

“It’s Us Against the World”: How Distrust in Americans versus People-In-General Shapes Competitive Foreign Policy Preferences

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Previous research has uncovered links between generalized distrust and preferences for competitive (vs. cooperative) action. However, based on individuals’ tendency to hold consistent attitudes and to believe that their own political preferences are morally legitimate, it was hypothesized that the direction of the relationship between distrust and competitive foreign policy preferences would depend on which category individuals had in mind: Americans or people. Two correlational studies with American participants were consistent with this hypothesis. Study 1 showed that distrust in Americans versus people had qualitatively different relationships with support for competitive policy preferences (i.e., immigration control, militaristic action). Study 2 found that when the covariance between distrust in Americans and people was controlled, distrust in Americans predicted opposition to torture of suspected terrorists, whereas distrust in people predicted support for torture of suspected terrorists. Moreover, individual discrepancies between distrust in Americans versus people uniquely predicted support for torture. Finally, mediational analyses in both studies indicated that political conservatism explained the effects between distrust in Americans versus people and competitive policy preferences. It is argued that distrust in Americans and distrust in people are distinct but complementary bases of Americans’ moral-political reasoning.

KEY WORDS: political morality, legitimacy, generalized trust, war on terror, immigration policy

“I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.”

—Thomas Hobbes, 1651

“[T]he average human being is about 95 percent selfish in the narrow sense of the term.”

—Gordon Tullock, 1976

Scholars and laypeople alike have expounded on the inherent selfishness of human nature for centuries. Many Westerners appear to learn at a young age, through religious teachings (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993), fables (Wuthnow, 1991), novels (Wrightsmen, 1992), academic curricula (e.g., Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993), and more subtle avenues (see Miller, 1999) that humans are naturally selfish and possess a general tendency to seek power and material fortune (see Miller, 1999, for a review). Whether or not humans actually act in terms of a “perpetual and restless desire” for material self-interest is debatable (see Holmes, Miller, & Lerner, 2002; Miller & Ratner, 1996; Sears & Funk, 1990, 1991). However, the present research is more concerned with the implications, rather than the accuracy, of the belief that humans are untrustworthy, greedy, and highly motivated by self-interest (e.g., Brewer & Steenbergen, 2002; Miller, 1999; Wrightsmen, 1992). Regardless of the truth or falsity of beliefs about human selfishness, research has repeatedly found that the beliefs themselves have far-ranging implications for human relations.

Most notably, research has shown that believing that others are likely to act in a selfish, competitive, or unscrupulous fashion may actually cause people to act in a selfish, competitive, or unscrupulous fashion (see Kelley & Stahelski, 1970; Miller, 1999). In other words, the beliefs have self-fulfilling potential. In research conducted on such varied psychological constructs as prosocial expectations (Holmes, 2002), interpersonal trust (Rotter, 1971), and social capital (Putnam, 2000), individuals with high levels of distrust in others have been more likely to engage in a variety of self-interested (as opposed to cooperative or communal) behaviors, including defecting in prisoner’s dilemma games (see Holmes, 2002), disobeying the law (see Tyler & Huo, 2002), and failing to vote in elections (see Putnam, 2000). In attitudinal research, Wrightsmen (1992) reported that pessimistic views of human nature were associated with trait Machiavellianism (i.e., the tendency to manipulate others through guile, deceit, and opportunism; Christie & Geis, 1970), and Duckitt and colleagues (Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002) found positive correlations between beliefs that the world is a “competitive jungle” and individuals’ social dominance orientation (i.e., a general preference for group-based status hierarchies; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). On the whole, then, distrust in humanity appears to lead to the adoption of an “eat or be eaten” orientation toward the social world (see Brewer & Steenbergen, 2002).

In recent years, political scientists have uncovered links between abstract views about human nature and more specific political attitudes and preferences. For example, in research examining the bases of Americans’ policy preferences, Bartels (1994, pp. 495–496) found that high distrust of people predicted increased support for use of military force to solve international problems. Similarly, Brewer and Steenbergen (2002) found that compared with trusting individuals (i.e., participants who endorsed statements such as, “. . . most people can be trusted”), cynics tended to support the principle of isolationism and to oppose cooperative forms of intervention in other nations’ problems. Thus, at least among American

respondents, distrust in human nature appears to be related to a more competitive, less cooperative orientation toward foreign policy (also see McClosky, 1967).

One plausible explanation for *how* beliefs about human nature influence foreign policy preferences is built on the “cognitive miser” view of social cognition (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Given the potentially vast amount of information and conflicting opinions surrounding foreign policy issues, people tend to opt for low-effort, time-saving strategies when they form foreign policy judgments (see Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987). Conceptions about people-in-general are thought to be stored in memory and then applied to novel situations as a way to save cognitive resources (Brewer & Steenbergen, 2002). Thus when it comes to perceiving the character of actual nations, trusting individuals tend to infer by default that they are “typically benign, cooperative, and honest” (Brewer & Steenbergen, 2002, p. 44), and cynical individuals see them as “typically hostile, uncooperative, and dishonest” (Brewer, Gross, Aday, & Willnat, 2004, p. 97). Perceptions that humans are generally untrustworthy lead to perceptions that specific nations are untrustworthy, which may contribute to less cooperative (e.g., isolation) and more competitive (e.g., military action) preferences and behaviors toward particular nations.

Present Research

The impetus for the present research arises from the observation that much of the political distrust literature has assumed, often implicitly, that beliefs and perceptions about humans are generally stable features of individual personality that influence thoughts, feelings, and behavior in the same or similar fashion across judgment domains. Tomkins (1963), for instance, argues that differences in beliefs about the inherent goodness of human nature constitute one of the most basic dimensions of the left-right political polarity, with those on the left tending to view people as basically good, and with those on the right viewing them as basically bad (also see McClosky, 1967). Taken to its logical end, such reasoning suggests that individual views about people, writ large, are applied in the same or similar fashion regardless of which “people” are held in mind. Indeed, individuals who distrust people-in-general have been found to possess relatively cynical views about more specific instantiations of people (e.g., relationship partners and foreign nations; see Couch & Jones, 1997; Brewer et al., 2004, respectively). However, in the present research, it is argued that most previous analyses of how beliefs about human nature influence political preferences have been much too narrow.

