

# Anger and Partisan Issue Consistency in the American Electorate

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## Abstract

Scholars of political behavior frequently argue that members of the electorate, following elite cues, have been bringing their issue positions into line with their partisan identification. Combined with the heightened degree of polarization in the contemporary era, this implies that rank-and-file Americans have been adopting more extreme and more consistently partisan issue positions. In this paper, I argue that fine-grained measures of an individual's personality-governed level of anger leads to higher degrees of partisan issue consistency in the electorate. I then show how rising degrees of partisan issue consistency predicts negative attitudes toward the national government as a whole. In doing this, I utilize the NEO-PI-R measure of personality. Commonly used in psychological literatures for its in-depth and accurate assessment of an individual's personality, it has heretofore been neglected by political scientists. Beyond illustrating the efficacy of this measure for scholars of political behavior and political psychology, the results of my analyses suggest that those individuals who score highest on the NEO-PI-R measure of anger have the most partisan issue consistency and, consequently, have lower evaluations of American government.

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In the contemporary era, polarization among political elites is at an all-time high (Fiorena and Abrams, 2012; Ahler and Broockman, 2015; Hetherington, 2001; Abramowitz and Saunders, 1998; Abramowitz, 2010). With this growing elite polarization, attentive Americans within the electorate have adopted positions on policy issues that are increasingly in line with those held by elected officials (Levendusky, 2010; Zaller, 1992; Layman and Carsey, 2002). Scholars argue that the key to this development is the ability of elites to transmit cues to members of the electorate about, in Converse's (1964) words, "what goes with what" in terms of political issues.<sup>1</sup>

Though Converse (1964) famously argued that very few individuals possess "constraint" (i.e., that they know "what goes with what" in terms of issue positions), much about American politics has changed over the past fifty years that necessitates a re-visitation of the degree of issue position consistency within the American electorate. Indeed, while the electorate of old was characterized by "the absence of recognition or understanding of overarching ideological frames of reference" (Converse, 1964), Americans today are more ideologically motivated and capable of identifying "liberal positions" from "conservative positions" (Bafumi and Shapiro, 2009; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Hetherington, 2001).

Given this rise of elite polarization and the increasing ability of elites to transmit cues to partisans in the electorate about "what goes with what" (see, e.g., Prior, 2007; Mutz, 2006, 2007; Dalton et al., 1998), we should expect to see Americans holding more *consistently* conservative or *consistently* liberal positions, depending on their own partisan identification.

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<sup>1</sup>Converse's (1964) own example of this notion was that "if a person is opposed to the expansion of Social Security, he is probably a conservative and is probably opposed as well to any nationalization of private industries, federal aid to education, sharply progressive income taxation, and so forth."

Yet, outside of demographic-based characteristics, such as education (Jacoby, 1991), race or culture (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016), or group-based affiliations (Mason, 2013, 2015; Green et al., 2002), extant theory provides little guide as to what sorts of individuals should be holding higher degrees of issue positions consistent with their partisan identity.

One promising way to gain leverage on this question is to utilize the growing literature on personality and politics. Scholars working within this field have shown that an individual's personality is predictive of their ideological leanings (Mondak and Halperin, 2008; Mondak, 2010; Gerber et al., 2010; Cooper et al., 2013; Barbaranelli et al., 2007), party identification (Gerber et al., 2012), willingness to discuss politics (Hibbing et al., 2011), and likelihood of voting (Gerber et al., 2009, 2013).

While these studies are a welcome contribution to our understanding of how personality affects political behavior, it nevertheless leaves numerous questions unexplored. For instance, how is personality related to the "strength and direction" of particular issue questions? How is personality related to issue constraint? It is these questions that I seek to answer in this paper. In particular, I am interested in how an individual's personality-governed level of anger is associated with the degree to which they hold positions across multiple issues that are in line with their partisan affiliation, a concept that I call *partisan issue consistency*. Additionally, I am interested in how anger-induced partisan issue consistency is associated with perceptions that government is unresponsive to the concerns and interests of the public. Indeed, though anger may lead to higher levels of partisan issue consistency and, with it, the benefits of polarization (e.g. higher participation, more clearly defined political choices), it is likely that an increase in consistent and extreme issue positions is related to a diminution in the belief that government cares about the needs of ordinary citizens.

In addition to examining these theoretical questions of interest, I also introduce and use a new measure of personality. While the majority of the personality and politics literature operationalizes “personality” by means of the Big Five framework (see, e.g., Mondak and Halperin, 2008; Mondak et al., 2010; Mondak, 2010; Gerber et al., 2010; Cooper et al., 2013), I jettison this measure in favor of Costa and McCrae’s (1995) NEO-PI-R measurement. Due to its careful and detailed measurement, the NEO-PI-R has become the “gold standard” in measuring individuals’ personalities. However, its usage has been limited in academic settings because the full battery contains 240 questions. While such a length precludes using the NEO-PI-R to measure an individual’s personality in most cases, because I am primarily interested here in an individual’s personality-governed level of anger, only ten questions are needed. Thus, while using the entire NEO-PI-R survey battery is typically infeasible, relying on it to measure just one aspect of an individual’s personality is not time intensive and does not present survey respondents with more of a burden than they are used to.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows: first, I outline a theory as to how an individual’s personality-governed level of anger is associated with partisan issue consistency. I then discuss how this partisan issue consistency is related to belief in government responsiveness (or lack thereof) to the public’s concerns. I then explicate my research design and introduce the NEO-PI-R measure of an individual’s level of anger. Next, I present a series of results, derived from a unique dataset on the political preferences of registered voters in the United States, that suggest that angrier individuals exhibit higher level of partisan issue consistency and that this partisan issue consistency is negatively related to belief in government responsiveness to the concerns and interests of the public. Finally, I conclude with a few thoughts on the implications of my findings and a note on directions for future

research.

