How Voters' Multiple Identities Affect their Response to Politicians' Moral Violations

Annemarie Walter and David Redlawsk

State of the Art

- Only limited attention paid to the role of social identity theory

- Studies examining voters' responses to politicians' immoral behavior tend to overlook:
  - the role of other identities than partisanship, such as moral identity
  - partisanship an identity, but consider it a group membership
  - how these identities might be competing

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Voters' Multiple Identities

- A social identity is a subjective sense of belonging to a group and an important part of people's self concept

- People can hold multiple social identities based on groups they belong, such as partisanship

- Social identities are acquired through inheritance, life experiences or accomplishment

- Social identities differ in internalization, i.e. the extent that they are central to people's self-concept

Maintaining a
Positive Social Identity

- Mechanisms include biased information processing, in-group favoritism and out-group derogation in behaviours

- In-group bias is moderated by identification strength

- Social groups have their own moral principles, and a group member transgressing these threatens the group image

- People's own morality as well as judgements about other people's morality is determined by their social identity

Partisan Identity

- Partisanship and strength affects how voters perceive and respond to politicians' moral violations

- **Partisan Ingroup Bias Hypothesis (H1):** People will evaluate politicians engaged in moral violations who belong to their party (ingroup) more positively than politicians who do not (outgroup)

- **Partisan Identity Strength (H2):** The stronger people identify with their party, the greater their ingroup bias when evaluating politicians involved in moral violations

Moral Foundation Theory

- Explains origins and variation in human moral reasoning on the basis of several innate, modular foundations.

- MFT categorizes moral intuitions into five foundations: Care; Fairness; Loyalty; Authority; and Sanctity (Haidt and Graham 2007).

- Moral Foundation theory (MFT) sees moral judgment as an intuitive process characterized by automatic affective reactions to stimuli (Clifford et al. 2011).

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Moral Principles of the Group

- Political parties have their own moral principles

- Moral Foundation Theory (MFT) suggests that liberals and conservatives have differing emphases, which may then be reflected accordingly in the two U.S. parties

- Liberals (Democrats) are more likely than conservatives (Republicans) to endorse the Care and Fairness principles, but generally do not endorse the Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity

- **Ingroup Moral Principles Violation (H3):** People will evaluate politicians that belong to their party (ingroup) more negatively when they violate moral principles of their ingroup than when ingroup politicians violate moral principles of the other party

Moral Identity

- Moral identity entails the extent to which people's self-concept is organized around their moral beliefs

- People who hold a strong moral identity are more likely to interpret situations in a moral manner and act accordingly

- Moral identity mitigates in-group favoritism and out-group hostility

- **Moral Identity Strength Hypothesis (H4):** The stronger people's moral identity the more negatively they evaluate ingroup politicians involved in moral transgressions

Experimental Design

- A vignette study using a between-subjects experiment in a 6 x 3 design embedded in a survey questionnaire administered to approximately 3000 U.S. voters.

- We manipulated the moral principle violated (Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity)and added a social norm violation as a baseline

- We manipulated the partisanship of the politician (Republican, Democrat, no partisanship) in the vignette

- Each respondent was randomly assigned a short vignette describing a fictional, but realistic sounding, scenario

- Data were collected between 2 October and 3 November 2020 by Dynata

- Dependent variable Likeability, 7-points scale running from 1 (Unlikeable) to 7 (Likeable)

Pre-test Stimulus Material Example for the Care Foundation

Scenario	Care	Fairness	Loyalty	Authority	Sanctity	Social Norms	Not at All Wrong	Wrong (Mean)	Easy
You see a politician mocking an opponent when the opponent stutters during a debate*	**68.30**	4.91	4.46	8.48	8.48	5.36	2.68	3.71	88.39
You see a politician say that an opponent is "too stupid to do the job"	**51.57**	8.52	4.48	11.66	10.31	13.45	9.87	3.04	91.98
You see a politician step back when a severely burned constituent tries to shake hands	**59.29**	7.52	7.96	7.52	6.64	11.06	3.54	3.35	90.71
You see a politician laugh out loud at a voter who asks for help	**62.83**	8.41	8.41	6.64	9.29	4.42	4.42	3.80	86.22
You see a politician make fun of a constituent with mental health problems	**71.24**	5.75	5.31	4.87	11.06	1.77	2.65	4.25	90.70

Stimulus Material

Norm violated	Vignette (non-partisan)
Care	You see a politician make fun of a constituent with mental health problems.
Fairness	You see a politician making sure that those who voted for him get first access to jobs.
Loyalty	You see a politician in your town say the neighboring town is better.
Authority	You see a politician violating safety regulations ordered by the Chief of Police at a disaster.
Sanctity	You see a politician was found having sex with a teenager.
Social	You see a politician carrying briefing papers to the capitol in a plastic grocery bag

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Partisan Identity

Partisan Identity Scale (Bankert, Huddy & Rosema 2017)

Items	Labels	Mean	H_i
1	When people criticize this party, it feels like a personal insult	2.4934	.57480
2	When I meet someone who supports this party, I feel connected with this person	2.8782	.64407
3	When I speak about this party, I refer to it as "my party"	2.5134	.60801
4	When people praise this party, it makes me feel good	2.8914	.64029
	Homogeneity Coefficient Scale		.61573

Note: N=2559. Question was not asked to nonpartisans. Response options are recoded as follows 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree, 5=Do not know. Method: Mokken Scale Analysis (Mokken 1971).

