

# Does Activism in Social Science Explain Conservatives' Distrust of Scientists?

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**Abstract** Data from the General Social Survey suggest that conservatives have become less trustful of scientists since the 1970s. Gauchat argues that this is because conservatives increasingly see scientific findings as threatening to their worldview. However, the General Social Survey data concern trust in *scientists*, not in *science*. We suggest that conservatives' diminishing trust in scientists reflects the fact that scientists in certain fields, particularly social science, have increasingly adopted a liberal-activist stance, seeking to influence public policy in a liberal direction.

**Keywords** Public understanding of science · Politics and science · Trust in science · Conservatism · Political polarization

## Conservatives' Distrust of Science?

Gauchat (2012) reports that confidence in science among American conservatives has been falling steadily for four decades. In 1974, General Social Survey (GSS) respondents who identified as conservative had the highest rates of trust in science of the three major political demographics—49%, compared with 48% for liberals and 45% for moderates. Moderates' trust in science dropped precipitously in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and remained fairly stable thereafter. Liberals' trust in science remained stable throughout the whole period. Conservatives' trust, however, steadily decreased. By

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2010, conservatives had the lowest rates of trust in science—38%, compared with 40% for moderates and 50% for liberals.

What accounts for conservatives' apparent skepticism toward science? There are two main schools of thought (Nisbet et al. 2015). The first says that conservatives are inherently more skeptical of scientific explanation. This may be because conservative ideology seeks to preserve traditional social structures and institutions, and “[t]he dynamism of science,” with “its constant onslaught on old orthodoxies, its rapid generation of new technological possibilities[,] presents an obvious challenge to more static worldviews” (Mooney 2005:5; partially quoted in Gauchat 2012:170). Additionally, the dogmatism, need for closure, and fear of uncertainty that characterize conservatives (Jost et al. 2003; Kruglanski 2004; Nam et al. 2013) may prevent them from revising their prior beliefs in response to new information, including scientific discoveries (see Nisbet et al. 2015).

Those who attribute to conservatives a greater inherent psychological disposition to reject science cite empirical findings suggesting that conservatives are less tolerant of ideologically threatening information. For example, supporters of Republican presidents are less likely to agree to write an essay arguing in favor of Democratic presidents than vice versa (Nam et al. 2013). Nam et al. interpret this as reflecting conservatives' greater drive to avoid dissonance-arousing situations. According to Nam et al., this psychological trait helps explain why (in their view) “conservatives are...more likely to hold false beliefs concerning a number of public policy issues...in comparison with liberals.” Also, conservatives are slightly more likely than liberals to adjust their factual beliefs to align with their moral views (Liu and Ditto 2012): Those who oppose stem cell research and encouraging teenagers to use condoms tend to deny that stem cell research will lead to medical benefits and that condoms are effective. Liberals do not show the same level of bias when asked about the deterrent power of capital punishment and the effectiveness of forceful interrogation of terrorist suspects. Those high in right-wing authoritarianism (RWA)—which is correlated, though not identical, with conservatism—manifest double standards when reasoning about political issues (Altemeyer 1996).

The second school of thought says that conservatives are not inherently more biased or inclined to reject science than liberals. Rather, conservatives and liberals are equally prone to engage in motivated reasoning to discount worldview-threatening scientific evidence (Brandt et al. 2014; Carl et al. 2016; Chambers et al. 2015; Crawford 2012; Crawford et al. 2013; Crawford et al. 2015; Graham et al. 2012; Kahan 2013). It just so happens that the most salient scientific controversies in recent times—evolution, climate change, etc.—center on theories that threaten the worldview of conservatives rather than liberals (see Nisbet et al. 2015).

Indeed, recent work in political psychology (cited above) suggests that liberals and conservatives are equally prone to engage in biased reasoning. Both liberals and conservatives employ double standards when reasoning about policy issues, but only when they accept the premise upon which a political dilemma is based (Crawford 2012). For example, conservatives (defined by Crawford as those high on RWA) may support mandating Christian prayer in public schools, though they object to laws mandating Islamic prayer even in Islamic countries. Liberals reject the premise that mandatory school prayer is acceptable at all. So liberals reject school prayer across the board, and do not employ a double standard in this case (Crawford 2012). However,

when Christian subjects are asked whether they support creating space in public schools for “voluntary prayer,” both conservatives and liberals reveal a double standard. As before, conservatives are more likely to support creating a space in schools for Christian prayer than for Islamic prayer. Liberals, since they accept the legitimacy of voluntary prayer, are more likely to support a space for voluntary *Islamic* prayer (Crawford 2012). Previous studies of the relationship between political orientation and bias tended to ask subjects to reason about dilemmas whose premises were not acceptable to liberals (e.g., mandatory school prayer). That is why these studies falsely suggested that conservatives but not liberals are biased.

