

ARTICLE

Rationally blind? Rationality polarizes policy support for colour blindness versus multiculturalism

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Abstract

Do White Americans prefer society to be ‘colour-blind’ by rising above racial identities, or ‘multicultural’ by openly discussing and considering them? We developed an ideology-rationality model to understand support for these diversity perspectives. Specifically, since people endorse a diversity perspective in line with their ideological values, we hypothesized that conservatism is related to a relative preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism. However, since colour blindness and multiculturalism are complex and multi-layered ideologies, we further hypothesized that the relationship between conservatism and a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism is especially pronounced under higher levels of rationality. Results confirmed the hypotheses, either when rationality was operationalized within a dual process theory (Study 1, $N = 496$) or experimentally induced within a tripartite model of cognition (Study 2, $N = 497$). Higher levels of rationality guided White Americans high in conservatism towards a stronger preference for colour-blindness, but those low in conservatism towards a stronger preference for multiculturalism. These results suggest that among White Americans the endorsement of colour blindness versus multiculturalism stems from the interplay between ideological orientation and rationality and that rational considerations about racial policies may further divide rather than unify along ideological lines.

KEYWORDS

analytic thinking, colour blindness, ideology, intergroup relations, multiculturalism, polarization, rationality

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BACKGROUND

Societies are becoming increasingly diverse. How society should approach racial diversity is fiercely debated among politicians, social scientists and lay people. People hold different opinions on the topic. Why do some people believe that society benefits from ignoring racial characteristics, and why do others believe that society benefits from considering racial characteristics? To answer this question in the US context, we propose an ideology-rationality model, holding that White Americans' support for colour-blind versus multicultural policy is rooted in political ideology and, critically, is bolstered by rationality.

Colour blindness and multiculturalism

Some believe that society benefits from a colour-blindness perspective, referring to the belief that 'race and racial differences should not be taken into account when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted' (Apfelbaum et al., 2012, p. 205). Colour blindness entails the view that one should focus on uniform norms for all and that racial characteristics should be disregarded. Others believe that society would benefit from a multicultural perspective, where racial differences are recognized, appreciated, and openly discussed. Multiculturalism subscribes to the idea that, although no one racial group should be central in society, racial differences do matter, and should be taken into account rather than ignored (Apfelbaum et al., 2012).

At face value, both approaches reflect promising avenues for promoting intergroup harmony (Plaut et al., 2009). If racial differences are acknowledged without judgement—a central corollary of multiculturalism—one will not devalue those of a different racial background. Likewise, if race is not even considered—a central corollary of colour blindness—one supposedly cannot discriminate on this basis. However, it has been argued that the deemphasizing of group differences within the colour-blind view can entail a reinforcement of the current (unequal) social order between racial groups in Western societies such as the US, thereby obviating an equitable society (Forman, 2004). In fact, some scholars have even claimed that colour blindness serves a 'neo- or internal colonial' agenda, and works against redressing racial inequalities (Crenshaw, 2019; Jackson, 2009; Yogeeswaran et al., 2018). In a colour-blind Western society, the White majority perspective is still dominant, without considering the perspective and cultural background of racial minorities. Colour blindness may thus foster cultural ignorance and risks the denial and perpetuation of racism (Fryberg & Stephens, 2010). Therefore, rather than promoting equality, some have asserted that colour blindness constitutes a form of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Although it is important to note that neither perspective is without its limitations (Plaut et al., 2018), empirical research supports the notion that policies and norms representing multiculturalism relative to colour blindness are related to several positive intergroup outcomes in the US and other Western countries (Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013), such as more positive face-to-face intergroup interactions (Vorauer et al., 2009), less implicit and explicit racial bias (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004), less behavioural prejudice (Holoien & Shelton, 2012), a higher probability of detecting racial discrimination (Apfelbaum et al., 2010), and among racial minorities: better academic outcomes (Birnbaum et al., 2021), work engagement (Plaut et al., 2009) and feeling accepted (Meeussen et al., 2014).

A deeper insight of colour blindness and multiculturalism is needed to gain knowledge of intergroup interactions (Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Previous research examined intergroup orientations from different perspectives, such as social identity theory (Garcia et al., 2005), intergroup threat (Velasco González et al., 2008), selective exposure (De keersmaecker & Schmid, 2023), and emotional capabilities (Van Hiel et al., 2019). In the current contribution, we propose an ideology-rationality model to advance understanding of White majorities' support for colour blindness versus multiculturalism in the US. The model holds that (1) people endorse a particular diversity perspective in line with their ideology of conservatism (cf. Kauff et al., 2021; Wolsko et al., 2006), and (2) that higher levels of rationality increase the alignment between one's core ideological beliefs and one's support for the specific diversity perspective.

The ideology of conservatism

Some theoretical accounts articulate that conservatism can be conceptualized as two interrelated dimensions (see Duckitt, 2001 and Jost et al., 2003 for overviews). The first dimension of conservatism concerns the preference for maintaining the current social order and structure by preservation of tradition. This resistance to change dimension is mainly oriented towards social issues, and therefore often labelled social conservatism. The authoritarian variant of social conservatism is typically captured by Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), which in addition to a preference for conventionalism and traditionalism, is also characterized by authoritarian submission and authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1981). However, although social conservatism and RWA are interrelated given their focus on traditionalism, not all social conservatives are high on authoritarianism.