The fact that distrust in people predicts more competitive foreign policy preferences does not necessarily mean that distrust in other relevant categories should also predict such preferences. Rather, in the present research it is argued that for certain categories, different conceptions of distrust should have qualitatively different relationships with individual foreign policy preferences. Specifically, individual differences in two particular targets of distrust, people and Americans, should have opposite implications when it comes to predicting

Americans' competitive foreign policy preferences. As noted above, distrust in "people" tends to be correlated with support for a more competitive approach to foreign policy. However, the present research propels the hypothesis that distrust in "Americans" should be correlated with a *less* competitive approach to American foreign policy. Moreover, it is argued that conceptions of distrust in "people" and "Americans" are not merely distinct, but rather that they operate in a complementary and coordinated fashion to shape Americans' political preferences. That is, the difference between the extents to which individuals distrust people and trust Americans, and vice versa, might provide unique insight into the engine driving Americans' competitive preferences. In the space below, the rationale for this argument is fleshed out, and two studies are presented that directly test how distrust in Americans versus people relates to individuals' competitive policy preferences and their political ideology.

Differential Distrust as Bases for Competitive Policy Preferences

A host of recent research on the psychology of legitimacy suggests that the ability of groups to influence other people is often as dependent on the perceived characteristics of the influencer as it is on the perceived characteristics of the influencee (see Jackman, 1994; Jost & Major, 2001; Tyler & Huo, 2002). For example, the ability for police to gain compliance from citizens in their community, and the ability for dominant groups to enhance their position of power over subordinate groups, both appear to be highly dependent on widespread beliefs about the moral legitimacy, benevolence, and fairness of the higher status groups (see Tyler & Huo, 2002, Jackman, 1994, respectively). Thus on one hand, individuals may support or oppose competitive foreign policies based on the characteristics of the people the policies target ("They deserve it because they are lawless, selfish, and greedy"). However, on the other hand, they may also support or oppose competitive foreign policies based on the characteristics of those carrying the policies out ("We are benevolent and fair-minded").

Given that most individuals wish to maintain consistent attitudes and to believe that their attitudes are morally legitimate (see Abelson et al., 1968; Abelson & Prentice, 1989), we should expect their beliefs about people and Americans to be coordinated in a way that allows them to do so. For people who believe that "people" are self-interested but "Americans" are not, supporting particular American foreign policies, such as wars against menacing foreign nations, makes both moral and intellectual sense. That is, the perception that people are generally selfish and corrupt but Americans are generally concerned for others' well-being would give Americans (and those who support American policies) the moral high ground in their dealings with self-interested people. As noted by Kramer and Messick:

People often have a very limited tolerance for other people or groups who are perceived to be dishonest or untrustworthy, *especially when they*

believe that they themselves or the groups to which they belong are engaging in more cooperative, trustworthy behavior (1998, p. 248, emphasis added).

Of course, the flip side of this argument is that if people are *not* deemed selfish and corrupt, but Americans are, it delegitimizes Americans' influence over people and makes it morally right to oppose competitive and noncooperative American foreign policies. Thus it is argued that distrust in people, in general, and distrust in Americans, in particular, should have opposite but complementary implications with respect to individuals' competitive policy preferences. Moreover, it is proposed that particular political preferences should flow from how the two forms of trust relate to one another, with competition being espoused by those viewing Americans as relatively trustworthy, and cooperation being espoused by those viewing people as relatively trustworthy. Such an arrangement between beliefs in people and Americans would facilitate consistency in individual beliefs as well as engender beliefs that one's own political preferences are correct, reasonable, and moral.

The Role of Conservative Ideology

A close reading of theoretical underpinnings of conservative ideology leads to the idea that political conservatism should mediate the hypothesized effects between beliefs about Americans versus people and competitive policy preferences. Several scholars have argued that the belief in humans' nasty, brutish, and immutable nature is a quintessential element of the conservative outlook (see McClosky, 1958). For example, the late conservative philosopher Russell Kirk posited that conservative ideas provide the checks against "anarchic impulse," "the innovator's lust for power," and do not deny that "humanity has a natural proclivity towards violence and sin" (2001, pp. 9–10). Similarly, Rossiter claimed "wickedness, unreason, and the urge to violence lurk always behind the curtain of civilized behavior" (1982, p. 64).

However, empirical evidence of the link between distrust in people and political conservatism has been inconsistent. For example, Wrightsman (1992) reported that distrust in human nature differed systematically among different ideological groups (e.g., marine corps recruits were more distrusting than guidance counselors), but not between different political parties. More recently, Block and Block found that males observed to be distrustful and suspicious of others in preschool later grew up to have more conservative political attitudes, suggesting a causal link from distrust to conservatism. But for preschool females, distrust and suspicion was unrelated to adult levels of conservatism (2006, p. 740). Still, the fact that the conservative philosophy is partly founded on distrust in human nature suggests that individual level conservatism should also be partly based on distrust in human nature.

Moreover, following the arguments above, previous assessments of the distrust-conservatism link have apparently failed to consider whether conceptions of the ingroup might dilute or be confounded with assessments of “humans” or “people” (see Wenzel, Mummendey, Weber, & Waldzus, 2003). The notion that people are inherently bad is in some sense a comparative one, meaning that a general distrust in humanity may necessitate a tacit assumption that “we” are generally good and trustworthy (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Empirically, conservatives express affinity for the nation with preferences for the maintenance and stability of the current social order, whereas liberals are more likely to endorse structural change (e.g., toward more social equality; for a review see Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003)—a tendency that should have been particularly pronounced at the time of the present research, when self-proclaimed conservatives held control of the U.S. presidency and both houses of the U.S. Congress (see McDermott, 1998).