If conservatives do not tend to be more biased than liberals, why have they become increasingly less trustful of science, as Gauchat (2012) reports? We argue that there has been a reduction in trust in *scientists*—not in *science* itself—among educated conservatives, and that this is due partly to the increasing liberal-activist stance among certain elements of the scientific establishment in recent years.

### **Limitations of Gauchat (2012): Trust in Science Versus Trust in the Scientific Community**

How did Gauchat (2012) measure “trust in science”? GSS interviewers preface questions concerning trust of social institutions with the following:

I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? (quoted in Gauchat 2012:172)

Respondents are then asked about “the Scientific Community.” Gauchat counts only the answer “a great deal” as indicating trust in science (172).

In an endnote, Gauchat acknowledges that he uses the term “science” to

refer to a group of people, the organizations they belong to, and the professional boundary that central institutions in society agree is a source of credible expertise....Terms like scientific establishment or organized science might be more appropriate, but these ideas are often simply referred to as “science.” (184n2; see also 182–83)

However, the people and institutions responsible for conducting science are not equivalent to *science*, regardless of how the word may sometimes be used. (a) Trust in scientific authorities is separate from (b) belief that the scientific method (whatever it is) is the most reliable way to gain knowledge of the world. It is important to note that neither (a) nor (b) implies the other. A person might not believe that the scientific method is the best way to learn about the world, but support scientific authorities on the basis that they advocate policies with which the person happens to agree. Conversely, someone might strongly believe in the scientific method, but doubt that mainstream scientific authorities are living up to its requirements. This means that falling conservative trust in “the scientific community” may not reflect antipathy toward the scientific method or resistance to ideology-threatening

scientific findings. Instead, it may betoken conservative skepticism of mainstream scientists whom they perceive to be pushing a liberal agenda.

Prima facie evidence in favor of this last possibility is that conservatives' loss of trust in the scientific community has been driven largely by *educated* conservatives. Gauchat (2012) finds that conservatives with high school, bachelor's, and graduate degrees all became less trustful of science from 1974 to 2010, but those with bachelor's degrees experienced a greater decline in trust than those with only high school degrees. He offers the following interpretation of these findings: "[T]hey imply that conservative discontent with science was not attributable to the uneducated but to rising distrust among educated conservatives....[E]ducated conservatives appear to be more culturally engaged with the ideology and...more politically sophisticated" (180). An alternative—or complimentary—hypothesis, as noted, is that the scientific establishment has taken an increasingly liberal-activist stance over the last four decades.

### **The Politicization of Science: Another Reason Why Conservatives Distrust Scientists**

Following Mooney (2005), Gauchat argues that conservatives have become less trustful of science because they are threatened by recent scientific discoveries. We offer an alternative explanation for the GSS data: Educated conservatives' increasing skepticism of scientific institutions is *partly* a reaction to the politicization—namely, the liberalization—of these institutions.

We begin by noting that conservatives are not uniformly more distrusting of all types of scientists. McCright et al. (2013) do find that self-identified conservatives report less general trust in scientists, measured by subjects' trust in scientists to "Create knowledge that is unbiased and accurate," "Create knowledge that is useful," "Advise government officials on policy," and "Inform the public on important issues." However, this is driven by conservatives' distrust of "impact scientists" who are concerned with "understanding human impacts on the environment and human health" (2). Conservatives actually report *greater* trust than liberals in "production scientists," whose work focuses on invention and innovation for the sake of economic production. So, for example, liberals have greater trust in climatologists who study climate change and pollution, whereas conservatives have greater trust in food and materials scientists. This raises the possibility that contemporary conservatives are not opposed to, or skeptical of, science per se. Rather, they lack trust in impact scientists whom they see as seeking to influence policy in a liberal direction.

