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# The Psychology of Authoritarian Populism:

## A Bird's Eye View

**Dr. Daniel Yudkin**

More in Common

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## About More in Common

More in Common is a new effort to build communities and societies that are stronger, more resilient and more open. The More in Common initiative took shape from work undertaken since 2015 to understand why advanced democracies failed to respond more effectively to the refugee crisis and its impact on domestic politics.

The refugee crisis was a harbinger of what happens when the forces of right-wing populist hate and division gain the upper hand, and those in favour of open and diverse societies do not come together in defense of those values. If the battle for hearts and minds is lost to authoritarian populists, advanced democracies will not be able to respond adequately to such profound collective challenges as climate change, inequality, technological disruption of the job market, population ageing and global public health threats. Holding diverse and inclusive societies together will become increasingly difficult.

More in Common's objective across its different streams of work is to build closer and more inclusive societies, which are resilient to the appeal of xenophobia and authoritarian populism. We aim to support the efforts of civil society and key influencers who share the values of open and inclusive societies, and help catalyse other new initiatives that advance these values.

More in Common is a non-profit organisation with teams in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. The co-founders of More in Common are Tim Dixon, Mathieu Lefèvre, and Gemma Mortensen.

For more information, please visit
**www.moreincommon.com**

## About the Author

Dr. Daniel Yudkin is a postdoctoral researcher in social psychology at Yale University, investigating how transformative experiences change people's values and behaviours. He obtained his PhD from New York University and was a Fellow at Harvard University. His research centres on how people assess and influence their surroundings, including how group membership influences moral judgment and how people determine their own social standing by comparing themselves to others.


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The Psychology of Authoritarian Populism:
A Bird's Eye View.



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# Introduction

Large numbers of people in established democracies have become increasingly anxious, divided and distrustful during the first two decades of the 21st century.

Concerns about declining economic prospects, the threat of terrorism and the speed of cultural change are contributing to a generalised increase in anxiety. At the same time, deep social divisions – by ethnicity, religion, class and values - are fuelling distrust about those who seem 'other'.

Alongside these changes, a series of scandals and the lack of credible plans for change from established political parties are undermining trust in liberal democratic systems. This is lifting citizens' natural brake on extremism. As a result, more people are becoming open to illiberal change.

None of these attitudes are formed in a vacuum. Online and offline, populist and non-populist narratives are competing to provide a lens to interpret the changing world. Populists are increasingly succeeding in this battle.

Together these feelings of anxiety and social distrust are resulting in growing hostility to 'out-groups' such as immigrants, refugees, Muslims and Jews. Larger numbers of people are adopting the view that breaking past democratic rules may be a price worth paying for change. These beliefs have provided a path down which authoritarian populist parties are marching.

More in Common is an initiative to build greater resilience to this rising threat to open, inclusive democracies. We are especially focused on the western world's four major democracies: the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and France. Our work includes:

- Conducting public opinion research
- Developing and testing communications strategies
- Partnering with nonprofits, philanthropy, media and the private sector
- Advocating for policy change, and
- Piloting interventions through both narrative and facilitating connection between people across the lines of difference.

We are conducting large-scale public opinion research studies in those four priority countries as well as other nations. Because the challenges we face today are complex and interconnected, we also need to source insights from a wide range of disciplines.

For instance, contributions from fields such as social psychology, economics, neuroscience, philosophy, and political science are all highly relevant to our work. Academic studies do not

provide an answer to all of the issues that we are grappling with, but they can help us better understand the overlay of factors now at play in our societies. To help provide ongoing insights, in 2018 More in Common is establishing a board of expert advisers from different academic backgrounds and institutions.

To help us incorporate the most powerful social science insights into our work, in 2017 we commissioned this paper from Dr Daniel Yudkin at Yale University. We asked Dr Yudkin to set out the key insights from social sciences that are relevant to understanding and responding to the rise of authoritarian populism and social fracturing. We also asked him to make recommendations for how these insights might shape More in Common's future work. Dr Yudkin prepared this paper with support from Miriam Juan-Torres and Stephen Hawkins on our own research team.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a bird's eye view of the most important contributions of each of these fields for More in Common's strategy and approach—highlighting the most important discoveries in each field, pointing out opportunities for further research, and outlining how past work can shape and inform More in Common's work going forward.

For those familiar with these fields of research, this paper may help clarify some of the insights guiding More in Common's work. For those whose expertise lies outside of the academic social sciences, the paper is intended as a roadmap for how different areas of academic specialization can help us to understand—and thereby undermine—the appeal of authoritarian populism.

Dr Yudkin has identified four relevant areas of research, each of which has its own section in this paper:

> **Section 1: Affiliation** illustrates how being a member of a group influences the way in which we interpret the world.
>
> **Section 2: Cognition** explores how hidden biases can shape our behaviour.
>
> **Section 3: Authority** examines how humans respond to power and hierarchy
>
> **Section 4: Values** explores how our deepest principles shape our political opinions.

The overall aim of this paper is to provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding and addressing the growing threats to pluralism and liberal democracy. Throughout the text you will see examples of how these insights might be applied to initiatives to counter polarization and strengthen inclusion.

Tim Dixon, Mathieu Lefèvre and Gemma Mortensen
*Co-founders, More in Common*

More in Common

# Section 1: Affiliation

It is widely known that humans imbue their communities with a tremendous amount of psychological importance. But how exactly people relate to their groups, and the implications this has for society, are far from obvious. What follows is a brief overview of some of the most important findings in this regard, and how they relate to More in Common's work.

## Early Research: The Power of Groups

**Spontaneous enmity.** One classic study illustrating the influence of group membership was conducted by Muzafer Sherif and colleagues in the 1950s and is known as the **Robber's Cave Experiment**.[1] In this work, the researchers studied the behavioural dynamics of boys who had been randomly assigned to two groups at a summer camp. Over the first few days, the groups cooperated peacefully among themselves. Next, however, the experimenters exposed the boys to the "friction" phase of the experiment—having them play team-based games such as tug-of-war, in which prizes were distributed to the winners. The boys quickly demonstrated increasing hostility toward each other, at times engaging in verbal or physical altercations. In addition, they showed a spike in **in-group favouritism**, rating the members of their own group as superior to those of the other. This experiment showed how quickly a group identity can form and how this identity can influence people's attitudes and behaviours. The tendency to immediately identify with one's group at the exclusion of others is, it seems, "baked in" to the human psyche.

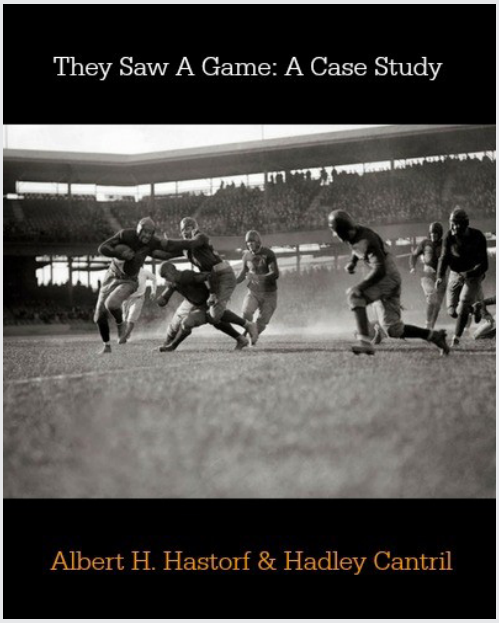


**FIGURE 1:** People's perception of events (such as a football game) vary according to their social identity

**Affiliation shapes perception.** This early work was followed up by a study on the effects of group membership on people's perceptions. The researchers studied a seemingly mundane phenomenon: fans' reactions to a football game taking place between Princeton and Dartmouth.[2] The researchers observed strong biases in people's perceptions of the game depending on which team they were rooting for. For instance, Princeton fans reported seeing significantly more fouls committed against the Princeton team; Dartmouth fans reported more fouls against the Dartmouth team.

[1] Sherif (1956).

[2] Hastorf & Cantril (1952).

Anyone with a passing familiarity with collegiate or professional sports may be unsurprised by this observation. The conclusions the researchers drew from it, however, were profound. They concluded that, contrary to everyday belief, there is in fact no such thing as a "game" occurring "out there" in the world, independent of human experience. Rather, the **perception** of the game depends on the memories, motives, preconceptions, wishes, and desires of the **observer**. The researchers explained it thus: "We behave according to what we bring to the occasion, and what each of us brings to the occasion is more or less unique." From the point of view of psychology, this is a critical insight. To understand why people do what they do, one must see the world through their eyes.

***Policy Opportunity:*** More in Common takes these insights seriously in its approach to connecting people who are divided by political differences. At the core of this insight is empathy for other perspectives. Rarely do people deliberately do something they know is wrong. Instead, far more frequently, people are compelled by their understanding of reality. Thus, rather than vilifying or dismissing people who hold different views, More in Common seeks to identify measures that can increase trust, openness and communication, in order to foster greater levels of cooperation and understanding.

**"Us" versus "them."** Another critical contribution to the scientific understanding of group behaviour is that of **minimal groups**. The idea is that people form biased attitudes about themselves and others on the basis of seemingly trivial bits of information. For example, researchers asked subjects to take a test that would putatively determine whether they were "overestimators" or "underestimators" (in fact, the test was fake). Subjects were then asked to make a series of decisions on the basis of this categorization. For instance, they were asked how positively or negatively they felt about other overestimators or underestimators: subjects overwhelmingly rated the members of their own group as superior—even though the information they had been given was a total fabrication. These biases even influenced their decisions regarding money. Subjects were paired with a counterpart from the opposing group. Experimenters then gave them a choice between $8 for themselves and $6 for their counterpart, or $6 for themselves and $2 for their counterpart.[3] People overwhelmingly chose the latter option, foregoing money in order to make themselves relatively better-off—a behaviour known as **maximum differentiation.** To be good, one needs to be "better than."

***Implications:*** This research has several important lessons. First, it illuminates the definition of a group: a group is whatever differentiates "us" from "them" in people's minds—even if it is based on minimal information. And it highlights how tiny pieces of social information shape the way people see themselves and each other.

Second, it shows the power of **relativity**: it is actually more important for people to be better-off than a counterpart than better-off objectively. This phenomenon can help explain increased resentment among working-class individuals across the western world. When being "well-off"

[3] Sidanius, Haley, Molina, & Pratto (2007).

means being "better than," one may feel threatened by the mere fact that other groups are approaching one's level social standing, even if they have not attained it. Consider the plight of white working-class people in the US and Europe. Research shows that they have been favoured by discriminatory practices applied to other groups (particularly African Americans)—including school segregation, unfair housing policies, and the like—for decades. It is possible, then, that the gradual levelling of the playing field, even if it remains far from equal, nevertheless feels like a loss, because it makes them relatively less advantaged. Years of dominance can make a close win feel like defeat.

