

Table 6-3 Ten-Item Personality Inventory

*"Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other."*

Disagree strongly	Disagree moderately	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree moderately	Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I see myself as:						
1. ____ Extraverted, enthusiastic.						
2. ____ Critical, quarrelsome.						
3. ____ Dependable, self-disciplined.						
4. ____ Anxious, easily upset.						
5. ____ Open to new experiences, complex.						
6. ____ Reserved, quiet.						
7. ____ Sympathetic, warm.						
8. ____ Disorganized, careless.						
9. ____ Calm, emotionally stable.						
10. ____ Conventional, uncreative.						

Source: Samuel D. Gosling, "Ten-Item Measure of the Big Five," <http://homepage.utsystem.edu/homepage/faculty/gosling/tipi%2osite/tipi.pdf>.

Note: Each of the Big Five personality dimensions is measured by answers to two of the trait pairs: Openness to experiences: agreeing with 5, disagreeing with 10; Conscientiousness: agreeing with 3, disagreeing with 8; Agreeableness: agreeing with 7, disagreeing with 2; Extraversion: agreeing with 1, disagreeing with 6; and Emotional stability: agreeing with 9, disagreeing with 4.

the researchers are not certain why being sociable and energetic is associated with conservatism.

Gerber et al. also consider whether the relationship between personality traits and political attitudes differs for whites and blacks. Why might the relationship differ for the two groups? Because whites and blacks operate in substantially different political environments and the effects of personality on policy attitudes is context-specific. That is, political context influences how individuals interpret government policies, which then affects whether a particular personality trait leads to more or less support for those policies. For example, given historical and current discrimination against black Americans, blacks perceive liberal economic policies as helping those who have been systematically denied opportunities to succeed in the marketplace. Thus, compared with whites, conscientious blacks see liberal economic policies as "dutiful, (e.g., helping those who are in bad circumstances through no fault of their own) rather than as undermining social norms

(e.g., work hard and you will get ahead)."<sup>26</sup> As a result, conscientiousness does *not* lead to strong support for conservative economic policies among blacks as it does for whites. Blacks tend to support liberal economic policies regardless of their level of conscientiousness.

Gerber and his colleagues' findings are fascinating. Overall, however, the scholarship on personality traits and political attitudes is still in its infancy. Much more work is needed to fully understand why certain personality traits lead to particular policy positions and how the political context influences the relationship between traits and policy attitudes.

### SELF-INTEREST

It seems incredibly intuitive that **self-interest** would have an important effect on our policy attitudes. When considering human nature, it certainly seems as if people are looking out for number one. Indeed, James Madison argued that a representative form of government is the best form of government because citizens are too focused on their narrow self-interest, whereas representatives have the wisdom to "best discern the true interest of their country."<sup>27</sup> Elite democratic theorists have used this argument to justify why elites (rather than citizens) should have central decision-making roles in politics.

Despite the intuitive—even compelling—nature of the claim that citizens follow their self-interest, there is actually quite limited evidence to support the proposition. On policy opinions ranging from government spending to government health insurance to race and gender issues to foreign policy, scholars have found only weak or nonexistent effects of self-interest.<sup>28</sup> For example, several studies showed that white nonparents were as likely to oppose school busing as a means to achieve racial integration as white parents with school-age children.<sup>29</sup> Instead of self-interest, racial prejudice was a key factor influencing attitudes on school busing: prejudiced citizens were more opposed to busing, whereas nonprejudiced citizens were more supportive of the policy (regardless of whether the citizens had kids or not). Other research indicates that citizens' evaluations of the nation's economy are more important than their own personal economic circumstances when assessing the political party in power.<sup>30</sup> In other words, general concerns about society—what political scientists call **sociotropic concerns**—trump **pocketbook issues** when citizens evaluate their government.

