

Cut From The Same Cloth? The Left-Wing and Right-Wing Share Dark Trait Similarities In
Political Extremism and Authoritarianism

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Dark Triad Traits and Political Correlations

The liberal left-wing and conservative right-wing in politics could not be any more different when contrasted by its two polarizing ideologies. When reviewing politics through the darker lens of human personality, a sizeable number of studies noted by Duspara and Greitemeyer (2017) revealed that right-wing orientation and political extremism are associated with the Dark Triad Traits. However, emerging research shows that both left and right-wing may share more in common than we think (Moss & O'Connor, 2020). This literature review will summarise existing research on the dark traits and their political conservative correlates, followed by critically examining the political overlaps between the left and right-wing when dissecting political extremism, authoritarianism, and its relation to the dark traits.

The Dark Triad is comprised of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). A study by Jonason (2014) with a US sample utilizing the Short-Dark Triad measure found that narcissism and psychopathy were linked to political conservatism. In another study on Australian racism, Jonason (2015) evidenced that Machiavellianism and narcissism were significantly correlated to right-wing authoritarianism, while Machiavellianism and psychopathy predicted a preference for social dominance orientation. Furthermore, in concordance with previous research of an Austrian sample, Duspara and Greitemeyer's (2017) study indicates that right-leaning individuals score higher in all aspects of the dark personality compared to their left-leaning political counterparts. Narcissism and psychopathy were also associated with political extremism in the aforementioned study, though the authors did note that the dark traits associated with political extremism are not consequential to assuming political right-wing stances.

In mainstream media today, there are two renowned sets of extreme political attitudes: Political Correctness (PC) typical of the left (Andary-Brophy, 2015), and White

Identitarianism (WI) of the Alt-Right (Moss & O'Connor, 2020). In a psychoanalytic study of Political Correctness versus Incorrectness, Western (2016) critiques that the PC of the left has morphed somewhat into an authoritarian moral movement in recent years with its intolerance for anyone who thinks or speaks differently – which does not deviate quite far from the aggression of authoritarianism in the right-wing (Conway, Houck, Gornick, and Repke, 2018). It is maintained that the political extremism of the left and right share the same sentiment of a world in which the boundaries of morality are unclear. Using a created LWA scale as a liberal mirror of the RWA, Conway *et al.* (2018) discovered symmetry between LWA and RWA scales revealing prejudice and dogmatism. For example, those scoring highly on the LWA scales agree that *“Our country needs a mighty and liberal leader.”*, *“The leader should destroy the radical traditional ways; if certain groups of Christian troublemakers would just shut up and accept their group’s proper place in society.”*. These liberal ideologies have proved the desire of being led by the authority of an iron fist championed by the cause of equality.

It would make sense to hypothesize that authoritarianism, as a construct, is correlated with dark traits. Previous research disagree on authoritarianism – a simple authority and psychological rigidity upheld by the political conservatives – existing in the left-wing (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2003), however emerging research such as Eynseck’s (2018) stipulates that authoritarianism in the left-wing exists, but may be disguised or expressed in a way that the liberal ideology appeals to the public. This is in accordance to the critiques of Western (2016) of PC covert aggression.

Conversely, in conjunction with the dark triad scale, negative correlations were found between authoritarianism and psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Hodson, Hoggs & Macinnis, 2009). In another study, Bird, Hickey, Leavitt, and Robinson (2022) were able to uncover aspects of ‘dark authoritarianism’ by utilising a latent profile analysis identifying

four political profiles: Democrats, Republicans, Dark Democrats, and Dark Republicans; and that the latter two scored almost higher and almost identical on both LWA and RWA scales.

While Dark Traits were more strongly predicted in Republicans than in Democrats, both Dark Democrats and Dark Republicans showcased higher Dark Triad scores accompanied by low Emotional styles. Bird *et al.* (2022) evidenced that dark personality traits can be uniquely manifested in authoritarianism, regardless of its left or right political orientation, and that dark authoritarianism may be better understood as an attitude leaning towards politically motivated aggression and violence as seen over the course of 2020 and 2021.

This segues nicely into Political Correctness. PC has its origins in the liberal left, of compassionate ideals surrounding the awareness and desire to avoid offense and disadvantage of marginalised groups in society (Andary-Brophy, 2015; Western, 2016). According to Andary-Brophy (2015), two dimensions of PC have been identified: Political Correctness Liberalism (PCL) and Political Correctness Authoritarian (PCA). PCL holds a more gentle approach between the two dimensions. When contrasted with PCA, Moss and O'Connor (2020) found that PCL was more closely tied with liberal ideals of equality and compassion, and was negatively predicted for dark traits. While PCA is motivated by liberal ideals all the same, this dimension was identified to utilise aggression and force as necessary to achieve ideological goals; Andary-Brophy (2015) reported that, similar to our political right-leaners, PCA showed a higher need for order and higher sensitivity to disgust. This further catalysed Moss and O'Connor's (2020) findings – those high in PCA and WI share similar dark profiles of narcissism and psychopathy, and to which all dark traits were negatively correlated with PCL.

In the study of politics and personality, there is a large body of research evidencing the existing relationship between the Dark Triad Traits and political conservative judgments (Duspara & Greitemeyer, 2017). While the left and right are as ideologically polarizing as

they are, there are certain extreme political attitudes cut from the same cloth and it can be seen as strategic means for people to achieve their own ideological goals regardless of political orientation. On that note, emerging research of “pathological altruism” is still fairly recent and further research is needed to further consolidate the relationship between the Dark Triad Traits and the political extremism of the left.

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