This finding also speaks to a long-term economic debate. Proponents of supply-side or "trickle-down" economics sometimes suggest that a "rising tide lifts all boats."[4] But the realities of human psychology suggest that, even if this is the case, it may not feel this way to those at the bottom of the ladder. Because economic well-being is measured in relative and not objective terms, the true measure of subjective economic advancement will not be fully captured by objective measures (for instance, GDP). Rather, it is best assessed by measures of the degree of economic discrepancy between rich and poor—that is, by the level of **inequality** in a society. Indeed, research has shown that income inequality (as indicated, for instance, by metrics such as the Gini coefficient[5]) is a better indicator of the psychological well-being of a population than more objective measures.[6] What Einstein found in the physical world applies equally in the social: everything is relative.

***Research Opportunity:*** To what extent are current social grievances a product of a sense of relative socio-economic slippage? In other words, do those who have succumbed to the allure of authoritarian populism feel economically disenfranchised even if they are better-off in objective terms? More in Common might examine this through basic survey methods. For instance, it might ask people the extent to which they agree with the statement "I'm worse-off today than I used to be." Then, it might examine how endorsement of this point of view predicts certain other political attitudes.

## Intergroup Bias

A consistent theme running through research on people's group affiliations is that of **intergroup bias**. Intergroup bias is defined as the favouring of one's own group over another in terms of such things as evaluation, affiliation, and allocation of resources.[7] The study of intergroup bias has yielded some fascinating insights. For instance, people display what is known as an **empathy gap** toward outsiders. While people are known to experience empathic pain at the sight of another's suffering,[8] this feeling is significantly reduced for members of an opposing group.[9] Indeed, some

[4] Nugent (2006).

[5] Yitzhaki (1983).

[6] Wilkinson & Pickett (2009).

[7] Taylor & Doria (1981).

[8] Jackson, Rainville, & Decety (2006).

[9] Cikara, Bruneau, Van Baval, & Saxe (2014).

research suggests that people actually experience boosts in mood when misfortune befalls an out-group member (known as Schadenfreude[10]). The effects of the empathy gap have been found at the neural level, where brain patterns associated with in-group empathy diminished for out-group members.[11]

Intergroup bias shows itself in other ways. For example, in a phenomenon termed outgroup homogeneity, people tend to see members of opposing groups as all alike[12]—a finding that can have important implications for the manner in which people classify members of other groups. This form of prejudice can be seen in a variety of contexts. For instance, in the political context, outgroup homogeneity can cause people to see all members of an opposing party as conforming to the same set of narrow views. It can lead people to see immigrants as all sharing certain unattractive or undesirable traits. Or it can seduce people into simplistic assumptions about different religious, ethnic, or national groups.

Another consequence of intergroup bias is **dehumanization**, in which people deprive rival group members of basic human features, including agency, identity, and the capacity for suffering.[13] Dehumanization has pernicious effects on people's decision-making. Research by psychologists at Stanford, for instance, found that the degree to which people implicitly associate black faces with having ape-like features predicts their willingness to sentence them to death for a crime.[14] This disturbing finding shows just how damaging intergroup biases can be for universally recognized ideals such as fair treatment under the law.

***Policy Opportunity:*** More in Common should promote an awareness of how group lines effectively change people's perception of each other. In so doing, it may help to undermine people's reflexive tendencies to vilify and distrust members of different communities.

## Effect on Beliefs

One important upshot of research on intergroup bias concerns the effect it has on the things that people believe about the world around them. Consider a person trying to establish an accurate picture of reality. While some facts are easy to discern—the fact that grass is green, for example—others, like the true origin of the universe—are somewhat less obvious. This task is further hampered by the fact that people are (now more than ever) burdened with a virtually infinite stream of information. This information comes from the Internet, but also from everyday social living in such forms as conversation, observation, and direct experience. In order to arrive at reliable conclusions, therefore, people often rely on **heuristics**—rules of thumb that act as a shorthand for the trustworthiness of a conclusion. Such practices save people the immense computational task required for parsing through reams of available information.

[10] Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje (2003).

[11] Cikara & Fiske (2011).

[12] Judd, Park, Yzerbyt, Gordijn, & Muller (2005).

[13] Haslam (2006).

[14] Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson (2006).

Heuristics influence everything from romantic decisions to judgments of risk. And one critical heuristic that people use when making sense of the world is group membership. Specifically, people often seek out what is known as an **epistemic authority** for information about what to believe.[15] Epistemic authorities are individuals people can rely on to provide them reliable information. And research shows that people overwhelmingly seek out epistemic authorities amongst the members of their own group.[16,17] The result is that a few individuals who establish themselves as epistemic authorities in a community can have enormous impact over public opinion.

These effects help explain the deepening political divisions in Europe and the United States. In the US, for example, it used to be the case that people of different political persuasions obtained their information from similar news sources. Individuals such as Walter Cronkite represented people who presented facts about the world free from political slant—for this reason he was dubbed "the most trusted man in America." Nowadays, people on the left and right are often informed by completely different news streams. On the right, Fox News figures such as Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and (until his dismissal) Bill O'Reilly have traditionally been regarded as trusted and respected news sources. But such a feeling is not shared by those on the Left, who has called these individuals "ignorant,"[18] "myopic,"[19] and "racist."[20] The left's epistemic authorities, which include Rachel Maddow, Lawrence O'Donnell, and Chris Hayes, have, in turn, been called "biased,"[21] "hysterical,"[22] and "unhinged."[23] Thus it is clear to see that changes in the way that people obtain their information today may be partially responsible for the current political divisions.

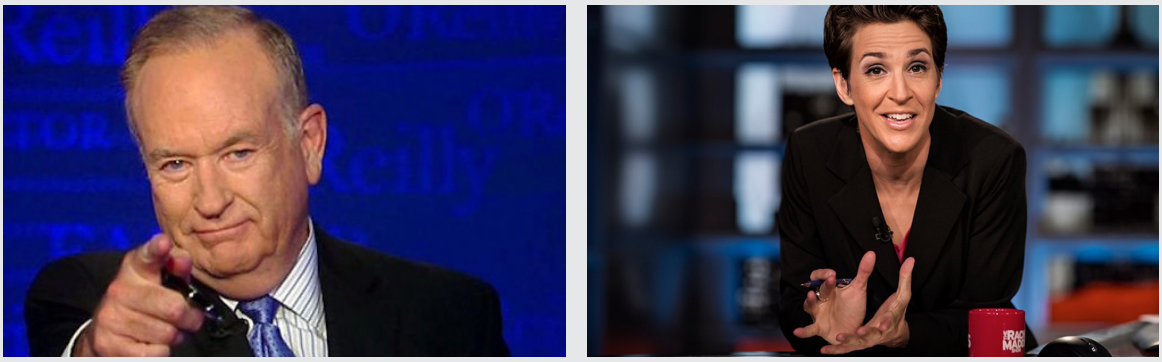

**FIGURE 2:** People often rely upon epistemic authorities for their beliefs about the world. Pictured: Fox News host Bill O'Reilly and MSNBC anchor Rachel Maddow.[24]

[15] Kruglanski, et. al (2005).

[16] Hogg (2007).

[17] De Breu, Nijstad, & van Knippenberg (2007).

[18] Stephens (2016).

[19] West (2013).

[20] Meyerson (2017).

[21] Ross (2016). Retrieved from: https://www.dailykos.com/

[22] Zero Filter (2017). Retrieved from: https://zero-filter.com/

[23] McLaughlin (2017).

[24] Courtesy of http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show and https://www.billoreilly.com

***Program Opportunity:*** More in Common can make use of these insights to help enact change. As part of its in-person engagement with individuals of different political persuasions, More in Common could promote programs that cause people to give more critical reflection to where they get their news. People on both sides of the aisle might, after a little encouragement, realize that their views may be shaped by a single information stream, instead of a diverse array of voices. More in Common could further help by suggesting alternative news sources from either end of the political spectrum, and by advising people on good practices for expanding their sources of information.

**Discounting opposing views.** Group membership influences beliefs in other ways. Psychologist Lee Ross and colleagues were interested in how people involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict responded to arguments made by the other side.[25] The researchers crafted messages calling for peace and showed them to both Israeli and Palestinian subjects. They altered the messages to appear as having been written either by an author on subjects' own side or the opposing camp. The data showed that subjects' perception of the message differed according to perceived authorship. When people believed the message had been written by one of their own, they endorsed the message. When written by the opposing side, they fiercely disagreed. This behaviour, termed reactive devaluation, was exhibited on both sides. It suggests that people will flexibly define their perceptions of others' actions according to their group membership.

***Implications:*** The effects of reactive devaluation are apparent in today's world. Consider, for example, the policies underlying the Affordable Care Act—Obama's signature legislation, which affected a large section of the U.S. economy. The ACA bears a resemblance to a proposal put forward by the Heritage Foundation in 1993. Indeed, the individual mandate, by far the most controversial element of the current bill, was present in the original Heritage plan,[26] and was a core part of legislation put forward by some Republican lawmakers in the early 1990.[27] However, when the bill went for a vote under the Obama administration, it received not a single Republican vote.[28] This behaviour led some commentators to suggest that Republicans "won't take yes for an answer."[29]

But Republicans are not the only ones who succumb to the reactive devaluation. When Donald Trump initially took office, Democrats decried his lack of experience, saying the man was not fit to take office or make important decisions regarding international affairs. Within a few months of his inauguration, Trump, in what could arguably be seen as an acknowledgement of the limits of his knowledge, delegated responsibility for setting troop levels in Afghanistan to Secretary of Defence, James Mattis. This move, however, was itself decried by left-leaning news organisations, including the New York Times editorial board, who accused the President of being "cowed by the weighty responsibility of sending more American Americans into battle."[30] It is hard to avoid

[25] Maoz, Ward, Katz, & Ross (2002).

[26] Cooper (2012). Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/

[27] Greenberg (2013).

[28] GovTrack (2009). Retrieved from: https://www.govtrack.us/

[29] Moulitsas (2011). Retrieved from: https://www.dailykos.com/

[30] The New York Times Editorial Board (2017). Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/

the conclusion that, on some matters at least, the President is subject to a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" mentality.

## Inferring Others' Motives

Group membership doesn't just influence people's beliefs about the world. It also affects how they perceive others' motivations—that is, the hidden desires that elicit behaviour. Imagine having a drink at a bar and noticing a large man continually looking in your direction. What is motivating the man's behaviour? Is it a sign of romantic interest? Aggression? Or is it simply that your shirt is on backward? In today's complex social world, determining the secret machinations that drive behaviour is a critical tool for success.[31] It is no wonder, then, that people are constantly obsessing over the hidden meaning of a smile, a sidelong glance, or an offhand remark.

