Ideological Asymmetry in the Relationship Between Epistemic Motivation and Political Attitudes

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Research on the psychological bases of political attitudes tends to dwell on the attitudes of conservatives, rarely placing a conscious thematic emphasis on what motivates liberals to adopt the attitudes they do. This research begins to address this imbalance by examining whether the need for cognitive closure is equally associated with conservatism in policy attitudes among those who broadly identify with the liberal and conservative labels. Counterintuitively, we predict and find that the need for closure is most strongly associated with policy conservatism among those who symbolically identify as liberals or for whom liberal considerations are made salient. In turn, we also find that the need for closure is associated with reduced ideological consistency in issue attitudes among liberal identifiers but not conservative identifiers. Although supportive of our predictions, these results run counter to a simple “rigidity of the right” hypothesis, which would predict a positive link between need for closure and policy conservatism regardless of ideological self-description, and the “ideologue” hypothesis, which would predict a positive link between these variables among conservative identifiers and a negative one among liberal identifiers. We discuss the implications these findings for understanding the motivations underlying liberals’ and conservatives’ attitudes and suggest that future research attend to the important distinction between ideology in the sense of symbolic identification with conservatism versus liberalism and ideology in the sense of an average tilt to the right or left in one’s policy attitudes.

Keywords: epistemic motivation, need for closure, ideology, attitude structure
“true believers” with respect to their chosen ideological labels due to an inclination to process incoming information in similar rigid ways, with the need for closure being associated with greater policy conservatism among self-described conservatives and reduced policy conservatism among self-described liberals.

In contrast, we develop and find support for the hypothesis that the need for closure should be most strongly associated with actual policy conservatism among those who identify as liberals, rather than uniformly predisposing individuals to policy conservatism or to the respective policy positions of the broad ideological label they identify with. Extending this basic result, we also find that the need for closure is associated with reduced ideological consistency in one’s attitudes among self-described liberals but not among self-described conservatives. Finally, using a survey experiment, we conceptually replicate our key finding by demonstrating that the need for closure is more strongly associated with conservative attitudes toward an issue when the issue is evaluated in the context of liberal rather than conservative ideological considerations.

Need for Closure and Ideological Preferences

As noted above, research finds that a general preference for closure and certainty correlates positively with various manifestations of political conservatism (see Jost et al., 2003, 2009; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Kemmelmeier, 1997). Perhaps the most common operationalization of individual differences in “epistemic motivations” such as these—particularly in studies of the psychological foundations of ideology—has been the need for cognitive closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). People who are high in this epistemic motivation dislike uncertainty, and they prefer to reach conclusions quickly and decisively. They seek to accomplish this goal by “seizing” quickly on any available information to reach conclusions and by “freezing” on these conclusions once they are reached. A key way of accomplishing the goal is by seeking out social contexts, cultural frameworks, and belief systems that promise order, clarity, and stability (Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

Accordingly, people high in the need for closure are more likely to adopt conservative identities and attitudes (e.g., Chirumbo, 2002; Golec, 2002; Jost et al., 2003; Kemmelmeier, 1997; Kossowska & van Hiel, 2003; Van Hiel, Pandelaere, & Duriez, 2004). Moreover, the need for closure is positively associated with other variables that conceptually relate to conservatism, such as an enhanced preference for high-status ingroups (Federico, Hunt, & Fisher, in press; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & DeGrada, 2006; Kruglanski, Shah, Pierro, & Mannetti, 2002), cultural traditionalism (Van Hiel et al., 2004), and greater reluctance to incorporate new information into one’s existing attitudes and beliefs (Ford & Kruglanski, 1995). These findings are quite robust, holding across a variety of samples from a wide variety of social and cultural contexts (Jost et al., 2003, 2009). By way of explanation, this approach suggests that the preferences for social convention, stability, and hierarchy associated with conservatism are especially satisfying to those who desire closure and certainty, leading to an elective affinity between the need for closure and the politics of the right—as the aforementioned rigidity of the right hypothesis would predict (Jost et al., 2003). Similarly, work on “value pluralism” has noted other reasons why conservatism may be a better closure provider than liberalism (Tetlock, 1983, 1986). This line of work assumes that these ideologies vary in the relative importance that they place on the values of individual freedom and social equality: liberals place relatively high importance on both values, whereas conservatives value freedom more than equality. In turn, resolving conflict between these competing values—and achieving closure—is easier for conservatives than for liberals because the values are of unequal strength.

Symbolic and Operational Ideology

A great strength of the literature reviewed above is that it demonstrates a relationship between the need for closure and many different manifestations of conservatism. However, less attention has been paid to the structural complexity of the ideological belief systems that typically serve as dependent variables in analyses of the political consequences of epistemic motivation—or to potential complexity in how epistemic motivation may relate to various components of these belief systems. In regard to this complexity, political psychologists regard ideological belief systems as being hierarchical in nature (Converse, 1964; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985). In this framework, abstract categories such as “conservatism” and “liberalism” serve as capstones in belief systems, which in turn organize assemblages of lower level values—for example, hierarchy and resistance to change in the case of conservatism and equality and openness to change in the case of liberalism (Jost et al., 2003). Finally, nearer to the bottom of the belief-system hierarchy, one can find the specific issue preferences implied by a particular ideology (Converse, 1964).

Although the structure of ideologies can be parsed in a number of ways (Jost et al., 2009), an especially important distinction is often made between symbolic ideology and operational ideology (Free & Cantril, 1967; Stimson, 2004). Symbolic ideology refers to identification with an ideological label (i.e., description of oneself as a conservative or liberal), whereas operational ideology refers to one’s average tendency to hold conservative versus liberal positions across specific policy issues. At first glance, symbolic and operational ideology may appear to be nearly identical constructs or one constructed captured via two different measurement strategies, but there are several reasons why researchers can and should distinguish between the two conceptualizations of ideology. In the literature on political attitudes, ideological self-description in the symbolic sense is thought of as a general posture that constrains specific policy attitudes and political behaviors (Converse, 1964; Federico, 2011; Hagner & Pierce, 1982; Levi- tin & Miller, 1979). Indeed, ideological self-description reliably predicts operational attitudes toward specific issues (Jacoby, 1991; Jost, 2006; Malka & Lelkes, 2010; Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991).

However, those who adopt an ideological label at the symbolic level do not always adopt operational policy positions that are consistent with that label (Converse, 1964; Kinder & Sears, 1985; Stimson, 2004). Early studies showed that nearly two out of three Americans who are operationally liberal identify symbolically as conservative (Free & Cantril, 1967). Although it is
important to note that the connection between symbolic and operational ideology is stronger among those who are informed enough to understand which issue positions “go with” the liberal and conservative labels (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Federico & Schneider, 2007), the split remains at the aggregate level. For example, Stimson (2004) estimated that 22% of General Social Survey respondents are “conflicted conservatives” who, despite their symbolic self-description, espouse liberal policy positions.

**Consequences of the Need for Closure Among Symbolic Conservatives and Symbolic Liberals**

Despite these reasons to distinguish between symbolic and operational ideology, research on the psychological bases of ideology has rarely attended explicitly to this distinction. Indeed, recent work finds a relationship between the need for closure and conservatism at both the symbolic and operational levels, suggesting that similar processes may connect the need for closure with each type of ideology (Golec, 2002; Jost et al., 2003; Kosowska & Van Hiel, 2003). Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that relationships among the need for closure, symbolic conservatism, and operational conservatism are more complex than these bivariate associations would suggest.

To begin with, it is true at a theoretical level that the need for closure should promote both symbolic conservatism and its concrete policy expression in terms of operational conservatism, because both conservative identity and policies suggest the certainty and stability of the status quo. As noted above, this is in fact the pattern revealed by empirical research. However, it is important to remember that the influence of the need for closure on symbolic conservatism itself—though robust—is not overwhelming in magnitude, with zero-order correlations that are typically less than .30 in Western democracies (Jost et al., 2003, p. 359). As such, symbolic liberals high in need for closure and symbolic conservatives low in need for closure are not rare. This raises two key questions. First, is the relationship between need for closure and operational conservatism uniform across the spectrum of symbolic ideological identifications? Second, if it is not, how might the relationship vary as a function of symbolic ideology?

