

Beliefs, Actions, and Hypocrisy: Understanding Moral Dynamics in Social Judgements

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BACKGROUND

- ❖ In our daily interactions, we are often confronted by those who believe and/or act differently. Sometimes they believe differently. Sometimes they hold the same values but fail to live up to them. How do we judge such individuals?
- ❖ Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and moral mandates (Skitka, 2002) predicts that we prefer people who share our beliefs, perhaps regardless of how they act.
- ❖ Moral hypocrisy research (Batson et al., 2002; Batson et al., 1999; Graham et al., 2015) suggests we prefer people who act consistently with moral values, perhaps regardless of those values.

GOALS

- ❖ **Question:** What matters more: someone who believes as we do, someone who acts as we want them to act, or someone who stays true to their own values, regardless?
- ❖ **Hypothesis:** Individuals prioritize those who share their moral beliefs but don't act on them over those with opposing beliefs or those with aligned actions but opposite beliefs.

METHODS

Participants: 75 volunteers (Psychology students from the SONA participant pool)

Survey Design: (On-line study)

Part 1. 40 scenarios involving 10 unique moral values (e.g., abortion, drug use, affirmative action). 4 variants within each value: Belief (pro vs. anti moral value) x Action (pro vs. anti moral value).

Question 10
 Someone strongly believes that abortion is wrong, and that the sanctity of an infant's life at any stage is paramount. However, they recently terminated an early-stage pregnancy after a doctor advised them that carrying it to term could be life-threatening due to a medical condition.

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
I feel positive towards this person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person's behaviour is ethical.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person is acting hypocritically.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would trust this person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could see myself being friends with this person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confused about why this person would act this way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part 2. To assess how beliefs/actions in Part 1 match with Pps own beliefs, Pps rated their subjective agreement/disagreement with each of the 10 moral values represented in the scenarios.

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement:
 I believe that abortion is impermissible, and that the life of a fetus should be protected in all circumstances.

Strongly disagree
 Moderately disagree
 Slightly disagree
 Neutral
 Slightly agree
 Moderately agree
 Strongly agree

