

Anger and Partisan Issue Constraint

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Abstract

Contemporary American politics is characterized by the entrenchment of partisan identities. It is less clear whether—and to what extent—these divisions have precipitated an increase in issue constraint. Capturing the extent to which Americans know “what goes with what” in terms of political issues, most scholars argue that aggregate levels of constraint among the mass public are relatively low. Nevertheless, there is substantial variation in the extent to which individuals exhibit constraint. In this study, I argue that both political anger and generalized apolitical anger are associated with individual-level constraint. Results from two sources of data indicate that political anger is linked to higher levels of individual-level issue constraint for both Democrats and Republicans, while apolitical anger is associated with higher levels of constraint for Republicans and lower levels of constraint for Democrats. Broadly, the results suggest that psychological factors are an important component in the development of individuals’ political attitudes.

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American politics in the 21st century is characterized by partisan division. Divergence among the Democratic and Republican parties along various sociodemographic lines – particularly race (Abramowitz, 2018) – has produced a climate of rancor and incivility in the mass public (Mason, 2018). And, while Americans have sorted along partisan-ideological lines (Levendusky, 2009), most scholars maintain that the average voter exhibits little to no ideological sophistication. Accordingly, while ideological liberals have become more Democratic and ideological conservatives have become more Republican over time, the average American voter is nevertheless viewed by many as “ideologically innocent” (Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017, c.f. Bafumi and Shapiro, 2009).

Such a claim has a longstanding tradition in political science. Indeed, Converse’s (1964) famous examination of ideology (or “belief systems”) argued that most Americans have little to no structure in their ideological thinking. The mass public, according to Converse (1964), is largely characterized by “feeble levels of [issue] constraint” and is devoid of any “recognition or overarching ideological frames of reference.” Yet, while such a description can accurately be applied to a significant portion of the electorate, it nevertheless is true that some portion of Americans *are* able to engage in conceptual or ideological thinking and exhibit issue constraint (see, e.g., Jacoby, 1991; Kozlowski and Murphy, 2019).

Though the sources of variation in degrees of individual-level issue constraint are vast, psychological forces are particularly apt toward engendering higher amounts of issue constraint. In particular, higher degrees of individual-level anger should be associated with higher levels of issue constraint. Such an expectation is rooted in anger’s ability to lower self-reflection (Tiedens, 2001), reduce mental processing, and increase reliance on simple cues and heuristics when making evaluations or assessments (Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer, 1994). Because no cue is more prominent than partisanship (Campbell et al., 1960), anger has the ability to cause Americans to think of themselves in terms of their partisan identity. Coupled with political elites increasingly – and consistently – sending coherent messages as to “what goes

with what” in terms of issues (Layman et al., 2010), those who are angry should exhibit more constraint in their issue positions.

To examine whether higher levels of anger are associated with greater amounts of issue constraint, I draw on on the 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES) and a unique dataset fielded in the fall of 2016. Modeling levels of constraint across six issue areas, the results suggest that higher levels of both political anger and generalized apolitical anger are associated with greater issue constraint. However, the results also suggest a partisan asymmetry in terms of anger’s ability to increase issue constraint. For Republicans, both generalized apolitical anger and political anger are predictive of higher degrees of issue constraint. As both types of anger increase, the predicted degree of issue constraint rises monotonically. For Democrats, a diverging pattern exists: while higher levels of political anger predict greater levels of issue constraint, higher levels of generalized anger are associated with *lower* levels of issue constraint. Thus, like work describing the nature and the composition of the two major parties (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016), the relationship between anger and issue constraint appears to be asymmetric across party lines.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. First, I outline work on partisan issue constraint in the American electorate. Next, I develop a theory as to how anger should increase partisan issue constraint at the mass level. I then detail the data sources before presenting a series of results that largely corroborate my theoretical expectations. Finally, I conclude with some thoughts about the implication of these findings for American political behavior and public opinion.

1 Issue Constraint in the Mass Public

Introduced by Converse (1964), constraint is the idea that individuals know “what goes with what” in terms of political issues. For instance, “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” (Converse, 1964). When individuals consistently adopt issues that “go with” one another, they are said to have higher levels of issue constraint.

Whether individuals actually possess high levels of constraint has been the subject of considerable debate. Converse (1964) himself argued that only political elites were capable of having issue constraint and that the mass public was characterized by “the absence of recognition or understanding of overarching ideological frames of reference.” More recent works concur with this notion, arguing that the American electorate is largely characterized by instability in issue positions (Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008; Zaller, 1992). Such claims have received additional support from Kinder and Kalmoe (2017), who find that the extent to which the mass public engages in ideological thinking in modern day American politics is nearly identical to that of their counterparts from half a century ago. Thus, while Americans “identify with . . . baseball teams, hometowns, schools, religions, political parties, and more,” ideology – and the constraint that goes along with it – appears to be something that Americans do not grasp (Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017).

