respondent H7, cited a “lack of honor” and “loss of empathy,” which they attributed to “the prevailing attitude of most people becom[ing] more and more selfish and self-centered” and “parents…unwilling or unable to teach their children to be honorable,” respectively. By contrast, another liberal espoused concerns about society rejecting science and becoming less rational. Specifically, respondent G10 (Liberal) wrote that “education, science, philosophy are not the enemy” and quoted classic science-fiction author Isaac Asimov as follows: “anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means ‘my ignorance is a good as your knowledge.’” Thus, although responses in this category were largely in line with the prediction that threats of change are salient for conservatives, and perhaps especially for religious RWAs, these concerns were not the sole domain of right-wingers.

Supplementary Category: Conspiracy Theories

A surpassing minority of respondents mentioned outright conspiracy theories, although responses in certain categories (namely immigration) were tinged with conspiracist ideation. For example, respondent Q3 (Liberal) expressed concerns over “aliens,” which could refer to immigrants or extraterrestrials, and K1 (Conservative, RWA) asserted that “China…introduced Covid.” In a similar vein, respondent S6 (Conservative) referred to COVID-19 as a “plandemic.” This same individual used language evocative of invasion (e.g., “overrun”) to describe illegal
immigration, evincing the conspiratorial Great Replacement narrative. Another conservative respondent (S8) expressed fears over “Jewish supremacy,” which they described thus: “Jews will continue to control the country for themselves and not the rest of the 98% of us.” Similarly, respondent K9 (Conservative, RWA) baselessly claimed that “Israel…control the media, banking, and [Israeli-American] dual-citizens are in our government.” This blatant antisemitism would be more surprising were it not for the volatile discourse surrounding the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict. Other forms of conspiracy theories were subtler, such as those baked into responses related to immigration. Participant rationales were frank and at times frankly racist in the language they used to describe immigrants, in particular illegal immigrants. Although few outright cried conspiracy, the aforementioned linguistic parallels that emerged here (e.g., invaded, overrun, infected, flooded) would appear to evidence the popular appeal of the Great Replacement narrative promoted by conservative pundits and entertained by popular figures like Elon Musk (e.g., Dang, 2023). Language evoking these conspiracist narratives was more prominent in conservative responses, which is also consistent with previous findings linking right-wing ideology to conspiracy beliefs (e.g., van der Linden et al., 2021). One liberal also referred to anti-immigrant rhetoric, albeit from a different perspective. Respondent V8 (Liberal) observed, “there has been a lot of negative media attention about illegal immigration, and certain parties will use this as a means for support for drastic unconventional solutions.”

**Threat Rankings**

In addition to spontaneously generated threats from the qualitative items, I examined participants’ rankings of twelve threats identified in prior research (Kahn et al., 2022). Following the open-ended section, respondents ranked the twelve threats from 1=most threatening to 12=least threatening, with no ties permitted. On the basis of a significant Kendall’s $W$ test, I
rejected the null hypothesis that respondents \((N=256)\) assigned ranks to the twelve threats at random, \(W=.14, \chi^2=402.61, p<.001\). However, unanimity was low across the sample, as would be expected if participants of different ideological leanings ranked the threats differently. Table 4 displays descriptive statistics for rankings of each threat across the sample.

**Table 4**

*Mean Ranking (and Standard Deviation) of Twelve Threats (N=256)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Mean Rank (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Poverty</td>
<td>4.78 (2.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. War</td>
<td>5.04 (2.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Crime</td>
<td>5.22 (2.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Terrorism</td>
<td>5.50 (2.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Climate Crisis</td>
<td>5.89 (3.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Inequality</td>
<td>6.37 (3.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Racism</td>
<td>6.52 (2.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Nuclear Weapons</td>
<td>6.52 (3.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Immigration</td>
<td>6.95 (3.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. MAGA</td>
<td>7.48 (3.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Religion</td>
<td>8.79 (3.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The Woke Mob</td>
<td>8.93 (3.41)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consistent with frequent mentions of economic issues in responses to the open-ended items, poverty was the top-ranked threat on average across the sample. Likewise paralleling their
prominence in the open-ended items, the sample ranked existential threats like war, crime, terrorism, and the climate crisis as particularly threatening. By contrast, political movements (MAGA and the Woke Mob) were ranked as less threatening, although open-ended responses would suggest that many respondents felt otherwise. Indeed, this seemed likely to reflect a response pattern whereby sympathizers with (or skeptics of) either movement rated their camp as a non-threat and the opposition as a threat. Moreover, given the preponderance of liberals in the sample, overall mean ranks likely obscured nuance in how left- and right-wingers ranked threats. To examine this possibility and other distributional characteristics of the rankings, I next performed a Kruskal-Wallis H test, a rank-based nonparametric extension of the Mann-Whitney U test that examines whether rankings differ across three or more groups. In line with the prediction that liberals, moderates, and conservatives would differently rank threats, significant differences emerged in how the groups ranked all threats but poverty. Table 5 reports inferential statistics, and Table 6 reports rankings for the twelve listed threats broken down across liberal, moderate, and conservative respondents.

**Table 5**

*Inferential Statistics from a Kruskal-Wallis Test of Sample-Wide Threat Rankings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Kruskal-Wallis H</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>30.34</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Crisis</td>
<td>82.89</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>38.39</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>Liberals ($n=124$)</td>
<td>Moderates ($n=62$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>78.60</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>47.06</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>51.21</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Weapons</td>
<td>7.37</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGA</td>
<td>82.44</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Woke Mob</td>
<td>110.24</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*Threat Rankings by Ideological Group ($N=256$)*
The picture that emerged from threat rankings across ideological groups was largely consistent with hypotheses and findings from the open-ended items. Specifically, liberals tended to evaluate MAGA, the climate crisis, racism, inequality, religion, and poverty as most threatening, issues that (with the exception of climate change) carry implications for egalitarianism and social justice. Indeed, rationales for respondents’ top-ranked threats made clear that liberals considered these threats to change and barriers to progress, although they did not speak exclusively in these terms. Moreover, some liberal respondents even framed the climate crisis, an existential threat, in terms of its implications for equality and the belief that underprivileged communities would experience the worst of its effects. By contrast, conservatives evaluated the Woke Mob, immigration, crime, terrorism, and nuclear weapons as most threatening and frequently, but not uniformly, referenced these threats’ implications for societal integrity (i.e., cohesion), shifting conventions, and violations of established norms and traditions.

On average, partisans on both sides of the aisle rated their ideological opponents as the number-one threat to the nation. Again, perceived threats to liberal and conservative values of social progress and preservation of the status quo were apparent in respondents’ rationales for their top-ranked threats. Liberals in particular commonly described Donald Trump and the MAGA movement as threats to social justice and equality, while conservatives decried what they perceived as the Woke Mob’s disregard for the nation’s “wholesome values and morals” (L9, Conservative), to borrow one respondent’s turn of phrase. Interestingly, moderates’ mean
rankings paralleled conservatives’ in that they rated the Woke Mob as a top threat, followed by immigration, crime, poverty, and nuclear war. This was a surprising finding, as moderates frequently cited political polarization and social division as threats in response to the open-ended items. Rather than viewing both far-left and far-right political movements as divisive, this pattern of rankings would appear to suggest that they attributed division more to the far-left. This is mere speculation, however, as few moderates’ rationales connected perceptions of societal fracture with a particular group. Pairwise comparisons performed with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level to account for Type-I error inflation offered further insight into apparent parallels between conservatives and moderates. Whereas liberals differed significantly from conservatives in how they ranked all threats but poverty and religion, and from moderates on all threats but poverty, nuclear weapons, and war, moderates’ and conservatives’ rankings converged across numerous categories. These were racism, religion, nuclear weapons, crime, war, and terrorism. Despite selecting the same top three threats on average (the Woke Mob, immigration, and crime), conservatives and moderates were not unanimous, but differed in how they ranked the Woke Mob \((p=.01)\) and immigration \((p=.03)\). Poverty was the sole threat for which there were no significant differences in mean rank across groups. Like frequent mentions of economic issues in the open-ended items, this may reflect poverty’s undifferentiated effects on the population, who feel the strain of economic hardship regardless of ideology.

For a more granular glimpse at patterns of threat rankings across the sample, I employed unfolding multidimensional scaling (UMDS), which models relationships between ranked items in a low-dimensional space (Finch, 2022). A two-dimensional UMDS model fit to the data using the Euclidean distance accounted for approximately 78% of variance in threat rankings \((\text{Stress}=.05, \text{Spearman’s } \rho=.83, \text{Kendall’s } \tau_b=.72)\). Figure 5 displays a configuration plot of threat
rankings in two dimensions, constructed in SPSS v.28 (IBM Corp., 2021). The visualization revealed several interesting trends. Whereas issues like poverty and to a lesser extent crime were central to individuals across the sample, other issues were more polarizing. These appeared to fall along a dimension of political ideology, represented by the x-axis. Indeed, threats clustered to the left of center tended to be those ranked highly by liberals (MAGA, inequality, racism, the climate crisis), and those to the right of center by conservatives (the Woke Mob, immigration, terrorism). On the left, rankings for inequality and racism, two clear threats to social justice and equality, were closely associated. These threats also loosely clustered with MAGA, another threat that liberal respondents characterized as a threat to change. Although threats on the right were less tightly clustered, the Woke Mob and immigration both fell well right of center.

Rationales provided for these threats further supported the prediction that conservatives are sensitive to perceived sources of disruption and unwelcome change. By contrast, existential threats like war, nuclear weapons, and terrorism clustered at the bottom of the plot and were ranked relatively highly by participants across the sample, whereas religion was regarded as relatively unthreatening.

Figure 5

*Configuration Plot of Threat Rankings Across the Sample (N=256)*
Finally, I compared threat rankings between authoritarians (those who scored +1SD above the mean on either LWA or RWA) and non-authoritarians using two dummy-coded variables (0=non-RWA, 1=RWA; 0=non-LWA, 1=LWA). This approach permitted the inclusion of the few wild-card authoritarians in analyses of both forms of authoritarianism, as opposed to excluding or coding these individuals as either RWAs or LWAs. Specifically, I performed two separate Mann-Whitney U tests to compare how RWAs ($n=40$) and LWAs ($n=42$) ranked threats relative to their non-RWA ($n=216$) and non-LWA ($n=214$) counterparts, results of which are reported in Table 7. Results for the first test revealed significant differences in how RWAs ranked a bevy of threats compared to the rest of the sample. In particular, compared to non-RWAs, RWAs ranked the Woke Mob, crime, immigration, and terrorism higher, and MAGA, the climate crisis, and inequality lower. LWAs also differed significantly from the broader
sample in how they ranked a variety of issues. These included MAGA, inequality, racism, and the climate crisis, which they ranked as more threatening, as well as the Woke Mob, crime, immigration, and terrorism, which they ranked as less threatening. By contrast, neither RWAs nor LWAs differed from the broader sample in how they ranked war, poverty, religion, and nuclear weapons. Table 8 reports authoritarians’ threat rankings, broken down into RWAs and LWAs.

**Table 7**

*Results of Mann-Whitney U Tests Comparing RWAs and LWAs to Rest of Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>RWAs (n=40)</th>
<th>LWAs (n=42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>p-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>3236.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Crisis</td>
<td>2753.50</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>3571.00</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>4047.00</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>2969.00</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>2826.00</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>3537.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>2780.00</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Weapons</td>
<td>3725.50</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>3973.50</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGA</td>
<td>2653.00</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Woke Mob</td>
<td>2600.50</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 8

**Threat Rankings for RWAs and LWAs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat Rankings</th>
<th>RWAs (n=40)</th>
<th>LWAs (n=42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Woke Mob</td>
<td>1. Inequality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Crime</td>
<td>2. Racism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Immigration</td>
<td>3. Climate Crisis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Terrorism</td>
<td>4. MAGA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. War</td>
<td>5. Poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Poverty</td>
<td>7. War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Inequality</td>
<td>10. The Woke Mob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Climate Crisis</td>
<td>11. Crime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. MAGA</td>
<td>12. Immigration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In support of the basic premise of the DDT framework, whereas LWAs evaluated issues with clear implications for social justice and equality (inequality, racism) as particularly threatening, RWAs tended to rank political opponents (the Woke Mob) and issues with implications for the integrity of society (crime, immigration, terrorism) most highly. Thus, right-
wingers, whether authoritarian or not, consistently ranked their political opponents as the foremost threat. LWAs also ranked their political opponents highly, albeit less so than RWAs and their non-authoritarian liberal peers. This finding echoed the open-ended responses, in which left- and right-wing respondents frequently elaborated on the threats they felt their political adversaries posed to their values. As noted, whereas liberals characterized MAGA as a regressive movement fronted by a leader with autocratic tendencies, conservatives took umbrage with what they perceived as cultural changes imposed by the Woke Mob. Interestingly, although RWAs’ top three ranked threats (the Woke Mob, crime, and immigration) mirrored conservatives’ (and moderates’) rankings, LWAs differed from non-authoritarian liberals in that they ranked their political opponents lower on average. More in line with the DDT’s prediction that threats to equality and progress motivate LWA, LWAs ranked inequality and racism over even the existential threat of climate change.

Taken together with the results of the thematic analysis, findings offered converging evidence that social justice issues and perceived barriers to progress, or threats to change, are uniquely salient to liberals and LWAs. Likewise consistent with predictions, threats with a potentially destabilizing influence on society and culture appeared to resonate particularly strongly with conservatives across both the open-ended items and threat rankings. Although right-wingers frequently connected issues like immigration, crime, and terrorism to existential concerns over security and safety, responses reflecting threats of change were hardly absent.

Discussion

This study provides valuable information about the threats and issues salient to American laypeople of various political ideologies. In their own words, liberals, conservatives, and moderates reported on the threats they perceived to the nation as well as their motivations for
citing those issues. Along with threat rankings, thematic analysis of this rich qualitative dataset offered qualified preliminary evidence for the threat of/to change distinction central to the DDT framework. Although the threats and rationales respondents supplied were wide-ranging, thematic analysis revealed trends that were generally consistent with hypotheses. References to threats of and to change were common threads across responses, with the former most frequently connected to issues like immigration, crime, government dysfunction, left-wing political opponents (namely, liberals and the Woke Mob), and societal degradation, and the latter to right-wing political opponents (Donald Trump and MAGA), loss of rights, prejudice and discrimination, inequality, poverty, and economic issues. As predicted, these tended to fall along conservative and liberal ideological lines, although not in all cases. Moreover, trends in threat rankings across ideological groups were suggestive of these threat types. This was particularly true of threats to progress and social justice, including racism, inequality, and the MAGA movement, which liberals, and especially LWAs, tended to rank among their foremost threats. Conversely, conservatives and RWAs rated the Woke Mob, immigration, and crime as their top-ranked threats. Interestingly, moderates’ responses to the open-ended items and threat rankings aligned them more closely with conservatives than liberals, in that they also expressed concerns over crime and immigration and ranked the Woke Mob, immigration, and crime as their top three threats. By contrast, moderates cited polarization and social division, economic issues, and poverty at higher rates than the rest of the sample.

