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The relationship between right-wing ideological attitudes and psychological well-being

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### Abstract

The relationship between right-wing ideological attitudes and psychological well-being has been intensively studied. While some studies supported the hypothesis that right-wing attitudes are negatively related with well-being, other research yielded positive or non-significant relationships. We conducted a meta-analysis (total samples = 97, total  $N = 69,221$ ) of measures of well-being, including positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, self-esteem and intrinsic goal pursuit. The obtained effect sizes were generally weak and non-significant, except for a moderate relationship between intrinsic goal pursuit and social dominance orientation. Our results thus do not support previous theories that claim that right-wing attitudes yield substantial relationships with psychological well-being.

Keywords: right-wing ideological attitudes, authoritarianism, psychological well-being

Since the pioneering work of Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) on the authoritarian personality, many studies have investigated the relationship between right-wing ideological attitudes and psychological well-being. Especially in the early days of authoritarianism research, scholars hypothesized that right-wing attitudes are positively related to psychological ill-being, as reflected by a higher incidence of psychopathology and personality disorders (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950). However, as studies examining this relationship have not consistently corroborated this hypothesis (e.g., Mehrabian, 1996; Schlachter & Duckitt, 2002), some researchers have argued that right-wing attitudes and well-being are basically unrelated (e.g., Houston, 1980, 1984; Butler, 2000). More recently, right-wing attitudes have even been reported to positively relate to well-being, as indexed by higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and self-esteem (e.g., Napier & Jost, 2008; Van Hiel & Brebels, 2011). Given this heterogeneous set of empirical results, a meta-analytic integration of previous empirical studies appears to be appropriate. Specifically, we conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between right-wing ideological attitudes (authoritarianism, conservatism and social dominance orientation) and several indicators of psychological well-being (positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and intrinsic goal pursuit).

#### *Right-wing ideological attitudes*

Scholars have argued that a comprehensive view on right-wing attitudes requires the differentiation between the social-cultural and economic-hierarchical domain (Duckitt, 2001; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Lipset, 1981; Middelndorp, 1978). In the social-cultural domain, right-wing attitudes refer to a strong preference for traditional values and norms, such as authoritarian parent-child relationships, traditional work ethics, and conventional female roles. Typical indicators of right-wing social-cultural attitudes are cultural or social conservatism, authoritarianism and traditionalism. In the economic-

hierarchical domain, right-wing attitudes refer to a preference for inequality, as reflected by the adherence to capitalist ideology, private initiative and unrestricted competition among individuals. Typical indicators of economic-hierarchical right-wing attitudes are economic conservatism and social dominance orientation.

### *Psychological well-being*

Psychological well-being refers to the experienced quality of life and reflects optimal psychological functioning and experience. Initially, the concept was studied in terms of (the absence of) psychopathology and negative emotional states, such as depression and anxiety. However, since the beginning of the 1960s, research interest has gradually shifted towards psychological growth and health (Deci, 1975; Diener, 1984; Cowen, 1991).

A widely used model of psychological well-being (Diener, 1984; Diener & Lucas, 1999) describes subjective well-being (SWB) as “a broad category of phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction” (Diener & Lucas, 1999; p. 277). According to these authors, SWB consists of two distinct components: (1) an affective component, including the presence of positive and the absence of negative mood and affect and (2) a cognitive component based on people’s appraisal of the extent to which they judge their life to meet their expectations and to resemble their ‘ideal’ life. Further research showed that SWB is positively linked with a wide range of positive characteristics including having strong social relationships, being more extravert and agreeable and less neurotic, and showing lower levels of psychopathology (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Psychological well-being may not only refer to subjective happiness, but also relates to the actualization of one’s potential and the extent to which one lives in accordance with oneself. A prominent example of a theory that emphasizes the importance of personal growth and development is Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to this

theory, to obtain psychological growth, integrity, and well-being, the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic goal pursuit is important. Whereas extrinsic goal pursuit refers to acquiring external indicators of self-worth, such as physical attractiveness, social recognition, and financial success, intrinsic goal pursuit refers to realizing basic growth tendencies, such as personal development, having satisfying relationships, and concern and involvement in one's community. Pursuing intrinsic goals satisfies basic psychological needs and relates to higher personal well-being and fewer signs of ill-being. Conversely, extrinsic goal pursuit is unrelated with well-being and psychological growth (Kasser & Ryan 1996; Vansteenkiste, Duriez, Simons, & Soenens, 2006).

#### *Psychological well-being in relationship with right-wing ideological attitudes*

Adorno et al. (1950) initially conceived the authoritarian personality as a sign of deeply ingrained psychopathology (see Wilson, 1973, p. 12), describing high scoring authoritarians as “generally maladapted people” who often experience fear, anxiety, shame, aggression and hostility. Similarly, Tomkins' (1965) ideo-affective polarity model suggests that a right-wing or normative orientation is related to negative emotions like fear and shame, whereas a left-wing or humanistic orientation is related to positive emotions like interest and enjoyment. Some empirical studies support this perspective that authoritarianism is “bad for the self”. For example, Peterson & Duncan (2007) showed that high scoring authoritarian 52-year old women experience less positive affect compared to their low-scoring counterparts, leading to increased levels of neuroticism ten years later. Moreover, Duriez, Klimstra, Luyckx, Beyers & Soenens (2011) found that authoritarianism is a risk factor in developing depressive symptoms. However, other studies yielded inconclusive results, often revealing that psychopathology is unrelated to right-wing ideological attitudes (Mehrabian, 1996; Schlachter & Duckitt, 2002; Van Hiel, Mervielde, & De Fruyt, 2004). Furthermore, right-wing attitudes have been reported to be unrelated to several indicators of well-being,

including happiness, presence of positive and absence of negative affect, life satisfaction (e.g., Butler, 2000), and self-esteem (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Houston, 1980, 1984).