Others argue that issue constraint has moved beyond being a characteristic only of political elites and is now a pervasive element of the electorate writ large (Bafumi and Shapiro, 2009; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008). These same works argue that individuals have become more polarized over time (c.f. Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2005; Fiorina and Abrams, 2012). This polarization in issue positions, combined with the rise of issue constraint, implies that individuals are holding more consistent and more ideologically extreme issue positions. Indeed, some evidence suggests that both intra- and inter-issue correlations have risen over time; such a development implies that “the political opinions of the American public are, for the first time in at least 70 years, consolidating around a few clear axes of ideological operation” (Kozlowski and Murphy, 2019).

These debates focus predominately on the degree to which the mass public exhibits issue constraint in the aggregate. They also tend to focus largely on the overall level of issue constraint – whether constraint is low, high, or somewhere in between. Regardless of the overall level of issue constraint exhibited by the mass public, there are individual-level factors that have been shown to be associated with greater amounts of ideological thinking. For example, scholars have shown that higher amounts of education and a greater ability to engage in conceptual thinking are predictive of ideological thinking (Jacoby, 1991). Thus, regardless of whether the aggregate amount of issue constraint exhibited by the mass public is low or high, there appears to be factors that produce meaningful individual-level variation in issue constraint. In this study, I examine the ways in which anger can produce higher levels of issue constraint. Describing how anger should be expected to increase individual-level issue constraint is the task to which I now turn.

2 Anger and Issue Constraint

Like many emotions, anger has been shown to change the ways in which individuals engage with the world around them. However, while some emotions may prompt reflection or introspection, anger has been shown to reduce levels of deep mental processing. Instead of logically and critically examining information, those who are angry tend to increase their use of information shortcuts.

Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer (1994) illustrate anger’s ability to increase individuals’ reliance on information shortcuts. Using an experimental design to study sources of bias and attitudes among students, their study randomized three things: an anger prime, the ethnicity (Hispanic or not Hispanic) of a fictitious student, and a piece of information about the described student (participates in campus athletics or does not participate in campus athletics). Moreover, in one scenario respondents were told that the individual had cheated

on an academic test; in another, respondents were told that the described individual had been accused of assault. Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer (1994) find that angry individuals were more likely to believe that the Hispanic individual was guilty of assault and academic fraud; they were also more likely to believe that the non-Hispanic individual participated in campus athletics. Thus, anger had increased survey respondents' reliance on an individual's ethnicity when forming evaluations and judgments at the expense of rational thought. Put more succinctly, "angry people are more likely to rely on simple cues in reacting to social stimuli" (Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer, 1994).

Though Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer's (1994) results were obtained in regards to issues particularly salient to university students, the logic of their findings can be easily translated to the American electorate. In contemporary American politics, no heuristic or information shortcut is more prominent than partisan identification (see, e.g., Mason, 2015; Layman and Carsey, 2002; Campbell et al., 1960). Accordingly, if individuals have a predisposition to be angry, they should be more reliant on cues – especially one as prominent as partisanship – as to what issues partisan identifiers in the electorate should adopt. Additionally, 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 and extremity. 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 and extremity even though political elites are continuing to send polarized cues.

Moreover, anger should be expected to increase an individual's degree of issue constraint due to its psychological nature. While other emotions – such as anxiety – cause individuals to both question their beliefs and seek out new pieces of information, anger has the opposite effect. When experiencing anger, an individual is more likely to "mentally retreat" and

rely on the information they already possess and the beliefs that they already hold. Indeed, because anger has 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.

Recent work adroitly illustrates this relationship via an experimental design. After arousing incidental anger among experiment participants via an emotional recall design (Lerner and Keltner, 2001; Lerner et al., 2003), Huber et al. (2015) found that individuals affiliated more strongly with their own party (this effect is particularly salient among self-identifying Republicans) *and* perceived a greater distance between the two major political parties. Additionally, individuals showed higher levels of “endorsement of partisan attitudes” after being primed to exhibit higher levels of anger (Huber et al., 2015). Thus, anger increases both issue constraint (i.e., “endorsement of partisan attitudes”) and issue extremity (Sadler et al., 2005), and effects of anger on political attitudes have been found regardless of whether the anger elicited is political in nature or not (Webster, 2018).

Examining the relationship between anger—both political and apolitical—and issue constraint is important because individual-level anger has been rising in the United States. In terms of political anger, data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) cumulative file show that the proportion of Americans who reported ever feeling angry at the opposing party’s presidential candidate has risen over time. When the ANES first asked this question in 1980, 49% of Americans reported ever feeling angry at the out-party’s candidate.¹ This number rose to just under 57% in 1996 before falling in 2000. However, recent years have seen a marked increase in anger: in 2012 and 2016, 64.8% and 89.7% of Americans

¹These numbers are calculated using the face-to-face weights in the ANES cumulative file.

reported feeling angry at the opposing party’s presidential candidate. The trends in political anger are shown in Figure 1(a).