We want to decide between two competing hypotheses. The first is Gauchat's: Conservatives have become less trustful of science because recent scientific discoveries threaten their worldview and undermine the justification for conservative policies. The second is our alternative hypothesis: In recent decades, impact scientists and scientific institutions have distorted or misrepresented science in order to advance liberal political causes. Increasing conservative skepticism of certain kinds of scientists and institutions (not of science per se) is a reaction to that change within the scientific community.

What sort of evidence is relevant to deciding between these two hypotheses? We need to determine whether scientists (*qua* scientists) have increasingly adopted a liberal-activist stance in recent years. The mere proportion of liberals among scientists

is irrelevant to this question. *Both* hypotheses under consideration predict that scientists have become more liberal—Gauchat’s, because scientists do not want to be associated with an anti-science political philosophy; ours, because certain sectors of the scientific community have become more hostile toward conservatives. Even if it is the case that scientists are increasingly donating to liberal causes, voting for the Democratic Party, or self-identifying as liberals, this does not support our contention that scientists *distort science* for the sake of liberal political aims.

In this article, we provide examples of prominent, mainstream scientists and scientific institutions putting a spin on scientific findings to influence policy, or the public perception of science, in order to advance liberal causes. To reiterate, we aim to show *not just that scientists are liberal, but that they use their authority as scientists, and the prestige of scientific institutions, to influence social policy in a liberal direction*. In political debates, contemporary scientists often serve as liberal activists. We also provide evidence that, in impact sciences, researchers face more hurdles when publishing results that conflict with liberal, rather than conservative, orthodoxies.

### **Diversity Is a Strength (Even when It’s Not)**

In 2007, former president of the American Political Science Association Robert Putnam reported that

inhabitants of [racially] diverse communities tend to withdraw from collective life, to distrust their neighbours, regardless of the colour of their skin, to withdraw even from close friends, to expect the worst from their community and its leaders, to volunteer less, give less to charity and work on community projects less often, to register to vote less, to agitate for social reform *more*, but have less faith that they can actually make a difference, and to huddle unhappily in front of the television. (Putnam 2007:150–51)

He explained in an interview with the *Financial Times*:

The effect of diversity is worse than had been imagined. And it’s not just that we don’t trust people who are not like us. In diverse communities, we don’t trust people who do look like us. [In racially diverse communities, people] don’t trust the local mayor, they don’t trust the local paper, they don’t trust other people and they don’t trust institutions. The only thing there’s more of is protest marches and TV watching. (quoted in Lloyd 2006)

Putnam said that “he had delayed publishing his research until he could develop proposals to compensate for the negative effects of diversity.” In his words, it “would have been irresponsible to publish without that” (Lloyd 2006). So he refrained from publishing empirical findings that contradicted a key tenet of contemporary liberalism (“diversity is a strength”) until he could think up a way to make it politically palatable to liberals. (Note the disturbing implication—if he never had found a way to put a liberal spin on his findings, then it *never* would have been responsible to publish them.) In his 2007 article, Putnam speculates that “[i]n the long run immigration and diversity

are likely to have important cultural, economic, fiscal, and developmental benefits” (137). He of course has his reasons for making this prediction. But it must be admitted that predictions about future social trends are notoriously less certain than verifiable empirical findings about the present. Putnam chose to be optimistic about the future of diversity, assuming that all ethnic groups will learn to identify with each by creating a “broader sense of ‘we’” (139) just as white Americans of different European backgrounds expanded their parochial identities to encompass all Whites.

In an *amicus curiae* brief for *Fisher v. University of Texas*—a case concerning the constitutionality of race-conscious admissions designed to promote diversity—Thernstrom et al. (2013) wrote that “[w]hat Putnam found certainly contradicted the more naive forms of contact theory” (i.e., the theory that the negative consequences of racial diversity are ameliorated by interracial contact). In response, Putnam submitted an *amicus* brief in which he accused Thernstrom et al. of “selectively cit[ing]” him because they did not mention his other findings, namely: “[W]hile increased diversity may present challenges in the short to medium term, greater diversity can lead to significant benefits to society in the medium to long term” (Putnam 2013). But these other claims—that despite challenges, diversity will eventually bring significant benefits—simply represent the liberal position on diversity. Note that Thernstrom et al. did not claim that Putnam’s findings ruled out the possibility that diversity will bring benefits, just that they contradict “the more naive forms of contact theory.” But Putnam—and, as we will see, other social scientists, too—presented his liberal opinion to the court as simply a scientific finding.

