



The Salience of National Identity and Americans' Orientations Toward Subgroups

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The Salience of National Identity and Americans' Orientations Toward Subgroups (revised August 2013)

The proposed study will assess the nature of Americans' national identity in relation to national subgroups such as immigrants, poor people, and Christian Fundamentalists. It draws on previous studies' examination of "exclusionary" and "inclusionary" forms of national attachment, while focusing on the differential impact of national attachments for Americans with differing political orientations. It uses a non-verbal national symbol (the American flag) to heighten the salience of national identity while skirting the fraught debate over the alternative substantive dimensions of national attachment.

Background

A substantial literature has focused on two dimensions of "national attachment" and debated the proper sets of measures to tap these attitudinal orientations [e.g., 6, 17]. One set of scholars focus on the distinction between a "love of country" (labeled "patriotism" or "constructive patriotism") and a competitive ideology of national superiority (called "nationalism," "uncritical patriotism," or "blind patriotism") [e.g., 7-9, 11, 14]. This dimension of national identity is most directly related to attitudes toward international relations and defense.

The second prominent distinction in the literature on national attachment contrasts inclusive understandings of the national community (variously called "civic nationalism," "liberal nationalism," or "inclusive nationalism") and exclusive understandings that place stricter limits on who "counts" as a member of one's nation (labeled "ethnic nationalism," "illiberal nationalism," or "exclusionary patriotism") [e.g., 1, 13, 15, 16]. This second dimension is most directly related to domestic policy preferences and attitudes toward national subgroups and is most relevant to the proposed study.

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3 The studies of national identity cited above use a range of alternative attitudinal measures
4 in an effort to capture one or another dimension of individuals' national attachments. Among the
5 challenges faced by scholars working with these measures are questions about ideological bias
6 [6], non-random measurement error [17], and the difficulty of empirically isolating aspects of
7 national attachment not only from each other but from correlated attitudes and beliefs such as
8 ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, cosmopolitanism, etc.
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11 One approach that helps mitigate these concerns is the experimental manipulation of the
12 salience of national identity using broad and comparatively "content neutral" symbols.
13 Specifically, a small number of studies in multiple countries have exposed random subsets of
14 subjects to images of their national flag. This approach has its limitations as well--a key one
15 being that the broad and symbolic nature of this stimulus makes it difficult to know exactly what
16 aspect of national attachment has been triggered by exposure to the flag. Nevertheless, the
17 experimentally randomized component of this approach helps allay concerns that measures of
18 national attachment are reflecting distinct but correlated constructs, while the comparatively
19 content-neutral aspect of the national flag helps allay concerns that verbal measures tap narrow
20 aspects of national attachment that are more relevant for some subgroups than others. In contrast,
21 a comparatively content-neutral symbol like a flag can trigger any or all of these different
22 associations for different subjects, while verbal measures that tap "constructive patriotism" or
23 "ethnic nationalism" tap only (or primarily) one specific dimension of national attachment.
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48 Previous research using national flags as experimental primes has focused on the impact
49 of national attachment on attitudes and behavior toward national minority or disadvantaged
50 subgroups. In the United States, India, New Zealand, Israel, and Indonesia, researchers have
51 found that exposure to images of the national flag generates more positive and inclusive
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3 orientations toward disadvantaged or lower status national out-groups [2, 4, 10], increased
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5 salience of egalitarian concepts [2, 12], and less extremist political views [5].¹
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8 None of the studies noted above, however, has looked at potential interactions between
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10 political ideology and responses to the national flag.² Like the proposed TESS study, the pilot
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12 study described below focused explicitly on the different reactions of liberal and conservative
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14 subjects and did not find the inclusionary responses to the flag characteristic of previous studies.
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16 Instead, liberals exposed to the American flag did not differ from those not exposed, while
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18 conservatives exposed to the flag displayed more exclusionary attitudes and behavior toward the
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20 poor than those not exposed.
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24 25 26 27 **The Pilot Study**

