

Conservatism predicts lapses from vegetarian/vegan diets to meat consumption (through lower social justice concerns and social support)



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ABSTRACT

Lapses from vegetarian and vegan (i.e., veg*n) food choices to meat consumption are very common, suggesting that sustaining veg*nism is challenging. But little is known about why people return to eating animals after initially deciding to avoid meat consumption. Several potential explanatory factors include personal inconvenience, meat cravings, awkwardness in social settings, or health/nutrition concerns. Here we test the degree to which political ideology predicts lapsing to meat consumption. Past research demonstrates that political ideology predicts present levels of meat consumption, whereby those higher in right-wing ideologies eat more animals, even after controlling for their hedonistic liking of meat (e.g., Dhont & Hodson, 2014). To what extent might political ideology predict whether one has lapsed from veg*n foods back to meat consumption? In a largely representative US community sample (N = 1313) of current and former veg*ns, those higher (vs. lower) in conservatism exhibited significantly greater odds of being a former than current veg*n, even after controlling for age, education, and gender. This ideology-lapsing relation was mediated (i.e., explained) by those higher (vs. lower) in conservatism: (a) adopting a veg*n diet for reasons less centered in justice concerns (animal rights, environment, feeding the poor); and (b) feeling socially unsupported in their endeavor. In contrast, factors such as differential meat craving or lifestyle inconvenience played little mediational role. These findings demonstrate that ideology and justice concerns are particularly relevant to understanding resilience in maintaining veg*n food choices. Implications for understanding why people eat meat, and how to develop intervention strategies, are discussed.

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1. Introduction

In much of the Western world, the adoption of vegetarian (meat free) and vegan (animal-product free) diets are on the rise. In the US, for example, a recent Gallup poll found that 5% of Americans describe themselves as vegetarian, with a further 2% considering themselves vegan (Newport, 2012). And this trend is growing rapidly; an Ipsos Mori poll in the UK observed a 350% increase over the past decade in those identifying as vegan (Saner, 2016). Such trends are gaining cultural currency, with an increase in celebrity endorsement, and the declaration of January as *Veganuary*, a month in which people strive to reduce their meat consumption (Doward,

2016). Consider also that, in the “What’s Hot in 2011” poll by the (US) National Restaurant Association, the majority of 1500 chefs earmarked vegan food a hot trend (Vegan diets become more popular, 2011). Moreover, consumers are increasingly putting pressure on businesses to offer animal-free products. For instance, beer-maker Guinness has bowed to public pressure to manufacture its famous stout without using animal by-products, after more than 250 years of its traditional brewing practices that involved using fish bladders as a filtering agent (Guinness goes vegan, 2015). With the adoption of “veg*n” (vegetarian/vegan) food choices gathering momentum, there is a pressing need to better understand the psychological factors underlying why many people fail in their own commitment to avoiding meat.

Several factors predict positivity toward veg*n diets. Experiments have shown, for instance, that asking people to eat meat (vs. nuts) lowers their moral concern for consumed animals, and lowers the perception of mental states in such animals (Loughnan, Haslam,

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& Bastian, 2010). There are also demographic and individual difference predictors. For instance, large-scale nationally representative data indicate that women (vs. men) are more likely to be vegetarian (Gale, Deary, Schoon, & Batty, 2006). Relatedly, eating meat is frequently associated with masculinity (Ruby & Heine, 2011; Thomas, 2016), leading some feminist theorists to draw direct links between animal exploitation and sexism (e.g., Adams, 2015; see also Rothgerber, 2013). Others have observed that those with more education or with higher IQ scores are more likely to become veg*n later in life (Gale et al., 2006).

Perhaps more intriguingly, research has also established a consistent relationship between (political) ideology and attitudes toward animal exploitation. For instance, those on the right (vs. left) are significantly more likely to consume meat and/or support other forms of animal exploitation (Allen & Ng, 2003; Allen, Wilson, Ng, & Dunne, 2000; Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Dhont, Hodson, & Leite, 2016; Dhont, Hodson, Costello, & MacInnis, 2014; Dietz, Frisch, Kalof, Stern, & Guagnano, 1995; Hyers, 2006; Ruby, 2012). In two relatively large Belgian community samples, Dhont and Hodson (2014) also isolated two key mechanisms responsible for explaining the left-right divide in animal consumption: Those on the right were more likely to consider vegetarianism a threat to culture/society, and were more likely to endorse human supremacy over animals. These relations held even after statistically controlling for the liking of meat; left-right differences in meat consumption were not simply due to differences in the hedonistic value in meat eating, but rather are relevant to dominance and superiority beliefs. Such findings offer novel insights into the reasons why people eat certain foods in their present lives, and highlight ideology as a less intuitive but consistent predictor.

