processing (see reviews by Baumeister et al. 2001; Cacioppo & Gardner 1999; Cacioppo et al. 1997; Larsen & McGraw 2011). Moreover, the combination of spatial and affective information is essential for many approach and avoidance behaviors, and thus for survival. As predicted by the ESM, Crawford and Cacioppo (2002) found that the incidental learning of the likely spatial location of affective stimuli is greater for negative than positive stimuli.

Given individual variation is the engine of natural selection, the ESM predicts that there are measurable individual differences in the positivity offset and negativity bias. The underlying structure and operation of the affect system is generally outside people's awareness, and these dispositional tendencies are similarly conceived as generally lying outside awareness, but like the affect system itself these dispositional tendencies should be measurable through people's judgments of and responses to affective stimuli. Indeed, temporally stable and predictive individual differences in the positivity offset and the negativity bias have been identified (Ito & Cacioppo 2005; Norris et al. 2011).

Participants in Norris et al. were exposed to three different sets of stimuli (pictures, sounds, and words), and during each set they were exposed to 66 stimuli, 6 of which were neutral and low in arousal, and 30 each of which vary in their extremity of pleasant or unpleasant and arousal but which were matched on these two dimensions. Ratings of each are made using the affect matrix – a 5 (positivity: zero to maximum) by 5 (negativity: zero to maximum) matrix on which participants rate each stimulus (Larsen et al. 2009). The positivity offset was indexed by the difference between the positivity and negativity ratings of the six neutral stimuli, and the negativity bias was gauged as the difference in the rating of the six most extreme unpleasant stimuli minus the rating of the six most extreme (and initially matched on extremity and arousal) pleasant stimuli. Results revealed that individual differences in the positivity offset and negativity bias were uncorrelated, temporally stable, and generalizable across ratings of pictures, sounds, and words. Furthermore, individual differences in the positivity offset predicted the spatial learning for positive stimuli, whereas individual differences in the negativity bias predicted the spatial learning for negative stimuli (Norris et al. 2011). Early electrical neuroimaging research indicated that the negativity bias is associated with a larger late positive potential (Ito & Cacioppo 2000; Ito et al. 1998; Smith et al. 2006), and recent work suggests that the positivity offset and negativity bias are associated differently to two serotonin receptor genes (Ashare et al. 2013). In sum, although most individuals exhibit both a positivity offset and a negativity bias, this is not true for all individuals, and stable individual differences in the positivity offset and negativity bias exist and predict what is learned about the world.

Hibbing et al. posit that individual differences in the negativity bias underlie the difference between liberals and conservatives. However, they treated any evidence that negative stimuli elicit more attention, consideration, or weight than positive stimuli as bearing on evidence for a negativity bias. This conceptualization of the negativity bias conflates the various underlying mechanisms that can produce such a result and provides little guidance for quantifying this bias. The definition and psychometrics of the negativity bias provided by the ESM may provide a means of testing the Hibbing et al. hypothesis.

Conservatives, liberals, and "the negative"

doi:10.1017/S0140525X13002549

Evan Charney

Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708-0239.
echar@duke.edu
http://www.duke.edu/~echar/

Abstract: The authors connect conservatism with aversion to negativity via the tendentious use of the language of threats to characterize conservatism, but not liberalism. Their reliance upon an objective conception of the negative ignores the fact that much of the disagreement between liberals and conservatives is over whether or not one and the same state of affairs is negative or positive.

One would anticipate that an attempt to identify the cause of the *political* differences between liberals and conservatives would carefully elaborate what those political differences are. The authors' characterization, however, is devoid of specific political content: Conservatives are "supporters of tradition and stability"; liberals are "supporters of innovation and reform," a distinction that represents the two "ubiquitous" (abstract), "primal mindsets" that "pervade human history" (sect. 1, para. 1). Perhaps, but what do these two mindsets have to do with liberalism and conservatism?

According to the authors' characterization, the following are conservatives: Andre Siegfried (1939), who defended the French Democratic Tradition by arguing that "for a hundred and fifty years the Revolution has served a basic line of demarcation in the domestic politics of France," and that its principles had to be "defended from a new enemy [i.e., Fascism] along a new battle front"; members of the Chinese Communist Party who in the name of the Communist tradition and stability opposed market reforms as dangerous innovations (Deng 2012); those who criticized the use of "enhanced interrogation" (referred to by critics as torture) during the Bush administration's "War on Terror" as based upon a "truly innovative and quite radical view" (Lederman 2007) that "undermin[ed] the moral values and legal traditions on which America was founded" (McTigue & Merman 2006); and the following are liberals: defenders of Vichy France; Chinese communists who advocated market reforms (but not basic rights); advocates of the use of enhanced interrogation.