Threats upon which liberals and conservatives agreed were particularly interesting, as in the case of economic issues, poverty, and war. Sample-wide threat rankings largely reflected the degree of agreement among groups, with poverty ranked most highly, followed by war and crime. These issues tended to be considered threatening by respondents of various ideological

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backgrounds, which may reflect their indiscriminate effects on the population, all of whom must contend with harsh economic conditions, societal unrest due to crime, and the death and disruption that would result from the nation going to war. The rationales provided for these issues offered clues about the motivations associated with different ideological leanings, which were again partially consistent with the premise of the DDT. For example, whereas conservatives frequently connected the threat of crime to an influx of undocumented immigrants, liberals were more inclined to connect it to desperation born of poverty, or in other cases access to guns. By contrast, the threat of war and the related threat of nuclear weapons were described similarly by respondents across the sample as agents of death and destruction. Furthermore, that liberals frequently mentioned and highly ranked climate change, an existential threat, is also noteworthy, as existential threats have largely been considered the domain of conservatives—and especially RWAs—in prior work. The current findings are overall consistent with this, as conservatives and RWAs tended to cite existential threats most frequently and rank them higher than liberals and LWAs. Other issues were more polarizing, hence MAGA and the Woke Mob being ranked among the lowest in sample-wide rankings versus highest when the sample was broken down by ideology.

Both liberals and conservatives viewed their ideological opponents as threats and implicated them in various social ills. Indeed, political and ideological opponents were highly salient across the sample, as responses to both the open-ended and ranking items demonstrated. Although this emphasis was doubtless impacted by the fact that the study was run during an election year, it provides a high degree of ecological validity for the current focus. If the values of liberalism and conservatism make certain threats salient, that should be even more true when confronted with how one’s political adversaries might steer the nation wrong. Indeed, concerns
about political opponents appeared to reflect a general sense of worry about the country being taken in a direction contrary to one’s personal values. This was particularly true of liberals, who routinely characterized their right-wing opponents as agents of prejudice and a regressive influence on the nation. Whereas political opponents were a theme across the sample’s responses, it bears noting that the MAGA movement and Donald Trump were mentioned more commonly than political opponents of conservatives (e.g., Biden, the Woke Mob). This in part reflects the overrepresentation of liberals in the sample; however, both liberals and LWAs cited their ideological opponents at higher rates than conservatives. Plainly, liberals perceive Donald Trump and MAGA as a clear and present threat to their values and freedoms, likely rendered all the more urgent by the upcoming 2024 presidential election. That several moderates also cited Donald Trump as a threat to democracy suggests that left-wingers are not alone in this fear, although liberals’ and LWAs’ emphasis on regression and oppression in connection to their political opponents highlights the particular salience of threats to change on the left.

Conversely, when conservatives (and moderates, in an unexpected finding) cited left-wing political opponents, they often described perceived consequences for the culture or moral fiber of the nation, in line with predictions regarding the threat of change. Whereas liberals reliably referred to MAGA and Donald Trump by name in their open-ended responses, conservatives were less uniform in how they described their political opponents. Some referred to “the Woke agenda,” while others decried socialism and communism, all of which they connected to the Democratic party. This may reflect that “wokeness” as a concept remains amorphously defined. To offer my own attempt at a definition, Woke represents a state of social enlightenment that captures the progressivism and egalitarianism at the heart of left-wing politics, in the same fashion that the desire to return to an ill-defined American heyday (i.e., to
Make America Great Again) is inherent to MAGA. In other words, to conservatives, the Woke Mob may well represent the embodiment of threats of change, whereas to liberals, MAGA represents a fundamental threat to progress and social justice. This seems to have borne out in the threat rankings, where conservatives and liberals consistently ranked the Woke Mob and MAGA respectively as top threats to the nation. Interestingly, moderates again mirrored conservatives in ranking the Woke Mob higher and MAGA lower on average. Whereas groups like Black Lives Matter and the antifascist movement (i.e., antifa) have often been villainized by right-wing media in past years, no respondents cited BLM or antifa as threats in the current sample (although respondents who labelled their opponents fascists were almost exclusively liberal). However, numerous conservatives and even some moderates referenced “wokeness” in open-ended responses, and both groups ranked the Woke Mob as the single greatest threat to the nation on average in subsequent ranking items. By contrast, that a higher proportion of conservatives than liberals cited government dysfunction as a threat is unsurprising given that the current administration is left-wing. However, not insubstantial numbers of liberals and moderates also expressed perceptions of dysfunction, which centered on the shared belief (albeit attributed to different sources) that the government is ineffectual and failing to serve the peoples’ interests. Moreover, findings with regards to the prevailing sense, particularly among liberals, that democracy is in decline align with other work that has found greater concern among liberals than conservatives over the state of democracy not only in America, but globally (Benjamin et al., 2022).

This study is one of few to the author’s knowledge to qualitatively examine threat perceptions of liberals and conservatives as well as left- and right-wing authoritarians. Moreover, this study provides valuable information about the types of threats to which self-described
moderates are sensitive, a topic that has received little attention in other work. History frequently overlooks moderates, as does the common practice in political psychological research of excluding individuals who score at the scale midpoint on measures of political ideology. By contrast, this study examined the viewpoints of centrists as well as left- and right-wingers in acknowledgment that moderates represent a significant and vital contingent of the votership in a functional democracy. Indeed, despite the preponderance of liberals in the current sample, on continuous measures of political ideology sample means fell only slightly left of center. In addition to economic and existential issues, which they mentioned at comparable rates to left- and right-wingers, moderates appeared to be particularly concerned about political polarization and social division. This was an unanticipated finding, and raised the question of whether these individuals’ identification as moderate on a subsequent forced-choice item was emblematic of their expressed distaste for partisan politics. Indeed, some responses appeared to reflect a certain degree of disgust with the current state of American politics. Otherwise, moderates’ language did qualitatively differ from that of partisan ideologues, especially from conservatives, with whom they agreed on a variety of issues in the threat rankings. One possible explanation for this is that some self-described moderates harbored conservative viewpoints but were disinclined to describe themselves as conservatives, perhaps out of distaste for certain elements of their camp. Indeed, it is possible that certain conservatives may renounce their partisan identity as backlash to the far-right’s contrarian brand of politics; for example, the so-called Never Trumpers (Boot, 2020). If this was the case, however, one would expect MAGA to feature more prominently as a threat in moderates’ responses. The opposite was true, as moderates and conservatives were unanimous in ranking the Woke Mob as their number one threat. A more likely explanation is that this pattern is emblematic of negative partisanship, a form of political negativity bias in
which individuals are less for one side than against the other (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). This would explain why someone might identify as moderate while taking particular exception to left- or right-wing politics. As for why moderates in the current sample appeared to view the Woke Mob as particularly problematic, I can only speculate based on the few open-ended responses to this effect. One moderate cited “American values being torn down” (W3), a clear threat of change, another conflated Wokeness with Democratic policies, and a third viewed both MAGA and the Woke Mob as sources of illiberalism. Moderates’ motivations surrounding these and other commonly cited threats, namely polarization and economic issues, warrant further exploration in future work.

In addition to liberalism and conservatism, the current analyses help elucidate the concerns and motivations of authoritarians on both sides of the political spectrum. In response to open-ended items, authoritarians tended to generate similar threats to non-authoritarians with whom they shared a political party, with several notable exceptions. For LWAs, threats of climate change, political and ideological opponents (namely MAGA and Donald Trump), economic issues and poverty, prejudice, and inequality featured prominently. For RWAs, the most commonly reported threats were immigration and various existential threats, including crime, war, terrorism and, surprisingly, climate change, as well as economic instability. In this regard, RWAs’ responses were consistent with earlier work that characterizes them as sensitive to threats to safety and security. For both LWAs and RWAs, however, open-ended responses supported the prediction that issues with implications for equality and social justice are more salient on the left, and threats with consequences for social cohesion and the potential to disrupt society on the right. Somewhat ironically, authoritarians on both sides of the aisle expressed concerns over social division and political polarization alongside criticisms of their political
opponents. In many cases, these criticisms centered on the notion that one’s ideological foes were the source of societal discord.

Overall, rationales provided by RWAs and LWAs tended to be similar to their non-authoritarian counterparts when referring to the same issues. That is, authoritarians did not consistently appear to use more extreme or violent language than non-authoritarians despite mentioning certain topics more often. For example, while numerous RWAs expressed virulent and occasionally racist sentiments, they did not appear to do so more frequently than non-authoritarian conservatives. Likewise, LWAs derogated their right-wing opponents as unsophisticated simpletons and fascists in comparable terms and at comparable frequencies to non-authoritarian liberals. A surpassingly small portion of the sample (n=3) scored high on both measures of authoritarianism (i.e., Altemeyer’s (1996) so-called wild card authoritarians). Of these individuals, two of whom were liberals (E3, O3) and one a conservative (P3), both liberals devoted several lines to climate change, while the conservative devoted several lines to economic threats. That all three of these wild cards displayed this response pattern could be taken as evidence of cognitive rigidity, in that each seemed to be fixated on one particular issue. However, given the minute sample size, it could as easily be indicative of low-effort responding. This may also explain how an individual might score high on two seemingly conflicting ideological measures.

Threat rankings offered further clues about the issues salient to left- and right-wing authoritarians, again providing partial support for predictions. Threats for which authoritarians’ and non-authoritarians’ rankings did not differ included poverty, nuclear weapons, war, and surprisingly, religion. Additionally, RWAs did not differ from non-authoritarians in regard to racism, whereas LWAs tended to rank racism more highly compared to the rest of the sample,
including non-authoritarian liberals. Findings with respect to political opponents revealed further nuance. Whereas RWAs and conservatives more broadly (as well as moderates) were unanimous in regarding the Woke Mob as the number one threat to the nation, LWAs and liberals were not in total consensus regarding the MAGA movement. Interestingly, although LWAs ranked MAGA among their top five threats on average, they tended to rank the movement lower than liberals at large. Instead, they evaluated systemic issues of inequality and racism as the foremost threats to the nation, in line with hypotheses and the characterization of LWAs as radical egalitarians. By contrast, RWAs ranked the Woke Mob, crime, and immigration, all issues with implications for social cohesion and the cultural climate, as most threatening. That political opponents outranked even existential threats for RWAs speaks to the salience of threats of change and departs somewhat from earlier work that has found RWAs to be particularly sensitive to existential threats. However, it may also reflect the immediacy of political threats in an election year versus the comparatively far-off prospect of, for instance, war and climate change. This possibility applies to the whole sample.

Although the primary hypotheses were largely upheld, responses to the open-ended items diverged from predictions in notable respects. Respondents referenced many clear threats of and to change, but these concerns were not preeminent, as economic issues and existential threats like climate change, crime, and war were the most frequently mentioned across ideological groups. Moreover, despite the open-ended items’ focus on threats to the nation, for several of the most-mentioned existential threats (e.g., climate change, war/nuclear war), many respondents cited the potential for global impact. These responses appeared to follow from the logical conclusion that global mass-casualty (even extinction-level) events supersede the interests of any one nation. A similar line of thought appears to have driven the previously noted response
pattern in which participants who spontaneously generated epistemic threats in response to the open-ended items ultimately ranked an existential threat highest in the threat ranking section. That is, whereas epistemic threats appear to have been more salient to these individuals when asked to list threats, reminded of existential threats, they tended to rank those higher. For liberals, this was frequently the case for the existential threat of climate change, whereas conservatives did this to a lesser extent for threats of terrorism, war, and nuclear weapons. On the whole, however, political opponents remained the top-ranked threats across ideological groups, whereas liberals and LWAs assigned inequality and racism similar, if not higher, rankings than existential threats. Thus, to again borrow Duckitt’s (2001) parlance, political beliefs make certain values so *chronically salient* as to in some cases supersede concerns about death and destruction. As a further indication of these principles’ chronic salience to conservatives and liberals, rationales even for existential and economic threats were consistently inflected with fears of change and threats to social justice and progress. For example, issues like terrorism, war, and crime were frequently cited by conservatives as disruptions to society and the American way of life alongside considerations of safety and security. Even immigration, which could be viewed as an existential threat by groups concerned about its implications for their majority status (e.g., Bai & Federico, 2020, 2021), was associated with threat of change as well as safety and security concerns. Likewise, liberals often, but not always, framed responses about economics and poverty in terms of human rights and equality. By contrast, findings with respect to climate change offered only partial support for the hypothesized threat of/to change distinction, although response patterns were largely consistent with prior work suggesting that liberals are more concerned about omission-based threats with global versus local extent (e.g., Kahn et al., 2022). Nonetheless, several liberals forecasted disproportionate impacts on
underprivileged and marginalized groups to explain their climate concerns, alongside more obvious references to casualties and widespread destruction. These trends suggest that even for existential threats, conservative and liberal values and corresponding threats of and to change were salient to respondents.

This study makes a notable contribution to literature surrounding the motivations and threat perceptions of liberals, moderates, conservatives, and left- and right-wing authoritarians. However, several limitations bear noting. First, this study was conducted during a U.S. presidential election year, and qualitative responses may have captured different political sentiments than during a less contentious time period. Frequent mentions of political opponents, polarization and division, and highly politicized issues like immigration and the loss of rights to bodily autonomy, among others, would appear to evidence the heightened salience of political issues in the current sample. Although responses to this effect tended to be particularly demonstrative of the predicted distinction between threats of and to change, it is possible that these threats may not be so salient under different conditions. Additionally, while intercoder agreement was generally acceptable, a few categories suffered from suboptimal reliability. This was particularly unfortunate in regard to certain political threats and perceptions of societal degradation and moral decay. As a result, some caution is warranted in interpreting these areas, which respondents spoke to in various terms that made reliable semantic coding more challenging. However, this methodological artifact should not be taken as a total invalidation of the contents of responses in these categories. Indeed, some scholars have argued that intercoder agreement is an imperfect metric or even antithetical to the epistemology of qualitative research (e.g., Clarke & Braun, 2013). Finally, in order to elucidate the threat-related motivations in the context of the current distinction, future research will need to probe whether and to what extent
respondents regarded each cited threat as a threat of or to change. Deeper analysis of how people conceptualize and respond to these threats, in addition to their sheer salience, will be particularly important. A notable shortcoming of the current study is its inability to account for the extent to which responses reflected respondents’ actual concerns or, for instance, issues they have heard about in the media but may not find personally motivating. Certain issues could be salient simply because they receive significant media attention, but may not resonate with the individual enough to provoke a response or necessarily because they are viewed as a threat of or to change. It is possible that some people, particularly those who are less threat-sensitive overall, may default to mentioning issues that receive the most media coverage simply because they are cognitively available. Moreover, people may perceive the same issues as threats for different reasons, which may have different motivational implications. For example, the growth of corporations with monopolistic ambitions could be viewed as a threat to progress by reducing economic freedom and curbing competition, or as a threat of change due to the loss of family businesses and local traditions. Follow-up research will be essential to fully address the question of how these threats translate to motivations.

The current study also presents various avenues for future research. For example, one question that the current design cannot answer, but which future studies should explore, is to what extent respondents’ exposure to political messaging influenced their responses. Although the threats people cited often fell in line with the issues over which their ideological camps typically claim ownership (e.g., climate change for liberals, immigration for conservatives), it was difficult to ascertain whether respondents were reporting on the basis of personal values or parroting partisan talking points. Some individuals may dutifully regurgitate the threats they have heard about on the news or from their favorite politicians, for instance, but this may not
necessarily stir them to action or authoritarianism. Indeed, a few respondents referenced recent news reports or articles they had read as rationales for citing certain threats. For partisan media sources, this could also be related to the heuristic functions of political identity, as individuals who tend to approach political issues via a more top-down process may be more likely to accept their party’s stance by default. Although effects on the salience of these issues should be similar, the centrality of these beliefs to the individual in question likely moderates their impact on behavior, including the possible embrace of authoritarianism. Accordingly, future studies should consider the impact of political expertise and engagement with political messaging on threat perceptions, as other scholars have argued (e.g., Federico, 2021).