Despite the clear importance of discerning others' motivations (a practice called **motivational inference**) the task is far from easy, not least because social information is often difficult to come by. It is accepted wisdom in social psychology that whenever an issue is subject to interpretation, it will be a breeding ground for bias. Motivational inference is no exception. People tend to use all sorts of external cues as a guide for inferring others' motivations. This includes group membership. For example, people have the tendency to attribute in-group members' behaviour to noble motives, such as selflessness, generosity, loyalty, and faith.[32] By contrast, out-group members are more likely to be perceived as driven by selfish motives, including arrogance, ignorance, or self-promotion.[33] The same goes for people who hold a different opinion from the self: those on "my" side are humble, fair, and rational; those on the other side blind, selfish, and callous. Intergroup bias in motivational inference makes people see the worst in each other.

***Implications:*** The effects of intergroup bias on motivational inference explain many things we see in the world today. Consider, for instance, the debate in September 2017 concerning high-profile NFL players kneeling during the US national anthem. Many of the most visible actors in this situation have stated that their motivation is to raise awareness of an issue of social justice. A charitable interpretation of such behaviour might be to impute generosity on the part of these athletes, given that they are suffering significant social duress on behalf of others. However, those in disagreement with their stance perceive this behaviour as arising from a variety of negative motivations, such as ingratitude to the military for their service, hyper-sensitivity, and moral grandstanding.

The same biases are undoubtedly committed in the other direction. Consider the issue of abortion. Many pro-life advocates state explicitly that the motivation for their position derives primarily from a compassion for unborn children, who they hold to be innocent and unrelated to the behaviour of the mother. Pro-choice advocates, by contrast, paint pro-lifers as regressive, anti-feminist puritans

[31] Reed & Trafimow (2004).

[32] Hewstone (1990).

[33] Reeder, Pryor, Wohl, & Griswell (2005).

on a crusade to force women to give birth as punishment for a cardinal sin. A more circumspect approach for those interested in fostering a productive dialogue between these camps might be to begin by taking seriously the self-described motivations of the people on both sides.

***Research Opportunity:*** While some research has been done on how groups influence motivational inference, there is still much work to be done. For instance, it is still not known how political ideology in particular influences people's inferences. And exactly what are the patterns of inference? How does the specifics of the behaviour influence motivational inference? And are there systematic patterns in how left and right judge others? These are questions that More in Common could effectively research.

## Factors Exacerbating Intergroup Bias

Intergroup bias is a pernicious tendency in even the best of circumstances. But research shows that certain conditions serve to bring out the worst in people. One such condition is that of **perceived threat**. Perceived threat consists of the experience that something of value—whether physical or psychological—is under attack.[34] Perceived threat can arise in response to genuine assaults on a person's safety and security, or to attacks on more abstract concepts like self-esteem or cherished values. Research has shown that psychological threat significantly increases intergroup bias[35,36]—which can lead to more xenophobia, nationalism, and support for authoritarianism.[37] The implications for current events are clear: to the extent that people perceive a threat through terrorism, or an economic threat to their well-being, they will demonstrate a more authoritarian and partisan behaviour.

Another important aggravator of intergroup bias is **psychological scarcity**. Scarcity, as documented by Harvard economic Sendhil Mullainathan and colleagues, is the psychological sense of deprivation.[38] This can be in financial terms, but it can also be in terms of other things such as time, material possessions, or even intangible quantities like affection or social belonging. Across these dimensions, research shows that scarcity results in **cognitive load**, which in turn causes a focusing in on the mind toward that which is lacking—a phenomenon akin to "tunnel vision." This can narrow people's tolerance for strange or uncertain things—including out-group members. Research has shown, for instance, that a scarcity mindset causes people to display more racist behaviours.[39] Cognitive load, in itself, causes people to be more biased when punishing in-group versus out-group members for the same transgression.[40]

[34] Sheldon & Kasser (2008).

[35] Van Bavel (2012).

[36] Hackel, Looser, & Van Bavel (2014).

[37] Feldman & Stenner (2008).

[38] Mullainathan & Shafir (2013).

[39] Krosch & Amodio (2014).

[40] Yudkin, Rothmund, Twardawski, & Van Bavel (2016).

***Research Opportunity:*** While there is some research suggesting that a scarcity mindset exacerbates intergroup bias, there is still much work to be done in this domain. Indeed, basic questions such as how scarcity mindsets influence group judgment remain largely unstudied. More in Common could fruitfully invest resources in exploring how conditions of economic scarcity influence a host of group processes, including distrust, outgroup homogeneity, and intergroup hostility.

## Solutions: Mitigating Intergroup Bias

The above suggests a very pessimistic prognosis of human relations. How can political divisions be overcome when people so eagerly demonstrate hatred of out-group members based on the most trivial information? This question has been the subject of intense investigation; and scientists have come up with a number of concrete proposals for policy-makers committed to bridging the divide between members of opposing groups.

One of the most influential theories for reducing intergroup bias is based on the idea of **recategorization**.[41] What this theory suggests is that out-group hostility arises because people make broad generalizations about members of an opposing group. Because of phenomena like **out-group homogeneity**, people come to certain conclusions about general characteristics of out-group members (e.g., "Everyone who voted for Trump is an ignorant bigot") and then assume these characteristics of every individual they encounter. The recategorization model suggests that the best way to reduce bias is to shatter these notions through exposure to "**counter stereotypical exemplars**" of the opposing group. In other words, to counter someone's opinion that all Trump voters are ignorant bigots, it is critical to expose a person to someone who belies these notions.

This enactment of "**intergroup contact**" (that is, meeting people from an opposing group) must be performed carefully, however.[42,43] If not done properly, an incident of intergroup contact can lead to more, not less, hostility, as anxieties and preconceptions lead to a breakdown in dialogue and heightened aggression.

Psychologists have outlined the conditions necessary for optimal intergroup contact, including:

- Both parties must participate under **equal status**. In other words, neither one can feel like the other has an upper hand in the interaction.

- Both parties must believe in a **legitimate mediator**. In other words, the individual, group, or organisation that is bringing the parties together must be seen by both to be impartial and not biased toward one side or the other.

[41] Gaertner & Dovidio (2014).

[42] Pettigrew (1998).

[43] Hewstone & Brown (1986).

- Both parties must have a **common goal**. That is, they must be striving to attain the same thing.

- **Face-to-face** encounters are superior to any other form (i.e. digital).

**Mutual differentiation.** One of the most promising theories on reducing intergroup bias is that which highlights a concept called **mutual differentiation**.[44] The idea behind mutual differentiation is that it is not productive for campaigns aimed at reducing intergroup bias to attempt to whitewash differences between members of each group. Pretending everyone shares the same skills and desires is unrealistic and counterproductive. Instead, the key is to highlight how each side has particular strengths and weaknesses indispensable for the attainment of a shared goal. In one experiment, researchers asked two teams of students to produce a short magazine article.[45] When the groups were assigned similar or overlapping roles, the contact experience resulted in no reduction in intergroup bias. By contrast, when the students were assigned complementary but non-identical roles in the project, intergroup bias was significantly reduced. This effect was further heightened such that each student was assigned to a role that played to his or her particular strength—for instance, with the Science students working on the more mathematical portion of the task and the Language Arts students working on the Verbal portion of the task. The fact that both groups of students could work toward the same goal in a role that **acknowledged their strengths** and was **non-comparable** to that of their counterparts led to the most significant reduction in competition and bias.

This experiment was carried out among college students and so there are limits to its generalizability to current events. However, the implications of this work are clear. Different groups—whether political, national, or cultural—pride themselves on certain skills and values. Presumably, most possess a mutual shared goal of peace and prosperity. But a variety of different strengths are undoubtedly required for the attainment of that goal. Recognizing that different things are needed is one way to move toward the thing. Clearly, not everyone is going to agree all the time. But this may be a step in that direction.

***Program Opportunity:*** As part of its mission, More in Common seeks to create transformative encounters between people of different groups or political points of view. During these sessions, it will be critical to implement the findings from social science on mitigating intergroup bias. For instance, More in Common will emphasize shared goals, highlighting how, despite important differences, everyone nevertheless is striving for a prosperous and free society where hard work is rewarded and no one is unjustly impeded by accidents of birth. From here, it will be critical to underscore the different approaches that may be taken to accomplish this goal. By differentiating people according to their values and abilities, while simultaneously stressing how each is vital to the long-term success of the democratic project, More in Common may affect a more productive dialogue between members of opposing camps.

[44] Turner & Hewstone (2010).

[45] Brown & Wade (1987).

***Research Opportunity:*** While a great deal of research has been devoted to exploring how to mitigate intergroup bias in various contexts, the research devoted specifically to examining how to untangle contests between members of different political groups is more limited. As part of its work, More in Common may test different programs for facilitating dialogue between members of different political groups, and track the attitudes of participants over time, thus implementing a controlled experiment in the most efficacious approach for mitigating political conflict.

## Summary: Affiliation

This section outlined some of the findings in the social sciences relevant to people's affiliation in groups. Because people so readily see themselves as members of distinct communities, and because these memberships have such a strong impact on variety of psychological processes ranging from beliefs, perception, and motivational inference, understanding these processes in detail will be critical to making progress in today's conflicted political climate.

Overall, this section has highlighted some of the most important things to keep in mind when enacting policies and programs aimed at finding commonalities amongst different groups. Here are some of the most important:

- Emphasize **epistemic authorities** and encourage people to get their information from different sources
- Further investigate the impact of political ideology on **motivational inference**
- Create meaningful opportunities for **intergroup contact** that help
- Create opportunities for **mutual differentiation**

In sum, More in Common, because of its thorough understanding of social scientific insights, may have a unique opportunity to create last change by acknowledging the idiosyncrasies of human affiliation.

The study of human cognition is the study of how people process information. Human beings, despite their vast intelligence, are also irrational—subject to significant limitations when it comes to interpreting the world around them. As a result, whenever information is unclear or uncertain, they fall prey to a variety of errors. Understanding these errors is key to making sense of today's political world.

