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# Why Do I Hate Thee? Conflict Misperceptions and Intergroup Mistrust

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*Members of partisan social groups often exaggerate how much their own opinions differ from those of their rivals. In the present two studies, partisans estimated their own and their rivals' attitudes toward different issues related to the social conflict and also made a variety of evaluative judgments about their own and the rival group. The authors found that (a) partisans perceive more disagreement with their rivals about values that are central to their own sides' ideological position than those that are central to their rivals' position and (b) perceptions of disagreement about the partisans' own central values are what predicts partisans' global evaluations of members of the outgroup (e.g., disliking, trait stereotypes, perceived similarity). Furthermore, partisans believed their adversaries were motivated by an opposition to the partisans' own core values rather than by promotion of the adversaries' core values. Discussion concentrates on the theoretical and applied implications of these findings.*

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**Keywords:** *egocentrism; conflict; stereotyping; intergroup perception; negotiation; prejudice*

Conflict between social groups is pervasive. Republicans and Democrats, prolife and prochoice individuals, labor unions and business management, environmentalists and industrialists, and prowar "Hawk" and antiwar "Dove" camps are only a few examples of the many social groups that are in conflict with one another. There are relatively benign instances of this conflict, such as the innocent bickering between Republicans and Democrats about political affairs, but on occasion, this conflict can escalate into more serious forms of hostility, violence, and cruelty, such as the lethal attacks on abortion providers by those who militantly oppose legalized abortion.

What causes intergroup conflict and tension? Although the exact cognitive and motivational forces are likely to be complex, one source of conflict may be misperceptions partisans have about their adversaries'

opinions. The existing research on intergroup perceptions of attitudes suggests that partisans frequently misperceive the attitudes of their rivals. For example, Robinson, Keltner, and colleagues (Keltner & Robinson, 1997; Robinson & Friedman, 1995; Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995) have shown evidence for an incompatibility error: Partisans perceive more disagreement between their own opinions and those of their rivals than exists in reality (cf. Dawes, Singer, & Lemons, 1972; Thompson, 1995). In one of their studies, they presented students who were for and against legalized abortion with scenarios describing cases of abortion, such as a high school-age girl who became pregnant by accident. For each scenario, participants rated the degree of sympathy they personally felt for the protagonist and estimated the level of sympathy felt by those on the opposite side. Not only did both groups of participants perceive large disagreement with their adversaries but their perceptions proved to be greatly exaggerated. For example, the prochoice participants felt highly sympathetic toward the protagonist and assumed that the typical prolife person would feel very little sympathy, when in fact, the prolife participants in the study reported feeling almost equally sympathetic. Replicating this incompatibility error with different social groups, Robinson and Friedman (1995) found that union and business representatives involved in a negotiation overestimated the extent to which they disagreed with each other

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about labor-related matters. Thus, the available evidence suggests that members of partisan social groups frequently misperceive the opinions, intentions, and motives of those in the rival group and, more specifically, they see disagreement with their rivals where no conflict exists.

More recently, Chambers and colleagues (Chambers, Baron, & Inman, 2006) have identified an important qualifier to this incompatibility error: Partisans perceive the most disagreement with their adversaries concerning the issues that are central to the partisan's own ideological stance. For example, Republicans view Democrats as being opposed to things such as a strong military and crime prevention, issues that are central to the conservative ideological platform. Democrats, in contrast, see Republicans as being opposed to things such as opportunities for minorities and environmental protection, which are issues central to the liberal platform. Whereas partisans perceive disagreement with their adversaries concerning the values that are central to their own side, they actually perceive much less (if any) disagreement concerning values that are central to their adversaries' ideological position. As an instance, Republicans believe that they and Democrats both favor opportunities for minorities, that is, they perceive agreement with Democrats about this issue.

What the existing literature does not tell us, however, is whether these perceptions of disagreement are linked to partisans' evaluative judgments of their adversaries, that is, none of the research mentioned above has examined whether perceptions of disagreement are associated with disliking of the outgroup (and perhaps liking for the ingroup). Intuitively, these perceptions should be associated with evaluative judgments about adversaries: the more disagreement partisans perceive between their own and their adversaries' opinions, the more they should dislike their adversaries, have negative stereotypes of the outgroup's traits, and so on. In fact, this is also an underlying assumption of research on intergroup perceptions of attitudes, but to our knowledge, none of the studies demonstrating incompatibility errors have examined this question or documented such a relationship.

The findings of Chambers et al. (2006) suggest that if there is a relationship between perceptions of disagreement and intergroup evaluations, it will be perceptions of disagreement about central issues that are most critical. For example, one reason Republicans may dislike Democrats and see them as unintelligent and stubborn is because they falsely assume Democrats are opposed to the things that are most dear to their own side, such as a strong national defense, crime deterrence, and a limited role of government. For Republicans, perceived

differences of opinion with Democrats about things such as environmental protection, opportunities for minorities, and other liberal-oriented values may simply not matter in determining how much they like or dislike Democrats. Thus, perceptions of disagreement and the incompatibility error may contribute to hostile intergroup relations, but it would be perceptions of disagreement about the partisans' own ideological values that would be most crucial.

Furthermore, although Chambers et al. (2006) were able to show asymmetric perceptions of disagreement between groups, they did not directly examine how partisans perceive the motivations and intentions of those in the outgroup. One factor contributing to intergroup conflict may be the belief among partisans that their adversaries work (actively and willfully) to undermine their own sides' core principles instead of the more benevolent—and realistic—view that their adversaries are simply motivated to advance the principles that are central to the adversaries' position. This malignant view of their adversaries' true intentions and goals may, in turn, foster the perception that they disagree more with their adversaries about their own side's core values than about their adversaries' core values. An alternative to this idea would be that partisans simply do not know much about their adversaries' opinions about their own core values, and in the absence of this factual knowledge, they assume their adversaries' opinions toward those issues must be different from their own (a conclusion that might be reached by perfectly rational thought processes). The latter idea does not necessarily suppose that partisans see their rivals as intentionally working to undermine their own side's core values, but without explicitly examining partisans' perceptions of their adversaries' motivations, we cannot differentiate between each of these alternative notions.

Some of the ideas behind our research can be traced back to Milton Rokeach's (1960) work on belief-disbelief systems. In some of his research, Rokeach asked whether perceived differences of opinion, per se, contribute to prejudicial reactions to an outgroup member beyond superficial differences between the ingroup and outgroup, such as differences in skin color, ethnicity, and so forth. In one study, he had participants rate their attitudes toward various racial ingroup and outgroup members whose opinions about social issues were said to be congruent or incongruent with the participant's own opinions. What Rokeach (1960) found was that perceived difference of opinion—by itself—was a sufficient condition for intergroup prejudice. In fact, racial outgroup members who shared one's dominant views were sometimes preferred over racial ingroup members who opposed one's dominant views. However,

Rokeach did not distinguish which types of issues would be most critical in the perceived disagreement-prejudice relationship, whereas we specify that a partisan group's core issues are what is key. Thus, our ideas follow Rokeach's early research on this topic and significantly advances it by examining people's naturalistic perceptions of disagreement about different types of issues and how disagreement perceived about core issues, in particular, coincides with negative inferences about outgroup members.

The two studies we report attempted to fill these gaps in our knowledge about intergroup perceptions and conflict. A first goal was to replicate the findings of Chambers et al. (2006) by showing that partisans perceive and exaggerate disagreement more for value issues central to their own side than for value issues central to their adversaries' side. To do so, we presented partisans on both sides of a divisive social debate with various value issues, some that were central to their own ideological position and some that were central to their rivals' ideological position. For each issue, we had them rate their own attitude (i.e., self-ratings) and estimate the attitude of their rivals (i.e., outgroup estimates) on *favor* and *oppose* scales. Similar to Robinson et al. (1995) and Chambers et al. (2006), we then compared the average responses for each group to obtain three separate indices: actual disagreement (i.e., self-ratings vs. outgroup's self-ratings), perceived disagreement (i.e., self-ratings vs. outgroup estimates), and overestimated disagreement (i.e., outgroup estimates vs. outgroup's self-ratings).

The second major goal was to investigate whether perceptions of disagreement predict partisans' global feelings (e.g., liking, trait attributions) about members of the rival social group and about their own group. To examine this question, we also had partisans rate both groups on a series of trait adjective scales (e.g., kind, dishonest), directly compare their liking for the ingroup versus the outgroup, rate their similarity to members of the ingroup and outgroup, and so on. On the basis of Chambers et al.'s (2006) findings, we suspect that perceptions of disagreement about central values will predict specific evaluations of the ingroup and outgroup, but perceptions of disagreement about the outgroup's central values will matter little, if at all.

