



# Conservatives Perceive Higher Levels of Disgust and Fear in Facial Expressions

Alexandra Agostini, Joseph Pochedly, James Russell  
Boston College

For more information  
contact  
Alex Agostini  
alexandra.agostini@bc.edu

## Background

•Both disgust and threat sensitivity have been associated with political conservatism (Jost et al., 2014; Oxley et al., 2008).

•Negative emotion underlies our moral judgments (Schnall et al., 2008), which affect our political ideology (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). So, does political ideology influence our perception of negative emotion in others?

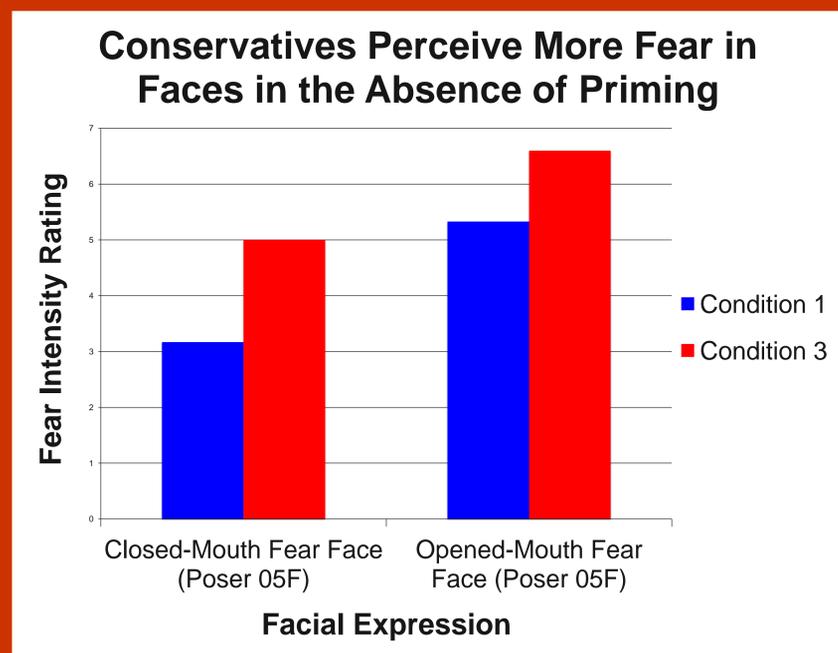
## The Study

•Liberals and conservatives (N=240) rated the emotion intensity of several facial expressions after being primed with either pro-liberal or pro-conservative statements (control conditions were not primed).

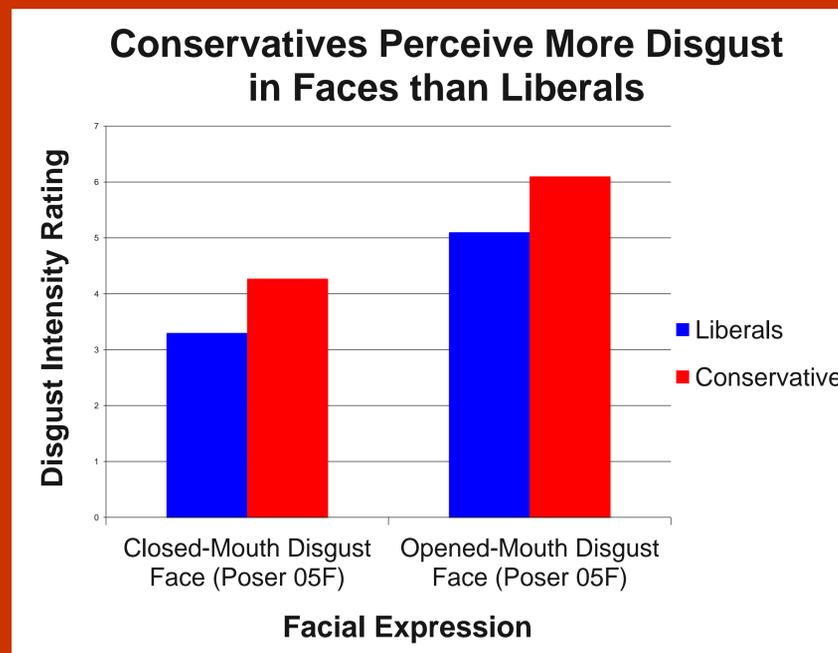
•Stimuli used included priming statements and 16 faces (two posers showing closed and opened-mouth variants of anger, disgust, fear, and sadness).

•We predicted that conservatives would perceive higher emotion intensities than liberals. We also predicted that intensity ratings would increase after participants rated statements with which they did not agree.

## Results



Conservatives who have not been primed are significantly more sensitive to fear than those who have been primed with pro-conservative statements.



Conservatives are marginally significantly more sensitive to disgust than liberals.

## Example Stimuli



	Not At All	Barely			Moderately			Extremely
Sad	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Angry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scared	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disgusted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

## Conclusions

- Conservatives were more sensitive to negative emotion than liberals.
- Conservatives perceived higher levels of negative emotion in Condition 3 (in the absence of priming) than in Condition 1 (after pro-conservative priming).
- Conservatives consistently perceived higher levels of negative emotion in facial expressions.
- Future research could examine the role of negative emotion sensitivity in political debates and elections.