**TABLE 1:** Concepts relating to group affiliation

| *Concept* | ***Definition*** |
|---|---|
| **Dehumanization** | Tendency to see outgroup members as "less than human." Leads to a failure to acknowledge others' experience and agency. |
| **Epistemic Authority** | An individual taken as a source of information; often a member of one's own group |
| **Group Membership** | Subjective sense of belonging to a social category; measurable by such questions as "To what extent do you identify as…?" |
| **In-Group Favoritism / Intergroup bias** | The tendency to see one's own group as superior to others in traits, opinions, and status |
| **Intergroup Contact** | Interaction between members of different groups |
| **Intergroup bias** | Tendency for people to privilege members of their own group and denigrate those of other groups. Can take place either at the conscious or subconscious level |
| **Maximum Differentiation** | Phenomenon whereby people prefer to receive resources that are relatively rather than objectively superior |
| **Minimal Groups** | The smallest piece of information necessary to induce group-based effects |
| **Motivational Inference** | The act of determining others' intentions and desires through social cues |
| **Mutual Differentiation** | Emphasizing different strengths of different parties to reduce competitiveness and bias in intergroup setting |
| **Outgroup Homogeneity** | Tendency to view outgroup members as possessing similar characteristics |
| **Perceived Threat** | State of insecurity regarding physical or psychological wellbeing |
| **Reactive Devaluation** | Tendency for people to discount opinions and beliefs on the basis of the identity of their proponents |
| **Recategorization** | Revising one's opinions about a group/individual by assigning them to a different conceptual group |
| **Scarcity** | The psychological sense of deprivation; known to exacerbate intergroup bias |

# Section 2: Cognition

## Cognitive Dissonance

One of the most important concepts for understanding the basics of human cognition is that of **cognitive dissonance**. Cognitive dissonance describes the psychological state of holding two contradictory beliefs. Research suggests that people find the experience of cognitive dissonance to be highly aversive, and will go to great lengths to avoid it. This results in some impressive displays of cognitive gymnastics.

Consider Leon Festinger's seminal experiment on this phenomenon.[46] Subjects were brought into an experiment room and shown a board of small wooden pegs. The experimenter instructed them to perform an incredibly dull task: turn each of the pegs counterclockwise a quarter turn, in succession, for an entire hour. Next, they were asked to inform the subject in the waiting room that the experiment was very interesting. Subjects were divided into two groups: those who were paid $1 to complete the task, and those who were paid $20 to complete the task.

After this phase of the experiment, the researchers asked participants to rate how enjoyable they found the task to be. Fascinatingly, it turned out that the group who was paid less money rated the task as more enjoyable. Cognitive dissonance explains why: for subjects who had earned $20 performing the experiment, it was not painful to say that the task was boring. For subjects who had only earned $1, however, it would have been painful to admit that they had wasted an hour of their lives for very little compensation. As a result they changed their attitude about the task in order to justify their behaviour to themselves.

Cognitive dissonance explains a great deal of human behaviour. In the current context, there are at least two important phenomena that make sense when seen through the lens of cognitive dissonance theory:

**Attitude inflexibility.** Cognitive dissonance explains in part why people have difficulty changing their minds—the so called "stickiness" of beliefs. Imagine a person who voted for Candidate A. After Candidate A takes office, she shows herself to be a very different person than what the voter originally thought—perhaps violating policies and principles that were the very basis for the vote in the first place. Such behaviour might be seen as a reason for the voter to change his mind. However, cognitive dissonance is at play here: the voter has an incentive not to change his mind about the candidate, because this would imply that the voter was stupid or foolish for being convinced by the candidate's assertions. Instead of changing his mind, therefore, the voter simply doubles down on his belief. In addition, he begins to see the people who attack his chosen candidate as motivated by jealousy or ignorance, because this is the only way to justify his belief. Cognitive dissonance thus makes certain cherished attitudes and beliefs very difficult to alter.

Several programs of research present striking examples of the "stickiness" of people's beliefs. In a classic experiment performed at Stanford in the 1970s, subjects were given false feedback about their aptitude to differentiate between "real" and "fake" suicide notes.[47] Half were told that

[46] Festinger (1962).

they performed far above average on this task, half far below average. Then, the experimenters told participants that, in fact, the feedback they had received was completely bogus. On the basis of this information, we might expect people to rid themselves of these beliefs and so, when asked about their competence on this task, rate themselves at about average. In fact, this is not what occurred. Instead, people who had been given superior feedback continued to believe they were better than everybody else. People who had been given inferior feedback continued to believe they were worse than everybody else. The same findings were obtained when people learned phony information about others' performance. This suggests that once people start to believe something, they have a very hard time changing their minds—even when this belief reflects poorly on them.

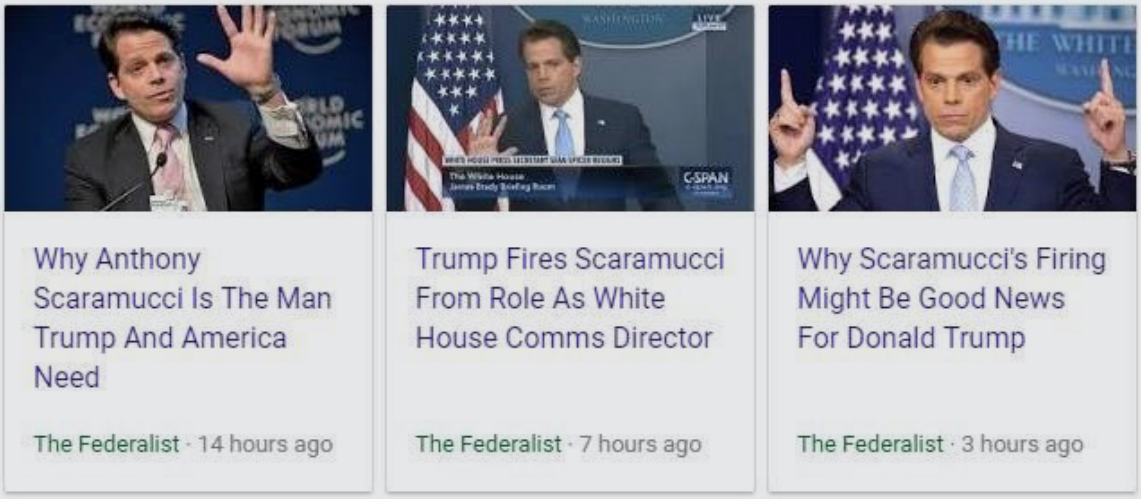


**FIGURE 3:** Cognitive dissonance in three steps[48]

**Confirmation bias.** Another pervasive consequence of cognitive dissonance is the tendency for people to seek out information that confirms their worldview.[49] One illustration of the confirmation bias was undertaken in a study that asked a group of students about their beliefs regarding capital punishment.[50] Students then read two articles, one presenting statistics in favour of their own view; the other presenting statistics against it. When students were asked to rate the credibility of the articles, they invariably rated the one that accorded with their own opinion as more credible than the opposite. In addition, the researchers found that students, after reading the opposing article, were even *more* entrenched in their own views than they had been before reading it.

[47] Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard (1975).

[48] Courtesy of @jayvanbavel

The confirmation bias explains a vast amount of human behaviour. For instance, it explains why people may stay with clearly unfit romantic partners: as the saying goes, they "see what they want to see." And it explains, in part, why people have such a hard time changing their minds. It also may explain why people's political views are so highly correlated with those of their parents: people start their lives steeped in whatever political ideology their parents hold.[51] As they develop more independence, though they may have the opportunity to leave the fold, there is immense psychological pressure to persist in these views, as giving them up would require renouncing beliefs that have been baked into the psyche for decades. Instead, the confirmation bias encourages people to continue seeking out information that confirms their pre-existing opinions—a phenomenon termed **motivated reasoning**.

This may be one reason why minds are so hard to change. Indeed, some new research on the effect of personal campaign contact on persuasion suggests that such intervention techniques are minimally effective. The research undertook a systematic meta-analysis of all studies regarding the efficacy of personal contact in general elections. In addition, it presented nine original field experiments testing the same thing. In both investigations, the average efficacy of such techniques was approximately zero.[52] This finding is particularly provocative given the immense investment that many campaigns make in recruiting "boots on the ground" to contact swing voters directly. It suggests that these endeavours are completely ineffective. More research is needed to determine the veracity of these effects, particularly given their counterintuitive nature. But the study presents a particularly striking example of how difficult it can be for political elites to change people's minds.

## Reason versus Intuition

Despite these obvious limitations to the processing of information, people's unwillingness to change their minds in the face of countervailing facts may seem someone surprising: isn't it true that people developed such big brains so they could figure out the difference between truth and falsehood? Philosophers Dan Sperber and Hugo Mercier say no. They put forward a theory of human reason called the **Argumentative Theory**.[53] According to this theory, the human mind was not designed to pursue the truth. Instead, it was designed to win arguments. Their reasoning is that, from an evolutionary perspective, it was far more beneficial to be able to persuade other people of one's own opinion than it was to be persuaded by others. Being able to convince others of the veracity of one's ideas would confer status and leadership on the speaker. This perspective explains why people are not typically good at changing their minds in the face of evidence: their minds are simply not designed to suss out the truth. The authors call this "myside bias."

The notion that the human mind is not particularly well adapted for coming to true beliefs is borne out in other theories. Jonathan Haidt, for instance, documents instances of what he terms

[49] Nickerson (1998).

[50] Lord, Ross, & Lepper (1979).

[51] Afford, Funk & Hibbing (2005).

[52] Kalla & Broockman (2017).

[53] Mercier & Sperber (2011).

**moral dumbfounding**.[54] Moral dumbfounding is a phenomenon whereby people, confronted with reasons to alter a cherished view, ultimately end up spluttering something to the effect of "It just is!" Such behaviour suggests that even the best arguments may do little to dissuade people of certain views. Haidt ran an experiment in which he told subjects a story of a brother and sister who, while on vacation together, decide to make love. In this story, the act is safe and consensual, and they use two forms of birth control so no pregnancy can result. Yet, participants insist that the act is wrong. Haidt concludes from this that human reasoning is not designed to generate moral conclusions. Instead, it is human **intuition** that arrives at moral conclusion. The purpose of reason, instead, is to justify these conclusions—like a lawyer arguing a case.

***Program Opportunity:*** Understanding the inner workings of moral reasoning can help to diffuse otherwise impassable dialogues. Oftentimes, it is unfortunately not productive to attempt to reason people out of a moral or political point of view. Instead, creating a **personal** experience with a given issue it required to enact change. For this reason, it is critical that More in Common engage people using on-the-ground, personalized experiences. This is why outreach programs and transformative encounters are going to be so critical. By bypassing reason and engaging directly with people's **intuition**, More in Common is likely to be far more effective in changing people's minds.

## Explanatory Depth

Another cognitive bias that plays an important role in today's political climate is illustrated by a study in cognitive science.[55] In this study, they asked subjects to explain how different objects and appliances worked—ranging from toilets to zippers to crossbows. The researchers first asked participants to say how intricate a knowledge they *thought* they possessed about the functioning of each of these mechanisms. In general, people had a fairly high degree of confidence: they thought they understood the appliances inside and out. Then they were asked to actually explain the objects. Immediately, people's confidence dropped—presumably, because they suddenly realized how complicated these seemingly simple appliances actually were. This is known as the illusion of explanatory depth. People tend to generally far overestimate what they know about a given topic.

This finding has implications for the political world. Consider the following statement: "Who knew healthcare could be so complicated?" Donald Trump rose to power promising a variety of simple solutions to America's problems: build a wall, stop Muslim immigration, healthcare for all. In reality, of course, these issues are far more complicated than they appear.

