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Reactionism: Resurrecting the Past

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology

by

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Kansas State University
Bachelor of Science in Psychological Science, 2015

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University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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**Abstract**

This research investigates a novel construct, reactionism – the belief that the past is good and should be resurrected. Specifically, these studies test two competing hypotheses. It could be that reactionism is purely perceptual, such that perceiving the past as positive will promote reactionary attitudes and behavior. Or reactionism could be motivated, such that perceiving change away from the past as threatening is necessary for reactionary attitudes and behavior. In study 1, I tested whether reactionism beliefs are related to greater support for policies that would resurrect the past. The prediction was unsupported, suggesting that reactionism beliefs are motivated. In study 2, the competing perceptual and motivation hypotheses were directly tested. Given the evidence from Study 1, I predicted that framing the past as positive (vs. negative) and change as threatening (vs. nonthreatening) increases support, and voting for, past policies. The motivation hypothesis was supported. Implications and future directions are discussed.

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# Reactionism: Resurrecting the Past

People generally have three options when contemplating change: they can do what they have already been doing (i.e., status quo), they can do something new, or revert back to something from the past (i.e., status quo ante). Of these three options the dominant choice is to stick with the status quo. A great deal of research has explored the psychological antecedents and consequences (e.g., loss aversion, endowment effects, risk aversion, existence and longevity biases, system justification motives) of peoples' preference for the status quo (e.g., Anderson, 2003; Crandall, Eidelman, Skitka, & Morgan, 2009; Eidelman & Crandall, 2009; Eidelman, Crandall, & Pattershall, 2009; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1991; Ritov & Baron, 1992; Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988).

In light of the prevalence of the status quo bias, people less frequently choose something new. However, there are circumstances when people prefer something new. For example, people may prefer new technology when it has enhanced or unique features above and beyond what they already have (Zhou & Nakamoto, 2007). In the context of goal progress, people may prefer a new (and perceivably riskier) strategy to make gains towards their goal (Zou, Scholer, & Higgins, 2014). It would appear that the choice for something new requires the perception that the benefits adequately exceed the cost.

The choice for something from the past – the status quo ante – is far less understood and remains virtually unexplored in the psychological sciences. Within the social sciences it has been political scientists who specialize in political thought who have most extensively discussed a preference for the status quo ante (e.g., Robin, 2011). Political scientists are most likely to refer to those who prefer the status quo ante as a reactionary. However, when they do they are often referring to someone on the extreme "far right" of the political spectrum (e.g., fascists). Further,

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they often describe a preference for the status quo ante as reactionaryism – the desire to reestablish conservative policies as a reaction to the perceived threat of liberal policies.

Psychologists studying the affective phenomenon of nostalgia have also tried to characterize people's affinity for the past (e.g., Batcho, 1995; Holbrook, 1993; Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008). From their perspective people who have positive memories from early in life tend to have complex bittersweet emotions when reflecting on the past with important and beneficial psychological outcomes (Sedikides et al., 2008).

In this research I will approach the tendency to prefer *the way things used to be* as a psychological phenomenon that is carefully adopted and employed. In my conceptualization I will use the term *reactionism* to describe the preference for the way things used to be as a belief or worldview that may facilitate a person's desire to resurrect something from the past.

The goal of these studies is to test whether reactionism is accurately conceptualized as motivated. It could be that simply perceiving that past as positive is sufficient to motivate individuals to want to resurrect the past. Or, it could be that perceiving threat, particularly a threat associated with change away from the past, is necessary to both perceive the past positively and be motivated to resurrect the past.

With the emergence of popular politicians on the political left (e.g., Bernie Sanders) and right (e.g., Donald Trump) espousing past ideals, this research is addressing a timely and important question: is a preference for the past and the desire to resurrect it an overlooked psychological phenomenon that explains support for social, political, economic policies which can broadly impact our society?

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**History and Origin of Reactionism**

The term reactionary was first formally used by Lazare Carnot in a 1797 essay regarding the Coup of 18 Fructidor (i.e., coup d'état) near to end of the French Revolution (Online Etymology Dictionary). In the essay, Carnot lamented that he had been ousted from the government and exiled along with "the same villains, then acting as factious reactionaries" after he had "contributed to extricate [the Directory] from new dangers." Carnot was a conservative; however he was opposed to hereditary rule in France due to his belief in its tendency to become despotic. He opposed Napoleon's desire for absolute rule, labeling supporters as *reactive* to democratic demands. This would become the first record where being labeled a reactionary would refer to a person's desire to resurrect the status quo ante (i.e., monarchical rule).

There is little recorded use of the term reactionary in the 19th century. When used, it was often in reference to the disposition of a counter-revolutionary – someone fighting against change. Often the term was employed by socialist and communist who sought to stigmatize the counter-revolutionaries fighting for totalitarian regimes. In the early 20th century as the Nazi party established itself as the Third Reich, to convey that they had resurrected the German empire of old, supporters were often referred to as reactionaries. Here, reactionaries would become inextricably linked with authoritarian and fascist regimes among political thinkers; hence, reactionaryism's modern definition as an extreme right wing movement (Robin, 2011).

However, in his 1943 essay *Credo of a Reactionary* Francis Stuart Campbell would attempt to divorce the term reactionary from the stigma of an authoritarian apologist. In his words, "The term 'reactionary' as I use it does not stand for a definite and immutable set of ideas. It stands for an attitude of mind." He continues, "I see no more virtue in looking forward longingly to an unknown future than in looking backward nostalgically to known and proven

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values." It is Campbell's sentiment, that to be a reactionary involves an "attitude of mind" which most closely relates to my conceptualization of reactionism. He goes on to clarify that past "known and proven values" are good and perceived to have been lost – no longer the status quo. To distinguish reactionism from a status quo bias I have also adopted the notion that it is related to aspects of past that are perceived as good and are no longer in existence.

**Related Constructs**

There are several constructs that are conceptually similar and potentially related to reactionism. For example, looking on the past favorably may involve feelings of nostalgia. Also, conservatives' affinity for traditions would indicate that aspects of the past have something of value and is worth preserving. Below I will discuss how nostalgia and conservatism are similar to, and distinct from, reactionism, and how different predictions can be derived from each construct. An argument could be made that status quo bias is related to reactionism. However, as previously mentioned, I approach the conceptualization of reactionism as an attitude that leads to a preference towards *what once was*, rather than what is. This is not to say that reactionism captures a desire to go back in time, but a desire to recreate or resurrect what once was because it is good, and potentially better, than what is or what will be.

**Nostalgia.** In Campbell's (1943) treatise he mentions, "looking backward nostalgically". Personal nostalgia is currently conceptualized as a mostly positive (albeit bittersweet) emotional experience that arises from looking back at our own past (Sedikides et al., 2008; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006). Sedikides et al. (2008) argues that personal nostalgia serves a palliative role in alleviating loneliness, negative mood, and existential threats by fostering positive thoughts of social connectedness from our past, which ultimately boosts self-esteem. While personal nostalgia certainly contains cognitive elements related to self-relevant

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memories within specific social contexts, nostalgia is primarily an affective phenomenon (Batcho, 1995, 1998; Holbrook & Schindler, 1994; Routledge, Arndt, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2008; Sedikides et al., 2008; Smeekes, 2015; Wildschut et al., 2006).

An important conceptual distinction can be drawn between reactionism and personal nostalgia. Nostalgic thoughts and feelings often begin with negative affect due to feelings of loss, loneliness, or social exclusion, for example (Batcho, 1995, Holbrook & Schindler, 1994; Sedikides et al., 2008; Wildschut et al., 2006). And while feelings of nostalgia culminate in positive affect and a boost in esteem, the positive affect co-occurs with negative affect due, in part, to people's understanding that the past they fondly remember *cannot* be re-created (Sedikides et al., 2008; Wildschut et al., 2006). Reactionism, which could also arise from negative experiences, captures the belief, and perhaps the motivation, that the past can be resurrected or re-created. Therefore, one primary distinction between reactionism and nostalgia hinges on whether or not people believe the past can and should be resurrected.