Several professional organizations including the American Anthropological Association, the American Political Science Association, and the American Sociological Association also submitted an *amicus* brief for the case. The brief asserts: “Building on a well-established body of literature, [social scientific] research underscores the University’s compelling interest in diversity....Among [the] benefits [is]...greater civic engagement...” (American Educational Research Association et al. 2013). It addresses Putnam’s (2007) study once—in a footnote—and faults Thernstrom et al. for “ignor[ing] methodological limits to the study (such as omitting variables dealing with intergroup contact and with racial segregation), and fail[ing] to mention that none of the data are drawn from higher education settings.” As noted, the only conclusion Thernstrom et al. drew from Putnam (2007) was that it contradicts “the more naive forms of contact theory”—a supremely cautious interpretation of the data.

Our point is not that diversity is undesirable, or that Putnam’s pessimistic findings are irrefragable (see Abascal and Baldassarri 2015) and that they necessarily apply to the university environment. Our point is that prominent scientists and scientific organizations are not committed to presenting research in a political neutral way, and they will distort it in order to advance liberal causes. One of the most prominent social scientists in the world openly admitted that he refrained from publishing empirical data that threatened an important liberal value—“diversity is a strength”—until he could think up a way to neutralize that implication. Ultimately, he concluded that, while all the *observable* data suggest that diversity causes social problems, *in the future*—the future which, of course, has not been observed—diversity will lead to great benefits. Now if anyone cites his study to support the claim that diversity is associated with problems, but fails to mention the alleged future benefits, he accuses them of “selectively cit[ing]” his “findings.” And although his study met the highest standards of social scientific research, the ASA and other

scientific organizations, for dubious reasons, proclaimed it irrelevant to a debate about the benefits of diversity.

## Thousands of Studies Support the Liberal Theory of Aggression?

A tenet of liberalism is that violence is a learned behavior. A favorite culprit is the media—people learn to be violent from seeing violence on television and in movies and playing violent video games.

In 2000, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) testified to Congress that “more than 3500” studies have investigated the link between exposure to media violence and actual violent behavior. “All but 18 have shown a positive correlation.” To make the point dramatically, it asserted that the strength of the correlation is “larger than that of condom non-use and sexually transmitted HIV, lead exposure and lower I.Q., passive tobacco smoke and lung cancer or calcium intake and bone mass, relationships which pediatricians accept as fact...” (American Academy of Pediatrics 2000).

Also in 2000, six scientific and medical organizations—the AAP, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Psychiatric Association—presented a joint statement to Congress on the link between exposure to media violence and aggression in children. According to the statement, “well over 1000 studies” have led the “public health community [to conclude] that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children. Its effects are measurable and long-lasting” (American Academy of Pediatrics et al. 2000).

It seems fair to say that these major scientific organizations have put their credibility on the line over this issue. The link is as great as that between lead exposure and lower IQ, or second-hand smoke and cancer? Over 1000—maybe even 3500—studies support a single conclusion, which is not contradicted by a single study worth mentioning? Well, it turns out that these organizations never conducted reviews of the literature about which they were testifying. A bit of investigation would have revealed an important fact: *There were not 1000 studies—let alone more than 3500—investigating the relationship between exposure to media violence and aggression.* It is simply false. In an extensive review of the literature, Freedman (2002) found around 200 studies that *address* the link (see Freedman 2002:13). Of these studies, more than half report findings that are inconsistent with there being a causal link. Of those whose findings are not inconsistent, there are other explanations for the results besides the causal hypothesis. In many cases, researchers interpreted a transient increase in general arousal from watching exciting (violent) films as elevated “aggression.” The ways in which aggression is measured (e.g., hitting a Bobo doll, asking a child “whether he would pop a balloon if one were present”) are often questionable for a number of reasons.

