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Ideology shapes evaluation of history within the general population

Francesco Rigoli 

Department of Psychology, City, University of London, London, UK

Correspondence

Francesco Rigoli, Department of Psychology, City, University of London, Northampton Square, London EC1V 0HB, UK.

Email: francesco.rigoli@city.ac.uk

Abstract

The way history is interpreted varies across ideologies as articulated by political thinkers and by leading politicians. Is history also assessed differently by laypeople reporting different ideological orientations? To address this, the article describes a study from six countries where, in addition to reporting their ideology on a left–right spectrum, participants evaluated the recent past, the present, and the near future. The data show that, in all countries, right- compared to left-wing supporters evaluated the past as more positive. To elucidate this effect, a second study manipulated the appraisal of the past between groups but found that this did not influence participants' ideology. A third study manipulated the salience of ideological representations between groups. Here, the high-salience group displayed a stronger link between ideology and evaluation of the past, indicating that embracing a certain ideology encourages a specific interpretation of the past. Exploring the factors mediating this effect, one last study found that nostalgia for tradition partially explains why right-wing supporters cherish the past more. Altogether, these observations show that how history is interpreted is central not only to intellectuals' writings and politicians' speeches but also to laypeople's political beliefs.

KEYWORDS

evaluation, future, history, ideology, past

INTRODUCTION

In modern political science, the term “ideology” refers to a relatively structured system of beliefs concerning the social and political realm (Freeden et al., 2013). A standard way to

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identify an ideology is to look at the texts of the major authors within a certain political tradition (Freedman et al., 2013). For example, the communist ideology can be studied by reading the texts of Karl Marx and his followers (Callinicos, 1983), and the liberal ideology is articulated in the writings of authors such as John Locke, Montesquieu, and John Stuart Mill (Bell, 2014). When looking at the factors shaping an ideological discourse, one realizes that the way history is interpreted is one of the major aspects. Marxism, for example, offers a view of history where, following an original communism characterizing ancient hunter-gatherer societies, new economic systems replace old ones, with class conflict being common to all (Marx & Engels, 1848/2004). This process is believed to culminate in a new age of communism, where economic scarcity is finally overcome and class conflict ends. As another example, central to many classical liberal writings is the idea that, before civilization emerged, mankind lived in a state of nature where individuals survived without being part of an institutionalized community (Jahn, 2016). History is central to fascist ideology too, where people are mobilized towards a struggle to recreate a mythical past during which the folk expressed all its power and glory (Griffin, 2013).

As these examples suggest, history plays a critical role in the texts of many influential political thinkers. Furthermore, as illustrated in the United States by recent slogans such as Barack Obama's "Yes we can" and Donald Trump's "Let's make America great again," the rhetoric employed by politicians often evokes images of the past or visions of the future (Denton, 1980). Yet an important question remains open: Is a similar emphasis on history also reflected in the political beliefs of common people? More precisely, do laypeople embracing a certain ideology view history differently from people embracing another ideology? And how? The answer to this question is far from obvious. On the one hand, a large body of evidence suggests that, within the general public, political beliefs are often incoherent and volatile (Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992). For example, many Western citizens ignore basic political facts such as who the president of their country is (Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001), and their opinions often blend contradictory claims and are amenable to irrelevant contextual cues (e.g., Landau et al., 2004; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). This picture suggests that it is unlikely that people interpret history in a way that reflects a coherent political ideology. And yet other evidence indicates that ideology is nonetheless far from unimportant among laypeople: Basic variables such as personality traits, values, and even cognitive abilities appear to correlate with one's own placement on the ideological spectrum (Caprara & Vecchione, 2009; Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2010). Ideology, this line of evidence suggests, might after all play a role also in shaping how laypeople view history (Liu & Hilton, 2005).

The present article aims at exploring how people reporting different ideological orientations evaluate history, in other words, at exploring how they evaluate the past, the present, and the future. In an online study (Study 1), participants were asked to evaluate society in the recent past (i.e., the period ranging from 1950 to 2000), in the present, and in the near future (i.e., society in 25 years). After evaluating society along history, participants were asked to report their ideology on a left- to right-wing spectrum, allowing us to look at the relationship between ideology and evaluation scores.¹ To assess the generality of the findings, the investigation was replicated in six countries as diverse as the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, South Africa, Mexico, and Poland. Next, we explored any causal relationship between history evaluation and ideology. Here the question was: If a relationship between history evaluation and ideology exists, does it occur because people who evaluate history in a certain way are more attracted towards a specific ideology? Or, rather, because people embracing a certain ideology tend to interpret history in a certain way? To arbitrate among these possibilities, in Study 2 we

¹We focused on the left–right ideological dimension because, as discussed below, we examined multiple countries. Important limitations notwithstanding, the left–right ideological dimension captures the political landscape of several countries, and it is thus one of the best options for comparing effects across countries.

manipulated the value attributed to history and asked whether this had an impact on the ideology reported by participants; in Study 3 we manipulated the salience of ideology and examined whether this influenced how people evaluated history. Finally, in Study 4 we investigated the question of which specific beliefs might mediate the relationship between ideology and evaluation of history.

STUDY 1

As outlined above, we examined people's evaluation of history focusing on three time points: the recent past, the present, and the near future. This allowed us to probe any relationship between history evaluation and ideology. The specific research predictions linked with each time point are outlined below.

The past

Within the right-wing tradition, many writings envisage a past time described as an age of lost virtue and morality (Burke, 1790/1965; Freeden et al., 2013; Muller, 1997; Schlesinger, 1955). Likewise, speeches of right-wing politicians often uncover a longing for the bygone days (Betz & Johnson, 2004; Kenny, 2017; Robinson et al., 2015). At the grassroots level, research in the United States has found that right-wing news websites often employ past-focused verbs (Robinson et al., 2015), that right-wing supporters are more nostalgic about commercial goods no longer available on the market (Lammers & Baldwin, 2018), that right-wing supporters are influenced more by messages expressed in a past-oriented framework (Baldwin & Lammers, 2016; Lammers & Baldwin, 2018), and that right-wing supporters report higher scores on measures of collective nostalgia, a construct capturing one's longing for the nation's past (Lammers, 2023; Lammers & Baldwin, 2020; Lammers & Uğurlar, 2023; van Prooijen et al., 2022). These observations raise the prediction that, compared to left-wing supporters, right-wing supporters evaluate the past more positively. However, note that the evidence just overviewed comes from one single country, the United States. An exception is the recent study of Lammers and Uğurlar (2023), which found no link between people's ideology and collective nostalgia in Turkey. As this study suggests, broadening the focus to a global scale might require revising the notion that the right's longing for the past is universal. Consider the following: In the last decades, there are nations whose political system has shifted towards the left (e.g., South Africa with the fall of apartheid) and other nations that have moved to the right (e.g., Poland with the fall of communism). If one looks at the latter countries, do right- compared to left-wing supporters view the past more negatively or more positively? If they view it more negatively, the conclusion is that there is no universal praising of the past by right-wing ideology. Guided by these considerations, here we aimed at examining the relationship between ideology and evaluation of the past and at assessing whether this varies across countries.