The second dimension of conservatism concerns the tolerance towards economic or status inequality and preference for a competitive society. This acceptance of inequality aspect is focused on economic-hierarchical issues and typically labelled economic conservatism. An ideological concept that also taps into attitudes towards inequality is Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), referring to one's preference for hierarchical and non-egalitarian relations among social groups (Pratto et al., 1994). Although both SDO and economic conservatism legitimize inequality and group dominance in society, conceptually, the former reflects an attitudinal orientation regarding intergroup relations, whereas the latter is more directly oriented towards economic policies (Pratto et al., 1994).

The bipartite conceptualization of conservatism in terms of (a) resisting social change and (b) accepting economic inequality, has often been used in social psychology research where the social versus economic distinction is directly relevant (e.g. Asbrock et al., 2010). However, conservatism has also often been operationalized on a single dimension ranging from left-wing or liberal to right-wing or conservative (Jost et al., 2009). In this approach, the social and economic domains are rather considered as merely different areas in which conservative ideology can be expressed. Indeed, empirical studies have shown that different measures of ideology tapping into social and economic dimensions of conservatism are closely intertwined and stem from an overarching conservatism dimension (Azevedo et al., 2019). Specifically, Azevedo et al. (2019) postulated that in Western societies both dimensions of conservatism are structurally and functionally interdependent since they both capture acceptance of (existing) inequality, albeit in different domains (i.e. social and economic), and social ideas and policies have ramifications for the economic domain and vice versa. Recently, Hare (2022) demonstrated that the social and economic dimensions of ideology in the US have become increasingly intertwined over the past four decades and that opinions on policy controversies about economic, social and racial issues better fit a unidimensional ideological structure in the US. Similarly, Stoetzer and Zittlau (2020) found that in US presidential elections, voters' attitudes about social and economic policies have become almost non-separable and collapse into a single dimension. As such, one can expect similar effects of social and economic conservatism in domains where general conservatism, rather than specific social or economic aspects, is the underlying driver of the effect.

Ideology plays a key role in how people think about race-related issues and policies (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). In this vein, Poteat and Spanierman (2012) found that RWA and SDO are related to the endorsement of colour-blind attitudes. Indeed, we argue that both dimensions/expressions of conservatism align more with the colour-blindness perspective compared to the multicultural perspective in the US. The fundamental idea of ignoring differences and having uniform norms for all to abide by which underlies the colour-blindness perspective (Apfelbaum et al., 2012), matches well the central tenets of both social conservatism and RWA, which is to focus on conventionalism and (forcefully) protecting the existing unequal social order (Jost et al., 2003). Colour blindness validates the order, ideas and values of the current social system which privileges and benefits the White majority relative to racial minorities (Neville et al., 2013).

Similarly, when conservatism is applied in the economic domain, a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism aligns with the competition core of both economic conservatism and SDO that legitimizes economic and status inequality among groups. By not considering and ignoring the

systematic and structural disadvantages faced by minorities, colour blindness justifies and fosters racial inequality and sustains social hierarchy (Neville et al., 2013). If (historical) group differences are ignored and the same norms, that are set by White majority members, apply to everyone, a level playing field for competition is assumed in which potential preferential outcomes in favour of the dominant White majority can be justified as ‘fair and unbiased’.

An ideology—rationality model of colour blindness and multiculturalism

We argue that the relationship between conservatism and a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism is stronger under higher levels of rationality in the US. Human reasoning is typically conceptualized within a dual process framework (Stanovich et al., 2016), holding that there are two types of information processing: intuitive thinking (often referred as Type 1) and deliberative or rational thinking (often referred as Type 2). Intuitive thinking is an automatic process with low involvement of high-level control systems; it is fast and effortless. Rational thinking is a fine-grained elaborative process that is computationally expensive—it is slower and more effortful.

How can rationality impact one's endorsement for colour blindness or multiculturalism? People pursue coherent belief systems (Azevedo et al., 2019). Therefore, we argue that people tend to adopt a diversity orientation that maximizes the likelihood of reaching their ideological goals, that is, conservatism is related towards a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism (cf. Poteat & Spanierman, 2012). However, we further propose that this coherence between ideology and diversity orientations is especially pronounced among individuals who think rationally because this likely deepens their understanding of the differences between colour blindness and multiculturalism. Indeed, colour blindness and multiculturalism are complex and multi-layered ideologies (Mazzocco, 2017). We expect that intuitive thinking may be insufficient to fully capture the true meaning and potential societal consequences of both diversity perspectives; it might (erroneously) lead one to conclude that colour blindness and multiculturalism are different means that will result in a similar goal—that of erasing group-based discrimination (Plaut et al., 2009).

To fully grasp the different implications underlying the two diversity perspectives, more elaborate reasoning may be necessary. Rational decision-making entails making decisions that better enable individuals to achieve their personal life goals using the best possible means (Stanovich et al., 2016). Colour-blind policies are more likely to retain the current social system and the (unequal) societal status quo, while multicultural policies are more likely to generate social change that advances the concerns and status of minority groups in the US. Hence, for White majorities high in (social and economic) conservatism, whose goal it is to maintain the existing social order, dominance and competition, the ‘rational choice’ is to prefer colour blindness over multiculturalism. In contrast, for those low in (social and economic) conservatism, whose aim it is to change the existing social order, dominance and competition, the ‘rational choice’ is to prefer multiculturalism over colour blindness. Thus, we hypothesized a positive relationship between conservatism and a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism among white majorities, which is especially pronounced under high levels of rationality.

