

IMPLICIT NATIONALISM AS SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION: THE CASE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Travis J. Carter and Melissa J. Ferguson
Cornell University

Ran R. Hassin
Hebrew University

America as a nation has self-perpetuating needs that do not always align with the needs or beliefs of individual Americans. As much as Americans may love their country and way of life, they do not always explicitly agree with the policies that best serve to bolster and perpetuate the nation, such as unyielding diplomatic stances, unilateral military action, or giving up civil liberties in exchange for security. How then does a country with such diverse explicit opinions maintain its national power structures and the support of the populace? System justification theory contends that members of a system have an implicit motive to justify and bolster that system (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Based on recent work on the implicit nationalism, we argue that the types of information that become associated with the nation in memory are the same types of information that help bolster and perpetuate the American system. In the present study, we find that a subtle reminder of America increases system justification for those with some moderate exposure to the political media, regardless of their explicit ideology. We argue that the implicit activation of information associated with America ultimately serves a nationalistic function, and more broadly, the system justification motive.

Immediately after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Americans showed their support for their nation in a variety of ways, but one of the most visible was the ubiquitous display of American flags, which were hung in windows, on car antennae, reproduced on hats and t-shirts, and waved in the streets (e.g., Skitka, 2005). America had just been attacked, and Americans responded by affirming their national membership, both directly and symbolically. The response was not limited to jubilant displays of national unity, however. There was also a considerable

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Travis J. Carter, Center for Decision Research, University of Chicago Booth School of Business, C74 Harper Center, Chicago, IL 60637.
E-mail: Travis.Carter@ChicagoBooth.edu

backlash against cultural groups regarded as un-American (most notably people of Middle-Eastern descent; Janofsky, 2003; Panagopoulos, 2006), and against the European nations that failed to support the ensuing American military response in Afghanistan and Iraq (Stolberg, 2003). The increased patriotism (Skitka, 2005), governmental support (Chanley, 2002), outgroup derogation and desire for a military response (Skitka, Bauman, Aramovich, & Morgan, 2006) are exactly what system justification theory would predict would happen after a significant threat to the system (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost, Liviatan, van der Toorn, Ledgerwood, Mandisodza, & Nosek, 2010; Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005; Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007).

System Justification Theory posits that because people are motivated to justify the existence of the system, they respond to a system threat by increasing their support for it in a variety of ways. America's continued existence, like that of other national systems, requires the support of its populace, especially when threatened. Much work has examined explicit forms of nationalism, and how they help to perpetuate the system (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Morgenthau, 1973), but relatively little research has examined how nationalism might operate implicitly. In the present article, we argue that people come to implicitly associate information with the nation, and that this information can be triggered by subtle environmental cues, such as the American flag, influencing attitudes and behavior in line with the activated information. Moreover, we maintain that the information that tends to get associated with the nation, specifically the same attitudes and beliefs that legitimize and bolster the existence of the nation, ultimately tends to serve a nationalistic function. Thus, we would expect that activating the information associated with the nation would lead to increases in system-justifying attitudes. Furthermore, we argue that this attitude shift is essentially an implicit manifestation of nationalism, which serves the system justification motive.

SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION

The nation is a broad social and cultural system, which, according to system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), people are motivated to support. The theory states that, in addition to being motivated to justify themselves and their social, cultural, or racial ingroups, people have a motive to support the larger system of which they are a part, and to see the status quo as legitimate and good. Over the past 15 years, a considerable amount of evidence has accumulated in support of the predictions made by system justification theory (for reviews, see Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost et al., 2010; Jost, Pietrzak, Liviatan, Mandisodza, & Napier, 2008). For example, a number of studies have shown that people tend to rationalize and support the status quo, even before it becomes the status quo. In one telling study conducted before the 2000 presidential election, participants reported greater liking for the candidate they were told was most likely to win, regardless of their political affiliation (Kay, Jimenez, & Jost, 2002). System justification motives seem to be somewhat general, as they can be triggered and satisfied across domains. Indeed, providing a simple rationalization for the status quo in the form of a complementary or benevolent stereotype (e.g., poor but happy) is sufficient to satisfy general system justification motives, prompting participants to more strongly believe in the legitimacy of the system (Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003; Kay et al.,

2007). The system justification motive can also operate implicitly, with internalized system-justifying attitudes even diverging from explicit beliefs (Ashburn-Nardo, Knowles, & Monteith, 2003; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Lane, Mitchell, & Banaji, 2005).