Previous research offers mixed guidance on these questions. On one hand, a simple reading of the rigidity of the right hypothesis suggests that the need for closure should predict greater operational conservatism among symbolic conservatives and liberals alike. That is, although symbolic conservatives may very well have a greater baseline preference for conservative policy than symbolic liberals do, the need for closure may uniformly push individuals away from whatever this baseline is and toward greater policy conservatism (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). On the other hand, to the extent that ideological self-description is itself a major influence on specific political attitudes and beliefs (Jacoby, 1991; Jost, 2006; Malka & Leukes, 2010), conservatism in the symbolic sense should promote operational policy conservatism over and above any direct influence of the need for closure or other “pre-political” variables. The reason for this is that liberalism and conservatism as symbolic identities suggest both broad social aims—such as a desire for social order and stability in the case of conservatism and openness and social change in the case of liberalism—and specific sets of desired policy prescriptions that further those aims (Jost et al., 2008, 2009). With respect to the right of the political spectrum, a symbolically conservative self-description should make the issue-relevant considerations and justifications that support conservative positions chronically salient, shifting operational policy preferences toward the conservative end of the spectrum (Zaller, 1992). Thus, although epistemic motivation should certainly have an influence, the dominant factor behind operational policy conservatism should be the degree to which one tends to view the political world through a symbolic conservative (rather than liberal) ideological frame.

The latter point suggests that the general identities implied by symbolic conservatism and liberalism may supply very different frames through which epistemic variables are likely to influence actual policy attitudes. By extension, it also suggests that the relationship between the need for closure and operational policy conservatism may differ among symbolically self-described liberals and conservatives. But how? One scenario is suggested by what has become known as the ideologue hypothesis (Rokeach, 1960; Tetlock, 1984, 1998; see also McClosky & Chong, 1985; Putnam, 1971). In essence, this hypothesis suggests that variables associated with rigidity or closed-mindedness—such as the need for closure—should make individuals adhere more strongly to whatever policy preferences are suggested by their symbolic ideological orientation. Consistent with this argument, research shows that a high need for closure is associated with a general tendency toward group-centrism, in which those with a high need for closure seek greater opinion uniformity and adhere more strongly to in-group norms (Kruglanski et al., 2006). Consequently, individuals high in need for closure may be more conservative in their operational policy attitudes if they identify symbolically as conservatives but less conservative in their policy attitudes if they identify symbolically as liberals.

In contrast to the predictions implied by the rigidity of the right and the ideologue hypotheses, we offer a novel argument that brings us back to the question of how motivational processes typically associated with those on the right might influence the political attitudes of those on the left. In particular, we argue that the need for closure should—somewhat paradoxically—have a stronger relationship with operational ideology among symbolic conservatives than among symbolic liberals. If, as described above, one of the strongest determinants of operational ideology is one’s symbolic ideological self-placement, symbolic conservatives will already have myriad reasons to hold conservative policy attitudes, regardless of their need for closure. Among these individuals, arguments in favor of policy conservatism—as well as broad conservative concerns about social stability and order—will be made chronically salient by their broad ideological self-description. This should make most symbolic conservatives chronically oriented toward conservative goals of social order and stability and policies perceived to further these goals, leaving the need for closure with little additional scope to influence operational policy attitudes.

In contrast, symbolic liberals should lack the ideological considerations needed to justify conservative policies on substantive intellectual grounds, in the form of specific policy arguments or of values that explicitly endorse social stability and order. Indeed, they are likely to have chronically available many liberal consid-
erations that militate against conservative policy stances. This should potentially leave the need for closure with more room to influence policy attitudes. That is, symbolic liberals may support conservative policies that they would otherwise oppose on substantive grounds if they also possess a generalized discomfort with uncertainty and instability due to a high need for closure. Among these individuals, a high need for closure should induce a desire for social stability and order not otherwise provided by their liberal symbolic ideology. In turn, this should push them in the direction of greater operational conservatism. If this is the case, the need for closure is likely to predict policy conservatism among symbolic liberals but not symbolic conservatives.

In turn, this primary hypothesis suggests a number of other relevant predictions. First, it suggests that the need for closure may have different consequences for political attitude structure among symbolic conservatives and liberals. In this vein, belief systems are often characterized in terms of their level of ideological consistency—specifically, vertical constraint between symbolic ideology and operational ideology with respect to attitudes toward specific issues and horizontal constraint among operational attitudes toward specific issues (Converse, 1964; Judd & Krosnick, 1989; Zaller, 1992). At first glance, we might expect that the need for closure would lead both conservatives and liberals to “seize” and “freeze” on the core opinions and beliefs of their symbolic ideological group (Kruglanski et al., 2006), consistent with the implications of the aforementioned ideologue hypothesis. However, to the extent that epistemic motivation shapes policy attitudes among symbolic liberals but not symbolic conservatives, ideological constraint may be more bound up with the need for closure on the left. If the need for closure predicts deviation from liberalism in the policy realm among symbolic liberals but has no effect on the policy attitudes of symbolic conservatives, then the need for closure may predict reduced ideological constraint in both its vertical and horizontal forms among symbolic liberals but not among symbolic conservatives. Thus, the need for closure may have asymmetrical effects not only on the general left–right bent of one’s policy attitudes but also on the structure of those attitudes as a function of symbolic ideology.

Second, just as one’s symbolic identification with conservatism or liberalism should make different ideological considerations chronically salient and moderate the policy impact of the need for closure, situational cues may make conservative or liberal considerations temporarily salient with the same effects. If our hypothesis is correct, the need for closure should not be especially relevant to specific policy preferences among individuals for whom conservative considerations relevant to a policy issue are explicitly made salient. In contrast, individuals for whom liberal considerations are made salient will not have easy cognitive access to reasons for taking a conservative stance on the policy. In the absence of substantive political rationales for a conservative stance, individual differences in the need for closure are more likely to push individuals in the direction of policies that imply certainty, stability, and order. Therefore, we also predict that the need for closure should be more strongly associated with conservative opinions about an issue when it is evaluated in the context of liberal rather than conservative ideological considerations pertinent to that issue.

Overview of the Present Research

In sum, our purpose of this study is to test a counterintuitive prediction: Although the need for closure is commonly thought of as a characteristic of self-described conservatives, its greatest impact on conservatism in policy attitudes may be found among those for whom liberal ideological considerations are salient. In the present study, we examine this basic question in a unique, nationally representative survey of Americans that included a validated short version of the Need for Closure Scale. Using these data, we examine three hypotheses:

1. Symbolic ideology should moderate the relationship between need for closure and conservatism in policy attitudes, such that the need for closure should be more strongly associated with operational policy conservatism among self-described liberals than among self-described conservatives.

2. Given the belief-system conflict that a high need for closure should produce among liberals, the need for closure should be associated with lower ideological constraint among self-described liberals but not among self-described conservatives.

3. The need for closure should be more strongly associated with conservative opinions about an issue when features of the situation lead that issue to be evaluated in the context of liberal rather than conservative issue-relevant ideological considerations.

In our tests of these hypotheses, we control for a number of other predictors of policy attitudes and attitude structure. In particular, given that those with higher levels of political information are more likely to align salient ideological content with policy positions (Stimson, 2004; Zaller, 1992), we account for the main effects of information and its interaction with symbolic ideology and/or manipulated ideological context in all of our analyses.