The present

One of the prevailing positions within the political right is conservatism, which, as the very name suggests, presumes an endeavor to preserve the present as it stands (Burke, 1790/1965; Freeden et al., 2013; Huntington, 1957; Muller, 1997). The notion that right-wing supporters strive to preserve the status quo fits with a large body of evidence indicating that they are less open to new experience (Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2003; Rock & Janoff-Bulman, 2010), oppose technological change at work (Fay & Frese, 2000), and manifest heightened system

justification (that is, they judge the social system as being more just) (Jost et al., 2003, 2004). This raises the prediction that, compared to left-wing supporters, right-wing supporters view the present society more favorably. However, once again the evidence supporting this prediction comes mainly from the United States and other Western nations. Do different countries show divergent effects? For example, does it matter whether the ruling party in a country is on the left or on the right?

Another aspect relevant to the question of whether the present is appraised more favorably by the left or by the right concerns some key social trends that have been documented globally. Although, to be sure, cross-country differences are substantial, research has revealed general social tendencies that affect most countries worldwide. The first of such tendencies concerns a widespread weakening of family ties, an abandonment of traditional practices, and an erosion of old hierarchical structures, all hallmarks of a contemporary society that has become more modern, and thus less traditional (Giddens, 1991; Kennedy, 2017; Schuerkens, 2003; Trask, 2009; Welzel, 2013). Compared to the left, the right ideology has been found to express a more favorable attitude towards tradition (Ashton et al., 2005; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Kerlinger, 1967; Rigoli, 2023; Treier & Hillygus, 2009). This, combined with the observation that contemporary society appears to be less traditional, may encourage people on the right to express a more negative attitude towards the present society.

Yet, another global trend may counteract this influence. In recent decades, research has documented a global shift towards a *laissez-faire* economy (Roy & Riello, 2018). This is supported by the observation that, in many countries, the rich are taxed less, income inequality has grown, and the welfare services have been downsized (Clayton & Pontusson, 1998; Emmenegger, 2014; Hicks, 1999; Milanovic, 2016; Scheve & Stasavage, 2016). Compared to the right, the left ideology is more hostile towards *laissez-faire* economy (Ashton et al., 2005; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Kerlinger, 1967; Rigoli, 2023; Treier & Hillygus, 2009). Therefore, given that the contemporary economic system appears to be more *laissez-faire*, people on the left may be those who, after all, report a more negative evaluation of the present society.

Based on these considerations, we aimed at examining the relationship between ideology and evaluation of the present and at assessing whether this varies across countries.

The future

Left-wing thinkers have often advocated a view where, by employing rationality and will, humanity can transform the present and build a better future (Birnbaum, 2002; Freeden et al., 2013; Rossinow, 2009). Such an idea of manmade progress hints at the possibility that the future appears more positive to people on the left than to people on the right. Yet, two considerations support the opposite prediction. First, the political narrative on the left, more than the one on the right, emphasizes dangers lurking in the near future such as economic crises or climate disasters (Alesina et al., 2018; McCright, Dunlap, & Marquart-Pyatt, 2016; McCright, Marquart-Pyatt, et al., 2016). Second, there is empirical evidence showing that right-wing supporters score higher on questionnaires measuring optimism (Schlenker et al., 2012). After all, people on the right might be those who have a better outlook on the future. However, a careful scrutiny reveals that the two predictions are not necessarily incompatible. The view advocated by many left-wing thinkers is indeed that a better future is possible but only if people engage towards change; otherwise, the argument goes, the future will remain grim or even get worse. Conversely, right-wing thinkers are typically skeptical about the human capacity to ameliorate society, but they are also less frightened about what can occur if humans fail to be engaged. Thus, left- compared to right-wing supporters might be more optimistic about the future that can be achieved with action, but more pessimistic about the future that can occur without acting. To test this, we asked participants to evaluate two future scenarios, one assuming that

people and institutions will make sensible choices, the other assuming that people and institutions will not make sensible choices (Rigoli, 2021). We predicted the first scenario to be appraised as being better by left-wing supporters and the second scenario by right-wing supporters. Here too we tested these predictions in multiple countries.

Participants

Participants from six different countries participated to the study, with each country analyzed separately. For each country, 200 participants were recruited online from the Prolific website (with 1200 being the total sample size) (no data were excluded from the analysis). The sample size for each country was established a priori adopting G-Power based on a multiple regression analysis with effect size equal to $f^2 = .07$, statistical power equal to $1 - \beta = .8$, and two-tailed type-I error probability equal to $\alpha = .05$. This requires a sample of 176 participants, which was rounded to 200. The prescreening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the selected countries.

When deciding which countries to include in the study, we attempted to maximize differences in terms of economy, social structure, culture, previous political regime, and current political regime. At the same time, we balanced this out with availability of participants in Prolific, the platform employed for recruitment. This resulted in choosing the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Mexico, and South Africa. Aside from the notable cultural differences, the countries' economy ranges from middle (Mexico) to high income (United States). Regarding the political regime in power from 1950 to 2000 (the period examined in the study), Poland was communist, the United States and the United Kingdom were (and continue to be) democracies where center-left and center-right parties alternated, Italy and Mexico were democracies where one single party (the center-right Christian Democratic Party and the center-left Institutional Revolutionary Party, respectively) governed, and South Africa was under apartheid. At the time of testing (October 2022), all these countries were democratic, but the ideology of the major ruling institutions was different: right-wing in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Poland, left-wing in the United States, Mexico, and South Africa.

For recruitment in the United Kingdom and the United States, we employed Prolific's prescreening system which allowed us to select half of the participants who had previously reported a right-wing ideology and half who had reported a left-wing ideology (a similar prescreening was not available for other countries and thus was not employed). The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of City University of London. We report all manipulations, measures, and exclusions regarding this and the following studies. All data and research materials are available at <https://osf.io/5bvwy/>. The study was not preregistered.

Materials and procedure

To assess how participants evaluated history, we asked them four forced-choice questions, all having the following options: Very bad, Rather bad, Moderately bad, Neither good nor bad, Moderately good, Rather good, Very good. The first question investigated people's appraisal of the recent past by asking (this is referred to as Q_{Past}):

Based on your memories, on what you have read, and based on what you have heard from other people, think about society (in its multiple aspects) in the period between 1950 and 2000. Overall, how good or bad do you think society was back then?

Focusing on the present, the second question asked (this is referred to as Q_{Pres}):

Think about society today in its multiple aspects. Overall, how good or bad do you think society is today?

Next, we probed participants' evaluation of their predicted future society. We asked participants to consider two alternative scenarios. First, participants were asked to evaluate the future in a good-prospect scenario (this is referred to as Q_{FutGood}):

Try to imagine how society will be in 25 years. Consider two possible scenarios. The first scenario is one where people and institutions have acted in the best available way to address the problems of society. In this scenario, how good or bad do you think society will be in 25 years?

Second, we asked participants to evaluate the future in a bad-prospect scenario (this is referred to as Q_{FutBad}):

Try again to imagine society in 25 years, but now considering an alternative scenario. In this second scenario people and institutions have not acted to address the problems of society. In this scenario, how good or bad do you think society will be in 25 years?

