Influence of Political Ideology on Coping and Personal Protection Practices During the Early Days of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract
Even prior to COVID-19, it was clear that political ideology was de ning experiences and attitudes of Americans. Responses to the societal repercussions brought about by the pandemic quickly seemed to follow the same pattern of di erence across the spectrum of political beliefs. This study explores the relationship of political ideology to personal responses to COVID. The present article reports on the results of an online survey in the USA conducted in June 2020 that explored the impact of personal political ideology on individual responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that political ideology was related to the likelihood of respondents following government guidance on personal protective practices. Ideological identi cation was not a signi cant predictor of the likelihood deologu   TJ .071 Tw 0 -1.2 Td [(e)21(xtr)2(emel)21(y divided, b)20(y politic
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While the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted life for everyone in the USA, the-reper cussions were experienced di erently by di erent groups (Krase et al., 2021). This study explores the relationship of political ideology to the challenges faced by, and coping mechanisms used by, adults in the USA in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Political Affiliation and Ideology in the USA

The United States Constitution does not mention political parties and they were not legally recognized in the USA until after the Civil War (Friedman, 1956). Yet, throughout the history of the USA, two political parties have dominated the political landscape at any given time. While the USA has a signi cant amount of social diver sity, which usually increases the number of viable parties, the USA primarily uses a restrictive electoral system, referred to as " rst-past-the-post" (FPTP) or single-member district (SMD) plurality. Because these systems elect only one member per district, a candidate needs only 51% of the vote to win. Duverger's Law suggests this encourages a two-party system, since it is very challenging for third parties to gain signi cant ground, although some political scientists argue that greater party diver sity should be possible, even under these rules (Milazzo et al., 2018).

For over one hundred and fty years, the two dominant parties in the USA have been the Democratic party and the Republican party. Around a third of reg-istered voters in the USA identify as Democrats and 29% identify as Republicans. The remaining group identify as "independents," suggesting they do not necessar ily a liate with either party. Further analysis of "independents" as voters nds that most "lean" toward one party or the other, with a slight favor to the Democratic party (Pew Research Center, 2019). This results in elections where a large majority of Americans have some attachment to a political party, but some individuals hold stronger party identi cation than others.

Political ideology, a concept related but di erent than political party a liation, refers to "a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and opinions, exhibiting a recurring pattern,

to COVID-19 (Christensen et al., 2020). Individuals leaning toward conservative ideology are more likely to deem "authority" in the context of political rhetoric as a "vice" rather than a "virtue" (Kraft, 2018) and are less likely to trust scientific statements from government sources (Agley & Xiao, 2021). Those who identify as "conservative" are more likely to report that the government focused too much on COVID-19 preventative measures (Christensen et al., 2020).

Political affiliation in the USA is largely, but not entirely, associated with political ideology (Dimock & Wike, 2020).Those on the left side of the spectrum of political ideology, identifying as liberal, are more likely to associate themselves with the positions of the Democratic party. Those on the right side of this spectrum, identifying as conservative, are more likely to associate themselves with the positions of the Republican party. However, political ideology is a complex concept, and such associations of ideology to party affiliation are not always clear cut, especially for those who find themselves in the middle of the spectrum (Lane et al., 2019).

Political ideology and affiliation connect with social work practice on the micro and macro level. Social workers and social work students are more likely to identify as liberal or moderate than conservative (Pritzker & Burwell, 2016; Ringstad, 2014; Rosenwald, 2006), but it is important not to assume that social workers are a monolithic group with shared political interests and perspectives (Galambos, 2009). Further, differences in political ideologies can affect social workers' perceptions of clients or prospective clients (Toft & Calhoun, 2020). For example, those with more conservative views may harbor narrow views of issues related such as homosexuality and abortion. At the macro level, social workers who work as elected officials, political staff members, or advocates must be able to work with leaders and members of both political parties and understand how ideology affects the policy issues they wish to address.

Impact of Government Political Ideology in Response to COVID-19

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the USA ranked number one amongst 195 countries for readiness to confront a pandemic (Center for Health Security, 2019). The USA, during the Obama administration, had authored the "Playbook For Early Response to High-Consequence Emerging Infectious Disease Threats and Biological Incidents" (United States National Security Council, 2014). However, the USA, under President Donald Trump, failed to follow the protocol outlined in that document, especially in the early days of the COVID-19 crisis (Johnson, 2021).