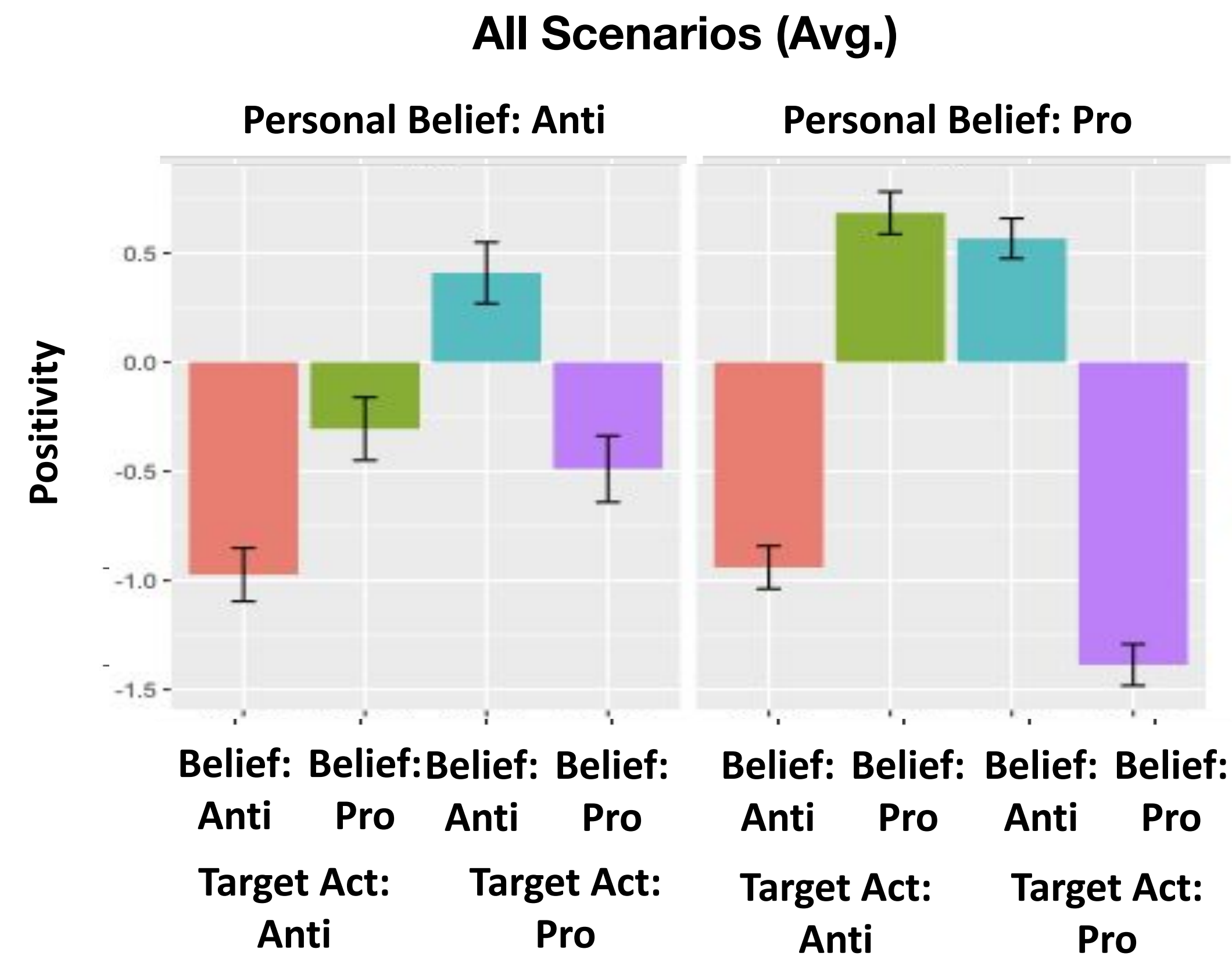
Part 3. Demographic data

Data Analysis:

1. Compute mean/s.d. of ratings for 2 (Personal belief) x 2 (Target belief) x 2 (Target action)
2. Mixed-effects multiple regression analysis analyzing the influence of match in belief, action, or both:
 Rating ~ AgreeAction + AgreeBelief + AgreeAction x AgreeBelief