Moral Identity

Moral Identity (Aquino and Reed 2002) – Internalization Scale

Items	Labels	Mean	H_i
1	It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics.	4.1988	.56282
2	Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am.	3.9612	.49043
4	I would be ashamed to be a person who had these characteristics.	4.0949	.47903
7	Having these characteristics is not really important to me.	3.8076	.48578
10	I strongly desire to have these characteristics.	4.0598	.49373
	Homogeneity Coefficient Scale		.50049

Moral Identity (Aquino and Reed 2002) – Symbolization Scale

Items	Labels	Mean	H_i
3	I often wear clothes that identify me as having these characteristics.	2.8674	.45858
5	The types of things I do in my spare time (e.g., hobbies) clearly identify me as having these characteristics.	3.1667	.47933
6	The kinds of books and magazines that I read identify me as having these characteristics.	3.4898	.46701
8	The fact that I have these characteristics is communicated to others by my membership in certain organizations.	3.1323	.46322
9	I am actively involved in activities that communicate to others that I have these characteristics.	3.3632	.47310
	Homogeneity Coefficient Scale		.46815

Note: N=2993.

Effects of Shared Partisan Identity

Average Marginal Effects Shared Partisan Identity on the Likeability of the Transgressing Politician

	1 Unlikeable	2	3	4	5	6	7 Likeable
All	-.127	-.003	.006	.030	.023	.023	.047
Democrats	-.076	.002	.007	.021	.014	.012	.021
Republicans	-.207	-.020	-.002	.038	.038	.044	.109

Note: N=2050.

Effects of
Partisan Identity Strength

Average Marginal Effects of Partisan Identity and Partisan Strength on the Likeability of the Transgressing Politician

	1 Unlikeable	2	3	4	5	6	7 Likeable
Weak Partisan Identity	-.058	.000	.004	.016	.011	.010	.018
Moderate Partisan Identity	-.115	-.001	.007	.029	.020	.020	.038
Strong Partisan Identity	-.212	-.017	.000	.038	.039	.045	.108

Note: N=2050.

Effects of
Ingroup Moral Principles

Average Marginal Effects of Ingroup Politician Violating Ingroup Principles on the Likeability of the Transgressing Politician

	1 Unlikeable	2	3	4	5	6	7 Likeable
Democrats	.070	-.003	-.006	-.016	-.011	-.011	-.021
Republicans	-.137	-.013	.000	.022	.022	.027	.078

Note: N=1719

Effects of Moral Identity

Predicted Probabilities Likability of the Transgressing Ingroup Politician and Outgroup Over Various Levels of Moral Identity Internalization

	1 Unlikeable	2	3	4	5	6	7 Likeable
Ingroup Politician							
Weak Internalization Moral Identity	.257	.108	.100	.200	.103	.088	.144
Moderate Internalization Moral Identity	.277	.112	.101	.197	.099	.083	.131
Strong Internalization Moral Identity	.413	.122	.100	.169	.073	.055	.068
Outgroup Politician							
Weak Internalization Moral Identity	.311	.118	.104	.195	.093	.075	.106
Moderate Internalization Moral Identity	.372	.123	.103	.181	.081	.061	.078
Strong Internalization Moral Identity	.597	.115	.082	.116	.041	.026	.023

Note: N=2050.

Replication: England

- Carried out similar study in England
  - Did not use the whole U to simplify partisanship

- Similar sample size, same survey questions with minor changes to reflect English context

- Same moral values violations by politicians
  - Conservative
  - Labour
  - No party named

- Results look very similar, except no apparent negative partisanship; out-party not treated much differently from in-party

Effects of Partisan Identity in England

Average Marginal Effects Shared Partisan Identity on the Likeability of the Transgressing Politician

	1 Unlikeable	2	3	4	5	6	7 Likeable
All	-.070	.003	.010	.025	.014	.010	.009
Labour	-.069	.001	.008	.025	.015	.011	.009
Conservative	-.070	.004	.011	.026	.014	.009	.006

Note: N=1680.

Average Marginal Effects of Partisan Identity and Partisan Strength on the Likeability of the Transgressing Politician

	1 Unlikeable	2	3	4	5	6	7 Likeable
Weak Partisan Identity	-.024	.002	.004	.009	.005	.003	.002
Moderate Partisan Identity	-.082	.003	.011	.031	.017	.011	.009
Strong Partisan Identity	-.159	-.010	.009	.054	.040	.033	.033

Note: N=1680.

Effects of
Ingroup Principles in England

Average Marginal Effects of Ingroup Politician Violating Ingroup Principles on the Likeability of the Transgressing Politician

	1 Unlikeable	2	3	4	5	6	7 Likeable
Labour	.261	-.016	-.035	-.075	-.054	-.04	-.041
Conservative	-.117	.003	.014	.033	.026	.02	.022

Note: N=1396

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Effects of
Moral Identity in England

Predicted Probabilities Likability of the Transgressing Ingroup Politician and Outgroup Over Various Levels of Moral Identity Internalization

	1 Unlikeable	2	3	4	5	6	7 Likeable
Ingroup Politician							
Weak Internalization Moral Identity	.286	.133	.141	.230	.101	.062	.047
Moderate Internalization Moral Identity	.350	.140	.139	.208	.083	.047	.032
Strong Internalization Moral Identity	.553	.136	.112	.132	.040	.018	.009
Outgroup Politician							
Weak Internalization Moral Identity	.329	.138	.140	.215	.089	.052	.037
Moderate Internalization Moral Identity	.432	.142	.131	.178	.064	.033	.020
Strong Internalization Moral Identity	.608	.128	.101	.111	.031	.014	.006

Note: N=1680.

Conclusions

- Both partisan identity as well as moral identity matter to how voters respond to moral violations

- We need to consider voters' multiple social identities when examining voters' moral judgments

- Limitations:
  - Only two social identities examined
  - Only measure positive partisan identity
  - Measure party's ingroup principles