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The Rights of Man: Libertarian Concern for Men's, But Not Women's, Reproductive Autonomy

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Libertarianism enshrines individual autonomy as its central political principle, but it has been criticized for applying this principle selectively. Reproductive decisions can stress the concept of individual autonomy by placing into conflict the claimed rights of each biological parent to choose. Two studies ($N_1 = 296$; $N_2 = 580$) show that among U.S. participants, libertarianism is associated with opposition to women's reproductive autonomy and support for men's. Libertarianism was associated with opposition to abortion rights and support for men's right both to prevent women from having abortions (male veto) and to withdraw financial support for a child when women refuse to terminate the pregnancy (financial abortion). Adjusting for the association between libertarianism and conservatism, only the relationship with opposition to abortion rights was rendered nonsignificant. Mediation analyses suggest that hostile sexism may account for libertarians' selective support for men's and not women's reproductive autonomy.

KEY WORDS: libertarianism, abortion, gender, sexism, reproductive autonomy

Abortion has been a central issue in the fight for gender equality. Women's ability to make decisions regarding their own reproductive capacities is seen as crucial to their status as autonomous human beings (Berer, 2017). While most developed nations do offer some access to safe abortion today (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2017), infringements on women's reproductive rights are still commonplace. Poland, for example, narrowly voted against passing a complete ban on abortions in 2015 (Rylukowski, 2015), and as of 2020 women can only access an abortion if the pregnancy endangers their life or health or is the result of a criminal act (Center for

Reproductive Rights, 2020). Politically conservative individuals are far more likely than liberals to oppose abortion: In the United States, 62% of Republican-leaning adults say abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, while 82% of Democrats say it should be legal in all or most cases (Diamant, 2020). While much previous research has examined the attitudes that liberals and conservatives hold towards abortion (e.g., Ho & Penney, 1992; Poteat & Mereish, 2012), research is lacking on the relationship between abortion rights and an oft-overlooked political orientation: Libertarianism.

Libertarianism is a political philosophy founded on the idea that individual liberty should be the defining principle around which society is organized. Sometimes referred to as classical liberals, libertarians believe that the government exists solely to protect individual rights, and that the needs of one person or group should not impose a moral duty on (and thus violate the individual rights of) another (Boaz, 2020). In the modern-day political landscape, libertarian ideology generally manifests as fiscal conservatism (e.g., opposition to taxes) coupled with social liberalism (e.g., support for marijuana legalization; Iyer et al., 2012).

Our work examines how libertarianism relates to a polarizing test case of individual liberty: Women's right to make decisions about reproduction. Proponents of abortion rights couch their arguments in terms of autonomy and choice, as exemplified in the label "pro-choice." The "pro-life" moniker adopted by their opponents couches the case against abortion rights in terms of the need to protect life from deleterious choices (Denbow, 2005). On the face of it, this suggests that libertarians, who frame individual freedom of choice as the defining virtue of ideal political systems, should support abortion rights.

Any simple application of libertarian principles is complicated, however, by the fact that there are two people who may perceive they have a right to choose: The pregnant woman and the biological father. Choices about abortion, therefore, can pit women's autonomy against men's. An example is the proposed "financial" abortion in which a man would not have to financially support a child he does not want, should the woman decide not to have an abortion. This policy has been advocated using libertarian arguments (e.g., Brake, 2005; Hales, 1996), and it is certainly consistent with men's liberty. However, it has been criticized on the grounds that such a policy does not recognize the more severe impingements on women's autonomy that are presented by pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting and therefore draws a false equivalence between the freedoms at stake for men and women (Humber, 1996). It has also been criticized as a form of economic coercion given that without financial support, women may not be able to proceed, as they prefer, with the pregnancy (Pettersen & Sutton, 2018; Sheldon, 2003).

A similar tension between men and women's autonomy arises when the woman wants an abortion and the man does not. In this case, men's autonomy is preserved by a policy that gives them the right to veto women's choices. Unlike financial abortion policies, which have merely been proposed, this policy is formally implemented in many countries. For example, in countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Turkey, spousal authorization is required for a woman to undergo an abortion. These policies formally write male control over women's reproductive choices into law (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2017).

These policy dilemmas do not occur in a vacuum: They play out within a sociohistorical context of male dominance. Despite their structural power over women, men are largely dependent upon women in the reproductive realm and so have sought to exert control over women's fertility and sexuality (Fox, 1977; Rothman, 1994). Translating any abstract political principle into policy, let alone one as supremely abstract and principled as liberty, requires ideological and institutional supports. Thus, to understand where libertarians might stand on the abortion debate and its concomitant dilemmas between the liberty of men and

women, we need to understand how libertarianism tends to be translated into specific policies and practices, and where libertarians stand on gender ideologies that inform abortion policies.

Libertarianism in Principle and Praxis

In political theory, a distinction is often made between the principles that are verbally enshrined in political ideas and how they are implemented in practice—termed Praxis by Marx and many subsequent scholars (Haug, 2001). Despite exalting liberty as a supreme political principle, libertarians have been criticized for applying it unequally, and being selective, explicitly or implicitly, about whose autonomy matters (Cooper, 2021; Freeman, 2001; Okin, 1989; Tucker, 2014). To illustrate, in a 2014 Pew Research Center poll of over 3,000 Americans, few self-identified libertarians held attitudes that were consistent with their proclaimed ideology across different issues. While libertarians were considerably more likely than the average American to believe that government aid to the poor does more harm than good, they were only slightly more likely to be accepting of homosexuality, and they were equally likely to support police stop-and-search procedures (Kiley, 2014).

This selective concern may be traced back to the historical origin of libertarianism. Its founding expositions were put forward by powerful White men, whose own actions and writings demonstrated that their belief in liberty did not extend to all people. Modern libertarianism traces its roots back to philosophers of the enlightenment era in the 17th and 18th centuries. John Locke is often referred to as the father of liberalism, and his theory of natural rights—namely, that the government exists to protect personal and property rights—created the foundation for liberal political theory (Boaz, 2015). Critics of Locke contend that he worked on behalf of slavery and colonialism, authored a document explicitly supporting slavery, and bought stock in a company that ran the African slave trade in England (Uzgalis, 2017). While support for slavery was widespread at the time, this may show that the principle of liberty was not always applied—or even intended—for all.