There is considerable heterogeneity in the degree to which people demonstrate the tendency to justify themselves, their groups, and the broader system. Typically, those most advantaged by the system show the highest level of support for it; their personal-, group-, and system-justification motives are aligned, and they believe their prosperity is the well-deserved product of a fair and just system, which should thus be maintained. For the disadvantaged, however, the system justification motive can conflict with personal- or group-justifying motives. There is a tension between their lack of prosperity and their continued participation in a system that perpetuates their lowered status. One way to resolve such dissonance is to believe that the system is fair, the status quo is legitimate, and their disadvantageous position is justified. Thus, people will often evince attitudes and exhibit behaviors that bolster the legitimacy and existence of the system, even when it is against their own self-interest to do so. Indeed, there is evidence that the poor tend to advocate policies that directly go against their self-interest (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003; Kluegel & Smith, 1986), which may result, in part, from a low sense of personal control (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008).

As another way to resolve the conflicts among the different motives, people in the lower-status group might demonstrate positive attitudes towards the higher-status group. Insofar as these attitudes confirm that a just system conferred status to those with desirable qualities, the conflict between the group and system justification motives is reduced (Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001). However, people may not be able to explicitly express attitudes that are more positive for an outgroup in comparison with their ingroup, since doing so directly contradicts the group-justification motive. Implicit attitudes, however, show no contradiction, and there is considerable evidence that implicit attitudes tend to favor the higher-status group. For example, students at a relatively low-status university had more positive implicit attitudes towards the higher-status university than their own university (Jost, Pelham, & Carvalho, 2002). Other evidence demonstrates that racial and other social groups show explicit ingroup favoritism regardless of their status, but implicitly, both high- and low-status groups tend to show more positive attitudes toward the higher-status group (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Participants in one study who were arbitrarily cast into a low-status group even tended to misremember the reasons for their group membership as more legitimate than they actually were (Haines & Jost, 2000). Ironically, when the conflicting self- and group-justification motives are less salient, such as when the attitudes being expressed are implicit, it may be those who least benefit from the system who support it most strongly (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). Taken together, this evidence suggests that many of the processes that satisfy and serve the system justification motive often operate under our conscious radar.

NATIONALISM

Although system justification applies to any system, in the present paper we focus on the nation as a system of unique political, economic, and cultural standards,

and on America as a particular case of a national system. According to the realist school of international relations, a nation's primary objectives are not unlike the objectives of living organisms: to survive and perpetuate themselves (Morgenthau, 1973). Just as predators develop powerful jaws to overcome their prey, and prey develop the speed to escape their pursuers in order to survive, nations must develop the means—political, economic, and military—to maintain their sovereignty and increase their influence over other nations (e.g., Morgenthau, 1973; Morgenthau & Thompson, 1956; Weber, 1919/1965). This requires sufficient military muscle to ward off threats, as well as political power and economic resources to govern and protect the national interest.

What is in the national interest, however, is not necessarily that which is in the interest of every individual citizen. How, then, can nations that effectively perpetuate the national system while poorly serving large numbers of individual citizens continue to survive? How can a nation maintain its integrity amidst a chorus of differing explicit beliefs about its direction? As discussed above, the motive to maintain a nation's power apparatus is not limited to those actually in charge of governing a nation; the individual citizens of a nation are also motivated to support the national system, even when the national interest may conflict with their own interests or explicit opinions (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek 2004). The system justification motive helps to create the popular support, or perhaps popular complacency, necessary for the national government to pursue policies that best allow the nation to maintain and grow its own power structures, at the expense of other possible investments.

The system justification motive, when applied to the nation-state, takes the form of nationalism—the belief that one's nation is superior to others (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). In the absence of widespread nationalism, an indifferent and complacent populace might allow national protective structures to weaken, leaving the nation vulnerable to economic collapse or military conquest; they may even come to favor other nations over their own. Recent work on implicit nationalism has begun to investigate the processes by which individual citizens develop and espouse the attitudes necessary to maintain national protective structures.

IMPLICIT NATIONALISM

Social and cognitive psychological research shows that, over time, a broad range of semantic and evaluative information becomes cognitively associated with a particular stimulus (or class of stimuli). This information can be activated immediately and unintentionally upon the mere perception of the stimulus (e.g., Bargh, 2007; Carlston & Smith, 1996; Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986). Recent work on implicit nationalism suggests that people have accumulated a diverse array of knowledge about their nation, including the general attitudes of the populace, the people who are most representative of the nation, the social norms governing how citizens should behave, and cultural norms about how the nation should interact with other nations. This knowledge can be activated upon the perception of a stimulus strongly associated with the nation, such as the official flag or other national icons, influencing subsequent judgments and behaviors (Butz, Plant, & Doerr, 2007; Carter, Ferguson, & Hassin, 2009; Carter, Ferguson, & Hassin, in press; Devos & Banaji, 2005; Ferguson, Carter, & Hassin, 2009; Ferguson & Hassin, 2007; Hassin et al., 2010; Hassin, Ferguson, Shidlovsky, & Gross, 2007).

