



# Political Polarization, Ingroup Bias, and Helping Behavior: Do We Help Others Who Are “on the Other Political Team?”

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**Abstract** The American social and political climate has become increasingly polarized. To explore the effects of politically based ingroup biases as they relate to intended helping of others, we designed a study in which we hypothesized that people who are extreme on the political spectrum will intend to help in-group members more so than out-group members. Using an experimental manipulation, we asked participants to choose if extremely progressive ( $N=212$ ; mean age = 22.9; 69% female), extremely conservative ( $N=47$ ; mean age = 32.8; 55% male), or neither represented their political beliefs. Participants were randomized to one of two vignettes, each depicting either a pro-blue lives matter or pro-black lives matter scenario. Results showed that, controlling for both age and gender, progressives were less likely to help out-group members compared with individuals in any other condition. Dispositional variables were also measured with dark and light triad traits. Light triad traits tended to positively predict helping intentions across conditions. Implications for understanding the psychology of helping are discussed.

**Keywords** Political polarization · Ingroup bias · Helping behavior · Political extremism · Personality

## Abbreviations

HREB Human research ethics board  
ANOVA Analysis of variance  
ANCOVA Analysis of covariance

The current study aimed to explore social and dispositional factors associated with helping others in light of political affiliations. Specifically, we investigated the extent to which people help those similar to themselves versus those who are different in terms of political beliefs. In a world marked by extreme political polarization, this research seeks to shed light on how modern political dynamics might influence immediate intended helping behavior.

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## The Social Psychology of Political Polarization

The increasing ideological divide between conservative and progressive movements in the USA has become a growing concern for domestic researchers and policy groups investigating the longitudinal effects of political polarization on social behavior (Motyl, 2018; van Prooijen, 2021). Individuals on both sides of the political spectrum are becoming increasingly entrenched in their worldviews, contributing to extreme partisan behavior (Doherty, 2014), often accompanied by moral certainty regarding one's stance on important social issues (Trivers, 1985). This polarization fosters an "us vs. them" mentality, which is deeply embedded in human social psychology.

Levine et al. (2005) explored the role of social group membership in helping behavior, demonstrating that both shared identity and the inclusiveness of group boundaries significantly influence the likelihood of helping behavior. Their findings revealed that helping behavior is enhanced when social categories are broad, encompassing both ingroup and outgroup members, whereas narrow categorizations, which emphasize group distinctions, limit helping primarily to members of one's ingroup. This finding aligns with the common ingroup identity model, which posits that emphasizing shared group membership can lead to more favorable evaluations and behaviors toward outgroup members (Nier et al., 2001). Political polarization, in this sense, can be understood as a manifestation of ingroup bias (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Humans tend to categorize people into "us" and "them," often underestimating the extent to which others share political stances (Bauman & Geher, 2003). This psychological tendency reinforces divisions and reduces cooperation between politically opposed groups (see Bauman & Geher, 2003).

However, ingroup bias itself can manifest in multiple ways. Hamley et al. (2020) emphasize that ingroup favoritism, whereby individuals treat their own group more favorably, does not always entail negative attitudes or behaviors toward outgroup members. Brewer (2017) identifies three forms of ingroup bias: Type I involves ingroup favoritism without outgroup derogation, Type II entails outgroup derogation without ingroup favoritism, and Type III consists of both ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation (i.e., when the outgroup is treated unfairly). These distinctions are crucial, particularly in understanding the extent to which political polarization may impact helping behavior, as individuals may reserve their efforts primarily for ingroup members without necessarily wishing harm upon outgroup members (Hamley et al., 2020).

The current study sought to explore the degree to which biased political thinking might affect how people act toward members of their own political group compared with how they act toward members of the other political group.

Specifically, we focused on intended helping behavior, which we predicted to be affected by whether the target of one's helping is a member of *one's own* group versus a member of the other group. Further, we did so using stimuli based on the modern political landscape by defining the ingroup and the outgroup based on affiliating with either the black lives or blue lives matter movements.

