

Political Attitudes, Cognitive Style, and Political Persuasion

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Introduction

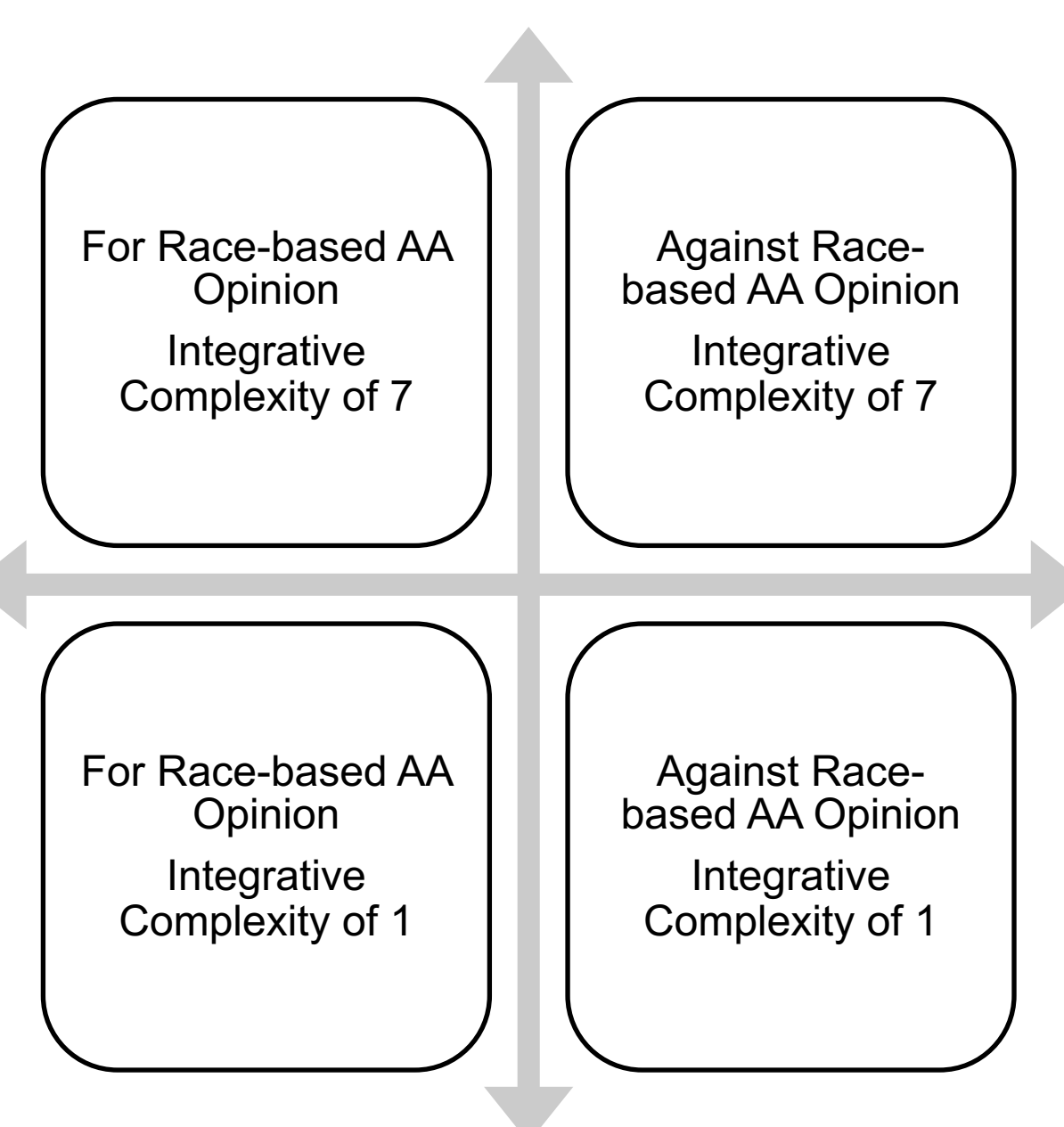
- How do liberals and conservatives differ? Existing evidence suggests clear divergences on cognitive style and sociopolitical attitudes. However, theories such as the rigidity of the right hypothesis (Adorno et al., 1950; Tetlock, 1983) and the ideologue hypothesis (Rokeach, 1956) make incompatible predictions.
- The present research aims to reconcile these incongruities by employing measures that assess (a) cognitive style/open-mindedness, (b) perspective-taking, and (c) relationships between characteristics of procedural justice.

Methods of Study 1

- Seventy-four participants (67.3% men, ages 18-75, median age 21, 50.9% had at least a four-year degree) were recruited. Only the responses of those participants who correctly answered at least four of six true or false attention check reading questions were retained for analysis ($N = 55$).
- Eighteen articles were gathered on the issues of gun control, Confederate statues, and U.S. national anthem protests by N.F.L. players. Six articles were found for each topic, three liberal and three conservative in political orientation.
- Participants were asked their political orientation and randomly assigned by a Latin Square Design to read four articles. For each article, they were asked to identify its political orientation along an eight-point scale from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Participants then responded to an Article Analysis Questionnaire that asked about the piece's reliance on emotion, logic, its persuasiveness, and whether it was well-written.