Method

Data

All of our analyses relied on the 2008 Information, Motivation, and Ideology Study (IMIS). The 2008 IMIS interviewed a nationally representative sample (N = 1,511 respondents) during the fall of 2008. The survey was conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc. (KN) using its web-enabled panel. To reach a nationally representative sample, KN chooses potential panel respondents through a scientific probability sample initially contacted via random-digit dialing telephone interviews. Adults successfully contacted this way are invited to participate in the KN web panel. If they agree, panel members are provided with a WebTV interface and free Internet access in return for completing a weekly survey (for representativeness evidence, see Chang & Krosnick, 2002; Huggins & Eyerman, 2001). The IMIS survey used a probability sample of all panel members 18 years of age or older. Among panel members randomly selected for the IMIS, 65.7% completed the survey. However, considering the rate at which households were recruited for the web panel (20%) and the rate at which at least one individual in each household completed an overall profile...
survey (54.5%), the final cumulative response rate for the IMIS was 7.2%.1

Measures

Below are descriptions of our measures. Unless otherwise indicated, all variables were recoded to run from 0 to 1 to ease interpretation of the coefficients in our regression models.

Need for closure. Given that the full 42-item Need for Closure Scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) was far too long for inclusion in a national survey—raising serious issues of cost and potential respondent fatigue—we turned to a revised 14-item version of the scale. Data collected by Pierro and Kruglanski (2006) in the United States and Italy suggest that this short scale has excellent psychometric properties, showing relatively high reliability (α = .81, in the United States; α = .79, in Italy) and strong disattenuated correlations with the original 42-item scale (r = .92, in the United States; r = .93, in Italy). The scale has been successfully used in recent published work as well (Pierro & Kruglanski, 2008; see also Kruglanski, Dechesne, Orehek, & Pierro, 2009). All items used a 6-point response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree); the text of the items can be found in Appendix A. Higher scores indicate a higher need for closure (α = .81; M = .44, SD = .14).

Ideological self-description. Symbolic ideology was operationalized in terms of ideological self-description. A measure was generated using responses to a series of sequential branching items. The first item read, “Generally speaking, would you consider yourself to be a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, or haven’t you thought much about this?” Those who answered “liberal” or “conservative” on the first item then received the following: “Would you call yourself a strong [liberal/conservative] or a not very strong [liberal/conservative]?” Those who answered “moderate” or indicated neither on the first item answered the following: “If you had to choose, would you consider yourself a liberal or a conservative?” [liberal, conservative, moderate]. Responses to these items were used to create a 7-point measure of ideological self-description: 1 (liberal, strong), 2 (liberal, not very strong), 3 (moderate/neither, lean liberal), 4 (moderate/neither), 5 (moderate/neither, lean conservative), 6 (conservative, not very strong), and 7 (conservative, strong). Higher scores indicate greater conservatism (M = .57, SD = .34).

Composite policy conservatism. Operational ideology was indexed as the average of respondents’ issue attitudes. A composite measure of policy conservatism was constructed from items measuring attitudes toward eight different policies covering the domains of economics, social welfare, defense, and social issues. Five-point measures of attitudes toward each policy were assembled from branching items; the items are described in Appendix B. Responses to each issue were recoded to run from 0 to 1 and reversed when appropriate so that higher scores always indicated a more conservative attitude. For purposes of analysis, the “liberal” and “conservative” positions on the issues were identified based on the positions taken by liberal and conservative political elites (who play the leading role in defining normative “liberal” and “conservative” positions in a political culture; see Gerring, 1998, for data on party platforms, and Poole & Rosenthal, 2007, for data on members of Congress; see also Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992) and on survey research on people’s perceptions of typical liberal and conservative beliefs (Erikson & Tedin, 2003, pp. 64–67).2 The recoded issue scores were then averaged to form a scale (α = .77, M = .45, SD = .20).

Constraint measures. To examine our second hypothesis, we examined multiple indices of constraint. Although constraint as an outcome is often examined by comparing correlations among issues in groups differing on some independent variable (Converse, 1964), this technique suffers from an inability to assess the individual-level structure implied by constraint (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Judd & Krosnick, 1989) and a tendency for correlations to be biased downward in groups that are highly homogenous in their attitudes (Barton & Parsons, 1977). Aggregate correlations are also not useful for examining constraint as a dependent variable in multivariate analyses, as we wish to do here. Therefore, we constructed individual-level measures tapping two aspects of ideological constraint: vertical constraint, or ideological agreement between one’s general left–right self-description and issue attitudes, and horizontal constraint, or ideological agreement between attitudes toward different issues. The two are related in that horizontal constraint can be thought of as a result of the vertical linkage between issue positions and a central ideological self-description; if an individual judges a greater number of issues in terms of his or her overall ideological identity, then attitudes toward those issues should be ideologically consistent as well (Converse, 1964).

Our measure of vertical constraint was based on indices used in other recent studies of attitude structure (e.g., Federico & Hunt, 2012; Federico & Schneider, 2007). It was computed as the proportion of the eight issue items for which the individual responded in a manner consistent with his or her overall position on the 7-point ideological self-description measure. This index taps the extent to which respondents adopt issue positions on the same “side” of the left–right divide as their general ideological self-description. The resulting index runs from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater vertical constraint (M = .48, SD = .25). In turn, our measure of horizontal constraint was based on a measure developed and validated by Barton and Parsons (1977) and used in numerous psychological studies (e.g.,

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1 The cumulative response rate is computed by multiplying these three component rates together (i.e., 20% × 54.5% × 65.7%; see Callegaro & DiSogra, 2008).

2 Confirming this designation of “liberal” and “conservative” issue stands, our data indicated that conservative ideological self-description was correlated with a preference for reduced government services and spending (r = .53), increased defense spending (r = .43), opposition to government-guaranteed jobs (r = .41), opposition to economic assistance to Blacks (r = .41), greater belief that a woman’s place is in the home (r = .26), opposition to stronger environmental regulation (r = .48), greater opposition to legal abortion (r = .48), and greater hostility to gay rights (r = .55), ps < .0001. To confirm this in a contemporaneous but independent sample, we examined the same ideology/issue correlations in the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES) time series survey; to keep question wordings parallel with those used here, we considered only ANES respondents who were randomly assigned to receive the “old” ANES item wordings (N = 1,156). Though the equivalent 2008 ANES correlations were somewhat weaker, all were significant and in the correct direction (i.e., r = .30, r = .26, r = .26, r = .26, r = .10, r = .29, r = .32, and r = .22, ps < .001).
It was computed by taking the standard deviation of each individual’s responses to the eight recoded issue items, recoding the resulting quantity to run from 0 to 1, and then reversing the score by subtracting from 1. This provides an indication of the lack of variability across a respondent’s issue positions; to the extent that a respondent is placing him- or herself in a similar left–right position across issues, scores on this measure tend to be higher ($M = .44$, $SD = .19$).

**Control variables.** The models we consider also contained several controls. Party identification was assessed with responses to a series of branching items. The stem item read, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?” Partisans then answered the following: “Would you call yourself a strong [Republican/ Democrat] or a not very strong [Republican/Democrat]?” Those who gave an independent, other-party, or no-preference response to the stem answered the following: “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?” [closer to Republican, closer to Democrat, neither]. Responses to these items were used to create a 7-point party identification measure ranging from 1 (strong Democrat) to 7 (strong Republican). Higher scores indicate a greater GOP tilt ($M = .50$, $SD = .36$).

Political information was measured with eight factual-knowledge items (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). These items asked (a) “What job or political office does Dick Cheney currently hold?” (b) “What job or political office does John Roberts currently hold?” (c) “What job or political office does Gordon Brown currently hold?” (d) “What job or political office does Nancy Pelosi currently hold?” (e) “Which political party currently has the most members in the Senate in Washington?” (f) “Which political party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington?” (g) “How long is the term of office for a U.S. Senator?” and (h) “Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to the Federal Courts—the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?” Responses were coded on a correct/incorrect (0/1) basis and averaged to form a scale ($\alpha = .65$, $M = .71$, $SD = .24$).