Finally, we assessed participants' ideology by asking them (this is referred to as Q_{ideol}):

Generally, do you prefer more left-wing or right-wing political opinions?

Options of the last question were: Left-wing, Moderately left-wing, Equal, Moderately right-wing, Right-wing. Questions were answered online using Qualtrics. This took approximately 1 min and was rewarded with £0.1.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for each country, and the online supporting information reports an analysis comparing the different time points against one another, alongside Table S1 which describes the Pearson correlation among variables. To examine the link between ideology and history evaluation, we fitted a multiple regression model of Q_{ideol} having Q_{Past} , Q_{Pres} , Q_{FutGood} , and Q_{FutBad} as predictors. Results for each country are reported below (Figures 1 and 2):

- a. United Kingdom: The following variables contributed to the model: Q_{Past} ($b = .392$, 95% CI [.267, .518], $t(195) = 6.15$, $p < .001$), Q_{FutGood} ($b = -.170$, 95% CI [-.289, -.051], $t(195) = -2.81$, $p = .005$), and Q_{FutBad} ($b = .171$, 95% CI [.026, .317], $t(195) = 2.33$, $p = .021$). Q_{Pres} did not contribute ($b = .064$, 95% CI [-.079, .217], $t(195) = 2.33$, $p = .021$). These results indicate that, in the United Kingdom, support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign higher value to the past and to the bad-prospect future scenario and who assign lower value to the good-prospect future scenario.
- b. United States: The following predictors contributed to the model: Q_{Past} ($b = .582$, 95% CI [.471, .693], $t(195) = 10.32$, $p < .001$) and Q_{FutGood} ($b = -.190$, 95% CI [-.064, -.315], $t(195) = -2.98$, $p = .003$). Conversely, neither Q_{FutBad} ($b = .058$, 95% CI [-.087, .203], $t(195) = .79$, $p = .429$) nor Q_{Pres} contributed ($b = -.159$, 95% CI [-.328, .010], $t(195) = -1.85$, $p = .066$). These

TABLE 1 Study 1: Descriptive statistics.

	Age	Past	Present	g Future	b Future	Ideology
<i>United Kingdom (99 females, 101 males)</i>						
Mean	40.56	4.65	3.65	4.88	2.34	2.99
SD	13.930	1.223	1.344	1.389	1.238	1.205
Skewness	.466	-.590	.234	-.877	.806	-.075
Kurtosis	-.663	-.362	-.783	.010	.220	-.985
<i>United States (99 females, 100 males, 1 nonbinary)</i>						
Mean	39.38	4.50	3.19	4.54	2.22	2.83
SD	13.955	1.510	1.258	1.523	1.303	1.547
Skewness	.683	-.468	.355	-.705	1.164	.090
Kurtosis	-.373	-.763	-.380	-.295	1.026	-1.581
<i>Italy (98 females, 99 males, 3 nonbinary)</i>						
Mean	31.06	4.12	3.82	5.20	2.14	2.10
SD	9.133	1.415	1.326	1.396	1.148	.980
Skewness	1.222	-.206	-.060	-1.078	.952	.843
Kurtosis	1.004	-.949	-.937	.678	.586	.339
<i>Mexico (100 females, 98 males, 2 nonbinary)</i>						
Mean	27.72	3.79	3.70	5.31	2.24	2.67
SD	6.421	1.482	1.312	1.278	1.315	1.028
Skewness	1.443	.058	-.081	-1.475	1.045	-.031
Kurtosis	2.414	-.868	-.960	2.356	.499	-.542
<i>South Africa (100 females, 99 males, 1 nonbinary)</i>						
Mean	28.24	3.67	3.26	4.66	2.16	3.03
SD	7.714	1.929	1.540	1.798	1.471	.894
Skewness	1.771	.051	.148	-.719	1.250	-.263
Kurtosis	4.428	-1.350	-1.058	-.569	.679	.709
<i>Poland (93 females, 101, 6 nonbinary)</i>						
Mean	27.73	4.30	4.03	4.98	2.72	2.46
SD	8.457	1.400	1.246	1.468	1.408	1.065
Skewness	1.293	-.293	-.048	-.842	.749	.181
Kurtosis	2.260	-.956	-.626	-.032	-.054	-.915

results indicate that, in the United States, support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign higher value to the past and lower value to the good-prospect future scenario.

- c. Italy: Only Q_{Past} explained a unique portion of variance ($b = .107$, 95% CI [.008, .205], $t(195) = 2.14$, $p = .033$), while other predictors did not (Q_{Pres} : $b = -.055$, 95% CI [-.178, .068], $t(195) = -.88$, $p = .378$; Q_{FutGood} : $b = -.016$, 95% CI [-.124, .092], $t(195) = -.30$, $p = .767$; Q_{FutBad} : $b = .057$, 95% CI [-.076, .191], $t(195) = .84$, $p = .400$). These results indicate that, in Italy, support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign higher value to the past.
- d. Mexico: Only Q_{Past} explained a unique portion of variance ($b = .127$, 95% CI [.032, .223], $t(195) = 2.63$, $p = .009$), while other predictors did not (Q_{Pres} : $b = -.066$, 95% CI [-.201, .069], $t(195) = -.96$, $p = .337$; Q_{FutGood} : $b = -.057$, 95% CI [-.185, .071], $t(195) = -.88$, $p = .380$; Q_{FutBad} : $b = .090$, 95% CI [-.027, .207], $t(195) = 1.51$, $p = .132$). These results indicate that, in Mexico, support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign higher value to the past.

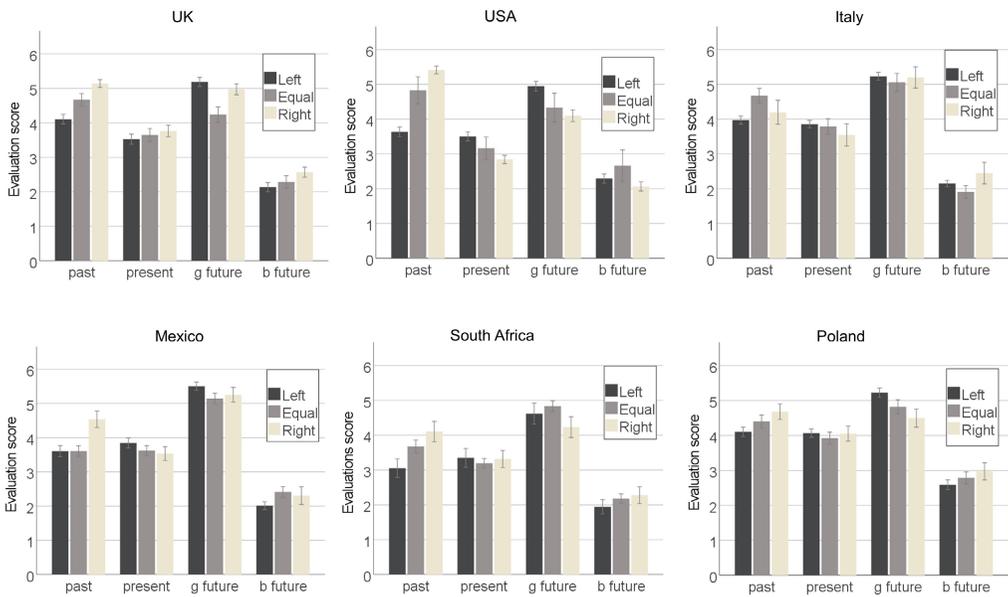


FIGURE 1 Study 1: Evaluation scores as a function of ideology. For Ideology, Left and Moderately left are pooled together; and Right and Moderately right are pooled together.