More modern proponents of libertarianism have also been associated with illiberal enterprises. Friedrich von Hayek, whose book *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) remains an integral libertarian text, supported the regime of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, recommending Pinochet's Chile to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as a model of the free market (Leeson, 2013). Libertarian economist Murray Rothbard was hostile towards both the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement (O'Malley, 2012) and promoted the idea that police should be allowed to torture criminal suspects (Rothbard, 2002). Christopher Cantwell, an alt-right activist and self-proclaimed disciple of Rothbard, claimed that he came to racism and anti-Semitism through libertarianism, saying "In libertarian philosophy, nobody ought to be compelled to associate with anyone else ... If blacks are committing crimes, or Jews are spreading communism, discriminating against them is the right of any property owner" (Weigel, 2017, para. 10).

While libertarianism in its entirety is not represented fairly by these cases, there is evidence that it translates to support for practices that reinforce dominance hierarchies. For example, libertarian attitudes and identity are correlated with social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto et al., 1994)—that is, opposition to equality and support for group-based dominance (e.g., Lauriola et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2019). They are also associated with conservatism, which in turn is associated with support for hierarchy and opposition to women's reproductive autonomy (e.g., Hodson & MacInnis, 2017). In the United States, libertarians are more likely to side with the Republican party

than the Democratic party (Smant, 2002); Iyer et al. (2012) found that, much like conservatives, libertarians placed considerably less importance than liberals on the moral foundations of harm and fairness, potentially rendering them less sympathetic to groups claiming to be oppressed.

Male Dominance, Sexism, and Abortion

These considerations suggest that libertarianism may be associated with gender ideologies that lead people to support men's reproductive autonomy but not women's. From a feminist perspective that recognizes male dominance as a pervasive structural force, it is unsurprising that attitudes to abortion generally depend not so much on concerns about the fetus, but on endorsement of sexist ideologies that reify male power (Hodson & MacInnis, 2017; Huang et al., 2014, 2016). Research has shown that sexism also shapes preferences for policies that maintain men's autonomy in reproductive decision-making, if necessary at the expense of women's.

Ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) has been helpful in illuminating the ideological basis of attitudes to gendered reproductive autonomy. This theory conceptualizes sexism as comprised of two correlated but evaluatively opposite components: Hostile and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism embodies resentment of perceived incursions on men's autonomy by women using feminine wiles (trapping men into relationships and draining their resources) or feminist ideology (accusing men of discrimination and demanding equality). Benevolent sexism, in contrast, represents women as more moral and refined than men, necessary for men's happiness, and entitled (if they live up to these expectations) to men's protection. Research shows consistently that benevolent sexism is associated with opposition to abortion rights (Huang et al., 2014, 2016; Petterson & Sutton, 2018), and that the valorization of motherhood (Huang et al., 2016), and self-sacrificial motherhood in particular (Sutton et al., 2022), may be responsible for this effect. Findings with respect to hostile sexism are more mixed and may depend on whether the abortion is needed to preserve the mother's physical health (Huang et al., 2014, 2016).

Where hostile sexism does matter is in policy attitudes when men and women's reproductive autonomy come into conflict. Petterson and Sutton (2018) found that although hostile sexism was unrelated to opposition to abortion per se, it was associated with support for financial abortion (men's right not to contribute to an unwanted child) and male veto (men's right to prevent women from aborting). In other words, hostile sexists did not have a predetermined position on abortion, but instead they opted for whichever position granted men more control in reproductive decision-making.

Relationships between libertarianism and ambivalent sexism are yet to be explored in the political psychology literature. Nonetheless, there is circumstantial evidence that hostile sexism may appeal to libertarians insofar as it is resentful of curtailment of men's liberties. Indeed, a strand of misogyny is clearly visible in libertarianism; Okin (1989) argued that libertarian principles have been developed based on the needs and experiences of men. Sociological studies have shown libertarianism to be strongly linked to misogyny in alt-right online spaces (Ging, 2019; Salter, 2016, 2018), and antifeminist Reddit groups have been found to express right-libertarian policy preferences (Rensin, 2015). Scholars have not noted such a connection to the warm but patronizing attitudes to women encapsulated by benevolent sexism. In one respect—its insistence that men have positive moral duties to women—it seems antagonistic to libertarian thought. All in all, potential correlations between libertarianism and ambivalent sexism appear to be worthy of investigation both in and of themselves and to understand libertarians' position on women's reproductive autonomy.

The Present Research

In two studies, we sought to examine how libertarianism translates into attitudes to abortion policy, including abortion rights, male veto, and financial abortion. As well as these variables, we measured political orientation and ambivalent sexism. If libertarianism straightforwardly valorizes individual liberty without gender bias, this entails the prediction that libertarianism will be related to more support for abortion rights, but no clear predictions about preferences for male veto and financial abortion, since these involve competing claims to liberty for men and women. In contrast, if libertarianism is instead a dominance-reinforcing political orientation, this entails the prediction that libertarianism will be *negatively* associated (at zero-order) with support for abortion rights. On the same basis we predicted that it would be related to support for men's right to veto abortion decisions and men's right to withdraw financial support for children carried to term against their wishes (i.e., financial abortion). We also predicted that libertarianism would be positively associated with conservatism, with higher levels of hostile sexism (which supports men's dominance and resents perceived impingements on their autonomy by women) and lower levels of benevolent sexism (which prescribes that men should curtail their own autonomy to protect and provide for women).

In the present studies, our main focus is on libertarian self-identification. We also complemented self-identification with Iyer et al.'s (2012) measures of libertarian ideology and moral foundations to explore whether they relate in similar or different ways to attitudes to men and women's reproductive autonomy. This informs our more general aim to explore tensions and inconsistencies between libertarians' policy preferences and the avowed principles of libertarianism. Self-identification is the standard approach for assessing political ideology, used on large-scale surveys such as the Pew Research Center's (Kiley & Keeter, 2015) and the focal predictor in Iyer et al.'s (2012) study—the only other major psychology study on libertarianism. Miller (1994) stresses the importance of political self-identification by pointing out that terms like “conservative,” “liberal,” and “libertarian” are social constructs that are constantly redefined by social change and whose relation to specific policy positions can change over time and across contexts. The same is true of self-declared politicized identities such as “feminist” that relate fairly loosely to specific gender attitudes (McCabe, 2005).