Contrary to this classic perspective on authoritarianism, some theoretical approaches suggest that adhering to right-wing attitudes may be adaptive. Terror Management Theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), for example, states that people cope with the anxiety stemming from the awareness of their own death by adhering to the dominant norms and values of one's culture. Thus, TMT suggests that adhering to right-wing attitudes serves as a buffer against death anxiety and subsequent ill-being. Furthermore, Social Identity Theory states that outgroup derogation and expressions of prejudice, have a self-restorative function, leading to higher levels of self-esteem (Fein & Spencer, 1997). Therefore, because right-wing attitudes are strongly connected to prejudice, high-scoring right-wing adherents may "benefit" from prejudice to bolster their self-esteem.

There is also a recent strand of studies that has provided empirical evidence for the perspective that right-wing attitudes "are good for the self". For example, in his popular book "Gross National Happiness", Arthur Brooks (2008) describes positive qualities, among which greater happiness, in conservatives in the USA. He suggests that these findings can largely be explained by religiosity (e.g., Haidt, 2006). Indeed, religiosity is associated with higher psychological well-being (Myers & Diener, 1995; Myers, 2000) and right-wing adherents tend to be more religious than liberals (Olson & Green, 2006). On the basis of North American samples, both Napier and Jost (2008) and Schlenker, Chambers, and Le (2012) reported greater happiness and life satisfaction among conservatives compared to liberals. Napier and Jost (2008) explained these findings in terms of System Justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994) stating that the relationship between political conservatism and psychological well-being is mediated by the rationalization of inequality. Schlenker et al. (2012), on the other hand explain this "happiness gap" by conservatives expressing greater personal agency,

more positive outlook, more transcendent moral beliefs (i.e., greater religiosity, greater moral clarity, less tolerance of transgressions), and a greater belief that the world is a fair place, which are assumed to contribute to psychological well-being.

Also in Europe, some recent studies reported that right-wing attitudes are related with greater psychological well-being. For example, Van Hiel and De Clercq (2009) reported positive relationships between authoritarianism and general health, especially in the presence of mental distress, and Van Hiel and Brebels (2011) found a positive relationship between authoritarianism and self-esteem among the elderly. These studies, however, do not stress the direct effects of right-wing ideological attitudes on well-being, but rather stress that such a relationship only occurs in specific contexts or life phases.

A third position has also been advanced. Based on the weak and inconclusive results obtained in many studies, some authors argued that while ideological right-wing attitudes strongly relate to political psychological variables (McFarland, 2012), only weak relationships emerge between these attitudes and personal well-being (Onraet, Van Hiel, Dhont, & Pattyn, 2012; Van Hiel et al., 2004). According to Van Hiel, Roets, Onraet, Ponnet, and Dhont (2012), a large majority of authoritarianism scales probe the collective-societal level, whereas psychological well-being has been typically studied at the intrapersonal level. These authors developed a multilevel authoritarianism model that predicts strong relationships with variables within the same level, but weak relationships with variables at a different level. Hence, in the context of the present research questions, a weak relationship would be expected between societal authoritarianism and intrapersonal variables such as subjective well-being.

#### *Specific indicators of psychological well-being*

As can be inferred from our research overview, many ill- and well-being indicators have been studied in relationship with right-wing attitudes. However, the inclusion of all these

variables in a meta-analytic review would prove too broad and unfocused. In the present study, we left aside indicators of personality disorders and clinical syndromes (e.g., depression) and instead focused on broad set of psychological well-being indicators. More specifically, we selected subjective well-being (the presence of positive versus the absence of negative affect and life satisfaction), self-esteem and intrinsic goal pursuit as indicators for well-being.

The heterogeneity of empirical findings of the general relationship between right-wing attitudes and well-being also applies to the specific well-being variables included in the present meta-analysis. For example, relationships between right-wing attitudes and positive emotions ranged from negative (Van Hiel & Kossowska, 2006) to non-significant (Butler, 2000) to positive (Choma, Busseri, & Sadava, 2009). Furthermore, Napier and Jost (2008) reported higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction among conservatives than among liberals, while Butler (2000) did not find such differences. Additionally, Choma et al. (2009) found greater life satisfaction among both political conservatives and liberals. Thus, it can be concluded that capricious relationships emerged between right-wing attitudes and subjective well-being.

Research has also been conducted on the relationship between right-wing attitudes and self-esteem (i.e., a global assessment of the self, see, Demo, 1985). According to Adorno et al. (1950), conservatism should be considered an ego defense of the insecure and inferior self. In other words, individuals cope with personal insecurities by adhering to traditional and conventional norms and to the authorities imposing these norms. Hence, a sense of inferiority or low self-esteem will trigger higher levels of right-wing attitudes. However, empirical studies revealed relationships between right-wing attitudes and self-esteem range from negative (Boshier, 1969) to non-significant (Altemeyer, 1998; Houston et al., 1980) to positive (Van Hiel & Brebels, 2011). Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994) reported



correlations between social dominance orientation (SDO) and self-esteem ranging between negative and positive values across samples (i.e., between  $-.29$  and  $.16$ ). In their meta-analysis, Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) obtained a weak, but significant effect size of  $-.09$  for the relationship between political conservatism and self-esteem.

