

Dr. Mark Brandt (Tilburg University), presenting author
Willem Slegers (Tilburg University)

Two characteristics of belief system networks distinguish between ideologues and non-ideologues

Some people are ideologues, whereas others are not. Here we show how the structure of the belief system distinguishes ideologues from non-ideologues using simulations and analyses of empirical data. We conceptualize belief systems as networks of interacting attitudes and identities (Boutyline & Vaisey, 2017; Brandt, Sibley, & Osborne, 2018) and the implied dynamics of these networks to understand the belief system of ideologues. We first simulate the dynamics of belief systems using an Ising model, which assumes that nodes of the belief systems mutually influence each other. Across several different network generation methods, we varied the density of the networks and the proportion of positive connections. We find that both the proportion of positive connections and network density contribute to and are necessary for ideologue characteristics to emerge; they are both consistently liberal or conservative and stable over time. To test if similar results emerge in empirical data, we use correlational class analyses to identify subpopulations with different belief system networks in data from Pew Research (N = 19,897) and the American National Election Studies (N = 17,107). The proportion of positive connections and network density were associated with the characteristics of ideologues belief systems, including increased prejudice towards political outgroups and increased political mobilization. Our findings give scholars the tools to identify the structure of belief systems that are likely to develop into the belief systems of ideologues and non-ideologues.