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Neoliberal Ideology and the Justification of Inequality in Capitalist Societies: Why Social and Economic Dimensions of Ideology Are Intertwined

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In this article we analyze data from high-quality surveys conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom that included multiple symbolic and operational measures of political ideology and psychological orientations. Our overarching goal is to elucidate the nature of conceptual and empirical connections between neoliberalism and social conservatism. In so doing, we revisit three major questions about public opinion in neoliberal societies: (1) Are ordinary citizens “innocent” of ideology? (2) Are social and economic dimensions of ideology structurally and functionally independent? (3) Are support for laissez-faire capitalism and opposition to welfare—hallmarks of neoliberal ideology—unrelated or negatively related to authoritarianism? In contrast to previous investigations relying upon fewer and poorer measures, we found that ordinary citizens do indeed hold coherent political attitudes, and their attitudes about social and economic issues are closely aligned. For instance, we observed that for five previously published

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ideological instruments, social and economic attitudes were robustly correlated in two large U.S. samples (with rs ranging from .40 to .69)—for respondents who were relatively low ($.31 \leq r \leq .60$) as well as high in political sophistication ($.50 \leq r \leq .77$). Contradicting prior claims, we found no evidence that support for the free market was negatively associated with authoritarianism for any group of respondents or any measure of authoritarianism. On the contrary, economic conservatism and the endorsement of neoliberal attitudes were strongly associated with right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, economic system justification, and gender-specific system justification (with rs ranging from .53 to .76). We conclude that the political belief systems of ordinary citizens are coherently organized around support for versus opposition to both social and economic forms of inequality in contemporary capitalist societies.

The very design of neoliberal principles is a direct attack on democracy.

(Noam Chomsky, 2010)

The ruling ideas of our epoch are best characterized as “neoliberal,” a multifaceted and somewhat nebulous term that refers to “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Neoliberalism, defined in this way, is conceptually related to more familiar constructs such as political-economic conservatism and support for laissez-faire capitalism. All three of these ideological forms project immense confidence in market forces to solve social as well as economic problems and reflect a deep suspicion of governmental efforts to regulate business and to provide for the welfare of its citizens.

Neoliberalism as an ideology originated in the early 20th century with the work of Ludwig von Mises, Carl Schmitt, Friedrich von Hayek, and Milton Friedman (Drolet, 2011), but its constituent elements have long been popular with political and economic conservatives (e.g., see Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). As a guiding principle of political economy, neoliberalism was not put into widespread practice until the 1980s, when it was embraced by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States. In Western societies today, neoliberalism is “the ideology that dominates our lives,” as Monbiot (2016a) has pointed out—a belief system that defends, bolsters, and justifies social and economic disparities under capitalism.

In this article, we analyze public opinion data from several sources to deepen our understanding of contemporary political ideology, focusing especially on neoliberal attitudes, in the United States and the United Kingdom. We seek to enhance the social-scientific understanding of neoliberal ideology in three ways. First, we link this concept to the research literature on political-economic conservatism by arguing that support for laissez-faire capitalism and opposition

to welfare is at the core of neoliberal and conservative ways of thinking. In so doing, we offer a conceptual and empirical framework for investigating social and economic forms of conservatism in relation to neoliberal ideology. Second, we expand upon the theory of political ideology as motivated social cognition to address the psychological interests—including resistance to change and acceptance of inequality (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003)—served by support for laissez-faire capitalism and opposition to welfare. Doing so obliges us to debunk the persistent notion that ordinary citizens are entirely “innocent” of ideology (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). Third, and most importantly, we argue that support for laissez-faire capitalism and opposition to welfare, which are essential aspects of economic conservatism and neoliberal ideology, are linked to individual differences in authoritarianism, social conservatism, social dominance orientation, and system justification. We provide converging evidence for these theoretical proposals and consider their implications for a deeper and more critical social-scientific understanding of neoliberal ideology in contemporary capitalist societies.

The Contested Nature of Ideology and Its Role in Public Opinion

Social scientists have taken every conceivable position on the question of how ideology relates to public opinion. One prominent tradition in political science, which may be traced back to Philip Converse (1964), holds that ordinary citizens are woefully ignorant about political matters and utterly unconcerned with them; as a result they are said to be “innocent” of ideological ways of thinking, with the consequence that public opinion is merely an “illusion” (Bishop, 2005). This skeptical position has been defended most recently and steadfastly by Kinder and Kalmoe (2017, pp. 3–4), who concluded that:

Converse found that most Americans were indifferent to or mystified by liberalism and conservatism as political ideas; that their opinions on government policy displayed little evidence of coherent organization along ideological lines; and that relatively modest proportions of the electorate were in possession of real opinions, even on matters of obvious national importance. In Converse’s judgment, most Americans were innocent of ideology [W]hen all the evidence is considered and all the counter-arguments assessed, Converse’s claim of ideological innocence, taken on its own terms, stands up.

Commitment to the doctrine of ideological innocence led Kinder and Kalmoe to embrace Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope’s (2011) position that “the evidence of increasing polarization is negligible” (p. 128), despite the fact that many esteemed public opinion researchers have reached the opposite conclusion (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Barber & McCarty, 2013; Grossmann & Hopkins, 2016; Hacker & Pierson, 2006; Hare & Poole, 2014). Abramowitz (2015, p. 19), for instance, has stated unambiguously that the American electorate is indeed “strongly partisan and deeply divided along racial, ideological, and cultural lines,” an assessment that is backed up by the Pew Research Center (2014).

Are Ordinary Citizens Truly “Innocent” of Ideology?

If it were true that ordinary citizens are entirely “innocent” of ideology, then there would be nothing of theoretical and practical significance for social scientists to say about ideological dynamics involving ordinary citizens living in neoliberal, capitalist societies. As Kinder and Kalmoe (2017) put it, “People are busy with more pressing things; politics is complicated and far away. Ideology is not for them” (p. 3). However, a major problem with this line of thinking—other than the fact that it disregards so much evidence of increasing liberal-conservative polarization in the United States—is that it equates ideology with political knowledge and sophistication (Jost, 2006). At the end of the day, Kinder and Kalmoe’s (2017) argument is essentially that ordinary citizens are mistaken and confused about many political issues; they are often wrong about the facts. Ironically, this conclusion fits rather snugly with more critical—or, if you like, pejorative—accounts, which regard ideology as a form of distortion, mystification, or rationalization (Hall, 2017; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Knight, 2006; Larrain, 1991).

Like a great many philosophers, social theorists, and, indeed, political scientists, we defend the position that—for better or worse—ideology plays a role in maintaining the legitimacy and stability of social systems, including the global capitalist system, with its high levels of social and economic inequality, even if that ideology promotes false, confused, or mistaken beliefs (Bartels, 2008; Bénabou, 2008; Habermas, 1989; Harvey, 2005; Larrain, 1991; Monbiot, 2016a; Railton, 2003; Shayo, 2009; Trump, 2018). As Stuart Hall (2017) put it, “Ideology works best by suturing together contradictory lines of argument and emotional investments” (p. 326). From this perspective, ideology is much closer to “false consciousness” than “political expertise,” and it is motivated not so much by logical considerations as psychological ones (Jost, 2006). People may well lack “forensic” ideology and a sophisticated understanding of political realities, but they do possess “latent” forms of ideology, as Robert Lane (1962) pointed out long ago, and this is almost surely what counts when it comes to the *perceived* legitimacy of social systems.

We therefore join the many scholars who maintain that the left-right (or liberal-conservative) dimension is useful, and perhaps even indispensable, for understanding the beliefs, opinions, and values of ordinary citizens as well as political elites (e.g., Bartels, 2008; Bénabou, 2008; Freeze & Montgomery, 2016; Goggin, Henderson, & Theodoridis, 2019; Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2014; Knight, 2006; Noël, & Thérien, 2008)—even if it is true that people are neither perfectly consistent nor loyal when it comes to their ideological preferences (Jost, 2006). As a general rule, however, conservatives and rightists are indeed more likely to value tradition, social order, authority, conformity, hierarchy, and social stability, whereas liberals and leftists are more likely to value progress, social change, and social, economic, and political forms of equality (e.g., Bobbio, 1996;

Clifford, Jewell, & Waggoner, 2015; Erikson & Tedin, 2015; Jost et al., 2003; Laponce, 1981; Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton, & Linz, 1962; Noël, & Thérien, 2008).

Twenty or so years of research in political psychology reveals that there are meaningful and replicable differences between self-identified liberals and self-identified conservatives in terms of personality traits (Caprara & Vecchione, 2017; Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, & Ha, 2010; Jost, 2006; Mondak, 2010), cognitive-motivational and rhetorical styles (Amodio, Jost, Master, & Yee, 2007; Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2003; Tetlock, 2007; Zmigrod, Rentfrow, & Robbins, 2018), and lifestyle choices and behaviors (Carney et al., 2008; DellaPosta, Shi, & Macy, 2015; Eastwick, Richeson, Son, & Finkel, 2009; Kloststad, McDermott, & Hatemi, 2013; Xu & Peterson, 2017; Xu, Mar, & Peterson, 2013). Liberals are generally more open, tolerant, curious, creative, deliberative, and intellectually minded, whereas conservatives tend to be more orderly, conscientious, moralistic, intuitive, closed-minded, and duty bound. It is easy to assimilate these results with longstanding observations that people who gravitate toward politically conservative, rightist opinions are generally more dogmatic, rigid, authoritarian, and prejudiced than people who gravitate toward more liberal, leftist opinions (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1998; Brown, 1965; Duckitt, 2001; Jost et al., 2003; Napier & Jost, 2008; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001; Womick, Rothmund, Azevedo, King, & Jost, 2018). However, the notion that political ideology is totally irrelevant to most people—as Kinder and Kalmoe (2017) and others have argued—is hard to square with the fact that measures of ideology are systematically related to many aspects of people’s lives, including their psychological characteristics.