Finally, we also included intrinsic goal pursuit in our meta-analysis. According to SDT (Ryan et al., 2000), intrinsic goal pursuit as opposed to extrinsic goal pursuit encourages personal growth and development (e.g., Vansteenkiste et al., 2006; Kasser et al., 1996). However, despite its importance for psychological well-being, intrinsic goal pursuit has only seldom been related to right-wing attitudes. The few studies investigating this relationship found that relative extrinsic goal pursuit (at the cost of intrinsic goal pursuit) is related to higher levels of RWA and SDO (Vansteenkiste, Duriez, Soenens, & De Witte, 2007; Duriez, 2011).

#### *The present study*

As can be inferred from the preceding research overview, conflicting results have been reported on the relationship between right-wing attitudes and well-being. Given these inconsistencies our central goal was to conduct a meta-analytic integration of empirical research on this relationship. More specifically, we focused on studies that investigated positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and intrinsic goal pursuit. Because positive and negative affect cannot be considered as opposite concepts (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1999), we conducted separate meta-analyses for each variable. Furthermore, previous research investigating intrinsic goal pursuit often used relative intrinsic goal pursuit measures, which are a blend of intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. However, Van Hiel, Roets, and Cornelis (2010) showed that the simultaneous analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic facet scales may distort their relationships with right-wing attitudes. Because our interest is primarily in the intrinsic aspect, we studied the correlations between right-wing attitudes and (absolute) intrinsic value pursuit.

We also investigated possible moderators in the relationship between right-wing attitudes and psychological well-being. More specifically, we coded each study for design, sample, and publication features. The design characteristics included the division of right-wing attitudes into authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and conservatism. Concerning intrinsic goal pursuit, we expect to find that especially social dominance orientation is a strong correlate. Indeed, the willingness to develop positive and trustful relationships with others and to help people in their community as enclosed by intrinsic goal pursuit (Kasser, 2002) seems to be opposite to a view of the world as a competitive jungle, which underlies social dominance orientation (Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2001). Furthermore, the sample population (under 18-years-old, students, adults, and elderly), sex composition (mixed-sex, males-only, and females-only), and geographic location of the study (North America, Europe, Oceania, and others) were also included as moderator variables. Since past research found that right-wing attitudes increase with age (e.g., Cornelis, Van Hiel, Roets, & Kossowska, 2009), one might expect that these attitudes yield beneficial effect and are accompanied with elevated psychological well-being for elderly. Indeed, Van Hiel and Brebels (2011) found a positive relationship between right-wing attitudes and self-esteem among elderly. For publication characteristics, we also coded whether the data were retrieved from a published or an unpublished paper.

### *Method*

#### *Search strategies and inclusion criteria*

We identified the studies for our review by using a variety of methods. First, we identified the relevant studies included in Jost et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis on the relationship between right-wing attitudes and self-esteem. Second, we searched a computerized database, ISI Web of Science, for studies published between 1950 and December 2011 by using a variety of keywords entered in various combinations (examples of keywords for right-wing

attitudes: authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, conservatism; examples of keywords for well-being: positive affect, negative affect, life satisfaction, subjective well-being, self-esteem, intrinsic goals). Third, we inspected the references cited in each article for additional relevant studies. Fourth, we contacted researchers in the field to uncover relevant unpublished data.

To be included in the meta-analyses, these studies had to meet several criteria. First, studies had to administer at least one measure of right-wing attitudes and at least one measure of psychological well-being. Furthermore, samples had to be statistically independent (no sample overlap). We developed a number of rules to obtain a single data point for each study when multiple outcome values were available. In particular, when studies included both authoritarianism and SDO, we randomly selected authoritarianism for half of these studies and SDO for the other half. However, when these studies also included a measure of conservatism, we selected the data point with conservatism because this measure was less frequently examined than authoritarianism and SDO. When multiple indicators of a single measure of right-wing attitudes were administered, the mean correlation between these indicators and the variable for the well-being measure was calculated. Similarly, for studies administering multiple indicators of a single well-being type, the mean correlation between these indicators and the right-wing attitudes measure was calculated and used in the analyses.

#### *Summary of study characteristics*

We located 74 studies that met the criteria for inclusion in the meta-analysis. These studies reported data from 97 independent samples with a total of 69,221 unique participants.

#### *Meta-analytical decisions*

We used Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients ( $r$ 's) between right-wing attitudes and well-being as effect size estimates. For studies reporting mean differences in scores on well-being across groups reporting high or low right-wing attitudes, the calculation

of effect sizes was based on reported test statistics (F-, t- or p-values) (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2005). When only the significance of the association was reported, we derived the lower limit effect size estimates from the reported significance level. When an association was reported to be non-significant, an effect size of zero was assigned. These are commonly used but rather conservative strategies that generally underestimate the true magnitude of effect sizes (Durlak & Lipsey, 1991).

### *Statistical analyses*

Comprehensive Meta-Analysis (CMA) version 2.2 software (Borenstein et al., 2005) was used. Pearson correlations were converted into Fisher-Z coefficients to permit an unbiased comparison and a combination of effect sizes. Next, the mean weighted effect sizes and 95% confidence intervals around the point estimate of the combined estimates were computed. Because we assumed that effect sizes would vary across studies, we applied a random-effects model (Hedges & Vevea, 1998) to compute the overall effects. These effect size estimates were then transformed back to correlations to facilitate interpretation. We also conducted homogeneity analyses to test the assumption that the sets of effect sizes were homogeneous at the population level and to test the influence of potential moderator variables.