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29 To assess variation in Americans' responses to images of their national flag, I conducted
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31 a web survey (n=1,600 recruited through Mechanical Turk) on which a random half of
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33 respondents saw a small American flag on the upper-left corner of each screen (figure 1). The
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35 survey included attitudinal measures toward immigrants, African Americans, homosexuals, and
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37 welfare recipients. Unfortunately, attitudes toward these different groups were not assessed with
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39 parallel measures, so caution must be used in interpreting the results. The central relevant
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41 findings from the pilot study are (1) that exposure to the American flag reduced support for
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43 welfare and generated more cynical attitudes toward welfare recipients, (2) that this effect was
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45 found exclusively among self-identified conservative respondents, and (3) that attitudes toward
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47 the other subgroups did not change significantly in response to flag exposure.
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53 In addition to these attitudinal measures, a behavioral measure was included in the survey
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55 in the form of a dictator game. Respondents were paid a 60 cent bonus and offered the
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57 opportunity to share some or all of this bonus with a randomly selected individual who was
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3 completing the same survey. For a random half of the respondents, the potential recipient was
4 described as having a family income of less than \$25,000; for the other half of the respondents,
5 the income of the potential recipient was not mentioned. Paralleling the results of the attitudinal
6 measures, conservatives were significantly less generous in sharing their bonus money with the
7 low income survey respondent when exposed to the American flag, while flag exposure had no
8 impact on their generosity toward a respondent whose income was not revealed. Liberals'
9 generosity was not affected by flag exposure in either the low income or unspecified conditions.
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20 The pilot study results suggest that national attachments do not work in the same way for
21 all Americans. But the non-representative nature of the sample and the lack of parallel measures
22 of different groups limit our ability to draw firm conclusions. In particular, conservatives' more
23 negative responses to the poor in the flag condition could be due to (1) a more exclusionary form
24 of national identity than that held by liberals, (2) a different set of subgroups that are viewed as
25 falling outside the boundary (or belonging at the periphery) of the national community than
26 liberals, or (3) a strong individualist component in conservatives' national identification relative
27 to liberals.
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41 **TESS Experiment**

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43 By exposing a random half of my respondents to an image of the American flag, the
44 proposed experiment will confirm (or not) the pilot study findings (Q2, Q6, Q7, Q13, Q16),
45 provide parallel measures of attitudes toward multiple out-groups (including those typically
46 viewed more negatively by liberals; Q3-Q18), and distinguish between individualist objections to
47 assisting the undeserving and a preference for private rather than government assistance to the
48 needy (Q1a/Q1b, Q19) as discussed in connection to exclusionary nationalism by Theiss-Morse
49 [15].
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3 The central analyses will assess the impact of the flag manipulation and the difference in
4 the magnitude and direction of this impact for liberals and conservatives. Based on the results
5 from the pilot study, a power analysis for the difference-in-differences for the flag manipulation
6 requires about 3,000 respondents.³ The questions in table 1 constitute 11 TESS units.⁴ Given the
7 sample size described above, this number of units somewhat exceeds the TESS allotment and I
8 will therefore plan to buy the additional resources with outside funding.
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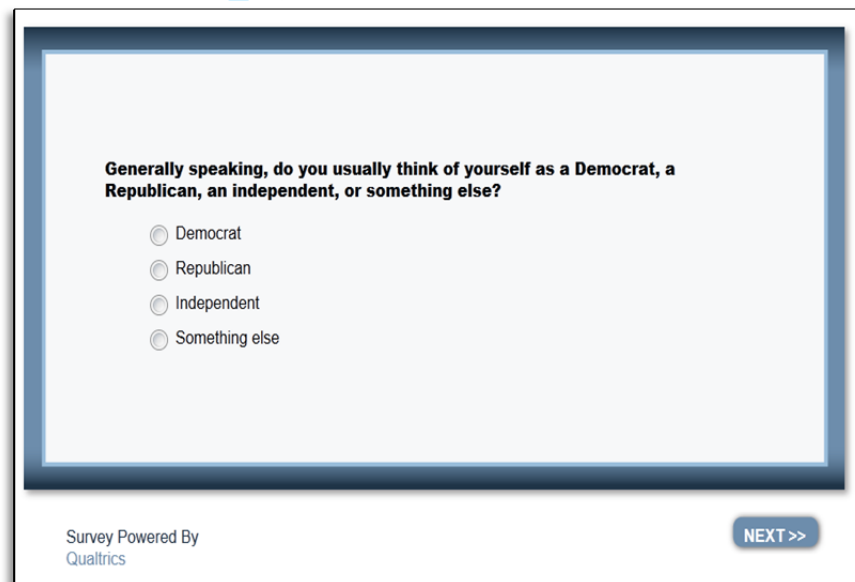
20 **Contribution to science and society**

