

Viewpoint Diversity and Political Bias

Research Report: SPAS-010 | September 18, 2020

Research Question

In this report, we asked people whether they think a scientific study should be shared with the public. The scientific study in question was a hypothetical one about the effects of teaching both liberal and conservative views in the classroom. Participants were asked whether they thought the study should be shared with the public if results showed an *increase* (versus *decrease*) in violence toward minorities on campus.

Methodology

Data Source

- Social and Political Attitudes Study (SPAS)
 - A nationally representative sample reflecting the U.S. adult population in terms of educational attainment, ethnicity, gender, and household income.

Participants

- 600 adults that identify as:
 1. Liberals: n = 159, 51% female, average age = 42.33 years
 2. Moderates: n = 241, 63% female, average age = 43.46 years
 3. Conservatives: n = 200, 39% female, average age = 52.16 years

Measures

1. To measure Political Orientation, respondents were asked, “When thinking about the following issues, where would you place yourself on the political continuum?” Participants were asked about their (a) financial/economic orientation and their (b) social/ cultural orientation.
 - a) If participants answered “liberal” *for both*, they were labeled “liberals.” If they answered “moderate” or “conservative” *for both*, they were labeled “moderates,” or “conservatives” respectively.
2. Viewpoint Diversity was measured with two vignettes presented at different points in the survey. In the vignettes, the respondents were told that a recent study was conducted by top academics at a large research university and the study found:
 - a) the more often professors teach both liberal and conservative views in their classroom, the higher the rates of physical violence toward minorities on campus.
 - b) the more often professors teach both liberal and conservative views in their classroom, the lower the rates of physical violence toward minorities on campus.

Respondents were asked how important it is that the results of the study be shared with the public. Answer options ranged from “very unimportant” (-2) to “very important” (+2)

Summary of Findings

1. Liberals, Moderates, and Conservatives all thought it was important that the research be shared with the public, regardless of the results of the study.
2. However, Liberals were more likely to say that it was very important for the public to be made aware of the findings when study results showed *higher* rates of violence towards minorities.
 - This is consistent with prior research showing liberals to be more concerned with fairness and inequality compared to moderates or conservatives. The effect size here, though statistically significant, was small.

Take-home messages for SPAS-010

The results here may suggest that Americans across the political spectrum are more supportive of scientific research and political diversity than is sometimes suggested by pundits and journalists. However, it is possible that the wording of the vignettes might have influenced our results. For example, people might feel that because the study was done by “top academics at a large research university,” it should be shared with the public regardless of its contents.

- Have an interpretation of this you want to share? Email it to research@skeptic.com

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Researchers

Anondah Saide, PhD
Kevin McCaffree, PhD
research@skeptic.com

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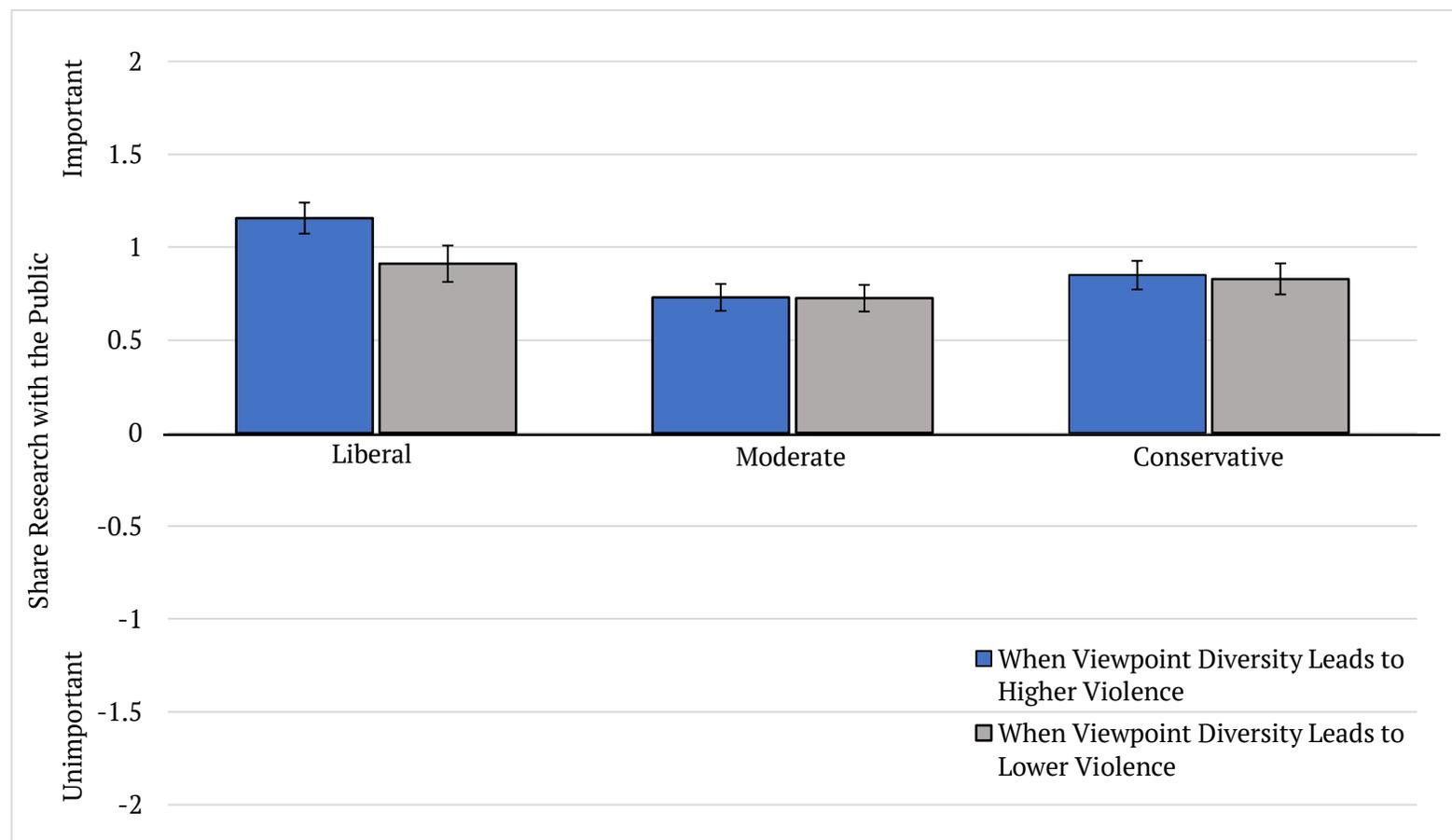
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Figure 1. Viewpoint diversity and political orientation



For additional information (e.g., statistical output, full citations) not included in this document, view the supplemental page for this report located at skeptical.com/research-center/social-political-attitudes-study/