We tested our hypothesis in two studies. In each study, we measured RWA, SDO, social conservatism and economic conservatism. The goal of including different ways of measuring conservatism is to examine whether the moderating role of rationality on the association between conservative ideology and a preference for colour blindness versus multiculturalism emerges regardless of the domain in which it is expressed (i.e. social or economic) and generalizes across different measures of conservatism. We report all measures, manipulations and exclusions. Sample sizes were determined before any data analysis, and data were analysed after data collection was completed. Supplementary analyses (see below), data and R-code of the studies are available at <https://osf.io/xpytw/>.

STUDY 1

We tested our ideology-rationality model of colour blindness and multiculturalism among US White majority members. We expected to find a positive relationship between conservatism and a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism, and that this relationship is magnified (i.e. moderated) by higher levels of rational thinking. In line with the theorizing of Duckitt (2001), we measured two dimensions of conservatism; the traditionalism dimension, captured by social conservatism and RWA, and the inequality dimension, captured by economic conservatism and SDO. We expected similar ideology—rationality results among the different indicators of conservatism.

Method

Participants

We conducted a power analysis using a simulation for linear multiple regression using the *nsim* function in R (code available on OSF). We had a priori no clear expectation of what effect sizes we could reasonably expect. Therefore, we opted for a power analysis on an ‘expected’ $\beta = .20$ for the main effect of ideology, and $\beta = .15$ for the ideology \times CRT interaction. These values were based on the work of Gignac and Szodorai (2016), who demonstrated that in research on the relationship between individual differences, a standardized beta of 0.20 corresponds to a medium effect size, and a standardized beta of 0.15 to a small-to-medium effect size.¹ Thus, in the simulated model, the effects were set as follows: $\beta_{\text{ideology}} = .20$, $\beta_{\text{crt}} = .00$, $\beta_{\text{ideology} \times \text{crt}} = .15$; and the significance level at .05. The simulation revealed that 500 participants would result in >0.90 power to detect the interaction effect. We recruited 500 White US citizens on Prolific. Five hundred and fifteen participants started the study whereof 496 completed the full study ($M_{\text{age}} = 39.87$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.02$; 296 identified as male, 188 identified as female, 10 identified as non-binary and two participants preferred not to disclose their gender).

Procedure and materials

First, we asked participants to read two different opinions endorsed ostensibly by different policy makers holding divergent views on minority groups in society. The descriptions represented a colour blindness perspective (‘I believe that we should rise above racial, ethnic and cultural differences. I believe that ethnic and racial identities are characteristics that eventually don't matter. Hence, when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted, all people should be treated in an identical manner, without regard to race and ethnicity’) and a multicultural perspective (‘I believe that we should pay attention to racial, ethnic and cultural differences. I believe that, although no group should be central, ethnic and racial identities actually do matter. They should be recognized and openly discussed. Hence, when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted, we should take into account people's racial and ethnic background’), based on Apfelbaum et al. (2012) and Morris et al. (2015). The labels of colour blindness and multiculturalism were not used in the description. Participants were asked to indicate which policy they preferred on a scale from 1 (strongly prefer policy 1) to 7 (strongly prefer policy 2). Responses were recoded such that higher scores indicated a relative preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism.

Next, we measured ideology. Specifically, we administered RWA (11 items; Altemeyer, 1981), SDO (16 items; Pratto et al., 1994), the self-placement on a social conservatism continuum (1 item; ‘In general,

¹It can be noted that the guideline from Gignac and Szodorai (2016) pertains to effect sizes for main effects. The effect of particular interest here is an interaction effect, which is typically smaller than the main effects, but for which there are no such general interpretation guidelines.

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics for Study 1 and Study 2.

	Scale range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's α
Study 1				
RWA	1–5	3.10	0.83	.88
SDO	1–5	1.98	0.81	.94
Social conservatism	1–7	3.11	1.91	
Economic conservatism	1–7	3.39	1.95	
CRT	0%–100%	42.08	30.17	.74
Colour-blind. versus Multicul.	1–7	4.10	2.16	
Study 2				
RWA	1–5	2.82	0.78	.85
SDO	1–5	1.90	0.80	.94
Social conservatism	1–7	3.03	1.76	
Economic conservatism	1–7	3.52	1.81	
Cognitive ability	0%–100%	75.22	17.24	.93
Colour-blind. versus Multicul.	1–7	4.09	2.15	

how would you describe yourself with regard to your position on social issues?' 1 = very liberal, 7 = very conservative), and the self-placement on an economic conservatism continuum (1 item; 'In general, how would you describe yourself with regard to your position on economic issues?' 1 = very liberal, 7 = very conservative).

Finally, a reworded version of Frederick's (2005), and Toplak et al.'s (2014) cognitive reflection test (CRT) was assessed as an indicator of rationality. This combined scale consists of seven mathematical problems that require only basic mathematical abilities to solve, but that have intuitively compelling incorrect answers. An example item reads: 'The ages of Lance and John add up 28 in total. Lance is 20 years older than John. How many years old is John?' The intuitive response is incorrect, and more cognitive deliberation is needed to come up with the correct response. The test, therefore, captures individuals' disposition to engage in rational thinking. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Analyses

First, we calculated the correlations among all variables. To test the predicted ideology-rationality model for the different indicators of ideology, we ran four linear regression models in which colour blindness support over multiculturalism was regressed on the centred scores of the respective ideology indicator, the centred scores of the CRT, and their interaction term. Only participants who provided complete data were included in the analyses.

