

Social Dominance Orientation, Sociopolitical Attitudes, and Beliefs on Current Political Issues

Evan Schmiedehaus¹, Megan L. Rogers², Stephanie Dailey³, Amber Lupo², Millie Cordaro², Rebecca Deason², & Krista Howard²

¹*Department of Psychology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO*

²*Department of Psychology, Texas State University, San Marcos, TX*

³*Department of Communication Studies, Texas State University, San Marcos, TX*

This study investigates the relationship between social dominance orientation (SDO) and sociopolitical beliefs, focusing on issues such as reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and election security. It also examines the indirect effects of sociodemographic characteristics, including age, gender, religion, race, education, and employment. An online survey was conducted with 587 adults who completed questionnaires on demographic characteristics, social dominance orientation, and current political beliefs. Factor analysis was used to identify key sociopolitical belief factors, and structural equation modeling assessed the relationships between SDO, sociodemographic characteristics, and political beliefs. The analysis revealed four main factors of sociopolitical beliefs: general political issues, women's/LGBTQ+ rights, fraud/power, and bias/appeal to emotions. SDO was significantly associated with all four factors, showing negative relationships with general political issues and women's/LGBTQ+ rights, and positive relationships with fraud/power and bias/appeal to emotions. Sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, religion, and education also showed significant associations with SDO and political beliefs. The findings highlight the complex interplay between SDO, sociodemographic characteristics, and sociopolitical beliefs. However, limitations related to sample demographics, recruitment via social media, and the use of a shortened SDO scale should be considered when interpreting the generalizability of findings. Understanding these relationships can inform the design and implementation of social policies aimed at addressing hierarchical social ordering and promoting egalitarian values.

Keywords: social dominance orientation (SDO), hierarchical social ordering, equality, sociopolitical beliefs, sociopolitical attitudes, voter participation

According to the Pew Research Center (2023), approximately 66% of eligible voters participated in the 2020 presidential election, marking the highest turnout in 120 years (Green et al., 2023). While the Pew Research Center has not yet published data for the 2024 election, initial findings from the University of Florida Election Lab (2024) indicate a comparable turnout of 64%. This trend of increased voter participation is evenly distributed across party lines, with Democrats accounting for 49% and Republicans 50% of the vote in the 2018-2022 election cycles (Green et al., 2023). Although the Pew study did not identify specific causes for this rise, motivational factors such as party affiliation, policy preferences, and the desire to maintain the status quo or advance societal change may play a role. Some voters may vote along party lines as a default, while others choose candidates who best represent their sociopolitical beliefs and policy goals.

Voting along party lines may appear to be little more than a superficial gesture of loyalty to familiar Democratic and Republican ideologies. However, contained within those ideologies are other, more nuanced factors, like advancing specific policy initiatives such as those pertaining to the omnipresent pro-choice – pro-life controversy, with potential to influence both political decision-making and access to health care. Ideologies and belief systems are powerful motivational forces because they function both epistemically and as justificatory frameworks for advancing particular social policies (Ho et al., 2012). As an example, conservatism—a traditional Republi-

can ideology—has been associated with authoritarianism, the preservation of the societal status quo, and a system of governance that consolidates power and the control of resources within the dominant class (Jost et al., 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). On the other hand, liberalism and Democratic ideologies are associated with social policies like affirmative action, in which power and resources are more likely to be shared amongst citizens (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Both political ideologies and concomitant systems of governance are representative of disproportional social ordering wherein some groups are situated in a dominant role with greater access to opportunity and the ability to control resources, in contrast to subordinate groups and subpopulations who have fewer opportunities and limited ability to control and distribute resources (Ho et al., 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Disproportionate social ordering is a central tenet of Social Dominance Theory (SDT) and related concepts like Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), a measure of individual receptivity to dominant social ordering (Prati et al., 2022; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The present study aims to examine associations between SDO, sociopolitical beliefs, and attitudes on current political issues, which can illuminate factors associated with growing trends like increased voter participation.

Social Dominance Theory

Group-based hierarchies are an anticipated and enduring feature of human social ordering. Social dominance the-

ory (SDT) examines the tendency for human beings to organize societies as group-based social hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004). Group-based hierarchies occur broadly across societies regardless of cultural distinctions (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Hierarchical social ordering can manifest as either a single dominant group or multiple hegemonic groups positioned at the top of society, relegating other groups to subordinate roles. Some researchers (e.g., Jost et al., 2003; Pratto, 1999; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) suggest that dominant group members navigate society with considerably more power and have a greater degree of access, control, and ability to manage and distribute resources to their advantage, especially when contrasted against subordinate group members who are limited in opportunities to enjoy the same benefits. Additionally, dominant group members are recognized as having a greater degree of *positive social value*, frequently distinguished by the attainment of a prestigious education, more desirable occupations, wealth accumulation, positive health outcomes, and high social status (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004). To the contrary, subordinate group members are characterized as having *negative social value* and are subordinated to a lower social status, yielding fewer positive outcomes pertaining to education, occupational opportunities, and health care (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004).

