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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ideological profiles of US adults and their support for youth mentoring

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Abstract

Little is known about the influence of political ideology and religiosity on adults' support for youth mentoring as a strategy to address social problems. This study used latent class analysis in a large, national sample of US adults to identify underlying ideological profiles associated with support for mentoring programs. Three latent classes emerged. The attitudes of two classes, Classic Conservatives and Progressives, were consistent with traditional political conservatism and liberalism; the latter endorsed higher support for the theory of mentoring and government spending on mentoring programs. Members of the third class, Religious Outsiders, were highly religious, self-identified as very conservative, and were highly supportive of the theory of mentoring and the use of government funds on mentoring programs. Ad hoc analyses revealed that Religious Outsiders were the most likely to actually participate in mentoring activities. These findings suggest that support for mentoring, while not universal, crosses traditional political lines.

KEYWORDS
conservatism, government spending, political ideology, religiosity, youth mentoring

Youth mentoring programs seek to address social problems, such as educational disparities, adolescent delinquency, and familial fracturing, by cultivating relationships between youth and caring, nonparent adults (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). Over the past two decades, the number of mentoring programs and youth served by them has expanded, and some programs have been shown to be effective in promoting positive behavioral, psychosocial, and economic outcomes (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018; Garringer, McQuillin, & McDaniel, 2017). However, only an estimated 1% of US adults volunteer in year-long formal mentoring programs, according to

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census data (Raposa, Dietz, & Rhodes, 2017), and approximately 9.4 million young people who are identified as at-risk for negative developmental outcomes do not have a mentor (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). This "mentoring gap" has spurred increased advocacy efforts to expand public and governmental support for mentoring (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014, p. 1).

Since the early 2000s, the federal government has spent over $2.5 billion on mentoring programs (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). The majority of voting-age adults in the US support government spending on early intervention programs for at-risk youth (Cullen, Vose, Lero Jonson, & Unnever, 2007), with over 80% approving of government spending on mentoring programs, specifically (Garringer & Benning, 2018). Still, support for mentoring programs, as well as actual participation in mentoring, is far from universal (Garringer & Benning, 2018), and little is known about the specific demographic and ideological characteristics that influence individuals' degree of support for mentoring.

Although extensive research has examined associations among political ideology, religiosity, and attitudes toward government spending in general, little has examined the influence of these factors in the context of mentoring. In the current study, we used a recent national sample of US adults to identify underlying demographic and ideological profiles associated with attitudes toward mentoring.

1 | DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND CONFLICTED CONSERVATISM

In the most basic sense, conservative political attitudes, associated with the Republican Party in the United States, support limited governmental oversight and lower spending on social programs. Liberal political attitudes, associated with the Democratic Party, believe in greater governmental involvement and higher spending on social programs (Farwell & Weiner, 2000). Those who identify as liberal tend to promote social change and social justice movements, while conservatives typically support the status quo (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Rasinski, 1987). However, extensive research in political science and psychology has demonstrated that political attitudes, identification, and policy decisions are far more complicated than a unidimensional liberal-conservative spectrum. Nationally representative studies have consistently documented at least two separate ideological dimensions—economic/fiscal and cultural/social—that are only mildly correlated, with estimates ranging from 0.21 to 0.36 (Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Treier & Hillygus, 2009). Despite increasing political polarization of party elites (Hawkins, Yudkin, Juan-Tores, & Dixon, 2018), there remains significant ideological diversity in the general public—especially among those who identify as conservative (Claassen, Tucker, & Smith, 2015; Hawkins et al., 2018).

In particular, political scholars have identified a sizeable minority of the population who self-identify with a conservative label but hold one or more liberal policy views. These so-called "conflicted conservatives," who make up an estimated 40% of self-identified conservatives and 30% of the general public, partly account for the widely-documented "ideology puzzle" (Claassen et al., 2015, p. 253–254). This ideological puzzle refers to the paradox that more voting-age adults in the United States self-identify as conservative than liberal while the majority take liberal positions when asked about specific policy issues, a phenomenon that has existed continuously at least since 1968 (Claassen et al., 2015; Ellis & Stimson, 2011). Among conflicted conservatives, the most popularly endorsed liberal policy view is toward government spending on education, suggesting that policies affecting youth may be a common area of ideological crossover. Compared to self-identified conservatives, self-identified liberals are more homogenous and endorse conflicting policy views at lower rates (Claassen et al., 2015).

Researchers have found several factors that partly account for the prevalence of conflicted conservatism. First, framing by political elites and the news media heavily influences lay people's perceptions of ideological labels (Claassen et al., 2015; Ellis & Stimson, 2011). In particular, across politicians and platforms, social scientists have consistently documented more favorable attitudes toward the conservative ideological label and the popular stigmatization of the liberal label (Ellis & Stimson, 2011; Schiffer, 2000). Consistent with this explanation, Claassen et al. (2015) found that watching Fox News—an outlet that tends to promote conservatism and eschew liberalism

(DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007)—was positively associated with the likelihood of being a conflicted conservative. However, even nonpartisan or left-leaning news outlets, such as USA Today and the New York Times, use the word "conservative" more frequently than "liberal" and are more likely to use "conservative" with positive connotations. The same holds true for Democratic politicians, who tend to use the term "progressive" rather than "liberal" and focus on specific policy positions rather than general labels for their platforms (Claassen et al., 2015, p. 255). This is in contrast to Republican politicians, who are more likely to brandish their conservative ideology while focusing less on specific policy positions (Claassen et al., 2015; Ellis & Stimson, 2011; Schiffer, 2000). With these implicit and explicit messages from the media and party elites, it is no wonder that adults in the United States are more likely to identify as conservative in name, even with some functionally liberal policy positions.