- e. South Africa: Only Q_{Past} explained a unique portion of variance ($b = .087$, 95% CI [.018, .156], $t(195) = 2.50$, $p = .013$), while other predictors did not (Q_{Pres} : $b = .032$, 95% CI [-.062, .127], $t(195) = .67$, $p = .504$; Q_{FutGood} : $b = -.035$, 95% CI [-.108, .039], $t(195) = -.93$, $p = .355$; Q_{FutBad} : $b = .033$, 95% CI [-.058, .123], $t(195) = .71$, $p = .476$). These results indicate that, in South African, support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign higher value to the past.
- f. Poland: The following predictors contributed to the model: Q_{Past} ($b = .146$, 95% CI [.041, .250], $t(195) = 2.75$, $p = .006$) and Q_{FutGood} ($b = -.168$, 95% CI [-.282, -.053], $t(195) = -2.90$, $p = .004$). Conversely, neither Q_{FutBad} ($b = .060$, 95% CI [-.060, .179], $t(195) = .98$, $p = .326$) nor Q_{Pres} contributed ($b = .023$, 95% CI [-.129, .175], $t(195) = .30$, $p = .764$). These results indicate that, in Poland, support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign higher value to the past and lower value to the good-prospect future scenario.

To assess the robustness of the findings, we also looked at the Pearson correlation analyses reported in [Table S1](#) in the online supporting information. These show consistent results except for the United Kingdom, where the Pearson correlation between Q_{ideol} and Q_{FutGood} was nonsignificant ($r(198) = -.118$, $p = .095$, 95% CI [-.253, .021]). Moreover, we estimated the same regression models again, except that now age and gender were also included as covariates. The results of this analysis are shown in [Table S2](#) and indicate that all effects are replicated, except for the effect of Q_{Past} which is nonsignificant in Italy ($b = .008$, 95% CI [-.002, .174], $t(193) = 1.50$, $p = .134$).

Altogether, the results of this analysis reveal that, in all countries, support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign higher value to the past ([Figure 2](#)). In the United States and Poland (and possibly in the United Kingdom) support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign lower value to the good-prospect future scenario. Only in the United Kingdom, support for the right (versus left) is higher for people who assign higher value to the bad-prospect future scenario. In none of the countries, evaluation of the present contributes to predict ideology.

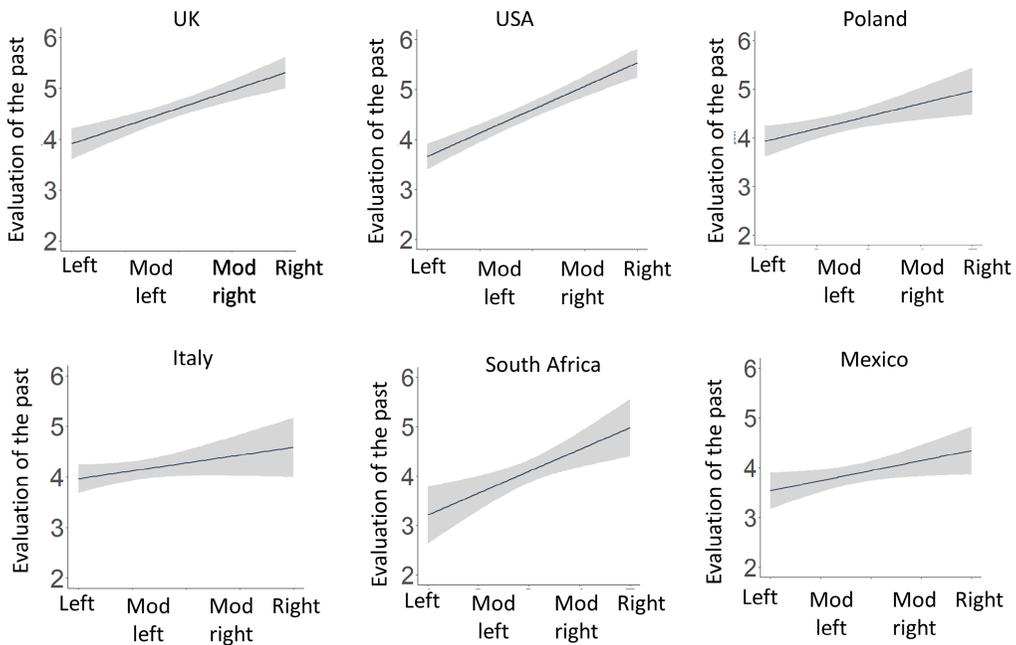


FIGURE 2 Study 1: Regression line (with 95% Confidence Interval) of evaluation of the past as a function of ideology.

STUDY 2

Study 1 shows a relationship between people's ideology and how they evaluate aspects of history. However, the study says nothing about which variable, if any, exerts a causal influence. Moreover, when looking at the available literature, for example, the one about the link between collective nostalgia and ideology (Lammers, 2023; Lammers & Baldwin, 2020; Lammers & Uğurlar, 2023; van Prooijen et al., 2022), no data speak to the question of whether ideology influences evaluation of history or vice versa. Study 2 aimed at assessing whether history evaluation has a causal influence upon ideology. The study focuses specifically on evaluation of the past, since Study 1 indicates that this time is the one which best distinguishes left-wing from right-wing supporters. The hypothesis tested here is that viewing the past as more positive predisposes people towards the right. This implies that any manipulation that encourages a more positive outlook about the past should, to some degree, nudge people towards the right. We tested this prediction in a between-subject study where, before being asked to report their ideology, one group was asked to list positive aspects of the recent past whereas another group was asked to list negative aspects thereof. The prediction was that the former group would report, on average, a more right-wing ideological orientation.

Participants

Prolific was employed to recruit two groups of 100 participants each (no data were excluded from the analysis). The sample size for each group was established a priori adopting G-Power based on an independent-sample *t*-test with effect size equal to $d = .4$, statistical power equal to $1 - \beta = .8$, and two-tailed type-I error probability equal to $\alpha = .05$. This requires a sample of 100

participants for each group. The prescreening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the United Kingdom. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of City, University of London. All data and research materials are available at <https://osf.io/5bvwy/>. The study was not preregistered.

Materials and procedure

To begin with, one group ($\text{Group}_{\text{Neg}}$) was presented with the following text:

Based on your memories, on what you have read, and based on what you have heard from other people, think about society in the period between 1950 and 2000. Take a couple of minutes to think about which aspects of this past society were worse than today. Write these aspects below.

The other group ($\text{Group}_{\text{Pos}}$) was presented with the same text except that the word “worse” was replaced with the word “better.” Participants were asked to write down their answer. The manipulation was predicted to elicit a more positive evaluation of the past for $\text{Group}_{\text{Pos}}$ compared to $\text{Group}_{\text{Neg}}$. For manipulation checking, participants were next asked (this is referred to as Q_{past}):

Overall, how good or bad do you think society was in the period between 1950 and 2000?