Finally, several demographics were considered. These included: age (in years), income (in thousands of dollars per year), race (0 = non-White, 1 = White), and gender (0 = female, 1 = male).

Because earlier work on the role of education has focused on the completion of a college degree as a critical educational experience in the development of attitude structures (e.g., Sniderman et al., 1991; see also Federico and Sidanius, 2002), we also included a variable indicating whether respondents had completed a college degree ($0 = \text{no, } 1 = \text{yes}$).

**Ideological Context Experiment**

The final part of the analysis we present below relies on data from a survey experiment in which we manipulated the ideological context in which respondents answered a target item about rights for criminal suspects. This effectively served as an experimental manipulation of symbolic ideological context. This experiment was placed at the very end of our survey, after respondents had completed the other measures discussed above. In an effort to manipulate ideological context for a specific issue in a subtle fashion, we employed a standard question-order manipulation that has been used for this purpose in numerous studies (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988; Tourangeau, Rasinski, Bradburn, & D’Andrade, 1989). To this end, respondents were randomly assigned to either a liberal context condition or a conservative context condition. The object of this manipulation was to systematically vary the ideological bent of the considerations salient to respondents before they completed the target item by varying the content of the items asked immediately prior to the target item. The context items we used for each condition highlight ideological themes that previous research suggests are emphasized respectively by political elites of the left and right in discussions of crime and civil liberties (McClosky & Brill, 1983, pp. 310–311; see also Altemeyer, 1996; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009).

In the liberal context condition, respondents completed three questions designed to activate liberal concerns about civil liberties and abuse of police powers: (a) “In enforcing the law, the authorities should stick to the rules if they want other people to respect the law. Do you agree or disagree?” (b) “Would say that the accused’s ‘right to remain silent’ is needed to protect individuals from forced confessions, or has it harmed the country by giving criminals too much protection?” and (c) “Keeping people in prison for long periods of time before bringing them to trial should not be allowed, no matter what the crime. Do you agree or disagree?” In the conservative context condition, respondents completed three questions intended to activate conservative concerns about the specter of crime and social disorder: (a) “Have you ever been threatened with a gun or shot at?” (b) “Is there any area around your house—that is, within a mile—where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?” and (c) “Do you think we are spending too much money, just about the right amount of money, or too little money on halting the rising crime rate?” After completing the

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3 Although previous studies have carried out known-groups validation of our horizontal-constraint measure—finding that political elites show greater constraint scores on it than members of the mass public (Barton & Parsons, 1977), following Converse’s (1964) criterion—the same has not been done for our vertical-constraint measure. Earlier studies do indicate that scores on the latter measure are higher among those high in information and education in mass samples (e.g., Federico & Hunt, 2012). Nevertheless, we also carried out a known-groups validation using merged data from face-to-face interviews from the 2000 American National Election Study (mass sample, $N = 1,006$) and the 2000 Convention Delegate Study (elite sample, $N = 3,237$; see Layman, Carsey, Green, Herrera, & Cooperman, 2010). The two surveys contained identical measures of ideological self-placement and five issue attitudes (services/spending, defense, national health insurance, aid to Blacks, and abortion). Using these measures, we constructed an index of vertical constraint using the same procedure reported above for the 2008 IMIS; scores were recoded to run from 0 to 1.

A one-way analysis of variance indicated significantly greater constraint among elites ($M = .62$, $SD = .34$) than members of the mass public ($M = .44$, $SD = .27$, $F(1, 4241) = 234.14, \ p < .0001$; Cohen’s $d = 0.58$). Moreover, when we constructed a horizontal-constraint measure identical to that used in the 2008 IMIS (also coded to run 0–1), we replicated earlier results and found greater constraint among elites ($M = .69$, $SD = .14$) than members of the mass public ($M = .62$, $SD = .16$), although the effect was somewhat weaker, $F(1, 4192) = 156.95, \ p < .0001$, Cohen’s $d = 0.47$.

4 Our survey also included a measure of the highest year of education completed by the respondent. Although we focus on college-degree completion as a control variable in our primary analyses for the reason indicated above, all of the results reported below are unchanged when the highest year variable is used instead.
context items, respondents then completed the target item about suspects’ rights: “Do you think the Supreme Court has gone too far in protecting the rights of people accused of crimes, or do you think it has generally done what is necessary to see that the accused are fairly treated?” This item was answered on a scale ranging from 1 (The Supreme Court has gone too far) to 9 (The Supreme Court has taken necessary steps). Responses to this item were reversed so that higher scores indicated a more conservative attitude and then recoded to run from 0 to 1 ($M = .56, SD = .27$, across conditions; $M = .54, SD = .27$, in the liberal condition; $M = .58, SD = .27$, in the conservative condition).

**Validation.** Formal manipulation checks are not used in question-order experiments of this sort; efficacy is indicated by a significant effect of the manipulation on target item responses (Tourangeau et al., 1989). In this respect, a regression of the target item on a dummy variable representing condition ($0 =$ liberal, $1 =$ conservative) revealed that individuals in the conservative condition gave more conservative answers to the target item, $b = .02, F(1, 1501) = 7.94, p < .01$. This effect remained significant even when the ideological self-description measure was added to the model as a control, $b = .02, p < .01, F(2, 1500) = 46.61, p < .01$. As a second check, we counted the number of context items to which each respondent gave condition-consistent responses in each condition (e.g., indicating that the right to remain silent is important in the liberal condition, indicating that one has been threatened with a gun in the conservative condition). If our manipulation had the intended effect, individuals who give more condition-consistent responses to the context items should express more liberal opinions on the target item in the liberal condition and more conservative opinions on the target item in the conservative condition (Tourangeau et al., 1989). In regressions of the target item on the count variable and ideological self-placement in each condition, this was the case. Net of ideological self-placement, respondents in the liberal condition who gave more condition-consistent responses indi-
cated more liberal opinions on the target item ($M = .46, SD = .18, p < .01$) than the liberal condition ($M = .39, SD = .28, p < .01$). The average proportion of liberal responses was higher in the conservative ($M = .39$) than the liberal condition ($M = .28$), whereas the average proportion of liberal responses was higher in the liberal ($M = .63$) than the conservative condition ($M = .50$). Thus, the manipulation used in our main study appears to produce significant differences in the accessibility of considerations linked to the liberal and conservative sides of the target issue, even in a validation sample with a relatively high baseline level of liberal issue-relevant thoughts.

Second, to be sure that our manipulation was not simply heightening fear and anxiety in the conservative condition, we looked at responses to relevant PANAS items. To this end, we averaged the four items from the PANAS that indexed fear and anxiety (scared, nervous, jittery, afraid; $\alpha = .80$). A one-way ANOVA indicated no significant difference in fear and anxiety across the conditions, $F(1, 133) = 1.67, p > .20$, although scores were slightly higher in the conservative condi-
tion ($M = 1.53, SD = .65$) than the liberal one ($M = 1.39, SD = .62$); nevertheless, scores were on the low end of the 5-point scale ($<2$) in both conditions. Thus, our manipulation does not appear to be significantly manipulating fear.

**Results**

**Relationships Among Study Variables**

The raw correlations among our key study variables are displayed in Table 1. Here, we focus in particular on the relationships between the need for closure and various political attitudes. To begin with, prior research suggests that the need for closure should be associated with conservatism both in general ideological self-description and in actual policy attitudes (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). Consistent with this prediction, the correlations in Table 1 indicate that the need for closure is correlated with greater symbolic conserva-
tive self-description ($r = .16, p < .001$) and greater policy conservatism ($r = .18, p < .001$); it is also correlated with a stronger affinity for the Republican Party ($p < .001$). Comparing
the correlations between ideological self-description and need for closure, on one hand, and policy conservatism, on the other, we find that ideological self-description correlates more strongly with policy conservatism \( (r = .72, p < .001) \) than the need for closure does \( (r = .18, p < .001) \). This is consistent with our argument that one’s general ideological framework is a more important and proximal factor in policy judgment.