Further contributing to discrepancies between self-identification and policy positions, the "conservative" label has varying applications and meanings, some of which are nonpolitical. In particular, many US residents associate the "conservative" label with religious conservatism, which refers to literal interpretations of religious texts, restrictions on lifestyle choices, and adherence to clearly articulated religious values (Claassen et al., 2015; Jones, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, Dionne, & Galston, 2013). However, religious conservatism is only moderately correlated with political conservatism (Jones, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, Dionne, & Galston, 2013). Furthermore, as several writers have pointed out, many liberal fiscal policies, such as support for the poor, are generally consistent with the teachings of major world religions (Johnson & Tamney, 2001). Thus, when lay people are asked to rate themselves on a single liberal-conservative dimension, they may be influenced by their religious views—not just their policy positions. Consistent with this explanation, Claassen et al. (2015) found that religiosity was positively associated with the likelihood of being a conflicted conservative (i.e., nominally conservative while holding some liberal policy views).

2 | POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, RELIGIOSITY, AND SUPPORT FOR MENTORING

Deeply influenced by his Protestantism, President George W. Bush's doctrine of "compassionate conservatism" led him to hold some positions on immigration, foreign aid, and social programs that may traditionally be categorized as "liberal" (Du Vall, 2010, p. 43). In a speech, President Bush (2000) explained, "It is compassionate to help our fellow citizens in need. It is conservative to insist on responsibility and results" (p. 645). During his presidency, he publicly supported and funded several mentoring initiatives, such as Mentoring Children of Prisoners, and sought to promote mentoring by increasing federal partnership with religious agencies and providing federal funding for faith-based mentoring programs (White House Archives, 2008). Although a full critique of President Bush's social policies is beyond our scope, he serves as a prominent example of moral and fiscal support for youth mentoring crossing traditional ideological and party lines, particularly under the influence of religion.

Alternatively, by some interpretations of US conservatism, support for mentoring may not constitute ideological conflict at all. At the heart of conservative, small-government, and capitalist doctrines are a "pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps" belief that every individual in the United States has the opportunity to succeed through hard work and tenacity (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016, p. 152). This "rugged individualism" is also largely consistent with the Protestant work ethic that is so foundational to mainstream conservative ideology in the United States (Emerson, Smith, & Sikkink, 1999, p. 414). When youth mentoring programs—as we know them today—were first founded in the 1900s, this philosophy was at their core (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Since the 1980s, support and advocacy for the expansion of mentoring programs have been led by powerful constituents from the financial industry (Ernst & Young & MENTOR, 2015; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006), many of whom support more conservative fiscal and social policies. Traditional one-to-one mentoring programs locate problems (i.e., a lack of role models for at-risk youth) and solutions (i.e., deployment of middle-class volunteers) at the individual, rather than societal, level (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Although mentoring researchers and practitioners are beginning to attend to multiple levels of the social ecology, this individualistic ideology is still influential and may continue to drive some conservatives' support for mentoring (Albright, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017). Conservatives may see mentoring as

a way of addressing inequality by helping young people "pull themselves up by their bootstraps," rather than increasing government spending on welfare, universal healthcare, and higher education (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016).

Conservative ideology and religiosity may also influence the extent to which adults actually volunteer or participate in mentoring programs. Although there has been little research on political and religious correlates of volunteer mentoring, there is a broad literature on volunteerism and charitable giving. Some have suggested that political conservatives are more charitable with their time and money (e.g., Brooks, 2006), but most work suggests that this finding is driven by the correlation between religiosity and conservatism. That is, self-identified conservatives are more likely to donate time and money to religious and nonreligious causes, but this association is fully mediated by religiosity (i.e., religious affiliation and attendance; Forbes & Zampelli, 2013; Vaidyanathan, Hill, & Smith, 2011). Indeed, helping those less fortunate and the value of children is core to the teachings of most major religions (Becker & Dhingra, 2001). Further, religious organizations may facilitate the cultivation of social networks that encourage individuals to volunteer (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Vaidyanathan et al., 2011). Religious organizations may directly provide volunteering opportunities based in houses of worship and may also be informed about opportunities in the community (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010; Vaidyanathan et al., 2011). Thus, religiosity appears to be a driving factor in political identification, ideological support for youth programs, and actual time and monetary contributions to youth programs.