Are Social and Economic Dimensions of Ideology Structurally and Functionally Independent?

There is another group of scholars who do not dispute that ideology matters to ordinary citizens, but they argue that a single left-right or liberal-conservative dimension cannot account for the diversity of public opinion in society. They contend that at least two more or less orthogonal dimensions are required (Feldman & Johnston, 2014) and that sociocultural and economic attitudes should be treated as separate ideological clusters that are linked to very different types of psychological characteristics (e.g., Crowson, 2009; Johnston, Lavine, & Federico, 2017; Malka, Soto, Inzlicht, & Lelkes, 2014; Weeden & Kurzban, 2016). These authors set up a strong juxtaposition between social and economic dimensions of ideology, arguing that economic conservatism is qualitatively unlike—and in some respects even opposed to—social conservatism. For instance, Feldman and Johnston (2014) argue that “authoritarianism and religiosity have substantively large effects on social conservatism but no significant effect on economic conservatism . . . Those high

on authoritarianism are very likely to be socially conservative, *but they are just as likely to be liberal on economic policy as conservative*" (p. 354, emphasis added).

Some researchers have gone even further to argue that—at least among citizens who are relatively low in political engagement and sophistication—authoritarian rigidity is associated with leftist—rather than rightist—economic views (Johnston et al., 2017; Malka et al., 2014). Thus, Malka and Soto (2015) claimed that "the rigidity of the right hypothesis ... applies to attitudes in the sociocultural domain but not the ... economic domain" (p. 139), allegedly because "many left-wing economic policies aim to provide people with economic stability and security, and this might be naturally need satisfying for" people who are high in needs for certainty and security (p. 138). In a similar vein, Johnston et al. (2017) analyzed data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) and concluded that "at low and medium levels of political engagement ... authoritarianism is associated with skepticism about the sufficiency of markets and with support for a greater government role in the economy" (p. 75). They declare strong support for the "reversal hypothesis," according to which authoritarianism is associated with economic conservatism for people who are high in political sophistication, but it is associated with liberal (or, more precisely, progressive) economic views for people who are low in sophistication.

The argument that social and economic dimensions of ideology are independent depends in part on the assumption that many citizens are either socially liberal but economically conservative or socially conservative but economically liberal (or progressive). Indeed, Feldman and Johnston (2014) claimed that: "Libertarians, who combine economic conservatism with social liberalism, are virtually as numerous as traditional conservatives" (p. 354).¹ Libertarianism, conceived of in this way, is often assumed to be either unrelated to authoritarian rigidity or *negatively* associated with it. For example, Johnston et al. (2017) argued that among those who are relatively low in political involvement "low authoritarians are more likely to believe that 'the free market can handle ... problems without the government being involved'" (p. 75). Stenner and Haidt (2018) claimed that: "Laissez faire 'conservatives' are not conservative in any real sense. They typically self-identify as classic liberals or libertarians. They strongly favor the free market

¹This is not what we found in the present research program, at least with respect to ideological self-placement (or symbolic ideology). In Sample 1 (see details in the Method section), fewer than 9% of respondents identified themselves as socially liberal and economically conservative, as compared with 35% who identified themselves as both socially and economically conservative. Furthermore, only 3% identified themselves as socially conservative and economically liberal, as compared with 29% who identified themselves as both socially and economically liberal. Less than 10% of respondents selected the scale midpoint (neither liberal nor conservative) for both dimensions of ideological self-placement (cf. Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). With respect to operational ideology, we found that the proportions of "socially liberal" and "economically conservative" respondents varied considerably as a function of the ideological instrument and method of classification.

and are usually pro-business, seeking to thwart ‘socialist’ or ‘left-wing’ efforts to intervene in the economy and redistribute wealth. *Psychologically speaking, they have nothing in common with authoritarians*” (p. 181, emphasis added).

However, there are several limitations of the research used to back up these very strong claims. First, the research by Feldman and Johnston (2014) was based on responses to just three questions about social issues (abortion, gay adoption, and women’s role in business and government) and four questions about economic issues (governmental spending on welfare, social services, health insurance, and federal assistance to the poor) in three waves of the ANES (2000, 2004, and 2006, with data from the last two years combined). The researchers noted that they excluded questions about race, immigration, and foreign policy, at least some of which would have tapped into *both* social and economic concerns, thereby increasing overall ideological structure and coherence. Nevertheless, even with these methodological exclusions (and inherent limitations arising from the use of very short ANES opinion scales, see Pietryka & Macintosh, 2017), Feldman and Johnston found that social and economic dimensions were significantly intercorrelated at .21 in 2000 and .36 in 2004/2006 (p. 343). Indeed, the two dimensions were significantly correlated even for those respondents who were classified as lowest in terms of political sophistication. In our judgment, this study hardly provides overwhelming evidence that social and economic attitudes are structurally independent of one another in general.

Second, the strong conclusions of Malka et al. (2014) about authoritarian rigidity are based on aggregate analyses involving respondents from 51 extremely heterogeneous countries, using ad hoc scales that were constructed from a panoply of items administered during the 2009 wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) that exhibited very poor psychometric properties. The authors noted that: “In the full sample, the five-item right-wing cultural attitudes scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .54 and mean interitem correlation of .19; the three-item right-wing economic attitudes scale had an alpha of only .17 and a mean interitem correlation of .06” (p. 1036). As a result, they reported “the results of analyses using both the attitude composites (for illustrative purposes) and individual attitude items as outcome variables” (p. 1036). Even more worrisome, Malka et al. estimated psychological “needs for certainty and security” (as an analogue of authoritarian rigidity) by taking five items (out of more than 50) from five different subscales of Schwartz’s (1992) Value Priorities Scale, and this composite, too, exhibited very poor psychometric properties: “These analyses yielded a five-item scale that contrasted motivations for security, tradition, and conformity with motivations for self-direction and stimulation. In the full sample, this scale had an alpha reliability of .56 and a mean interitem correlation of .20” (p. 1038). Thus, Malka and colleagues’ conclusions were based purely on patterns of correlations involving several unreliable scales that were not designed for the purposes to which they put them (cf. Flake & Fried, 2019; Flake, Pek, & Hehman, 2017; Hussey & Hughes, 2018).

Third, the conclusions about authoritarianism reached by Johnston et al. (2017) are based entirely on analyses involving a four-item scale of childrearing values. Although some political scientists like this measure because it is thought to be devoid of political content (e.g., Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Johnston et al., 2017; Stenner, 2005), it has been criticized rather heavily on both methodological and substantive grounds (Hooper, 2017; MacWilliams, 2016). Among other things, scores on the childrearing scale have been found to yield insufficient internal reliability (Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Henry, 2011; Hetherington & Suhay, 2011), to be noninvariant across race/ethnicity (Pérez & Hetherington, 2014), and to exhibit weak associations with other established measures and known correlates of authoritarianism (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018; Dunwoody & Funke, 2016). From a theoretical perspective, too, this scale captures very little of the rich conceptual and empirical detail of the authoritarian personality as described by Adorno et al. (1950), Altemeyer (1998), Brown (1965), Jost and Hunyady (2018), and others; in other words, it violates the presumed multidimensionality of the construct (Voicu, 2012). When it comes to investigating associations with economic conservatism, there is an additional methodological problem, which is that two of the four childrearing items mention “independence” and “self-reliance,” and endorsement of these values is taken to indicate a *lack* of authoritarianism (Johnston et al., 2017, p. 72). The problem is that independence and self-reliance—abstractions of the “free, possessive individual” (Hall, 2017, p. 318)—are hallmarks of neoliberal, pro-capitalist ideology (Harvey, 2005; Monbiot, 2016b), as in Margaret Thatcher’s famous statement that “there’s no such thing as society”—only “individual men and women.” Given this historical and ideological context, it is understandable that at least some respondents in Johnston et al.’s study who were reticent about the values of independence and self-reliance preferred progressive economic policies that were supportive of social welfare and income redistribution.

In any case, we suspect that the tendency—even among social scientists—to treat social and economic dimensions of ideology as separate and distinct is itself the product of neoliberal ideology. Through the pervasive (but questionable) assumption that a philosophical commitment to the “free market” is nothing more than a pure and principled endorsement of values such as freedom and self-reliance, the *social* ramifications of global capitalism are effectively concealed. Ideological support for laissez-faire capitalism may be divorced, in the realm of ideas, from racism, sexism, and classism—aspects of traditional authoritarian prejudice—even as corporate hegemony perpetuates and perhaps even aggravates actual social divisions based on race, sex, and economic standing.² From our perspective, reasserting the connection between social and economic ideas (and

²Furthermore, in terms of cognitive schemas and messaging cues pertaining to public opinion, we would argue that the partitioning of social versus economic issues is not only artificial and problematic but also improbable in light of extensive psychological evidence in nonpolitical domains that individuals very often reduce decision-making complexity by subjectively compressing

realities) is a necessary first step in any attempt to understand and, indeed, confront the group-based injustices that persist in contemporary capitalist societies.