As a third goal, we asked partisans in both studies questions explicitly designed to see how they perceived both the nature of the wider debate as well as the motivations driving their adversaries and their opinions. We make the counterintuitive prediction that partisans are more likely to think that their adversaries are motivated by an opposition to their own side's core values rather than advancing the core values of their adversaries' ideological position.

#### STUDY 1: ABORTION

As an initial investigation, we surveyed prolife and prochoice individuals concerning issues related to the debate about legalized abortion, namely, women's reproductive rights, freedom from government interference in private lives, the value of human life, and a moral code of sexual conduct. Previous research by Chambers et al. (2006) has demonstrated that prochoice and prolife individuals tend to perceive more disagreement with their adversaries concerning issues central to their own side than those central to their adversaries' side. For instance, prochoice individuals assume prolife persons are opposed to women's reproductive rights—one of the core prochoice values—whereas prolife persons assume prochoice persons are opposed to the value of human life—one of the core prolife values. Both groups of partisans tend to perceive far less disagreement with their adversaries concerning their adversaries' core values. Prolife individuals, for example, assume that they and prochoice persons both favor women's reproductive rights.

Expanding on Chambers and colleagues' (2006) findings, however, we expected that disagreement perceived about central issues would predict hostile feelings toward the outgroup but disagreement perceived regarding noncentral issues would not. To see if this was the case, we had participants rate their own group and the outgroup along several positive and negative trait dimensions, compare their liking for the two groups, and so on. We also asked participants several questions explicitly tapping into their thoughts about the (presumed) motives of those on the opposite side of the debate. We suspect, for example, that partisans would assume that their adversaries are motivated more by a malevolent opposition to their own side's ideological principles than by endorsement of the adversaries' ideological principles. In essence, prochoice individuals might believe that prolife individuals are more compelled to attack women's reproductive rights than to defend the value of human life.

#### Method

Participants were students enrolled in a psychology course at the University of Florida. By instructions posted on a recruitment Web site, only those with strong views for ( $n = 246$ ) or against ( $n = 201$ ) legalized abortion were invited to participate. Participants arrived at the laboratory room in groups of up to five persons and completed all aspects of the study individually on personal computers, with anonymity of their responses assured. First, they were presented with four issues (women's reproductive

**TABLE 1: Average Self-Ratings, Outgroup Estimates, Actual Disagreement, Perceived Disagreement, and Overestimated Disagreement Among Prochoice and Prolife Participants in Study 1**

Value Issue	Self-Ratings		Outgroup Estimates		Actual Disagreement	Perceived Disagreement		Overestimated Disagreement	
	Among PCs	Among PLs	PCs of PCs	PLs of PCs		Among PCs	Among PLs	PCs of PLs	PLs of PCs
Average for PC issues	3.35 (1.69)	0.57 (2.28)	-2.25 (2.15)	1.79 (2.78)	2.79 (0.19)	5.60 (3.11)	1.45 (2.70)	-2.81 (2.15)	-1.56 (2.78)
Average for PL issues	2.22 (1.84)	3.51 (1.63)	2.50 (2.76)	-1.18 (2.35)	1.29 (0.17)	0.70 (2.11)	4.69 (3.07)	-1.01 (2.76)	-3.40 (2.35)

NOTE: PC = prochoice; PL = prolife. Self-ratings and outgroup estimates were made on separate  $-5$  (*strongly oppose*) to  $+5$  (*strongly favor*) scales. Actual disagreement was computed from the difference between PL's self-ratings and PC's self-ratings. Perceived disagreement was computed from the absolute difference between self-ratings and outgroup estimates. Overestimated disagreement was computed by subtracting the outgroup's self-ratings from outgroup estimates. Numbers in bold represent central value issues for the group in question.

rights, freedom from government interference in private lives, the value of human life, and a moral code of sexual conduct), and for each issue, they rated their own attitude and that of the typical outgroup member on separate  $-5$  (*strongly oppose*) to  $+5$  (*strongly favor*) scales (see Appendix A). They also rank-ordered each issue in terms of its importance in determining their personal attitude toward legalized abortion (1 = *most important* to 4 = *least important*). In addition, we had them estimate how important members of the outgroup would rank-order each issue using the same 1 to 4 scales.

Participants also rated the typical prochoice and typical prolife person in terms of 15 trait adjectives, compared their liking for the ingroup versus the outgroup, and rated which group better represented their own core values and beliefs. They also rated how much anger they felt toward members of the outgroup, how similar members of the ingroup and outgroup are to each other, the extent to which their abortion attitude was an important part of their identity, and how committed they felt to their abortion attitude. A complete list of the trait ratings and group evaluation items, along with the corresponding response options, appears in Appendix A. Order of the trait ratings (about prochoice and prolife individuals), opinion estimates (for prochoice and prolife issues), and evaluation items (before or after opinion estimates) were counterbalanced across participants.

### Results

Collapsing across groups, perceived disagreement about the two prochoice issues was positively related ( $r = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as was perceived disagreement about the two prolife issues ( $r = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, we averaged participants' ratings for the two prochoice issues and the two prolife issues for all of the reported analyses. Because trait ratings about prochoice and prolife individuals were highly interrelated (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$  and  $.92$ , respectively), we averaged them to form separate

composite ratings about each group after appropriate reverse-coding of the negatively valenced traits. Higher numbers on these composites indicate more favorable trait ascriptions for the group in question. Many participants failed to complete the importance rankings for self or about outgroup correctly (e.g., assigning the same rank to two or more issues). In our analyses of the importance rankings, we excluded participants who completed either the self or assumed outgroup importance rankings incorrectly, which accounts for the much smaller sample sizes reported in the analyses below.

*Importance of values.* Replicating past findings with these groups (Chambers et al., 2006), prochoice participants felt that the prochoice issues ( $M = 2.20$ ) were more important in determining their position toward legalized abortion than the prolife issues ( $M = 2.80$ ), paired  $t(49) = 3.17$ ,  $p < .01$ , whereas the prolife participants felt just the opposite (prochoice issues:  $M = 2.80$ , prolife issues:  $M = 2.20$ ), paired  $t(51) = 3.95$ ,  $p < .001$ . These differences in perceived importance of the issues are a necessary precondition of our argument and are vital to understanding the perceptions of disagreement reported below.

*Actual disagreement.* To determine the actual disagreement that existed between the prochoice and prolife participants, we compared the average self-ratings made by each group for the prochoice and prolife issues (see columns 2, 3, and 6 in Table 1). First, there were real differences of opinion between the groups. Relative to prolife participants, prochoice participants had more favorable personal attitudes toward the prochoice issues,  $t(445) = 14.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , and less favorable attitudes toward the prolife issues,  $t(445) = 7.77$ ,  $p < .001$ . When self-ratings were entered into a 2 (group: prochoice vs. prolife)  $\times$  2 (issue: prochoice vs. prolife) ANOVA with issue as a repeated measure, these differences emerged in a Group  $\times$  Issue interaction,  $F(1, 445) = 252.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . As will be discussed in the next section, these actual

TABLE 2: Average Group Evaluation Ratings Among Prochoice and Prolife Participants in Study 1

Dependent Measure	Group	
	PC Ratings	PL Ratings
	M (SD)	M (SD)
Trait rating for PCs (composite)	4.80 (0.81)	3.53 (0.96)
Trait rating for PLs (composite)	3.58 (0.91)	4.63 (0.82)
Difference: Trait rating for ingroup-outgroup	1.22 (1.21)	1.10 (1.23)
Which group do you like more	2.28 (2.12)	-2.33 (2.26)
Anger towards outgroup	3.73 (2.87)	4.22 (2.90)
How similar are PCs and PLs	0.33 (2.74)	-0.09 (2.55)
Which group represents your core values	2.54 (2.37)	-3.52 (1.89)
Importance of abortion attitude to identity	4.12 (2.96)	5.21 (3.14)
Commitment to abortion attitude	6.15 (2.94)	6.75 (2.91)

NOTE: PC = prochoice; PL = prolife. The exact phrasing of these items and the response scales are provided in Appendix A.

differences of opinion did not match the perceived differences of opinion, particularly when they concerned the partisans' central issues.