There are a few instances, however, when self-interest does influence citizens' policy attitudes. For example, homeowners are more likely to favor property tax cuts than nonhomeowners.<sup>31</sup> Smokers are more opposed to cigarette taxes and bans on smoking than nonsmokers.<sup>32</sup> And gun owners are less supportive of gun restrictions than people who do not own guns.<sup>33</sup> These examples suggest that self-interest plays a meaningful role when the effects of a policy are *visible, tangible, large, and certain*.<sup>34</sup>

*when it works*

In an innovative study, Dennis Chong, Jack Citrin, and Patricia Conley examined the conditions under which self-interest matters.<sup>35</sup> They define self-interest as the “tangible, relatively immediate, personal or family benefits of a policy.”<sup>36</sup> They conducted an experiment to examine when self-interest has a stronger effect on citizens’ attitudes. Specifically, they collected data by embedding an experiment in a telephone survey of a national representative sample of 1,067 U.S. citizens. The survey was conducted between June 21, 1998, and March 7, 1999. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: No Prime, Self-Interest Prime, or Sociotropic Prime. In the No Prime condition, subjects were asked to indicate their preference regarding two possible reforms of the Social Security system: reducing benefits to wealthier retired people or increasing taxes on people who are working. In the Self-Interest Prime condition, subjects were first prompted (or primed) to consider how the policy changes would affect them personally and then asked the question about which reform they would prefer. In the Sociotropic Prime condition, subjects were first asked to consider which policy change would be better for future generations and then asked to indicate which change they would prefer. See Table 6-4 for question wordings.

Chong et al. compared the responses of people ages sixty and over with those under sixty in these three conditions. If self-interest is at work, then older people should lean toward raising taxes on people who are working, whereas those under sixty should favor cutting benefits for retirees. That is the pattern we see in the No Prime and Self-Interest conditions: a strong majority of the older group supported raising taxes, while a small majority of those under sixty preferred to reduce retiree benefits (see Table 6-4). But when citizens were primed to think about sociotropic considerations—which proposal will be best for future generations—opinions varied little by age. In the Sociotropic Prime condition, the younger group became more supportive of raising Social Security taxes and the older group became more open to reducing benefits. Overall, these results suggest that self-interest influences how citizens think about Social Security, yet the extent to which self-interest matters depends heavily on how the issue is presented.

In an entirely different domain, Robert Erikson and Laura Stoker also demonstrate that self-interest can influence political attitudes when the stakes are visible, tangible, large, and certain.<sup>37</sup> Specifically, Erikson and Stoker examine what happens to the political attitudes of young men when they are faced with the prospect of being drafted for military service. In 1969 in the midst of the Vietnam War, Republican President Richard Nixon instituted a new policy that assigned numbers (1 through 366) to draft-eligible men based on their birth dates. The men assigned low numbers were called up first for duty, whereas the men assigned high numbers were virtually assured they would *not* be drafted. The policy in effect randomly assigned some men to be vulnerable to being sent to war in Vietnam and others not to be. This was a perfect case in which self-interest should have shaped public opinion because those with low draft numbers faced

**Table 6-4 The Influence of Self-Interest on Social Security Attitudes**

*“There is a lot of discussion about the possible ways to change Social Security to make sure that all people who retire can get their Social Security benefits. One proposal is to reduce the amount of money paid to retired people who have additional sources of income. Another proposal is to keep the amount of money paid to retired people the same as it is now, but increase Social Security taxes for people who are currently working.”*

	<i>Reduce retiree benefits</i>	<i>Raise Social Security taxes</i>
No prime:		
“Which proposal do you think should be adopted?”		
Under 60	56%	45%
60 and over	32	68
Self-interest prime:		
“Which proposal do you think would be financially better for you personally—reducing the amount of money paid to retired people who have additional sources of income, or keeping the amount of money paid to retired people the same as it is now, but increasing Social Security taxes for people who are working?”		
“Which proposal do you think would be financially better for other members of your family?”		
“Which proposal do you think should be adopted?”		
Under 60	52	49
60 and over	28	72
Sociotropic prime:		
“Which proposal do you think would do more to ensure that the Social Security fund will have enough money to provide for future generations?”		
“Which proposal do you think should be adopted?”		
Under 60	45	55
60 and over	42	58

*Source:* Dennis Chong, Jack Citrin, and Patricia Conley, “When Self-Interest Matters,” *Political Psychology* 22 (2001): 555, 565–566.