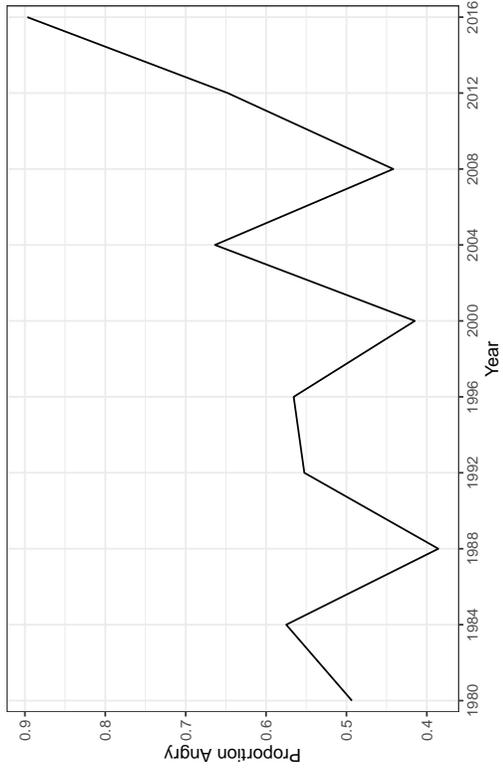
In addition to this rise in political anger, Americans’ generalized apolitical anger also appears to have spiked. Data from the Gallup Global Emotions report – shown in Figure 1(b) – has repeatedly asked Americans whether they “experienced anger yesterday,” a question designed to capture generalized anger in the American public. As of 2017, 17% of Americans indicated that they had experienced anger the day prior to being surveyed. By 2018, this number had jumped to 22%. This represents an approximately 30% increase in the percentage of people who reported feeling angry. Translated into raw numbers, this indicates that nearly 72 million Americans experienced some form of anger in the 2018 wave of the survey.²

3 Research Design

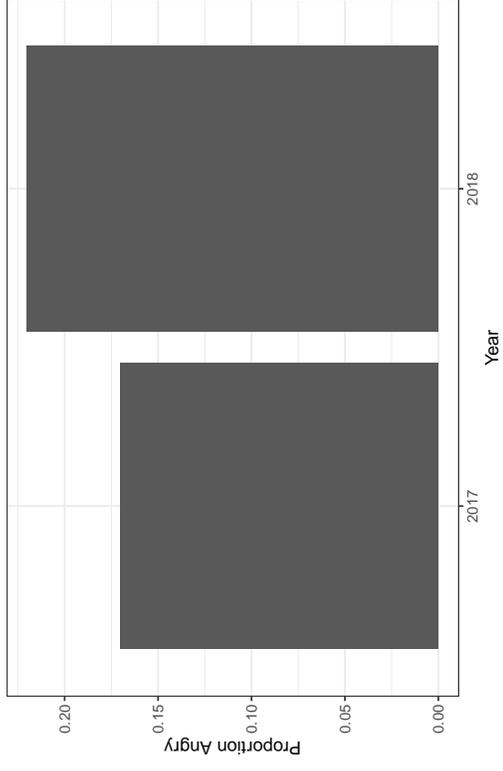
The data for this study come from two sources. First, I use data from the 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES) to examine the relationship between issue constraint and *political* anger. The second data source examines the relationship between issue constraint and apolitical, or *generalized*, anger. This second set of data is derived from a larger survey on personality, emotions, and political behavior (hereafter, referred to as the “personality data”). Fielded via Survey Sampling International (SSI) in late 2016, 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 3 in the Appendix.

To measure partisan issue constraint in the ANES data, I relied on individuals’ responses to six issue items: support or opposition towards same-sex marriage, gun control (e.g.,

²A broader overview of the Gallup Global Emotions report can be found at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/249098/americans-stress-worry-anger-intensified-2018.aspx>.



(a) Political Anger in the U.S.



(b) Generalized Apolitical Anger in the U.S.

Figure 1: *Americans' political and apolitical anger*. These figures show the rise of political and apolitical anger in the American public.

purchasing a firearm should be: more difficult, easier, or kept the same); limits on access to abortions; degree of support or opposition to ending birthright citizenship for the children of immigrants; views on regulating businesses in order to limit carbon emissions; and, finally, views on affirmative action in college admissions. In each case, respondents could pick the most liberal option, the most conservative option, or an option – or set of options – in between. The full list of potential responses to these questions can be found in the Appendix.

To measure partisan issue constraint in the personality data, I asked individuals to state their preferences on the same six issues: 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”). As with the ANES data, the full list of potential responses to the questions used to measure issue constraint in the personality data can be found in the Appendix.

In both datasets, responses to these issue position questions were combined to create a measure of issue constraint for each individual. For those who self-identify as Republicans, constraint scores were calculated by summing the number of times that individual indicated that the most conservative response was closest to their own policy preference. Likewise, for those who self-identify as Democrats, constraint was measured by summing the number of times that individual chose the most liberal response as being closest to their own policy preference. Note that, because an individual has to indicate a preference for the *most* conservative or liberal position for Republicans or Democrats, respectively, across these six issue areas, this produces a conservative measure of individual-level issue constraint. In the

personality data, constraint scores are low: ranging from possible values of 0-6, the mean value for Republicans is 1.7; similarly ranging from possible values of 0-6, the mean value for Democrats is 3.5. In the ANES data, constraint scores also range from 0-6 and have a mean value of 2.7 for Republicans and 3.4 for Democrats.

