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Political Ideology and Attitudinal Ambivalence: Investigating the Role of Ideological Extremity

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Abstract

Are individual differences in political ideology associated with inclinations to hold more or less ambivalent attitudes? Extant research on the linear association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence yielded inconsistent findings. The present research tested the hypotheses (a) that the association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence is curvilinear with lower levels of ambivalence at both extremes of the ideological spectrum and (b) that higher political interest is associated with lower levels of attitudinal ambivalence. It used data from large and demographically diverse electoral surveys in a set of three studies (Study 1: $N = 13,808$; Study 2: $N = 6,528$; Study 3: $N = 4,789$) that focused on attitudes toward political candidates (Studies 1 and 2) as well as political parties (Study 3) in Germany. Overall, the results support both hypotheses even when general attitudes toward the politicians and parties are controlled in the analyses.

Keywords

political psychology, ideology, attitudes, ambivalence

It is possible to simultaneously have positive and negative evaluative reactions toward the same attitude object (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 1997). Attitudinal ambivalence seems particularly likely in the case of political attitudes, where individuals are continuously exposed to a multitude of conflicting pieces of information and opinions about the same attitude object, such as a particular politician, a political party, or a policy proposal. The present research investigates whether and how political-ideological orientations of individuals are associated with the extent to which they tend to hold ambivalent political attitudes. The prediction that such a link exists follows from theorizing and empirical research on the associations of ideological orientations with thinking styles (see below) and from the assumption that individual differences in thinking styles have implications for the structure and complexity of attitudes (see Rudolph & Popp, 2007). Extant empirical research findings on the ideology–ambivalence link are inconsistent (Jost & Krochik, 2014; Newman & Sargent, 2020; Sargent & Newman, 2021). In the following, after briefly introducing the concept of attitudinal ambivalence, I describe the theoretical explanations for the opposite findings of previous research on ideology and attitudinal ambivalence and propose a third perspective. In the empirical part, I use data from large electoral surveys to test the predictions that follow from the three theoretical perspectives.

Attitudinal Ambivalence

Attitudinal ambivalence refers to the simultaneous existence of strong positive *and* strong negative evaluative reactions toward the same attitude object (e.g., Conner & Sparks, 2002; Jonas et al., 2000; Schneider & Schwarz, 2017; Thompson et al., 1995; van Harreveld et al., 2015). Hence, attitudinal ambivalence is conceptually distinct from indifference, where an attitude object elicits weak evaluative reactions in general. Attitudinal ambivalence can emerge *within* the affective, cognitive, or behavioral attitude component as well as *between* attitude components. Furthermore, it is possible to distinguish between *subjective* ambivalence, which refers to the self-reported experience of ambivalence, and *objective* ambivalence, which refers to the simultaneous presence of opposite evaluative reactions. The present research focuses on objective ambivalence within the affective attitude component.

The extent to which political attitudes are ambivalent has been shown to be associated with numerous relevant variables (for an overview, see Warner & Gainous, 2020)

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such as more unstable global attitudes (Lavine, 2001), delayed formation of voting intentions (Lavine, 2001; Schmitt-Beck & Partheymüller, 2012), weaker associations of global evaluations with specific beliefs and assessments (Lavine, 2001), increased likelihood of split-ticket voting (Mulligan, 2011), decreased predictability of political behavior (Basinger & Lavine, 2005; Greene, 2005; Lavine, 2001), and lower turnout (Çakır, 2022; Mutz, 2002). Hence, understanding the factors that play a role in the ambivalence of political attitudes contributes to understanding the bases and dynamics of political attitudes and behavior. Extant research on sources of ambivalence in political attitudes points to personal factors such as value conflict (Craig et al., 2005; Keele & Wolak, 2006), mixed conceptions of attitude-relevant identities (Lindstam et al., 2021), and information processing style (Rudolph & Popp, 2007), as well as to contextual factors such as campaign environments (Keele & Wolak, 2008; Rudolph, 2011) or heterogeneous social networks (Mutz, 2002). Recently, political-ideological orientations have been proposed to be associated with attitudinal ambivalence (Jost & Krochik, 2014; Newman & Sargent, 2020; Sargent & Newman, 2021).