Finally, we also find significant negative correlations between the need for closure and our two constraint measures \( (p < .001, \text{for vertical constraint}; p < .05, \text{for horizontal constraint}) \). However, as we shall see, the relationship between the need for closure and the constraint measures is less robust after various controls are applied, and it is qualified by a key interaction between the need for closure and ideological self-description. On this latter score, it is worth noting that the correlation between need for closure and ideological self-description—though significant—was modest \( (r = .16, p < .001) \). Squaring this coefficient and multiplying by 100 indicates that only 2.56% of the variance in ideological self-description is shared with the need for closure, suggesting the existence of non-negligible numbers of symbolic liberals and conservatives whose underlying epistemic motivation is “inconsistent” with their chosen political identity. This leaves considerable room for the operation of the interactive dynamic at the heart of our remaining hypotheses.

### Need for Closure, Ideological Self-Description, and Policy Conservatism

Our first and main hypothesis was that the relationship between epistemic motivation and conservatism in policy attitudes would be stronger among symbolic liberals than among symbolic conservatives. This expectation is in contrast to both the simple rigidity of the right hypothesis, which predicts a similar positive relationship between need for closure and policy conservatism among symbolic conservatives and liberals, and the ideologue hypothesis, which predicts a strong positive relationship between need for closure and policy conservatism among symbolic conservatives and a strong negative relationship between the two among symbolic liberals. As noted previously, symbolic ideology was operationalized in terms of ideological self-description, whereas operational ideology was indexed using an averaged composite measure of issue conservatism. We examined our hypothesis using ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression. The analysis proceeded in two steps. In the first step, composite policy conservatism was regressed on the controls (age, income, race, gender, college degree, and party identification), ideological self-description, need for closure, and political information. In the second step, a product term for the key Ideological Self-Description × Need for Closure interaction was added. Because information has been shown to interact with ideological self-description to predict policy attitudes (e.g., Zaller, 1992), a product term for the Ideological Self-Description × Information interaction was also added on this step. Inclusion of this additional term helps control for the possibility that self-described liberals who are high in need for closure may simply not be well-informed enough to select the “correct” liberal policy positions corresponding to their identity. In the analyses, party identification, ideological self-description, need for closure, and information were mean-centered by subtracting the mean of each variable from each respondent’s score on the variable. Finally, to guard against possible effects of heteroskedasticity, HC3 robust standard errors were used in all models (as recommended for all analyses by Long & Ervin, 2000).

The results are shown in Table 2. Model 1 examined the additive effects of the key predictors while controlling for various demographics. As expected, those who symbolically identified as conservatives \( (b = .28, p < .001) \) leaned further right in their policy positions. Consistent with prior research (Jost et al., 2003), those high in the need for closure also expressed more conservative policy attitudes \( (b = .08, p < .01) \). In addition, those who leaned Republican \( (b = .18, p < .001) \), males \( (p < .01) \), and those high in information \( (p < .001) \) expressed more conservative policy attitudes, whereas those with college degrees expressed less conservative attitudes \( (p < .001) \). Importantly, if we examine the standardized coefficients for key predictors in this model, we find that the net predictive power of ideological self-description \( (\beta = .47) \) is far stronger than that of the need for closure \( (\beta = .06) \). Indeed, ideological self-description produces the largest standardized coefficient in the model, with only party identification even approaching it in magnitude \( (\beta = .32) \). This reinforces our assumption that ideological self-description is a more important and immediate predictor of policy attitudes than epistemic motivation, this time in a multivariate context.

In turn, Model 2 added the two interaction terms to the equation. As the estimates in Table 2 indicate, both the Ideological Self-Description × Need for Closure interaction \( (b = -.19, p < .01) \) and the Ideological Self-Description × Information interaction \( (b = .35, p < .001) \) were significant. To probe these interactions,
simple slopes for the need for closure and information were computed one standard deviation above and below the mean of ideological self-description (Aiken & West, 1991). As expected, the need for closure was highly related to policy conservatism among self-identified liberals ($b = .14, SE = .03, p < .001$) but not among conservatives ($b = .01, SE = .04, p > .75$). This pattern of interaction is graphically depicted in Figure 1.5 The simple slopes for information were consistent with prior work: information in need for closure is fairly similar among those who place themselves in one of the three positions to the right of the self-description midpoint ($r^2 = .02, n = 498$) and those who place themselves in one of the three positions to left of the midpoint on the ideological self-description measure ($r^2 = .017, n = 755$). Thus, even though variance in need for closure does appear to be slightly greater among self-described conservatives, the difference is small. In any case, our simple-slope comparisons relied on unstandardized coefficients, whose magnitude is relatively unaffected by variance differences across subgroups (Pedhazur, 1997). Finally, we should also note that the experiment below also helps rule out objections based on preexisting variance differences in need for closure as a function of ideological self-description, as respondents were randomly assigned to a liberal or conservative ideological context long after completing the need for closure items in the survey.

\[ b = -.06, SE = .02, p < .01 \] and greater policy conservatism among conservatives ($b = .18, SE = .01, p < .001$).

**Alternative specifications.** For the sake of economy, we present complete results for the relatively simple composite issue conservatism model described above. However, previous research suggests other effects that we might wish to control for while examining the key Ideological Self-Description $\times$ Need for Closure interaction. For example, previous work suggests that the need for closure may have a stronger relationship with political attitudes among the well-informed, who can better select the conservative attitudes “implied” by a closed epistemic orientation (Federico & Goren, 2009). Moreover, education—like information—also appears to promote consistency among attitudes, suggesting that our college-degree variable might also interact with both ideological self-description and the need for closure to predict differences.

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**Figure 1.** The relationship between the need for closure and policy conservatism among self-described liberals and conservatives, 2008 Information, Motivation, and Ideology Study (IMIS) data. Simple slopes for liberals and conservatives were estimated one standard deviation below and above the mean for ideological self-description, respectively. "Self-description" operationalizes symbolic ideology, whereas "policy conservatism" indexes operational ideology.

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**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Composite policy conservatism</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Model 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>$b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (1 = male)</td>
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<td>(.001)</td>
<td>-.0004</td>
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<td>Gender (1 = white)</td>
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<td>(.01)</td>
<td>.02***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (1 = white)</td>
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<td>(.01)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree (1 = bachelor’s or more)</td>
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<td>(.01)</td>
<td>-.03***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(.01)</td>
<td>.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for closure</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political information</td>
<td>.06***</td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td>.06***</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ideological Self-Description $\times$ Need for Closure</td>
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<td>(.07)</td>
<td>.35***</td>
</tr>
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<td>228.95 (11, 1475)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
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<td>.606</td>
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**Note.** Entries are unstandardized ordinary least-squares regression coefficients and HC3 robust standard errors ($N = 1,487$ for all models). Ideological self-description operationalizes symbolic ideology; composite policy conservatism indexes operational ideology.

**$^*$ $p < .05$.  $^*$ $p < .01$.  $^*$ $p < .001$.**
issue conservatism (Sniderman et al., 1991). To examine these possibilities, we estimated a model that added three interactions to “Model 2” from Table 2: Need for Closure × Information, Ideological Self-Description × College Degree, and Need for Closure × College Degree. None of these interactions were significant (ps > .75). More importantly, the Ideological Self-Description × Need for Closure interaction remained significant (b = -.20, p < .01). Thus, our key result appears to be robust to alternative specifications.