Inasmuch as there are liberal traditions (e.g., Hartz 1955), the stability of which liberals are concerned to defend, a concern with tradition and stability cannot be the defining attribute of political conservatives. Precisely how liberalism and conservatism should be defined is a vexed question, but the content of the article leaves no doubt as to what the authors intend by these terms: the political attitudes of 21st century American liberals and conservatives. As such, although we can look for historical antecedents of contemporary American liberalism and conservatism, they can no longer be mischaracterized as two ubiquitous, primal mindsets associated with an ancient and universal *political* division. The authors might object that I define political ideology too narrowly, but it is hard to see how a characterization that cannot differentiate political liberals and conservatives could tell us anything useful about the causes of their differing political views. In fact, what the authors characterize are not two political ideologies, but two personality types that could appropriately be termed "stability seekers" v. "innovators."

A fundamental – perhaps *the* fundamental – assumption underlying the authors' theory is that the relationship between negativity bias (NB) and political conservatism is *causal* because conservative policies "seem naturally to mesh with heightened response to threatening stimuli" (sect. 6, para. 7). What is the basis of such a claim? Surely, someone who experienced acute aversion to a particular threat could believe that *liberal* policies were a better guarantor of public safety (or order and stability). For example, liberals do not perceive the threat posed by what the authors describe as a "bad guy with a gun" (sect. 6.2, para. 6) as any less of a threat than conservatives (as the intensity of both sides in recent debates over gun control in the US should make apparent). Rather, (many) liberals think the best way to deal with such a threat is stricter gun control whereas (many) conservatives think it is "a good guy with a gun" (Lapierre 2012). If both liberals and conservatives are equally averse to the threat, then greater or lesser aversion to negativity cannot be the source of their differences. Furthermore, is it the authors' contention that the conservative, but not liberal political response to gun violence seems "naturally to mesh" with an acute aversion to the

nature of the threat? And what does it mean for a political response "naturally to mesh" with the nature of a threat?

Nor can greater or lesser aversion to negativity account for the fact that some threats are perceived *as threats* by liberals but not conservatives, something the authors mention in passing as instances where their theory may not apply:

> If conservatives are universally more averse to negativity, it would seem that heightened response and attention to the negative should lead to equal amounts of concern over a leveled rainforest and a hostile outgroup (sect. 6.2, para. 6)

Some conservatives deny that global warming is a threat not because, as the authors speculate, it is a "longer term and arguably more amorphous" threat (sect. 6.2, para. 6) but because they deny that it exists; others argue that although it exists it is not manmade, or its dangers are overstated or are outweighed by the costs of reducing greenhouse gases.

This points to an omnipresent form of political disagreement: Depending upon their ideology, liberals and conservatives may view one and the same state of affairs as negative *or positive*. Hence (to generalize), the overturning of Roe v. Wade is a negative (threat) for liberals and a positive for conservatives; teaching creationism in the public schools is a negative (threat) for liberals and a positive for conservatives; denial of the right to same-sex marriage is a negative (threat) for liberals and a positive for conservatives. In fact, most conservative policies can be characterized as threats to liberals, just as most liberal policies can be characterized as threats to conservatives, a fact concealed by the authors' tendentious use of the language of threats to characterize conservative, but not liberal positions.

What distinguishes political liberals and conservatives is not that conservative but not liberal political views reflect (or mesh with) a heightened aversion to negativity. Rather, conservatives and liberals disagree both over the best way to deal with an agreed upon negative (e.g., a bad guy with a gun) and over whether *one and the same state of affairs* (e.g., prayer in public schools) is itself negative or positive.

Significantly, the omnipresence of such disputes appears incompatible with the authors' understanding throughout that the negative refers to what *really is* (i.e., objectively) negative: Greater reactivity to the negative means greater reactivity to negative *events*, negative *stimuli*, negative *environments*, and negative *states of affairs*. Hence, their use of the language of *perception*: Perceiving the negative is akin to perceiving the color blue. Although the authors acknowledge that persons can be factually mistaken about the *existence* of an objectively negative state of affairs (just as poor lighting might lead one mistakenly to conclude that a blue object is black), they fail to realize that some of the most contentious debates in political life are over whether the very same things are negative or positive.