*Perceived disagreement.* To calculate perceived disagreement, we subtracted participants' estimates of the outgroup opinion from their self-ratings separately for the prochoice and prolife issues (see columns 2-5 and 7-8 in Table 1). Higher numbers on these indices suggest greater perceived differences of opinion with the outgroup. When we submitted these indices to an ANOVA with issue as a repeated measure, the key finding was a Group  $\times$  Issue interaction,  $F(1, 445) = 541.72, p < .001$ . This revealed that prochoice participants perceived far more disagreement with prolife persons about core prochoice issues than about core prolife issues, paired  $t(245) = 21.61, p < .001$ . Prolife participants, in contrast, assumed that they disagreed with their prochoice counterparts more about prolife issues than about prochoice issues, paired  $t(200) = 12.02, p < .001$ . Again, these findings closely corroborate those of Chambers et al. (2006), who observed the same asymmetrical perceptions of disagreement among both prochoice and prolife college students and members of prochoice advocacy groups.

*Overestimated disagreement.* We computed indices of overestimated disagreement by subtracting the self-ratings of one group from the outgroup estimates of the other group (see columns 9-10 in Table 1). Numbers less than zero on a given index mean that the group in question underestimated the favorability of their adversaries' opinions toward the issues. Replicating the findings of Chambers et al. (2006), partisans were most inaccurate when it came to estimating their rivals' opinions about their own central value issues. A significant Group  $\times$  Issue interaction on these indices,  $F(1, 445) = 135.82, p < .001$ , confirmed that prochoice participants underestimated prolife individuals' attitudes concerning prochoice

issues more than concerning prolife issues, paired  $t(245) = 8.51, p < .001$ , whereas prolife participants underestimated prochoice individuals' attitudes concerning prolife issues more than concerning prochoice issues, paired  $t(200) = 8.06, p < .001$ .

*Intergroup evaluations.* The average group evaluation ratings made by prochoice and prolife participants can be found in Table 2. As the data in this table clearly reveals, both of these groups displayed an ingroup bias, judging members of their own group in a more positive light than members of the opposing group. Prochoice participants judged the typical prochoice person as possessing more favorable traits than the typical prolife person, paired  $t(245) = 15.69, p < .001$ , whereas prolife participants judged the typical prolife person as possessing more favorable traits than the typical prochoice person, paired  $t(200) = 12.69, p < .001$ . Both partisan groups also reported liking their ingroup more than their outgroup (comparing the average rating for each group to the midpoint of the response scale, both  $t_s > 14.63, p_s < .001$ ).

How were the perceptions of disagreement mentioned earlier related to the partisans' global views of their adversaries, their own group, and their commitment to their abortion attitudes? To shed light on this question, we performed a series of regression analyses using the perceived disagreement indices about both prochoice and prolife issues as the predictor variables and the composite trait ratings and other evaluative judgments as the dependent variables.<sup>1</sup> Table 3 displays the standardized beta values and zero-order correlations from these analyses for each partisan group.

The results strongly confirm our prediction that perceptions of disagreement concerning central issues predict partisans' evaluations of outgroup members but perceptions of disagreement about the adversaries' core issues does not. Specifically, the more disagreement

**TABLE 3: Average Standardized Beta Values Relating Perceived Disagreement Indices and Group Evaluation Ratings Among Prochoice and Prolife Participants in Study 1**

<i>Dependent Measure</i>	<i>Group</i>			
	<i>Prochoice</i>		<i>Prolife</i>	
	<i>Perceived Disagreement Concerning</i>		<i>Perceived Disagreement Concerning</i>	
	<i>PC Issues</i>	<i>PL Issues</i>	<i>PC Issues</i>	<i>PL Issues</i>
Trait rating for PCs (composite)	<b>.23** (.23**)</b>	-.06 (-.06)	.03 (.03)	<b>-.44** (-.44**)</b>
Trait rating for PLs (composite)	<b>-.24** (-.24**)</b>	-.01 (-.01)	-.06 (-.06)	<b>.09 (.09)</b>
Difference: Trait rating for ingroup-outgroup	<b>.33** (.33**)</b>	-.03 (-.03)	-.06 (-.06)	<b>.41** (.40**)</b>
Which group do you like more	<b>.38** (.38**)</b>	-.05 (-.04)	.03 (.02)	<b>-.32** (-.32**)</b>
Anger toward outgroup	<b>.16* (.16*)</b>	-.07 (-.07)	-.14* (-.14*)	<b>.36** (.36**)</b>
How similar are PCs and PLs	<b>-.07 (-.06)</b>	.15* (.14*)	-.12 (-.12)	<b>-.17* (-.17*)</b>
Which group represents your core values	<b>.31** (.31**)</b>	-.11 (-.11)	.01 (.00)	<b>-.40** (-.40**)</b>
Importance of abortion attitude to identity	<b>.19** (.19**)</b>	.04 (.04)	-.17* (-.17*)	<b>.29** (.29**)</b>
Commitment to abortion attitude	<b>.21** (.21**)</b>	.02 (.02)	-.27** (-.27**)	<b>.34** (.34**)</b>

NOTE: PC = prochoice; PL = prolife. Perceived disagreement was computed from the difference between self-ratings and outgroup estimates. Higher numbers on the trait rating composites indicate more favorable impression of the target group. Numbers in bold represent central value issues for the group in question. Zero-order correlations are reported in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

prochoice participants perceived with prolife persons about prochoice issues, the more they ascribed undesirable traits to prolife persons, desirable traits to prochoice persons, and reported liking their ingroup more than their outgroup, all  $ps < .01$ . For prochoice participants, perceived disagreement about prochoice issues also was positively associated with increasing anger felt toward the outgroup, thoughts that their ingroup represented their core beliefs, beliefs that their abortion attitude was an important part of their identity, and stronger feelings of commitment to their abortion attitude, all  $ps < .01$ . Perceived disagreement about prolife issues failed to independently predict any of these same measures, except perceptions of ingroup-outgroup similarity,  $p < .05$ .

Prolife participants displayed the exact opposite pattern. The more disagreement they perceived with prochoice persons about prolife issues, the more they ascribed undesirable traits to prochoice persons, reported liking their ingroup more than the outgroup, and felt anger toward their outgroup, all  $ps < .01$ . Perceived disagreement about prolife issues in this group also was positively associated with decreasing perceptions of similarity between ingroup and outgroup members, thoughts that their ingroup represented their own core beliefs, beliefs that their abortion attitude represented an important part of their identity, and increasing levels of commitment to their abortion attitude, all  $ps < .01$ . Except for anger felt toward the outgroup, commitment to their abortion attitude, and importance of abortion attitude to their identity (all  $ps < .05$ ), perceived disagreement about prochoice

issues was not independently related to any of these same evaluative measures in this group, all  $ps > .05$ .

*Global viewpoint items.* As the data for the global viewpoint items in Table 4 reveal, prochoice and prolife participants differed in how they perceived each others' underlying motives and what issues they believed were most at stake in the wider debate about abortion.

For example, prochoice participants agreed more than did prolife participants that the latter group's true motivations were to attack women's reproductive rights rather than advance moral values. For their part, prolife participants agreed less than did prochoice participants that the latter group was honest in its claims to protect women's reproductive rights. Furthermore, prochoice participants agreed more than did prolife participants that the latter group ends up doing more harm to women's reproductive rights than they do to help protect moral values. Part of the reason the groups differed in how they viewed their own and their rivals' motivations may be traced to the relative importance they placed on the central values of each group: Prochoice participants agreed more than did prolife participants that women's reproductive rights were most relevant to the abortion debate and agreed less than did prolife participants that moral values were most relevant.

Here, we see that partisans seemed to deny that their adversaries were motivated out of a sense of protecting or upholding their adversaries' core ideological principles and, instead, they made the more malevolent (and hostile) inference that their adversaries' true intentions

TABLE 4: Average Agreement Ratings for Global Viewpoint Items Among Prochoice and Prolife Participants in Study 1

Item	Rated Agreement		t Value for Difference
	Among PCs	Among PLs	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	
Favor more motivated to attack moral values than protect women's rights	1.71 (1.01)	2.65 (1.26)	-8.79**
Oppose more motivated to attack women's reproductive rights than protect moral values	2.58 (1.34)	1.96 (1.10)	5.29**
Favor are honest when they claim they want to protect women's rights	4.20 (0.94)	3.33 (1.13)	8.91**
Oppose are being honest when they claim they want to protect moral values	3.91 (1.10)	4.50 (0.74)	-6.52**
Favor end up doing more harm to moral values than they help women's equality	1.72 (0.94)	3.81 (1.05)	-22.14**
Oppose end up doing more harm to women's equality than they help moral values	3.39 (1.19)	2.04 (1.02)	12.73**
The debate over abortion is really a question about women's reproductive rights	2.85 (1.38)	1.56 (0.95)	11.29**
The debate over abortion is really a question about the value of human life	1.92 (1.02)	3.35 (1.28)	-13.07**

NOTE: PC = prochoice; PL = prolife. Agreement ratings were made on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale. The degrees of freedom for all comparisons of means were 445. The exact phrasing of these items and the response scale is provided in Appendix A. \*\* $p < .01$ .

were to undermine and threaten their own side's ideological principles. Beyond this, partisans even went so far as to claim that their rival's ideological principles were less relevant to the wider social debate.