Most human societies contain three distinct but interconnected *hierarchical systems*: age, gender, and “arbitrary sets” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004). Age-based hierarchical systems assess societal worth based on assumptions related to age. For example, younger workers are often seen as productive contributors to the economy, while older individuals may be perceived as an economic burden due to declining health and cognitive abilities (Zubielevitch et al., 2023). Although ageist thinking can lead to discrimination against older persons, researchers like Zubielevitch et al. (2023) have found evidence supporting the cultural assumption that older people may exhibit higher levels of prejudice. Consequently, they may be more accepting of hierarchical social ordering and undesirable outcomes associated with concepts like right-wing authoritarianism.

Gender-based hierarchical systems ascribe different levels of worth to men and women, traditionally placing men in dominant and higher-status roles, especially in patriarchal societies, in contrast to more egalitarian ones (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Legitimizing beliefs associated with gender-based hierarchies are expressed and justified using both benevolent sexism (e.g., women are nurturers and require protection) and hostile sexism, which can be experienced as

overt verbal and physical attacks against women (Barbeitos & Modesto, 2023). Non-binary and trans individuals also experience subordination within gender hierarchies, facing significant prejudice, discrimination, and invalidation of their identities. Research indicates that these experiences contribute to higher risks of psychological distress, depression, and anxiety among non-binary people (Budge et al., 2013).

Arbitrary sets, the third hierarchical system, are contextually dependent and arbitrarily defined social distinctions based on such factors as ethnicity, culture, race, class, caste membership, tribe, nation, religious affiliation, and other social constructs (Van Laar & Sidanius, 2001). Like the other two hierarchical systems, arbitrary set factors are interconnected and mutually interdependent structural components of social life. Gender and age hierarchies are universal across societies, whereas arbitrary set hierarchies occur more frequently in societies in which people can generate and sustain economic surplus (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Sidanius and Pratto (1999) emphasize the conditions of economic surplus, which frequently lead to role specialization, the formation of male-based coalitions, and the creation of arbitrary-set hierarchies. Arbitrary-set social hierarchies reappear and recreate themselves over time, culture, and geography, and are therefore an anticipated and sustaining feature found across diverse societies.

SDT posits that societies develop ideological belief systems to mitigate conflict and maintain social order. These systems promote legitimizing myths and cultural narratives that justify and sustain hierarchical structures favoring dominant groups (Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Such myths shape cognition, attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making at both individual and group levels (Mathews et al., 2009). Sidanius (1993) identified three main types: 1) paternalistic myths, which portray subordinate groups as dependent and incapable; 2) reciprocal myths, which frame intergroup relations as cooperative and mutually beneficial; and 3) sacred myths, which attribute social hierarchies to divine or natural order (Jost et al., 2003; Sidanius, 1999). These myths anchor ideologies like conservatism, which aim to preserve existing power structures and social inequalities (Jost et al., 2003).

Sidanius and Pratto (1999) distinguish between two types of cultural ideologies: hierarchy-enhancing (HE) and hierarchy-attenuating (HA). HE ideologies support social hierarchies, while HA ideologies promote greater equality. These ideological orientations are reflected not only in institutional structures but also in the sociopolitical beliefs individuals endorse. For example, beliefs that emphasize law

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and order, traditional family roles, or national superiority often align with HE ideologies, reinforcing existing power structures, whereas beliefs that advocate for social justice, minority rights, and redistributive policies tend to reflect HA ideologies, challenging hierarchical norms (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). These ideologies also manifest in institutional roles: HE institutions, such as banks, insurance companies, and real estate firms, have historically contributed to systemic discrimination, whereas HA institutions are more likely to invest in programs that support marginalized communities and promote equity (Sidanius et al., 2004). Additionally, religious ideologies, particularly those that emphasize tradition, authority, and exclusivity, can function as hierarchy-enhancing belief systems, reinforcing group-based dominance and resistance to egalitarian change (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Importantly, HE ideologies are not exclusive to dominant groups—subordinated individuals may also endorse them. This acceptance often stems from perceived lack of alternatives or fear of reprisal for challenging the status quo (Jost et al., 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 2009; Tesi et al., 2019). Such dynamics can foster a “norm of compliance”, where inequality is passively accepted. Ultimately, HE ideologies are complex belief systems that reinforce structural inequality and group-based subordination.