To account for variability within effect size distributions, we conducted moderation analyses using the categorical testing procedures (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). A significant within-groups  $Q$  ( $Q_w$ ) indicates that the effect sizes within each moderator category are heterogeneous. A significant between-groups  $Q$  ( $Q_b$ ) estimate indicates that the effect sizes of the moderator subgroups are significantly different.  $I^2$  indices are also computed (Higgins & Thompson, 2002) and show the percentage of variability in point estimates stemming from between-study heterogeneity rather than from sampling error. An  $I^2$  of 0 indicates that no variability in effect estimates is caused by heterogeneity, but instead stems from sampling

error;  $I^2$ -values on the order of 25, 50, and 75 represent low, moderate and high heterogeneity, respectively.

#### *Publication bias analyses*

Publication bias stems from the greater likelihood of publication of results that are statistically significant, which can cause an overestimation of the meta-analytic effect size. To test for publication bias, several tests are performed. The fail-safe number is the minimum number of hypothetical studies with non-significant results that are necessary to eliminate a significant overall effect (Rosenthal, 1995). If the fail-safe number exceeds the critical value of  $5k + 10$  ( $k$  = the number of samples), the meta-analytic finding is considered to be robust. Conversely, if the fail-safe number falls below this critical value, a publication bias problem may exist. Furthermore, Duval and Tweedies' (2000) trim-and-fill method was used to estimate the adjusted effect sizes and confidence intervals. This method constructs a funnel plot containing each study's effect size against its precision (inverse of its standard error). The plot should be shaped as a funnel if no publication bias is present. If non-significant results are underrepresented in the plot, the values for these missing studies are imputed, and an adjusted effect size is calculated.

#### *Results*

To evaluate the magnitude of the combined effect sizes, we used the conventions established by Cohen (1988). Thus, correlation effect sizes of  $r \leq .10$  and  $r \geq .40$  are considered as indices of small and large effects, respectively, while values falling in between are considered moderate effects.

#### *Positive affect*

The meta-analysis of the relationship between positive affect and right-wing attitudes was based on 21 samples (total  $N = 3,204$ ) and revealed that the overall relationship was non-significant ( $r = -.02$ ,  $p = .46$ ; see Table 1). The effect size was heterogeneous, indicating that

differences in effect size among the samples may be explained by the moderator variables. Sex composition was not included as a moderator variable because only 4 samples were male-only or female-only. Because we investigate 4 possible moderator variables, we corrected for multiple comparisons using a significance level of .01 ( $\approx .05/4$ ). It was revealed that none of the moderator variables reached this significance level. Finally, as the overall effect size was non-significant, we did not conduct publication bias analyses.

[[Insert Table 1 about here]]

### *Negative affect*

The meta-analysis of the relationship between negative affect and right-wing attitudes was based on 17 samples (total  $N = 2,605$ ) and revealed that the overall relationship was non-significant ( $r = .05$ ,  $p = .14$ ; see Table 2). The effect size was heterogeneous. Sex composition was not included as a moderator variable as only 2 samples were male-only or female-only. Only one moderator variable reached the corrected significance level of .01. More specifically, a weak positive relationship between right-wing attitudes and negative affect emerged in the samples collected in Europe ( $r = .11$ ,  $p > .001$ ), whereas a negative relationship appeared in Oceania ( $r = -.25$ ,  $p > .05$ ), and a non-significant relationship appeared in North America. Finally, as the overall effect size was non-significant, we did not conduct publication bias analyses.

[[Insert Table 2 about here]]

### *Life satisfaction*

The meta-analysis of the relationship between right-wing attitudes and life satisfaction was based on 24 samples (total  $N = 7,935$ ) and revealed that the overall relationship was significant ( $r = .06$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see Table 3). The effect size was heterogeneous. Several moderators reached the corrected significance level of .01. First, ideological measure was a significant moderator, with a positive effect size for conservatism ( $r = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and non-

significant effect sizes for authoritarianism and SDO ( $r = .02$  and  $r = .00$ , respectively). Furthermore, in mixed samples the effect size was positive ( $r = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the effect size was non-significant for samples including only males or females ( $r = .01$  and  $r = -.04$ , respectively). Moreover, also the origin of the sample was a significant moderator, with a positive relationship emerging in North America ( $r = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the relationship was non-significant in Europe and Oceania ( $r = .11$  and  $r = -.02$ , respectively). Finally, we found a positive effect size for published studies ( $r = .10$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while a non-significant effect size appeared for unpublished studies ( $r = .00$ ). However, publication bias analyses revealed that publication bias is unlikely.

[[Insert Table 3 about here]]

### *Self-esteem*

The meta-analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and right-wing attitudes was based on 51 samples (total  $N = 11,704$ ) and revealed that the overall relationship was non-significant ( $r = -.02$ ,  $p = .25$ ; see Table 4). The effect size was heterogeneous, and it was revealed that the age category of the sample significantly moderated the effect. More specifically, samples including young participants (i.e., under 18 and university students) did not show a significant relationship between self-esteem and right-wing attitudes ( $r = -.02$ ,  $p = .42$  and  $r = -.02$ ,  $p = .44$ , respectively). However, this relationship, though weak, was significant in the adult samples ( $r = -.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and positive in the elderly samples ( $r = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, as the overall effect size was non-significant, we did not conduct publication bias analyses.

