

Perceptual Differences between Liberals and Conservatives

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Formal Hypotheses

If you ask someone whether or not someone of the opposite political orientation thinks differently, the answer will be overwhelmingly 'yes'. However, is there a scientific basis to this?

Do differences in 'social perception' translate into liberals and conservatives actually perceiving situations differently? Recent work by Haidt would certainly suggest so, showing that the conservative value set has more dimensions than the liberal value set. These 'dimensions' arise because conservatives give almost equal weight to harm, fairness, in groups, authority, and purity in making a moral decision, while liberals place harm and fairness above all other moral considerations (Haidt, 2007). These differing value sets would lead to conservatives and liberals drawing varied conclusions about social situations because these sets would lead the individual to focus on certain aspects of the situation.

1.) Informal evaluations of the sanity of others are affected by our political orientation.

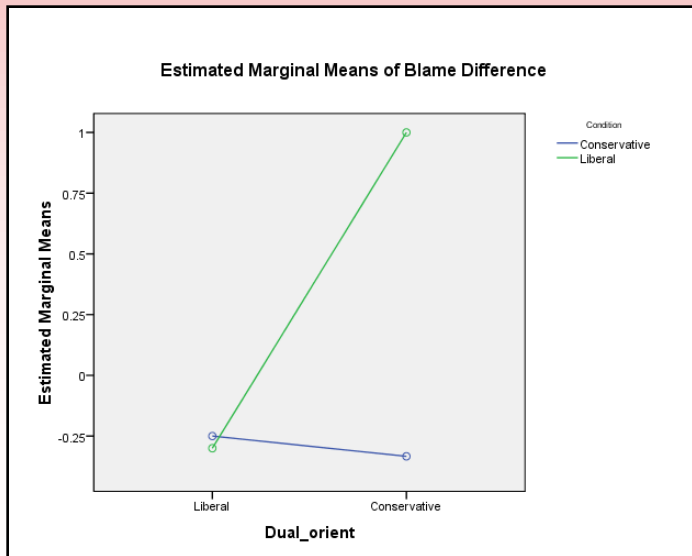
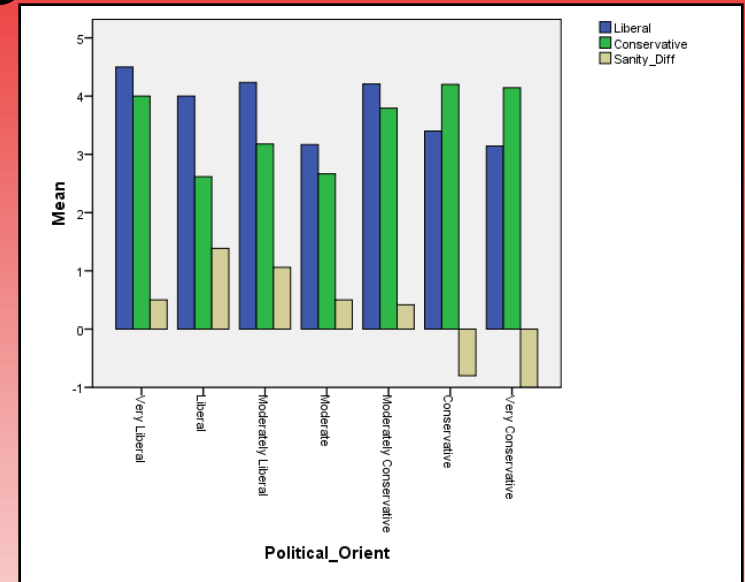
2.) Jurors will be more persuaded by closing arguments cloaked in terminology aligned with their political orientation than closing arguments in the terminology of the opposing political orientation.

Why is this important?

The ethical ramifications of such an effect would cast doubt upon rational deliberations as the basis of moral psychology.

Results

It was found to be the case that participants who rated themselves as 'liberal' were significantly more likely than those who rated themselves as 'conservative' to give higher normalcy ratings to the liberal vignette than the conservative vignette and vice versa. The implications of this effect are staggering, showing that informal judgments that are not politically connected can be significantly impacted by political bias.



Pilot testing revealed that lawyers may be able to shift the language they use in defending clients to manipulate jurors based on their political orientations. Liberal jurors seem to respond favorably to both 'liberal' and 'conservative' defenses while conservatives appear to only respond favorably to 'conservative' defenses. A more formal investigation into this effect is currently being launched.