2.1 | The current study

Overall, the preceding literature review suggests that there is significant heterogeneity, particularly among self-identified conservatives, in support for government spending on social programs for youth. We posit that this apparent ideological diversity within party lines is partly driven by the framing of "liberal" and "conservative" labels in the media as well as religiosity, which may lead people to self-identify as conservative while holding some liberal policy views. However, these hypotheses draw from general research on political and religious ideology and attitudes toward government spending, rather than attitudes toward youth mentoring programs specifically. We believe it is important to understand how ideological factors operate within the context of mentoring to develop more effective strategies to engage adults across political and religious spectra to help the millions of at-risk youth in need of a mentor. To fill these gaps in knowledge, the current study used data from a recent national survey of US adults to examine associations among ideological self-identification, religiosity, and attitudes toward youth mentoring programs (Garringer & Benning, 2018). In particular, we used latent class analysis (LCA) to identify underlying ideological profiles of US adults and the extent to which attitudes toward mentoring are associated with membership in latent ideological classes. The guiding research question for our analyses was: Do US adults' thoughts about the importance of mentoring and their support for federal investment in mentoring programs predict their ideological subgroups?

Although our main research question was on ideological factors toward youth mentoring that predict attitudes towards policy, we were also curious about whether the prevalence of actual mentoring behavior differed by ideological profiles. This question was secondary and developed after the primary set of analyses and was thus pursued in ad hoc analyses.

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Sampling and participants

The current study consists of secondary analyses of the Power of Relationships Study (Garringer & Benning, 2018), a survey of US adults' mentoring attitudes and activities commissioned by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership. Survey respondents were sourced from the Online Panels of Survey Sampling Inc. (SSI), which uses the internet to recruit diverse national samples inclusive of historically underrepresented groups. Panel participants earned points for completing surveys, which they can later redeem for gift cards, although the exact incentives are

determined and distributed by the paneling company and not known to the researchers. It is important to note that participants are made aware that they will qualify for survey incentives only after completing screening questions, making it unlikely that the incentive affected their responses to items that determined eligibility.

The general sampling frame was intended to be all adults in the United States 18 years or older, with the acknowledgment that those without internet access could not be included. In addition, oversampling was conducted to reach individuals who identified as Native American/American Indian or Alaskan Natives, native Spanish speakers, and adults who engaged in mentoring that is connected to or supported by their employer, pursuant of other aims of the project. SSI uses a convenience-based opt-in online panel source. Invitations to participate were disseminated proportionately based on census demographics to recruit a nationally representative sample in terms of gender, age, race, ethnicity, income, and region. As data were collected, the demographic composition of the sample was regularly monitored using demographic quotas. Participant invitation distribution and inclusion were adjusted continuously to ensure sample proportions that correspond to the demographics of the US population. Among the general population, the response rate to the survey was 9%, and the completion rate among qualified respondents whose demographic quotas had not already been met was 59.6%. Among the oversamples, the response rate was 75.5%, and the completion rate among qualified respondents whose demographic quotas had not already been met was 74.2% (See Table 1).

A total of 1,700 surveys were completed, 1,317 of which were from the general population and 383 from the oversamples. Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 2.

3.2 | Procedure

Surveys were self-administered online and available in English and Spanish. They contained a range of open- and close-ended questions assessing participants' opinions and views of youth mentoring, participation in youth mentoring, and demographic characteristics. The average survey completion time was 23 minutes. Data were collected between July and August of 2017.

3.3 | Measures

3.3.1 | Demographics

Participants were asked to identify themselves in terms of race and gender. They were also asked to indicate their total household income from the previous year on a 10-point scale (1 = "Less than $10,000,"

TABLE 1 Response and completion rates among invited participants in the general population and the oversamples (i.e., Native American/American Indian or Alaskan Natives, native Spanish speakers, and adults who engaged in mentoring that is connected to or supported by their employer)

	General population	Oversamples
Total invites	79,761	4,370
Survey starts	7,186	3,298
Response rate	9.0%	75.5%
Total respondents not qualified	43	2,782
Outside of United States	11	6
Under age 18	32	29
Does not qualify for oversample	–	2,747
Not included (demographic quota full)	4,978	22
Qualified incompletes	848	111
Completed interviews	1,317	383
Completion rate among qualified, sub-quota respondents	59.6%	74.2%

TABLE 2 Demographic distribution of the sample (N = 1,700)

Demographic	Percentage
Age range	
18–24	12.6
25–29	9.0
30–34	8.8
35–39	8.2
40–44	8.6
45–49	8.9
50–54	9.3
55–59	8.6
60–64	7.6
65–69	6.1
70–75	4.3
76 or older	8.0
Gender	
Female	55.2
Male	44.6
Other	0.2
Race and ethnicity (nonmutually exclusive)	
American Indian, Native American, or Alaskan Native	7.2
Asian American, East Asian, or Southeast Asian	6.9
Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American	12.2
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	16.6
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.6
White	72.9
Middle Eastern	0.2
Other race or ethnicity	1.1
Prefer not to answer	2.1
Total annual household income	
Less than $10,000	5.6
$10,000–$14,000	4.6
$15,000–$24,999	10.1
$25,000–$34,999	12.2
$35,000–$49,999	14.1
$50,000–$74,999	19.2
$75,000–$99,999	13.8
$100,000–$149,999	10.8
$150,000–$199,999	4.5
Prefer not to say	2.8
Region	
New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)	10.1
Mid Atlantic (NJ, NY, PA)	12.2
East North Central (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI)	10.5
West North Central (IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD)	7.8
South Atlantic (DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, DC)	15.1
East South Central (AL, MS, KY, TN)	7.8
West South Central (AR, LA, OK, TX)	12.1
Mountain (AZ, CO, ID, NV, NM, UT, WY)	9.4
Pacific (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA)	15.1