[[Insert Table 4 about here]]

### *Intrinsic goal pursuit*

The meta-analysis on the relationship between intrinsic goal pursuit and right-wing attitudes was based on 17 samples (total  $N = 6,755$ ). The analysis revealed that the overall

relationship was moderate in magnitude ( $r = -.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Table 5), indicating that intrinsic goal pursuit is associated with a weaker endorsement of right-wing attitudes. The effect size was heterogeneous. Sex composition was not included as a moderator variable because only 4 samples were male-only or female-only. Moreover, because all studies were conducted in Europe and most of them were unpublished, the origin of the sample and the publication information were not included as moderators. Given that we investigated only two possible moderator variables, we corrected for multiple comparisons using a significance level of .025 ( $= .05/2$ ). Significant moderator effects were obtained for ideological measure ( $p < .001$ ) and tested group ( $p = .018$ ). More specifically, the relationship between intrinsic goals and right-wing attitudes was significant and moderate in strength for SDO ( $r = -.26$ ) but not for authoritarianism ( $r = -.03$ ). Furthermore, it was shown that whereas the groups of individuals under 18 years of age, university students, and adults showed a negative relationship between intrinsic goal pursuit and right-wing attitudes ( $r = -.19$ ,  $r = -.11$ , and  $r = -.19$ , respectively), this relationship was positive among the elderly ( $r = .14$ ). However, we should note that this latter relationship was non-significant and based on only one sample. Finally, because most of the samples were unpublished, we did not conduct publication bias analyses.<sup>1</sup>

[[Insert Table 5 about here]]

#### *Specific analyses of the American samples*

The overall picture emerging from this meta-analysis is thus one of weak or non-significant relationships between right-wing attitudes and well-being. An important result, however, is that our meta-analysis of life satisfaction revealed a positive relationship in North

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<sup>1</sup> We have also performed a series of meta-analyses on the relationship between right-wing attitudes and extrinsic goal pursuit and relative extrinsic goal pursuit (extrinsic – intrinsic). It was revealed that right-wing attitudes are positively related to extrinsic goal pursuit ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI = .22$  to  $.35$  and  $r = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI = .30$  to  $.42$ , for RWA and SDO, respectively) and relative extrinsic goal pursuit ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI = .23$  to  $.40$  and  $r = .46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI = .38$  to  $.52$ , for RWA and SDO, respectively). These strong relationships might be especially generated by the “materialism” component of extrinsic goal pursuit (Van Hiel, Cornelis, & Roets, 2010).



America (including 12 American samples and 1 Canadian sample), whereas this relationship was non-significant in Europe and Oceania. Some of these American samples have been analyzed in recent works (Brooks, 2008; Napier & Jost, 2008; Schlenker et al., 2012). However, it might well be that the relationship between right-wing attitudes and psychological well-being depends on the ideological climate. More specifically, conservatives might be happy when a conservative government is in office, but less so when a left-wing government is in office. The effect of ideological climate can be studied best in the USA because of the dominance of only two political parties (Republicans and Democrats) while in many West European countries governments consist of parties with various ideological pamphlets (multiparty coalitions).

In the present study, we examined the effect of ideological climate by conducting an additional meta-analysis based only on American samples. We defined ideological climate on the basis of two indicators. First, we defined the ideological climate of the different states by looking up whether Democrats or Republicans had won the presidential elections prior to the time of the data collection in that state. If studies did not describe the exact time of data collection, we used the year of publication minus 2 as the reference year. Moreover, samples collected in more than one state were assigned on the basis of a majority rule: If most participants lived in a Republican (Democrat) state, the sample was coded with a Republican (Democrat) ideological climate. Second, we also investigated the ideological climate at the country level by coding whether the president in office belonged to the Democratic or Republican party.

The results are depicted in Table 6. We were not able to run this analysis for intrinsic goal pursuit, because no North American samples were available. Because the overall effect sizes for positive and negative affect were homogeneous ( $Q_w = 9.99$  and  $6.81$ , respectively), we did not conduct moderator analyses. As a result, we were able to conduct moderators only

for life satisfaction and self-esteem. These analyses did not yield significant effects of ideological climate. Specifically, no significant differences in effect sizes emerged between Democrat and Republican states ( $Qb = 2.17$  and  $.52$ , for life satisfaction and self-esteem, respectively), nor between times when a Democrat or a Republican president was in office ( $Qb = .00$  and  $.17$ , for life satisfaction and self-esteem, respectively).

[[Insert Table 6 about here]]

### Discussion

With this meta-analytic study, we aimed at investigating the relationship between right-wing attitudes and several indicators of psychological well-being. The analyses revealed non-significant effect sizes for positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem ( $r_s = -.02$ ,  $.05$ , and  $-.02$ , respectively). The finding for self-esteem does not corroborate the previous meta-analytic finding of Jost et al. (2003), who reported a significant effect size of  $-.09$ . This difference is best explained by the little overlap of the samples included in both meta-analyses as only 18% of our samples were also included in Jost et al.'s (2003) study. A significant but small effect was obtained for life satisfaction ( $r = .06$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that right-wing attitudes are related to greater life satisfaction. Furthermore, intrinsic goal pursuit was associated with lower levels of right-wing attitudes ( $r = -.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Although this finding seems to support the classic work on authoritarianism, it should be noted that a significant relationship only emerged for SDO, while authoritarianism was not significantly related to intrinsic goal pursuit. Finally, additional analyses of the American samples revealed similar patterns of results in Democrat and Republican ideological climates, suggesting that the absence of a direct relationship between right-wing attitudes and well-being cannot be attributed to the political climate. In sum, the overall picture emerging from our study is that the relationships between right-wing attitudes and psychological well-being are typically low and often non-significant.