Results

Table 2 represents the correlation matrix. In line with recent work (e.g. Azevedo et al., 2019), the four indicators of conservatism (RWA, SDO, social conservatism, economic conservatism) were highly interrelated. Furthermore, higher scores on the indicators of conservatism were related to a relative preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism. The CRT was not significantly related to diversity policy preferences.

The ideology-rationality model is presented in Table 3. As expected, the positive associations between the ideological variables and a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism were moderated by

TABLE 2 Correlations among variables in Study 1 and Study 2.

Study 1					
RWA					
SDO	.55***				
Social conservatism	.50***	.48***			
Economic conservatism	.37***	.40***	.84***		
CRT	-.25***	-.11*	-.24***	-.15***	
Colour-blind. versus Multicul.	.27***	.10*	.14**	.15***	.03
Study 2					
RWA					
SDO	.57***				
Social conservatism	.58***	.58***			
Economic conservatism	.48***	.49***	.77***		
Cognitive ability	-.39***	-.36***	-.23***	-.11*	
Colour-blind. versus Multicul.	.34***	.21***	.32***	.31***	-.08

Note: Correlations in Study 2 are presented across conditions.

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

CRT scores. The interaction pattern was largely consistent across the four measures of ideology. More specifically, the positive relationship between conservatism and a relative preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism emerged only for individuals showing higher reflective thinking on the CRT. This interaction was significant for SDO, social conservatism, and economic conservatism. For RWA, the interaction was not statistically significant ($p = .057$), but a similar pattern with a more pronounced conservatism effect under high reflective thinking was observed. Thus, individuals were particularly likely to endorse colour blindness over multiculturalism if they were higher in ideological conservatism *and* rational thinking. The results are visualized in Figure 1. Including age and/or gender in the analyses did not meaningfully alter the results. The results of these additional analyses can be found on OSF.

STUDY 2

In Study 1, we operationalized rationality within a dual-process theory. We used the CRT; capturing the thinking style to override intuitively appealing responses in favour of more elaborated ones (Frederick, 2005). However, although the CRT assesses ‘thinking style’ rather than ‘thinking ability’ (Toplak et al., 2014), some have argued that performance on the test is aided to a certain degree by thinking ability (see e.g. Sobkow et al., 2020).

More recently, Stanovich et al. (2016) incorporated the dual-process theory of rationality into a tripartite model of cognition. This conceptual model explicitly differentiates between thinking style and thinking ability, and rationality results from an interplay between both cognitive systems. Thinking style refers to whether someone relies on automatic cognitive processing (i.e. intuitive thinking), or engages in reflective and higher order cognitive processing (i.e. rational thinking). Thinking ability refers to cognitive ability or ‘intelligence’, one’s maximal ability to conduct higher cognitive processes of reasoning. This tripartite model thus holds that rationality is the result of both: (1) allocating sufficient cognitive resources to the problem (i.e. engaging in rational rather intuitive thinking) and (2) having sufficient cognitive capabilities to process the information and solve the problem (i.e. cognitive ability).

In Study 2, we aimed to replicate the ideology-rationality model, building on this more recent account of rationality. Specifically, we differentiated more clearly between thinking ability and thinking style, by measuring individual differences in ability and experimentally manipulating style. A

TABLE 3 Study 1: Four models predicting preference for colour blindness relative to multiculturalism as a function of specific ideology, CRT and their interaction.

Preference for colour blindness versus multiculturalism									
	Model 1: IV: RWA		Model 2: IV: SDO		Model 3: IV: SOC. CON.		Model 4: IV: ECO. CON.		
	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Ideology	.29 [.20, .38]	<.001	.11 [.02, .20]	.013	.20 [.11, .29]	<.001	.18 [.09, .27]	<.001	
CRT	.10 [.02, .19]	.019	.04 [-.05, .13]	.378	.07 [-.02, .16]	.105	.05 [-.04, .13]	.290	
Ideology*CRT	.08 [-.00, .17]	.057	.14 [.05, .23]	.002	.19 [.10, .28]	<.001	.16 [.07, .25]	<.001	
Slopes									
-1 SD CRT	.21 [.08, .34]	.001	-.03 [-.15, .09]	.621	.01 [-.10, .12]	.854	.03 [-.09, .14]	.653	
+1 SD CRT	.37 [.25, .48]	<.001	.25 [.12, .38]	<.001	.38 [.24, .52]	<.001	.33 [.20, .46]	<.001	

Note: Coefficients are standardized. Values between brackets represent 95% confidence intervals. 'Ideology' refers to the specific ideology considered as independent variable (IV) in each model (Model 1: RWA, Model 2: SDO, Model 3: Social conservatism, Model 4: Economic conservatism).