3.1 Empirical Strategy

In order to examine the relationship between an individual’s level of anger and issue constraint, I run models with the following functional form on both the ANES data and the personality data:

$$pic_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \rho_i + \mathbf{X}_i + \epsilon_i \tag{1}$$

where pic_i denotes individual i ’s level of partisan issue constraint and ρ_i is individual i ’s level of anger. To measure anger in the ANES data, I rely on a question that asked respondents how frequently they felt angry toward the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. Here, anger is measured by the frequency with which respondents felt angry at the opposing party’s presidential candidate. Thus, for Democrats anger is measured by the frequency with which they felt angry at the Republican Party’s presidential candidate; analogously, for Republicans anger is measured by the frequency with which they felt angry at the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate. These measures capture an explicitly political form of mass-level anger. Higher values on this measure are indicative of a greater level of anger.

To measure anger in the personality data, I rely on the NEO-PI-R measure of Angry Hostility. This measure, which is a facet-level trait of the Big Five “emotional stability” metric, is comprised of ten statements that measure an individual’s disposition toward being

angry or calm throughout the course of the day, week, month, or year.³ The Angry Hostility facet-level trait is measured by a series of ten statements, half of which are positively coded and half of which are reverse coded.⁴ Respondents are asked to indicate how accurate each statement is as a description of their own life by selecting one of five answers: the description is “very inaccurate,” “moderately inaccurate,” “neither inaccurate nor accurate,” “moderately accurate,” or a “very accurate” description of themselves.⁵ Examples of statements include “I get angry easily,” “I get upset easily,” “I am not easily annoyed,” and “I keep my cool.” The full list of statements used to measure an individual’s personality-governed level of anger can be found in the Appendix. After responses to the statements have been registered, scores are combined to produce an overall metric of anger that ranges from 0-40. As with the ANES measure of anger, higher values on this measure are indicative of a greater level of anger. However, unlike the ANES measure, this measure of anger is apolitical – or *generalized* – in nature. It captures the overall tendency of an individual to express anger in his or her daily life.

To minimize the amount of confounding in my estimates, I include a series of control variables captured by \mathbf{X}_i in Equation 1. Control variables include individual i ’s level of education, race, household income, self-reported ideology (coded such that higher values indicate a more conservative and liberal ideology for Republicans and Democrats, respectively), 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

³NEO-PI-R measures of personality are proprietary tests of *Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.* and their usage is prohibited in academic studies. Therefore, the measure used here is derived from an “open source” measure of the NEO-PI-R developed by psychologists. Though the measures are not identical, the “open source” measure used here is strongly correlated with the proprietary version – indeed, the correlation between the two is .90. For more information see, http://ipip.ori.org/newNEO_FacetsTable.htm.

⁴This coding scheme is used in order to correct for any social desirability bias that might arise while respondents are answering the questionnaire.

⁵These responses are coded to range from 0-4.

during the 2016 campaign, attempting to persuade another person’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 the strength of individual i ’s partisan self-identification. The model shown in Equation 1 is estimated separately for Republicans and Democrats, and is run only on those individuals who are registered voters. Estimation is via ordinary least squares (OLS).

4 Results

4.1 Political Anger and Issue Constraint

To begin, I first examine the relationship between political anger and issue constraint in the mass public. Table 1 displays the results of the regressions of issue constraint on anger from the 2016 ANES. All model estimations occur separately on Republicans and Democrats, with some specifications including a measure of the strength of an individual’s partisanship. Moreover, estimation occurs only on those individuals who indicated that they were registered to vote in 2016.

The results of these models suggest that those individuals who are more ideologically extreme exhibit a greater amount of issue constraint. Similarly, those individuals who identify as “strong partisans” have more issue constraint than those who do not. Most importantly, however, are the relationships between anger and issue constraint. For both Republicans and Democrats, the results of the models in Table 1 indicate that higher levels of anger are associated with greater issue constraint. These relationships hold regardless of whether a measure of one’s strength of partisanship is included, though the relationship between anger and issue constraint among Democrats is slightly attenuated when conditioning on this variable.

Table 1: Anger and Ideological Constraint Across Partisanship (ANES)

	Issue Constraint		Issue Constraint	
	Republicans	Republicans	Democrats	Democrats
Anger	0.227*** (0.028)	0.218*** (0.028)	0.181*** (0.032)	0.162*** (0.032)
Education	-0.072 (0.061)	-0.060 (0.060)	0.273*** (0.062)	0.285*** (0.062)
Non-white	-0.061 (0.104)	-0.045 (0.104)	0.012 (0.080)	-0.009 (0.080)
Income	-0.022*** (0.005)	-0.022*** (0.005)	0.008* (0.005)	0.009* (0.005)
Ideology	0.404*** (0.035)	0.366*** (0.037)	0.397*** (0.032)	0.384*** (0.032)
Female	-0.113* (0.069)	-0.132* (0.069)	-0.058 (0.073)	-0.064 (0.073)
Participation Scale	0.015 (0.024)	0.009 (0.024)	0.135*** (0.020)	0.128*** (0.020)
Strong Partisan		0.235*** (0.074)		0.218*** (0.076)
Constant	0.297 (0.229)	0.420* (0.231)	0.048 (0.207)	0.072 (0.207)
N	1,085	1,085	1,098	1,098
R ²	0.233	0.240	0.309	0.314

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

To more clearly illustrate the relationship between political anger and issue constraint in this data, I next generate predicted constraint scores for both Democrats and Republicans as anger ranges from its minimum to its maximum value. These predicted constraint scores are calculated by holding all other variables at their mean values. These predictions are shown in Figure 2.

