

Should people get what they deserve?: Belief in a Just World and Voting Preference in the 2020 Presidential Election

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Introduction

Before discussing the specifics of the present study, a survey in which Belief in a Just World scores were entered into a logistic regression with expressed voting preference during the 2020 Presidential election, a somewhat extensive foray into the literature on personality and politics is essential for outlining the rationale behind the assumption that personality variables, in general, and Belief in a Just World, in particular, would have an influence on voting preference.

Personality in Politics

Western societies, since the spread of mass participation in government, have seen the rising influence of individual personality in the dictation of political rhetoric and behavior, in their natures and rhythms. Moreover, even researchers of democracy have found that voters' habits, moral preferences, and values have become as or more important in guiding political choice than sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, educational level, and income, (Ricolfi, 2002; Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004). In egalitarian societies, where individuals are encouraged to voice their opinions, personal values are even more relevant to political-choice making than personal identification (Barnea, 2003; Caprara et al., 2009).

Moreover, in the context of the competing political interests that have riven present day American politics, researchers have found that the ideological cleavages represented by the political left and right divide continuum does indeed capture several major dimensions of political and psychological phenomena, and that ideological self-placement meaningfully covaries with psychological differences in personality (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004; Caprara et al., 2009). Yet predicting voting behavior by personality has only recently caught research attention, as traditionally, social and cultural issues, as well as the personality traits of voters that underpin them, have not been given the same consideration or emphasis in political forecasting as have been those individual attitudes that pertain exclusively to economic and foreign policy issues (Blankenship et al., 2018).

However, as more research on the effects of personality, attitudes, and values in a political context has accumulated, and the two-term presidency of Barack Obama, who emphasized social justice issues throughout his campaigns and presidency, recedes into the past, researchers have had to reconsider the "culture war" and culture war issues as being of primary importance in reflecting the U.S.'s true political divide (Abramowitz, 2013; Blankenship et al., 2018; Hunter, 1991). The article by Abramowitz attempts to explain how these cultural issues signal a need to understand the dynamism and nuance of personality and its interrelationship with the ideological narratives that give context to personality and social identity. Moreover, the study described in this article attempts to examine and provide information pertinent to the growing research that shows that there are consistent constellations of personality variables, constituted by constructs of the most decontextualized and essential kind, such as basic personality traits, as well as those of the most subjective kind, such as ideological endorsements of an active ideological group, to more fully understand which of these constructs are best able to effectively define how individual members of politically discrete social groups differ from one another.

It is important to acknowledge that, as the personality dimensions of the electorate appear to shape policy preferences, this will in turn affect political outcomes. Politicians talk about favored policies in order to win votes; those who misread the electing body and instead promote unpopular views will suffer political loss.

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In fact, the literature has revealed that when policies are implemented without public support, protest and backlash often occurs, and, thus, attitudes and values create "boundaries of political permission" (Thielo et al., 2015).

Moreover, researchers assessing issue preferences have shown that these reliably predict voting behavior (Rodden & Snyder, 2008). Thus, issues and issue responses amongst individual voters matter (Blankenship et al., 2018). The problem, then, is to distinguish which attitudes matter most in boundary-setting and issue resonance amongst voters.

The Political Personality

Political scientists have touched upon several factors in attempting to explain the emerging prominence of personality in the political life of nations. These include the increasing role of education in the individual life course, a heightened awareness of individual rights, and culturally cultivated feelings of commitment and loyalty to the nation. Moreover, in proportion to freedom from scarcity, individual citizens become increasingly likely to encounter alternative worldviews while pursuing and exploring their own interests and objectives, and political preferences will thus likely reflect a variety of personal interests, including material statuses, self-concepts, attitudes, and perceptions (Nozick, 1989). Many of these explanations depend upon a belief in the power of the citizen to act as a reasoning agent capable of examining and selecting from his or her political options and consistently choosing that which best conforms to his or her beliefs and values (Himmelweit, Humphreys, Jaeger, & Katz, 1981). Therefore, personality research has become a new and invaluable tool for the comprehension of political realities, specifically in delimiting the ideological contours that exist and exert influence at any given time in history (Caprara, 2007).

In the study of personality as directing political identities, researchers have typically acknowledged two primary aspects of personality: these are traits and values (Caprara et al., 2009). Traits consist of the varying dimensions wherein individuals reliably exhibit consistent patterns of feelings, thoughts, and actions, such as embodied in the Five-Factor Model of personality (Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1990). Values, on the other hand, exist as belief concepts which reflect desirable behaviors and objectives which transcend specific situations in order to provide a meaningful framework for the interpretation of behaviors and events, and which serve as guides for evaluation and choice selection and both values and traits have been shown to exert an influence on political behaviors and political preferences (Schwartz, 1992).

However, questions about how, why, and in what ways individuals differ at the levels of political and philosophical sense-making hover at the center of questions of political psychology. Why do people identify as conservatives or liberals, and what does it mean both in context and in consequence? How do ideologically aligned individuals differ from one another, and what do these differences mean for the political reality of a nation or state? Returning to the previous definition of personality, most researchers have approached such questions by beginning at self-identification, and then splitting the direction of their inquiry in either an upward (values) or downward (traits) direction. The latter approach looks down from political identity and examines the underlying dimensions of ideological endorsement, such as the personality traits described by the Big Five Taxonomy (Haidt et al., 2009). The other approach looks up from the level of ideological identity, towards the matrices of meanings, approbations, and self-narratives that link individual endorsers together in an articulable and increasingly contextualized way. These are values, attitudes, and the vast assortment of attributes which, while somewhat contextualized in the sense that basic understandings and expectations of reality, are yet far from explicitly tied to contemporary socio-political realities.