Although respondents did not all toe party lines, many used language evocative of or echoing political pundits and partisan media narratives. This was most apparent in regard to immigration, which conservatives and moderates consistently characterized as a literal invasion, with many making specific reference to a supposed influx of military-aged men over the southern border. However, it also extended to other threats, namely crime and gun violence, which conservatives tended to attribute to mental illness and liberals to inadequate gun control. To explore how laypeople feel about this and any number of political issues, future qualitative studies could apply thematic analysis techniques to pseudo-naturalistic data sets available to the online public, such as social media posts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, X) and internet blog sites (e.g., reddit). Given the noted linguistic parallels in how partisans characterized pet issues and the widespread impact of social media on the cultural milieu, future research in this vein could examine how political messages spread in online forums. More specifically, given the nature and degree of exposure to political content on social media (to say nothing of its use as a preferred medium of communication by certain politicians), future work might explore how viral content
memetic language influences the political discourse. Finally, future research should expand upon moderates’ motivations and examine whether and what issues might compel them to embrace authoritarianism, and which form if so. In the current sample, authoritarian moderates were about evenly split between LWAs \( n=4 \) and RWAs \( n=5 \), yet moderates’ response patterns suggested a greater affinity for conservative viewpoints overall. It is unclear whether this is representative of moderates writ large, but based on the present data alone, economic issues, political polarization, and social division would be interesting candidates for further exploration in this regard. Another question that warrants investigation is whether moderates are by nature less cognitively rigid than their partisan counterparts, and what other personality traits might be related to identifying as a moderate. In other words, what elective affinities predispose individuals to centrism?

The current findings present a complex picture of the threat-related motivations of liberals, moderates, and conservatives. The breadth of threats and rationales respondents cited illustrates both the highly subjective nature of threat and the tenuous state of our national order, which has rarely seemed less stable than during the last two election cycles. Perhaps the greatest strength of the current study, then, was the use of qualitative methods to examine these timely and nuanced issues in Americans’ own words. The combination of inductive and deductive approaches used here to generate codes and analyze themes permitted an exhaustive exploration of people’s threat perceptions, which generated some unanticipated findings. Whereas predictions regarding threats of and to change guided this research from the outset, other questions and themes emerged during the process of coding and analysis. Nonetheless, the patterns that emerge from the data are sufficiently consistent with the premise of the DDT’s threat-to-authoritarianism pathways to warrant testing the framework in an experimental setting.
The distinction between threats of and to change appears to be both conceptually viable and theoretically useful for understanding the motivations of liberals and conservatives, alongside extant threat taxonomies. Accordingly, a second phase of research built upon these findings by empirically testing the DDT model across two distinct populations of American citizens.
Study Two

Study One revealed a breadth of threats salient to American citizens of various political ideologies and offered preliminary evidence for the particular salience of threats of change to conservatives and threats to change, or barriers to progress and social justice, to liberals (H1). Findings were thus generally consistent with the central premise of the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism (DDT), which predicts that cognitive rigidity predisposes conservatives and liberals to RWA and LWA respectively in response to distinct threats to their values. Study Two empirically tested the predictions of the DDT model in student and lay samples of American adults, as well as explored additional questions related to potential differences between these samples. Specifically, Study Two examined the model’s predictions that cognitive rigidity acts as a common dispositional diathesis of LWA and RWA, as suggested in prior work (e.g., Costello et al., 2022), and that this affinity for authoritarian might be aggravated by different threats based on an individual’s particular brand of politics. Moreover, I was interested in whether these diverging threat-to-authoritarianism pathways might elicit different manners of authoritarian responses based on the multidimensional conceptualizations of LWA and RWA established in earlier literature (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996, 1998; Costello et al., 2022; Duckitt et al., 2010). As a corollary question, I investigated whether cognitive rigidity, authoritarianism, and the proposed threat-to-authoritarianism processes differed between American undergraduates and laypeople.

The DDT represents the first integrated theory of authoritarianism across the political spectrum. To reiterate, the model predicts that cognitive rigidity is positively related to both RWA and LWA (H2), and that this relationship is enhanced by threats of change for conservatives (H3a) and threats to change for liberals (H3b). In particular, because conservatism
stresses the preservation of traditional values and old-fashioned ways of life, conservatives should be especially threatened by the prospect of cultural shifts, loss of traditions, and disruption of the status quo. By contrast, liberalism’s emphasis on personal autonomy, equality, and social progress likely enhances the salience of threats to these values, namely sources of inequality, injustice, and barriers to progress, or threats to change. Various lines of evidence, including the predictions borne out in Study One, point to the particular importance of social cohesion and tradition to rightists and RWAs (Choma & Hodson, 2017; Duckitt & Sibley, 2017; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2008; Jost et al., 2013; Jost et al., 2018; Jugert & Duckitt, 2009) and social justice and egalitarianism to leftists (Graham et al., 2009, 2013; Jost et al., 2008; Kteily et al., 2017; Lucas & Kteily, 2018; Martin & North, 2021; Waldfogel et al., 2021). However, little research has directly examined the motivational processes that underlie LWA, a critical oversight to which other scholars have drawn attention (e.g., Duckitt, 2022; Kay et al., 2023; Osborne et al., 2023). For ideologues on both sides of the political continuum, cognitive rigidity, the tendency towards psychological inflexibility, was expected to interact with political ideology to predict sensitivity to these threat types and the likelihood of endorsing authoritarianism in response. In other words, the DDT proposes that left- and right-wing authoritarianism arise as a function of cognitive rigidity, political ideology (liberalism or conservatism), threat type, and interactions thereof. These diverging threat-to-authoritarianism pathways, and in particular the threat to change-to-LWA pathway, are the most significant novel contribution of the current work. In order to test this novel framework, I performed a within-subjects experiment with a repeated-measures design. In it, participants completed measures of cognitive rigidity, threat type, and authoritarian behavioral intentions following a manipulation designed to prime threats of and to change.
In order to test **Hypothesis 2**, that cognitive rigidity acts as a common dispositional diathesis of LWA and RWA, I focused on two markers of cognitive rigidity derived from prior work: dogmatism and the need for cognitive closure. Dogmatism, which reflects unjustified certainty in one’s beliefs, has long been considered a central feature of cognitive rigidity, and is a robust predictor of authoritarianism (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996, Costello et al., 2022; Ganzach & Schul, 2021; Onraet et al., 2015). Need for cognitive closure (NFC; Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski et al., 2006; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Roets & van Hiel, 2011; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), or the motivation to reach conclusions quickly (i.e., obtain closure) and resist reopening the case once one has done so, is likewise regarded as a central component of cognitive rigidity. Like dogmatism, NFC has been shown to predict authoritarianism (e.g., Berggren et al., 2019; Chirumbolo, 2002; Costello et al., 2022; van Hiel et al., 2004) and conservatism more generally (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a), although more recent work has drawn this rigidity-of-the-right perspective into serious question (e.g., Zmigrod, 2020; Zmigrod et al., 2020). As previously noted, these are far from the only variables to be treated as markers of cognitive rigidity in earlier work, a state of affairs which has led to conceptual ambiguity in the literature. There are several reasons for focusing on these particular constructs in the current study. First, both dogmatism and need for closure have emerged as robust predictors of RWA (Berggren et al., 2019) and, to a lesser extent, LWA (e.g., Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022). Second, both are easily measured using readily available and well-validated scales. Finally, because cognitive rigidity in general, and dogmatism in particular, have been routinely conflated with conservatism and RWA (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; Rokeach, 1954, 1960; Wilson, 1973), it seemed appropriate to reexamine the construct’s relationship to authoritarianism in the context of an updated, expanded theoretical framework. Support for the ‘dispositional diathesis’
component of the DDT model would be established if cognitive rigidity significantly predicts greater endorsement of LWA and RWA in initial bivariate correlations and multilevel models. Moreover, I predicted that effects would be more pronounced for conservatives than liberals given the lopsided relationship between cognitive rigidity, authoritarianism, and right-wing ideology demonstrated even in work evidencing left-wing rigidity (Zmigrod, 2020; Zmigrod et al., 2019, 2020). Based on prior studies using similar measures of authoritarianism and cognitive rigidity (e.g., Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022), small- to medium-sized effects were expected for the cognitive rigidity-to-LWA link, and medium to large effects for the rigidity-to-RWA link.

Support for Hypotheses 3a and 3b, that threats of change enhance RWA in cognitively rigid conservatives and threats to change enhance LWA in rigid liberals, would be established if mean-centered interaction terms between cognitive rigidity and perceived threat of and to change predicted variance in left- and right-wing authoritarian responding over and above independent predictors entered into the model. Furthermore, post hoc analysis should display a differential moderation effect such that the predicted positive effects of cognitive rigidity upon authoritarianism would be enhanced for conservatives and liberals in the threats of and to change conditions, respectively. The threat manipulation featured in the current study presented participants with fictional political movements whose platforms were framed either as extremely regressive (threat to change) or extremely progressive (threat of change). Given the venom with which respondents in Study One referred to their political opponents, threats of change were expected to strongly elicit authoritarian responding, particularly among conservatives. By contrast, Russo and colleagues (2020) found in an Italian sample that whereas perceptions of societal threat were related to higher ACT Authoritarianism (i.e., aggression), Conservatism (i.e.,
submission), and endorsement of antidemocratic norms. Traditionalism (i.e., conventionalism) buffered the effects of societal threat on support for antidemocratic norms. However, a buffering effect seemed unlikely in the current study, as threats of change directly impinge upon the old-fashioned ways of life that conservatism is concerned with protecting. For liberals, meanwhile, threats to change were expected to evoke authoritarian responses. While significant positive effects were anticipated on authoritarianism, however, the relative lack of research in this regard precluded more specific predictions about the extent of this relationship.

Finally, with respect to differences between undergraduates and laypeople, LWA was expected to be more prevalent among college students, and RWA among laypeople. While it seemed possible that cognitive rigidity would be higher overall among laypeople than undergraduates due to age-related personality changes in open-mindedness, it also appeared possible and perhaps likely that cognitive rigidity would be more common among liberal undergraduates than laypeople. However, it was unclear whether this would contribute to differences in the predicted motivational processes for RWA and LWA. Although the direction of predicted effects seemed unlikely to differ across samples, if LWA is truly more prevalent among college students, it seemed possible that the lopsided symmetry between left- and right-wingers found in other work would be less pronounced in the student sample compared to the lay sample. The literature remains divided as to whether undergraduates are suitable candidates for political psychology research. Whereas some scholars advocate for the use of college convenience samples (e.g., Krupnikov et al., 2021), others have long questioned their generalizability (Sears, 1986). I therefore examined whether students diverged from laypeople on the variables of interest. Although not the central question of the current research, it is a timely one. For example, American college campuses have been the site of some of the most
contentious protests surrounding Israel’s prosecution of war in Gaza, and media discourse around this movement has often centered on radicalism and authoritarianism among left-wingers (e.g., Chait, 2024; Harper, 2023). These highly visible trends were not a direct impetus for the current work, yet they point to an urgent need to elucidate the processes of motivated cognition that underlie authoritarianism across the political spectrum. To that end, I devised an experimental procedure to test the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism in an empirical setting.

**Method**

**Participants and Design**

Study Two employed a 1 (Cognitive Rigidity) x 2 (Political Ideology) x 3 (Threat Type) within-subjects repeated-measures experimental design with cognitive rigidity and political ideology (liberal or conservative) as between-subjects predictors and threat type as a within-subjects factor with three levels (threat of change, threat to change, and a neutral control). Data for Study Two were collected between February and April 2024 across two simultaneous waves of data collection. After applying preregistered exclusion criteria, a total of \( N=465 \) participants (223 female, 236 male, 3 non-binary, missing \( n=3 \)) were retained for analyses. In the first phase of data collection, a convenience sample of \( n=206 \) undergraduates (\( M_{\text{Age}}=19.04, SD_{\text{Age}}=1.21 \)) were recruited via Sona Systems from the University at Albany student research pool in exchange for course credit. Simultaneously, a second sample of \( n=259 \) American adults (\( M_{\text{Age}}=45.35, SD_{\text{Age}}=15.87 \)) were recruited from CloudResearch’s Connect population in exchange for $5.00. Demographic information for each sample is reported in Table 9.

**Table 9**
Means (and Standard Deviations) on Demographic Variables Broken Down by Sample (N=465)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Students (n=206)</th>
<th>Laypeople (n=259)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>19.04 (1.21)</td>
<td>45.35 (15.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics – Symbolic</td>
<td>3.89 (1.23)</td>
<td>3.55 (1.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics – Social</td>
<td>3.71 (1.30)</td>
<td>3.40 (1.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics – Economic</td>
<td>4.17 (1.35)</td>
<td>3.82 (1.91)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the full sample, participants ranged in age from 18 to 82 (M=33.64, SD=17.65), and were 55% White, 20% Black, 14% Latino/a, 7% Asian, and less than 1% Indigenous and Middle Eastern; 2% of participants indicated that they were multiracial or described themselves otherwise. Overall, the sample was moderately politically liberal on 7-point Likert-style items assessing symbolic (M=3.70, SD=1.60), social (M=3.54, SD=1.65), and economic ideology (M=3.98, SD=1.69), with lower scores reflecting greater liberalism. In response to a forced-choice item regarding political ideology, 59% of respondents (n=276) identified as liberals and 41% as conservatives (n=189). The lay sample was well-educated, with 85% completing at least some college; for those with college degrees, the most common areas were in the computer sciences (e.g., data science, information technology, programming), business (e.g., accounting, administration, economics, finance), the liberal arts (e.g., English, humanities, arts), and various sciences (e.g., biology, mathematics, physics, psychology). Most respondents fell within or below the $50,000-89,000 income bracket.

Recruitment targets were estimated based upon the sample size (~250) at which correlations stabilize (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Participants who took less than 2 minutes to complete the study, answered less than two-thirds of the items, or stated that they were not 18
years of age, U.S. citizens or non-English speakers were excluded based on a priori data quality standards. While the lay sample reached this threshold, due to issues of incomplete data and failed attention checks, 195 student respondents who responded ‘no’ to a question asking whether their data should be used had to be excluded from analyses, leaving the student sample below the target. Nonetheless, the combined sample well exceeded this threshold for the within-subjects design. This study was preregistered at: aspredicted.org/P9G_Z23. Data can be found at: osf.io/rpucd/?view_only=464eeeab6b0942728b1639d7b6667724.

Analytic Approach

All analyses were run in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28.0 (IBM Corp., 2021); main hypotheses were tested using the Mixed Linear Models function. First, to ensure that threat prompts increased the salience of threats of/to change as intended, a repeated-measures ANOVA was used to compare threat perceptions across the threat conditions and a neutral control. After testing statistical assumptions and examining bivariate correlations among the variables of interest, a series of multilevel regression analyses were performed to examine the DDT’s predictions that distinct threats enhance the predicted relationship between cognitive rigidity and authoritarian ideologies for conservatives and liberals (H2-3). Specifically, endorsement of authoritarian responses was modelled as a function of predictors (cognitive rigidity, political ideology, threat type) and multiplicative mean-centered interaction terms in a series of multivariate models. Multilevel modelling permits the investigation of within- and between-subjects effects in repeated-measures designs with multiple trials nested within subjects, and is robust against collinearity between predictor variables due to pooling of subjects (Nezlek, 2008; Peugh, 2010). This approach was particularly necessary in the current study due to the issue of collinearity between cognitive rigidity and political ideology. As cognitive rigidity is primarily
an elective affinity for conservatism, the use of multilevel models allowed me to examine effects of rigidity and political ideology on authoritarianism at different levels of the model while accounting for the well-established correlation between these predictors. In other words, this approach accounted for clustering within subjects across repeated trials, as would be expected based on an individual’s political ideology and level of cognitive rigidity. Additionally, collinearity is chiefly an issue when examining the contribution of individual-level variables, which is reduced when assessing the model as a whole.