Therefore, analogous to the relationship between distrust and policy preferences, there is reason to believe that the beliefs that Americans are trustworthy, but people are not, should predict higher levels of political conservatism. Moreover, to the extent that political conservatism drives competitive policy preferences, the tendency for conservatives to hold divergent views of Americans and people may help explain the proposed link between distrust in Americans versus people and competitive foreign policy preferences. In effect, trust in Americans and distrust in people may cause individuals to adopt higher levels of political conservatism, which in turn contributes to higher support for competitive foreign policies.

Summary and Research Plan

The present research proposes that, far from holding monolithic conceptions of human nature that apply to all people in a qualitatively similar fashion, individuals hold conceptions of distrust that differ between social categories and diverge in ways that provide a moral foundation for their political preferences. In particular, the present research examines how distrust in Americans versus people, and the discrepancy between distrust in Americans versus people, shape Americans’ competitive foreign policy preferences and political ideology. It further examines whether political conservatism mediates the link between distrust in Americans versus people and foreign policy orientations. For ease of presentation, the four hypotheses tested in the present research are numericized below.

1. Whereas distrust in Americans will predict lower support for competitive foreign policies, distrust in people will predict higher support for competitive foreign policies.
2. Similarly, whereas distrust in Americans will predict lower political conservatism, distrust in people will predict higher political conservatism.
3. Political conservatism will mediate the link between distrust in Americans versus people, on the one hand, and foreign policy orientations, on the other.

4. Finally, the discrepancy between distrust in Americans and distrust in people will predict individuals' foreign policy orientation, with the highest support for competitive policies occurring the more participants distrust people relative to Americans.

To test these hypotheses, data were collected from two relatively heterogeneous web-based samples: political discussion board respondents (Study 1) and urban volunteers (Study 2). Whereas the Study 1 design only permitted direct tests of Hypotheses 1–3, Study 2 was designed to assess all four hypotheses. To assess competitive foreign policy preferences, the present research examined support for tougher, more competitive immigration and military policies (Study 1), and support for U.S.-sponsored torture of suspected terrorists (Study 2).

Study 1

Method

Participants. After a large number of online political discussion forums were researched, two forums were located, one left leaning and the other right leaning, that appeared to have similarly large numbers of participants (as judged by apparent message-board activity) discussing American politics. At the forums, users with a registered user name and e-mail address could post new topics and reply to other users free of charge. After registering a username at each site using the standard registration procedure, in May of 2005 I posted a single message on each site asking for volunteers to take part in a five-minute, UCLA-sponsored survey of political attitudes. Participants were taken to the web-based survey by clicking a link that was included with the message. Several safeguards were built into the data collection to help protect its integrity.¹ Data collection was halted approximately three hours after the messages were posted. Two hundred and twenty-nine participants provided some data, but only 202 provided complete or almost complete data and were included in the subsequent analyses (58% of participants were from the right-leaning site). The sample was predominantly male (70% male and 30% female) and White (76% White, 12% "I decline to indicate," 5% "other," 3% Black, 2% Latino, and 2% Asian). The median age of respondents was 47 years (range 18–79), and the median level of education was college graduate. Demographics from the right and left leaning sites did not differ in terms of racial/ethnic composition, $\chi^2 = 9.02$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$, or mean levels of education (1 = *Some high school*; 6 = *Post-graduate degree*; $M_{\text{Education}} = 4.59$ vs. 4.28 for right and left, respectively), $t(201) = 1.60$, $p > .10$. However, respondents from the right-leaning

¹ A professional web-survey company hosted the questionnaire. Participants were allowed to move forward through the questionnaire, but not backward. Upon completing the questionnaire, participants were blocked from re-accessing the questionnaire with a cookie that recorded and tracked their computer's Internet protocol address. Please contact the author for additional details.

website were significantly more likely to be male (78% vs. 59%), $\chi^2 = 8.27$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$, they were significantly older ($M_{\text{years}} = 49.2$ vs. 40.5), $t(195) = 4.42$, $p < .001$, and they reported attending religious services significantly more frequently (1 = *Never*; 9 = *More than once a week*; $M_{\text{Attendance}} = 3.93$ vs. 2.59 for right and left, respectively), $t(201) = 3.69$, $p < .001$. These three latter variables are statistically controlled in the analyses that follow.

Design and Procedure. After a brief introduction to the study, participants provided information about their political affiliations and were randomly assigned to one condition of the between-subjects design (Americans vs. People). In the Americans condition, participants completed a measure of distrust in which the subject of each statement was "Americans." In the people condition, participants received the same measure except the word "Americans" was replaced with the word "People." All participants subsequently responded to items assessing their policy preferences and demographics.

Distrust. A six-item measure was developed to assess distrust (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*):² "To get ahead in life, most Americans (people) are willing to step on other people," "Americans (People) are primarily driven by self-interest," "Americans (People) tend to think winning is more important than how the game is played," "With few exceptions, Americans (People) want what is fair for everyone" (reverse coded), "Americans (People) are primarily concerned for the well being of others" (reverse coded), and "Most Americans (People) would rather lose the game than win by cheating" (reverse coded). After collapsing across conditions, a principal components analysis (PCA) on all six items revealed the presence of only one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one, which explained 58% of the total item-variance. Separate PCAs within each condition also revealed single factor solutions with the factor explaining 62% and 49% of the item-variance in the Americans and people conditions, respectively. The alpha reliability for the full scale, collapsed across conditions, was very good (Alpha = .86; $M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.05$).

Political conservatism. Due to their extremely high correlation, two items were combined that assessed participants' political ideology: "When it comes to politics, do you consider yourself a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative?" (1 = *Very liberal*; 4 = *Moderate*; 7 = *Very conservative*), and "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republicans or the Democrats?" (1 = *Further to right than most Republicans*; 4 = *In the middle/neither one*; 7 = *Further to the left than most Democrats*; item was reverse coded). The two items formed a highly reliable index (Alpha = .97; $M = 4.25$, $SD = 2.26$).

² The first and third items listed were modeled closely after two items in a scale of social dominance orientation (see Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The SDO items "To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups of people" and "Winning is more important than how the game is played" were modified to assess perceptions rather than preferences.