The left panel of 2 displays predicted constraint scores for self-identified Democrats. For these individuals, having the lowest amount of anger yields a predicted constraint score of 3.04. This score increases to 3.23 at the next level of anger, 3.4 at the third highest level of anger, and 3.57 at the fourth highest level of anger. At the maximum level of anger, predicted constraint scores for Democrats reach a value of 3.77. This increase from the lowest to the highest amount of anger is associated with a 24% increase in the predicted amount of issue constraint.

A similar pattern emerges for Republicans (right panel of Figure 2). For Republicans with the lowest levels of political anger, the predicted constraint score is 2.04. As anger increases to the next highest level, the predicted constraint score rises to 2.26. At the third highest level of anger, predicted constraint scores for self-identified Republicans reaches 2.49. At the fourth highest level of anger, predicted constraint scores climb to 2.72. Finally, Republicans with the highest level of political anger are predicted to have constraint scores of 2.95. As with self-identified Democrats, this move from the lowest to the highest amount of political anger predicts a significant increase in issue constraint. Indeed, moving from one end of the anger scale to the other is associated with an increase of 44.6% on the measure of predicted issue constraint.

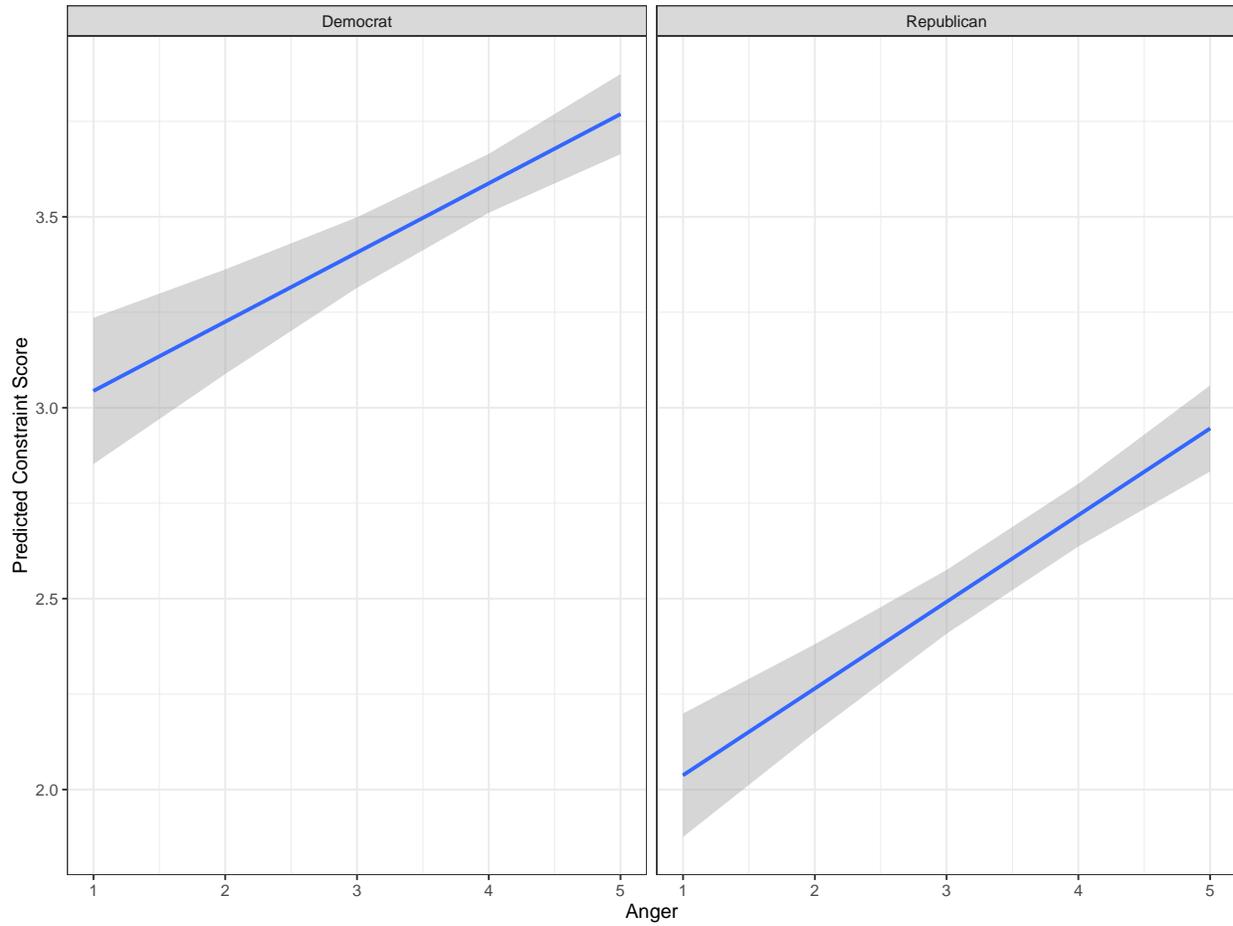


Figure 2: *Political Anger and Predicted Issue Constraint*. This figure shows how issue constraint increases for both Democrats (left panel) and Republicans (right panel) as political anger increases.