Starting from these traditional approaches, McAdams (1995) developed a three-level account of personality to reconcile these complementary but distinct methodologies. In this view, personality is deconstructed into three interacting but hierarchical dimensions, called Levels. The first level consists of *dispositional traits* which are global and decontextualized, such as Big Five personality traits or disgust sensitivity, and are measured with little attention to the specifics of subjectivity. The second level, *characteristic adaptations*, however, are contextualized and conditional, and include values, goals, and attitudes. These two levels are highly interrelated. Level 2, however, is highly variable when compared to Level 1 across life stages and contexts, and can respond to experimental manipulations as both an independent or dependent variable. These are values and attitudes. Finally, and even more subjective, variable, and difficult to quantify, there are Level 3 variables, which revolve wholly around identity, specifically, identity experienced as narrative. Level 3 personality factors consist of the stories people tell themselves about their lives and the narrative frameworks that often underpin heuristics and guide interpretations of new information, particularly when related to moral or political reasoning and behavior.

While the interaction of Level 1 and Level 2 processes are useful in understanding the political divisions that exist between left-wing and right-wing ideologies (for example, by examining how traits and values interact and covary, such as how low openness to experience correlates with right-wing authoritarianism), to truly understand the nature of ideologies such as those implicit in different political labels, The relationships between Level 2 and Level 3 personality dimensions cannot be ignored. Because level 3 variables are the narratives, internalized and indicative of self- or shared- identity, these ground political endorsements into the lived experiences of individuals and groups; political labels serve, ultimately, as the headings under which ideological narratives are classified (Haidt et al., 2009). Thus, while a resurgence of the psychological study of ideology has recently led to many fruitful studies integrating Level 1 and Level 2 constructs (Jost, 2006), there is a need to incorporate elements of Level 3 dimensions into the study of the political personality. Moreover, by linking Level 2 constructs, such as Belief in a Just World (BJW), with voting behaviors (a proxy for Level 3 endorsement), we may begin to establish a framework from which to proceed towards a more inclusive, and therefore more complete, understanding of the significant patterns that distinguish individual political psychologies.

Level 2 Value and Attitude divide

Traditional political scholarship has posited the U.S. electorate as spanning a continuum of political values and attitudes, ranging from liberal and progressive at the leftmost pole, to traditionalist and conservative at the other (Blankenship et al., 2018). Further serving to emphasize the importance of personality for the modern political scientist and psychologist, scholarship and media discussions on the 2016 Presidential election have revolved around what are perceived to be irreconcilable cultural attitudes, pertaining mostly to social issues, and serving as the essential distinguishing elements of the modern American political division. These Culture War issues include abortion and LGBTQ rights, which do not belong to the economic or foreign policy preferences that have traditionally been seen as the fundamental determinants of where an individual lands at on the political spectrum.

Frustrating attempts at political reconciliation, traditionalists and progressives might differ to such an extent that each one's views are not only different but mutually incomprehensible to the other (Blankenship et al., 2019, p. 173). If, in fact, level 2 personality factors filter political worldviews, as is most certainly the case, then those who feel less distressed by perceptions of unfairness (Emotional Reaction to Unfairness; ERU) and those most able to reason away the existential threat of injustice (Belief in a Just World; BJW) will have difficulty in coming to a mutually shared understanding of what problems the government needs to address, much less coming to a mutually shared policy approach towards such issues (Blankenship et al., 2018).

In order, then, to examine which differences in personalities are most important in the division of ideologically defined groups, an examination of the broader-scale implications of political endorsement must be conducted. This is supported by Caprara et al. (2009), who found that voters from both left- and right- coalitions exhibited distinct traits and values that aligned logically with the stated orientation of their respective parties and endorsement of politically-aligned ideological narratives (Haidt;*). Individuals who value universalism have consistently leaned towards left-wing ideological identification, in keeping with the political left's stated commitments to social justice issues. Individuals who valued security, on the other hand, were consistently aligned towards right-leaning ideology, which is in keeping with the traditions of the political right's emphasis on social order (Caprara et al., 2009). Agreeableness and openness are values that call for greater acceptance of others as equals and for the promotion of tolerance and understanding between all groups (Schwartz, 1992). On the other hand, conscientiousness relates to values that call for submissive self-restriction, for the preservation of tradition and the need for stability (Schwartz, 1992). In other words, conservatives hold norm attainment, tradition and abiding by rules, and a desire for orderliness as their primary political motivations (Roccas et al., 2002). (Caprara et al., 2009). From these observations, we can identify other Level 2 personality metrics that will likely act upon voter preference in any given political struggle. This leads us to Belief in a Just World (BJW).

Yet the constituent elements that define individuals at either end of the spectrum remains a matter of debate and speculation, and includes not only attitudes and values, but lifestyle differences such as gun ownership and church attendance (Blankenship et al., 2018; Erikson, 1998). Moreover, personal values have been found to fully mediate the relationship between personality traits and political orientation. Thus, the attitudes and values that actively serve in the incorporation and accommodation of new information into overarching Level 3 narratives will likely be key to understanding the nature of any discrete, politically-distinct ideological group, and comprehending how those who have personal ties therewith will behave, and why, when questions of policy are at stake.

Belief in a Just World

Human beings possess an innate need to perceive their world as stable, orderly, and predictable (Bowlby, 1969; Lerner, 1980). (Kaiser et al., 2004). Such a perception confers adaptive benefits to the individual, including heightened sense of self-control, motivation, self-worth, self-efficacy, and improved mental health (Greenberg et al., 1997; Kaiser et al., 2004).