**Measures**

**Demographics and Political Ideology.** Participants supplied the same demographic information and respond to the same measures of political ideology included in Study One. Additionally, a forced-choice item was used to sort liberals and conservatives into political ideology categories for the purposes of later analyses.

**Forced-Choice Political Ideology.** To facilitate sorting participants into different ideological groups in Study Two, respondents were asked: “If you had to choose, would you describe your views as closer to liberal/conservative?” Political ideology was treated as an effect-coded categorical predictor (-.5=Liberal, .5=Conservative) in multilevel linear models.

**IV1. Cognitive Rigidity.** The following two measures of dispositional cognitive rigidity were included. For tests of the primary hypotheses, a composite Cognitive Rigidity index was derived by averaging the two scores (after converting -4 to +4 scale points to a 1 to 9 scale). Full scales can be found in Appendices C and D.

**IV1a. Dogmatism.** I administered the 20 item (-4=Extremely false to +4=Extremely true) DOG Scale (Altemeyer, 1996), which measures rigidity and unjustified certainty of held beliefs.
The DOG Scale is well-validated and has displayed strong reliability in prior work, with Cronbach’s α ranging from .90 to .92 (Altemeyer, 1996; Costello & Bowes, 2023; Costello et al., 2022; Crowson et al., 2008). In the current study, it demonstrated similarly strong reliability, α=.90.

**IV1b. Need for Cognitive Closure.** Participants completed 15 items (1=Strongly disagree to 6=Strongly agree) comprising the short version of the Need for Closure Scale-Revised (NFCS-R; Roets & van Hiel, 2011), which assesses the desire for certainty, dislike of ambiguity, and tendency to quickly form strong impressions and opinions. The NFCS has been widely validated and found to be reliable in previous work, αs ranging from .84 to .88 (Costello et al., 2022; Costello & Lilienfield, 2021; Guay & Johnston, 2022; Roets & van Hiel, 2011). It showed similar reliability in the present sample, α=.87.

**IV2. Threat of/to Change Prompts and Perceptions.** Participants read and responded to a series of items following each of three vignettes designed to prime different types of threats: threat of change, threat to change, and a neutral control. All participants read all three vignettes, presented in random order. In the threat conditions, threat type was primed using two versions of the following text:

*Threat [to/of] Change Prompts*

A growing and increasingly influential group of [traditionalist/reformist] voters and policy-makers called the [Old Ways/New Futures] Caucus wants to [control people’s freedom to choose their lifestyle/redefine what it means to be an American.] If these people get their way, they will vote [regressive/progressive] politicians into power who aim to [undo decades of social progress/fundamentally alter the values and ways of life that make our country special.] In the
name of [tradition/progress,] they will [reinforce the status quo/discard tradition and revise our national identity.] Is this really who you want setting the agenda for America’s future? For yours and your children’s future? If these people take power, [prepare for more business as usual/you may not recognize the country in a few years]. These not-so-hidden agendas become even clearer when you consider that most [Old Ways/New Futures] politicians are [in the pocket of corporate lobbyists and one-percenter/held hostage by new age radicals.] Why else would they [go to bat for companies that disregard people for profit/promote the indoctrination of schoolchildren with ‘woke’ beliefs] and support policies that [stack the deck against minorities and the underprivileged/make it easier for immigrants to tilt our country’s demographics]? It’s simple: the people in the [Old Ways/New Futures] Caucus want to [revert us to an antiquated society where they hold all the power/rewrite history and shift the goalposts of reality.]

Neutral Prompt. As a neutral control, participants read the following vignette about a fictional county council candidate, adapted from Canache et al. (2022):

During the councilmember’s time in office, the high school dropout rate has decreased, from 12.1% to 11.9%. Changing admissions rates at public universities were offset by an increase in grants and funding secured for incoming students. Additionally, the jaywalking rate, measured in jaywalkers per 100,000 people, has increased, from 371.7 to 371.9. In the upcoming election, the councilmember plans to run on a platform of improving pedestrian crossings and reducing traffic violations. In addition to securing funds for educational resources, including improved school lunches, money will be allocated to hiring new crossing guards and installing new road signs, stop-lights, and traffic cameras.

Manipulation Check. Threat Perceptions. Following each threat prompt, participants reported their perceptions of the described threat and neutral prompts in response to eight items
on 7-point scales. Two items (1 = Not at all threatening to 7 = Very threatening) assessed collective threat perceptions: “How threatening do you consider this to [the country, society as a whole]?” Six further items (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree) assessed perceived threat of/to change. A total Threat Perception index was derived by taking the average of the items. Perceived Threat of Change and Perceived Threat to Change scores were computed by taking the average of the three threat of and to change items, respectively. The threat perception items displayed a high degree of internal consistency in the present sample, $\alpha = .91$.

**Threat of Change.**

1. The party/candidate is likely to disrupt social order.

2. The party/candidate is likely to erode traditional values and ways of life.

3. The party/candidate is likely to alter the fabric of society.

**Threat to Change.**

1. The party/candidate is likely to worsen inequality and social injustice.

2. The party/candidate is likely to set back social progress.

3. The party/candidate is likely to have a regressive influence on society.

**DVs. Authoritarian Attitudes and Responses.** Following the threat type manipulation, participants were given the opportunity to endorse left- and right-wing authoritarian responses using 25 newly-devised items (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree) of the Authoritarian Responding Scale, inspired by and corresponding to the tripartite conceptualizations of RWA and LWA outlined in prior work (e.g., Altemeyer et al., 1998; Costello et al., 2022; Duckitt, 2010). Greater endorsement of the expressed attitudes and policy positions indicated higher levels of authoritarian behavioral intentions. All participants responded to all items following
each threat prompt. The newly-devised scale showed a high degree of internal consistency, \( \alpha = .89 \). A full list of items can be found in Appendix E.

**Exploratory Variables. Authoritarianism.** Finally, in addition to the above behavioral intentions measures, authoritarian ideologies across the political spectrum were assessed using up-to-date and widely-validated measures of RWA and LWA. These were presented in random order following the threat manipulation and authoritarian responding outcome measure. Participants responded to both the LWA Index (Costello et al., 2022), and the ACT Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010). While using arguably stable, trait-like measures of authoritarianism as outcome variables is controversial, some scholars contend that authoritarianism is better conceptualized as an ideological dimension than a personality trait (e.g., Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt et al., 2010). Consistent with this premise, various studies have found that threat increases authoritarian beliefs on certain trait-like measures of RWA (Asbrock & Fritsche, 2013; Duckitt et al., 2010; Russo et al., 2020; Winter et al., 2023). Additionally, other scholars have called for the inclusion of both trait-like and behavioral response measures to better distinguish how and whether they respond to threat (e.g., Cohrs, 2013), like those featured in the present study. For analytic purposes, the authoritarian responding items listed above were treated as the primary DVs. Scores on the trait-like LWA and RWA measures were included for exploratory purposes (e.g., to examine correlations between extant measures of authoritarianism and the variables of interest).

**Exploratory Variable 1. Right-Wing Authoritarianism.** Participants responded to the 36 item (1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree) Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism Scale (ACT Scale; Duckitt et al., 2010), a tripartite measure of right-wing authoritarian attitudes based on the ideological conceptualization of authoritarianism adopted in recent years. The full
scale can be found in Appendix A. The ACT Scale has shown evidence of convergent and discriminant validity and good reliability in prior work, $\alpha$ ranging from .83 to 94 (Duckitt et al., 2010). The scale and its subscales ($\alpha_{\text{Auth}}=.89$, $\alpha_{\text{Cons}}=.90$, $\alpha_{\text{Trad}}=.91$) demonstrated high reliability in the current sample, $\alpha=.95$.

**Exploratory Variable 2. Left-Wing Authoritarianism.** The 39 item (1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree) Left-Wing Authoritarianism Index (LWA Index; Costello et al., 2022) was administered to assess feelings of Anti-Hierarchical Aggression, Anti-Conventionalism, and affinity for Top-Down Censorship of conflicting views. The full scale can be found in Appendix B. In past work, the LWA Index has demonstrated good discriminant validity and high internal consistency, Cronbach’s $\alpha$ ranging from .94 to .95 (Avendaño et al., 2022; Costello et al., 2022; Fasce & Avendaño, 2022). Likewise, in the current sample it displayed high reliability, $\alpha=.95$.

**Results**

**Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between the predictor variables and trait-like measures of authoritarianism are displayed in Table 10. Relations between political ideology, cognitive rigidity markers, and left- and right-wing authoritarianism were generally consistent with prior work and the dispositional diathesis component of the DDT. Specifically, conservatism was associated with higher RWA ($r=.68$), dogmatism ($r=.22$), need for cognitive closure ($r=.10$), and lower LWA ($r=-.48$). Notably, LWA positively correlated with cognitive rigidity markers dogmatism ($r=.14$) and need for cognitive closure ($r=.15$), albeit less strongly than correlations between RWA and dogmatism ($r=.37$) and need for closure ($r=.23$). Moreover, RWA and LWA were negatively intercorrelated ($r=-.24$). Additionally, a cognitive rigidity index
composed of dogmatism and need for closure was positively related to both RWA \( r = .38, p < .001 \) and LWA \( r = .14, p = .003 \). Table 11 displays a second correlation matrix showing interrelations between main predictors and dependent variables measured using the novel Authoritarian Response Scale. Offering further preliminary support for the prediction that cognitive rigidity acts as an authoritarian diathesis, a cognitive rigidity composite was significantly positively related to all authoritarian responding subscales \( rs = .07 \) to .33) except LWA Anti-conventionalism, with which it negatively correlated \( r = -.21 \). Likewise, threat perceptions across conditions were associated with higher levels of authoritarian responses in all categories \( rs = .14 \) to .36). Finally, whereas scores on the LWA Index and RWA ACT Scale were inversely correlated, scores on the left- and right-wing components of the novel Authoritarian Responding Scale were inconsistently and often positively intercorrelated. To examine the dimensionality of this novel measure, I performed an exploratory factor analysis, reported later on.

**Table 10**

*Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Between-Subjects Variables and Trait-like Authoritarianism Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>33.64 (17.65)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Political Views</td>
<td>3.74 (1.55)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dogmatism</td>
<td>94.88 (23.12)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. NfClosure</td>
<td>4.02 (.76)</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. LWA</td>
<td>136.15 (38.46)</td>
<td>-.38*</td>
<td>-.48*</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. RWA (ACT)</td>
<td>3.69 (1.00)</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.68*</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

Study 2: Correlations among Predictor Variables and Authoritarian Responding DVs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cognitive Rigidity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Perceived Threat</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. LWA Omnibus</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. AHA</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.90*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A-C</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.77*</td>
<td>.50*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. TDC</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.88*</td>
<td>.77*</td>
<td>.48*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. RWA Omnibus</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.46*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Aggression</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.64*</td>
<td>.69*</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.73*</td>
<td>.78*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Submission</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.90*</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Conventionalism</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>-.36*</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.86*</td>
<td>.43*</td>
<td>.71*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = p < .01

**Threat Manipulation**

Before hypothesis testing, a test of the threat manipulation was performed. A repeated-measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction suggested that both the threat of change and threat to change prompts elicited higher threat perceptions compared to a neutral control, \( F(1.97, 915.30)=425.53, p<.001 \). Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, \( \chi^2=6.47, p=.04 \); thus, within-subjects effects were established based on adjusted degrees of freedom. A Bonferroni-corrected post hoc analysis...
revealed significantly higher threat perceptions in the threat of change ($M=4.40$, $SD=1.49$, $p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL, UL]=[1.80, 2.23]$) and threat to change ($M=4.97$, $SD=1.40$, $p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL, UL]=[2.36, 2.81]$) conditions compared to a neutral control ($M=2.38$, $SD=1.30$).

Moreover, threat perceptions in the threat to change condition were significantly higher than in the threat of change condition ($p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL, UL]=[.34, .81]$).

Further repeated-measures ANOVAs run on perceived threat of change and threat to change scores (derived by averaging the three items of each subscale) also suggested that the manipulation was successful in evoking threats of and to change across conditions. As intended, threat of change perceptions differed significantly across all conditions, $F(2, 928)=382.76$, $p<.001$. The assumption of sphericity was not violated for perceived threat of change. Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons found that perceived threat of change was significantly higher in the threat of change condition ($M=4.87$, $SD=1.47$, $p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL, UL]=[.16, .60]$) than the threat to change condition ($M=4.49$, $SD=1.41$) and neutral conditions ($M=2.52$, $SD=1.38$, $p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL, UL]=[-2.58, -2.12]$). The threat to change condition in turn elicited higher threat of change perceptions than the neutral condition ($p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL, UL]=[-2.18, -1.77]$).

Likewise, perceived threat to change differed significantly across conditions, $F(1.88, 872.27)=335.42$, $p<.001$. A significant Mauchly’s Test supported the use of Greenhouse-Geisser corrected degrees of freedom, $\chi^2=30.57$, $p<.001$. Threat to change perceptions were significantly higher in the threat to change condition ($M=5.30$, $SD=1.50$, $p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL, UL]=[.98, 1.55]$) than the threat of change condition ($M=4.03$, $SD=1.75$) and neutral conditions ($M=2.51$, $SD=1.40$, $p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL, UL]=[-3.04, -2.54]$). In turn, the threat of change condition elicited higher threat to change perceptions than the neutral condition ($p<.001$, 95% CIs $[LL,$
Thus, although both threat conditions were associated with increases in both threat of and to change perceptions, these perceptions were significantly higher in the corresponding condition.

**Exploratory Factor Analysis on Authoritarian Responding Scale**

Because the dependent variable was measured with a newly-devised measure of authoritarian responding, I first conducted an exploratory factor analysis to examine its structure and inform decisions regarding item retention. A principle components analysis with oblimin rotation was conducted on the 25 items of the novel Authoritarian Responding Scale ($N=465$). The PCA found support for a four-factor solutions that explained 60.34% of variance in responses. Four components were extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1, and a scree plot revealed an elbow at two components and a sharp plateau after four components. Table 12 reports item loadings and communalities for the four-component solution, which ranged from .44 to .72 for all items, exceeding the preregistered ≤.3 threshold for deletion. Thus, all items were retained for subsequent analyses. Item loadings were partially consistent with the RWA and LWA subscales as written, with some overlap.