Support for competitive foreign policies. Participants were asked to indicate their level of opposition (1 = *Strongly oppose*) or support (7 = *Strongly support*) for the four following social policies: “More security along U.S. borders,” “Tougher immigration restrictions,” “A more aggressive U.S. foreign policy,” and “A tougher stance against nations like Iran and North Korea.” Although the initial plan was to develop separate measures for immigration and military preferences, PCA conducted with the four items revealed the presence of only one factor, which explained 74% of the total item-variance, so the items were combined ($\text{Alpha} = .88$, $M = 4.41$, $SD = 2.23$).

Results

In the analyses for both Studies 1 and 2, unless otherwise indicated, all variables were recoded to range from 0 to 1, all reported regression coefficients are unstandardized, and all hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Hypothesis 1 states that whereas distrust in Americans should predict lower support for competitive foreign policies, distrust in people should predict higher support for competitive foreign policies. This hypothesis was tested with a three-step linear regression with support for competitive foreign policies as the dependent variable. On Step 1, statistical controls were entered for participant gender, age, and frequency of religious-service attendance. On Step 2, the dichotomous condition variable (0 = *Americans* ; 1 = *People*) and the measure of distrust were entered. On Step 3, the multiplicative interaction term between the two Step 2 variables (Condition* Distrust) was entered. The regression coefficients and standard errors from this analysis are presented in Table 1.

Step 1 ($R^2 = .17$, $p < .001$) revealed that the coefficients for each of the control variables were significant: Males ($B = .14$, $p < .01$), older people ($B = .51$, $p < .001$), and more frequent religious-service attendees ($B = .29$, $p < .001$) all displayed significantly higher levels of support for competitive foreign policies. Step 2 ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p < .01$) revealed that, net of the condition variable, distrust was negatively related to competitive policy support ($B = -.36$, $p < .001$). Step 2 also revealed no difference in policy support between the two experimentally induced conditions ($B = .01$, *ns*). Finally, Step 3 ($\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p < .001$) revealed a significant two-way interaction ($B = .78$, $p < .001$). Simple slopes analyses revealed that, consistent with Hypothesis 1, distrust in Americans predicted significantly lower support for competitive foreign policies ($B = -.60$, $p < .001$). However, inconsistent with Hypothesis 1, distrust in people did not significantly predict higher support for competitive policies ($B = .15$, $p = .34$). The significant interaction is plotted in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 2 states that whereas distrust in Americans should predict lower levels of political conservatism, distrust in people should predict higher levels of political conservatism. This hypothesis was tested using the same regression structure as above, but the index of political conservatism was treated as the

Table 1. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (with Standard Errors in Parentheses) of Linear Regression Models Predicting Support for Competitive Foreign Policies and Political Conservatism

	Support for Competitive Foreign Policies			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	.51 (.13)***	.44 (.13)***	.45 (.13)***	.05 (.09)
Male	.14 (.04)**	.14 (.04)***	.15 (.04)***	.00 (.03)
Religious Attendance	.29 (.07)***	.25 (.07)***	.24 (.07)***	-.01 (.05)
Distrust		-.36 (.10)***	-.62 (.12)***	-.21 (.08)*
Americans (0) vs. People (1)		.01 (.04)	-.41 (.11)***	-.18 (.08)*
Distrust * Americans vs. People			.78 (.20)***	.32 (.14)*
Political Conservatism				.60 (.04)***
R ² Change	.17***	.05**	.06***	.38***

	Political Conservatism		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	.76 (.16)***	.67 (.16)***	.68 (.15)***
Male	.22 (.05)***	.23 (.05)***	.24 (.05)***
Religious Attendance	.48 (.09)***	.43 (.09)***	.42 (.09)***
Distrust		-.45 (.12)***	-.70 (.14)***
Americans (0) vs. People (1)		.03 (.05)	-.39 (.14)**
Distrust * Americans vs. People			.76 (.24)**
R ² Change	.26***	.05**	.04**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

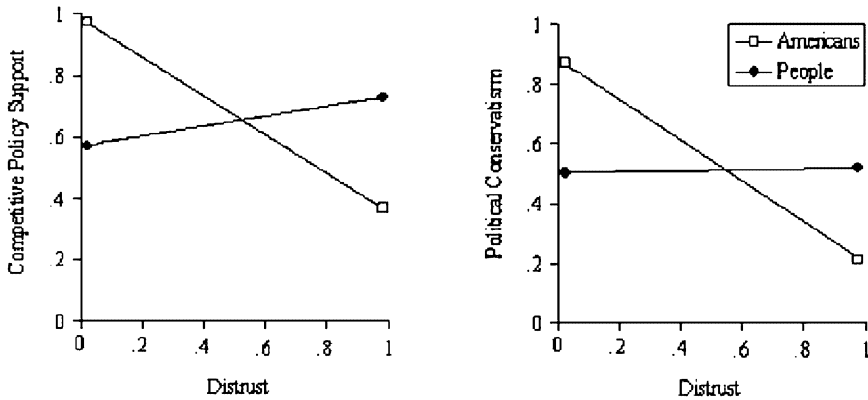


Figure 1. Support for competitive foreign policies and political conservatism as functions of distrust in Americans vs. people. Two-way interactions are significant ($ps < .05$).

dependent variable. Mirroring the above results, Step 1 ($R^2 = .26$, $p < .001$) revealed that males ($B = .22$, $p < .001$), older people ($B = .76$, $p < .001$) and more frequent religious-service attendees ($B = .48$, $p < .001$) all displayed higher levels of political conservatism. Step 2 ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p < .01$) revealed a significant main

effect for the measure of distrust ($B = -.45, p < .001$). Step 2 also indicated that levels of political conservatism did not differ between the two experimental conditions ($B = .03, ns$). Finally, Step 3 ($\Delta R^2 = .04, p < .01$) revealed the presence of a significant two-way interaction ($B = .76, p < .001$). Consistent with Hypothesis 2, simple slopes analyses revealed that within the Americans condition, higher distrust predicted significantly lower levels of political conservatism ($B = -.70, p < .001$). However, inconsistent with Hypothesis 2, and echoing the test of Hypothesis 1, within the people condition there was no significant relationship between distrust and political conservatism ($B = .06, p = .76$). A plot of the significant interaction is depicted in Figure 1.