Nostalgia can also be experienced when people think of the collective in-group. In Smeekes (2015) conceptualization, it is argued that collective nostalgia is experienced specifically in reference to a collective for whom the person is an in-group member. This is consistent with Sedikides et al's. (2008) definition of nostalgia which states that the self (or in the case of collective nostalgia, the in-group) is positioned as the protagonist when reminiscing about the past. In a compelling program of research, Smeekes and Verkuyten (2013; 2014) have demonstrated that people are motivated to perceive self-continuity across time. And that perceiving self-continuity promotes in-group identification and affiliation. Further, people often enhance their perception of self-continuity by perceiving the in-group as more cohesive over time, thereby strengthening in-group identification. When the in-group is threatened people start

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to develop feelings of nostalgia towards the ingroup of the past – collective nostalgia – and begin to use in-group defenses (Smeekes, 2015; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013; 2014). Frequency of nostalgic thoughts toward the national ingroup (i.e., "national nostalgia") increased among Dutch nationals when primed to think about the influx of immigrants and refugees. More frequent nostalgic thoughts about the nation predicted the belief in autochthony – the nation belongs to the original inhabitants – which then predicted greater prejudice towards immigrants and a desire to restrict immigration to the Netherlands (Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2014).

Given that people can experience nostalgia toward a collective of individuals it is plausible that feelings of collective nostalgia may facilitate, or at least co-occur with, reactionism. For example, when Dutch participants in Smeekes et al's., (2014) study's show a preference to reduce immigration because they want give the country back to the original inhabitants, they are essentially choosing to restore a past that existed for a past ingroup. I would argue that these authors are demonstrating reactionism, since they were able to show that frequently longing for the (presumably better) national past leads to a preference to resurrect the past, particularly when societal changes are made salient.

One important distinction between reactionism and collective nostalgia is that collective nostalgia is circumscribed so that it only includes concerns about the ingroup. Reactionism beliefs can also be centered on the ingroup. But it can also be centered on the individual who might wish to resurrect an idiosyncratic aspect of the past unrelated to the ingroup, a process not yet reported in the social psychological literature. Another important distinction is that reactionism beliefs may motivate symbolic reactionary behavior. An individual who sees societal decline in one domain (e.g., diluted culture through over immigration) might support policies that restore unrelated aspects of the past (e.g., deregulation of financial markets) as means of

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fulfilling their desire to restore "past glories", or perhaps compensate for the threat of societal change. Finally, these collective nostalgia studies were limited since they did not directly tap people's evaluation that the past was better than the present or future. Rather, they focused on the frequency to which people longed for the past (though, speculatively, perhaps greater frequencies of nostalgic reflections reflect greater perceived threat due to societal change). Moreover, the researchers did not directly manipulate whether the past was better than the status quo or future, but rather whether or not the past was something people generally long for, which at best implies the past was better.

In order to demonstrate that reactionism is distinct from collective nostalgia, the belief that the past is better than the status quo or future, and worthy of resurrecting, should be able to uniquely predict support for a policy from the past beyond feelings of collective nostalgia. Further, reactionism should predict support for past policies beyond general feelings of personal and historic nostalgia. This would rule out the possibility that reactionism is confounded with an affective process that facilitates the desire to re-establish a higher status for the ingroup or to simply relive a personal past (see the Discussion for ideas on how the affective processes underlying reactionism would differ from those related to nostalgia as this question is beyond the scope of the present studies).

There is evidence that nostalgia is connected to "sensitive periods" of a person's past (e.g., Holbrook, 1993, 1994; Holbrook & Schindler, 1994). In their research on the relationship between consumer behaviors and feelings of nostalgia, Holbrook and Schindler (1994) developed a measure of historic nostalgia similar to reactionism. It captured positive attitudes towards qualities of the past and negative attitudes toward the future (which were reverse scored). The researchers demonstrated that positive attitudes towards the past predicted people's

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liking of fashion models depicted as representing past cultural eras. However, the fashion model that tended to be rated highest for each participant portrayed fashion and products that were specific to a person's age in the past (~ 14 years old) – their "sensitive period". So while these researchers explored the effects of evaluations of the past, they were focused on past experiences within a person's lifetime. Reactionism goes beyond historic nostalgia conceptually, by allowing for positive evaluations of a past that was not experienced by the individual to influence their attitudes and choices. No one alive today was alive in the 1880's, but I hold that it is possible, and indeed likely when the future is perceived to harbor societal decline, to prefer laws, policies, and social dynamics that existed in the 1880's instead of what we have now.

**Conservatism: Political and psychological science perspectives.** At first, reactionism and conservatism would appear to overlap significantly. However, according to political scientist Corey Robin (2011) conservatism is rooted in a desire to *conserve* liberty and privileges. This implies that institutions and policies that confer liberty and privileges, while rooted in the past, are still in existence. Consistent with this notion are historical examples, such as when conservatives opposed the liberation of slaves, suffrage rights for women and ethnic and racial minorities, and many other progressive movements that would seemingly water down the power of the privileged (Robin, 2011). Reactionism, though, is a belief directed to something that no longer exists, not something that needs to be maintained – which is a status quo bias. However, once conservatives begin to perceive that privileges or entitlements have been lost, then reactionism would more accurately characterize a motivation to restore what was lost. Therefore, while reactionism should certainly compliment and perhaps predict conservatism, it is a distinct phenomenon that applies when policies or institutions (that perhaps confer privileges or status) are to be restored, not maintained.

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Research on the psychological antecedents and consequences of conservatism has been extensive since researchers started investigating the authoritarian personality during WWII (Fromm, 1941). Fromm believed that authoritarianism was a sickness of the German people. Using a personality approach to further explicate Fromm's thesis, conservatives started to be characterized as submissive to authority. They are characterized as rigidly and dogmatically preferring to maintain the mandates of cultural and religious traditions and tend to elect authoritative leaders (i.e., Right Wing Authoritariansim, RWA; Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altmeyer, 1981; Rokeach, 1960). Conservatives have also been characterized as having a preference to dominate and have authority over other people and groups in order to establish and maintain social and economic hierarchies related to class and race (i.e., Social Dominance Orientation, SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Combined, tendencies towards right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance reliably predict conservative attitudes in the context of politics and prejudice (Altmeyer, 1998; Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002). However, Stanley Milgram (1963) powerfully demonstrated that situational forces play in people's submission to authority. A supposedly conservative characteristic, obedience to authority was a phenomenon far more common than to simply be a sickness experienced within a particular culture. Importantly, he demonstrated that submission to authority was a matter of degree that could be experimentally induced, and relied, perhaps more so, on specific characteristics of the situation than on specific personality traits.

Integrating situational factors and individual differences, researchers began to use a motivated social cognition approach to assess epistemic, existential, and ideological motives that promote conservatism (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a, 2003b, Jost et al., 2007). For example, conservatism has been linked to avoiding ambiguity, uncertainty, and abstraction

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(Frenkel-Brunswik, 1948; Jost et al., 2007; Wilson, 1973), a need for closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), lower sophistication and integrative complexity (Sidanius, 1988; Tetlock, 1984), a need for order and structure (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993; Schaller, Boyd, Yohannes, & O'Brien, 1995), greater perceptions of threat (Jost et al., 2007; Lavine, Lodge, & Freitas, 2005), greater self interest (Sears & Funk, 1991), and greater system legitimizing (i.e., status quo maintaining) beliefs (Jost et al., 2003a; Jost, Kay, & Thorisdottir, 2009). From this perspective conservatism can arise from situational cues that promote these epistemic, existential, and ideological motives. Further, conservatism is especially likely among those who have personality characteristics related to more traditional forms of conservatism (i.e., those higher in authoritarian and dominance tendencies) that draw their attention to those cues.

As previously mentioned, reactionism lends itself to the promotion of conservatism since a core motive is to conserve a status quo rooted in the past (Altmeyer, 1998; Jost et al., 2003a; Pratto et al., 1994). Thus, reactionism could be characterized as an ideological motive within the Jost et al. (2003) framework, alongside SDO, RWA, system justification, and the rationalization of self-interest. Indeed, conservatives could be trying to preserve qualities of past (e.g., religious and cultural traditions) that are perceived as better than countercultural movements (e.g., feminism, political correctness) or the proposed policies of left. But while the motivation to preserve traditions, policies, and hierarchies of the past is best characterized by right-wing authoritarianism and dominance orientation, these constructs fail to capture the distinct belief that past traditions, policies, and hierarchies no longer exist and need to be resurrected. In other words, they may conflate *what is* with *what was*. Reactionism is driven by the motivation to *restore*, not maintain, a good past that no longer exists. Therefore, reactionism should uniquely

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predict preferences for policies that no longer exist beyond general conservatism and related constructs like right-wing authoritarians and social dominance orientation.