## 1 A Theory of Anger and Partisan Issue Consistency

Social psychologists have long recognized the role of emotions in explaining patterns of behavior. In particular, anger has been found to be associated with myriad behavioral acts. Among other things, anger has been shown to affect social perception (Keltner et al., 1993), increase the use of group stereotypes and other heuristics (Bodenhausen et al., 1994), prompt individuals to engage in risk seeking activities (Lerner and Keltner, 2001), and make individuals more punitive (Lerner and Tiedens, 2006).

Key for the theory underlying the link between anger and higher levels of partisan issue consistency is Bodenhausen et al.'s (1994) finding that "angry people are more likely to rely on simple cues in reacting to social stimuli." Though their results were obtained in regards to issues particularly salient to university students (e.g. banning meat from the school cafeteria), the logic of their findings can be easily translated to the American electorate. Indeed, if individuals have a predisposition to be angry, they should be more receptive to the increasing amount of cues sent by elites as to what issues partisan identifiers in the electorate should adopt. Because elites in the contemporary era are highly polarized, these cues about policy positions will be both extreme and consistent. The result is that individuals who are angry will adopt these policy positions, resulting in a high degree of partisan issue consistency. On the contrary, when individuals are not angry, they should be less willing and likely to rely on cues or heuristics from political elites. This implies that, unlike their angrier counterparts, these individuals should have lower levels of partisan issue consistency

even though political elites are continuing to send polarized cues.

Moreover, because anger has also been linked to aggression and a lack of self-reflection (Tiedens, 2001), this implies that individuals who have high levels of anger should be less likely to seek out different issue positions that may best ameliorate societal and political problems. Without taking the time to examine all of the possible positions one might take on any given political issue (e.g. examining both a liberal position and a conservative position), angry individuals should default to the cues they receive from their co-partisans who hold elected office.

Being more receptive to elite cues and, as a result, having higher degrees of anger-induced partisan issue consistency, is likely to have deleterious consequences on individuals' levels of confidence in government. Such an expectation is rooted in both the psychological literature on anger's role in reducing trust in individuals and institutions, and the changing nature of American political discourse. For example, Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) find that experimentally inducing anger reduces individuals' levels of interpersonal trust. This finding is corroborated by Gino and Schweitzer (2008), who find that angry individuals are less trusting and less likely to accept advice from their peers. Within political science, the dramatic rise in elite polarization has led to more confrontational styles of governing and lower levels of trust in institutions. Crucially, this lack of trust is most prevalent when an individual's party does not control the levers of government (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015). Thus, with anger and polarized elite cues fueling heightened partisanship within the electorate, individuals who have a high degree of partisan issue consistency should have a concomitant lower degree of confidence in American government.

## 1.1 Personality in Context

While the theory I have outlined thus far suggests that higher levels of personality-governed anger should be associated with higher degrees of partisan issue consistency, it is unlikely that an individual's personality is something that can vary over time. Indeed, according to the psychology literature from which it is derived, "personality" refers to a relatively stable set of characteristics that guide one's disposition toward the social world (McCrae and Costa, 1994; Digman, 1989; Cobb-Clark and Schurer, 2012). Once formed, personality tends to change very little – if at all – barring major life events (McCrae and Costa, 1994).

If this is the case, then why should we be interested in something that is predictive but does not vary over time? My argument is that, while personality does not vary over time, changing electoral and political contexts can make an individual's personality-governed level of anger more or less salient for predicting and guiding patterns of political behavior. In particular, the current era is likely to be one where those individuals with high levels of personality-governed anger should have high degrees of partisan issue consistency. This is due not only to increasing elite polarization, but also due to the dramatic increase in negative affect among partisans and between partisan and social groups. While Americans used to feel largely indifferent about the opposing political party and its supporters, negative affect has increased tremendously in recent years as racial, social, and cultural identities have become intertwined with partisan affiliation (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016; Mason, 2015). This anger-fueled negative affect and the political environment it has created now means that "partisanship elicits more extreme evaluations and behavioral responses to ingroups and outgroups" than longstanding cleavages such as race (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015).

This increase in negative affect is seen clearly in Figure 1, which utilizes data from the

American National Election Studies (ANES) cumulative file to show the trends in partisans' average ratings of their own and the opposing party over time. Measured on a "feeling thermometer" scale that ranges from 0-100, it is apparent that the mean score that individuals give to their own party has changed very little over time. Indeed, in 1978, the first year the feeling thermometer question was asked on the ANES survey, the average rating that respondents gave their own party was 70.45. By 2012, this same number had dropped just barely to 70.06. By contrast, Americans have a stronger dislike for the opposing party today than they did in the past. In 1978, respondents gave a mean rating of 47.79 to the opposing party; in 2012, that rating had dropped to 27.06 – a drop of 43.4%.<sup>2</sup>

The current political climate of high negativity and partisan rancor leads to the following expectation:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Higher levels of personality-governed anger will be associated with higher levels of partisan issue consistency.*

While anger and negativity toward the opposing party has increased over time in the American electorate, it is likely that the partisan issue consistency wrought by this anger and negativity has diminished Americans' views about the responsiveness of the national government to the concerns and needs of the general public. Scholars have previously shown that trust in government is affected by, among other things, the relationship between one's own party affiliation and that of the current president (Citrin, 1974), dissatisfaction with Congress (Hetherington, 1998), and exposure to negative messages from the media (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997).<sup>3</sup> These findings imply that partisanship plays a large role in how

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<sup>2</sup>For this analysis, independents who indicated that they lean toward one of the two parties are included as partisans.

<sup>3</sup>See Levi and Stoker (2000) for an excellent overview of what affects levels of trust in government.

citizens view and assess the government. With high levels of anger in the electorate and, as a result, increasing levels of partisan issue consistency, partisanship has become even more salient as a heuristic for the general public. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2.** *Higher levels of partisan issue consistency will be associated with the belief that the national government is unresponsive to the needs and concerns of the public.*

## 2 Research Design

The data for this study are part of a larger survey on personality, emotions and political behavior. Fielded via Survey Sampling International (SSI), the survey is a national sample of registered voters. The total sample size is 3,262 respondents. Of these, 42.8% are men and 57.2% are women; 82% are white, 6.6% are African-American, and 5.5% are Hispanic; finally, 85.4% have at least some college education and 14.6% have only a high school diploma. More complete summary statistics are shown in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here.]