Prior to proceeding with a test of Hypothesis 3, it should be noted that between the two dependent variables in the above analyses, political conservatism significantly predicted support for competitive foreign policies ($B = .63; SE = .04, p < .001$). This relationship, along with the two significant interactions reported above, together satisfies criteria for formal tests of mediation (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). To examine whether the interaction effect of distrust on support for competitive policies was mediated by political conservatism, a fourth step was simply added to the regression analysis predicting support for competitive foreign policies (see Step 4 in Table 1). The measure of political conservatism was entered on this fourth step, and its predictive contribution was significant ($B = .60, p < .001$). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, the contribution of the two-way interaction term was significantly reduced, from $B = .78$ to $.32, t(196) = 2.65, p < .01$. Further analyses revealed that political conservatism explained 58% of the variance between distrust in Americans versus people and competitive policy preferences. This finding provided clear support for Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

Study 1 provided strong support for the idea that distrust in Americans and distrust in people are distinct aspects of individual political psychology. However, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not fully supported. Although distrust in Americans was associated with lower support for competitive policy preferences and lower levels of political conservatism, distrust in people was unrelated to these outcome variables. One possible explanation is that, compared with beliefs about American trustworthiness, beliefs about people were simply not as salient or politicized in the minds of our participants and so did not evoke clear responses across the political spectrum. It is also conceivable that the measures of distrust in Study 1 were diluted by participants imagining "Americans" in the "people" condition, and vice versa. This latter explanation for the lack of significant effects for distrust of people was addressed in Study 2, described in more detail below, which allowed for the separating of distrust in Americans versus people by controlling one variable for the other and thereby providing a cleaner test of the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3 was fully supported in that the difference between the slopes for distrust in Americans versus people predicting competitive policy support was explained by political conservatism. Said differently, the interaction predicting support for competitive policies was explained by the interaction predicting political conservatism. Of course, causal inferences must remain tentative, given that the design was correlational and, because of the between-subjects manipulation, did not allow for elaborate model testing. To address this latter limitation, Study 2 employed path analytic models to test the plausibility of two competing causal sequences: the proposed model, in which distrust in Americans versus people predicts conservatism, which in turn predicts competitive policy preferences, and an alternative model, in which political conservatism predicts levels of distrust in Americans versus people, which in turn predicts competitive policy preferences.

Finally, although Study 1 did not allow for a direct test of Hypothesis 4—which concerns how the two forms of distrust relate to one another within, rather than between, individuals—the randomization to conditions and the pattern of results seen in Figure 1 do provide circumstantial evidence in support of Hypothesis 4. Given that *people* is superordinate to *Americans*, the *people* category can be thought of as a reference point by which Americans are judged (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). The patterns observed in Figure 1 are consistent with the idea that individuals who support competitive American policies are likely to see Americans as more trustworthy than *people-in-general*. At the same time, those who do not support American-led competitive foreign policies may regard *people* as more trustworthy than Americans. Both patterns would be consistent with regard to allowing Americans to see their foreign policy preferences as morally and intellectually legitimate, regardless of what those preferences are.

However, to argue most powerfully that it is the discrepancy between beliefs about *people* and *Americans*—within the same individuals—that shapes policy preferences and political ideology, it is necessary to demonstrate that the proposed relationships exist within the same individuals. Because Hypothesis 4 addresses whether the cognitive discrepancy in distrust in Americans versus *people* influences political preferences, Study 2 employed a completely within-subjects design, meaning that participants would indicate their distrust of both *people* and *Americans* in the same session. A difference score will then be calculated between the two forms of distrust and examined as a predictor of political preferences. The within-subjects design also allowed for the separating of distrust in Americans versus *people* and permitted more elaborate causal modeling.

Study 2 had one final, critical difference from Study 1. Namely, while including the same measures of distrust and political conservatism used above, Study 2 employed a new dependent variable to assess competitive policy preferences: support for the use of torture on suspected terrorists. The issue of whether the United States should allow the use of torture on suspected terrorists was highly salient in the United States at the time of this research, as news outlets had recently reported on various episodes alleging that the United States sanctioned the use

physical and psychological torture on suspected terrorists and military prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Abu Ghraib, Iraq, and other remote locations where torture was apparently carried out by foreigners on behalf of the United States (see Mayer, 2005).

The salience of the torture issue provided an excellent opportunity to assess individuals' desire for their nation to act in a competitive, self-interested manner. The present research argues that part of the reason why distrust in people versus Americans should be complementary is so individuals may regard their own policy preferences as morally and intellectually correct. Given the negative moral connotations associated with torture, the expression of support for torture should be accompanied by a cognitive rationale for why torture is morally permissible. On the one hand, individuals might support torture of terrorists, and harsh forms of punishment more generally, because of a cynical outlook on people-in-general (see Altemeyer, 1988). However, in the present research it is argued that endorsement of torture should be predicated not only on distrust of people, but also on the idea that the United States is in the moral position to use coercive means in their conduct with such untrustworthy people. Those who view Americans as trustworthy and people-in-general as untrustworthy should tend to endorse the use of United States-sanctioned torture.

Study 2

Method

Participants. Eighty-two online volunteers (74% Female and 26% Male) participated in the study. Participants were recruited from a website used to recruit volunteers for miscellaneous jobs and services in cities and communities around the United States. Similar postings were placed on the websites seeking volunteers in five major U.S. cities (number of participants from each city in parentheses): Atlanta (7), Austin (19), Los Angeles (20), New York (9), and San Francisco (26). The postings used similar wording as the postings in Study 1 and were visible on each website simultaneously for 72 hours in January 2006. The same safeguards were implemented as in Study 1.¹ The racial/ethnic composition of the sample was 65% White, 13% Black, 8% "other," 6% Latino, 6% "I decline to indicate," and 4% Asian. The median level of education was college graduate ($M_{\text{Education}} = 4.12$), the median age was 28 years ($M_{\text{Years}} = 34.59$), and the median frequency of attendance at religious services was "several times a year" ($M_{\text{Attendance}} = 3.41$).