Context, engagement, and the (multiple) functions of negativity bias

doi:10.1017/S0140525X13002550

Christopher M. Federico,[a] Christopher D. Johnston,[b] and Howard G. Lavine[c]

[a]*Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455;* [b]*Department of Political Science, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708-0204;* [c]*Department of Political Science, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455.*

federico@umn.edu christopher.johnston@duke.edu lavine@umn.edu

http://www.psych.umn.edu/people/facultyprofile.php?UID=federico

http://sites.duke.edu/chrisjohnston/

http://www.polisci.umn.edu/people/profile.php?UID=lavine

Abstract: Hibbing and colleagues argue that political attitudes may be rooted in individual differences in negativity bias. Here, we highlight the complex, *conditional* nature of the relationship between negativity bias and ideology by arguing that the political impact of negativity bias should vary as a function of (1) *issue domain* and (2) *political engagement*.

Hibbing and his colleagues provide an enlightening overview of current research on the psychological foundations of ideology, with a specific focus on how ideology may be rooted in individual differences in negativity bias. Here, we focus on two points underplayed in the target article. First, we highlight the *conditional* nature of the relationship between negativity bias and ideology. Second, we contend that the mechanism by which negativity bias structures preferences is more complex. Although we agree that negativity bias has important consequences for political attitudes, we also suggest that its impact should vary as a function of (1) *issue domain* and (2) *political engagement*, or the degree to which citizens are interested in and informed about politics.

In the domain of social issues (e.g., gay marriage), variables associated with negativity bias should translate into conservatism among both the engaged and unengaged (though the relationship may be stronger among the engaged; Zaller 1992). Such "easy" issues elicit symbolic associations relevant to negativity bias (e.g., threats to traditional values) regardless of political knowledge. However, economic policy is "hard" – technical and unlikely to automatically elicit emotionally laden symbolic associations (Carmines & Stimson 1980). We argue that in the domain of economic issues, engagement should play a key moderating role. Among the engaged, economic preferences should serve a *symbolic function*, expressing partisan and cultural affiliation. Two mechanisms are responsible. First, cues from political-party leaders assign symbolic meaning to party membership and party-endorsed issue positions. For example, in an effort to reshape electoral competition long dominated by the Democratic Party, Republicans embraced a number of affect-laden concerns related to race and ethnicity, crime, and religion, all issues *directly* related to negativity bias (Hetherington & Weiler 2009). Second, elites strategically *frame* economic issues in symbolic terms ("Obamacare is socialism"). These frames convey the abstract meaning of issues in ways relevant to negativity bias (e.g., rapid institutional change). However, since symbol-laden elite signals like cues and frames are more likely to be picked up by the highly engaged (Zaller 1992), it is only among these individuals that negativity bias should influence partisan sorting (Federico & Goren 2009; Federico et al. 2011) and lead to the assimilation of party-approved issue frames.

By contrast, if less attentive citizens are unlikely to notice (and therefore be influenced by) elite cues and frames, their economic preferences are more likely to serve an *instrumental function*. That is, the economic preferences of inattentive citizens should reflect a more personal view of the stakes – that is, the extent to which one desires government protection from the risks associated with free markets. Given this largely instrumental outlook,

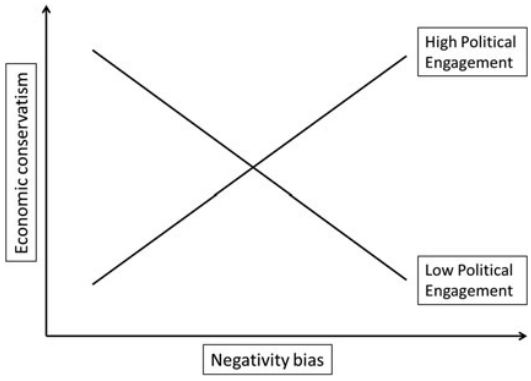

Figure 1 (Federico et al.). Schematic representation of predictions regarding the impact of negativity bias as a function of issue domain and political engagement.