The survey asked individuals to fill out a series of demographic questions, such as age, race, gender, education, and household income. Participants were also asked to disclose their partisan and ideological identification along a seven-point scale.<sup>4</sup> In addition to demographic and partisan/ideological information, the survey asked participants a series of questions about participatory acts and candidate choice. Among other things, individuals were asked about their voting habits and future voting intentions, how frequently they talk

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<sup>4</sup>These scales are analogous to those found in the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES).

to others about politics, whether they have made campaign donations, and whether they have attempted to influence someone else's vote choice.

Most important for this study are two series of questions measuring individuals' personality-governed level of anger, and positions on various contemporary political issues. Individuals were asked to state their preferences on six issue items: abortion, birth-right citizenship, same-sex marriage, affirmative action programs, gun control, and climate change/global warming. After being told about the issue, individuals were asked to select a potential response that best matched their opinion regarding that issue. Responses for each issue position ranged from the most conservative end (e.g. "global climate change is not occurring; this is not a real issue") to the most liberal end (e.g. "global climate change has been established as a serious problem, and immediate action is necessary") with a moderate/unsure position in the middle (e.g. "we don't know enough about global climate change, and more research is necessary before we take any actions"). The full list of potential responses to these questions can be found in the Appendix.

These questions were used to create a measure of partisan issue consistency for each individual. For those who self-identify as ideological liberals or Democrats, partisan issue consistency was measured by summing the number of times that individual chose the most liberal response as being closest to their own policy preference. Likewise, for those who self-identify as ideological conservatives or Republicans, partisan issue consistency scores were calculated by summing the number of times that individual indicated that the most conservative response was closest to their own policy preference. Partisan issue consistency scores range from 0-6 and have a mean value of 1.1 for conservatives and Republicans and 2.7 for liberals and Democrats.

One assumption that I am making here is that liberals and Democrats should both adopt the liberal position in order to have some degree of partisan issue consistency, and vice versa for conservatives and Republicans. While one could argue that there are conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans, the increasing degree of partisan sorting within the American electorate implies that, in the current era, there are very few ideological conservatives who identify with the Democratic Party and perhaps even fewer ideological liberals who identify with the Republican Party (Levendusky, 2009; Fiorina et al., 2005). Thus, coding partisan issue consistency in this way seems relatively innocuous.

**NEO-PI-R Angry Hostility** In order to measure how angry each individual is, participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire for the Angry Hostility NEO-PI-R facet-level trait.<sup>5</sup> According to the NEO Personality Inventory survey developed by Costa and McCrae (1995) to measure the Big Five, each of the five domains (e.g. Openness to new experiences, Conscientiousness) is comprised of six lower-level facets. Each of the facets “represent[s] the more closely covarying elements within the domain” and are mutually exclusive. Each domain contains six facets because, according to Costa and McCrae (1995), “inclusion of more than six would soon lead to intellectual overload.” Furthermore, the factor analyses employed to identify the facets within each domain require a requisite amount of variables to facilitate replication (Gorsuch, 1983). Though these facets do not cover the entirety of the

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<sup>5</sup>In actuality, the measure used here is slightly different from that found on the NEO-PI-R. Because the NEO-PI-R is a proprietary test of *Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.* and its usage is prohibited in academic studies, psychologists have collaborated to create “open source” measures of numerous scales that correlated highly with their proprietary counterparts. Despite being slightly different measures, the “open source” version used here correlates highly with the actual NEO-PI-R test. Analyses have shown that the “open source” measure of the Angry Hostility facet-level trait has a remarkably high correlation, .90, with the NEO-PI-R measurement. For more information, see [http://ipip.ori.org/newNEO\\_FacetsTable.htm](http://ipip.ori.org/newNEO_FacetsTable.htm) or Goldberg et al. (2006).

variance within each domain, they do appear to capture a large amount while still remaining parsimonious. By aggregating each facet-level score within the five respective domains, Big Five scores can be obtained for any given individual.

The Angry Hostility facet-level trait is derived from the Emotional Stability domain of the Big Five, and it largely measures the degree to which an individual is temperamental in their behavior (Lord, 2007). The Angry Hostility facet-level trait is measured by a series of ten statements, five of which are positively coded and five of which are reverse coded.<sup>6</sup> Each statement is presented to an individual and then that individual is asked to state their level of agreement or disagreement with the veracity of that statement in regards to their own life. Agreement is measured on a five-point scale ranging from one to five. A rating of one indicates that an individual “strongly disagrees” with a statement about herself, a rating of two indicates that an individual “disagrees” with that statement, a rating of three indicates that an individual is “neutral” about the statement, while ratings of four and five indicate that an individual “agrees” or “strongly agrees” with the statement, respectively. The final score for an individual’s level of Angry Hostility is simply the summation of each of the ten questions. Formally, anger is measured as follows:

$$Anger = \sum_{i=1}^5 x_i + \sum_{j=1}^5 x_j \quad (1)$$

where  $i$  are the positively coded statements and  $j$  are the reverse coded statements. The positively coded statements of the Angry Hostility facet-level scale are “I get angry easily,” “I get irritated easily,” “I get upset easily,” “I am often in a bad mood,” and “I tend to lose

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<sup>6</sup>Half of the statements are reverse coded in order to correct for any social desirability bias that might arise while answering the survey.

my temper." The reverse coded statements are "I rarely get irritated," "I seldom get mad," "I am not easily annoyed," "I keep my cool," and "I rarely complain." By asking questions that are positively and negatively coded, the survey instrument is less susceptible to being answered in socially desirable ways.