Belief in a Just World was a concept first described by Melvin Lerner in the 1960s (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014), and resulted from his observations on hospital staff interacting with mentally ill patients. The patients were expected to find employment in the local community; however, many patients feared to leave the hospital, which ostensibly encouraged "delinquency," vis-à-vis a failure to follow up with job interviews or to search for work at all. During sessions between therapists and patients, Lerner witnessed the therapists aggressively questioning and disparaging the patients, to the extent that the patients emerged feeling disheartened and degraded. Lerner questioned how these professionals could treat these individuals, vulnerable as they were, in such an ostensibly cruel and self-defeating way, and noted that, at hospital staff meetings, therapists would vent their frustrations by attributing traits such as manipulateness and laziness to their patients (Lerner, 1980). From these observations of professionals trying and failing to make a difference, and distressed about it, Lerner hypothesized what would become one of the central tenets of BJW: namely, that people have a fundamental need to believe in justice, and that threats to this belief could be minimized by blaming sufferers for their own suffering (Lerner, 1980; Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). Moreover, he hypothesized an adaptive value in BJW, suggesting that some BJW was necessary for individuals to participate in routine activities such as planning, saving, and investing. Otherwise, the prudence of these practices would become uncertain, and the motivation to practice them would diminish. Thus, there exists a strong incentive for people to make unsympathetic attributions when explaining the suffering of others, especially if the alternative threatens to undermine the security of one's self-concept.

Ultimately, Belief in a Just World (BJW) is an attitudinal construct which provides individuals with a heuristic foundation for interpreting the world as stable and predictable. Essentially, BJW posits a world of karmic redistribution, where rewards and punishments are meted out impartially and in accordance with what one deserves (Lerner, 1980). Those that suffer in a just world deserve their suffering; those that prosper earned their prosperity. (Kaiser et al., 2004). The important function served by the BJW is the ability to make sense of negative events in light of one's own life and experience, such that one is protected against feelings of vulnerability (Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976). Feelings of vulnerability are enhanced when seeing an individual with which one emphasizes suffer (*), since bad things do not happen to good people who deserve to be blessed. Such heuristically-based belief predispositions affectively insulates individuals against a host of thoughts that threaten the self-concept of a beneficiary of a society in which organized systems of injustice exist (Hafer & Olson, 1993; 503). (Kaiser et al., 2004)

However, individuals differ in their endorsement of BJW; moreover, high endorsers and low endorsers differ in a logically consistent manner. High endorsers tend to emphasize an internal locus of control while concomitantly endorsing conservative political values, a Protestant work ethic, and authoritarian leanings (Furnham & Procter, 1989; Kaiser et al., 2004).

As discussed, Belief in a Just World serves to make sense of the world – to draw meaning from our experiences and enable us to commit to resolving the challenges that face us. This phenomenon has been demonstrated to have an adaptive function, and even when challenged by exogenous forces, individuals will often sooner believe it with more conviction than discard it (Hunt, 2000). However, when events clearly violate an individual's BJW, occasionally, he or she will turn to policy to bring back into balance the belief that the world is just (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). For example, individuals could support restitution and prevention policies, thus, in the individual's mind, bringing into existence balancing factors against the dread of a fully chaotic and unjust world. However, BJW is a double-edged sword, and when such policies appear futile, those with high BJW will often turn to psychological defenses such as denial, withdrawal, and reinterpretation (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). However, when evidence discredits the reassuring belief that being good protects one against misfortune, high BJW endorsers experience amplified feelings of fear, stress, and vulnerability (Lerner, 1980; 503). (Kaiser et al., 2004)

According to Lerner, several strategies exist to meet or cope with threats to the BJW worldview. The first of these consist of "rational strategies:" these involve support for preventative measures meant to protect society against injustice as well as support for restitutive measures, should prevention appear unachievable (Lerner, 1980). Another strategy involves accepting that there are limits to what can be done in the face of injustice and which emphasizes a need to consider the nature of victim relationships, one's access to resources, and the potential risks vs. benefits of action. However, this strategy requires the acceptance of nuance, which runs counter to heuristics logic and can also leave one vulnerable to some of the self-concept threats inherent in facing injustice.

Finally, Lerner hypothesized "nonrational" responses, which include withdrawal and denial, and which lead individuals to be selective in the types of information they willingly expose themselves to. Lerner believed that, with time, distance, and distraction, the saliency of the unjust event, and the potency of its threat, might diminish.

However, as with White identity management, the most crucial strategy, for those interested in resolving issues of injustice, revolves around the strategic reinterpretation of events. In this instance, the outcome, cause, and character of the victim become the critical subjects of interest for those seeking to integrate the knowledge of an unjust event in such a way that one's Belief in a Just World can continue unperturbed. Lerner demonstrated experimentally that all three reinterpretation strategies were more likely to take place when people observed, from a place of impotence, the innocent suffering some injustice (Lerner, 1980; Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). However, the cognitive restoration of justice by blaming victims for their fates (Lerner & Miller, 1978) becomes less effective when individuals can sympathize with the victims (Lerner & Mathews, 1967). Specifically, feeling that one might easily suffer the same fate as the victim evokes sympathy and understanding rather than victim blaming. (Kaiser et al., 2004

Lerner drew his conclusions initially from the theory of cognitive dissonance (Lerner, 1965). Specifically, if, to avoid dissonance, an individual commits to the belief of a world in which efforts and rewards are intertwined, then such individuals will also need to believe that this relationship between effort and reward applies equally to all other people. Although initially, this understanding of BJW was tied to a universal, intrapsychic need, Lerner eventually came to believe that social institutions and socialization also played a role in the development and maintenance of justice beliefs (Lerner, 1977). Noting the link between BJW and another construct, called the Protestant work ethic, Lerner (1980) concluded that Belief in a Just World might emanate from one's belonging to a dominant culture (Lerner, 1980; Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993). Because of the complexity of BJW as a construct, which has been further parsed into self-BJW and general-BJW varieties in recent years (Bartholomaeus & Strelan, 2019), it is not surprising that differences between groups and between individuals in groups have been demonstrated, providing evidence to suggest that just world beliefs are multifaceted (Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993). However, it must be noted that the link between high BJW and sociopolitical conservatism has emerged as amongst the most consistent and strongest of relationships that exist between BJW and other constructs and identities (Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993).