Is Support for Laissez-Faire Capitalism Unrelated or Negatively Related to Authoritarianism?

It is well worth recalling that earlier generations of social scientists saw important parallels between commitment to pro-capitalist ideology and the holding of authoritarian-conservative social attitudes. An entire chapter of *The Authoritarian Personality* written by Daniel Levinson was devoted to the fact that endorsement of political-economic conservatism, operationalized in terms of support for Big Business and laissez-faire capitalism and opposition to labor unions and social welfare, was positively and significantly correlated with authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, and racial and ethnic prejudice (Adorno et al., 1950, Chapter V; see also Napier & Jost, 2008). Similarly, social dominance theory holds that there are individual differences when it comes to generalized preferences for and against group-based inequality (Altemeyer, 1998; Jost et al., 2003; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Coming from a social dominance perspective, Sidanius and Pratto (1993) provided evidence that in the United States and Sweden support for free-market capitalism was positively associated with anti-Black racism ($r_s = .25$ and $.38$, respectively, $p < .001$). More recently, Weeden and Kurzban (2016) analyzed data from the United States General Social Survey (GSS) from 1980 to 2014 and found that—although religious and economic attitudes were largely unrelated to one another—the overall correlation between economic conservatism and racial conservatism was $.41$. As Sidanius and Pratto (1993) pointed out, findings such as these are incompatible with the philosophical assumptions of the Austrian School of neoliberal economics, according to which (a) “free market competition and labor market ethnic discrimination are inherently incompatible” and (b) “in a truly competitive, capitalist market place, the stable equilibrium would not allow for ethnic or racial discrimination” (p. 382).

According to system justification theory, people are ideologically motivated (to varying degrees, depending upon situational and dispositional factors) to defend and justify existing social, economic, and political arrangements. In the context of contemporary capitalist societies, with their very high levels of inequality, this means that many citizens—especially those who are drawn to politically conservative ideas and opinions—are prone to use stereotypes and other social judgments to excuse and rationalize social and economic disparities within and between groups in society (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). According to Manstead (2018):

multidimensional categorization frameworks into a single underlying dimension (see Jost, Nam, Amodio, & Van Bavel, 2014, pp. 24–26).

The neoliberal ideology that has dominated political discourse in most Western, industrialized societies in the past three decades has influenced attitudes to such an extent that even supporters of left-of-centre political parties, such as the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, regard poverty as arising from individual factors and tend to hold negative beliefs about the level of welfare benefits for the unemployed. Such attitudes are shared to a perhaps surprising extent by working-class people ... and, as we have seen, the research ... suggests that working-class people endorse ideologies that endorse and preserve a social system that materially disadvantages them.

Thus, system justification theory provides another reason to expect that social and economic attitudes would be generally intertwined, insofar as the same social psychological processes that lead people to justify economic inequality under capitalism would also lead them to justify disparities based on race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, gender, and sexual orientation (see Jost, 2019).

As we have seen, there are a number of theoretical, methodological, and empirical reasons to question the conclusions drawn by other scholars that (1) ordinary citizens are “innocent” of ideology, (2) social and economic dimensions of ideology are structurally and functionally independent, and (3) support for laissez-faire capitalism is unrelated to—or even *negatively* associated with—authoritarianism, social dominance, and system justification. In the remainder of this article we argue that the theoretical approaches outlined above reflect fundamental misunderstandings of the role of social and economic ideology in neoliberal, capitalist societies. Although in some cases it might well make sense to distinguish between issues that are primarily about matters of social or cultural concern and others that are focused on economic concerns, in many other cases a firm distinction between social and economic attitudes seems unwarranted and, indeed, untenable. After all, nearly every public policy issue pertaining to the redistribution of wealth and governmental spending on welfare, public education, health care, and other social services invariably has significant ramifications for the social sphere and taps into attitudes and beliefs about race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, gender, sexual orientation, and other social and cultural categories.

Social-Theoretical Critiques of Neoliberalism: Why Would Social and Economic Dimensions of Ideology Be Intertwined in Capitalist Societies?

There is a rich critical tradition of social theorizing about neoliberalism that brings these questions about the relationship between social and economic dimensions of ideology to the fore (e.g., Giroux, 2004; Hall, 2017; Harvey, 2005; Monbiot, 2016). Drolet (2011, pp. 93–95), for instance, provides a useful historical perspective on the development of neoliberal ideology. He writes that:

Neoliberalism as an ideology itself emerged in the early 1970s as a pro-business challenge to what is commonly referred to as ‘embedded liberalism,’ i.e., the set of Keynesian policies, socio-political constraints and legal regulations that surrounded market processes and corporate activities and framed industrial and economic relations in Western liberal

democracies during the post-war period. 'Embedded liberalism' was a class compromise between capital and labour. In the U.S., it grew in great part out of the New Deal and the tradition of 'welfare liberalism' . . .

[Neoliberalism] aims at bringing all fields of human activity under the aegis of the market, and proposes that the state should create markets where they do not exist: health care, social security and education, for example . . . it favours a more laissez-faire approach that in practice has favoured the development of a monopolistic-oligopolistic form of capitalism.

From this perspective, neoliberalism is an ideology that is best understood as a laissez-faire, pro-market reaction against liberal-socialist policies that were implemented after the Second World War to mitigate the deleterious effects of social and economic inequality under capitalism. Following its adoption by Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s, inequality in the United Kingdom and the United States—and, indeed, other capitalist countries—has risen dramatically (e.g., Piketty, 2014), just as critics of neoliberalism feared it would.

Although neoliberal ideology enshrines personal liberty and freedom as core values, critics have often pointed out that by dismantling labor unions and social safety nets it makes the vast majority of workers less free—and far more dependent upon business corporations.³ When Jorge Larraín (1991) analyzed the rise of neoliberal ideology under Thatcher, for instance, he noted that it was necessary for the Tories to emphasize conservative social issues such as “law and order” to deal with unemployment, crime, and other consequences of rising economic inequality that were made worse by governmental divestment from social welfare programs:

Unemployment is treated as laziness and pricing yourself out of a job, workers' strikes are transformed into a problem of public order. Criminality and new forms of violence are treated as the result of lack of authority in the family, not enough law and order, lack of Victorian values, etc. Terrorism is successful because of the free press and the excessive leniency of the law. Divisions and forms of discrimination are partly blamed on immigration and partly conjured away by patriotism and jingoism. Thatcherite ideology thus tries systematically to displace and conceal the real origin of British problems. It totally transfers or confines the principles of freedom, equality and self-interest to the economic sphere of the market while it attacks them in the political sphere . . . The authoritarian features of Thatcherite ideology are not arbitrary and contingent, they are necessitated to deal with the results of the operation of the free market. (p. 25)

Even ostensibly libertarian concepts such as “economic freedom” have in fact been associated, historically speaking, with the enforcement of social order, hostility to organized labor, and the suppression of dissent (Giroux, 2004; Hall, 2017; Harvey, 2005; Monbiot, 2016). Class conflict, in other words, has often been suppressed through authoritarian means. Indeed, Hayek's neoliberalism

³ Adorno et al. (1950) saw this problem clearly 70 years ago, well before the term “neoliberal” was in common circulation: “This [economically conservative] way of thinking assumes that the individual has ‘freedom’ economically to the extent that there are no government restrictions on him; it overlooks the fact that economic freedom for most people today is limited . . . by economic forces originating in business monopoly” (p. 156).

grew out of “a conservative, authoritarian form” of political-economic theory developed by professors at Freiburg University in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Drolet, 2011, p. 94). Apparently, Hayek even praised Chile under the fascist dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, presumably because the dictatorship served and protected capitalist institutions and interests (Monbiot, 2016a).

Critics of neoliberalism point out that—far from opposing authoritarian, socially conservative points of view—neoliberal ideology legitimizes global exploitation and economic inequality under capitalism, and works in conjunction with—and may even require—authoritarian attitudes to insure the maintenance of social stability (Giroux, 2004; Hall, 2017). At best, neoliberal ideology fosters indifference to the plight of the poor—the “welfare queens,” in Reagan’s memorable phrase—much as socially conservative ideology fosters indifference to the plight of racial and ethnic minorities (Adorno et al., 1950). At worst, neoliberalism is a victim-blaming ideology that treats poor people as responsible for their own poverty and, in doing so, exonerates social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements under capitalism. In this sense, it is a system-justifying ideology *par excellence*. Monbiot (2016a) writes: “The rich persuade themselves that they acquired their wealth through merit, ignoring the advantages—such as education, inheritance and class—that may have helped to secure it. The poor begin to blame themselves for their failures, even when they can do little to change their circumstances.”

It follows from this theoretical critique of society that when contemporary political actors—the heirs of Reagan and Thatcher, economic conservatives like Paul Ryan and self-described libertarians like Rand Paul—move to deepen tax cuts for wealthy individuals and corporations and cut back on public health care provisions or unemployment benefits or funding for public education they are not merely exhibiting confidence in the free market and defending individual freedom. In practice, they are determining which members of society are well-situated to thrive and which are not. Unfortunately, the problem is not confined to one or two countries, as the Chilean example would suggest. Harvey (2005) observed, for instance, that “neoliberalism in authoritarian states such as China and Singapore seems to be converging with the increasing authoritarianism evidence in neoliberal states such as the United States and Britain” (p. 81).