Though use of the Angry Hostility facet-level trait seems like a reasonable way to gain theoretical leverage on questions of interest when compared to the domain-level characteristics of the Big Five, one reasonable concern is that these lower-level traits might lack predictive power. If this is the case, then taking such an approach might entail a trade-off between cogent theory building and analytical utility. Fortunately, this does not appear to be the case. Comparisons between the Big Five domain-level characteristics and the facet-level traits show that "a few carefully selected personality facet scales can predict as well as or better than can all of the Big Five factor scales combined." Moreover, this same analysis found that "a substantial part of the criterion variance predicted by the facet scales is variance not predicted by the [domain] scales" (Paunonen and Ashton, 2001). Similarly, in their study of personality disorders, Reynolds and Clark (2001) find that the domain-level characteristics are too broad to generate "clinically meaningful descriptions" of disorders. Thus, their suggestion is to make use of the facet-level traits to obtain a "substantial increase in predictive power and descriptive resolution" on questions of interest (Reynolds and Clark, 2001).

Finally, in order to measure perceptions that the national government is unresponsive to the concerns and needs of the public, survey participants were asked to state their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "The national government is unresponsive to the concerns and interests of the public." The scale used to measure level of

agreement or disagreement with this statement ranges from 0-10. A rating of zero indicates that the respondent “completely disagrees” with the statement, while a rating of ten indicates that the respondent “completely agrees” with the statement. Thus, higher scores on this measure indicate a higher perception that the national government is unresponsive to the public’s concerns and interests.

## 2.1 Empirical Strategy

In order to examine the relationship between an individual’s personality-governed level of anger and partisan issue consistency, I run models with the following functional form:

$$pic_i = \alpha + \beta_1\rho_i + \gamma X_i + \epsilon_i \tag{2}$$

where  $pic_i$  denotes individual  $i$ ’s level of partisan issue consistency and  $\rho_i$  is individual  $i$ ’s score on the Angry Hostility NEO-PI-R facet-level trait. Control variables, contained in the  $X_i$  vector, include individual  $i$ ’s level of education, race, household income, gender, and a scale measuring level of political participation. The political participation scale is created by counting how many of the following activities each individual has done: voting in the 2012 presidential election, voting in the 2016 political primaries, displaying a yard sign during the 2016 campaign, attempting to persuade someone else’s vote choice, donating money to a campaign, writing a letter to a politician, and talking about politics with friends or co-workers. Depending on the model specification,  $X_i$  may also include measures of individual  $i$ ’s partisan self-identification. In order to allow for heterogeneous effects, the model shown in Equation 2 is estimated on four subgroups of the data: ideological liberals, ideological

conservatives, Democrats, and Republicans.<sup>7</sup> Estimation is via ordinary least squares (OLS).

In order to estimate how partisan issue consistency is related to perceptions that the national government is unresponsive to the needs and concerns of the public, I estimate models with the following functional form:

$$gr_i = \alpha + \beta_1\rho_i + \gamma X_i + \epsilon_i \quad (3)$$

where  $gr_i$  measures individual  $i$ 's belief that the national government is unresponsive to the public's concerns and interests. Individual  $i$ 's degree of partisan issue consistency is captured by  $\rho_i$  and the  $X_i$  vector contains the same set of control variables as in Equation 2. Similarly, the model shown in Equation 3 is estimated separately for ideological liberals, ideological conservatives, Democrats, and Republicans, in order to allow for maximum flexibility.

### 3 Results

The distribution of the NEO-PI-R measure of anger can be seen in Figure 2. The metric ranges from a minimum of 10 (the most pacific individual in the data) to a maximum of 50 (the angriest individual in the data). The mean score on the NEO-PI-R anger measure is 25.9 and the median is 26. The standard deviation is 7.8.

[Figure 2 around here.]

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<sup>7</sup>The models for ideological liberals and ideological conservatives contain control variables for partisan affiliation. No models contain control variables for an individual's ideology because it makes little sense to imagine a Democrat or a Republican who has a high degree of partisan issue consistency but, simultaneously, is not ideologically extreme. Nevertheless, models with this control variable included produce nearly identical coefficient estimates as those derived from the specification in Equation 2. The results of the models with ideology included as a control variable are available upon request.

The dependent variable, partisan issue consistency score, has a possible range of zero to six. For the measure of liberal partisan issue consistency, all of these possible values are observed. For the measure of conservative partisan issue consistency, no value of six is observed in the data. In other words, none of the individuals in this data hold consistently extreme conservative issue positions across the six issue items. The mean score on the conservative partisan issue consistency measure is slightly larger than one, while the mean score on the liberal partisan issue consistency measure is 2.7. Full descriptive statistics for these measures are shown in Table 2.

[Table 2 around here.]

Recall that the expectation is that individuals who score higher on the NEO-PI-R measure of anger should have higher levels of partisan issue consistency. The results of the models, estimated as shown in Equation 2, show that this relationship exists in two of the four subgroups in which the analysis is conducted. Among ideological liberals, there is no statistically significant relationship between the NEO-PI-R measure of anger and partisan issue consistency. Interestingly, there is a statistically significant *negative* relationship between anger and partisan issue consistency for self-identifying Democrats. These two findings are contrary to the hypothesized relationship between anger and issue constraint and extremity.

However, among ideological conservatives and self-identifying Republicans, there is a clear positive relationship between the NEO-PI-R measure of anger and partisan issue consistency. For ideological conservatives, the coefficient estimate on the NEO-PI-R measure of anger is .010. For Republicans, the coefficient estimate is a smaller .009. Importantly, these results are obtained even when controlling for various factors that we already know to be associated with higher degrees of issue extremity: level of political participation (Abramowitz, 2010);

education (Jacoby, 1991); and, depending on the model, partisanship (Bartels, 2000; Bafumi and Shapiro, 2009).

[Table 3 around here.]