To further elaborate on the purpose of BJW, and the way that it perpetuates in individual cognition, it is necessary to turn to what previous researchers have identified a "deservingness heuristic." The deservingness heuristic is central to explaining how individuals make decisions regarding the causal roots of inequality (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Moreover, more recent work in evolutionary psychology has linked attitudes towards welfare programs to this heuristic, with the focal premise revolving around whether the recipients of welfare are believed to be either unlucky or else lazy (Peterson, 2012). These developments led Wilkins and Wenger (2014) to contend that a theory of desert must play a central role in attempting to understand policy outcomes.

Impact of Belief in a Just World - Example: Affirmative Action

The role of the deservingness heuristic, for example, has been used to explain American voters' evaluation of government programs aimed at assisting African Americans (Sniderman et al., 1991). These same researchers found that Americans who believed that African Americans were responsible for the social disparities they experienced were against assistance programs such as Affirmative Action. In contrast, those who acknowledged systematic differences in lived outcomes (in other words, who rejected BJW) were more supportive of such policies (Sniderman et al. (1991). Additionally, Sniderman et al. (1991), suggested this divergence can be explained by Weiner's (1980) attribution-emotion-action model of helping behavior. In essence, then, those who do not attribute the blame for another's misfortune to the actions of the sufferer will feel pity and subsequently seek to help the troubled individual. On the other hand, if one's misfortune is attributed to his or her own doing, rather than pity, anger will be evoked, and no help will come.

To understand how deservingness heuristics and BJW play a role in forming individual reactions to policies meant to address disparate outcomes between groups, such as Affirmative Action, it must first be acknowledged that social policy reflects a society's beliefs about "who and why people deserve help" (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014, p. 325). Deservingness has long been debated in the United States and has occasionally led to acts of violence and the passing of repressive laws (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). Yet questions of deservingness cannot be disentangled from questions of justice, with BJW serving a foundational role in discussions on broad public policies linked to group identification and inter-group perceptions (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014).

While these debates do not always articulate their precepts in the explicit language of deservingness and justice, they are nonetheless expressed in appeals to central values embedded in American political culture. For example, the self-made man has been a keystone of cultural and political discourses since the earliest days of the United States (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). Moreover, opposition to social justice reforms most often manifests as concern for the role of government in everyday life.

If a person believes that the world is just and opportunities to succeed are equitably distributed, government actions are most easily cast as the real injustice (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). In fact, central to right-wing ideological narratives is the belief that America and its value systems are under attack by left-wing forces that wish to leech money from deserving and good Americans in order to give it to the underserving and lazy.

Wilkins and Wenger (2014) identified a dual mechanism whereby Belief in a Just World might influence the direction of Affirmative Action and other social justice policies in the United States. Through Belief in a Just World, not only are racial disparities perceived to be fair and socially acceptable, but the disadvantage experienced by any given group can be rationalized as emanating not from structural inequalities, but from the choices, attitudes, and abilities separating the different groups (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). Because BJW facilitates victim-blaming, then, the way that individuals perceive themselves, their groups, and other groups, will hinge largely upon their acceptance of Belief in a Just World (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014).

In attempts to distinguish the impact of public perception on support for policies such as Affirmative Action, however, it is essential to look beyond demographic variables and account for differences in individual attitudes and values. Thus, personality characteristics have also become a focal point for social psychologists and others attempting to untangle the complicated relationship between populations and policy outcomes (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). For example, several character traits, ranging from social dominance orientation to conservatism, have been linked to the rejection of Affirmative Action policies. Most importantly, the belief that racial disparity can be traced to moral and character failures, simultaneously discounting systematic differences in lived experiences, most clearly distinguish those that oppose Affirmative Action and social justice policies and those that support it (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). Ultimately, then, attributions of deservingness and conviction or doubt in the just nature of human existence are fundamental in the divergence point whereat individuals choose a stance on social justice issues.

Wilkins and Wenger (2014) utilized data pooled from the General Social Survey (GSS) between 1994 and 2006 to test whether those with the most substantial BJW identification would be most opposed to Affirmative Action. The GSS is considered nationally representative for individuals between the ages of 16 to 64 and is, therefore, useful for examining and isolating the influence of personal attitudes on policy decisions. Although the GSS does not use a specific questionnaire to derive just-world beliefs, there are questions that can be used, by proxy, to estimate what direction the individual leans: specifically, whether hard work or luck and connections, or both equally, contribute most to individual success. This approximation of Belief in a Just World, though not interchangeable with BJW scores, served as the independent variable in their study, while support for policies meant to help women or Blacks served as the dependent variables (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014).

It is important to note that for the period under observation, over two-thirds of Americans believed that hard work trumped all other considerations in achieving success (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). This finding is likely correlated to the predominance of Protestant Work Ethic in the American population, which is another level 2 personality variable that frequently correlated with BJW. Regardless, lower BJW was found to most strongly predict support for affirmative action, particularly for African Americans (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). Moreover, concerning demographic variables, being a woman significantly raised the likelihood of support for preferential hiring of females but not for African Americans, while being African American significantly increased support for both forms of affirmative action (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). These results support the idea that there is a commensurate effect of exposure to discriminatory policies on support for affirmative action.

Not surprisingly, political identification also corresponded to support for affirmative action (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). However, it appeared that those who identified as anything less than extremely liberal were un-supportive of affirmative action; thus, it seems that high Belief in a Just World, as well as low support for affirmative action, is widespread amongst Americans (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). Finally, when racial attitudes were controlled for, there remained a significant effect of BJW on support for preferential hiring for African Americans. African Americans that believed discrimination and inadequate education, rather than effort, were more important determinants of racial inequality were likely to support affirmative action, whereas, when willpower was considered the most important determinant, even African Americans were considerably less likely to support affirmative action.

Thus, attitudes appear critical, even when considering demographic variables, in explaining how supportive an individual is of policies meant to reduce social inequality – in fact, attitudes appear to predominate in importance over membership in a minority group.

Thus, Wilkins and Wenger's (2014) work helps to place perceptions of justice and deservingness as central in securing support for public policies meant to serve as redistributive or preventative checks to injustice, and to show that perceptions of deservingness hinge on beliefs about a just world.