People's overconfidence appears to be exacerbated by something very ironic: ignorance. Social psychologists Dave Dunning and Justin Kruger gave subjects a variety of tests on things like humor, grammar, and logic. Before the subjects took the test, they were asked to

[54] Haidt (2011).

[55] Rozenblit & Keil (2002).

make a prediction about how well they would actually do. The experimenters found virtually no relationship between predicted performance and actual performance: people who were in the bottom tenth percentile of performance expected themselves to be about as competent as those in the ninetieth percentile. The reason for this, the authors concluded, is that the same talents that make a person good at an actual task are similar to those that make the person good at *estimating* how good they are at the task. In other words, people who are incompetent at a task are similarly incompetent at judging their own ability. This is known as the **Dunning-Kruger Effect.**

## Effects of Technology

The biases people demonstrate in their cognition are severely exacerbated by the algorithms that underlie social media. Indeed, social media is designed to play on people's worst instincts—which is part of what makes it so addictive. Consider the confirmation bias. People already seek out information that confirms their views. But even the most drastic measures one can take to avoid such biases are powerless against a news feed that is tailor-made to suit one's opinions and interests. Facebook has admitted that it deliberately displays information that is likely to be pleasing to users—this is, in part, how it prevents usership from becoming an uncomfortable confrontation with dissenting opinions. As a result, social media is a direct injection of confirmation bias right into the user interface.

In a recently published study, researchers examined the spread of emotionally charged language through the social medium of Twitter. They found that the Twitter community is made up of two deeply isolated groups defined by political beliefs. While information spreads rapidly within each community, it travels very little outside of people's communities. Moreover, the content that travels most rapidly within communities is what the authors term "moral-emotional." This is language that possesses both value-based content, as well as an emotional component.

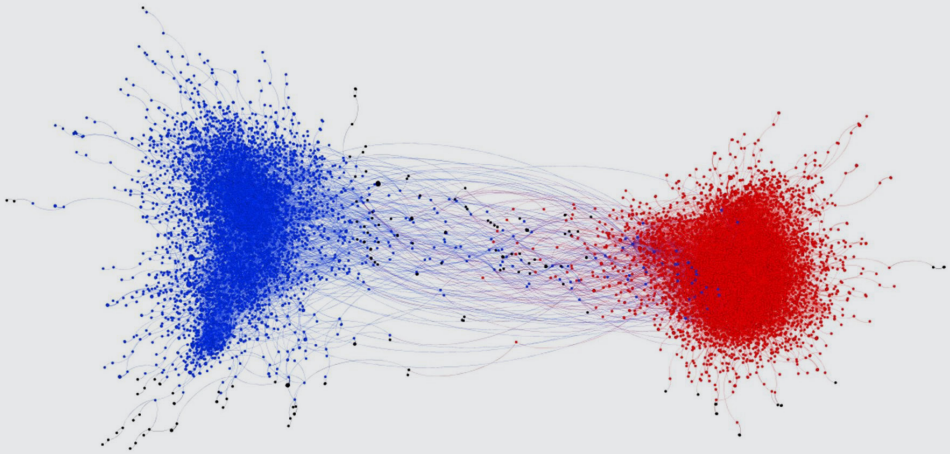

**FIGURE 4:** Network graph of moral contagion shaded by political ideology on Twitter. The graph represents a depiction of messages containing moral and emotional language, and their retweet activity, across all political topics (gun control, same-sex marriage, climate change). Nodes represent a user who sent a message, and edges (lines) represent a user retweeting another user. The two large communities were shaded based on the mean ideology of each respective community (blue represents a liberal mean, red represents a conservative mean). Image courtesy of the authors.[56]

Social media impacts cognition in other ways, too. Consider the case of **moral outrage**. Moral outrage originally evolved in order to ensure that people in a group were obeying the rules of the community. When people in a group were willing to speak up against those who were violating group norms, it drastically increased the overall success and functioning of the group. As a result, moral outrage is a functional and effective way to uphold group norms. To understand how moral outrage has been corrupted in the digital age, it is important to consider how outrage works.[57] Consider a person who takes more than his fair share of mammoth meat after a hunt. The person who spots him may alert the group to his behaviour, potentially subjecting him to punishment and ostracism. But this isn't the only effect of outrage: it also confers **reputational benefits** on the decrier. Research has shown that people who are willing to speak out against others' infractions enjoy boosts in popularity, social esteem, and trustworthiness.[58]

These tendencies appear to be deeply ingrained in the human psyche: indeed, children as young as three years old appear to be willing to pay a personal cost to punish another child who has broken the rules.[59] But in the context of social media, such mechanisms go haywire. In an effort to demonstrate their reputation, people practically fall over themselves calling out cases of moral infractions. Ron Jonson profiles many such cases in his book "So You've Been

[56] Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, & Van Bavel (2017).

[57] Crockett (2017).

[58] Jordan, Hoffman, Bloom, & Rand (2016).

[59] Yudkin, Rhodes, & Van Bavel (Under review).

Publicly Shamed."[60] He points out that social media provides people with what can fairly be called "outrage porn," which plays directly to people's desire to build their reputations by piling on in opposition to a moral infraction.

People's persistent need to enhance their reputations is evident in other behaviours, as well. Current research is examining the case of "moral grandstanding," whereby people play up a belief they think will play well with their "base"—which in this case is their social network. Such behaviour only increases the sense that the two sides are shouting past each other in an effort to demonstrate their **moral credentials**.[61] Persuasion, in other words, is simply not the point.

***Research Opportunity:*** While social scientists have made some progress in understanding how technology affects politics and cognition, there is a great deal more work to be done in this domain. Indeed, research on how the algorithms that underlie social media impact the political brain is in its infancy. More in Common could greatly expand understanding of these issues through its own research. For example, much is still not known about whether "meme culture," which is a well-known medium for communication among far-right groups, exacerbates latent racism amongst these communicates or merely reflects it. In addition, does having an opportunity to express prejudiced beliefs help to mitigate the expression of these beliefs in more violent means, or does it serve as more of a "gateway drug"—that is, gradually normalizing the expression of abhorrent views such that they seem more and more acceptable over time? This could be a fruitful avenue for further research.

Other questions relating to the role of technology relate to what is known as **virtue signalling**—that is, the act of demonstrating one's moral value in a community. One important question related to this is the extent to which virtue signalling can lead to **moral satiation**—that is, the feeling of having done one's part in a moral battle. To test this question, More in Common might examine people's willingness to participate in active political protests after having demonstrated their allegiance online. It is possible, in other words, that loudly proclaiming one's alliance with a moral worthy cause is sufficient to cause people to feel they have "done their duty," and thence disengage with any legitimate political action.

## Summary: Cognition

In this section we discussed how imperfections in the ways that people process information can lead to biases and prejudices in the political sphere. Because true facts are hard to come by in a world of opinion, people often find themselves using informational short-cuts to arrive at their beliefs about the world. Such short-cuts can lead people to change their minds too quickly in the face of new information, or to hold on to cherished beliefs far longer than is rational.

[60] Ronson (2015).

[61] Merritt, Effron, & Monin (2010).

Based on this understanding of the political mind, in our work More in Common aims to:

1. Create opportunities for immediate and personal interactions, which have the opportunity to overcome people's cognitive defences and encourage **attitude change**.

2. Investigate further the role that technology has in **exacerbating cognitive biases**, including the confirmation bias, informational isolation, and virtue signalling.

3. Incorporate insights around **motivated reasoning** to influence people's beliefs and endorse opinions even they are not in their own best interest.

**TABLE 2:** Concepts related to the influence of social cognition on political behaviour

| *Concept* | ***Definition*** |
|---|---|
| **Argumentative Theory** | Theory suggesting that human reason evolved to win arguments not track truth |
| **Attitude Inflexibility** | Consequence of cognitive dissonance whereby people demonstrate unwillingness to change their minds in the face of countervailing evidence |
| **Cognitive Dissonance** | The psychologically aversive experience of holding two contradictory views at the same time |
| **Confirmation Bias** | The tendency to search and attend to only that evidence which corroborates one's views |
| **Dunning-Kruger Effect** | Cognitive bias whereby the lower someone's ability on a task, the greater their tendency to overestimate that ability |
| **Heuristics** | Mental shortcuts that people use to arrive at judgments and decisions |
| **Illusion of Explanatory Depth** | Tendency for people to feel they understand complex phenomena with far greater precision than they actually do |
| **Moral Credentials** | Credits obtained in the eyes of one's community for conforming to group norms |
| **Moral Dumbfounding** | The state of being unable to rationally justify one's moral intuitions |
| **Moral Satiation** | Phenomenon whereby people feel they have "done their duty" after a trivial moral contribution and are thereby absolved from further action |
| **Motivated Reasoning** | Tendency to bend one's belief to suit one's internal desires and motivations |
| **Myside Bias** | The tendency to focus on the strongest parts of one's own argument and the weakest parts of others' |
| **Outrage Signalling** | The practice of condemning moral transgressors to boost one's own reputation |
| **Virtue Signalling** | Advertising one's moral worth to a community |

# Section 3: Authority

The political landscape of the last few years has been characterized by a surge in the popularity of authoritarian policies and personalities—from Hungary and Poland to the Netherlands and the United States. Critical to counteracting the appeal of these authoritarian tendencies is understanding the basic human mechanisms that drive them. In this section we explore the conditions that attract people to authoritarianism—as well as the consequences of this attraction.

## Classic Research

How people come to be seduced by the allure of authoritarian regimes was a question that gained new urgency following the horrors of World War II. The Holocaust revealed that that, in the span of only a few years, a country of seemingly normal citizens could become xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and aggressive. What prompted this shift toward authoritarianism became a key question for social scientists.

One of the best-known studies examining the authoritarianism was conducted by Stanley Milgram at Yale University in the 1950s and 60s.[62] Milgram recruited subjects and told them they would be playing the role of "teacher" to a person doing a learning task. Each time the learner made a mistake, it was the teacher's job to "shock" the learner with ever-increasing voltages. Milgram examined the conditions under which people would administer potentially deadly levels of shock.

Milgram identified several factors that contributed to people's willingness to ever-higher levels of electric shock. One was the presence of a uniform: if the experimenter telling the participant to continue was wearing a white lab coat, the participant was far more likely to continue than if he was wearing street clothes. Another was the presence of an ally: people who were paired with another teacher, they were far were likely to dissent, because they could rely on this person for validation.

Before running his experiment, Milgram asked experts to predict what proportion of people would go "all the way" with their shocks. The experts predicted that only a very limited number of people—the truth psychopaths—would go that far. In fact, about two thirds of people administered potentially fatal electric shocks.

