

# Conservatives Are More Reluctant to Give and Receive Apologies Than Liberals

Matthew J. Hornsey<sup>1</sup>, Karina Schumann<sup>2</sup>, Paul G. Bain<sup>3</sup>, Sheyla Blumen<sup>4</sup>,  
Sylvia X. Chen<sup>5</sup>, Ángel Gómez<sup>6</sup>, Roberto González<sup>7</sup>, Yanjun Guan<sup>8</sup>,  
Emiko Kashima<sup>9</sup>, Nadezhda Lebedeva<sup>10</sup>, and Michael J. A. Wohl<sup>11</sup>

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## Abstract

This article examines the proposition that conservatives will be less willing than liberals to apologize and less likely to forgive after receiving an apology. In Study 1, we found evidence for both relationships in a nine-nation survey. In Study 2, participants wrote an open-ended response to a victim of a hypothetical transgression they had committed. More conservative participants were less likely to include apologetic elements in their response. We also tested two underlying mechanisms for the associations: social dominance orientation (SDO) and entity beliefs about human nature. SDO emerged as a stronger and more consistent mediator than entity beliefs. Apologies are theorized to be a rhetorical vehicle for removing power inequities in relationships post-transgression. Consistent with this theorizing, it was those who are relatively high in commitment to equality (i.e., those high in liberal ideology and low in SDO) who are most likely to provide and reward apologies.

## Keywords

apology, political ideology, conservatism, reconciliation, social dominance orientation

During the 2016 race for Presidency of the United States, the Democrat nominee (Hillary Clinton) apologized 5 times in 8 months: for using her private e-mail server while secretary of state (September 2015), for praising Nancy Reagan's record on promoting HIV awareness (March 2016), for supporting her husband's 1994 crime bill (April 2016), for using the phrase "off the reservation" (April 2016), and for saying that she'd put the coal industry "out of business" (May 2016). This contrasts with the Republican nominee who, when pressed on when he had last apologized, said "It was too many years ago to remember. I have one of the great memories of all time, but it was too long ago" (Donald Trump; August 2015).

Other Republicans elevated the reluctance to be apologetic to the status of a moral virtue or rallying cry. Henry Kissinger—Secretary of State for successive Republican administrations—once said, "You are you and that is the beginning and the end—no apologies, no regrets." In a similar vein, Ronald Reagan wrote, "I hope that when you're my age, you'll be able to say as I have been able to say: We lived in freedom, we lived lives that were a statement, not an apology." The book Mitt Romney released in the lead-up to the 2012 election was titled *No Apology*.

We presented these examples merely to lend a human face to a broader research question: Do different political ideologies predict willingness to deliver apologies (and willingness to accept apologies when they are received)? The question is consequential because the presence of an apology is profoundly

important for the forgiveness process. In a meta-analysis of 175 studies on interpersonal forgiveness (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010), people were much more likely to forgive when the transgressor had apologized. Moreover, the effect size ( $r = .40$ ) was comparable with other variables that are highly proximal to forgiveness, such as harm severity ( $r = -.26$ ), trait forgiveness ( $r = .34$ ), and whether the transgression was intentional ( $r = .50$ ). In short, apologies matter: They help heal relationships that have been threatened by a breach of trust. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that proclivity to apologize—an individual difference variable—is positively associated with a

<sup>1</sup> University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

<sup>2</sup> University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

<sup>3</sup> Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

<sup>4</sup> Pontificia Universidad Católica Del Perú, Lima, Perú

<sup>5</sup> The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>6</sup> Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid, Spain

<sup>7</sup> Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile

<sup>8</sup> Durham University, Durham, UK

<sup>9</sup> LaTrobe University, Melbourne, Australia

<sup>10</sup> National Research University, Moscow, Russia

<sup>11</sup> Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

## Corresponding Author:

Matthew J. Hornsey, University of Queensland, Campbell Rd, UQ, St Lucia, Queensland 4072, Australia.

Email: m.hornsey@uq.edu.au

range of well-being indices (Howell, Dopko, Turowski, & Buro, 2011). Neither is it surprising that victims have strong emotional needs to receive apologies (Hornsey, Okimoto, & Wenzel, in press; Leunissen, de Cremer, Folmer, & van Dijke, 2013).

Interestingly, research on proclivity to apologize has lagged well behind research on the effects of apologies. Existing research has focused on gender (Schumann & Ross, 2010) and the personality signatures of those with a proclivity to apologize (Dunlop, Lee, Ashton, Butcher, & Dykstra, 2015; Howell et al., 2011; Howell, Turowski, & Buro, 2012). However, there is no existing theorizing that has drawn a psychologically meaningful line between people's political orientations and their willingness to apologize in interpersonal contexts.