There are several empirical implications of this line of theoretical argumentation that we explore in the remainder of this article. First, we argue that the dissociation between social and economic dimensions of ideology has been exaggerated considerably in previous scholarship on public opinion (e.g., Crowson, 2009; Federico & Malka, 2018; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Johnston et al., 2017; Malka & Soto, 2015; Weeden & Kurzban, 2016). A great many public policy issues—such as those pertaining to welfare spending, redistribution of wealth, public education, health care, affirmative action, military budgets, and law and order—involve *both* economic priorities and social concerns pertaining

to race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, gender, and sexual orientation. Thus, we hypothesize that—when one samples a sufficiently wide range of public policy positions using previously published (and presumably validated, to differing degrees) ideological instruments—social and economic attitudes will indeed be positively intercorrelated, even among participants who are relatively low in terms of political sophistication, and both types of attitudes will be correlated with overall ideological self-placement. Second, we hypothesize that—in contrast to the results of previous research using limited numbers of ad hoc items and, in some cases, flawed methodological procedures—support for laissez-faire capitalism will be positively related (rather than unrelated or negatively related) to authoritarianism, social dominance, and various forms of system justification.

Method

Sample 1 (SSI Nationally Representative Sample; N = 1,500)

We hired Survey Sampling Incorporated (SSI; www.surveysampling.com), a market research firm that recruits participants from a panel of over 7 million U.S. citizens, to recruit a nationally representative sample of 1,500 Americans (50.7% women) in the weeks preceding the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election (from August 16 to September 9, 2016). The age distribution of our sample was as follows: 18–24 years (12.9%), 25–34 (17.6%), 35–44 (17.5%), 45–54 (19.5%), 55–65 (15.6%), and older than 65 (16.9%). The ethnic breakdown was: White/European American (82.5%), Black/African American (7.7%), Latino (5.9%), and “Other” (4.0%). In terms of religion, 67.6% identified as Christian, 17.1% as religiously affiliated but not Christian, and 15.3% as Atheist/Agnostic. With respect to education 35.1% indicated “high school only or lower,” 31.4 % indicated “some college,” and 33.6% indicated having received a “Bachelor” or “Graduate” degree. The median income category was \$50,000 to 74,999.

In addition to administering a much greater number and variety of political and psychological instruments (including full scales) than in other nationally representative surveys (such as ANES, GSS, and WVS), we took a number of steps to insure that the quality of the data would be especially high. These included following professional recommendations to minimize problems of careless responding and satisficing behavior in online survey studies. Specifically, we employed 10 random attention and consistency checks as well as time controls (on both page and survey submissions). Out of 1,885 respondents who finished the survey, 385 failed more than one attention check or finished the survey in under 22 minutes and were therefore excluded from the sample. (Participants who successfully finished the survey had a mean completion time of 67 minutes and a median of 51 minutes.) By administering several complete, previously

validated scales designed to measure social and economic attitudes rather than a smattering of individual items, as in many other surveys, we were able to capitalize on positive psychometric properties of the scales and to generalize our results beyond just one or two operational instruments. We randomized the order in which the various scales were administered (across participants), but the order of items within each scale was kept constant and, whenever possible, the items were administered in the order in which they were listed in previous publications.

Symbolic ideology. Respondents completed three questions about symbolic ideological self-placement: (1) “Overall, where would you place yourself, on the following scale of liberalism-conservatism?” (2) “How about in terms of social and cultural issues? (e.g., abortion, separation of church and state, affirmative action)” and (3) “How about in terms of economic issues? (e.g., taxation, welfare, privatization of social security).” Responses were provided on Likert scales ranging from 1 (*Strongly liberal*) to 9 (*Strongly conservative*).

Operational ideology. Issue-based ideological preferences were assessed using five different instruments: (1) the Core Domains of Social and Economic Conservatism Scale, which contains four items measuring economic conservatism and three items measuring social conservatism (Feldman & Johnston, 2014); (2) the Pew Research Center’s “Core Issues in American Politics” scale, which is comprised of 12 items (e.g., “The government needs to do more to make health care affordable and accessible”; Zell & Bernstein, 2014); (3) the Social and Economic Conservatism Scale, which includes five economic and seven socially conservative values (e.g., “Traditional values”; Everett, 2013); (4) the Political Issue Statements, which is comprised of 10 items measuring political orientation in left-right ideological space (e.g., “A woman should have the right to choose what to do with her body, even if that means getting an abortion”; Inbar, Pizarro, & Bloom, 2009); and (5) an adapted 16-item version of Henningham’s (1996, 1997) Social and Economic Conservatism scales, which are contemporary versions of the “classic” Wilson and Patterson (1968) scale for measuring liberalism-conservatism. Scale reliabilities we obtained for Samples 1 and 2 are listed in Table 1 (see Supplementary Materials for a full list of items).

Endorsement of neoliberal attitudes. Upon close inspection of the five scales used to measure operational ideology, we identified 23 items that, in our judgment, clearly reflected neoliberal economic attitudes, as characterized by several authors who have written extensively on the topic (e.g., Drolet, 2011; Giroux, 2004; Hall, 2017; Harvey, 2005; Larrain, 1991; Monbiot, 2016). These included support for the free market, business, corporations, profits, and tax cuts, as well as opposition to governmental spending, welfare, unemployment benefits, labor unions, minimum wage provisions, public health insurance, and

Table 1. Scale Reliabilities and Mean Interitem Correlations for Ideological Measures Administered to Samples in the United States (Samples 1 and 2)

	Number of items	Scale reliability (Cronbach's α)		Mean interitem correlation	
		Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 1	Sample 2
Ideological measures					
Symbolic measures					
Ideological self-placement (social, economic, and overall combined)	3	0.79	0.80	.79	.80
Operational measures					
Everett (2013)	12	0.88	0.90	.38	.42
Feldman and Johnston (2014)	7	0.78	0.79	.34	.35
Henningham (1996, 1997)	16	0.87	0.87	.29	.30
Inbar et al. (2009)	10	0.78	0.80	.26	.29
Zell and Bernstein (2014)	12	0.85	0.86	.32	.34

Note. For Sample 1, $N = 1,500$, and for Sample 2, $N = 2,119$.

environmental regulation of business (complete items are listed below in Table 8). Approximately 92% of the items classified by researchers as economically conservative were used in our measure of neoliberal attitudes.

Right-wing authoritarianism. Participants completed a 12-item Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (Funke, 2005) that facilitates the independent measurement of authoritarian submission (e.g., “Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn”), authoritarian aggression (“What our country really needs is a strong, determined President which will crush the evil and set us on our right way again”), and authoritarian conventionalism (“The withdrawal from tradition will turn out to be a fatal fault one day”). Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 9 (*very strongly agree*).

Social dominance orientation. Participants completed the Social Dominance Orientation Scale-7 (Ho et al., 2015), which consists of two eight-item subscales, namely group-based dominance (“In getting what your group wants, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups”) and opposition to equality (“We should strive to make incomes more equal,” reverse coded). Responses were provided on a scale from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 9 (*very strongly agree*).

General system justification. Participants completed the eight-item general system justification scale (Kay & Jost, 2003), which contains items such as these:

"In general, the American political system operates as it should," and "American society needs to be radically restructured" (reverse-scored). Responses were provided on scales ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 9 (*Strongly Agree*), with a higher overall score indicating stronger system justification in general.

Economic system justification. Participants also completed the 17-item economic system justification scale (Jost & Thompson, 2000), which includes items such as: "Laws of nature are responsible for differences in wealth in society," and "There are many reasons to think that the economic system is unfair" (reverse-scored). Responses were provided on scales ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 9 (*Strongly Agree*), with a higher overall score indicating stronger justification of the economic.

Gender-specific system justification. Participants completed the 8-item gender-specific system justification scale (Jost & Kay, 2005), which includes items such as: "In general, relations between men and women are fair." Responses were also provided on scales ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 9 (*Strongly Agree*), with a higher overall score indicating stronger justification of the gender-relations.

Political sophistication. Sophistication or knowledge about political issues was measured with the following items: (1) "Who is the current Speaker of the House?" *Correct answer: Paul Ryan.* (2) "Who is the current Senate Leader?" *A: Mitch McConnell.* (3) "How many electoral votes are needed to win the presidency?" *A: 270.* (4) "What fraction of votes is needed in Congress to override a Presidential veto?" *A: 2/3.* (5) "What state just became the second to have a larger Hispanic population than White population?" *A: California.* (6) "The Constitution requires an actual enumeration of the population every . . . ?" *A: 10 years.* (7) "Conservatives would tend to support all of the following EXCEPT . . . ?" *A: Affirmative action.* (8–10) "Please select the current jobs of the following office holders in the answer boxes below. (8) Secretary of the Treasury?" *A: Jack Lew.* (9) "Secretary of Defense?" *A: Ash Carter.* (10) "Attorney General?" *A: Loretta Lynch.* For each respondent we summed the number of correct answers (integers ranging from 0 to 10). The sample mean was 5.96 ($SD = 2.67$). Respondents who scored above the median were classified as "high" in political sophistication ($n = 688$, group mean = 8.47, $SD = 1.59$), and those who scored at or below the median were classified as "low" in political sophistication ($n = 812$, group mean = 3.85, $SD = 1.59$).