Social-cognitive research highlights how intragroup favoritism and psychological biases contribute to discrimination against outgroups (Matthews et al., 2009). These biases often arise from efforts to reduce uncertainty, perceived threat, and anxiety related to intergroup conflict. Consequently, individuals may stereotype others, reinforce social boundaries, and uphold hierarchical structures. While such behaviors can be shaped by learning and experience, sociopolitical belief systems—such as authoritarianism or social dominance orientation—can play a significant role in sustaining hierarchical norms. Understanding these belief systems is essential for evaluating individuals’ receptivity to social inequality and resistance to change.

Social Dominance Orientation

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) refers to an individual’s attitudinal preference for hierarchical versus egalitarian social structures (Pratto et al., 1994). Those high in SDO tend to endorse hierarchy-enhancing (HE) ideologies and legitimizing myths, while those low in SDO are more supportive of hierarchy-attenuating (HA) values and policies. SDO influences not only ideological alignment but also the social roles individuals pursue and the institutions they affiliate with, as those higher in SDO often gravitate toward roles and organizations that reinforce inequality.

To assess individual receptivity to social hierarchy, Pratto et al. (1994) developed the Social Dominance Orientation scale, a psychometrically validated tool with strong internal consistency, temporal reliability, and both predictive and discriminant validity. Predictive validity refers to the scale’s ability to forecast attitudes and behaviors associated with social dominance, such as support for nationalism, sexism, punitive policies, and opposition to social welfare. In contrast, discriminant validity ensures that SDO is distinct from other psychological constructs. For example, while both SDO and authoritarianism may predict conservative attitudes, the SDO scale uniquely captures preferences for group-based hierarchy, independent of personality traits like agreeableness and openness, or values like empathy and altruism.

SDO has been associated with a variety of sociopolitical attitudes, including nationalism, sexism, cultural elitism, and policy preferences related to welfare, civil rights, and military intervention (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius et al., 1999). However, less is known about how SDO relates to contemporary sociopolitical beliefs frequently discussed in public discourse. To address this gap, the present study introduces a novel questionnaire assessing beliefs on topics such as reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, election integrity, education, and economic policy. Items like “Roe v. Wade is a constitutional right” and “CRT should not be taught in schools” aim to capture current ideological divides and explore how these beliefs correlate with SDO and demographic variables such as age, gender, and education. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Social Dominance Theory and the literature reviewed above, the present study tested several hypotheses.

Hypotheses

Based on Social Dominance Theory and prior research on Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Individuals with higher levels of SDO will be more likely to endorse hierarchy-enhancing sociopolitical beliefs, such as support for election fraud narratives, resistance to progressive education policies (e.g., CRT bans), and emotionally-charged or conspiratorial political rhetoric.

H2: Individuals with higher levels of SDO will be less likely to endorse hierarchy-attenuating sociopolitical beliefs, such as support for reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and egalitarian policy positions.

H3: Sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race, education, employment) will have indirect effects on sociopolitical beliefs through their influence on SDO, such that individuals from dominant social groups or with higher socioeconomic status will exhibit higher SDO and,

in turn, greater endorsement of hierarchy-enhancing beliefs.

By integrating novel belief items and underrepresented demographics, this research seeks to expand the SDO literature and inform future investigations into political behavior and social policy development.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

This study recruited participants using Facebook Sponsored Ads in Fall 2022. A total of 821 participants agreed to participate in the online, anonymous, cross-sectional study. Participants were allowed to skip any items they did not feel comfortable answering. Of those who completed the survey items, 587 participants were included in the analyses for this study. The ages ranged from 18 to 92, and the mean age was 60.2 ($SD = 18.0$). For this sample, 61.5% ($n = 356$) reported being female, 37.0% ($n = 214$) reported being male, and 1.6% ($n = 9$) reported being non-binary or other. The racial/ethnic breakdown of this sample is 83.6% ($n = 491$) white; 2.2% ($n = 13$) black; 4.6% ($n = 27$) Hispanic; 2.6% ($n = 15$) Asian or Pacific Islander; 1.4% ($n = 8$) American Indian or Alaskan Native; and 5.6% ($n = 33$) Mixed or Additional Race/Ethnicity. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Measures

Demographic Information

Participants provided information about their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, marital status, religion, education level, and employment status.

Social Dominance Orientation Scale – Modified Version

The Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO) examines social dominance orientation, specifically the endorsement of social hierarchies and the endorsement of egalitarian beliefs (Sidanius, 1999). The modified SDO (Mata et al., 2010) consists of five items measuring the endorsement of social hierarchies and the endorsement of egalitarian beliefs. Items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Example items include: “If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.” Items were scored such that higher scores indicated greater SDO. The SDO shows good reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$; $M = 63.1$, $SD = 11.8$).