Their options were: Very bad, Rather bad, Moderately bad, Neither good nor bad, Moderately good, Rather good, Very good. Finally, we measured ideology in Study 1 by asking (this is referred to as Q_{ideol}):

Generally, do you prefer more left-wing or right-wing political opinions?

Their options were: Left-wing, Moderately left-wing, Equal, Moderately right-wing, Right-wing. Questions were answered online using Qualtrics. This took approximately 1 minute and was rewarded with £0.1.

Results

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 2 separately for each group. To check whether the experimental manipulation actually affected people's evaluation of the past, we compared Q_{past} between groups and found that $\text{Group}_{\text{Pos}}$ participants reported a more positive evaluation of the past compared to $\text{Group}_{\text{Neg}}$ participants ($t(198) = 2.90$, $p = .004$, $d = .410$, 95% CI [.130, .690]).

Next, we compared ideology as reported by the two groups. Remember that the prediction is that $\text{Group}_{\text{Pos}}$ expresses a more right-wing ideology compared to $\text{Group}_{\text{Neg}}$. Disconfirming the prediction, no between-group difference in ideology emerged ($t(198) = -.83$, $p = .407$, $d = -.118$, 95% CI [-.393, .162]). Note finally that, replicating Study 1, Q_{past} and Q_{ideol} were positively correlated both in $\text{Group}_{\text{Pos}}$ ($r(98) = .277$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [.085, .449]) and in $\text{Group}_{\text{Neg}}$ ($r(98) = .219$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [.024, .399]), indicating a more positive evaluation of the past in right-wing participants.

In short, these results disconfirm the prediction that a more positive view of the past moves people towards the right: Although our manipulation succeeded in eliciting a better appraisal

TABLE 2 Study 2: Descriptive statistics.

	Age	Past	Ideology
<i>Group_{Pos}</i> (47 females, 50 males, 3 nonbinary)			
Mean	32.85	4.59	2.32
<i>SD</i>	11.999	1.311	1.171
Skewness	1.551	-.571	.426
Kurtosis	2.745	-.304	-.898
<i>Group_{Neg}</i> (48 females, 49 males, 3 nonbinary)			
Mean	34.49	4.05	2.46
<i>SD</i>	12.994	1.321	1.210
Skewness	1.162	-.469	.480
Kurtosis	.808	-.134	-.656

of the past in *Group_{Pos}* compared to *Group_{Neg}*, the two groups manifested no difference in ideology.

STUDY 3

Here we test another possibility that might explain the relationship between history evaluation and ideology, that is, we tested whether the latter variable exercises a causal influence upon the former. Put another way, the hypothesis is that ideology provides a pair of glasses through which history is appraised as better or worse. If this is the case, then increasing the salience of ideological representations should magnify the relationship between ideology and history evaluation. Focusing once again on evaluation of the past, we tested this prediction in a between-subject study. Participants of the control group were asked first to evaluate the recent past and next to report their ideology. On the contrary, participants of the experimental group were first asked to report their ideology, next to list their political values and beliefs, and finally to evaluate the recent past. We reasoned that, for the experimental group, this manipulation increased the salience of ideological representations during evaluation of the past. Because of such enhanced salience of ideology, the ensuing prediction was that the relationship between ideology and evaluation of the past was stronger in the experimental group compared to the control group.

Participants

Prolific was employed to recruit two groups of 200 participants each (no data were excluded from the analysis). The sample size for each group was established a priori adopting G-Power and based on a comparison between two Pearson correlations with effect size equal to $q = .3$, statistical power equal to $1 - \beta = .8$, and two-tailed type-I error probability equal to $\alpha = .05$. This requires a sample of 178 participants for each group, which was rounded to 200. The pre-screening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the United Kingdom. Prolific's prescreening system also allowed us to select half of the participants who had previously reported a right-wing ideology and half who had reported a left-wing ideology. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of City, University of London. All data and research materials are available at <https://osf.io/5bvwy/>. The study was not preregistered.

Materials and procedure

Participants of the control group were first asked to appraise the recent past (this is referred to as Q_{Past}):

Based on your memories, on what you have read, and based on what you have heard from other people, think about society (in its multiple aspects) in the period between 1950 and 2000. Overall, how good or bad do you think society was back then?

Their options were: Very bad, Rather bad, Moderately bad, Neither good nor bad, Moderately good, Rather good, Very good. Next, they reported their ideology as follows (this is referred to as Q_{ideol}):

Generally, do you prefer more left-wing or right-wing political opinions?

Their options were: Left-wing, Moderately left-wing, Equal, Moderately right-wing, Right-wing.

Participants from the experimental group reported their ideology as first thing by answering to Q_{ideol} above, and next they were presented with the following text:

Take a couple of minutes to think about the political opinions and values that better describe you. Please write these below.

Participants were requested to write down their answer. This manipulation aimed at boosting the salience of participants' ideological representations. Finally, participants from the experimental group evaluated the past by answering to Q_{Past} as above.

Results

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 3 separately for each group. The analyses revealed that Q_{Past} and Q_{ideol} were positively correlated both in the control group ($r(198) = .292, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.160, .410]$) and in the experimental group ($r(198) = .462, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.346, .565]$). Remember that the prediction was that, because ideology is more salient for the experimental group in comparison with the control group, the second correlation should be significantly larger than the first. This prediction was confirmed empirically (Figure 3; Fisher $z = 1.98, p = .048$).

Is this effect due to group differences occurring on the left, on the right, or on both sides of the political spectrum? To address this question, we ran a Johnson-Neyman analysis as illustrated in what follows. We removed participants who answered "Equal" to Q_{ideol} , thus isolating participants who manifested a preference for either ideological side. For these participants, we fit a regression model of Q_{Past} having Q_{ideol} , group, and the interaction between the two variables as predictors. The interaction term was significant ($b = .324, t(382) = 2.61, p = .010, 95\% \text{ CI } [.080, .568]$). To probe the nature of the interaction effect, we ran the Johnson-Neyman analysis which revealed that the difference in Q_{Past} between groups was significant for people reporting "Left" ($b = -.495, t = -2.47, p = .014, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.889, -.102]$) and for people reporting "Right" ($b = .477, t = 2.04, p = .042, 95\% \text{ CI } [.017, .938]$), but neither for people reporting "Moderately Left" ($b = -.171, t = -1.44, p = .151, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.404, .062]$) nor for those reporting "Moderately Right" ($b = .153, t = 1.11, p = .266, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.118, .425]$).

TABLE 3 Study 3: Descriptive statistics.