**Competing Hypotheses**

There is reason to believe that simply perceiving that past as positive will be sufficient for engendering support for reactionary policies and promote reactionary behavior. Many people regularly encounter information that glorifies the past as being simpler and more wholesome. Often, people will lament how technology is driving people apart or that the breakdown of the nuclear family is the source of society's woes. Persistently encountering information that the past is better than the way things are, or will be, could lead to an affinity to the past due to mere exposure (Zajonc, 1968). From this perspective, simply perceiving the past as positive is sufficient for promoting the motivation to resurrect the past since it will seem like the more familiar and likeable option. A potential mechanism for frequent exposure of past positive framing is intergenerational transmission of political preferences. Researchers have demonstrated that among politicized families children tend to adopt their parents political views (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009).

However, an affinity for the past could also develop should perceiving the past as positive serve to fulfill a psychological need, such as mitigating threat and uncertainty (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). The content of beliefs seems to be well suited for sustaining beliefs, a phenomenon referred to as "elective affinities" that originated with Goethe (1809/1966). In Jost et al.'s (2003a) motivated cognition framework, the belief that change is threatening is populated by content that supports the belief; for example, perceiving the past as better than the way things are, or will be. Thus, having an "elective" affinity for the past could be necessary for sustaining the belief that change is unfavorable. Moreover, elective affinities are conceptualized as being

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recursive. Thus, the belief that change leads to negative outcomes may make the past look better, and believing that the past is better may make change feel threatening. From this perspective, a belief (i.e., the perception) that change is threatening should be necessary to promote the motivation to resurrect a positive past.

**Overview of Studies**

The goal of the present program of research is to test the predictions that are derived from the assumptions of reactionism, namely, that reactionism will uniquely predict increases in people's preference to re-establish a positive past beyond related constructs such as nostalgia and conservatism. In the first study, I will test a reactionism scale's ability to uniquely predict (i.e., predictive validity) policy preferences that reflect the status quo ante (i.e., resurrecting a past policy) rather than policies maintaining the status quo, or new/future policies. I predict that reactionism will be positively related to and uniquely predict preferences for status quo ante policies beyond nostalgia and conservatism, will be positively related to, but fail to uniquely predict preferences for status quo policies beyond measures of conservatism, and will be negatively related to, but fail to uniquely predict an aversion to novel policies beyond measures of conservatism.

In the second study I will test the prediction that perceiving the past as positive (vs. negative) and change away from the past as threatening (vs. non-threatening) will causally influence reactionistic policy preferences and reactionary behavior (i.e., voting for the past policy). By manipulating the framing of a novel policy as resurrecting a past that is better than the alternative, people's support of and voting for the policy should be increased. Reactionism beliefs, that the past was better and should be resurrected, should explain increased support of and voting for the past policy.

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## Study 1

In this study I test whether reactionism, as operationalized by the reactionism scale developed for this study, uniquely predicts a preference for policies framed as having existed in the past. I expect that reactionism will predict more positive evaluations of past policies, above and beyond ideology and nostalgia. Moreover, it is expected that reactionism will be related to, but not uniquely predict positive evaluations of status quo policies. And finally, that reactionism will be related to, and uniquely predict negative evaluations of future policies.

### Method

**Participants and power.** Undergraduate students were recruited for partial course credit in a thirty minute online survey administered by computer in the lab. Using preliminary effects sizes from exploratory data in G*Power software, to detect a semi-partial effect for reactionism of $sr^2$ = .03 with a residual variance of $R^2_{residual}$ = .65 a priori power analysis indicates that to achieve a small effect size of $f^2$ = .046 using multiple regression with three predictors at 95% power a minimum sample of $N$ = 285 was be needed. To account for the possibility that 5% of participants would fail the attention check items, I sought to collect a sample of $N$ = 300. However, due to limited resources (i.e., credits) I was only able to collect 170 participants, of which 6 were excluded for failing the attention check items. This yielded a final sample of $N$ = 164. The sample was 68.3% female, 74.4% White, with an average age, $M$ = 19.2, $SD$ = 2.0.

**Procedure and materials.** The study was presented as a task to determine people's opinions on political policies. After providing informed consent, participants responded to a series of fully randomized questionnaires assessing their reactionism beliefs, support for a range of policies, their political ideology, and tendencies towards experiencing personal and collective

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nostalgia. Afterward, they provided their demographic information, read a debriefing statement, receive participation credit, and were thanked for their participation.

***Reactionism.***I developed an eleven-item measure of reactionism that is designed to capture the extent to which the past is perceived as better than the present or future and should be resurrected ($\alpha$ = .88). Using a Likert-type scale ranging from *1 = Strongly Disagree* to *9 = Strongly Agree*, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the following items: a) *There are not many things from the past that are better than today* (reverse scored); b) *There were points in history where people lived better than we do now*; c) *People from the past experienced more of "the good life" than we do now*; d) *The future will never be as great as certain times in the past*; e) *Society would not benefit from bringing back certain ways of life from the past* (reverse scored); f) *Too many things these days are not as good as they once were*; g) *I would support a community leader or politician that wanted to bring back certain past policies*; h) *As society moves forward, we should consider reviving certain ideas, values, or policies that are no longer in use*; i) *Once society moves past certain ideas, values, or policies we should forget about them* (reverse scored); j) *Life would be better if we returned to "the good old days"*; k) *The world I grew up in was better than the world today.*

***Policy support.***To assess policy support, participants indicated their level of support for six policy proposals (e.g., the size of desks on campus, the height of hand rails, the width of sidewalks, the minimum length of university passwords, the minimum number of credits needed to finish a degree, the number of emergency exits per building). They were randomly framed as reflecting past policies (e.g., *In the past,...*), status quo policies (e.g., *Currently,...*), or future policies (e.g., *In the future,…*). Fully counterbalancing the framing of the policies controlled for

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the possibility that some framing a particular policy a particular way would be inherently more appealing than others.

Level of support for each policy was assessed with three items each using a Likert-type scale ranging from *1 = Strongly Disagree* to *9 = Strongly Agree*: a) *I would support this policy*; b) *This policy should not be implemented* (reverse scored); c) *Other people should support this policy*. The first item directly taps participants' support; the second item taps participants' aversion to the policy; the third item taps participants' attitude strength via a desire to impress their support onto others (Krosnick et al., 1993). For each participant the three policy support items were averaged for each policy (α's ranged from .66 to .95). The three policies for each framing were averaged to create separate indices of policy support for past ($M$ = 6.33, $SD$ = 1.51), status quo ($M$ = 6.64, $SD$ = 1.46), and future policies ($M$ = 6.51, $SD$ = 1.42). In order to contrast support for policies from the past with support for status quo and future policies, three difference scores were calculated contrasting the past with status quo, past with future, and past with status quo and future combined.

***Political Ideology.***

There has been considerable debate surrounding the conceptualization and operationalization of political ideology (for a review, see Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Most commonly, ideology is measured along a single bi-polar continuum (often with a single item) from liberalism to conservatism; and there is compelling reasons for doing so. A single bi-polar dimension serves as a reliable heuristic in political discourse for understanding others' policy positions and worldviews, which is evidenced by stronger correlations between liberalism and conservatism during election cycles when political discourse occurs more frequently (Federico & Schneider, 2007; Jost et al., 2009).

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However, a growing number of scholars believe that using a single item fails to capture the nuances in ideologies, and that there may be as many as six distinct ideologies (e.g., Choma, Hafer, Dywan, Segalowitz, & Busseri, 2012; Hirsh, DeYoung, Xu, & Peterson, 2010). Along this vein, three other methods of operationalizing political ideology have emerged. First, the social and economic dimensions of political ideology are measured separately. This can be done with two items, one for each dimension, or by using instruments that assess constructs are theorized to reflect these dimensions such as SDO and RWA (Duckitt, 2001). Second, social and economic ideology is measured by indexing self-identification along the liberal-conservative continuum for constellation of contemporary social and economic political issues (Everett, 2013). Third, liberalism and conservatism are measured separately by indicating level of support for a range of issues that are uniquely important to liberals and conservatives (Kerlinger, 1984).

I employed a three-item measure of ideology requiring participants to self-report their economic, social, and overall political ideology using a Likert-type scale ranging from *1 = Very Liberal* to *9 = Very Conservative.* I have chosen this operationalization for two reasons; first, it is my position that ideologies are worldviews that guide people's perceptions of and support for political issues, and that people generally have a relatively accurate understanding of their own ideology that is predictive of a wide range of phenomenon (Federico & Schneider, 2007; Jost et al., 2003a; Jost et al., 2009). Second, while using political issues to approximate people's ideology may be appropriate in certain circumstances, in this study's design political issues are positioned as criterion variables and cannot be appropriately used as control variables approximating participants' ideology. The three items were combined to form a moderately reliable index of ideology ($\alpha = .52$).