The Ambivalence-Aversion Hypothesis

As mentioned above, the prediction that ideological orientations are linked to a tendency to hold more or less ambivalent attitudes follows from considerations concerning the association of ideological orientations with thinking styles. One of the most prominent theoretical views in this respect is the *rigidity-of-the-right perspective* (Tetlock, 1983). According to this view and the closely related *ideology-as-motivated-social-cognition model* (Jost et al., 2003), strong needs for security (existential needs) and certainty (epistemic needs) facilitate the endorsement of conservative political views that can be characterized by two core elements: (a) resistance to change and (b) acceptance of inequality. Strong epistemic needs are characterized as being associated with a rigid cognitive style. Even though the concept of cognitive rigidity is broad and often not clearly defined (see Cherry et al., 2021; Costello et al., 2023), studies documenting associations between conservatism and measures that reflect a motivation to obtain clear answers and stick to them, low tolerance of ambiguity, avoidance of attitude-inconsistent information and cognitive dissonance, low openness for new experiences, and a tendency to rely on intuitive rather than reflective judgments (for overviews, see Hibbing et al., 2014; Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2009; Van Hiel et al., 2010) have been taken as evidence for the hypothesized conservatism–rigidity link.

One straightforward prediction regarding the association of ideological orientations with attitudinal ambivalence, which can be derived from the *rigidity-of-the-right perspective*, holds that the low tolerance of ambiguity that characterizes the rigid cognitive style of conservative

individuals decreases the likelihood of holding ambivalent attitudes. In line with this reasoning, Krochik and colleagues (2007) conducted an online study using a large convenience sample of U.S. residents, which included 95 political and nonpolitical attitude objects and yielded support for their hypothesis that individuals with a more conservative orientation tend to experience less ambivalent affective reactions toward attitudinal objects.

The Elaboration-Avoidance Hypothesis

More recent research on the ideology–ambivalence link yielded findings that stand in contrast to the results by Krochik and colleagues (2007): Newman and Sargent (2020) investigated the association of political orientations with attitudinal ambivalence among convenience samples of U.S. residents in a set of five online studies where they failed to find support for a negative association of conservatism with attitudinal ambivalence. Instead, their results indicate associations of subjective and objective ambivalence with ideology in the opposite direction: On average, conservatism was associated with more rather than less attitudinal ambivalence. A follow-up study (Sargent & Newman, 2021) replicated this pattern for objective (but not subjective) ambivalence using attitude objects similar to those used by Krochik and colleagues (2007). As a post hoc explanation for their findings, Newman and Sargent (2020) speculated that increased attitudinal ambivalence among conservatives (vs. liberals) might result from the fact that the higher epistemic needs of conservatives are associated with a tendency to avoid conscious reflection on ambivalent attitude objects which would be necessary to resolve these ambiguities and construct more consistent attitudes (see Clark et al., 2008, for evidence that ambivalence can elicit avoidance of thinking about persuasive messages). Notably, as the *ambivalence-aversion hypothesis*, this line of reasoning is compatible with the *rigidity-of-the-right perspective*. Still, it suggests an opposite association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence.

The Ideological Extremity Hypothesis

According to the *ideological extremity hypothesis*, extreme political orientations on both sides of the political spectrum rather than conservatism specifically are associated with simplistic, dogmatic, and inflexible belief systems and thinking styles (Brandt et al., 2015; Conway et al., 2018; Costello & Bowes, 2022; Fernbach et al., 2013; Greenberg & Jonas, 2003; Lammers et al., 2017; Toner et al., 2013; van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019; Zmigrod, 2020, 2022; Zmigrod et al., 2020). In line with this view, ideological extremity and strength of partisanship on both sides of the ideological spectrum have been demonstrated to be associated with higher scores on behavioral measures of cognitive inflexibility (Zmigrod et al., 2020), more simplistic

perceptions of the political domain (Lammers et al., 2017), a tendency to ignore external information in judgments (Brandt et al., 2015), illusions of understanding (Fernbach et al., 2013), absolute certainty (Costello & Bowes, 2022; Rollwage et al., 2018), the perception of own beliefs as superior (Harris & Van Bavel, 2021; Toner et al., 2013), as well as intolerance (Brandt et al., 2014) and authoritarianism (Conway et al., 2018; for an overview, see van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019; but see also Jost et al., 2007). If Jost and Krochik (2014) are correct that a rigid cognitive style decreases the likelihood of holding ambivalent attitudes, it follows from the *ideological extremity hypothesis* that attitudinal ambivalence should be low at the extremes of both sides of the political spectrum rather than on its right side in particular.