The Milgram experiments reveal important aspects of human nature. They show that people's willingness to obey a figure of authority is, far from being restricted to the limited few, inherent in everyone. People tend to think they would not perform the same behavior when placed in that situation. The reality, however, is that most would.

[62] Milgram (1978).

## The Authoritarian Personality

Following Milgram's important revelation, scientists began to explore the dispositional factors that cause people to support authoritarian systems in their personal and political lives. Research has identified several components of what became known as the **authoritarian personality**. The authoritarian personality is characterized by a belief in the absolute rectitude of one's own beliefs and values, and of the necessity of submission of others to these beliefs and values.[63] The scientific consensus is that authoritarianism at a personal level tends to manifest in people's political behaviour as well (i.e. support for authoritarian regimes).[64]

***Family life and childhood.*** Beginning in the 1940s, researchers became interested in the sorts of parenting style that people were exposed to that caused them to embrace a more authoritarian style. This was based in the Freudian idea that people's behaviour in adulthood is largely determined by experiences they had early in life.

Theodor Adorno developed a short questionnaire called the F- ("fascism") scale which, he claimed, was capable of identifying the extent to which people belonged to what he called the **authoritarian personality** type.[65] The F-scale consists of 9 factors, including conventionalism, submission to authority, and aggression. He found that people who reported a punitive relationship with their parents, particularly a strong father figure, predicted their tendency to embrace similar views later in life.

The notion that early experiences shape authoritarian leanings has borne the test of time. Indeed, the cognitive linguist George Lakoff has made similar claims, suggesting that the sorts of language people use is associated both with early family structures, and with the authoritarian leanings.[66]

***Intolerance of ambiguity.*** Another important personal quality that is believed to lead to a greater likelihood of embracing authoritarian systems is an intolerance of ambiguity. Researchers presented children with an unusual disc-shaped figure and measured how long they took to identify the figure, and how easily they changed their minds about the figure in response to new information. They found that children who took longer or were less willing or able to change their minds tended to similarly demonstrate a host of other qualities, including ethnocentrism (the tendency to prefer peers of their own race), punitiveness, and distrust of strangers.[67]

***Intergroup bias.*** As we observed in the earlier section of this paper on Affiliation, people tend to demonstrate a consistent level of hostility to people who are not deemed part of the "tribe." Relating this finding to authoritarianism, research has found that people who are more prone to

[63] Baars & Scheepers (1993).

[64] Presley (2016).

[65] Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford (1950).

[66] Lakoff, George (2016).

[67] Frenkel-Brunswik (1949).

rely on stereotypes when making inferences about others, and are more prone to prejudice and anxiety when interacting with outsiders, are similarly prone to endorse authoritarian policies.[68]

***Conservatism.*** There is some evidence that the same underlying processes that lead people to embrace conservatism also lead them to be susceptible to authoritarian practices. A recent article by John Jost and colleagues entitled "Conservatism as motivated social cognition"[69] argues that conservatism—defined as the tendency to resist change and defend the status quo—arises from an attempt to satisfy certain deep-seated psychological tendencies such as the fear of death, resistance to new experiences, intolerance of uncertainty, and the need for structure and order.

Related to this is the concept of **system justification**.[70] The theory of system justification explains why people often vote against their own self-interest. People have a variety of needs, including the need to belong (relational), and the need for certainty (epistemic). System justification suggests that people will often defend the status quo—i.e., the "system"—because it provides them with these needs. For instance, having a fixed and established society helps people to feel more sure of their situations; more certain of the world around them; and less anxious about their position in the world. This is related to the notion of prioritization: while fighting against an unjust system might lead to a fairer society, it also is aversive because it cuts against people's existential, epistemic, and relational needs. Thus people will have the tendency to support existing systems even if it is to their own disadvantage.

While there is undoubtedly an association between conservatism and authoritarianism, it should also be pointed out that the concepts are not identical. Indeed, some polling research suggests that authoritarians pursue policies with a distinct fingerprint from the umbrella republican organization. For instance, research has shown that authoritarians are far more likely to support policies that call for the government to play an active, even aggressive role in combatting threats from outside sources, including hostile foreign powers, illegal immigration, and radical Islamic terrorism. While Republicans also see these issues as a source of threat, they are less likely to endorse the unbridled use of government power to handle them, and are less willing to make sacrifices to freedom and to the constitution to do so. Authoritarians, by contrast, are willing to make sacrifices to freedom for safety—supporting, for instance, laws requiring citizens to carry identification at all times, and strategies of phone surveillance scanning calls for signs of terrorist activity.

[68] Navarrete, Kurzban, Fessler, Kirkpatrick (2004).

[69] Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway (2003).

[70] Jost, Banaji, & Nosek (2004).

## The Authoritarian Dynamic

But people's authoritarian tendencies are not determined by character alone. Indeed, important work by Karen Stenner and others suggests that personality is but one part of a two-part equation.

Stenner introduces the concept of the **authoritarian dynamic**.[71] The authoritarian dynamic is characterized by an interaction between two independent factors: the person and the situation. The personal factors of the authoritarian dynamic are the dispositional elements that are inherent in an individual's personality—including the qualities mentioned above. The situation, by contrast, consists of the factors in people's environment that draw out their latent authoritarianism.

Stenner calls the environmental factors that elicit authoritarianism **normative threat**. Normative threat is defined as a threat to unity and consensus—that is "oneness and sameness." She suggests that, when people feel a sense of insecurity or instability, they are more likely to embrace authoritarian practices.

This idea is confirmed in past work. For instance, one study examined people's conversions from more universalist to more to authoritarian church denominations.[72] The study found that people's embrace of more authoritarian practices occurred when there was greater perceived threat—for instance, of war or violence—in society. This supports the idea that a sense of threat can increase interest in authoritarian systems.

In sum neither an authoritarian personality nor normative threat are sufficient in isolation to cause people to vote for authoritarian policies and leaders. Rather, it is the dynamic interplay between them that creates the "perfect storm" for the persuasive tactics of authoritarian populists.

## Understanding—And Combatting—Modern Authoritarianism

Past research regarding the psychology of authoritarianism can shed light on the political problems of today. One of the most provocative findings from year proceeding the election of Donald Trump is that of all the variables associated with voters' tendency to vote for Trump, personal authoritarianism is perhaps the strongest. This suggests that research originating as early as the 1940s is more relevant than ever today.

[71] Stenner (2005).

[72] Sales (1972).

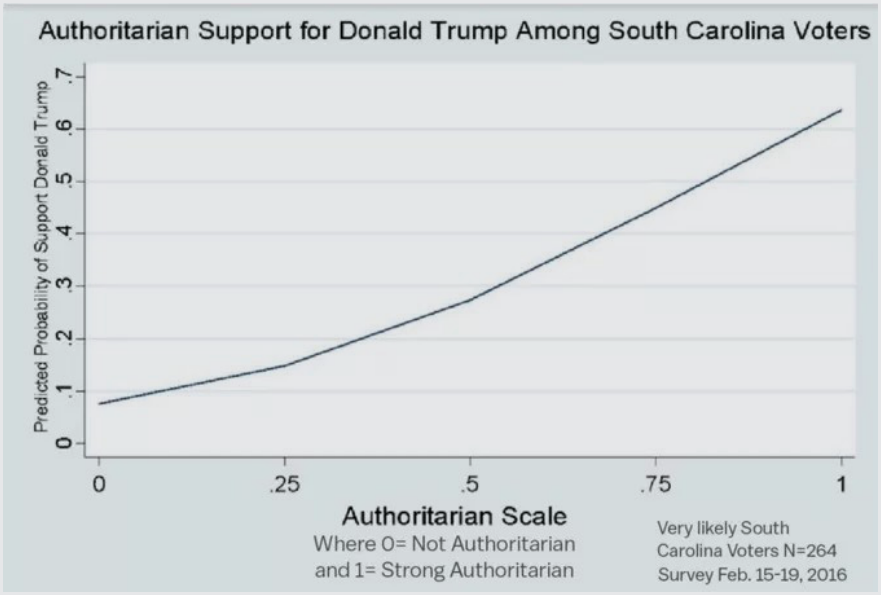


**FIGURE 5:** Perceived threat, authoritarian personality, and the likelihood of voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 US election[73]

Extensive reporting by numerous outlets suggest that a significant majority of people who voted for Trump, or for Brexit in the UK, feel under threat.[74] Indeed, the notion of threat may well prove to be one of the most vital concepts to understand the current moment. The threat comes from multiple sources. At the most explicit level, there is the threat of terrorism. Threats of terrorism are sporadic and, from a purely statistical level, far less dangerous than, say, dying in a house fire or a car crash. Yet the public reaction against these threats is immense, in part because such threat go straight to the heart of the authoritarian appeal: a stranger, with a different value system anathema to that of the homeland, enacts violence just when it is least expected. ISIS and other terrorist organizations have realized-some might say brilliantly--that they needn't actually threaten the way of life of millions of citizens of western democracy. Rather, they need just make them feel that such a way of life is threatened. Thence ensues a cascading embrace of authoritarianism. Such a dynamic gives credence to Roosevelt's oft-repeated adage, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

But terrorism isn't the only source of threat in the western world today. Working class white citizens frequently report a threat to their very way of life. Indeed, the significant strides made in the progressive movement in recent years, including tackling the gender pay gap, addressing racial disparities in employment, housing, income, and education, plus cultural shifts such as the legalization of gay marriage, increasingly diverse college campuses, and the embrace of progressivism in popular culture such as Hollywood and television, creates a growing sense of loss among those in these more conservative enclaves. This creates a natural backlash against such cultural and societal shifts.

[73] Reproduced from MacWilliams, M. (2016).

[74] E.g. https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/11/08/donald-trump-johnstown-pennsylvania-supporters-215800

***Policy Opportunity:*** The insights provided by research on authoritarianism point the way to fostering greater sense of commonality and communication amongst seemingly disparate groups of individuals. The issue hinges on a single concept: threat. More in Common should strive to mitigate the sense of threat that each political side holds about the other in two ways: real and perceived. At a perceptual level, it will be critical to show people how perceived threats such as immigration are not as threatening as they appear to be. Conducting research exploring the various ways in which immigration populations, properly educated and assimilated, can enrich and enliven a community, is critical, as is disseminating this information to the people who would benefit from it the most.

In addition to reducing the perception of *threat*, it is also critical to reduce the actual threat of progressive policies to people's way of life. This means addressing the at-times legitimate concerns that people have regarding the impact of social diversity and immigration on their way of life. More comprehensive immigration policies, which take a realistic stance to the effect that mass immigration can have on employment in communities, would be one way to start. In addition, taking a more sympathetic attitude toward anxious white working-class individuals who worry, sometimes rightly, about the effect that progressive policies will have on their livelihood, can foster a more productive dialogue that can eventually lead to productive compromise, thereby undermining the appeal of authoritarian populism.