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the federal government of the USA was led by a Republican President (Donald Trump), a Republican controlled Senate, and a Democratic controlled House of Representatives (Bowling et al., 2020). Twenty-three states had Republican governors and Republican controlled state legislatures; 15 states had Democratic governors and Democratic controlled state legislatures; 12 states had "divided governments," where the party of the governor, or at least one house of the state legislature, was not consistent with that of the others (Ballotpedia, 2021). The year 2020 was also a Presidential election year, with the entirety of the US House of Representatives and one-third of the US Senate

about the pandemic, believed that the death toll is higher, and that spending on the public health response should be increased, compared to Republicans (Gadarian et al.,2020).

Conservatives, supporters of President Trump in particular, were found to have a lower interest in securing information about the pandemic, and perceiving COVID-19 to be less of a risk (Barrios & Hochberg, 2020). The partisan divide on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic mirrored past experiences with other health emergencies. During the H1N1 pandemic of 2009, partisanship had a signi cant impact on willingness to be vaccinated; Democrats were more willing to be vacci-nated than Independents and Republicans (Makridis & Rothwell, 2020).

The impact of political ideology on personal decisions in response to the COVID19 pandemic cannot be understated. This trend has continued as political ideology has been shown to be closely related to decisions about vaccines (Agarwal et al.,2021). The present study was not speci cally designed to focus on the relation-ship between political ideology and personal decisions in response to the COVID19 pandemic. The focus of the present study was, broadly, to identify factors related to individual coping and adaptation in the early days of the COVID19 pandemic. The particular examination of the data presented here focuses on the relationships of cop-ing and adaptation to individual political ideology.

Methods

This study involved an anonymous, cross-sectional survey administered online through Qualtrics Survey Software. Institutional Review Board approval was secured prior to survey distribution. Data were collected in June 2020 and targeted adults living in Canada and the USA. Only respondents from the USA were included in the present analysis. Informed consent was provided in the introduction of the survey, and completion of the survey was considered consent for participation. Sur vey completion took about 10 min or less.

Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling, utiliz-ing researchers' personal contacts, social media, and personal and professional net-works. There were additional e orts made to reach underrepresented populations and geographic areas in the initial stages of data collection. The research team iden-ti ed personally known contacts from those communities, and personalized com-munication was initiated in an e ort to encourage them to participate and to share the survey.

The survey consisted of thirty researcher-constructed individual items, each

Respondents were also asked to provide various demographics including age, gender identity, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, state/province, and their geographic setting. Respondents were not asked to provide their political party a li- ation. Most importantly for the present study, political ideology identi cation was solicited through a self-reported Likert-type scale that represented points on a spectrum from "extremely conservative" to "extremely liberal."

Analyses in the present article examined the role of political ideology on individuals' experiences with and response to COVID-19 in the early months of the pandemic in the USA.

Results

For this article, only survey respondents from the USA were included in the analyses. The USA sample includes 1,311 people. Representation from all fty states and the District of Columbia was obtained. The participants in the present sample ranged in age from 17 to 86, with a mean age of 41.78. The majority of this sample identi ed as female (83.8%), and White (77.1%). The largest groups of the sample identi ed as having moderately liberal political views (40.4(sam)3.1(d Masal)]TJ 0 Tw (-

Table 1 Demographics of the sample

Demographic	N	Mean (SD)/%
Age		41.7779 (16.378)
Gender identity		
Female	1081	82.9
Male	208	16.0
Other	15	1.2
Race/ethnicity*		
Amer Indian/Native American/Indigenous	2	0.2
Asian	29	2.2
Black or African-American	108	8.3
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	62	4.8
Middle Eastern or North African	6	0.5
Native Hawaiian or other Paci c Islander	1	0.1
White	1001	77.1
Other	18	1.4
Education		
Less than HS diploma	1	0.1
HS diploma or GED	298	22.8
Associate's degree	87	6.6
Bachelor's degree	289	22.1
Master's degree	445	34.0
Doctoral degree or PhD	189	14.4
Geography		
Small and large city	489	37.4
Suburban	410	31.3
Rural/town	405	31.0
Political views		
Extremely conservative	23	1.8
Moderately conservative	150	11.6
Neither conservative or liberal	303	23.5
Moderately liberal	519	40.2
Extremely liberal	297	22.7

*More than one option could be selected

Liberal respondents were more likely to approve of their state governor's COVID-19 responses; conservative respondents were more likely to approve of national leadership's responses. Conservative respondents were more likely to base personal preventative measures on the opinions/recommendations of family/friends, whereas liberal respondents were more likely to rely on government recommendations. Respondents who identi ed as more liberal were more likely to report following their state's recommended preventative measures during the