## General Discussion

Classic studies on authoritarianism have assumed that right-wing attitudes relate to poor well-being (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950). However, previous studies of the relationship between right-wing attitudes and well-being yielded a rather heterogeneous set of findings. While some studies did not find such relationships (e.g., Butler, 2000), it was recently argued that right-wing adherents show higher well-being than left-wing proponents (e.g., Schlenker et al., 2012; Van Hiel & Brebels, 2011). Our main goal, therefore, was to provide a meta-analytic integration of empirical research on the direct relationship between right-wing attitudes and various indicators of well-being. Overall, it was revealed that these relationships were non-significant or weak in magnitude. More specifically, right-wing attitudes were non-significantly related to positive affect, negative affect and self-esteem, while a weak and positive relationship with life satisfaction emerged. Pursuing intrinsic goals was found to be the strongest correlate of right-wing attitudes, showing a mild, negative effect size,  $r = -.15$ .

In sum, the present study, which is based on samples including more than 100,000 participants, do not speak for a general negative (as in classic approaches of right-wing attitudes, e.g., Adorno et al., 1950) or positive (as in some recent approaches, e.g., Napier & Jost, 2008; Schlenker et al., 2012; Van Hiel & Brebels, 2011) relationship. In other words, people having right-wing attitudes are not particularly low or high in well-being. The weak relationships reported in our meta-analyses are similar to a recent wave of studies of right-wing attitudes and variables that probe the emotional domain. For example, Onraet et al. (2012) and Van Hiel et al. (2012) reported that internal threat, consisting of several types of anxiety, is only weakly related to right-wing attitudes. Our results also indirectly touch upon recent research indicating that right-wing attitudes and neuroticism – the negative affect factor of personality - demonstrate low and often non-significant relationships (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008; Van Hiel, Cornelis, & Roets, 2007) and upon studies revealing that right-wing attitudes

are not associated with maladaptive personality (Schlachter et al., 2002; Van Hiel et al., 2004). However, our study also revealed that specific conditions may impact well-being among right-wing adherents. However, other potential moderators, which were not investigated in the present meta-analysis, might also be of relevance. We discuss these moderators in the following sections.

*Specific conditions that lead to higher or lower psychological well-being in authoritarians and conservatives.*

The present findings seem to correspond best with the view that right-wing attitudes are essentially unrelated to psychological well-being. However, we found some interesting moderator effects. First, among the elderly, adhering to right-wing attitudes is associated with higher levels of self-esteem, intrinsic goal pursuit and (a trend toward higher) life satisfaction, whereas in groups of individuals under 18, students and adults, these relationships were non-significant or weakly negative. Second, it was revealed that the type of right-wing attitude measures also influences its relationship with psychological well-being.

In explaining the positive relationship between right-wing attitudes and well-being among the elderly, Van Hiel and Brebels (2011) stressed the ego-integrative function of right-wing beliefs for older people. In other words, because the elderly focus on accepting their past life and integrating personal experiences and memories (Erikson, 1982), they have a strong sense of being part of their culture and tradition and believe that it should be preserved in the future. As a result, right-wing attitudes seem to be comforting for older people and may, therefore, contribute to psychological well-being. Moreover, right-wing elderly might experience greater well-being because of their increased level of religiosity. Indeed, some studies revealed that religiosity mediates the relationship between conservatism and psychological well-being (Brooks, 2008; Schlenker et al., 2012), while religiosity becomes

more important as a source of happiness and well-being in the old age (e.g. Blazer & Palmon, 1976).

The studies included in the present meta-analysis, however, do not permit to draw firm conclusions on the role of age in the relationship between right-wing attitudes and well-being. One might argue that these age findings should not be considered an ageing effect, but instead reflect cohort effects. In other words, this finding might be attributed to the ideological climate in which the (present) older generation grew up, instead of real generational effects. However, Van Hiel and Brebels (2011) have argued that because age and right-wing attitudes are similarly related in countries with other ideological climates, such as former communist countries (Cornelis, Van Hiel, Roets, & Kossowska, 2009), and because attitudes can change throughout the course of life (Levenson, 2000), ageing seems to be a plausible explanation. However, the use of cross-sectional data to demonstrate age effects in previous studies is an important limitation, and a conclusive test of the age increase in prejudice would require a longitudinal design in which right-wing attitudes could be studied from early adulthood to advanced age.

Second, the type of right-wing attitudes measured also influences the relationship with psychological well-being. More specifically, our study revealed that life satisfaction yielded its strongest correlation with conservatism, while intrinsic goal pursuit was strongly related to SDO, but unrelated to RWA. As argued before, the latter moderator effect might be explained by the fact that the helping and caring aspect of intrinsic goal orientation (Kasser, 2002) opposes the perception of the social world as a competitive jungle (Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2001), which underlies social dominance orientation and lays out the basis for manipulative and strategic interpersonal behavior to maximize one's personal benefits.

*Other potential moderators*

Age and type of right-wing attitude might not be the only two moderators influencing the relationship between right-wing attitudes and psychological well-being. However, the present choice of moderators is based on prior work, and therefore limited. In the next section, we discuss some other potential moderator variables.

A potential interesting moderator variable is socioeconomic status. According to System Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), right-wing attitudes are associated with rationalization of the current social, economic, and political system, and as a result, conservatives tend to rationalize away existing social inequality. It might be expected that justifying the existing social order is especially adaptive for individuals with high social status, as these justification efforts legitimize their own dominant status and sense of superiority. However, the same act of rationalizing social inequality may be expected to have detrimental consequences for low-status individuals. Jost and colleagues indeed found that social justification is beneficial for high-status groups members, while it was associated with psychological ill-being (low self-esteem, high depression and neuroticism) among members of low-status groups (Jost & Thompson, 2000; Jost & Hunyady, 2002). Hence, high status conservatives may experience more emotional and existential benefits than low status individuals.