To more clearly show the relationship between the NEO-PI-R measure of anger and partisan issue consistency, consider the two plots shown in Figure 3. The plot on the left shows the relationship between anger and partisan issue consistency as levels of anger increase for ideological conservatives. The plot on the right shows the exact same relationship but for those who self-identify as Republicans.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, predicted values are derived from holding education, income, and participation levels at their mean values. Moreover, gender is set to male and the nonwhite dummy variable is set to zero. In the graph on the left, the partisanship variable is held at its mean value.

[Figure 3 about here.]

As can be seen, for both ideological conservatives and Republicans, there is a strong positive relationship between anger and partisan issue consistency. For ideological conservatives, as the NEO-PI-R anger measure goes from its lowest value to its highest value, the estimated partisan issue consistency score jumps from 1.3 to 1.82. This is an increase of 40%. A one standard deviation increase above the mean on the NEO-PI-R anger of measure is associated with a 5.1% increase on the partisan issue consistency score. Similarly, the fitted values for the relationship between anger and partisan issue consistency for Republicans shows that moving from the minimum value of anger to the maximum value increases the

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<sup>8</sup>In these calculations, an individual was classified as a Republican if they identified themselves as either an independent who leans Republican, a weak Republican, or a strong Republican.

issue constraint score from 1.62 to 2.08. This is an increase of 28.4%. Analogous to the predictions for ideological conservatives, a one standard deviation above the mean on the NEO-PI-R anger scale is associated with a 3.8% increase on the partisan issue consistency score for self-identifying Republicans. Anger, it appears, is a predictor of partisan issue consistency for conservatives and Republicans even when controlling for more obvious, well known predictors such as participation levels and education.

Though higher levels of anger – at least for conservatives and Republicans – are associated with higher degrees of partisan issue consistency, the implications of higher partisan issue consistency are unclear. In Section 1, I argued that higher levels of partisan issue consistency would be associated with higher perceptions that the government is unresponsive to the concerns and interests of the public. In order to test this empirically, I estimate models as shown in Equation 3 via ordinary least squares (OLS). As with the models estimating the relationship between anger and partisan issue consistency, the models shown here are run on four subsets of the data: ideological conservatives, ideological liberals, Republicans, and Democrats.

[Table 4 about here.]

The results in Table 4 follow a similar pattern to those in Table 3. For ideological conservatives and Republicans, higher scores on the partisan issue consistency measure are associated with higher belief that the national government is unresponsive to the concerns and interests of the public. The coefficient estimate for ideological conservatives indicates that a one unit increase on the partisan issue consistency score is associated with a .45 increase in the rating individuals give on the 0-10 government unresponsiveness scale. The relationship is slightly smaller for Republicans, with a one unit increase on the partisan issue

consistency score being associated with a .40 increase on the government unresponsiveness scale. In both cases, then, conservatives and Republicans who exhibit higher degrees of partisan issue consistency view the national government as less responsive to the concerns and interests of the public.

Interestingly, the coefficient estimates for ideological liberals and Democrats are in the opposite direction than they are for ideological conservatives and Republicans. This indicates that, as partisan issue consistency scores increase for these sorts of people, perceptions of government unresponsiveness also decrease. As with the findings regarding anger and partisan issue consistency, these results run contrary to the theorized expectation.

### 3.1 Ideological and Partisan Asymmetry

There are two notable patterns that emerge from these results. The first is that higher levels of anger is associated with higher partisan issue consistency for conservatives and Republicans but not for liberals and Democrats. Given these findings, the theory outlined in this paper is only half-confirmed at best. However, given what we know about the nature of polarization and partisan behavior in the United States – both among the elites and the masses – such a finding is not terribly surprising. While many scholars argue that polarization is occurring, it is clear that polarization is a phenomenon largely driven by one of the two main political parties. The fact that Republicans have become more conservative over time than Democrats have become liberal has produced a stark asymmetry in polarization (see, e.g., Mann and Ornstein, 2012; Butler, 2009).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>For further evidence of this trend in asymmetric polarization, see the following report from the Pew Research Center: <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>.

Given what we know about the types of people who tend to be polarized *and* the arguments put forth in Section 1, it makes sense that anger is associated with higher partisan issue consistency for conservatives and Republicans only. The most polarized individuals tend to be the most “biased, active, and angry” (Mason, 2015) and hold the most negative views toward the opposing party and its supporters (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016). This negativity and anger is largely rooted in ideological disagreements (Rogowski and Sutherland, 2015). Because Republicans and conservatives have been the progenitors of the rise of polarization in the American electorate, we should see anger being a larger factor in influencing partisan issue consistency for these individuals than for liberals and Democrats. Thus, while the original theory outlined in Section 1 argued that higher levels of anger would be associated with higher levels of partisan issue consistency for both sides of the political divide, the fact that we see this pattern only on the political right fits with what we know from the larger literature on political behavior (Huber et al., 2015).

The second pattern that emerges from these results is closely related to the first. In examining the relationship between partisan issue consistency and beliefs about government responsiveness, we see evidence that ideological conservatives and Republicans are more likely to believe that government is unresponsive to the public’s concerns and interests when they have higher partisan issue consistency. Ideological liberals and Democrats, meanwhile, exhibit the opposite pattern. Why might liberals and Democrats be more likely to believe that government is responsive to the needs and concerns of the public when they have higher partisan issue consistency? One possibility is that liberals and Democrats often attempt to enact their political agenda through government agencies. In this sense, having a high degree of partisan issue consistency – for instance, believing that government should do more to

protect the rights of gay and lesbian Americans, and pursue stricter gun regulations – and believing that government is responsive are by no means incompatible. After all, if liberals and Democrats were to believe that government is unresponsive to the public’s concerns and interests, it would make little sense to pursue social and political goals through government. Thus, it appears as though liberals and Democrats with a high degree of partisan issue consistency by definition should have higher beliefs in government responsiveness. However, this is only one possible explanation. Indeed, examining the precise reason for these differing effects across partisan and ideological lines is likely to be a fruitful avenue for future work.