*Assumed importance of issues to outgroup.* Partisans were generally accurate in estimating the relative order in which their adversaries prioritized the issues, but they greatly exaggerated the relative degree of that prioritization. For instance, prochoice participants assumed (quite correctly) that prolife individuals would judge prolife issues more important than prochoice issues ( $M_s = 1.87$  vs.  $3.13$ ), paired  $t(49) = 7.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . When compared to prolife participants' actual self-ratings of importance ( $M_s = 2.20$  and  $2.80$  for prolife and prochoice issues, respectively), however, it becomes clear that prochoice individuals greatly exaggerated the relative degree to which their adversaries prioritized those issues; the gap in the prochoice group's assumed ratings significantly exceeded the gap in the prolife group's actual ratings,  $t(49) = 3.81$ ,  $p < .001$ . By the same token, prolife participants correctly assumed that prochoice individuals would perceive prochoice issues as more important than prolife issues ( $M_s = 1.80$  vs.  $3.20$ ), paired  $t(51) = 8.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . But when compared to prochoice participants' actual self-ratings of importance ( $M_s = 2.20$  and  $2.80$  for prochoice and prolife issues, respectively), we see that prolife participants greatly exaggerated the relative prioritization that their adversaries placed on these issues,  $t(51) = 4.73$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## STUDY 2: POLITICS

In Study 2, we sought to replicate the same perceptions of disagreement among partisans involved in a different social debate, namely, Republicans and Democrats

in the debate about political policy. But we had several additional goals. One was to examine how Republicans and Democrats view each others' motives and intentions, to see whether they believe their adversaries are motivated out of a sense of opposition to their own side's core ideological values, just as prochoice and prolife partisans did in Study 1. To see if this was the case, we asked Republican and Democrat participants in this study to respond to global viewpoint items similar to those used in the last study, but about issues relevant to the political arena. Second, we wished to determine whether Republicans and Democrats exaggerate how their rivals prioritize different issues relevant to the political debate. We suspected, for example, that Republicans will overestimate how much more important Democrats would believe liberal issues were to their attitude position than were conservative issues. Thus, we had both partisan groups estimate how their adversaries would rate the importance of each issue and compared these assumed importance ratings with the actual importance ratings made by members of the outgroup, similar to Study 1.

Third, in addition to the main political issues (e.g., strict punishment of criminals, protecting minority rights), we asked Republican and Democrat participants in this study to estimate their own and their adversaries' opinions toward several issues that were largely irrelevant to the political sphere or to the ideological precepts of either side, such as donating an organ or improving highways. We suspect that partisans will be much less apt to perceive disagreement with their adversaries concerning these neutral issues than concerning the issues that are central to their own ideological position and, perhaps, perceive as little disagreement about these neutral issues as they perceive about issues that are central to their adversaries' ideological position. Moreover, we

suspect that perceptions of disagreement about these neutral issues would matter less in determining how they evaluate their rivals than the disagreement they perceive about their own side's central issues. This would demonstrate more conclusively that partisans think about and weight differences of opinion about their own central values most when evaluating their rivals.

### Method

**Participants.** Students from the University of Florida participated in exchange for credit toward an introductory psychology course requirement. Only participants with a preference for either the Republican ( $n = 235$ ) or Democrat ( $n = 245$ ) parties were invited to participate.

**Design and procedure.** Participants arrived at the laboratory room in groups of up to five persons and all instructions, materials, and dependent measures were presented via personal computers. Testing took place individually and participants were assured that their responses would be kept completely anonymous.

First, participants were asked to state their political affiliation (Republican, Democrat, Neutral/Unaffiliated, or Other Party). After this, participants were presented with the four main value issues (strict punishment of criminals, strong military and national defense, protecting the environment, and protecting minority rights) and for each issue, they made a rating of their personal opinion and that of the typical Republican or typical Democrat (target group was always opposite to their own self-identified political affiliation). Both self-ratings and outgroup estimates were made on 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 10 (*strongly favor*) scales (see Appendix B).

Also, participants rated the typical Republican and typical Democrat along a series of 12 desirable and undesirable trait adjectives. Following this, participants were asked several additional group evaluation questions, such as how similar they personally were to the typical Republican and Democrat, to what degree they would enjoy having the typical Republican and typical Democrat as a friend, how similar Republicans and Democrats are to each other, which group they like more, and how strongly committed they were to their own political attitude. A complete list of the trait and group evaluation items can be found in Appendix B.

Next, participants rated the importance of each value issue in determining their own political stance (1 = *not at all important*, 10 = *very important*), rank-ordered the importance of each issue (1 = *most important*, 4 = *least important*), and estimated how the typical outgroup member would rate each issue (using the same 1-10 rating scales). Then, participants expressed their agreement with several statements asking about the motives and intentions of people

in their own group and the outgroup as well as which issues they regarded as most relevant to their attitudes toward national political policy (see Appendix B).

Finally, participants rated their own and the typical outgroup member's opinions toward four politically neutral issues (road/highway improvements, eliminating traffic laws, eliminating people's right to a jury trial, and donating an organ; each rating from 1 = *strongly oppose* to 10 = *strongly favor* scales) and also rated the importance of each issue in determining their own political beliefs. Order of opinion estimates (about conservative and liberal issues) was counterbalanced across participants, as was the order of trait ratings (about Republicans and Democrats) and opinion estimates for the neutral issues (self-ratings or outgroup estimates). When finished, participants were debriefed and dismissed.

### Results

Actual, perceived, and overestimated disagreement was computed in the same manner as in Study 1. Across groups, perceived disagreement about the two conservative issues was positively related ( $r = .74, p < .001$ ), as was perceived disagreement about the two liberal issues ( $r = .69, p < .001$ ), and were thus combined to form separate indices. Of interest, perceived disagreement among the four neutral issues was largely unrelated (all pairwise  $r$ s  $< .09, ns$ ), and we report aggregated results for these issues merely for illustrative purposes. Trait ratings were highly interrelated about both Republicans and Democrats (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$  and  $.86$ , respectively) and so we averaged these ratings to form composite ratings about each group after appropriate reverse-coding of the negatively valenced traits. Higher numbers on these composites indicate more favorable traits attributed to the group in question.

**Importance of values.** As would be expected, Democrats rated liberal issues more important to their personal political attitudes than conservative issues ( $M$ s = 7.71 vs. 5.90), paired  $t(244) = 14.41, p < .001$ , whereas Republicans rated conservative issues more important to their personal political attitudes than liberal issues ( $M$ s = 7.48 vs. 5.81), paired  $t(234) = 12.56, p < .001$ .

Although the groups differed in how they prioritized the issues, both groups did find their adversaries' issues to be at least moderately important to their own political stances, as implied by the fact that the groups' absolute ratings of importance for both sets of issues fell toward the upper end of the rating scale. This means that the groups did not entirely deny the relevance and importance of their adversaries' principles but instead simply viewed those principles as being somewhat less relevant than their own core principles.

**TABLE 5: Average Self-Ratings, Outgroup Estimates, Actual Disagreement, Perceived Disagreement, and Overestimated Disagreement Among Republican and Democrat Participants in Study 2**

Value Issue	Self-Ratings		Outgroup Estimates		Actual Disagreement	Perceived Disagreement		Overestimated Disagreement	
	Among REPs	Among DEMs	REPs of DEMs	DEMs of REPs		Among REPs	Among DEMs	REPs of DEMs	DEMs of REPs
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SE)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Average for REP issues	<b>8.49 (1.14)</b>	6.70 (1.57)	<b>4.35 (1.62)</b>	8.83 (1.08)	1.79 (0.13)	<b>4.14 (2.08)</b>	2.13 (1.92)	<b>-2.35 (1.62)</b>	0.34 (1.08)
Average for DEM issues	7.00 (1.47)	<b>8.73 (1.11)</b>	8.15 (1.32)	<b>4.25 (1.09)</b>	1.73 (0.12)	1.15 (1.99)	<b>4.48 (1.92)</b>	-0.58 (1.32)	<b>-2.75 (1.49)</b>
Average for NEUT issues	7.31 (1.24)	7.21 (1.33)	6.09 (1.15)	6.10 (1.07)	0.10 (0.11)	1.22 (1.29)	1.21 (1.45)	-1.12 (1.45)	-1.20 (1.07)

NOTE: REP = Republican; DEM = Democrat; NEUT = neutral. Self-ratings and outgroup estimates were made on separate 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 10 (*strongly favor*) scales. Actual disagreement was computed from the difference between REP's self-ratings and DEM's self-ratings. Perceived disagreement was computed from the absolute difference between self-ratings and outgroup estimates. Overestimated disagreement was computed by subtracting the outgroup's self-ratings from outgroup estimates. Numbers in bold represent central value issues for the group in question.