Methods of Study 2

- This study was carried out over a nationally representative college-educated Qualtrics panel of eighty-one participants (50% women, ages 24-75, median age 54).
- The study employed a 2x2x2 between-subjects factorial design. Independent variables were participant ideology, whether the argument was for or against policies of racial preference, and the argument's integrative complexity (IC).
- Participants were randomly assigned to listen to one of four audio recordings of legal rulings on a fictitious race-based affirmative action (AA) case between a coalition of Asian Americans and UCLA. Participants were asked to summarize each argument by a 20:1 compression ratio.
- Participants were asked to complete the Actively Open-minded Thinking Scale, Cognitive Reflection Task, a Judge Open-mindedness Questionnaire, and a Procedural Justice Questionnaire.
- The judicial opinions were constructed to be orthogonal in political orientation and integrative complexity.



Hypotheses

- The Rigidity of the Right Perspective Predicts:** Compared to political liberals, conservatives are less open-minded, worse perspective-takers, more receptive to arguments coming from their own side and less receptive to those of the other side, more averse to complexity, and exhibit poorer cognitive reflection.
- The Ideologue Perspective Predicts:** Compared to political moderates, staunch liberals and staunch conservatives are worse perspective-takers, more receptive to arguments that conform with their political worldview, are less open-minded, more averse to complexity, and demonstrate poorer cognitive reflection.