### **3.2 A Note on the Causal Ordering**

Though the above results indicate that higher levels of anger – at least for Republicans and ideological conservatives – are associated with higher levels of partisan issue consistency, we must be careful to avoid interpreting them in a causal sense. The results shown here have been interpreted as if anger is a mechanism leading to higher levels of partisan issue consistency. However, one concern is that the causal arrow goes the other way. That is, instead of anger affecting levels of partisan issue consistency, having a high degree of partisan issue consistency could be affecting individuals’ personality self-reports. While the data do not allow for an adjudication between these two causal pathways, extant theory provides a useful guide as to how these results should best be interpreted.

According to the literature from which it is derived, personality is seen as a stable characteristic of individuals that is formed early in the course of life and, once it is formed, seldom – if ever – changes (McCrae and Costa, 1994; Digman, 1989; Cobb-Clark and Schurer, 2012). As McCrae and Costa (1994) note, “the greatest part of the reliable variance (i.e., variance

not due to measurement error) in personality traits is stable." These same authors also show that personality stability exists across gender and racial groups. If personality is stable and formed largely during the early stages of life, then it seems implausible to assume that individuals both learn about politics and its associated nuances *and* adopt certain policy preferences before their personality begins to develop. The more likely explanation is that personality development is temporally prior to the formation of issue preferences.

However, one further objection is that, even if personality is formed before the adoption of issue preferences, it is possible that individuals might alter the ways in which they respond to a personality battery precisely because of their issue positions. Moreover, respondents may simply misunderstand the personality questions or they may present "false answers" as a form of social desirability bias (though neither of these problems are limited to surveys that seek to measure personality traits). Fortunately, empirical analyses suggest that social desirability plays a minimal role in survey responses. Citing numerous studies, Piedmont (1989) claims that "more direct and 'obvious' [survey] items possess better validity than subtle items" and that "when respondents are presented with a direct query about their internal state, they will give an honest and accurate response." Thus, concerns about social desirability bias in response to personality questions appear to be unfounded.

Finally, even if personality was not stable (and therefore was susceptible to changes given a survey battery) and/or individuals projected their issue positions onto survey batteries seeking to measure personality traits, such a problem is likely avoided here due to the way in which the survey was designed. Indeed, the questions measuring individuals' baseline level of anger on the NEO-PI-R scale was presented *before* the series of questions about issue positions. Accordingly, from a mechanical standpoint, it was impossible for respondents to

this survey to answer their personality questions based off of the way in which they answered questions about issue positions.

While causality cannot be determined given the nature of these data, theory and matters of research design suggest that the causal ordering flows from an individual's level of anger to her degree of partisan issue consistency. Arguing that the causal arrow instead points in the other direction would require more assumptions – assumptions that are tenuous at best.

## 4 Conclusion & Discussion

In this paper I have argued that higher levels of anger, as measured on the NEO-PI-R scale, are associated with greater partisan issue consistency. Moreover, I have argued that higher levels of partisan issue consistency should predict greater belief that the national government is unresponsive to the concerns and interests of the public. The results I have shown indicate that this pattern does exist, though only for ideological conservatives and those who self-identify as Republicans. While this suggests that the theoretical expectations outlined in this paper are only half correct, the fact that these findings exist only among conservatives and Republicans comports with previous findings in a range of literatures focusing on polarization and emotions and politics (see Section 3.1).

Moreover, while I am hesitant to make any causal claims regarding these findings, I have argued in Section 3.2 that any sort of causal relationship would most likely go *from* anger and *towards* partisan issue consistency. Though such an argument seems reasonable given the findings and implications of the extant literature, future work should utilize experimental designs in order to more properly adjudicate the direction of causality.

The relationship between anger and partisan issue consistency is not just an intellectual curiosity. Indeed, the results in this paper suggest that anger predicts partisan issue consistency, and that higher levels of partisan issue consistency – among conservatives and Republicans – is predictive of believing that the national government is unresponsive to the concerns and interests of the public. Assuming government should be a vehicle to solve social problems and provide for the collective good, having lower levels of belief that the government is capable of doing these things is problematic.

In addition to examining the relationship between anger, partisan issue consistency, and belief in government responsiveness, this paper contributes to the literature on personality and politics by introducing and using a new measure of personality. Though the NEO-PI-R has been in existence for some time now, it has yet to be used within political science. This is unfortunate because it is a more thorough measure of an individual's personality and, compared to the Big Five domain-level personality traits, is more theoretically tractable.

Crucially, the findings presented in this paper hinge upon the theoretical idea that, though an individual's personality tends to remain stable over time, changes in electoral and political contexts (such as a high degree of elite polarization) can make certain personality traits more or less salient for guiding patterns of behavior. Future work, then, should explore what sorts of factors can make personality traits – whether anger, anxiety, or something else – more or less salient within the political realm. Given the wide array of traits measured by the NEO-PI-R personality scale and the constantly shifting nature of political discourse, plenty of work remains for students of political behavior and political psychology.

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## 5 Appendix

### 5.1 NEO-PI-R Anger statements

*Please indicate, according to the scale provided below, how accurate each of these statements are as a description of yourself. (Note: options are “very inaccurate,” “moderately inaccurate,” “neither inaccurate nor accurate,” “moderately accurate,” and “very accurate.”)*

- I get angry easily. (positive-coded)
- I get irritated easily. (positive-coded)
- I get upset easily. (positive-coded)
- I am often in a bad mood. (positive-coded)
- I lose my temper. (positive-coded)
- I rarely get irritated. (reverse-coded)
- I seldom get mad. (reverse-coded)
- I am not easily annoyed. (reverse-coded)
- I keep my cool. (reverse-coded)
- I rarely complain. (reverse-coded)

### 5.2 Issue questions for constraint measures

1. Which of the following best represents your view on abortion?
  - By law, abortion should never be permitted.
  - The law should permit abortion only in cases of rape, incest, or when the woman’s life is in danger.
  - The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman’s life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established.
  - By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.
2. At present, anyone born in the United States is a citizen. Should the United States government deny automatic citizenship to American-born children of illegal immigrants?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I have no position on this issue