### Ingroup Bias and Helping Behavior

*Social Identity Theory (SIT)* introduced the concept of ingroups and outgroups, suggesting that individuals have a tendency to view their ingroup more favorably than outgroups (i.e., ingroup bias or favoritism; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). This bias can trigger intergroup competition, conflict, or discriminatory behavior, even when individuals are simply aware of the presence of an outgroup. SIT operates on a continuum, ranging from purely interpersonal to purely intergroup behavior, with the intensity of group identification increasing with conflict. Individuals are motivated by self-esteem, which can be derived either through personal achievement or group membership. SIT outlines three core processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Social categorization allows individuals to organize their social world by grouping people into categories. Through social identification, individuals align themselves with particular groups, adopting behaviors and norms. Social comparison involves individuals evaluating their own group against others, often leading to competition or conflict as they strive to maintain a positive social identity. Social hierarchy and group comparison further contribute to a ranking of group status, with groups often striving for superiority over others. Threats to group status, particularly when one group perceives its superiority to be legitimate, may provoke intense discrimination and resistance to any challenge from another group, as this threatens the stability and legitimacy of the existing social system.

Political polarization can be viewed as a specific form of ingroup bias (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This phenomenon is believed to be an evolved aspect of human social psychology (Geher & Wedberg, 2022; Wilson, 2020), suggesting that in ancestral environments, cooperation with ingroup members would have conferred evolutionary advantages. Helping members of one's ingroup would have increased the likelihood of future reciprocation, whereas outgroup members, being less likely to offer such reciprocity, were often met with less helping behavior.

Ingroup bias and political polarization are famously connected (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Research indicates that political polarization is linked to a reduced willingness to engage in helping behavior toward those in the opposing group (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). This aligns with Wang et al. (2024)

meta-analytic findings that individuals who receive more social support are more likely to engage in helping behavior. In short, people who see others as in their outgroup tend to not only hold relatively negative opinions of said others, but they also tend to see said others as, essentially, all the same. This phenomenon, which clearly speaks to polarization, is often referred to as outgroup homogeneity (Haslam et al., 1996). In tandem, these social psychological biases make it so that people not only rate *others* in relatively negative terms, but they tend to see everyone in said other categories in the same way—a classic recipe for political polarization.

Helping behavior (also known as prosocial behavior) is complex from an evolutionary perspective (see Geher & Wedberg, 2022). When we think of our evolved psychology, the idea of helping others at a cost to oneself makes little sense on the surface. However, across the past several decades, various researchers have shown that helping behavior is evolvable in species that meet certain preconditions. Based on his work regarding reciprocal altruism (i.e., each individual helping the other while they help themselves), Trivers (1985) made the case that humans would have been selected to engage in helping behaviors toward others who were likely to reciprocate such helping acts into the future. Importantly, such others are likely to be members of one's own ingroup, as members of one's own ingroup are likely to be encountered in one's future and, thus, might be well-positioned to help one back at a future point. Members of the outgroup, broadly defined, on the other hand, are less likely to return acts of helping. The current work explores this basic prediction in the context of modern political issues in the USA.

### The Role of Personality in Helping Behavior in a Politically Polarized World

As something of a secondary set of questions, we also explored the effects of certain personality traits on the intended helping behavior measured in this research. Specifically, based on extensive recent research on understanding personality traits from an evolutionary perspective, the current work included measures of both the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and the Light Triad (Kaufman et al., 2019). The Dark Triad conceptualizes personality traits as they relate to Machiavellianism (engaging in manipulative behavior such as lying), Narcissism (inflated sense of worth and degree of selfishness) and Psychopathy (anti-social behavioral characteristics and a lack of empathy; see Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Evidence seems to suggest that the facets of the Dark Triad may influence political attitudes and behaviors, such as, increased preference for authoritarian leadership (Hart et al., 2018), outparty discrimination (Fatke, 2017) and willingness to engage in violent activism (Gøtzsche-Astrup et al., 2015).

The Light triad (Kaufman et al., 2019) is a relatively new personality measure that aims to identify and quantify other-oriented selfless behavior. The Light Triad attempts to measure personality traits as they relate to beliefs in treating people as ends unto themselves and not a mere means to an end (Kantianism), belief in the fundamental goodness of everyone (Faith in Humanity), and a belief in valuing dignity and the unique worth of each individual (Humanism; see Kaufman et al., 2019). The Light triad was also found to correlate with other personality measures including measures of compassion and empathy, interpersonal guilt, and individual life satisfaction (Kaufman et al., 2019). Kaufman and colleagues, in their research, identified a moderate negative relationship between dark triad and light triad scores, to which they suggested that these two constructs are complementary and dynamic over the course of individual development. Generally, we expected Dark Triad traits to correspond to relatively low levels of helping, while we expected Light Triad traits to correspond to relatively high levels of helping. We expected these effects across levels of the independent variables.