The Present Research

The present research investigated the association of individual differences in political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence from the perspective of theorizing on the link between political ideology and cognitive style. Despite making opposite predictions, two previously discussed hypotheses are compatible with the *rigidity-of-the-right perspective*. In this respect, however, authors have recently argued that the conservatism–rigidity link can often be observed at the level of self-report measures of cognitive style but not necessarily at the level of behavioral measures (Eichmeier & Stenhouse, 2019; Guay & Johnston, 2021; Zmigrod et al., 2020). Instead, research using behavioral measures tends to find evidence for cognitive rigidity on both sides of the political spectrum (e.g., Ditto et al., 2019) and to be compatible with the ideological extremity hypothesis (Kossowska et al., 2023; Zmigrod et al., 2020). These differences between findings based on self-reports and findings based on behavioral measures might reflect that cognitive rigidity is increased at both extremes of the ideological spectrum but that certain personality traits, such as cognitive flexibility and ability, are more desirable and identity-relevant for individuals on the left than on the right side of the political spectrum, which creates ideological asymmetry on self-report measures (for empirical evidence pointing into this direction, see Bakker et al., 2021; Boston et al., 2018; Burger et al., 2020; Luttig, 2018). In light of these findings and given that measures of objective attitudinal ambivalence are correlates of information processing rather than self-report measures of cognitive style, the core prediction of this research was based on the *ideological extremity perspective*:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Individuals at both extremes of the left–right ideological spectrum tend to hold less ambivalent political attitudes than individuals who place themselves more toward the center of the scale.

In addition to the research question concerning the ideology–ambivalence link, this research investigated the

association of political interest with attitudinal ambivalence. Political interest is an indicator of the extent to which individuals engage with political attitude objects cognitively. This aspect can be expected to have implications for attitudinal ambivalence. However, different theoretical perspectives suggest different predictions: On one hand, one might expect political interest to foster more nuanced, multifaceted, and—consequently—more ambivalent political attitudes (e.g., Barker & Hansen, 2005; Rudolph & Popp, 2007). On the other hand, from the perspective of theorizing on attitude strength (e.g., Howe & Krosnick, 2017), more politically interested individuals can be expected to assign more personal importance to their political attitudes, which should facilitate stronger and less ambivalent attitudes. In line with the reasoning that individuals are usually motivated to reduce attitudinal ambivalence and that this motivation is stronger, the more personally meaningful attitude objects are, I predicted a negative association of political interest with attitudinal ambivalence:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Higher levels of political interest are associated with lower levels of attitudinal ambivalence.

These hypotheses were tested in three studies that used data from the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES). Studies 1 and 2 investigated attitudes toward political candidates in the context of two different elections. Study 3 investigated attitudes toward political parties in the context of yet another election. The presentation of the studies follows a conceptual order (attitudes toward candidates first, attitudes toward parties second) rather than the chronological order of data collection. The present research differs from previous research on the association of ideological orientations with attitudinal ambivalence by (a) testing the prediction that attitudinal ambivalence tends to be lower at both extremes of the left–right ideological spectrum, (b) focusing specifically on political attitudes, (c) using data from large, demographically diverse samples collected in the context of actual federal elections, and (d) using non-U.S. samples.

All data used in the present research are available under the links specified in the References. The scripts of the analyses are available under <https://osf.io/wksnz/>. Due to the large samples, the statistical power to detect effects as small as $f^2 = 0.01$ within the comprehensive linear regression models was $>.99$.

Study 1

Study 1 investigated the association of political ideology with the ambivalence of political attitudes using data on attitudes toward the two main candidates for the chancellorship in the 2017 German Federal Election: Incumbent Angela Merkel of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), who was running for her fourth term in

office, and challenger Martin Schulz of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), who was running for Chancellor for the first time. Both candidates can be considered centrist, which is reflected in the perception of their ideological orientations by the respondents of this study on a left–right scale ranging from 1 (*left*) to 11 (*right*), where Angela Merkel received an average score of 6.04 ($SD = 2.04$), and Martin Schulz received an average score of 4.78 ($SD = 1.71$). Even though the German Chancellor is not elected directly by the voters, media coverage of the campaign focuses strongly on the competition between the candidates nominated by those parties that hold a reasonable chance of leading a potential future government.