Given that ideology plays a role in predicting meat consumption generally, we consider whether ideology plays a role in predicting the *return to meat consumption* among those who have, at some point in life, attempted to become veg*n. Surprisingly little is known about factors predicting a lapse back to meat consumption. Arguably, sustaining a non-meat diet requires considerable restraint, particularly if doing so for non-moral reasons (e.g., health) as opposed to for the sake of animals (Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997). Moreover, adopting a veg*n diet requires the development of new habits, learning of new skills (e.g., food preparation), the curbing of cravings for meat, and navigating new and awkward social interactions (e.g., being presented with a meat-based meal in a social setting). Consider an unpublished study (Herzog, 2011) of former vegetarians ($n = 77$), most of whom (57%) had become vegetarian for reasons of animal ethics, with others doing so for health (15%) or environmental (15%) reasons. Among the reasons listed for returning to meat consumption were social awkwardness, stigma, inconvenience, and meat cravings. Recent polls confirm that remaining vegetarian or vegan is indeed challenging. In a 2005 CBS News national poll ($n = 936$), three times as many people identified as *former* than current vegetarians (Alfano, 2005).

To what extent might psychological factors explain why (some) people fail to meet their goal of not eating meat? In the present investigation we consider several factors that can theoretically predict lapsing to meat consumption. Given the role of ideology in predicting the one's *present* levels of meat consumption (e.g., Dhont & Hodson, 2014; see; Ruby, 2012), we focus on whether ideology can predict *lapsing* from veg*n food choices. With the correlation between ideology and meat consumption typically in the 0.20 (Allen et al., 2000) or 0.25–0.30 (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Studies 1–2) range, the relation between ideology and meat consumption is not close to perfect (i.e., 1.0). Even though *on average* those on the

(vs. left) are at greater odds of lapsing back to meat consumption. We observe that those on the right, on average, consume more meat than those on the left, and may do so for reasons of dominance (e.g., human supremacy and entitlement over animals) and as pushback against vegetarian threat (e.g., beliefs that vegetarianism jeopardizes cultural customs and traditions, and negatively impacts the economy). We predicted that those relatively higher (vs. lower) in conservatism are at greater odds of having lapsed back to eating meat. In our analyses, we also consider potential confounds that can be related to ideology or meat consumption (e.g., respondent sex, education, or age) to isolate the ideology effect and determine its magnitude. To the extent that conservatism may predict greater odds of lapsing to meat-eating, we also seek to understand *why* this might be the case.

1.1. Rationale and hypotheses

Our goal is to understand the predictors of lapsing to meat consumption. We focus on political ideology given its relation to meat consumption (e.g., Dhont & Hodson, 2014), but we also consider demographic variables such as age, gender, and education. To the extent that political ideology predicts lapsing, we seek to understand why (i.e., the mediating processes that could account for this left-right difference) and the degree to which it operates through various mediators. There exist several reasons why those higher (vs. lower) in conservatism might have greater odds of having relapsed to meat consumption. Some of these presumably concern the reasons why an individual had attempted a veg*n diet in the first place. Adopting a veg*n diet for reasons of justice (e.g., animal rights, environmental concern) will theoretically sustain a meat-free diet. In such a case, one is guided by values to not harm others. Yet, animal rights and related concerns are, on average, relatively more central to left-leaning ideology. Thus, if conservatives exhibit greater odds of relapsing, it might be due to (or explained by) lower endorsement of social justice motives as a reason for having previously adopted a veg*n diet. We also consider whether those on the right versus left differ in their personal reasons for not eating meat, or in terms of experience peer/cultural pressure to become veg*n, in ways that might account for a conservatism-lapse relation. Other reasons that might explain left-right differences in the odds of lapsing might reflect differential experience of several risk factors. For example, it is possible that those on the right (vs. left) might crave (or have craved) meat more, given their higher levels of meat consumption on average, with this mediating process explaining left-right differences in lapsing to meat eating. Likewise, those on the right versus left might differ in feelings of insufficient social support. In particular, those on the right might not experience sufficient support to the extent that they are more likely to associate with people with similar ideologies. We also consider if left-right differences in lapsing to meat consumption might be explained by perceived health concerns or displeasure with lifestyle inconveniences. Thus, we not only ask whether political ideology predicts the odds of having lapsed to meat eating among those attempting a veg*n diet, but we posit and test several unique mediation processes that might explain any observed left-right divide.