### The Current Study

This study aimed to examine if political affiliation affects how likely one is to help an individual with opposing versus similar political views. We examined helping, an important index of perceptions of others, related to an ingroup/outgroup context, keeping in mind that helping behavior is one-dimensional and only captures a slice of attitudes toward someone from another group. We employed a randomized, between-subject design via an online survey created on Qualtrics. We hypothesized that:

- (1) Participants identifying as politically extreme would present as less helpful to outgroup members and more helpful to ingroup members and
- (2) Individuals scoring high on dark triad traits would present as less helpful to both ingroup and outgroup members. Similarly,
- (3) We predicted that higher scores on the light triad would correspond to increased helping behavior across levels of the independent variables.

Importantly, we did not have a priori predictions regarding whether relatively progressive participants versus relatively conservative participants would be more or less likely to help either ingroup or outgroup measures. Rather, we predicted members of both groups to be more helpful toward ingroup members and less helpful toward outgroup members.

## Method

This study was conducted following approval from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) from the affiliated institution.

## Participants

A total of 279 individuals participated in the online survey. Only those identifying as extremely progressive or extremely conservative were able to complete the survey and therefore were included in the analyses. The mean age was 24.8 ( $SD = 10.9$ ). Participants self-reported race such that 53.5% identified as White, 13.8% Latinx, 6.9% Asian, 4.5% Black, 0.3% Native American, 3% not listed, and 1.5% chose to not disclose. 23.4% identified as male, 51.7% female, 5.4% non-binary, 1.8% not listed, and 1.5% preferred not to say. We also asked participants if they were currently in college and 70.6% indicated yes. When analyzing the two political groups separately, extremely progressive ( $N = 212$ ) had a mean age of 22.9 ( $SD = 8.4$ ), 69% identified as female, 19% male, and 9% non-binary. In the extremely conservative group ( $N = 47$ ), the mean age was 32.8 ( $SD = 15.4$ ), 30% identified as female, 55% male, and 0% non-binary.

Participants were recruited through social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Recruitment scripts were also posted on well-known political groups on social media, various college campuses across the country, and a campus-wide email listserv. The school's subject pool system granted one credit to psychology students for taking the online survey. Psychology students were able to leave the survey at any point and still receive credit. No other incentives were given. To be eligible to participate, individuals must have been 18 years or older and fluent English-speakers.

## Procedures

The survey was completed at a time of the individuals choosing, in one sitting. A total of 21 questions were presented and the approximate duration was 10 min. When participants clicked on the link to the survey included in the recruitment script, it directed them to the online survey. The first page of the survey was a consent form which included the purpose, procedures, qualifying inclusion and exclusion criteria, potential risks and benefits, a confidentiality statement, point of contact's email address, and contact information for the ethics board. Individuals were told that the survey was completely voluntary, and they could stop participating at any point. Participants then had the option to consent and begin the survey or decline and exit.

If the individual consented, they were first asked demographic questions: age, gender, race, and college enrollment

status. Then, participants were asked to disclose how they identified politically with three answer choices: extremely politically progressive, extremely politically conservative, or neither. Using this measurement scheme, we were able to have a categorical measure of political affiliation for our study's purposes. Any participant choosing neither was immediately directed to the end of the survey where they were debriefed and thanked for their time. Credit was still given to psychology students. Those choosing extremely progressive, or extremely conservative were randomized to one of two vignettes. The vignettes depicted a scene of either a black lives matter supporter or a blue lives matter supporter (simply based on logos worn by the targets while pumping gas). Then, participants were asked to imagine that supporter moving into their neighborhood and to what extent they would help that person with varying tasks. The light triad and dirty dozen (dark triad) were then presented. After the assessments were voluntarily completed, a debriefing message appeared on the final page of the survey. The debriefing included appreciation for participation, the author's contact information, the number to the counseling center at the institution, and a message to psychology students instructing them on how to obtain subject pool credit.