4.2 Generalized Apolitical Anger and Issue Constraint

While the preceding results have shown that higher amounts of anger are linked to greater issue constraint among the mass public, it is possible that this relationship is driven by the fact that the anger is explicitly political in nature. To examine whether this is the case, and whether apolitical – or *generalized* – anger can also shape levels of issue constraint in the mass public, I now draw on the personality data described in Section 3.

To examine whether apolitical, or *generalized*, anger is related to higher levels of issue constraint, I present a series of regression results in Table 2. These results show that, for Republicans, non-White respondents tend to have lower amounts of ideological constraint. A similar pattern is observed for those with greater amounts of income and for women. On the other hand, the results of the model indicate that those Republicans who are more ideologically conservative tend to have higher amounts of issue constraint. Similarly, those who identify as strong Republicans and those who are more active in politics tend to also exhibit higher amounts of issue constraint.

Most important for the purposes of this study is the relationship between personality-governed levels of anger and partisan issue constraint. Among Republicans, the positive coefficient on this estimate indicates that those who are angrier tend to exhibit greater amounts of partisan issue constraint. This relationship exists in both the model that conditions on the strength of an individual’s partisan identification and the one that does not.

Similar to the models estimated on self-identified Republicans, Democrats with a more liberal ideology tend to have higher levels of issue constraint. Identifying as a strong Democrat is associated with higher levels of issue constraint, as is being more engaged in politics. Contrary to the models estimated on Republicans, however, female Democrats are predicted to have higher levels of issue constraint than male Democrats.

Interestingly, the relationship between anger and issue constraint among Democrats is the opposite of that for Republicans. While Republicans who are angry tend to have greater

	Issue Constraint		Issue Constraint	
	Republicans	Republicans	Democrats	Democrats
Anger	0.009** (0.004)	0.009** (0.004)	-0.016*** (0.004)	-0.016*** (0.004)
Education	0.0005 (0.025)	0.003 (0.024)	0.081*** (0.025)	0.079*** (0.025)
Non-white	-0.253** (0.110)	-0.233** (0.109)	0.074 (0.077)	0.061 (0.078)
Income	-0.019* (0.010)	-0.018* (0.010)	-0.0005 (0.010)	-0.0004 (0.010)
Ideology	0.246*** (0.024)	0.221*** (0.025)	0.323*** (0.023)	0.315*** (0.023)
Female	-0.234*** (0.066)	-0.232*** (0.066)	0.322*** (0.069)	0.327*** (0.069)
Participation Scale	0.053*** (0.012)	0.046*** (0.012)	0.047*** (0.012)	0.043*** (0.012)
Strong Partisan		0.206*** (0.070)		0.117* (0.070)
Constant	0.273 (0.185)	0.325* (0.186)	1.381*** (0.174)	1.391*** (0.174)
N	1,106	1,106	1,540	1,540
R ²	0.132	0.138	0.164	0.166

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

Table 2: *Anger and Issue Constraint Across Partisanship.* This table shows the relationship between anger and ideological constraint for both Democrats and Republicans. For Republicans, higher levels of personality-governed anger are associated with greater amounts of ideological constraint.

amounts of issue constraint, higher levels of personality-governed anger among Democrats are associated with *lower* levels of issue constraint. As with the models estimated on self-identified Republicans, this relationship exists whether or not a measure of strength of partisanship is included.

To more substantively illustrate the relationship between personality-governed levels of anger and issue constraint, Figure 3 displays the predicted constraint score for Democrats (in the left panel) and Republicans (in the right panel) as levels of anger increase. These predictions are derived from the models displayed in Table 2; all control variables are held at their mean values. The trends shown in Figure 3 clearly indicate that anger works in opposite ways for Democrats and Republicans. For Democrats, there is a monotonic decrease in predicted constraint scores as anger increases. For Republicans, the opposite is true: higher levels of personality-governed anger are associated with a monotonic increase in the predicted amount of issue constraint. Though these relationships might seem small, it is important to note that the possible range of constraint scores is quite small: as mentioned in Section 3, possible constraint scores range from 0-6, and the maximum observed constraint score among Republicans is 5. Moreover, examining the percentage increase or decrease reveals that changes in anger represent meaningful shifts in the predicted amount of constraint exhibited by any individual. For Republicans, moving from the lowest amount of anger to the higher amount of anger is associated with a 24.4% increase in the predicted amount of constraint. For Democrats, this same jump in anger is associated with a 17% decrease in the predicted amount of issue constraint.