We predicted that those relatively higher (vs. lower) in conservatism will exhibit greater odds of lapsing to meat consumption (H1). We also tested whether ideology predicts lapsing above other demographic variables, such as age, education, and gender, each of which could be potential confounds. We also predicted that a conservatism-lapsing relation might be explained (i.e., mediated)

expectations because those on the right are relatively less concerned about animal welfare (Dhont & Hodson, 2014) and human-determined environmental damage (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2016), report greater liking of meat (Dhont & Hodson, 2014), and presumably feel more socially unsupported and isolated (given that animal rights and related issues tends to be concerns in predominantly left-leaning circles; see Jasper & Poulsen, 1995).

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Data were collected through the Faunalytics charity (www.faunalytics.org) by Harris Interactive in May 2014. Access to the data, questionnaires, and further study details are available at <https://faunalytics.org/dataset-study-of-current-and-former-vegetarians-and-vegans/>. The participation invitation was sent to a US sample of those aged 16 and older, with the study focus not disclosed prior to participation. According to Faunalytics invitations to participate were sent to a representative US sample, with the participating sample being generally representative, albeit somewhat “older, wealthier, more educated, [and] less racially diverse” with more women than average (see Asher et al., 2014). Over 11,000 participants completed the survey, but we focus on the 1,387 current or former veg*n. Of these, approximately 95% completed the political ideology measure, leaving a final sample ($N = 1313$) of 1102 former veg*n (i.e., those lapsed) and 211 current veg*n. (The sample of current veg*n was comprised of 159 vegetarians and 52 vegans. To increase the sample size for analysis these were combined into a “veg*n” category to reflect those presently not eating meat). The proportion of those who have lapsed (84%) is consistent with past population estimates (Alfano, 2005) and thus is well-suited for predicting odds of being former versus current veg*n as a function of variables such as political ideology. Participants ranged from 17 to 96 years old ($M = 47.39$, $SD = 15.40$), were 29.8% male, with some post-secondary education at or below undergraduate level ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.34$). Participants self-classified as White (80.4%), Black/African-American (5.6%), Asian/Pacific Islander (3.1%), or mixed/other (4.3%). Missing data were minimal (<2%) and we used full information maximum likelihood estimations (FIML) with Mplus 7.4 software.

2.1.1. Survey questions

For brevity, we refer the reader to the online resources (above) detailing the specifics of the full questionnaire. Participants responded to basic questions about the types of foods that they eat and whether they have adopted vegetarian or vegan diets in the past (i.e. have lapsed).

2.1.2. Political ideology

Participants indicated their political orientation (1 = strongly conservative, 5 = strongly liberal); scores were reversed so that higher scores reflect a more conservative (vs. liberal) ideology.

2.1.3. Reasons for adopting veg*n diet

Participants were asked the reasons why they initially adopted a vegetarian or vegan diet. Questions were subsequently worded to be consistent with their status as current or former vegans (i.e., present or past tense) on scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very

desiring to follow social trends ($r = 0.42$, $\alpha = 0.58$).