Media researcher John Murray takes credit for “inadvertently” creating the 1000+ studies myth when, some years earlier, while working on the National Institute of Mental Health’s review of this issue, he estimated that around “2,500 publications of all kinds [were] relevant to the review” (Freedman 2002:24). He was referring to all

publications, including magazine articles, theoretical papers, and papers on topics that were only tangentially related to the subject. This offhand statement then morphed in a bizarre claim that thousands of studies implicate television watching in aggressive behavior, which became the cornerstone of several scientific organizations' testimony to Congress.<sup>1</sup>

Freedman does not believe that exposure to media violence causes aggression, and our point is not that he is necessarily correct. Our point is that several of the most important scientific organizations in the United States presented testimony to Congress—testimony that was intended to influence policy—that misrepresented science in a way that favors a liberal approach to dealing with violence.

Freedman (2002:16) suggests some possible reasons why the APA testified that there was a scientific consensus on this issue. Maybe it “was worried about its public image”—or wanted to appease members of Congress who blame television violence for crime and who also control funding for science. Another possibility, which Freedman does not consider, is political. Namely, it is a tenet of liberalism—arguably it is the essence of liberalism—that violence and bad behavior are caused by bad social conditioning. Sowell (1987) argues that belief or nonbelief in the perfectibility of people is what distinguishes liberals and conservatives, respectively. If aggression is not the result of social influences, if it appears without social prompting, this threatens a tenet of liberalism.

## Tolerance of Liberal Activism in Social Science

The ASA defines “sociology” as “the study of society” including people’s social lives, social aggregations, and so on (Smith 2014:5–6). There is nothing in the definition about an ultimate purpose of the discipline. Smith (2014), however, argues that American sociology is guided by a “sacred project”—a *political end* for which sociological investigation is undertaken and findings interpreted and disseminated. The sacred project involves reorganizing society to fight oppression, inequality, poverty, hierarchy, and the like. Its ideological orientation arose out of the Social Gospel, civil rights, feminism, Marxism, and other progressive movements. Smith reviews extensive evidence that sociology books published by major academic presses, articles in top journals, events sponsored by the ASA, and the three most popular introductory textbooks in the field overwhelmingly promote the sacred project.

As candidate for President-Elect of the American Sociological Association in 2002, Michael Burawoy wrote a personal statement to describe himself to voting members. He declared himself an advocate of “public sociology,” which is “a sociology that transcends the academy” to effect (liberal) social change (see Martin 2016). He was ultimately elected. Not only is public sociology tolerated by sociologists, but someone

<sup>1</sup> Murray himself strongly supports a causal link. In a 1-star review on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), he calls Freedman’s book “a biased attack on the science of psychology, the profession of communications, and the common sense of any educated reader.” In response to a request for sources that refute Freedman (2002), Murray sent us an unpublished paper that did not cite any of Freedman’s work. In response to a follow-up request, he referred us to a special issue of the *Hofstra Law Review* (Summer 1994), which was published before the book in question.

who specifically plays up his commitment to this form of liberal activism was elected by sociologists to represent their field. Clearly, no conservative would ever have been nominated for the position, let alone elected.

Variance in mathematics ability appears to be larger for males than females (Benbow et al. 2000; Wai et al. 2010). When president of Harvard Larry Summers mentioned this fact in connection with the underrepresentation of women in quantitative fields, the anthropologist J. Lorand Matory and the sociologist Theda Skocpol introduced motions to censor him, which were approved by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (Marra and Polsky 2005). He was ultimately forced to resign. Many prominent psychologists had previously endorsed the reality of biologically based gender differences in mathematical ability, and so presumably agreed with Summers's remarks. Diane Halpern, for example, who was president of the APA in 2004, reviews a great deal of evidence showing that males tend to score higher on tests of mathematical aptitude than females, especially at the high end (though she does not come to a definitive conclusion about the cause of the differences) (Halpern 2000). In 2012, she commented sympathetically on Summers's remarks (Halpern 2012). Nevertheless, Summers received virtually no meaningful support from the institutions of science. This case illustrated that mainstream scientific institutions are unwilling to stand up for dispassionate reporting of scientific findings in the face of liberal activist pressure.