Soenens and Duriez (2012) suggested another moderator variable, referring to the motivational dynamics behind right-wing attitudes which might influence its relationship with well-being. More specifically, they argue that for individuals who adopt conservative beliefs for controlled motives (e.g., to meet external demands), might experience ill-being, while individuals who adhere to right-wing attitudes for autonomous motives (e.g, because of a genuine conviction), experience heightened well-being.

Finally, previous studies on the relationship between right-wing attitudes and well-being have typically focused on personal well-being. However, it might be that well-being at

the societal level, referring to the perceived optimal functioning of the society (including the government, education, health services, and the general state of a specific society or country), may be more closely related to right-wing attitudes than personal well-being. Level of self (personal versus societal) might thus be an interesting moderator variable for future studies.

### *Conclusion*

Our meta-analysis revealed that right-wing attitudes are only weakly related to psychological well-being. Because of the use of multiple indicators of well-being, this main conclusion cannot be reduced to particular types or aspects of well-being, but instead can be generalized to different forms of well-being. Despite this general weak relationship, our findings also suggest that in specific conditions or life stages, such as among elderly, having right-wing attitudes is associated with heightened psychological well-being.

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Table 1. Moderators of effect sizes for studies on positive affect and right-wing attitudes

Moderator	<i>n</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>r</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>Q<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>Q<sub>w</sub></i>	<i>I<sup>2</sup></i>
Total Set	3204	21	-.02	-.08 to .04		49.98***	59.98
Ideological Measure					1.66		.00
Conservatism	771	3	.09	-.12 to .29		12.64**	84.17
Authoritarianism	1629	11	-.06	-.14 to .03		27.19**	63.22
SDO	804	7	-.02	-.09 to .05		1.85	.00
Tested group					2.01		50.19
Students	2275	13	-.05	-.12 to .01		27.14**	55.78
Adults	929	8	.04	-.07 to .14		14.63*	52.15
Origin					5.28		62.09
North America	1203	8	-.06	-.04 to .16		17.09*	59.05
Europe	1926	11	-.08*	-.14 to -.01		20.87*	52.09
New Zealand/Australia	75	2	.01	-.22 to .24		.52	.00
Publication information					.49		.00
Published	1807	11	-.00	-.10 to .10		42.64***	76.54
Unpublished	1397	10	-.04	-.10 to .01		6.82	.00

*Note.*

*k* = number of studies; *CI* = confidence interval; *Q<sub>b</sub>* = homogeneity statistic between classes;

*Q<sub>w</sub>* = homogeneity statistic within classes. *I<sup>2</sup>* = homogeneity statistic

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

Table 2. Moderators of effect sizes for studies on negative affect and right-wing attitudes

Moderator	<i>n</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>r</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>Q<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>Q<sub>w</sub></i>	<i>I<sup>2</sup></i>
Total Set	2605	17	.05	-.02 to .11		39.11***	59.09
Ideological Measure					.94		.00
Conservatism	771	3	-.02	-.20 to .15		8.98**	77.72
Authoritarianism	1065	8	.08	-.02 to .13		17.81**	60.69
SDO	769	6	.05	-.03 to .13		5.98	16.40
Tested group					.03		.00
Students	1846	11	.05	-.03 to .13		28.92***	65.42
Adults	759	6	.04	-.07 to .15		10.00	50.01
Origin					10.94**		81.72
North America	1033	6	-.01	-.11 to .10		11.07*	54.82
Europe	1497	9	.11***	.05 to .17		11.98	33.22
New Zealand/Australia	75	2	-.25*	-.46 to -.02		.04	.00
Publication information					1.40		28.42
Published	1208	7	.01	-.08 to .10		11.74	48.91
Unpublished	1397	10	.08	-.00 to .16		20.90	56.94

*Note.*

*k* = number of studies; *CI* = confidence interval; *Q<sub>b</sub>* = homogeneity statistic between classes;

*Q<sub>w</sub>* = homogeneity statistic within classes. *I<sup>2</sup>* = homogeneity statistic

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

Table 3. Moderators of effect sizes for studies on life satisfaction and right-wing attitudes

Moderator	<i>n</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>r</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>Q<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>Q<sub>w</sub></i>	<i>I<sup>2</sup></i>
Total Set	7935	24	.06**	.02 to .10		75.58***	69.57
Ideological Measure					9.82**		79.64
Conservatism	4952	9	.12***	.08 to .17		15.71*	49.08
Authoritarianism	1489	8	.02	-.08 to .11		22.65**	69.11
SDO	1494	7	.00	-.08 to .07		12.96*	53.71
Sex composition					10.85**		81.57
Mixed	6399	17	.09***	.04 to .14		55.13***	70.98
Male	505	3	.01	-.08 to .10		.46	.00
Female	1031	4	-.04	-.10 to .02		2.96	.00
Tested group					3.25		38.49
Students	2284	10	.06	-.01 to .12		19.95*	54.89
Adults	5202	11	.03	-.03 to .09		38.97***	74.34
Elderly	449	3	.23*	.02 to .42		9.63**	79.23
Origin					9.62**		79.21
North America	5615	13	.09***	.04 to .13		27.91**	56.99
Europe	865	5	.11	-.08 to .28		29.30***	86.35
New Zealand/Australia	1455	6	-.02	-.07 to .03		3.61	.00
Publication information					6.03**		83.41
Published	5725	14	.10***	.05 to .15		36.98***	64.84
Unpublished	2210	10	.00	-.07 to .06		19.77*	54.47