To gain more detailed insights into the mechanisms that might underlie the predicted findings, we also tested whether the predicted effects would hold when conservatism was adjusted for—an important objective given that conservatives oppose abortion (e.g., Diamant, 2020) and libertarianism and conservatism are correlated (Iyer et al., 2012; Smant, 2002). We also examined whether the relation between libertarianism and reproductive policy preferences was mediated by hostile sexism, shown by Petterson and Sutton (2018) to be similarly associated with a preference for men's reproductive autonomy. The two studies used identical materials and procedures, with Study 2 serving as a direct replication of Study 1 in a different population. In Study 1, we tested these hypotheses in a sample recruited from Prolific, a widely used and validated crowdsourcing platform (Peer et al., 2017). In Study 2, we sought to replicate our findings in a sample obtained from social media users.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants

Participants were 306 United States residents, aged 18 and above. They were recruited through the online platform Prolific (Peer et al., 2017); 10 participants were excluded for failing to complete the survey, leaving 296 responses for analysis. Of these, 129 were women, 164 men, and three indicated their gender as “other.” The mean age was 36.75 years ($SD = 12.00$). Participants’ ethnicity was not recorded.

Procedure

Participants completed the measures detailed below in randomized order, as well as measures related to perceptions of abortion for a separate study. Once these measures were complete, participants indicated their gender, age, religion, education level, and political persuasion (i.e., the extent to which they described themselves as liberal, conservative, and libertarian on 7-point scales ranging from 0 [*Not at all*] to 6 [*Very much*]).

Measures

Support for Abortion Rights

Participants completed a seven-item scale measuring attitudes towards the legality of abortion under various circumstances, sourced from the General Social Survey (Smith et al., 2011). Each of the seven items asked whether the participant believed “it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion” under a different given circumstance, such as “if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children.” An item which inquired about a “serious defect in the baby” was reworded as the researchers found it to connote an antiquated view of disability; the phrasing was changed to “congenital disability.” Answers were given on an 8-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 8 (*Very much*) ($\alpha = .93$).

Ambivalent Sexism

Participants completed two subscales from the ambivalent sexism inventory created by Glick and Fiske (1996) to measure benevolent and hostile sexism. The shortened version of the scale used here comprised six items for benevolent sexism ($\alpha = .89$) such as “Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess,” and six for hostile sexism ($\alpha = .94$), for example “When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.” Participants rated their agreement with the statements on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 6 (*Agree strongly*).

Religiosity

A four-item scale was used measuring three key elements of religiosity—ritual (i.e., “How often do you attend religious services?”), consequence (i.e., “In general, how important are your

religious or spiritual beliefs in your day to day life?”), and experience (i.e., “When you have problems or difficulties in your work, family or personal life, how often do you seek spiritual comfort?”)—as well as an overall measure asking, “In general, would you say you are a religious person?” (Sullivan, 2001). Participants answered these questions on a 5-point Likert scale containing ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*A great deal*) ($\alpha = .95$).

Libertarian Ideology

We used a seven-item scale developed by Iyer et al. (2012) to measure lifestyle and economic/government liberty. Five questions were from the economic/government subscale (e.g., “People who are successful in business have a right to enjoy their wealth as they see fit”), and two questions were from the lifestyle subscale (e.g., “People should be free to decide what group norms or traditions they themselves want to follow”). Participants indicated the extent of their agreement with these items on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*) ($\alpha = .72$).

Libertarian Moral Foundations

We used two items from the same lifestyle and economic/government liberty scale by Iyer et al. (2012); however, these items were rated based on relevance rather than agreement. Participants were asked to what extent the following considerations were relevant to their thinking when deciding whether something is right or wrong: “Whether or not private property was respected” and “Whether or not everyone was free to do as they wanted.” These statements were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all relevant*) to 6 (*Extremely relevant*) ($\alpha = .50$).

Financial Abortion

Based on research by Petterson and Sutton (2018), one item was used to measure endorsement of financial abortion and was analyzed on its own: “If a child is born against the father’s will, he should not be obligated to support the child financially” (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 6 = *Strongly agree*).

Male Veto

To assess attitudes towards men’s right to veto women’s reproductive decisions, we used three items devised by Petterson and Sutton (2018): “A woman should not be allowed to have an abortion if the man involved really wants to keep his unborn child”; “Today, men do not have enough say during pregnancy”; and “It would be fairer if the man involved had to consent to a woman’s decision to abort his unborn child.” Participants’ responses were recorded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) ($\alpha = .88$).

Results

Bivariate correlations were first calculated to examine the interrelations between variables (Table 1). Due to low internal consistency (i.e., $\alpha < .7$), the libertarian moral-foundations items were treated as two separate measures (i.e., Property and Freedom). Consistent with

Table 1. Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (Study 1)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Libertarian identification	2.40	1.84											
2. Libertarian ideology	4.28	0.74	.28***										
3. Libertarian moral foundations: Property	3.92	1.31	.22***	.19**									
4. Libertarian moral foundations: Freedom	4.21	1.15	.23***	.25***	.33***								
5. Abortion rights	6.11	1.81	-.15**	-.07	.00	.20**							
6. Male veto	3.26	1.52	.37***	.23***	.30***	.02	-.51***						
7. Financial abortion	2.98	1.59	.24***	.03	.12*	.08	.04	.35***					
8. Religiosity	2.73	1.45	.32***	.11	.31***	.10	-.41***	.58***	.19**				
9. Hostile sexism	2.98	1.48	.44***	.21***	.27***	.08	-.33***	.72***	.40***	.55***			
10. Benevolent sexism	3.44	1.32	.34***	.24***	.22***	.11	-.30***	.59***	.20**	.55***	.70***		
11. Liberal identification	3.61	1.88	-.07	-.22***	-.02	.15*	.48***	-.29***	.05	-.11	-.23***	-.07	
12. Conservative identification	2.04	1.79	.26***	.24***	.09	-.08	-.50***	.53***	.04	.36***	.48***	.31***	-.65***

Note: *N* = 294.
 p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

our predictions regarding libertarianism in praxis, libertarian identification was positively associated with support for male veto over reproductive decisions, support for financial abortion, and both hostile and benevolent sexism; it was also negatively associated with abortion rights. All libertarian measures except for the second libertarian moral-foundations item (i.e., freedom) were positively associated with male veto and both facets of sexism, and the freedom item was the only measure of libertarianism to be positively associated with support for abortion rights. Libertarian identification was also positively associated with conservative identification.