Table 2 Signi cant correlations with political views

	n	Mean	SD	r
Age	1274	41.78	16.39	0.20**
Educational attainment	1291	2.5	0.72	0.35**
Source of information	1201	3.73	2.01	0.30**
Newspaper	1220	4.47	1.73	0.12**
TV news	1231	4.16	1.48	0.06*
Family/friends	1213	2.11	1.69	0.59**
I am satis ed with national leadership's response	1289	4.37	1.63	0.21**
I am satis ed with state governors' response	1280	4.73	1.30	0.12*
I based personal preventative measures on government o cial	1277	3.65	1.58	0.08**
recommendations	1291	5.49	1.05	0.21**
I based personal preventative measures on the opinions/ recommendations of friends and family				
I strictly followed state's preventative measures (e.g. social distancing, wearing a mask) during the COVID19 outbreak				
Measures taken were appropriate to risk in my community	1292	4.73	1.46	0.164**
I was prepared for the COVID19 outbreak	1288	2.48	1.58	0.10**
My life was signi cantly disrupted by the COVID19 outbreak	1223	5.07	1.32	0.06**
I experienced childcare challenges	637	2.91	2.19	0.13**
I experienced nancial challenges	1169	3.41	1.91	0.15**

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

COVID-19 outbreak, and believing the measures taken by their government were appropriate to the risk in their community.

A ve-stage hierarchical multivariate regression model was built to examine the impact of political ideology on respondent's basing protective measures on government recommendations as described in Table 3. Political ideology was a signi cant predictor basing personal protective measures on government o cial recommendations, even when age, race, educational attainment, geographic classi cation, and source of information were controlled for. More liberal respondents, those who used those certain sources of information (i.e., TV news, family/friends, and radio), and those more satis ed with state leadership were more likely to report basing their personal protective measures on government recommendations, when all factors were controlled for. The predictors in the nal model account for almost 16% of the model's variance.

A ve-stage hierarchical multivariate regression model was built to examine the impact of political ideology on respondent's reported likelihood to follow

Table 3 Factors related to basing personal protective measures on government o cial recommendations: hierarchical regression analysis

Predictors	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	Model 4 β	Model 5 β
Political ideology	0.134**	0.139**	0.149**	0.169*	0.093*
Age		0.020	0.001	0.017	0.042
Race		0.023	0.022	0.026	0.031
Gender		0.007	0.006	0.014	0.005
Education			0.046	0.001	0.012
Geography (rural/non-rural)			0.017	0.012	0.018
Source of information				0.009	0.022
Newspaper				0.016	0.007
Social media				0.191	0.155**
TV news				0.094	0.078*
Family/friends				0.061	0.066*
Radio					
National leadership					0.022
State leadership					0.314**
R^2	**0.017**	**0.015**	**0.015**	**0.066**	**0.157**
R^2 **change**		**0.002**	**0**	**0.051**	**+ 0.091**

$n = 1311$, $*p < 0.05$, $**p = < 0.005$

state recommended preventative measures, when other factors were controlled in the model. As described in Table in the rst four stages of the model, political ideology was a signi cant predictor of following state-recommended preventative measures, even when age, race, educational attainment, geographic classi cation, and source of information were controlled for. Political ideology drops out of signi cance as a predictor of following state recommended preventative measures in the nal model when satisfaction with state and national leadership are controlled for. In the nal model, age and satisfaction with state and national leadership are the only remaining signi cant predictors of following state recommended preventative measures. The older the respondent and the more satis ed with state leadership, the more likely the respondent was to follow state recommended preventative measures, regardless of self-reported ideology. Respondents who were more satis ed with national leadership were less likely to follow state recommended preventative measures, regardless of self-reported ideology. The predictors in the nal model account for 11% of the model's variance.

Discussion

The results of this study con rm ndings from other sources that political ideology is related to personal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Political ideology did not have a signi cant impact on coping and adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Di erences in political ideology were factors in personal choices for source

of information used during the pandemic, satisfaction with government o cials, and personal protective measures used during the pandemic.

Sources of Information

One signi cant nding of this study related to the connection between ideology and the source of information respondents used to stay abreast of the COVID-19 pan-

COVID-19 was not a serious threat and about the potential catastrophe of over reach of government authority. The other group was hearing that COVID-19 was a serious threat and that their actions had the potential to show their care for others. When members of the two groups interact, they lack a common set of facts and priorities, and therefore little common ground to make individual decisions, even though those individual decisions a ect their communities. Irreconcilable perspectives unfortunately further alienated and divided friends and family during this pandemic.

There is a growing amount of research on the impact of social media on how people responded to the COVID-19, and other important events of our times (Choukou et al., 2022). The present study con rms that this research is valuable. Such research should continue to explore the impact of social media, as well as television, as sources of information as well as sources of support.