After implicit exposure to an American cue (such as the American flag), participants have shown a greater desire for power (Carter et al., 2009), and they became more likely to hold positive implicit and explicit attitudes toward, and even more likely to vote for, conservative politicians (Carter et al., in press). These demonstrations are not limited to Americans. In Israel, where the national flag is more closely associated with mainstream (and politically moderate) Zionist ideas, Hassin and colleagues (2007) found that Israeli participants subliminally exposed to the Israeli flag were more likely to express politically centrist beliefs, and were even more likely to vote for a politically centrist party. Though work on implicit nationalism is a relatively recent undertaking, the results so far nonetheless demonstrate that people do implicitly associate information, attitudes, and behaviors with their nation, all of which can be easily triggered by national cues, and once activated, can influence subsequent attitudes and behavior.

How does this work on implicit nationalism relate to system justification theory? In the American case, much of the information associated with the nation, including aggression (Ferguson & Hassin, 2007), power (Carter et al., 2009), and politically conservative beliefs (Carter et al., in press), seems to be the same information used to bolster and perpetuate the existing American system (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). That is, the information people associate with America tends to be the information that best serves the interest of America as a powerful state, and thus, the system justification motive. For example, nations need to maintain their political, military, and economic power apparatus in order to survive, and having power over other nations directly helps to ensure national sovereignty. In a series of studies, Carter and colleagues (2009) found an implicit link between America and the concept of power, demonstrating that the concept of power was both more accessible and more desirable after exposure to American cues. Participants in one study were more likely to endorse the belief that America should be a powerful nation, with the authority to dictate global economic and nuclear policy after being primed with an American flag (Carter et al., 2009). The association of America with the concept of power, when activated, may lead to attitudes that help politicians maintain protective economic, political, and military structures.

It is important to note that the associations people develop with the nation do not necessarily reflect their consciously-endorsed beliefs. For example, Carter and colleagues (2009, in press) found that the impact of the American prime was not moderated by explicit political beliefs, even when the measure itself was highly correlated with those beliefs. That is, even on highly politicized beliefs, liberals and conservatives were impacted equally by the prime, and pushed in the same (conservative) direction. The prime influenced liberals' attitudes in a direction that was directly opposite to that which they consciously endorsed. This is also consistent with the idea that implicit nationalism is a form of system justification. Just as the implicit attitudes and beliefs of those ill-served by the system are often more in line with the status quo than their own self-interest (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), the implicit associations with the nation may be system-justifying, regardless of one's explicit beliefs. That is, even for liberals, who tend to explicitly disavow system-justifying beliefs (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008), the information they implicitly associate with the nation may be system justifying in nature.

In short, we believe that the information that comes to be associated with the nation ultimately serves a nationalistic function: attitudes and behaviors that bolster the national power apparatus and preserve the national character. When this

information is activated, such as through exposure to a national symbol, attitudes and behaviors can shift in directions that are consistent with explicit nationalistic beliefs, though outside of awareness. It is this process that we have dubbed implicit nationalism. Furthermore, we believe that because nationalistic attitudes and behaviors advocate the legitimacy and bolster the existence of the national system, implicit nationalism serves to satisfy the system justification motive.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

How do people's implicit associations with the nation develop, especially given the expected conflict between implicit associations and explicit beliefs for liberals? We believe that the associations develop in part because of exposure to, and assimilation of, information suggesting such a relationship, and that the news media plays a vital role in providing such information. Media exposure is, unsurprisingly, highly predictive of knowledge of world affairs (Ferguson et al., 2009), and although it can influence explicit opinions and beliefs (e.g., Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Berkowitz, 1984; Bushman & Cantor, 2003; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Shaw, 1991; Strange & Leung, 1999), media exposure in general is not associated with any particular political ideology (see Ferguson et al., 2009). How might exposure to the media affect implicit associations? We believe that, regardless of the particular position endorsed by political pundits, the issues discussed tend to revolve around matters that are crucial to the national interest, and start with the latent assumption that the national system is worthwhile and must be preserved. Much of the debate between political pundits is a debate about exactly how this should be accomplished. We posit that people develop implicit associations between the nation and attitudes that serve and legitimate national interests, even at the cost of their own interests, by extracting this underlying relationship from the variety of topics discussed. That people might develop specific nation-bolstering attitudes from exposure to the media is exactly what one would expect from a nationalist, system-justifying media system (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). This idea receives support from the fact that, in many of the studies cited above, the effects of American cues were greater for those who reported a relatively high amount of exposure to U.S. political news (Carter et al., 2009; Ferguson et al., 2009; Ferguson & Hassin, 2007).