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22 At a time of historically high political polarization, understanding how national identity
23 differentially shapes the social and political views of Americans with different political
24 orientations is increasingly important. In contrast to the inclusive responses to national symbols
25 found in previous research, my pilot study suggests that national symbols can elicit both positive
26 and negative responses that may differ for different groups of respondents. The pilot study found
27 negative responses only for conservative respondents, but the proposed study will be able to
28 more accurately assess the consequences of national attachments for both liberals and
29 conservatives.
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41 By helping to illuminate the multiple consequences of national attachment and the
42 multiple associations that citizens have with their countries' national symbols, this study will
43 deepen our understanding of citizens' conceptions of the national community. Deeper
44 understanding of how national attachments can help bridge but also divide subgroups can benefit
45 society as a whole, as well as scholars of political science, social psychology, sociology, and the
46 many other disciplines that embrace national attachments as a central element of social life in the
47 contemporary world.
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Figure 1



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Table 1 - Survey Items for TESS

Q1 (version a). Do you agree or disagree that charitable organizations should provide help with food, rent, and other basic needs to people who have lost their jobs during the economic downturn even if they have family members that could help them make ends meet? (5-point scale from agree strongly to disagree strongly)

Q1 (version b). Do you agree or disagree that government should provide help with food, rent, and other basic needs to people who have lost their jobs during the economic downturn even if they have family members that could help them make ends meet? (5-point scale from agree strongly to disagree strongly)

Q2. Do you think that most people who receive money from welfare today could get along without it if they tried, or do you think that most of them really need this help? (5-point unlabeled scale)

Q3-Q12. Please indicate how favorable or unfavorable you feel toward each of the following groups (1-10 scale; randomize order):

Immigrants
 African Americans
 Gays and lesbians
 People on welfare
 Poor people
 Rich people
 Christian fundamentalists
 The Tea Party
 Business owners
 Farmers

Q13-Q18. The United States' government has many programs that are designed to help different groups with problems they may be facing. Please tell us if you think the government should be doing more or less to help each of the following groups (Much less, Somewhat less, About the same, Somewhat more, Much more; randomize order):

Poor people
 African Americans
 Business owners
 Welfare recipients
 Farmers
 Small towns with high levels of unemployment

Q19. Which is more important to you, that people in need get help or that everyone takes responsibility for themselves? (5-point scale with middle and end-points labeled)

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22 ¹ Kimmelmeier and Winter (2008) focused on the “outward oriented” nationalism/patriotism
23 dimension rather than inclusive/exclusive dimension of national attachment, but also report that
24 in contrast to these other studies, subjects exposed to the American flag scored higher on the
25 group dominance subscale of social dominance orientation.
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28 ² One study that did examine ideological orientation along with a variety of other possible
29 moderators (Carter et al. 2011) did not find any significant interactions, although the outcome
30 variable in this study was not attitudes or behavior toward subgroups, but party and candidate
31 preferences.
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34 ³ This calculation is based on a power analysis with power=.8, and an effect size for flag
35 exposure of 8 percentage points among conservatives and 0 points among liberals (typical of the
36 results in the pilot study), and an alpha level of .05.
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39 ⁴ 3 stand-alone questions of 1 unit each, a matrix of 10 affect questions for 5 units, a matrix of 6
40 government assistance questions for 3 units.
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