



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on December 13, 2023

The Sheeple Factor: Study Shows How Social Pressure Influences Political Positions

Politicians are well known, and oft derided, for tailoring their message to suit the crowd. But it turns out, a new study has found, that there's a little politician inside of many of us — that is, people will often alter their political positions based on social pressure. This is stating the obvious, of course, but the research also indicates something many will find counterintuitive.

While some believe money trumps all in corrupting man's endeavors, social pressure can have a greater impact than even monetary incentives.



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The [study](#), conducted at the University of Bern, Switzerland, was largely inspired by the uniformity in thought and action observed in government officials and citizens alike with the Covid-19 response. And the Bern researchers sought to replicate famed 1950s conformity experiments performed by psychologist Solomon Asch. In these, Asch would ask an individual to match line lengths as part of a group exercise but, unbeknownst to that person, the other members of his group were study confederates instructed to deliberately give incorrect answers. The result?

A striking number of the subjects chose to parrot the obviously wrong answers rather than buck the group consensus.

The Bern researchers, sociologists Dr. Axel Franzen and postdoctoral researcher Sebastian Mader, not only wanted to learn if Asch's findings applied in our time and in a different culture (Asch worked with American students), but added dimensions to the study: They included a group that was offered monetary incentives for correct answers, and the academics also aimed to determine if the results could be replicated with political opinions.

This three-part study involved 210 participants, mostly University of Bern students. As for the results, [PsyPost reports](#):

The study's findings were striking in their similarity to Asch's original results. In the non-incentivized group, the average error rate in the line judgment task was 33%, closely mirroring Asch's findings. However, in the incentivized group, the error rate dropped to 25%. This suggests that while financial rewards can reduce the impact of group pressure, they do not eliminate it.

"When we started the study, we could not imagine to be able to replicate the original findings as close as it turned out," Franzen and Mader told PsyPost. "We thought Asch's findings were overstated. We also believed that providing incentives for correct answers would wipe out the conformity effect. Both did not happen.

... In terms of political opinions, the experiment revealed that group pressure significantly



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influenced participants' responses to political statements. An average conformity rate of 38% was observed.

The researchers also examined what personality traits of the “Big Five” — extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness — decreased the chances of conformity to error in the line task, and found that only the last one did. For the record, “openness” is “how open-minded, imaginative, creative and insightful a person is or can be,” [informs](#) Thomas.co.

In reality, though, this research brings to mind why G.K. Chesterton called common sense “that forgotten branch of psychology.” This was reflected in the *PsyPost* article’s MSN.com [comments section](#), too.

“This is far simpler than these respected psychologists posit,” wrote “J Chamberlin” in a representative response. “IMHO it is nothing more than ‘go along to get along’. No one wants to buck the bull horn at the microphone.”

“Yes, most people are sheep. Not a surprise,” added “Tony Satterthwaite,” striking an even more cynical note.

In fairness, scientists, “soft” ones included, will seek to use empirical research to prove (even obvious) hypotheses. Regardless, at issue here is just common sense.

Humans are not solitary creatures, such as bears or tigers, but social ones. As such, it is *natural* for us to be influenced by wider social groups. Thus did the quite brilliant Ambassador Alan Keyes once note (I’m paraphrasing), “Social pressure is the greatest force there has ever been for controlling human behavior.”

Moreover, as with all creatures, humans operate based on incentive; only, possessing intellect and free will, our range of incentives is wider. And in a given situation, one incentive can take precedence over others, either because of its nature or magnitude.

For example, making a monetary incentive great enough will likely overwhelm any social-acceptance motivation. A person can also have an emotional incentive (i.e., great passion) relating to a particular political position that can surpass an existing social or monetary incentive.

These truths inform about much that happens in our world. For instance, “consensus” is so often emphasized in the climate-change debate precisely because people are influenced by the flock. It’s likewise with pseudo-elite manipulation via Big Tech, conventional media, entertainment, and academia: Giving a new idea — even an absurd one — the illusion of popularity will in reality make it more popular.

As to this, the Bern researchers issue a warning: “Here we like to cite Mark Twain,” related *PsyPost*, “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.”

To be precise, however, this is simplistic. The Truth is rather: When you find yourself part of an emotion-fueled bandwagon or mob, it’s time to pause and reflect.

Obviously, Truth sometimes lies at a society’s center just as it may reside at its periphery. For example, the majority conclusion that we need sleep, food, water, and love to be healthy and happy is absolutely true. The [notion that “equality” is akin to a virtue](#) and should be striven for [may not be](#).

But then there’s what psychologists won’t address: The cure for the sheeple phenomenon is belief in



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and love for Truth (God). That is to say, if we believe in nothing beyond this world, then what's called "right and wrong" can only be a function of this world; i.e., collective human preference (click [here](#) for in-depth explanation). And believing this, why wouldn't we be influenced by "incorrect" consensus, particularly in abstract matters (especially since since there would be nothing objective and beyond consensus to say such determinations *are* incorrect)?

A person who knows and loves Truth, however, will never bend to a majority acting contrary to it. The knowledge that he's actually right — objectively, eternally, absolutely — and that not even the greatest powers on Earth can change that breeds a sense of principle that trumps popularity, conviction that resists compulsion. Such a person knows firsthand that while might doesn't actually "make right," right does make might.



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