In this article, we make a case that conservatives will be more reluctant to give apologies than liberals and less likely to reward apologies offered by others with forgiveness. We examine two variables that may help understand the links between political conservatism and willingness to give and receive apologies: implicit theories about the malleability of human nature (*entity beliefs*; e.g., Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995) and ideological beliefs about power differentials (*social dominance orientation* [SDO]; e.g., Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). We review the case for these pathways below.

### Entity Beliefs

An apology, in essence, is a statement of transformation. Implicit in any apology—particularly for an intentional transgression—is the notion that the transgressor has changed: that the person who committed the transgressions has reflected on their nature, seen fault in it, and sought to repair it (Goffman, 1971). If one does not believe that personalities change—that is, if people have entity theories of human nature—then apologizing (or accepting another's apology) might seem empty or pointless. Consistent with this notion, Howell, Dopko, Turowski, and Buro (2011) found a modest but significant positive correlation between proclivity to apologize and the belief that people are amenable to change, while Schumann and Dweck (2014) found that people with entity theories of personality are less willing to accept responsibility for their transgressions. There is also evidence that people who hold entity theories about groups are less trusting following an interpersonal apology (Haselhuhn, Schweitzer, & Wood, 2010) and less forgiving in the face of intergroup apologies (Wohl et al., 2015). Finally, people who hold relatively conservative values are more likely to hold entity beliefs about human nature (Kahn et al., 2016). This suggests a mediated model, such that conservatives have more entity beliefs about human nature, and through this are less willing to apologize. People holding entity beliefs about human nature might also be less willing to forgive in the face of an apology because the implicit promise of change would seem unconvincing (see Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006, for a discussion of the importance of the “promise to change” aspect of an apology).

### SDO

Another relevant variable is people's ideological beliefs about power hierarchies and equality. According to exchange theory, transgressions lead to disequilibrium in the relationship, with predictable downstream consequences in terms of negative affect. But the experience of remorse indicates that the offender is suffering pain, and as such apologies restore equity in the relationship, leading to a reduced need for additional punishment (Dirks, Lewicki, & Zaheer, 2009; Gold & Weiner, 2000; Kramer & Lewicki, 2010; O'Malley & Greenberg, 1983). Reinforcing the emphasis on power differences, the needs-based model of reconciliation argues that transgressors and victims have different goals that they seek to achieve through the reconciliation process (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Shnabel, Nadler, Canetti-Nisim, & Ullrich, 2008). Transgressors' primary motivation is to restore their moral image in the eyes of others. For victims, however, the primary goal is to restore what has been taken away from them in terms of power, control, honor, and status. An apology is often cited in this literature as a prototypical example of a win-win event: It helps restore transgressor's moral reputation and at the same time restores victims' power (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015).

Central to both perspectives is the notion that apologies serve the function of reducing the power gulf between victims and transgressors. To the extent that people intuitively share this perspective, one might reasonably expect that their willingness to apologize is associated with broader ideologies about the desirability of equality. One construct relevant to our analysis is SDO (Pratto et al., 1994), which assesses people's general orientation to the existence of societal hierarchies. People low in SDO see equality as a virtuous goal; to the extent that apologies are seen as equity-promoting rhetorical tools, low-SDO people might be relatively congenial to the notion of giving (and receiving) apologies. In contrast, people high in SDO tend to see power differences as normal, natural, and unproblematic; as such, they may see less of a need to apologize, and may be less likely to reward others' apologies with forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> Given that there is a robust positive association between political conservatism and SDO (e.g., Ho et al., 2015), it again suggests an indirect path, such that conservatism is associated with negative attitudes toward apologies, mediated through SDO.

### Study 1

We conducted a survey study across nine nations to provide the first test of whether people's political ideologies are associated with their attitudes toward the giving (and receiving) of apologies. We predicted that participants identifying themselves as more conservative would be less willing to apologize. We also predicted that the link between political ideology and proclivity to apologize would be mediated through SDO and/or entity beliefs about human nature.

In addition to measuring proclivity to apologize as a criterion variable, we measured the extent to which participants

reported a greater proclivity to forgive upon receiving an apology. In line with the meta-analysis reported earlier (Fehr et al., 2010), we expected that forgiveness would be higher in the event of an apology. However, we predicted that this “apology bonus” would be greater among liberals than conservatives, an association that would be mediated through SDO and/or entity beliefs.