**TABLE 6: Average Self-Ratings, Outgroup Estimates, Perceived Disagreement, and Overestimated Disagreement for Neutral Issues Among Republican and Democrat Participants in Study 2**

Value Issue	Self-Ratings		Outgroup Estimates		Perceived Disagreement		Overestimated Disagreement	
	REPs (n = 235)	DEMs (n = 245)	REPs of DEMs	DEMs of REPs	Among REPs	Among DEMs	Among REPs	Among DEMs
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Highway improvements	7.37 (1.65)	7.30 (1.87)	5.69 (2.00)	6.49 (1.81)	1.69 (2.48)	0.80 (2.69)	-1.61 (2.00)	-0.88 (1.81)
Eliminating traffic laws <sup>a</sup>	8.05 (1.96)	7.95 (2.11)	6.29 (1.92)	7.24 (2.04)	1.77 (2.50)	0.71 (2.51)	-1.66 (1.91)	-0.81 (2.04)
Eliminating right to jury trial <sup>a</sup>	5.60 (3.36)	5.15 (3.70)	5.44 (2.70)	5.37 (2.33)	0.17 (2.44)	0.22 (3.71)	0.28 (2.70)	-0.23 (2.33)
Donating an organ	8.20 (1.91)	8.42 (1.77)	6.95 (1.78)	5.31 (2.06)	1.25 (2.57)	3.11 (2.76)	-1.57 (1.78)	-2.89 (2.06)
Average for NEUT issues	7.31 (1.24)	7.21 (1.33)	6.09 (1.15)	6.10 (1.07)	1.22 (1.29)	1.21 (1.45)	-1.12 (1.45)	-1.20 (1.07)

NOTE: REP = Republican; DEM = Democrat. Self-ratings and outgroup estimates were made on separate 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 10 (*strongly favor*) scales. Perceived disagreement was computed from the difference between self-ratings and outgroup estimates. Overestimated disagreement was computed by subtracting the outgroup's self-ratings from outgroup estimates.

a. These measures were generally undesirable actions so we reverse-coded responses for these items to ease interpretation of the results.

*Actual disagreement.* Again, there were real differences of opinion between Republicans and Democrats across the issues (displayed in columns 2, 3, and 6 of Table 5). Relative to Republicans, Democrats had more favorable personal attitudes toward the liberal value issues,  $t(477) = 14.58, p < .001$ , and less favorable attitudes toward the conservative value issues,  $t(477) = -14.23, p < .001$ . When the self-ratings of both groups were submitted to an ANOVA with issue as a repeated measure, this difference was confirmed by a significant Group  $\times$  Issue interaction,  $F(1, 477) = 429.10, p < .001$ .

*Perceived disagreement.* Once more, both partisan groups saw more disagreement with their adversaries about central value issues than about noncentral issues (see columns 2-5 and 7-8 of Table 5). A highly significant Group  $\times$  Issue interaction on the perceived disagreement indices,  $F(1, 477) = 609.10, p < .001$ , shows that Democrats perceived more disagreement with Republicans about liberal issues than about conservative issues,

paired  $t(243) = 16.14, p < .001$ , whereas Republicans perceived more disagreement with Democrats about conservative issues than about liberal issues, paired  $t(234) = 18.66, p < .001$ . In particular, Democrats felt that Republicans were highly opposed to the protection of minority rights and the environment—values traditionally associated with a liberal ideology—and Republicans felt that Democrats were highly opposed to the defense of the nation and strict crime deterrence—values traditionally associated with a conservative ideology.<sup>2</sup>

Up until now, we've studied perceptions of agreement and disagreement surrounding issues that are relevant to the wider social debate. Do partisans perceive—or even manufacture—disagreement with their adversaries about issues that are largely irrelevant to that debate? We computed perceived disagreement scores across the four neutral issues similar to those for the relevant issues and averaged them to form a composite index of disagreement (responses to the jury trial and traffic law items were reverse-coded; see Table 6 and row 6 of

Table 5). Although both partisan groups tended to see some amount of disagreement with their rivals even about these peripheral issues, it is also quite clear that the disagreement they perceived was much weaker than that they perceived about issues that were central and relevant to their own side's ideological position. When we entered the perceived disagreement indices for the neutral issues into an ANOVA along with the indices for conservative and liberal issues, a significant Group  $\times$  Issue interaction emerged,  $F(2, 476) = 308.04, p < .001$ .

Looked at more closely, Democrats thought that they and Republicans were in much more agreement about things such as donating an organ and eliminating traffic laws (and the other neutral issues) than about things such as protecting the environment and protecting minority rights, paired  $t(243) = 22.54, p < .001$ . Moreover, Republicans thought that they and Democrats were in much greater agreement about things such as eliminating people's right to a jury trial and improving highways (and the other neutral issues) than about things such as a strong national defense and punishment of criminals, paired  $t(234) = 19.91, p < .001$ . In fact, partisan groups perceived almost as little disagreement with their rivals about these neutral issues as they did concerning issues that were central to their adversaries' ideological stance; that is, the disagreement Democrats perceived with Republicans about neutral issues was less than the disagreement they perceived about conservative issues, paired  $t(243) = 6.05, p < .001$ , and the amount of disagreement Republicans perceived with Democrats about neutral issues was roughly the same as the disagreement they perceived about liberal issues ( $t < 1$ ).

Thus, groups are not prone to see disagreement with their rivals about all issues. Rather, the disagreement they see is restricted to the set of principles that are defining of their own side's doctrine. For issues that are congruent with their adversaries' doctrine and for issues that have little to do with the wider conflict, partisans actually perceive (relatively) more similarity between their own and their adversaries' opinions.

*Overestimated disagreement.* Not only did partisans perceive the most disagreement about their central issues but their views of their adversaries' opinions toward these issues tended to be most inaccurate as well (see Table 5, columns 9-10). The Group  $\times$  Issue interaction on the overestimated disagreement indices,  $F(1, 477) = 611.48, p < .001$ , highlights that Democrats underestimated Republicans' attitudes toward liberal issues much more than toward conservative issues, paired  $t(243) = 23.89, p < .001$ , and conversely, Republicans underestimated Democrats' opinions toward conservative issues much more than toward liberal issues, paired  $t(234) = 11.90, p < .001$ .

Although partisans grossly underestimated their adversaries' opinions toward their own core values, their views of their adversaries' opinions about neutral issues were more calibrated and nearly as accurate as their estimates concerning their adversaries' core issues. More precisely, Democrats underestimated how much Republicans endorsed core liberal issues more than they underestimated how much Republicans endorsed the neutral issues, paired  $t(243) = 14.23, p < .001$ , and Republicans underestimated how much Democrats valued conservative issues much more than they underestimated how much Democrats valued the neutral issues, paired  $t(234) = 10.11, p < .001$ . This difference in inaccuracy across conservative, liberal, and neutral issues between the two groups was confirmed by a significant Group  $\times$  Issue interaction with issue as a repeated measure,  $F(2, 476) = 309.93, p < .001$ .

*Intergroup evaluations.* Table 7 displays the average group evaluation ratings among Republican and Democrat participants. Quite obviously, these two groups disliked each other. Democrats reported liking ingroup members (i.e., other Democrats) more than outgroup members (i.e., Republicans), paired  $t(244) = 12.19, p < .001$ , ascribed more favorable traits to fellow ingroup members than to outgroup members, paired  $t(243) = 18.54, p < .001$ , expressed a greater desire to make friends with a typical ingroup member than with a typical outgroup member, paired  $t(244) = 13.88, p < .001$ , said they were more similar to the typical ingroup member than to the typical outgroup member, paired  $t(244) = 20.73, p < .001$ , and revealed an ingroup bias in their liking for the ingroup relative to the outgroup (comparing the average rating to the midpoint of the response scale),  $t(244) = 30.06, p < .001$ .

Moreover, Republicans reported liking ingroup members (i.e., other Republicans) more than outgroup members (i.e., Democrats), paired  $t(234) = 10.38, p < .001$ , ascribed more favorable traits to fellow Republicans than to Democrats, paired  $t(234) = 14.52, p < .001$ , expressed a stronger desire to make friends with a typical ingroup member than with a typical outgroup member, paired  $t(234) = 10.19, p < .001$ , said they were more similar to the typical ingroup member than to the typical outgroup member, paired  $t(234) = 20.44, p < .001$ , and displayed an ingroup bias in their liking for their ingroup relative to their outgroup (comparing the average rating to the scale midpoint),  $t(234) = -28.60, p < .001$ .