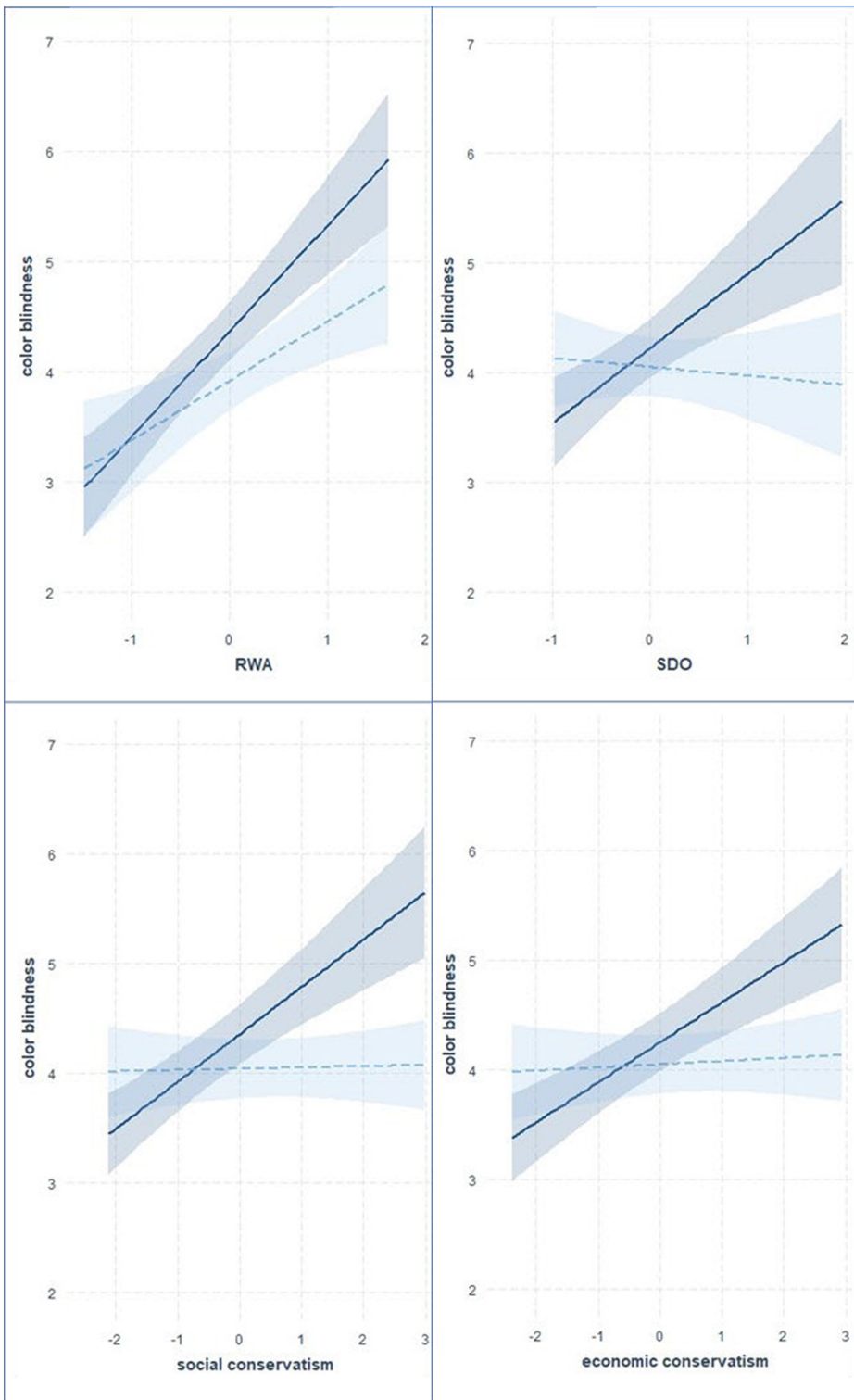


FIGURE 1 The relationship between ideology and attitudes towards colour blindness relative to multiculturalism, depending on CRT scores. The full line represents mean +1 *SD* on the CRT and the shade represents its 95% confidence interval, the dotted line represents mean -1 *SD* on the CRT and the shade represents its 95% confidence interval.

reflective thinking style was instilled in half of the participants by asking them to reflect on the diversity policies and to write down their reasoning (cf. Isler et al., 2020). Hence, we tested a more fine-grained prediction in Study 2, that when it comes to supporting particular diversity orientations, individuals (1) endorse a perspective that is in line with their core ideological attitudes and (2) that they do so especially when they engage in elaborative reasoning on the diversity perspective *and* have more cognitive capabilities to process relevant information adequately. Thus, we hypothesized that a preference for colour blindness relative to multiculturalism was predicted by a three-way interaction between conservatism, thinking style, and thinking ability. Specifically, we expected that the positive relationship between (social and economic) conservatism and a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism is magnified when individuals engage in reflective thinking and have relatively higher levels of cognitive ability.

Method

Participants

We conducted a power analysis using a simulation for linear multiple regression using the *nsim* function in R (code available on OSF). Given that the means of the main effect of ideology, and the interaction effect in Study 1 were close to the values used for the theoretical estimates used in Study 1 (i.e. 0.20 and 0.15, respectively), we also used these for the power analysis in Study 2. The simulated model then reads as follows: $\beta_{\text{ideology}} = .20$, $\beta_{\text{condition}} = .00$, $\beta_{\text{cognitive ability}} = .00$, $\beta_{\text{ideology} \times \text{condition}} = .00$, $\beta_{\text{ideology} \times \text{cognitive ability}} = .00$, $\beta_{\text{condition} \times \text{cognitive ability}} = .00$, $\beta_{\text{ideology} \times \text{condition} \times \text{cognitive ability}} = .15$ and the significance level at 0.05. The simulation revealed that 500 participants would result in >0.85 power to detect the three-way interaction effect. Five hundred White US citizens were recruited on Prolific. Three participants were omitted from the sample because they did not follow the instructions, leading to a final sample size of 497 ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.71$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.80$, 245 identified as male, 245 identified as female, six identified as non-binary and one participant preferred not to disclose their gender).