## Materials and Measures

All procedures, except the recruitment script, were posted on Qualtrics' web-based platform that was used to create the online survey. As described above, participants were randomized to one of two vignettes. Subjective behavioral decisions, as used in this measure, have been used previously to measure helping behavior (e.g., Ruel et al., 2022). While this measuring system is short of tapping actual behaviors, it generally requires more thought on the part of participants relative to simply using straight-out Likert scales (Silva et al., 2019). The vignettes read as follows:

Pat, who is new in town, is wearing a Blue Lives Matter t-shirt and jeans while pumping gas next to you before you head to work. After pumping gas, Pat heads into the store and comes out with a water.

The only interchangeable phrase was *Blue Lives Matter* or *Black Lives Matter*, wherein randomization was evenly distributed among participants, no matter what political affiliation they identified as. The vignette instructions were identical, asking participants to read the statement and keep in mind that subsequent questions may pertain to it.

## Helping Questionnaire

The helping questionnaire is a self-report measure consisting of 10 items (Ruel et al., 2022). It was designed simply as a measure of how much someone would help another across

an array of everyday kinds of events, capturing participants' attitudes one-dimensionally. Instructions were modified to ask participants to imagine that Pat (the supporter in the vignettes) had just moved into their neighborhood to establish a more personal connection. Each item was also modified to include the name Pat in it. Examples of the items included: "I would drive Pat to the airport," "I would buy Pat coffee," and "I would drive Pat to the hospital in an emergency situation." Participants were instructed to indicate how much they agree or disagree using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The sum of all 10 items were calculated upon analysis, with 70 being the highest possible score, equating to the greatest extent of helping. In the current sample, internal consistency calculated using Cronbach's alpha for all helping questionnaire items was 0.94.

### Light Triad

The Light Triad scale is a self-report measure composed of 12 items (Kaufman et al., 2019). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the given statements using a 7-point Likert scale where 1 indicated *strongly disagree* and 7 indicated *strongly agree*. The scale consists of three subscales: Faith in Humanity (i.e., "I think people are mostly good"), Humanism (i.e., "I tend to admire others"), and Kantianism (i.e., "I prefer honesty over charm"). A total score was calculated by summing each individual subscale. In the current sample, internal consistency calculated using Cronbach's alpha for all

Light Triad items was 0.81.

### Dirty Dozen (Dark Triad)

The dirty dozen, measuring dark triad traits, is a self-report measure consisting of 12 items (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the given statements using a 7-point Likert scale where 1 indicated strongly disagree and 7 indicated strongly agree. The scale is comprised of three subscales: Narcissism (i.e., I tend to want others to admire me), Psychopathy (i.e., I tend to lack remorse), and Machiavellianism (i.e., I tend to manipulate others to get my way). Scores may range from 12 to 84, where 84 would indicate the highest level of dark triad traits. A total score was calculated by summing each individual subscale. In the current sample, internal consistency calculated using Cronbach's alpha for all dirty dozen items was 0.81.

## Results

The primary analysis was designed to see if political affiliation and experimental conditions (black lives matter versus

blue lives matter target) affected reported willingness to help the target. Additional analyses addressed if personality traits associated with both the Dark and Light triad scales independently predicted helping aside from the between-subject factors.

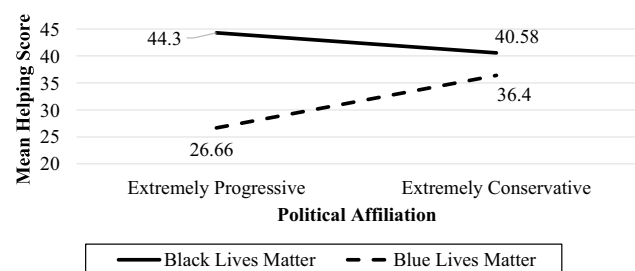
### Effects of Political Affiliation and Experimental Condition on Self-Reported Helping Behavior

A factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) with helping as the dependent variable and political affiliation and the experimental condition (black lives matter or blue lives matter) revealed no significant main effect for political affiliation ( $F(1, 233)=0.200, ns$ ) nor condition ( $F(1, 233)=2.626, ns$ ) with helping outcome scores. However, a significant interaction between these variables was observed ( $F(1, 233)=6.99, p=0.009$ ; see Fig. 1). To account for the significant difference in age and gender between the progressive and conservative groups, two analysis of covariance's (ANCOVAs) were performed and the statistical significance of the model remained, suggesting that age and gender did not play significant roles in predicting helping behaviors: ( $F(1,232)=6.81, p=0.010$ ) and ( $F(1,232)=6.76, p=0.010$ ), respectively.