2.1.4. Risk factors for lapsing to meat consumption

Questions were again worded to reflect current or past factors that make veg*n diet difficult to sustain. *Meat craving* was tapped by 6 items pertaining to temptation and craving meat itself ($\alpha = 0.83$) (e.g., “I crave/was tempted [crave/am tempted] by beef or pork”). An additional potential item was dropped due to low inter-correlation with other items. Where beneficial this strategy was utilized for other scales. *Insufficient social support* was best assessed by 3 items (e.g., “I felt [feel] the important people in my life were [are] unsupportive of my [veg*n] diet”) ($\alpha = 0.60$). *Health concerns* were assessed by 4 items tapping concerns about health for self, for family etc (e.g., “I was [am] taking too many vitamins/supplements”). Finally, feeling of *inconvenience* to lifestyle were tapped by 5 items (e.g., “I found [find] it time consuming to prepare [veg*n] meals”) ($\alpha = 0.78$).

3. Results

3.1. Correlations and descriptive statistics

The correlations between key variables and descriptive statistics can be found in Table 1. Variables were entered in their raw (i.e., unstandardized) form but standardized results are reported throughout. As expected, greater conservatism was associated with greater odds of lapsing (i.e., being a former not current veg*n). Greater conservatism was also associated with less initial motivation to become veg*n for justice reasons, or for personal reasons. Conservatism significantly correlated positively with some of the lapsing risk factors (e.g., insufficient social support; health concerns) but not others (e.g., meat-craving; inconvenience).

3.2. Model test (conservatism predicting lapsing via potential mediators)

To test the c-path in the model, we first ran a logistic regression model with conservatism predicting the likelihood of lapsing to meat consumption (no/yes). In support of H1, conservatism was a significant predictor of lapsing ($b = 0.23$, $S.E. = 0.07$, $\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$). An odds ratio of 1.26 [95% CI: 1.11, 1.44] means that for each 1-point increase in conservative ideology (on a 5-point scale) there was a 26% increase in the odds of having lapsed to meat eating. Moreover, the standardized beta (0.15) represents an effect size in the small-to-moderate range (Gignac & Szodorai, 2016; Hemphill, 2003) that is comparable to the meta-analytic values typical in social psychology (median $r = 0.18$, see Richard, Bond, & Stokes-Zoota, 2003).

We then tested the effect of conservatism on lapsed meat eating through seven potential mediators: justice concerns to become veg*n, personal reasons for becoming veg*n, peer/cultural influence to become veg*n, meat craving, insufficient social support, health concerns, and inconvenience. Whereas the first three are psychological factors that can fortify resolve to sustain veg*n food choices, the last four are risk factors that might increase the odds of lapsing. The results of the path model are illustrated in Fig. 1. In terms of the a-paths (i.e., from conservatism to mediators), those higher (vs. lower) in conservatism demonstrated significantly lower veg*nism motives rooted in justice ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$) or per-

much). *Justice concerns* were tapped by 3 items concerning animal protection, environmental concerns, and ending world hunger (i.e., better feeding the poor) ($\alpha = 0.84$). *Personal reasons* were tapped by 4 items relevant to costs, personal health, tastes/preferences, and meat-disgust ($\alpha = 0.58$). Two items tapped *peer/cultural influence*, such as feeling influenced by others (friends, family, partner) or

sonal reasons ($\beta = -0.10, p < 0.001$), and reported less social support ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.001$) and greater health concerns ($\beta = 0.08, p = 0.006$). With regard to the b-paths (i.e., from mediators to lapsing), only two of the four mediators predicted by conservatism significantly predicted lapses to meat eating: those with stronger justice motives for veg*nism demonstrated lower odds of lapsing

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Conservatism		-0.30***	-0.10***	-0.02	0.04	0.10***	0.08**	0.01	0.10***	0.16***	-0.14***	-0.04
2. Justice			0.60***	0.26***	-0.18***	-0.32***	0.05	-0.06*	-0.36***	-0.24***	0.00	0.13***
3. Personal				0.20***	-0.29***	-0.24***	0.05	0.00	-0.28***	-0.16***	-0.08**	0.16***
4. Peer/cultural					0.22***	-0.27***	-0.30***	0.33***	0.05	-0.09**	0.04	-0.09**
5. Meat crave						0.16***	0.42***	0.54***	0.40***	-0.03	0.01	-0.13***
6. Insuff.support							-0.15***	-0.03	0.29***	0.08**	-0.09**	0.01
7. Health								0.45***	0.10***	-0.03	-0.02	-0.04
8. Inconven.									0.13***	-0.14***	-0.01	-0.08**
9. Lapsing										0.15***	-0.01	-0.04
Covariates												
10. Age											-0.05	-0.14***
11. Education												-0.04
12. Sex												
M	2.66	2.34	2.76	1.74	2.61	3.44	2.02	2.44	0.84	47.39	4.52	0.70
SD	1.06	1.24	0.92	0.96	0.95	0.84	0.81	0.88	0.37	15.39	1.34	0.46