10 = "$200,000 or more). They were asked to report their exact age by free-response and then on a 13-point scale (1 = "Under 18" [excluded], 2 = "18 to 24," 3 = "25 to 29,"…13 = "76 years of age or older"). Due to missing data on the free-response age variable, participants' responses on the scaled age item, which had complete data, were used for analyses.

3.4 | Conservative/liberal self-identification

Participants were asked to "indicate…the point that best represents your overall political views" on an 11-point, notched scale (0 = "Very liberal on most issues," 11 = "Very conservative on most issues"). The notched scale was presented horizontally, left to right, without numerical scores. Responses were reduced to the following 5-point response format: 1 = "Strong Liberal" (notches 0 and 1), 2 = "Moderate Liberal" (notches 2, 3, and 4), 3 = "Middle (midpoint/notch 5), 4 = "Moderate Conservative" (notches 6, 7, and 8), and 5 = "Strong Conservative" (notches 9 and 10). These groupings were set a priori to reduce inconsistent variability between poles and increase practical application.

3.5 | Perception of the country

Participants were asked, "Overall, do you feel like things in the United States are generally going in the right direction, or are they on the wrong track?" and responded dichotomously (i.e., "going in the right direction" or "on the wrong track").

3.6 | Support for social justice movements

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "In general, I support social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street, and others like this" on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = "Strongly disagree," 5 = "Strongly agree").

3.6.1 | Religious affinity

Participants were asked to "please indicate the point that best represents the extent to which you participate in organized religion (such as temple, mosque, church, or synagogue) on an 11-point notched scale with endpoints labeled (0 = "I do not have any religious affiliation and do not participate in any religious groups or organizations," 10 = "I have strong religious affiliations and am highly active in organized religion"). The notched scale was presented horizontally, left to right, without numerical scores. Responses were reduced to the following 4-point format: 1 = "No Religious Affinity" (notches 0, 1, and 2), 2 = "Little Religious Affinity" (notches 3, 4, and 5), 3 = "Some Affinity" (notches 6, 7, and 8), and 4 = "Strong Religious Affinity" (notches 9 and 10). These groupings were made based on the distribution of the final data to reduce inconsistent variability between poles and to increase practical application.

3.6.2 | Perceived importance of mentoring

Participants were asked, "Overall, how important do you feel mentoring relationships outside of the immediate family are to young people as they are growing up?" and responded on a 11-point Likert-type scale (0 = "They are not at all important to youth as they are growing up," 10 = "They are vitally important to youth as they are growing up").

3.6.3 | Support for governmental funding of mentoring

Participants were asked, "Do you support or oppose the use of government funds to contribute to youth mentoring programs?" and responded on an 11-point Likert-type scale (0 = "I completely oppose the use of government funds for youth mentoring programs, 10 = "I completely support the use of government funds for youth mentoring programs").

3.6.4 | Participation in mentoring

Participants were presented with definitions of formal mentoring programs (i.e., "a program or organization whose main mission and focus is to connect adults and youth in meaningful relationships where the adult acts as a mentor") and informal mentoring (i.e., "less structured or totally unstructured mentoring relationship that comes about naturally or as the result of…involvement with an organization such as a school or other institution that works with young people"). They were then asked whether or not they had participated in each type of mentoring during the previous year.

3.7 | Data analytic plan

Our research question is "Do US adults' beliefs about the importance of mentoring and their support for federal investment in mentoring predict their ideological subgroups?". This research question involves two parts: (a) classification of individuals based on their ideological subgroup; and (b) prediction of these latent subgroups from their thoughts about and support of mentoring.

We used Mplus version 8.0 to conduct LCA for this study. LCA is a subtype of finite mixture modeling wherein categorical classes are not known (i.e., they are latent), but inferred from known indicators. In LCA, individuals are classified based on their observed characteristics into a number of categorical groups, with this number being specified by the researcher. To determine the number of groups, we used the following indicators: Akaike information criterion (AIC), Bayesian information criterion (BIC), and Sample Size Adjusted BIC and Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test for model differences. We also used estimates of relative entropy, a metric that indicates class certainty. Entropy ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater class certainty. Because these data were intended to be a nationally representative sample, we included individual sample weights to ensure the representativeness of our sample to the national population. In practice, this means that we statistically adjusted for discrepancies between our sample and population-level stratification.