Three hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to determine whether the outcome variables of interest (i.e., abortion rights, male veto, and financial abortion) varied as a function of libertarian identification after controlling for liberal identification, conservative identification, gender, religiosity, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism (Table 2). Variables were entered in three steps. In Step 1, demographics and politics (i.e., liberal identification, conservative identification, religiosity, and gender) were the independent variables. In Step 2, libertarian identification was entered into the Step 1 equation to examine whether it explained variance over and above the demographic and political variables. In Step 3, hostile and benevolent sexism were added to examine whether any effect of libertarianism might be explained by the more well-understood role of sexism. Due to the inclusion of gender as a variable of interest, participants who indicated their gender as “other” were excluded from this analysis, leaving 293 participants.

For abortion rights, the model was significant in all three steps, but libertarian identification was not a significant predictor of abortion rights, while benevolent sexism was a significant negative predictor. For male veto, the model was significant in all steps, and libertarian identification was a significant positive predictor of male veto in the second step. Hostile and benevolent sexism were both significant positive predictors of male veto, and once these two variables were entered into the equation, libertarian identification was no longer a significant predictor. For financial abortion, the model was significant in all steps, and libertarian identification was a significant positive predictor of financial abortion in the second step. Hostile sexism was a significant positive predictor of financial abortion, while benevolent sexism was a negative predictor; once these two variables were entered into the equation, libertarian identification was no longer a significant predictor.

We conducted the same three hierarchical regressions using each of the libertarian measures as independent variables (Table 3), such that demographic variables (i.e., liberal identification, conservative identification, gender, and religiosity) were added in Step 1, the libertarian variable of interest was added in Step 2, and sexism (i.e., benevolent sexism and hostile sexism) was added in Step 3.

For abortion rights, libertarian ideology was a significant positive predictor after adjusting for sexism, while both libertarian moral foundations: Property and libertarian moral foundations: Freedom were positive predictors after adjusting for both demographics and sexism. For male veto, libertarian ideology was a significant positive predictor after adjusting for demographics, but was rendered nonsignificant after adjusting for sexism; libertarian moral foundations: Property was a significant positive predictor after adjusting for both demographics and sexism. For financial abortion, none of the three alternative libertarian measures were significant predictors. In summary, each of the libertarian measures demonstrated a different relationship with the outcome variables of interest, and no measure mirrored precisely the results associated with libertarian self-identification.

Table 2. Summary of Regression Analyses, Libertarian Identification (Study 1)

Predictor	Abortion Rights				Male Veto				Financial Abortion			
	β	t	sr^2	t	β	t	sr^2	t	β	t	sr^2	t
Step 1	$F(4, 286) = 41.32^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .37^{***}$				$F(4, 286) = 65.58^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .48^{***}$				$F(4, 286) = 6.22^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .08^{***}$			
Liberal ID	.35	5.45 ^{***}	.07	-0.41	-0.2	-0.41	.00	1.41	.11	1.41	.01	1.41
Conservative ID	-0.16	-2.30 [*]	.01	5.08 ^{***}	.32	5.08 ^{***}	.05	0.20	-0.02	0.20	.00	0.20
Gender	-0.05	-1.08	.00	-3.96 ^{***}	-0.17	-3.96 ^{***}	.03	-3.12 ^{**}	-0.18	-3.12 ^{**}	.03	-3.12 ^{**}
Religiosity	-0.31	-6.00 ^{***}	.08	9.54 ^{***}	.44	9.54 ^{***}	.17	2.97 ^{**}	.18	2.97 ^{**}	.03	2.97 ^{**}
Step 2	$F(5, 285) = 32.95^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .00$				$F(5, 285) = 56.08^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .02^{**}$				$F(5, 285) = 6.52^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .02^{**}$			
Liberal ID	.35	5.41 ^{***}	.07	-0.83	-0.05	-0.83	.00	1.05	.08	1.05	.00	1.05
Conservative ID	-0.16	-2.23 [*]	.01	4.41 ^{***}	.28	4.41 ^{***}	.03	-0.35	-0.03	-0.35	.00	-0.35
Gender	-0.05	-1.08	.00	-3.54 ^{***}	-0.15	-3.54 ^{***}	.02	-2.75 ^{**}	-0.16	-2.75 ^{**}	.02	-2.75 ^{**}
Religiosity	-0.31	-5.82 ^{***}	.08	8.75 ^{***}	.41	8.75 ^{***}	.14	2.34 [*]	.15	2.34 [*]	.02	2.34 [*]
Libertarian ID	-0.01	-0.10	.00	3.15 ^{**}	.15	3.15 ^{**}	.02	2.68 ^{**}	.17	2.68 ^{**}	.02	2.68 ^{**}
Step 3	$F(7, 283) = 24.50^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .0$				$F(7, 283) = 62.41^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .11^{***}$				$F(7, 283) = 11.16^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .11^{***}$			
Liberal ID	.37	5.64 ^{***}	.07	-1.22	-0.06	-1.22	.00	1.35	.10	1.35	.01	1.35
Conservative ID	-0.15	-2.05 [*]	.01	2.91 ^{**}	.17	2.91 ^{**}	.01	-1.67	-0.13	-1.67	.01	-1.67
Gender	-0.07	-1.36	.00	-1.18	-0.05	-1.18	.00	-1.31	-0.07	-1.31	.00	-1.31
Religiosity	-0.26	-4.26 ^{***}	.04	4.49 ^{***}	.21	4.49 ^{***}	.03	0.49	.03	0.49	.00	0.49
Libertarian ID	.01	0.10	.00	0.99	.04	0.99	.00	1.17	.07	1.17	.00	1.17
BS	-0.15	-2.16 [*]	.01	2.20 [*]	.12	2.20 [*]	.01	-2.55 [*]	-0.19	-2.55 [*]	.02	-2.55 [*]
HS	.04	0.53	.00	6.49 ^{***}	.39	6.49 ^{***}	.06	9.37 ^{***}	.54	9.37 ^{***}	.11	9.37 ^{***}

Note: $n = 293$.

Abbreviations: BS, benevolent sexism; HS, hostile sexism.