What is most remarkable about these findings is that they are driven by a measure of a stable, individual-level disposition. Indeed, one's personality traits, including their trait-based level of anger, tend to form early in the course of life and – for the most part – exhibit a tremendous amount of stability (Cobb-Clark and Schurer, 2012; McCrae and Costa, 1994). Accordingly, these results suggest that some individuals are predisposed by their proclivity

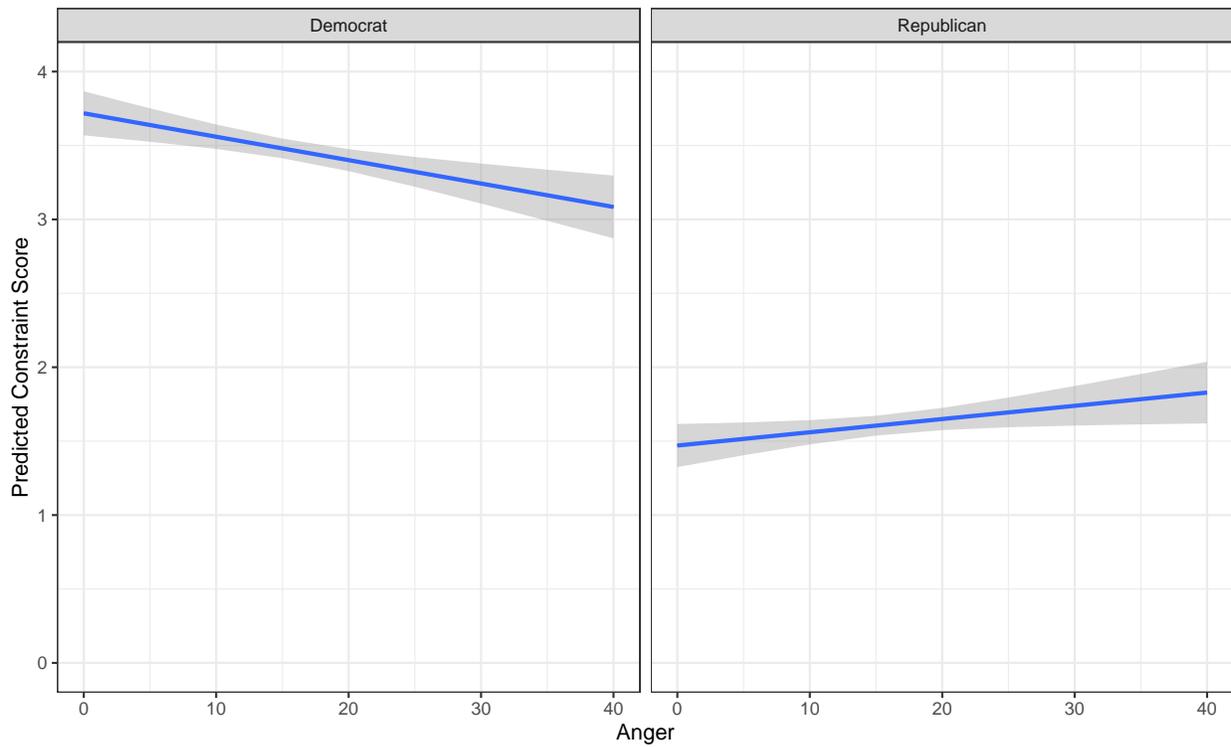


Figure 3: *Generalized Anger and Predicted Issue Constraint*. This figure shows how issue constraint increases for Republicans (right panel) and decreases for Democrats (left panel) as personality-governed levels of anger increase.

towards being angry to have greater amounts of issue constraint than others. Despite accounting for predictors one would think would be most important in terms of explaining degrees of issue constraint (such as ideological extremity or one’s level of political participation), the results shown in Table 2 and Figure 3 suggest that a non-trivial portion of the variance in individuals’ levels of issue constraint is due to a factor that is distinctly personal: trait-based anger.

One notable aspect about these results is that, unlike the results shown in Table 1, the relationship between anger and issue constraint among Democrats is negative when analyzed using the personality data. What explains these contradictory results? The most likely explanation for these differing findings is the operationalization of anger. In the models shown in Table 1, anger was measured by the frequency with which individuals reported feeling angry at the opposing party’s presidential candidate. In this models shown in Table 2, anger is measured by self-reports on a personality battery. The former measure of anger, then, is explicitly political; the latter measure is one that is apolitical, or *generalized*, in nature. That these differing measures of anger produce different results for Democrats, but not Republicans, suggests that anger operates in different ways across the two parties.

That anger can operate differently for Democrats and Republicans has grounding in recent work. As Phoenix (2019) notes in his study of race and anger, Whites and non-Whites channel their anger in markedly different ways. While Whites tend to exhibit higher levels of political engagement when angry, non-Whites are more prone to exhibiting political resignation. Because the Republican Party is predominately White, while the Democratic Party is more racially diverse, it is unsurprising that generalized apolitical anger translates into political attitudes in different ways across partisan lines (see also, Banks, 2014).

Moreover, generalized apolitical anger may be related to lower levels of issue constraint for Democrats because the Democratic Party is less ideologically homogeneous than the Republican Party. While the contemporary Republican Party is best viewed as a vehicle for

ideological conservatives, the Democratic Party is more accurately seen as a constellation of varying groups and group-interests (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016). Lacking a comparatively less rigid ideological framework, Democrats may have a more difficult time translating apolitical anger into consistently liberal political attitudes.