There are different approaches to predicting latent classes from auxiliary variables. One approach involves classifying people according to some measurement indicators, and then independently analyzing a prediction model using some set of independent variables. This approach is referred to as the "classify-and-analyze," or hard partitioning 2-step, approach (Kamata, Kara, Patarapichavatham, & Lan, 2018). Implicit in this approach is the assumption that class specification is independent of prediction and that classes are errorless during prediction (i.e., the model excludes measurement error), which is not the case in reality. Because we were interested in how thoughts about mentoring predicted political "classes" of people, we modeled the prediction of these latent classes simultaneously with latent class indicators (i.e., the one-step approach). We chose the one-step approach because we know that support for social interventions such as mentoring is likely related to, and should inform, the structure of political classes. Thus, if we were to form classes separate from the influence distal indicators, we risk misspecifying the latent classes, biasing estimates between classes and latent indicators, and ignoring measurement errors associated with classification in prediction thereby increasing the likelihood of false positives in the prediction model (Kamata et al., 2018). Moreover, the 1-step approach has been found to improve class separation (Clark & Muthén, 2009). There are acceptable alternatives to the 1-step model, including variants on a 3-step model (see Kamata, et. al, 2018); however, the 1-step approach performs as well or better than the 3-step approach when using large sample sizes, and is recommended when entropy is less than 0.80, as in our case.

We specified latent classes using the explicit endorsement of political ideology and religious affinity, as well as age and income. Moreover, we included politically salient questions designed to query support of social justice movements and the perception that the country is going in the right or wrong direction (see "Measures" section), which is an important distinguishing feature of subgroups in political identity (Graham et al., 2009; Rasinski, 1987). We originally included race as a class indicator, but this indicator performed poorly; this is likely because most participants were white, and classes include people who are mostly white, thus not discriminating class

membership. Classes formed using these indicators were predicted simultaneously by distal predictors of support for federal involvement in promoting mentoring and thoughts about the importance of mentoring.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Latent classes

Three classes emerged as the best model, as indicated by the plateauing AIC and BIC, the nonsignificant LMRALRT test, and the entropy values, as seen in Table 3. The three-class solution represented classes that were primarily distinguished by political ideology and religious affinity. The first class ($n = 426$) we named Classic Conservatives, which were characterized by modest religious affinity (approximately 56% of this class were categorized as having either some or strong religious affinity), and majority conservative ideology (approximately 75% of this class was categorized as moderately or strongly conservative). Classic Conservatives were also the oldest (on average older than 45) and wealthiest group. No one in this class agreed or strongly agreed with support for social justice movements, and slightly over half felt like the country was headed in the wrong direction. The second class we named Progressives ($n = 963$), who reported low religious affinity (approximately 70% endorsed no or little affinity) and endorsed moderate or liberal political ideology (less than 0.4% were classified as strongly conservative). The Progressives were younger than the Classic Conservatives (but not the 3rd class) and reported the lowest income. This class overwhelmingly felt the country is headed in the wrong direction (i.e., >78%) and showed modest support for social justice movements (i.e., >57%). We named the final class the Religious Outsiders ($n = 205$), who were primarily defined on the basis of their strong religious affinity (approximately 90% endorsing some or strong religious affinity), strong conservative identity (approximately 90% moderately or strongly conservative), and their sense that the country is on the right track (approximately 75%). The Religious Outsiders were the youngest class. Interestingly, this group showed strong support for social justice movements (i.e., >85%). Thus, this class represents a highly religious and conservative subgroup that shows greater support for social justice movements than either of the other two classes. Table 4 includes class proportions and means for all class indicators.

4.2 | Prediction of classes

Classes were predicted from the two independent variables (i.e., support for the theory that mentoring is important and support for government investment in mentoring) simultaneously. These prediction models are similar to multinomial logistic regression models. However, rather than assigning each person a 1 or 0 with the assigned class, each participant is assigned a posterior probability for their assigned class (i.e., the probability that they are from a class).

Using Religious Outsiders as the reference class, these models indicated that when perceptions of “mentoring as important” increased, the likelihood of being assigned to either Progressives ($B = -0.51$ (0.19); Estimate/standard error (SE) = −2.58; $p = .01$) or Classic Conservatives decreased ($B = -0.36$ (0.22); Estimate/SE = −1.66; $p = .09$); although the latter was not statistically significant. In general, the trend indicates an increased probability of being a Religious Outsider as support for “mentoring as important” increases. Similarly, relative to Religious Outsiders, as

TABLE 3 Latent class identification statistics

# Of classes	AIC	BIC	SA-BIC	LMRALRT	LMRALRT *p* value	Entropy
1	49,754	49,863	49,799	–	–	–
2	31,701	31,879	31,774	681.665	.00	0.68
3	31,343	31,612	31,453	390	.00	0.75
4	31,146	31,506	31,293	228	.38	0.70

Abbreviations: AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion.