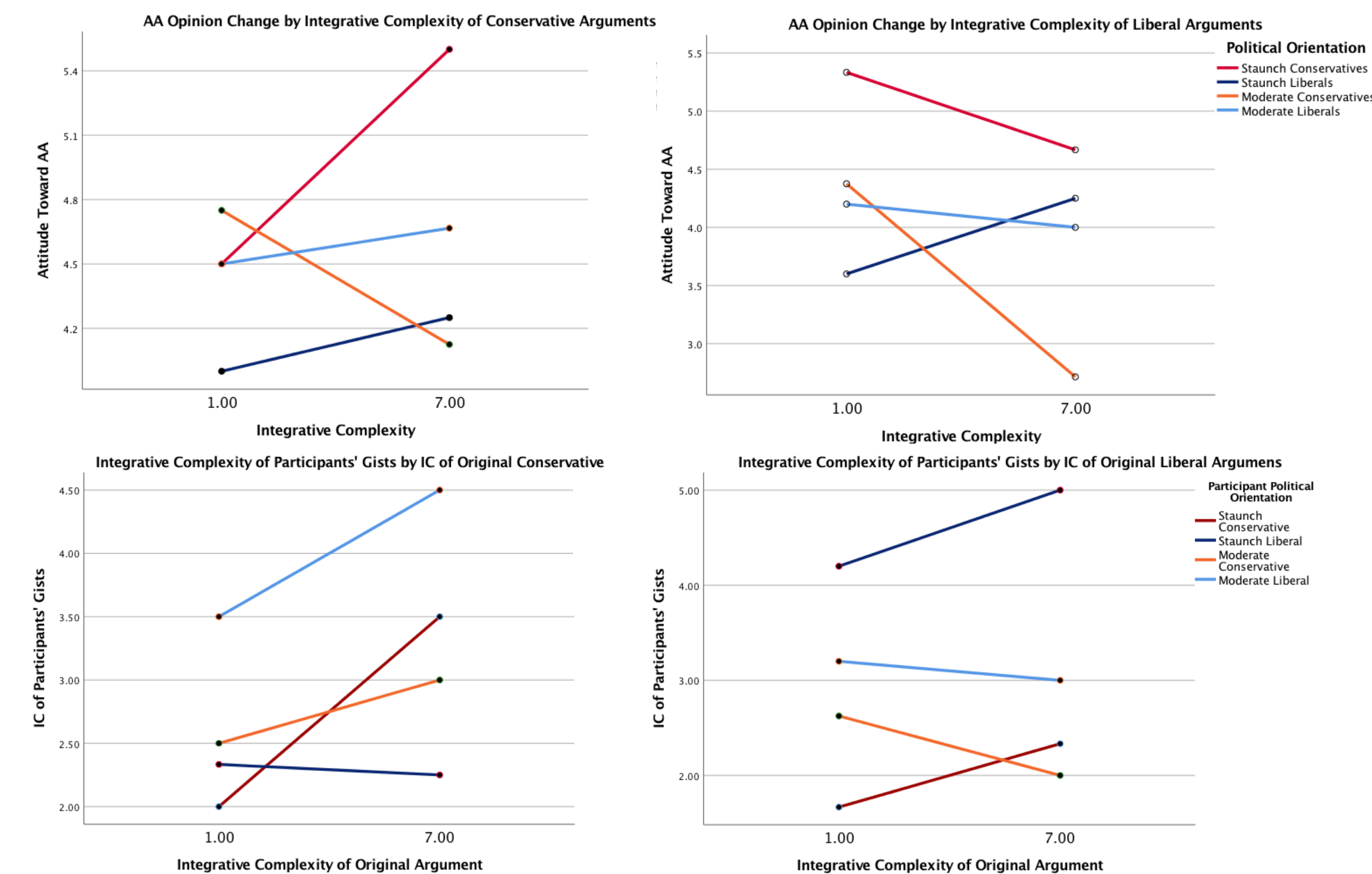
Key Findings of Study 1

Characteristics	Liberals ($N = 33$)		Conservatives ($N = 22$)		All Participants ($N = 55$)	
	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2
Well-written	.508***	.258***	.328*	.108*	.387***	.150***
Emotion	.173	.030	.182	.033	.090	.008
Logic	-.457**	.209**	-.301*	.091*	-.353***	.124***
Argument's Political Orientation	-.164	.027	.363**	.131**	.206*	.042*

- The emotional valence of the arguments did not significantly explain the persuasiveness of the texts but being well-written and logical did. For liberals, whether a piece was logical and well written explained 32.6% of the variance ($R = .326$, $F(2, 45) = 10.891$, $p < .001$). For conservatives, these two predictors explained 11.9% of the variance ($R = .345$, $F(2, 77) = 5.198$, $p < .01$). Instead, for conservatives, recognizing the argument's political stance alone accounted for 13.1% of the variance in its persuasiveness ($R = .363$, $F(1, 81) = 12.255$, $p < .01$) and significantly predicted its persuasiveness ($\beta = .363$, $p < .01$).

Key Findings of Study 2

- Actively open-minded thinking (AOT).** On average, we found participants who identified as conservative had higher AOT scores ($M = 2.63$, $SE = .13$) than those who identified as liberal ($M = 2.25$, $SE = .12$). This difference was significant $t(79) = -2.19$, $p < .05$. On average, moderate liberals and conservatives had similar AOT scores $t(51) = .779$, $p = .44$ while staunch conservatives and staunch liberals differed greatly in AOT scores $t(26) = 2.933$, $p < .01$.
- We employed three metrics to assess perspective-taking: an assessment of participants' attitudinal changes and two scores based on gists, namely their integrative complexity and content.
- Attitudinal Shifts.** We found staunch conservatives on average changed their position on AA more so than liberals. This difference was significant $t(26) = 2.976$, $p < .01$. This difference was not significant comparing moderate liberals and moderate conservatives $t(51) = -.875$, $p = .386$.
- Gist Scores.** We found no significant difference between liberals and conservatives on perspective-taking of the other side $t(79) = -.561$, $p = .576$. There was also no significant difference when we compared staunch conservatives and staunch liberals $t(26) = .862$, $p = .397$. The same held when comparing moderate conservatives and moderate liberals $t(51) = .441$, $p = .661$.



- Integrative Complexity of Gists.** A Mann-Whitney test indicated that the integrative complexity of the summaries was greater for liberals ($N = 38$; $M = 3.54$; $Mdn = 3$) than for conservatives ($N = 43$; $M = 2.47$; $Mdn = 2$), $U = 492.0$, $p < .001$, $r = -.33$. To test the ideologue hypothesis, we conducted further tests. We found that staunch conservatives ($N = 12$; $M = 2.25$; $Mdn = 2.5$) and staunch liberals ($N = 16$; $M = 3.47$; $Mdn = 3.0$) differed in the integrative complexity of their gists though non-significantly $U = 56.0$, $p = .09$, $r = -.33$. The difference between moderate conservatives ($N = 31$; $M = 2.55$; $Mdn = 2.0$) and moderate liberals ($N = 22$; $M = 3.59$; $Mdn = 3.0$) was significant $U = 213.0$, $p = .018$, $r = -.32$. Both moderate liberals and staunch conservatives increased the integrative complexity of their gists upon hearing a highly complex conservative judge. No comparable shifts were seen in the gists of liberal arguments.
- Cognitive Reflection Task (CRT).** On average, participants who identified as conservative had lower CRT scores ($M = 1.12$, $SE = .16$) than those who identified as liberal ($M = 1.13$, $SE = .18$). This difference was not significant $t(79) = 1.36$, $p = .18$.
- Procedural justice.** Trust in Federal courts significantly predicted ratings that the decision by the court was reasoned, $b = .64$, $t(79) = 7.26$, $p < .001$. Trust in Federal courts also explained a significant proportion of the variance in these ratings, $R^2 = .40$, $F(1, 79) = 52.76$, $p < .001$.

Conclusion

- Liberals appear to view integrative complexity as mere window dressing and are less liable to shift their attitude in response. In contrast, conservatives are highly influenced by manipulations of integrative complexity. Listening to arguments of greater integrative complexity seemed to make conservatives more open-minded.
- Our studies suggest two diverging routes of persuasion. Conservatives appear to recognize and reward integrative complexity while liberals see past structural complexity and focus more on logic and how well-written an argument is overall.

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