Regardless of the precise nature of these diverging patterns, the results presented above suggest that, for Republicans, anger is associated with higher amounts of issue constraint—this is the case whether the anger is apolitical or political in nature. For Democrats, the results presented in this paper suggest that the relationship between anger and issue constraint is dependent upon the type of anger: apolitical anger is associated with lower issue constraint, while political anger is associated with greater issue constraint. More precisely understanding the psychological underpinnings of these differences promises to be a fruitful avenue for future research.

5 Conclusion & Discussion

The results presented above reveal interesting dynamics about the nature of issue constraint in the American public. First, overall levels of issue constraint remain at moderate levels. Nevertheless, these results suggest that there are important sources of variation in predicting the amount of issue constraint that any given individual exhibits. In particular, the results suggest that anger is a powerful force in shaping individual-level issue constraint. Among Republicans, higher amounts of both political and apolitical anger are predictive of greater levels of issue constraint. Among Democrats, more frequently experiencing political anger is predictive of greater issue constraint; however, greater amounts of apolitical anger are linked to lower amounts of issue constraint. Such a finding is likely due to the demographic compositions of the Democratic and Republican parties, coupled with the differing ways in which individuals process their anger (see, e.g., Phoenix, 2019; Banks, 2014).

These results suggest that, should anger continue to rise (as shown in Figures 1(a) & 1(b)), issue constraint among the mass public can be expected to increase. This is particularly true if the anger expressed by the mass public is political in nature. Because anger can aid in elites' desires to be re-elected (Webster, 2020), it is likely that the mass public will continue to receive cues and signals that seek to elicit their anger. Yet, for some portion of the electorate, anger need not be political in nature for issue constraint to increase. Among self-identifying Republicans, even generalized apolitical anger is associated with higher levels of issue constraint. Thus, to the extent issue constraint is harmful in that it proscribes an honest assessment as to the most appropriate policy prescription in any given issue domain, tamping down the amount of political anger in the United States is likely to be only a partial remedy.

Nevertheless, the results presented in this study do merit additional examination. Though the issues used to measure issue constraint in this study are important and salient points of debate in contemporary American politics, it is possible that individuals will exhibit different amounts of constraint in other issue areas. Accordingly, one area for future research is to examine the relationship between anger and issue constraint across new issue domains. Relatedly, future work should consider the sources of individual-level variation in issue constraint among non-voters. Given that voters tend to be more engaged in the political process than their non-voting counterparts (Abramowitz, 2010), understanding the similarities and differences between these two segments of the population is important. Finally, future work should consider the potential moderating effects of media consumption on the relationship between anger and issue constraint. With partisan media growing in popularity, the increasing reliance on physiologically arousing segments (Mutz, 2007), and the media prone to presenting ideologically extreme politicians (Wagner and Gruszczynski, 2017), it is likely that exposure to these partisan cues should strengthen the ties between anger and issue constraint. With anger continuing to rise, plenty of work remains for students of political psychology and

political behavior.

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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)

Issue questions for constraint measures in personality data

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.

Issue questions for constraint measures in ANES data

1. Which comes closest to your view?
 - Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry.
 - Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions but not legally marry.
 - There should be no legal recognition of a gay or lesbian couple's relationship.
2. Do you think the federal government should make it more difficult for people to buy a gun than it is now, make it easier for people to buy a gun, or keep these rules about the same as they are now?
 - More difficult.
 - Keep these rules about the same.
 - Easier.
3. There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your views?

- By law, abortion should never be permitted.
 - The law should permit abortion only in case 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.
4. Some people have proposed that the U.S. Constitution should be changed so that the children of unauthorized immigrants do not automatically get citizenship if they are born in this country. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose this proposal?
- Favor.
 - Oppose.
 - Neither favor nor oppose.
5. Some people think the federal government needs to regulate business to protect the environment. They think that efforts to protect the environment will also create jobs. Let us say this is point 1 on a 1-7 point scale. Others think that the federal government should not regulate business to protect the environment. They think this regulation will not do much to help the environment and will cost us jobs. Let us say this is point 7 on a 1-7 scale. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?
- Regulate business to protect the environment and create jobs.
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -
 - No regulation because it will not work and will cost jobs.
6. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose allowing universities to increase the number of black students studying at their schools by considering race along with other factors when choosing students?
- Favor.
 - Neither favor nor oppose.
 - Oppose.

Table 3: Summary Statistics of Personality Data

Statistic	N	Proportion	Min	Max
White	3,252	0.820	0	1
Black	3,252	0.066	0	1
Asian	3,252	0.038	0	1
Native American	3,252	0.009	0	1
Hispanic	3,252	0.055	0	1
Other Race	3,252	0.012	0	1
High School Only	3,248	0.146	0	1
Some College	3,248	0.854	0	1
Male	3,255	0.428	0	1
Female	3,255	0.572	0	1
Democrat	3,247	0.521	0	1
Independent	3,247	0.108	0	1
Republican	3,247	0.371	0	1
Liberal	3,244	0.386	0	1
Conservative	3,244	0.331	0	1