Life Disruption, Preparation, and Challenges

Liberal respondents were more likely to report life disruptions, including child-care challenges, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, when compared to conservative respondents. Conservative respondents were more likely to report feeling prepared for the pandemic, yet they were also more likely to report nancial challenges as a result of the pandemic. It is unclear from the current examination of these di erences are simply perceived, and thus reported, or are actual di erences in experiences. If these di erences are in perception, then further examination of the impact of ideology on personal construction of experience is warranted. If di erences in actual experiences are con rmed, then further examination is required into how ideological perspective might be related to actual different lived experiences, and not just belief systems.

Sources of Support

This study found that political ideology was related to di erences in sources of support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conservative respondents were more likely to rely on religious beliefs and religious communities for support. Liberal respondents were more likely to use mind/body practices and social media. These di erences might relate to the di erences in respondents' perception of COVID as a problem, their ability or willingness to interact with others, or pre-existing reliance on religion for coping. The ndings that liberal respondents were more likely to also use alcohol or other substances for support aligns with a pre-pandemic study which showed that consumption of alcohol was greater in more liberal states than in more conservative states (Yakovlev & Guessford, 2013), and represents an interesting area for future research. It is also possible this connects to liberal respondents' higher perceptions of disruption during the pandemic.

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Satisfaction with National and State Governments

This study found that political ideology was related to respondent satisfaction in their state governor's and national leadership's response to the COVID19 outbreak. The more liberal a person reported to be, the more likely they were to report satisfaction with their state governor. The more conservative a person reported to be, the more likely they were to report satisfaction with national leadership, which was controlled by conservatives at the time of the survey. Satisfaction in government response to the COVID-19 outbreak also impacted respondent's use of personal protection against COVID-19, which suggests respondents were ltering their own responses to the pandemic through their personal perceptions of risk and assessment of the veracity of the government's authority.

Responsive Personal Protection

At the bivariate level, political ideology was related to personal choices related to per sonal protective measures. Respondents who identi ed as more liberal were more likely to base their personal protective measures on government guidance, and strictly follow such guidance on the issue, than more conservative respondents. However, when multivariate analyses controlled for additional factors, some of these relationships changed, or disappeared. Interestingly, multivariate analyses found that satisfaction with state and national leaders was a more important predictor of strictly following state directed preventative measures than political ideology. These contradictory ndings suggest that satisfaction with government leaders, at various levels, is not always associated with self-reported political ideology. This nding in particular is interesting as it relates to support for President Donald Trump during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Implications for Social Work Practice, Policy, Education, and Research

The ndings of this research o er important information for social work practitioners at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. While social workers may have valid concerns about keeping political di erences outside of professional relationships, this study suggests that discussing a client's ideology, perspectives on government, and sources of information about news might help inform their feelings about and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and other signi cant events. Social workers also need to be aware of their own ideology and how it in uences their response to COVID-19, and be mindful of this positionality as they communicate with colleagues, clients, and community members about the pandemic. Often social workers assume that other social workers are like-minded in their political or social beliefs, but as Galambos (2009) reminds us, social workers bring diverse backgrounds and views to the(ar).089 Tw 0 -t8(er)2(e m1)4(es on gy andnds and)]TJ .147 Te(ers)]69

where the presence of ideology is often inevitable, may have useful insight into ways to acknowledge and respect ideological di erences within professional relationships.

This study presents several policy implications, particularly for implementation. Given the di erences in news sources for individuals with di erent political ideologies, communication about signi cant public policies needs to be targeted at television, newspapers, and social media. In addition, e orts to curb misinformation on social media and television need to continue, as the disparity in information from di erent sources is likely connected with di erent responses to the pandemic. As social workers continue to be involved in e orts to change policy post-pandemic, the ndings that conservative individuals experienced nancial setbacks and liberal respondents experienced disruptions such as limited access to child care may provide insight into constituencies that would be supportive of policies to expand child care, increase economic opportunities, and more.

As social work education recovers from the pandemic, this study calls us to continue to address di erences in political ideology within the profession, and prepare our students to be able to understand their own ideology and how it a ects their work, and to be able to appropriately discuss political ideology with others. Brouillette (2016)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research found individuals experienced the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in disparate ways, contingent upon many factors, including political ideology. A common saying used during the COVID-19 pandemic relates to the variety of individual and community experiences: "we may all be in the same storm, but we are in very di erent boats." The results of this survey support this assertion, and also suggest that individuals who are conservative and liberal might not recognize that they are having di erent experiences. As the level of contentious political partisanship and divide in the USA continues, social workers have a role to play in creating policy and developing practice that is responsive to the realities of the people we serve, regardless of ideological perspective.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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