Method

Analytic Approach. To estimate the robustness of the empirical evidence, the hypotheses were tested both by assessing bivariate associations of affective ambivalence with political ideology and political interest as well as through multivariate analyses that included a set of control variables. The prediction of an inversely u-shaped association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence (*H1*) was tested both through polynomial regression and using the two-lines test proposed by Simonsohn (2018). Because I expected political interest to be associated with attitudinal ambivalence (*H2*) and political ideology, I included it in the set of control variables in addition to demographic controls (see below). In addition, I included the general attitude toward the respective attitude object in the set of control variables. Even though one might conceive general attitudes as the mediator of the effect of ideology on ambivalence, this is not the mechanism underlying my hypothesis. Instead, I was interested in the attitudinal consequences of ideology-related differences in thinking style and, therefore, in the association of ideology with ambivalence holding the general attitudes constant, thereby conducting a conservative test of my prediction. In addition to testing my hypotheses separately for each attitude object, I pooled repeated assessments referring to different attitude objects using multilevel regression models.

Sample. Study 1 used data from the 2017 Short-term Campaign Panel of the GLES (2019), which was conducted as an online survey. Respondents eligible to vote were recruited through quota sampling (age, gender, education) from a large online access panel (for details, see official study documentation). All respondents with answers on the relevant variables (see below) were included in the analyses, resulting in a maximal sample of 13,808 respondents (49.40% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 48.84$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.69$).

Attitudinal Ambivalence. Respondents indicated the strength of their negative feelings as well as the strength of their positive feelings toward each of the two candidates on 5-point

scales ranging from 1 (*no negative/positive feelings at all*) to 5 (*very strong*). Using these ratings, ambivalence scores regarding the two candidates were calculated using a formula proposed by Thompson and colleagues (1995): $(|P + N| / 2) - |P - N|$, where P and N represent the scores for positive and negative evaluative reactions. These ambivalence scores ranged from a minimum of -1 to a maximum of 5. As these measures of negative and positive feelings were included in Waves 4 and 6 of the campaign panel, average ambivalence scores across waves were calculated for each candidate ($r = .55$ for Merkel and $r = .49$ for Schulz)¹.

Political Ideology. The ideological orientation of respondents was measured using self-ratings on a scale ranging from 1 (*left*) to 11 (*right*). Average scores across Waves 4 and 6 of the survey were calculated ($r = .84$).

Political Interest. Political interest was measured on a reverse-coded scale originally ranging from 1 (*very interested*) to 2 (*somewhat interested*), to 3 (*in between*), to 4 (*not very interested*), to 5 (*not at all interested*), and averaged across Waves 4 and 6 ($r = .87$).

General Attitudes. Respondents indicated their general attitudes toward the two candidates on scales ranging from -5 (*I do not think much of the politician at all*) to $+5$ (*I think a great deal of the politician*). These scales were recoded from 1 to 11 and averaged across Survey Waves 4 and 6 ($r = .90$ for Merkel and $r = .81$ for Schulz).

Demographic Control Variables. Gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*), age, and education (highest school degree coded as *low*, *medium*, or *high*) were used as demographic control variables.

Results and Discussion

Bivariate correlations show that more rightward ideological orientations tended to be associated with less affective ambivalence toward Merkel, $r = -.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = $[-.11, -.07]$, and Schulz, $r = -.09$, $p > .001$, 95% CI = $[-.10, -.07]$, which is in line with the *ambivalence-avoidance hypothesis*. However, supporting *H1*, polynomial regression models provide evidence for an inversely u-shaped association of ideology with attitudinal ambivalence (see Table 1). A random intercept multilevel regression model with attitude objects nested in respondents (see Table 2) also shows a significant quadratic fixed effect of ideology on attitudinal ambivalence. *H1* is also supported by the results of two-lines tests as proposed by Simonsohn (2018; see Figure 1 and Table A1.2 of the Supplemental Material). Notably, the inflection point of both bivariate two-lines tests lies left from the midpoint of the ideology

Table 1. Regression Models Investigating the Association of Political Ideology and Political Interest With Attitudinal Ambivalence Toward Angela Merkel and Martin Schulz in Study 1

Predictors	Merkel (1)		Merkel (2)		Schulz (1)		Schulz (2)	
	Estimates	<i>p</i> value	Estimates	<i>p</i> value	Estimates	<i>p</i> value	Estimates	<i>p</i> value
Political ideology	0.34	<.001	0.09	.004	0.27	<.001	0.17	<.001
Political ideology ²	−0.48	<.001	−0.23	<.001	−0.39	<.001	−0.21	<.001
Attitude Merkel			0.18	<.001				
Attitude Schulz							0.21	<.001
Political interest			−0.09	<.001			−0.10	<.001
Gender (1 = female)			−0.02	<.001			−0.00	.270
Age			−0.00	<.001			−0.00	<.001
Education (1 = medium)			0.02	.002			0.01	.166
Education (1 = high)			0.01	.129			0.01	.258
Observations	13,808		13,526		13,678		13,386	
R ² /R ² adjusted	.024/.024		.109/.108		.020/.020		.111/.111	

Note. The continuous predictors and the attitudinal ambivalence scores are scaled from 0 to 1. Bold values highlight $p < .05$.