The decision to sample participants from nine nations reflects a determination to draw conclusions that translate beyond the Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) samples that are already overrepresented in the literature (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Our goal was not to conduct a formal cross-cultural analysis, and we make no a priori predictions about whether results might be moderated by culture. However, for the sake of thoroughness, we also examined how the key variables vary as a function of the national sample.

## Method

### Participants and Sampling

Participants were community members recruited through online data collection companies ( $N = 2,130$ ,  $ns$ , for each nation ranged from 211 to 287). Sample size was determined so that we would have sufficient power to test our model not just at the overall level but also within each nation.

Participants (51.2% female,  $M_{age} = 39.67$  years, standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = 13.75) responded to an invitation to take part in a survey titled “Personal ideals and views.” We sampled from developed and developing countries spanning five continents: Australia, Chile, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Peru, Russia, and the United States. Questionnaires were translated into the native language of non-English-speaking samples using translation/back-translation procedures.

### Measures

*Entity beliefs* were measured using a 3-item scale devised by Chiu, Hong, and Dweck (1997). An example item is “The kind of person someone is, is something very basic about them and it can’t be changed very much” (1 = *very strongly disagree*, 6 = *very strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .77$ ).

*SDO* was measured using a 4-item scale validated across an international sample (Pratto et al., 2013). Participants rated their support for four statements, including “Group equality should be our ideal” (reversed) and “Superior groups should dominate inferior groups” (1 = *extremely oppose*, 10 = *extremely favor*;  $\alpha = .53$ ).<sup>2</sup>

*Reluctance to apologize* was measured using 6 items from the proclivity to apologize measure (Howell et al., 2011). Example items include “If I think no-one will know what I have done, I am likely not to apologize” and “I don’t apologize very often because I don’t like to admit that I’m wrong” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .87$ ).

To measure the *apology–forgiveness bonus*, participants were presented with three scenarios in which they had been

transgressed against. In each case, participants were asked “Do you think he or she should be forgiven?” which they answered using a sliding scale from 0 (*never, regardless of the circumstances*) to 100 (*all the time, regardless of the circumstances*). Within each scenario, the question was posed twice: First in the event that the transgressor does not apologize and then again on the understanding that the person “apologizes and seems genuinely sorry.” The scenarios included a workplace transgression (“A work colleague loses their temper at you in front of other work colleagues”), a social transgression (“You find out that an acquaintance has been criticizing you behind your back”), and a romantic transgression (“Your partner cheats on you by sleeping with someone else”). Levels of forgiveness measured before ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and after ( $\alpha = .75$ ) being told that the transgressor had apologized were highly correlated across the three scenarios and so were combined into separate scales of pre- and postapology forgiveness. Apology bonus was calculated by subtracting the mean pre-apology forgiveness score from the mean postapology forgiveness score, such that higher scores reflected a greater forgiveness bonus for receiving an apology.

*Political ideology* was measured by asking participants where they would place themselves on a scale of “left” versus “right” (1 = *left*, 9 = *right*) and “liberal” versus “conservative” (1 = *very liberal*, 9 = *very conservative*). The 2 items were positively correlated ( $r = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ) so were combined into a single scale of political conservatism.<sup>3</sup>

*Covariates.* Five control variables were measured at the end: *age*, *sex* (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*), *income* (1 = *much lower than the average national income*, 5 = *much higher than the average national income*), *education* (1 = *did not finish high score*; 8 = *professional degree*), and *religiosity* (1 = *not at all religious*, 7 = *extremely religious*).

## Results and Discussion

Means, *SDs*, and correlations among variables are presented in Table 1. The mean for political ideology approximated the midpoint of the scale, indicating that the sample was not skewed politically (this was true within countries as well, with the mean political ideology scores ranging from 4.54 to 5.75). As expected, postapology forgiveness levels ( $M = 57.20$ ,  $SD = 24.00$ ) were about one *SD* higher than pre-apology forgiveness levels ( $M = 35.01$ ,  $SD = 25.62$ ), an effect that was highly significant,  $F(1, 2086) = 8,893.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_p = .81$ .

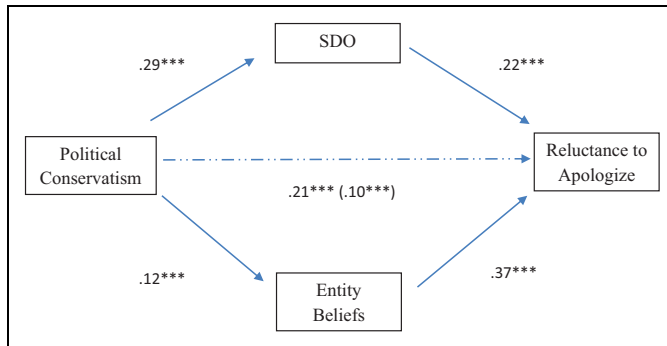
Correlations between the key variables were in line with predictions. Most importantly, the more conservative participants reported themselves to be, the more they expressed reluctance to apologize, and the less they reported an apology bonus in terms of forgiveness.