Procedure

Participants were briefly introduced to the study and proceeded to the measures of distrust in people and Americans. The same item wording was used as in Study 1, except in this study all participants responded to both the people and

Americans measures. To control for order effects, half of the participants completed the people scale first, and the other half completed the Americans scale first. The alpha reliability was .80 for the people scale ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.89$), and it was .83 for the Americans scale ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 0.90$). To assess political ideology, participants completed the same measure of political conservatism used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .73$, $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.34$). The new variable, support for torture of suspected terrorists, was operationalized as follows.

Support for torture. Four items were created to assess support for torture of suspected terrorists (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*): “To save American lives, interrogators should be allowed to use physical torture against suspected terrorists,” “There are times when the United States’ use of physical torture on suspected terrorists is morally justified,” “The United States should never allow the use of physical torture on suspected terrorists” (reverse coded), “Even if a terrorist in custody knew details of an upcoming attack against America, the terrorist should not be tortured to extract the information” (reverse coded). A principal components analysis revealed the presence of one factor explaining 86% of the item-variance (Alpha = .95, $M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.66$).

Results

The central purposes behind Study 2 were as follows. First, when considered simultaneously within the same individuals, distrust in Americans versus people should have opposite signs with regard to political ideology and foreign policy orientation (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Additionally, this study sought to retest the hypothesis that political conservatism mediates the relationship between distrust in Americans versus people and foreign policy orientation (Hypothesis 3). And finally, Study 2 sought to test whether the cognitive discrepancy between distrust in Americans versus people can uniquely predict policy preferences and political ideology (Hypothesis 4).

Focusing on Hypotheses 1 and 2, two linear regression analyses were conducted using support for torture and political conservatism as dependent variables, respectively. Both analyses had the same structure. For the sake of comparability with Study 1, controls were entered for participant gender, age, and frequency of attendance at religious services on Step 1. The two measures of distrust (i.e., distrust in Americans and people) were entered on Step 2.³ The results for both analyses are presented in Table 2.

In strong support of Hypothesis 1, distrust in Americans predicted significantly lower support (higher opposition) for torture of suspected terrorists ($B = -.81$, $p < .01$), whereas distrust in people predicted significantly higher support for torture of suspected terrorists ($B = .78$, $p < .05$). Parallel support was

³ Ancillary analyses, not reported here, found that the interaction effect (i.e., Distrust in Americans*Distrust in people) was not a significant predictor of either dependent variable.

Table 2. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (with Standard Errors in Parentheses) of Linear Regressions Predicting Political Conservatism and Support for United States-Sanctioned Torture of Suspected Terrorists

	Support for Torture of Suspected Terrorists		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-.08 (.08)	-.08 (.08)	-.04 (.07)
Male	-.13 (.25)	-.20 (.24)	-.30 (.22)
Religious Attendance	.27 (.15) ^o	.22 (.15)	.07 (.14)
Distrust Americans		-.81 (.31)**	-.48 (.29)
Distrust People		.78 (.32)*	.35 (.31)
Political Conservatism			.55 (.14)***
R ² Change	.07	.10*	.16***
Political Conservatism			
Age	-.06 (.06)		-.08 (.06)
Male	.21 (.19)		.15 (.18)
Religious Attendance	.31 (.12)*		.29 (.12)*
Distrust Americans			-.58 (.23)**
Distrust People			.79 (.23)***
R ² Change	.11*		.13**
Difference Score Mediation Analyses			
	<i>Political Conservatism</i>	<i>Support for Torture</i>	
	Model 1	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-.06 (.06)	-.09 (.08)	-.06 (.07)
Male	.16 (.18)	-.20 (.24)	-.31 (.22)
Religious Attendance	.27 (.12)*	.23 (.15)	.09 (.14)
Difference: Americans-People	-.67 (.21)**	-.80 (.29)**	-.43 (.28)
Political Conservatism			.54 (.14)***
R ² Change	.22**	.16*	.15***

^o*p* < .10, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

also found for Hypothesis 2: Distrust in Americans predicted significantly lower levels of political conservatism ($B = -.58, p < .05$), whereas distrust in people predicted significantly higher levels of political conservatism ($B = .79, p < .01$).

To test Hypothesis 3, a path model was constructed in which support for torture was the focal dependent variable, political ideology was the mediating variable, and perceptions of Americans versus people were correlated independent variables. Because regression analyses had already shown that the paths from the independent variables to support for torture were statistically significant, the mediational test involved eliminating these two direct paths from the model and then testing the indirect relationships from the independent to the dependent variables traveling through the mediator variable. The model therefore had two

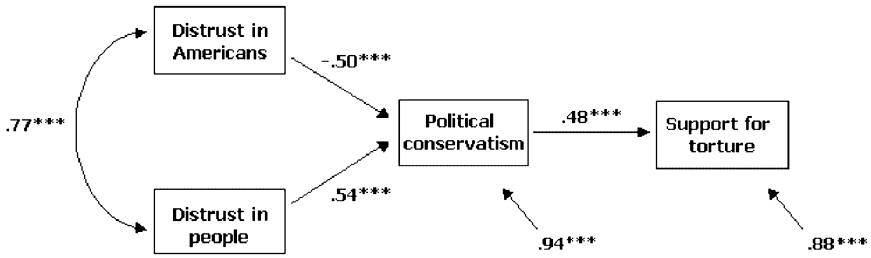


Figure 2. Hypothesized path model in which political conservatism mediates the effects of distrust in Americans and people on support for torture of suspected terrorists. Entries are standardized coefficients (*Chi-square* = 3.35, *df* = 2, *p* = .20; *RMSEA* = .09). ****p* < .001.