THE PRESENT STUDY

If, as we suggest, the information associated with America ultimately serves a nationalistic function, and in so doing, serves the system justification motive, then we would expect that, when primed with an American cue, participants would be more likely to express system-justifying attitudes. We have some support for this idea in the research reported earlier, including a study in which participants who were primed with the American flag were more likely to endorse the belief that America should be a globally dominant nation (Carter et al., 2009). Additionally, participants who were subtly exposed to an American prime were more likely to express more negative attitudes towards lower status racial and ethnic groups and to vote for politically conservative candidates (Carter et al., in press; Porter, Ferguson, Carter, & Hassin, 2011), attitudes that are known to be correlated with system justification (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008).

However, although these findings are suggestive, there is no direct evidence that a subtle reminder of America alters responses on a more general measure of system justification. The present study aims to do just that. We asked participants to complete a diffuse measure of system justification (Kay & Jost, 2003), either in the presence of a subtle American cue or not. We predicted that the American symbol would prime information associated with America, which is system justifying in nature, leading participants to report greater system-justifying attitudes. Based on previous research (e.g., Carter et al., 2009; Ferguson & Hassin, 2007), we expected that this effect would be evident primarily among those who have at least some degree of exposure to the political media.

A second aim of the present study was to obviate a limitation of previous studies, namely the reliance on college student samples (see Henry, 2008). In this study, we used a sample that was recruited over the internet to complete the survey. Although using the internet as a study environment introduces a host of unpredictable and uncontrollable factors, it does allow us to test our hypotheses using a more diverse sample and to see how incidental primes might affect people's responses in their "home" environment. Allowing for some greater degree of statistical noise, other researchers have had much success using a web-based approach to data collection (e.g., Gosling & Johnson, 2010; Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002a, 2002b).

METHODS

Participants. Two hundred twenty-nine participants (158 female, 70 male, one unspecified) were recruited via social networking sites and internet message boards to participate in an online study being conducted by researchers at Cornell University investigating the relationship between certain personality traits and different types of beliefs in exchange for a chance to win a \$25 gift certificate to Amazon.com. The mean age of participants was 34.2 (range: 16–76). Participants were predominantly white (69%), with smaller representation by Asian-Americans (21%), Hispanics (4%), and African-Americans (5%), and 6 participants (1%) not reporting race.

Materials and Procedure. After consenting to participate in the study, participants first completed the eight-item measure of diffuse system justification, taken from Kay and Jost (2003). It is designed to measure "perceptions of the fairness, legitimacy, and justifiability of the prevailing social system" (Kay & Jost, 2003, p. 828), and has been shown to be sensitive to the activation of general system justification motives (Kay & Jost, 2003; Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007). Sample items include "In general, I find society to be fair" and "Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve." Participants indicated their agreement with each item on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree). The 8 items were reasonably well correlated ($\alpha = .83$), and were averaged into a single measure of diffuse system justification in the analyses reported below.

The American-prime condition was identical to the control condition, except for a small American flag (72 pixels wide, which on most computer screens is 2.54 cm or smaller) present in the top left corner of the screen while completing the system justification scale, which served as the manipulation of exposure to an American cue.

After completing the system justification scale, participants then completed several additional questionnaires to assess potential moderators. They completed a

questionnaire assessing demographic variables (including age, income, and education), a media exposure and political ideology questionnaire (described below), the Individualism and Collectivism Scale (INDCOL; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995), and the patriotism and nationalism subscales of the Patriotism and Nationalism Scale (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Because previous research has demonstrated that system justification can alleviate negative emotions to exert a palliative effect (Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Napier & Jost, 2008), we included two questions assessing happiness and life satisfaction (1 = not at all, 9 = very much) on the demographic questionnaire as exploratory measures.

In addition to the crucial measure of political news following (How often do you follow U.S. political news on average?, 1 = rarely, 10 = frequently), the media exposure and political ideology questionnaire included questions about political television watching, reading *The New York Times*, watching *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart, watching FOX News (each answered on 10-point Likert scales; 1 = rarely, 10 = very frequently), and general television watching (0 = not at all, 7 = five or more hours per day). Although the media exposure questions were typically highly correlated, it was expected, based on previous research (Carter et al., 2009; Ferguson & Hassin, 2007) that responses to the single question assessing U.S. political news following in general would be most likely to moderate the effect of the American prime.

The survey also assessed the degree to which participants considered themselves to be religious (1 = not at all, 10 = extremely), to place themselves on a continuum of supporting socialism vs. capitalism (1 = socialism, 10 = capitalism), and the degree to which they considered themselves to be Republican, Democrat, Independent, liberal, or conservative (each on separate 8-point scales, 0 = does not apply, 1 = weak, 7 = strong). Responses to these last items were combined into a composite measure of political ideology by subtracting the sum of Democrat and liberal from the sum of Republican and conservative, creating a range of -14 (extremely liberal) to +14 (extremely conservative).