	Age	Past	Ideology
<i>Exp group (102 females, 98 males)</i>			
Mean	43.17	4.60	2.84
SD	16.463	1.261	1.293
Skewness	.365	-.567	-.050
Kurtosis	-.692	-.227	-1.452
<i>Control group (98 females, 100 males, 2 nonbinary)</i>			
Mean	43.38	4.69	2.80
SD	15.119	1.159	1.368
Skewness	.333	-.399	.067
Kurtosis	-.980	-.609	-1.482

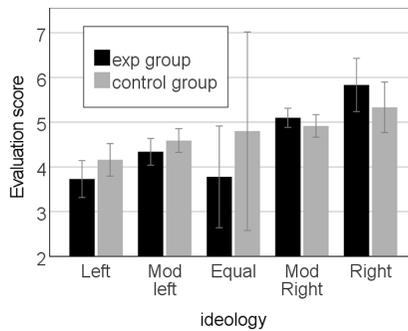


FIGURE 3 Study 3: Evaluation scores as a function of ideology for the two groups.

STUDY 4

The data presented so far support the notion that ideology shapes people's evaluation of history. This raises a fundamental question: Which specific beliefs mediate this effect? For example, which specific beliefs associated with a right-wing ideology favor a more positive appraisal of the past? The present study aims at addressing this question, once again focusing on evaluation of the recent past.

A previous study investigating the link between collective nostalgia and ideology provides valuable insight on this question (Lammers & Baldwin, 2020). The study found that support for a populist politician increased for people who were nostalgic about politically incorrect rhetoric but decreased for people who were nostalgic about polite rhetoric. This evidence is relevant because it highlights different forms of nostalgia, each with the potential of having a distinct link with ideology. Yet, the previous study focused on populism, which is different from the more classic notion of left–right ideology. While analyzing nostalgia in terms of politically incorrect or polite rhetoric appears to be adequate for studying populism, it does not appear so when the goal is to study ideology on a left–right spectrum. Thus, we sought to identify a way to decompose the notion of nostalgia in a way that is appropriate for investigating its link with the left–right ideology.

We proceeded by considering three lines of empirical evidence. The first comes from research investigating the processes underlying peoples' judgments about society and politics at large (Ashton et al., 2005; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Kerlinger, 1967; Rigoli, 2023; Treier

& Hillygus, 2009). The data reveal that these judgments are shaped by two broad underlying dimensions. The first is a social dimension, opposing people who admire traditional societies (e.g., characterized by respect for tradition, by strong family ties, and by a hierarchical organization) against people cherishing modern societies (e.g., characterized by neglect of tradition, by weaker family ties, and by a more egalitarian organization). The other dimension is economic and opposes people praising economic laissez-faire (e.g., associated with lower taxes on the rich, higher income inequality, and weaker welfare state) against people appreciating economic redistribution (e.g., linked with higher taxes on the rich, lower income inequality, and stronger welfare state).

The second line of evidence relevant here is the finding that the social and economic dimensions just described are linked with ideology (Ashton et al., 2005; Caprara et al., 2006; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Kerlinger, 1967; Rigoli, 2023; Schwartz et al., 2010; Treier & Hillygus, 2009). Specifically, the data indicate that people on the right typically have a positive attitude towards traditional society and laissez-faire economy, while left-wing supporters tend to praise modern society and redistributive economy.

The third relevant body of empirical data concerns the issue of how, in comparison with the recent past, today's society has changed with respect to the social and economic dimensions just described. Revealing a widespread weakening of family connections, an abandonment of traditional practices, and an erosion of old hierarchical structures, research has shown that, in most countries worldwide, society has today become more modern, and thus less traditional (Giddens, 1991; Kennedy, 2017; Schuerkens, 2003; Trask, 2009; Welzel, 2013). At the same time, the data also tell us that, compared to the recent past, the economy is today characterized by a more laissez-faire, and thus a less redistributive, approach (Roy & Riello, 2018): In most countries worldwide, the rich are taxed less, income inequality has grown, and the welfare services have been downsized (Clayton & Pontusson, 1998; Emmenegger, 2014; Hicks, 1999; Milanovic, 2016; Scheve & Stasavage, 2016).

Altogether, the three lines of evidence just overviewed inspire the following predictions. First, people who report a more positive evaluation of the recent past may do so because they are nostalgic about its traditional and redistributive character. In other words, we may speak about a *nostalgia for tradition* and about a *nostalgia for redistribution*. These may be two partially independent factors promoting a better outlook towards the past. Second, ideology may influence these two forms of nostalgia, with right-wing ideology enhancing nostalgia towards tradition and left-wing ideology boosting nostalgia towards redistribution. Put another way, this hypothesis views the two forms of nostalgia as factors mediating the effect of ideology upon evaluation of the past.

The present study aims at testing the predictions just outlined. Ideology and evaluation of the past were measured as in previous studies. To quantify people's nostalgia towards tradition and towards redistribution, we developed an approach wherein these variables were treated as latent dimensions. Employing structural equation modeling, the analyses assessed a statistical model where ideology influences evaluation of the past in three ways: via a direct path, via nostalgia for tradition, and via nostalgia for redistribution. We hypothesized that people on the right reported higher nostalgia for tradition, in turn eliciting a better outlook towards the past. We also hypothesized that people on the left reported higher nostalgia for redistribution, the latter promoting a better outlook towards the past too. These hypotheses were tested employing a cross-sectional mediation analysis. It is paramount to stress at the outset that this sort of analyses is inadequate to proof conclusively that any observed mediation is real (Bullock et al., 2010; Bullock & Green, 2021; Fiedler et al., 2011; Preacher, 2015; Rohrer et al., 2022). This is because cross-sectional mediation analyses neglect the temporal dimension and may obtain biased estimates. Nonetheless, when a mediation effect emerges from cross-sectional mediation analyses, it is at least warranted to conclude that such effect *may* exist.

Participants

Prolific was employed to recruit 1200 participants (no data were excluded from the analysis). To ensure that the sample was representative of multiple countries, participants were drawn from the same countries analyzed in Study 1: United Kingdom, United States, Italy, Poland, Mexico, and South Africa; each country contributed with 200 participants. The sample size was established a priori adopting the software developed by Soper (2023) and based on a structural equation analysis with effect size equal to $f^2=.1$, statistical power equal to $1-\beta=.8$, and two-tailed type-I error probability equal to $\alpha=.05$ (Cohen, 1988; Westland, 2010). This requires a sample of 158 participants for each of the six countries (i.e., 947 in total), which was rounded to 200 (i.e., 1200 in total). The prescreening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the selected countries. For the United Kingdom and the United States, Prolific's prescreening system also allowed us to select half of the participants who had previously reported a right-wing ideology and half who had reported a left-wing ideology (this feature is not available for other countries). The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of City, University of London. All data and research materials are available at <https://osf.io/5bvwy/>. The study was not preregistered.

Materials and procedure

Participants began by reporting their ideology (is referred to as Q_{ideol}) as measured in previous studies:

Generally, do you prefer more left-wing or right-wing political opinions?

Next, they were asked to appraise the recent past (referred to as Q_{past}), again following previous studies:

Based on your memories, on what you have read, and based on what you have heard from other people, think about society (in its multiple aspects) in the period between 1950 and 2000. Overall, how good or bad do you think society was back then?