Need for Closure, Ideological Self-Description, and Attitude Structure

Thus far, our results indicate that the need for closure correlates most strongly with conservative policy attitudes among symbolic liberals. This result is more consistent with our hypothesis than either the simple rigidity of the right hypothesis or the ideologue hypothesis. Our key result also suggests that self-described liberals whose epistemic orientation is inconsistent with their identity (i.e., those high in the need for closure) should experience inner conflict. In turn, this conflict should have consequences for the ideological coherence of one’s political attitudes, with a high need for closure leading symbolic liberals—but not symbolic conservatives—to be less “ideological.” This brings us to our second hypothesis, which states that the need for closure should be associated with lower ideological constraint among self-described liberals, but not among self-described conservatives. Here, our prediction contrasts most sharply with predictions implied by the ideologue hypothesis, which would suggest a significant positive relationship between need for closure and constraint among both symbolic conservatives and liberals—such that the need for closure makes those on both the symbolic right and left more consistent ideologues. We explored our second hypothesis with OLS regressions predicting two different indices of ideological constraint: a measure of vertical constraint, or consistency between one’s symbolic ideological orientation and policy attitudes, and horizontal constraint, or the level of ideological consistency among one’s different policy attitudes. All details of model specification and estimation were identical to those in the policy-conservatism models reported above, except for the change of dependent variables.

The results for vertical constraint are shown in Table 3. Looking first at the main effects in Model 1, those high in information showed greater vertical consistency between their symbolic ideological identifications and policy attitudes in the need for closure also expressed more conservative policy attitudes (b = .08, p < .01), as one would expect. However, those high in the need for closure showed less vertical constraint (b = -.12, p < .01). Interestingly, party identification and ideological self-description had opposed relationships with vertical constraint: Whereas those who leaned Republican showed greater constraint (b = .12, p < .001), those who symbolically described themselves as more liberal showed less constraint (b = -.28, p < .001). Model 2 again added the two interaction terms to the equation. In this model, both the Ideological Self-Description × Need for Closure interaction (b = .47, p < .001) and the Ideological Self-Description × Information interaction (b = .23, p < .01) were significant, qualifying the aforementioned main effects. To unpack these interactions, we computed simple slopes for the need for closure and information one standard deviation above and below the mean of ideological self-description. Consistent with our predictions—but not those made by the ideologue hypothesis—the need for closure was associated with reduced vertical constraint among self-described liberals (b = -.27, SE = .06, p < .001) but not conservatives (b = .05, SE = .06, p > .40). Moreover, even though information was associated with greater vertical constraint among both self-described liberals and conservatives (ps < .001), the strength of this relationship was strongest among conservatives (i.e., b = .19, SE = .04 vs. b = .13, SE = .04).

The results for horizontal constraint are summarized in Table 4. In Model 1, neither the need for closure nor information predicted horizontal ideological consistency in respondents’ policy attitudes (ps > .10). However, both those who leaned Republican (b = -.07, p < .001) and those who symbolically described themselves as liberal (b = -.05, p < .05) showed less horizontal constraint. Finally, older respondents (p < .001) and White respondents (p < .05) also showed less constraint, whereas those with college degrees showed greater horizontal constraint (p < .01). However, the estimates in Model 2 are again of greater interest to us. Here, both the Ideological Self-Description × Need for Closure interaction (b = .29, p < .01) and the Ideological Self-Description × Information interaction (b = -.19, p < .01) reached significance. As before, simple slopes for the need for closure and information were computed one standard deviation above and below the mean of ideological self-description. Consistent with our second hypothesis—but not the ideologue hypothesis—the need for closure was associated with reduced horizontal constraint among self-described liberals (b = -.12, SE = .05, p < .05) but not among conservatives (b = .08, SE = .05, p > .05). Moreover, information predicted greater horizontal constraint among self-described liberals (b = .07, p < .05), but it predicted lower constraint among self-described conservatives (b = -.06, p < .05).

Alternative specifications. Previous work suggests—in the spirit of the ideologue hypothesis—that those with more extreme self-descriptions (either to the left or the right) may be more ideologically rigid (e.g., Tetlock, 1984; see also Tetlock, 1998), implying greater constraint on the ideological extremes. If an effect of this sort accounts for significant variation in constraint, it is important to control for these effects in testing the key ideological Self-Description × Need for Closure interaction. To check for this, we added the square of ideological self-description to the full equations labeled Model 2 in Tables 3 and 4. These models indicated significant positive quadratic effects for ideological self-description for vertical constraint (b = .10, p < .05) and horizontal constraint (b = .79, p < .001), suggesting that constraint does in fact increase with ideological

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6. The stronger relationship between need for closure and composite issue conservatism among self-described liberals is not simply due to greater range restriction among self-described conservatives. Variance in issue attitudes is roughly similar across ideological self-descriptions. In fact, there is actually slightly less variance in composite issue conservatism among those who place themselves in one of the three positions to left of the midpoint on the ideological self-description measure (χ² = .018, n = 498) than among those who place themselves in one of the three positions to the right of the self-description midpoint (χ² = .027, n = 755). This result parallels what others have found as well (Stimson, 2004).
extremity (Aiken & West, 1991). However, in both models, the Ideological Self-Description × Need for Closure interaction remained significant ($p < .01$).

Finally, previous analyses suggest that the effect of strong attachment to a belief system on consistency may be particularly strong in sophisticated samples (see Tetlock, 1998). As a check on this, we estimated two more models—one each for vertical and horizontal constraint—adding the square of ideological self-description and information for vertical constraint ($b = .28$, $p < .05$), and horizontal constraint ($b = .21$, $p < .03$) to the full equations labeled Model 2 in Tables 3 and 4. The latter two terms examine the possibility of a particularly strong tendency for ideological extremists to show greater constraint when they are highly sophisticated (i.e., well-informed or educated). These estimates indicated significant positive coefficients for the product of the square of ideological self-description and information for vertical constraint ($b = .47$, $p < .03$) and horizontal constraint ($b = .47$, $p < .03$); neither product term involving the college-degree variable was signifi-

Table 3
Need for Closure, Ideological Self-Description, and Vertical Constraint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Vertical constraint</th>
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<td>$SE$</td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
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<td>−.001† (.0004)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.003† (.002)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>−.004 (.02)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.12*** (.02)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>.151</td>
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Note. Entries are unstandardized ordinary least-squares regression coefficients and HC3 robust standard errors ($N = 1,487$ for all models). Ideological self-description operationalizes symbolic ideology.

Table 4
Need for Closure, Ideological Self-Description, and Horizontal Constraint

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<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
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<td>−.01 (.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race (1 = white)</td>
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<td>−.03* (.01)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree (1 = bachelor’s or more)</td>
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<td>.03* (.01)</td>
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<td>Party identification</td>
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<td>−.06** (.02)</td>
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<td>−.02 (.04)</td>
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<td>.002 (.02)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>.29*** (.10)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Self-Description × Information</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>−.19** (.06)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>.54*** (.03)</td>
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<td>$F$ (degrees of freedom)</td>
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<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
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<td>.082</td>
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Note. Entries are unstandardized ordinary least-squares regression regression coefficients and HC3 robust standard errors ($N = 1,487$ for all models). Ideological self-description operationalizes symbolic ideology.

*p < .05.  ** p < .01.  *** p < .001.
icant ($p > .50$). This suggests that the aforementioned curvilinear effect of ideological extremity is especially strong as information increases (Aiken & West, 1991). Importantly, though, the Ideological Self-Description × Need for Closure interaction again remained significant in both models ($p < .05$). Thus, our attitude-structure results appear to be quite robust, even in the presence of other interesting effects.

**Need for Closure, Ideological Context, and Policy Conservatism**

Thus far, our results provide strong support for our hypotheses. However, if our basic argument about the asymmetrical consequences of the need for closure is correct, situational activation of symbolic considerations relevant to the liberal and conservative sides of a political dispute should have moderating effects similar to those observed above for ideological self-description. This brings us to our third hypothesis, which states that the need for closure should be more strongly associated with conservative opinions about an issue when it is evaluated in the context of liberal rather than conservative ideological considerations.