As seen in Table 1, the proposed mediators (*SDO* and *entity beliefs*) were both associated with political conservatism, reluctance to apologize, and apology bonus. We conducted mediation analysis on the overall sample to test whether the relationship between political conservatism and reluctance to apologize occurred via *SDO* and *entity beliefs*. Mediation

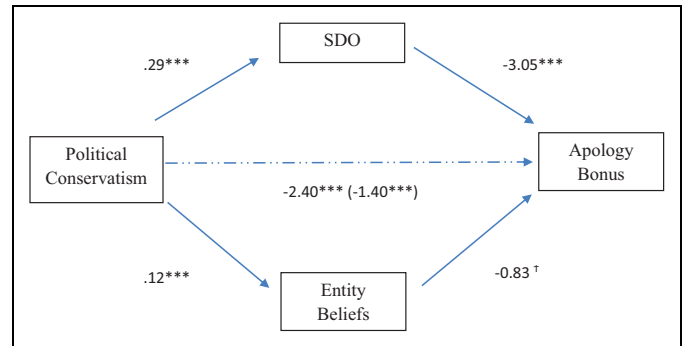
**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations (SDs), and Intercorrelations Among Variables.

Variable (and Range)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5
Political conservatism (1 to 9)	5.09	(1.48)	.27***	.18***	.24***	-.17***
Social dominance orientation (1 to 10)	4.03	(1.58)		.21***	.35***	-.26**
Entity beliefs (1 to 6)	3.82	(0.99)			.35***	-.10***
Reluctance to apologize (1 to 7)	3.30	(1.33)				-.28***
Apology bonus (-100 to 100)	22.20	(21.61)				

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



**Figure 1.** Relationship between political conservatism and reluctance to apologize, mediated through social dominance orientation (SDO) and entity beliefs. All numbers are unstandardized coefficients. The number in parentheses is the direct effect after controlling for SDO and entity beliefs. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



**Figure 2.** Relationship between political conservatism and apology bonus, mediated through social dominance orientation (SDO) and entity beliefs. All numbers are unstandardized coefficients. The number in parentheses is the direct effect after controlling for SDO and entity beliefs. \*\*\* $p < .001$ . † $p < .10$ .

analysis was conducted using Hayes's (2012) process computational model (Model 4 testing two mediators in parallel) with 10,000 bootstrapped samples and 95% confidence intervals (CIs).

Figure 1 shows the unstandardized coefficients for each path. The indirect effects of political conservatism on reluctance to apologize through SDO ( $ab = 0.06$ , standard error [ $SE$ ] = .07, 95% CI [0.0499, 0.0775]) and entity beliefs ( $ab = 0.04$ ,  $SE = .07$ , 95% CI [0.0310, 0.0595]) were both significant. In sum, the more conservative participants were, the more they endorsed both SDO and entity beliefs, which then flowed through to a reluctance to apologize. It should be noted that the relationship between political conservatism and reluctance to apologize remained significant after including the mediators, suggesting partial mediation ( $b = 0.10$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t = 5.53$ , 95% CI [0.0665, 0.1397]).