“a (relatively) high likelihood of being forced to abandon all personal plans and undertakings and to take part in a potentially life-threatening war. As one’s lottery number increased, one’s vulnerability decreased.”<sup>38</sup>

As luck would have it, a representative sample of young men affected by this draft policy were interviewed in 1965 and reinterviewed several times later as part

of an ongoing panel study to examine political attitudes and socialization. (This is the Jennings and Niemi panel study we discuss at some length in Chapter 2.) The data collected included the respondents' birth dates, which allowed Erikson and Stoker to determine the draft number assigned to each male respondent. As a result, the researchers were able to use these data to investigate whether vulnerability to the draft changed young men's political attitudes. Indeed, they found striking evidence that being assigned a lower draft number influenced attitudes in several ways. When reinterviewed in 1973, men with lower numbers were more likely to think the war in Vietnam was a mistake than those with higher numbers. In addition, compared with the men who held high draft numbers, the men vulnerable to the draft were less likely to have voted for Nixon for reelection and were more likely to express a liberal ideology and liberal issue positions. Remarkably, when interviewed twenty-eight years later in 1997, the men who had been assigned low numbers continued to be more likely to report that the war was a mistake than those assigned high numbers. Erikson and Stoker also present evidence that the vulnerable men reconsidered their partisanship, which led them to become more Democratic and largely stay that way into later adulthood. Overall, Erikson and Stoker's research demonstrates that self-interest can have powerful and long-lasting effects when citizens are faced with circumstances in which their lives might be severely disrupted and even put in jeopardy.

## VALUES

*- don't have to talk about values + bias in class*

Values are "general and enduring standards."<sup>39</sup> They are abstract beliefs about how the world *should* work. As such, values constitute citizens' core principles, guiding their understanding of right and wrong. Thus, it makes sense that citizens' values would influence their specific policy positions.<sup>40</sup>

Scholars have identified two fundamental values that influence public opinion: egalitarianism and individualism.<sup>41</sup> **Egalitarianism** is the belief that citizens should be equal regardless of their personal characteristics.<sup>42</sup> In the U.S. context, egalitarianism emphasizes equality of opportunity, not necessarily equality of results. In other words, egalitarianism is the belief that all citizens should have the *chance* to achieve rather than the belief that all citizens should be guaranteed equal outcomes. **Individualism** is the belief that citizens should get ahead by virtue of their own hard work; people should "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" and rely on their own ingenuity.

Egalitarianism and individualism are abstract concepts and therefore difficult to measure. Nevertheless, political scientists have devised a set of survey questions to assess these concepts. In particular, Stanley Feldman analyzed citizens' levels of agreement with several statements that were included on a pilot study for the 1984 ANES to come up with the best way to measure egalitarianism and individualism.<sup>43</sup> He identified three statements that provide a valid measure of egalitarianism (see Table 6-5 for the wording of these items). The first two items seem to

focus on support for equal opportunity, while the third is more ambiguous. Some people might infer that treating people "more equally" means ensuring equal results, whereas others might think the statement simply refers to providing people with equal opportunities. Feldman also identified five statements that provide a valid measure of individualism (again, see Table 6-5 for the wording of these items). These statements emphasize the personal effort that is needed for someone to get ahead in life. (Note that agreeing with the first three statements is the individualistic response, whereas disagreeing with the last two statements is the individualistic response.) What do you think—do these statements do a good job measuring individualism and egalitarianism?

Feldman analyzed the impact of egalitarianism and individualism on citizens' policy attitudes. He demonstrates that egalitarianism is closely related to citizens' opinions on a wide range of policies. For example, egalitarian citizens are more likely to support welfare programs; increased government spending on health and education; and government efforts to improve the societal position of African Americans, women, and the poor. Thus, across many different policy areas, egalitarianism leads to more progressive political views. In contrast, individualism has an effect in only a few policy areas; nevertheless, its influence is still noteworthy. Individualistic citizens are more likely to oppose welfare spending and prefer a more limited role for the federal government (compared with state governments) in handling social and economic problems.

**Table 6-5 Measuring Egalitarianism and Individualism**

<i>"I am going to read several statements. After each one, I would like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree. I would also like to know whether you agree or disagree strongly or not strongly."</i>	
<i>Egalitarianism</i>	<i>Individualism</i>
"Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed."	"Any person who is willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding."
"One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance."	"If people work hard, they almost always get what they want."
"If people were treated more equally in this country, we would have many fewer problems."	"Most people who don't get ahead should not blame the system; they really have only themselves to blame."
	"Hard work offers little guarantee of success."
	"Even if people try hard, they often cannot reach their goals."

Source: Stanley Feldman, "Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values," *American Journal of Political Science* 32 (1988): 421.