**Table 12**

*Component Loadings, Communalities ($h^2$), and Percents of Variance for PCA on Authoritarian Responding Scale Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>C3</th>
<th>C4</th>
<th>$h^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicians with extreme views should be barred from holding public office. (LWA, AHA1)</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>RWA</td>
<td>LWA</td>
<td>AHA</td>
<td>TDC1</td>
<td>TDC2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups with extreme views should not be allowed to hold</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protests on public property. (RWA, Aggr3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremist politicians who are currently in office should be removed. (LWA,</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHA2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regressive political candidates should be banned from</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spreading their hateful views on campuses. (LWA, TDC1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal action is justified to prevent certain people from</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing their hateful views on campuses. (LWA, TDC2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any media outlet that gives groups like this a platform should be</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>publicly condemned. (LWA TDC4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical movements must not be permitted to pursue their</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extreme agendas. (RWA Aggr4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malevolent viewpoints do not deserve the same protections as</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conventional “free speech.” (LWA TDC3)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile, unruly political movements should be nipped in the</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bud before they can damage society. (RWA Aggr1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If young people were taught to respect tradition rather than</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to entertain radical ideologies, society would be a lot better</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off. (RWA Conv2)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinful new-age ideas are eating away at our society. (RWA Conv4)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should teach children traditional values and morals.</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RWA Conv3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honoring traditions is the only way to prevent their</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>destruction by radical forces. (RWA Conv1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should be protected from subversive ideas. (RWA Sub2)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The police and military are best equipped to deal with the radicals in our society. (RWA Sub3)

Strong leadership is the best defense against radical movements. (RWA Sub1)

For handling radical movements, it is best to defer to the judgment of the authorities. (RWA Sub4)

Police should be praised, not punished, for roughing up disrupters like these. (RWA Aggr2)

To counteract the spread of regressive ideologies, schools should be required to teach about our country’s racist, colonialisit history. (LWA AC3)

Blind devotion to tradition holds society back from true progress. (LWA AC4)

Supporters of racist, homophobic, and transphobic groups should be forced to undergo extensive training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. (LWA AC2)

Regressive viewpoints must be met with radical progressivism. (LWA AC1)

Violent protests are warranted when oppressive groups come into power. (LWA AHA3)

Oppressors like these should be made to experience the suffering they inflict upon marginalized groups. (LWA AHA5)

Movements like these prove that the current status quo needs to be dismantled. (LWA AHA4)

Percent of Variance Explained  29.89  21.01  4.87  4.56

*Note. Component Labels:

C1 – LWA/RWA Aggression*
C2 – RWA Deference

C3 – LWA Anti-Conventionalism

C4 – LWA Anti-Hierarchical Aggression

The first component (eigenvalue=7.47) extracted accounted for 29.89% of variance and comprised all four items of the LWA Top-Down Censorship subscale and two items of the LWA Anti-Hierarchical Aggression subscale, as well as three items of the RWA Aggression subscale. All of these items reflected sentiments related to curbing extreme or radical agendas and political movements either by censoring their ability to spread their views or preventing them from taking office and enacting policies. Thus, they appeared to reflect related forms of (chiefly left-wing) authoritarian aggression towards political opponents. Although this points to a need to better distinguish the wordings of these items in future iterations of the scale, particularly with regards to top-down censorship, it is also suggestive of parallels between LWAs and RWAs pointed to in prior work (e.g., Costello et al., 2022). Specifically, these items captured the fundamentally antidemocratic desire at the heart of authoritarianism to impose ideological uniformity on one’s political opposition. Other components were more clearly composed of the authoritarian responding subscales as devised. For example, a second component (eigenvalue=5.25) accounting for 21.01% of variance in responses comprised all items of the RWA Conventionalism and Submission subscales, along with one item of the RWA Aggression subscale. Summarily, these items reflected deference to traditional values (conventionalism) and established authorities (submission). Similarly, the aggression item that loaded onto this component referred to support for rough policing. Component three (eigenvalue=1.22) explained 4.87% of variance and was composed of the four items of the LWA Anti-Conventionalism subscale, which reflected rejection of tradition and a desire to abolish regressive viewpoints.
Finally, component four (eigenvalue=1.14) accounted for 4.56% of variance and comprised the remaining three items written to capture LWA Anti-Hierarchical Aggression (AHA).

Several items cross-loaded onto multiple components, most but not all of which were consistent with the scale’s intended structure as a measure of authoritarian responding with left- and right-wing categories. For instance, all the items reflecting LWA Top-Down Censorship (TDC) also loaded onto the LWA Anti-Hierarchical Aggression component, while the RWA Conventionalism items loaded negatively onto the LWA Anti-Conventionalism (AC) component. There was also overlap between components three and four, which reflected LWA Anti-Conventionalism and Anti-Hierarchical Aggression respectively. Moreover, intercorrelations between the extracted components, reported in Table 13, partially supported decomposing the scale into LWA and RWA subscales. For example, whereas authoritarian aggression correlated positively with component two, which chiefly reflected RWA deference to traditions and authorities, LWA Anti-Conventionalism was negatively related to this RWA deference component. However, this component’s partial overlap with LWA Anti-Hierarchical Aggression points to parallels in the wordings of these items. Rather than potentially muddle conclusions due to overlap between items reflecting forms of aggressive left-wing viewpoint policing and right-wing aggression, and across subscales intended to distinctly reflect LWA and RWA, I proceeded with scoring the scale as an omnibus measure of authoritarian responding. Overall, factor analytic findings suggest a need for future work to clarify the scale’s dimensionality and refine item wordings to improve its psychometric properties.

Table 13

Component Correlation Matrix for Authoritarian Responding Scale
Component  |  C1  |  C2  |  C3
---|---|---|---
C1. LWA/RWA Aggression  | --  |  |  
C2. RWA Deference    | .25  |  --  |  
C3. LWA A-C  | .29  | -.22  |  --  
C4. LWA AHA  | .37  | -.00  | .15  

**Hypothesis 2: Cognitive Rigidity as an Authoritarian Diathesis**

Next, a sequence of multilevel linear models were fit to test the predictions of the DDT framework that cognitive rigidity predicts authoritarianism across ideological groups and that these relationships are enhanced by, for conservatives, threats of change, and for liberals, threats to change. In other words, these models examined authoritarian responding as a function of cognitive rigidity, political beliefs, threat type, and interactions thereof. More specifically, I examined the prediction that cognitive rigidity and political ideology interact to inform the types of threats to which individuals are sensitive, and that these threats motivate cognitively rigid individuals to embrace authoritarianism.

Prior to analysis, assumptions of linearity, homogeneity of variance, and normality of the residuals were examined. To facilitate interpretation of interaction effects, continuous predictors were grand mean-centered and up to three-way multiplicative interaction terms computed between the predictor variables. Skewness and kurtosis coefficients fell within reasonable bounds (<±.5) for the residuals, and visual inspection of Q-Q plots indicated that cognitive rigidity and threat perceptions for each of the threat types were normally distributed (Singer & Willett, 2003). Additionally, Mahalanobis distance statistics evidenced two multivariate outliers. Outliers were retained, as extremists were a focus of this research. Assumptions were otherwise
met. Prior to running mixed models using the SPSS Mixed Model function, data were converted to long format, with repeated measures for the authoritarian responding DV condensed into single variables with multiple rows for each subject and a unique case identifier assigned to each individual.

In order to test hypotheses, I proceeded to fit a series of multilevel models on authoritarian responding omnibus scores. Repeated trials were nested within subjects. Intercepts were allowed to vary randomly, while slopes were set to random for subjects across threat conditions and fixed for between-subjects predictors. Within-subjects predictors included threat type (two dummy-coded variables: 1=threat of change, 0=other; 1=threat to change, 0=other). Between-subjects predictors included a cognitive rigidity index derived by averaging scores on the two markers (dogmatism, need for cognitive closure) and political ideology (-.5=liberal, .5=conservative). To test the pathways specified by the DDT model, I also included mean-centered, multiplicative interaction terms between cognitive rigidity, political ideology, and threat type. Likelihood Ratio (LR) chi-squared tests were used to compare the fit of the proposed model to competing models. If the DDT model failed to converge as predicted, I planned to drop random effects, beginning with slopes, until a satisfactory model was fit.

**Authoritarian Responding as a Function of Cognitive Rigidity, Political Ideology, and Threat Type**

To examine the DDT’s predictions that cognitive rigidity acts as a dispositional diathesis of left- and right-wing authoritarianism (H2), that liberals and conservatives embrace authoritarianism in response to distinct threats to their political ideology (H3a/b), a further series of multilevel models were fit. First, a model was tested with threat condition entered as a within-subjects predictor and cognitive rigidity and political ideology as between-subjects predictors.
Subject was treated as a random effect. To test **Hypotheses 3a and 3b**, mean-centered interaction terms between Political Ideology x Threat Type (*of* and *to* change) were added to the model as fixed effects. Further mean-centered interaction terms between Cognitive Rigidity x Political Ideology, Cognitive Rigidity x Threat Type, and Cognitive Rigidity x Political Ideology x Threat Type were included to elaborate on the threat-to-authoritarianism pathways specified by the DDT model. Where significant interaction effects appeared, I performed simple slopes analyses to probe for moderation effects (Bauer & Curran, 2005; Preacher et al., 2006). This factorial model included 34 parameters. Table 14 reports results from the analysis on omnibus authoritarian responding.

### Table 14

*Results of a Model Introducing Two- and Three-way Interactions Between Predictors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% CIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>16.47</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>599.02</td>
<td>109.43</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>16.17, 16.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Rigidity</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>599.02</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.02, .07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>599.02</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.24, .94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat Type (<em>Of</em>)</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>907.62</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.25, .64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat Type (<em>To</em>)</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>907.62</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.23, .62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigidity x Politics</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>599.02</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.11, -.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigidity x Thrt Type (<em>Of</em>)</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>907.62</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>-.02, .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigidity x Thrt Type (<em>To</em>)</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>907.62</td>
<td>-1.74</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.03, .00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics x Thrt Type (<em>Of</em>)</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>907.62</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.10, .68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics x Thrt Type (<em>To</em>)</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>907.62</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>-.41, .37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was mixed support for hypotheses in the full model on omnibus authoritarian responding. Although cognitive rigidity and both threats of and to change were associated with increased authoritarian responding, there was limited evidence that these effects were modulated by political ideology. Inconsistent with the threat of change-to-RWA and threat to change-to-LWA pathways (H3a/b), political ideology did not significantly interact with threat of change or threat to change to predict authoritarian responding. Likewise, three-way interactions between political ideology, cognitive rigidity, and threat type were nonsignificant. However, a significant interaction between Cognitive Rigidity x Political Ideology predicted lower authoritarian responding. A simple slopes analysis of the relationship between politics and authoritarianism at high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD) levels of cognitive rigidity suggested that whereas conservatives’ endorsement of authoritarian responding was unrelated to cognitive rigidity (b=-.29, SE=.42, p=.48), liberals were more likely to endorse authoritarian responding at high (versus low) levels of cognitive rigidity (b=.99, SE=.43, p=.02). In other words, partially consistent with hypotheses, cognitive rigidity appeared to enhance authoritarian responding for liberals, but not conservatives.

**Model Refinement**

Initial tests of the DDT model found broad support for Hypothesis 2, in that cognitive rigidity was associated with higher levels of authoritarianism. By contrast, there was limited support for Hypotheses 3a and 3b and the threat-to-authoritarianism pathways proposed by the DDT model. Effects of threat type suggested that both threat of and to change were associated
with increases in authoritarian responding, but interaction effects were negligible on the whole. Despite finding limited evidence for the proposed DDT framework, an interaction between Cognitive Rigidity and Political Ideology that warranted further exploration. Moreover, at 34 parameters, many of which were nonsignificant interactions, a more parsimonious model was preferable. I therefore sought to refine the model while acknowledging that evidence for the \textit{\textit{a priori}} hypotheses was at best mixed. I next report upon this process of model refinement, which ceased once a satisfactorily parsimonious model was fit.

I first dropped interaction terms that were nonessential to the main hypotheses. As the DDT posits that the salience of certain threat types depends upon political ideology, up to three-way interactions between cognitive rigidity, political ideology, and threat were retained. By contrast, two-way interactions between cognitive rigidity and threat conditions were nonsignificant across categories, and were thus candidates for deletion from the simplified model. Test statistics for the updated model are reported in Table 15.

In the first version of the reduced model, the pattern of effects remained largely consistent with previous models. Cognitive rigidity predicted increased authoritarian responding. Likewise, threat \textit{of} and \textit{to} change were associated with increased authoritarian responding. By contrast, political ideology was unrelated to omnibus authoritarian responding. Thus, the reduced model again offered partial support for \textbf{Hypothesis 2} and minimal support for \textbf{Hypotheses 3a and 3b}. With respect to interaction effects, results were similarly inconsistent with the predicted threat-to-authoritarianism pathways. The sole significant interaction, between Cognitive Rigidity \textit{x} Political Ideology, was associated with decreased authoritarian responding. Analysis of simple slopes of the relationship between political ideology and authoritarianism at high and low levels of cognitive rigidity suggested that whereas authoritarian responding did not depend upon
cognitive rigidity for conservatives \((b=-.28, \ SE=.42, \ p=.50)\), liberals high (versus low) in cognitive rigidity were more likely to endorse authoritarianism \((b=1.00, \ SE=.43 \ p=.02)\). However, there was no evidence of two-way interactions between politics and threat type or predicted three-way interactions between rigidity, politics, and threat type. A likelihood ratio test indicated that compared to the previous model \((-2 \ LL=47264.77, \ AIC=47332.77)\), the more parsimonious model \((-2 \ LL=47269.01, \ AIC=47333.01)\) was not significantly poorer fit, \(\chi^2(2)=4.24, \ p=.12\).

**Table 15**

*Reduced Model Version 1: Effects of Predictors and Interaction Terms on Authoritarian Responding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(b)</th>
<th>(SE)</th>
<th>(df)</th>
<th>(t)</th>
<th>(p)</th>
<th>95% CIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>16.47</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>600.16</td>
<td>109.49</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>16.18, 16.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Rigidity</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>443.34</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.02, .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>596.22</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>-.23, .95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat Type ((Of))</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>907.82</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.25, .64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat Type ((To))</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>907.82</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.23, .61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigidity x Politics</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>600.28</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.11, -.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics x Thrt Type ((Of))</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>907.82</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.09, .67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics x Thrt Type ((To))</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>907.82</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>-.45, .31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rig. x Pol. x Thrt Type ((Of))</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>907.82</td>
<td>-.82</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>-.05, .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rig. x Pol. x Thrt Type ((To))</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>907.82</td>
<td>-1.40</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.06, .01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Final Model

I next probed for significant interaction effects in a further simplified version of the model. In this iteration, I examined effects of cognitive rigidity, political ideology, and threat of and to change on authoritarian responding, as well as two-way Cognitive Rigidity x Political Ideology and Political Ideology x Threat Type interactions. I dropped three-way interactions between Cognitive Rigidity, Political Ideology, and Threat Type, which were not significantly related to authoritarian responding in previous models.

Test statistics for the final model are reported in Table 16. As in previous models, cognitive rigidity predicted greater endorsement of authoritarian responding. Likewise, regression coefficients for both threat types on authoritarian responding were significant and positive. By contrast, effects of political ideology were nonsignificant, and few significant interaction effects were evidenced. However, a two-way interaction between Cognitive Rigidity x Political Ideology predicted lower endorsement of authoritarianism. Simple slopes analysis on the relationship between political ideology and authoritarianism at high and low levels of cognitive rigidity revealed the same pattern as prior models. Whereas conservatives’ endorsement of authoritarian responding was not modulated by cognitive rigidity (\( b=-.42, SE=.40, p=.29 \)), for liberals, high (versus low) cognitive rigidity predicted greater authoritarianism (\( b=1.15, SE=.41, p=.01 \)). In other words, consistent with previous models and partially in line with hypotheses, cognitive rigidity appeared to enhance authoritarian responding for liberals, but not conservatives. A likelihood ratio test comparing this model to the previous iteration indicated that the fit of the reduced model did not differ significantly from the less parsimonious model (-2 LL=47269.01, AIC=47333.01), \( \chi^2(2)=1.96, p=.38 \), while Akaike’s
Information Criterion for the reduced model (-2 LL=47270.97, AIC=47330.97) suggested that it was preferable to the full threat type model given its relative parsimony.