Sample 2 (SSI Convenience Replication Sample; $N = 2,119$)

Through SSI we also administered the same survey to a large convenience sample of 2,119 American adults (21.5% women), who completed study materials from August 20 to September 13, 2016. (Information about sampling and

exclusion criteria is included in the Supplementary Materials). Age was distributed as follows: 18–24 (9.1%), 25–34 (13.8%), 35–44 (11.4%), 45–54 (2.7%), 55–65 (3.6%), 65 and older (59.3%). The ethnic breakdown was: White/European American (85.9%), Black/African American (5.1%), Latino (4.1%), and “Other” (5.0%). In terms of religion, 70.7% identified as Christian, 15.7% as religiously affiliated but not Christian, and 13.7% as Atheist/Agnostic. With respect to educational status, 16.2% chose “high school or lower,” 40.4% reported “some college” and 43.4% had attained a “Bachelor” or “Graduate” degree. The median income category was \$50,000–\$74,999. All variables were measured in the same way as in Sample 1. The sample mean for political sophistication was 6.56 ($SD = 2.58$). Once again, respondents who scored above the median were considered “high” in political sophistication ($n = 1,154$, group mean = 8.89, $SD = .71$), and those who scored at or below the median were considered “low” in political sophistication ($n = 965$, group mean = 4.61, $SD = 1.84$).

Sample 3 (YouGov U.S. Sample; $N = 3,500$)

We hired YouGov (a well-known international polling firm) to conduct a three-wave panel survey in the year prior to the U.S. presidential election. The first wave lasted from April 9 to May 1, 2016 (3,500 respondents), the second wave from September 9 to October 9 (2,635 respondents), and the third from October 25 to November 7 (2,628 respondents). Respondents were matched to a sampling frame based on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest. The frame was constructed through stratified sampling from the full 2010 American Community Survey sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file). The total sample was 44% male, 75% White/Caucasian, the median age was 52 years old, and the median level of education (24%) reported was “some college.”

Ideology. We measured (symbolic) ideological self-placement with a single item: “As shown on the scales below, some people in the United States tend to identify more with the political left, while others tend to identify more with the political right. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between. Please place yourself on this scale.” Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 0 (*Far Left*) to 100 (*Far Right*).

We also analyzed responses to two single-item measures of operational ideology.⁴ With respect to the economic dimension, respondents were randomly

⁴We focused on two questions (about taxation and immigration) that were asked consistently across multiple waves using similar wordings and response scales in the United States (Sample 3) and the United Kingdom (Sample 4) and that were deemed politically relevant in both contexts. Other policy questions were administered and might have served as reasonable proxies for social or economic

assigned to answer one of the following two questions: “A progressive tax plan is one in which those with higher incomes pay a higher share in taxes than those with lower incomes. On the scales below, the midpoint represents the current U.S. tax system, the far left represents a less progressive system, and the far right represents a more progressive system than we have now”; or “Some people think the rich should pay much higher tax rates than they do now. Others think everyone should pay the exact same tax rate, and so we should lower the tax rates currently paid by wealthy Americans. And of course others have opinions in between, such as keeping tax rates the same as they are now.” Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 0 (*Less Progressive Tax System*) to 100 (*More Progressive Tax System*) for the first item and ranging from 0 (*Raise tax rates on wealthy*) to 100 (*Lower tax rates on wealthy*) for the second. With respect to the social dimension, they read: “As shown on the scales below, some people think that the United States should deport all illegal immigrants and others think we should instead provide them with a path to citizenship. And of course others have opinions in between, such as allowing illegal immigrants to obtain guest worker status.” Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 0 (*Deport all illegal immigrants*) to 100 (*Eventual path to citizenship*). Responses to these items were scored so that higher numbers indicated stronger endorsement of conservative viewpoints, and they were averaged across the three waves.

We measured political sophistication with three items: (1) “Would you say that compared to 2008, average workers’ earnings have increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?” *Correct answer: Increased*. (2) “As you probably know, Barack Obama was first elected president in November of 2008, and took office in January of 2009. Would you say that compared to 2008, the number of Americans without health insurance has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?” *A: Decreased*. (3) “Would you say that compared to 2008, the number of immigrants illegally crossing the border from Mexico each year has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?” *A: Decreased*.⁵ Political sophistication was measured in all three waves. Because there were missing responses, we calculated the propor-

ideology, but they introduced other ambiguities. For instance, there was at least one question about abortion, but—in addition to bringing in issues of religion and gender identity—it was less clear to us that the issue had the same political resonance in the United States and the United Kingdom at the time of the survey.

⁵ A fourth factual question was also administered, but—upon consulting various economic reports written by experts—we were unable to determine an unambiguously correct answer. The question was: “Would you say that compared to 2008, income inequality has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?” It would appear that, at the time of writing, there is no consensually accepted general answer to the question of whether income inequality in the United States increased, decreased, or stayed the same between 2008 and 2016. According to one website (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/219643/gini-coefficient-for-us-individuals-families-and-households/>) the Gini coefficient rose slightly from .47 in 2008 to .48 in 2016, whereas another suggests that income inequality

tion of correct answers out of all those attempted (across waves) and classified respondents as “high” in political sophistication if they scored above the median in terms of accuracy ($n = 1,654$, group mean = 0.46, $SD = 0.16$) and as “low” if they scored at or below the median ($n = 1,845$, group mean = 0.09, $SD = 0.09$).

A total of 3,353 participants completed the primary measures of interest, namely the ideological self-placement question and Kay and Jost’s (2003) general system justification scale. In addition, respondents completed one of two measures of authoritarianism in split-sample fashion. Approximately half of the sample answered four right-wing authoritarianism items: “What our country really needs, instead of more ‘civil rights,’ is a good dose of law and order”; “Some of the worst people in our country nowadays are those who do not respect our flag, our leaders, and the normal way things are supposed to be done”; “We should treat protesters and radicals with open arms and open minds, since new ideas are the lifeblood of progressive change”; and “The situation in our country is getting so serious, the strongest methods would be justified if they eliminated the troublemakers and got us back on our true path.” Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 5 (*Strongly Disagree*). The other half of the sample completed Stenner’s (2005) measure of childrearing values, which read as follows: “Talking about the qualities that children should have, I am going to mention several characteristics and I would like you to tell me which is more important for a child: Independence or Respect for elders; Self-reliance or Obedience; Considerate or Well-behaved; Curiosity or Good manners.” Values of 1 (low authoritarianism) were assigned to the first response in each pair, and values of 2 (high authoritarianism) were assigned to the second response in each pair; if respondents chose “both” we assigned an intermediate value of 1.5.

Sample 4 (YouGov UK Sample; N = 3848)

We also conducted a four-wave panel survey administered by YouGov in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland). The four waves were collected between July 9, 2014 and June 17, 2015. This convenience sample was drawn from YouGov’s panel on social media users (YouGov Social), which at the time of collection consisted of 14,000 respondents. Overall, there were 1,308 respondents retained for all four waves out of 3,846 who answered at least one wave of the survey. The sample was 55% male, 52% reported 15 years or more of education, the median age was 48 years, and household income was £34,200. Most respondents (84%) were from England, 5% were from Scotland, 9% were from Wales, and 1% were from Northern Ireland. A total of 1,853

may have started to decline during President Obama’s tenure (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-income-gap-began-to-narrow-under-obama/>).

participants completed the ideological self-placement question and a version of Kay and Jost's (2003) eight-item general system justification scale that was modified slightly to fit the British context.

Ideology. As in the U.S. sample, we measured (symbolic) ideological self-placement with a single item: "As shown on the scale below, some people in Britain tend to identify more with the political left, while others tend to identify more with the political right. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between. Please place yourself on this scale." Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 0 (*Far Left*) to 100 (*Far Right*). We also administered single item measures of operational ideology. With respect to the economic dimension, respondents read: "As shown on the scale below, some people think that social spending should be increased even if that means higher taxes. Others feel that taxes should be cut even if that means lower social spending. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between." Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 0 (*Social spending should be increased even if that means higher taxes*) to 100 (*Taxes should be cut even if that means lower social spending*). With respect to the social dimension, they read: "As shown on the scale below, some people think that the number of legal immigrants to Britain should be greatly increased. Others feel that legal immigration to Britain should be greatly reduced. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between." Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 0 (*Legal immigration to Britain should increase a lot*) to 100 (*Legal immigration to Britain should decrease a lot*). Operational ideology was measured in all four waves, so we took the mean of the four scores in both cases.

We measured political sophistication with four items: (1) "Compared to a year ago, do you think unemployment in Great Britain has increased, decreased, or stayed the same?" *Correct answer: Decreased*. (2) "Next we'd like to ask about some other things that have been in the news. The Islamic militant group known as ISIS currently controls territory in which of these countries—Syria, Kuwait, Morocco, or Pakistan?" *A: Syria*. (3) "Over the past 5 years, has the number of immigrants to the United Kingdom from other EU countries been: (Less than 100,000 per year, Between 100,000 and 300,000 per year, Between 300,000 and 500,000 per year, More than 500,000 per year, Don't Know)?" *A: Between 100,000 and 300,000 per year*. (4) "Which of the following parties won the Greek parliamentary elections in February 2015? (Golden Dawn, New Democracy, Syriza, The River, Don't Know)?" *A: Syriza*. The first three questions were surveyed in Waves 2 and 3, and the fourth in Wave 3 only. As in the U.S. case, we calculated the proportion of correct answers across waves and classified respondents as "high" in political sophistication if they scored above the median in terms of accuracy ($n = 1,484$, group mean = 0.95, $SD = 0.08$) and as "low" if they scored at or below the median ($n = 1,823$, group mean = 0.56, $SD = 0.19$).