TABLE 4 Overall sample and latent classification with percentage representation or mean/standard error across indicators

Class identifiers	Overall sample (*N* = 1,700)	Religious outsiders (*n* = 205)	Classic conservatives (*n* = 426)	Progressives (*n* = 963)
Political ideology				
Strong liberal	18.6%	2.0%	0.0%	31.0%
Moderate liberal	14.4%	3.0%	4.0%	22.0%
Middle	25.6%	5.0%	20.0%	33.0%
Moderate conservative	21.4%	35.0%	35.0%	13.0%
Strong conservative	20.1%	56.2%	40.7%	0.4%
Religious affiliation				
No affiliation	32.6%	8.3%	23.8%	45.4%
Little affiliation	19.8%	1.6%	19.4%	24.5%
Some affiliation	22.1%	35.3%	23.5%	17.5%
Strong affiliation	25.4%	57.9%	33.0%	12.6%
Direction of country				
On the right track	35.8%	74.5%	46.8%	21.2%
On the wrong track	64.2%	25.5%	53.2%	78.8%
Social justice movements				
Strongly disagree	22.5%	6.2%	62.4%	7.2%
Disagree	13.8%	12.0%	21.4%	10.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	29.2%	22.2%	16.2%	35.2%
Agree	17.4%	30.4%	0.0%	25.0%
Strongly agree	17.1%	29.2%	0.0%	22.1%
Income				
Mean (SE)	5.52 (0.06)	5.89 (0.27)	5.92 (0.20)	5.29 (0.12)
Age				
Mean (SE)	6.93 (0.08)	5.14 (0.46)	8.79 (0.28)	6.38 (0.12)

Note: Total annual household income measured on the following scale: 1 (less than $10,000), 2 ($10,000–$14,999), 3 ($15,000–$24,999), 4 ($25,000–$34,999), 5 ($35,000–$49,999), 6 ($50,000–$74,999), 7 ($75,000–$99,999), 8 ($100,000–$149,999), 9 ($150,000–$199,999), 10 ($200,000 or more). Age is measured on a scale from 2 (18–24-year old) to 13 (76 years or older).
Abbreviation: SE, standard error.

support for federal involvement in mentoring increased, the probability of being assigned to Progressives ($B = -12$ (0.06); Estimate/SE = −1.82; $p = .06$) or Classic Conservatives ($B = -0.53$ (0.08); Estimate/SE = −5.95; $p = .00$) decreased, with the former not being statistically significant. Together, these results indicate that, as a general trend, both support for mentoring as important and support for federal involvement in mentoring positively predict the probability of being a Religious Outsider; however, the prediction for federal involvement is better at distinguishing Classic Conservatives from Religious Outsiders, and the prediction for mentoring as important is better at distinguishing Progressives from Religious Outsiders. The raw univariate averages of support for mentoring as important and for federal investment in mentoring distinguish these groups more explicitly, with Religious Outsiders displaying far greater support for both compared to the other two groups.

4.3 | Ad hoc analyses

In addition to the main research questions tested above, we became interested in the extent to which members of each latent class actually participated in mentoring young people. Thus, we examined the percentages of adults in each latent class who endorsed having participated in formal mentoring (through a structured program) and

informal mentoring within the previous year. Consistent with broader results regarding attitudes and ideologies, we found that a much larger proportion (46%) of the Religious Outsider class engaged in more formal mentoring compared to Progressives (20%) and Classic Conservatives (12%). However, Classic Conservatives reported the most informal mentoring (38%), followed by Progressives (32%), with Religious Outsiders endorsing the least amount of informal mentoring (28%). Finally, we looked at percentages of classes that endorsed not mentoring in any capacity and found that Classic Conservatives (49%) and Progressives (48%) were most likely to indicate not mentoring at all, whereas only 26% of Religious Outsiders reported not mentoring at all.

5 | DISCUSSION

Our LCA of a national sample of US adults suggested that there is significant heterogeneity in adults' mentoring attitudes that are not fully captured by a conservative-liberal dichotomy. Two latent classes emerged that represented traditional ends of the political spectrum. Classic Conservatives tended to be older, religious, and unsupportive of social justice programs. Somewhat surprisingly, only about half of this group felt the country was going in the right direction. Classic Conservatives endorsed the lowest perceived importance of mentoring and were least supportive of the use of government funds for mentoring programs. Progressives, on the other hand, were not religious and were more diverse in terms of age, largely felt the country was going in the wrong direction, and were supportive of social justice movements. Progressives perceived mentoring to be important and supported the allocation of government funds for mentoring programs at moderate levels. Consistent with research highlighting "conflicted conservatives," a third class emerged which consisted of a group of young, highly religious, self-identified conservatives who felt that the country was going in the right direction but supported social justice movements (somewhat unexpectedly, at higher rates than Progressives). This Religious Outsiders group was highly supportive of the theory of mentoring and the use of government funds for mentoring programs.

The liberal-conservative split found in the first two classes is consistent with traditional ideologies and policy positions associated with these labels in US politics. Liberals tend to support government oversight and spending on social programs, such as mentoring, as well as social justice movements. Conservatives, on the other hand, favor less government oversight, more limited governmental spending on social programs, and are less supportive of social justice movements (Feldman & Johnston, 2014). By these traditional interpretations of conservative and liberal ideologies, stronger liberal support for government-funded mentoring is expected.