Table 16

Final Model: Authoritarian Responding as a Function of Cognitive Rigidity, Political Ideology, and Threat Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% CIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>16.49</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>596.82</td>
<td>109.83</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>16.19, 16.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive Rigidity</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>443.53</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.02, .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>596.82</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>-.23, .95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threat Type (Of)</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>908.02</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.24, .63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat Type (To)</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>908.02</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.21, .59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigidity x Politics</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>443.53</td>
<td>-2.87</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.11, -.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics x Thrt Type (Of)</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>908.02</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.10, .67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics x Thrt Type (To)</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>908.02</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>-.46, .30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of Student and Lay Samples

As a corollary to the central research questions and hypotheses, I was interested in whether the predicted processes and variables of interest differed between college students and laypeople. To examine whether students and laypeople differed in terms of political views, cognitive rigidity, or authoritarianism, I ran a series of additional analyses. Sample means were compared on continuous composites of political ideology and cognitive rigidity, measured with the DOG Scale (Altemeyer, 1996) and the Need for Closure Scale (NFC-R, Roets & van Hiel,
2011), and left- and right-wing authoritarianism, measured with the LWA Index (Costello et al., 2022) and ACT Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010). Results from these analyses are reported in Table 17. Significance was established at a Bonferroni-corrected $p$-value of .0125 (.05/4) for multiple comparisons. Contrary to expectations and common characterizations of college students as leftist, students ($n=206$) scored closer to the midpoint on political ideology than laypeople ($n=259$), although these differences were not significant at the adjusted $p$-value. Levels of cognitive rigidity and RWA likewise did not differ across samples. By contrast, scores on the LWA Index were significantly higher among the student sample than the lay sample. Parallels between these two groups would appear to lend credence to the viability of undergraduates as subjects for political research, and perhaps as a target population for investigating LWA.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics and Results from Welch test comparing Political Views, Cognitive Rigidity, and Authoritarianism across American students ($n=206$) and laypeople ($n=259$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>$M$ (SD)</th>
<th>$df_1, df_2$</th>
<th>Welch’s $F$</th>
<th>$p$-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Views</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3.92 (1.15)</td>
<td>1, 444.66</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>3.59 (1.79)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Rigidity</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>49.11 (9.37)</td>
<td>1, 457.61</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>49.72 (13.17)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWA (ACT Scale)</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3.79 (.63)</td>
<td>1, 401.97</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>3.62 (1.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWA Index</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>147.63 (30.13)</td>
<td>1, 458.69</td>
<td>38.02</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>127.02 (41.84)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Significance established at Bonferroni-corrected $p=.00125
Discussion

This study tested a novel, integrated theory of left- and right-wing authoritarianism, the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model. Findings offered partial support for hypotheses, but limited support for the DDT framework overall. Whereas cognitive rigidity, political ideology, and threat type were individually associated with increased authoritarianism, liberals and conservatives did not diverge as drastically as expected, nor did the specific motivational processes posited by the DDT play out as predicted. In line with Hypothesis 2 and the dispositional diathesis component of the model, cognitive rigidity was consistently associated with greater endorsement of authoritarian responding. Likewise, preliminary analyses revealed positive correlations between two markers of cognitive rigidity, dogmatism and need for closure, and more stable ideological measures of LWA and RWA. Thus, inflexible styles of thought appear to predispose both liberals and conservatives to authoritarianism. Based on the interaction effect in the current study, however, cognitive rigidity appears to act as a dispositional diathesis of authoritarianism more for individuals on the left than the right. This is partially consistent with prior research on the personality correlates of LWA (e.g., Conway et al., 2023; Costello et al., 2022), as well as other arguments in favor of the Authoritarian Symmetry (e.g., Conway et al., 2018; Crawford, 2012; Suedfeld et al., 1994) and Rigidity-of-the-Extremes (e.g., Zmigrod, 2020; Zmigrod et al., 2019, 2020) hypotheses. Furthermore, comparatively modest bivariate correlations between cognitive rigidity and LWA Index (Costello et al., 2022) scores relative to ACT Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010) scores suggest the lopsided symmetry suggested in earlier work. That is, because cognitive rigidity tends to be an elective affinity for conservatism, it is typically more closely related to RWA than LWA. This was not the case in the current experiment,
however, as high levels of cognitive rigidity were associated with enhanced authoritarian responding for liberals, but not conservatives.

Whereas the pattern of effects in the multilevel models broadly upheld \textbf{Hypotheses 2}, \textbf{Hypotheses 3a} and \textbf{3b} found limited support. The DDT framework posited that threats \textit{of} change are more salient to conservatives due to their emphasis on traditionalism and preserving old ways, which motivates them to endorse RWA in response to perceived cultural shifts and societal disruption, or threats \textit{of} change (H3a). Conversely, liberals’ emphasis on personal liberties and egalitarianism was expected to make them more sensitive to perceptions of inequality and barriers to social progress, or threats \textit{to} change, leading to increased LWA (H3b). Neither of these threat-to-authoritarianism pathways were clearly evidenced, however. Although threat perceptions in the threat \textit{of} and \textit{to} change scenarios tracked with participants’ political ideology such that conservatives perceived greater threat \textit{of} change and liberals greater threat \textit{to} change, effects on authoritarian responding were inconsistent with the diverging pathways specified by the DDT model. Significant effects of both threat types on authoritarian responding were consistently positive and of a similar magnitude, but there was no evidence of higher-order interactions between political ideology and threat type. Taken together, these findings suggest that both threats \textit{of} and \textit{to} change motivate individuals to embrace authoritarianism, and that both liberals and conservatives will endorse authoritarianism when primed with threats. In other words, inconsistent with \textbf{Hypotheses 3a/b}, there was no evidence that authoritarian responses to threat depended upon political ideology.

Further calling the DDT model’s threat-to-authoritarianism pathways into question, there was minimal evidence of reliable interactions between the central predictors. Of the significant interactions that did emerge, the most robust was a two-way interaction between cognitive
rigidity and political ideology, which consistently predicted significant decreases in authoritarian responding. Simple slopes analyses offered some clues about the nature of these higher-order interactions. Specifically, the significant interaction between rigidity and politics appeared to be driven by cognitively rigid liberals, whereas conservatives’ endorsement of authoritarian responding was not modulated by cognitive rigidity. The latter non-finding may point to overlap between cognitive rigidity and conservatism, while the overall pattern of findings would appear to suggest that, at least in the current sample, cognitive rigidity acts as an authoritarian diathesis for left-wingers. Indeed, cognitive rigidity predicted greater endorsement of authoritarian responding primarily among liberals. In light of extensive prior research linking conservatism and cognitive rigidity to RWA, this suggests that cognitively rigid individuals on both sides of the political spectrum are more inclined to support efforts to impose their views on others and muzzle viewpoints with which they disagree. Moreover, constituent lower-order interactions between cognitive rigidity and threat condition were nonsignificant for both three-way interactions, suggesting that these variables’ effects on authoritarianism were independent of one another. Thus, although broader hypotheses regarding the relationships of cognitive rigidity and threat to authoritarianism were upheld, the DDT framework as a whole appears to provide at best an incomplete picture of the processes of motivated social cognition that give rise to left- and right-wing authoritarianism.

Another question in the current study regarded possible ideological differences between college students and laypeople. In particular, it seemed possible that students would skew liberal compared to laypeople, and perhaps be more prone to LWA responding as a result. There was mixed evidence of this, as RWA and political views did not differ significantly between the student and lay samples; by contrast, LWA was higher among students. Indeed, whereas average
scores on continuous measures of political views fell slightly left of center in the overall sample, students scored closer to the scale midpoint on average than laypeople, albeit incrementally so. Neither cognitive rigidity nor RWA scores on the ACT Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010) differed between students and laypeople, the majority of whom were themselves college-educated. However, LWA Index (Costello et al., 2022) scores were higher among students, and age, which was considerably lower in the student sample, negatively predicted authoritarian responding overall. Exploratory analyses indicated that age effects were particular to liberals, with older left-wingers less inclined to endorse authoritarian responding than their younger counterparts. The latter findings would appear to evidence the young, far-left firebrands who tend to receive (often unflattering) popular media coverage (e.g., Friedersdorf, 2023; Harper, 2023), and lend some credence to right-wingers’ characterization of college students as rabid left-wingers.

Although the proposed model was unsupported, the current findings offer valuable insight into the relationship between threat and authoritarianism, especially among left-wingers. Whereas the role of threat as a motivator of RWA is well-documented, this study is among the first to the author’s knowledge to examine its relationship with LWA, something for which there has been a recent call (e.g., Duckitt, 2022; Lambert et al., 2019). In particular, threat to change was consistently associated with increased endorsement of authoritarianism, an effect which appeared to be driven by cognitively rigid liberals. Ultimately, however, liberals and conservatives reacted to both threats of and to change by endorsing authoritarian responding. Left-wingers may therefore be more sensitive to cultural shifts, and right-wingers to barriers to progress, than anticipated.

So, if threats of and to change do not discretely activate authoritarian diatheses among liberals and conservatives, what does? The current results did not uphold the specific threat-to-
authoritarianism pathways specified by the DDT model, but threats were hardly unrelated to authoritarianism. To further disentangle liberal and conservative threat responses and elucidate the motivational processes associated with different forms of authoritarianism, other types of threat may be better candidates for future research. For example, existential threats may be more closely related to LWA than acknowledged in prior research, which has tended to focus on right-wingers’ disproportionate concerns over safety and security. Economic threats are another possible candidate for further investigation, especially in light of Study One’s findings, which I elaborate on in the general discussion.

Several limitations of the current work bear noting. Measurement was a particular weakness of the current design, especially as pertains to the dependent variable. For example, factor analysis suggested overlap between the intended subscales of the outcome measure, which precluded conclusions about whether liberals and conservatives meaningfully differed on these responses and how they related to threat type. Although it is apparent that both liberals and conservatives will endorse various authoritarian measures in response to threats, the current study cannot speak to whether these were clearly distinguished along ideological fault lines. To address these psychometric shortcomings, further item refinement and a reexamination of the scale’s dimensionality is needed if it is to be used in future work. Although parallels in how liberals and conservatives responded to the threat prompts are likely not solely attributable to measurement artifacts, overlap between the subscales as written, and the consequent treatment of authoritarian responding as an omnibus score, doubtless obscured nuance in the dependent variable. Additionally, data were collected during a U.S. election year, and may therefore capture different political dynamics than during less contentious seasons. However, as previously noted, this arguably increased the ecological validity of the experimental manipulation used here.
Despite finding limited support for the DDT model, this research presents various opportunities for future research. First, future studies should examine whether other categories of threats elicit distinct authoritarian responses from liberals and conservatives. In the current study, threats were conveyed in the form of hypothetical political movements with diametrically opposed stances. While threats of and to change did not exert the expected effects in all cases across ideological groups, the overall pattern of findings highlights the relevance of threat to LWA in particular. Other threat types, namely existential threats, may have greater consequences for LWA, as they have been shown to strongly predict RWA in earlier work. Economic threats are another potentially interesting candidate for future study. Whereas some research has suggested that economic threats occupy a distinct domain from other threat types due to their relative complexity (Crawford et al., 2017), they are clearly salient issues on which liberal and conservative politics sharply diverge, and may thus be informative to the motivational processes associated with different forms of authoritarianism. Recent evidence suggests that conditions of economic inequality increase support for strong leadership (Sprong et al., 2019); it is possible that perceptions of economic threat increase certain forms of authoritarian responding as well. Affect is another likely covariate that should be explored in future work. For example, it is possible that some participants were more incensed than apprehensive in response to the experimental prompts, and endorsed certain authoritarian responses out of anger or disgust rather than fear or sadness. This would suggest a different motivational dynamic, which may be related to differences in people’s specific responses to threats. Indeed, Huddy and colleagues (2005) found that perceived threat of terrorism predicted increased support for aggressive military retaliation in the wake of 9/11, whereas terrorism-related anxiety predicted lower support for aggressive measures and higher support for American isolationism. Although these findings are
specific to a single category of threat and threat response, other work on the behavioral consequences of anxiety- and approach-related motivations (see Jonas et al., 2014, for a review) suggests that their implications may extend to authoritarian responses. For example, threats that provoke anger may evoke more punitive reactions (e.g., authoritarian aggression), whereas anxiety-provoking threats may be more closely related to responses aimed at shoring up one’s values (e.g., conventionalism/anti-conventionalism). Furthermore, liberals and conservatives may be prone to different emotional responses to the same threat, with possible consequences for authoritarianism. Indeed, in the same vein as work which suggests that conservatives are more threat-sensitive than liberals (e.g., Hibbing et al., 2014), some scholars have pointed to heightened disgust sensitivity among conservatives (e.g., Inbar et al., 2012; but see Elad-Strenger et al., 2020, for evidence that these effects may be domain specific for liberals and conservatives). It is possible that anger and disgust carry disparate consequences for, say, aggression than for conventionalism or anti-conventionalism. Moreover, liberals and conservatives may manage gut check disgust responses to violations of their beliefs differently (Feinberg et al., 2014). These affective responses may shape both how likely liberals and conservatives are to perceive issues as threats as well as how they react to them, and should be explored in future work.

Ultimately, initial tests of the Dual Diathesis-Threat Model of Authoritarianism were unsuccessful. Whereas cognitively rigid liberals and conservatives were more likely to respond to threat prompts by endorsing authoritarianism, the types of threats to which they responded did not present a clear-cut picture of distinct motivational pathways on the left and right. Although there was evidence that threats to change elicited greater authoritarian responding from liberals, these effects were not exclusive to liberals. Moreover, threats of change were also associated
with increases in authoritarian responding for liberals and conservatives. Even with respect to cognitive rigidity, the most reliable predictor of authoritarian responding across the sample, effects were stable but not staggering. Yet developing a comprehensive framework of authoritarianism across the political spectrum remains a worthwhile goal, and it seems clear that cognitive rigidity deserves a role in any eventual theories to this effect. In the final section, I discuss how the current studies contribute to the theoretical landscape and explore what paths they present towards accomplishing this goal.
General Discussion

The current research makes several noteworthy contributions to the field of political psychology. These studies are among the first to qualitatively and empirically investigate the types of threats associated with liberalism and left-wing authoritarianism, and to test an integrated theory of authoritarianism across the political continuum. Although the DDT framework was not upheld, developing a comprehensive theory of authoritarianism remains a crucial task for the discipline, towards which this research represents a small but significant step. In Study One, American adults of various political leanings reported on the threats they perceived to the nation and society. Thematic analysis revealed sentiments largely in line with predictions, with liberals tending to emphasize issues like climate change, MAGA, inequality, poverty, and prejudice, and conservatives focusing on immigration, crime, war, and terrorism, as well as perceived cultural decline. Moreover, liberals’ and conservatives’ threat rationales were consistently laden with corresponding values of egalitarianism and traditionalism, and generally evinced the threats to and of change central to the DDT. Specifically, whereas liberals regularly, but not exclusively, framed threats in terms of their implications for the underprivileged and how they might set back societal progress, conservatives expressed fears about cultural shifts and the loss of what they regarded as essential American ideals. These motivations were particularly evident in liberals’ responses regarding racism, inequality, loss of rights, and the far-right. Among conservatives, meanwhile, immigration was viewed as preeminent threat of change, along with crime and broader concerns about cultural decay, which they frequently attributed to their left-wing opponents. However, these were far from the sole terms in which left- and right-wingers described threats. Existential and economic threats also featured prominently, suggesting that individuals harbor rational fears for their safety and financial security regardless of political
ideology. Thus, while liberal and conservative values do appear to increase the salience of threats to and of change, universal concerns about survival seemed to supersede these. Nonetheless, the existential threats that liberals (e.g., climate change) and conservatives (e.g., terrorism, immigration, violent crime) cited clearly diverged based on issue ownership (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Kahn et al., 2022; Seeberg, 2017).