After completing all of the questionnaires, participants answered several open-ended suspicion-probe questions. Specifically, they were asked if they had noticed anything unusual about the study, if they thought that their answers were influenced by anything on the questionnaire, and if there was anything strange or unusual about the questionnaire. Only one participant reported any suspicion concerning the presence of the flag on the computer screen, and was removed from the analysis, though including her data does not alter the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were no significant differences between conditions on any of the moderator variables (all $ps > .10$). The overall means are summarized in Table 1. The remaining analyses were conducted using a standard least-squares regression, with continuous variables centered and standardized, and prime condition dummy coded (control condition = -1, American prime condition = +1). There was no main effect of the American prime on the measure of diffuse system justification, though there was a marginal main effect of news following, $\beta = .122$, $t(224) = 1.85$, $p < .07$, and the predicted prime condition \times news following interaction, $\beta = .140$, $t(224) = 2.12$, $p < .05$. Following the procedures of Aiken and West (1991), we compared the effect of the American prime on high and low news followers by testing the simple slopes

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean (SD)
Diffuse System Justification	5.03 (1.38)
Ideology/Party Affiliation	-1.46 (6.58)
News Following	6.71 (2.49)
Television News	6.01 (2.64)
Fox News	4.72 (3.06)
<i>Daily Show</i>	3.75 (2.96)
<i>New York Times</i>	3.43 (2.80)
Television Watching	2.07 (1.83)
Socialism vs. Capitalism	6.22 (1.98)
Religious	5.12 (2.74)
Patriotism	3.67 (.68)
Nationalism	3.10 (.73)
Horizontal Collectivism	6.41 (1.27)
Horizontal Individualism	6.88 (1.04)
Vertical Collectivism	5.90 (1.29)
Vertical Individualism	5.38 (1.19)
Happy	6.26 (1.68)
Satisfied	5.96 (1.91)
Age	34.15 (11.38)
Reported Income	\$62,013 (42,220)

Note. Descriptive statistics for the main measures and moderator variables in the study. None of the measures reported here were significantly different in the American-prime and control conditions.

at 1 SD above and below the mean of news following. As predicted, participants who were high on news following exhibited greater diffuse system justification in the American prime condition than in the control condition, $\beta = .184, t(224) = 1.98, p < .05$, whereas participants who were low in news following were not affected by the American prime, $\beta = -.095, t(224) = -1.02, p > .30$ (see Figure 1). The interaction between news following and prime condition remained statistically significant when controlling for political ideology and patriotism (both $ps < .05$) and remained marginally significant when controlling for nationalism ($p < .10$). Being so highly correlated with system justification (see Table 2), one might have expected these three measures to be influenced by the American prime in a similar fashion. These measures were taken at the very end of the survey, so the impact of the American flag prime might well have decayed. Indeed, as mentioned above, none of these three measures was significantly impacted by the American prime.

Although three of the items on the system justification scale specifically mention the United States, those items were not solely responsible for the effect. Indeed, looking just at the items that ask about society more generally, not specifically mentioning America or the United States, the same prime condition \times news following interaction was significant, $\beta = .153, t(224) = 2.32, p < .05$.

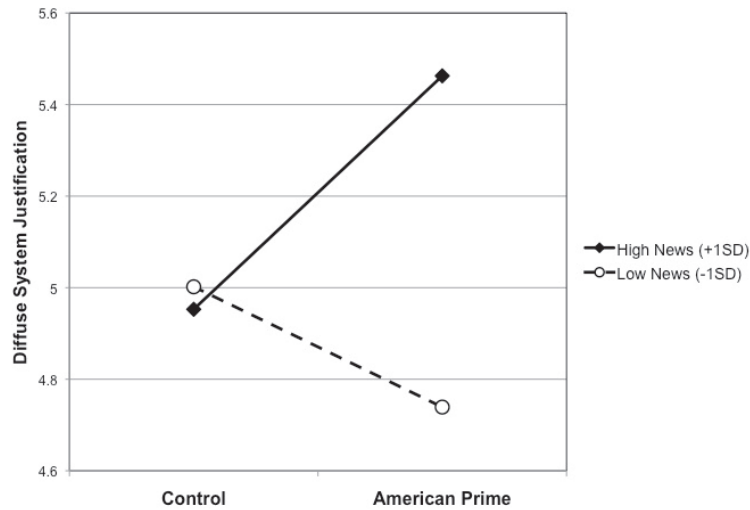


FIGURE 1. Diffuse system justification, plotted at 1 SD above and below the mean of news following.

None of the other moderators, including political ideology or any of the specific news sources (separately, or as composite measures of media exposure), significantly interacted with the American prime when predicting scores on the system justification scale. There were also no reliable three-way interactions involving news following, prime condition, and any of the potential moderators.