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

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analyses, All Libertarian Variables—Study 1

Predictor	Abortion Rights		Male Veto		Financial Abortion	
	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Libertarian ID						
Adjusting for demographics/politics	-.01	.917	.15	.002**	.17	.008**
Adjusting further for sexism	.01	.920	.04	.324	.07	.242
Libertarian ideology						
Adjusting for demographics/politics	.08	.118	.11	.012*	.02	.697
Adjusting further for sexism	.11	.034*	.05	.251	.00	.938
Libertarian moral foundations: Property						
Adjusting for demographics/politics	.12	.013*	.13	.004**	.03	.589
Adjusting further for sexism	.13	.010*	.08	.036*	-.02	.764
Libertarian moral foundations: Freedom						
Adjusting for demographics/politics	.17	.000***	.01	.862	.05	.425
Adjusting further for sexism	.18	.000***	-.03	.462	.02	.694

Note: *N* = 293.

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

Based on the libertarian-identification results, mediation analyses were carried out to test whether the relationships between libertarianism and both male veto and financial abortion were mediated by hostile sexism. We used Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS (2017), version 3.5, model 4, and tested the significance of indirect effects using bootstrapping procedures. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 5,000 bootstrapped samples, with 95% confidence intervals. Liberal identification, conservative identification, benevolent sexism, support for abortion rights, gender, and religiosity were also added to the analyses as covariates. Again, participants who indicated their gender as "other" were excluded from analysis, leaving 293 participants.

As seen in Figure 1, results showed that, as predicted, hostile sexism mediated the relationship between libertarian identification and both male veto in reproductive decisions, indirect $B = .05$, $SE = .02$, $CI = [.02, .09]$, and endorsement of financial abortion, indirect $B = .08$, $SE = .02$, $CI = [.03, .13]$.

Discussion

Consistent with our predictions regarding libertarian praxis, these findings demonstrated that libertarians may indeed be selective about whose autonomy matters. Libertarian self-identification was positively associated with support for male veto over reproductive decisions, support for financial abortion, and both hostile and benevolent sexism. It was also negatively associated with abortion rights and positively associated with conservatism. Libertarian identification was still associated with male veto and financial abortion after

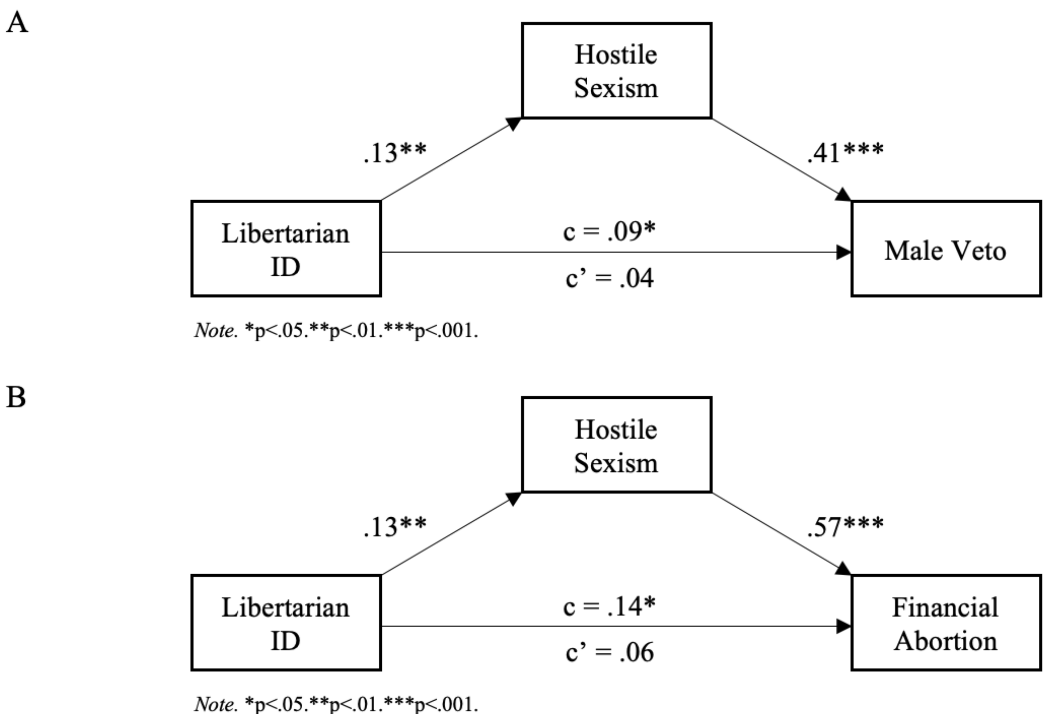


Figure 1. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationships between libertarian identification and (A) male veto in reproduction and (B) support for financial abortion as mediated by hostile sexism (Study 1).

controlling for conservatism, but not after controlling for hostile and benevolent sexism, and the relationship between libertarian identification and both support for male veto in reproduction decisions and support for financial abortion was mediated by hostile sexism. These results demonstrate that self-identified libertarians appear to place greater priority on men's reproductive autonomy than they do on women's and that this may be explained by libertarians' hostile sexism.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants

Participants were 853 residents of the United States aged 18 and above recruited through social media; 273 participants were excluded for failing to complete the survey, leaving 580 responses for analysis. Of these, 363 were women, 188 were men, and 29 indicated their gender as "other." The mean age was 30.51 years ($SD = 12.77$). Participants' ethnicity was not recorded.

Procedure

Participants were recruited by posting links to the Qualtrics survey on Facebook and Instagram, as well as four Reddit boards: Three related to abortion (*r/prolife*, *r/prochoice*, and *r/abortiondebate*) and one general board for recruiting research participants (*r/samplesize*). This study then followed the same procedure as Study 1.

Measures

Participants completed the same measures of abortion rights ($\alpha = .97$), ambivalent sexism ($\alpha = .89$ for hostile sexism, $\alpha = .76$ for benevolent sexism), religiosity ($\alpha = .95$), libertarian ideology ($\alpha = .78$), libertarian moral foundations ($\alpha = .36$), financial abortion, and male veto ($\alpha = .89$) used in Study 1. Participants also completed the demographic measures from Study 1.

Results

As in Study 1, bivariate correlations were first calculated (Table 4). Due to low internal consistency (i.e., $\alpha < .7$), the libertarian moral-foundations items were again treated as two separate measures. Once again, libertarian identification was positively associated with support for male veto, support for financial abortion, and both hostile and benevolent sexism, and was negatively associated with support for abortion rights. All libertarian measures except for libertarian moral foundations: Freedom were positively associated with male veto, financial abortion, and both facets of sexism, and the freedom item was again the only measure of libertarianism to be positively associated with support for abortion rights. Libertarian identification was again positively associated with conservative identification, and this time was negatively associated with liberal identification.