## Summary: Authority

It is clear that the current world conditions have created an environment ripe for the proliferation and success of authoritarian regimes. All humans have, to some small degree, a latent sense of resistance to change and closed-mindedness. However, the activating ingredient to such built-in authoritarianism is threat—to safety, security, or way of life. By first recognizing the importance of threat in producing authoritarian voting behavior, and then combatting this threat—both real and perceived—More in Common can foster a political atmosphere that does not succumb to these authoritarian impulses.

Based on this understanding of the political mind, More in Common may:

1. Promote research examining the extent that progressive policies such as those related to immigration negatively or positively affect the native community.

2. Combat the sense of threat—both real and perceived—created by the dynamics of a changing world.

**TABLE 3:** Concepts relating to the psychology of authority

| *Concept* | ***Definition*** |
|---|---|
| **Authoritarian Personality** | Type of personality possessing certain characteristics—including resistance to change, fear of outsiders, and intolerance of complexity—associated with endorsement of authoritarian systems of leadership and government |
| **Authoritarian Dynamic** | Interplay of environmental and dispositional (personality) factors that exacerbate authoritarianism |
| **Normative Threat** | Sense of danger relating to one's current way of life |
| **System Justification** | The act of supporting the status quo (often one's own detriment) to satisfy certain existential, epistemic, or relational needs |

# Section 4: Values

Human values run deeper, even, than thoughts or beliefs: they are often beyond the reach of reason, impervious to argumentation. The moral values people hold may be the biggest factor in explaining the political divisions we see in the world today.

## Moral Foundations

Perhaps the most influential assessment of the differences between right and left is a framework put forward by Jonathan Haidt and colleagues known as Moral Foundations Theory.[75] In this theory, the researchers argue that conservatives hold certain ethical values that liberals don't recognize. The researchers divide the moral world into five distinct categories:[76]

- *Fairness/Cheating:* relating to proportionality, equality, reciprocity, and rendering justice according to shared rules
- *Care/Harm:* cherishing and protecting others
- *Authority/Subversion:* submitting to tradition and legitimate authority
- *Purity/Disgust:* abhorrence for disgusting things, foods, actions
- *Loyalty/Betrayal:* standing with one's group, family, nation
- *Liberty/Oppression:* freedom from oppression or domination

They asked people to rate the importance of each of these categories in their moral thought. What they found was that liberals rated as important only fairness and harm. Conservatives, by contrast, also rated fairness and harm as somewhat important, but they also deemed the three other foundations as equal important. These results suggest that conservatives may be sensitive to moral values that liberals don't consider important.

[75] Graham, Haidt, & Nosek (2009).

[76] Haidt (2012).

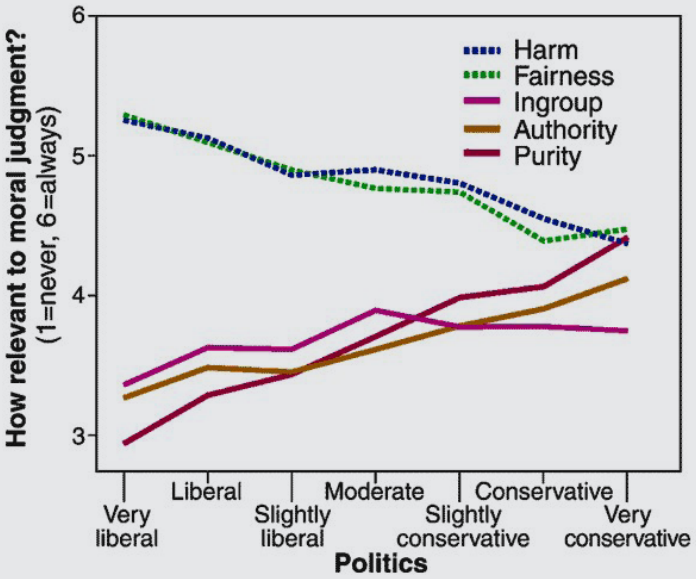


**FIGURE 6:** Relationship between political affiliation and endorsement of five of the moral foundations.[77]

Moral Foundations Theory has been subject to various criticisms. For instance, the question of precisely how many foundations there are (is Honesty a foundation? Gratitude? Self-reliance?) has not been satisfactorily resolved. However, these details notwithstanding, the theory advances a critical insight. By suggesting that ideological differences are born of an adherence to divergent (yet arguably equally legitimate) value systems, the theory provides a basis for further dialogue.

***Policy Opportunity:*** More in Common recognizes the different values that animate people of different points of view. When people debate, they may be appealing to different values and as a result arrive at an impasse. By translating political viewpoints in terms of values—a process called **moral translation**—More in Common may help people to find common ground, or at least facilitate an extra degree of shared understanding. This suggests that if More in Common wants to appeal to individuals outside of liberal enclaves it will be critical to develop **communication strategies** that appeal to conservative values.

[77] Haidt (2007).

## Causal Attribution

There is another important framework for understanding differences between Left and Right. The difference lies between their **attributions of responsibility**. Consider the following quotation made by President Barack Obama in 2012:

> *If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business – you didn't build that.*

Now consider the following quotations made by Republican candidate Herbert Hoover in his run for the presidency in 1928:

> *"The Republican Party [supports] the rights and responsibility of the individual…The American system [is one] of rugged individualism…the very basis of liberty and freedom."*

The distinction between these viewpoints is how they attribute causes to events. To Obama, individuals' outcomes are the product of forces beyond their control. People cannot claim sole credit for what they have achieved because other things—such as the government, communities, or pure luck—were primarily responsible. To Hoover, by contrast, the responsibility lies with the individual: it is up to each person themselves to enact their own outcomes, since people are the authors of their own destiny.

## Person versus Situation

The idea here is that people can differ in their **causal attribution**—that is, in the behind-the-scenes forces that produce the results we see in the world. And this notion is in fact a well-studied concept in social psychology. Psychologists tend to distinguish between the **person** and the **situation**. And this person/situation distinction is incredibly useful for understanding the psychology of liberals and conservatives. While conservatives tend to suggest that the outcomes people receive are the product of **personal responsibility**, liberals tend to believe that people's fate is out of their hands: that is, that **situational factors** are largely responsible for where people end up in society.[78]

The person/situation distinction illuminates the viewpoints we see in politics today. For example, someone who believes that people are largely responsible for where they end up in society should also believe that they owe little to their communities, and accordingly they should pay low taxes. Indeed, conservatives traditionally oppose tax increases. By contrast, someone who believes that people are not responsible for their plight might think that wealth should be redistributed to more vulnerable members of society, since they did little to deserve their good fortune. Indeed, liberals traditionally favour increasing taxes.

[78] Chirumbolo, Areni, & Sensales (2004).

Similarly, someone who believes that people are responsible for their own fate should support strict policing policies, since criminals have only themselves to blame for their deviant behaviour. This is indeed the conservative view. By contrast, someone who believes that one's behaviour is largely the part of the circumstances and environment in which one grew up should support more compassionate law enforcement practices, since people are not to blame for the harshness of their surroundings. Sure enough, liberals typically take a more permissive approach to law enforcement.

***Effect on values:*** The insight that liberals and conservatives tend to differ in their causal attributions also helps to explain some of each side's most cherished values.[79] Consider a "Person-centered" value set. According to this value set, the ethical life depends on confronting life's challenges with strength and fortitude, making no excuses and taking responsibility for one's actions.[80] Such a viewpoint is characterized by an endorsement of principles such as self-reliance, freedom, and limited government. At a more concrete policy level, this philosophy manifests as an endorsement of policies such as limited gun control, lower taxes, strict policing practices (since individuals are responsible for the crimes they commit), and freedom from environmental regulations.

By contrast, a more "Situation-centred" approach states that an ethical life depends on acknowledging the various ways in which people's outcomes have been determined by forces outside of one's control. As a result, liberal politics are characterized by compassion toward the less fortunate, redistribution of wealth, and acknowledgement of privilege. More concretely, this manifests as support for policies like more extended health care reform, compassionate incarceration policies, protection of vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, women, and LGBT individuals.

Other research in psychology confirms the idea that liberals and conservatives fit squarely in a person/situation spectrum. Cognitive linguist George Lakoff, for example, suggests the differences between liberals and conservatives are that conservatives believe that morality is strength, while liberals believe that morality is empathy.[81] Clearly, strength emphasizes the responsibility of the individual while empathy emphasizes taking into account the challenges that the individual is confronting. In a text analysis of Twitter data, John Jost and colleagues showed that conservative legislators valued more self-direction, while liberals values universalism and economic security.[82] The notion that conservatives endorse more personal attributions of causal responsibility was also borne out in other social psychological research.[83]

The conservative/person liberal/environment framework is also echoed in the writings of current political commentators. Consider the writing of Ta-Nehisi Coates, one of the most influential writers on the Left today:

[79] Tetlock & Mitchell (1993).

[80] Brookes (2013).

[81] Lakoff (1995).

[82] Jones, Noorbaloochi, Jost & Tucker (2017).

[83] Pandey, Sinha, Prakesh, & Tripathi (1982).

> *"The fact of history is that black people have not—probably no people ever have—liberated themselves strictly by their own efforts. In every great change in the lives of African Americans we see the hands of events that were beyond our individual control."*

Here, Coates demonstrates again the liberal ethos that individual outcomes are the responsibility not of the person, but of the environment. Contrast with the writing of conservative author Shirley Robin Letwin, who advocated for the "Vigorous Virtues": "upright, self-sufficient, energetic, adventurous, independent-minded, loyal to friends and robust against foes." Again, it is clear that liberals adopt a situation-centred view of causal attribution. Conservatives, by contrast, adopt a person-centred view.

## The View From Both Sides

Psychologist Carl Jung argued that every personality has both a dark and a light side—two sides of the same coin.[84] The same may be said of value sets. Each set of values has flaws when taken too far. Table 3 offers "dark" and "light" descriptors of the Person-centric and the Situation-centric value sets. The "light" set of descriptors represents some of the characteristics that someone might use to sympathetically describe that point of view. The "dark" set of descriptors, by contrast, represents how a given value set might be described by someone from the opposite side.

What we see from Table 3 is that liberals and conservatives can look either noble or flawed depending on the observer. Too often, people are blind to their own shortcomings—a type of **self-serving bias**. Because people tend to see themselves as virtuous and noble, they tend to view dissenting others as flawed and selfish—thus leading them to overlook the times in which they take things too far or hold mistaken views.

**TABLE 4:** Dark and light sides of left and right value sets[85]

| | *Light Side* | *Dark Side* |
|---|---|---|
| **Left (Situation-centered)** | Compassionate | Weak |
| | Caring | Hysterical |
| | Sensitive | Paternalistic |
| | Empathic | Fatalistic |
| | Open to novelty | Needy |
| **Right (Person-centered)** | Strong | Arrogant |
| | Resilient | Blind to privilege |
| | Rugged | Indifferent to suffering |
| | Courageous | Victim-blaming |
| | Independent | Resistant to change |

[84] Jung (1960).