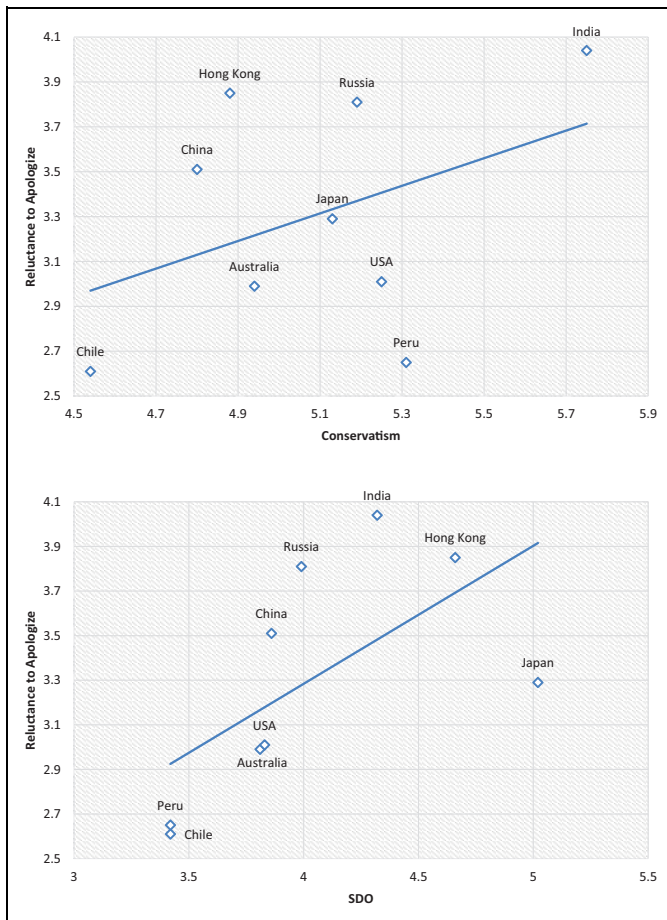
We repeated the analyses controlling for age, sex, income, education, and religiosity. When all predictors were included in the model, there was evidence that men and younger participants were relatively anti-apology ( $ps < .001$ ). Of more relevance to our research question, indirect effects of political conservatism on reluctance to apologize through SDO ( $ab = 0.06$ ,  $SE = .01$ , 95% CI [0.0482, 0.0770]) and entity beliefs ( $ab = 0.03$ ,  $SE = .01$ , 95% CI [0.0222, 0.0492]) remained significant, and the relationship between political conservatism and reluctance to apologize remained significant even after including the mediators and covariates ( $b = 0.09$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t = 4.87$ , 95% CI [0.0560, 0.1316]).

A second set of analyses was conducted with apology bonus as the criterion variable (see Figure 2). The indirect link between political conservatism and apology bonus via SDO was significant ( $ab = -0.88$ ,  $SE = .16$ , 95% CI [-1.1286, -0.6739]), but this time the parallel link via entity beliefs was not significant ( $ab = -0.10$ ,  $SE = .06$ , 95% CI [-0.2343, 0.0162]). In sum, the more conservative participants were, the more they were likely to endorse SDO beliefs, which was in turn associated with less of an apology bonus on forgiveness. Again, the relationship between political conservatism and apology bonus remained significant after including the mediators, suggesting partial mediation ( $b = -1.40$ ,  $SE = .33$ ,  $t = -4.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-2.0458, -0.7585]).

Inclusion of the covariates did not change the significant indirect link between political conservatism and apology bonus via SDO ( $ab = -0.90$ ,  $SE = .12$ , 95% CI [-1.1508, -0.6858]) or the nonsignificant link via entity beliefs ( $ab = -0.06$ ,  $SE = .05$ , 95% CI [-0.1706, 0.0391]). Even after including covariates and mediators, the direct effect of political ideology on apology bonus remained significant ( $b = -1.00$ ,  $SE = .34$ ,  $t = -2.90$ ,  $p = .004$ , 95% CI [-1.6683, -0.3222]).<sup>4</sup>

### Cross-national Analyses

Nation-level data are summarized in Figures 3 and 4. In line with expectations, countries that reported the highest levels of SDO and conservatism also tended to report the greatest reluctance to apologize and the lowest apology bonuses. As a