Their options were: Very bad, Rather bad, Moderately bad, Neither good nor bad, Moderately good, Rather good, Very good. Finally, participants had to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed (on a scale encompassing *Strongly disagree*, *Disagree*, *Neither agree nor disagree*, *Agree*, *Strongly Agree*) with each of the following sentences:

- “Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that there was more respect for authorities” (referred to as Q_{N1}).
- “Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that family ties were stronger” (referred to as Q_{N2}).
- “Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that there was more respect for traditions” (referred to as Q_{N3}).
- “Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that income was more equal across people” (referred to as Q_{N4}).
- “Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that the welfare state was much stronger” (referred to as Q_{N5}).
- “Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that rich people were taxed more” (referred to as Q_{N6}).

The order of these sentences was randomized across participants. The prediction was that two latent factors determined the score for these items. Specifically, the first three items (from Q_{N1} to Q_{N3}) were predicted to reflect a factor indicating nostalgia for tradition, whereas the last three items (from Q_{N4} to Q_{N6}) were predicted to reflect a factor indicating nostalgia for redistribution.

Results

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 4. To begin with, we examined the factorial structure of the questions about nostalgia for the recent past (from Q_{N1} to Q_{N6}). Employing confirmatory factor analysis, we compared two models (estimation of the models was based on maximum-likelihood method).² In model 1, all six items reflect one single factor; in model 2, two factors are at play, one capturing nostalgia for tradition and mapping onto items Q_{N1} to Q_{N3} , the other capturing nostalgia for redistribution and mapping onto items Q_{N4} to Q_{N6} . The statistics describing the two models are as follows:

- Model 1: RMSEA = .208, 90% CI [.192, .224]; CFI = .702; TLI = .504; SRMR = .139; AIC = 21,442; BIC = 21,503; SBIC = 21,465.
- Model 2: RMSEA = .089, 90% CI [.072, .106]; CFI = .952; TLI = .909; SRMR = .064; AIC = 21,053; BIC = 21,120; SBIC = 21,078.

All statistics converge in showing that model 2 outperforms model 1, also corroborated by a significant chi-square test comparing the two models ($\chi^2(1) = 390, p < .001$). The standardized factor loadings of model two are reported in Table 5 (the Delta method was employed to derive the z-score; Cheng et al., 2021). As supported by an analysis of configural invariance reported in the online supporting information, model 2 appeared to fit the data well even when each country was considered individually.

Next, we employed structural equation modeling to estimate the model shown in Figure 4 (estimation of the model was based on maximum likelihood).³ Here, ideology (Q_{ideol}) influences evaluation of the past (Q_{past}) in three ways: via a direct effect (effect *a*), via nostalgia for tradition, and via nostalgia for redistribution. The statistics describing the model as a whole are: RMSEA = .085, 90% CI [.074, .097]; CFI = .935; TLI = .893; SRMR = .064; AIC = 24,889; BIC = 24,981; SBIC = 24,923. The results about the tests of the specific effects are reported in Table 6 (the Delta method was employed to derive the z-scores; Cheng et al., 2021). Supporting our initial hypotheses, the results highlight three distinct pathways whereby ideology influences evaluation of the past. The first pathway (effect *a*; Table 6) captures the finding that, independent on any other mediator variable, a right-wing ideology favors a more positive view of the past. Following the second pathway, right-wing ideology bolsters nostalgia for tradition (effect *b*; Table 6) which, in turn, encourages a more positive appraisal of the past (effect *d*; Table 6). The indirect effect of ideology via nostalgia for tradition was significant (Table 6). Following the third pathway, left-wing ideology elicits nostalgia for redistribution (effect *c*; Table 6), which, in turn, encourages a more positive appraisal of the past (effect *e*; Table 6). The indirect effect of ideology via nostalgia for redistribution was also significant (Table 6). Notably, the effect of nostalgia for tradition upon evaluation of the past is not significantly different from the effect of nostalgia for redistribution upon evaluation of the past (see test of the contrast *d* – *e*; Table 6). However, the

²The confirmatory factor analysis was performed employing the Lavaan library in R.

³The structural equation modeling analysis was performed employing the Lavaan library in R. The code is available at <https://osf.io/5bvwy/>.

TABLE 4 Study 4: Descriptive statistics.

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Age	34.19	14.981	7.150	127.852
Ideology	2.63	1.196	.220	−.969
Past	5.01	1.569	−.153	−.974
More respect for authorities	3.10	1.236	−.069	−1.051
Family ties were stronger	3.64	1.114	−.567	−.489
More respect for traditions	3.41	1.244	−.423	−.883
Income was more equal	2.88	1.192	−.010	−1.021
Welfare state was much stronger	3.13	1.083	−.231	−.634
Rich people were taxed more	2.98	1.084	−.028	−.447

TABLE 5 Study 4: Statistics of the two-factor model estimated during the confirmatory factor analysis.

Item	Standardized factor loading		z	p
	Nostalgia for tradition	Nostalgia for redistribution		
Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that there was more respect for authorities (QN1)	.650	–	–	–
Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that family ties were stronger (QN2)	.725	–	19.65	<.001
Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that there was more respect for traditions (QN3)	.853	–	19.08	<.001
Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that income was more equal across people (QN4)	–	.680	–	–
Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that the welfare state was much stronger (QN5)	–	.445	9.96	<.001
Something I really like about society between 1950 and 2000, is that rich people were taxed more (QN6)	–	.710	9.81	<.001

Note: Fit indexes of the model are: RMSEA = .089, 90% CI [.072, .106]; CFI = .952; TLI = .909; SRMR = .064; AIC = 21,053; BIC = 21,120; SBIC = 21,078.

effect of ideology upon nostalgia for tradition is significantly stronger compared to the effect of ideology on nostalgia for redistribution (see the test of the contrast *b* + *c*; Table 6). This difference explains why, replicating the finding of the previous studies above, right-wing people overall have a more favorable opinion about the past compared to left-wing people (see total effect of ideology; Table 6).

DISCUSSION

The article asks whether people on the right of the ideological spectrum appraise the past, present, and future differently from people on the left. The data show that this is so in the case of the past: In all countries examined, right- compared to left-wing supporters evaluated the past as

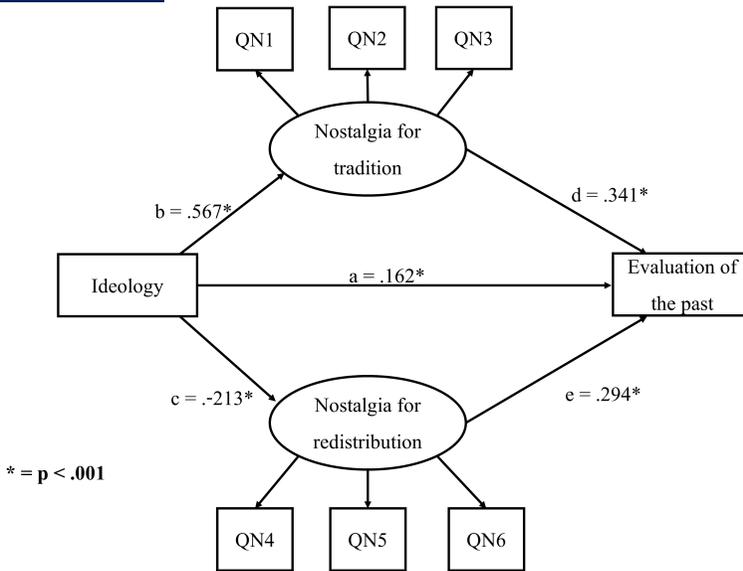


FIGURE 4 Study 4: Model analyzed with structural equation modeling.