Table 2. Multilevel Regression Models Investigating the Association of Political Ideology and Political Interest With Attitudinal Ambivalence Toward the Attitude Objects of Studies 1, 2, and 3

Predictors	Study 1		Study 2		Study 2		Study 3		Study 3	
	Estimates	<i>p</i> value	Estimates	<i>p</i> value	Estimates	<i>p</i> value	Estimates	<i>p</i> value	Estimates	<i>p</i> value
Political ideology	0.31	<.001	0.15	<.001	0.15	<.001	0.14	<.001	0.50	<.001
Political ideology ²	−0.43	<.001	−0.25	<.001	−0.16	<.001	−0.14	<.001	−0.46	<.001
Political interest			−0.09	<.001			−0.06	<.001	−0.10	<.001
Gender (1 = female)			−0.01	<.001			−0.01	.006	0.01	<.001
Age			−0.00	<.001			0.00	.327	−0.00	<.001
Education (1 = medium)			0.01	.003			0.00	.549	−0.01	.117
Education (1 = high)			0.01	.040			0.00	.716	−0.01	.002
Attitude			0.15	<.001			0.15	<.001	0.25	<.001
Observations	27,486		26,912		19,547		19,264		23,925	
Marginal R ² /Conditional R ²	.023/.460		.088/.453		.015/.212		.051/.235		.045/.367	

Note. The continuous predictors and the attitudinal ambivalence scores are scaled from 0 to 1. Bold values highlight $p < .05$. Information on the fixed effects of attitude targets and random effects has been omitted from the table (see Table A3.4 of the Supplemental Material for comprehensive information).

scale (at point 4 for Merkel and point 4.5 for Schulz), which corresponds with the negative correlations between ideology and attitudinal ambivalence. In line with *H2*, political interest is negatively correlated with affective ambivalence toward Merkel, $r = -.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [−.10, −.07], and Schulz, $r = -.12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [−.14, −.11] (for a full correlation matrix, see Table A1.1 of the Supplemental Material) and is a negative predictor of ambivalence in the regression models (see Tables 1 and 2).

Overall, these results support the predictions of an inversely u-shaped association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence (*H1*) and of a negative linear association of political interest with attitudinal ambivalence (*H2*). At the same time, the linear trend of lower levels of ambivalence toward the right side of the ideology scale is also compatible with the *ambivalence-aversion hypothesis*. To test the robustness of these findings, Study 2 investigated the association of ideology with attitudinal ambivalence toward

political candidates in an election involving a competition between three rather than two candidates.

Study 2

Study 2 investigated the association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence toward political candidates using data collected in the context of the German Federal Election in 2021. Two aspects concerning this election are particular: First, no incumbent was running for reelection because the former chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) decided to retire. Second, three rather than two candidates competed for the future chancellorship: Armin Laschet (CDU), Olaf Scholz (SPD), and Annalena Baerbock (Green Party). Even though the data of this study do not include information on the perceived ideological orientation of these candidates, participants of a survey that was collected at the same time (GLES, 2023) gave Laschet an average score of 6.56 ($SD = 1.86$),