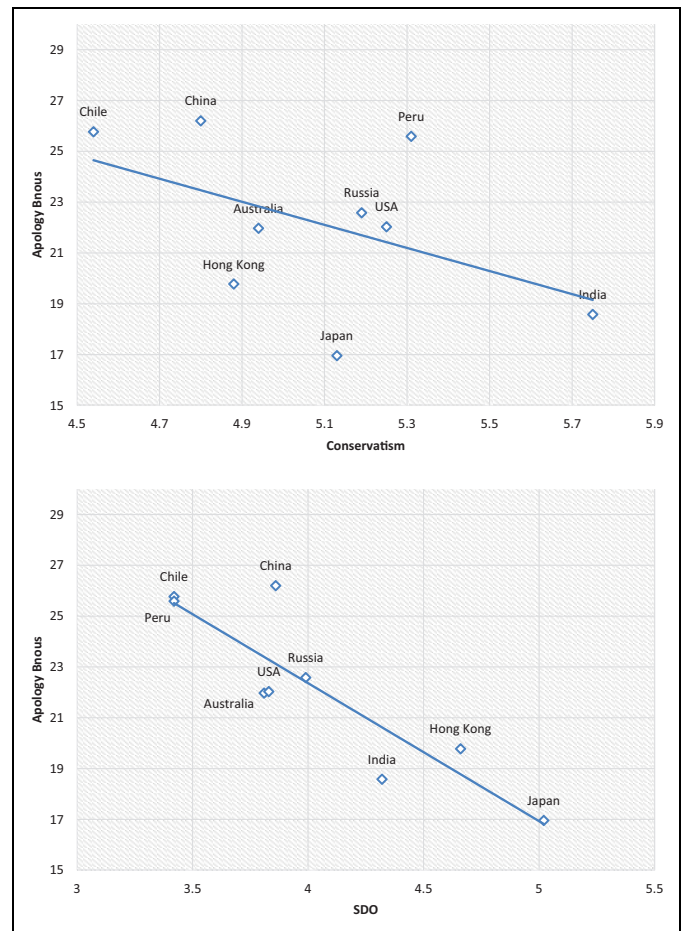


**Figure 3.** Nation-level data for reluctance to apologize and political conservatism (top graph) and social dominance orientation (bottom graph).

check of the robustness of the results, we ran models separately for each of the nine nations. Of course, the drop in *N* associated with conducting analyses within nation lowered the power of each analysis. However, the link between conservatism and reluctance to apologize emerged as significant in seven of nine nations (in Peru, it was marginally significant; in Chile, it was nonsignificant). The indirect effect of SDO in mediating the link between political conservatism and reluctance to apologize remained significant in all but two nations (Japan and Russia). Furthermore, the role of SDO in helping explain the link between political conservatism and the apology bonus was significant in six nations: Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, and the United States. In contrast, the indirect effect of political conservatism and reluctance to apologize through entity beliefs was only significant in India and the United States.

### Study 2

Although relatively consistent, the size of the relationship between political conservatism and proclivity to apologize in Study 1 ranged from small to moderate. Furthermore, it is



**Figure 4.** Nation-level data for apology bonus and political conservatism (top graph) and social dominance orientation (bottom graph).

unclear how much of the relationship could be explained by common method variance and pattern responding; methodological artifacts associated with the approach of correlating two self-report scales. To address this, we sought to replicate the main relationship between political orientation and proclivity to apologize, but this time operationalizing proclivity to apologize by coding open-ended responses.

In Study 2, participants imagined they had committed a transgression toward a neighbor and were asked to record what they would say to the neighbor in response. Consistent with Study 1, it was expected that more conservative participants would be less likely to use apologetic statements in their response than would relatively liberal participants. Given the inconsistent mediational evidence for the entity belief measure in Study 1, we again measured entity beliefs but this time with a different scale.

### Method

#### Participants

Study 2 was conducted using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Eighty-three participants initially completed the study, but 5

left their open-ended response blank, and 13 did not follow instructions (i.e., they either imagined themselves from the victim's perspective or wrote something that was clearly not a response to the neighbor). This left 65 usable participants (56.9% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 32.75$ ), comprising 38 from India and 27 from the United States.

### Materials and Procedure

Participants first completed a number of individual differences scales, including a 3-item measure of entity beliefs adapted from Erdley and Dweck (1993; e.g., "Someone's personality is a part of them that they can't change very much;" 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .96$ ).<sup>5</sup> Participants were then asked to imagine that they had committed a transgression against a neighbor (by not watering their plants as frequently as promised, leaving the neighbor's plants distressed) and to write down what they would say to the neighbor.<sup>6</sup> Two assistants blind to hypothesis coded the responses for the presence (coded 1) or absence (coded 0) of apologetic statements (e.g., I'm sorry or I apologize). Interrater reliability was high ( $\kappa = .93$ ); discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

At the end of the study, participants recorded their demographic details, including *political conservatism* (1 = *extremely liberal*; 7 = *extremely conservative*) and the control variables of *age*, *sex*, *nationality* (measured as country of birth), and *religiosity* (measured as in Study 1).

### Results and Discussion

As predicted, the more conservative participants were, the less likely they used apologetic statements in their open-ended response ( $r = -.38$ ,  $p = .002$ ). This relationship remained significant after controlling for nationality, age, religiosity, and sex ( $r_{\text{partial}} = -.37$ ,  $p = .004$ ).

Although the main association documented in Study 1 proved robust in Study 2, the role of entity beliefs in explaining the association was not: Entity beliefs did not significantly correlate with either political orientation ( $r = .21$ ,  $p = .093$ ) or apologetic statements ( $r = -.08$ ,  $p = .51$ ). This is despite the fact that the two cultures examined in this study—India and the United States—were the cultures in Study 1 for which there was robust evidence that entity beliefs played a role.

### General Discussion

This article provides the first evidence that people are more reluctant to apologize if they are more politically conservative. Because there is a temptation to simplify and magnify differences between ideological categories, we want to put on the record that this does *not* mean that conservatives are anti-apology. In Study 1, scores on our reluctance to apologize measure were generally below the midpoint, so the majority of our participants showed a proclivity to apologize, regardless of political orientation. But the data across both studies showed

that this proclivity to apologize waned for participants who were more politically conservative.