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In addition to the three, I employed the widely utilized right-wing authoritarianism (α = .66; RWA; Altemeyer, 1998) and social dominance orientation (α = .90; SDO-2; Ho et al., 2012) scales. This is to ensure I am operationalizing conservatism as broadly as possible and thus providing a more stringent test of reactionism's predictive ability.

***Personal, collective, and historic nostalgia.*** To assess personal nostalgia, I used the Nostalgia Inventory (NI; Batcho, 2007a) where participants assess how much they miss twenty aspects of their past using a scale ranging from *1 = Not at all* to *9 = Very much* (α = .84; see Appendix A for full list of items rated).

To assess collective nostalgia I adapted the two measures of national nostalgia (NN) used in Smeekes et al. (2014), which was adapted from the NI. Using a Likert-type scale ranging from *1 = Very Rarely* to *9 = Very Frequently* participants responded to the following items: a) *How often do you experience nostalgia when you think about the America of the past?*, b) *How often do you long for the good old days of the country?*, c) *How often do you long for the America of the past?*, d) *How often do you feel nostalgic when you hear American songs from the past?*, e) *How often do you bring to mind nostalgic experiences related to the way American people were?*, f) *How often do you bring to mind nostalgic experiences related to the way American society was?*, (α = .84).

To assess historic nostalgia I used Holbrook and Schindler's (1994) Nostalgia Scale (NS) where participants rated their agreement for eight items (see Appendix B for all eight items, α = .60) using a scale ranging from *1 = Strongly Disagree* to *9 = Strongly Agree*. At first glance the collective/national (NN) and historic (NS) nostalgia items appear similar to items on the reactionism scale. However, these nostalgia scales assess people's *longing* for the past, not their

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evaluations of the past. Due to the substantial operational overlap, however, controlling for national and historic nostalgia provided a stringent test of reactionism's predictive validity.

**Results**

**Analytic strategy.** As an initial test of the hypothesis that reactionism is positively associated with support for policies that represent the status quo ante, weakly or unrelated to support for policies that represent the status quo, and negatively related to support for novel policies I used bivariate correlations. To test the hypothesis that reactionism is a unique predictor of support for policies that represent the status quo ante but does not predict support for status quo policies, I used hierarchical regression by entering the ideology and nostalgia indices in the first step, and reactionism in the second step.

**Bivariate correlations.** Bivariate correlation analysis (see Table 1) did not support my hypothesis that reactionism would be positively related to support for university policies framed as resurrecting the past.

Table 1
*Bivariate Correlations*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. React. | - | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Past | .05 | - | | | | | | | |
| 3. Present | .06 | .33*** | - | | | | | | |
| 4. Future | .10 | .28*** | .21** | - | | | | | |
| 5. Pol. Ideo | .58*** | .21** | .06 | .02 | - | | | | |
| 6. SDO | .39*** | .08 | -.02 | -.03 | .46*** | - | | | |
| 7. RWA | .55*** | .12 | -.07 | .00 | .71*** | .54*** | - | | |
| 8. PNI | .32*** | .06 | .08 | .09 | .26** | -.05 | .21** | - | |
| 9. HN | .57*** | -.06 | -.04 | -.01 | .27*** | .22** | .34*** | .25** | - |
| 10. CN | .59*** | .16* | .08 | .05 | .52*** | .24** | .45*** | .36*** | .27*** |

***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, **$p < .05$

**Hierarchical regression.** Given that reactionism was unrelated to support for policies from the past, there is reason to be skeptical that is would uniquely predict support for policies

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from the past. Indeed, reactionism was unrelated to support for university policies regardless of their temporal construal (*p*s > .4). However, reactionism was uniquely and negatively related to support for policies from the past relative to support for policies in the future, though the model was only marginally significant ($F(7, 156) = 1.78$, $b = -.34$, $p = .10$, *95% CI* = [-.67, -.01], $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p = .04$). Stated differently, reactionism predicted that participants were more supportive of policies from the future than policies from the past. Reactionism was unrelated to the other policy contrasts. It should also be noted that policy preferences did not differ as a function of framing, suggesting that among students considering university policies a status quo bias did not influence their preferences.

**Discussion**

Overall, the results of Study 1 did not support, and perhaps contradicted the prediction that reactionism would be related to and predict support for policies from the past. There are two possibilities for the findings, though the data doesn't speak to these possibilities. First, reactionism's relationship with support for past policies could be motivated. Specifically, perceiving the past as better and worthy of resurrecting may require dissatisfaction, and perhaps frustration or anger with the way things are, or will be. Should reactionism be motivated by negative affect, reflecting on a positive past would serve a similar palliative function to nostalgia, which has been shown to mitigate the negative psychological consequences of existential threats. However, with nostalgia the source of threat is unrelated to the positive past the reflected upon in response to threat. In the face of threat, people simply search for a positive past experience to help restore esteem. But with reactionism, the source of threat serves to direct attention to specific aspects of the past that were better. Finally, while nostalgia might motivate an approach orientation towards an immediate goal by restoring self-esteem, reactionism might motivate an

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approach orientation towards more abstract, broader societal goals that would restore society to a past glory.

The second implication is that reactionism has been partially misconceptualized. Perhaps the past simply serves as reference point, against which people gauge the well-being of society. The more societal decline that is perceived, the more positively the past is perceived, and thus the more motivated people are for change towards something, perhaps anything, better. Since the future brings change, people may turn to the future in their hope of approximating the *betterness* of the past. Hierarchical regression analysis speaks to this possibility. After accounting for several variables that predict positive attitudes for the past, reactionism predicted more support for future policies compared to past policies. Thus, what sets reactionism apart from the other constructs may be its ability to predict a preference for change.

## Study 2

Evidence from Study 1 suggests that reactionism is not merely a perceptual process, but one that is motivated. In this study I pit the two hypotheses against each other: that perceiving the past positively is sufficient for engendering more support for past policies, vs. perceiving change away from the past as threatening is necessary for engendering more support for past policies. By framing a novel policy proposal as reflecting a better (vs. worse) past when the present and future are perceived negatively, support for a status quo ante policy should increase. By using a novel policy I can eliminate people's knowledge of the policy as an alternative explanation for increased (or decreased) support. A known policy could be perceived as helping or hurting a particular group, which might lead to intergroup processes such as prejudice that would influence policy support. Therefore, a novel issue will provide the most stringent test of the hypothesis that when people perceive that past as better they will prefer to resurrect the past.

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## Method

**Participants and power.** Mechanical Turk workers participated in a five minute online survey for $0.40 compensation (an effective hourly rate of $8 per hour which is slightly above minimum wage). A priori power analysis indicated that a sample of $N$ = 300 was needed. I collected $N$ = 305 participants, of which $N$ = 201 successfully completed the attention and manipulation checks and were retained for analysis. The sample consisted of a slight majority of females (57.2%; two identified as transgendered), the average age of $M$ = 40.0, $SD$ = 13.7, it was mostly White (79.6%) and educated beyond high school (92.5%), and had an income over $39,999 (64.7%). Participants lived in 44 states and the District of Columbia.

**Procedure and materials.** The study was presented as an opinion survey to assess support for a policy that would regulate the minimum width of roads. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four policy framing conditions where the valence of the past and threat of change was manipulated. Specifically, participants read a political flyer/mailer (see Appendix C for flyers) where the past was framed positively (*Bring Back a Bygone Era!*) or negatively (*Let Bygones Be Gone!*), and where the threat of change was made salient (e.g., when the past policy was to bring back narrower roads, *Fatalities occur 33% more often at wider widths. Source: U.S. DOT Federal Highway Admin.(2013)*). The flyers were counterbalanced so that the roads were being made either wider or narrower. I reasoned that participants would find wider roads more favorable overall (perhaps they feel safer); but that when threatening information about wider roads was available it still would lead to a preference for narrow roads when the past was framed positively. Because of counterbalancing road width, the information in the threat condition was

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varied. Specifically, when proposing that making roads wider will bring back a positive past, or avoid recreating negative past, the threatening alternative was, *Accidents are 50% more likely at narrow widths*, and when proposing that making roads narrower will bring back a positive past, or avoid recreating a negative past, the threatening alternative was, *Fatalities occur 33% more often at wider widths.* For better or worse, keeping the threatening information factually accurate was prioritized over keeping the threatening information constant. The rationale at design was that should participant's fact check the claims they will find them accurate and provide responses that accurately reflect their attitudes on the issue.

Prior to reading the flyers, participants were told that politicians couldn't decide on the best regulation. And so participants were asked to study the policy proposal and decide how they would vote on this policy in a local referendum during the next election cycle. Importantly, the flyers concluded with the question, *Change is happening, which side are you on?* This rhetorical question was meant to indicate to participants that the status quo is not an option, and therefore, eliminate the possibility of status quo biases influencing judgments and decisions.