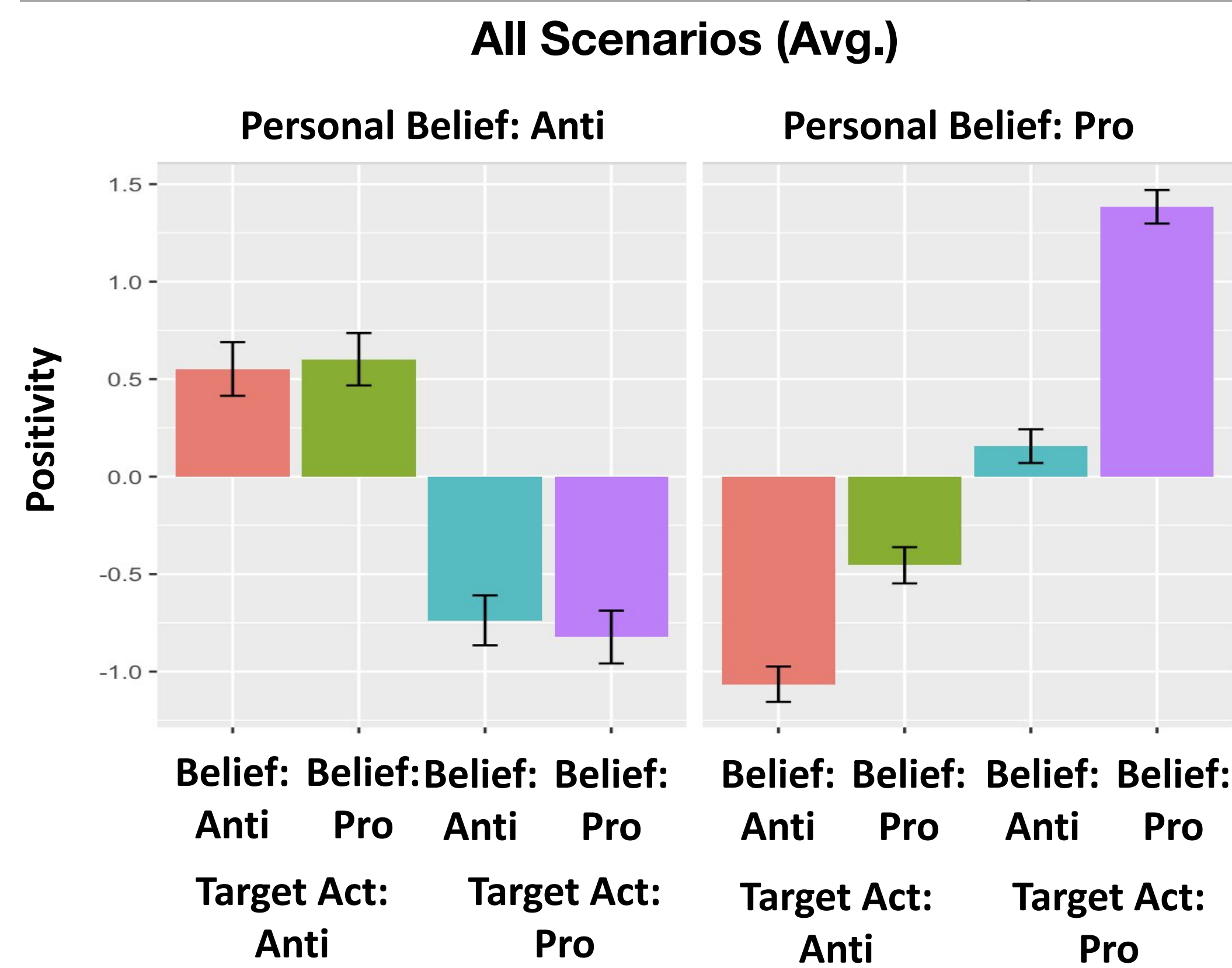
RESULTS

Do people evaluate a mismatch between beliefs and actions as hypocritical?