Four separate groups were then created from the two independent variables, and a one-way ANOVA was computed. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the four groups and helping scores ( $F(3, 233)=24.96, p<0.001$ ). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that members of the progressives + blue lives matter group scored significantly lower in helping than did members of all other groups (see Table 1).

### The Dark and Light Triad Facets as Predictors of Helping Behaviors Across Conditions

Multiple zero-order correlations were computed for all participants to assess Dark and Light Triad subscales as predictors of helping behaviors. Small to moderate significant



**Fig. 1** Interaction between political affiliation and condition. *Note* A significant interaction was found between the dependent variable of helping, self-reported political identity, and the experimental condition



**Table 1** Descriptive statistics for helping variable across political belief and vignettes conditions

Condition:	Black lives <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Blue lives <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Total <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
<i>Political Belief:</i>			
Extremely progressive	44.30(15.43) <sup>a</sup>	26.66(14.10) <sup>b</sup>	35.75(17.21)
Extremely conservative	40.58(15.36) <sup>a</sup>	36.40(10.26) <sup>a</sup>	38.44(12.99)
Total	43.71(15.41)	28.34(13.98)	36.19(16.60)

Progressive + black lives matter ( $N=102$ ), progressive + blue lives matter ( $N=96$ ), conservative + black lives matter ( $N=19$ ), conservative + blue lives matter ( $N=20$ ); means with different subscripts (letters a and b) are significantly different (based on the Tukey post-hoc analysis) at the  $p < .05$  level. Specifically, the mean of the extremely progressive group randomized to the blue lives matter vignette was significantly lower than all other groups

**Table 2** Pearson correlations between light triad scores and helping across all political conditions

	1	2	3	4
1. Helping	—	—	—	—
2. Faith in Humanity	.267** .542** .322**	—	—	—
3. Humanism	.311** .316 .313**	.483** .404** .467**	—	—
4. Kantianism	.180* .289 .195**	.218** .279 .227**	.453 .447** .458**	—

The top correlation in each cluster corresponds to the progressive group ( $N=212$ ), the middle correlation corresponds to the conservative group ( $N=47$ ), and the last correlation corresponds to all groups ( $N=279$ )

**Table 3** Pearson correlations between dark triad scores and helping across all political conditions

	1	2	3	4
1. Helping	—	—	—	—
2. Narcissism	.268** .126 .252**	—	—	—
3. Psychopathy	-.020 -.202 -.028	.136 .117 .142*	—	—
4. Machiavellianism	.064 -.127 .052	.421** .263 .399**	.339** .689** .439**	—

The top correlation in each cluster corresponds to the progressive group ( $N=212$ ), the middle correlation corresponds to the conservative group ( $N=47$ ), and the last correlation corresponds to all groups ( $N=279$ )

positive correlations were observed between Helping and all subscales of the light triad: faith in.

Humanity ( $r(242)=0.322$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Humanism ( $r(242)=0.313$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and Kantianism ( $r(242)=0.195$ ,  $p=0.002$ ). When Dark Triad scores were examined, a small significant positive correlation was found between Helping and the Narcissism subscale ( $r(252)=0.252$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (see Table 2).

Multiple zero-order correlations were also computed for progressive and conservative groups, separately. The progressive group showed weak to moderate and significant positive correlations between all subscales of the light triad: faith in humanity ( $r(195)=0.267$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Humanism ( $r(195)=0.311$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Kantianism ( $r(195)=0.180$ ,  $p=0.012$ ) with helping scores. A significant positive correlation was found between the Narcissism subscale of the Dark Triad and the helping questionnaire ( $r(187)=0.268$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The conservative group showed a large significant positive correlation between the Faith in Humanity subscale of the Light Triad and the helping questionnaire ( $r(38)=0.542$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). All correlations were two-tailed tests. No other correlations were statistically significant

between personality measures and helping scores (see Table 3).