System justification has been shown to have a palliative effect (Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Napier & Jost, 2008), and we find corroborating evidence here as well. For these analyses, we created a composite measure of well-being, by averaging their happiness and satisfaction ratings ($\alpha = .94$). Participants' scores on the system justification measure were positively correlated with their reported well-being ($r = .40, p < .001$). Intriguingly, this was especially true for those who had previously been primed with an American cue, as evidenced by a prime condition \times system justification interaction in predicting well-being, $\beta = .135, t(224) = 2.16, p < .03$. Although not statistically significant, there was a trend for the correlation between system justification and well-being was marginally stronger in the American prime condition ($r = .50, p < .001$) than in the control condition ($r = .33, p < .001$), by comparing the two correlations after applying Fisher's r -to- z transformation, $Z = 1.60, p = .11$ (see Rosenthal, 1991).¹

Although the effect of the American prime on system justification was moderated by exposure to political news, all of those exposed to the American prime

1. It is worth noting that although there were no mean differences on the well-being variables between conditions, there was a significant difference in the correlation between the happiness and satisfaction ratings in the control ($r = .86$) and American prime ($r = .93$) conditions, $Z = 2.42, p < .02$. Examining the effect of the prime and system justification on the two well-being variables separately yields largely similar results.

TABLE 2. Correlations between the Main Measures and Moderator Variables in the Study

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. System Justification																				
2. Political Ideology	.16*																			
3. News Following	.11	-.02																		
4. TV News Following	.09	-.02	.79***																	
5. Television Watching	-.06	-.02	.17*	.32***																
6. Fox News	.27***	.32***	.3***	.44***	.14*															
7. New York Times	.32***	-.13+	.31***	.27***	-.12+	.27***														
8. Daily Show	.18**	-.2**	.22***	.26***	-.06	.19**	.55***													
9. Socialism vs. Capitalism	.37***	.36***	.13*	.02	-.12+	.20**	.19**	.12+												
10. Religious	.26***	.26***	.22**	.27***	.09	.39***	.23***	.16*	.17*											
13. Patriotism	.33***	.29***	.19**	.17**	.07	.26***	-.08	-.17*	.23***	.23***										
14. Nationalism	.41***	.26***	.03	.10	-.09	.43***	.20**	.03	.30***	.39***	.40***									
15. Horizontal Collectivism	.25***	-.01	.24***	.27***	.07	.26***	.26***	.17*	.13*	.28***	.23***	.38***								
16. Horizontal Individualism	.02	-.12+	.15*	.12+	-.01	.06	.18**	.05	.09	.10	.07	.20**	.44***							
17. Vertical Individualism	.32***	.16*	-.02	.01	-.11	.21**	.31***	.28***	.35***	.12+	-.01	.44***	.40***	.24***						
18. Vertical Collectivism	.18**	.11	.12+	.24***	-.04	.34***	.26***	.21**	.14*	.36***	.14*	.49***	.65***	.26***	.44***					
19. Age	-.07	.19**	.31***	.3***	.18**	.11+	-.18**	-.20**	.01	.22**	.35***	.05	.04	.03	-.17*	.00				
20. Education	.12+	.00	.20**	.11+	.00	.04	.17*	.22***	.14*	.11+	.03	.09	.08	.00	.20**	.12+	.05			
21. Reported Income	.20**	.14*	.16*	.12+	.05	.10	.16*	.13*	.18**	.03	.13+	.10	.15*	.02	.20**	.09	.03	.23***		
22. Happy	.43***	-.05	.19**	.12+	.03	.06	.19**	.14*	.21**	.23***	.21**	.13+	.30***	.21**	.11+	.07	.05	.07	.16*	
23. Satisfied	.36***	-.02	.17**	.12+	.01	.10	.21**	.16*	.15*	.24***	.21**	.12+	.24***	.15*	.08	.07	.09	.11	.15*	.90***