Notes: inconven = inconvenience; insuff = insufficient; sex (0 = male; 1 = female); lapsing (i.e., return to meat consumption; 0 = no, 1 = yes). $N = 1313$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

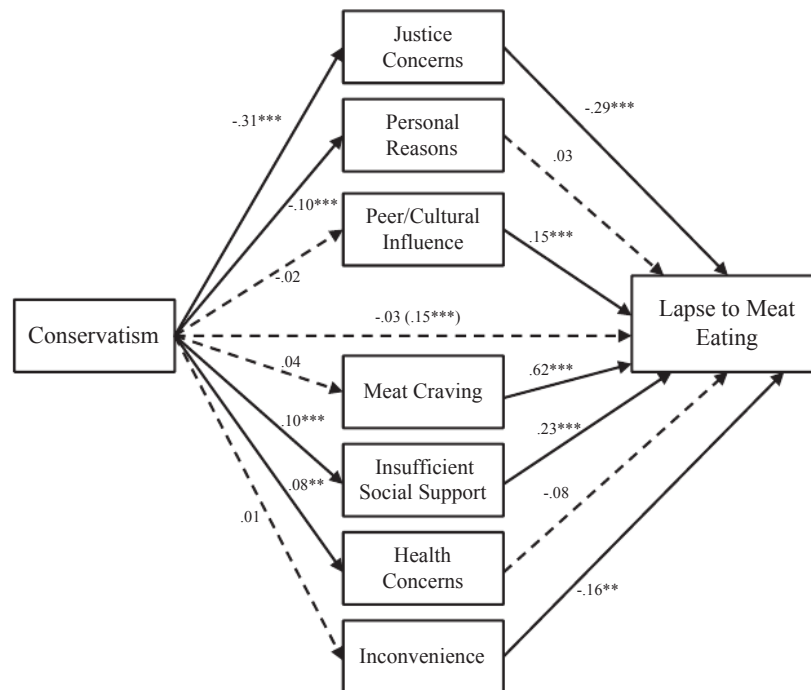


Fig. 1. Mediation model testing the indirect relation of conservatism on lapsing to meat consumption through mediating processes. Standardized values shown; mediator residuals set to covary (unshown). Parenthetical value represents the zero-order relation between conservatism and lapsing. Dashed paths are non-significant. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

($\beta = -0.29, p < 0.001$), and those reporting less social support for maintaining veg*nism were of greater odds of lapsing ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$). Of note, these paths were significant after accounting for meat cravings, feelings of inconvenience, and peer/cultural influences to becoming vegan (see Fig. 1). The path from inconve-

respectively. With the mediators in the model, the zero-order relation between conservatism and lapsing ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.001$) became non-significant ($\beta = -0.03, p = 0.485$). Thus the odds of meat-lapse, as predicted by conservatism, was fully explained by those higher in conservatism disavowing justice reasons for their

nience to lapsing was negative in the model but was positive as a zero-order correlation. This reflects a suppression effect; we urge caution in interpreting this model path.

Overall, there was a significant total indirect effect (IE) of conservatism predicting the odds of having lapsed to meat consumption (standardized IE = 0.13, $p < 0.001$). Two specific indirect effects were observed, one through lower justice concerns for veg*nism (IE = 0.09, $p < 0.001$), and one through insufficient social support (IE = 0.02, $p = 0.001$). These findings support H2 and H4,

Gale et al., 2006). These factors might also be relevant to predicting lapsing (i.e., sustaining decisions to remain veg*n). We reasoned that participant age might be a potential confound. Older people might be more fixed in their dietary habits and thus have a greater tendency to return to meat. Moreover, those who are older have had more opportunity to have tried veg*nism and lapsed, in the same way that older people might be more likely to be divorced (vs. currently married). Older people also score higher in conservatism (Cornelis, Van Hiel, Roets, & Kossowska, 2009) on average.