To examine the overall amount of variability of helping explained by Light Triad and Dark Triad personality traits, and to examine the unique amount of variability explained by both Light and Dark Triad traits on helping behaviors, a multiple regression was conducted. A significant amount of variability was accounted for by the set of light triad and dark triad traits ( $R^2=0.20$ ,  $F(6, 223)=9.17$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, approximately 20% of variability in helping can be accounted for by information regarding participants' light and dark triad traits. Next, semi-squared partial correlations were computed to address the unique amount of variability in helping accounted for, separately, by the six subscales of the Light and Dark Triad. For the Light Triad, Faith in Humanity uniquely accounted for a significant amount of variability in helping ( $sr^2=0.03$ ,  $p=0.003$ ), as did Humanism ( $sr^2=0.03$ ,  $p=0.005$ ), whereas Kantianism reached marginal significance ( $sr^2=0.01$ ,  $p=0.088$ ). Regarding the Dark Triad, Narcissism uniquely accounted for a significant amount of variability in helping ( $sr^2=0.04$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), Psychopathy reached marginal significance ( $sr^2=0.03$ ,

$p = 0.064$ ), and Machiavellianism did not reach significance ( $sr^2 = 0.00$ ,  $ns$ ; see Table 4).

## Discussion

In the current political environment, fissures and tensions abound. By some measures, there is more political polarization in the United States now than there has been in many decades (see Motyl, 2018). Understanding the behavioral science of this divide has the capacity to help us bridge the substantial ideological divide that surrounds us as we collectively move forward. Framing this divide in terms of ingroup bias (Billig & Tajfel, 1973), the current study sought to better understand how politically framed ingroup/outgroup labels might relate to self-reported levels of helping of some target individual who either (a) identifies with one's political ingroup or (b) identifies with one's political outgroup. Our methodology allowed us to see if self-reported progressives versus self-reported conservatives differed in their proclivities to help ingroup versus outgroup members. Further, we sought to see if, across experimental conditions, the facets of the Dark Triad (see Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and the Light Triad (Kaufman et al., 2019) independently predict helping behavior in the scenarios created for this study.

Based on results of a 2\*2 factorial ANCOVA, our main finding was that a proclivity to help the target was contingent on the independent variables. Specifically, based on the results of a significant interaction, self-identified progressives were significantly less likely to help an outgroup member (target wearing a Blue Lives Matter shirt) compared with members of the other conditions. This finding suggests that, on average, progressives may hold particularly negative attitudes toward political outgroup members compared with others. This result aligns with current sociopolitical trends, wherein progressives, perhaps reacting to more recent and

emotionally charged political events, such as the controversial outcomes of the 2016 and 2020 elections, express heightened levels of opposition toward political outgroup members. Such reactions may stem from ongoing tensions surrounding social justice issues, perceived threats to civil liberties, and moral conviction, as discussed by Trivers (1985). This intensification of political divisions may explain why progressives in our study reported a lower willingness to assist individuals identified with opposing political stances. Furthermore, it is possible that these reactions are influenced by a generational divide, as our findings suggest that age did not significantly moderate helping behavior. The broader sociopolitical environment, particularly events that trigger ideological fervor, may disproportionately affect younger progressives, shaping their intergroup attitudes. Importantly, note that both gender and age were included as covariates and neither had independent significant impacts on these basic findings.

In terms of dispositional correlates of helping, all facets of the Light Triad (Faith in Humanity, Kantianism, and Humanism) were positively related to proclivity to help (across conditions). On the other hand, for the Dark Triad, only Narcissism was significantly related to helping proclivity. Interestingly, the correlation between Narcissism and helping was positive in nature, suggesting that those who are high in Narcissism are more likely to want to help others. When we separated participants by political affiliation, this finding only stood for progressive participants, suggesting that only among progressives, Narcissism may be positively associated with helping others. But again, this finding is counter-intuitive and requires further study.

## Limitations

While this study provides an efficient and elegant way to study ingroup bias vis-à-vis the current political climate, it is not without limitations. For one, we studied only self-identified extremists in terms of political affiliation, which makes it so that we cannot make inferences regarding political moderates. Seeking to replicate these findings in other countries that have clearly demarcated *progressive* and *conservative* sects might be illuminating.

Moreover, our sample size also varied drastically between political groups, as we found it difficult to find extremely conservative participants in the region where our campus is located, even when targeting more conservative universities. Future research would certainly benefit from obtaining a more representative sample of political extremes.