In turn, these hostile feelings partisans felt toward each other were predicted to a greater extent by the disagreement they perceived about their own side's core issues than the disagreement they perceived about their adversaries' core issues (see Table 8), results that closely

**TABLE 7: Average Group Evaluation Ratings Among Republican and Democrat Participants in Study 2**

Dependent Measure	Group	
	REP Ratings	DEM Ratings
	M (SD)	M (SD)
Trait rating for REPs (composite)	6.59 (0.81)	4.99 (1.03)
Trait rating for DEMs (composite)	5.32 (0.92)	6.81 (0.94)
Difference: Trait rating for ingroup-outgroup	1.26 (1.33)	1.82 (1.53)
Which group do you like more	2.51 (1.33)	7.60 (1.36)
How similar are REPs and DEMs	4.42 (1.52)	4.25 (1.68)
Enjoy having an average REP as a friend	7.40 (1.21)	5.71 (1.67)
Enjoy having an average DEM as a friend	6.20 (1.63)	7.38 (1.24)
How similar are you to an average REP	6.91 (1.32)	3.75 (1.54)
How similar are you to an average DEM	4.15 (1.52)	6.64 (1.50)
Commitment to political attitude	6.69 (2.32)	6.67 (2.23)

NOTE: REP = Republican; DEM = Democrat. The exact phrasing of these items and the response scales are provided in Appendix B.

**TABLE 8: Average Standardized Beta Values Relating Perceived Disagreement Indices and Group Evaluation Ratings Among Republican and Democrat Participants in Study 2**

Dependent Measure	Group					
	Republican			Democrat		
	Perceived Disagreement Concerning			Perceived Disagreement Concerning		
	REP Issues	DEM Issues	NEUT Issues	REP Issues	DEM Issues	NEUT Issues
Trait rating for REPs (composite)	<b>.13*</b> (.13*)	.09 (.06)	.13* (.17*)	.09 (.20**)	<b>-.34**</b> (-.38**)	-.13* (-.18**)
Trait rating for DEMs (composite)	<b>-.05</b> (-.08*)	.06 (.06)	-.10 (-.10*)	-.02 (-.10)	<b>.29**</b> (.30**)	.05 (.09)
Difference: Trait rating for ingroup-outgroup	<b>.11</b> (.14*)	.01 (.00)	.15* (.17**)	-.07 (-.20**)	<b>.40**</b> (.44**)	.12 (.17**)
Which group do you like more	<b>-.21**</b> (-.22**)	.05 (.10)	-.02 (-.05)	-.04 (-.15*)	<b>.37**</b> (.39**)	.09 (.15*)
How similar are REPs and DEMs	<b>-.18**</b> (-.22**)	.10 (.14*)	-.08 (-.10)	-.03 (.03)	<b>-.17*</b> (-.18**)	-.10 (-.13)
Enjoy having an average REP as a friend	<b>.25**</b> (.27**)	-.02 (-.07)	.10 (.14*)	.20** (.25**)	<b>-.15*</b> (-.22**)	-.14* (-.17**)
Enjoy having an average DEM as a friend	<b>-.13</b> (-.13)	.03 (.07)	.07 (.05)	.01 (-.05)	<b>.18**</b> (.18**)	.01 (.03)
How similar are you to an average REP	<b>.22**</b> (.28**)	-.16* (-.21**)	.11 (.13*)	.10 (.17**)	<b>-.20**</b> (-.23**)	-.08 (-.12)
How similar are you to an average DEM	<b>-.16*</b> (-.21**)	.13* (.17**)	-.04 (-.06)	.01 (-.05)	<b>.19**</b> (.19**)	.04 (.06)
Commitment to political attitude	<b>.23**</b> (.27**)	-.13 (-.19**)	.03 (.06)	-.09 (-.15*)	<b>.22**</b> (.24**)	-.03 (.01)

NOTE: REP = Republican; DEM = Democrat; NEUT = neutral. Perceived disagreement was computed from the difference between self-ratings and outgroup estimates. Higher numbers on the trait rating composites indicate more favorable impression of the target group. Numbers in bold represent central value issues for the group in question. Zero-order correlations are reported in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

parallel those of the partisans involved in Study 1. To the extent that Democrats perceived disagreement with Republicans about core liberal issues, they attributed negative traits to Republicans and positive traits to Democrats, reported a stronger desire to become friends with fellow Democrats and avoid becoming friends with Republicans, said they were more similar to the typical Democrat and less similar to the typical Republican, said Democrats and Republicans were less similar to each other, stated a stronger commitment to their liberal political attitudes, and revealed an ingroup bias favoring Democrats, all  $ps < .05$ . For Democrats, perceived disagreement about core conservative issues did not independently predict any of these same evaluation measures

(all  $ps > .05$ ), except the desire to become friends with an outgroup member,  $p < .01$ .

To the extent Republicans perceived disagreement with Democrats about core conservative issues, they attributed more positive traits to Republicans, reported a stronger desire to form friendships with other Republicans, said they were more similar to the typical Republican and less similar to the typical Democrat, said Republicans and Democrats were dissimilar to each other, stated a stronger commitment to their (conservative) political attitudes, and displayed an ingroup bias in favor of Republicans, all  $ps < .05$ . Except for assumed similarity to the average ingroup and outgroup member ( $ps < .05$ ), perceived disagreement with

TABLE 9: Average Agreement Ratings for Global Viewpoint Items Among Republican and Democrat Participants in Study 2

Item	Rated Agreement		t Value for Difference
	Among REPs	Among DEMs	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	
By pursuing their agenda, Republicans end up undermining minority rights	2.16 (0.96)	3.42 (1.14)	-13.08**
By pursuing their agenda, Democrats end up undermining national defense	3.21 (0.99)	2.20 (0.97)	11.26**
Republicans are honest they want strict punishment of criminals	4.37 (0.76)	3.58 (1.13)	8.90**
Democrats are honest they want to protect the environment	3.56 (1.00)	4.19 (0.79)	-7.70**
The important issues in politics are protecting the environment	1.88 (0.90)	2.57 (1.08)	-7.57**
The important issues in politics are strength of the military	3.25 (1.12)	2.43 (1.20)	7.66**
Republicans resent minorities and wish to undermine their civil rights	1.49 (0.76)	2.86 (1.20)	-14.90**
Democrats are antagonistic towards America and desire to Weaken its sovereignty	2.49 (1.15)	1.43 (0.72)	12.04**

NOTE: REP = Republican; DEM = Democrat. Agreement ratings were made on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale. The degrees of freedom for all comparisons of means were 478. The exact phrasing of these items and the response scale is provided in Appendix B. \*\* $p < .01$ .

Democrats about core liberal issues did not independently predict any of these same group evaluation items among Republican participants, all  $ps > .05$ .

Turning to the neutral issues, the weak disagreement that partisans perceived with their adversaries about these issues had little or no influence on how they evaluated members of either political group. When we entered the perceived disagreement indices for neutral issues into the regression analyses along with the indices for conservative and liberal issues, the neutral issues did not consistently predict the group evaluation items, and their inclusion did not affect the pattern of relations between the group evaluation items and perceived disagreement for either conservative or liberal issues. However, there was one discernible trend for neutral issues: The more disagreement partisans perceived about these issues, the more favorably they evaluated members of their own group and the less favorably they evaluated members of their adversarial group—a perfectly sensible pattern of data. Nevertheless, it is apparent from the generally stronger beta weights for partisans' core issues that these issues were more instrumental than neutral issues in defining how partisans viewed their rivals.

*Global viewpoint items.* Republicans and Democrats differed in how they saw the wider social debate and what they perceived to be the underlying motives and intentions of their rival group and their own group (see Table 9). For example, Democrats agreed more than did Republicans that the latter group ultimately undermines minority rights rather than protects the nation. And Democrats—more than Republicans—agreed that Republicans resent minorities and seek to undermine their rights and opportunities. Conversely, Republicans were more skeptical than Democrats that the latter group is honest in its claims to protect the environment and rights of minorities, and Republicans felt that

Democrats end up doing great harm to the nation's defense and sovereignty—something Democrats strongly disputed. Once again, these differences in how the partisans perceived each others' motivations and intentions can be traced to the relative prioritization they placed on each sides' core issues: Republicans agreed more than Democrats that military strength is the vital issue in the debate over politics, whereas Democrats agreed more than did Republicans that civil rights is the principal issue.