After reviewing the flyer, they indicated their support for the proposed policy, and whether they would vote for or against the policy. Then they completed brief measures of political ideology, nostalgia, and attitudes towards regulating road width, followed by a manipulation check and demographic questions. Finally they were debriefed, thanked, and automatically compensated upon returning to the Mechanical Turk web portal and entering a unique participation code.

**Policy Support.** The same three-item policy assessment from study one was used and formed a reliable index of policy support ($\alpha = .94$). In addition, participants indicated their voting intention (i.e., *Do you intend to vote in favor of or against the proposal? For* or *Against*).

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**Predictors.** The following scales were described in Study 1: reactionism (α = .93); self-reported political ideology (α = .96); right-wing authoritarianism (α = .93); social dominance orientation (α = .95); collective nostalgia (α = .97).

**Covariate.** Because it is possible that some participants may have overall positive or negative attitudes toward government regulation that might influence participants responses, participants responded to three items assessing regulatory attitudes on the following Liker-type scale, *1 = Not at All* to *9 = Very Much*. The items were: a) *How much do you think the government should be involved in regulating road width?* b) *How necessary do you think it is for the government to regulate road width?* c) *How much are you opposed to government regulation, regardless of what is being regulated?* (reverse scored). The items were administered after all of the measures, but prior to the demographics at the end of the study, and formed a reliable index (α = .76). The scale was unaffected by the manipulation.

**Manipulation Check.** Participants responded to two final items before providing demographic information that assessed how well they had read and remembered the information from the political flyer. The first item, *In the flyer you reviewed previously, what was proposed? To make the roads wider or narrower?*, was followed by a choice between wider or narrower. The second item, *In the flyer you reviewed previously, what was the numerical value of the statistic provided, 33% or 50%?*, was followed by a choice between 33% or 50%.

**Results**

**Analytic strategy.** Using univariate linear modeling I tested the competing predictions that a) perceiving that past positively is sufficient for increasing reactionary attitudes and behavior, or b) perceiving change as threatening is necessary for increasing reactionary attitudes and behavior. I also used Hayes (2013) Process macro in SPSS to test whether more support for a

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reactionary policy explains increased voting for the policy when the past is framed positively, but only when change is framed as threatening.

**Policy Support.** A main effect of valence ($F(1, 192) = 19.10$, $p < .001$, $n_p^2 = .09$, *90% CI* = [.03, .17]) emerged such that participants were more supportive of the policy when the past was framed positively ($M = 5.59$) than when framed negatively ($M = 4.32$). The effect of threat trended in the predicted direction, but did not reach significance ($p = .12$). Importantly, support for hypothesis b) was observed, that perceiving change as threatening is necessary for increasing reactionary attitudes, but only when the past is framed positively. Linear modeling revealed the predicted interaction, $F(1, 192) = 17.38$, $p < .001$, $n_p^2 = .08$, *90% CI* = [.02, .16]. When the past framed positively people were more supportive of the policy ($F(1, 192) = 17.45$, $p < .001$) when the alternative was threatening ($M = 6.41$) than when a threat was not presented ($M = 4.76$). When the past was framed negatively, people's support for the policy was marginally different ($F(1, 192) = 3.22$, $p = .07$) when retaining a past policy was framed as threatening people were less supportive of it ($M = 3.94$) compared to when a threat was not presented ($M = 4.70$).

An additional interaction was observed where the effect of threat was moderated by the counterbalancing order, $F(1, 192) = 16.35$, $p = .05$, $n_p^2 = .02$, *90% CI* = [.02, .16]. This was primarily driven by the fact that, as expected, people seem to prefer wider roads. When the past represented wider roads, policy support was unaffected ($F(1, 192) = .11$, $p = .75$) by whether a threat was present ($M = 6.41$) or not ($M = 6.54$). But when the past represented narrower roads, policy support was higher ($F(1, 192) = 6.22$, $p = .01$) when a threat was present ($M = 3.94$) than when it was not ($M = 2.91$).

Despite the effect of counterbalance as a moderator of threat, a three-way interaction between threat, valence, and counterbalance did not emerge ($p = .76$). Overall, there was a main

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effect of counterbalance such that there was more policy support ($F(1, 192) = 110.37$, $p < .001$, $n_p^2 = .37$, *90% CI* = [.26, .45].) when the roads of the past were wider ($M = 6.48$) than when they were narrower ($M = 3.43$). Regardless, when the past was framed positively and change was threatening people were more supportive of a policy that would resurrect the past (see Figure 1a & 1b). And when the past was framed negatively and threatening, there was less support for the policy. Though, support for an unpopular policy (the narrower road) at least appears to be unaffected by whether it's framed as threatening or not (see Figure 1a).

Figure 1a
*Policy Support: Narrower Roads in Past*

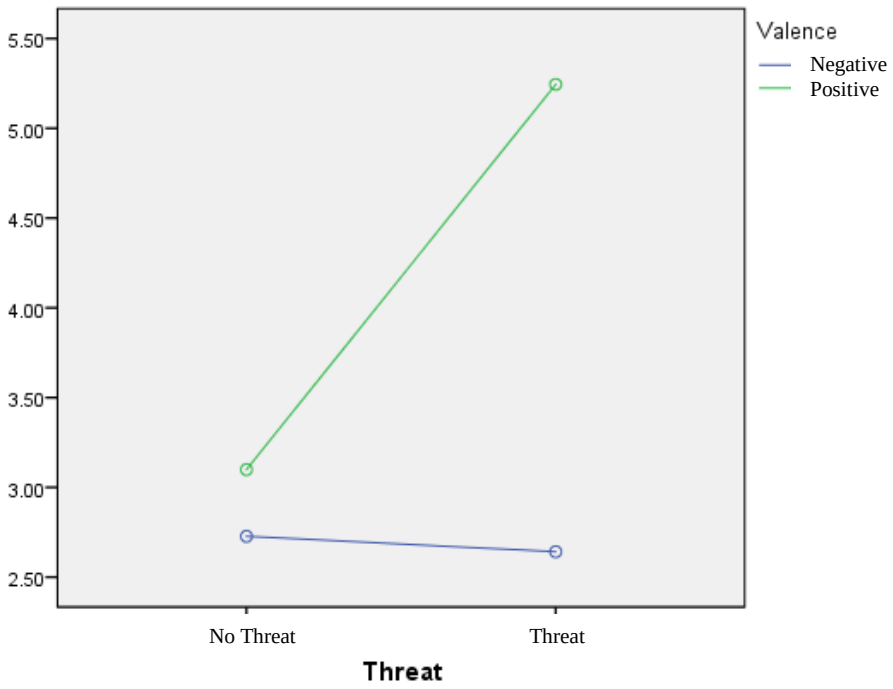


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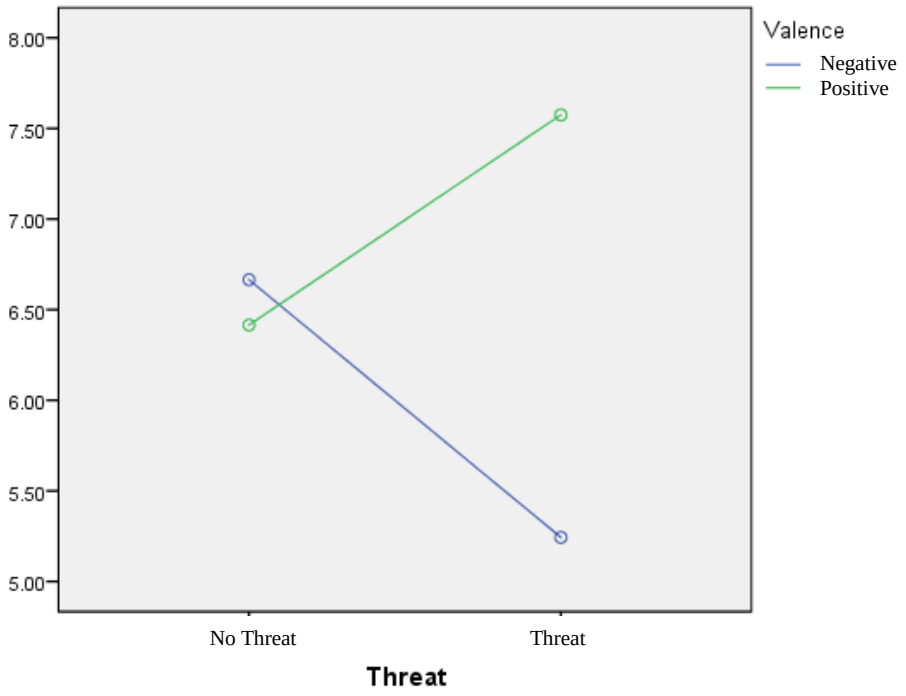
Figure 1b
*Policy Support: Wider Roads in Past*