[85] See also Bryne Edsall (2012).

***Program Opportunity:*** More in Common can help bridge gaps between communities by facilitating conversations in which people engage in a process of **critical self-reflection**. What are some situations in which their most deeply cherished beliefs might not hold true? What are some advantages of the views of the opposing side? When might a more balanced perspective be more appropriate? By facilitating this sort of dialectical thinking among participants, More in Common may open a cognitive pathway to considering the merits of other people's views.

***Research Opportunity:*** While theorists have long speculated that different cognitive styles underlie conservative versus liberal positions, there is still considerable research needed on this topic. For instance, only a few projects have undertaken the task of investigating politics as being driven by divergent causal attributions of person versus situation. Further research using potentially qualitative analysis of people's explanations of events would go a long way in strengthening these conclusions.

## Moral Prioritization

Consider the following fact: a full 71% of voters in the United States agree that Donald Trump's behaviour is "not what I'd expect from a President."[86] In addition, only 16% of people say that they "like" Trump's conduct as President.[87] Yet Trump won the Presidential election with almost sixty-three million votes. What explains this apparent contradiction?

The answer may lie in the notion of **moral prioritization**. To understand this idea, it is helpful to recall an important advancement in human psychology made by Abraham Maslow in the 1940s. Maslow suggested that people have a "hierarchy of needs" beginning with food and sleep and ending with higher needs like self-actualization. The thrust of this work was that people would forsake higher-level needs if they were not able to fulfil more basic needs.

The apparent Trump paradox may be slightly less befuddling in light of this insight. Many people—Trump voters included—disagree with certain aspects of his behaviour. Twenty-three-year-old Joseph Richardson, interviewed in Atlantic magazine, called Trump "kind of a jackass."[88] But he voted for him anyway because, despite this apparent distaste, he believed that Trump would be "very successful."

This attitude is consistent with the notion of moral prioritization. And this is importance because it goes against a sort of accepted wisdom among liberal punditry: that people who voted for Trump did so because of his offensive commentary, his puerile feuds, and his narcissistic tendencies.

In fact, the insight of moral prioritization is that it is just as likely that people voted for Trump despite these characteristics. If what Trump offered (whether honestly or not) was of higher priority—i.e., economic empowerment, tighter border control, fewer apologies for American exceptionalism—then people may have forsaken lesser values for others.

[86] Tesfamichael (2017).

[87] Blake (2017).

[88] Foran (2017).

***Research Opportunity:*** A key aim for More in Common may be to begin by examining precisely what these core morals were that caused people to give up other, traditionally conservative principles (such as family values). Once these values are identified there may be an opportunity to appeal to these values without needing to resort to authoritarian populism. Focus groups that use qualitative analysis to investigate whether people have conflicted attitudes could help to suss out which values are being given priority in the current political regime.

## Summary: Values

This section explored the ways that people's moral values influence their political beliefs. The upshot from decades of research in political psychology is that political attitudes can often be explained in terms of differences in the appeal of various moral principles. While the conservative mindset is targeted toward more "Person-centred" values such as discipline, duty, and responsibility, the liberal mindset is focused more toward "Situation-centred" values such as compassion, fairness, and protection of the vulnerable.

More in Common is built on the premise that either one of these value sets, taken in isolation, would be ineffective. Rather, an intelligent and reasoned use of both systems is required for a functioning and free democracy. At the same time, it is critical to recognize how either of these systems, when taken to their extreme, becomes counterproductive. Thus an honest process of self-reflection from both sides would go a long way to fostering an agreeable dialogue. More in Common will help with this, both at the programmatic level, by initiating personal experiences that prompt both self-reflection and consideration of other points of view, and at the policy level, by promoting this stance among global leaders and policymakers. An honest assessment of how each side's philosophy has both strengths and weaknesses might serve to crack open the barricades of distrust separating the political parties and provide the basis for a more fruitful dialogue.

Based on this understanding of moral and political psychology, More in Common will:

1. Develop communication strategies that are tailored to the value set endorsed by the target

2. Promote research further aimed at investigating the various values endorsed by people of different political beliefs.

3. Test and demonstrate the connection between inclusion and welcoming with values held by both liberal and conservative population segments, acknowledging the importance of value systems underlying these principles.

**TABLE 5:** Concepts relating to political values

| *Concept* | ***Definition*** |
|---|---|
| **Causal Attribution** | The act of determining the underlying cause of events observed in the world |
| **Environmental Attribution** | The act of inferring that environmental (or situational) factors are responsible for the observed phenomenon |
| **Moral Foundations Theory** | Theory suggesting that liberals and conservatives differ in their recognition and adherence to one of five different moral pillars |
| **Moral Prioritization** | Act of giving precedence to certain values, even if at the expense of other dearly held principles |
| **Moral Translation** | Communication strategy that operates by framing moral issues in terms of the specific value set held by the target |
| **Personal Attribution** | The act of inferring that personal (or dispositional) factors are responsible for the observed phenomenon |
| **Self-serving Biases** | The tendency to be blind to the flaws in one's own argument or personal and vigilant to those of others |

# Future Research

As noted at various points in this paper, there are a number of critical areas that still have not been thoroughly investigated in the social sciences. As a result, these present important opportunities toward which More in Common may devote its resources.

## Affiliation

• **In-group members as sources of information.** While some work has shown that people seek in-group members for information, there is significant work to be done here, including what sorts of conditions exacerbate the effect; and when these tendencies could be mitigated. Thus More in Common could fruitfully investigate the conditions that lead to group-based selection of epistemic authorities.

• **Patterns of motivational inference.** It is known that group membership influences people's perception of others' motives. But exactly how this occurs is not fully understood. For instance, does each positive attribute always have the same negative complement, like colours on a wheel? For instance, is "courage," when framed from a negative motivational standpoint, always seen as "recklessness?" Or might it also be construed as "selfishness" or "ignorance?" Examining the patterns in differently valenced motivational attributions would be a novel contribution to current understanding of person perception.

• **Conditions of successful intergroup contact.** While decades of research have been performed to understand when intergroup contact will lead to a mitigation of group bias, there is still much work to be done, not least because idiosyncrasies of individual psychology will vary widely according to the situation. Thus what works in Northern Ireland may not work in the United States, which may not work in the Netherlands. Thus More in Common can forge new ground by embarking on a data-driven campaign to understand what forms of intergroup contact are most effective in today's political climate.

## Cognition

• **Effects of technology.** Perhaps the greatest opportunity in the realm of research on political cognition relates to the effect of technology. As has already been stated, the current technological world presents unprecedented challenges to the human mind, playing to its prejudices and biases. More in Common could add to scientific understanding of the effects of technology on political polarization by:

• Conducting a more detailed examination of where people get their information and which sources they deem most credible/persuasive

• Examining the effects of **moral satiation** on moral action. People may feel less compelled to act if they can demonstrate their moral credentials.

• **Attitude change and persuasion.** Investigating which persuasion techniques work best in the political context and follow-up up with focus groups to assess the efficacy of intergroup encounters.

## Authority

• Investigate the extent to which progressive policies toward immigration contribute to **realistic** versus **perceived threats** to the livelihood and employment of white working class voters.

• Test which source of threat—immigration, employment, terrorism, cultural threat—exerts the most influence on the sense of "normative threat" that, when combined with authoritarian qualities, leads to authoritarian voting tendencies

• Test communication strategies aimed at identifying the most effective means of combatting misguided perceived threats

## Values

• Test the most effective **communication strategies** for appealing to individuals of different points of view

• Seek further validation for the "attributional" theory of political ideology. In what cases do liberals and conservatives attend to person/situation explanations for behaviour? In what cases does this not hold true?

• Further investigate how attitudes can be changed. One recent article demonstrated that framing arguments in terms of values native to the target resulted in considerably more attitude change than those not fitting this description. However this is a single data point and more work must be done on the types of messages that are most effective in getting people to change their minds.

# Conclusion

The existing research highlights three main opportunities that More in Common should look to take advantage of.  Firstly, there are a number of important gaps in the psychology that is underlying the populist rise in Europe and the United States. There is an opportunity to close these gaps with effective **research**. This should be combined with a set of relationships that enables the organisation to provide leaders and strategists with insights into how to thwart or mitigate the rise of authoritarian populism in the future.

Secondly, we should look to take the opportunity to influence **policy and communication**. By adopting a more inclusive and understanding stance toward members of various political persuasions—one informed by social scientific evidence showing the different value systems that characterize ideologies—More in Common may help to create a bridge among different systems of thought, thereby facilitating more effective and inclusive policy-making.

Finally, we should seek to effect change through **experiences** (as enacted through **programs**). More in Common should look to find ways that will lead to conversation, dialogue, and discussion between groups who see each other as different.

# Additional Reading

While this paper covered some of the topics in psychology relevant to today's political situation and More in Common's mission, there are countless others deserving of fuller treatment. Below is a (partial) list.

## Affiliation

• **Hewstone and Brown** have done work demonstrating the importance of intergroup contact in resolving conflict in Ireland.

• **Gaertner and Dovidio** have compiled an important edited volume about how to reduce intergroup conflict.

• **Jay Van Bavel** has done work showing how intergroup bias is flexible and can be managed through manipulations of people's mindset.

• **Dave Amodio** has work on the **neuroscience of intergroup prejudice**.

• **Sendhil Mullainathan**'s book *Scarcity* covers the psychological effects of having too little.

## Cognition

• **Leon Festinger**'s book *When Prophesy Fails* demonstrates the effects of cognitive dissonance.

• Nobel prize winner **Danny Kahneman** writes about cognitive biases and heuristics in **Thinking Fast and Slow**

• **Cass Sunstein** has written widely on the effects of technology on politics and human interaction

• **Robert Cialdini**'s book *Influence* puts forward some of the early ideas on Persuasion

## Authority

• **Chris Wenzel**'s book *Freedom Rising* presents a refreshing counterpoint to dark prophesies: it shows how social modernization can transform the lives of citizens

• **Karen Stenner**'s book *The Authoritarian Dynamic* presents a dense but illuminating picture on the state of the art of research on authoritarianism

• **Chris Hedges**' book *The Empire of Illusion* examines how the dwindling ability to differentiate fact from fiction is in part responsible for the growing authoritarian allure

## Values

• **Jonathan Haidt**'s book *The Righteous Mind* introduces many of the concepts covered in this section

• There is a helpful dialogue between Haidt and **John Jost** at **TheEdge.com**

• **Josh Greene**'s book *Moral Tribes* introduces moral judgment

• **Phil Tetlock** has written on political values and attitudes

• **Paul Rozin** has written on on **moralization** of amoral concepts.

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