Interestingly, in Study 1, politically conservative participants were also less influenced by apologies when determining whether a transgressor deserved forgiveness. Again, this is not to say that conservatives are unimpressed by apologies: Forgiveness levels were much higher in the presence of an apology than in the absence of an apology, and this was the case for the vast majority of participants in our sample. But the data show that the apology bonus in terms of forgiveness is less pronounced for conservatives than for liberals. So not only are conservatives less likely to want to provide an apology than liberals, but they are also less likely to weight an apology when determining whether to forgive.

We do not wish to imply that there is an *intrinsic* moral virtue or psychological advantage in giving or accepting apologies. Elsewhere it has been argued that there is a downside to the normative expression of apologies as a default response to hurt (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Hornsey, 2015), and there is also a case to be made that it might be premature to forgive in the face of thoughtless or qualified apologies (e.g., Barlow et al., 2015). However, it is undeniable that *in general* the proclivity to apologize is associated with positive well-being (Howell et al., 2011) and that receiving apologies helps enable victims to move on (Fehr et al., 2010; Tavuchis, 1991). Forgiving transgressors is also associated with a range of positive consequences in terms of physical and psychological health (e.g., Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014). Given this, the current data suggest that conservatives' relative unwillingness to give and accept apologies might present an obstacle to intrapsychic health and interpersonal reconciliation.

We examined two mechanisms through which political conservatism and attitudes toward apologies might be connected: SDO (Study 1) and entity beliefs about human nature (Studies 1 and 2). The positive link between conservatism and SDO reflects a long-established effect in the literature (Ho et al., 2015). What is new is the finding that SDO was positively associated with a reluctance to apologize and negatively associated with the tendency to reward an apology with forgiveness. We argue that this reflects people's underlying orientations to the importance of reducing or maintaining power inequalities. Apologies are widely construed to be a rhetorical vehicle for removing power inequities in relationships posttransgression. As such, it makes sense that low-SDO people—who are committed to equality—are more likely to provide and reward apologies than higher SDO people, who are comfortable with maintaining power differences.

We also theorized that people may be more reluctant to provide apologies the more they held entity beliefs about human nature. Given that apologies are often seen as markers of character reform or transformation, it seemed plausible that people would be less congenial to apologies the more they believe that the people cannot fundamentally change who they are. But despite the evidence for an indirect effect displayed in Figure 1, we are cautious in concluding that entity beliefs are

a major reason for why conservatives are more likely to give apologies than liberals. First, the mediating role of entity beliefs emerged reliably in only two of nine national samples in Study 1 and was not replicated in Study 2. Second, even in Study 1, there was no evidence that entity beliefs mediated the relationship between political conservatism and an apology bonus in terms of forgiveness. Together, the results offer only limited evidence for the hypothesis that the association between political ideology and the willingness to provide and reward apologies is tied to broader beliefs about the capacity for transformation.

### *Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions*

Nine national samples allowed us to test the generalizability of the observed effects outside WEIRD samples, which is a strength of the study. However, one challenge of examining this question outside WEIRD samples is that the notion of left and right ideology has different psychological resonances in different countries. Five of the nations in the current samples have communist, postcommunist, or socialist governments. In China and Russia, for example, “left-ist” values may be less tied to “progressive” or “liberal” values, as they are in long-standing democracies such as the United States or Australia (Huber & Inglehart, 1995; Piurko, Schwartz, & Davidov, 2011). Indeed, in China, Hong Kong, and Russia, the correlations between the two indices of political ideology were relatively weak. However, we are reassured that the noise attached to our operationalization of political ideology in these countries would have worked against our hypotheses rather than for them, meaning that the observed effects are unlikely to be artifacts of psychometric issues.

Of course, the cross-sectional nature of our designs raises the usual questions about causality. We can only state with confidence that political ideology and attitudes to apology are associated (rather than being linked causally). However, it should be noted that the reverse causal path to that shown in Figures 1 and 2 seems less theoretically plausible: It is hard to envisage how attitudes specifically about apology could influence broader political ideologies or the other variables of interest (SDO and implicit theories about human nature).

Finally, it remains to be seen whether the results would generalize to more public apology contexts (e.g., many-to-many apologies). Previously, theorists have cautioned against taking conclusions drawn from research on interpersonal contexts and uncritically extrapolating it to the collective context (Hornsey & Wohl, 2013; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). So although there are theoretical reasons to expect that the link between political ideology and apology beliefs would also emerge at the collective level, this link should not be presumed. This is especially the case given that public/collective apologies are often wrapped up in political debates about where the boundaries of morality and responsibility lie (Wohl, Hornsey, & Philpot, 2011), so whether conservatives or liberals are more likely to want to apologize might well depend on the sociopolitical context surrounding a transgression.