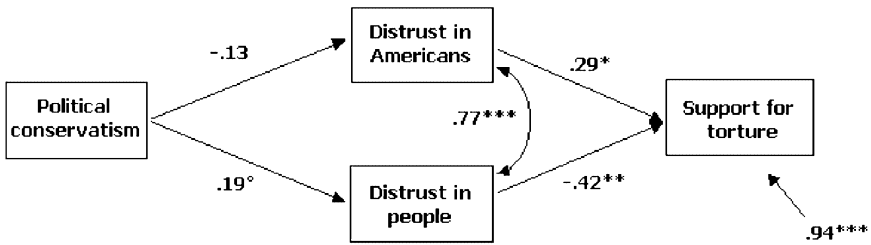


Figure 3. Alternative path model in which distrust in Americans and people mediates the link between political conservatism and support for torture of suspected terrorists. (*Chi-square* = 17.03, *df* = 1, *p* < .001; *RMSEA* = .44). **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

degrees of freedom, which reflected the absence of the two direct paths from the measures of distrust to support for torture (see Figure 2).

In addition to testing the hypothesized model, an alternative model was tested to provide a model for comparison. In the alternative model, support for torture was kept as the dependent variable, but the positions of the measures of distrust and political conservatism were reversed. That is, political conservatism was an exogenous variable shaping distrust. Distrust in people and Americans then carried the effect of political conservatism to support for torture. To give the alternative model the best chance of reproducing the relationships between the variables, the error terms between two measures of distrust were allowed to correlate. Freeing this parameter reduced the number of degrees of freedom in the alternative model to one, with this single degree of freedom reflecting the absence of a direct path from political conservatism to support for torture (see Figure 3).

The raw data of the four relevant indices used in the path models were analyzed with *EQS 6.1 for Windows* (see Bentler & Wu, 2002). The bivariate correlation matrix of the variables in the model is presented in Table 3. Schematic depictions of both models tested, as well as the path estimates from the standardized solutions, are presented in Figure 2. In strong support of Hypothesis 3, the

Table 3. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables Used in Path Models

	1	2	3	4
1. Distrust in Americans	–			
2. Distrust in people	.77***	–		
3. Support for torture	–.20°	–.01	–	
4. Political conservatism	–.09	–.15	.48***	–
<i>M</i>	4.86	4.55	2.90	2.81
<i>SD</i>	0.90	0.89	1.66	1.34

°*p* < .10, ****p* < .001.

model in which political conservatism was a mediator provided a very good fit to the data (*Chi square* = 3.35, *df* = 2, *p* = .20; *RMSEA* = .09). All direct paths were statistically significant (*ps* < .001) and in the hypothesized direction. Additionally, Sobel tests revealed that the key indirect paths (i.e., the relationships between distrust and support for torture traveling through political conservatism) were also significant (*Zs* = 2.78 and –2.67 for people and Americans, respectively, *ps* < .01). Finally, an analysis of the saturated model, in which all possible paths were estimated as predictors of support for torture (i.e., a straightforward regression analysis), revealed that the direct paths from the exogenous variables were reduced to non-significance (*Bs* = –.48 and .35; *SEs* = .29 and .31; *ps* > .10; for distrust in Americans and people, respectively) when the mediator, political conservatism (*B* = .55, *SE* = .14, *p* < .001), was included in the model. Thus in clear support of Hypothesis 3, political conservatism did in fact mediate the relationships between distrust in Americans versus people and support for torture of suspected terrorists.

The alternative model, on the other hand, provided a poor fit to the data (*Chi square* = 17.03, *df* = 1, *p* < .001; *RMSEA* = .44). The path between political conservatism and distrust in people, and the path between political conservatism and distrust in Americans, each failed to reach conventional significance levels. Taken together, a comparison of the two model fits lends confidence to the notion that in the causal chain leading to support for torture of suspected terrorists, political conservatism is better thought of as a mediator of distrust, rather than a cause.

Finally, to test Hypothesis 4, a simple difference score was calculated between the two measures of distrust (Distrust in Americans – Distrust in people), with higher scores indicating a tendency to trust Americans more than people and with lower scores indicating a tendency to trust people more than Americans. The use of difference scores in psychological research is controversial (see Cohen & Cohen, 1975), primarily because such scores tend to be unreliable when the elements of the difference score are highly correlated, as was the case here. However, both Studies 1 and 2 have now demonstrated that, consistent with the above theorizing, the two elements of the proposed difference score are individually unique predictors of the dependent variables under investigation. Moreover, the high correlation between the measures of distrust, which results in attenuated

reliability of the difference score, should work against, rather than in favor of, finding the hypothesized relationships.

Nevertheless, consistent with Hypothesis 4, the difference score (calculated from predictors that were rescaled from 0 to 1; $M = .05$; $SD = .12$; range = $-.36$ to $.42$) proved to be a strong and significant predictor of both support for torture ($B = -.76$, $p < .01$) and political conservatism ($B = -.67$, $p < .01$; see Table 2). That is, the more participants distrusted Americans relative to people, the less likely they were to display conservative preferences. Moreover, when political conservatism was added to the equation predicting support for torture, the predictive contribution of the difference score was reduced to nonsignificance ($B = -.43$, $p = .13$). Further analyses revealed that the mediated effect explained 54% of the direct effect from the difference score to support for torture. These findings thus provide direct support for Hypothesis 4 and converging support for Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

Study 2 provided strong support for all four research hypotheses. Additionally, this study gave confidence to the validity of the hypothesized mediational sequence, as the proposed model accommodated the data considerably better than an alternative model in which political conservatism, rather than distrust in Americans versus people, was exogenous. An examination of the simple bivariate relationships, presented in Table 3, threw light on why the alternative model provided such a poor fit.