Beliefs about Current Political Issues

The BCPI measure was developed by a panel of researchers in this study to examine beliefs about reproductive health, LGBTQ+ issues, election security, school-related issues, economic topics, and general political issues. The measure includes 30 statements to which

participants indicated their level of agreement using a 9-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). Example statements include: “Voter fraud is an important issue” and “States should decide abortion laws.”

Data Analytic Strategy

The factor structure of the political beliefs items was first examined through factor analytic procedures. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (Kaiser & Rice, 1974) and Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1951) established the suitability of these data for factor analysis. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with oblimin rotation was then conducted to determine the best-fitting factor structure. To identify the optimal number of factors, eigenvalues, the scree plot, 1,000 random dataset parallel analyses, and Velicer’s minimum average partial (MAP) test (Zwick & Velicer, 1986) were examined. Ultimately, the number of suitable factors was determined through examination of significant loadings across possible models to balance model fit, parsimony, and the interpretability of factors.

After identifying the optimal number of factors, the proposed model—examining relations between political beliefs and social dominance—was tested. First, the measurement model of each latent variable (i.e., the four political belief factors) was assessed. Weighted least squares estimation was used due to the ordinal nature of each item. Model fit was evaluated using recommended guidelines (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000), including the chi-square test of model fit (χ^2), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean residual (SRMR). Namely, good model fit was indicated by a non-significant χ^2 statistic, $CFI \geq .95$, $TLI \geq .95$, $RMSEA \leq .06$, and $SRMR \leq .06$. Adequate model fit, on the other hand, is indicated by $CFI \geq .90$, $TLI \geq .90$, $RMSEA \leq .08$, and $SRMR \leq .08$. Second, the structural model was assessed through three iterative models: (1) testing direct relations between political beliefs and social dominance; (2) incorporating sociodemographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, religion, race, education, and employment) as covariates; and (3) examining the indirect effects of sociodemographic characteristics through social dominance onto each political belief.

All analyses were conducted in R using the EFA dimensions (O’Connor, 2023), lavaan (Rosseel, 2012), and semTools (Jorgensen et al., 2021) packages.

Results

Identification of Factor Structure

Both the KMO statistic (.96) and Bartlett’s test of

sphericity ($\chi^2[465] = 16,111.72, p < .001$) supported the use of these data in factor analysis. Examination of eigenvalues, the scree plot, parallel analyses, and the MAP test indicated that 3 (MAP), 4 (scree plot), or 6 (eigenvalues, parallel analysis) factor solutions may be appropriate. Both the five- and six-factor solutions had factors with only two items, as well as poor interpretability of factors, suggesting possible overextractions. In contrast, the three- and four-factor solutions were interpretable. However, the three-factor solution had significantly poorer fit than the four-factor solution ($\Delta\chi^2[28] = 313.90, p < .001$), as well as numerous non-loading and cross-loading items; thus, the four-factor solution was retained for subsequent analyses. Factor loadings are presented in Table 2. Factor 1, reflecting general political issues, comprised 10 items. Factor 2, reflecting *women's/LGBTQ+ rights*, included 7 items. Factor 3, reflecting *fraud/higher-power control*, was composed of 4 items. Factor 4, reflecting *biases/appeal to emotions*, comprised 7 items. Three items did not load onto any factor and were removed from further consideration. There were significant correlations between each factor: general political issues, women's/LGBTQ+ rights, and beliefs about biases/appeal to emotions were all positively related to each other ($r_s = .39$ to $.74$), whereas fraud/higher-power control was negatively associated with the other three factors ($r_s = -.79$ to $-.30$).

Measurement Models

Good model fit was found for the general political issues ($\chi^2[35] = 65.72, p = .001, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .04$), women's/LGBTQ+ rights ($\chi^2[14] = 37.22, p = .001, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .02$), fraud/power ($\chi^2[2] = 7.57, p = .023, CFI = 1.00, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .02$), and bias/appeal to emotions ($\chi^2[13] = 62.39, p < .001, CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .06$) factors (with a residual covariance drawn between General Political 1 and General Political 2 in the bias/appeal to emotions model). This supported the use of these factors in the subsequent structural models.

Relations between Social Dominance and Political Beliefs

We first tested the direct relations between social dominance and each political factor. The overall model fit was adequate-to-good ($\chi^2[340] = 924.27, p < .001, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .05$). Social dominance was significantly negatively related to general political issues ($\beta = -.62, p < .001$) and women's/LGBTQ+ rights ($\beta = -.61, p < .001$), but significantly positively related to fraud/power ($\beta = .59, p < .001$) and bias/appeal to emotions ($\beta = .50, p < .001$).