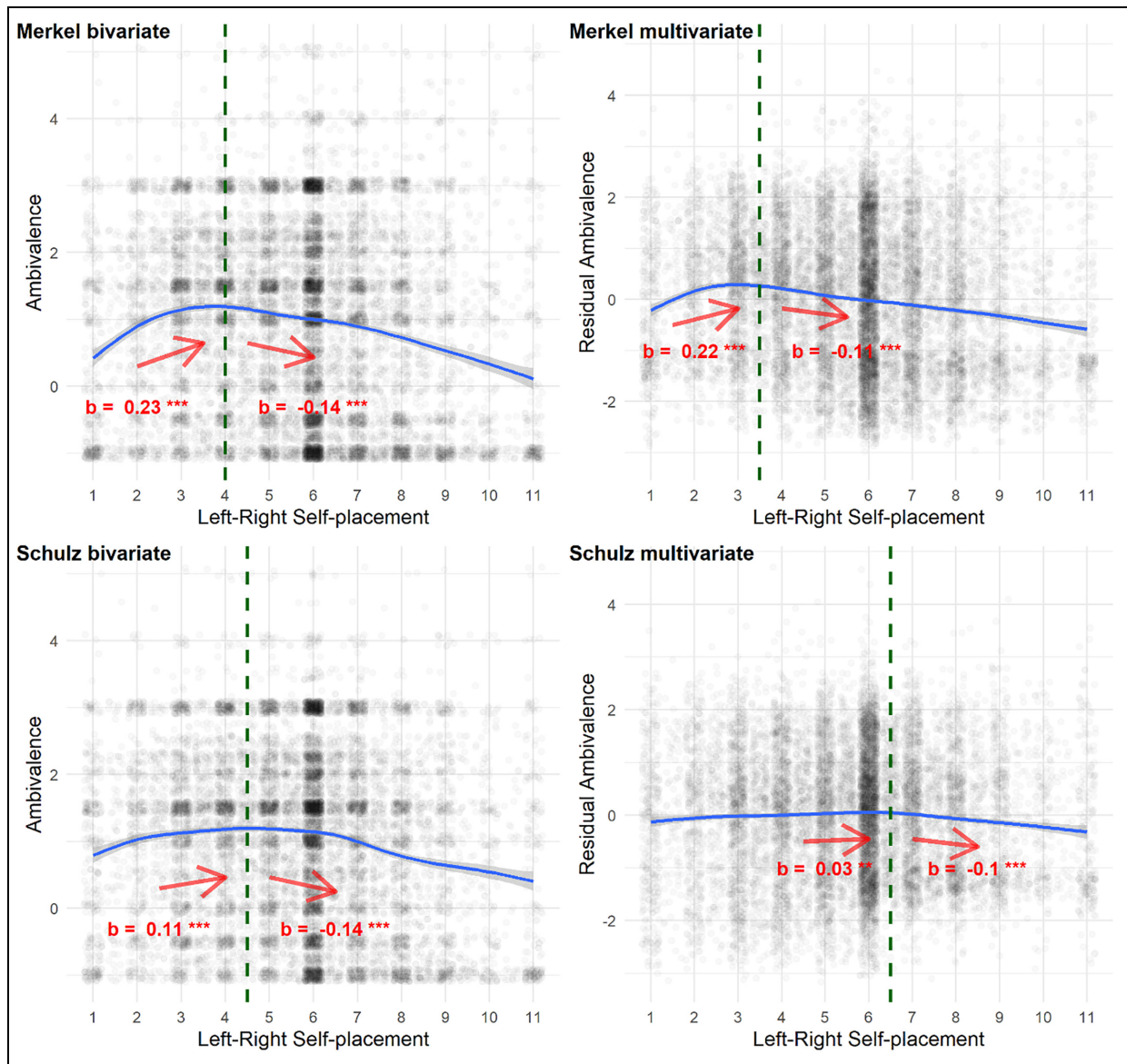


Figure 1. Association of Individual Differences in Ideology With Attitudinal Ambivalence Toward Angela Merkel and Martin Schulz (Study 1)

Note. The solid line depicts a generalized additive model (GAM) fitted to the data. The dashed vertical line represents the break point, and the arrows and regression weights refer to the regression lines below and above the break point of a two-lines test according to the algorithm developed by Simonsohn (2018). Multivariate analyses control for the general attitude, political interest, gender, age, and education.

*** $p < .0001$. ** $p < .001$.

Scholz a score of 4.75 ($SD = 1.70$), and Baerbock a score of 4.01 ($SD = 1.84$) on a scale ranging from 1 (left) to 11 (right). Compared with Study 1, the survey of Study 2 used a different interview mode and sampling design as well as a different question format to assess positive and negative reactions toward the candidates.

Method

Sample. Study 2 used data from the 2021 Rolling Cross-Section of the GLES (2022), which was conducted using a

probability sample through telephone interviews (for details, see official study documentation). All respondents with answers on the relevant variables (see below) were included in the analyses, which resulted in a maximal sample of 6,528 respondents (44.26% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 55.18$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 16.66$).