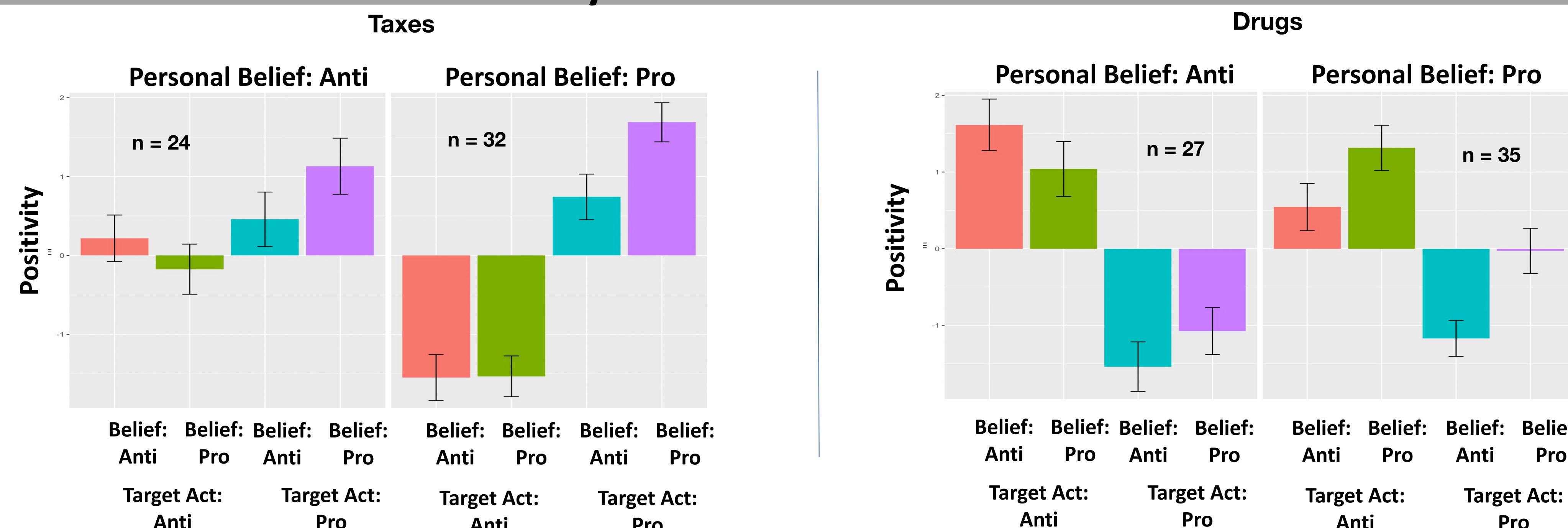
- ❖ Yes! Consistency of actions (whether anti/anti or pro/pro) are rated as less hypocritical, regardless of personal beliefs.
- ❖ Some evidence of moderation by personal belief: when someone refrains from acting, they are viewed as less hypocritical when that restraint does not match their own personal beliefs.
- ❖ When a person supports a particular cause, hypocrisy for any reason is seen as hypocritical.

What matters more, overall: beliefs, actions, or hypocrisy?



- ❖ Regression results:
 - > **Belief** β (effect size) \pm s.e.: $.43 \pm .10^{***}$
 - > **Action** β (effect size) \pm s.e.: $1.29 \pm .10^{***}$
 - > **Belief x Action** β (effect size) \pm s.e.: $.37 \pm .15^*$
 - ❖ Actions matter more than beliefs: Pps feel more positive towards those whose *actions* agree with the judge's personal beliefs. This effect is stronger than the effect of agreement with beliefs.
 - ❖ Hypocrisy matters: people feel more positively towards others when their beliefs and actions match.
 - ❖ Supplemental analysis: Personal belief strength/extremity intensifies each of these effects (all Ps < .001)
 - ❖ Similar results for other ratings (ethicality, friendship, etc.)
- *P < .05 **P < .01 ***P < .001

Does this vary for different kinds of moral values?



Interesting variation as a function of different moral values: Consistency of actions doesn't always override beliefs in evaluations. Pro-tax individuals value compliance more but are less critical of non-compliance than anti-tax individuals. Non-drug users, surprisingly, receive positive evaluations from both pro-drug and anti-drug individuals, while drug users face strong negativity from both groups.

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Actions and beliefs both matter, but actions matter more.
- ❖ In some, but not all cases, consistency between beliefs and actions, even in cases where we might disagree with the belief, also fosters positive judgments, trust, and social acceptance.
- ❖ Inconsistency between beliefs and actions in others leads to confusion and uncertainty in the individual's perceptions and judgments.
- ❖ Understanding the importance of belief-action alignment has implications for fostering trust, improving social dynamics, and enhancing ethical evaluations in interpersonal interactions.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- ❖ Limitations include potential sample bias, self-reporting bias, sensitivity of topics, lack of longitudinal data for tracking changes over time, and a lack of exploration into cultural and contextual factors that could impact belief-action alignment and moral judgments.
- ❖ Future research directions should focus on using experimental designs to manipulate belief-action congruence, diversifying sample, implementing longitudinal designs, incorporating qualitative methods to understand reasoning behind moral judgments, as well as examining cultural and contextual influences.

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