The same three hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted as in Study 1 (Table 5). Again, participants who indicated their gender as "other" were excluded from analysis, leaving 551 participants.

Table 4. Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (Study 2)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Libertarian identification	1.71	1.73											
2. Libertarian ideology	3.94	0.87	.47***										
3. Libertarian moral foundations: Property	3.44	1.37	.27***	.37***									
4. Libertarian moral foundations: Freedom	4.33	1.20	.14**	.28***	.22***								
5. Abortion rights	0.95	1.98	-.23***	-.17***	-.13**	.18***							
6. Male veto	2.18	1.39	.32***	.24***	.18***	-.13**	-.76***						
7. Financial abortion	3.03	1.72	.14**	.17***	.09*	.09*	.10*	.08*					
8. Religiosity	1.84	1.20	.11**	.02	.12**	-.16***	-.55***	.46***	-.25***				
9. Hostile sexism	1.80	0.97	.35***	.28***	.24***	-.08	-.50***	.61***	.15***	.24***			
10. Benevolent sexism	2.27	0.96	.16***	.11**	.18***	-.12**	-.41***	.40***	-.09*	.39***	.53***		
11. Liberal identification	4.42	1.76	-.28***	-.15***	-.10*	.11**	.53***	-.47***	-.47***	.33***	-.50***	-.32***	
12. Conservative identification	1.12	1.48	.39***	.28***	.30***	-.12**	-.64***	.60***	.07	.43***	.63***	.41***	-.62***

Note: *N* = 575.

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

Table 5. Summary of Regression Analyses, Libertarian Identification (Study 2)

Predictor	Abortion Rights				Male Veto				Financial Abortion			
	β	<i>t</i>	sr ²	β	<i>t</i>	sr ²	β	<i>t</i>	sr ²	β	<i>t</i>	sr ²
Step 1	$F(4, 543) = 154.29^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .53^{***}$				$F(4, 543) = 110.04^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .45^{***}$				$F(4, 543) = 15.92^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .11^{***}$			
Liberal ID	.20	5.12***	.02	-.15	-3.46**	.01	-.03	0.57	.00			
Conservative ID	-.34	-8.23***	.06	.36	8.03***	.07	.21	3.78***	.02			
Gender	.11	3.50***	.01	-.16	-4.95***	.02	-.05	-1.08	.00			
Religiosity	-.33	-10.06***	.09	.25	7.03***	.05	-.35	-7.73***	.10			
Step 2	$F(5, 542) = 225.81^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .00$				$F(5, 542) = 91.56^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .01^{**}$				$F(5, 542) = 13.86^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .01^*$			
Liberal ID	.20	5.11***	.02	-.14	-3.27**	.01	.04	0.73	.00			
Conservative ID	-.33	-7.97***	.05	.32	7.01***	.05	.18	3.05**	.02			
Gender	.11	3.50***	.01	-.16	-4.88***	.02	-.04	-1.01	.00			
Religiosity	-.33	-10.01***	.09	.26	7.28***	.05	-.34	-7.56***	.09			
Libertarian ID	.01	0.15	.00	.10	2.90**	.01	.10	2.26*	.01			
Step 3	$F(7, 540) = 92.47^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .01^{***}$				$F(7, 540) = 84.40^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .07^{**}$				$F(7, 540) = 12.35^{***}$ $\Delta R^2 = .03^{***}$			
Liberal ID	.17	4.38***	.02	-.08	-1.87	.00	.07	1.23	.00			
Conservative ID	-.27	-5.96***	.03	.17	3.63***	.01	.11	1.80	.01			
Gender	.09	2.88**	.01	-.12	-3.98***	.01	-.03	-0.81	.00			
Religiosity	-.33	-9.60***	.08	.28	8.10***	.06	-.30	-6.34***	.06			
Libertarian ID	.02	0.62	.00	.06	1.86*	.00	.08	1.74	.00			
BS	-.03	-0.92	.00	-.03	-0.91	.00	-.14	-2.74**	.01			
HS	-.13	-3.21**	.01	.35	8.20***	.06	.21	3.65***	.02			

Note: *n* = 551.

Abbreviations: BS, benevolent sexism; HS, hostile sexism.

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

For abortion rights, the model was significant in all steps, but libertarian identification was not a significant predictor of abortion rights, while hostile sexism was a significant negative predictor. For male veto, the model was significant in all steps, and libertarian identification and hostile sexism were both significant positive predictors of male veto. For financial abortion, the model was significant in all steps and libertarian identification was a significant positive predictor of financial abortion. Hostile sexism was a significant positive predictor of financial abortion, while benevolent sexism was a negative predictor; once these two variables were entered into the equation, libertarian identification was no longer a significant predictor.

We then conducted the same three hierarchical regressions using each of the libertarian measures as dependent variables (Table 6), as in Study 1. For abortion rights, libertarian moral foundations: property was a significant positive predictor after adjusting for sexism, while libertarian moral foundations: freedom was a positive predictor after adjusting for both demographics and sexism. For male veto, libertarian ideology was a significant positive predictor after adjusting for demographics but was rendered nonsignificant after adjusting for sexism. For financial abortion, libertarian ideology was a positive predictor after adjusting for both demographics and sexism. Once again, each of the libertarian measures demonstrated a different relationship with the outcome variables, and no measure mirrored libertarian self-identification.

Again, mediation analyses were carried out to test whether the relationships between libertarian identification and both male veto and financial abortion were mediated by hostile sexism using the same methodology as in Study 1. Again, participants who indicated their gender as “other” were excluded from analysis, leaving 551 participants.

As seen in Figure 2, results showed that, as predicted, hostile sexism mediated the relationship between libertarian identification and male veto in reproductive decisions, indirect $B = .02$, $SE = .01$, $[.01, .04]$, and endorsement of financial abortion, indirect $B = .03$, $SE = .01$, $[.01, .05]$.