Attitudinal Ambivalence. Respondents indicated their (dis)agreement with the statements “[Candidate name] triggers negative feelings in me.” and “[Candidate name] triggers positive feelings in me.” using a scale ranging from 1

(*strongly agree*), to 2 (*agree*), to 3 (*neither agree nor disagree*), to 4 (*disagree*), to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Ambivalence scores were calculated as in Study 1.

Further Variables. General attitudes toward the candidates, political ideology, political interest, and the other control variables were measured as in Study 1.

Results and Discussion

The direction of the linear association of ideology with affective ambivalence is inconsistent: Political ideology is positively correlated with affective ambivalence toward Scholz, $r = .03$, 95% CI = [.01, .06], and Laschet, $r = .08$, 95% CI = [.06, .11], and negative correlated with affective and ambivalence toward Baerbock, $r = -.08$, 95% CI = [-.10, -.05]. Polynomial regressions provide evidence for an inversely u-shaped association of ideology with ambivalence (*H1*) toward Baerbock and Laschet but not toward Scholz (see Table A2.2 of the Supplemental Material). Results of a multilevel model with candidates nested in respondents (see Table 2) support *H1*. Two-lines tests corroborate these results in the case of Laschet but only partially in the case of Baerbock (with covariates included; see Section 2.3 of the Supplemental Material). The locations of the inflection points on the ideology scale vary in the two-lines tests for the different candidates (Scholz: 7, Baerbock: 4/6 [without/with covariates], Laschet: 6), which is compatible with the observed inconsistent linear associations between ideology and ambivalence. Supporting *H2*, political interest is negatively correlated with attitudinal ambivalence toward Scholz, $r = -.07$, 95% CI = [-.09, -.04], Baerbock, $r = -.05$, 95% CI = [-.07, -.02], and Laschet, $r = -.10$, 95% CI = [-.12, -.07] and negatively associated with ambivalence in the regression models (see Tables A2.1 and A2.2 of the Supplemental Material and Table 2).

In sum, the results of Study 2 support the prediction of an inversely u-shaped association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence (*H1*) when the data on the three different candidates are combined. Analyses at the level of the individual candidates partially support this prediction. Concerning the *ambivalence-aversion hypothesis* and the *elaboration-avoidance hypothesis*, the results are inconclusive because the sign of the linear association between ideology and ambivalence varied between the different candidates. Supporting *H2*, political interest was negatively associated with attitudinal ambivalence. As a next step, Study 3 extended the analyses to attitudes toward political parties rather than candidates.

Study 3

Study 3 investigated the association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence toward political parties using data collected in the context of the German Federal

Election 2013 on attitudes toward the five parties represented in the German Bundestag at that time: the CDU (perceived ideological orientation on a left–right scale ranging from 1 [*left*] to 11 [*right*]: $M = 7.05$, $SD = 1.96$), the SPD ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.72$), the Green Party ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.67$), the Free Democratic Party (FDP; $M = 6.60$, $SD = 1.93$), and DIE LINKE ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.65$).

Method

Sample. Study 3 used data from the 2013 GLES Campaign Panel (GLES, 2016), which was conducted as an online survey. Respondents eligible to vote at the elections were recruited through quota sampling (age, gender, education) from the frame population of an online access panel (for details, see official study documentation). All respondents with answers on the relevant variables (see below) were included in the analyses, resulting in a maximal sample of 4,789 respondents (49.05% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 46.03$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.76$).

Affective Ambivalence. Positive and negative feelings were measured as in Study 1, however, with political parties instead of candidates as the attitude targets. An affective ambivalence score for each political party was calculated as described in Study 1. As the measures of negative and positive feelings were included in Waves 1, 3, and 6 of the campaign panel, average ambivalence scores across waves were calculated ($.86 \leq \alpha \leq .91$).

Further Variables. General attitudes toward the parties, political ideology, political interest, and the other control variables were measured as in Study 1.

Results and Discussion

The direction of the linear association of political ideology with affective ambivalence is inconsistent for the different political parties, ranging from a positive correlation of $r = .33$ to a negative correlation of $r = -.14$ (see Table A3.1 of the Supplemental Material). The results of separate polynomial regressions (see Table A3.2 of the Supplemental Material) as well as multilevel regressions combining the data on the five different parties (see Table 2) support the prediction of an inversely u-shaped association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence (*H1*). Two-lines tests corroborate these findings for all parties except one (FDP; for details, see Section 3.3 of the Supplemental Material). The inflection points of these two-lines tests are close to the midpoint of the ideology scale for all parties except for DIE LINKE, where the inflection point lies on the left side of the scale. Supporting *H2*, political interest is negatively correlated with attitudinal ambivalence toward the different parties, $-.12 \leq r \leq -.24$ (see Table A3.1 of the Supplemental Material) and negatively associated with

ambivalence in the regression models (see Table 2 and Table A3.2 of the Supplemental Material).