Table 2. Correlations between Social and Economic Dimensions of Ideology as a Function of Political Sophistication in the United States (Samples 1 and 2)

Ideological measures	Political sophistication	Pearson's correlations	
		Sample 1	Sample 2
Symbolic measures			
Ideological self-placement (social vs. economic)	Low	.71	.71
	High	.73	.76
	Total	.72	.74
Operational measures			
Everett (2013)	Low	.54	.60
	High	.70	.77
	Total	.62	.69
Feldman and Johnston (2014)	Low	.33	.31
	High	.50	.53
	Total	.40	.42
Henningham (1996, 1997)	Low	.38	.40
	High	.56	.67
	Total	.47	.54
Inbar et al. (2009)	Low	.39	.43
	High	.69	.72
	Total	.57	.61
Zell and Bernstein (2014)	Low	.42	.44
	High	.62	.71
	Total	.53	.59

Note. For Sample 1, $N = 1,500$, and for Sample 2, $N = 2,119$. All correlations in this table are statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Results and Discussion

Our first hypothesis was that in Western capitalist countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom social and economic dimensions of ideology would be intertwined, even for respondents who were relatively low in terms of political sophistication. We obtained very strong support for this hypothesis with respect to both symbolic and operational measures of ideology, that is, in terms of ideological self-placement and the expression of content-laden opinions. Social and economic dimensions of ideological self-placement were highly intercorrelated in Samples 1 ($r = .72$) and 2 ($r = .74$), and this was true of respondents who were low as well as high in terms of political sophistication (see Table 2). For respondents who were low in sophistication social and economic dimensions were correlated at .71 in both samples, and for respondents who were high in sophistication the correlations were .73 in Sample 1 and .76 in Sample 2. In other words, the percentage of shared variance between symbolic measures of social and economic conservatism was roughly 50%.

We also investigated our first hypothesis with respect to operational measures of social and economic conservatism.⁶ For all five of the ideological instruments we administered, social and economic dimensions of ideology were strongly correlated in both samples (with r s ranging from .40 to .69). However they were measured, the two dimensions were significantly correlated in both samples for respondents who were low in terms of political sophistication (with r s ranging from .31 to .60) as well as high in sophistication (with r s ranging from .50 to .77). In other words, the percentage of shared variance between operational measures of social and economic conservatism varied from roughly 10% to 36% for respondents who were low in political sophistication and between 25% and 60% for respondents high in political sophistication. It is perhaps noteworthy that when we administered Feldman and Johnston's (2014) scale, we obtained correlations between social and economic dimensions that were substantially higher ($r = .40$ and $.42$ in Samples 1 and 2, respectively) than in the ANES data they analyzed. Of the 36 comparisons shown in Table 2, every single one was statistically significant at $p < .001$ and of at least moderate magnitude. There was no evidence that social and economic attitudes were unrelated for any group of respondents or for any of the five measures of operational ideology that we administered.

According to Kinder and Kalmoe (2017), ordinary citizens' ideological self-placements are nonideological and essentially meaningless forms of "tribal" identification. If this is the case, then ideological self-placements should be largely uncorrelated with scores on the five measures of operational ideology. But this is not what we found. As shown in Table 3, overall ideological self-placement was strongly correlated with scores on all five operational measures of ideology in both samples (with r s ranging from .64 to .76); economic ideological self-placement was strongly correlated with scores on all five operational measures of economic ideology (with r s ranging from .57 to .70); and social ideological self-placement was strongly correlated with scores on all five operational measures of social ideology (with r s ranging from .62 to .75). Furthermore, every measure of ideological self-placement was significantly correlated with every measure of operational ideology at $p < .001$.

In Samples 3 (United States) and 4 (United Kingdom), we observed that overall ideological self-placement scores were robustly correlated with single-item operational measures of social conservatism (support for the deportation of illegal immigrants) and economic conservatism (support for a less progressive taxation system), with r s ranging from .51 to .71 (see Tables 4 and 5). Ideological self-placement was significantly correlated with operational measures of social

⁶Whenever possible, we employed the classifications of "social" and "economic" items used by the original researchers who developed each of the scales; when this was unclear, we classified the items based on their contents in accordance with our understanding of the research literature.

Table 3. Correlations Between Symbolic and Operational Dimensions of Social and Economic Ideology in the United States (Samples 1 and 2)

Sample	Measures of ideological self-placement (symbolic)						Ideological measure (operational)
	Overall		Economic		Social		
	1	2	1	2	1	2	
Operational ideology	0.72	0.76	0.70	0.73	0.72	0.75	ZB
	0.72	0.72	0.68	0.68	0.71	0.72	IPB
	0.72	0.73	0.65	0.67	0.75	0.76	HC
	0.70	0.70	0.66	0.67	0.70	0.72	FJ
	0.64	0.64	0.61	0.61	0.65	0.62	EV
Operational economic ideology	0.59	0.70	0.66	0.70	0.54	0.62	ZB
	0.57	0.61	0.59	0.60	0.51	0.55	IPB
	0.52	0.61	0.57	0.62	0.48	0.55	HC
	0.60	0.64	0.63	0.65	0.53	0.57	FJ
	0.51	0.58	0.58	0.61	0.47	0.49	EV
Operational social ideology	0.67	0.67	0.57	0.59	0.73	0.73	ZB
	0.68	0.68	0.62	0.62	0.71	0.71	IPB
	0.68	0.67	0.57	0.58	0.74	0.75	HC
	0.58	0.53	0.46	0.46	0.66	0.65	FJ
	0.62	0.60	0.55	0.56	0.65	0.62	EV

Note. For Sample 1, $N = 1,500$, and for Sample 2, $N = 2,119$. All correlations in this table are statistically significant at $p < .001$. Correlations are italicized when symbolic and operational measures of ideology are matched in terms of domain specificity. EV = Everett (2013); FJ = Feldman and Johnston (2014); HC = Henningham (1997); IPB = Inbar et al. (2009); ZB = Zell and Bernstein (2014).

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Involving Symbolic and Operational Dimensions of Social and Economic Ideology and Other Political and Psychological Variables in the United States (Sample 3)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Overall ideological self-placement (symbolic)	51.81 (3,490)	25.22					
2. Social conservatism (operational)	47.19 (3,489)	33.94	.51*** (3,480)				
3. Economic conservatism (operational)	37.75 (3,484)	30.35	.57*** (3,476)	.48*** (3,480)			
4. Political sophistication	0.27 (3,499)	0.22	-.32*** (3,489)	-.42*** (3,488)	-.32*** (3,483)		
5. General system justification	4.57 (3,363)	1.43	.25*** (3,353)	.05** (3,353)	.25*** (3,348)	-.02 (3,362)	
6. Right-wing authoritarianism	3.12 (1,717)	0.84	.52*** (1,711)	.44*** (1,714)	.38*** (1,706)	-.28*** (1,716)	.20*** (1,653)
7. Child-rearing values (authoritarianism)	1.54 (1,761)	0.15	.27*** (1,757)	.25*** (1,754)	0.16*** (1,757)	-.13*** (1,761)	.11*** (1,691)

Note. Political sophistication was treated as a continuous variable in all correlations shown in this table. No respondents completed both the right-wing authoritarianism scale and the measure of child-rearing values. All correlations in this table except two are statistically significant at $p < .001$. Pairwise sample sizes (*ns*) are shown in parentheses below means and correlations.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Involving Symbolic and Operational Dimensions of Social and Economic Ideology and Other Political and Psychological Variables in the United Kingdom (Sample 4)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Overall ideological self-placement (symbolic)	44.17 (2,582)	21.65				
2. Social conservatism (operational)	61.01 (3,702)	24.62	.58*** (2,575)			
3. Economic conservatism (operational)	42.46 (3,630)	26.00	.71*** (2,562)	.52*** (3,608)		
4. Political sophistication	0.73 (3,307)	0.25	.16*** (2,582)	-.02 (3,187)	.11*** (3,132)	
5. General system justification	4.42 (2,507)	1.43	.37*** (1,853)	.09*** (2,400)	.35*** (2,362)	.22*** (2,500)

Note. Political sophistication was treated as a continuous variable in all correlations shown in this table. All correlations in this table except one are statistically significant at $p < .001$. Pairwise sample sizes (*ns*) are shown in parentheses below means and correlations.

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

and economic conservatism among respondents who were relatively low in political sophistication (with r s ranging from .43 to .68) as well as high (with r s ranging from .47 to .72), as shown in Tables 6 and 7. In other words, the picture that emerges in our research program is hardly one of ideological incoherence, ignorance, or innocence.

We also hypothesized that the endorsement of neoliberal attitudes in particular—including support for laissez-faire capitalism and opposition to social welfare programs—would be positively related (rather than unrelated or negatively related) to authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and various forms of system justification. We obtained very strong support for these hypotheses in Samples 1 and 2. As shown in Table 8, responses to nearly every single item were positively and significantly correlated with right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and general, economic, and gender-specific system justification. Out of 230 correlations (10 correlations for each of the 23 items) very few failed to attain statistical significance at $p < .001$. Mean scores on the composite measure of neoliberal attitudes, aggregated across all 23 items, were very strongly correlated with right-wing authoritarianism (r s = .55 and .64 in Samples 1 and 2, respectively), social dominance orientation (r s = .56 and .53), economic system justification (r s = .73 and .76), and gender-specific system justification (r s = .57 and .58). The endorsement of neoliberal attitudes was also correlated, albeit much more modestly, with general system justification (r s = .25 and .22). Furthermore, these patterns were observed among respondents who were low as well as high in political sophistication, as shown in Table 9.