The emergence of the Religious Outsider group, though less intuitive, is also consistent with previous research demonstrating heterogeneity amongst those who identify as conservative. This sizable minority of "conflicted conservatives" are individuals who identify with a conservative label but hold one or more liberal policy positions, particularly in domains that affect young people, such as education (Claassen et al., 2015; Ellis & Stimson, 2011). Researchers attribute this phenomenon to a number of potential causes, including the more positive connotation assigned to the conservative label by the media and politicians, as well as nonpolitical meanings associated with the word "conservative" (Claassen et al., 2015). In particular, a considerable proportion of US adults identify with religious conservatism, which is only mildly correlated with political conservatism. Claassen et al. (2015) found that religiosity is associated with an increased likelihood of being a "conflicted conservative," leading them to conclude that some individuals who identified as conservative were likely influenced by their religious interpretation of the label. Consistent with this previous finding, individuals in our Religious Outsider latent class had a much stronger affinity to organized religion than their Classic Conservative and Progressive counterparts.

The high religiosity of the Religious Outsider group may also explain their high participation in formal mentoring programs, which exceeded that of both Classic Conservatives and Progressives. Religious affinity, more so than political ideology, is amongst the most robust predictors of volunteerism (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Paxton, Reith, & Glanville, 2014). The value of children and the act of giving time and money are consistent with the teachings of all major religions, and churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues often cultivate cultures of giving (Forbes & Zampelli, 2013; Uslaner,

2002). In addition, religious organizations may have connections with other nonprofits, including mentoring organizations, or may offer their own volunteering opportunities (Forbes & Zampelli, 2013; Paxton et al., 2014). In fact, faith-based mentoring programs, which are often based within houses of worship, have vastly expanded over the past two decades, particularly after the Bush administration supported government partnerships and funding for religious nonprofits to promote youth mentoring (White House Archives, 2008).

Mentoring might also appeal to some aspects of Protestant ideology. Although the survey instrument did not ask participants to identify their denomination, Protestantism is by far the most common religious sect in the United States, with almost half of US population identifying with a Protestant denomination (Newport, 2017). Further, Protestant values deeply influenced US ideals, particularly those held by political conservatives (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Prevalent among these Protestant values are individual responsibility, strong work ethic, and equal opportunity. As some writers have pointed out, the contemporary youth mentoring movement was founded with this underlying philosophy. By locating both social problems and solutions at the individual level and relying on volunteerism, one-to-one mentoring programs eschew larger-scale investment in educational, health, and community infrastructure (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Thus, many Religious Outsiders may not view their support for mentoring as a departure from their conservatism. Rather, they may favor the use of mentoring to address social problems because it appeals to individualistic US ideals of hard work and self-made upward mobility, rather more collectivistic policies and safety net programs, such as universal healthcare, free higher education, raising the minimum wage, and higher taxes for the wealthy.

It was also notable that a sizeable majority (74.5%) of Religious Outsiders expressed the belief that the country was "on the right track," compared to just under half (46.8%) of Classic Conservatives and less than a quarter (21.2%) of Progressives. As context for these findings, these data were collected approximately a half year after President Donald Trump took office, a period during which Republicans also controlled the House of Representatives, the Senate, and held the majority of governorships. Although it is impossible to know exactly how individuals interpreted this item, it is likely that many participants' endorsement of the direction of the country was influenced by support for contemporaneous policy initiatives. These findings are consistent with broader trends regarding strengthening support for Republican politicians and policies among highly religious voters (e.g., Evangelicals), including among younger generations like Millennials (Pelz & Smidt, 2015).

Perhaps more surprising, however, was Religious Outsiders' high level of support for social justice movements, particularly because the item named Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street as examples, two movements that have been widely associated with political progressivism. However, it is possible that support for these movements represents an area of political crossover that is fairly common amongst self-identified conservatives, particularly those who are younger and religious (Claassen et al., 2015). Alternatively, there is evidence that many conservatives say they support social justice and consider conservative causes such as antiabortion advocacy, religious freedom, and tax cuts to be pursuant of social justice (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Thyer, 2010). Even if these examples were not provided on the survey, the item did not define "social justice," leaving respondents to interpret the term according to their own definitions.

5.1 | Contributions, limitations, and directions for future research

This study is among the first to examine associations among political identification, religiosity, attitudes toward youth mentoring, and actual mentoring activities. We used an LCA to identify underlying demographic and ideological profiles using a large, nationally representative sample of US adults. Although previous research has examined mentors' perspectives on individual relationships and programs, they have rarely captured how adults view the mentoring movement, particularly in relation to their political and religious beliefs. Our findings contribute significant nuance to this body of knowledge by demonstrating that support for and participation in mentoring do not always fall neatly on the unidimensional conservative-liberal spectrum and that religiosity may

have a significant role in some self-identified conservatives' broad support for mentoring programs, including the allocation of government funds for them.

