

Abigail (Abby) Cassario

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Current Position

Graduate Student, The Belief Systems Lab, Department of Psychology, Michigan State University

Current Research Agenda

My research examines why individuals vary in the content and meta-cognitive properties of their political beliefs, organized around three core themes. First, I study how individual differences in cognitive tendencies and belief system structure shape the organization and dynamics of political beliefs. Second, I investigate how beliefs remain stable or change in the face of upheaval in personal or societal circumstances, with implications for ideological orientation, democratic resilience, intergroup attitudes, and responsiveness to populism (dissertation paper). Finally, an emerging line aims to develop and test interventions aimed at fostering epistemically grounded belief change rather than raw persuasion in polarized contexts, extending my agenda towards applied questions of misinformation, persuasion, and democratic health.

Research Interests

Ideology, Beliefs, Belief Systems, Polarization, Misinformation, Populism, Computational Social Science

Teaching Interests

Political Psychology, Political Behavior, Intro to American Politics, Polarization, Beliefs & Misinformation, Undergraduate Methods

Education

2026	Ph.D. in Social/Personality Psychology, Michigan State University (expected)
2021	M.A. in Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
2019	B.A. in Political Science and Psychology, University of North Carolina at Asheville (Summa Cum Laude)

Grants, Honors & Awards

2025	SPSP Student Publication Award for Best Graduate Student Publication (for Cassario & Brandt, 2025)
2025	Summer Institute in Social and Personality Psychology (attendee)
2025	PolNet-PaCSS 2025 Graduate Student Fellowship
2022-2023	MSU Graduate Merit Assistantship
2019-2024	UNC Chapel Hill Department of Political Science Thomas Uhlman Fellowship (declined, 2022-2024)
2019	UNC Chapel Hill Graduate Merit Assistantship

Research

PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

2025	Wetherell, G., Thompson, J. L., Cassario, A. L. , Brandt, M. J., Gnall, S., Rice, S., Solanki, P., Vallabha, S., & Carrillo, A. (in press). Do mismatches between individual and target group personality predict prejudice? <i>Collabra: Psychology</i> , 11, 136887.
2025	Cassario, A. L. , Vallabha, S., Thompson, J. L., Carrillo, A., Solanki, P., Gnall, S. A., Wetherell, G., & Brandt, M. J. (2025). Registered report: Cognitive ability, but not cognitive reflection, predicts expressing greater political animosity and favouritism. <i>British Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 64(2), e12814.
2025	Cassario, A. L. , & Brandt, M. J. (2025). Testing theories of threat, individual difference, and ideology: Little evidence of personality-based individual differences in ideological responses to threat. <i>Social Psychological and Personality Science</i> , 16(6) 657-668‡
	‡ Recipient of the SPSP Student Publication Award for Best Graduate Student Publication in an SPSP Journal, 2025.
2023	Cassario, A. L. (2023). Perceived vulnerability to infectious disease and perceived harmfulness are as predictive of citizen response to COVID-19 as partisanship. <i>Politics and the Life Sciences</i> , 42(2), 277-290.
2019	Cox, K. S., Hanek, K. J., & Cassario, A. L. (2019). Redemption in a single low point story longitudinally predicts well-being: The incremental validity of life story elements. <i>Journal of Personality</i> , 87(5), 1009-1024.

EDITOR REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

2023	Brandt, M. J., & Cassario, A. L. (2023). Distinguishing between worldview conflict and shared alliances: Commentary on Pinsof, Sears, and Haselton. <i>Psychological Inquiry</i> , 34(3), 168-174.
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ACCEPTED STAGE I REGISTERED REPORTS

- 2023 Thompson, J. L., **Cassario, A. L.**, Rice, S., Gnall, S. A., Carrillo, A., Solanki, P., Vallabha, S., Brandt, M. J., & Wetherell, G. (2023). Registered report: Stress testing predictive models of ideological prejudice. *PLOS ONE*.

CURRENT PROJECTS

- 2025 **Cassario, A.L.**, Triki, A.[†], & Brandt, M.J., Threat exposure does not predict increased conservatism in three large experiments: Evidence from the U.S. (Manuscript in preparation, target *Political Behavior*.)
[†]Denotes mentored undergraduate student
- 2025 Triki, A.[†], **Cassario, A. L.**, & Brandt, M.J. (Manuscript in preparation, target: *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*). There is more evidence for ideological symmetry than asymmetry in party cue effects across a representative sample of issues.
- 2025 **Cassario, A. L.**, Vallabha, S., & Brandt, M. J. (Manuscript in preparation, target: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*). Central attitudes are more resistant to change, but are not necessarily less responsive to persuasive interventions.
- 2025 **Cassario, A. L.**, & Brandt, M. J. (Ongoing, data collection complete, target: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*). Conviction cascades: Moral conviction transmits through belief system ties.
- 2025 **Cassario, A. L.**, (Ongoing, data collection). Exploring the effects of anticipated, actual, and perceived downward mobility on political attitudes.
- 2025 Brandt, M. J. & **Cassario, A. L.** (Ongoing). Within-person fluctuations in daily stress do not predict political prejudice or engagement, but higher between-person stress does: Evidence from an EMA study.

Invited Talks

- 2025 Cassario, A. L. (2025, Spring). Moral conviction transmits through belief system ties. Invited talk at the Interdisciplinary Consortium on Moral Decision Making, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA.
- 2025 Cassario, A. L. (2025, Spring). Moral conviction transmits through belief system ties. Invited talk at the Inequality Working Group Meeting (virtual).

Selected Conference Presentations

- 2025 Cassario, A.L. & Brandt, M.J., (December, 2025). Moral conviction transmits through belief system ties. Poster presented at *MIT Directions of Polarization, Norms, and Trust in Societies*, Cambridge, MA.
- 2025 Cassario, A.L. & Brandt, M.J., (August, 2025). Moral conviction transmits through belief system ties. Poster presented at *PolNet-PaCSS Conference*, Cambridge, MA.
- 2024 Cassario, A. L. & Brandt, M.J., (2024, February). Testing theories of threat, individual difference, and ideology: Little evidence of personality-based individual differences in ideological responses to threat. Poster presented at the *Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) Annual Convention*, San Diego, CA.
- 2022 Cassario, A. L. (2022, April). Not all motivated reasoning is partisan: Personality and harm perceptions limit the influence of partisanship in shaping citizens' perceptions of COVID-19. Paper presented at the *Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA) Annual Meeting*, Chicago, IL.

Teaching Experience

Introduction to Social Psychology (MSU, instructor of record)
Introduction to Personality Psychology (MSU, TA, grader)
Psychology of Women (MSU, TA, grader)
Introduction to R Programming and Statistics (MSU, TA, section instructor; UNC, TA, grader)
Introduction to American Politics (UNC, TA, section instructor)
Race, Innocence and the Death Penalty (UNC, TA, section instructor)

Reviewer

Legislative Studies Quarterly
Political Behavior
American Journal of Political Science
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
British Journal of Social Psychology
Politics and the Life Sciences
Psychological Science
Social Psychological and Personality Science
Journal of Personality
Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy

Computer Skills

R (Advanced)
Qualtrics (Advanced)
SAS (Intermediate)

SPSS (Intermediate)
MATLAB (Beginner)
Github (Beginner)
Python (Beginner)
L^AT_EX