TABLE 6 Study 4: Results of the structural equation modeling analysis.

Contrast	Standardized coefficient	z Score	p Value
<i>a</i>	.162	4.68	<.001
<i>b</i>	.567	17.04	<.001
<i>c</i>	-.213	-5.91	<.001
<i>d</i>	.341	8.83	<.001
<i>e</i>	.294	7.96	<.001
Indirect effect of ideology via Nostalgia for tradition	.193	8.35	<.001
Indirect effect of ideology via Nostalgia for redistribution	-.063	-4.95	<.001
<i>b</i> + <i>c</i>	.354	7.33	<.001
<i>d</i> - <i>e</i>	.047	.79	.429
Total effect of ideology	.292	10.58	<.001

Note: Fit indexes of the model are: RMSEA = .085, 90% CI [.074, .097]; CFI = .935; TLI = .893; SRMR = .064; AIC = 24,889; BIC = 24,981; SBIC = 24,923.

being more positive. In the United States and Poland, and possibly also in the United Kingdom (although in the latter country the results of the regression analysis are not confirmed by the Pearson correlation), an effect emerges also when considering the good-prospect future scenario: This was evaluated more positively on the left. Contrary to predictions, the present does not appear to be evaluated differently by the left and the right. Based on these results, we investigated any causal effect between ideology and evaluation of the past. While we observed that one's evaluation of the past does not affect ideology, we found that, when ideological representations become more salient, the relationship between ideology and evaluation of the past becomes stronger. The last study suggests that this effect may be partially mediated by nostalgia for tradition, which bolsters a positive evaluation of the past and is higher among people on the right.

These observations indicate that a better appraisal of the past distinguishes the right from the left, an effect evident in all nations and thus reflecting a general phenomenon. Moreover, the data suggest that this does not arise because people with a better opinion about the past are attracted towards the right, but rather because the right-wing ideology provides a framework to interpret the past as being a better age. The last study suggests that nostalgia for tradition might mediate this effect, at least partially: People on the right report a longing for tradition, for hierarchical order, and for family connections, which they attribute to the recent past. The study also reveals a nostalgia for redistribution among left-wing supporters. Yet, this form of nostalgia is not as strong on the left as the nostalgia for tradition is on the right, explaining why, eventually, right-wing supporters are those cherishing the past more.

Although, in all countries studied here, the past was praised more on the right, a recent paper has reported no link between ideology and collective nostalgia in Turkey (Lammers & Uğurlar, 2023). How should this observation be reconciled with our findings? An important difference is that, while in the present article participants were asked to evaluate the past, in the previous paper participants filled a questionnaire about collective nostalgia. If participants are asked to evaluate the past rather than filling a questionnaire about collective nostalgia, an effect may perhaps emerge in Turkey as well. However, Turkey may indeed be truly different from the countries examined here. While research indicates that, on a global level, most countries were more traditional in the past compared to the present (Giddens, 1991; Kennedy, 2017; Schuerkens, 2003; Trask, 2009; Welzel, 2013), this may not be the case for Turkey (Lammers & Uğurlar, 2023). Therefore, compared to right-wing supporters living in most countries, Turkish right-wing supporters may indeed be less nostalgic. This raises the hypothesis that the link between ideology and evaluation of the past may be moderated by the extent to which a country's society was more traditional in the past compared to the present (Lammers & Uğurlar, 2023).

The data show no difference between right and left on how the present is appraised. This goes against our initial prediction, motivated by evidence showing that people on the right are more likely to resist change (Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2003; Rock & Janoff-Bulman, 2010). However, that right-wing supporters do not exhibit a particularly good outlook on the present might not be as surprising after all: Many classical right-wing thinkers have voiced their dismay for the present, regarded as an age of vice and decadence compared to the glorious past (Chadwick, 1998; Decker, 1986; Helleiner, 1942). Our findings may help to clarify why people on the right tend to resist change: They might do so not so much because they like the present, but rather because they like the past, and because they may view change as being a further step away from the past. Linked to this, our findings clarify the nature of the link between system justification and right-wing ideology (Jost et al., 2003, 2004): They indicate that this link does not arise because right-wing supporters appreciate the present more than left-wing supporters. On this basis, an intriguing possibility for future research is to explore whether the link between right-wing ideology and traits such as resistance to change and system justification can be explained by the fondness for the past expressed by people on the right. Even more specifically, future research may explore whether nostalgia for tradition, which has emerged here as the dimension driving the right's appreciation of the past, is linked with resistance to change and system justification.

In the United States and Poland, and possibly also in the United Kingdom, left-wing supporters reported a better appraisal of the future, but only when assessing a scenario where people and institutions were assumed to have made sensible choices. This fits with our initial predictions, in turn motivated by the belief articulated by classical left-wing thinkers that mankind's actions can transform society for the better (Birnbau, 2002; Freedman et al., 2013; Rossinow, 2009). Inasmuch as the effect is restricted to the good-prospect scenario, the findings reveal that left-wing supporters believe that human actions can make a difference: Their opinion is that the future can improve, but only if appropriate choices are made. While the effect concerning the past emerges in all countries, the effect concerning the good-prospect future scenario was evident only in two (possibly three) countries, indicating that the left's optimism on how society can be

improved is not a general phenomenon. Research encompassing a larger number of countries is needed to establish which conditions enable the left's optimism to emerge.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We stress some limitations of the research presented here. First, while we collected information about participants' gender and age, we did not collect other demographic variables such as ethnicity, education, income, religion, or political engagement. Whether these influence the link between ideology and evaluation of history remains an open question. For instance, exploring the role of ethnicity is particularly important in multiethnic countries such as South Africa and Mexico. A second limitation pertains to Study 2, where we observed that manipulating the value of the past did not affect people's ideology. Here the construct of ideology was operationalized directly along a left–right scale, a measure found by prior research to be relatively stable (Brandt & Morgan, 2022; Jost, 2006; Vaisey & Kiley, 2021). A possibility for future research is to assess whether the null finding can also be replicated when ideology is operationalized in a more sensitive or indirect manner (e.g., as a set of attitudes or as an implicit behavioral outcome). One last limitation concerns Study 4. It is important to emphasize once again that cross-sectional mediation analyses, like the one employed in Study 4, do not prove conclusively that the observed mediation is real (Bullock et al., 2010; Bullock & Green, 2021; Fiedler et al., 2011; Preacher, 2015; Rohrer et al., 2022). This is because cross-sectional mediation analyses neglect the temporal dimension and may obtain biased estimates.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings show that ideology shapes the vision of history not only among intellectuals and politicians but also among laypeople. These observations support the general view that, far from being uninfluential, ideology affects the way laypeople interpret their social environment. Moreover, these data suggest that the sophistication of laypeople's ideological beliefs is considerable, inasmuch as these beliefs encompass representations as complex as those concerning appraisal of history.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data and research materials are available at <https://osf.io/5bvwy/>. This study's design and its analysis were not preregistered.

ORCID

Francesco Rigoli  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2233-934X>

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