### **Summary**

This research uncovered a previously undocumented relationship: Conservatives are less likely than liberals to want to provide apologies and are less likely to reward received apologies with forgiveness. These data—and the mediating role of SDO—reinforce theorizing that construes apologies as rhetorical tools for diminishing power differences posttransgression and suggest that willingness to give and receive apologies may be related to individual differences about the desirability of equality as a principle. More broadly, the data reinforce how political ideologies infuse how people conduct themselves interpersonally, in this case in ways that have implications for interpersonal reconciliation and forgiveness.

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### **Notes**

1. Evidence for this latter notion can be extrapolated from the finding that prosocial individuals (who typically value equality) behaved more cooperatively in a negotiation with a hypothetical colleague who had apologized for an angry outburst than with a colleague who had not apologized. In contrast, those low in prosociality were more likely to exploit the apologetic counterpart (Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2010).
2. Given the modest internal consistency of the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) Scale, we examined each item separately as a potential mediator of the link between political conservatism and the criterion variables. Indirect effects described in Figures 1 and 2 remained significant when the SDO Scale was replaced with any one of its individual items.
3. The measures were included after a set of questions on people’s folk theories about what constituted perfect societies, measures that were designed to answer an unrelated research question (the full set of measures is available upon request). Three hundred and five participants—who started the questionnaire but dropped out before completing any of the measures in the current manuscript—are not counted in the reported *N* for this study.
4. The model predicting apology bonus was then repeated but with two different methods of operationalizing the change score reflecting the difference between pre-apology and postapology forgiveness. First, we regressed the postapology forgiveness scores on the pre-apology forgiveness scores and used the associated standardized residuals as the criterion variable. We then ran a separate



model in which we used only postapology forgiveness scores as the criterion variable but with pre-apology forgiveness scores included as a covariate. Whichever way the criterion variable was analyzed, the effect remained the same: SDO was a significant mediator, but entity beliefs were not.

5. Other measures—for example, of self-consciousness, self-esteem, need for cognition, and need for closure—were peripheral to hypotheses. Data can be obtained upon request from the first author.
6. Half the participants imagined that the neighbor's plants were wilting and the foliage brown; the other half imagined that the plants were almost all dead and the foliage burned. Results were the same regardless of the severity of the consequences described in the scenario, so data are reported after collapsing across these conditions.

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- move people toward more constructive responses to conflict (e.g., apologies, empathy, and forgiveness).
- Paul G. Bain** is a senior lecturer in social and cross-cultural psychology. His latest research interests involve people's beliefs about how society will change in the future and their political implications.
- Sheyla Blumen** is a professor in the field of talent development and gifted education.
- Sylvia X. Chen** is a professor at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her research interests include the social psychology of bilingualism and biculturalism, personality and social behavior in cultural contexts, and globalization and multiculturalism.
- Ángel Gómez** is an associate professor at the Department of Social and Organizational Psychology at UNED, Madrid. Dr. Gómez's research interests include the exploration of extreme behavior in general and identity fusion in particular, and strategies for improving intergroup relations and reducing intergroup conflicts and violence.
- Roberto González** is a professor of psychology at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile. His research interests are in intergroup contact, social identity, acculturation processes, and prosocial behaviors.
- Yanjun Guan** is a senior lecturer in management at Durham University Business School, UK. Dr. Guan's research interests include cross-cultural psychology, career development, and organizational behavior.
- Emiko Kashima** is an associate professor at La Trobe University, Australia. Her research concerns culture and social psychology, including acculturation, language use, and threat reactions.
- Nadezhda Lebedeva** is a professor in the Department of Psychology and head of the International Laboratory for Socio-Cultural Research at The National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Russia. Her research interests are values, intercultural relations, acculturation, culture and innovations, and social and cultural change.
- Michael J. A. Wohl** is a professor of psychology at Carleton University. His research focuses on the role emotions play in conflict and the regulation of those emotions to advance forgiveness and reconciliation.

## Author Biographies

**Matthew J. Hornsey** is a professor of social psychology at the University of Queensland. He examines how people respond to trust-sensitive messages such as criticisms, recommendations for change, and gestures of remorse.

**Karina Schumann** is an assistant professor of social psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. Her main research focus is interpersonal conflict resolution, with a special emphasis on understanding how to

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