The idea that all racial groups have identical distributions of innate intelligence is a central tenet of contemporary liberalism. Many prominent social scientists openly express the view that it is morally wrong to conduct scientific investigations that threaten to uncover innate racial differences (see Cofnas 2016; Gottfredson 2005; Sesardic 2005). Gardner (2001:8), for example, writes that he does “not condone investigations of racial differences in intelligence, because [he] think[s] that the results of these studies are likely to be incendiary” (note the implication that he thinks differences are *likely* to exist) (quoted in Cofnas 2016:485). Sternberg (2005:300) writes that good science is characterized by “taste in the selection of problems to solve,” and it is in bad taste to study the genetic basis of group differences in intelligence. Those who argue in favor of studying group differences (including both liberal and conservative scientists) never argue the opposite—that we should avoid research that threatens to undermine the theory of genetically based *differences*. Rather, they just argue that “the scientific truth must be pursued” (Ceci and Williams 2009) and “rational discussion of the offensive is okay” (Flynn 2007).

## How Hard Is It for Conservative Social Scientists to Publish?

Social and personality psychologists are paradigm impact scientists. They often work on politically relevant issues like discrimination, racism, and sexism, and make policy recommendations—virtually always supporting the liberal perspective (Redding 2001:206–8, Table 1; 2012)—on the basis of their research. The APA sometimes makes official statements on policy issues that are questions of values rather than fact, always supporting the liberal position (Redding 2001, Table 1).

The ratio of liberals to conservatives among psychologists has increased significantly over the past few decades (Redding 2012:513). Today, only 6% identify as “conservative overall.” On social issues, only 3.9% identify as conservative, and 5.5% as

moderate (Inbar and Lammers 2012). As noted earlier, the mere fact that liberals outnumber conservatives in a field is no proof of bias (though it does create a significant risk of confirmation bias; Duarte et al. 2015). Do psychologists conduct science in a politically neutral way in spite of their personal politics? In their own words—no.

In a survey of social and personality psychologists, Inbar and Lammers (2012) found that one-out-of-six would be “somewhat (or more)” disposed not to invite a known political conservative to a symposium, and to reject papers written from a conservative perspective. One-out-of-four would be disposed to reject conservative grant applications, and one-out-of-three would favor a liberal job candidate. This is remarkable given the stigma attached to discriminating against people on the basis of their beliefs. One would have to assume that willingness to discriminate will be underreported in a survey like this (see Honeycutt and Freberg 2017). But let’s take the most conservative estimate with regard to peer review for papers. Often, to get a paper published, the journal editor plus three referees must accept it.<sup>2</sup> If one-out-of-six editors/referees openly discriminates against conservative submissions, that means there is a less than 50% chance— $(5/6)^4$ —that neither the editor nor any of the referees will be open discriminators against conservative papers. Since one-out-of-three psychologists say they would discriminate against conservative job candidates, there is just a 20% chance that the paper will be handled only by people who do not openly admit to discriminating against conservatives in at least some contexts.

Honeycutt and Freberg (2017) surveyed university faculty in 76 disciplines about their willingness to discriminate against conservatives *or* liberals. They found that the vast majority of faculty members in all disciplines except agriculture (a paradigm production science) identified as liberal. The same proportion of conservatives and liberals expressed willingness to discriminate against those with opposing political views. While conservatives may be equally inclined to discriminate, in Honeycutt and Freberg’s words they “clearly lack the means and opportunity for execution,” at least in impact sciences like psychology and sociology. Only 4% of social and personality psychologists in Inbar and Lammers’s survey identified as conservative. Assuming that conservatives are just as willing to discriminate as liberals, 1.33% (i.e.,  $4\% \times 1/3$ ) of social and personality psychologists are conservatives who openly acknowledge that they would discriminate against liberals in some context. If a journal submission goes through an editor and three referees, it has an almost 95% chance of *not* being handled by a conservative who discriminates against liberals.

Recent examples of high-profile frauds in social science lend credence to the idea that reviewers and journal editors apply much less scrutiny to papers reporting liberal-

<sup>2</sup> Some journals use two rather than three referees, or will accept a paper if two-out-of-three write a favorable report. Sometimes more than one editor is involved in assessing submissions. If we assume that only one editor and two referees handle a submission, it does not substantially change the estimated probability of facing a discriminator.

friendly results. Over the course of more than a decade, Diederik Stapel published dozens of sensational papers on such topics as how easily Whites or men can be prompted to discriminate against Blacks or women (Wright and DeLisi 2016:4). We now know that these papers were fraudulent. As to how he was able to get away with his fraud for such a long time, Stapel explained that he was giving social scientists what they were “waiting for” given the state of the literature (Bhattacharjee 2013). It is telling that he believed he would get away with—and for a long time he did get away with—false liberal-friendly findings.