Thus, BJW appears to be a precursor to policy, rather than the other way around (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). For those invested in addressing unjust policies, understanding how perceptions of justice and deservingness might help to promote injustice cannot be downplayed. Specifically, if we are predisposed to see the world as just, we will reinforce this belief through our decisions, which will lead to us reinterpreting events such that policymaking serves to increase injustice, rather than to help resolve it (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014).

Belief in a Just World and Victimization

BJW often precedes secondary victimization, wherein victims are blamed for being victims (Correia et al., 2007). Moreover, secondary victimization is highly correlated to levels of BJW, as victims threaten the stability of just-world beliefs, such that lower Belief in a Just World is linked to less secondary victimization (Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia et al., 2007). Victim blaming is the most widely studied response to challenges to BJW, wherein the victim's personality of character is derogated such that responsibility for their victimization can be attributed to the victim, and not to a failure in the logic of karmic redistribution (Lerner & Miller, 1978).

Lerner initially believed that BJW would be tightly interlinked with the individual differences between those observing the victimization and those experiencing it. Namely, the threat to BJW would be more salient when the victim was from a group with which the observer identified. Essentially, "It is not so frightening when something 'bad' happens to one of 'them'" (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1031). Studies have empirically supported this assertion and likened it to the need of an individual to protect themselves from the prospect of sharing a similar vulnerability (Correia et al., 2007). However, BJW appears to operate in a more nuanced fashion than was initially anticipated. For example, when comparing homosexuals with AIDS to their heterosexual counterparts, heterosexual participants were more likely to blame the former for their condition (Anderson, 1992). Moreover, male participants were more likely to secondarily victimize female rape victims than were female participants (Kleinke & Meyer, 1990).

This picture becomes more telling when, rather than examining individuals, collective groups become the focal point of research. For example, high Belief in a Just World has been shown to possess a positive correlation with blaming disadvantaged outgroups, including citizens of third world countries, emigrants, the unemployed, etc., for whatever misfortune they might experience (Correia et al., 2007). Most importantly, for individuals with high BJW, poverty in the third world is not a result of structural causes but due to factors intrinsic to the individual (Harper & Manasse, 1992). Additionally, BJW correlates positively with negative assessments of the poor and with the rejection of social justice objectives (Clayton, 1992). Yet BJW does not deal solely with causal attributions for the suffering of victims, but with support for the status quo in general. For example, strong BJW predicts the belief that the situations endured by disadvantaged groups are not only just (Dalbert & Yamauchi, 1994), but that their disadvantages are exaggerated.

Correia et al. (2007) conducted a modified Stroop test in which vignettes were presented to participants. In the vignettes, a child is injured after playing in an unsafe area; in the innocence condition, the vignette is framed such that there were no warnings in place to caution against playing in the area; in the blame condition, such warnings were prevalent, such that the child can no longer claim naivety about the potential dangers. Utilizing the modified Stroop test, it was found that, in the innocent condition, there was a significantly longer latency period in identifying the color stimulus when, rather than a neutral word, a word related to justice preceded the mask. This indicated that mental categories related to justice were strongly activated by perceptions of injustice. No such latency existed in the blame condition. These results showed that an innocent victim is more threatening to the maintenance of BJW than a blameworthy victim.

When Correia et al. (2007) performed a secondary study including a stigmatized outgroup, it was found that, for the innocent, ingroup condition, latency rates were again high, indicating the activation of mental structures associated with justice. However, neither of the blame conditions nor the innocent outgroup condition revealed such mental activation, suggesting that threats to BJW were minimized not only when blame could be attributed, but one the victim belonged to a group outside of one's own.

Because Correia et al. (2007) included a stigmatized outgroup, it is possible that not only were the participants able to resolve BJW threats quickly but, in fact, BJW might have been reinforced, as, for those with high Belief in a Just World as well as negative attitudes towards the outgroup in question, it might be easy to see any misfortune, whether just or not, befalling the outgroup member as deserved (Correia et al., 2007).

Social Justice and Unfairness

Unfair treatment elicits anxiety and distress in those who experience it (Weiss, Suckow, and Cropanzano (1999). Researchers have even observed this response in non-human animals (Brosnan & de Waal, 2003; McGetrick & Range, 2018) (Bizer, 2020). Additionally, the stated goal of promoting justice and fairness is an integral component of many forms of government, and many nations have set up bureaucratic systems designed ostensibly to ensure these objectives. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states this purpose in its opening sentence (Bizer, 2020). The more unfair an event is judged to be, the more intensely and persistently one recalls it has having been distressing (Mikula, Scerer, and Athenstaedt (1998) (Bizer, 2020).

Moreover, observing unfairness perpetrated on others also elicits distress (Fehr & Gächter, 2002). Additionally, in one experiment, participants reported spikes in anger when a major disparity in reward distribution was believed to have been arranged by the individual who most benefitted therefrom, compared to participants who were led to believe that the distribution was randomly generated (Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009). Moreover, situational and individual factors can also moderate emotional responses to unfair actions. Participants feel significantly more anger about unfair treatment visited on individuals they have been primed to empathize with than on those they have not (Batson et al., 2007). Personality dimensions, including personality traits, can significantly moderate emotional responses to perceived unfairness (Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001). Ultimately, however, the distress experienced when confronted with unfairness does not possess universal expression; some individuals feel the sting of witnessing or experiencing unfairness more keenly than do others. Bizer's (2020) Emotional Response to Unfairness (ERU) scale operationalizes this sensitivity; moreover, ERU exhibits significant and important relationships with BJW and other attitudes, including political and ideological (Bizer, 2020).

ERU, though a related construct, differs significantly from BJW. While the former pertains to affective response, the latter pertains to the cognitive framework underlying one's justice beliefs (Bizer, 2020). High BJW will actually tend to shield individuals from distress when faced with injustice, through rationalizing strategies such as victim blaming; thus, ERU and BJW have an inverse relationship (Bizer, 2020). In essence, high BJW individuals utilize a cognitive perceptual framework in order to preserve affect and minimize cognitive dissonance (Lerner, 1980; Bizer, 2020).