Also of note in Study One, respondents across the political spectrum rated their opponents as urgent threats to the nation, demonstrating the salience of political beliefs to threat assessments. In particular, concerns about the MAGA movement and the Woke Mob appeared to follow from the expectation that one or the other would take the country in a direction contrary to the respondent’s values. Predictably, these responses highlighted liberals’ and conservatives’ concerns regarding their opponents’ perceived brand of regressive or progressive politics. As well as exemplifying the motivated social cognitions at the heart of political ideology, findings pointed to polarization in the sample. Both liberals and conservatives tended to rank their opposition’s movement as most threatening and the movement that corresponded to their own politics as among the least threatening. Whereas liberals characterized MAGA as a regressive influence on society and a clear threat to change, conservatives described the Woke Mob as altering the cultural fabric for the worse. Interestingly, moderates also tended to rank the Woke Mob as a top threat, but regarded MAGA as less threatening. Moderates also frequently cited polarization and social division as threats, in addition to existential and economic concerns shared by broad swathes of the sample. That is, they appeared to view partisanship as problematic in its own right, which may help explain their identification with the middle ground and threats with widespread consequences for the population at large. Findings regarding the threats salient to moderates make a notable contribution to the literature, which has frequently
neglected centrists for methodological or practical reasons—as I admittedly did in Study Two. However, further research is needed to clarify the motivations associated with these threats.

In addition to elucidating the threats salient to liberals, moderates, and conservatives and establishing preliminary evidence for the threat categories central to the DDT model, Study One also offers clues about the threats salient to left- and right-wing authoritarians. Although open-ended responses and threat rankings did not noticeably differ between non-authoritarian conservatives and RWAs, compared to non-authoritarian liberals, LWAs ranked issues of inequality and racism higher, and MAGA lower, on average. In this sense, LWAs in Study One did appear to place an emphasis on issues of equality and social justice, consistent with predictions regarding threats to change and LWAs’ reputation for radical egalitarianism. Liberals’ responses and rankings also broadly evidenced the salience of this threat category. By contrast, although threats of change were present in conservatives’ and RWAs’ responses, existential threats to safety and security were predominant for right-wingers. This aligns closely with prior research on conservative threat sensitivity and the motivational antecedents of RWA, in particular the Dual-Process Motivational Model (DPM; Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 2017), which connects RWA to dangerous worldviews. This may help explain the negligible relationship between threat of change perceptions and authoritarianism among conservatives in Study Two. Moreover, it raises the question of whether Social Dominance Orientation, predicted in the DPM model by belief in a ruthless, competitive world, might be more related to epistemic fears about cultural changes, or threats of change.

In Study Two, American undergraduates and laypeople completed measures of threat perceptions and authoritarian responding following three within-subjects conditions designed to manipulate threat. Threat prompts described political movements intended to evoke either the
threat of cultural shifts and disruption of social conventions, or threats of change, the threat of inequality and regressive influences, or threats to change, or a neutral control. Although data collection for Study Two commenced before data for Study One were analyzed, respondents’ widely-voiced concerns regarding their political opponents appeared to support the ecological validity of the threat prompts in Study Two. Likewise as intended, threat perceptions differed meaningfully across the within-subjects conditions and between liberals and conservatives. However, threat types tended to exert similar effects on overall authoritarian responding, and most significant predictors appeared to affect authoritarian responding independent of one another. Probing for interaction effects returned little evidence of the parallel-but-opposing threat-to-authoritarianism pathways sketched out by the original model.

Given these conflicting findings, is the distinction between threats of change and threats to change a meaningful one? Perhaps conceptually, as evidenced by responses in Study One, but at least as measured in Study Two, its empirical utility is unclear. Threats of and to change trended in the same direction with regards authoritarian responding in the overall sample, and there were few analyses in which effects of one, but not the other, type of threat was significant. Nonetheless, there may be other outcomes for which these threat categories carry more distinct consequences. Refining the operationalization and measurement of these concepts may prove fruitful in that regard.

Despite finding limited support for the particular diathesis-threat framework proposed here, Study Two contributes to our understanding of the personality features that predispose people to authoritarian and antidemocratic positions. Cognitive rigidity, measured here with dogmatism and need for cognitive closure, was consistently associated with greater support for authoritarianism, especially among liberals. Thus, inflexible modes of thought increase
proneness to uncompromising positions, which people may not be picky about in the face of threats. More specifically, based on the markers of cognitive rigidity measured here, people who are quick to ‘seize and freeze’ (e.g., Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Perry & Sibley, 2013) upon conclusions (i.e., have high need for closure) and are unyielding in their beliefs (i.e., dogmatic) are more likely to support authoritarian responses. Here, these included aggressing towards groups framed as extreme or radical, submitting to authorities to deal with the same, indoctrinating dissenters with conventional views, and endorsing tactics to bar the opposition from sharing their views. Still, the mechanisms by which cognitive rigidity enacts its effects upon authoritarianism remain less than clear. Again, effects of cognitive rigidity on authoritarianism were stable but not massive in Study Two, suggesting that other explanatory factors are likely at play. In addition to exploring these potential covariates in future work, it may be worthwhile to examine whether other markers of cognitive rigidity, such as integrative complexity and need for cognition, are more closely related to the processes studied here.

What do these studies suggest about parallels between RWA and LWA, and how do the current findings fit in with extant literature? Setting aside for a moment its aforementioned psychometric limitations, Study Two adds to a growing body of work which suggests that cognitive rigidity underlies both left- and right-wing authoritarianism. Across both studies, moreover, there was clear evidence of LWA and RWA on both behavioral intentions and stable ideological measures. These findings align with the Authoritarian Symmetry hypothesis and are generally consistent with the Rigidity-of-the-Extremes perspective, indicating that authoritarianism is in part a function of cognitive rigidity for both liberals and conservatives. Indeed, the current study suggests that this may particularly be the case for left-wingers. Furthermore, Study Two suggests that given the opportunity, liberals and conservatives will
endorse an array of authoritarian responses in response to threats, which need not necessarily correspond to their left- or right-wing brand of politics. This could be taken with a note of optimism or pessimism. On one hand, the current findings do not suggest that certain strains of intolerance are inherent to particular ideological groups—yet neither do they appear to be confined to them. In the context of debates about the conceptual validity of LWA, Study Two results suggest overlap between left- and right-wing authoritarian responding even as negative correlations between scores on the LWA Index (Costello et al., 2022) and ACT Scale (Duckitt et al., 2010) in Studies One and Two support their distinction. The former finding likely owes in large part to similarities in the item wordings of the RWA aggression and LWA anti-hierarchical aggression subscales, but this does not render this overlap wholly meaningless. Factor analysis supported a multifactor solution that was only partially in line with prior multidimensional conceptualizations of RWA and LWA. Thus, I proceeded with the omnibus authoritarian responding score as an outcome variable. Yet while I maintain in line with the contemporary view of authoritarianism as an ideological dimension that LWA and RWA are distinct constructs, parallels in the authoritarian responding measure may point to the shared impulses at their core, namely the impulse to crush the opposition and secure the supremacy of one’s own rigid strain of beliefs by whatever means necessary. As an anecdotal point to this effect, even nominally left-wing regimes (e.g., communist dictatorships) tend to share features with RWA in practice. Indeed, history is rife with examples of left-wing revolutions coopted by strongmen who effectively exercised their power in the same ways as RWAs—or perhaps more accurately as totalitarians. Although the current work offers no answers in this regard, this distinction is nontrivial. Among others, it raises the question of whether revolutions are necessary for left-
wing authoritarian systems to arise, or whether existing institutions could veer towards LWA under the right threat conditions and the weight of their own agenda.

What does the present work suggest about the state of American politics? Troublingly, in light of respondents’ wide-ranging concerns about their political opponents in Study One, there are signs that the current cultural climate may be conducive to authoritarianism. Whether they perceive their opponents as threats of or to change, voter apprehension is likely to mount as the election cycle winds up. This carries potential implications for prejudice, civil unrest, and perhaps even political violence. There are few reasons to expect that this election cycle will be less acrimonious than the last, and some to suggest it will be more so (e.g., Vail III et al., 2022). More than simply worrying, however, the current sociocultural conditions present an opportunity to study these developments in real time. Future studies should therefore examine voting behavior, a less drastic but no less consequential outcome, to examine whether authoritarian impulses correspond to support for far-left or far-right candidates. To that end, researchers could capitalize on the upcoming 2024 election to better understand the motivations that drive support for certain ideological positions and the politicians whose platforms embody them. Moreover, future studies should explore a bevy of outcomes and potential mechanisms of the processes of motivated cognition only suggested here. Of particular interest are affective responses, level of political expertise/engagement, and the influence of other threat types, such as existential and economic threats, on left- and right-wing authoritarianism. Work to this effect may be able to clarify the processes and boundary conditions, if any, that distinguish left- and right-wing authoritarianism in principle and practice. Moderates also deserve attention in future research. Study One appeared to capture similarities between moderates and conservatives, but it is unclear whether these similar issue stances would translate to parallel motivational processes.
Along with revisiting the types of threats to which liberals and conservatives are sensitive, follow-ups should include moderates and expand upon the psychological correlates of centristm. It seems possible that moderate views belay lower levels of cognitive rigidity, for example, and there may be other psychological characteristics that distinguish centrists from partisans and extremists. For instance, moderates may be less reactive to the emotional content of political messages, which may make them less likely to endorse extreme attitudes than their far-left and -right counterparts. Investigating these prospective differences will be a worthwhile challenge for future work.

Future research should also address how political engagement and expertise influence threat perceptions, and whether this predicts differences in authoritarianism. There is some evidence to suggest that this may be the case. For example, Federico (2021) has suggested that engagement with the more simplistic, absolutist rhetoric favored by political candidates enhances polarization. As another related, but conflicting possibility, some research suggests that a surpassing minority of the country are politically informed (Kalmoe, 2020). If this were correct, would such ill-informed individuals be inured to political messaging or, more problematically, simply pick their positions on less informed bases? For the latter possibility in particular, need for closure seems like a relevant predictor, as recent evidence suggests that high NFC is related to greater reliance on heuristics (Morosoli et al., 2022). Relatedly, more work is needed to better understand the online environs and mediums by which poisonous ideologies spread. Indeed, the preeminence of technology in daily life may give rise to new forms of authoritarianism, and perhaps already has. Some commentators have argued that the political machinations of Silicon Valley and social media conglomerates amount to a form of “techno-authoritarianism” (LaFrance, 2024). As technocrats align more and more closely with political movements and
their figureheads—domestic and foreign—control of the information space stands to become less rather than more democratized. Foreign autocrats have long exploited this by censoring internet access within their borders and disseminating disinformation at home and abroad. Domestic authoritarians may attempt to use similar strategies to further their aims. Understanding the social psychological processes that predict endorsing antidemocratic content online (e.g., through post engagement) may help predict and prevent the spread of authoritarianism in online settings.

Incumbency may be another boundary condition of interest to authoritarianism, particularly in regard to threat perceptions. To the extent that threat type was associated with authoritarian responding in Study Two, endorsing authoritarianism appears to reflect a defensive posture. People may be more prone to this sort of posturing when their party is not in power than when it is, which may inform their threat perceptions and responses. This protective impulse appears to be particularly connected to conservatism overall, as conservative politics demonstrate. For example, the Republican tactic of stacking the Supreme Court with conservative justices is a tacit acknowledgment of their numerical minority, which disadvantages them in the legislative branch. Recent events in American politics also bear this out. For an example of extreme right-wing responses to perceived threats, look no further than the aggrieved mob that stormed the Capitol on January 6th, 2020, in protest of Donald Trump’s loss.

Finally, while the current work has focused on American populations, cross-cultural research will ultimately be necessary to fully elucidate the psychological and motivational correlates of left- and right-wing authoritarianism. The ideological divisions of liberalism and conservatism predate modern history, and their psychological bases doubtless transcend specific cultural contexts. Likewise, the issues and threats to which liberals and conservatives are sensitive appear to be categorically consistent across cultures (Seeberg, 2017). Examining how
these processes play out in different sociopolitical climates, including historically left-wing contexts (e.g., De Regt et al., 2011), may be particularly informative to the motivational processes associated with LWA and RWA. Indeed, authoritarianism remains a pressing concern in both domestic and international politics.

These studies illuminate the threats, motivations, and psychological variables associated with liberalism, conservatism, and authoritarianism. As a first step towards an integrated theory of authoritarianism across the political spectrum, however, the Dual Diathesis-Threat model represents something of a false start. The current findings were informative, but far from conclusive. Further work is needed to clarify the relationships between the variables of interest and identify a satisfactory theory of authoritarianism on the political left and right. Yet the current studies help pave the way towards that goal, with methodological and theoretical implications that warrant further exploration. The conceptualization of authoritarianism has expanded and evolved considerably across its history, raising nearly as many new questions as have been resolved. Continued efforts to establish a comprehensive account of these dangerous ideologies will be crucial to answering them.
Conclusion

The current research provides valuable clues about the psychological variables and processes of motivated social cognition that underlie authoritarianism on the political left and right. Findings regarding the influence of cognitive rigidity, political ideology, and threat perceptions upon authoritarian responding shed light on the political psychologies of American citizens, and may be generalizable to other western sociopolitical climates. Yet the conclusions drawn here are also a reflection of the sociocultural context in which this research was conducted, and which undoubtedly colored the results of both studies. The portrait they paint of domestic politics is in some respects stark. Indeed, Study One found clear evidence of the social division and political polarization that many respondents cited as a threat to the nation in itself. Across ideological groups, American citizens commonly mentioned and consistently ranked their political opponents as top threats. In addition to cataloguing specific concerns about how the opposition would damage the nation, liberals, conservatives, and even moderates frequently described their political opponents as threats to democracy. In a poisonous irony, as the findings of Study Two demonstrate, similar fears can motivate people to adopt antidemocratic positions. Although threats of and to change did not elicit diverging effects on authoritarian responding as expected, both kinds of threats increased support for various forms of authoritarianism, especially among left-wingers. Thus, when presented with threats in the form of social or political movements with uncompromising views, people may be motivated to support still more uncompromising positions.

This is a noteworthy finding in our fractious political climate, especially in the context of the upcoming presidential election. Hyperbolic rhetoric regarding the heart and soul of democracy are commonplace during election years, but the 2024 election, coming on the heels of
an attempted insurrection, seems particularly precarious. Also noteworthy, if diminished somewhat by measurement issues, is that threats may not elicit discriminant responses from left- and right-wingers. Given sufficient grievances, people may support various authoritarian countermeasures—and by extension, the authoritarian politicians who promise to dole out such punishment on their behalf. Whether these motivations could lead people to switch political allegiances is unclear, but moderates ranking the Woke Mob as a top threat in Study One raises the question of what this portends for their voting behavior. Another more likely trend for which there appears to be anecdotal evidence is that voters across the aisle will support increasingly extreme figures within their own party. As people’s concerns about their political opponents (and other threats) grow, they may choose to buck more conventional, centrist politicians in favor of leaders with authoritarian impulses (e.g., Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). This may be how the pendulum of national politics swings towards the extremes of the political continuum, to divisive effect. At worst, this could accelerate the erosion of bipartisanship and lead people to eschew cherished values in favor of grievance politics. As our cultural climate becomes increasingly polarized, people of all political persuasions would benefit from Dickens’s reminder that “throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise.”