A couple years ago, LaCour and Green (2014) published their now-retracted paper, “When Contact Changes Minds: An Experiment on Transmission of Support for Gay Equality,” in *Science*. The first sentence of the paper read: “Foremost among theories of prejudice reduction is the contact hypothesis, which contends that outgroup hostility diminishes when people from different grounds interact with one another”—thus characterizing anyone who opposes same-sex marriage (tendentiously called “gay equality”) as having “prejudice” and “hostility” to homosexuals. The study claimed that “a 20-minute conversation with a gay canvasser” significantly increased acceptance of same-sex marriage 9 months later. This finding would imply that opponents of same-sex marriage are on such weak intellectual footing that the most trivial exposure to an opposing view is enough to permanently overturn their whole outlook. As we now know, no study was ever conducted at all, and the fraud was found out due to the tenacious efforts of two graduate students, David Broockman and Joshua Kalla. But the editors and referees at *Science*, and the vast majority of the social scientists who welcomed LaCour and Green’s paper, accepted the unflattering claims about conservatives at face value, seeing no need to probe more deeply.

## Conclusion

Gauchat claimed that conservatives had less trust in “science” than liberals. We observed that he found only that they have less trust in *scientists*, not *science*, and that there is independent evidence that conservative distrust is directed toward what McCright et al. (2013) call “impact scientists” (e.g., social scientists) rather than “production scientists.” We provided evidence that leading social scientists and social science organizations misrepresent research in order to influence public policy in a liberal direction, tolerate censorship of work that challenges liberal beliefs, uncritically accept dubious scientific findings that paint conservatives in an unflattering light, and practice a variety of forms of discrimination against conservative scholars. Conservatives’ recognition of this reality could explain why only 38% of conservatives in 2010, compared with 50% of liberals, said that they had “great deal of confidence” in “the scientific community” (Gauchat 2012).

Losing the trust of conservatives may not be the only bad consequence of liberal activism in social science. Science itself is harmed. As Weber (2009:146) warned, “whenever the man of science introduces his personal value judgement, a full understanding of the facts ceases.” Today, social science is facing a “replication crisis” (Open Science Collaboration 2015): Many findings that were thought to be firmly established are turning out not to be replicable when tested more carefully. It is noteworthy that a significant number of the effects that are falling victim to the replication crisis either

supported liberalism or were somehow unflattering to conservatives. “Stereotype threat” is perhaps the most striking example. Since stereotype threat was proposed to explain gaps in the test scores of Blacks and Whites more than two decades ago (Steele and Aronson 1995), it has become one of the primary liberal explanations for group differences in performance and has spawned many thousands of follow-up studies. Yet it may turn out that it was all a mistake—a consequence of publication bias and questionable research methods (Ganley et al. 2013; Jussim 2015). Other studies that could not be replicated, while not being explicitly anti-conservative, subtly support liberal ideas or cast conservatives in a bad light. For example, studies that could not be replicated include one where people “increased their endorsement of a current social system after being exposed to money” and another where Americans became more conservative after seeing a U.S. flag (Yong 2013). The former makes money seem to be bad thing, in line with liberal skepticism of capitalism. The latter suggests that conservatism is a primal reaction to tribal symbols. Virtually none of the non-replicable effects were at all favorable to *conservatism*. This suggests that findings that might favor conservatism are scrutinized much more carefully than those that favor liberalism—if they are not censored or rejected for explicitly moral reasons (e.g., Gardner 2001; Sternberg 2005).

In the past few years, a number of social scientists, led by Jonathan Haidt, have called upon social scientists to diversify the field and make a conscious effort to root out liberal bias (Duarte et al. 2015). We conclude with a prediction: If social scientists begin counteracting liberal activism, the trend of lowering conservative trust in scientists will reverse.

**Acknowledgements** Thanks to Lawrence Nichols and Neven Sesardić for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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