To explore this possibility, we turned to a survey-context experiment included in the 2008 IMIS. As described previously, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions in this experiment: one in which they answered questions that activated considerations relevant to civil liberties and the need to restrain police powers (liberal ideological context) and one in which they responded to questions that activated considerations related to fear of crime (conservative ideological context). Following this manipulation, they responded to a target item asking whether or not the Supreme Court has gone too far in protecting suspects’ rights ($p < .001$), as were older respondents ($p < .01$). Moreover, consistent with a long line of findings suggesting that political sophistication promotes support for civil liberties (e.g., McClosky & Zaller, 1984), respondents with college degrees ($p < .01$) and those higher in political information ($p < .001$) are less likely to respond conservatively to the suspect-rights policy item. Finally, the context manipulation had the usual effect, producing slightly stronger support for the idea that the Supreme Court has gone too far in protecting suspects’ rights in the conservative ideological context condition ($b = .02, p < .01$); however, the need for closure was not related to responses on the suspects’ rights item ($p > .10$).

If we examine the standardized coefficients for these last two predictors, we find that context manipulation condition ($β = .07$) was more strongly related to responses on the rights item than the need for closure was ($β = .04$). Again, this supports our claim that the balance of salient ideological considerations—whether shaped by general ideological self-description or situational factors governing the ideological context in which an issue is evaluated—is a more important factor in policy judgment than distal psychological variables related to epistemic motivation.

In turn, Model 2 added the interactions of interest. The predicted Ideological Context × Need for Closure interaction was significant ($b = -1.4, p < .01$), whereas the Ideological Context × Information interaction failed to reach significance ($b = .01, p > .50$). To probe the significant interaction, we computed simple slopes for the need for closure in each of the ideological-context conditions. Consistent with our expectations—but not those of the rigidity of the right or the ideologue hypotheses—the need for closure was associated with more conservative responses to the suspect-rights policy item in the liberal context condition ($b = .22, SE = .07, p < .01$) but not the conservative context condition ($b = -.06, SE = .07, p > .30$). This interaction is depicted in Figure 2.

**Alternative specifications.** Previous research again suggests other effects that are worth accounting for while exploring the Ideological Context × Need for Closure interaction. For example, there are the Need for Closure × Information and Need for Closure × College Degree interactions we described earlier in the context of our composite issue-conservatism analysis. Besides these, two other effects suggest themselves. First, one’s chronic ideological self-description—like the temporary salience of various ideological frames—may interact with information and education to predict suspects’ rights attitudes. Second, like information, education may moderate the impact of ideological context. To examine these possibilities, we estimated an additional model that added five interactions to Model 2 from Table 5: Need for Closure × Information, Need for Closure × College Degree, Ideological Self-Description × Information, Ideological Self-Description × College Degree, and Ideological Context × College
Table 5
Need for Closure, Ideological Context, and Attitudes Toward the Rights of Criminal Suspects: Results From the Context Experiment

<table>
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<th>Predictor</th>
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<th>Model 2</th>
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<th>SE</th>
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<th>SE</th>
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<td>-.004</td>
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<td>-.04**</td>
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<td>.15***</td>
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<td>Need for closure</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td>Political information</td>
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<td>-.10***</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideological context manipulation</td>
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<td>.02**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideological Context × Need for Closure</td>
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<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideological Context × Information</td>
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<td>.52***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>13.19 (10, 1469)***</td>
<td>12.16 (12, 1467)***</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.084</td>
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Note. Entries are unstandardized ordinary least-squares regression coefficients and HC3 robust standard errors (N = 1,480 for all models). The ideological context condition operationalizes symbolic ideological context, whereas the dependent variable ("Court has gone too far") indexes operational ideology.

"** p < .01.  *** p < .001.

Discussion

In this study, we explored the interactive effects of the need for cognitive closure and symbolic identification with various ideological labels on concrete policy conservatism. In doing so, we extend work in this area in a novel and counterintuitive direction. Although we found the usual significant bivariate relationships between the need for closure and conservatism in both general ideological self-description and policy attitudes, subsequent multivariate correlational and experimental analyses revealed that the overall picture was more complex. In support of our first hypothesis, we found evidence that the need for closure has a stronger relationship with operational conservatism—in the form of conservative policy preferences—among those who symbolically describe themselves as liberal rather than conservative. Moreover, consistent with our second hypothesis, we found a stronger association between the need for closure and ideological constraint among symbolic liberals than among symbolic conservatives. This result suggests that the conflict between a high need for closure and the substantive imperatives associated with a liberal identity...
may interfere with the formation of ideologically consistent issue attitudes among symbolic liberals. Finally, we found that experimentally manipulating the situational salience of liberal versus conservative considerations moderates the relationship between the need for closure and policy attitudes in a manner similar to symbolic ideological self-description. In particular, among survey respondents for whom liberal considerations were made salient, need for closure was more closely associated with conservative opinions about a target issue.

This research provides new insights into the relationship between epistemic motivation and various political orientations. First and foremost, the findings indicate that the need for closure—a tendency that has long been associated with the conservative end of the spectrum—also has a role to play in explaining policy attitudes among those who identify generally with the left. Indeed, our findings indicate that the need for closure is more strongly predictive of conservatism in policy preferences among symbolic liberals and individuals for whom liberal ideological considerations are temporarily salient. Although symbolic liberals should generally gravitate to liberal policy content, all other things being equal, the current study suggests that they may end up looking more like symbolic conservatives at the level of policy attitudes when their epistemic orientation is more closed. Thus, in terms of political consequences, our findings place individual psychological predispositions such as the need for closure squarely in the center of the interplay of symbolic and operational ideology.

As we have noted, our results also challenge other well-known perspectives on the relationship between measures of closed-mindedness and rigidity—such as the need for closure—and conservative attitudes. First, insofar as we find a positive relationship between need for closure and policy conservatism only among symbolic liberals and those exposed to a liberal ideological context, our results argue against a simple form of the rigidity of the right hypothesis predicting such a relationship among all individuals. Instead, our findings imply that the need for closure has net predictive power only among those who lack substantive considerations that support conservative policy positions (i.e., symbolic liberals and those in liberal contexts).

Second, our results are also inconsistent with some implications of the ideologue hypothesis (Tetlock, 1984, 1998), as well as theorizing about need for closure and group-centrism (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2006). If those higher in the need for closure are generally more ideologically rigid or more prone to conform to ingroup norms, then symbolic liberals and those in liberal contexts who are high in the need for closure should show significantly less operational policy conservatism, whereas symbolic conservatives and those in conservative contexts who are high in the need for closure should show greater policy conservatism. This was not the case, however. Among symbolic conservatives and those in conservative contexts, the need for closure is unrelated to policy attitudes. Among symbolic liberals and individuals in liberal contexts, our results are even more contrary: The need for closure predicts deviation from, rather than adherence to, the assumed ingroup norm of policy liberalism. Our constraint results echo this finding: Need for closure was unrelated to ideological consistency among symbolic conservatives, but it predicted reduced consistency among symbolic liberals. Thus, it is difficult to argue on the basis of our results that the relationship between need for closure and policy attitudes reflects a general tendency for the dispositionally closed-minded to be “ideologues” or to conform to salient ideological norms.

More broadly, the results of this study also indicate that researchers must attend to the distinction between symbolic and operational ideology to understand the complex dynamics that underlie individual political preferences. Although symbolic ideology predisposes individuals to adopt policy positions that are in line with their ideological self-description, symbolic and operational ideologies do not always align (Stimson, 2004), indicating that the two are conceptually and practically distinct. Individual differences such as the need for closure are correlated with both the operational and the symbolic dimensions of ideology, but we find that the relationships among individual differences, operational ideology, and symbolic ideology are more complex than these linear associations suggest. That is, the relationship between the need for closure and operational conservatism actually depends on one’s symbolic self-description as a liberal or a conservative or the salience of liberal versus conservative ideological frameworks. Our findings further suggest that the relatively strong relationship between the need for closure and operational policy conservatism among symbolic liberals leaves the latter less likely to adopt issue positions that are ideologically consistent with one another—and perhaps more important, vertically consistent with their liberal self-description. In other words, symbolic liberals whose epistemic motivations conflict with their ideological self-description may be particularly prone to symbolic-operational inconsistency. As such, the present research is one of the first studies, to our knowledge, to begin to explain why the symbolic and operational aspects of political ideology may diverge among certain individuals. This possibility deserves further study, with attention to other epistemic and existential needs that may serve a similar function.