Social Dominance Orientation and Emotional Response to Unfairness

High SDO individuals tend to oppose policies and ideologies that seek to minimize hierarchical advantages and disadvantages, as SDO measures an individual's approval of current hierarchical patterns between groups, regardless of its impact on fair outcomes (Pratto et al., 1994). Those high in SDO are, unsurprisingly, also emotionally desensitized to ERU. (Bizer, 2020)

Importantly, SDO and authoritarianism each predict conservative beliefs and these measures together account for more than 50% of the variance in ethnocentrism and prejudice (Hiel & Mervielde, 2002). The relationship between authoritarianism and SDO has been suggested as evincing two forms of dispositional bias. Authoritarianism has been connected to disdain for targets who violate in-group norms and standards, while SDO (dominance-based prejudice) appears to be more related to the instrumental paradigm that establishes superiority and power in a frightening and highly competitive world (Hiel & Mervielde, 2002). Additionally, SDO appears to correlate consistently and positively with Belief in a Just World, and negatively towards universalist values (Hiel & Mervielde, 2002 & Mervielde, 2002), which predict concern for the wellbeing of outgroup members (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004).

What are ideological narratives and Moral Foundations?

Level 1 and Level 2 personality factors both contribute in fundamental ways to political identities and behaviors, yet these exist and operate within specific socio-cultural contexts. These contexts make up the 3rd level of personality and, when concerning the realm of politics and culture, can be described as ideological narratives. Ideological narratives are a class of narrative that, like life stories, contextualize and articulate the psychosocial constructions of an individual and the cultural context within which the individual lives out their life. However, unlike life stories, which are focused almost exclusively on the individual, ideological narratives form the core of all political movements.

They typically address the present by conceptualizing history (“once upon a time...”), revolve around a protagonist, an antagonist or obstacle, a clash, and a denouement, which together are meant to reveal why the given political movement is the solution (Western, 2007). They often deal with a reconstructed past and a potential future and thus tell tales of progress or degeneration. As life stories cannot be shared, ideological narratives depend wholly on the number of people who accept them as their own, although occasionally making slight alterations that complement their individual life story.

Further unlike life stories, ideological narratives concern the fates of peoples, take in far broader conceptions of history, and regularly used as justification for broad policy actions and, occasionally, violence (Haidt et al., 2009).

Haidt, Graham, and Joseph constructed another theory designed to accommodate cross-level work, called Moral Foundations Theory (MFT; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004), a cluster of Level 2 psychological constructs that serve as the base from which individuals construct Level 3 narratives including life stories and the collective narratives that animate competing political ideologies.

It should be emphasized that a simple left-right political scale predicts a broad array of other traits, behaviors, and preferences. However, Haidt et al. (2009) demonstrated the great amount of nuance that this bipolar approach had previously only intimated, by utilizing the five moral foundation constructs and a Level 3 articulation of the political divides that predominate in modern American political culture (Haidt et al., 2009).

To more fully comprehend how a study of BJW and political endorsement contributes to the integrative efforts of political psychologists, it is necessary to expand upon the Moral Foundations Theory and its specific moral foundations. These provide the psychological scaffolding upon which cultures develop their moral systems, and consist of harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Harm/care concerns itself primarily with the suffering of others and consists of caring and compassion virtues. Fairness/reciprocity revolves around aversion to unfair treatment, inequality, and justice values. Ingroup/loyalty attends to values related to group membership, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, and vigilance against betrayal. Authority/respect stresses the importance of hierarchical relationships and obligations, such as obedience and role fulfillment. Finally, purity/sanctity emphasizes the threat of physical or spiritual contamination, and consists of virtues such as chastity, wholesomeness, and mastery of desire. (Haidt et al., 2009).

According to Haidt et al. (2009), these are the fundamental psychological phenomena which inform individual estimation of what and who are worthy of blame or worthy of praise. They are the “taste receptors of the moral sense” (pg. 112). And while, like taste receptors, most individuals possess them to some degree, they are not always evenly distributed or attended to, as can be seen in the multifarious ways in which different cultures build upon them. And yet they appear ubiquitous as foundational to all aspects of the moral life: they inform norms, values, taboos, institutions, and religions. However, they are difficult to study directly, and thus the recommended approach is to study the individual endorsement of culturally constructed virtues.

Once we accept the prominence of moral foundations as elementary to the culturally constructed definitions of virtues and vices, the “culture war” becomes immediately clearer. Culture-war issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and affirmative action appear to be viewed by those of the left side of the political spectrum through the lens of Harm and Fairness, whereas by those on the right through lenses that stress authority, ingroup, and purity values (Haidt & Graham, 2007).

Conservatives and Fairness

It is interesting to note that fairness, while evident, was much different from the fairness endorsed by liberals. Specifically, conservatives conceptualize fairness as reciprocity, particularly for those who break the law; they are not, however, concerned with equality of outcomes, an essential element of social justice movements. Liberals and conservatives also appear to value fairness differently, and when participants were asked to indicate whether an action or idea was morally right or morally wrong, liberals prioritized fairness values (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek, 2009), while in another experiment, conservatives prioritized loyalty values (Voelkel and Feinberg, 2018). It is possible, then, that the low priority given to fairness and justice issues by conservatives is related to inoculation to such issues by the tendency towards higher BJW; thus, justice issues might not be prioritized because, it is believed, there are no significant justice issues (Bizer, 2020).

Bizer (2020) also found that ERU and political ideology were correlated, with those who are more troubled by unfairness being more likely to self-identify as liberal. Unsurprisingly, high endorsers of BJW were more likely to self-identify as conservative. ERU and BJW were both significant and contributed uniquely to predictions of political identity.