Procedure and materials

First, participants completed the same measures of RWA, SDO, social conservatism and economic conservatism as in Study 1.

Next, participants were presented with the same description of colour blindness and multiculturalism as in Study 1. We experimentally induced thinking style by assigning participants randomly to a *no reflection* or a *reflection* condition. In the no-reflection condition, identical to Study 1, participants were merely asked to indicate which policy they preferred. In the reflection condition, participants were presented with a textbox and instructed as follows: 'Please reflect on both policies. What do you think about these policies? Write down your thoughts' (for a similar procedure of inducing reflective thinking in the context of mathematical problems, see Isler et al., 2020). Subsequently, they were asked to indicate their preference for colour blindness relative to multiculturalism.²

Finally, participants completed the Ammons Quick Test (Ammons & Ammons, 1962). In this cognitive ability test, participants are presented with four different pictures and a list of 50 words of varying difficulty in their meaning (e.g. edible, bellicose). Participants are asked to assign each word to the picture that best represents its meaning. The percentage of correct answers is used as an index for cognitive

²Three participants were removed from the analyses because their written answers were unrelated to the described policies. As a proxy to gauge the extent of participants' elaboration; participants in the no reflection condition spent on average 49 seconds between the start of the presentation of the policies and indicating their preference, whereas participants in the reflection condition spent on average 198 seconds to decide which policy they preferred, $F(1, 495) = 255.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$.

ability. For another recent use, see De Keersmaecker et al. (2021). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Analyses

First, we calculated the correlations among all variables across both conditions. Next, we tested the ideology-rationality model for the different indicators of conservative ideology. Since rationality was conceptualized as the interplay between thinking style and thinking ability, we ran four linear regression models in which support for colour blindness over multiculturalism was regressed on the centred scores of the ideology indicator, condition ($-1 =$ no reflection; $1 =$ reflection), centred scores of cognitive ability, as well as their two-way interactions, and the three-way interactions, respectively. Only participants who provided complete data were included in the analyses.

Results

Correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2. As in Study 1, the four indicators of conservatism (RWA, SDO, social conservatism, economic conservatism) were highly interrelated and were associated with a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism. The relationship between cognitive ability and preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism was negative, but not significant ($p = .074$).

The results of ideology-rationality model are depicted in Table 4. Higher levels on the four measures of conservatism were associated with a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism, but critically, these relationships were moderated by rationality. The interaction pattern was largely consistent among the four ideological measures. The relationship between ideology and a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism was most pronounced under high levels of rationality, that is, for individuals who had higher cognitive abilities *and* engaged in reflective thinking (see Table 4). More specifically, the relationship between conservatism and a relative preference for colour blindness (main effect of ideology) was more pronounced among individuals with relatively higher levels of cognitive ability (two-way interaction between ideology and cognitive ability), and this pattern was strengthened when individuals were prompted to engage in reflective thinking (three-way interaction between ideology, cognitive ability and reflective thinking). This pattern was consistent and statistically significant for all indicators of ideology, except for economic conservatism where the interaction pattern was similar but not statistically significant ($p = .099$). Hence, using an experimental approach, Study 2 replicates Study 1 showing that the relationship between conservatism and a preference for colour blindness versus multiculturalism is especially pronounced among rational individuals. The results are visualized in Figure 2. Including age and gender in the analyses did not meaningfully alter the results. The results of these additional analyses can be found on OSF.

DISCUSSION

We found that US white majorities' support for colour blindness versus multiculturalism is a result of the interplay between their conservative ideological orientations and levels of rationality. Higher levels of conservatism were related to a relative preference for colour blindness, whereas lower levels of conservatism were related to a relative preference for multiculturalism. Critically, this pattern manifested mainly among relatively more rational individuals. This indicates that people support diversity positions and policies that align with their core ideological values and that rationality increases the coherence of one's belief system. The CRT (Study 1) and cognitive ability (Study 2) were not significantly related to a preference for colour blindness over multiculturalism.

TABLE 4 Study 2: Four models predicting preference for colour blindness relative to multiculturalism as a function of specific ideology, cognitive ability, condition, its two-way interactions and its three-way interaction.