Namely, when considered on their own, the bivariate relationships between each respective measure of distrust and the dependent variables failed to reach statistical significance. It was only after each measure of distrust was controlled for the other measure of distrust that the clear pattern of hypothesized relationships emerged. More precisely, it was the unique variance in distrust in people—the variance not associated with distrust in Americans—that predicted support for torture and political conservatism. Likewise, it was the unique variance in distrust in Americans that predicted opposition for torture and political conservatism. Because the alternative model only controlled the two measures of distrust for one another after estimating political conservatism, rather than before (as in the hypothesized model), the alternative model assessed the relationship between political conservatism and measures of distrust that conflated, rather than separated, their unique variances, perhaps attenuating the strength of the paths. In other words, political conservatism did not predict unique dimensions of distrust, but the unique dimensions of distrust did predict political conservatism.

General Discussion

The present findings are consistent with the idea that distrust in Americans and distrust in people are unique and complementary facets of Americans'

political preferences. Although Study 1 provided only partial support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, the pattern of the data was consistent with the idea, confirmed directly in Study 2, that, after controlling one dimension of distrust for the other, distrust in Americans predicted lower support for competitive policy preferences, whereas distrust in people predicted higher support for competitive policy preferences. Both studies showed that the different slopes associated with distrust of Americans versus people on policy preferences were largely explained by political conservatism (consistent with Hypothesis 3). And Study 2 provided direct evidence that the relative difference between distrust in Americans versus people predicted competitive foreign policy preferences (consistent with Hypothesis 4).

Somewhat counterintuitively, the present findings suggest that perceiving Americans to be generally benevolent and cooperative may actually grant Americans the moral credentials to act in a competitive and self-interested fashion (see Monin & Miller, 2001). The catch, of course, is that when a body with moral credentials acts in a self-interested fashion, the act is unlikely to be interpreted as being motivated by selfishness or greed. One person calls the war in Iraq a premeditated act of avarice and aggression; another calls it a war fought for freedom and justice. A key claim of the present research is that differing views about people, in a general sense, and Americans, in particular, provide a clear foundation on which these sorts of political judgments and opinions can rest. Support for American-led competition is seen as moral and righteous *because* American motives are highly other-oriented and the motives of people in general are so highly self-interested: "People are bad, but we are good." Those who oppose competition, on the other hand, seem to think, "People may be bad, but we are worse." The result is that both parties are able to believe that their own policy position is the morally correct or superior position, whereas those holding the contrary position might be deemed crazy, cruel, or ignorant (see Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995).

The present findings should be viewed in the context of other scholarship recognizing the importance of the relationship between superordinate and subgroup stereotypes for predicting competitive preferences toward outgroups (e.g., Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). However, the present research departs from both these approaches in significant ways. Rather than positing that intergroup competition flows from regarding the ingroup as similar to (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wenzel et al., 2003), or as holding proprietary status over (e.g., Blumer, 1958; Sidanius, Feshbach, Levin, & Pratto, 1997), its superordinate category, the present research presents an instance where competition flows from seeing the ingroup as morally superior to the superordinate standard. Drawing on findings that pessimistic views of people-in-general correlate with competitive preferences, the present research combined this idea with the notion that perceived trustworthiness of the ingroup is often a precursor to moral endorsement of ingroup-led competition. Thus the present model holds that views of Americans are contrasted from, and are complementary to, views of people, which together form a moral basis for competitive foreign policy preferences.

Additional Questions and Limitations

The finding that distrust in human nature varies across political variables naturally leads to the question of where the trust and distrust come from. As noted in the introduction, people appear to learn to distrust human nature from direct and indirect instruction (e.g., parents, books, religion) and more subtle forms of instruction (e.g., political events; see Miller, 1999). Although such explanations shed light on the origins of distrust in general, they must be elaborated to explain the patterns associated with different targets of distrust observed here.

One explanation for the sources of differential distrust can be derived from social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This theory is an effort to explain why, the world over, human societies are arranged into group-based social hierarchies, with dominant groups enjoying a disproportionate share of the good things in life (e.g., wealth, good health), and with subordinate groups enduring a disproportionate share of the bad things in life (e.g., poverty, disease). Central to the theory is a concern with understanding mechanisms by which dominant groups, such as Americans, consciously and unconsciously enhance and maintain their status over subordinate groups. One way this is accomplished, according to the theory, is through the perpetuation of *legitimizing myths* that make the dominant groups' position appear normal, preferable, and righteous. Thus the theory would hold that individuals might adopt the differential distrust seen in the present research as a convenient way of legitimizing (or delegitimizing) generalized preferences for group-based dominance. In other words, distrust in Americans versus people might be partly derived from individual preferences for social dominance (or anti-dominance). Future research should seek to test this possibility, particularly in terms of the causal relationship between distrust and social dominance preferences.

Questions concerning generalizability might be raised due to the sampling method used to obtain the data. Should we trust the results of web-based questionnaires? In a study designed to address this very question, Gosling and colleagues (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004) reported that with simple safeguards on data collection (such as those implemented here), "Internet findings generalize across presentation formats, are not adversely affected by nonserious or repeat responders, and are consistent with findings from traditional methods" (p. 93). A variety of other studies on online samples' generalizability suggest similar findings (see Gosling et al., 2004, for a review).

However, it must be noted that the samples I obtained were by no means representative of the U.S. population. The Study 1 sample was overwhelmingly composed of white, middle-aged, highly politicized males, whereas the Study 2 sample was younger, more ethnically diverse, and overwhelmingly female. In both samples, higher education was overrepresented, and ethnic diversity was underrepresented, relative to the U.S. population. Of course, the usefulness of the present samples is carried by the observed relationships among variables (rather

than on population mean estimates), but confidence in the findings' generality would undoubtedly benefit from additional investigations employing representative samples.

Conclusion

Invariably, it seems that people with clear stances on issues such as torture and military engagement also regard their stances as morally legitimate. The present research can be viewed as an attempt to understand how abstract views about human nature work together to allow such moral clarity to occur. It does not appear to be the case that competitive preferences are driven by a unitary contempt for all human kind, but rather by a nuanced appreciation for the interrelations between various facets of human kind. Distrust in people and distrust in Americans appear to have unique, but complementary, connections in Americans' political psychology.

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