Further, it is noteworthy that the intended helping in this research was self-reported, hypothetical helping. Measuring attitudes toward members of outgroups requires a multi-faceted approach to capture the complex nature of intergroup relations (see Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Based on work in the

**Table 4** Multiple regression predicting helping from light and dark triad traits criterion variable: helping

Predictor variables	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>
Light triad			
Faith In Humanity	.73	.21	*
Humanism	.87	.21	*
Kantianism	.50	.13	
Dark triad			
Narcissism	.74	.23	*
Psychopathy	.56	.14	
Machiavellianism	−.09	−.02	
$R^2 = .20^*$			

\* $p < .05$

field of social psychology, helping behavior toward a target (e.g., Ruel et al., 2022) is an important behavioral mechanism that speaks to attitudes. For this reason, while we could have focused on a number of outcome measures, we decided to go with intended helping behavior—partly because past research has progressed in this manner and partly because intended helping behavior sits at the interface of self-reported attitudes and actions. To increase ecological validity, future research might benefit from addressing other markers of liking for a target such as ratings of the target's likely attributes (e.g., kindness, intelligence, moral nature, etc.). Using an actual behavior-based measure (i.e., in vivo exposure) to evoke helping, or similar outcomes would help to better explain the current findings.

Our study did not include an official manipulation check; however, the differing responses from participants across vignettes serve as an indirect indication that the manipulation worked as intended. While this provides some confidence in the effectiveness of the manipulation, we acknowledge the importance of explicitly assessing whether participants recognized the group membership of the character portrayed. We recommend future studies to incorporate a formal manipulation check in similar designs to ensure that the manipulation is accurately perceived.

Finally, while our study did include appropriate situational and dispositional factors, the results raise further questions. Future studies would benefit from synthesizing both the social and individual factors involved in intended helping behavior, perhaps by adding personality factors as moderators. Other individual-level factors would be interesting to evaluate based on past work on the psychology of political polarization. For instance, in a study of attitudes about football players kneeling during the Star Spangled Banner, right-wing authoritarianism emerged as a strong predictor variable against these actions (see Sevi et al., 2021). Other studies (Dallago & Roccato, 2010) have also found right-wing authoritarianism to be a reliable predictor of politically motivated attitudes and actions. Perhaps a replication of our study that included a measure of right-wing authoritarianism would be beneficial in future work.

## Implications and Bottom Line

Written during a time of large-scale political unrest, this paper sought to illuminate the social psychology of ingroup bias as it relates to major political divisions in the USA today. Our methodology allowed us to explore just how much our political attitudes affect our intended behaviors toward others. Interestingly, we found that self-identified political progressives were significantly less likely to help someone wearing a Blue Lives Matter shirt compared with participants in any of the other conditions.

Perhaps in light of all of the unrest that permeated the nation during the Trump presidency, progressives were essentially simply fed up and had come to develop particularly negative attitudes toward political outgroup members (relative to conservatives or to people who identify with other political affiliations).

In terms of dispositional characteristics, it looks like those who score as high in the Light Triad may well be, in a sense, super-helpers, tending to want to help others regardless of the powerful lines that are drawn by ingroup/outgroup reasoning.

At the end of the day, our social world consists of actual people interacting with actual other people. Large-scale political politics, which have been essentially disastrous over the past few years, are difficult for people to process rationally (see Geher et al., 2015). To the extent that this reality trickles down to how we actually treat our neighbors, this all may be problematic. Hopefully, the current work sheds light on how and why such ingroup biases can come to influence behavior on the ground in a way that might help cultivate a more prosocial world that cuts across political divisions into the future.

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**Author contribution** All authors except FA were involved in conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, and methodology. All authors provided resources, software, and visualization. BF, GG, and SH were involved in project administration and validation. BF, GG, and FA wrote the original draft and reviewed and edited. Author GG supervised. There was no funding acquisition.

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**Data availability** The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## Declarations

**Conflicts of interest** We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

**Ethical Approval** This study was conducted following approval from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) from the State University of New York at New Paltz.

**Consent to Participate** Informed consent to participate in this study was obtained from all participants.

**Consent for Publication** Participants in the current study consented to publish the de-identified data.



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