Table 6. Summary of Regression Analyses—Study 2

Predictor	Abortion Rights		Male Control		Financial Abortion	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
Libertarian ID						
Adjusting for demographics/politics	.01	.878	.10	.004**	.10	.024*
Adjusting further for sexism	.02	.536	.06	.063	.08	.082
Libertarian ideology						
Adjusting for demographics/politics	.01	.733	.09	.008**	.12	.007**
Adjusting further for sexism	.02	.476	.06	.060	.10	.019*
Libertarian moral foundations: Property						
Adjusting for demographics/politics	.05	.137	.04	.279	.06	.155
Adjusting further for sexism	.06	.049*	.01	.821	.05	.224
Libertarian moral foundations: Freedom						
Adjusting for demographics/politics	.07	.018*	-.03	.309	.07	.109
Adjusting further for sexism	.07	.022*	-.03	.298	.06	.129

Note: $n = 551$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

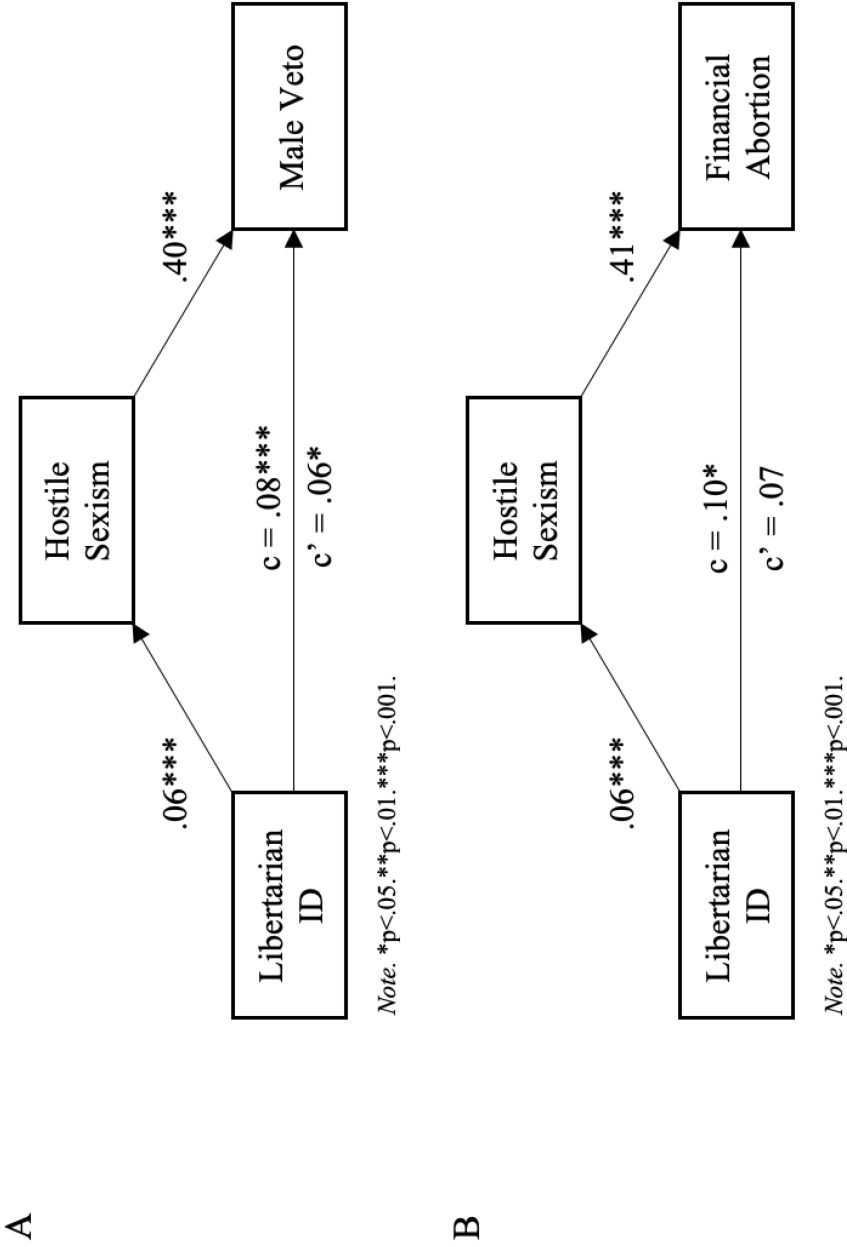


Figure 2. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationships between libertarian identification and (A) male veto in reproduction and (B) support for financial abortion as mediated by hostile sexism (Study 2).

Discussion

This study sought to replicate the results of Study 1 in a larger sample recruited from social media. Even with the more liberal skew of this study's participants, our findings again provided support for the idea that libertarians give priority to the autonomy of certain groups over others. Like in Study 1, libertarian identification was positively associated with support for male veto over reproductive decisions, support for financial abortion, and both hostile and benevolent sexism; it was also once again negatively associated with abortion rights and positively associated with conservatism. Libertarian identification was still associated with male veto and financial abortion after controlling for conservatism, but not with financial abortion after controlling for hostile and benevolent sexism. However, unlike in Study 1, libertarian identification was still associated with male veto after controlling for sexism. We again found that the relationship between libertarian identification and both support for male veto and support for financial abortion was mediated by hostile sexism. These results further emphasize that, when conflicts between the reproductive autonomy of men and women arise, libertarians tend to prioritize men's decision-making at the expense of women's and further suggest that their higher levels of hostile sexism are implicated.

General Discussion

The present results confirm that self-identified libertarians may be selective about whose autonomy matters. The priority they gave to men's reproductive autonomy over women's echoes the support that libertarians have been shown to exhibit for practices that reinforce dominance hierarchies (Lauriola et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2019). Specifically, libertarian identification was negatively correlated with support for a woman's right to make her own reproductive decisions. Meanwhile, libertarians were supportive of men's right to both veto their partner's abortions and remove their financial support for unwanted children (thereby potentially coercing their partner to abort).

In this respect, libertarians viewed reproductive autonomy in much the same way as the hostile sexists in Petterson and Sutton's (2018) research, who opted for whichever position on abortion would afford men the most control. The present studies suggest this is not a coincidence by showing that hostile sexism is associated with libertarian identification, and that it may mediate between libertarianism and preferences for policies that favor men's reproductive autonomy at the expense of women's. These findings echo observations that libertarianism and misogyny are intertwined in some contemporary social movements (Rensin, 2015) and suggest that this translates into concrete policy preferences. Despite the lack of past research on the direct link between hostile sexism and libertarianism, this connection reinforces the previously noted link between libertarianism and SDO (Lauriola et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2019). Sibley et al. (2007) claim that hostile sexism is rooted in a competitive worldview which emphasizes the scarcity of power, resources, and status and which motivates individuals to strive for intergroup dominance (in this case, male dominance over women). This worldview is characterized by high levels of SDO and clearly shares many common elements with the competitive, highly individualistic nature of libertarianism.