Next, sociodemographic characteristics were incorpo-

rated as covariates to examine whether these relationships remained statistically significant after accounting for individual characteristics. Model fit was adequate-to-good ($\chi^2[685] = 1373.26, p < .001, CFI = .92, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04$). Social dominance remained significantly associated (in the same direction) with all four political factors, after accounting for all sociodemographic characteristics. Additionally, several significant sociodemographic findings emerged: Age was significantly negatively associated with general political issues and women's/LGBTQ+ rights, such that older adults were less likely to endorse these beliefs; age was unrelated to fraud/power and bias/appeal to emotions. Cisgender women and gender diverse individuals were more likely to endorse general political issues than cisgender men, and cisgender women were more likely to endorse women's/LGBTQ+ rights than cisgender men. No other gender differences emerged. Those identifying with a Christian religion were less likely to endorse general political issues and women's/LGBTQ+ rights, and more likely to endorse fraud/power beliefs than non-religious individuals. Those identifying with a world religion were more likely to endorse fraud/power beliefs than non-religious individuals. Finally, those with higher levels of education were less likely to endorse fraud/power beliefs than those with less education. Detailed statistics from this model can be found in Table 3.

Finally, we tested whether social dominance significantly accounted for the relationship between each sociodemographic characteristic and sociopolitical belief. Employment status was removed from this model for parsimony since it was not significantly related to social dominance or any political beliefs. Of the sociodemographic characteristics, only age, cisgender women (versus cisgender men), Christian religion, and education were significantly associated with social dominance. Indirect effects emerged for gender, Christian religion, and education; specifically, social dominance accounted for the relationship between (1) identifying as a cisgender woman and each political belief ($p_s = .013$ to $.015$), (2) identifying with a Christian religion and each political belief ($p_s < .001$), and (3) levels of education and each political belief ($p = .004$ to $.006$). There were no other significant indirect effects ($p = .107$ to $.978$).

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between social dominance orientation (SDO), sociopolitical beliefs, and attitudes about current sociopolitical issues. In addition to examining established associations between SDO and political ideology, this study contributes

to the literature by identifying distinct dimensions of contemporary sociopolitical beliefs and demonstrating how these belief dimensions relate to both SDO and sociodemographic characteristics. These dimensions reflect distinct patterns of attitudes toward contemporary sociopolitical issues, including beliefs about electoral legitimacy, social hierarchy, and attitudes toward marginalized groups. More specifically, this study was designed to (1) test the direct relations between sociopolitical beliefs and SDO; (2) incorporate sociodemographic characteristics into the analysis, including age, gender, religion, race, and other underrepresented variables such as education and employment; and (3) examine the indirect effects of the sociodemographic characteristics through SDO onto each sociopolitical belief.

Factor 1, which encompassed general political issues, revealed associations between Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and a range of sociopolitical beliefs, including those related to economic policy, taxation, health care, and gerrymandering. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that sociopolitical beliefs aligned with more liberal views tend to correlate with hierarchy-attenuating ideologies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Factor 2 focused on beliefs related to women's and LGBTQ+ rights, such as the protection of same-sex marriage and reproductive autonomy. These beliefs reflect liberal preferences and are similarly associated with hierarchy-attenuating ideologies (Jost et al., 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), reinforcing the connection between progressive social values and lower levels of SDO.

Factor 3, reflecting concerns about fraud and power, included beliefs about whether presidential elections have been rigged. These beliefs are difficult to associate consistently with SDO, as they have been expressed across party lines following elections such as *Bush v. Gore* in 2000 (Craig et al., 2006) and *Trump v. Biden* in 2020 (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). Concerns about election integrity also vary by political affiliation, with Democrats more focused on voter suppression and Republicans on fraudulent voting (Edelson et al., 2017). This suggests that beliefs about election fraud may be shaped more by immediate political contexts and partisan loyalties than by stable ideological orientations like SDO. Further research could explore how these contextual factors interact with SDO to inform beliefs about electoral integrity, guide the behavior of the electorate, and influence public policy design.

Factor 4, bias and emotional appeals, included beliefs such as media bias, political dishonesty, and the perception that educators hold partisan views. These beliefs are closely linked to Republican party affiliation and percep-

tions of cultural elitism, particularly the idea that professors promote ideological agendas (Jost et al., 2003; Pratto et al., 1994). These associations further underscore the role of ideological orientation in shaping how individuals interpret sociopolitical information, suggesting that future research should examine how perceptions of bias and emotionally charged rhetoric interact with SDO to influence institutional trust and political behavior.