**Voting behavior.** A main effect of valence was again observed, $F(1, 192) = 16.34$, $p < .001$, $n_p^2 = .08$, *90% CI* = [.02, .16], such that people were more likely to vote for the policy when the past was framed positively (62.1%) than when framed negatively (37.9%). The main effect of threat again trended in the predicted direction, but was non-significant ($p = .44$). Evidence again supported hypothesis b), that perceiving change as threatening is necessary for increasing reactionary behavior, but was again qualified by valence. Linear modeling revealed the predicted interaction, $F(1, 192) = 6.49$, $p < .001$, $n_p^2 = .03$, *90% CI* = [.001, .10]. When the past framed positively people voted more for the policy ($F(1, 192) = 5.9$, $p = .02$) when the alternative was threatening (72.1%) than when a threat was not presented (52.2%). When the past was framed negatively, voting behavior did not differ ($F(1, 192) = 1.47$, $p = .23$). Though, there was a trend

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similar to policy support; when keeping the past was framed as threatening people voted less for the policy (32.6%) compared to when a threat was not presented (43.2%).

A main effect of counterbalance was again observed. Overall, there was more voting for the policy ($F(1, 192) = 76.5$, $p < .001$, $n_p^2 = .29$, *90% CI* = [.18, .38].) when the roads of the past were wider (76.3%) than when they were narrower (23.7%).

**Conditional effects analysis.** Conditional effects analysis with 10,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2013) also revealed support for hypothesis b) that perceiving change as threatening is necessary for increasing reactionary behavior – more support for and voting in favor of a policy that would resurrect the past, $b = 7.30$, $SE = 4.82$, *95% CI* = [.78, 17.3]. The coefficient produced by the PROCESS macro is an estimate of the difference in conditional indirect effects as a function of the independent variable. In my case, it tests whether there are differences in how effectively policy support explains the effect of threat on voting behavior when comparing a positively framed past to a negatively framed past. When change was threatening, people were more supportive of a reactionary policy, which explained why they were more likely to vote for the reactionary policy, but only when the past was framed positively ($b = 7.73$, $SE = 4.18$, *95% CI* = [3.0, 16.3]). There was not an indirect effect of policy support when the past was framed negatively (*95% CI* = [-4.8, 5.9].

**Additional analyses.** Study 2 was intended as a conceptual test of reactionism. However, as a test of the validity of the reactionism scale I developed for Study 1, I predicted that reactionism beliefs would follow a similar pattern of effects as policy support and voting behavior. Specifically, I predicted that reactionism beliefs would be greatest when the past was framed positively and change as threatening. However, this pattern of effects only partially emerged. To the contrary, reactionism beliefs where higher when the past was framed negatively

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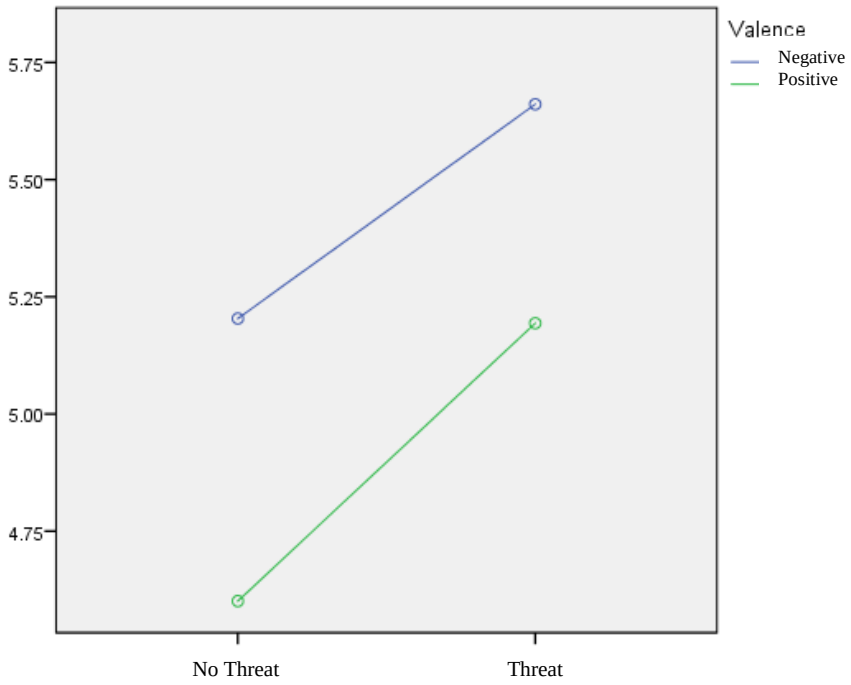
($F$( 1, 192) = 4.68, $p$ = .03, $n_p^2$ = .02, *90% CI* = [.00, .08]). But as expected, reactionism beliefs were higher when a threat was present ($F$( 1, 192) = 4.53, $p$ = .04, $n_p^2$ = .02, *90% CI* = [.00, .08]). Rather than an interactive effect, these effects appear to be additive (see Figure 2). When the past is framed negatively, people are more likely to report that things used to be better, and all the more so if the past is framed as threatening! Possible explanations for the finding are discussed below in the general discussion.

Figure 2
*Reactionism: Additive Effects*




**Discussion**

In Study 2, I sought to conceptually test two competing hypotheses regarding the underpinnings of reactionism. There was strong support for the hypotheses that reactionistic attitudes and behavior is motivated in part by the perception of threat, and not merely by perceiving the past positively. Specifically, when the past was framed positively (vs. negatively)

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and change was framed as threatening (vs. not threatening) people were more supportive of a policy from the past, and more likely to vote for the policy. There was also evidence that the extent to which policy support explains voting behavior as a function of threat depends on how the past is framed – support for the policy as a function of threat did not explain voting behavior when the past was framed negatively, perhaps because narrower roads were largely unpopular.

## General Discussion

These two studies were guided by two goals. First, I sought to establish the reactionism beliefs scale as a unique predictor of policy preferences that would resurrect the past, beyond related constructs like nostalgia and conservatism. I did not find evidence indicating that the reactionism scale is related to a preference for past policies. The only effect to emerge indicates that the reactionism scale captures a preference for change, but not necessarily to the past. Second, I sought to uncover whether reactionism was a purely perceptual or a motivated process. Evidence from Study 2 strongly suggested that reactionism, operationalized as support for and voting in favor of a past policy, is motivated by the perception of threat, but only when the past is framed positively.

The largely null results of Study 1 have two possible explanations. It may be that the university policies were too mundane to engender any meaningful variability in participants concern or support. And given that there were six policies that were randomly framed three different ways, the design of the study created considerable noise in the data. A potential solution would be to analyze each policy separately. Descriptively, it appears that some policies were more popular than others ($M_{password}$ = 5.12; $M_{handrails}$ = 6.06; $M_{desks}$ =6.12; $M_{credits}$ = 6.35; $M_{sidewalks}$ = 7.01; $M_{exits}$ = 8.00). Breaking down each policy by framing is also revealing (see Figure 3)

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| Figure 3<br>*Mean Policy Support as a Function of Framing* | | | | One-way ANOVA:<br>Framing Effect on Policy Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Temporal Construal | Policy | *M* | *SD* | |
| Past | Sidewalks | 7.04 | 1.35 | $F(2,161) = .03$, $p = .98$ |
| | Hand Rails | 5.98 | 1.34 | $F(2,161) = .27$, $p = .76$ |
| | Desk Height | 5.70 | 1.89 | $F(2,161) = 3.24$, $p = .04$ |
| | Exits | 8.16 | .99 | $F(2,161) = 1.08$, $p = .34$ |
| | Passwords | 5.00 | 1.71 | $F(2,161) = 9.99$, $p < .001$ |
| | Credit | 6.54 | 1.92 | $F(2,161) = .65$, $p = .53$ |
| Status Quo | Sidewalk | 7.04 | 1.61 | |
| | Hand Rails | 6.03 | 1.39 | |
| | Desk Height | 6.50 | 1.65 | |
| | Exits | 7.83 | 1.37 | |
| | Passwords | 6.11 | 2.05 | |
| | Credit | 6.37 | 2.14 | |
| Future | Sidewalks | 6.98 | 1.74 | |
| | Hand Rails | 6.06 | 1.46 | |
| | Desk Height | 6.15 | 1.42 | |
| | Exits | 7.80 | 1.19 | |
| | Passwords | 4.47 | 2.26 | |
| | Credit | 6.13 | 1.65 | |

Most policies did not differ as a function of framing. Though, desk height was significantly less supported when framed as a past policy compared to status quo framing ($p = .03$), and did not differ from support for future policy framing. Additionally, a status quo bias emerged for support for password length, such that people were more supportive of the policy when it was framed as representing the status quo compared to past ($p = .07$) and future framing ($p < .001$) . Despite these two differences, support for policies was relatively consistent regardless of how they were framed indicating that manipulating the framing was largely ineffective in influencing participants support.