3. Do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?
  - Favor
  - Oppose
  - Oppose same-sex marriage but support civil unions
4. Affirmative action programs give preference to racial minorities in employment and college admissions in order to correct for past discrimination. Do you support or oppose affirmative action?
  - Strongly support
  - Somewhat support
  - Somewhat oppose
  - Strongly oppose
  - I have no position on this issue
5. In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of firearms should be . . .
  - More strict
  - Less strict
  - Kept as they are
6. From what you know about global climate change or global warming, which one of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?
  - Global climate change has been established as a serious problem, and immediate action is necessary.
  - There is enough evidence that climate change is taking place and some action should be taken.
  - We don't know enough about global climate change, and more research is necessary before we take any actions.
  - Concern about global climate change is exaggerated. No action is necessary.
  - Global climate change is not occurring; this is not a real issue.

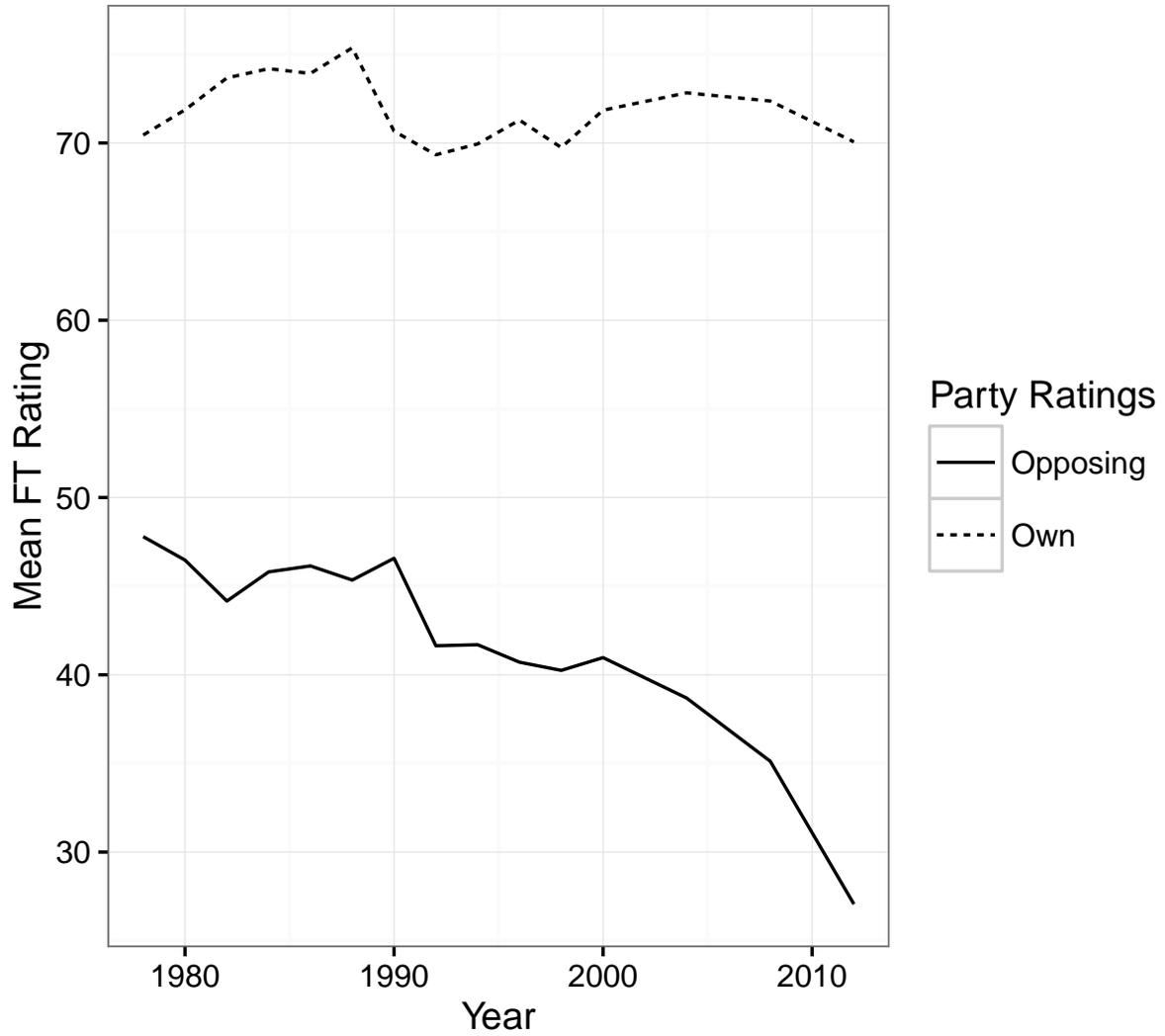


Figure 1: *Decline in Affect for the Opposing Party over Time.* Using data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) cumulative data file, this figure shows the trend in partisans' mean ratings of their own party and the opposing party over time. While Americans have changed little in their opinions toward their own party, their views about the opposing party have plummeted.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Personality Data

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
White	3,252	0.820	0.384	0	1
Black	3,252	0.066	0.249	0	1
Asian	3,252	0.038	0.190	0	1
NativeAmerican	3,252	0.009	0.094	0	1
Hispanic	3,252	0.055	0.229	0	1
OtherRace	3,252	0.012	0.110	0	1
HighSchoolOnly	3,248	0.146	0.353	0	1
SomeCollege	3,248	0.854	0.353	0	1
Male	3,255	0.428	0.495	0	1
Female	3,255	0.572	0.495	0	1
Democrat	3,247	0.521	0.500	0	1
Independent	3,247	0.108	0.310	0	1
Republican	3,247	0.371	0.483	0	1
Liberal	3,244	0.386	0.487	0	1
Conservative	3,244	0.331	0.471	0	1