Extensive research has demonstrated a significant link between SDO and sociopolitical beliefs, a finding that is well-supported by the research model (Bergh et al., 2014; Wedell & Bravo, 2021). For instance, studies (Barbeitos & Modesto, 2023; Jost et al., 2003) indicate that greater levels of SDO are associated with the endorsement of sexist attitudes and intolerance for women's issues. Results from our findings confirm this assertion, indicating that SDO is negatively associated with women's issues. Further, Prati et al. (2022) conducted research examining three political beliefs and associations with political engagement: (1) perceived fairness of the political system, (2) perceived corruption of the political system, and (3) perceived political self-efficacy. All three political beliefs were associated with greater levels of political engagement and individual levels of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), underscoring the psychological underpinnings of civic behavior. These findings align with Prati et al.'s (2022) results, which similarly link concerns about electoral fraud and power dynamics to elevated SDO. Together, these patterns highlight the importance of examining sociopolitical beliefs, such as fairness, gerrymandering, and voter participation, not only as reflections of individual ideology but as influential factors for shaping public opinion and informing equitable policy design. Future research should continue to investigate how these beliefs interact with broader contextual factors to influence democratic engagement and institutional trust.

The next step was to evaluate how individual characteristics related to SDO. Age and gender, which are two enduring demographic features of social ordering, were examined to identify associations with SDO. In addition to the examination of age and gender, the study also considered underrepresented demographic variables ("arbitrary sets"), including race/ethnicity, education, and employment. Religiosity was also examined. The individual characteristics that are directly linked to SDO include identifying as male, Christian, and having lower levels of education.

Identifying as male was associated with higher levels of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) compared to individuals identifying as female, a finding consistent with pri-

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or research indicating that men are more likely to endorse hierarchy-enhancing ideologies (Reed, 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). This pattern held when comparing cisgender men and cisgender women, while no significant differences emerged between gender diverse participants and other gender groups. The sample also included a higher proportion of female respondents, which may limit the generalizability of these findings across gender groups. Although only 11 respondents identified as gender diverse, which refers to individuals who do not identify as cisgender men or women, their inclusion offers important insight. Prior research suggests that receptivity to social dominance orientation (SDO) predicts attitudes toward transgender and nonbinary individuals (Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021), highlighting the relevance of gender identity in shaping sociopolitical beliefs. Notably, cisgender women and gender diverse individuals were more likely to endorse general political issues than cisgender men, and cisgender women were more likely to support women's and LGBTQ+ rights. These findings suggest that gender identity may play a meaningful role in shaping public opinion on equity-related issues, and future research should further investigate how gender diversity intersects with ideological orientation to influence political engagement and attitudes toward social inclusion.

Religion was the sole arbitrary set designation under review for the present study. Religious designations consisted of Christian religion (including Catholic and Protestant traditions), world religions (referring to a range of religions including Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Sikhism), and none. Study findings indicate that identifying with a Christian tradition compared to no religion was associated with higher levels of SDO. Previous research has consistently linked Christianity to higher levels of SDO (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993; Sidanius et al., 2004), but examining it in relation to individuals who identify as Christian compared to those with no religious affiliation offers valuable insight and can inform the direction of future research initiatives. Identifying as gender diverse, compared to a man, and identifying with a world religion were unrelated to SDO. SDO did not account for the relation between a world religion and any of the four political factors, though it is notable that the total effect was only significant between world religion and fraud/power. No other arbitrary set associations were examined.

There were also indirect links between individual characteristics and beliefs about current political issues. Age was significantly negatively associated with Factor 1 (general political issues) and Factor 2 (women's and LGBTQ+ rights), indicating that older adults were less likely to endorse these

beliefs. This finding aligns with previous research showing that older individuals tend to favor conservative beliefs and ideologies that support social hierarchies (Jost et al., 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Zubielevitch et al., 2023). As shown in Table 3, higher levels of education were negatively correlated with SDO, consistent with prior studies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993; Sidanius et al., 2004). Education was also significantly negatively related to fraud and power beliefs, but showed no association with the other three factors. This pattern is particularly relevant for future research and policy, as educational disparities—especially among members of low-status groups—may contribute to ideological divides and influence political engagement (Van Laar & Sidanius, 2001). Understanding how education shapes receptivity to dominance-oriented beliefs could inform interventions aimed at promoting civic awareness and reducing polarization. Employment was not associated with any of the four factors, though this may reflect limitations in study design rather than a definitive lack of relationship.