Some limitations of the study should also be addressed. Although we found that adults' responses to the survey were meaningful, the survey was designed for breadth and brevity, and core variables were measured with single items. Previous research suggests that political ideology is much more complex than a single spectrum and that individuals' ideological label does not necessarily capture that actual voting behavior and policy preferences (Hawkins et al., 2018; Johnson & Tamney, 2001). Future studies should examine political ideology with greater depth and nuance, such as assessing specific policy views on a range of issues, self-reports of actual voting behavior, provide a wider range of self-identification options (e.g., "libertarian," "progressive"), and/or allow participants to write-in their preferred ideological labels. Further, given the complex, multifaceted nature of liberal and conservative labels, future research might use qualitative methods, such as focus groups or cognitive interviews, to gain a better understanding of the thought processes and decision-making underlying participants' responses to survey items, particularly those asking them to identify as liberal or conservative.

Further, there are some limitations to the online sampling method. Although generally in line with other online panel surveys (Baker et al., 2013), the response rate among the general population was low (i.e., 9%). Consistent with best practices for this type of internet panel (Hays, Liu, & Kapteyn, 2015), quota sampling and poststratification adjustments (i.e., sample weighting) were used to ensure demographic representativeness of the US population in terms of age, gender, region, income, race, and ethnicity. Still, it is possible that the final sample was biased in other ways. For example, beyond the obvious fact that participants needed to have internet access to participate, survey completers may have differed from survey nonrespondents or noncompleters in terms of personality (e.g., conscientiousness), civic engagement, or responsiveness to financial incentives (which were minimal, but present).

Finally, the cross-sectional nature of these survey data imposes limitations on interpretations. For example, it is difficult to determine the directionality of influence among the variables of interest, such as religiosity, political ideology, attitudes toward mentoring, and actual mentoring behavior. Although religiosity and ideology likely influence adult's support for and interest in mentoring, subsequent experiences and exposure to mentoring (direct or indirect) might likewise exert influence on religious participation and beliefs, as well as political attitudes and behavior. These cross-sectional data offer a snapshot of the complex associations among these variables, but future studies utilizing longitudinal data might offer a more nuanced understanding of temporal and directional influences. Particularly because age emerged as an important variable in the latent class identification, longitudinal data assessing if and how mentoring attitudes and behavior change over time would be helpful teasing apart cohort-specific characteristics versus age effects.

As discussed above, we only preliminarily explored ideological correlates of actual mentoring behavior, as this question was secondary and developed subsequent to our main analyses. Other demographic and social factors that influence ideology and volunteerism, such as race, geographic region, marital status, and parenthood, are also available in these data but beyond the scope of the current paper. Most existing research has focused on youth who participate in mentoring; obtaining a more nuanced understanding of adult supporters and participants in mentoring is a valuable contribution of this study and an important future direction.

5.2 | Practice and policy recommendations

In addition to these future research directions, the findings from this study can inform practice and policy. Notably, we found strong support for mentoring on both sides of the political spectrum (according to self-identification). Despite lower support by older, traditional conservatives, there appears to be a younger generation of self-identified conservatives who are highly enthusiastic about mentoring, including government funding for programs. Thus, governmental support for mentoring might be an area for potential bipartisan collaboration during a time of unprecedented partisanship. Of course, given the high religiosity of the younger, conservative mentoring supporters and previous findings suggesting that a significant portion of mentoring programs are set within houses of worship (Garringer & Benning, 2018), there may still be disagreement about the types of programs whose

funding should be prioritized (e.g., religious vs. secular). Although ongoing compromise will be needed, lawmakers and their constituents alike should set aside other differences to promote mentoring initiatives, which most Americans endorse.

Yet, adults' stated support for mentoring is at odds with the rates of participation in mentoring activities. There is a sizeable proportion of US adults (particularly among progressives, according to our results) who support mentoring in theory but do not actually mentor. Organizational advertising and recruitment efforts that target these interested, but nonparticipatory, adults might increase programs' ability to serve long waitlists of youth in need of mentors. Garringer and Benning (2018) found that among the most common reasons adults cited for not mentoring was a lack of knowledge about how to get involved, indicating a greater need for public awareness and outreach campaigns. It is also notable that both conservative and liberal supporters of mentoring approved of social justice causes, suggesting that mentoring organizations may be able to align their outreach campaigns with topical social justice issues without creating major partisan tensions among stakeholders.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

This study is amongst the first to examine the political and religious profiles of adults and the extent to which these characteristics are associated with ideological and political support for youth mentoring. In addition to identifying two classes of adults (Classic Conservatives and Progressives) that are split along the traditional liberal-conservative binary, we identified a sizeable third class who identified as highly conservative and religious while endorsing support for the theory of youth mentoring and the use of government funds on youth mentoring program. These classes were identified using latent modeling and thus were driven by patterns within our large, national dataset. Yet, they are consistent with recent research from political science that challenges the unidimensional conceptualization of political ideology and the strong influence of religion in US politics (e.g., Claassen et al., 2015). Thus, our paper extends this body of knowledge by exploring patterns of support toward youth mentoring programming, specifically, which can inform future research, practice, and policy efforts to expand the impact and availability of mentoring interventions for young people.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors of this manuscript have complied with APA ethical principles in their treatment of individuals participating in the research, program, or policy described in the manuscript. The research was deemed exempt by UMass Boston's institutional review board due to secondary analysis of deidentified data. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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