In general, libertarianism has struggled to reconcile the adverse implications of one person's autonomy for another's, and abortion is an issue that uniquely tests the boundaries of libertarian principles. Human reproduction may pose a particular challenge for libertarianism: Not only may men and women's autonomy conflict, but interdependencies between them become so profound that the concept of individual autonomy loses coherence. More

complications ensue if we regard the fetus as an individual with current or potential claims to autonomy. Okin (1989) claims that libertarianism's principle of individual autonomy is inherently at odds with pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing, and that these realities bring to light an issue largely ignored by libertarian theorists whereby "the potential lives of some are radically dependent upon (because contained within) the bodies of others" (Okin, 1989, p. 75).

Decisions about whether, and how, to regulate abortion rights, financial abortion, and male veto are policy issues that lawmakers must confront. Okin's (1989) viewpoint is consistent with the guiding feminist principle that "the personal is political"; this slogan was coined by second-wave feminists to combat claims that issues such as sex and abortion were personal problems that should be withheld from the public sphere (Rogan & Budgeon, 2018). One might think that since libertarianism is a framework for political systems and favors individual liberty, it would prefer to stay out of intimate family life. Nonetheless, the present findings show libertarianism does not straightforwardly translate to a preference to deregulate these issues. In the absence of any legislation, women would have a *de facto* legal right to abortions (which libertarians opposed or were indifferent to once conservatism was adjusted for), men would have the *de facto* right to financial abortion (which libertarians supported), but no right of veto over women's decisions (which they also supported). The common denominator in libertarians' preferences to regulate or deregulate is therefore their indifferent or antipathic attitudes to women's reproductive autonomy when men have a competing claim. However, it is worth noting that certain indices of libertarianism were positive predictors of abortion rights after controlling for both conservatism and sexism, suggesting that libertarian identification, but not all features of libertarian ideology, are antagonistic to women's reproductive autonomy.

One relation we did not expect to observe was the positive correlation between libertarianism and benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism seems to fly in the face of libertarian principles by imposing duties on men to protect and provide for women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This warm and apparently altruistic quality of benevolent sexism is widely misunderstood: People tend to see it as a profeminist ideology, and women react much less adversely to benevolent rather than hostile sexism (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2019). Nonetheless, it reifies and bolsters male dominance both in its own right and because of its association with hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This makes it perhaps less surprising that libertarians tended to endorse benevolent sexism in the present studies. Further work is required to examine whether this support emerges independently, despite, or because of, libertarians' conscious understanding of benevolent sexism and its consequences for gender relations (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2019).

One measure of libertarianism in our study was not associated with benevolent sexism: The libertarian moral-foundations item that asked how relevant "whether or not everyone was free to do as they wanted" is when deciding whether something is right or wrong (Iyer et al., 2012). This item, more than the other three indices of libertarianism, seems to capture the core concept of individual autonomy, stripped of other political content. Interestingly, it demonstrated a different and often opposing pattern of correlations with policy preferences from the other indices of libertarianism. The other moral-foundations item—"whether or not private property is respected"—had a pattern of correlations that much more closely resembled the libertarian self-identification item. This reflects the diverse and sometimes contradictory impulses contained within libertarianism. Research into libertarianism as a political

and individual differences construct remains in its infancy, and as it evolves, a more nuanced approach may become possible.

A notable limitation of our research is that the present studies sampled American participants only, meaning that different results may have held in other countries. While many European libertarian thinkers throughout history (such as those referenced in the introduction) have demonstrated illiberal tendencies, much contemporary European libertarianism tends to emphasize egalitarianism and is more associated with the left side of the political spectrum; in fact, there are left-libertarian political parties in several Western European countries (Carlson, 2012). However, this left-leaning strain is less commonly seen in the United States. When asked about the difference between American and European libertarianism, Noam Chomsky—who classifies himself as a European-style libertarian socialist—said:

Libertarianism has a special meaning predominantly in the United States. In the United States, it means dedication to extreme forms of tyranny ... It picks up from the libertarian tradition one element, namely opposition to state power. But it leaves open all other forms of—and in fact favors—other forms of coercion and domination. So it's radically opposed to the libertarian tradition, which was opposed to the master-servant relation. (Falcone, 2015, para 9–10)

Cooper (2021) argues that while more liberal versions of libertarianism do exist in the United States, a large portion of the American libertarian movement was guided by Murray Rothbard into an alliance with paleoconservatism (a populist, isolationist alternative to the more cosmopolitan neoconservatism; Ashbee, 2000), the effects of which can now be seen in the alt-right. Cooper suggests that paleoconservatism helped mend libertarianism's intrinsic contradiction between economic freedom and property rights—which can impinge upon freedom for those who are not the property owners—by pairing freedom from the state to unfreedom in the private sphere such that gender and racial hierarchies could be maintained. Future research is needed to examine the psychological profile of libertarians outside the United States and determine whether they are prone to the same illiberal tendencies.

Another limitation of our research is the lack of widespread familiarity with the term “libertarian” compared to terms like “liberal” and “conservative.” In a Pew Research survey, only 57% of Americans correctly matched the term “libertarian” with its definition in a multiple-choice question; when looking at those with a high school education or less, this number fell to 42% (Kiley, 2014). In their analysis of libertarians, the Pew Research Center accounted for this lack of clarity by only including data from participants who both identified as a libertarian and could correctly define the term. Given that our survey merely asked participants the extent to which they described themselves as libertarian without also assessing whether they had a clear idea of what the term meant, there is a risk that some participants merely guessed at a definition. Future research into libertarianism would do well to address the lack of understanding around the label and ensure that participants are familiar with its meaning.

Libertarianism is a growing force in politics (Fuller, 2014), but it has been subjected to much less empirical scrutiny than liberalism and conservatism. We found that libertarians—especially when defined in terms of their self-identification—are largely indifferent to women's reproductive autonomy and effectively oppose it when it conflicts with men's. These results not only illustrate the tensions that arise in libertarianism when competing claims of liberty emerge, but they cast light on why libertarianism has not been a strong force in the struggle for

women's reproductive autonomy. The present findings suggest that further empirical study of libertarianism—both in terms of its abstract principles and its translation into specific policy positions—is needed. They provide some preliminary indication that a multidimensional approach to libertarianism may be required, as its history and current manifestations embrace diverse and sometimes contradictory strands, spanning antiegalitarian preferences, misogyny, and the love of personal liberty.

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