Because it has been suggested that even people who identify themselves as left-of-center have embraced major tenets of neoliberal ideology (e.g., Manstead, 2018), we inspected mean scores on all 23 of the neoliberal attitude items as a function of ideological self-placement in the economic domain in the context of our nationally representative sample in the United States (Sample 1). Respondents who identified themselves as economically conservative ($n = 728$) endorsed nearly all of the neoliberal attitudes, exhibiting mean scores above the scale midpoint for 17 of the 23 items. However, respondents who identified themselves as economically moderate (neither liberal nor conservative, $n = 256$) scored above the scale midpoint for only 7 of the 23 items, and those who identified themselves as economically liberal ($n = 516$) scored above the scale midpoint for 5 of the 23 items. On average, members of all three groups, including economic liberals (or progressives), favorably evaluated the attitude objects of business, limited government, and fiscal responsibility, and they also agreed that “federal tax cuts have been worth it” and “the welfare system is too easy to abuse.” Thus, we obtained some evidence that certain elements of neoliberal ideology have penetrated the political consciousness of economic progressives. At the same time, there are significant differences of opinion in terms of neoliberal attitudes taken as whole. As shown in Figure 1, self-identified conservatives endorsed neoliberal attitudes more strongly (group

Table 6. Correlations Involving Symbolic and Operational Dimensions of Social and Economic Ideology and Other Political and Psychological Variables as a Function of Political Sophistication in the United States (Sample 3)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Overall ideological self-placement (symbolic)	—	.47*** (1,646)	.56*** (1,644)	.27*** (1,588)	.59*** (795)	.27*** (855)
2. Social conservatism (operational)	.43*** (1,833)	—	.47*** (1,646)	.05 (1,588)	.42*** (795)	.27*** (855)
3. Economic conservatism (operational)	.51*** (1,831)	.37*** (1,833)	—	.25*** (1,586)	.41*** (792)	.17*** (856)
4. General system justification	.24*** (1,764)	.04 (1,764)	.26*** (1,761)	—	.24*** (768)	.15*** (824)
5. Right-wing authoritarianism	.38*** (915)	.34*** (918)	.23*** (913)	.16*** (884)	—	—
6. Child-rearing values (authoritarianism)	.22*** (902)	.18*** (899)	.11*** (901)	.07* (867)	—	—

Note. Correlations for respondents classified as “high” in political sophistication on the basis of a median split are above the diagonal (upper triangle), and correlations for respondents classified as “low” in political sophistication are below the diagonal (bottom triangle). No respondents completed both the right-wing authoritarianism scale and the measure of child-rearing values. All correlations in this table except three are statistically significant at $p < .001$. Pairwise sample sizes (*ns*) are shown in parentheses below correlations.

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

Table 7. Correlations Involving Symbolic and Operational Dimensions of Social and Economic Ideology and Other Political and Psychological Variables as a Function of Political Sophistication in the United Kingdom (Sample 4)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Overall ideological self-placement (symbolic)	–	.57*** (1,191)	.72*** (1,187)	.38*** (950)
2. Social conservatism (operational)	.59*** (1,384)	–	.49*** (1,418)	.12*** (1,182)
3. Economic conservatism (operational)	.68*** (1,375)	.56*** (1,703)	–	.34*** (1,170)
4. General system justification	.31*** (903)	–.06* (1,213)	.32*** (1,188)	–

Note. Correlations for respondents classified as “high” in political sophistication on the basis of a median split are above the diagonal (upper triangle), and correlations for respondents classified as “low” in political sophistication are below the diagonal (bottom triangle). No respondents completed both the right-wing authoritarianism scale and the measure of child-rearing values. All correlations in this table except one are statistically significant at $p < .001$. Pairwise sample sizes (ns) are shown in parentheses below correlations.

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

mean = 5.82, $SD = 1.30$) than self-identified moderates (group mean = 4.50, $SD = 0.81$) and self-identified liberals (group mean = 3.76, $SD = 1.05$), who scored well below the scale midpoint (all group comparisons were statistically significant at $p < .001$).

We also hypothesized that support for laissez-faire capitalism would be positively related to authoritarianism, social dominance, and system justification. As shown in Table 4, economic conservatism (measured in terms of support for a less progressive tax system) was positively and significantly correlated with right-wing authoritarianism ($r = .38$) as well as authoritarianism measured in terms of childrearing values ($r = .16$) in Sample 3, both $ps < .001$. We obtained no evidence of a “reversal” effect of the kind reported by Johnston et al. (2017). Even among respondents who were low in political sophistication, economic conservatism was positively and significantly associated with both measures of authoritarianism ($r = .23$ for right-wing authoritarianism and $r = .11$ for the childrearing measure), although it is true that these associations were stronger among respondents who were high in political sophistication ($rs = .41$ and $.17$, respectively; see Table 6). Economic conservatism was also positively and significantly associated with scores on general system justification in both the United States ($r = .25$) and the United Kingdom ($r = .35$), as shown in Tables 4 and 5. These patterns, too, were observed for respondents who were low as well as high in political sophistication, as shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 8. Items Used to Measure Neoliberal Attitudes and Their Correlations with RWA, SDO, and System Justification in the United States (Samples 1 and 2)

Sample	RWA		SDO		GSJ		ESJ		Gender SJ	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Business	.31	.36	.21	.28	.27	.28	.37	.44	.35	.41
Limited government	.35	.41	.25	.28	.06	.08	.35	.43	.28	.36
Welfare benefits (R)	.35	.43	.40	.35	.11	.09	.48	.49	.35	.36
Fiscal responsibility	.26	.28	.09	.14	.16	.23	.26	.34	.26	.32
Government welfare (R)	.42	.49	.42	.40	.11	.10	.50	.53	.35	.36
Unemployment benefits (R)	.21	.33	.37	.38	.08	.07	.38	.38	.26	.26
Worker's unions (R)	.36	.43	.35	.38	.12	.07	.45	.49	.31	.37
Wealth tax (originally socialism) (R)	.29	.39	.39	.34	.20	.15	.53	.52	.41	.40
Minimum wage (originally the dole) (R)	.29	.38	.34	.38	.03	.05	.40	.45	.24	.32
The welfare system is too easy to abuse and does not give people enough incentive to find work.	.48	.52	.40	.35	.17	.18	.49	.54	.40	.40
Overall, labor unions tend to hurt the United States economy. (R)	.40	.42	.40	.37	.15	.08	.45	.45	.34	.34
Federal tax cuts have been worth it, because they have helped strengthen the economy by allowing Americans to keep more of their own money.	.23	.29	.17	.18	.20	.23	.30	.33	.28	.32
Government spending (R)	.41	.49	.43	.42	.14	.14	.49	.55	.39	.40
Medical insurance (R)	.39	.46	.41	.38	.21	.21	.54	.56	.41	.42

(Continued)

Table 8. Continued

Sample	RWA		SDO		GSJ		ESJ		Gender SJ	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Guaranteed jobs (R)	.38	.42	.42	.39	.22	.22	.55	.60	.46	.43
Assistance to poor (R)	.40	.48	.42	.42	.16	.18	.54	.59	.40	.44
There need to be stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment. (R)	.36	.45	.40	.37	.14	.15	.50	.51	.40	.43
The government should help more needy people even if it means going deeper into debt. (R)	.35	.45	.40	.37	.16	.14	.54	.58	.42	.42
Business corporations make too much profit. (R)	.18	.23	.29	.28	.30	.28	.49	.50	.43	.41
The government needs to do more to make health care affordable and accessible. (R)	.25	.40	.40	.38	.17	.14	.48	.50	.37	.38
Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good.	.42	.50	.34	.37	.07	.03	.43	.46	.32	.33
Labor unions are necessary to protect the working person. (R)	.33	.38	.31	.30	.15	.11	.43	.46	.31	.34
Poor people have become too dependent on government assistance programs.	.52	.60	.46	.47	.18	.21	.56	.62	.44	.49
Overall score (mean responses, aggregating all 23 items)	.55	.64	.56	.53	.25	.22	.73	.76	.57	.58

Note. For Sample 1, $N = 1,500$; for Sample 2, $N = 2,119$. All correlations in this table above $r = .08$ are statistically significant at $p < .001$. (R) = Responses to these items were reverse-scored. RWA = Right-wing authoritarianism, SDO = Social dominance orientation, GSJ = General system justification, ESJ = Economic system justification, Gender SJ = Gender-specific system justification.

Table 9. Correlations between Neoliberal Attitudes (composite measure) and RWA, SDO, and System Justification as a Function of Political Sophistication in the United States (Samples 1 and 2)

Sample	RWA		SDO		GSJ		ESJ		Gender SJ	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Low sophistication	0.47	0.52	0.53	0.47	0.19	0.23	0.63	0.69	0.44	0.47
High sophistication	0.64	0.74	0.63	0.61	0.28	0.18	0.79	0.79	0.65	0.65
Total	0.55	0.64	0.56	0.53	0.25	0.22	0.73	0.76	0.57	0.58

Note: For Sample 1, Total $N = 1,500$ ($n = 812$ for low sophistication and $n = 688$ for high sophistication). For Sample 2, Total $N = 2,119$ ($n = 1,154$ for low sophistication and $n = 965$ for high sophistication). All correlations in the table are statistically significant at $p < .001$. RWA = Right-wing authoritarianism, SDO = Social dominance orientation, GSJ = General system justification, ESJ = Economic system justification, Gender SJ = Gender-specific system justification.