Preference for colour blindness versus multiculturalism												
	Model 1: IV: RWA			Model 2: IV: SDO			Model 3: IV: SOC. CON.			Model 4: IV: ECO. CON.		
	β	<i>p</i>	CI	β	<i>p</i>	CI	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	CI	β	<i>p</i>	CI
Ideology	.36 [.27, .45]	<.001		.22 [.12, .31]	<.001		.31 [.23, .40]	<.001		.30 [.22, .39]	<.001	
Cogn. Ab.	.00 [-.10, .10]	.985		-.11 [-.21, -.00]	.048		-.07 [-.16, .02]	.118		-.06 [-.15, .02]	.152	
Condition	-.00 [-.09, .09]	.984		-.02 [-.11, .07]	.648		-.02 [-.10, .07]	.657		-.04 [-.13, .04]	.339	
Ideology*Cogn. Ab.	.14 [.05, .23]	.002		.18 [.08, .28]	<.001		.15 [.06, .24]	.001		.08 [-.01, .16]	.082	
Ideology*Condition	.08 [-.01, .17]	.081		-.01 [-.11, .08]	.772		.02 [-.07, .10]	.685		.06 [-.03, .14]	.178	
Cogn. Ab.*Condition	-.05 [-.15, .05]	.301		-.13 [-.23, -.02]	.018		-.09 [-.18, -.00]	.045		-.05 [-.14, .03]	.217	
Ideology*Cogn. Ab.*Condition	.10 [.01, .20]	.038		.13 [.03, .23]	.015		.13 [.04, .22]	.005		.07 [-.01, .16]	.099	
Slopes: no reflection												
-1 SD Cogn. Ab.	.24 [.06, .42]	.010		.18 [.01, .35]	.041		.28 [.12, .43]	.001		.24 [.07, .41]	.005	
+1 SD Cogn. Ab.	.33 [.16, .49]	<.001		.28 [.10, .46]	.003		.31 [.15, .48]	<.001		.25 [.09, .41]	.002	
Slopes: Reflection												
-1 SD Cogn. Ab.	.21 [.03, .39]	.023		-.06 [-.23, .11]	.492		.07 [-.11, .26]	.432		.21 [.03, .39]	.021	
+1 SD Cogn. Ab.	.67 [.49, .86]	<.001		.47 [.29, .64]	<.001		.59 [.41, .76]	<.001		.51 [.34, .68]	<.001	

Note: Coefficients are standardized. Values between brackets represent 95% confidence intervals. 'Ideology' refers to the specific ideology considered as independent variable (IV) in each model (Model 1: RWA, Model 2: SDO, Model 3: Social conservatism, Model 4: Economic conservatism).

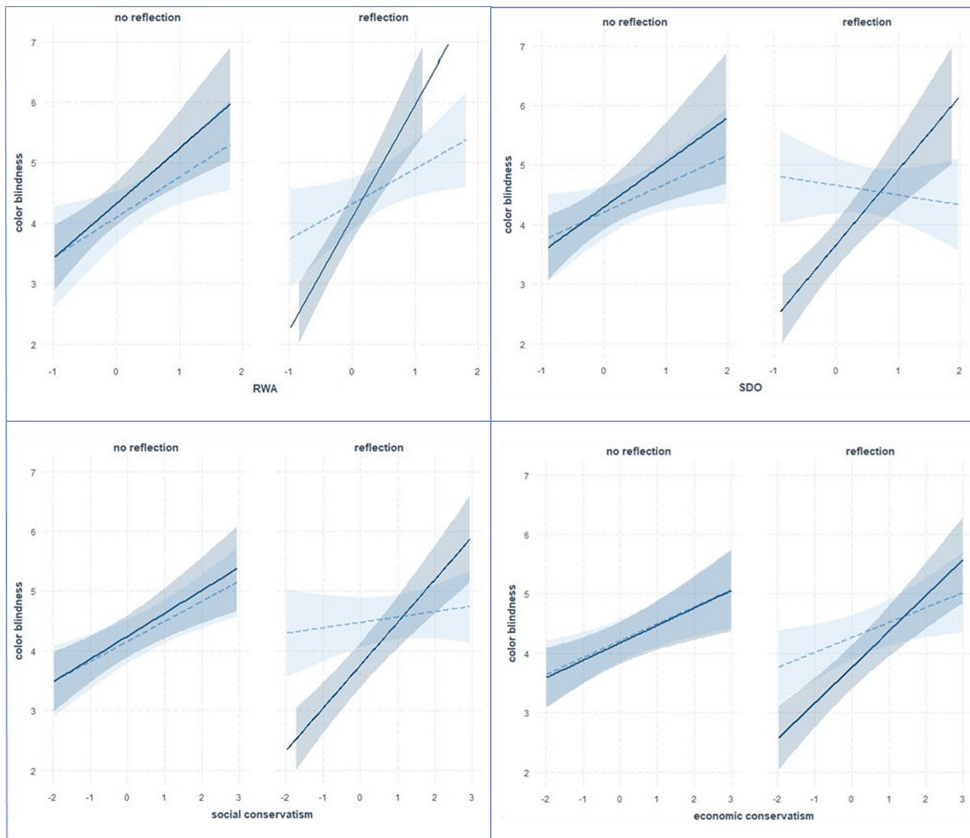


FIGURE 2 The relationship between ideology and attitudes towards colour blindness relative multiculturalism, depending on the interplay of reflective thinking and cognitive ability. The full line represents mean +1 *SD* on the cognitive ability measure and the shade represents its 95% confidence interval, the dotted line represents mean -1 *SD* on the cognitive ability measure and the shade represents its 95% confidence interval. For each ideological measure, the left panel represents scores in the no reflection condition and the right panel represents scores in the reflection condition.

Results showed that participants who were most likely to be able to rationally analyse and understand the policies displayed attitudes that aligned more strongly with their core ideological beliefs. Among similar lines, Kahan et al. (2012) found a polarizing role of science literacy in the relationship between cultural worldviews and perceptions of climate change risk. The present results indicate that polarized attitudes about policies in the left-wing or right-wing direction should not be perceived as irrational, inconsiderate opinions or stemming from lazy cognition. Given one's ideological core values, the endorsement of relatively more outspoken or 'extreme' attitudes about certain policies can originate from rational means to attain one's ideological goals. Consequently, appeals to encourage elaboration in order to change minds and thereby garner support for a particular opposing policy may be ineffective. Instead, they may even further entrench people in their ideology-congruent convictions about which policy is preferable.