Paralleling the above analyses, we first ran a logistic model without mediators but including covariates. In the model with conservatism, age, education, and sex (coded male = 0; female = 1) predicting lapsing, both conservatism ($b = 0.19$, S.E. = 0.07, $\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.007$) and age ($b = 0.03$, S.E. = 0.01, $\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) were significant unique predictors. (Monte Carlo integrations were conducted for covariate analyses in light of a few missing values on gender and recommendations from Mplus). With an odds ratio of 1.21, this indicates that for each 1-point increase in conservative ideology (on a 5-point scale), there is a 21% increase in the odds of being a former (vs. current) veg*n. The odds ratio for age (1.03) means that each 1-year increase in age was associated with a 3% increase in the odds of having lapsed. Neither education ($p = 0.972$) or sex ($p = 0.556$) were significant predictors. Overall these analyses suggest that political conservatism, like age, uniquely predicts the odds of having lapsed to eating meat.

A test of the full mediation model that also includes age, education, and sex as covariates produced results essentially equivalent to those in Fig. 1. That is, there remained a significant total indirect effect of conservatism on lapsing (IE = 0.11, $p < 0.001$), with a significant effect channelled through both lower justice concerns (IE = 0.08, $p < 0.001$) and through insufficient social support to maintain veg*n food choices (IE = 0.02, $p = 0.008$). The direct effect of conservatism on lapsing was not significant with mediators included in the model ($\beta = -0.04$, $p = 0.299$). Thus, even after statistically controlling for potential confounds such as age, education, and sex, conservatism predicted greater lapsing with regard meat consumption, through relatively lower: (a) emphasis on justice concerns as a reason for adopting veg*nism; and (b) social support to avoid a return to a meat-based diet.

4. Discussion

Given the role of ideology in predicting the amount of meat one presently consumes (Allen et al., 2000; Dhont & Hodson, 2014), and in the willingness to exploit animals (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Hyers, 2006), we explored political conservatism as a predictor of the odds of being a former (vs. current) vegan. In keeping with recent findings that political ideology predicts a range of day-to-day behaviors (e.g., Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008), those higher (vs. lower) in conservatism were at significantly greater odds of having lapsed from a veg*n diet to meat consumption, as expected, with an effect size in the small-to-moderate range. Moreover, the relation re-

veg*nism adoption, and feeling socially unsupported in their efforts. Contrary to predictions, left-right differences in lapsing were not explained by differential meat craving (H3).

3.3. Ancillary analyses

We next present the model with potential covariates. Previous research indicates that women (vs. men), and those with more education, are more likely to adopt vegetarian diets later in life (e.g.,

support, offering important insights into intervention planning. Attempts to boost concerns about justice (for animals, for the planet, for poor people) represents a particularly strong starting point in light of the present findings. Indeed, a lower justice motivation for veg*nism predicted lapsing even beyond basic and visceral meat craving. Attempts to highlight the associations between eating animals and harming others (McKnight, 2014) might prove beneficial in future studies. For example, exposure to documentaries or books on the impact of meat consumption on animals and the environment (e.g., Foer, 2009) could help those who striving to achieve a veg*n diet as their own personal goal. Moreover, when meat-avoidance is characterized by a moral dimension, people tend to bolster their resistance to meat consumption (Rozin et al., 1997). Framing meat consumption as a moral issue can therefore help personal resolve. Given that those on the right generally consider themselves good and moral people (Altemeyer, 1996), making these links salient offers promise in the present context. It is possible that messages emanating from the right (vs. left) might also be influential in boosting the justice-relevant aspects of eating less meat. Some caution is urged here though, given the encyclical message from the Pope on the moral imperative to curb climate change led Catholics to delegitimize the Pope as a credible source of input on this topic (Li, Hilgard, Scheufele, Winneg, & Jamieson, 2016). That is, such messages can backfire. Future research can examine how messages about lowering the consumption of meat can originate from prominent figures on the right while being consistent with recipients' diet goals and concerns for justice more generally.