Limitations

In recognition that the present study has considerable strengths in identifying both direct and indirect associations between SDO, sociopolitical beliefs, and the multiple factors under review, there are also notable limitations which warrant further discussion. Firstly, the study questionnaire was distributed through advertisements on various social media channels, so the sample excludes those who do not use social media, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the mean age of study participants was 60 years old, which can prove limiting when contrasted against the life experiences and interests of both younger and older individuals. Future studies should aim for a more diverse age range to capture a broader spectrum of perspectives and to investigate how the relationship between SDO, demographics, and sociopolitical beliefs changes across the lifespan. In addition, the present study was cross-sectional, which can prove challenging when seeking to establish specific causal associations. Conducting longitudinal studies can enhance our understanding of causal relationships and temporal associations, thereby improving the generalizability of the findings.

It is also important to recognize that the sample consists primarily of older individuals, with an average age of 60.2 years and a majority identifying as White (83.6%). This demographic profile may limit the extent to which the findings can be applied to broader populations, especially in relation to issues concerning race and LGBTQ+ communities. The perspectives of younger individuals, as well as those from more racially and gender-diverse backgrounds,

may differ due to distinct social and political experiences.

Another notable limitation of the study concerns the categorization of religious affiliation. Participants were asked to select the option that most closely aligned with their religious identity, which may have oversimplified the complexity of religious belief systems. For example, Christianity encompasses a wide range of denominations with distinct traditions, practices, and theological interpretations despite sharing a common sacred text. Similarly, while Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are all Abrahamic religions, they differ significantly in doctrine, ritual, and worldview (Silverstein & Stroumsa, 2018; Stroumsa, 2015). These distinctions are further complicated by ideological variation within each tradition, ranging from moderate to more fundamentalist expressions. Such variation may meaningfully influence attitudes toward hierarchy and social dominance. Moderate religious orientations may align more closely with egalitarian values and lower SDO, whereas more dogmatic or fundamentalist beliefs may be associated with higher SDO due to their emphasis on tradition and social order. Future research should aim to incorporate more nuanced religious classification systems that account for denominational, philosophical, and ideological diversity, as these factors may significantly shape participants' sociopolitical attitudes and their relationship to SDO.

Lastly, the study employed a five-item modified version of the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) scale rather than the full SDO-7. This decision was based on practical considerations during the study design phase, including the research team's prior experience with the abbreviated version and its use in related studies. Although the shortened scale has demonstrated acceptable reliability here and in previous research, it may not fully capture the conceptual breadth of the SDO construct. As a result, its use may limit content validity and affect internal consistency. Future research would benefit from employing the full SDO-7 to assess the robustness and generalizability of the present findings.

Conclusion

This study underscores the intricate relationship between social dominance orientation (SDO) and sociopolitical beliefs, revealing how deeply ingrained attitudes towards hierarchical social ordering and equality shape perspectives on critical political issues. By highlighting the significant associations between SDO and beliefs about reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, election security, and other sociopolitical matters, this research provides valuable insights into the psychological underpinnings of political behavior. The findings indicated that lower levels of SDO are associated with more egalitarian attitudes and greater support for inclusive policies.

Additionally, the role of sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, religion, and education in shaping these beliefs points to the need for targeted educational and policy initiatives that address the specific needs and perspectives of diverse population groups. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of SDO on political engagement and policy support, as well as the potential for educational programs to mitigate hierarchical attitudes. Understanding the dynamic interplay between individual psychological orientations and broader sociopolitical contexts can inform the development of strategies to promote social equity and democratic participation.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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SDO AND SOCIOPOLITICAL BELIEFS

Table 1.

Political Belief Statements

Category - Item	Statement
Economic Issues - 1	The wealth inequality gap is widening
Economic Issues - 2	The wealthy should pay their fair share of taxes
Economic Issues - 3	Free health care is a right
Economic Issues - 4	Green energy will help the economy
Economic Issues - 5	Poor people should be given financial support from the government
Economic Issues - 6	The president is responsible for the economy
Election Security – 1	Voter fraud is an important issue
Election Security – 2	The most recent presidential election was rigged
Election Security – 3	A so-called "dark state" controls elections in the U.S.
Election Security – 4	Gerrymandering is not a problem
Election Security - 5	Both parties try to win elections at all costs
General Political - 1	All politicians are dishonest
General Political - 2	Politicians use fear to motivate people
General Political - 3	The media is biased
General Political - 4	I feel angry when I watch the news

Table 1 cont.