They thus appear to measure and operationalize two related but separate facets in the political identity of American voters (Bizer, 2020). Potentially, BJW preserves affective security in the face of injustice only to the degree that is capable of mediating perceptions of BJW-challenging stimuli and render them neutral in justice-value. Future research should seek to elucidate the interrelationships shared by ERU, BJW, and political orientation. For example, when Bizer (2002) sought to predict ERU based on personality dimensions and political ideology, he found that the measures most successfully capable of accurate prediction were the two attitude metrics of SDO and BJW, even when accounting for political ideology and personality trait agreeableness.

Although there existed a positive correlation between ERU and liberal identification, this association was better explained by a combination of BJW and SDO. Thus, it appears that BJW and emotional sensitivity to justice and fairness issues play a central role in the current configuration of the American political system. (Bizer, 2020) Thus, because BJW also facilitates victim blaming and is associated with both well as an aversion to governmental programs meant to treat unfair disparity in outcomes, those high in BJW will be most likely to vote for Trump in 2020.

Present Study – BJW and Trump

In 2016, Hillary Clinton spoke to issues widely recognized as important to liberal and progressive voters, while Trump, emphasizing the preferability of the past to the present or a transformed future, ran firmly on appeals to common traditionalist and conservative themes (Blankenship et al., 2018). Trump's rhetoric supported the legitimacy and preservation of American hierarchical structures and tradition hegemonic group dynamics within and beyond US borders – thus, SDO (Blankenship et al., 2018). Intention to vote for Trump already associated with higher SDO (Choma & Hanoch, 2016; Blankenship et al., 2018)

National Identity is another element typically involved in the political process, especially during elections. This takes patriotic and nationalistic forms, which, though overlapping, are empirically distinct constructs. The former concerns positive affect directed towards the nation; the latter deals with feelings of national superiority and dominance (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Bar-Tal & Staub, 1997; Blankenship et al., 2018). Moreover, nationalism, but not patriotism, are associated with support for tough immigration policies, intolerance towards minorities, and support for aggressive U.S. military intervention (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Blankenship et al., 2018).

During the 2016 election, both candidates made appeals to national identity; however, Trump made anti-immigration central to his discourse on national identity and a cornerstone of his agenda, while simultaneously emphasizing American superiority. On the other hand, Clinton evoked tolerance and love of country as the fundamental values of national identity, leading to a more welcoming stance on immigration and the integration of foreign-born individuals into the fabric of the body politic (Blankenship et al., 2018).

Social justice issues significantly and negatively predicted votes for Trump (Blankenship et al., 2018). SDO significantly predicted voting for Trump, as mediated through lower concern for social justice issues. (Blankenship et al., 2018). To those with low SDO, social justice issues were considered more important than other issues throughout the course of the 2016 election, from the period prior to nominations through to the election itself and contended that how people responded to these issues was thus a consistently important factor in the 2016 election. Because Trump is the incumbent in the 2020 election, they will likely be just as important in this cycle. (Blankenship et al., 2018)

Thus, Blankenship et al. (2018) contended that personality orientations indirectly influenced voting behaviors because different personality dimensions differentially emphasized the importance of different issues, and these might be the key factors in determining who any given individual will choose to vote for. SDO, because of its acceptance of the status quo and its commitment to current hegemonic hierarchies, appears to be an important element in conservative politics. However, it appears that this is primarily mediated through a rejection of social justice issues, more so than through support for individual rights issues (such as gun ownership), as the former but not the latter occurred in Blankenship et al.'s (2018) study. In fact, social justice issues mediated the link between all included personality dimensions and voter choice. Thus, “culture war” issues appear to be a primary facet of modern partisanship. Deserving and justice beliefs would, therefore, appear to be central to the American polity, with BJW playing a crucial role in any given individual's political belief system (Blankenship et al., 2018). Perhaps of most concern to those interested in addressing social injustice, high BJW is regularly correlated to attitudes and constructs (such as endorsement of authority, religion, traditionalist views on women, opposition to socialism, and belief in a non-interventionist economy) strongly associated with support for the status quo (Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993; Wilson, 2013)

Thus, researchers must continue to examine the impact of this and other enduring dispositions on the political life of a nation (Blankenship et al., 2018): a political psychology rooted not in the belief that individuals are mechanistic agents driven by the pursuit of logical self-interest, but by the messy and occasionally irrational directives of the personality. In this way, then, psychologists have a role to play in attempting to disentangle the complex and seemingly unpredictable nature of political behavior (Blankenship et al., 2018). The current study attempted to continue this analysis of the importance of Belief in a Just World in political attitudes and ideology by measuring BJW and looking at stated voting plans for the 2020 Presidential Election.