By splitting the file by framing and conducting partial correlations between the reactionism and scale and policy support for each policy, controlling for covariates, it's possible that the reactionism scale predicted specific policies on the basis of framing. However, only one

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effect emerged; the reactionism scale was negatively correlated to the password (*pr* = -.29, *p* = .04) policy in the status quo condition, but was unrelated in the other framing conditions. The scale was unrelated to all other policies regardless of their framing. Given the overall lack of effects is plausible that the policies were simply too mundane and failed to engender engagement with the materials.

The other possible explanation for Study 1 is that the reactionism scale measures something other than what it was intended to measure. Perhaps the scale measures the extent to which people use the past to evaluate the way things are. When a large discrepancy between the way things were and the way they are is observed, perhaps people are motivated for change. And maybe any change that appears to be an improvement is acceptable, regardless of whether that change is reactionary or progressive. However, using data from Study 2, I would argue against this possibility. Specifically, reactionism beliefs, as operationalized by the reactionism scale, were significantly higher when a threat was made salient regardless of whether the past was framed positively or negatively. But when the past was framed negatively and threat was salient, there was an additive effect – reactionism beliefs were highest.

Framing the past as negative and threatening could have induced participants to generate their own mental examples of a positive past in order to buffer against the psychological threat derived from the flyers. This could be viewed as a compensatory response in the face of counter-attitudinal information. This explanation is bolstered by the fact that reactionism beliefs were measured *after* participants had the opportunity to express support (or lack thereof) for the policy. For those who hold reactionism beliefs, information to the contrary (a negative and threatening past) may have been frustrating, and the opportunity to indicate low support for the (negative and threatening) policy may have augmented that frustration. Thus, when the

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opportunity to express reactionism beliefs became available later in the survey, participants heightened reactionism beliefs would have been captured by the scale. In contrast, participants in the positive past condition, for whom the threat of change was made salient, would not have encountered counter-attitudinal information. Moreover, any need to compensate for the threat (of change away from a positive past) they were experiencing would have been fulfilled by the opportunity to express support for and vote in favor of the policy. Thus, later in the survey they would have been less motivated to express their reactionism beliefs on the scale.

While the possibility that reactionism beliefs are compensatory has yet to be tested, evidence from Study 2 indicates that reactionistic attitudes and behavior are indeed motivated, particularly when change is threatening. In study one, no threatening information was provided. Thus, the extent to which the policies were threatening depended on whether participants perceived the threat on their own accord. And since reactionism was unrelated to policy support, given the evidence from Study 2 it's possible that participants perceived relatively little threat in the policies due to their mundane nature. The finding that reactionism predicted more support for policies in the future than policies from past could be a function of regression modeling. After accounting for the variance explained by several measures of ideology and nostalgia, which are generally related to perceiving the past positively, the remaining unexplained variance could be described as a preference for change. The reactionism scale was designed to capture two facets, perceiving the past more positively than the way things are or will be, and a desire for change that either literally or symbolically resurrects a positive past. Perhaps participants who showed more support for future policies did so because they believed things used to be better and could be that way again. This is empirical question that should be addressed in future studies.

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**Implications and Broader Impact**

The implications of reactionistic beliefs could be far reaching. Perceiving the past as better may serve as a motivated cognition with affective consequences that allows for political goal pursuit. Specifically, theories of threat compensation (see Hart (2014) for a review) predict that when people perceive a discrepancy between their expected security and actual security – perhaps due to the perceived inadequacy of policies designed to protect people economically, socially, or physically (e.g., terrorism threat) – people will experience frustration and anger and become approach oriented (Carver, 2006). Perceiving the past as ideal and worthy of resurrection may provide goal content while playing a palliative role in minimizing the immediate threat. Further, this process may apply to people across the political ideological spectrum since people of all ideologies are likely to perceive discrepancies between their expectations and actual states. Though, conservatism may lend itself to reactionistic processes due to conservatisms association with affinities for the past. For liberals, reactionistic processes may be limited to a more circumscribed set of phenomena, at least in Western societies where the political trajectory has bent toward neoliberal progressivism.

Building on the palliative function of reactionism beliefs as a threat compensation strategy, strategically looking to the past to confirm beliefs about the way society should operate may lead to worldview defense and therefore political extremism (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003). With the dominance of liberal cultural values juxtaposed with the dominance of conservative politics (Robin, 2011) there is indication that extremism and rigidity is no longer relegated to the political right (cf. Jost et al., 2003, 2007). As people's political, economic, and social goals become perceivably more threatened, perceiving the past as better and worth resurrecting may become increasingly common as people search for a way forward. And the affective

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consequences (e.g., frustration and anger) associated with perceiving barriers to these past ideals may facilitate extreme behaviors. Anecdotally, the violence between Trump supporters and dissenters at political rallies could be interpreted as reflecting these extreme behavioral outcomes.

Believing that the past is better and worth resurrecting could be motivated by several psychological variables that facilitate the pursuit political goals. For example, conservatives may believe that traditions and authority are no longer respected (Altmeyer, 1988), or that social and economic hierarchies are being subverted (Pratto et al., 1994), so they may be motivated to perceive the past as ideal and worthy of resurrection. Indeed, reactionism may play an important role in the perpetuation of multiple forms of prejudice. Conversely, liberals may believe that progress towards economic and social equality (Haidt & Graham, 2007) is being subverted and may be motivated to perceive the past as better. Thus, while conservatives may be more prone to reactionistic thinking due to a greater focus on conserving a status quo that often maintains long standing ideals, liberals may be equally susceptible to strategically perceiving the past as better when it facilitates their political goals.

Indeed, should reactionism be an important antecedent to pursing goals that serve to resurrect the past, reactionistic thinking may have utility across many life experiences. Dieters may strive to recreate a body image of the past. Sports teams may seek to recreate past glories. Luddites, agrarians, and utopian idealist may seek to go back to simpler times. Perhaps reactionism can lead to objectively positive outcomes as dieters, substance abusers, and patients recovering from intensive therapies (e.g., radiation) seek to overcome the threat of change and reestablish lost health.

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**Limitations and Future Directions**

There were several notable limitations across the studies, some of which have been discussed and solutions proposed (e.g., counterbalancing noise in Study 1). A notable limitation is the measurement of reactionism. A persistent concern is whether it is measuring what I think it's measuring. To try and understand more about what reactionism is measuring I split the file in the Study 2 by valence, threat, and counterbalance. Then I conducted partial correlations between the reactionism scale, policy support, and voting behavior, controlling for regulatory attitudes, ideology, and nostalgia. The results were illuminating. Despite the fact that I have conceptualized reactionism as being motivated by perceived decline relative to the past, an assumption supported by Study 2, the scale itself only predicted policy support and voting behavior when the past was framed positively, no threat was presented, and the road width to be resurrected were wider roads. I refer to this as the "rose colored glasses" condition, a seemingly best case scenario. Stated plainly, higher scores on the reactionism scale predicted greater reactionary attitudes ($pr$ = .65, $p$ = .001) and behavior ($pr$ = .49, $p$ = .02) when it was a romanticized version of the past that is to be resurrected. The scale marginally predicted more voting ($pr$ = .41, $p$ = .09) for a negative past policy that was framed as threatening, but only when that past policy would bring back wider roads. In the case the scale seems to predict a rejection of the how the past was construed. Finally, the scale marginally predicted less voting ($pr$ = -.56, $p$ = .06) for the policy when the past was framed negatively and as threatening, and when the policy would bring back narrower roads.

Taken together, the scale seems to predict a desire to resurrect popular policies from the past, even when framed negatively and as threatening, and a desire to avoid unpopular policies from the past. Interestingly, and contrary to my conceptualization, when the past is framed

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positively, and change away from the past is perceived as threatening, reactionism is unrelated to reactionary attitudes and behavior, even when the policy is popular (i.e., wider roads). This is despite the fact that reactionary attitudes and behavior were most prevalent under these circumstances. It seems clear that the scale, as a proxy for reactionism beliefs, is missing an important facet – the perception that alternatives to a perceivable better past are threatening. Future efforts at constructing a scale to operationalize reactionism will take heed of this evidence.