Finally, our data add to the literature by examining the overall relationship between a validated scale measure of need for closure and ideology in more representative sample. Although many studies have found evidence for this correlation, to our knowledge this study is the first to examine it in a large, nationally representative sample rather than student samples or small convenience samples of adults. Interestingly, the correlations we obtain (i.e., $r = .15$ for ideological self-placement and $r = .18$ for issue conservatism) are slightly smaller than the modal relationship between the two variables found in previous analyses of samples from Western democracies (which range between .20 and .30; see Jost et al., 2003). Though we are reluctant to make too much of this finding in the absence of data from other representative samples, it does raise questions about whether characteristics of the student samples used in previous work may have led to an overestimate of the magnitude of the relationship between need for closure and ideology. For example, if a liberal context does in fact strengthen the political consequences of the need for closure, as we argue here, it is possible that the more liberal climate of universities relative to society at large (e.g., Henry, 2008) may have shifted the magnitude of the relationship in a more positive direction in the large body of previous work on this topic that has relied heavily on student data. Further examination of this question is a worthy goal for future work.

Looking beyond the focus of the present study, we believe that similarly asymmetrical patterns may hold in other domains as well. For example, public-opinion research suggests that negative evaluations of Blacks are more strongly related to opposition to affirmative action among symbolic liberals than symbolic conserva-
tives, because the latter have explicitly ideological reasons to oppose the policy whereas the former do not (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). Closer to the present study’s focus, researchers may wish to extend these findings by exploring whether a similar dynamic is at work in the relationship between other politically relevant individual differences—such as the openness to experience and conscientiousness dimensions of the five-factor model of personality (e.g., Mondak & Hibbing, 2011)—and political attitudes.

In sum, the present research represents an important step toward understanding the complex interface between epistemic needs and various manifestations of ideology. Our findings demonstrate that epistemic motivations typically associated with conservative policy preferences paradoxically have a stronger relationship on such preferences in liberal contexts (i.e., when people symbolically describe themselves as liberals or when liberal considerations are made salient). Others have posited that a distinct set of psychological motives is associated with conservative versus liberal orientation (Kerlinger, 1984; Skitka & Tetlock, 1993; Vigil, 2010) or that ideological extremism in either direction is associated with certain cognitive styles (McClosey & Chong, 1985; Putnam, 1971). Here, we take a different tack, examining the implications of a psychological predisposition typically associated with conservatism among symbolic liberals in pursuit of a more nuanced account for how and why psychological predispositions and political ideology influence one another. The findings suggest that a task for future research is not only to identify unique antecedents of liberalism but also to more closely examine the ways in which the individual differences that have already been linked to political orientations play out on the left end of the symbolic ideological spectrum. By examining psychological variables in combination with broad symbolic identifications, we can better understand why individuals on both the right and the left come to adopt the attitudes they do toward more specific political matters.

References


Appendix A

Need for Closure Items

1. In case of uncertainty, I prefer to make an immediate decision, whatever it may be.
2. When I find myself facing various, potentially valid, alternatives, I decide in favor of one of them quickly and without hesitation.
3. I prefer to decide on the first available solution rather than to ponder at length what decision I should make.
4. I get very upset when things around me aren’t in their place.
5. Generally, I avoid participating in discussions on ambiguous and controversial problems.
6. When I need to confront a problem, I do not think about it too much and I decide without hesitation.
7. When I need to solve a problem, I generally do not waste time in considering diverse points of view about it.
8. I prefer to be with people who have the same ideas and tastes as myself.
9. Generally, I do not search for alternative solutions to problems for which I already have a solution available.
10. I feel uncomfortable when I do not manage to give a quick response to problems that I face.
11. Any solution to a problem is better than remaining in a state of uncertainty.
12. I prefer activities where it is always clear what is to be done and how it needs to be done.
13. After having found a solution to a problem I believe that it is a useless waste of time to take into account diverse possible solutions.
14. I prefer things to which I am used to those I do not know, and cannot predict.

Appendix B

Policy Items

Attitudes toward each issue were assessed with a stem item indicating direction of opinion. Based on responses to each stem, respondents then completed one of two follow-up items aimed at measuring the strength of their attitude; respondents who gave the “moderate” response to a stem were not given a follow-up. Response options for stem items and follow-ups are listed in parentheses after each question below; alternate forms of the follow-ups are given in brackets.

Services and spending. Stem: “Some people think the government should provide fewer services even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending. Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven’t you thought much about this?” (Fewer services/reduce spending, should stay the same as it is now, more services/increase spending.) Follow-up: “Should the government [reduce/increase] services and spending a great deal or [reduce/increase] services and spending only some?” (A great deal, only some.)

Defense. Stem: “Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense. Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven’t you thought much about this?” (Decrease, should stay the same as it is now, increase.) Follow-up: “Should the government [decrease/increase] defense spending a lot or a little?” (A lot, a little.)

Jobs. Stem: “Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven’t you thought much about this?” (Government should see to jobs and standard of living, it depends, government should let each person get ahead on own.) Follow-up: “Do you feel strongly that the government should [see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living/just let each person get ahead on their own], or not so strongly?” (Strongly, not strongly.)
**Aid to Blacks.** Stem: “Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of Blacks. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Blacks because they should help themselves. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven’t you thought much about this?” (Government should help Blacks, it depends, Blacks should help themselves.) Follow-up: “Should [the government help Blacks/Blacks have to help themselves] to a great extent or only to some extent?” (Great extent, only some.)

**Women.** Stem: “Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government. Others feel that a woman’s place is in the home. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven’t you thought much about this?” (Women and men should have equal roles, it depends, a woman’s place is in the home.) Follow-up: “Do you feel strongly or not strongly that [men and women should have equal roles/a woman’s place is in the home]?” (Strongly, not strongly.)

**Environment.** Stem: “Some people think we need much tougher government regulations on business in order to protect the environment. Others think that current regulations to protect the environment are already too much of a burden on business. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven’t you thought much about this?” (Tougher regulations needed to protect environment, it depends, regulations to protect environment already too much of a burden on business.) Liberal follow-up: “Do we need to toughen regulations to protect the environment a lot, or just somewhat?” (A lot, somewhat.) Conservative follow-up: “Are regulations to protect the environment way too much of a burden on business or just somewhat of a burden?” (Way too much, somewhat.)

**Abortion.** Stem: “Some people feel that the government should not restrict a woman’s right to an abortion, and that women should be able to have them whenever they choose. Others feel that abortion is wrong and should not be allowed under any circumstances. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven’t you thought much about this?” (Government should not restrict, it depends, abortion should never be allowed.) Follow-up: “Do you feel strongly or not strongly that [the government should not restrict a woman’s right to an abortion/abortion is wrong and should not be allowed under any circumstances]?” (Strongly, not strongly.)

**Gay rights.** Stem: “Some people feel that gays and lesbians should be protected from bias and discrimination. Others feel that homosexuality is wrong and that the government should not pass laws protecting gays and lesbians. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven’t you thought much about this?” (Government should protect gays and lesbians from bias, it depends, government should not protect gays and lesbians from bias.) Follow-up: “Do you feel strongly or not strongly that the government [should/should not] protect gays and lesbians from bias?” (Strongly, not strongly.)

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**Retraction of Trampe, Stapel, and Siero (2007)**


This retraction follows the results of an investigation into the work of Diederik A. Stapel (further information on the investigation can be found here: https://www.commissielevelt.nl/). The Noort Committee has determined data supplied by Diederik A. Stapel to be fraudulent. His co-authors were unaware of his actions and were not involved in the collection of the fraudulent data.