Of course, targeting insufficient social support, both actual and perceived, might prove a particularly practical first step. Social psychologists have at their disposal an arsenal of tools in this regard, including the manipulation of social norms (e.g., Cialdini et al., 2006). For instance, field experiments have found that exposure to descriptive norms informing hotel guests that most other guests reuse their towels reduces new towel requests (and thus conserves the environment) (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). Similar interventions that stress how others are reducing their meat consumption, or that people support those who do, offer promise as interventions. With vegetarian and vegan diets becoming increasingly popular (Newport, 2012; Saner, 2016), social support will become more salient and presumably weaken the left-right divide in lapsing. Overall, such interventions offer promising avenues for helping people to attain their own goals of reducing meat consumption.

4.1. Limitations and future directions

We were able to employ a large, representative American community sample to test this research question. This dataset is unique in the field and of considerable value. Common to large surveys of its kind, however, there were a limited number of items administered to participants. Future studies would be advised to

mains significant after statistically controlling for age, education, and sex, themselves potential correlates of both conservatism and meat consumption.

Moreover, our tests of a simultaneous mediation model (see Fig. 1) offer insights into why left-right differences predict the odds of lapsing. Specifically, a greater odds of returning to meat consumption was predicted by ideology because those higher (vs. lower) in conservatism reported fewer justice reasons for attempting veg*n practice in the first place, and because they reported feeling socially unsupported in their non-meat consumption endeavors.

Of note, the indirect effect (see Fig. 1) through justice concerns was almost four times the magnitude of that through social

include additional items to boost reliability of the scales. Such studies would also benefit from adopting longitudinal data collection strategies to assess the predictive ability of conservatism over time. Whereas we employed logistic regression analysis to predict the odds that an individual is a former or current veg*n, tracking these processes over time would allow researchers to determine whether initial levels of political ideology predict later decisions to become veg*n, and subsequent decisions to relapse to meat consumption. Ideally, large enough samples of both vegans and vegetarians would be collected to allow for comparisons (e.g., Rothgerber, 2014) of these groups separately rather than an aggregate.

We also encourage future researchers to explore this research

question outside of a Western context. The US sample employed was an ideal starting point given that the US consumes some of the highest meat volumes globally (OECD, n.d.), with US (food) culture very influential internationally. American eating patterns are readily adopted by other cultures, in ways that often deteriorate the well-being of those cultures (Francis & Stevenson, 2013; Lipski, 2010). Nonetheless, cultures differ markedly in their meat consumption, and there are also cultural reasons to eat or not eat meat. Furthermore, given that the effect of political ideology on an outcome variable can vary systematically across cultures (Van Assche, Roets, De keersmaecker, & Van Hiel, 2017), it would be beneficial to compare ideology-lapsing relations across cultures.

Finally, although we examined a multitude of mediating processes, several of which could fortify the resolve to maintain a veg*n diet, and others that could represent risk factors for lapsing, additional social or intergroup factors could be considered. For instance, meat-eaters (especially those on the right) often consider vegetarians and vegans threatening (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Dhont et al., 2016; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017), and express prejudice toward this group (MacInnis & Hodson, 2017; Studies 1–2; see also; Minson & Monin, 2012). As a social group, veg*n are considered less warm than competent (MacInnis & Hodson, 2017; Study 2), that is, they are targets of envious prejudice (i.e., considered a high status group but one hostile in intent with regard to interacting with others). And veg*n are sensitive to such negativity, declaring themselves targets of negative attitudes, discrimination, and social distancing from others (MacInnis & Hodson, 2017; Study 3). It is presently unclear the extent to which factors such as these might be responsible for lapsing to meat consumption; future research can explore this possibility.

5. Conclusions

Contemporary research continues to reveal the relevance of ideology (see Jost, 2006, 2017), even in domains that, on the surface, appear to have little to do with politics (e.g. Carney et al., 2008). Here we add to a growing body of work demonstrating that ideology is relevant to understanding appetitive food behaviors and choices. In particular, the present data demonstrate that those higher (vs. lower) in political conservatism have greater odds of having lapsed and returned to meat consumption. These left-right differences are largely due to lower endorsement of justice reasons for becoming veg*n, and lower social support for not eating meat (not differences in meat craving or inconvenience to lifestyle, etc) among those on the right. These novel findings provide insights into the political and social psychological factors that determine whether or not individuals stick with their decisions to forgo meat.

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