Methods

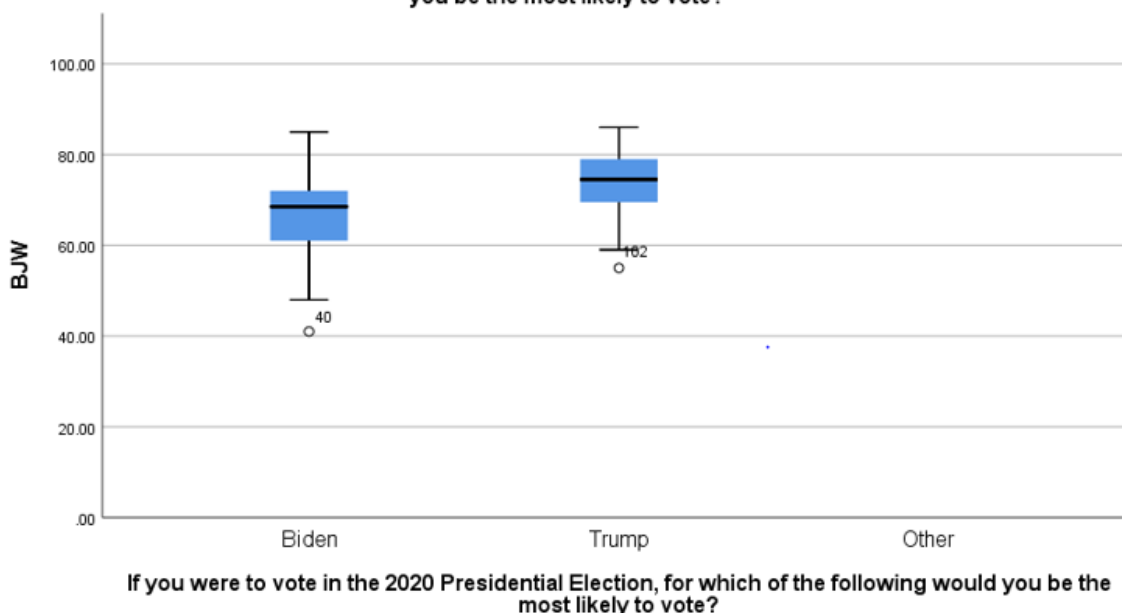
Voting eligible participants at a major university in the Southwestern United States were asked to participate in an online study on voting preferences. Basic demographic information was collected (age, gender, racial identification and a rating of political ideology on a continuum from “very liberal” to “very conservative”) and were administered the Belief in a Just World Scale (Lerner, 1980). The entire study was administer online using the Qualtrics data collection system.

Results

Following the rationale and evidence provided, we expected that higher BJW endorsement would correspond with voting for Trump, rather than for Biden. We used binary logistic regression to test this hypothesis, and assigned intent to vote for Biden as 0, and intent to vote for Trump as 1. After removing those who endorsed a third party or who did not respond, we retained 94 participants, with 46 endorsing Biden and 48 endorsing Trump. Turning to BJW, the mean score for Biden endorsers was 66.89, while, for Trump endorsers, it was 73.77. The remaining descriptive details are included in Table X, and a boxplot distinguishing between the endorsers in terms of BJW are shown in Table X2.

If you were to vote in the 2020 Presidential Election, for which of the following would you be the most likely to vote?		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BJW	Biden	46	66.8913	9.31481	1.37339
	Trump	48	73.7708	6.99313	1.00937

Simple Boxplot of BJW by If you were to vote in the 2020 Presidential Election, for which of the following would you be the most likely to vote?



For the test, we conducted a forward stepwise binary regression using voter endorsement as the dependent variable and BJW as the covariate. Before accounting for BJW, since 48 participants expressed the intention to vote for Trump and 46 expressed the intention to vote for Biden, the baseline model, based purely on relative differences in endorsement, predicted that all participants would endorse Trump, and was correct 51.1% of the time. The constant only model had a log likelihood of 130.269. Examining those variables not in the baseline equation, the Roa's coefficient for BJW was 14.28, significant at the $p < 0.1$ level, indicating its potential to strengthen the predictive model. Not surprisingly, after BJW was included in the model, the log likelihood became 114.66, lower than that of the baseline model and signifying that more of the variance was explained after the inclusion of BJW scores. Moreover, the predictive success of the model increased from 51.1% to 66%.

Thus, accounting for BJW produced an improvement in the model, which became significantly more capable of discriminating between the Trump and the Biden endorsers.

Discussion

Although modest, we find that the single inclusion of the BJW scale produces a substantially more accurate prediction than that given by the base model. Moreover, though we know BJW is more nuanced than has conventionally been accepted (Bartholomaeus & Strelan, 2019), the current study demonstrates that BJW retains a fundamental ability to predict, in the expected direction, political endorsement, as predicated upon previous research. Thus, we find further evidence suggesting that personality variables, particularly those that flow naturally between Level 2 and Level 3 dimensions, such as the influence BJW has on individual acceptance of a given ideological narrative, matters in the dictation of policy outcomes. This phenomenon might hold particularly well when the political endorsement in question pertains to a high profile, ideological champion, such as presidential candidates tend to be, whose positions are widely known as being representative of current political movements.

Thus, the trend towards ever more refined forms of political psychology, centered in the piecing together of prototypical voter personalities – for example, the BJW, SDO, and RWA triad – appears to be amongst the most potentially fruitful areas of future politico-psychological research. This elaboration of psychological trends in political reality is particularly essential for those seeking to understand how the undercurrents of mass personality guide any given political outcome. With such information, practitioners and scholars of political advertising might hone their attempts to cultivate political goodwill amongst the electorate; for example, advertisements that stress a politician's record on fairness might be particularly influential for a population with low BJW and high ERU. Moreover, understanding how Level 2 voter personalities and level 3 ideological narratives relate can only become more important for political actors as social-media platforms continue to sharpen high-precision targeted advertising software (Cadwalladr, 2019). Thus, given an individual voter's BJW endorsement, political outreach efforts might stress the politician's intention to help those unjustly suffering from systematic disadvantages. Alternatively, as those high in BJW will likely remain unswayed by such rhetoric, and it might, in fact, alienate such voters, politicians will know instead to make another sort of political appeal, altogether (Bizer, 2020).

Finally, future research might continue to examine the relationships between BJW, SDO, and RWA, in light of the explicit themes that predominate in a politician's rhetoric and constitute his or her public outreach. As Christopher et al. (2008) mentioned, exploring differences in the subscales of any given construct can reveal important nuances in what the construct means at an individual level. For example, Protestant Work Ethic, RWA, SWO, and BJW, all important conservative constructs, interacted in discernably distinct ways when all were broken into subscales (Christopher et al., 2008). For example, the belief that hard work yields desirable outcomes and an aversion to leisure, from the Protestant Work Ethic Scale, predicted BJW, whereas morality/ethics, self-reliance, and aversion to leisure, from the same scale, predicted RWA. Thus, parsing each construct into its essential elements and examining how these relate to each other and the specific factors that constitute a supported ideological narrative will likely further illuminate the interactions of and directions between Level 2 personality dimensions and their importance as elements of more extensive, Level 3 ideological endorsements.

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