Political Belief Statements

General Political - 5	The U.S. is experiencing a constitutional crisis
LGBT Rights - 1	The right to same sex marriage should be protected
LGBT Rights - 2	States should decide same sex marriage laws
LGBT Rights - 3	Marriage is between one man and one woman
LGBT Rights - 4	The LGBTQ agenda is damaging society
LGBT Rights - 5	Transgender persons should have legal protections
Reproductive Rights - 1	Roe v. Wade is a constitutional right
Reproductive Rights - 2	States should decide abortion laws
Reproductive Rights - 3	People should have the right to make their own reproductive decisions
Reproductive Rights - 4	Abortion affects men and women equally
Reproductive Rights - 5	The loss of individual rights means the loss of freedom
School Issues - 1	CRT (critical race theory) should not be taught in schools
School Issues - 2	Local school boards need to be closely monitored
School Issues - 3	Many teachers and professors are politically biased
School Issues - 4	Transgender athletes should be able to compete with their gender of choice
School Issues - 5	The 2nd amendment makes schools less safe

SDO AND SOCIOPOLITICAL BELIEFS

Table 2.

Factor Loadings of the Four-Factor Solution

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Economic Issues - 1	.78	-.07	-.06	.08
Economic Issues - 2	.69	-.07	-.15	.07
Economic Issues - 3	.85	.12	.12	-.08
Economic Issues - 4	.57	.13	-.17	-.10
Economic Issues - 5	.75	.18	.18	-.11
Economic Issues - 6	.03	-.15	.42	.06
Election Security – 1	-.11	.03	.64	.13
Election Security – 2	.04	-.09	.83	.10
Election Security – 3	.02	-.03	.79	.13
Election Security – 4	-.37	.01	.06	-.03
Election Security - 5	-.21	.02	-.04	.40
General Political - 1	-.03	-.07	-.09	.52
General Political - 2	.05	-.08	-.24	.49
General Political - 3	-.28	.12	.17	.61
General Political - 4	.22	.08	.21	.48
General Political - 5	.42	-.10	.13	.33
LGBT Rights - 1	.02	.93	.06	.08

Table 2 cont.*Factor Loadings of the Four-Factor Solution*

LGBT Rights - 2	-.30	-.40	.09	-.08
LGBT Rights - 3	-.01	-.93	-.03	-.07
LGBT Rights - 4	-.06	-.83	.01	.07
LGBT Rights - 5	.15	.63	-.01	-.04
Reproductive Rights - 1	.24	.49	-.14	-.04
Reproductive Rights - 2	-.32	-.31	.24	-.04
Reproductive Rights - 3	.03	.62	-.17	.08
Reproductive Rights - 4	-.01	-.14	.15	-.05
Reproductive Rights - 5	-.01	.33	-.05	.24
School Issues - 1	-.43	-.22	.07	.16
School Issues - 2	-.07	-.03	.23	.36
School Issues - 3	-.25	-.05	.14	.46
School Issues - 4	.51	.35	.22	-.23
School Issues - 5	.53	.07	-.14	-.16

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Table 3.

Relationships between Sociodemographic Characteristics, Social Dominance, and Political Beliefs

	Social Dominance		General Political Issues		Women's/LGBTQ+ Rights		Fraud/Power		Bias/Appeal to Emotions	
	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>
	Age	-.12	.111	-.21	.001	-.16	.010	.04	.607	.10
Cisgender Woman	-.10	.027	.10	.006	.12	.001	-.01	.894	-.01	.824
Gender Diverse	-.00	.995	.10	.005	.06	.100	-.04	.307	-.05	.240
Christian Religion	.32	< .001	-.24	< .001	-.29	< .001	.24	< .001	.06	.239
World Religion	.06	.172	-.04	.307	-.02	.581	.10	.014	.05	.328
Race (White)	-.05	.277	.03	.427	.01	.792	-.06	.138	-.10	.047
Education	-.15	.001	.05	.235	.07	.076	-.09	.038	-.08	.083
Employment Type										
Full-Time	.05	.675	.06	.548	.11	.251	-.09	.353	.08	.470
Part-Time	-.06	.479	.05	.429	.06	.351	-.06	.426	.05	.543
Retired	.00	.980	.15	.191	.22	.053	-.19	.133	-.04	.791
Student	-.09	.215	.08	.174	.12	.050	-.05	.439	.13	.097
Home Caregiver	.00	.978	.05	.209	.02	.620	.01	.810	.02	.719
Multiple Jobs	-.02	.582	.02	.493	.05	.149	-.03	.463	-.04	.377
Disabled/ Unemployed	.03	.662	.05	.469	.06	.353	-.06	.435	.11	.196
Other	.02	.763	.02	.670	.03	.537	-.02	.754	-.01	.890
Social Dominance			-.54	< .001	-.51	< .001	.50	< .001	.47	< .001