In sum, the results of Study 3 support the prediction of an inversely u-shaped association of political ideology with the level of ambivalence of attitudes toward political parties (*H1*) and of a negative correlation between political interest and attitudinal ambivalence (*H2*). As in Study 2, the evidence on the linear association between ideology and ambivalence is inconsistent and therefore inconclusive concerning the *ambivalence-aversion hypothesis* and the *elaboration-avoidance hypothesis*.

General Discussion

In light of contradictory findings on the linear association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence in previous studies, the central hypothesis of this research was that the association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence is inversely u-shaped rather than linear, reflecting that attitudinal ambivalence is weaker among individuals at both extremes of the left–right scale compared with individuals with more moderate ideological orientations. Overall (with few exceptions at the level of individual attitude objects), the results of the analyses of this study support this prediction. The observed linear associations of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence were inconsistent across studies and attitude objects. This mirrors the mixed findings of previous research and supports neither the *ambivalence-aversion hypothesis*, according to which conservatives tend to hold less ambivalent attitudes, nor the *elaboration-avoidance hypothesis*, which predicts the opposite. Instead, the findings support the *ideological extremity hypothesis*, according to which extreme political orientations on both sides of the political spectrum are associated with less ambivalent political attitudes. The present research also shows that higher levels of political interest are associated with less attitudinal ambivalence. This finding is compatible with the notion that more politically interested individuals assign more personal importance to political attitudes, which facilitates stronger and less ambivalent attitudes (Howe & Krosnick, 2017).

Some limitations and particularities of this study should be discussed: First, the observed curvilinear patterns were often not very pronounced. To get an impression of the relevance of the observed ideology-related differences in attitudinal ambivalence, we can use a logistic regression model that predicts the probability of switching vote intentions during the electoral campaign from the ambivalence toward the party one intends to vote for (see Table A3.24 of the Supplemental Material). According to this model, the difference in average attitudinal ambivalence toward the CDU between respondents scoring 1 on the ideology scale ($M = -0.03$) and respondents scoring 7 on the ideology scale ($M = 1.23$) in Wave 1 of Study 3, for example, would correspond to an increase of the probability of

voting for a different party than the one indicated at Wave 1 from 23% to 28%.

Second, following prior research on the ideology–ambivalence link, political ideology was operationalized using left–right self-placements. In this respect, it is important to note that the highest ambivalence scores were not always observed at the midpoint of the scale (i.e., the exact shape and position of the inversely u-shaped curve of the ideology–ambivalence link varied) and that the analyses of this study leave open which concrete political attitudes and beliefs are associated with extreme left–right self-placements. Furthermore, more specific ideology dimensions than left and right can differ in their psychological bases (e.g., Costello et al., 2023; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Federico & Malka, 2018). However, additional analyses using items that can serve as proxies for the respondents' social and economic ideological orientation (see Sections 1.3–1.6 and 3.5–3.11 of the Supplemental Material) find support for inversely u-shaped associations of both ideology dimensions with attitudinal ambivalence.

Third, despite the focus of the present research on the general pattern of the ideology–ambivalence link, the findings also indicate that the specific associations of ideological orientations with attitudes toward concrete political attitude objects are idiosyncratic. Hence, case-specific investigations of the ideology–ambivalence link are also a very valuable research approach.

Fourth, the present research used only German samples and data collected in the context of German elections. Hence, future research should investigate the generalizability of the findings to other national, political, and cultural contexts.

Finally, all hypotheses tested in the present research reflected the assumption that the predicted association of ideology with attitudinal ambivalence is due to ideology-related differences in cognitive style. However, neither previous research nor the present one shows empirically that differences in cognitive style do, in fact, account for the observed associations. Hence, future research should explore the cognitive mechanisms underlying the association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence. Hopefully, the present research contributes to this by helping clarify the nature of the association of political ideology with attitudinal ambivalence.

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Supplemental Material

The Supplemental Material is available in the online version of the article.

Note

1. Separate analyses for the individual survey waves of Studies 1 (Sections 1.7 and 1.8 of the Supplemental Material) and 3 (Sections 3.12–3.14) yield results very similar to the analyses based on the average scores.

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