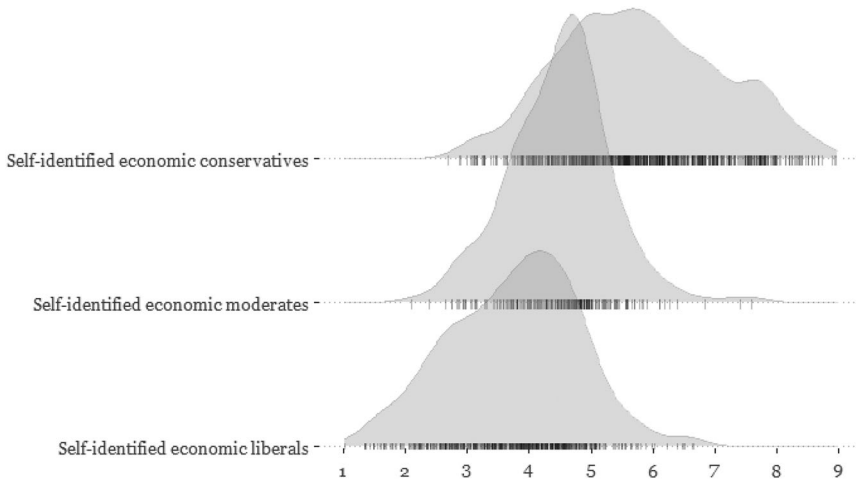


Fig. 1. Distribution of neoliberal attitudes (composite scores) as a function of ideological self-placement on the economic dimension in the United States (Sample 1).

Note. These results are based on a nationally representative sample (Total $N = 1,500$). For self-identified economic conservatives, $n = 728$; for self-identified economic moderates (neither liberal nor conservative), $n = 256$; and for self-identified economic liberals, $n = 516$.

General Discussion

In a set of high quality, nationally representative surveys administering a much greater number and range of attitudinal instruments than in previous research, we demonstrated that social and economic dimensions of ideology (whether measured in symbolic or operational terms or both) were indeed highly correlated in the United States—even among respondents who were relatively low in terms of political sophistication. We also found that social and economic attitudes were highly correlated with overall ideological self-placement on liberal-conservative and left-right dimensions, suggesting that ideological identifications are much more than just arbitrary “tribal” symbols. Furthermore, we observed that the endorsement of pro-capitalist, neoliberal economic attitudes was associated with authoritarianism (whether measured in terms of childrearing values or scales of right-wing authoritarianism) as well as social dominance orientation and general, economic, and gender-specific forms of system justification. The upshot of these results is that, in our judgment, it would be gravely misleading to suggest that: ordinary citizens hold political attitudes that are trivial or meaningless (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017); social and economic attitudes are unrelated to one another (Feldman & Johnston, 2014); or social and economic dimensions of ideology are linked to qualitatively different psychological concerns (Johnston et al., 2017; Malka & Soto, 2015; Stenner & Haidt, 2018).

The results of our research program, in which we administered complete versions of several different, previously validated attitude scales—rather than analyzing a handful or two of ANES, GSS, or WVS items, as in previous research—failed to substantiate Kinder and Kalmoe’s (2017, p. 3) glib characterization of ordinary citizens:

Parochial in interest, modest in intellect, and burdened by the demands and obligations of everyday life, most citizens lack the wherewithal and motivation to grasp political matters in a deep way. People are busy with more pressing things; politics is complicated and far away. Ideology is not for them.

On the contrary, we observed a remarkably high degree of ideological coherence when it comes to how social and economic attitudes of ordinary citizens are intertwined. In this respect, we obtained quite different results than in research programs by Feldman and Johnston (2014), Malka et al. (2014), and Johnston et al. (2017). Social and economic dimensions of ideology, whether measured symbolically or operationally, were in fact highly intercorrelated—even among respondents who were relatively low in political sophistication. Thus, we obtained strong support for Stuart Hall’s (2017) observation that “the market/free enterprise/private property discourse persists cheek by jowl with older conservative attachments to nation, racial homogeneity, Empire, tradition” (p. 326). Of course, this does not mean that citizens’ beliefs and opinions are correct or well-informed, only that they conform readily to an overarching left-right dimension that captures individual differences in advocacy versus resistance to social change and acceptance versus rejection of inequality, as underscored by the theory of political ideology as motivated social cognition (e.g., Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003, 2008, 2014).

We readily concede that there are limitations associated with any analysis of ideology that is based exclusively on the kind of explicit, self-report indicators that are used in research on public opinion, including the research we have presented here. Although we took several steps to insure that the data we analyzed were of unusually high quality, we cannot rule out the possibility that respondents were constructing responses to our prompts in an “online” manner rather than revealing pre-existing ideological commitments stored in memory (e.g., see Fazio, 2007). It is also conceivable that some of the contents of “social” questions semantically primed or otherwise affected responses to “economic” questions, potentially inflating correlations between social and economic attitudes for artificial rather than genuine reasons. Presumably, the fact that we randomized the order in which scales were administered across respondents means that both of these potential biases were attenuated. But even if it were discovered that social issues primed economic issues (and vice versa), we would interpret such a discovery as a possible vindication of our main theoretical contention, which is that social and economic processes are in fact intertwined—both in contemporary capitalist society and in the minds of its citizens.

Taken in conjunction, our findings reveal that—in terms of general, symbolic identifications as well as specific, operational attitudes—ordinary citizens in the United States (and the United Kingdom, although our measures were much more limited in the latter context) exhibited ideological preferences in which social and economic concerns were closely intertwined. Perhaps this is because—in neoliberal societies—economic policies have enormous implications for the treatment of people belonging to various social categories based on race, ethnicity, religion, age, nationality, immigration status, gender, and sexual orientation. In terms of the big picture, it seems to us that these findings strongly contradict common assumptions that (1) citizens hold political attitudes that are meaningless, unstructured, and nonideological (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017), and (2) social and economic attitudes are structurally and functionally independent of and largely orthogonal to one another (Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Johnston et al., 2017; Malka & Soto, 2015; Stenner & Haidt, 2018).

Our findings also refute the claims that “Laissez faire ‘conservatives’ are not conservative in any real sense” and that “Psychologically speaking, they have nothing in common with authoritarians” (Stenner & Haidt, 2018, p. 181). In nationally representative samples from the United States, we observed that economic conservatism, whether measured in symbolic or operational terms, was in fact consistently and positively correlated with authoritarianism. Generally speaking, our findings are far more reminiscent of empirical observations made in previous decades about the relatively close connections between social and economic dimensions of ideology in general and support for laissez-faire capitalism and racial prejudice, intolerance, and ethnocentrism in particular (Adorno et al., 1950; Napier & Jost, 2008; Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993) than they are of more recent claims about structural and functional independence (Federico & Malka, 2018; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Johnston et al., 2017; Malka & Soto, 2015; Stenner & Haidt, 2018).

We believe that it is impossible, from a scientific perspective, to understand and appreciate neoliberalism as an ideology—or, indeed, the realities of living under the neoliberal world order—without seeing clearly the connections between social and economic variables. We have argued that individuals differ considerably from one another as a function of left-right or liberal-conservative orientations when it comes to the tolerance of social *and* economic forms of inequality. At the same time, we also note the extent to which many citizens in the United States and the United Kingdom (whether “liberal” or “conservative”) are willing to tolerate relatively high levels of economic inequality and let the system “off the hook,” so to speak, when it comes to providing for social welfare, collective bargaining rights, and public investment in societal infrastructure. Far from indicating that ideology is meaningless in people’s lives, these observations about the extent to which neoliberal attitudes have permeated public consciousness underscore the power of a system-justifying ideology to defend and bolster the societal status quo.

Concluding Remarks

When neoliberal political actors withdraw support for health care or unemployment benefits or public education, could it be that they are not merely expressing the value of individual freedom or a principled commitment to “small government”? We believe, especially in light of theoretical critiques of the role of ideology in neoliberal societies, it is unrealistic to assume that attitudinal support for tax cuts for the wealthy and austerity programs for the poor is unrelated to the social dimension of ideology. Given that neoliberal economic policies adversely affect some people more than others—including racial and ethnic minorities, poor people, and many others who are marginalized in society—it seems much more likely to us that social and economic attitudes are intertwined at least in part because both are linked to individual differences in support versus opposition to social and economic forms of inequality.

To be clear, our conception of ideology—both when it comes to individual and group processes of social, cognitive, and motivational organization and its role in capitalist societies—should not be confused with other conceptions that are popular among political scientists, such as those that emphasize political knowledge, sophistication, accuracy, and logic. Rather, we join Larrain (1991, p. 26) in conjecturing that there is something important and valuable about a theoretical analysis that makes some use of the critical, pejorative conception in which ideology is understood, at least in part, as an “attempt to mask, explain away or justify the greater unfreedom and inequality” that continues to unfold in contemporary neoliberal societies. It is indeed possible that, as Monbiot (2016a) argued, neoliberalism is so pervasive “that we seldom even recognise it as an ideology,” although we may unwittingly “internalise and reproduce its creeds” about, for instance, the wisdom of tax cuts for the wealthy, corporate hegemony, and the privatization of public institutions, and—more generally—the inherent superiority of market forces over governmental and other not-for-profit forms of collective organization and planning.

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