Another resounding conclusion from the current work concerns cognitive rigidity. Overall, the present findings suggest that what people believe can be secondary to how they believe it. Liberal or conservative, in the current sample the tendency towards an inflexible thinking style predisposed people to greater authoritarianism. As a stable personality feature, the role of cognitive rigidity as a dispositional diathesis for authoritarianism may be difficult to combat. Nonetheless, the current research, although inconclusive in some regards, suggests the
presence of other important predictors, namely threat perceptions, that may be better candidates for countering authoritarianism. For example, it is possible that gaining better understanding of the opposition’s beliefs could make them appear less of a bogeyman, although this could also have the opposite effect. Yet certainly for some undeserved targets of respondents’ ire in Study One, namely immigrants, improved understanding of their plights may make them appear less threatening. This is not to dismiss or diminish the threats to democracy posed by various entities, but rather to propose one potential route to reducing authoritarian responses to such. Whereas unjustified belief certainty and close-mindedness promote intolerant and ultimately counterproductive responses to threats to one’s beliefs, an attitude of epistemological humility is more likely to foster cooperation and outcomes agreeable to both sides. For conservatives, this may mean accepting that others’ beliefs and customs, however newfangled, are as valid as their own. For liberals, meanwhile, this may mean acknowledging that traditional lifestyles and old-fashioned values are not inherently wrong by virtue of being old. However, this requires a willingness to engage with different perspectives and question one’s own views that cognitively rigid individuals may struggle with.

As the current findings illustrate, political psychological processes are as complex and multifaceted as the social issues with which they deal. Acknowledging these nuances not only in the realm of research, but also the popular discourse, is a necessary prerequisite for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the tidal forces that govern society. From this place of elevated understanding, perhaps we could seek stiller waters. By contrast, failing to bring this level of nuance to our political conversation may cost us the opportunity to right a listing ship. Proponents of well-intentioned but heavy-handed efforts to mainstream ideologies that may not be shared by the broader population would do well to keep this in mind (e.g., DEI, CRT, gender
theory). Indeed, academia has suffered from a perceived reputational decline that, deservedly or not, has been oft attributed in the past decade to its mishandling of conversations around issues like race and gender. This has come to a head most recently in protests surrounding the war in Gaza, with various commentators citing the illiberalism of certain left-wing protesters and criticizing academic institutions’ tepid responses thereto (e.g., Mendoza, 2024). Equally, those who seek to safeguard their traditional viewpoints by exploiting the Supreme Court system to codify beliefs at odds with the modern majority would do well to remember that democracies evolve with the needs of their people. Yet this is far easier said than done, due to the deeply entrenched processes of motivated social cognition spoken to by the present work.

As a final note, although I am no historian, certain disturbing parallels bear noting between the current geopolitical climate and the pre-WWII of authoritarianism that inspired Adorno and colleagues’ (1950) seminal work. Both in terms of geopolitical volatility, with multiple concurrent wars and nations with naked imperialistic ambitions jostling for hegemony (e.g., Plokhy, 2023), and the fractious state of domestic politics, the world seems poised for the return of ghosts better left to the past. At risk of betraying my own threat perceptions, the specter of authoritarianism looms as large today as ever, and in both wings of the political theater. Indeed, if there is one note with which I hope to leave readers, it is that authoritarianism is not exclusive to a particular era, society, or ideological premise. It remains a pressing threat, and social and political psychologists would do well to continue exploring its psychological underpinnings at the individual and system level. Elucidating the psychological correlates and motivational processes, shared and distinct, that foment all forms of authoritarianism represents an ongoing challenge for the discipline, just as combating these forces remains an enduring struggle for society. The stakes are high. On that note, I end with another quote, this one from
Cormac McCarthy (1992): “In history there are no control groups. There is no one to tell us what might have been. We weep over what might have been, but there is no might have been. There never was” (pp. 239).
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Appendix A

Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism Scale (ACT Scale; Duckitt et al., 2010)

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using the response options provided. For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your opinion.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Neither agree nor disagree
5 = Somewhat agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

Conservatism ("Authoritarian Submission")

1. *It’s great that many young people today are prepared to defy authority (R).
2. *What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity.
3. *Students at high schools and at university must be encouraged to challenge, criticize, and confront established authorities (R).
4. *Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.
5. *Our country will be great if we show respect for authority and obey our leaders.
6. *People should be ready to protest against and challenge laws they don’t agree with (R).
7. People should be allowed to make speeches and write books urging the overthrow of the government (R).

8. The more people there are that are prepared to criticize the authorities, challenge and protest against the government, the better it is for society (R).

9. People should stop teaching children to obey authority (R).

10. The real keys to the “good life” are respect for authority and obedience to those who are in charge.

11. The authorities should be obeyed because they are in the best position to know what is good for our country.

12. Our leaders should be obeyed without question.

**Traditionalism**

1. *Nobody should stick to the “straight and narrow.” Instead people should break loose and try out lots of different ideas and experiences (R).

2. *The “old-fashioned ways” and “old-fashioned values” still show the best way to live.

3. *God’s laws about abortion, pornography, and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late (Not included in original version of Traditionalism scale).

4. *There is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps (R).

5. *This country will flourish if young people stop experimenting with drugs, alcohol, and sex, and pay more attention to family values.

6. *There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse (R).

7. Traditional values, customs, and morality have a lot wrong with them (R).

8. Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else (R).
9. The radical and sinful new ways of living and behaving of many young people may one day destroy our society.
10. Trashy magazines and radical literature in our communities are poisoning the minds of our young people.
11. It is important that we preserve our traditional values and moral standards.
12. People should pay less attention to the bible and the other old-fashioned forms of religious guidance, and instead develop their own personal standards of what is moral and immoral (R). *(Not included in original version of Traditionalism scale).*

**Authoritarianism ("Authoritarian Aggression")**

1. *Strong, tough government will harm not help our country (R).*
2. *Being kind to loafers or criminals will only encourage them to take advantage of your weakness, so it’s best to use a firm, tough hand when dealing with them.*
3. *Our society does NOT need tougher government and stricter laws (R.)*
4. *The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers, if we are going to preserve law and order.*
5. *Our prisons are a shocking disgrace. Criminals are unfortunate people who deserve much better care, instead of so much punishment (R).*
6. *The way things are going in this country, it’s going to take a lot of “strong medicine” to straighten out the troublemakers, criminals, and perverts.*
7. We should smash all the negative elements that are causing trouble in our society.
8. The situation in our country is getting so serious, the strongest methods would be justified if they eliminated the troublemakers and got us back to our true path.
9. People who say our laws should be enforced more strictly and harshly are wrong. We need greater tolerance and more lenient treatment for lawbreakers (R).

10. The courts are right in being easy on drug offenders. Punishment would not do any good in cases like these (R).

11. What our country really needs is a tough, harsh dose of law and order.

12. Capital punishment is barbaric and never justified (R).

**Scoring:** After reversals, compute MEAN of each subscale. Depending upon extent of intercorrelation between subscales, could take composite MEAN across all three scales (e.g., see Manson, 2020). However, scale is technically multidimensional. Asterisked items are included in the short-form version used in Study One.
Appendix B

Left-Wing Authoritarianism Index (Costello et al., 2022)

Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using the response options provided. For each statement, please select the response that best reflects your opinion.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Neither agree nor disagree
5 = Somewhat agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

1. The rich should be stripped of their belongings and status.*
2. Rich people should be forced to give up virtually all of their wealth.
3. If I could remake society, I would put people who currently have the most privilege at the very bottom.
4. America would be much better off if all of the rich people were at the bottom of the social ladder.*
5. When the tables are turned on the oppressors at the top of society, I will enjoy watching them suffer the violence that they have inflicted on so many others.*
6. Most rich Wall Street executives deserve to be thrown in prison.

7. Constitutions and laws are just another way for the powerful to destroy our dignity and individuality.

8. The current system is beyond repair.

9. We need to replace the established order by any means necessary.*

10. Political violence can be constructive when it serves the cause of social justice.

11. Certain elements in our society must be made to pay for the violence of their ancestors.

12. If a few of the worst Republican politicians were assassinated, it wouldn't be the end of the world.

13. I would prefer a far-left leader with absolute authority over a right-wing leader with limited power.

14. Schools should be required by law to teach children about our country's history of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia.

15. Anyone who opposes gay marriage must be homophobic.*

16. Deep down, just about all conservatives are racist, sexist, and homophobic.

17. People who are truly worried about terrorism should shift their focus to the nutjobs on the far-right.*

18. The "old-fashioned ways" and "old-fashioned values" need to be abolished.*

19. Radical and progressive moral values can save our society.

20. All political conservatives are fools.*

21. I cannot imagine myself becoming friends with a political conservative.

22. Conservatives are morally inferior to liberals.

23. It is important that we destroy the West's nationalist, imperialist values.
24. I try to expose myself to conservative news sources. (R)

25. There is nothing wrong with Bible camps. (R)

26. I hate being around non-progressive people.

27. Classroom discussions should be safe places that protect students from disturbing ideas.*

28. University authorities are right to ban hateful speech from campus.*

29. I should have the right not to be exposed to offensive views.

30. To succeed, a workplace must ensure that its employees feel safe from criticism.*

31. We must line up behind strong leaders who have the will to stamp out prejudice and intolerance.

32. When we spend all of our time protecting the right to "free speech" we're protecting the rights of sexists, racists, and homophobes at the cost of marginalized people.

33. I am in favor of allowing the government to shut down right-wing internet sites and blogs that promote nutty, hateful positions.*

34. Colleges and universities that permit speakers with intolerant views should be publicly condemned.

35. Getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so-called "right" to free speech.*

36. Fox News, right-wing talk radio, and other conservative media outlets should be prohibited from broadcasting their hateful views.

37. Even books that contain racism or racial language should not be censored. (R)

38. I don't support shutting down speakers with sexist, homophobic, or racist views. (R)

39. Neo-Nazis ought to have a legal right to their opinions. (R)
**Scoring:** After reversals, SUM items to produce a composite score. Higher scores indicate authoritarian attitudes aimed at dismantling established hierarchies. Asterisks indicate items in the LWA-13 abbreviated version of the scale (to be included in Study One).
Appendix C

DOG Scale (Altemeyer, 1996)

Instructions: For each of the statements in the following section, indicate the degree to which you think it is true or false by selecting a number in the space beside the question on the scale given below:

-4 = Extremely False
-3 =
-2 =
-1 =
0 = Neutral
1 =
2 =
3 =
4 = Extremely True

1. I may be wrong about some of the little things in life, but I am quite certain I am right about all the BIG issues. (NOT SCORED)

2. Someday I will probably think that many of my present ideas were wrong. (NOT SCORED)

3. Anyone who is honestly and truly seeking the truth will end up believing what I believe.

4. There are so many things we have not discovered yet, nobody should be absolutely certain his beliefs are right. (Reversed)

5. The things I believe in are so completely true, I could never doubt them.
6. I have never discovered a system of beliefs that explains everything to my satisfaction. (Reversed)

7. It is best to be open to all possibilities and ready to reevaluate all your beliefs. (Reversed)

8. My opinions are right and will stand the test of time.

9. Flexibility is a real virtue in thinking, since you may well be wrong. (Reversed)

10. My opinions and beliefs fit together perfectly to make a crystal-clear “picture” of things.

11. There are no discoveries or facts that could possibly make me change my mind about the things that matter most in life.

12. I am a long way from reaching final conclusions about the central issues in life. (Reversed)

13. The person who is absolutely certain she has the truth will probably never find it. (Reversed)

14. I am absolutely certain that my ideas about the fundamental issues in life are correct.

15. The people who disagree with me may well turn out to be right. (Reversed)

16. I am so sure I am right about the important things in life, there is no evidence that could convince me otherwise.

17. If you are “open-minded” about the most important things in life, you will probably reach the wrong conclusions.

18. Twenty years from now, some of my opinions about the important things in life will probably have changed. (Reversed)

19. “Flexibility in thinking” is another name for being “wishy-washy”.

20. No one knows all the essential truths about the central issues in life. (Reversed)
21. Someday I will probably realize my present ideas about the BIG issues are wrong.

(Reversed)

22. People who disagree with me are just plain wrong and often evil as well.

**Scoring:** Scale points of -4 to +4 are changed to 1 – 9. Items 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 15, 18, 20, 21 are reversed. After reversals, SUM items to compute a total score; higher scores indicate higher levels of dogmatism.
Appendix D

Need for Cognitive Closure Scale-Revised (NFCS; Roets & van Hiel, 2011)

Instructions: Read each of the following statements and decide how much you agree with each according to your beliefs and experiences. Please respond according to the following scale:

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Moderately disagree
3 = Slightly disagree
4 = Slightly agree
5 = Moderately agree
6 = Strongly agree

1. I don’t like situations that are uncertain.
2. I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.
3. I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.
4. I feel uncomfortable when I don’t understand the reason why an event occurred in my life.
5. I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.
6. I don’t like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.
7. When I have made a decision, I feel relieved.
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I’m dying to reach the solution very quickly.
9. I would quickly become impatient and irritated if I would not find a solution to a problem immediately.
10. I don’t like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.

11. I dislike it when a person’s statement could mean many different things.

12. I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.

13. I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.

14. I do not usually consult many different opinions before forming my own view.

15. I dislike unpredictable situations.

**Scoring:** Compute MEAN of items. Higher scores indicate a higher need for cognitive closure.
Appendix E

Authoritarian Responding Scale

Instructions: In the following section, you will read a brief passage and respond to a series of questions. Please read carefully and answer each item by choosing the response option that best describes your opinion.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Neither agree nor disagree
5 = Somewhat agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

RWA Responding

Aggression

1. Hostile, unruly political movements should be nipped in the bud before they can damage society.
2. Police should be praised, not punished, for roughing up disrupters like these.
3. Groups with extreme views should not be allowed to hold protests on public property.
4. Radical movements must not be permitted to pursue their extreme agendas.

Submission

5. Strong leadership is the best defense against radical movements.
6. Children should be protected from subversive ideas.
7. The police and military are best equipped to deal with the radicals in our society.

8. For handling radical movements, it is best to defer to the judgment of the authorities.

Conventionalism

9. Honoring traditions is the only way to prevent their destruction by radical forces.

10. If young people were taught to respect tradition rather than to entertain radical ideologies, society would be a lot better off.

11. Schools should teach children traditional values and morals.

12. Sinful new-age ideas are eating away at our society.

LWA Responding

Anti-hierarchical Aggression

1. Politicians with extreme views should be barred from holding public office.

2. Extremist politicians who are currently in office should be removed.

3. Violent protests are warranted when oppressive groups come into power.

4. Movements like these prove that the current status quo needs to be dismantled.

5. Oppressors like these should be made to experience the suffering they inflict upon marginalized groups.

Anti-Conventionalism

6. Regressive viewpoints must be met with radical progressivism.

7. Supporters of racist, homophobic, and transphobic groups should be forced to undergo extensive training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

8. To counteract the spread of regressive ideologies, schools should be required to teach about our country’s racist, colonialist history.
9. Blind devotion to tradition holds society back from true progress.

*Top-down Censorship*

10. Regressive political candidates should be banned from spreading their hateful views on campuses.

11. Legal action is justified to prevent certain people from sharing their harmful views.

12. Malevolent viewpoints do not deserve the same protections as conventional “free speech.”

13. Any media outlet that gives groups like this a platform should be publicly condemned.