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; +p < .10

showed palliative effects of system justification. We believe that the high and low news followers have different information associated with America, and it was the activation of these different types of information that led to increased system justification for high news followers. With well-being, however, the American prime did not appear to be simply elevating the well-being of those participants who expressed system-justifying attitudes, such as high news followers. Why, then, was the relationship between system justification and well-being influenced by the American prime? Although we cannot assess the mechanism directly in the present study, we can speculate that when the prime activated information related to America, participants' views about the system, and in particular the American system, became more relevant to their current mood. Indeed, a test of the simple slopes shows that those scoring highly on the system justification scale (+1SD) were not significantly happier, nor were those who scored low (-1SD) significantly less happy, in the American prime than the control condition (both $ps > .12$). Rather, it appears that the prime increased participants' use of their system-justifying attitudes in forming their happiness and satisfaction ratings.² Consistent with this idea, the increased correlation between system justification and well-being in the American prime condition was statistically significant only for the items on the system justification scale that specifically mention America ($r_{control} = .24$ vs. $r_{prime} = .47$, $Z = 1.99$, $p < .05$).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of the present study support our hypotheses. After subtle exposure to an American symbol, participants scored higher on a diffuse measure of system justification, provided that they had at least moderate exposure to the U.S. political media, but regardless of their explicit ideology or explicit nationalistic beliefs. We also obtained evidence of the palliative effect of system justification, which was made stronger by the implicit American prime. Overall, we propose that these findings support the broader point that the information that tends to become associated with America in memory appears to be the same type of information that, when activated, supports the general motive to bolster the system and support the status quo. It also suggests that people may develop these associations through exposure to the U.S. political news media, but apparently not because of any specific news source.

CONSEQUENCES

How might the effects demonstrated above operate in the daily lives of citizens? That is, how might an implicit relationship between American cues and system-justifying attitudes (at least, among high news followers) actually perpetuate the status quo, and further empower the American system? The most obvious way for this type of pattern of associations in memory to have systemic effects would

2. It is important to note that well-being levels did not moderate the impact of the prime in predicting scores on the system justification scale, negating the possibility that the American prime increased system justification through an increase in mood.

be that it influences overt political behaviors, such as voting and voicing policy preferences to elected officials. That is, if exposure to an American cue just before entering the voting booth leads people to be more likely to vote for conservative politicians, who tend to advocate policies that support the status quo and increase America's economic, political, and military muscle, this would be strong evidence of the operation of the system justification motive. In fact, there is some evidence of this. In one study, participants who were primed with a small American flag while indicating their voting intentions were more likely than those who were not primed to vote for Republican presidential candidate John McCain, who was much more likely than Barack Obama to endorse using America's military and economic power in dealing with foreign nations (Carter et al., in press).

Although the present investigation focuses on the American case, we expect that the same types of system-justifying information tend to be associated with the nation in other countries as well. In experiments conducted in Israel, Italy, and Russia, for example, subtle flag priming resulted in increased support of mainstream political views, which may be less likely than either extreme to challenge the system and the status quo (Hassin et al., 2007; Hassin et al., 2010). Moreover, what information in particular is system-justifying for a given nation may vary according to what is in that particular nation's apparent interests, and how it might best assert itself and its agenda among a world of nations. For example, many European countries might see bolstering their economic or political power, but not their military power, as the best way to legitimize themselves to the rest of the world. This is an interesting question for future research, and may help elucidate the more general mechanisms at work across nations.

NEWS FOLLOWING

In the study reported above, it was only those participants who showed some moderate exposure to U.S. political news who demonstrated the predicted increase in system justification following exposure to the American flag prime. We believe this helps to identify one major source of the implicit association between America and attitudes, beliefs, and motives that serve the national interest. Specifically, we posit that people learn this association through repeated exposure to the ideas in the U.S. political media. Studies on implicit learning have demonstrated the human ability to learn even complex associations spontaneously and nonconsciously (Anderson, 1983; Anderson, 1996; Eitam, Hassin, & Schul, 2008; Howard & Howard, 1992; Lewicki, 1986; Lewicki, Hill, & Czyzewska, 1992, 1997; Reber, 1989), although we expect that this association would only develop over a relatively long period of time, and not over the course of a single news broadcast.

Consistent with previous work, it was only the tendency to follow U.S. political news, and not exposure to any specific news source, that moderated the effect of the American prime. Although this is certainly a topic for future research, we suspect that this particular question specifically taps into exposure to discussions about America as a system, both in foreign and domestic affairs. Many of the other news sources, though they feature political content and often have a political slant, discuss a much broader range of issues. For example, one may read *The New York Times* for their health and lifestyle section, or watch FOX News for their coverage of natural disasters. This type of content is unlikely to lead to the implicit

associations we believe are responsible for the effect demonstrated in the present study. Rather, being particularly attuned to political and economic affairs may be the crucial distinction.

However, in considering the moderating role of news following in the study reported above and elsewhere (e.g., Carter et al., 2009; Ferguson & Hassin, 2007), it is important to note that we cannot rule out the alternative possibility that the causal arrow points in the opposite direction. That is, although we interpret the news-following moderator as evidence of some form of implicit learning, it is also possible that people who already associate America with system-justifying information also happen to be those who choose to follow the news. Although this explanation is certainly plausible, there is some evidence in the present study that speaks against it. Because system justification is more closely associated with conservative political ideology (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008), one would expect that participants who associated American cues with system-justifying attitudes would be likely to follow more conservative news sources. However, exposure to relatively conservative (e.g., FOX News) or liberal (e.g., *New York Times*, *The Daily Show*) news sources did not appear to moderate the influence of the American prime. This is somewhat ironic, given the degree of explicit disagreement between liberal and conservative commentators on whether and how the American status quo should be preserved.