Table 2: Summary Statistics for Partisan Issue Consistency Measures

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Conservative Partisan Issue Consistency	3,176	1.096	1.102	0	5
Liberal Partisan Issue Consistency	3,176	2.712	1.623	0	6

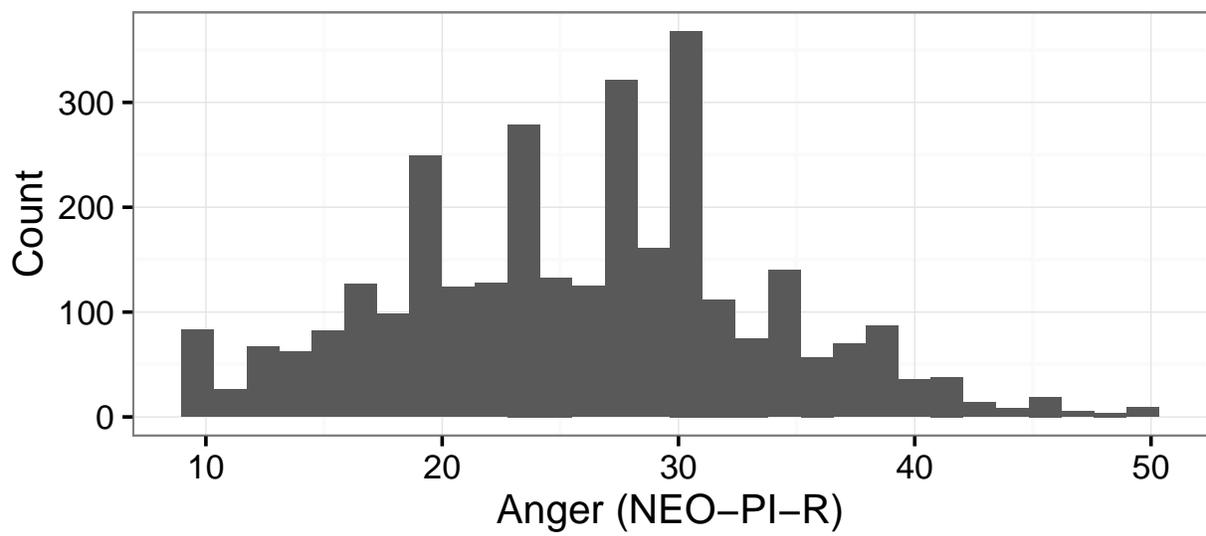


Figure 2: *Distribution of the NEO-PI-R Anger measure.* This histogram shows the distribution of the NEO-PI-R measure of anger. The variable ranges from 10 to 50 and has a mean value of 25.9.

	Partisan Issue Consistency			
	Conservatives	Republicans	Liberals	Democrats
Anger	0.010** (0.005)	0.009** (0.004)	-0.007 (0.005)	-0.012** (0.005)
Demographics:	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Partisanship:	Yes	No	Yes	No
N	983	1,107	1,144	1,548
R <sup>2</sup>	0.102	0.040	0.113	0.050

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

Table 3: *The Relationship Between Anger and Partisan Issue Consistency.* This table shows how scores on the NEO-PI-R measure of anger are related to partisan issue consistency. For ideological conservatives and self-identifying Republicans, higher levels of anger are associated with higher levels of partisan issue consistency.

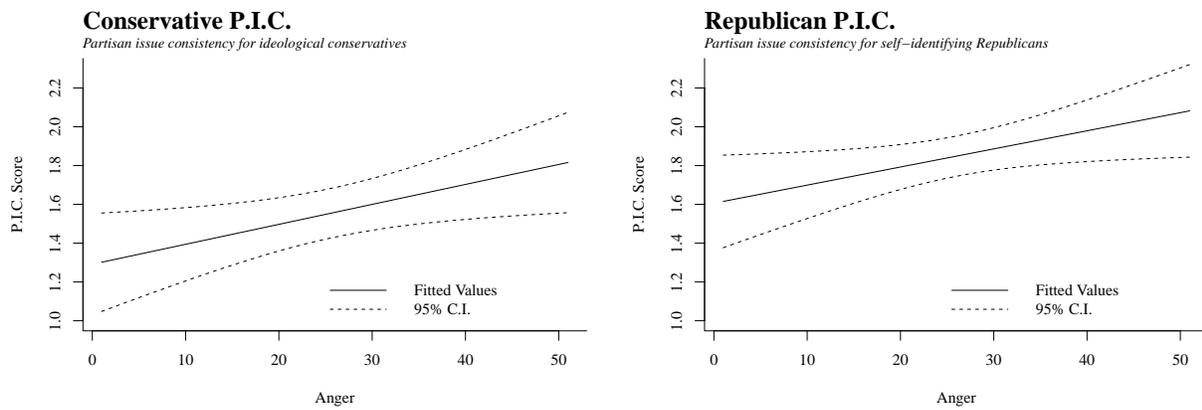


Figure 3: *Change in Partisan Issue Consistency given Level of Anger.* These figures show how an individual's level of partisan issue consistency increases for conservatives (left) and Republicans (right). Predicted values are derived from holding education, income, party identification, and participation levels at their mean values. Gender is set to male and the nonwhite dummy variable is set to zero.

	Govt. Unresponsiveness			
	Conservatives	Republicans	Liberals	Democrats
Partisan Issue Consistency	0.450*** (0.062)	0.403*** (0.054)	-0.180*** (0.054)	-0.174*** (0.045)
Demographics:	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Partisanship:	Yes	No	Yes	No
N	1,007	1,137	1,181	1,599
R <sup>2</sup>	0.079	0.087	0.035	0.020

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

Table 4: *Partisan Issue Consistency Predicts Belief in Government Responsiveness.* This table shows that ideological conservatives and self-identifying Republicans who have higher levels of partisan issue consistency are more likely to believe that the government is unresponsive to the concerns and interests of the public. The opposite pattern holds for ideological liberals and self-identifying Democrats.