The design and materials of Study 2 also posed some limitations. For instance, the threat was varied as a function of counterbalancing. 33% more fatalities may be inherently more threatening to people than 50% more accidents since the former explicitly mentions mortality, but the opposite could have true since the absolute value of accidents was higher in the latter. However, even when wider roads were framed as threatening (33% more fatalities) people still showed more support for widening the roads than for making them narrower. Thus, while counterbalancing effects persisted, they are not uninformative since the variable appears to map onto policy popularity. And while overall support for an unpopular policy was lower, when it was framed as part of a positive past, and change away from that past was threatening, people supported the unpopular policy more, and were more likely to vote for it. Future research should employ pilot testing to evaluate the popularity of policies in an effort to find policies that could be characterized as neutral in order to eliminate the effect of popularity on attitudes and behavior.

More conceptually, there is the possibility that in Study 2, by framing the past as both negatively and threatening people were prevention motivated, and by framing the past as positive and the alternative as threatening, people were promotion motivated. Voting for policies that are

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framed as good and help avoid negative outcomes could be explained by rational decision making or simple hedonism. However, when threatening information was not provided, voting behavior and policy support was unaffected by the valence of the past ($p > .2$ and $p > .8$, respectively). So being told the past was good or bad did not influence people the way it should if they were behaving rationally. Though, it's also rationale to avoid threats. However, even when an unpopular policy from the past was framed negatively and as threatening (i.e., Let a Bygone Era [narrower roads] Be Gone! 50% more accidents on narrower roads) there were still people who voted, seemingly against their self-interest, to resurrect the policy (11%). So while regulatory focus and rational self-interest might play a role in some individual's decision making, this was not the case for everyone.

A final notable limitation of these studies is the narrow context within which reactionism is being studied. As mentioned previously, reactionistic beliefs may apply to a variety of situations beyond those involving politics. In the proposed studies I am treating reactionism as a strictly political phenomenon. But in an effort to more accurately define reactionism (as strictly political or not) the phenomenon should be studied across a variety of contexts where people may be motivated to perceive the past as better and worth resurrecting.

**Conclusion**

In this proposal I have argued that reactionism is an overlooked and important set of beliefs that may play a critical role in political dynamics and beyond. I have proposed two initial studies to test the underlying assumptions of reactionism – that perceiving the past as good, and change as threatening, is necessary for reactionistic attitudes and behavior. Validating these assumptions serves as the first step towards a long term program of research that will serve to elucidate the role of a strategic belief about the past that may motivate political behavior.

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**Appendix A (Nostalgia Inventory items)**

Family
Things you did
Holidays
Heroes and heroines
Toys
The way society was
Not having to worry
The way people were
Pet or pets
Places
Feelings you had
Not knowing sad or evil things
Music
TV shows, movies
Church or Temple, etc.
Someone you loved
School
Your house
Friends
Having someone to depend on

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**Appendix B (Historic Nostalgia Scale items)**

1. They don't make ‘em like they used to
2. Things used to be better in the good old days
3. Products are getting shoddier and shoddier
4. Technological change will ensure a brighter future (reverse coded)
5. History involves a steady improvement in human welfare (reverse coded)
6. We are experiencing a decline in the quality of life
7. Steady growth in GNP has brought increased human happiness (reverse coded)
8. Modern business constantly builds a better tomorrow (reverse coded)

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**Appendix C (Study 2 materials: flyers)**

**Positive past with threat (wider roads)**

**Positive past with no threat (wider roads)**

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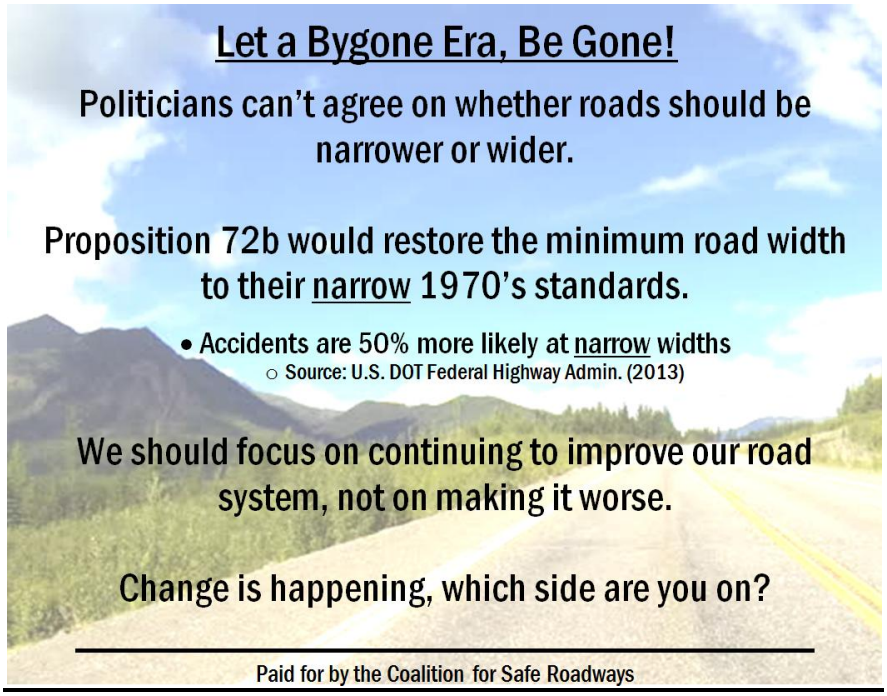
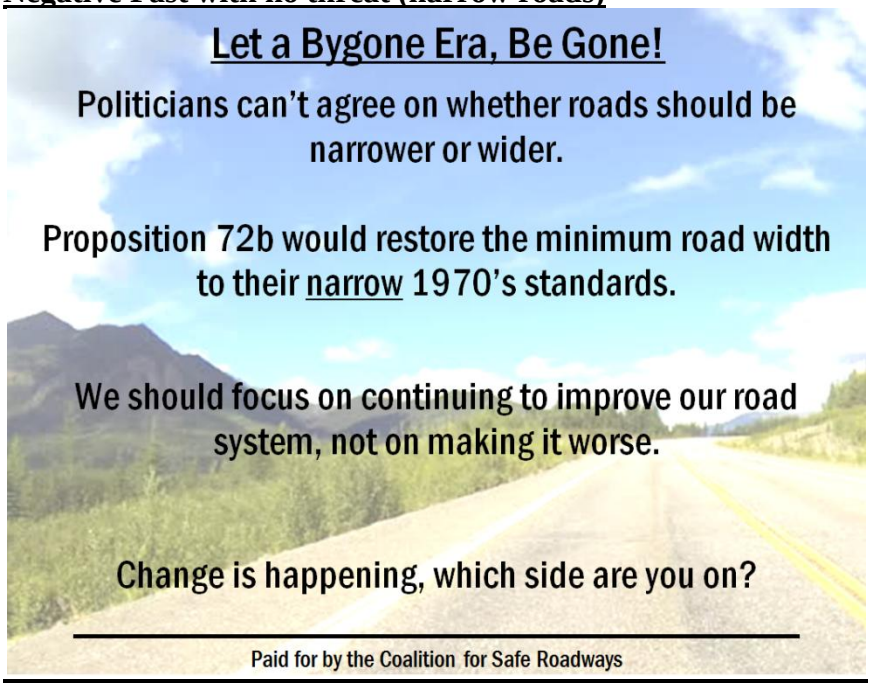
**Negative Past with threat (narrow roads)**




**Negative Past with no threat (narrow roads)**

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**Appendix D (IRB Approval Letter)**

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

April 5, 2017

MEMORANDUM

| | |
|---|---|
| TO: | Derrick Till<br>Scott Eidelman |
| FROM: | Ro Windwalker<br>IRB Coordinator |
| RE: | PROJECT CONTINUATION & MODIFICATION |
| IRB Protocol #: | 16-04-683 |
| Protocol Title: | *Reactionism* |
| Review Type: | ☒ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB |
| Previous Approval Period: | Start Date: 04/19/2016 Expiration Date: 04/18/2017 |
| New Expiration Date: | 04/18/2018 |

Your request to extend and modify the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. If at the end of this period you wish to continue the project, you must submit a request using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation on or prior to this new expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

**This protocol has been approved for 3,500 total participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

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