In Study 2, we adopted a novel perspective and methodological approach to cognition by operationalizing rationality as the interplay between thinking ability and thinking style (based on Stanovich et al., 2016), and experimentally manipulating thinking style (based on Isler et al., 2020). The observation that asking people to actively reflect on policies causes a stronger alignment between one's ideology and policy preferences, but only among those with relatively more cognitive abilities, signifies the theoretical and methodological importance to distinguish between cognitive styles and cognitive abilities, and consider their potential interplay. This interplay between thinking ability and thinking style has

the potential to advance understanding of judgement and decision making across many domains, but is largely neglected in the empirical literature.

Our results also highlight the importance of situational and contextual factors in politics. There are times in which people engage in or are prompted to engage in more elaborative reasoning about diversity policies, for example, in the run-up to elections or when incidents take place that get a lot of (social) media attention. In situations such as these, the opinions of individuals with left versus right-leaning political orientations might diverge as a consequence of elaboration. Moreover, this process is likely to be further reinforced since people often discuss political issues in echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2021), and the discussion of thoughts and opinions among like-minded people leads to more extreme opinions (Schkade et al., 2010).

Importantly, Knowles et al. (2009) showed that the term 'colour blindness' might mean something different depending on one's political ideology and perceptions of intergroup threat. Specifically, high levels of threat prompt White majorities high in SDO to define the concept of colour blindness relatively more in terms of a procedural justice than a distributive justice principle. For this reason, we avoided the ideology-loaded terms of colour blindness and multiculturalism in our experiments. Since no single standard measurement method exists to assess attitudes towards colour blindness and multiculturalism (Mazzocco, 2017), and different investigations use slightly different conceptualizations of colour blindness and multiculturalism (Plaut et al., 2018), we operationalized colour blindness and multiculturalism based on their most central defining characteristic, i.e. beliefs about whether racial characteristics matter, and should be considered or not (see e.g. Apfelbaum et al., 2012). However, we wish to point out that other scholars have developed multi-faceted theoretical models of colour blindness. For example, Mazzocco (2017) identified different variations of colour blindness, based upon people's degree of egalitarianism and awareness of racial inequality. Future research with a more direct focus on colour blindness might examine differences in the endorsement of these subtypes of colour blindness.

This research can be of applied relevance to policy makers and practitioners. Common approaches to changing minds entail encouraging elaboration that seeks to garner support for a particular opposing policy view. The present results suggest that such practices may be ineffective and may actually further entrench people in their ideology-congruent convictions. In contrast, reframing policies so that they align more with the ideology of those that one wishes to persuade might be a more promising avenue. For example, focusing on the value of multiculturalism as a tool for the cultural preservation of both minority *and* majority culture might be appealing to relatively more conservative individuals.

Limitations

In the present studies, we relied on Azevedo et al.'s (2019) work that people generally pursue a coherent belief system, and built on the assumption that people with higher levels of rationality have the *ability* to develop a more coherent belief system. That is, we considered rationality as a source of participants' awareness of the potential societal implications of the two diversity beliefs. However, a limitation is that this assumption was not explicitly tested. An alternative account might be that people with higher levels of rationality also have a stronger *motivation* to develop coherent belief systems. Although this possibility does not detract from the present findings, investigating whether such motivation plays a role may provide further insights into the underlying mechanisms.

Moreover, we focused on White majority members in the US in the present investigation, a most relevant target group and context given its racial disparities and growing diversity. Therefore, we pre-screened participants based on nationality (US citizens) and ethnicity (White). However, since exposure and experiences with different cultures impact intergroup orientations (Tadmor et al., 2012), a limitation of our studies is that we did not take participants' (historical) immigration background into account.

The obtained results were robust, with comparable effects across two different studies, four different operationalizations of conservative ideology, and two different operationalizations of rationality. Nevertheless, a limitation is that our model was only tested in one country, and we explicitly caution

against overgeneralizing the results across contexts and time. Relationships between ideological orientations and intergroup attitudes are context-dependent (Roets et al., 2015), and changes in societal awareness about colour blindness and multiculturalism might impact support for these perspectives. Indeed, political and racial beliefs are not fixed, and partly shaped by exposure to media coverage of public affairs and the discourse of political elites (Zaller, 1992).

CONCLUSION

Rationality polarizes diversity attitudes along ideological lines among White Americans. That is, rationality guides conservative White majorities towards a preference for colour blindness, and liberal White majorities towards a preference for multiculturalism, as either policy presents a rational means to achieve their differently valued ideals. Insight into this dynamic may help us to better understand and acknowledge why people hold different viewpoints. Such acknowledgement rather than a normative approach, may be a necessary step to counter polarization on social issues. Ironically, rational appeals may thus further divide rather than unify public opinion on key social issues.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jonas De keersmaecker: Conceptualization; formal analysis; methodology; writing – original draft. **Katharina Schmid:** Funding acquisition; methodology; writing – review and editing. **Arne Roets:** Methodology; writing – review and editing. **Namrata Goyal:** Methodology; writing – review and editing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data and R-code of the studies are available at <https://osf.io/xpytw>.

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