Unfortunately, because we expect that this association develops over a relatively long period of time, proper empirical investigation of the causal relationship is a challenging undertaking. Nonetheless, although we find that the end result of an American prime is the same for liberals and conservatives, it would be interesting to probe the specific contents of their implicit associations, given that they are presumably exposed to very different opinions on the same issues. A related issue has to do with those who reported little news following. It is unclear whether they have altogether different information associated with the nation, or possess similar associations as those who are high in news following, only weaker. The opposite slopes of the lines for those who are high and low in news following (see Figure 1) would suggest that their associations are qualitatively different, but it would be inappropriate to do more than speculate on an effect that was not statistically significant. Indeed, specific probes of the contents of low news followers' implicit associations could be useful for understanding just how exposure to the news leads to the effects reported here. In any case, these are interesting questions for future study.

IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT DISSOCIATION

One interesting aspect of the findings reported here and in other work on implicit nationalism (e.g., Carter et al., 2009, in press) is the apparent dissociation between implicit associations and explicit beliefs. We obtained significant positive correlations between the system justification scale and scores on patriotism, nationalism, and conservatism (see Table 2), but none of these variables moderated the influence of the prime. Instead, the American prime tended to increase system justification, regardless of participants' explicit political beliefs, provided they had at least some moderate exposure to U.S. political news. People in general seem to find the idea that their attitudes or behaviors might be influenced by the presence of an American flag disconcerting (Carter et al., 2009), and this might be especially so

when they are shifted toward the opposing ideological pole. In this case, liberal news followers might explicitly disagree with the contents of their implicit associations and be especially unnerved by the idea of being influenced by them in a conservative direction (see Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). This is analogous to people who explicitly endorse egalitarianism, but whose implicit racial associations nonetheless leak into their nonconscious behaviors (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995).

Practitioners of progressive liberal politics tend to advocate change and (to some extent at least) subversion of the status quo. Indeed, change was the central message of Barack Obama's successful 2008 presidential campaign, which was offered as an argument against the status quo established by the previous Republican administration. Yet, in order for the national system to be maintained and meet the demands of the system justification motive, the status quo must be preserved to some degree. As system justification theory expects, the motive is often best served nonconsciously (e.g., Jost et al., 2008), particularly for those who are lower in status, insofar as they would have difficulty explicitly advocating policies or beliefs that obviously go against their self-interest (Jost et al., 2004). If the motive were not operating implicitly for those who benefit little from society, it probably would not be operating at all. Similarly, if some form of nationalism did not operate implicitly, even for those who explicitly reject jingoism and the expansion of American economic or military power, then it would not serve the ideological needs of the current system. Thus, progressives might strengthen their resolve for systemic change in the face of nationalist rhetoric or conspicuous flag-waving, but the flag hanging quietly on the wall might very well undermine that resolve on an implicit level. This is not to say that liberals who are exposed to an American flag suddenly become highly nationalistic, but that their attitudes shift in a direction that make nationalistic policies more appealing and more likely to be acted upon.

RESPONSE TO SYSTEM THREATS

The present findings demonstrate an implicit link between America and system justification, such that those who were primed with an American flag were more likely to endorse system-justifying attitudes. We also suspect that anything that would activate the system-justification motive, such as a threat to the system (e.g., Kay et al., 2005), or exposure to information that helps to rationalize the system, such as complementary stereotypes (Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003), would also lead to greater implicit and explicit positivity toward America. Endorsement of broader patriotic attitudes, even implicitly, should help to assuage system justification concerns.

When a very significant threat to the American system occurs, as it did on September 11, 2001, people did indeed respond with increased positivity towards America and its symbols. These sorts of threats, specifically threats to the physical well-being of a nation's citizens, may represent the rare alignment of ego, group, and system justification motives. In order to preserve oneself and one's ingroup, the system as a whole must be defended. As such, it is no surprise that Americans responded to 9/11 with displays of national unity (Skitka, 2005), with increased support for government institutions (see Jost et al., 2010), by shunning those deemed "less American" (Skitka, et al., 2006), and by engaging in acts of self-preservation (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003).

Intriguingly, strong patriotic displays themselves may create something of a positive feedback loop. Threats to the system increase displays of national unity, including displays of national symbols such as flags. Exposure to national symbols increases support for the system, which may itself increase the desire to display national unity. Although there was considerable division in public opinion regarding the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March of 2003, it is possible that without a year and a half of increased flag displays in the aftermath of 9/11, the degree of American popular support for the Bush administration's decision to invade might have been considerably weaker.

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