*Assumed importance of issues to outgroup.* Although partisan groups recognized (correctly) that their adversaries prioritized the issues differently than they themselves did, they greatly exaggerated just how differently their adversaries prioritized those issues. Democrats were right in assuming that Republicans would find conservative issues more important than liberal issues ( $M_s = 8.02$  vs.  $4.04$ ), paired  $t(244) = 26.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , but they overestimated how much more important Republicans would find the conservative issues (comparing to the actual difference in Republicans' self-ratings of importance:  $7.48$  for conservative issues,  $5.81$  for liberal issues),  $t(244) = 14.73$ ,  $p < .001$ . In the same vein, Republicans correctly inferred that Democrats would find liberal issues to be more important than conservative issues ( $M_s = 7.75$  vs.  $5.08$ ), paired  $t(234) = 17.58$ ,  $p < .001$ , but they overestimated how much more important Democrats would regard the liberal issues (comparing to the actual difference in Democrats' self-ratings of importance:  $7.71$  for liberal issues,  $5.90$  for conservative issues),  $t(234) = 5.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . Here again, it appears that the groups mistook their adversaries' opposing position in the wider social debate as an indication that their adversaries cared very little about the issues that were most dear to their own philosophical position.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Previous research on intergroup perceptions of attitudes has established that partisans often misperceive the opinions of their rivals and, more specifically, that partisans overestimate the amount of disagreement that exists between their own and their rivals' attitudes (Dawes et al., 1972; Robinson et al., 1995; Thompson, 1995). The present research once again found an important qualifier to this basic tendency in that partisans presumed the most disagreement with their adversaries about the value issues that were central to their own ideological position. For value issues that were fundamental to their adversaries' ideological position, partisans actually perceived much less—if any—disagreement with their adversaries. Moreover, the more disagreement partisans perceived about their central issues, the more inaccurate they tended to be in estimating their adversaries' attitudes toward these types of issues (see also Chambers et al., 2006).

But beyond this, the key finding to emerge from the present research was that these (mis)perceptions of disagreement were linked to the specific impressions partisans had of their rivals. In particular, to the extent partisans believed their rivals were opposed to their own core values, they attributed negative traits to members of the rival group, positive traits to members of their own group, saw themselves as less similar to the outgroup, expressed anger toward the outgroup, and exhibited an ingroup bias in favor of their ingroup. Their perceptions of disagreement about their rivals' core values, however, had almost no influence on how they perceived their rivals or members of their own group.

In explaining why partisans are more inclined to perceive disagreement about central value issues, Chambers et al. (2006) offered an account based on the idea that partisans reason egocentrically when thinking about their rivals. They suggested that partisans think primarily about the ideological principles underlying their own position when attempting to estimate the opinions of their rivals and give insufficient attention to the ideological principles underlying their adversaries' position (for research examining the role of egocentrism in other social judgments, see Chambers & Windschitl, 2004; Krueger & Clement, 1994; Krueger, 1999; Ross & Sicoly, 1979). By a deductive error in logic, partisans falsely assume their adversaries must be opposed to values that are central to their own particular side in the wider social debate. For example, Republicans value a limited role of government and tend to think about political affairs along these lines. They take Democrats' contrary position in the overall social debate as evidence that Democrats must be opposed to a limited role of government rather than

simply recognizing that Democrats are guided by a different set of principles and prioritize issues differently than they do themselves.

More concrete evidence that partisans not only saw the debate in terms of their own side's values but also presumed that their adversaries sought to contradict these values came from the global viewpoint items in both studies. For example, the prolife partisans in Study 1 thought the debate about abortion boiled down to a matter about the sanctity of human life; to them, women's reproductive rights were immaterial to the debate. Moreover, prolife partisans in that study doubted that prochoice people were truly motivated by a devotion to women's reproductive rights and, in fact, assumed that prochoice persons were really attempting to undermine the sanctity of moral values and human life. For their part, prochoice partisans felt that the crucial issue in the abortion debate is women's rights and, at the same time, they felt that their prolife adversaries do more to hinder those rights than they do to help protect moral values. Republicans and Democrats in Study 2 expressed similar misgivings about each others' true motivations and intentions.

Furthermore, in both studies, we observed that partisans had greatly exaggerated perceptions about how their rivals prioritized the various values and, in particular, they mistakenly presumed that their adversaries assigned very little importance to their own sides' core values and beliefs. Prochoice partisans in Study 1, for example, correctly assumed that prolife people regard the value of human life as the most important principle guiding their opposition to legalized abortion, but prochoice partisans erred in believing that this was the only principle prolife persons regarded as relevant to their viewpoint about legalized abortion.

The present findings provide other indirect support for the egocentrism account. It appears that the global impressions that partisans had of their rivals were grounded in the perception that their rivals contested their own most cherished values and ideals. Their perceptions about how much they disagreed with their rivals concerning their rivals' core values seemed not to matter, either because they neglected to carefully consider these issues when judging the outgroup or because they downplayed the importance of those issues, perhaps for socially motivated reasons. In any case, the present findings suggest that to know where partisans perceive the ultimate source of conflict lies, one must know which issues the partisans regard as important to themselves because these are likely to be the issues that partisans are most prone to perceive disagreement about and the ones influencing how partisans actually evaluate their rivals.

Of course, given that this evidence was correlational, we cannot make firm conclusions about the direction

of causality. For example, perhaps disliking for the outgroup led to increasing perceptions of disagreement (especially for central issues), or perhaps a third variable accounted for the relationship between both variables. Further research is clearly needed to establish the exact causal role of disagreement perceptions in intergroup evaluations and conflict. One approach might be to present partisans with fabricated information about their adversaries' opinions toward central and noncentral issues (manipulating the ostensible amount of disagreement) to examine which particular issue differences have greater effect on outgroup evaluations. However, because it is difficult to manipulate people's preexisting beliefs in a nonartificial manner, it would be more appropriate to manipulate the salience of such perceptions. Hence, a second experimental approach might be to manipulate the types of opinion differences (central issues vs. noncentral issues) partisans focus on before evaluating outgroup members.

Our findings also can be integrated with some other popular theories of intergroup perception and prejudice (e.g., optimal distinctiveness theory, Brewer, 1991; the sacred value protection model, Tetlock, 1999). As a broad theory of intergroup relations, social identity theory (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971) argues that individuals can bolster their personal self-esteem by positively discriminating groups to which they belong from those to which they do not belong (e.g., Oakes & Turner, 1980). One means of positively differentiating one's ingroup and outgroup may be to exaggerate differences of opinion between the two. For example, believing that one's ingroup has a more desirable attitude position than one's outgroup toward some socially relevant topic, such as equality for all races, confers an indirect benefit to one's sense of self. A finding from the present studies that initially appears at odds with social identity theory is the fact that partisans saw agreement about their adversaries' core principles even though they viewed these issues as moderately relevant to the wider social debate. At first glance, it seems unclear from the theory's motivational standpoint why partisans (especially the most strongly committed) would not also desire to view themselves as having the more advantaged position toward these issues. This finding is not necessarily troubling for the theory, though; differentiation may be expected to occur only to the extent that the issues are core aspects of the ingroup identity and value system. At a more general level, the present research raises fundamental questions about whether partisans may strategically perceive and exaggerate opinion differences to affirm the self-concept or enhance the status of group memberships, a potentially promising area of future research.

Although the focus of the present research was on groups with long-standing histories and prior knowledge of each others' values, we speculate that these same misperceptions may arise in other types of social groups with competing interests, even if the parties involved in the conflict have no prior knowledge about their adversaries' interests and motivations. For example, in social contexts marked by competition, such as a negotiation between a buyer and seller over a house, a legal settlement between two parties, or a game between two sports teams, the parties may see those on the other side as trying to hinder their own side's goals rather than furthering the other side's goals (e.g., Thompson, 1995). Some support for this hypothesis comes from classic research by Kelley and Stahelski (1970), who investigated the perceptions students involved in a prisoner's dilemma game had about their competitor's intentions. On the whole, students assumed that their competitors were apt to defect rather than cooperate, and this was especially true of students who themselves had a competitive orientation. Perhaps the students who were most interested in maximizing their personal gains (i.e., those inclined to defect) were most prone to see their competitors as undermining their goal of maximizing their own personal gain. In future research, we will examine whether these misperceptions exist in novel groups with competing interests and whether these misperceptions might contribute to nonoptimal behaviors and strategies among parties (e.g., the tendency for negotiations to end in stalemates, failures to maximize joint profits and gains).