*Note.*

*k* = number of studies; *CI* = confidence interval; *Q<sub>b</sub>* = homogeneity statistic between classes; *Q<sub>w</sub>* = homogeneity statistic within classes. *I<sup>2</sup>* = homogeneity statistic. Two samples of Schlenker et al. (2011) were winsorized: *N* = 1142 instead of *N* = 3690 and *N* = 41717

\* *p* ≤ .05; \*\* *p* < .01; \*\*\* *p* < .001

Table 4. Moderators of effect sizes for studies on self-esteem and right-wing attitudes

Moderator	<i>n</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>r</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>Q<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>Q<sub>w</sub></i>	<i>I<sup>2</sup></i>
Total Set	11704	51	-.02	-.05 to .01		143.75***	65.22
Ideological Measure					8.21*		75.64
Conservatism	3505	11	.02	-.06 to .10		44.03***	77.29
Authoritarianism	4273	21	.01	-.03 to .05		28.23	29.15
SDO	3926	19	-.08**	-.14 to -.03		48.43***	62.84
Sex composition					.23		.00
Mixed	9984	42	-.02	-.06 to .02		128.19***	68.02
Male	566	5	-.01	-.16 to .13		10.26*	61.05
Female	1154	4	-.00	-.08 to .08		5.00	40.05
Tested group					24.19***		87.60
Under 18 year olds	1528	3	-.02	-.08 to .03		1.41	.00
Students	5924	29	-.02	-.07 to .03		89.19***	68.61
Adults	3581	16	-.05*	-.10 to -.00		28.76*	47.84
Elderly	671	3	.17***	.09 to .24		1.16	.00
Origin					5.40		44.40
North America	5232	24	-.01	-.06 to .05		85.29***	73.03
Europe	3408	11	.00	-.06 to .07		31.08***	67.83
New Zealand/Australia	1964	12	-.04	-.10 to .02		17.24	36.18
Other	1100	4	-.09**	-.14 to -.03		1.84	.00
Publication information					.00		.00
Published	7590	36	-.02	-.06 to .03		117.23***	70.15
Unpublished	4114	15	-.02	-.07 to .03		26.36	46.89

*Note.*

*k* = number of studies; *CI* = confidence interval; *Q<sub>b</sub>* = homogeneity statistic between classes; *Q<sub>w</sub>* = homogeneity statistic within classes. *I<sup>2</sup>* = homogeneity statistic

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

Table 5. Moderators of effect sizes for studies on intrinsic goals and right-wing attitudes

Moderator	<i>n</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>r</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>Q<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>Q<sub>w</sub></i>	<i>I<sup>2</sup></i>
Total Set	6755	17	-.16 <sup>***</sup>	-.22 to -.09		109.48 <sup>***</sup>	85.39
Ideological Measure					85.30 <sup>***</sup>		98.83
Authoritarianism	2683	8	-.03	-.07 to .02		7.67	8.74
SDO	4072	9	-.26 <sup>***</sup>	-.29 to -.23		8.36	4.31
Tested group					10.04 <sup>*</sup>		70.11
Under 18 year olds	2360	3	-.19 <sup>**</sup>	-.32 to -.05		23.10 <sup>***</sup>	91.34
Students	1149	4	-.11	-.23 to .01		11.00 <sup>**</sup>	72.73
Adults	3136	9	-.19 <sup>***</sup>	-.27 to -.09		53.11 <sup>***</sup>	84.94
Elderly	110	1	.14	-.05 to .32		.00	.00

*Note.*

*k* = number of studies; *CI* = confidence interval; *Q<sub>b</sub>* = homogeneity statistic between classes;

*Q<sub>w</sub>* = homogeneity statistic within classes. *I<sup>2</sup>* = homogeneity statistic

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

Table 6. Moderators of effect sizes for studies on psychological well-being and right-wing attitudes in the USA.

Moderator	<i>n</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>r</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>Q<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>Q<sub>w</sub></i>	<i>I<sup>2</sup></i>
<u><i>POSITIVE AFFECT</i></u>							
Total Set	749	7	.09	-.01 to .19		9.99	39.99
<u><i>NEGATIVE AFFECT</i></u>							
Total Set	579	5	.02	-.09 to .14		6.81	41.27
<u><i>LIFE SATISFACTION</i></u>							
Total Set	5161	12	.09***	.04 to .14		26.98***	59.23
Ideological climate state					2.17		53.82
Democratic	3971	10	.09**	.03 to .14		24.01**	62.51
Republican	48	1	.30*	.02 to .54		.00	.00
Ideological climate country					.00		.00
Democrat president	3890	9	.10***	.04 to .15		20.40**	60.78
Republican president	129	2	.09	-.31 to .46		5.03*	80.13
<u><i>SELF-ESTEEM</i></u>							
Total Set	4878	23	-.01	-.07 to .05		85.26***	74.20
Ideological climate state					.52		.00
Democratic	2111	10	.01	-.07 to .10		31.82***	71.73
Republican	1786	12	-.04	-.13 to .06		42.56***	74.16
Ideological climate country					.17		.00
Democrat president	1756	8	.00	-.10 to .10		29.95***	76.63
Republican president	2141	14	-.02	-.11 to .06		46.38***	71.97

*Note.*

*k* = number of studies; *CI* = confidence interval; *Q<sub>b</sub>* = homogeneity statistic between classes; *Q<sub>w</sub>* = homogeneity statistic within classes. *I<sup>2</sup>* = homogeneity statistic

One sample has not been included in the moderator analyses of both life satisfaction and self-esteem. This sample included data from 1972 to 2008, making it impossible to determine the ideological climate of this sample.

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