These results have both theoretical and applied implications, such as for our understanding of group prejudice and stereotyping and for efforts aimed at curtailing intergroup conflict. In terms of practical applications, for example, this research suggests that some strategies that attempt to inform partisans about their adversaries' actual beliefs (e.g., the contact hypothesis, Allport, 1954) will be more effective in reducing conflict than others. To be most effective, such strategies may need to inform partisans about their adversaries' opinions concerning value issues that are important to the partisans' own particular ideological stance. As we have seen, it is these value issues that partisans are most inclined to presume and exaggerate disagreement with their foes, and it is about these values that appear to be the foci of partisans' negative impressions of their rivals.

Of course, focusing partisans on their adversaries' core values (or neutral/irrelevant issues, such as in Study 2) also could lessen their feelings of animosity, particularly because partisans see little disagreement with their adversaries about these issues. Along these lines, having partisans actively adopt the perspective of

their adversaries may be another means of reducing intergroup prejudice, particularly if it encourages partisans to frame the debate in terms of their rivals' core values (e.g., Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). Indeed, explicitly informing partisans about their adversaries' true motives has been demonstrated to facilitate harmonious and productive intergroup relations (e.g., in negotiation settings, Thompson & DeHarpport, 1994). However, given that perceptions of disagreement about these types of issues were demonstrated in the present studies not to predict intergroup evaluations, this latter strategy may be somewhat limited in effectiveness, particularly if partisans discount the relevance of these issues. Further research examining the effectiveness of these different strategies is clearly needed, but the present research begins to shed light into which specific cognitions and misperceptions should be targeted by these strategies for them to be maximally effective. Thus, the present research should be of interest not only to researchers who study the origins of prejudice, stereotyping, and conflict in social groups but also those who conduct interventions with groups in real-world settings, such as arbitrators in business negotiations and legal settings.

*Conclusion.* According to some naïve theories of group conflict, the reason why groups dislike one another is because of a mere difference of opinion. In this view, groups can comprehend the true motives and interests of their rivals but the disagreement with their rivals stems from an inherent opposition to their rivals' values (in other words, the reason why Republicans dislike Democrats is because Republicans fundamentally object to civil rights for minorities). In contrast to these naïve theories, however, we have shown that partisans do not object to the central principles of their rivals and, in fact, they agree wholeheartedly with their rivals that these principles are worthwhile. Rather, the reason partisans dislike each other may stem from the misperception that their rivals' malevolently oppose the principles that are most dear to their own side. Thus, there is not one common set of principles that partisans disagree with one another about but rather there are two divergent sets of principles (which are not necessarily mutually exclusive to each other) and partisans believe the ultimate source of conflict with their rivals is located in the set of principles defining of their own sides' doctrine. Partisan group members suffer the misapprehension that their adversaries work to actively and willfully oppose their own sides' interests rather than promoting the values that are central to their adversaries' doctrine. As we have shown, it is this perception that may spawn the feelings of distrust and animosity that partisans feel toward their rivals and may ultimately fuel conflict between partisan groups.

## APPENDIX A

### Opinion Estimate Items for Study 1

Each rating made on a -5 (*strongly oppose*) to 0 (*neutral*) to +5 (*strongly favor*) scale

Self-ratings: "Concerning [issue], what is your personal attitude?"

Outgroup estimates: "Concerning [issue], what is the attitude of people who [favor/oppose] legalized abortion?"

### Trait Rating Items for Study 1

Each rating made on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) scale  
"How [trait] is the typical person who [favors/opposes] legalized abortion?"

Honest	Pleasant
Intolerant	Inconsiderate
Bad	Hostile
Flexible	Likable
Aggressive	Threatening
Kind	Trustworthy
Unreasonable	Intelligent
Fair	Unfriendly

### Group Evaluation Items for Study 1

"Which group of people do you like more?" -5 (*people who oppose legalized abortion*) to 0 (*neither group*) to +5 (*people who favor legalized abortion*)

"How angry do you feel toward people who oppose your attitude toward abortion?" 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very*)

"How similar are people who favor and oppose legalized abortion to each other?" -5 (*very dissimilar*) to +5 (*very similar*)

"Which group better represents your own core beliefs and values?" -5 (*people who oppose legalized abortion*) to 0 (*neither group*) to +5 (*people who favor legalized abortion*)

"To what extent is your attitude toward abortion an important part of your identity?" 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*)

"How committed are you to your attitude toward legalized abortion?" 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*)

### Global Viewpoint Items for Study 1

Each rating was made on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale

1. People who **favor** legalized abortion are **more motivated to attack moral values** and the sanctity of human life **than** they are motivated to **protect women's rights**.
2. People who **oppose** legalized abortion are **more motivated to attack women's rights than** they are motivated to **protect moral values** and the sanctity of human life.
3. People who **favor** legalized abortion **are honest when they claim they want to protect women's rights** and gain freedom from government interference in private lives.
4. People who **oppose** legalized abortion **are honest when they claim they want to protect moral values** and the sanctity of human life.

5. People who favor legalized abortion **end up doing more harm to the moral values** of this country **than they help women's equality**.
6. People who **oppose** legalized abortion **end up doing more harm to women's equality than they help** the moral values of this country.
7. **The debate over abortion is really a question about women's reproductive rights** and freedom from government interference in private lives. The value of human life and sexual morality are irrelevant as to whether or not abortion should be legal.
8. **The debate over abortion is really a question about the value of human life** and sexual morality. Women's reproductive rights and freedom from government interference in private lives are irrelevant as to whether or not abortion should be legal.

1. **By pursuing their political agenda, Republicans end up undermining minority rights** rather than helping to strengthen national defense.
2. **By pursuing their political agenda, Democrats end up undermining national defense** rather than helping to protect the environment.
3. **Republicans are being honest** when they claim **they want strict punishment of criminals** and to protect the nation from attack by foreign enemies.
4. **Democrats are being honest** when they claim **they want to protect the environment** and the rights of minorities.
5. The **important issues in the debate over politics are protecting the environment** and protecting the rights of minorities; strength of the military and national defense and strict punishment of criminals are less relevant.
6. The **important issues in the debate over politics are strength of the military** and national defense and strict punishment of criminals; protecting the environment and protecting the rights of minorities are less relevant.
7. The truth is, **Republicans resent minorities and wish to undermine their civil rights** and protections.
8. The truth is, **Democrats are antagonistic toward America and desire to weaken its sovereignty** and ability to defend itself.

## APPENDIX B

### Opinion Estimate Items for Study 2

Each rating made on a 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 10 (*strongly favor*) scale

Self-Ratings: "What is your attitude toward [issue]?"

Outgroup estimates: "What is an average [Republican's/Democrat's] attitude toward [issue]?"

### Global Viewpoint Items for Study 2

Each rating made on a 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very*) scale  
 "How [trait] is an average [Republican/Democrat]?"

Intelligent	Trustworthy
Honest	Ignorant
Friendly	Stubborn
Aggressive	Ethical
Considerate	Immoral
Tolerant	Radical

### Group Evaluation Items for Study 2

"To what degree would you enjoy having an average Republican as a friend?" 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*)

"To what degree would you enjoy having an average Democrat as a friend?" 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*)

"To what degree are you and an average Republican similar?" 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*)

"To what degree are you and an average Democrat similar?" 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*)

"To what degree are Democrats and Republicans similar to each other?" 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*)

"Which group do you like more: Republicans or Democrats?" 1 (*Republicans much more*) to 5 (*neither group*) to 9 (*Democrats much more*)

"How strongly are you committed to your own political group?" 1 (*not strongly committed*) to 9 (*strongly committed*)

### Global Viewpoint Items for Study 2

Each rating was made on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale

## NOTES

1. The indices of perceived disagreement tended to be weakly correlated with each other (for prochoice and prolife issues in Study 1: prochoice participants,  $r = .11$ ; prolife participants,  $r = .13$ ; for liberal, conservative, and neutral issues in Study 2:  $r$ s ranged from  $.06$  to  $.30$  among Democratic participants and from  $-.09$  to  $.27$  among Republican participants). In other words, the amount of disagreement partisans perceived about one set of issues wasn't necessarily related to how much disagreement they perceived about other issues. The weak interrelations between these indices permits us to examine their independent influence on the trait and group evaluations items because we avoid problems of multicollinearity.

2. Assuming that participants might perceive less disagreement about their core issues and exhibit less ingroup bias when they were explicitly thinking in terms of their adversaries' core principles, we attempted to manipulate perspective taking in Study 2. Specifically, participants were instructed to focus on their adversaries' opinions either toward their own core values or the core values of the adversarial group (or neither in a control group). This manipulation failed to moderate any of the effects we report.

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